
“The Next Wave of Chinese Urbanization: Impact on Economic Growth, Urban Governance and the Built Environment within and beyond China”

As Director of the Harvard Design School’s Real Estate and the Built Environment Program, I submit this application for a \$50,000 Harvard China Fund Grant to support an Academic Conference at the Harvard Center in Shanghai in the fall of 2014 focusing on China’s next wave of urbanization.

As China’s three-decades-long export and investment-led boom starts to lose steam, the central government is currently contemplating alternative economic growth initiatives that leverage on the new wave of urbanization and city making to fundamentally redirect Chinese cities toward consumption, efficiency, productivity, job creation and social welfare. The proposed Academic Conference will examine and speculate potential new trajectories for China’s next wave of urbanization. It will be a timely debate and discussion of the challenges and opportunities for China’s new leadership in urbanization policy, the consequential impact of directional shift on China’s built environment, both urban and rural, and the empirical applicability of urban governance paradigms on China’s sustainability, global competitiveness, and social stability.

This Academic Conference will be multidisciplinary in nature, advance the discourse and insights on China’s new wave of urbanization, and include critical subjects such as:

1. Alternatives for reforming and restructuring urban governance in China and the comparative and competitive advantages of Chinese institutions, both public and private, in dealing with increasing complexity and scale of urban development and city making, particularly in the absence of developed local capital markets and as new priorities are framed by the new Chinese leadership.
2. Comparative urbanization trajectories and policy initiatives of different countries, both developed and developing, in addressing the intersection of economic growth, planning, urban development, and construction of second-tier or third-tier future cities, and the prospect for China to accelerate city-making, and transform, if not aggravate, already strained social, political, economic patterns, including wealth formation, across society.
3. The capability of Chinese regulators and institutions, in connection with private sector, to create economic, aesthetic, and sustainable values in the physical built environment by harnessing and integrating building form, design thinking, financing innovation, urban development and planning models, all in the context of sustainable economic growth.

The organization of this academic conference will be led by Dr. Bing Wang and will be supported by professors and practice professionals from the Harvard Design School, the Business School, and the Kennedy School, as well as professors from Tongji University’s College of Architecture and Urban Planning and School of Economic Management, and Tsinghua University’s School of Public Policy and Management and School of Architecture. The latter two Chinese universities could be joint-organizers of the Conference to provide local support if desired. Participants will also include leading practitioners and policy makers involved in China’s urban governance, urban planning and design, and policy making, such as Vice Minister Qiu Baoxing of China’s Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and others.