

# Urban Planning and Construction of Guangzhou during the Republic of China Period

Zichen Li<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

<sup>a</sup>375992526@qq.com

\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** During the Republic of China period, Guangzhou was in the process of urbanization and faced various problems and challenges; In order to achieve modernization and standardized construction of the city, Guangzhou has begun a new stage of urban planning and construction. This article analyzes and studies the historical background and main characteristics of urban planning and construction in Guangzhou during the Republic of China period, explores its impact on the urban development of Guangzhou, and puts forward suggestions for future urban planning and construction. Research has found that from 1920 to 1940, under the guidance and influence of municipal regulations during the Republic of China period, Guangzhou formed a vibrant, orderly, and distinctive urban space. Compared to other open cities in China, the modernization process of Guangzhou has shown characteristics of radical and rapid development, becoming a charming city and playing a demonstration role in subsequent urban construction. From a historical perspective, a comprehensive urban planning regulatory system has been formulated based on urban characteristics, and its institutional design has achieved representative results in both local and stage.

**Keywords:** The Republic of China Era, Guangzhou City, City Planning, Urban Construction, Economic Development

## 1. Introduction

Guangzhou is one of the important cities in southern China, with a long and diverse history of urban planning and construction. During the Republic of China period, Guangzhou entered a new stage of urban planning and construction, which had a significant impact on its future development. During this period, the development of Guangzhou was influenced by multiple factors, including foreign capital, traditional feudal ideology, emerging bureaucratic capitalism, and national capitalism. These factors are intertwined to form a unique Urban morphology, making Guangzhou a city with its own characteristics and system. Huang Sujuan mentioned that after the Xinhai Revolution, the Guangdong military government won the legitimacy of inheriting public land through regime change. They also enacted laws to regulate official and private land rights, further distinguishing the ownership of land ownership. These measures have brought new opportunities for rights protection and development for farmers and landowners in Guangdong. Modern governments and people have reestablished contractual relationships in land affairs, and at the same time, the urban land property management system has begun to take shape. This means that the government and people have redefined their rights and responsibilities in land use, development, and ownership [1]. Zou Dong mentioned in his research on urban construction in Guangzhou that during the Republic of China period, Guangzhou experienced a rapid and radical modernization process compared to other open cities in China, and became an example for other cities to follow [2]. For example, Fang Xunye mentioned that the urban construction of Xi'an during the same period went through a process of gradual development from disorder to order. The function of the city clock tower also gradually changed with the transformation of the city, transforming from a military stronghold and security center in the past to a commercial center and public space in modern cities. In addition, the Guangzhou Municipal Government has become too idealistic in urban planning, detached from political reality. However, from a historical perspective, Guangzhou has also achieved some partial and phased achievements in the design of urban management systems [3]. Therefore, the process of urban construction in Guangzhou has a strong reference value.

With the abolition of the government offices that symbolized feudal hierarchy, the old city structure

of Guangzhou was completely changed. To this end, the Guangzhou Municipal Government removed the city walls around the city and built new roads, allowing the spatial combination of Guangzhou city to be completely reshaped. Koster M believes that in a rapidly urbanizing world, urban planning, including the interventions it generates, has been studied from different perspectives as a field of intervention in urban space and residents' lives [4]. After the Xinhai Revolution, industry became an independent industry category and made significant contributions to the development of the transportation industry. In addition, Guangzhou established an urban planning management agency and learned and introduced European and American urban planning theories, greatly improving the level of urban construction. This also laid a solid urban foundation for Guangzhou during the Republic of China period and promoted a qualitative leap in the form of the city. Through studying this article, people have gained a deep understanding of the urban planning and construction of Guangzhou during the Republic of China period, providing reference and reference for future urban planning and construction.

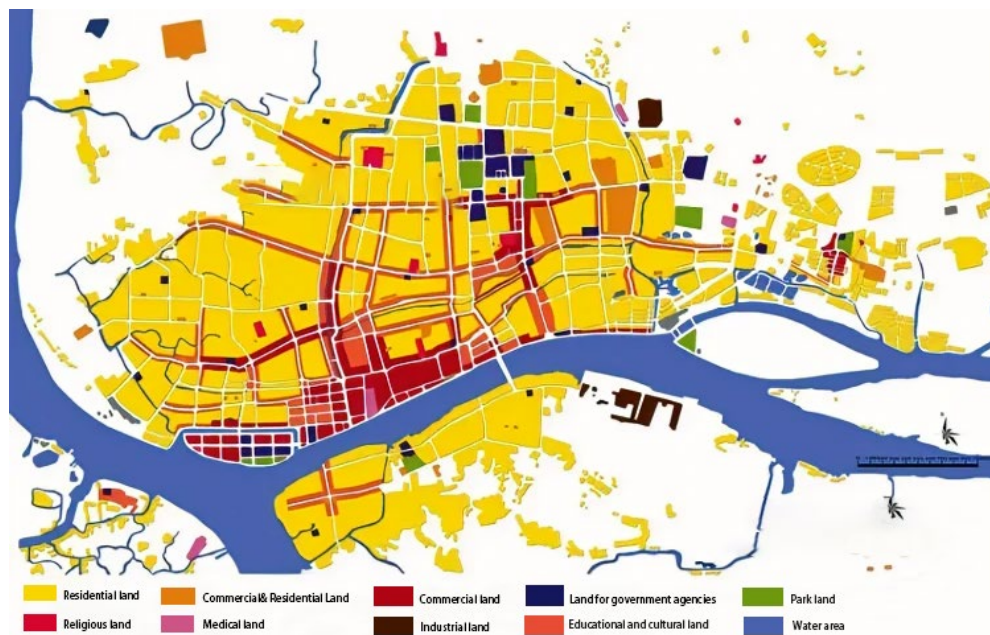
## **2. Interpretation: A Hundred Wastes Awaiting Revitalization, the Sprouting of Urban Construction in Guangzhou during the Republic of China Period**

In 1920, the Guangzhou Municipal Government was officially established, and urban planning and construction began to receive more systematic planning. In 1928, the Guangzhou Municipal Government obtained primary autonomy, providing an opportunity to further improve the level of urban planning and construction. The Guangzhou Municipal Government has issued a series of legal documents, including the "Construction Plan of Guangzhou City", the "Temporary Widening Street Rules" and its amended regulations, the "Implementation Plan of Guangzhou Public Works", and the "Guangzhou Municipal Government Governance Plan", comprehensively planning and discussing various aspects such as the renovation of old urban areas and the construction of urban public facilities. During this period, Guangzhou also introduced the first formal urban planning document in history, the "Draft Outline of Guangzhou Urban Design". At the same time, Guangzhou introduced Western planning and construction theories, established a new type of municipal management organization, and began to implement planned and guided orderly growth. She X believes that the regionality and uniqueness of a city are not only reflected in its external image, but also more influenced by factors such as large population, differences in urban and rural economic development, and the implementation of local government planning and construction policies [5]. In this context, the changes in urban space in Guangzhou during the Republic of China period were significant. The government continuously strengthens the urban infrastructure through planning and construction, and the city's strength gradually increases. Especially in the fields of industry and transportation, the Guangzhou government attaches great importance to it and has vigorously developed it. Urban construction is at the forefront of the country and is known as the "Model Guangzhou City". Bian, Lanchun L believes that the new urbanization path aims to achieve high-quality development and construction of cities, and also puts forward new requirements. Although there are shortcomings in urban planning, urban construction, and social governance, they also clearly demonstrate corresponding norms and guidance, indicating that construction has entered a stage of further improvement [6].

## **3. Characteristics of Urban Planning and Construction in Guangzhou during the Republic of China Period**

After the establishment of the Guangzhou Municipal Government in 1920, with the introduction of Western urban planning and construction concepts during the Republic of China period and the strong promotion of the Guangzhou Municipal Government, the urban economic development accelerated and drove the development of various industries, including transportation and industry. During the planning process, the Guangzhou Municipal Government mainly divided the urban zoning into four functional areas, namely residential, industrial, commercial, and mixed urban areas, based on the living needs of citizens and the economic development needs of the city within the scope of Guangzhou. Among them, industrial parks are located near the the Pearl River and some river shorelines, commercial parks are located in the old urban areas and some newly planned areas, and residential areas are located in the southwest, south and northeast of the urban area. At the same time, there are also some mixed areas that combine various functions such as industrial, commercial, and residential, such as the Guangzhou New City area and Zhongshan Road area. The division of these urban zones is to adapt to the development of urban economy and the needs of citizens' lives.

In terms of transportation, public transportation is the main means of transportation in Guangzhou, including buses, subways, ferries, etc., providing convenience for citizens' travel. In addition, Guangzhou also has multiple expressways, expressways, and main roads that connect the urban area and surrounding cities, facilitating regional exchanges and economic activities, as shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. Urban Planning and Distribution of Guangzhou during the Republic of China Period*

With the significant increase in urban population, the government of Guangzhou during the Republic of China period carried out new planning and construction for residential areas. In the planning and construction, Guangzhou mainly focused on the planning and construction of new areas, including two types: the first is the high-end residential new area with Western modern style. In order to adapt to the increase in urban population and the requirements of urban modernization, the Guangzhou government has introduced a new urban planning plan, redesigned the new area, and constructed high-end residential areas. For example, high-end residential communities and worker residential areas have been built in Huangpu New Area; The construction of these high-end residential buildings marked the modernization of Guangzhou at that time and provided new impetus for its economic development. The second is the workers' residential areas. While the urban economy is developing, the working class in Guangzhou is also rapidly developing, which makes the construction of workers' residential areas very important. The government has built many worker residential areas in the new area, providing high-quality housing environment for the workers. For example, in surrounding areas such as Zengcheng, the government has built a large number of apartment houses suitable for workers to live in, and the construction of these residential areas has effectively solved the problem of workers' housing.

While constructing the new area, the old urban area is retained as a mixed zone, mainly for historical and practical considerations. The old urban area has a long history of architecture, and the urban planning and management methods are also different from modern cities, making it difficult to carry out comprehensive functional zoning. In addition, the historical heritage and features of residences, shops, cultural sites, and other places in the old urban area have deeply ingrained in people's hearts, and cannot be simply changed and rebuilt based on the ideas of modern urban planning. Therefore, in the early stage of urban planning work, government departments mainly adopted policies to protect historical heritage. The old urban areas remained basically in their original state, while in the newly built areas, more attention was paid to rational planning according to functions. At the same time, in order to protect the unique historical culture and urban landscape of the old urban area, government departments have gradually introduced various protection policies and measures, such as cultural relics protection, old city renovation, etc., so that the old urban area can continue to develop and improve while preserving its historical context, so it is basically preserved in its original state.

Due to the absorption of Western urban planning concepts and full consideration of current urban planning and construction land standards, Guangzhou city has problems such as land use control

threshold gap, lack of regional differences in climate correction, and failure to consider terrain factors. The Guangzhou municipal government has proposed a step-by-step process framework for establishing and revising standards to address these issues; By setting conditions, a universal basic standard for construction land has been established [7-8]. The most representative among them is the Huangpu New Area, which drew on advanced European urban planning concepts, including circular squares, straight streets, dense parks, etc., becoming a representative of Chinese urban planning at that time, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Old photos of streets in Huangpu New Area, Guangzhou during the Republic of China period

In addition, in the urban planning of Guangzhou during the Republic of China period, in order to meet the needs of urban growth and modernization, the Guangzhou government increased investment in infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and water conservancy facilities [9-10].

(1) Road construction: During the Republic of China period, the main roads in Guangzhou began to be constructed on a large scale. During this period, roads such as Wusongtong Road, Xiangxi Road, and Zhongshan 6th Road from Guangzhou Railway Station to Shangxiajiu Road were opened one by one. At the same time, many branch streets and alleys were also constructed, such as those in areas such as Lizhiwan and Chenjiaci, which developed into bustling commercial blocks due to the expansion during this period.

Bridge construction: In order to improve traffic conditions, Guangzhou has expanded many new bridges. For example, the the Pearl River Bridge from Guangzhou South Railway Station to Guangzhou Tower has changed the pattern of north-south traffic in Guangzhou after its completion. (2) In addition, many rivers and ponds in Guangzhou during the Republic of China period also began to be renovated and renovated, becoming many beautiful landscapes.

(3) Construction of water conservancy facilities: During the Republic of China period, water conservancy facilities in Guangzhou were considered one of the key points of urban planning, and many large-scale drainage and water supply projects were also constructed. Among them, the more prominent ones are the Zengcheng Water Supply Project and the Nansha River Flood Discharge Project within Guangzhou City.

Compared with other cities in China that were opened earlier (such as Tianjin, Shanghai, Qingdao, Wuhan, Dalian, etc.), Guangzhou has made relatively radical improvements in urban construction and infrastructure construction. At the same time, the Guangzhou Municipal Government accepted and absorbed Western construction planning ideas during the Republic of China period, laying the foundation for the modernization process of the city [11-12], as shown in Figure 3.

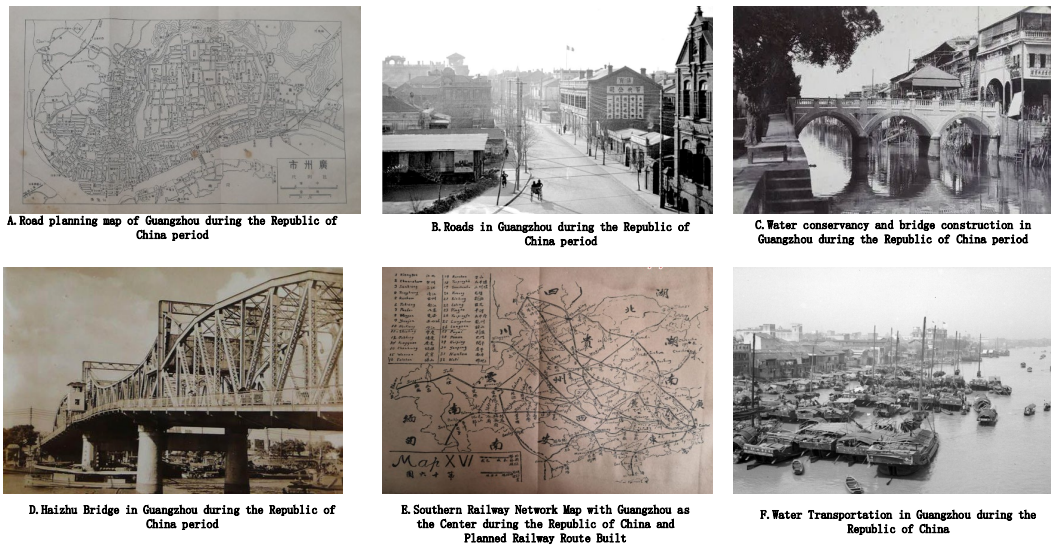


Figure 3. Planning and Realistic Map of Road, Bridge, and Water Conservancy Facilities Construction during the Republic of China Period

### 3. The Impact of Urban Planning and Construction on Urban Development in Guangzhou during the Republic of China Period

In the 1940s, Guangzhou underwent a historic transformation, and urban planning and construction entered a peak period. The appearance of the city has been significantly improved. In response to the requirements of urban modernization, the Guangzhou government has increased its efforts in urban planning and construction, constructing many new streets, buildings, and public facilities; The urban layout of Guangzhou has been adjusted and upgraded, making the entire city more modern, standardized, and convenient.

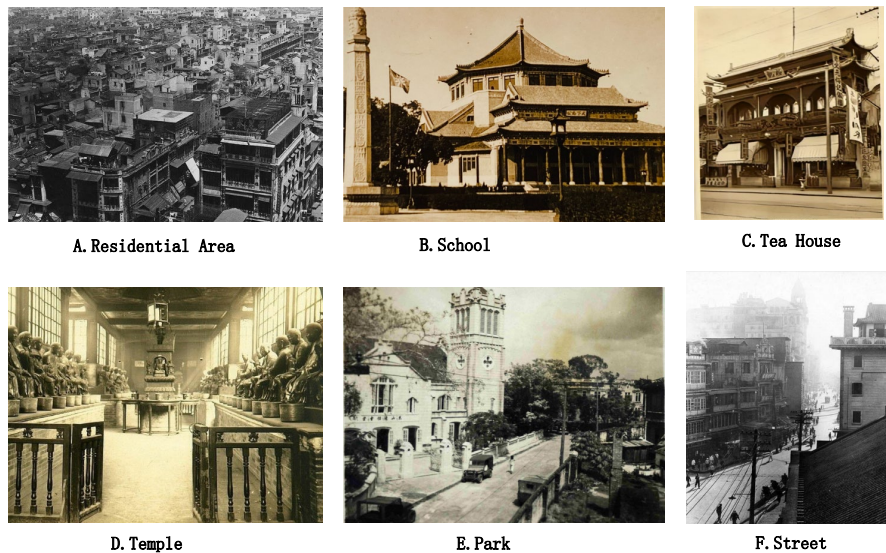


Figure 4. Realistic Map of Urban Construction in Guangzhou during the Republic of China Period

During the Republic of China period, with strong government investment, Guangzhou's urban transportation system was comprehensively improved, making it easier for citizens to travel [13-14]. To facilitate the daily life of citizens, the Guangzhou government has strengthened the construction of public facilities, expanded cultural venues such as music, art, and opera, as well as facilities such as health and medical institutions, schools, and parks, which have comprehensively improved the living conditions of Guangzhou citizens. While building a new type of city, the government has also focused on cultural construction, and the cultural atmosphere of the city has been improved. Especially, the new venues invested by the government, such as museums and cultural activity squares, such as the

Guangdong Provincial Museum and Guangzhou Art Institute at that time, have expanded the cultural influence of Guangzhou [15-16]. The Guangzhou government has retained many relevant images during the construction of urban cultural venues, as shown in Figure 4. Overall, the investment and reform in urban planning and construction during the Republic of China period in Guangzhou enabled comprehensive development, laying the foundation for the rapid socio-economic development of Guangzhou, and also laying an important foundation for the economic rise of Guangdong Province and South China region [17-18].

#### 4. Conclusions

In the historical process of large-scale municipal construction in Guangzhou, the Republic of China period was a very important period. During this period, successive governments in Guangzhou actively studied and absorbed advanced construction planning ideas from the West, providing theoretical basis and practical experience for urban planning and construction; Gradually putting urban planning and construction on a modern track, building modern infrastructure is one of the primary tasks of urban planning and construction, including the construction of roads, railways, canals, etc. [19-20]. In urban planning and construction, it is important to pay attention to the construction of residential areas and provide citizens with a more comfortable and convenient living environment; At the same time, the development of commercial centers is also one of the important directions for urban economic development. It is necessary to focus on learning modern commercial and service industry operation models, while also complying with local historical culture, traditional public buildings, and urban landscapes. The planning and construction of Guangzhou during the Republic of China period provided valuable experience for the development of modern cities. The experience of urban planning and construction in Guangzhou during the Republic of China period has great reference significance for future urban planning and construction, especially in terms of infrastructure construction, commercial center development, cultural and historical protection. Although it has lasted for a long time, it still has high practical significance. These experiences and lessons can provide reference for future urban planning and construction, and it is also necessary to explore and formulate urban planning and construction plans suitable for the future development of Guangzhou based on the current social, economic, and environmental characteristics.

#### References

- [1] Huang Sujuan. *The Construction of State Power and the Changes of Urban Land Property Rights in Guangzhou during the Republic of China (1911-1935) society*. 2018, 38(2):20-20.
- [2] Zou Dong. *On the Urban Planning and Construction of Guangzhou during the Republic of China Planner*. 2017, 33(1):142-146.
- [3] Fang Xunye. *The Bell Tower and the Urban Construction of Xi'an during the Republic of China Journal of liberal arts college: Social Sciences Edition*. 2020, 23(2):55-60.
- [4] Koster M. *An ethnographic perspective on urban planning in Brazil: Temporality, diversity and critical urban theory. International journal of urban and regional research*, 2020, 44(2): 185-199.
- [5] She X, Li C. *A Close Look at the Urban Planning and Development in Asia—A Review on Asian Cities: Planning and Development. China City Planning Review*, 2019, 28(01):78-80.
- [6] Bian Lanchun. *A Review on the Innovation of Urban Regeneration Institutions in China: Experience from Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Shanghai. China City Planning Review*, 2020, v. 29(01):88-89.
- [7] Niu X, Zhao N, Fan N. *Urban planning construction land standard and its revision based on climate and topography in China. Journal of Geography: English Edition*. 2021, 31(4):18-18.
- [8] Yang Yuzhen. *Crisis Response: A Third Perspective on Understanding China's Urbanization and Planning. International Urban Planning*. 2019, 34(4):79-85.
- [9] Li J, Wang M. *How Modern Financial Support Drives Innovative Urban Planning and Construction: Grey Relation Analysis. Open House International*, 2018, 43(1):118-123.
- [10] Wang Dong, Tang Xiaoxiang, Guo Huanyu. *Current Status and Reflection on the Study of Aesthetic Culture in Traditional Villages of Guangzhou Prefecture during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Journal of South China University of Technology (Social Science Edition)*. 2018, 20(2):91-96.
- [11] Tao Wei, Lin Kefeng, Gu Hengyu, et al. *The spatiotemporal evolution of the spatial form of Shawan Ancient Town in Guangzhou from a syntactic perspective Tropical Geography*. 2020,

40(6):970-980.

[12] Chen Yueyuan, Long Tenggao. *The World is 'Public ': County level Public Property Management System and Property Rights Changes during the Republic of China Period* *Social magazines*. 2023, 43(2):96-122.

[13] Zhang Pei, Xu Jianping. *Road network transformation in the transformation of modern traditional Urban morphology—Taking Ningbo city as an example*. *Historical Geography Research*. 2023, 42(4):32-49.

[14] Yang Xi. *Progress in quantitative research methods for the layout and morphology of rural settlements both domestically and internationally in the past 20 years*. *International Urban Planning*. 2020, 35(4):72-80.

[15] Li Qiang, Zhang Jing. *Rationality and Western Urban Planning Theory*. *Research on Urban Development*. 2019, 26(4):17-24.

[16] Zhou Yuxuan, Li Xun, Shen Long. *A Study on the Evolution Mechanism of Urban Spatial Structure from the Perspective of Capital Cycle: Taking Haizhu District as an Example*. *Human geography*. 2018, 33(4):68-75.

[17] Shen Zitong, Sun Wu, Sun Liang, etc. *The types, spatial distribution, and influencing factors of architectural combinations in the main urban area of Guangzhou*. *Tropical Geography*. 2021, 41(3):540-553.

[18] Sun Wu, Ouyang Ruikang, Chen Xiang, et al. *The Structure and Evolution of Building Heights in the Main Urban Area of Guangzhou from 1835 to 2017*. *Geographic Science*. 2021, 41(3):454-462.

[19] Lin Yuchen, Luo Tao, Zhang Xuwei. *Traditional Renewal and Modern Transformation: Aesthetic Exploration and Enlightenment of the Evolution of Urban Planning Thought in China*. *Journal of Beijing Forestry University (Social Sciences Edition)*. 2021, 20(3):24-31.

[20] Sun Shiwen. *Analysis of Urban Planning in China: Planning Paradigm and Urban Planning Development in China*. *International Urban Planning*. 2019, 34(4):1-7.