

Supporting Chinese Modernization through Cities: Paths and Missions - An Academic Symposium

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Editor's Note. The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed to "advance the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through Chinese modernization." Cities are the core spatial carriers of national modernization, and their development models are deeply intertwined with national modernization strategies. Chinese modernization emphasizes such features as a huge population, common prosperity for all, and harmony between humanity and nature. China's urban development must therefore break away from traditional path dependence and explore a modernization paradigm that is both distinctively Chinese and globally oriented. How high-quality urban development can support the national and civilizational transformation of modernization, and how the leap from "point-based modernization" to "full-territory modernization" can be achieved, has become an urgent academic question. To this end, the editorial office has organized this academic symposium, "Supporting Chinese Modernization through Cities: Paths and Missions." Grounded in the context of Chinese modernization, it analyzes the deep relationship between urban transformation and national modernization, and explores how high-quality urban planning can support national modernization goals.

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The Historical Role and Mission of Cities in Chinese Modernization

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At the present historical stage, the overarching development goal of our country is to elevate an ancient and splendid civilization into a great, prosperous, strong, and modern civilized nation.

Throughout the historical evolution of Chinese civilization, cities have always served as high grounds for the formation and transformation of civilization. They are among the places where civilization originated, and through radiation and linkage they have driven social development and cultural integration across wider regions. In other words, cities not only activate diverse forms of interaction across vast territories in the form of spatial nodes; at different historical moments they have also carried major leaps in Chinese civilization and become the starting points of new historical peaks. In Western discourse, this city-centered mode of advancing the evolution of an entire civilization is often understood as a concrete manifestation of the process of "civilization." Cities drive the whole. Across more than five thousand years of Chinese civilization, three features can be observed: 1) the coexistence and simultaneous emergence of multiple civilizational origins in different geographic directions; 2) a historical tendency toward integrated interaction and fusion; and 3) continuous innovation and re-creation at each civilizational source through the absorption of external elements.

In the process of building a modern state, cities continue to perform a key function in the overall modernization of the Chinese nation. From the perspective of civilizational evolution, the major roles of cities can be summarized in four respects. First, cities should become important sources of modern Chinese civilization and play a leading role in the contemporary sociocultural system. Second, cities need the capacity

to absorb and integrate external elements of modern civilization, injecting new momentum into their own modernization through cross-regional learning and reception. Third, through nodal radiation and networked linkage among cities, they should promote coordinated modernization at the national scale and shape a modern civilizational pattern marked by multiple circles, connectivity, and shared progress. Fourth, on the basis of integrating multiple elements, cities will become the places where a new round of national institutional, cultural, and social genes are nurtured; through constant iteration and evolution, they will help transform traditional Chinese civilization into modern civilization in depth.

It may be said that cities essentially shoulder the historical mission of supporting the entire nation in its advance toward modernization. Since modern times, this mission has gradually become clear, yet it has not been fully accomplished. Holding fast to the original aspiration of "supporting national modernization through cities," we must guard against the overextension of material-oriented tendencies in urban construction, and recognize that cities are not merely collections of space and built environment, but key nodes in the cultivation and dissemination of modern civilization. Only by placing urban construction within the dual mission of civilizational inheritance and modern transformation can the Chinese nation truly achieve the historic leap from an ancient civilizational power to a modern civilizational power.

Taking Cities as the Core: Following a Path of Coordinated Urban-Rural Development that Supports Chinese Modernization through Economic Prosperity, Cultural Inheritance, Inclusive Sharing, Green and Low-Carbon Transition, and Smart Efficiency

Wang Guangtao (Former Minister of Construction; Chair of the Environment and Resources Protection Committee of the 11th National People's Congress; Senior Engineer)

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that Chinese modernization should be basically achieved by 2035. As the main carriers of population and economic agglomeration, cities function as engines in the realization of Chinese modernization. As principal actors in economic development, cities are the core force that drives development through innovation and consolidates the growth of national and household wealth. Cities are also repositories of history and culture; historical remains, cultural relics, and humanistic traditions are part of urban life itself. Cities are the principal homes where different groups live and work together, and only by making cities more inclusive can common prosperity be realized. The green and low-carbon transformation of cities is strategically important for supporting the national "dual-carbon" goals and promoting sustainable development. Facing a future shaped by artificial intelligence and disruptive innovation, cities are also the "digital foundation" on which Chinese modernization will be built.

First, economic prosperity. Economic prosperity is the basis of the modern city. Although China's per capita GDP has exceeded US\$13,800, it is still only at the global average level [US\$14,500 per person, according to World Bank data] and only about one-third of the EU average. There remains a long road ahead. This requires that transformation and innovation continue to serve as breakthroughs for the urban economy. Efforts should be made to develop new quality productive forces, not only by promoting high-tech industries and cultivating strategic emerging industries, but also by using informatization and the Internet of Things to upgrade traditional industries. In this way, productivity can be continuously improved and the international competitiveness of China's real economy can be strengthened. In urban economic development, the rapid application of artificial intelligence across industries will inevitably accelerate industrial iteration. Traditional categories of employment will decline rapidly, while labor productivity in emerging industries will rise sharply even as employment scale decreases. Cities must therefore pay close attention to employment, treat

it as the foundation of people's livelihoods, weave a dense social security network, strengthen lifelong training and learning, and provide social security systems that meet the needs of flexible workers and people holding multiple jobs.

Second, cultural inheritance. The city itself is an important carrier of human civilization. Culture is not only the soul of the city, but also an important marker of urban character and quality. Comprehensive urban and rural surveys of historical and cultural heritage should be conducted for all historical periods and across all spatial areas and elements, followed by holistic conservation and adaptive use. In the process of urban modernization, to protect traditional neighborhoods, ancient buildings, and cultural relics is to preserve the city's history and cultural lineage. We must comprehensively excavate, organize, and summarize the varied wisdom of construction accumulated in China's urban development since antiquity, extracting the theoretical and practical essence of Chinese urban construction as the foundation for high-quality urban development in Chinese modernization. We should uphold fundamental principles while fostering innovation: cultural transmission requires both intergenerational safeguarding and renewal in keeping with the times. Cultural inheritance can strengthen residents' sense of belonging and pride, enhance cohesion and identity, and provide intellectual support for urban development, enabling the outstanding ideas of traditional Chinese urban civilization to develop innovatively in the construction of modern Chinese cities.

Third, inclusive sharing. A crucial feature of Chinese modernization is "common prosperity," which in cities means enabling residents of all social strata to share the fruits of development. At present, especially in megacities and superlarge cities, sharp supply-demand tensions in housing, quality education, and medical resources have produced substantial differences in public services and welfare guarantees between local household-registered residents and new citizens and young newcomers. Studies of non-hukou residents in Shenzhen, Foshan, and Guangzhou show that in each city more than three million people cannot obtain affordable and decent housing, with the gap exceeding that of local registered residents by 23.6%, 22.2%, and 30.1%, respectively. In Shenzhen, for example, among the 10.07 million people living in urban villages, the number of kindergartens and community health centers is only one-third of that in formally developed built-up areas. Cities also have many shortcomings to address in the fair sharing of education, medical care, and public services. Continuous urban renewal actions should be carried out so that urban infrastructure and public services can be shared fairly, enabling all groups to live and work in peace and contentment.

Fourth, green and low-carbon development. Cities are the main consumers of energy. As urban economies and societies become more prosperous, the energy-consumption structure dominated by industrial processing and manufacturing will gradually be replaced by one dominated by the tertiary sector and residents' daily lives. According to the national "dual-carbon" strategy of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality, China will achieve carbon peaking by 2030. This sets demanding requirements for green and low-carbon urban development, and it is also a field in which China can make an important contribution to global sustainable development. Cities must therefore focus on low-carbon transport, the green upgrading of municipal facilities and old residential communities, the multi-scale integration of green and low-carbon technological systems and standards from planning to neighborhoods, blocks, and buildings, and multi-scenario applications that guide urban green and low-carbon transformation. This will help form an independently innovated, large-scale industrial system in China.

Fifth, smart efficiency. Informatization has already generated many new application scenarios and changed people's lives. Rapid breakthroughs in artificial intelligence and information technology can greatly improve efficiency and scientific decision-making in urban governance, smart communities, coordination among vehicles, roads, people, and networks, and risk management. For example, enhanced monitoring and

early warning for underground urban pipelines and major sources of danger can play an important role in risk prevention, control, and emergency dispatch. With rapid aging and declining birth rates, smart communities and smart homes can play a prominent role in improving well-being and enhancing the service efficiency of complete communities. The use of digital technology in the "urban brain" for intelligent management and scientific decision-making also deserves continued promotion and improvement.

The Role of Cities and the Four New Missions of Future Urban Planning

Yang Baojun (President, Urban Planning Society of China; National Engineering Survey and Design Master; Professor-level Senior Urban Planner); Chen Peng (Director, Institute of Village and Town Planning, China Academy of Urban Planning and Design; Professor-level Senior Urban Planner)

1. Cities play a leading and guiding role in national modernization; without urban modernization with Chinese characteristics, there can be no Chinese modernization.

From the perspective of historical development, cities have three timeless essential attributes: they are homes for human life, crystallizations and carriers of human civilization, and incubators and accelerators of innovation. From the perspective of modernization, cities play a leading and guiding role in the transformation of national social structures and the progress of social civilization; they are the "locomotives" of modernization. The modernization of a country is, in essence, a systemic transformation from traditional society to modern society. Whether industrialization, urbanization, democratization, rule of law, scientific and technological revolution, or institutional innovation, breakthroughs and transitions are all achieved under the impetus of cities.

Cities are therefore the core carriers and dynamic engines of national modernization. Without urban modernization, there is no national modernization; in the context of Chinese modernization, urban modernization also carries requirements and meanings with Chinese characteristics. Cities are the carriers of urbanization. Only when cities absorb more than one billion people and complete their comprehensive transformation from peasants into urban citizens can a country of 1.4 billion people realize modernization. Cities are agglomerations of advanced productive forces. Only when cities themselves prosper economically and effectively radiate and drive surrounding regions can modernization characterized by common prosperity for all be achieved through balanced regional development and urban-rural integration. Cities are centers of cultural inheritance and innovation. Only by respecting history and culture can the continuity of Chinese civilization over more than five thousand years be sustained through cultural confidence, achieving modernization that coordinates material and spiritual civilization. Cities are focal points of tensions between humans and land. Only by respecting and revering nature can green and low-carbon transformation be led and modernization based on harmony between humanity and nature be achieved. Cities are windows of opening to the outside world. Only by upholding the concept of a community with a shared future for humanity can modernization on a path of peaceful development be realized through higher-level international openness and cooperation. It is especially worth noting that the world today is undergoing changes unseen in a century. In the process of Chinese modernization, many unpredictable risks and challenges will arise. The comprehensive resilience needed to respond to complex changes in society, the economy, ecology, and other fields will become an important standard for measuring the modernization level of cities in the future.

2. Urban planning in the new era has four new missions; to meet the complex demands of modernization, the discipline must advance on the twin wings of science and technology and the humanities.

Urban planning is not a single plan, but a planning system. In accordance with the national planning system, urban planning will form a complete system led by strategic planning, grounded in territorial spatial planning, and supported by specialized planning. Yet regardless of how the composition of the urban planning system changes, the inner value of planning remains constant: seeking truth in a practical way. This means studying real problems, responding to real needs, creating real value, and ensuring real implementation. In light of the goals of Chinese modernization and the needs of the era, future urban planning will have at least four new missions. First is systemic coordination: based on a full life-cycle concept of the city, planning should shift from single spatial governance to integrated systems governance. Second is value creation: in response to the era of urban renewal, planning should shift from spatially based asset expansion to value creation and the conversion of rights and interests. Third is governance empowerment: as cities shift from a focus on construction to a focus on governance, planning should be upgraded from a single auxiliary technical tool into a comprehensive lever for governance modernization. Fourth is transformation leadership: by fully drawing on the technological advantages of cities, planning should promote green, low-carbon, smart, and resilient transformation across society. At present, the key task is undoubtedly to promote urban renewal and activate development momentum.

The discipline of urban planning in China has long been dominated by engineering, with science as a supplement. In the earlier period of large-scale construction centered on spatial production, this had its rationality and necessity, but it is no longer sufficient for the complex demands of modernization. Looking ahead, the discipline must take flight on the two wings of science and technology and the humanities, complementing and reinforcing each other. If science and technology change the world, the humanities warm it. Technology is important, but it is value-neutral and, to people, often cold. Yet cities are homes in which people seek a better life. Urban planning must serve people's material, spiritual, and other needs; it must make cities places that nurture and cultivate people, and allow every person to feel humanistic care and the people-centered development philosophy. This requires, on the one hand, stronger technological empowerment, such as AI-driven reconstruction of planning paradigms, precision planning supported by big data, and intelligent process reengineering. On the other hand, it requires integrated innovation, breaking down the boundaries among science, engineering, humanities, and business to build a composite knowledge system. Through interdisciplinary curriculum iteration, planning education should cultivate compound professionals capable of working across the full chain of planning, construction, operation, and governance. Ultimately, a comprehensive knowledge system for urban planning, oriented toward Chinese modernization, the era of urban renewal, and the new national planning system, should be established, providing Chinese theories and pathways with shared human value for the modernization of developing countries.

Urban Development in Chinese Modernization: Key Dimensions and Scenario Reconstruction

Zheng Degao (Vice President, China Academy of Urban Planning and Design; Professor-level Senior Urban Planner)

Chinese modernization has five defining features: modernization of a huge population; modernization of common prosperity for all; modernization that coordinates material and spiritual civilization; modernization of harmony between humanity and nature; and modernization on a path of peaceful development. Chinese urban modernization is the core carrier and important engine of Chinese modernization. Achieving the modernization of Chinese cities requires development across five dimensions: the economy, society,

environment, culture, and intelligence. It also involves the transformation of urban development from factor-driven "growthism" to innovation-driven "structuralism." Drawing on theories of spatial reproduction, innovation geography, and urban dynamics, I argue that future cities in Chinese modernization should focus on innovation-led economic prosperity, common-prosperity-oriented public service provision, green and low-carbon natural cities, "culture plus" scenario applications, and smart-led urban governance.

Innovation-led economic prosperity will reshape urban innovation chains, industrial chains, and supply chains. Chinese modernization requires economic development, especially per capita GDP, to reach a certain level. China has now crossed the middle-income trap; by 2035, per capita GDP is expected to reach US\$25,000, the level of a moderately developed country, and by 2049 to reach the level of developed countries. Because China has entered the ranks of economies that others are trying to catch up with, the core task is to shift from factor-driven to innovation-driven development. Research in China and abroad shows that innovation does not occur in all cities, but in a number of "innovation pinnacle cities." It can be judged that such cities will exert a deeper influence on the urban system than "global cities." We need to study the major impacts of the "innovation chain, industrial chain, and supply chain" (the "three chains") on the functions and spatial layout of Chinese cities and on population flows. A preliminary conclusion is that the three chains follow different spatial agglomeration patterns: the innovation chain tends to agglomerate and organize within a range of 5 km; the industrial chain tends to be organized at the metropolitan-area scale, generally clustering within 50 km; and the supply chain tends to be organized in urban agglomerations within a range of 120 km. As a result, pinnacle innovation cities and the urban agglomerations and metropolitan areas they influence will undergo a new round of reshaping and restructuring around the three chains.

Public service provision oriented toward common prosperity will reshape good houses, good residential compounds, good communities, and good urban districts. The second key to Chinese urban modernization is common prosperity, an important expression of the people-centered city concept. To give ordinary people a sense of gain, happiness, and security requires support from key spatial scenarios. Around common prosperity, development can unfold through the "four goods." First, good houses that are safe, comfortable, green, and smart are crucial to Chinese modernization. Second, although each person's dwelling may differ greatly, once residents step outside their homes they should enjoy the convenience of public services in good residential compounds and good communities. The "15-minute community life circle" should be improved by strengthening functions such as elderly care, childcare, medical care, parks, and commerce. Finally, the most important criterion for a good urban district is to "reserve the best resources for the people." Shanghai's "One River and One Creek" initiative is one of the best examples of public-space construction, allowing all people to enjoy high-quality spaces that are more humanistic, vibrant, and ecological.

Green and low-carbon natural cities will reshape the relationship between cities and nature. Ancient Chinese cities emphasized "the unity of heaven and humanity" and the "city within nature." One hallmark of modern urban civilization is the open park available to all residents. Looking ahead, we must further break through the city-ecology binary. Urban development should rely more on nature-based solutions, and the relationship between city and ecology should shift from "parks in the city" to "the city as park." Its core meaning is a transition from fragmented parks to parks everywhere. Preliminary research shows that the total area of parks in Chinese cities is already not small; the key problem is inadequate quality. Improvement should focus on two goals: biodiversity and the satisfaction of human needs. To achieve biodiversity goals, ecological corridors should be connected and small-scale habitats created. To meet human needs, objectives

such as "seeing greenery within 300 meters and reaching a park within 500 meters" should be embodied. Beijing's "boundaryless parks" and Chengdu's "park city" have both made valuable explorations. In addition, cities should emphasize low-carbon ways of living and producing. The creation of low-carbon neighborhoods and low-carbon industrial parks increasingly reflects a city's low-carbon ambition.

Scenario applications led by "culture plus" will reshape urban civilization and spaces of new consumption. Cities are not only containers of human material civilization, but also key fields for the reproduction of spiritual civilization. The importance of protecting, inheriting, and activating urban culture has been widely recognized, yet broader consensus on specific methods and pathways remains insufficient. First, historical and cultural resources should be protected as fully as possible. Policies such as "survey before construction," "archaeology before land transfer," "old cities must no longer be demolished," and "retain, improve, and demolish" must be strictly implemented so as to protect humanity's collective memory and spiritual anchorage. Second, we should further recognize the importance of "culture plus" for the economy and society. Culture is an important driving force of urban development. People's consumption patterns are undergoing profound change: from "space production" to "space consumption," from paying for products to paying for spatial scenes, and from "buying a cup of coffee to drink" to asking "where to drink coffee." "Culture plus" spatial scenarios will become increasingly important in cities. Old residential areas, old factory districts, and old streets will find greater value in the coexistence of old and new. Beijing's Shougang Park and Shanghai's Columbia Circle (Shangsheng Xinsuo) have both regained vitality in the new era.

Smart-led urban governance will reshape the mechanisms of urban operation and maintenance. With technological advances in artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing, cities will be able to develop in a smarter way. Some persistent problems in urban development, especially big-city diseases, will be addressed through smarter solutions. First are applications in key smart fields, including smart transportation and smart healthcare. Congestion in big cities is sometimes the result of insufficiently smart and timely response; in the future, smart traffic lights and smart travel guidance will find more application scenarios. Second are spatial scenario applications from "smart communities" to "smart urban districts." With the broad application of urban sensing systems and the construction of smart platforms such as CIM, cities will become as intelligent as humans, or even more so, and will be able to identify, warn of, and solve problems in a timely manner.

A Health-Oriented View of the Modern City: Ideas, Pathways, and Technological Support

Wang Lan (Dean and Tenured Professor, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University)

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China states that the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation should be advanced on all fronts through Chinese modernization. As the core spatial carrier of modernization, the city is not only an important engine of economic growth, but also a concentrated carrier of social governance, ecological civilization, and people's well-being. Against this background, the goals and pathways of urban development need to be deeply reconstructed: the former view of modernization that relied narrowly on physical construction and economic growth should be replaced by a new paradigm of urban modernization centered on "people's health," supported by digital intelligence, and oriented toward equity and harmony.

1. The transformative mission of cities in the perspective of Chinese modernization

Chinese modernization has "five features": a huge population, common prosperity for all, coordinated development of material and spiritual civilization, harmony between humanity and nature, and a path of

peaceful development. In short, Chinese modernization emphasizes a systemic leap that balances equity, ecology, and overall social well-being.

From this perspective, urban modernization is not merely the physical expansion of "forests of high-rises and crisscrossing rail lines," nor is it simply a competition over GDP and city rankings. It should be reflected more fully in the universality of public services, the sustainability of environmental quality, and the comprehensive improvement of residents' well-being. In particular, "people's health," as an important goal of national modernization, is no longer only the task of health departments; it must become the underlying logic and strategic fulcrum of urban planning and governance.

We therefore argue that health-centered modern city building should become an important pillar in promoting Chinese modernization. A healthy city is not only a measure for improving the quality of urban space, but also a key platform that organically integrates national strategy, public governance, and people's expectations.

2. Responding to the core demands of modernization through "healthy city science"

On the basis of long-term research and practice, we have proposed and deepened the theoretical framework of "healthy city science." It is defined as an emerging interdisciplinary field that aims to promote people's physical and mental health across the whole life cycle and all spatial scales, integrates knowledge from medicine, planning, geography, and other disciplines, and builds mechanisms of spatial intervention through evidence-based pathways. This framework responds to the people-centered, equitable, and systemic qualities emphasized by Chinese modernization.

In terms of technical pathways, we have established a "four elements and three pathways" model. Through key planning elements such as land use, spatial form, transport networks, and green space, interventions are made along three dimensions: health risk control, health resource allocation, and health behavior promotion. We also propose a three-stage technical process of "diagnosis - formulation - evaluation," which enables dynamic identification of spatial health effects and whole-cycle guidance.

This model and process can be embedded in China's multi-scale planning system, including territorial spatial master planning, the 15-minute life circle, and community micro-renewal. It provides quantifiable, evaluable, and traceable institutional tools for improving urban health. Evidence-supported decision-making of this kind also reflects the empirical spirit and scientific rationality that Chinese modernization attaches to high-quality development.

3. The digital-intelligent leap of healthy cities: empowering new governance with new technologies

Entering a new era of digital-intelligent civilization, urban development is undergoing a profound transformation from experience-oriented to intelligence-driven. Emerging technologies represented by big data, machine learning, digital twins, and large language models (LLMs) provide an entirely new tool system for building healthy cities.

These digital-intelligent technologies not only improve the precision with which urban health risks are perceived, such as pollution-source identification, heat-island monitoring, and tracking of sudden epidemics, but also enable reverse-driven spatial design oriented toward health goals. For example:

- Big data can support precise evaluation of health resource allocation, such as the spatial match between elderly populations and elderly-care facilities.
- AI and spatial modeling can predict how different planning schemes promote health behaviors such as physical activity and social interaction.

- Large language models can serve as engines for generating knowledge graphs and design strategies, assisting decision-making for health-oriented urban planning.
- Digital twin city platforms can simulate in real time the dynamic impact of spatial policies on health indicators, achieving "governance while verifying."

The integration of these frontier technologies with the healthy-city concept not only raises the scientific level of urban governance, but also offers a scalable Chinese solution for a distinctive path of urban modernization.

4. Promoting institutional system upgrading centered on health

Urban modernization depends not only on concepts and technologies, but also on the support of institutional systems and talent mechanisms. We propose an industry-university-research collaborative model with planning as the main structure and health as the orientation. It works simultaneously in education, research, and practice to build a sustainable support system for modern urban health.

In talent cultivation, interdisciplinary courses should be promoted, and collaborative education mechanisms should be explored between urban-rural planning and medicine, geographic science, environmental science, and other fields. At Tongji University, for example, we have already opened a course in "healthy city science," carried out interdisciplinary joint teaching, and experimented with dual-degree programs, helping students internalize the idea of health-oriented planning.

In academic research, development of multi-factor, multi-spatiotemporal models of health effects should be accelerated, especially by incorporating the time dimension through "evolutionary simulation." This will reveal more complex causal chains between spatial elements and health outcomes, providing solid evidence for health-oriented planning.

In practice, urban health governance pilot zones should be established to link theoretical research with policy practice. Whole-cycle planning experiments using "health as the objective function" should be carried out in urban renewal, ecological restoration, and the allocation of public service facilities, and should be incorporated into the national evaluation system for the quality of urban and rural development.

5. Conclusion: healthy cities as the spatial foundation of Chinese modernization

The goals of Chinese modernization are common prosperity, ecological civilization, and social harmony. Urban spatial organization, policy guidance, and public service systems constitute the basic venues for realizing people's well-being and social equity. Therefore, building "healthy cities" can become both an entry point and a point of leverage for Chinese modernization. The idea of the healthy city responds to people's demand for a better life and also embodies the evolution and leap of urban governance concepts in the new era.

In the future, we should continue to move cities from material orientation to health orientation, from static morphological construction to dynamic well-being creation, and from partial optimization to systemic improvement, thereby laying a firm health foundation for Chinese modernization and building people's cities.

Planning and Building the People's City in the Context of Chinese Modernization

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In the context of Chinese modernization, high-quality urban development concerns people's well-being, social stability, and sustainable development. The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist

Party of China put forward the principle that "people's cities are built by the people and for the people." The idea of the people's city has become an important guide for urban construction in the new era. Accurately identifying the demands and challenges of urban transformation and exploring pathways for sustainable development are key issues in realizing Chinese modernization.

1. Demands for urban transformation oriented toward Chinese modernization

Urban development urgently needs to shift toward high quality. Chinese urban construction is moving from incremental expansion to stock optimization and quality improvement. In May 2024, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development issued the Notice on Solidly and Orderly Advancing Urban Renewal, which proposed promoting refined design and renewal at different urban scales, including buildings, residential compounds, communities, and blocks, and emphasized guiding spatial optimization through high-quality urban design.

Urban construction must adhere to people-centered principles and respond to the different needs of diverse groups. New urbanization emphasizes people-centered development, shifting cities from scale expansion to the equalization of public services and the fairer distribution of spatial resources. How to achieve spatial responses from the perspective of segmented populations, and how to build livable and work-friendly urban environments that are age-friendly, gender-friendly, and more inclusive, have become another core requirement of urban transformation under Chinese modernization.

2. Challenges in planning and building people's cities for diverse group needs

Older adults: absence of an age-friendly system and insufficient spatial support. By the end of 2024, China's population aged 60 and above had reached 310 million, accounting for 22% of the total. Existing urban space has long been scaled to the working-age population. Age-friendly facilities, health-care spaces, and barrier-free systems lag behind; care resources and social spaces at the community level are insufficient; and cities struggle to support older adults' multi-level needs for health, emotion, and participation.

Children: lagging growth environments and gaps in spatial provision. Children are highly dependent on safety, playfulness, and social interaction, yet traditional urban planning standards lack age-differentiated activity spaces, play networks, and mechanisms for children's participation. Community spaces contain obvious gaps in physical care and psychological growth support, making it difficult to meet the spatial conditions needed for children's all-round development.

Women: pervasive gender blindness and delayed spatial response. Most urban spaces still use "gender neutrality" as their underlying planning and design logic, ignoring women's specific needs in daily travel, rest, caregiving, and other activities. Problems include inadequate urban safety, weak spatial privacy, cramped women's public toilets, and a lack of baby-care facilities or inconvenient placement of such facilities. Women are more sensitive to safety, aesthetics, and functional complexity, yet existing urban planning, design, and construction systems lack systematic responses to gender differences.

Young people: insufficient development space and a weak sense of spatial belonging. Young people are the main subjects of urban vitality, yet they face systematic shortages of housing, employment, and social spaces. Against a background of high mobility, young people often occupy a "spatially marginalized" position in cities and lack flexible spaces and cultural spaces that support their development needs. This weakens many cities' attractiveness to and integration of young people, and undermines young people's identification with and sense of belonging to the city.

Low-income groups: weak housing security and unequal spatial opportunity. In 2024, the income ratio between urban and rural residents in China was 2.34, and the urban-rural income gap still existed. Low-income groups are excluded from quality spatial resources and face problems such as peripheral housing locations and poor accessibility to transportation and medical care. Planning and construction still need improvement in service provision, employment accessibility, and residential stability, as the problem of structural "spatial poverty" has begun to emerge.

3. Sustainable planning pathways for group-specific care in people's-city construction

Urban planning must respond systemically at the institutional, spatial, and technological levels, promoting urban inclusiveness, resilience, and sustainable development.

Emphasize institutional equity and social inclusion, and build sustainable sociospatial relations. Urban planning should shift from the "incremental allocation" of spatial resources to "fair redistribution." It should improve the housing system with the guarantee of the right to housing at its core, optimize layout models for public service facilities, promote reform of the household registration system and a housing system that encourages both renting and purchasing, and build a sociospatial pattern suited to Chinese modernization.

Optimize spatial structure and scenario creation to respond to differentiated needs. Cities should focus on creating public spaces and life scenarios that are diverse, composite, and shared by all age groups. Through micro-renewal, block governance, and age-friendly concepts, spatial adaptive reconstruction should be promoted, enhancing people's sense of gain, happiness, and security in the urban environment.

Strengthen digital perception and technological empowerment to improve the responsiveness of planning. With the help of big data, sensing devices, behavioral experiments, and other technologies, the differentiated preferences of various groups in spatial use can be accurately identified. Planning and design can thus shift from experience-driven to data-driven, incorporating the actual perceptions of children, women, older adults, low-income groups, and others into planning decisions. This will improve the adaptability and precision of spatial design and provide technological support for building people's cities.

Supporting Chinese Modernization through Cities: Renewing Urban Planning under the Concept of Safety and Resilience

Yang Xiaochun (Deputy Dean and Professor, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Shenzhen University)

1. Safety challenges facing cities in the process of Chinese modernization

The advancement of Chinese modernization depends on high-quality urban development. In recent years, however, while cities have enjoyed the dividends of urbanization, the complexity and vulnerability of their operational systems have continued to rise. The interconnection of urban infrastructure, high population density, and the concentration of economic activity make cities more sensitive when facing various risks. At the same time, frequent extreme weather events caused by global climate change, such as torrential rain, floods, and typhoons, as well as the secondary disasters they trigger, have had major impacts on urban operation and development. The rampage of COVID-19 in 2020 further exposed the vulnerability of cities in public health security. These disaster events have not only caused enormous economic losses, but also posed serious threats to residents' lives and social stability, fully revealing the inadequacy of current urban safety assurance systems.

2. Advancing urban planning and design through the concept of safety and resilience

In the face of these complex problems, the concept of safety and resilience brings new ideas and directions to the discipline of urban planning. Safety-resilience urban planning is not simply a specialized disaster-prevention and disaster-reduction plan, but an overall upgrading of urban planning and design thinking. It emphasizes a shift from the traditional risk-response model dominated by engineering defense to resilience thinking centered on improving the overall adaptability and resistance capacity of urban systems. This concept requires us, in the planning process, to fully consider the reality that cities coexist with risks, identify diverse and extreme sources of risk, clarify their spatial distribution, and scientifically assess corresponding spatial and governance needs. In this way, cities can have higher tolerance when struck by risks and faster recovery once risks subside.

Safety-resilience urban planning requires the construction of a theoretical framework covering multiple risks, multiple systems, the whole process, and the whole territory. In the highly urbanized digital-intelligent era, it follows the guiding idea of "adapting to risks and co-constructing form and data." Its analytical logic is to "judge disaster-response needs according to risks, analyze disaster-bearing characteristics through elements, and derive resilience strategies from safety." It takes "moderate pressure-bearing and rapid functional recovery" as the basic principle for setting spatial-system planning goals and governance capacity standards. Through a method system of precise adaptation and a technology system of data-empowered form-making, planning methods are continuously optimized and a scientific and reasonable theoretical architecture is established.

3. Renewing urban planning and design under the concept of safety and resilience

3.1 Digital-intelligent innovation in technical methods

At the level of technical methods, the urban planning discipline needs to keep pace with the times and actively introduce informatized and intelligent technologies. On the one hand, smart integrated platforms should be built for data collection, index construction, model simulation, and emergency-management planning tools, helping refine the perception of urban safety risks, intelligentize planning and design, and platformize planning management. Through big data, the Internet of Things, digital twins, and other technologies, real-time monitoring can be conducted for key urban risk areas and critical infrastructure, and risk-feature identification and evaluation models can be constructed to achieve rapid perception and precise identification of urban risks. On the other hand, technologies should be developed for urban disaster scenario simulation, disaster impact prediction, and multimodal spatial resource allocation, automatically generating multiple safety-resilience urban planning schemes and providing decision-makers with comprehensive and concrete options.

3.2 Refined expansion of planning content

In terms of planning content, it is necessary to deeply analyze real needs and key challenges faced by cities in different regions, at different scales, and of different sizes; to coordinate relations between the long term and the distant future, rigidity and flexibility, higher-level requirements and lower-level demands; and to integrate resilience strategies into the entire planning process, from preliminary analysis to spatial strategy, planning scheme, and implementation measures. First, different disaster-risk zones in different regions have markedly different practical needs. Second, safety-resilience planning at different spatial scales faces different key challenges. At the regional scale, the challenge lies in networked collaborative resilience across administrative boundaries; at the city scale, it lies in the systemic resilience of internal space; and at the community scale, it lies in the performance resilience of characteristic building clusters and key facilities.

Therefore, at the preliminary analysis stage, multi-source data should be integrated and multivariate measurement methods used to scientifically portray the characteristics of urban safety and resilience. Key risks and key areas linked to the city's natural and social characteristics should be precisely assessed, providing reliable technical support and data foundations for planning decisions. At the planning strategy stage, the overall goals, basic principles, and response guidelines for urban safety and resilience construction should be clarified on the basis of precise risk zoning and comprehensive judgment of spatiotemporal behavioral characteristics. At the planning-scheme stage, attention should focus on risk features and disaster chains, while considering the basic capacities and operating rules of the city's socioeconomic, natural-ecological, and governance systems. Future development scenarios under different goal orientations and external policy environments should be simulated, and comparative schemes that balance society, economy, and environment should be selected for inclusion in a scenario library. At the implementation stage, intelligent technical algorithms should be used to form policy tools that can dynamically respond to different scenario patterns, guiding relatively stable normal development while also responding to spatial feedback under sudden disturbances.

3.3 Adaptive improvement of the policy system

In the policy system, a whole-cycle control mechanism based on broad participation should be established and improved. On the one hand, a multi-actor co-governance model involving government departments, professional institutions, and social forces should be established, allowing each party's strengths to generate synergy. On the other hand, relevant policies and laws for resilience construction should be improved; important standards and norms for resilient city construction should be refined and revised; and a rich, layered set of technical guidelines for planning and design should be established to meet the actual needs of cities in different regions and of different types. Through the combination of rigidity and flexibility in policies and regulations, a sound rule-of-law system can be built to provide both firm constraints and flexible guidance for urban safety and resilience construction. At the same time, standards, norms, and technical guidelines should be continuously updated and revised to meet new demands and challenges in urban governance.

New Missions for Urban Planning in Supporting Chinese Modernization through Cities

Peng Chong (Deputy Dean and Professor, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Huazhong University of Science and Technology)

As an important symbol of human civilization and the core carrier of modern society, the city has an irreplaceable strategic position in the process of Chinese modernization. To enable cities to support Chinese modernization, scientific planning pathways must be systematically designed. In the era of rapid urbanization, the field of urban planning has developed theories and methods of socioeconomic development strategy analysis and spatial planning layout that correspond to that stage. Facing the essential requirements of Chinese modernization - high-quality development, common prosperity for all, harmony between humanity and nature, and the creation of a new form of human civilization - urban planning now shoulders new historical missions.

1. Spatial development planning that serves new quality productive forces

The current development of new quality productive forces and the wave of the information technology revolution have raised new requirements for both development planning and spatial planning. First, against the background of scientific and technological innovation, the prerequisite is to analyze, for particular cities

and regions, the coupling among the industrial chain, supply chain, innovation chain, and capital chain, and to study the interaction between industrial upgrading and population agglomeration. This determines the future characteristics of the population and labor force and the structure of the economy and industry. Second, we must investigate in depth how the spatial needs of people and industries change with the development of new quality productive forces. From the perspective of the urban system, future urban-rural relations and the coordinated development pattern of large, medium-sized, and small cities merit study. Within cities, concrete analysis is needed of the synergistic pathways linking urban resource allocation, policy support, and industrial development, such as the scale and layout of industrial land, the optimization direction of transportation and other infrastructure, and the spatial modes of innovation-ecosystem creation. Finally, a spatial adaptation mechanism should be explored and constructed. In this process, the coordination of economic and environmental effects should be taken into account, forming layout optimization schemes adapted to the distinctive development of cities.

2. Human-centered urban renewal planning

Urban renewal is a key area in which planning serves the new stage of urbanization. The first task is to establish sustainable urban renewal models and improve diversified investment and financing methods, including urban development and construction models, urban structure optimization and life-cycle management, and supporting policies and regulations. The second is to coordinate development and safety. Planning must prevent and respond to multiple challenges in urban operation, including climate-disaster risks, economic risks, and social risks, and comprehensively enhance urban resilience. The third is housing and community construction, such as promoting the renovation of old urban residential communities, building complete communities, and advancing "three-old" renewal and redevelopment. The fourth is the improvement of urban functions and the construction and renovation of facilities, such as establishing a multi-level and full-coverage public service network, actively promoting dual-use public infrastructure for ordinary and emergency conditions, carrying out age-friendly and child-friendly improvements, scientifically arranging new public cultural spaces, and advancing new infrastructure construction. The fifth is restoring urban ecosystems and inheriting historical culture. Mountains, water, and cities should be treated as an integrated whole; a continuous and complete system of urban ecological infrastructure should be built; surveys of urban cultural heritage resources should be conducted; management and protection should be strengthened; and reasonable ways to use cultural heritage should be explored.

3. Smart city planning based on carbon-based and silicon-based co-creation

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has made smart city planning far more complex. First is spatial complexity: how should we understand urban space? Technological progress supports the evolution of urban physical space into a three-dimensional system of low-altitude, surface, and underground spaces, which makes future planning face more complex tasks of development and protection. Second is temporal complexity: how should we understand the evolutionary laws of cities co-created by carbon-based and silicon-based actors? In *Solving the Problem of Social Intelligence through HAI-ism*, Academician Wu Zhiqiang points out that with the rise of advanced AI tools such as ChatGPT, the world has officially entered a new era of intelligent civilization, and "HAI-ism" has emerged, jointly creating an unprecedented, more prosperous and harmonious intelligent world. It can be seen that exploring the mutual relationship between carbon-based beings (humans) and silicon-based intelligence (AI), and then revealing how this relationship reshapes cities and predicts urban development trends, is a prerequisite for planning. Third is actor complexity: how can humans and AI jointly conduct smart city planning? In *Who Will Write the Future City?*, Professor Peng

Zhongren argues that the intelligent essence of urban planning is human-centered intelligence. Planners therefore need to study how to define value orientations, guide AI in assisting or autonomously carrying out many types of planning formulation, management, and supervision tasks, and integrate the participation of other actors such as enterprises and the public, thereby producing efficient and high-quality planning outcomes.

Finally, as a planning educator and researcher, I believe planning is a future-oriented applied discipline and is of great significance for advancing the development and construction of modern Chinese cities. The discipline and profession need to accelerate renewal in order to lead practice. First, we need a deep understanding of the urban giant system and of the coordinated relations among people, economy, society, and nature in the process of Chinese modernization. We should incorporate extensive interdisciplinary research and develop innovations in planning theory and methods with Chinese characteristics, serving development strategies and spatial layout optimization for cities and regions. Second, we need a deep understanding of the laws and key tasks of urban spatial development in the era of stock optimization. Unlike the period of rapid urbanization, when the planning discipline focused on spatial planning and design under a growth paradigm, today's priority is to study human-centered theories and methods of spatial renewal in the stock era, supporting reforms in urban construction, operation, governance systems, and urban renewal planning and design. Third, we need to deeply translate and apply frontier information technologies, promoting the scientific and intelligent development of planning and the construction of a new system of smart and efficient governance. In talent cultivation, the planning major has shown multiple career exits in recent years. In the future, training models may achieve multiple outputs through combinations of general and specialized education, refined cultivation, and one-person-one-strategy approaches; and training pathways may explore experiences such as micro-majors, integrated undergraduate-graduate programs, and residential college systems.

Promoting Chinese Modernization through High-Quality Urbanization

Chen Chen (Tenured Professor, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University)

As spatial carriers where population, industry, capital, technology, information, and other development factors are highly concentrated, cities play an irreplaceable core role in Chinese modernization. They are the core engines driving high-quality development, the main spaces that carry and serve a huge population, and the key platforms for addressing imbalanced and inadequate development.

New urbanization is an important strategy for Chinese modernization in terms of spatial carriers, population structure, and social governance. The first of the five core features of Chinese modernization is "modernization of a huge population." China's urbanization rate rose from 17.9% in 1978 to 67.0% in 2024, and hundreds of millions of people completed a modern transformation in cities. Population is the cornerstone of urbanization. New urbanization is people-centered urbanization, while land, investment, and spatial growth are all systemic chain reactions brought about by population urbanization. It should also be recognized, however, that the average annual growth rate of China's permanent-resident urbanization rate has slowed to about 0.8%. The rapid urbanization process has reached a turning point and is entering, ahead of schedule, the "late stage of urbanization" in Northam's three-stage urbanization model. It shows new problems and challenges in three main respects.

First, against the background of national demographic transition, the labor-intensive urbanization model based on the demographic dividend is no longer sustainable. China entered an era of negative population growth in 2022. The working-age population decreased by 40 million over a decade. The decline of manual

laborers is pushing urban competition toward knowledge workers, and human capital has become a new driving force for development.

Second, under rational household decision-making, the low-cost urbanization model in which destination cities do not shoulder public services and do not provide affordable housing is no longer sustainable. Population mobility in the new era is increasingly family-based and localized. Yet the quality of county-level urbanization still needs improvement, while higher-ranking cities, because of their quality public services, more easily attract high-quality talent.

Third, vast rural areas have still not escaped the dilemmas of aging and hollowing-out. Traditional agricultural production that relies on smallholders and family farms will become increasingly difficult. Aging is especially serious in rural areas of central and western China, where agricultural production depends on elderly people. Eastern villages rely on industry or tourism resources to maintain vitality. The new generation of migrant workers lacks both willingness and skills for farming, further intensifying rural decline.

Developed countries that have basically completed urbanization have adopted several major approaches in the late stage of urbanization. First, they promote human-capital accumulation. Germany, for example, cultivates high-quality industrial workers and technical talent through vocational education and school-enterprise cooperation; the United States attracts highly educated talent from around the world by improving quality public services and quality of life. Second, they provide supportive housing security for urban immigrants; for example, Singapore's Housing and Development Board provides public housing extensively for low- and middle-income groups. Third, they use urbanization dividends to support rural areas. On the one hand, they adapt to the multifunctional evolution of rural territories in the late stage of urbanization; on the other hand, they remove institutional barriers for "new farmers" returning to the countryside under the trend of counter-urbanization.

There are three implications for Chinese modernization.

First, we should recognize the objective trend of declining fertility and the limits of pronatalist policies, and promote a shift from labor-driven urbanization to knowledge-driven urbanization. As traditional driving forces such as low-cost industrialization and land finance weaken, knowledge innovation, digital-intelligent civilization, high-quality consumption, and green sustainability will become the major characteristics of a new wave of urbanization. China should move away from a labor-driven urbanization path based on resources and energy consumption and the provision of cheap labor, and move toward a rational and innovative knowledge-driven urbanization path. Urban planning should shift from passively meeting the spatial needs of industrial expansion to actively shaping physical, social, and institutional environments that attract talent, stimulate innovation, and support high-value-added industries.

Second, the housing problem of the floating population should be solved, residential justice in the new stage of urbanization should be realized, and the structuralist "dual urbanization" model should be transformed into humanistic "people's urbanization." As housing prices in China's core cities continue to rise, the lowering of institutional thresholds for formal urban status and the rising market cost of property ownership mean that an increasingly large group of new citizens faces a gap between the willingness to settle and the ability to pay for housing. Urban planning needs to study how categorized housing supply and precise public service supply reform can achieve resource allocation that fits individual mobility and urban development, while improving the effectiveness of grassroots social governance.

Third, we should follow the laws of urban-rural integration and rural multifunctional evolution in the advanced stage of urbanization, provide institutional guarantees for talent, capital, and technology from

large cities and urban agglomerations to flow to the countryside, and activate endogenous rural development. The flow of urban elements to rural areas is not only an economic return for the loss of rural elements, but also a cultural return that revitalizes local society and reshapes rural governance. Higher demand for talent and greater rural development potential are making more and more "new farmers" leaders and main actors in comprehensive rural revitalization; at the same time, this places higher requirements on public services, social security, and rural governance.

The Strategic Leap of Urban Space: Digital-Intelligent Empowerment and Systems Governance in the Context of Chinese Modernization

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1. How can cities become active spatial engines of Chinese modernization?

Chinese modernization is not only a leap in economic scale, but also a systemic restructuring of population structure, innovation capacity, social equity, and ecological security. Compared with the development path of traditional industrial civilization, contemporary Chinese cities, as the spatial nodes in which population and factors are most concentrated, have seen their governance capacity, innovation ecology, and spatial inclusiveness become key variables in the leap of modernization. With population mobility, industrial restructuring, and the coupled evolution of old and new urban districts, cities are becoming the most active, complex, and strategically proactive spatial platforms for Chinese modernization.

The "strategic leap of urban space" means that, within Chinese modernization, cities are shifting from single economic functions to composite governance platforms, from passive carriers to active leaders, and from static planning to dynamic coordination. This not only requires efficient integration of limited spatial resources, but also demands deep transformation in institutions, social structures, and ways of life. The optimized provision of urban space, the balanced layout of public services, and the guarantee of ecological resilience are gradually building the spatial foundation of modernization. Cities are shifting from "containers of growth" to "main arenas of systems governance," becoming the principal engines for implementing national strategies and advancing social progress.

2. How do digital-intelligent technologies reconstruct the boundaries of urban planning and spatial governance?

New-generation artificial intelligence, spatial big data, and digital twins have opened unprecedented boundaries for urban planning. Traditional planning relies on static data and experiential judgment, making it difficult to address the dynamism and high coupling of urban systems. Today, the rise of computational urban science enables us to perceive urban operation in real time and dynamically simulate complex processes such as population flows, land use, transportation, and resource allocation. Big-data-driven models and algorithms, together with multi-agent simulation, provide planning with foresight and adaptive capacity.

Take digital twins as an example: policies and schemes can be iteratively tested in virtual environments, providing scientific feedback for real-world decision-making. Digital-intelligent platforms also break through the traditional governance model of segmented departments and territories, enabling coordinated linkage across departments and among multiple actors. Mechanisms of social participation, public feedback channels, and the coordination of multiple interests can also be efficiently integrated through intelligent systems. Urban planning is therefore no longer merely a drawer of blueprints, but the designer of an

integrated system of "modeling - simulation - optimization - governance." A human-machine collaborative mechanism of co-governance is gradually taking shape, pushing urban governance from experience-based toward scientific, predictive, and feedback-based modes.

3. The new mission of the planning discipline: how should it respond to the dual challenges of social transformation and technological revolution?

As Chinese cities enter the stage of stock optimization and high-quality development, the traditional logic of incremental planning is gradually losing effectiveness. The overlap of uneven regional development, spatial fragmentation, population aging, ecological vulnerability, and diverse demands for social governance has posed unprecedented challenges to the planning discipline. Planners are no longer merely "designers of space"; they must become "integrators of systems," "decoders of data," and "organizers of social collaboration."

This means, on the one hand, that planning talent must possess new technical competencies such as data modeling, spatial simulation, and systems analysis. On the other hand, they must deepen their understanding and guidance of social structures, cultural mechanisms, and public behavior. Disciplinary construction should also integrate across artificial intelligence, data science, sociology, and ecology, promoting both the local construction of planning theory and its international dialogue. Ultimately, the fundamental mission of planning is to shape an orderly, just, and resilient spatial order, to keep people at the center amid digital-intelligent empowerment, and to build a more inclusive and sustainable urban future for society.

Chinese modernization is the largest and most complex modernization process in the world, and cities stand at the forefront of this spatial transformation and governance leap. Moving from spatial expansion to systemic reshaping, and from experiential governance to digital-intelligent coordination, cities are no longer subsidiary containers of growth, but laboratories for national strategy and carriers of public value.

The rise of computational urban science and digital-intelligent governance not only enriches the technical toolkit of planning, but also promotes a shift in the urban planning paradigm from static blueprints to dynamic coordination, and from spatial design to institutional construction. This leap creates systemic coupling among technology and institutions, the public and data, and policy and space, pushing urban governance into a more refined, flexible, and open stage.

Looking ahead, only by continuously deepening human-machine collaboration and promoting innovation in knowledge systems and practical logic can urban planning truly play a strategic guiding role amid technological change and social complexity. The strategic leap of urban space is not only a methodological renewal, but also a process of institutional reconstruction and public-value rebuilding. It concerns the spatial carrying capacity of national modernization and the pathways for realizing social equity. We should use systems thinking to address complex challenges, technological capacity to respond to public demands, and spatial governance to carry national visions, so that urban planning can truly become a solid foundation supporting Chinese modernization.

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