

Contact

Wenzheng Li, Ph.D.

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Education

2019-2024 **Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning**, *Cornell University*, Ithaca, NY, USA

Dissertation: Polycentric Spatial Development—Measures, Explanations, and Performance

Committee: Stephan Schmidt, Department of City and Regional Planning

John I. Carruthers, Field of Regional Science

Shanjun Li, Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management

Nomination: Barclay Gibbs Jones Award 2025—the highest dissertation award in the field of city and regional planning in North America

Funding: This research was supported by the Sage Fellowship awarded by the Graduate School of Cornell University; the C.V. Starr Fellowship awarded by The East Asian Program of the Einaudi Center.

2016-2018 **Master of Regional Planning (MRP)**, *Cornell University*, Ithaca, NY, USA

2012-2016 **Bachelor of Science in Remote Sensing**, *China University of Geosciences*, Wuhan, China

Fields of Interest

Topics Land-use planning; metropolitan governance; housing studies; International planning studies, ; sustainability; regional science and urban economics

Methods urban spatial data analytics; AI (GeoAI and large language models); GIS & remote sensing; applied econometrics

Study Area Sub-Saharan Africa, China, North America, Europe,

Employment

Current Position

2025.8-present Postdoctoral Research Fellow, School of Community and Regional Planning, The University of British Columbia

Main tasks: Conduct quantitative research in housing and urban spatial structure.

- Develop an AI–human expert workflow to extract and analyze public engagement materials, and apply econometrics to examine how formal institutions (e.g., laws and procedures) and informal institutions (e.g., social norms and local practices) shape housing approval outcomes in the U.S. and Canada.
- Study the evolutionary patterns of urban spatial structure, and the associated economic, social, and environmental outcomes.

Previous Positions

2024.8-2025.6 Lecturer, Dept. of City and Regional Planning, Cornell University (90% Teaching, 10% Service)

- Spring 2025 CRP 1200: Intro to Statistics for Urban Studies (Quant method I)
CRP 4680/5680: Introduction to Urban Data Science
- Fall 2024 CRP 4080: Introduction to Geographic information system,
CRP 2100: Neighborhood Change in the City: Quantitative Methods (Quant Method II, co-taught),
CRP 3280/4280: Mapping and Counter-Mapping (co-taught)
- Summer 2024 CRP 3850/5850 Urban Spatial Data Analytics
- 2021-2024 Teaching Assistant, Dept. of City and Regional Planning, Cornell University**
- CRP 1200 Introduction to Statistics for Urban Studies
CRP 5040 Urban Economics
CRP 4080 Introduction to GIS
CRP 5080 Introduction to GIS for Planners
CRP/DESIGN 4680/5680 Urban Spatial Data Analytics
CRP 6290 Advanced Topics in GIS
AEM Big Data & Business Analytics

Publications (* Corresponding authors)

- 2026 Schmidt, Stephan, and **Wenzheng Li**. "Municipal Fragmentation and Metropolitan Open Space Patterns." *Urban Affairs Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10780874261468958>.
- 2026 Schmidt, Stephan, Yucheng Zhang, **Wenzheng Li**, and Houpu Li. "Urban Morphology and the heat island effect in African cities: evidence from Ghana, Togo, and Tanzania." *Remote Sensing Applications: Society and Environment* (2026): 102005. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rsase.2026.102005>
- 2026 **Li, Wenzheng**, Stephan Schmidt*, Jintao Guo. "Regional polycentric spatial patterns and air pollution: An empirical study of German metropolitan regions" *Cities*, 170, 106676. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2025.106676>
- 2024 **Li, Wenzheng***, Stephan Schmidt. "Can spatial patterns mitigate the urban heat island effect? Evidence from German metropolitan regions." *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23998083241227500>
Media coverage: [Multiple city hubs, dispersed parks keep metro areas cooler](#), Cornell Chronicle
- Li, Wenzheng***, Stephan Schmidt, and Stefan Siedentop. "Can polycentric urban development simultaneously achieve both economic growth and regional equity? A multi-scale analysis of German regions." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*: 56(2), 525-545. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X2311919>
- Li, Wenzheng***, and Stephan Schmidt. "The spatial-temporal evolution of urban development patterns in Chinese cities: Dynamics and interpretations." *Growth and Change* 55, no. 2: e12722. <https://doi.org/10.1111/grow.12722>
- Schmidt, Stephan*, **Wenzheng Li**, John Carruthers, and Stefan Siedentop. "Planning institutions and urban spatial patterns: Evidence from a cross-national analysis." *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X211044203>
- Schmidt, Stephan*, Said Nuhu, Ryan Thomas, **Wenzheng Li**. "Place attachment, regional identity and perceptions of urbanization in Moshi, Tanzania." *Habitat International* 150 (2024): 103132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2024.103132>
- 2021 Matuke, Samantha, Stephan Schmidt*, and **Wenzheng Li**. "The rise and fall of the American pedestrian mall." *Journal of Urbanism* 14, no. 2: 129-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2020.1793804>.
Media coverage: [Lessons From the Rise and Fall of the Pedestrian Mall](#), Bloomberg CityLab

Articles in Progress

Journal Articles: Under Review

- 2026 **Li, Wenzheng**, Ziyi Zhang, and Yan Wu*. “Vertical housing price gradients, elevators, and ageing communities: evidence from Beijing.” *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*.
- 2026 John I. Carruthers, **Li, Wenzheng**. "Population and Employment Dynamics in a Fast-Growing Economy: Evidence from Chinese Prefectural Regions" *Papers in Regional Science*.

Articles In Progress

Li, Wenzheng “Reorganizing Agglomeration: Urban Scaling and the Rise of Polycentric Regions”

Julia Gabriele Harten, Wenzheng Li, Andrew Yan, Christos Thrampoulidis. Who Wants What Where and Why? Leveraging AI and City Council Records to Analyze Housing Supply Narratives in Vancouver, Canada

Li, Wenzheng, Julia Harten, Andrew Yan, Christos Thrampoulidis. "Human in the Loop or Out? Evaluating Human Involvement in Housing Approval Process in Vancouver using a Hybrid AI-Expert Pipeline"

Li, Wenzheng. Polycentricity and Dispersion in Sub-Saharan African Cities: Spatial-Temporal Change of Urban Structure in 482 Cities, 2004–2024, Prepared as a book chapter.

Yucheng Zhang, Wenzheng Li, Stephan Schmidt. The Dirtier Fringe: Seasonal Reversal of the Core-Periphery PM_{2.5} Gradient in Sub-Saharan African Cities.

From Polycentricity to Policy: substantive attention, legal traction, and Implementation Pathways in German Regional Spatial Plans

Invited Talks, Presentations, Seminars

Conference presentation: How do People Talk about New Housing? Leveraging Large Language Models and City Council Records to Analyze Housing Supply Narratives in Vancouver, CA.

Presented at

2026 International Conference on Urban Affairs (UAA) in Chicago

Conference presentation: Regional polycentric urban spatial patterns and air quality—Evidence from German metropolitan regions.

Presented at

2025 International Conference on Urban Affairs (UAA) in Vancouver, BC;

2024 Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) conference in Seattle, WA.

Conference presentation: Can polycentric urban development simultaneously achieve both economic growth and regional equity? A multi-scale analysis of German regions.

Presented at

2025 The 7th Economic Geography Conference (EGC) in Worcester, MA;

2024 International Association for China Planning (IACP) Conference in Hangzhou;

2023 North America Regional Science Council (NARSC) Conference in San Diego, CA;

2022 ACSP Conference in Toronto, ON.

Conference presentation: Can spatial patterns mitigate the urban heat island effect? Evidence from German metropolitan regions.

Presented at

2024 American Association of Geographers (AAG) Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii;

2023 ACSP Conference in Chicago;
2023 AAG Conference in Denver, Colorado

Conference presentation: The spatial-temporal evolution of urban development patterns in Chinese cities: dynamics and interpretation.

Presented at

2023 NARSC Conference in San Diego;
2022 IACP Conference in Wuhan (Virtual);
2021 ACSP Conference (virtual)

May'24 **Invited Talk:** The performance and governance of polycentric urban regions—Evidence from Germany. at the East China Normal University, Shanghai

Nov'22 **Conference presentation:** The determinants and Outcomes of Chinese regional growth 2000 to 2020. **Presented at** NARSC Conference in Montreal, QC

Nov'21 **Conference presentation:** Vertical housing gradients: evidence from Beijing. **Presented at** NARSC Conference (virtual), Denver, Colorado

Nov'20 **Conference presentation:** Housing prices and Air Quality in Beijing, **Presented at** NARSC Conference (Virtual)

May'20 **Workshop presentation:** Developing Mobility-as-a-Service Serving Small Urban & Rural Communities, Tompkins County, NY, MOD On-Ramp Lessons Learned webinar 2020.

Nov'18 **Conference presentation:** Housing Prices and Time-varying NDVI, **Presented at** NARSC Conference, San Antonio, TX

Awards and Grants

2026 Canada Postdoctoral Research Award (CPRA), The Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) (two-year competitive fellowship, \$140,000 CAD)

2023, 2019 Sage Research and Dissertation Writing Fellowship, Cornell University (\$130,000 USD)

2023 C.V. Starr Fellowship, The East Asian Program of the Einaudi Center, Cornell University (competitive fellowship, \$35,000 USD)

2019 Tompkins County Mobility-as-a-Service (Maas) Pilot Program, funded by the FTA Mobility on-demand On-Ramp Program (Collaborator, contributed to drafting the initial proposal, \$820,000 USD)

2018 Alan Black Transportation Planning Grant, Cornell University (\$1,700)

Travel Grants

2024 Graduate School Travel Grant (\$700)

2023 Graduate School Travel Grant (\$500)

2023 Department of City and Regional Planning (CRP) Travel Grant (\$500)

2022 Graduate School Travel Grant (\$600)

2022 Department of City and Regional Planning (CRP) Travel Grant (\$500)

2021 Department of City and Regional Planning (CRP) Travel Grant for virtual conference (\$120)

Academic Service

Editorial Board	Growth and Change
Journal Reviewer	Applied Geography Growth and Change Scientific Report Cities Journal of Regional Science Asian-Pacific Journal of Regional Science The Annals of Regional Science Sustainable Cities and Society Nature: Cities Spatial Network and Economics Applied Spatial Analysis and Policy Environment and Planning A Environment and Planning B Urban Climate npj Urban Sustainability Journal of Housing and the Built Environment
Mentorship	Mentoring and advising first-year undergraduate students on academic topics
Session Chair	Regional Challenges and Regional Planning. International Association for China Planning (IACP) Conference 2023 Land-use and territorial spatial planning. International Association for China Planning (IACP) Conference 2021
Discussant	NARSC Conference in 2023, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2018

Professional Positions

Jun'18-Jun'19	Project Assistant, Tompkins County Department of Social Services, Ithaca, NY - Developed business model to facilitate the Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) pilot project. - Coordinated transportation planning in the southern tier NYS. - Assisted with federal grant application from the FTA and SUMC.
Sep'15-May'16	GIS/Remote Sensing Analyst—ToolGeo Technology, Wuhan, China - Developed software platform for automatic evaluation of urban public space coverage. - Developed computer version algorithms for feature extraction.

Media Coverage

Feb'24	Multiple city hubs, dispersed parks keep metro areas cooler : "Polycentric" development patterns can lessen the urban heat island effect by distributing urban density and curbing the sprawl of impervious surfaces," Cornell Chronicle.
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Datasets Published

Mar'20	<i>The Rise and Fall of the American Pedestrian Mall</i> (2020) available at https://osf.io/ybdev/ . This dataset contains 125 American Pedestrian Mall records with mall properties (e.g., open/removed year) and the demographic and socio-economic factors in the associated cities.
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Affiliations/Memberships

Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP)
American Association of Geographers (AAG)
Cornell Institute for China Economic Research (CICER)
Cornell East Asian Program (EAP)
Regional Science Association International (RSAI)
International Association for China Planning (IACP)
Urban Affairs Association (UAA)

Language Skills & Technical Competencies

Software	ArcGIS; QGIS; Mapbox; ENVI; Google Earth Engine (GEE), IMPLAN; Microsoft Office
Coding	Python; R, Stata, MATLAB, C++, C#, Java, IDL
Languages	English, Mandarin