

From China to the world – Urban China studies for a global community

As the inaugural editors of *Transactions in Planning and Urban Research* (TPUR), we would like to welcome you to this new journal, which we hope will become a platform for diverse new inquiries and dialogues on the urban and regional development and planning processes in urban China. We would like to start this editorial statement by answering the most important question first: what is the motivation for launching a journal that is dedicated to Urban China studies? Firstly, we believe that China's phenomenal and accelerated urbanisation presents an exciting laboratory for researchers to observe economic, environmental, social-cultural, and governance changes and innovations in the contemporary world. For instance, being the world's largest carbon emitter and the second largest economy means that China's role in tackling some of the most pressing challenges such as climate change will have huge implications for the entire planet. Yet despite being the largest carbon emitter, China is also an important site of experimentation in new ways to reduce carbon emissions including urban energy transitions towards renewable energies and the development of a range of urban green infrastructures such as eco-cities, greenways, and sponge cities. Secondly, although urban China may display aspects of uniqueness, these novel features of Chinese cities are neither exceptional beyond compare nor do they exist in silos disconnected from the rest of the world. Instead, Chinese cities are intricately connected to other contexts and are parts of wider transnational and global processes. At the same time, however, many aspects of China's urbanisation and its future trajectory are not pre-defined by existing theories and instead require both contextual and comparative research (Robinson, 2016). We are therefore of the conviction that urban China can provide fertile ground to critically reflect on existing theories and create new

concepts as well as become a launching pad to establish dialogues with other contexts. Thirdly, as a research field, 'Urban China' is growing rapidly, and is one of the most active, dynamic and well-connected. The research field is situated at the juncture of China Studies, which comes from the tradition of area studies and is oriented towards historical, cultural, and political contexts and Urban Studies which treats Chinese urbanisation as part of political, economic, environmental, and social-cultural changes of the (de-)globalising world. Whilst both research traditions have contributed greatly towards a better understanding of urban China, we felt that there is a need for a journal that can bridge these two research traditions and treat Chinese urbanisation in a holistic, reflexive and grounded view without being confined within historical and cultural specificities. We therefore believe that it is time to introduce a journal that pays particular attention to the recent developments in China and their policy implications while situating this research in comparative perspectives within wider urban processes.

There are several objectives that this journal aims to achieve. First and foremost, our goal is to better understand urban China and to identify, analyse and critically reflect on the *most pressing urban issues* and *latest urban planning practices* in China and to promote the development and implementation of actionable planning and policy solutions that could be of relevance to contexts beyond China. The second aim is to render research on urban China more accessible to a global audience who may not be researching China per se but are nonetheless studying urban issues and processes that are relevant, connected and/or similar to the ones in China. For example, one key area of interest to this journal is the practice of urban planning which has played a pivotal role in the urban transformation of China and the continued dominance of the state in governing a marketized society (Wu,

2018). Following the slowing down of China's economy and growing concern on issues of social inequality and climate change, the role of urban and regional planning is also changing from a growth-based model to one that is more concerned with environmental protection, societal justice, and resident representation. Critical reflections from China can thus help to enlighten how urban and regional planning needs to change in order to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. The third objective of the journal is to shed light on a more diverse range of Chinese cities beyond mega cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. Instead of building a model of "the Chinese City", our vision for this journal is to provide space for diverse strands of inquiry into the multiplicity and diversity of an emerging urban world. Insights from China's second, third or fourth tier cities, inland cities and economically underdeveloped or shrinking cities are thus of equal importance to this journal as developed coastal cities, municipalities or financial and political centres. Finally, we hope to facilitate even greater impacts of urban China studies for a global community and therefore aim for the journal to be listed in SSCI index within the next three years.

With the proliferation of urban China research, different approaches in studying Chinese urbanisation have emerged. Some studies draw on existing theoretical frameworks with the aims to refine and provincialize existing theories and understand how they unfold in the empirical case of China. We can also observe the emergence of studies that treat urban China as a source for generating new theories such as concepts of state entrepreneurialism or in-situ marginalisation. Additionally, a more recent approach situates China in a comparative perspective and treats the Chinese case neither as an exception nor recipient of external theories, but instead aims to learn more about China through the lens of other

contexts. Recognising the unique strengths of each of these research strategies, *TPUR* welcomes all the aforementioned approaches in studying urban China as well as novel and alternative perspectives. Regardless of the approach, there are two key principles that all articles in this journal need to meet. Firstly, all submissions should contribute towards a better understanding of urban China. Whilst the refinement of existing theories or creation of new concepts are welcome, they are not obligatory for this journal. The primary concern of this journal is *not* to fill a theoretical niche but rather to understand the situation on the ground. We therefore welcome any submissions as long as they are related to China and contribute towards a better understanding of urban China. Secondly, the knowledge produced in this journal needs to be accessible to the diverse range of audiences engaged in urban and planning studies. To this end, we require studies to be written in a concise and clear manner with an international readership in mind. Submissions also need to ensure that technical and context specific jargon and concepts are translated and explained in a way that is understandable to the wider audience who are not familiar with urban China. Additionally, quantitative studies need to ensure that their content is comprehensible to a readership without any expertise in quantitative research methods. Any quantitative methods used should bring real added value to the understanding of urban China. Likewise, studies should avoid overly complicated and complex writing styles and terminologies in order to ensure that readers who are not native English speakers are not disadvantaged.

As an interdisciplinary journal, we invite contributions from a wide variety of fields concerned with urban issues in China within the academic community as well as beyond the academia such as planning practitioners, policymakers, international, national, local, non-governmental and grassroots organisations and community representatives. *Transactions in*

Planning and Urban Research welcomes submissions concerned with a diverse range of urban related practices, processes and challenges in China. For example, one urgent issue that is of great interest to this journal is China's endeavours to tackle climate change and how the country can realise its recent pledge to reach carbon emissions peak by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. We welcome submissions that are concerned with how the development and management of Chinese cities can contribute towards environmental protection and climate change adaption and mitigation. Another theme that is of interest to this journal is the emergence of urban agglomerations (城市群, chengshi qun), such as the Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta or the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, which play an important role in reducing intercity competition and promoting regional growth. Moreover, the material and mental well-being as well as social integration of migrant residents who make up around half of the population in major Chinese cities is of great interest to this journal. A further topic of relevance is China's recent shift from economic growth driven urban planning towards a more collaborative and regulatory role for urban and regional planning. This change in priorities can be observed from the recent introduction of territorial planning (国土空间规划, guotu kongjian guihua) and the transfer of urban planning powers from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to the Ministry of Land Resources, which is primarily concerned with the protection of ecological and rural land. At the same time, China is also seeking to upgrade economic structure towards an innovation driven economic model. We invite submissions that explore the challenges and processes involved in the shift from growth based to regulatory planning and its implications for the environment, society and economy. In addition to inquiries into specific urban issues and processes within China, we also welcome studies which treat China from a comparative perspective or studies which are not dealing with the geographic

context of China per se but are nonetheless related to urban China. For instance, the scope of the journal includes research into urban development projects outside of China which have received significant Chinese investments or have Chinese involvement such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

With regards to the types of articles, this journal will publish three categories of content:

1. *Original research articles* between 6,000-8,500 words inclusive of abstract, references and endnotes. Articles can be conceptual, empirical or methodological in focus and can be qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. In addition to the aforementioned topics, possible themes include but are not limited to: neighbourhood and community development and governance, the livelihood and social integration of rural migrants, housing, health and wellbeing in cities, informality, urban technologies and automation, transportation, environment and climate change, social equality and justice, urban/regional governance and politics, financialization, mega urban and infrastructure projects, regional and urban innovation, rural planning and development, urban liveability and sustainability.
2. *Annual keynote article* of up to 8,500 words including references: Every year our journal will commission one article to discuss an important urban issue that is of particular relevance to urban China. The keynote article will be accompanied by a commentary paper written by a second invited author with a word count between 3,000 to 5,000 words including bibliography.
3. *Critical debate articles* between 3,000-5,000 words inclusive of references: These articles are critical commentaries or thought pieces on a particular topic/field of research or the latest policy and planning practices and innovations in China.

Submissions concerned with the policy and planning practices should aim to move beyond merely describing the contents of the policy and need to be reflective and critical. For instance, if a manuscript wishes to comment on the latest masterplan of a city, then in addition to describing some of the plan's key features, it will need to explain the motivations and thought process behind the creation of the masterplan.

The journal welcomes special issues and invites prospective guest editors to submit a call for papers and a case for support to the editors of TPUR. A typical special issue will include four to nine full length articles of up to 8,500 words including references plus one guest editorial introduction with a length up to 5000 words.

In conclusion, we hope that scholars, policy makers and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines will think of this journal first if they wish to learn about and share findings on the most pressing and latest planning and urban issues and innovations in China. We also hope that the launch of *Transactions in Planning and Urban Research* will stimulate more interest, conversations and debate about urban China and enable a more holistic and in-depth understanding of urban China that is accessible for both urban China researchers as well as the global urban studies and planning community.

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References

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