CITIES IN A CHANGING WORLD:
QUESTIONS OF CULTURE, CLIMATE AND DESIGN

• Paper / Proposal Title:
In-between Grounds: Cultural Heritage in China’s Middle Ground

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• Abstract (300 words):
Caught between China’s ever-expanding urban centers and marginalized rural villages exists an amalgamated territory that has surprisingly been overlooked and dismissed by the profession and academics. We have coined this diffused landscape “Middle Ground”, a peripheral urban condition distinctive to China. China’s Middle Ground is not planned, it is continuously transforming and characterized by a series of generic buildings typologies: three-story concrete frame houses, corrugated pitch roofed warehouses, brick-clad factories and glass office buildings. Beyond these anonymous buildings, exists a complex network of once-rural historical villages, once the backbone of vital trade routes, that are today disappearing at alarming rates.

The future existence and eventual integration of these traditional villages back into the daily life of China’s “Terrain Vague” is the topic of this research. By taking a network of Hakka villages centered around the village of He Xin Wu (何新屋), Guangdong Province, the paper seeks to study a dozen traditional Hakka villages along the ancient Yue Gan Trade Route (粤赣驿道) connecting Guangdong and Jiangxi, with the aim to understand and assess their status vis-à-vis configuration, construction and potential revitalization. Without innovation and solutions that challenge China’s Middle Ground, its rural DNA risks being lost and vanishing forever. Architecture through the integration of heritage and technology can facilitate a realignment and promote a positive change between rural traditions and the inevitable socio-economic restructuring. He Xin Wu represents a unique
opportunity to stimulate a sense of place, instill civic pride and social engagement in a constantly mutating and often anonymous landscape.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Peter W. Ferretto was born in Manchester in 1972, grew up in the Northern Italian town of Como. He graduated from both Cambridge and Liverpool Universities and worked as a registered Architect for several International architectural practices, including Herzog & de Meuron in Basel, before establishing his own firm, PWFERRETTO, in 2009. He started his academic career as a Unit Master in the undergraduate programme at the Architectural Association in London where he was also Director of the Seoul Visiting School between 2007-2010. In 2009 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Architecture at Seoul National University in Korea and since 2014 has taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong as an Associate Professor of Design and Practice. In 2016 he was made Director of the Masters of Architecture Programme and in 2019 became Associate Director of the School. Ferretto’s research explores the relationship between urban/rural territories through architecture and design. His research subjects include Architectural Urban Typologies of Seoul, Residual Urban Spaces of Hong Kong, Everyday Urban Conditions, The Contemporary Background City, Reactivating the Social Spaces of Chinese Ethnic Minority Villages and Self-build Timber Houses in Rural China.