

EDITORIAL

Revitalizing ideas for countryside conservation
in Chinese societiesSidney C. H. Cheung^{1*} and Thomas W. L. Chung²¹Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China²School of Architecture, Faculty of Social Science, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China(This article belongs to the *Special Issue: Regenerating Views, Values, and Visions in Countryside Conservation in Chinese Societies*)

Countryside conservation has attracted increased attention not primarily for preserving rural landscapes for traditional farming, but for offering urbanites a channel to escape the pressured lifestyles of modern cities and immerse themselves in the diverse cultures. Countryside refers to the intermediate zone between rural and urban areas, where urban dwellers are welcome to visit while fully respecting the innate values of the rural inhabitants. To enhance the rural-urban symbiosis in the countryside area, traditional settlements and local houses in the new countryside zones play significant roles as important settings where both the local host and urban guest engage with each other. Historically, in the eyes of modern architects and urban planners, most of these areas have been vibrant agricultural settlements enriched with meaningful traditions for centuries and serve as geographical convergence points with other areas. For many Chinese societies, these areas represent precious land resources with rich cultural heritage; however, they have become increasingly vulnerable to natural encroachment due to the exodus of villagers who aim for better economic opportunities in the city and overseas.

Countryside conservation and revitalization projects in these once dilapidated villages come into sight in respect to government policy support and availability of funding. Situated between the urban fringe and the heartland of nature conservation known as country parks—and often lacking vehicular access or modern infrastructure—these locations have become prioritized for rural revitalization funding to mitigate the risks of uncontrolled private developments and potential conflict with local villagers. This prompts the alliance of villagers, stakeholders, researchers, other interested parties, and the public in variegated conservation efforts for research, education, and recreational benefits. In this special issue, we present several insightful articles focusing on various rural locations that demonstrate various approaches to strategizing and implementing measures to address the dynamics in many Chinese communities.

This special issue arose both from an invitation from the editorial team of the *Journal of Chinese Architecture and Urbanism* and the ongoing countryside conservation projects in Hong Kong, which we have been working on since 2020. More importantly, recognizing that several related projects with similar themes have been undertaken by colleagues, we believe it is timely to synthesize these research outcomes in a coherent thematic framework through collating them in a special issue. Such an effort would help garner greater attention for countryside conservation, particularly through the lens of multidisciplinary approaches. To enhance the quality of each research contribution and

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foster mutual understanding of one another's work, we organized a casual yet intensive hybrid-format meeting at a prominent bookstore in Chengdu in October 2024. The event provided an opportunity to strengthen all the (selected) articles through the exchange of research experiences. Field visit to Chengdu's suburban areas at the time of the meeting also offered valuable insights and inspiration.

In this special issue, we gather a collection of articles contributed by scholars and experts working in different fields of research such as anthropology, archaeology, architecture, history, museum studies, and sociology. These articles investigate the shifting connotations of

Chinese architecture in the context of urbanization and modernization. We are confident that articles in this special issue offer readers a valuable entry point for understanding the views, values, and visions of countryside conservation in Chinese societies through multidisciplinary perspectives.

Conflict of interest

Both Sidney C. H. Cheung and Thomas W. L. Chung are Guest Editors of this special issue, with the former also serving as an Editorial Board Member for the journal. Separately, all the authors declared that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.