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Suburbanisation processes in contemporary China: Chengxiang Old Town

Original
Suburbanisation processes in contemporary China: Chengxiang Old Town / Strina, A. - In: China Room Report 2024 / Forina C., Ramondetti L.. - ELETTRONICO. - Torino : Politecnico di Torino, 2024. - ISBN 979-12-81583-03-0. - pp. 122-127

Availability:
This version is available at: 11583/2988996 since: 2024-05-25T21:48:27Z

Publisher:
Politecnico di Torino

Published
DOI:

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27 November 2026



Politecnico di Torino

China Room REPORT 2024

Edited by Camilla Forina and Leonardo Ramondetti

Politecnico di Torino

CHINA ROOM

REPORT 2024

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Suburbanisation Processes in Contemporary China: Chengxiang Old Town

DESIGN UNIT

Master of Science: Architecture Construction City at Politecnico di Torino

AY: 2021-2022

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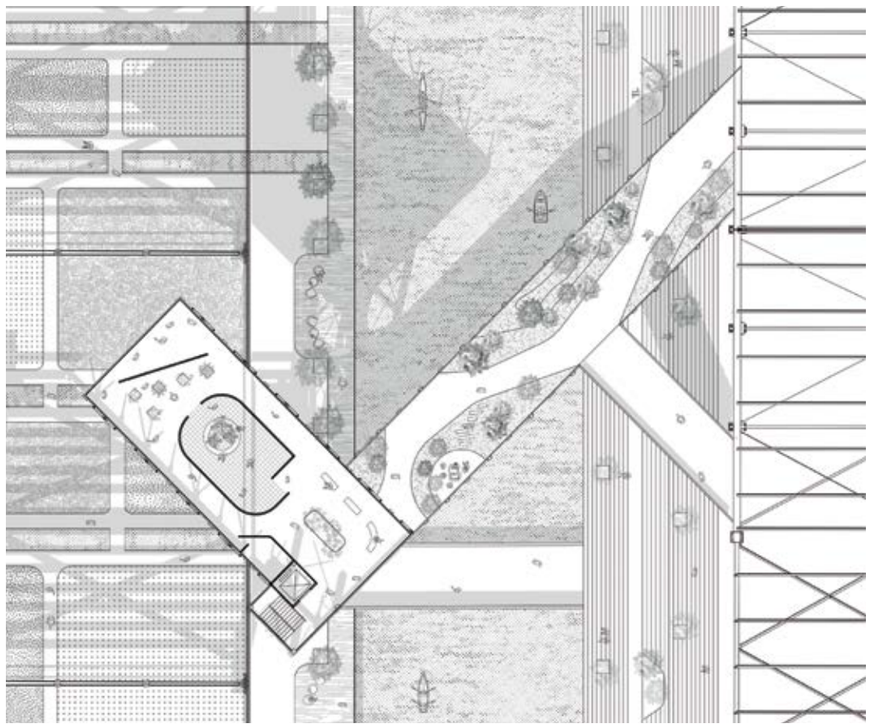
Cover | Natura Interludio, topography over time (credit: Inés Valero, Cristina Rodriguez, Jaime de la Torre, María Fernández).

Suburbanization in China has developed since 1980, responding to the country's rapid economic growth. By involving Gong Dong, founder of the Beijing studio Vector Architects, as Visiting Professor, the Design Studio aimed to address the most recent changes of this phenomenon: the emergence of vast industrial parks, large-scale transportation infrastructures, and mass-producxed housing estates that intersect and often collide with suburban villages' unique characteristics (environmental, social, and economic). This novel interplay necessitates new projects, both at the territorial and architectural scale, to propose scenarios in which old and new spaces can coexist and generate greater formal and functional quality of life.

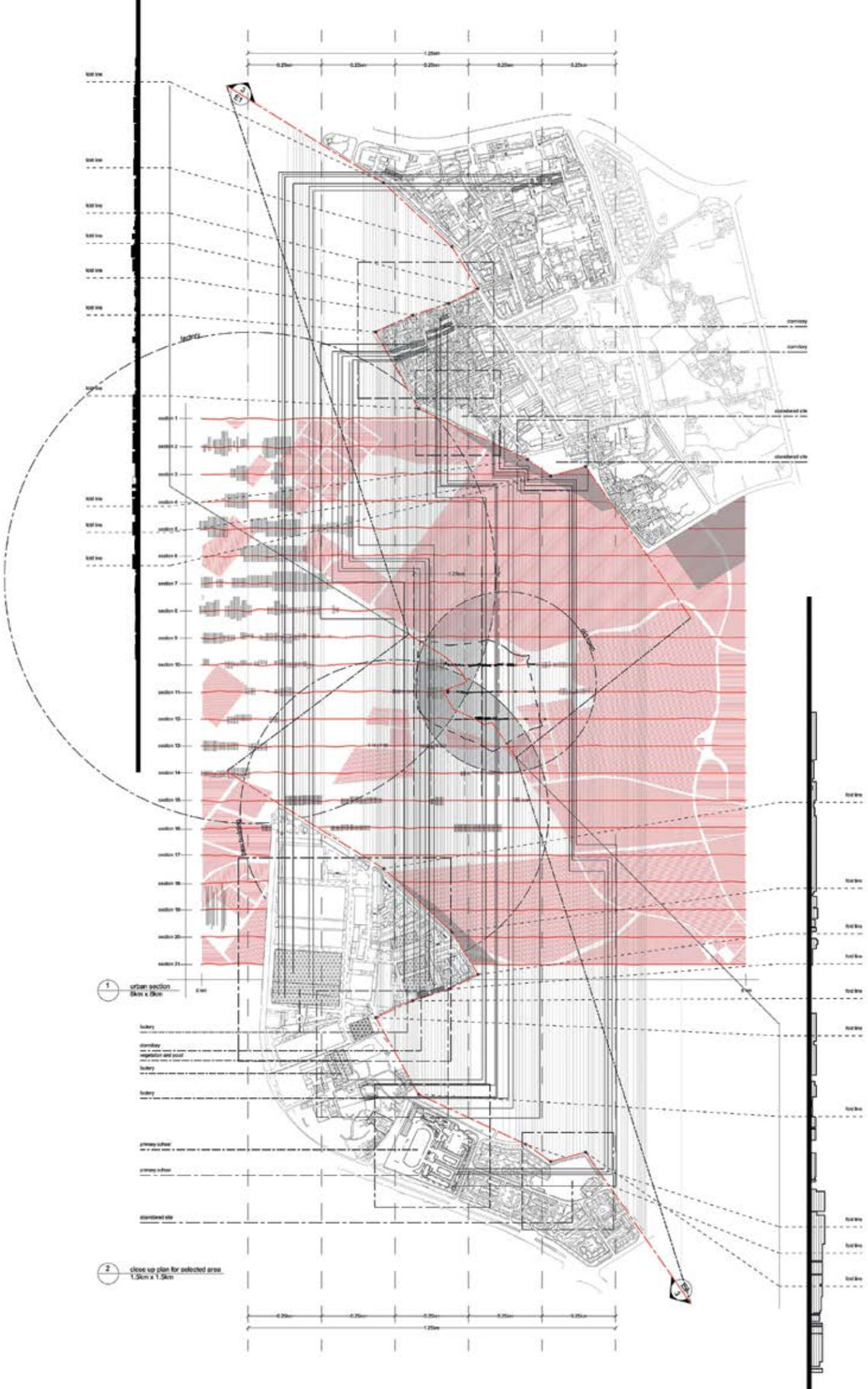
To do this, during fifteen weeks, 54 students are organized into groups and carried out four architectural and four urban planning exercises. In the initial phase of the investigation, students are asked to develop a technically coherent representation of the space to be designed and to raise questions relevant to the design. The primary attention is given to different territorial systems and patterns: topography, water, mobility, nature, and built space. At the same time, students are invited to undertake an observation of ways of life and daily practices in Chengxiang. In the second part of the Studio, students are asked to develop an urban design strategy for the suburban condition, in consistency with some of the topics that emerged during

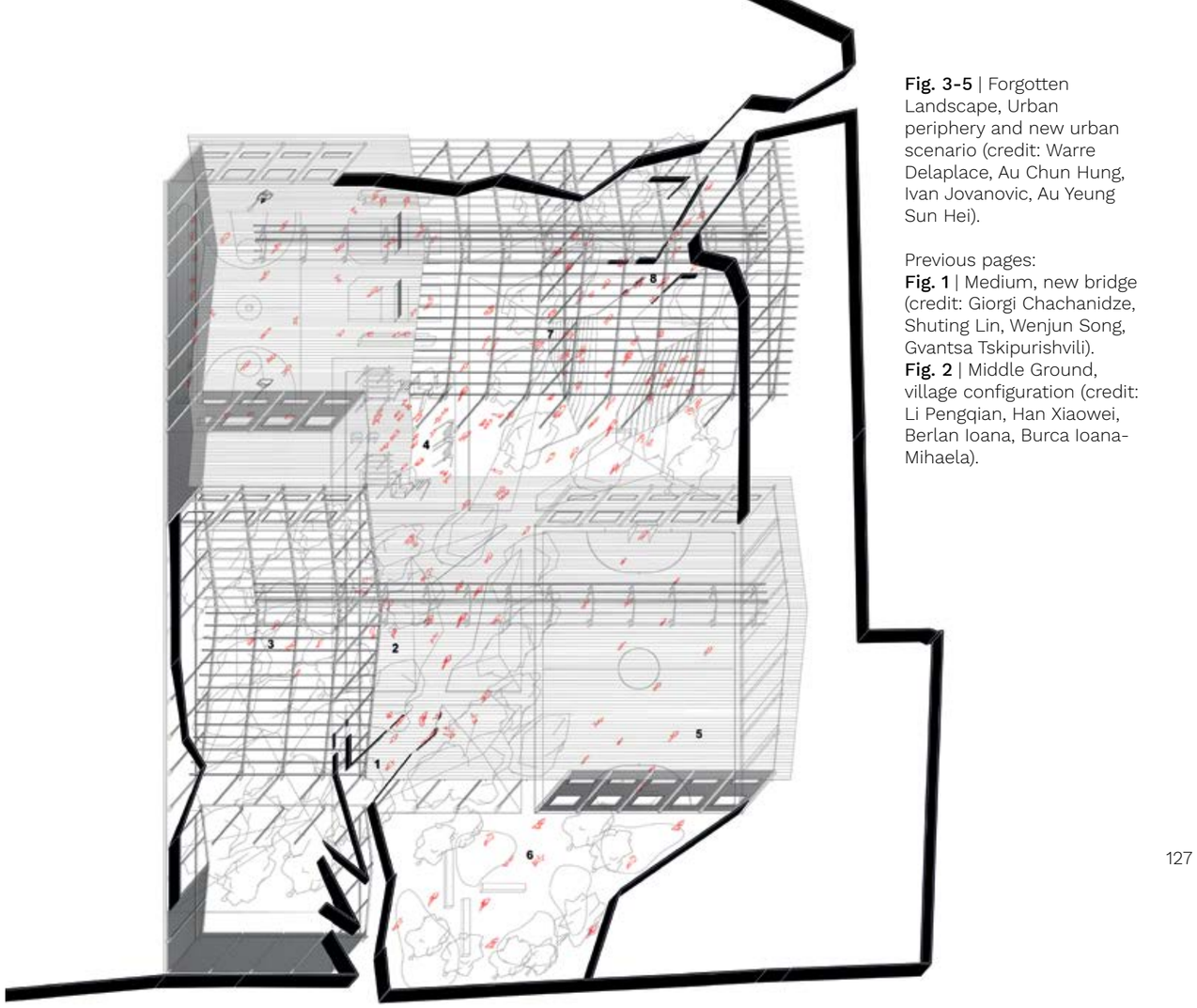
the investigation phase, and then provide an architectural intervention that can enrich and deepen the urban scenarios proposed. Throughout the course, lectures and seminars help in defining the theoretical framework, both through a general exploration of the topic of suburban urbanization in China and through case study projects. In particular, the contribution of Architectural Design presents a series of public spaces and buildings for social activities in the fringes between urban and rural. The contribution of Urban Planning focuses on the emerging transformations in suburban areas and on how contemporary urban design aims to address them, both in the East and in Western countries.

Each scenario developed by the student groups explores new relationships between architecture and urban space. Each project develops a specific theme, such as new residential models, new industrial and logistics settlements, new environmental infrastructures, new public spaces, and new mobility infrastructures. Materials, tectonics and architectural tones are at the heart of each project to establish a new relationship with the existing built environment.









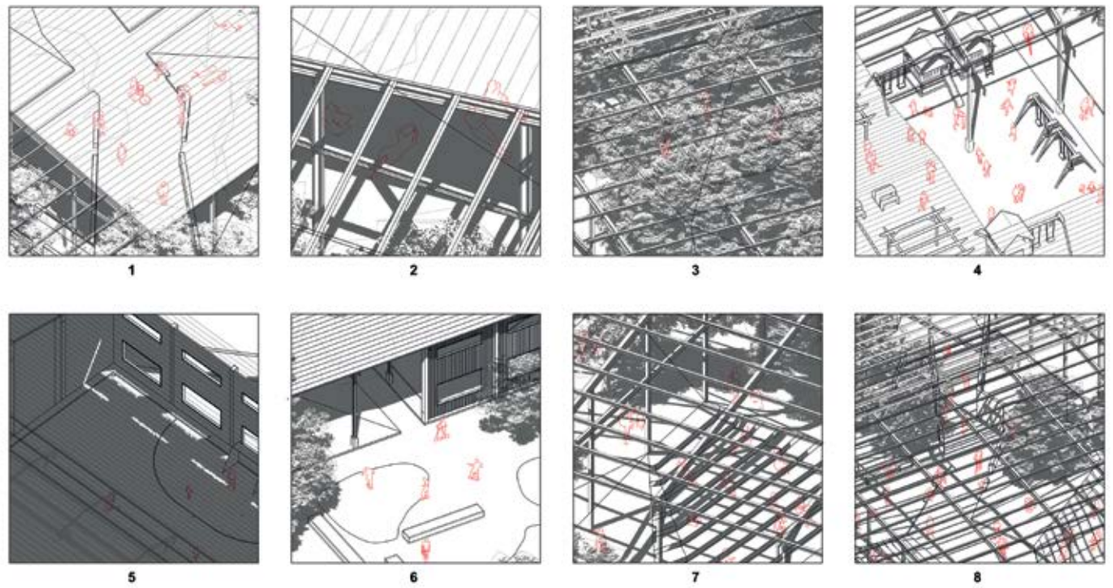


Fig. 3-5 | Forgotten Landscape, Urban periphery and new urban scenario (credit: Warre Delaplace, Au Chun Hung, Ivan Jovanovic, Au Yeung Sun Hei).

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Fig. 1 | Medium, new bridge (credit: Giorgi Chachanidze, Shuting Lin, Wenjun Song, Gvantsa Tskipurishvili).
Fig. 2 | Middle Ground, village configuration (credit: Li Pengqian, Han Xiaowei, Berlan Ioana, Burca Ioana-Mihaela).

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
China Room
REPORT 2024
Edited by: Camilla Forina, Leonardo Ramondetti
Graphic design: Camilla Forina
Proof reading: Saurajeeta Bose Paul
Cover: A farmer collecting crops in Gangyao Village, 2021 (credit: Raul Ariano)

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The publication collects the outputs of the research activities of the China Room of the Politecnico di Torino referring to the period 2017 - 2020. Texts, images and graphics are the result of the work of professors, researchers and PhD students of the China Room or of collaborations with students, institutions and external research groups. The aim is to present and disseminate the China Room's research themes and methods to the academic world. The information provided is intended as a general guide throughout a selection of a wider material production.

©2024 Politecnico di Torino, Turin, Italy
ISBN 979-12-81583-01-6 paperback
ISBN 979- 12-81583-03-0 ebook
March 2024.

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