

Urban Planning Theory and Its Development in China

Yishuai Huang

Yulan Middle School, Yulan , China

Keywords: Urban planning theories, Theoretical model, Historical research

Abstract: The urban planning theory, which is closely related to specific national conditions, is constantly evolving throughout time and increasingly reflecting the features of diversification and complexity. It is of great significance to systematically summarize and analyze the evolution of urban planning theory and the practice in China from the historical perspective. Starting with the concept and classification of urban planning theory, this paper reviews the evolution of modern urban planning theory, and analyzes the continuous development of China's urban planning model with the changes of economic and social environment.

1. Introduction

Urban planning is the comprehensive deployment, specific arrangement and implementation management of the city's economic and social development, land utilization, spatial layout, and various constructions within a certain period time. Urban planning has a long history. In the fifth century BC, Hippodamus' model of urban layout which was centered on the city square and framed by a grid of road systems in ancient Greek [1] reflected the early achievements of urban planning in society. However, as a modern theoretical discipline, urban planning was not established until the early 20th century and has rapidly developed worldwide [2]. In different stages of economic and social development, people have different understandings of how to shape the urban spaces, which has also led to the continuous improvement and diversification of urban planning theories.

Since the reform and opening up in 1978, especially since the 1990s, China has entered a new era of rapid development in urban areas. In the meanwhile, modern urban planning theories in western developed countries were soon introduced to China in different ways and had a significant impact on the development of domestic urban planning theories and practices [3, 4]. Obviously, in China, which is significantly different from western developed countries in terms of the course of history and social background, the urban planning theory presents a different development from western theories. However, currently, the research of urban planning theories based on Chinese reality is relatively lacking.

On this basis, this paper first clarifies the conceptual connotation and composition of the urban planning theory, sorts out the changes in modern urban planning theories since the end of the 19th century, and analyzes the evolution of Chinese urban planning models since the founding of the People's Republic of China, aiming to contribute to the evolution of urban planning in China.

2. Definition and Evolution of Urban Planning Theories

2.1 Definition and Composition of Modern Urban Planning Theories

In a broader sense, the urban planning theory should be divided into the urban theory and the planning theory. Both of their research objects are cities, but the focus is obviously different.

The urban theory focuses on the city itself. It studies all aspects of the tangible entities and intangible dynamic causes of the complex system of a city, including urban history (the history of urban evolution and construction), urban sociology (the composition and changes of urban society, urban culture, immigration and migration, and the issues of ethics, poverty, women, children's education, and crime, etc.), urban governance (the political organization of the city, urban management, regime theory, etc.), urban economics (urban economic structure, employment, land economy and taxation, etc.), urban recession and renewal (the impact of family life cycle on communities, gentrification, and some involving urban planning and urban design). In recent years, it also includes globalization and urban theories (the global city, globalized economic networks, etc.) and urban ecology theories (low-carbon economy, circular economy, green development, etc.). The basic theories in the urban theory mainly refer to social disciplines such as political economy, sociology, economics, and geography, but these social science theories have been reorganized and transformed for the application of urban problems. To be precise, urban research focuses on the application of sociology and economics to urban problems, instead of the social sciences themselves. At the same time, the urban theory focuses on the mechanism of urban problems, which generally does not discuss solutions to specific problems (such as the specific transportation problems and housing problems).

On the other side, the planning theory focuses on human's effort on intervening in urban development and solving urban problems, namely planning. Therefore, the planning theory not only studies the object of the city, but also focuses on studying how to solve urban problems through planning, aiming at guiding specific planning schemes with theories. This theory itself includes two aspects: the theory of the planning discipline itself, and the theoretical research on the planning objects for the preparation of making various plans. Faludi (1973) [5] pointed out that planning can be divided into two types. One is "functional", which has a known objective. Under the given condition, planners study "how to make plans". The other is "normative", whose purpose is to set goals for the planning work itself within the framework of rational choice, that is, "why to make plans". Corresponding to this, there are also two kinds of planning theories. The "functional" planning theory is called "theory in planning", which focuses on how to make planning recommendations for achieving the target after it is given. The main point is the principles and methods of preparing specific plans for different functions, for example, the principles and methods of land use planning and traffic planning. The "normative" planning theory is called "theory of planning", that is, "a pure planning theory". It studies the planning work itself, including the development history, basic goals, social functions, and work procedures of the planning industry. The focus is on the rationality of the existence of this discipline and its values and professional ethics.

It needs to be highlighted that in western planning schools, the so-called planning theory refers to this "theory of planning" rather than the "theory in planning". For many planners who are engaged in specific work, they are concerned about how to prepare drawings and documents to solve specific problems. They are less concerned about the "pure planning theory" because they believe that in most cases of real practices, the planning objectives are given, and the planner's job is to realize the objectives instead of setting them, so there is no need to be so obsessed with examining these objectives. In fact, the theory of planning is very important. Looking back at the

history of urban construction in the world, most of the causes of the problems are the deviations of planning objectives and theories. Specific planning methods are never the main reason for mistakes.

2.2 Evolution of Urban Planning Theories

The evolution of western urban planning theories can be mainly divided into four stages.

The first stage began with the “garden city movement” proposed by Ebenezer Howard at the end of the 19th century. It went through the modern architectural movement in the 1920s and the *Athens Charter* in 1933, and reached its peak with the *Town and Country Planning Act* in Britain in 1947. This stage was the embryonic stage of the urban planning theoretical paradigm. At this time, the core of urban planning was essentially an artistic process of space design. The paradigm of planning theories also gradually developed around the core concept of spatial aesthetics.

The second stage is the creation of the paradigm of planning theories from the 1940s to the 1960s. The development of urban planning theories has experienced an important transition from the “planning of physical environment” before the 1940s to the “systematic and rational planning” after the 1960s. The essential cognition of planning activities has also changed from “art” to “science”. With the introduction of system theory, cybernetics, and information theory into urban planning, the theoretical paradigm of rational comprehensive planning is gradually established. The design basis of urban planning in the theory of this period has not been completely stripped away, and the physical form and aesthetic image are still important contents of urban planning. The ideological basis of improving society through building a good physical space has not changed. Only a rational comprehensive planning system with a relatively complete logic has been established.

The third stage was from 1960 to 1975, during which a major change occurred in the paradigm of planning theory. In the late 1960s, as the effectiveness of the rational comprehensive planning paradigm declined sharply in practice, people began to have a deep introspection on the nature of urban planning. The elite model in the past was questioned by many parties. As a result, urban planning began to turn to social science, and three conceptual changes occurred: (1) Social issues such as social equality and justice became the core of the planning system, shifting from only caring about the physical environment to a comprehensive planning; (2) Urban planning changes from only emphasizing the objectives to emphasizing the process and time sequence of achieving objectives; (3) Urban planning has shifted from focusing on design techniques to focusing on research of policies [6].

The fourth stage began in 1975 and continues till now. The greatest feature of urban planning theory paradigm in this stage is diversification. There appeared a New Right planning theory in the neoliberal era, Western Marxism and critical theory, urban regime theory, postmodernist planning theory, and collaborative planning theory. The theoretical paradigm of urban planning has further transformed, and cooperation, coordination and interest balance have become the core of planning. With the development of cognition of urban planning values and the nature of political activities, planners’ role has changed from the technical experts in the early stage to the coordinators in judging planning issues among different interest groups. Facing the reality of social pluralism and power imbalance, achieving planning goals through extensive social cooperation has become a new orientation. At the same time, the content of theoretical research has become more and more extensive, including a large amount of social science and humanities contents, and emphasizes on how to better protect citizens' rights and interests through policies such as government governance and public management.

3. Practices and Development of Urban Planning Theories in China

The development process of China's urban planning theoretical research is different from that of European and American countries. Compared with the modern planning background of those developed countries, a notable feature of the society since the founding of the People's Republic of China is the continuous changes in the main social contradiction, economic development and economic systems. As a result, as a government function, urban planning theories and methods also undergo important changes accordingly. The practical development of urban planning theories in China can be roughly divided into three stages: the planned economy period (1949-1978), the market-oriented transformation period (1978-2012), and the new era (2012 -Present).

3.1 Stage I: 1949-1978

Between the founding of the People's Republic of China and the reform and opening up in 1978, China was in the time of planned economy. During this period, it mainly borrowed from the urban planning model the Soviet Union [7], which formed a production plan-driven urban planning. Under the planned economy, it was believed that the main social contradiction was the contradiction between the advanced social system and backward social productivity. The fundamental task was to give priority to the development of industry, especially the heavy industry, and to transform from a backward agricultural country to an advanced industrial country as soon as possible. In this economic system, "for whom, what, how, and where to produce" were determined by plans, so urban planning is driven by production plans. This model has the following basic characteristics.

First is the concretization of the national economic plan. Planning for the production is the implementation of the national economic plan in space, especially the industrial construction plan which served as the mainline. The 1st National Conference on Urban Construction in 1952 pointed out that the main material basis of urban construction is industrial construction. The plan, location and speed of industrial construction determine those of urban construction. Urban construction must take the policy adapted to industrial construction.

Second is to properly meet the material and cultural requirements of the people. On the one hand, labor is an indispensable determinant of production. Satisfying the material and cultural needs is not only the fundamental purpose of improving production, but also is essential for ensuring the reproduction of labor and meeting the needs of labor input in industrial construction and production. Therefore, urban planning and construction must serve the people. On the other hand, this period was in the process of industrialization and urbanization under the condition of unlimited labor supply. The welfare of workers and urban residents must be moderate, otherwise it would not only affect the relationship between investment and consumption and restrict industrial construction and production development, but also affect the balance between urban and rural areas and cause excessive rural population flooding into cities. Therefore, coordinating with production and properly meeting the material and cultural requirements of the people have become the basic principles and guidelines of urban planning.

3.2 Stage II: 1978-2012

The 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party marked China's entry into a market-oriented transition period. During this period, China absorbed the modern urban planning ideas from Europe and the United States and formed a growth competition-driven urban planning. The principle social contradiction in this period is considered to be the contradiction between the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people and the backwardness of social

production. Therefore, the fundamental task is to develop social productivity with economic construction as the center, and reform and opening up as the fundamental driving force. With the localization and marketization of the responsibility and rights of “for whom, what, how and where to produce”, the planned economy has transformed into a government-led market economy driven by competitive local governments. With this economic system, urban development depends on whether competitive local governments can obtain the competitive advantage of production growth in market competition. In this context, the “market-oriented planning” with neo-liberalism characteristics has emerged in the field of planning theory. Its main thrust is that planning should mainly serve to promote economic development. This model has the following characteristics:

First is the basic tool that competitive local governments use to boost competition. Planning for the growth of production in competitive areas means that urban planning is a comprehensive tool for competitive local governments to compete for growth. It is a strategic tool for competitive local governments to mobilize, organize, market or operate urban resource allocation to achieve growth under the leadership of the central government in accordance with its own strategic intention, will, responsibility and rights [8]. Therefore, since the mid-1990s, urban planning has been defined in official documents as the basic means or public policy for the government to guide and regulate urban construction and development.

Secondly, investment promotion and economic development should be the priority. In the economic development with an unlimited supply of labor force, the shortage of physical capital is the main bottleneck of economic growth. The key to competition for growth is to compete for accumulating material capital and for attracting and retaining investors and enterprises. Therefore, the development, packaging and marketing of cities for investors and enterprises have become the inevitable choice of competitive local governments. Almost all cities regard attracting investment as the priority goal and task of urban planning. They try their best to provide cheap construction land and its supporting infrastructure, public services and preferential policies for attracting investment. But they neglect or even ignore the interest and needs of workers, residents and especially migrant workers [9]. This kind of urban planning theory which emphasizes economic growth over social development, emphasizes production over living, and emphasizes development over environmental protection provides strong support for the miracle of China's rapid economic growth, but it also causes a serious imbalance in economic and social relations, urban-rural relations, and the relationship between human and nature.

3.3 Stage Iii: 2012-Present

Since 2012, the international situation has undergone unprecedented changes, and China's development has entered a new era. The main contradiction of Chinese society in the new era has been transformed into the contradiction between the unbalanced and inadequate development and people's ever-growing needs for a better life. In order to adapt to this major contradiction transformation, China's urban planning has gradually transformed to be driven by people's better life. The 2015 Central Conference on Urban Workings emphasized that the people-centered development idea and “people's city for the people” were the starting point and ultimate goal of urban work. In this context, planning for the people is to meet the people's needs for a better life. This model has the following characteristics.

First is a better life for the people, which is not only the requirement of urban development in the new era, but also the growing demand for people's democracy, rule of law, equality, justice, safety and environmental quality. At this stage, urban planning gradually began to correct the serious tendency of emphasizing economic growth efficiency over social equity and justice, emphasizing construction over safety, and emphasizing development over protection. It respects residents' right

to know, participate and supervise urban development decisions, so as to make the city safer, more beautiful, and more equal.

Second is to center on improving the quality of the city. The so-called quality of place refers to the sum of the quantity, diversity, quality and availability of immovable goods and services (including personal services, public services, natural and artificial environment, and infrastructure) between cities [10]. With the rapid development of economy and society, income difference is no longer the only factor that determines the satisfaction of migrant workers and residents to the city. Urban pleasure and living costs such as transportation and housing are becoming more and more important determinants. Therefore, in order to ensure that the city can gain a competitive advantage in the competition of satisfied labor force and residents, urban planning begins to consider improving urban pleasure and satisfying residents' needs by minimizing the cost of transportation and housing, so as to create a living quality more suitable for learning, communication, innovation and people's daily life.

4. Conclusions

The historical and theoretical research of urban planning is a vast field. In this paper, the urban planning theories and their practices and development in China are generally reviewed. To conclude, in the past 70 years, the People's Republic of China has successively formed three urban planning theoretical models, namely, the "production plan-driven model", the "growth competition-driven model" and the "better life-driven model". Furthermore, this paper holds that:

(1) The theory of urban planning is constantly developing and evolving, and current theories are temporary. When a theory reaches its peak and becomes a "paradigm", doubts about it will appear at the same time, because there is no paradigm that can fully explain and guide the rich and complex practice of urban construction. There are always deficiencies and gaps. When questioning the existing paradigm, a new paradigm is being created. The progress of theories lies in the continuous questioning, supplement, transformation and innovation of the established paradigm.

(2) Urban planning is not pure science, but applied science. A theory must be based on the external conditions (including time, space and other factors, such as "Chinese characteristics") when it is applied. At the same time, it should learn from and establish on the basis of the existing planning theories (such as humanism and other normative theories with universal value in western theories). The fundamental purpose of planning is to construct the order of urban development for the sake of public health, public safety and social welfare. Therefore, the main task for planners is still to better guide planning practice. Planning theories cannot be separated from practice and fall into abstract reasoning.

References

- [1] Burns, A. (1976). *Hippodamus and the planned city*. *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, (H. 4), 414-428.
- [2] De Neufville, J. I. (1983). *Planning theory and practice: Bridging the gap*. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 3(1), 35-45.
- [3] Abramson, D. B. (2006). *Urban Planning in China: Continuity and Change: What the future holds may surprise you*. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 72(2), 197-215.
- [4] Shi Nan, Li Baihao, Li Cai, & Qu Changhong. (2019). *A Review of Chinese City Planning Researches and Important Treatises from 1949 to 2009*. *Urban Planning Forum*, (2), 4.
- [5] Faludi, A. (1973). *The "systems view" and planning theory*. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, 7(1), 67-77.
- [6] Tong Ming. (2005). *Urban Planning from the Government Perspective*. *China Architecture and Building Press*.
- [7] Zou Deci. (2014). *Research on the Development of Urban Planning in China*. *China Architecture and Building Press*.

- [8] Yin Chengzhi, & Sun Hao. (2017). *Competition, Economic Growth and Physical Urbanization Intensity in China: An Empirical Study Based on the Data of 35 Large and Medium-sized Cities*. *Urban Development Studies*, 24(12), 30-37.
- [9] Li Meiqin. (2014). *Methods and Strategies of Urban Planning for Supporting Investment Promotion*. *Jiangxi Building Materials*, (21), 41-41.
- [10] Yang Kaizhong. (2019). *The New Logic of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Coordinated Development: Local Quality-driven Development*. *Economy and Management*, 33(01), 7-9.