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# BEYOND SOVIET MODEL: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND PLANNING EVOLUTION IN MAOIST ERA'S CHINA

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Pre-reform Chinese urban planning is often described as “Soviet Planning Mode”, thus overlook the impact of Mao. The planning history in Chinese context shall perceive it in the vein of its historical development, this article explores planning practice in Maoist Era's China exclude “Soviet Planning Mode”. In order to trace the Planning Evolution due to institutional Changes, research selects three typical planning events which are Capital Beijing Planning at the initial stage of new China, People's Commune Planning in the late 1950s, Daqing Planning Pattern in 1960s. The study reveals that urban planning from 1950s-1960s experienced the ideological thought of prudency, learning, idealism and decentralism, its evolving process link to Mao's political and economic policies closely. Besides, in later life of Mao's China, urban planning Thoughts shows a Hybridism state with both Soviet mode and local gene.

## Keywords

Soviet Model, People's Commune , institutional change, planning history of Maoist Era's China, town-country hybridism

## How to Cite

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China begins to participate in global modern plan since 20th, in particular the social practice of socialism pattern since 1949. The Chinese urban planning during 1949 to 1979 has the transitional feature. It is both the continuity of early modern times and the root and soul of urban planning after reform and open-up. Undoubtedly, it has great significance to the development of Chinese current urban and rural planning subject through backtracking and reconsideration on its history. It is always called as “Maoist Era” from the setup of People’s Republic of China announced by Mao in 1949 to Mao’s pass-away in 1976 as each aspect in Chinese social practice during this period shall embody Mao’s personal stigma. Currently, we are in the post-Maoist Era of developmentalism thinking orientation and show incomprehensible rejection for various practices in Maoist Era . When the contemporary planners are talking about the urban planning in Maoist Era, it always makes people emerge the stereotyped image “Soviet Mode”. Actually, in terms of academic research, such experimental summary lacks sufficient preciseness as it only grasps certain features in certain times and neglects the evolving logics of the planning practice diachronism evolution. The planning history in Chinese context shall always perceive it in the vein of its historical development. During the recent thirty years, Mao made the strategic choice based on foreign and domestic environment, which influenced each aspect from the policy development to the daily life of common people. The urban planning as the continuity of national development plan has the obvious influence particularly. My research selects three typical planning events except “Soviet Mode” Planing in Maoist Era, which are Capital Beijing Planning at the initial stage of new China, People’s Commune planning in the late 1950s and Daqing pattern and three-line construction in 1960s. The three events are put in the framework of Institutional Change for review to try to construct the ideological trend of urban and rural planning in Maoist Era and its evolving prospect.

## FROM NANJING TO BEIJING: CAPITAL PLANNING

### CAPITAL PLAN OF NANJING

Since the setup of Ming Dynasty in Nanjing in AD 1368, Chinese capital was in Nanjing or Beijing over the past 600 years. In April 1927, Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek set capital in Nanjing and announced the setup of the first national modern country in Chinese history. In regard to Nanjing’s urban planning, it became the superexcellent practice case of pursuing modernism and nationalism by the sovereign states. Actually, Sun Yat-sen had a wish of setting Nanjing as capital. As Sun’s follower, Chiang Kai-shek put great passion to the planning of new capital. In 1928, he established Capital Construction Committee and Capital Design Technical Committee and engaged Americans (Henry K.Murphy , 1877-1954) and Ernest P. Goodrich , 1874-1955) as the consultants. He urgently desired to consolidate country governance through capital planning and construction and announce the sharp rise of a modern country to the whole world.

As Chinese first master plan, the Capital Plan of Nanking compiled through one year’s time not only absorbs the planning concepts of European and American scientism and rationalism but also carries forward Chinese traditional planning culture and form through fusion of Chinese and western cultures. In particular to American expert’s idea of retaining Nanjing defensive wall as avenue around the city and park around the city, it is not the modern pattern of dismantling city and building the road. In the game of politics and technology, politician in charge of politics reclaims the right. Due to the war, the City Plan of Nanking was not fully implemented, but it confirmed Nanjing’s spatial pattern as modern city so that Nanjing Ming Dynasty City Wall and other remains survived in modern construction. (Figure 1)

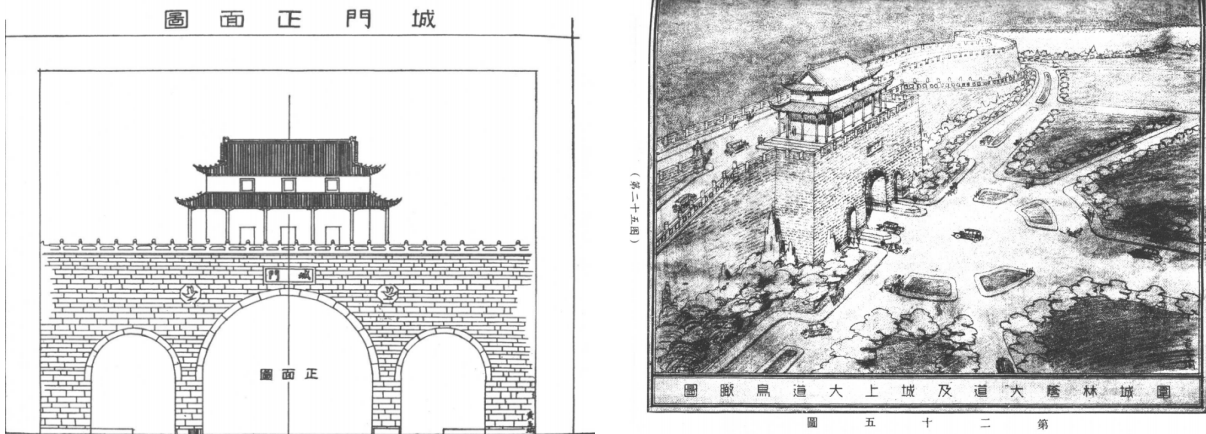


FIGURE 1 in the City Plan of Nanking, Murphy advanced to keep the aerial view of Nanjing defensive wall and its surrounding environment. (1929)

## DEBATE ON NEW SOCIALIST CAPITAL BEIJING PLAN

In 1949, 20 years after the City Plan of Nanking, Mao Zedong replaced Chiang Kai-shek and set up People's Republic of China with Beijing as capital. As the new political center, Beijing aroused wide discussion on how to display new requirements of socialist capital based on the old one. Its urban planning also became the important event with attention nationwide. In May, 1949, Beijing set up Urban Plan Committee. Liang Sicheng studying in USA and Chen Zhanxiang studying in Britain and other experts set about to study the capital planning. Meanwhile, Mao Zedong government invited soviet experts, the first socialist country in the world, to work on Beijing's planning. When facing the core problems of utilizing old capital and planning the new one including the confirmation of new administration center, they had serious divergence and formed two opposite opinions of "Outside the City" and "Inside the City". Confrontation between these two powers became the event fixing people's attention in Maoist Era .

"Outside the City" Party takes some Chinese experts headed by Liang and Chen as representatives and stands for leaving the old one and constructing the new administration center. They believe: firstly, the old one has systematic and complete planning and layout and is the model of Chinese ancient capital planning; if inserting the huge work center into it, it will destroy the completeness of historical environment; secondly, the old city has high density with no land available; finally, it can avoid the disadvantages above by finding a new area in the western suburb. If achieving the effect of combining the old one and the new one, it can show the national characteristics of Chinese tradition and create the spirit of time to meet modern demands. It is the famous "Liang-Chen Proposal" (Figure 2).

"Inside the City" Party takes soviet experts as representatives and advocates to set up it inside the old city. They believe: firstly, considering the economic level, it can utilize the original urban facilities; secondly, it has good appearance giving full play to the original value of cultural relics; thirdly, it is so convenient that other areas can surround the old city and closely link with the administration center.

At early years of the new nation, social order was far from the stable state. There were also some areas in chaos caused by local wars. At this time, Mao was prudent and didn't give direct response to the dispute. He supported Soviet proposal more effectively through the pattern of political activities, learned from Soviet Union in various fields and set Soviet concept, culture and technology as the socialistic Chinese developing orientation in future. With the establishment of Soviet development pattern, Liang-Chen proposal lost the supporting basis. Their right of speech was seriously weakened and the proposal became the castle in the air undoubtedly.



FIGURE 2 Liang Chen Proposal—relationship between the administration center and the old city (1950)

Although Beijing hadn't confirmed its formal urban planning proposal till the end of 1952, the proposals advanced by Chinese and Soviet experts were all implemented. Liang-Chen Proposal was on the shelf and became one pity in modern Chinese history. The planning pattern proposed by Soviet experts happened to hold the same view with the governor's political space appeal. It covers the meaning of policy behind and the technology became the secondary factor.

## PEOPLE'S COMMUNE: MAO'S GARDEN CITY

### REFLECT: CRITICISM OF SOVIET MODE

The founding of People's Republic of China is the new stage for Chinese urban planning. Under the assistance of Soviet Union, the First Five-Year Plan started modern urban planning with 156 items of industry as center, Soviet planning pattern as the model and gradually formed the planning system in match with highly-planned economic system. However, with regard to China, the fundamental objective of absorbing foreign aid was to support the realistic demands of domestic construction. Starting from the long-term view, Chinese developing trend must experience the transfer from blood transfusion to hemopoiesis. In the Second Five-Year Plan, the number of projects designed by China independently occupied 70%. When Chinese seeking on self-independent developing road touched Soviet authority, both parties began to have divergence. The divergence developed from decoupling of policy orientation at the end of 1950s to fierce rivalry of ideological orthodoxy at the beginning of 1960s. Soviet Union pressured China by economic means finally. In 1959, Soviet Union withdrew all experts from China, putting an end to the aid.

Without aid, it was necessary to experience the labor pains in the economic construction field. The development of “Central Government Corporationism” orientated by heavy industry became difficult to sustain. Therefore, the central government began to motivate the enthusiasm of local industrialization and tried to launch local government and even country to attend national industrial construction which was monopolized by central government previously, which was great leap forward activity launched during 1958 to 1960. It showed that local industrialization started up rapidly and tried to replace foreign investment input stopped suddenly by concentrated utilization of resources in different units of city and country nationwide so as to keep the high-accumulation state of national industry and realize rapid modernization.

## NEW IDEAL SOCIAL SPACE: PEOPLE’S COMMUNE

In fact, Mao thought it was a good thing to lose Soviet aid and a good opportunity for China to develop self-independently. As early as 1957, Mao advanced On the Ten Major Relationships(Lun Shi Da Guan XI); when discussing relevant topics, Mao compared them with Soviet pattern to show a new developing concept on selectable absorption of Soviet development experience. With regard to urban planning, it probed the urban planning roads suitable for China and became the consensus in the planning circle because it gradually exposed the inadaptation of Soviet planning in China with deficient resources in the urban planning work which was set up by simulating Soviet. The politicians and planners widely criticized Soviet planning and construction problems, such as opposition between its high standard and the thought of opposing waste and building the country with diligence and thrift, wide land use and waste, formalism, etc.

Soviet planning pattern was taken down from the house of worship and a new planning pattern was urgently needed to be set up. In the middle of 1950s, establishment of cooperatives in country and the first Five-Year Plan were completed successfully in advance so that the idealism color of CPC leadership level with Mao as the chief began to return back. The theory and publicity department began to concentrate on studying the utopian socialism theory, including new residential quarter pattern (Xin Cun)and cosmopolitanism began to emerge in the minds of CPC leaders. Then, people’s commune was set up. In people’s image, each commune has its own agriculture, industry, university, middle school, primary school, hospital, scientific research office, shop, service, kindergarten and canteen. A plurality of country communes revolved around the city and became the bigger communist commune. For example, in urban and rural system planning, it stipulated that the county population reached 50,000 to 70,000 generally, and the maximal one was 100,000. The population of commune was about 20,000; each commune set up four housing estates with 5,000 people respectively. Therefore, they formed a combined city (Figure 3). This was the ideal urban and rural structure of people’s commune. Obviously, it happened to have the same view with relationship between city and country in Howard’s garden city concept. Therefore, in terms of planning pattern, the spatial idea of people’s commune showed amazing consistency with the fundamental principle of combined city in Howard’s garden city.

Such spatial image became the framework document in urban and rural planning at that time and also became the new model of planning in Great Leap Forward period. It was the first time for the planners to advance that the commune center should organize life based on the production unit and concentrate industry, residence and agriculture in a housing estate, instead of dividing it based on the function like that of the past cities. People’s commune was developed in country, city and then the whole nation. One commune was like a social cell which could be a Factories, residential areas, schools or any organizations. It was the ideal urban and rural space unit regarded by Mao. As a political activity, it was popularized in a large scope. Figure 4 is the sketch map of the urban and rural unit at that time. It was just like a small autarkic society. The social justice was prominent by the homogeneity of the life space. Many public facilities showed the advancement of multifunction. Meanwhile, super-size central square was also used for mass gathering. The red flag in the geometric center of the square and Mao Zedong statue in the center of the park symbolized the spatial will of socialism.

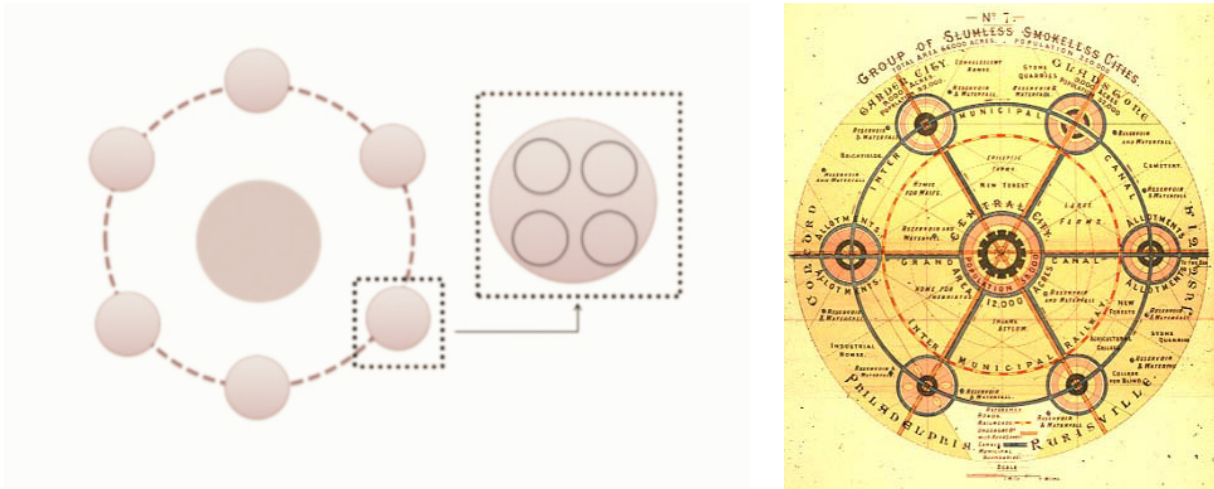


FIGURE 3 People's Commune and Garden City

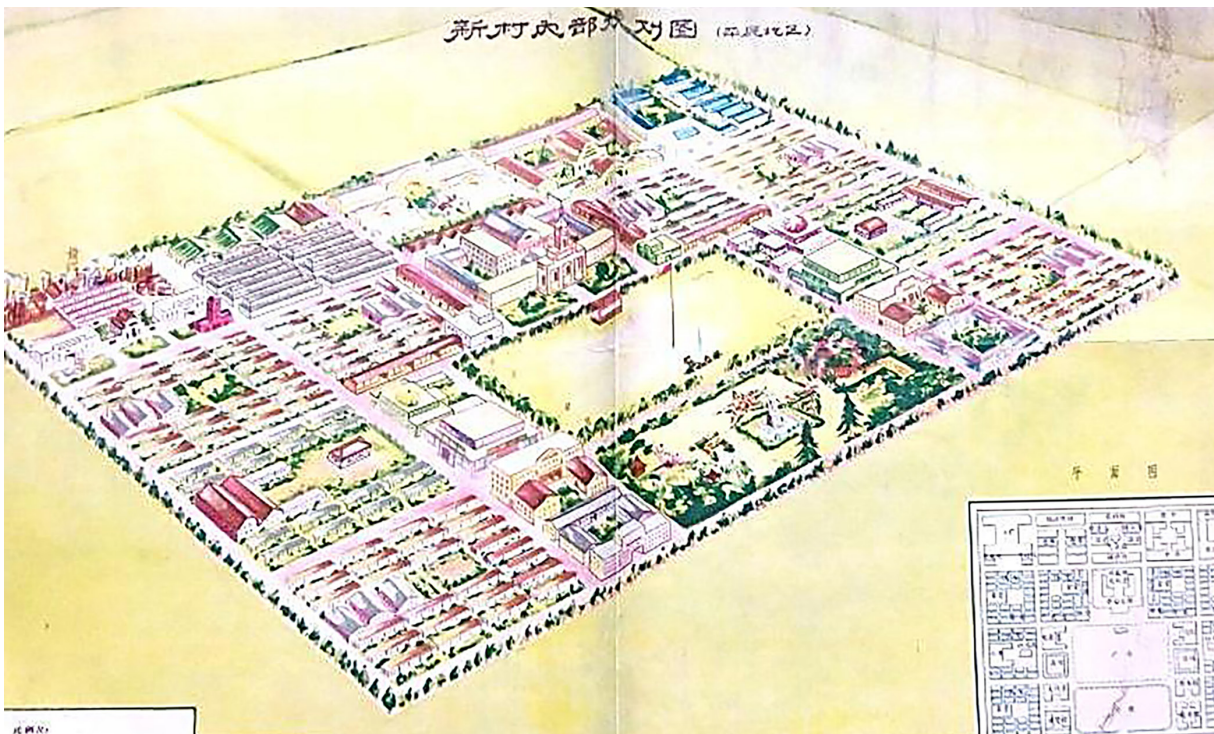


FIGURE 4 Space diagram of People's Commune(1958)

It was undoubted that Mao's exploration on rapidly constructing the socialism influenced Chinese planning practice. Wherein, due to the tension on Sino-Soviet relation, China began to explore and plan the new pattern independently. At this time, Mao's pattern of replacing Soviet planning pattern by commune became the new planning model. Although it seemed the continuity of Soviet in terms of technical manual in surface, it could be taken as one result of path dependence under no other learning object environment. In overall, as the ideal urban and rural space unit, people's commune still generated great influence on Chinese urban planning concept.

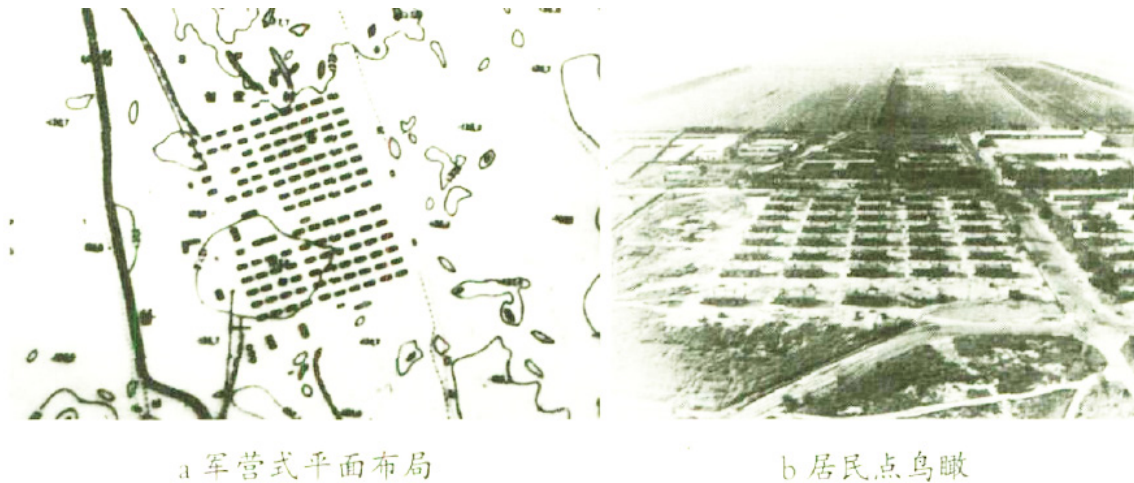


FIGURE 5 Daqing with the housing estate and without city center

## DAQING PATTERN: UNIT OF TOWN-COUNTRY HYBRIDISM

### DAQING PATTERN

In the Great Leap Forward period, rapid expansion of industry and city brought disastrous consequence. However, at the beginning of 1960, the famine phenomena broke out nationwide, and the urban planning was blamed as one of the factors for promoting the national crisis. State Development Planning Commission had the primary measures for “three-year natural disaster”, including reduction of urban population, compression of urban supply, and no urban planning.

Later, the work of compiling urban planning was stopped. Most planners were transferred to the country. Due to the finding of petroleum, Daqing became the construction key nationwide during the whole 1960s. Daqing was reputed as a country-type city and a city-type country and was set up as the model for popularization nationwide. As the resource supply was in extreme shortage, Daqing’s residence adopted low standard by a simple walling method of filling in clay in the middle of two fixed boards. Moreover, as Daqing had no local peasant, it solved the problem of insufficient provisionment by utilizing the relatives of external male staff to reclaim and farm wasteland.

Most remarkably, Daqing pushed “non-urbanized industrialization” to the extreme. The city didn’t set up the city center. Three large-scale bases developing along the railway undertook the functions of administrative management, research and development and petrochemical engineering production. The site selection of the housing estate was close to the production site (Figure 5). Since 1964, the whole country developed the activity of learning from Daqing in industry. With the promotion of Daqing leader to the National Planning Department, Daqing Pattern was applied to national five-year plan. And it directly influenced the urban planning in national three-line construction.

### THREE-LINE CONSTRUCTION: CONTINUITY OF DAQING MODEL

With regard to three-line construction, we can’t avoid talking about international situation which China faced at the later period of 1960s. At that time, China suffered the provocation from western countries headed by U.S.A., and the conflict with Soviet Union in the socialism camp also escalated. Due to geological and historic reasons, 70% of Chinese industries were distributed in northeast and coastal region. In an angle of military economics, such industrial layout showed very fragile; the heavy industry in northeast was fully in Soviet’s firing range; in the coastal region, the east China industrial region with Shanghai as center was fully exposed in American attacking range. Once war began, Chinese industry would fall to paralysis soon.

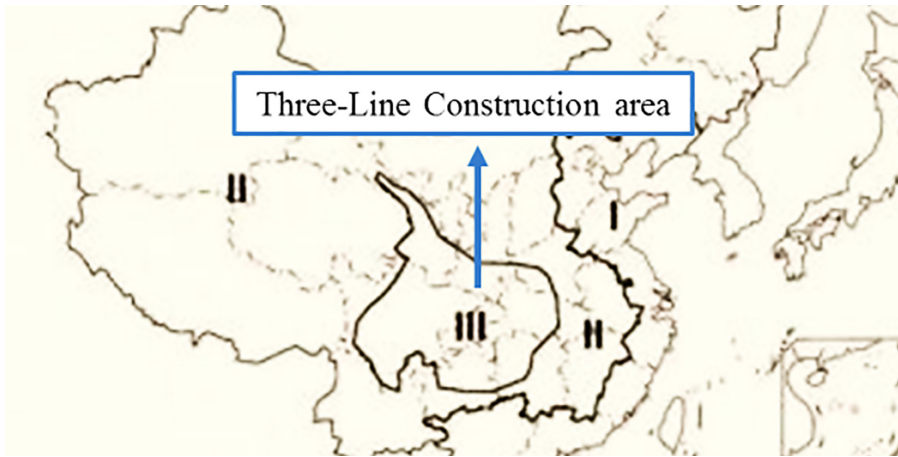


FIGURE 6 Spatial distribution of three-line construction



FIGURE 7 Dispersed Layout of an ordnance factory in Hubei Province

Under the condition of breaking out war possibly at any moment, the three-line construction activity was started up. Three-line construction meant the construction of large-scale national defense, technology, industry and traffic infrastructures with war readiness as the guidance concept in 13 provinces in the central and western regions of China since 1964(Figure6), and it was the large-scale industrial migration process in Chinese economic history .

Dispersion and air defense is the planning subject under wartime, and three-line construction with war readiness as the guidance concept is the protruding embodiment of the planning concept in wartime. In order to cope with the possible war, the military industry or heavy industry was dispersed and hidden in the mountains and valleys. The site was always set in the barren land or rural settlement. The space is formed under the effect of external force giving priority to national plan. Actually, such construction pattern can't form the city. As three-line construction in this type stressed on utilizing terrain, so the layout of the important engineering was hidden to adapt to the demand of war readiness. Therefore, their planning layout was in the banding pattern. The roads extended along the ditch. The buildings were arranged along the street. The industrial production didn't depend on the city and made overall arrangement independently(Figure 7). The site selection and design of the planning in this stage is different from the previous decision making system of the planning. Basically, no planner attends it comprehensively and gives technical guidance, and it is fully based on the realistic conditions in terms of policy and reality. Under the extreme difficult environment, it tries to develop the production and provide the living condition. It is obvious that the policy of not building the city is the extreme expression of decentralism thought, which shows the politician's ideology of perishing difference between the city and the country, and it is also the choice considering that the war may happen at any moment.



## CONCLUSION: TERMINATION OF URBAN PLANNING AND ITS EVOLVING CLUE IN MAOIST ERA

### FINALITY OF MAOIST ERA

In Chinese modern history, 1976 was the boundary line; this year, Mao Zedong's pass-away and finishing of the Great Cultural Revolution announced the termination of Maoist Era and the open-up of new times. This year, Tangshan was reconstructed and planned after earthquake and became the first city to concentrate national powers for urban planning practice. With the recovery of urban research and urban planning activity, people really realized that it is not feasible without urban planning in city construction. To some extent, Tangshan reconstruction and planning after earthquake was the termination of city-against and no urban planning policy during three years, and it also meant the ending of urban planning in Maoist Era. Since then, Chinese urban planning entered the new period with development orientation.

### IDEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF PLANNING

The reason for the dispute on Beijing capital planning was the uncertainty of new regime on future development at initial stage. In particular to Beijing as national political center, it had huge significance to socialist country. Actually, the free dispute was allowed officially for long time after foundation of the country, which had direct relationship with the government's prudent attitude in the policy reconstructing process. The Communist Party walking out from the country had no experience in urban planning and governance obviously. In international intercourse, only Soviet Union became Chinese partner. Therefore, since 1953, it became to learn from Soviet Union in overall and set up the centralized planning system in the urban planning field. However, with the breaking of Sino-Soviet relation, China began to adopt a self-developing road. The great leap forward could be taken as the activity from the local region industrialization to overall industrialization aided by Soviet Union. In this stage, along with the interference of planning to the rural area, the ideological trend of the idealist planning in urban planning began to appear. As the ideal unit of city and country, people's commune became the new pattern, and under the circumstance of possible war at any moment, more and more urban plans were based on the realistic decentralism.

Therefore, it can be said that urban planning in Maoist Era from 1949 to 1976 experienced the ideological thought of prudence, learning, idealism and decentralism. Its evolving process can show that it had close connection with national policy .

### HYBRIDISM PLANNING THOUGHTS

In the initial stage of urban planning in Maoist Era , it was affected by "Soviet Mode", and in the subsequent developing process, it had close link to Mao's political and economic policies. Three-line construction and Daqing pattern advanced by the space pattern of people's commune were the spatial embodiment and response of Mao's governance pattern. If a part of Soviet pattern comes from the urban planning principle of western modernism, the spatial unit advanced by Mao Zedong is stamped with the stigma of traditional China. For example, people's commune takes canteen as the centre to organize the space, which shows the hungry hardworking people's thought of taking food as the first need in Chinese traditional society. Therefore, in later life of Mao's China, urban planning Thoughts shows a Hybridism state with both Soviet mode and local gene.

### Notes on contributor(s)

Xu Hao is PHD student of Southeast University, Nanjing, China, his research interest is urban planning in socialist China, the second author Li Baihao is his tutor.

Li Baihao is professor of Southeast University, he is Secretary-General and vice chairman of Chinese Academic Committee of Planning History and Theory (ACPHT) which was established in 2012, his research interest is urban planning history of China.

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- Figure 2- Li Hao. "Liang-Chen Project" and "Luoyang Mode": Comparison and Inspiration on the Planning Pattern of Constructing a New Town Near the Old City. *Urban Planning International*, 2015(3).
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