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

Yun Gao, Nicholas Temple

This study aims to highlight the growing distinction between the city and its modes of representation. We will interrogate this relationship by examining the historical changes of Kunming, a city on the Southwest borderland of China. The study sets out to examine the deeper historical difference between Western and Chinese concepts of temporality represented in buildings and through the relationship between city and society.

We explore how the urban space in Kunming city were designed and transformed to reflect the cultivated intersections between the self, power and ritual. The study argues that changes in the territorialised districts of the traditional city after the Qing dynasty, as a movement to modernization, has led to the emergence of the commercial space in the city centre, the increasing importance of streets and the public spaces in Kunming. The study seeks to explore if the tradition of the unity of the environment and collective identity still informs contemporary urban and architectural design practice that is often concealed beneath the homogeneous urban image.

We argue that the forces of globalization in society no longer reside simply in the use of new materials and technologies (leading to a conspicuous break from the traditions of the past) but also reveal the organisation of different (sometimes competing) systems of urban and architectural knowledge (both contemporary and traditional) way of design and build.