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A Critique of Theories of Urban Planning in China

Wing-shing Tang

Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, New Territories
Hong Kong

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About the author

Wing-shing Tang, Lecturer, Department of Geography,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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Introduction

Both planning theoreticians and practitioners are interested in delineating urban planning in China. By the end of 1976, there emerged in China the need to reinstate urban planning as a tool to control urban development, a tool first introduced in the mid-1950s and then downgraded since the 1960s. There have been increasing urban planning activities since then. First of all, the contribution of urban planning to economic and societal development has been confirmed in various policy reports and work conferences. As a derivation of this development, cities and towns have completed preparing their master plans and, for some of them, even district plans and detail plans. The legal basis of urban planning has also been installed through the promulgation of the Urban Planning Regulation in 1984 and, then, the Urban Planning Act in 1989. Institutionally, urban planning has been assigned a more prominent position in the administrative hierarchy, especially with respect to economic planning. In short, developments in urban planning since the mid-1970s have been considerable. How do we understand the nature of urban planning behind these developments?

Recently, there has been a rapidly growing literature to examine various aspects of urban development in China. Suffice it to mention just a few examples: from urbanisation (Chan, 1994; Kirkby, 1985; Solinger, 1991; Tang, 1997), urban citizenship (Chan, 1996), urban land development and redevelopment (Dowall, 1994; Tang, 1994; Yeh and Wu, 1996; Zhu, 1994), housing (Zhou and Logan, 1996; Wang, 1994; Wu, 1996), internal structure (Lo, 1987; Yan, 1995; Yeh and Wu, 1995; Wu, 1997; Wu and Yeh, 1997) and

urban restructuring (Wu, 1995, 1997). In comparison, the literature narrowly focused on urban planning (for instance, Khakee, 1996; Kwok, 1988; Pettinga, 1992; Sit, 1996; Wang and Hague, 1992; Xie and Costa, 1991, 1993) has not caught up with the other sub-areas. This is the case not only in terms of quantity, but also in theoretical advancement. It is the objective of this paper to review the literature on urban planning in China so as to highlight its deficiencies. The literature, especially the Chinese one, has been full of apologetic statements rather than explicit and coherent theoretical arguments. Nevertheless, it is still possible to read between the lines and pick up some loose threads. In order to subject these arguments to a critical assessment with a certain degree of analytical depth, I will carefully draw on the Western literature on urban planning theory (for a glimpse, see Campbell and Fainstein, 1996; Mandelbaum, Mazza and Burchell, 1996) for information and insights.

The paper is organised in the following way. The next section will outline the major arguments of the literature. These arguments are then subject to a careful scrutiny in the third section. There will be a methodological critique, which is to be followed by a theoretical one. It is hoped that this literature review will act as the backdrop for a better informed analysis of urban planning in China. Section four suggests a way to achieve this objective. All the arguments are then summarised in the final section.

The Major Arguments

The relationship between urban planning, the built environment and the state in China has never been the object of serious investigation and debate. The field has been largely dominated by partial diagnoses of the problems of implementing urban planning in the past. It has been observed that urban planning had changed in styles over time (for example, Buck, 1984; Cao, 1981; Fung, 1984; Gui, 1984; He, 1990:25-170; Kwok, 1981; Ma, 1979; Thompson, 1975; Wang, 1985; Xie and Costa, 1991, 1993; Zhao, 1984). Ng and

Wu (1995:281-83) have even explicitly labelled these changes in style as the "explanation" for the Chinese urban planning system.

Urban planning during the First Five Year Plan (FFYP) is conceived more technically as the "continuation and concretisation of national economic planning." Precisely, it is the latter that defines the former, not *vice versa*. We are repeatedly told that there was lot of economic development during that period. There were 156 national key projects aided by the Soviet Union and a considerable number of other supplementary local projects. Accordingly, enormous physical development, in terms of industrial plants and housing complexes for their workers and some basic community facilities, had to take place in major industrial bases and key-point cities. The main task of urban planning was to co-ordinate administratively the physical designs of capital construction projects decided at other, higher levels: to select factory location and plant sites, to design the layout of industrial towns, to divide functional zones, to arrange service facilities and to develop existing built-up areas (for detailed examples, see Kwok, 1981:153-71). Because of the input of Soviet experts, it was also highlighted that urban planning at that time was modelled on the Soviet Union: formalistic street patterns and grand design for public buildings and monuments, huge public squares and the predominance of master plans.

When the political climate changed, as during the years between the Great Leap Forward (GLF) and the end of the Cultural Revolution (CR), the intervention of the "leftist" ideology was emphasised. During the GLF, large-scale urban development and the formulation of unreasonable master plans were attributed to the utopian vision of superseding Western countries within a short period of time by the Maoist ideology of "walking on two legs." Afterward, administrative co-ordination began to give way to the still utopian socialist principles of equity and equalitarianism. The political ideology of eradicating the "three great contradictions" — the difference between workers and peasants, between manual and mental labour and between town and country — was considered influential at that time. At a time when

explosive city growth in the third world alarmed people in the 1960s and 1970s, and when the Soviet socialist bloc was criticised as revisionist, Western scholars did not hesitate to grab this opportunity and put a new label on this ideology and practice: anti-urbanism. Besides other policies, this ideology led to a few community development strategies, including the "urban commune" and the Daqing model. The urban commune was seen as a sub-community within a city with economic, political, socio-psychological functions. It was set up with the basic purpose of establishing rural villages within the urban setting, thereby reducing alienation while developing the community spirit (Xie and Costa, 1993:105). Kwok (1981) also showed how Daqing, a city built for oil exploration, was a model of urban-rural convergence. There, urban development combined with development of the rural area so as to eliminate the gap between town and country. Later, the Chinese carried the Daqing model to the extreme by applying it to settlement planning in the third front (*sanxian*): outlying areas in each district and the interior of the country.

Finally, to complete the discussion, these "leftist" principles were replaced by the principle of efficiency after economic reforms started in 1978 (Buck, 1984). The concern with urban planning had now been shifted to that of co-ordination. Every city had to be planned to perform its central functions, with the objective of promoting economic growth. Also, urban planning norms were promulgated and a development control system established. There was also reforms in the area of the relationship between economic planning and urban planning, the urban planning design and the administration of the design units (Li, 1989). Lately, there have been concerns with co-ordinating various urban planning related activities in transition to the market economy (Li, 1995; Man, 1995).

To summarise, these technical and ideological styles are derived inductively from the comparatively conjunctural circumstances, such as the FFYP, GLF and CR. Should the conjunctural circumstances surrounding urban planning practices change, it is necessary to look for new styles.

A Critique

These diagnoses are, however, incapable of grasping urban planning beyond the level of appearance. We are informed that planning styles had changed over time, and no more. This critique will examine the major arguments, first, methodologically and, then, theoretically.

Methodological Problem

It is difficult to make sense of these styles over time. Resembling fashions and fads, these styles gain and lose popularity as circumstances change. Then, any meaningful connection cannot be postulated between a preceding style and the one succeeding it. This problem can be avoided if each of these styles is understood in terms of a "deeper structure." The latter, which is less transient, acts as a point of reference to anchor the connections between different styles.[1] The "deep structure" that I have in mind refers to governmental reasoning and practice. The various styles of urban planning are but styles of the many forms of such reasoning and practice. Put differently, the major arguments in the literature have suffered methodologically from, to apply Sayer (1992) loosely, chaotic conceptualisation.

To elaborate, take ideology as an illustration: it is socially made. This understanding, however, does not contradict our disagreement with the negative view of ideology as deceptive or falsely-conscious (see Rutland, 1985:248). In his analysis of representations in urban planning, Fischler (1995) comes to a conclusion similar to our position. In China, it is even a truism that ideology is socially made. Kirkby's (1985:1-20) critique of the "anti-urbanism" thesis immediately comes to my mind. According to him, neither the prescription of Marx and Engels nor the theory and practice of the Soviet Union since the 1930s — both are considered influential in Chinese socialism — emphasise anti-urbanism. Having examined the objective and origins of its membership, he also concludes that the Chinese Communist Party

(CCP) does not embody such a philosophy of anti-urbanism. To him, the observable anti-urban practice must be attributable to the goals of economic development. My task here is not to debate whether the latter is the cause, as this has been done elsewhere (Tang, 1997). Rather, the point is that the practice of urban commune, the Daqing model, rural-urban convergence, etc., must be informed by some deliberate discourses that intermediate the practice and the anti-urbanism ideology.[2] Lin's (1981) analysis of economic policies in China helps to further elaborate on this point. He shows that an analytical analysis of a policy cannot even proceed unless the official ideology has been shaped or advocated, or even adjudicated, in such a way as to legitimise that policy (see also Halpern, 1988). In other words, all these reasonings and practices — the ideology, the intermediating discourses and the practice — are governmental practices of the socialist state. In a sense, they constitute part of what Latour (1986) calls association (see also Murdoch, 1997b). The state needs to do many things in order to enlist, enrol and mobilise many agents for its own cause. In short, the above has argued that we need to situate ideology in the context of governmental practice.

Understood in this way, neither the Soviet model nor the ideology would be something floating around; instead, they will be more solidly grounded. Their relationship with the actual urban planning practice would also be rendered more comprehensible.

A Mythical Concept of the State

Obviously, the Chinese state has never occupied a central position in the conceptualisation of urban planning styles. This does not imply that analysts are not aware of its predominance. In fact, it has been widely acknowledged that urban planning is subordinated to central planning and susceptible to the ideology of the state. This is something that even many studies of urban planning under capitalism may not use to anchor their analyses. That being said, one cannot deny the crude fact that the state has never been

seriously examined. For most Chinese studies, the state is a taboo, an area that has to be taken for granted and not open for examination. Studies written for Western readership offer a list of state institutions responsible for urban planning and related policies and practice (e.g., Xie and Costa, 1993:109-11). This is understandable, especially during those days of the bamboo curtain, since it had been difficult to get hold of the agents involved and their administrative relationships. But, such a list cannot be a substitute for a serious understanding of the state. It is not uncommon for both Chinese and English language studies to consider urban planning as a policy area. The analytical task is then reduced to policy evaluation: uncover the factors leading to the success or failure of urban planning (Xie and Costa, 1993:113-14; Wang, 1985). The recommendations are usually institutional, in that urban planning should be better integrated with economic planning on the one hand and with urban physical development on the other. In doing so, these studies have diverted from the state and its reasoning and practice and avoided any careful and meaningful analysis (for a succinct critique of policy studies, see Miller and Rose, 1990:3-4).

Even if they wanted to take the state more seriously, their understanding of the state is bound to be mis-informed. This has a lot to do with the field of conventional Western sinological analysis at large. The literature has been dominated by a view that the Chinese state under communism is authoritarian, if not totalitarian (Lieberthal and Oksenberg, 1988:3-20; Perry, 1994:704; Xuan, 1985; Vidmer, 1980). Accordingly, the state is omniscient and omnipotent, and its structure is monolithic. But, research has started to prove that this concept of the state is far from being true. The Chinese state has never been a unitary entity. While the state is already composed of the CCP, the army, the bureaucracy, etc., each of these constituents itself consists of diverse elements. Post and Wright (1989:137-44) draw our attention to the fact that, in the Chinese economic sphere, surplus is produced and demanded concurrently by thousands of enterprises, and regulated by a slightly smaller number of administrative organs. Yang (1988)

also convinces us that it is difficult to perceive power as residing in a non-differentiated and coherent bureaucratic class and applied externally by this class to society. Power, which must be seen as "a lived relationship between power strategies and resistance or subversion," "does not operate smoothly, but is always beset by internal tensions and dysfunctions" (Yang, 1988:410). Moreover, Shue (1988:33) comments that this conventional focus on the supreme political élite has missed "the even more challenging and complex articulation of the relationship between the segmented bureaucracy" and "the segmented society over which" it operates. The local cadres have a certain degree of autonomy and show flexibility in handling central state's directives. In other words, the Chinese state is more heterogeneous and less monolithic than we are told it to be.

Because of this reason, there are many "unintended consequences" of central state directives and policies. Lieberthal and Oksenberg's (1988) analysis of the intervening role of state bureaucracy in energy policy making finds that the centre-local relation has rendered the policy outcome different from its original intent. Kornai's (1980a, 1980b; see also Kornai (1992) for a concise summary) classic study of the interaction between central planners and their subordinate control organisations and production enterprises in socialist economies, in general, points to the fact that the planned investment and production targets and the actual outcomes usually do not match with each other. Oi's (1989) analysis of agricultural policies highlights again the discrepancy between policy formulation and implementation. Rather than relying on individual policies, Bachman (1991) and White (1991) examine many policies of the GLF and CR, respectively, but come to a similar conclusion. All these examples of "unintended consequences" further support the argument that the state is heterogeneous and not monolithic.

It is highly likely for the "passive" and outdated position to put forward mis-informed — usually dramatised — accounts of the Chinese state. If the analysis is mis-informed, so are the descriptions of planning styles. It is to the implications for urban planning that we now turn.

A Technicist Concept of Urban Planning

Urban planning is usually simplified into a technical process. The aforementioned administrative, co-ordinative style found during the FFYP, for instance, is heavily dictated by a techno-rationalist understanding of the planned economy. As a negation of the individualistic, anarchic, profit-oriented market, central planning in China, like in other socialist countries, is usually depicted as an *ex ante* professional activity co-ordinating economic and social activities in the best possible way (see Lyons, 1987, 1990; Yang, Xiang and Ouyang, 1982). Such a technical rationalisation also assumes that the behaviour of others would follow the designated course. Urban planning, a sub-set of central planning, is no exception to this techno-rationalist description. Its task therefore involves the physical co-ordination of investment projects in the city. This is to be achieved by formulating a master plan which lays down the major infrastructures and locations of different zonal activities. This is exactly what the Chinese standard texts on urban planning (for instance, Song, Cui and Zhang, 1985; Tongji Daxue et al., 1981) have offered us, although it is still disputable (see Xu, 1993) whether they have been directly influenced by the Western literature (for example, Chadwick, 1971; Faludi, 1973; McLoughlin, 1969). It is also necessary to add in passing that researchers from the even more critical urban literature, such as Castells (1977:64-72), Sawers (1978) and Scott (1980:165-68), have mistakenly adopted a similar view of urban planning in socialist countries.

The techno-rational concept is not immune to criticism, though. In his classic study of socialist economies mentioned earlier, Kornai (1980a, 1980b) has demonstrated perceptively that the planning process as dramatised by the techno-rationalist is in fact a bargaining process between central planners and their subordinate control organisations and production enterprises. The

behaviour in such a resource-constrained economy does not follow the plan. Production enterprises are, most of the time, prevented from supplying more outputs due to their inability to secure more inputs. While these enterprises are under little pressure to seek maximum profits due to their paternalistic relationships with the state, the desire to raise output by ambitious production plans forces them to strive to obtain additional inputs. The result is a further shortage in inputs and then outputs, and the vicious circle continues. In the end, the planned investment and production targets and the actual outcomes usually do not match with each other. The findings of Feng et al. (1991), Jiang and Guan (1991), L. Li (1990) and Wong (1986) on the Chinese case tend to support the general statements made by Kornai.

Many people have taken a step further by even challenging the fact that there is no planning in socialist countries (e.g., Wilhelm, 1979, 1985; Zaleski, 1980). Rutland's (1985) analysis of planning in the Soviet Union is a case in point. According to him, central planning in the strictest sense is absent in socialist countries. The latter have plans but *do not plan*, since the plans are mechanisms to *control* and not for the purpose of co-ordinating activities. Planning increases the opportunities for social control: to check on socially deviant behaviour. "The centre does not have any real interest in... decisions about where to locate factories, about what individual factories should produce, and how... but persists in demanding the right to make them because they are not absolutely sure that these decisions which lie in *the penumbra of their gaze* may not turn out to affect their interests in the long run" (Rutland, 1985:106, emphasis added). This right is furnished by the planning system.

Control of the society and economy and the legitimacy of the party are decisive concerns of the Chinese state too. The latter undertakes industrialisation as well as measures to curtail uncontrolled industrialisation so as to guarantee its legitimacy. The Chinese state had not loosened its grip on the economy and society even during the CR. Wong (1991) finds that the state was involved in virtually every aspect of the rural industrialisation

programme, whereas G. White (1983:162-64) reminds us that, in contrast to her democratic and egalitarian message, the state continued restricting individual rights and curbing the market. The fall of the Gang of Four leading to the adoption and implementation of economic reform measures by Deng Xiaoping and the whole development leading to the June 4 Beijing massacre in 1989 illustrate vividly the imperative to control (Li, 1988:199-214; Yang, 1988, 1989).

Besides, technical rationality does not seem to be the dominant mode and outcome at the level of urban spatial development. Applying Kornai's (1980a, 1980b) conceptualisation of shortage economy and many others and examining from the perspective of production enterprises, Tang (1990) has shown that rationality seems to be the exception rather than the rule in the production of urban space in China. The industrial system and other related measures have caused an expansionary drive. Cities and towns are not only the resulting location of investment hunger induced by the expansionary drive, but also the breeding ground reproducing that expansionary drive. Cities and towns are growth magnets due to their larger and denser spatial organisation and spatial fixes. The land allocation and control mechanisms have their share too (Tang, 1994). Resources have been siphoned into and away from the urban land development process in response to shortages of inputs in both the production sphere and the serviced land. The result of this process is the prevalence of shortages of serviced land everywhere. It has also been found that these shortages cannot be cured by planning. The planning mechanisms discourage the flow of investment capital, goods and services into the production of serviced land. Even worse, the shortage problem is complicated by the land ownership system. The latter has the effect of aggravating the shortage problem by reducing the stock of land available for future occupancy; another side-effect is to control over-determinately the use characteristics of individual land parcels. The land control mechanisms further complicate the shortage problem in that the large number of land administration organisations do not control urban land development on the basis

of "objective" criteria, such as pricing and norms. Their reliance on inter-organisational resource dependencies tends to result in anarchic and chaotic urban land development. Finally, Tang (1997:21) hints at a Foucauldian interpretation of urbanisation, which is proposed to be the mediator as well as the outcome of the process of extending the state's control over the economy and society. The nation, as argued, is divided into urban and rural spaces. The former is subject to more direct and tighter control, the latter receives looser control. Put differently, urban space in China is more complicated than we used to think of (see also Yeh and Wu, 1995; Wu, 1997; Wu and Yeh, 1997). If these findings are right, it should be seen as a political and analytic issue.

In short, this discussion urges us to go beyond the current understanding of urban planning. Reducing everything to technical rationality is bound to omit important insights. In particular, it is more fruitful to understand urban planning as part of the socialist state's strategies and tactics to control the economy and society.

A Restricted Concept of Urban Planning Knowledge

Following directly from the preceding point, negligence in the conceptualisation of urban planning has deprived us of the opportunity to unravel the many dimensions of urban planning knowledge in China. The literature usually conceives of its problems and solutions in technical terms and a-materially. According to the techno-rationalist conception, urban planners, who are seen as supervisors/leaders rather than followers of urban development, are empowered to direct and co-ordinate all project undertakers. It is thus possible for them to concentrate on the production of master plans, which describe perfect, distant future situations. More recently, there have even been calls to simplistically equate urban planning with physical urban design (e.g., Li, 1985; Wu, 1988; Zhou, 1986). Concomitantly, planners can devote little energy to development control, since implementation is not a problem at all. Because of their claimed superiority, they can also rely on some "objective" planning standards/guidelines to work out

the space requirements of the whole urban community. This whole process can be achieved within their own thinking capacities and without the necessity of consulting the affected parties. Z. Wu (1986) argues that urban planning has taken the form of a master plan due to planners' closed (vs. open), uni-directional (vs. feedback-oriented), static-optimal (vs. dynamic and process), single-minded, mechanistic (vs. pluralistic), and normative (vs. functional) thinking methodology due to the planners' inferior thinking capacity (see also Zhou, 1988).

There are, undoubtedly, occasions when the literature tries to extend beyond this understanding of urban planning knowledge. This is in the area where planning is put into practice, or what the Chinese call urban planning administration (*chengshi guihua guanli*). There, many issues of implementation are touched upon and recommendations made. Examples can be drawn from the debates on ways to reform the urban planning system and practice in the 1980s. There are claims that planning practice can be improved by the development of a more sophisticated set of legal powers and other relevant administrative procedures and the advancement of scientific urban planning techniques. Chaotic urban development in the past was, so argued, partly due to the fact that the urban planning authority was not always involved in the location decision-makings of many land occupants, especially those from levels higher than the city. Had it been allowed to participate in this decision-making, irrational decision would have been minimised. Besides, had the whim of influential cadres been prohibited from intervening in the decision process by explicitly stipulated laws and regulations, urban planning decisions would have been much more rational. The outcome of implementation would have also deviated little from the approved plans. The fact that these debates evaluate the implementation problems and make recommendations to improve the implementation gap points to the programmable nature of urban planning. But, the debates have narrowly concentrated on seeing things technically and developing instrumental knowledge. Little attempt has been made to develop knowledge that renders urban

planning and its problems thinkable and calculable, and amenable to deliberate initiatives. In a nutshell, this literature would have us believe that urban planning knowledge is after all technical.

It is, however, misleading to view urban planning knowledge as purely technical and a-material. First of all, even if the interest is in the strictest technical sense of co-ordination, planning knowledge should not be restricted to technical knowledge. There are other non-technical, interpretive, normative and subjunctive knowledges, which have already been identified to be imperative to urban planning practice in the Western literature (de Neufville, 1987; Healey, 1992, 1997; Forester, 1989; Mazza, 1995; Richardson, 1996; Roweis, 1988). Besides, and more importantly, if the Chinese state is very much interested in controlling the economy and society, it will rely on the urban planning mechanism to gain control over the development of the built environment as part of the control package. To control, it may require programmable knowledge different from that needed to fulfil the requirement of efficiency, socialist principles of equity or egalitarianism. It requires knowledge to hold together diverse actors as well as to make sense of the problems. Whether other actors would be mobilised for the state's cause is dependent on urban planning knowledge. The latter cannot therefore be seen as something neutral to be employed in co-ordination. Nevertheless, nor can it be seen as something employed to retard urban development as a form of domination by the state bureaucracy, a view explored by Konrad and Szelenyi (1977) for Hungary. As argued earlier, it is important to explore the more subtle practices of the Chinese state. This means that it might be insightful to see urban planning in the more subtle form of, say, guidance-power (Roweis, 1988) than in the overt and dominating form of force or repression.[3]

The Technical Profession

The literature always implies that urban planning is a distinctive profession with a coherent set of technical knowledge. A profession is usually defined in the West as an occupational group with a specific body of knowledge, expertise and skill considered to be the exclusive domain of that professional group, and clearly marked off from other spheres of competence, the "turf" of other professions (Healey, 1985). According to Roweis (1983:156, emphasis in original), urban planning in North America is an occupation "which studies the social processes of land occupancy and the territorial relations involved in them, *with the aim* of facilitating, through practical involvement in the realm of territorial politics, the social reproduction of viable territorial organization." It is this distinctiveness that we can consider urban planning as a distinctive occupation. The development in China in the past, however, did not seem to have reached that stage. The object of study of the urban planning profession was not yet clearly delineated. Nor had the profession been given the degree of freedom to investigate unless policy analysts were, literally, adjudicated to do so (Lin, 1981).[4]

That urban planning in China is not a distinctive profession can be supported by the few occasions of identity crisis over the history of socialist China. In November 1960, immediately after the turmoil of the GLF, it was announced in the Ninth National Planning Conference that urban planning should be suspended for three years. This led to a fatal destruction of the system, including stringent restriction on the scope of its operation and serious cutback of the numbers of planning authorities and personnel. Similar blows were recorded in 1964 when the Design Revolution Campaign was launched and, later during the CR, when urban planning was seen as counter-revolutionary (He, 1990). Finally, Song (1997) even notes a similar crisis during the reform years.

These crises had something to do with the fact that the profession could not define its domain of concern and defend it. Even immediately after the GLF, urban planning was seen as part and parcel of national economic planning. The former was merely a specific technical arm of the latter. Its specific task was to co-ordinate capital construction projects approved in various production plans. Borrowed from the Soviet Union, the big brother, this

model was not supposed to be challenged. (Note that the frugality campaign launched in the mid-1950s only challenged the space standards of Soviet practice but not the urban planning system and its relationship with national economic planning.) "Premature legitimation," to borrow loosely a concept from Reade's (1987:31-68) analysis of the British town and country planning system, had caused the urban planning profession the opportunity to examine critically this subordinate relationship with economic planning and its nature. It therefore came as no surprise to anyone that this prematurely legitimised close affiliation with economic planning had resulted in the suspension of urban planning, when restraint measures were adopted to control the expansionary drive triggered off by the GLF. Urban planning had, as the argument goes, nothing to co-ordinate without additional physical construction.

The profession could not equally defend its domain of concern due to the resistance of other agents, fuelled by the way the society and the economy were governed. Central to the techno-rational representation of urban planning is the notion that co-ordination can be done most efficiently and effectively according to a technical mode. The latter refers to the expert's application of targets, quotas or space standards/requirements to formulate economic or physical development plans. At best, this process is modified by bargaining between the planners and other affected agents based on the outcomes of previous plan fulfilment. Deep in this mode is the potential threat, if not an actual one, imposed by the expert planners on the affected agents, regarding the approval of production, material, land or location quotas. There is always the chance that the outcome of this process is dictated more by the expert planners than by the affected agents. It is then not surprising that, especially during both the Design Revolution Campaign and the CR when the dominant mode of resource allocation and co-ordination was very much "politicised," urban planning was basically neglected.[5]

In no circumstance of identity crisis can urban planning be seen as a distinctive occupation (Roweis, 1983). It is misleading to

denounce, as the literature has done, these identity crises as the mere intervention of the "leftist" ideology. Instead, the above has clearly shown that the urban planning profession's failure to define the domain of concern and defend it as part of the relationship between the urban planners, other agents and the tactics and strategies of the state to govern the economy and society (e.g., Johnson, 1993; Pal, 1990; Reed, 1996).

Suggestions for a Viable Chinese Urban Planning Theory

I have argued in the above that the literature has not successfully investigated the relationship between urban planning, the built environment and the state in China. What I want to suggest in this section is one way to make up for the deficiency. Recently, there has been a growing interest in applying Michel Foucault's theory to understand urban planning in the West (e.g., Allen, 1996; Boyer, 1983; Fischler, 1995; Huxley, 1994a, 1994b; Roweis, 1988). Most of them draw on his concept of power/knowledge. In some of his later works, Foucault started to focus on modern political power and constructed the concept called "governmentality" or "government rationality" (Foucault, 1991). Since then, a new literature about this concept has developed (e.g., Barry, Osborne and Rose, 1996; Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991; Miller and Rose, 1990; Rose and Miller, 1992).[6] This literature rejects a perspective that concentrates on state institutions. Instead, it focuses on the identification of programmes and practices of rules in micro-settings. The strategy to understand state practices is to examine the political rationalities and technologies of government. The former represents how issues are problematised and programmes formulated, whereas the latter refers to the assemblages of practices, materials, techniques and agents that are deployed to put the abstract rationalities and programmes into effect.

Research has started to apply the governmentality concept to urban planning (Mercer, 1997; Murdoch, 1997a; Rabinow, 1989).

One advantage of this concept is its ability to overcome the aforementioned problems related to the treatment of urban planning as a policy area. It manages to bring the state and its reasoning and practices under careful and meaningful study. Accordingly, urban planning must be understood in the broader context of the political rationality of the day. The latter informs the way urban areas are problematised, programmes of government formulated and technologies of government deployed.

Tang (1994) has made a preliminary attempt to apply the governmentality concept to understand urban land development in China, while Tang (1997) has expanded it to urbanisation in general. The Chinese state, it has been argued, attempts to control all realms of life to produce governable persons and production enterprises. In the past, population had been divided into urban and non-urban households and the nation partitioned into urban and rural places. The economy had been regulated in such a way that it had exhibited the characteristics of a shortage economy. All the problems related to urban land production and urbanisation, mentioned in one of the previous sections, can be interpreted within this perspective. It has also been argued that, since the late 1970s, the Chinese state has shown a new rationality, calling for a bigger role for cities and towns and, therefore, urban planning (Ng and Tang, 1997).

These studies are found wanting for two reasons. First, since both studies are preliminary attempts, many of the concepts have not been subject to careful scrutiny and, thus, have not been fully elaborated. Not only does one need to take on board many issues, such as the applicability of the governmentality concept to a setting different from Europe, where it was originally derived (e.g., Dutton, 1992; Minson, 1993; Sigley, 1996), but also one needs the rationality and many technologies be carefully documented. Besides, if our interest is to extend these applications to urban planning, the governmentality perspective requires us to conceptualise it in the context of the socialist state's attempts to govern the society and the economy. The state needs to draw on many resources, including knowledge, in order to govern its population and economic activities. As a result, such a conceptual construction of urban planning requires us to interweave together politics, management of the built environment, economic practices, professional inputs and science.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the literature on urban planning in China. It was found wanting, both methodologically and theoretically. Methodologically, the literature has failed to situate the various styles of urban planning — from technical co-ordination, socialist ideology of equity and equality to economic efficiency — on governmental practices. Theoretically, its conception of the socialist state has been, at best, homogeneous and monolithic. Far from resembling the state in capitalist societies, the Chinese socialist state is still more complex than we have usually conceived it to be. There is a diverse set of heterogeneous agents both within and outside the state. If the state, or indeed any of its agents, intends to do something, it needs to enlist, enrol or mobilise others. Thus, we need to have a more informed state theory that can account for this heterogeneity. This informed account is imperative for the improvement of the techno-rational concept of urban planning in the literature. The latter, which sees urban planning as a technical process to co-ordinate socio-economic activities in space, falls short of recognising it within the context of the state's strategies and tactics to govern the economy and society and gain the party legitimacy. Urban planning should be seen as a means for analysing the strategies and tactics employed. The techno-rational concept also privileges the instrumental nature of urban planning knowledge at the expense of its programmable counterpart. But, technical knowledge for planned production, which is developed out of the thinking capacity of urban planners themselves, would not allow us to make sense of urban planning as part of the tactics and strategies of the state. What constitutes the essential knowledge is to come to terms with the situation and tie together diverse

agents. Finally, the literature would have us believe that urban planning, which consists of a coherent set of knowledge, is a distinctive profession. It has been found that this is not the case. Faced with challenges channelled by strategies and tactics of the state, urban planning has never been able to develop a recognisable domain of concern, thus transforming it into a distinctive profession. Finally, the paper has suggested to apply Foucault's concept of governmentality to delineate urban planning practice in China. Accordingly, urban planning should be understood in terms of the political rationality and technologies of government.

Notes

1. It should be admitted without further delay that this point of critique draws on Roweis and Scott's (1977) critique of Western urban planning theories.
2. I am here drawing loosely on the difference made by Gao (1994) between Maoist ideology and Maoist discourse.
3. Lately, there emerged more progressive studies in the Chinese literature addressing some of the issues mentioned here (see Tong, 1997).
4. Similar challenges to the role of experts can be found in other social realms, such as medicine (Anagnost, 1994), birth control (Sigley, 1996) and punishment (Dutton, 1992).
5. In China studies, the profession problematique has been captured as the "red" versus "expert" dichotomy (Schurmann, 1968:75-76, 162-72). This dichotomy can be criticised as too rigid, with the effect of simplifying the fluidity and inter-penetration involved between the two.
6. For the latest development in the governmentality literature, readers are advised to consult the journal, *Economy and Society*, one of the "turfs" of this literature.

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A Critique of Theories of Urban Planning in China

Abstract

This paper reviews the literature on urban planning in China. The literature usually sees urban planning in terms of changing styles over time. It is found wanting both methodologically and theoretically. Methodologically, it has failed to situate the various styles of governmental practices. Theoretically, the socialist state has been uninformedly conceptualised as homogeneous and monolithic. This has led to the adoption of a techno-rational concept of urban planning, which in turn has privileged the instrumental nature of urban planning knowledge. Finally, the literature has conveyed a myth that urban planning is a distinctive profession. By way of conclusion, the paper suggests that all the above problems in the literature can be improved by adopting Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, which means that urban planning in China must be situated in the realm of political rationality and understood as a technology of government.

對中國城市規劃理論的批判

鄧永成

（中文摘要）

本文分析了現有中國城市規劃理論的問題。照一般的看法，中國城市規劃在歷史上經過好幾個階段，形成不同的風格。可是，無論從方法論或理論來說，這個看法都存在著很大的謬誤。在方法論方面，它不能從政府管治實踐來理解各種風格；在理論方面，社會主義國家機器常常被誤解爲同質性和整體性。由此帶出一個技術的、理性的概念，強調城市規劃知識的工具性本質。最後，這些理論編造了一個神話：城市規劃是一門獨特的專業。在結論部分，本文提出一個可以解決以上諸問題的方法，那就是運用福柯的管治概念，從政治理性的角度，理解中國城市規劃爲一種管治的工藝。