



Exploring the role of urban festivals on urban development under Chinese urban planning

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Executive Summary

Chinese urban development has been influenced by growth supremacism for a long time. As a tool to control the growth of cities, Urban planning is also limited by its characteristics, which are economic growth and high profits first. Breaking these limitations is impossible for Chinese urban planners in the Chinese specific political system. Thus, the purpose of this research is to explore the role of urban festival on urban development under Chinese urban planning system. Through its role, Chinese urban planners might have a chance to start bottom-up urban planning. It will be helpful to the improvement of Chinese urban planning when growth supremacism is ended. The Boolean searches method is employed in this research to find the appropriate academic articles about the urban festival and urban development. Through the literature review, urban festival has good economic and social influences on the Chinese urban development though they both have limitations. However, it is still a good approach to increase the proportion of bottom-up urban planning in Chinese urban development under growth supremacism.

Introduction

Chinese Urban Development under Chinese Urban Planning

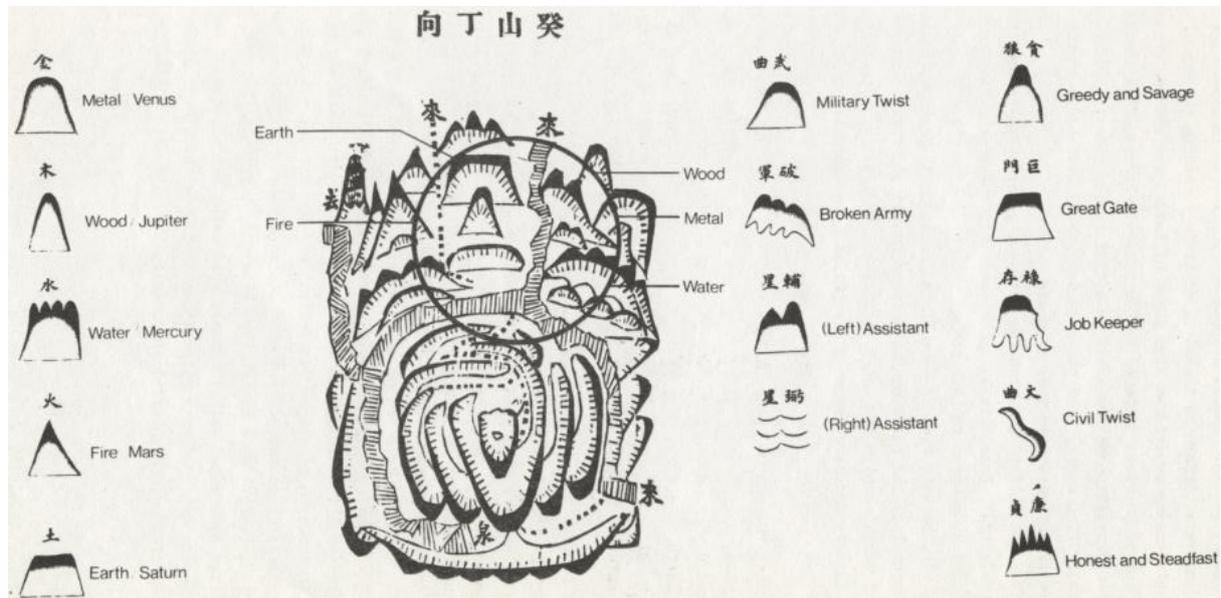


Figure 1. It is a specific landform in *Feng shui* and analysis of the landform by an auspicious circle. Source: *Patterns of the Sky and Earth: A Chinese Science of Applied Cosmology* (BENNETT, 1978)

Urban planning has a long history in China. In ancient times, cities were traditionally surrounded by walls and placed according to *Feng shui*¹, which continues to enlighten the rule of Chinese traditional urban composition (DOUAY and Black 2017, 1). In the modern periods, the characteristics of urban planning were affected by the Western world, as a source of inspiration. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Nationalist party pursued urban-oriented modernization policies that conformed to the characteristics of rational planning, as seen in

¹ It also known as Chinese geomancy, is an ancient Chinese traditional practice which claims to use energy forces to harmonize individuals with their surrounding environment. The term feng shui means, literally, "wind-water". From ancient times, landscapes and bodies of water were thought to direct the flow of the universal Qi – "cosmic current" or energy – through places and structures. Because Qi has the same patterns as wind and water, a specialist who understands them can affect these flows to improve wealth, happiness, long life, and family; on the other hand, the wrong flow of Qi brings bad results.

European and American cities (DOUAY and Black 2017, 1). As an important part of the current Chinese urban planning system, the Planning Institute² was gradually established in the 1950s with reference to the Soviet Union model (DOUAY and Black 2017, 1). Since then, the Planning Institute has become an important part of the Chinese urban planning system. The establishment of the Planning Institute followed the idea of separating "administration" from "technology" to avoid too many administrative and political factors. However, the goal is far more ideal than the reality.

According to Figure 2, with an average annual economic growth rate of 9.7% since 1978, China has created large-scale and sustained growth never seen in the world (Liu et al. 2017, 1).

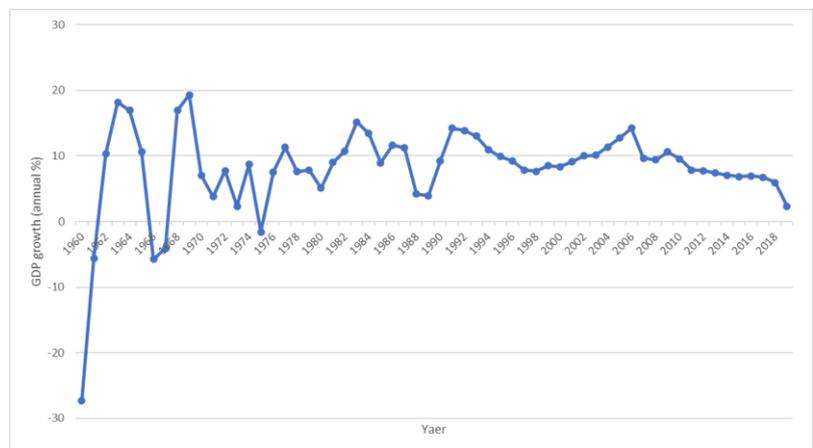


Figure 2. Chinese GDP Growth rates since 1960. Created by Author. Source: The World Bank

In the 1980s, through the study of the post-war Japanese

economy, some scholars revealed for the first time that Japan pursued "growth supremacism" strategy (Zhang et al. 2013, 45). It put economic growth first and high profits first. Through analyzing the so-called "high growth" phenomenon in China in the past nearly 30 years, it is obvious that this kind of growth supremacism caused the emergence of the "China miracle".

² Various urban planning and design and consulting agencies compose the Planning Institute.

In fact, since the *reform and opening up*³, the influence of growth supremacism has not only affected the field of economic growth, but has also permeated all aspects of the whole development system, which includes urban planning.

In the past 20 years, the economic growth mode driven by investment and external demand has greatly suppressed the development of the Chinese endogenous economy and private economy (Zhang et al. 2013, 48). After 1994, the implementation of the system of tax distribution made local governments actively collect financial resources from off-budget, especially from land expropriation (Zhang et al. 2013, 48). To a great extent, the rapid growth of the Chinese economy is achieved by the expansion of urban space. Therefore, urban space is the core means by which growth supremacism can realize capital appreciation and accumulation, and distribution of wealth and resources (Zhang et al. 2013, 47).

As a technical and political process to guide orderly development over an area, coordinate the interests of all parties and coordinate various problems, urban planning is also affected by growth supremacism. Because public interest is one of the most important values orientations of urban planning, the pursuit of economic growth becomes the greatest public interest of Chinese urban planning under the impact of growth supremacism. Under the role of the powerful urban government, the government is not only the main body of urban planning compilation, but also the main and direct driving force of urban planning

³ The Chinese economic *reform or reform and opening up*, known in the West as the opening of China, is the program of economic reforms termed "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" and "socialist market economy" in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Led by Deng Xiaoping, often credited as the "General Architect", the reforms were launched by reformists within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on December 18, 1978, during the "Boluan Fanzheng" period.

implementation. It objectively plays the role of promoting economic growth. However, urban planning also becomes an important system tool to rake in enormous profits for many local urban governments. Through the construction of the industrial area, new districts, and other big urban planning, the local urban government can implement land increments to realize the capital cycle of space exploitation and income. As a result, urban decision-makers often regard urban planning as a tool to achieve their political achievements during their term of office. This situation causes urban planning to focus on short-term growth targets and lack concern for long-term sustainable development. In addition, current Chinese land finance essentially relies on overdrawing the future income of social-economic growth to seek immediate rapid growth.

Because of these many disadvantages, growth supremacism must be terminated in the future (Zhang et al. 2013, 45). Its end means that action of the city government that actively implements the planning vision through a top-down approach will be greatly weakened. The implementation of urban planning will mainly rely on a bottom-up process, an uncertain market, and social micro-subjects' demands and applications. However, the market currently is mostly placed in a secondary or passive state of acceptance, and the participatory enthusiasm of market subjects, urban residents, is inhibited. To improve this situation, a change in urban planning is extremely urgent. The possibility is less for urban planners to start a revolution in Chinese urban planning because of the imbalance of weight between administration and technology in urban planning. The problem that is addressed in this Professional Project is, how could Chinese urban planners try to increase the proportion of bottom-up urban planning in Chinese urban development under growth supremacism?

Currently, the urban festival can be a good approach to achieve this goal. Its influences are limited, but they are important to urban development. Thus, the local government will not see it as *ultra vires*⁴. There is more space for urban planners to boldly do their own work and let the urban festivals play their role in urban development.

Research Method

To get information on urban festivals' impacts and limitations on urban development, I use Boolean searches on three databases, namely Web of Science, Scopus, and Academic Search. The keywords that I used in the Boolean searches include urban festivals, urban development, Chinese urban planning, experience economy, sense of belonging, and place image. Through three basic Boolean search commands, AND, OR and NOT, I identified several academic journals. Zhang, Zhao, and Chen (2013) introduced growth supremacism, and its influence on Chinese urban development and Chinese urban planning. Johansson and Kociatkiewicz (2011) applied an experience economy framework to analyze city festivals as potentially transformative practices, helping re-imagine urban space and reshape urban identity. Finkel and Platt (2020) analyzed the relationship between cultural festivals and cities on social, economic, and political aspects. Li, Wang, and Chen (2020) analyzed successful South Korean festival activities for offering countermeasures and suggestions for Chinese festivals.

⁴ *Ultra vires* ('beyond the powers') is a Latin phrase used in law to describe an act which requires legal authority but is done without it. Its opposite, an act done under proper authority, is *intra vires* ('within the powers'). Acts that are *intra vires* may equivalently be termed "valid", and those that are *ultra vires* termed "invalid".

There are two search criteria for paper retrieval. First, only academic articles from 2000 to 2020 were selected for subsequent reviews. The urban festival is a very neoteric approach to promoting urban development. Its trend of growth accompanies the experience economy. Second, the source types only include academic journals and books.

Result

Urban Festival



Figure 3. The upper left corner is Burning man, the upper right corner is Oktoberfest, the lower left corner is Boryeong Mud, the lower right corner is Fallas. Source: ABC News, Mitcham & Carshalton RUFC, PichiAvo, ABC News

There are many different local festivals in different areas and cities, such as Burning man⁵, Oktoberfest⁶, Boryeong Mud⁷, Fallas⁸, etc (Figure 3). The festivals that are celebrated in a specific city are called city festivals or urban festivals. According to Marjana and Jerzy's explanation, "a popular organizational form for creating experience spaces, and for marketing cities, is the urban festival"(Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011, 2). Urban festivals might focus on distinctive elements, food, culture, art, etc. They also focus on both or all of them. Urban festivals can bring many positive influences on economic and social side of Chinese cities. For example, they can contribute to cities' positive image, economic growth, sense of identity, etc. (McClinchey 2008, 252)(Herrero et al. 2007, 303-304). Through the urban festival, many stakeholders are involved in the same activity. A communicational environment would be created for the stakeholders. These benefits make urban festivals play an important role in urban development. Moreover, this role is more inclined to the bottom-up methods of urban planning, which is the lack of most Chinese urban development under Chinese urban planning.

⁵ An event focused on community, art, self-expression, and self-reliance held annually in the western United States. The name of the event comes from its culminating ceremony: the symbolic burning of a large wooden effigy.

⁶ The world's largest Volksfest, featuring a beer festival and a travelling funfair. It is held annually in Munich, Bavaria, Germany. It is a 16- to 18-day folk festival running from mid- or late-September to around the first Sunday in October, with more than six million people from around the world attending the event every year.

⁷ An annual festival which takes place during the summer in Boryeong, a town around 200 km south of Seoul, South Korea.

⁸ A traditional celebration held annually in commemoration of Saint Joseph in the city of Valencia, Spain. The five main days celebrated are from 15 to 19 March, while the Masclatà, a pyrotechnic spectacle of firecracker detonation and fireworks display, takes place every day from 1 to 19 March. The term Falles refers to both the celebration and the monuments burnt during the celebration.

The Values of Urban Festival on urban development

“Throughout history, people from all over the world have set aside time for communal celebration and festive experiences”(Finkel and Platt 2020, 1). There are many different ways, carnivals, fairs, parades, and festivals. They can bring different feelings about normal life to the people who attend the festival. Finkel and Platt also noted, “It has been widely accepted by scholars for some time that, historically, festivals were temporary escapes from the mundane nature of everyday routines and bring people out of the ordinary reality of their lives”(Finkel and Platt 2020, 1). However, festivals have more functions than these scholars thought. There are many influences of urban festivals on cities’ development. They mostly get together in the economic, social areas.

In economic area, urban festivals play a more and more important role. After the emergence of symbolic economy⁹ and experience economy¹⁰ concept, exciting experiences can be produced to attract consumers to the market without goods or services (Richards and Wilson 2004, 1932). In addition, “Cities have always been hubs for celebration and festivity, drawing people together to interact in ways” (Finkel and Platt 2020, 3). Thus, the experience economy makes creation of value that bases on experience become real to urban.

⁹ We provisionally define “symbolic economy” as a complex system in which transactions aim at assigning and transferring symbolic values through a co-emerging semiotic medium.

¹⁰ The term "Experience Economy" was first used in a 1998 article by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore. They argue that businesses must orchestrate memorable events for their customers, and that memory itself becomes the product: the "experience". More advanced experience businesses can begin charging for the value of the "transformation" that an experience offers.

“Experiences space involves cultural, social activities that the city has to offer” (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011, 2). By remodeling the city’s environment to build experience space, it can get economic benefits. To attract people, the urban festival is the priority importance to the experience economy. Therefore, urban festival become a popular organizational form for creating distinctive experience spaces and marketing cities (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011, 2).

Due to urban festival’s economic function, it can increase local consumptions, bring visitors, and offers jobs. If experiences of the urban festival are attractive and exciting enough, it even can build special manufactories and businesses that can bring more consumptions and jobs.



Figure 4. Thousands of performers scatter all over Edinburgh to perform all kinds of shows, from huge names to budding comedians looking to build their careers. Source: Edinburgh Fringe Festival Facebook

Taking Edinburgh Festivals as one example, as the few UK urban festivals that can attract large numbers of international visitors (Finkel and Platt 2020, 6), the service economy is its largest growth sector that represents 80% of its GDP (Jamieson 2004, 74). “Overseas

tourism in the Edinburgh area is worth an estimated £325m, about one-third of the Scottish total.” (Jamieson 2004, 74). In August, thousands of visitors come to this place so that it helps Edinburgh create thousands of jobs (Finkel and Platt 2020, 6). Taking Chengdu as the other example, as the city that creates the best experience space in China, its exciting experience brings an enormous economic benefit. Its local culture and food does not only create jobs and consumptions, but also builds its own production line of food and business.

In social area, festivals are always important throughout the history of world (Hassanli, Walters, and Williamson 2021). Cultural affiliation of human beings consists of basic elements such as individuals, families, clans, communities, ethnic groups, regions, and countries. These elements include language, kinship, religious beliefs, local beliefs and customs, clothing traditions, eating habits, literature and art, entertainment, and competition. They can seem as “symbols.” Many "symbols" and the social relations that are connected by this "symbol" system form a comprehensive cultural network. Everyone can find their own place in it. Festivals are the time node that highlights this cultural identity (Finkel and Platt 2020, 2). Through the direct experience in this network, people recognize themselves and their groups(Finkel and Platt 2020, 2). Thus, festivals are an important carrier of cultural identity. The experiences on festivals help people to build their complete memory. This kind of memory goes round and round and accompanies the life course of each social member. They form a labeling system for identification and separation to people.

Therefore, urban festivals as a classification of festivals would inherit these values, which would let residents create the sense of belonging to local cities. This sense of identity would play an important role in retaining highly skilled workers and educated groups. To a

lot of Chinese cities, which are in the transition, it is a big benefit. High-skilled workers and educated groups are the keys for modern cities to be successful. In addition, urban festival also can help the city to recast its urban image and relieve social contradiction (Hassanli, Walters, and Williamson 2021, 5). Like Shin presented, “a city's image is critical in providing an environment attractive to highly skilled workers and such newly arising industries as those in the areas of advanced technology and culture” (Shin 2004, 1). The reduction of social contradiction will also improve social stability. As a result, the urban can get its deserved development.

Discussion

Limitations of Urban Festivals

Although urban festivals can bring many positive influences on economy and society of Chinese cities, urban festivals still have their limitation. Sometime, urban festivals would cause over-reliance on their economic influences. According to previous content, Edinburgh is an example of urban festivals' positive economic influences. However, it is like an iceberg. In other words, there are some bad implications behind its big achievement. “A survey of advertised vacancies in 1997 revealed that 47% of Edinburgh's jobs were part-time, a proportion which exceeded Scotland's own average” (Jamieson 2004, 74). “Two thirds of the vacancies were in retail and hotel/catering, and here average wages were lower than the Scottish average, with 84% vacancies paying below the Low Pay Unit's then minimum wage target of £4.61 per hour” (Jamieson 2004, 74). Some working groups in Edinburgh have high incomes because of the urban festivals and their unique job. They boost the local per capita

income. However, others are more likely to have part-time and/or seasonal jobs that earn less and may be more vulnerable to poverty (Jamieson 2004, 74). The reason for these phenomena is the local economy loses its diversity. As a result, the local economic safety would face big challenges when black swan theory happens.



Figure 5. Flashback Funk festival 2020 in Uncasville, United States. Source: FestivAll

In addition, urban festivals would attract a lot of visitors to cities (Tsaur et al. 2019, 27). City is the place that has a high-density population. It means the space is limited whatever the range of a city is. A lot of visitors mean the lack of space (Finkel and Platt 2020, 6). The visitors might compete in the public space with residents. According to a survey, “many local residents view their city differently during the festival and resent the crowds, traffic congestion, crime and other negatives that increased tourism can bring” (Finkel and Platt 2020, 6). They are also concerned about the environmental influences because of the negative externality of the urban festival. “Emphasis on catering to tourists can often lead to the appropriation of public space to the detriment of locals” (Finkel and Platt 2020, 6). Urban environment is a basic and necessary element when people choose where they want to live. If people feel they are excluded from their own spaces and in their own celebrations, they may

feel disappointed and choose a different place to live. For urban development, population is the base of everything (Duan 2012, 280). Thus, an over-developed urban festival might cause migration of population, which affect the urban development (He et al. 2019).

The progressing of urban festival needs to keep a balance. Development of a city cannot completely rely on urban festival; the local consumptions and other industries also need to get development as well as the local infrastructures. Sustainable urban development needs a balanced progressing on every field. There are some good suggestions. Acceptable placing thresholds on the growth of urban festival. Using the economic benefits of urban festivals to invest in research and development, and compensate other industries.

How Can Urban Festivals Play Its Role in China?

Urban festivals can provide economic and social advantages to the growth of Chinese cities. Economic benefits come from the experience economy; social benefits come from the urban festival's own value as cultural production. A successful urban festival must have certain local, historical, and cultural elements. They would bring life to urban festival because of their uniqueness, which contributes to the originality and characteristic of urban festival. "Any innovations are the transformation and reorganization based on the existing things" (Li, Wang, and Chen 2020, 105). Therefore, urban festival's base is the unique local, historical, and cultural elements. It is the most important part that can make it play its role. Although China has a vast territory and abundant resources with a long history and a large nationality, its urban festival still has issues , "such as the lack of cultural excavation, homogenization of content, lack of overall thematic awareness, and low participation of the masses" (Li, Wang,

and Chen 2020). Therefore, the importance of a good urban festival is the deep excavation of local uniqueness in culture, environment, and history.



Figure 6. Muju firefly festival use a mixture of stunning natural light sources, and impressive light expositions to create one of the most unforgettable experiences of urban festival in South Korea. Source: SnackFever

South Korea is in East Asia, just like China. Its history and culture have large similarities with China because they come from the same root. Thus, its good urban festivals can play a strong reference in Chinese urban festival's development. There are many good examples, such as Muju firefly festival, Jeju wildfire festival¹¹, etc. Muju firefly festival is one of the best examples. Its background is global environmental damage and the collapse of

¹¹ It is the world's greatest fire festival that reinterprets the cattle farming traditions of Jeju through a modern sense. The festival's roots come from a tradition called "bangae," which is to burn down the fields during the time between late winter and early spring. This renews the greens and exterminates vermin before the horses and cows are set free on the fields to graze.

firefly population in Muju (Li, Wang, and Chen 2020, 103). It is obvious that this festival has a high ecological and educational value (Li, Wang, and Chen 2020, 103). It also keeps its uniqueness as an urban festival. The element of Muju firefly festival targets the special thing in the environment of Muju, firefly. It does not only bring the sense of pride and the sense of belonging to the local residents, but it also attracts visitors to attend the festival. Fireflies are the children hood memory of a lot of people who were born here. They have special social values, which can separate Muju from other cities. In other words, they can create a sense of identity for residents. In addition, Muju firefly festival advocates the concept of protecting the environment, which can let people feel a sense of pride. To visitors, fireflies are beautiful insect, but they are not common insect that can see in everywhere. Therefore, fireflies have their own uniqueness, and are attractive to visitors. Muju firefly festival presents how important a local special theme is to a good urban festival.

Moreover, deep cultural excavation also has two other parts. First, in order to deeply excavate the local element, local academic conferences can be held regularly for research and exchange about the successful cases of the good urban festival around the world (Li, Wang, and Chen 2020, 105). For example, the researchers noted that “food is becoming the main attraction for tourists who wish to taste something new, whether exotic delicacies or very simple traditional specialties of a region” (Gagić et al. 2012, 1055). Thus, food will be more and more important in the urban festival because the urban festival is an experience economy. It is also the reason why a lot of urban festivals focuses on food. A good urban festival needs to follow the trend to get continuous benefits for urban development. The second part is innovation of urban festival. For the festival’s content, stakeholders have the responsibility to

contribute to its analysis, in-depth development and reconstructions so that urban festival has more new activities on the basis of existing content (Li, Wang, and Chen 2020, 105).

Summary, Conclusions, and Policy Implications

Although Chinese urban planning is still limited by the political situation and growth supremacism, the urban festival might be the chance to break the blockades. Like Li, Wang, and Chen showed, “Participants of the urban festival can grasp the uniqueness and characteristics of the urban festival through planning, and further actively participate in activities, so as to promote the development of regional economy, social culture and ecological environment” (Li, Wang, and Chen 2020, 105). Through urban festivals, Chinese urban planners can increase the proportion of bottom-up urban planning in Chinese urban development under growth supremacism because communication is bilateral during the urban festival. The whole process of urban festivals is full of communication. In addition, many stakeholders are involved in the same activity by urban festivals. There are performers, travelers, residents, volunteers, small retailers, entrepreneurs, and public sectors. As a result of the respective goals of different stakeholders and their understandings of cities and urban festivals, it is easy to have conflicts (George 2015, 125). These issues can be eliminated through communication. Urban planners are the appropriate intermediaries between both and the appropriate organizers.

It is the best of times; it is the worst of times. As a developing country, China is still in the process of pursuing developed countries. Its many fields still have enormous potential for development. Urban festival is one of them. Many Chinese cities still don't realize the

potential power of urban festivals can bring to urban development. China is at the crossroad of economic transformation. Many past advantages of urban development are disappearing, and opportunities for urban development are written in water. The political situation also prevents bottom-up innovation in urban development. If urban doesn't currently seize the opportunities, urban development will be more and more difficult in the future. Although there are many obstacles on the road of urban and regional development, Chinese urban planners still need to struggle for the future of Chinese urban development and the innovation of Chinese urban planning.

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