

Understanding the Popularity of Historical Conservation in China: The Depoliticized Narratives as a Counter-Insurgency Strategy in Guangzhou

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Abstract : The land finance in China in recent years has propelled urban renewals in the name of historical conservation and led to massive gentrification and compulsory relocation. Such inequalities cause insurgence. Drawing on public planning information, ethnographic field notes, and online interview data about Guangzhou's Enninglu Area, this paper aims to present how such insurgence has been contained and put down gradually through depoliticization narratives represented by "improving living conditions," "conserving historical culture," and "public participation". This paper's findings include that 1) Besides economic growth, maintaining social stability in alignment with the central government are equally important to local government, reveals the latter efforts to mediate the growth coalition, residents, media, and academics so as to reconstruct the interface between state and society; 2) To empower the insurgence, the media and academics use public interests for propaganda, that diverts attention away from its political dimension; 3) In response, the government introduces improved regulations and planning, turning social inequalities into technical inadequacy so as to become the defender of public interests, which justifies the incoming renewal and prevents public questioning. By comparing regime changes among governments, developers, residents, media, and academics caused by renewal policies, this paper presents the depoliticized narrative as a counter-insurgency strategy to contain social conflicts and to boost inner-city renewal.

Keywords : inner city renewal, depoliticization, historical conservation, public participation

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