Past and present Macao: a view of the city and its skyscrapers taken from Fortaleza do Monte (Monte Fortress). Photo by Mica Costa-Grande (IC Archives), 1998.

Discourse on the City
Identity Formation and Urban Change in Contemporary Macao

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> "When, almost thirty years ago, I disembarked for the first time in Macao, the city did not have the aspect that it now has. It was different, better, more interestingly characteristic: Chinese in one half, and the rest Portuguese...We never realized that we had something that others in these Oriental regions aspired to have: something that defined us ..., something here that comprised our being, our life, our history. We have been digging our own graves. More than this, we have taught the gravedigging profession to the Chinese population with whom we share our walls. I know that Macao has never been a Florence, nor, in terms of the beauty of its architecture, like Beijing or Hangzhou. Yet, Macao had many things very Portuguese and very Chinese, much more of national [character] than other Europeans in China have. And all this, almost all of it, has been destroyed by us...we who have been digging our own graves! I remember well how everything from the Praia Grande, the Rua do Campo, the roads around the S. Domingos hospital, the Leal Senado, and the rest that extends along down to Barra, was all Portuguese. And what is it today?… An architectonic confusion, characterless, contemptible" (Mendes 1996: 15).

These words, written by Portuguese educator and critic Manuel da Silva Mendes in 1929, remained for many people surprisingly relevant in the late twentieth century. In this and other texts he wrote before his death in 1931, Silva Mendes recalled with joy the vistas that imbued Macao with a distinctive identity ("something that defined us"), lamented the destructiveness of unplanned urban development, and held forth against the absence of a social and civic sensibility among the city's residents, and against the incompetence (or ignorance) of the administration that allowed, and even facilitated, this destruction.

Seventy years later, in September, 1998, the Instituto Cultural de Macau (ICM) sponsored an international conference with a far-reaching title: "The Culture of Metropolis in Macao: Modernity, Modernism, Modernization. Urbanism, Identity, Collective Heritage and Quotidian Culture – Strategies for the 21st Century." The conference convened several dozen participants from the US, Portugal, and Macao to discuss various aspects of the urban environment in Macao: its history and growth, land use and reclamation, sustainable development, heritage preservation, and architectural attributes. The conference took as its theme the need to "establish a past behind the future of Macao," and culminated in an effort to elicit, from the variety of architects,

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The Macao Tower – the world's 10th tallest of its kind – is 338 meters high. Photomontage by Government Information Bureau, 2001.

urban planners, engineers, constructors, historians, and city administrators who participated, strategies to develop Macao as a modern city while maintaining a sense of its identity, its past. In this sense, the ICM conference and the writings of Silva Mendes can be taken as two moments in what has been called a "discourse on the city."[1]

António Aresta, writing about Silva Mendes, describes this discourse as "a new language on the social and on the urban structure" (Mendes: 14). Yet the existence of a discourse about the urban environment in Macao is certainly nothing new. Macao has been a city since 1583.[2] As such, the charm of its "urban fabric" has long attracted the attention of writers and artists: the seventeenth-century travelogues of Peter Mundy, the eighteenth-century poems of Wu Li, the nineteenth-century paintings of George Chinnery, as well as the twentieth-century short stories of Macanese authors like Henrique de Senna Fernandes and José dos Santos Ferreira, all record delight in aspects of the city: in its vistas, in the unexpected juxtapositions of European and Chinese architectural elements, in the experience of walking its jumble of narrow, winding streets, through the Chinese bazaar, along the Praia Grande.[3] Periods of good fortune, prosperity, and growth, as well as of misfortune, ruin, and decay, have been recorded in and through the changes they have wrought upon the physical features of the city.

Yet what may have been new about this discourse in the early twentieth century was the particular way in which Silva Mendes talked about the urban as a means of social and political critique: his sense of nostalgia for a disappearing aesthetic, his concern with a national character in decline, his belief that urban structures could and should reflect the unique identity of a city's inhabitants. It is this anxiety about the meaning of change that marks the continuity between the 1920s and the 1990s. The concerns voiced in the 1998 conference, and elsewhere in public forums during the transition era, differed from those of Silva Mendes not in kind, but in degree. As Macao underwent a period of breathtaking political, social and economic change, the discourse on the city took on new breadth and urgency.

I have written elsewhere about the political, social and economic transformation of Macao during the 1990s, and about why concerns about instilling a sense of belonging and collective cultural identity took on such significance during this period of uncertainty.[4] Certainly, the words of Silva Mendes should be enough to convince us that transformation and uncertainty are nothing new in Macao. Indeed, some historians argue that the one constant in the history of the city of Macao seems to be brief bursts of rapid and radical change that completely transform the city and its population.[5] Yet in the 1990s, perhaps to a greater degree than ever, the urban environment was one of the main arenas in which and *through* which these transformations were wrought. By 1999, massive land-reclamation projects had already more than doubled the surface area of the territory,[6] radically altering not only the topography but also the very geography of the city. On this new land, immense high-rise apartment blocks, built with the labour of over a hundred thousand immigrant workers, were built to house factories to employ more immigrant workers. In the 1990s, major infrastructure projects included

a new airport, a new tunnel, a new bridge, a new jetfoil terminal and heliport, a new container port, a new waste treatment facility, a new sports stadium, a Cultural Centre, and seven new museums. Proposed projects as of early 1999 (only some of which have been completed) included a Marina, a Convention and Exhibition Centre, a theme park, several new green spaces, the tenth tallest tower on the planet, a bridge linking Macao and Zhuhai, a Macao extension to the Zhuhai-Canton Railway, an international port, new buildings to house the Legislative Assembly and the Courts, and, last but not least, plans to fill in the sea separating Macao's two outlying islands, Taipa and Coloane, and to build on it a "Cotai New City" (Nova Cidade Cotai) large enough to accommodate 150,000 more residents.[7] In conjunction with all this new construction, the pre-handover Macao government undertook major efforts to classify, restore, and preserve some of the architectural structures and ensembles that it considered to be part of Macao's historical and cultural patrimony. Finally, large public monuments, at the rate of one per year between 1992 and 1998, were commissioned by the government to commemorate the legacy of economic and cultural exchange and cooperation between Portugal and China.[8] The sheer amount of work done on the physical environment meant that civil construction – which in most places is merely an indicator of economic growth in other sectors – became one of the four leading sectors pushing Macao's growth. "It was heaven for an architect," said one Portuguese architect who worked in Macao in the early 1990s. "In Portugal it takes ten years to build a single building. In Macao in the same amount of time, you could build three buildings on the same spot."

Yet, by 1999, all was not well. The construction frenzy of the 1980s and 1990s, driven primarily by a transnational economics of speculation, left the city with a surplus of 30,000 to 50,000 empty residential units. This surplus weighed on the city in the form of entire brand-new ghost towns within the city whose existence should have spelled trouble for banks, bankruptcy for investment firms, and lost revenues for the state. In mid-1993, when the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) implemented macroeconomic controls that tightened the lines of credit for mainland speculators, many investors had to pull out; and so the city was sprinkled with the

Recently built roads and flyovers leading to the new city waterfront and the Macao Cultural Centre (top right). Photo by Government Information Bureau, 2001.

skeletons of abandoned half-built skyscrapers that sat untouched for years, while work on several new projects, including the above-mentioned Cotai project, was slowed or stopped. The government could not restore fast enough all the buildings it had classified as heritage sites; many of them stood mildewed and crumbling, and others collapsed. An electrical fire that destroyed a "classified" residence whose façade had been restored by the Cultural Heritage Department raised serious questions, in both the Portuguese and Chinese press, as to precisely what was being preserved, and why.[9] And grumbling about the money "wasted" on public monuments, when it could be better spent on social programs or invested for the future government, became louder each year.

In short, when I arrived in Macao in 1997 to do field research on how collective identities emerge (or fail to emerge) in moments of transition, the discourse on the city was everywhere. Change in the urban

environment was one topic almost everyone mentioned. During the course of my research, I spoke with no one who had been in Macao for more than a few years who did not initiate a conversation about what the city was like "when I first came here" or "when I was a child," and how different it is now. Whether in the form of intense nostalgia for the vistas, the architecture, the sense of intimacy once afforded by the city; in the form of awe or admiration at the pace of urbanization; of complaints about real estate fortunes made and lost; of chagrin at the lack of centralized planning that has led to careless (over)development; or of laments about the lack of attachment to and interest in the city evinced by the majority of its residents, discourse (both public and private) about the city was every bit as pervasive as the physical changes to the cityscape. Like Silva Mendes seventy years before, residents of and visitors to Macao discussed the changes they witnessed in the city space around them, as well as the way these changes were being "marketed" to the residents whose lives they affected, as a way of making statements about changes in social, political, and economic relations that were fundamentally transforming social life in Macao during the transition.

Given this, the question of how perceptions of rapid change in the built environment may shape, and be shaped by, a "social imaginary" of identity and belonging became a particularly relevant one. I should emphasize that the term "social imaginary" does not imply that a sense of belonging and place is some kind of collective delusion, fantasy, or false consciousness. Rather, it is a term anthropologists use to emphasize that certain collective concepts or entities (for example, "nation" or "race") that appear "natural" are in fact socially constructed—that is, based on shared assumptions about the world, without which they would have no social force or meaning. The present paper, written in early 1999 as a preliminary report on my research findings, thus bridges the questions of "belonging" and urban change through an ethnographic approach to the discourse on the city. As such, it asks three main questions: first, how do people use, inhabit, move around, and talk about the changing urban space that surrounds them? Second, when people talk about these changes in the built environment, what (else) are they talking about? And third, is the attempt to cultivate and maintain a sense of belonging to Macao at odds with an emphasis on change, or might they be mutually reinforcing?

ANTHROPOLOGY, CULTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The research questions that motivate this study are, among other things, an attempt to engage in a new kind of urban ethnography. The discipline of American anthropology has, as we shall see below, a relatively brief and troubled relationship with cities. What anthropology has had to say more generally about culture and identity may prove useful in conceptualizing and studying the contemporary discourse on the city of Macao, but at the same time the study of identity and urban change in Macao points out some shortcomings in the previous literature on cities, and provides an impetus for new anthropological approaches to the study of cities. In this section and the following one, I sketch a brief outline of what has been done in the field so far.

For most of its history as a discipline, cultural anthropology has been concerned with the study of so-called "primitive" societies: that is, "nonliterate peoples living in non-Western countries with a low level of technological advancement" (Friedl & Chrisman 1975:1). Both the theory and methodology of early cultural-anthropological inquiry were suited for village studies; a concentration on the study of relatively small, isolated, and apparently self-contained communities both led to and grew out of a holistic concept of culture as a set of rules for social behaviour – a concept that posited "cultures" (like the villages that these anthropologists usually studied), as isolated, self-contained, internally consistent, and, when undisturbed by outside influences, unchanging.

The cultural analysis of the built environment did, to a certain extent, enter into this kind of village anthropology. In this context, anthropologists argued that the way people understand the world, their culture, and their society, can be reflected in the way they construct and organize their dwelling space. For example, Pierre Bourdieu, in his study of the Kabyle people of northern Africa, noted how the structure of the traditional Kabyle house reflected the dualistic worldview that, he argued, structured much of Kabyle culture, gender relations, agricultural practices, and perceptions of time and space.[10] Although Bourdieu,

writing in the early 1970s, was critical of the static, objectivist approach to culture and society that had characterized much anthropological analysis until then, his interpretation of the symbolic significance of Kabyle architecture is consistent with the holistic notion of culture, as it demonstrates how all the elements within a given culture are interrelated and how each smaller part within a culture reflects and reproduces the larger worldview.

But for the most part, studies such as these commented on the structure of social spaces that were markedly *different* from modern urban or suburban ones.[11] Given the theoretical and methodological focus of village anthropology, it is perhaps not surprising that, for many cultural anthropologists until the mid-1960s, the city only became a subject for study when villagers moved there. The complexity, heterogeneity, density, and relative mobility of urban societies, compared to rural communities, led early urban anthropologists to argue that cities represented "the breakdown of the basic foundation of human society" (Friedl & Chrisman 1975:5)—namely, ties to the family, to ritual and religious beliefs, and to the land. Urbanization, they argued, would inherently involve alienation and displacement. Later debates in urban ethnography tended to centre around proving or disproving this point; but this tendency meant that, until recently, "anthropological urban studies have dealt largely with urbanization, the process by which rural emigrants settle in and adjust to urban life, rather than with the way of life in cities, which is commonly referred to as urbanism. In addition, because we have been interested primarily in how people adjust to urban life, we have paid much less attention than have other social scientists to broader issues involving the operation of the urban system (i.e., the network of cities within a nation, the ways in which these cities are interrelated, and how the lives of urbanites and rural residents are influenced by large-scale demographic, political, economic, and sociological processes)" (Foster & Kemper 1974:6).

Perhaps for this reason—and perhaps because ethnographers carried with them a conception that villages were "places," whereas cities were "spaces"—questions about the symbolic significance of the built environment were all but ignored in anthropological analyses of cities. Until recently, while many anthropologists may have found plenty to say about the symbolic significance of, for example, the architecture of a temple in a Chinese neighbourhood in San Francisco, few would have ventured similar analyses of office towers or suburban townhouses that surrounded the temple and made it seem unique. There was a tendency to view such modern urban buildings as more or less simply the destruction of meaningful places; and the focus of urban ethnography came to be on how residents of these new "inert," "meaningless" spaces managed (or failed) to engage in activities that would integrate them, despite their environment, into some sort of larger "dis-placed" framework—native-place ties to their home villages, for example, or peer-group ties to gangs, and so on.[12]

As the field of American urban anthropology developed in the 1970s, however, not only did the methods and focus of anthropological research change, but the lack of fit between the conventional view of culture-as-village and the urban cultural forms and phenomena anthropologists were confronted with was one empirical problem that helped to bring about a change in the operative concept of culture. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, one of the main proponents of symbolic or interpretive anthropology, suggested that "social relations involve a continuous process of interpretation and reinterpretation…., [that] people's actions are based upon a continuous process of interpreting and reinterpreting the actions of others….[and that] society is not static or fixed but dynamic and fluid" (Jackson 1989: 172). Around the same time, British literary and cultural critic Raymond Williams wrote that culture should be considered as "a set of signs and symbols that are embedded in a whole range of activities, relations, and institutions, only some of which are manifestly 'cultural,' others being overtly economic, political, or generational" (in Jackson 1989:38). Observers of cities (who, for the reasons mentioned above, at first were not anthropologists, but rather urban planners, architects, historians, and even literary critics) who adopted this approach to culture as a set of symbols that people are constantly interpreting realized that the built environment does not just exist as an inert set of objects that passively reflects a set of cultural norms or rules that govern a society. Instead, the built environment, much like a literary text, is a changing ensemble of material objects that can actively *signify*—and all the more so in a city, where residents' lives and daily movements involve and are structured by buildings, streets, and the spaces between them. As

one practitioner of this cultural approach to architecture emphasizes, "architecture is more than a set of objects with which we come into occasional contact. It constitutes the very processes, practices and spaces that make up the physicality of life. It forms the spaces in which all aspects of our lives reside and flow" (Borden 1995: 4).

In recent years, the interpretive approach to cities has flourished in hybrid fields such as cultural studies and cultural geography, fields which integrate the insights and methods of architectural historians, anthropologists, economists, literary critics, philosophers, psychoanalysts, art historians, geographers, social theorists and others. The works of two authors can be taken as examples of different ends of a continuum of the interpretive cultural-studies approaches to the built environment: Mike Davis and Ackbar Abbas. Davis, in his book *City of Quartz*, emphasizes the political-economic history behind the development of the city of Los Angeles, applying what could be called a marxian approach; Abbas, in his book *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, focuses on the visual and semiotic aspects of the built environment of contemporary Hong Kong, taking what might be called a more textual approach. These approaches are often considered to be antithetical to each other; but since I argue that an ethnographic approach can and should draw on the strengths of both of them, I will briefly outline these strengths as well as the weaknesses of each.

Davis, a journalist from Los Angeles, is interested in revealing "the complex social relations that lie behind the production of culture" (Jackson 1989: 36). More than this, however, Davis' chief success, and chief contribution to the field, is in his ability to demonstrate how both those social relations (especially relations of class and race) as well as the cultural products they give rise to (the specific forms of Los Angeles' architecture and urban design, as well as other cultural and countercultural phenomena that make L.A. famous) are equally laden with, and indeed thrive on, contradictions between and interrelations among themselves. In this sense, although Davis does not talk about culture as such, his analysis does not revert to a simplistic and holistic notion of culture, but rather shows how culture, *as a set of significations*, both structures and is structured by power and money.

Abbas, a professor of comparative literature in Hong Kong, criticizes an overemphasis on simplistic political-economic approaches which "simply (see) architecture as capitalism inscribed in built space" (Abbas 1997:79). While he holds in view the importance of the capitalist market economy that is behind the high-rise, high-density apartment blocks and high-tech bank buildings so characteristic of Hong Kong, he insists that there is more to the story than money politics, and his interests lie with, as he puts it, "ways of seeing the city" (Abbas 1997:76). Abbas borrows from the field of literary criticism and takes a semiotic approach to the built environment. This approach involves "reading" the city like a text, explaining the elements of metaphor, allusion, simile, aporia and other such imagery and significatory devices that can be found in that "text." For example, Abbas criticizes the design of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, calling it "one of those modernist, placeless structures that could be from anywhere" (Abbas 1997:66), which incorporates "a patina of local history" as an attempt to foster a sense of local identity. This attempt, Abbas argues, has the inverse effect of making history disappear, reinforcing the historical power of colonialist ideology to define what is and is not history, what Hong Kong is and what it is not (Abbas 1997:66-69).

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In this sense, Abbas shares with Davis an unstated concept of culture that is similar to that espoused by Raymond Williams. Both Davis and Abbas are interested in the relationship between urban forms and their social meanings; I say they are on opposite ends

of a continuum to underline that their differences are, in my view, primarily a matter of relative emphasis and direction, rather than inherent incompatibility. Davis starts with the historical, the "invisible" social forces of American society, and ends up with how they structure the city of Los Angeles as we know it; Abbas begins with the contemporary, the "visible" urban forms of the city of Hong Kong as we see it, and ends up with the ideological and material forces that structure society and even the world as it is becoming. For all their differences, however, both these approaches share one major difference from the more strictly ethnographic approach of this paper—a difference that can be summed up in an observation made about Davis' book by reviewer Marshall Berman. Berman points out that the photographs Davis includes in his book depict "a cityscape starkly empty of people" (Berman 1991:420). This is a telling detail; Davis well achieves his goal of relating the grand narratives of capital flows and powerful developers behind the distinctive architecture and urbanism of Los Angeles, but ultimately, he is not interested in how the residents of the city themselves—the inhabitants of the ghettos or wealthy gated communities—narrate their experience and interpretation of the city. Similarly, Abbas' interpretation of Hong Kong architecture relies on theoretical insights and the alacrity of the author's own interpretation. It does not address who, aside from the author and those who have read the author's book, may view the Hong Kong Cultural Centre in the same way he does.

In contrast, an ethnographic approach to the built environment would need to hold in view both ends of this continuum—both how "invisible" social forces structure the built environment and how the "visible" elements comprising this environment may have powerful significatory powers. In addition, however, the major contribution of the ethnographer would be to ascertain how differently-positioned residents of Hong Kong or Los Angeles may imbue the buildings and the city with different meanings. In the words of Iain Borden, one of the participants in an ongoing interdisciplinary group project on cities entitled *Strangely Familiar*, "the architecture and physical spaces of the city mean different things to different people, and…this meaning is constantly shifting, being alternatively reinforced or challenged every time someone enters a building" (Borden 1995:3).

This approach is concomitant with a modified approach to the study of cultures as sets of symbols. This new approach, which focuses on the potential for differentiation, movement, and change within and among cultures rather than on unity, isolation, and stasis within cultures, makes the question of collective identity come to the forefront. In other words, how are collective meanings, as the basis for group cohesion and solidarity, produced and disseminated? This is the basic anthropological question of identity: "who are we, and how do we know it?"[13]

CITIES AND IDENTITY

Identity is one topic that virtually everyone who writes about urban environments seems to raise at some point or another. Indeed, argues one American historian and architect, "the politics of identity…are an inescapable and important aspect of dealing with the urban built environment, from the perspectives of public history, urban preservation, and urban design" (Hayden 1995:7). Yet there is more to this statement than meets the eye. How can we understand identity in the urban context? What, and who, do the politics of identity involve when we talk about cities? How do identities form in cities, and how can urban environments contribute to a sense of identity? While countless authors make mention of "identity" in their writings about cities, fewer of them take these basic questions into consideration. In this section, rather than presenting a full overview of the vast literature on cities and identity, I elucidate two prevalent approaches to the subject, outlining their contributions to the field and contrasting them with the ethnographic approach where appropriate.

One way of approaching the question of cities and identities that is found most often in analyses by architectural historians, but which also permeates many works in other fields, is to talk about "the identity of the city." In other words, this approach focuses on the distinguishing features of the city as a whole, and defines the city by those features. Michael Hough provides a good example of this approach when he writes that "the identity of the city is a combination of cultural and natural history, the variety of its ethnic and interest groups, its cultural and economic history, and its development patterns" (Hough 1990:121). In defining how the built environment of a city shapes

its identity, Hough emphasizes the urban fabric; that is, as he puts it, "identity in the urban centre is based on the continuity of the built environment….Urban spaces, squares, parks, streets, and the ways these are linked are the organizing framework. The life and activity of this fabric is nourished at its edges by shops, cafes, cultural and commercial activities" (115). He is concerned with the architecture not only of buildings, but of the entire built and natural environment, and primarily with the city street as a social environment (93). In this sense, any given city has only one identity, and, as Abbas argues, "architecture…is the first visual evidence of [this] putative identity" (Abbas 1997:64).

While this approach is useful in presenting convincing arguments for why one cannot talk about urban identity without talking about the built environment, it differs from an ethnographic approach in two major ways. First, it makes the physical structures and layout of the city the protagonists of the story of identity formation, as it were. Put crudely, Hough argues that a city has the identity that it does because of its buildings, its streets and parks; human residents of the city simply move around in this environment and enact the identity they find there. This is illustrated by Abbas, who makes constant reference to the city as an active agent, the subject, rather than the object, of verbs: the city produces, the city portrays, the city desires, fears, disappears—as if the city had, at some level, an existence and even a will somehow separable from the inhabitants and socio-economic processes that comprise it.

The second, and related, difference between this approach and an ethnographic one is the unproblematic assertion that a city has only one identity. It does not allow for the possibility that a city may have different aspects of identity, as well as different identities for different people. In this sense, I would argue that this approach is a kind of corollary to the holistic, static conception of culture as a sort of pre-existing set of internally consistent rules. The question of how different people interpret the social or architectural facts of their environment is never a question.

But for an ethnographer of urban identities, rather than being part of the explanation, discourse about the identity of the city is part of the thing to be explained: what does it mean to talk of "Macao's identity", its lasting characteristics, its culture? For whom is this identity relevant and meaningful? And how do the governors of, residents of, and visitors to that city reproduce or change those meanings?

In contrast to this first approach, Dolores Hayden (in her book *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*), focuses less on what the identity of a city as a whole may be, and more on how identities are formed in the relationship between city dwellers and the urban spaces they inhabit. This approach explores the many different forms and levels of identity existing in the same city, acknowledging that the same urban space may be interpreted differently by different people: what may be a collection of ugly, run-down industrial buildings for one person may, for another, resonate with memories of work and family life. The key to Hayden's analysis is an emphasis on the importance of collective memory, and on how the urban environment can be a kind of living repository for these memories: "identity is intimately tied to memory: both our personal memories (where we have come from and where we have dwelt) and the collective or social memories interconnected with the histories of our families, neighbours, fellow workers and ethnic communities. Urban landscapes are storehouses for these social memories, because natural features such as hills or harbours, as well as streets, buildings, and patterns of settlement, frame the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes" (Hayden 1995:9).

Hayden is especially interested in the preservation of vernacular urban landscapes (that is, ordinary buildings such as tenements, union halls, factories, and churches, rather than monuments and "great works" of outstanding architectural quality) as a way of fostering shared memories and a stronger sense of civic identity that can include a wide variety of urban dwellers. In emphasizing that urban environments become imbued with social meaning through the human interactions that take place among them, and through the stories and histories that are told about them, Hayden's approach is much closer to the ethnographic focus that motivates this paper.

However, Hayden's rhetoric, like that of many urban social critics including David Harvey (1990) and Manuel Castells (1989), does not deal well with one topic that any analysis of Macao—contemporary or historical—must take into consideration: the question of urban change. Hayden and many of her colleagues tend to equate urban change with the *loss* of identity.

Echoing the sentiments of early urban anthropologists, they emphasize that urbanization in the late twentieth century has involved "the apparent shift away from what is distinctive to what is similar in the contemporary world" (Hough 1990:2). Shaped primarily by the demands of the capitalist real estate market, the argument goes, the modern process of urbanization has resulted in the reproduction of countless numbers of spaces that appear identical—high-rise apartment blocks, shopping malls, highway flyovers, and the like—both within cities and in different cities around the world. This fundamental loss of distinctiveness equals a loss of meaning, and therefore, of identity. The following example given by Hayden is telling: "as a field of wildflowers becomes a shopping mall at the edge of a freeway, that paved-over meadow, restructured as freeway lanes, parking lots, and mall, must still be considered a place, if only to register the importance of loss and explain it has been damaged by careless development" (Hayden 1995:18). Yet while many of us may prefer the aesthetics of a meadow over those of a shopping mall, and may criticize the ecological damage that may be inflicted by careless development, we must be careful not to conflate aesthetic and ecological concerns with the analysis of how social meanings are produced. These new structures, as long as they are inhabited by people, will themselves become fertile ground for the growth of new memories, and thus will not lose meaning so much as they will become imbued with new meanings. For some, these new meanings may include a sense of loss or nostalgia; however, an ethnographic approach would take this as a topic for inquiry, rather than assuming "loss" as an automatic result of change. Hayden assumes that change and identity are not compatible, that new buildings erase memories as completely as they erase old structures. But social meaning, like energy, cannot be destroyed; it can only be converted into other states of meaning. And this process of conversion happens constantly. An ethnographic approach to identities in cities, especially in a rapidly-changing city such as Macao, must pay close attention to how new spaces and structures are integrated, or not integrated, into residents' sense of the city and of themselves.

These are some of the questions that an ethnographer of the emergence of identity in a rapidly-changing city such as Macao must keep in mind. As Iain Borden puts it, "Urban meaning is not immanent to architectural form and space, but changes according to the social interaction of city dwellers. Conversely, people's identity in terms of their age, gender, class and culture is partially constructed in relation to the spaces and buildings they occupy" (Borden 1996: 12). It is important to maintain this flexibility in analysing the production of social meanings and histories through reference to the built environment, while also taking into account how changes in the built environment as well as among the people who inhabit this environment may be, together, affected by larger economic and political interests. In this sense, we could say that the changes that transformed the economy and social structure of Macao in the last two decades of the twentieth century—for example, the effects of tourism, real estate speculation, bureaucratic corruption, newly emerging ethnic and linguistic divisions, the emergence of a middle class, and preparations for the return to Chinese sovereignty—changed not only the physical aspect of the city and the composition of its population, but also the relationships between the city and its residents. Finally, it is important to remember that people know and interpret the urban environment not solely on a visual level; various aspects of knowledge (or rumour or myth) about, for instance, how certain buildings got to where they are now, who invested in their construction, or who their tenants have been, also comprise an important part of how and what buildings may signify.[14] Thus it is that an ethnographic approach to the built environment in Macao should pay attention to residents' lived experience of the city, they way they

How can we understand identity in the urban context? What, and who, do the politics of identity involve when we talk about cities? How do identities form in cities, and how can urban environments contribute to a sense of identity?

narrate, inhabit, and move around the urban environment, by combining a semiotic analysis of meaning, and political economic analysis of social relations. Such an analysis takes the physical changes in the city, official and unofficial discourse on the city, as well as metadiscourse about how these changes are narrated by their proponents or opponents, as inseparable parts in the attempt to understand how collective identity is formed through reference to a rapidly-changing built environment.

In this paper, I will restrict my comments to just two specific arenas of change: the heritage preservation movement, and the new neighbourhoods in the northern district of the city. I have chosen to discuss these two together because they are linked, as we shall see, in ways that may not seem immediately apparent.

PATRIMÓNIO ARQUITECTÓNICO: TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PRESERVATION

O culto do Património é um dos modos de realizar a Saudade.

The cult of patrimony is one way to actualize nostalgia.[15]

I want to begin this discussion of urban change by talking about preservation. This approach may seem paradoxical, but I want to pursue the paradox for four major reasons, two practical and two theoretical. First, the results of the heritage preservation movement – especially the bright European-style buildings, in pastel pinks and greens, that dot the city "like so many wedding cakes"[16] – comprise one aspect of the urban landscape that casual visitors and residents alike know and remember and comment on, and thus provide an obvious entry into a discussion of the city. Second, the heritage preservation movement is directly tied up with questions about the style and legacy of Portuguese colonialism and the process of decolonisation, and thus is a particularly timely subject. Third, the movement itself is one that makes explicit reference to, and claims on, the issues of place and belonging that motivate my study. And finally, it is the argument of this paper that not only does the social meaning of urban space change with the way the space is used or inhabited, but that the conscious attempt to preserve a space is itself a way of changing the social meaning of that space.

As we saw earlier, Dolores Hayden and others consider the built environment to be a repository of the shared memories that are the stuff of identity.[17] For this reason, the preservation of historically significant structures and spaces is necessary to maintain, and give solid physical expression to, these memories and this identity. Implicit in this argument is its converse—namely, that the disappearance of such buildings must involve the disappearance of identity—and this assumption is a major theme in the discourse on the city of Macao. The theme of loss—loss of identity, of charm, of uniqueness—at the expense of unplanned urban development is one that runs throughout the rhetoric of the proponents of architectural heritage preservation, and it lends itself easily to nostalgic discourses that have been around since the time of Silva Mendes.

Nostalgia is a particular kind of memory, a particular way of narrating one's relationship to the past. It is an emotional, rather than intellectual, attachment to the past; a yearning for "the way things were in the old days," necessarily depoliticised and selective, which monumentalises rather than scrutinizes past events or states of being. While a narrative of nostalgia is not a useful tool for the analysis of urban change (as we saw in the case of Hayden), it is nonetheless a significant part of the discourse on Macao's cityscape. In literary works and songs about Macao as much as in the words of numerous informants both in Macao and overseas, sites such as Lilau, Praia Grande, the Ah-Ma temple, Three Lamps, the Luís de Camões Park, evoke a particularly nostalgic, even mythic, form of memory. The epigraph which begins this section, taken from the introduction to a special edition of the journal *Revista de Cultura* called *Macao Heritage I: Four Centuries of Urbano-Architectonic History*, is evidence of the strong connection that is made between the heritage initiative and nostalgia as a form of collective memory in Macao.

Narratives of nostalgia and loss can, in different contexts, have different effects. Silva Mendes used a nostalgic narrative about Macao's past as a form of self-criticism in the present. Collective nostalgia is often a cornerstone of cultural nationalism. In order to understand the place of narratives of nostalgia in the contemporary discourse on the city, and its effects in the production of urban identities, we must take a

closer look at the architectural heritage initiative as a transformative, rather than simply preservative, project.

Surrounded by the mirrored glass of bank towers, the terraced spirals of high-rise carparks, and the soot-stained tile of the thirty-story apartment blocks that now dominate Macao's skyline, traces of the old city of Macao still remain. Some of these traces exist in the form of ruined old buildings of sagging grey brick and gap-toothed paint-peeled shutters, abandoned by all life except the trees that sprout from their roofs. Others, the showpieces of the restoration movement, have been gutted and girdered with steel rather than rotting wood, redesigned inside, repainted outside and reopened as government offices, shops, and restaurants.[18] Efforts to preserve some of this "old world charm" of Macao were a controversial part of a wide-ranging attempt during the transition period to reorganize of the narratives of Macao's history and culture, and thereby to redefine the prospects for the city's future.[19]

In 1976, the Macao government passed the first law governing the preservation of historic buildings and created the Commission for the Preservation of Macao's Heritage. In 1984, this heritage law was strengthened and the list of classified sites expanded to include over 130 buildings, monuments, and neighbourhoods.[20] In most classified areas, property owners were forbidden to destroy or make alterations to the exterior of the buildings, and any plans for new buildings would be subject to approval by the Commission. It was not until the late 1980s, however, that the heritage preservation movement came into full swing, as the Commission was upgraded into a government Department (Departamento do Património Cultural, under the auspices of the Instituto Cultural) with an annual budget in the millions, allocated for the restoration of dilapidated but classified sites. Between 1990 and 1997, according to an estimate by a representative of the Cultural Heritage Department, approximately HK$69 million (approx. US$9 million) was spent on restoration works throughout Macao's peninsula and two islands.

At first, it seems easy to dismiss the heritage initiative as a classic example of colonial nostalgia. This term was popularised by anthropologist Renato Rosaldo in a somewhat different context: he uses it primarily to describe the fascination colonisers come to feel for the "native" culture they have destroyed in the process of colonisation (Rosaldo 1989). Here, I use it to describe the desire of colonisers to relive the "good old days" of colonial wealth, power and privilege—days which always seem to be bygone. In fact, one of my interviewees, Tiago, an architect who had been involved in the heritage initiative since the mid-1980s, admitted that it was in a spirit of nostalgia—or, as he called it, "anticipated nostalgia"—that the movement began and was able to gain the support of the government. When the Macao-Portuguese government became aware, in 1987, that their days in Macao were numbered, "they wanted to preserve something of the past, some legacy of the Portuguese presence in Macao that would endure after the departure of all the Portuguese people."[21]

Proponents of the heritage initiative, including Tiago, are careful to emphasize that although the movement may have begun in this spirit, it has a wider significance for the city's residents: "the preservation of old buildings, streets and places cannot simply be discarded as nostalgia. The policy of preserving the architectural heritage reflects a basic desire of people to identify with their ever-changing living environment by certain reference features. Tangible testimonies of the past provide such reference points by allowing people to identify an environment as home" (Marreiros 1991:101).

However, I argue that this is not simply an issue of "allowing" people to identify an environment as home, but of encouraging people to identify Macao as home in a particular way. The transition-era heritage initiative was not simply about the restoration of dilapidated physical structures. Rather, as the heritage initiative produced useful buildings out of decaying ruins, it also produced narratives about history, identity, and belonging. It involved an attempt to redefine the history and identity of Macao, to redefine the way people felt about the traces of the past they encountered on the streets every day.

In this sense, seeing the initiative solely as a form of colonial nostalgia ignores the extent to which it saw itself as playing a role in the conscious effort to tell a history of Macao that was explicitly *not* colonial. In 1979, Portugal and China signed a secret agreement, later made public, which declared that Macao would no longer have the political status of a colony, and instead would be considered to be "Chinese territory under Portuguese administration."[22] In the twenty years between that declaration and the handover, there was

Architecture of Nostalgia: Restored heritage buildings in downtown Macao, Largo do Senado (above) and in Taipa, Avenida da Praia (right).
Photos by Government Information Bureau, 2001.

a vigorous effort to do in the realm of culture and history what had been done in the realm of law and politics: to transform the image of Macao from "European city in the Orient" to "a city where East meets West" – a city characterized by multicultural openness, tolerance, hybridisation and exchange, rather than domination, exclusion, or colonization. The agonistic narrative of European colonial domination, native anti-colonial agitation and eventual self-liberation had, according to the proponents of this approach, begun to lose currency as a way to conceptualise the history of Macao; a new wave of historians began to re-examine the historical record and find, rather than simple colonialism, evidence of a unique form of cooperation between Portugal and China based on unwritten policies of compromise and mutual benefit.[23]

This redefinition of history and identity was central to the success of the heritage initiative and it took place, to a very large extent, in and through the heritage buildings themselves. In heritage discourse, the hybrid Sino-European architectural styles of monuments such as the São Paulo Façade, and the juxtapositions of radically different architectural styles, both Chinese and Western, took on new significance. They were the evidence for, and incarnation of, this essential identity of Macao and its people: "The importance of affirming an identity lies in the need to alert the population to those characteristics which make them different from others. Architecture, urban design and landscape...are...outstanding evidence of a lasting identity. Through such evidence, any citizen or visitor can discover the history of the place and of its culture, and thus reasons and origins of its difference, which is desirable to retain."[24]

For proponents of the heritage initiative, the heritage buildings were important symbols, a kind of insurance against Macao's being engulfed by "the mundane sameness of a modern commercial city" (Duncan 1991: 182).

Hayden and other activists who write about the necessity for the preservation of vernacular architecture do so with the idea that these buildings will serve as a kind of living social history textbook, to educate future

generations about the lives and struggles of their ancestors. But in Macao (as well as in many other places where architectural heritage initiatives have become popular), the process of transforming these buildings into symbols of identity involves a transformation of history into nostalgia. This can happen, in cases of vernacular architecture such as the Casa de Ópio or the ensemble along the Rua da Felicidade, when the physical structures are carefully restored without reference, or with romanticizing references, to the various uses for which they were originally built. Sometimes, as in the case of the Casa de Ópio (which, at the time of this writing, was slated to become a Chinese pharmacy), the transformation of history into nostalgia involves a degree of historical irony. Other times, as with the Rua da Felicidade, Macao's erstwhile "red light" district which now houses specialty restaurants, it is simply a case of gentrification. In this way, the restoration movement attempts to provide a clean, depoliticised, uncontroversial and picturesque space for the creation of and circulation of public memories which everyone – Portuguese, Chinese, resident, tourist – can share.

Many cultural critics and social historians have decried heritage initiatives in the United States and Europe for precisely this reason (see Hewison 1991; Koshar 1994; Lowenthal 1994; Walsh 1992). Yet, from another perspective, the transformation of history into nostalgia is not inherently or necessarily a bad thing. The attempt to transform potentially divisive histories of conflict and compromise into a basis for something more positive may have its value in the bid to foster a sense of community and prosperity in a disaggregated and economically beleaguered city such as Macao. But this process should be acknowledged for the transformative process that it is. Problems arise only when narratives of nostalgia come to replace public history entirely, and the distinction between the two is lost.

The attempt to map this new history and unique identity across the urban space of Macao was also controversial. Where topics such as colonialism, history, culture, and development – not to mention large sums of money – are involved, there is bound to be controversy. Any attempt to restrict building in an era of rampant real estate speculation is bound to have

opponents. Indeed, in the conversations I had with a variety of Macao residents, there seemed to be little consensus regarding the heritage initiative. Even among those who agreed that it was an important and worthwhile expenditure, there were doubts as to whether the projects were being done well enough, or whether these attempts were too little too late; there were cynical insinuations that the only reasons for preserving old buildings were the absence of infrastructure for development in the older districts of the city, and the fact that so many new buildings are standing empty. The most widely-publicized criticism seemed to be that by restoring only the exteriors of the heritage buildings, the government was pouring money into firetraps in order to prop up a fragile and superficial façade of culture and history, and creating a culture of dependency in which private owners of classified buildings would maintain them only as long as they received government funding to do so.

Such criticisms of the manner of restoration were an important part of the public discourse about heritage during the transition era, but they did not negate the basic premise of the heritage initiative, which is that the buildings embody a valuable and potentially lucrative aspect of Macao's identity. Indeed, the proponents of the heritage initiative were relatively successful in turning the perceived restrictions into advantages, by defining Macao's heritage buildings, and its unique history, as the basis for the city's economic development. "When heritage was linked to tourism," explained Tiago, "and everyone realized that Macao could be a 'chicken of golden eggs' – that's when their attitude towards preservation took a turn for the better." Gradually, more and more developers, city planners, and investors came to agree that destroying heritage buildings was not simply destroying evidence of the past, but also the basis of Macao's future prosperity.

Thus the new definition of an essential "Macao-ness" – politically, economically, and culturally – was, in this era of rapid change, being linked ever more closely to the city's built environment. The heritage initiative was an effort to redefine the way in which people conceived of themselves in relation to the city, to define a new urban identity: a local, place-based identity, the "Macao person" [澳门人]—a person who, regardless of race, language, class, gender or nationality, has a strong sense of belonging to the city, and a strong sense of the city's uniqueness. It was an attempt to transform the way people thought about themselves and their city in the present, through reference to physical evidence of a romanticized and monumentalised past. Indeed, I would argue that during the 1990s, the widespread public narrative of nostalgia was as much a product of the heritage initiative as an impetus for it; rather than simply codifying into law and concretising into buildings an already-existing sentiment, the heritage initiative fostered nostalgia as the foundation for a broadly shared urban identity. In this sense, the quotation that begins this section could also be read (though perhaps it was not written) in two different ways: as saying that the cult of patrimony is a way of giving physical substance to the emotional state known as nostalgia, or that the cult of patrimony itself produces the social phenomenon known as nostalgia. In fact, I contend, it does both.

But, returning to the opening question of this paper, what effect did such a discourse have in shaping the social imaginary of belonging among different Macao residents during the transition era? What other histories or narratives did Macao residents "read" in the restored buildings? And how did differently-positioned residents interpret, and contribute to, the discourse about these buildings and the identity they were supposed to symbolize? In the formal interviews and informal conversations I conducted with Macao residents during the course of my research, four main themes or lines of discourse about the heritage buildings and about the rhetoric of the heritage initiative emerged. As we shall see, themes of nostalgia, belonging, identity and history circulate through the comments of Macao residents, but not always in the way one might expect. I illustrate with four examples:

1. Anti-Nostalgia I: Colonial Ambivalence

For some Portuguese residents of Macao, the preservation movement was not about colonial nostalgia so much as it was about a kind of colonial ambivalence: for them, the heritage buildings, and the heritage project as a whole, represented evidence not of an admirable history of cultural exchange, but rather the legacy of the failure of Portuguese colonialism in China. "It is like we are trying to do in the last ten years what we didn't do in the previous 430," one Portuguese civil servant told me. The disproportionate

emphasis placed on these disappearing buildings as the primary legacy of the Portuguese presence in Macao became an arena for the critical re-evaluation of the history of the Portuguese presence in Asia. They viewed the heritage initiative as a poor substitute for the solid framework of institutional, linguistic, cultural and economic affiliations with Portugal and Portugueseness that was lacking. In this context, comments such as the following were sometimes read as (though not written as) expressions of this supreme ambivalence—a simultaneous pride in Macao's architectural heritage, and chagrin at the fragility of Macao's unique identity: "It's like this: without its architectural patrimony, Macao would not exist. Without the unique plan of its urban design, without its heritage buildings—Macao would be the same as countless other neighbouring cities, as alike as two drops of distilled water" (Cunha, 1998:3). [25]

2. Anti-Nostalgia II: Economic Development

A second, oppositional, theme, one which is common in all parts of the world where heritage projects have been undertaken, came from the business sector and developers who had competing economic interests in developing the properties that were being restricted by the government. Mr. Kwok is a Chinese businessman and member of the Macao Chinese Chamber of Commerce, arguably the single most powerful civic association in Macao and one which lobbied against the government's decision to "classify" certain areas of the city as protected heritage sites. Of particular concern to Mr. Kwok and others like him were the quantity of broken-down buildings which stood in classified areas but which had yet to be restored. Nostalgia did not enter the picture for Mr. Kwok; the main value he saw in the heritage buildings was how they fit into Macao's economic profile. He admitted that the effort to restore and maintain some of Macao's historic buildings could be valuable in the interests of tourism; but, he argued, "When tourists come to Macao they like to visit the major temples, and these tourist attractions are certainly worth maintaining. But the Portuguese just go too far! Classifying those old ruined buildings on New Street as cultural relics? What tour guide is going to take their tour to see some ruined old building? What kind of attraction is that? What we need to attract is outside investment. We need practical measures to boost industry and exports, not these idealistic attempts to preserve some 'cultural legacy'."

The ruined old buildings were a sign of history, all right, but it was a ruinous history of economic stagnation and decay that should be eradicated rather than preserved. According to Mr. Kwok, the future of Macao did not need this sort of past; nor did it need an identity that would distinguish it from its neighbours. Rather, it needed to approximate as closely as possible the history of rational capitalist modernization behind the success of the nearby post-colonial city-states of Hong Kong and Singapore. Skyscrapers, land reclamation, and rapid urbanization were signs of this success. For Mr. Kwok, the heritage buildings were signs of irrational state restrictions on development – of, in a sense, a past without a future. "But let's wait and see," he told me with a sparkle in his eye, "after 1999, I imagine there will be some modifications in the policy about the preservation of heritage sites."

3. Nostalgia's Converse: Narratives of Social Progress

Another narrative line that emerged from the interviews was comprised of stories told by elderly residents of Macao who maintained a living memory of the buildings as they were used before becoming heritage sites. Cheng Ah-po, aged 78 in 1999, was the last remaining daughter of an old and once-wealthy Macao Chinese family whose other members have all emigrated overseas. "It's different now," she told me, brightly, one afternoon as we walked around the neighbourhood near the old folks' home where she lived. "So much has changed. Now the Chinese and the Portuguese respect each other and are friends. But back then, things were different…" To illustrate her point, she stopped me in front of the enormous old mansion on Rua do Campo which had been restored in 1993. She told me that every time she passes that building she thinks of the time when it was still inhabited by the man who built it – a businessman by the name of Gou, who made his fortune by obtaining the monopoly rights to run gambling establishments in the territory. It was a time, before 1946, when the sale and use of opium was still legal in Macao, but monopolized by the state. In those days, she said, the

entranceway to the mansion, now jammed with parked motorbikes, had been frequented by itinerant musicians. "Do you know what they were doing?" she asked me with a grin. Unlicensed opium dealers would disguise themselves as itinerant musicians, she recalled, concealing their merchandise in the pipes of their instruments. It was a kind of tradition they had — they'd travel from wealthy house to wealthy house, playing their instruments and plying their trade, until one day they earned enough money to obtain a license and open a shop. That kind of *pin mun saang yi* [偏门生意], or illicit business, she told me with a certain degree of mirth, was what Macao was built on. "All the rich families used to live in beautiful houses down along the Praia Grande – oh, the Praia really was beautiful back then – but nine out of ten of them made their money off this kind of business."

For Cheng Ah-po and others like her, the heritage buildings were repositories of personal memories and urban myths that were not the pleasant, gentrified ones of peaceful cultural exchange and tolerance. Instead, the buildings mapped a pre-war city rent by ethnicised class divisions, a city whose beautiful neighbourhoods were founded upon corruption and quasi-legal activities; in the opulence of restored mansions, Cheng Ah-po read a history of decadence. But she enjoyed telling these stories, and they always were lightened by a happy ending: how much the situation had changed for the better. Her narrative was the inverse of Silva Mendes's, the inverse of nostalgia; it was a narrative of progress, of 'how far we have come.'

4. Qualified Nostalgia: The Politics of Depoliticisation

The heritage project, and the narrative of nostalgia it entailed, seemed to have met with the most support among the younger generation of Macao's residents. However, because the heritage project was primarily a state-sponsored initiative, many locals who expressed affection for the picturesque cobblestone plazas and graceful temples still positioned themselves very carefully in relation to the semiotic transformation these sites entailed. The comments of Ah Sun, a young Macao-born Chinese civil servant who spent time studying both in mainland China and in Portugal, were indicative of this caution. Ah Sun responded to my questions about the heritage initiative with his own story about two "heritage" monuments that no longer existed. In 1966, he commented, a statue of a nineteenth century Macanese colonel that stood in Macao's main square was toppled by anti-Portuguese demonstrators who found it to be an intolerable symbol of colonial domination.[26] Yet in 1993, when a statue of Governor Ferreira do Amaral – who ruled Macao from 1846 to 1849, when his harsh colonial policies got him assassinated by Chinese villagers[27] – was dismantled by the Macao government, many local Chinese lamented its removal. Ah Sun continued,

"I don't want to get into the question of whether it [the removal of the statue] was right or wrong in any sort of political sense, objectively speaking. Still – and this is just my personal opinion – I wish they hadn't torn it down. When I was a kid we used to go play in that park. It was a really nice park. A lot of families used to go, kids would play there around the base of the statue, it was a really nice gathering place. And I bet almost no one knew what that statue was or who that guy was. He was just a guy on a horse, right, I bet if you took a poll of all the people who used to play in that park, that almost no one would know or care about its history. So in some ways there was no reason to tear it down. But when they dismantled it, they dismantled part of my childhood with it. They dismantled part of my feeling for Macao [拆了一部分我对澳门的感情] ..."

Aware of the controversial political nature of his apparently apolitical remark, Ah Sun was careful to distance himself from any statements about the interpretation of history or the desirability of a Macao identity. His fondness for the statue (and, through the statue, for Macao), he insisted, had to do with memories of "shared experience" with family and friends, memories that he placed firmly outside the purview of the state— and outside of History. But he also contended that the state was doing the right thing by preserving these monuments and providing a space for the circulation of collective memories that may or may not be linked to grand (state) narratives of culture, history, and identity.

By arguing that the heritage initiative involves the production of nostalgia, I do not mean to imply that narratives of nostalgia have been invented out of whole cloth; as we saw with Silva Mendes, the role of nostalgia in the discourse of the city has been an important one throughout the twentieth century. But

High density: a night view of northern Macao and its intricate urban texture. Photo by Government Information Bureau, 2001.

it is important to understand this process in order to understand the specific way in which the heritage initiative, as a profoundly transformative process, attempted to foster a sense of collective identity. Instilling a particular relationship to the built environment involved instilling a particular relationship to the past, and through it, to the present. But nostalgia and heritage, as we see from the above commentaries, are not accepted unproblematically by Macao residents as the only way to conceive of their relationship to the city and of themselves as Macao people. Far from being detrimental to the success of the heritage initiative, such dissent, dialogue and controversy succeeded in focusing public attention more closely on how the past was embodied in the structures of the city. As Robert Hewison argues, the aim of heritage initiatives should be to "interrogate the past as well as preserve it. And if we question the past, we may be encouraged to question the present so arrive at a more dynamic sense of identity, neither nostalgic nor nationalistic, but critically engaged in shaping the future" (Hewison 1991:168).

It is important, however, to view this preservation movement in light of the other changes that were happening simultaneously in the city—especially in light of those development projects which, according to some, were sounding the death knell for Macao's unique identity.

THE NORTHERN DISTRICT: MACAO'S NEW 'OTHER'?

The heritage preservation projects were widely publicized as the primary aspect of the built environment through which a sense of belonging to Macao could be fostered. But while the state was busy with the transformative work of preservation, new urban development projects in other parts of the city were transforming the patterns of movement and settlement that are a crucial part of how people define their sense of place in the city. The effort to recast "old" buildings in a new light should be viewed in the context of how these new neighbourhoods, created on reclaimed land in the ten to fifteen years prior to the

handover, were themselves involved in the fundamental reorganization of the city's social space.

Macao's city wall, which once separated the "Christian city" from the Chinese farmland that surrounded it, has been demolished for centuries, and with it the enforced segregation of the city along religio-ethnic lines.[28] Nonetheless, some informants spoke with me of a time, as recently as the 1960s, in which there were still relatively distinct neighbourhoods which reflected a basic division of the population into three groups: Portuguese, Macanese, [29] and Chinese. In the 1990s, although the architectural traces of those neighbourhoods remain in some districts, and the cognitive traces in the memories of their inhabitants, the demarcation of neighbourhoods – and through them, of the contours of belonging – changed significantly.

The parish of Nossa Senhora de Fátima,[30] known colloquially as the "northern district" (Pt. "Zona Norte," Ch. 北区), was the fastest-growing district in Macao in the 1990s. In fact, what was at the turn of the twenty-first century the most populous district of Macao was, at the turn of the twentieth, a narrow isthmus surrounded by the sea. The series of land reclamation projects that created this district began in 1919 with a narrow access road extending out to Ilha Verde; in the early 1990s, the latest, largest reclamation/ development project, Areia Preta [黑沙环], was completed. In 1999, the "northern district" referred to five large neighbourhoods: Iao Hon [佑汉], Areia Preta [黑沙环], Toi San [台山], Ilha Verde [青州], and Fai Chi Kei [筷子基].

These neighbourhoods came into existence well within the lifetimes of Macao's current residents, and the rapidity and degree of change was a common topic of conversation. Lai San, a Macao Chinese woman in her mid-twenties, told me of working away the dawn hours of her childhood to bring forth fresh produce from her family's farm in Iao Hon, land which has now sprouted concrete and blacktop, noodle shops and auto mechanics, toy factories and thirty-story housing projects. The father of another Chinese acquaintance took great delight in driving me around the northern district, where he and his family live and work, and pointing out to me which of the present-day housing developments had been mere vegetable fields or sea when he arrived in the 1960s. The construction of these developments, as well as the exports from the factories which they house, were both catalysts for and results of Macao's recent economic growth: the northern district was the location of most of Macao's manufacturing and export-processing industry, which together comprised one sector of the economy that boomed during the 1980s.

An integral part of the boom that gave rise to these neighbourhoods was the influx of well over 100,000 "new immigrants" from China in the space of a decade—which led to a population increase of over 50% between 1981 and 1991.[31] The term "new immigrant" [新移民] had, in official usage, a very specific definition: it referred to people who came to Macao from mainland China after January 14, 1979.[32] Thanks to China's looser emigration policies after 1978, and to Macao's growing demand for cheap labour, the number of Chinese immigrants arriving in Macao, both legally and illegally, skyrocketed during the 1980s; on three occasions between 1982 and 1990, the Macao government granted amnesty to a total of more than 70,000 illegal Chinese immigrants. In addition to these, the number of immigrants from mainland China living in Macao illegally was estimated, in 1994, to be anywhere from 47,000 to 100,000. The majority of these "new immigrants," both legal and otherwise, lived in the northern district – which was, as of 1996, home to 36.8% of Macao's total population.

Indeed, the northern district was commonly considered to be the "new immigrant" neighbourhood. But once again, we may ask, what effect did this association of the new developments with new immigrants have on the social imaginary of belonging? In the comments made by long-term Macao residents about the northern district, it appears that they articulated a sense of place and belonging that was defined at least partly *against* the new developments and their inhabitants. [33]

One Macanese man I spoke with expressed his sense of distance from the northern district through a narrative of the extreme discomfort he experienced when he once got on the wrong bus and ended up in the northern district. He had no idea where he was: the streets were laid out in a confusing way and the bus seemed to have taken the most circuitous route possible. Worse yet was the fact that, unlike in the older parts of the city, the signs at bus stops were written only in Chinese – a language which he could speak but not read. As he told it, this experience provoked anger at feeling

like a foreigner in what he considered to be his own city, and fear that this sense of alienation was what would lie in store for him and the entire Macanese community after the handover. He narrated this incident as the "last straw" leading to his decision to leave the territory before the handover.[34] In his case, the northern district reified the profound sense of alienation and displacement – racial, geographical, linguistic – that many Macanese felt in the face of the political transition.

Although this man's reaction reflected the specific concerns of a certain segment of the Macanese population during the transition period, it is fair to say that many long-term Chinese residents of Macao shared his sense of apprehension about the northern district. Several long-term Chinese residents of Macao, as well as ex-residents who had returned to Macao after long absences, told me that they always get lost in the northern district. Many claimed that they know how to get *through* the northern district to the Border Gate, because they would often go "back to the mainland" [返大陆] for inexpensive dining and shopping; but that the district itself remained a disorienting maze of buildings that "all look alike."

In addition, because some illegal immigrants arrived in Macao through channels set up by criminal syndicates, the large number of illegal immigrants living in the northern district, and the relatively high number of gang-related violent incidents that occurred there, led to the association of the northern district with criminality. When I was apartment-hunting upon my arrival in Macao, a couple of Macao-born Chinese friends advised me that the neighbourhood of Areia Preta, where rents were cheapest, "should be safe for foreigners—but if you were a single Chinese woman, I wouldn't recommend it." The sporadic but sustained episodes of triad violence broke out all over the city between 1996 and 1999 did, to some degree, redraw the map of Macao with regard to crime and violence, but among many long-term Macao residents, the northern district never lost its taint of illegality and danger.

And finally, among the "new immigrants" who populate the northern district, a substantial number were natives of Fujian province,[35] who spoke several related dialects that are effectively unintelligible to Cantonese speakers. Fujianese[36] sailors and merchants have played an important role in Macao since before the arrival of the Portuguese;[37] in fact, records indicate that Fujianese sailors in Malacca were the ones who first helped the Portuguese navigate north to China. Yet the different linguistic and cultural practices of the Fujianese "new immigrants," as well as their apparent refusal to "integrate" into Macao society, gave rise to a certain measure of resentment on the part of some Macao "locals":

"Fujian people here live like slaves, like slaves! They don't know how to enjoy life. They come here to work, they live up in the northern part of the city, in the ghetto, many of them don't even have houses, and they live all cramped together, and then a bus will go pick them up, like 50 at a time, and take them to work. They work hard and save up their money and send it all back to Fujian. But they do not belong here, they are aliens here, really, they are just like slaves. They do not integrate into Macao society."

"They do not integrate into Macau society" was a complaint commonly made about the "new immigrants" in general, not only those from Fujian. One University of Macao sociologist who directed a survey among new immigrants of the northern district echoed this popular sentiment when he concluded, "Most new immigrants have, at best, very tenuous connections with all levels of Macau society;…they mostly live within their own social circles. New immigrants lack a sense of belonging to Macao and there exist some barriers between them and Macao people" (Wong 1990:168). Indeed, it was clear that in common usage, the term "new immigrant" referred not simply to a Chinese person recently arrived in the territory, but to a particular social position within Macao that also involved neighbourhood of residence, class status, language, and perceived degree of alienation from Macao society. Thus, for example, when Li Qiulai – a college-educated woman from Shanghai who taught at the University of Macao, lived in Taipa, and had learned Cantonese – would refer to herself as a "new immigrant", it was widely perceived as a joke, even though Li came to Macao later than many of the "new immigrants" who lived in the northern district. In fact, some Macao-born Chinese referred to the "new immigrants" or "mainlanders" of the northern district as the fourth major ethnic group in Macao, along with Portuguese, Macanese, and (Macao) Chinese. As one Macao Chinese, Siu Tong, put it, "Well, racism wouldn't be the right word, 'cause we're all Chinese, but... there are certainly snide remarks about people

from the mainland squatting and throwing rubbish and this and that, and spitting."

Perhaps, however, it would be more accurate to say that the new social category that emerged in these remarks was not the "new immigrants", but the "Macao Chinese" themselves. The association between the "northern district" as an alien and confusing place, and the "new immigrants" as an alien and threatening group, was one way in which long-term Chinese residents of Macao mapped an emerging sense of their own belonging across the built environment of Macao. Fissures within Chinese communities along lines of native place and dialect have always existed,[38] in Macao as elsewhere. In Macao, under the pressures of the rapid socio-economic and political changes of the 1990s, not only did these fissures become more pronounced and more spatially segregated, but the lines along which these fissures were drawn were themselves changing: changing in a way that may indicate the tentative emergence of "Macao" as a kind of native place in its own right.

CONCLUSIONS

The two processes described in this paper are evidence that, during the transition period, questions of identity and belonging were tied ever more closely to the discourse on the city. Not only was this discourse pervasive in everyday conversation, but it had become a million-dollar industry in its own right, giving rise to conferences, research activities, publications, and restoration projects. It also comprised sets of institutions, legislation, policies, knowledges, strategies, visions of the past and of the future, that in some way or another involved almost every aspect of social, economic, and political life in Macao. Whereas seventy years ago, Manuel da Silva Mendes could only express his reaction to the forces of change he saw going on around him, in the 1990s the discourse on the city (or at least, certain aspects of this discourse that have been sanctioned by the state) was involved in the process of shaping the direction of urban change, and through it, of urban identity.

Yet the formation of urban identity in the face of rapid change does not always happen in the simple way we might expect. When the heritage initiative is viewed in isolation, and as a conservative rather than transformative process, it appears that the relationship is a simple one of cause and effect. It appears that the construction of new developments, which have no historical value, and the huge influx of new immigrants, who have no sense of belonging, lent an added urgency to the heritage initiative's attempt to slow down or reverse these deleterious effects on the urban environment by maintaining the few icons of history and identity that remained. Viewed in this light, the prospects for successfully maintaining Macao's "identity" were rather dim indeed.

The observations made in this paper, however, could suggest a different relationship. If we view the work of the heritage initiative as a kind of transformative preservation, one which actively attempted to create a "past behind the future" of Macao by redefining the significance of the city's heritage buildings; and if we view this work in conjunction with the process of conceptual and spatial segregation that was going on in the northern district; then it may be possible to conclude that the political and economic changes of the transition period, which so many people feared would destroy Macao's identity once and for all – the economic boom, the influx of new immigrants, the construction of new high-rises, the departure of the Portuguese, and so on – were actually giving rise to a stronger sense of belonging on the part of a young and growing Macao middle class who had both the desire and the means to create for themselves a past that was meaningful in the present.

Not every aspect of this process is positive; as Siu Tong's characterization of the new immigrants bears out, every statement of "who we are" includes an exclusionary statement of "who we are not." Macao's "essential identity" can never be "retained" – neither in its buildings nor in its people – because identity is (at least in its anthropological definition) a set of social meanings that are constantly redefined in changing social and historical contexts. Yet it is precisely the dynamism of this process, the constant redefinition of who "we" are and how we know it, that lends vitality and meaning to the city's changing mien. RC

Author's Note: This paper was originally written in 1999 as a preliminary report on research conducted between 1997 and 1999. Since then, parts of the paper have been published under the title "Macau: Notes from the Field—On Belonging and the City," in *Portuguese Studies Review* Vol. VII, No.2, pp. 93-111. However, this is the first time that the paper as a whole has been published. I would like to thank all of the Macao residents who contributed, knowingly or unknowingly, to the analysis presented here; for those of you who might recognize yourself in these pages, I hope the shock will not be too great to bear. Responsibility for any factual errors or analytical shortcomings of the paper, however, remains mine alone.

NOTES

1 Though, ironically, when Silva Mendes wrote these words in 1929, the new "characterless" buildings about which he complained were most likely precisely those that have now been restored as heritage sites.

2 With the creation of a municipal government in that year, Macao's status was elevated from "povoação" (settlement) to "cidade" (city). It was at this time that the city was officially christened "Cidade do Nome de Deus de Macao na China," or "City of the Name of God of Macao in China." See Basto da Silva 1997, p. 59.

3 See Peter Mundy 1919; Wu Li 1993, pp. 140-154; Instituto Cultural de Macau 1997; José dos Santos Ferreira 1968.

4 See, for example, Clayton 2002, pp. 170-171.

5 For example, Jonathan Porter 1996.

6 See Wong Hon-keong and Wu Zhiliang, 1996, pp. 5-6. However, since the time of this writing in 1999, reclamation has continued apace and accurate figures for the total actual land area of Macao are difficult to obtain. In 1994, reclaimed land accounted for 56% of the total land area of Macao, and approximately two-thirds of the land area of the peninsula (see Wong Chao Son et al., 1997, p. 72). For details on individual reclamation projects, see Bruce Taylor, 1994, and Jon Prescott (ed.), 1993.

7 For details see G. Lopes 1998, pp. 8-35.

8 The commissions all went to Portuguese artists. For details about the monuments built through 1997, see "Os Novos Monumentos", in *Revista Macau*, II Série N° 61 (May 1997), pp.42-48.

9 See, for example, "Fachada ICM," in *Macau Hoje*, 9 December 1997, p. 5.

10 See Bourdieu 1990.

11 In subsequent work, Bourdieu went on to analyze social relations within modern European societies, especially in higher education and fine arts circles. Significantly, however, at this point he switched disciplines, from anthropology to sociology.

12 See Friedl and Chrisman (1975) for an elaboration of this point.

13 For a good summary of this anthropological concept of identity, see Richard Handler 1994.

14 See Koshar 1998, pp. 216-217 for examples of different narratives of "building pasts."

15 Luís Sá Cunha 1998. "Saudade" is a word that has no exact equivalent in English. It connotes an affectionate tie to the past, a sense of yearning or longing or loss – a sense that may include nostalgia but is not limited to it. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this paper I have translated it as "nostalgia," as this is a form of memory that, in the context of heritage discourse, functions in a similar way as "saudade."

16 Several informants referred to the restored buildings in this way.

17 See also Urry 1994, pp. 50-51.

18 The use and administration of restored buildings which were privately owned, or which were places of worship, was left to the owners; however, the Department of Cultural Heritage stressed that state-owned restored buildings should be used, and so many of them have been converted into government offices.

19 For details on what this "reorganization" of history entailed, see Clayton 2002.

20 See Marreiros 1991; Durão 1997; and Prescott 1993.

21 According to other sources, this impetus to preserve a legacy of Portugueseness in Asia existed as early as the mid-1970s (see Claro and Alves 1997; Conceição Jr. 1978). However, the fact that it was only in the late 1980s and 1990s that heritage preservation projects took off indicates that signing of the Joint Declaration in 1987 probably did intensify this initiative.

22 For details see Pereira 1991, pp. 273-274.

23 See especially the works of Fok Kai-cheong, such as Fok 1996, pp. 219-236, and Fok 1991, pp. 328-344.

24 Luís Durão 1997, p. 9. The original text reads: "A importância da afirmação de qualquer identidade, reside no facto de alertar a população para o que de qualquer forma a identifica das demais. A arquitectura, o urbanismo e o paisagismo…são… documentos evidentes duma identidade que permanece, perante qual o cidadão, ou o visitante, se interroga sobre a história desse local, da cultura que lhe é inerente e das razões que estão na origem das diferenças que interessa manter."

25 "É assim: sem o seu Património arquitectónico, Macau não existia. Sem o traçado singular do seu desenho urbanístico, sem os seus edifícios patrimoniais—Macau seria igual a inúmeras, outras, cidades vizinhas, parecidas como duas gotas de água destilada."

26 The statue was of Coronel Vicente Nicolau de Mesquita (1818-1880), who led a successful attack against Chinese forces on the Macao border in the wake of the assassination of Governor Ferreira do Amaral. See P. Manuel Teixeira 1997, p. 391-2.

27 For two conventionally contrastive accounts of the exploits of Governador João Maria Ferreira do Amaral, see Fei Chengkang's anticolonialist reproof in his *Macao: 400 Years* (English ed.) (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1996); and J. M. Marques Pereira's serialized homage entitled "O 50° anniversário da Morte de João Maria Ferreira do Amaral e da Victoria de Passaleão, 22-25 Agosto de 1849," in his *Ta-Ssi-Yang-Kuo*, Série I Vol. I-II (Macao: Direcção dos Serviços de Educação e Juventude and Fundação Macau, 1995).

28 In the early years, Macao's full name was "City in the Name of God of Macao in China," which referred only to the walled *cidade cristã*, the Christian city. Beyond the walls lay the Chinese villages, the burial grounds for non-Catholics, the rice fields and pig farms that supplied the city's markets. These rural areas were cultivated by Chinese farmers; residence in the city was restricted, by Chinese as well as Portuguese authorities, to Christians – mostly Europeans, their slaves, and Chinese converts to Catholicism. Chinese farmers, traders, fishermen, and others who worked in the city but who were not Catholic were required to leave the enclave before the city gates closed every night. One author gives this as the reason that the term "Macaense" is still today used to refer only to the mixed-blood and local-born Portuguese, instead of to everyone born in Macao: in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he writes, "Chinese theoretically lived outside the city walls, and were not considered residents of the Catholic citadel that was Macao" (Cabral 1993, p. 21). Later, when this law was relaxed and the city began to expand beyond its original walls, Chinese settlements grew into urbanized neighborhoods whose population quickly outstripped the Europeans in the "Christian city."

29 The term "Macanese" (Pt. Macaense, Ch. 土生葡人) conventionally refers to the small but cohesive and politically significant "mixed" group of bilingual Eurasians in Macao who identify themselves as at least partly Portuguese. It can also refer to Portuguese born in Macao (see note 28), as well as to ethnic Chinese who identify as Portuguese in terms of language, religion, education and culture.

30 For official administrative and statistical purposes, the Macao peninsula is divided into parishes—a fact which reveals deep and lasting influence of the Catholic church in the social administration of the city. As of today, there are five parishes on the Macao peninsula (Nossa Senhora de Fátima, São Lourenço, Sé, Santo António, São Lázaro). For details on each of these parishes, see Wong and Wu 1996, pp. 8-9.

31 Macao's population statistics, especially those from the 1981 Census, are notoriously unreliable. See Alice Alvim de Matos nd., p. 192. However, most sources estimate Macao's 1981 population was

approximately 295,000, and that the territory accepted (legally) over 130,000 new immigrants during the 1980s. As of 1996, the population was officially 424,430, although unofficial estimates put the total at over 500,000.

32 Wong Hon-keong and Wu Zhiliang, p. 463.

33 I consciously present here views of the northern district through the eyes of those who do not live in that district. The views of the 'new immigrants' themselves are an important aspect of my larger research project, as well as of the future of Macao, but presentation of these views must be reserved for a longer paper.

34 It must be said that this is certainly an extreme case; other Macaense I spoke to did not express such a strongly adverse reaction, though many said they rarely have any need or desire to go to the northern district. The majority I spoke with did share a concern about their future in Macao.

35 Again, accurate numbers are hard to come by. One 1994 estimate put the number of Fujianese males employed in Macao's construction sector alone at 70,000, or 1/7 of Macao's total population. See Zheng Tianxiang et al., 1994, p. 17.

36 Also known in English as 'Fukkienese' or 'Hokkienese.'

37 Indeed, the well-known story of the founding of Macao's landmark Chinese temple, the Ma Kok [妈阁] or Ah-Ma Temple, involves Fujianese fishermen who were saved from shipwreck by an apparition of the goddess Ah-Ma, to whom they erected the temple that still stands on Macao's southwestern shore.

38 See especially Emily Honig, 1992.

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