

Portuguese Literary Voices From Macao

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It is not easy to create a typology for the literature of Macao in Portuguese, given the small numbers of Portuguese who settled in the city, and the fact that the vast majority of its citizens, especially since the middle of the nineteenth century, have been Chinese, who have brought with them a time-honoured literary tradition of their own. The brief sojourns in the city of no less than Camões, in the sixteenth century, and Bocage in the eighteenth, were coincidental, and Macao is scarcely if at all mentioned in their work. Indeed, it could be said that any literary tradition in 'Portuguese' prior to the beginning of the twentieth century in Macao, was in fact an oral one, expressed and channelled through the unique, but now largely

The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a revival in Portugal's interests as an imperial nation after the trauma of the loss of Brazil, its most important colonial territory, in 1822. Portugal's efforts to retain its historical position in East and West Africa and to expand its territorial bases were to be represented at the Congress of Berlin in 1885, and partially frustrated by the British Ultimatum in 1890. In spite of this humiliation, however, Portugal was to begin the twentieth century with its African empire intact and a central focus of its international political relationships. Portugal was, however, by this time less economically powerful than its European colonial rivals, and the maintenance of its position in Africa

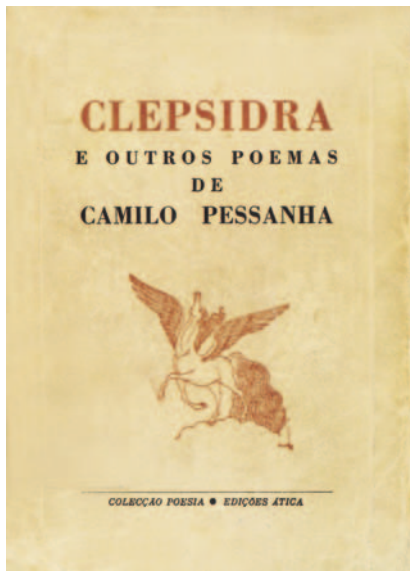
It could be said that any literary tradition in 'Portuguese' prior to the beginning of the twentieth century in Macao, was in fact an oral one, expressed and channelled through the unique, but now largely defunct Creole language, the 'Língua Maquista' or Patuá.

defunct Creole language, the 'Língua Maquista' or Patuá. Anything resembling a Portuguese literature of Macao only really dates from the last one hundred years, and may be contained within two *fin-de-siècle* periods, which held a symbolically charged value to the Portuguese sense of national identity.

required considerable effort in terms of human and material resources. It is therefore perhaps little wonder that on various occasions during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, voices were raised in parliament proposing the abandonment or sale of the smaller territories or enclaves of the 'Estado da Índia', the colonial residues of Portugal's earlier imperial activity in South and East Asia. Nevertheless, quite apart from the fact that Macao could not have been alienated in this way without the agreement of China, there emerged an Asian lobby in Portugal, which was to include, among others, such prestigious figures as Bernardo Pinheiro Correia de Melo, the Count of Arnoso, lifelong friend of Eça de Queirós, and member of the treaty delegation that visited Beijing in 1887.

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Camilo Pessanha
Clepsidra e Outros Poemas
Edições Ática



Jaime do Inso
O Caminho do Oriente
Instituto Cultural de Macau
Macau, 1996



Mosaico
Vol. I, N.º 1
Órgão do Círculo Cultural de Macau
Macau, Setembro, 1950

In an essay on Luso-Chinese relations published much later, the Count, foreseeing the potential of the Chinese market, urged his countrymen to cultivate commercial links with China by taking advantage of Portugal's privileged position in Macao. Similar concerns were raised by the Hong Kong Portuguese, Montalto de Jesus. In the event, therefore, the views of the Asian lobby prevailed, with the result that the territorial relics of Portugal's remote 'first' empire were re-incorporated, both practically and in the Portuguese collective consciousness, into the country's re-invigorated 'third' imperial enterprise. In concrete terms, this meant that modern educational institutions, such as a state secondary school, were introduced into Macao, and a small military presence was sustained, along with the apparatus of government. This in turn increased the size of the Portuguese expatriate community. The relatively independent, 'Venetian' republic, which had ensured the *de facto* political autonomy of Macao for centuries, came to an end. Among this new wave of Portuguese expatriates were writers, one of whom, Camilo Pessanha, was to become Macao's most famous Portuguese literary resident since Camões.

It is now appropriate to consider for a moment what effect this re-engagement with the East, and in particular China, had on Portuguese 'Orientalism'.

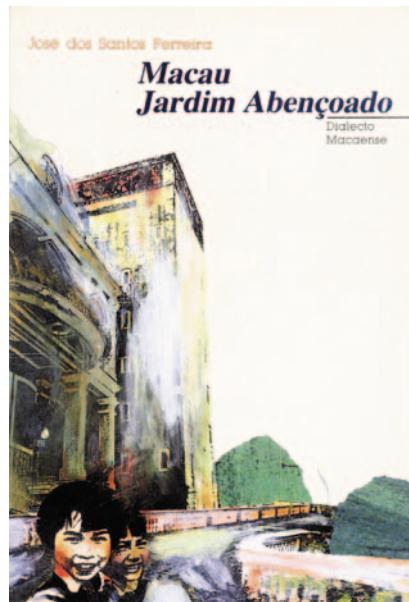
Orientalist motifs had, of course, entered European literature and other cultural forms ever since the eighteenth century. The taste for what in Europe was called 'chinoiserie', and the attraction to difference expressed through the emphasis on the exotic, all had their repercussions in literature emanating from France and England, while also having exponents such as António Feijó and even the early poetry of Pessanha in Portugal. But by the turn of the century, Portuguese Orientalism was to become inflected by a peculiarly national concern with the country's decline from past greatness. The East became the mirror the Portuguese looked in to re-establish this collective memory, and sometimes it was as dissatisfied imperialists that they viewed Portugal's present state. It was undoubtedly Pessanha, Portugal's major symbolist poet and resident in Macao for thirty-two years until his death there in 1926, who synthesized these contradictions.

If one were to summarise the thematic characteristics of Pessanha's writing, one could pick out four main features. Firstly, he was a man who, in common with others of his generation, felt himself to be an orphan of history, an exile in an age he felt he did not belong to. In part, this was a feeling induced by the national humiliation caused by the British Ultimatum of 1890 and by the four-hundredth

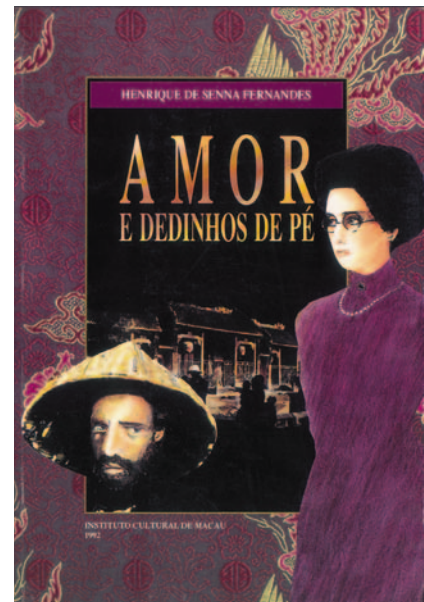
LITERATURA



Deolinda Salvado da Conceição
Cheong Sam: A Cabaia
Secretaria dos Assuntos Sociais e Cultura
Macao, 1979 [2.ª ed.]



José dos Santos Ferreira
Macau Jardim Abençoado
Dialecto Macaense
Instituto Cultural de Macau
Macao, 1988



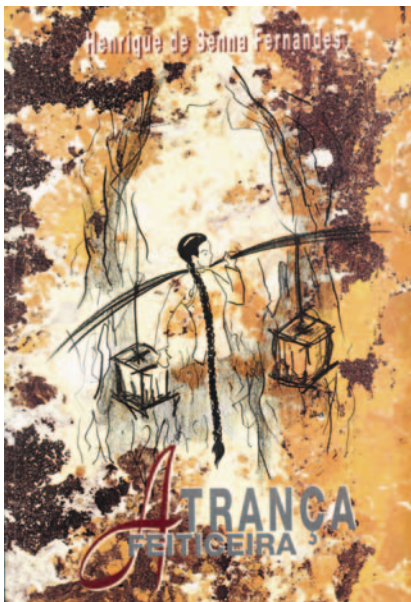
Henrique de Senna Fernandes
Amor e Dedinhos de Pé
Instituto Cultural de Macau
Macao, 1992 [3.ª ed.]

anniversary, in 1898, of Vasco da Gama's pioneering voyage to India. In Pessanha, it is immediately visible in poems such as "Quando?" and "San Gabriel". Secondly, he developed a profound admiration for traditional Chinese culture, and in particular, its long poetic tradition. While very few of his poems actually focus on the physical reality of Macao and China, where he lived for so long, there is little doubt that he absorbed into his own poetry some of the time-honoured features of Chinese poetry, most notably its subtle use of symbolism and its tendency towards understatement. Moreover, in his translations of Chinese poetry, it is apparent that he was attracted to the themes of loss of innocence and exile that seemed to mirror his own. On the other hand, in some of his articles that emerged from lectures given to new arrivals and visiting colonials, he used the language of ethnocentrism, that seemed to contradict his fascination with Chinese culture, and there is some evidence too that his views on race mixture were well within the nineteenth-century Social Darwinist tradition. The fact is that Pessanha was a figure beset by contradictions: in many ways, he was a colonial who failed as such in the sense that he 'went native', learning Chinese and co-habiting with local women. It was Pessanha's lifestyle that undoubtedly explained the fourth characteristic of his

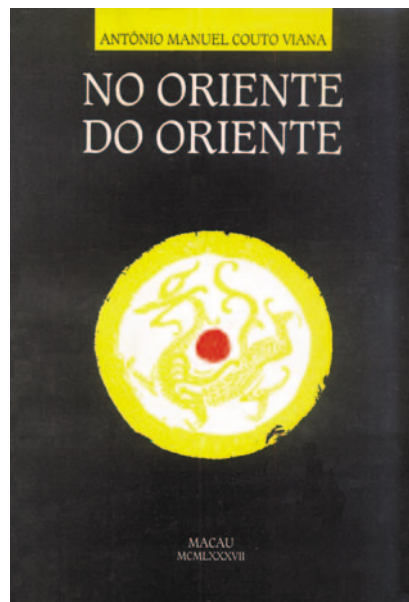
work, visible particularly in letters written to his family or friends: when he was in Macao, he bemoaned his exile in the East, and wanted to go back to Portugal; on his rare visits to Portugal, he wanted to return to China. It is this profound restlessness that makes Pessanha a peculiarly modern figure: in our postcolonial and postmodern age, we can to some extent more readily identify with themes that relate to migration within our contemporary, 'globalized' world: mobility, displacement and exile.

The 1920s and 1930s correspond to the 'high' period of colonial literature. We must bear in mind that the Portuguese Republic of 1910, which had openly espoused the 'third' imperial cause, was overthrown in 1926. However, the ensuing years witnessed the gradual rise to power of Salazar, who would reconfirm the country's imperial commitment with particular emphasis after the creation of the New State in 1933. Jaime do Inso was a naval officer who lived for some years in Macao at the turn of the century, and wrote a number of books about Macao and China. Likewise, Emílio de San Bruno, the literary pseudonym of Filipe Emílio de Paiva, was another naval officer who lived in Macao for a short period, and wrote a number of colonial novels, one of which, *O Caso da Rua Volong* (1928), was set in Macao. This and Inso's

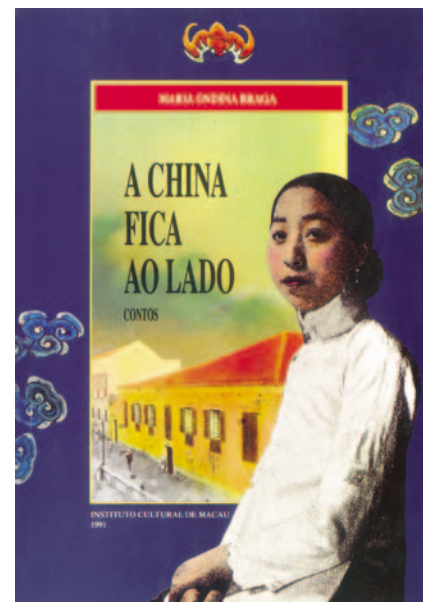
LITERATURE



Henrique de Senna Fernandes
A Trança Feiticeira
Fundação Oriente
Macao, 1993



António Manuel Couto Viana
No Oriente do Oriente
Edição de Autor
Macao, 1987



Maria Ondina Braga
A China Fica ao Lado
Instituto Cultural de Macau
Macao, 1991 [4ª ed.]

O Caminho do Oriente (1932) both won prizes from the Portuguese Government's General Colonial Agency. Nowadays, they are of little more than ethnographic interest, but what they do reveal is the conflict between formal colonial values (the 'perils' of going native) and the practice of Portuguese colonialism, in which many single men—men, after all, such as Pessanha—set up families with local women, helping to produce a hybridized population that ran counter to the ideology promulgated by Lisbon.

The next stage in our historical survey of literature in Macao may be dated from the end of World War II. The 1950s were to witness the emergence of a specifically Macanese literary and cultural consciousness. To some extent, it reflected the revival of cultural life after the harsh years of the war, and it is also linked to the recovery of the press in Portuguese, most notably the newspaper, *Notícias de Macau*, and the literary review, *Mosaico*. But it is also worth remembering that something similar was happening in the Portuguese territories in Africa, except that in Macao there could never be the political outcomes that occurred in colonies such as Angola and Mozambique. If the cultural historian and Sinologist of this generation was Luís Gonzaga Gomes, and the cultivator of 'Patuá' was José dos

Santos Ferreira (popularly known as Adé), the two literary voices were Deolinda da Conceição and Henrique de Senna Fernandes. Deolinda, who had experienced firsthand Japanese internment in Shanghai, and who ran the women's page of the *Notícias de Macau*, published an important collection of stories, *Cheong-Sam - A Cabaia* (1956), before her premature death in 1957. Somewhat in the style of Pearl Buck, these tales focus on the problems faced by women in traditional Chinese society, in particular those who had been educated in the West, as well as on the identity of the Eurasian population of her native city, and of which she was a representative. The early stories of Senna Fernandes, written between the 1950s and 1970s and published in *Nam-Van* (1978), likewise focus on the inner world of the Macanese as they adapted to the profound changes brought about by the war and post-war years, thus introducing a theme that would characterize his two major novels, *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé* (1986) and *A Trança Feiticeira* (1992). Indeed, two constant themes in Senna Fernandes' fiction concern the survival of the Macanese during and after the War—which for them represented something of a rupture with the past—and the emergence of a more progressive, forward-

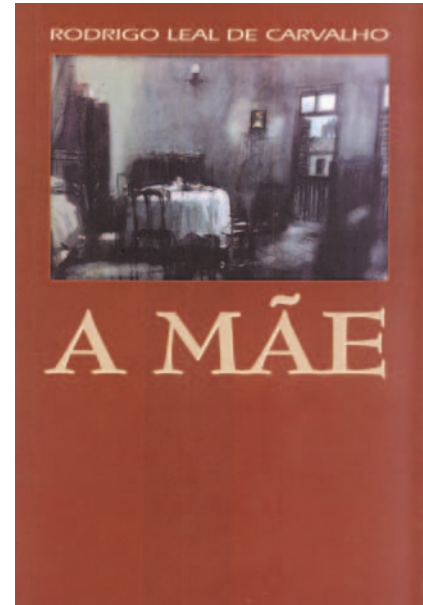
LITERATURA



João Aguiar
Os Comedores de Pérolas
Edições Asa
Lisboa, 1995 [6ª ed.]



Rodrigo Leal de Carvalho
Requiem por Irina Ostrakoff
Livros do Oriente
Macao, 1993



Rodrigo Leal de Carvalho
A Mãe
Livros do Oriente
Lisboa, 2001

looking Macanese bourgeoisie. To some extent, then, the central focus of his work is the survival and renewal of the Macanese as a definable ethnic group.

The second development in the literature of Macao is linked to Portugal's long withdrawal from Empire between 1961, the year of the Angolan uprising that would mark the beginning of the nationalist wars in Africa, and 1974, the year of the Revolution that would bring an end to Salazar's colonial regime. The author whose experiences reflect the early, dramatic years of the 1960s is Maria Ondina Braga. Her journey into the declining Portuguese Empire in 1961, and her subsequent four-year residence in Macao, can be seen metaphorically on two levels. On the one hand it seemed to reflect a new modernity in which women (like Deolinda da Conceição and now Maria Ondina Braga) were beginning to carve out a space for themselves in the face of traditional patriarchal values. On the other, it was an anti-epic journey that seemed to close the adventure begun by the empire-building navigators of four centuries before: she had to leave Angola as a result of the insurrection, she abandoned Goa with the last civilians during the Indian take-over. But it was her years spent in Macao and later, some months spent in Beijing in the 1980s, that were to influence much of her writing and feed her fascination

for Chinese culture. In her short story, *A China Fica ao Lado* (1968), she brings to the fore, rather as Deolinda had, a concern for the plight of refugees and of women, as well as some of the contradictions resulting from the cultural encounter between East and West. In her later novel, *Nocturno em Macau* (1988), she tackles for the first time the emotional relationship between European female and Chinese male, although paradoxically she fails to break down the boundary between European self and non-European 'Other'.

By the time of the Portuguese Revolution of 1974, Maria Ondina Braga was long back in Portugal, but the last ten to fifteen years of Portuguese rule in Macao brought a flourishing literary activity in Portuguese. There were two reasons for this: the presence of greater numbers of Portuguese residents than ever before, as Portugal prepared to return Macao to China, and the emergence of cultural institutes, such as the Instituto Cultural de Macau and the Instituto Português do Oriente, and a press, including the independent publishing house Livros do Oriente that encouraged publishing activity. It was as if a conscious and concerted effort were being made to interpret Macao, not only in terms of its unique history as a meeting point between East and West, but also as it changed from being a relatively small colonial town

LITERATURE



Alberto Estima de Oliveira
O Corpo Consentido
Instituto Cultural de Macau; Instituto Português do Oriente
Macao, 1993



António Rebordão Navarro
O Discurso da Desordem
Livros do Oriente
Macao, 1995 [2^a ed.]



António Augusto Menano
Qual o Começo de Tudo Isto?
Livros do Oriente
Macao, 1996

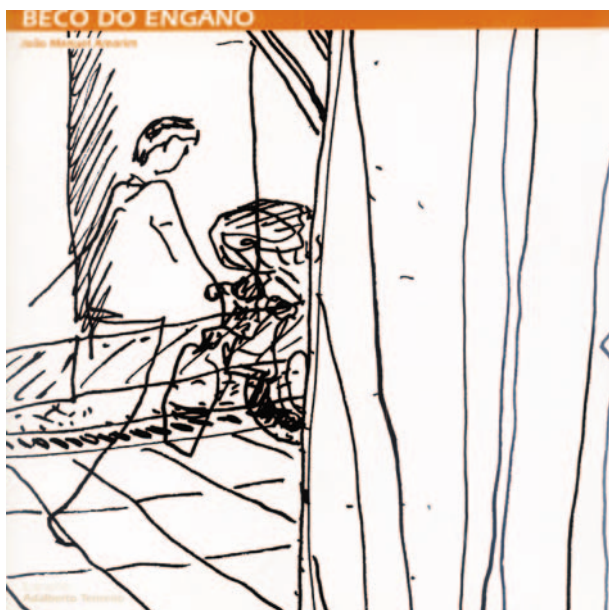
into a larger and more impersonal city. It was also as if an attempt were being made to somehow ensure the strongest possible Portuguese cultural legacy. Once again, it is tempting to see similarities with processes in other former Portuguese territories. The 1960s and 1970s had witnessed the emergence of African literatures in Portuguese, often sponsored by the ailing colonial state. After independence in 1975, this tendency towards sponsorship was taken over by the new Angolan and Mozambican regimes in an attempt to reflect national cultural cohesion. Whatever the political motives for encouraging literary production, it did ensure a healthy publishing activity and helped to stimulate a debate on literature and culture among the older and younger generations of the intelligentsia.

Some of the writers of the transition years in Macao (1987-1999), such as the poets Jorge Arrimar and Carlos Frota, had been born and brought up in Angola and were seeking new roots (or routes) in Macao. Both poets to some extent become re-integrated into a Portuguese maritime tradition in some of their imagery, while also coming to terms with the notion of a plural identity, which is seen as compensation for (or a consequence of) their original loss. Others, such as Fernando Sales Lopes, author of the collection of poetry, *Pescador de Margem* (1997), lamented the

passing of an epoch and the danger of its loss to memory (or even loss of memory), while at the same time acknowledging a personal debt to a city that had brought him into contact with other cultures. In the work of a number of poets, including the ones mentioned above, there is often an attempt to map Macao: any number of poems refer to the city's monuments, transforming them into icons of stone, which speak of other ages and contain ghosts and memories lacking in the human faces around.

Other writers, such as the novelists Josué da Silva, António Augusto Menano and to some extent António Rebordão Navarro, resort to the quest motif, in which a hidden secret is uncovered and some facet of Macao's past comes to light and is explained. The author who has most consistently and successfully exploited this motif is the nationally acclaimed João Aguiar, whose two novels, *Os Comedores de Pérolas* (1992) and *Dragão de Fumo* (1998) are unique examples of political thrillers set in the final years of Portuguese rule. But it is in the main character of these and Aguiar's most recent novel, *A Catedral Verde* (2001), António Carreira (the surname significantly means 'route') that Portugal's transition from an imperial into a post-imperial European state is reflected. Carreira is a man of his age and generation, who has lived through the late colonial

LITERATURA



João Manuel Amorim
Beco do Engano
Livros do Oriente
Macao, 1996



Fernando de Sales Lopes
Pescador de Margem
Livros do Oriente
Macao, 1997

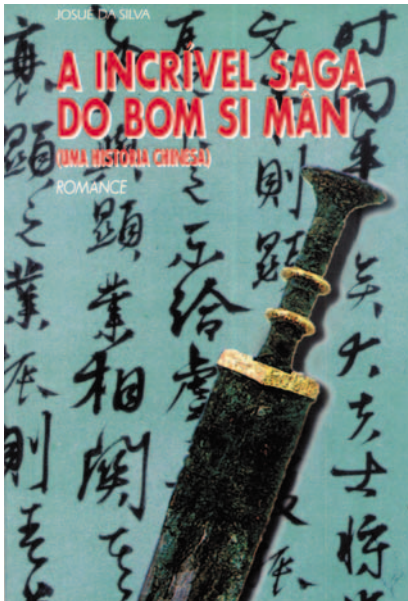
wars and, in middle age, is coming to terms with a new postcolonial Portugal. In this, and marked by his visits to Macao, he is a modern Portuguese ‘everyman’ in search of a new ‘route’.

The most prolific novelist of Macao during the transition years was Rodrigo Leal de Carvalho, who published six novels between 1993 and 2001. Resident in the territory for nearly four decades, Carvalho chronicled the lives of the various diasporas that settled in the city. His first and most recent novels, *Requiem por Irina Ostrakoff* (1993) and *A Mãe* (2001), focused on a group that absorbed his interest in particular, the White Russian émigrés who ended up in Macao during the war years after fleeing Shanghai. In his preference for documentary detail and wide sweeps of history, with novels that are often interlinked through the re-appearance of characters from one novel in another, Carvalho’s writing bears some resemblance to that of Christopher New.

Finally, other novelists, such as Carlos Morais José, a journalist by profession, and the anthropologist João de Pina Cabral, reflect, in their incursions into fiction, the changing face of Macao over the transition years. For her part, Fernanda Dias, in both her poetry and short stories, does this too, while bringing a

gendered approach that to some extent continues the tradition begun by Deolinda da Conceição and Maria Ondina Braga. But of all the fiction writers and poets of the transition years using Portuguese as a medium, it is significant that only one, the poet Yao Jingming, is ethnically Chinese, and it is even more revealing that he is a native of Beijing, and that his first volume of poems, *Nas Asas do Vento Cego* (1990) was published in Portugal when he was working in the Chinese diplomatic service. It demonstrates that the use of Portuguese can, in this post-imperial period, become de-territorialized: Yao Jingming writes in a language he has learned and studied, and publishes in Portugal (his second volume, *A Noite Deita-se Comigo* (2002), has just been published). His co-author of the book *Confluências* (1997), Jorge Arrimar encounters China in Macao and carries it with him back to the Azores. But perhaps the most significant Portuguese alter ego of Yao Jingming is a young woman travel writer, Cláudia Ribeiro, author of *No Dorso do Dragão. Aventuras e Desventuras de uma Portuguesa na China* (2001). It is a detailed account of four years spent in China in the late 1980s, where she studied Mandarin with a scholarship from the Chinese Government and travelled extensively. There can surely be no more

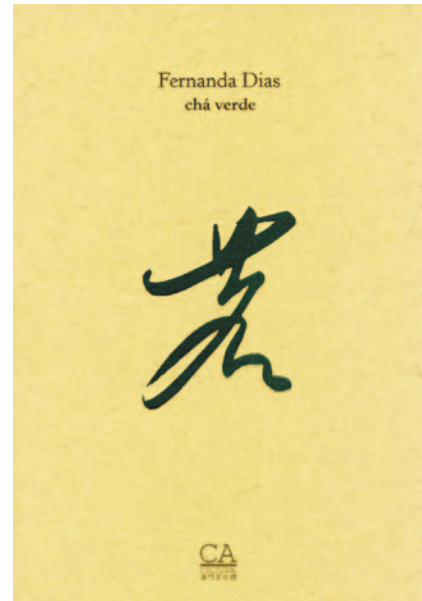
LITERATURE



Josué da Silva
A Incrível Saga do Bom Si Mân (Uma História Chinesa)
Livros do Oriente
Macao, 1997



Jorge Arrimar e Manuel Yao
Confluências
Imprensa Oficial
Macao, 1997



Fernanda Dias
Chá Verde
Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macao
Macao, 2002

apposite metaphor for Portugal’s postcolonial modernity than a young female journeying through the vastness of China with a rucksack. But like Yao Jingming, her interest in the ‘Other’ occurred independently of the historic Luso-Chinese links embodied by the city of Macao.

In conclusion, I do not intend to speculate on the future of a literature in Portuguese in Macao, for that will happen as long as there are people here who feel moved to use the language for that purpose. Suffice to say that at present, there is still a lively Portuguese press in the city, albeit for a smaller Lusophone community, and there are still active writers, among them the doyen of Macanese letters, Henrique de Senna Fernandes. Subsequent generations of Macanese, such as Carlos Marreiros

and António Conceição Júnior, have made their name in other cultural fields, notably architecture and graphic art, but they have also written poetry and essays respectively. Finally, Miguel de Senna Fernandes is a prime mover behind preserving and diversifying the cultural heritage of Patuá. Macao’s polyphonic cultural voice therefore still includes Portuguese, and it would doubtless be all the poorer if that voice were to fall silent, for in it lies the uniqueness of this ancient city as it seeks to preserve its cultural identity in the face of the many challenges of a new century. **RC**

Author’s Note: Text of a talk given at the Clube Militar de Macao on 18th April 2002, on the occasion of the launch of the anthology *Visions of China: Stories from Macao* (Gávea - Brown / Hong Kong University Press).