

# *The Remodeling of Urban Functions by Urban Renewal—Take Guangzhou as an example*

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**Abstract:** Urban renewal and urban construction live together, urban renewal is an inevitable choice of urban development, but also an important path to promote high-quality urban development. In China, the connotation and extension of urban renewal are constantly enriched and improved, and the theory of "urban organic renewal" explores the problem of urban renewal development from the perspective of system and overall situation. The urban renewal of Guangzhou began to pay attention to the participation of various theories, the coordination of the government, and the balance between the interests and needs of different groups such as developers and residents, and began to seek mechanism innovation to achieve the long-term development goals of the city. Urban development is changing from extension to connotation promotion. In order to promote the transformation of old and new drivers of growth and accelerate the glow of new vitality of old cities. In the future, Guangzhou as an internationally recognized city and the forefront of reform and innovation, should continue to give full play to the advantages of "leader", unswervingly and vigorously promote urban renewal, and inject new impetus and expand new space for urban construction and development.

## 1. Introduction

At present, China has entered into the era of stock, which forces all places to carry out urban renewal work from point and surface, and the practice is increasingly rich. Urban renewal focuses on the humanistic core. In the face of the renewal needs in different periods, each city has different concerns. Urban renewal is not only the development and reuse of material space, but also the renewal and remodeling of the city connotation and the improvement and promotion of urban functions. It is an important starting point to realize the sustainable development of cities. Under the current background of tight constraints on resources and environment, urban renewal is the main measure for the development and protection of territorial space, and improving the utilization efficiency of stock land resources is an important guarantee for high-quality urban development.[1] Guangzhou city adheres to the principle of "demolition, governance and prosperity", and is accelerating the pace of urban renewal. As a national central city and the core engine of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Guangzhou focuses on promoting high-quality

development, creating high-quality life, and achieving efficient governance, actively and steadily promoting urban renewal, accelerating the transformation of the development mode of megacities, and building a livable, resilient and smart city.

## 2. Theory and Practice of Urban Renewal

Party's 20 report, "adhere to the people's city building, people's city for the people, improve the level of urban planning, construction, governance, speed up the transformation of the mode of large city development, the implementation of urban renewal action, strengthen the construction of urban infrastructure, build livable, toughness, wisdom city". The life of a city lies in its continuous renewal and continuous burst of vitality. Renewal is the eternal state and constant theme of the city. The Central Urban Work Conference held at the end of 2015 clearly proposed that urban repair and organic renewal should be carried out in an orderly manner, solve problems such as the decline of environmental quality, spatial disorder, and damaged historical and cultural heritage in the old urban areas, and restore the functions and vitality of the old urban areas. In 2020, the first time the "Implementation of Urban Renewal Action" in the Proposal of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-term Goals of the 235 Year, which elevates urban renewal to the level of national strategy. In 2021, "urban renewal" was included in the Government Work Report for the first time, and the 2022 Government work report included "orderly promotion of urban renewal" as a key work in 2022. The party's 20th annual report pointed out that we will implement urban renewal actions, strengthen urban infrastructure construction, and build livable, resilient and smart cities. Urban renewal is a complex and systematic project, covering many fields such as economy, society and environment, and it requires a comprehensive and systematic evaluation system to objectively evaluate it.[2] This evaluation system should also include all indicators of the fields involved. Objective evaluation of Guangzhou's urban renewal through the evaluation system can ensure the sustainable development of urban renewal and the well-being of the people, which is of great significance to the beautiful development of the society.

From a global perspective, the concept of urban renewal has gradually changed from large-scale demolition and reconstruction with single goal and efficiency priority to small-scale and gradual urban renewal and community development with diversified goals and rich content, humanistic color, emphasizing citizen participation and giving consideration to social equity. Foreign urban renewal started earlier. Urban renewal in the modern sense in western countries originated in the industrial revolution. The concept of urban renewal was first proposed at the first World Urban Renewal Conference in the Netherlands in 1958. The conference explained the urban renewal as: people living in the city have different living expectations and needs for travel, shopping, entertainment and other activities. In order to form a better living environment and a better urban appearance, the improvement requirements are put forward for the housing or the environment, and this kind of urban construction activities to improve the living environment is urban renewal.[3] From this explanation, the early urban renewal focused on the improvement of the material environment in which people live. The large-scale urban renewal movement originated after World War II, especially in the UK and America in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1970s, the concept of sustainable development appeared in the thought of urban renewal, and gradually became the important ideological basis of contemporary urban renewal. During this period, urban renewal mainly studied the problems of urban planning and urban development, and restricted the behavior of urban expansion.

The pace of urban renewal in China is developing synchronously with the continuous advancement of urbanization process. The earliest study of urban renewal in China began in 1979. Professor Wu Liangyong put forward the theoretical idea of "organic renewal", starting from how to

correctly deal with the problem of inheritance and transformation in urban renewal. It is advocated that according to the inner order and law of the city, conform to its texture, with the appropriate scale and reasonable scale, and explore the renewal of urban development on the basis of sustainable development. When Chinese cities have experienced the rapid development after the 1980s, we feel that the characteristic culture of local historical blocks is disappearing rapidly today, and the urban space and land resources are increasingly tense.[4] These contradictions are particularly thoroughly reflected in urban villages. This micro-society breeds a series of social diseases, theft, drug trafficking, and a series of problems caused by population expansion. Since the 1990s, with the economic blowout economic growth, the state has carried out the policy of paid use of urban land, introduced market forces and private capital into the market construction process, and commercial housing has entered a period of rapid development. However, there are still many problems in the large-scale and high-speed urban renewal and urban expansion in this period, such as insufficient attention to the urban history and culture, which makes the cultural characteristics of some cities disappear.

A new round of urban renewal system construction around 2010, the key nodes respectively in 2010 Guangzhou "three old transformation" characteristics of urban renewal, in 2015 Shanghai "outstanding global urban construction" release and start the four urban renewal plan, and in 2011 Beijing began to emphasize the protection of the old city, population organization, set up the old city for special policy, and began from "overall relocation, planning and construction" to "regional system consideration, microcirculation organic update". Beijing is also speeding up the renovation of shantytowns and environmental improvement through government-led and market operation methods. At home, Shanghai and Shenzhen are the pioneers and practitioners of urban renewal in China. Shanghai has a long history of urban renewal, and it is the first city to incorporate urban renewal into the overall urban planning.[5] From the beginning of the old renovation in the 1980s, to the 1990s to the protection of historical buildings, the redevelopment of the old industrial real estate in the new century, to the great transformation of urban villages. Shenzhen is the first city to introduce the concept of "urban renewal" in China. One of the characteristics of Shenzhen urban renewal is the "integration of industry and city", among which the typical cases are OCT Creative Cultural Park, Shanxia Industrial Zone, etc. Urban renewal has become a new general trend of urban construction. From big cities to small counties, urban renewal has been listed as one of the key tasks. In the face of the complexity of urban renewal, how to promote the healthy and sustainable development of urban renewal in an orderly manner and better empower urban development has become a proposition that needs to be paid attention to in breaking the situation.

### **3. The historical context and mechanism characteristics of urban renewal in Guangzhou**

As one of the central cities of the pearl river delta city of Guangzhou, clear urban renewal as an important city work in the new period, to urban planning construction more brilliant color, through the development of higher level of modern service industry, in improving the city cultural quality and reputation at the same time, meet the demand of Guangzhou citizens for a better life. Since 1949, especially since the reform and opening up, Guangzhou's economic and social development has made remarkable achievements, but rely on the traditional development model of new resources is unsustainable, must further change the mode of development, through the urban renewal release stock resources potential, meet the urban transformation development of new space, new economy, new function of resource demand, realize the sustainable development of the city.

#### **3.1 The evolution process of urban renewal in Guangzhou**

(1) In the preliminary exploration stage (before 2009), the reconstruction of dilapidated houses

and old cities was mainly promoted in a case manner (before the introduction of No.56, 2009).Features: There is no systematic policy, strictly restricting the entry of multiple entities such as the market, choose a single project, mainly adopt government investment, to improve the urban environment.

(2) The "Three Old" reconstruction stage (2009-2014), taking the implementation of the "three Old" reconstruction as an opportunity, no. 56 and No. 20 documents were issued, and the "three Old" reconstruction policy system was established, which steadily promoted the reconstruction of old villages, old factories and old towns. Features: Under the leadership of the government, qualified projects are allowed to transform themselves, rationally distribute the land value-added income, focusing on the comprehensive demolition and construction mode, promote a single project, focusing on the transformation of hardware facilities.

(3) In the stage of "Harmonious Renewal of Urban System" (from 2015 to present), the Urban Renewal Bureau was established, the "1+3" policy and Document No.6 were issued, and the renewal and transformation were promoted in a regular and orderly manner. Features: government-led, market operation, benefit sharing for the principle, emphasizes the industrial transformation and upgrading, historical and cultural protection and living environment improvement, innovative put forward "transformation" update way, pay attention to long-term benefits and sustainable development, to ensure the organic integration of industry and project, improve the stakeholders land value-added benefit sharing mechanism.

### **3.2 The operation mechanism of Guangzhou urban renewal**

(1) Improve the working mechanism and optimize the top-level design. In 2015, the Urban Renewal leading Group was established as the permanent coordination organization for the renewal and reconstruction of the city, with the main leaders of the municipal government as the leader, and the relevant units and district government as the member units to be responsible for the implementation of renewal and renovation projects within the administrative region. In May 2023, in order to further strengthen the government overall planning of the reconstruction of urban villages, Guangzhou set up the headquarters for the reconstruction of urban villages, with the main leaders of the Municipal Party Committee as the first chief commander and the main leaders of the municipal government as the chief commander, to strongly promote the reconstruction of urban villages.[6]In addition, in order to improve the scientific decision-making level of the reconstruction of urban villages, Guangzhou has set up an Expert Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal, and established a team of experts covering urban renewal, planning, land and construction to provide advice for the policy formulation, planning and program review for the reconstruction of urban villages.

(2) Strengthen the guidance of planning, and revitalize the urban space with high quality. Establish "special planning, construction planning, project reserves and annual plan" organic combination, layers of progressive urban renewal planning management system, namely the urban renewal special planning clear medium and long-term development goals, urban renewal project recent construction planning designated recent urban renewal area, key projects, urban renewal project reserve, annual plan clear specific project progress, control the scale of urban village reconstruction, adjust the pace of development. Through the transformation of urban villages, it cuts into the spatial context of urban development, plays the transportation advantages of the subway hub of Conghua passenger Station, practices the mode of "TOD+business circle", and forms the urban comprehensive development axis of Conghua Avenue and the industrial service development axis of Conghua Avenue.[7]At the same time, overall consideration should be given to the distribution of land for expropriation, resettlement, delivery and storage, and the quality and

efficiency in combination with the redevelopment of inefficient land, so as to enable the space system. From 2009 to 2014, Guangzhou, as the earliest pilot project of "three Old" renovation in China, vigorously promoted the renovation of urban villages in Pazhou Village, Yangji Village and Linhe Village. From 2015 to 2018, Guangzhou took the lead in setting up the Urban Renewal Bureau in China, innovatively proposed the "micro renovation" renewal method, and launched the micro renovation projects such as Pantang Wuyi District and Old Nanhai County Community. Since 2019, Guangzhou has continued to deepen the urban renewal work, established a sound renewal policy system and planning and control transmission mechanism, and planned the renewal and upgrading of old communities in pieces.

(3) Pay attention to the regional overall planning and innovate the working mechanism. On the basis of government leading, urban renewal area planning work, promote pieces shall update, break the land ownership boundaries, integration and scattered plot, unified land consolidation, planning, management, overall planning drive for industrial economy, public service, environmental quality, housing, cultural heritage and other all-round development. Taking Pazhou Village as an example, its development model of cultural inheritance, innovative development and harmonious coexistence with green ecology makes Pazhou Village become a model of urban renewal in Guangzhou. We will explore new models of transformation. Guangzhou is currently exploring a new model of urban village reconstruction featuring "expropriation according to law and net land transfer". Selected new central axis (haizhu), Guangzhou railway station, Luo Chong wai area, ring five mountain innovation source area four key area as a pilot, establish the city, district joint "headquarters+company" working mechanism, clear state-owned enterprises as the main body, under the city headquarters as a whole, cooperate with the government collection, compensation and resettlement work, form a net in accordance with the rules in accordance with the law. Adequate funds are the key factor for the smooth reconstruction of urban villages. [8] Guangzhou is actively seeking national support for the reconstruction of urban villages in the central budget funds, local government special bonds, policy-based development financial instruments and other fields.

(4) Prepare government-subsidized housing to meet the housing needs. Guangzhou pay attention to the combination of urban village reconstruction and development of affordable housing, for urban village reconstruction plot in addition to the resettlement housing residential land in a certain proportion of affordable housing, reconstruction of resettlement area meet the villagers live surplus rental housing, is given priority to with small family relatively concentrated construction, and long-term rental for affordable rental housing. On the premise of meeting the structural safety and meeting the fire control codes and standards for the renovation of existing buildings, it will be included into the standard management of affordable rental housing. To guide the subsidized rental housing with individual and collective property rights to entrust village collective economic organizations or select specialized large-scale housing rental agencies for overall operation. At the same time, Guangzhou Anju Group will be established to strengthen the preparation and supply of government-subsidized housing through market-oriented, professional and large-scale operation to promote the formation of a long-term mechanism. For example, Mengxiang Community in Beishan Village has five rental management enterprises, including Yili, Aijia, Suimei and Xinxin, which have settled in successively. A total of 891 rental houses have been upgraded and 16, 590 talent apartments have been built, which has effectively served the development of enterprises in the area.[9]

### **3.3 The shortcomings of Guangzhou's urban renewal**

Guangzhou urban renewal has been promoted in accordance with the principle of "government-led and market operation", and many renewal projects are participated by private

enterprises and developers. The "three red lines" for the real estate industry in 2020, combined with the impact of the epidemic, the policy of "prevention and construction" by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and 2021 led Guangzhou to reenter the evaluation and rectification period. Under the influence of these circumstances, the struggle of private enterprises and the stagnation of renewal projects, which brought hidden worries for the future development of Guangzhou and even the social stability of Guangzhou. In addition, there are also some problems in the market operation mode, such as the high overall planning cost of the area, the difficulty in controlling the pace, the impact on the incremental land market, and the gap between the demolition and subsidy standard and the land acquisition mode. In view of these problems, as early as 2019, Article 18 of the Guiding Opinions of Guangdong Provincial People's Government on Deepening Reform and Accelerating the "Three Old" Transformation and Promoting High-quality Development proposed: give play to the role of the government. In August 2021, the Municipal Housing and Construction Bureau also proposed to "encourage functional state-owned enterprises to participate in urban renovation projects".[10] Urban renewal projects in Huangpu District and Baiyun District both encourage state-owned enterprises to participate in old renovation projects.

First, the planning system is not guided. "Project on project" fails to fully reflect the strategic intention of urban development, and fails to focus on the promotion of key areas. The pace of renewal is fast in the peripheral areas and slow in the central urban areas, and there is a lack of comprehensive and systematic planning. Second, the strategic guidance of urban structure optimization strategy is insufficient. The policy design follows the traditional "three old" classification without spatial differentiation and fragmented implementation; the transformation function of the implemented projects is mainly residential, which brings a large number of population gathering and increases the pressure of public service. Third, heavy project implementation, weak overall planning. Nearly one quarter of the policies involve the calculation of the transformation cost and income sharing of specific projects, focusing on the economic balance of a single project, lack the thinking of "playing a chess game and calculating a big account", and lack the consideration of the balance of urban development.[11]

#### **4. Explore the path to improve the current urban renewal and development quality in China**

##### **4.1 Accelerating the legislation on the reconstruction of urban villages**

We actively summarized the experience in the reconstruction of urban villages, issued the Regulations on the Reconstruction of Urban Villages in Guangzhou, studied and formulated guidelines for the administrative treatment of compensation and resettlement of urban villages, and made full use of legal thinking to solve difficult problems such as left-behind households in the reconstruction of urban villages. We will implement the national policy document on actively and steadily promoting the reconstruction of urban villages in megacities, improve local supporting policies and measures, and provide policy support for the reconstruction of urban villages under the new situation and new model. According to the relevant policies on the expropriation of collective-owned land and state-owned land in Guangzhou, the role and role of state-owned enterprises in the expropriation work of the management and implementation subjects are not mentioned. It is suggested to improve the relevant provisions of the relevant laws and regulations. Good at relevant policies, revitalize the confidence of relevant enterprises, and encourage enterprises to continue to invest in urban renewal projects.

#### **4.2 Promote industrial transformation and upgrading, and actively expand the sources of funds**

We will focus on the construction of a modern industrial system, properly handle the relationship between "housing" and "production", increase the space supply of modern industrial industries in the process of renewal and transformation, formulate and implement industrial transformation and upgrading plans, improve industrial supporting facilities, strengthen the introduction of emerging industries, and promote the transformation and upgrading of village-level industrial parks, logistics parks and traditional wholesale markets.[12] By striving for national special loans, special loans, central financial subsidies, the application of local government special bonds and other ways, to increase the support of urban renewal funds. We will promote the establishment of Guangzhou Urban Village Reconstruction Fund, encourage financial institutions to participate in project financing, and expand diversified financing channels.

#### **4.3 Add the financial perspective and consider the whole life cycle**

In Hangzhou's land development model, fund guarantee is a very important link, including land transfer fees, financial subsidies, special loans, local government special debt, and the introduction of social capital. At present, three years after the epidemic, the debt ratio of major state-owned enterprises is at a relatively high position. How to broaden the source of funds through various financial means should be specially studied in the future. In addition, the perspective of the whole life cycle should be introduced in the update to coordinate the first-level development, second-level construction, third-level operation and fourth-level market. At present, mode 1 focuses on the first-level development, and mode 2 focuses on the first-level and second-level linkage development. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the consideration of the later operation and other aspects.

#### **4.4 Strengthening the protection and utilization of historical and cultural heritage**

We will handle the relationship between "retention" and "reform", carry out in-depth investigation, evaluation and census of historical and cultural resources for renovation projects, formulate a list for the protection of historical and cultural resources, and strictly protect immovable cultural relics, historical buildings, and ancient and famous trees. We will make rational and diversified use of historical and cultural heritage, introduce cultural, tourism, commercial and other business forms and functions, and promote the activation and utilization of historical and cultural heritage. From the increasingly hollow aging to attract artists and young people to gather in Pantang Wuyue, from a small fishing village to Pazhou Village adjacent to the 100-billion level e-commerce headquarters cluster area, from the old factory to the birthplace of WeChat, the annual output value of enterprises in the park increased by 1, 500 times T.I. T Creative Industry Park. Urban renewal supports the construction of key functional platforms and major infrastructure, improves the quality of living environment, promotes the industrial transformation and development, strengthens the construction of affordable housing, promotes the inheritance of history and culture, and continuously expands the new space for high-quality urban development.[13]

#### **4.5 High standards will enhance the resilience of cities, and effectively enhance the vitality of urban and rural areas**

Strictly observe the ecological bottom line, with the help of the radiation driving effect of Conghua Passenger Station of Metro Line 14, combined with the ecological restoration of Liuxi

River-Xiaohe River waterfront, optimize the embankment ecology, create water-friendly and low ecological intervention space, and restore the shallow wetland. At the same time, drawing on the international experience of Bishan Park, a number of sponge city construction technologies are adopted to realize rainwater regulation and storage, ecological purification, and build green infrastructure. In the reconstruction project of Hang Village, it is planned to build 5G+cultural and tourism digital service center through digital empowerment, and build the central control function of cultural and tourism in the central urban area. [14] At the same time, combined with residential, commercial and residential plots, people-oriented, create high-quality living environment, design improved house type, supporting a new generation of neighborhood center, create cultural communication theme space, enable precise supply services, improve the quality of life of residents, and constantly improve the people's happiness and satisfaction.

## **5. Enlightenment and suggestions for promoting the high-quality development of urban renewal**

### **5.1 Policy level**

The state strictly defines the growth boundary of construction land in big cities, the state strictly controlled the new construction land in the central urban areas of megacities with a population of more than 5 million; the 2015 Central City Work Conference made it clear that the stock should strictly control the increment, respect the law of urban development, and urban renewal and urban repair should be carried out. In its guideline on comprehensively promoting the economical and intensive use of land, Guangdong province proposed that in principle, the proportion of stock land in the total construction land used in Guangzhou should not be less than 60%.

### **5.2 Operational level**

The Ministry of Land and Resources has clarified the rigid requirements of "balance of occupation and compensation, occupation and compensation, and occupation of paddy fields" for land expropriation. If all kinds of urban construction involves the occupation of cultivated land, we must implement the requirements of first supplementing before occupying and directly supplementing high-quality cultivated land or paddy fields, strengthen the institutional constraints on the balance between the occupation and compensation of cultivated land, and force cities to tap the potential and use the existing land. We will further promote the redevelopment of inefficient urban land, further revitalize the stock of construction land, and improve the efficiency of land use.[15] Starting from this year, except for infrastructure and livelihood projects, Guangdong province will not directly distribute the new construction land quota to the Pearl River Delta region, and explore the implementation of the "one award X" for the "three old" comprehensive renovation, and comprehensively improve the "three awards X" policy.[16] The allocation of new construction land targets will be linked to the revitalization of the existing construction land, the promotion of the "three old" renovation, and the promotion of demolition and reclamation work. Promoting the "three old" transformation and revitalizing the stock of land will become an important direction of land management.

### **5.3 The promotion of the connotation and the extension of urban renewal**

From revitalizing the existing construction land, economical and intensive land use, to improving the living environment, promoting industrial transformation and upgrading, improving the social governance system, and the reconstruction of humanistic spirit.[17] The scope of the "three old"



transformation has been extended to the micro transformation of old residential areas, characteristic towns, industrial transformation and upgrading of village-level industrial parks, and the protection and activation of historical and cultural blocks. The development and construction of megacities will enter the development stage of focusing on revitalizing the stock and realizing the incremental value in the stock space. Urban renewal will be an important driving force for the future urban development and the differentiated promotion of long-term key system projects, and renewal is development.[18]

## 6. Conclusions

Urban renewal is to transform the areas or property of the urban built-up areas that are not suitable for the requirements of The Times and the people's lives. From the economic point of view, it is a process of land value constantly changing and gradually being realized. It is this continuous renewal that makes the city full of vitality. At the crossroads of transformation, Chinese cities are trying to achieve urban rejuvenation with gradual and small-scale renewal after abandoning large-scale urban construction and reconstruction.

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