The modern and sophisticated façade of the Macao Museum of Art (MAM). Photo by MAM.

City of Museums
Reflections on Exhibiting Macao

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INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, Macao has been known by many names—City in the Name of God, City of Churches, City of Casinos; Lotus City, City of Culture, City of Commerce, even City of Sin. In the years just prior to the handover, however, as one of the participants in this study noted, it was rapidly becoming a "City of Museums." Between 1993 and 1999, no fewer than six new museums were opened in Macao. When the Macao Museum was inaugurated amidst much fanfare on April 18, 1998, chaos reigned in the museum lobby as some 25,000 visitors jammed the halls waiting to get in. Watching these developments while doing ethnographic research on the question of collective identity and political transition in Macao, I began to ask myself what was the significance of this "museum fever" that seemed to have the city in its grip. And the longer I watched, the more I became convinced that the process of finding an answer to this question would reveal a great deal about how the government and residents of Macao viewed their past and as well as their future, and how those views had changed over time. An examination of the social and historical contexts of Macao's "museum fever" will reflect the changing concerns of a society in transition, and reveal some surprising continuities.

THE MUSEUM: SOME DEFINITIONS

The present inquiry into the history and development of museums in Macao is another point of entry into the discussion of a single basic question that drove many anthropological and sociological studies: "How do intellectual, artistic, and material productions enter into a society's construction of an image of itself, the development of. . . a 'collective self-consciousness'?" (Ames 1992:111). Answering this question involves examining how a society conceptualizes and publicly represents itself, its past, its culture, and its relationship to others. This is a twofold task: it involves analyzing not only the content, but also the form of any society's representation of itself. The museum is one such form.

A museum is a unique phenomenon: it is as much a philosophy as it is a space; a form of entertainment as much as of education; and a site of social, ideological, and cultural production and reproduction. But how can we define a museum? What makes the museum different from other ways of (or places for) publicly displaying material artefacts, such as galleries, monuments, parks, salons, private collections, exhibitions, fairs and so on? Because I argue that certain social and political changes are reflected in the changing role of museums and museumification in particular, it is necessary to clarify what it is that makes museums unique.

The Museums Association provides the following definition: "a museum is an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit" (Pearce 1992:4). The four key terms here are:

- the *collection*—an ensemble of material artefacts, no matter how many or few, that have been

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MAM gallery. Photo by MAM.

deemed valuable in some sense (economically, socially, artistically, historically, or in any other sense);

- the *institution*—comprised of buildings, staff members, visitors, budgets, guidelines, and an entire more-or-less permanent apparatus that exists independently of individual efforts or interests;
- the *interpretation*—the idea that the museum, by juxtaposing certain objects or providing verbal exposition on how visitors should understand the displays, is engaged in the conscious creation of meaning; and finally,
- the *public*—the fact that the modern museum, even if it is privately-owned, is generally obliged to be open to the public and is often understood to fulfil some kind of educational function, broadly defined.[1]

But Pearce adds that the "most crucial" aspect of the museum is the existence of "a cultural perspective which underwrites the whole and upon which, in turn, museums themselves exercise some influence" (Pearce 1992:3). Certain aspects of this "cultural perspective"—such as the very idea that a culture or set of cultural practices can be represented and understood through inert material objects—are fundamental assumptions behind the practice of museum exhibiting, and are common to all museums. Other aspects—for example, which objects are considered worthy of exhibiting, and how these objects are interpreted for the audience—are different in different sociocultural settings. This last point is crucial, for the creation and institutionalization of public meaning is not something that happens the same way, for the same reasons, and with the same results all over the world. It is the realization of this last point that has led social scientists to make the museum itself an object of study: "Museums are representations of the societies in which they are situated. The are repositories of culture, machines for recontextualization, and platforms for the creation and promotion of cultural heritage… By studying museums in their social and historical settings, we can study the making of culture in its concrete reality" (Ames 1992: 47). Thus defined, it becomes clear why a study of Macao's museums and its "museum fever," in their social and historical settings, would be a particularly fruitful way of addressing the larger issue of identity, culture and history which took on such prominence during the transition era (1987-1999).[2]

THE HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM

The concept of the museum—the idea that material cultural artefacts can and should be put on public display, and that this display can and should be "consumed" by spectators as a form of educational entertainment—may seem quite deep-rooted to many inhabitants of the late twentieth century world. But in

fact this concept, as well as most of the world's modern museums, is rooted in the specific historical conditions of nineteenth-century colonial Europe. In order to understand how museums have changed over the past century, and more specifically to understand what these changes might mean for museums in late twentieth-century Macao, it is necessary first to provide some background into the social and political contexts that gave rise to the popularity of the museum institution in Europe. The rise of this institution—especially, but not solely, the ethnographic museum—is inextricably linked to the history of European colonialism, the rise of capitalism, the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the expansion of the modern state: four aspects of European history that are themselves inextricably intertwined. A closer look of each of these four aspects will allow us to critically evaluate the changes museum practices and institutions over time, as well as the differences and similarities between museums in Macao and elsewhere.

A. Museums and Colonialism

Museums, like the discipline of anthropology itself, are generally understood to have gained real widespread legitimacy during the same period that European states reached the prime of their expansion into far-flung colonial empires. This, as the reader may have guessed, is no coincidence. The collection and display of artefacts (be they cultural, historical, biological, botanical, etc.) is, among other things, a form of control and classification of knowledge; and knowledge, as the saying goes, is power. In order for a minority of Europeans to govern large territories and populations that they knew nothing about, the colonial state had to study as much as possible about the peoples and cultures they were ruling. Colonial administrators were in a position to be able to do this and, in fact, to be *compelled* to do this, and they used a variety of people, tools, and techniques to accomplish this vast task of governance. But the although collection and study of artefacts by colonial scientists did contribute a great deal to the advancement of the social and natural sciences, this process did not lead to a simple, transparent understanding of how the societies under their rule "really worked." Rather, they often led colonials to feel confident about making generalized statements—sometimes wildly inaccurate—about how they understood these societies to work. As Benedict Anderson observes, the census, the map, and the museum were three key methods that colonial governments devised and refined: "together, [the census, the map, and the museum] profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion—the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry" (Anderson 1983: 164).

But these techniques shaped not only the way the colonial state imagined its dominion; they also

shaped the way Europeans and Americans "back home" imagined their empire, the peoples they governed, and hence their own position in the world (see Coombes 1994). The vast amounts of knowledge collected in the colonies, in the form of artefacts such as ritual objects, artwork, and even human "specimens," were sent back to be analyzed, interpreted, and displayed for the consumption, edification and entertainment of the European and American bourgeoisie. These artefacts profoundly shaped the perceptions of the modern West.

B. Museums and the Rise of Capitalism

According to Susan Pearce, "it is no accident that modern museums began at more or less the same moment that modern capitalism began to get under way" (Pearce 1992:238). The origins of museums in the West have an ambiguous relationship with the capitalist economic systems in which they emerged. This relationship is particularly relevant to Macao in two aspects:

i. the circulation of commodities and the determination of value

It may seem obvious to note that objects in museums are not commodities: that is, although they may have been purchased, they are virtually never for sale. Indeed, this is one characteristic that distinguishes art museums from art galleries. However, when we are discussing the production of meaning in and by a museum, this simple fact is of crucial importance. A capitalist economy is dominated by the logic of the commodity, which has been defined as an object whose "exchangeability for some other thing is its socially relevant feature" (Appadurai in Pearce 1992). In an environment in which social relations are structured in terms of the possession and exchange of material objects, the museum holds itself aloof from the "normal" commodity relationship by insisting that certain objects have socially relevant features that preclude their being exchanged for other objects: "The deliberate detachment of collections from commodity-hood and their elevation into sacred objects above and beyond the normal workings of the commodity market is one of the things which curators usually feel most strongly about, and is at the heart of impassioned debates about the sale of museum material" (Pearce 1992:236). At the same time, however, by implying that the world can be known and appreciated through a collection of its objects, museums reinforce one assumption that underlies the commodity logic: that "things" are of paramount importance.

ii. the position of museums in capitalist societies

Just as the museum institution holds an ambivalent position vis-à-vis commodity economies, so too does it fill an ambivalent and changing role in relation to the capitalist societies in which they first emerged. The museum institution grew out of the European tradition of private collections, whereby wealthy or powerful individuals or families (often nobility) would maintain a collection of valuable artwork, objects seized during overseas exploits, or gifts from abroad, as a demonstration of their superior taste, adventurous spirit, or VIP status. Such collections were usually open by invitation only, and were maintained financially by the families as a form of prestige. Over the years, such collections were gradually made more public: many were acquired by the state; others were run by private or philanthropic foundations (for instance, the Rockefeller Foundation in the US or the Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal) that still had links to the original family, but with a decidedly public, educational function.

As Robert Hewison notes "traditionally… the great national museums have been a public responsibility, supported by general taxation, and this model was followed by local museums established from the mid-nineteenth century onward. In both cases access was 'free'" (Hewison 1991:164). The result was that museums were removed from direct participation in the market economy. Similar to public schools, hospitals, or other institutions for the public benefit, museums did not have to worry about making a profit or even about generating enough income to cover their expenses. Museum institutions, like the objects they contained, were thought of as "outside" the workings of the market: the very suggestion that the preservation, expansion, or autonomy of the collections at, for example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, or the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, should be tied to their ability to generate "box-office" receipts

MAM gallery. Photo by MAM.

would have been (and still is) anathema to museum professionals. Yet the millions of dollars necessary to run the major museums must come from somewhere, and thus the fates of these museums are inextricably linked to the fortunes of the market economies in which they operate. It is this economic factor, Hewison argues, that has led to the major changes in policy and form that have transformed the museum institution in the past twenty years.

C. Museums and Social Class

As museums evolved into the twentieth century, they became a quintessentially middle-class phenomenon. As Eric Davis notes, the establishment of public museums in the United States, unlike in Europe, had more to do with the emergence of a bourgeoisie than with the remnants of royalty or the expansion of the state. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he writes, "the American museum…served an important role in consolidating the status and power of many nouveau riche families" (Davis 1994: 91). At that time, Davis argues, the museum institution was still associated in the public mind with the taste and wealth of European nobility, and so American nouveau riche found that funding, establishing, or otherwise associating themselves with museums helped legitimize their social position as elites. But gradually, the museum in both America and Europe became dominated by the middle classes: it was they who had the leisure time to go to museums and the education to appreciate the importance of "artistic" or "cultural" objects; it was they who could afford to receive the training necessary to curate museums; they who got elected to public office and supported the public funding of museums. For this reason, argues Ames, museums gradually started to "present and interpret the world in some way consistent with the values they held to be good, with the collective representations they held to be appropriate, and with the view of social reality they held to be true" (Ames 1992: 21). Thus the museum, argue some critics, became society's temple to itself: an institution through which the dominant classes of a given society could enshrine, reaffirm and reproduce their own worldview.

D. Museums and the Modern State

Finally, the popularization of the traditional museum institution was inseparable from the expansion of the modern state. On the one hand, many states began to acquire collections and museums in order to protect objects of value (however defined) and to ensure public access to them. On the other hand, the general tendency for modern states to legitimate their control by gaining hegemony—that is, by gaining some sort of general public consensus based on the ability to contain political opposition by peaceful means rather than by sheer force—meant

that educational institutions such as museums came to be seen as prime sites for the reproduction not only of social values, but also of political legitimacy. The major state-sponsored museums in a given society, as well as the very idea of museumification as a worthwhile exercise, "may express and authenticate the established or official values and images of a society in several ways, *directly*, by promoting and affirming the dominant values, and *indirectly*, by subordinating or rejecting alternate values" (Ames 1992: 22).

The relationship between the museums and the modern state has been especially clear in many post-colonial nations. There are several reasons for this, two of which may be of particular relevance to the case of Macao. First is the fact that colonized peoples often saw their cultures objectified and museumified by the Europeans who had control of their governments. We have seen already how, on the European end, the rise of museums was linked to the expansion of empires. As these European collections grew, residents of the countries of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East saw their artworks, their religious and ritual objects, and even sometimes their items of daily use, sent away for permanent exhibition in European museums. Seeing the importance that European societies placed on the public display of cultural artefacts in museums and world expos reinforced the idea that the museum was an key ingredient of modern societies; and the experience of standing by helplessly while thousands of ancient or otherwise culturally significant objects were packed up and shipped overseas meant that control over the ownership and interpretation of material artefacts became a particularly important site for political struggle. Secondly, in many instances, the violence and shock of the overall experience of foreign domination led colonized intellectuals to a crisis in a form of consciousness that we would now call national or cultural identity. As Partha Chatterjee and other postcolonial historians have argued, the process of European colonization did not simply allow Europe to "modernize" by providing the raw materials needed to spur industrial output; rather, the process of colonialism itself was one through which colonial nations were taught to denigrate their own cultures (or at least aspects of their own cultures) as "traditional" and "backward," and therefore fundamentally incompatible with the desirable condition of "modernity," which was defined in European terms (Chatterjee 1986). For this reason, upon independence, in many ex-colonies questions of the relationship between "tradition" and modernity, culture and nationhood, identity and sovereignty, took on heightened significance. A government that could answer these questions, could foster a sense of national pride and identity, could also unify the people and thus gain popular legitimacy. In the cases of Iraq and Nigeria (which I take as examples simply because studies have been done on their museums and museum policy) the government sponsors and closely controls a whole network of museums of history, art, folklore, and ethnography, and in so doing consciously tries to instill a sense of national pride, unity, and national belonging among the diverse peoples that comprise their nations (see Davis 1994; Kaplan 1994).

What makes the museum different from other ways of (or places for) publicly displaying material artifacts, such as galleries, monuments, parks, salons, private collections, exhibitions, fairs and so on?

Of course, museums are not "unproblematic reflections of dominant ideological interests" (MacDonald 1994:4)—be those colonial, capitalist, class or state interests. As complex institutions, museums are at the centre of a dynamic cultural field that is filled with motives, messages, interests, individuals, institutions, producers and consumers. Yet a closer understanding of these dynamic forces serves to highlight the importance of museums in modern public culture: "the contradictory, ambivalent, position which museums are in makes them key cultural loci of our times. Through their displays and their day-to-day

Macao Museum (MM) in a renovated heritage building, on top of the Hill Fortress. Photo by MM.

operations, they inevitably raise questions about knowledge and power, about identity and difference, and about permanence and transience." (MacDonald 1994:2).

MUSEUMS IN SOCIETY

It has been argued that museums, much like other forms of non-verbal communication, can be read as a "text." That is, we can ask similar questions of museums and their exhibits that a literary critic might ask of a great novel: for example, how does the author (curator) place certain words (objects) together in sequence to create certain meanings or evoke certain emotions in the reader (visitor)? In what ways do the meanings we find in the words (exhibits) exceed the original intention of the author? What is the role of the individual reader (visitor) in interpreting these meanings? These questions and others like them have led to important observations about how and narratives are constructed through museum exhibits, and the extent to which these narratives can be open to conflicting interpretations.

However, other equally important questions have been raised by the fact that museums have certain distinctive qualities that are unlike any text, or, for that matter, any other institution or medium. First, even though both published texts and museums are public works, they are public in very different ways. The act of reading can and usually (though not always) does take place individually and statically; in museums, however, the visitor's interpretation of meanings involves physical movement through a space, and often involves social interactions with staff, guides, fellow visitors, and so on. Second, museums have a legitimating function that exceeds that of most texts: due to the air of "expertise," "objectivity," or "science" that surrounds the traditional museum, the interpretations or narratives that museums present are more likely than most kinds of texts to be accepted by visitors as "truth." And finally, as institutions, museums are important participants—and objects of

This and facing page: various aspects of the Macao Museum galleries and ethnographic collections. Photos by MM.

controversy—in the political and economic systems in which they operate. The growing number of national economies that are dependent on cultural tourism, the decline of state funding for museums in Europe and the US, and the massive public debates over controversial museum exhibits, all remind us that the museum, whose often serene and authoritative aura may give the impression of timelessness and detachment, is in fact inextricably tied, in very concrete ways, to the social, political, and economic environment in which it operates.

REMAKING MUSEUMS

Given the foregoing observations about the history of the museum and its political, economic, and social position in many post-colonial societies role of is last observation, it should come as little surprise that over the past quarter-century, there have occurred substantial changes in the form, function and even the content of the museum. Museum researchers have noted two interrelated trends: on the one hand, while there has been a serious challenge to the traditional role, methods, functions and even the basic definition of the museum, there has been, on the other a proliferation of new museums, many of which use new methods to display new themes to new audiences, none of which would ever before have been found in a museum. Once museum professionals and social scientists came to realize the wealth of information museums can offer about how societies view themselves and the world around them, museums ceased to be simply a place to exhibit the results of "expert" studies on history, culture, or art; rather, the museum itself came to be an object of study. Almost every aspect of museum exhibiting, from policy to content to management to viewer response, has come under scrutiny. What museum visitors get from their visits, why they visit museums in the first place, and how they relate the information they absorb in the museum to other aspects of their lives and experiences are questions that have taken on new importance as the museum takes on new social and economic roles. The capacity that museums may have for aiding economic development in some regions, as well as their potential for contributing to the creation of community identity – be it at the level of the town, city, region, tribe, or nation – have also been recognized as two of the major functions of new museums around the world. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will limit the discussion to the changes that have come about in the way the relationship between the museum and society is conceptualized, and the effects this has on both the development of museums and on the social spaces in which they function.

Over the past three decades, the interwoven fabric of interests and functions (described above) that shaped the museums of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has been fundamentally altered. In many countries, especially in the West, states have cut back on funding, forcing museums to become more directly tied into an increasingly globalized marketplace, and to look to corporations and consumers financial support. At the same time, the era of direct colonialism has ended, and the peoples that were often the objects of museumification have begun to challenge the forms of representation and 'truth claims' that were made about them and their history.

Development has brought about a larger and more firmly established middle class in more and more nations and regions of the world – a middle class that has both the interest and the means to commemorate its own history and that of its nation. All these factors combined have changed the nature of the museum, and of its position in societies.

Of these factors, the first—the museum's increasing commodification—may have played the most important role in the transformation of contemporary museums. In the late twentieth century, museums are, to quote a museum researcher, "concerned to position themselves in an increasingly global and rapidly changing market-place" (Urry 1994: 62). This phenomenon has a direct relationship with the rise of tourism. Tourism in general, as a form of entertainment and as an industry, is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon (MacCannell 1976); but the popularity of tourism for the sake of learning about how other people live (or used to live) is an even more recent trend. The rise of "cultural tourism" has come into its own in the past few decades, and is already a mainstay of many developing or formerly colonized territories. The role of the museum in this new and often lucrative field cannot be underestimated. Indeed, the museum is central to the industry of cultural tourism on two levels: on one level, museums are built as cultural attractions for travellers who have paid money to learn about another culture; but on another level, museums reproduce the activity of cultural tourism on a micro scale, as visitors enter, move through, and "consume" the museum in a way analogous to tourists' movement through and consumption of the countries and cultures these museums represent. It is a fact of no small significance that the governments of many regions whose economies are heavily dependent upon cultural tourism have adopted policies aimed at trying to fashion their entire societies into "living museums" (see Kaplan 1994).

This trend has had an enormous impact on both the philosophy and the practice of museum exhibiting. Robert Hewison notes that the original motivation behind the museum movement in the nineteenth century was a desire to educate and to serve the social good via the objective examination of the past or of different cultures. Now, however, museums "perceive themselves as a part of the leisure and tourism business….[and] the original purpose of having a museum, which was to preserve and interpret a significant number of objects, has been almost entirely displaced by the desire to give the visitor some kind of more or less pleasurable 'experience.'…. [The museum] is treated as a form of investment that will regenerate the local economy." (Hewison 1991: 166-167). Hewison argues that social goals of the museums of old are fundamentally incompatible with the profit-driven, consumer-oriented goals that new museums tend to—or, due to lack of public funding, are forced to—embrace. He laments the commodification of the museum experience, arguing that in the pursuit of profit, museums of ethnography and history end up aestheticizing the past, erasing all traces of conflict and change and providing modern-day consumers with beautiful images of a past—their own or that of others—that never existed. This aestheticization, coupled with the advent of new kinds of interactive technologies that draw the viewer in closer to the

"artefacts" on display, certainly makes museums more popular places for a wider section of society. However, Hewison and others criticize the strategies of some of Britain's new industrial museums (sawmill or coal-mining museums), which turn the brutal experience of the exploitation of workers into form of entertainment for tourists. According to these critics, these new museums, like Hollywood films or television sitcoms, present as "reality" a highly stylized and often whitewashed version of events that precludes any "real" understanding of the actual historical experience they purport to represent.[3]

Another important change in the function of museums is that they have come to be seen as important sites for the creation or consolidation of collective identities. Writes one museum professional, "the emphasis upon museums as projections of identity…has become increasingly salient over the past decade as museums orthodoxies have been challenged by, or on behalf of, many minorities which have been previously ignored or marginalized by museums" (MacDonald 1994: 9). As the process of collective remembering is recognized as a key part of forming an identity, both the goals and methods of many museums have changed: rather than strict education about the facts and figures of the past, for example, many history museums are more intent on eliciting in visitors a feeling of nostalgia for or identification with that past; and with this more populist goal, old methods of exhibiting (the presentation of an aloof and dusty set of artefacts in glass boxes, for example) have been replaced by more interactive exhibits designed to attract and entertain. At the same time, with the growing awareness of the power of representation that the museum wields, and with growing movements of self-determination among formerly-colonized (or otherwise oppressed) peoples, more and more groups have begun to build more and more museums as a way to affirm their cultural autonomy and to legitimate their collective identity.

Both pages: Various aspects of the Macao Museum galleries and ethnographic collections.

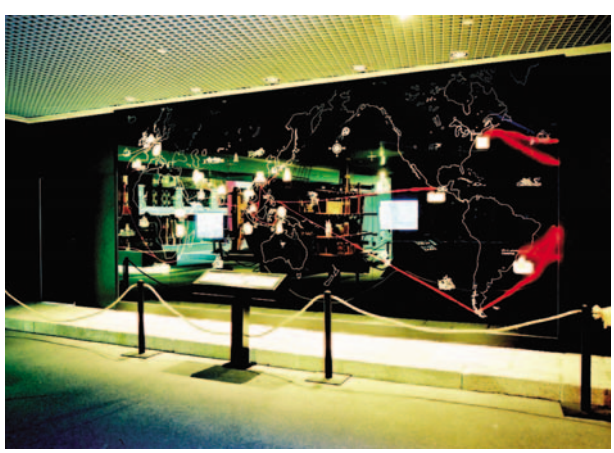
MUSEUMS IN MACAO

In 1999, at the time of the handover, there were no fewer than ten official museums and two memorial halls in Macao.[4] Eight of the museums were on the Macao peninsula: the Macao Museum, the Maritime Museum, the Fire Department Museum; the Grand Prix Museum, Wine Museum, the Macao Museum of Art, Crypt and Museum of Sacred Art in the renovated São Paulo Ruins, and the São Domingos Museum. One, the Taipa House Museum, was located on Taipa; and another, the Museum of Nature and Agriculture (Casa Verde), on Coloane. The striking

thing about Macao's many museums was that that fifteen years prior to the handover, none of them existed—and the one major museum that did exist prior to the late 1980s, the Museu Luís de Camões, ceased operation in 1988.[5] The concerted effort to establish a museum in Macao began officially in the first decade of the twentieth century; yet the vigour with which this movement was enacted, the forms it took, and the success with which it met in the last decade of the century would certainly have surprised the original proponents. An examination of the tortuous history of the museum initiative and the peregrinations and successive incarnations of individual museums throughout the twentieth century can reveal a great deal not only about how museums have been conceptualized differently in different eras, but also about the wider preoccupations of the state and society that they represent.

The carving up of history into stages or eras is, in all cases, an exercise in artifice; in some cases, this exercise can be detrimental to the understanding of complex historical processes. Nevertheless, because an attempt to systematically analyze the history and foundation of each of Macao's museums is beyond the scope of this paper at the present time, I have chosen to use the artifice of dividing the history of museum practices in Macao into three "eras," in order to clarify the kinds of changes that were occurring in these practices as well as in the museum's role in Macao society. It should be emphasized that these eras are not strictly chronological; they are *not* intended to imply an evolution from one era to the next, nor from "lower" to "higher" forms of museum life. Museums embodying different eras may well coexist simultaneously, just as some that embody the same era may do so in different ways. This categorization is simply an attempt to grasp the different ways that different institutions have responded to their political and cultural contexts over the years.

The first era I have identified below comprises the early years of museum development, an era in which neither the museum philosophy nor the museums themselves, were very well rooted in the city. In the second, "transitional" era, even though there were new kinds of museum practices emerging in new socio-political contexts, during this period, there were chronological and conceptual overlaps between the museums of different kinds. The third era I call "The New Generation of Museums" to underline that the museums that emerged in the 1990s comprise a roughly contemporaneous cohort of new ideas, practices, and institutions—but also to highlight the fact that there was a conscious effort to *generate new museums* in a way that had never



happened before. The discussion in this paper will be limited to the three largest and best-known museums that have operated in Macao in the twentieth century, each of which may best represent the three eras named above:

- *Museu Luís de Camões*. Macao's most important museum until the mid-1980s was the Museu Luís de Camões, administered by the Leal Senado. The impetus behind the creation of this museum, as well as the early history of this institution, is explained by its long-time curator Luís Gonzaga Gomes in a 1974 document that draws on several archival sources as well as on the author's own experience.[6] Information about the development of the museum in the 1970s and 1980s was drawn from interviews with the then curator, Dr. António Conceição Júnior, and from journal articles and other publications about and by museum staff during that period. As we shall see, the Luís de Camões Museum had many incarnations, but the most successful and long-lived one was as a museum of art, based on a collection of Chinese ceramics and paintings, as well as some paintings of Macao by well-known artist George Chinnery and his Chinese student Lam Qua.
- *Museum Marítimo de Macau.* Administered and funded by the Capitania dos Portos, the Maritime Museum has also had more than one incarnation; a museum called *Museu Marítimo e de Pescarias* existed in Macao from 1920 to 1945, while the currently-existing Maritime Museum, established in 1987, became Macao's most important and most popular museum after the closure of the Luís de Camões in 1988. However, the nature and objectives of this museum were completely different from those of its predecessor. As its name suggests, the Maritime Museum is not a museum of art, but rather a museum documenting the history and current practices of fishing and navigation associated with the territory of Macao.
- *Museu de Macau*. Opened in 1998 amidst much fanfare, the Macao Museum was heralded as a museum for of, for, and by the people of Macao. The museum's division into three main sections—the Genesis of Macao, the Popular Arts and Traditions of Macao, and Contemporary Macao—reflects its general focus on the history, culture, and heritage of contemporary Macao.

I. Taking Root

Museums—or more accurately, museumification—had been on the minds of certain members of the government of Macao since the late nineteenth century. The first call for a municipal museum arose as a result of a temporary exhibition, in Macao, of local artefacts that had been collected in order to be sent for exhibition to two museums in Portugal (the Museu da Universidade de Coimbra, and the Museu Colonial in Lisbon). The request for these artefacts had come to the then Secretary General of the Government of Macao, José Alberto Corte Real, as early as 1871, from the director of the Botanical Gardens of the University of Coimbra, who wished to add to his collection some plant specimens as well as some "artefacts made of plant materials" that could be found commonly in Macao's markets. This request on the part of the botanist, apparently, arose out of purely scientific considerations; however, the Secretary General saw in it the opportunity to serve two further ends. Not only would such a collection benefit the advancement of botanical science, it also had the potential to stimulate Macao's economy and spur Portugal's industrial development by introducing the residents of the metropole to the exotic and inexpensive products, both natural and manufactured, of its languishing colony.[7]

During the opening ceremony of this temporary exhibition in 1879, two prominent members of the community called for the creation of a permanent Municipal Museum of Macao. This call was made again and again at various times over the years; as Corte Real himself put it, in a petition to the Leal Senado, "the Municipal Museum of Macao, being an establishment that would be extremely useful both for commerce and for popular instruction much like the museums in many municipalities of the most civilized nations in the world, could also contain a historical section that would be of great value not only to Macao, but also for the traditions of the Portuguese nation in this part of the world…and the influence these traditions have exercised upon the arts, industry, commerce,…laws and the politics of some of these peoples" (Corte Real, in Gomes 1973:8).[8]

Museum of Sacred Art (MSA) in São Paulo Ruins. Photo by MM.

The museum envisaged by Corte Real is undeniably "colonial": it grows directly out of the Portuguese colonial presence in Macao, in the very specific meaning of the term 'colonial' as referring to the exercise *of formal sovereignty by a foreign nation over the territory of another.*[9] More than this, however, it can also be seen as an attempt to establish a colonial consciousness among the Portuguese residents of Macao. The years from 1846 until 1885 (when China finally signed a Protocol recognizing Portugal's right to govern Macao) were filled with attempts, both violent and non-violent, to establish Macao as a true colony of Portugal. With this rising colonial consciousness among both the government of Macao and the intellectuals of the metropole, the establishment of a museum "much like the museums in many municipalities of most civilized nations," must have seemed increasingly important as an apparatus of colonial administration.

Sponsored by the state, this museum would has economic, educational, and ideological ends—three ends that are conceived of as three indispensable parts of a whole. The museum could educate people about the history and culture of Macao and the Portuguese in Asia; could aid economic development, in this case by educating more people about the products and services available in Macao; could commemorate the presence of the Portuguese in Asia, and further glorify that presence by representing the material wealth engendered by that economic strength; and finally, it could to reinforce the values and traditions of the Portuguese nation.

However, even at this early stage of the museum movement in Macao, there were two major aspects that set the museum institution in Macao apart from its European counterpart, and that will echo throughout the history of museums in the territory. The first is the explicit link made between the creation of museums and their potential role in economic development; and the second is the relative lack—or at least the relative impermanence—of formal institutionalization and state support. These differences make it quite clear that Macao's museums, far from being simple reproductions of the archetypal European museum, were firmly (and sometimes catastrophically) linked to local conditions and interests.

i. museums in the economy

The major difference between these early plans for a municipal museum in Macao and the archetype of the traditional European museum is that in Macao,

the museum was envisaged as having explicitly, and primarily, economic ends. In the words of the Secretary General and of the committee commissioned to collect the artefacts to be sent to Portugal in the late nineteenth century, one can hear echoes of the desperation that must have followed Macao's precipitous economic decline after the establishment of Hong Kong:

"we are convinced that, in order for peoples to develop all aspects of life,…it is necessary to conjoin governmental action with the initiative of citizens,…especially when, as is the case now, it is a matter of reanimating a decaying settlement, repairing the disasters that have affected its normal life and rescuing, from its own ruins, the sources of its rebirth and renewed prosperity, whose origins are, fortunately, not yet extinct (Gomes 1973: 44)."[10]

In this sense, then, the philosophy behind this first proposal for a museum in Macao had more in common with the philosophy behind the world exhibitions that were one popular feature of the colonial era in Europe, than with that of the museum. Timothy Mitchell has pinpointed the world-as-exhibition epistemology (or worldview) that underpinned, and was reproduced by, the European colonial worldview, epitomized by the phenomenal popularity of these

Interiors of Museum of Sacred Art. Photos by MM.

world exhibitions in the late nineteenth century. This epistemology involved a particular relationship between the individual and the world of things, a relationship in which "everything seemed to be set up as though it were the model or picture of something,…a mere signifier of something further….World exhibition here refers not to an exhibition of the world, but to the world conceived and grasped as though it were an exhibition" (Mitchell 1989: 222).The second, and crucial, aspect of this worldview was the commercialism that drove it: not only was the 'real world' representable as if it were an exhibition, but, more specifically, it was "something created by the representation of its commodities" (Mitchell 1989: 225). Whereas traditional museums were based on the removal of their artefacts from the world of commodities, the world exhibition was based on the explicit commodification of the world; whereas the whole philosophy of the traditional museum is based on the fact that none of the artefacts on display are for sale, in the world exhibition, everything is for sale—including the privilege of "experiencing" that world.

Indeed, it was not only this worldview, but also the actual world's fairs themselves, that were the impetus behind the creation of Macao's first museum. Twenty years after the first set of Macao artefacts was sent to Portugal in 1879, a small collection of fishing nets and model ships and boats from China and Timor was sent to the 1900 Paris Expo. Upon its return to Macao, this collection became the nucleus of a larger collection built by Arthur Leonel Barbosa Carmona, the Adjunct to the Capitão dos Portos. Operating out of an empty room in the Department of Statistics and Opium Control (Repartição de Estatística e

Superintendência do Ópio), under the auspices of the Port Authority (Capitania dos Portos), Barbosa Carmona set up a small museum called the Museu Marítimo e de Pescarias in 1919. His objective in establishing this museum was to create a base for all the research upon "this interesting and most important topic" that would be necessary to the development and administration of Macao (Barbosa Carmona 1953: 9). He hired a local carpenter to build more model ships, set up aquariums of fresh water fish, and arranged exhibitions on the dredging and land reclamation projects that were changing the contours of Macao's harbor and coastline. In 1922, again, part of this enhanced collection of model ships was sent to the International Expo in Rio de Janeiro.

The creation of the other major museum in Macao of this era was also inspired by the world exhibitions in Europe, but met with much less success at first. The year 1910 witnessed the creation by decree[11] of "a historical, ethnographic, physiographic, commercial and industrial museum, to be called 'Museu Luíz de Camões' and containing a historical section pertaining principally to the colony of Macao, as well as another section representing the province of Timor, in its various aspects, especially from the agricultural and industrial point of view" (Gomes 1973: 13). Under the auspices of a steering committee that was also charged with the responsibility of conserving "monuments both secular and sacred, civil and military, of Portuguese or Chinese background, existing in Macao and its dependents," the new museum was to be housed in the building in the Camões Grotto Park. However, due to the scheduling difficulties, apathy, and what Gonzaga Gomes calls the "almost certain allergy to all things artistic or historical" afflicting several members of the steering committee, nothing ever came of this first decree.

After several fits and starts during the decade that followed, in 1920 the government once again created a scientific, literary and artistic association, the Institute of Macao, which was charged with the "conservation of buildings and objects with historic, artistic or documentary value existing in Macao" and with "the creation of a Museum." But, according to Gonzaga Gomes, the atmosphere of total demoralization and defeat that reigned in Macao during that era meant that nothing, aside from a few meetings and an official photograph, ever came of this institute.

Finally, in 1926, the interim Governor Almirante Hugo de Lacerda created the Museu Comercial e Etnográfico Luís de Camões (Portaria n.º 221, 5 Nov. 1926). The creation of this museum came in the wake of excitement and enthusiasm that accompanied the completion of the Porto Exterior and the staging of a grandiose Macao Industrial Expo and Fair. These, combined with other urbanization efforts implemented by Governor Tamagnini Barbosa beginning in 1927, comprised a herculean effort to "liberate the city from the lethargic apathy, the routinization of the daily grind, the negativist skepticism and the tragic defeatism that was annihilating it and condemning it to an imminent and ruinous decay" (Gomes 1973: 15). The new museum was to be comprised of two sections: a historical and artistic section and a commercial section, which would include exhibits from the Fair as well as a large proportion of the exhibits from the Museu Marítimo e de Pescarias.

The collection and display of artifacts (be they cultural, historical, biological, botanical, etc.) is, among other things, a form of control and classification of knowledge; and knowledge, as the saying goes, is power.

ii. museums in the city

The Victoria and Albert Museum or the Smithsonian, both creations of the high colonial era, were housed in solid, imposing buildings that seemed to remain solid and imposing no matter how the city changed around them. Their enshrinement thus is a reflection of their claim to be representing timeless, abstract and objective truths. Unlike these institutions, the early museums in Macao were shuffled from place to place, and the fates of the museums and their collections rose and fell with the sometimes-cruel fate

of the city. They were by no means permanent institutions in the sense of having permanent buildings, large staff, fixed budgets, and so on, but rather were moved around from place to place as the government shuffled and reshuffled its priorities.

For example, the Museu Marítimo e de Pescarias, having been established as an independent museum in 1919, then incorporated into the Luís de Camões in 1927, was finally once again installed as an independent collection in 1934, when Barbosa Carmona retired to Portugal. The location chosen for this new installation was the hydroplane hangar of the Aviação Naval, located on the newly reclaimed land of the Porto Exterior. By this time the collection had expanded to include, among other items, more than a dozen model ships, a model of shipbuilder's yard, instruments used in fishing and navigation (such as anchors, fishing nets, fishing hooks, compasses, oyster-harvesting equipment, and the like), as well as photographs, paintings and documents on a maritime theme. The change in location, however, doomed this entire collection to destruction on January 16, 1945, when American aircraft bombed the hangar on the suspicion that it was being used to house stockpiles of Japanese gasoline and supplies. The only piece of the original collection that remains is an engraved brass lantern that was not moved to the new location, and which is still a part of the museum's collection.[12]

The museum that Governor Lacerda created in 1926 had a more tortuous, though more fortunate, career. The peregrination of this museum (which began as the Museu Comercial e Etnográfico Luís de Camões and ended as simply the Museu Luís de Camões) around the city of Macao, and a series of openings, closing and re-openings, began in 1926 did not end until 34 years later, in 1960, when the museum finally opened to the public in the Casa Gardens building. The long litany of museum sites that Gonzaga Gomes faithfully recites reaches almost comical dimensions as he tracks the ever-more decrepit collection of artistic

This and facing page: S. Domingos Church, in downtown Macao and its sacred art collection. Photos by MM.

and commercial artefacts around the city; but is indicative of the changing priorities of the government as well as of the relationship between the museum and other public institutions in the city, and for that reason I would like to recount it briefly here.

In 1926, the Museu Comercial e Etnográfico Luís de Camões was installed in the Palacete da Flora, displacing nothing less than the office of the Secretária do Governo, which was removed to a separate building. However, as the steering committee worked on the new museum, they found that the original idea, which called for a museum of history and art with an annex comprised of an exhibition of commercial goods in the style of a World Expo, was unworkable: it seemed inappropriate to mix historic/artistic objects with commercial objects, and the Palacete was too small to accommodate both collections separately. Thus began the journey of the Museu Etnográfico e Comercial Luís de Camões:

- 1927: the historical section of the new Museum and a new Public Library are established together in the Leal Senado building. The commercial section of the museum remains in the Palacete da Flora.
- 1928: the Escola Infantil is slated to move into the Palacete da Flora, so the Commercial Section of the Museum leases, for 10 patacas per month, the ground floor of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia.

  The ground floor of the Santa Casa had been the long-standing location of the prize-drawing of the Santa Casa lottery, which for many years had been the Santa Casa's main source of revenue. With the government's expansion of the lottery franchise and the resulting rise in competition, the Santa Casa lottery became unprofitable and by 1928 the Santa Casa was in difficult financial straits. Lottery operations closed down, and the museum moved in. The site was advantageous for the museum, since the Santa Casa was not only in a central location but also had a long tradition as a well-known public space, both of which meant that the museum's commercial section would be more easily accessible to visitors and foreigners. The museum, under a new director, opened to the public on June 22, 1929. (Two years later, on August 13, 1931, the Palacete da Flora was completely destroyed when the nearby Flora Powder Magazine exploded).

- 1932: Upon the death of renowned educator and art collector Dr. Manuel da Silva Mendes, the museum acquires the majority of his collection—but, to the consternation of several museum advocates, the Leal Senado does not act quickly enough to prevent several of the best pieces being sold to collections overseas.

  Reputed to be among the best private collections of Chinese art objects in Asia, the Silva Mendes collection included bronzes, Shiwan pottery and ceramics, as well as some prized pieces of celadon, enamel, and jade. This collection breathed new life into the art and history section of the museum, and remained the nucleus of the museum's collection until it closed in 1988.
- 1933: The financially ailing Santa Casa makes one last effort to revive the lottery, and once more needs the ground floor for lottery operations. The commercial section of the museum is moved out of the Santa Casa to share quarters with the Economic Services Inspection Office.
- 1936 (December): The art and history section of the Museum, still housed in the Leal Senado, is moved out of that location to make room for the expansion of the Public Library. It is moved into the Santa Sancha Palace.

  The Santa Sancha Palace, originally a private residence, was acquired by the government in 1923 and had first served as the governor's residence in 1926 for Governor Tamagnini Barbosa. At the end of Tamagnini Barbosa's first two terms, the Santa Sancha had been deemed "inappropriate and superfluous as the summer residence of the highest authority of the province,

Governor António Miranda" (Gomes 1973: 20). The grounds were used as a hospital from 1934 until 1936, when the hospital was closed due to lack of funds and both sections of the museum were moved in.

- 1937 (May): Governor Tamagnini Barbosa returns to Macao for two more terms as governor, and the Santa Sancha once again becomes "appropriate and indispensable as the residence of the highest authority of the province" (Gomes 1973: 21). At this point the museum is moved to its final destination in the Casa Garden, but shares the space with the National Press, whose operation are housed there.

  By this time, according to Gonzaga Gomes, the collection had fallen into a state of neglect, and "was a museum in name only." It languished in two decrepit back rooms of the Casa Garden until the early 1950s, when the National Press moved out of the Casa Garden and into a building of its own. At this point, a number of individuals, including Gonzaga Gomes himself, lobbied hard to reopen the museum. They were successful, as Governor Esparteiro appointed a committee to restore and refurbish both the collection and the Casa Garden building. Three dozen pieces of the collection were sent to Lisbon for restoration, while the building was fumigated and painted.

After several more false starts during the late 1950s, the museum, now officially called the Museu Luís de Camões, was opened to the public on 25 September 1960, as part of the celebrations of the Comemorações Henriquinas. Luís Gonzaga Gomes was appointed by the Leal Senado to curate the museum, which he did until his death in 1974.

Most accounts of the Museu Luís de Camões state that it was established in 1960. Indeed, in 1985, the museum sponsored a series of exhibitions and events to mark its twenty-fifth anniversary. Yet two things become clear from this examination of the prehistory of this museum. First, in this era, museums operated more or less on the fringes of the state: though their operating costs were supplied by the government, neither museums as institutions, nor the educational or ideological goals they claimed to fulfil, were deemed a priority by the state. In this sense, we may say that rather than a museums per se, in this era Macao had "collections"—and that any efforts towards improving, enlarging, or publicizing these collections were due to the work of individuals who, though not trained as museum professionals, had a passion for collecting. Second, we can see that during this era, the social and political preoccupations were focused much more on commercial expansion and economic development than on the desire to preserve the past or to pursue knowledge. It may seem ironic that during this "high period" of Portuguese colonialism in Macao, the "quintessentially colonial" institution of the museum never really took off. As we can see from the various incarnations of the Luís de Camões Museum, subject to the whims of each new governor, shuffled from building to building, the museum did not serve the immediate economic or political ends that were considered relevant, and so was allowed to languish.

II. Transitions

A change in the relationship between museums and their socio-political context came about in the 1970s, with the change in Macao's political status and the beginnings of a more sustained economic development. After the Portuguese revolution of 1974, when Portugal renounced its claim to all its colonies, in official terms, Macao ceased to be a colony and became, instead, a "Chinese territory under Portuguese administration." With the rapid development of neighbouring Hong Kong, Macao's economy also began to grow and industrialize. The reconfiguration of social relations in Macao brought about by these changes, as well as the input of individual museum staff, led to a re-evaluation of the potential social role of museums.

Transitions I: New Curatorship of the Museu Luís de Camões

In 1976, curatorship of the Museu Luís de Camões was taken over by António Conceição Júnior, then a young Macanese recently returned to Macao with a fine arts degree from Lisbon. He brought with him a new philosophy of museums, a philosophy that reflected the changes of the times and also foreshadowed the changes in the museum industry. Seeking consciously to break with the impassivity and formality of the traditional museum, and to take advantage of, rather than try to deny, the socio-cultural role of the museum as a public institution, his priority

in running the museum was "to bring life to the city and to bring dialogue between the city and the museum."

In so doing, it was necessary to turn the "collection" into an institution—with permanent buildings, staff, and a significant public audience. The new curator first sought to increase popular participation in museum activities. Concerned that the museum had, historically, been visited only by "a handful of Macanese who already knew where it was," publicity was evidently high on the list of priorities. Macao's Portuguese-language newspapers from the 1970s and 1980s are full of reports about activities at the museum and interviews with the curator and artists about the changes underway. Temporary exhibitions were organized in the first temporary gallery in Macao. A museum publication was launched; massive renovations to the Casa Garden house were undertaken; links with Hong Kong Arts Center were forged; new pieces were acquired. The aim, according to the curator, was "to break completely with the cold, imposing air [of traditional museums], and to turn the building into an approachable place not only by the arrangement of the installations, but also by the relationship between visitors and staff" (Conceição Júnior, 1979: 37).

Not only was the museum to have a reinvigorated presence in the social life of the city, but with the end of the high colonial era in Macao, the city and the very definition of the "public" it served was also different. For the first time, a strong and explicit emphasis was placed on the social and cultural benefits the museum could bring to the "mixed community" of Macao, in terms of its ability to foster "a sense of belonging" to the city and to overcome the fragmentation engendered by successive waves of migration and the particularities of Portuguese rule in Macao. The museum was seen as a key center for the kind of cultural and educational activities that could foster a sense of community that would transcend barriers of language, and help maintain a sense of a local identity that, according to one article published in the museum's publication, was under threat from rapid economic development.[13] These early concerns about the threats to a local identity did not rise *sui generis* from the concerns of the museum's curator; rather, they were part of a larger constellation of responses to imminent urban and social change that included a nascent movement to protect Macao's architectural heritage.

In this transitional era, then, we can understand how changes in Macao social and political circumstances engendered, and were furthered by, changes in museum policies and practices. The existence of the museum was no longer justified as a strategy for promoting Macao's economic development; rather, it became an institution designed to guard against the cultural ravages caused by Macao's economic development. Foreshadowing the museums to come, the problem of popular participation in museum activities, and the question of identity and community building began to come to the fore in discussions of the role of museums in society.

The museum, however, was still not immune from the lack of strong state support. The Casa Garden building was in a state of disrepair; the lack of air-conditioning made the museum unappealing to visitors hoping to escape the summer heat, while humidity and termite infestation endangered the well-being of the collection. In 1988, the Casa Garden building was purchased by the Orient Foundation. At this juncture, rather than moving to yet another location, the Museu Luís de Camões closed its doors and the collection was packed up and put into storage.

The rise of "cultural tourism" has come into its own in the past few decades, and is already a mainstay of many developing or formerly colonized territories.

Transitions II: The Museu Marítimo de Macao

The Maritime Museum that opened on November 7, 1987, had no direct relationship with the museum of the same name that met its demise under American bombs forty years earlier. The objectives of the new museum were may sound remarkably similar to the objectives of the original museum founded in 1919: "to collect, preserve, and display the historical and

cultural heritage [*património*] of a maritime nature that exists in Macao, and to conduct and publish research into the different aspects of maritime activity, past and present, related to Macao, China, and Portugal" (Oleiro & Peixoto n.d.: 39). However, certain key differences in the wording of this objective, as well as in the practices of the museum, indicate some fundamental differences in its orientation and practice as well.

One key difference is contained in the use of the single word "heritage." Cultural critics in Great Britain, where the "heritage boom" has taken off in the past ten years, explain how "heritage" works as a particular way of conceptualizing the past (see Walsh 1992; Corner and Harvey 1991). The concept of heritage implies a common inheritance (usually manifested in material objects) that belongs to all members of a given society and thus unites these members with each other and provides them with both a sense of continuity with their past, and a sense of pride in their uniqueness. This concept is often closely tied to the creation or reinforcement of a collective identity that is based on collective memory of, and often on nostalgia for, a romanticized past. As in the Museu Luís de Camões, we see the beginnings here of an invocation of identity and heritage that was completely absent in earlier conceptions of what a museum should be, but that will become even more salient in the "new generation" of Macao's museums. Indeed, this is perhaps the most salient aspect of the social role museums in this transitional period: it was at this time that the question of heritage and identity came to take precedence over economics as the primary justification for the establishment or reinvention of museums.

The Maritime Museum marks a break with previous museums in another important way, however: it was the first of several museums in Macao that grew from nothing but an idea[14]:

"there were no collections, nor pieces of collections, nor books, not even a file card. There was no building, nor an architectural design, nor a locale chosen for the building site. But, more importantly, there were no precedents to help illumine the road ahead, or to help define the standards of quality; none of us had experience that would enable us to foresee the reaction of a largely heterogeneous public. Some of the themes to be addressed were unheard-of in other museums, due to the specificities of Macao's situation, and there were no previous studies or international authorities on the subject who could be consulted. Starting from zero, it was necessary to conceive of everything, create everything, define rules, formulate principles, to specify the orientation and basic philosophy of the museum" (Oleiro & Peixoto n.d.: 40).

The collection, the institution, the interpretation, the public, even the "orientation and basic philosophy" —everything about the museum had to be created from scratch. Originally, this museum was housed in an existing building from the 1940s that had been gutted and restored to accommodate a small series of exhibits. Like their predecessors in 1926, the creators of the new Maritime Museum realized almost from the start that the chosen site would prove inadequate; but unlike their predecessors, they were able to obtain the permission and funding from the government to construct the first building in Macao designed expressly for a museum. The completion of this building not only provided the museum with a tailor-made space for expansion, but also symbolized the permanence of the museum institution, and its importance as a public space.

The "orientation and basic philosophy" of the new Maritime Museum, like the new incarnation of the Museu Luís de Camões, were concerned with defining the museum in relation to the public it served. To attract a wider audience, the museum set up exhibits that encouraged interaction, between the visitor and objects on display, as well as with world outside of the museum building. For example, the museum maintained in working order a Chinese junk, built in Macao's shipyards, that offered regularly-scheduled rides around the Inner Harbor, amongst the "real life" boat people whose way of life was represented inside the museum. The museum's audience grew as a result of these reconceptualizations of museum exhibiting; and, significantly, it grew in two important directions that foreshadowed future trends. First, as Macao's schools came to see the museum as a worthwhile educational experience, more and more of them incorporated museum visits into their curriculum. And second, the Museum became, along with the A-Ma Temple across the street from it, one of Macao's major "tourist attractions." It was certainly one of the first and only such tourist attractions that consciously provided a coherent narrative statement about Macao's culture and history to its visitors. As the numbers of visitors reached into the tens and hundreds of thousands, and the museum came to be regularly

Macao Maritime Museum (MMM) in Barra, Inner Harbour. Photo by MMM.

included on package tours of the city, within a few years the role that the museum could play in encouraging cultural tourism became increasingly clear. Ironically, it was precisely at the point when the economic factor in the rhetoric of museum development had taken a back seat to other, more educational goals, that the museum began to acquire the economic function that had once been its chief justification.

In sum, then, both museums of this generation began to manifest changes in the logic behind exhibition practices and in the conception of the relationship between the museum and the world around it. While the state was still a relatively weak factor in the growth of these museums (at least, compared to what would come next), the changes in political status, the transformation of the economy, and the more active public role museums began to seek out set the stage for a further acceleration of their development into the 1990s.

III. The New Generation of Museums

What I have deemed the new generation of museums in Macao is not so much a radical break with what came before as it is a new consolidation of the trends that were emerging in the late 1980s, coupled with the emergence of the state as a major advocate and sponsor of museums.[15] This consolidation came about in the context of the rapid transformation of Macao's political, economic, and social conditions during the long decade prior to the transfer of sovereignty to China in 1999. During this period, the rhetoric of the need for a sense of belonging and local pride became even stronger. Wedded to this ideological objective, however, was a reinvigorated economic objective as well. Possibly the single most important difference in the new generation of museums was the realization, on the part of the museum professionals as well as government funders, of the role museums could play in Macao's economic development. The Macao Government Tourism Office used the terminology of the marketplace in describing the motives behind the "museum fever" that gripped 1990s Macao: "It's because we have to diversify our product," said one tourism official in response to my question about why Macao has established so many museums recently. In the early 1990s, with the precipitous decline of the industrial boom that had fuelled much of the economic growth in the 1980s, the government realized that

tourism was the one sector that had the potential for the kind of sustained growth necessary to maintain the health of Macao's economy. Yet two major characteristics of this sector—its heavy dependence upon the gambling industry, and the tendency for tourists to stay in Macao an average of only 1.3 days—needed to be changed before tourism could truly become a viable economic alternative.

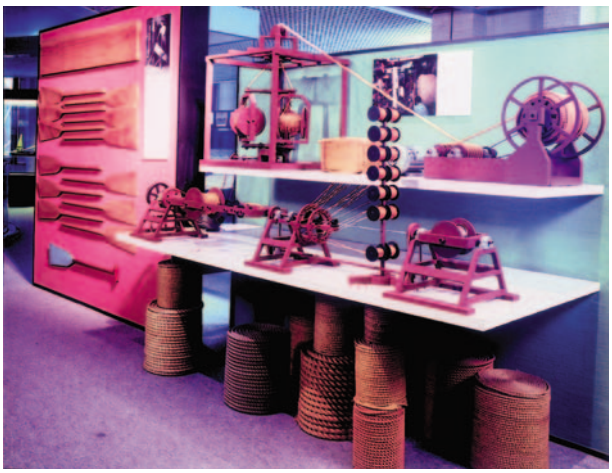
Thus the development of new museums was a conscious economic strategy on the part of the government. On the one hand, attention to the economic role of museums was hardly new in the 1990s—echoing, as it did, the nineteenth-century prehistory of Macao's museums. On the other hand, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that what was new was the way this economic role was conceptualized in the 1990s, in response to the demands of the tourism economy. We may describe this change as a kind of acceleration of the commodity logic of early museums: whereas the early museums were designed to display the commodities that Macao had to offer, the 1990s museums worked through the commodification of the museum experience itself. The aim of the museums was no longer to kindle the desire of visitors to leave the museum and seek out business transactions among Macao's residents; rather, the aim was to kindle the desire of visitors to visit. The museum would no longer function as a neutral space in which the exchange of material goods could be promoted; instead, it entered the marketplace itself, offering up for consumption its own materiality.

But while this economic role may have been the impetus for the government's massive investments in the museumification of Macao, we should not be too quick to dismiss the new museums as mere tourist gimmicks with no real meaning for, or social role to play in, the life of the city. On the contrary, it was precisely at this moment—when the new economic role of the museum institution compelled it to adopt new strategies to reach ever-wider audiences—that the museum took on an even stronger social and political importance in the life of the city. It is precisely at this moment that we must scrutinize even more closely how the museum institution represented, both explicitly and implicitly, the society in which it operated. The Macao Museum, as the largest and most celebrated museum to open in Macao just prior to the handover, is a prime example of how these socio-cultural, political, and economic roles of the museum were reconceptualized and recombined in transition-era Macao.

The Macao Museum

"It's definitely unlike any other museum I've ever been in," laughed one staff member when asked to compare the Macao Museum to other museum experiences either in or outside of Macao. In April of 1998, the much-awaited, much-discussed Museu de Macao was opened to the public amidst much fanfare. The presence of Prime Minister of Portugal, António Guterres, lent an air of momentousness to the opening ceremonies. From almost any angle—the number of people involved in the planning process, the number of permanent staff, the number of visitors; the architectural logistics of the building site, the care taken in preparing the museum and it collections, the aid and donations received—the Macao Museum must be

Both pages: Interiors of the Maritime Museum. Photos by MMM.



considered one of the biggest museum projects in the history of Macao. And as the comment of the staff member suggests, the establishment of this museum in some ways marked another break with what had come before.

There are, of course, continuities. The architect of the Macao Museum, Carlos Bonina Moreno, was the same architect who designed the new building of the Maritime Museum in 1987. Learning from that experience, the architect and other planners and technicians built upon their earlier success. Like the Maritime Museum before it, the Macao Museum began from scratch, from nothing but a request by the Governor of Macao. "There was no site, no collection, and no staff," mused the architect and several early consultants to the museum project. There was only the imperative to create a museum for the people of Macao.

But in contrast to the aims of traditional museums, which were to exhibit and narrate the importance of an existing collection of material objects, the Macao Museum's aim was to exhibit and illustrate, via material objects, a narrative about the importance of Macao. "We started from the story and then collected the objects, rather than the other way around," explained one employee who was involved in the planning process. In this sense, the museum's paramount objective foregrounded its role in building community identity, a role that we saw beginning to emerge in the earlier era. Architect Moreno explained,

"The ethnographic aspect of the museum is the most important. This is the role of the museum in the city. More than fifty percent of Macao's residents have come here in the past ten years. A society needs to have some common culture or traditions—this common culture is like a cement to hold society together. Otherwise, it is just like living in one of these high-rise buildings, where you can live right next door to people for many years and still never know them, never even say 'hello' to them. So the museum can help create a common identity, a common language and culture, and thus a people of Macao in the true sense of the word."

The first priority in creating the museum was to decide upon this story: what *is* Macao, and who *are* its people? In order for the museum to belong to the people of Macao, the people of Macao must be defined as a group; and it is in this sense that the museum can be understood as part of the expansion of the state. On the one hand, the Museum was the result of a desire on the part of the government to "give something back to the people of Macao"—one staff member indicated that they were working hard to change the "somewhat negative image" that the Macao government has among a large sector of the population, "the sense that the 'public administration' never does anything for the public." But on the other hand, in a more subtle way, the museum can be seen as a part of the state's increasing interest, just prior to the handover, in becoming involved in the inherently political task of defining who 'we'—the Macao people—are. The museum's ability to foster a sense of belonging to the city , via an appeal to cultural points of reference that can transcend barriers of language and place of origin, was highlighted as its foremost task and contribution. According to the people who built it, the museum's ideological role, as an arena for the creation and reproduction of a hegemonic understanding of "ourselves" and of society, was the first of its two major functions.

In this sense, then, the establishment of the Macao Museum finally fulfilled the vision for a municipal museum that Corte Real set forth more than a century earlier. Like the municipal museum envisaged by Corte Real, the Museum of Macao had economic, educational and ideological ends: to encourage the people of Macao to take pride in their "unique identity" by providing them with a narrative about their history, culture, and city; and to aid the development of cultural tourism by promoting and

A gallery in the Maritime Museum. The present building opened in November 1987. Photo by MMM.

commodifying this cultural and historical identity. In the same way that Corte Real saw these three aims as part of a single endeavor, so the creators of the Macao Museum hoped the prosperity engendered by the rise in tourism would lead to further pride and satisfaction with the hegemonic narrative about this identity, further strengthening the cultural values and traditions that it involved, as well as the public's interest in maintaining that identity.

But the Macao Museum did so using methods, and achieving results, that Corte Real would never have imagined. For, as discussed above, the social and political problems presented to museum professionals (such as the creators of the Macao Museum) in the post-colonial world of the late twentieth century were different than those at height of the colonial era. More specifically, in Macao the key question was how could a museum effect a strong sense of common identity from among a diverse and historically fragmented population, drawing on a historical legacy that was rife with politically sensitive points of contention? Ironically, in order to accomplish this difficult and highly political task, the museum had to adopt a strategy that emptied the past of its political content.

The Labyrinth of Nostalgia

It may not be surprising to learn that a key representational strategy adopted by the Macao Museum in order to evoke this kind of common identity is what Kevin Walsh calls "nostalgia-arousal" (Walsh 1992). According to the museum architect,

"We decided to concentrate on Macao's recent past—aspects of life in Macao which no longer exist but which older people still remember. In the first few days after the museum was opened to the public, we had a lot of older people coming in, and many of them got very emotional."

Nostalgia-arousal works, according to Walsh, by eliciting selective memories in the visitor which

effect a personal, emotional involvement with the object (or ensemble of objects) on display, rather than the detached objectivity and distancing effect so common to traditional museums. Although each visitor will have a different interpretation of any given exhibit based on their different life experiences, nostalgia-arousal maximizes the social or collective aspect of memory by the subtle implication that these personal memories are universal in some way. The observations of another staff member may serve to illustrate this point:

"At around 10 in the morning, groups of older women would come in to visit the museum after going to the market. They loved the exhibits of Macao's recent past, the way Macao used to be when they were young. They would walk around together in groups, looking at the exhibits and reminiscing about their lives, discussing the exhibits saying 'oh yes, remember, that's exactly what it used to be like!' or 'no, it wasn't really like that, it was more like this…'"

…the Macao Museum's aim was to exhibit and illustrate, via material objects, a narrative about the importance of Macao.

Yet the nostalgia-arousal effect is not limited to older visitors who can fill museum objects with personal meanings by attaching to them empathic memories of lived experience. It can work with younger generations as well. As the same staff member continued, the true fulfilment of the aims of the museum could be embodied in the figure of a child who visits the museum with his or her grandmother. "We hope older people like this would come and recall their fond memories of what Macao used to be like, and we hope they will bring their grandchildren to visit as well, so that when their grandchildren grow up they will also have fond memories of the museum, as a place they used to go with their granny who would tell them all about the old Macao. And then they can carry on the memories that their grandparents had." In this sense, we see that the museum is engaged in the process of actively *creating* nostalgia, rather than (as Walsh implies) simply "arousing" nostalgia from a dormant state.

The creation of nostalgia is, as we noted above, a major characteristic of the age of museums as flashpoints for community identity. Many scholars lament the apparent transformation of museums from institutions of scholarly research and education into commodified centers of entertainment and the uncritical celebration of a depoliticized "culture" or "history." This criticism must be taken seriously: as Walsh reminds us, "the exploration of nostalgia is not necessarily a bad thing…[but] this natural interest in the past should be used as a kind of preface to a more critical engagement with the past and its links with, or contingency on, the present" (Walsh 1992:99). However, it should also be noted that this transformation is not a simple one from "objective" to "subjective," from education to entertainment, from impartiality to politicization. For, by virtue of their very "public-ness," museums have never been impartial. As a mode of representation, the labyrinth of nostalgia may entail a different set of traps for the uncritical audience than does the forest of scientific objectivity, but since they are as much *products* of a given culture and history as they are ways of representing that culture and history, museums have always been, and will always be, partial and profoundly political.

CONCLUSIONS

To return to the question with which we began, what *was* the significance of the "museum fever" in 1990s Macao?

It is clear that museums in Macao, as elsewhere, have always been built "for the future of the city." The difference in they way museums were run in the different eras outlined above is primarily a matter of how that future was conceptualized. In the 1990s, at the height of a period of major sociopolitical change, the museum institution became an important site for the production of cultural and social meanings that could unify the citizens and provide them with both material prosperity and a sense of history and belonging. The above discussion of the transformation

of museum practices in Europe provides a sense of how economic, political and social changes in the eras of decolonization and "globalization" have played out in the realm of public culture. In the case of Macao's own era of decolonization, the field of public culture came to be occupied with a concern over identity (the fundamental question of "who are we?") and its ramifications for the economic and political well-being of the territory. And this, in brief, was what this fever was about: in a period of rapid change and uncertainty, museums, the institutions they comprise and the practices they embody, were about nothing less than the struggle for the future of Macao. RC

NOTES

1 This was not always the case. As Ames points out, early European museums were extremely selective as to how many and what kind of visitors they would allow in.

2 The "transition era" refers to the period between 1987, when the Joint Declaration was issued announcing that China would resume control over Macao in 1999, and the actual resumption of that control twelve years later. For more information on how and why issues of culture and history did take on such prominence during this period, see Clayton 2002a and 2002b.

3 The question to ask here, of course, is whether or not the traditional museums provided a 'real' understanding of the world, or just a different kind of stylized interpretation.

4 The two memorial halls—the Sun Yat-sen Memorial House and the Lin Zexu Memorial Hall—are, for various purposes and with some degree of justification, classified together with museums. There are important differences, however, between the functions of a memorial hall and that of a museum; for this reason, as well as to limit the scope of this paper, I will not comment extensively on these two monuments.

5 Other museums did operate, at various times, prior to 1988. The Museu Arqueológico das Ruínas de S. Paulo was established in 1962, during the rule of Gov. Jaime Silvério Marques, but was destroyed during the riots of December 1966; a second museum created at the same time, the Museu de Armamento, suffered the same fate but was reconstituted as the Museu Militar some years later.

6 See Gomes 1974.

7 The establishment of the British colony of Hong Kong at the end of the Opium War in 1842 had sent Macao's economy into a tailspin. Hong Kong's deep water bay was better suited for the new steam-powered ships that were becoming more common for trade, and the establishment of a British outpost meant that Macao was no longer the sole home base for European traders working in China.

8 The original reads: "O Museu Municipal de Macao, constituindo um estabelecimento de grande utilidade para o comercio e para a instrucção popular, á semelhança de muitas municipalidades das nações mais civilizadas do mundo, poderia conter também uma secção histórica de grande valor, não somente para Macao, mas tambem para as tradições de nação portugueza nesta parte do extremo oriente,…[a] influencia que exerceram nas artes, nas industrias, no comercio…e nas leis e na politica de alguns d'esses povos." (Corte Real in Gomes 1973: 8). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

9 The Portuguese had been present in Macao since 1557 but had never claimed full, formal political sovereignty over the territory until 1849, when Governor Ferreira do Amaral did so unilaterally.

10 The original reads: "estão convencidos que para os povos desenvolverem todos os elementos de vida,…se torna indispensavel auxiliar a acção dos governos com a iniciativa dos cidadãos,… mórmente quando, como agora, se trata de reanimar uma povoação decadente, de reparar desastres que affectaram a sua vida normal e de tirar d'entre as proprias ruinas as fontes de renascimento e nova prosperidade, cujas origens não estão felizmente extinctas."

11 Portaria N.º 231, published in *Boletim Oficial* No. 42, 5 November 1910.

12 Bairrão Oleiro and Brito Peixoto, n.d.

13 From 'Vila Alegre', in *Artis* 3, 1979 [?].

14 Other museums that have been built from scratch include the three major new museums sponsored by the Macao government — the Macao Museum, the Grand Prix Museum, and the Wine Museum.

15 The striking thing about the state-sponsored museums in Macao, compared to state-sponsored systems of museums in many other countries, is that they are not administered by a single authority. Although the impetus behind the expansion of museums has come mainly from the MGTO, and the majority of new museums that have opened are under their administration, still it is significant that there is no centralized museum authority to administer budgets, personnel, policy, and management of the museums. It seems that it is still too early to call the proliferation of museums in Macao a 'system.'

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