

**Columbia University**  
**GSAPP**  
**Spring 2016**  
**Advanced Studio VI**

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**Studio Assistant: TBD**

## **Rural Village Urbanism**

Tangjiazhuang Rural Co-working Base



### Intro

China, once a self-sustaining agrarian society, has experienced a historically unprecedented exodus of rural populations to expanding urban areas over the past thirty years. Since Deng Xiaoping's *Open and Reform* in the late 1970's economic development has focused growth on urban areas. As a consequence, rural development has lagged behind despite its crucial role in sustaining China's massive population and its cultural heritage. With the recent transformation towards an

urbanized society, what role does the countryside play today and what role will it have in the future? Urbanization is a process that radically transforms territories, alters existing reciprocities and forms new relationships between diverse places. What new relationships can be formed between the urban and the rural?

### Rural to urban Migration

Despite its economic successes in recent decades, China's per capital income discrepancy is among the worst in the world. Urban income is 3.33 times greater than in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the new urban inhabitants have migrated from the countryside, with as many as 225 million people currently "floating" from city to city in search of the next employment opportunity and better wages. The mass exodus of rural populations towards urban areas in search for more prosperous opportunities has depleted the countryside of its most productive workforce, decreasing the efficiency of the small family farms. Also, without economic incentives for younger populations, communities' most vital populations leave their families and friends behind in search of more prosperous opportunities in the cities straining the fragile social and familial bonds so essential for a quality existence and historical place continuity. The countryside is being "hollowed out."

### Food and Resource Security

In addition, after years of misuse, inefficient methods of farming, unchecked urbanization and uncontrolled environmental deterioration, like increased desertification, China has lost large areas of arable land over the past 30 years, threatening its food security and increasing its dependency on imported food from producers around the world. Without proper protection or consideration, even more arable land could be lost as urban growth continues. With relatively low densities/FAR in many centers, Chinese cities grow predominately horizontally consuming more and more valuable agricultural land. This horizontal expansion is accommodated by the extension of highways, subways and other public modes of transportation stretching the cities vast distances into the vulnerable countryside.

## **Project: Rural Village Regeneration**

### Studio Logistics/structure:

- *Students can choose whether to work individually or in teams of two. However, students will work in teams of three to four during the initial research and site analysis phase during the first two week.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oecd.org>

- *Critic Jeffrey Johnson will predominantly attend every class, with the exception of the week of February 22-26, which will be run by the Studio Assistant, and the occasional absence due to guest jurying GSAPP studio reviews. The studio will have an assistant (TBD) that will help with organization, class set up for reviews and the Kinne trip logistics. They will join the studio once a week, mostly for pin-ups.*



### “Back to the Land”

Living with nature in the countryside has always been important in Chinese culture. Villages in the countryside were the centers of knowledge, culture and creativity. Intellectuals were cultivated in the countryside. The countryside was the source of scholars for the cities. With the radical transformation of society during the past few decades, there has been a general shift away from traditional rural origins towards new desires of urban lifestyles. However, most recently, China is experiencing a desire to return back towards the rural countryside. Intellectuals, scholars, artists and poets are returning to the countryside in search of alternative lifestyles and other forms of inspiration other than from the city.

The project is part of China's "back-to-the-land" movement – or the New Rural Reconstruction Movement, which started in the early 2000's. With an emphasis placed on creating a sustainable way of life in the countryside entrepreneurs are attempting to revitalize villages for those inhabitants still living in them and to create opportunities to attract back many who have left for the city. According to World Bank data, as of 2010, 37% of Chinese workers were employed in agriculture vs. 2% in the US.<sup>2</sup> A large number of people still reside in the countryside and depend on it for their livelihood.

The urban population in China has grown over the past few decades at a historically unprecedented rate. Today 54 percent of China's population lives in cities, up from 42.5 percent in 2005. As a consequence of the mass migration from the countryside to the city, villages are rapidly disappearing. According to China's Ministry of Civil Affairs, in 2002 there were 3.6 million villages. In 2012, the number decreased to 2.7 million. It is estimated that China is losing 300 villages a day.<sup>3</sup> The trend is unfortunately supported by the government. In its efforts to transition its economy increasing domestic consumption, the government plans to move hundreds of millions more people from rural areas to cities over the next few decades.

"In China, the ideology of urbanization is too dominant. Everyone believes a successful life can only happen in the city... As soon as the villagers have a little money, they buy an apartment in town. They think living in old houses is a sign of failure."<sup>4</sup> – Ou Ning, co-founder of Bishan Commune

How can the rural village reassert itself in the process of modernization and urbanization without sacrificing the preservation and cultivation of its culture? How can you balance the needs for urbanization with those of rural regeneration? How can the rural village offer opportunities for upward mobility for its inhabitants encouraging long-term commitment to the community?

Despite recent successes, undoubtedly conventional, short-sighted or profit-driven eco-tourism models are not able to answer this question. Many fall victim to over commercialization, which leads to gentrification. Often, the local villagers, even if they profited marginally, get left behind by larger and wealthier investors from outside. Property values rise and decisions regarding the village's future are left to those with only profit in mind. How can the rural village become a socially and ecologically sustainable prototype in the future that both enables the local villagers and empowers them to formulate their own future? In order to address the complexity of rural China development, this studio aims at developing alternative

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<sup>2</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/01/05/372491552/chinas-villages-are-dying-a-new-film-asks-if-they-can-be-saved>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/01/05/372491552/chinas-villages-are-dying-a-new-film-asks-if-they-can-be-saved>

models of eco-tourism, local craft, agriculture and culture. And, importantly, it will consider how architecture can play an important role in its advocacy.



## **Tangjiazhuang Village**

The project site is located in Tangjiazhuang Village, in Huangshan (Yellow Mountain), Anhui Province in China. Anhui Province is currently the experimental region for alternative eco-tourism and rural China development projects. Taking advantage of its newly constructed high-speed train and highway network, this area is closely linked (within 6 hours) with major south China cities, such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen, and eastern China coastal cities, such as Shanghai and Hangzhou.

Tangjiazhuang Village consists of 6 village clusters located in a valley along a natural river. The village clusters are located very near to the west gate of Huangshan scenic zone, one of the most popular eco-tourism zones in China. The region's dominant agricultural is tea production. In the last decade, this area has been preserved for development strategically by the government. However, due to the dramatic increase of demand from the domestic tourism market, the local government recently opened up the development opportunities to private investors.

### **Tangjiazhuang Rural Co-working Base:**

The studio project site was recently acquired by a pair of young entrepreneurs, who the studio will meet. Their goal is to develop a sustainable and alternative eco-hospitality project in the village to facilitate rural co-working activities for young entrepreneurs from major cities in China. Such co-working space will help incubate rural development projects, agricultural projects, research, social development projects and civic technology projects. Ultimately, they aim to develop a prototype

combining rural incubator programs and eco-hospitality programs. The following initial ideas have been considered:

1. The development is to facilitate the engagement of creative industries with rural development ideas and local production activities.
2. It facilitates the co-creation process between the researchers and young entrepreneurs from outside and the local residents.
3. The development will work with international research institutes to develop a rural research center.
4. The development model will include renovating existing buildings, new construction of buildings when necessary and adapting existing houses by local villagers.

### **Studio Design Project Requirements:**

The studio will design prototypes that reimagine collective life and work in the village, and that will provide for better rural living in China. Each architectural proposal will offer visions for a new collective and co-operative – a new 'utopia'. Each project proposed will incorporate multiple functions that respond to the contemporary needs of the countryside. Students will consider local environmental and climatic conditions, growing cycles as well as resource availability and building customs.

Each student or team will select a minimum of two programs or functions to incorporate into a building or buildings. It will be up to the student or team to construct an argument for their selections through their initial research and analysis.

Recommended Building Programs to select from:

- Housing: create prototype collective houses with multiple variations.
- Farming co-op with shared facilities.
- Co-working workshop for local craftspeople and farmers.
- Tea factory
- Library/Bookshop
- Education/Rural Research Institute
- Cultural venue

It is the responsibility of each student or team to determine the appropriate size and building area for their project.

### **Research**

The studio will undertake research on the following topics at the beginning of the semester. The Research phase of the studio will be conducted in teams of 3-4 students. Each team will be assigned one or two topics to research and present to the studio during week two (see schedule).

- User groups / demographics – migrant populations/flows / Hukou
- Agriculture: new farming technologies and community engagement
- Land Policy / market factors / Urban vs Rural
- Society / Community / family unit in china (past, present) / collectives
- Urban-rural historical precedents: International
  - *Garden City*, by Ebenezer Howard (1902)
  - *New Regional Pattern*, by Ludwig Hilberseimer (1945–49)
  - *Agronica*, by Andrea Branzi (1993–94)
  - *Broadacre City*, by Frank Lloyd Wright (1934–35)
  - *Agricultural City*, by Kisho Kurokawa (1961)
- Rural Village Regeneration precedents: China
  - Bishan, Anhui Province
  - Moganshan, Jiangsu Province
  - Hongcun, Anhui Province
  - Wencun Village (Amateur Studio – Wang Shu and Lu Wenyu)
- Rural/vernacular Architecture
- Eco-Tourism

### **Deliverables (TBC)**

- Presentation quality color computer generated Floor Plans (one floor plan for every unique floor) to a scale necessary to communicate design.
- Presentation quality color computer generated Building Sections to a scale necessary to communicate design.
- Presentation quality color computer generated Site Plan at a scale necessary to communicate design.
- Presentation quality physical model. Scale to be determined.
- Presentation quality computer generated renderings of the project.
- All of the above drawings + images of the models will be formatted in a booklet form and submitted at the end of the semester.

### **Kinne Trip March 6-13**

The studio will travel to China visiting Shanghai for approximately three days then travel by train to the village of Tangjiazhuang. The studio will spend three days in the village and will meet with local inhabitants, document the existing architectural conditions and visit nearby villages, including Bishan where artist/author/activist Ou Ning resides and has created Bishan Commune.

### **Schedule:**

January 22	First Class – Studio Introduction
January 28 (TH)	Research Presentation
February 4 (TH)	Pinup
February 11 (TH)	Pinup
February 18 (TH)	Pinup

Feb 25 (TH)	Mid-Review
March 6-13	<b>Kinne Trip</b> Shanghai + Tangjiazhuang Village, China
March 14-18	Spring Break
April 14 (TH)	¾ Review
April 29 (F)	Final Review

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 Shi Runjiu: *A Beautiful New World*, 1999.  
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#### Megablock/Housing:

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