magnolias, cypresses, thuja, junipers, isises, gliadoli, lilies, flowering plants that are twisted. This, together, al-
lowed to recreate a unique image of a private house with introduction of the Secession features at all levels – from
the smallest architectural detail of the house to the ele-
ments of the landscape design.

General conclusion
The principles of development of streets with a concen-
trated location of the objects of Secession in the main
architectural centres of this style, depended on the prin-
ciples of development typical for a particular city, the
location of zones of Secession in the main architectural
centres relative to the borders of the reserves and histo-
rical areas, is also marked by specific features.

Due to its specific occurrence and short duration (on
average up to twenty years), the style of Secession on
the territory of Ukraine did not have city-forming sig-
ificance. It manifested as an object style – in some
cases at the level of ensemble development of individ-
ual streets or residential complexes (and then in rare
architectural centres), and the manifestation of style as
observed at the level of the façade or facades) of
the house up to individual details. It is at the level of
the façade where the main features of varieties of Se-
cession (decorative, rationalistic, classicized) can be
observed – decorativeness, asymmetry, polychrome,
curvilinearity of the decorative Secession; lack of de-
cor, monochrome, geometric forms of the Rationalistic
Secession (decorative, rationalistic, classicized) can be
the façade where the main features of varieties of Se-
ccession style in small cities can be attributed to the historical
environment of the second, and in some cases – the
third category, that is, with the permission of more
active intervention in the historical structure of the
spatial framework (3, p. 175-176). In the main cen-
tres, in zones of concentration of architectural ob-
jects of the Secession style, the preference is given to
a holistic restoration of objects while preserving the
building along the streets along the "frontline areas"
and not necessarily maintaining the low-value cour-
yard buildings deep in the neighbourhoods.

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Introducing urbanisation as the principal mean of
economic development
With the promulgation of an array of measures under the
well-known label of Reform and Opening policies, promot-
ed by Deng Xiaoping since the 1980s, China has started
ashothing socio-economic transition to achieve the status
of developed and modern country. The results of the path
taken four decades ago are under the lights of media, which
paint the Chinese megacities as the tangible effects of this
process. This article moves from two assumptions. First,
the Chinese transition is just halfway and it is expected to
last for several decades. This raises many concerns about
how sustainability will be applied to such anast development
model (Til 2010) and challenges the canonic notion of city
(Meriggi 2018). Second, urbanisation is not the result of the
transition. Conversely, it is the principal and controversial
mean. The Chinese model for mass housing is the result
of precise land optimization through engineering-based
approaches, based on the maximization and velocity of
profits (Sudic 2005: 2; Chow 2015: 74; Fabris and Sem-
prebon 2015: 104-113). Against the backdrop of the theo-
ries of "ecological civilisation", urbanisation is accepted
as apositive value (Bai et al. 2011). More, we witness an
unquestioned faith in it, perhaps son of apositivistic ap-
proach toward development, that turns urbanisation into the
unavoidable form of national growth. The Chinese model
applied to ordinary practices is commonly acknowledged
by scholars to produce built forms insensitive to contextual
specifications, adopting repeated solutions flattened by
the absence of typological variations (Huang 2006)
(Figure 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). The threats of urban growth can be
found in several factors. One is the institution of
the so-called "Special Economic Development Zones"
(SEZs), namely areas which benefit from legal, fisc-
al and use privileges to facilitate land development
and foreign investments, among which Shanghai
and Shenzhen are the most known expressions. An-
other element is the trading of land use rights, which
produces funds to be devoted to construction activity
such as infrastructures. In China all the land is astate-
owned property but the right of using it can be sold
for certain line-spans. Moreover, the relaxation of the
rigid household registration system, the hukou, ex-
acerbates the already consistent migration flow from
ruralities to urban agglomerates (Friedman 2005; Zhu
2017: 3.)

Rural Urbanisation: from apolitical process
to apolitical goal
In parallel with urban expansion, another form of
urbanisation is the re-shaping of the Chi-
inese territories, the one known as in-situ ur-
banisation. This consists of the productive of
urban-like environments in rural areas, that in
China comprehend all those territories under
the jurisdiction of villages and townships. The

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Shaping a future countryside.
Light and shadow on rural settlement's models in Chinese urban-rural
continuum

Abstract
With the turn of the millennium, Chinese central government issued arrays of policies targeted to promote virtuous cycles of vitalization in rural areas, mitigate the socio-economic gap with urbanised regions, and face the problem of food security. The current transition is leading China to have an ever-saturated land where the boundaries between human settlements are elusive and blurred, shaping what is scholarly labelled as an urban-rural continuum. The settlement's schemes realized over the last years, that consists of small or medium size towns as the result of natural villages relocation or new agglomerations, intercepts the call for urbanity, and its related amenities in terms of infrastructure and services – or, in accord, the desire for ahouse in the city – emerging from the marginalized rural citizens. The authors found that such controversial practices are shaping the new Chinese countryside which, conceived as a form of sustainable development by national programs, turned out to impact significantly on the people lifestyle as well as the built environment. Based on several months on-field ob-
vervations and recent literature, the paper reveals atwo-fold degree of resilience: weak about the real production of space for
dwelling and robust about the intangible culture composed by indigenous beliefs and symbolism entangled with the con-
cepts of home and family.

Keywords: China, development, rural, countryside, housing

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countryside is experiencing a profound transition as well, whose turning points are the proclamation of the People Republic of China, which imposed a new social order on the long-lasting traditional one, and the new era inaugurated with the Reform and Opening policies issued since the 1980s. In particular, the implementation of the Household Responsibility system, which ensured farmers direct access to the markets’ opening, represented a catalyst for socio-economic and cultural development. Peasants’ revenue was put in housing construction, either replacing existing dwellings or adding new volumes on the arable soil. The introduction of modern techniques, especially reinforced concrete, ensured farmers to build taller and larger houses, able to host all the members of the family during the holidays and festivals.

The model of rural dwelling shifted from the traditional one-storey courtyard (or semi-courtyard) complex to the free-standing multistorey box-a-like “villa” (Knapp 2005: 6), a rough concrete structure to dress with fancy apparatus of decorations inspired both to local and western elements (Figure 6). This happened in a spontaneous and pervasive way in close relation with processes of rural abandonment, of existing buildings, residential land expansion, shaping the so-called phenomenon of “village hollowing” (Liu et al. 2010; Long et al. 2012: 17; Sun et al. 2011: 355). At the turn of the millennium, Professor Wen Tiejun formulated the “three rural issues”, framing the contemporary challenges of rural development (Wen 2007: 24; Pan, Luo et Wen 2017: 128). The questions enunciated by Wen coupled with the problem of “food security” (Brown 1995) and social segregation (Whyte 2010), raising many concerns among Beijing’s policy-makers about how to deal with the countryside restructuring ensuring a sustainable path towards the desired development. Moreover, land reclamation is apressing topic in national agenda considering the relationship between arable land and population in China. Indeed, only 10% out of the Chinese territory is arable, considerably lower than the world amount counting for 24%. Meadows and forests are appreciably inferior too (Zan et al. 2018). An array of top-down policies have been defined at different levels of administration, including the 2006 “Building anew socialist countryside” (Long, Lu, Li et al. 2010: 466; Ahlers and Schubert 2009: 38), the 2013 “Beautiful Village” (Zhang 2018: 13; Li 2016: 72), and the 2018 “Strategic plan for Rural Revitalization 2018-2022”, in order to stimulate virtuous practices of rural development. A new interest towards the restructuring of the countryside is also witnessed by cultural institutions, such as the Chinese participation to the 2018 Venice Biennale of Architecture, with a pavilion narrating the design experiments taking place in contemporary rural China, entitled “Building a Future Countryside” (Xiangning 2018). The current transition of ruralities has been acknowledged to be a potential asset for rural development, but also enhancing the integration between in situ and the agricultural products processing, with online retail and logistics. The new settlement is characterized by “crystal clear streams with reflections of beautiful flowers and fragrant fruits surrounded by thinly-built fences,” but also enhances the integration between industries and villages, mobilizing rural resources, and helping farmers to get rich.” From one side, the project optimizes the spatial layout providing the largest amount of services at the lowest price.
in this project are poor and denote ascerbate devotion
to the improvement of the settlement’s spatial qual-
ity. Even though the project aims, and achievements,
to concentrate the residential area, the built shaping
resonates as an urban peripheral expansion. This
pattern negates both the presence of acenture and the
consolidated relationships between territory and hu-
man activity, afflute that characterized the ruralisms
over centuries. This settlement’s model of integrating
the grassroots aspirations, the top-down policies and
the natural resources faces the application of ba-
nal solutions in terms of built forms and spatial layout
(Figure 10, Figure 11, Figure 12).

Searching new settlement’s models starting from
strategic approaches
The settlement’s schemes realized over the last
years, consisting of small or medium size towns
as the result of natural villages relocation or new
agglomerations, intercept the call for urbanity, and
its related amenities in terms of infrastructure and
services — or, in adord, the desire for ahouse in
the city — emerging from the marginalized rural citi-
zens. The implementation of the above-mentioned
policies resulted in controversial practices such as
villages relocations and construction of suburbia-
like settlements. During our fieldwork, we observed
atwo-fold degree of resilience: weak about the real
production of space for dwelling, as the case of
Jiankou Village clearly reveals, and robust about
the intangible culture composed by indigenous be-
iefs and symbolism entangled with the concepts of
home and family. This materializes in concomitance
with the strong presence of religious and sacred
spaces, such as temples and family shrines, and
in the dwellings interiors, manifesting in domestic
furniture and wall’s decorations. Even tough such
atmospheric space, between inside and out-
side, sacred and secular may puzzle external ob-
servers, we have found that this apparent ambiguity
is strongly radicated in the Chinese cultural back-
ground (Knapp 2005). We argue that the recent ar-
y of policies and initiatives opens ahuge space for
design experimentations. Some architectural
practices have engaged this new challenge, as in
the case of the well-known Rural Urban Framework
(Bolchover and Lin 2014; Valle 2016). However,
we found inconsistent gap between the proclaimed pur-
poses and guidelines and the ordinary practices. In
order to mitigate the loss of cultural diversities, the
authors suggest that a smart strategy should start by
considering what exists as apotential asset, avail-
able for practices of re-cycling, such as the gradual
demolition of dilapidated artefacts, the introduc-
tion of temporary uses, or the punctual action on
the buildings in acceptable state of conservation.
The case study illustrated suggests that land use
optimization enhances the services’ quality but at
the same time, threatens the aesthetic and cultural
values that permeate the rural settlements. In our
opinion, in Jiankou Village this happened because

the planning design for the new community missed
the contribution of architectural and urban design disciplines,
which disreged in front of comforting methodologies of “land optimization”, based more on quantitative selection
rather than qualitative discern and critic thinking.

ENDNOTES
1 The hukou system is used by the government to plan expenses for so-
cial services. According to the hukou, the population is divided into two
categories: rural and urban. This geneerates two classes that hardly
possible to switch.
2 Namely: rural people, rural society, and rural agriculture.
3 Jiankou Happy Communities Village, Putian City District, Fujian Province.
4 Text taken from the Jiankou Village Illustrative panel illustrated in figure
7. Text revised by the authors.

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