The regional concept of Zhang Jian

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Introduction

Understanding Zhang Jian and his spatial perspective for modernization undertakings

Spatial perspective is an important approach for understanding the modernization undertakings of Zhang Jian. According to current research, the city of Nantong served as the main action center throughout Zhang Jian's career, in unfolding his modemization undertakings, and represents his construction achievements in terms of modernization.

Zhang Kaiyuan (1986) listed the term of village-ism with respect to "Local Autonomy," arguing that, in Zhang Jian's opinion, local autonomy is the foundation of constitutionalism and it means that with village-ism, local governments enjoy the power of autonomy.¹ Wu Liangyong (2003) studied Zhang Jian's practice of city construction and planning concepts, proposing the statement of Nantong being "A Pioneering City in Modern China."² Qin Shao (2004) analyzes the pattern of Nantong by reconfiguring the urban space of Nantong, including its new downtown area, suburbs, architecture, landscape, and visitors' impressions.³

It is universally acknowledged that a city lives in a region and that the region serves as the foundation for the development of the city. Many researchers have noticed the theory and practice of Zhang Jian. As Zhang Kaiyuan (1986) pointed out: "The local autonomy advocated by Zhang Jian was not restricted to a small region of Tonghai from the very beginning. He not only planned for the entire Jiangsu Province, but he wanted to promote the pattern of local autonomy in the entire nation."⁴ Zheng Hongyi (1993) argued: "another essential part of Zhang Jian's urban construction theory is the combination of urban construction and regional development, taking the city as part of the region and trying to promote regional economic growth with the development of the city, while a flourishing regional economy will produce a higher degree of urban prosperity."5 Wu Liangyong (2003) believed that "Zhang Jian's theory of developing Nantong was not restricted to a city alone; instead, he sought a common and harmonious development of city, town and county, in other words, he sought a regional development." Zhao Peng and Jin Yan (2004) held that "the city of Nanton ... is not merely an interconnected pattern composed of one city and three towns or of one city and several towns; more importantly, it was an essential part in the entire social system composed of regions."⁶ The regional concept of Zhang Jian has already attracted the attention of most scholars in the field, yet their studies are not systematic and do not reveal the specific connotation, formation and influence of his theories and practice.

The present paper is based on current research, studies the regional concept of Zhang Jian in his modernization undertakings and focuses on the basic connotation of the concept, the process of its formation, its sources as well as its values and inspirations to us.

Basic connotation of Zhang Jian's regional concept

The concept of village-ism embodies the ideal and practices of local autonomy of Zhang Jian. Through the analysis of villageism, it is easy to understand the basic connotations of his regional concept.

"Being self-existent, self-supplying, and selfdefensive" and developing comprehensive local undertakings of industries, education and charities

Zhang Jian used the concept of village-ism to make it clear that a region is part of an entire nation. Through local autonomy, a region could achieve development in times of social turbulence and survive in a harsh social environment.

• Nantong is a village in China: Zhang Jian devoted his entire life to developing local undertakings. At the end of the Qing Dynasty (1616-1911), he focused on village affairs, "devoting himself to the benefits of people and concentrating on one place; some people sniffed and scorned it as village-ism."⁷ But Zhang Jian believed that "Nantong is actually a village in China,"⁸ and that the prosperity of Nantong would have a positive influence on surrounding regions. He felt certain that he could turn his ideal into reality and was happy to accept the so-called village-ism as indicating the local autonomy. In both official documents and private letters composed by Zhang Jian in his later years, the phrases of "village management", "village-ism" and "local autonomy" are alternatively used.

• Promoting local undertakings of education, industries and charities step by step and comprehensively: How to achieve village-ism? According to Zhang Jian, "wisdom is the root of everything and the most effective way to enlighten people is education. Yet education cannot be realized with empty hands. So industries shall go first. With industries and education benefiting from each other, charity finds its foundation – hence public welfare too."⁹ As for the specific implementation process, in 1922 Zhang Jian announced in his "Letter Composed on Birthday": "the sequence shall be industries, education, charities and public welfares to achieve local autonomy; as for the field requiring focus, one should start from nothing, gradually accumulate what is needed."¹⁰ Generally speaking, the village-ism of Zhang Jian has distinct features of steady progress and overall planning.

Being self-existent, self-supplying, and self-defensive": Village-ism is actually a development pattern for Zhang Jian to independently revive local regions without the help of either government or society. "In our days, people suffer a lot. When they turn to the government for help, they find the government is stubborn and indifferent to their sufferings; when they turn to society for help, they find society is totally corrupted. Therefore, I do not know any other method except for local autonomy that can save people from sufferings effectively."¹¹ Since the state authorities are "corrupted and not worth consulting with," Zhang Jian was anxious for more autonomy to be "self-existent, selfsupplying, self-defensive, and finally self-governing."12 From the military point of view, since Nantong is not located at a strategic place, there is no need for military forces to fight over it. This is a favorable condition for Nantong to be "self-existent, self-supplying, and self-defensive."

"From village to city and to capital," to promoting village-ism from Nantong to the surrounding region and to further influence the entire nation

Zhang Jian promoted village-ism gradually, and he hoped that the local autonomy implemented in the Tonghai region could serve as a model for other regions to follow and that his ideal "prototype of a brand new world" could be publicized.

• "A new world: village of farming and pasturing"¹³: In 1901, Zhang Jian organized and established Tonghai Farming and Pasturing Company, which served as a reliable cotton pro-

ducing base for the founding of the later Dasheng Cotton Mill and indicated that Zhang Jian's modern undertakings developed from the city of Nantong to a larger area of the Tonghai region. After ten years of construction in the Tonghai Farming and Pasturing Company (fig. 1), "within the area surrounded by dikes and dams, people have bedrooms to sleep in, living rooms to receive guests, storage rooms to store things, gardens to grow vegetables; tenant farmers have their own houses, merchants have markets to sell their commodities; there are roads and bridges and it is a small world, while ten years before, there was not even grass grown on the land, people lived in small houses as henroost, suffering unbelievable hardships."¹⁴

• **Tonghai Farming and Pasturing Company**: There were dikes and dams, rivers, roads, and towns in the Tonghai Farming and Pasturing Company; the past barren wilderness was transformed into a place suitable for residing and became a "prototype of a brand new world."¹⁵

• The development of the coastal area in north Jiangsu Province and Nantong as a central city of the region: During eight years – 1914 to 1922 – in the 6,000 km coastal plain area east of the Fangong Dam in north Jiangsu Province, south of Lüsi of Nantong, north of Chenjiagang Port of Fu-ning, a region with many counties – Nantong, Rugao, Dongtai, Yancheng, Fu-ning, and Lianshui – over 40 farming companies were established, transforming a large part of beach land into bases for grain and cotton production, opening up new living ways for a large number of farmers and immigrants. The newly developed farming area was no longer barren and became developed and more prosperous than most adjacent villages.

Most of these farming and plantation companies had a close relationship with Zhang Jian in different ways and were initiated by the Tonghai Farming and Pasturing Company (fig. 2). Nantong was then the center of the farming region in north Jiangsu Province, and was the transfer station between distribution centers of cotton, cotton yarn and cotton goods and salt fields. According to the investigation made by the Japanese Komai Tokuzoi (1922), "looked as if Nantong were the capital city of the region north of the Changjiang River."16 Yan Xuexi (1983) once pointed out that the economic region surrounding Wuxi to the south of the Changjiang River and the economic region surrounding Nantong to the north of the Changjiang River are of importance in the research of the economic history of modern Jiangsu Province ... The important economic activities of Haimen, Qidong, Rugao (including today's Rudong), Dongtai, as well as Yancheng and Fu-ning were all developed with Nantong as the center of the region.

The provinciation of Xuzhou: Zhang Jian endeavored to promote village-ism and once intended to establish a new political and economic center for Tonghai region that was independent of Jiangning so as to exercise its local autonomy in a larger area. This is what scholars call the Program of Provinciation of Xuzhou.¹⁸ In the tenth lunar month of the 30th year under the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1904), Zhang Jian wrote in his Suggestion on the Provinciation of Xuzhou: "in view of the general situation in China, the British warships cruise up and down the Changjiang River, the German railway passes Shandong Province. Occupying the Changjiang River, their power will surely expand to the north; occupying Shandong Province, their power will surely expand to the south. Located in the middle between the north and the south, Xuzhou is the best location for strong power." Therefore, "if we want to adopt effective measures according to time and to turn a useless place into a crucial pass, the best way is to provinciate Xuzhou." In other words, in order to remove domestic concerns and foreign aggression, a provincial government should be established in Xuzhou. Although his plan of provinciating Xuzhou failed,

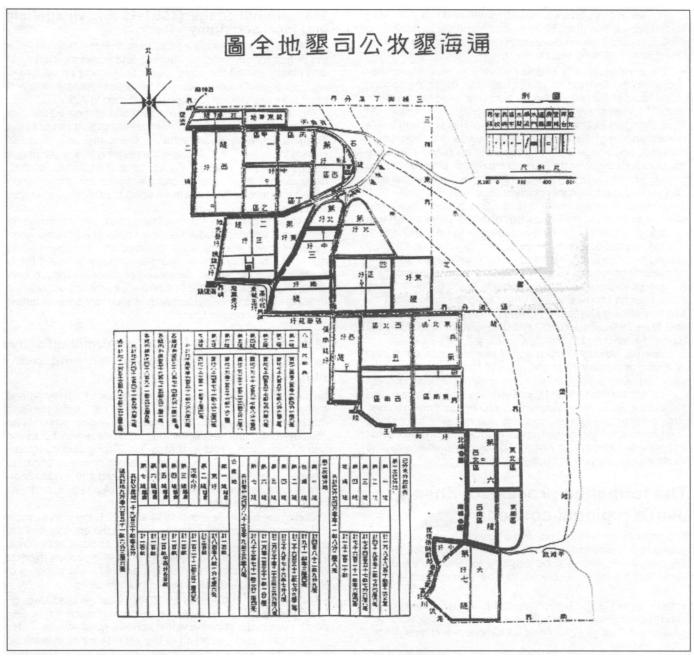


Fig. 1: Layout of the land of Tonghai Farming and Pasturing Company. (Source: Zhang Xuwu. Zhang Jian, editor-in-chief. (Beijing, China Industry and Commerce Association Press, 2004).

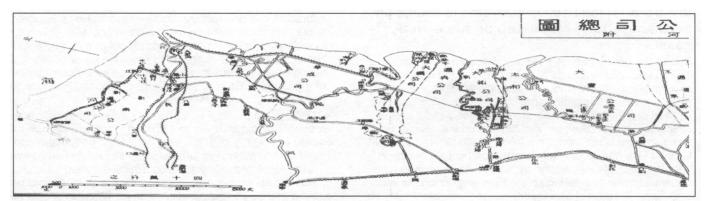


Fig. 2: General view of farming land in Tonghai Region. (Source: Zhang Xuwu. Zhang Jian, editor-in-chief. (Beijing, China Industry and Commerce Association Press, 2004).

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Zhang Jian did not give up making efforts to develop in other places outside Tonghai. To a certain degree, he promoted the economic and cultural development of the areas along the Changjiang River and Huaihe River.

• **"From village to city and to capital":** In 1904, Zhang Jian quoted "in the first year a village was shaped, in the second year a city was formed, and in the third year a capital came into being"¹⁹ (*Source: Shi Ji (Historical Records)* in his article "On Shun Being an Industrialist Statesman"). This is Zhang Jian's understanding of the development process of village-ism in both time and space. From farming and pasturing villages to the coastal area in north Jiangsu Province, and then to the provinciation of Xuzhou, this was Zhang Jian's ideal for constructing villages, counties and then cities.

Another important issue is that, Zhang Jian once even planned to promote his village-ism over the entire nation and used to promote his farming and pasturing undertakings in regions beyond Jiangsu Province. For example, in 1915 he pointed out: "the autonomy in Nantong leads in the nation and has been carried out for over ten years ... the autonomy of Nantong can also serve as a model in the country."²⁰ In the same year, he cooperated with Wang Tongchun in founding the Xitong Farming Company in Hetao, Suiyuan Province, and cooperated with Shen Yunpei and other people in founding the Haigan Farming and Pasturing Company.²¹

In a word, although the practice of modernization conducted by Zhang Jian occurred in one place of Nantong, yet he had a wide and general perspective. Zhang Jian's regional concept can be summarized as "being self-existent, self-supplying, and self-defensive," in which industries and charities forming a complete system ... "From village to city and to capital," from local to region and forming certain scales gradually. It is obvious that the regional concept of Zhang Jian is comprehensive and involves several systems on different levels.

The formation process of Zhang Jian's regional concept

The regional concept and practice of Zhang Jian underwent an evolution process from the unconscious to the conscious and to the mature. According to his personal experience, the development of his regional concept can be summarized in three stages:

- Initial Stage (1883-1900): "Devoted to village undertakings" and "focusing on his own business"
- Transitional Stage (1901-1905): Village-ism and local autonomy; and,
- Mature Stage (1906-1926): The formation of the procedures of surveying and mapping, planning, constructing.

Initial Stage (1883-1900): "Devoted to village undertakings" and "focusing on his own business"

During the period between 1883 and 1894 before the 1895 Jianwu War, Zhang Jian as a squire had devoted his efforts to several village undertakings. Without the guide of a complete regional concept, although some of his works at the time had regional property, yet he did this unconsciously and it was out of spontaneous enthusiasm that he "served the people" as a "scholar-bureaucrat." After the War of 1895, Zhang Jian returned to his hometown and "focused on his own business." With the ideal of local autonomy as an inner motivation, his industrial activities centering on the Dasheng Cotton Mill were conscious. But most of his industrial activities were in the city of Nantong and there was no distinct intention of regional planning and development.

Transitional Stage (1901-1905): village-ism and local autonomy

In 1901, Zhang Jian wrote a Statement on Regulations of Raising Funds for the Tonghai Farming and Pasturing Company and clearly stated the objectives, content and procedure of regional development, which had the distinct features of a program from preparation to planning and then to action.

In 1903, Zhang Jian visited Japan and compared the program of constructing cities, roads and farming lands in the Tonghai Farming and Pasturing Company with those in Hokkaido, Japan.²² It is clear that the planning and developing of the Tonghai region was a conscious exploration of regional development; its experience has been extensively applied latterly in the development of a large-scale coastal area in Jiangsu Province.

In 1903, Zhang Jian returned from Japan and combined his village-ism with the modern concept of local autonomy in regional planning, operation and construction. For example, he noted, "During the reform in Japan, the government firstly planned the road system composed of national roads, county roads and village roads."²³ He then realized the importance of a regional transportation system and decided to "construct further roads after returning to China."

Mature Stage (1906-1926): The formation of the procedures of surveying and mapping, planning, constructing

In 1906, Zhang Jian set up the department of surveying and mapping in Tongzhou Normal College to train surveyors and draftsmen to survey and draw the entire region, which is an objective basis and necessary foundation for regional planning and construction. This indicates that Zhang Jian's regional concept, especially his regional planning concept, began to mature. In other words, Zhang Jian realized that it was important to consider the overall development of a region, and also began to apply his ideas in scientific practice.

During the period between 1914 and 1921, the development of Nantong was widely acknowledged in the country and the function of Nantong as a model reached its peak at the time. Zhang Jian's regional concept was applied in various aspects of the modernization undertakings, and his understanding of regional planning also became increasingly clear.

- For example, in 1919 when Zhang Jian passed through Dongtai, he made a speech in a welcoming ceremony hoping that "systematic planning would achieve good results."²⁴ He had a clear understanding of the importance of systematic planning in regional development.
- Another example is the regional road system. Zhang Jian believed that transportation was the foundation for all undertakings: "transportation is the foundation of local industries, education, civil and military administration."²⁵ He endeavored to plan the road construction in the entire county.
- In addition, Zhang Jian set up detailed plans for the construction of water control works in Nantong, the construction of a new channel in north Jiangsu Province, and the construction of the Longhai Railway (from Lanzhou, Gansu Province to Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province).

In 1920, Zhang Jian was appointed supervising officer of Wusong Trading Port. In 1921, in an inaugural speech he pointed out clearly that *"planning should go first before construction, and surveying and mapping should go first before planning,"* that *"the planning for construction should be appropriate, the surveying and mapping for planning should be detailed and be carried out step by step. The plan should be <i>publicized and discussed with people for common benefits."*²⁶ Zhang Jian summarized the work procedure of surveying and

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mapping, planning, and constructing, which meant that, through over 20 years of practical exploration he had accomplished the technical preparation in the different stages of surveying and mapping, planning, and constructing; he also achieved a complete set of methodology and his theories of regional planning and development had matured.

During the same period, Patrick Geddes (1854-1932), the famous Scottish scholar and a pioneer in planning, proposed his standard procedures of "surveying, analyzing and planning." It is instructive to compare their work procedures:

• Firstly, both of them emphasized the understanding of regional features and development tendency. Geddes took natural areas as the basic framework for planning and regional survey as the foundation for regional analyzing and planning, while Zhang Jian emphasized the general development of a region, tried to distinguish and understand the main regional elements through surveying and mapping (including of course a personal investigation of the region).

• Secondly, both took regions as the basic unit for their research and practical solution. Geddes dealt with industrialized regions, in which the metropolis expanded in a larger scope, cities and towns in suburban areas combining to form largescale urban agglomerations, where the main problems were the decentralization and re-centralization of the urban population and employment in the region. He sought the combination of goals of both city and country in a neotechnic era. However, Zhang Jian had to deal with a relatively unenlightened rural region, the development of which was in the stage of preindustrialization (or in the initial stage of industrialization). The main problem for Zhang Jian was how to promote regional development.

• Thirdly, Geddes focused on the planning process of regional development and his main purpose was scientific planning based on survey and analysis, while Zhang Jian focused on the entire process of regional development, on understanding the region through surveying and mapping, on reorganizing the region through planning, on transforming the region through planning. His final purpose was to construct a "brand new world." Therefore, he took planning as a necessary step to promote regional development and an important measure to solve problems in regional development.

In conclusion, through three stages of initiating, transforming and maturing, Zhang Jian gradually formed his own regional concept and the concept of planning with distinct features. The regional exploration goes through the stages of being unconscious and conscious from "devotion to village undertakings" and "focusing on his own business" to later concepts of villageism and local autonomy; from village-ism and local autonomy to the formation of his work procedures of surveying and mapping, planning, and constructing; he summarized his practices and produced his own regional theories and methodology.

Sources of Zhang Jian's regional concept

The interaction between the continuity of traditional social culture and the invasion of western culture forms the basic motivation for the development of China in modern history. Zhang Jian's regional concept is also a product in this special social environment.

Roots in traditional Chinese culture

Zhang Jian's regional concept originates from Chinese traditional culture. After he had devoted his efforts to industrial undertakings, he still took traditional culture as the criterion for his action and tried to find a foundation and an explanation from

it for his actions. In addition, his regional concept had the distinct features of traditional Chinese culture. The objectives of his regional planning and regional development can be summarized with one word: "sheng" (grow). Zhang Jian named his cotton mill Dasheng, which came from a sentence of the Book of Changes: growing is the outstanding merits and virtues of heaven and earth. Almost all his undertakings are rooted in traditional culture, including his founding of the Tonghai Farming and Pasturing Company, the promotion of cotton and tree plantations so as to improve people's lives, the construction of roads so as to provide convenient transportation, the treatment of the Huaihe River and the construction of water control works so as to secure people's benefits, the request of tax exemption so as to implement lenient administration, the construction of orphanages, old people's homes, public cemetery, and schools so as to help those in need.

As for his understanding of spatial development, his early "devotion to village undertakings" and "focusing on his own business" as well as later village-ism and local autonomy – all these, to a considerable degree, are ideals of ancient Chinese scholar-bureaucrats to help everybody in the world. As for the procedures of developing Nantong "From village to city and to capital," from one region to surrounding regions and finally influencing the entire nation, one can clearly identify the belief held by traditional scholar-bureaucrats of "first cultivating one's moral character, then managing one's family, and finally governing the entire world." To infuse traditional Chinese culture and spirit into the construction and development of a region, is one of the sources of Zhang Jian's regional concept and also its main feature.

Learning from western modernization achievements

After the Opium War of 1840-1842, some open-minded Chinese began to turn to the outside world for possible solutions for China. After the 1860s, learning from the west had become a current trend in society and Zhang Jian was one of the leaders of the movement. Visiting Japan in 1903 was an important event for Zhang Jian to learn from western modernization achievements, and he was deeply affected by the event. In a sense, the visit serves as a demarcation line during the evolution of his theory. Through his 70-day onsite investigation, Zhang Jian absorbed some new concepts, including the idea of local autonomy. He then re-organized and improved his theories originating from Chinese tradition, and formed his systematic theory of local autonomy. Qin Shao believed that "What Zhang Jian did in Nantong was, after all, to imitate the success of the Japanese and to adopt institutions and practices that had become staples of advanced Western countries."27 Apart from Japan, Zhang Jian was also interested in the practices in the USA, including reclamation and farming projects, and water conservancy projects. He also invited a Dutch engineer to do regional development works. In a word, in order to "construct a prototype of a brand new world," he insisted on one principle: "Nantong should have all that the autonomous developed countries have, and he should put them into effect; he is not concerned about difficulties, he only cares about whether what he considers is right or wrong."28

One thing is very important here, when Zhang Jian learned from western modernization achievements, he also emphasized the actual situation in China. As he summarized the experience of the autonomy in Nantong in 1921: "As for the developed countries in the world, we should learn from their spirit and superiorities with the full consideration of our own strength and abilities. We should do what is appropriate at the time, not to be disappointed in the fields where we are weak, not to be arrogant in the fields where we are strong."²⁹

Exploring and practicing creatively

In the history of modern China, there were a lot of people with ideals of making our nation strong and people rich. Zhang Jian was one of them and he did more than just dream; instead, he used these ideals to guide his actions. His regional concept is originated in his personal experience. Wu Liangyong (2003) compared the planning of Zhang Jian and that of Geddes, pointing out that: "Geddes advocates regional planning; in a sense his effort is idealistic and academic; while Zhang Jian not only took into consideration urban construction and regional development, but he also put his thoughts and theories into practice. This is his indelible contribution."³⁰

In his practice of regional development, Zhang Jian adopted both the essence of traditional Chinese culture and the achievements of western modernization. He put it this way: "we should learn from ancient times, from today's world, from China and from foreign countries; yet we should not be totally like ancient times, like today's world, like China and like foreign countries. We should investigate what is the most appropriate for the region, we should consider what is best for the local people, we should understand our financial capacity, so as to achieve the best results."³¹ He finally obtained outstanding achievements; this is a process of practical exploration, and also a process of creating theories.

In conclusion, Zhang Jian's regional concept was "the combination of meticulous preparation, unsurpassed creation and gradual accumulation,"³² which finds its roots in traditional Chinese culture and is achieved through learning from the western (Japanese) modernization achievements and persistent practice.

The values of Zhang Jian's regional concept and practices: A source of inspiration

To understand and emphasize Zhang Jian's regional concept as well as to actively explore its theoretical and practical values is useful for the current regional development in China.

Establishing regional and even national development framework centering on industries

Zhang Jian attached great importance to industries in both his theories and practices, and industries brought changes to regional spatial patterns. Zhang Kaiyuan once said that: "Zhang Jian founded Dasheng, and Dasheng contributed a lot to society. Taking Dasheng as a foundation, Zhang Jian developed economy and culture in the entire region of Tong, Chong, Hai. The significance of Dasheng goes far beyond a common cotton mill³³:

- on the one hand, that the modern enterprise group and industrial system centering on the Dasheng Cotton Mill requires a larger and interconnected development region; and,
- on the other hand, that industries serve as the foundation (or "handle") for regional development.

In an historical perspective, developing industries is the core and main feature of the theory and practice of Zhang Jian. We all know that, in 1921, Sun Yat-sen finished his General Plan of Establishing a State, in which a part entitled "The International Development of China" contains the general framework of national land development with industrial patterns of ports and railway lines. Sun planned to achieve general modernization in China on the basis of industrial development.

Relatively comprehensive modernization in a region as a sample for broader regional modernization in China

As an autocratic feudal nation with a profound historical background, it is very hard for China to achieve modernization. It can only be achieved in some regions by the social elite with modern ideas. Extensive modernization in the entire nation is impossible. In this sense, the village-ism and local autonomy advocated by Zhang Jian and his regional concept had a positive social significance at that time, for its essence was to explore a practical way to reform society and save the nation starting from the grass roots level.

When China suffered from a corrupt government and frequent wars, implementing the reform plan of local autonomy and village-ism advocated by Zhang Jian in the entire country was impossible. But the comprehensive planning and constructing in Nantong and its surrounding areas obtained outstanding achievements and proved to be very successful. The exploration of modernization in regional areas serves as a good example for overall modernization. The practice of Zhang Jian has its own distinct features, just as later experimental activities in other places in the country; they all provide valuable experience for the further exploration of modernization in China. Today, the general situation is peaceful and stable, the external environment for regional development has changed fundamentally and the active development measures might produce more extensive influence. Looking back at Zhang Jian's regional concept and practice, we can get a new inspiration: the process of a comprehensive regional development, although a local issue, can affect the overall modernization in China.

Bringing new hope for regional development by strengthening urban and rural relations

Under the direction and leadership of Zhang Jian, through over 20 years of persistent practice and exploration, urban and rural construction obtained outstanding achievements, making Nantong "a pioneering city in modern China," and providing an "example of regional modernization" in China. Today, we might find that the gap between urban and rural development in Nantong is still obvious and that the influence of Nantong as a central city is limited. But one thing is important here, in combination with the current situation for the development of China: the lessons from Zhang Jian's regional concept and successful practice are guiding us to try and unite the city and the country so as to achieve regional development.

Zhang Jian once said: "when our tradition is infused with other's new elements, its effectiveness might continue; when we can accomplish a task by adopting the methodologies of foreign countries, then we shall learn from them."³⁴ This reminds me of Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928), British thinker and Zhang Jian's counterpart, a famous pioneer of planning. He conceived the concept of the "garden city" in 1898 and pointed out that "Town and country must be married, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization."³⁵ This is inherently consistent with Zhang Jian's ideal of a "brand new world" and with his dream of a "civilized region."³⁶ At the same time, the conclusions of both of them come a long way to reach us, enlighten and inspire us today: *bringing new hope for regional development by strengthening urban and rural relations.*

Notes

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