

# A Unique Place in the World Historical Western Images of Macao

GEORGE WEI\*

## Sonnet to Macao

Gem of the Orient Earth and open Sea,  
Macao! That in thy lap and on thy breast  
Hast Gathered beauties all the loveliest,  
O'er which the sun smiles in his majesty!

The very clouds that top each mountain's crest  
Seem to repose there, lingering lovingly.  
How full of grace the green Cathayan tree.  
Rends to the breeze and now thy sands are prest

With gentlest waves, which ever and anon  
Break their awakened furies on thy shore!  
Were these the scenes that poet looked upon;

Whose lyre though known to fame knew misery more?  
They have their glories, and earth's diadems  
Have nought so bright as genius' gilded gems!

Sir John Bowring,  
Governor of Hong Kong (1854-59)

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Macao has been a vital point for interactions and exchanges between the East and the West since the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During this long period of time, many westerners visited and lived in Macao and left their footprints and influences there, either good or bad. At the same time, Macao engraved its image on the mind of the westerners who stayed in Macao and who brought their views of Macao back to their homelands through their writings, publications, paintings, poems, etc. To a great extent, the Western images of Macao are valuable historical source materials that record the development and evolving features of Macao and provide an outside view of Macao, which could be quite objective and could serve as a mirror to reflect the historical conditions of Macao. What then were the most impressive and lasting images that Macao left on westerners? How did Macao look in the eyes of westerners in the past, and what was Macao's historical fame? How did Western views of Macao reflect the cultural interactions or conflicts that occurred in Macao? To address these questions, this article will collect and analyse the limited records of Macao left by westerners to see how the image of Macao was created and evolved among the westerners and what was recorded about Macao by westerners as historical witnesses.

#### 'GEM OF THE ORIENT EARTH': THE BEAUTY OF MACAO'S NATURAL SETTING AND SURROUNDINGS

In 1928 Stella Benson, an English feminist, travel writer and novelist, commented on Macao by saying, 'The city of Macao is old, but it seems older than its years.'<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Macao, where one could find many impressive historical legacies, is surprisingly older than many visitors could imagine. Yet, to most westerners, what surprised them at their first sight of Macao probably was not its historical inheritance but its natural beauty. The westerners who visited Macao were almost all impressed first by its topographical setting and ocean environment, smoothly mingling the natural beauty with the man-made architecture and human traces and activities.

As early as the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, Macao was already well known in the West for its nice weather and atmosphere. The American writer William C. Hunter, from the 1820s an employee and later

a partner of the large American firm Russell and Company, recollected that 'Foreign visitors to the ancient Portuguese city of Macao, founded during the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, are delighted with its calm quiet life, its brilliant atmosphere, and lovely climate.'<sup>3</sup> Thomas Kuyck van Mierop, a twenty-four-year-old Englishman, arrived in Macao with the East India Company's ship *Grenada* on March 12, 1780, and wrote in his journal, 'This harbour is a majestic bay.'<sup>4</sup> Rev. Walter M. Lowrie, American missionary to China, wrote in Macao on May 17, 1843: 'The heat of summer is great; the thermometer now ranges about 80°; but it is not as bad as that of India, and we have cool and bracing winters. There is not commonly any frost or snow in this latitude.'<sup>5</sup> An article in the *Dublin University Magazine* well summarised the general view of Macao's geographic features in 1848:

A view of Macao from the sea is exquisitely fine. The semicircular appearance of the shore, which is unencumbered and unbroken by wharfs or piers [there are one or two small landing places projecting] and upon which the surge in continually breaking and receding in waves of foam, whereon the sun glitters in thousands of spangling [*sic*] beams, presents a scene of incomparable beauty.<sup>6</sup>

A contemporary artist, Robert Burford, also made a broad description of Macao as ocean islands:

Turning from the city, the eye ranges over a vast extent of sea, bounded in some parts by the horizon alone, in others, by numerous Islands of different size and form, some presenting verdant hills and luxuriant foliage; others, large masses of rock, thrown into every variety of light and shade, from the faintest blue to the most somber brown, according to their distance, or position, or from the rich things they receive from the glowing rays of the setting sun.<sup>7</sup>

This kind of general view of Macao as a fine and charming place enjoying a blessing from sea and sun was confirmed by other contemporaries. J. Dyer Ball, author of *Things Chinese*, *The Cantonese Made Easy Series*, and *How to Write Chinese*, stated, 'Many a picturesque view is to be obtained, the fine sweep of the Praya Grande being universally admired.'<sup>8</sup> After landing on Macao in January 1839, Auguste Borget, the French painter and traveller best known for his drawings of exotic scenes in Asia, and in particular

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China, wrote, 'Frequently in the evening I stroll to the terrace of the convent, or to the hills covered with rocks, which enclose the peninsula on the south-west, and whence in every direction the eye rests on the most delightful landscapes.'<sup>9</sup> Harriett Low, a young American woman from Massachusetts who accompanied her aunt to travel to and stay in Macao during the 1820s and 1830s, well recorded her early western impression of Macao's topography with her careful feminine eyes and delicate description:

Macao from the sea looks beautifully. Some most romantic spots. ... All the isles have flat stones and as smooth as a floor. You ascend 5 flights of steps and come to an observatory from which we have a fine view of the Bay and harbour and can see all over the town. Round it there is a terrace and many pretty plants. It is not in as good order as it must be soon. With

this little spot and a few birds, I shall get along very comfortably. I had no idea there was so pretty a place here.<sup>10</sup>

Low continued: 'The scenery all around us was delightful. The sun was behind us on our return, just setting behind the hills and shedding its softened beams upon the city of Macao—which added much to its beauty.'<sup>11</sup> Rev. George Smith arrived in Macao in 1844 and left us his impression of Macao: 'The view of Macao is very striking, as seen from the harbour, and the place itself forms the most delightful residence open to foreigners in China.'<sup>12</sup>

The pleasant climate and quietness of Macao is one of its attractions. Low often mentioned, 'The weather here is delightful, and since we returned from Canton we have enjoyed it highly.'<sup>13</sup> Low's circle in Macao and Canton agreed that they were 'very glad to breathe the fresh air of Macao which they all say is much purer than C[anton]'.<sup>14</sup> It seems that Macao's wonderful scenery had a therapeutic function that became the first attraction and comfort to Western visitors who came from far away and that could help them overcome the loneliness and difficulty of living in an alien place. No wonder, 'On our return to Macao it seemed more enchanting than ever', to Low. 'The lovely weather and the quiet were really delightful; and since my return I have employed my time much to my own satisfaction, which is very comforting.'<sup>15</sup> After her wonderful experience in the pleasant environment of Macao, Low even believed that 'perhaps the time may come when with more positive miseries or troubles I shall have to look back upon the time spent in Macao as at any rate the most quiet and most free from troubles, if not the happiest portion of my life.'<sup>16</sup> The longer Low stayed in Macao, the stronger grew her appreciation and admiration of Macao's natural charm. Low even used words such as 'romantic', 'art', 'perfectly', and 'paradise' to express her love of Macao's extraordinary and striking natural scenes:

We had a beautiful walk in that paradise of a place. It is large, wild, and romantic. It is a work of art it is true, but it resembles Nature so perfectly that you would not think but that it was originally formed in this way. ... Such immense rocks and trees. ... There are several Banyan trees, growing with their roots almost out of ground, spreading over the rocks. I wish I could give you any idea of it by description.<sup>17</sup>

A N A R R A T I V E  
OF AN  
EXPLORATORY VISIT  
TO EACH OF THE  
CONSULAR CITIES OF CHINA,  
AND TO THE  
ISLANDS OF HONG KONG AND CHUSAN,  
IN BEHALF OF THE  
Church Missionary Society,  
IN THE YEARS 1844, 1845, 1846.  
BY THE  
REV. GEORGE SMITH, M.A.,  
OF MAGDALEN HALL, OXFORD, AND LATE MISSIONARY IN CHINA.  
  
NEW YORK:  
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,  
82 CLIFF STREET.  
1847.



## MACAO STUDIES



View of Macao. From George Smith, *A Narrative of an Exploratory Visit to each of the Consular Cities of China, and to the Islands of Hong Kong and Chusan in Behalf of the Church Missionary Society in the Years 1844, 1845, 1846.*

Similarly, J. Dyer Ball used almost the same words to describe what he saw in Macao. His lines went such as:

One of the most enchanting scenes in Macao is that of this beautiful bay, quiet and graceful sweep of sea wall ... All descriptions are imperfect; ... an instance of what the artistic eye finds ... The scenery altogether is romantic and charming.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, as Sir John Bowring did in his poem cited at the beginning of this paper, Ball used the terms 'gem' and 'gem-like' to describe the beauty of Macao and 'surprises' to convey his unexpected excitement and enjoyment when he saw some charms and beauties in Macao:

Surprises meet you everywhere. The gardens are bestrewn with giant boulders in Nature's irregular disorder. Trees, ages old, cast their gnarled branches skyward, creating an umbrageous dell of indescribable beauty and splendor. Gardens and native plants abound in nooks and recesses,

while all around shrubs and flowers flourish in wonderful profusion.<sup>19</sup>

With such a natural beauty, no wonder Macao has become a tourist attraction. The Reverend John Arthur Turner, an English Wesleyan minister and missionary to China from 1886 to 1891, recalled,

The usual resort of foreigners seeking the benefit of the sea-air in the hottest weather is the ancient Portuguese colony of Macao. Steamers run to this place from Canton. ... It is a favourite resort for invalids and holiday makers, who find grateful refreshment in its quiet walks, fresh sea breezes, and tasteful gardens.<sup>20</sup>

#### THE UNIQUENESS OF MACAO: ARCHITECTURE AND FORTRESSES

When Thomas Kuyck van Mierop visited Macao, his companion, Mr. Cuming, stated, 'Unique

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conditions prevail here.<sup>21</sup> It is true, and Macao is certainly a unique place in the world. Why is it so? Italian traveller Gemelli Careri, one of the earliest round-the-world travellers, who visited Macao in 1695, left us his impression of Macao, which analyses the source of Macao's uniqueness:

Tho' at Macao they have not ground to sow a handful of pease, yet God provides for them, in such manner that they live in plenty enough, all necessities being brought them from the adjacent parts, and they make so much of themselves, that their tables are never without sweet-meats, excellently made by the women; and I may truly say, I never fed so well anywhere as at Macao, the women there knowing how to cover a table for a king, and to please any nice appetite.<sup>22</sup>

From Careri's remark, we learn that the uniqueness of Macao came from 1) its smallness; 2) its excellent food; and 3) its women, who were diligent and marvellous cooks. Similarly, Robert Elwes was much impressed by the young women of Macao. He saw little tanka boats

rowed by young girls, with as fresh red faces as many country girls in England. They are better-looking than most of the Chinese, not that their features are very handsome, but they are good-tempered, and their laughing mouths show fine white teeth, affording a contrast to the sallow complexions and indented eyes which generally characterised the Celestial race. Their figures are round and plump, their hands and feet generally small and well formed, and the latter are never bandaged up and deformed like those of the higher classes.<sup>23</sup>

The following descriptive lines are found from a novel about Macao, but they realistically depict the reality of life on boats in the harbour of Macao:

Even the smallest housed whole families under canvas hoods, and deck cooking on charcoal braziers was in progress. This Portuguese territory, a minute frill on the great mass of the continent, was still China, where space for man is at a premium and people are spilled over from the land onto water to float out their living.<sup>24</sup>

Rev. Walter Lowrie remarked on the narrow and crowded streets of Macao: 'The streets are narrow and crooked; very few are more than ten feet wide, and some not more than six. They are commonly full of

persons passing along, hucksters and peddlers, with their wares and cries of various kinds.'<sup>25</sup> J. Dyer Ball also acknowledged Macao's smallness, but in his eyes Macao was like 'a beautiful little gem' with its unique architectural style. He stated:

Some fail from an attempt to liken this beautiful little gem with another world-renowned spot, the Bay of Naples. Let it be acknowledged at once that each is sui generis and attempt no comparison. There is no doubt when coming in from sea towards Naples and trying to detect Macao in Naples one does see a faint resemblance in one of the house-clad hills of the latter to Macao's central portion; but rather let one be content with enjoying the beauties of each and attempt no belittling of the grand proportions of the one or try to greaten the sweet gem-like curves and colours of dear old Macao.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the uniqueness of Macao came not only from the littleness of this peninsula but also from its great people who know how to make life better, as well as its cultural and environmental genre and architectural configuration that mixed the East and the West. In the eyes of these westerners, the natural beauty of Macao was not entirely 'natural'; it was part of the effect of the human efforts, activities, and tastes. Borget was appalled by the crowdedness of some inhabitant areas in Macao and 'the smallness of the space', but he found that 'there were flowers everywhere; it afforded me great pleasure to find some poetry among so many privations.'<sup>27</sup> Ball was so surprised by the natural beauty of some man-made gardens that he preferred not to distinguish human traces from natural ones: 'The writer would not attempt to describe Nature's beauties and contents himself with referring to the historical associations of these charming gardens.'<sup>28</sup>

The human effort in accommodating and enhancing the natural beauty of Macao is mostly associated with its architecture. Low spotted 'a Josh [Joss] house at a distance which formed a very pretty scene. ... It stands among immense rocks and trees on the sea shore, is fancifully ornamented and presents a picturesque view from the water.'<sup>29</sup> Ball also had an eye for the contribution of Macao's architecture to Macao's landscape, noting the 'rows of houses rising up the gentle slopes and the ancient forts and modern public buildings dotted here and there, while behind all rise the Mountains of Lappa and to the right those

## MACAO STUDIES

beyond the Barrier.<sup>30</sup> The above-mentioned article in the *Dublin University Magazine* reported:

The Parade [Praia Grande] which is faced with an embankment of stone, fronts the sea and is about half a mile in length. A row of houses of a large description extends along its length, \*\*\* Some are coloured pink, some pale yellow and others white. The houses, with their large windows, extending to the ground \*\*\* with curtains. \*\* convey an idea to the visitor that he has entered a European rather than an Asiatic seaport.<sup>31</sup>

The familiarity of the houses in Macao with Western styles was perhaps another attraction to westerners. Robert Elwes liked the town of Macao because 'The town is quite in the Portuguese style, and is very prettily built and situated, running, like Naples, in a curve round the bay.'<sup>32</sup> In the 1960s, Macao was called the 'Monte Carlo of the Orient.'<sup>33</sup> Rev. George Smith expressed a similar view:

THE TRAVELS  
OF  
PETER MUNDY,  
IN EUROPE AND ASIA,  
1608—1667.

VOL. I.  
TRAVELS IN EUROPE, 1608—1628.

EDITED BY  
LT.-COL. SIR RICHARD CARNAC TEMPLE, BART, C.I.E.,  
EDITOR OF 'A GEOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF COUNTRIES  
ROUND THE BAY OF BENGAL.'

CAMBRIDGE:  
PRINTED FOR THE HAKLUYT SOCIETY.  
MCMVII.

Having been for two centuries in the possession of the Portuguese, it presents to the eye the aspect of a European city, with its assemblage of churches, towers, and forts.... The European houses are spacious and of handsome exterior.... Macao, in many respects, resembled a fashionable watering-place in England, and abounded with the comforts, the refinements, and even the luxuries of European life.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, in the eyes of the artist Robert Burford, the houses in Macao

present their fronts to the water, and occupying the whole of the vast extent of the semi-circle, are large, substantial buildings, in the European style; of simple architecture, with large gables, and little or no ornament; yet being painted of many colours, have a varied and pleasing appearance. At the back of the line, rising like an amphitheatre on the sloping ground, numerous other houses are seen, intermixed with churches, and sacred edifices—always conspicuous objects in a catholic town—large gardens, and light and airy summer-houses; the highest portion being broken into several hills, crowned by forts or monasteries, has a fine effect; and, far above all, rising from a neighbouring island, towers a mountain of considerable elevation, and picturesque shape, forming a noble back ground.<sup>35</sup>

Thomas K. van Mierop was very pleased with Macao's shore

lined with houses of great dignity, all of them painted in bright colours (by order of the Portuguese), behind which rises a gentle slope covered with gracious buildings, including numerous churches and walled gardens planted with many trees.<sup>36</sup>

He concluded:

This is, I am sure, a city like no other in the world, for though situate in China, and though infested—by day, at least—by Chinamen of every quality, it is of itself a part of Europe, a down-at-heel part it may be said, subdued by Roman Catholic superstitions, yet all the same it is Europe, and I rejoiced at this.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, the westernised houses added a great deal of Western flavour to the city of Macao, but the architectural features that impressed westerners most were religious buildings. It's claimed that Macao has

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View of Macao. From Peter Mundy's *Journal*, edited by Sir Richard Carnac Temple.

'more churches and chapels to the square mile than any other in the world.'<sup>38</sup> Therefore, Father Antonio Cardim, Rector of the Collegiate Church of St. Paul, called Macao 'the Head of Christendom in the East.'<sup>39</sup> Peter Mundy, the Cornish traveller, diarist and artist, wrote in July 1637, 'The rooffe of the Church aperteyning to the Collidge (called St. Pauls) is of the fairest Arche that yett I ever saw in my remembrance, of excellent workmanship.'<sup>40</sup> J. Braga wrote, 'At Macao we find the ruins of the Oldest Church in China. Standing at the foot of the stately flight of steps leading up to the base of the ruined facade we are struck with the impressive beauty of this noble structure.'<sup>41</sup> To Braga, the religious compound in Macao, namely the convent, displayed a high level of artistic disposition: 'Mossy paths and sloping walks have replaced magnificent flights of steps, leading up to the ancient Convent already mentioned.

The artistic temperament of the Portuguese is shown here to a high degree.'<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, Auguste Borget was more interested in Chinese architecture. His eyes were caught by the Mage Temple, which was 'the most beautiful marvel without doubt, that I have seen in this country.' Borget went to the temple 'almost every day.' He later made a vivid and realistic oil painting of the Mage Temple [Ma-Kok].<sup>43</sup> Likewise, C. R. Boxer asserted that the Chinese Temple of the Goddess A-Ma remains 'to attest the former strength and opulence of the city.'<sup>44</sup> As a matter of fact, the conspicuous difference between the Eastern and Western architectural and life styles in Macao formed another uniqueness of Macao, a city with both European and Asiatic characteristics. J. Dyer Ball wrote that, at first sight, the houses of Macao convey an idea to the visitor that he has entered a European rather than an Asiatic seaport. This



idea becomes still stronger by the constant ringing of the church bells and passing and repassing of \*\* priests clad in cassocks and three-cornered hats. But this illusion is quickly dispelled when the eye, turning towards the sea beholds the numerous sampans and mat-sail boats \*\*\*, or glancing shoreward rests upon figures clad in Chinese costume.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, what attracted Western visitors was not only the natural beauty of Macao peninsula and the western style of Macao's houses and churches but also the unique harmony between Eastern and Western cultures and interactions as a perfect picture presented in Macao. The editor of Vantage Press called Macao 'a unique place where Orient and Occident met and blended.'<sup>46</sup> Colin Simpson declared:

Not only Sunday painters of the despised representational school but avant garde modernists could go mad about Macao. The character of the place seeps through the eye. It is a microcosm where the Orient is joined to the Occident and where the whole human condition is surely more palpable to the painter than it is anywhere else on earth.<sup>47</sup>

Interestingly, westerners' impression of a peaceful and harmonious Macao was not disturbed or overshadowed by the fortifications there, which were fully noticed by Western visitors then. C. R. Boxer informed us that Macao 'was formerly known ... as the 'Gibraltar of the Far East' and 'famous for its cannon, mostly cast in the years 1625-1645 by the celebrated founder Manoel Tavares Bocarro.'<sup>48</sup> In 1635 António Bocarro, Chronicler-in-Chief of the State of India at Goa, made a detailed description of Macao, especially its fortresses, though it is believed that he was never in Macao.<sup>49</sup> Bocarro stated that Macao 'has one of the best gun-foundries in the world', and 'all the aforesaid artillery, fortifications and walls in the City were made at its own expense.'<sup>50</sup> British sea-captain Alexander Hamilton visited the city in 1701 and noted that the largest brass cannon he ever saw were 'mounted in proper Batteries about the City.'<sup>51</sup> William C. Hunter confirmed that 'Macao became a 'place forte'... The several fortifications yet stand as originally constructed, and are mostly armed with cannon cast in its own foundry, some as early as 1612.'<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, Hunter pointed out that 'It was during that period that her [Macao's] churches

were built (with one exception) as well as the college and church of San José, which occupy a height near the middle of the town.'<sup>53</sup> Historian Jonathan Porter called Macao 'The Fortified City.'<sup>54</sup> It seemed that in the eyes of westerners the civil force was dominant in Macao, and Macao's fortifications and cannons were mainly for the purpose of defending Macao's civil life and prosperity and 'to prevent the Hollanders being able to enter in their ships.'<sup>55</sup> In fact, due to the lasting peace of Macao, the cannons of Macao were even used for peaceful and religious activities. As early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas K. van Mierop made a comment on Macao saying that 'Each hilltop, of which there are three, is crowned by a fort, the use of which would appear to be ceremonial.'<sup>56</sup> Low recorded that during a Catholic procession 'The cannons all round the fort then fired, and the bells ringing. It seemed, as you may judge, more like a festival than a Sabbath.'<sup>57</sup>

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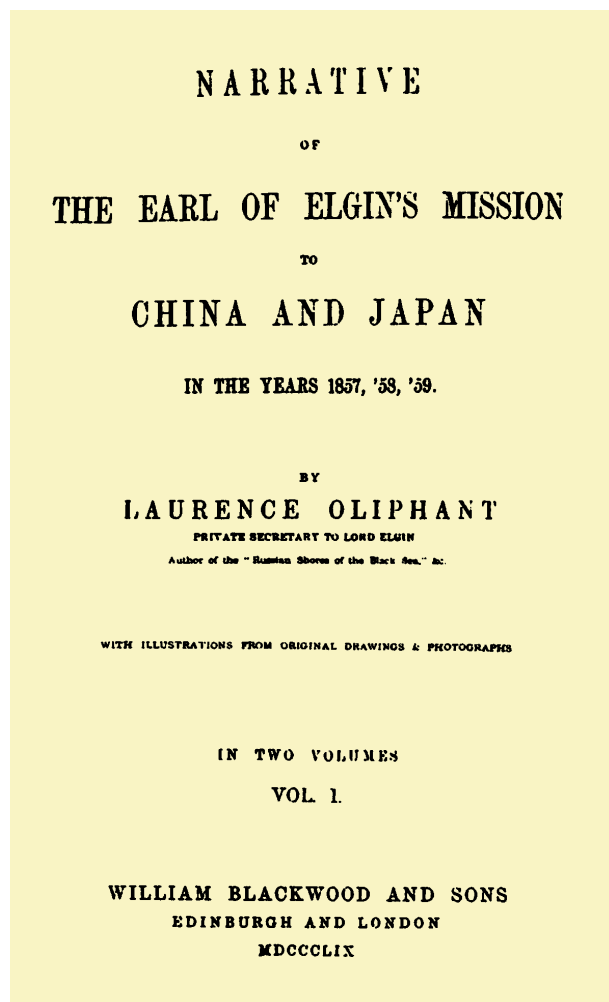
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M.DCC,XLIV.



ESTUDOS DE MACAU



Moreover, westerners often compared Macao with Hong Kong and had a more favourable view of Macao because, according to Laurence Oliphant, private secretary to Lord Elgin, Macao's

narrow streets and grass-grown plazas, the handsome façade of the fine old cathedral crumbling to decay, the shady walks and cool grottoes ... all combined to produce a soothing and tranquillizing effect upon sensibilities irritated by our recent mode of life.

In contrast, Macao's 'air of respectable antiquity was refreshing, after the somewhat parvenu character with which its ostentatious magnificence invests Hong Kong.'<sup>58</sup> Another correspondent, George Wingrove Cooke, shared the view with Oliphant that 'Macao is open to the sea-breeze, which Victoria is not ... Macao also has shady gardens and pleasant walks and rides,

and is the only place where the poor Hongkongian can go to change his atmosphere.'<sup>59</sup>

#### THE UNIQUENESS OF MACAO: POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL ELEMENTS

The range of Low's personal life was quite limited and isolated, yet her view of Macao as a religious and peaceful city was close to the reality, which is exactly part of Macao's uniqueness: a port island developed for trade, yet held together by common beliefs; a fortified city at risk of possible human attacks and invasions, yet content with its serene nature and life. While Low witnessed Macao's tranquillity from the position of a foreigner at a certain distance and on the surface, C. R. Boxer offered his insight into that phenomenon from a scholarly perspective. In Boxer's view the free and peaceful status of Macao mainly resulted from its dislocation from both China and Portugal, which rendered Macao free from tight juridical control. 'Another reason for its popularity', Boxer explained,

was the fact that the long arm of the Inquisition did not reach that far, or at all events had its activities seriously curtailed, owing to the disfavour with which it was quite naturally regarded by the neighbouring Chinese authorities. For fear of provoking a clash with the Chinese, no auto da fe was ever held at Macao. ... With the native Chinese population the local ecclesiastical officials did not dare to interfere, in contrast to the rigour with which the Goanese Hindus were sometimes treated in Portuguese India.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, the Portuguese carefulness and the Chinese indifference provided Macao much freedom.

In addition, Boxer continued, 'Another interesting feature of the place was the uniquely democratic form of government which it enjoyed, in comparison with the despotic rule which prevailed in the remaining Portuguese colonies—or in those of all other European powers for that matter.' Most Portuguese cities and colonial settlements had their Senate, but under the absolute monarchical regime they 'were shorn of all save purely administrative powers and it was the Viceroy, Governor, or Captain-General who was the real ruler.' Even after the liberal constitutional regime replaced the monarchy in Portugal during the 1830s, 'the Senate's authority was reduced to that of an ordinary municipal council whilst the civil governor was invested with full

power.' However, the Governor and Captain-General of Macao, appointed by the Crown since 1623, 'found it very difficult to contend with the Senate' of Macao, and 'his direct control was virtually limited to the command of the forts and garrison.' The real governing body was the Senate, half of whom 'were elected by a form of popular (thought not universal) suffrage for a three year period.' If any great event occurred, a general meeting would be convoked, 'in which the Captain-General, the Ecclesiastical authorities and the leading citizens were summoned to deliberate with the Senators on the measures to be adopted.' If there was a clash between the Governor and the Senate, 'it was almost invariably the Senate which won.'<sup>61</sup>

Besides this unique political system, other economic, social and cultural elements of Macao also formed parts of its uniqueness. Macao is small and surrounded by sea and located at the mouth of the Pearl River of China, but Macao's unique location and environment make it closely associated with trade and trading ships and boats, which added another unique beauty to Macao. Artist Robert Burford described:

Ships of all countries are seen winding their way amongst the numerous islands in the outer passage, and the extensive sky is occupied by craft of every description, from the heavy trading junk and native passage-boat, to the small Tan-kea or Egg boats, which ply by hundreds between them and the shore; the whole contributing much, by their variety of size, singularity of shape, and the gay colours they exhibit, to the general effect, interest, and beauty of the scene.<sup>62</sup> (p. 3)

António Bocarro studied Macao's trade and found out that all the following items were imported into and exported from China via Macao in great volumes: pearls, seed-pearls, precious stones, musk, amber, porcelain, silks, gold, vermilion, quicksilver, and zinc.<sup>63</sup> Bocarro concluded that

In short, of everything that nature has produced in many Kingdoms, there is such an abundant supply in this one only that it seems as if it alone has them. ... So that if we could obtain freedom of trade with China only, this alone would suffice us without any other, all this East, nay all the world, could be supplied by it alone.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, the trade via and with Macao turned it into a wealthy place. António Bocarro believed that Macao was 'one of the noblest cities in the East, on account

of its rich and noble traffic in all kinds of wealth to all parts; it has all kinds of precious things in great abundance, and more and wealthier citizens than any other in this State.'<sup>65</sup> As a result, interestingly, as Boxer found out, Macao became 'a favourite resort for indigent suitors from all parts of the Portuguese empire' because 'there were established a number of rich families who could afford lavishly to endow their daughters.'<sup>66</sup> Obviously, due to its successful trade, Macao had become not only wealthy but also attractive to bachelors and adventurers. No wonder António Bocarro would claim that the Portuguese families in Macao with their children 'are much stronger and lustier than any others in this East.'<sup>67</sup>

Since the majority of Macao's population is Chinese, the Western view of Chinese must be very important to forming their impression of Macao. As a matter of fact, the characteristics of the Chinese

## CHINA:

BEING

"THE TIMES" SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE FROM CHINA

IN THE YEARS 1857-58.

REPRINTED BY PERMISSION.

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GEORGE WINGROVE COOKE,

AUTHOR OF "THE HISTORY OF PARTY," ETC.

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people were another important part of the uniqueness of Macao to westerners. The first impression that the Chinese people of Macao left upon Westerners was their poverty. William Hickey commented on Macao that, 'Not only men, but everything around, bespoke the acme of poverty and misery.'<sup>68</sup> 'A vast number of the poor people live upon the water', Low wrote, 'Their dress is singular.' However, Low found that although these Chinese were poor, they appeared 'cheerful and happy.' She even believed that people 'would wonder that [there is] a smile upon their faces, when apparently so miserable.'<sup>69</sup> Low wrote that her Western friends thought 'the Chinese were very civil' because when the Chinese gathered in crowds round the house of the westerners, expecting them to come out, they 'filed off on both sides at their approach and made no noise. Nothing but a little buzz of admiration was heard.' Many Chinese people 'paid 3 cash to see the Fanqui (foreign devil) women, but none made the least disturbance.'<sup>70</sup> Low also noticed that the Chinese 'were all perfectly civil, and made no noise, but only showed a little curiosity', which the Chinese 'have a share in common with their fellow-creatures of more enlightened parts.'<sup>71</sup> Eventually, Low even concluded, 'Now I think the Chinese are much more civil than either American or English people would have been if a China woman had have [sic] appeared in our streets dressed in the costume of her country with little feet.'<sup>72</sup> Similarly, after staying in Macao for a while, Robert Morrison, the first Protestant Christian missionary to China, wondered 'why the Chinese were more civilised, and had many temporal blessings which some of the barbarous nations around them had not?'<sup>73</sup>

## THE NEGATIVE WESTERN VIEW OF MACAO AND ITS PEOPLE

Macao could not, of course, be perfect in every aspect to westerners, who detected things in Macao that they did not like. Although mostly Macao remained a harmonious society, the division between the Chinese and the Portuguese was visible. Robert Burford witnessed that Macao was 'divided from the main by a wall crossing the narrowest part, which effectually restricts the Portuguese to the limits assigned them, and enables the Chinese, by stopping the supply of provisions, always to bring them to

terms, when any disputes occur.'<sup>74</sup> Auguste Borget explained that 'The Portuguese and the Chinese part of the town are separated by a wide street, called the place of the Senate.' 'The only similarity between a Chinese encampment and a European one', Borget continued with disdain, 'is that both have clean and well-made tents. What a difference is there between our active soldiers, always in motion, with their well-fitting uniform and martial air, and those pacific men embarrassed by their unwieldy garments, armed with lances, pikes, and matchlocks!'<sup>75</sup> With a similar attitude, J. Dyer Ball recorded that 'Beyond the Barrier there appears to be a piece of neutral ground. The distinction between occidentalism and orientalism; between civilisation and barbarism; between the European and the Asiatic is noticeable at once.'<sup>76</sup> To Stella Benson, however, 'The empty shell of Portuguese taste is here' in Macao, 'yet the city seems to me almost wholly Chinese at heart.'<sup>77</sup> Low asserted that 'People say the government of Macao is only nominally Portuguese.'<sup>78</sup> Rev. Walter Lowrie was very sympathetic with the poor Chinese, who were lower than Portuguese and foreigners in Macao: 'The [Portuguese] ladies, and a good many of the foreign male residents, commonly pay their visits in sedan chairs, borne by two Chinese. I used to pity some of the bearers as they went panting along under the weight of some fat fellow. ... The houses of the foreigners are commonly large and roomy; the servants live in the basement.'<sup>79</sup>

Disgust toward some aspects of Chinese habits and culture was clearly expressed by westerners. António Bocarro wrote of 'the Chinese, who are so suspicious' and claimed that 'the Chinese exact money for everything.'<sup>80</sup> Robert Morrison had a similar feeling about the Chinese, commenting: 'The Chinese who assisted me were very mercenary.'<sup>81</sup> Although Low highly regarded the Chinese, she once felt: 'The Chinese are very cunning, and know every well what they are about',<sup>82</sup> and 'they were very shrewd, and knew just the tender point to touch.'<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Low realised that the Chinese 'are very superstitious respecting the place in which they bury their dead', and sighed, 'They are a strange people.'<sup>84</sup> Robert Morrison also noticed the superstitious ways of the Chinese in 'attesting the truth of an assertion by cutting off the head of a fowl', or 'by dashing a potter's vessel to pieces, and wishing that if they speak falsely it may be done unto them in like

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manner; or by blowing out a candle, and wishing that they in like manner may be extinguished.<sup>85</sup> He even recorded the details with which the Chinese asked for good luck: the worshipers 'took up a crooked piece of wood' and 'threw it down again and again, till it fell in a posture that they wished, or thought ominous of good.' Morrison probably was quite uncomfortable with the fact that the Chinese showed no respect to others' religious activity because 'There is nothing social in their worship, nor any respect shown by those who are not engaged. One is praying, another talking and laughing, a third cleaning utensils, etc.' Moreover, the Chinese also picked their favourite deities. 'Hence many of the temples are quite deserted, whilst Phi-te Poo-sa (北帝廟) was crowded, smoked, smutted, and almost burnt out of his dwelling.'<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, some westerners felt the Chinese were very conservative and stubborn. Robert Morrison reported from Macao that 'the Chinese are prohibited from teaching the language;' to obtain masters to teach would face 'the penalty of death.'<sup>87</sup> He almost cursed the Chinese with his teeth clenched:

This shrewd and discerning people are absurd and unreasonable enough to consider it criminal for foreigners to know their language, or possess their books; and still more to have the books of foreigners in their own possession. The expedition has increased their restrictions in a tenfold degree, both here and at Macao.<sup>88</sup>

Low complained, 'there is no comparison to be drawn between the Chinese and any other nation in the world. They will not allow any innovation upon 'old custom', and will ding those words into your ears forever if it is not for their interest to violate it, when it is quite a different thing.'<sup>89</sup> Moreover, Low continued, the Chinese 'cannot talky reason' and they must be 'bullied.'<sup>90</sup> Bocarro recorded that 'The Chinese are so inimical to any foreign nation entering their lands, that even though they realise the great help they have received from the Portuguese in their wars against the Tartars, ... all the more reluctant to admit the latter in their Kingdoms.'<sup>91</sup> Morrison was keenly aware of 'the contempt of the Chinese towards all foreigners' as well as the fact that his two assistants 'agreed in considering it altogether useless to be at any trouble to know any thing of foreigners' because they insisted that 'the depths of knowledge contained in the Four Books have never been fathomed; and, till that be done, it is folly to



The Great Temple of Macao. Drawing by Auguste Borget, lithograph by Eugène Cicéri, in Borget's *La Chine et les chinois* (Paris, 1842).

attend to any other.'<sup>92</sup> Thus, Morrison concluded: 'The professed esteem of my people [Chinese] for Confucius is unbounded.'<sup>93</sup>

Westerners found other Chinese habits and cultural phenomena that they did not feel comfortable with. The bound feet of Chinese women were always an exotic and erotic topic among westerners, and even a religious person such as Bocarro could not help but make a comment: 'The Chinese women are so retired that the Portuguese never see them, and they are brought up from childhood with their feet so tightly bound that when they grow up they are almost dropsical in their walk; they are exceedingly chaste towards us.'<sup>94</sup> Bocarro also discovered Chinese were 'greatly addicted to sodomy, which is not punished nor regarded askance amongst them.'<sup>95</sup> Bocarro believed that the ordinary Chinese were 'idolaters', and 'the common people of this nation are greatly given to deceits.' Their judges, who received high respect, actually were 'noticeably grave and severe.'<sup>96</sup> Due to such a system and culture, Bocarro reported, 'it has been and still is frequently seen that' the Chinese who were entrusted by Portuguese with a great sum of money 'embezzle the money of the Portuguese and flee without returning it to them.'<sup>97</sup> No wonder that one of Low's friends 'thinks Macao a queer place.'<sup>98</sup> The Chinese in Macao certainly had a reputation for loving gambling. Stella Benson observed and recorded the scene of a Chinese gambling room:

The Chinese fan-tan dens stand—are encouraged by the Portuguese Government—and there you



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can go and take rather monotonous risks with a spare dollar and watch the Chinaman as he best loves to be—with his head bent over a board on which all that he has lies in danger.<sup>99</sup>

Gavin Black's novelist comment on Macao is exaggerated, but it is one of the Western views of Macao: 'Outside of the new China all Chinese gamble. It is more important to them than food, and food is more important than sex.'<sup>100</sup>

Of course, westerners had their biased and privileged view of Macao which revealed their ignorance. When William Hickey visited Macao in 1770, he called the city 'this miserable place' and the soldiers of Macao 'wretches' who were just 'honoured with a title of soldiers.' He described Macao's fort as 'wretched ill-constructed.' Likewise, his fellow Maclintock was 'as disgusted as myself with Macao.'<sup>101</sup> Stella Benson, an English woman, described what she saw in Macao with a cynical tone:

The broad calm masks of Chinese women look down on the streets ... the blunt eccentric shapes of papayas and bananas fill the squares and gardens instead of roses and olives; the churches are deserted except for a few little tranquil Chinese matrons, trousered and sleek, with their babies strapped in big coloured handkerchiefs on to their shoulders. ... the Chinese temples stand, their ferocious porcelain sky-lines bristling with dragons and dolphins, their dusty and slovenly altars presided over by absent-minded but complacent Buddhas.

She even disliked the Portuguese architectural taste shown in Macao, including 'the coloured plaster walls, the low corrugated red tile roofs, the quiet gardened convents, the churches full of a vulgar and ardent daylight.'<sup>102</sup> Rev. Walter Lowrie was amused by Chinese winter dress. Though 'a great admirer of the Chinese modes of dress', he told his mother,

You would laugh if you saw them. ... Their appearance is consequently next thing to ridiculous. ... Many a time I have laughed at the comical appearance of a young dandy ... I should like to see one of them in Broadway, with his thick soled shoes and green tights, his wadded vests, and round cap and long tail behind.<sup>103</sup>

After the First Opium War, Hong Kong quickly rose to become a new trading center in Asia that replaced

the traditional role of Macao. Macao's economy and wealth rapidly declined, and the people of Macao had to resort to other businesses than trade for survival. Soon Macao became infamous for the coolie trade, drugs, prostitution, and gambling.<sup>104</sup> As Henry Norman described,

[D]uring these twenty years uncounted thousands of coolies were decoyed, entrapped, stolen, and pirated to Macao, kept prisoners in the gloomy 'barracoons', whose grated windows are still everywhere visible, theoretically certified as voluntary contract labourers by an infamous profit-sharing procurador, and then shipped to toil, and starve, and rot, and die in mines and fields and plantations everywhere.<sup>105</sup>

'By the 1920s and 1930s', American historian Jonathan Porter concluded, 'Macau had become one of the world's notorious "cities of sin," where gambling, prostitution, and opium houses flourished.' A visitor expressed an extremely critical view of Macao in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

There is no question that it harbors in its hidden places the riffraff of the world, the drunken ship masters; the flotsam of the sea, the derelicts, and more shameless, beautiful, savage women than any port in the world. It is hell. But to those who whirl in its unending play, it is the one haven where there is never a hand raised or a word said against the play of the beastliest emotions that ever blacken the human heart.<sup>106</sup>

The famous Anglo-American poet W. H. Auden also revealed his strong disappointment with Macao through a sonnet, part of which goes like this:

This city of indulgence need not fear  
The major sins by which the heart is killed,  
And governments and men are torn to pieces:  
Religious clocks will strike; the childish vices  
Will safeguard the low virtues of the child;  
And nothing serious can happen here.<sup>107</sup>

Some Western writers called Macao 'Far East's Las Vegas' or 'The Monaco of the East', and called 'the Chinaman the greatest gambler on earth.'<sup>108</sup> They also considered Macao as a piratical centre and an asylum for the people who feared no law, human or divine.<sup>109</sup> The editor of Vantage Press claimed: 'Macao has long suffered a reputation for being a 'city of sin', a haven

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for gangsters and gamblers and other unsavoury characters.<sup>110</sup> Colin Simpson found in the 1960s that Macao was 'one of the last places in Asia where you can see teenage prostitutes sitting in the doorways of open brothels; and one of the principal smuggling ports for heroin and opium.'<sup>111</sup> A Western novelist provided readers with a detailed and imaginary negative picture of Macao and even portrayed it as a better haven than Las Vegas for sinners: 'Whatever your other pleasures, they are delivered discreetly to your bedroom door (no matter how offbeat) as part of room service. Prices are not yet Las Vegas's, but they are reaching for it.' However, 'The crime rate is low and you're unlikely to be knocked on the head in a dark lane even if you've had a big win.'<sup>112</sup> The author believed that Macao 'is the Far East headquarters for American, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, French, and British espionage services, and offers as well the world's most sophisticated and comprehensive networks dealing in commercial snooping, which means that an elaborately 'secured' conference in a top floor hotel suite is totally covered by half a dozen agencies long before it starts.'<sup>113</sup> Historian Jonathan Porter called Macao a 'dangerous place, a refuge for the down-and-out and a haven for smugglers, spies, and other malevolent characters.'<sup>114</sup> Reporters used the titles 'Macao Is Called North Korea Spy Site' and 'Too Easy into Macao' for their articles published in *The New York Times* and *Manchester Guardian Weekly*.<sup>115</sup>

In short, to most westerners, Macao is a unique place in the world. Although small, it has its natural island beauty, grand forts, colourful Western and Eastern buildings, great mixed culture and civilisations, as well as its shortcomings. As time flies by and Macao goes through modernisation, what will happen to the uniqueness of Macao? It seems that westerners are not much worried about that, and that one of Macao's attractions to westerners is its changing yet enduring features. While Macao is continually being transformed, it has never lost its charming historical characteristics. For instance, after the Chinese Communist Party took over China, colonial Macao, in face of the approaching Communist power and Communist ideology, stood in an odd situation, but it managed to maintain its historical infrastructure. Even after Mao's China started the Cultural Revolution, Gavin Black called Macao 'this little historical anachronism', but he still recommended to many visitors to the Orient who 'have never even

heard of Macao' to 'believe us, this tongue of land two and a half miles long by one wide sticking out from Chairman Mao's China is *well* worth a visit.'<sup>116</sup> To Black, the lasting attraction of Macao to westerners is probably still the Portuguese colonial heritage: 'There is considerable new building along the waterfront, but behind and around this is a town that seems to have its roots right back in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Portuguese colonial, with brightly painted villas covering the small hills.'<sup>117</sup>

Thus, the charm of Macao comes from its ability to adopt the new while keeping the old. How could Macao do that? Black believed:

It is possible that Peking allows Macao to continue to exist as a colony just to have it handy as a retreat for all Marxist-oriented millionaires suddenly exposed by mission failures. Russia could do with a little enclave of a similar kind somewhere along the shores of the Mediterranean as a recruitment incentive.<sup>118</sup>

Yet, the new policy of the CCP toward Macao could have its detrimental effect on Macao. Black was worried about 'Macao being the only Far Eastern featherbed available for failed undercover Communists who want to go on owning big American limousines' and that 'even here paradise wasn't going to last, the portents of change obvious—a gaming ship and new hotels for mass tourism.'<sup>119</sup> Black pointed out:

Macao is utterly different. Here is a nicely concentrated distillation of the world's delights with the source of your basic inspiration just down the road if you need it, while at the same time you live immune from your spiritual motherland's physical austerities.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, Macao has been and will probably continue to be a unique place that is tiny but a container that mixes the West and the East, the tradition and the modernity, the religious and the impious, the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the evil, the lasting and the changing. Since Macao was returned to China in 1999, the policy of the central government toward Macao has certainly been extremely important to Macao, but Macao's future cannot be determined only by that; there are many other elements that can affect Macao's future too. Macao's future is in the hands of the Macao people, and it will be very interesting to see how westerners will view Macao in the years to come and to compare their views with those of their counterparts in the past. **RC**

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