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‘I will write until I am heard!’

The Poetic Resistance through Graffiti in China’s Urban
Space and Social Media

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the possibility of the mediated city providing a space for resistance in everyday life in a society where free speech channels are strictly controlled. The case studied in this thesis is the phenomenon of a group of fans of a singer who has been banned by the government in mainland China writing graffiti in public urban space on Rehe Road in Nanjing to express their love and support for their beloved singer. On the one hand, there is a growing crackdown from above on freedom of expression; on the other hand, urban space becomes the medium through which furtive resistance such as graffiti writing can take place. How can urban space be mediated, and how can ordinary citizens utilise mediated urban space to confront authorities? This is the thesis' primary concern.

Several methods were used in this study to collect enough data to fully understand the case. Photos of graffiti from four years (2017-2021), social media materials about graffiti, articles about graffiti, and interview transcripts of nine graffiti writers make up the empirical dataset. Data was collected through documentation, observation, and interviews, and then analysed using semiotic analysis and a qualitative coding process. The data collection process is guided by Internet Mediated Research methodology, and most empirical data analysis approaches are inspired by critical visual methodology.

There are two key findings of this study. The first finding is about how the natures of place and urban space are changing in today's media-saturated cities. In this study, the graffiti mediated Rehe Road in the real world before remediating the street on social media. Rehe Road's material and virtual natures are both weakened and strengthened during the (re)mediation processes. As a result, instead of being a monolithic entity, the place and urban space have become a half-real and half-virtual existence. The second finding concerns the possibility of resistance occurring in the (re)mediated place and in urban space. This study notes that (re)mediated Rehe Road has become a space for creativity, power-deconstructions, and even spatial reconstructions from below. This study uses the term 'poetic resistance' to discuss young people's act of writing graffiti in public space as a kind of mild, sometimes apolitical, timid resistance against the overwhelming power from above.

Keywords: urban China, poetic resistance, mediated city, graffiti, social media

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1. Introduction

Urban space has never been just a space for people to live or work. Whether it is medieval-era carnivals in squares or post-millennium occupy movements all over the world, urban space has always been a space of resistance. In the summer of 2019, millions of Hong Kong citizens went to the avenues, streets, and parks in their city to protest about their vanishing freedom and civic rights. It is a form of resistance in urban space, loud and fierce; the same year spring, a folk musician Li Zhi (李志) in mainland China was banned by the authorities for unspecified reasons, and his fans began to express their displeasure by writing graffiti on a street in Nanjing mentioned by Li Zhi in one of his songs. Writing graffiti is another form of resistance taking place in urban space, furtive and mild, which might be strange for most western readers of this thesis, but it is one of the various mild resistance forms that one can conduct when living in a place where speech channels are quite limited.

Controls from above

Li Zhi, a Chinese musician, ‘disappeared’ from public view on April 12, 2019. On that spring day, his fans discovered that all of Li Zhi’s songs had been removed from all mainland China music streaming platforms, as well as all video clips pertaining to him from video sharing platforms. Then they also found that Li Zhi’s million-follower Weibo account was nowhere to be found. Since then, ‘Li Zhi’ remained a ‘sensitive’ name, and he has been barred from attending any public entertainment events. In May 2020, a Nanjing bookstore published an article on its official WeChat account announcing a joint event with Li Zhi. The following day, the account was suspended by WeChat team without explanation. In August 2020, Li Zhi’s online fan community on Weibo (‘Super Topic’超话, as literally translated from Chinese) was disbanded by Weibo’s operator. Now, if one wants to upload Li Zhi-related clips on Douyin (Tik-Tok’s mainland China version), the clips will almost certainly be deleted right away. Many Li Zhi’s fans have been waiting for their favourite singer to return from 2019 to 2021, but the reality appears to be the opposite of their expectations.

What happened to Li Zhi and why did he vanish? No solid answer can be given here. The newspaper *Independent* links Li Zhi’s disappearance to his outspoken behaviour, such as writing songs that have irritated the authorities (Wang, 2019). Many of Li Zhi’s songs deal with political events or social issues. For example, *The Square* (广场) and *People Do Not Need Freedom* (人民不需要自由) by Li Zhi both allude to the 1989 Tiananmen Square

protests, which are still considered taboo in mainland China. According to *Independent's* analysis, the year 2019 marked the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests, and the government's decision to ban Li Zhi was one of the measures taken to maintain societal 'harmony' (Wang, 2019). Another story is also going around that Li Zhi used to file a series of lawsuits to defend his music's copyrights. Those accused include tech giants like Tencent and Alibaba, as well as many entertainment industry moguls; as a result, he was banned by those who had conquered all the resources in the industries (Fan, 2019).

There is no way to verify all these assumptions as no party has ever come forward to claim responsibility for Li Zhi's disappearance. However, from Li Zhi's story, it is clear that the controls over free speech in mainland China are tightening, particularly with the involvement of tech giants and their advanced technologies. Thus, fans of Li Zhi can no longer legally listen to his songs, watch his video clips, or publicly discuss him online, let alone get the news of his comeback.

Guerrilla wars from below

Living in such a society with limited space for free speech might not have a significant impact on people's daily lives, but still, as human beings, people desire to express themselves. Several years ago, media scholars noticed that Chinese netizens were avoiding confrontation with the hegemonic state machine by using alternative tactics such as hilarious memes or cute cat pictures to conduct guerrilla wars between censorship and freedom of expression (Yang and Wu, 2017; Mina, 2013). However, as previously stated, even a video clip relating to Li Zhi can now be censored by algorithms in under a minute. Tackling those 'sensitive' memes or pictures are way too simple for the censorship mechanism. What can ordinary people do to get some space for their speech in such circumstances? Li Zhi's fans have devised a number of tactics for launching long-term guerrilla wars against the authorities. When the aforementioned online community was shut down by the platform operator in 2020, fans quickly created a new one with the oblique community name 'idol-type singer' (偶像派歌手), as Li Zhi has a song with the line: 'I am just an idol-type singer' (Li, 2009). As a result, only Li Zhi's most ardent fans will be able to locate this 'secret gang' without attracting undue attention. Another example of these guerrilla war tactics can be seen in the case of this study, which is graffiti on Rehe Road.

Rehe Road (热河路) is located in the northwest corner of Nanjing, Jiangsu Province's capital city, near the cosmopolitan Shanghai. Decades ago, the area was a suburb of the city and was

considered to be inhabited by people of the lower classes. In 2014, Li Zhi released his seventh album *1701* and one of the album's hits was *Rehe* (热河), which depicts the other side of the glamour city through the eyes of migrant workers. The song starts with the line 'Rehe Road resembles Jintan County in its 1980s'. Jintan County is Li Zhi's hometown, from which he moved to Nanjing in the 1990s to begin his university career. From the lyrics of *Rehe*¹, one can assume that Li Zhi used to live on the street for some time when the street was still a harbour for those newcomers in the city. This street was filthy, unkempt, and littered with sweat and tears. *Rehe* can also be compared to the Beatles' 1960s song *Penney Lane*, in which the musicians also chose to depict a street in Liverpool in great detail. Interestingly, there is a barber in both songs, but the one in Penny Lane is delightful while the one on Rehe Road is laden with anxiety. This is an important point to remember about Rehe Road: it is not a romantic street with lovely people, but rather the polar opposite. When the song became popular in 2014, Rehe Road started to attract the song's lovers to visit the street, similar to how millions of tourists visit Penney Lane in Liverpool each year. Some of the visitors began writing graffiti on the walls along Rehe Road. The exact date when the first piece of graffiti appeared on Rehe Road is unknown, but the first recorded post about Rehe Road graffiti on Weibo was made in early July 2017. The graffiti quickly spread across several exterior walls of to-be-demolished buildings on the street during the 7-day National Day holiday and Li Zhi's New Year concert held in Nanjing at the end of 2017, when more visitors visited the street. On the walls were many Chinese characters, drawings, and even pictures (Figure 1-1).

¹ The complete lyrics can be found in Appendix 1.



Figure 1-1 A quick look at the graffiti in this study (Source: 小葱同学)

The walls went viral on the Internet in May 2018, prompting a news report from *The Paper*, an influential Chinese digital newspaper, to introduce the graffiti phenomenon. A city management officer stated in the report that this was their 20th erasure of the graffiti on Rehe Road. She emphasised that no one is allowed to write anything on public walls without permission, according to Jiangsu Province’s Urban Management Regulation (Qiu, 2018). Graffiti on Rehe Road is, without a doubt, a transgression. The graffiti on Rehe Road has never gone away, despite the government’s repeated attempts to erase it. Since *The Paper*’s report, the mainstream media has never paid attention to the graffiti on Rehe Road. However, there are new posts about Rehe Road graffiti almost every day on social media, particularly on Weibo, making following the subsequent story of the graffiti there a feasible task. The walls were demolished in 2018 as part of redevelopment projects, and visitors began to write on the opposite (eastern) side of the street, where there were numerous advertisement boards. Since the first piece of graffiti was photographed by a passer-by four years ago, the graffiti on Rehe Road has repeatedly appeared, been erased, and reappeared. If one walks down the street, one might notice graffiti on street signs, streetlamp poles, pavements, tree trunks, bollards, commercial boards, billboards, and other surfaces. At first, the graffiti was mostly

about Li Zhi's songs or the personal stories of the writers. Since Li Zhi's disappearance, more graffiti has been written about the writers' longings for him and their hopes that he will return. Of course, some graffiti has expressed dissatisfaction with the authorities, particularly in the days following April 12, 2019, when texts like 'where there is oppression, there is resistance' and 'science, freedom, democracy' appeared among the graffiti on Rehe Road. Graffiti writers writing such texts in urban public space is daring in today's societal milieu in mainland China. How does Rehe Road become a space for graffiti writing, and how does the public space become a space for resistance? This is the starting point of this study.

Aims and research questions

The Chinese people are facing an ever-shrinking space for free speech. The case of Li Zhi, who is unable to create music freely, and his admirers, who have lost their rights to listen to the music as they wish, exemplifies this statement. In these circumstances, the graffiti on Rehe Road is valuable: it is valuable because it allows fans to express themselves through the medium of graffiti. Graffiti on this street and social media are also valuable because they serve as markers for people to identify others who share a common interest, allowing them to gather and 'communicate' with one another when no other communicative tools are available. Furthermore, graffiti is always seen as a form of resistance (Hebdige, 2002; Young, 2013; Trivunda and Velikonja, 2020), and the graffiti on Rehe Road inevitably reflects the theory. Thus, three keywords must be addressed in this study: media, urban space/the city, and resistance. Two research questions regarding the relations between these keywords can be formed, as follows:

1. In what ways is Rehe Road mediated in physical urban settings and remediated on social media?
2. How has the mediated and remediated Rehe Road become the space of resistance?

This study aims to accomplish three objectives by addressing these questions. To begin, it is necessary to comprehend the relationship between the media and urban space, particularly in an era when the media has gradually saturated our urban settings. How have the places and urban spaces that accommodate our everyday lives changed in nature? Furthermore, how do human and place relationships change when human life is placed in mediated and remediated urban space? Second, to understand graffiti writers' motivations for transgressional acts in public space from the perspective of resistance, including how they complete resistance and what they are resisting against. The focus is on youth resistance in mainland China's

authoritarian context, which has received little attention in previous scholarship. Third, to archive the graffiti that has appeared and vanished on Rehe Road over the years; their voices, while frail and ephemeral, deserve to be heard.

The following chapters begin by reviewing the literature that is relevant to this study. The third chapter describes the Internet Mediated Research and critical visual methodology that influenced the methodological design of this study, as well as the data collection and analysis methods used, such as documentation, observation, interview, semiotic visual analysis, and so on. The fourth chapter is devoted to a thorough examination of the empirical data in terms of the study's three keywords. The final chapter explicitly answers the research questions and concludes the thesis with some additional thoughts that could be investigated in the future.

2. Literature Review

‘Social life in the 21st century is increasingly life lived in media cities.’ The quote is the first sentence of Scott McQuire (2008)’s well-known book *Media City*. Urbanisation is accelerating worldwide, so does the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Are we living in cities full of media, or in mediated space set in cities? This chapter begins with an examination of academic works on the interplay between the media and the city. The second part focuses on the scholarship surrounding the study’s case – graffiti in mainland China. Special attention is given to understanding the act of writing graffiti in media-saturated urban settings. The third part deals with the academic research on resistance against power in everyday life, via poetic forms, in the environment of mediated cities.

Media and cities

The first task of this section is to locate this study on a cross-disciplinary academic map in order to determine which academic field this thesis contributes to. Then, the concepts of place and space are distinguished and their respective relations with media are also discussed. Studies about media pilgrimage are briefly examined at the end of this part to provide some background information for this study’s case.

Two sub-fields

This section aims to pinpoint where this study fits into an interconnected cross-disciplinary academic area where media studies collide with human and cultural geography, as well as urban studies.

Media studies and human and cultural geography have been interacting with each other for a long time. In the science of geography, there has been a ‘cultural turn’ dating back to the 1970s and it was the starting point of human and cultural geography. Chinese - American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977) is one of the pioneers who advocates studying geography beyond ‘scientific purview’; instead, he stresses paying more attention to ‘human experience, awareness, and knowledge’ (Tuan, 1976). Tuan has been developing his theories on human and place/space relationships throughout his academic career from various aspects, such as topophilia (1990), fears (1979), religions (2012), and so forth. Edward Relph (1976) is also an influential name in human and cultural geography. He explores individuals’ sense of place and placelessness on the philosophical foundation of phenomenology and connects

human's Dasein (being there) to place. Relph (1976) pays close attention to the role of the media in influencing people's sense of placelessness, pointing out that the media is isolating humans from the real world by providing them with second-hand information. At the same period, media scholars also noticed the significance of place/space in media studies and a 'spatial turn' emerged in media studies. Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) shares a viewpoint with Relph when he argues that media are causing individuals to have 'no sense of place'. Meyrowitz points out that media, mainly electronic media in his time, are threatening the connection between physical location and social interaction that has been bound for centuries. Such a spatial turn in media studies has attracted many influential media scholars since the 1990s. In the UK, David Morley (1996, 2000, 2017) and his students Nick Couldry (2000) and Shaun Moores (2012) are dedicated to understanding how media are involved in the place-making process in the context of modernity and mobility. In Europe, André Jansson and Jesper Falkheimer (2006) advocate constructing a sub-field combining media studies and human and cultural geography as 'geographies of communication' or 'communication geographies', which aims to explore '*how communication produces space and how space produces communication*' (Jansson and Falkheimer, 2006, p.9, italics in original). In the US, Paul Adams (2009) proposes the name 'geographies of media and communication' or 'media geographies' as an attempt to set up a 'taxonomic system' discussing the relations between space, place, media and communication.

Another line to study the media-place/space relationship is the sub-field that combines media studies and urban studies. Media and city/urban space are the two keywords in this sub-field, and throughout recent two decades, various expressions have been used to describe the two's interactions, such as 'cybercity' (Graham, 2004), 'electronic city' (Aurigi and De Cindio, 2008), 'communicative city' (Gumpert and Drucker, 2008; McQuire and Sun, 2021), 'media city' (McQuire, 2008; Tosoni and Ridell, 2016). Zlatan Krajina notices that there are mainly three directions among scholarship on links between media and cities/urban space: *joint historical origin* discussing how media is participating in the process of urban space construction, *mutual definition* revealing the representational feature of media in creating cities, and *new shared developments* focusing on the integration of media and urban space in urban planning and construction (Krajina, 2021, p.46, italics in original). At the same time, there are also media scholars attempting to delineate this sub-field by naming it as, for example, 'urban media studies' which aims to deal with the omnipresent mediated place/space in modern cities (Tosoni and Ridell, 2016; Tosoni et al., 2019), and 'urban media

and communication' that tries to 'think through the mediated city' as the 'dominant form and central context of human settlement and interaction in the 21st century' (Krajina and Stevenson, 2020, p.5).

To summarize, the two sub-fields of communication/media geographies and urban media studies were briefly discussed in this section. This research can be pinned in both fields, or in the area where the two subfields overlap. The cross-disciplinary nature of the study, as well as the immaturity of the fields themselves, cause difficulty in locating this study accurately in the academic world. But the bright side is that in this emerging and developing academic field, there is much more space for participants (Krajina, 2021; Andersson, 2019).

Furthermore, by recapping the history of the two sub-fields, one may find that in some studies, the concept of 'place' is highlighted, for example, topophilia or the 'sense of placelessness'; while in other studies, 'space' has been given more attention, for example, urban space. Such a nuance reminds this study to carefully examine the two concepts and apply them in the analysis. The following sections will firstly review how existing research has dealt with them through the lens of mediation.

Mediated place

Before the discussion of 'mediated place', it is necessary to distinguish the concept of 'place' from 'space'. In his seminal book *Space and Place* (1977), Tuan explains the relationship between 'space' and 'place' by analogy with the relationship of movement and pause. For Tuan, 'each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place' (Tuan, 1977, p.6). However, it is still somewhat too abstract to understand how place is different from space. Doreen Massey (1994, p.154) gives a very straightforward definition of place, in which she believes that place is always 'in networks of social relations and understandings'. Tim Cresswell (2015, p.16) further explores how space can be transformed into place, as he points out, when 'a portion of space' is invested with meaning by humans and when it is emotionally attached to a human, a space becomes a place.

Therefore, how do media participate in the process of place-making? There are three main trends in different periods. Human geographers in the early days applied Stuart Hall's representational theory and encoding/decoding approach in their analyses to explore the process of places' mediation. Jacquelin Burgess and John Gold (1985), whose collection *Geography, the Media and Popular Culture* is representative of the trend as the authors analyse how places, including nations, landscape, or disasters, are depicted/portrayed by

media such as newspapers, movies, novels, or documentaries, under the influence of political and economic power. The second trend appeared at the beginning of the 21st century when scholars in geography such as Nigel Thrift started to advocate a non-representational approach to discuss the limitations of mediation of places. Thrift (2005, p.233) underscores that media such as screens and software are becoming the new surface of the world and creating a ‘mechanical reality’. Therefore, he suggests that social science scholars think ‘beyond mediation’ by rediscovering the value of the human body and back to the materiality of the world (Thrift, 2005); moreover, he also points out that more attention should be given to what the media have done, instead of what they have said (represented) (Thrift, 2008). In recent decades, the third trend has also taken place both in media studies and human and cultural geography, calling for academia’s attention to the interaction between virtual and physical worlds. On the one hand, how the blurred boundaries between real and digital worlds are affecting individuals’ sense of place is frequently discussed. Massey (1994)’s influential phrase ‘a global sense of place’ implies that in the context of globalisation, the boundary is not a must when we talk about the concept of ‘place’. David Morley has written several books on mediated places in the era of globalisation and mobility, to some extent as an echo to Massey’s discussion but from a media and communication perspective, noting that mediated places featured as boundary-less does not imply the ‘death of geography’ (Morley, 2007, p.203), but with the help of ICTs a sense of ‘place polygamy’ is generated (Morley, 2017, p.10). On the other hand, how the physical and virtual places are affecting each other is also a popular topic after the Millennium. In his book *The Place of Media Power*, Nick Couldry (2000) concludes five discursive media powers in mediating places: framing, ordering, naming, spacing, and imagining. He employs the case of visitors’ media pilgrimage to opera soap *Coronation Street*’s filming place to explain that mediated places are distant from the real world and higher than the ‘ordinary world’ in terms of social status. However, over the past decade, with the development of ICTs, digitally mediated places have taken over more space in individuals’ everyday lives. For example, smartphones with GPS devices attach individuals firmly to places. Malcolm McCullough (2012) calls such media ‘locative media’, and he believes that these media are constantly layering virtual places onto real places and thus redefining individuals’ spatial imaginations towards places. Among all these discussions on mediated places, one emerging voice in academia is also valuable, that the mediation of places is not only the process of weakening the boundaries of places, but also sharpening (Andersson, 2019). According to Magnus Andersson (2019), scholarship on mediated places has surprisingly focused on its symbolic aspect for a long time while

ignoring its materiality to a large extent. For example, the Wi-Fi infrastructure that supports mediated places, as well as public screens and graffiti in physical places in cities, are all important elements in understanding place mediation.

To conclude this section, the phenomenon of media pilgrimage should be introduced. The media company Granada Studio organizing the *Coronation Street* tour to make a profit out of the mediated places is one type of media pilgrimage, as mentioned in Couldry (2000)'s book; or fans of the X-Files visiting Vancouver city to experience the real places featured in the movies is another type of media pilgrimage (Hills, 2002). Listeners of *Rehe* visit Rehe Road is, without a doubt, a media pilgrimage that is more specifically related to music tourism, which discusses tourism based on the connections between the birthplaces of a music genre or the artists, or the places mentioned in specific songs (Eksell and Månsson, 2020). The music pilgrimage resembles a ritual that transforms 'a person, a relationship, a social position, and a place' and creates 'symbols of group membership and values' (Eksell and Månsson, 2020). The analogy between music pilgrimage and ritual will be applied in this study's analysis in the following chapters.

Mediated space

Compared with the concept of 'place', the concept of 'space' is a more abstract one (Tuan, 1974, p.4). As it has been discussed in the previous section that much scholarship has attempted to distinguish 'place' and 'space', it is still an interchangeable pair of words in both people's daily use and academic works. Henri Lefebvre (1991, p.154) regards space as a social product and he believes that 'space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning'. Michel de Certeau (1984, p.117), also a French sociologist, notes that a place is the 'configuration of positions' which is stable while space is dynamic with social practice. In this sense, French sociologists' definitions of space are ultimately very similar to definitions of 'place' proposed by human geographers. Therefore, it is no surprise that Cresswell (2006, pp.16-17) admits that Lefebvre's social space 'plays the same role as place'. Along with Cresswell's statement, this study's use of 'space' implies more 'social space' in the Lefebvrian sense.

In urban media and communication studies, 'space' is a term that innately possesses the nature of mediation, as 'space' refers to the 'shared sphere of action between cities and media', where communication takes place (Krajina 2021, p.49). This argument reveals the first dimension of mediated space – *space as media*. Media theorist Friedrich Kittler (1996,

p.722) has his classic articulation that ‘the city is a medium’, it ‘records, transmits and processes information’. The empirical study from cosmopolitan Shanghai, China, provides an interesting example of how urban space is a medium. People’s Square is a scenic spot in downtown Shanghai where visitors can enjoy both historic and modern architecture, as well as a matchmaking corner where parents in their 50s and 60s meet at a corner of the square to display their unmarried children’s information in the hopes of finding a suitable partner for their children. In these scenarios, the urban space is communicative; it is a repository of historical data, a network of wires transmitting data in real time, and, most importantly, a space for interactions between heterogeneous subjects. (Zhong, 2018).

The second dimension of mediated space refers to the space that is full of media, i.e., *media in space*. On the one hand, countless media infrastructures such as CCTV and Wi-Fi devices (Graham and Marvin, 2001) are densely distributed in urban space. Most of the time, these infrastructures affect social relations in an invisible way. For example, the distribution of Wi-Fi hotspots has a profound impact on the flow of people in urban space as they are always chasing the Internet for their mobile phones (Polson, 2018). On the other hand, there are many visible media in urban settings and most of them interact with residents in everyday life. Ubiquitous public screens in urban space provide a good example. In his PhD dissertation on urban public screens, Krajina (2014) concludes that in the mediated urban space/cities, individuals are tamed to be accustomed to encountering various types of media in their daily routines, and it gradually becomes a habitus for residents in the mediated city to know how to deal with media in public space.

Mediated space’s third dimension is the phenomenon that space is being integrated with media, i.e., *space with media*. McQuire (2008) calls it ‘media city’ and Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (2004) coin ‘mediaspace’, and for the public, such a mediated space is often called the ‘smart city’. All of these names somewhat reveal the same fact that media and space are merging at the architectural level. Hank Haeusler (2020) uses the example of media façades to demonstrate the phenomena of ‘media architecture’, which requires city planners and architects to design urban space completely in a data-driven logic. In this sense, the media are not decorations or extensions of urban space, they are there to operate space.

The question is: Are we passively manipulated by the mediated space that we have created ourselves? Recent empirical studies provide some answers in different aspects. Matthew Zook and Mark Graham (2007, p.466) notice that Google Maps on almost everyone’s smartphone is secretly ranking and filtering places in urban space where people reside. By

doing so, companies can ‘sell’ the mediated space to map users. The two researchers have coined ‘DigiPlace’ to reveal how mediated places/space are transformed into profits by companies. However, in Google Maps’ world, the APP-users are still somewhat very passive. Lee Humphreys (2010) conducted one-year ethnographic fieldwork in New York on how residents use an APP called Dodgeball to pin themselves and contact friends who are also on the APP and nearby. She concludes that the APP-users privatised urban space such as pubs, clubs, or cafés by checking in and gathering friends on Dodgeball. Humphrey (2010) refers to the mediated space in her case as ‘parochial space’, a term coined by Lyn Lofland (1998) to describe how urban residents make sense of urban space through the network and social interaction that occurs in cities. In this sense, APP users, i.e., ordinary people, are actively participating in the process of producing space.

Going back to sociologists and critical theorists such as Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Michel Foucault, they all believe that space is the arena for production, encounters, and contestations. Following a review of recent studies, it is safe to say that their theories are also applicable to mediated space, particularly contestations in mediated space, which are critical for this study to understand the graffiti from Li Zhi’s fans. The relevant literature will be discussed in the third part of this chapter.

Graffiti and citizenship

This part gives detailed discussions on scholarly works related to the case of the study. The first section is about the definition of ‘graffiti’ in China, especially in mainland China’s societal context. The second and third sections will discuss the production and representation of graffiti respectively.

Graffiti in China

The forms of graffiti vary from country to country, from culture to culture. In the western context, graffiti is often bonded with the subculture, delinquency (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974; Hebdige, 2002; Pan, 2014), or usually mentioned accompanied with street art (Avramidis and Tsilimpounidi, 2017). However, in China, especially in mainland China, graffiti has slightly different connotations. Graffiti in China has traditionally taken the forms of inscriptions (tizi 题字), slogans (biaoyu 标语), big-character posters (dazibao 大字报), or scrawls (tuhua 涂鸦). In modern Chinese cities, slogans are the most common graffiti on the streets (Smith, 2020; Pan, 2014). However, not all aforementioned forms of ‘writings on walls’ are regarded

as graffiti by scholars. Minna Valjakka (2011) writes a detailed and ambitious article attempting to define graffiti in China, in which she suggests scholars define contemporary graffiti in China as a 'new form of artistic self-expression' (Valjakka, 2011, p.71). In her article, Valjakka (2011) notes that Chinese graffiti does not get enough attention from western academia. At the time of this writing, ten years have passed, and the situation has not improved - only a few academic publications in the anglophone world have given Chinese graffiti a platform to present itself; most academic works on Chinese graffiti focus on graffiti outside of mainland China (Pan, 2015; Zhang, 2017; Valjakka, 2019). Moreover, even in this very small academic circle, the discussion about how we can define graffiti in China is disputable. This study embraces a broader sense of graffiti and defines graffiti with its original meaning, implying that 'writing appears on the wall' (Tsilimpounidi, 2013). To be more specific, graffiti is used in its most broad sense as illicit, unauthorised writing or artwork in public space (Young, 2013). The study hopes that by doing so, it will be able to reach a wider audience and involve more academics.

With the definition of graffiti in mind, there are mainly three types of graffiti in China studied by scholars. The first type is very much like western graffiti with an aesthetic value that can be regarded as street artwork. For example, graffiti by a Chinese artist, Zhang Dali, was painted on the walls of to-be-demolished houses in major cities in China between 1995 to 1998 (Valjakka, 2011; Pan, 2015). The second type of graffiti in China is very unique in Hong Kong as a tool for social movements. During the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement in 2014, there were many Lennon Walls scattered throughout the city with handwritten notes expressing their demands for suffrage; this type of graffiti contains strong political intention, and it is a way to unite protesters in chaotic social movements (Valjakka, 2019). In Hong Kong, Lennon Walls have less aesthetic value since they are walls full of post-it notes with words but have far more political functions. The third type of graffiti appears mostly in mainland China, usually with random writings or drawings in public space in big cities with neither strong political intention nor aesthetic values. For example, urbanism scholar Nick Smith (2020) investigated graffiti written by locals in Chongqing's Ciqikou neighbourhood. Ciqikou was undergoing a redevelopment project in 2008. Residents who used to live there were reluctant to leave, so they wrote graffiti on the exterior walls of houses that were to be demolished, requesting that the area be spared from demolition. Different from the other types of graffiti in China, this type of graffiti is only made up of Chinese characters with no aesthetic value at all.

It is interesting to note that in Chinese-speaking academia, researchers rarely spend time defining what is ‘graffiti’. Literature on CNKI, mainland China’s largest academic database, equates graffiti with street art, completely disregarding those writings lacking artistic value. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, ‘graffiti’ sometimes has its homophonic translation as ‘guifeiti’ (鬼飞踢) (Bi, 2011), sharing the same connotation as the word used in western cultures.

Thus, more research is needed to expand the meaning of the term ‘graffiti’ in a more Chinese context.

Writing graffiti

This section examines the academic literature on the act of writing graffiti in urban space, focusing on three areas: How do we define the act of writing graffiti? Where is the graffiti written? And why do graffiti writers write graffiti?

First, the ways to describe the act of writing graffiti. To begin with, it is necessary to know: Who is writing graffiti? The labelling of those people who write graffiti in public space differs in literature, including writers (Pan, 2015; Trivundža and Velikonja, 2020), residents (Smith, 2020), creators (Zhang, 2017), co-authors (Valjakka), and artists (Pan, 2015). Different labels for graffiti participants indicate different types of graffiti and intentions. For example, the labels ‘artists’ and ‘creators’ stress the aesthetic value of graffiti, ‘co-authors’ gives attention to the content of graffiti, while ‘residents’ emphasises the identity of graffiti producers. These labelling practices also reveal a great deal about how academics define the act of writing graffiti. Based on the way the scholars label graffiti producers, the acts of producing graffiti in China are accordingly depicted as ‘creating’ (Valjakka, 2011), ‘co-authoring’ (Valjakka, 2019), and ‘writing’ (Pan, 2015; Smith, 2020). Moreover, Zhang (2017, pp.930-931) distinguishes the gestures of ‘writing’ and ‘painting’ by featuring writing as a non-artistic gesture and painting as a gesture with ‘its intentional and emotional content’. This study consistently uses the term ‘write’ to refer to the act of graffiti production processes, and thus ‘writers’ to label graffiti producers because they are more neutral and have multi-dimensional connotations.

Second, where do people write their graffiti? Some scholars point out that graffiti is very site-specific (Kwon, 2004; Bengsten, 2013). Valjakka (2015) characterises graffiti as ‘site-responsiveness’ to reveal the impact of site selection on graffiti’s ‘content and form’. In western countries, writing in public space such as trains is common (Lennon, 2016; Weide, 2016), while in China, it is still impossible for graffiti writers to write any place they want.

Graffiti sites in mainland China show varying degrees of (il)legality. For example, the local government planned a graffiti area in downtown Chongqing, and all the graffiti was written by officially approved writers (Pan, 2015); some well-known art areas, such as 798 in Beijing, also allow graffiti to exist in order to boost the creative industries' prosperity in the area (Valjakka, 2011); while writers such as Zhang Dali chose primarily 'forbidden places' for personal public expression, this will be considered illegal (Bruce, 2010). Zhang (2017, p.933) interviewed some graffiti writers in Macau and one of the interviewees said that they only chose 'locations that are deserted, but interesting'. According to research on graffiti in public toilets in Taiwan, the dual natures of private and public that public toilets have provided graffiti writers with anonymity to speak (Chen, 1996).

Third, why do people keep writing on walls, especially in urban space? One possible explanation is based on the media nature of graffiti, which suggests that graffiti is not only an expressive platform for artists but also the public domain with 'a plurality of heterogeneous materials of expression being worked upon, disseminated and coming into reciprocal contact' (Brighenti, 2017, p.132). The other possible motivation of graffiti writers is to claim the 'right to the city', an expression proposed by Lefebvre (1996, p.154) to describe that urban space is constantly being remade by its citizens. Graffiti is no doubt a part of such a remaking process. Citizenship in urban space guarantees two key rights: the right to participate in decision-making and the right to appropriate the space (Purcell, 2002). Occupy movements worldwide (such as Tahrir Square protests, Arab Spring events etc.) are demonstrations of how people claim space and aim to have a say in cities/nation's future (Lokot, 2020). When discussing such movements, scholars, particularly those specializing in media studies, have focused too much on how social media facilitate decentralized protests, i.e., protesters communicating in the virtual world (Lokot, 2020), while ignoring the material aspect of communication in these movements, i.e., how urban space has also provided communicative space for citizens (Lokot, 2020). Thus, in this study, the urban space in which the graffiti writers express their opinions will be highlighted, including why they have selected certain places to write, and how they have made use of the urban space to resist.

Mediating graffiti

In the previous section, the 'media nature of graffiti' is briefly mentioned, as graffiti is 'simultaneously physical acts and cultural practices' (Avramidis and Tsilimpounidi, 2017, p.4). This feature reminds us of the commonly mentioned idea of the 'material and

symbolic aspects of communication’ (Krajina, 2020; Jansson and Falkheimer, 2006). Thus, graffiti as a means of communication has two dimensions: graffiti *as* the media and graffiti *on* the media.

On the one hand, graffiti has long been regarded as a medium or media. For example, some call it a ‘cheap medium’ for enabling people to express channels at low costs (Philips, p.339). Some suggest graffiti and street art as ‘popular visual media’ as they provide places for ‘expression of social belonging’ (Trivundža and Velikonja, 2020). Ivor Miller (2002) suggests that graffiti is ‘a kind of proto-Internet’ since it works as ‘a network of information’. Jeff Rice (2012) shares a similar opinion, as he says that graffiti’s tagging form is the prototype of the user-generated feature of the Internet. In mainland China, some researchers argue that graffiti is an alternative medium which is marginalised by the mainstream, but possesses the communicative, representative and emotional functions as regular media do (Jiang, 2019). This study uses the plural form of ‘media’ to indicate that graffiti can be an analogy to various media platforms in various forms as it is diverse and always changing in time. On the other hand, graffiti nowadays is also largely mediated. Much of the graffiti has been distributed online, especially on social media. Lachlan MacDowall (2018) focuses on the interactions between graffiti and Instagram, and he proposes a mutual relation of the two media: street (graffiti) on Instagram and Instagram on street, indicating that graffiti is represented on social media and also many Instagram elements, such as hashtags, are written in graffiti on streets (MacDowall, 2018). MacDowall (2016) also suggests that there are two layers of mediated graffiti: visible representation and invisible datafication.

The good sides of mediated graffiti are that it has enriched the forms of graffiti (for example, the emergence of GIF-iti) and enabled the ephemeral pieces of work to be kept for a much longer period even after their site’s removal (Trivundža and Velikonja, 2020). The drawbacks of mediated graffiti are also criticised by many in academia. From an economic perspective, some artists’ graffiti nowadays is more tailored to digital media, i.e., to sacrifice the on-site aura in order to be perfectly presented on Facebook or Instagram, or to give up artistic style to satisfy the audience whose attention could be transformed into potential commercial opportunities (Glaser, 2015; Rushmore, 2013). Furthermore, most social science scholars worry that mediated graffiti has weakened the power of graffiti as a way for citizens to claim the right of the city. Valjakka (2019) regards Hong Kong Lennon Walls as a ‘spatial power’ and emphasises that even though with the walls’ images distributed on social media, the on-site participations are irreplaceable. For Valjakka, social media cannot provide ‘adequate

representation of the core physical, material, spatial, and temporal circumstances on-site or of the divergent forms of agency, manifestations, and aesthetics'. Pan (2014) concludes that there are two flows when graffiti in physical space being digitalised and disseminated in cyberspace, referring to the flow of exhibition space and the flow of the audience. The former flow results in the deprivation of haptic perception of the graffiti, space, and the author, while the latter flow results in the incapability of the audience in terms of participation and acting in reality. Interestingly, though urban space and graffiti are both regarded as media by scholars as discussed in previous sections when studying graffiti on social media, the concept of 'remediation' is rarely used to analyse the double mediation of graffiti in an already mediated place/space. This study will attempt to introduce the term 'remediation' when analysing the graffiti on Rehe Road on social media. The analysis will be presented in Chapter 4.

Everyday life and resistance

This section introduces some theories that will be useful and inspiring for analysing the data. The first section will provide a brief overview of everyday life in urban space through the eyes of social scientists, emphasising that urban space has always been a site of contestation. The second and third sections, which use graffiti as an example, go into greater detail about how power and resistance are contesting each other in poetic ways. Furthermore, music censorship is discussed as state power in the second section, which is critical to understanding Li Zhi's 'disappearance' in mainland China.

Everyday life in city

Everyday life is a common expression for most people, and they have been using it without any second thought. As one of the interviewees responded to Krajina when he was asked for thoughts on public screens in London, this interviewee said: 'I never thought someone would be asking me about that screen?! I don't look at it. It's. . .just there' (Krajina, 2014, p.1). Everyday life, like the public screen in cities, is 'just there', but in academia, it is far more than 'just there', as it is a field full of meanings and social relations. Alfred Schutz (1954), for example, assumes that the everyday lifeworld is a 'socio-cultural world' in which dwellers connect in various ways and with varying degrees of anonymity and intimacy. Erving Goffman (1959) notes that there are full of performances and symbolic interactions in an individual's everyday life. In this sense, everyday life functions similar to the concept of 'place' for human geographers and 'space' for sociologists.

Like place/space, everyday life is also the arena within which power is continuously exercised. When the young lady in Baudelaire (2008)'s poem *The Eyes of the Poor* sits in a newly opened glitzy café and sees the poor man's weary eyes through the French window, she is disgusted. On one side, it is the delightful life of the rich in the gleaming metropolitan area; on the other, the poor, dreary life, separated by a window. What has been segmented, for Baudelaire, is also economic statuses and classes. Lefebvre, as an avant-garde sociologist in urban space, points out several decades ago that everyday life was not simply a lived experience but contains 'a deep structure' (Highmore, 2004, p.115). As a Marxist, Lefebvre believes that everyday life is exploitative, oppressive and relentlessly controlled (by consumption) (cited in Highmore, 2004, p.117). However, there is also space for resistance in the cities. The simplest solution has been provided by de Certeau (1984) a long time ago, as he points out that walking in the cities is a tactic to resist the planned paths by the authorities. Power and resistance are two inseparable motifs in everyday urban life. The following sections will elaborate on the tensions between the two, both with the adjective 'poetic' before them, indicating that power and resistance primarily operate and occur at a symbolic, tactical, and mythological level in this study.

Poetic power

How can power be exercised without violent machines from the above? Two influential theorists, Lefebvre and Foucault, have given their answers respectively at macro and micro levels. For Lefebvre, the concept of 'space' contains three aspects, which is often called Lefebvre's 'spatial triad': spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.38-39). To put it simply, spatial practices refer to the perceived space that we physically use in our everyday lives; representations of space refer to the conceived space in which science and knowledge operate; and representational space refers to the lived space in which individuals represent space through symbols and signs. Apart from the perceived space, which is directly attached to physical infrastructure in space, the other two kinds of space exist in more abstract ways. Conceived space is usually tightly controlled by the authorities via urban planning, street naming, or education, while lived space is subject to ordinary people's spatial experience in various artistic forms. If we applied the spatial triad in analysing the power relations around graffiti, the top-down control is quite obvious. For example, who has the right to decide the areas in which graffiti writing is allowed? In his ethnographic study in Gezi Park protest, Turkey in 2013, Kyle Evered (2019) found the state erased graffiti in the square every night and the government labelled the act of

writing graffiti as 'terroristic'. In this case, the erasure of graffiti on the walls is the control over social practices (physical space) and the labelling strategy showcases how power can be exercised by 'knowledge' (also discourse to some extent). The other example, from an economic aspect, which has been briefly mentioned in the mediated graffiti section, is that graffiti writers start to customise their graffiti based on the consideration of their presence on social media, to be better promoted or have their works go viral (Rushmore, 2013). In this scenario, representational space is employed to produce 'goods' that have potential commercial values, in other words, the space becomes the means of production. The other perspective to reflect on the 'poetic power' in everyday life is provided by Foucault, who has promoted the metaphor 'panopticon' by Jeremy Bentham, illustrating the omnipresent disciplines in modern society (Foucault, 2011). The power of the panopticon is an Orwellian power, which transverse everywhere in everyday life and will eventually be internalised as self-surveillance. The aforementioned site selection of the graffiti writers in Macau, for example, reveals somewhat self-surveillance when they reflect their graffiti in public space and call the act of graffiti writing 'illegal'. They have a clear 'spatial taboo' in their minds where they know the graffiti will be erased by the government very soon. Such self-surveillance makes them never 'spray on the walls of historical value' (Zhang, 2017, p.933).

Another topic unrelated to spatial control but relevant to the context of this study, namely music censorship in mainland China, should be discussed briefly in this section as a poetic power from above. After the foundation of the People's Republic of China since 1949, music censorship never stopped in mainland China. The government banned Taiwanese ballads which were too feminine in the 1970s, some Chinese rock n roll stars who were considered too provocative in the 1980s, some Hong Kong Cantopop songs around the 2000s which were perceived as relating to political events (Yang, 2017). Furthermore, some hip-hop performers and singers were blacklisted for their 'inappropriate' expressions (Luo and Ming, 2020). Usually, there are no clear explanations for the banned singers or songs. General assumptions are either the singers have expressed unacceptable political views or conducted misbehaviours, or the songs that are explicit, politically incorrect, or too religious (Yang, 2017). Some studies from mainland China conclude that the removals of certain pieces of music are mainly due to the issues of piracy, uncensored foreign music, vulgar content (Li, 2010; Wang, 2019). However, through all these years' implementation of music censorship, Chinese people have started to accept the situation at will, and they believe the government is really 'protecting them from harmful information' (Yang, 2017). In this sense, the poetic

power exercised in virtual ‘representational space’ is very effective, at least, from the point of view of the government.

Poetic resistance

If we accept Foucauldian all-pervading power in everyday life, it appears that powerless people will be disciplined regardless. Fortunately, everyday life is not so rigid; it is porous, with countless minute spaces where resistance can freely enter and exit. In his ethnographic work in a rural area of Malaysia, James Scott (1985) noticed that peasants there were adopting various furtive forms of resistance against a nationwide Green Revolution that threatened their land ownership. Scott (1985, p.29) concludes that peasant resistance took the form of ‘foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth’ in everyday life or work. For Scott, these acts are all ‘weapons of the weak’. The other example of such furtive resistance in everyday life is conducted by city dwellers, in Michel de Certeau’s work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). De Certeau (1984, p.30) first distinguishes between the powers’ strategy, which is to ‘produce, tabulate, impose’ spaces, and the powerless’ tactics, which is to ‘use, manipulate, and diverse’ spaces. He claims that city dwellers employ tactics on a daily basis when walking through the city. Walking, according to de Certeau, is a tactic for resisting cartographers and the power they wield in urban planning. According to de Certeau, the walkers are heroes who ‘belong to no one’. De Certeau’s arguments are quite inspiring in this study, as he reveals both the gentle aspect of resistance in everyday life and how unconsciously resistance can be. Although not everyone who walks through Paris realizes how heroic they are simply by walking through their city, de Certeau believes that their resistance is real, as evidenced by the results. Zaki Habibi (2020) observed the tactics of resistance in his urban media ethnographic research conducted in two creative cities in Malaysia and Indonesia, where local creative communities are adopting ‘silent and unnoticed’ tactics to resist official narratives, and such tactics are called ‘subtle resistance’ in his work. Though the terminology used to describe these everyday life resistances varies across regions and time periods, they all share at least two core characteristics: they are non-subversive and non-violent. In this study, these characteristics are concluded as ‘poetic’, and thus the resistance is the poetic resistance, corresponding to ‘poetic power’ inscribed in everyday life.

The implications of the words ‘poetic’ and ‘poetics’ in the context of space and resistance require some clarification in order to elaborate the ‘poetic resistance’ with empirical data on urban space graffiti in the following chapters. Firstly, it is not the first time that the word

‘poetics’ is collocated with ‘space’. Back in 1958, the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1964) wrote his classic book *The Poetics of Space*, in which he applies phenomenology as the method, acquiring linguistic materials from modern poems to describe people’s imaginations of space in their houses. Though the word ‘poetics’ is used in its ‘relating to poems/poetry’ sense by Bachelard, the book inspires this study to rethink the space at its philosophical level that touches on the ‘dasein’ of human beings. Secondly, the terms ‘poetic’ and ‘poetics’ have implications that go beyond poems or poetry to creative action in general (Frosh, 2019, p.10). Linguist Roman Jakobson (1960) observes that language has six communicative functions, one of which is poetic. Poetic function of language ‘deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects’ (Jakobson, 1960, p.356). Along with Jakobson’s theories, Smith (2020, p.584) proposes his own term ‘spatial poetics’ to comprehend graffiti as a form of resistance in his case. The anti-demolition residents in Smith’s research took advantage of arbitrary connections between signifiers and signifieds to separate the original meanings (signifieds) from specific signifiers and appropriate them to express their demands. In Lefebvre’s ‘spatial triad’, the operation takes place at the ‘interface’ of coded and uncoded space, i.e., conceived and perceived space.

A review of existing literature reveals three facts. To begin with, in contrast to studies that discussed media and cities/urban space as two distinct entities several decades ago, the trend in academia today is gradually gaining traction to discuss their profound integration. Second, the uniqueness and distinctiveness of graffiti in China, particularly that written by ordinary people in mainland China, merits academic investigations both domestically and internationally. Finally, resistance has a poetic aspect to it. All those secretive acts that do not follow the rules from above are all resistance, even if they are mild and timid; resistance also has a spatial nature, i.e., poetic resistance usually takes place in a specific location. To sum up, the discussions on mediated urban space, the literature on graffiti in China, and the discussions on resistance in everyday life have provided various perspectives and inspirations to help this study’s analysis go deeper. However, before presenting findings based on empirical data, the next chapter will first outline the methodologies that guided the study’s design and the methods used to collect and process all of the data.

3. Methodology and methods

This study's dataset comprises various types of empirical data, including photos of the graffiti, posts about the graffiti on social media, articles pertaining to the graffiti on the Internet, interview transcripts, and observation notes. All the data is collected digitally due to the impacts of the pandemic. The first section of this chapter discusses the methodological inspirations that guide the entire data collection and analysis process. The specific methods used to acquire and process the data are then discussed. The chapter ends with reflections on the implementations of the methodologies and methods.

Methodological inspirations

As mentioned, all the data in this study is gathered in digital ways via the Internet. Therefore, it is crucial to design the data collection process carefully so that it helps the researcher to gain the data that is demanded. Internet-mediated Research (IMR) has provided this study with many methodological inspirations. IMR is broadly defined as research containing the process of collecting empirical data with the assistance of the Internet (British Psychological Society, 2017). Compared with traditional physical qualitative method tools, the Internet can 'enhance and expand methodological opportunities beyond what is possible or practicable offline' (Hewson et al., 2016, p.1). IMR contributes to this study by providing documentary data on graffiti from various periods, allowing the researcher to reach out to many anonymous graffiti writers, and enabling the researcher to experience the urban space when physical visits are impossible due to the pandemic situation. Additionally, with the evolving technologies of smartphones with high-pixel cameras, and various streaming platforms, the opportunities to observe 'people's movements around a city' and collect 'potentially vast volumes of in situ data while participants are on the move' have increased dramatically (Hewson et al., 2016, p.25). As a result, IMR encourages researchers to think outside the box of methodological materiality by utilizing the advantages afforded by the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to explore and expand the possibilities of conducting qualitative research, particularly research involving urban space.

In terms of dealing with the collected data, images become the problem, as they comprise the majority of the study's empirical dataset, which is crucial for the analysis. In this sense, this study is image-centred. The problem is: how to methodologically approach such a type of empirical data in a cross-disciplinary study aiming to cover certain areas of media, urban, human and cultural geography, and graffiti studies? Gillian Rose (2016, p.22)'s critical visual

methodology, which encourages researchers to ‘understand the importance of images’ and ‘take images seriously’, is the main source of methodological inspiration here. According to Rose (2016, p.22), a critical approach to understanding images requires researchers to acknowledge image effects, image social contexts, and ‘your own way of looking at images’. Similar to Rose, Marcus Banks (2001) also calls for understanding the ‘internal’ (the content of images) and ‘external’ (social context/relations embedded in images) narratives of visual work. Thus, the methodology acknowledges the agency of a variety of subjects, including the image itself, its creators, viewers, and the researchers themselves. With such a multi-subjective methodology, the research can interpret the images from various perspectives and delve deeper into the broader social context behind the images. Additionally, Rose especially points out that images are important for studies on urban space as they ‘can convey something of the feel of urban places, space and landscapes’ (Rose, 2016, p.308). In this study, since the researcher had no chance to visit the street in person, the digital photos of the graffiti, the street, and the urban space have provided rich data facilitating the researcher to get a multi-facet sense of ‘colour, texture, form, volume, size and pattern’ of the graffiti’s settings and human beings who have connections with the graffiti as well (Rose, 2016, p.308).

Apart from IMR and critical visual methodology, two other methodological inspirations that are complementary but also necessary to be mentioned here, they are a non–media-centric approach in media studies and a phronetic approach in social science. On the one hand, the non-media-centric approach is advocated by David Morley, who suggests paying attention to media’s ‘material as well as its symbolic dimensions’ (Morley, 2009, p. 114). Such a statement gives this study the confidence to focus on both representational and more-than-representational (Lorimer, 2005) aspects of the interaction between media and urban space. Plus, the approach also encourages the researcher to ‘decentre’ media in media studies, to put media and ICTs ‘in a far wider frame’ (Krajina et al., 2014, p.684), and ‘with broader views of the day-to-day from beyond the field’s usual limits’ (Moore, 2018, p.7). The concept of ‘phronetic social science’, coined by Bent Flyvbjerg (2001), on the other hand, reminds researchers to pay close attention to the dynamic relationship between social phenomena and the power mechanisms that underpin them. Flyvbjerg (2001) also encourages researchers to make full use of ‘concrete cases’ to ‘search for the great within the small’. Thus, this study will use the case of Rehe Road graffiti and hopes to find the broader social contexts and power fields surrounding the Rehe Road graffiti by thoroughly explaining the case.

Data collection

All types of data in this study are collected via three qualitative research methods: documentation, observations, and interviews.

Documentation aims to collect existing documents rather than eliciting data oneself. In this study, the documentation process is mediated, meaning to collect data such as video, audio, maps, and photographs on social media (Pennington, 2017, p.237). Documents are mainly from Weibo, a twitter-like microblogging platform in China. The choice of Weibo is based on two reasons: First, Weibo is an open platform for all Weibo users, which means that when a researcher uses the platform, they have access to a massive database generated by 511 million monthly active users (China Internet Watch, 2021). The data can be traced back to the platform's inception in 2008. Secondly, posts by the users on Weibo are vivid, comprehensively presented with the elements of texts, emojis, pictures/GIFs/videos/music, hashtags, location check-ins, comments, and so forth. Such extensive features provide the researcher with a wealth of information that can be used to virtually observe and 'experience' the urban environment through visual elements and to comprehend people's thoughts through textual elements. Weibo posts with the location check-in tag 'Rehe Road' (热河路) were searched when collecting data. There are 1295 results, of which 420 are relevant to this research (i.e., pertaining to graffiti). All valid posts are manually copied into a Word document with a table separating the date, text, images, and all comments for each post. Other supporting documents come from mainland China's other social media platforms, including Zhihu and Douban². Because the researcher did not 'ask people to participate or answer questions', all of these documents were gathered in an unobtrusive manner (Prior, 2008 cited in Pennington, 2017, p.237). Furthermore, because posts and articles on various platforms have been published at different times, these documents, particularly photographs taken at 'the same place at regular, frequent intervals' (Rose, 2016, p.313), can document the rapidly changing urban space.

However, social media platforms are not the only means to collect documents; mediated observations in this study also contribute to adding documents into the dataset. In qualitative IMR, the boundary between documentation and observations are gradually blurred (Hewson et al., 2016, p.32). For instance, when collecting documents from Weibo, the researcher was

² Zhihu is a Quora-like knowledge sharing platform, where there is a question about Rehe Road with 32 answers and Douban is a social networking website where several users posted their own articles about Rehe Road graffiti. This study has selected 5 articles into the dataset, see the list in Appendix 2.

simultaneously observing people's behaviours and interactions (Hewson et al., 2016, p.19). Furthermore, this study used urban walking as a method, but the way it was implemented was 'unconventional', as the entire process was completed online. On the one hand, Baidu Maps' Total View feature³ allows users to virtually walk down the street by immersing oneself in a three-dimensional virtual urban space with panoramic photos. Plus, the Total View has a Time Machine feature that allows the researcher to compare panoramic images of the same location in different years. On the other hand, a mediated urban walking was conducted in this study, with an on-site observer walking on Rehe Road in China and live-streaming the street scene to the researcher in Lund, Sweden via video call. The on-site observer expressed his thoughts and feelings about the street and the graffiti there. The researcher listened to both the voice on the street and the on-site observer's enunciations while watching the real-time video on the screen. The observation was semi-structured, with an observation script prepared⁴, but it was still open to whatever happened on the street spontaneously. This was also a photo-documentation process, as many photos and two video clips were taken during the observation and can be analysed retrospectively as part of the 'coding process' (Rose, 2016, p.314). All of the details and reflections from this mediated urban walking have been recorded in a fieldwork note⁵. The problems caused by not being able to conduct on-site urban space observation in person can be mitigated using both virtual and mediated urban walking methods.

Interviews also help with the problem of not being able to 'observe people for a long time' and understanding 'people's ideas, thoughts, opinions, attitudes' (Berg, 2014, p.161). Two strategies have been employed to find suitable interviewees, namely those who have previously written graffiti on Rehe Road: 1) to approach graffiti writers who indicated their writing acts on social media platforms; 2) to publish recruitments on various platforms. The strategies worked well, and nine graffiti writers accepted the interview invitations, and they wrote their graffiti between the years of 2018 and 2020⁶. The semi-structured interviews are then conducted with these interviewees⁷. Furthermore, to address the issue of 'phone phobia' among some potential interviewees, an asynchronous IMR approach, i.e., online text chats, was used to 'alleviate the immediate pressure' of phones (O'Connor et al., 2008) and collect

³ It is the Chinese version of Google Maps' Street View feature.

⁴ See the first part of Appendix 3.

⁵ See an excerpt from the note in the second part of Appendix 3.

⁶ See Appendix 4, to protect all the interviewees, personal information is removed.

⁷ See Appendix 5 for the interview guide.

‘rich, elaborate data’ (Bowker and Tuffin, 2004). All synchronous interviews were conducted via audio calls, with each interview lasting an average of more than one hour. Asynchronous interviews took place on Weibo, Douban, and WeChat. These asynchronous interviews are unstructured and informal, and they only provide supplementary information for this study.

Analytical approaches

Critical visual analysis is the method used to interpret and understand graffiti. Even though the graffiti in this study consists primarily of Chinese characters and words, these texts ‘are still undeniably bound to the visual’ (Lynn and Lea, 2005). To analyse graffiti visually, this study employs Andres Hansen and David Machin (2013, p.174)’s semiotic analysis approach because it provides a versatile toolkit for producing more ‘systematic analyses of photographs’. Hansen and Machin (2013) argue that photographs have two dimensions - denotation and connotation - reminding researchers of considering both the description and interpretation of images, which aligns well with Banks’ emphasis on understanding both internal and external narratives of visual work.

The study has a problem of how to analyse graffiti that was both located in physical urban space and represented on social media at the same time. Rose (2016, p.24) offers a partial solution by encouraging researchers to examine an image at ‘four sites’, in which the site of the image itself matters, but also the site of circulation also matters. Thus, graffiti images can be examined by analysing their compositions and meanings; after that, questions like ‘How are they organized and by whom?’ and ‘What has changed?’ can be asked about how these graffiti images are represented on social media. However, there is one flaw: the graffiti images are only about the mediation process, whereas the images on social media should be discussed in terms of remediation, and both mediation and remediation processes contribute to this study in different ways. As a result, two analysis schemes are required in this case. When Roland Barthes’ concept of ‘myth’ is added to the scenario, two types of ‘signification’ (myth) emerge: mediated and remediated graffiti and urban space. The point here is that the myth of mediated graffiti and urban space contributes to the myth of remediated graffiti and urban spaces construction (Figure 3-1, 3-2). The semiotic analysis is divided into two parts: the analysis of the graffiti image itself and the analysis of the representation of graffiti on social media. Two separate analysis schemes are created, each focusing on ‘non-representational’ and ‘representational’ aspects of graffiti and urban space⁸.

⁸ See Appendix 6 for the schemes.

Signifiers #1	Signified #1
(Denotation) Chinese characters, lines, shapes on walls, trees etc.	(Connotation) words, sentences, drawings
Sign #1 → Signifier #2	
(Denotation) the literal meanings of words, sentences, drawings, on different media	
Signified #2	
(Connotation) the meanings behind the words, sentences, drawings	
Sign #2 → Myth #1	
To reveal ideologies, power mechanisms behind	

Figure 3-1 The myth of mediated graffiti and urban space

Signifiers #1	Signified #1
(Denotation) pictures, texts, and other elements on social media in a certain order.	(Connotation) Posts on social media
Sign #1 → Signifier #2	
(Denotation) posts' motifs, implications + Myth #1	
Signified #2	
(Connotation) the interpretations of the motifs of social media's posts combined with Myth #1	
Sign #2 → Myth #2	
To reveal ideologies, power mechanisms behind	

Figure 3-2 The myth of remediated graffiti and urban space

The dataset also includes interview transcripts⁹ and other documents (such as captions and comments extracted from Weibo posts, as well as articles from other social media platforms). This study uses ethnographic content analysis (ECA) to deal with such data, which is aided by the software NVivo to complete the coding process. When ethnographically analysing qualitative data, there are primarily five stages: data collection, protocol development, coding, analysis, and reporting. ECA is not a linear process, but rather one that is: 1) recursive and iterative; 2) immersive; and 3) reflexive (Altheide and Schneider, 2013). As a result, as the study progresses, the coding process continues. The coding has gone through two cycles. During the first cycle, the researcher remained open to data and scanned through

⁹ See Appendix 7 for one translated interview transcript.

all of the datasets transcripts and documents, resulting in a lengthy code list. After that, a protocol was drafted and then implemented¹⁰. Patterns (pattern coding) were identified in the second cycle, followed by the creation of categories and subcategories (focused coding). In total, NVivo was used to code nine interview transcripts, captions and comments from 420 Weibo posts, and five articles from other social media platforms¹¹.

Reflections

The world appears to have become accustomed to living with limited mobility, and more work is now being done digitally and remotely. As a result, the reflections on conducting mediated qualitative research, such as this study, should hopefully provide some inspiration for future qualitative IMR, particularly studies about urban space.

First of all, mediated urban walking is a new exploration to apply urban walking as a method in an entire mediated process. It is a supplementary but crucial method for collecting data on urban space for this study. Prior to the completion of the mediated urban walking, the semiotic analysis of visual data had been underway for some time. The results based on photographs and descriptions from interviews were satisfactory, but something was missing on a deeper level. Then, after the mediated urban walking, many previously hidden aspects of urban space, such as the texture of the media on which people write graffiti, the vivid details of all the graffiti, and encounters with other fans on the street, suddenly popped up. Two points should be made here: on the one hand, the selection of on-site observer is critical. The on-site observer in this study was a journalist with the capacity to capture details, accurately describe scenes and feelings, and communicate with people. Such capacities are crucial for mediated urban walking since there are essentially two observers in the process, the researcher in front of the computer screen and the on-site observer. The interactions between the two subjects will determine the richness of collected data. On the other hand, the documentary of the whole process with videos and photos is significant. Typically, urban walking is used to capture 'greater phenomenological sensibility' (Kusenbach, 2003) and to elicit 'sensory and affective investigations' (Springgay and Truman, 2018). In this sense, mediated urban walking invariably results in the loss of some sensory details. However, according to Habibi (2020, p.54), photographic documents from urban walking are equally effective if the visual

¹⁰ See the third part of Appendix 8.

¹¹ See the first and second part of Appendix 8.

works are created in an ‘immersive way’ with ‘the chosen social and cultural phenomena’. For this study, mediated urban walking is an alternative during the pandemic as ‘the loss or impairment of one sense may lead to other senses being enhanced or creatively used’ (O’Neill and Roberts, 2020, p.20).

The second problem of IMR is concerning ethical issues. When interviewing people via audio calls, the APPs such as WeChat or QQ seemed to be the only choice in mainland China. Some interviewees were very cautious about the content of the conversations as certain parts of the interview involved topics related to resistance and transgression. Interviewees usually avoided talking about ‘sensitive’ topics on WeChat as they were afraid of being monitored. Therefore, though the audio calls somewhat created a relaxed atmosphere for the interviewees when they talked with a total stranger (the researcher) for the first time, they can still be regarded as ‘unsafe’ due to the omnipresent surveillance in cyberspace. To avoid any potential risks to the interviewees, all the questions that were regarded as ‘sensitive’ by the interviewees had been stopped immediately. Furthermore, for all the interviewees, as well as all the authors of the posts and comments mentioned in the analysis, this study has made every effort to keep their personal information revealed to a minimum and to keep the original data accessible only to the researcher¹². To go even further, when the IMR is conducted, ubiquitous digital surveillance appears to be unavoidable. The key takeaway from this study is the importance of mutual trust between the researcher and the interviewees. More importantly, in the digital era, researchers must always remember that IMR is not a one-size-fits-all methodology. While acknowledging the importance of virtuality in everyday life, it is also critical not to overlook the material aspect of human society, as this study has explained when discussing mediated place/space in chapter two. Physical interactions and face-to-face communications will be the best way to build trust and reduce the impact of surveillance during interviews in the future.

One final point is the issue of data validity when performing IMR. The solution for this study is to triangulate data using multiple methods such as interviews, document analysis (including semiotic analysis), and observations (Denzin, 2009). The results of the various methods are in good agreement. For example, a sentence claimed to have been written on the pavement by one interviewee was seen in both urban walking and a photo posted on Weibo. As a result, the validity of IMR can be completely assured.

¹² The principle was also dictated in an oral consent form before every interview, see Appendix 9.

4. Analysis

‘Rehe Road is home for me’, Interviewee #8, a Gen Z-er who has never lived in Nanjing, describes his attachment to Rehe Road with the word ‘home’. Of course, he is familiar with Rehe Road thanks to the song and other media. On Rehe Road, he also wrote his own texts and shared photos taken there on social media. In this study, Interviewee #8 is very typical, and his story reveals the complex intertwined relationships between media, urban space, and graffiti. This chapter begins with attempts to elaborate on Rehe Road’s mediation through media, graffiti, and other elements. The second part looks at how remediated graffiti has altered human-place relationships. The final part articulates how the act of writing graffiti in a mediated and remediated urban space has evolved into a form of poetic resistance in mainland China today.

Mediated Rehe Road

Rehe Road used to be an ordinary Nanjing street. It was unknown to the majority of people, including Nanjingnese, prior to its ‘debut’ in Li Zhi’s song and news about the graffiti erasure in the media. For example, Interviewee #3, despite being born and raised in Nanjing, had never heard of the street. The street is now attracting tourists from all over the country, primarily *Rehe*’s lovers or Li Zhi’s fans, thanks to the singer’s and the media’s attention. This section of the analysis tries to explain how Rehe Road has been thoroughly mediated, both as a materially and culturally reshaped place and as an urban space that has become a media complex itself.

The street: a symbolised place

Rehe Road, as a corner in the big city of Nanjing, is not particularly impressive. However, in the eyes of lovers of the song or fans of Li Zhi, it is more than a path for cars to pass through or a space for city residents; it is a pause in the city’s busy traffic, and in Tuan’s theory, it is a ‘place’ with meanings. A ‘place’ can be created by filling a specific space with ‘values, perceptions, memories, and traditions’, according to human geographers; more importantly, ‘place-making’ is typically a bottom-up process (as opposed to placemaking as a top-down strategy) (Alan, 2017). Several place-makers are identified in this section as part of the process of making Rehe Road a ‘place’.

From a representational perspective, the main players here include three forces. Firstly, it is undoubtedly the song and the singer, as all the interviewees in this study explain this

explicitly, that *Rehe* and Li Zhi are the main reasons for their visits. Music can be a place-maker in the sense that it represents places in its various forms, and ‘the representation of these places involves the forwarding of specific narratives’ (Kruse, 2005, p.89). The lucid lyrics, melancholic melody, and Li Zhi’s performance of *Rehe* are all narratives that inject peculiar meanings into Rehe Road in this study. The other place maker is the mass media, which uses its ‘discursive power’ to represent the place (Andersson, 2019, p.111). On social media, users usually portray the street as a unique and interesting location, whereas in mainstream media, such as local newspapers, the street is always portrayed as an area that needs to be redeveloped and cleaned. The city taxi drivers are the final players in the construction of Rehe Road. Interviewee #9 ran into a driver who was once a retailer on Rehe Road. The driver described the street as having a lively atmosphere and friendly neighbourhoods in its heyday in the 1990s. However, the driver sighed, stating that the street is now only for the wealthy. Such descriptions had profoundly affected Interviewee #9’s perception of Rehe Road. Several times during the interview, she referred to Rehe Road as a street ‘for the wealthy’, despite the fact that the street in real life is still under construction and frequently dusty. To some extent, Interviewee #9 looks at Rehe Road with the lens ‘borrowed’ from the taxi driver. Thus, taxi drivers are a medium, wandering around in the space of the city, adding those anecdotes to the streets, architecture, landmarks and so forth, turning all the urban locales into places by their narratives. Three sources aid visitors in forming an image of Rehe Road prior to, and even after their physical visit: the song (textual/audio), media representations (visual), and finally taxi drivers (oral). Each layer is augmented onto the other, and Rehe Road becomes more than just a city corner.

However, place-making does not solely depend on representational sources, nor does it end when the visitors arrive at the destination physically. A place can be socially constructed both in meaning (by lyrics or images) and materiality (by graffiti that has changed the landscape of the street); it is also important to think about a place from a non-representational and phenomenological perspective, in which human experience and humanity are essential (Creswell, 2015, pp.46-51). Visitors on Rehe Road use a variety of methods to make sense of the place, including writing, reading, and photographing the graffiti on the street. Even simply walking down the street can be interpreted as a way to make a place because every walker is immersed in the environment through their sensory organs - they see, smell, hear, and touch it. Many interviewees in this study mention the weather of the day they visited Rehe Road. Interviewee #8 could not remember the exact date of his visit at first during the

interview, but he remembers that it was a hot day, ‘the sunshine was strong, maybe it was early May’, he recalls. For Interviewee #2, it was a chilly day, ‘so cold that I had to enter a bubble tea shop to get a warm drink’. Coincidentally, *Rehe* has a line saying that ‘but there is always one type of weather that makes me nostalgic’. Time flies, so why does a place remain lingering in one’s mind years later? It is always humanity and individual’s perceptions that matter.

Place-makers are not only vital in making a place but more importantly, in this study, to mediate the place. Firstly, all the place-makers mentioned above are mediating the worlds of virtual and real. Interviewee #6 claims himself a non-fan of Li Zhi, he went to the street because he read an article on WeChat introducing the viral graffiti walls on Rehe Road. For him, Rehe Road and the graffiti are all cultural symbols, they are ‘fun’ and ‘cool’. He saved the photos of the graffiti walls from the article and when he was on the street, he asked a resident the whereabouts of the walls by showing the photos to the resident. Thus, Interviewee #6 was not sightseeing the landscape on Rehe Road, but ‘mythscape’ there. Applying Roland Barthes’ mythology theories to urban media studies, mythscape refers to the myth adhered to the physical landscape. The mediascape is the first-level sign, consisting of the physical landscape and media representations of the landscape; then, in the mythical level, the mediascape becomes the signifier, combining with pre-existing perceptions of the place (signified) to create mythscape (Bennet, 2002, p.89). For Interviewee #6 and other visitors who visit Rehe Road for the song, the singer or the graffiti, the scenery there is mythscape. Some visitors also listened to *Rehe* while they were walking on the street. On Weibo, they usually post a screenshot of their music player playing the song with a check-in tag on Rehe Road. The screenshot plays a role as a witness, witnessing their physical and virtual existence, as they are there on the street, but also ‘live in media’ simultaneously (Frosh, 2019, pp.91-92). Secondly, the mediated place is also roaming between the realms of ordinary and extraordinary. It is ordinary in the physical world, but extraordinary in the mediated world, where there is a barber shop, a lobster restaurant, and a shabby cinema. All these landmarks are mentioned in *Rehe*, but they have long since vanished from the real world. Almost every interviewee mentions such non-existent scenery, and Weibo posts also highlight these places frequently. The question is, why are these Gen Z-ers, who have never seen these landmarks, so obsessed with these invisible sceneries? The possible reason may be that the landmarks are fixed in their collective memories, or ‘prosthetic memory’, as Alison Landsberg (2004) defines it, which means that the song’s listeners create and share collective memories based

on mediated representations rather than ‘lived experience’. Prosthetic memories equip visitors with a tourist gaze, through which they can always discover that ‘below the ordinary, there is the extraordinary peculiarity’ (Bennet, 2002, p.89). The prosthetic memory is not the main focus of this thesis, but it is mentioned here to provide a better understanding of the Rehe Road’s remediation, which involves the transformation of collective memories into personal memories and is discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Urban space: a media complex

The sky was still bright on this Saturday afternoon. Rehe Road was a hive of activity, with cars whizzing by on the main roads and pedestrians walking on the sidewalks. This scene is similar to any other city street in mainland China’s major cities. However, if one came to a halt in front of any plane tree planted alongside the road, one would notice densely written Chinese characters strewn across the trunks of the trees. A date, a single word, a sentence, or even a paragraph can be found in some of the handwriting. Then, as one moved their gaze around, similar handwriting appeared on street signposts, streetlamp poles, billboards, advertising boards, sphere bollards, and even the pavement beneath their feet (Figure 4-1). Graffiti can be found all over the public space, sending a strong message that the space is a container that can accommodate a variety of media.¹³.

¹³ The excerpt from the mediated urban walking note.

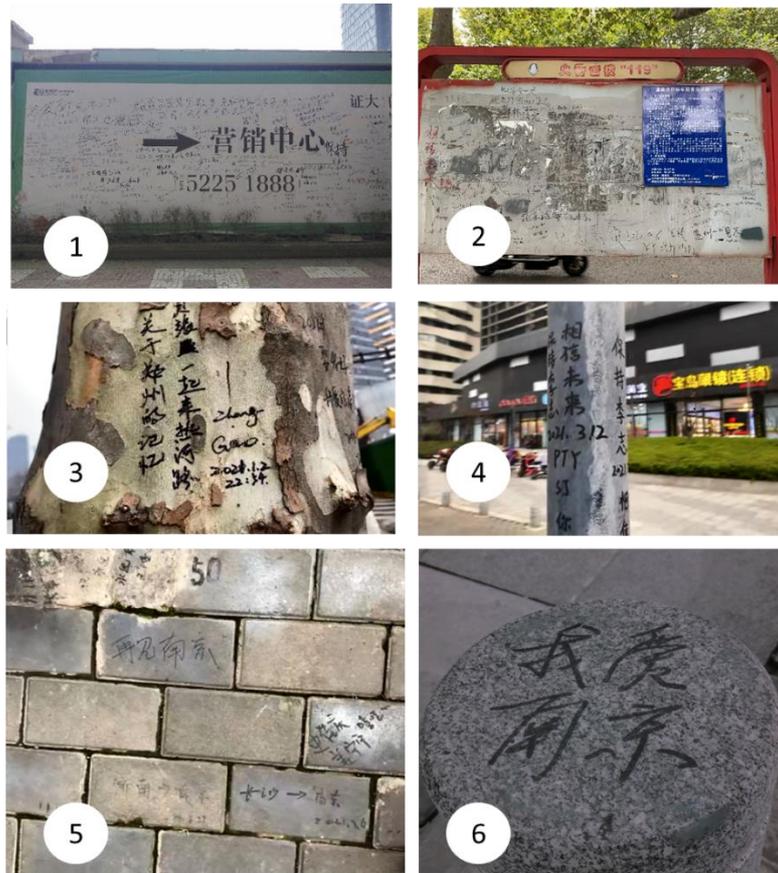


Figure 4-1 Graffiti everywhere on Rehe Road (Source: 1- 小賴皮的人間販賣; 2- 用心; 3,4,5-the author; 6- Interviewee #1)

In urban media studies, media and city are usually regarded as two intertwining but separate objects (McQuire, 2008; Krajina, 2014). However, the ubiquitous graffiti on Rehe Road requires us to reiterate Friedrich Kittler (1996)'s argument that 'city as a medium'. According to Kittler (1996, p.722), the media can be a variety of 'familiar things' in our daily lives, including 'the city'. This study goes a step further, claiming that the urban space has evolved into a container for a diverse range of media, a media complex. As previously stated, urban space's compositions, such as tree trunks, street signposts, pavements, and so on, are all media for graffiti. Graffiti writers are well-versed in the affordance of each medium. First is the textural affordance, whether they are 'writable' or not. Interviewee #1 left her graffiti on two types of media, one on a marble bollard and the other on the pavement. She had no marker pen back then, only a pen in her bag, so she bought a whitener pen to write on the pavement and used her own pen to write on the marble bollard because the texture of the latter is more suitable for the pen to write things on (Figure 4-2). Second is the spatial affordance concerning space where the medium has provided for the writers. The photos in Post # 171 show that there is a lot more graffiti on the sphere bollards than on the posts of street signs or streetlamps. One possible explanation is that posts have insufficient space for

writers to create graffiti, whereas sphere bollards have more room for more content. Additionally, one's moral judgment plays a role in media selection. For example, Interviewee #4 states that she can accept people writing anywhere in that space, but that writing on tree trunks is unacceptable because it is irreversible and the act itself is disgusting to her.

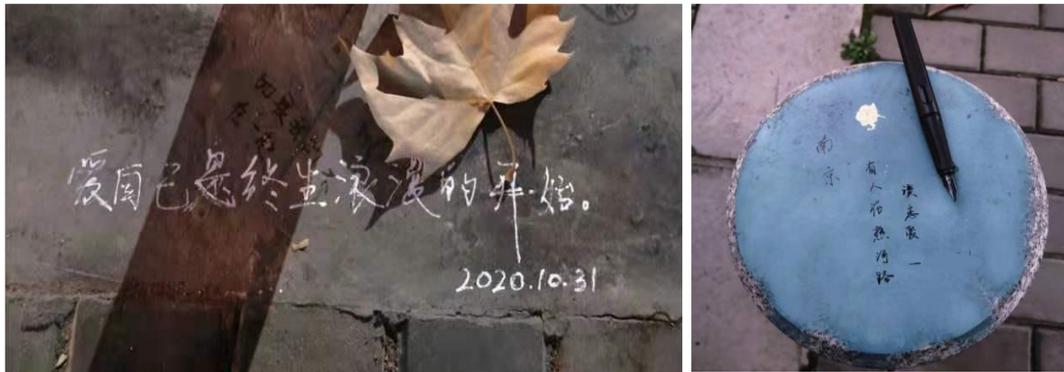


Figure 4-2 Interviewee #1's two pieces of graffiti (Source: Interviewee #1)

It is also worth noting that the urban media complex resembles social media, both in terms of how they are consumed as social media and in terms of the core social media characteristics that urban space as media possesses. On the one hand, social media communication logic has a significant impact on the patterns graffiti writers use to construct their narratives. For example, during the urban walking, the on-site observer noticed that three graffiti writers were 'interacting' on a tree trunk using the @ sign (Figure 4-3), which on social media platforms like Weibo or WeChat serves as an indicator of 'virtual conversation' (Mischaud, 2007) and comes with features such as addressivity (pinning a specific person) and coherence in the conversation (Honey and Herring, 2009). Some graffiti writers also include their nicknames at the end of their work, which refers exactly to their Weibo profile name. Furthermore, many writers' habit of leaving the dates of their visits as graffiti signatures resembles the phenomenon of viewers on Bilibili, a YouTube-like video-sharing website, writing down the date at the end of the video they were watching in the real-time scrolling commenting system (Article #3).



Figure 4-3 The use of sign @ in graffiti (Source: the author)

Four aspects can be concluded when it comes to core social media characteristics of urban space media. First, interactivity among any strangers who use the same platform. Apart from the use of social media sign @ to talk to each other, there are also many ‘Q&A’ interactions among the graffiti texts. For example, Interviewee #9 recalls that when browsing through the graffiti on an advertising board, she noticed that many writers had asked the same question: Has man a future? ¹⁴ She claims she had an impulsive feeling that there had to be an answer to this question, so she wrote down: (Her real name) declares: A future is a promise! Such interactions are asynchronous, just as many interactions on online forums or in comment sections on social media. Second, the anonymity of the media in urban space has helped graffiti writers to overcome their fears of being caught committing ‘vandalism’. Anonymity in this context does not refer to the ability for people to write graffiti without revealing their real names or identities (though it is a form of social media anonymity). It is more of a sense of being able to be anonymous in certain urban settings on Rehe Road. On the one hand, Rehe Road is in a redeveloping area where the sign ‘to-be-demolished’ (chai 拆) can be seen on every exterior wall of the shabby buildings, and the entire space on the street was delivering a desolate and decaying atmosphere, especially between 2017 and 2019, when the redevelopment projects had yet to begin. Graffiti was written on the exterior walls of an abandoned bookstore and the walls enclosing a construction site, according to documents

¹⁴ It is also the name of a song by Li Zhi.

from 2017. With the demolition of the walls, people began writing on advertising boards that were surrounded by weeds, garbage, and dust in the years 2018-2020. As many interviewees have argued, all these urban settings have created the ideal environment for acts of transgression because ‘everything there will be demolished anyway’. Some graffiti writers, on the other hand, consider Rehe Road to be a remote part of the city, with only a few passers-by, according to their observations. The street is a very safe place to write graffiti, especially at night:

I arrived at Rehe Road during the daytime on my first day (of my trip to Nanjing) [...] Until the night of the third day when I had to say goodbye to Nanjing, I went to Rehe Road again. Under the cloak of darkness, I left my words for the singer who has been accused of misconduct. (Post #129)

Third, the public space on Rehe Road has the capacity for assemblage, which means that it can constantly attract song lovers or Li Zhi’s fans from all over the country. This characteristic is important not only for establishing a community, but also for forming collective memories through graffiti writing in the same urban space, which is important in place-making, as discussed in the previous section. Fourth, one disadvantage of social media has been carried over into urban space media: things can be deleted. The methods of deleting content on urban space media vary, for example, demolishing the walls, whitewashing the tree trunks, replacing the advertising boards, etc. With a very Internet-mediated sentence, Interviewee #3 expresses his resignation towards the doomed future of his graffiti: ‘Not long the graffiti wall will be 404ed, including my text.’ The term ‘404’ stands for ‘404 not found’, which means the webpage the user is trying to access is no longer available. The 404 error can have a variety of technological causes, but for ordinary Chinese netizens, it is usually associated with censorship. The use of the passive form of the word 404 (404ed) implies that there must be some sort of manipulation going on behind the scenes. As a result, just as content on social media can be censored, graffiti in public space can be ‘deleted’ or ‘blocked’ as well.

Remediated graffiti

At the end of the previous part, the interviewees seem to understand the destiny of their graffiti which will be removed at some point, but why did they write it in the first place? Interviewee #9 responds bluntly: ‘To photograph my graffiti.’ Rehe Road, as previously stated, has already been mediated. As a result, when the mediated street is then represented

by other media, particularly digital media, the process can be considered remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, p.45). Rose (2016, p.28) concludes that remediation occurs when old ‘generic conventions’ are combined with digital technologies, resulting in the creation of ‘their own genres’. If graffiti on mediated Rehe Road is the ‘old medium and genre’, remediated graffiti is the ‘new medium and genre’. In this study, two types of social media, WeChat or QQ, which are more private, and Weibo, which is more public, are used to remediate graffiti on Rehe Road. New genres are derived from old ones (graffiti on-site) in these different media, as well as new cultural and societal connotations.

WeChat/QQ: a performative diary

WeChat and QQ are all the products of tech giant Tencent Company in China. Despite the fact that they are aimed at different user groups, they have very similar features, such as instant messaging, a personal timeline page, and payment etc. In general, the two social media platforms connect people through users’ strong ties. To put it another way, it is a world of acquaintances. Interviewees usually share their Rehe Road trip either via instant messages or personal timeline (Moments on WeChat or Q-zone on QQ) or in both ways. Regardless of the channels through which they share information, the principle is that only a limited group of people can access their stories. Interviewee #2 used WeChat Moments to share photos of Rehe Road and the graffiti but made the post private. She explains that her Rehe Road experience is very personal to her: ‘My friends may not know Li Zhi or the song, so I don’t like to share it with them.’ Interviewee #1 also uploaded her Rehe Road photos to QQ Photo, a cloud-based photo storage service:

The platform is very private for me. There I own a very spacious personal space. [...] No one ever interacted with me in the photo album, it was uploaded for myself in the first place. If I would really draw other people’s attention, I would put it in my timeline with an elaborated caption. (Interviewee #1)

The locked text in Moments and the photos in QQ Photo are both digitalised diaries and photo albums in the sense that they document and archive individual’s events at a specific point in their daily lives. If, as discussed in previous sections, the mediated place has given visitors on Rehe Road a ‘tourist gaze’ that transforms the street’s ordinariness into extraordinariness, the remediated graffiti then returns the place to its original ordinary state. Ordinariness, as Ben Highmore (2011, p.6) points out, is a process in which the unusual becomes ordinary, the irregular becomes regular, and there is not only ‘being ordinary’, but

also ‘becoming ordinary’. Firstly, diaries have transformed the previously mentioned (prosthetic) collective memory constructed by mediated Rehe Road into personal memory, in which ‘we tell the story of our lives to ourselves [...], a process that is felt and acted upon’ (Garde-Hansen, 2011, p.34). Consequently, Rehe Road no longer belongs to the so-called ‘collective others’, but to the diarists; memories from Li Zhi’s song, mass media representations, and taxi drivers have been replaced by personal stories. During the interview, Interviewee #8 read the texts from his Q-zone timeline written on the day he visited Rehe Road, in which he stated: ‘There will be no Li Zhi on Rehe Road anymore, [...] brand new buildings on both sides of the road [...] met another Li Zhi fan, and we both left with disappointments.’ The street breaks up with all his previous imaginations in his digital diary, reconstructed with segmented narratives about street scenes in his eyes and an encounter with another fan. Thus, a personal memory of the street has been established. Secondly, remediated Rehe Road is distancing itself from its religious aura for visitors, using Max Weber’s term ‘disenchantment’ to describe the transition from extraordinariness to secular life. Rehe Road is thought to have religious connotations by many visitors. For example, a fan called himself a ‘chela’ to Li Zhi and when he visited Rehe Road, he murmured on Weibo: ‘your chela comes to visit you.’ (Post #111) Another fan describes his visit to Rehe Road as a ‘pilgrimage’ (Post #159). In their eyes, Rehe Road is more than just a place; it is a ‘shrine’ (Post #413). Then, when the ‘pilgrimage’ was recorded into their digital diaries on WeChat or QQ, whether in chat groups or personal timelines, the sacred and holy aura surrounding the Rehe Road abruptly dissipated, submerging them in a sea of mundane, entrapped in the overwhelming triviality of everyday life. On April 5, 2021, for example, a fan paid a visit to Rehe Road during her Qingming Holiday¹⁵. From Zhengzhou to Nanjing¹⁶, it was clearly a well-planned trip; she even bought a marker pen to write graffiti. She seemed ecstatic about the trip and kept sending photos to a 500-member WeChat fan group. Her photographs drew immediate attention, but the topic quickly shifted. Other members of the group began to talk about their lunch, the weather in their cities, and so on¹⁷. The buzz of everyday life, photos of food, and screenshots of the weather forecast engulfed the sacred journey. It resembles a rite of passage on WeChat, through which the remediated Rehe Road

¹⁵ A national 3-day holiday, also known as Tomb Sweeping Day, at the beginning of April (like Easter). This holiday will be mentioned in the following section as well, it was April 4 in 2020.

¹⁶ Zhengzhou, a city in Northern China, approximately 700 kilometres away from Nanjing.

¹⁷ The instance is from the observation made by the author in one of Li Zhi’s WeChat group.

is disenchanted, separated from the mediated Rehe Road, the place is privatised and trivialised.

It is also noteworthy that WeChat and QQ are not completely locked diaries or photo albums. Individuals may, like traditional ones, share their diaries or photo albums with others at some point (Humphreys, 2018, p.32). Because online groups, Moments, Q-zone, and QQ Photo are all semi-public spheres, the situation is more complicated for these digitalised diaries and photo albums. There will always be audiences as long as the account owner does not completely lock them out. Therefore, users of WeChat and QQ intend to keep their stories as personal documents on the one hand. On the other hand, they are fully aware of the platforms' publicity, and they are aware that their family, friends, and co-workers/classmates are all potential audiences. Thus, for them, social media platforms are performative stages where they can show off their travels, music preferences, and individuality among crowds. In this situation, the remediated Rehe Road is their cultural capital. If Bourdieu's analysis on taste and Goffman's theories on performance are added here, keeping digital diaries on WeChat and QQ helps media users create their online persona through music, remediated graffiti, and other cultural symbols. Such social media taste performances 'present an opportunity for differentiation' (Liu, 2007, p.255), but they also help diarists express their emotions in everyday life. The youth encode their attitude on Rehe Road or the graffiti with these riddle-like photos or texts. For them, being rebellious without inciting censorship or punishment is a form of social and cultural capital. This will also be discussed in the final part of this chapter.

Weibo: a sophisticated network

If WeChat and QQ are for strong interpersonal ties, Weibo is for weak ties between strangers. As Interviewee #5 points out, Moments' personal timeline contains many people he knows well in real life, but Weibo is different in that it allows him to post things he would rather not show to his senior family members or work leaders. When graffiti is represented on Weibo, according to Hong Kong scholar Lu Pan (2015, p.95), it is watched by a distracted audience who 'spends very little time looking at anything'. However, when placed in the context of ordinary people's random writing in their everyday lives, rather than artistic graffiti in Pan's case, remediated graffiti on Weibo is more than a platform for representing and drawing the public's attention in this study. Remediated graffiti, based on the concept of a 'network society' (Castells, 2010; van Dijk, 2006), is in fact a portal, or an entry point to an invisible network where information is exchanged, individuals are connected, and social capital is

shared. It is necessary to understand how the network, defined by Manuel Castells (2010, p.501) as a ‘set of interconnected nodes’, works on social media before elaborating on the key characteristics of the network based on remediated Rehe Road graffiti. The essence of networking logic, according to Castell’s arguments, is that ‘the power of flows takes precedence over the power of flows’ (Castells, 2010, p.500). A network exists in this sense when there are movements (flows) between nodes. If each Weibo user is a node, three types of flow between nodes can be identified by observing all interactions within Rehe Road graffiti-related posts.

The first flow concerns information, both about the graffiti and beyond it. Most people want to know where the graffiti is. In addition, there is a lot of information about graffiti’s removals. In the comment section of Post #120, User A asked the blogger if the graffiti was still there, and User B chipped in saying, ‘I heard that the tree trunk has been full of graffiti’, to which User C replied: ‘It appears that the graffiti had been erased, all the marks were covered.’ At least four interlocutors (including the blogger) participated in this conversation, each providing information based on their own personal experiences. Regardless of the accuracy of such data, the network’s rich first-hand information is already a significant advantage. Furthermore, there is information available in addition to the graffiti. For example, people like to spread the news of Li Zhi’s comeback in their posts, despite the fact that most of the news is based on rumours. This type of information usually sparks some debate. Additionally, under posts about Rehe Road graffiti, it is also very common that people share trip routes, travel tips in Nanjing city. The second flow revolves around music products. Much of the time, the topic is about sharing websites where Li Zhi’s songs or videos can be downloaded. Because almost all information about the singer has been removed from the Internet in mainland China, his music listeners or fans are limited to storing his songs and footage on their personal computers or secretly uploading them to the cloud service. The issue is that the cloud service providers will delete the fans’ cloud-stored files if the files are discovered as ‘sensitive’, so the entries to the files are constantly changing. That is why, whenever Rehe Road-related posts appear on Weibo, there are usually users begging for links to download the singer’s work. The download links in Chinese are literally translated as ‘resources’ (资源), which is the same word used to refer to valuable resources such as oil, water etc. Interestingly, the ‘resources’ they seek are also stored in a global peer-to-peer (p2p) network, where each user is also known as a ‘node’, assisting all strangers in the network with file sharing and circulating. Interpersonal communication flow

is the final flow. In the comment sections of Weibo, users usually start ‘small talks’. For instance, Nanjingnenses’ greetings to visitors from other places (Post # 89: Welcome, the girl from Inner Mongolia), concerns for others (Post # 15: You will be quarantined when you return from Nanjing), and making appointments (Post # 72: When will you come to meet me?). Many of these discussions have no clear responds; after all, Weibo is a platform for weak ties. Small talks like these can be thought of as network adhesives; they are not crucial, but they can help to tighten the web to some extent.

Two points should be made for further understandings of the network after elaborating the operating logic of the network derived from remediated Rehe Road graffiti on Weibo. The first is the social capital that is available in the network. Interpersonal relationships should be somewhat beneficial in the network, as shown in the analysis of resources flow. More importantly, such reciprocities are many-to-many rather than one-to-one, which is the same principle as a peer-to-peer network. Several strangers can participate in and contribute to the same conversation, as Post #120 shows. Everything is organized in a decentralized manner. Also, Interviewee #2 recalls that before visiting Rehe Road, some Weibo users gave her some helpful tips about where to go in Nanjing, so she posted her graffiti photos on Weibo with the intention of assisting other Li Zhi’s fans in finding the right place to visit. Hence, reciprocal interactions within the network can be viewed as a form of social capital that enables people to collaborate to achieve common goals. It should be noted, however, that the network is not open to all Weibo users, and that a ‘countersign’ is required. Since content mentioning the singer’s name on social media will be usually censored, remediated graffiti plays a significant role as a portal to a ‘dark web’ beneath the surface. Anyone who understands the meanings of Rehe Road graffiti on Weibo is tacitly regarded as a node of the network because it is a default that only die-hard fans of Li Zhi can understand the complicated connections between Rehe Road, the song, and the singer. Sometimes, fans will confirm each other’s identities by the game of pairing lyrics from Li Zhi’s songs. Only after the codes are paired, can the conversations continue. Jan van Dijk (2006, p.34) suggests, network society is loosely organized, but this study’s network based on remediated Rehe Road also demonstrates the network is somewhat exclusive and closed. The second point about the network is the interplay between the physical place and the virtual network. Both Castells (2010) and van Dijk (2006) underscore the importance of mediated communication in a network society, and Castells even has a section in his book titled ‘the end of the city?’ to demonstrate the global prevalence of virtualised communities. However, this study’s empirical data shows that a

network is established based both on a real place and virtual cyberspace, one cannot exist without the other. Visitors to Rehe Road physically experience the place in a mediated way, where real-world scenes are superimposed on their imagined world, as discussed in the previous section. When the graffiti photos on Weibo are used to remediate Rehe Road, the relationship is overturned because the virtual network is built on interactions with a real place. This network characteristic reflects a growing trend in urban and media studies that there will be no end to cities, only a deeper integration of virtual and physical worlds. Additionally, Doreen Massey (1994)'s understanding of 'place' as 'network of social relations' can be expanded here from real world to virtual world, where people interact both online and offline and networks in places are more intrigued and sophisticated than ever in (re)mediated cities.

Poetic resistance

As of this writing, Rehe Road has been mediated, and the graffiti on the street has been remediated. The place has been imbued with meanings, and a sophisticated network has been established. So, the final question is why? What messages do these graffiti writers want to send and what goals do they want to achieve with so much effort being put into this small urban space (that eventually becomes a place)? The purpose of this part is to decode the codes found on (re)mediated Rehe Road. The discussion is sparked by the keyword 'resistance', specifically 'poetic resistance'. The word 'resistance' is too heavy in its original sense in a country where speech is strictly regulated; it has a far lighter and more poetic meaning in mainland China. The graffiti-related studies mentioned in the literature review by Pan (2015) and Smith (2020) both provide us with an alternative perspective on the resistant nature of graffiti in an authoritarian society. The problem with their cases is that the graffiti was so ephemeral that the researchers were not exposed to the graffiti's resistance mechanism enough. The disadvantage is avoided in this study by extending the observation period to four years. The following sections make three main observations about the mediated Rehe Road and the remediated graffiti's resistance nature: claiming the right to the city and de- and re-constructing the power structure that was once embedded in the urban space.

Grffiti: a territorial marker

'I came to Nanjing to see the city in Li Zhi's songs.' This is the text from Post #152 on Weibo. This simple sentence has an intriguing implication: after all, whose city is it? Is it a city that is in Li Zhi's song, or the song depicting the stories in the city? At least, for Post

#152, the owners of the city are *Rehe* and Li Zhi. This is the first layer of resistance, tying the city to an ordinary name (though there is a public figure behind the name); it is the first step toward liberating the city from grand narratives and returning it to people. For the graffiti writers, they also want to ‘reprioritise social space as truly public, owned, used, inhabited, and accessible to all’ (Zieleniec, 2006, p.12). As previously stated, the space on Rehe Road is a complex of media for graffiti writers, where they can write their personal stories, private emotions, their names, and the names of their lovers. All the marks strewn across Rehe Road are declarations of ownership, asserting their claim to space and the city. Unfortunately, they are not the only group attempting to privatize space (Figure 4-4). Of course, there are the street management offices that are constantly erasing graffiti. This is the power from above. Empirical data from mediated urban walking and articles in the mainstream media suggest that at least three government divisions are responsible for taking care of Rehe Road in different ways. They are, (1) Urban Management and Law Enforcement which appeared in the news in 2018 when the first graffiti walls were white-painted (Qiu, 2018), (2) Gardening Division which is in charge of the plant conservation, and (3) the residential committee of the street, which used to hang red banners on the walls in 2018 after the graffiti was erased. Sometimes the residential committee of the street is also responsible for demolition and relocation work, so the frequently seen ‘to-be-demolished’ sign is drawn by them. The third force that is constantly attempting to occupy public space is illegal commercial advertisements, the vast majority of which deal with faking certificates and official stamps. These advertisements are a type of graffiti that can be seen in places where Li Zhi-related graffiti has appeared, and they are also resilient, meaning that new ones appear out of nowhere even after they have been erased several times. The fourth force claiming the public space is converged by the residents on the street. Some of them were indigenous residents before the redevelopment of the street, while the others are residents who have purchased the newly built apartments on the street.



Figure 4-4 Graffiti from different forces (Source: Left - 高一上; Upper right - the author; lower right - 吴思人) ¹⁸

All these forces competing for the urban space have their ‘ownership’ of Rehe Road in distinctive dimensions. The government divisions have always controlled the space in the governmental dimension, where the banners, the notice signs, the marks of erasure all serve as indicators of social order and power. Illegal advertisements are exploiting space in an economic dimension, where space can be converted into economic capital and profits. Aside from those who claim the space through graffiti, residents who live on the street also have legal ownership of the space. When physically inspecting the street, the on-site observer noticed a significant difference in the landscape between the two sides of the street. The area is under construction on the eastern side, and everything is dusty and grey, whereas on the western side, there are many well-designed modern high-rises (Figure 4-5). In Post #8, a similar scene is described in a mournful tone:

[...] on one side of the street there are many high buildings built, and many pretty girls are passing by¹⁹. However, on the other side of the street, the dilapidated shopping malls are still standing there, where elders are buying groceries. With the walls enclosing all the shabby buildings, everything will be buried, waiting for their rebirth, corresponding to the slogan ‘better city, better life’²⁰.

¹⁸ Left picture: red stencil graffiti read ‘expropriation’; upper right picture: ‘faking certificate’ with a phone number; lower right picture: the banner read ‘Scenery is in your heart in instead on the walls; stop graffitiing is everyone’s responsibility.’

¹⁹ Here is a reference to a line in Rehe, saying ‘Pretty girls sometimes come and go, but they never say hello’.

²⁰ It is a slogan of Expo 2010 in Shanghai.

Thus, there are two groups of people living on Rehe Road. For those who are indigenous inhabitants, they have Rehe Road in an emotional dimension, as their place-attachment to the street is the strongest among all the spatial competitors. A Weibo user captured the scene in her picture in 2019, showing how an authentic inhabitant's life looks like on Rehe Road (Figure 4-5). As shown in Post #171, residents hang a piece of string between a wall and a high voltage tower as a clothesline to dry their clothes, indicating Rehe Road is the space for their everyday life. They have absolute ownership of the place. There is a piece of graffiti written on the wall of a to-be-demolished bookstore in 2017, stating: 'In this bookstore, my uncle bought a book for me, later he was scolded by my aunt.' Here, the indigenous residents possess real memories of Rehe Road, and this graffiti is an indicator of their spatial ownership, a platform for emotional expression and a container for their memories. However, for the newcomers living in the modern apartments, the street is more like a fancy 'shelter', where they are compacted in their small suites fixed in large buildings. It is reasonable to assume that those apartment owners work in the city's central areas and only return to the street after work. One resident on Rehe Road, for example, complained on Weibo about the loud noise from a construction site at midnight. This post stands out among all the Weibo posts with the Rehe Road check-in tag because it is not about music or romantic relationships, but rather the mundane details of everyday life. Hence, such resident's street ownership takes on a functional dimension. Finally, graffiti writers claim ownership of the place/space in a symbolic dimension, where they both physically interact with the street and virtually inject their emotions into space through symbolic expressions. The graffiti here can be regarded as a territorial marker employed by those graffiti writers, as a 'visible manifestation of a group's social space' (Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974, p.505). Graffiti writers do not live on the street, but they do have a social space and a community there. This study tries to describe the (re)mediated Rehe Road's community as 'pseudo' (Table 4-1). The members of such a pseudo-community physically and virtually own part of the social space on Rehe Road. This concept aids our interpretation and comprehension of the new human-place relationship in mediated and remediated urban settings.

Table 4-1 A typology of different space owners on Rehe Road

characteristics	indigenous residents	gated-apartment residents	pseudo-community members
human-place relationship	neighbourhood	community	pseudo-community
the legality of the space	legal residents	legal residents	illegal invaders
attachment to the place	emotional	functional ²¹	symbolic
time spent on the street	long	medium	short
interpersonal connections	strong ties	weak ties ²²	loosely but actively ²³
cares toward communal undertakings	strong	strong	to some extent ²⁴

²¹ they purchase the apartment based on factors such as location, public transport, educational quota etc.

²² Usually, people who live in modern apartment hardly have communication with their neighbours in China.

²³ Members are eager to talk with each other both online and offline, for example, the encounter with other two fans during urban walking, but after all, they are strangers.

²⁴ They are trying to solve real world problems on Rehe Road, but limited to certain issues, such as the erasure of their graffiti, or where their hidden marker pens have gone.



Figure 4-5 Life on Rehe Road (Source: left – Weibo Post #171; right – the author)

It is also noteworthy that the competition for the urban space has been spread to cyberspace, where stores on Rehe Road have been circulating their promotion messages in the comment sections when posts are with check-in tag of Rehe Road on Weibo, including a hamburger restaurant (Post #162) and a hair salon (Post #192). Moreover, an online vendor is also promoting his business of selling Li Zhi's digital albums (Post #174) on Weibo. Thus, it is further self-evident that Rehe Road, as a (re)mediated place, is constantly switching its existence between real and virtual, physical and symbolic.

Graffiti writing: a power subverter

If claiming the right to the place is the first layer of poetic resistance, the attempts to 'subvert' the power structure in urban space by writing graffiti is the next layer. All the redevelopment projects on Rehe Road demonstrate how the ruling class and capitalists are exploiting the urban space as a 'means of production' (Lefebvre, 1991). Governmental control, or borrowing Foucault (2007)'s words, the 'governmentality' of space is also hidden in every tiny corner of space, such as the red banners prohibiting graffiti, the repetitive erasures of graffiti, and surveillance cameras hanging over the street.

The deconstruction of power, which contains the destruction in discursive and mythological ways, is also the source of poetic resistance. Discursive resistance is the most straightforward way. The lyrics of the song *Rehe*, in which the singer says, 'No one walks with a lover on Rehe Road', are met with resistance, with countless graffiti texts saying: 'I am walking with my lover on Rehe Road.' Others express their discontent with a society that allows few channels for free expression, such as 'They thought that if they killed all the roosters, there would be no dawn', or 'They wanted to bury us, but they didn't expect that we are the seeds'. These texts are very implicit and reserved, the audience has a sense that they are resisting

something as the texts contain an imaginary enemy ‘they’, but who are ‘they’, who are suppressing folks’ speech and who is the tyrant from above? The answer is always open for viewers. Mythological resistance refers to the method used by individuals to deconstruct the power embedded in the origin myth from above by exploiting the arbitrariness of the connections between signifiers and signified. For example, the red banner hanging on the street was graffitied with the text ‘people do not need freedom’ (Figure 4-6). Here, the signifiers include the red banner, the graffiti text. The meaning behind the image is that the powers from above (red banner) and below (graffiti) are competing. When entering the mythical level, the meaning fades away, leaving only the signification to fill the void. The graffitied text on the banner is from one of Li Zhi’s songs, which is a satire towards mainland China’s authoritarian atmosphere. Is it true that people do not need freedom? The answer is emphatic: ‘No, that is not true; people do need freedom.’ The graffiti writer’s poetic manoeuvre subverts and deconstructs the myth that the red banner has built: the majestic, mighty, invisible power that rules over ordinary people. This is not a one-off occurrence. On May 11, 2018, Interviewee #5 visited Rehe Road, the day after the previous graffiti walls were whitewashed. ‘I felt that the banners were inharmonious in the surroundings’, he recalls what he was thinking when he saw the red banners hanging on the walls where the colourful graffiti used to be. Near one of the banners, he wrote his graffiti. ‘They wanted us to be obedient, which is fine, but I don’t want to be that obedient’, he said in the interview. Interviewee #3, who visited Rehe Road on April 4, 2020, demonstrates a more mythological resistance. That was Qingming Holiday, when Chinese people pay regards to their ancestors, and it was also the day in 2020 when the government launched a nationwide mourning campaign for the ‘martyrs’ who sacrificed their lives on the front lines against Covid-19. On an advertisement board, Interviewee #3 wrote his text of ‘Missing Doctor Li Wenliang’²⁵:

I felt that I was obligated to write something on the street. First, Li Zhi was 404ed, then Doctor Li, and then numerous voices and groups that need to be heard or seen are 404ed. Not long the graffiti wall will be 404ed, including my text. All of them will be erased, but we remember, that is the most important thing. (Interviewee #3)

²⁵ Li Wenliang was regarded as the whistle-blower who spread the message about Covid-19 at the beginning of 2020, when the government was trying to cover it up from the public. Li was admonished on his behaviour from local police station. He died of Covid-19 in February 2020. Upon his death, many Chinese citizens expressed their angers toward the government for their inappropriate accusation of Li, but the criticisms were soon censored.

The deconstruction by Interviewee #3 is more sophisticated and comprehensively, not only toward the spatial power structure on the street but also toward the power system beyond the street. He deconstructs the grand narratives from above and resists forgetting each ordinary name. In fact, Doctor Li is on the list of national martyrs who were mourned on April 4, but for Interviewee #3, he refused to obey the order from above. Instead, he chose to write down the name by his hand in the public space, as he explains: ‘The act of writing itself is the attitude, is the resistance.’ This deconstruction is fabricated by the selection of date, refusal to take part in the government-launched campaign, texts on graffiti; and most importantly, the act of writing graffiti as a declaration of resistance.



Figure 4-6 A banner graffitied: ‘People do not need freedom’ (Source: Weibo Post #130)

The second way to resist poetically is to reconstruct space with one’s own power logic. As discussed before, Rehe Road is mediated and remediated at various levels, after which new values and meanings have already been injected into the street. This is comparable to Humphrey’s (2010) research on how people parochialize space by using social media APPs to make space for their social scenes. The graffiti writers’ reconstruction project on Rehe Road, on the other hand, is far more profound and overwhelming. In the second part of this chapter, the processes in which remediated graffiti transforms visiting Rehe Road from collective memories to personal one, from a pilgrimage to everyday mundane, are discussed as ‘rites of passage’. Here the third ritual joins the scenario when (re)mediated Rehe Road has

been transformed from an ordinary street into a playground. As Tim Edensor (2001) suggests that tourists usually have two types of performance when visiting a special place – disciplined and improvised performance. Disciplined performance requires visitors to complete choreographed activities on their list. The choreographed activities on Rehe Road in this study include finding the graffiti, looking for the landmarks mentioned in the song, such as a barber shop, a lobster restaurant, a monument, or a cinema, or watching the scene when Bus 32 crosses Yijiang Gate. All the items on their to-do list necessitate their participation and effort. Post #1 compares finding graffiti on the street to going on a ‘treasure hunt’. In Article #4, the author admits that he had to wait half an hour in the rain to photograph Bus 32 crossing Yijiang Gate. These scripted performances, however, are insufficient for those inventive graffiti writers. They have also developed an improvised performance ritual. For example, Post #89 describes her visit to Rehe Road with the verb ‘play’. How do one play on a mundane street? Interviewee #4 exemplifies how to set up one’s own game in a seemingly monotonous urban space (Figure 4-7). Finding, reading, and writing graffiti on the street are all very basics. She discovered six pens hidden among the weeds along the graffiti-covered walls. Usually, it is an Easter egg left by previous graffiti writers. Then she met Li Zhi’s other two fans and had a brief conversation with them. When Interviewee #4 was to return the marker pen into the weeds, she discovered a CD in the weeds! A message from the giver was written on the CD’s paper cover: ‘For the one who also loves Li Zhi.’ Interviewee #4 wrote on Weibo about the experience, saying: ‘I felt elated!’ One comment under the post exclaimed: ‘What a treasure!’ On Rehe Road, her game was far from over. She pinned a red scarf with a sketch of Li Zhi to the tree trunk before leaving the street, as a tribute to one of her predecessors who had hung a T-shirt on the same tree trunk. Interviewee #4 clearly sees the street as a playground that she and other graffiti writers have created entirely on their own. They have completely reconstructed the original power logic embedded in the urban space. They walk down the street in their path, making those small corners significant. They also use a variety of ‘tactics’, in de Certeau’s words, to avoid confrontations with the authorities, such as writing their texts on the backs of tree trunks or on the seasonally-changing advertisement boards and so on. On a macro-level and in the long run, powerful authorities control space, whereas ordinary graffiti writers acquire space piece by piece in the short term. It is a ‘victory of place over time’ in this sense (de Certeau, 1980, p.5). Furthermore, the self-built playground shares many of the same characteristics as the network. It contains all information, resources, and interpersonal communication flows. Let us recap Interviewee #4’s happy hour on Rehe Road with the concept of poetic resistance,

which she and her network-mates have been carrying out unconsciously but sophisticatedly through the use of urban space, social modalities (walking and writing graffiti), everyday technological affordance (a series of acts related to the marker pen), and undercurrent ‘revolt’ (putting the CD - the very censored material - in a hidden place).



Figure 4-7 Interviewee #4's playground on Rehe Road (Source: Interviewee #4)

One additional point about the reconstructed urban space should be made before ending this section. The remediated Rehe Road also participate in the process of reconstructing the power structure in the urban space. Post #79 has several pictures showing the arrows, bicycle sign and boundary lines on pavements (Figure 4-8). By putting all the elements in a different sequence on Weibo in the cyberspace, a new urban space has been constructed, where the original signs employed by the city planners are appropriated by the Weibo user to create her own space. This is a bricolage, a make-do, a small trick that the weak can use to resist the powerful, according to de Certeau (1984, xiii), it is ‘poetic as well as warlike’.

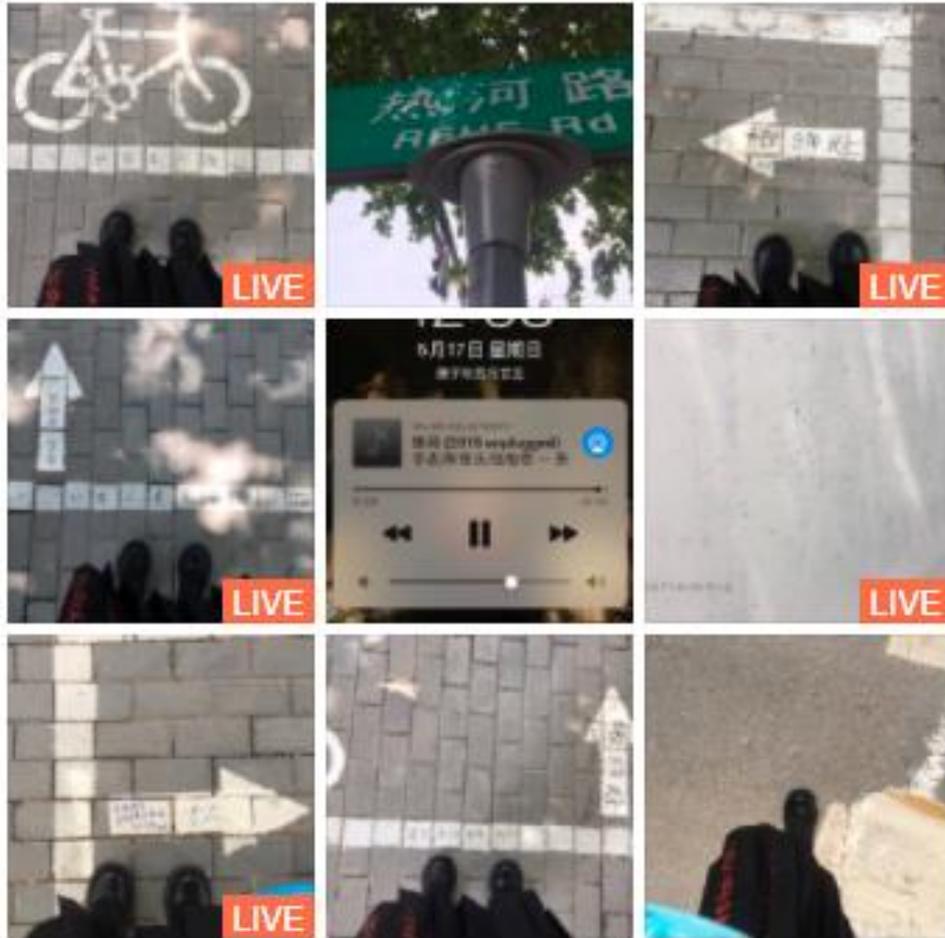


Figure 4-8 A new urban space on social media (Source: Weibo Post #79)

5. Conclusion

As of writing, the case of the graffiti on Rehe Road has been thoroughly investigated, one point should be made here before drawing any conclusions: the fundamental issue underlying media and the city relationship is how human beings interact with the city in a media-saturated era. These thoughts will guide this chapter as it wraps up the thesis with clear answers to the research questions.

(Re)mediated city: materiality and virtuality

The inspiration for this study at the very early stage came from a quite vague feeling that the street and the entire urban space become a large three-dimensional medium when one observes all the jumbled graffiti on Rehe Road. Later, while searching the Internet for Rehe Road graffiti-related materials, countless photographs and texts generated by those ordinary netizens have created yet another space to accommodate the already mediated urban space. As a result, these thoughts became the study's starting point, which later evolved into the first research question: In what ways is Rehe Road mediated in physical urban settings and remediated on social media?

In terms of the mediation of Rehe Road, this study decomposes the street into two aspects: as a place and as a social space. On the one hand, the mediation of the place involves the place being made by the song *Rehe*, the media's representations and the taxi drivers' depictions in Nanjing city. The first two place-makers are discussed frequently in academia, but scholars usually ignore the human body as a medium. In this case, taxi drivers serve as mobile media, providing anecdotes and personal stories about the city's streets. The song inspires spatial imagination, whereas media representation focuses on symbolic discourses, and taxi drivers convey these two intertwined processes through 'mobility' (the taxi's physical movement) and 'socialities' (the orality of social chat led by the taxi driver). With the importance of the human body in mind, this study also reveals how the place is mediated in a phenomenological way, by visitors walking down the street, feeling the temperature, writing graffiti, taking pictures with their gestures, sensory organs. The mediation of urban space, on the other hand, follows a different line in urban media studies, which views the city as a medium. The key finding of this study is that urban space is more than one medium, but rather a media complex, in which graffiti writers use walls, pavements, posts, bollards, and billboards as media. Furthermore, social media operating logic has significant impacts on media communication within the complex. Interactivity, anonymity, the ability to gather

people with similar interests, and deletability are all characteristics of the urban media complex, which are similar to those of social media. In particular, the deletability feature, which was once a selling point for social media, has now been extended to urban space media, serving as important evidence of the graffiti writer's poetic resistance. Those speckled marks left by authorities during graffiti erasures are all badges for young people who dare to stand out and express themselves in an authoritarian setting.

When it comes to remediation of the graffiti on Rehe Road, there are two orientations – one is to use the semi-private social media such as WeChat and QQ, where the graffiti writers usually lock their pictures and texts like a diary or photo album, documenting their mundane everyday lives. As a result of the remediation, the place has been disenchanted from its holy aura and divorced from its extraordinariness. This study also notes that WeChat and QQ are not completely private diaries because there are always audiences. Thus, the diary provides the stages of performance, to showcase young people's tastes and distinctiveness. The other orientation is the remediation on Weibo, where a sophisticated network among fans of Li Zhi is formed by posts about the graffiti on Rehe Road. Information, resources, and interpersonal communication are the three flows that run beneath the surface of the network. These flows are actually transporting social capital throughout the complex network, benefiting all nodes (individuals) within.

A hidden line runs parallel to all of the discussions throughout the analysis. It is the interplay between physical place (Rehe Road) and virtual space (social media). This study mentions the mythscape which transforms the ordinary real-world landscapes into extraordinary myths; and a virtual network on Weibo that is founded based on interactions on the physical street; as well as competitions for urban space both online and offline; or young people reconstructing their own urban space both on physical Rehe Road and on social media space. In these examples, Rehe Road is no longer entirely a physical street, and the social media community is no longer entirely virtual; instead, a new space has been created that is neither real nor virtual. Back to Andersson (2019)'s point mentioned in the second chapter, the mediation of place is not just about weakening the boundaries between real and virtual, but also sharpening. Along with this logic, this study looks into the remediation process that has been added to the mediated place/urban place. The main conclusion is that in a media-saturated urban setting, each place/urban space innately contains both material and virtual natures, and the two are inextricably linked in modern place/urban space. The term 'pseudo-community' used in this study exemplifies the inextricable interaction of materiality and

virtuality implanted in a single place/urban space (i.e., Rehe Road). Pseudo-community members do not physically live on Rehe Road, but they possess physical social space on the street; their network is completely virtual on social media, but they even help each other tackle real-world problems on Rehe Road (for example, helping to locate the graffiti there or leaving marker pens in the weeds). When places and space are mediated and remediated in more profound ways, human societies can expect more pseudo-communities to emerge in the future. The other product of the integration of physical and virtual place/urban space is a space where creativity and poetic resistance can take place. This will be concluded in the next section.

‘I write therefore I am’: the act of resistance

The second research question of this study is about resistance: How has the mediated and remediated Rehe Road become the space of resistance? It should be highlighted before unfolding the conclusion of this section: when thinking about resistance in this study, it is necessary to put it in an apolitical context; most of the interviewees in this study even voiced their supports to the authorities concerning the issues such as censorship, erasure of their graffiti, etc. Then, it is interesting to ponder what is the motivation of their act of graffiti writing, even it is apparently an act of vandalism or transgression that will displease the authorities they support? Before answering this question, it is better to start with the main findings of this study on how they resist on the (re)mediated Rehe Road.

Three layers of resistance have been identified. The first layer of resistance is to reclaim the right to the urban space by writing graffiti, to make graffiti writers themselves a ‘pseudo-community’ member on Rehe Road, as argued, even though they have no legal ownership of any piece of the surface of the street. Here, the graffiti plays vital roles as ‘territorial markers’ to demarcate the graffiti writers’ social space on the street. The second layer of resistance is the deconstruction of the power structure embedded in Rehe Road. On the one hand, graffiti writers deconstruct power in a discursive way by writing lines that are opposite to the original meaning of *Rehe*’s lyrics. On the other hand, they also resist the authority mythologically, by taking advantage of arbitrary bonds between signifiers and signifieds, to detach the power implanted in the myths that the original mythical signifiers and signified created. The third layer of resistance takes place when graffiti writers have reconstructed the urban space ultimately by their own power. Graffiti writers cast all the original rules and regulations away inserted by the urban planners and regulators and then construct the urban space by their will.

One of the key findings in this study is that the graffiti writers have gamified Rehe Road by their ludic practices on the street - such as writing sentences on the surface of all the infrastructure whimsically, employing the urban space to play 'treasure hunt' games, or deploying the street as their stage to complete their 'performance art'. In this scenario, the graffiti writers have taken over the control of the street from city planners or the street offices; thus, public order has been reconstructed, rules are rewritten, a new space only for the graffiti writers created, where they enjoy the absolute powers in the new regime.

Additionally, the reconstruction work has been transported onto social media where Weiboers represent the urban space in their own ways, bricolaging traffic signs from the urban planners, putting them in a completely new order. Such integration of physical and virtual space is what has been briefly mentioned in the previous section, arguing that the mediated and remediated place/urban space are the new space where creativity and poetic resistance come in. Foucault (1986) has a concept of 'heterotopia', by which he suggests that there is a space that serves as a mirror of the real world. In heterotopia, one sees the real world in a virtual but reflectional way. Foucault (1986) believes that when looking at the world in the mirrors (i.e., heterotopia), one 'occupies' the place 'at the moment'. In this sense, (re)mediated Rehe Road in this study is the heterotopia, the space where ordinary people take absolute power and resist at the moment. In this half-real and half-pseudo, half-virtual and half-physical space, the resistance becomes very poetic. Thus, this study uses the term 'poetic resistance' to conclude the way the young graffiti writers resist. Poetic resistance plays the games of symbols, styles and myths on one side; but on the other side, there is the deconstruction and reconstruction of power structure taking place. Poetic resistance is also very ambiguous; like poems, signifiers and signifieds can be glued in multiple ways and they are interpreted in even more directions. It is the resistance without discernible targets. Moreover, poetic resistance is rooted in everyday life, most of the time it is even conducted unconsciously, just as walkers as rebellious heroes in de Certeau's description. As discussed, graffiti writers' Rehe Road visits and the act of graffiti writing have become the trifling matters in their diary, months or years later, they cannot even recall the date of their 'pilgrimage'. The concept of poetic resistance facilitates us to understand the motivations of graffiti writing in a more Chinese context. For those who really regard themselves as 'dissents' in mainland China, poetic resistance is a safe way to express their opinions that is different from so-called mainstream voices. Poetic resistance, unlike other types of resistance, has no specific demands or targets of criticism. One piece of graffiti wrote several

lines from a Cantonese song *Jiaming* (家明), which is said to be a song memorising the unmentionable 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. If one understands the context of the lyrics, this piece of graffiti can be interpreted as a resistance to tyranny. However, both the song and the act of writing the lyrics on Rehe Road are so poetic that one can explain them in many other irrelevant ways. Apart from those ‘dissents’, most of the graffiti writers, at least interviewees in this study, have no clear political intention at all. They wrote for fun, to demonstrate their rebellious attitude, or to release pressure. However, it is not the content of graffiti nor their motivations of writing graffiti that reveal the core value of poetic resistance, instead, it is the act of writing graffiti per se that exposes the key feature of poetic resistance, the resistance to the regulations that forbid graffiti in the public space. This is an act of resistance to the disappearance of their favourite singer, to the time that can eliminate everything. In this sense, Descartes’s classic line ‘I think therefore I am’ can be appropriated as ‘I write therefore I am’ here.

It is noteworthy that poetic resistance can only take place in the (re)mediated place/urban space. On the one hand, only physical space in cities is appropriate for conducting poetic resistance, as the heterogeneity of cities usually ensures the anonymity of resistance; additionally, the more disciplined the place is, the more powers can be challenged; in this sense, cities with ubiquitous rules and surveillance are the ideal place for poetic resistance. On the other hand, the virtuality of (re)mediated place/urban space promises the sustainability of the resistance, such as the network on Weibo discussed in this study, which enables each node to provide only limited capital to achieve a broader goal collaboratively.

It is near the ending of this study, there are still many interesting findings from empirical data that cannot be fully presented here, it is the biggest pity for this thesis. In the process of finding and talking with the interviewees, the deterrence and censorship from the authorities in mainland China have always been the sword of Damocles, there was no way to identify who wrote People Do Not Need Freedom on the back of the red banner. Even when talking with those graffiti writers who really have some complaints toward the government, they dared not to fully express themselves. This is the biggest limitation of this study. However, this frustrating process confirms the value of this study from the other aspect, that fighting for one’s freedom of speech is important.

People come and go on Rehe Road but writing something on the street can offset the sense of powerlessness when faced with the mighty state machine or existence, 'dasein' in Heidegger's word, itself. One finding in this study that cannot fully elaborate here is that the young graffiti writers on Rehe Road are also fighting against urbanisation and modernity in contemporary China. These Gen Z-ers in China usually spend most of their time living in those high-rise apartments in cities, they have an obsessive eagerness for life in the 1980s-the 2000s when people lived in neighbourhoods depicted in *Rehe*. That is the reason for most Rehe Road visitors, seeking the scenes of a place with 'humanity' (人情味). Then, they found out that Rehe Road has also changed ultimately, and they felt deeply disappointed. Disappointment is a mixed feeling of placeless, powerless, and rootless, as Relph (1976, p.43) points out, individuals are detached from their places, but they have no idea that places are 'profound centres of human existence'. For a long time, Rehe Road has been undergoing redevelopment, with old homes being demolished and new ones being built; young people's graffiti on the street has also been erased several times, much like the life and death of a place. This can be discussed in future studies, for instance, to examine the interplay of mediation, urbanisation, and individuals' dasein. For this thesis, it is better to stop here, with a quote from Interviewee #3 when he was asked that how he digests the fact that his texts on Rehe Road will be erased anyway, he was not pessimistic about it, instead, he became a little emotional in his speech tone:

What I have done is just an act to empower myself, to grant value to myself. My writings will be erased eventually, but I will write until I am heard. (Interviewee #3)

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Lyrics of *Rehe*

Rehe

Lyrics: Li Zhi (translated by the author)

Rehe Road resembles Jintan County in the 1980s, with plane trees, garbage, dust and various groceries

People always leave the street very early and pull down the roller doors. They put on their sweaters and light a cigarette before the darkness

On Rehe Road there is a barbershop existed for years, one pays five yuan for all the hairstyles

The barber and his younger sister sit in front of a mirror in silence

Their hometown is behind them, on the other side of Yangtze River, it's called Quanjiao County

No one walks with a lover on Rehe Road. But when the dawn comes, there is always someone feeling melancholic

If you had never been here on Rehe Road when you were young, have you now got what you want?

Next to the Monument is a shabby cinema, Nanjing West Railway Station is 500 metres away to the north

New-comers always get lost in the labyrinth-like city, they pant, they shed tears, they run, fall, and keep running

Qiulin Lobster Restaurant moved to a new place, Bus 32 crosses Yijiang Gate as always

The viaduct demolished and a new tunnel built, my life has been within Yancang Bridge area all these years

It has been 896 days since I came to the city, Rehe Road has never changed its appearance

Pretty girls sometimes come and go, but they never say hello

No one walks with a lover on Rehe Road. But when the dusk comes, there is always someone feeling sentimental

If you ever been here on Rehe Road when you were young, are you now one of them in the throng?

No more clothes that can make your attach to, but there is always one type of weather that makes me nostalgic

You wake up, you eat, year in, year out; you met, you parted ways on the same day

Appendix 2 A list of articles from Zhihu and Douban

Number	Author	Source	Link
Article #1	你很美好 我得回家		
Article #2	CC 迟	Zhihu	https://www.zhihu.com/question/27534866
Article #3	畅言		
Article #4	李金辉		
Article #5	方色客	Douban	https://www.douban.com/note/747391348/

Appendix 3 Mediated urban walking

1. Observation script

Street

- Is it hard to find the street?
- How do the street and the built environments in the surrounding look like? (the buildings, the stores, the plants, the colours, the street views, the breadth of the street, the soundscape and smell-scape of the street)
- The surveillance cameras or neighbourhood management staff on the street.
- What happens in the street now? Are there many passers-by, street vendors, people standing and chatting there, car drivers honking, noise from construction site nearby, etc.?
- What are the main difference features compared with other street(s) within the same block or nearby the junction?

Graffiti

- Where are the locations of graffiti?
- Is it easy to identify the graffiti on the street?
- What has been written/drawn?
- The marks indicating erasures.
- Try to find marker pens left by previous graffiti writers.
- Do you see something familiar you have ever seen before in social media?

Graffiti writers (if any)

- The gesture of graffiti (writing/ drawing).
- What are they doing? (taking the picture? reading? talking? something else?)
- Encounter with other writers?
- What the people do when they see these graffiti? Do most of the passers-by stop and read these (and/or re-write) here? If so, what kind of reactions do they usually make on the spot?

2. Walking note (excerpt)

Date: 2021.03.21

Time: 09:00-10:40 (GMT+8 16:00-17:40)

Platforms: WeChat and FaceTime

Form: Video call

Observers: Yang in Nanjing, China & Maizi in Lund, Sweden

The general descriptions to the street from Yang

- **Passers-by:** 1) on eastern side is fewer than the other side. There were many passes-by at both street's ends, but most of them were at the bus stop at the southern end. 2) Passers-by were mostly the elders. 3) Most of the passers-by did not pay too much attention to the graffiti on the walls or trees. During the tour, Yang only noticed two passers-by who gave a glimpse on the graffiti. One young man had taken some pictures of the graffiti on trees, while one elder man just passed by without any special action.

A dialogue with other two fans on the street

(Yang was walking on the street and there was a boy starting to talk to him out of blue.)

The boy: are you also B fan (the fan of Li Zhi)?

Yang: sort of, I am helping my friend to see the graffiti on the street. Where are you from?

The boy: I am Heilongjiang Province, and he (pointing to his companion) is from Jiangxi. We are having internships here.

Yang: will you write anything on the tree?

The boy: no, it is not good for the public space.

Reflections from Maizi

The tactics

From below	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People writing graffiti on the back of trees is a tactic as they believe it is not that easy to find and not that obvious.
From above	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The previous commercial board has been replaced with the foam board, which is quite glossy and hard to write things on, even people write things on them, it is easier to erase, by rain or by towels. What's more, the boards on the walls now are very small now with limited space to write things.

Appendix 4 Interviewees

Appellation	Gender	Interview date	Interview via	Date wrote the graffiti
Interviewee #1	Female	2021.2.28	WeChat	2020.10.31
Interviewee #2	Female	2021.3.1	WeChat	2019.12.19
Interviewee #3	Male	2021.2.22	WeChat	2020.4.4
Interviewee #4	Female	2021.2.22	WeChat	2020.4.12
Interviewee #5	Male	2021.2.15	WeChat	2018.5.11
Interviewee #6	Male	2021.2.28	WeChat	2018.5.20
Interviewee #7	Male	2021.2.23	WeChat	2020.5.4
Interviewee #8	Male	2021.2.25	QQ	2019.5.14
Interviewee #9	Female	2021.3.16	WeChat	2020.7.14

Appendix 5 Interview guide

Part One Basic facts

1. When did you visit the street? (date, daytime/night)
2. Who was with you when you were there?
3. Why did you choose the street when you visited the city (or why did you want to go to the street as a city residents)?

Part Two Feelings about the street

1. What was your imagination or expectations to the street before you visited it?
2. What was your feelings about street when you were there? (sound, smell, colours, emotions...)
3. How did you find the graffiti walls and what was your feelings towards the walls?

Part Three Opinions on co-authoring

1. How did you get your mark pen to write?
2. Did you see other people who were also writing on the walls?
3. What did you write on the wall?
4. What was the motivation to write things on the walls?
5. Can you recall any impressive writings now?
6. Did you take picture of your writing? Did you post the pictures on social media and if yes, why?

Part Four Opinions on graffiti walls

1. How do you understand the critics from others that it is not so good to write things on public walls?
2. How do you understand that the walls have been whitewashed several times?
3. How do you understand the phenomenon that people write things on the walls time and time again all these years?

Please introduce me other interviewees if possible!

Appendix 6 Semiotic analysis

1. Myth of mediated graffiti and urban space



Photo #201701

Shot date: 2017.12.25

Location: an outer wall of a to-be-demolished bookstore

Author: @尚一上

Source: authorised by the author

Categories	Subcategories	Items	Denotations	Connotations
Objects	Graffiti	Drawings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chinese character ‘拆’ (demolish) in a circle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a very symbolic sign in China, especially after the 1990s. The sign should be here on this wall as it is a to-be-demolished building, but the sign itself written by ordinary people has no power within. The graffiti writer appropriates the sign and deconstruct the powerful connotation of the sign. ...
		Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making wishes: ‘I want to go to the new years concert’ (我想去看跨年), ‘good luck with my postgraduate entrance exam’ (考研加油) Lyrics: ‘has man a future’ (这个世界会好吗) ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal stories are a way to record to document. Some of stories are related to the street or the singer, some of the stories are completely personal. This is also one important signifier which implies the medium nature of the wall, as a channel to express. ...
		Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writings on the upper and lower part of the wall are larger than those in the centre and corner areas. Drawings are obvious among other writings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually, personal stories are written in very small sizes as the texts are longer or the writers do not want the writing to be that obvious. ...
		Signatures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some left the dates. Some left the pinyin abbreviations of their names. some with their real names. Some graffiti without signatures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signature of one’s name is a way to identify oneself, to claim the ownership of certain piece of graffiti.

Categories	Subcategories	Items	Denotations	Connotations
		Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is one graffiti at the left lower corner that is written in English, ‘** (a name), I want to have a future with you. –**’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of foreign language from a Chinese person (judging from the names) indicates the love confession in public space is not a common for Chinese, in this situation, using a foreign language reduce the sense of shame.
		One writer with many pieces of graffiti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is one graffiti writer named Wang Kai (王凯) writes several pieces of graffiti, each piece has his name as signature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
	Medium	The wall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A white wall. There are some white paint spots in the front area of the wall. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The wall is plain white because it has been painted not long ago, and the traces of erased writings indicate that the ‘battles’ between the graffiti writers and the city management offices are constantly undergoing.
Settings	Street	Passers-by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No passers-by in the photo. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No passers-by in the photo, it is because the photographer deliberately avoid shooting people in the photo, or it is really a desolate place in the city...
		Traffic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not identifiable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
		Pavement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cement pavement, grey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cement pavement is not common in China’s major cities, as it is not that good to look, not that ‘modernised’...

Categories	Subcategories	Items	Denotations	Connotations
	Building		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole building is not identifiable in this photo, but we know it is a bookstore to be demolished. • There are some shabby structures above the wall. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The very similar to the analysis above, the shabby bookstore ruin creates a perfect graffiti place.

2. Myth of remediated graffiti and urban space

Date: 2020-5-17



Caption: miss Rehe Road, Nanjing

Author: endfessrainn

Comments:

A: OMG! This street is full signs about Brother B! (Li Zhi)

The author replied A: Yes, it is written in Brother B's song!

B: Also Shanyin Road.

C: Turn over a new leaf and believe in future!

Likes: 32

Pictures: 9

Link:

https://weibo.com/6068291826/J2kES4fS0?type=comment#_rd1617266980846

Categories	Denotations	Connotations
Objects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graffiti writings are on the pavement and a wall. • There is a street sign. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The caption with one English word ‘miss’ followed by a location check-in tag of Rehe Road, what she is missing of? Maybe the old street in her imagination based on the lyric, or the singer Li Zhi as he was just banned by the government then (2019.4.12), or she is missing someone has something to do with the song? • ...
Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many signs painted on the street by the authority, there are bikes and several arrows pointing to different directions. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We cannot see the whole view of the street in her photos, but we can still see the urban setting of the street. There are many arrows, icons, and lines painted boldly on the pavements, these are all from the city planner and management offices, they are disciplines and rules for walkers....
Salience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The centre position of the post is the screenshot of iPhone lock page with a music player playing the song the song <i>Rehe</i>. • ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As we discussed above, the screenshot of the music player indicates the integration of imagined street and urban space in reality...
The viewer’s position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the graffiti photos are shot from above, with some distance. • The street sign photo is shot from below. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking down on the graffiti on the pavement is how we look things on the ground when we walking, also the looking up posture indicates she is not that tall and she is raising her head to look the street sign. • ...
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no other participants rather than the photographer herself. • ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no identifiable participants in these photos, except the feet and the dress of the girl. She is there all the time, she does not show her face, we cannot see her expressions, we cannot tell her emotions. • ...
What is happening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The girl is walking, judging from the last photo of the post. • ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is walking, from the last photo, which is a little blurred by the shaking camera. We can see one of her feet is stretching out...

Categories	Denotations	Connotations
Modality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No filters applied to the photos as they are shot in 'live' mode. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The girl is trying to give an authentic experience of the street by using 'live' mode, it can record the movement of the camera and the sound of the setting...
Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The post has got many likes. There are three netizens commenting the post. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the comments are from fans of Li Zhi, judging from their words. For example, Brother B is the nickname of the singer, which indicates a sense of intimate...

Appendix 7 A transcript of interview with Interviewee #3

Maizi (M): Firstly, on which date did you visit Rehe Road?

Interviewee (I): It was April 4, 2020. I drove to the Rehe.

M: Why did you choose that date?

I: It was a national Memorial Day to commemorate the frontline workers who died due to Covid-19. Before the date, Doctor Li Wenliang's death sparked a large controversy on the Internet and the incident caused public outrage, so to speak. It was also a public holiday, so I had time. I remember that all the entertainment venues were closed because of the memorial event. Then my friend and I wanted to go out and take a tour together, then we drove to Rehe Road. Because that was not the first time I had gone there, I said to my friend that there is a graffiti wall over there, we can leave a message or something.

M: Was it daytime or night when you arrived Rehe Road?

I: In the afternoon.

M: Do your friends like Li Zhi too?

I: No, he does not. I like him. In fact, it was me who suggested to go to Rehe Road. I said: 'I want to write something today.'

M: Did you leave a message when you first visited Rehe Road?

I: Yes, I did.

M: Why did you choose to go to Rehe Road? Not Shanyin Road (山阴路) or other roads that are also mentioned in Li's songs.

I: It was because of the graffiti wall, of course. Many fans left messages on the walls on Rehe Road, we call it to 'check-in' (打卡). It is a very important place to check in. If you are a fan of Brother Bi (*a nickname of Li Zhi among his fans*), you should go to Nanjing to have a look. As for when the graffiti started to appear, I have no idea. It seems that it has been there for a very long time, probably people have been doing this thing (writing graffiti) constantly. Then after I learned this, I went there in that year, it might be 2019 or 2018.

M: From which channel did you first learn about the existence of this check-in place?

I: A friend of mine told me. She said that there is a wall on Rehe Road, where many young people are writing graffiti to demonstrate their attitudes. She said that you can check it out when you have time to visit Rehe Road. Then I always have this graffiti in my mind.

M: Are you native in Nanjing?

I: No. I come from another city. There were many considerations when I chose Nanjing as my place to start my career; of course, part of the reason was because of Li Zhi.

M: Then after you went to Nanjing, did you go to those places (Rehe Road, Shanyin Road) to check in immediately?

I: No, after I arrived in Nanjing, I was busy settling down. After some time, I had time to visit places in Li Zhi's songs, including Shanyin Road, there is an art gallery.

M: When did you start to like Li Zhi and his songs?

I: In 2017 or 2016. But at the time, I couldn't say I love him, I just thought his songs were pretty good. Especially some of his hit songs, such as *Sky City*, even if you don't listen to folk songs, or even if you don't know this singer, you may have heard these songs. Because of this good impression of his songs, I started to get more information about the singer. Until later I saw some of his clips, videos, and interviews, I told myself that he is a very energetic and principled musician. Then his expressive attitude made me like him even more. From that moment on, I changed my identity as a simple listener to his admirer. Probably in 2017 or 2018.

M: Would you define yourself as a fan of Li Zhi?

I: I don't define myself as his fan, because he doesn't need fans. He only needs people to scold him (*laugh*). I don't really treat myself as a fan or regard him as a role model to chase. I think he is a person first, and what's more, he is a mirror, through which you can observe things, reflect on things, help you know that some people in this world are like this, while others like that. Through this mirror, we question and doubt this world, and then think about what the world is like with these questions and doubts. Yes, he is more like a mirror, I do not categorise him as an idol.

M: Before you went to Rehe Road, how did this street look like in your imagination?

I: Some pictures in my mind. It may be that kind of small alley, residential buildings.

M: When you arrived Rehe Road for the first time, what was your feeling?

I: The first feeling was that this street was quite difficult to find, because there are Rehe Road, and South Rehe Road as well, it is a very large area. Then it took a while to find it. Because I was driving, not riding a bicycle, or taking a bus, it was difficult to stop by to check when I was driving, and I had to find a place to stop before I could go around. When I drove on the street, I didn't notice any difference. It was an ordinary street. Then there was a corner, and I saw a few walls with many words on it, and then I thought, it might be here. Then I saw a street sign read 'Rehe Road'.

M: So, when you first visited there, it was the graffiti walls that helped you to locate Rehe Road?

I: The street sign as well. Because the street sign saying that this area is Rehe Road and South Rehe Road, I knew it was probably the area, and then I saw the graffiti walls, I got the confirmation.

M: Before you recognised the street as Rehe Road, did you think it is much different from other streets in Nanjing?

I: A very ordinary street, not distinct from other streets in Nanjing at all. After confirming that it was Rehe Road, I felt disappointed. The street was different from what I imagined. It is too broad, urbanised, and too normal. How could such an ordinary street become a place to check in. It was not beautiful, and it has no uniqueness. I realised at that time, the meaning of the street is not innately possessed by itself but given by people.

M: So, what were your expectations for this street before you arrived?

I: My expectation for it was that the street has its uniqueness. When I visit the street, I may find resonances to the song *Rehe*. I could think about the stories used to be happening there. It should definitely more than an ordinary street. These expectations and the reality generated the disappointments.

M: Could you describe the graffiti wall you saw then?

I: It's a very ordinary wall with real estate advertisements board on it, and there are some big trees next to it. That wall made me feel a bit like a disobedient student at school, he is conspicuous all the time, but then being disciplined again and again. But he keeps his rebel again and again. If you say the graffiti wall is obtrusive, it is not very obtrusive, as it was written on one or two out of many real estate advertisement boards on the street. It is not obtrusive, nor does it completely in harmony with street scene.

M: How many graffiti walls were there?

I: Three, they were all filled up with graffiti, and then the trees next to them were also filled up with graffiti. You know, that kind of big trees, the trunks were full of writings.

M: Could you recall the specific date when you first wrote graffiti on Rehe Road?

I: I don't remember it clearly. It should be in 2019.

M: Where did you find the pen?

I: The pen, I just wanted to talk about that. I went there with my friend, and none of us had any marker pens. At that time, we didn't expect to write anything at all. We were just taking a purposeless trip there and wanted simply to have a look of the street and the graffiti wall, we didn't say that we must write something there. Then, when I saw that the whole wall was full of lyrics and other writings, I thought, we should find a pen to write something. But there were no stationery shops around. Then we crossed the street and found a supermarket where I bought a package of marker pen. I still remember that there were four pens in the package, two red and two black. The supermarket seems to be on the ground floor. I was desperately to get a pen.

M: How did you dispose that marker pen later?

I: I took it back and put it in the car. I forgot, maybe it was taken away by my friend.

M: What did you write for the first time?

I: I wrote a song's name of him: 'Has man a future? Definitely yes.' Everyone wrote the question line from the song, but I wanted to give them an answer.

M: At that time Li Zhi had been banned, right?

I: Yes.

M: Did you find any impressive graffiti from others?

I: Most of them were check-in messages such as who came, the date, where they come from, for example, from Wuhan, from Chengdu. There are also some sentences, I can't remember the content, most of them were lyrics from Li's songs. There were also paintings. The one I remember most is a face, Li Zhi's face.

M: Why did you feel imposed to write something the first time when you visited Rehe Road?

I: I was totally affected by the atmosphere. As I said, we didn't plan to write then. But seeing that wall I was so shocked and moved. It turned out that everyone still remembered the banned singer. For me, such voices and spirit deserve to be heard and seen.

M: Who is writing things on the walls here, in your opinion?

I: I think 90% of the writers visited this street on purpose, I could not think of a reason for people who has no knowledge of Li Zhi or *Rehe* visit Rehe Road, because the street is not beautiful, no tourists will be here. People know Rehe Road and come here because they listen to the song, they share similar tastes on music. For me, people who like Li Zhi have many similarities in personalities - they like folk music, rock and roll, and then they keep their angers, swear the world when feel dissatisfactory. They always say no, always refuse, always have their attitudes. Everyone is very similar, but everyone is also very distinct. Everyone hates the world so much and is hated by the world as well. At that moment, I felt that everyone was very close. If I were deeply moved at that moment.

M: Then, what is your motivation when you wrote on the wall for the second? Why did you choose April 4 as the date of your visit?

I: I felt that all the events were connected together coincidentally, it was very interesting. My previous Weibo profile text was '404 not found'. At that day, I felt that I was obligated to write something on the street. First, Li Zhi is 404ed, then Doctor Li, and then numerous voices and groups that need to be heard or seen are 404ed. Not long the graffiti wall will be 404ed, including my text. All of them will be erased, but we remember, that is the most important thing. Therefore, I wrote down 'missing Doctor Li Wenliang'.

M: What does the phrase 'missing Doctor Li Wenliang' mean to you?

I: Firstly, it is my tribute to the medical staffs on frontline against Covid-19. The second point is that behind the sentence is an attitude. What should not be erased can never be erased. Even if you erase it, people will remember it anyway. We MUST remember these things in fact, including Li Wenliang's story. Topics on Li's death on Weibo Trend were deleted, and then the government was reluctant to apologize at that time and no explicit explanations were given, everyone was angry. I think their angers should be seen and remembered. Li Wenliang is a label which beyond the individual he was. Similarly, Li Zhi is also a label. He is the memory that was maliciously erased, a voice that was maliciously erased. I simply felt that they are all worth being remembered and seen.

M: What do you think of the wall itself?

I: It is a place for emotional expressions. For example, if you are in a bad mood, or if you really miss Li Zhi, you can go to that wall and the street.

M: If he were not banned, would this wall still so important?

I: It's not that important anymore. It is because he was banned, people need to find some resonance. It is difficult to communicate on the Internet, you need to find a platform of communication, and finally we have found this wall.

M: How do you define this wall?

I: It's a very simple wall. Whether it's a graffiti or a mark wall, though the content is different, the core essence remains the same – to help people to express something.

M: Have you searched your own writings after you left the street?

I: I know it will definitely be erased. Because first of all, it is an advertisement board. People will definitely not let you write on the advertisement. In addition, some people may think that it affects the cleanliness of the city, and then the Environmental Protection Division will get rid of it.

M: What do you think of the criticisms that the graffiti is polluting the urban space?

I: Yes, I admit that the graffiti has negative impact on the cleanliness of the city. But without such a vandalism, how could I gain your attention? If I am not arrogant, how do you see me. Since you didn't talk to me gently, why should I talk to you gently. Of course, I am just kidding. As a good citizen, I think it is not really vandalising the public space. In the eyes of ordinary passers-by, it may be just a wall plastered with fake certificate and stamp ads.

M: Are you comfortable if people regard your graffiti as the same as those ads?

I: I don't. I hope that people who like Li Zhi can see the wall, so that they their voices can be heard. I don't really care about the judgements from those who don't understand us. The only concern is that if this wall disappears, or if it doesn't exist, how could I convince myself that there is still someone like me out there in the world?

M: How do you digest the fact that the wall will disappear sooner or later?

I: It will be sad if these voices are erased, I believe most people will feel so. At first, I also had the feeling that everything I said had no chance to be heard or seen. But now I changed my perspective to think about this, I feel that I do not really have to be seen and heard by

writing graffiti. What I have done is just an act to empower myself, to grant value to myself. My writings will be erased eventually, but I will write until I am heard.

M: Will you write on Rehe Road in the future?

I: Maybe, maybe I have a bad or get sick someday, I will visit Rehe Road. It's just a way to cheer me up. If I am really angry about something, I will write something again.

M: Do you pay attention to other people's graffiti every time you go?

I: Yes. Some writings are really interesting and fun. There is one I have always remembered: 'They thought that if they killed all the roosters, there would be no dawn.'

M: Thanks! I guess it is the end of our interview, really enjoyed talking with you!

Appendix 8 Coding

1. Coding interview transcripts in NVivo

Name	Files	Referen
1. Mediated city	9	51
(1) Rehe Road		8
Social media		4
Taxi driver		3
The song		5
Imagination from the s		4
Listen to the song on t		2
(2) Urban space		9
Affordance		3
Media(platforms)		3
Maker pen		2
Core nature		9
Anonymity		7
Deletable		1
Document		1
Encounter		3
Grouping		4
Interactive		1

在正常市民眼中，它可能就是一面贴满广告的墙罢了，贴满了办证广告、配钥匙广告的一面墙罢了。

M: 那你希望别人跟办证广告混为一谈吗?

I: 我不希望。我希望大家能看到，有喜欢李志的，或者有这种态度的人能看到原来大家在这，原来你的声音可以被听到。那些不了解的人他们的态度，他们怎样看我并不在意，我只是怕这面墙消失的话，或者他不存在的话，比如像我以前没有看过这面墙的时候，我可能没有看到这一部分群体在，现在我是看到了。

<Files\\Transcript 5> - 5 2 references coded [2.20% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.24% Coverage

又正好听说热河路附近又抓市容，管得比较严，

Reference 2 - 1.96% Coverage

按道理来说，你会觉得有这种红色的横幅旁边还有涂鸦，你会觉得涂鸦刺眼；但是我在那边看到这两个东西放在一起，我反而觉得这个横幅刺眼。我拍的所有照片都在横幅附近的50米范围内，就是这种感觉，这个横幅反而更刺眼，或许那些不知道这个文

Coding Density

Ads

Battlefield

Banner

2. Coding data from social media in NVivo

Nodes Search Project

Name	Files	References
1. Mediated city	1	19
(1) Rehe Road	1	7
(2) Urban space	1	12
2. Remediated graffiti	1	58
3. Poetic resistance	1	28
(1) How do they resist	1	12
(2) Who do they resist	1	15
(3) Why do they resist	1	1
4. Conclusion	1	26

Drag selection here to code to a new node

(2) Who do they resist

<Files\weibo data1> - 5 15 references coded [1.86% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.05% Coverage

Reference	Code	Date	Text	Source
1	M-spur	2月1日 20:42	又一次来南京 mark 第一次在五岁 和红红的鹿合影 第二次是五年前的今天 雪中好像看见了世界 第三次抓住十八岁的末尾 和迟到的星空 这次只是中转站 但实现了愿望清单的一项-像寻宝一样 看见整条路的地标石砖树干都写满了呐喊 他说年轻时别来热河路 可是年轻人依然相信未来[泪] 2南京 热河路	宇航员荔枝: 南京 M-spur: 感受到了 繩无衣: 热河路到了, 百思不得其解 M-spur: 一千个人 繩无衣: 回复@M-

Reference 2 - 0.41% Coverage

Reference	Code	Date	Text	Source
	xx是个YYC	1月14日 23:50	也算是完成人生的梦想之一吧, 从15年就想去看一次热河路, 这次我去了, 而且是和爱的人一起去。去晚了, 也的确, 热河路像所有城市的缩影, 打破, 重铸, 去掉了所谓的肮脏, 破乱, 重铸所谓的秩序规则, 不是这样不好, 只是热河路也确实少了, 曾经下关的风味, 外地人在这座城市边缘讨生活的样子, 如今挹江门依旧伫立, 热河路的涂鸦, 被一层一层油漆抹匀再挤压, 依然一副文明城市的模样, 街道一旁不仅仅有了高楼, 也多了干净的潘西路过了, 而街道的另一旁, 依旧是老旧的商城。多了买菜的大爷大妈, 而这一方曾经的破旧也随着一堵堵墙的修葺, 被尘封起来, 等待下一次的资本注入, 继续延续着那句话“城市让生活更美好。” 2南京 热河路	

Reference 3 - 0.17% Coverage

Freedom of speech
Them as power
Them as non-fans
Coding Density
Them as disciplines
Battlefield

3. Coding scheme (example)

For interview data

*the table was exported from NVivo and partly demonstrated here.

Categories	Example	References
1.Mediated city		51
(1)Rehe Road		18
Social media	I knew the graffiti from one of my WeChat friend's Moment, he posted some photos (Interviewee #7)	7
Taxi driver	The taxi driver knows a lot about Rehe Road, he talked much with me (Interviewee #8)	4
The song		7
Imagination from the song	I know the street via the song (Interviewee #1)	5
Listen to the song on the street	We listened to <i>Rehe</i> on Rehe Road (Interviewee #1)	2
(2)Urban space		33
Affordance		4
Marker pen	The marker should be the one the Weibo user left (Interviewee #8)	2
Media(platforms)	There are some bollards made of marble (Interviewee #1)	4
Core nature		29
Anonymity		14

Categories	Example	References
Atmosphere	There were passers-by around, but I didn't feel embarrassing at that place, that is a place for people who love Li Zhi (Interviewee #7)	5
Settings	For me, Rehe Road is a remote area in the city (Interviewee #1)	9
Deletable	That wall will soon be 404ed (Interviewee #3)	1
Document	It is a medium on which people can document their life (Interviewee #5)	1
Encounter	I met two girls on the street (Interviewee #7)	6
sense of belonging	I felt that his fans are so powerful (Interviewee #4)	6
Interactive	I felt that the question needs an answer (Interviewee #9)	1

For Weibo data

*the table was exported from NVivo and partly demonstrated here.

Categories	Example	References
1. Mediated city		19
(1) Rehe Road		7
Social media	I saw a graffiti wall's photo on Weibo last night (Post #166)	2
The song	One can only understand <i>Rehe</i> when one visits here in person (Post #316)	5
(2) Urban space		12

Categories	Example	References
Affordance		9
Marker pen	I left a big marker pen with black ink on Rehe Road (Post #401, comment section)	9
Core nature		1
Anonymity	It doesn't matter, the law cannot be enforced when everyone is an offender (Post #29, comment section)	1
Media		2
2.Remediated graffiti		58
Claim writings	That kitty cat was drawn by me on the new year's day (Post #139, comment section)	9
Code	I love Nanjing (Post #67, comment section)	3
Greetings	Welcome girl from Inner Mongolia to Nanjing (Post #89, comment section)	11
Share info-graffiti	I went to the street yesterday and the graffiti was almost erased (Post #91, comment section)	8
Share info-merch	Where did you get the phone case with Rehe Road's sign (Post #38, comment section)	1
Share info-online community	The old Super Topic disappeared, here is the new one (Post #68, comment section)	3

Categories	Example	References
Share info-resources	Do you have Li's songs (Post #43, comment section)	5
Share info-the singer	Li Zhi came back, I come to Nanjing (Post #19)	2
Share info-the street	Where is the graffiti wall, didn't find it (Post #27, comment section)	7
Share pictures	Hi Bro, can I repost your pictures (Post #17)	9

Appendix 9 Consent form

*This consent form was dictated to participants ahead of all the interviews.

Thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in this interview. I am Maizi Hua, I am currently taking Media and Communication Studies program at Lund University in Sweden. Now I am writing my Master's thesis and my topic is on mediated urban space. The graffiti on Rehe Road, Nanjing is the case of my study. I am looking for interviewees who used to write graffiti on Rehe Road. This interview will take half an hour to one hour, before we start the main part of interview, I would like to inform the following information and get your consent:

1. This study will be recorded, and the recordings will be stored until the completion of this study;
2. I guarantee that all the original data is only accessible for the researcher (Maizi Hua);
3. The content of our conversation will be included in my Master's thesis;
4. All of your personal information, except your gender, will not be revealed;
5. You can choose answer or not answer any questions in this interview.

Now please give me your consent to all the terms of this study. Thanks.