

# Artistic Renewal and Heritage Conservation—Deleuze’s Philosophy in Reimagining Yongning Ancient Walled City

XU Ze-kai

Management School, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom

The Yongning Ancient Walled City, located in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, is a historic site with over 600 years of cultural heritage. Its preservation faces challenges posed by rapid urbanization, yet it also offers opportunities for creative renewal through artistic and cultural frameworks. This paper explores a novel approach to reimagining Yongning by integrating Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy—emphasizing multiplicity, rhizomatic connections, and the fold—with environmental art and cultural narratives. By drawing on Deleuze’s concepts of “nomadic space” and “fold” within the context of heritage conservation, this study provides actionable strategies for blending modern artistic practices with traditional cultural identity. Through field research, theoretical exploration, and design application, this paper demonstrates how Yongning can transform into a living museum of art, culture, and history. The findings aim to expand the dialogue on aesthetics, spatial theory, and heritage renewal.

*Keywords:* art and heritage conservation, Deleuze’s philosophy, nomadic space, rhizomatic design, fold theory, cultural aesthetics

## Introduction

The Yongning Ancient Walled City stands as a testament to centuries of cultural and artistic heritage in Quanzhou, Fujian Province. The site’s unique architectural forms, rooted in Ming Dynasty traditions and influenced by maritime trade, reflect a dynamic interplay of local and international aesthetics. However, rapid urbanization and modernization have encroached upon its historical integrity, necessitating innovative approaches to its preservation and renewal. This study situates Yongning at the nexus of art, philosophy, and spatial theory, employing Gilles Deleuze’s concepts to reinterpret its conservation challenges through an artistic lens. By embracing Deleuze’s notions of fluidity, multiplicity, and interconnectedness, the paper proposes an artistic transformation that aligns with both modern urban needs and traditional cultural values.

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XU Ze-kai, Master, is currently pursuing an MSc in Creative and Cultural Industries Management at the University of Sheffield’s Management School. With a background in environmental design from the China University of Geosciences, he specializes in architectural heritage conservation and urban renewal. His research interests include applying contemporary philosophical theories to spatial design and exploring innovative methods for preserving historical sites.

## Literature Review

### Existing Studies on Yongning Ancient Walled City

Research on Yongning has traditionally focused on the preservation of its physical structures and historical narratives. Early works emphasized the conservation of tangible heritage, such as city walls, courtyard houses, and religious temples, while neglecting the evolving cultural practices that sustain the community's identity. Lin (2017) underscore the importance of adaptive reuse but fall short of addressing the creative integration of heritage with modern urban life.

Recent studies have shifted toward examining Yongning's socio-cultural dimensions. For instance, Shen (2015) highlight the significance of the "you shen" (god-walking) ritual as a living tradition that fosters community cohesion. Yet, these studies often treat cultural practices and urban planning as separate domains, overlooking their potential for synergy. Furthermore, architectural analyses, such as those exploring the "da cuo" style, reveal the city's historical role as a trading hub and its architectural hybridity, blending Chinese and Southeast Asian influences (Gao, 2015). However, these studies lack actionable strategies to harmonize heritage with contemporary artistic and environmental concerns.

### Deleuze's Philosophy in Spatial and Artistic Contexts

Gilles Deleuze's philosophy has been instrumental in rethinking spatial design and artistic practices. His concepts of the fold, nomadic space, and rhizome challenge traditional hierarchical structures, offering a framework for creating dynamic, interconnected spaces (Liu, 2013). The fold, as explored by Deleuze, represents the seamless integration of disparate elements, making it particularly relevant for blending historical and modern aesthetics. Nomadic space emphasizes adaptability and fluidity, advocating for environments that support movement, interaction, and diversity (Wang, 2017). Finally, the rhizome model disrupts linear planning paradigms, promoting decentralized, networked spaces that reflect cultural multiplicity (Liu, 2022).

Architectural theorists have applied these ideas to projects that reimagine urban spaces as living artworks. Gehry's curvilinear designs and Kuma's innovative use of traditional materials exemplify the fold's potential to merge past and present (Wang, 2008). Similarly, Deleuze's rhizomatic approach has inspired cultural nodes that connect local traditions with global narratives, as seen in projects like the Yokohama International Port Terminal. However, the application of these theories to heritage conservation remains underexplored, particularly in contexts like Yongning where art and cultural practices intersect.

## Methodology

This study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, integrating:

**Field Research:** On-site observations and interviews with local stakeholders, focusing on Yongning's architectural features and cultural practices.

**Theoretical Analysis:** Application of Deleuze's philosophical concepts to the spatial and cultural dynamics of Yongning.

**Design Proposals:** Development of artistic and ecological interventions that align with both heritage conservation and modern urban aesthetics.

## Findings and Discussion

### Historical and Cultural Foundations

Yongning's heritage encompasses not only its physical structures but also its vibrant cultural traditions. The city's architectural forms, such as the iconic courtyard houses, embody a synthesis of Chinese and Southeast Asian influences, reflecting its historical role as a maritime hub. Additionally, rituals like the "you shen" ceremony illustrates the community's enduring connection to its spiritual and social roots. However, these elements are increasingly threatened by urban sprawl and the homogenizing effects of modernization.

### Artistic Interpretations of Deleuze's Philosophy

Deleuze's philosophy provides a compelling lens for reimagining Yongning as a space where art and heritage converge. The concept of the fold informs strategies for integrating historical motifs into contemporary structures, creating spaces that honor the past while embracing innovation. For instance, new cultural centers could incorporate traditional architectural elements such as eaves and courtyards, reinterpreted through modern materials and techniques.

Nomadic space offers a framework for designing pathways and public areas that encourage exploration and interaction. By transforming underutilized alleys into dynamic corridors connecting key cultural landmarks, Yongning can become a network of fluid, interconnected spaces. These pathways could feature art installations and interactive exhibits that narrate the city's history, blending traditional storytelling with contemporary artistic expressions.

The rhizomatic approach further supports the creation of decentralized cultural nodes, such as performance spaces, art galleries, and community hubs. These nodes, linked through physical and digital networks, would foster a sense of cultural multiplicity and inclusivity. For example, augmented reality (AR) applications could overlay historical scenes onto present-day settings, allowing visitors to experience Yongning's past through an immersive, artistic medium.

### Ecological and Visual Enhancements

Incorporating ecological art into Yongning's renewal process can address both environmental and aesthetic concerns. Vertical gardens and green walls on historic structures not only enhance visual appeal but also promote sustainability. Similarly, water features inspired by traditional Chinese landscape design could be integrated into public spaces, creating serene environments that reflect Yongning's cultural ethos. These elements, combined with art installations that evoke the city's maritime heritage, would enrich Yongning's urban landscape while preserving its identity.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates the potential of Deleuze's philosophy to inform artistic and cultural approaches to heritage conservation. By applying concepts such as the fold, nomadic space, and rhizome, Yongning Ancient Walled City can be reimagined as a living museum that harmonizes tradition with innovation. Future research could explore the scalability of these strategies in other historical and cultural contexts, further bridging the disciplines of art, philosophy, and urban renewal.

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