

Rise and Fall of the *Qilou*: Metamorphosis of Forms and Meanings in the Built Environment of Guangzhou

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This article examines how narratives surrounding *qilou* (arcaded buildings) have changed through three very different moments over a period of almost a century in Guangzhou, China. As a result, what public discourse once perceived as a new, modern form now serves as a symbol of traditional local culture. The metamorphosis of the *qilou* narrative in response to different visions, social circumstances, and practices provides a good entry point for understanding the contestations and dynamics that have shaped priorities in seeing and thinking about urban space in South China. By relating subjective experiences with physical environments, the case of *qilou* also challenges the predominant framework of the nation-state as an anchor for understanding contemporary China, and points to the significance of regional dynamics within and beyond international borders.

Qilou, roughly speaking, are arcaded concrete-frame buildings that combine Western facade elements with local forms of interior spatial arrangement, and which often combine residential and commercial uses. Many residents of Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong province in South China, now proudly consider these buildings to be their city's most emblematic architectural artifacts. They also see *qilou*, and the neighborhoods that surround them, as representing an old Cantonese lifestyle of intimate neighborly interaction and convenient access to small stores for daily necessities.

As part of Guangzhou's preparation for the 2010 Asian Games, the *qilou* was chosen through a government-backed survey, which enlisted the participation of citizens and the media, as one of ten cultural symbols that best represented South China. The massive destruction of *qilou* as part of recent urban renewal plans has likewise been denounced on the Internet and in other media by residents, who complain that their replacement with

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other forms of development has wiped away much of the city's Cantonese character.

Physical buildings are sediments as well as mirrors of specific processes of development. In terms of social, economic and political relationships, they give history a material face. However, as David Lowenthal has also pointed out, "physical remains have their limitations as informants, to be sure: they are themselves mute, requiring interpretation."¹ In the case of *qilou*, their current symbolic status disguises the fact that they were overlooked, both by scholars of Chinese architecture and the local media, for decades.

Using Guangzhou as a case study, this article traces the dramatically different narratives that have surrounded *qilou* in public discourse through three very different historical moments: the early twentieth century (the Republican era); the 1950s, 60s and 70s (the Maoist era); and the first decade of the twenty-first century. *Qilou* were originally seen as auxiliary structures enabling the construction of a new street system in the 1920s and 1930s. They were then reinterpreted during the Maoist years as betraying bourgeois tastes and serving the exploitative classes, and were thus subjected to socialist transformation. In the early twenty-first century, however, *qilou* have reemerged as a key symbol of Cantonese culture and social life. Indeed, they have become a key site for the deployment of a politics of local identity. Such changing narratives beg the question: What allows different observers over time to see and think so differently about the same physical forms?

As the historian Barbara Lane eloquently demonstrated in her study of architectural practices in Germany before and during the Nazi regime, specific historical narratives combining art and politics typically shape the symbolic meaning and interpretation of architectural styles.² In a similar vein, this article investigates the social and political circumstances that have supplied the language framing the meaning of *qilou* at different historical moments. Combining archival and field research conducted between 2007 and 2013, it explores the different visions and practices of various authorities who have sought to produce a modern city and a desirable society. These official narratives have to a large extent shaped priorities when it comes to seeing and thinking about urban space in Guangzhou. Yet, powerful as it may be, ideological struggle must also come to terms with the practical concerns of everyday life. Thus, while government-orchestrated narratives of modernity and national identity have to a great extent defined people's sense of the built environment, mundane encounters and individual memories add important layers of meaning to buildings and their surroundings, sometimes unintentionally challenging the official narratives.

Sedentary buildings often project the image of a city as an enduring whole. By relating the present with an underdocumented remote past and a nostalgic recent past, contemporary interpretation of buildings also contributes to the reconstruction of an urban history seemingly without rupture. Yet, as the vicissitudes of *qilou* and the various nar-

ratives concerning them suggest, built environments serve as nodes that not only connect time with space, physically and metaphorically, but also bridge fragmented experiences. In a rapidly changing urban China, they may also foster a new politics of identity through processes of remembering, forgetting, narrating and building.

QILOU AND QILOU STREETS IN GUANGZHOU

The *qilou* (literally "riding building") is an arcaded form of architecture that combines residential and commercial uses in a three-to-four-story structure. Set back into the building behind the arcade, the ground floor is typically occupied by stores. The upper floors, meanwhile, are occupied by living quarters and extend out over a paved pedestrian corridor, supported on perimeter columns. In Guangzhou, a 1912 government regulation used the term "*qilou* with feet" (*youjiao qilou*) to describe these structures — with "feet" referring to the columns or pillars that supported the upper floors. Subsequent government documents, however, omitted "with feet," and *qilou* became the standard term after the 1920s.

A typical *qilou* has a narrow street front but extends deeply to the rear of the block. *Qilou* typically also stand side by side, forming a covered corridor on the ground floor. *Qilou* corridors sometimes occupy one side of a street, but more often they extend along both sides. Streets with such corridors are called "*qilou* streets" (FIGS. 1, 2).

Historically, the form of the *qilou* may be traced to the shophouses with their "five-foot way" verandahs that were built in Singapore according to regulations instituted by Sir Stamford Raffles, the British administrator of that colonial city, in 1822. From there, the form spread to other Southeast Asian cities beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.³ Documents suggest that the *qilou* first appeared as a form in cities and market towns in South China in the early twentieth century.⁴ While there is no record showing when the first *qilou* was built in Guangzhou, Republican government documents and maps indicate that most were built between the late 1910s and the 1930s. The earliest *qilou* streets were built on the site of moats and city walls that were filled and torn down in 1919. Others followed the path of old main streets within the original city walls, and extended beyond them. *Qilou* construction was also common in the Xiguan (West Gate) area of Guangzhou. This was the city's most densely populated area and also its business center, located just to the west of its old city wall.

Like similarly hybrid buildings in Shanghai, *qilou* are products of Western-Chinese encounters during the urbanization processes that emerged in China during the early twentieth century.⁵ However, prevailing social and historical conditions in different cities gave these processes local forms. One distinctive feature of *qilou* is their Western-influenced facades. Some details on these facades have vernacular origins, such as

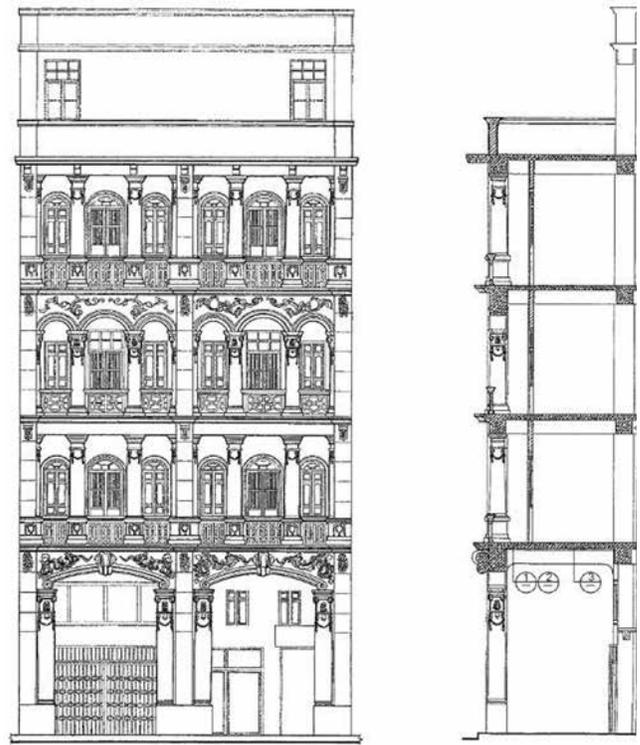


FIGURE 1 (LEFT). A section of qilou street. Photo by the author (2012).

FIGURE 2 (RIGHT). A qilou facade and partial side view (only the corridor area and above are shown from the side; the residential and store areas would extend to the right, the width of which might be five times or more the width of the corridor.) Source: G. Tang, ed., *Liangnan Lishi Jianzhu Cehuitu Xuanji* [A Collection of Measured Drawings of Historical Buildings in South China] (Guangzhou: Huanan Ligong Daxue Chubanshe, 2004), p.214.

the so-called “Manchu window”; but, for the majority of *qilou*, facade composition entailed a jumbled vocabulary of Western architecture, including Neoclassical and Art-Deco pilasters, pilaster strips, and Baroque cresting above cornices (FIG. 3).

The Western influence probably resulted from the long-term exchange of goods, people and ideas in this historical port city. For centuries, Guangzhou (formerly known as Canton) was one of the most important ports along trade routes in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean.⁶ Eighteenth-century Canton had already witnessed the emergence of hybridized buildings such as the “thirteen factories,” built by Chinese merchants as dwellings and trading centers for foreigners conducting business there.⁷ And in the late nineteenth century, after the Opium Wars, Western-style buildings, such as the Neoclassical Customs House and the granite Sacred Heart Cathedral (the biggest granite Gothic cathedral in China) came to dominate the built fabric of Shamian Island, a former French-British concession, and the city’s northern riverbank.⁸ Meanwhile, Western-educated Chinese architects began to design grand, hybrid buildings like the Zhongshan Memorial Hall and campus buildings for Christian schools around the city.⁹

Juxtaposed with these elite buildings were commercial and residential hybrid buildings like *qilou*. Most *qilou* were constructed by unknown builders, but some could be attrib-

uted to overseas Chinese businessmen who belonged to large trading and social networks connecting the Pearl River Delta in South China with Southeast Asia, Australia, the United States, and Europe. Members of this diaspora returned to Canton and constituted a vibrant business force by the early twentieth century.¹⁰ When they built hotels, department stores, cinemas and residences, these buildings often took the form of *qilou* and helped contribute to the development of *qilou* streets.

Despite their exotic facades, the interior spatial layouts of *qilou* primarily reflected local concerns. Individual *qilou* tend to be narrow and deep, some stretching back more than fifty feet — three to four times their width. In some cases the depth of a building might even surpass the width of the street in front. While official guidance stipulated the minimum height of the ground floor, it left the width and depth to individuals’ discretion.¹¹ Such a skewed ratio of width to depth may have related to the *qilou*’s commercial function. With stores opening out only at the front, a building’s width determined, disproportionately, its value. Because owners paid a premium for exposure to potential customers, it would have made little economic sense to build wide, shallow buildings. One result of such economic calculations, in combination with the fact that *qilou* were built in rows, was that a good area of most such buildings received little or no natural light.



FIGURE 3. Qilou facades. Photos by the author (2012).

By the 1930s *qilou* lined both sides of many Guangzhou streets, extending to more than 24.5 miles — more than in any other Chinese city (FIG. 4).¹² Eventually, the construction of *qilou* did slow in the mid-1930s. Doubts about their impact on the city had been raised as early as the early 1930s. For example, in 1931 the Public Works Department suggested that *qilou* not be allowed on certain streets because they left no space for trees.¹³ The list of streets supposedly without *qilou* in Guangzhou continued to expand between 1931 and 1932 as part of the municipal government's "City Beautiful" movement.¹⁴ But during this time the issue of *qilou* continued to be debated on a case-by-case basis.¹⁵ Finally, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 and the subsequent civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists essentially halted new construction. Only a small number of *qilou* were built in the early days of the Communist-led government after 1949 — and those that were built did not have elaborate facades.

Despite a lack of maintenance, many *qilou* survived the volatile three decades of Maoist China. However, accelerated economic development since the late 1980s has proved partic-

ularly rough for *qilou* and *qilou* streets.¹⁶ In 1987 an elevated highway was erected in the middle of Renmin Road, the longest north-south *qilou* street in the city. And in 1993 ground was broken for Guangzhou's first subway line, which was partly located beneath one of its oldest east-west thoroughfares, Zhongshan Road, which had extensive *qilou* corridors on both sides.¹⁷ Just as in the Republican period, the government has taken neighboring land and resold it to raise funds for such infrastructure construction. Thus *qilou* on the most commercially active parts of these streets have now been demolished, except for a handful of buildings saved following the discovery nearby of a thousand-year-old imperial garden. Around the same time, *qilou* along a north-south artery, Jiefang Road, were also razed relentlessly to widen the street.

While the municipal government's infrastructure building led to entire *qilou* streets being bulldozed or lost to the shadow of elevated highways, real estate developers have also coveted the parcels along *qilou* streets for their land value. This has led them to tear down many *qilou* individually to create space for new commercial buildings and highrise gated

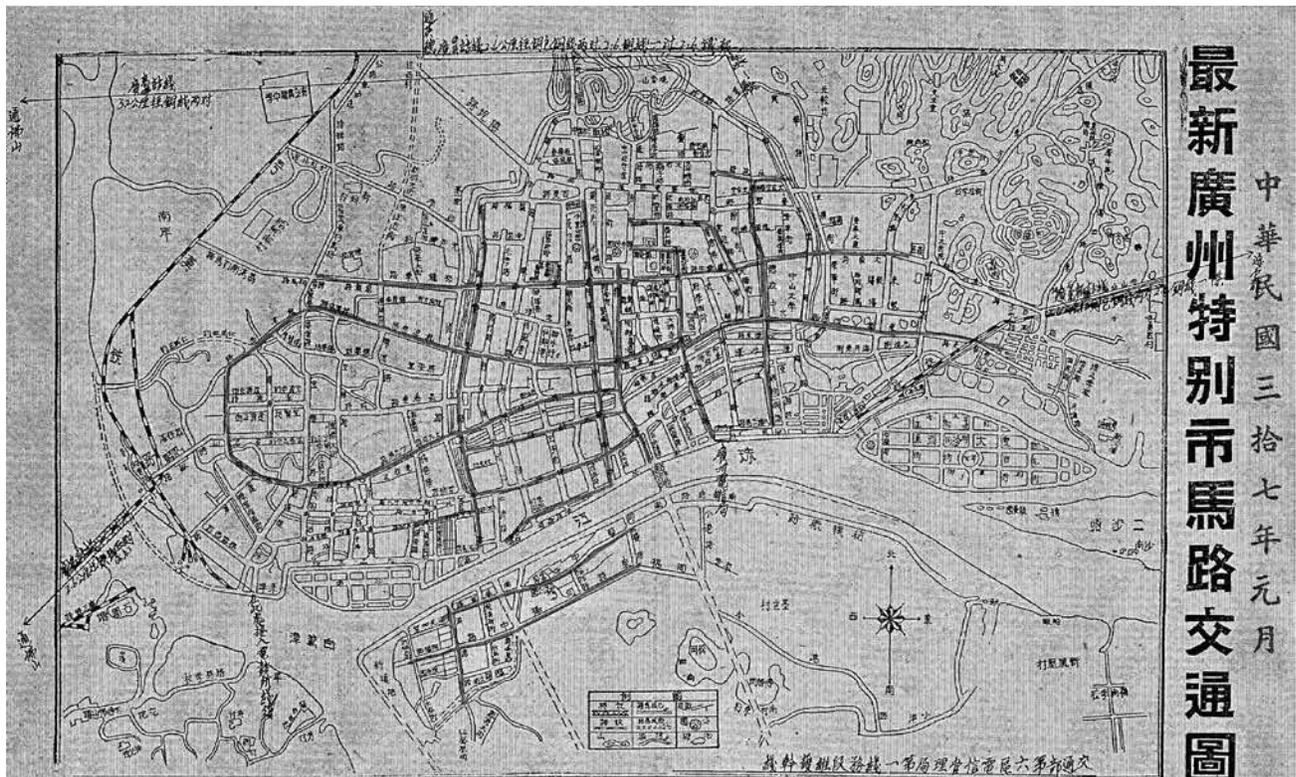


FIGURE 4. Map with highlighted qilou streets in Canton in the 1940s. Source: The map was published in 1948 in *New Canton Yearbook* (1935). Streets shown with qilou are based on information from the author's interviews with old residents, from field trips between 2007 and 2012, and from qilou maps in other studies. See J. Li, "Guangzhoushi Qiloujie Baohu Zhong De Jiaotong Wenti Ji Duice" ["Transit Problems and Countermeasures of Preserving Qilou in Guangzhou"], in Y. Shu, R. Chen, C. Tu, and L. Dai, eds., 2007 Nian: Zhongguo Guangzhou Chengshi Jianshe Fazhan Baogao [The Urban Construction Development Report of Guangzhou in China (2007)] (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2007), pp. 421–32; and J. Zheng, "Guangzhou Qiloujie Kongjian Fenbu Tezheng Yu Baohu Cuoshi" ["Spatial Distribution of Qilou Streets and Protective Measurements in Guangzhou"], *Chengshi Guihua*, No.11 (1999).

communities. By 2010 more than half of the *qilou* streets were gone (FIG. 5). Many of the remaining thoroughfares could not be called *qilou* streets anymore, because *qilou* on either side had been torn down, eliminating the connected corridors that had once been their defining element.

QILOU GROUPS AS A NEW URBAN FORM IN THE REPUBLICAN ERA

As mentioned, the period between the late 1910s and early 1930s witnessed a boom in the construction of *qilou*. During this time government officials issued many regulations concerning their construction. In 1912 such regulations required anyone wanting to build houses and stores along major streets and the Pearl River embankment to use the *qilou* form.¹⁸ Subsequent regulations provided extensive specifications for engineering and structure, spatial layout and floor height, the relationship between street width and the depth of the covered corridor, construction time and materials, and

the responsibility of building owners and shop operators to keep the walkway free for passage.

These regulations were among the earliest efforts to standardize building construction in Canton, but they offered evidence of more than just a paradigm shift in governance. Even without considering their ornamental Western facades, *qilou* had features that distinguished them from older, one-story structures in the city. In particular, steel bars and cement were used to create the structural frames for *qilou* with multiple floors. And these new materials and construction techniques required expertise that was uncommon at that time, pressing government officials to become expert knowledge providers. The regulations were so detailed that, as Lin has soundly argued, the municipal government may have meant to provide an operational model for inexperienced builders.¹⁹

Yet, except among regulators, the construction of *qilou* seems to have been invisible to commentators in other kinds of publications, from newspapers to official yearbooks. Such disinterest may ultimately reflect the historic position of architecture in China as a practical skill rather than a form of art or

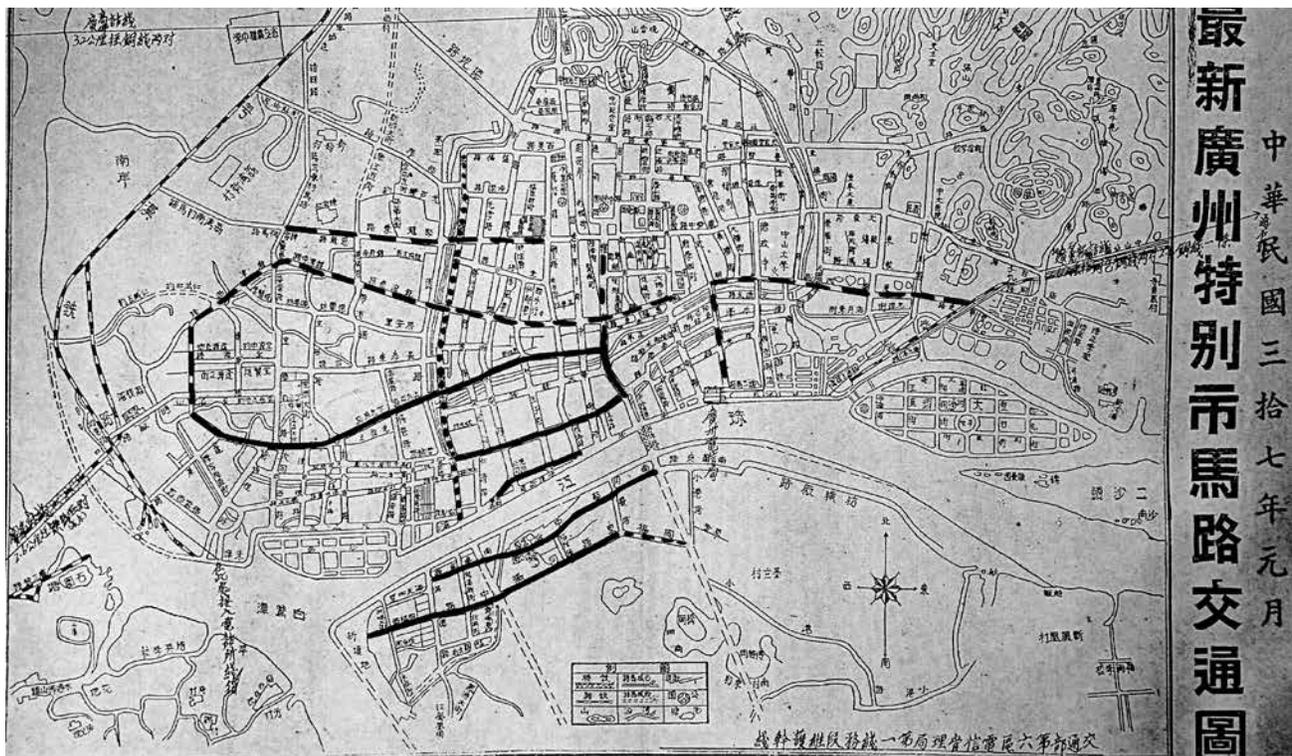


FIGURE 5. Map with estimated remaining qilou streets in Guangzhou in 2014. Source: I use the same base map as in Figure 4. Information is derived from my interviews and my own field trips between 2007 and 2014.

- Renmin Road, a street in which qilou are mostly kept, but an overhead expressway was built (see Figure 8 for a street view).
- - - Streets with only sporadic qilou buildings left.
- Streets still relatively well lined with qilou.

knowledge deserving scholarly attention. It would remain so until the return of Chinese students who had studied in Western countries in the early twentieth century.²⁰ But even then, despite great enthusiasm for “vernacular” forms, students of Chinese architectural history devoted greater attention to political and religious buildings such as temples and palaces than to more mundane commercial and residential structures.

Meanwhile, many who wrote down their impressions of the city at the time may have already seen *qilou* in neighboring Hong Kong and other Southeast Asian cities and may not have thought of them as architecturally significant. However, such observers were very impressed by something else the *qilou* created, and they left plenty of commentary about it: streets. In contrast to the relative lack of interest in *qilou* buildings, Canton’s new street network featured prominently in a variety of public reports. Newspapers like the *Far Eastern Review* contained a number of features on the city’s achievement in building streets and other infrastructure. Likewise, Huang Foyi’s “Chronicle of Canton and its Wards” provided thorough information about every street in the city.²¹ Year-books, published annually by the municipal government, also included a narration of street construction. But in these accounts, the construction of *qilou* seems to have been as-

sumed, as most of the new streets were, in fact, *qilou* streets. Tracking the building of streets can therefore be used to estimate the scale and time of *qilou* construction.

The visibility of streets vis-à-vis the invisibility of *qilou* needs to be contextualized as part of a crucial moment when the government began to take an active role in infrastructure construction as a way to create a modern city. Canton in the early twentieth century was a walled city. As late as the mid-nineteenth century residential blocks, within or outside the city walls, were separated by gates that were closed at night.²² Many small streets in the city’s densely populated residential areas were narrow and winding, having developed organically along the original watercourses in the city.²³ Except for a few main streets made of slates within the walls, the majority of streets in these neighborhoods were “paved” with a mixture of pebble stones and mud.²⁴ Due to the lack of proper sewage pipes, this meant that water would accumulate whenever it rained, and the streets were often flooded.²⁵ This condition was even recorded in old Cantonese children’s songs.

For the reformers, many of whom had studied abroad, Canton’s decline could be attributed to old city forms, the backward nature of which was incompatible with a new age.²⁶ They saw its dense neighborhoods as presenting great risks of



FIGURE 6. A commercial street in Canton in the nineteenth century before the rise of qilou. Source: Photo by William Henry Jackson; courtesy of the Library of Congress.

fire and disease, and they saw its old streets and walls as the main obstacles to development — a challenge that became particularly evident with the arrival of automobiles (FIG. 6). For example, in an article addressing the necessity of developing the automotive industry and building roads, the author Jun Sun reasoned:

Citizens of our country need to know that the development of automotive industry reveals the strengths of a country and the superiority of a culture. If its automotive industry is burgeoning, the country must be mighty and its culture progresses everyday. As a result, the country becomes a land of nobility and civilization. . . . The fundamental among the fundamental (in building the automotive industry) is the construction and arrangement of streets.²⁷

Municipal officials envisioned a modernizing project that would transform the city into a center of commerce through rational planning and urban construction. Immediately after the official establishment of the municipal government in 1918, they launched a series of infrastructure projects that included demolition of the city walls and construction of water and electricity service, railroads, and streets.²⁸ The construction of a rational street system was a particularly high priority. In their vision, wide, tidy streets, most paved with asphalt, would improve public health, facilitate the flow of goods, and stimulate economic development.²⁹ The new

street plan also introduced the pedestrian walkway, a conceptually novel space, to facilitate the free flow of automobiles. A main purpose of qilou streets was to separate space for automobiles from space for pedestrians. Rows of qilou forming a covered pedestrian corridor would not only prevent pedestrians from obstructing auto traffic, but facilitate commerce by providing direct access to first-floor businesses (FIG. 7).

Such ambitious plans required resources that the newly founded government did not have. However, the mass construction of qilou on expropriated land presented the municipal government with a practical, cheap way to separate pedestrian and vehicle traffic. With the land between the pillars and the front door belonging to private building owners, the government would simply stipulate that they had to pave it as part of uniform walkway regulations. In this manner the municipal government not only generated revenue by selling land for qilou construction, but it also reduced the cost of building the new public spaces by shifting responsibility for the pedestrian walkways onto the shoulders of qilou owners.³⁰

To further encourage the construction of qilou, the municipal government adopted a legal strategy that maximized the number of possible builders. This involved issuing two sets of documents: qilou building permits and land ownership certificates. Parties other than a landowner could thus apply for a building permit if the landowner did not want to build.³¹ As a last resort, in case no one applied for the building permit, the government could even auction the permit to whomever was interested in building.

FIGURE 7. Taiping Nan Road (today's Renmin Road) in Canton in the 1930s. Source: Guangdong Shengli Tushuguan [Guangdong Provincial Library], ed., Yangcheng Xunjiu [Discovering the History in Guangzhou] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 2004), p.39.



By appropriating the *qilou* from other cities, officials were therefore not only interested in spurring construction of a collection of individual buildings, or even commercial streets. The attractiveness of the *qilou* had less to do with architectural innovation or aesthetics than with the ability of groups of *qilou* to organize a separation of walkways for pedestrians, streets for cars, and stores for economy. It provided a new urban form that suited the municipal government's agenda to build a modern city.

In part at least, this vision was eventually realized. Tiangu Cheng, the chief of the Canton Public Works Department in 1930, noted that street building had outpaced other construction in the first three decades of the twentieth century.³² And many *qilou* streets became the busiest thoroughfares in the city, with individual *qilou* housing a variety of stores, restaurants and cinemas. In a symbiotic existence, new streets brought traffic, and *qilou* provided space for consumption, which in turn increased traffic on the streets. The result was the image of a vibrant city that can today be seen in many old photos. Yet, behind the rows of relatively tall *qilou*, old neighborhoods remained, whose tightly packed houses were set on winding, narrow alleys hidden from the eyes of those cruising the straight, wide *qilou* streets.

The planned, rational use of space created by the *qilou* groups also faced constant challenge from more mundane sources. Pedestrians and peddlers continued to walk or sell their goods on the newly paved streets. This was such a problem that the municipal government was forced to issue new ordinances from time to time specifying where people should

walk and admonishing them to control their chickens and ducks. At night the *qilou* corridors also became home to tens of thousands of the city's poor. Some of these people were coolies who could not afford to rent a place to sleep, but others were residents who had lost their homes through confiscation precisely to build the new *qilou* streets.³³

In a rare mention of *qilou* in a major newspaper, the author of an article in *Shenbao* in 1934 used "centipede's feet" as a metaphor for *qilou* streets.³⁴ This reflected the fear that better-off observers felt for the bodies of the homeless hidden in the shadow of *qilou* corridors. However, when the Japanese air force bombed the city in the late 1930s, some *qilou* corridors were also used as general shelters, possibly because of the *qilou*'s more robust physical structure. Nonetheless, the destruction and displacement caused by the *qilou* construction campaign was largely discounted by official sources. And the shadows in the corridors escaped the eyes of photographers, as they were incompatible with the pursuit of the "modern."

QILOU'S SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION: A HOUSE IS A HOUSE, DESPITE ITS BOURGEOIS TASTE

In 1949 the Communist Party gained power, initiating the socialist era in Chinese life and politics, and in its transformation from "Canton" to "Guangzhou," the city experienced much more than a change of name. The new regime brought a sea change in political relationships, social organization, and economic activity, which reshaped the meanings and the

everyday life of the built environment. Just as in the previous era, however, *qilou* were taken for granted. Neither major local newspapers nor official histories considered *qilou* an important architectural type or cultural artifact. Instead, they were subsumed into two new categories: “decrepit,” a target for repair; and “industrial and commercial housing,” a target for political struggle.³⁵

In this radically changed political environment the Western facades and business functions of *qilou* certainly stood out. Every aspect of social life was now interpreted as embodying an ideological divide between socialism and capitalism, and this involved the labeling of artifacts as well as individuals. Eventually, whatever was identified as “capitalist” was publicly denounced at best, and destroyed at worst, as a consequence of the volatile waves of political action that swept China over the next three decades. In the process, the Western facades of *qilou* were criticized for their bourgeois cultural expression.³⁶ And business owners in *qilou* or *qilou* owners who lived on rents were labeled as capitalists or landlords, and were exposed to great political risks.

Nonetheless, the *qilou*'s capitalist and bourgeois associations did not lead to its demise. After all, ideological struggle could not solve the problem of housing shortage. In 1949 the average living area per person among Guangzhou's millions of residents was only 48 square feet.³⁷ And when government and society were short of economic resources, buildings like *qilou*, despite their Western styles of decoration, remained valuable — as long as they were reformed as part of a socialist city.

In the eyes of the new government, the transformation of physical buildings had little to do with aesthetics or architectural style. It was instead a matter of ideological transformation, and this meant a change of ownership and tenancy in pursuit of a new vision of cities as places of production instead of consumption. In the process of transforming the buildings and the city in the 1950s, the municipal government thus nationalized a good number of *qilou*. It first confiscated buildings that belonged to “imperialists,” “bureaucratic capitalists,” war criminals, and traitors. It then bought out assets in businesses and industries owned by so-called nationalist capitalists. In the *qilou* streets this meant that most small private business folded, while some larger ones, such as hotels and restaurants, were converted to state ownership.

An even greater impact came as a result of the central government's project for the “socialist transformation” of private rental houses.³⁸ Echoing the central government's call, the Guangzhou government started a private housing transformation campaign in 1958. Through its mouthpiece newspaper, it pointed out that more than 65 percent of the houses and rooms in the city were privately owned, and more than 75 percent of these were for rent. It then accused landlords of charging high rents in the face of critical housing demand.³⁹ To address the crisis, it decreed that all rental areas exceeding 1,615 square feet would thereafter be managed by the government, which would pay the original owners 20 to 40 percent

of new state-determined rents. The municipal government explicitly listed “industrial and commercial housing” as its target, which deliberately singled out many *qilou* for socialist transformation. By 1966 the state then declared it had bought out the property rights of building owners through the payment of rents between 1958 and 1966.⁴⁰ Many *qilou* were subsequently converted into state-owned properties.⁴¹

After socialist transformation, previously bourgeois *qilou* came to serve the proletarian masses in socialist China. Grouped together with other dilapidated houses, some *qilou* received government funding and technical support for repair and reinforcement. Some confiscated *qilou* were also turned into state-owned enterprises, stores, and offices. But many more were divided into small apartments to accommodate as many residents as possible.⁴²

Although private business activity was gone, the hustle and bustle of *qilou* streets, particularly as residential space, remained. This was less an intended outcome than a result of the blending of public and private space that resulted from the compact living conditions. This quality is well illustrated by Feng Luo's early life on Enning Street.⁴³ A typical *qilou* street, completed in 1931, the 18-meter-wide Enning Street had some of the most elaborate, imposing *qilou* in the city. Luo's father had rented a ground-floor space in one of these before 1949 to sell his handmade brass utensils. However, in the decade after the Communist Party took over, this *qilou* became state-owned, because, according to Luo, “the deed . . . was lost.”⁴⁴

Luo's family continued to rent this space after the transition, and it came to serve as the home of Luo's parents and their six children. Their one room was roughly four feet in depth and eight feet in width, but thanks to the high ceiling, they were able to insert a mezzanine level in the space to accommodate all family members at night. In addition, they were able to fetch water from public faucets and use public restrooms, which were common in every old neighborhood. Nevertheless, the arrangement meant the family literally lived on the sidewalk. Luo and his siblings played there; the family cooked on the walkway; they hung out their wash under the ceiling of the corridor; and they brushed their teeth and the men even showered on the curbside. In summer they simply slept on rattan mats in the corridor, next to neighbors who were a little better off and used reclining bamboo chairs.

Luo's family was by no means unique in using pavement to compensate for the lack of living space. As Luo and other interviewees recalled, “everybody lived similarly in those days.” When family life extended into the sidewalk, the boundaries between the domestic and the public, between different homes, were blurred. And the shift of boundaries was not only spatial, it was temporal, as boundaries were constantly under negotiation according to residents' needs at different times of the day and the week and in different seasons. The socialist transformation of space, therefore, subverted, although unintentionally, the rational control of space initiated in the Republican era through the creation of *qilou* streets.

Yet, ironically, the form of social life shaped by a lack of living space in *qilou* neighborhoods would later become a foundation for a nostalgia through which new representations of *qilou* would emerge.

QILOU AS SYMBOLS OF CANTONESE CULTURE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The arrival of a new era of economic reform in 1979 provided a chance for *qilou* to regain some of their former commercial vitality. In the reform era, urban development projects departed from the socialist-revolutionary ideal of class struggle and instead embraced the seemingly less politicized projects of globalization and modernization. The 1985 master plan for Guangzhou thus proposed that businesses be restored in the city's 28 *qilou* streets. In particular, several busy thoroughfares with *qilou* on both sides were revived as the city's main consumption locations. These now provided space for clothing stores, food markets, and cinemas, in a way not unlike that in which these corridors had functioned in the early twentieth century.

The revitalization of *qilou* streets, however, proved vulnerable to large-scale processes of state-orchestrated urbanization, which again emphasized transportation and commerce. Thus, *qilou* streets were ultimately deemed not wide enough, and *qilou* were described as too old and poorly maintained. Ironically, just as the city's old houses and winding streets had been replaced by *qilou* and *qilou* streets in the Republican time, these same forms were now seen as expendable in pursuit of the municipal government's vision of a global metropolis. As described earlier, this led to a series of government projects aimed at stimulating commerce, which

brought a massive destruction of *qilou* and *qilou* streets after the late 1980s (FIG. 8).

Yet as *qilou* streets were being demolished, the *qilou* as an architectural form began to gain attention, and it became an independent object of study in the 1990s. In one of the earliest publications on South China architecture that mentioned *qilou*, Yuanding Lu and Yanjun Wei provided a detailed description of the form and included thirteen drawings of *qilou* facades.⁴⁵ They then rationalized the birth of the *qilou* as an adaptation to the hot and rainy climate of South China. In this scenario, pillared corridors were originally designed to shelter people from the rain and sun. Only later, when residential floors were built on top of the corridors, did the *qilou*, as it eventually emerged, take shape. The authors likewise noted the uniqueness of typical *qilou* facades, but only briefly mentioned their foreign architectural influence.⁴⁶

The study of *qilou* gained momentum in the first decade of the twenty-first century, particularly after the government announced in 2007 that the buildings along Enning Street would be torn down to make room for shopping malls and office buildings. Following the announcement, the residents of 183 Enning Street wrote a letter to the government to protest the plan, and journalists closely followed the process of destruction. Among other things, news outlets reported that even though the semi-official Guangzhou Archeological Research Institute had listed the street as a protected area, the bulldozers had arrived even before a reconstruction plan was finalized. Such media coverage attracted the intensive attention of the public, who expressed dissatisfaction and even anger on the Internet and in daily conversation. *Qilou* were subsequently discussed extensively in newspapers, journal articles, theses for advanced degrees, and a number of monographs.



FIGURE 8. Renmin Nan Road with an elevated highway in the middle in contemporary Guangzhou. Photo by the author (2012).

Academic publications quoted by newspapers discussed the architectural origin of the *qilou* in diverse fashions. Deqi Shan, for example, followed Lu and Wei's 1990 description of the *qilou* as an indigenous architectural form, adding only that their construction "made it convenient for customers to do their shopping, and [so it was] was beneficial to market commodities."⁴⁷ Xie and Liu eventually went further, declaring that *qilou* started in Guangzhou and spread to the rest of Guangdong, Guangxi and Fujian provinces before its influence reached Southeast Asia.⁴⁸ Most scholars today, however, consider the *qilou* to demonstrate dual origins. On the Chinese side, *qilou* were rooted in "stilt-style" architecture (*ganlanshi jianzhu*) and the Chinese eaves gallery (*yanlang*). Meanwhile, on the foreign side, some argue that the *qilou* may be traced to similar architectural styles along the Mediterranean in southern Europe.⁴⁹ Others point to houses with verandas in colonial India, a style that the British adapted to the local humid and hot climate.⁵⁰ Liu has summarized these various speculations thus: "developed in colonies, *qilou* is an architectural form that blends the East and the West architectural languages."⁵¹

The fact that Chinese authors customarily feel obliged to search out the origin of the *qilou* reveals a certain uneasiness in finding the indigenous in the hybrid. The complexity of this relation is problematized by a politics of identity when it comes to dealing with East-West relations and national-local encounters within the overarching official framework of Chinese history and identity. In the rhetorical construction of China as a modern nation-state, China's encounter with the West has been depicted as involving "a century of humiliation" following defeat in the first Opium War in 1842. The dichotomy between China and the West is thus deemed to subsume a similar relation between the backward and the advanced, the traditional and the modern.

Such a legacy still shapes contemporary attitudes toward China's global encounters.⁵² In addressing South China's architectural history from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, Xiaoxiang Tang, a professor of architecture in a Guangzhou university, explained: "The emergence of a large number of Western architectural buildings, exemplified by the architectural group on Shamian Island and the church buildings, signifies the fundamental transformation of the architectural culture in South China."⁵³ Such transformation was the "inevitable result of the unprecedented clash and exchange of the archaic, isolated Chinese ancient architecture and the Western architectural culture that traveled across the ocean."⁵⁴ In his eyes, the Western buildings on Shamian Island were brought to Guangzhou by outside commercial forces that intended "an economic invasion," and by church groups that intended "a cultural invasion."⁵⁵ This was a process full of inequality, pain and insult.

However, such Chinese-West rhetorical tension builds on the premise of a coherent national identity. This is increasingly being challenged by local variations, out of which a new discourse of Cantonese identity has grown. Such a

challenge adds complexity to the reading of *qilou* — a hybrid type that does not look like any commonly accepted "traditional Chinese" building. The symbolic form of traditional architecture associated with Chinese identity in the eyes of both Chinese and non-Chinese writers is often Beijing's *siheyuan* (courtyard houses). But courtyard houses are almost entirely absent in Guangzhou. Instead, hybrid buildings and Western buildings began to adorn the urban landscape in the nineteenth century, precisely because the city was a hub of global maritime trade.

For Tang, the adoption of Western architectural practices was rooted in the rational consciousness (*lixing zijue*) of foreign-educated, Chinese-born architects. Their efforts to combine a variety of Western and indigenous elements led to the integration of Chinese and Western architecture in the late 1920s.⁵⁶ Scholars have also pointed to Guangzhou's maritime history and its diaspora, arguing that Cantonese have long been open to foreign influence, and seldom confined by established rules. Such a practical mentality and interest in commerce led the Cantonese to attend more to the *qilou*'s functions — its combination of business and residence — than cultural origin.⁵⁷ Thus, the mixed features of the *qilou*, both in form and function, exemplify the creative rationality of the local people who designed, built and embraced them. It was exactly such rationality, scholars now argue, that has since led to the rapid economic development of Guangzhou, which has become one of the wealthiest of China's cities in the era the economic reform. At the core of these scholarly writings is the paradigm that a transgression of national boundaries, instead of the importance of national culture, is the defining feature of Cantonese identity.

With this rhetorical shift away from the *qilou*'s relationship with transportation, *qilou* have now become cultural artifacts, embodying a Cantonese identity that is associated with local history and agency. This is, of course, at odds with other kinds of regional or ethnic identities in China, which have been cast as "less civilized" than the national identity proclaimed in official representations.⁵⁸ The urban-based local identity in Guangzhou is thus seen to be at least as modern as the national one, and perhaps even more cosmopolitan.

Such rising concern for local identity is in part a response to the city's changing position in the larger economic system. In the early reform days, Guangzhou was among the first group of Chinese cities to undergo economic liberalization. It was thus "one-step-ahead" when cities like Shanghai remained cautious about market-oriented economic policies.⁵⁹ However, in recent years, the Yangtze River Delta-Shanghai region has risen to become the main rival of the Pearl River Delta-Guangzhou area in the global supply chain. Shanghai and Beijing have strategically developed into cosmopolitan cities that attract global funds and showcase China. Guangzhou, conversely, has been largely marginalized in the nation-state framework of the twenty-first century, and a sense of lagging behind is now discernable in public discourses.

FIGURE 9. A *qilou* street, renovated and promoted by the municipal government as a “traditional” commercial street for tourism. Photo by the author (2012).



Such sentiments have been further aggravated by a new diversity in the city, brought by millions of people who have moved there from all over China in search of better lives and better job opportunities. Mandarin has now replaced Cantonese as the daily language in many new areas of city. And government-backed urban renewal projects, in complicity with predatory real estate developers, have become a powerful driving force toward formal homogeneity with other Chinese cities. Many old city neighborhoods have thus been razed to make room for gated communities, shopping malls, highrise office buildings, and boulevards tailored to rising middle-class consumers.⁶⁰ In this context, the local government has renovated two *qilou* streets (0.3 mile in length) as the “traditional commercial streets in Canton.” But these spaces, which cater largely to national and international tourists, appear “artificial” to local residents (FIG. 9). And such transformations overshadow the old and dwindling neighborhoods occupied by predominantly Cantonese speakers.

The present outburst of research and commentary on *qilou* thus corresponds to rising claims of local identity. Many Guangzhou residents, journalists and writers have turned to the disappearing old city fabric for a sense of stability in the face of such a rapidly changing urban environment. That *qilou* and *qilou* neighborhoods have become a source of reassurance can be partly attributed to the fact that many of them embody experiences in marked contrast to newly gentrified areas of the city. Many commercially active *qilou* streets today remain occupied by small businesses, tailored mostly to daily consumption in the adjacent neighborhoods, and the image of *qilou* neighborhoods remains associated with low-income residents, friendly neighborhood relationships, and traditional foods.

Yet, even with so much public attention, Enning Street, “the most beautiful old street of Guangzhou” (as it is now remembered in newspapers and magazines), remains relatively quiet. After plans to demolish it were exposed in the media, the local government put its renewal project on hold. However, many residents had already moved out before the neighborhoods behind the *qilou* were razed. Like their neighbors, Feng Luo and his siblings had already accepted government compensation for the apartments they had bought in these same neighborhoods in the early reform days, and had built spacious houses in faraway suburbs. Luo converted the tiny street-level family home in Enning Street into a store, selling handmade brass utensils, as his father had done before 1949. This now means he must commute nearly an hour each way everyday between home and store, despite the fact that his high-priced utensils seem to attract few customers. Nevertheless, he spends much of his time chatting with neighbors and passers-by. His lament is that highrises and gated communities do not provide the same kind of neighborly warmth.

Luo’s lament is echoed by visitors, journalists and scholars who write about *qilou*, even though many of them never lived in *qilou* or *qilou* neighborhoods. For them, Luo, his store, and the *qilou* neighborhoods represent a genuine local lifestyle — one where neighbors are close to each other; convenient small stores meet daily necessities; and small restaurants serve local cuisine until well after midnight. For them, to protect *qilou* is to protect the old city fabric, physically and culturally.

Ironically, Luo’s reminiscence of his early life in the homey *qilou* neighborhood, upon which contemporary writers construct a sense of nostalgia for Cantonese culture, is to a great extent the result of the overcrowded living conditions that followed socialist transformation. And while the propo-

nents of *qilou* condemn the current government for its brutal demolition of old buildings and displacement of old residents, they largely overlook the fact that *qilou* and *qilou* streets were themselves made possible by almost exactly the same acts during the Republican era. Among these were the government's violent removal of residents and confiscation of private property to make space for new construction. When this past is occasionally mentioned, it is considered part of an arduous, yet beneficial campaign by a determined municipal government and forward-looking officials to create a modern city.⁶¹

Qilou advocates and old residents like Feng Luo likewise tend not to mention that they have already moved out of their old *qilou* neighborhoods. Given the fact that *qilou* buildings share thin walls with each other, living there typically meant that neighbors could hear everything that went on in each other's apartments. And sometimes the whole *qilou* building would shake when a heavy vehicle passed by on the street. The lack of privacy and exclusion, together with poor light and a lack of open space, probably also make *qilou* undesirable as raw space to be remodeled into luxury apartments.

Meanwhile, commentators in various media also tend not to talk about actual conditions, because the majority of them have never known them. Yet, by wrestling with the issue of architectural origins while neglecting the hardship of life in *qilou* neighborhoods, their representations, combined with the nostalgic sentiments of former residents and the need of local government to promote tourism, have allowed *qilou* to rise in status and become symbols of local culture and identity.

SHIFTING VALUES, SHIFTING NARRATIVES

Since the early 1900s urban China has witnessed a number of dramatic political, social and cultural shifts. In every transitional moment, new buildings have been inscribed into old spaces. Old buildings, in turn, have faced physical and cultural transformation, if not destruction, to enable the creation of new landscapes.

As a hybrid building type, the *qilou* emerged in Guangzhou in the early twentieth century. Massive numbers of them have now been demolished in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. From *qilou* groups as a new urban form to individual *qilou* as cultural artifacts, the meanings surrounding this building form have also changed. As crystallized in public records, these reflect the different visions and practices that have reshaped urban space in different periods.

The forms of the physical buildings and their meanings provide room and set limits for their later metamorphosis through processes of urbanization. Thus, during the Republican era, public discourse focusing on the function of *qilou* rather than their artistic style, left little paper trace. This, in turn, has allowed observers in the twenty-first century to construe *qilou* as an indigenous architectural form suited to the local life conditions in Guangzhou. The combined function

of the *qilou*, providing both residential and commercial space, made the *qilou* an attractive building form in the 1930s. But it led to the *qilou* being condemned as "capitalist" and "bourgeois" in Maoist times. The subsequent socialist transformation of *qilou* reshaped everyday interaction with the streets, but it largely resulted from the inadequate supply of living space or proper hygienic facilities in most homes during the socialist period. Such street life, in turn, has become the source for a nostalgic vision, an inherent critique of the poor relationship between neighbors in contemporary gated communities. Maoist overcrowding, intriguingly, may thus be seen as essential to the current construction of the *qilou* as a symbol of local Cantonese culture.

Qilou corridors bore witness to the beginning of an epoch during which automobiles instead of people dominated streets. Yet it was exactly because of their connectedness and massive scale that they were later seen to be too expensive and complicated to remodel, either for purposes of gentrification or preservation. The attention focused on *qilou* today, however, has rendered invisible many other old buildings with different yet distinctive features. One might point, for example, to the aesthetically unappealing dormitories built during the inward-looking Maoist period. These cannot be associated in any way with cosmopolitanism. Yet reconstruction projects in areas of the city where they were built often escape public scrutiny, and many continue to be destroyed, even though they offer evidence of other social and political histories in the city.

Exploring the metamorphosis of *qilou* and their meaning affords a better grip on important issues in Chinese urbanization. By challenging the perception of a single coherent Chinese culture, the rise and fall of *qilou* suggests certain shifts of empirical and analytical framework in terms of the origin of built environments. Likewise, understanding them as part of a particularly South China context suggests relations that observers and researchers are not always aware of. Taking shape in the early twentieth century, the Guangzhou *qilou* was a product of the circulation of capital, people, and architectural languages in a larger region that included South China and Southeast Asia. However, their later transformation during the Maoist era and their spectacular rise as a symbol of local culture in the past decade reveal an overarching framework of the Chinese nation-state centered in the north. Many local residents feel both attached to and alienated from this vision, particularly against the backdrop of dramatic urban change. These frameworks not only influence flows of capital and goods, but also the directions in which people look for connections and ruptures, and the ways they interpret their surroundings. Being able to identify such shifts of framework provides a better sense of the power relations in the production of knowledge in constructing the "one China" myth.

Meanwhile, a nuanced understanding of *qilou* also provides a good entry point to understanding the relation between subjective experience and built environments. Contemporary representations of *qilou* involve myths about their

origins, nostalgia about their previous life, obliviousness to the uncomfortable, mundane experiences they once contained, uncritical reflection about political brutality throughout their history, and even some unconscious or semi-conscious resistance to an imposed national narrative. As spaces and artifacts that allow all these discourses to converge, *qilou* also highlight the plasticity and connectivity of history, memory and forgetting that gives meanings to buildings and reshapes built environments.

The rewriting of the *qilou's* history, imagined or real, in contemporary Guangzhou has contributed to a sense of

stability and continuity for residents living through a period of intense transformation. As both sediments of time and articulations of space, built environments such as *qilou* and *qilou* neighborhoods allow such residents to connect to the past on a personal level while looking into the future using the languages of modernity and cosmopolitanism. In the mutually constructive process of representation and city building, boundaries of binary categories such as modern and traditional, Western and indigenous, are highly flexible. Yet such constructed categories remain highly relevant to people's understanding of space and time.

REFERENCE NOTES

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1. D. Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.xvii.
2. B. Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).
3. According to the Raffles Ordinance (1822), "All houses constructed of brick or tiles have a common type of front each having an arcade of a certain depth, open to all sides as a continuous and open passage on each side of the street." See H.Y. Lee, "The Singapore Shophouse: An Anglo-Chinese Urban Vernacular," in R. Knapp, ed., *Asia's Old Dwellings: Tradition, Resilience, and Change* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and H. Davis, *Living over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012). On a field trip to Singapore and Malaysia in 2014 I noticed that *qilou* streets were common in big and small cities and towns in the region. Judging by the years inscribed on the buildings or the opening years of the stores, many were built in the early twentieth century.
4. *Qilou* can also be found in other cities and towns in southern China including those in Guangdong province, in its neighboring coastal province Fujian, in Guangxi province, and on Hainan Island. The South China Sea maritime network connected this southern China region to cities and towns in Southeast Asia for centuries. See T. Hamashita, *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*, L. Grove and M. Selden, eds. (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008); and E. Tagliacozzo and W. Chang, eds., *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). No substantiated research has yet explored the circulation of *qilou* as an architectural form, and *qilou* streets as an urban form, from a regional perspective. But this would provide a useful lens through which to understand the connectivity of this region, at least until the Second World War.
5. P. Rowe and S. Kuan, *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
6. L. Blussé, *Visible Cities: Canton, Nagasaki, and Batavia and the Coming of the Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); and P. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong and London: Hong Kong University Press, 2005).
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9. J. Cody, *Building in China: Henry K. Murphy's "Adaptive Architecture," 1914–1935* (Hong Kong and Seattle: Chinese University Press and University of Washington Press, 2001).
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13. *Shi Xingzheng Huiyi Gongwujū Tiyi Baiyun Deng Lu Buzhun Jianzhu Qilou* [Municipal Council Proposing Qilou Should Not Be Allowed on Baiyun and Other Streets] (1931).
14. C. Peng and X. Yang, "Qilou Zhidu Yu Chengshi Qilou Jianzhu" ["Qilou Regulations and Urban Qilou Architecture"], *Huanan Ligong Daxue Xuebao* no.4 (2004), pp.29–33.
15. For example, *Shi Xingzheng Huiyi Gongwujū Tiyi Baiyun Deng Lu Buzhun Jianzhu Qilou; and Gongwujū Tiyi Jingyuan Nanlu Yingfou Zhunjian Qilou An* [Public Works Department Proposing Whether It Should Be Allowed to Build Qilou on Jingyuan Nan Street] (1934).
16. In recent years Guangzhou and other growth-oriented municipal governments have been committed to a globalized strategy that sees "the city as a growth machine." For more details, see H. Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place," *American Journal of Sociology*, No.82 (1976), pp.309–32; and N. Smith, "New Globalism,

- New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy,” *Antipode*, No.34 (2002), pp.427–50. Relying on this strategy to stimulate economic growth, municipal governments actively use urban renewal projects to deal with a number of problems: dilapidated neighborhoods with buildings that are in need of repair or are simply falling apart; the need to accommodate an expanding urban population; the desire of residents for more comfortable living conditions; and the wider aspiration to build a competitive modern metropolis. Due to fiscal decentralization, local governments aggressively sell land rights to raise revenue. See Y. Hsing, “Land and Territorial Politics in Urban China,” *The China Quarterly*, No.187 (2006), pp.575–91.
17. When interviewed more than ten years later, the then mayor Ziliu Li explained the choice of the route for the first subway line: “It must be in the most bustling place where traffic needs to be addressed that a subway line is to be built. If you first build the subway in Nansha where there are no people, do you build subway for exhibition?” See T. Ren, H. Wei, and J. Wang, eds., *Chengbian: Guangzhou Shinian Chengjian Qishilu [City Transformation: Revelations of Ten-Year City Building in Guangzhou]* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 2010), pp.75–87.
18. *Guangdongsheng Jingchating Xianxing Qudi Jianzhu Zhangcheng Ji Shishi Xize [Guangdong Province Construction Supervision Statute and Detailed Regulations]* (1912).
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22. *Ibid.*
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31. For more details, see S. Huang, “Minguo Shiqi Guangzhou Qilou De Guizhang Yu Shijian” [“Regulations and Practice of Arcades in Guangzhou during the Republic of China”], *Xueshu Yanjiu*, No.3 (2013), pp.123–33, 160.
32. T. Cheng, “Guangzhoushi Malu Xiaoshi” [“An Abridged History of Streets in Guangzhou”], in *Guangzhoushi Shizheng*, No.356 (1930), pp.95–100.
33. The municipal government auctioned the land, and used the income to finance its infrastructural construction. F. Han, Z. Kuang, and S. Huang, “Jiu Guangzhou Chaicheng Zhulu Fengbo” [“Conflicts in the Wall Demolition and Street Building in Old Canton”], *Guangzhou Wenshi*, No.46 (1994), pp.164–68; and Y. Chen, “Cao Ruying Chaicheng Zhulu De Fengbo” [“Conflicts in Cao Ruying’s Wall Demolition and Street Building”], *Yangcheng Gujin*, No.1 (1994), pp.44–46.
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36. L. Lin, *Gang’ao Yu Zhujiang Sanjiaozhou Diyu Jianzhu: Guangdong Qilou [Regional Architecture in Hong Kong, Macau, and the Pearl River Delta: Guangdong Qilou]* (Beijing: Kexue Chubanshe, 2006), p.80.
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40. “Zuigao Renmin Fayuan Dui Guangdong Gaoyuan Guanyu Jingzufang De Yezhu Shijishang Sangshi Suoyouquan De Pifu” [“The People’s Supreme Court’s Reply to the Guangdong People’s High Court about the Owners of Economic Rental House Have de Facto Lost Their Ownership”], September 18, 1964; and “Chengxiang Jianshe Huanjing Baohubu Guanyu Chengshi Siyou Chuzu Fangwu Shehuizhuyi Gaizao Yiliu Wenti De Chuli Yijian” [“Suggestion on the Questions Left by the Socialist Transformation of Urban Private Rental Houses by the Urban and Rural Construction and Environment Protection Bureau”], February 15, 1985.
41. From the 1980s on the Guangzhou municipal government began to return the rights to buildings that had undergone socialist transformation to their original owners. Priority in this process was given to overseas Chinese, including Hong Kong and Macau residents. A decision by the People’s Supreme Court in 2008 is supposed to apply this same policy to the entire country. See “Zuigao Renmin Fayuan Guanyu Feizhi 2007 Niandi Yiqian Fabu De Yougan Sifajieshi (Diqipi) De Jueding” [“The People’s Supreme Court’s Decision to Rescind Relevant Previous Judiciary Interpretations”], effective on December 24, 2008. However, a good number of *qilou* remain unclaimed due to complicated legal and practical issues that deserve a separate article.
42. While there is little information about typical residential densities in *qilou* during the Republican era, field interviews indicate that such divisions were a product of the Maoist period.
43. Feng Luo is a pseudonym.
44. According to some old residents’ accounts, many owners dared not claim the buildings, or else they fled to Hong Kong or other countries to avoid political persecution.
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46. *Ibid.*, p.162.
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