

# The Transformation Mode of Historical and Cultural Blocks and Its Enlightenment

## Taking the Micro-transformation of Yongqingfang, Guangzhou as an Example

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### ABSTRACT

The transformation of Yongqingfang has gone through three stages: "retrofitting", "focusing on historical and cultural values", and "micro-transformation". The main mechanism of the "micro-transformation" model refers to the guiding principles and practical paths. The guiding principle includes "government-leading, enterprise undertaking, and public participation". The practice path is to strive to preserve the original block layout, implement "embroidered" transformation, and carry out the appropriate demolition and repair of the original buildings. In order to meet the needs of modern activities, the internal structure of some buildings is carried out on the basis of not changing the external shape of the block building. On the premise of preserving the original style of the block, it is important to optimize the public service facilities and revitalize and update the business and culture in the block, so that the ancient street can restore the commercial and cultural vitality. By sorting out the micro-transformation model of Yongqingfang, three enlightenments can be drawn that are beneficial to the transformation of the historical and cultural street. That is, it is suggested to balance the interests of investors and the interests of residents during the transformation, balance the inheritance and innovation, and do well in the integration and balance relationship between culture and industry.

**Keywords:** Historical and cultural blocks, Experience, Enlightenment, Micro-transformation of Yongqingfang.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Yongqingfang (also known as Yongqing Block) is located on En'ning Road, known as the "most beautiful old street in Guangzhou", and is one of the earliest historical and cultural districts in Guangzhou. Since the "micro-transformation" in 2016, Yongqingfang has gradually achieved activation and upgrading. In August 2020, it became a national 4A tourist attraction and the first intangible heritage block in Guangzhou. The micro-transformation of Yongqingfang is a new attempt by Guangzhou to renew and renovate historical and

cultural blocks, and its experience provides a reference for the renewal and transformation of historical and cultural blocks. Therefore, it is very meaningful to explore the experience of Yongqingfang's micro-transformation and sum up its transformation enlightenments.

## 2. THE TRANSFORMATION OF YONGQINGFANG

### 2.1 2006-2008: "Retrofitting"

In 2006, Guangzhou introduced the strategic idea (modernization), and En'ning Road, where Yongqingfang is located, became the first transformation project of old city. The transformation work is carried out in the manner of complete demolition, construction of middle and

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high-level buildings, and relocation in place. However, due to many reasons such as unclear construction plan and poor communication with residents, local residents strongly opposed it.

## **2.2 2009-2014: "Focusing on Historical and Cultural Values"**

In 2009, Liwan District promulgated the "En'ning Road: Historical and Cultural Protection and Development Plan".

The idea has changed from pure commercial development to focusing on historical and cultural values. In 2011, Guangzhou passed the "Enning Road: Renewal Plan of Old City". The planning scheme has been revised several times, finally forming the reform idea of focusing on historical and cultural values. However, in the following three years, due to the lack of government funds and other issues, the transformation work was difficult to advance and has been on hold.

## **2.3 2015- : "Micro-transformation"**

In 2015, in order to solve the problems in the urban renewal process, Guangzhou established the Urban Renewal Bureau, which is responsible for urban renewal work. Taking this opportunity, Liwan District passed the "Request for Micro-transformation of Yongqing Block", indicating that the transformation of En'ning Road is on the agenda again. In 2016, Guangzhou issued the "Guangzhou Urban Renewal Measures", proposing the concept of "micro-transformation", that is, "on the premise of maintaining the current construction pattern basically unchanged, it refers to renewal measures, such as partial demolition of buildings, replacement of building functions, preservation and repair, and the rectification, improvement, protection, activation and improvement of infrastructure" [1]. The proposal of "micro-transformation" provided a new idea for the transformation of Yongqingfang. Yongqingfang became the first micro-transformation project in Guangzhou.

## **3. THE MAIN MECHANISM OF YONGQINGFANG'S MICRO-TRANSFORMATION MODEL**

### **3.1 The Main Principles of Micro-transformation**

According to the guiding ideology of "Guangzhou urban renewal measures", Urban Renewal Bureau of Liwan District formulated the "Guidelines for micro-transformation of Yongqing District", and proposed that the micro-transformation of Yongqingfang should be in accordance with the principles of "government-leading, enterprise undertaking and public participation".

#### **3.1.1 "Government-leading"**

The first is to formulate laws and regulations to ensure that there are rules to follow for micro-transformation.

The government played a leading role in the micro-transformation of Yongqingfang, which organized the investors and residents into the transformation. Through the formulation of laws and regulations, the rights and interests of investors and residents are guaranteed, and the orderly promotion of "micro-transformation" is realized. Guangzhou passed the "En'ning Road: changes in control detailed planning for old urban renewal block", and Liwan District formulated the "Guidelines for the micro-transformation of Yongqingfang".

The second is to provide and introduce funds to ensure the sustainable development of micro-transformation.

"From the start of the project in 2007 to the completion of the demolition and resettlement of En'ning road project in 2012, the government has invested 1.8 billion yuan." [2] In order to solve the problem of capital investment and make the transformation of Yongqingfang continued, the government introduced social capital by BOT mode. BOT (Build — Operate — Transfer) refers to a cooperation mode between government and enterprises on public projects. The government allows enterprises to raise funds for the construction, management and operation of public projects within a certain period of time, and return

them to the government after the expiration of the period. In the micro-transformation of Yongqingfang, the government introduced Vanke. After the transformation, Vanke will enjoy 15 years of operation. During this period, Vanke will enjoy the right to attract investment, manage enterprises and plan activities. After 15 years of operation, the block will be returned to the government to achieve "win-win" among the government, the public and the enterprises

Finally, a negotiation platform will be built to ensure the smooth promotion of micro-transformation.

In view of the lessons that the transformation before the micro-transformation has been difficult to promote and stalled for more than a decade due to the failure to deal with the interests of all parties, the government attaches great importance to coordinating the interests of all parties and actively building consultation platform in the micro-transformation. The former urban renewal bureau of Liwan District and Duobao sub-district office organized and established "En'ning Road Committee". There are 25 members in this committee, including 12 resident representatives. Its main responsibility is to supervise the operation of the transformation and coordinate the contradictions in the transformation.

### *3.1.2 "Enterprise Undertaking"*

In the micro-transformation of Yongqingfang, social capital is introduced through BOT to realize the undertaking of enterprises. Based on the government's overall positioning of "micro-transformation" of Yongqing District, Vanke has followed the concepts of "restoring the old as the old, building the new as the old, sorting traffic, thinning texture, improving the foundation, eliminating hidden dangers, repairing cultural relics, and activating resources" to repair the block buildings. Combined with the needs of modern society, the business and other industries are added. After the completion of the micro-transformation, Vanke enjoys the operation right of the block, which is not only a measure to protect the income of Vanke, but also an important aspect of "undertaking".

### *3.1.3 "Public Participation"*

In the process of micro-transformation, people are encouraged to participate actively. The government advocates the establishment of a committee for the joint creation of historical and cultural blocks, which enables the public to supervise the operation of micro-transformation through the platform, and to reflect the problems in the micro-transformation, so as to safeguard their rights and interests. In 2017, 60 representatives who lived along En'ning road submitted proposals to the Standing Committee of Guangzhou Municipal People's Congress. In addition to the concept of "reflecting the disturbing problems during the construction process, the proposal also puts forward a series of suggestions for the management of Yongqingfang and the future transformation of Enning Road" [3].

## **3.2 The Practical Path of Micro-transformation**

The first is to keep the original block pattern. "Good urban texture can improve the image of the city, support street activities, and become the time container of the combination of history and reality and the carrier of urban culture." [4] The original block pattern of Yongqingfang includes "one vertical street and two horizontal lanes", namely, "Yongqing street, Yongqing first lane and Yongqing second lane". During the micro-transformation of Yongqingfang, the block pattern is retained.

Secondly, the "embroidered" transformation is implemented to properly dismantle and repair the original buildings. In order to meet the needs of modern activities, the internal structure of some buildings is reconstructed on the basis of not changing the external form of block buildings.

First, a small number of buildings were properly demolished, and some collapsed buildings were reconstructed. Those places that were not suitable for reconstruction were reserved for public activities.

Some lanes in Yongqingfang block are very narrow, which are not conducive for people to travel. By demolishing a small number of buildings with low historical and cultural values, the entrance space of the alley becomes suitable, and the width

of the pedestrian passage is suitable. For the collapsed buildings in the block, if the buildings have greater historical and cultural values, the buildings should be rebuilt at the original sites. If the buildings don't have greater historical and cultural values, it is not necessary to make the reconstruction, which can be left for the public activities. No. 13 of Yongqing 1st Lane was the former residence of Bruce Lee. However, due to disrepair, it almost collapsed. In view of its historical and cultural value, it has been restored in the micro-transformation, showing its original style.

The second is to keep the original facade of the building unchanged, and only to repair the necessary places.

The buildings in the Yongqing block were mainly built in the two historical periods, namely, "the late Qing Dynasty" and "the time from the founding of the People's Republic of China to the reform and opening up", accounting for 40% and 28% respectively, totaling about 70%" [5]. With wind and rain erosion, some window decoration and gray sculptures with Lingnan characteristics were altered or even erased. In the process of micro-transformation, the facades of these old houses were cleaned and repaired in accordance with the principle of trade-in. The carved colored sculptures on the archway, the carp-shaped drainage under the blue brick eaves, and the granite on the pavement have been restored. "The blue bricks on the wall are custom-made. It is required to compare them with that of the original building. If they exceed a certain color difference, they won't work." [6] In the process of restoring the arcade, the wooden-framed casement window are kept as what they are, and they are just repainted. Both the carvings on the archway and the colored sculptures have been preserved, but they were only recolored during the micro-transformation process.

Finally, in order to adapt to the needs of modern activities, the internal structure of some buildings was transformed without changing the external form, and modern architectural elements were added.

Along the first lane and second lane of Yongqing, there are two rows of buildings to be used as offices. However, the internal structure of these buildings is too scattered, and the lighting is not very good. Under the premise of basically not changing the facade, the walls in the building were

opened up and modern architectural elements such as glass were added, so as to achieve the spacious and bright effect.

Third, on the premise of preserving the original appearance, it is required to optimize the public service facilities and improve the sanitation, drainage, lighting, fire control, communication and other facilities.

In view of the problems of bystreet and narrow lanes in the area, as well as the problem of insufficient public space and hidden fire control risks, the characteristics of bystreet and narrow lanes were retained in the second phase of the transformation. At the intersections of the streets and the riverside, some dilapidated buildings were demolished and sparsely to create some neighborhood garden spaces and greenways. With the integration and planning, the factors of fire passages, street texture, traffic organization are considered, the spatial pattern of street texture has also been optimized, and the problem of fire evacuation left over from the original dense blocks have been alleviated.

It is suggested to revitalize and renew the business and culture in the area, and then the commercial and cultural vitality of the old streets can be restored.

- business activation

"The vitality of historical and cultural blocks is not only reflected in terms of the appearance of the block, but also in the business renewal, so as to make the block alive." [7] Yongqingfang provides an incubation and display platform for the development of new business formats in the micro-transformation. Nowadays, in Yongqingfang, there are shops set with the theme of "movable type printing", integrating traditional culture with modern experience. Also, there are boutique homestays named "Guimi", combining the historical and cultural experience with accommodation. And there are life houses such as "c a f e", enjoying coffee, desserts, leisure and social networking. The introduction of these new formats has turned Yongqingfang into a famous "punch-in place", allowing people to have the sense of participation and experience.

- cultural activation

With the development of society and the changes in people's consumption, the cultural influence of historical and cultural blocks is gradually declining. The cultural resurrection of historical and cultural blocks requires continuous introduction of new cultural formats and reconstruction of cultural influence. Yongqingfang attaches great importance to the promotion of traditional cultures such as Cantonese opera, copper-making, and Cantonese embroidery in the micro-transformation. In January 2021, Guangzhou passed the third phase of transformation plan for Yongqingfang, stating that in the third phase, "a street for traditional Chinese medicine will be built" [8].

#### **4. ENLIGHTENMENT OF YONGQINGFANG'S MICRO-TRANSFORMATION MODEL**

As the first micro-transformation project of historical and cultural district in Guangzhou, Yongqingfang has obtained great success, achieving the effects of "environmental improvement, cultural heritage, function transformation, and rebirth" [9]. The micro-transformation of Yongqingfang provides a reference for the transformation of old areas in Guangzhou, and its experience has been promoted in Guangzhou. "As of the end of May 2020, Guangzhou has completed a total of 323 micro-transformation projects in old communities, benefiting 40,000 families, 1.5 million people, and 30.94 million square meters of old buildings have been transformed." [10] Through the exploration of the micro-transformation of Yongqingfang, several enlightenments are concluded to better realize the protection and development of historical and cultural blocks.

##### ***4.1 Balancing the Interests of Investors and the Interests of Residents***

The government plays the roles of initiator and leader in the transformation of historical and cultural blocks. The government draws investors and residents into the reconstruction of historical and cultural blocks, formulates reconstruction rules through laws and regulations, and realizes and supervises the subsequent reconstruction process. When formulating laws and regulations, the

government should balance the interests of investors and residents.

First of all, if investors' income is not guaranteed, they are unwilling to intervene. The transformation of historical and cultural districts requires a large amount of capital investment, and government finance is an utterly inadequate method in dealing with a severe situation. In the process of micro-transformation of Yongqingfang, the government explored the use of BOT (build-operate-transfer) and introduced Vanke to invest in and renovate the neighbourhoods, realizing the "win-win" among the government, people and enterprises. In view of this experience, it is necessary to unblock the channels of social capital participation for the transformation of historical and cultural blocks, and use the policy inclination of tax reduction and housing use to attract social capital. In the later management of historical and cultural districts, it is necessary to adhere to the separation of government and enterprises, and a company team that understands the market and operations should be employed to make the better management and market, so that the historical and cultural districts will be on the track of sound development.

Secondly, if the interests of residents are damaged and cannot be guaranteed, they will not be willing to compromise, and it will be difficult to carry out the transformation work.

In the process of "micro-transformation" of Yongqingfang, Liwan District has adhered to a people-oriented transformation concept, actively exerting the public participation, and fully respecting the wishes of residents. Under the leadership of the government, a committee for the transformation of historical and cultural districts was established, with more than half of the 25 members being residents. The committee supervised the renovation of the block, and reported the problems arising from the renovation to the higher authorities, and effectively protected the legitimate rights and interests of the residents.

##### ***4.2 Balancing the Inheritance and Innovation***

The "micro-transformation" of Yongqingfang has well dealt with the balance between inheritance and innovation, realizing the persistence and tolerance of innovation. If there is no adherence to

the tradition, there will be no Yongqingfang that adopts the concept of "repairing the old as the old". Without tolerance for innovation, there will be no famous Yongqingfang today.

First of all, for the historical and cultural blocks, more emphasis is placed on the inheritance of its "history" and "culture". "Culture" is the core value of historical and cultural blocks. If "culture" is lost in the transformation process, historical and cultural blocks will lose their value. "Repairing the old as the old" is an important guiding ideology for the micro-transformation of Yongqingfang. The concept of "repairing the old as the old" is applied in the transformation process, not only focusing on the restoration of the historical buildings in the block, but also emphasizing the inheritance of "history" and "culture" behind the "old buildings". The ancestral homes and historical buildings of many celebrities in Yongqingfang have been baptized for a long time and are a microcosm of Cantonese culture. In the process of "micro-renovation", Yongqingfang has preserved many cultural relics and historical buildings, such as Cantonese Opera Luangyutang, Bruce Lee's ancestral residence, and arcades.

Secondly, historical and cultural blocks are living heritage, which will change with historical changes. To achieve sustainable development, innovation must also be emphasized in the transformation process. In the transformation process of block, it is necessary to make the innovation according to the needs of modern life, to prevent historical and cultural blocks from being reconstructed in the form of "monuments", and to prevent historical and cultural blocks from losing their vitality and failing to complete the function of cultural inheritance. In the micro-transformation process, modern architectural elements mainly based on structural reinforcement are added to the facades of some buildings with inconspicuous original features and low protection levels. For Zhongshuge at No. 227, Yongqingfang, Enning Road, Qilou, the original building has a better overall appearance, but the internal components are more aging. In order to meet the needs of modern use, the original large layout and exquisite components were retained in the renovation, but the internal space was adjusted.

Through the inheritance of tradition and the tolerance of innovation, Yongqingfang has

successfully integrated the traditional culture of the old city with the characteristics of the modern city, and has become a new landmark with Guangzhou's local culture.

### **4.3 Handling the Integration and Balance of Culture and Industry**

Culture is the core value of historical and cultural blocks, and industry is the support for the sustainable development of historical and cultural blocks. The integration and balance of culture and industry must be handled in the transformation process of historical and cultural blocks. Just by blindly emphasizing the protection of blocks, historical and cultural blocks may become "monument"-style blocks, losing their function of cultural inheritance due to lack of popularity. If much emphasis is on industry and over-development is carried out, it may cause historical and cultural districts to become commercial scenic spots and lose their authenticity.

In the process of "micro-transformation", Yongqingfang has achieved a better integration and balance of culture and industry. Under the premise of paying attention to history and culture, industries such as maker space, literary and artistic handicraft shops, coffee shops have been introduced, injecting new life into Yongqingfang. It not only retains the old city style and features of Xiguan, Guangzhou, but also incorporates modern cultural elements, becoming a famous scenic spot. The second phase of the transformation project of Yongqingfang, which started at the end of 2018, has been gradually opened in August 2020 after more than a year of upgrading and renovation. During the second phase of the project, it not only introduced more industries with local characteristics, but also brought together 10 intangible cultural heritage studios, including Cantonese porcelain, Canton Embroidery, and Lion Dance. It also attracted the "net celebrity" cultures such as Zhongshuge and Xicha, giving Yongqingfang a unique landscape of the integration and development of new and old business forms.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

To sum up, the main mechanism of Yongqingfang micro-reconstruction includes guiding principles and practical paths. Its

transformation experience has provided the valuable experience for the city history culture block transformation, and also has presented the question which should be paid attention to in the history culture block transformation.

### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

This paper is independently completed by Qiuzhun Wang.

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