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## 9. The Value and Meaning of Temporality and its Relationship to Identity in Kunming City, China

*Yun Gao and Nicholas Temple*

### Abstract

This chapter highlights the changing relationships between the city and its modes of representation through an examination of the historical transformations of Kunming, a city on the southwest border of China. Our intention is to introduce particular characteristics of urban space in Kunming as the basis for a more detailed examination of the historical differences between Western and Chinese perspectives of temporality in building, which will be explored in a forthcoming book, and how these differences are manifested in the changing social contexts of the city. This chapter demonstrates that changes in the territorialized districts of the traditional city of Kunming since the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) constitute a movement towards modernization. Moreover, this development has given rise to a distinctive type of mercantile space within the city centre, with increasing importance attached to the commercial street. Importantly, this feature of the urban topography of Kunming can be seen as closely related to the surrounding mountains and lakes, both within and outside the old city boundaries that have served as primary reference points for Kunming's urban planning. The study seeks to establish whether the traditional meanings of temporality in building, as manifested within the particular urban grain of Kunming, still inform contemporary urban and architectural practice, given that such relationships are often concealed beneath the homogeneous image of the temporal city.

**Keywords:** Kunming, urban change, traditional street, temporality, modernization

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## Introduction

Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have explored the different relationships between time and buildings in China and the West, stating:

These were buildings [...] that disguised their own histories of fabrication and subsequent restorations. The Forbidden City transcended the merely human circumstances of its life in time. In the European tradition of building and making to which Beauvoir was implicitly comparing the Chinese palace, an artifact's historicity is both the source of its authority and the basis for an eventual demystification of that authority. In the modern West, the very old building or painting is venerated for having survived and for testifying with its body to the corrosive effects of the passage of time (Nagel and Wood 2010: 7).

The apparent contrast of the different relationships between time and buildings in China and the West, in the value and meaning attached to temporal change in the Chinese and European traditions of building and restoration, provides only a glimpse of a much more complex relationship between the city and individuals in both the past and the contemporary globalized world.

The Forbidden Palace and many other Chinese imperial palaces represent a remarkably unified order of power and virtue as defined by traditional Chinese philosophies dating back to the Zhanguo Period (500-221 BCE).<sup>1</sup> For example, the ideal layout of the 'Palace City', recorded in *Kaogon Ji*, *Zhou Li*, *Jiangren* and written in Zhanguo period, was based on a hierarchy of different social groups. More significantly the palace was represented as the centre (cosmic pivot) of microcosm of the earth (Wright 1977: 47). Xu suggested that there was a 'cosmological gulf' between China and the West (Xu 2000: 49). As Mote discussed (1971) about the cosmology of the Chinese city that for the Chinese, there was no creator or external cause for creating the world or humans as those in the West:

The genuine Chinese cosmogony is that of organismic process, meaning that all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and

1 The ideal layout of the city is summarized in the 'Kaogon ji', wrote in the mid-tenth century. Kaogon Ji, in *Zhou Li, juan* 41. Translated by Wheatley (1971: 411). The ideal layout of the city represents more significantly as a microcosm and the very centre of the earth than as the old well field system of land settlement and cultivation.

that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process (Mote 1971: 17–18).

Therefore, Xu suggested that “for the Chinese, the discovery or projection of a fixed point was equivalent not to the creation of the world but to the *finding* of the world” (Xu 2000: 49). The capital city, where the emperor resided, linked Heaven and Earth. A proper siting of the palace was regarded as responsible for aligning the human realm with the moral patterns of the cosmos (Xu 2000: 32–49). The highest achievement of this palace building complex, as often discussed in Chinese academic studies, is the symbolic unity between Heavenly and Human realms expressed through the architecture. Xu explained this in four categories: ‘choice and preparation of the site, cardinal orientation, city layout, and disposition of principal structures’ (Xu 2000: 29–55). The ideal spatial setting of the imperial palace, that represented the crucial link between the individual’s sense of communion with nature and Heaven, could raise people’s self-understanding in their relation to the heavenly realm. As Tu Weiming explained about Mencius’s Confucian way:

Mencius asserted that if we fully realize the potential within our hearts, we will understand our nature; and by understanding our nature we will know Heaven. This profound faith in the human capacity for self-knowledge and for understanding Heaven by tapping spiritual resources from within (Tu 1990: 118).

Over time, such unity transcended the lifetime of the physical artefacts of buildings, revealing in the process something eternal through their perpetuity. Using Kunming city as an example, we explore in this chapter how the protection, preservation, and inheritance of traditions, as represented by classical Chinese buildings, adhered to these ideologies and spiritual associations until the beginning of the twentieth century, only to be subjected to the overall urban restructuring of the expanded modern city and its gradual modification building ornamentation during the later-part of the century. We argue that in this process the craftsmanship of architectural elements that traditionally indicated different ‘temporal’ stages was redeployed in modern design as a means of re-authenticating buildings as legitimate heritage artefacts. Our investigations seek to determine whether the ‘deep’ tradition of value and meaning of temporality in building, and its relationship to cultural identity, still informs the contemporary city in China, with specific reference to Kunming.

Situated on a frontier, Kunming was always influenced by external culture and traditions, not only from Southeast Asian countries and traders/merchants from other regions in China, but also, more recently, from the influences arising from the retreat of universities and factories from other Chinese cities to Kunming during the war with Japan. In many ways, the spaces of Kunming were transformed to reflect these changing relationships between practices, power, and ritual. The unique importance attached to the streets in Kunming and the penetration of commercial areas into the city centre, where government offices were traditionally situated, represented decisive changes in the symbolic meanings of the city; albeit still traceable to an older tradition.

### History of Yunnan and Kunming—city and commercial business

Compared to the central plains of China, Yunnan has served as a peripheral and remote frontier for centuries. Throughout history, it has had close links to Southeast Asia, with the same ethnic groups living in both Yunnan and the adjacent countries. Due to the geographic complexity of the Himalayan mountain ranges and the large rivers in the region, the indigenous peoples scattered in these remote areas have historically been portrayed in historical records as 'barbarian and exotic' (Yang 2009: 243). Many Chinese historical writings describe Yunnan as an attractive but dangerous land (Guo 2008: 19-62). However, recent historical research of this part of China has taken a rather different view. For example, there has been new interest in the influence from central China before the nineteenth century as well as Yunnan's historical links with Southeast Asian countries (Giersch 2006). The geographical location of this province is also seen as strategically important by the current central government, which considers it a politically and socially important bridge to southwest countries such as Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand (Su 2013; Xie et al. 2009).

Kunming as a settlement was first established in 280 BCE, when a senior general of the Chu Kingdom named Zhuang Qiao led his troops into the region. There they 'built the city wall and moat and founded a state' (Xie et al. 2009). This city was called Julan City (且蘭城). Before the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), Kunming was a small settlement on the south of Dian lake. By 764 CE it had developed into a larger city called Toudong City (拓東城), which was part of the Nanzhao Kingdom (南詔國, 738–937 CE) that unified Yunnan and controlled parts of today's Guizhou and Sichuan Provinces, and

Vietnam and Myanmar. According to the historical book *Man Shu* (蠻書),<sup>2</sup> Kunming was the second capital of Nanzhao, and was a 'large city with famous business establishments, and many crafts and commercial entities' (Xie et al. 2009). However, it was not until the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), when the imperial court established Yunnan province as an administrative centre, that the Vice-chief-minister of the Yuan Dynasty commissioned a major engineering project to control the flooding of Dian Lake. Kunming city consequently became the food storage, political, economic, and cultural centre of the province.

When the Yuan Dynasty was first established, the new central imperial court adopted a military stance towards the southwest region (the so-called 'barbarian' areas). As a result, a number of large rebellions emerged between 1264 and 1273. The conflicts that resulted prompted the Yuan central government to change its policies to promote the rule of virtue in the attempt to culturally assimilate the region. One of the methods was to promote Confucius among all levels of citizenship in Yunnan in order to reform the 'barbarians' into 'civilized' people. In 1274, a Yuan administrator sent from the imperial court, Sai Dian Chi (賽典赤), was appointed the governor of Yunnan. His first strategy was to build a Confucian temple in Kunming and to teach Confucian philosophy to the local people so that they would understand 'the rule of virtue'. Previously, the local traditions concerning the social order or hierarchy and the rituals of daily life had been very different from those in central China. From the Yuan Dynasty onwards, Confucian principles were vigorously pursued by the city's administrators. Building Confucian temples in Yunnan was part of the central strategy for ruling the region. Confucian teachers were recruited from Shanxi and Sichuan provinces: 'For Confucius the primary function of education is to provide the proper way of training noblemen, a process that involves constant self-improvement and continuous social interaction' (Tu 1990: 114). Confucius defined humanity as 'conquer[ing] yourself and return[ing] to ritual' (克己復禮),<sup>3</sup> hence the interplay between inner spiritual self-transformation and outward social participation. Consequently, Confucian traditions, which cultivated virtuous government, social cohesion and individual well-being, served a central role in the development of Yunnan and its commercial life. By the Ming

2 *Man Shu* was written by Fan Chuo during the Tang Dynasty. It includes ten books in a series about various aspects of life in Yunnan province. The documents record data about roads, mountains, and rivers; political regions; cities and towns; products; local habits; army; and the countries surrounding the province.

3 The *Analects* 12.1. For more discussion, see Kieschnick 1992.

Dynasty (1368–1644), Confucian education was thriving in Yunnan, where 59 temples were built during the Ming Dynasty, and seventeen more during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912).

Because of the huge differences between the culture and societies of Yunnan and those of central China, Sai Dian Chi's strategy for ruling Yunnan was to follow Confucius' saying of 'harmony but not sameness' (和而不同),<sup>4</sup> thereby allowing the local people to follow their own customs while also introducing the new Confucian ideology and education. Unlike the imperial palaces where the spatial arrangements followed the order defined by Confucian ideology, that also adhered to a strict Chinese standard of the city form, the layout of Kunming city gradually followed the topology and topography of the natural landscape.

### Ritual and commercial space in relation to the natural environment

As a political, economic, and cultural centre of the province during the Yuan Dynasty, Kunming was described by the scholar Wang Sheng (王昇) in a long descriptive poem about Dian Lake (*Dian Chi Fu*—滇池賦):

Green Rooster Mountain is precipitous and dangerous  
 Golden Horse Mountain is meandering and exquisite  
 Ruan Mountain is towering and green  
 Shang Mountain is hidden and gathering under the sky  
 Wuhua [hill] gathered all the excellence of world's creations  
 Sanshi [three markets] is the most prosperous among those  
 Two towers [West and East temple pagodas] sustain the sky  
 One bridge [Yunjin bridge] like the rainbow crossing the sun path  
 Thousands of ships, like countless ants, gather around the Yunjin bridge  
 Tens of thousands of boats moor outside the city walls  
 Bringing hundreds of commodities from land and sea  
 Making people in Kunming rich  
 The grace and kindness of the Yuan Dynasty extended  
 Far into the frontier lands in all four directions  
 Even with the remote areas in Yunnan  
 Being ruled long by the emperor, has been busy on sending the tributary  
 With rhinoceros and elephants keep going  
 As the rivers all going into the sea day and night (Xie 2009: 47-48).

4 The *Analects* 13.23. For further details, see Li 2015.

In *Dian Chi Fu*, Wang links the appreciation of the natural landscape that surrounded Kunming with the locations of administrative offices, markets, and monasteries in the city, expressing how the hustle and bustle of the mercantile communities—their mechanical and commercial activities—intertwine with the natural order, rather than being in opposition to it. The visual connections between the backdrop of mountains and sky and the topographical locations of the marketplace and its mechanisms of trade and commercial transactions bind both natural environment and built environment with the eternal temporality of the world and virtues defined through Confucian ideology. As an example, in the *Analects*, Confucius also associates virtues with mountains and water: ‘The wise delight in water; the benevolent delight in mountains. The wise know ways of moving through; the benevolent know leisurely calm and tranquillity; the wise enjoy cheerfulness; the benevolent enjoy long life’ (*Analects* 6.26).<sup>5</sup>

When the Italian explorer Marco Polo arrived in Kunming, around the same time this poem was written, he wrote that Kunming was a ‘magnificent big city’ (Polo 1936). There were businessmen and artisans. Different groups lived together, including idolaters, Nestorian Christians, and Muslims. But the idolaters were the most numerous. The locals produced plenty of rice and wheat, but as they thought it was not hygienic to make bread from wheat, they ate rice. They also added spices to crops to make alcohol. The currency used was seashells, which could also be used as hair decorations. There were many salt wells in the city, where salt was extracted for local use. The tax on salt was a large source of income for the Great Khan (Polo 1936). Polo didn’t mention any ritual ceremonies held in the city which were an important influence in defining the forms of urban space. Nevertheless, his experiences of the old city demonstrate that Kunming was a vibrant and culturally diverse commercial centre.

This atmosphere however of a busy, but also somewhat disordered and chaotic city illustrated by Polo changed during the Ming Dynasty, when Kunming acquired the appearance of a more ordered city as appropriate for its growing political power and ritual/ceremonial significance.

5 The *Analects* 6.23: 知者樂水，仁者樂山。知者動，仁者靜。知者樂，仁者壽 (translated by the author).



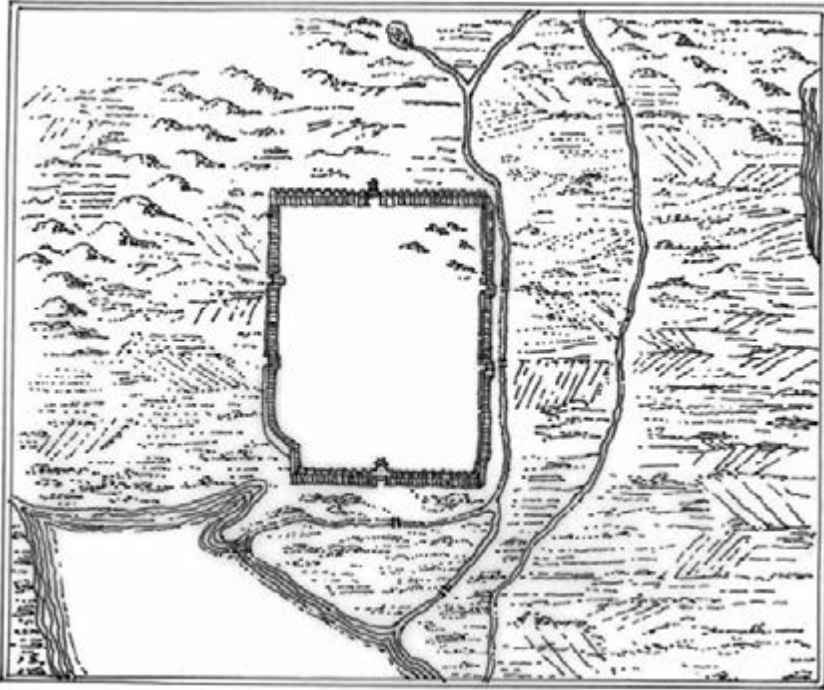
## Form of the political and ritual space in the Ming Dynasty

In 1381 Ming armies conquered Yunnan and changed the name of the city from Zhongqing Chen (中慶城) to Yunnan Fu (雲南府). Yunnan included four prefectures and nine counties in its administration region. Kunming was one of the counties. This was the period when burnt bricks started to be used as a building material and for city walls, unlike the mud bricks that had been used earlier. The Ming administration built high walls and storages for food collected within a wide region. Kunming was expanding, and a new brick city wall was erected 500 metres north of the previous one to enclose the expanded city. This expansion not only aimed to avoid flooding from the lake outside the city walls, but also enabled the walled city to encompass three hills (Yuanton, Wuhua, and Zubian), and the Green lake within the walled area in response to considerations of *feng shui* (風水, 'geomancy'). The Chinese map of the city at this time demonstrated both monumentality and spirituality, in which the symbolic/ritual relationships between *feng shui* and the city found visual expression in the city plan which was formed in the shape of a tortoise. In China, the tortoise is regarded as an auspicious animal, symbolising longevity. The new city wall separated the offices, temples, and schools within the walls from the common residents who lived outside the walls.

According to Liu Xue (Liu 2003), who quotes from the Yunnan historical records by Dai (1901), the Ming Dynasty-era master geomancer Wang Zhanhai designed Kunming city in a tortoise shape within the setting of the surrounding mountains and lake. His design concept referenced Long Dragon Mountain, to the north of the city, which extended from the adjacent Sichuan province, which in turn is connected to the Yuanton hill inside the city, where it divides into five 'branches' of clusters of smaller hills. The 'Yang' branch ends in the Wuhua Hill where the Confucius temple was built (Liu 2003: 32-35). The head of the mountain range then points toward the west, as if to intertwine with the head of the tortoise that forms from the shape of the city.<sup>6</sup> This Chinese map contrasts sharply with the later map drawn by Jean-Baptiste du Halde and published in the eighteenth century in *Description de la Chine* (Du Halde 1736), which focused on the geometric shape of the city within the larger geographic context.

The old city of Kunming contained six gates along the city walls that were symmetrically placed east to west, whilst on the north and south sides the gates were both in the middle of the walls. The north-south axis in the city was marked by four archways built along the axis.

6 This plan of the city is shown in Dai 1901: 15.

**Figure 9.1** Map of Kunming (after Jean-Baptiste du Halde, 1736)

Source: authors' drawing

The area within the wall was mostly occupied by the offices of the ruling governors, the houses of wealthy citizens, monasteries, schools, and an examination hall managed by the gate-keepers of the elite civil service. Some houses and gardens for officers and wealthy people were located outside the city wall in the surrounding suburbs. Indeed, the bulk of the residents of the city lived outside the walls, many gathered in the suburban districts on the south side. Importantly, there are no streets marked on the historic maps of Kunming shown. However, the central Nanguan Street serves as the principal ceremonial axis of the city. According to documents in the Qing Dynasty, the length of this street was divided into three zones: the left side was used exclusively by pedestrian officers; the right side was earmarked for businessmen; and the privileged route along the middle was reserved for aristocrats. The city was zoned according to each area's relationship with the hills and with Green Lake (Xie et al. 2009). This indicates that the city was treated as an interconnected network of physical spaces and their ritual/ceremonial passageways and precincts.

## City without streets

The Ming-Dynasty map of Kunming clearly emphasizes the location of the hills in the city, the territorial demarcations of the different districts—marked out by dotted lines—together with the names of important buildings. With the different urban quarters and prominent buildings represented as integral parts of the urbanscape, it is clear that the city was effectively shaped by the territorial divisions of the districts rather than by street patterns. Moreover, these maps demonstrate the importance attached to Wuhua Hill, which aligned with the middle axis of the city and connected to the important waterway of Dian Lake. In essence, the layout of Kunming was arranged according to the hill and lake inside the city enclosure and the mountains and lake outside the city walls, collectively providing a distinctive spatial and topographical grammar of political power and a virtuous/noble life.

The unmarked streets of Kunming were simply narrow lanes. No numbers were assigned to the houses along these streets; instead, buildings were identified by their names or their locations in relation to the archways and the districts (Xie et al. 2009). Another character of the spatial arrangement was that there was no visual evidence of public spaces in these maps, as is typical of commemorative maps of European cities, such as Rome, from the early modern period.

A document dating to the Qing Dynasty mentions that four districts inside the city walls were mainly for government offices, examination halls, monasteries, and educational schools, as well as providing accommodation for people coming from other provinces to trade. Other residences, workshops, and markets for commoners located outside the city walls. There were a total of eighteen residential and marketing areas outside the city walls of Kunming (Liu 2003: 22). This complex array of commercial, civic, and religious buildings on the periphery of Kunming had a similar relationship that is redolent of what Nicholas Temple observed about ancient Western cities, namely that the ‘market place actual gave sustenance to participatory (civic/religious) involvement rather than undermining it’ (Temple 2018).

The view from the top of Wuhua Hill toward Dian Lake and West Mountain, which was formed in the shape of a ‘sleeping beauty’ by West Mountain according to popular folklore, was the most important *jing* (景, roughly translated as ‘scene’, but more accurately describing the interactive unity between scenic views and the spectator (Zou 2008) that effectively embodied the whole city. As Zou suggests in regard to the *jing*: ‘The existence of *jing* cannot be categorized as either an object (for example, materiality of buildings) or a subject (political ideologies) based on Western metaphysics,

rather it presents itself as a primordial vision, or sense, that is inscribed in emotion and intention'. *Jing* therefore renders the vision of nature and scenery as *embodied* in the self: a reflexive relationship between viewer and viewed (Zou 2008: 362). To keep the views from some sites in the city to the surrounding mountains was one of the most important principles for urban space planning for Kunming City. The 'Long Couplet on Daguang Pavilion', an inscription on columns of Daguang Pavilion in Kunming, by Sun Ranweng (孙髯翁), a celebrity of Kunming during the Qianlong Period of the Qing Dynasty (1711–1799), describes the city in relation to the surrounding natural landscape—a poetic account that in many ways transcends the reality of the city. Describing the *jing* and expressing personal emotions, the author looks back at how the city emerged along a vein of the natural landscape among the mountains and the lake. Military and political events shaped Kunming city during the Han, Tang, Song, and Yuan Dynasties. After listing the heroes from Yunnan's history, Sun Ranweng then states the following:

Extraordinary historical deeds achieved with efforts that could move mountains were merely a temporary state and ephemeral stage that could disappear with the changes occurring between dynasties. The beautiful bead curtains in the painted mansions could not last as long as the rain at night or the cloud at dawn. Only the broken stone tablets that recorded the stellar performances are left in the sunset and evening mist. What one can experience now are the occasional sounds of temple bells, lights from the fishing boats that illuminate half of the river, two lines of lonely geese in the sky, and the cold frost left on bed pillows in the morning.

The couplet expresses no particular joy or sorrow, instead conveying personal feelings about the history of the city and its cosmic significance, finally focusing on the relics of the broken stone tablets, the occasional sound of a bell, and the sight of small fishing boats in the middle of the lake that merge with the natural landscape. Finally, both natural and built environment in the picture gained in the process an extended life in the cyclic rhythms of Chinese time.

The map drawn by the Joseph Beauvais, a Frenchman who was stationed in Kunming in 1901, expresses a rather different way of understanding the city. Using the Western technique of the 'method of lines', this map of Kunming is drawn with the clear intention of representing the street patterns. Hence, the representation of Kunming through the ages has borne witness to the influence of very different cultural outlooks. When applied to traditional Chinese cities, modern western techniques of cartography, that served essentially as abstracted and scaled registers of urban space,

obscured much of the underlying symbolism of the topographical contexts and orientational alignments of urban arrangements as demonstrated in this example.

The influence from Southeast Asian countries in the nineteenth century extended their influence north into the adjacent Yunnan province. During the 1870s, Yunnan opened four counties along its borders to neighbouring countries as foreign trading outposts. As a result of these international trading links, imported goods and local industries led to the transformation of the urban forms of Kunming and changed the structure of commercial markets across Yunnan province. A government-run business bureau was then established in 1883, and in 1905, with the fast pace of modernization, the Kunming governor applied to the imperial court for permission to open the city as a commercial port for overseas trade. The government gave permission to open an area in the southeast of Kunming, encircled by a perimeter boundary of six kilometres, that was specifically for rental to foreign businesses (Xie et al. 2009). With investment from French companies as part of a plan to extend their commercial influence in the region, the Yunnan-Vietnam railway started running in 1910. This was the first railway built in western China. Due to the construction of the new railway system, the formerly isolated Yunnan region suddenly became a hub in an international network of transport and trade. It was not only commodities from eastern China that reached Kunming via Hong Kong and then Haiphong in Vietnam, but also many imports from Western countries.

In 1911, the establishment of the New Army in Kunming gave rise to a successful local regime that further pushed the development of industry and commercialization in the region. From 1911 to 1917, 38 roads were rebuilt and widened. Many streets were named after famous buildings, archways, offices, or monasteries. The ambition to plan the city as a modern metropolis resulted in the implementation of many new urban policies. To rationalize and reorder urban life, a unified opening time (7 a.m.) was introduced for all shops in 1912. Those who opened late were fined for non-compliance. Other regulations were also introduced for cleaning streets and unifying the colour of buildings. Pedestrians were also required to walk on either side of the street in one direction in an orderly fashion (Jie 2009: 24-25). These and other initiatives transformed the old city into a more efficient modern metropolis. Other development also promoted the economic growth in Yunnan province. In April 1912, electricity was brought to the city for the first time, supplied by the Shilongba Hydropower Plant in Yunnan, the first electricity-generating station in China. Around the same time, water-supply systems and telecommunications were also introduced.

**Figure 9.2 The Military Academy**

Source: authors' photo

The Kunming Municipal Administration was set up in 1922 to take over the role of the Police Bureau in overseeing planning, building regulations, and urban construction projects. Clear zoning of different urban functions and easier traffic flow were seen as priorities and, as a result, the city authorities decided to demolish the old city walls in the southern and eastern districts. From 1922, the streets, together with new markets, parks, and public spaces, started to play a much more important role in the spatial organization of the city, which was substantially different from the territorialized zones (urban

**Figure 9.3** Huize Hall, Yunnan University



Source: authors' photo

quarters) of the ancient city. Accompanying these urban/infrastructural developments were important changes in lifestyles that were influenced by Western practices, such as food, fashion, and leisurely pursuits (Jie 2009: 49).

At the same time, the early twentieth century also witnessed the construction of many new buildings that consciously adopted Western styles, albeit internally consisting of traditional wooden structures (Xie at al. 2009).

For example, the Military Academy, built in 1918, was designed using a combination of Western and Chinese styles in timber. Huize Hall in Yunnan

University, built in 1924, started to modify the traditional courtyard plan of the compound and incorporated a concrete structure.

The elevations of Huize Hall that can be seen today are evidence of architectural details that derive from Western design/drawing techniques, a practice motivated in part by the training of Chinese architects in Europe, such as Zhang Banhan (张帮翰), who studied in Paris. The idea of using new building features signified a new way of understanding architecture and the different kinds of knowledge it introduced. Notwithstanding these important developments, the name of the building, *Huize* (会泽) is deeply rooted in Chinese tradition; the term means 'gathering knowledge/benefaction'. What seems evident in such examples is that the preservation of tradition was more likely to be expressed in the otherwise hidden structures and names of buildings (and their meanings), rather than in their outward stylistic appearance. A number of churches, a hospital, and a theatre were similarly built using traditional timber-frame construction but clad in Western-style architectural features. There were of course exceptions to this rule, as in the buildings with larger spans (such as cinemas) where Western methods of building with reinforced concrete were used.

## Influences from Central China

Another significant phase of the external influences on Kunming's urban development came during the Second World War, when the Japanese invaded China, occupied most of its major cities, and blocked its seaports. Yunnan province escaped this invasion and the Yunnan–Myanmar Highway became the major connection between China and the external world during the war. A number of Chinese universities, factories, and military forces were also relocated to Kunming, bringing with them the most advanced technology, manufacturing, and education. To reflect the rapid development during this period, Kunming's 1943 Masterplan was published to define the districts with different functions in the city. However, the plan was not implemented due to the civil war in China. The city wall to the south was totally demolished and a new financial street (Lanpin Street) was built in its place.

Skilled workers moved into Kunming from other regions of China, and with their skills and expertise many new factories were constructed. Between the 1930s and 1940s, Kunming built its first concrete factory and a steel factory. In 1933, the first building regulations were compiled and by the 1930s, timber construction methods had all but disappeared. Four city plans for Kunming were made in 1953, 1957, 1959, and 1962 respectively. The



plans primarily aimed to develop new districts and industry areas that were separated from the old town. Many public buildings and urban infrastructure facilities were provided during the period. However, the urban development of Kunming stagnated during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. Few new building or construction was recorded during the period apart from a factory for Yunnan Baiyao Pharmaceutical Manufacturer, Chengdu-Kunming railway, and a large project aimed to 'claim the land from the Dianchi Lake' for agriculture usage. During the same period, on the other hand, a large amount of relics and historical buildings were demolished.

### Wenming Street after the 1980s

After economic reform was introduced in the 1980s, urban-planning policies loosened their embrace of the ideological principles evident during the socialist-revolutionary era and focused more on progress and modernization. For this reason, the 1985 masterplan for Kunming proposed that the businesses area be further developed in the city centre.

In the process, the traditional streets became vulnerable to large-scale redevelopment and city-planning policies that aimed to widen roads for more efficient transportation and commercial activity. In pursuit of such contemporary urban infrastructure, the municipal masterplan proposed the demolition of houses located within defined boundaries to make way for new streets. In addition, the old style of courtyard houses was now considered derelict, old fashioned, and lacking proper kitchen and toilet facilities. In 1992 both Chuanchun and Wuchen Roads, which used to be the main streets where the governor's offices and grand courtyard houses were located, were finally demolished. Mr. Liu from the planning department remembered that there were no defined regulations for protecting cultural heritage during this demolition. The residents were reminded by planners to save beautifully carved old timber and stone decorations, and wooden windows and doors before the demolition, but few residents took notice of these requests. Many ornaments and other pieces were picked up by the planners who were on the sites and brought back and stored in the courtyard of the Planning Department, and eventually many of these building and ornamental remnants were salvaged and stored in the provincial museum.

Despite being one of the first group of cities to be awarded the title of Historical Cultural City in China in 1982, Kunming rapidly lost its stock of traditional houses built during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The traditional courtyard houses in Kunming were called 'Stamp Houses' (to reflect the

**Figure 9.4** Traditional houses, Wenming Street

Source: authors' photo

fact that the square footprint of the courtyard house resembled a Chinese stamp). As an architectural form, the Stamp House has gained increasing recognition from academic researchers on architecture since the 1950s, but the protection of traditional courtyard houses attracted the attention of the general public and the media only after the demolition of most of the traditional streets.

In 1998, the Kunming Urban Construction Archive Institute commissioned a survey of Wenming Street which was published in the book *The Investigation of the Design and Construction of the Wenming Street District* (KUCAI 1998). Wenming Street is a smaller and less important street in the history of Kunming and has smaller and rather ordinary courtyard houses along its frontage. Its importance is largely due to the attempts to preserve some traces of its historic urban/built fabric. Indeed, it is the last (and only) street in the city where such initiatives have taken place.

The book includes a detailed survey, with a series of drawings of the courtyard houses on Wenming Street. It states that the purpose of the survey was essentially to record the traditional houses as evidence of the historical cultural traditions and also to inform any future preservation projects. The authors argue that many of the houses surveyed are of great antiquity and possess a vitally important cultural heritage. Part of the strategy of preserving these buildings was to renovate the old houses to

reveal their original form and character. Four principles are mentioned in regard to this renovation process: 1) to reintegrate (and thereby protect) the 'spiritual' content of these representations and their physical forms; 2) to balance protection with reuse; 3) to combine new materials and protected materials/fragments; and 4) to utilize information gleaned from scientific surveys as evidence, rather than rely on 'subjective' decisions about methods of protection (Fang 1998). Other authors in the book note that such traditional houses in Kunming have been influenced not only by the commercial complexes found elsewhere in Yunnan province, from Tongchong to Dali, but also by the Qilou forms from Guangdong in South China and styles from the West. Hence there is no single version of what the local forms or local heritage of the houses should be.

Li Shiqiao believes that, in contrast to Western traditions where the preservation of original locations under original conditions constitutes the overriding priority of any conservation project and in which the archiving of documents serves an important intellectual purpose, in China the activity of 'reconstituting' old buildings, often through the use of new structures or materials, possesses some degree of 'immaterial authenticity' in the collective memories of people. Hence, questions of heritage, and therefore continuity of traditions, of architecture resided in the repeated reuse and reconstruction of building layouts rather than in their original siting or material preservation. In such an enterprise, authenticity was maintained through spatial and temporal relocation, so the original place of a historic building or monument is in the end not so significant (Li 2014: 162-179). This same understanding informed the refurbishment of Wenming Street, in the way traditional motifs and building elements were replicated or reused, without the need to preserve its original construction as a material artefact.

The brief for protecting architectural heritage on Wenming Street changed after 2004, when the regulations for protecting heritage were first formally codified. Before 2004, traditional houses were not identified by law as material artefacts that needed to be protected. After 2004, some courtyard houses on Wenming street were formally listed as listed buildings. The initial brief in 1990 for surveying and restoring the traditional houses on the street was to keep the authenticity (consistency) of the original styles. The traditional houses in Kunming were timber structures, different from the famous renovation projects in other places in China, for example in Xintiandi, Shanghai, where the buildings are made of brick. The restoration of timber structures requires specialist craftsmen, but such skills are a scarce resource in China today, particularly for such large-scale restoration projects.

This challenge was further exacerbated by the increasing difficulties of securing funding for such work.

Within the framework of a city partnership between Zurich and Kunming, a group of Swiss experts in historic preservation supported Kunming's preservation efforts in 1996 (Stutz 2002). The scholars from Zurich suggested that such renovations needed to go beyond the mere protection of individual cultural relics or antiquities to recognize the heritage value of the whole street and its public spaces as an integral part of the contemporary city (Gao 2012: 136).

The urban-planning policies in Kunming have incorporated this principle as well as following new developments in conservation regulations, and have started to include the whole street as a conservation area. In masterplans since the 1950s, plans have followed two primary principles: to preserve Wenming Street as the historical axis of the city; and to maintain the visual and spatial relationships between the three mountains and Dian Lake outside the city and the three hills and Green Lake within the old city boundaries. With the systematic demolition of historic streets in Kunming during the 1990s, and the rapid disappearance of much of the older fabric of the city, Wenming Street emerged as a remnant of a largely forgotten city that could be 're-authenticated' through the replication of architectural features and the part appropriation of building elements. Eventually developers were brought in with investment funding to develop Wenming Street as a commercial thoroughfare, but different policies were applied to the two sides of the street: new buildings on one side were designated for tourism, while the traditional courtyard houses on the other side were refurbished as cultural heritage monuments that record the historic past of Kunming city.

There are similar examples of the renovation of historic streets in other parts of China. Qianmen Street in Beijing, for example, has been renovated not because it is the most historically important street or possesses distinct architectural qualities, but because of its location and its exemplary function as part of the axis in the city. Other examples of renovated commercial streets include Fuzi Miao in Nanjing and Xintiandi in Shanghai. Both were existing traditional commercial streets that have been renovated in traditional styles. In some cities, there are also new commercial streets being designed and built in traditional forms in places with no historical evidence of such buildings. The Wenming Street project sought to reproduce the traditional styles of historic commercial streets, with the inclusion of new buildings that were deemed to possess some degree of 'immaterial authenticity' in the way Li suggests outlined earlier. In the production of

**Figure 9.5** Shops, Wenming Street

Source: authors' photo

pseudo-traditional styles, the link with the past, as a general sensibility, appears to be more important than defining connections to particular points in the past. The latter approach, as we know, is more prevalent in restoration/conservation projects in the West where there is a tendency to 'freeze' a building or interior at a certain moment in time.

In the West, building refurbishment presents different connotations or implications when it comes to issues of repair, conversion, renovation, restoration, conservation, or retrofitting. It can range from restoring the original form of the buildings when first erected, to refurbishing, which records changes through the passage of time. Refurbishment is defined as making use of what is usable in existing (ageing) buildings; the skilful adaptation of building shells (which is valuable in its own right and not owing to any historic mystique) to a new or an updated version of its previous use (Marsh 1983: 3). Refurbishment can vary from a simple repair, like painting a façade, to a more complex process that includes structural reinforcement work.

In Wenming Street, some old courtyard houses have been renovated and listed as 'provincial heritage'. When the refurbishment started there were no guidelines for the refurbishment of historical buildings or any standard set of renovation practices in China. When the wooden residential houses required a change of use (to commercial buildings) such as shops,

**Figure 9.6 Restored courtyard houses, Wenming Street**

Source: authors' photo

restaurants, or hotels, questions were asked about how to 'renovate old building as the original form and structure' (Ding 1998: 20), and how to renovate the street district with side-by-side traditional courtyard houses to meet the requirements of sufficient fire escapes and protection against seismic activity (to level 8 on the Richter Scale) for all public/commercial buildings in Kunming. In other words, how could they be renovated to convincingly reflect a familiar historic setting of the street by resorting to replicated craftsmanship?

Eventually the link to the past was identified with traditional craftsmanship and local materials used in restoration. Competitions were held in Kunming to find and recruit the most skilled craftsmen who could make the details of the traditional building. A key feature of this process was the application of Chinese calligraphy to memorialise (and thereby re-authenticate), through stone wall inscriptions, the work of the last living craftsman able to undertake this work in the province. In this way, reconstructed history was somehow 'embedded' in contemporary construction, recollecting in the process forgotten or declining craft-skills.

## Conclusion

As Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan explored in their book *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China*, since the opening of the Treaty Ports in the 1840s Chinese attitudes towards architecture have gone through various transformations—from ‘Chinese learning for essential principles and Western learning for practical application’ to contemporary buildings built with new materials and technology, but their forms would reflect socialist essence and Chinese cultural form. In recent years, there was a reversal to design buildings with contemporary essence, but represented Chinese form (Rowe and Kuan 2004). Yet to understand the reasons for the values attached to the ‘traditional styles’ of the commercial streets built in almost all of the large cities in China over the past decade, we have to recognise that both essence and form in these examples reveal changes that are different from those discussed in Rowe and Kuan’s book.

Marvin Trachtenberg has developed a new approach to understanding the temporal ‘stages’ of buildings in his recent book, *Building in Time: from Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion* (2010). In his investigation of Western traditions Trachtenberg identifies important (but often misunderstood) overlaps in the different temporal ‘stages’ of building before the advent of the modern age. These overlaps enabled the design of buildings to be changed during longer periods of construction and occupancy. With the introduction of more systematic methods of procuring buildings, and the shorter life-spans of the structures, these overlaps were eventually lost and replaced with the staged programmes found in modern design and building schedules.

Different ‘temporal’ stages were reflected in the design and construction of the Forbidden City in Beijing during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Twelve years were spent on gathering materials and making the elements for constructions, such as timber columns, tiles, and bricks, while only four years were needed to put the elements together and build the palace. Elaborate ritualized efforts were involved in collecting, making, and transferring the materials and components through the long passage of time before they could be properly integrated as the building came into being. Hence time was embedded in the building process itself, not only in the materials and compositions but also in the transporting and transforming of the materials that signified power and virtue. In the case of the renovation of Wenming Street in Kunming, we argue that the authenticity of the place relies on the practices of craftsmanship alone, which could transform raw materials into visibly traditional building

elements that registered historical change in various ways. Moreover, this connection to craftsmanship, meant that local identities were expressed through the agency of traditional forms of making, which were deemed to possess a higher value than buildings made with modern construction methods. We can therefore identify very different attitudes regarding protecting and inheriting cultural heritage in China compared to those expressed in the West—attitudes that give less value to material heritage than to their modes of crafting and fabricating.

Recapitulating Nicholas Temple's discussion about the shifting historical relationships between commercial, political, and religious life in the West (Temple 2018), and what these changes tell us about the temporality of building in the way articulated by Trachtenberg, it would be salutary to compare the impact of capitalism and the market on historic cities in China and Europe. Such a comparison, which is beyond the scope of this investigation, must acknowledge their very different cultural perspectives of commercial life: in particular, how representations of urban space over time have helped shape (or more recently diminish) our sense of place and collective memory. What we are witnessing in the contemporary globalized world is an extraordinary (one might claim alarming) homogenization of urban space in which 'contemporary consumerism pervades an amnesiac condition' (Temple 2016).

Following this cue, we would have to ask how the new sense of identity in the city today, as Arjun Appadurai argues, 'seeks to annex the global into their own practices of the modern' (Appadurai 1996: 5). This broadly 'compensatory' act perhaps best articulates what material reminders of the past (whether actual or reconstituted) can contribute to redefining our collective historicity against the synchronic and virtual backdrop of the digital world. In this context the West can learn much from Chinese culture, particularly how temporal change can be registered architecturally and in the urban framework without necessarily relying on formalistic terms of reference as temporal registers

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