

**Planning Theory as an Institutional Innovation:
Diverse Approaches and Nonlinear Trajectory of
the Evolution of Planning Theory**

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[Abstract]

Reviewing the evolution of planning theory in the US since the 1930s and comparing American planning experiences with Chinese planning practices in the last 50 years, the author argues that planning is essentially an institutional arrangement between the government, the marketplace and society in response to social changes in a particular society and a particular period of time. Given the pluralistic nature of modern society, the diverse directions of social development, and the uncertainty caused by unforeseeable social events, the trajectory of planning theory evolution is non-linear and based on diverse approaches. The development of planning theory reveals innovative efforts of planners to meet social changes. Planning theory will continuously evolve with the changing demands of institutional arrangements in a changing world. Therefore the construction and reform of the Chinese planning theory should be understood as an institutional innovation.

[Key words] Planning theory, American planning theory, Chinese planning theory, institutional innovation

1. Introduction: planning theory as an institutional innovation

Discussion and debate about planning theory has caught the attention of Chinese planners—especially the younger generation or planners—in recent years. Suggestions and propositions of Chinese planning theory have been developed to address changing Chinese society.

This article contributes to the discussion by arguing that the profession of planning was created as a response to social demand. Planning functions as an institutional arrangement between governments, the private sector and civil groups in a given society. Changes in human society are the driving forces behind changes of all professions, including planning. The evolution of planning theory reflects the changing society and its changing demand on planning. Given the pluralistic nature of modern society, the multiple directions social development trends, and the uncertainty caused by unforeseeable social events, the trajectory of planning theory evolution reflects diverse planning approaches and a non-linear pattern. Planning history shows that the development of planning theory is segmental, diverse, and diverging, rather than integrated, uni-directional, and linear. Thus, a “comprehensive planning theory” exists only in the form of the sum of all theory segments delineating the relative Truth in an abstract sense, rather than one universally applicable integrated theory covering all planning theories and practice in the real world. The traditional understanding of planning theory as a single theory that has evolved along a linear trajectory has limitations and is misleading. The misunderstanding may mislead planning practitioners to seek the “universally ideal” model in which the Truth is accomplished socially, economically and environmentally, and the planning process that is “universally correct”.

Although there is a common core of concerns to the planning profession and to planning theory, the core itself is not fixed but largely defined by the changing world and the complicated background of a particular society where planning is taking place— e.g. changes due to different time and rooted in different places. As a result, only when planning theory gives adequate attention to and addresses the changing social background of the society in which it is being applied, can planning practice make a difference, and planners fulfill expectation of the society. In that sense, a planning theory is an innovative effort institutionally in a given society and a given time period.

Surely, innovation may involve errors and need corrections and revisions. It is the endless corrections and revisions of planning theory that demonstrate the non-linear pattern of the planning theory’s evolution. As human society continues to evolve, the demand for new institutional arrangement will continue, as will the need to adapt

planning and planning theory. Therefore, the construction of Chinese planning theory should be viewed as an effort to reform Chinese institutional arrangements.

2. A review of the American planning theory since the 1930s: Planning theory as an institutional innovation

There are considerable differences in urban planning theory and practice between America and European countries, especially non-English speaking European nations, although all planning branches have grown from the same roots (such as social reform movements and enlightenment thoughts) and share most concepts of modern planning theory. Accordingly Chinese planners call these planning theories “western planning theory”. The article will review the US planning theory rather than discussing similarities and differences among branches of planning theory in different parts of the western world.

It is well known that the value system of modern planning theory originates from utopian and socialist scholars, and that urban form theory was founded by planners advocating garden city, the Modern Movement, and other urban form ideas in Europe. These theories significantly affected the American planning profession in the early 1900s. In fact, planning was understood as to design urban form, beautify cityscape, and reform urban society through improving the built environment at that time. Planners’ main concern was physical form rather than urban social problems, so “technical rationality” was more important than the “procedure rationality”. After the WWII, the busy schedule of re-building destroyed cities made European planners focus almost totally on urban physical development (such as new towns) so “technical rationality” was overemphasized. This practice was quite different from planning work in the US where no major cities were damaged in the war except in Hawaii. As the US became the sole super power in the west, planning theories developed by American scholars since the 1950’s (“American planning theory”) emerged and not only became dominant in the US, but significantly influenced European planners. In the globalization era after the 1980s, cities on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean confront similar urban problems, and planning theories in the US and European nations increasingly affect each other and contribute to “globalization”. We may start from reviewing the trajectory of the evolution of planning theory in the US in order to better understand the nature of planning.

2.1 The birth of American planning theory

Although planning practice (land use regulation, urban design, etc.) had a long history in many American cities, modern American planning theory was established during the “New Deal” period of the 1930s. (Stiftel, 2000). Unregulated “free market” capitalist competition led to the 1929 economic crisis and stimulated the appeal for government intervention. President Roosevelt’s policy adviser Rexford Tugwell championed planning as a so-called “Fourth Power” of government in allocating resources by state power. (The English word planning means both resource/development planning and physical planning in Chinese.) Under Tugwell’s influence, the Federal Government established the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), the Resettlement Administration (RA) and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to manage resource by using public power to plan resources for the first time in the American history. The generation of American planners who worked in these institutions as young men and women (including J. Friedmann, the leading American planning scholar today) were involved in resource allocation and redistribution rather than just guiding development and designing townscapes, the traditional tasks to planners. The new position of planning makes planners agents of government intervention for the public interest so the “value rationality” becomes increasingly important. To a certain extent, this position of planning in the American society still defines the identity of planning in the US today.

To position planning as the “Fourth Power of government” is of course an institutional innovation in the US, a well developed free market economy in which resource allocation is viewed as falling in the realm of the private sector rather than of the government. The notion of planning as a government function representing public interest not only is a milestone in modern American planning theory but also leads to the long-running debate on the relationship between planning and power. The concept of planning as public intervention combined with Keynesian economic policy spread widely in western countries for over 30 years, and contributes to the construction of welfare states in these nations. Thus, planning as a profession evolves from a sort of designing art in its earlier days to a management and social science today. The Demonstration Cities program in the New Deal developed a new model of planning work: collection and

examination of data, evaluation of alternatives, and creation of systems for implementation. This model demonstrates the early version of the “rational model” of planning, and illustrates a new applied science in social sciences: urban planning. (Stiftel, 2000)

It is easy to imagine how strong opposition would be to government intervention in resource allocation in a traditional free market economy such as the US. What is the theoretical foundation of the legitimacy of planning as a government intervention in a democratic society? Karl Mannheim, a leading figure of the Frankfort School who fled from the Nazi Germany to America, argued in his book *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (1940) that planning is necessary to free and open societies. He developed a framework in analyzing four social structures (Table 1).

Table. 1 Mannheim’s four social structures
based on levels of participation and centralization

Society		Public participation	
		High	Low
Centralization	High	Democratically planned society	Dictatorship
	Low	Anarchy	Anomie

Based on Stiftel, 2000

According to Mannheim’s theory, low levels of participation and high levels of centralization could lead to dictatorship; high levels of participation and low levels of centralization will result anarchy; low levels of both participation and centralization may cause anomie; and only high levels of both participation and centralization could lead to the favored outcome of a “democratically planned society”.

Mannheim argued further that planning is inevitable due to technology and population growth. The problem therefore is not “if planning is needed” but “who would plan?” Although planners may take leadership in planning, Mannheim cautioned that planners should pay sufficient attention to “substantial rationality” rather than to “functional rationality”, or, the definition of correct end states or goals rather than merely the means.

Mannheim's theory led to the so-called Great Debates in American planning history. One key issue in the debate was how to distinguish "freedom from" and "freedom to" in discussing government's function regarding its relations to the marketplace and civil society. The famous economist Frederick Hayek who led the opposition to Mannheim, argued that government at best is clumsy and inefficient so what we should fear is bloated government intervening in all societal decisions. As a result, he asked for getting freedom from the government. Mannheim's supporters believed that government through public intervention affords us freedom to do things that we otherwise would be unable to do (such as large scale infrastructure and development projects), and the argument of government's coercion is a mistake. The public's selection of the format of modern government is evidence that people support an organized society.

Although no commonly accepted conclusion was drawn from the debate, acceptance of planning as a profession and the value of American planning theory have been widely recognized by American society.

The birth and establishment of the American planning theory provides a valuable case that the creation of the planning theory is essentially an institutional innovation within the context of a particular society in a particular period of time. At the beginning of its evolution, "native" American planning theory abandoned the traditional European planning theory that focused primarily on physical development, and switched to planning's social function. Theory reflected an institutional innovation as a response to the changes of the American society during the depression period. It was believed that the disorder of economic development was caused by the unregulated profit-driven market with insufficient public interventions. The development of planning theory met American people's expectation that government would intervene when economic crises occur. The New Deal initiated by President Roosevelt with the adoption of Keynesian policy was characterized by a high level of state intervention, and urban planning was employed as a powerful tool of government intervention. This renovated institutional arrangement between the state, the marketplace and the society was advanced because it helped solve the problems of economic crisis and social tension during the recession. The policy influenced policy-makers not only in the US but also in other west nations from the 1930s to the early 1940s.

However, the government-led planning theory workable at that time is not appropriate for different situation in a different context, so the planning theory has been revised significantly in the US. Common American planning theories today, such as communicative or collaborative planning, are very different from earlier planning approaches and principles. Thus, I argue that planning theory should be viewed as having only relative Truth and the definition of planning is specific to time and circumstances. For instance, we could not simply apply American theory to Chinese cities without understanding the context in which the theory was developed. For China, government since the 1950's has been too powerful instead of insufficient. The over-active role and overwhelming functions of the government remained unchanged until the Economic Reform and the Open Door period. It is not appropriate, therefore, to call for more government intervention following Rexford Tugwell's notion of "planning as the Fourth Power of government" in urban development practice in China. The belief that planning theory can be generalized and applied to planning practices around the world may mislead planning practice in countries whose development status and urban problems are different. For that same reason, Chinese planners should create Chinese planning theory specifically for Chinese cities by viewing planning theory as an institutional innovation for China today.

2.2 Rational Planning

American society is basically pro-private ownership and individualism, and opposed to strong government intervention. The US Congress denied the re-authorization to National Resources Planning Board (NRPB) in 1941, which caused NRPB employees to disband. After WWII, the political atmosphere had also been changed. Scholars supporting Keynesian policy left Washington DC and came to the University of Chicago's "Program in Education and Research in Planning". Although it lasted only nine years, this program has had an enormous influence in setting the direction of American planning theory. Leading professors in the program included Rexford Tugwell and Harvey Perloff. Given the changed societal situation in post war America, they turned to methodological research and a more "scientific approach" while reducing the political and ideological aspects of planning. In trying to define an appropriate planning model in a capitalist democratic society, they introduced social sciences into planning.

Economics, political science, and other disciplines greatly enriched the planning education and research.

Learning from managing “New Deal” programs, professors such as Banfield and Margolis developed a new approach to problem solving in the public sphere in 1955. The new model had five steps:

1. Ends reduction and elaboration
2. Design of courses of action
3. Comparative evaluation of consequences
4. Choice among alternatives
5. Implementation of the chosen alternative

The model gave the birth to the well-known Rational Planning Model -- the most widely applied model in planning practice so far. Due to its simplicity and apparent logic, the model is often viewed as applicable in all public domains everywhere around the world. Influenced by Keynesian theory, the model emphasized that the major function of planning in a market economy should be correcting market failures and complementing market functions. This “fundamentalist” notion of planning still provides the foundation of planning today.

To improve planning methodology, the Rational Model borrowed a whole set of analytical tools from other disciplines: cost-benefit analysis from economics, operational analysis from operational research, statistics, mathematical modeling from quantitative social science methods. These new tools convinced planners as well as society that planning is a true science and planners have professional skills specifically suited for planning tasks, so that planning as a profession has legitimacy.

The Rational Model is so named since it focuses on the complex relations of individual rationality and collective rationality. It is well known that the “rational individual” is a key concept in economics in which “rational self interest” is believed a human instinct. While individuals and firms may be able to identify their interest, it is difficult to identify interests best to all in issues in the realm of public affairs. While individuals pursue their interests by taking rational action, it is difficult or impossible to identify the best interest of the public as a whole and take actions for the common interest in a society with multiple interest groups. As a result, the concept of “collective

rationality” in which interests of various groups are integrated has been proposed. Individuals’ actions may cause externality costs to the society; so the “rational action” by individuals may actually be “irrational” to the society. In other words the “sum of individual rationality” is quite different than collective rationality. Planners’ efforts are to reduce the gap between the two rationalities through the construction of public interest and collective rationality.

Although the Rational Model had been widely adopted, criticisms emerged as soon as the model was created. The major critique was that the model paid too much attention to “tool rationality” as a natural science but too little to “value rationality” as a social science, and the model was based on the concept of “public interest” at an abstract level while ignoring interests of interest groups, especially under-represented groups. Socially disadvantaged groups have less access to resources, including data and information, the two critical resources for the application of the Rational Model. The discussion of “collective rationality” has proceeded at a conceptual level rather than as a feasible approach due to the lack of methods to carry it out. The rational planning model was also criticized as unrealistic, since the steps the model required depend on a full possession of information that exceeds the capacity of human beings. Moreover, since planning decisions are often made by politicians based on and motivated by political considerations rather than by planners based on rational analysis, a “rational decision” is arguably a just a dream.

It is necessary to examine any institutional innovation in real world practice. The Rational Model did not change American government’s activities institutionally as the notion of "planning as government power" in the 1930s did. However, for the first time it creatively defined the function of planning in a market-oriented society at the theoretical level. The fundamental function of planning in a market economy, as outlined in the Rational Model, is to complement market functions and correct market failures. In a market-oriented democracy, professional planners aim at overcoming the limitation of individual rationality through defining and supporting collective rationality. It is important to point out that planning theory focuses on collective rationality while economics studies individual rationality. The main purpose of learning economics for planners, therefore, is to determine the deficiency caused by individual rationality (the

market) and to remediate it by collective rationality (represented by public policy), rather than to develop plans following market desires.

The Rational Model, in this sense, is a theoretical innovation. Moreover, a series of planning tools and methods developed with the Rational Model are innovations to planning methodology. The Rational Model, strictly speaking, is a planning methodology instead of a planning theory.

The development of planning theory will not stop with one innovation, let alone one single model appropriate for all planning practices. Over-emphasizing the Rational Model causes misunderstanding of political decision-making in real life as “irrational” comparing to the “rational” scientific decision-making. It may confuse young planners who are unaware of the political attributes of planning when they graduate. They may even misunderstand the correct starting point of the Rational Model—the mission of planning to correct market failure and the scientific analytic methods—when confronted with the irrationality of political decision-making in planning practice. "Planning suggestions" based on rational analysis actually are never the same as "planning decisions" based on political reality. Planners complaining that planning is subjected to ideas of local elected officials, seem do not fully acknowledge the political attributes of planning activity and may then question the rationale and effectiveness of planning.

This review of the planning history in the US shows that the evolution of planning theory follows a dynamic and multi-direction trajectory. Even in a single society such as the United States, theories at different periods have diverse orientations and trends. Furthermore, the relationship among various theories is fragmented, disconnected and inconsistent. For instance, Tugwell’s ideas about federal resources allocation and "planning as the Fourth Power of the government" are significantly different from the rational model that emphasizes scientific methods and "planning as a way to complement and correct market failure". The evolution of the two notions has no linear connections. The focuses and rationales of planning theories indeed shift according to the changing urban problems of a particular society, because the major purpose of planning as an applied science is to deal with urban problems at a certain time and in a certain context.

New planning theory appears as a type of institutional innovation since the essence of planning is an arrangement of institutions—the roles of the state, the marketplace, and the society. One of the differences between natural science theory and planning theory is the latter must be revised with changing circumstances. (Actually, even some natural scientific theories are also revised as they develop.)

2.3 Incrementalism and advocacy planning

The deliberation and critiques to the Rational Model led to planning theory to evolve in diverse directions. Incremental planning by Charles Lindblom in 1960 and advocacy planning by Paul Davidoff in 1965 are two influential developments.

Dr. Lindblom, a professor of political science, reminded planners of the critical role of politics in planning. He critiqued the Rational Model for defining goals and objectives before deciding feasible approaches for implementation, since politicians, the real decision makers, prefer to choose policies and goals at the same time. Moreover, whether a plan is good or bad depends on whether it receives support from decision makers and its feasibility in the real world rather than on its scientific quality and merit. As a result, the Rational Model is hard to apply in practice. Lindblom suggested the concept of incremental planning with “the simultaneous selection of goals and policies, and consideration of alternatives only marginally different from the status quo.” (Stiftel, 2000) The hardship in planning implementation is reduced and planners are able to grasp the planning process in such an approach. Lindblom’s emphasis on social practice instead of theoretical abstractions shows the influence of realism and pragmatism in contrast to the idealist nature of the Rational Model.

Following Lindblom, Amitai Etzioni developed the concept of “middle range bridge” as an effort to reconcile rational planning with incrementalism. The strategic planning movement at the period focused on the analysis of the organization and short-term action rather than comprehensive long-term solutions by using impressions instead of hard data. (The Chinese version of strategic planning popular these days in China is quite different from its American origin in that sense.)

Global political movement in the 1960s greatly affected the planning profession. The Civil Rights movement in the US, for instance, fostered a new generation of planners. The most influential work includes “*Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning*” by Paul Davidoff in 1965, which created the concept of advocacy planning.

Frustrated by the value neutral nature of the Rational Model and its indifference of the needs of disadvantaged groups in contemporary American planning practice, Davidoff advocated for a meaningful planning to address the social and economic issues confronting American cities. Planners providing planning services on behalf of low-income, minority neighborhoods are called “advocate planners”. Partially due to the political atmosphere at the time and stimulated by advocacy ideas, the Federal Government launched the Model Cities and Office of Economic Opportunity programs. Eligible activities included support for “planning shops” with the nickname of “little city halls”. Federally-funded, planners, architects, and lawyers lived in low income and minority neighborhoods to understand people’s needs and provide assistance. In the course of advocacy work to public aid to these communities, these professionals became more and more involved in local politics.

The positive outcomes of the advocacy movement include re-emphasis on social justice in planning and the awareness of the needs of poor communities. With more public as well as private resources flowing into poor communities, the quality of life in these communities was improved and more residents were encouraged to participate in local political activities. Though eventually their participation affected local development, there remained unsolved issues. First, it was not easy for all advocate planners to work effectively in low-income ethnic neighborhoods. Many advocate planners with their ethnic and social backgrounds (often white middle class) could not fully understand the problems facing the communities they served that had different demographic backgrounds (frequently black low-income). Secondly, the advocate planners raised residents’ expectations of planning outcomes, but often failed to produce the anticipated results. This ultimately disappointed residents in the results and even disappointed them about the planning profession.

A more critical issue was that planning bore the risk of being abused as a political tool in elections and other complicated aspects of local politics. The over-emphasis on planning's political attribute exceeded the realm of planning and generated questions about the advocacy model, which finally marginalized Davidoff to "fair housing".

Advocacy planning was obviously one of the significant institutional innovations in the history of American planning theory. The role of the society was emphasized in planning's mission together with the efforts of asking for the state's assistance to communities. It called for planners working for disadvantaged groups and social justice as the primary goal of planning. Planners guided by this theory were pursuing equity in the planning practice through grassroots participation. Advocacy planning theory released planners from the labels such as "comprehensive", "neutral value", and serving the abstract concept of the public interest. It not only contributed "value rationality" to planning, but also had influences on other aspects of American society. The basic approach of advocacy planning—seeking solutions for the interest of underrepresented communities through participation—has been widely adopted in planning projects for low-income communities, as well as civic movements of environmental organizations and labor unions.

The emergence of advocacy planning had a direct relationship to the general political environment of the 1960s. In other word, we may regard advocacy planning as an extension of the 1960s Civil Rights movements into the field of planning. In light of this history, we could argue that an innovation in planning theory cannot gain popular support unless there is an appropriate social condition or "the right soil". Planning theory as an effort to create new institutional arrangements is obviously limited by social contexts. When the social climate changes, existing institutional arrangements may become inefficient and new ones need to be formed. This helps explain why the development of planning theory takes a non-linear trajectory.

2.4 Crisis in planning theory and the introduction of political economy: Regime Theory and Social Learning

Given the debate over advocacy planning, planning theories diverged in various directions in the 1970s. Some scholars turned to the procedural planning theory focusing on planning processes; others stressed planning contents or substantive planning theory. Dutch professor A. Faludi labeled the two directions as “theory of planning” and “theory in planning”; the former addresses the nature, function and procedure of planning and the latter covers theoretical frameworks of planning work including land use, transportation etc. But to divide planning theory into the two areas was controversial, since many scholars argued that no planner could focus just on the planning process while leaving substantive issues to others or vice versa. However, it is still debatable which planning task is more important in a particular context—the process (e.g. organizing public participation) or the content (e.g. designing policy to control sprawl). To a certain degree, the debate is fundamental to the definition of the planning function in a society. Since no consensus could be reached, the debate caused the so-called “crisis in planning” in the 1970s. The diverse directions and divergent nature of the trajectory of planning theory’s evolution is most obvious in that period of time.

A group of advocacy planning supporters turned to a more radical direction, they believed that the current American institutional setting could no longer meet the needs of the poor so a new institutional arrangement became a must. They advocated public ownership of land, promotion of industries that could absorb the most unemployed, and a bottom-up approach in planning process. The movement was named “progressive planning” with social justice, public participation, and planning legitimacy as goals. A few cities adopted their ideas such as Berkeley, California a city with a progressive tradition.

Attracted by the emerging New-Marxist structuralism and enlightened by the advocacy planning movement, some scholars became interested in the relationship between planning and local politics from a political economy perspective. The outcome included the theory of “City as A Growth Machine” and, later, influential Regime Theory. Based on his research in the 1970s, Dr. Molotch concluded that pro-growth coalitions control city hall and planning institutions in most American city. The members of the “growth machine” consist of government officials, real estate developers, owners of commercial developments, communication and other infrastructures. These interest

groups push economic growth and urban development while neglecting groups voicing concerns relating to the environment, community development, and affordable housing. Due to the predominant influence of growth machines over decision makers in city hall, opposition representing the interests of average residents was seldom listened to. This situation was further developed in Clarence Stone's Regime Theory in 1980. Stone concluded that urban development is a product of "regime politics" in which various informal frameworks by three stakeholders of the local state, the marketplace and the civil society affect development decisions. In most cases, pro-growth coalitions have the strongest influence and the civil society the weakest. Only with the support the local state or the marketplace can civil society realize its preferred development outcomes.

Regime Theory indicates that the effectiveness of planning work relies on a common ground of planners and the leading regime. Without the support or at least mutual understanding of the regime, planners find it impossible to get plans realized. Evidence of this is that there is almost no successful case of the implementation of progressive planning ideas in American cities today, since no decision makers choose to form a regime with progressive planners.

In answering the question of "how and how much planners could affect decision making", social sciences, especially political science were introduced into planning. Influenced by "learning by doing" of pragmatism, social learning theory suggested planners first learn from society by sharing their experience with various interest groups and building consensus. A series of theories were developed based on the social learning model. John Friedmann's "transactive planning" argued that citizens and civic leaders, not planners, had to be at core of planning. Planners should carry out decisions of citizens rather than making plans by themselves in a top-down pattern. Chris Argyris's "theory of action" suggested planners act as catalysts to create a self-correcting decision structure capable of learning from its own errors. (Stiftel, 2000)

Although the time axis per se is "linear", the evolution of planning theory has a non-linear trajectory along the time axis. The characteristics of planning theories from the end of the 1960s through the 1970s were multi-directional, divergent, diverse and non-linear. Planning theory had not evolved linearly or been revised along the road of the

rational planning model. Rather planners recognized that over-emphasizing the scientific side of planning and ignoring the political attribute of planning led to an isolation of planners from decision-makers and limited the influence of planning on urban development. Planning theory, therefore, turned to social science for redemption when planning had increasingly become a type of public policy. New planning schools with diverse directions and approaches emerged and contended with each other after political economy, political science and sociology were introduced into planning theory. It is important to note that the theory diversifying process was in a period of economic transition of the United States when globalization had emerged, but was not fully developed, manufacturing was moving out from central cities, downtowns were declining, suburbanization was surging, and the wave of massive new development in downtown areas had largely ended. Planning was confronted with the problems of how to revitalize the declining central city and understand the mechanism and motivations of urban evolution. Since traditional planning theory, especially so called "scientific approaches", could not provide answers to those new questions, planning theorists had to search for new theories and a new round of institutional innovation in terms of relationship between the state, the marketplace and society.

However, there was no common agreement at the beginning of exploration for new approaches. There is always a period of ferment and exploration in planning theory evolution in which different planning schools co-exist and debate with each other. Now is a transitional period in both the economy and society in China, a period similar to the United States in the 1970's. In the planning field in China, therefore, there are doubts and debates about existing planning theories, but new theories have not yet been created or matured.

2.5 Communicative planning, post-modernism and post-modern planning

The period of review and introspection of traditional Western social theories and concepts in the 1970s stimulated the development and diversification of social theories in the west. As a branch of social sciences, planning received considerable influence. The globalizing process brings everything closer including planning scholars on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean so planning theory once again showed some "unification".

From the 1970s to the 1980s, the development of many new philosophical theories, such as Thomas Kuhn's paradigms; Paul Feyerabend's relativism; and Jurgen Habermas's critique theory signaled a new intellectual age. These leaders announced the beginning of the post-modernist era in which the traditional Positivism is challenged by post-modernism and post-positivism. Positivism believes that in nature and social sciences, scientific methodology and findings can be tested and proved through research. Since the "scientific" methods and findings represent universal truths and are applicable in all settings across the world, they are neutral and value-free.

Post-positivism, on the contrary, argues that no knowledge is value-free and universally true so as to be applicable to all settings. Even the term "knowledge" itself is relative and context-defined. Therefore, more important to scholars is to understand the context and meaning of a planning situation through communication rather than rush to conclusions tested by "scientific methods".

Post-positivism emphasizes the following propositions:

“1. All theory is to a greater or lesser degree normative; that is, suffused with values and embedded within a social and historical context.

2. Given such a social and historical context the application or use of theory cannot be “read off” from principles or tenets of that theory derived from a more abstract understanding.

3. Theory is mediated through space and time allowing for its differential formulation, interpretation and application.

4. If theories are normative, variable through time and space, and contextualized through social and historical mediation (of which planning is one) there is no distinction between substance and procedure but a complex iterative relationship between ideas and action.” (Allmendinger, 2002).

US planning scholars reacted to these developments. If the Rational Model reflects the influence of positivist ideas, the communicative planning concept illustrates the beginning of the post-positivism era. John Forester, a professor of urban planning at Cornell, suggested the planning model of consensus building through communication, and he believed that the best way to help the disadvantaged is to provide accesses to information and decision making structures followed by building consensus. His ideas

received supports from planning scholars of both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. British professor Patsey Healey stressed planners' role as mediator among various interest groups. The communicative model indicates these steps in planning: identifying common interest and building consensus through communication; developing alternatives; selecting the best alternative based on participated decision making; and implementation. One thing the model emphasizes is diversity. The model is obviously a revision of the "unified" rational model.

Since the 1970s, the post-modernism theory led by philosopher Michael Foucault became most influential in the west including the US. At the same time, new challenges emerged in American domestic life. The Reagan administration adopted new-liberalism policies following Premier Thatcher's conservative economic policy, characterized by deregulation, privatization, and reduction of Federal government aid to low-income households, which worsened the hardship of the urban poor. Immigrants as a consequence of rapid globalization concentrated in big cities. The increasing number of immigrants increased the number of urban poor, and caused tension between the newcomers and the former urban residents, while providing cheap labor to employers. The challenges intensified conflicts in race, class, and gender in urban areas as American cities became more diverse. These new developments proved post-modernism's statement of "the universality of variation" and post-positivism's Multiculturalism. According to Multiculturalism, understanding sub-groups and their needs is more important than emphasizing the "public interest" at a general and abstract level. So-called "human progress" in history is viewed by Multiculturalism a circle of one ruling group replaced by another.

In the field of planning, planners were aware of the challenges and responded with appeals for respecting diversity and differences among individuals, making efforts to build consensus through communication. Planners were encouraged to share knowledge and power with residents of the community where a plan was going to be introduced. More planners moved away from the traditional "scientific" quantitative approach and turned to the qualitative "story telling" method, which was viewed as better for fostering mutual understanding and building consensus. The shift indicates an effort to achieve a

new institutional arrangement between the state, the marketplace and society, with planning as a tool for mediation.

One important development with Multiculturalism is the social capital theory in urban sociology. Dr. Robert Putnam of Harvard stated in a 1995 article that there are various social networks in communities. The informal network is as valuable as human capital and financing capital. Social capital as a complex system may bring both positive and negative impacts to the community. The appropriate use of social capital could help in solving problems in urban areas brought by globalization, especially in low-income and migrant communities. The theory soon became most popular and valuable in community planning.

Postmodernism stimulated debates on planning theory with a focus among planners remaining on the identity of the planning profession. The question is: Should planning pay more attention to goals and values philosophically, or to the assessment of plan formulation and outcomes scientifically? To a certain extent, the debate seems still centered on “value rationality” and “tool rationality”.

The contingency theory, influenced by post-modernism, intends to synthesize various theories by stating that planning theory does have variations; and different theories should be used in different contexts. It also argues that planning theory contains both a value function and a tool function, but when and in what context the functions should be emphasized is contingent—the context would finally determine the appropriate approach to a problem. Obviously, these statements show the strong influence of post-positivism on planning theory.

There are additional critical concerns to planners in a world of uncertainty. A fundamental issue for planners is whether or not human beings have the ability to project the future based on experience of the past—a notion as the foundation of planning work. Or, do planners have quite limited capacity to make the world better. The current trend seems to be that planners remain modest and leave decision power to the public and the government while just providing service in communication. This attitude has moved quite far away from the attitude of earlier planners who were ambitious in changing the world by better planning.

The challenges confronting American planners are much complicated today than ever—the outside world demands planners’ commitment substantively, while mainstream planning theory is still striving to improve procedural rationality. Substantive planning work is becoming popular. New Urbanism, for instance, responds to expectations of the real estate business and local government. The higher density development pattern promoted by New Urbanism could foster social capital and increase public participation. Sustainable development concepts also contain both value and substantive aspects such as unifying people to make better use of limited resource. Both the two theories combine substantive and procedural planning.

From New Deal to the early 1970s, American planning scholars had established theories for vernacular planning. American theories were differentiated from those in Europe, due to different historic traditions, urban problems, as well as functions of the public sector (including planning), the marketplace, and society on the two continents; or more general differences in institutional settings. After the 1980s with the increase in globalization, there were more similarities in social problems between the two continents. Communication and interaction in the academic world had increased with the progress in technology. American planning theories thus had more and more become an important part of social science in the West.

Given the increasing diversity in social science theories and the strong influence of diverse philosophies, planning theories have also been developed along diverse approaches. This results a multi-directional, divergent and non-linear trajectory for the evolution of urban planning theory. It seems obvious that the review and revision of classic theories in social sciences in the West, especially the development of post-positivism and post-modernism, together with the changing demands and expectations of society, would lead to the development of more diversified planning theories.

3. Conclusion: the multi-direction, divergent and non-linear trajectory of the evolution of planning theory

I argue in this article that planning is essentially an institutional arrangement for functions and roles of the state, the marketplace, and society at a particular place in a particular period, so planning theory is context-defined and should not be viewed as a universal truth. This argument to certain degree receives support from works of other planning scholars. For example, John Friedmann created a valuable framework in analyzing the origins, principles and evolution of planning in his classic “*Planning in the Public Domain*”. Friedmann proposed a matrix based on the relation of action and knowledge and ideology in classifying planning theories. (Table 2) There are four clusters of planning theories: policy analysis, social learning, social reform, and social mobilization. (Fig. 1) (Friedmann, 1987)

Table 2 Friedmann: the classification of planning theory

Knowledge and ideology	Conservative	Progressive
Social engagement	Policy analysis	Social reform
Social transition	Social learning	Social mobilization

According to Friedmann, among the four clusters, policy analysis emphasizing tool rationality is more conservative, social learning focusing on value rationality is moderate, social reform intending to pursue reform within the existing institutional setting is relatively progressive, and social mobilization encouraging political movements is most radical. It seems that he himself favors the social learning and social reform theories. The four clusters may have some overlapped propositions but are quite different in most concepts and directions. Moreover, there is no evidence for a “linear evolution” trajectory among them, rather, they were evolving and co-existing in parallel.

In commenting on the evolution of planning theory in the last 70 years, British professor Phil Allmendinger identified seven clusters: systems and rational theories (similar to policy analysis); Marxism and critical theory; New Right theory (following Hayek’s deregulation and small government ideas); pragmatism theory; advocacy theory; postmodernism theory (including Multi-culture theory) ; and collaborative theory (also with collective and communication planning). It is obvious that these clusters have no evolutionary relations—they have not evolved along a linear trajectory. Allmendinger further identified six planning styles based on the attitude to the marketplace and urban problems facing the community. (Table 3, Allmendinger, 2002)

Table. 3 Allmendinger: A typology of planning styles

Perceived nature of urban problems	Attitude to market processes	
	Market-critical: redressing imbalances and inequalities created by the market	Market-led: correcting inefficiencies while supporting market processes
Buoyant area: minor problems and buoyant market	Regulative planning	Trend planning
Marginal area: pockets of urban problems and potential market interest	Popular planning	Leverage planning
Derelict areas: comprehensive urban problems and depressed market	Public investment planning	Private management planning

Source: Allmendinger, 2002

Reviewing Friedmann’s four theory clusters and Allmendinger’s seven clusters and six planning styles, it is obvious that planning theories are more diversified instead of unified in foundations and propositions. Therefore, planning history illustrates that the American planning theory did not simply revise existing theories in the same direction in a linear way. Rather, new efforts often started from a new track in order to find new solutions to new urban problems or to find new explanations to old urban problems. The consequence is the multi-direction, divergent and non-linear trajectory of the evolution of planning theory. In recent years, Chinese planners have established a consensus that planning is a public policy. In addition to this correct recognition, I would argue that planning’s fundamental mission is to establish an institutional arrangement as a response to urban problems in a particular society

and time period. The central piece of public policy is to make or revise institutional arrangement between the state, the marketplace, and the society over issues relating to public interest. Due to the diversity of modern society, the multiple directions of social developments, and unpredictable events happening in the world, an institutional arrangement functions appropriately only in a particular context, or, it is context-defined rather than universally applicable, and the arrangement include only limited Truth. As “the Truth” consists of many segments and parts, “comprehensive” planning theory should be understood as the sum of all planning theories at an abstract level, rather than as a unified, universally correct and applicable theory. The misunderstanding of “comprehensive” planning theory and application of theory to places different from the place where the theory was originated may mislead planners. Therefore, both trials of simply applying west planning theory to Chinese cities (as seen in some Chinese planning practices), and imposing western planning theories and using west terminology to explaining Chinese urban issues (as seen in some western China-research publications) runs a serious risk of misguiding planners.

There are lessons learned from the review of the trajectory of evolution of the American planning theory.

1. The real driving force behind the development of planning theory is social change including economic, social, and political developments. Planning as an apply science, cannot be separated from changes in a society and social practice. The Chinese saying “the situation makes the hero” can be paraphrased for planners as “the situation makes the development of planning”. Chinese planners should be engaged more actively in all social practices instead of being limited to physical development as the “sole” mission of planning.

2. The development of other social and nature sciences, especially philosophy, has important influence and impacts on the development of planning theory. The explanation of social, economic and political changes is best elaborated by and reflected in philosophical research and findings. Philosophy provides us a basic tool at the abstract level to understand society, or more importantly, understand ourselves, and a tool

valuable for all sciences including planning. Planning research should thus pay sufficient attention to the development of other sciences, especially new trends in philosophy.

3. As in literature, planning theory is the product of individual planning scholars, arrived at through their analyzing social changes from their own perspectives. Differences in their viewpoints, social positions, and individual backgrounds contribute to the differences in their theories. For instance, Rexford Tugwell as a federal government official in the liberal Roosevelt administration created his theory that is different from the theory developed by Paul Davidoff, a lawyer and fair housing advocate who headed a nonprofit organization promoting housing integration in suburbs and a university professor. Even the same scholar at different positions in different periods may have different ideas about planning. The “advisor Tugwell” in the Roosevelt administration showed a different attitude to planning compared to the “professor Tugwell” at the University of Chicago. This helps explain the multiple directions and non-linear nature of trajectory of the evolution of planning theory.

I favor the post-positivism school from a philosophical perspective. What impresses me is the school’s emphasis on context and history in analyzing social issues, including planning, rather than imposing a simple “universal” solution (“external validity”) as required by the positivism approach. Moreover, since individuals interpret theory, even the same theory may be understood differently by different people at different periods of time. It is true that the planning profession has a common core as an applied science. Planning focuses on resource allocation (land and space in particular) and redistribution among various interest groups to pursue a balance between the segments of society and society as a whole, and between current and future costs and benefits. But the core itself is also context-defined instead of fixed—the variation in social—cultural development in different contexts requires planners to define their core work differently.

For Chinese planners, the conclusion is that the Chinese planning theory should be generated and understood as an institutional innovation in the Chinese society. Because China is so vast and the Chinese society is changing so rapidly, any planning theory

workable in one place and one period may not be appropriate at other places and time, hence current planning theory has only limited legitimacy. The implication is, planners have to constantly learn from society before trying developing any plan. There may be errors and mistakes in making plans, so planners have to constantly revise their plans in light of a better understanding of changes, which contributes to the birth of new, better quality theories. Here, we see a great potential for the development of planning theory and the planning profession in China where the largest urbanization experiment in the human history is on-going.

Author's notes

The major reference of the evolution of the American planning theory is Dr. Bruce Stiftel's chapter in *The National AICP Exam Preparation Course Guidebook*, 2000. But the discussion, comments, findings and conclusions are all by the author.

Main Reference (A short-list)

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