Xia Ban Cheng, or “the lower part of the city,” is the old town area of Chongqing. Its historical urban fabric is notable for the way it has adapted to the city’s natural topography, which is comprised of mountainous slopes and river valleys. The onset of China’s reform era since 1978 destabilized the relationship between the built environment and the surrounding landscape in consequential ways. Sections of the landscape were radically transformed during several urban renewal projects, while certain urban renewal projects were designed to integrate with the landscape elements in order to optimize the quality of the built environment. In other renewal projects, the mountain-river landscape was treated as the basis for the construction of commercially driven architectural spectacles.

This research will first provide a general historic survey of the area in an effort to map out the major forces that have produced its urban transformation. These forces include urban policy-making and influential political events such as the establishment of Chongqing as a direct-controlled municipality by the central government in 1997, the 5th Asia Pacific Cities Summit held in Chongqing. Top-down planning and design schemes, and key infrastructural construction projects, among others, have also been influential. Besides, the study will also rely on eleven case studies involving high-rise and high-density renewal projects, traditional mountainous vernacular conservation/restoration, and a gateway area renewal project at Chaotianmen, the oldest dock area of Chongqing. This research will investigate the evolving relationship between the cityscape and mountain-river landscape in Xia Ban Cheng between 1978 to 2012 in an effort to address the lacuna that exists concerning our knowledge of Chongqing’s recent urban history and the unique relationship between urbanization and the natural landscape of Sichuan province.