

Chinese planning history methodology under interdisciplinary background

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The study on Chinese planning history is on the rise. In 2011 urban and rural planning was established as an independent first-level discipline in China. Accordingly, its secondary discipline - planning history – gained independence from architectural history and urban history. In November 2012, the Academic Committee of Urban Planning History and Theory was formally founded under the Committee of Urban Planning Society of China, bringing together scholars from various research fields focusing on studies of planning history and theory. With a growing diversity of the academic background of these scholars in recent years, the interdisciplinary feature of planning history increases. The participation of scholars in the field of history, law, sociology, geography and so on brings new research topics like “history of planning academics” and “legal history of planning”, greatly enriching the research contents and methods of planning history in China.

The establishment and improvement of disciplines rely on the establishment of methodologies. Only subjects that have appropriate historical research methods guided by specific methodologies can be called history disciplines. Planning history study is no exception. However, against the backdrop of massive construction in China, Chinese planning study is more oriented to direct application values of planning practices rather than planning history research and its associated methodology. Additionally, Chinese historian FU Sinian’s view point – history is the historical materials and data - has exerted great influence on history and planning history study in China. As a result, a lot of planning history studies focus on describing the conceptual characteristics of each development phase of cities or regions by combing through historical data of planning. Nevertheless, it is historians’ perception and interpretation of historical facts instead of historical facts themselves that play a

decisive role in history studies. Therefore, apart from studying historical data and facts, more emphasis should be placed on research perspectives and methods of planning history.

Planning history study has the characteristics of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. First, as a secondary discipline of urban and rural planning, an engineering subject in China, planning history carries engineering nature. Thus, research methods of natural science need to be applied in the study. Second, due to that planning studies are usually categorized as social science in the western system, and especially the ISI system, the study of planning history hence greatly depends on the research methods of social science. Third, as a branch discipline of history under humanities, planning history study undoubtedly needs to borrow the research methods of humanities, especially those related to historic study. This paper aims to establish a three-tier planning history methodology that covers generic methods, historic methods and interdisciplinary methods. As regards to the generic methods, it is a methodological platform that all the disciplines based on. Logic method, comparative method, and system methods are examples in this platform. Historic methods are generally methods that the discipline of history and other sub-disciplines under history are used, such as the historical data method and the description method of history. Interdisciplinary methods – based on learning from the methodologies of natural science, social science and humanities – are the core of this paper. Influenced by the natural science, quantitative analysis, methods of measurement and experiments can be applied in the study of planning history. Of them, the method of descriptive statistics is frequently used in Chinese planning history studies. Under the impact of social science, planning history study can both refer to particular research methods of social science such as the Social Network Analysis, and adopt various research perspectives of social sciences. Influenced by humanities, field investigation originating from anthropology, oral historiography method from history study and iconography method from arts study can supplement the planning history research.