Preserving Historic Qilou Districts in Southern China: Consideration of Western Models

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Preserving Historic Qilou Districts in Southern China: Consideration of Western Models

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July 2018
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Preserving Historic Qilou Districts in Southern China: Consideration of Western Models

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Abstract

The historic qilou buildings are essential to the people in Southern China. Unfortunately, due to some of the urban renewal policies, many of the qilou districts have been either demolished or abandoned. For years, many scholars had written books and articles about how to preserve these significant historic urban elements. However, these studies failed to include examinations of the historic preservation program in other countries or the existing ones in China. This thesis was written in the hope of filling the gap. This study discusses the historical developments of the qilou buildings and their significances in four selected cities: Guangzhou, Macau, Meizhou, and Kaiping. This study then includes analysis on whether creating the US-based Main Street Program, and using the UNESCO World Heritage Sites model to manage these qilou districts are feasible in the selected cities.

Key Words: Qilou Buildings; Chinese Urban History
Chapter 1: Introduction—Saving Our History

What constitutes “history?” It may be the artifacts that we see in a museum or text we read in books. However, history is beyond the objects that people observe in a collection. It is everywhere: from a statue that stands in a park, to a store where people conduct business; from a bridge that connects two ends of the shore, to a lighthouse that gives ships direction in the dark. Historic sites large and small can have significant meanings to a community, a region, and sometimes, a nation. People from all over the world may witness the Colosseum in Europe, the Great Wall in Asia, the Pyramids in Africa, and the West Wall in the Middle East. They are all standing today because of the actions of historic preservationists. Besides iconic UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS) like these, the small-scale urban fabric is also preserved around the world as well. For instance, in cities such as Boston, London, and Kyoto, thousands of historic buildings are still used by the locals as homes, shops, and restaurants. All of those historic buildings are preserved because of their critical meanings to the people of the region. If a historical object is meaningful to a group of people, then it should be preserved so that it may continue to enrich the social and cultural life of the area for centuries.

Similar to other urban commercial buildings around the globe, qilou buildings have significant meanings to many Chinese people, especially those living in the south. The term “qilou” may literally be translated into English as “riding building.”\(^1\) Architecturally, qilou buildings are “arcaded concrete frame buildings that combine Western façade elements with local forms of interior spatial arrangement.”\(^2\) Most qilou buildings are three or four stories tall. Since qilou buildings often combine both residential and commercial uses, the ground floors of these buildings are typically occupied by stores and the upper floors are living quarters that

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2 Ibid.
“extend out over a paved pedestrian corridor, supported on perimeters columns.” In addition, the term “qilou street” refers to a row of qilou buildings linked together. A qilou district is a series of qilou streets. These homes were usually built between the 1920s and the 1930s and are “reached by alleys that branched from the colonnade.” Such settings created some of the highest-density residential districts in Southern China. (Figures 1.1 to 1.3)
Figure 1.2: A qilou street’s pedestrian corridor. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Qilou buildings, like many historic buildings around the world, have different styles. Since qilou buildings are a combination of both Western and Chinese architecture, many of them contain Western classical, gothic, and baroque architectural elements. On the other hand, some qilou buildings also have Chinese elements; such as using Chinese style exterior wood trim and sporting gazebos on top of the buildings.

Similar to their architecture values, the historic values of qilou are also remarkable. Historically, qilou buildings may be first constructed by the British colonists in 1822 in Singapore. While there is no clear evidence to prove the theory, many historians believe that the

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first Chinese qilou building was built around 1888 in Guangzhou. The most intensive period of qilou buildings’ constructions occurred between the 1920s and the 1930s under the Guangzhou City government’s planning policy. During the same period, many other Southern Chinese cities in Mainland China also began building their own qilou buildings, as they were considered “fashionable” at the time. Qilou buildings were used as shop houses, which allowed people to conduct businesses and live in the same buildings; and also private homes or hotels, and governmental or public buildings. These historic qilou buildings deserve preservation because they remind people of a historic period. They represent how the Southern urban Chinese lived between the 1920s and the 1930s; Chinese engineering and commerce; Chinese connections with the West; and more importantly, Chinese culture and history.

Unfortunately, some recent historic preservation practices had affected these historical communities like never before. Qilou buildings are less recognized than other building types as historic resources. In some Chinese cities, such as Guangzhou, urban renewal activities are tearing down qilou buildings, constructing bridges and highways within qilou districts, and erecting modern commercial signs over qilou buildings’ facades. In response, historic preservationists, such as Professor Yang Honglei and Professor Zhang Jun have raised the question whether it is possible to preserve historical properties and develop cities and towns simultaneously.

Recently, many professionals, government officials, and private citizens have taken action to save these valuable properties. In the last few years, the most common practice is the government-led listing programs, by placing the names of historic districts in different

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7 Yang Honglie. *Preserving Qilou in Southern China.*
8 Ibid.
9 Ye Shuming. *The Ten Major Name Cards of Lingnan Culture—Arcade Building,* 35.
preservation lists both nationally and locally. At the moment, however, there are no qilou
districts listed on the “Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level”
(hereinafter “National Heritage Preservation List”). In other words, all of the qilou buildings
right now are managed at the local level, which is unfortunate for those historic buildings, as
they are not receiving support from the Central Government. On the other hand, many scholars
such as Professor Yang and Professor Zhang have written books or articles about those historical
qilou buildings, and how to preserve them. In some colleges and universities, more preservation-
related classes are being offered. In addition, some private citizens are either establishing
preservation firms to save the buildings or petitioning the government to save qilou buildings. Thus, it is fair to say that saving qilou buildings has become a major concern for both the
governments and the citizens.

For years, multiple preservation plans have been created in China to save valuable historical
properties. However, these plans lack substantive examinations of preservation plans in other
countries and pre-existing programs in China. This study intends to investigate Western models
for preserving commercial buildings like qilou buildings, and also to examine existing
preservation approaches toward these historic properties. This study also serves another purpose:
to introduce the historical qilou buildings to a wider audience so that more people may contribute
to this significant issue of preserving the qilou buildings.

This study will focus on four cities that have large districts of qilou buildings: Guangzhou,
Macau, Kaiping, and Meizhou. Guangzhou City has the oldest and largest qilou districts in China.
Macau has a district of qilou buildings within the buffer zone of the Macau Historic Centre WHS.

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13 Ibid.
The Western preservation programs that this thesis examines are the American Main Street Program and the global UNESCO World Heritage Site program. The Main Street Program is a public and private cooperative economic improvement program developed privately in the United States aimed at revitalizing historic commercial districts. The WHS Program is a program within the United Nations with a mission to preserve and protect cultural and natural sites of global human value. In most cases, a WHS is managed by a local government agency with advisement from the WHS program.

After examining the selected preservation plans, this thesis then develops recommendations for preservation planning in the selected cities, based on the best practices from these programs. The recommendations in this thesis are made based on the analysis of the preservation needs in these cities, and how programs components that could work there in similar ways.

Although many of the US-based preservation programs might appear to work in China, these programs could still face legal challenges at all three levels: national, provincial and local. For example, what legal difficulties would the private citizens face if they want to create a non-profit Main Street program? Thus, besides analyzing whether a given US-based preservation plan

15 Author’s exchange with current occupants of the qilou buildings in Meizhou, summer 2017.
would work in China from a preservation standpoint, an analysis from a legal perspective of the plan is also necessary.

In terms of sources of evidence, this study relies on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include historic photos and feedback from casual encounters with local building occupants during fieldwork. Secondary sources include scholarly works on the history of qilou development in China and a variety of newspaper and online news articles on contemporary issues with qilou preservation.

Accordingly, the outlines of each chapter are as follows:

Chapter two focuses on the historical development and significances of the qilou buildings. The first part of this chapter is a brief history of qilou buildings’ development in selected and other cities. The discussion on the selected cities is more detailed and the others are brief. The process of constructing the qilou districts started in 1912 in Guangzhou City as part of the urban renewal policy implemented by the Nationalist government. During the establishment of these districts, transnational Chinese business people contributed their wealth and knowledge in the making. Guangzhou’s qilou district then became a model for other cities in Southern China, including the cities that were selected in this study, Kaiping, and Meizhou. In addition, in the then-Portuguese colony of Macau, qilou district was also constructed as an urban renewal policy led by the local authority.

The second part of this chapter is about why qilou buildings are important: their distinctive character and historical associations. Architecturally, qilou buildings are distinctive because they can only be found in Southern China and a few countries in Southeast Asia; their construction materials were collected locally; and as well as their architectural elements. Historically, qilou buildings also represent a critical time period in Chinese history and a cultural shift in Chinese
society. As more common Chinese people were able to communicate with foreigners in the post-first Opium War era, an increased number of Chinese officials and architects began to accept, design, and construct buildings with Western façade elements. This phenomenon was an indirect conflict to traditional Chinese values, as some of the qilou buildings were as a way of highlighting people’s wealth.

Chapter three discusses current conditions and challenges facing the qilou buildings in the selected cities. There is a brief discussion about the legal issues facing these buildings in terms of the land ownership situation in China. This chapter then discusses the physical conditions of the buildings: growing mold and vegetation, paint failure on their façade, and changes made to these buildings over the years such as modern additions made by the current occupants. In addition, this chapter briefly talks about the laws and regulations that are mentioned throughout the study. Photos that the author took during the field trip are used in this chapter as evidence of these buildings’ current physical conditions. The challenges that this chapter discusses are: the unbalance or not enough financial support for the selected cities; lack of promotions of the qilou districts; the fact that none of these buildings are on a preservation list; different treatments for these buildings depending on if they are outside of a preservation district boundary; and the uncertain future of the qilou buildings in Kaiping.

Chapter four focuses on the public and private cooperative Main Street Program. Resources used for this chapter are found online. This chapter also contains brief introductions to the program and what it can do for communities. The introduction is followed by discussions on whether the program can be created in the selected cities in similar ways. In short, the establishing the Main Street program in Mainland China is going to face challenges due to the
Chinese political system. However, it is more likely to create a Main Street program in Macau since it has a political system similar to the United States.\(^\text{18}\)

Chapter five concentrates on the government managed program WHS. This chapter includes an introduction of the program and how the local governments in the selected cities can manage the qilou districts similar to a WHS. In short, parts of the qilou buildings in Macau, are currently included as contributing elements of the Macau Historic Centre, which is a WHS. In Kaiping City, one of the selected cities in this study has its own WHS, Kaiping Diaolou and Villages, which can also be used as an example for other selected cities.

Chapter six provides summaries for the previous chapters. It also compares the Main Street program and the UNESCO WHS model. Finally, the chapter includes a conclusion based on the findings.

When it comes to creating a balance between urban and/or rural development and historic preservation, there is not a single plan that will fit all the communities. Due to different culture and jurisdiction, some preservation plans might work in a given area, while others might not. For years, many scholars have contributed their understanding and knowledge to the issue of preserving historic properties in China. This study is part of that conversation. By discussing the historical and architectural backgrounds of qilou buildings and their significances; examining selected successful preservation plans around the globe, reviewing the legal challenges facing today’s preservation practices in China; saving those valuable historic properties can become reality.

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Chapter 2: Historical Developments and Significance of Qilou Buildings

From 1636 to 1824, China was an isolated nation, with almost no connections to the outside world. Under Qing Dynasty government’s (1636–1912) “closed door” policy (imposed until August 29th, 1842 the signing of Nanking Treaty), foreigners could barely make their way to China. The Qing government believed that as the “Middle Kingdom” China had everything it needed, and since other countries were just “barbarian states”, there was no need for China to communicate with others. However, everything changed after China’s First Opium War (November 3rd, 1839 –August 29th, 1842) with Great Britain. The War was a turning point for Imperial China. As the vanquished side of the war, China was forced to open its doors to foreigners. Western technologies, cultural, religion, and architecture were introduced to Chinese people in such era.\(^\text{19}\) The first qilou building was created within this background.

The Origin Stories of Qilou Buildings

There is no clear answer to where or how the qilou building form first emerged. However, there are several theories about how this type of buildings might have come to be. One of the theories suggests that qilou buildings may be first constructed by the British colonists in 1822 in Singapore.\(^\text{20}\) The building form appeared in China during the post-Opium era.

When Western missionaries started to come to China after the First Opium War War, they also brought some Western architectural ideas and knowledge with them. Western religion, especially Christianity, was arguably the first foreign religion that arrived in China in the late nineteenth century.\(^\text{21}\) As one of the five trading ports that were opened to Westerners during the post-Opium War area in Imperial China, Guangzhou was usually the first stop in Mainland China for the European missionaries, due to its geographic location: it was situated right next to

\(^{19}\) Yang Honglie. *Preserving Qilou in Southern China.* 42.
\(^{21}\) Yang Honglie. *Preserving Qilou in Southern China.* 42.
the ocean and close enough to the then-British colony of Hong Kong. In 1888, after receiving a permit from the local Chinese authority, British and French missionaries designed and built the first Catholic cathedral in Guangzhou, the Sacred Heart Cathedral. Unlike most buildings in China during the nineteenth century, stone and bricks were used for the construction of the cathedral. The more common construction material combination for Chinese building at the time was wood, brick, and concrete.

In the modern period, masonry materials are the strongest historical evidence for the question “when and where was the first qilou building built in China.” In traditional Chinese culture, stones are generally considered “cold” materials, and homes are supposed to be “warm.” In Imperial China, the only two places that stones would be used as building materials were graveyards and border walls. However, the first qilou building in China was built with stones and bricks. To explain, there were some leftover materials for the Sacred Heart Cathedral’s construction and some Chinese people, probably businesspersons purchased those leftover stones and brick from the European missionaries. The buyers then designed and built the first qilou building in China. Due to the fact that the qilou buildings surrounding the cathedral were built with materials similar to the cathedral, most Chinese historians believe that this theory is accurate, despite not having other evidence.

The materials and the Western facade elements made those qilou buildings very unique in China in the late nineteenth century. Qilou buildings were also not very common in southern China at the time. They were sporadically built in some urban cities. The more deliberate qilou building constructions come later, after the 1911 Democratic Revolution.

22 Ibid. 42.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 In traditional Chinese culture, people often believe that stones are "cold" materials, but wood is "warm" material. Thus, houses in imperial China were generally built with wood, so that people can feel comfortable at home.
The Development of Qilou Buildings in the Early Twentieth Century

Before the first Opium War, the government officials, and the Chinese people were not too interested in foreign information. This situation changed during the post-Opium War era when some Chinese officials began to study Western science. Those officials later proposed the idea of creating schools in China that focused on Western technology and science and in the meantime sending Chinese students to Europe and the United States to study. The proposal was accepted by the Emperor around 1860, and that period was known as the “Self-Strengthening Movement” in Chinese history. The Chinese people in the late Qing Dynasty called the schools that taught Western technology and science “Western schools”. It is debatable whether the outcome of the Self-Strengthening Movement actually helped China in the wars against the Western powers. However, the movement certainly trained enough students to be future city planners and architects.

In 1911, after overthrowing the Qing government, the Nationalist Party established their government in Guangzhou. In 1912, the Nationalist officials introduced some new urban planning policies to the city. The urban planners and architects, who led the effect of designing and building the qilou district in Guangzhou, were mostly trained in Western countries.27 For instance, Sun Ke, the Mayor of Guangzhou between 1920 and 1925, and also the Minister of Labor, Cheng Tiangu were both trained in the United States. Guangzhou City’s Public Affairs Director during the said period, Huang Heng, studied in Europe. In addition, a large number of public servants in Guangzhou municipal government at the time were trained in Western countries.28 Since Guangzhou City was the capital of the Nationalist government at the time, other cities in Southern China later used Guangzhou City’s qilou district as a model for

27 Yang Honglie. Preserving Qilou in Southern China. 44.
28 Ibid.
developing their own. For instance, from the 1920s to the 1930s, many Chinese businessmen who immigrated to the Americas, Europe and Southeast Asia returned to their hometown, Kaiping City. These people bought blueprints of Western buildings with them, and they started building qilou buildings around the river. Since qilou buildings were presented in Guangzhou before the 1920s, it is doubtful that the businessmen in Kaiping independently invented the qilou building form themselves.

The constructions of these qilou districts were mandated by the Nationalist government as an urban renewal policy, with the financial support from business people. As Professor Zhang said in his article, *Rise, and Fall of the "Qilou": Metamorphosis of Forms and Meanings in the Built Environment of Guangzhou*, most of the qilou buildings in Guangzhou were constructed by “unknown builders.” In other words, it was the Nationalist government introduced the regulations on qilou buildings’ constructions, and the business people invested their money in these qilou districts.

*The Emergence of Qilou Buildings in Guangzhou*

In the 1910s, Guangzhou was arguably one of the wealthiest cities in the south. However, the streets were narrow and chaotic. The poor management of the streets needed much improvement. When the Nationalist government came to power in Guangzhou in 1911, it ordered the removal of the street gates. In terms of qilou building constructions, the Guangzhou municipal government implemented the *1912 Guangzhou City Building Regulation*. The regulation stated that newly constructed buildings in Guangzhou City had to be qilou buildings.

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
It was the year that the word “qilou” first appeared on official documents in China. In October 1918, in order to create more spaces for the qilou buildings’ constructions, the municipal government of Guangzhou ordered the Nationalist Army with the help of some citizens to tear down the remaining city border walls. Since then, an increased number of qilou buildings started to appear in Guangzhou City’s urban area. Many qilou buildings that people could see in Guangzhou today, mainly two or three stories, were built in the 1920s. The urban renewal plans imposed by the city government during the 1920s also changed the cultural landscape of Guangzhou City: wider roads, more organized streetscapes, and prettier buildings. Yide Road in Guangzhou City, where the Sacred Heart Cathedral is located also became the business district of Guangzhou City in the 1920s.

During the 1920s, qilou buildings in Guangzhou were mainly built of wood and bricks, not stones and bricks. The first floors of the buildings were used as private homes and/or shops, and the upper floors were mainly residential. In terms of architectural styles, most of them incorporated Western façade elements on a vernacular local form such as greek revival, gothic revival, and baroque features. The size of the qilou buildings was also regulated by the Guangzhou City government, which explains why the height and width of the qilou buildings were similar. The phrase “qilou street” also appeared during this period, as qilou buildings were built right next to each other.

For the people of Guangzhou, adopting this new kind of building was not difficult. The Cantonese usually welcome a useful object. Given the fact that Guangzhou City was located in the south of China, and its temperature was usually high, and rain was common, the design of the
qilou building was suitable for the city. The Cantonese people could walk in the arcades during strong sunshine and rain, which was beneficial for them in the climate.\textsuperscript{41}

The Emergence of Qilou Buildings in Kaiping City

Unlike Guangzhou, where the government ran its urban renewal projects, the transnational Chinese led Kaiping City’s urban renewal efforts and qilou buildings’ constructions.\textsuperscript{42} Qilou buildings in Kaiping City were usually two to three stories, and they were built of brick and
concrete. The construction of the qilou districts was also massive. The main qilou street in Kaiping was about 300 meters (or 328 yards) long. Based on a recent survey conducted by the local government, Kaiping City’s historic district has more than six hundred qilou buildings.  
Similar to Guangzhou City, the construction of the qilou buildings in Kaiping in the 1920s, was part of the City government’s urban renewal plan. Since private parties built the qilou buildings in Kaiping, the architectural styles were more diverse, and some business people competed with each other to see who built the most visibly pleasing qilou building. Thus, qilou buildings in Kaiping were mainly built for business purposes, unlike the ones in Guangzhou, which were built for both public and private uses.

Figure 2.2: Kaiping qilou district. Red line represents the boundary of the district. From: http://inews.gtimg.com/newsapp_bt/0/1342772302/641.

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
The Emergence of Qilou Buildings in Meizhou City

In the 1930s, the Nationalist government’s implemented some urban renewal policies in Meizhou City, including the construction of its qilou district. In 1932, Meizhou’s Mayor Peng Jingyi ordered the removal of the city’s border wall. The construction of Meizhou’s first qilou street also started in the same year. Meizhou’s qilou district was located near the river. In the 1930s, Meizhou was the home of the Hakka people, a minority group in Guangdong Province; its qilou buildings, therefore, were mostly constructed by the Hakka businessmen. Roads in the district were designed for pedestrians so they were narrow, only 8.5 meters (or 28 feet) wide. Meizhou’s qilou buildings were generally two to three stories high; a few of them were four stories high. These buildings’ first floors served as stores and storages, and the upper floors were private homes. In Meizhou, construction materials for the qilou buildings such as concrete and bricks were made locally. The concrete used for these buildings’ construction was mixed with ash, sand, and clay, which was the material traditionally used by the Hakka people.

Qilou Buildings in the Portuguese Colony of Macau

Besides the three cities selected for this study in Mainland China, qilou buildings can also be found in Macau. From 1557 to 1999, Macau was a Portuguese colony. Based on a historic photograph, early qilou buildings in Macau were built before or in 1903, about fifteen years later than the earliest examples in Guangzhou. In 1903, in order to improve transportation service in the downtown area, the Macanese government decided to construct a new road. After years of planning, the Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (or New Road) project started in 1911 and completed...
in 1918. Since the New Road connected the ferry and south bay areas in Macau, the New Road area soon became Macau’s business district. Macau’s temperature was similar to Guangzhou; thus, qilou building was a good fit for Macau. Qilou buildings in the New Road area were mostly built by the Macanese government.  

Figure 2.3: A historic photo taken in about 1903, showing the qilou buildings located in Macau’s ferry area. From https://aamacau.com/2016/11/15/%E5%85%A7%E6%B8%AF%E9%A8%8E%E6%A8%93%E7%9A%84%E7%AF%89%E8%B7%A1/.

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Figure 2.4: A historic photo showing the qilou buildings in Macau’s New Road area. From https://aamacau.com/2016/11/15/%E5%85%A7%E6%B8%AF%E9%A8%8E%E6%A8%93%E7%94%84%E7%AF%89%E8%B7%A1/. 
Figure 2.5: Historic Centre of Macau. Macau’s qilou buildings are mainly located around Senado Square. From: http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1110/multiple=1&unique_number=1289.
Qilou Buildings in Other Southern Chinese Cities

Besides the cities in Guangdong Province and Macau, qilou buildings may also be found in other southern provinces. In Guangxi Province, Guangdong’s neighbor province, qilou buildings there need preserving. Located in Guangxi Province, Wuzhou City is also right next to the river like Kaiping City. In the 1920s, Wuzhou City underwent an urban renewal practice, similar to Guangzhou’s: the city border walls were razed down and the roads were widened. During the urban renewal process, the older buildings were then replaced by qilou buildings. As foreigners from Europe started to build churches, hospitals, and banks in Wuzhou, some of them adopted the qilou building form. The local architects also applied some Western ornament to the Chinese building for Western owners. This explains why qilou buildings in Wuzhou contain many western architectural elements. For instance, gothic revival and romanesque elements are found on many buildings in the qilou district. Since Wuzhou City is right next to the river, and flood events were common in the 1920s, qilou buildings in Wuzhou have some features that other cities’ qilou buildings do not: “iron rings” and “water gates.” Iron rings attached to the first floor’s columns, function as ties for boats during flood events. The building’s water gates are usually found on the buildings’ second story. The gates are exits for people during flood events. Thus, during floods, residents of qilou buildings could go to the second floor and escape from the flood area in their boats. Due to the planning efforts, Wuzhou City’s qilou district became the city’s financial and business district in the 1930s. It continues to be so today: Wuzhou City’s qilou district still hosts numerous banks, hotels, and restaurants. The long-term plan of the Wuzhou City government is to maintain the area as a tourist destination and business district.

50 Yang Honglie. Preserving Qilou in Southern China. 139-152.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
Guangdong and Guangxi provinces are the earliest documented areas in southern China with qilou buildings. However, the form diffused beyond these provinces as well. Qilou buildings in Fujian Province, which emerged somewhat later, also reflect local culture in their architectural treatments. Fujian Province is located on the east coast of China. During the Imperial period, numbers of cities in Fujian Province became trading centers for Chinese and Western merchants. Some cities were also the stops for the world-famous Silk Road. In Quanzhou City, Islamic architectural styles could be found in some qilou buildings’ windows.\(^{54}\) Those windows are proof of Chinese connection with the Middle East during the Imperial period, as some Muslims had their way to China and contributed their knowledge to the construction of qilou buildings.\(^{55}\) Construction materials in Quanzhou are also unique. In terms of materials, bricks and stone could be found in the some of the qilou buildings. Some qilou buildings’ column also used concrete that was mixed with shells and small stones.\(^{56}\) That kind of concrete came from local materials, as in the 1920s and 1930s. It was difficult to ship materials from one city to another. Today, Quanzhou City’s qilou district is a business area for both the local residents and visitors. Government-led renovation works took place in around 2005.\(^{57}\) The façade of Quanzhou City’s qilou buildings were all “fixed” and repainted with some uniform color, such as red and black. Quanzhou City government’s long-term plan for the qilou street is to keep the area as a small business and residential mixed-used district. As discussed above, qilou buildings in southern China is a unique kind of architectural buildings. Their significances are another reason why they should be preserved.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
\(^{57}\) Author’s conversation with the residents in the historic district.
Architectural and Historical Significance of Qilou Buildings

The significances of qilou buildings may be summarized by two points: their distinctiveness and their historical associations.

The Distinctiveness of Qilou Buildings

One, as mentioned above, qilou buildings are only found in southern China and a few countries in Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia, Singapore and India. Qilou buildings in Southeast Asian were constructed under the regulation implemented by the British colonists. These Southern Asian countries also had important trade relationship with Guangzhou in the Eighteenth century. The form first appeared in Guangzhou and was later introduced to other Southern Chinese cities. Figure 11 shows how the qilou building form was introduced to Chinese cities as Westerners and transnational business people came to China.

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In other parts of Asia, such as Japan and Thailand, there are houses that many people called “shop houses”, instead of qilou buildings. In short, a shop house is usually a building that functions both as a shop and a private home. Those “shop houses” are close to qilou buildings in terms of their functions, as people may conduct business and live in the same building. Thus, some people may categorize qilou buildings as shophouses, that categorization, however, is not entirely accurate. Although most of the qilou buildings in China were constructed primarily as shop houses, there are examples where qilou buildings are used for other purposes. In Guangzhou City, some qilou buildings are used as governmental buildings, libraries, and hotels.

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In some southern cities in China, some qilou buildings are used completely as residential buildings. In addition, shop houses in Japan and Thailand and other parts of the world also do not have arcades and columns, like qilou buildings. Thus, it is not totally correct to refer all the qilou buildings as shop houses, even though many of them are being used in that way.

Two, qilou buildings’ materials are distinctive as well. In China, during the 1920s, it was not easy to transport building materials from one city to another. Thus, most of the construction materials used were collected locally. For example, Quanzhou City, as mentioned above, used concrete that was mixed with shells and small stones, since it is located on the coast. In addition, depending on who built those buildings, construction materials could be different as well and these materials represent the regional preference. In Guangzhou City, the city government constructed the qilou buildings using concrete. On the other hand, Meizhou City, the construction materials for the qilou buildings were concrete and bricks, which were the common materials that the Hakka people used to build their homes.

Three, qilou buildings’ architectural elements are unique. For a nation once considered “the Middle Kingdom”, to build buildings that contain Western elements was a historic change. By the 1920s to the 1930s, those historic qilou buildings showed that more and more Chinese architects were willing to accept foreign ideas in the said decade. While most of the qilou buildings contain western architectural elements, some of them have mixtures of both western and Chinese elements, which make them more unique than others. In Guangzhou City’s Beijing Road shopping area, two qilou buildings have Chinese style gazebos built on top of them, but their columns may be considered as greek revival, (Figures 12 to 16).

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62 Ibid
Figure 2.7: Taotaoju bakery, in Guangzhou City’s Beijing Road shopping area. It is a qilou building that has a Chinese style gazebo on top, and two black Greek Revival style look like columns at its façade. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 2.8: Taotaouju bakery, in Guangzhou City’s Beijing Road shopping area. Façade columns closer look. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 2.9: Lianxianglou bakery in Guangzhou City’s Beijing Road shopping area. It is a Qilou building that has a Chinese style gazebo on top, and some Greek Revival style looks like columns at its façade. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 2.10: Lianxianglou bakery in Guangzhou City’s Beijing Road shopping area. A Chinese style gazebo is located at its top. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
The Historical Associations of Qilou Buildings

Since Imperial China experienced decades of “closed door” policy, it was difficult for foreigners to come to China before 1842. As more foreigners immigrated to China in the post-Opium War period, they bought western architectural knowledge with them. Thus, qilou buildings first represent the historical background of the post-Opium War area in China, when Westerners would come to China and exchange architectural ideas with the Chinese people. The first historical association is strongly connected to the second one: Chinese architects adopting western architecture.
As common people of China people started to communicate with foreigners, they soon began to accept some aspects of Western cultures. When an increased number of overseas Chinese returned to their hometowns to build qilou buildings, Chinese workers were willing to create something that they have never seen before. It was a remarkable cultural shift for the Chinese people, as they changed from thinking “China cultural is the best” because of the “closed door” policy, to thinking “it is time to try something new” and create a new kind of building and a new kind of commercial district.

In addition, qilou building also changed the way Chinese people styled buildings. In traditional Chinese culture, people hid their wealth. In other words, Chinese tradition mandates that wealthy people deemphasize their good fortune. In Kaiping City, where the qilou buildings were mostly built by overseas Chinese business people who returned to their hometown. Chinese industrialists, unlike others, like to create and live in “good looking” buildings as symbols of their successes. Western buildings, unlike traditional Chinese buildings, are more ostentatious. As Western architectural styles were adopted by the businessmen lived in Kaiping City, qilou buildings there were built as a way of highlighting their wealth. This phenomenon was an indirect conflict with traditional Chinese value. In other words, qilou buildings built in Kaiping represented a shift in Chinese culture.64

Summary
Qilou buildings in China are worthy of preservation, because of their historical and architectural significance. Qilou represents how much China changed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, since the end of the first Opium War, both in architecture and in culture. They also represent the new links that China had with the West and the rest of the world during the early twentieth century. Due to those reasons, some Chinese cities have made

64 Ye Shuming. The Ten Major Name Cards of Lingnan Culture—Arcade Building, 101-102.
substantial efforts to preserve qilou buildings and districts. However, some historic qilou districts face renewed threats. The current conditions of the qilou districts in the selected cities will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Current Preservation Conditions and Challenges

*Brief Introduction of the Chinese Laws Mentioned in This Study*

For the benefit of the readers, the followings are some brief introduction of the Chinese laws mentioned in this thesis. All of these laws were either created by the National People’s Congress (hereinafter “Chinese Congress”) or the State Council. The English translations of these laws can be found online either on the website of United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China (https://www.cecc.gov/resources/selected-prc-legal-provisions) or Peking University Center for Legal Information (http://en.pkulaw.cn).

- **Administrative Procedure Law**: created by Chinese Congress in 1989, to “[protect] the lawful rights and interests of citizens” and “[ensure] and [supervise] the exercise of administrative power by administrative organs according to law”. 66

- **Legislation Law**: created in 2000 by Chinese Congress, as Chapter Two, Section Four stated, the power to interpret a national law “[vested] in [Chinese] Congress”. Under the circumstances of “the specific meaning of a provision of such legislation requires further clarification” and/or “a new situation arises after enactment of such legislation, thereby requiring clarification of the basis of its application”. 67

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65 The State Council is the chief administrative authority in China. It is chaired by the premier and includes the heads of each cabinet-level executive department.


- Interim Regulations Concerning the Assignment and Transfer of the Right to the Use of the State-owned Land (hereinafter “Land Regulation”): created by State Council in 1990, it states the usage times for each type of land.\(^6^8\)

- Cultural Relics Protection Law (hereinafter “CRPL”): created by Chinese Congress in 1982, the current version was amended in 2017; it is the law that governs all the historic preservation practices in Mainland China.\(^6^9\)

- The Basic Law of Macau Special Administrative Region: created by Chinese Congress in 1999, it is the mini-constitution of Macau. It also states that Macau is not subject to the national level historic preservation laws that govern Mainland China, according to the “One Country, Two Systems” policy.\(^7^0\)

**A Brief Introduction to the Chinese Legal System**

Following the Communists’ Civil War victory in Mainland, China adopted a civil law system in 1949. Under the current Chinese legal system, judges can only decide cases based on written statutes, and previous cases serve only as references. The rights to define and change laws belong to the legislative branches at all levels.\(^7^1\) Chinese national laws govern all related laws at lower administrative levels. Provincial and local governments, however, do have the right to create their own laws within the confines of the national laws.\(^7^2\)

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\(^{72}\) Ibid.
The national courts in China also do not have the right to review local laws or determine if they violate national laws. If there is a conflict between laws, the situation has to be solved by legislators under the Legislation Law. However, under the Administrative Procedure Law, courts do have the right to invalidate specific acts of the executive branch. For years, many have questioned the independence of the Chinese judicial branch because of the law-defining process. On the other hand, some have argued that resolving legal conflicts is more of a legislative action, not a judicial matter.

A Discussion on Historic Preservation-Related Laws in China

In China, the law that governs all historic preservation activities is the Cultural Relics Protection Law (CRPL). According to CRPL, there are two types of historic resources: movable and non-movable. Movable historic items are usually items that can easily be moved around, such as a book, a painting, or a piece of clothing. In other words, movable historic items are typically the objects that people see in a museum. Non-movable historic items generally refer to real estate properties, such as qilou buildings. Thus, qilou buildings are also subject to Land Regulation. In China, Land Regulation and CRPL are closely related in relation to historic preservation practice, especially when it comes to non-movable historic properties.

The reason that these two laws are closely related is historical. After the winning the Civil War in Mainland in 1949, the Communist Party established their government. Since then, land ownership in China had changed dramatically, and the changes have significantly impacted and still affect historic preservation practices. Under the current Land Regulation, the government

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73 Ibid.
75 Congressional-Executive Commission on China. “Administrative Procedure Law of the People's Republic of China (Chinese and English Text).”
76 Ibid.
owns all the lands in Mainland China.\textsuperscript{77} When a private party purchases a piece of land from the government, that party is only buying the right to use the given piece of land for a certain period of time. In other words, after the transaction of a given piece of land, the person that bought the land would have the right to use the land for certain years, but the ownership of the land still belongs to the government forever. Depending on what type of land it is, the period of land usage rights differ. For example, for residential lands, the usage right is 70 years; industrial, educational, scientific, cultural, health, and sports land the usage right is 50 years; and for business, tourism, or entertainment uses the usage right is 40 years.\textsuperscript{78} The type that relates to most qilou buildings is residential since most of them were constructed primarily for residential purposes. Accordingly, because of the land ownership status, the government has a lot of power over non-moveable historic properties. In addition, usage times do not reset if any transaction happens in between the usage period. For instance, if Person A buys a piece of land from the government for residential purpose, the usage time would be 70 years. Ten years later, Person A sells that land to Person B, the usage time for that specific land would be 60 years, instead of 70.

Since all the lands belonging to the government in perpetuity, the government can seize properties whenever it wants without compensation. This is a major issue facing historic preservation in China. Due to the land ownership model, Land Regulation in many cases even supplants CRPL in China. Thus, CRPL regulates private parties more than it regulates the government in terms of non-movable historic properties. For years, many have raised the question of what will happen when usage right periods expire. At this moment, there is no clear answer. There are assumptions that the usage rights would automatically be re-granted to the buyer for the said years, dependent on the types; or the buyer would have to re-buy the usage

\textsuperscript{77} National People’s Congress. “Cultural Relics Protection Law of the People’s Republic of China (2017 Amendment).”
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
right from the government. It might not be a problem at the moment; it surely would be an issue in the future.\textsuperscript{79}

In summary, the CRPL governs all the historic preservation activities in China. Local historic preservation laws and regulation are created within the confines of CRPL. As non-moveable historic resources, qilou buildings are subject to the Land Regulation. According to the Land Regulation, transactions of lands are similar to a land lease agreement. Thus, the Land Regulation supplants CRPL in many cases.

\textit{A Discussion on Historic Preservation Related Laws in Macau}

Macau is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) in China. Thus, it is not subject to the majority of laws that are created by the Chinese Congress, including the Land Regulation. Since Macau is not governed by the Land Regulation, the owner of a given piece of land also owns the building on top of it.\textsuperscript{80} This exception gives the building owners in Macau the more rights to renovate their buildings. For instance, some qilou buildings owners in Macau are investing their own money to preserve those buildings.\textsuperscript{81}

Historic preservation practices in Macau are governed by the Cultural Heritage Protection Act of 2013 (CHPA). The CHPA is similar to the CRPL, and states that historic buildings are “non-movable historic properties.” It also puts management of the Macau Historic Centre under the authority of the Macau cultural bureau.\textsuperscript{82} Unlike Mainland China, the Macanese government cannot compel changes to the privately-owned real estate without owners’ permission. In


\textsuperscript{81} Author’s conversation with the building owns in summer 2017.

addition, the Macanese cultural bureau also has the authority to manage the buildings within the
designated buffer zones of the Historic Centre.\textsuperscript{83}

\textit{Overview of the Conditions and Challenges}

It is no secret that not all the historic qilou districts are in the same condition. It is so due to
different cities’ urban planning and historic preservation policies, and also their financial
situations. This chapter discusses the current conditions and preservation status of the selected
four cities’ qilou districts and also talks about the preservation challenges.

\textit{Levels of Preservation Protection for Qilou Districts}

The lack of official recognition at the national level is among one of the challenges facing
qilou buildings. In China, preservation plans or policies are led by the governments.\textsuperscript{84} The most
common preservation practice in China at the moment is the “listing policy.” Such practice will
register a given historic site on a certain heritage preservation list, either local or national.\textsuperscript{85} At
the national level, the heritage preservation list is called “Major Historical and Cultural Site
Protected at the National Level” (hereinafter “National Heritage Preservation List”).\textsuperscript{86} The sites
that are on the National Heritage Preservation List are managed by the State Administration of
Cultural Heritage, within the Ministry of Culture. At the moment, there are seven versions of
such lists. The list includes sites that the Central Government considers significant to Chinese
people for both historical and/or cultural reason(s).\textsuperscript{87} For instance, the Great Wall, the Imperial
Palace, and the Shamian Island Historic District. Every few years, there is a newer version added
to the previous ones, as more sites are included in the National Heritage Preservation List.

Surprisingly, none of the qilou building districts in China are listed on the National Heritage

\textsuperscript{83} The State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People’s Republic of China. “The Historic Centre of Macao.”
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} The State Council of the People’s Republic of China. “Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level”.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
Preservation List. In other words, all of the qilou districts are only listed on the provincial and local level heritage preservation lists.

The lack of national recognition means that the Central Government is not providing any resources for the qilou districts’ preservation practices. Since no qilou district is included on the National Heritage Preservation List, there are no common standards for qilou buildings’ rehabilitation practices. Thus, in addition, it is possible that the people that live in other parts of China may not know about qilou buildings. There are some qilou buildings located in Macau’s Senado Square area, which are included in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS). They are, however, included in WHS only as part of the buffer zone buildings for the Historic Centre of Macau.

Other Issues Affecting Preservation of Qilou Districts

There are some other issues facing those qilou buildings as well. When the author visited Meizhou and Kaiping, there were no public transportations that could bring the visitors to the qilou streets. As the business owners in Meizhou and the visitors in Kaiping told the author, they had to take their own bikes, motorcycles or cars to get there. While not having enough customers might be considered more of an economic issue, and less about historic preservation, more businesses in the districts may potentially generate more money for the owners to preserve their buildings.

Qilou District in Guangzhou

In Guangzhou City, the qilou buildings that are located within the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street, one of the most popular shopping areas for both the locals and the visitors, are in a much

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88 Ibid.
91 Author’s exchange with the locals and the visitors, summer 2017.
better condition than the ones that are not (Figures 3.1 to 3.4). For instance, in 2009, although all of the qilou buildings in Guangzhou City were renovated by the municipal government, before the 2010 Asian Olympic Games, as part of the “make the city look better” campaign, qilou buildings within the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area, received different treatments than the ones that were not.  

For example, Qilou buildings that are located within the shopping area had their mold and vegetation cleaned during the renovation process, and repainted with a new color. 

The qilou buildings that are located outside of the shopping area, on the other hand, were also repainted with new color, but mold and growing vegetation could still be found on their exteriors (Figure 3.2). It is also unclear whether those buildings were repainted with their original color or not.

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93 Ibid.
Figure 3.1: Entrance of the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area. The sign with brown background reads “Beijing Road Pedestrian Street” with the English translation underneath. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.2: Qilou buildings outside the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area. Mold and growing vegetation can be found on the qilou buildings’ exterior. Most of the qilou building on this street were repainted with simple colors. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.3: Qilou buildings within the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Landscape Changes in Guangzhou’s Qilou District

Over the years, some urban renewal projects have happened in Guangzhou City’s qilou district. These urban renewal projects had significantly changed the historical landscape of the qilou district. These activities had also damaged the integrality of the area. For instance, in one part of the qilou district, an elevated highway was constructed across the area (Figure 3.5). As some of the locals said, the traffic brings a lot of “noises” into their neighborhood. ⁹⁴ In the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area, two new shopping malls and one office building were built in and near the qilou district (Figures 3.6 and 3.7). For the Beijing Road area, it is

difficult for the small businesses to compete with the stores and restaurants inside shopping malls. To explain, Guangzhou has a hot temperature during summer time; customers may prefer to shop in the shopping malls, where there are air conditioners.  

Figure 3.5: A qilou street in Guangzhou. An elevated highway was built within a historic qilou district. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.

\(^{95}\) Ibid.
Figure 3.6: A Shopping Mall Built within the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Due to its history as a former Portuguese colony until 1999, Macau contains many significant historic buildings that are meaningful to both Chinese and Portuguese people. Thus, the cultural bureau of Macau created the Historic Centre, which includes about 30 historic sites. The cultural bureau later decided to nominate this Historic Centre to the UNESCO WHS. With the assistance of the Ministry of Culture of China, the Historic Centre of Macau was inscribed on the UNESCO WHS list in 2005.\(^6\) The Historic Centre itself is separated into two zones on the

Macau peninsula. Most of the historic sites and the qilou buildings are located on the western side of the peninsula (zone one, see Figure 3.8). Each section is surrounded by a buffer zone.

The Macau Historic Centre WHS is managed by the cultural bureau of Macau.\textsuperscript{97} The bureau does not directly manage the properties in the buffer zones; it is only responsible for the properties that are part of the WHS. However, buildings in the buffer zones are subject to the bureau’s review and approval process, if “any construction, reconstruction or alterations” take place inside these areas.\textsuperscript{98} Since the qilou buildings in Macau are mostly located in the New Road area, in between properties 6 and 7, as shown in Figure 8. They are, therefore, part of buffer zone one of the Historic Centre, and subject to the regulations and guidelines implemented by the cultural bureau.

To explain, a building’s facade cannot be changed, but a building owner can alter the building’s interior. The owner can also construct new additions atop of the original building, but the height of the building cannot exceed 18 meters (or 59 feet). The additional sections of the building also must be built to conform to the city’s regulations; a certain distance behind the original facade, so that the additional section will not be visible from streets.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Du Juan. “Macau’s New Road Area is a Preservation District ”; Alex Lou. “Qilou Buildings in the Ferry Area.”
In the 1980s, some qilou buildings in Macau were torn down in order to make room for new buildings. The remaining qilou buildings in Macau are mostly located in the New Road and Senado Square areas.\textsuperscript{100} Since returning to Chinese sovereignty in 1999, the Macau cultural bureau has worked with the preservation professionals, to protect and restore historic properties in the area, including the ones located on the Senado Square.\textsuperscript{101} The bureau is also responsible for implementing all heritage protection laws. In addition, the bureau has numbers of “professional architects, engineers, historians and other experts and technicians” who “draft and implement plans” for the agency.\textsuperscript{102}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid.]
\item[101] The State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People’s Republic of China. “The Historic Centre of Macao”.
\item[Ibid.]
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The Macau Historic Centre, is receiving a significant amount of support from the Macau local government for preservation purposes, and perhaps also, tourism and business purposes. For instance, the tourism bureau of Macau has been promoting the Historic Centre for years. On its website, the tourism bureau has provided information about the WHS properties and explaining people to why these sites are worth visiting. The qilou buildings in Macau that are located within the WHS buffer zones, like the ones in Guangzhou’s Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area, are having fewer issues that the ones that are located outside of the historic district’s boundary. For example, in Macau, qilou buildings near the Senado Square area, part of the contributing element to the Historic Centre of Macau, only have minor issues like mold and growing vegetation on their exterior. The qilou buildings that are further away from the Senado Square have larger issues such as paint failure, water damage, and mold and growing vegetation on their exteriors (Figures 3.9 to 3.12).

Figure 3.9: Qilou buildings on Senado Square, Macau. Photo by Qiiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.10: Qilou buildings that are not located near Senado Square. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.11: Qilou buildings that are not located near Senado Square. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.12: Qilou buildings that are not located near Senado Square. The owner of the bakery (the bakery is on the left side of the photo) told the author that he is using his own money to preserve the building. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Qilou District in Meizhou

Meizhou City’s qilou buildings are located mainly in the “old city”, and they were built near the Mei River. Meizhou City has yet to have a plan to preserve its qilou buildings. According to some of the current occupants of those buildings in Meizhou City, the qilou buildings have not been “touched” for years.104

During the 1960s, as people in Meizhou started to ship products via roads, small businesses began moving out of the qilou district. In addition, the newly developed city center was also more attractive to the business people.105 In some cases, qilou buildings were torn down in order to make room for new buildings. In 2005, the Meizhou City government created a small-scale revitalization plan for the district. The plan included renovating of some qilou buildings and rebuilding the roads. However, the result of the plan was not very positive.106 Historically, businesses in Meizhou’s qilou district were mainly depended on products that were shipped in via the river. Nowadays, however, more people are shipping goods via vehicles, the qilou districts’ narrow roads are not very business-friendly.107

As shown in the images below, some of the qilou buildings have broken doors and windows, mold and growing vegetation on their exteriors, electric wires hanging on their facade, and some owners had done things on their own to change the buildings’ physical appearance, such as repainting the columns and the facades, and changing the windows (Figures 3.15 to 3.17). Even though the local government did recognize the qilou district in Meizhou as a heritage preservation site in 2010, the local government has yet to have specific plans to preserve these buildings.108 Due to lack of financial support from the local government, some locals did decide

104 Author’s exchange with the locals during the field trip in summer 2017.
105 Sun Jian, “Preserving Qilou Buildings in Meizhou.”
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Author’s exchange with the locals during the field trip in summer 2017.
to use some of their own money to renovate the broken parts of the buildings. As shown in the pictures below, the owners’ methods of renovating the buildings were to replace the broken parts with modern items, such as replacing the original wooden windows with aluminum ones or repaint parts of the exterior with white color (Figures 3.15 to 3.18).

Figure 3.13: A map showing the qilou district in Meizhou City. The qilou buildings are mainly located in the circled area shown in the map. Map from https://map.baidu.com/, 2018. Edited by Qiming Li.

\[^{109}\text{Ibid.}\]
Figure 3.14: A sign located outside of the qilou district in Meizhou City, with a brief introduction of the area, placed by the local government in 2010. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.15: Qilou streets in Meizhou City. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.16: A clothing store in Meizhou City. The columns were repainted by the owner as well as the aluminum windows and fences. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.17: A clothing store in Meizhou City. The columns were repainted by the owner as well as the aluminum windows and fences. Mold could be found at the façade and there is water damage at the column (right). Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.18: A tea store in Meizhou City. Façade repainted by the owner. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Qilou District in Kaiping

Starting in the 1980s, one section of the Kaiping City’s qilou building district was transformed into a movie set. Many visitors came to Kaiping City to see the movie set or to see their favorite actors on the set. In 2017, the city government announced a buyout plan to purchase all of the qilou buildings in the historic district, with the assistance of business sponsors. According to the plan, the entire qilou district would become a combination movie

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set and theme park. While this plan may bring more money to the district, but some locals residents also raise concerns that the plan would damage the integrity of those qilou buildings.

According to the plan, the project is expected to cost 6 billion Chinese yuan (or about 960 million USD). In other words, this massive project is more of a business plan rather than a preservation plan. Nevertheless, the project managers have decided to take some time and effort to renovate the qilou buildings, such as cleaning and repainting those buildings’ exteriors. Problems found in their interiors, like broken beams and columns will also be replaced. At the moment, the entire plan is at its earliest stage. When the author visited Kaiping in the summer of

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113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
2017, most of the buildings’ owners had already finished their deal with the city government, as those buildings were sealed by the government (Figure 3.21). Considering the current conditions of those buildings, such as paint failure, growing vegetation and mold on their exteriors (Figure 3.22) and also issues within those buildings such as leaking roof, corroded rebar, and other security risks, renovating those buildings would take a long time.\textsuperscript{116}

Setting aside the actions that have already taken place in the district, there are some unanswered questions regarding the future of the preservation plan. For instance, no one can say for sure whether the project could be done on time and on budget. The plan also does not clearly state how the resident of the qilou district will be involved in the project.\textsuperscript{117} In fact, the residents there would move to the city center, as part of the plan. The government also stated that the usage right of these qilou buildings now belongs to the real estate company that is going to manage the plan.\textsuperscript{118} While the government said that the residents may come back and help the tourism project, it is uncertain whether this part of the plan may become reality. As some of the occupants there told the author that they would like to come back, and some said that they would seek new opportunities in the city center.\textsuperscript{119} On a positive note, when the author visited Kaiping, there were some tourists shopping in the qilou building area (Figure 3.23). Thus, it is possible that a fully renovated Kaiping qilou district may attract more visitors.

In summary, the preservation plan in Kaiping will turn the qilou district into a Disneyland with historical buildings. Since the residents of the district no longer have the usage rights of these buildings, the real estate company, therefore, can sell these rights to buyers. It is therefore doubtful whether the cultural landscape of the district will remain the same as it is today.

\textsuperscript{116} Xiang Xianjun, and Xu Tianhe. “Kaiping City’s 6 Billion Preservation Plan.”
\textsuperscript{118} Kaiping City Government. “Ten Questions Regarding Chikan Historic Town Development.”
\textsuperscript{119} Author’s exchange with the current occupants of the buildings Summer, 2017.
Figure 3.21: Qilou buildings in Kaiping City. Most of them are sealed and preservation works are undertaking. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.22: Qilou buildings in Kaiping City. Many of them have visible issues such as growing vegetation and mold on their exteriors. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 3.23: Qilou buildings in Kaiping City. A few visitors were there when the photo was taken. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Chapter 4: The Main Street Program

This chapter examines the public and private cooperative Main Street program and discusses whether the program may be created in the selected Chinese cities. This chapter first provides a brief introduction to the program, and then focuses on the feasibilities of implementing the Main Street program’s approaches in Guangzhou, Macau, Meizhou, and Kaiping.

A Brief Introduction to the Main Street Program

The Main Street program was established by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1977 as a solution for small towns that were struggling financially, with a specific focus on historic commercial districts. At that time, the program was a “pilot project” for the National Trust. The National Trust selected three towns in the Midwest region of the U.S.: Galesburg, Illinois; Hot Springs, South Dakota; and Madison, Indiana. By 1980, the pilot project had some successful results in these towns. In Galesburg, thirty new businesses opened and raised the historic commercial district occupancy rate to 95 percent. In Hot Springs, the program was successful enough to have widespread participation from merchants and property owners in the downtown area, and sales tax revenues were increased by 25 percent. The results allowed the National Trust to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the project, and the Main Street program was launched nationwide in 1980. The program has Four-Point Approaches and Eight Principles.

The Four Points are the following:

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121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
Organization. A Main Street program is set up at a local level, and the city’s residents, officials, and business owners are all involved in the process.

Promotion. A city promotes its culture, history, and significant events.

Design. Historic preservation works take place. This approach involves the rehabilitation of historic buildings and improvement of a city’s transportation infrastructure.

Economic Vitality. Decision makers and business owners work together to develop a long-term economic plan that would help the program fund itself in the future.125

The Eight Principles are the following:

Comprehensive. The program should cover all the approaches. In other words, a balanced program.

Incremental. Small projects may also make a big difference in a community. By setting up small goals, getting the community involved, the people of the city can see that changes are happening in the neighborhood.

Self-help. Higher-level governments could provide assistance to a struggling community. However, in the long-term, the city needs to get its stakeholders involved and create a program that could help the city in the future.

Public and Private Partnership. All the local Main Street programs need the support from both the government and the citizens. This principle is meant to have both the public and private sectors work together and help each other.

Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets. Each city has its own uniqueness. A city’s culture and historic resources should be identified and the resources are the solid foundation for a successful Main Street program.

125 Ibid.
• Quality. Main Street programs are long-term programs, and they should be completed in the finest methods.

• Change. The community needs to change its perceptions of downtown revitalization. This principle is meant to increase the support of the Main Street program among the citizens in the city.

• Action Oriented. Changes do not need to be significant, but they should be visible to remind the public that revitalization efforts are underway in the city.¹²⁶

In short, a Main Street program is a public and private partnership economic development policy that includes the revitalization of a city’s historic downtown. The major tasks for a Main Street are property management, marketing, human and financial resources management. It is a bottom-up, grassroots, and volunteer-driven non-profit business. A city’s historic downtown is often the representation of that city. It is where the city’s tax base is concentrated, and it often draws tourists.¹²⁷

Based on the conditions of the qilou buildings in case study cities, as discussed in the earlier chapter, it would be reasonable consider adopting aspects of a Main Street approach in Guangzhou and Macau first and then in Meizhou. Although in Kaiping, the city government already has a comprehensive plan to preserve the city’s qilou buildings, as it was meant to help the qilou district financially in the long term. The program is still in the very early stages as of summer 2017. While this study is not meant to discredit the qilou buildings’ revitalization plan established by the urban planners in Kaiping, this thesis examines if the future film set and theme park mixed-used historic qilou district could benefit from a Main Street-based approach in the long-term.

¹²⁶ Ibid.
¹²⁷ Ibid.
The Overall Planning Approaches in Mainland China and Macau

As Professor Yang wrote in his book, *Preserving Qilou Buildings in Southern China*, Mainland China has a "top-down" historic preservation and/or urban planning approach.128 This approach is the opposite of Main Street program’s “bottom-up” approach. Thus, if Main Street programs are to be established in the three selected Mainland cities, Guangzhou, Meizhou and Kaiping, these programs would need to be created as government programs rather than a public and private cooperated partnership.

Since many of the preservation-related programs in China are led by government, it is hard for preservationists to put their plans into practice without the cooperation of the government. Even though Professor Yang in his book called for cooperation between government and residents, he still believed that the government should take the lead in preservation effort, due to the “top-down” historic preservation practices implemented in Mainland China since 1949.129 Thus, setting up an entirely private citizen-led preservation program will be challenging.

Establishing a Main Street program in the selected Mainland cities may also face some legal challenges. In the US, Main Street programs are often managed by private citizens, with some exceptions. Since most of the buildings and the lands they stand upon are owned by private citizens, buildings owners in the US have the right to oppose the government’s policies. In China, on the other hand, since building owners do not own the lands that their buildings built upon, they often have to accept the government’s plans. For instance, in Kaiping, the local government was able to seize all the buildings in the district, because it has jurisdiction over the land that those buildings stand on. There is a practice in some Western countries called

129 Ibid.
“grandfathering”, meaning that a newly established policy does not apply to historical subjects. However, this is not the case in China in terms of land ownership laws.

Due to the overall political system in Mainland China, the governing body of the Main Street program in the selected cities in Mainland is most likely to be the municipal cultural bureau. In Mainland China, local non-movable historic properties are often managed by the municipal cultural bureaus.\textsuperscript{130} Since the Chinese Land Regulation states that in Mainland China, all the lands are owned by the governments; the governing bodies have the jurisdictions over the buildings that are built on top of the lands.\textsuperscript{131} For instance, in Guangzhou, the lands within the city are entirely owned by the city government. Thus, even though the city government of Guangzhou does not own the buildings, it still has the right to change the buildings’ exteriors, due to the National Land Regulation. The best-known practice of the Land Regulation in Guangzhou is the citywide historic buildings renovation project before the 2010 Asian Olympics, managed by the cultural bureau. In this case, the cultural bureau did inform the building owners when the bureau would have taken actions on their properties. However, the bureau did not ask the building owners’ opinions on whether its actions were acceptable to them.\textsuperscript{132} Therefore, setting up Main Street programs in Mainland has to have the municipal cultural bureau involved due to the Land Regulation.

Macau, on the other hand, has a political system that is different than the one in Mainland China. According to the \textit{Macau Basic Law}, Macau has a political system that is similar to most

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 279-283.
of the Western countries, and it is not subject to the Chinese national laws. Therefore, it is possible that the Main Street program in Macau may be created similar to the ones in the U.S. 

Implementing the Main Street Approaches and Principles in Guangzhou

The Guangzhou municipal historic district has many qilou streets, as shown in Figure 1. The best-known qilou street in Guangzhou is arguably the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area. Since the 1920s, the area has long been a shopping district for both the residents of Guangzhou and its visitors. The qilou buildings in the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street, as discussed in the previous chapter, are generally in fine condition. However, there are other qilou streets in Guangzhou that are having issues attracting visitors. If a Main Street program is to be created in Guangzhou, the qilou buildings located outside of the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area may be used as a test project. In other words, the local government can expand the pre-existing shopping area to the nearby qilou streets. Since the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area has already been promoted by the city government for a few years, it is very well known among the locals and the visitors. Thus, it is reasonable to expand the shopping area, so that the qilou streets nearby can also benefit from the area’s economic development plans.

In 2009, the city government created a large-scale renovation project for the shopping area to ensure the qilou buildings in this area “looked good” before the 2010 Asian Olympics. In other words, the shopping area is a place that the local government highly values as cultural and historical assets of the city. The qilou buildings outside of the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area may be renovated by the municipal government, using similar methods.

The area also is often crowded during the holidays, which means it is easily accessible and popular for a lot of people. Since it is a pedestrian street shopping area, cars are not allowed within the area, which makes the area reasonably safe for people to walk around. In short, Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area has already met the promotion, and design approaches for a Main Street program. Given the fact that the area is a popular shopping place, the area should be able to financially support itself in the long term, which meets the economic vitality approach of a Main Street program. Thus, expanding the shopping area to the nearby qilou street may be feasible, because of its location. Upon the success of the testing project, the Main Street approaches may expand further to other qilou streets in the city (shown in Figures 4.3 to 4.5).

Figure 4.1: The entrance to the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 4.2: Qilou street outside of the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 4.3: A qilou street in Guangzhou. A viaduct was built within a historic qilou district. There is no sign in the area to introduce the historic assets to visitors. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 4.4: A qilou street in Guangzhou. There is no sign in the area to introduce the historic assets to visitors. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
In order to expand the Main Street approach to other qilou streets, the municipal government of Guangzhou has to promote the historic qilou assets to the visitors. As shown in Figures 4.2 to 4.5, there are qilou streets located in other parts of the city. However, the promotion approach of these areas needs to be handled better. Currently, there are no signs in the nearby areas that can introduce these qilou streets to the visitors. In order to bring visitors to these qilou streets, the municipal government of Guangzhou may place signs at the entrance of the qilou areas, so that the tourists may know there are other qilou streets available for them to explore. In addition, since the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area is well-known among the visitors,
information about other qilou districts can be promoted in the area so that customers know that there are other shopping options.

The organizational approach of a Main Street program involves more than just the municipal government. It is important that the business owners in the shopping area also get involved in the process. Since the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area is a purely commercial district, there are no residents that the local government can invite to a planning meeting at the moment, but it may consider inviting the business tenants.137 When the municipal government in Guangzhou decided to apply the Main Street approaches to other qilou streets, the municipal cultural bureau can also invite the residents to the meeting since some of the residents are using their qilou buildings as both their business buildings and homes. The business owners and the residents of the future Guangzhou City’s Main Street program district can also petition the Cultural Bureau to address their concerns on the government’s actions toward the area.

In terms of the Eight Principles, there are a few actions that the Guangzhou City government can take. First, the Main Street program needs to be balanced, which covers all the approaches of a Main Street program. This is the reason that inviting business owners of the district to the planning meetings are critical since they can address the needs of the district to the decision makers. Second, the government can set up small goals for the district to achieve in a few years. Thus, this section recommends that the Guangzhou City Main Street program should begin by expanding the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area to the close by qilou street. The area may be a demonstration project that showcases what a Main Street program can do for a community before expanding it to other areas in the municipal historic district.

In the US, the nonprofit Main Street programs are often self-funded. Given the political system in Guangzhou, the self-support approach does not apply here where if the government is

to use series of planning approaches modeled in the Main Street program. However, other qilou streets might face financial challenges at the beginning of the process. Thus, the government may provide some qilou with additional financial support. The self-help principle is also related to the public and private partnership principle. In public planning meetings, business owners and residents can tell the decision makers that they need financial support in their area.

Since the Guangzhou municipal government had already created a historic qilou district in the city, the identifying historic resources principle had been done, as shown in Figure 4.5. In terms of the quality principle, it is up to the local government and stakeholder to work together to create different plans for different areas of the historic district. In addition, the qilou buildings that are located on the outskirts of the Beijing Road Pedestrian Street shopping area should be renovated as the same as the ones that are in the shopping area. Renovating other qilou buildings in the municipal historic district address the change and action-oriented principles for a Main Street program. Cleaning the mold and growing vegetation on the exteriors of the qilou buildings is a step that may be noticed by the district’s residents. It can also help to restore the confidence among the business owners and resident of the qilou streets.

**Creating a Main Street program in Macau**

Macau’s New Road area has some of the best-preserved qilou buildings in the city. Qilou buildings surrounded the Senado Square are even included as contributing parts of the Macau Heritage Centre, which is listed on UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites (WHS). However, the main preservation focus for the Macanese government at the moment is the WHS properties themselves, not the buildings within the buffer zones. This practice may explain why the qilou buildings located outside of the Senado Square have minor visible issues, such as growing mold and vegetation on their façade. These issues can be solved by simple clearing methods. Since the
building owners in Macau also own the lands that the buildings built upon, the cultural bureau in Macau cannot change the buildings’ exterior without the owners’ permission. This regulation is different than the way it is set up in Mainland China. In other words, the renovation of these qilou buildings requires the cooperation of the building owners and the local authority.  

Besides minor renovation works, the New Road area already has the assets needed to for a Main Street program's creation. The issue for the small business located in the area, however, is that the shops next to the Senado Square do not have as many customers as the ones located at the Square, as shown in Figures 4.6 and 4.7. For years, the promotional focus for the Macau cultural bureau has been the properties that are part of the WHS. In other words, there are business assets located in the New Road area, but the government in Macau has not done enough work to promote the small businesses next to the Senado Square and to drive capitals there. The Main Street program’s promotion and economic vitality approaches may help the situation. The Macau cultural bureau can promote the small business in the nearby qilou streets at the Senado Square so that the entire New Road area can remain profitable in the long term.

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Figure 4.6: Customers at the Senado Square. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
Figure 4.7: An empty storefront in the New Road area. Photo by Qiming Li, 2017.
The design approach, which includes the renovation works for historic buildings, needs to take place in the New Road area, due to the qilou buildings’ current conditions. The renovation work is linked to the organization approach. Due to the legal framework in Macau, the cultural bureau, which oversees all the historic non-movable properties in Macau, must make an agreement with the building owners before renovating the qilou buildings. However, the renovation works may also take another approach that the renovation works could take. Instead of having the government fixing the exterior issues for the building owners, the government can let the owners solve the issues by themselves. As stated in the WHS nomination form, the Macanese government had already created some guidelines for the buildings’ owners to follow, if they wanted to fix the building themselves.\(^{139}\) Since the organizational approach requires the involvement of both the government and the private parties, the cultural bureau should invite the local residents and business owners to its Main Street meetings. The Macau Main Street program executive board should also have representatives of residents and business owner present.

In terms of the Eight Principles, this section recommends a few actions for the cultural bureau to take. First, the Bureau has to create a comprehensive renovation plan with the building owners in the district buffer. The government does, however, have the right to regulate the WHS area.\(^{140}\) It is critical for the governing body to make agreements with the owners in terms of the renovating methods and timelines.\(^{141}\) Secondly, upon creating a clear timeline for the renovation work, the cultural bureau needs to let the building owners know when to expect people to come and clean their buildings’ exteriors. Since the regulations in Macau allow the building owners to make changes to buildings on their own, an alternative for cleaning these buildings can be having


\(^{140}\) Ibid.

\(^{141}\) Du Juan, “Macau’s New Road Area is a Preservation District”
the building owners conduct such action by themselves. In this practice, however, the cultural bureau needs to review and approve the building owners’ renovation proposals prior to the undertakings, as stated in the local regulation. In the long term, the cultural bureau could host regular planning meetings, so that the public can be aware of what comes next for the Main Street program and also address their needs to the governing body.

Applying the Main Street Approaches to Meizhou

In the US, the purpose of the Main Street approach would be to leverage existing assets and encourage entrepreneurialism among existing business and residents. However, due to the current financial situation of the qilou district in Meizhou, the money needed for the preservation practice in Meizhou has to come from somewhere else. In other words, at the current stage, the qilou district in Meizhou needs financial investment from outside of the area, in order to implement the Main Street approaches there. This practice is different than most of its counterparts in the US.

In terms of seeking investment from elsewhere, there are a few possible options. One of these alternatives may inline with the Main Street design approach since it involves the improvement of Meizhou qilou district’s transportation choices. The first option may be bringing Meizhou residents from the “New City” (or the now-city center) to the historic district and also to attract tourists to the district. The qilou district is not very accessible via public transportation. As some of the current occupants of the buildings told the author, they had to use their own vehicles to get to the district.\textsuperscript{142} Thus, improving public transportation options for the district is necessary. Due to the fact that the streets of the district are very narrow, only 8.5 meters (or 28 feet) wide, it is not reasonable for public buses to travel inside the district.\textsuperscript{143} The alternate

\textsuperscript{142} Author’s exchange with the current occupants of the buildings summer, 2017.
solution to the issue is having busses go around the district and make frequent stops for the residents. In addition, adding some traffic lights at each end of the streets will be beneficial for both the pedestrians and the vehicle drivers.

In addition, to bring people to the district via roads, the other choice is to transport people via the water, such as providing water taxi for people to come into the district. Since a Main Street is about leveraging the existing historical assets, this practice not only honors the historic tradition of the district, as it was in the 1930s, when people shipped goods into the district via boats. This practice may potentially create more jobs for the district’s residents.¹⁴⁴

Tourism, however, is a long-term solution for the qilou district in Meizhou. In order to renovate the qilou district, creating a short-term investment plan is also needed. A short-term investment may either come from the provincial government, or from business people from neighboring cities. In order to attract money from outside of the city, Meizhou City government needs to promote the district, which is the promotion approach of a Main Street program.

Accordingly, this section recommends the following actions for the future governing body for the Meizhou Main Street program. First, the district needs money. Thus, the cultural bureau has to either petition the provincial government for financial support or seek private investors. In terms of seeking private investors, Meizhou’s officials can send people to Kaiping and ask the experienced officials for their advice. Second, upon getting enough financial support, the cultural bureau in Meizhou needs to create a comprehensive renovation plan for the district, which includes documentation of the buildings in the district, renovation methods, and a timeline. When creating a renovation plan, the decision makers in Meizhou may once again ask the planners in other cities for advice. Third, Meizhou’s Main Street approach should start on a small scale, so that the cultural bureau can examine the successful and challenging parts of the program.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.
before expanding it district-wide. In the long-term, Meizhou’s cultural bureau has to continue to find ways and means to promote the district, so that it can attract visitors there. In terms of promotion, Meizhou’s cultural bureau can work with the Hakka people in the district, so that people in the “New City” may come to the qilou district and experience a different culture.

**Managing Kaiping’s qilou district as a Main Street program**

The preservation plan for the qilou district in Kaiping has already been undertaken, which was discussed in Chapter three. This section therefore only discusses the current process briefly and how the district might be managed as a Main Street program.

In Kaiping, all the qilou buildings in the district have been purchased by the local government, with financial support from business people. The residents of the district will also move to the city as part of the plan. The district will be turned into a mixed-used movie set and theme park. As of summer, 2017, renovation work has begun in the district. After completion, the future theme park and movie set mixed-used district will be managed by the local cultural bureau and a private real estate company. In other words, the project is more than just rehabilitation of the existing buildings. It is transformation.

Considering the fact that the current residents of the qilou district have not been involved in the renovating process; it is uncertain whether these people will come back once the process is completed; and the real estate company and the future residents of the district may not know enough history about the area, creating a Main Street program in Kaiping’s qilou district is unlikely. However, the qilou district may benefit from some of the approaches and principles of a Main Street program.

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Since the municipal government of Kaiping has already created a preservation plan for the district, and also decided that the district will be managed by a real estate company in parts, implementing new organizational and design approaches for the district is unrealistic. However, the municipal government of Kaiping may continue to advertise the district, similar to the promotion approach of a Main Street program. The cultural bureau in Kaiping may use online platforms, place advertisements in newspapers and work with news networks to ensure that more people can know about the district. In terms of the Main Street program’s economic vitality approach, since Kaiping’s preservation plan is meant to turn the district into a tourist spot, and there were already visitors there, it is possible that a fully renovated qilou district may generate more revenue for the area.

In terms of the principles of a Main Street program, such as identifying and capitalizing on existing assets, the urban planner in Kaiping may consider focusing on how to generate revenue from the exiting qilou district itself, and not to construct new buildings in the district, which will damage the integrality and authenticity of the area.
Chapter 5: UNESCO World Heritage Sites

There are numerous historic sites around the world that are not only significant to a specific region of people, but also to all mankind. Some of these historic sites are designated by the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as World Heritage Sites (WHS). At the moment, China has a total of 36 cultural-related sites listed as WHS, including the Historic Centre of Macau, which is part of this study. While this thesis does not argue that the qilou buildings in the selected cities should be designated as WHS at the moment, it examines how the qilou districts in these cities can be managed using WHS management principles developed in Macau. This chapter first examines the Historic Centre of Macau, as there are some qilou buildings included in the district. This chapter then looks at other cultural-related sites in Mainland China, because three selected cities are within its jurisdiction. Finally, this chapter discusses whether the qilou buildings in China can be managed as WHS in similar ways.

A Brief Introduction to UNESCO World Heritage Sites

UNESCO WHS program was created in 1972, as a result of the signing of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World’s Cultural and Natural Heritage. The goal of the convention was to “[focus] on the preservation of cultural sites” and “[deal] with the conservation of nature.” The nomination process for a WHS is often long and complicated. Each of the State Parties usually submits nominations to the organizing World Heritage Committee for review and approval. In China, if a historic property is listed on the national level heritage preservation list, “Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National

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Level” (hereinafter “National Heritage Preservation List”), that site is that managed by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, within the Ministry of Culture.\footnote{The State Council of the People’s Republic of China. “Major Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level”. State Administration of Cultural Heritage. Accessed March 11, 2018. http://www.sach.gov.cn/col/col1644/index.html.} The Ministry of Culture is also responsible for nominating historic sites to UNESCO. In other words, if in the future, any of these qilou districts is to become a WHS, the Ministry of Culture will be in charge of completing the process and submit the documents to UNESCO.

**WHS Management Model in Macau**

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, Macau’s historic district, also known as the Macau Historic Centre, has been included as a WHS since 2005. The Historic Centre is managed by Macau’s cultural bureau.\footnote{The State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People’s Republic of China. “The Historic Centre of Macao”. World Heritage Scanned Nomination, File 1110. July 15, 2005. http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1110.pdf.} The Historic Centre itself is separated into two zones on the Macau peninsula. Each section is surrounded by a buffer zone. The qilou buildings that this study focuses on are mainly located on the western side of the peninsula (zone one, see Figure 1).

In order to manage the Historic Centre more efficiently, the cultural bureau has created a few regulations and guidelines for the preservation practices in the area. In summary, buildings in the buffer zones are subject to the bureau’s review and approval process, if “any construction, reconstruction or alterations” take place inside these areas.\footnote{Ibid.}
Figure 5.1: Buffer zone 1 of the Macau Heritage Centre. The New Road area, where people can find most of the qilou buildings in Macau is located in between properties 6 and 7. Image from: http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1110.pdf.

**WHS Management Model in Kaiping**

Kaiping’s qilou district is located in Chikan Town, which is surrounded by diaolou buildings. Diaolou buildings, in short, are similar to qilou buildings. Diaolou buildings also contain both Chinese and Western structural and decorative forms, but they were built for residential and defensive purposes. They are also not connected to one another like qilou buildings. The diaolou buildings were inscribed on WHS in 2007, due to their unique functions.¹⁵²

In terms of ownership, the government owns the lands that these buildings stand upon. The diaolou buildings are “collectively and individually owned.”¹⁵³ In this case, agreements had been

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¹⁵³ Ibid.
signed between the government and the building owners. While private parties own these buildings, the Kaiping municipal Cultural Bureau has the authority to manage these buildings.\footnote{Kaiping City Government. “Kaiping Diaolou and Villages.” Kaiping City Government. Accessed May 29, 2018. http://www8.kaiping.gov.cn/test/dlshenbao/wenda.html.}

Besides the National Land Regulations, and Cultural Relics Protection Law, Kaiping City government has also created a local regulation in an effort to preserve diaolou buildings in the city. In short, it is prohibited to build new buildings within the diaolou villages, and private parties are not allowed to alter the exteriors of these buildings.\footnote{Kaiping City Government. “Kaiping Diaolou and Villages-Regulations” Kaiping City Government. Accessed May 29, 2018. http://www8.kaiping.gov.cn/test/dlshenbao/4.html.}

![Figure 5.2: A map showing the diaolou villages in Kaiping City. The city’s qilou district is located in Chikan Town. Image from: http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1112.pdf.](image)

**Managing Qilou Districts Based on WHS Models in China**

Due to the differences between the laws in Mainland China and Macau, it may be more reasonable for the qilou districts in Guangzhou and Meizhou follow the Kaiping diaolou model.
The qilou district in Macau may follow the current Macau Historic Centre model. Since the municipal government in Kaiping has already drafted a preservation plan for its qilou district to be managed in partnership with a real estate company, this section therefore only discusses what actions the Kaiping Cultural Bureau may take.

**Possible Approaches for Guangzhou and Meizhou**

For Guangzhou and Meizhou, the followings are a few potential approaches that the municipal cultural bureaus may take if the decision makers in these cities eventually decide to manage their qilou districts as a WHS.

- First, the professionals within the historic preservation field may create a comprehensive development plan. There are a few universities in China that these cities’ Cultural Bureaus can consider working with. Kaiping’s diaolou WHS plan was created with the partnership of Peking University and the University of Hong Kong helped Macau’s Cultural Bureau for their plan.\(^{156}\) The Guangzhou and Meizhou Cities can reach out to these schools once again for their cooperation since these universities have experiences of doing similar projects before.

- Second, the Cultural Bureaus can create boundaries for the qilou districts, and guidelines and regulations for historic preservation practices that will take place in the districts. Renovating the qilou buildings can be done with the partnership of private firms or by the Cultural Bureaus’ own professionals.

- Third, the selected cities’ cultural bureaus can communicate with the Cultural Bureau in Kaiping, to discuss the strengths and weakness of the WHS in Kaiping, so

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that these the selected cities’ decision makers may make fewer mistakes during the process.

- Finally, similar to the WHS in Kaiping, the selected cities’ Cultural Bureaus can make agreements with building owners. The building owners can continue to occupy the qilou buildings but grant the Cultural Bureaus to authority to manage the districts, in terms of their exterior alterations.

Possible Approaches for Kaiping

Since the urban planners in Kaiping have already designed a revitalization plan for its qilou district, this section therefore only discusses the possible approaches that may be incorporated into the plan currently under formulation.

Kaiping’s qilou district management policies can be similar to the current diaolou village management plans. There are, however, a few differences between the two building types. Qilou buildings are more characteristic of a large urban setting, but diaolou buildings are located in small village settings. Moving forward, there can be two offices within the Kaiping cultural bureau, one in charge of the qilou district and the other continuing to manage the diaolou villages. In addition, Kaiping City can also consider creating a local regulation to govern the historic preservation practices in the qilou district similar to the one created for diaolou villages.

Possible Approaches for Macau

Since Macau has already created a comprehensive policy for the qilou buildings in the WHS buffer zone, no recommendations are made. However, the Macau Cultural Bureau could consider the possibility of creating an office that works exclusively on the listed properties of the WHS, and another office that manages the qilou buildings in the buffer zone, if it has not been done yet.
By doing so, the Bureau can run more efficiently, as its employers can specialize in buffer zone regulations and the actual WHS listed building requirements.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis was written for the purpose of filling the gap of the current research that has been done in China about preserving historic qilou buildings. This thesis covered the historical development of the qilou districts and their significance; the current conditions of these districts, the applicable laws and regulations that govern the preservation practices in the selected cities, and the potential legal challenges in terms of landownerships; US-based Main Street program approaches; and the UNESCO WHS model.

This study also discussed the current conditions of the qilou districts, which may be summarized as the lack of official recognition at the national level; recent urban renewal projects conducted within the districts; not receiving financial support from the local governments, and the uncertain future for the districts. This thesis mentioned that the Cultural Relics Protection Law governs all the preservation practices in Mainland China, and how the Interim Regulations Concerning the Assignment and Transfer of the Right to the Use of the State-owned Land may affect preservation policies in terms of landownerships. In addition, this study explained why Macau has its own set of laws and regulations for preservation practices.

This thesis then analyzed the bottom-up Main Street. The Main Street program was created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1977 as a solution for towns that were struggling financially, with a specific focus on historic commercial districts. The introduction of the Main Street program was followed by a discussion on whether a Main Street program may be created in the selected cities in similar ways.

Finally, this study examined two UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS) in China, Macau Historic Centre and Kaiping Diaolou Villages, and how each of the qilou districts may benefit from the WHS model.
The Main Street Program vs. The UNESCO Model

Regardless of which one of the models might be more feasible in the selected cities, placing qilou building districts on the National Heritage Preservation List could arguably be the very first step of preserving them. It is very often the case in China that if a given historical site is on a heritage preservation list, that place is more likely to receive more financial support from the government. Getting some of the qilou streets or districts on a given heritage preservation list would be critical for many struggling communities, such as the qilou district in Meizhou City, one of the poorest cities in Guangdong Province.

In Mainland China, governments have the right to seize qilou buildings and control these buildings’ physical appearance. In addition, according to applicable laws, and also considering the political system in Mainland, it is nearly impossible to create a Main Street program in the Guangzhou, Kaiping, and Meizhou, without the involvement of the local authorities. A Main Street program is often meant to have the locals getting together and solves the problems facing their communities without a lot of involvement from the government. Mainland China’s top-down centralized political system conflicts the bottom-up approaches of a Main Street program. Thus, creating Main Street programs, which led by private citizens in the selected cities in Mainland, is very unlikely. Nevertheless, there are some alternative solutions, considering the Main Street approaches may be beneficial to these cities. In this case, the governing body of the Main Street program is most likely to be the cultural bureaus in each city. In terms of the involvement from the private citizens, the residents and the business owners of these cities petitioning the governing body with suggestions. In addition, the citizens can pursue legal options to protect their rights, as stated in the Administrative Procedure Law.

The UNESCO model is a top-down historic preservation program, and a familiar model to the Chinese government since China already hosts several WHS. Thus, the UNESCO model may be a better fit for the selected cities in Mainland. Although this thesis does not suggest that qilou districts should be included on WHS at the moment, but it might be an option in the future.

Since Macau has a different political system than Mainland China, and it is also not subject to the national laws discussed in this thesis, it may be possible to create a Main Street program there. However, based on the fact that the WHS model is not new to the Macanese government, it may be reasonable to follow the current WHS model first and then explore the possibilities of forming a Main Street program in Macau later.

Conclusion

Given the political system and legal challenges facing historic preservation practices in Mainland China, the UNESCO model may work better in the selected Mainland cities. However, since Macau has its own set of laws and regulations, it is still possible that a Main Street program may be created there.
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