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Emergent Technology for Building Rural-Urban Incubators

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The studio will explore the diverse and multivalent rural-urban context in southwest China to speculatively consider alternate models of future urbanization. By coupling advanced construction technologies and local building practices, the studio will design mixed-use incubators that can act as a catalyst for measured urban growth. Having experienced unrelenting spatial transformation over the past several decades, settlements in the rural and rural-urban territory comprise a collaged context of regularized urban fabric, productive landscape, and vernacular village fabric that traverses a sprawling network of infrastructure and natural landscape systems. The distinct co-existence and varying degree of adjacencies between the local-specific and the urban-generic contexts open the possibility to cultivate novel forms of spatially and architecturally hybridized systems, as well as offer important clues to rethink sustainable modes of urbanization through specific local cultural, spatial, and material practices.

The studio seeks to develop experimental designs for rural-urban incubators by exploring the intersection of emergent construction technology and local building techniques. Probing between the local-specific and urban-generic, projects will accommodate the diverse and coexisting needs of the agricultural and urban communities. Current architectural and urban developments within the rural framework largely oscillate between two extremes: monotonous copies of homogenized urban models or ad-hoc bottom-up local construction. The studio will visit and develop an understanding of the rural-urban context to discover unique local spatial and construction practices as opportunities to customize housing and community program for an adaptable design. In tandem, the studio will research current advanced fabrication technologies and progressively examine the possibility of scaling up such systems or augmenting technology with local material resources. Students will work in teams of two to develop speculative design projects that operate both at the scale of the rural-urban fabric (village) and the scale of the building through drawings and experimentation with small-scale model prototypes.

The site of intervention will be the rural-urban zone along the urban boundary of Chongqing, China. Being the only provincial-level municipality and first-tier city in Southwest China, the Chongqing municipal area spans 82,403 km² and is equivalent in size to Austria. The city is dotted with urban clusters which are surrounded by vast rural districts and landscapes, further intensifying the urban and rural dual structure. The studio will travel to Chongqing in central China between 2/15-2/23 to research Chongqing as a multivalent place and its “rural-metropolis” characteristics.