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

**Yun Gao, Nicholas Temple**

## **Abstract**

This study aims to highlight 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 borderland of China. Our intention here is to introduce to the reader 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, to be explored in a forthcoming book, and how these differences are manifested in the changing social contexts of the city.

The study demonstrates that changes in the territorialised districts of the traditional city of Kunming after the Qing dynasty, constitute a movement towards modernization. This development moreover gave rise to a distinctive type of mercantile space within the city centre, with the increasing importance attached to the commercial street. Importantly this feature of the urban topography of Kunming can be seen to relate closely to the surrounding mountains and lakes both within and outside the old city boundaries that have served as primary reference points in urban planning. The study seeks to establish if the traditional meanings of temporality in building, as they are 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 temporary city.

## **Introduction**

Nagel and Wood explore the different relationships between time and buildings for those 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 De 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 & Wood 2010). This apparent contrast in the value and meaning attached to temporal change in Chinese and European traditions of building and restoration provides only a glimpse of a much more complex relationship between the city and individuals in the past and in the contemporary globalised world.

The Forbidden Palace, as other Chinese imperial palaces in history that emulated this model of ceremonial space, represents a remarkably unified order of power and virtue defined by the traditional Chinese philosophies dating back to the Zhou dynasty<sup>1</sup>. The highest achievement in the palace building complex, as often discussed in Chinese academic studies, centres on the symbolic unity between Heavenly and Human realms. As Tu Wei-ming explained about the 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) In this way, the ideal space represented by the imperial palace could raise people’s self-understanding through its relationship to the heavenly realm. Over time such unity transcended the lifetime of the physical artefacts of buildings, revealing something eternal through perpetuity. Using Kunming city as an example we explore how the protection, preservation, and inheritance of traditions, represented by classical Chinese buildings, adhered to these ideologies and spiritual associations that still prevailed at the beginning of the 20th century, only to be subject in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the overall urban structure of the expanded city and its modified building ornament. We argue that in this process, the craftsmanship of architectural elements that traditionally bore different ‘temporal’ stages was redeployed in modern design as a means of re-authenticating buildings as legitimate heritage.

Our investigations will seek to determine if 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 in a frontier land, Kunming had always been influenced by external culture and traditions, not only from Southeast Asian countries and traders/merchants from other regions in China, but also more recently overseas influences and the influence from central China arising from the retreat of other cities during the anti-Japan war. The spaces of Kunming were in many ways 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 the decisive change in the symbolism of the city.

### **History of Yunnan and Kunming – City and Commercial business**

Yunnan has served as a peripheral and remote frontier for centuries when compared to the central plains in China. Throughout history, it had close links with South East Asia, the same ethnic groups living in both Yunnan and the adjacent countries. Due to the geographic complexity within the Himalayas mountain ranges, and the large rivers in the region, the indigenous peoples scattered in these remote areas have historically been portrayed as ‘barbarian and exotic’ (Yang, 2009: 243). Many historical writings in China describe Yunnan as an attractive but dangerous frontier (Harrell, 2001). There have been different areas of focus in recent historical research of this part of China. For example, there has been interest in the impact from central China before the 19th century and, in contrast, historical links with the Southeast Asian Countries (Giersch, 2006). The geographical location of this province is seen as strategically important by central government, serving as a political and socially important bridge to southwest countries (Su 2013; Xie, Li & Ma 2009).

Kunming as a settlement was first established in 280BC, when a senior general of the Chu Kingdom, Zhuang Qiao, led his troops into the region. There they “built the city wall and moat and founded a state” (Xie, Li & Ma 2009). The city was called ‘Julan City’ (且蘭城). Before the Tang Dynasty (618-907), Kunming was a small settlement on the south of Dian Lake. It then eventually developed into a larger city, called Toudong City (拓東城) in 764AD, during the period of the Nanzhao Kingdom (南詔國) (AD 738–937), which unified Yunnan and controlled over parts of today's Guizhou, Sichuan, Vietnam and Myanmar provinces. According to the historical book, *Man Shu*<sup>2</sup> (蠻書), Kunming was the second capital for Nanchao, and was a “large city with famous business establishments, and many crafts and commercial entities” (Xie, Li & Ma 2009). However, it was not until the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368), when the imperial court establish Yunnan province as an administrative centre, that

the vice chief minister of the Yuan Dynasty commissioned a major engineering project to control flooding of the Dian Lake. Kunming city consequently became the food storage, and the political, economic and cultural centre of the province.

When the Yuan dynasty was first established, the policies by the new central imperial court, towards the southwest region (the so called “barbarian” areas), adopted a military stance. As a result, a number of large rebel movements emerged during the 10 years between 1264 and 1273. The conflicts that resulted prompted Yuan central government to change its policies to promote the rule of virtue in order to culturally assimilate the region. One of the methods was to promote Confucius in Yunnan among all levels of citizenship in order to transfer the “barbarians” into “civilized” people. In 1274, a Yuan administrator sent from the imperial court, Sai Dian Chi (赛典赤) who was appointed as the governor of Yunnan. His first strategy was to build a Confucius Temple in Kunming and to teach Confucian philosophy to local people in order for them to understand ‘the rule of virtue’. The local traditions concerning the order or hierarchy and the rituals of daily life had been very different from those in central China. From Yuan onwards, Confucian principles were applied and vigorously pursued by the city’s administrators. Building Confucian temples in Yunnan was part of the central strategy for ruling in 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 in such a way that you “conquer yourself and return to ritual”<sup>3</sup> (克己復禮); hence, the interplay between inner spiritual self-transformation and outward social participation. In the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the Confucius education was thriving in Yunnan, with 59 temples built in the Ming dynasty, and seventeen more built in the Qing dynasty.

Because of the huge difference existing in the culture and societies in Yunnan, from those regions in the central China, Sai Dian Chi’s strategy for ruling Yunnan was to follow Confucius’ saying: “harmony but not sameness”<sup>4</sup> (和而不同), allowing the local people to follow their own customs but at the same time, introducing the new Confucian ideology and education. Hence the form of Kunming city gradually followed the topology of the natural landscape rather than follow the strict Chinese standard city form.

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

As a political, economic and cultural centre of the province in the Yuan dynasty, Kunming was described by Wang Sheng (a well-known scholar at the time), in his long and descriptive poem about Dian Lake (*Dian Chi Fu*) (Wang, Yuan dynasty), as follows:

‘Green Roster 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'. (Translated into English by authors)

In *Dian Chi Fu*, Wang linked the appreciation of the natural landscape that surrounded Kunming with the locations of administrative offices, markets and monasteries in the city, expressing the way the hustle and bustle of the mercantile communities – their mechanical and commercial activities - intertwine with the natural order, rather than both being in opposition. The visual connections between the backdrop setting of mountains and sky and the topographical locations of the market place, and its mechanisms of trade and commercial transaction, bind both with the eternal temporality of the world.

In *Analects*, Confucius associates virtues with Mountains and Water: 'Wise delight in water; benevolent delight in mountain. Wise know ways of move and through; benevolent know leisurely calm and tranquil; Wise enjoy cheerful; benevolent enjoy long life.'<sup>5</sup>

When the Italian explorer, Marco Polo, arrived in Kunming around the time when this poem was written, he wrote about the city that was in a way unaffected by the ritual arrangement of Chinese space, concluding that Kunming was just a 'magnificent big city'. (Polo, Marsden, and Komroff, Trans. Li. 1936) There were businessmen and artisans. Different groups lived together, including idolaters, Nestorian Christians, and Muslims. But the idolaters numbered the most. The locals produced plenty of rice and wheat. But they considered that it was not hygienic to make bread from wheat, so they ate rice. They also added spices to crops to make alcohol. The currency used were seashells, which could also be used as hair decorations. There were many salt wells in the city, where the salt for local was extracted. The tax for salt was a large income for the Great Khan. (Polo, M., Marsden, and Komroff, Trans. Li. 1936).

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

### **Form of the political and ritual space in the Ming dynasty**

In 1381, during the Ming dynasty, Ming armies conquered Yunnan, and changed the name of the place from Zhongqing Chen (中慶城) to Yunnan Fu (雲南府), which included four prefectures and nine counties in its administration region, in which Kunming was one of the counties. This was the period when brick started to be used as a building material and city walls, unlike the adobe bricks used before. The Ming administration built high walls for storing foods within a wide region. Kunming was expanding and new a brick city wall was erected to enclose the expanded city of 500m further north. This expansion not only aimed to avoid flooding, but also enabled the walled city to encompass three hills (Yuantong Hill, Wuhua Hill and Zubian Hill), and the Green Lake within the walled area in response to Fengshui considerations. The Chinese map of the city at the time demonstrated both monumentality and

spirituality, in which the symbolic/ritual relationships between Fengshui and the city found visual expression in the form of a tortoise. The tortoise was regarded as an auspicious animal in China, symbolising longevity. The new city wall separated the offices, temples and schools within the walls from the common residents who lived outside the walls.

**Figure 1 here.**

According to Liu Xue (2003), who quoted from Yunnan historic record, that the master geomancer Wang Zhanhai during the Ming dynasty designed Kunming city as a tortoise shape within the setting of the surrounding mountains and lake. His design concept made reference to the Long Dragon Mountain, to the north of the city, which extended from the adjacent Sichuan province, which in turn is connected to the Yuantong hill inside the city where it then 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 orientates to the west as if to intertwine with the head of the tortoise that forms the shape of the city.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese map contrasts sharply with the later map drawn by Jean-Baptiste Du Halde and published in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in *Description de la Chine* (Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, 1736) which focused on the geometric shape of the city within the larger geographic context.

**Figure 2 here.**

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

**Figure 3 here.**

The area within the wall was occupied mostly by the offices of the ruling governors, houses of wealthy citizens, monasteries, schools and an examination hall managed by the gatekeepers 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 residents of the city lived outside the walls, many gathered in the suburban districts on the south side. Importantly, there were no streets marked on historic maps of Kunming in Figure 1 and 2. However, in figure 4 the central Nanguan Street was set to emphasize the principal ceremonial axis of the city. According to documents at the time, the length of this street was divided into three zones; the left side used exclusively by pedestrian officers; then the zone earmarked for businessmen on the right and finally the privileged route along the middle for aristocrats. The city was zoned according to the relationship with the hills and Green Lake. (Xie, Li & Ma 2009) Hence, the city was not treated as an entity, but rather an interconnected network of physical spaces and their ritual/ceremonial passageways and precincts.

The maps of Kunming, as other Chinese cities, were conceived with political implications, much like commemorative Chinese paintings. As Zou suggests in regard to the *jing* (roughly translated as 'scene', but more accurately describing the interactive unity between scenic views and the spectator): 'The existence of *jing* cannot 'be' categorized as either an object (e.g. materiality of buildings) or a subject (e.g., political ideologies) based on Western metaphysics, rather it presents itself as a primordial vision, or sense, that is inscribed in emotion and intention.' (Zou, 2008:362) Consequently, *jing* renders the vision of nature and scenery as being *embodied* in the self; a reflexive relationship between viewer and viewed.

**City without Streets**

The Ming dynasty map of Kunming clearly emphasised the location of the hills in the city and the territorial demarcations of the different districts as 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 from these maps 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 that aligned with the middle axis connecting to the Dian Lake which served as an important waterway for transportation. In essence therefore 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, which collectively provided a distinctive spatial and topographical grammar of political power and a virtuous/noble life.

In reality, the unmarked streets of Kunming were simply narrow lanes. No numerical numbers were assigned to the houses along these streets; instead buildings were identified by their names or by their locations in relation to the archways and their districts. Equally significant is that there was no visual evidence of public spaces in these maps as is typical of commemorative maps of European cities of the early modern period, such as Rome where streets were connected to public spaces.

A document, dating from the Qing dynasty, mentions that four districts (*fan*) inside the city walls were mainly for government offices, examination halls, monasteries, educational schools, as well as provided accommodation for people coming from other provinces to trade. This provision ‘fuori le Mura’ (outside the city walls), naturally followed the location of other residences, workshops and markets for commoners. Indeed there were a total of eighteen residential and marketing areas (*pu*) outside the city walls of Kunming (Liu, 2003:22). What we see emerging in this complex array of commercial, civic and religious buildings, on the periphery of Kunming, is a relationship that is redolent of what Temple observed about ancient Western cities; namely that the ‘market place actual gave sustenance to participatory (civic/religious) involvement rather than undermining it.’ (Temple 2016)

The view from the top of the Wuhua Hill to the Dian Lake and the West Mountain, which was formed in the shape of a “sleeping beauty” according to popular folklore, was the most important *jing* that effectively embodied the whole city. To ensure this view is maintained, modern planning laws requires that no new buildings be constructed in this area. Similar to Dian Chi Fu, a writer from the Yuan dynasty, the Long Couplet on Dagan Pavilion, written by Sun Ranweng, a celebrity of Kunming in Qianlong Period of the Qing Dynasty, described the city in relation to its surrounding natural landscape, a poetic account that in many ways transcended the reality of the city. Describing images of the *jing* and expressing personal emotions, the author looks back at how the city emerged along the vein of the natural landscape among the mountains and the lake. Throughout history, military and political events shaped Kunming city during the Han, Tang, Song and Yuan dynasties. After listing the historical heroes in Yunnan’s history, the author 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.’ (Translated into English by authors)

The couplet expresses no particular joy, or sorrow but conveys instead personal feelings about the history of the city and its cosmic significance, finally focusing on the relics of the broken stone tablets, occasional sound of bells and the sight of small fishing boats in the middle of the lake that merge with the natural landscape, gaining in the process an extended life in the cyclic rhythms of Chinese time.

The map drawn by the French Joseph Beauvais in 1901, who was stationed in Kunming at the beginning of the 20th century, expressed a rather different way of understanding the city. With the technique of Western “method of lines” (*xianfa*), the map of Kunming was drawn with the clear intentions of representing the street patterns. Hence, the representation of Kunming through the ages has borne witness to the influence of very different cultural outlooks.

#### **Figure 4 here**

#### **The influence from Southeast Asia countries: New streets and public spaces**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the British and French colonised Vietnam and Burma, and then extended their influence north into the adjacent Yunnan province. During the 1870s, Yunnan was forced to open four counties along its borders to neighbouring countries as foreign trading outposts.

External influences from Southeast Asian countries was profound during this time. With the investment from French companies, as part of the plan to extend commercial influence into the region, the Yunnan-Vietnam railway started running in 1910. This was the first railway built in western China. In April 1912, for the first time electricity was established in the city and this was supplied by the Shilongba Hydropower Plant in Yunnan, the first electricity generation station in China. At this time, water supply systems and telecommunications were also introduced.

Because of the construction of the new railway system the Yunnan region since 1910, which has long been isolated by its natural barriers of mountains and rivers, suddenly became a hub on the international network of transport and trade. Not only commodities from eastern China reached Kunming, via Hong Kong and then Haiphong in Vietnam, but also many direct imports from Western countries started to arrive in the city.

As a result of these international trading links, imported goods and local industries have led to the transformation of the urban forms of Kunming, and changed the structure of commercial markets across Yunnan province. In 1827, the first government owned industry, to manufacture cannon, was set up in Kunming. Following on from that, a government run business bureau was established in 1883. In 1905, with the fast pace towards modernization, the Kunming governor applied to the imperial court for permission to open the city as a commercial port for overseas trade. As a result, an area in the southeast of Kunming, encircled by a perimeter boundary of six kilometres was opened specifically to foreign businesses for renting. Along the main axis road on the east of the city are located government offices, as well as between the third and fourth archway therefore accommodated a large number of shops selling goods from overseas. (Xie, Li & Ma 2009)

In 1911, the establishment of the New Army in Kunming gave rise to a successful new local regime that further pushed the development of industry and commercialization in the region. From 1911 to 1917, thirty-eight roads were rebuilt and widened. Many streets were named after famous buildings, archways, offices or monasteries. The ambition of planning the city as a modern metropolis had resulted in the implementation of many new urban policies. To rationalize and order urban life, a unified opening time (7am) for all the shops was



introduced in 1912. Those who opened late were given fines for non-compliance. Other regulations were also introduced for cleaning streets and unifying colours of buildings. Pedestrians also required to walk on the either side of street in orderly fashion (Jie, 2009:24-25). These and other initiatives transformed the old city into a more efficient modern metropolis.

The Kunming Municipal Administration was set up in 1922 to take over the role of the Police Bureau for overseeing the implementation of planning regulations in building and the 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 of Kunming. From 1922, the streets, together with new markets, parks and public spaces started to play a much more important roles in the spatial structure of the city that was substantially different from the territorialised zones (urban quarters) of the ancient city. Accompanying these urban/infrastructural developments were important changes in life styles that drew influence from western practices, such as food, fashion and leisurely pursuits (ibid. 49).

At the same time, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also witnesses the construction of many new buildings that consciously adopted Western styles, albeit with traditional wooden structures internally (Xi, Li & Ma 2009).

#### **Figure 7 here.**

We see this for example in the Military Academy, built in 1918, which was designed using a combination of Western and Chinese styles using timber structures. Huize Hall in Yunnan University, on the other hand, was built in 1924 and started to modify the traditional courtyard plan of the compound by incorporating a concrete structure.

#### **Figure 8 here.**

The building elevations of Huize Hall that can be seen today evidence numerous architectural details that derive from western design/drawing techniques, a practice that was motivated in part by Chinese architects being trained in Europe, such as Zhang Banhan who studied in Paris. The idea for 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*' is however deeply rooted in Chinese tradition; the term means gathering knowledge or 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 appearances. A number of churches, a hospital and a theatre were built using traditional timber frame construction, but clad in western styled architectural features. This included a YMCA building which was constructed in 1933. Exceptions to this rule of course existed, as we see in the larger span buildings (such as cinemas), where western methods of reinforced concrete were used.

### **Influence from Central China**

Another significant phase, in the external influences on Kunming's urban development, came during the Second World War, when the Japanese invaded China, occupying most of its major cities and blocking seaports. Yunnan province escaped this invasion and the Yunnan–Myanmar Highway became the major connection between China and the external world during the war. Also, a number of Chinese universities, factories and military forces were relocated to Kunming, bringing with them the most advanced technology, manufacture and education at the time. To reflect the rapid development during the period, Kunming's 1943 Masterplan was

published to define the districts of different functions in the city. The city wall to the south was totally demolished and a new financial street (Lanpin Street) was built in its place.

Skilled workers moved from other regions of China, and with their skills and expertise many new factories were constructed. From the 1930s to the 1940s, Kunming built the 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. Urban development in Kunming however stagnated during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976.

### **Wenming Street in Kunming after the 1980s**

After the economic reform in the 1980s, urban planning policies embraced less of the ideological principles evident during the socialist-revolutionary era and more on progress and modernization. The 1985 master-plan for Kunming thus proposed that businesses area to be further developed in the city centre area.

However, traditional streets became vulnerable to large scale developments and city planning policies that aimed to widen the roads for more efficient transportation and commercial activity. In pursuit of such contemporary urban infrastructure, the municipal master plan propose to demolish houses located within the defined boundaries to make way for new streets. In addition, the old courtyard houses were considered derelict and old fashioned without proper kitchen and toilet facilities. From 1992 both Chuanchun and Wuchen roads, which used to be the main streets where the governor's offices were located and grand courtyard houses, were finally demolished. Recalling the demolition process, Mr. Liu from the planning department remembered that there was no defined regulations for protecting the cultural heritage during the period. The residents were reminded by planners to save beautifully carved old timber and stone decorations, wooden windows and doors before the demolition, but few residents took notice. Many ornaments and other pieces were picked up by planners who were on the sites and brought back and stored in the courtyard of the Planning Department, but eventually many of these building and ornamental remnants were salvaged and stored in the provincial museum.

Despite being awarded the title of the *Historical Cultural City in China* in the first groups of cities being recognised in 1982, Kunming rapidly lost its traditional houses built during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The traditional courtyard houses in Kunming were called 'Stamp Houses' (to reflect the square footprint of the courtyard house like a Chinese stamp). A Stamp House, as an architectural form, had gained increasing recognition from academic researchers on architecture since the 1950s. The protection of traditional courtyard houses attracted attention from the general public and the media after the demolition of most of the traditional streets. In 1998, 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. However, its importance is due largely to attempts to preserve some traces of the historic urban/built fabric. Indeed it is the last (and only) street in the city where such initiatives have taken place.

### **Figure 9 here.**

The book includes a detailed survey, through a series of drawings of the courtyard houses in 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 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 old houses to reveal their original forms and characters. Four principles are mentioned in regard to the renovation process: 1) to reintegrate (and thereby protect) the ‘spiritual’ content of these representations and their physical forms; 2) to balance protection with reformation; 3) to combine new materials and protected materials/fragments, and 4) to utilise 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 heritages of the houses should be.

Li Shiqiao believes that in contrast to Western traditions, where preservation of original locations under original conditions constitutes an over-riding priority of any conservation project, in which archiving of documents serves an important intellectual purpose, in China a rather different practice prevails, in which the activity of ‘reconstituting’ old buildings often through the use of new structures or materials possess some degree of ‘immaterial authenticity’ in the collective memories of people. In such an enterprise authenticity can be maintained through spatial and temporal relocation; that the original place of a historic building of monument is in the end not so significant. (Li 2014:162-179) The same understanding informed the refurbishment of Wenming Street.

The brief for protecting architectural heritage on Wenming Street changed after 2004 when the regulations for protecting heritage were first formally codified. The initial brief for renovating 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, such as for example in Xin Tiandi where buildings in Shanghai are made of brick. 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 is further exacerbated by the increasing difficulties of securing funding for such works.

At the time, within the framework of the city partnership between Zurich and Kunming, a group of Swiss experts in historic preservation supported Kunming’s preservation efforts in 1996 (Stutz, 2002) Zurich scholars suggested that such the renovation needed to go beyond the mere protection of individual cultural relics or antiquities, recognizing 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 and also followed new development in conservation regulations, and have started to include the whole street as a conservation area. In master plans since the 1950s, two primary principles have been followed to preserve Wenming Street as the historical axis of the city and to maintain (as discussed earlier) the visual and spatial relationships between the three mountains and Dian Lake outside city and the three hills and Green Lake within the old city boundaries. Eventually developers were brought in with investment funding to develop Wenming Street as a commercial thoroughfare, but different policies were applied for the two sides of the street; new buildings on one side were designated for tourism, whilst the traditional courtyard houses on other side were refurbished as cultural heritage monuments that record the historic past of Kunming city.

**Figure 10 here**

**Figure 11 here.**

There are similar examples of historical streets being renovated in other parts of China. Qianmen Street in Beijing has been renovated, not because it is such an urban design or architectural success, but because of its being in Beijing, and part of ‘the axis of the nation’ and thus its example function. Other examples of renovated commercial streets are Fuzi Miao in Nanjing and Xin Tiandi in Shanghai. Both were existing traditional commercial streets renovated in pseudo-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 the historic commercial street, with the inclusion of new buildings which were deemed to possess some degree of ‘immaterial authenticity’ in the way Li suggests. In the productions of pseudo-traditional styles, the link with the past, as a general sensibility, appears to be more important than defining connections to particular point 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 retrofit. It can range from restoring the original forms when buildings were first built (as referred to above) to a refurbishment that records changes through the passage of time. Refurbishment is defined as making use of what is usable in the ageing building stock, 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 existing use (Marsh, 1983:3). Refurbishment, however, can vary from a simple repair like painting façades to a more complex process that includes structural reinforcement works. One of the meanings of restoration on online Oxford Dictionaries is defined as the “process of restoring a building, work of art, etc. to its original condition” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016), and renovation as “restore (something old, especially a building) to a good state of repair”.

In Wenming Street, some old courtyard houses were renovated and listed as ‘provincial heritages’. When the refurbishment started, there were no guidelines on the refurbishment of historical buildings or any standard set for renovation practice in China. When the wooden residential houses required change of use (to commercial buildings) such as shops, restaurants or hotels, questions were asked about how to “renovate old building as the original form and structure”, and how to renovate the street district with traditional courtyard houses, one next to another, to meet the requirements of fire escape and protection against seismic activity (at a level of ‘8’ on the Richter Scale) for public/commercial buildings in Kunming. In other words, how to reflect the ‘authentic identity’ of the street; at which point (or points) in the history of Kunming should the buildings and streets be renovated accordingly?

Eventually the link to the past was identified with traditional craftsmanship and local materials were accordingly used in restoration. Competitions were held in Kunming in order to find and recruit the most skilled craftsmen who could make the traditional building details. For example, Chinese calligraphy found in texts and used on street signs was carved on stone fixing to walls by the last living craftsman who could do the work in the province. In this way, the history was somehow ‘embedded’ in contemporary construction, even if this was only managed in a fragmentary way.

## **Conclusion**

As Rowe and Kuan explored in their book *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China*, attitudes towards architecture in China, since the opening of the Treaty Ports in the 1840s, have gone through various transformations – from ‘Chinese learning for essential principles and Western learning for practical application’ to ‘socialist essence and

cultural form' and then an reversal to 'modern essence and Chinese form' (Rowe & Kuan 2004). Yet in order to understand the reasons for the value attached to 'traditional styles' in commercial streets recently built in almost all large cities in China over the past decade, we have to recognise that both essence and form in these examples reveal different changes to those discussed in Rowe and Kuan's book.

Marvin Trachtenberg 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). Trachtenberg identifies in his investigation of western traditions 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 their shorter life-spans, these overlaps were eventually lost and replaced by the staged programmes found in modern design and building schedules.

There were different 'temporal' stages reflected in the design and construction of the Forbidden City in Beijing during the Ming and Qing dynasties. For the Forbidden City, twelve years were spent on gathering materials and making the elements for constructions, such as timber columns, tiles, bricks, whereas only four years were taken to put the elements together and build the palace. Elaborate ritualised efforts were involved in collecting, making and transferring the materials and components through the long passage of time, before they could be properly integrated when the building came into being. Hence time is embedded in the building process not only in materials and compositions, but also in transporting and transforming the materials that signify power and virtue. In the case of the renovation of Wenming Street, we would argue that the authenticity of the place relied on craftsmanship alone that could transform raw materials into matured building elements that in various ways registered historical temporality. Its relationship to identity was identified with traditional practice in design and construction, which in this case, held higher value than those for buildings made by modern methods. Therefore there were different attitudes and methods regarding protecting and inheriting cultural heritage, and the understanding of relics/antiques in China from those in the West.

Recapitulating Temple's discussion about the shifting historical relationships between commercial, political and religious life (Temple 2016), and what these changes tell us about the temporality of building in the way articulated by Trachtenberg, it would be salutary to compare and contrast the impact of capitalism and the market on historic cities in both 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. But what we are witnessing in the contemporary globalised world is an extraordinary (one might claim alarming) homogenisation of urban space in which 'contemporary consumerism pervades an amnesiac condition.' (Temple 2016)

Following this cue, we would have to ask how the new self in the city today, as Appandurai argues can, '.... seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern' (1996:5) This 'compensatory' act perhaps best articulates what material reminders of the past (whether actual or constructed) can contribute in redefining our collective historicity, against the synchronic backdrop of the digital world. In this context we can learn much from Chinese culture, in particular how temporal change can be registered architecturally and urbanistically without necessarily relying on explicit terms of reference, such as Aldo Rossi's typological model of urban artefacts. (Rossi, 1984)

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2. *Man Shu* was written by Fan Chuo in Tang Dynasty. It includes 10 books in the whole series about various aspects in Yunnan province. The documents recorded data about roads, mountains and rivers, political regions, cities and towns, products, local habits, army and surrounding countries in the province.
3. Analects 12.1. More discussion about the idea see John Kieschnick, Analects 12.1 and the Commentarial Tradition, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 112.4:567-576 (1992)
4. Analects 13.23 . More details see Chenyang Li, *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony* (Routledge Studies in Asian Religion and Philosophy) (Routledge, 2015)
5. Analects,6.23. Confucius associates virtues with Mountains and Water: 'Wise delight in water; benevolent delight in mountain. Wise know ways of move and through; benevolent know leisurely calm and tranquil; Wise enjoy cheerful; benevolent enjoy long life.' (知者樂水，仁者樂山。知者動，仁者靜。知者樂，仁者壽).
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