Editorial

BEN HILLMAN AND JONATHAN UNGER

For the first time in history, more Chinese people now live in towns and cities than in rural villages. Reaching 51% in 2011, urbanisation in China is accelerating. Convinced that this holds the key to the country's ongoing social and economic development, China's leaders recently announced an urbanisation target of 70% (approximately 900 million people) by 2025. However, leaders including Premier Li Keqiang have emphasised that future urbanisation would be characterised not by an expansion of megacities (*dushihua* 都市花), but by growth in rural towns and small cities (*chengzhenhua* 城镇化). The Party is essentially seeking to take the cities to the rural populace rather than bring the rural populace to the cities. Following the policy announcement at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, a group of national ministries has been tasked with developing guidelines for promoting the urbanisation of rural China.

In reality, this understudied dimension of China's urbanisation has been underway for some time. Following the industrialisation of many rural areas along the coast and within distance of cities, many "villages" have grown to accommodate 30,000 or more workers. Today many of these villages, especially in the Pearl River Delta, have become urban-like nodes in an ever-widening urban sprawl. Even in China's agricultural heartland, vast numbers of county towns are becoming small cities, a process accelerated by the increasing concentration of public services in county towns and the expansion of industry in China's inland provinces. In a separate thrust, in much of China, under the auspices of the Building a New Socialist Countryside programme (*jianshe shehui zhuyi xin nongcun* 建设社会主义新农村) that began in 2006, [1] government policies are encouraging whole villages to demolish their current housing and to move into communities of high-density townhouses, sometimes merging several villages in order to provide supermarkets, libraries, etc., in a replication of urban life. All of these forms of onrushing urbanisation are reshaping rural China – its landscape, culture, and social structures.

The articles in this issue examine these diverse changes. The papers derive from a workshop [2] that we organised in 2012 in Yunnan, at which the papers were discussed and critiqued, and subsequently were revised with our editorial input. Valuable additional editorial suggestions have been provided by external referees and the editors of *China Perspectives*.

The first three papers by Andrew Kipnis, Ben Hillman, and Tom Cliff are case studies of different types of county towns that have rapidly become cities. Andrew Kipnis' paper explores urban-rural integration in a prosperous rural city in Shandong Province. Tom Cliff examines the Chinese visions underpinning city planning and the impact of urbanisation on local culture and ethnic relations in a small city in Xinjiang. Ben Hillman's case study of a rapidly growing county capital in northwest Yunnan explores the impact of its expansion and explains how, in the absence of effective education and employment policies, urbanisation can lead to the economic marginalisation of ethnic minorities.

The next paper examines a largely unknown but widespread type of urbanisation. Him Chung and Jonathan Unger present case studies of four villages in Guangdong that have urbanised while retaining control of their land and converting the village collectives into property companies. This stands in contrast to the most widely known form of urbanisation in rural China, which involves the forced acquisition of farmland by the local state before its conversion for commercial or industrial development.

A third set of papers examines *in situ* rural urbanisation, in which villages in the countryside increasingly resemble the urban environment. A paper by Yu Zhu, Min Lin, Liyue Lin, and Jinmei Chen uses recent data to examine the extent of this process from a provincial perspective. David Bray's paper examines the policies and thinking behind the state's use of urban planning to remake villages in the national Building a New Socialist Countryside programme, and he illustrates this through case studies. In a related paper, Lior Rosenberg uses comparative case studies from a richer and a poorer province to examine different local government approaches to reconstructing villages in this programme.

By examining the different ways rural China is being reshaped and urbanised, this special issue provides new insights into one of the most dramatic and important transformations now underway in China.

1. The Building of a New Socialist Countryside (BNSC) programme is very broad-based and includes abolition of China's agricultural tax; abolition of all rural school fees up through grade 9, with free textbooks provided to poor students; a nationwide subsidised rural health insurance program; subsidies to farmers for their acreage of grain crops; massive rural road paving; as well as reconstruction of villages. History may well record the BNSC as the major achievement of the Hu-Wen leadership.
2. The workshop was funded by the Australian National University's Centre on China in the World, for which we express appreciation.