

The Macao Holy House of Mercy and its Charitable Activity

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ABSTRACT: The Holy House of Mercy was established, in 1569, the Hospital of the Poor was created, as well as an isolation hospital to attend the lepers, the Hospital of S. Lazarus, with an attached small church, called Our Lady of the Hope (current church of S. Lazarus), and, also, almost since its beginnings, the House of the Displayed, or Roda, as commonly called, in order to collect the foundlings, generally children of Chinese and slave women. New hospitals had arisen, asylums for aged persons had been established and the orphanages had spread. The poor, in general, were taken care of by giving them material help. As well as the gatherings for women and wisdom in needs.

The income of the Brotherhood came from an annually consigned percentage in the rights of the citizens, as well as of legacies and other particular donations, being rare the rich people who, upon dying, did not bequeath their goods or a part of them to the Holy House of Mercy.

Assistance to sick persons in their own domicile was created. Dowries for the orphan maidens to marry had been instituted. The prisoners, the delinquents, the death convicts were not forgotten as the Holy House of Mercy extended them spiritual, judicial and material assistance.

Nowadays the Holy House of Mercy of Macao constitutes one of the most important social institutions of the city and continues to maintain an active social presence in the now Special Administrative Region of Macao, developing several important activities of social welfare.

KEYWORDS: The Holy House of Mercy; Social Welfare; Women's Gatherings; Hospital of the Poor and the Lazarus; House of the Rejected ("Roda").

Between the end of the 16th century and the end of the 18th century, the special survival "*formula*" of the Portuguese in Macao¹ was fundamentally building a form of specialized "trade emporium", with the

complex social characteristics of a port enclave that, tolerated by the imperial Chinese authorities, survived in the long-term due to its capacity of being useful to the commerce (trade) that the emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties prohibited, both to their own people as well as to foreigners, minus some cyclical (temporary) exceptions on time and limited spaces. Thus rose a Luso-Chinese city with a Portuguese and Luso-Asian population demographically greatly dominated by

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The Holy House of Mercy, c. 1915. Image: Miguel Russell. Cecília Jorge / R. Beltrão Coelho collection.

women compared to men, almost completely at the mercy of trade, moving through the enclave, but not always easily finding kinship and families.

This melting pot of cultures resulted in the creation of an Euro-Asian Macanese community, the so-called “*filhos da terra*” (*children on the land* or local natives).² This Macanese community, with bilingual or multilingual cultural characteristics, had an important role in the history of Macao. The Macanese were the cultural “bridge” between Portuguese and Chinese. In fact, the settlement of Hong Kong, in the beginning, had to rely on the help and expertise of the Macanese.

In any case, Macao was growing with the commerce and became an important port also connected to the Silk Road³ too.

With them the Portuguese bring their institutions as the Municipal Council (later Loyal Senate) and the Holy House of Mercy (*Santa Casa da Misericórdia*).

Immediately after the founding of Macao, the Church established itself there and Macao became the center of the first Diocese of the Catholic Church in East Asia, in 1575. In 1594, St. Paul’s College, the first western-style university in the distant Far East, was established in Macao, in order to train the Jesuits in the Chinese language, culture and customs, before starting their work as missionaries in the interior of China. The Jesuits that came from different European nations, especially from Latin Europe, such as Matteo Ricci, Nicolaus Trigault, Tomás Pereira and others, became the first generation of excellent sinologists. The Jesuits, together with their Chinese counterparts, such as Xu Guangqi, Li Zichao, Mei Wenting and others, trained in Latin idioms, began an exchange between cultures, translating and introducing western mathematics, astronomy, physics, architecture, medicine, weapons armaments, the art of printing, music, arts, among

ESTUDOS DE MACAU

other things, into the East, and bringing Chinese philosophy, literature, medicine, tea, porcelain, lacquer, architecture and painting to the West.

This significant cultural interchange was one of the greatest contributions of Macao to World History. It was made possible due to mutual respect and tolerance. The ruins and façade of St. Paul's Cathedral, with its Eastern and Western elements, are a symbol of the cultural identity of Macao. This multicultural identity involves a coexistence, interaction and mixing of East and West, such as traditions, architecture, literature, painting, music and gastronomy.

Foundation of the *Misericórdias* (Holy House of Mercy)

The existence of confraternity or brotherhoods originates from the Middle Ages, and their final objective was to satisfy the need for worship and saving the souls of its members, dead or alive, men or women, rich or poor, such as the construction of a chapel in the inside of a church. As this need increased over time, new structures emerged, the Mercies. The Mercies would come to embody a faith closer to Christ and the Virgin Mary, focusing on practicing actions of devotion and piety in a Country that, similarly to the rest of Europe, saw a significant increase in the number of poor.⁴ The paradigm of social life that originated from the economic modifications of the 16th century, as well as the consecutive years of natural and non-natural catastrophes, determined European society in the following centuries. This caused an unprecedented impoverishment in Europe.⁵ This huge increase in poverty was a social phenomenon and, simultaneously, demands justifications from the wealthy. It is in this context that the activity of charitable institutions and the Religious Orders of Mendicants develops. This became the safest way to obtain salvation, but was also an occasion for the donor to show off their riches and openly exteriorize their pious feelings.⁶ With the Council of Trent (1545-1563) this question, ie, the topic of faith, is highlighted and becomes more and more associated with the notion

that salvation is achieved only through faith and actions, contrary to Protestantism.

The Portuguese presence in the World gave rise to a diverse group of the Holy House of Mercy, that extended from continental Portugal to the Atlantic Archipelagos, Africa, Asia and Brazil. Thus, the expansion process of the Mercies would develop, simultaneously, in the territories of the continent, Atlantic isles, and Asian and American territories. Its construction fulfilled the social needs of the population but also the needs of a monarchy looking for international affirmation.

The differences between the diverse *Mercies* weren't very noticeable compared to the Lisbon model, given that the Mercies were very similar amongst each other despite the differences of social bases and relative to its institutional organization.

The Holy House of Mercy ended up centralizing social welfare and for that they became great collectors of the means for the practice of charity. Like the Portuguese colonization knew, the Holy House of Mercy learned many ways during its formation in their actions to the "Other".

According to tradition, the Brotherhood dedicated to Our Lady of the Mercy was established in 1498, in a chapel of the Cathedral of Lisbon and had resulted from the conjoined action of Queen Leonor (1458-1525), widow of King João II, and the Spanish Friar Miguel de Contreiras, her confessor, on an occasion where King Manuel was absent from Castile.⁷ The foundation of the first Brotherhood (*Misericórdia*) - that of Lisbon - occurred in the year in which the Portuguese arrived in India and King Manuel immediately agreed with the initiative of his sister, Queen Leonor.⁸

The new Brotherhood quickly extended throughout Portugal, as well as in the overseas establishments (in the strongholds or military bases and fortresses of North Africa, throughout Brazil and the enclaves of the "State of India", arriving in Macao and Japan), almost at the same time they were multiplying throughout the kingdom, thanks to the royal support.⁹

MACAO STUDIES

The fruits of this institution were soon felt. New hospitals were built; the existing ones were improved, asylums for old people were established and there were more and more orphan houses. The poor, in general, were taken care of and they were given material support. Assistance to the sick people in their own domicile was created. Dowries for the maiden orphans to marry were instituted. The prisoners, the delinquents, the convicted to death were not forgotten. The Holy House of Mercy extended its spiritual, judicial and material assistance to them.¹⁰

From the mid 16th century, at the same time that they consolidated their social presence and received generous royal protection, the *Misericórdias* also obtained the right to collect real properties, starting to accumulate great patrimonies, obtained especially through donations and pious inheritances, which mobilized other protections, devotions and support.¹¹

In general terms, the Mercies sought to transform properties and material gifts into capital, cash or silver, creating a specialized deposit that was frequently used to guarantee insurances and loans, introducing the insurance and banking aspects of the brotherhoods.

The Mercies thus also served as banks, through which money transactions were made, from Macao or Brazil to Portugal, or vice-versa, all free of charge, for charity. Individuals relied on the Mercies to obtain information regarding their parents, who they had had no news from for a long time, thus serving as intermediaries in inheritance questions.¹²

In colonial societies, where maintenance of the social statute was important, one of the great concerns of the charity was to support the people who, despite their good condition, had fallen into situations of poverty, due to several kinds of adversity. It was mostly, a secret kind of, domiciliary help, which meant to keep these (impoverished) people in an upper social *status*, in contrast to those whose poverty was openly recognized because they “extended their hands in public”. For this reason, these people were called “ashamed poor”.¹³ This help was part of logic maintenance of social

hierarchies: on one hand, the institution reaffirmed the hierarchies when helping to maintain the existing distinctions, since it prevented the social order from being discredited; on the other hand, the receivers avoided the social exclusion that public aid would submit them to. The aided poor, in this group, were generally widows, orphan girls without a dowry to get married, family units which lacked a father or a husband, etc. The “ashamed poverty” constituted a level of descending social mobility that charity tried to prevent, even though the origins of these poor were middle classes, but with some social credit. In this sense, the charity included, as one of its components, social reproduction.¹⁴

The Mercies also offered assistance to children, including the rejected (abandoned children) and the homeless. The first were children who had no known parents, and the second were children whose family context had disintegrated and, thus, needed help.¹⁵ They also helped orphans, understood as being all the children who had no father, many of which did not need material help. As for those in this case, the Mercies limited themselves to safekeeping their inheritable money, after the magistrate (judges and orphans’ scribes, and the appraisers and *partidores*)¹⁶ had made the inventory. This was a common procedure, especially in the Mercies of Asia and, often, with “fraudulent maneuvers”.¹⁷

Many Mercies (*Misericórdias*) also administered colleges for orphan boys, although these were normally linked to seminars; as well as women’s gatherings (*recolhimentos*), that could also have orphan girls and aimed to protect the “female honor”.¹⁸

Asides from the poor and the orphans, the Mercies of Goa and Macao also employed a charitable aid that was important to those imprisoned. It is worth remembering that prisoners, until well into the 19th century, received practically no state aid, with their food, clothes, hygiene and general monitoring being guaranteed by family circles or charity institutions.

ESTUDOS DE MACAU

The Mercies of Goa and Macao were also significant places of Catholic education. Added to these processional, ritual, cultural and funeral duties was also some spiritual intentions that sought to mobilize prayer in the activities of the brotherhood.

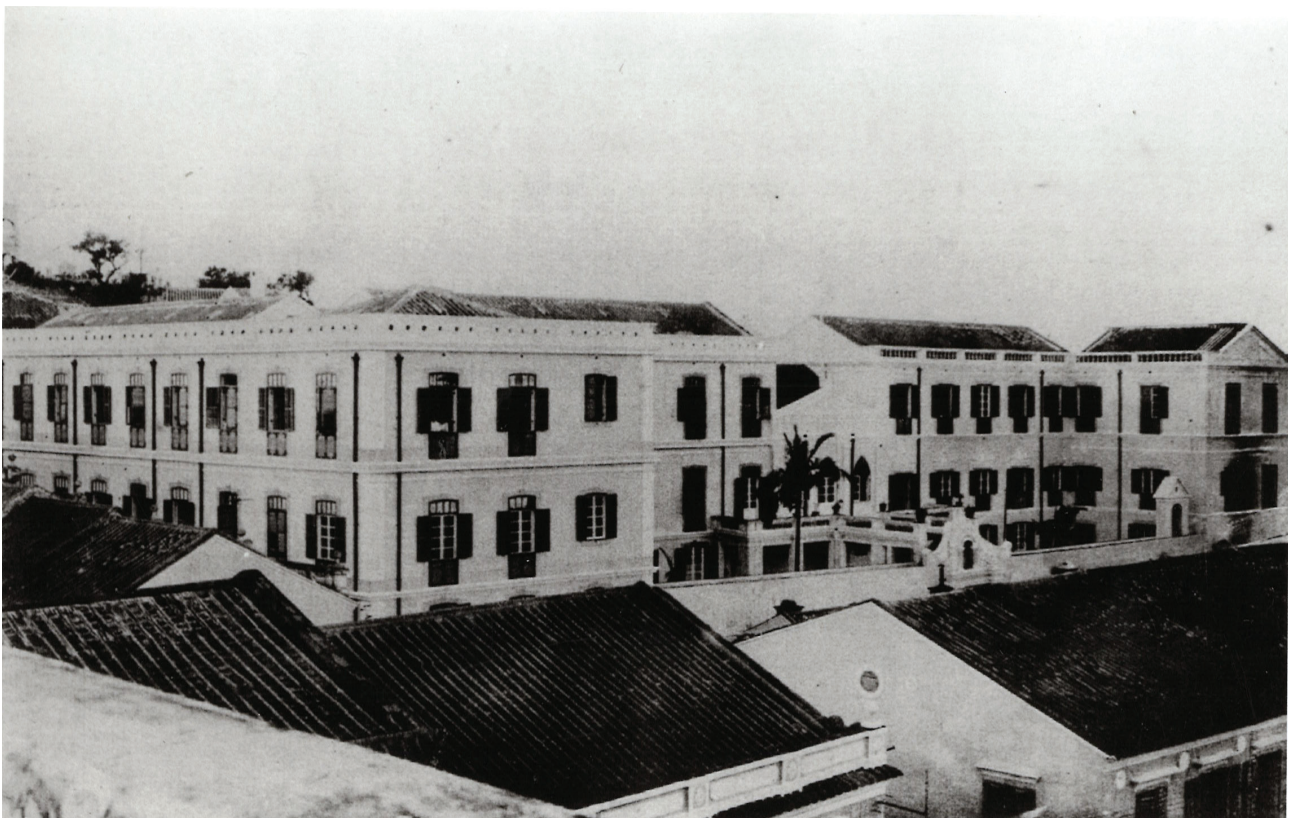
One of the signs of the Mercies' supremacy over other fraternities was the visibility they enjoyed in local processions, with competition only from religious orders, overwhelming any competition from parochial fraternities, which did not offer assistance to the needy.¹⁹

The existence of the Mercies was justified by the employment of charity but, in truth, the majority of its resources were not utilized in assisting the poor. They were, instead, used to pay chaplains for the Masses they prayed, or in interest loans and, also, in costs related to religious praying (processions, religious vests, etc.) or with the construction and upgrades in churches and chapels.²⁰

It should be noted that, in this time, “charity resources” were small in face of the search for assistance, due to the large percentage of poor existing in the societies of the Old Regime.²¹

The Municipal Council or Senate and the Holy House of Mercy were the twin pillars of Portuguese colonial society, from Maranhão to Macao. It was mainly the Town Hall Senate and the Holy House of Mercy (whose members constituted true colonial elites) who helped to maintain united the different colonies of the vast Portuguese Maritime Empire, guaranteeing a continuity that the other authorities (governors, bishops and magistrates) could not.²²

It became ever more important, for the society of the time, to belong to the administration of the Mercies, thus their Purveyors and Board of Directors were recruited from the most influential strata (people) of the metropolitan (motherland) and ultramarine society (overseas societies) of that time.²³



Hospital of St. Raphael - AM, 1627.

The Commitment (*Compromisso*) was the “constitution” of the Mercies and in it were written the general and specific aims of its founding, as well as the duties that fell upon the 13 annually elected officials that guided the Brotherhood. The spirit of the *Compromisso* defended the idea that all men being sons of the same Creator God, and the principle that assistance allied with charity, helping with poverty, sickness and bitterness. The Mercy was led by a group of brothers, 13 in number, that met two or three times, forming the Board of Directors (*Mesa*). The *Mesa* (Board of Directors) was presided by the main figure representative of the authority within the Brotherhood - the Purveyor (*Provedor*). The second figure, in order of importance, was the Scribe (charged with all the writing of the fraternity). Other positions of importance within the Mercy that, generally, fell upon the members of the Board of Directors, were the treasurer, responsible for all the writing involving receipts and costs, presenting his accounting at the Board of Directors (*Mesa*); the other two were the Butler (*Mordomo*) of the Chapel (charged with synchronizing and organizing the Masses in the chapel, as well as taking care of the vestments of prayer) and the Butler (*Mordomo*) of the Bursary (a position close to the treasurer, probably preceding the last and with the same functions). The two main positions - Purveyor and Scribe - belonged to brothers from the nobility (and to members of the clergy, among them), even despite the second class brothers also present, in a *ratio* of six to seven - this way the majority of the noble brothers was kept, in case it was necessary to “form a block”. The number thirteen was also important as a symbolic value, since it replicated the number of people at the Last Supper (Lord’s Supper), whom the Commitment (*Compromisso*) of the Mercy of Lisbon, from 1600, said the members of the Board of Directors should imitate.²⁴

The first Commitment (*Compromisso*) of the Mercy of Macao, of 1627, while being based on the ones from Lisbon and Goa, was, however, adapted to the reality of Macao. In it was clearly specified

the duties of the Brothers elected for their respective positions, by scales, so that all had the opportunity of practicing acts of mercy.²⁵

The Holy House of Mercy of Macao

In Macao, the Bishop Belchior Carneiro, only a year after his arrival, created, in 1569, the Holy House of Mercy. There were still only a few Portuguese houses in Macao, does it can be concluded that the Brotherhood was destined more towards the locals, to provide for all the poor ashamed and for those who need it, as stated by its founder. And, just as in Portugal, one of the major activities of the Mercies was the establishment and maintenance of hospitals for the poor. Bishop Belchior Carneiro, shortly after founding the Mercy, opened a hospital, where “they admitted both Christians and pagans”, as he mentioned in a letter to General of the Company of Jesus, dated 20th November 1575. The hospital became known as the Hospital of the Poor and, three centuries later, was renamed Saint Raphael. In 1591 there were already clear and concrete references to the hospital.²⁶ Afterwards, he established the Hospital of the Lazarus, destined for lepers. It started its function outside the city, in the area where today the parish of Saint Lazarus can be found. As many were converting to Christianity, the Holy House of Mercy built the Chapel of Our Lady of Hope (currently the church of S. Lazarus), with its own chaplain, in order to attend to the spiritual needs of lepers or incurables. This hospital would only be closed in 1896, after 326 years of existence, with the last incurable patients transferring to the new leprosarium (leper hospital) of the Government, in Ka-Ho and the island of D. João.

The assistance to the infirm poor and the lepers, through these two hospitals, was the most important work of the Mercy in Macao. For that, the Compromise of 1627 offers it great attention, as can be verified in the chapter where the duties of the Butler of the Hospital of the Poor are enumerated.²⁷

From then on, other social works were established, including institutions for protection of abandoned

ESTUDOS DE MACAU

children, orphans, widows, “regretful” women, etc. In 1571, for example, the Holy House already provided special support the abandoned children, the orphans and captives, visiting the sick poor in their houses. All this assistance was maintained at the cost of alms from residents and the monthly fees from the Brothers.²⁸

Besides the Hospital of the Poor and the Lazarus, the Holy House had, almost since its beginnings, the House of the Rejected, or the “*Roda*”, as it was commonly called, in order to collect the foundlings, generally children of Chinese and slave’s women. The Holy House of Mercy took care of them through a governess and maids, whose choice was subject to very strict rules.²⁹ The rate of mortality among these abandoned children was very high and, more than saving their lives, the Mercy tried to save their souls through baptism.³⁰ Most were children of the feminine sex (normally non- desired), that the mothers abandoned after birth in the streets or delivered to the Hospital of the Rejected. Since there was no space to shelter them all, the foundlings were delivered to poor foster mothers, who received a small monthly subsidy to take care of the children until they were seven years old.³¹

After this period, the Mercy no longer provided assistance to the rejected, nor was it interested anymore for in well-being. As a result, the foster mothers ordered the children to beg for alms, in order to gain their sustenance. Most of them became prostitutes.³²

The Governor José Maria da Ponte e Horta, forbade the “*Roda*”, in Macao, by the governmental order in 1867, but without practical results.³³ Only in 1876 was it abolished, when the Holy House of Mercy trusted the Rejected ones to the Canossian Children of Charity, who took care of them, at first in the building of the Rejected and later, in the Asylum of Holy Childhood, in Saint Anthony.³⁴ The orphan girls were also object of the beneficence of the Mercy of Macao. In 1592 there were funds for dowries for the orphans, for their marriage. The dowries were requested by the orphans, or offered through

proclamations, which invited the interested parties to present the request. They were often married in the Chapel of the Mercy, and the Supplier and the board members attended the wedding.³⁵

The Mercy was also in charge of the concession of dowries to single girls that needed them to achieve marriage. But to get a dowry they had to meet the criteria defined by the Mercies, such as an age limit, being orphans of father, absolutely needing the dowry to marry. On the other hand, the Brothers of the Brotherhood had to check on the poverty, honour and virtues of the candidates, but all these requisites obeyed the need to keep of their “sexual honour”, that was in danger because of them being single.³⁶

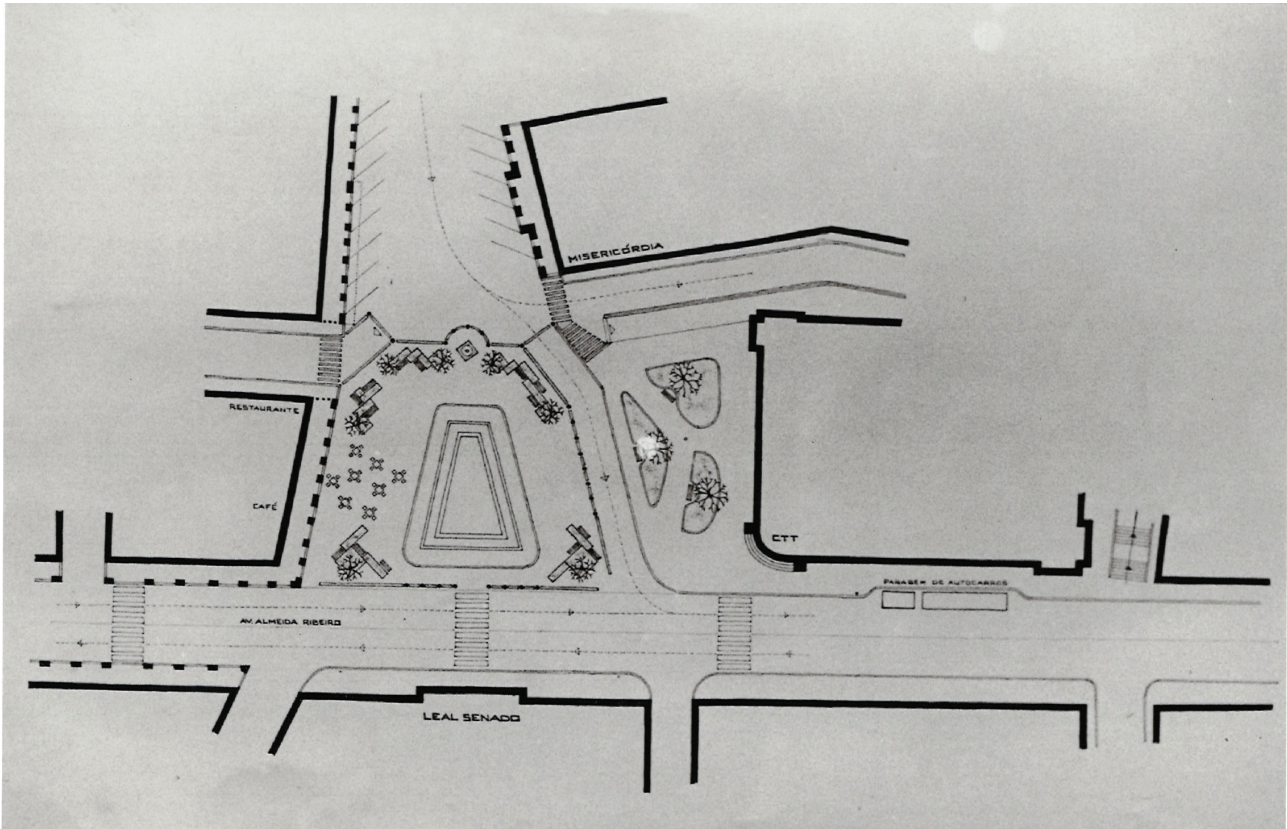
In 1726, in Macao, was recognized the need to take care of the orphans and widows, who many were at that time, due to the frequent deaths in shipwrecks of the vessels that were doing commerce outside Macao. The statute was then approved and thirty widows and orphans were admitted. They received support, and the orphans were instructed to become family mothers.³⁷

From this time, in 1737, the institution was suspended, up to 1782, when the Brotherhood made a proposal to establish a new asylum, in accordance with the Senate that gave four thousand *taels* and the name of “Female Hospice of Santa Rosa de Lima”.³⁸

There was, also, a project to create an Orphanage, which was founded by the Holy House of Mercy in 1898, although it had received its first orphan as early as 1895.³⁹ Its rulebook is dated from 1900 and maintained the number of orphans up to 40,⁴⁰ but, by 1905, it had already housed 50 orphans there.⁴¹

In the beginning, the orphans resided in the first houses on the right side of the Saint Raphael hospital, moving after, in 1903, to the new building in Tap-Seac (which, afterwards, became the *Liceu Nacional*).⁴²

In 1918, the Orphanage was ended and the orphans were transferred to the Saint Joseph college at the expense of the Mercy.⁴³ And, in 1933, a Brother (*mesário* and an old resident of the orphanage), Pedro Paulo Ângelo, founded a new orphanage with 12



The Holy House of Mercy - AM, 1627.

orphans, in 2, Travessa dos Santos, called “Association for the Protection of Poor Youngsters and Orphans” (*Associação de Protecção aos Jovens Pobres e Órfãos*), which was sustained not only by the Mercy, but also by public support.⁴⁴ In 1940, this orphanage was managed by a director committee, educating 30 orphans installed in Vila Flora. Later, it was incorporated by another orphanage, led by the Salesians, with primary schooling and “arts and crafts” (typography, bookmaking, electricity, etc.).⁴⁵

The Holy House of Mercy of Macao celebrated the big holidays of the liturgical calendar, such as Holy Week and the Visitation (when donation of alms was highest), All-Souls Day, Saint Martin and Christmas.⁴⁶

The donation of alms – which gave visibility to the Mercies and represented the spectacular side of charity – also were, in the case of Macao, an attempt to reaffirm the community of Portuguese origin, as well

as those of “mixed people”.⁴⁷ This charity-spectacle, of gigantic donations of alms, during Holy Week or Visitation, had aims to legitimize the Mercy.⁴⁸

There existed, also, the regular donation of alms to the poor that the Holy House aide, but in reduced number, not surpassing one hundred, between rejected (*Expostos*), the sick and lepers.⁴⁹

According to the opinion of some, the logic behind the assistance given by the Mercy of Macao was predominantly political and, for that reason, of reduced economic and social range.⁵⁰

These different abilities of monopolizing the charity supported itself in an impressive economic power, which included the active participation in the games of commercial trade. This power was based on, mainly, in the mobilization of wills, that is, the Mercy of Macao obtained the majority of its profits from the legacies, under the form of money or “root goods”

ESTUDOS DE MACAU

(“*bens de raiz*”), which were given without reservation or conditions, such as, for example, the obligation of a certain number of Masses for a certain period of time in the church of the brotherhood.

The majority of the budget of the Brotherhood of Macao was destined to sea commerce, which made it so that the brotherhood focused itself in the investment of capital. Thus, the Macanese Holy House of Mercy dedicated itself to financing maritime trade and money lending with interest rate to individuals. This was designated *sea risk* and given directly by the Mercy.

Thus, the influx of the Brotherhood of Macao originated from a percentage annually consigned in the rights of the citizens, as well as from legacies and other individual donations, being rare for rich people that, on dying, did not will their estate, or part of it, to the Holy House of Mercy.

The Mercies also served as “banks”, since through them money transactions could be made, from Overseas to Portugal or vice-versa, all gratuitously, for charity. Individuals would utilize them for obtaining information on their parents, from whom they would not receive any news in a long time, serving many times as intermediaries in inheritance issues.

The charity work of the Mercy of Macao was also felt in the organization of an Economic Kitchen, in 1896, for the poorer classes. In 1900, the Holy House founded the House for Disabled Women, whose building was renovated in 1925; in the same year, it founded a Hostel (Shelter) for women (refuge for homeless and helpless women) or Old Ladies’ House (*Albergue das Indigentes*). It also built cheap-rent houses, for the purpose of helping many families which needed them, and served to urbanize the neighborhoods of Saint Lazarus and Tap Seac.

For a long time, the only institution of hospital assistance in Macao following western practices was the Hospital of Saint Raphael, also known as the Hospital of the Poor, and administered by the Holy House of Mercy. There was also an infirmary, of the Jesuits, since

1622, with a *botica* (*pharmacy* - which also supplied the Hospital of the Mercy), which disappeared in 1762 (with the expulsion of the Jesuits).

The hospital of the Poor (afterwards called Saint Raphael) was exclusively catering to Catholics, except in extremely grave cases and, to its specific functions were added that of elderly and disabled housing. Remodeled in 1912-13 and in 1938-39, it only stopped functioning in 1975.

Another hospital maintained by the Macanese Mercy was the hospital of the invocation of Saint Lazarus, which housed lepers; it was an asylum for lepers.

It supported, thus, the hospital of Saint Raphael; the hospital of Saint Lazarus; the clinic “Lara Reis”, for the treatment of cancerous diseases; The Asylum of Our Lady of Mercy, for disabled women; a Shelter for women (*Albergue*) or Old Ladies’ House; and, due to the circumstances, was also in charge of other aid to the needy.

We can conclude that the Holy House of Mercy had become powerful, permanent institution, absolutely essential in the relations and social duties of the Christian community, becoming fundamental in the management of an important part of the circulation of people and goods in Macao.

In the 19th century there occurs a profound change in the concept of assistance and its workers, which was already starting in the 18th century, with the Marquês de Pombal legislation. The interference by the State, appropriating even more social welfare functions, was felt even within the organic order of the *Mercies*.

On the other hand, there was already the manifestance, broadened since the beginnings of the 19th century, for the institution of military hospitals independent from the Mercies which, subsidized by the State, directed attention to many sectors of diseases and accidents that, until then, were managed by the confraternities, including the healing of soldiers.

Daily alms were also prohibited, due to being considered to stimulated loitering and laziness. The

begging (the beggars) thus became an issue of the State and not of local institutions, multiplying the legislation which repressed loitering and marginality.

The Symbols Iconography

The Holy House possessed, in the Senate Square, the Church, the Register Office (*Cartório*) and the House of the Rejected.

The current building of the Holy House of Mercy was built in the 18th century and is of neoclassic style, with some influences of the Mannerist style. It has the façade in arcade, richly decorated and the frontispiece (entrance) is composed of a mixture of columns and pilasters between the arcades, with a covered hallway at the ground level and a balcony in the upper level.

At the top of the front face, a bronze bust of its founder, Bishop Melchior Carneiro, was placed, in 1905, whose portrait occupies the place of honor in the gallery of the benefactors of the institution, in the Hall of Sessions, where it can also be found the skull of this Bishop and his wooden cross, found in his coffin.⁵¹

At the front of the Church of Mercy was a granite in bas-relief, representing the “Virgin Mother of Mercy”, on the frontispiece and inserted on the wall. It is not known the exact date when this bas-relief was made, but there are those who say that it was made around the year 1590.⁵² It is also not known who would have made it.⁵³

When the demolition of the Church occurred (21st September 1883), which had five floors, bell



Albergue - AM, 1627.

ESTUDOS DE MACAU

tower at the front and a spacious cloister on the side and back, it was ordered to carefully remove that stone to keep it, but, a few years later, it ended up serving as a lid on one of the interior wells, although with the hewn face turned down, thus it did not suffer too much damage. Later, it was again ordered to be placed in a wall of the hall of lotteries, inside a wardrobe with wooden doors, to protect it. Afterwards, it went to where it can be found today, that is, on the stairway of the Senate.⁵⁴

What iconographical representations can be found on this relief? It represents the usual group, common to all Mercies, “symbol” of these institutions, reproduced in the banners, illuminations of the Commitments, bells, stamps, and even merely decorative altarpieces (retable) or embossments (reliefs), with the center being occupied by the Virgin Mother of Mercy, with crown and open mantle, held at the ends by two winged angels, to protect and cover the faithful that, like her, all have their hands held in praying position.⁵⁵

Here are represented the people that had most contributed to the Mercies: Queen Leonor, widow of King João II, i.e., the Founder; King Manuel and his wives and Queens - first, Queen Maria, afterwards, Queen Leonor of Austria - as the first brothers and great benefactors; the Pope Alexander VI, that had approved the primitive statute; the Archbishop of Lisbon, Martinho da Costa and his brother - the Cardinal Jorge da Costa - the Cardinal “of Alpedrinha”; a religious man from the Order of the Holy Trinity, Father Miguel Contreiras; some older brothers and, finally, anonymous figures representing the “the petty and humble people”. With the passage of time, what changed was the distribution of the figures, that is, the way these figures were placed, mainly, since Father Bernardo da Madre de Deus, Attorney-General of the Order of the Holy Trinity, decided to “resuscitate” (revive) the memory of Father Miguel Contreiras, insisting that he was painted on the flags as one of the Settlers (founders) of the Fraternity and one of the greatest aides to Queen Leonor.⁵⁶

From 1575, thus, it was established that the flags would have: “At the center, the Holy Virgin, Mother of Mercy; at her right hand, the Pope, a Cardinal, a Bishop, as heads of the militant Church and a religious person from the Holy Trinity, serious, old, emaciated, on his knees, with his hands raised with the letters F. M. I. that mean – “Friar Miguel Institutor”. On the left side of the same Lady, a King, a Queen, in memory of the Illustrious King Manuel and the Queen Leonor, as the first Brothers of the Brotherhood and companions of the Venerable Institutor (Settler), plus two old men, serious (severe) and devout. At the feet of the Lady some figures of the miserable, that represent the poor [...]”. But the Order of the Holy Trinity was still not satisfied and, on the 24th April 1627, obtained an king’s charter from Filipe II ordering that all the flags of the Mercies conformed to those of the City of Lisbon, making and painting those flags in the same manner used in Lisbon, with the image of the aforementioned religious man and the letters F. M. I., as mentioned previously and for the flags that were already painted to be amended. This would occur in all the Mercies of Portugal and its ultramarine territories.⁵⁷

This would have certainly happened in Macao. Thus, it should there be represented, besides from the Virgin Mother of Mercy whose mantle is sustained at the ends by two cherubim with feathery wings, also the following figures: at her right side, the Pope Alexander VI, with a mantle and a tiara (crown); a bit further in, a figure in a hat, the Cardinal “of Alpedrinha”; on the other end, still on the same side, two Brother knights, with pointed helms; at the left side of the Virgin Mother, in first plane, a Father of the Order of the Holy Trinity, Miguel Contreiras; to his right, Queen Leonor, with royal crown, tall and closed, as appropriate for the time; a bit farther behind, King Manuel, with open royal crown; between the two, D. Martinho da Costa, with miter; further in, another Brother knight, old, also with helm; finally, at the back, the heads of many figures, the People. It seems,

however, that the artist transgressed, which was used since 1575, regarding the relative position of many of the figures... It also seems unlikely that, in Macao, there had been no notice of such resolutions, since the same Commitments (*Compromissos*) were equally present in Goa, from where the Holy House of Mercy of Macao received them so that they were operating under the same rules.⁵⁸

However, it should be noted the delicate touch and grace that the main figures were treated with, which reveals the artistic category, whoever the author of the relief (*relevô*) was, hewn from only one piece of granite, with a texture which is not very fine and, thus, more difficult to carve.⁵⁹

The Holy House of Mercy Nowadays

Nowadays, particularly important works of the Holy House of Mercy include The Our Lady of Mercy Home for the Elderly (*Lar de Nossa Senhora da Misericórdia*), built in 1920, and renovated and rebuilt in 2001. Equally relevant is the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (*Centro de Reabilitação de Cegos*), newly remodeled in 2003, working as a “day center” for socializing, with musical equipment, work subsidy and meals. Infant assistance is part of the The Creche of the Macao Holy House of Mercy (*Creche da Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Macao*) from installations given by the Social Welfare Bureau (*Instituto de Acção Social*), which was inaugurated in 2002, manages a bilingual pre-school in Portuguese and Chinese, housing 258 children with ages ranging from six months to three years. There are also several assistance subsidies mobilized by the Macanese Brotherhood, supporting needy students from the Portuguese School of Macao, many disabled and some social care associations. The Social Shop of the Mercy (*Loja Social da Misericórdia*), founded in 2013, distributes food and first aid products to needy people on the first Saturday of each month. The old Shelter House of Disabled Women, also known as the Old Ladies’ House (which once operated as a refuge for homeless and helpless women), restored,

works today as a cultural space of the Holy House in the neighborhood of Saint Lazarus (S. Lázaro).

To these investments directed towards sectors of social inferiority can be added, the remodeling of the 18th century headquarters of the Holy House of Mercy, such as the Travessa da Misericórdia, where it is located, and a museum which exhibits to the public some pieces of sacred art and memorials that help tell the very rich history of the Mercy of Macao. Also the Members Club that has been operating since January 2001, which is located just next to the entrance to the main building and has a bar and serves lunch.

Conclusion:

The Brotherhoods (*Misericórdias*) sought to accomplish several acts of charity with the objective to ameliorate – not solve – the poverty of the Christian people and recent converts that lived in misery in their locations.

Founded right after the Portuguese conquest of the Indian city, in 1510, the Holy House of Mercy of Goa became a powerful institution in the social life of the Portuguese colonial enclave, projecting its influence through many trade hubs of Asia. Besides originating the creation of several brotherhoods of the Mercy in several harbors of India marked also by the Portuguese political and economic presence, it is also due to the influence of the major example of the Holy House of Mercy of Goa that the Holy House of Mercy in Macao was built.⁶⁰

The assistance, powers, capacity of mobilization and the dissemination of the doctrine of the acts of mercy implied that, materialistically speaking, the Mercies of Goa and Macao managed to obtain sufficiently generous donations and inheritances to fund their functions. Quite rapidly, the two Asian *Misericórdias* managed to accumulate impressive fortunes.

Often, the frequent death of Portuguese merchants, soldier and adventurers in these faraway places of the Orient, caused by disease, sinking, military

ESTUDOS DE MACAU

confrontations and a broad range of other mortal pressures, resulted in situations of orphan hood. At the same time, it was also common that some Portuguese abandoned their local descendents, leaving for the capital or other ultramarine domains. This resulted in a large number of orphans, often of Luso-Asian origin which, especially for females, was taken advantage by the Brotherhoods for the creation of “nuptial markets”, in which the numerous candidates for marriage were offered young and local women, who were educated or assisted by the brotherhoods.

For a long time, between the end of the 16th century and the end of the 18th century, the Macanese Brotherhood (Holy House of Mercy) based its prosperity, activities and charity on the income from the many pious inheritances that, converted into funds (money), properties and other goods, assured a munificence (generosity) for the least protected sectors of the “Christian city”. The contemporaneous economic and social transformations occurring throughout the 18th century, not only made many of these patrimonies disappear, it also permanently devalued them, placing the Mercy in serious social embarrassment, incapable of fulfilling its duties and distributing charity.

The downfall of the Mercies presages more complex changes in political and social attitudes towards assistance, particularly its spiritual aspect. The laws of the Marquis of Pombal put into question the supremacy of soul over the body, when it started to be significantly noticed the enormous volume of wills, donations and pious inheritances that bound the metropolitan and ultramarine spaces to pray for the dead. Consequently, the legislative investments of Pombal altered the inheritance laws, limiting the portion available to soul-related matters. The free chapels, that is, those instituted by families extinct at the time of the law, were incorporated into the Crown and sold at public auction already by the time of the rule of Queen Maria I, even though they had been considered to be of insignificant value. The income of

the fraternities also came to be inspected for taxation, creating an irreversible movement in which the «public cause» took precedence over pious causes.⁶¹

Afterwards, with the implementation of Liberalism in Portugal (1820) and, even more strongly felt, the programs of Costa Cabral, leads to the affirmation of the commercial bourgeoisie that desired political stability and the effective freedom of financial speculation, but, as is known, it took a long time until the last decades of the 19th century and beginnings of the 20th century, to finally develop a large bourgeoisie tied to the progress of industry, to banking activities and to trade with the colonies, especially African properties. With the successive Liberal Governments, assistance became considered one of the duties and responsibilities of the State administration. For that reason, King Pedro IV nominated a committee charged with increasing the welfare of the working classes and Queen Maria II, in order to protect the indigents, created, in a decree of 6th April 1835, the General Council of Beneficence, charged with perfecting assistance. Finally, with the Republic in Portugal (5th October of 1910) the reorganization of assistance expands, creating a Welfare Bureau and the Central Welfare of Lisbon.⁶²

It can be considered that the Mercies were born and developed to fulfill common fraternity programs, but slowly went astray from their original functions, institutionalizing assistance but maintaining, even today, an inevitable (essential) presence in Portuguese society.⁶³

As for the Macao’s Holy House of Mercy, it passed through several difficulties (and adversities) throughout their time. The Board of Directors elected by the Brothers stopped working from 1848 until 1891, being administered during that time by a committee nominated by the Government. The Brotherhood continued, however, performing acts of mercy, as recommended in the Commitment (*Compromisso*).⁶⁴ At the end of the 19th century, due to its use of the lottery, its economies and finances

MACAO STUDIES

were balanced and it started enjoying, in a manner of speaking, a comfortable lifestyle, having retaken its acts of assistance.⁶⁵ It was restored in 1891 by the Decree of 15th June of that year, being reorganized by the new Commitment (*Compromisso*) approved by the Provincial Decree of 18th May 1893.⁶⁶

As can be seen, the Holy House of Mercy of Macao constitutes, still today, one of the most

important social institutions of the city. Founded towards the end of the 16th century, that is, 450 years ago, developing initiatives centered around the figure of the bishop Belchior Carneiro, the Holy House continues to maintain an active social presence in the now Special Administrative Region of Macao, developing several important activities of social welfare. **RC**



The House for Disabled - AM, 1627.

ESTUDOS DE MACAU

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Fok Kai Cheong, *Estudos sobre a instalação dos Portugueses em Macau*. Lisboa: Gradiva, 1996.
- 2 When the Portuguese settled in Macao, they did not bring their wives, only slave women from Africa, India and Malacca, that they found along the route to the Orient. The first generation of Macanese were descendents of these weddings, followed by others with Japanese women and, only later, with Chinese women. Traditionally, the majority of Macanese had a Portuguese name, were baptized in the Catholic Church, and received a Portuguese education alongside their fathers, but spoke Chinese as their maternal language and adopted many Chinese manners. Their language, called *Pátua*, adopted many Malaccan, Indian, African and Cantonese words, and has a different grammar compared to Portuguese, which it is based on.
- 3 The *Silk Road* was an ancient network of trade routes, formally established during the Han Dynasty of China, which linked the regions of the ancient world in commerce between 130 BC-1453 AC, when the Ottoman Empire boycotted trade with China and closed them, referring to both terrestrial and the maritime routes connecting Asia with the Middle East and Southern Europe. It was central to cultural interaction between the regions for many centuries.
- 4 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, *História breve das misericórdias portuguesas: 1498 – 2000*. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2008, p. 23.
- 5 Bronslaw Geremek, *A Piedade e a Força. História da Miséria e da Caridade na Europa*. Lisboa: Terramar, 1995, p. 147.
- 6 Bronslaw Geremek, *A Piedade e a Força* (...), p. 26.
- 7 Sá, *Quando o Rico se faz Pobre*. (...), p. 49.
- 8 Sá, *Quando o Rico se faz Pobre*. (...), p. 49.
- 9 Leonor Diaz de Seabra, *A Misericórdia de Macau (séculos XVI a XIX): Irmandade, Poder e Caridade na Idade do Comércio*. Macau: Universidade de Macau, 2011, p. 90.
- 10 Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, *Da descoberta da Misericórdia*, p. 158. and pp. 166-167.
- 11 Ivo Carneiro de Sousa - *Da Descoberta da Misericórdia à Fundação das Misericórdias (1498-1525)*. Porto: Granito, 1999, p. 112.
- 12 George Bryan de Sousa, *A sobrevivência do Império: os Portugueses na China (1630-1754)*, p. 45.
- 13 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, “Estatuto Social e Discriminação: Formas de Selecção de Agentes e Receptores de Caridade Nas Misericórdias Portuguesas ao Longo do Antigo Regime”, p. 311.
- 14 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, “Estatuto Social e Discriminação...”, p. 312.
- 15 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá – *Quando o Rico se faz Pobre: Misericórdias, Caridade e poder no Império Português, 1500-1800*. Lisboa: CNCDP, 1997, p.111.
- 16 *Partidores* – Court officials who divide the assets of inheritance.
- 17 Isabel Sá, *Quando o Rico se faz Pobre...*, p. 113.
- 18 Isabel Sá, *Quando o Rico se faz Pobre...*, p. 113.
- 19 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá - *Quando o Rico se faz Pobre: Misericórdias, Caridade e Poder no Império Português, 1500-1800*. Lisboa: CNCDP, 1997, p. 61.
- 20 Isabel Sá, *Quando o Rico se faz Pobre...*, p. 109.
- 21 Isabel Sá, *Quando o Rico se faz Pobre...*, p. 110.
- 22 Charles R. Boxer, *O Império Colonial Português*. Lisboa: Edições 70, 1981, p. 263.
- 23 *Ibidem*.
- 24 Isabel Sá - *Quando o Rico se faz Pobre...*, p. 103.
- 25 Leonor Diaz de Seabra, *O Compromisso da Misericórdia de Macau de 1627*, pp. 20-28.
- 26 Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, “Introdução ao Estudo da Misericórdia de Macau: caridade, poder colonial e devoção régia”, in Leonor Diaz de Seabra (ed.), *O Compromisso da Misericórdia de Macau de 1627*. Macau: Universidade de Macau, 2003, p. 8.
- 27 Leonor Diaz de Seabra, *O Compromisso da Misericórdia de Macau de 1627*, p. 76.
- 28 Gomes, *Op. Cit.*, p. 63.
- 29 Leonor Diaz de Seabra (ed.), *O Compromisso da Misericórdia de Macau de 1627*, p. 87 e p. 139.
- 30 José Caetano Soares, *Macau e a Assistência: Panorama médico-social*, p. 342.
- 31 Charles Boxer, *O Senado da Câmara de Macau*, p. 44.
- 32 Charles Boxer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 45.
- 33 Manuel Teixeira, *As Canossianas na Diocese de Macau. Cem Anos de Apostolado (1874-1974)*, p. 26.
- 34 Manuel Teixeira, *Bispos, Missionários, Igrejas e Escolas: no IV Centenário da Diocese de Macau, (Macau e a sua Diocese, Vol. 12)*, p. 286.
- 35 Leonor Diaz de Seabra (ed.), *O Compromisso da Misericórdia de Macau de 1627*, pp. 89-92.
- 36 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, “Estatuto Social e Discriminação”, p. 317.
- 37 Anders Ljungstedt, *Um Esboço Histórico*, p. 62.
- 38 George Bryan Souza, *A sobrevivência do Império*, p. 291.
- 39 Manuel Teixeira - *Macau e as suas Ilhas*. Macau: Escola Tipográfica, [1940?], p. 163.
- 40 J. S. - “A Misericórdia de Macau”, in *Anuário de Macau*, Macau, 1927, pp. 137-148, p. 143.
- 41 Manuel Teixeira, *Macau e as suas Ilhas...*, p. 163.
- 42 *Ibidem*.
- 43 Soares, *Macau e a Assistência...*, p. 384.
- 44 Soares, *op. cit.*, p. 400.
- 45 Soares, *op. cit.*, p. 400.
- 46 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá - “Ganhos da terra e ganhos do mar: caridade e comércio na Misericórdia de Macau (séculos XVII-XVIII)”, in *Ler História*, 44 (2003), pp. 45-57, p. 52.
- 47 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá - “Ganhos da terra e ganhos do mar”, p. 55.
- 48 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá - “Ganhos da terra e ganhos do mar”, pp. 54-55.
- 49 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá - “Ganhos da terra e ganhos do mar”, p. 54.
- 50 Isabel dos Guimarães Sá - “Ganhos da terra e ganhos do mar”, p. 56.
- 51 Rodrigues da Silva, *A Assistência em Macau*, p. 57.

- 52 Manuel Teixeira, “O Baixo Relevo da Misericórdia”, in *Boletim Eclesiástico da Diocese de Macau*, Macau, 85 (986) Set. 1987, p. 51.
- 53 Manuel Teixeira, “O Baixo Relevo da Misericórdia”, p. 51.
- 54 José Caetano Soares, *Macau e a Assistência, Macau e a Assistência: Panorama Médico-Social*. Lisboa: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1950, p. 358.
- 55 José Caetano Soares, *Macau e a Assistência*, p. 358.
- 56 José Caetano Soares, *Macau e a Assistência*, p. 359.
- 57 José Caetano Soares, *Macau e a Assistência*, p. 360.
- 58 José Caetano Soares, *Macau e a Assistência*, p. 361.
- 59 José Caetano Soares, *Macau e a Assistência*, p. 358.
- 60 Leonor Diaz de Seabra, *A Misericórdia de Macau (...)*, p. 99.
- 61 Leonor Diaz de Seabra, “Introdução”, in *O Compromisso... de 1893*, pp. 10-11.
- 62 Seabra, “Introdução”, in *O Compromisso... de 1893*, p. 9.
- 63 Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, *Da Descoberta da Misericórdia à Fundação das Misericórdias (1498-1525)*. Porto: Granito, 1999, p. 112.
- 64 Pe. Manuel Teixeira, *As Confrarias em Macau, (Macau e a sua Diocese, vol. 11)*, p. 280.
- 65 José Caetano Soares, *Macau e a Assistência*, pp. 314-315.
- 66 Leonor Diaz de Seabra (ed.), *O Compromisso da Irmandade da Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Macau de 1893*; pp. 1-21 e pp. 94-113.

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ALBERGUE

慈堂婆仔屋

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