

A mingling of East and West

Cities in Hainan feature a distinct architectural style brought back from Southeast Asia

By HUANG YIMING
AND HAO NAN

haonan@chinadaily.com.cn

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1911), a large proportion of Chinese ventured into *Nanyang* — the term for Southeast Asian countries and regions such as Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia — to carve out a living. Some returned, bringing back not only a variety of goods but the architectural styles of their far-flung adopted homes.

Many Chinese who returned to Hainan province were influenced by an architectural form they called *qilou*, or arcade houses. The style was widely used throughout Southeast Asia and melds several European architectural designs.

In Hainan province, the facade of a building built in the *qilou* style appears both exotic and very Chinese, with dragons, phoenix and auspicious flowers engraved into the frontage.

The province's first *qilou* building was built in the shop-lined Bo'ai North Street in Haikou, capital of Hainan.

In Haikou, there are about 600 *qilou* buildings concentrated on 12 streets that stretch for 1.2 square kilometers. Built by Chinese returnees after the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), it is the largest cluster of preserved *qilou* buildings in China.

In 2010, the 12 streets underwent renovations. One such thoroughfare, Zhongshan Street, is now open to the public and is a popular local tourist attraction.

Another area of Hainan where *qilou* buildings can be found is Qionghai, the home of many overseas Chinese who returned to the mainland.

A castle-like building in the town of Boao in Qionghai, nicknamed "the top house", was built in 1934 by four brothers surnamed Cai who lived and made a fortune in Indonesia.

The mansion comprises two main buildings at the center and two two-story buildings on each side and courtyards at the front and back. It has 50 rooms, 80 doors and 104 windows and sits on an area of more than 600 square meters. The Cai family home is currently a tourist hotspot in Qionghai.

The town of Zhongyuan in Qionghai is another area that consists of Chinese returnees who once lived in *Nanyang*.

They not only brought back the exotic architectural styles of Southeast Asia, but also many of their goods, such as coffee. Today, many



Top: A popular street in Haikou that features the architectural style called *qilou*. **Above left:** Chinese returnees from Southeast Asia perform in the town of Xinglong. **Above center:** The castle-like building that once belonged to the Cai family is a hotspot in Qionghai. **Above right:** The town of Boao in Qionghai.

PHOTOS BY HUANG YIMING / CHINA DAILY

locals in Hainan brew their coffee in big iron kettles and drain it through cotton fabric or iron filters.

Coffee arrived in Hainan in the 1940s when Chinese Indonesian Chen Xianzhang introduced robusta coffee beans to the Fushan area of Chengmai county in northern Hainan. In southeastern Hainan, the town of Xinglong has more than 30 coffee shops that offer authentic Southeast Asian snacks.

Xinglong Overseas Chinese Farm is the largest farm for overseas Chinese in China. Since the 1950s, more than 13,000 overseas Chinese

from 21 different countries and regions have relocated to the farm. Most of them speak foreign languages and some have still retained the lifestyle and customs of Southeast Asian countries.

Across the province, people like to gather in coffee shops and chat for a long time. There is even a nickname for this kind of leisure time: "old daddy's tea", a phrase that originated from Chinese returnees who once lived in *Nanyang*.

According to historical records, Hainan witnessed two waves of immigration out of China. One

occurred during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), after the explorer Zheng He commanded expeditions to Southeast Asia, the Middle East and East Africa from 1405 to 1433. The other wave occurred in the Qing Dynasty after the first Opium War ended in 1842.

Figures from the *Collection of Historical Documents Concerning Emigration of Chinese Laborers* show more than 240,000 Hainan natives went abroad between 1876 and 1898. Today, about 2 million Hainanese live in Southeast Asia.

Xing Yixi, whose father went to

Thailand as a teenager, said he currently lives 20 days of every month in China, with the rest of the time in Thailand. Xing first went back to Hainan in 2003 and invested 6 million yuan (\$967,200) to build a road in his father's name.

Chinese people's experiences moving to *Nanyang* early last century have been adapted into Hainan local Qiong Opera.

Venturing into Nanyang, for example, has been critically acclaimed in China since the performance was held at the Mei Lanfang Theatre in Beijing in 2009.

Province works to protect unique ethnic cultures

By LIU XIAOLI AND HAO NAN

haonan@chinadaily.com.cn

While the picturesque natural landscapes in Hainan province are the biggest draw for tourists, the island's unique tropical culture and ethnic diversity are just as captivating.

The province is home to many ethnic groups, with the Li and Miao people particularly prominent on the island.

The Li were the earliest settlers and developers of Hainan, with their first-recorded appearance on the island traced back 3,000 years ago.

The Miao people are the second-largest ethnic group in Hainan, with more than 400 years of history in the province.

The two ethnic groups are highly dissimilar, each with their own distinct styles in clothing, dancing, architecture, handicraft and religions. Both, however, have made great efforts to preserve their traditions.

Bamboo rice, glutinous rice wine and *yucha*, a fermented dish made up of slices of raw fish and cooked rice, are typical foods for the Li and Miao people.

In recent years, as the regional tourist industry develops, the Hainan government has made every effort to protect and highlight the two ethnic cultures.

The Binlang Valley Cultural Tourism Zone in Baoting county, for example, has preserved the ancient buildings of the Li and their traditional ways of life.

Built in 1998, the tourism destination is devoted to the protection



Top: The Miao people are the second-largest ethnic group in Hainan. **Above left and above right:** The Li people were the earliest settlers of Hainan province.

and promotion of the ancient ethnic culture. Visitors can enjoy live performances by the Li people, tour a folk culture museum, a ceramic art museum and a totem gallery and experience 10 related national intangible cultural heritage items, such as how the Li people make cloth out of tree bark and build their boat-shaped houses.

The zone currently has more than 1,000 employees.

Chen Guodong, the zone's deputy general manager, said they are trying to build the valley into an international tourist brand to promote the Li and Miao ethnic cultures around the world.

Another must-see site in Baoting county is the Yanoda Rainforest Cultural Tourism Zone, which opened in 2008.

It is a national tourism destination and a model for the local culture industry. Its recreational programs, including a 600-meter zipline through the forest, have attracted lots of adventurous tourists. The zone is also home to about 1,500 kinds of trees and tropical flowers.

Yanoda currently has two parks open to the public and has a total investment of 300 million yuan (\$48.4 million). Construction on another three parks in the zone will conclude in 2023.

In the zone, people say *yanoda* as a way of saying hello.

It is also known as *ya nuo da* in Chinese. Zhang Tao, the zone's president, said the phrase has given the three Chinese characters new meanings, which individually refer to innovation, commitment and practice.



The statue of Guanyin Bodhisattva stands 108 meters tall on a manmade island just off Nanshan.

Two mountain destinations for bliss and stone carvings

By LIU XIAOLI AND FU CHAO

fuchao@chinadaily.com.cn

In Hainan province, Dongshan Mountain and the Nanshan Scenic Area, the two most famous Buddhism destinations in the province, attract many Buddhists from across China every year.

According to historians, Buddhism came to Hainan during the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907), with the Chinese monk Jianzhen an important figure.

Jianzhen, today known for promoting Buddhism in Japan, attempted to visit Japan six times from AD 743 to 754.

In AD 748, after the fifth attempt failed, Jianzhen passed by Hainan. According to legends, he and his disciples gave lectures on Dongshan Mountain, a significant event in popularizing Buddhism on the island.

Dongshan Mountain, dubbed as the First Mountain in Hainan and located in the city of Wanning, is home to a number of famous temples, most of which were built during the Tang Dynasty.

The mountain area covers some 10 square kilometers and is 184 meters high at its peak. Ancient temples and historic relics on the mountain are key cultural heritage sites in Hainan. The Chaoyin Temple is a very popular destination for overseas Chinese Buddhists.

Dongshan Mountain is also known for calligraphy works carved on its stones by literary figures from different dynasties.

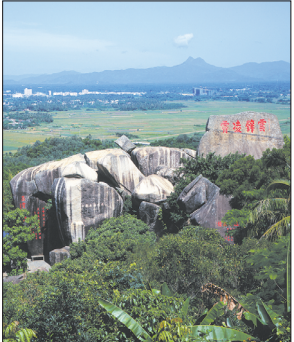
The stone carvings in Dongshan Mountain started during the Eastern Jin Dynasty (AD 317-420). On visits to the mountain, poets and essayists would sit and write and then assign sculptors to carve them out on stones. Today, the calligraphy works, all in various styles, attract art lovers from around the country.

More than a million tourists visit Dongshan Mountain annually. In 2013, the National Tourism Administration designated the mountain region as a national 4A tourist site (5A is the highest level).

While Dongshan Mountain is known for its stone carvings, the Nanshan Scenic Area in Sanya is known as the most blissful Buddhist destination. The name Nanshan originates from a popular Buddhist expression: "Good fortune is as much as the East Sea, longevity is as high as Nanshan".

The Nanshan Temple and the statue of Guanyin Bodhisattva are must-see sites. The stone statue stands 108 meters tall on a manmade island just off Nanshan and is larger than the Statue of Liberty. There is also a temple for Guanyin Bodhisattva on the island.

According to the tourism bureau of Sanya, approximately 4 million tourists visit the Nanshan Scenic Area each year, which tops all scenic sites in the city.



Dongshan Mountain is known for calligraphy works carved on its stones.