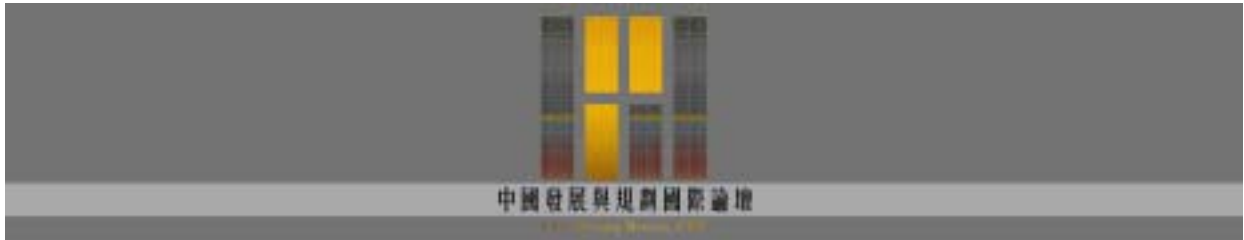


Remarks from CPN Faculty Advisor, Prof. Lawrence Vale June 2009

As the Faculty Advisor to the China Planning Network since 2004, I have watched with great pride as CPN has gained in scale, ambition and impact. A network is only as strong or as broad as its membership, yet I am continually reminded of the core leadership strength. The CPN Commissioners have made this organization their central priority for the last six years. Two of them have already moved on from their studies at MIT, while the third will graduate soon. From the start, however, CPN has always been beyond MIT. MIT has been an anchor, but CPN has always been free to sail on its own. Together, the CPN Commissioners have had the vision, and developed the necessary connections, to turn CPN into a major force for understanding China's unprecedented rapid urbanization. And, like all who are properly trained in the field of City and Regional Planning, they have been concerned with both interpretation and action. As the attendance at the 2009 China Week attests, their own relative youth and lack of official seniority have never been a barrier to attracting the participation and partnership of senior leaders from numerous universities, government ministries, NGOs, foundations, and media organizations.

As CPN's Faculty Advisor at MIT, I have tried to help the CPN Commissioners position the organization in the best possible way and to help them negotiate the political landscape of Western academia, but I have tried never to give advice unless asked to do so. If I had been a more proactive advisor, I am sure that I would have urged CPN to operate with more modest goals, with fewer conferences, fewer conference topics, and been content to juggle participation from fewer senior partners. All that would have been plausible, but completely misguided. As I see it, CPN's greatest strength is the insistence of the CPN Commissioners on always undertaking whatever is the possible maximum. They run an organization on a shoestring budget but have somehow managed to turn shoestrings into tentacles. They reach out to those at the highest level of achievement and influence, and almost always manage to draw them in, to the mutual benefit of all parties.

CPN has not solved the problems of China's urbanization, but I hope that it can be accurately claimed that CPN has done much to improve the quality of the dialogue. CPN is a platform for both thought and action, and a meeting ground for those who sorely need facilitated opportunities to meet. Earlier this month at the Graduation Lunch for the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT, I had the distinct honor to present the CPN Commissioners with one of the our top awards, the prize for "Outstanding Contribution to the Intellectual Life of the Department." Although I had nothing to do with their nomination or selection for this award, I interpret its meaning in two ways.



First, it acknowledges the success of CPN in putting the global importance of China's urbanization challenges on the intellectual agenda of hundreds of faculty and students at MIT, and beyond. Second, though, it acknowledges the way that CPN has conveyed the urgency of this message in such a well-organized manner--always diplomatic yet also relentlessly insistent. I hope that other efforts from academia and government can learn from this model of social entrepreneurship, boundless energy, and organizational transparency.

In my six-and-a-half years as a Department Head at MIT, no initiative emerging from the Department has made me prouder than the growth of CPN. Although I am very sorry not to be able to participate in person in the 2009 China Week, I am eager to join all those who will follow its media trails. Both within Beijing and on the other side of the planet it is increasingly easy to follow the achievements of the China Planning Network, and for that we can all take great pride.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Lawrence J. Vale'.

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