Co-exist or Integrate?
Reviewing the Spatial Planning Reform of China from the Perspective of Central-Local Relations

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Abstract: A multiplicity of spatial plans in a planning system can have different ways of co-existing under different institutional organizations. Having a highly centralized government like China, the phenomenon of a multitude of national-level plans dominating at the same time has its own unique characteristics. Much literature emphasizes only the lacking of coordination between governmental institutes. However, this research finds that the current constitution of the Chinese planning system profoundly reflects the relations between central and local governments. This paper first examines the characteristics of the Chinese political system, briefly reviewing the iterative process of “centralization-decentralization-selective centralization”, showing the rise and fall of spatial planning as an administrative tool of local governments. Especially since the 1990s, the central government has raised revenue from the local level, which leads to local governments depending more on selling land for quick money. But as the urban expansion accelerates, the state asserts its control on local development by the National Main-function Plan and National Land-use Plan, which seriously impedes the coordination of spatial plans at different levels. Therefore, this study argues that spatial planning reform in China requires not only generating integrated information platforms and technical standards, but more importantly, establishing new relations between central and local government. In the end, some suggestions are made on central authorities reducing the constraints of a planning censorship system and rebalancing the responsibility and the public finance of local government on planning matters.

1. INTRODUCTION

In China, planning is an administrative tool of the government. There are quite a number of and types of spatial plans. At least 83 types of plans are authorized by laws or regulations, of which 22 are spatial plans, and 25 are spatially-related planning tools utilized by various government departments (Liu, Shi, & Xiang, 2017). Among them, city master planning, land use planning and major function-oriented zones’ planning are the three most comprehensive spatial plans, which make an important component of the spatial planning system of China.
City master planning, managed by Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, is to determine the city's future scale and direction of development, to set up goals, to reasonably deploy urban functions, and to clarify specific spatial layout. The history of city master planning is the longest in the country. A matured system of planning techniques has formed due to this (Li, 2011; Gu, 2015) Land use planning, organized by the Ministry of Land and Resources Management, is to formulate overall arrangement and layout in time and space for the function, scale and intensity of land development for a certain region. It is a tool of the central government to practice land supply regulation and to control the overall aggregation of land for construction purposes (Gu, 2015; J Lin, Zhou, & Zhang, 2017). Major function-oriented zones’ planning, supervised by the National Development and Reform Commission, is to divide the country or region into spatial and functional zones with specific development positions, based on comprehensive analysis of resources and environment carrying capacity, the existing development density and potential and other factors. The major function-oriented plan first appeared in 2007 with the purpose of forming a framework for coordinating regional development (Shi, 2008; Wang, 2009).

Other than the three major spatial planning types, environmental plan and the national five-year plans (Wang & Shen, 2014) also have the tendency to develop into more comprehensive national overall plans with the purpose of effectively coordinating the contradiction between "development" and "protection" through scientifically arranging all spatial resources (Gu, 2015). However, these spatial plans are fragmented, lacking cohesion, and conflicting with each other, which has brought about the problem of increasing inefficiency and waste of resources, which has also weakened the legitimacy and executive efficiency of spatial planning.

In recent years, these problems have become a hot topic in China's planning circles. Many scholars have discussed how to standardize the technical standards of various planning to integrate the multiple spatial plans (Xiao, 1998; Lu, Yang, & Li, 2004; Cai, 2009; Huang, et al., 2016). These studies avoid the institutional background of the coexisting phenomenon. Some other scholars emphasize solving the problem from the relations between government departments, by establishing a collaboration platform (Harbers et al., 2017; Yejun Huang, 2012; Y. Wang, 2009; Zhu & Yin, 2016). A multitude of spatial plans of similar spatial scales coexisting has been and is now still the case in some countries with long-standing planning traditions, such as the Netherlands (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994; Zhou, Hu, & Gu, 2017). It is easy to simply accuse the lack of horizontal coordination between government departments as the reason for the overlap, crossing-over of and conflicts of spatial plans, regardless what socio-economic system the planning system is embedded in.

There are few articles that try to explore the reasons for the coexistence of the multiple spatial plans and the significant meaning of planning integration from the angle of intergovernmental relations, especially the relation between the central and local governments. The relationship between the central government and local governments is an important issue in the construction of a major power system, which has a profound impact on the coordination of spatial development as well as on the planning system. Before China's decentralization reform in 1978, spatial planning was not widely seen in China, and urban planning was in a state of stagnation for a long time. But since the local government received more discretion from the central government, especially in the most recent 20 years, the types of
spatial plans organized by the central government department increased dramatically. For this reason, this article tries to understand the correlations between the phenomenon of the multiple-plan coexistence and the decentralization of state power.

In China, the planning system is grounded in an all-around government management system. Under the "strong government and weak society" mechanism (A. D. Z. Wang, 2005), direct government control on spatial development has a more profound influence than that of countries with a market economy. Among the over 80 types of spatial plans, many, especially plans for relatively large scales, are in fact a tool of the central government making use of the administrative power of formulating and implementing spatial plans to guide and contain lower-level governments (Oi, 1992).

This article first attempts to summarize the characteristics of the central and local relations in China, including the evolution of these relations and its impact on spatial development. Then, the nature and development of city master planning, land use planning, and major function-oriented zones’ planning will be analyzed, to reveal the need of the central government to control and regulate local development in different socio-economic development phases. This study argues that the phenomenon of coexistence of multiple spatial plans stems from the conflicts of interest of the lateral government departments only from the surface. But in fact, the conflict deeply reflects the vertical relations of different government levels, especially the logic between the central and local, during the gradual socio-economic reform process. It is based on this theory, that the direction of “integration-of-multiple-spatial-plans” is discussed.

2. RESEARCH APPROACH

Much research has emphasized the low efficiency of the current planning system in China and thus has been eager to give suggestions on technical integration of different urban plans. But this article focuses on the fundamental reasons for the co-existence of multiple urban plans. It tries to reveal the reason why the central government put forward Land Use Planning and Major Function-oriented Zones’ Planning when the City Master Plan had been already in use before them. This study argues that the main reason lies in the desire for control from the central government to local government that causes the co-existence phenomenon.

In that regard, this article focuses on the perspective of central and local relations since it is important to understand that the spatial planning system of China is deeply rooted in the country’s political system, under the background of “Strong Government and Weak Society” in China. Rooted in the planned economy system of past times, the central and local government relation is the most important feature of the nation’s institutional structure, so it is the main field of political system reform. This relation profoundly influences the spatial development and the spatial planning system of China.

In the following sections, firstly a literature review is carried out to show the discussions on the central and local relations. The focus is on the land development driven by the local government following fiscal reform, and the consequences and pressure that the central government faces. Then, a systemic analysis is made for the main types of spatial planning in China that is the city master planning, land use planning, and the major function-oriented zones’ planning. The orientation and main contents of the three plans are explained to reveal the purpose as to why the central government
is eager to introduce multiple types of comprehensive spatial plans. In conclusion, this study argues that the purpose of the planning system reform happening at the moment should again be to reflect the interests and demands of the central government, as it continues to assert control on local governments.

3. TRANSITION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 The relations of central and local during the planned-economic period

In 1949, China began to establish a strict centralized planned-economic system. The fiscal, economic, financial and administrative power of the whole country was centralized in the hands of the central government. In this period, local governments worked only as agencies for the central government at lower levels. The institutional setup was organized in such a way to correspond to that of the central departments for social and economic management. In other words, the supervision and management systems were formed from top to bottom by departments and sectors, namely in "straps" - the vertical management system. Correspondingly, “blocks” - the horizontal structure - indicates management organization subordinated to the level of province, city, and county and so on. These kinds of “straps” and “blocks” formed the structure of a subordinated government system where responsibilities could be distributed in vertical manner from top to bottom, but also leading to the formation of complex central and local relations (Z. Zhou, 2009).

In this strict central planning system, the central government was responsible for collecting and spending the budget. The budget for construction was for a long time formulated by the former National Planning Commission (current National Development and Reform Commission), and then distributed to and executed by the provinces. The corresponding funds were issued by the Ministry of Finance. Other than that, local governments had very few financial resources. Local enterprises were mostly state-owned enterprises, whose profits were ought to be collected by the central government. Therefore, local governments were not motivated to develop their own economy and could only play the role of implementers of the central government's plan. Urban planning matters that were supposed to be within the scope of local government responsibilities, such as the scale and pace of urbanization and the provision of public service, were also to obey the overall order of the central economic plan, controlled by the centrally-planned instructions.

This centralized system was able to promote massive social production, avoiding the waste of resources caused by local competition, and ensuring an equalized allocation of social resources. However, the highly-centralized system led to a lack of an incentive mechanism. Thus, under the strict central planning system, sometimes small-scale decentralization was empowered to local governments. For example, the responsibility and financial resources to provide public services. It was hoped that local governments would shoulder more burdens of local development, making up for the differences between the “one-size-fits-all” policy of the central government and the actual needs of local areas, increasing their economic
vitality. However, while local governments actively involved themselves in pursuing local economic growth, it brought about the problem of stability for the macro-economy, which again made the central government compelled to increase discretion granted to local governments. Between 1949 and 1977, China's institutional model saw the iteration of "decentralization and centralization" (Z. Zhou, 2009).

3.2 Central and local relations in transition

From 1978, China begun with its economic reform process, the central government started to decentralize more power and financial resources to local governments. The financial contracting system was adjusted to ordinate with the new central and local relations. In 1980, the fiscal revenue-sharing system was carried out, which formed a financial relation based on the division of income and expenditure and self-balancing. In 1994, the central and local tax distribution system was adjusted. Local economic growth was further linked to local revenue. At the same time, administrative power was also decentralized. For example, local governments can formulate local development policies and spatial plans according to the actual situation of local regions, most of which did not require approval by the state. Under the gradual decentralization process, local governments have become a stakeholder with their own range of powers and responsibilities, and relatively independent financial discretion. They are no longer executive agencies of the central government under the traditional planned economic system, following hierarchical order. L. Zhou (2008) argues that the vertical hierarchy governmental system is a level-to-level agency system, where the upper-level government decentralizes the management powers (security, employment, economic development, to provide public goods, etc.) as a package delivery to the next lower level government. But the appointment of lower-level government officials, evaluation and management are entrusted to their direct superior departments.

In addition, the central government meant to stimulate the local governments to become the main bodies responsible for developing local economies, by offering more supportive policy and opportunities for those local regions that had better-developing momentum. At the same time, an evaluation index system was established for the selection and appointment system of government officials. Although indexes are diverse, city GDP (gross domestic product) growth and the scale of local economies are always the most important evaluation indexes, as the key reference for promotion.

Although the direction of China's reform was to establish a market-oriented system, the government's direct intervention of microeconomics was to gradually decrease, with the leading role of the government in guiding and controlling economic development resulting in no fundamental change. Only through the decentralization of powers, the dominator of local development has shifted from the central government to local governments. The divisions of central government departments at local levels, in the vertical “straps”, work as main bodies driving local economic growth (Caulfield, 2006). Tending to get actively involved in their economy, local governments usually make use of the state-owned land resources to attract private investment, promoting economic growth and city construction. But it has also brought about macroeconomic problems, such as overheating investment, low investment efficiency, and similarity of industrial structure. The excessive speed and scale of land development is especially troubling.
4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT-LED LAND DEVELOPMENT

Due to the ambiguity of land property rights, the land has become an essential resource that local governments can easily grasp (Jieming Zhu, 2002). After the reform of the tax sharing system in 1994, local governments began to use the monopoly of local-level development to transfer a large amount of agricultural land into commercial development, forming an upsurge of enclosures. Initially, local governments were keener to engage in the construction of development zones, implemented the strategy of “building nests and attracting phoenixes”, and attracted investment through infrastructure construction and cheap land rents, thereby expanding the local government tax source. With the large-scale promotion by governments at all levels, development zones were hot across the country. In the past decade or so, with the gradual saturation of the manufacturing industry, warming of real estate, and the enthusiasm of the municipal government for land finance, the municipal government has acquired huge revenue from land sales by accumulating large amounts of construction funds. The revenue from land sales accounts for more than 50% of the individual urban fiscal revenue.

These government-led developments have brought about some serious problems: (1) Widening income differences and social differentiation: Most local governments did not respect the wishes of farmers and forcibly requisitioned rural collective land. Economic compensation was not in place; the auction price of land in some mega cities continued to rise, and real estate prices also rose, which increased the living cost and business costs for new urban residents; most of the land revenue was concentrated. In cities, the gap between urban and rural disparities had been widened. (2) The green land and cultivated land were greatly reduced, causing an ecological crisis. (3) There is a structural disorder in land use: There are many high-tech parks, creative industry parks, new urban districts, big squares and wide roads, many of which are idle lands and “ghost towns”. (4) In recent years, the real estate market in many places has become saturated, and borrowing has become a new and compelling choice for local governments: Since the late 1990s, local governments have begun to establish local financing platforms to solve the shortfall in expenditure. In particular, after the financial crisis of 2008, the Central Government launched a fiscal investment of 4 trillion RMB, and local governments launched a corresponding supporting plan of nearly 10 trillion RMB. The scale of local investment and financing platforms and local government debt began to expand rapidly. In recent years, great threats to macroeconomic stability have been formed.

The over-supply of land caused by land development has triggered territorial politics to emerge (Rithmire, 2013) and controversy over excessive “incentive mechanisms” of the central government to localities and the lack of “restraint mechanisms”, which has also made spatial planning a focus (L. Wang & Shen, 2014).

4.1 Coexistence of spatial plans: a reflection of the failure of traditional planning?

In general, local governments need to have discretion in providing local public services and promoting local economies. In the process of
decentralization and economic transition, the expansion of the discretionary power of Chinese local governments, while contributing to economic growth, has also led to a series of problems such as the overlarge scale of spatial development. For this reason, the central government will raise doubts about whether “the discretion of the local government is excessive”. Therefore, the central government will inevitably need to strengthen the restrictions on local governments and control the discretion of the local governments in the development of urban land and space resources. Due to the lack of legal, judicial, and fiscal constraints, and the failure to establish a set of power supervision mechanisms to adapt to the market economy, higher levels of government often rely on administrative measures to achieve supervision of local governments. In administrative measures, the role of administrative directives in the traditional planned economy has weakened, and spatial planning and performance evaluation indicators have replaced traditional administrative directives to a certain extent. Among them, to ensure that spatial planning effectively constrains the spatial development behavior of local governments, the central government will strengthen the restrictive content of spatial planning.

Before the decentralization reform, there were only a few types of planning such as city master plan in the spatial planning system, and the urban plans belonged to the scope of the municipal government's authority. The restrictive role of the urban planning was only for the society and the lower levels of government, and it lacked constraints on the municipal government itself. For this reason, a new type of spatial planning with the main purpose of constraining local government emerged to make up for the inadequacy of the central government's local control measures.

4.2 City Master Planning: administrative tools of municipal government

In all kinds of spatial planning in China, the history of city master planning is the oldest. Contemporary city master planning in China emerged in the 1950s. At that time, in order to coordinate with the construction of key national projects and coordinate the relations between key projects and the development of urban space, the “city master plan” system was initially established, and planning was carried out in several key industrial cities. The “master plan” at this stage is seen as a continuation of the economic and social development plan, with a focus on urban functional zoning, site selection of industrial projects, and infrastructure construction, and direct development of material space. During the Great Leap Forward in 1958, local governments were allowed to coordinate the resources of their jurisdiction and develop the local economy, which led to a nationwide investment boom. New industrial lands appeared in cities. Urban planning was also active at that time. In order to adapt to the Great Leap Forward in industrial construction, some cities proposed unrealistic planning goals. For instance, the urban planning of Yinchuan and Xiangfan put forward the development targets of 1 million and 1.2 million people respectively based on the original population of 100,000. However, in the subsequent rectification of the economic order, the discretion of the local government was constrained, and the city planning as an administrative tool for the municipal government was required to be suspended for three years, but it was actually a long-term stagnation (K. Wang, 1999).

The urban planning system was restored in 1978, transformed from serving plans and projects of upper levels to serving the local government.
By 1990, a legal planning system centered on the "Urban Planning Law" was essentially formed. Through urban planning, it would conduct "building arrangements" for space, and then integrate the resources within its jurisdiction, and meanwhile coordinate the appeals of various departments. It was based on the physical form of urban space, guided by the goals of economic and social development for a certain period of time, and through the determination of the nature, scale and development direction of the city, spatial arrangements were made for the road systems and other infrastructure, buildings, industries and other urban functional units involved in the urban physical development pattern, in order to coordinate arrangements for the spatial layout of various functions of the city, realize the rational use of urban land, and promote the development of urban space in an orderly manner.

From the perspective of planning technology, urban planning has weak constraints. The technical standards for urban planning are provided by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development to provide technical standards. According to the "Urban and Rural Planning Law", the "local government shall, before compiling the city master plan, make a summary of the implementation of the current general city plan and the implementation of various special plans, and evaluate the supporting capabilities and construction conditions of the infrastructure." "Based on regional planning and urban-rural integration, forward-looking studies on strategic issues such as the city's orientation, development goals, urban functions, and spatial distribution should be conducted." But these legal provisions lack rigidly binding content. For example, the scale of future urban development in the planning period, despite the existence of per capita land use standards and other restrictions, due to the lack of strict validation of the "population size forecast", urban planning is often based on deliberately increasing the size of the population forecast, and then making the scale of urban construction exceed actual needs. Some urban planning even often reverses the predicted size of urban population through the scale of construction land needed by local governments to achieve the legitimacy of the planned scale of urban construction land in the future.

In addition, for a long time, there has lacked upper-level macro planning in the urban planning system to guide the overall urban planning. Although the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the Provincial Office of Housing and Urban-Rural Development have compiled national and provincial urban system plans, most of them are guidelines and have few restrictions. Moreover, the preparation time and specific requirements for these macro-scale plans all have differences between each other, lack coordination and convergence between the top and bottom, and the authority and operability are also limited (X. Li & Men, 2004).

Although urban planning needs to be approved by local people's congresses, local people's congresses as the highest authorities are not always able to perform their due functions and roles. Although the power of local government officials is fundamentally given by the Municipal People's Congress, it is more directed by the higher authorities. The position of the local people's congressman is mostly taken over by local officials, so the role of local people's congresses is largely blurred. In the process of urban decision-making, the procedural rules for the Municipal People's Congress to participate in decision-making are not specific and are unclear, making the role of the Municipal People's Congress greatly limited.
Although the "Urban and Rural Planning Law" has established a "hierarchical examination and approval" method, it also stipulates that the “city master plans” of some important cities need to be reported to the central government for approval. However, the main approval content lacks major and minor differences. Moreover, excessive approval content and department involvement have exceeded the authority of the higher-level government. These have also resulted in that the duration and efficiency of the approval cannot be guaranteed. Some approval procedures are frequently 3-5 years, sometimes eight years. Although it was not always possible to obtain approval promptly, the planning prior to the approval process was still implemented to ensure the timeliness of the plan. Therefore, the low efficiency in the approval process not only reduces the guiding role of the examination and approval, but also reduces the binding significance of the approval, which provides an excuse for planning violations and illegal activities (Zhao & Hao, 2012).

City master planning has gradually progressed toward standardization and legalization. Till 1990 a legal planning system based on the Urban Planning Law had been only basically formed. A judicial accountability system in urban planning was also missing. A city master plan as a normative legal document, although directly affecting the allocation of public resources and regulating the public interest, in its preparation and results, is regarded as an abstract administrative act and does not fall within the scope of administrative litigation regulated by the Administrative Litigation Law of China. It is considered with non-litigating nature. For the concrete administrative behaviors of the implementation of urban planning, the scope of procedures and jurisdictions that the government should follow is more of a principled provision. In practice, administrative regulations or orders are often used in place of legal restrictions, thereby reducing judicial accountability. As the vulnerable group of urban planning games, the public cannot safeguard their rights and interests through more deterrent judicial relief. Regardless of the old version of the "Urban Planning Law" or the existing "Urban and Rural Planning Law", the specific applicability of relevant laws and regulations depends on the local government's adaptation to local conditions. This is a practice that has been delegated authority but is not clearly regulated, which causes the legislators to inadvertently give the local government too much discretion, and the judicial system that abuses the discretion of the municipal government has not yet been established.

Due to the lack of restraint mechanisms for upper-level governments and the lack of inherent social restraint mechanisms, urban planning has become an administrative tool or growth tool for local governments, constantly expanding the scale of cities and pursuing “leap-forward development” (Wu, 2015). Sometimes urban planning even serves the major personal achievements of the municipal government’s leaders. With the beginning of the new leadership term cycle, the government frequently compiles or revises the “master plan” in order to meet the new leadership’s need to pursue short-term performance. In this case, "urban planning" starts by reflecting the intention of the administrative officials. What is more, local governments often use the image of city planning “technical rationality” to persuade the superiors to circumvent the limitations of other types of spatial planning (such as the subsequent land use planning).

In short, since urban planning authority belongs to the municipal government, and the planning approval, implementation, supervision systems and the technical content of planning are all lacking in effective constraints, urban planning shows “expanding” characteristics. This has also
led to the difficulty of urban planning in implementing the central government's regulatory requirements for the municipal government in urban development.

4.3 Land Use Planning: restrictive on the total amount of land for development

China's land-use planning began in the 1950s, focusing on the planning of state-owned farms, people's communes and irrigated areas, with the aim of serving agriculture. The National Land Administration was also affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture at that time. The planning experts were mainly soil experts. In the 1980s, land use planning at the county level began to appear. The first “Land Administration Law of the People's Republic of China” was issued in 1986, being clearly required for general land use planning. It regulated that “urban planning and general land use planning should be coordinated; in a planned urban area, land use shall conform with city planning”. The first round of general land use plans focused mainly on rural agricultural areas outside urbanized areas. They emphasized research on the bearing capacity of land, the development and governance of cultivated land, the prediction of urban land, index adjustment and partitioning. They become the main content of general land use planning. The suitability of certain types of land for certain functions, the allocation of resources among different industries, sectors, and regions and the spatial organization of land use functions have been paid much attention to (J Lin et al., 2017). However, the social status and juridical power of the general land use planning under the market economy had not reached the height it should have. The planning was lacking an effective regulative mechanism on urban constructed land, constraint methods on the transition of farmland to non-agricultural functions, protection regulations on cultivated land, as well as control on the development of township enterprises.

Since the 1990s, there has been a boom in “land enclosure” activity, especially in 1992 and 1993, when the "real estate boom" and "special economic zone" wave swept through China. The speed that the agriculture land was diminishing at reached a record high. The phenomenon let the central government recognize the importance of implementing restriction on spatial development. In 1997, the No. 11 files issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, "Notice on Further Strengthening Land Management and Protecting Arable Land”, emphasized that “according to China's specific conditions, the land management in our country, especially the measures for protecting cultivated land, must be very strict, and must be implemented stringently”. It required strictly that the total amount of cultivated land of provincial governments could only be increased, must not be reduced, and be based on a dynamic balance manner, and additionally, that efforts were to be made to improve the quality of cultivated land. The policy also called for careful preparation, revision and implementation of general land use planning. This was during the reform of decentralization, a power control tool by the central government to manage the development scale of local levels, when other directive control methods over the local governments were decreasing (Gu, 2015; J Lin et al., 2017).

To this end, the status and usefulness of the general land use planning had been significantly promoted. Land use planning was endowed with the function of restricting the total amount of land for development. The core meaning of the land use planning had shifted to improving the land use
efficiency, and to the compensation principle of linking the decrease of cultivated land for development with reclamation for new arable land elsewhere. General land use planning was purposed to secure national land for national economic and social development by applying overall management and planned allocation of various types of land functions for development based on the coordination of various governmental departments with land demand. The plan made every effort to make full and reasonable use of limited land resources, according to the determined land use type. On the planning content, away from the single agricultural land planning in the past, its planning scope was expanded to all urban and rural land within the territory of the overall arrangement. It shifted from focusing on only utilizing land for development into a comprehensive theme for land development, protection and renovation; from focusing on the micro-scale land-use organization, to more macro-control and policy guidance; from emphasizing on production and development, to promoting the coordinated economic, social, resource and environmental development by master planning.

The legal status of the general land use plan had also been greatly improved. Once approved, the plan would become legally binding and incorporated into the five-year plan and annual plan of the national economic and social development and shall be strictly implemented. By the end of 2000, land use planning at five levels, from the national to the town level, had basically been completed around the country and implementation started, following a step by step top-down control through the five hierarchies. To this point, the system has been established for the general land use planning, based on the central control of land supply constraints.

The second round of the general land use plan, that of 1997, emphasized too much on agricultural land, especially the protection of cultivated land and permanent farmland, with the aim to "strictly restrict the conversion of agricultural land into construction land, controlling the total amount of construction land", "to ensure no decrease on the total amount of cultivated land". As a result, construction land necessary for national economy development was not planned for well enough, and the impact and demand on the ecological environment did not have sufficient research support. The plan had been violated again and again in actual operation, for it was against the logic of economic and social development. Thus, it did not really show positive effects of land use planning. The third round of the land use plan was formulated in 2006, which set up the rationale of being "global, flexible and dynamic". A land use evaluation index system was created for the economical and intensive use of land, from the economic, ecological and social points of view. Space-time and potential analyses would be performed for the land use of specific areas, providing a base for the control index decomposition in the land use functional plan and spatial layout of construction land (J Lin et al., 2017).

Henceforth, general land use planning is on the path to becoming a regional comprehensive planning strategy because of its core role of implementing control of land use and development for the central government. In contrast to the city planning, land use planning emphasizes restriction in quantity of land development from the national strategic point of view to that of local governments. The "land rules" and "land indicators" formulated in the land use plans must be strictly complied with by city plans. The city planning departments are often in a relatively weak position when coordination is needed between it and the land-use planning department. The comprehensive long-term development goals and visions of
city plans are subject to the fixed amount of land available as established in the land use plan. Interestingly, city plans have become a tool of local government to bargain for more land for development from provincial and higher levels.

The emergence of land use planning has profoundly affected the relations between central and local governments in China. Due to the commonly-seen discrepancies between local demand of land for social and economic development and the amount of land predicted and restricted in the land use planning, the plan has become a straightjacket of local growth, just like in a period of a planned economic system with a tight control of supply of resources (Gu, 2015). The principle of dynamic balance of the increase of construction land in the urban area and compensated with the reclamation of new arable land elsewhere has become the basis of local governments lobbying for more policy support.

4.4 Major Function-oriented Zones’ Planning:

hierarchical top-down plan

The central government tends to pursue the macroscopic benefits, advocating differentiated growth, opposing the one-hive growth model. However, due to the emphasis on the effectiveness of policy and the lack of effective mechanisms in coordinating local interests, the central government's control policy often works as a "one size fits all". This kind of policy is often made by a certain central ministry or committee from its own perspective and is oriented towards a single goal. For example, the second edition of the national general land use plan ignored the comprehensive goal of social development, neglected the influence of efficiency and social justice, and resulted in high social costs. Therefore, it is difficult to ensure monitoring and management of spatial plans, if only relying on the policy and plans made by the central government.

In order to frame reasonable targets that fits local situations, the eleventh five-year plan in 2006 put forward a new type of spatial plan - Major Function-oriented Zones’ Planning, intending to clarify the prioritized functions suitable for a certain region in the country, re-arranging the pattern of regional development before the relations of various types of spatial planning is settled. It had the ambition to become the foundation of decision-making for various types of spatial planning, and therefore forming a coordinated system through four governmental levels (national-provincial-municipal-county) and between different government sectors (Shi, 2008).

The document "Opinions on the Preparation of Major Function-oriented Zones’ Plan" (‘the Plan’) by the State Council of 2007 put forward that, the Plan is strategic, fundamental, and legally binding in nature, and is the overall basis for national economic and social development and a variety of spatial planning in spatial development and arrangement. Traditional development plans in China can be seen as being based on the plans and interests of a vertical “straps” system (central department’s) plan. It mainly gave priority to the balance of man-power, financial power and material resources, and determined the allocation proportion between departments and regions. But major function-oriented zones’ planning is based on the logic of regional comprehensively matched development and transverse comparability, emphasizing balanced and coordinated development among regions in the country in the long-term.

The main intention of promoting this new type of spatial plan is to clarify the development direction, intensity control, to standardize the order
of development, to improve the development policy, and to form a sustainable national spatial development pattern. Resources and environment carrying capacity, and existing building density and development potential are objective differences between regions and are also the foundations in determining the main and prioritized functions for that specific region. By further referencing to factors like population distribution, economic layout, land use functions and the urbanization development pattern, reasonable arrangements can be made with comprehensive considerations for the overall development tasks for different regions in the national development framework. Optimized development zones, key development zones, restricted development zones and prohibited development zones are the four types of land regions used by the Plan. The main drive is to constrain irrational development impulses, using development intensity as a single coordinate to determine the type a region belongs to. The central government hopes to use this plan as a base to achieve regional harmonious development, promoting orderly and planned urbanization, and overall coordination of the spatial development pattern (Gu, 2015; Shi, 2008).

Major function-oriented zones’ planning requires the higher-level government to base local land use and development plans on obeying the farmland protection line, the principle of ecological construction and environmental protection, and economic and social development demands. According to the types of main functional zone assigned to the region, local governments are given access to different land development rights or construction permissions (Jian Lin & Xu, 2014), and are accompanied with different evaluation criteria for local officials. Compared with the general land use plan, the National Major Function-oriented Zones’ Plan is performing the central planning of national economic and spatial development from the perspective of the central government. It is more comprehensive, macroscopic and strategic.

5. DIRECTION OF INTEGRATING SPATIAL PLANS

To promote the integration of multiple spatial plans is the reform direction of the Chinese government in recent years, with the aims to reduce repetitive planning and improve planning efficiency, to improve the rationality and comprehensiveness of planning through department cooperation; to promote the planning and management of docking through coordinated control, to improve the national macro-control system based on planning, to strengthen the seriousness and authority of planning, and implement the rules and regulations (D. Li, 2011).

Therefore, for improving the spatial planning system and government efficiency, the spatial plans in the vertical system could already have basic cohesion regarding planning objectives, statistics caliber, spatial control method and planning sequence, etc. But for the overlapping and conflict in the horizontal system, it is necessary to calibrate and coordinate three key factors in spatial planning (i.e. targets, indicators and coordinates), content and scope of planning, standard statistical caliber, land use types, planning period, and restrictive index. Much workload is on re-standardization and building information platforms. However, it is not the "oneness" of planning technology that is the key issue here. The concept of "technology supremacy" needs to be reconsidered. More importantly, the "oneness" system mechanism should be established for achieving real integration.
To effectively control urban expansion, it is necessary to rationalize the relations among all kinds of spatial planning and re-build a planning system. City planning which is organized by local governments should pay attention to national policy guidance and constraints, especially those binding targets such as "newly-increased construction land", combining local "expansion-oriented" planning with the “control-oriented” planning logic of the central government. On the other hand, the General Land Use Plan should be able to respect the actual local needs when allocating the land index. Increasing elasticity in the supply system can also help to avoid land provision deviation from the real need. Major function-oriented zones’ planning is above all other types of spatial planning. It is a kind of strategic policy planning that can provide a fundamental basis for city planning, general land use planning and environmental planning, transportation planning and other kinds of spatial planning. It is a long-term, strategic and fundamental framework plan, useful to establish cooperation among all kinds of spatial planning rather than replacing any of them. After formulating the main functions for strategic zones in the country, it is then possible to implement spatial management through city master plans and land use plans. Therefore, the new spatial planning system should base itself on major function-oriented zones’ planning, and then include land use planning and city planning.

Due to the decentralization reform, the restrictive mechanism of local governments had been weakened. New types of spatial planning were therefore strengthened to assert control from central to local governments. Therefore, it is possible to reduce dependence on restrictive planning, by reasonably increasing the level of central control of other aspects. Existing decentralization reform has remained focused on administrative and fiscal decentralization. A clearer functional division of different governmental levels should be established. That is to differ from the past reform, which attached great importance to the power division but not the function division. This study suggests further decentralizing much public management and public service powers to the local government, to strengthen the autonomy of local government management responsibility, and to make them bear more of the cost of management and service provision. And some functions such as economic adjustment shall be borne by city governments, or at a higher level, so that county governments and lower-level authorities can focus on providing better quality public services, as their main responsibility. Further, it is necessary to adjust the performance evaluation systems of local government officials, from a formerly pure economic index to a more comprehensive appraisal index. For example, taking social satisfaction as the main indicator in evaluating and appointing local government leaders.

In addition, although all kinds of spatial planning emphasize the function of public policy, they reflect only the government's "responsibility". Because of the different functions and rights, cohesion problems arose due to different interests and starting points of different levels of governments. If planning is based on real public interest, it can avoid disputes brought about by different responsibilities. For this reason, the integration of multiple plans needs to review the formulation and implementation path of various spatial planning from the perspective of interest coordination in future periods, involving the perspectives of different stakeholders in the planning, introducing societal supervision mechanisms to the government, and expanding citizens' participation in depth and breadth to the processes of public management activity. Finally, local development plans should be
placed under the multiple supervisions of higher-level government, the people's congress of the same level, and of the people themselves.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The decentralization reform provides local governments more and more autonomy and resources of their own, making local governments the main bodies developing their local economies. They indeed are playing a crucial role in enhancing the local competitiveness and promoting economic growth. In recent years, urban expansion has been the most important strategy by local governments to accelerate capital accumulation. The rapid expansion has brought the problem of inefficient land use, which calls for the needs of macroeconomic regulation and control. The planning game in this sense is about land development rights.

City master planning as a traditional type of spatial planning leads to weak control and regulation and has become a tool of expansion by local governments. To control the disordered urban growth, the central government must use alternative spatial planning tools to restrain local city plans. For example, raising the legal status and functional scope of national land use plans to control the expansion of urban construction at the local level by setting up rigid limits for total yearly amount of land differing in scale level for different regions. In addition, the major function-oriented zones’ plan gives instructions for the development direction, development intensity, order and development policy guides for regions, based on comparison of macro-regional development conditions, to form a sustainable national spatial development framework, and further guide and constrain city master plans and land use plans. The emergence of highly regulative types of spatial plans has also deeply affected the relations between the central and local governments. A new bargaining over land development rights between the central and local has therefore been triggered. The key issue of local governments is to persuade the central government to grant more amounts of land for development.

Currently, both the central and local governments welcome plan integration reform with their own considerations. The central government considers that “integration” will bring more control and a tighter grip over bringing all the spatial factors together under one single organization, while resolving conflicts between different spatial plans shall bring local governments clarity about how much more land is to become available for construction. For both sides, the obscurity has severely hindered development.

The key to “the-integration-of-multiple-spatial-plans” is not the coordination of planning techniques of different plans, but to establish a system that can coordinate the relations between the central and local governments. It must be able to reflect the state policy for spatial development, but also be specific and pertinent to local demands. All new spatial plans should be guided by the Main Functional Zoning Plan, and be based on the city plan, and integrate the restrictive content of a National Land Use Plan.

In addition, the adjustment of the central and local relations can also bring opportunities for the “integration-of-multiple-plans”. The division of functions between governments at different levels and the strengthening of the division of powers can reduce the constraints between local
governments, increasing social participation, and forming more constraints on spatial planning.

REFERENCES


