

Michael Cheng-tek Tai\*

# The Future is Urban – An Urban Bioethics Perspective

## Summary

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This paper proposes a future urban that is bioethically viable not only in hardware construction but also in software equipment supporting the hardware's viability for a harmonious relationship between humankind and nature. The future urban must not develop to become only a gathering of people in the city but ought to be designed to integrate within the global ecosystem. This paper will suggest a list of basic infrastructural requirements for an ecologically sustainable future urban.

The methodology used in this paper is qualitative descriptive, derived from paper's literature reviews along with other scholars who provided insight for the author to develop a list of recommendations for future urban planning.

**Keywords:** sustainability of development, urban planning, ecosystem, bioethics, Yin and Yang.

## I. Introduction

Sustainability of development has long been neglected throughout the process of urban expansion since the Industrial Revolution until the middle of the twentieth century when pollutions of various kind forced humankind to reconsider its relationship with nature. The term development sustainability thus came into being emphasizing a sustainable development that meets human needs without compromising nature's ability to replenish itself. This concept of sustainable development was officially described by Brundtland Commission Report of UNESCO in 1987 as a

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\* *Correspondence Address:* Michael Cheng-tek Tai, Department of Medical Sociology and Social Work, Institute of Medicine, Chung Shan Medical University, No.110, Sec. 1, Jianguo N. Rd., Taichung City 40201, Taiwan. ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7325-4963>. E-mail: [mctaicht@gmail.com](mailto:mctaicht@gmail.com).

“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>1</sup>

After World War II, the unprecedented economic boom paved the way for improved living standards worldwide. As the environmental crisis started appearing on the horizon, humankind was forced to re-think their understanding in regard to growth and development.

For better living condition and work opportunities, people moved to cities, and this process of urbanization intensified the deforestation and exploitation of the land. That, in turn, gradually caused ecological damage. Van Rensselaer Potter voiced in his book of *“Bioethics – Bridge to the Future”* published in 1971 that “human ethics cannot be separated from a realistic understanding of ecology.”<sup>2</sup> The word “bio-ethics” was first used by Fritz Jahr of Germany in 1927 who called for respecting of every living being on earth and treating it with care. Jahr argued that new science and new technology must require new ethical and philosophical reflection and asked for land ethics and animal ethics. Facing the reality of the urban expansion damaging the natural environment, voices of concern started to surface advocating a new urban bioethics that would preserve, repair and restore natural resources for the future during development.

## II. Literature Reviews

### 1. The Future is urban

*“The future is urban”* is the title of an interesting article introducing the Institute of Urban Futures of Concordia University in Canada written by Dawon van Linde and Prof. Shauna Janssen, the Institute’s director. This Institute explores the connection between often separated fields such as urban planning, recreation, and health. This article advocates that cities should not be isolated entities but integrated parts of a global ecosystem and must be sustainably designed to purposely regenerate the health and integrity of the earth’s living system.<sup>3</sup>

For an ecologically sustainable city, the following awarenesses are recommended in city planning:

1 Jarvie, Michelle E. (1987), Brundtland Report: Publication by World Commission on Environment and Development, *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brundtland-Report> (accessed: January 15, 2020).

2 Potter, Van R. (1971), *Bioethics - Bridge to the Future*. Eaglewood (N.J.); Prentice Hall Inc., vii.

3 Van der Linde, Damon (2018), *The Future is Urban*, University Magazine, Concordia, Montreal, Canada; Concordia University Press, 2.

1. Previous expansion of city limits and the processes of urbanization developed in the past have led people away from being connected with earth-nature.
2. Future urban planning must integrate societal connection with our natural world.
3. Urban-cities must be holistically-designed to satisfy all human needs and must not to deprive the living rights of other species.

*Future is urban* describes the fact that urbanization is a developing trend, and in order to create a sustainable future, a new awareness of respect toward nature and our living environment must be emphasized. Urban residents should not isolate themselves from nature and must bring in a new understanding that cities are not isolated entities but parts of the global ecosystem. This article stresses that cities can be designed to regenerate health and integrate within earth's living system.

## 2. A Sand County Almanac

*A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold was published posthumously in 1949, a collection of his essays. The book features monthly entries, as Leopold shared his insight that revealed Leopold's idea of a "land ethic" calling for a responsible relationship between people and the land which they inhabited through a year spent on his one hundred and twenty acre Wisconsin farm. This book is considered a landmark in the American conservation movement, which explained Leopold's belief that humankind should have moral respect for the environment. Any attempt to harm it is deemed unethical.

Aldo Leopold's land ethics crystalized his philosophy that "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise".<sup>4</sup> This book was influential in the movement of environmental conservation in the 1960s. A land ethic is a philosophical framework about how humans should relate to the land. He argues that there is a critical need for new ethics postulating that "No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions."<sup>5</sup> It is an ethic dealing with human's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it.<sup>6</sup> In the Ecological Conscience section of the book, he wrote:

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4 Leopold, Aldo (1949), *A Sand County Almanac*. New York; Oxford University Press, 224–225.

5 *ibid*: 209.

6 *ibid*: 207.

“conservation is a state of harmony between men and land”.<sup>7</sup> one hundred and twenty acres. He suggested re-thinking how to maintain harmonious relationships between people and land. Land ethics changes the role of human beings from conquerors of the land-community to plain members and citizens of it. It implies that humans should respect their fellow-members as well as the community. He also advocates that species should continue as a matter of biotic right, as well as obey and follow the rule and law within the ecosystem. Leopold offers an ecologically-based land ethic that strictly rejects human-centered views of the environment and focuses on the preservation of healthy, self-renewing ecosystems. *A Sand County Almanac* was the first systematic presentation of an eco-centric approach to the environment.<sup>8</sup> Environmental ideologies continued to grow in popularity and recognition in the later 20th century.

### **3. Urban Bioethics: Adapting Bioethics to the Urban Context by Prof. Jeffrey Blustein and Dr. Alan Fleischman in 2004.**

Although this article was published over ten years ago, it provides a basic framework for urban bioethics and remains influential to this day. The article indicates that urban bioethics challenges traditional bioethics to broaden its scope from health concern to the public good for the interest of family, community, and society. Three features were recommended for consideration in urban life in urban bioethics: density, diversity, and disparity. The article argues that these three features affect the health of the urban population that cannot be taken lightly in the development of an urban center.

This article articulates the urban bioethics as “an area of inquiry within the discipline of bioethics that focuses on ethical issues, problems and conflicts relating to medicine, science, health care and the environment that typically arise in urban settings”.<sup>9</sup> Blustein and Fleischman distinguish between two principal domains in urban ethics, health care, and environmental concern. These domains call for attention to the ramification, which arises in an urban context. The authors’ concerns pinpoint that the issues relevant to these two domains pertaining to current circumstances. As we confront issues of the Covid 19 pandemic today, these two concerns are more self-evident than ever, such as social distancing to avoid over-crowdedness in order to

7 Ibid, 204.

8 Des Jardins, Joseph R. (2013), *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed, Boston; Wadsworth Press, 179.

9 Blustein, Jeffrey and Fleischman, Alan (2004), Urban Bioethics: Adapting Bioethics to the Urban Context, *Academic Medicine*, 79 (12), 1198.

prevent the spread of coronavirus. The authors warned the congregation of people in a narrow place could create many health threats due to the crowdedness in congested places. They say “Density of urban living makes the health-related problems of any group within the city a serious concern of all urban dwellers”.<sup>10</sup>

Diversity is the phenomenon of the urban city for people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds squeezing together in a small area. Quite often, the same background group of people will congregate in the same location, creating such as China town or Italian district of a metropolitan city. The diversity and disparity are the common phenomena of the urban poor. Urban bioethics intends to understand these phenomena and if possible, find ways to provide solutions. In conclusion, the authors admit that urban bioethics overlaps with other areas of bioethics, such as public health ethics, clinical ethics, institutional ethics but urban ethics aims to focus attention upon neglected bioethical problems in urban settings.<sup>11</sup>

### **III. Urbanization is reality**

The UN has calculated that half of the world’s population lived in urban areas at the end of 2008 and projected that by 2050 about 68% of the developing world and 86% of the developed world will be urbanized.<sup>12</sup> The formation of urban centers congregates a large number of people living together in relatively small areas of place we call the city. Urban living provides much convenience to people, such as job opportunity, better health care facilities, recreational and cultural events and educational availability. People, however, move to city not only due to the reason of simply to seek a better future, often they have no choice but to move for survival. For the meagre people looking for a better world, they usually squeeze together in the same already crowded area, thus creating a new form of slum. In order to solve this problem, much land has to be plowed through deforestation and cultivation of wild acreage to create living quarters and to build factories, school facilities, and health care institutions... These not only can upset the balance of eco-system but also deprive the habitual areas of animals forcing them to move to other places that may be unfit for them.

Moving from people’s familiar surrounding where the families may have lived for hundreds of years to a strange and crowded city can uproot the social ties of the

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10 Ibid, 1203.

11 Blustein, Jeffrey (2001), Setting the agenda for urban bioethics, *Journal of Urban Health*, 78, 7–20.

12 World Population Prospects (2019), Department of Economics and Social Affairs. Population Dynamics, Office of the Director, Population Division, United Nation.

migrants. Quite often, the old members of the families are left behind in remote villages, thus blocking the close family cohesion. Consequently, the phenomenon of urbanization has many effects on air pollution, water contamination, population crowdedness, slums forming, human isolation... and animals losing their habitual areas. Some people may suffer from poor physical health due to deprived and insolvent living qualities in addition to losing their social supporting network by living in a strange city with limited or without social connection. Today's medical sciences have confirmed the importance of social relationship and its cohesion in a person's health and wellbeing. Without such affinity and support, people can wither and perish quicker than anticipated.<sup>13</sup> Migrated people actually become "a lonely crowd" living among strangers as rootless and lonely people.

Urbanization is a tide that has become inevitable. To ensure that this development will not be flourished in the expenses of human suffering and environmental exploitation, an urban bioethics has to play a role in city development. The concepts of sustainable development through conservation and restoration and an endeavor to maintain a close human relationship in urban center must be advocated. The city planning must be based on this foundation of urban bioethics that upholds the values of human affinity and respect among all living beings, including animals and plants.

Three problems are highlighted: socioeconomic inequality as a major determinant of health inequality, the foundations of an ethic for public health, and the impact of social context on the therapeutic alliance between patients and physicians. Urban bioethics serves as a vehicle for raising deep theoretical and methodological questions about the dominant assumptions and approaches of contemporary bioethics. Demands for cultural sensitivity, so pronounced in the urban context, compels us to re-examine the central commitment in bioethics to personal autonomy. The multiculturalism of urban life also argues for a dialogic approach to bioethical problem solving rather than the monologic approach that characterizes most bioethical thinking.

## IV. A bioethically viable city

### 1. What kind of urban center is bioethically viable?

From the literature reviews we discussed earlier, we learn that to design an ideal new urban center, there are different domains needing our attention in order to create an ecologically viable, culturally friendly, and economically affordable new urban center.

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<sup>13</sup> Umberson, Debra and Montez, Jeniffer K. (2010), Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy, *Journal of Health Soc Behav*, 51 (1), 54–66.

The WHO has defined health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.<sup>14</sup> To promote healthy living, a bioethically viable urban center needs to consider its formation from environmental, physical, health-wide, and social factors that affect the wellbeing of people as well as the mother earth. In other words, it needs to be holistic in planning. In upholding the values of human affinity and respect among all living beings including animals and plants, Fritz Jahr has called for “respect every living being in general and as an end in itself and treat it, if possible, as such”.<sup>15</sup> Thus, for a bioethically viable urban city, some particular measures in regard to human wellbeing and the ecological balance must be considered in urban planning such as the issue of land availability, infrastructures of a new city, ecosystem, cultural, hygienic, and educational domains. Urban bioethics calls for respect for life, the sustainability of development and responsibility. This reminds us to listen to the voice of nature, as well as to have the wisdom of knowing that humans can genuinely thrive only when being aligned and in harmony with the rhythms of the Universe.

Urban bioethics must foster a unique focus on the ethical dilemmas in the pluralistic environment of cities. It should inform the thinking of health professionals, policymakers, social scientists, and others to promote ethically responsible measures from an integrative point of view.<sup>16</sup> A standard is recommended here for a bioethically viable city that covers physical, mental, social, and environmental domains:

1. Wide paved road and street light to allow not only cars but also pedestrians with sidewalk to move safely around. (physical domain)
2. Park and playground for children with trees surrounding it. (physical and social domains)
3. Green section, like Central Park of New York, with trees providing habitation areas for birds and the likes to enhance living quality for all living beings. (physical, social, and environmental domains)
4. Convenient public transportation systems. (physical and social domains)
5. Streets designed on the square pattern to allow easy access and recognition. (physical domain)
6. A sewage system and water treatment plant to treat all waste water before releasing. (physical and environmental domain)

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14 World Health Organization: Constitution of the WHO as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June 1946. Official Records of the World Health Organization No.2 1948:100.

15 Jahr, Fritz, *Essays in Bioethics 1924-1948* (2013), Zurich; Lit Verlag Ag Gmb, 20.

16 Tai, Michael C. (2008), *The Way of Asian Bioethics*, Taipei; Princeton International Press, 16.

7. Power plant to provide electricity based not on nuclear or coal but natural means, such as wind or solar power...etc. (physical and environmental domains)
8. Garbage/waste material recycling and treating facilities. (physical and environmental domains)
9. Community health center/clinics, including counselling service. (physical and mental domains)
10. Library (mental domain)
11. A cultural center such as a museum, art gallery, etc. (mental and social domains)
12. Recreation center including a playground for children and gymnasium where people can exercise and gather together for visits. (physical, mental and social domains)
13. The public education system should be established for equal opportunity for all. (mental and social domains)
14. Public housing to provide affordable accommodation for immigrants to avoid slum or ethnic district from forming. Integration promotes mutual acceptance and respect. (physical and social domains)
15. Senior citizen homes and caring programs. (physical and social domains)
16. District police station and fire department. (physical and social domains)
17. Spiritual institutions such as a church, synagogue, mosque, temple of worship. (mental and social domains)
18. On spot bicycle-renting to reduce automobile gas exhaustion and to promote convenient biking. (physical and social domains)
19. City officials, civil servants and health professionals should be required to take at least six hours of continuing education on bioethics every year. (mental and social domains)

## **2. Yin and Yang theory in a bioethically viable urban**

Besides deriving the ideas from the scholars in the section of literature reviews of this article, these above-recommended domains for a bioethically viable urban center have also followed the teaching of Lao-tze, the founder of Taoism who teaches that the ideal way of living is to follow nature. Taoist philosophy assumes that the universe contains two forces, Yin and Yang moving around constantly. When these two forces are in balance, there is harmony and happiness. Applying this thought to city development,



when Yin and Yang elements in urban centers work mutually, all within it will be benefitted.<sup>17</sup> The force of Yin refer to feminine principle characterized as slow, soft, yielding, diffuse, cold, wet, and passive and is associated with water, earth, the moon, femininity, and night time, dark, wetness, cold, passivity, disintegration. The forces of Yang refers to fire, sky, the sun and masculine and is associated with daytime, sunny light, hard, solid, focused, hot, dry, and active. Yin and Yang are bound together as part of a mutual whole, e.g. there cannot be the bottom of the foot without the top, or if a human race had only men or only women, this race would disappear in a single generation, yet men and women together create a new generation that allows the race they mutually create to survive. Yin and Yang transform each other and perfect each other.

The hard structures of a city are Yang and the service programs provided are Yin.

To Taoism, humanization and harmonization are two goals that we must pursue. If an urban center flows with nature in harmony, good health and happy living of all beings are ensured. Flowing with nature as the ultimate end of human life is what constitutes happiness.<sup>18</sup> An urban bioethics must consider if a city provides these two elements mutually, the Yang city planning and the Yin service programs, available to its inhabitants.

Urban bioethics calls for respect for life, the sustainability of development, and responsibility. The future urban development must keep in mind these principles that we, as human beings, have to be responsible stewards of the earth and listen carefully to the voice of nature without breaking the rule of nature. Only when we align and are in harmony with the rhythms of the universe can a new modern city become a comfortable home for all.

## V. Conclusion

Urbanization is a reality of the world that will keep growing. More than half of the global populations now live in urban areas where we notice that density, diversity, and disparity are present. Mega-metropolitan cities have been expanding in the last century that affects human wellbeing and ecological balance even more. Therefore, thinking of designing a bioethically, viable urban city cannot be overlooked and delayed. It can be a reconciliation between a human and nature, "...a pursuit for peace and harmony between man and man, race and race, creed and creed and

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17 Chan, Wing-Tsit (1963), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, New Jersey; Princeton University Press, 163ff.

18 Ibid.

between man and nature ... for a friendly and amiable relationship".<sup>19</sup> A bioethically viable city will be a proof that humankind is marching toward a mutually respectful atmosphere among all beings, including plants, land, wind, water, and animals on earth.

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<sup>19</sup> Tai, Michael C. (2019), Bioethics of Reconciliation, *Austin Anthropology*, 3 (1), 5.

# Budućnost je urbana – urbana bioetička perspektiva

## Sažetak

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Rad nudi buduću urbanost koja je bioetički održiva ne samo u vanjskoj konstrukciji, već i u unutarnjoj opremljenosti koja podupire konstrukcijsku sposobnost za skladan odnos ljudi i prirode. Buduća urbanost ne smije se razviti tako da postane samo skup ljudi u gradu, već bi trebala biti integrirana u globalni ekosustav. Rad predlaže listu osnovnih infrastrukturnih zahtjeva za ekološki održivu buduću urbanost. Metodologija korištena u radu je kvalitativno-deskriptivna, proizašla iz pregleda literature u radu s drugim znanstvenicima koji su autoru pružili uvid za izradu liste preporuka u planiranju buduće urbanosti.

**Ključne riječi:** održivost razvoja; urbano planiranje; ekosustav; bioetika; Jin i Jang.

