

Article

Governance Strategies for Informal Settlements in China: The Case of Guangzhou

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Abstract: Informal settlements in developing countries have attracted widespread attention, and existing research is mainly concerned with the causes and evolution of informal settlements. However, few studies have focused on investigating the spatial governance strategies of informal settlements in order to understand the evolution of informal settlements in the context of institutional arrangements. The aim of this research is to develop a framework for the spatial governance of informal settlements to explain their causes. The research finds that informal settlements in China are influenced by an urban–rural dual land system in which the collective land ownership system means that villagers are ambiguous in their approach to land development. During rapid urbanization, villagers have adopted diverse land development strategies based on land rent incentives to attract capital investment and earn profits, which has led to the rapid spread of informal settlements.

Keywords: informal settlements; Guangzhou; governance



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1. Introduction

The dramatic economic, political, and social changes that have occurred in China since the reform and opening up have fundamentally altered the power structure and mechanism of action of urban development [1]. Additionally, with a strong influence on the process of urban spatial evolution, China is currently undergoing the world's largest and most complex urban transformation, which has garnered considerable attention from international academic circles. According to studies, decentralization, marketization, and globalization have resulted in significant changes in the political, economic, and social spheres, and the system as a carrier of space is also undergoing dramatic transformation and restructuring. Strong governments are involved in market management. Housing inequality in urban China is strongly affected by state policies that give preferential treatment to insiders [2]. Social and economic development and changes have had a profound “social” impact. As Castell argues, space is an expression of society, and its forms and processes are shaped by the dynamic evolution of the overall social structure. Informal settlements are an important feature of urban informality, and with the rapid development and urbanization of the country, Chinese cities are emerging in multiple dimensions, creating new formal and informal spaces to accommodate the rapid urbanization of the country and create the splendor of Chinese urbanization [3,4]. With the rapid expansion of China's urban centers, new urban entities are emerging as a result of large-scale global and domestic capital shifts to the built environment, with a large number of informal settlements that form informal spaces embedded in the urban built environment. Due to the background of imperfect urban planning and management laws and regulations in the past, the management of informal settlements has been poorly promoted and less effective. Informal settlements are exposed nakedly in the urban landscape, and it is difficult to explain informal settlements

in terms of general illegal activities, in the sense that the problem of informal settlements is one of division of power and limitation of power [5]. From the point of view of upper management, some “irregular” settlements are illegal in some way, but the users of informal settlements have some legal rights to live in them, and they are also restricted by civil rules and informal transfer contracts [6].

The current mainstream planning research has overemphasized the focus on global cities while ignoring the pressing urban problems of developing countries. As Peter Hall argues in *Urban Future 21: A Global Agenda for 21st Century Cities*, bankrupt farmers in developing countries have led to “informal hyper-growth” [7]. The informal hyper-growth is the result of the “informal hyper-growth” [6]. There is a large amount of international research on informal settlements, which focuses on three aspects: (1) discussion of the policies and methods for dealing with informal housing [8–13]; (2) research on the causes, processes, and mechanisms of informal settlement formation, including the microscopic formation mechanisms of urban informal spaces such as slums and informal settlements and their logic of action [14–18]; (3) the exploration of the spatial characteristics, and the social values, of slums and informal housing [19]; and (4) a discussion of the spatial characteristics, and social values, of slums and informal housing [20]. These studies mainly focus on the discussion of policy approaches for dealing with informal housing, the exploration of formation mechanisms and action logic, basic spatial characteristics and social values [21–25], and suggestions for governance countermeasures [26,27]. One of the major topics to be investigated in this field is land use planning and its orderly issues, specifically the formation mechanism of informal settlements from macroscopic policies and government governance [28,29]. However, few studies have focused on investigating the spatial governance strategies of informal settlements in order to understand the evolution of informal settlements in the context of institutional arrangements [30–34]. In the process of rapid urbanization, this paper assumes that villagers can play an important role in the expansion of informal settlements by adopting different development strategies depending on institutional arrangements. The aim of this research is to develop a framework for the spatial governance of informal settlements to explain their causes.

Informal settlements in China are mainly settlements that violate urban and rural planning laws and regulations, are located in built-up areas and peripheral areas of urban areas, and are generated by a variety of subjects such as government, institutions, enterprises, urban residents, and rural areas [35]. They are somewhat different from urban informal spaces formed by urban poor encroaching on land, such as slums, which have been traditionally studied abroad. The rise of Chinese cities provides an important experiment in global urbanization, and the study of informal spaces constituted by informal settlements can enrich the theory of urbanization. The study of the topic of informal settlements in China also highlights important theoretical implications due to their prominent characteristics of complexity and sophistication that are not predetermined by existing urban theories. These phenomena provide a source for a theory of the politics of public space in terms of the development path of informal space in China’s transitional economic system. Because the urbanization that China is experiencing is unprecedented in the world in terms of its specificity and complexity, and cities have become more diversified and fragmented [36], the study of urban spatial politics in China during the transition period through the evolutionary path of informal architectural space, combined with existing research and spatial development theories, provides a new perspective for Chinese urban geography to understand the evolution of informal urban space. The present study was designed to determine the effect of providing an analytical framework for investigating the spatial governance of informal settlements in China. This study provides new insights into the field of Chinese cities and thus may have important implications for global urban studies.

2. Governing Informal Settlement Based on Political Economy

Since the 1970s, spatial politics, led by Henri Lefebvre’s theory of spatial production and Michel Foucault’s theory of power space, has linked “space” with “power”, “politics”,

and “society”. It transforms the traditional ontological inquiry into space into a focus on social relations and human practices that can be seen everywhere in daily life, in order to deeply reveal the power relations and their practices that pervade in social space. It seeks to reveal the power relations and practices that pervade social space and to seek answers to a series of social problems from spatial thinking. This theoretical exploration has given a strong impetus to the “spatial turn” in Western humanities and social sciences research, and spatial and political analysis has become the theoretical key to understanding the logic of social problem generation [37].

Existing geographic studies have focused on political economy approaches, examining the relationship between the government and the market to explain the new spatial production of Chinese cities; however, there is a lack of discourse on the corresponding social relationship aspects. With the rise of China, a theory for urban studies and a reconceptualization of China’s renewed urbanism have developed [38]. The basic facts of the current period of “transition” and the institutional analytical framework it establishes should be the basic starting point for the study of urban spatial reconfiguration. In order to explain the inner mechanisms of socio-economic phenomena in Chinese cities, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between government, market, and society, while the current explanatory theories in urban studies focus on the relationship between the government and the market. To explain the transformation of China’s urbanization, it is also necessary to pay more attention to the relationship between the government and society. Informal settlements are an inescapable topic in urban stock renewal, reflecting the game between the government and society in terms of the distribution of interests, from a microscopic perspective. China’s progressive reforms have generally maintained a relatively smooth environment for institutional change, but as a direct result, the dual regulation system, which operates both inside and outside the system, has led to a large number of non-regulatory behaviors and rent-seeking activities of different interest groups. The dual regulation environment in Chinese cities during the transition period is widespread and contributes to the complexity of China’s urban spatial structure. Based on the framework of spatial-political-economic analysis of informal settlements, we try to better dissect the formation mechanism and basic logic of informal settlements. Among them, the market originates from the “land rent surplus” and its behavioral incentives under urban expansion, which constitutes the economic conditions for the formation of informal settlements; the government is the relational space constructed by state power through a series of strategies such as institutions, laws, and rules, which inherently reflects the mapping of state power relations in the urban village system; and society is the game of interests between different interests and the redistribution process between different social groups. The interrelationship between the three forces and the promotion of informal settlements is the driving force behind the emergence of informal settlements. It is the process of mutual game and extinction of the three forces and their impact on urban regeneration.

3. Study Area and Methodology

Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong Province, the political, economic, scientific, technological, educational, and cultural center of Guangdong Province, and a famous coastal open city and national comprehensive reform pilot area in China. Guangzhou is located in the southern part of mainland China, the southeastern part of Guangdong Province, the northern edge of the Pearl River Delta, and close to the lower estuary of the Pearl River Basin. Guangzhou is the meeting point of the Beijing–Guangzhou and Guangzhou–Shenzhen railways and the center of civil air traffic in China, with close links to the other parts of the China (Figure 1). Guangzhou is also known as the “Southern Gate” of China. The city has the jurisdiction of Yuexiu District, Haizhu District, Liwan District, Tianhe District, Baiyun District, Huangpu District, Panyu District, Huadu District, Zengcheng District, and Conghua District.



Figure 1. The geographic location of the case study area in Guangzhou Source, drawn by the authors. The background map is from ESRI.

Informal settlements are the product of rapid urbanization in China. Informal settlements are the result of rapid urbanization in which a large amount of rural land is expropriated by government authorities for urban development; most of the village settlements are left completely preserved due to the high compensation costs and the fact that most of the village building sites are gradually surrounded by expanding urban built-up areas. In China, these villages are called urban villages, which are typical of informal settlements. These urban villages are widely distributed in major cities in China, with Guangzhou and Shenzhen in the Pearl River Delta region being the most typical.

The spatial characteristics of geographic elements in informal settlements differ greatly from those of surrounding urban buildings. The general characteristics of buildings in informal settlements are mostly characterized by high building density, small spacing between buildings, and low building height compared with the surrounding urban buildings.

With the development of remote sensing technology, high-resolution images have been widely used for monitoring urban surface buildings, and we extract the land boundary of informal settlements based on remote sensing images to extract the construction land extent in different years. The physical spatial characteristics of informal settlements are classified by the random forest method, taking the sample input for model training and classification. The land boundaries of informal settlements are extracted using this method.

In this paper, we take urban informal settlements as the research object, and the research areas are Yuexiu District, Liwan District, Haizhu District, Tianhe District, Baiyun District, and Huangpu District (Figure 2). In this paper, based on deep neural networks, this study uses unsupervised deep feature learning as a research method to extract the spatial distribution of informal settlements in Guangzhou City in 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2015 using high-definition remote sensing image data.

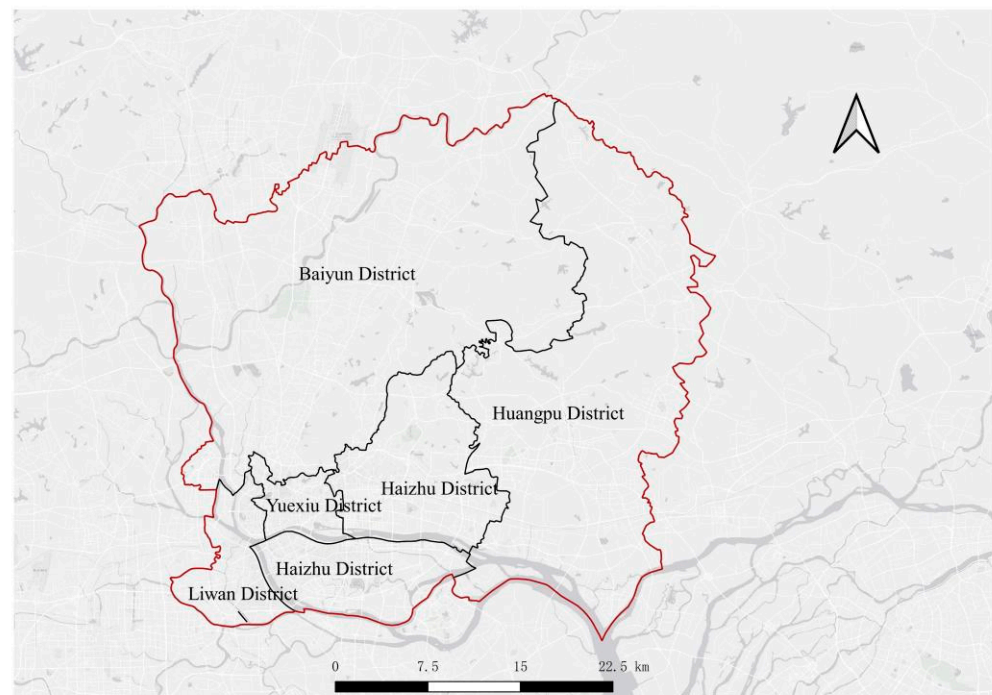


Figure 2. A study area on the informal settlements' source, drawn by the authors. The background image is from ESRI.

4. Spatial Distribution Pattern of Informal Settlements in Guangzhou

The economic and urban transformation of post-reform China is the result of the interaction of endogenous and exogenous factors. Since the early 1970s, with the crisis of the Fordist–Keynesian accumulation mechanism, neoliberalism has emerged in many developing countries, which has resulted in deregulation, the removal of institutional constraints, and the expansion of market power. From a global perspective, China's economic reform is not as simple as a shift from a centrally planned economy to a market economy with Chinese characteristics; China's urban transformation is linked to a globalization process that has had a significant impact on one or more aspects of China's social, economic, and spatial structure. In order to investigate the relationship between the changing development of urban informal space formed by informal settlements and the development process of urbanization, the analysis of the spatial and temporal evolution of informal settlements through a phased treatment will help to deeply identify the spatial characteristics of informal settlements and their evolution patterns. Based on the basic characteristics of the number of informal settlements in Guangzhou over time, and synthesizing the basic situation of urban development and the evolution of policies for investigating and dealing with informal settlements in Guangzhou, this paper divides the development of informal settlements in Guangzhou into three stages: the formation stage (1981–1990), the group axial proliferation stage (1991–2000), and the circle proliferation stage (2001–2011), and analyzes each stage of the spatial characteristics of informal settlements.

4.1. Formative Stage (1981–1990)

After the reform and opening up in 1978, the economic development gradually changed from a planned economy to a market economy centered on the market, using the competition mechanism and regulated by market supply and demand and price changes. China's urban spatial structure underwent a major transformation. Polycentric urban structures are important spatial development strategies in megacities; they have decentralized morphologies and functional characteristics that profoundly impact urban space development [39,40]. The state achieved key breakthroughs in the market system, macro-control system, reform of state-owned enterprises, land system and social security system and

carried out a series of reforms in various fields. In 1984, the “Guangzhou City Master Plan” approved by the State Council listed the old town of Guangzhou as a key transformation and upgrading area, and its development direction focused on reviving traditional commerce, and industrial technology upgrading and transformation, focusing on restoring and creating a large number of traditional commercial streets and specialized streets such as Gaodi Street, Beijing Road, and Shangxiajiu, forming a primary commercial center consisting of the Renmin South-Changti, Haizhu Square, and Railway Station-Liuhua Road areas.

The fourth congress of the Communist Party of China in Guangzhou in 1981 proposed the development orientation of “building Guangzhou into an economic centre of the province and South China”. In 1984, the Master Plan of Guangzhou City was issued, defining the spatial development strategy of “three major clusters in a belt” and the direction of market-oriented economic system reform. The spatial development strategy of “three major clusters in a belt” was to upgrade the industries in the central city through the transformation of the old town and the relocation of factories, to create a science and technology cultural and educational area in Tianhe and a comprehensive area of Tianhe Sports Center, to develop the Guangzhou Economic and Technological Development Zone by relying on Huangpu Port, and to build a satellite city in Baiyun Xinhua Town and Shiqiao Town. With rapid economic development, the Baiyun and Tianhe districts of Guangzhou have become major urban development centers. Under the conditions of rapid expansion of urban land to the periphery of the suburbs and the growing demand for housing from the foreign population, informal settlements have formed clusters (Figures 3 and 4).

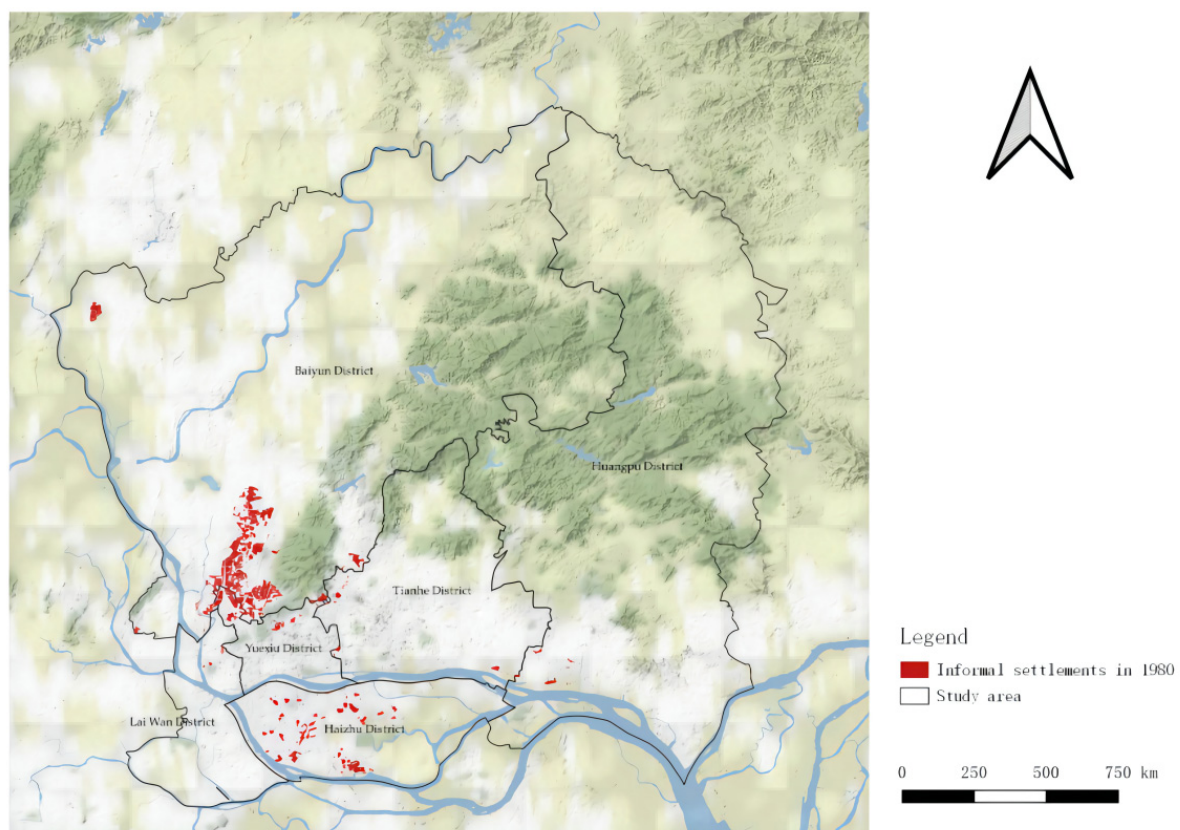


Figure 3. The spatial distribution characteristics of informal settlements in 1980. Source: drawn by the authors. The background image is from the Stamen map.

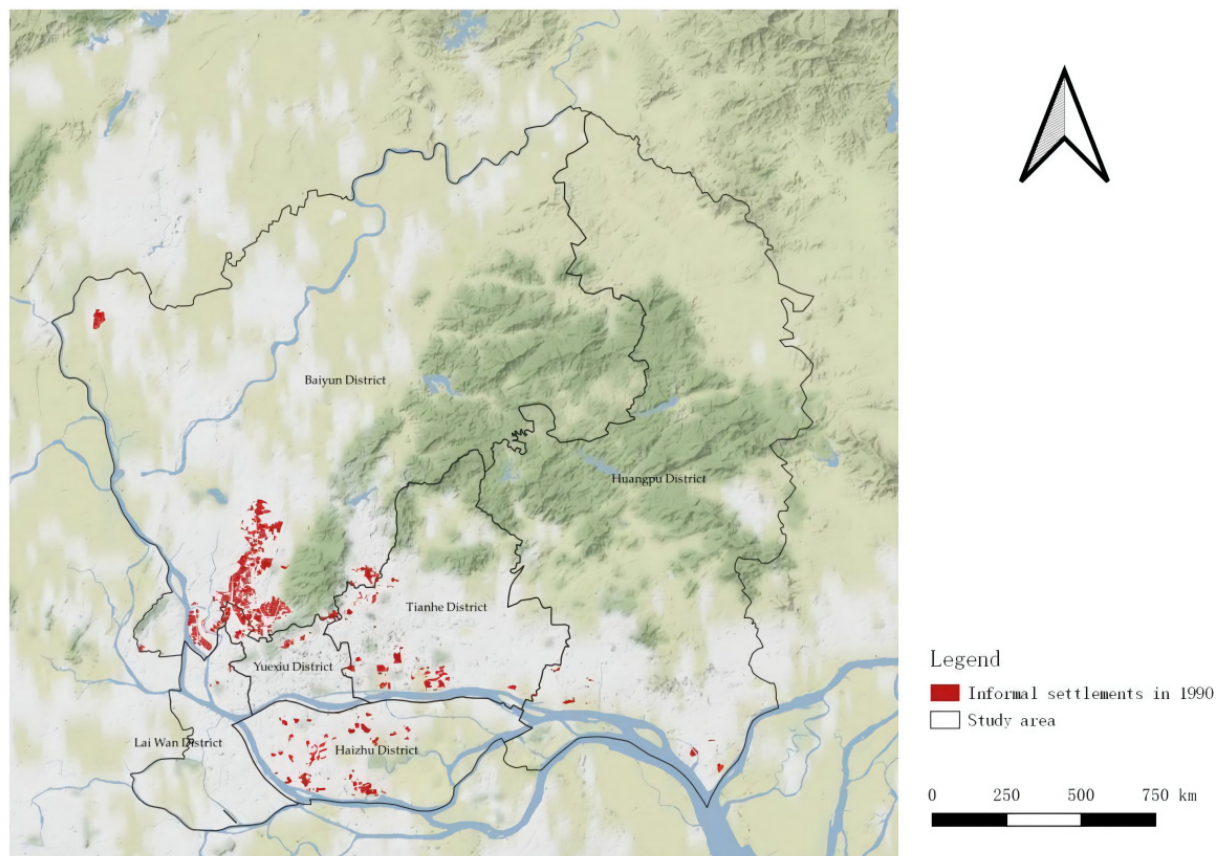


Figure 4. The spatial distribution characteristics of the informal settlements in 1990. Source: drawn by the authors. The background image is from the Stamen map.

4.2. The Initial Development Phase (1990–2000)

As part of rapid economic development, due to the aforementioned investigation of informal settlements and the handling mechanism, inefficient law enforcement and other problems have, for a long time, resulted in the informal settlement of land. Informal settlements are becoming increasingly serious; they have been hidden in the past, scattered in informal settlements, and have developed into an open, large-scale occupation of land to build houses and led to economic interests driven by the past individual administrative organs' illegal approval, ultra vires approval to engage in informal settlements development. The town was also approved to engage in informal settlements, and the law enforcement departments are not strict, or even intentionally indulgent. In this context, this has resulted in the rapid growth of informal settlements in peripheral streets, villages, towns, and other areas. The general characteristic of informal settlements in Guangzhou is the rapid axial spread outwards from the old town in the form of clusters, with the most pronounced expansion towards the east. In particular, large-scale informal settlements are rapidly forming in the area around the Tianhe Sports Center in Tianhe District (Figure 5).

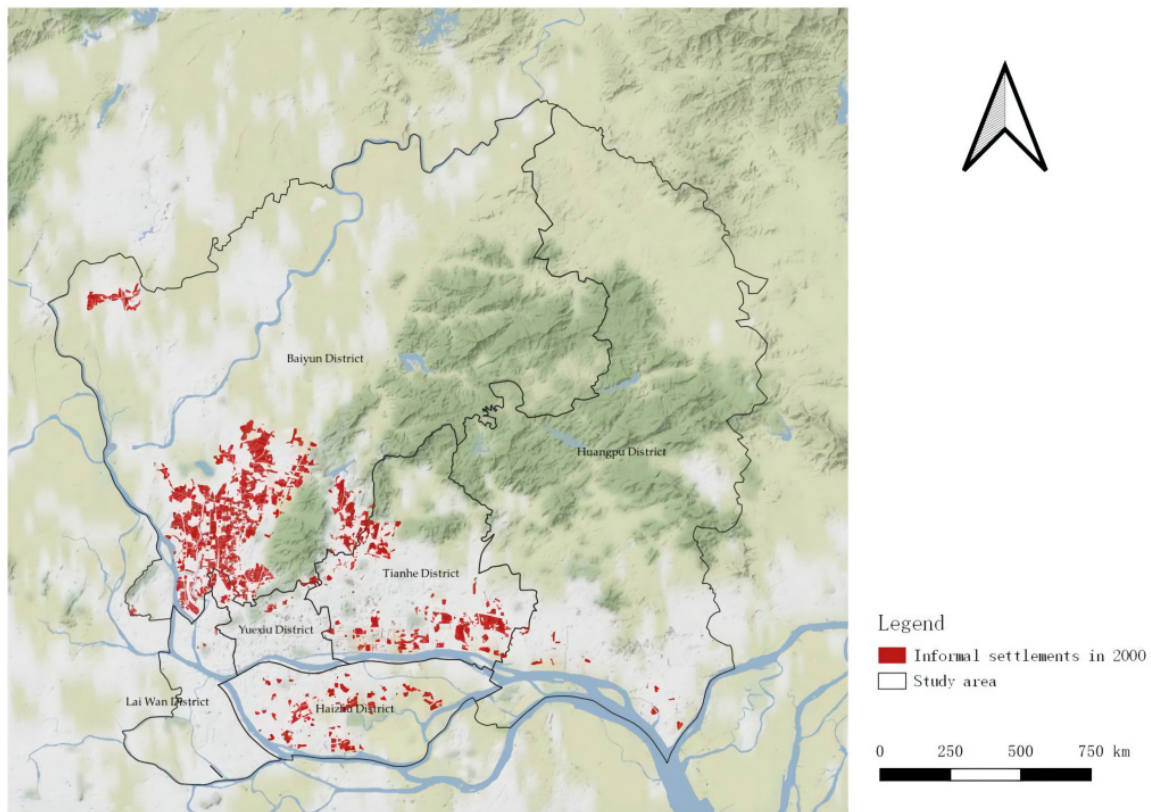


Figure 5. The spatial distribution characteristics of informal settlements in 2000. Source: drawn by the authors. The background image is from the Stamen map.

4.3. Rapid Development Phase (2000–2010)

In 2001, the Guangzhou Urban Development Strategic Plan was launched, putting forward for the first time the spatial development strategy of “southward expansion, northward optimization, eastward advancement and westward linkage”, further extending the city’s reach to Huangpu, Panyu, and Nansha. The spatial structure of Guangzhou city has undergone significant changes, starting from the original single center to a multi-center pattern. During this period, the proliferation of informal settlements accelerated with the rate of urban expansion (Figure 6).

4.4. Stable Development Phase (2010–2015)

The Asian Games intensified the modernization of Guangzhou’s urban development and pushed the city’s glorious achievements to an all-time high. With the successful hosting of the Asian Games, Guangzhou has further enhanced its status and role as a regional center city and expanded the city’s international influence. Guangzhou’s urban development in the post-Asian Games era has shifted towards the optimal adjustment of the city’s functional layout, the renewal of old cities, ecological construction, and the enhancement of cultural resources. This is a return to rationality after rapid urban growth. During this period, the rate of outward expansion of the city’s informal settlements reduced as the city’s development strategy and focus shifted, entering a stable phase of development (Figure 7).

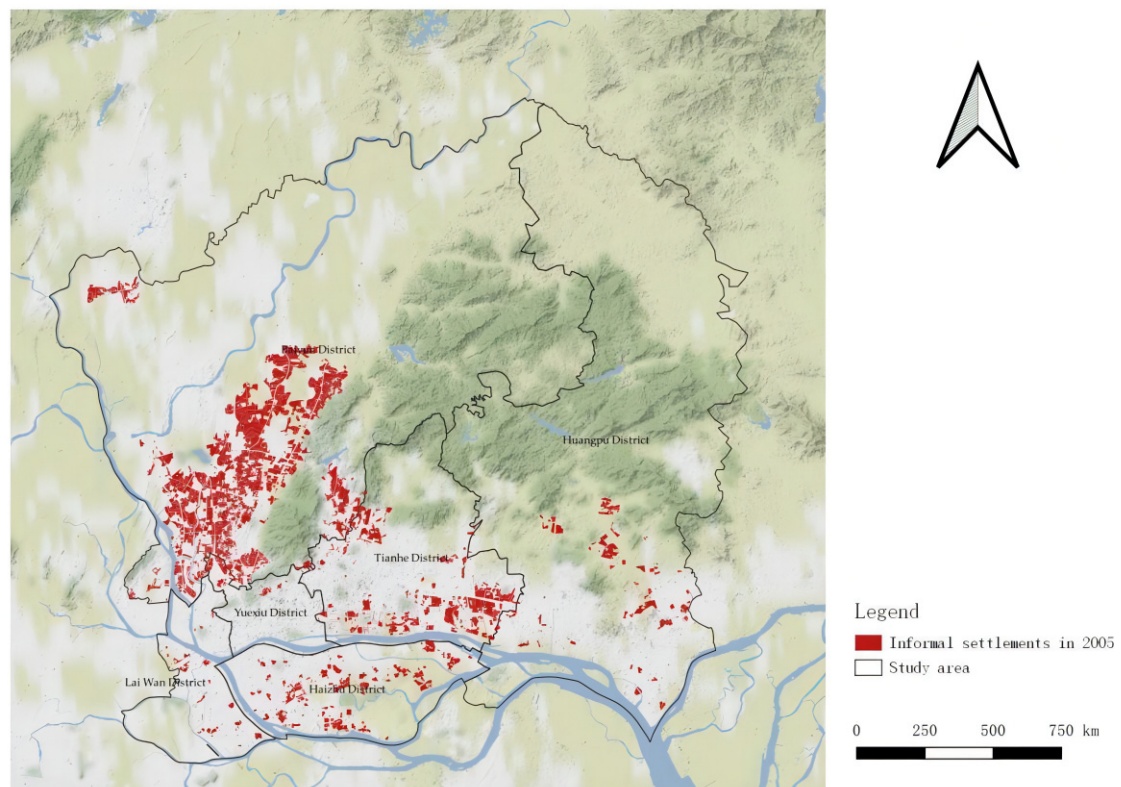


Figure 6. The spatial distribution characteristics of informal settlements in 2005. Source: drawn by the authors. The background image is from the Stamen map.

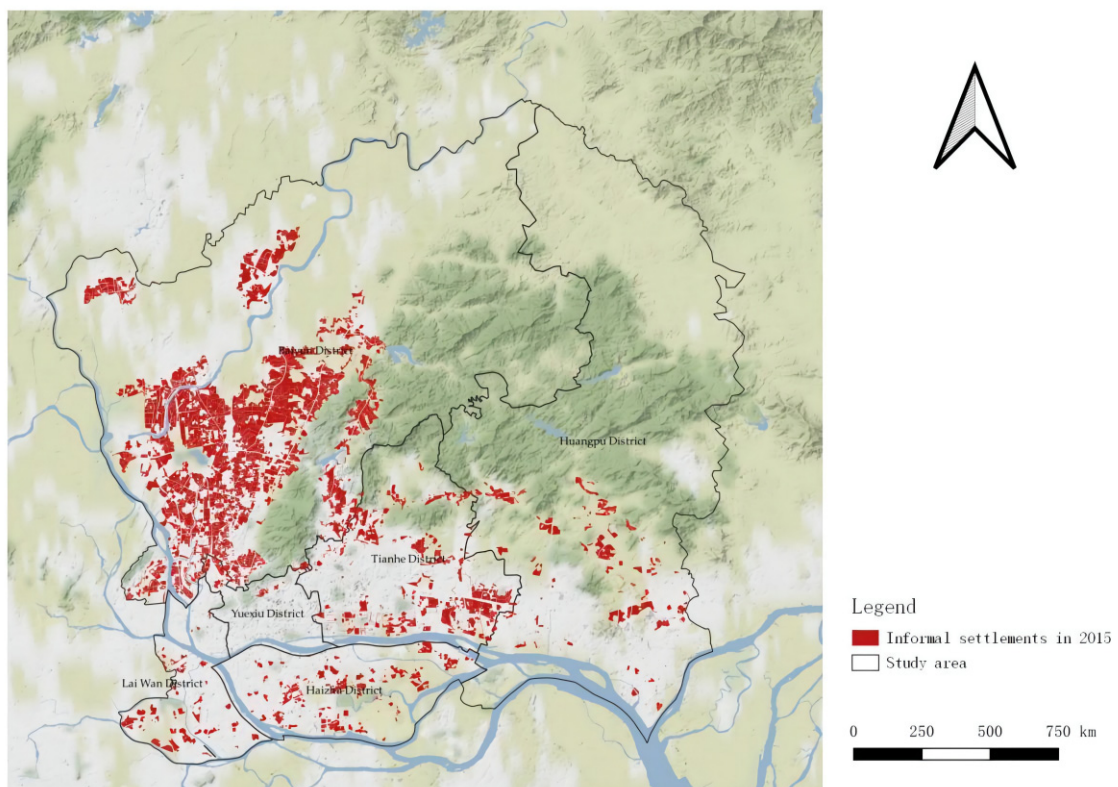


Figure 7. The spatial distribution characteristics of informal settlements in 2015. Source: drawn by the authors. The background image is from Stamen map.

4.5. Informal Settlement Development Trends

The economic and urban transformation of post-reform China is the result of the interaction of endogenous and exogenous factors. Since the early 1970s, with the crisis of the Fordist–Keynesian accumulation mechanism, neoliberalism has emerged in many developing countries, resulting in deregulation, the removal of institutional constraints, and the expansion of market power. From a global perspective, China’s economic reforms are not as simple as a shift from a centrally planned economy to a market economy with Chinese characteristics; China’s urban transformation is linked to a globalization process that has had a significant impact on one or more aspects of China’s social, economic, and spatial structure. In order to explore the spatial development trend of informal settlements and the governance of government departments in the future, it will be helpful to deeply understand the spatial evolution pattern of informal settlements by analyzing the spatial layout characteristics of informal settlements at different stages. This paper classifies the development of informal settlements in Guangzhou into four stages: the formation stage (1981–1990), the initial stage (1990–2000), the rapid development stage (2001–2010), and the stable stage (2010–2015).

By extracting the area of informal settlements at each stage, we can see that as urbanization slows down, the growth of informal settlements will gradually decrease in the future (Figure 8). The existing stock of informal settlements has become a difficult issue for the city government departments to regulate. The future management of these existing informal settlements will become the focus and difficulty of policy design. In terms of institutional arrangements, the focus of government departments should gradually shift from the growth of informal settlements to strategies for their regeneration. In particular, the role of villagers in the regeneration of informal settlements should be emphasized. In the future, government departments should focus on policies that are beneficial to the promotion of villagers’ self-regeneration of informal settlements.

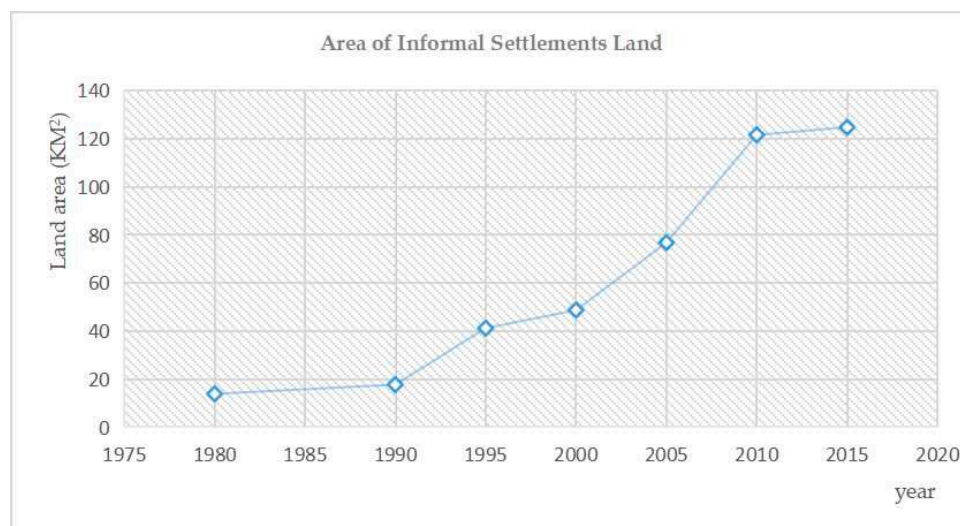


Figure 8. The evolution of land area in informal settlements in the study area. Source: drawn by the authors.

5. Spatial Governance Mechanisms for Informal Settlements

5.1. Incentives for “Surplus Land Rent” under Urban Expansion

According to China’s constitution, the form of land ownership in China is socialist public ownership, implementing two forms of property rights: state ownership and collective ownership. Land in urban areas is owned by the state, while rural land is collectively owned. This gives China two different bundles of property rights, with full property rights for state-owned land in the cities and incomplete property rights for collective land in the countryside [41,42]. The emergence of land rent surpluses in China’s urbanization

process is due to China's unique dualistic land system. Urban land can be transferred through the property rights market and has full property rights attributes. Collective land cannot benefit directly through the land market and can only obtain income from land output. Only through government expropriation or requisition can one benefit in the land market, so rural collective land ownership is an incomplete property right. Complete urban state-owned land property rights and incomplete rural collective land property rights constitute the dual property rights structure of urban and rural land in China. The economic incentive for informal settlements is the result of maximizing "land rent surplus" by urban governments and rural collective economic organizations. Under this incentive of China's urban–rural land system, villagers can only maximize their income by renting out their houses due to the restrictions of the collective land ownership system (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Villagers get income from house rentals in Guangzhou. Source: taken by the authors.

5.2. Lenient Land Management and Development Control

Urban development relies on the government's monopoly system for land. The land reform that began in the late 1980s changed the previous system of using land without compensation and for an indefinite period of time, resulting in two parallel land development models in China, namely, the "administrative allocation" and the "paid concession model". Since the late 1990s, the government-led renovation and development of old cities has been the most direct factor affecting urban space. In rural areas, land is collectively owned and the state enjoys the right of eminent domain over collective land. Related studies have shown that the dualistic land system is one of the most important factors affecting urban development and urban space in China [43], and from the ownership structure, the land use system is to divide the land use rights with the ownership rights. From the perspective of land suppliers, the urban government monopolizes the land market and prohibits collective economic organizations or farmers from making transactions with land directly. The state expropriates collective land according to demand and can only trade on the land make after it becomes state-owned. State land is covered in formal management and development control under urban planning, and the management of land in urban villages is affected by a lax system. The introduction of the market economy system and the decentralization of state management authority are its institutional factors. This informal and unregulated space is not the result of state governance failure and weak governance, but rather we believe it is a conscious strategy. Not only does it give great discretion to land developers, but it also provides a large number of housing and factories for foreign labor, a response to a low-cost urbanization model (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Informal settlements providing housing for the rural migrant population. Source: taken by the authors.

5.3. Spatial Interest Game and Redistribution Process

The current law stipulates that the situation of in-situ repair exemption from permit cannot change the building structure, building facade, etc. However, from the perspective of fire safety and seismic capacity of modern settlements, the original brick and wood structure of dilapidated houses simply does not fit the current development of Guangzhou. Such conditions are too harsh, resulting in residents reporting poorly on the construction of dilapidated houses. Due to the cumbersome reporting procedures and complicated approval channels, only an extremely small number of village collective properties have been successfully upgraded, and a large number of unlicensed properties are difficult to upgrade. Village collective properties built in the 1970s and 1980s or even the 1950s and 1960s simply do not have an outlet for reporting and approval, resulting in their inability to be repaired or rebuilt, resulting in a large number of plants becoming dilapidated to buy safety hazards, while dilapidated plants are unable to attract high-end industries to move in, seriously affecting the overall social and economic development of village collectives. Moreover, since most of the projects are under the direct control of the provinces and municipalities, it is difficult for the urban management departments to enforce the law and investigate them, and if they are not investigated and dealt with, they will face recrimination, causing a dilemma for urban management law enforcement officers.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

The research finds that informal settlements in China are influenced by an urban–rural dual land system in which the collective land ownership system means that villagers are ambiguous in their approach to land development. During rapid urbanization, villagers have adopted diverse land development strategies based on land rent incentives to attract capital investment and earn profits, which has led to the rapid spread of informal settlements. The aim of this research is to develop a framework for the spatial governance of informal settlements to explain their causes. The results of this investigation show that

the incentive for villagers to maximize the “surplus land rent” is an economic factor in the development of informal settlements. The governmental sector, which regulates the development of informal settlements through formal and informal institutions, is the institutional factor in its spatial evolution. Spatial competition between stakeholders and the urban administration is a social factor that drives the development of informal settlements. The spatial pattern of informal settlements is driven by the interplay of the market, the government, and society. This study finds that informal settlements in China have developed in response to China’s urbanization process, which is essentially a reflection of state power relations and spatial governance strategies at different times in the urban transformation process. Informal settlements should be viewed from a dialectical and systemic perspective on the formation and evolution of informal settlements.

The results of this study indicate that the contradiction between the incapacity of urban housing to satisfy the housing demands of the enormous immigrant working population, the deficient procedures for submitting various types of construction reports, the difficulty in channeling the need for housing and the growing demand for housing from residents, the complex and unsound enforcement process, and the increasing economic gains through informal settlements has been transposed in China’s rapid urbanization process. Informal settlements are a prominent manifestation of this. In particular, the increasing severity of informal settlements in major cities such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen has attracted widespread and sustained attention. This paper reflects the complex state power relations and spatial governance strategies behind informality, exploring the nature of informal spaces and pointing out the differences between urban informality in China and third world countries, using the spatial evolution characteristics of informal settlements that have been investigated and registered by the enforcement authorities in Guangzhou.

In practical terms, history has brought us to a moment when the majority of humanity resides in cities that matter. The focus of global urbanization has shifted to the developing world, and the center of urban development is no longer confined to the developed world. China’s contemporary urban transformation deserves special attention [44–46], not only because of its unparalleled scale and speed but also because its unique growth trajectory defies normal theoretical expectations [47]. Chinese cities are emerging in multiple senses: they create new substantive spaces to accommodate the country’s rapid urbanization but at the same time develop new property rights and characteristics as cities change and cannot be easily encompassed by Western urban theory [3]. Dick and Rimmer argue that Southeast Asian cities do not constitute a separate typology, viewing the Southeast Asian urban form as increasingly Westernized, although they acknowledge the different elements that do exist in these cities [48]. Their study rejects Third World urban characteristics such as informal spaces, and the contrast between Southeast Asian informal housing produced by the large number of informal settlements in China is very similar, with characteristics of Third World cities yet unique in its own development, and emerging Chinese cities provide a laboratory to observe global urbanization [49]. The mechanisms of government monopoly over land are highly dependent on urban development, and the government seeks to control land in order to eliminate informal settlements through urban renewal. However, as more of the countryside has been converted to private leases through self-development, informality has increased and a distinct pattern of development has re-emerged, underpinned by distinctive state dominance in land supply, namely, through land financing. These are geographical processes and spatial patterns that are unique to China and, as with Asian cities, necessitate a rethinking of Western urban theory. Both land-driven urban development and urban village expansion reveal extensive neoliberal and informal processes.

With the market-economy-led reform and opening up, China’s informal settlements have grown rapidly as a result of rapid economic development and urbanization. The reason for this is that China’s rapid development has left the government unable to provide for the housing needs of its large migrant population, which is being met by private rentals in the housing market. The rental housing economy is the economic source of a large number of informal settlements.

Collective land development is informal in urban areas, and farmers rent out their homes in the housing market without adequate government recognition of land use and land development rights. Particularly in urban villages, farmers have developed by self-building, resulting in passive illegal construction due to inconsistency with existing national development policies. China's urban informality is rooted in the urban–rural dichotomy, which is governed by different land systems. Urban land is state-owned, while rural land is collectively owned by peasants, especially in rural areas where the collective ownership system means that the authority to deal with land development is ambiguous. The traditional loose land management and planning controls in rural areas are informal sources of institutions. As the market environment and domestic economic conditions have changed, villagers have adopted a variety of land development strategies that they have successfully developed to attract capital and earn profits, thereby enabling rapid informal building development.

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