

The Relationship of Skateboard Culture and Modern Street in China

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Abstract: With the introduction of skateboarding in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games and the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, the influence of skateboarding in China improves constantly, and it has played a role in the transformation of Chinese streets. This essay analyzes the reasons of the different influences of Chinese and American skateboard culture on their respective streets, discusses the acceptance degree of Chinese streets to skateboard culture and the influence of skateboard culture on Chinese streets through questionnaire survey. Research shows that skateboard culture mainly plays a positive catalytic role in Chinese streets, which can make the streets younger, diversified and interesting. However, due to insufficient attention to skateboard culture, problems such as noise, rising pavement maintenance costs, personal safety hazards, and street shop conflicts appear. Taking into account the above problems, suggestions to further transform the street are proposed. In the future, it can also consider distinguishing the skateboarder and pedestrian flow lines and setting some transition space.

Keywords: skateboard culture, streets, positive catalysis, danger and conflict

1. Introduction

Skateboarding culture originated in the United States. In the development of skateboarding culture, American streets were the first to be affected, and most of these influences tended to be negative. Skateboarders were particularly disliked in the late 1980s and 1990s, even treated as common criminals. People in the United States avoided skateboarders. Legislation was later introduced to ban skateboarders from public areas, impose curfews on skateboards, and issue "no skateboarding" tickets and fines. In China, the influence of skateboard culture on streets shows a different trend from that of American skateboard culture. China's skateboard culture mainly has a positive influence on the streets, but problems and conflicts also appear in the process of combining skateboard culture with Chinese streets. Therefore, it is of great significance to find the different influences of Chinese and American skateboard culture on streets and study the reasons for that. At the same time, it also has a reference significance for optimizing the combination of skateboard culture and Chinese streets.

This article analyzes the difference in the influence of skateboard culture on Chinese and American streets, understands the caused factors, and discusses the acceptance and change of Chinese streets to skateboard culture and the influence of Chinese skateboard culture on Chinese streets through the questionnaire. Based on the analysis results, the relevant suggestions are also put forward.

2. Background of Skateboarding Culture

2.1. Skateboarding Culture in America

According to Ian Boden's research, skateboarding culture originated in the United States, dating back to California in the 1950s and 1960s. Surf culture was sweeping the United States and was popular with young people in the 1950s and 1960s. Due to the environmental demands of surfing, surfing is only available for about three months a year. Young Americans who love surfing invented a new sport called "land surfing", skateboarding. With the appearance of polyurethane (PU) pulley and maple skateboards, people can use skateboards to make more difficult moves (such as Ollie and other vertical skateboard moves), so the excitement and fun of skateboards have been greatly improved.

The popularity of skateboarding in the United States has grown quickly, and the number of skate parks has skyrocketed. However, in 1966, the safety of skateboards began to be questioned in the United States, causing the popularity of skateboarding culture to plummet. Most skate parks in the United States were closed due to declining popularity and high maintenance costs, and thus skaters are turning to the streets. As skateboarding interfered with the operation of American streets, the United States government began to restrict skateboarding. Many skaters began to rebel, trespass into another person's house, and occupy the road. American skateboarding culture has become increasingly rebellious.

2.2. Skateboarding Culture in China

The development of Chinese skateboarding culture is relatively late, and can be divided into three stages. The first stage was from 1990 to 2000. During this period, skateboarding culture mostly developed freely and had low influence. The second stage is from 2000 to 2010. This is a period of detente between China and the United States and the improvement of cultural inclusiveness. Skateboarding culture spreaded rapidly from Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing and other developed areas, gradually to the surrounding cities. The third stage is from 2010 to the present. This is the period of normative development, and skateboarding has developed as a sport [1].

Because China's urbanization process is relatively slow, there is plenty of space for skateboarding. Since the late 1990s, with the accelerated process of globalization and the progress of science and technology, more young Chinese people know Western culture for the first time and express their yearning for it. Therefore, skateboarding culture in China has a good living environment like a greenhouse. Due to the inherent destructiveness of skateboarding, Chinese skateboarding culture is relatively "moderate", and "rebellious", "destructive" or other bad elements are less, reflecting the difference from mainstream Chinese culture [1].

2.3. The Reason for Different Influences of the Skateboard on Chinese and American Streets

2.3.1. Cities Develop Differently

In the United States, the process of urbanization is earlier than the development of skateboarding. Most streets in the United States lack consideration for skateboarding, which leads to the conflict between skateboarding culture and the city. This environment feeds the rebelliousness of American skateboarding culture. However, China's urbanization process is relatively late, and skateboarding culture has become popular in recent decades. Therefore, most of the streets have land that has not been planned or used yet, which can be used for skateboarding. The rebelliousness and destructiveness of skateboarding in this environment are also greatly reduced.

2.3.2. Skateboarding Developed in a Different Era

In the 1970s to 1980s, the United States was in a period of new culture bursting out, with numerous "rebellious" cultures emerging, such as hip-hop and graffiti. The skateboard culture has been affected by rebellious cultures. In addition, the regulation of skateboarding in the United States has expanded the negative impact of skateboarding. In China, the development period of skateboarding coincides with the period when China actively accepts the world. Chinese have a good attitude towards cultural acceptance and tolerance. Therefore, the influence of skateboarding is also relatively positive.

3. Methods

3.1. Introduction of Research Methods

The method used in this paper is questionnaire survey to find the relationship between the skateboard culture and the street through a questionnaire survey, and analyze the survey results. Consider that the main demographic for skateboarding is young people in college. Therefore, college students from four universities in Dongguan, Guangzhou and Shantou and skaters nearby are selected as the main research group. There are 34 skaters on and off campus, including 23 skaters on campus and 11 skaters off campus.

3.2. Questions of Survey Questionnaire

- (1) Where is your main skateboarding location?
- (2) Do you skateboard alone?
- (3) How do you meet other skateboarders?
- (4) What is your original purpose for skateboarding?
- (5) How about the facilities at the skateboarding venue?
- (6) Do you attract other people's attention when you skateboard?
- (7) What is the age of the other skaters you meet while skateboarding?
- (8) How do you learn skateboarding?

4. Results of the Research

- (1) The main age group of Chinese skateboarders is 12 to 22 years old (Figure 1).
- (2) The original intention of Chinese skateboarders is mainly to use skateboarding as a way of sport. They like the exquisite skills and exciting challenges of skateboarding and use skateboarding to socialize. However, using skateboarding to combat domestic discipline did not appear in the survey (Figure 2).
- (3) Most skateboarders in China play together and learn from each other (Figure 3).
- (4) Campus and streets are the main venues for skateboarding in China, followed by skate parks, the space in front of commercial buildings, and indoor skate parks (Figure 4).
- (5) Current situation of skateboard street: more than half of skateboard streets have simple skateboard facilities. Nearly two-thirds of the skateboarders think that the environment of the skateboard street is good (Figure 4).
- (6) The main hazards of skateboarding are injuries to the skaters, followed by noise and injuries to passers-by (Figure 5). The attraction of the skateboard to the surroundings is very high (Figure 6).

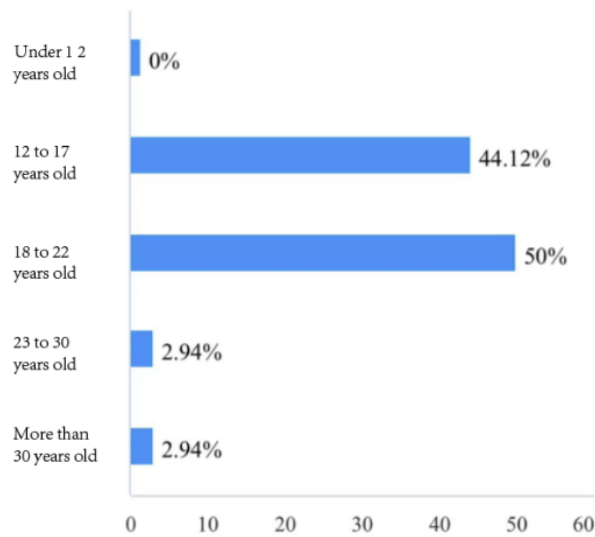


Figure 1: The age structure of skateboarders

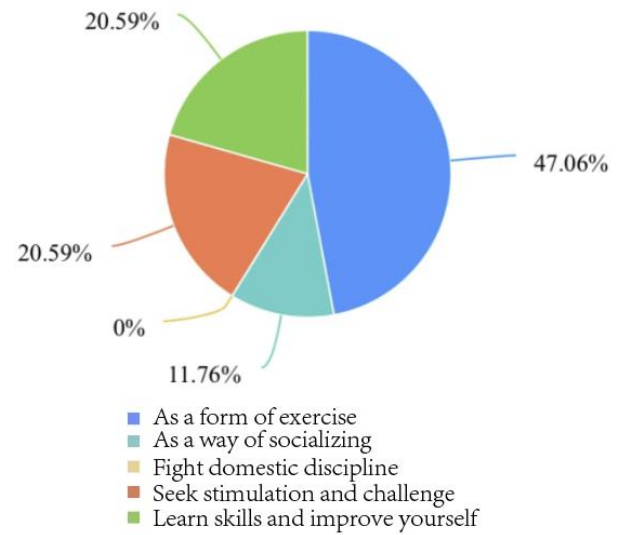


Figure 2: The original intention of skateboarding



Figure 3: (Left) The percentage of people who play skateboard alone; (Middle) The way to learn skateboarding; (Right) The way to know skateboarders

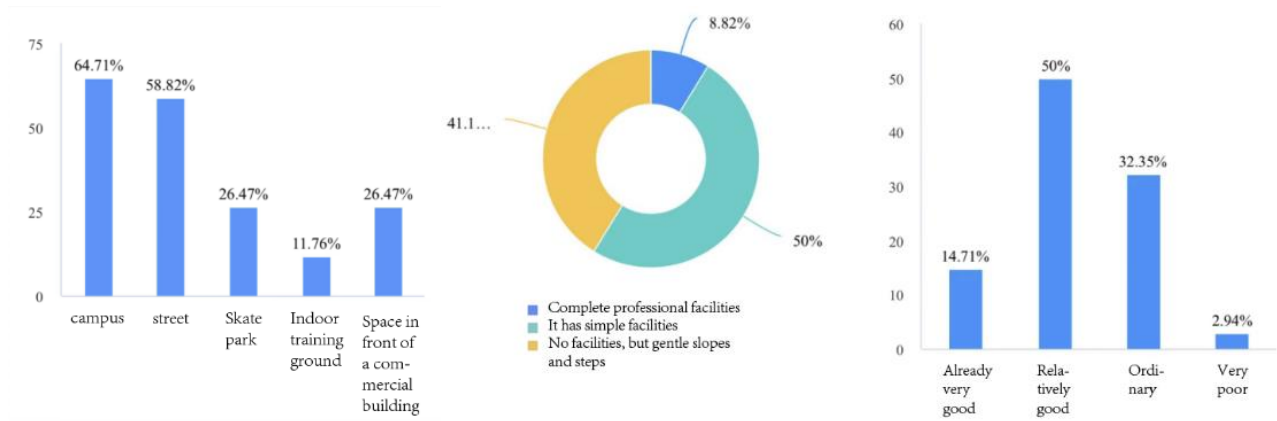


Figure 4: (Left) Distribution of Skateboard venues; (Middle) Distribution of skateboard facilities; (Right) Evaluation of skateboard venues

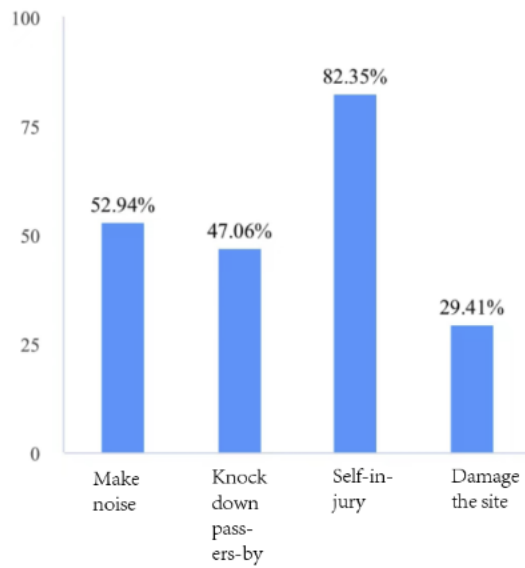


Figure 5: Harms of skateboard

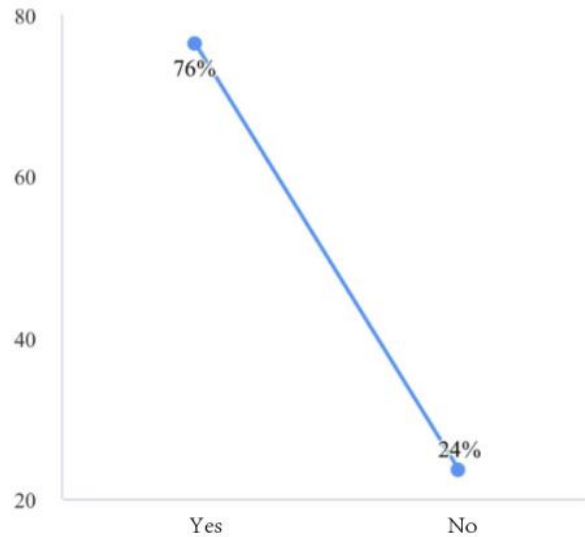


Figure 6: The percentage of people who are attracted when skateboarding

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. The Differences between Chinese and American Skateboarding Cultures

Because the background of American and Chinese skateboard culture is different. Referring to Figure 2, the percentage of Chinese skateboarders who learn to skateboard because they are against family discipline is as low as 0% in the data. Chinese skaters like the excitement and challenge of skateboarding, as well as the exquisite skills of skateboarding. They tend to regard skateboarding as a way to enrich themselves before starting to learn skateboarding, while some American skaters learn skateboarding because they are attracted by the rebelliousness of skateboarding.

5.2. The Acceptance of Skateboarding Culture on Chinese Streets

With the development of skateboarding culture, some first-tier and new first-tier cities in China begin to choose streets to build skateboard venues. They show an attitude of acceptance, but their attention to skateboarding is still insufficient. At present, there are two sources of skateboard sites. One is to give unused space on the street to skateboard enterprises to build, and the other is to transform the existing space to provide skateboards.

5.2.1. Use Unused Space to Build

The AVENUE & SON Taikoo Li flagship store on the Shanghai foreshore is a typical example of an unused space built by a skateboard company. AVENUE & SON Taikoo Li flagship store in Shanghai Foreshore connects indoor and outdoor spaces, combining skateboard streets with shops, breaking the inherent boundaries of thought and space. An open and inclusive street space is built from the outside to the inside (Figure 7), allowing people of different ages to enjoy skateboarding and directly experience the fun of skateboarding culture [2]. The skateboard street has also been built to look gorgeous, due to the commercial nature of AVENUE & SON's flagship Taikoo Li store on Shanghai's foreshore. But upscale skateboarding streets like AVENUE & SON's flagship store on Shanghai's

foreshore are rare in China. The first reason for this situation is that there are few large-scale skateboard enterprises in China, and most skateboard shops are small enterprises, which makes it difficult to undertake the construction of unused space. The second is the high cost of operation, ordinary skateboard shops cannot pay for the high cost.

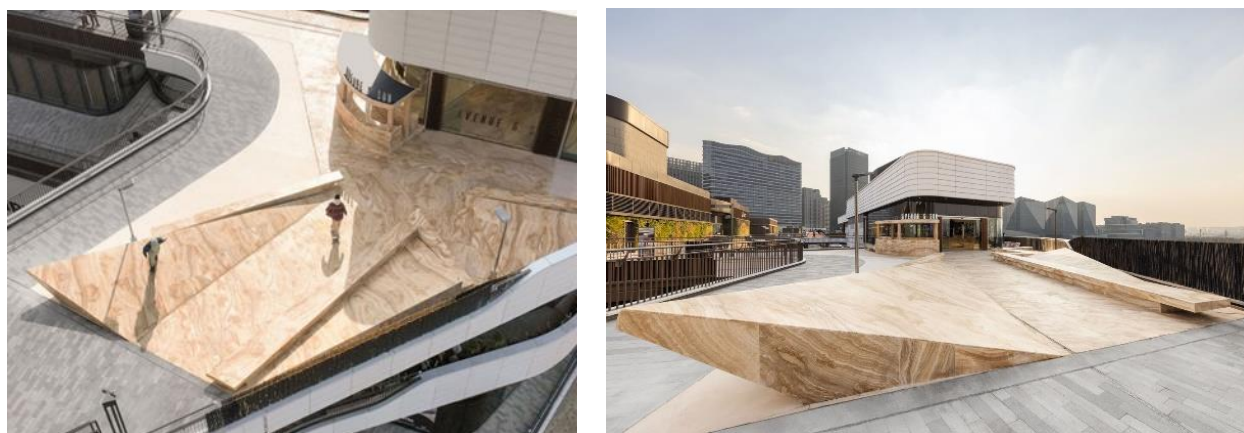


Figure 7: AVENUE & SON Taikoo Li flagship store in Shanghai Foreshore

5.2.2. Transform the Existing Space

At present, transforming the existing space is the most important source to provide skateboards, and the transformation methods mainly fall into two categories.

The first method is to place the facilities of skateboards directly on the street. For example, Raffles in Wuhou District of Chengdu, Sichuan Province and Hei De Hui One City in Dongguan, Guangdong Province (Figure 8). This kind of transformation is very fast but not deep enough, which could cause conflicts between streets and skateboards. The direct placement of skateboard facilities has enriched the interest in the street space to a certain extent. A series of floating gentle slopes and slight height differences make the old streets dynamic. But at the same time, it also brings a series of problems. For instance, the distribution of skateboarding facilities on the street makes the street narrow. Pedestrians and Skateboarders collide with each other and the streets become more chaotic.

The second method is to restructure the road surface, giving elevation difference and adding slope. This is one of the best ways to integrate skate culture with the streets. This way of transformation is comprehensive, and the skateboard naturally integrates with the surrounding environment, but it takes a long time to build. For example, the skateboard street of Pazhou Bridge in Guangzhou (Figure 9). The road in Pazhou Bridge in Guangzhou is divided into two lines, one for pedestrians and the other for skateboarders. Because the gentle slopes or steps are formed from the pavement, they blend in well with the surrounding environment. In contrast to putting the skateboarding facilities directly like Raffles mentioned above, the skateboard road in Pazhou Bridge is more likely to be there from the start, with fewer impacts. But such skateboard streets are also rare in China due to the high cost and time required to build them.

As shown in Figure 4, professional facilities only account for 8.82%. Most skateboarding venues in China have simple facilities or only gentle slopes, like Raffles in Wuhou district of Chengdu, Sichuan province. Although the streets for skateboarding are accepted in China, the degree of attention about skateboarding is insufficient.

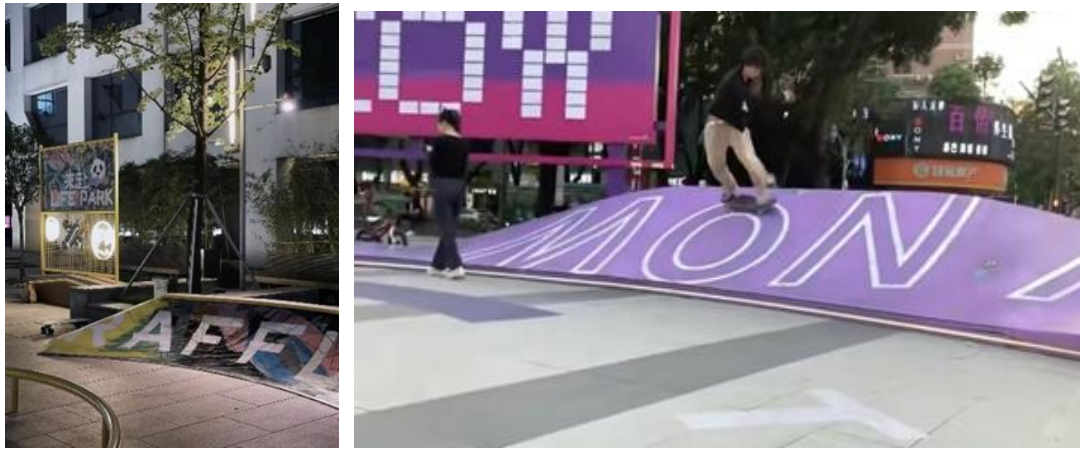


Figure 8: Raffles in Wuhou District of Chengdu, Sichuan Province and Hei De Hui One City in Dongguan, Guangdong Province



Figure 9: Pazhou Bridge in Guangzhou

5.3. The Influence of Skateboard Culture on the Street and Suggestions

5.3.1. Positive Influence

(1) The change of skateboard culture to street social space

Skateboarding culture breaks the old status quo that "most social space is distributed indoors" and gradually transforms the social space from indoor to outdoor. Skateboarding facilities, such as steps and gentle slopes, can be used as rest and communication space for other groups such as passers-by. Compared with the closed environment like the coffee and milk tea shops, this outdoor skateboard step or slope provides users with an open and free communication environment. The appearance of skateboarders also provides a relaxed and dynamic atmosphere for this social space, which attracts the social space to expand outdoors gradually. As shown in Figure 3, Chinese skateboarders tend to act in groups, and half of them know each other by skateboarding together on the street. The street becomes a prime location for skateboarders to know each other, and skateboarding also enhances the social function of the street.

(2) Skateboarding culture has rejuvenated the streets

With the emergence of skateboarding culture, the street is attracting more young people to join. Due to the high physical requirements of skateboarding, most of these skateboarders are under the age of 16 to 30 (Figure 1). According to the sports consumption trend report released by Decathlon in 2021, consumers' demand for health and sports is on the rise, and they focus on exploring more outdoor sports places and ways. Skateboarding is becoming an emerging popular sport [3]. Young skateboarders enter the streets, which rejuvenates the streets and improves the usage rate of the streets. It brings the street young atmosphere and enhances the activity. Due to the culture of staying at home, COVID-19 and e-commerce, many young people don't want to go out, but the skateboard culture relieves this problem and attracts young people to go out.

(3) The interesting change and diversification of skateboard culture to the street

Under the influence of skateboarding, the originally smooth street surface began to appear with a height difference. The floating road enlivens the whole street and adds a lot of fun to it. The appearance of skateboarding also makes the street artistic. In the past, most streets in China only served the function of walking and blocking the view of traffic roads and roadside buildings. The emergence of skateboarding has promoted the diversification of the streets. Skateboard facilities and ramps strengthen the function of buffer, and provide rest and entertainment spaces of the street.

5.3.2. Negative Influence

(1) Bring noise and disruption

Due to the friction between the skateboard and the ground in skateboard movement, it is inevitable to cause noise and damage. Unless it's a marble skate road like AVENUE & SON Taikoo Li flagship store in Shanghai Foreshore, the general street with skateboards is much younger than one without skateboards. Skateboards raise the cost of street maintenance. The noise brought by skateboarding could also affect the use of buildings around the street, and interfere with the rest or work of people inside the building. When skateboarding brings vitality to the street, it also breaks the quiet atmosphere of some old streets.

(2) Bring danger and conflict

The danger of skateboarding is very high. As shown in Figure 5, among the surveyed population, the proportion of skateboarders injured is up to 80%. According to the study on the characteristics of sports injuries of young skateboarders, the average incidence of sports injuries among young skateboarders is 45.97% [4]. The danger is not limited to skateboarders, people who sit near the skateboard can also be hurt. Due to the appearance of skateboards, the street flow becomes complicated, which may conflict with the original street industry. Skateboarding also causes damage to nearby shops, breaking the stability of the street.

5.3.3. Suggestions

According to the current situation of Chinese streets, it is suitable to carry on the in-depth transformation of the street. It is suggested not simply arrange skateboard facilities to save costs. The government should promote the integration of skateboarding culture into the streets, instead of imposing it. By referring to Clayton Grau's urban skateboarding plan, the relationship between people and the city can be carefully explored, and the seasonal used or unused space on the street can be transformed once or twice [5]. For example, Bike Path-South Pasadena, a project that repurposes the Bike Path on the street to create a curved glide zone for skateboards (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Bike Path-South Pasadena (Source: Urban Skateboarding Project website / urbanskateproject.com/)

In the future, after the expansion and optimization of the street, it is possible to set up different street lines for skateboarders and pedestrians. It reduces the chaos of the streets and makes the streets more coordinated. It can also set up transition spaces on the street. Referring to the contact-free used car retail system space along the national highway in Takamatsu, Kagawa Prefecture, it is suggested to make full use of the street corner space. It can not only beautify the streets but also ease the complicated traffic flow [6] (Figure 11). Setting up transition spaces at street corners can relieve the pressure caused by skateboards and pedestrians and reduce street clutter with aesthetic effects [7,8].

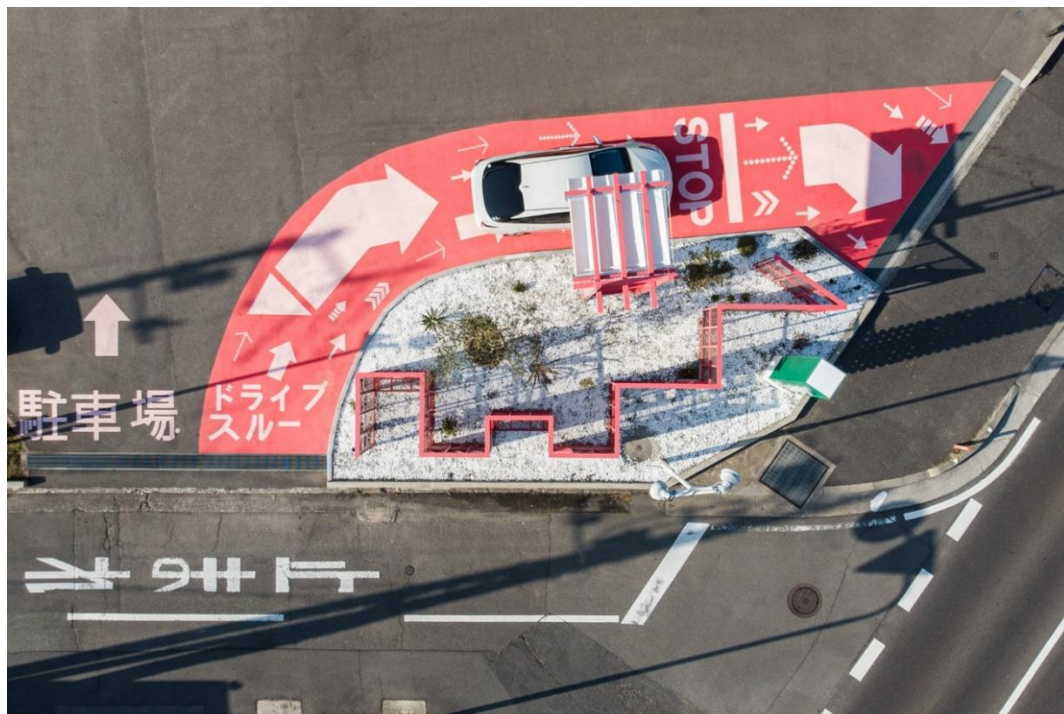


Figure 11: Contactless used car retail system space along the national highway in Takamatsu, Japan

6. Conclusion

Through questionnaires, this essay discusses the reasons for the different influences of Chinese and American skateboard culture on their respective streets, the acceptance and change of skateboarding culture in Chinese streets, as well as the influence of Chinese skateboarding culture on Chinese streets.

Due to the relatively slow process of urbanization in China, Chinese streets have suitable space for skateboarding. Coupled with the inclusiveness of culture in the current era, skateboarding culture has a good living space in China. This is the main reason why Chinese and American skateboarding cultures have different influences on the streets. Now the streets of China are embracing skateboarding. Although there are some problems such as insufficient transformation degree and shallow attention degree, the positive catalytic effect of skateboard culture on the old streets is also obvious, and the streets gradually become young, diverse and interesting. There are also negative effects, such as noise, pedestrian and pedestrian flow conflicts, and street maintenance costs. These problems require designers of future cities to pay more attention to the factors of skateboard culture and make reasonable planning to reduce the negative impact of skateboarding. Skateboarding should no longer be like an aggressor forced into Chinese cities, skateboarding should be naturally integrated into Chinese cities.

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