

Qilou: Where Freedom Takes Shape

Ruled under numerous foreign imperial governments—from the Qing Dynasty to the Empire of Japan to the Kuomintang—for almost three centuries, Taiwan developed as an important trading center due to its crucial location and abundant natural resources. During Qing's sovereignty, merchants from mainland China clustered around the western ports in central and southern Taiwan. Along with goods and skills, they brought with them a type of shophouse local to Southern China—*Qilou* (騎樓, literally “riding building”). Densely packed in rows in town centers, *Qilou* form arcades with colonnades supporting the projecting eave or floors above the sidewalks, offering a collective public space for commerce and pedestrians (Fig. 1). Walking down a bustling arcade in commercial districts such as Dadaocheng in Taipei today is like traversing through time, with Taiwanese history crystalized in these buildings. It is not an exaggeration to say Taiwan is a nation built on *Qilou*. Although some effort has gone into documenting these buildings, the scope has been limited and the mentality remains treating them as quirky colonial artifacts. **This project, Where Freedom Takes Shape, will analyze how *Qilou* endure and evolve through history and show this unique architectural form's crucial role in fostering the vibrant culture and society in Taiwan today.**

Incredibly flexible, the *Qilou* typology absorbs political, cultural, and economic forces and reinvents itself through history, which is evident in plan, section, and decoration (Figs. 1-4). Since the Qing Dynasty, *Qilou* have had to balance between the desire to provide more storefronts along the road and private courtyard living while respecting traditional *Fengshui* for both commercial and domestic prosperity (Fig. 4c). Beginning in the 18th century, each Taiwanese city traded with particular cities on the mainland, and as a result *Qilou* in each took the form found in those cities. After the Opium Wars, *Qilou* began to pick up Western design elements as an influx of foreign investment reshaped the economy. Once the Japanese Empire took control of Taiwan, it followed the European model of colonial empire in imposing European architectural styles to reshape local identity and project power. *Qilou* put on a new skin and adjusted to house larger commercial activities and a denser population (Figs. 4a and 4d). Similarly, as the Kuomintang government imported the International Style to modernize society in the 20th century, strip windows and Bauhaus railings started to show up on *Qilou*. In effect, *Qilou* offer a thread of spatial continuity across time—a place where Taiwanese people formed distinct cultural customs and traditions that flourish to this day. Thanks to their adaptability, *Qilou* have today become a living embodiment of Taiwan's freespirted culture, filled with the color and chaos of urban life as shopkeepers and residents make each arcade their own.

Although *Qilou* in Taiwan embody a rich history, little design analysis has been done on their formal evolution and shifting civic role. Traveling by car along the coast of Taiwan, I will use major cities that were historic trading centers as hubs and visit the smaller townships around them. I intend to sketch, diagram, photograph, and document the defining features—façade, arcade, courtyard, interior organization, typology, user pattern—of selected *Qilou* for different uses from 1750 to the present day.

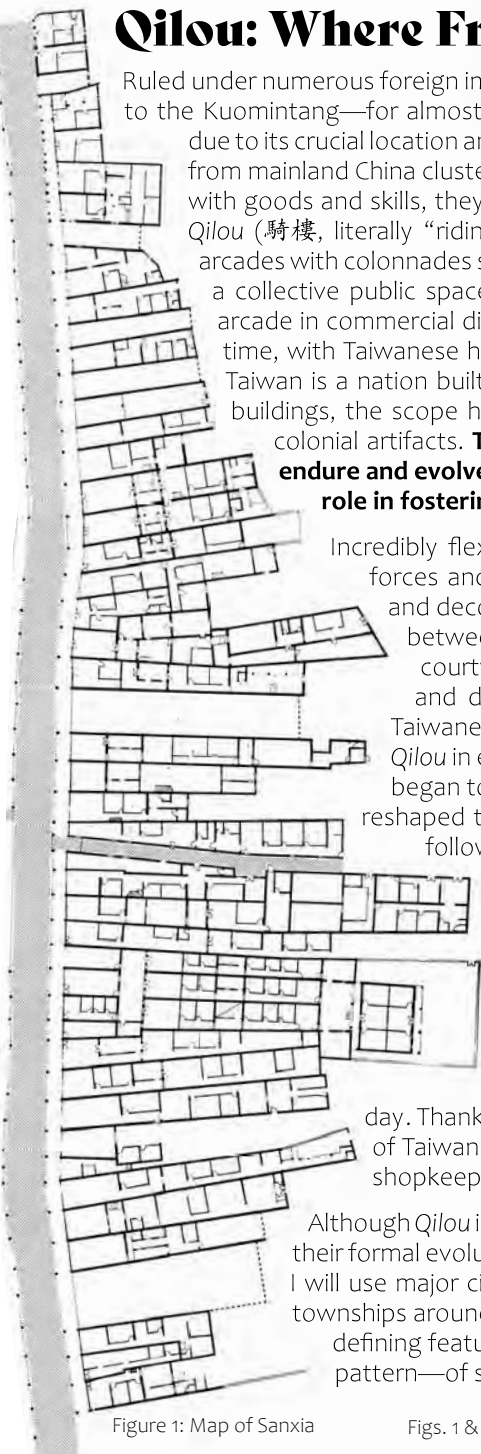


Figure 1: Map of Sanxia

Figs. 1 & 4 from 台灣傳統長形連棟式店舖住宅之研究 Figs. 2 & 3 from 台灣古建築圖解事典

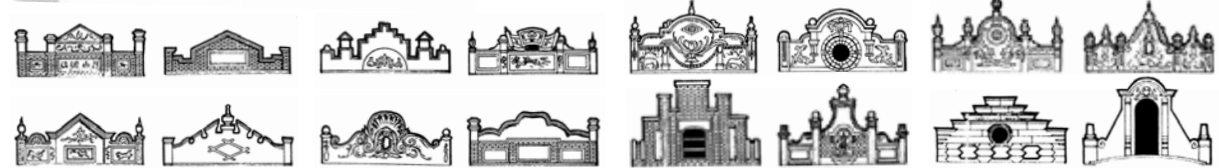


Figure 2: Catalog of Decorative Pediments and Parapets

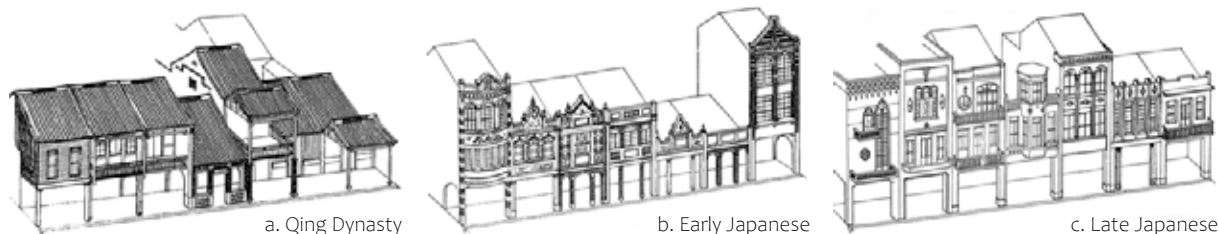
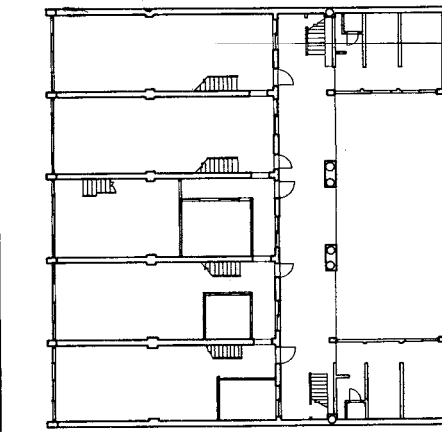
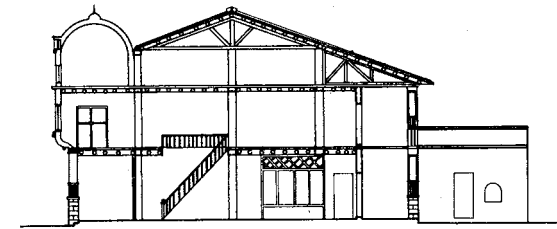
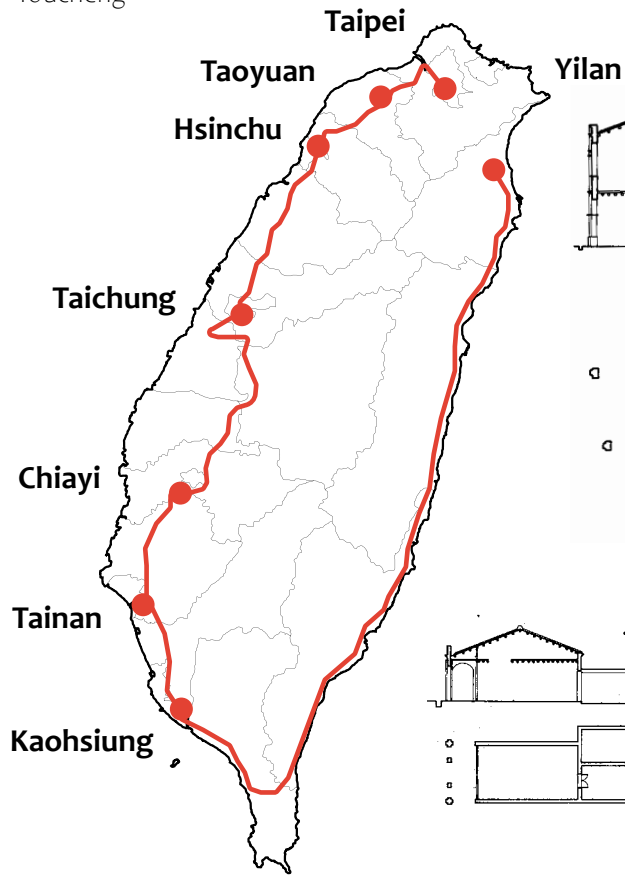


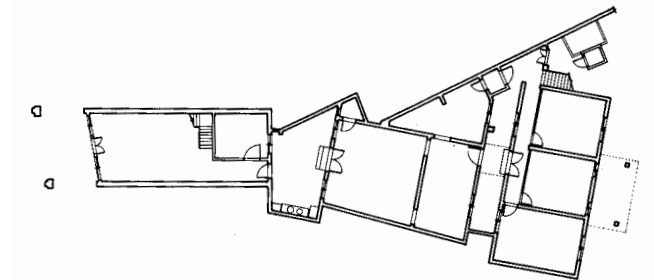
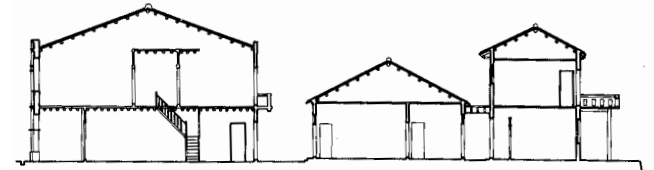
Figure 3: Evolution of Qilou from Qing Dynasty to Late Japanese Era

Itinerary

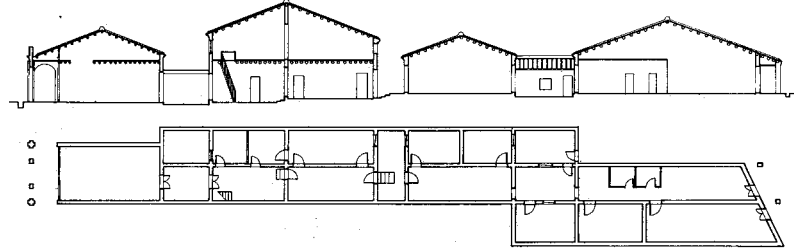
Taipei Region Tamsui, Monga, Dadaocheng, Shenkeng	Day 1 - 8
Taoyuan Region Daxi, Sanxia, Longtan, Sanken, Xinwu	Day 8-18
Hsinchu Region Hukou, Beipu, Fugang, Guanxi	Day 18-25
Taichung Region Lukang, Dali, Nantun, Puli, Zhanghua	Day 25-35
Chiayi Region Puzi, Hsiluo, Dalin, Beigang, Huwei	Day 35-40
Tainan Region Yanshui, Xinhua, Jingliao, Qiaonan	Day 40-45
Kaohsiung Region Qishan, Pingtung	Day 45-47
Yilan Region Toucheng	Day 47-50



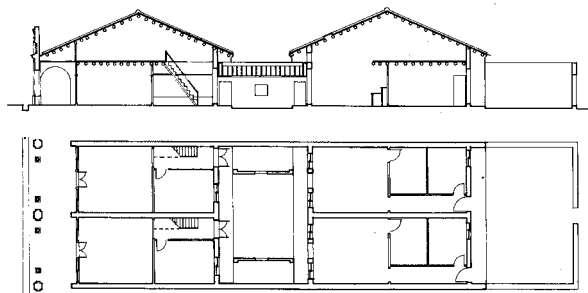
a. Japanese Era Qilou with Ceremonial Dome in Fugang



b. Qing Era Qilou Expanding to Utilize Available Space in Beipu



c. Qing Era Qilou Fitting Courtyard Between Two Streets in Sanxia



d. Japanese Era Qilou with Baroque Front and Chinese Back in Daxi

Figure 4: Selected Qilou Ground Floor Plans and Sections



Monga



Dadaocheng



Hsiluo



Hukou



Zhanghua



Sanxia

Budget

Airfare	\$1,500
Transportation (Car Rental)	\$3,700
Accommodation (\$50/day)	\$2,500
Food (\$20/day)	\$1,000
Guide and Admission	\$500
Contingency	\$800
Total	\$10,000