Rural Urban Framework is the research and design of Joshua Bolchover and John Lin, Assistant Professors at The University of Hong Kong. The research takes place within the diverse and contested landscape currently under rapid formation between rural and urban centers of China. This zone is neither rural nor urban, is politically uncertain, and often takes advantage of grey areas in government policy.

Within this context, each project attempts to balance the drive for development with sustainable considerations. Working with various NGO's, local Chinese governments, business of education and construction along with other universities and students, the projects seek unconventional and collaborative ways of funding and building architecture. The projects are conducted within the Community Project Workshop (CPW) of the Faculty of Architecture at The University of Hong Kong.

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The last 30 years has witnessed the extreme and visible development of the Chinese city. During this time there has been a less visible but equally drastic transformation happening in the villages and small townships of rural China. Mass migration, the rise of the middle class and the collapse of a rural livelihood have begun to breakdown a traditionally balanced notion of rural and urban counterparts. The plan to move 400 million rural citizens into cities by 2030 and the drive to urbanize to provide new areas for economic growth have produced a tension between agricultural land and urban land that is reaching a critical impasse. In addition, China’s economic rise is producing an increasingly polarized society, instrumentalised and maintained through the Hukou registration policy whereby every citizen is either registered as a rural or urban resident depending on where they were born. This policy distinguishes between land development rights, health care, and access to education regulating and enforcing the division between the city and the countryside.

Nevertheless the inter-relation between urban processes and rural processes has produced a diverse landscape of blurred, ambiguous territories as land is being transformed. It is these zones which play out the contestation between policies, land ownership, development rights and individual land speculation; between farmers, developers, local government, factory owners, or foreign investors. These zones represent a critical juncture in China’s ongoing economic revival – they bring to light unresolved regulations or loopholes in the system, black-market grey areas and discrepancies between individual and collective action, between individual profit and compensation. They demonstrate specific forms of urbanization producing unique characteristics. They often describe in-between states: half finished, partially abandoned, or half demolished. To this extent they are dynamic: exemplifying the struggle between local and large scale forces attributed to global economic development.

This research context is the framework for our projects. The research work looks to understand these processes as well as to extract design tools for architectural projects ranging from village schools to a master-plan strategy for an eco-tourist island resort, to an agricultural education and community centre. Each project somehow encapsulates China’s relentless transformation and with it the inherent tensions underlying such growth. The dialectic between rural and urban is most pronounced in these instances. The intention is to understand this context, act within it and speculate on how China will consolidate economic growth with agricultural sustainability.
These clusters of densely packed and loosely regulated enclaves in the cities are the results of tradeoffs between the government and villagers when claiming large tracts of farmland for further urban expansion. These areas continue to be regulated under rural ownership laws (which prevent city dwellers from owning land but allow villagers to own land collectively) and have resulted in compact politically autonomous ‘islands’ embedded in China’s modern cities. In addition, the right of these rural dwellers to build a dwelling and the demand for cheap migrant worker housing transformed local farmers into property developers. These areas have also become known for gambling, prostitution and other illegal activities. Outside of the system, but absolutely necessary for the phenomenal construction and maintenance of the city, these Urban Villages have become an intractable problem for city planning.
II SUBURBAN CHINA
RISE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS, NEW LEISURE LANDSCAPES: GOLF THEME PARKS AND BOURGEOIS VILLAS

It is anticipated that in 2025 China will have the largest middle class in the world. Ironically, the rise of this middle class is being fueled by the current middle class of America. As the largest consumer of Chinese exports worldwide, the American middle class in their suburban settings is paying in part the wages of the over two hundred million migrant factory workers on their way to the 'American dream'. The current plan to move 400 million of the 700 million rural residents into cities by 2030 will present not only a major economic feat but also a spatial problem. Already as the numbers of middle class rise and their wealth increases, more are seeking out high-end Western-style villa developments in the urban periphery as well as gated communities. The growing demand for entertainment and leisure has created a phenomenon of huge spa and karaoke complexes, golf courses and theme parks. If suburbia as we know it is the solution of middle class America then given the scale and density of the middle class aspirations in China we wonder what form will it take?
Yanzhou Island masterplan is a concept and design for a new eco-recreational park. The goal is to convert a historic village, its farmlands and fishponds located on an island in the Pearl River Delta into a diverse leisure landscape. The strategy seeks to create many different ‘islands’ of programs hidden within the existing rural landscape. Condensing programs to minimize environmental impact is also an attempt to maximize the experience of the island itself. Different programs respond seasonally as well as to tidal changes in the delta. Existing fishponds, temples and village houses are incorporated into the design as well as new programs for a spa, garden/restaurant, clubhouse, hotel and various floating islands accessible by boardwalk. The goal is to enhance and maintain the character of the rural village and adapt it into a sustainable recreational destination within the PRD.

YANZHOU ISLAND MASTERPLAN, GUANGDONG PROVINCE

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III FACTORY TOWN
FROM AGRICULTURE TO INDUSTRY, GATED COMMUNITIES, FLOATING POPULATION, SECONDARY CITIES

China is best known as the world’s factory. It contains some of the densest factory agglomerations in the world. These semi-urban conditions consist of a huge work force made up primarily of migrant labor freely circulating from factory to factory. Unlike previous models of industrial cities, there is no apparent organizing structure. This seemingly random landscape seems to promote fluidity above all else. Analogous to how the global economy needs fluidity of capital in order to function, the market urbanism of factory towns relies on the fluidity of capita. The physical landscape in turn reflects such market conditions. Gated factories and gated communities exist in isolation, capable of expansion and self reliant as systems of work and leisure, they have no relation whatsoever to anything else in the landscape. With hardly any public facilities, all formal public spaces exist behind closed gates. The highly controlled and autonomous environments inside gates are only contrasted by the extreme chaos of the landscape outside.
IV CONTESTED TERRITORY
FARMER VS DEVELOPER, RURAL CAPITALISM, ABANDONED STRUCTURES

The continuing conversion of rural territory into urban substance through various means is blurring the lines, which define not only their physical boundaries but their economies. The areas which are outside the cities, the large expansive peripheries once occupied solely by rice paddies is rapidly and simultaneously transforming into a generic territory, neither strictly urban nor rural, dotted with factories and isolated residential towers amidst remnants of farmland. This land is still under the legal designation of ‘rural’ territory and continues to develop in a haphazard manner through coalitions of rural committees, developers, individual farmers and village governments. The growth of this peripheral zone is much faster, more ruthless and seemingly devoid of planning control even compared to the infamous growth of Chinese urban areas. This proto-rural territory is a contested space, organized along territorial lines of traditional farming plots, being speculated simultaneously as new residential communities and high end industrial parks. As opposed to the past development of cities, which were government organized and led, this wave of development is propagated by individual farmers and village co-operatives eager to catch up.
The Jian county schools are 4 secondary schools with a total of 3,300 students and 1,800 live-in students from nearby rural areas. The design is a school prototype that can be adapted to different program requirements and different site conditions. The initial strategy is to create a perimeter building that frames a large courtyard. This wall, much like a traditional old city wall contains the inner public life of the school. Additional public and social functions of the school such as the library, the canteen, the art block and the administration building, push into this space activating the courtyard. The courtyard space acts as a CAMPUS – an interconnected space for living, working and socializing. The campus is further broken into smaller spaces that relate to each of the social functions to create MICRO-COMMUNITIES within the larger space. Each of the buildings that are inserted into the courtyard are LANDSCAPE BUILDINGS: each has a specific landscape idea linking the building to the landscape. The library rises up from the ground as a series of steps leading to an outdoor terrace, the canteen is cantilevered forming a pleasant shaded area for dining, the art-block has an inner courtyard allowing the classroom activities to spill outside during good weather and the office block has a multi-function meeting room that receives light from both sides.

Date: 2009-current
Size: 24,000 sqm
Total Cost: 3,000,000 usd
Unit Cost: 125 usd/sqm
As in many developing countries the rapid transformation of rural territory directly into industrialized urban substance has been accompanied by mass migrations of workers to new urban centers. Since 2008 and the onset of global recession, those millions of workers are going home. It is estimated that in China alone over a 6 month period, 20 million workers have left cities and returned to their rural homes. The mass migration of workers to and from cities has created a landscape of movement and a unique brand of highway urbanism. Along this highway lines the production of building materials and sites of material refinement. Entire towns of blue trucks specialize in transportation of construction materials into the cities and its urban peripheries. The majority of buildings constructed in China has nothing to do with architects, forming instead a brutal new vernacular of concrete standardized blocks and colorfully tiled facades.
The TaiPing Bridge Project was a two-year reconstruction and surface renovation project of a historic 300 year-old bridge in Guizhou Province, China. Like most rural areas in China, the village has undergone massive changes, reflective of the rapid urbanization process elsewhere. The project attempted to reconcile the long history of the existing masonry construction with modern techniques of pre-cast concrete. Though the primary task was to repair a collapsed arch, the larger problem was how to revitalize the once important and historic location. Pre-cast concrete was used to rebuild the arch as well as pave the bridge. Bridge pavers were custom designed to transform into planters at various scales as well as seating. In this way the bridge was re-programmed as a public space. Volunteers and villagers planted the bridge with a combination of donated plants and wild varieties sourced from the surrounding mountains.

Date: 2006-2009  
Size: 200 sqm  
Total Cost: 25,000 usd  
Unit Cost: 125 usd/sqm
TONGJIANG PRIMARY SCHOOL, JIANGXI PROVINCE

Responding to the prevalence of demolition in rural areas this project proposes a strategy for recycling old buildings into a new primary school in Tongjiang county. The project brief required replacing an existing school building with a new building and expanded program. Our proposal for the demolition of the old building is to reuse the rubble as a growing medium and insulation on the proposed green roof. In the meantime, traditional ‘green’ bricks no longer manufactured will be collected from demolition sites of old houses in this historic region. These bricks will be used as a large screen wall and ground paving for the school.

Date: 2010-current
Size: 600 sqm
Total Cost: 90,000 usd
Unit Cost: 150 usd/sqm
VI DEGRADED FARMLAND
LOSS OF AGRICULTURE, LAND POLLUTION, AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

The dwindling supply of fertile arable land due to urbanization is exacerbated by a growing population that is wealthier and consuming more meat per capita than ever before. The reduction of available agricultural land pressurizes the supply of food, water and energy demanded by China’s urban population, intensifying the consumption of fertilizers and chemicals. Agriculture is currently a bigger source of water contamination than factories. In the Pearl River Delta where there are 10 cities with a population over 1 million and an estimated total population of 120 million people, the ratio between the amount of agricultural land necessary to support the given population has already reached its limit.
QINMO VILLAGE PROJECT, GUANGDONG PROVINCE

Qinmo Village Project is aimed at the long-term sustainable development of a rural Chinese village. Located in Huaji County at the western border of Guangdong Province, the area is one of the poorest in China, with yearly earnings as low as 200 USD and only 6 hours drive from Hong Kong. The project goes beyond mere building construction by integrating educational programs and sustainable concepts. Initiated in 2006 as part of a design workshop to re-think the standard 3 story concrete buildings which are typically donated as schools in rural areas, the designs stressed sustainability and ecological responsibility. Today in 2010, the full scope of the work involves 7 different projects which are funded individually by charitable organizations from Hong Kong. Every building project is coupled with a program initiative that emphasizes the education of villagers, whether it is through a school roof garden as an alternative teaching facility or the demonstration eco-household farm. Most importantly by improving on what and how to farm, the economic viability of the villagers can be strengthened. The failure of the farm system forces the young and able-bodied to migrate to cities, finding alternative ways to make a living as migrant laborers. Only the elderly and children remain in most villages. Not only has the concept of a rural livelihood been eroded, the entire social structure is at risk. The project seeks to re-build the notion of the village as a community and to reinforce the idea that education is the primary tool for sustainable development. The designs of the various projects are themselves adapted from and ‘learn’ from the existing typologies and construction methods of rural China. Simple variations in the use of concrete screen or brick work, the adaptation to existing landscape conditions and the re-programming of outdated buildings all inform on the generic conditions of design in rural China. To this day the project continues to involve students, professionals and organizations from China and Hong Kong together in a coordinated effort to explore and find new solutions to the way in which rural transformation can happen.

Date: 2006-2010
Size: 2000 sqm
Total Cost: 170,000 USD
Unit Cost: 81 USD/sqm
1. QINMO COMMUNITY CENTER
The original village school is renovated and transformed into a community center with a program of meeting room, dormitory, large dining area, communal kitchen and office space. The center will be used by the villagers as well as a place to host eco-workshops and volunteers. Qinmo Eco-Household the demonstration household farm will include pigs and chickens, a greenhouse and a selection of vegetables. Expertise in setting up the farm will come from staff of Kadoorie Farms in Hong Kong.

2. QINMO VILLAGE PUBLIC SPACE
The village center is programmed through landscaping and integration of concrete furniture.

3. QINMO PRIMARY SCHOOL
The school gets its shape from the existing rice terraces on the site and blends into the agricultural landscape. The linear structure of classrooms creates a public space facing the village side and classrooms with views to the landscape on the other side. Its facade is made of colorful bricks which are individually painted by the villagers.

4. QINMO SCHOOL PLAYGROUND
The basketball court and playground connect directly with the stepped seating resulting in a theater space that is used for village events as well as morning roll call and exercise sessions.

5. QINMO SCHOOL LIBRARY
The library is built as a playful landscape for students. Instead of furniture, the floor is raised to create void ‘islands’ for seating and reading.

6. QINMO SCHOOL ROOF GARDEN
The roof is transformed into a series of community gardens belonging to the classrooms below. The students will engage in caring for the garden as part of their educational curriculum.

7. QINMO SCHOOL TOILET
A typical village toilet is ‘wrapped’ in a screen of open brick structure resulting in better ventilation and light.
VII VILLAGE COMMUNITY
MODERNITY AND TRADITION, RURAL LIVELIHOOD, GENERATION GAP, DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT

The traditional relationship between the countryside and the city, the farm and the factory has become exploited and increasingly complex within the processes of globalization. Trapped in a cycle of migration to urban areas, the villages in China have lost their productivity. Their out-dated farming techniques are increasingly damaging to the environment and also to any long-term economic sustainability. The failure of the farm system forces the young and able-bodied to migrate to cities, finding alternative ways to make a living as migrant laborers. Only the elderly and children remain in most villages. Not only has the concept of a rural livelihood been eroded, the entire social structure is at risk. Major demographic shifts in the overall population have created a gender imbalance which will result in an estimated 30 million more men than women by 2020.
RURAL URBAN ECOLOGY IN THE EXHIBITION
QUOTIDIAN ARCHITECTURES, VENICE BIENNALE 2010
Joshua Bolchover and John Lin
Exhibition Team: Christiane Lange
Joe Giu, Keith Hui, Paul Mok, Nathaniel Lam,
Rebecca Wang, Anna Wan

YANZHOU ISLAND MASTERPLAN, GUANGDONG PROVINCE
Design: Joshua Bolchover and John Lin
Project Team: Calvin Liang, Martha Tsang
Client: Zhaoqing Development Company

JIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS, JIANGXI PROVINCE
Design: Joshua Bolchover and John Lin
Project Team: Hei Ho
Jess Lumley, Christiane Lange
Carol Nung, Law Wai Yue, Wong Yok Fai, Mariane Quadros de Souza,
Joe Giu, Suzy Liu, Maggie Hua, Keith Hui
Commissioning Donor: Yanai Foundation

TAI PING BRIDGE RENOVATION, GUIZHOU PROVINCE
Project Leader: John Lin
Engineering Advisor: Dr. Xing Shijian
Students: Jiaxin Chum, Li Bin, Abdul Yeung, Charles Lai, Gu Lik Hang,
Cheng Hiu Tung, Zhang Xudong, Lau Hiu Yeung, Chu Ling Tung, Cheung Wai Nga
Commissioning Donor: Wu Zhi Qiao Foundation
Collaborating Institutions: The University of Hong Kong, Chongqing University

TONGJIANG PRIMARY SCHOOL, JIANGXI PROVINCE
Design: Joshua Bolchover and John Lin
Project Team: Christiane Lange
Anna Wan, Jess Lumely, Mariane Quadros de Souza
Commissioning Donor: World Vision
Additional Donors: Luke Him Sau Charitable Trust

QINMO VILLAGE PROJECT, GUANGDONG PROVINCE
Design: Joshua Bolchover and John Lin
Project Team: Abdul Yeung
Gary Chan, Tammy Chow, Kenneth Lau, Hugo Ma, Tim Mao,
Danny Tang and students from Sacred Heart Canossian College
Commissioning Donor: Matthew Cheng + Peggy Young / Green Hope Foundation
Additional Donors: Lucy Tsai / Chinese Culture Promotion Society,
Luke Him Sau Charitable Trust, Hope Education Foundation,
Kadoorie Farm and Garden Corporation

RURAL URBAN FRAMEWORK, BOOKLET
Graphic Design, Cover Image: Christiane Lange
COMMUNITY PROJECT WORKSHOP (CPW)
The Faculty of Architecture at The University of Hong Kong is a comprehensive school of architecture, dedicated to teaching, research and community engagement. A significant number of academic staff are actively involved in the designing of, and planning for, community projects. They are also engaged in a broad range of community-based projects in China, Hong Kong, and Macau. This has led to the establishment of the Community Project Workshop (CPW) – 香港大學建築學院社區項目工作坊. The CPW is an organization providing design and consultancy services to government and non-government organizations, and undertakes other non-commercial projects requiring interdisciplinary expertise drawn from all the disciplines of the Faculty: Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Real Estate and Construction, and Urban Planning and Design.

The community projects undertaken by the CPW are aimed to cope with the pressing and changing community’s needs in our society. CPW teams consider the rationale behind the current design and planning concepts of each community project, generating sensitive and practical design ideas. CPW adopts an interactive/participatory approach in order to meet the specific objectives of the community, leading to a continuous process of discussion and feedback in order to determine a community’s aspirations and needs.

http://fac.arch.hku.hk/cpw/

JOSHUA BOLCHOVER is an Assistant Professor at the University of Hong Kong where he is researching and designing buildings in rural China. Recent exhibitions include Utopia Now: Opening the Closed Area, a research project on the Hong Kong and Shenzhen border at the Venice Biennale 2008. He has curated, designed and contributed to several international exhibitions including Get it Louder, a touring exhibition in China; Airspace: What Skyline does London want, Hydar: Can Buildings Curate and has exhibited at the HK-SZ Biennale. Joshua was a local curator for the Manchester-Liverpool section of Shrinking Cities between 2003 and 2005. He has collaborated with Raoul Bunschoten, Chora researching strategic urban projects and has worked with Diller + Scofidio in New York. Previously he has taught architecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, London Metropolitan University, Cambridge University and the Architectural Association. He was educated at Cambridge University and at the Bartlett School of Architecture.

JOHN LIN is an Assistant Professor at the University of Hong Kong. He was born in Taiwan and immigrated to the US in 1983. After studying in both the Art and Engineering programs at The Cooper Union in New York City, he received a professional degree in Architecture in 2002. His experimental constructions have been published widely and exhibited in the Architecture Park (Kolonihaven) at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen (2004), the Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism (2007), the Beijing Architecture Biennale (2008) and at the Venice Biennale (2008). He has received two commendations for his ‘Qinmo Village School’ and the ‘TaiPing Bridge Renovation’ projects in the Architecture Review Awards for Emerging Architecture (2009). His current research concerns the relationship between Rural and Urban China with a focus on the sustainable development of Chinese Villages. He has taught previously at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture and The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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