Foreword

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One should first survey the harmonious aspects of the *yin* and *yang* of the site, taste its waters, examine the suitability of the soil, and observe the exuberance of its vegetation. After this, one may build the city and erect its walls, conduct zoning and designate residential sites; then followed by building access to the fields and demarcating their boundaries. Only after all the above work is done may one start building houses.

The above is a vivid and succinct enunciation by Chao Cuo, a Chinese political adviser and official of the Han Dynasty (202 BC–AD 220), as recorded in the ancient history book of *Han Shu*. The quotation describes the process involved in building a city, planning a community and constructing one's home. As a town planner, I can feel the continuation of a city's history and the consolidation of its culture every time I read these writings.

For the past 170 years or so since its inception, which is neither long nor short, Hong Kong has gone through a lot of challenges and difficulties in the history of urban development. Western theories and practices of town planning have been introduced to the territory, and have gradually evolved into planning concepts, strategies and systems in line with the local conditions. This is a subject worthy of our in-depth exploration.

Compared with the relatively abundant land resources in the West, the limited land available for development in Hong Kong means it always has to face the challenge of coping with a growing population. Therefore, high-density and high-rise development is a pattern and a form suitable for Hong Kong consistent with the local situation to meet the city's economic and livelihood development needs. In the 1960s and 1970s, some Western town planners were so sceptical about the model of high-density urban development that they even went to the extreme of blowing up entire communities of high-rise and high-density housing. However, after the planning and practices of different periods, the high-density and compact model of urban development in present-day Hong Kong not only fully takes the environment and conservation into account, but also enables reasonable layouts and appropriate public facilities and open spaces. A convenient and vibrant urban environment is successfully provided for its citizens, thanks to the highly efficient municipal services and urban management. Hong Kong has set a good example for modern urban development.

In the 1990s, town planners in foreign countries started to reflect on the automobile-led model of city expansion promoting 'suburbanisation'. Instead,

Hong Kong planners advocated the model of 'transit-oriented development' (TOD). As early as the 1980s, the formulation of the Territorial Development Strategy stipulated a focus on public transport with railways as the backbone, for the benefit of coordinating land use and spatial distribution. Currently, about 90 per cent of Hong Kong's daily traffic volume relies on public transport, including 40 per cent by railway. About 75 per cent of the commercial and office premises and 40 per cent of residences (by floor area) in the territory are within a 500-metre walking distance of railway stations.

TOD, characterised by compactness and high density, has become the most sustainable model of urban development widely recognised by the town planning industry around the world. Hong Kong is a pioneer and, more importantly, a firm practitioner in this field.

From the handover to the early twenty-first century, the evolution of town planning in Hong Kong may be summarised as transformation in three aspects: a more open and transparent system; a more diverse and inclusive paradigm; and the formation and strengthening of a multi-centre, multi-axis spatial development model.

The implementation of the Town Planning (Amendment) Ordinance 2004 has enabled more open and transparent arrangements of the town planning system, in terms of the provision of planning information, channels for public input, deliberation by the Town Planning Board (TPB) of planning applications, formulation of statutory plans, consideration of public representations, and so on. These institutional reforms have provided a more open and inclusive platform that facilitates more active interactions amongst stakeholders on town planning issues, enabling public attention and monitoring of planning proposals in a broader and closer manner.

The 'development-led' planning paradigm, which has effectively helped Hong Kong to cope with many challenges in the post-war era, remains the mainstream of planning efforts. However, this paradigm must become more diverse and inclusive in order to cope with today's complicated challenges and aspirations involving various stakeholders. A number of factors are playing a more and more important role in the mentality and practice of planning, such as town planning, local construction, smart city, environmental protection, ecological and cultural conservation, sustainable development, biodiversity, climate change and an ageing population.

With a number of strategic planning exercises and new town developments in the post-war era, we have managed to construct nine new towns in addition to traditional development areas on both sides of Victoria Harbour. And a multi-centre spatial pattern has been formed in terms of population distribution. However, we have not yet formed a spatial distribution well aligned with economic activities and employment. This results in high volume and long-distance one-way commuter flows, with serious congestion on trunk roads during rush hour. The large amount of commuting time by the working population also means additional carbon emissions by motor vehicles. In the ongoing study of 'Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030', one of the core topics is advocating the construction of a more balanced

pattern of spatial distribution of population and jobs by leveraging the geographical advantages and supporting transport infrastructure of the various districts in the New Territories. It is intended to establish and reinforce a long-term strategic planning concept featuring multiple centres and axes, so that Hong Kong can move towards a spatial development model which is sustainable and more balanced.

Urban development should provide our citizens with a better life, working space and environment. Under the high-density and compact model of urban development, it remains the biggest challenge and even an endless responsibility for Hong Kong town planners to constantly improve the liveability of the city.

We are very pleased that Professor Ho Pui-yin of the Chinese University of Hong Kong has conducted an extensive and in-depth study of town planning in Hong Kong, commenting on town planning efforts from a historical perspective and providing a summary. This is a professional publication long anticipated by town planners, builders of cities and all those who care about Hong Kong's development. I am convinced that this book will help us review the history of Hong Kong's urban development and town planning and summarise the experience, so that we can optimise town planning to create a better life for our citizens.