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## Implementation Assessment and Future Prospects of the Major Function Oriented Zoning Strategy (Postprint)

**Authors:** Chen Dong, Liu Baoyin, Fan Jie, Zhou Daojing, Guo Rui, dynasty,  
Wu Jianxiong

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### Abstract

As a beneficial attempt and exploration during China's industrial civilization period aimed at ecological civilization, Major Function-Oriented Zones can be divided into two stages. This article reviews the characteristics of the planning and formulation stage before the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, as well as the stage after the Congress when Major Function-Oriented Zones were elevated to a national strategy and fundamental institution. It evaluates and summarizes achievements including the deep rooting of strategic thinking among the people, the basic formation of the strategic pattern, remarkable results in classified development, and the preliminary establishment of the institution. The article proposes that Major Function-Oriented Zones will continue to play a greater strategic and foundational role in China's modernization drive. As a major strategy, layout plan, and institutional arrangement that implements the leadership of the Communist Party of China, leverages the advantages of the socialist system, and achieves modern spatial governance from top to bottom, Major Function-Oriented Zones should further strengthen the orientation of territorial space development and protection that is people-centered, regards high-quality development as the primary task, and takes building a new development pattern as the strategic foundation, expand new functions that meet the people's aspirations for a better life and national security needs, and rely on the spatial governance system to improve more precise development guidelines and supporting policies for functional zones.

## Full Text

# Implementation Evaluation and Outlook of Major Function Oriented Zone Strategy

CHEN Dong<sup>1,3\*</sup>, LIU Baoyin<sup>2</sup>, FAN Jie<sup>1,2,3</sup>, ZHOU Daojing<sup>2</sup>, GUO Rui<sup>2</sup>, WANG Zhao<sup>2</sup>, WU Jianxiong<sup>1,3</sup>

1 Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100101, China

2 Institutes of Science and Development, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100190, China

3 College of Resources and Environment, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100049, China

## Abstract

Major Function Oriented Zone (MFOZ) represents a beneficial attempt and exploration aimed at ecological civilization during China's industrial civilization period, which can be divided into two distinct stages. This paper examines the characteristics of the planning development stage before the 18th Communist Party of China (CPC) National Congress and the subsequent stage when MFOZ was elevated to a national strategy and basic institution. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the strategic thinking of MFOZ has become deeply rooted among the people, the strategic pattern has been basically formed, categorized development has achieved remarkable results, and the institutional framework has been initially established. The evaluation and summary of these achievements demonstrate that MFOZ will continue to play a greater strategic and fundamental role in Chinese-style modernization. As a major strategy, layout plan, and institutional arrangement that implements the leadership of the CPC, leverages the advantages of the socialist system, and achieves modern spatial governance from top to bottom, MFOZ should further strengthen its territorial development and protection orientation that is people-centered, prioritizes high-quality development, and takes building a new development pattern as its strategic foundation. It should expand new functions to meet the people's aspirations for a better life and national security needs, and rely on a sound spatial governance system to establish more precise development guidelines and supporting policies for different functional zones.

**Keywords:** Major Function Oriented Zone (MFOZ), strategy, institution, evaluation, outlook

## 1. Development History of Major Function Oriented Zones

### 1.2 Planning Development Stage (2003–2011)

From the beginning of reform and opening up to the early 21st century, China's economy experienced sustained rapid development with accelerated industri-

alization and urbanization. However, the lack of overall deployment and unified arrangement of territorial space led to insufficient precision and coordination in regional policies, resulting in prominent problems of disordered spatial development and structural imbalance. First, there was a long-term absence of a strategic blueprint for territorial development and protection. As China transitioned from a planned economy to a market economy, the effectiveness of government macro-control tools through industrial and investment policies gradually weakened, making scientific and effective organization and management of territorial space an increasingly important concern for governments at all levels, especially the central government. Although relevant ministries such as the National Development and Reform Commission, the former Ministry of Land and Resources, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development explored various forms of spatial planning, China lacked a strategic blueprint to guide territorial development and protection until the promulgation of the National Major Function Oriented Zone Planning in 2010. Second, regional policy units were too large and focused excessively on economic development. From the coastal-inland and eastern, central, and western economic belts in the 1980s, to the seven major economic regions in the 1990s, and gradually to the “four major plates” formed in the late 1990s, regional policies always suffered from excessively large implementation units. Moreover, whether non-equilibrium development policies or regional coordinated development policies, they all emphasized economic development while neglecting the comprehensive balance and coordination of population, economy, resources, and environment. Third, problems of disordered spatial development and structural imbalance became increasingly prominent. Local governments prioritized economic scale expansion as the primary or even sole goal of regional development, ignoring resource and environmental constraints and their own comparative advantages. Agricultural areas were developed blindly, with cultivated land decreasing by 88 million mu between 2001 and 2008, posing a challenge to food supply security. Ecological areas were wantonly developed, with ecological land decreasing by 261 million mu between 2001 and 2008, leading to degradation of overall ecosystem functions and posing a grave threat to ecological security. Urban areas were overdeveloped, with the “pie-spreading” urban expansion model resulting in low efficiency and effectiveness in land and other resource utilization, deteriorating human settlements, and increasingly serious “urban diseases.”

As a long-term deployment and overall arrangement for China’s territorial space development, MFOZ involves major adjustments in regional and departmental interests. Therefore, from 2003 to 2011, China focused on strengthening the scientific foundation of MFOZ and developing its planning framework. In terms of scientific foundation, starting in 2003, a research team led by the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences conducted continuous innovative research on MFOZ, forming the basic theory (territorial function theory), technical methods (dual evaluation technical methods), and data platforms (resource and environmental carrying capacity monitoring and early warning system and database), thereby

constructing a scientific and technological support system for MFOZ. Before the 18th CPC National Congress, the research team mainly revised traditional regional economic equilibrium models to propose a three-dimensional spatial comprehensive equilibrium model, constructed an indicator system and single-item and comprehensive integration algorithms for major function identification, conducted territorial spatial function suitability evaluation, developed a MFOZ draft, and completed technical procedures for provincial MFOZ planning. These technical procedures were adopted nationwide and by all provinces, with MFOZ evaluation results becoming an important basis for MFOZ planning. Regarding the planning advancement process, the 11th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2006) dedicated Chapter 20 to promoting the formation of MFOZ, dividing territorial space into four types: optimized development, key development, restricted development, and prohibited development. The 2006 Central Economic Work Conference proposed “advancing MFOZ planning at different levels to provide a scientific basis for promoting coordinated regional development.” In 2007, the State Council deployed the compilation of national and provincial MFOZ plans. In 2010, the State Council issued the National Major Function Oriented Zone Planning, marking the completion of national-level MFOZ planning. By 2011, provincial-level MFOZ plans had also been completed in some provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the central government.

### 1.3 Stage as National Strategy and Basic Institution (2012–Present)

After the 18th CPC National Congress, MFOZ was elevated to a national strategy and basic institution for territorial development and protection, powerfully promoting ecological civilization construction and spatial governance system reform.

**1.3.1 Formation Process of MFOZ Strategy and Institution** Currently, China’s territorial space strategy includes major regional strategies, regional coordinated development strategies, and MFOZ strategy, among which only MFOZ is both a strategy and an institution. The MFOZ strategy and institution have undergone a continuous enrichment and improvement process. Because MFOZ concerns the overall situation of China’s regional sustainable development, it was first elevated to a strategy. In 2010, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee first proposed the concept of “MFOZ strategy.” In 2012, the report of the 18th CPC National Congress enriched the connotation of MFOZ strategy, proposing to “accelerate the implementation of MFOZ strategy, promote development in strict accordance with the major functional positioning of each region, and build a scientifically rational urbanization pattern, agricultural development pattern, and ecological security pattern.” As the basic spatial unit relied upon for compiling spatial planning and formulating regional policies, MFOZ was further elevated to an institution. In 2013, the Decision of the Central Committee of the CPC on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reform proposed to “unswervingly implement

MFOZ institution, establish a territorial development and protection system, and promote development in strict accordance with MFOZ positioning.”

**1.3.2 Continuous Strategic and Fundamental Role of MFOZ** The MFOZ strategy and institution have been continuously improved. In 2017, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued Several Opinions on Improving MFOZ Strategy and Institution, proposing that “building MFOZ is a major strategy for China’s economic development and ecological environment protection,” and that “improving MFOZ strategy and institution should leverage its fundamental role in territorial development and protection, promote the precise implementation of MFOZ strategic pattern at the city and county levels, improve the long-term mechanism for differentiated and coordinated development of different MFOZ, accelerate institutional reform and legal construction, and consolidate the foundation for optimizing territorial development and protection patterns and innovating national spatial development models,” thus pointing out the direction for improving MFOZ strategy and institution.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council have unswervingly implemented MFOZ strategy and institution, achieving positive and remarkable results in MFOZ construction.

## **2. Implementation Effects of Major Function Oriented Zones**

### **2.1 Strategic Thinking of MFOZ Deeply Rooted Among the People**

MFOZ has become an important component of Xi Jinping’s thought on ecological civilization and an original theoretical and practical achievement with Chinese characteristics. The concept of MFOZ has become a broad consensus, with each county-level administrative unit having a clear major function. Highlighting the fundamental role of resource and environmental carrying capacity in achieving harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, emphasizing functional positioning based on comparative advantages in the national “one chessboard” framework, and highlighting policy support for achieving common prosperity for all Chinese people in building territorial spatial patterns have become the basic principles for optimizing territorial spatial patterns.

### **2.2 Strategic Pattern of MFOZ Basically Formed**

The urbanization development pattern with “two horizontals and three verticals” as the main body, the agricultural production pattern with “seven areas and twenty-three belts” as the main body, and the ecological security pattern with “two screens and three belts” as the main body have been basically formed, receiving high recognition from central and local governments. The MFOZ strategic pattern has become the planning basis and action program in implementing major regional strategies and new urbanization strategies, enhancing food security functions, and strengthening ecological security barrier functions.

### 2.3 Remarkable Achievements in Categorized Development of MFOZ

Urbanization areas have become important spatial carriers for China's new urbanization. Between 2010 and 2020, the population and GDP of urbanization areas increased by 5.4% and 1.6% respectively nationwide, with population and economic activities further concentrating in these areas. The grain security function of major agricultural product production areas remained basically stable, with the overall scale of these areas changing little and major grain output growing steadily between 2010 and 2020. Ecological space such as forests and wetlands in key ecological function areas continued to increase, with forest area growing by 15.1151 million hectares (a 10.37% increase) between 2010 and 2020, further enhancing ecological security barrier functions. The living standard gap among residents in different functional zones has been continuously narrowing.

### 2.4 MFOZ Institution Initially Established

MFOZ represents a beneficial attempt and exploration aimed at ecological civilization during China's industrial civilization period. Under conditions of an unsound spatial governance system and non-modernized governance capabilities, MFOZ serves as a basic institution that provides both overall structural design and guidance for national territorial space at the top level and major function positioning and constraints for each county at the grassroots level. It has directly promoted the "multiple plans integration" reform, the establishment of a natural protected area system, ecological compensation and ecological product value realization mechanisms, industrial negative lists, and other ecological civilization institutional reforms, becoming a model of modern spatial governance institution that is systematic, scientific, information-based, and legalized through a "strategy + planning + policy" framework.

### 2.5 Main Problems in MFOZ Construction

The integration between MFOZ strategy and the national regional coordinated development strategy needs to be further strengthened, the precision of spatial transmission and implementation of MFOZ strategy needs improvement, and the common misunderstanding of replacing "major" function with "single" function needs to be corrected. Before the reform of the territorial spatial planning system, conflicts and lack of coordination existed among different spatial plans. After the reform, while MFOZ was incorporated into territorial spatial planning and the "three zones and three lines" were demarcated, there has been a tendency toward "one plan dominating all," along with difficulties in policy coordination and an emphasis on protection over development. Additionally, the types and boundaries of MFOZ are continuously evolving and adjustable.

### 3. Mission and Improvement Strategies of MFOZ in Chinese-Style Modernization

The “14th Five-Year Plan” period is crucial for China to basically and comprehensively achieve modernization. Adapting to new changes and requirements in the domestic and international environment of the new era, MFOZ will continue to play a greater strategic and fundamental role in Chinese-style modernization.

#### 3.1 MFOZ Shoulders the Mission of Creating Spatial Carriers for Chinese-Style Modernization

MFOZ is a major strategy, layout plan, and institutional arrangement for implementing the leadership of the CPC, leveraging the advantages of the socialist system, and achieving modern spatial governance from top to bottom. It represents the pioneering exploration of socialist modernization led by the CPC in the field of spatial governance, having established a Chinese-style spatial governance system model that integrates top-level national coordination with county-level implementation, concentrates resources to accomplish major tasks, and meets modernization requirements. Its continuously improving institutional system and model can satisfy the spatial governance needs of Chinese-style modernization.

First, MFOZ demonstrates high consistency with the goals of Chinese-style modernization. As a spatial carrier for achieving modernization and common prosperity for the Chinese people through peaceful development, MFOZ aligns with the strategic connotations of Chinese-style modernization in coordinating material and spiritual civilization, achieving harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, and balancing development and security, protection and development, and qualitative and quantitative growth. Second, MFOZ will make due contributions to building a new development pattern. In achieving Chinese-style modernization, MFOZ will construct a territorial development and protection pattern oriented toward modernization goals, innovate regional high-quality development models that conform to new development concepts, and clarify paths for achieving harmonious coexistence between humans and nature across the country, providing spatial guarantees for the common prosperity of 1.4 billion Chinese people and the coordination of material and spiritual civilization. Third, MFOZ will provide guidance for different regions to explore differentiated paths toward Chinese-style modernization. The differentiated functional positioning determined for each county-level administrative unit and the categorized development directions formulated for different types of zones will help various MFOZ explore region-specific models of Chinese-style modernization according to local conditions and enable central, provincial, and autonomous region governments to match policy systems more targeted and effectively. Fourth, MFOZ will provide more comprehensive spatial support for Chinese-style modernization through strategic integration. As the basic map for implementing various national strategies and policies in space and optimizing the layout of major productive forces and projects, MFOZ is also the top-level design that adheres to

national coordination and integrates major regional strategies. Future efforts should promote deep integration between MFOZ strategy and regional coordinated development strategy and major regional strategies to provide overall strategic support for achieving Chinese-style modernization.

### **3.3 MFOZ Should Expand New Functions to Meet People' s Aspirations for a Better Life and National Security Needs**

MFOZ should adapt to new consumption hotspots and spatial location preferences arising from nationwide consumption upgrading, attach importance to new functional demands generated by “dual carbon” goals and supply chain security, and guarantee new territorial space for responding to new international geopolitical relations and globalization trends.

First, in key ecological function areas and urbanization areas, recreation and leisure areas should be listed as separate composite functions. This will help change the current situation where some key ecological function areas focus only on protection without considering the coordinated balance between protection and meeting people' s needs. Through comprehensive development of nature education, historical and cultural education, and related supporting industries, MFOZ can satisfy people' s growing demand to experience and appreciate China' s magnificent nature and rich history, promoting the formation of a truly sustainable domestic large-cycle system for recreation and leisure that can continuously inspire generations of Chinese people. Second, energy and mineral security guarantee areas should be listed as separate composite functions. This will not only better guarantee China' s energy and mineral security but also help these areas explore urbanization and industrialization paths suitable for themselves, avoiding potential problems of insufficient successor industries and serious social issues after resource depletion that might result from following general urban development patterns. Third, border areas should be listed as separate composite functions. This will fundamentally change the current situation where increasingly strict ecological protection requirements in border areas seriously affect border stability and defense construction, establishing the concept of border security and national security as the top priority in these regions.

### **3.4 MFOZ Should Establish More Precise Development Guidelines and Supporting Policies**

Using policies controlled by the Ministry of Natural Resources as the main body and relying on the spatial planning system, MFOZ should improve its supporting policy system to comprehensively ensure precise implementation.

First, fully utilize the achievements of territorial spatial planning system reform. Based on the MFOZ strategic pattern and county-level major function positioning, and integrating the demarcation results of “three zones and three lines,” MFOZ should determine a more precise spatial control target system and more targeted supporting policy system. It should maintain reasonable flexi-

bility for conversion between different MFOZ, allowing dynamic adjustment of MFOZ through scientific evaluation under the premise of being conducive to national overall development and security goals. Second, improve the MFOZ supporting policy system. Using policies controlled by the Ministry of Natural Resources as the main body, with performance evaluation policies and fiscal policies as key breakthroughs, and supported by industrial, environmental protection, and other departmental supporting policies, MFOZ should improve the policy system for ecological function areas while actively expanding supporting policies for urbanization areas and major agricultural product production areas. It should strengthen incentive policies adapted to different functional zones while improving restrictive policies, forming a powerful supporting policy system for MFOZ strategy. Third, comprehensively ensure precise implementation of MFOZ. MFOZ should maintain the same frequency and resonance between its strategic pattern and national development strategic pattern, clarify the MFOZ division scheme in territorial spatial planning as soon as possible, and specify the concrete composition list of different strategic patterns. Among the combination types of three major functions plus N composite functions, MFOZ should formulate more systematic and precise categorized development guidelines, spatial control indicators, and supporting policy systems. It should encourage local governments to explore and practice detailed MFOZ division and types and introduce local governance systems in improving the territorial spatial planning system.

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