

ID 1372 | THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE PLANNING THEORY SINCE THE 1978: A THEMATIC PERSPECTIVE

Kang Cao¹, Li Zheng²

¹Department of Regional and Urban Planning, Zhejiang University,

²Chongqing Liangjiang New Area Longxing Construction & Investment Limited,
k_cao@126.com ; addand@outlook.com

1 INTRODUCTION

The year 1978, when China initiated its policy of reform and opening-up, marks a distinct turning point in the history of urban planning in modern China. A new Chinese urban planning system, with its values, ethics, approaches, laws, regulations and so on, has gradually formed since that time. A set of Chinese planning theory also emerges within this system development. This set of theory 'is interpreted as the values, principles and working procedures which conduct planning practices' (Zhang, 2008) by Chinese planners. This paper will mainly discuss Chinese planning theory.

Different academics have different views when categorizing planning theories. As known to all, Faludi (1970) categorizes planning theories in substantive theory (theory in planning) and procedural theory (theory of planning). Based on his classification concept, other scholars develop varied ways of classification of planning theories. In Hender (1995)'s opinion for example, besides 'theory in planning' and 'theory of planning', she further identifies a third category, namely 'theory for planning', or definitional theory. Subject-oriented theory provides the knowledge base to inform the planning process. To her, definitional theory is the body of theory that describes what planning actually is and how it fits into the social context, and procedural theory deals with the process of planning, with issues related to determining the 'best' approaches for transferring knowledge into action. Wolfe (1989) categories planning theories the same way as Hender's, but calls definitional theory as 'explanation' theory. Focusing on definitional theory and procedural theory, this article aims to shed light on the development of Chinese planning theory since 1978.

2 DEFINITIONAL PLANNING THEORY

Definitional theory deals with the nature of planning. The Chinese definitional planning theory study began in the early 1980s when Chinese were eager to shake off the legacy of the USSR and to form a 'new' urban planning system partially based on the European and North American planning system. It is inspired from three origins or Perspectives, namely, practices of the socialist market economy, inspirations from traditional Chinese philosophy, and lessons from Western positivist philosophy. Prior to 1978, when China was in the time of planned economy, planning was perceived as a technique to embody the economic plans of central government. One of the main activities of planning was painting blueprints that are were directly used to guide city development. However, in the process of economic reform since the 1980s, it was recognized that the perception of planning as a technical activity hinders China from developing the market economy and participating in the global economic system. Simultaneously, the Western planning thoughts started to exert influence on Chinese planning theory. All kinds of 'Western' planning thoughts and theories poured into China and acted as important enlightenments for developing 'Chinese' planning theory. Against such background, Chinese planning scholars began to rethink the nature of planning. The theory debate articles at this time mainly focused on the 'scientific nature', 'soft scientific nature', 'rationality', and 'sociality' of planning, with some high-frequency terms like 'philosophy', 'basis', 'nature', 'characteristics', etc. These were Chinese kind of 'definitional planning theory.'

2.1 THE NATURE OF CITY PLANNING

Sun (1993), for example, conceived of city planning as an applied science. In his opinion, planning was about making arrangements of land use and formulating development guidelines based on city development goals and overall studies of the city. The construction activities guided by planning were to change city space so that an orderly city development could be achieved. Thus, turning planning thoughts

into practice was what planning should be about. Meanwhile, different from natural science, according to Sun's point of view, the application of city planning requires the acceptance of social communities.

Wang (1989) holds the opinion that during the period of planned economy, planning activities in China were narrowly perceived as technical activities. But from the year 1978 on, as commodity economy replaces product economy, planning became an activity that required a wide social support. Hence, city planning was both physical and social, and by nature it was more social than physical.

In Tong's (1997) view, the ideological basis of planning theory should return to rationality. Planning activities on one hand depend on scientific studies, on the other hand cannot be divorced from social environment. The leading academic journal about urban studies and planning issues in China - *City Planning Review* - once organized a special discussion on issues like 'scientific mode of planning', 'soft science' and posed the question 'is city planning a soft science?' (Vol. 11, Issue 3 and 4, 1987). This discussion provided a formal platform for Chinese scholars to explore the nature of planning. Chen (2007) argues 'if we link the core definition of city planning to the strict definition of science, we cannot draw the conclusion that "city planning is a science"'.

Thus it can be seen that concerning the nature of planning, Chinese scholars have been very aware of the dual attributes of planning. Just as Zhao (2005) describes, planning is neither entirely a 'technology' of 'scientific rationality', nor completely a passive 'coordination and cooperation', but 'a combination of the two'.

2.2 THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF PLANNING

With the development of market economy in China, the social aspects of planning are increasingly emphasized by Chinese theorists. For example, Wang (2003) pointed out that current theoretical study of Chinese planning stayed in the 'instrumental rationality' stage, and economic and social considerations were quite lacking. He held the opinion that planning was an activity that falls in between natural science and social science, and it should be realized that planning should be more considered as a public policy. Zhang and Legates (2009) held the viewpoint that in the post neo-liberalism era (post-crisis era), social learning and social reform should become the direction of Chinese planning theory. To them, city planning should help establish a balanced interest distribution.

Although the social features of planning have been recognized since 1978 at the theoretical level, however in practice, planning is still perceived as a scientific technical activity. According to the viewpoints of Zhang (2008), urban development became the primary goal of China in its socialism construction process since the 1980s' economic reform. As an important means of implementing the central policy and allocating resources, planning was mainly employed to promote urban economy growth, enlarge city scale and improve production efficiency. Influenced by the central government's message 'development is the absolute truth,' the pursuit of economic efficiency rather than social equity became the first priority of local governments. Hence, planning turned into a productive force, a rational tool used to accelerate economic growth.

2.3 THE LOCALIZATION OF PLANNING THEORY

It is worth mentioning that during a certain period (approximately from the late 1980s or the early 1990s onwards), Chinese scholars start to explore localized planning theory and try to investigate the nature of planning based on traditional Chinese philosophy. Qian Xuesen, a renowned Chinese scientist, advocated for the study and construction of the "shan-shui" city from the traditional Chinese nature view in the 1990s. Shan and shui refer to mountains and water or rivers, and actually mean the nature. The essence of his advocacy is to pursue the co-existence of the human and nature or the non-human. Base on the theory of "shan-shui" city, Liu and Li (2006) proposed the idea of "planning of poetry conception". They considered the process of planning a process of pursuing and creating a poetic city. Planner should "Grasp the truth of the ecological environment, create a good man-made living condition, and achieve a beautiful poetic world so that people can 'live poetically'". Nevertheless, such explorations are purely conceptual analysis and not aimed at directing planning behaviors in practice.

3 PROCEDURAL PLANNING THEORY

Apart from the exploration of planning nature, the definitional planning theory, theoretical debate on planning process in China is also very essential in Chinese planning theory development. In the time of planned economy, the understanding towards planning process was relatively narrow. The view that planning process referred exclusively to the process of plan formulation, namely a linear process, including steps like 'data collection – data analysis – scheme formulation' was dominant. After the economic reform, new ideas influenced by the western planning thoughts concerning planning process started to emerge. Among all the thoughts, rational planning theory was most influential. In the framework of rational planning theory, planning was a means to find the best solutions, and planners should act like engineers who rationally sought for the optimal answers based on external conditions and requirements (Faludi, 1973). Through learning rational theory from the West, Chinese scholars started to emphasize the necessity of planning cities in a 'scientific' and 'objective' way, and divide planning process into the following 5 steps: (1) definition of problem and/or goals; (2) identification of alternative plans/policies; (3) evaluation of alternative plans/policies; (4) implementation of plans/policies; (5) monitoring of effects of plans/policies.

3.1 PLANNING PROCESS UNDER A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

From the 1970s on, influenced by the idea of humanism, new ideas like advocacy planning, transactive planning, and communicative planning arose in the western world. While in China, with the sociality of planning being recognized, Chinese scholars also started to think the process of planning from a social perspective. They advocated that the general public is supposed to play a role in the planning process, and the planning process should be cyclic rather than linear. In other words, the public should participate in each step of the process and between each step a feedback mechanism ought to be established. As with what happened to planning nature, despite the changing cognition of planning process, the gap between theory and practice was evident. According to Zhang (2008), the planning process in most Chinese cities was not transparent enough. Public participation was superficially organized in the form of plan information education and plan consultation such as organizing the public to visit urban planning exhibition hall, soliciting public opinions of plans or projects through questionnaires. Substantive public participation, such as establishing public planning committees with veto right, was absent. For such superficial public participation, citizens might show their passions at the very beginning out of curiosity. Once they find they cannot genuinely participate in the decision-making process but were only accepting the results passively, they started to feel bored and unsatisfied. In addition to examining planning process at the operational level, He (2005) also defines planning process from the perspective of the relationship between participating actors. In his viewpoint, planning process is "an active process where the administrative bodies and other actors (such as legislative bodies, interest groups, social media, citizens, etc.) exercise their power and rights, and a process where different actors interact with each other to set up and achieve city development goal."

3.2 THE ROLE OF PLANNERS

The role of planners is a permanent topic in the discussion of planning process. While in the period of the planned economy, planners are exclusively perceived as technicians who organize urban space strictly according to government's economic plans and then draw the blueprints, a diverse understanding towards planners' role can be identified in the time of socialist market economy. As a Chinese-American, inspired by Western planning thoughts, Zhang (1993) takes the leading role in the discussion of planners' role in socialist market economy. From his viewpoint, against the backdrop where the emphasis of planning is slowly changed from 'efficiency' to 'equity,' planners should give more attention to people instead of plan itself in order to ensure the long-term interests of the whole public, and spend more time on studying human activities. Planners should focus on the public interest, and show no discrimination and favor to any actor in the process. He also argues for the transformation of planners' career training. In his opinion, planning process influenced by market economy is supposed to include more components like legislative procedure, laws and regulations analysis, economic analysis, policy analysis, etc. Hence, planners should be trained to learn the hearing procedure, methods of negotiation, and ways of making a compromise. After Zhang's paper is published, the topic - planner's role along with planners' values – starts to receive

more attention from local Chinese scholars. Tong (1997) argues planners should not be scientists or people who only focus on painting blueprints. Instead, planners should be formal or informal technocrats. The mission of planners is to apply the scientific technology to the social public behaviors. Simultaneously, Chinese academics even organized several formal discussions on this topic. For example, the leading planning journal *Planners* (Vol. 14, Issue 1, 1998) published the draft of '21st Century City Planner Declaration' and emphasized that planners should "plan, design and construct cities in the spirit of humanism, highlight the social harmony between different cultures and different social groups; avoid social segregation and conflicts, serve citizens without bias, not sacrifice and harm public interest, keep updating professional knowledge and skills [...]".

Planners (Vol 16, Issue 4, 2000) also organized the discussion on the issue of 'speak truth to the power', which again brought Chinese scholars' attention on planners' role. Chen (2001) suggests three directions for planners' career development: state planners, registered planners and community planners. In particular, state planners are technical officers who serve the government planning management institution. Their duties include: (1) to speak truth to the power; (2) to endeavor to participate in the decision-making process; (3) to make overall and long-term guidelines for social, economic and environmental development in cities; and (4) to defend public interest and stand up for the weak groups. In contrast, registered planners are planners employed by engineering survey or design institutes. They are technical planning professionals who provide plan, design and consulting services according to the market demand. The career goal of them is to maximize the benefits of project owners without violating laws, regulations and technical specifications. Community planners are devoted to affairs like community management, renewal and renaissance. They are state planners at the community level. Their objective is to seek for long-term and maximal benefits for communities they work for while not infringing the interest of other communities and the whole city.

Zhang (2002) holds the opinion that planning must ensure a balance between the state, market and civil society. In principle, planners are civil servants who represent the interests of all citizens. With the support from communities and social groups, they make suggestions for land and spatial arrangements based on market orientations, and ultimately help achieve the goal of promoting social progress. It should be recognized that the interrelationships between planners and the state, planners and market, planners and civil society are complicated. Although planning is a government activity, planners are supposed to act as professionals who work hard to correct the mistakes of government decisions. Planners must rely on the market when implementing plans on one hand but they are also required to direct the market, and supervise the market on the other hand. Planners should encourage public participation to balance the power in the decision-making process, but they also have the responsibility of educating public and helping improve communities' competence.

He (2003) argues civil society in China is embodied in the flourishing development of non-government organizations (NGOs) and communities. Against such background, planners are supposed to collaborate with citizens and NGOs, and form an organic trinity to promote community development.

4 CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the development of Chinese planning theory is still in its infancy, and theorists in China give their primary attention to the nature of planning, in particular how to define Chinese planning in the unique context of socialist market economy. Simultaneously, they are concerned about the role of planners as well as the professional ethics that planners should comply with. The focus on definitional theory and procedural planning theory demonstrates that Chinese scholars and practitioners are still confused about the ontology of planning and have not been able to go further in theory debate. They have attempted to get involved into the international discussion on planning theory, yet the differences in contexts and cultures makes a common discussion at the same theoretical level between China and the West difficult. This might be the directions of Chinese planning theory development in the future.

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