

THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN THE PROCESS OF GENTRIFICATION IN LARGE-SCALE CITIES OF CHINA - A GUANGZHOU CASE

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ABSTRACT

Enhanced competition among cities worldwide in globalization has accelerated the reorganization of urban settings. Gentrification emerges during urban redevelopment in this context, expanding beyond its initial birthplace in cities like London and New York to more lower-tier cities in developing countries like east Europe and China. Different from the situation in advanced cities in Europe and North America that gentrification occurs after urbanization is basically completed, counterparts in developing economies are experiencing gentrification concurrent with process of urbanization. Given the increasing evidences of gentrification in developing economies, this paper aims to look into this process using a Chinese city case, i.e. the inner city of Guangzhou. With reference to the urban redevelopment in Guangzhou, by examining the role of the state in both consumption- and production- side performances of the market, this paper finds that it is not the market power but the political power that determines the emergence of gentrification in China.

KEYWORDS

Gentrification, urban redevelopment, China, driving forces.

INTRODUCTION

Gentrification, as both a type and a result of urban redevelopment, refers to a inner-city change 'in the population of land users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated change in the built environment through a reinvestment in fixed capital' (Clark, 2005: 256). A vast literature has contributed to the understanding of theoretical dynamics of gentrification. When gentrification expands considerably in developed economies, it attracts attentions of many researchers interesting in exploring underlying forces behind this process. Being in the society of the capitalist market economy, these researchers look into the function of the market, in which aspects of demand and supply interact. As a result, two clusters of explanations, consumption-side theories and production-side theories respectively, are formed. To be specific, consumption explanations hold that concentration of the new middle class leads to socio-spatial transformation of inner-city neighborhoods and thus gentrification (Bridge, 2001; Butler, 1997; Caulfield, 1989; Ley, 1986; Rose, 1984); whereas production explanations maintain that capital reinvestment into the previously risky inner city triggers property speculation and therefore attracts gentrifiers (Clack, 1988; Hammel, 1999; O'Sullivan, 2002; Smith, 1979). Other factors, to a large extent, have been sidelined for the purpose of theoretical simplicity (Lees, et al., 2008; Smith, 1996).

In fact, besides forces of the market, another factor, i.e. the role of the state in gentrification, has been pointed out for long (Smith, 1979). However, this factor has been overlooked until gentrification enters its third wave. As Hackworth and Smith (2001) suggest, gentrification in the third wave has been more openly supported by the government. Many recent evidences also show that gentrification has been incorporated into the urban policies for the purpose of urban regeneration (Cameron, 2003; Millard-Ball, 2001; Slater, 2004; Uitermark, 2003). Although there exists a suggestion that the state is a key actor engaging in third-wave gentrification, little further work has done to understand this influential participant.

For the case of Chinese cities, where a transition towards the market economy under a context of socialism is taking place, the interaction of the market and the state force is more complicated. As a matter of fact, while the principle of market economy has been greatly appreciated in China since the open door policy, municipal governments extensively intervene in urban activities in general and urban redevelopment in particular.

Therefore, the question of to what extent gentrification in Chinese metropolises has been a state-driven process should be examined in detail.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN INITIATING CONSUMPTION OF GENTRIFIERS

Generally speaking, middle-class population in metropolises of China has not been a mass until very recently and they have no inclination to necessarily chose to live in the old urban centre. However, by helping to enlarge the middle-class group through leading economic restructuring, releasing their housing demand through housing reform, and stimulating their housing consumption through financial assistance, the local governments have guided the middle class to settle down in the inner cities and gentrify the neighborhoods they lived in.

Enlarge the Middle Class through Industrial Restructuring

Market transition in China follows an experimental and progressive path, and the governments, either central or local, have played a dominant role in leading the direction of the transition and the pace of the reform. Quite different from advanced capitalist countries that context of the economic change triggers the process of industrial restructuring, China under market transition performs industrial restructuring as a strategy to promote economic change. In order to maintain remarkable local growth and enhance interurban competition at both national and international scales, local governments of some major cities in China, regardless of industrial base of the localities, have been aggressively promoting service-oriented industrial restructuring and middle-class expansion to seek for a service society.

In Guangzhou, the targets of tertiary-sector GDP contribution designated by the municipal authority in the Ninth to Eleventh Five-Year Plan illustrate above-mentioned aggressive state-led industrial restructuring. For example, the Eleventh Five-Year Plan in 2005 sets a target of 59% in terms of tertiary-sector GDP contribution in the coming five years¹. Also, the local government has specially given assistance to pillar sectors, such as finance and information-technology sector, to foster a competitive economic structure. A slogan of ‘pull out of manufacturing and heavy industry and develop tertiary industry’ (*tuier jinsan*) widely noted in public documents explicitly reflects the service-oriented transition in Guangzhou in general and in urban old centre in particular. Therefore, the heavy intervention of the government under market transition has lead to a result of booming knowledge-based service-sector series and greatly expanding middle-class population (Table 1).

Table 1 Tertiary-sector growth and middle class expansion in Guangzhou (2001-2007)

	workers in tertiary sectors %		workers in finance, IT and technical service sectors %	
	Yuexiu	Guangzhou	Yuexiu	Guangzhou
2001	85.9	58.4	2.4	2.1
2003	86.7	55.0	12.9	3.9
2005	88.0	56.4	12.3	4.4
2007	89.3	54.8	13.1	5.7

Source: Yearbook of Yuexiu District 2002-2008, Yearbook of Dongshan District 2002-2005, and Statistical Yearbook of Guangzhou 2002-2008.

Table 1 shows clearly the outcomes of service-oriented industrial restructuring. With respect to Guangzhou as a whole, over 50% of workers have been working in the tertiary sectors. It is worth noting that although the proportion has changed little, the amount of service workers has been constantly increasing. In comparison to Guangzhou, Yuexiu has an even higher proportion of service workers with a percentage point to more than 85%. When looking into the service workers in more detail, it is found that the fraction of middle class with higher socioeconomic status, which are usually workers in the sectors of finance, IT, and technical service, is much less in Guangzhou while relatively higher in Yuexiu. In detail, in Guangzhou, this group of middle class is only about 5% of the working population, whereas in Yuexiu they account for 13% which is over double of the Guangzhou average.

By shifting structure of the economy, the local government of Guangzhou strategically enlarges the population group with greater economic advantages, which are referred by some as new middle class (Burris, 1986). However, the terminology of ‘middle class’ has been less noted in Chinese literature. The politically-loaded word ‘class’ makes the term ‘middle class’ so sensitive in the context of socialist China that it is less used.

¹ <http://www.gd.gov.cn/govpub/fzgh/sywgy/0200607030001.htm>

Instead, the government prefers to refer this fraction of population as ones who become rich first (*xianfu*), a group of which then can help others to achieve prosperity later on (*houfu*). Regardless of the terminology tricks, the government has virtually played a dominant role in fostering the middle class, which in turn gives rise to the potential of gentrification in the inner city.

Release Housing Demand of the Middle Class through Housing Reform

By housing reform, the state attempts to release the suppressed consumption demand of expanding middle class in terms of better housing. Before housing reform, urban employees were mostly settled down in the public housing allocated by the SOE employers. This kind of housing, for most of the time, was located in the separate courtyards of individual SOEs, and the courtyards were generally composed of industrial structures and the public housing nearby. When looking into workers' housing condition of the time in more detail, it is found that their housing had been in poor condition (Table 2). A series of census data in Guangzhou in 2000, which is two years after housing reform, presents the housing condition of households in Guangzhou and Yuexiu district during the housing allocation period. It is showed that 81.2% of workers in Yuexiu-1 lived in the housing of no more than two rooms with an average of 1.7 rooms for each household, and about half of the households had lived in one-room dwellings during pre-reform area. In Yuexiu-2, workers with housing no more than two rooms accounts for 69.5% and they had an average housing condition of two rooms for each household. Likewise, Guangzhou as a whole also had a poor housing condition very similar to Yuexiu. Nevertheless, since housing functioned as not a product but an important welfare of socialist society, it was impossible for the workers to purchase or even rent more spacious dwellings in the market. Actually, there was no housing market existing at the time.

Table 2 Household housing condition of workers in Guangzhou before housing reform

	Household housing of one room %	Household housing of two rooms %	Household housing of three rooms and above %	Average rooms
Yuexiu-1	47.8	33.4	18.8	1.7
Yuexiu-2	29.5	40.0	30.5	2.0
Guangzhou	34.4	35.1	30.5	2.0

Source: Census Data of Guangzhou 2000.

Housing reform in China was launched actually early in the 1980s, but with an experimental approach of public-housing privatization in limited cities. However, since workers still obtained housing from work units, some of which though were purchased by the work units through real estate market, such reform had hardly influenced urban living. In 1998, the Ninth People's Congress abolished the previous housing policy of welfare allocation replacing with a system of housing commodification (Wang and Murie, 2000). As a result, individuals who have housing need since then are allowed to purchase in the housing market.

In the Guangzhou case, the sale of public housing started from 1989 but only speeded up in 1998. Till to the end of 1999 when housing allocation was completely abolished, more than half million public houses with an area of 32.7 million square meters had been sold to local workers (GCYC, 2000). Since then, no public housing is available for purchase and workers need to buy the dwellings in the market like other commodities. The data in Table 3 regarding housing sources in Guangzhou illustrates such commodification process of housing. According to the table, by 1999, most of the public housing in Guangzhou had been privatized; and since 2000, the new-built commercial housing has been the major component of the housing market.

Table 3 Areas of different housing sources for personal purchase in Guangzhou (1997-2007)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
New-built commercial housing	0	2.00	3.51	4.67	4.40	9.01	9.48	9.63	9.59	9.65	8.44
Privatized public housing	1.36	6.36	11.76	0.10	0.09	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Yearbook of Guangzhou, 1998-2008.

Unit: Million square meters.

Housing reform greatly impacts the settlement pattern of those who have better economic bases. In a style of social mixing in the pre-reform era, their propensity for better housing was suppressed in the courtyards. To illustrate, table 4 shows little differentiation in terms of allocated housing between people of lower socioeconomic status and people of higher achievements. In the period of housing commodification, in contrast,

employees with better economic bases can resettle through property purchase in the housing market to improve their housing condition. Also, they do not have to necessarily live adjacent to the work places but can choose the settlement in line with their location preference and affordability. The termination of enforced courtyard living, on this account, triggers the demand of the new affluent for better housing.

Table 4 Housing condition of workers with different education attainments in Guangzhou before housing reform

	High school and below	Technical school and college	Bachelor degree	Master degree and above
Average rooms	2.18	2.20	2.38	2.38

Source: Census Data of Guangzhou 2000.

The above-mentioned demand is soon manifested explicitly in the housing market. Table 5.5 presents the growth of luxury housing consumption by the emerging middle class in Guangzhou between two census years. Utilizing a threshold of ten times of yearly salary average, the group of class with luxury housing consumption is marked out. It is found that this group in Guangzhou as a whole in 2000 accounts for 8.1% of the households with housing consumption, and the percentage rises to 12.3% in 2005. In Yuexiu in contrast, the percentage of luxury housing consumption accounts for 4.8% in 2000 and increases to 13.2% in 2005. As for the household number of luxury housing consumption, there is an expansion of 4.4 times in Guangzhou and an even higher expansion of 9.5 times in Yuexiu.

Table 5 Growth of luxury housing consumption in Guangzhou between 2000 and 2005

	Housing consumption above ten times of yearly salary average in 2000 (0.2 million RMB)		Housing consumption above ten times of yearly salary average in 2005 (0.3 million RMB)		Housing consumption above ten times of yearly salary average between 2000-2005
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Increase ratio
Yuexiu	7210	4.7%	68500	13.2%	9.5
Guangzhou	128700	8.1%	566000	12.3%	4.4

Source: Census Data of Guangzhou 2000, 2005.

Stimulate Consumption of Potential Gentrifiers

After housing demand is released through housing reform, the state makes further efforts to stimulate housing consumption in the old urban centre. On the one hand, public investment is conducted in upgrading inner-city infrastructure and urban image. Accordingly, the road network is greatly improved, and the urban landscape is beautified. For example, Donghachong, which is a small river in Yuexiu, was ever dirty and obsolete, and the buildings alongside the river were mostly dilapidated. However, as a part of image upgrading scheme, a large amount of public fund has been invested into the riverside since 2002, resulting in the demolition of old buildings replaced with green space. As a result of public investment, the upgraded infrastructure and landscape in the inner city, along with ample preexisting urban amenities, has greatly attracted the emerging middle class to settle down.

On the other hand, the system of Housing Provident Fund (HPF) is strategically utilized by the government to stimulate middle-class's upward housing consumption. The HPF system is originally designed by the government to replace in-kind housing welfare with monetary housing welfare. In this system, both employers and employees are required to deposit a proportion of wage in the HPF, and the deposit can only be used in housing consumption. In addition, the contributors to the HPF can also loan from the HPF with low interest rate when buying commercial housing. However, such monetary welfare is unevenly distributed between middle class and working class because of the income differentiation. With respect to the middle class with higher income, they obtain more welfare, the part deposited by the employers.

In Guangzhou, the unevenness of the HPF system is further enhanced by local government to benefit the middle class. Firstly, the government initiates a flexible deposit rate with gradient, authorizing higher deposit rate for those who earn more. The government stipulates that the basic deposit rate for the working class is 5%, whereas for workers with higher affordability, the rate should be increased to 8%. Also, the government allows a deposit rate as high as 20% for more advantaged groups. Secondly, the government raises the maximum amount of HPF loan. The maximum amount of HPF loan in 1999 was 160,000 Yuan² and the number rose to 500,000 in 2008³.

² <http://www.59148.com/law/gz/7460.html>

Thirdly, the restrictions of one-off HPF loan and maximum loan period of twenty years are released. Till to 2008, one can obtain the HPF loan many times⁴, and the maximum loan period has extended to thirty years⁵.

Although the monetary housing welfare system involves most beneficiaries in the previous housing allocation system, benefits are more distributed to the emerging middle class with higher socio-economic status. Initiated with upward housing demand and supported with the HPF, the middle class in Guangzhou are stimulated by the government to consume high-end housing of more spacious rooms, favorable landscape, and ample urban amenities, which are more available in the inner city.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN PROMOTING CAPITAL REINVESTMENT

Apart from producing the middle class and potential gentrifiers, the state also channels capital into the old urban core to accommodate them. Similar to the context of western cities, the rent gap, which is the gap between the lower capitalized ground and higher potential ground rent (Smith, 1979), also exists in Chinese metropolises due to uneven development. However, this uneven development is brought about by strategized urban growth approach but not capital movements. Besides, since existing problems of property right hamper the spontaneous capital inflow, the state implements land reforms attempting to remove the obstacle and facilitate the capital reinvestment in filling up the rent gap.

Rent Gap as a Product of Urban Development Strategies after Reform

In Chinese metropolises, the rent gap between capitalized ground rent and potential ground rent in old urban centers has been easily identifiable (Wu, 1997). A mass of land in inner-city areas is occupied by dilapidated residential and industrial structures, whereas both local government and developers expect a more optimal land use. This rent gap, however, is not a result of free capital movements generating investment in some areas and disinvestment in the other. Instead, the rent gap is created by the heavy intervention of the state in terms of urban development pattern.

First of all, through urban planning, the local government manages the spatial growth model of cities. Quite different from the urban strategy of under-urbanization or de-urbanization in the Maoist period (Ma, 2002), the government of Guangzhou aggressively strategizes urban expansion and urbanization during reform. During the 1980s, the local authority initiated a new urban planning, The Master Plan of Guangzhou 1981-2000, to drive the process of urban expansion (Lin *et al.*, 2006). This plan presents a strategy of built-up area expansion and eastward-oriented development. Therefore, the development of previous suburban districts including Tianhe, Liwan south, and Baiyun had been the main focus. In contrast, redevelopment in the old urban areas had been ignored. Since most local developers at the time were SOEs, which were under control of the state, capital uniformly flowed into the new land rather than the inner city. Likewise, the following urban planning, The Master Plan of Guangzhou 1991-2010 and The Master Plan of Guangzhou 2001-2010, consistently gives higher priority to the development of new land. The emphasis on the new land development greatly raises the land price of Guangzhou, and thus the potential ground rent of land plots in the inner city inevitably rises.

In addition, the industrial restructuring forced by the government further raises the potential rent of the land in the inner city. Maintaining that value of inner-city land is better explored in the form of commercial or complex use instead of industrial use, the local government aggressively replaces traditional manufacturing industry with tertiary industries. Accordingly, supply of new industrial land is rigorously restricted in the inner city, whereas land with other uses is consistently provided. Such industrial restructuring is also manifested in the planning documents. The Strategic Conceptual Planning of Urban Development in Guangzhou 2000, for example, stresses the service and business function of Yuexiu. As a result, the shift of urban land use from industrial use to commercial or complex use further give rise to the upsurge of land price in the inner city.

While potential ground rent of inner-city land parcels has increased, the capitalized ground rent is much lower. Both SOEs and the local government have received extremely low land rent because of welfare heritage on the one side and financial shortage on the other. However, before the land with preexisting structures is assembled by the government and leased again on the land market, no potential ground rent can be captured.

Facilitate Reinvestment through Land Reforms

³ http://www.gzgjj.gov.cn/web/static/articles/catalog_2c94ecab2c7c2a73012c7c44ed0e000b.html

⁴ http://www.gzgjj.gov.cn/web/static/articles/catalog_52cb532f2ceeb7f4012cf2f9f61a0109.html

⁵ http://www.gzgjj.gov.cn/web/static/articles/catalog_52cb532f2ceeb7f4012cf2f88ae70107.html

The rent gap unintentionally created by the local government is closed also by the government. Realizing that a constant local growth cannot be fueled by just urban expansion or urbanization, but also by a competitive economic structure which means a vibrant urban core, the government since the 1990s began to channel investment into the devastating inner city. The land reforms are firstly conducted to tackle the problem of unclear property rights which hampers reinvestment in the inner city. In the reform, ownership of urban land by the government is specified and underlined in the Constitution of China (Yeh, 2005). By crystallizing the state's ownership right of urban land, it legitimizes the possible state action of land acquisition. Also, the notion of land-use right which is a part of land property right is clarified in the Land Administrative Law. By defining the land-use right as a special commodity, the new land policy replaced the system of land allocation with land-use right leasing. An urban land market, therefore, is established, and the land parcels in the market can be leased, transferred, and exchanged in terms of time-limited land-use right. Furthermore, the government is also granted a right of land-use conversion by the Land Administrative Law. As a result, the right of land-use conversion is strategically utilized by the government in urban planning to dislocate those inferior industrial land uses.

After the land reforms by which land property rights are redefined and redistributed, the government begins to tackle the occupied land parcels inherited from state-socialist system. With respect to the land parcels where restituted private houses and privatized public housing are sitting, the local government retrieves them through public schemes of redevelopment, justifying them by revitalizing obsolete areas for public interest. The land law entitles local governments to a land-acquisition right only when for public projects. In practice, however, municipalities strategically define the 'public' and 'private' in line with their own interests (Fang and Zhang, 2003). In Yuexiu, for example, a public scheme of 'small change in one year, and mediate change in three year' (SCMC scheme) was launched in 1998 to improve the livability of the locality (YCBC, 2009). However, in the guise of public projects, heavy private investment occurred, demolishing a large amount of dilapidated housing structures replaced with high-rise condominiums such as JHY.

Besides, the institutional change of demolition-and-relocation (*chaiqian*) further eases the land acquisition of those occupied with dwellings (He and Wu, 2009). Before the 1990s, most redevelopment projects performed on-site relocation, and in 1991 the State Council stipulated a pattern of off-site compensation for residents affected by redevelopment (Dowall, 1994). In 2001, however, the regulation in Guangzhou was revised to encourage monetary compensation instead of in-kind compensation⁶. The shift from in-kind compensation to monetary compensation greatly lowers the difficulty of land acquisition and threshold of capital reinvestment. Firstly, monetary compensation is much less time-consuming than construction of resettlement housing. Secondly, as there is no norm of monetary compensation, both the local government and developers tend to be stronger in bargaining for a lower compensation (Fang, 2000).

In dealing with inherited industrial land occupied by SOEs, on the other hand, the local government strategically utilizes the right of land-use conversion during industrial restructuring. For some of the SOEs with allocated land in the inner city, the local government firstly stimulates them to relocate by replacing the allocated land with more plots in the suburb and sometimes additional cash, and then leases the retrieved land in the land market. For some other, a partnership of joint venture between SOEs and private developers is allowed by the government in order to redevelop the land (Zhu, 1999, 2004). Besides, by negotiating with the local authority, the joint venture can be authorized to convert the industrial land with commercial, residential, or complex use depending on local land-use planning. Furthermore, in order to attract more reinvestment, the local government even makes flexible controls of development intensity regardless of urban planning. For example, new built structures in the inner city can be in very close distance and the plot ratio can be as high as 18.6 whereas in the planning document the highest plot ratio is only 7 (Lin *et al.*, 2006).

Similar to the situation that the government keeps middle in the inner city by investing in infrastructure, facilities, and urban environment, the government also utilizes such public investment to lever more private reinvestment. As Wu (1997: 660) argues, 'although the rent gap is huge, the input required to capture the gap is also enormous'. In order to attract private reinvestment, the government firstly needs to market inner-city housing consumption; and attempting to stimulate housing consumption, the government invests to image a quality urban living. In Yuexiu, for example, the government invested over 200 million Yuan between 1998 and 2005 to improve livability of the locality (YCBC, 2009). As a result of public investment, both land and housing price tremendously increase, and therefore private reinvestment flows in.

⁶ <http://www.fzxx.cn/S/BookPages/203/Default.shtml>

When the inherent problems of occupied land in the inner city are solved, the infill development in open space becomes less risky. In some areas in Yuexiu, capital quickly flows into open space as soon as adjacent occupied land parcels are redeveloped. Further to facilitate redevelopment, the local government also reduces or exempts various fees and charges of urban land use, provides in-kind subsidies, and allows an approach of installment in terms of land lease payment (He, 2009). For example, the down payment of land lease fees in Guangzhou was reduced from 30% to 20% in 1995 (Wang, 1995).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper explores the underlying forces of gentrification in China. In view of a progressive market transition which the government heavily intervenes, the role of the state in leading gentrification is examined. By analyzing the role of the state in influencing both performances of the middle class and developers, it is found that the state has been playing a leading role in generating gentrification in the inner city of Guangzhou. In general, under a context of emerging market economy in China, the local government has played a significant role in influencing performances of the housing and land markets. In order to model a vibrant old urban core and motivate conspicuous consumption of emerging middle class, the local government has been striving to stimulate both consumption side and production side of the market. In this respect, He (2009) was correct to conclude gentrification in major metropolises of China as a state-sponsored pattern.

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