

Planning theory in China: its development and state of the art

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It is generally agreed that the development of Chinese planning theory study since the establishment of People's Republic of China could be divided into two stages by the year 1978. In this year China launched its economic reform and the opening-up policy, which have dramatically changed the zeitgeist of the whole country. In the first stage, from 1949 to 1978, China was greatly influenced by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) model. The second stage, much more intricate and complicated than the first one in theory research, is from 1978 to the present. We focus on exploring the development trajectory of planning theory research in the second stage despite the "chaos, ambiguity, conflict and complexity" (Cao and Hillier, 2013) of the theory evolution course. Until now, Chinese scholars have developed different opinions on phase division of this stage in accordance with the social, economic, political and cultural context as well as the academic trends (Wang, 1999; Wei, 2005; Zhang, 2009). We generally distinguish three developing phrases in Chinese planning theory which partially overlap with each other in their time span: from the 1980's, since 1997 and since 2000.

In the early times of Chinese planning theory development since 1978, in addition to the planning theories and methods from USSR, those developed in Europe and the US in the postwar period were brought into China as well by translating the excerpts of the original literatures. In the first years, the studies of Chinese planning scholars on planning theory were preliminary explorations and mainly focused on some basic issues such as the nature of urban planning. Terms like "philosophy", "basis" or "foundation" appeared frequently in the titles of the relevant journal articles, indicating that the studies were concerning fundamentality and originality. At that time, urban planning was still considered as a (natural) science. The discussions

concentrated on topics like the scientific nature, soft science, and systematic character of urban planning. Perception and exploration of the roles of planners, a permanent topic in Chinese planning studies, were also one of the important issues in this period.

After 1997, articles explicitly contain the key word “planning theory” began to emerge in the journals. In the studies at that time, researchers mainly employed the western analytical methods and philosophic perspectives. Of all the overseas theories, Faludi’s (1973) division between “theory in planning” and “theory of planning” exerted the greatest influence. Through the publications of Chinese scholars working overseas and Chinese students studying abroad, local scholars in China developed a preliminary understanding towards the mainstream theories in the western countries. However, time lags between the emerging of the original thoughts and their spread in China are quite common. Simultaneously, there are plenty of local studies on ancient Chinese planning ideas. Purpose of these studies were twofold: to explore the possibility of creating new Chinese planning theories based on the ancient Chinese philosophy (such as the thoughts of Confucius and Mencius, the geomantic omen theory, etc.); and to conduct pure conceptual analysis of ancient Chinese planning ideas.

Ever since 2000, Chinese scholars have started to synchronize their studies with the international ones. Through various channels like participating in the international conferences (or even host such conferences) and publishing papers in the peer-reviewed English journals, Chinese scholars have tried to be actively involved in the international academic researches. The most frequently mentioned or cited western planning theories include the rational planning, systematic planning, procedural planning, and communicative planning/collaborative planning and so on. However, many scholars agree that what China requires is some kind of mixed theory instead of a single one. In that case, several theories co-exist and different theories are chosen to guide planning practices under different circumstances. Chinese scholars believe that western theories and thoughts, Chinese ancient philosophy and practices of Chinese socialist market economy are three main sources for Chinese planning theoretic innovation. Meanwhile, they also pay attention to the problems and

shortages in theory studies, for instance, the theory studies' stagnation in the stage where researchers propose hypotheses based on experimental inductions, the low efficiency of knowledge accumulation, and the value crises in the theory development.