

# Merchants and Commerce in Asia and the Portuguese Empire Over the Long 18<sup>th</sup> Century

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## INTRODUCTION

Merchants and commerce in Asia and the Portuguese Empire over the long 18<sup>th</sup> century are examined in this essay, which is preliminary in nature and an integral part of a larger research project. It is written primarily from the perspective of Portuguese merchants—individuals, groups, and/or informal/formal associations and/or institutions dedicated to making a livelihood through ship-owning, operating, chandelling, investing, financing, and trading in local, regional, intra-regional and/or global maritime commercial activities that exclude ship building, *cabotagem* or coastal shipping, fishing and whaling. It focuses on the identities and networks found within one locality and community—the Portuguese at Macao. The scope is broadened by identifying and

including additional comments about other Portuguese, hyphenated-Portuguese and non-Portuguese European and Asian merchants and their commercial and communal activities at different localities in Asia, America, and Europe.

The long 18<sup>th</sup> century, temporally, ranged from around 1684 to around 1835. For Macao and China, the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century began with the Qing, a new, foreign/non-Han dynasty, finally establishing effective political and administrative control over all of China, and ending with the emergence of tensions between Qing China and the English East India Company and British private traders over the illicit traffic and sale of Indian opium in China, which resulted in the first Opium War and in the English establishing themselves at Hong Kong. It is one of the major, and relatively understudied, topics concerning the history of Macao and its relations with China in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The reason for this is that until now the activities of Portuguese merchants have been overshadowed in comparison with the more spectacular successes of other European private merchants and Company rivals.

It focuses, primarily, upon Macao's existence and its commercial history as an adjunct of the Canton/Guangdong market within the context of the history of China in the early modern global economy. It explores the maintenance, development, and expansion of China's maritime trading contacts with Asia, Europe,

Map of the Town and Harbour of Macao, by W. Branston. Published in Anders Ljungstedt, *An Historical Sketch of the Portuguese Settlements in China and of the Roman Catholic Church and Mission in China & Descriptions of the City of Canton*, 1834.

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and America via Portuguese merchants and their shipping that was physically based in and operated out of the city of Macao, and Portuguese merchants and their shipping that was physically based in and operated out of the Portuguese empire's metropolitan centre, Lisbon, its peripheries in America, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, and other peripheries in Asia that were in and outside of the *Estado da Índia*—Goa, Daman, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, which maintained regular contact and commercial exchange with China via Macao.

This approach is influenced by the Annales School and its interest in commercial structures as well as the functioning of networks and the daily life of merchants and people, which seeks, to the degree that is possible, for a total or holistic treatment. It is supplemented by my examining Macao and the major ports that were involved in Macao's commercial development as a colonial and/or port city and employs a supply or commodity chain analysis that shapes my focus about merchants and their agency and networks in the development of commerce by exploring the social and cultural history of different individual and groups or categories of commodities that were involved. It is argued that this methodology permits a truly cross-disciplinary approach that examines Portuguese, European, and Chinese maritime trade from a social, cultural, and economic perspective, which conceptualises them as being an integral aspect of the early modern European, Portuguese in particular, Chinese, and global economies. It permits the research to be structured around quantifiable results and observations, while at the same time permitting qualitative observations to be made. It is based upon multiple Portuguese, and other European and Asian archival and secondary sources found in Europe, America, and Asia.

This paper is organised into five sections; an introduction; Macao and the Portuguese; Portuguese Merchants and Ships; Commerce and Prosperity; and a final section which provides some preliminary conclusions.

### MACAO AND THE PORTUGUESE

Macao's *raison d'être* for its Chinese and European occupants has been primarily commercial in nature, that is, to produce sufficient income from maritime

trade to insure the livelihoods and the survival and communal development of its inhabitants. Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in China in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Macao was neither a densely populated nor a commercially active Chinese port city. It was, rather, by all accounts, a quiet fishing village. Macao was an extremely small peninsula that included three small islands (Verde, Taipa, and Coloane), located on the south-westerly approaches to the Pearl River, which, as a result, provided good fluvial access to Whampoa, the primary port, and Canton, the administrative and commercial city and market of Guangdong province. It did not have direct access to any substantial arable or cultivable areas of combustible production, but possessed a relatively safe harbour (but not as good as a similar location to its east, that became Hong Kong in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The Portuguese were dependent on Chinese authorities locally and on Canton for their major supplies of food and for any goods or commodities that they might purchase or market.

Portuguese Crown authority was present at Macao but the colonial ethos was that of the married settler or *casado*. The *casados*, as married men, were heads of households, which included servants and slaves, and their numbers depended upon their and the community's economic well-being and the physical space that was available. In general, the *casado* was a *reinol*, a Portuguese born male, who had been in Crown service, retired and sought to prosper and raise a family. Over the period in question, bi-lateral migration of *reinóis* to and from Macao, very small in number and irregular in frequency, did occur. In general, they were given residence at Macao and were incorporated into local society and it was from this group that the majority of the merchants at Macao were found. Based upon petitions for permission to leave Macao and subsequent Crown approvals for individuals and their families to return to Portugal or move to other parts of the Empire, there was limited mobility. With the paucity of available European women, the progeny of the *casados* produced *Macaenses*—an important, diverse and multi-racial demographic element within Portuguese colonial society. Office holding and voting privileges in municipal and other local institutions, such as the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* (the Holy House of Mercy, an important charitable, lay brotherhood) were the exclusive province of the *casados* and *moradores* or Portuguese inhabitants.

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The size of the Portuguese population and community at Macao was always relatively small. Specific, conclusive details about its historical demography have been illusive. Based upon some of the available data for the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, there were around 2,000 Portuguese inhabitants including slaves at Macao and by 1669 there were only 300-320 *casados* estimated to be residing in the city.<sup>1</sup> In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (1722), the available data suggests a demographic decline in the number of *casados* or male inhabitants to 274 and the number of females was disproportionately high—nearly four times.<sup>2</sup>

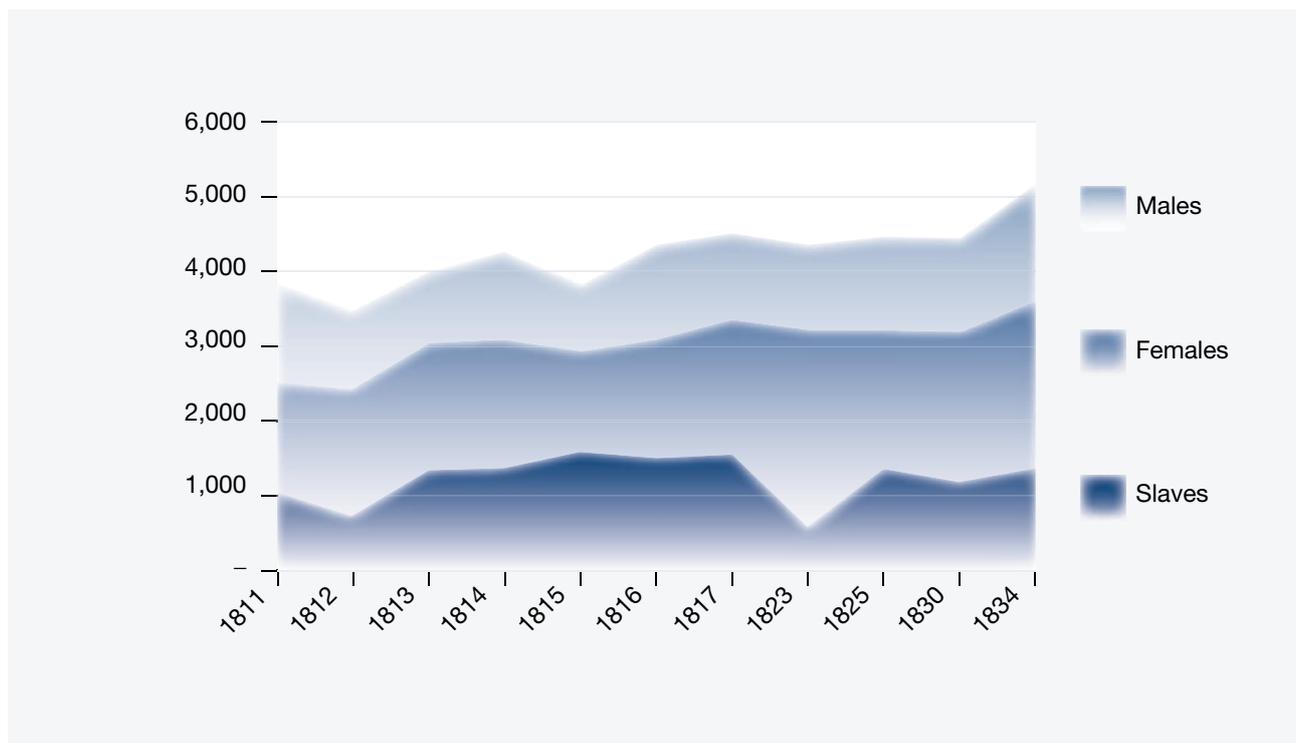
At the beginning of the long 18<sup>th</sup> century, from 1745-1793, there are sources that suggest that the total non-Chinese population of Macao fluctuated from around 3,000 to 6,000 persons.<sup>3</sup> However, a series of population reports prepared from 1811-1834 and reproduced below in Table 1, clarify and provide detailed demographic data about the size and composition of the Portuguese community's population at Macao. In general, the Crown-supported military,

administrative, and ecclesiastical establishments were registered separately or not at all in these reports.<sup>4</sup>

The enslaved mature and immature male and female population within the Portuguese community at Macao was roughly one third of the total population. The mature and immature white and mixed-race female population within the Portuguese community at Macao was over another one-third of the total population. And, the mature and immature white and mixed race male population within the Portuguese community at Macao was well under one-third of the total population.

Merchant and commercial activity was primarily a mature male-dominated activity, although there are sporadic references to widows who were temporarily active until remarriage or other male immediate or extended family members assumed control over their shipping and commercial assets. The same records, as shown in Table 2, permit a further discrimination of the mature and immature male population within the Portuguese community at Macao from 1811-1830. These highlight the small size of the mature

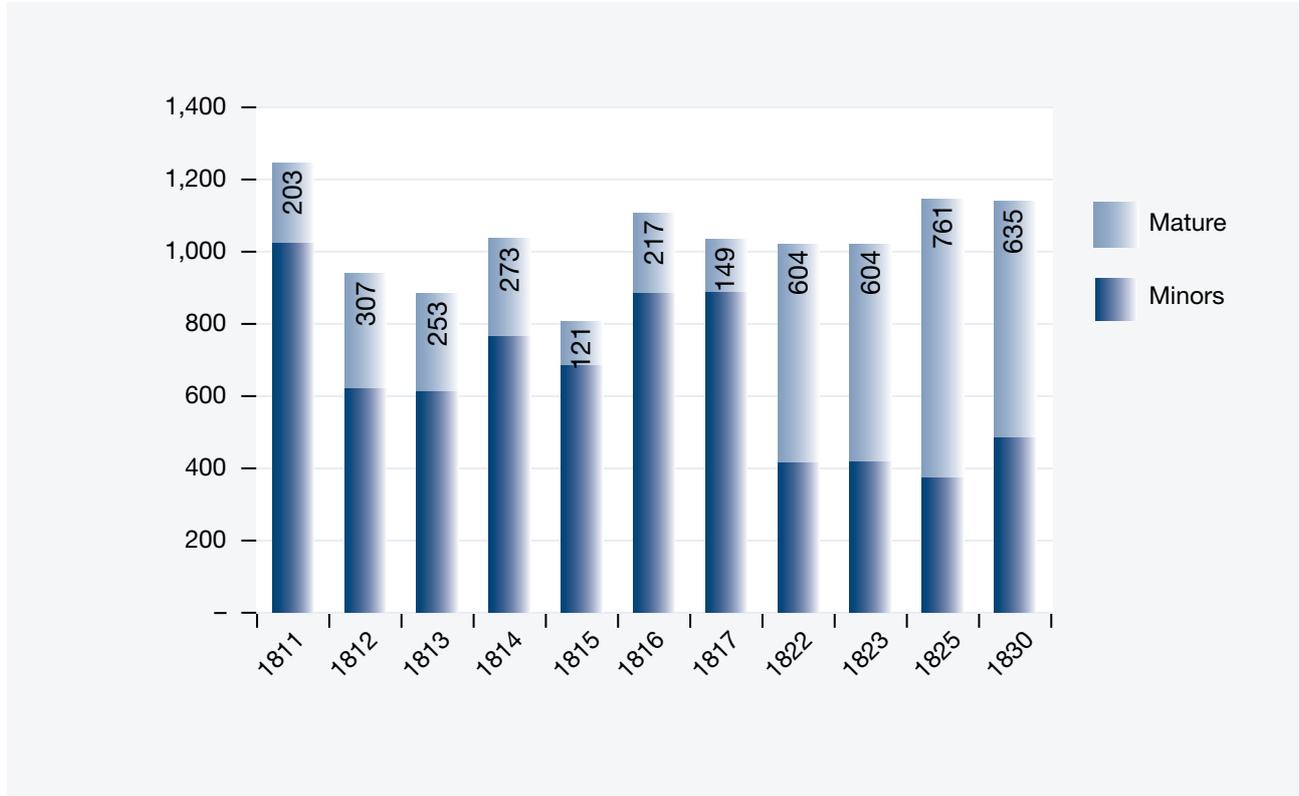
Table 1. The Portuguese population of Macao, 1811-1834



Source: Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Lisbon, *Maços de Macao*, 'Population Maps'.

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Table 2. Portuguese male population at Macao, by age and maturity, 1811-1830



Source: AHU, *Maços de Macao*, 'Population Maps'.

male population and suggest the high degree of concentration of merchant activity in the hands of a very small number of males.

**PORTUGUESE MERCHANTS AND SHIPS**

The merchant investing in maritime trading activities in general in the age of sail or in particular in Asia, whether European or Asian, operating as a group in a joint-stock company, multi-partnership or as an individual entrepreneur, pursued profit maximisation goals via commercial exchange at the available regional and intra-regional port/markets. The Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants at Macao were not exceptional in this regard. While it has often been correctly observed, especially by Professor C. R. Boxer, that everyone in the Portuguese community at Macao, as institutions and as individuals, including the municipal council, the lay brotherhood, and the Church, in particular the Jesuits, invested or financed Portuguese maritime ventures,

not everyone was a merchant as defined in this essay. Over the long 18<sup>th</sup> century, the commercial survival and revival of the city's prosperity became increasingly controlled and concentrated in the activities of relatively fewer and more influential merchants.

Merchant ownership and operation or not of multiple ships or a single ship outright or in association with others is an overwhelmingly important factor in identifying merchants in general and key merchants in particular and is used in advancing a typology of the merchant and Portuguese merchants in the Empire in general and in particular the Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants. Obviously, the number of ships was fewer than the size of any specific merchant population at any and all locations. At Macao, for example, over the long 18<sup>th</sup> century the number of ships in the Portuguese/*Macaense* merchant fleet is estimated at between six to eight ships in 1684. By the late 1710s, the number of ships expanded to thirteen or fifteen ships. Although ships were lost, sold and disincorporated, for most of

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the rest of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the number of Portuguese vessels that were owned and operated at Macao remained at or around fifteen. It is only in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and into the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the numbers of ships of the Portuguese/*Macaense* fleet increased to around twenty-five. There were multiple ship types (denominated in the records as ships, sloops, barks, brigs, corvettes, and *palas*) with diverse sizes (draught and cargo capacities), number of sails, placement, and sailing characteristics that these merchants owned and employed. While there are difficulties in estimating the size of individual ships and the total fleet cargo carrying capacity, a preliminary estimate suggests that the total fleet cargo carrying capacity fluctuated from well under 3,750 tons at the beginning and between 7,500 to 10,000 tons toward the end of our period. While there were still risks and losses because of shipwreck, piracy, and war and those losses did adversely impact individual and collective merchant fortunes, in comparison with the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were lower rates of losses for all Portuguese ships in general and for the Portuguese/*Macaense* fleet in particular.

The sailing ship, as a transportation system, imposed operational constraints on merchants and their commerce. In order to operate properly, with less risk of shipwreck, and to transit as rapidly as ship design, operating condition and wind power would permit, ships had to be in ballast, properly loaded and packed with dunnage to avoid the shifting of weight which imperilled a ship's handling and operation.<sup>5</sup> A range of commodities, bulk items, generally with a low cost/unit, were suitable and served this functional purpose, but their selection, negotiation and handling were important elements in the safety of the ships and the merchants' investment. The availability in quantity, quality and in price, and the composition of goods and commodities at port/markets in general and at Macao in particular, therefore, was of paramount interest to merchants investing in local, regional, intra-regional and global maritime trade.

Having established the reduced size of the demographic pool from which Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants emerged, the rationale for their behaviour, and the reduced number of shipping assets that merchants owned, operated, financed, and facilitated commerce, three merchant typologies have been identified: primary (major, multiple, ship owners,

operators, and investors); secondary (single ship owners, operators, and investors); and tertiary (investors and/or commission agents). These typologies emphasise basic distinctions between ship owning, operating, and investing in maritime trade.

A few brief, general observations over our period about these typologies, merchant numbers, and career trajectories are possible. First, a very rough rule of thumb about the total number of merchants at Macao emerges. By using the criterion that has been advanced, around 10% of the mature Portuguese male population may be viewed and defined as merchants. Based upon the fluctuations of ship ownership over our time period, primary merchants or those owning and operating more than one ship fluctuated at different points in time from nil to two to five individuals. Secondary merchants or those owning and operating one ship fluctuated from four to sixteen individuals. Tertiary merchants or those individuals with relatively significant capital and/or credit investing capability in maritime commercial ventures fluctuated from fewer than fifteen up to forty individuals. There was a high level of risk involved in maritime trade that via insolvency and sudden death at sea logically influenced the variability and volatility in the length of an active merchant career, which at Macao was usually one generation, although there were instances of successive generations of merchants from the same or extended families. When succession occurred, it was more generally than not from the second and third typology of merchants at Macao.

## COMMERCE AND PROSPERITY

The commerce and prosperity of merchants at Macao was based upon the Chinese sub-regional market of Guangdong at Canton. The city of Macao was not outwardly prosperous in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but its merchant fleet was active and contributed to China's maritime economy. The categories of commodities that were in supply and demand in China were agricultural, textiles and natural dyes for textile production, metals and others. A detailed report on the Chinese goods from Canton that were available at Macao was prepared by a commercially astute Portuguese Crown official in 1771. At that time, there were twenty-one items exported from China at Macao. The composition of the principal export commodities was sugar, tea, tobacco,

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raw and colored silk and silk piece goods, zinc, alum and worked copper items. According to the report, there were thirty-three items imported into China via Macao. The composition of the principal imported commodities that flowed into the Macao market for sale at Canton was pepper, raw cotton, opium, rice, salt, tin, lead, silver, and sappanwood and included the ‘exotic’ China market demand for shark’s fin, bird’s nest and ivory.<sup>6</sup>

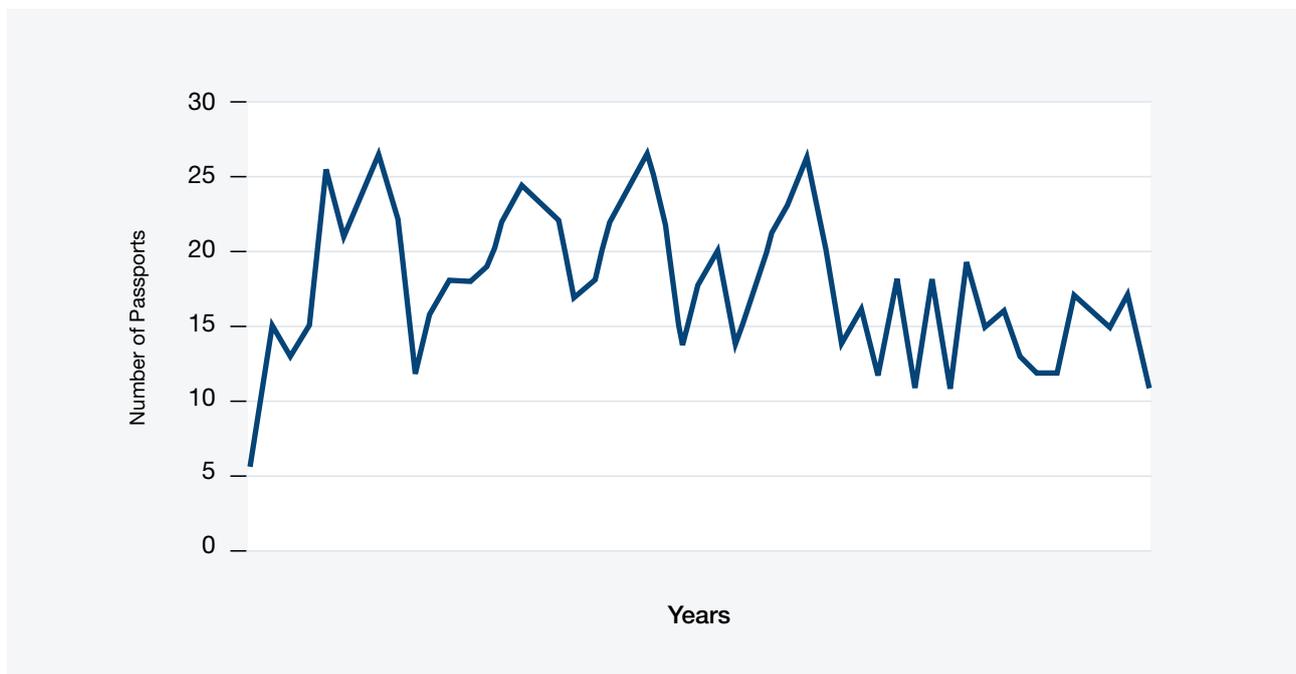
The records of the municipal council (*Senado da Câmara*) of Macao, as shown in Table 3, document the number of passports issued to all of the shipping that departed the city from 1784 to 1834. The passports were overwhelmingly issued to: 1) Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants (*casados* and *moradores*); 2) Portuguese merchants, usually from Portugal and/or the *Estado da Índia*, temporarily, residing in Macao; 3) a few ships owned by the municipal council; 4) a few ships owned by Armenian merchants residing in Macao; and 5) jointly owned Luso-Spanish shipping that operated out of both Manila and Macao. Eighteen passports, on the average, were issued annually.

While there is neither time nor space in this essay to discuss and examine these passports in detail, there

are a number of pertinent observations about them that can be advanced. First, Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants explored and exploited commercial opportunities that were located in an ever-widening and distant geographical arc from Macao, which emerged via: a) regional state systems such as the Tayson in central Vietnam, for example, and others requesting assistance; b) the Portuguese becoming commercially competitive in the intra-Asian trade from India in opium and raw cotton; c) the position of neutrality in some European conflicts adopted by the Portuguese Crown; and d) the ‘freeing of trade’ implemented by the Crown to obtain increased revenues from maritime trade from Asia in Portugal and accelerated, from 1808 to 1821, during the Napoleonic wars and invasion of Portugal, which provoked the Court’s transfer to Rio de Janeiro and its operation out of Brazil. Secondly, the Portuguese/*Macaense* merchant fleet at Macao, apparently became more efficient, increasing frequencies and making faster transit to their regular and additional annual major intra-Asian colonial and port cities ports of call.

By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the list of those ports for which passports were issued was under a general rubric called ‘from the Cape of Good Hope to inside’.

Table 3. Portuguese/*MACAENSE* shipping passports, 1784-1834



Sources: Arquivo Histórico de Macao (AHM), Macao, Leal Senado, ‘Passports’.

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They included passports for Chinese ports to the north of Macao, Manila and minor ports in the Philippines and the Indonesian Archipelago that encircled the Sulu Zone; all of the major and most of the minor ports of mainland Southeast Asia, the Indonesian Archipelago, and the Malay Peninsula, including Bencoolen, Malacca, Penang, and Singapore; and all of the major and most of the minor ports in the Bay of Bengal (Burma), India, Sri Lanka, and the French islands in the Indian Ocean to the island of Mozambique in East Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. A small number of passports were issued for the west coast of America and different islands in the Pacific Ocean, specifically, Palau in Micronesia. And, finally, there were passports regularly issued for Rio de Janeiro and Lisbon, as well as others sporadically issued for ports in northern Europe, the northeast coast of the United States of America, British settlements in the Caribbean, and for Luanda in Angola in Africa.

What about Portuguese merchants in Portugal and its Empire? From 1692 to around 1774, there were no fewer than nine companies that were established by merchants in Portugal, usually under the aegis of the Crown but always under its license that traded with Asia, in general, and Macao, in particular, with temporary monopoly rights over the voyages and trade. They all failed. All of them rarely included any direct ownership or participation by Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants in Macao and trade between Portugal and Asia, generally, was the preserve of merchants residing in Portugal.

By 1774 forwards (possibly earlier), changes emerged. The Crown discarded the monopoly of trade model in favour of licensing multiple, individual, and ship-owning merchants in Portugal from different parts of the Empire, including from Macao, to sail and trade between Europe and Asia. Those private merchants were organised as individuals, in partnerships, or limited companies, while the Crown maintained a limited number of sailings of ships belonging to the Portuguese Royal Navy. The shipping belonging to private merchants focused on commercially desirable destinations and markets in Asia and they were not restricted to calling at ports in the *Estado da Índia*. Out of the 500 matriculated merchants belonging to the *Mesa do Bem Comum* (the Lisbon based institution that organised merchants and their activities), only a small

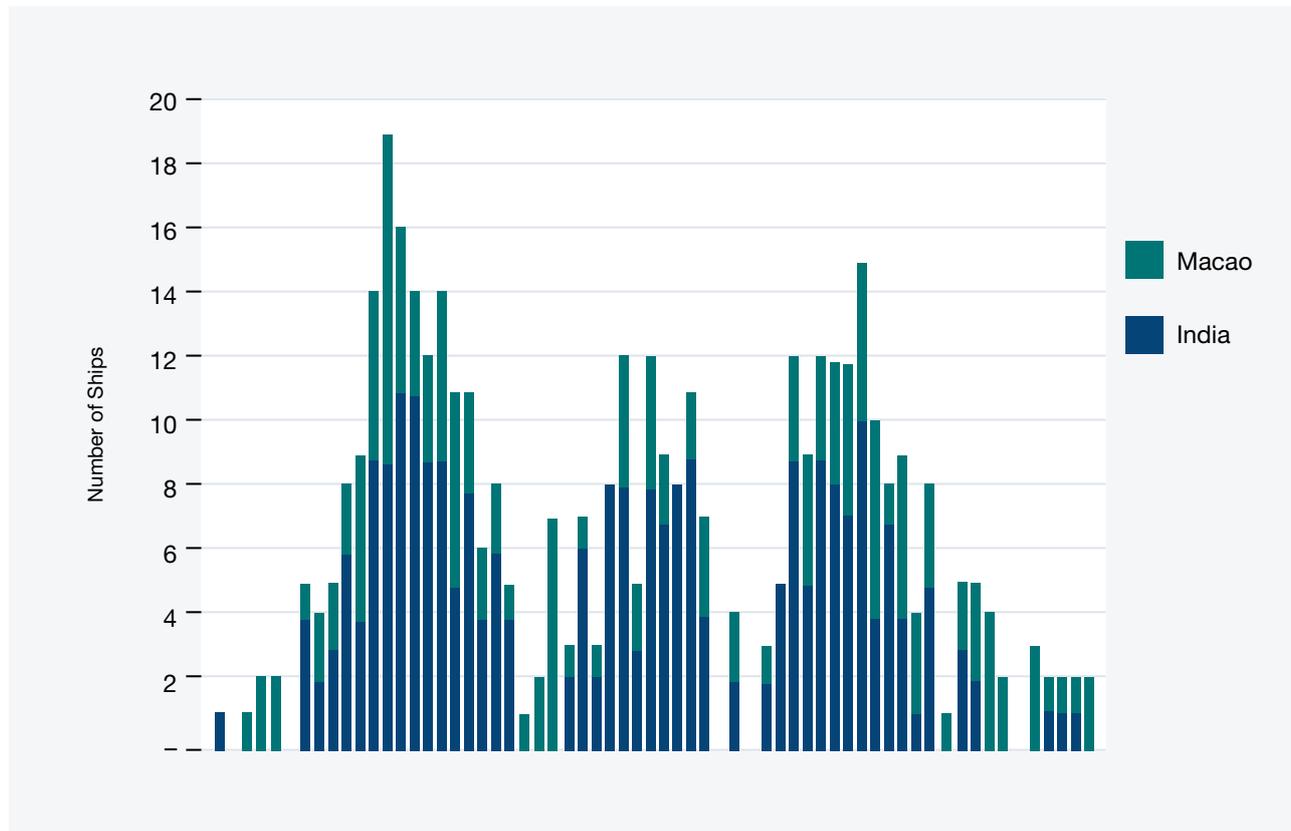
percentage, probably, as low as 10% were active in this trade between Portugal and Asia at any time over this period. The typologies of these merchants were similar to those Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants at Macao that have already been introduced.

The maritime trade between Portugal and Asia was no longer the preserve of the Crown and/or the Portuguese merchant interests in Lisbon as a consequence of the Crown's relatively newly found pragmatic attitude towards maritime trade that sought to benefit from the revenue-producing potential for the Crown from this liberalisation of mercantilist doctrines and policies. It is argued that the categorisation of this trade as being part of the earlier 'carreira da Índia' system is not useful or appropriate, since the Portuguese merchants shipping began to act more like other European East Indiamen as they commercially responded to the 'freeing of trade'. Some of the commercial practices and policies implemented by the Crown benefited all of the merchants that were involved, stimulated this trade, and produced significant revenues for the Crown from custom's duties collected on imports from Asia at Lisbon. These practices included: 1) the adjustment as commercial conditions dictated, upwards or downwards, of tariffs; 2) the facility of financing the payment of tariffs, initially, from cash terms to six months and, subsequently and successively, from six to twelve, from twelve to eighteen, and, finally, from eighteen to twenty-four months; 3) the regular authorisation of transshipments of cargoes; 4) 'draw-back' or the temporary re-exportation of a semi-finished good for the item to be finished in another market and, subsequently, re-introduced in Portugal, was introduced and permitted, for example, for solid white, semi-finished, cotton textiles from Coromandel that were imported from India to Lisbon, re-exported, temporarily, to the Netherlands or England, where they were dyed and patterned, returned to Lisbon for the payment of duty and sale and consumption in Portugal or other parts of Europe, Africa, and/or America; and 5) when faced by merchants failures or insolvencies, the installation by the Portuguese Crown of liquidators to work out and pay the outstanding debts.<sup>7</sup>

Some 10,836 Portuguese and foreign ships were recorded as arriving at Lisbon from 1772 to 1834. All of the arriving ships involved in the maritime

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Table 4. Portuguese shipping at Lisbon from India and Macao, 1772-1834



Sources: *Senado da Câmara* of Lisbon, *O Livro do Marco: Imposto da ancoargem* and AHU, *Maços de Macao* passports and 'visita de ouro' reports.

trade between Europe and Asia were Portuguese-owned, included limited numbers of ships owned and investments made by Portuguese/*Macaense* and Portuguese/Brazilian merchants, and numbered: 413 or 4% of the total.<sup>8</sup> The majority of Macao's and China's trade is found in the numbers of ships and their cargo manifests registered as having arrived in Lisbon from Macao. However, since cargoes from China were purchased in other parts of Asia and some of the Portuguese ships arriving from India were Macao owned and/or included cargo manifests of goods from China, the unit of analysis, for our purposes, has to include all of the Portuguese trade from Asia registered at Lisbon. Table 4 graphically depicts the total numbers and the distribution of Portuguese ships arriving annually at Lisbon from India and Macao from 1772-1834.

Prior to and over the long 18<sup>th</sup> century, until the introduction of revenue streams from gambling

and opium tax farming in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the municipal revenues of the city of Macao were obtained almost exclusively through the collection of customs duties on the goods and commodities that were imported into the city. Based upon those records, it is observed that Macao's finances went from weak, to precarious, to stable, and to relatively prosperous over the long 18<sup>th</sup> century. These revenue flows also serve as a good guide to Portuguese/*Macaense* merchant fortunes.

In the late 17<sup>th</sup> and well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the maritime customs duty rates were established on an annual basis by the *Senado da Câmara*. While the records of these annual deliberations do not stipulate the actual amounts of income received from the maritime customs duties, they are highly instructive and detail important aspects of the fiscal management of the city of Macao. They outline, in particular, a seemingly flexible and adaptable method of controlling the acquisition of

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new, and the re-payment of old, obligations, such as the loans from the Crown of Siam, the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* and the city's inhabitants, obtaining the necessary income to cover expenditures, and providing support for social institutions, such as the convent of Santa Clara.

There were three categories of rates that were determined on the basis of the type of good and commodity. The custom duty rate categories were based upon whether the delivered good or commodity was 1) *grossa* or bulk, 2)  *fina* or fine, which meant that it could be weighed in a small balance, and 3) silver. In general, the placement of a good or commodity into one of these three custom duty rate categories was well-known and established. Goods or commodities that were *grossa* or bulk items were, for example, pepper, opium, cloves, sandalwood, sappanwood, tin and lead;

a good or commodity that was  *fina* or fine were items such as coral, amber and, at times, textiles. Silver is a self-evident category which included un-minted bar as well as minted Spanish or European coin.

Table 5 outlines the maritime custom duty rates established by the *Senado da Câmara* at Macao from 1690 to 1741.<sup>9</sup> It demonstrates that the  *vereadores* or aldermen of Macao's municipal council would adjust maritime custom duty rates to generate sufficient operating income to cover municipal expenditures and obligations. Since many of these same municipal office holders were ship owners, operators and investors, they sought to insure the city's functioning at the lowest cost to their commercial interests. When necessity required, for example, to insure re-payment of a loan from the inhabitants of Macao to the city to cover expenditures in 1695, the aldermen increased duties on bulk goods

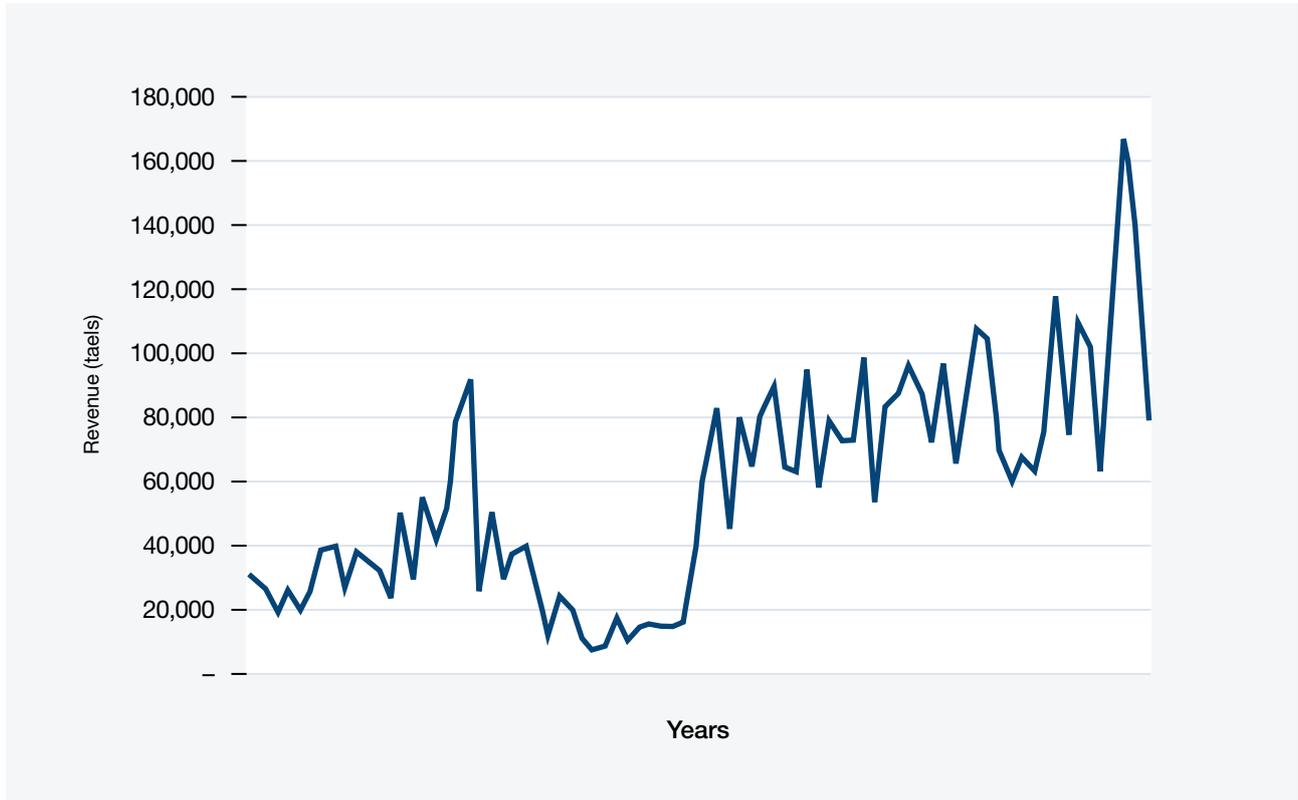
Table 5. Maritime custom duty rates at Macao, 1690-1741

Year	<i>Grossa</i>	<i>Fina</i>	Silver
1690	12%	8%	4%
1692	11%	8%	3%
1693	8%	5%	2%
1695	10%	5%	2%
1696	12%	8%	2%
1697/8	10%	10%	2%
1700	12%	12%	2%
1701/3	10%	5%	2%
1704	10%	5%	3%
1705	12%	5%	3%
1706/10	11%	5%	2%
1714	12½%	6%	2½%
1719/26	8%	4%	2%
1727/30	8%	5%	na
1734/6	8%	4%	2½%
1739/41	8%	4%	2½%

Source: *Arquivos de Macau*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series.

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Table 6. Macao’s customs duties revenue, 1764-1843



Source: AHU, *Maços de Macao*, 'Municipal Financial Balances' and other reports.

from 10% to 12%. Shortly thereafter, they were able to return this rate to its former level. To a limited degree, the fixing and adjustments to these rates may be seen as a barometer of the commercial performance and activities of the city’s merchant fleet. Through a close examination of these reports, evidence also emerges that the aldermen would handle certain goods and commodities on a discretionary basis in relation to market conditions and volumes of commodities that were being imported and the income those quantities were generating for the city.

For the eighty year period, from 1764-1843, the records for Macao’s total customs duties revenues and value of imports establish that the registered revenue was slightly over 4.5 million taels or 56,250 taels/year and permit those annual revenue flows to be graphically depicted as shown in Table 6. Furthermore, since we have the rates charged/category (a flat rate/chest for opium; 5% for coarse and fine goods, and 2% or less for silver) and volumes of the imported goods, it is

possible to conservatively estimate that the total value of goods imported by Portuguese/Macaense merchants into Macao and China over the same period was from 45 to 65 million taels.

Because of similar types of reports concerning the collection of customs duties, it is also possible to comment upon the composition and volumes of goods imported into Macao and China by Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants, in detail but not *in extenso*, over the sub-period from 1784-1828. The results are revelatory.

The revelation is not so much in the emergence or, in general, in the increased commercial importance of opium in trade with China but in the size and vitality of the Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants’ involvement in this commerce and the dependence upon this commerce that Macao and Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants developed. The Portuguese/*Macaense* merchant involvement in Indian opium sourced from Bengal and Malwa for the China market at Macao

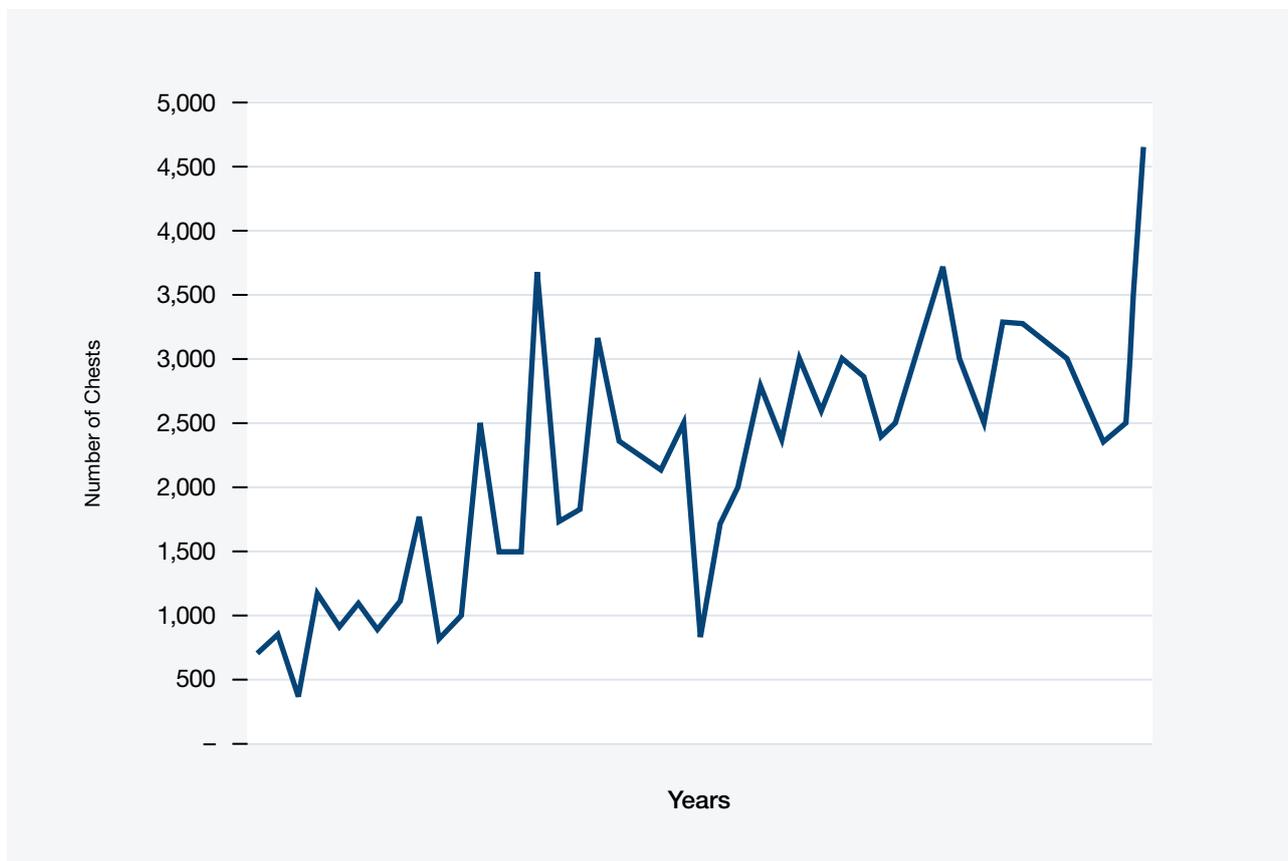
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was 800 chests annually in 1771. They were procuring Malwa and/or Bengal opium on the Malabar coast from 166 to 233 *taels* per chest and Bengal opium from 100 to 133 *taels* per chest; this opium was selling in China from 260 to 750 *taels* per chest.<sup>10</sup> In comparison with other goods and commodities that they were selling in China in greater volume, such as pepper and raw cotton, Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants were obtaining their largest gross profit margins by far on their Bengal and Malwa opium transactions.

Over a forty-five period, from 1784 to 1828, Portuguese authorities at Macao quantified the Portuguese/*Macaense* merchant involvement in the Indian opium trade, as shown in Table 7, as being a total of 98,847 chests for the sub-period or an average 2,196 chests/year to China.<sup>11</sup> From 1784-1803, they paid a 7.2 tael, flat rate/chest, import duty to the Crown/municipal council custom house at Macao

that conceptually remained a flat rate/chest but was increased to 16 *taels*/chest from 1804-1828 forwards. Since the Crown also permitted the transshipment of goods at Macao that did not have to pay import duty, including opium, it is estimated that the Portuguese/*Macaense* merchants transhipped around 5,000-10,000 chests of additional quantities of opium for their commercial activities in the Malay and other ports in the South China Sea, which was equivalent to 5-10% of the amount of opium that they imported over the same sub-period into Macao and China. Customs revenues on imported non-opium goods and commodities versus opium were from 1784 to 1828 almost clearly divided into two equal halves (51:49%). Simply put, opium had become the lynchpin of the Portuguese/*Macaense* merchant fortunes and the basis for Macao's commercial success and re-newed prosperity at the end of the long 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Table 7. Opium imports by Portuguese/*MACAENSE* merchants at Macao, 1784-1828 (number of chests)



Source: AHU, *Maços de Macao*, Cx. 60, no. 6 (27/i/1830).

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## CONCLUSIONS

There are a number of specific and more general observations and conclusions that can be drawn from this essay, despite its preliminary nature. Specifically, it has examined merchants and commerce found in one locality at Macao in China and in one dual community—the Portuguese/*Macaense*—and made some comparisons with other Portuguese merchant communities elsewhere over the same time frame. The relatively small communal size, its demographic composition, the reduced numbers of merchants and the apparent tendency towards the concentration of wealth and power, is striking and has important implications. This essay described and examined in some detail a range of issues: communal and merchant demography; key parameters for behaviour and categorisation; general market and commercial conditions and merchant and communal performance and profitability. Those ranges of issues as well as others not discussed in this essay have been and will continue

to be utilised in a broader comparative manner with other Portuguese and other European and/or Asian merchant communities.

This case study of Portuguese merchants and commerce engages and provides the basis for broadening the current state of the field in several directions: for example, 1) within the imperial and metropolitan Portuguese economy and whether this commerce can be considered as dependent, inter-dependent or independent upon the British economy; and 2) within the development of European imperial and colonial administration in Asia and imperial Qing China and emerging overseas Chinese communal commercial activities within Southeast Asia. It certainly attests that the size and number of Portuguese merchants and the commerce that they developed and in which they competed in China over the long 18<sup>th</sup> century was intrinsically and totally disproportionate to their size and their historically perceived capabilities, which made Macao an important global ‘hotspot’ over the long 18<sup>th</sup> century. **RC**

## NOTES

- 1 See George Bryan Souza, *The Survival of Empire: Portuguese Trade and Society in China and the South China Sea, c. 1630-1754*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 31-33.
- 2 See Timothy J. Coates, *Convicts and Orphans: Forced and State-Sponsored Colonizers in the Portuguese Empire, 1550-1755*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 181 and 182.
- 3 See A. M. Martins do Vale, *Os Portugueses em Macau (1750-1800)*. Lisboa: Instituto Português do Oriente, 1997, p. 119.
- 4 See Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Lisbon, *Maços de Macao*, Cx. 31, no. 20 (26/i/1811); Cx. 34, no. 10 (5/xii/1812); Cx. 35, no. 39 (12/xii/1813); Cx. 37, no. 79 (15/xii/1814); Cx. 39, no. 8 (4/xii/1815); Cx. 40, no. 36 (7/xi/1816); Cx. 43, no. 32 (1/xiii/1817); Cx. 49, no. 25 (22/iii/1823); Cx. 53, no. 2 (27/i/1825); Cx. 55, no. 17 (15/xii/1825); Cx. 58, no. 34 (8/ii/1828); and Cx. 61, no. 25 (13/ii/1830); and Anders Ljungstedt, *An Historical Sketch of the Portuguese Settlements in China and of the Roman Catholic Church and Mission in China and Description of the City of Canton*. Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1836; reprint: Hong Kong: Viking Hong Kong Publications, 1992, pp. 161-164.
- 5 See George Bryan Souza, ‘Ballast Goods: Chinese Maritime Trade in Zinc and Sugar in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, in *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400-1750* edited by R. Ptak and D. Rothermund. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990, pp. 291-315.
- 6 See AHU, *Maços de Macao*, Cx. 6, no. 28, (10/xi/1771), which has been transcribed and published, see A. M. Martins do Vale, *Os Portugueses em Macau (1750-1800)*, appendix 20.
- 7 For the petitions from private merchants dealing with Asia in general and China (Macao) in particular to the Crown (the Royal Treasury) and its decisions and policies concerning customs and commercial treatment from 1732 to 1799, see Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo (IAN/TT), Lisbon, *Conselho da Fazenda, Repartição Índia e Ordens, Decretos, Maços 1-10*, Caixas 890-899.
- 8 For the numbers, names, dates of arrival and cargo manifests of nearly all the arriving Portuguese shipping including those from Asia in general and Macao in particular at Lisbon from 1772-1834, see the sixty volume collection entitled: *O Livro do Marco: Imposto da ancoragem*, in the Senado da Câmara of Lisbon and the passports and ‘*visita de ouro*’ reports in the sixty-five boxes of loose leafed bundles of documents dealing with Macao in the AHU, *Maços de Macao* collection.
- 9 For the sources for this table and the discussion that follows on the *Senado da Câmara* deliberations, see *Arquivos de Macau*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vols. I: 1, p. 29; 2, pp. 81, 97; 3, pp. 137, 155, 159, 187, 207, 241, 257; II: pp. 1, 7, 20, 34, 55, 67, 83, 89, 97, 108; II: 3, pp. 133; II: 4, p. 195; II: 5, pp. 284, 309, 338, 354, 376; III: 1, pp. 16-17, 36, 51-2, 82, 98, 105, 121-122, 159, 174, 183-184, 200, 207, 213, 218, 241, 243; and IV: pp. 2, 76.
- 10 See AHU, *Maços de Macao*, Cx. 6, no. 28 (10/xi/1771) and A. M. Martins do Vale, *Os Portugueses em Macau (1750-1800)*, appendix 20.
- 11 See AHU, *Maços de Macao*, Cx. 60, no. 6 (27/i/1830).