Statement of the Problem

The challenge was to create a center of healthcare excellence serving the Kunming region in China’s tropical Yunnan province. Kunming’s rapidly growing population and national importance called for a large-scale university hospital with a striking architecture embodying regional pride and identity.

Site and Environs

Kunming is China’s “City of Eternal Spring,” with omnipresent blossoms and lush vegetation year-round. It has the country’s mildest climate and most abundant sunshine, with temperatures ranging from 50 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit.

The hospital is in the center of a new development district, surrounded by broad avenues linking it to other civic institutions and surrounding residential areas.

Design Intentions and Distinguishing Factor

The project is conceived to channel natural forces in the service of healing. It builds on the principles of salutogenesis, emphasizing factors that support human health and well-being, rather than on factors that cause disease. The project embodies a “sense of coherence” in which comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness are paramount.

The constituent parts of this full-service hospital are clearly articulated and intuitively comprehensible for patients and families. The differences among Outpatient, Emergency, Treatment and Inpatient units are precise, yielding carefully related but expressively distinct building volumes.

Thoughtful connections make for a building complex that is easily and efficiently navigable for patients and staff alike. Personnel and logistics flows follow a simple network of intersecting paths, from open-air bridges and balconies to underground service corridors.

The project is firmly grounded in the Kunming region’s natural splendor. Its high-performance facades evoke clear skies whose scattered clouds are recalled in randomly perforated sunscreens. The stems and stalks of abundant trees and plants appear at large scale on the tower facades. Large expanses of subtly variegated metal panels recall the renowned limestone formations of the nearby “Stone Forest,” offering patients and families a reassuring sense of solidity animated by light.

The medical center complex is characterized by a sense of openness and permeability, taking full advantage of the natural healing effects of light and air. In response to Kunming’s year-round temperate climate, public spaces are either fully open air or only semi-enclosed. The covered outpatient atrium is open to soft breezes that set its lush native foliage in motion, offering a sense of respite while linking clinics with diagnostic and treatment facilities.

In the inpatient units, where the need to provide 1,000 beds dictated the creation of a 14-story tower, the same proximity to nature is provided by multi-story hanging gardens that cascade in the center of each floor. Patients, families and staff alike traverse these gardens while passing to and from strategically-placed elevators that provide ready access to state-of-the-art surgical, diagnostic and treatment services.

Family nurturing and support are vital for patient healing. These take on a more practical nature in China, where families are often responsible for a patient’s food and laundry. The project facilitates this family participation in organic fashion by integrating laundry drying racks into the facades outside patient rooms. Families are encouraged to take an active role, speeding patient recovery.