An Extended Urban History Review of Macao and Hong Kong through the End of the 20th Century

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ABSTRACT: Macao and Hong Kong were founded as port cities for the China trade around 1557 and 1842, respectively. This paper discusses the rich but understudied urban history of these two cities. The paper adopts an evolutionary perspective and uses three research vectors: (i) the nature of the relations between the cities and their respective hinterlands, (ii) the role and character of mercantile elites, and (iii) their urban morphology. The argument is that what enabled these two cities to survive as colonial cities on the South China Sea was their ability to adapt to or transform their environments, and to establish social, cultural, economic and political dynamics with China and with other neighbouring countries. One of the key findings is that the urban history of these cities is crucial to understanding their current roles in the local, regional and global urban hierarchy.

KEYWORDS: Colonial urban history; Port city development; Macao; Hong Kong; Asia.

1. Introduction

Macao and Hong Kong were founded as port cities for the China trade around 1557 and 1842, respectively (Mesquita, 1995). The handover of these two territories to the Chinese administration in the late 1990s has spurred attention to their evolutionary urban histories. With this change it was supposed that Macao and Hong Kong would become more Chinese; however, their heritage and legacy will likely put a distinct mark upon their future. The past cannot be surgically severed from the present or the future. Macao and Hong Kong will certainly be Chinese, but uniquely so (Smith, 1995, p. xv).

Among the many books written in the second half of the 1990s about the colonial history of either Macao or Hong Kong, various deserve to be highlighted, e.g. Smith (1995), Porter (1996), and Mesquitela (1996) on Macao, and Chengkang (1996), Faure (1997), and Welsh (1997) on Hong Kong. Almost all of these books study these cities individually over an extended period of time in ways that are interesting to a wide audience of history enthusiasts (Konvitz, 1993). However, this paper fulfils a lacuna in the comparative scholarship of colonial port cities in the Pearl River Delta (PRD), because with the exception of Basu's (1985) work on port cities in Asia I could not locate any other major comparative urban history accounts. I employed a long-term approach, conceivably because returning

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to Chinese rule represents the latest stage of a cycle that started with the maritime trade of the fifteenth century. As these ports opened to Western trade, they became centres of world mercantilism. Hong Kong benefited greatly from its deep-water port and relatively distant enterprises, while Macao specialized in trading relations between Canton and Japan.

This paper discusses the rich but understudied (Abbas, 1997) urban history of these two cities. Based on the major works identified above, this paper adopts an evolutionary perspective and utilizes three research vectors: (i) the nature of the relations between the cities and their respective hinterlands, (ii) the role and character of mercantile elites, and (iii) their urban morphology. On each of these three research vectors, I have attempted to undertake a cross-disciplinary and comparative approach. This paper argues that what enabled these two cities to survive as colonial cities on the South China Sea was their ability to adapt to or transform their environment, and to establish social, cultural, economic and political trade dynamics with China and other neighbouring countries.

This paper makes an overall contribution to the study of the colonial city in Asia by illustrating its main key features. These include: geographic locational advantage; access and settlement by diverse peoples, groups, communities, and trade diasporas; the conjunction of several diverse economies, including commerce, agriculture, extraction, and industry; political continuity and protection; the symbiosis of hinterland and periphery, usually within a maritime trade system; and a boundary or frontier between cultures (Porter, 1996, p. 8). One of the key findings is that the urban history of these cities has been crucial to understanding their current roles in the local, regional and global urban hierarchy.

2. Early history of the South China Sea

China has a long and eventful history. However, for most of it there was "no direct contact between the West and China" (Endacott and Hinton, 1968, p.5). Levathes (1994) has even claimed that China has always had a certain ambiguity toward foreigners and foreign influence, as if it was a hostile refuge in isolation from the outside world. Nonetheless, just before the arrival of Portuguese navigators in the East, some Western travellers and merchants established various contacts with China as early as the thirteenth century. The most well-known was Marco Polo who lived in China for almost two decades (1275–1292). His writings played an important part in the European voyages of discovery to the Far East and to the West. The Portuguese led the way but they were soon followed by the Spanish, the Dutch, the English and the French, while the Russians pushed their way overland towards the boundaries of China (Endacott and Hinton, 1968, p.6).

Before 1498, when Vasco da Gama and his fleet rounded the Cape of Good Hope and landed in East Africa on their way to India, very large Chinese ships had already crossed the China seas and Indian Ocean, from Taiwan to the Persian Gulf and to distant Africa (Jacques, 2009, p.79). The Chinese knew about Europe from Arab traders but had no desire to go there because, in their perspective, those lands offered only wool and wine, which was not very enticing (Levathes, 1994, p. 20). From 1405 to 1433 China extended its sphere of influence throughout the Indian Ocean, such that half of the world was in China's grasp. China could have become a great colonial power, a hundred years before the great age of European exploration and expansion. However due to the Chinese emperor's prohibition on overseas travel and shipbuilding, Japanese pirates ravaged the China coast. The world leader in science and technology in the early fifteenth century was "left at the doorstep of history," as burgeoning international trade and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution propelled the Western world into the modern age (Levathes, 1994, pp. 20–1).

In fact, China withdrew from the seas at the moment when European powers were venturing farther and farther from the safe haven of the Mediterranean, seeking a sea route to the Far East. Portugal sought a

passage to China in the 1440s by exploring the West Coast of Africa (Levathes, 1994). Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, Vasco da Gama reached Calicut in India in 1498, and Fernão Magalhães fulfilled Columbus' dream of reaching the China seas by sailing West in 1521 (Bergreen, 2004). The voyage of Vasco da Gama was crucial in opening possibilities for navigation and commerce between Europe and Asia (Miaobing, 1994). The Portuguese fiercely made their way into the South China Sea. They constructed trading posts, a system already in practice on the West coast of Africa, as Steven Spielberg's 1997 film *Amistad* illustrated so well. The Portuguese sailors created networks of fortresses in the conquered possessions not only on the Western coast of Africa but also in Goa, Damão, and Diu in what is today India; and later in Macao, which was recognized as a territory under Portuguese administration by the Chinese as early as 1557 (Balsas, 2018). The Portuguese centred their commercial interests in Malabar, Malacca, Moluccas, Banda, Ceylon, China and Japan (Knight and Liss, 1991).

According to Braga (1963), the progress of the Portuguese in Asia, after they found the Indian coast, was truly remarkable. Factories were set up in all the important centres of Western India, as well as in the African trade depots on the long route between Europe and the East. The Portuguese had to face the opposition of the Muslim fleets, but the seaworthiness of their ships was proven in the battles that followed, and the command of the Indian Ocean changed to the hands of the Western people (Braga, 1963, p. 25). It was not long before the Portuguese took Malacca (1511), and expeditions were sent to all the great trading people of those days. From the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Chinese suffered devastating raids by Japanese pirates. According to Levathes (1994, p. 181), "they took over entire Chinese villages, robbing and terrorizing the inhabitants."

In 1513, a Portuguese trading venture arrived at the mouth of the Canton River. The first Portuguese to visit China was Jorge Alvares, who carried a stone pillar on which the arms of Portugal had been engraved. Portuguese traders began visiting China, carrying spices from the East Indies and cotton goods from India, as well as European artifacts. Portuguese ships visited Chinese ports mostly at the invitation of Chinese merchants. One of the main reasons for the rapid development of Macao, from its foundation until the early decades of the seventeenth century, was the regular voyages made between India and Japan.

In 1543, the Portuguese discovered Japan, and a thriving trade commenced; the Portuguese acquired ever-greater quantities of Chinese silk that they sold in Japan and Europe. They also purchased porcelains and other wares of China, as well as musk, rhubarb, camphor, goods of bronze and brass, and many other things. For these goods the Portuguese paid in silver, or they traded pepper and other spices, as well as cotton fabrics and other merchandise (Braga, 1963). The Portuguese showed the Japanese how to use firearms, which at that time were unknown in Japan. In the 1550s, China began to trade with Portugal through Macao, and in the 1570s, with Spain at Manila, the latter's base in the Philippines. Commercial relations with other European colonial powers followed (Levathes, 1994).

3. The establishment of Macao

In the matter of two or three decades, the little settlement of Macao grew from an obscure fishing village into a thriving entrepôt, "rivalling the most important trade centres even in Europe" (Braga, 1963, p. 29). Portuguese seafarers settled in Macao over four hundred years ago. The territory began as a small harbour where ships took shelter and where merchandise could be dried and cleaned. Macao was a haven for pirates and refugees escaping problems in other parts of Asia, and a shelter for fishermen. The establishment of the Portuguese in Macao was more than a mere favour. They were allowed to settle on the mouth of PRD because local people could benefit from their presence.

According to tradition, the small fishing village was given to the Portuguese in exchange for the defeating of pirates. The first Portuguese to arrive in Macao would have landed close to the temple of Á-Má (or *Barra*). It is commonly believed that this gave origin to the name Macao, derived from *A-Ma-Kau* or the mouth of Á-Má (Broeze, 1989). Macao was set apart from other colonial Asian port cities. Porter (1996, p. 4) argued that Macao borrowed something from the pattern of traditional Asian ports but never emerged to become one of the great Western colonial emporia. Like the smaller Asian ports, Macao was suited to access the trade of a limited hinterland as an entrepôt in the traditional maritime trade network, but it was inadequate for exploiting the large-scale production for export from a vast inland region, which required large ships and deep-water port facilities (Broeze, 1989). The port of Hong Kong would later emerge to perform some of those functions.

Nonetheless, Macao played a key role in the Portuguese Empire (Mullin, 1994). Based on the Phoenician model of fortresses and trading posts, the Portuguese traders established in Macao, in the early seventeenth century, one of the richest entrepôts of the world (Cremer, 1987). At that time, Canton was the only port through which external trade could be done from Southern China, and also between foreigners (Gunn, 1996). The Portuguese were the only foreigners allowed to travel to and trade in Canton (this was so until 1685). Macao functioned as a key centre for supplies. From the small peninsula of Macao, the Portuguese laid the foundations for a continuous and profitable trade, controlling links between China and Japan for almost a century (1543–1639).

One of the most outstanding reasons for the development of Macao was the commerce between the Chinese and Japanese in which the Portuguese played the role of intermediary (i.e., the Chinese of the period were forbidden to trade with Japan, and the Japanese could not enter China). These two nations were at war with each other because of the unrestrained pillage by Japanese pirates all along the Chinese coast (Gomes, 1995, p. 132). Thus, the Portuguese merchants enjoyed exclusivity in the acquisition, transport and sale of Chinese silk, which was eagerly sought by the Japanese. This gave rise to the development of neighbouring regions of silk production, an industry that expanded quickly, bringing prosperity to Southern China (Braga, 1963). In 1663, the lucrative trade with Japan came to an end. This represented a great loss for the economy of Macao.

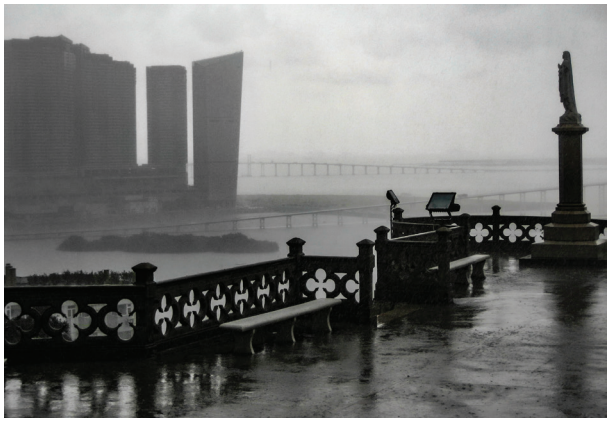
The members of this Western community created demands for supplies in their homes as well as provisions for their ships. They required biscuits, bread and cakes, non-spirituous wines, fresh vegetables and fruits, and furniture of European design, as well as clothing and footwear different from anything seen before in China. All these promoted livelihoods for Chinese artisans and craftsmen, as well as tradesmen (Braga, 1963, p. 30). For their ships the Portuguese required biscuits and bread; smoked, salted and preserved meats and fish; and fresh and preserved fruits and vegetables; which also created an indirect demand for such things as cordage, sails, lumber, nails, and so on. Braga (1963, p. 31) also stated that "the influence of all this on the life of the Chinese in the cities (and countryside) close to Macao could not have been small," and besides the farmers, artisans and craftsmen, there were traders and peddlers, not to speak of those who made a living engaged in the carrying of goods (Endō, 1969).

It has been said that "Portugal's zeal for missionary enterprise exceeded the nation's desire for wealth" (Braga, 1963, p. 27). This was often perceived because the Portuguese traders navigated with Jesuit priests and the support of the Catholic church. The imposing facade of St. Paul's cathedral (the landmark of Macao) is a testament to the Jesuits' achievements. The Jesuits were responsible for the first Western-style university in Asia. Besides Catholicism, Jesuit priests introduced Western medicine to Japan and China, as well as installing the first movable printing presses on which they edited

religious and grammatical books. The power of the church often went beyond the religious interfering in the territory's administration. The Church also held a vast number of properties and wealth in Macao.

The Portuguese began building the city of Macao even before Portugal had obtained settlement rights in Macao (Boxer, 1993). Keeping with traditional Portuguese city planning, they chose land in the hills by the sea, to have easy access to the water and for strategic reasons. The early settlement was situated in the Southern part of the peninsula, around the inner bay and bordered by the *Praia Grande* (Infante et al., 1995). In the layout of the city, great consideration was given to the location of the various religious and administrative institutions, and less attention was given to the topography and natural resources (Marcelo, 1996, p. 431). There were several fortifications, similar to those of Portugal and its colonies. A wall that divided the peninsula and the Southern half was called *"Cidade Cristã"*. Chinese farming villages soon appeared around the Portuguese enclave.

Maze-like passages typical of Muslim cities, which run through Macao, could appear chaotic at first, but they provided protection from the outside and simultaneously gave the city its picturesque appearance. Orthogonal street-grid planning was not introduced in Macao until the 1920s; many of these meandering streets still exist in the centre of the city, giving it a "distinct Portuguese atmosphere" (Marcelo, 1996, p. 432). Many trading houses were built along the waterfront (i.e. *Praia Grande*) (Ortet, 1993; Lam and Scott, 2012). A peculiar form of architecture and port city planning was developed featuring a mix of European (Konvitz, 1978) and Asian styles (Davies, 1976). Today, very few of the old buildings on the waterfront have survived in Macao. Oyster-shell and glass windows were introduced with new conveniences for habitations and community life (Braga, 1963). Until the annexation of Hong Kong, numerous European merchants, starting with England's East India Company, built their residences in Macao (Marcelo, 1996).



Macao's skyline on a rainy day, 2010. Photo by the author.

4. Competitors for China's trade

With the fusion of the crowns of Portugal and Castile, the hostility of the enemies of Castile towards the Portuguese overseas territories, namely Macao — which enjoyed exclusive commerce with China and Japan — became stronger (Gomes, 1995, p. 136). Initially, the Portuguese were the only Western presence in the region (Flores, 1994). From the seventeenth century onwards, however, the Portuguese had to compete with the Dutch, who overran Malacca in 1641, and with the English, for the highly profitable silk and silver trade, and for control of the European trade in the exotic goods of the Far East.

Macao was clearly declining. China was raising obstacles to foreign influence. To worsen the situation of an impoverished Macao, there was a terrible outbreak of plague, completely paralyzing commerce. During the Napoleonic Wars, and part of an Anglo-Portuguese alliance, the British utilized the various Portuguese colonies, in order to protect them from the French (Gomes, 1995, p. 140).

By about 1750, Macao had drawn into itself, and had become more autonomous socially and economically, but nevertheless "survived without its former prosperity" by relying on local and regional

trade with Southeast Asia and China (Porter, 1993, p. 9). European trade was now in the hands of the English and Dutch. The British public wanted Chinese tea, and fortunately (at least for them) British traders could also offer opium cultivated in India. By the early 1800s, despite the emperor's attitude, the opium trade was thriving. British opium merchants justified the traffic by arguing that they were only satisfying the market. Opium was an ideal commodity, imperishable and extremely profitable. The Chinese denounced the traffic as immoral, but were outraged only when the balance of trade was turned against them.

In 1839, strong-arm tactics by Chinese officials charged with stamping out the opium trade produced the confiscation and destruction of cargoes and threats against the British merchants, which led to war. This war ended in August 1842, with the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in which the Chinese emperor was obliged to open up five "Treaty Ports" to untrammeled British trade and to cede Hong Kong, already occupied in 1841 by British troops, as a base for protecting this trade (Lewis, 1983, p. 60).

5. The establishment of Hong Kong

It is well accepted by several scholars that the foundation of the British colony of Hong Kong in 1842, and its fast development, was one of the reasons for the decline of Macao (Abbas, 1997; Calado et al., 1985; Pires, 1993). Hong Kong was founded as a port for the China trade in 1842. Davies (1976) even affirmed that Hong Kong is the port and the port is Hong Kong. This statement reflects quite well the importance of this maritime port for this British colony in the PRD.

The port shaped the structure of the early settlement and influenced the morphology of the entire city. Many writers have described the beauty and grandeur of the harbour and its natural setting (Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1996). However, it was the positional advantage and physical conditions that favoured the growth of its shipping and commerce. Hong Kong was organized as a free port, and soon was able to demonstrate its value both for transshipment of goods and for access to China's coastal commerce opportunities.

As a port city on the edge of China, Hong Kong experienced rapid economic growth and demand for raw materials, labour, and technologies. Hong Kong was also "a gate for the introduction of Western influences upon the Chinese" (Smith, 1995, p. xvi). With the development of the harbour, trade and shipping industries prospered. In addition to the establishment of a great number of trading companies, various kinds of factories (based on foreign capital) were also established.

Hong Kong survived on its ability to trade; and trade thrived because the institutions for trade were put in place and because a mercantile community grew up in Hong Kong that actively sought opportunities for trade (Faure, 1997, p. 117). The population of

Hong Kong General Post Office, Connaught Place, 2014. Photo by the author.

Hong Kong has always been predominantly Chinese. It was politically overlaid by colonial rulers, and in its first few decades, commercially populated by foreign merchants (Smith, 1995). Most of the Chinese who came to Hong Kong immediately after the British took possession were opportunists, collaborators with the British or Chinese fugitives. Among Hong Kong's early merchants were the taipans of Western companies, the *compradores* who served as intermediaries between Western trading houses and the Chinese population, and Chinese merchants of imports and exports.

The Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce (HKCC) was formed in 1861, to represent the interests of Western merchants in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Chinese General Chamber of Commerce (HKCGCC) was formed much later in 1913. In political terms, one might say that the entrepreneurs quite readily accepted a conservative working relationship with the Hong Kong government. No serious constitutional demand was ever made in the name of the mercantile community. Therefore, "no impetus for social reform was driven from its imagination" (Faure, 1997, p. 118).

From the very outset, the development of Hong Kong as a trading centre in Southern China was characterized by an unremitting search for further land suitable for urban development — a pressure imposed on the territory by its "ever-expanding population and vigorous economy" (Pryor and Pau, 1993, p. 98). A comprehensive plan was never drafted for Hong Kong in its early days of colonization (Hideo, 1996). Prior to the territory's handover to China in 1997, the Planning Department prepared a seven-objective development plan covering the following elements: population and housing; airport height and density; businesses and commercial activities; industry; port development, transport; urban design and landscape; environment; district governance; public consultation; implementation and monitoring (Planning Department, 1991).

In the early days, the British divided the settlement of Hong Kong Island into quarters where members of the various racial groups could live their separate existence, each quarter having its own distinctive lifestyle. The central part and the Mid-Levels of Hong Kong were classified as the European domain, while the Chinese settlements were at the Eastern and Western parts of the city (known as bazaars). The common residential buildings of the early inhabitants were of the traditional Chinese style (Tregear and Berry, 1959). Land reclamation and economic development has been critical to sustaining Hong Kong's role as a major international finance centre.

Santo Agostinho Square, Macao, 2010. Photo by the author.

6. Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have attempted to characterize and discuss some of the most important aspects of the urban history of these two cities (Sena, 1994; Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1996). More than robust findings, this study constitutes a comprehensive synopsis of the urban development of these two colonial port cities in Asia. As recognized by Marcelo (1996, p. 434), synthesizing the history of Macao in only a few short pages is a "difficult task because of its long span over multiple centuries".

Through the use of mostly qualitative evidence I have shown that what enabled these two cities to survive as colonial cities on the South China Sea was their ability to adapt or transform their environment (Chung

et al., 2001), and to establish social, cultural, economic and political dynamics with China and with other neighbouring Asian countries. The history of Macao and Hong Kong is in itself representative of the history of Asia's relationship with Europe (Rifkin, 2004).

Two key findings are worth highlighting. First, the urban histories of these cities are crucial to understanding their present roles in the local, regional and global urban hierarchy (that is, Hong Kong a world class city, and Macao a smaller but economically powerful territory). Second, the biggest challenge Macao and Hong Kong face in the near future is the need to re-define themselves to answer the question of "where and how do we go from here?" and finally to assess whether centuries of Portuguese and British legacies and influence in Asia are worth preserving and extending beyond the fifty-year transition periods. I anticipate that the urban future of these two Special Administrative Regions will remain visibly Chinese; nonetheless, they will certainly exist as unique and globally connected urban paradigms of a European presence in Asia.

Hong Kong Island, Victoria Harbor's waterfront, 2014. Photo by the author.

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