

The Most Loyal City: Roman Catholic Competitive Domination and Antagonistic Tolerance of Indigenous Chinese Religious Sites in Macao (c. 1550–1850)¹

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ABSTRACT: Portuguese colonial occupation and settlement from the sixteenth century onwards included a significant dimension of religious dissemination: a primary example is the imposition of Iberian Roman Catholic sacred forms at sites throughout peninsular Macao, China. Through early occupation and sustained commercial activity with local peoples, colonised Portuguese regions in Macao experienced aggressive assertion of Catholic religious dominance. In Macao, Portuguese military commanders, colonial governors, and missionary orders established Roman Catholic churches, chapels, and shrines — with their attendant Iberian religious modes — overlooking sites occupied by indigenous Chinese temples and shrines, or Buddhist sites.

This paper surveys the extant physical evidence for Roman Catholic competitive domination of selected Chinese religious sites within Macao during the period of Portuguese maritime expansion into East Asia. It follows the framework of “Antagonistic Tolerance” first conceived by anthropologist Dr. Robert Hayden (University of Pittsburgh) in order to explore Portuguese motives and methods for the co-optive establishment of “new” sacred spaces, as well as long-term implications of the syncretism of indigenous and Roman Catholic religious practices at those sites. In addition to primary and secondary source research carried out in Portugal and former colonised Portuguese spaces, this article draws on comparative data and images collected while conducting site fieldwork in Macao during 2019 and 2020.

KEYWORDS: Macao; China; Portuguese Empire; Colonialism; Religion.

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During the process of the first colonial contact and occupation, the principal Portuguese enclave in China saw assertions of religious behaviour and dominance that conform to a conceptual model developed by researchers of the Antagonistic Tolerance Project (AT Project),² which seeks to study sacred spaces that are both shared and contested by members of different religious communities. At the peninsula of Macao, a strategic trade port near the mouth of the Pearl River in coastal southern China, the Portuguese

occupied a sparsely populated land whose Chinese inhabitants practiced a variety of Asian religious traditions — mostly Buddhist, Daoist or indigenous folk beliefs — and rebuilt it in their image, creating a regional capital for their European Christian empire in Asia (known collectively as the *Estado da Índia*), from the mid-sixteenth century to the late twentieth century.³ It was by far the largest Portuguese colonial enclave in China, with an urban population surpassing 34,000 souls by 1850 (of whom only a very small proportion, about 3,500, claimed European heritage).⁴

There, over the course of three centuries, a spectrum of Roman Catholic missionary orders established churches, chapels, and shrines on sites that were designed to compete with pre-existing Chinese temples and Buddhist shrines in opulence and splendour.⁵ By the middle of the eighteenth century, the city of Macao would boast more than twelve churches, monasteries, and convents — the largest and most intensely ecclesiastical Christian site in East Asia — and become known to Europeans (somewhat hyperbolically) as “The Most Loyal City”,⁶ just as the Portuguese, who saw themselves as the imperial successors of the Romans and proponents of a golden age of western Christian civilisation in Asia, intended.⁷ Appropriations of sacred space occurred at other Portuguese colonisation sites in Asia; for example, along the west Indian coast, including at Cochin (Kochi), Damão (Daman), Chaul, Diu and Baçaim (Bassein). In the Portuguese eastern imperial capital, Goa, India, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, colonial authorities attempted systematically to eliminate all non-Christian religious sites within the colonised territory through violence and demolition.⁸ The starkest period of religious intolerance began in 1540, as increasing numbers of militant missionary organisations, the Society of Jesus foremost among them, established themselves in Goa.⁹ The Jesuits and other holy orders began operations based in southern China soon after, but no subsequent destruction on the same level was

seen. What happened in Macao, and the reasons Portuguese policy towards indigenous religious sites was so different from that carried out in their colonial enclaves in India, are questions this paper will seek to answer/explain.

This article proceeds from work completed in collaboration with an international, interdisciplinary team of scholars on a project aimed at assessing comparatively the competitive sharing of religious sites across disparate geographic regions and culturally diverse eras.¹⁰ A principal finding of our research is that, historically and at present, in cities and regions inhabited by two (or more) communities of differing faiths or creeds, dominance is indicated by control of key religious structures, either by one of those communities or by a larger polity that holds all under control (e.g., a colonial empire). Change in dominance is indicated by changes in control over these key sites in the built environment, and their physical transformation to meet the tenets of the newly dominant faith.¹¹ During episodes of conquest, such sites may be seized and destroyed, or reconstructed drastically. Classic examples include the immediate conversion into a mosque of the Hagia Sophia church in Istanbul following the Ottoman conquest in 1453, or the destruction of the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlán after the Spanish conquest in 1519, and the use of its stones to build the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Mexico City.

Since our project model views religious sites as cultural indicators of political dominance, or challenges to it, we have developed a theoretical framework — with measures of dominance — that we believe has broad historical applicability. These measures are based on important features of major religious sites that our work shows are indicators of dominance: *perceptibility* (especially visibility, audibility and massiveness) and *centrality*. In zones of actively contested politico-religious dominance, competing groups will build structures that challenge the height, visibility, audibility, and/or massiveness of the rival group’s religious or political structures.

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The explicit purpose of the AT Project model is to provide analysis that is comparative — meant to draw attention to common historical dynamics in cases of competitive dynamics between co-resident religious communities, or newly arrived, conquering ones, in circumstances that may be broadly disparate, geographically, culturally, or chronologically. Our model is not meant to challenge or discredit other types of historical analysis. Rather, our research model is intended to be applied to augment existing studies, assessing historical data using an alternative but compatible interpretive framework, thus providing new ways of thinking about incidents of socio-religious conquest in comparison with other similar occurrences, even in seemingly dissimilar places or eras. Hence, our work is positioned to contribute to major historiographical currents regarding imperial experiences and global cross-cultural interactions — especially studies that examine linkages between the imposition of religion and the exercise of political power, as well as the role and agency of conquered or colonised peoples in these processes.

Historic Macao provides multiple powerful examples of this dynamic — controlling or overshadowing religious sites as a means of asserting political and cultural dominance.¹² Christian chapels or churches dominated and eclipsed diverse Chinese religious temple sites (sacred structures with prayer halls, governmental offices, and record archives), which the Portuguese, who never fully appreciated their cultural importance, described dismissively with the pejorative term *pagodes*.¹³ One such site, the Mong-Há Temple, may have been founded as early as the thirteenth century, when Macao came under the rule of the Yuan Dynasty.¹⁴ Macao's most famous indigenous religious site, the A-Ma Temple, located near the southwestern tip of the peninsula, dates from the early Ming Dynasty (the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries). Under Portuguese administration, both temples continued to be prominent places of indigenous religious ritual and observance, especially the A-Ma Temple, for mariners and fishermen of the region.¹⁵

During the sixteenth century, the earliest Christian churches were built in and around Macao, as a consequence of Portuguese Roman Catholic occupation of this key trade port. Some of these churches were built near or above the sites of Chinese temples, according to local tradition, and as represented in early Portuguese sources.¹⁶ As overt assertions of dominance, Macao's Christian strongholds were often integrated into military compounds situated on high ground, including Monte Hill, the most visually prominent elevation on the peninsula until the late twentieth century.¹⁷

The strategy conducted in Macao was unique in the Portuguese colonial world, reflecting an unusual Portuguese tolerance of Chinese religious practices and respect for Chinese sacred spaces. Both geographic and historical circumstances led to this relationship: originally occupying a mere six or seven square kilometres in area, the peninsula and enclave were tiny, with a very small population, and this certainly shaped the nature of Portuguese religious policy towards the colony. Also important to note was that the Portuguese occupied Macao tentatively, more or less by invitation, with the gradual consent of Chinese regional and imperial authorities; only over a decade later did they agree upon a treaty for long-term occupation.¹⁸ The question of who held ultimate sovereignty over the space was always somewhat ill-defined, and vacillated over time depending on the relative power of the Europeans and Chinese authorities.¹⁹

That said, the Portuguese presence in Macao demonstrates some aspects of attempted cultural/political dominance typical of the AT model, while leaving some others aside. The Portuguese ruling strategy effected an attempt of AT without manifesting clear religious hegemony, instead using a shared architectural and geographic language to define boundaries of power. We argue here that, in line with the AT model, the primary methods used by the Catholic European authorities in Macao relied on establishing hybrid models of *perceptibility* (principally

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through height and visibility of religious sites) and *centrality*, constrained by the geographic and socio-political circumstances of the region.

Unlike in Goa, their other chief imperial enclave and commercial hub in Asia, the Portuguese never attempted to impose religious homogeneity on the Macao peninsula. Such a policy was not necessary or practical; the Portuguese needed local Chinese labourers, who practiced traditional indigenous regional rituals, so to antagonise and risk driving off the workforce through forced conversion to Roman Catholicism just was not a viable policy. Moreover, the tenuous Portuguese presence in Macao was too fragile, and Macanese trade too valuable, to risk incurring the ire of Chinese imperial authorities over evangelising the Christian faith. To be sure, the expulsion from Japan of all Portuguese interests in 1639, precipitated by their failure to cease religious proselytising, as ordered by Japanese authorities, served to reinforce a non-aggressive religious policy in Macao. Thus, because the Portuguese did not achieve unassailable political hegemonic control over Macao during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they could not enact the manifestations of full religious hegemony, as they did in the core territories of Goa during the same chronological period.

Instead, the Portuguese had to rely on more subtle means to assert religious and cultural dominance. A careful consideration of a detailed topographical map of Macao, printed in 1889, indicates a few very interesting and telling circumstances concerning the Portuguese rule of Macao when considered through the lens of the AT Project.²⁰ First, a number of very prestigious Chinese temples (*pagodes*) were allowed to survive and function in prominent locations, but on low ground, and these were usually dominated by higher Portuguese military structures (*fortalezas*), all of which featured a visually prominent Roman Catholic chapel. These temples include the Pagode de Lin-fou at the narrowest point and entrance to the peninsula, and the famous A-Ma Temple of Macao, which appears on the 1889 map as “Pagode da Barra” near the southwest point of the Macao peninsula.

Second, all major Portuguese fortifications occupied the highest ground, namely Mount Fortress, Guia Fortress, Our Lady of Penha Fortress and Mong-Há Fortress, which makes sense for military reasons and for featuring prominent and highly visible Christian chapels within their walls, telegraphing the presence of the Roman Catholic faith. Meanwhile, all the major Portuguese religious buildings in colonial Macao occupied central, elevated, highly visible locations with commanding views of anchorages and sea approaches: the Cathedral, the Jesuit St. Paul’s Church, St. Lawrence’s Church, and the Holy House of Mercy Church. Thus, the AT argument is very applicable to circumstances in colonial Macao, even if there are some notable differences in AT dynamics between Portuguese enclaves in India and China. Moreover, because these systematic features have not been noted in the extant historiography regarding the Portuguese presence in Macao, the AT model is a key analytical tool for understanding how they asserted religious and cultural dominance.

The first Roman Catholic churches in China were constructed and administered by missionaries and religious orders, like the Jesuits, who built St. Anthony’s Church, St. Lawrence’s Church, the Church of Mater Dei, and the famous St. Paul’s College. The Dominicans constructed the St. Dominic’s Church, and the Augustinians constructed St. Augustine’s Church. These missionaries began to arrive in Macao during the second half of the sixteenth century, turning this small but, in that era, unique European commercial establishment in China into a point of training and departure for missionaries across the Far East.²¹ Jesuit missionaries often pursued their studies at St. Paul’s College, the first Western-style university in Asia, destroyed by a fire in 1835, along with the adjacent church of the same name (also known as the Church of Mater Dei, the façade of which stands as the current centrepiece of the ruins).²²

The above churches were built by both the Diocese of Macao, founded in 1576, and the religious orders, based on architectural styles of Europe, in itself

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an act of imposition and a tacit assertion of cultural superiority. Some of the churches were constructed in the Baroque style, but they also display East Asian architectural features, mainly Chinese. Besides Mater Dei, other topical examples of Western and Eastern cultural fusion can be seen in the interior of the St. Joseph's Seminary, which uses Chinese tiling and structural techniques,²³ and Guia Chapel, which is elaborately painted with Western and Eastern mythological motifs.²⁴ As we shall see, cultural appropriation through the copying and incorporation of indigenous architectural elements is also a component of the AT model.²⁵

The importance of Macao as a religious beachhead and place for the training of missionaries was reinforced by the founding in 1728 of the Jesuit Seminary to help educate missionaries as well as priests. This institution prospered until 1762, when word finally reached Macao that the Jesuits had been expelled from the Portuguese Empire due to orders from the prime minister, the Marquês de Pombal (a decree promulgated in Lisbon in 1759).²⁶ Following this event, the Macao authorities used the abandoned St. Paul's College as a military barracks, which was eventually destroyed, along with the annexed church, by the infamous 1835 fire. However, during the previous year, in 1834, the crown expelled all religious orders from Portugal and its territories, including Macao. All of their properties and goods, including churches and convents, were confiscated and used by anti-clerical authorities as barracks or hospitals, among other things.²⁷

Evidence of Portuguese attempts to impose religious and cultural dominance is conspicuous across the Macao peninsula. In the districts that make up the oldest zone of Portuguese occupation, colonial Roman Catholic churches in Portuguese Manueline, Renaissance, and Baroque styles dominate virtually every public square, and whitewashed chapels or shrines surmount most prominent elevated points of land, there to assert the cultural dominance

of Christianity.²⁸ Similarly, Portuguese fortresses supplanted earlier fortifications or culturally symbolic structures at strategic points throughout the colonised peninsula,²⁹ and European authorities took over areas of Chinese political and commercial importance, such as the land where the Leal Senado building now stands.³⁰

Clearly, seizing, claiming and occupying conspicuous spaces was done with a distinct military purpose in mind — high ground is easier to defend, and communication signals can be sent from hilltop to hilltop. An illustration of colonial Macao published in Russian explorer Ivan Fedorovich Kreuzenshtern's *Atlas to the Voyage around the World [...]* depicts several fortified hilltops on the Macao peninsula, circa 1806, with distinct visual sight-lines observable between the fortifications, across the surrounding harbours, and towards the Chinese mainland.³¹ The same dynamic is apparent in a slightly earlier illustration drawn in 1787 by French nobleman Jean François de Galaup La Pérouse.³² But the deliberate Portuguese policy of taking possession of key, highly visible commanding heights can also be understood as a calculated attempt to influence the morale and behaviour of the colonised indigenous population: every salient hilltop cross and every dazzling whitewashed church façade was a constant reminder to the Macanese natives and visiting South China Sea traders of the ascendancy of European Christianity in China.³³ Such motives were evident to contemporaries who arrived from Europe: for example, Swedish merchant Anders Ljungstedt, who passed through Macao in the late eighteenth century, observed that many of the churches, monasteries, convents, and hermitages were located upon the hills; that is, on the “best sites” of the city, with “excellent views”, and that some of them were fortified against possible attack.³⁴ Nearly two centuries earlier, in 1637, English traveller Peter Mundy noted that, at Macao, the principal churches were prominently situated, finely built, and decorated with eye-catching colours; he also noted the “many

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castles and fortifications” atop the peninsula’s major land elevations.³⁵

Consistent with AT theory, the Portuguese authorities understood *perceptibility* as an important factor in controlling the populace, although their attempts were often mixed at best. Ljungstedt recounts an attempt in 1780 by the Senate to demolish Chinese scaffolds made for a local festival. The bishops, knowing full well that following this decree would disrupt the uneasy peace between Westerners and the Chinese, decided the best way to follow the order was to preach “that all Christians should, for the sake of the salvation of their souls, abstain from having a peep, either through the window from behind the Venetian blinds, or in the street” at the risk of excommunication. Ljungstedt found great humour in the fact that, by his reckoning, fewer than fifty adult Christians managed to resist the impulse of curiosity, and that most gratified it by “looking at the gorgeous ceremonies... gazing at night in the bazaar, at ingenious illumination, theatrical jests, and amusements”.³⁶ This scenario is representative of the major problems the Portuguese authorities had to confront during this period: how to assert sovereignty and dominance in a place that was distinctly Chinese from an historical and cultural standpoint. Attempting to assert religious superiority was one of the few tools the Portuguese colonial and ecclesiastical authorities had available to them.

The assertion of religious superiority is a clear tool of empire and a method of establishing cultural dominance. Because Roman Catholicism arrived in Macao not through conquest but rather through negotiated occupation, and because the territory was not initially contested militarily, the Portuguese did not appropriate the most prominent religious sites associated with the previous regime, as they did elsewhere (in Goa or Ceuta, for example). The Portuguese colonial and religious authorities did not destroy or desecrate existing sacred structures to convert or rebuild them for their own religious purposes.³⁷ Instead, the Portuguese were at pains to seek

more subtle ways to assert their cultural and religious dominance. Eventually, Macao in the seventeenth century did become vulnerable to potential counter-attack — not from regional Asian seaborne forces, but from rival, Protestant, European powers, principally the Dutch. We will next consider some specific examples of sites that illustrate this dynamic, organised by geographic proximity.

A-Ma Temple

As the most famous Chinese religious site in Macao, A-Ma Temple occupies a prominent location on the southwestern side of the peninsula, sheltered on the leeward side of high ground but facing the Inner Harbour, visible to vessels coming to the anchorage there. Dating back to the Ming Dynasty in the sixteenth century, it is widely believed that the transliterated name of the temple gave rise to the Western name of the city, Macao.³⁸

The growth of the A-Ma Temple is organic rather than planned — it radiates up the hillside from a rocky outcropping of the peninsula’s southwestern beach, facing the approaches to Macao’s most secure anchorage, the Inner Harbour. The location of temples near the coast is not unprecedented, as many Chinese sailors would create shrines near the areas where they fished or from which they ventured off into open water.³⁹ What makes A-Ma Temple unique, however, is its size and scope, thus revealing its significance to a variety of Chinese cults. Primary shrines towards Mazu, the Queen of Heaven, are present, as are smaller embedded sections dedicated to the Buddhist deity Guanyin and other divinities. Even today, signs direct visitors through the maze-like complex towards Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian sites of worship, all consolidated in one place.⁴⁰ Thus, A-Ma Temple is representative of both the eclectic and decentralised qualities of religious practice in Macao, regional rites that would be receptive to yet another interpretation upon the arrival of Christianity. For both the Chinese and Portuguese, the parallels between the cult of

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Mazu, which defined this area of the city, and that of the Virgin Mary, already invoked as a protectress of seafarers in Portuguese culture, allowed for an extraordinary level of religious syncretism and tolerance from either side, Asian and European, at least in the initial points of contact.⁴¹

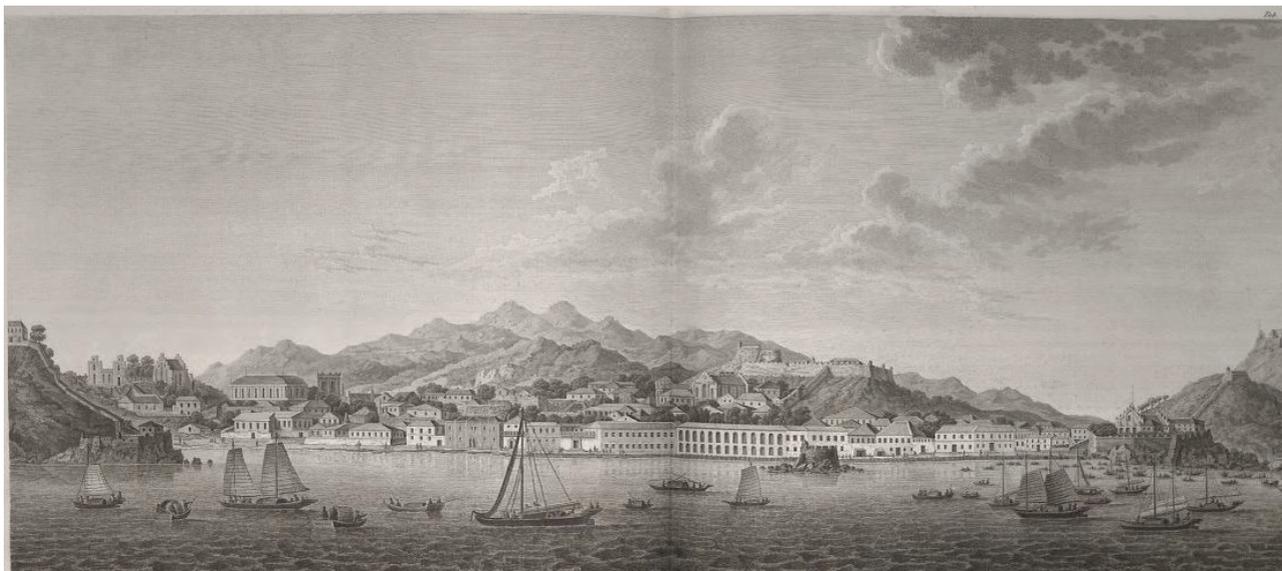
Our Lady of Penha Chapel

One of the Portuguese religious sites that overlooks the A-Ma Temple can be found within 500 metres, atop Penha Hill, at 63 metres above sea level one of the highest points in colonial Macao. The hermitage of Our Lady of Penha, built in 1622 and renovated in 1837, occupies the topmost part of the hill; the Roman Catholic structure and surrounding colonial-era fortress were dedicated to Our Lady of Penha in France. This conspicuous landmark delineates the southernmost tip of the Praia Grande.

The circumstances surrounding the founding of both religious sites are conspicuously parallel: both A-Ma and Penha were founded in response to supposed divine intercessions of religious figures to sailors in turmoil, and both were dedicated to

respective female protectors to which their namesakes are given: Mazu, the Queen of Heaven, and the Virgin Mary. Historian Jonathan Porter suggests that the initial establishment of Catholicism in Macao was successful in part because of these similarities of spiritual worship, where “influences bled across the frontier, producing such infusions as the blurring of the images of Guanyin or Mazu and the Virgin Mary... representatives of their respective worlds who also encountered each other at the cultural juncture in Macao”.⁴²

Our Lady of Penha Chapel does have several defining features that assert dominance over its Chinese counterpart: height, and two types of perceptibility — visibility and audibility. The whitewashed colonial church on the height was visible from all directions, including the Chinese-controlled mainland, while the A-Ma Temple was built directly adjacent to the coastline, with the main entrance just above sea level.⁴³ For the Portuguese, this verticality allowed greater visibility, providing better military protection (a similar justification for the site location of the nearby Moorish Barracks, built in the nineteenth century), but also



View of Macao from the east, along the principal seaward approach to the Outer Harbour, 1813. Note the prominent visibility of multiple Portuguese religious buildings. Between the elevated Penha Chapel (far left) and the Guia Fortress and Chapel (far right), St. Lawrence's Church, Cathedral, St. Augustine's Church, St. Francis's Convent, and St. Paul's Church all stand out as salient landmarks. Macao has thus been transformed deliberately into an expression of European Roman Catholic religious culture in China at the mouth of the Pearl River. Kreuzenshtern, Ivan Fedorovich, *Vid goroda Makao s morskoi storony*. V Sankt-Peterburgi, v Morskoj tipografii, 1813. Map. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003627000/>.

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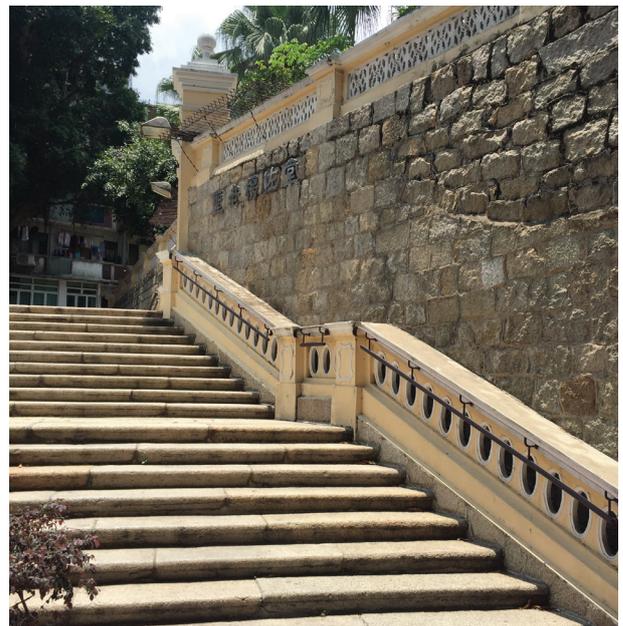
ensured that, unlike A-Ma, the Catholic site could be seen from the sea on any vessel's approach towards the Inner Harbour or the anchorage at Praia Grande. Visibility was also important because it contributed to an elevated auditory component of the site: not only were the chapel's bells audible throughout the Macao Peninsula, but it was customary for arriving sailors to fire shipboard cannons as a salute upon sighting the Penha Chapel, followed by a pilgrimage to the hilltop site, once on dry land, to give thanks for a safe voyage.⁴⁴

St. Lawrence's Church

St. Lawrence's Church is "dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, [and] is one of the three oldest churches of Macao. Originally constructed between 1558 and 1560, St. Lawrence's Church [...] was later rebuilt and re-consecrated in 1618".⁴⁵ The current building originates from a nineteenth-century symmetrical construction designed by Tomás D'Aquino in the Baroque and European neoclassical style, built over an older wooden structure. The church sits upon a small, geographically central hill, dominating the

small urban square before it, with an imposing set of adjacent steps leading up to the façade (see image). Wives and families would pray on these steps for the safe return of sailors, which had the added effect of imposing verticality alongside the two solemn towers on the façade. Further visibility and perceptibility were ensured through its distinctive architectural style, as well as the great tolling bell and clock situated in the church towers.⁴⁶ Prior to modern times, St. Lawrence's façade would have been easily visible from Macao's seaward approaches. Building techniques such as these have been successfully replicated in sites such as the Church of Mater Dei and St. Joseph's Seminary, with the apparent goal of creating an exaggerated sense of height, grandeur and moral pre-eminence.

Again we see the role of St. Lawrence's overlapping with nearby sites in this Macao parish. St. Lawrence himself is the patron saint of navigators; the Chinese name for this sacred site, *Feng Shun Tang* ("Church of Smooth-sailing Wind"), suggests that the church was another Christian pilgrimage site for sailors, putting it in religious alignment with



The highly conspicuous façade of the St. Lawrence's Church and entrance stairway, 2020. Photos by Mark Chih-Wei Liang.

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the nearby hermitage of Our Lady of Penha, and in competition against the A-Ma Temple further south, which all served a similar purpose in attracting seafaring worshippers.⁴⁷

St. Lawrence's, the Penha hermitage, and to a lesser extent the southern St. James's Chapel, all surround the A-Ma Temple and serve similar religious roles — however, they do not envelop A-Ma or threaten to dominate it completely, as seen in Goa or other Portuguese colonial sites. Besides Porter's argument on religious similarities, one possible consideration that may explain such a chronologically extended geographic juxtaposition is the idea that Chinese and Portuguese religious sites occupying unique niches in the built space, a theory postulated by Pinheiro et al.⁴⁸ The ancient Chinese idea of *fengshui* or geomancy privileges sites between bodies of water and into the slopes of hillsides; literally, “mountain to the back and water in the front.”⁴⁹ A-Ma Temple takes up an especially auspicious site in this regard. The Portuguese, on the other hand, were more inclined to select the highest and most visible sites for their early religious chapels, in line with general European ideals of asserting and consolidating religious and military strength.⁵⁰ Building upon Pinheiro's model, and aligned with the AT doctrine of perceptibility, one of the most important identifiers for geographic control was height, given the limited land mass of the peninsula and lack of otherwise distinct geographic boundaries. Coupled with the relative lack of development of Macao during the early modern period, this observation provides some context to why widespread destruction of Chinese religious sites was not seen from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries.

Lin Fong Temple

Situated on the opposite end of Macao from A-Ma, towards the northern end of the peninsula, Chinese religious sites are predominantly featured near the only land border connecting the region with the mainland. Lin Fong Temple, in the northern

Mong-Há district, represents one of the three “ancient temples of Macao” and approximates the site of some of the earliest and most populated Chinese settlements on the peninsula.⁵¹ A British relief chart from 1796 includes a building that fits the description of this indigenous religious site on the isthmus, at the narrowest point linking the Macao peninsula to mainland China, referred to as a “Chinese temple” named *Sang-Miau*.⁵² Among its other distinct features, the Lin Fong Temple also has the honour of being the tallest Chinese temple in Macao, although — in accordance with the AT model — it is immediately overshadowed in height by the nearby Mong-Há Hill (54 metres in altitude) and the corresponding Portuguese fort, which the European colonisers referred to as “Fortaleza de Monghá”.⁵³ This small brick-walled fortification, built as a precaution in the mid-nineteenth century following the first Sino-British Opium War (1839–1842), held ten artillery pieces that dominated the landward approaches to Macao. In the 1960s the fort was demilitarised, and now has been stripped of many important historical features — including its erstwhile, highly visible Roman Catholic chapel.⁵⁴

In terms of the AT Project conceptual model, Lin Fong Temple and Mong-Há Fortress are both prominently placed at the only land entrance into and out of the peninsula during the colonial period. Any Chinese or foreign merchant, tradesperson, or labourer arriving to Macao by land or by sea would have noted these prominent landmarks. They represent opposing cultures in an attempt to assert a visual presence over the region (although the northern Border Gate, controlled by the imperial Chinese through most of the colonial period, had a more concrete say over actual physical control of the peninsula). Height played such an important role in establishing sovereignty and dominance that it was contested even within the historical documentation of Macao: numerous extant Chinese-drawn maps from the seventeenth century conspicuously exaggerated

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and magnified the size of the Border Gate, incorrectly representing it as elevated to a vertical stature comparable to Portuguese forts and churches.⁵⁵

Mong-Há Temple

This is the site currently referred to as the Kun Iam Tong Temple, primarily dedicated to the worship of Guanyin, the Chinese goddess of mercy. It is also known to the public as “*Pou Chai Sim Un*”, referencing Guanyin’s compassionate mission and the site’s role as one of the most important Buddhist temples in China.⁵⁶ Due to an inscription on an iron pagoda bell in the complex, the age of the temple is thought to date at least back to 1632.⁵⁷

Both Mong-Há Temple and Lin Fong Temple served important purposes as headquarters for Chinese political delegations that came from the mainland.⁵⁸ The diplomatic use of these sites were themselves strategic; in terms of location, they were isolated further from the Portuguese settlements in the southern part of Macao, more so than other prominent, culturally resonant sites like the A-Ma Temple. Conversely, this location facilitated a hasty exit from the peninsula, should such have been necessary. Thus, they may have been more acceptable or desirable as viable sites for imperial political envoys who often came to assert Chinese sovereignty in the region.⁵⁹

Guia Chapel

As the most isolated Christian site in Macao, this chapel is situated inside the Guia Fortress, on the highest point of the Macao peninsula, 94 metres above sea level; the exact date of construction is unknown, although the fort itself was built from 1622 to 1638. Ljungstedt describes the Guia hermitage as likely having been preceded by a small chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary before conversion to a nunnery around the time of the Dutch attempt to take Macao by force in 1622.⁶⁰

In line with the AT model, the ancient Chinese temples and the corresponding Portuguese chapel/

forts nearby engaged in complex rituals, proceedings, and visual demonstrations designed to indicate control over the region. On 3 September 1839, for example, Commissioner Lin Zexu visited Macao to “execute national sovereignty” over the region, an elaborate inspection occasionally ordered by Imperial authorities throughout the Qing Dynasty.⁶¹ He received Portuguese officials in Lin Fong Temple — Guia Fortress and other churches paid tribute with artillery salutes and bell ringing during the Chinese delegation’s subsequent survey of the region.⁶² The Portuguese prudently paid deference here: while these proceedings were sufficient to allow Chinese officials to assert their sovereign rights, it is important to note that verticality allowed the Portuguese authorities to maintain a constant presence in Macao during times of turmoil, such as increasing tensions between the Chinese and British in the run up to the First Opium War. One of the most notable examples of this dynamic is the aforementioned attempted Dutch invasion in the early seventeenth century — an instance when the Chinese were forced to abandon their vulnerable low-lying settlements in Macao, including Lin Fong and Mong-Há, whereas the Portuguese stood their ground atop Guia Hill and fought off the invaders — the strategic height of the fort played a major role in their decisive victory.⁶³ Instances such as this help explain why the Portuguese insisted on the domination of elevated strategic locations when asserting and establishing their sovereignty in colonial enclaves far from the European metropole. While Macao’s indigenous peoples in time of crisis could retreat to safe refuge on the imperial Chinese mainland, the Portuguese had no other option but to remain and defend their colony.

Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple

With Guia Hill to the north and Penha Hill to the south, we will now explore the sites along the eastern Praia Grande, one of the most representative regions of colonial Macao. The central Chinese religious site here is the Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple —

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also known as the Kuan Tai Temple. The building was constructed sometime before the nineteenth century, with historical markers referencing a renovation in 1792. Built according to typical southern Chinese temple architecture, consisting of a sunken gateway, glazed roof, and grey brick façades, it is a “modest construction,” according to its UNESCO description.⁶⁴

Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple was historically important as the centre of the principal Chinese business district in the early history of Macao. Besides being a site of worship to gods of loyalty and wealth, the temple also housed a Chinese neighbourhood association (precursor to the modern-day Chamber of Commerce) that served the business interests of the community. The Qing Dynasty had their imperial representatives dispatched to make official proclamations and public announcements at this site, underscoring its importance to Chinese daily life in the city.⁶⁵



Exterior of Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple, 2020. The low sightline and grey characteristics of the site make it difficult to locate among the surrounding European architecture. Photo by Mark Chih-Wei Liang.

Due to its proximity to Senado Square, the history of the Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple cannot be dissociated from the architectural fabric of its religiously prominent and culturally resonant Portuguese neighbours, namely the Holy House of Mercy Church, Leal Senado building, the Cathedral, and St. Dominic’s Church. The difference in appearance between the politically dominant Portuguese civic and religious structures and the Chinese one is striking, and in strict accordance with the AT Project model: the temple occupies a lower, less colourful site that is not immediately noticeable in one’s sightline amidst the surrounding buildings.

Even so, researchers Richard Tambling and Louis Lo call this temple, “the Chinese complement to the colonial administration in the Senado”.⁶⁶ At the convergence of three business streets and next to a busy Chinese bazaar, the Temple took a prominent role in the daily life of the Chinese and Portuguese, distinct from the detached, Baroque, and walled-off seminaries and churches elsewhere in the region.⁶⁷ There are no records that reveal whether or not the Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple supplanted a pre-existing Chinese shrine, or if the Portuguese deliberately sanctioned the construction of this site. Nevertheless, the Portuguese may have tacitly approved of its placement, as it allowed them to monitor the public sentiments of the Chinese without interrupting the pointedly European aesthetic of the Outer Harbour shoreline. The Chinese, while losing symbolic and iconographic control in this regard, could have developed a strategic advantage of their own: traditional Cantonese *Lingnan* architecture, with its low profile and mould-resistant materials, was much more likely to survive the subtropical climate and monsoonal onslaughts than their foreign counterparts, a testament to the site’s continued survival today.⁶⁸

Holy House of Mercy Church

Founded by bishop Dom Belchior Carneiro in 1569 as part of the global Holy House of Mercy network, this building was deliberately sited on the

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central, culturally and politically resonant Senado Square, a place that manifested Portuguese dominance. The Macao Confraternity and Fraternity of Mercy provided relief for the poor, as well as to soldiers and sailors who served the empire; the original institution in Portugal grew out of the medieval Hospitaller charity and social welfare movement in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁶⁹ The church and bell tower are no longer standing, although the associated charity house still occupies its original location. The site is therefore one of the older Catholic sites in our survey, placed in a prominent location on the right-hand side of the Senate House.

While not a principal religious location per se, the activity of the Holy House carried an ecclesiastical mission intertwined with the larger political, economic, and social goals of the Portuguese — a lodestone of European identity fronted by performative systems of charity and “ritual almsgivings”.⁷⁰ Its prominence in the square, at the intersection of both Chinese and European daily life, is befitting of its status: the Holy House of Mercy Church was important enough to take over religious duties of the Cathedral during the latter’s renovation in 1780.⁷¹

This site was an important early marker of Portuguese influence in Senado Square, especially before its neighbouring buildings came into being (St. Dominic’s, 1587, Leal Senado building, 1784, etc.); it is an anchor point upon which the surrounding urban landscape developed, in line with the AT model of *centrality*. With the church at the centre, other charity sites under Mercy auspices developed along the margins of Chinese/Portuguese society: a leper house, a hospital, and a foundling home, among others.⁷² The site is present in maps dating to the sixteenth century and shows both a bold architecture style, with whitewashed walls and neoclassical columns, in distinct comparison to the Chinese sites, such as the Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple on which it directly imposes. The Holy House of Mercy Church is a case study of Catholic authorities attempting to assert sovereignty

and dominance while cultivating sympathies with the local population through built works. Because the Holy House of Mercy had a principal role in sheltering orphans and widows of sailors, the site also had a complementary role to the religious spaces previously mentioned.⁷³

St. Dominic’s Church

Located in the city centre directly north of Senado Square, the UNESCO nomination calls St. Dominic’s Church “one of the richest historical monuments of Macao”. Associated initially with Spanish Dominicans, the church traces its history to 1587 and was originally referred to by the locals as “*Pan Cheong Tong Miu*” (Temple of Wooden Planks). The current church, with its yellow walls and distinctive white plasterwork, prioritises the original design, with an 1828 building that replaced the wooden structure.

The history of St. Dominic’s is intertwined with religious clashes throughout Macao’s past — not just between Chinese and European authorities, but also between competing Christian sects. The Spanish friars were expelled in 1588 under orders of the Viceroy of Goa, and control of the site was given to their Portuguese counterparts soon after.⁷⁴ Incidents of violence occurred in 1642 (in the aftermath of the rebellion that asserted the independence of Portugal from Spain) as well as from 1707 to 1709 due to the Chinese Rites Controversy, in which Christian tolerance of indigenous religious activities was questioned.⁷⁵

In AT terms, St. Dominic’s Church plays another major role in asserting Catholic dominance in the city centre of Macao. It directly imposes upon and dominates the Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple alongside the Holy House of Mercy, so much so that surrounding streets take their Portuguese names using the church as a geographic centre. The Dominicans’ site was at one point immense, encompassing the church, a convent, and eventually the Macao office of Public Works, as well as a fire station — all evidence of the St. Dominic’s Church consolidating *centrality* as an assertion of

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dominance through being a cornerstone of this part of the city and peninsula, perhaps even more so than the Senado building itself.

Once again, we assert the AT idea of deliberately-built niches giving the Portuguese an iconographical advantage in the administration of the region during the colonial period. Business dealings in the Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple were allowed and encouraged — Europeans would defer to their Chinese counterparts in certain matters where there was colonial tax revenue to be gained. Interestingly, a Chinese map of Commissioner Lin Zexu's 1839 inspection of the city distinguishes the Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple as the centre of Macao, pointedly avoiding mention of, or otherwise ignoring, the European sites of power that surrounded it: the Cathedral, St. Dominic's, the Holy House of Mercy Church, and the Senado building.⁷⁶ At the same time, the Portuguese reclaimed *centrality* by establishing parallel economic, political, and social sites designed to offer a strictly Christian perspective for the daily comings and goings of the city's inhabitants. They also ensured that the built environment along the eastern end of the Praia Grande would reflect solely Portuguese and European sensibilities. A late eighteenth-century European commentator, observing the skyline of Macao, mentions that:

*the sea-view of the city does not partake of the Chinese character, because the low natives who reside in Macao inhabit the back streets only, and their dwellings being but one storey in height, are concealed by the Portuguese and English houses that surround them.*⁷⁷

Colonial-era paintings and engravings reflect a coastline with church-adorned hills, Western-style bell towers, and sloping European verandas: the city seemed Chinese in name only.⁷⁸ The Portuguese must have been immensely sensitive to cultivating this image of Macao to arriving foreigners from Britain, the Netherlands, and other Western countries — a shining

Portuguese city would evidence their unchallenged sovereignty over the region — although the reality was much more complex.

Church of Mater Dei

We now turn our focus slightly inland. As the crown jewel of Macao's Christian religious sites, the façade of what was once the Church of Mater Dei constitutes the most noticeable section of the current Ruins of St. Paul's. The church was built between 1603 and 1640, preceding a 1582 structure that burnt down twice in 1595 and 1601.⁷⁹ It is the second location of the Jesuits, after their first church was destroyed by fire.

Both the interior and exterior designs are attributed to Italian Jesuit Carlo Spinola and feature a Baroque/Mannerist approach unique in China. The UNESCO nomination highlights the façade's "biblical images, mythological representations, Chinese characters, Japanese chrysanthemums, a Portuguese ship, several nautical motifs, Chinese lions, [and] bronze statues with images of the founding Jesuit saints... in an overall composition that reflects a fusion of world, regional, and local influences".⁸⁰ Indeed, at first glance upon approaching the structure, the iconography is nearly overwhelming, a feature enhanced by the façade's domineering, towering outline, emphasised by a long ascension of broad granite steps. This prominent church façade would have been highly visible from Macao's primary seaward approaches, an unmistakable architectural assertion of Portuguese religious, cultural, and political dominance.

Mater Dei is a project that exemplifies and arguably perfects Jesuit design ideas featured in other sites throughout the city. The mixing of Chinese and Western images can be seen in the Guia Chapel frescoes, the iconographic blurring of the Virgin Mary with Chinese female divinity is replicated in places like the Penha hermitage, and the horizontal divisions and triangular narrowing the façade, following the classical concept of divine ascension, can also be observed at churches such as St. Dominic's and St. Joseph's.

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Anthropologists, architects, and art historians all have discussed the ways in which the Ruins of St. Paul's manage to disorient and disrupt viewers — for example, as a concept of heterotopia (a marked space of “otherness” first postulated by philosopher Michel Foucault),⁸¹ a case of cultural borrowing,⁸² or as a dialogue.⁸³

The apparent lack of iconographic hegemony in the St. Paul's façade aligns well with our argument of Macao as an AT site. While both Western and Chinese values coexist, there are subtle hierarchical tools used by the Jesuits to visually assert Catholic dominance. For example, while Asian images do make up parts of the façade, they tend to congregate around the middle and lower sections of the ruins. While the craftsmanship of the composition reflects clear oriental influences in its details, the whole theme is undoubtedly “Christian in essence”.⁸⁴ The path of ascension is clear: while Chinese motifs are tolerated, and even celebrated, the path to salvation ends clearly in the pure verticality of Western ideas. This supposed hierarchy in the collective European psyche, however implicit, allowed for the dissemination and mitigated tolerance of Chinese and European ideas in relation to each other, a compromise rare in the Portuguese colonial world.⁸⁵

St. Paul's College

The importance of height continues throughout all of the sites that make up the Ruins of St. Paul's and surrounding structures. The sixty-eight granite steps that lead up to the façade of Mater Dei create a distinct feel of ascension from the lower square (*Largo da Companhia de Jesus*) — this perception was apparently more important than symmetry, as the steps are slightly off-centre to the left, due to a previously existing structure, the St. Paul's College.

Though no longer standing, the importance of the St. Paul's College to the Roman Catholic Jesuit presence in Macao — and Asia as a whole — cannot be overstated. From 1572, the College was a central

training and staging site for missionaries operating in East Asia; it featured a printing press with movable type for the production of religious documents and hosted a treasure room and library with works on Japanese missionary and diplomatic affairs. It was integrated with the Mount Fortress, “the most strategic site of the Macao Peninsula”, through shared walls and gateways along its eastern side.⁸⁶ The St. Paul's complex was said to be built seamlessly into the nearby defensive area, cementing its role as a central military and religious site, while also raising the suspicions of the Chinese who questioned the Europeans' possible ulterior religious motives in the city.⁸⁷

In their understanding of the plans for St. Paul's, urban historians have imagined a site immensely vital to the growth of the Macao city, and one implementing the AT doctrine for control and importance through *centrality*. Pinheiro et al. write:

*Macao's 16th-century history was affected by contradictory views due to missing data from the generic descriptions of places such as bays, hills, and shrines which could not be clearly identified with Macao's geographic location. Legends were adapted to fill up these important historical gaps... All documents and scientific evidences pointed to the fact that when the Portuguese arrived, the place was deserted: there were no local forts, temples, harbours, residences, or any other types of archaeological ruins which could have influenced the construction of a western city.*⁸⁸

Through application of the AT model, we suggest that the Portuguese took advantage of the disparate Chinese religious sites and used built, elevated spaces such as the St. Paul's Church and College to define (and thus centre) their ideal colonial city, at once dominant and loyal in military, political, and religious terms. Dominance was achieved without the destruction of indigenous sites seen in Goa: areas of Portuguese control, such as the Praia Grande neighbourhood, Senado Square,

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and the St. Paul's complex, carved up the landscape and subsequently re-centred the colonisers' power within the geographic fabric of the city in a way that favoured Portuguese sensibilities without infringing on Chinese sites of influence.⁸⁹ Such a methodology is unique to Macao, and reflects a liberalised version of colonial city planning, compared to the strategies effected in other Portuguese enclaves across Asia (Malacca, Goa, Diu, and Cochin), where indigenous religious sites were destroyed and repurposed around a central Christian axis.⁹⁰

Conclusion

Several tumultuous events in the nineteenth century, primarily instigated during the governance of João Maria Ferreira do Amaral from 1846 to 1849, would eventually lead to the deterioration of Chinese and Portuguese relations, with the latter taking more direct control of the Macao colony following the dissolution of the Senate.⁹¹ The idea of establishing a more secure "colonised area", adapted from practices that were centuries old by the sixteenth-century occupation of Macao, was predicated upon a final goal of centralised colonial authority supported almost entirely by revenue derived through exploited labour and natural resources, as well as the wealth of trade opportunities at the mouth of the Pearl River, into which the Portuguese insinuated themselves.⁹²

To realise that goal in Macao, it was necessary to decisively subordinate, with methods both artful and compromising, the traditional socio-religious powers to those of the ascendant colonial authority — situating Buddhism and indigenous deities with Roman Catholicism, while managing the supremely delicate political balance required to rule an indigenous society. Through the mandates of post-occupation religious or military site acquisitions and an aggressive building programme, Ferreira do Amaral's plan shifted the tone towards a colonial administration focused on more direct political, commercial, and religious domination. The colonial state's salient public role effectively eclipsed the

social balance — political, religious, and economic — that Chinese elites had long exercised alongside Portuguese authorities. Ferreira do Amaral and his successors reimagined Macao to confirm, with its prominent and unmistakable physical landmarks, a profoundly changed social order, in which the Portuguese Crown and the Roman Catholic Church aggressively asserted their dominance, taking precedence over the status quo of Chinese and Western influences seen over the previous three centuries.

Thus, perhaps alongside the significance of the few resulting religious conversions to Christianity, the ultimate effect of the Portuguese presence in Macao may be reckoned by a profound *cultural* conversion wrought in the Macanese landscape — in the built environment, as well as the development of a unique religious co-habitation — by the nearly half-millennia relationship of exchanges with the European metropole. The enduring result has been a colonisation of the *imagination*, or *conscience*, which created a hybridised, simultaneously bi-cultural class of beings, who recognise and practice a blended Sino-European religious and cultural reality in their lives.

These conclusions serve to illustrate and demonstrate the potential utility of the Antagonistic Tolerance model, the use of which allowed this dimension of the conquest of Macao to become more evident, even though this singular aspect of the post-occupation transformation of Macao has never been noted in prior scholarship, and never explored in such detail. Earlier writers have discussed the role of the Portuguese in asserting their dominance over Macao in the formal colonial period, but few have identified or analysed the preceding dimensions that allowed for such control. The tactics by which the Portuguese Church and State put their policies into effect were diverse and distributive: through the domination or construction of culturally symbolic and paralleled architecture in the occupied city, by increasing the *perceptibility* and *centrality*

of European cultural/religious structures without directly infringing upon competing indigenous religions, and by advancing Portuguese imperial domination through broad institutionalisation of the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, across disparate

regions, the Antagonistic Tolerance model can provide useful methods for identifying forms of cultural and religious contestation, and the means of asserting dominance, that may not otherwise be apparent. **RC**

NOTES

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