

An Analysis on Planning Paradigms and the Evolution of Urban Planning in China

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Abstract: This paper reviews the major “paradigms” for urban planning around the world and classifies the planning in China into three paradigms: construction-oriented planning, development-oriented planning, and regulation-oriented planning. The contemporary urban planning system in China started with construction-oriented planning in the 1950s under the influence of the Soviet model, and this course was changed after China broke up with Russia. In the early stage of reform and opening up, urban planning system was reshaped with reference to development-oriented planning and was later mixed with regulation-oriented planning at the end of 1980s. Although the key features, contents, and methods in those three paradigms were all absorbed and played an important role in the rapid urbanisation of China, urban planning system is still construction-oriented at its core, notwithstanding the attempts and pilot programmes of urban spatial development strategic plan, territorial planning of cities and counties, and the integration of multi-modal planning. Based on the analysis on the evolution course of urban planning system in China and its functions under given political and socio-economic landscape, this paper reveals the institutions of urban planning in China in different times, its unique development path, as well as the root causes.

Keywords: Planning Paradigm, Construction-oriented Planning, Development-oriented Planning, Regulation-oriented Planning, Evolution of Urban Planning, China

1 Planning paradigms and the institutional context

After Thomas Kuhn first defined and applied the term “paradigm” in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, “paradigm” became a popular term that is used to analyze the development of research and practices of various disciplines. However, in Kuhn’s book, as rightly pointed out by some scholars, “paradigm” as a term has at least twenty different meanings. Therefore, it would be helpful to first define “paradigm” in this paper. In the broadest sense, according to Kuhn’s definition, paradigm refers to “a widely-recognised model or mode”. Various paradigms bear fundamental differences: the change of paradigm would cause material changes in both

epistemology and methodology, and even entail a different world view and approach to the world ^[1]. The “paradigm” discussed in this paper means, as defined by Kuhn in his book, the foundation and standards that underpin a discipline and the related practices, along with the complete set of institutions and methods built around that discipline. In that sense, “paradigm” does not refer to any specific theory, institution, method, or their formats, but rather the entirety made up of all the above, including specific ideas, thoughts, institutions, methods, and specific practices. A paradigm should be continuous and consistent in its evolution, and keep its coherence over a certain period of time. Indeed, as a discipline evolves and the practices unfold, paradigms may mix with one another to some degree. Therefore, in the analysis of “paradigms”, we should look into the abstract prototypes so as to understand the essence. In this paper, the term “paradigm” is used in exactly that sense to categorise modern urban planning.

Due to the different interpretations of urban planning and varied institutions and cultures that different countries have, the role, scope, and implementation of urban planning also differ, resulting in hugely different urban planning systems. Viewing through the lens of “paradigm”, the planning systems across the world fall into three categories: construction-oriented planning, development-oriented planning, and regulation-oriented planning. Although such classification is based on the distinction of planning outcomes, the three categories match with corresponding administrative institutions and implementation mechanisms. So it is fair to classify entire planning systems in the same way. By nature, the three planning systems all bear the basic characteristics of modern urban planning: i.e. public intervention in private development and construction ^[2]. That sets modern urban planning apart from conventional urban planning, and also constitutes the foundation for the inception and development of modern urban planning. In order for modern urban planning to achieve that mission, rules are needed to determine and allocate land and space uses before construction takes place. Subsequently, management and regulation should be in place to ensure private development and construction abide by the pre-agreed rules and standards. That, is the gist of modern urban planning system, and its outcome plans, as well as its management mechanisms ^[2-3].

(1) Construction-oriented planning is the planning aimed to organise urban construction effectively and reach pre-set construction goals. In terms of contents, it emphasises that certain codes and standards must be observed to define the scope, scale, processes, and final results of construction. The prototype of such planning is the “general layout map” in architecture design, which much resembles a blueprint with technical criteria. The early modern urban planning in Continental Europe since the

mid-19th century, e.g. the German urban expansion planning, is a good example. This type of planning was the predominant planning paradigm in the early 20th century. It is also known as urban planning with architecture or engineering background.

(2) Development-oriented planning is based on the prediction of future development. Its scope is determined by the needs of future development; its implementation is in line with the directions set forth in the planning and opens to adaptation to realities. It is different from construction-oriented planning in that its logic standing is to allocate land and spatial resources to meet the needs of social and economic development; whereas that for construction-oriented planning revolves around the physical design of construction projects and the physical environment. The former has its focus more on proper processes, while the latter on the consistency of results. As there are always uncertainties in prediction versus the realities, and always an “oscillation effect” caused by asynchrony, the statutory regulations and planning are usually used as strategic guide for directions. When it comes to specific construction projects, decisions are made with multiple factors taken into account. To this end, planning approval constitutes an important part of the urban planning system. One typical example of this planning system is the post-war development planning system in the UK, which is especially representative since the 1960s as it became better articulated with reference to systematic methodology ^[3].

(3) Regulation-oriented planning is based on the distribution and protection of land titles, usually done in the form of local regulations on land use for potential development. The core of regulation-oriented planning is to protect current interests in land and space uses against being harmed by new constructions. Such planning is done in strict compliance to local regulations: not only any changes or revisions of the planning must go through legislative procedures, even construction management and dispute settlement are also subject to judiciary process. Examples of this type of planning include the planning legislation and regulation system originated in Germany and matured in American cities. Peculiar to this type of planning is that most academic studies in this field are in the domain of law ^[4-5].

From the above we can see the key criteria in this classification are how public power intervenes with the private sector in construction and development. The different ways of intervention actually represent the different intrinsic logics and institutions of each type of urban planning system. Though there is overlapping and convolution among the systems in terms of their scope and practices, the purposes of those planning systems and the way different systems are combined, or the lack thereof, are still

fundamentally distinctive from one another; i.e. there is always a “trunk” for each of those systems that the whole system attaches to and serves. Of the three types, construction-oriented planning and development-oriented planning centre on future relationship; while regulation-oriented planning takes the relationship of current interests as the subject. Between the former two, construction-oriented planning has its perspective upon the final results, while development-oriented planning is more about striving for the target. Therefore, although the ultimate goal for all modern urban planning systems is always to execute public regulation on private construction projects, some key differences remain in their underlying institutional framework, way of regulation, as well as the planning mechanism and statutory outcomes which serve as the basis for regulation^[6].

As countries all have different paradigms for urban planning systems, they all have their own distinctive development paths for urban planning. Yet there was mutual learning and absorption in the process, so some integration and convolution can be seen. However, the basic paradigms have not changed in any material way. In general, the British development planning system that came into being after the Second World War remained essentially unchanged, despite several rounds of reforms. Though some regulation-oriented planning methods were employed to some extent in regional planning and local planning, the statutory planning programmes remain an important consideration for planning decision-making of any development projects, which should be examined and approved in the light of related policy, nature of the project, and the changing circumstances. On the other side, the planning system in Continental Europe, while keeping “construction-oriented planning” at its core, started to draw from the British “development-oriented planning” in the 1960s and applied it widely in the overall planning of regions and city-regions. When making decisions in detailed planning and evaluating construction projects, more attention was given to the social and spatial relationship between construction projects^[7]. Whereas in the US, most cities adopted two systems—“development-oriented planning” and “jurisdiction regulations”. The overall planning done by city councils are applicable primarily in domains of public policy, public affairs, and government-used land; while the jurisdiction regulation system is applicable to private land and developments. Despite some overlapping and interactions, the two systems are independent in their evolution.

2 The multi-front exploration for urban planning in China’s recent history

Modern urban planning in China gradually took its shape under the

influence of many Western thoughts ^[8-9]. In history, the “garden city” movement and some early urban planning theories found their way into China back in the 1910s. The former appeared mostly in journals, books, and articles in mass media, while the latter was found mostly in college textbooks in civil engineering and other related fields. Many factors played a role in shaping the concepts of urban planning in China at the time, which was built upon the early planning system in Continental Europe: first and foremost was the Chinese traditional culture and philosophy, its institutional framework and construction ideology; then there was the influence of German planning system relay-imported from Japan, especially as many engineering and architecture professionals who studied in Germany and France returned to China and took positions either in the urban administrations or in engineering and design fields. By the end of the 1920s, some major cities in China began to try their hands on formulating urban planning based on their municipal agenda, e.g. the “Capital Programme” of Nanjing, and the “Greater Shanghai Programme”, etc. These programmes bear distinctive features of American cities during the time of “beautification campaign” in the US. The urban planning of American cities in that period inherited the tradition of early urban planning in Continental Europe and brought it to a new height. The stipulations on the scope of planning in the “Metropolitan Planning Law” enacted by Chinese national government in 1939 manifested similar features.

After China finished the War against Japanese Aggression, its urban planning got rid of the pre-war patterns and features, as demonstrated in examples like the “Greater Shanghai Metropolitan Programme”. In terms of blueprints and planning documents, process of research, and subject matters and questions, especially in the organisation of city functions, the urban planning in China then bore apparent characters of Stanley Abercrombie’s Greater London planning ^[10]. This certainly had to do with the background of the planning team, especially that Mr. Chen Zhanxiang, one of Abercrombie’s students returned to China and took part in planning programmes. On the other hand, the substances of American jurisdiction division system were introduced to China, leading to the formulation of, for instance, “the Provisional Jurisdiction Plan for the Built-up Area” (1948) in Shanghai. However, it is worth noting that these planning programmes were mostly in stages of experiment, improvement, or early implementation. At the time, the civil war in China has not ended yet, there was neither the time nor the room to implement those planning or to reform the system. As such, little historical evidence was available to assess the performance of such planning.

3 The composition and establishment of modern urban planning system in China

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China chose to side with the USSR and follow in the Russian footsteps in developing its own institutions. Urban planning, as a part of social governance system, was restored under the guidance of Russian experts. In this period, a keynote for urban planning was the binary separation of urban planning and economic planning. Urban planning was regarded as an extension of national economic planning, and an instrument to implement economic plans. The scope of urban planning was limited to construction and engineering, and the approach to urban planning was more about implementing the economic plans and making spatial planning and arrangements to ensure construction tasks can be achieved. The core tasks for urban planning at the time were to plan and construct facilities (primarily public service facilities) to support (major) construction projects laid out in the economic plans. A popular term in urban planning then was “general layout”, which aptly tells the nature of urban planning at the time ^[11-12]. In the binary framework of separated economic planning and urban planning, the paradigm for construction-oriented planning was reinforced and it became the baseline for China's modern urban planning and kept evolving thereafter ^[13]. As a matter of fact, since the mid-1950s, especially over the decades after the reform and opening up, many planners tried to break free from the limitations of construction-oriented planning; however, from institutional framework, organisational structure, to social conception and even the identity awareness of some planners, the status of construction-oriented planning as the baseline has never changed—urban planning is merely for construction projects, in other words, if no construction is expected, urban planning is not needed. The outcomes of urban planning are to serve the needs, in fact the immediate needs, of construction. The popular notion about urban planning was that the quality of urban planning should be evaluated by reconciling planning maps with construction needs and as-built results.

Right after China started the reform and opening up, through restoring and improving the policies and mechanisms left from the late 1950s, China saw a rapid development period for urban planning. On one hand, there was the understanding and interpretation of the existing planning framework; and there was the long-time backlog of housing supply, traffic congestion, severely underdeveloped public service facilities and utilities, etc. all enhancing the basic model of construction-oriented planning. On the other hand, in the urban planning shaped by modern architecture

movement amongst other modernisation courses, the best received and promoted part by Chinese planning practitioners and educators is the new town planning in the UK and elsewhere in the world ^[14-15]. The urban planning shaped by modern architecture movement, also known as Modernist urban planning, had its root in early urban planning in Continental Europe and evolved with modernist architecture studies. Due to the selective introduction of new town planning system to China, the methods for construction and designing were mistaken for the principles of urban planning. With the education and industry institutions as the catalyst, the notion of construction-oriented planning was further enhanced.

The British development-oriented planning system, which is valued by Peter Hall as the cornerstone of post-war urban planning systems in all countries, was introduced at roughly the same time ^[3]. Apparently, its clear and complete systematic structure has made the system easy to present and adopt. In particular, that system corresponds quite well with the established urban planning hierarchy in China in the late 1950s, so it soon became the dominant narration of China's urban planning system. However, there are huge differences between construction-oriented planning and development-oriented planning, at least on the interpretation and application of the outcomes, which entails completely different management systems. When China started to introduce British publications in the late 1970s, the British urban planning system has already finished its transformation in the late 1960s. By that time, the discussions on the contents and logic of "development-oriented planning" and how it should influence policy arrangements had basically finished. So China was left with little chance to digest the nature (or the "paradigm") of "development-oriented planning". Consequently, we failed to really understand the differences between concepts like "master planning", "detailed planning" in the two paradigms of construction-oriented and development-oriented planning; neither did we analyze thoroughly the root causes for the change from "master planning/detailed planning" to "structural planning/local planning" or the changes in planning scope and methods. So much attention was given to the structure of the planning system that even till the 1990s, it was no surprise to read statements like "structural planning is equivalent to the master planning in China, while local planning is equivalent to the detailed planning" in introductory literature about the British planning system. That being said, our understanding of development-oriented planning is essentially limited to seeking equivalent format of the planning outcomes. What China had done was just transplanting the names onto existing Chinese planning system, or even, just using them to justify the reasons and completeness of Chinese

planning system.

With that as the background, China transplanted the two paradigms of “construction-oriented planning” and “development-oriented planning” to its own urban planning system. In the process, China drew from many theories and methods of Western modern urban planning to enrich its understanding and methodology and to expand its knowledge scope in urban planning. On the other hand, without sufficient introspection on its existing planning system, China only copied the ostensible features to form a planning system that is construction-oriented planning at its core and seems development-oriented on the surface. This won yet more ground for construction-oriented planning. Back then development planning and urban planning were the responsibilities of different administrative departments. The economic reform that started in 1984 established economic growth as the key drive for city development. A system in which counties are governed and guided by cities was set up, winning the cities a lot of attention. Therefore, urban planning was given a leading status as the blueprint and masterplan for city development. Under such circumstances, some scholars came up with the idea of urban system planning, which quickly became a significant component of the planning system. Meanwhile, those components that had been significant before like industries deployment, territorial planning, etc. were deemed as belonging to planned economy and not conducive to improving city competitiveness and economic growth, hence faded out. Meanwhile urban system planning was scaled up from counties, to cities, to provinces, then nationwide. The thinking of urban planning and construction-oriented planning became the norm and form to approach regional issues. That differs from the process when European countries adopted the idea of development-oriented planning in the early 1940s, in which they first created and reinforced regional planning and city-region planning in order to allocate all resources for development, and to transform the planning scope and management mechanism at city level. In terms of detailed planning and limits on development, re-evaluation on uncertainties was emphasised; planning constraints for the surrounding areas were subject to necessary changes as the construction going on. In this way, the spirit of development-oriented planning is embodied in the whole planning system ^[7].

As economic reform reached greater depth and economic growth in cities sped up, a key agenda in the late 1980s was how to set up an urban planning system that can both meet the demand of economic growth and manage its market impact. With reference to the urban jurisdiction regulations in the US, a number of Chinese urban planning and design institutes started experiments in this regard in Shanghai, Guilin, Suzhou, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Wenzhou, etc., which formed the

framework for regulatory detailed planning. The framework was later endorsed by the practice of state-owned land title transfer and was further developed. Later, Shenzhen Special Economic Zone set up its own brand new urban planning system which was adapted after that of Hong Kong. The requirement for a mandatory plan map covering the whole city area in that system is a good example of applying city-wide regulatory detailed planning, as compared to the previous practice of having the map only for the land for transfer ^[16]. A comparison between the regulatory detailed planning in China and the city-region jurisdiction regulations in the US would easily show some fundamental differences between the two: the former is a planning programme, while the latter is regulation. The former has regulatory criteria that are based on the planners' imagination and vision on future development, with emphasis on the regulation of the development of all land plots; whilst the latter adheres to the principle that development of one plot should not pose adverse impact on the same form of development in its neighbouring plots. In that sense, China's regulatory detailed planning in essence just copied the regulatory criteria in American city-region jurisdiction regulations. Therefore, the system is very different from the American system not only by nature, but also in all aspects including its scope, methods, applicability, as well as management philosophy and measures. Nevertheless, the invention of regulatory detailed planning has changed the old way of regulating development by constraints of architecture format, showing some prototypic features of regulation-oriented planning. However, its basis is still criteria based on predictions and designs for future, so the relations between a plot and its surrounding land is defined on the basis of planners' expectations. As such, the nature of construction-oriented planning remains unchanged. That explains why later on regulatory detailed planning is evaluated by whether or not it meets the needs for construction; why criteria of regulatory detailed planning are changed extensively to better fit the needs of construction; and why more flexibility is suggested in many rounds of reforms on regulatory detailed planning.

4 Attempts to defy the paradigm of construction-oriented planning and its consequences

By the mid-1990s, the framework of modern urban planning system in China was largely in place, in which the three paradigms of modern urban planning were harmonised under Chinese administrative system. The most characteristic and effective features of each of the three internationally recognised paradigms are represented in China's urban planning system ^[17].

The harmonisation of the three proves that: when the synergy and strategic coordination of various development factors is neglected, morphological design with construction-oriented planning as its core and directions would become the norm for the regulation of all kinds of city developments. That is in essence to regulate ongoing urban development projects with an imagined vision, so problems inevitably arose in practice. That is made all the more apparent as China is rapidly urbanising. Governments at all levels as well as urban planners are all seeking solutions. Some typical solutions are the strategic planning for urban space development initiated by local governments, and the “integration of three/multiple planning programmes” pressed ahead by the central government. Judging from the results, these all represent goals and attempts to defy the constraints of construction-oriented planning; however, under various mechanisms, all have gone to the opposite, i.e. enhancing the feature of construction-oriented planning ^[18].

(1) Strategic planning for urban space development

As China set the goal to establish a market economy, the potential of market factors was unlocked. Coastal cities in Eastern China and regional centre cities gained momentum for rapid development; urbanisation also got on the fast track, with urban population increasing quickly. The reform and opening up in China started with streamlining administrative procedures and delegating power. After the tax decentralisation reform in 1994, city governments started to transfer state-owned land to commercial developers in a bid to expedite the rapid urban expansion, embarking on a journey later known as “land finance”. Urban growth thus changed from small footprint expansion with scattered, discrete development zones of various kinds to large scale spontaneous sprawl, dubbed as “stretching the skeleton”. A great number of contiguous new towns and new districts started to emerge.

While China was sparing no efforts in gaining entry to the WTO, economic globalisation drove the centre cities to grow rapidly. The strategic planning for urban space development, which revolves around improving city competitiveness, took off in Guangzhou at the turn of the 21st century, and later found its way to many major cities. The rise of strategic planning for urban space development is in line with the international trend, e.g. cities like London, New York, Chicago, etc. also started to draft urban space strategic planning around the same time. There is one shared focus in their contents: improving the competitiveness and sustainability of cities. But the emergence of urban space strategic planning in China is more attributable to the temptation to go beyond the constraints of existing regulations. For that sake, almost all cities made an excuse that the time taken to draft and approve the master planning is so long that the planning cannot catch

up with rapidly changing realities. Whatsoever, an undeniable fact is that the regulatory criteria set forth in statutory planning programmes cannot meet the needs for “stretching the skeleton”, “building a great city”, or “leapfrog development”. Therefore, some sort of “non-statutory planning” has to be employed to realise the ambition of cities ^[19].

If we look at the contents of a strategic planning for urban space development, a key feature is its perspective, which is to the extent of a whole city or even larger regions. The rational allocation of all development resources is the core of the planning, representing a breakthrough as compared to the previous city master planning system, which only focuses on the centre city. In the latter, though some city-region planning was included in city master planning, most of the contents is on urban system, i.e. the relationship between major towns and the distribution of infrastructure. Involvement of regional development factors was limited, as the priority was to serve the city, not to make a bigger plan for the region as a whole, nor to provide a wider basis for regional governance ^[20]. The strategic planning for urban space development examines the city-region as its subject. On one hand that is certainly a necessary result as cities have grown into contiguous urban areas and towns started to compete for the limited resources; on the other, which represents a counter-measure to address the widening gap between urban and rural areas which was caused by overemphasis on cities. Therefore, in these planning programmes priorities are given to the development and conservation of the city-region and to the development policy so as to guide the coordination within not only the core city but also a larger region. In that case they are no longer directive plans for specific construction projects. The same trend is reflected in the later emergence of “urban-rural coordinated planning” as well as other county- or city-level master planning ^[21].

While the strategic planning for urban space development kept its regional perspective and shifted towards policy as its subject matter, the prototype of “policy district” concept was proposed. It is also an important token that urban planners introduced the basic concepts of development-oriented planning and broke the constraints of construction-oriented planning. The definition of “policy districts” were rather rough (most of the districts are oversized) and contain some indicative rather than precise expressions on spatial arrangements, such as “expand to the east”, “controlling on the north”, or “the middle part stands out”...no specific policies were proposed accordingly, and no clear and close links were established between the districts and some new policies. However, the integration of social and economic development deployment with spatial development changed the purely construction-oriented planning approach which stresses on specific land use for projects. So at least that sent a

signal of policy trends along certain spatial directions. In practice, some cities applied the conceptual framework laid out in the spatial development strategic planning directly as the action roadmap, turning policy indications into execution plans. That again proved that the interpretation of urban planning was still limited to the scope of construction-oriented planning. In some later spatial development strategic planning, cities even set goals to include some large projects for near-term implementation into the planning in order to concentrate all resources on them. This apparently went against the purpose of urban planning.

Undoubtedly, the rise of strategic planning for urban space development can be attributed to two causes: first, city governments wish to synthesise all development resources in the region to build a big and strong centre city and seek space for its expansion. Second, spatial development strategic planning can be used to get around the constraints imposed in the master planning. In practice, urban master planning has been used as a tool for the central government to control local governments, and higher governments to control lower governments. But lower governments always want to find ways to get around the control from higher above, where spatial development strategic planning proved useful. The same applies in the case that regulatory detailed planning breaks the constraints of master planning. Viewing from another angle, while spatial development strategic planning is used by city governments to cope with constraints imposed by master planning and higher governments, it also strengthens the control by city governments over lower county and township governments. In that sense, city governments actually pass the regulation pressure from their superiors to their subordinates. Such traits of spatial development strategic planning, along with the demand of the central government to strengthen macro-regulation, rendered it necessary to have tighter regulations. Some areas, lines, and figures were set as regulatory criteria, but they were still based on the construction-oriented planning approach. With these measures in place, urban planning became even more a tool for higher government to control lower governments, and less a means and process for city governance. This was later institutionalised as a blueprint-based mandatory regulation^[18,22]. The conception of urban planning in this context has had a great bearing on urban planning reforms and its latest institutions.

(2) “Integration of three” / “multiple planning programmes into one”

Two decades into the reform and opening up, the city-centred development had enabled rapid social advancing and economic growth, as well as fast urbanisation. But the disparity between urban and rural and among different regions also grew wider. This problem, in combination with the flaws in economic and social structure caused by

the rapid growth, and the issues in resources and eco-environment due to overdevelopment and overexploitation, had direct impacts on the quality of urbanisation and the sustainability of growth ^[23]. That is why shortly into the 21st century, Chinese central government tightened macro-regulation amidst market volatilities. Macro-regulation at that time was not done any more by economic plans and administrative approval procedures which were common in the planned economy era, but more by bank financing resources, urban planning, land supply, etc. As a result, urban planning came to the centre stage as a major regulatory force.

After almost twenty years of exploration in reform and opening up, China set the vision of building a socialist market economy and changed the administrative approach of planned economy. The “National Economy Plan” in the planned economy era had its name changed into “National Economic and Social Development Plan” in 1982. By the time of the “Eleventh Five-Year Plan” (2006-2010), it was changed again into “National Economic and Social Development Planning”, showing that the mandatory instructive plan had been changed into a guidance planning. More importantly, in a market economy, the distribution of capital and other development resources depends more on the market. Accordingly, the macro-regulation approach and measures should all change ^[24]. In the previous development-oriented planning more attention was given to the planning along “lines” and “belts”; whereas by this time, attention was shifted to “plots” and “areas”. In the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, the concept of “main functional area” was proposed for the first time, based on which the “National Planning for Main Functional Areas” was done to serve as the guidance for regional development.

Early in the reform and opening up period, in order to contain large scale encroachment on farmland by emerging rural businesses and by urban sprawl, as well as the unregulated expansion of the suburbs towards cities, centralised management of land was introduced through integration of the governance responsibilities of urban construction department and agriculture department into one land regulation department. The “Law on Land Management” enacted in 1986 stipulates that “master planning for land use” should be developed. A complete top-down mechanism has been developed after many years of practices, which explicitly determines the quantity of land supply. To respond to the state’s macro-regulation measures, the mechanism of land use inspection was established by the state government in 2004, with an aim to ensure the enforcement of the most stringent land management regulations, including land use master planning.

As such, the development and construction in a region or a city

is subject to direct constraints of the National Economic and Social Development Planning, urban planning, and land use planning. From an institutional perspective, each of the three has its own scope, respectively economic and social development, urban construction deployment and development control, and control on land use. But content-wise, the three are interrelated and intertwined. If we compare them to the “development-oriented planning + construction-oriented planning” model in Continental Europe, or the development-oriented planning paradigm in the UK, we may conclude that the three are just different facets of the same thing, or the artificial division of an organic entirety. Even worse, the three divided facets were put under the administration of different governmental departments, who are intuitively expansive, yearning for more power. So the three planning systems have been put on a track of competing for unduly expansion of their power so that each can include more dimensions that are related by any account. And by making itself more “complete,” each seeks to prevail over the other two. That struggle went on for many years and each type of the planning systems grew in its contents, regulation scope, and the intensity of regulation measures. The main functional area planning evaluates factors such as resource endowment, current situation, and development potential, and demarcates policy districts based on its judgement of development prospects. Although some policy packages are tailor-made to certain areas, the concrete guidance it offers to those districts is limited. That remains true even at county level. Land use master planning takes protecting farmland as its aim, through allocating land quota at different levels it holds sway of land supply for development. What it lacks is the consolidation of development resources and the arrangements for future development. By its nature it is the control on land supply at local government level. Whereas, urban planning has been prioritising the deployment and regulation on specific construction projects, in which too much attention was given to cities and too little to the region. More often than not its efficacy is compromised by near-term construction projects. While the other two emphasise the control by higher governments over lower ones, urban planning pays more attention to the regulation on specific construction and development projects, notwithstanding that since the turn of the century it has been also used as a tool for the central government to control local governments. That being said, due to the different viewpoints, values, and regulation methods of different planning systems, some contradictory regulation requirements arose for the same area, which resulted in low governance efficiency and development in some areas being held back. That is exactly the issue which the “integration of three planning programmes” meant to address.

Pilot programmes for the integration of the three were rolled out in

2014. The administrative departments for each of the three planning systems were each allocated some regions where they play the leading role in the integration. This caused one abnormal phenomenon: a department would use the planning system it is most familiar with as the baseline to integrate others. Such practice is, in a sense, to seek the appropriate way for integration; or to explore the effective way to integrate the three planning systems within the existing framework. However, the pilot programmes were not successful. Reasons include issues in the administrative structure and in planning techniques (e.g. the classification of land uses), but most important is the inconsistency in missions, regulation scopes, and deployment of planning systems. Simple comparison and adjustments just brings only superficial consistency. However, the “integration of the three” and the “integration of multiple planning programmes” that followed shortly afterwards both retained the perspective on city-region, rather than the city itself. It is fair to even say, whichever department is in charge of the “integration”, it would always put much more attention on the city-region rather than the city urban area, which may represent an over-correction from the previous approach. That has created a foundation for the latest version of city-region master planning of Beijing and Shanghai (applicable until 2035); and also created some confusion between city-region and city urban area (and thereafter the planning in the two scopes) in the discussions of spatial planning system. On the other hand, main functional area planning and land use planning both are strongly top-down; whereas urban planning has long been looking at the city per se and materialising the intention of constantly expanding the city (or put it another way, resisting the control imposed by higher governments). That is why in the last ten years or so, while the central government’s control over city governments was constantly enhanced, the meaning of urban planning digressed to such priorities as defining and defending certain lines, areas, and districts. The coordinating function of urban planning was lost to a greater degree; while the thinking and approach of construction-oriented planning and construction regulation was carried forward and further enhanced.

Though the case-specific style “integration of the three planning programmes” did not achieve good effects, it still reveals the directions to go and the priorities to follow. Either it is the integration of three or more planning systems, the point is to make it an integral component of state governance capacity. That means, the integration should not be just about the contents and methods of planning, even not just about the type of planning system, but it should entail institutional and methodological reforms on planning ^[20]. Now that is something we can expect to take place in the new system of national spatial planning.

5 Conclusions: issues and the directions to take

The urban planning system in China was formed by drawing from other countries and adapting to the needs for social development and planning execution. Based on a core paradigm of construction-oriented planning, some features of development-oriented planning and regulation-oriented planning were absorbed to form a system with unique Chinese characteristics. It is fair to say that such a system integrates the best and most effective components of urban planning systems in other countries into an entirety. However, the institutions, methods, etc. that underpin the three paradigms differ significantly. The mosaic-style mix-up of imported systems and pragmatic practices has led to an ostensible harmonisation, in which the logic within the hierarchical components does not really hold. A critical shortcoming of that is the inconsistency^[25] in governance system and policy, which are vital to the formulation and implementation of urban planning. Therefore, though all levels of governments stress upon the importance of urban planning all the time, they have been stressing on different aspects of planning, putting urban planning in an awkward position. Under such circumstances, urban planning is either used as a tool for power struggle between higher and lower governments; or it is essentially excluded from the social governance system while still being held liable for all sorts of wrongdoings in urban development.

Over the years, the Chinese government has put in place a departmental (and compartmental) governance system. The administrative tools and measures are so divided, self-enclosed, and self-aggrandising that coordination between departments is hard to realise. As urban planning is the responsibilities of a few departments, it is hard to give full play to its coordinating role for overall development and construction. More often than not, the interpretation of urban planning was distorted to serve the interests of certain departments^[26-27]. There have been chances from time to time that urban planning in China could be shifted from a construction-oriented system to a development-oriented one, or at least development-oriented planning could gain a stronger role in the rationale of planning to better complement the shortcomings of construction-oriented planning, e.g. when spatial development strategic planning were done in the late 1950s, mid-1980s, and around 2000, and the “integration of multiple planning programmes into one” kicked in around 2010. However, transformations did not come through owing to the specific governance structure at the time. Rather, it went to the opposite, consolidating the foothold of construction-oriented planning. Urban planning as a coordination function was weakened over and again. Albeit supposedly an instrument to guide high quality development, urban planning ended up

being limited to regulatory measures in forms of some lines and figures.

It was in such an institutional framework that urban planning became a self-enclosed system that could only improve within the constraints. The improvements are very “path-dependent” in that the thinking and practices of construction-oriented planning is prevalent all along. The introduction of development-oriented planning and regulation-oriented planning seemed to have enriched the varieties of paradigms in China’s urban planning, but they have rather enhanced the foot holding of construction-oriented planning and even expanded the scope of regulation under the mind-set of construction-oriented planning, resulting in many wrong conception and inappropriate practical measures. Those who realised the problems of the existing planning system attempted to make some changes out of the box, for instance the strategic planning for spatial development initiated by city governments, and the “integration of multiple planning programmes into one” initiated by the central government. These were carried out here and there in China in high profile for some time and got many planners on board. However, due to various reasons, they finally led to the decline of the coordinating role of urban planning, and in a way enhanced the notion that construction-oriented planning equals urban planning, making China’s urban planning lose its directions and even go against the trend of modern urban planning. So it is safe to say, in today’s society when both the economic growth model and planning institutions are changing, the change of mind-set is critical. If constraints imposed by construction-oriented planning remain and people do not reflect on the nature and components of the current urban planning thoroughly^[28], it will be hard for modern urban planning to make real difference in China as a component to the state governance system and a token for governance competence. **UPI**

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