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Research on the transformation and upgrading of historical and cultural blocks from the perspective of urban regeneration—Take yongqingfang in Guangzhou as an example

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Abstract: With the rapid development of urbanization, the development and construction of new towns and new areas has become the main direction of urban expansion. On the contrary, the development of the old urban areas has been neglected and gradually fell into recession. In the new era, how to promote the new vitality of the old city and realize the double wheel drive between the old city and the new city has become an urgent research topic. Enning Road, located in the old urban area of Liwan, Guangzhou, gathers the essence of Xiguan arcade building, but once became a typical example of the decline of old blocks. Through micro transformation, it not only protects the authenticity of the historical environment, but also promotes the development of the cultural tourism industry, realizes the regeneration of the historical and cultural blocks, and walks out a unique road to the revitalization of the historical and cultural blocks. Based on this analysis, the article puts forward policy suggestions to further improve the revitalization of historical and cultural blocks from the aspects of establishing a diversified participation mechanism, correctly handling the relationship between the protection and development of historical and cultural relics, and preventing violations of consumer rights and public interests.

Keywords: rent gap theory; urban regeneration; historical and cultural block; micro transformation

1. Introduction

After more than 40 years of reform and opening up, China's urbanization process has made remarkable achievements. Urban construction is changing with each passing day, and urban physical space is expanding rapidly. However, to varying degrees, China is facing the double challenges of lagging public service facilities in new urban areas and aging infrastructure in old urban areas. In the new era, urban development has gradually changed from extension to connotation, and the requirements for high-quality urban development have gradually increased. Under the requirements of high-quality development, embodying humanistic care and realizing urban sustainable development has become a new topic faced by the urban government. While pursuing economic benefits, urban development also pays more and more attention to the social goals of improving the quality of life of residents, improving the urban environment and enhancing the intrinsic cultural value of the city. This paper takes Guangzhou, the Millennium commercial capital, as an example. In order to revitalize the old urban area, under the premise of "repairing the old as the old", existing planning laws and regulations and retaining the characteristic culture, this paper creatively walks out a micro transformation road of urban regeneration. Through minor maintenance and

modification of yongqingfang area of Enning Road, the transformation of functional decaying material space has been completed. The exploration of the micro transformation mode of yongqingfang in Guangzhou not only preserves people's memory of nostalgia, improves the living environment and quality of life of local residents, but also provides an important reference for other old urban areas to preserve regional characteristics, history and culture, and promote the recovery of economic vitality and urban regeneration of old urban areas.

2. Rent gap theory and urban regeneration

2.1. Urban renewal and evolution at home and abroad

The large-scale urban renewal movement originated from the slum clearance movement in the United States and Britain and the activities on urban beautification. For the demolition and reconstruction of slums in urban central areas, the housing act of 1949 first used the concept of "urban redevelopment" and established the slum clearance and urban redevelopment division. The housing act of 1954 formally used the concept of "urban renewal" for the first time to describe the housing renovation actions in urban slums and decadent areas [1]. The first International Symposium on urban renewal held in the Hague, the Netherlands in 1958 divided "urban renewal" into three types: redevelopment, rehabilitation and conservation [2].

With the dynamic development of the city, its connotation also has different focus with the times. In 1974, Singapore established the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) under the Ministry of national development, which is responsible for urban land use, planning and construction management. In 1980, the UK passed the local government, planning and Land Act, which established the legal basis of urban development corporations (UDCS). According to this law, the Minister of environment can designate areas and establish urban development companies (UDCS). In 1981, London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) and Merseyside Development Corporation (MDC) were established in London and Liverpool port respectively to encourage industrial and commercial development by reclaiming abandoned land and buildings, ensure the provision of social facilities and housing to promote regeneration. On 1 May 2001, Hong Kong established the urban renewal authority, which established four strategies through the urban renewal strategy: (1) redevelopment; (2) Repair (rehabilitation); (3) Conservation (Preservation); (4) Revitalisation. In 1998, Taiwan adopted the urban renewal Ordinance, which took urban renewal as a policy mechanism to revitalize industry. The urban government took it as a means of city appearance transformation and environmental improvement, and the private market regarded it as an economic tool to create value and maintain value. Among them, Taipei is trying to promote the strategy of urban regeneration station (URS) and explore the way out of urban renewal.

In the past thirty years, the domestic urban renewal theory has made positive progress. The representative theories are: (1) organic renewal theory. It is considered that urban renewal is carried out in a whole way. In the process of renewal, it advocates that the whole is reasonable and orderly, and follows the law. It emphasizes that the renewal and development of the city should be explored on the basis of sustainable development [3]. (2) Comprehensive and systematic urban renewal. It is advocated

that urban renewal should establish a long-term and overall development goal, that is, to improve urban vitality and functions, adjust urban structure, improve urban environment, update material facilities, promote urban civilization, promote social progress, and emphasize the integration of social economy, politics and culture in urban renewal [4]. These two theories both put forward the suggestion that the renewal should pay attention to urban civilization and carry out orderly and reasonable protective renewal under the condition of maintaining urban cultural characteristics. Under the current situation of social development, urban renewal should follow the principle of “people-oriented”, focus on improving the quality of people’s life, improving the quality of life, inheriting local history and culture, protecting the ecological environment, and finally build an urban environment integrating politics, economy, culture, society and ecology [5]. In practice, there have emerged such models as the space replacement of Xintiandi in Shanghai [6], the renovation of Kuanzhai alley in Chengdu as new [7], and the “funding start and sponsorship operation” of nanluogu alley in Beijing [8].

To sum up, the research on the concept, mode, policy and other aspects of urban renewal and transformation has a large number of documents, diverse cases and rich content, which has promoted the development of theory and practice. However, there are also widespread conceptual differences unclear meaning, etc. In different contexts, the concept of renewal and transformation is evolving with the change of spatial scale, investment and financing methods, socio-economic effects, etc. In addition to the development and reconstruction urban renewal that emphasizes the transformation of physical space, there is a comprehensive vision to solve urban problems and promote urban well-being through the continuous improvement of social, economic, material and environment in urban areas Urban regeneration of actions and processes [9], and it is also hopeful to further promote urban regeneration/renaissance, which is more attractive to life and work. However, in China, there are few strict definitions and distinctions of relevant concepts, and “urban renewal” is often used to generalize them.

2.2. Dynamic mechanism of urban regeneration

Urban renewal not only refers to the renewal and transformation of physical space, but also needs to emphasize the sustainable development of economy, society and environment carried by space. It needs to highlight the economic logic of urban renewal, that is, the dynamic mechanism of urban regeneration. In addition to public welfare/public renewal projects, urban regeneration is driven by the existence of rent gaps. The concept of rent gap was first proposed by Neil Smith, which refers to the “gap between the potential land rent level and the capitalized actual land rent under the current land use” [10]. Among them, the potential land rent refers to the sum of land capitalization under the highest and best use, while the capitalized actual land rent is the actual total amount of land rent under the current land use. Smith believes that in the long run, in an expanding city, the potential land rent will continue to increase. During the initial development of the land, the investment density of the fixed capital conforms to the land use of the potential land rent at that time, that is, the actual land rent is equal to the potential land rent [11]. In urban development, due to urban expansion, the potential land rent increases gradually, but the actual land rent decreases

with the gradual deterioration of buildings, resulting in an increase in the gap between the potential land rent and the actual land rent (**Figure 1**). Accordingly, the only rational behavior of the owner is to reduce investment and only maintain the building to a minimum. Therefore, the decline of buildings will accelerate, which will lead to the expansion of the rent gap, and the expansion of the rent gap will make speculative profits for the company that obtains the land for redevelopment. Finally, redevelopment will make the area conform to the land use of potential land rent and start another cycle. With the whole process of urban development, the city will continue to regenerate and transform. When the rent gap is large enough, the developer can buy cheaply, pay the cost and profit of the builder for repair, pay the interest of mortgage loan and construction loan, and then sell the final product at a satisfactory price to obtain income, the renovation will occur [10]. The commonly used methods are: (1) to increase the plot ratio, that is, to make the renovation economical and feasible by increasing the building area; (2) Upzoning, that is, changing the land use type of a specific area, for example, changing the area originally belonging to the residential area into a commercial area [12]; (3) Upgrade the industrial level, that is, replace low value-added industries with high value-added industries through re planning and layout of industries; (4) Gentrification, through repositioning and improving relevant supporting facilities, as a high-end community, attracts middle and high-end income groups to replace low-income groups; (5) Mix the above strategies.

3. Exploration on urban regeneration mode of yongqingfang

Enning road was born in 1931. It gathers the essence of Xiguan arcade building. It is the most complete and longest arcade block in Guangzhou and is praised as “the most beautiful old street in Guangzhou”. Enning road is connected with the arcade of the Shifu and Shangxiajiu pedestrian streets. Around it are historical and cultural protection areas such as Changhua street, xiguan Dawu, yaohua street, etc., with rich Lingnan customs and Xiguan cultural characteristics. With the eastward shift of the urban development center of Guangzhou, the region has gradually fallen into recession, with a concentration of dilapidated houses, potential safety hazards, and the urban historical and cultural context in jeopardy. How to protect the characteristic culture of Xiguan along Enning Road, improve the living quality of residents in the old urban area, and inject new vitality into the old block is an urgent problem to be explored. Yongqingfang, located in the west section of Enning Road, is the first phase pilot project of Enning road reconstruction project.

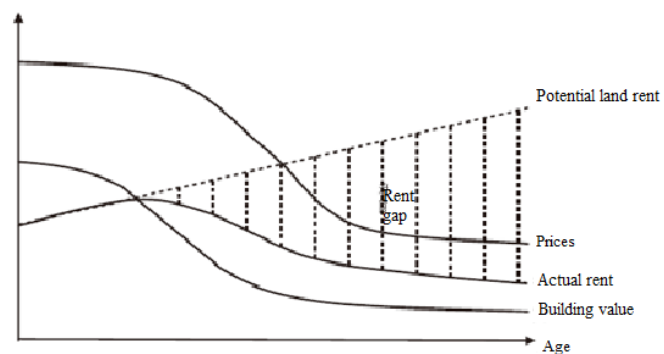


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of Smith rent gap.

3.1. Transformation process

- 1) The plan has not been determined, and the demolition shall be carried out first. In November, 2006, the Enning road reconstruction project was listed as the first pilot project of old city reconstruction in the implementation of “middle note”. It was the largest area of reconstruction of dilapidated houses in Guangzhou at that time, and many houses were in a precarious state. In November 2008, the demolition of Enning Road Reconstruction Planning Area officially began. Before the Asian Games in October 2010, the demolition of Enning road was stopped, and large areas of ruins were not removed in time. From 2007 to 2011, the draft of the transformation plan was changed four times, and no final conclusion has been reached. Due to the undetermined transformation plan and the rising house prices, the relocation costs are rising year by year, making it difficult to renew the old city of Guangzhou. Although the planning is difficult to produce, the vigorous demolition is ahead of the planning. Due to the uncivilized construction in the demolition process, some people even forcibly removed valuable building objects, resulting in the destruction of relevant buildings and cultural relics in Enning Road, and some scenic spots and historic sites, ancient streets and lanes no longer exist. There are many hidden dangers in the houses of the residents who have not been relocated, the surrounding public security is unstable, garbage piles, and the living environment and quality of life of the residents cannot be guaranteed.
- 2) From comprehensive transformation to micro transformation. In January 2010, more than 180 households jointly requested the government to re plan. The government, the media, scholars, design units and non-governmental cultural organizations contain each other. In addition, the housing property rights left over by the history of the old city are not clear, the resident population is complex, and the interest demands are diverse, so the transformation was once put on hold [13]. On 25 June 2011, the old city reconstruction plan of Enning road was unanimously approved by Guangzhou Urban Planning Committee. The new plan highlights the priority principle of historical and cultural protection and no longer pursues local economic balance. The plot will retain 118,400 square meters of historical building area, accounting for 55% of the current total building area. On 28 February 2015, Guangzhou urban renewal Bureau was officially established, becoming the first municipal government agency for urban renewal in the mainland. In the measures of Guangzhou City for urban renewal issued in 2015, Guangzhou first proposed the “micro transformation” mode, which lists urban micro transformation and comprehensive urban transformation as an important way of urban renewal. According to the definition of the measures, “micro transformation” refers to a new way to implement local demolition and construction of buildings, replacement of building functions, preservation and repair, as well as renovation, improvement, protection, activation and improvement of infrastructure under the condition that the urban architectural style and characteristics are basically unchanged. It is mainly applicable to the built-up areas, which have little impact on the overall pattern of the city, but the current land use functions are in contradiction with the surrounding development,

and the land use efficiency is low Plots with poor living environment. In 2015, the government of Liwan District passed the guidelines for the construction of micro transformation in Yongqing district and the guidelines for the control of business types of micro transformation communities in Yongqing district and other guidance schemes and management guidelines for multiple micro transformation modes, which enabled the old city in this district to be improved.

3.2. Transformation mode

The micro renovation of Yongqing area of Enning road is to transform the area through the renovation and repair method of “repairing the old as the old, minor renovation and minor renovation” on the premise that the construction pattern in the designated reconstruction area is basically unchanged, and effectively renovate the surrounding environment with the main purpose of protecting local history and culture. Under the principle of “repairing the old as the old”, the repair and maintenance shall be implemented in accordance with the BOT mode of “government led, enterprise undertaken and residents’ participation”. Through the government led, market resources shall be reasonably introduced to achieve the objectives of protecting culture, revitalizing the resources of the old City and improving the living environment. Yongqingfang area is the first phase of the reconstruction of Enning road. It is located in the middle of Enning Road, adjacent to the Guangdong opera art museum. It covers an area of about 8000 square meters, and the repair and maintenance building area is about 12,000 square meters.

- 1) Transform the main body. The micro transformation mode of yongqingfang is led by Liwan District Urban Renewal Bureau and its subordinate institution, liwan District old city transformation project center. In 2016, guangzhou Vanke Real Estate Co., ltd. Was determined to invest and construct the Yongqing area project through public investment promotion, and has a 15 year operation period. During this period, guangzhou Vanke Real Estate Co., ltd. Has the right to use and benefit from the project, which will be returned to the government after the end of the concession period. This renovation of dilapidated houses fully introduces social funds, solves the problems of large amount of funds and high risks through the participation of social subjects, and the dominant power lies in the government.
- 2) Financing mode. According to the investment promotion announcement of the renovation and activation of dilapidated (old) houses in Yongqing District in April 2016, it is positioned as a creative and entrepreneurial Industrial Park focusing on shared office space. The activation and utilization includes the introduction of long-term rental apartments, maker offices (office space for entrepreneurship and innovation) and community education camps, of which the maker office area shall not be less than 2000 square meters (the total project area is 7200 square meters). Following the principle of “repairing the old as the old, building a new harmony; sorting out the traffic, sparing the texture; specializing in cultural protection, and activating resources”, vanke has strengthened the structure of the existing two cultural relics protection buildings at the ancestral residence of Bruce Lee and No. 24–28 Yongqing street, followed the traditional process, and repaired the traditional elements such as the tile surface, green brick

wall, red brick wall, gray carving, color sculpture, etc. Although this micro transformation mode can inherit history and culture, it needs to pay a high transformation cost. The reconstruction area of yongqingfang is about 7000 square meters, and the reconstruction cost per square meter is as high as 10,000 yuan. The total investment in the reconstruction plan of yongqingfang is about 65million yuan, and the construction cost recovery cycle is as long as 12 and a half years [14]. The high transformation cost puts forward higher requirements for later operation and profitability. Whether Vanke will return the management right to the government or continue to explore a new cooperation mode after the expiration of the period has not been determined. How to make profits within 15 years has become a big test for the operation of yongqingfang.

- 3) Operation mode. As the first urban micro renovation project in Guangzhou, the name of yongqingfang is derived from Yongqing street, no. 99, enning road. After the renovation of dilapidated buildings, the word “yongqingfang” is changed to “yongqingfang”, which retains elements such as green brick houses, red brick houses, long gate, manchuria window and flagstone road. At present, yongqingfang has been put into operation, and the rental rate is about 80%. The settled enterprises are mainly cultural and creative enterprises and scientific and technological innovation enterprises. The income of yongqingfang mainly comes from the rent. The rent is pushed back according to the cost recovery in 15 years. At present, the average monthly rent is 100–120 yuan per square meter [14]. Regarding the rent based income model, yongqingfang merchants expressed concern that if Vanke could not achieve better profits, it might gain income by increasing the rent in the future, which would increase the pressure on the settled merchants. Yongqingfang needs to carry out secondary marketing, package and realize more cultural contents, and obtain the support of the capital. Tenants hope that Vanke can put resources on the table for sharing, and we can borrow from each other to jointly explore possible profit models. In order to improve the operation capacity and make better use of the existing cultural background for cash realization, vanke has used historical and cultural elements such as Bruce Lee to continuously activate the image of yongqingfang, such as holding concerts, photography exhibitions, painting exhibitions and other activities to attract people and expand the popularity and influence of yongqingfang.

4. Analysis on urban regeneration effect of yongqingfang

4.1. Positive significance

- 1) Preserve the authenticity of historical environment. The principle of “renovating the old as the old”, “preserving the original texture of streets and Alleys” and “introducing new industries” of micro transformation have protected the characteristic architectural relics in yongqingfang area to a great extent. The buildings to be reconstructed in phase I in this area are mainly those in the style of the Republic of China, in which the roadway texture is still in existence, but the interior is dilapidated, sundries are scattered, and there is no one to manage. Therefore, during the reconstruction process, the main goal is to preserve the existing texture of the buildings, and provide reinforcement, maintenance and

other methods to transform the buildings in this area. The original Xiguan customs with the characteristics of old Guangzhou have been preserved, so that civilization can be inherited and nostalgia can be continued.

- 2) Promote the development of cultural tourism industry. In the process of transformation, vanke positioned yongqingfang as having four major functions: shared office, education camp, long-term rental apartment and supporting business. It carried out appropriate business activities such as office, education, characteristic arts and crafts, light catering and coffee shops in the characteristic building complex, which was conducive to attracting more people. The integration of the old and new characteristic culture and modernity promoted the rapid rise of the cultural tourism industry in the area, not only are local people keen to come here to cherish their memory, but also attract a large number of tourists to feel homesickness.

4.2. Existing problems

- 1) Low social participation in the transformation process. In the whole process of micro transformation, the participation of community organizations and all residents is low. The public's understanding of micro transformation is limited to the publicity made by government departments, and there is no reasonable mechanism and effective third-party platform to summarize, feed back and coordinate the public's ideas and opinions.
- 2) Commercialization destroys the original community network. Yongqing district has repaired the living environment through micro transformation, but the new industries injected into the transformation process, such as handicrafts workshop, intangible cultural heritage cultural exhibition, cloud office, catering and leisure, have made Yongqing District commercialized. Therefore, most of the residents chose to relocate. After the completion of the project, only 12 households remained here. The life of the residents in the original community is the soul of the culture of the historical block. The over commercialized environment has destroyed the real life of the original community, making the original community network no longer exist.
- 3) Sustainable development is still being explored. The relevant person in charge of the project said frankly that yongqingfang is not a profit-making project for the time being. Compared with economic benefits, yongqingfang is more an exploration of urban renewal, old city transformation and cultural protection. Due to business pressure, in December, 2018, vanke applied to the urban renewal Bureau of Liwan District for adjusting the business format, introducing supporting businesses, adding a large number of light catering, retail, experience stores and convenience stores, and changing long-term apartments to time rent apartments (**Figure 2**). At the same time, vanke has started the construction of yongqingfang phase II, which is positioned as the historical and cultural creative block in Xiguan, Guangzhou. It will set up creative office area, bar, fashion business and comprehensive supporting facilities, high-quality B & B, and retain some living functions. The total area of the house is about 70,000 square meters, almost 10 times the area of phase I, and the investment of 1 billion yuan is far

more than 65 millions yuan of phase I. As there are not many associated scenic spots with strong appeal around, and there is still a certain distance from the subway station, the traffic volume of Yongqing square is still far behind that of Xintiandi in Shanghai, nanluogu Lane in Beijing, kuanzhai Lane in Chengdu and Xintiandi in Lingnan in Foshan.

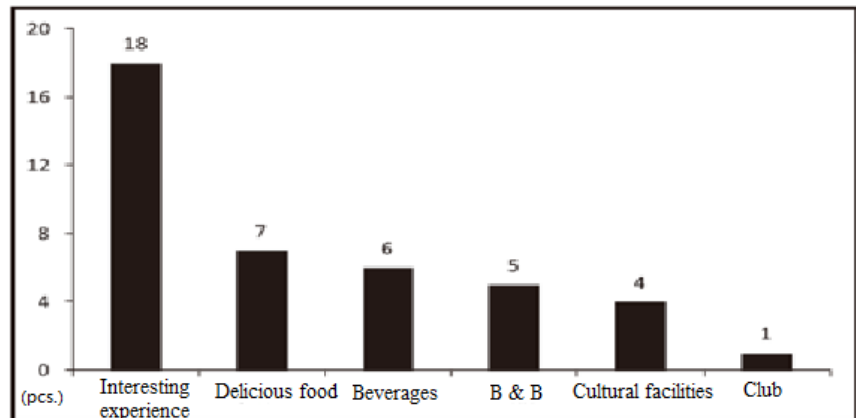


Figure 2. Business function and format statistics of yongqingfang.

Data source: drawn according to the 2019 Yongqingfang roaming guide.

5. Conclusion and enlightenment

From the case of micro reconstruction in yongqingfang area, the large-scale demolition and construction without public participation and closed-end decision-making is very likely to cause resistance from citizens and is not conducive to the protection of history and culture. To a large extent, the mode of “micro transformation” is conducive to protecting the authenticity of the historical environment and promoting the development of cultural tourism industry in the region and surrounding areas. BOT financing is conducive to reducing the burden on the government and improving the efficiency of project operation. At the same time, most of the business forms of yongqingfang have changed from residence to business, which has also caused damage to the community network; the introduction of BOT mode can easily lead to the tendency of enterprises to pursue economic interests excessively. The main purpose of micro transformation urban regeneration is to improve the living conditions of local residents and protect the characteristic culture of the block. From the perspective of the micro transformation of yongqingfang, we can get the following enlightenment: first, establish a multi participation urban renewal model. Urban renewal and transformation need the coordination of various forces in the city. Among them, government forces (government agencies at different levels and their policies, regulations and review mechanisms), market forces (various enterprises involved in urban construction) and social forces (community organizations, residents and non-governmental organizations) are indispensable forces. When the government is the main force, it makes the main guiding transformation and construction for urban renewal, which is constrained and revised under the constraints of the market and social forces. The harmonious coexistence of various forces can better promote the harmonious, diversified and efficient urban renewal and reconstruction. However, the choice of urban space regeneration mode for different business types is still a problem

worth exploring.

Second, correctly handle the relationship between the protection and development of historical and cultural relics. Micro transformation mode is mainly a transformation mode for historical and cultural blocks, and the concept of historical and cultural blocks contains two characteristics: the existence of real historical sites and the carrying of real historical information. The neighborhood and the real life of the neighborhood are part of the historical and cultural district. To truly protect the historical and cultural blocks, in addition to the effective maintenance and repair of the original texture of the buildings in the process of micro transformation, it is also necessary to pay attention to the rational introduction of new industries in the block to avoid disturbing the normal life of the residents in the block. How to balance economic benefits and social effects is the first thing that must be made clear in urban renewal and transformation.

The third is to prevent infringement of consumers' rights and interests and public interests. Within the specified concession period, the right to use and operate the BOT investment and financing project is in the hands of the enterprise. If it sets up checkpoints during the operation period, increases the relevant expenses of visitors and facility users, and attempts to recover the construction costs as soon as possible in a short time and obtain high profits, it is easy to cause social conflicts, and is contrary to the original purpose of protecting historical and cultural blocks and promoting the renewal of old cities. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the standardization of BOT mode, cultivate BOT, ppp and other investment and financing modes, and promote the establishment of a clear and authoritative legal system for investment and financing. Especially when the renovation cost cannot be compensated by increasing the plot ratio, the balance of revenue and expenditure of the project not only tests the operation ability of operators, but also the planning and decision-making ability of local governments. As a pilot project, the micro transformation mode of yongqingfang is not mature enough to be popularized for both enterprises and the government. Especially in the context of preventing large-scale demolition and construction, how to realize the sustainable regeneration of old urban areas has become a problem that still needs to be explored.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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