



Block of granite from the chapel of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia (Holy House of Mercy) in Macao, now in the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau (formerly the Leal Senado).

The Portuguese Chromosome

Reflections on the Formation of Macao's Identity in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

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INSIDE THE WALLS: THE URBAN SYSTEM AND THE SOCIAL WORLD OF MACAO

Our knowledge of the city's organisation, its spatial layout and the evolution and transformation of its physical form is still poor. There is a pressing need for a monograph on Macao's urban fabric, especially since among the myriad of Asian port cities stretching from Kilwa to Nagasaki, Macao was perhaps the only one to be truly "produced" by the Portuguese. Moreover, it played a leading role in the rejuvenation

of East Asia's urban structures in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a phenomenon that was clearly shaped by the Western presence and shown in the appearance of Macao in the late 1550s, of Nagasaki and Manila in the early 1570s and some fifty years later, of Batavia in 1619.

The present appearance of Macao cannot, in fact, be separated from its sixteenth century beginnings. Equally, the city cannot hide its roots or disguise the differing concepts of urbanization that form the basis of its creation and evolution. The truth is that Macao is a Portuguese city that was set on the coastline of the Chinese empire and that enjoyed the benefits of permanent contact with the urban centres of the Far East and of Southeast Asia. In a nutshell, Macao is a crossroads of urban systems.

Above all else, the city is Portuguese. In many aspects, Macao is like any Portuguese city from the period of the transition from the mediaeval to the modern world. Its inhabitants naturally sought to reproduce some aspects of the places they knew, as is

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visible in the structure of the space and the urban lifestyle itself. For example, similarities appear in the nature of the major buildings, specifically the city hall and the *Misericórdia* (House of Mercy), and in the many parish or monastic churches that were built in the city's early days. Daily life was structured around these spaces, which established themselves as the city's nerve centres. Indeed, it was in these public places that the city council announced its decisions, while the most important celebrations and meetings took place in the squares outside the main churches. Furthermore, the parish churches helped define specific areas inside the city, thereby contributing to the appearance of neighbourhoods.

Evidently, the Cathedral was the people's main reference point as they flocked through streets that had no fixed names and were known according to whoever lived there or to their position in relation to the cathedral. As was also true in mediaeval Portuguese cities, the prison was located next to the city hall, while there also was a main street (*rua direita*), the only one wide enough for celebrations of any significance. When the walls were built, the city acquired more elements of Western urban tradition. In contrast to those in Chinese cities, the wall was unconcerned with having a regular form, but instead follows the terrain. The towers housed cisterns, thus guaranteeing the city's water supply in the event of a siege. Instead of wickets, one finds gates, and the *Rossio de S. Francisco* reproduced the *rossios* (common lands) from Portuguese cities.

The Portuguese legacy was also found in the city's daily life. When inhabitants died, they left property to religious brotherhoods (*confrarias*). Public holidays celebrated the city's patron saints, and bullfights were held in the main street using bulls brought from the closest Chinese villages.

Yet this should not be taken to mean that Macao was a faithful copy of a Portuguese city. The men who built it were well aware of Asian urban structures, so it should come as no surprise that the city assimilated characteristics from the host area. Consequently, the influence of urbanization in the Southeast Asian islands merits consideration. The cities in question are predominantly non-fortified cities that grew up around the respective ports with no defined plan and in response to business opportunities. The lives of these cities revolved fundamentally around trade, as was

reflected in the population, the social organisation and the political structure. As happened in the Malay sultanates, entrance to Macao was via the port, an excellent one that the Portuguese never tired of praising and that was a perpetual source of envy for foreigners.

Thus, Macao also developed around the port and in the same disorganised manner, as noted by Diogo Caldeira do Rego in 1623. "Each [person] built for himself, ... which made this city very spread out, poorly armed and hard to defend." As will be shown, Macao is the result of informal expansion, which explains why detailed Portuguese maps of the city only appeared in the years of the "bureaucratic" rule of the viceroy, the Count of Linhares (1629-1635).

Cities like Macao have no need of walls. Indeed, it had none for over fifty years, and it was only an external threat that forced a change. The same happened in Melaka, where fortification work began in the 1560s in response to the assault on Aceh, and in Nagapattinam, whose defences date from when the Dutch attacked in the 1640s. This same phenomenon was repeated in the cities of the Malay sultanates, which started to build fortifications from the early seventeenth century onwards as a result of the concern caused by Dutch attacks. The problem in Macao was that building fortifications went against the rules established by the Middle Kingdom. For the Chinese, allowing Macao to become a walled city was tantamount to acknowledging its administrative autonomy.

Like any other port city, Macao was a cosmopolitan place, which housed a mixed population of Westerners and Asians. Besides the Portuguese, other Europeans also lived there, even in times of rivalry and competition. The city was also home to a broad range of Asian peoples: Japanese, Korean, Bengali, Siamese and a host of men and women from the Malay world. However, in contrast to the customary situation in Southeast Asian sultanates, they did not divide themselves up into neighbourhoods defined according to their respective places of origin. Finally, there were the slaves of the Portuguese, who lived in their masters' houses and evidently were unable to form autonomous communities. Among all these different groups, it seems that only the Japanese managed to maintain any sense of individuality.

As in the urban societies of the Southeast Asian islands, the power of Macao's oligarchy was measured by the number of dependants that its "important



Detail of a chest lid with a view of the city of Macao, 1746. Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, No. 2016P. Reproduced in a catalogue entitled *Cartografia de Macau, séculos XVI e XVII* (cartography of Macao, 16th and 17th centuries), Lisbon, Missão de Macau, 1997.

men” could organise and support. These groups undeniably formed a sizeable part of the population. First and foremost, these dependants were vital in the domestic environment, forming a mass of servants that ensured that the family unit functioned properly and contributed to their lord’s standing. Secondly, there were the armed slaves, who were almost always black or Japanese, and who guaranteed the oligarchy’s military and symbolic power.

These were the troops that turned quarrels between individuals into minor-scale wars that could disturb the entire city. Documents reveal that

these warriors that served the leading residents were often involved in fights and skirmishes, not infrequently heading off to Canton when the opportunity for doing business tempted them. However, unlike events in some Southeast Asian cities, there were no slave revolts during the period in question. Instead, the last wills of their masters often gave them their freedom and sometimes even some goods.

Last, but not least, we must consider the Chinese influence on Macao’s urban fabric. This is perfectly evident in the physical space, ranging from temples to

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ordinary buildings, and also appears in the bazaar – the city’s trading area – which bears no resemblance to anything in Portuguese cities. Yet it is the human side of the city that best mirrors the difference, as Macao constantly demonstrates its people’s dual origin. The Luso-Chinese mix appears in the language, in marriages, urban festivities and religious ceremonies, possibly explaining why the Middle Kingdom’s influence over Macao appears more in the organisation of the people than of the space.

Consequently, it is no surprise that Macao developed an institution that is characteristic of the Chinese urban system and that also appears in cities in the Southeast Asian islands where the influence of Chinese communities is most strongly felt. Macao had the *cabeças de ruas* (street-heads), people who were responsible for the inhabitants of each street or block. As a result, the city imposed means of urban control that were typically Chinese and whose purpose was to organise and fit people into society. Population records are one – perhaps the most important – aspect of this. This task was given in 1627 to the city’s Chinese “interpreter” and the “scribe”, who were to have “the list of Chinese street-heads with their names, and shops that they have on their lists.” They were also to avoid having “idle people on the land” and to organise “a list of all the ships from the land.” In 1691, the municipal council already had a list of all the Chinese people in the city, and anyone whose name did not appear should “go immediately up away within three days.”

Furthermore, following the example set by “up away” (i.e. Canton), the city started to close its gates during the night. During the seventeenth century, the city council revealed its constant concern to keep lists of and maintain a watchful eye on the Chinese population. Even so, Macao could never be compared in this matter to the other “European” cities in the region. In Manila, the Spanish kept the area within the walls exclusively for themselves, closing the Chinese up in the *parian*. The Dutch acted differently in Batavia, although as the *frijburgers* were mainly interested in making money and going home, they rarely established real roots. Macao was completely different. Miscegenation overcame segregation, not least because of “demographic engineering”. That is the sense of Jorge Pinto de Azevedo’s proposal, sent to King João IV in 1646: “the people are white, as in Portugal, and thus it is more propitious for creation

due to the happiness with which the Portuguese marry Chinese women, and from both these castes are born white children who are better than in most parts of this Orient.”

The Portuguese men showed no hesitation in marrying the local women, but there were also Portuguese women in the city, such as Beatriz de Sousa, who died in 1637. In fact, Portuguese women were also involved in miscegenation, marrying Chinese converts to Christianity. One such case was Francisca Pires, who had a son in Portugal but still married Luís Figueira, a “local man” in Macao.

This “promiscuity” appeared constantly. The “Chinese Christians” lived alongside the Portuguese; moreover, conversion was synonymous with legal integration. The new converts could inherit the goods of “Old Christians”, thereby creating new ties and commitments. For example, Agostinho Varela only left his goods to his relatives on the condition that they converted to Christianity. If they did not, the *Misericórdia* would be his sole heir.

Moreover, the Portuguese habitually bought Chinese children. These *muitsai* or *atai* often circulated in the *Estado da Índia* like any other good, or alternatively stayed in Macao, working as the servants of the Portuguese residents. Even so, there can be no doubt that these children are another sign of the Luso-Chinese mixture, since many converted to Christianity, adopted Portuguese names, married as Christians and were included in the wills their masters, who often treated them like their own children.

As the Portuguese themselves owned houses outside the city limits, they were also actively involved in this cultural mix. The municipal council repeatedly issued orders prohibiting the renting of godowns (warehouses), shops and houses to the Chinese and banning “gaming between the Christians and the Chinese,” but these were all in vain as the groups mixed freely, as noted in a seventeenth-century Chinese text. The same attitude was repeated almost throughout maritime Asia.

This miscegenation unquestionably helped to compensate for the chronic shortage of Portuguese residents. Statistics on Macao’s population only appear at a late stage, with the first censuses dating from 1745, 1774 and 1791. Only qualitative information can be used for earlier times, leading to the conclusion that even in good years, there were rarely over one thousand



Plan of Macao by António de Mariz Carneiro, in 'descrição da Fortaleza de Sofala e das mais da Índia' (description of the Sofala fortress and others in India), Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon.

inhabitants, a number that could fall to three hundred in times of recession, as in the 1660s. At such times, the large number of widows and orphans caused major imbalances in local society. Measures had to be taken to rectify this serious situation and to protect the oligarchy, which in turn led to marriages between men who could be “useful” to the city and the said orphans and widows.

In most cases, this does not simply mean there was a shortage of men, but rather a shortage of “good” men. Even the city’s political elite was culturally ignorant: there was a lack of educated men to fill such important posts as the *ouvidor* (magistrate) or to write a letter to the Emperor of China.

This was a small, poorly educated and quarrelsome group, revealed by countless references to constant conflict between the Portuguese residents of

Macao. Outside observers, such as the viceroys, defined the problem as a self-destructive process. In 1716, Vasco Fernandes César de Menezes (1712-1717) wrote to Father Miguel do Amaral about Macao and its inhabitants, noting that “they themselves contribute to their own ruin.” Even before, in 1692, a Jesuit priest had established an interesting connection between the demographic and moral crises of that age: “the smaller the lands and the fewer the inhabitants, the more inclined they are to disunity, and sometimes to great hatred. Macao is not exempt from this curse.”

Despite being intellectually challenged, this group did display considerable political acumen. In the first twenty years of its life, Macao’s political and administrative structure grew more complex. In 1569, D. Melchior Carneiro founded the local *Misericórdia* along the lines of the equivalent Lisbon institution.

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This welfare institution has yet to be studied in detail. Given its political and economic importance, this is a major failing, as it simultaneously provided credit and acted as an instrument of power for the local oligarchy. The other and undoubtedly more important cornerstone of the power wielded by the “important men” of Macao was the *senado da câmara* (municipal council). In 1582, after swearing allegiance to Philip II, the residents decided to request permission to form a local government, as had already happened in cities within Portugal and in the *Estado da Índia*. The crown consented, and four years later, a charter issued in Goa ratified the creation of the *senado da câmara* of Macao, whose structure was copied after the one in Évora.

Once the city’s self-government had been established, the senate emerged as Macao’s central political institution. As António Hespanha noted, “rather than being a guarantee of the city’s political integration into the complex of crown policy for the Far East, Macao’s municipal organisation supported the city oligarchy’s inward-looking desire for autonomy.” The implications of this will be examined below.

THE OUTER WORLD: DOING BUSINESS AND DIPLOMACY

In 1664, Father Luís da Gama wrote: “the wealth of Macao comes from the sea, and the entire city lives off this. There are no stable goods other than those brought by the wind and the sea. If they fail, everything fails.” From the very start, Macao was a trading city and largely depended on the wealth it managed to generate, as clearly shown, for example, by the records of legacies to the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia*. Apart from servants, money and jewels were the items most commonly bequeathed. These goods were almost always used in overseas trade and their value, therefore, was recorded according to their value in silver and silk. Debts incurred in business deals were mentioned, but little was said about land holdings. Like many other cities in the same temporal and geographical frame, Macao lived from and for trade, and its administrative form, defence structures, its “foreign policy” and its social fabric must all be considered in the light of that fundamental principle.

One perfectly knows the broad outlines of the locations and the series of markets that made Macao’s

fortune or, in times of crisis, simply guaranteed its survival. Trade with Japan, linking China’s coastal fringe to the Japanese archipelago, brought Macao a period of economic prosperity that lasted until the middle of the seventeenth century. The main symbol of this trade was, of course, the *kurofune* or “black ship” that reached Nagasaki laden with silk and returned to Macao filled with silver. The Japanese soon recorded this image, as shown on the magnificent *namban* screens now found in some of the finest museums worldwide.

With Nagasaki, Manila was the other great source of Macao’s mercantile activity until the middle of the seventeenth century. However, the crisis of the 1640s – caused by the definitive break in relations with Japan, the distance between Macao and Manila after the crowns of Spain and Portugal parted company and the loss of Melaka to the Dutch in 1641 – all forced the trading strategies to enter a new phase. In the subsequent decades, the city’s merchants explored new routes and tried to do business at other locations on the coasts of Southeast Asia. They had, naturally, done this prior to 1640, but the secondary markets assumed a new importance after that date. Makassar, Banten, Batavia, Banjarmasin and Timor in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago all gained ground, while the newly favoured locations on the mainland were Siam, Cambodia, Dai-Viet and Tonkin. Macao’s economic survival, which was further threatened by the regular bans on sailing ordered by the early Qing, was played out alternately in all these locations.

In the 1720-30s, Macao’s traders again started to explore new possibilities. Southeast Asia no longer seemed to offer sufficiently appealing markets. While ships from Macao continued to sail to Manila, the “Malay ports” – a name that embraced Aceh, Kedah, Melaka, Batavia, Borneo and Timor – and the other trading posts in Indochina, most of the ships and capitals turned their attention to the Indian Ocean. In the following years, ships sailed regularly to Surat, Goa, the Malabar ports and locations on the Coromandel Coast, Ceylon and the ports in Bengal. The city clearly still had imagination enough to adapt quite well to the new situation.

All these trade networks bear the indelible mark of Macao’s magnates. They realised the importance of the markets and products, they changed direction whenever conditions so dictated, they faced all the competition and they chose the most appropriate

partners. Certain individuals stand out in contemporary records, with the names of Pero Fernandes de Carvalho, Gonalo Monteiro de Carvalho, Joo Vaz Preto, Antnio Fialho Ferreira, Gaspar Borges de Fonseca, Francisco Carvalho Aranha, Vicente Rodrigues, Diogo Vaz Bvaro, Antnio Galvo Godinho, Pero Rodrigues Teixeira and Ferno Barreto de Almeida appearing constantly in the first century of Macao's life.

In Japan, these magnates' main competitor was the Portuguese crown itself, which decided in 1550 to establish a monopoly on sailing there. Having been prohibited from autonomous management of their trade in Japan, Macao's merchants opted, whenever possible, to purchase the concession or to travel on the "black ship" as agents of the city of Macao. During times of tighter royal control, they even made discreet attempts to sabotage crown interests. One such case came in 1630, when the post of administrator of navigation to Japan was created. Having suffered the effects of Lisbon's unexpected interference, some of Macao's merchants tried to persuade the interpreters from Nagasaki to forge a letter to the city banning the new trade system "so that no ship acting on His Majesty's behalf can return."

Residents who had more limited resources resigned themselves to playing a secondary role on the "black ship", surrendering their savings to the more influential businessmen. Minors who were mentioned in the last wills and testaments drawn up in the city during those years knew that until they reached the age of maturity, their money was "making profits" in the hands of such magnates as Pero Martins Gaio.

After the early voyages, the central figure in Manila was Bartolomeu Vaz Landeiro, a leading merchant from Macao who also played a fundamental role in relations with Japan. Yet the Macao-Manila route was a clandestine one, since the crown did not approve of contact between the two cities. Nonetheless, despite regular bans, the trade never actually ceased, a defeat that the king himself acknowledged when he advised the viceroy not to "tighten" the ban on this trade.

Sebasto Soares de Pais (1637) provides exceptionally important evidence on this issue, highlighting the complicity between Portuguese and Chinese merchants from Guangdong in the trade with Manila, which was the best means to counter the

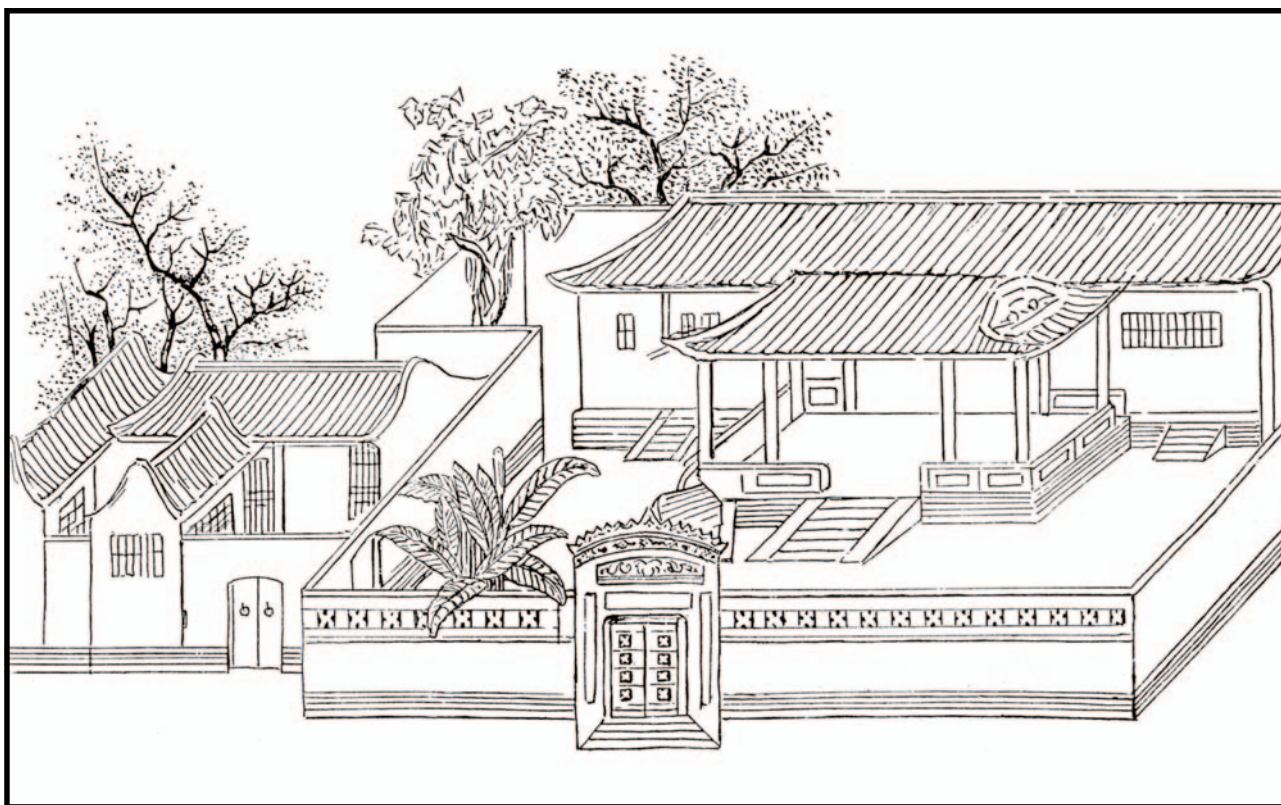
control exercised by merchants from Fujian over this route. He then emphasises the central role played by Macao's magnates in that trade and ends by stressing the dynamism of private initiative, as shown by the frequency of voyages that were not controlled by the authorities. This spirit of free enterprise led to cases such as that of Jernimo Macedo de Carvalho, who did business between Macao and Manila "at his own expense and risk," armed with the "flag and patent of the Dutch."

None of the routes mentioned would be of any relevance were it not for the success of the Macao-Canton trade. To put it another way, without a connection to the capital of Guangdong Province, Macao would not have been economically viable. It was there that the city bought the supplies to feed the people; it was there that Macao's merchants purchased the silk they would sell in Nagasaki and Manila. The council was well aware of this and often emphasised how essential these ties were: "it would be beneficial for this city to maintain the said trade with Canton, as not losing this city depends upon it." Indeed, Macao's fate depended on its status as the first "European neighbourhood" of the Chinese city.

The Canton fair was the clearest expression of the economic ties between the two cities. Held twice a year, from December to January and May to June, this was the center for all trade. Yet this should not be taken to mean that the seasonal appearance in Canton of merchants from Macao was exclusively for business purposes. Visits to the Chinese city also involved a political dimension that should not be neglected, as they reflected fluctuations in local politics and the friction inherent in border societies.

The council had controlled this process since 1595, when the "elected for Canton" – a group of thirty dignitaries selected to negotiate on behalf of all the others – were first mentioned. The documents record that they were men of "good understanding, practical, and experienced in matters related to Canton." Naturally, by entrusting these "important men" with representing the city, Macao gained great political advantages, but this form of selection unquestionably also enabled the local oligarchy to further strengthen its position.

The success of the "elected for Canton" depended on their skill in negotiating with the imperial officials and presupposed the existence of good contacts with



Drawing of the Senado da Câmara, *Ou Mun Kei Leok* — *Monografia de Macau*, p. 57.

Chinese traders. The relationship between traders from the two cities swung constantly between co-operation and competition, although co-operation dominated since “the Portuguese depend on the *queves* ..., and do whatever they want.” Despite frequent complaints, the *queves* (apparently from the Malay word *kiwi*, meaning “trading partner”) were the Macao merchants’ strongest business allies, supplying them with silk prior to payment, offering credit and sending goods in their own ships. This group of men has still to be fully studied, although Bryan de Souza’s work is a major step forward. It is already known that in the 1630s, a certain *queve* Fanu was a real leader who had influence in both cities. The Portuguese considered him to be a man of “great experience in everything that can be done in it [trade]” and that whenever they had any trading difficulties with Canton, he solved them all. In his report on the situation in Macao in the 1660s, Father Luís da Gama clearly revealed the importance of Lin Siam Cum as an intermediary between the Portuguese city and the officials of Guangdong, while the same role was played in the 1690s by *queve* Bonquá,

considered to be the “most important and richest [Chinese] merchant” in Macao.

During the economic crisis that started in the mid-seventeenth century, the dependence of Macao’s residents on the Chinese merchants from Guangdong grew ever greater. The Portuguese merchants, who only had a small fleet of their own, had no hesitation in transporting their goods on Chinese ships or even going “out from this city in Chinese *lorchas*.” Taking advantage of the crisis that hit the Portuguese city, evidence suggests that the Chinese magnates invested in property. Although the sale of their houses was certainly one way for the Portuguese to get through these difficult times, it was a source of great concern to the viceroy, the Count of Ericeira (1717-1720), who noted that “it seems that most and the best houses of this city are being occupied by the Chinese.”

Yet even in times of crisis, there are success stories among the Portuguese community. Examination of documents on the second half of the seventeenth century and early years of the eighteenth reveals the same handful of names: Pascoal Roza, Manuel Vicente

Rosa, Constantino Álvares da Paz, Francisco Xavier Doutel, Francisco Leite Pereira, Manuel Favacho and Pero Vaz de Sequeira. These men had enormous business acumen and could satisfy all the gaps in the market that the competition had abandoned either from lack of interest or incapacity.

Some of these men skilfully managed to combine business and politics, even to the point that it is not possible to distinguish between their role as businessmen and that as diplomats. I will cite just four examples. The first is Francisco Gomes Leite, who had business interests in Japara (Java island), Larantuka, Lifau, and was the only captain on the Timor route. Judging by his appointment as Macao's envoy to Cambodia, Dai-Viet and Tonkin in 1684-85, his interests in mainland Southeast Asia were apparently no less impressive, and he also had property and interests in Goa. He died in 1690, but his son, Francisco Leite Pereira, soon took his place as one of Macao's most prominent merchants. The second example is Nicolau Fiúmes, a foreigner who married Antónia Correia in Macao and who had business relations with several locations in the region, mainly Batavia and Cambodia. When he died in 1717, many people owed him money, even including members of the Chinese community, as records show that one Gia owed him 34,000 taels, Pouquá another 12,600 and Quonquá 5,800.

Nonetheless, undoubtedly one of the most interesting people in that period's local oligarchy was a woman called Catarina de Noronha. In fact, she was the central figure in Macao life during the last thirty years of the seventeenth century. The widow of Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo, who died in Larantuka in 1667, she reached Macao in 1670. She owned at least three ships, and her vast resources made her practically immune to the crises that cyclically fell on the city, as both the Jesuits and the residents readily acknowledged. Her death in 1701 helps historians clarify the scale of her fortune as the many goods recorded in her will – drawn up by the influential figure

of Pero Vaz de Sequeira – reveal the mobile wealth of people such as her and her husband who were constantly moving from one place to another.

Besides maintaining the necessary political and diplomatic relations with the kingdoms in Indochina or the sultanates in the Southeast Asian archipelago so as to ensure successful business and Macao's survival, the oligarchy also largely assumed responsibility for relations with China. This is particularly true at the provincial level, covering daily relations with the Guangdong authorities. To carry this out, the municipal council created a lay political body that was able to weaken the chronic dependence on the Jesuits as intermediaries. In 1627, the "Regulation on the City's Interpreters" established a permanent office of translators and interpreters in Macao. This was of enormous importance as none of the other cities in maritime Asia that were reached by the Portuguese had any such institution.

In fact, nowhere else was the activity of interpreters controlled by such detailed regulations. This was surely due to permanent contact with political systems whose power was tangibly based on information and consequently depended clearly on specialists in spoken and written communication. China had the *Siyiguan*, and in Nagasaki, the Japanese had the *Tō tsuji* (office of Chinese interpreters) and the *Oranda tsuji* (office of Dutch interpreters), which were very active, for example, in gathering information on China.

Thus, Macao simply observed what was going on around it and copied a successful system. Gradually, the city equipped itself with the tools to face Chinese bureaucracy, emphasising the written word as a means of government, organising and classifying documents and realising the supremacy of precedent over legal principle, aiming to gain access to secret information and setting up apparently effective spy-rings.

The city learned to listen, but it also had to speak; it needed to show itself to the Middle Kingdom through the written word. This involved producing

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what were effectively propaganda texts that mould opinion rather than inform. As in other geographical and cultural areas, the press was fundamental in this. In this case, it is not the press that used movable type, designed fundamentally for texts in Portuguese, but books and pamphlets with wood engravings that were used whenever a text in Chinese had to be published. This work was normally done by the head scribe of Macao, as stipulated in the regulation dated 1627. It is, therefore, no surprise that the council considered him to be “the hands and feet of the city.”

The city actively pursued a policy of publishing texts in Chinese for consumption in the Middle Kingdom, listing the services provided by the city as well as the favours that the emperor had granted to the Portuguese. The purpose was to show the Son of Heaven how useful Macao was and, by extension, to affirm the city’s political and administrative autonomy. For example, it is known that Gonçalo Teixeira Correia’s expedition of 1628 to help the Ming against the advancing Tartars in the north was used to spread written word throughout the empire of Macao’s military might.

Up to a point, the work of this office of interpreters thus went beyond the provincial level. Indeed, at certain moments in the city’s life, the oligarchy was tempted to take the lead in direct contact with the Forbidden City. Offering military support to the Ming empire was an outstanding means of promoting the city. As noted, this happened in the last years of that dynasty and would happen again in the second half of the seventeenth century, during a critical phase when the Qing dynasty imposed itself in the empire’s southern provinces. Another way of gaining favour in Beijing was through medicine. The Kangxi emperor’s open-minded interest in new fields of knowledge and new experiences led Macao to release some of its physicians to serve the emperor in the latter years of the seventeenth century.

Macao’s political class frequently even dreamed of sending ambassadors from the council senate directly to the emperor in Beijing. The city’s interests justified leapfrogging the Guangdong authorities, since the latter often acted as a sort of filter. As the Macao councillors lamented in 1685, “the emperor is far away and we cannot complain to him other than through the people who are the source of our complaint.” Diogo Pereira and Gil de Góis’ abortive attempt in as early as

1563-1565 was one such attempt to get around this filter. Over one hundred years later, the same purpose lay behind Bento Pereira de Faria’s successful mission (1678), and was also the motive for the proposed (but never carried out) embassy of Francisco de Alarcão Sottomaior in 1719.

This was one area where the co-operation of both Goa and Lisbon was absolutely vital. However, the crown did not always share the city’s expectations, and diplomatic missions to Beijing with the king’s blessing were supposed to busy themselves with broader and more noble questions than just Macao. The two perspectives were very different.

THE SHADOW OF GOA AND LISBON: MANAGING TIES WITH THE FOREFATHERS

Besides managing relations with China, handling relations with the Portuguese crown was certainly the greatest challenge facing the Macao oligarchy.

The city is not the result of the political strategies drawn up in Lisbon, but instead sprang from the determination of private individuals who never really abandoned the territory. This is one sign of a phenomenon that is fundamental for any understanding of the Portuguese presence in the Orient: to the east of Ceylon, official activity was substantially weaker, which opened the door to private enterprise. Macao was very much one of those “quasi-spontaneous colonies” of Portuguese who populated the region and outlasted the demise of the empire. These were the *bandéis* (from the Persian word *bandar*, meaning “port”) that were recorded in Portuguese sources across most of maritime Asia, but whose natural “habitat” was in the Bay of Bengal and in Southeast Asia. Some of these *bandéis* were never even born and only existed as projects, the result of conjunctural circumstances or individual action, while others met premature deaths as their residents moved on to other locations in a noteworthy process of re-formation, flexibility and understanding of local conditions.

This is indeed what George Winus called the “Shadow Empire”, made up countless “trading republics” (Luís Filipe Thomaz) that enjoyed considerable freedom and were constantly rebellious in nature. This was a sort of negative of Goa, the opposite of everything that the capital of the *Estado da Índia* stood for. These two worlds, whose very natures

were hostile to one another, were frequently incompatible. The case of Hugli, in the Ganges delta is perhaps the most similar to that of Macao, yet there can be no doubt that Macao is the finest example of the Portuguese *bandéis* in Asia. Having started as a simple settlement in the middle of the sixteenth century, by the end of the twentieth century its future was being negotiated at the highest diplomatic levels between the Portuguese Republic and the People's Republic of China.

In light of the above, it seems natural that Lisbon's view of the Portuguese city in the Far East was generally critical and mistrustful. Consequently, there was regular talk of "taming" the local oligarchy, including suggestions that the council senate should be abolished. This conflict between central and local power, a recurrent theme in Macao's political and institutional history, took a variety of forms. However, the differences as to the best way to conduct relations with China held centre stage. The extremely blunt words of Francisco Rodrigues Silveira on this subject in the late sixteenth century explain all:

"In China, in the port of the goddess, there is another settlement of Portuguese which does great harm to the Christian faith and disservice to God and His Majesty. For it is very clear that it is a great indecency for Portuguese people to live in a place where they are forcibly subject to the strange laws of the land where they live rather than to those of their king and natural lord; where they are forced to prostrate themselves on the ground and adore and revere a heathen mandarin as they should only adore and revere our Lord God. And the Chinese are powerful and oblige the Portuguese to this through their boundless covetousness, which their governors adore, and they are not as in Goa and other lands where they make the heathens kneel down when the holy sacrament passes by."

Anyone who examines Macao from a distance will have difficulty in understanding this strategy of adaptation, which was immediately identified as an unnecessary and humiliating exercise in servility. One hundred years later, in 1720, it was the viceroy, the Count of Ericeira, who launched a fierce criticism of the way that Macao's councillors welcomed Chinese officials, prostrating themselves seven times before their visitors "where the Portuguese should never make such a demonstration of inferiority before any nation, nor

should Christians except before God." Thus, when the debate on the legitimacy of Portugal's sovereignty over Macao was raised in the late eighteenth century, there were those in Lisbon who defined the council senate as a body "mostly made up of exiles..., all most ignorant in matters of government and, having no other vision than that of seeking their fortunes by means of navigation and trade, they only care to make the tyranny of the mandarins less cruel through servile humiliations" (Martinho de Mello e Castro, 1783).

Besides maintaining the necessary political and diplomatic relations with the kingdoms in Indochina or the sultanates in the Southeast Asian archipelago so as to ensure successful business and Macao's survival, the oligarchy also largely assumed responsibility for relations with China.

The situation was completely different in the eyes of the "important men" who governed the city. They repeatedly stated that "the land belongs to the king of China" and it never crossed their minds to claim Portuguese sovereignty over Macao, as is perfectly evident from the conflict with the Society of Jesus over the ownership of the *Ilha Verde* in 1621. Any sign of the *Estado da Índia* reinforcing its position was seen by the Portuguese residents of Macao as an intrusion. This explains their conflicts with a succession of the crown-appointed captains-general as from 1621, their threats to abandon the city in time of crisis – made in full awareness of the serious setback this would be for the Portuguese *Padroado* in China – and their recurrent propaganda efforts that trumpeted the city's services to the crown, emphasising the importance of the city's origins and the circumstances surrounding its creation.

PATRIMÓNIO / História

This is the main thrust of the *Report on the Origin of the City of Macao*. This document, dated 1629, was sent by the city's residents to Philip IV and is little more than a self-panegyric that creates a memory in an attempt to justify the community's existence and elevate it in the monarch's eyes. The classical explanation of the birth of Macao seems to correspond to one of those "foundation legends" that embellish the history of any city in either the eastern or western world. It is a clear example of a case where collective memory interferes in the historical process. As Jacques Le Goff (1992) warns, collective memory is often a question of deformed and anachronistic myth that should be subjected to close examination by historians. Consequently, it is my view that the traditional story of the pirates and the "gold plate" is nothing more than a fabrication made up at that time and very probably based on the Portuguese support for the suppression of the Zhelin Revolt of 1564, duly exaggerated over the following centuries.

What was really in question was the survival of a "trading republic" that had become accustomed to deciding its own fate without significant interference from central power. The situation in the 1620s was particularly propitious, so the message was intended to show the king, just a few years after the crushing 1622 victory over the Dutch in Macao, how pointless it was to have a captain-general, a post created the year before, though already proposed in the late sixteenth century by the governor of the Philippines. Moreover, Macao's leading citizens knew that the question of abolishing the council senate, the institution that embodied the city's autonomy, was mooted with some frequency in political decision-making circles. It was vital to avoid still more drastic plans, such as Dominican Diego Anduarte's proposal to destroy the city, being given any credence at court. São Tomé de Meliapor, another quasi-spontaneous colony, had faced identical threats a hundred years before. Thus, the past appears as the historical property of a rather rebellious community that was in constant need of self-legitimation.

Macao was a vulnerable centre that was threatened both by those who "adopted" it and by those who "ran"

it. Beijing always saw the city as a foreign body, "a southern ulcer" that had to be controlled. In turn, Lisbon saw Macao as a rebellious city run by a band of men who persistently challenged royal authority. The secret of the local oligarchy's success lay in their "invention" of a city that had an individual identity that could stand between these two opposing threats.

FINAL REMARKS

In my opinion, these are the essential aspects of Macao's "Portuguese chromosome". However, the situation definitely changed in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. In economic terms, the implementation of the Canton System and the other European powers' "assault" on the China trade – a prelude for the Opium Wars, the founding of Hong Kong in 1841 and the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 – brought major changes to Macao's trading life.

In political terms, the dawn of liberalism in Portugal would create the conditions required to "tame" the Macao oligarchy, turning the senate into a simple city council and handing political functions over to the governor. This had, in fact, been in preparation ever since discussion of the legitimacy of Portugal's sovereignty over Macao was first raised in the 1780s.

The transformations of the early nineteenth century were accompanied by many others that brought about incredibly rapid change in Macao's appearance over the next two hundred years. Nonetheless, the remains of the "Portuguese chromosome", the remnants of the city's original nature and the marks left by the city's political and social elite still need ongoing study. **RC**

Author's Note: This is a revised and enlarged version of the paper presented to the Conference 'Macao on the Threshold of the Third Millennium', organized by the Macau Ricci Institute and held at Macao, 14-15 December 2001. I am grateful to Jonathan Porter for his useful comments and insights as discussant of my paper. A selected bibliography is published at the end of the article, but it was decided not to include any footnotes. All the bibliographical references are to be found in the chapters I wrote for the *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, A. H. de Oliveira Marques, ed., Lisbon, Fundação Oriente, vols. 1 (tom. II) and 2, 2000-2001.

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