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Between China and Europe Person, Culture and Emotion in Macao

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Among the books that have appeared in English over the last ten years on Macao, João de Pina-Cabral's *Between China and Europe: Person, Culture and Emotion in Macao* is a unique work of historical and social anthropology. Some of the basic tenets of this study had already been applied in his earlier book, published in Portuguese some ten years before under the title, *Em Terra de Tufões: Dinâmicas da Etnicidade Macaense* (1993). As its title suggests, this was essentially a study of the Macanese and the dynamics of their changing relationship with their Portuguese and Chinese heritages, based on research carried out during the early 1990s. *Between China and Europe* benefits from further observation of events leading up to the Handover in

December 1999 and Macao's first two years as a Special Administrative Region of China, and traces the way the territory was administered by Portugal and how the Macanese acclimatised and adapted to changes that took place, especially from the middle of the nineteenth century.

Central to Pina-Cabral's thesis is the notion of Macao's history as being affected by what he calls 'incidents', which redefined the relationship between the Portuguese administration and the Chinese government, and in turn influenced the way the Macanese perceived their own relationship with their twin heritages, causing them to alter or to nuance their social and cultural customs. The two most well-known 'incidents' were, according to the author, the ones that ushered in a more formal period of colonial rule in 1846 during the controversial governorship of Ferreira do Amaral, and then ended it in 1966/7 (the incident of early December of 1966, known as the '1,2,3'), bringing in a return to the informal status quo that had prevailed up until the nineteenth century. Ferreira do Amaral was something of a 'Sebastianist' colonial hero. An impulsive veteran of the Portuguese retreat from Brazil in 1822, he arrived in Macao determined

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to enforce colonial power in the territory, by expelling the Chinese customs house that had existed in the city since its foundation and putting an end to the payment of ground rent, a tradition that seemed to contradict the principle of Portuguese sovereignty. If his heavy-handedness was a motive for profound concern to the Macanese elite and their time-honoured forum, the Senate, it also upset the local Chinese and the neighbouring administration based in Canton, especially when he chose to drive a new road through a Chinese burial ground. It was this and his inability to compromise that brought about his gruesome assassination while out riding in 1849. If Amaral was ultimately a colonial martyr, his redemption was assured in the immediate aftermath of his murder by the heroics of a Macanese militia colonel, Vicente Nicolau de Mesquita, who led a successful foray against what was perceived as a military threat from a Chinese outpost adjacent to the border. These incidents have, of course, been well chronicled by historians, but what Pina-Cabral does is to tie the events to the story of the statues of the two 'heroes' in order to illustrate their symbolic importance during later 'incidents'.

Given the brazenly hostile actions of Amaral and Mesquita towards the Chinese, it is perhaps surprising that the Portuguese authorities were allowed to erect statues of them, but here again, the ever-observant author reminds us that the statues were cast and erected during the 1930s, just as the Salazar dictatorship was asserting itself and preparing for the Lisbon exhibition of 1940, at the very time when the attention of the embattled Chinese government was distracted by the Japanese invasion. As far as the Chinese were concerned, the issue of controversial statues in Macao would have to wait.

As the new communist regime in Beijing consolidated its power after 1949, it gradually sought

to bring relations with Portuguese Macao back to what they had been over a century before, at the same time reasserting Beijing's influence in the territory in the face of Kuomintang rivalry from Taipei. Here again, statues and other icons of the Portuguese presence were forced to play a role. The most enigmatic monument discussed by Pina-Cabral in fact never existed. In 1955, the Salazar government fell upon the idea of commemorating the four-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the city, by erecting a suitable monument to be ready for the event in 1957. It never got further than a concrete plinth, for Zhou Enlai, China's Foreign

Minister, got wind of the plan and sent a circuitous message to the local authorities that such an act would not be welcome. As so often happened. Lisbon's diktat was issued with scant regard for local sensitivities and limitations, of which even its nominated governors usually became aware during their tenure of office. The plinth was dynamited by the Portuguese, but the humiliation was felt by the Macanese, who saw this compliance as evidence of Portugal's weakness. Worse was to follow as a result of the riots of late 1966, which saw a humiliating climb-down by the Lisbon government and a formal apology for casualties inflicted. For the Macanese, this constituted the final loss

of face. But one of the first targets of the rioters had been precisely Mesquita's statue, which was pulled down by the mob from its pedestal in Senate Square. A kinder fate was reserved for Amaral's less accessible equestrian statue: firstly, the Chinese figures at its base, which the governor appeared to be striking with his raised crop, were removed, and eventually in 1992, the whole statue was discreetly packed up and shipped back to Lisbon. But as Pina-Cabral points out, by that time the colonial period, which had informally ended in 1967, was all but over. Memory of national humiliation was the preserve of the old guard in Beijing



The statue of Mesquita in Senado Square before being pulled down and destroyed in 1966.

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who insisted on the statue's removal before the Handover. For the general public in Macao, the only significance of Amaral's statue was, according to one young Chinese resident of the city, that it was part of Macao's heritage that had been taken away. Amaral was, in the words of this interlocutor, "just a guy on a horse... when they dismantled it, they dismantled part of my childhood with it. They dismantled part of my feeling for Macao..." (p. 76).

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If the events of 1966 resulted in the growing influence of Beijing in Macao, the 1974 revolution in Portugal brought an end to the Portuguese military presence in the colony, which in turn was an important element in encouraging the Macanese to re-evaluate what the author terms their "capital de portugalidade" – that is the degree to which they saw their identification with Portugal and Portuguese as fundamental to their survival. For centuries, soldiers had stayed on in the colonies after completing their commissions and married local women, bringing to their families the so-called prestige of Portuguese stock, while often making a socially advantageous match for themselves. By the 1980s, many Macanese began to marry into the expanding Macao Chinese middle class with two important effects: firstly, Cantonese rather than Portuguese became the first language at home; secondly there was a tendency to adopt Chinese names and naming systems alongside or to the exclusion of Portuguese ones, a custom that had been dropped during the century of formal colonial rule.

The 'incidents' did not stop with the 1966 riots, for it became apparent that Beijing had no intention

of seizing back the territory as the Indians had done in Goa, even though it was useful to make the Portuguese dictatorship believe that this might be necessary. Nor did the 1974 revolution in Portugal alter Beijing's attitude. When the timetable was eventually set for the Handover as a result of the agreement of 1987, intense negotiations between Lisbon and Beijing began during the 1990s. The Portuguese were generally adamant that there would be no need for a Chinese military presence in Macao after 1999 given their own demilitarization of the territory in 1975. For Beijing, however, the stationing of troops was a *sine qua non* for the affirmation of sovereignty. The disagreement gave rise, according to Pina-Cabral, to the final 'incident' during Portuguese rule. As 1999 approached, the security situation deteriorated in Macao as gambling interests competed for control of the industry, with inevitable triad involvement. Many of these interests originated across the border, and there may well have been links with the PLA itself. The stationing of troops was therefore presented as the only way to guarantee security in the territory after 1999, but in fact it was the act of sovereignty that Beijing had always wanted.

More than anything, Pina-Cabral's eminently readable and richly woven study enables us to appreciate the dynamics of what he terms a frontier ethnicity. The whole point about the Macanese is that contrary to what previous scholars had sought to prove, there is no defining Macanese phenotype, which does not of course mean that there is no social hierarchy or that there is no elite cluster of 'old families' with claims over what constitutes Macanese identity and therefore who can be considered Macanese. Pina-Cabral, however, sees Macanese identity as being essentially an overlapping of Portuguese and Chinese (or other) heritages, by which he means that Macanese can both pass for Portuguese and for Cantonese depending on the context in which they are operating. He emphasises the flexible, adaptable personality of Macanese identity – that is, identity as process and change rather than a fixed state or goal to be reached or evoked. As for the future of the Macanese as a group, their survival may depend on the extent to which they can exert a cultural influence on the Macao-born Chinese, with whom they have so many common interests to defend, not least of which are the way of life and unique historical legacy of their city. **RC**