First Question: Who are you, and how do you engage with cities in developed/developing countries?
My name is Nianhua Liu, and I hail from Shenzhen, China. Over the years, I have had the privilege of visiting more than 40 countries, with the majority—over 30—to be precise—being developed nations. Only a handful of the countries I've explored fall under the category of developing nations. My passion for travel drives me to immerse myself in diverse cultures, and I have a particular affinity for visiting the capital cities first, as they often embody the quintessential aspects of a country. By engaging with both developed and developing cities, I gain a comprehensive understanding of urban dynamics, infrastructure, and cultural nuances that define each nation.

1. What do you consider typical aspects for cities in developed/developing countries? You can include personal observations.
In my experience, cities in both developed and developing countries share certain characteristics, yet they also exhibit distinct differences. For instance, major Chinese cities like Guangzhou and Shenzhen, each housing over 20 million residents, are densely populated with an abundance of skyscrapers, a hallmark of their developed status. Similarly, when I visit cities like London or New York, the skyline dominated by tall buildings conveys a sense of economic prosperity and advanced infrastructure. However, in developing countries, while some cities are rapidly urbanizing and constructing high-rise buildings, others may still lack such extensive development, leading to a mix of modern and traditional architecture. Personally, I've observed that the presence of skyscrapers often signifies a city's development level, reflecting both economic strength and the ability to support large populations with advanced facilities.

2. How do living conditions differ between city centers and their peripheries in developing countries? Have you lived in such conditions?
Living conditions in city centers versus their peripheries in developing countries can be quite contrasting. In Shenzhen, residing in the city center offers unparalleled convenience, with close proximity to shopping centers, schools, business districts, hospitals, and other essential amenities. However, this convenience comes at the cost of high noise levels, overcrowded public transportation, and significant traffic congestion during peak hours. On the other hand, living in the suburban areas provides a quieter and more peaceful environment, ideal for those seeking respite from the hustle and bustle of the city. Nevertheless, the infrastructure in these peripheral regions often lags behind, with fewer amenities and less efficient public services. Personally, I have experienced both settings and find that while the city center is vibrant and full of opportunities, the suburbs offer tranquility but lack the comprehensive infrastructure needed for daily convenience.

4. Have you experienced the impacts of insufficient infrastructure on residents' health?
Absolutely, insufficient infrastructure can have a direct impact on residents' health. Access to quality healthcare facilities, such as hospitals and pharmacies, is fundamental for maintaining public health. In China, for example, residents can purchase medicines at pharmacies even late into the night, ensuring that medical needs are promptly met. In contrast, during my visits to several European cities, I noticed that access to necessary medications after standard business hours, typically after 9 PM, is often restricted. This limitation can pose significant challenges for individuals requiring urgent medical attention or ongoing treatments. The disparity in healthcare infrastructure highlights the critical role that robust and accessible health services play in safeguarding the well-being of urban populations.

5. What cultural factors influence residents' preferences when choosing housing?
Cultural influences play a significant role in shaping residents' housing preferences. In cities like Shenzhen, many people prefer living in the city center within high-rise buildings due to the convenience and status associated with central locations. This preference is deeply rooted in Chinese cultural values that emphasize hierarchy and the aspiration to live in prestigious, elevated spaces. Additionally, for those with sufficient financial means, there is a trend towards purchasing villas in suburban areas for leisure and holiday purposes, reflecting a desire for a balance between urban convenience and suburban tranquility. The cultural inclination towards hierarchical living spaces drives the demand for higher and centrally located residences, reinforcing the social and economic structures within the city.

6. Are traditions and customs reflected in urban planning?
Yes, traditions and customs are often deeply embedded in urban planning, especially in regions with rich cultural heritages like China. Traditional proverbs and principles frequently guide the layout and design of cities. For instance, the saying "山南水北" (located in the south of a mountain and the north of a water body) emphasizes the importance of natural landscapes in city placement and development. Similarly, "坐南朝北" (facing north while sitting south) reflects architectural orientations that harmonize with cultural and environmental considerations. These traditional guidelines ensure that urban development respects historical practices and environmental harmony, blending modern infrastructure with cultural identity. Such integration helps preserve cultural heritage while accommodating the needs of a growing urban population.

8. How do cities cope with migration and population growth? Is this a dangerous phenomenon?
Cities manage migration and population growth through strategic urban planning and infrastructure expansion. Building more skyscrapers and enhancing infrastructure are common approaches to accommodate the increasing number of residents. In large

countries like China, urbanization is seen as an essential and ongoing process rather than a dangerous phenomenon. The government's focus on creating metropolitan areas, such as the Great Bay Area, exemplifies efforts to distribute population density and foster economic integration among nearby megacities like Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. By developing interconnected urban regions, cities can effectively manage growth, reduce the strain on individual urban centers, and promote balanced regional development. Consequently, while rapid urbanization presents challenges, proactive planning and infrastructure investment can mitigate potential risks and support sustainable growth.

11. Do you know of any successful projects aimed at improving housing in city centers and their peripheries in developed/developing countries?
One notable example of a successful housing improvement project is the Greater Bay Area (GBA) initiative in China. The GBA encompasses three major cities—Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou—within a proximity of less than 100 kilometers. The central government's objective is to create a synergistic economic zone that leverages the strengths of each city to foster regional growth and integration. By developing infrastructure and housing projects that connect these cities, the GBA aims to enhance the quality of life, promote economic collaboration, and alleviate housing pressures in individual urban centers. This initiative not only improves housing availability but also stimulates economic activity and innovation across the region. The GBA serves as a model for how coordinated urban planning and regional cooperation can effectively address housing challenges in both city centers and their surrounding areas.
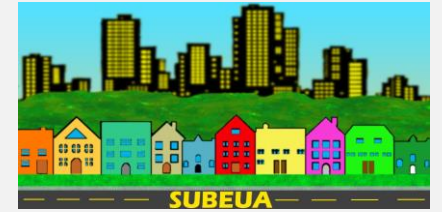
I highly recommend the book great nation needs bigger city which delves into the urbanization trends in China.

12. What role do technology and innovation play in addressing problems related to suburbanization? How can new technologies contribute to sustainable urban development?
Technology and innovation are pivotal in addressing the challenges associated with suburbanization and fostering sustainable urban development. In China, advancements such as delivery drones and autonomous vehicles are being developed to enhance connectivity and efficiency between urban centers and suburban areas. Delivery drones can reduce traffic congestion by minimizing the number of delivery vehicles on the roads, while autonomous vehicles can offer reliable and efficient transportation options, making suburban living more feasible and attractive. Additionally, smart infrastructure technologies, like IoT-enabled utilities and energy-efficient building systems, contribute to more sustainable and resilient urban environments. These innovations not only improve the quality of life for residents by providing better services and reducing environmental impact but also support the seamless integration of suburban areas into the broader urban framework. By leveraging technology, cities can create more sustainable, efficient, and livable environments that accommodate population growth and urban sprawl.

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