

10 YEARS  
OF THE  
CHINA ROOM  
RESEARCH  
GROUP AT  
POLITECNICO  
DI TORINO

# CHINA BEYOND EXCEPTION

Spatial Entanglements  
across Architecture  
and Urban Studies

Castello del Valentino, Turin

JANUARY 20<sup>TH</sup>-22<sup>ND</sup> 2027

**CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

**DEADLINE EXTENDED UNTIL JUNE 15<sup>TH</sup>**

例外之外的中国

# 10y



Politecnico  
di Torino



## INTRODUCTION

China Room is an interdisciplinary research group at Politecnico di Torino that brings together scholars in architecture, urbanism, and geography to study Chinese urbanisation processes and the impact of Global China on spatial dynamics worldwide. Over the past ten years, the group has developed a rich and diverse body of work, encompassing academic and applied research through exhibitions, teaching initiatives, and design projects often in collaboration with other universities and institutions. These experiences have gradually shaped the China Room into an open and dynamic space where multiple epistemologies, methodologies, and sources of knowledge intersect and mutually inform one another.

To mark her 10 years of activities, China Room is pleased to announce the conference ***China Beyond Exception. Spatial entanglements across Architecture and Urban Studies*** conceived to mobilize and extend the debate initiated within the group outward, in an attempt to broaden the discussion with new perspectives and trajectories. The conference is supported by the Department of Architecture and Design and the Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning. It will take place at the Castello del Valentino (Turin) on January 20–22, 2027.

### PREMISE

Building on a position that consistently guided the group approach, the conference resists the tendency to frame China as an isolated exception within global debates on architecture and urban studies. Instead, China is approached as a privileged field of inquiry from which phenomena, interpretations, and practices emerge in accelerated forms and are confronted across different spatial contexts. While China is often portrayed as a singular case, an extreme laboratory, or a systemic anomaly, ***China Beyond Exception*** proposes a shift in perspective from exceptionality to relationality. Processes observed in China are treated as critical lenses through which to interrogate broader contemporary transformations across rural and urban spaces, infrastructures, professional practices, and pedagogical experiments.

In light of this, the call for original contributions is organised around three interrelated thematic axes that shape the current research trajectories of the group—architectural knowledge, planetary ruralism, infrastructure-led urbanisation. It invites theoretical, empirical, and design-oriented contributions. Emphasis is not placed solely on contributions that take China as their primary or exclusive case study; rather, the call explicitly encourages submissions that engage with the conference's three thematic axes.

In line with the group's values, the conference seeks to foster an open, inclusive, and collaborative space for exchange. The call deliberately pluralizes voices and is addressed to PhD candidates, early-career researchers, and established scholars, all invited to contribute to a collective conversation that begins in China but deliberately moves beyond it.

PROGRAMME

Authors of accepted abstracts will be invited to develop full papers, which will be presented and discussed during the conference with scholars from related fields. These sessions will provide focused feedback for the revision of the contributions. The conference programme will also feature three public lectures by **internationally renowned scholars and practitioners**, hosted at the Castello del Valentino and open to a wider academic and public audience. In addition, the conference will offer two opportunities to engage with the urban and territorial context of Piedmont. One afternoon will be dedicated to a field visit to the **UNESCO World Heritage Site of Langhe-Roero and Monferrato**, a rural landscape shaped by viticulture, settlement patterns, and agricultural heritage. Participants will also be introduced to **Turin's urban history**, with a focus and visit of the city's layered urban fabric, architectural heritage, and spatial transformations.

PUBLICATION

Each conference session will form the basis for the submission of a dedicated **special issue in an international academic journal**. All manuscripts will undergo a standard peer-review process prior to publication, in accordance with the editorial guidelines of the respective journal. Papers not accepted through this process will be published in other international academic journals.

## TERMS AND DEADLINES

### CALENDAR

Submission of extended abstract: **June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

**NEW DEADLINE**

Selection announcement and sharing of editorial guidelines: **Mid-July, 2026**

Submission of full paper: **Mid-December, 2026**

Conference date: **January 20-22<sup>nd</sup>, 2027**

Conference venue: **Castello del Valentino, Torino**

Participation will be exclusively in person; no participation fee is required to attend the conference.

### EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION

#### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

**Language:** UK English

**Citation:** APA Style

**Keywords:** up to 5

**Length:** up to 6000 characters (spaces incl.; bibliography excl.)

**Conference session:** -

*Extended abstracts may be structured at the authors' discretion and must **clearly specify the intended session**. They should provide a clear overview of the aims of the research and the underlying research questions, while situating the contribution within the current state of the debate and ongoing research in the field. This should be followed by a concise explanation of the approach adopted to address the research questions, focusing in particular on methodology, positionality, and potential case studies.*

#### SHORT BIO

**Language:** UK English

**Affiliation:** University, School/Department, Research group

**Email:** -

**Length:** up to 700 characters (spaces incl.)

### SUBMISSION

Submissions should consist of a single Word file (maximum size: 10 MB) containing all required materials. The file should be named using the session number, followed by an underscore and the author's surname (examples: S1\_Surname.doc; S2\_Surname.doc; S3\_Surname.doc), and should be sent to: **china.beyond@polito.it**

**For any additional inquiries please visit us at: <https://chinaroom.polito.it/open-call/> or contact [china.beyond@polito.it](mailto:china.beyond@polito.it)**

# THE UNSTABLE PROFESSION

Pedagogy, Practice,  
and the Reconfiguration of  
Architectural Knowledge

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S1

## THE UNSTABLE PROFESSION

### Pedagogy, Practice, and the Reconfiguration of Architectural Knowledge

#### PREMISE

The relationship between **architectural pedagogy** and **professional practice** has long been under debate, raising questions about employability, disciplinary autonomy, technological disruption, and professional identity (Colomina et al., 2022). Since the **institutionalisation of architectural training**, the discipline has continuously questioned, reframed, and reformulated how architecture should be taught and how teaching relates to **practicing in an unstable professional environment**, contingent on broader economic, social, and political shifts (Salama, 2015).

In the case of modern China, architectural professionalism did not emerge through autonomous guild consolidation but through state-mediated institutionalisation (Han, 2018), in which architectural schools served as primary mechanisms for stabilising professional identity (Sha, 2013). In recent years, China has come to represent a paradigmatic case in which the architectural profession is confronted with **explicit signals of structural change**: contraction of real estate markets, saturation of conventional design roles, platformisation of services, expansion into advisory and digital domains, and increasing precarity. These shifts are no longer peripheral fluctuations; they are **systemic transformations already affecting enrollment patterns, curricular restructuring, and the perceived value of architectural degrees in major universities across the country**.

What appears in China with particular clarity, however, reflects broader reorganisations of architectural practice and education worldwide, prompting renewed scrutiny of how professional expertise is defined, institutionalised, and transmitted. The expansion of consultative roles, digital mediation, environmental governance, and socially embedded practices are challenging inherited definitions of professionalism. As the traditional model of the architect primarily engaged in building design becomes less assured, architecture is increasingly performed through hybrid roles that blur authorship, expertise, and responsibility.

#### RATIONALE

Starting from this premise, this session asks to examine a specific and consequential dynamic in architectural knowledge production: when professional instability becomes explicit, architectural education inevitably responds; when education responds, the core epistemologies of architectural knowledge are reconfigured; and when that knowledge is reconfigured, new competencies and professional subjectivities are reintegrated into practice in altered forms (Seng, 2022). This entails **moving beyond familiar notions of a “gap” between academy and practice**, often framed in terms of skills or employability, **towards a more inclusive and plural understanding of how shifts in market conditions, institutional structures, social concerns, and disciplinary mandates materially reshape what counts as architectural knowing and doing**.

By foregrounding *contingency*, this session invites contributions that interrogate how architectural education responds, anticipates, or resists—strategically, defensively, or experimentally—to structural shifts in professional reality and market conditions. We seek geographically situated, materially grounded, and cross-culturally comparative investigations that question whether and how architectural education participates in the production, stabilisation, and destabilisation of professional identity.

The session seeks contributions engaged with, but not limited to, the following issues:

### **1. Professional Instability and the Recalibration of Architectural Knowledge**

How does the instability of professional conditions—including fragmented authorship models, the rise of consultancy and advisory roles, new digital production environments, and the fluctuation of real estate markets—reshape architectural education? In what ways do discourses of adaptability, innovation, and resilience reorganize the hierarchy of design skills and competencies?

Rather than treating employability as a purely economic metric, we invite analyses of how it becomes embedded within disciplinary self-definition and how competency discourse interacts with broader epistemological shifts.

### **2. Diversification and the Emergence of New Professionalisms**

As architectural labour expands into environmental mediation, policy advisory roles, data-driven urban analysis, community facilitation, and transdisciplinary consultancy, what forms of professionalism emerge? Do these shifts signal a dilution of disciplinary boundaries, or the expansion of architecture's operational horizon? How do educational institutions negotiate this diversification: through specialisation, hybridisation, or the reinforcement of core disciplinary identities?

We encourage contributions that situate these questions within global and comparative perspectives, moving beyond single national contexts.

### **3. Pedagogies and Projects in Transition**

Beyond curricular re-organisation in response to external conditions, how does the recalibration of architectural knowledge define new forms of pedagogies? To what extent are contingent recalibrations in design education integrating cross-disciplinary domains to respond to external expectations? How do evaluative cultures, peer dynamics, external reviewers, research integration, and digital mediation reshape what counts and specifically defines architectural competences and, consequently, unfold new forms of design?

Contributions may engage with contemporary debates on critique culture, pedagogical reform, and experimental studio formats, including transdisciplinary and research-led models.

Colomina, B., Galán, I. G., Kotsioris, E., & Meister, A.-M. (Eds.). (2022). *Radical pedagogies: Architectural education and the British tradition*. MIT Press.

Salama, A. M. (2015). *Spatial Design Education: New Directions for Pedagogy in Architecture and Beyond*, Ashgate.

Seng, E. (2022). Situated competency | Competenza situata. *Ardeth*, 10-11, 21–37.

Han, J. (2018). *China's architecture in a globalizing world: Between socialism and the market*. Routledge.

Sha, K. (2013). Professionalism in China's building sector: An economic governance perspective. *Building Research & Information*, 41(6), 728–742.

# RURALISM(S)

Spatial Dynamics  
and Everyday Practices  
from China to Planetary  
Perspectives

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S2

## RURALISM(S)

### Spatial Dynamics and Everyday Practices from China to Planetary Perspectives

PREMISE

Contemporary spatial debate is increasingly called to move beyond urban-centred frameworks as primary analytical categories that have long structured the interpretation of spatial change (Roy, 2016; Watson, 2009). **Within rural studies, crisis has been recurrently used to describe the rural as a space of demographic loss, economic marginality, environmental degradation, or social fragility**, often in implicit comparison with urban norms of productivity and growth. Such framings tend to position the rural as a residual category—defined by what it lacks—while obscuring its active role in producing plural spatial dynamics and diverse daily practices. From a critical and relational perspective, crisis is therefore understood not as a singular condition to be solved, but as a narrative and analytical category that shapes how the rural is known, governed, and designed. In this sense, the notion of crisis does not simply describe rural conditions, but actively participates in producing them, delimiting which futures are imaginable and which practices are rendered legitimate.

RATIONALE

By challenging the idea of the rural as a residual or fixed category subordinated to the urban, this call invites contributors to **rethink ruralities beyond binary spatial taxonomies**. Rather than opposing the urban or re-centering the rural as a new totality, this call is positioned on a relational **rural–urban continuum**. It explicitly refuses rural–urban hierarchies and dichotomies, while remaining attentive to the co-constitutive relations through which rural and urban processes are continuously entangled and unevenly produced. Within this framework, rural spaces are not understood as residual secondary condition or operational landscapes derived from urbanisation processes, but as an active planetary condition of contemporary spatial transformations (Wang et al., 2023).

This perspective aims to disarm nostalgic and marginal conceptions, **addressing rural spaces as sites of active spatial production**. Thus, the rural emerges within diverse physical topographies, industrial and market regimes, social and cultural frameworks, technological structures, ecological dynamics, and modes of human and more-than-human settlement, rather than a space of mere vulnerability and backwardness.

With the plurality of **Ruralism(s)**, this call signals a deliberate engagement with epistemological and ontological diversity, foregrounding **multiple ways of knowing, governing, and designing rural spatial dynamics and everyday practices** in China and beyond (Bolchover & Lin, 2016; Hibbard et al., 2019). Within this framework, rather than restoring an idealised past or compensating for presumed failure, the notions of *repair* and *care* engage with existing conditions, uneven power relations, and ongoing transformations (Awan et al., 2011; Fitz & Krasny, 2019), shifting attention from rupture, crisis and emergency to processes of sustaining, reworking, and negotiating. Understood not as technical solutions or normative imperatives, but as situated spatial practices that foreground maintenance, interdependence, and responsibility across human and more-than-human relations, **repair and care can open to imagining rural futures beyond binary spatial imaginaries** (Scott et al., 2019).

ISSUES OF EXPLORATION

Rather than passive backdrops, rural spaces actively produce, assemble, regulate, and metabolise different flows (labour, capital, data, commodities, energy, waste, species, etc), playing a central role in contemporary processes of spatial transformation, climate change, ecological impact, economic development, governance and cultural production. Far from being external to innovation, **rural spaces constitute primary sites where transformations are materially and spatially enacted, reconfiguring architecture and landscapes.** In this perspective, focusing on ruralities as active arenas where multiple actors coexist in conditions of tension, interdependence, and asymmetrical power, this call asks to rethink Ruralism(s) as a space of opportunity in which plural and situated spatial practices can foreground and imagine new rural futures.

Contributions may explore how plural spatial dynamics and everyday practices have materialised across different context, in China and beyond. Possible questions of inquiry can be:

- 1. What alternative epistemological frameworks can emerge from reading rural transformations as an active and intentional process rather than an indirect consequence of urbanisation?**
- 2. How to critically overcome the narratives of crisis for spatial knowledge, governance practices, and design interventions in rural contexts?**
- 3. Through which planning tools, experimental design practices and reuse strategies, do rural spaces actively produce heterogeneous and adaptive spatial transformations?**
- 4. How can the notions of *repair* and *care* contribute to envisioning alternative rural futures?**

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INFRASTRUC-  
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URBANITIES

*After the Chinese Boom*

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S3

## INFRASTRUCTURE-LED URBANITIES

### After the Chinese Boom

#### PREMISE

Over the last decades, **large-scale infrastructural projects have emerged as critical drivers of interconnected transformations**, intensifying environmental change, accelerating urban expansion, and deepening social and spatial frictions (Schindler et al., 2021). Unprecedented political, symbolic, and economic resources are being channelled into transport corridors, energy systems, and water networks, largely in support of new forms of urbanisation (Nesbit & Waldheim, 2023). However, current shifts in global investment patterns and geopolitical power relations signal a new conjuncture marked by recalibration, slowdown, renegotiation, and selective retrenchment rather than continued expansion of novel infrastructural systems. These transformations are once again reshaping urban development trajectories. Rather than examining infrastructures primarily at its moment of promise and projection, this session invites exploration on its afterlives: **incomplete corridors, renegotiated contracts, stranded assets, transformed governance arrangements, and emergent urban configurations that outlast the initial investment cycle.**

#### RATIONALE

By focusing specifically on infrastructure-led urbanisations associated with Chinese projects and investments, and how such investments materialise and reshape urban spaces in the wake of the boom years, this session intends to open up reflection on **infrastructure-led urbanisations “after the Chinese boom”**, a phase in which the urban consequences of previous waves of investment are unfolding unevenly across territories. We are concerned with **how infrastructural projects generate concrete urban settings, how they reconfigure spatial relations, and how they induce novel governance and design practices.** This condition is particularly evident in relation to Chinese projects, such as the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. Often described as a global force of urban transformation (Apostolopoulou et al., 2026), the BRI has come to occupy a pivotal position as an infrastructure-led development strategy with far-reaching urban consequences, including **logistics and infrastructure development** (Smith, 2022), **urban models circulation** (Wan et al., 2020), and **new town construction** (Safina et al., 2024), among others. Recent shifts in politics and economic conditions invite renewed scrutiny on such initiatives, since the modalities through which infrastructure-led urban projects materialises across specific contexts have become increasingly complex and differentiated.

Transcending geopolitical and macroeconomic readings, this section seeks to discuss three main issues:

### **1. The emerging spaces of infrastructure-led urbanisation**

What infrastructure-led urbanisations are produced by Chinese-related projects and investments? We invite contributions that examine how water, energy, transport, and logistics systems actively participate in the production of new urban spaces and spatial relations. Ports, dry-ports, special economic zones (SEZs), energy hubs, and transport corridors increasingly operate as nuclei of urbanisation, giving rise to hybrid spatial formations that blur distinctions between cities, regions, and infrastructures. These spaces emerge at the intersection of global flows and local spaces, generating new patterns of connectivity while simultaneously reworking existing urban fabrics.

We encourage papers that investigate how different infrastructural systems interact and overlap to shape urban landscapes and morphologies, governance arrangements, and everyday life. How do planning frameworks, zoning regimes, and design strategies attempt to steer or stabilise these evolving urban conditions? What tensions emerge between large-scale infrastructural ambitions, local environments and socio-spatial dynamics? By foregrounding spatial planning and design perspectives, this theme seeks to unpack how Chinese-related infrastructure-led urbanisation produces distinctive urban forms, uneven development trajectories, and contested spatial outcomes.

### **2. The urban projects behind infrastructure-led urbanisation**

Large-scale infrastructural investments have increasingly been accompanied by ambitious urban projects and speculative visions, often articulated through masterplans, flagship developments, and new town initiatives. Globally, projects such as Xiong'an New Area, Masdar Eco-City, or NEOM City exemplify how infrastructure is mobilised as a catalyst for comprehensive urban futures, frequently designed by internationally renowned architectural and planning firms. These projects promote imaginaries of efficiency, sustainability, and global competitiveness, while embedding infrastructure at the core of urban form and governance.

Chinese-related infrastructure-led urbanisation similarly rely on urban projects and spatial visions to frame infrastructure-led growth, attract investment, and legitimise landscape transformations. Yet these visions are rarely neutral: they are shaped by specific planning and design cultures, circulating urban models, and promoting urban aspirations. This issue invites contributions that critically examine urban projects, masterplans, and design narratives underpinning infrastructure-led urbanisation, as well as the actors involved in their production and implementation. How do these projects translate global infrastructural ambitions into situated urban forms? How are they adapted, contested, or reworked over time? By focusing on planning and design practices, this issue seeks to unpack the role of urban projects as mediators between infrastructure, urban futures, and socio-spatial change, regardless of whether such visions are ultimately completed.

### 3. The multiple temporalities of infrastructure-led urbanisation

Characterised by being chronically over budget and delayed, large-scale infrastructural projects inherently unfold across extended temporal and scalar horizons. Their planning phases often precede implementation by years or even decades, if implementation occurs at all. Yet even when initial visions remain unrealised, they frequently trigger pre-emptive interventions that become inscribed in the urban fabric, while simultaneously generating spatial frictions and social contestations. The mere prospect of future transformation can be sufficient to mobilise actors and reconfigure urban space, rendering the suspension that characterises many infrastructural megaprojects a critical moment of anticipatory governance and speculative urbanism.

Against this backdrop, we invite contributions that critically examine the spaces emerging from the intersection of multiple infrastructural temporalities in context where Chinese projects and investments materialise. While existing scholarship has predominantly approached infrastructural times from socioeconomic or sociotechnical perspectives, we particularly encourage submissions that engage with them through the lenses of spatial planning and design. Indeed, anticipation and partial spatialisation of infrastructural projects can, in themselves, produce lasting transformations in territorial governance, land-use patterns, urban landscapes and morphologies, and everyday life, irrespective of whether such projects are ultimately completed.

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