

EDITORIAL

Open Access



# Launch editorial

Zhiqiang Siegfried Wu\*

Several facts are certain now. First, the scale of urbanization in China has reached a world-class level. The amount of farmers moving into cities or the migration within urban regions in China becomes a world-level phenomenon. Second, urban planning professionals all over the world want to know what is happening in China's urban and rural planning. Third, the construction process of China's national spatial planning system could be open to the world planning academia, so the world may know, in what aspects and at what stages planners are doing for the modernization of China.

For many years, I have been thinking about the differences between “guihua (planning)” in China and planning in Western civilizations. In addition to the commonly recognized differences in political background, history and culture, what are the real genetic differences? The answer came to me when I was doing planning research in Nanyang, Henan Province. In Chinese characters, “guihua (planning)” is composed of “规(gui)” and “划(hua)”. The character “规(gui)” is composed of the calligraphic units “夫 (fu)” and “见(jian)”, which mean “the member of state council” in ancient and the “opinion and ideas” respectively, indicating the will from the top. And the character “划(hua)”, in its traditional form “劃”, is composed of the units meaning a painting (畫) and a saber (刀). However, in its modern simplified form “划”, the character is only composed of a dagger-axe (戈) and a saber (刀), with its connotation emphasizing on laws and regulations instead of the more poetic sense in its traditional context. Rethinking the original meaning and structural elements of Chinese characters has indeed provided a new

perspective. When our generation learned about “guihua (planning)”, we learned it as “planning”. Almost all concepts, values, techniques, and the system construction of “guihua (planning)” are under an English language framework.

In fact, in the contemporary *guihua* (planning) in China, many traditional Chinese cultural hints could be traced. For example, as the counterpart of “neighborhood composition”, we have Jiayuan (a larger-family-based household unit), traditional villages, temples and ancestral halls. They are ways of organizing life under the traditional Chinese family philosophy, but are different from the concepts in modern Western Cities. For another example, Chinese cities usually adopt trinal-level management systems, namely, cities, city districts and sub-districts, which is also influenced by the cultural genes of Chinese tradition. Another typical spatial organization mode in Chinese cities is the storefronts with manufacturing space in the backyards. Such storefronts have gradually been developed from the social communication space in agricultural societies into those in urban social environments. We Chinese prefer to arrange processions around streets on the occasions of either funerals or weddings. However, in the context of Western culture and modern urban planning theories, there have never been any specialized instructions on street spatial planning for funeral or wedding processions. Likewise, although many spatial organization phenomena are inevitable scenes in our lives, no corresponding planning theories can be found in the current urban planning system, as they do not exist in the Western theoretical framework or the knowledge network of urban planning. That's why we sometimes see incomprehensible points or blanks in urban and rural planning.

If we wish to explain to the world how China's urban-rural planning and spatial planning practice are doing, is the term “planning” all-sided enough to convey all the

\*Correspondence:

Zhiqiang Siegfried Wu  
wus@tongji.edu.cn

College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, 1239  
Siping Road, Yangpu District, Shanghai 200092, China



connotations? Or could it tell more if we use the Chinese term GUIHUA (the Pinyin alphabet of “planning” in Chinese)? After profound thinking, we decided on the latter, as GUIHUA better declares the journal’s historical function as to tell the world the facts of planning in China and the stories behind it. With this purpose, we named this journal “Frontiers of Urban and Rural Planning” and keep the Chinese term GUIHUA as the journal’s subheading and theme.

We will select outstanding papers on urban and rural planning practice policies, technologies and methodology for our readers over the world, who are concerned about planning in China. We hope to show our readers the important milestone in the process of constructing China’s urban-rural planning system. We are also documenting this historic period, when multiple planning practices emerge and are viewed from multiple perspectives amid this grand event. Hence, we present to you, the journal “Frontiers of Urban and Rural Planning”.

**Author’s contributions**

The author(s) read and approved the final manuscript.

**Declarations**

**Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Published online: 10 January 2023

**Publisher’s Note**

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.