

## COMPARATIVE INTERNATIONAL HISTORY: URBAN REDEVELOPMENT IN AMERICA AND CHINA

Driven by ecopolitical powers and enabled by advances in technology, urban redevelopment policies and plans were born to facilitate the transformation of old, obsolete cities into new, modern places in both developed and developing countries. Comparing developed America with developing China around c. 1945-1970s, the former reinvested cities to reverse suburbanization and the latter modernized ancient systems to catalyze urbanization. With the emphasis on economic growth, their identical technocratic redevelopment projects of making monumental landscapes and building modern highway systems reveal legacies of top-down urban redevelopment that planners did not acknowledge at that time.

### Reimagining Cities for Economic Growth

#### Post-war Suburbanization in Developed America

Urban redevelopment projects in the 20<sup>th</sup> century occurred under different sociopolitical contexts but with a similar emphasis on economic development. As a known fact, America was the world's largest economy after WWII. After industrialization and urbanization, its post-WWII suburbanization caused by white flight had exaggerated wealth and racial segregation between the suburbs and the cities (Ammon, 2020; Lees et al., 2008). To restore economic vitality, urban renewal policies including the Housing Act of 1949 and 1954, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 were established. However, as Hall (2002) and Isenberg (2004) criticized, with the compromise of liberal housing experts, the national policies and funding for urban redevelopment were maneuvered by business-mayoral coalitions in destroying old downtowns more than reconstructing better cities. Their main motivations include manifesting functionalism and modernism, increasing property values and taxes, maintaining global statures of cities, as well as achieving ethnic and racial segregation (Ammon, 2020; Hall, 2002; Isenberg, 2004).

#### Rapid Urbanization in Developing China

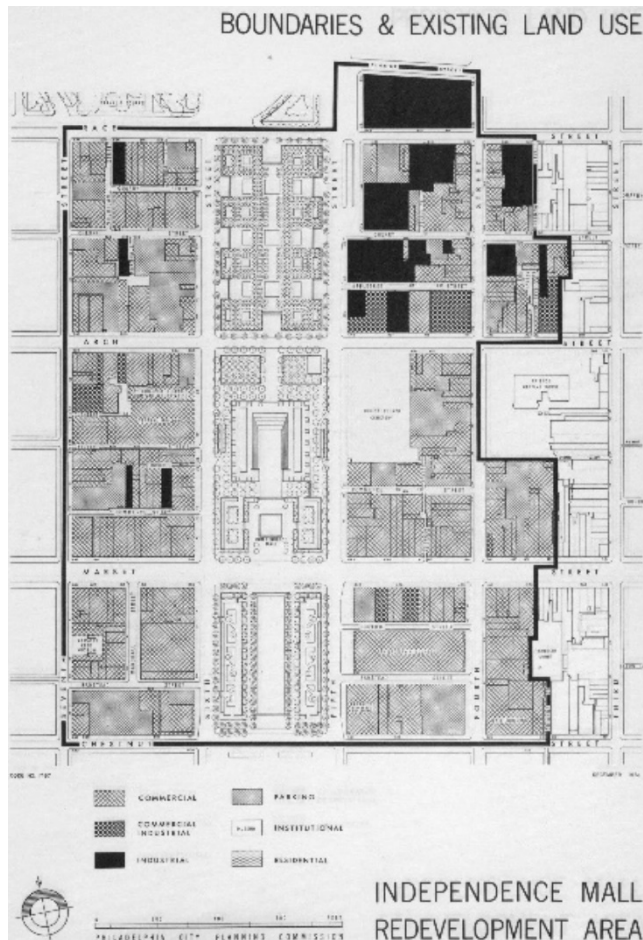
Such neoliberal and technocratic development processes were also seen in China, where political power shifts had enlarged cities' ecopolitical insecurity. China had experienced imperialism, colonization, the 1949 People's Republic of China (PRC) formation, and the 1978 Economic Reform in a short period of time (Campanella, 2011; Zhang, 2010), which resulted in the rapid and massive redevelopment of contemporary cities. Chinese lands had been collectively owned under the Maoist party-state, but induced by the Economic Reform, the 1986-1988 revised Land Management Law allowed local governments to transfer land use rights to developers (Zhang, 2010). As Zhang described, while local governments gained more decision-making power, they, like the American precedents, largely favored developments that could generate more revenue. Eager to prove China's powers on the global stage, the authorities transformed old, unindustrialized areas into new, modern cities as catalysts for economic growth.

### Rebuilding Cities through Identical Technocratic Approaches

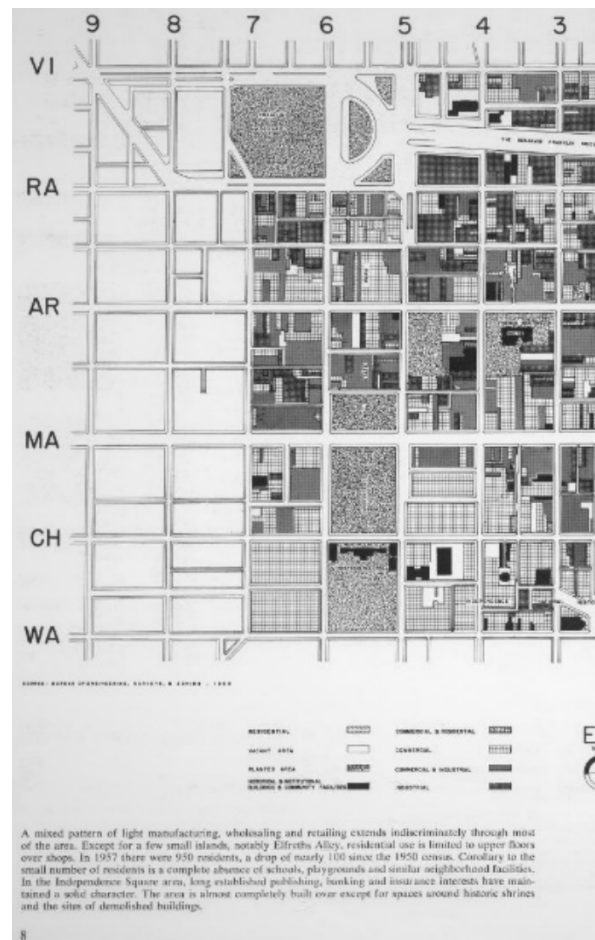
#### Urban Landscape

Rooted from the City Beautiful ideology, the transformation of unplanned, dense environments into organized, monumental spaces was at the core of both countries' redevelopment projects to attract capital and showcase power (Hall, 2002). While American cities were sponsored to replace existing historical fabrics of the minority with middle-class ideologies, Chinese cities took the same model to cover up national shame with modernist designs.

## Preserving History for Middle-Class Capital



**Figure 1. Boundaries and Existing Land Use Map in Independence Mall Plan (Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1966)**



**Figure 2. Existing Land Use Map in Old City Plan (Harbeson Hough Livingston and Lardon, 1960)**

As redevelopment projects had destroyed at least portions of fifteen North American Chinatowns (Vitiello & Blickenderfer, 2018) that were in the “old” cities, Philadelphia’s 1966 Independence Mall Plan, which was in conformity with the city’s 1960 Comprehensive Plan (Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1966), exemplifies how U.S. urban renewal projects ignored existing fabric for building monumental historic spaces. The Independence National Historic Park was proposed first in 1947 (Philadelphia Chinatown Urban Renewal Tour | Your Audio Tour, n.d.) to preserve the history of the American Revolution (Independence Visitor Center Corporation, n.d.). Bounded mainly by Race Street, 7<sup>th</sup> street, and Chestnut Street as shown in Figure 1, the redevelopment area is sited between “the historic and residential districts of the old city and the intense commercial development of the central core” (Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1966), bearing “the creation of a prime commercial area and for preservation and enhancement of the historic buildings.” The Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) (1966) condemned Chinatown’s inadequate land uses within the Old City Redevelopment Area as shown in Figure 2 and used photography as evidence to showcase the area as abandoned, deteriorated, and congested, justifying the renewal projects. With vast open space and symmetrical landscape, the Independence Mall State Park at the center of the area contrasts the surrounding “overcrowded” buildings that are “lack of proper light, air, and open space” as warranted by the PCPC (1966). The project was implemented mostly as planned to serve as a monumental space for tourists as observed during a walking tour in 2020. Such

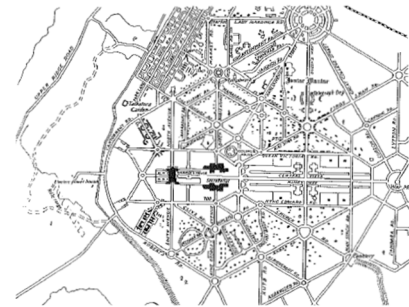
monumental yet superficial design was at the core of City Beautiful designs, exactly how the plans such as the Lutyens-Baker Plan in Figure 3 symbolize rulers' power (Hall, 2002). The Plan (1966) also aims to enhance the desirability of adjacent land for "high-grade commercial and tourist-oriented activities" which is clearly an appeal to middle-class capital.

### *Erasing History for Global Power*

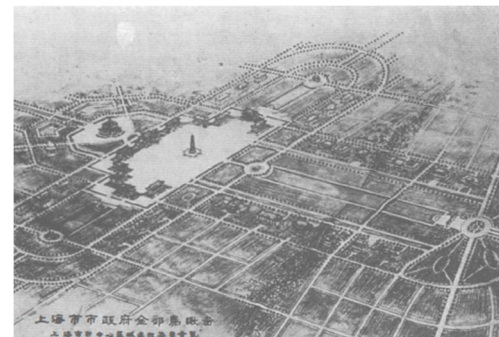
As American cities built monumental historic parks to further economic development, Chinese cities learned western design techniques to erase dishonored history and showcase ecopolitical power. For example, to reclaim Shanghai from foreign intervention, the City Planning Commission laid out the Greater Shanghai Plan with a civic center as shown in Figure 4. The center's vast and orderly layout was derived from the Neoclassical City Beautiful tradition (Campanella, 2011), which not surprisingly resembles western monumental spaces such as Philadelphia's Independence Mall in Figure 1. The grand civic buildings, wide boulevards, and centered Chinese pagoda designed by American-influenced Chinese architects were to symbolize the ecopolitical progress of the city. Similarly, after the Economic Reform (Douay, 2008), the 1988 Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai, along with other consecutive plans (The Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai, 2013), illustrates the emphasis on using parks and towers to create a modern landscape with Chinese garden characteristics, creating skylines as shown in Figure 5 (Campanella, 2011). Campanella unilaterally described the top-down westernization of Chinese cities to establish a global image that is independent of its semi-colonized history. Century Park of Shanghai, designed by a British firm, was praised by Owyang (2011) to be popular among local families but critiqued by him to be unpleasant, intimidating, and empty. Beyond Shanghai, in order to catch up with leading cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, the remote and underdeveloped cities such as Kunming also destroyed old structures to serve the new tourism and border commerce economy (Zhang, 2010). These illustrate that although with ancient legacies, Chinese cities had upheld modern redevelopment projects of the developed countries to catch up with their political power.

### *Highway Infrastructure*

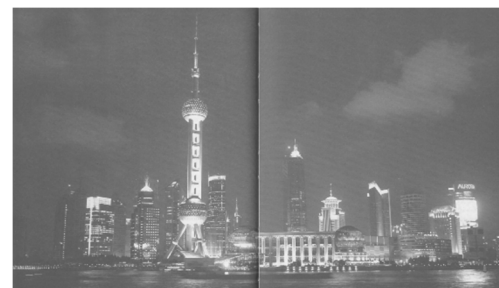
Besides monumental landscapes, nothing else boosts a nation's economic activities more than highway systems. With the popularization of automobile vehicles, both governments saw interstate highways as a great network for advancing transportation systems and providing jobs (Campanella, 2011; Weingroff, 1996). They established policies to facilitate highway constructions, giving cities great power to reinvent themselves with modernist planning methods (Beauregard, 1989). The U.S. federal highway aids made it economically possible for cities such as Philadelphia, New York, and Los Angeles to build highways in



**Figure 3. The Lutyens-Baker plan for colonized New Delhi under the British Raj (Hall, 2002)**



**Figure 4. Civic Centre, Greater Shanghai Plan, 1930s (Campanella, 2011)**



**Figure 5. The signature skyline of China's urban revolution, 2007 (Campanella, 2011)**

designated urban cores but stimulated great disputes (Isenberg, 2004; Vitiello & Blickenderfer, 2018). Without acknowledging the controversies in America, Chinese authorities facilitated expressways constructions as a testimony of socialism and modernity (Campanella, 2011; Sorensen, 2002).

### *Building Highways for Displacement of Urban Minorities*

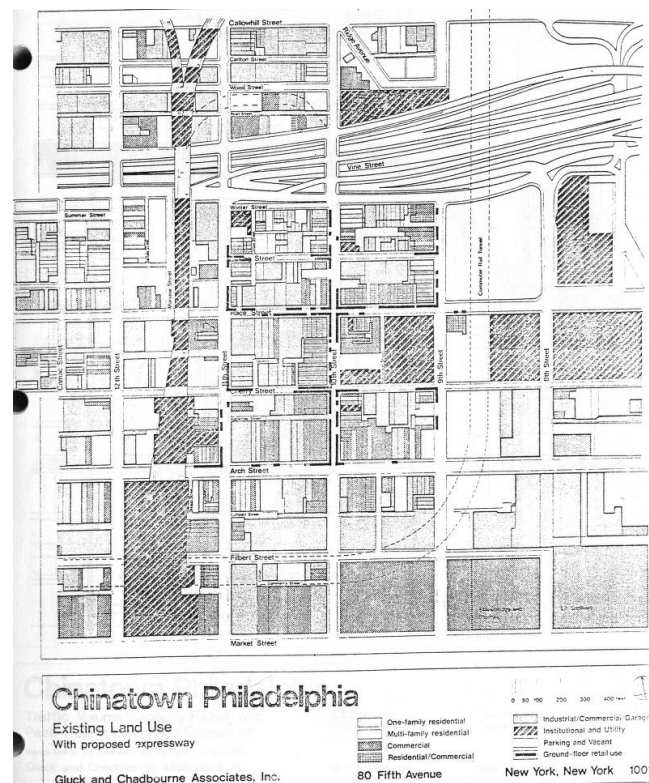
U.S. cities nationwide had attempted to use highways to replace urban minority poor with suburban white middle-class (Cebul et al., n.d.; Isenberg, 2004), and Philadelphia was one of them. According to Vitiello and Blickenderfer (2018), though unwritten in official plans, cities' modernist plans had long targeted the "poor minority neighborhoods" such as Chinatown, as illustrated in Figure 6. Philadelphia began the demolition by 1957 after urban renewal funding became available after Eisenhower's Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Combined with the nearby Independence Mall project, several blocks east of Chinatown and on northside Chinatown, whose land uses were One-family residential and Industrial/Commercial/Garage as signified in Figure 7, were demolished with over 600 people displaced. The Gluck and Chadbourne Associates' (1975) traffic analysis report illustrates the inconsiderate consequences that would be imposed upon Chinatown, two of them being the forced relocation of the Holy Redeemer Church and excessive traffic "intruding into the heart of Chinatown". Later, the report's traffic examination with the demand for planners' environmental impact statement helped Chinatown to negotiate the highway's design, which had been confirmed by the research of Vitiello and Blickenderfer (2018). Nonetheless, the highway projects show U.S. cities' thirst for capital investment at the expense of the minority and those less wealthy.

### *Constructing Highways for National Image*

Similar Chinese highway and arterial systems were constructed to connect Chinese cities to the world despite causing displacement and increasing the gap of wealth. Campanella (2011) set the narrative that the government saw automobile ownership as a key modern feature to increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and showcase modernization, despite that massive road-building would disrupt people's lives in Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai, and many more cities. Nanpu bridge in Pudong New Zone, as shown in Figure 8, exemplifies how building highway bridges after removing hundreds of families helped transform Shanghai's public image into a modern metropolis. Compared with Campanella's storyline, the Chinese



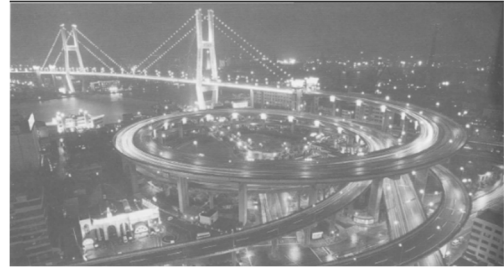
**Figure 6. Map of proposed Chinatown redevelopment project, 1973. (Vitiello & Blickenderfer, 2018)**



**Figure 7. Chinatown Philadelphia Existing Land Use with Proposed Expressway. (Gluck and Chadbourne Associates, Inc., 1975)**



narrative's (Feng, 2018) emphasis on the mileages of highways and their contribution to economic growth also illustrates China's focus on using technology as a trophy of growth despite uneven wealth accumulation (Zhang, 2011). China had exceeded America in building massive interstate systems in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, meanwhile publishing books commemorating such infrastructures in Beijing, Shanghai, and Tibet (Campanella, 2011). In fact, Chinese' infrastructure worship was largely shaped by America's automobile industry. Under authorities' strategies, plans were formed by local planning experts (Xia, 2019) but guided by American expertise from engineer Todd, planner Goodrich, Princeton graduate Wu and many companies (Campanella, 2011). Admiring America's economic growth, China adopted its modernist planning techniques and learned its technology, nonetheless overlooked their problems and limitations.



**Figure 8. Coiled access ramps, Nanpu Bridge between Puxi and Pudong, opened in 1991 (Campanella, 2011)**

## Redeveloping Cities under Different Contexts

Around c. 1945-1970s, modern American and Chinese cities had been redeveloped from the condemned old cities. Both pursuing economic development with modern landscapes and highway projects, their rational policies and modernist planning were however under disparate political contexts and depicted varying redevelopment processes. For constitutional-republic America, the cities' top-down redevelopment plans reflect greater competition between cities and suburbs (Isenberg, 2004) as well as intense conflicts between groups of different interests (Ammons, 2020; Vitiello & Blickenderfer, 2018). Despite these complications, America's monumental landscapes and connected highways at the locations of the once condemned "slums and blight" that exist today demonstrate the dominance of the economic-driven approach. Although the common good was disrespected at first, resulting in massive displacement and segregation, its later policy revisions due to revolts encouraged the power of individual citizens. For socialist-republic China, its bureaucratic redevelopment projects were documented as the nation's photogenic efforts in terms of modernization and economic development (Campanella, 2011; Feng, 2018). The rapid development of modern-looking civic centers, skyscrapers, highways, and bridges on top of its historical fabric confirms its ambition to emulate the economic success of the developed countries and regions. Its propaganda that modernization is for the public good despite forced relocation and environmental issues (Campanella, 2011) enabled massive urban redevelopment under socialism.

In summary, the urban redevelopment of America and China has a uniform goal for economic development and identical technocratic approaches of building monumental landscape and modern highways, though under different ecopolitical contexts. Their resemblance was mainly because of their disparate development levels and political systems at that time. As the renowned world's leading developed country, America did not need to establish a powerful global image anymore but wanted to keep expanding its economy, while China was desperate to strengthen its stagnant economy. As a result, China took America's modernist planning model for urban redevelopment. The negligence of public goods as the cost of modernist planning had produced social and environmental problems such as displacement and waste of resources to be alleviated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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