

# Resistance to Being Listed Industrial Heritage? The Conflicts and Dilemma of Heritage-Making During Land Banking in Guangzhou

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## Abstract

Amid rapid urban regeneration over the past decade, industrial heritage conservation in China has garnered increasing attention, focusing more on the reuse of listed buildings than on conflicts in the inscription process. This article examines the conflicts and dilemmas between urban redevelopment and industrial heritage conservation during the inscription process in China, through five case studies in Guangzhou. It aims to provide both an understanding of conflicts and institutional challenges posed by land banking, and insights into stakeholder dynamics, the role of media and NGOs, and the implementation of cultural heritage assessments. Grounded in the Institutional Analysis and Development framework, the empirical studies reveal that institutional conflicts, particularly resistance from land development centers and former factory owners, often stem from financial motivations. This resistance can lead to the premature demolition of potential heritage sites but also drive institutional innovations. Guangzhou’s introduction of the Wenping assessment system integrates industrial heritage identification with land banking and urban regeneration planning, aiming to protect heritage from hasty demolitions. Media coverage and NGO advocacy have been instrumental in heritage-making and prompting policy responses. The adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sites into creative industrial parks faces challenges from their temporary nature and land banking pressures, underscoring the need for policies ensuring stable and enduring reuse. Ambiguous responsibilities and fragmented management systems further impede effective heritage conservation.

## Keywords

heritage-making; heritage inscription; industrial heritage; land banking; urban regeneration

## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, China has experienced a surge in heritage initiatives, utilizing culture and heritage to construct national identity and showcase soft power (Maags & Svensson, 2018; Nakano & Zhu, 2020). Heritage, as noted by Zhu and Maags (2020), serves as a powerful instrument to pursue economic, political, or sociocultural interests. However, the respective initiatives started later than in Western countries, where the value of industrial heritage for tourism gained early recognition (J. Zhang et al., 2022). The 2006 Wuxi Proposal, issued at the first China Industrial Heritage Preservation Forum, marked a significant milestone, integrating industrial heritage into broader cultural heritage management. Since then, industrial heritage research and preservation in China have gained attention, fostering awareness and proactive preservation measures. The inherent conflict between preservation and redevelopment in heritage inscription processes involves negotiation and dissonance (Oevermann, 2015; Oevermann & Mieg, 2021; Smith, 2006; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). Tensions are particularly significant in rapidly urbanizing regions, where development pressures often lead to the demolition of unlisted industrial heritage (H. Zhang et al., 2023; J. Zhang et al., 2022). Despite this growing concern, most research in China focuses on adaptive reuse of listed industrial buildings, often overlooking the conflicts during inscription. There is a need for longitudinal studies to track the outcomes of respective regulations, providing deeper insights into effective practices.

Guangzhou, a major industrial hub in South China, offers a unique perspective on industrial heritage inscription and preservation within China. Despite significant progress since 2006, Guangzhou faces ongoing conflicts and challenges. The Tui Er Jin San (退二进三 in Chinese) strategy, initiated in 2005, aimed to restructure industry by relocating secondary industries and repurposing vacated factory buildings. In 2008, the Municipal Government's *Measures for the Disposal of Industrial Land of "Tui Er Jin San" Enterprises in Guangzhou City* planned to relocate 295 enterprises posing environmental and safety hazards by 2015. Additionally, the 2009 *Opinions on Accelerating and Promoting "Three Olds" Redevelopment (No.56)* focused on regeneration of old towns, former industrial sites, and urban villages. A 2010 document titled *Notice on Promoting the Relevant Planning and Management Requirements for Temporary Construction Projects in "Tui Er Jin San" and Old Factory Transformation* encouraged the temporary reuse of vacant factories, leading to a flourishing of creative industrial parks.

Since these initiatives, the Guangzhou government has surveyed and adaptively reused unlisted industrial heritage. However, rapid urban redevelopment and the absence of a clear protection system have left many potential industrial heritage sites unprotected. The 2009 Three Olds policy allowed factory owners opting for land banking to receive 60% of the land premium as compensation, spurring explosive growth in urban regeneration projects. The 1994 tax-sharing system led local governments to rely heavily on land finance, making land banking a crucial tool for urban development and financing infrastructure projects (Wu, 2022), often resulting in hasty demolitions due to resistance from land development centers (LDCs) and profit-oriented former factory owners given the immature pre-protection policies. For example, the 2013 demolition of the No. 1 Rubber Factory in Guangzhou illustrates how the possibility and procedure of industrial heritage list inscription can accelerate the destruction of old industrial buildings. However, these conflicts can also spur institutional innovations. Understanding institutional conflicts and resulting innovations is crucial for developing policies that balance heritage preservation with urban redevelopment.

The adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sites, often transformed into creative industrial parks, has been both successful and contentious. These creative industrial parks face demolition threats due to land banking pressures, highlighting the tension between temporary and permanent uses of industrial heritage. For example, the controversial case of Redtory in Guangzhou sparked debates on heritage value and related list inscription. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing long-term strategies that balance heritage preservation with urban redevelopment.

Starting from this point, the article seeks to address the following questions: In which way does land banking cause resistance against industrial heritage inscription in Guangzhou? What factors pose challenges to the adaptive reuse and preservation of industrial heritage? Employing the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework, the study examines conflicts and dilemmas in the institutional landscape of industrial heritage inscription and preservation in China. By exploring related conflicts and negotiations, it aims to understand the institutional conditions necessary for stabilizing cultural clusters. Building on insights from five case studies in Guangzhou, it analyses specific constellations and provides conclusions applicable to other regions experiencing similar conflicts.

The article encompasses a research review, an introduction to the research framework, an exploration of exogenous variables and context, a detailed examination of specific constellations through case studies, an analysis and discussion based on the empirical studies, and a concluding section. By delving into these questions and employing the IAD framework, the article aims to contribute nuanced perspectives to the intricate interplay between land banking, resistance to heritage inscription, and the challenges faced in the adaptive reuse and preservation of industrial heritage in Guangzhou.

## 2. Research Review, Research Framework, and Methodology

### 2.1. Industrial Heritage-Making and Adaptive Reuse in the Chinese Context

Industrial heritage preservation in China has evolved significantly over the past decade, driven by rapid urbanization, economic transformation, and changing policies (J. Zhang et al., 2022). The Chinese government has progressively integrated industrial heritage into broader heritage management, making adaptive reuse and preservation central to urban governance (Currier, 2008; He, 2017; Liu, 2017; Niu et al., 2018; Zheng, 2011). Unlike in the West, where factory closures often result from industrial restructuring, closures in China are linked to state intervention, particularly under *Tui Er Jin San*. Cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou have focused on transforming old factories into creative industrial parks, supported by government policies promoting creative industries. These parks, distinct from Western creative clusters, operate under top-down policy guidance with weak community ties (Liang & Wang, 2020; C. Yang & Qian, 2023). They require government approval and emphasize industry-upgrading policies (Cen et al., 2017; V. Y. Yuan, 2020), often serving as temporary land-use strategies leading to government-led demolition and redevelopment (Q. Yuan, 2016). This approach has faced dissatisfaction and resistance from the creative class (Liu, 2017).

Recent studies highlight the increasing integration of community engagement in the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sites in China. Notable examples include the transformation of Shanghai Minsheng Art Wharf. However, the anticipated benefits of community engagement and the bargaining power of non-state

interests have often been restrained by the state exerting vigilance against social unrest that could be brought about by heritage conservation (Qian, 2023). State control remains a significant factor in shaping these processes. In some cases, the redevelopment of heritage sites has led to gentrification, displacing long-term residents and altering the social fabric of neighborhoods (C. Yang & Qian, 2023). However, existing research, particularly in China, often prioritizes technical and spatial aspects, overlooking conflicts inherent in decision-making processes and social aspects of heritage preservation.

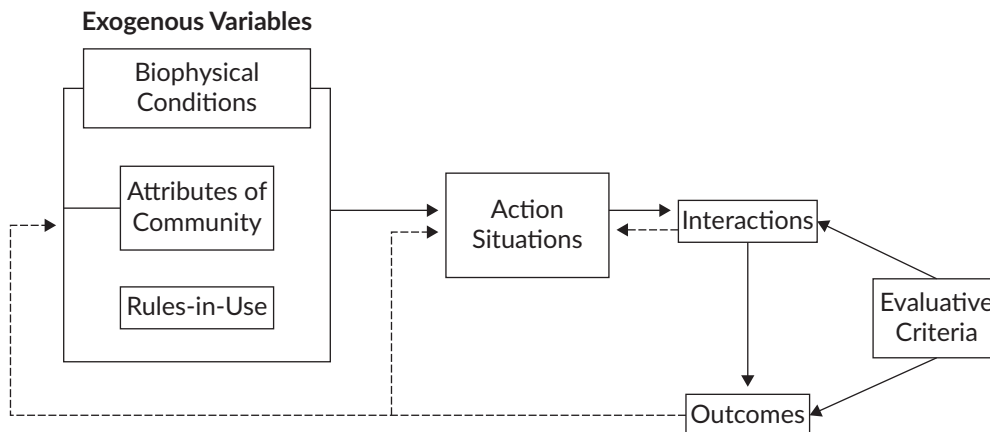
In cases where industrial sites become creative parks, the discourse centers on whether these reuses should be stabilized and listed as heritage. This discourse critically shapes transformation strategies of former industrial sites, influencing decisions on whether land or heritage value takes precedence (Q. Yuan, 2016). Consequently, industrial heritage-making becomes a powerful tool guiding redevelopment, crucial for stabilizing and preserving old factories and transitioning them from temporary reuse to enduring preservation and adaptive reuse (Oevermann, 2015; Oevermann & Mieg, 2021; Tan et al., 2022). Industrial heritage-making involves active social and cultural processes to identify, preserve, and celebrate elements deemed valuable by a community. This process engages various stakeholders, including communities, governments, and organizations, in determining which aspects of the past should be preserved and carried forward. Q. Yuan and Cai (2018) note that grassroots organizations and local communities are playing a growing role in conservation efforts, providing valuable input and advocating for the preservation of industrial sites. By examining conflicts, stakeholder dynamics, and policy innovations, this article seeks to identify critical factors for long-term preservation, and conditions essential for stable and sustainable adaptive reuse of industrial heritage within cultural clusters.

## **2.2. Research Framework: The IAD Framework**

The IAD framework, developed by Ostrom et al. (1994), is a widely recognized theoretical foundation in political science and institutional economics. It provides a methodical approach to analyzing the structure and operations of institutions, particularly in collective action, governance, and resource management. It is significant for illuminating how institutions shape behavior, influence decision-making, and determine outcomes across various social and environmental contexts.

The components of IAD include exogenous variables, action situations, interactions, outcomes, and evaluative criteria (Ostrom, 2010b; see Figure 1 in the current article). Exogenous variables encompass physical and material conditions, community attributes, and rules in use. Community attributes refer to the social and cultural backdrop of an action situation. The action arena, the core element of the IAD framework, includes the action situations and the actors involved, where industrial heritage-making is viewed as a social process involving various actors. Nevertheless, Ostrom (2010a) suggests not strictly distinguishing between the action arena and action situation. The action situation is a “black box” where operational, collective, or constitutional choices are made, encompassing information observation, action selection, interaction patterns, and outcomes. The IAD framework will be used to understand the logic of actors’ behavior, and explore the outcomes of their interactions in the context of industrial heritage preservation.

Institutions, according to the IAD framework, are the formal and informal rules and norms that structure interactions among actors. Institutions in this study encompass rules and organizations established to manage and preserve industrial heritage sites, crucial for understanding decision-making, resource allocation, conflict



**Figure 1.** The IAD framework. Source: Ostrom (2010b, p. 646).

resolution, and heritage conservation. The aforementioned exogenous variables provide the external context and conditions shaping institutional development and function in Guangzhou, influencing how heritage sites are preserved, managed, and utilized.

The IAD framework, as a systematic and robust approach, allows for a detailed examination of stakeholder roles and behaviors, including government bodies, NGOs, media, and former property owners, within the institutional landscape. It highlights both resistance and innovation in heritage conservation and seeks to unravel how land banking influences actor behavior regarding industrial heritage inscription and preservation.

### 2.3. Research Sites, Case Selections, and Data Collection

Guangzhou boasts a notable concentration of industrial heritage along its transport routes, particularly along the Pearl River and near railway stations. The city's institutional development for historical and cultural heritage protection progressed slowly until 2013. In the 1990s, the Guangzhou Historical and Cultural City Conservation Office was established, but it was abolished in 2003. Despite preparations for the Preservation Plan for the Historic and Cultural City of Guangzhou since 2003, the plan took a decade to materialize and remained unpublished until 2013. A pivotal event that year accelerated heritage conservation efforts when the Jinlingtai and Miaogaotai buildings in Yuexiu District were demolished overnight, following the expiration of their heritage protection. Local conservationists and media had previously highlighted the buildings' historical value, and in 2012, the Guangzhou Land and Housing Authority temporarily halted demolition. However, on June 10–11, 2013, the developer illicitly destroyed the buildings, sparking public outcry. Media attention and public pressure led the government to mandate the reconstruction of the demolished structures. This incident prompted a broader debate on heritage conservation, driving regulatory reforms that now require pre-acquisition surveys of historical buildings to prevent similar occurrences.

The five case studies in Guangzhou (see Figure 2) were chosen for their controversial impact on institutional choices, providing rich insights into real-world challenges and innovations in industrial heritage preservation. They illustrate how institutional conflicts and stakeholder dynamics play out, particularly during the land banking process, where heritage inscription is crucial for urban regeneration. In the early stages, heritage inscription might impede land banking leading to hasty demolitions, as seen in the No. 1 Rubber Factory case.



**Figure 2.** Five selected case studies in Guangzhou.

Former industrial sites transformed into creative industrial parks also faced threats from land banking and demolition, with cases like Redtory drawing public attention and advocacy. The No. 2 Cotton Spinning Factory highlights the complexities of heritage inscription during land banking. To enhance protection, Guangzhou introduced a “cultural heritage assessment” (Wenping, 文评 in Chinese) in 2013, integrating heritage identification with urban planning, as successfully applied in the Guangzhou Paper Factory. Inadequate protection and early demolitions prompted conservationist and NGO attention, exemplified by the Chengzhitang Warehouse case, which showcases bottom-up heritage identification and adaptive reuse.

Data collection spanned several years, incorporating fieldwork, interviews, and investigations. The authors conducted fieldwork from 2008 to 2012 on Redtory, studying No. 1 Rubber Factory from 2014 to 2018, and engaging in in-depth interviews in 2016. More than 20 interviews from 2012 to 2016 involved policymakers, planners, NGOs, media representatives, and residents, exploring the Three Olds Regeneration and Tui Er Jin San. Additional fieldwork from 2018 to 2022, supported by a German Research Foundation-funded project, involved semi-structured interviews with local officials, planners, and developers in Guangzhou.

### 3. Exogenous Variables and Context of Industrial Heritage List Inscription in Guangzhou

#### 3.1. Physical and Material Conditions: Vacant Old Factories Boom and Land Banking

Since the 1990s, many old industrial sites have been converted into residential housing projects by real estate developers (Zhu & Wang, 2019). For instance, derelict factories along “Industrial Avenue” in western Haizhu District were redeveloped into large housing projects. Developers were highly active in this context under the Tui Er Jin San policy, which relocated 216 enterprises by 2012. The massive closure of state-owned factories freed a lot of land space and resources for urban redevelopment (Q. Yuan, 2016). However, such large-scale property-led redevelopment increased pressure on the public infrastructure in those areas. According to the Three Olds policies since 2009, owners can receive 60% of the land premium as compensation if they opt

for land banking by the government. This incentivized former factory owners to participate, resulting in an explosive growth of urban regeneration projects. Since 2008, creative industrial parks converted from old factories have developed at an unprecedented speed and scale, with 62 conversions by 2014. As the land value increases, land banking becomes increasingly attractive to original factory owners. Many owners prefer maximizing their benefits through land banking rather than remaining as creative industrial parks.

### ***3.2. Community Attributes: Increasing Heritage Value Appreciation by the Civil Society***

The proactive involvement of media and NGOs has been pivotal in shaping heritage agendas and influencing government actions. Media coverage of the demolition of industrial heritage often leads to public outcry and subsequent policy responses. Public participation and media coverage are crucial in shaping Guangzhou's urban heritage conservation system. In recent years, third-party organizations, community residents, and the general public have increasingly focused on preserving historical and cultural heritage, gathering public opinion, detecting damage to historical relics, and providing feedback on conservation plans (Q. Yuan & Cai, 2018).

The media acts as a public platform for expression and communication with government decision-makers (He, 2018). Through investigations of public events and social issues, the media captures public attention and stimulates discourse (Lin, 2022). This allows the government to gather suggestions from the public, subsequently influencing public decision-making processes and contributing to institutional development. In essence, the media bridges the public and the government, fostering dialogue that shapes the trajectory of urban heritage conservation.

The media focuses on conflicts and controversies, using in-depth coverage to bring issues to the forefront of public attention. Tensions between regeneration and heritage conservation aspects of the Three Olds policy frequently lead to public events prominently featured in the media. The contentious Enning Road regeneration project (2006–2021) demonstrates how media coverage of heritage preservation can transform events into public matters, influencing public opinion and government responses. Continuous media attention and public outcry led to more inclusive and collaborative planning methods. This case highlights the vital role of the media in urban heritage conservation, showing how coverage drives public engagement and influences policy decisions (He, 2018; Tan & Altrock, 2016; Tan et al., 2023). The government is compelled to address public concerns, align them with its agenda, and impact decision-making and institutional development (He, 2018; Tan & Altrock, 2016). This is facilitated by the relatively open nature of media and government departments in Guangzhou, which are rather receptive to public criticism and opinions.

### ***3.3. Rules in Use: Industrial Heritage Inscription in Guangzhou***

The conservation status of heritage in Guangzhou, categorized into “immovable cultural relics,” “historic buildings,” and “traditional buildings,” is determined by factors such as value, state of conservation, adaptive reuse, conservation cost, and stakeholder preferences (Long et al., 2017). Stringent management, particularly for immovable cultural relics, can impact adaptive reuse. Industrial heritage, listed as immovable cultural relics in Guangzhou, enjoys better conservation due to strict legal protection, while listing as historic buildings leads to less optimistic preservation outcomes. Nevertheless, historic building status helps mitigate the risk of demolition.

Since 2010, the Guangzhou Urban Planning and Research Centre has surveyed over 100 industrial heritage sites, formulating criteria and identifying both protected and unlisted buildings. Mapping efforts delineated 45 comprehensive industrial heritage landscape areas. In March 2012, the Guangzhou Planning Bureau announced the city's first comprehensive survey of historical buildings and the establishment of an inscription list for historical buildings. This survey also assessed "approved but unbuilt" sites in Guangzhou, focusing on identifying unlisted buildings and structures deemed worthy of preservation.

In 2013, increased awareness of industrial heritage preservation led the Guangzhou government to emphasize evaluation and inscription during land banking through the aforementioned Wenping. It aimed to identify industrial buildings with preservation value at the early stage of land banking, preventing demolition and initiating subsequent conservation. In 2014, Guangzhou initiated a cultural heritage census, focusing on industrial heritage. The recommended list of industrial historic buildings is formed through various methods, with a lengthy process from identification to approval, sometimes leading to demolition before heritage listing.

## 4. Focal Action Situations

### 4.1. *Resistance to Be Listed as Industrial Heritage: Demolition Before Heritage Inscription*

Established in 1944, the Guangzhou No. 1 Rubber Factory was relocated to Conghua District in 2010, leaving its original Haizhu District site under the Guangzhou LDC's management, where it remained unused. The Guangzhou LDC operates under the Guangzhou Municipal Land and Housing Authority. Its key responsibilities include drafting, submitting, and executing compensation and resettlement plans for demolitions within land banking areas. Additionally, the LDC manages the tendering, auctioning, and sale of profit-oriented land, as well as the allocation of non-profit-oriented land within the land banking system. In October 2013, the *New Express* published an investigative report on the factory's abandonment, emphasizing its conservation value. The report stemmed from a nomination by the NGO Henandi Cultural Association, attracting public attention and prompting media coverage.

Shortly after the publication, the LDC quickly informed the local authorities about the demolition of the northern part of the factory due to concerns that media attention would subject it to public scrutiny and inclusion in the heritage assessment (interview with journalist on March 4, 2016). Simultaneously, the journalist contacted the Planning Bureau, leading to a letter urging pre-protection of cultural heritage clues within the site. The Planning Bureau's directive included suspending the sale of the site. Although the demolition was halted upon receiving the moratorium, most historic buildings, including those with potential value, had already been destroyed, leaving only part of the framework (see Figure 3).

The LDC's urgency was driven by its annual land banking task, aiming to meet land sale targets. Property rights of No. 1 Rubber Factory were held by the LDC, essentially making them government property rights. LDC chose to sell the land to fulfill annual targets:

The property rights of the No. 1 Rubber Factory have already been given to the LDC, which is essentially the property rights of government departments. However, the LDC seemed reluctant to preserve them, viewing them as deteriorating buildings with limited value. Additionally, there is a mandate to sell the land. The LDC must sell the land to meet its annual land sale target. (interview on March 4, 2016)





**Figure 3.** No. 1 Rubber Factory (a) before demolition in 2012 and (b) after demolition in 2013.

Journalists' networking with local planning authorities played a crucial role. Timely media updates on potential industrial heritage helped planning authorities avoid administrative risks. The relationship between journalists and planning authorities was described as mutually beneficial, with journalists acting as informants, aiding the authorities in fulfilling their preservation duties.

The Jinlingtai event has prompted Guangzhou to establish a pre-protection system for historical buildings, while the case of No. 1 Rubber Factory further emphasized the urgency of accelerating its development. In November 2013, the Measures for the Protection of Historic Buildings and Historic Landscape Areas in Guangzhou were introduced. They allow anyone finding a building with conservation value to report it, triggering immediate pre-protection. Buildings passing the evaluation are safeguarded from damage or demolition during the 12-month pre-protection period. This has contributed to preventing the destruction of other historic buildings in similar circumstances. Additionally, the regulation stipulates that any losses incurred due to pre-protection measures must be compensated according to the law.

In response to the No. 1 Rubber Factory case and to mitigate similar risks faced by historical buildings, Guangzhou launched its first list of historic buildings in 2014. Seven industrial heritage sites were included, demonstrating a commitment to preserving its historical and cultural assets.

#### **4.2. Heritage Inscription Driven by the Demolition of Creative Industrial Parks**

Despite the success and attractiveness of many creative industrial parks developed on the land of former state-owned enterprises in Guangzhou, they often face demolition due to land banking. The controversial demolition of Redtory, once a successful case of adaptive reuse, serves as a prominent example. After the Guangdong Canning Factory relocated in 2008, its original site was included in the government's land banking plan and temporarily managed by the original company. In 2009, Jimei Group Interior Design Co., Ltd. and Guangdong Canning Factory signed a 10-year lease agreement. By attracting artists and revitalizing the space, the old factory was successfully transformed into the widely recognized Redtory, a prominent creative industrial park. However, since its land had been transferred to the LDC for land banking, the planned International Financial City in the area (see Figure 4) led to Redtory's demolition controversy starting in 2013. Meng Hao, a member of the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the National Political Consultative Conference, strongly opposed the demolition and even moved into Redtory to protest. In 2014, he established a gallery, co-founded by Zhang Hong, a member of the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and a professor at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine



**Figure 4.** Sites of heritage clue within the scope of the planned International Financial Centre. Source: Guangzhou Municipal Government (2014).

Arts. In January 2015, the Guangzhou Municipal LDC sent a letter to the operator of Redtory, requesting them to expedite the clearance of tenants and the handover of land on the site. As a result of widespread criticism from scholars and the media, the government was under pressure from the public and reassessed the industrial heritage at the site, later adjusting its plan for complete demolition to a proposal of partial preservation and partial redevelopment (see Figure 5). Despite protests and calls for preservation, part of Redtory still faced demolition (see Figure 6). This highlights how creative industrial parks in Guangzhou are often treated as temporary land resources, which can lead to conflicts with efforts to preserve industrial heritage.

A planner from the Guangzhou Planning Institute said:

Redtory was allowed to be used as a creative industrial park at the beginning when there was no pressure on local finances, but the land was found to be too valuable; the land banking started to work. But at that time, Redtory was already operating well and had become popular with the public, but perhaps some of the preliminary lease contracts were not written clearly, so when the LDC tried to acquire the land, they found a lot of resistance. (interview on November 25, 2021)

Another case called Guangzhou No. 2 Cotton Spinning Factory, transformed into a creative industrial park in 2012, also faced protests and conflicts with tenants when the owner sought to end the lease and redevelop the land into the International Financial Centre through land banking (see Figure 4). As the conflict between the landlord and the tenants escalated, the media reported about it and drew some attention from the public and professionals. In the factory, there was a former large textile workshop with jagged windows intact, published in the *Journal of Architecture* in 1963 and recommended by experts to be listed as historic building. After on-site research, experts concluded that it has a certain conservation value and expressed the need for in-depth research. The tenant hoped that the historic building status would help to ensure the tenancy, while



Figure 5. Plan of Redtory. Source: Guangzhou Municipal Government (2014).



Figure 6. The remaining part of Redtory in 2019.

the owner opposed heritage inscription, wishing to end the lease as soon as possible. In order to ease the conflict, the government adopted the vague expression “Guangzhou No. 2 Cotton Spinning Factory (part of the workshop)” when announcing the conservation list. The purpose of including the building in the industrial inscription without specifying its scope was to provide space for future planning negotiation (Long et al., 2017). The government’s vague approach reflects the delicate balance between stakeholders in this case.

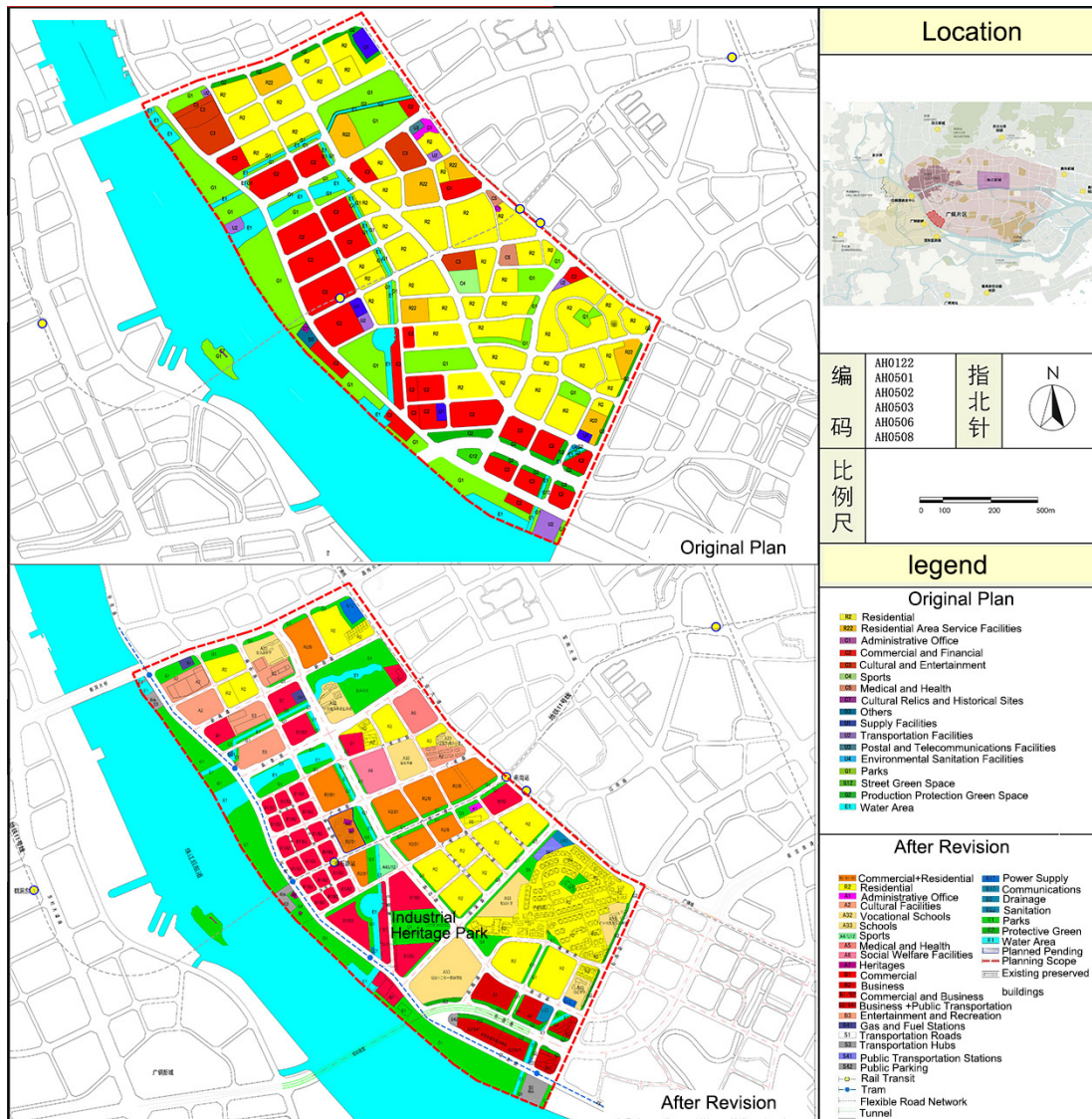
The demolition of creative industrial parks underscores their temporary nature. While controversial, it often sparks debates about industrial heritage protection. Yet, within the context of land banking and urban redevelopment, the development of creative industrial parks remains temporary and unstable.

### ***4.3. Compulsory Industrial Heritage Assessment in the Detailed Regulatory Planning***

Guangzhou, in its efforts to enhance the protection of industrial heritage within the context of land banking, has introduced the Wenping system. The primary goal is to prevent incidents like the No. 1 Rubber Factory demolition, integrating industrial heritage identification with land banking and urban regeneration planning. Guangzhou proposes incorporating requirements for industrial heritage assessment and conservation into land transfer management. This approach aims to address resistance and potential destruction during land transfer, making planning and design conditions for industrial heritage integral to overall land transfer processes.

An illustrative example is the Guangzhou Paper Factory. Following its relocation to Haizhu District in 2012, the original site was handed over to the LDC for land banking. The survey of the industrial heritage, initiated with the onset of land banking, ran parallel to the regeneration plan. The survey and planning teams collaborated closely to synchronize the construction of new buildings and conservation of industrial heritage in the planning scheme. To safeguard the highly valuable industrial heritage, adjustments were made to the original road network, preventing heritage destruction during later redevelopment. In addition to the initial four immovable cultural relics, the survey recommended recognizing nine more historic buildings and 11 traditional buildings. On September 25, 2014, the detailed regulatory plan for the area, along with the associated list of industrial heritage clues, received approval from the Planning Commission. In 2015, the revised detailed regulatory plan for the parcels was approved by the municipal government (see Figure 7). Industrial heritage was incorporated into the planning and design conditions of the 17 plots within the Guangzhou Paper Area as part of the regulatory plan.

While the Wenping system plays a crucial role in conserving unlisted industrial heritage, implementation challenges persist due to system imperfections, such as lax qualification requirements for preparation units and insufficient implementation of in-depth field research. The lack of qualification requirements, absence of independent regulatory mechanisms, and weak legal constraints pose significant hurdles. Planning and design institutes, often tied to project developers, primarily undertake cultural assessments, compromising independence (W. Yang & Wu, 2019). Unclear requirements contribute to simplified processes, and conflicts arise during plan adjustments, where Wenping clashes with redevelopment demands (He, 2022). The system, initially aimed at rescuing unlisted cultural heritage, has become essential for conserving unlisted industrial heritage—but improvements are needed for more effective implementation and conflict resolution.



**Figure 7.** Revised regulatory planning of the Guangzhou Paper Factory area. Source: Guangzhou Municipal Government (2016).

#### 4.4. Active Participation of NGOs in Informal Industrial Heritage Investigation

Due to the lack of effective channels for public participation and supervision, instances of “constructive destruction” of heritage have repeatedly occurred, especially in the context of land banking. This preservation challenge has, to a certain extent, eroded public trust in the government, leading to the emergence of civil society preservation actions. In Guangzhou, an increasing number of third-party organizations and NGOs, such as the Provincial Attractions (Shengcheng Fengwu) and the aforementioned Henandi Cultural Association, have directed their attention to the preservation of industrial heritage. These self-organized initiatives play a crucial role, especially after the historical significance of the Guangzhou No. 1 Rubber Factory, nominated and recommended by the Henandi Cultural Association, had left the group members shocked and deeply disappointed upon learning of its looting and demolition.



**Figure 8.** Chengzhitang Warehouse (a) before renovation and (b) after conversion into kindergarten. Source: Guangzhou Municipal Planning and Natural Resources Bureau (2023).

The Chengzhitang Warehouse in Haizhu District represents another industrial heritage site discovered by the Henandi Cultural Association. Built in the late Qing Dynasty and reconstructed during the Republican period, the warehouse was initially found in a state of disrepair in 2013 (see Figure 8a) by a heritage enthusiast and the Henandi Cultural Association. Subsequently, it was recognized as one of the industrial heritage sites of the Pearl River Back Channel through a declaration. In January 2014, the warehouse received designation as one of the first batches of historic buildings in Guangzhou. In 2014, Taikoo Xinlei Education Development Company leased the old warehouse and transformed it into Taikoo Xinlei Kindergarten (see Figure 8b). However, during the specific renovation and transformation process, the lack of legal support and regulations on planning, construction, and fire protection hindered the implementation of revitalization. Despite these challenges, the project was acknowledged as a pilot project and a good example of the conservation and utilization of historical buildings by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development in 2018.

The insufficient protection of industrial heritage by local authorities and the destruction of historic buildings by market developers consistently draw the attention of cultural conservationists and NGOs. These advocates often turn to experts and the media to voice their concerns, monitor developments in industrial heritage conservation, and exert pressure on policymakers. A journalist from the heritage census section of the *New Express* stated:

These volunteers provide us with clues. Usually, having been in this field for so long, you get to know certain individuals or NGOs, and they will provide some research they conducted or offer clues about which site is at risk. We then investigate; some information comes from individuals, some from NGOs. (interview on March 4, 2016)

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Action Logics: Resistance to Heritage Inscription by LDC and Former Owners, and Latest Trends

The regeneration of old factories on state-owned land in Guangzhou is predominantly achieved through land banking or self-regeneration. After regeneration, complete property rights allow independent property sale and mortgage. Government expropriation via land banking involves sharing land rent surplus with owners.

Self-regeneration by state-owned enterprises enables original owners to profit post-transfer to the government, occurring after the free transfer of at least 15% of the land and payment of a land premium. Since the Three Olds program, land banking for residential use has been popular and lucrative, often preferred over self-redevelopment into commercial or industrial use. Factories converted to residential housing are expropriated via land banking, with former state-owned enterprises receiving 60% of the land premium under the 2009 policy. Though this compensation was reduced to 40% in 2015, land banking remains a favorable option for former owners.

In the 1990s, the tax-sharing system led local governments to finance themselves through land banking for development. LDCs serve as the governments' land banks, acquiring funds for urban infrastructure and industrial park development. The hosting of the Asian Games elevated Guangzhou's international profile but burdened the city with significant debt, increasing dependence on land banking for revenue. The LDC formulates annual land transfer plans to control prices, facing difficulties and pressure in land acquisition, highlighting the conflict between cultural heritage conservation and land banking.

The LDC's swift decision to demolish the No.1 Rubber Factory post-media coverage was driven by the fear that heritage designation would impede development and land banking. To avoid a financial loss, the state opted to demolish the factory for land sale as soon as possible. The head of the Guangzhou Planning and Research Centre stated: "In the past, many of these very valuable appellations were reluctant to be listed as heritage areas because declaring them would have meant restricting their operation, conversion, trading, restoration, and use" (Lv, 2019).

Adding insight from interviews, a planner from the Guangzhou Urban Planning and Research Centre mentioned:

We worked on a project from the Guangzhou Shipyard, a factory rapidly demolished by its owners during land banking. The warehouse was valuable due to its military industry origins. In fact, many of the buildings were of quite good quality. Unfortunately, it was the manufacturers themselves who abandoned and demolished them. (interview on November 6, 2019)

Moreover, resistance to becoming listed heritage from the property owner has been also noted by the media. For example, a journalist highlighted:

I have interviewed many owners of historic buildings, and many of them were unwilling to have their properties protected. They told me privately but would not approach the newspaper to report about their properties as historic buildings, and they also do not want them to be inscribed as historic buildings because, in this case, they cannot be demolished. Mostly they bought the properties just to demolish and rebuild. (interview on March 4, 2016)

The contraction of the real estate market since 2021 has reduced the demand for new construction, creating opportunities to focus on the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sites. The slowdown in land banking has shifted actors' behavior and priorities regarding industrial heritage inscription and preservation. Local governments' reduced reliance on land sales revenue now allows prioritization of long-term cultural and historical value over short-term economic gains, leading to more balanced urban planning and integrated industrial heritage preservation.

Land banking has proven to be a crucial strategy for revitalizing declining urban areas, particularly in older industrial cities (Silva, 2011). However, this approach can threaten industrial heritage preservation, as economic development pressures lead to the destruction of valuable former industrial sites (Q. Yuan, 2016; H. Zhang et al., 2023). Property owners' reluctance to designate sites as heritage areas exacerbates this issue, favoring financial gains from redevelopment over preservation (He, 2018). Balancing the economic benefits of land banking with the need to preserve industrial heritage is crucial for maintaining the cultural and historical fabric of cities amid urbanization. Adaptive reuse, which repurposes old industrial buildings to generate economic benefits while preserving their historical features, offers a viable and essential solution (Niu et al., 2018). In recent years, as the industrial heritage system in China has gained support and become more refined, resistance from LDCs and factory owners has eased, leading to increased recognition of the value of industrial heritage and support for preservation efforts.

### **5.2. Interaction Pattern: Bottom-Up Investigation Based on Social Network**

In the No. 1 Rubber Factory case, the *New Express* newspaper actively engaged in heritage surveys, prompting conservation actions and mobilizing various stakeholders. Since July 2012, its *Guangzhou Historical Building Survey—Civil Edition* encouraged public and NGO nominations, resulting in 119 nominations out of 721 historic buildings in Guangzhou and influencing government support (He, 2018). These recommendations were submitted to government survey teams, and among the first and second batches of 478 historical buildings, 95 were nominated by the *New Express*.

The demolition of the No. 1 Rubber Factory followed media coverage within this civic survey framework, illustrating direct media involvement in heritage preservation. In January 2014, the *New Express* published an investigative report revealing the demolition of many old factories, including eight sites listed in the *Third National Cultural Relics Census*. This report prompted the planning department to investigate and review all Three Olds redevelopment sites, placing those identified by experts under preliminary protection.

Other outlets like *Guangzhou Daily* and *Nanfang Daily* adopted similar initiatives, expanding public engagement. *Nanfang Daily* and the Provincial Bureau of Cultural Heritage launched an online platform, People's Direct Voice for Guangdong Cultural Preservation, collecting public clues about endangered unlisted heritage. A total of 134 sites in the first and second batches of historical buildings were recommended by news media. However, media professionals often face pressure from stakeholders when reporting on heritage issues.

Linking this with the first case, the journalist from *New Express* highlighted their early attention to industrial heritage, initiating an informal census in 2012 with citizen-nominated potential heritage sites. Collaborating with an NGO, they addressed the disappearance of old factories, emphasizing preservation. Urgency arose with Guangzhou's Tui Er Jin San announcement, prompting a citywide survey of industrial heritage. Their efforts prompted the government to increase listed industrial heritages and initiate evaluations and investigations during the Three Olds regeneration. This proactive stance by the media, predating incidents like Jinlingtai, showcases their pivotal role in shaping heritage preservation agendas and spurring governmental action.

The cases of Guangzhou show how media and NGO involvement can prompt governmental action and policy shifts, aligning with global discourses on participatory governance and community-driven conservation



(Gibson & Pendlebury, 2009; Kalman, 2014). It underscores how bottom-up initiatives can complement top-down approaches, creating a more inclusive and effective governance framework for heritage management, and ensuring the sustainability and resilience of cultural clusters.

### **5.3. Challenges of Rules in Use: Operational Inefficiencies**

The implementation of heritage preservation faces challenges due to fragmented responsibilities and unclear position rules. Research on heritage management has shown that such fragmentation often leads to operational inefficiencies and undermines effective conservation efforts (Pendlebury, 2009). Administrative departments like cultural heritage authorities oversee immovable cultural relics, while planning departments handle the census, declaration, and management of historic buildings, leading to inefficiencies and redundant surveys. The compartmentalized management fosters a tendency to evade responsibilities during the declaration and identification process, leading to operational inefficiencies in assessing heritage status. Simultaneously, the district head may prioritize heritage preservation, but the subordinate department may not share the same priorities. Fragmented responsibilities between administrative departments and planning authorities also lead to inefficiencies and conflicts in heritage preservation efforts. Clear delineation of responsibilities and transparent decision-making processes can mitigate conflicts and enhance heritage conservation stability.

Furthermore, ambiguous roles between planning authorities and street offices further hamper collaboration in urban heritage preservation. Historic buildings managed by street offices often face neglect due to hesitancy in oversight, while the Planning Bureau cannot intervene effectively due to their equal status. This linked mechanism complicates responsibilities, making it easy for issues to go unnoticed. A journalist noted: “The Planning Bureau’s responsibility for planning management and the district’s role in site protection often clash. Timely notifications lead to action by the Planning Bureau, but districts resist being reported as they bear primary responsibility” (interview on March 4, 2016). Clear responsibilities and transparent decision-making processes can mitigate conflicts and enhance heritage conservation stability. This issue resonates with broader debates in heritage management literature, which emphasize the need for integrated governance frameworks to overcome institutional silos and enhance collaborative efforts (Smith, 2006).

Preservation challenges extend to industrial heritage not officially inscribed. The Guangzhou Urban Planning and Research Centre faces difficulties in protecting surveyed industrial heritage lacking legal status. A staff member involved in the research project at the Guangzhou Urban Planning and Research Centre, which has been working on surveying and registering industrial heritage since 2010, stated: “These heritages, though surveyed and included in the database of potential industrial heritage, are excluded from the historic city protection system. Colleagues provide advice on planning, but without legal backing, ensuring their preservation remains challenging” (interview on November 6, 2019). This challenge is reflective of broader issues in heritage conservation where legal and policy frameworks often lag behind the needs of heritage sites, particularly those associated with industrial and modern heritage (Gibson & Pendlebury, 2009). By integrating industrial heritage into planning and design conditions, future efforts can enhance legal support and improve preservation outcomes, contributing to more sustainable and inclusive urban development.

#### 5.4. Outcomes of Nested Action Situation: Conflict-Driven Institutional Innovation

Between 2012 and 2016, interconnected case studies formed a complex network of focal action situations in Guangzhou. The controversial demolitions of Jinlingtai and Miaogaotai in 2013 marked a turning point, prompting official attention to unlisted heritage preservation and accelerating the cultural heritage plan. The demolition of the No. 1 Rubber Factory further highlighted the need for a better pre-preservation system, leading to the issuance of the Measures for the Protection of Historic Buildings and Historic Landscape Areas in Guangzhou to prevent similar destruction.

The No. 1 Rubber Factory case also sparked institutional innovation with the Wenping system, influencing subsequent cases like the Guangzhou Paper Factory, where heritage surveys were included early in the land banking process. The Redtory case stirred public debate on balancing heritage preservation with land redevelopment, revealing the instability of adaptive reuse and highlighting the need for more supportive policies. The Redtory and No. 2 Cotton Spinning Factory cases underscored the necessity for stable policies to support adaptive reuse, ensuring the long-term sustainability of cultural clusters.

In response, Guangzhou implemented several institutional designs, including the 2016 Regulations on the Protection of the Historical and Cultural City of Guangzhou, encouraging diverse uses based on historic building characteristics. The Chengzhitang Warehouse case exemplified the need for better regulations, prompting policymakers' attention. Further support for adaptive reuse came in 2018 when Guangzhou was included in the first batch of 10 pilot cities in China for the conservation and utilization of historic buildings. Subsequent regulations, such as the 2019 Measures on Supervision, Management, and Subsidy for the Renovation of Historic Buildings, and the 2020 Measures on Promoting Rational Utilization of Historic Buildings, strengthened legal frameworks. In 2022, the Guangzhou Municipal Bureau of Industry and Information Technology issued the Measures for the Management of Guangzhou's Industrial Heritage, the first city-level regulatory document on industrial heritage in Guangdong Province. These policies collectively facilitate the legal adaptive use of industrial heritage.

The case studies from Guangzhou highlight the complexities of preserving industrial heritage in rapidly urbanizing contexts. This aligns with broader heritage governance literature, emphasizing adaptive policies and multi-stakeholder engagement for sustainable heritage sites (Kalman, 2014; Smith, 2006). Meanwhile, they also underscore the need for longitudinal research to assess the long-term impacts of policy innovations and stakeholder interactions, enhancing understanding of effective and sustainable heritage conservation measures over time, and contributing to ongoing debates on best practices in industrial heritage preservation.

## 6. Conclusions

The pivotal role of media and NGOs in shaping heritage agendas and influencing government actions highlights the importance of civil society in heritage conservation—an area requiring more attention in existing research. The introduction of a pre-protection system for historic buildings in Guangzhou is a novel contribution, allowing for immediate temporary protection of buildings with potential heritage value, thus preventing hasty demolitions and ensuring comprehensive heritage assessments. Additionally, the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage, despite its temporary nature, can influence heritage preservation debates, underscoring the need for mature policies to support stable and sustainable adaptive reuse practices.

By analyzing interconnected action situations, this research contributes to ongoing debates in industrial heritage conservation by revealing how conflicts and controversies can drive institutional innovation and policy reform, and demonstrating the dynamic and iterative nature of policy development in heritage preservation and land banking. Driven by conflicts in the practice of industrial heritage inscription and preservation, Guangzhou has made considerable strides in heritage conservation and adaptive reuse. Governance efforts matured significantly since 2013, with advancements in policy, industrial heritage investigations, and increased systematic industrial heritage inscription. Clear and enforceable policies, thorough early heritage assessments, and stakeholder collaboration are identified as crucial for successful heritage conservation. These elements ensure a more predictable and stable environment for heritage conservation, help identify and protect valuable heritage sites before redevelopment pressures arise, and integrate heritage preservation into broader urban development plans.

In the early stages, when the industrial heritage preservation system was underdeveloped, there was a rush to demolish industrial heritage during land banking due to immature pre-protection policies. To strengthen industrial heritage protection, Guangzhou implemented the Wenping system to avoid incidents like the demolition of the No. 1 Rubber Factory. Despite its positive intent, practical issues such as lax qualification requirements for preparation units, preliminary assessments, and limited in-depth field research persist. Additionally, Wenping often curtails developable land, affecting development project intensity and leading to conflicts with redevelopment demands.

By examining the specific challenges faced in Guangzhou, this study provided reflections that illustrate the broader issues of institutional fragmentation and regulatory ambiguities that are common in many parts of the world. It highlights the importance of clear and transparent decision-making processes, essential for mitigating conflicts and ensuring the stability of heritage conservation efforts.

In conclusion, empirical studies guided by the IAD framework highlight the importance of a multifaceted approach to industrial heritage preservation, involving clear policies, stakeholder collaboration, financial incentives, and public engagement, crucial for creating a sustainable and resilient framework for long-term preservation and adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sites. Furthermore, identification and analysis of resistance from LDCs and former factory owners against heritage inscription due to potential financial losses are critical for understanding the challenges in heritage preservation. Further investigating conflicts in industrial heritage inscription during land banking and more longitudinal studies on respective regulations and specific projects would help to enhance ongoing advancements in conservation and governance for adaptive reuse.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

## Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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