RECOVERING CHINA’S AGRICULTURAL AND WATER LANDSCAPES
RECONFIGURING RURAL TO URBAN BUILT TYPOLOGIES

Bassett will be discussing her design research and teaching, which engage the Recovering of China’s Agricultural and Water Landscape and the reconfiguring of rural to urban built typologies. Within the context of China’s new urbanization strategy, her work examines the possibilities for China’s landscape and ecological recovery in the face of its previous Urbanization’s deterioration of ecology and cultural identity. In opposition to China’s recent previous urban development strategies, a renewed relationship between nature and culture through new models of urbanization operate at the intersection of urban design, planning and ecological systems. These include the reconfiguring of rural to urban built typologies, having the agency to be transformative, in addition to the reinsertion and embedding of the everyday social and cultural practices and processes in China within public space in Chinese cities. China’s recent urbanization has been explosive. In an inversion which first began with its opening up again to market forces in 1978 with Economic Reform under Deng Xiaoping, it is projected that China’s population will transition from 80% rural and 20% urban to 20% rural and 80% urban by the year 2050.

The recent eco-city project in China initially presented the potential to address a number of issues of sustainability. While these have done so, in part, primarily at the building systems scale, it can be critiqued that they have been lacking in integrative sustainable and meaningful public space. Their construction and development have, in some cases, actually undermined their actual landscapes and the eco-system services, which they provide. While recent trends in Western cities have begun to adopt urban agriculture as strategies, China’s cities continue to adopt a more City Beautiful movement approach to its landscapes.

This discussion explores possible alternative building typologies, which take the valuable qualities and characteristics of rural building typologies and reconfigure them in to urban ones. It explores their potential to create hybrid programs and typologies, which can create opportunities for urban agriculture. It does so through the analysis and discussion of selected case studies. This includes design research, in addition to analyzing the results of two architecture and urban design studios run in collaboration between Chinese and US students by me. The first examined alternative methods for urban development using the Tianjin Chinese Eco-city as a lens to do so. The studio examined alternative solutions to the prevailing prescriptive zoning and building massing and spacing strategies, which are conducive to creating the Modernist Tower in a Park model in Chinese cities. The studio also re-examined the role of ecology in the design through integrated landscape and ecological planning as a methodology. Further, the studio also examined the possibilities of activating the spaces in between buildings as productive landscape, which might include harvesting water collection and producing energy, in addition to creating productive urban landscapes. It examines these strategies across a spectrum of design scales: the building envelope; master planning and their integration with the larger landscape and ecological systems of design. She will also discuss a second project run this past summer with UB Architecture students, entitled, “Village Acupunctures: Back to the Countryside: An Urban Landscape and Architectural Intervention for Xixinan, Anhui through ecological urbanism and public space design”. Finally, she will discuss a project which engages the Reconfiguring Networks and Infrastructures in Huai Hua, Hunan, a design for Urban Agriculture Infrastructure and an Adopt a Farm Model-Shanghai Urban Dwellers.
In conclusion, these projects offer new models for rural building typologies reconfigured as new urban ones, addressing issues of food security and the recovery of China’s agricultural and water landscapes, in addition to positing how these provide new possibilities for re-inserting and re-embedding the everyday social and cultural practices and processes in Chinese cities.

**BIO**

Shannon Bassett is an architect and urban designer. Her research, teaching, writing and practice operate at the intersection of architecture, urban design and ecological systems. She teaches both undergraduate, as well as graduate design studios in both architecture, as well as urban design. She also teaches a graduate research seminar entitled, Landscape and Ecology as Urbanism.

Her writing on both China’s explosive urbanization and its changing landscape, as well as shrinking cities and the post-industrial landscape in North America, has been published in Topos, Urban Flux (Beijing), Canadian Architect, Garten + Landschaft and Landscape Architecture China. Her design research has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, including at the Hong Kong and Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture (2012) and was featured in the ensuing book publication, “Learning from Tri-ciprocal Cities: The time, the place, the people.” She was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant for (re)stitch TAMPA, the publication (Re)stitch Tampa Riverfront-Designing the Post-War Coastal American City through Ecologies” ensued from this research platform. Her design practice has included designing an urban design master plan and study for an urban artist colony on 42-acre site, the Village of the Arts in Bradenton, Florida as well as a series of speculative design studies for the City of Tampa Riverwalk for the City of Tampa. She has lectured internationally, as well as run design research studios in China collaborating with the Tongji College of Architecture and Urban Planning, the Tianjin School of Architecture and most recently, Turenscape-College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, Peking University in both Beijing and Anhui province.

She is an elected board member of the International Association for China Planning (IACP) and has served two consecutive terms since 2011. She holds a Masters of Architecture in Urban Design from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and a Bachelors of Architecture with Distinction from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. While at Harvard she was a Research and Teaching Assistant for the Center for Urban Development Studies, later the Institute for International Urban Development, assisting with the research for the publication "Financing Urban Shelter: Global Report on Human Settlement" for the United Nations.