ISA ONLINE GUEST LECTURE
‘SAUTÉ’ URBANISATION
THE DIALECTICS OF SPACE AND PLACE IN CHINA’S SOUTH-WESTERN PERIPHERY

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Over the last 20 years of “Reform and Opening Up”, China has embraced an explicit policy of urbanisation. In the literature, space and place-making are often perceived as distinct or conflicting dimensions of urban change, whereby the former is severed from or dominates the latter. Richard Sennett has described this dynamic as an asymmetry between ville (state initiated space-building) and cité (place-dwelling by local residents). By focusing on the multi-ethnic south-western frontier of Yunnan, this paper explores the effects of recent urbanisation on Tai ethnic minority communities in the emerging border city of Jinghong. It suggests that we need to conceptualise urbanisation in dialectic terms rather than as a dichotomy. Specifically, it argues that urbanisation can produce a two-way dynamic whereby the ville co-opts the cité and the cité permeates the ville through consensus. The resulting ‘sauté urbanisation’ captures these mutually informing practices of state space construction and ethnic place-making.

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