

A Cultural Narrative of Macau

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Macau became the first European settlement on the South Chinese coast in 1557, and will be remembered as the last one after the end of 1999. For centuries Macau has been an *ad hoc* city-state and has developed a distinct culture of metropolis. A port city, Macau survives, prospers, and benefits from being at the margins of the Eurocentric world economy and in the Sinocentric tributary order on the periphery of the Chinese empire. Through the layering of histories, Macau illuminates the cultural symbiosis of East and West, which is best exemplified in urban and architectural characteristics of quotidian life, such as plaza, road network, street arcade and verandah. The paper suggests that cultivating the symbiotic conditions of quotidian life would be an important strategy for continuing Macau's characteristics as a metropolis.

Being at the marginality of cultural geography, Macau can accommodate both the Portuguese desire to establish a settlement for trade and the Chinese will to designate an entry port for foreigners. After centuries of development, Macau provides us with many layers of historical understanding. One of these may exhibit Macau as a city of artifacts of the history of European expansion in Asia. This layer entails the balance of political power and its changes through cultural meditation. A second layer is about the growth of commerce between East and West in which the role of Macau is played as a trading emporium in exchanges of commodities and cultures. A third layer may regard Macau as a beginning point in East Asia for extending Christianity in the history of missionary ventures. Still, another point of view may seek to unfold the history of Macau, in particular, a city of two intersecting cultural origins. Then, Macau may be seen as a city for the symbiosis of East and West. A symbiotic relationship best describes Macau's references, cultural origins and the changing reality of the present conditions.

SYMBIOSIS

Symbiosis is an active state of existence achieved by recognizing differences. A symbiotic relationship appears to include movements of inclusion, rather than exclusion. Between opposing forces, a symbiotic state often accommodates differences while searching for possibilities to benefit all. Symbiosis may utilize movements and forces to arrive at new opportunities instead of obtaining status quo harmony, compromise and eclecticism. The space for symbiosis lies in the intersecting zone of forces, whose necessary condition is to suspend offense, prejudice, disbelief, and mistrust. A symbiotic balance is temporarily achieved by networking strategies for mobility rather than operational rules on stability. The symbiosis of differences generally does not follow the Marxist dialectical progress to reach the "third," namely from thesis and antithesis to synthesis. On the other hand, a symbiotic process does provide a shift of practices from indifference to recognition of difference while identifying a common ground for discursive possibilities.

Macau mainly has two cultural origins: the Portuguese and the Chinese. The quotidian culture of Macau appears to be neither purely Chinese nor strictly Portuguese in practice. On the contrary, Macau is often regarded as a place at the margin of either cultural world. This neither/nor phenomenon entails a symbiotic relationship taking place at the intersecting zone of worlds culturally and geographically.

The cultural archetypes of the two worlds are vividly expressed in their literary works of epic mythology and narratives: *Os Lus'adas*, by Luis de Camões (1524?-80), and *Hong-lou-meng* (also known as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*), by Cao Xueqin (1717?-63). The two literary works may be understood as distillations of their respective worldviews. In them, juxtaposed mythologies and narratives of contemporary history and culture are constructed in an allegorical form. In both, the gods intrude in quotidian affairs, sometimes in dreams, and interfere at critical points of events and then let them follow their own courses. Yet the two portray distinctive views on the world; one is enclosed, self-contained, introverted, and a garden-like seclusion while the other is unbounded and extroverted, demonstrating an incomplete empire pursuing an unfulfilled, world-encompassing destiny.

Camões composed *Os Lus'adas* as an epic celebration of "Portugueseness" during his travel through Portuguese Asia and back to Lisbon between 1553 and 1570. His narrative focuses on the voyage of Vasco da Gama (1469-24) to India in 1497. Camões exalts the Portuguese as the embodiment of a heroic legacy; or the legacy of Vergil in the period of Discoveries.

Archetype and allegory in *Hong-lou-meng* represent the social life and customs of Chinese civilization around the setting of a self-sufficient, self-contained, well-maintained garden. The Chinese world was a closed, organic totality, possessing an inherent moral order governed by "mandated" rite. The traditional tribute system of relations, personified by ritual, attempts to project the hierarchical, moral order of the center over the periphery but focusing attention inward. Whereas the Portuguese world was characterized by heroic continuity, the Chinese world was characterized by hierarchical continuity. By accident, two distinctive, powerful cultures have to settle in Macau by chance. Their practices have been oscillating cultural impulses, therefore preserving each other's core-beliefs while seeking out new opportunities for the common good.

METROPOLIS

In his book on *Laws*, Plato outlines how a new *polis* is to be planned. The first question to arise is where to locate the new city, which is to be planned, of course, on the land. The *polis* itself and most of the population were to be settled inland, away from the seashore, to avoid, insofar as possible, contact with the sea and with maritime and overseas influences. Plato believes that a *polis* should be as self-sufficient as possible. He eliminates, as far as possible, the

maritime and foreign trade from the potential economic resources, because he wants the society to be virtuous and peaceful, so that it can enjoy stable good government.¹ His precepts are not aimed at security only, but at virtue and happiness through “goodness.” To achieve this goal, however, Plato insists that opportunity be strictly limited in two ways. First by screening the lure of overseas adventure, speculation and profit, secondly by restricting the extent of territory. Until the Industrial revolution in western Europe in the nineteenth century, there could have been only two major sources of wealth: income from the land and profits from trade.²

Plato’s view of the ideal *polis* offers an explanation of the general fear of maritime activities and foreign influences by appealing to the issues of security and continuity. In Europe and China, the policy to forbid entrance to foreigners was often regarded as an effective measure to stop the influence of foreign policy and foreign interests in daily domestic affairs. In the late Ming Dynasty, the Chinese emperors did not like the frequent trading activities along the coast and even forbid all marine travel and commerce. However, the founding of Macau asserts the Chinese notion that stability and isolation could not guarantee security for an indefinite period.

Aristotle, in his Book VII *Politics*, discusses at length Plato’s ideas and the *Laws* in particular but without paying much attention to the territorial question.³ Aristotle’s principles seem to agree with Plato’s on the desirability of self-sufficiency, but they differ greatly on the ways in which self-sufficiency and safety are attained. Aristotle’s emphasis on the “enjoyment of leisure” is an elaboration of the “good life” which is at obvious variance with the “modest ambition” of the more puritanical Plato. Aristotle describes the general characteristics of the territory of city, which he wishes to be “difficult of access to the enemy, easy of egress to the inhabitants” (such an ideal that may be rather difficult to achieve geographically). He also wants the position of the city itself “well situated in regard both to sea and land,” and in a conveniently central location. Sea navigation and maritime commerce are to be fully used by the Aristotelian state, whose self-sufficiency is achieved through foreign trade as well as local production. The state organizes its territory to be a regular and full participant in the international system and does not seek seclusion or isolation from it.

Alexander, a disciple of Aristotle, put his education into practice. He appears to have linked his concept of the Hellenistic way of life with urbanization and a steady flow of commercial relations which bind together the lands of the empire. The middle East still bears the imprint of Alexander’s planning and establishment of new cities. Many were called Alexandria. Alexandria of Egypt, for example, a great commercial and cultural metropolis for many centuries, was set in the delta of the Nile. Alexander planned a network of seaport cities, located near the mouths of great rivers, as major commercial hinges and hubs of his empire. Cities depended on each other for their commercial, cultural and political ventures. With Roman supremacy, the imperium took on a definite universal quality in doctrine and even in practice. The appeal of universality became the Roman’s colonial model for cities and territories. The expansion of the Roman empire only stopped at physical barriers. Accessibility to the remote parts of the empire hardly affected the doctrine of the universality of Rome’s domination. Within the regularly accessible space, Rome applied a policy of systematic planning, homogenizing the system of laws and the ways of life, and developing increasing economic interdependence.

The Caesars could plan a network of several Romes just as Alexander the Great visualized a network of Alexandrias. The idea of universal empire had uprooted the seat of power. Instead of presenting his decision to transfer the capital of Rome to Constantinople as an act of imperial policy, Constantine announced that it was dictated by divine will as seen by the emperor in a vision. Rome and Constantinople were good capitals not so much because they were great crossroads so much as they were mystical crossroads. Constantine was the first Caesar to become a Christian. A

religion with a universal doctrine was spreading through the Roman world. The political structure of the world was gradually taking on a religious, metaphysical connotation.

After Constantine, the Roman colonial system began to demonstrate the necessity of binding religion, commerce and politics together. Religion provides the Roman empire not only with universality, but also with continuity. Imperial authority might have lost its territorial base in the West, and became nomadic in practice. The remedy for the decline of the Roman empire appeared to be in using the cultural superiority of the Roman system and moral superiority of the Christian faith to convert the non-Christians and re-establish a unified order based on the Christian belief. The Roman model of religious universality and continuity became an effective measure for the European colonial systems for centuries to come.

The Portuguese’s seafaring resulted in a network of port cities for commercial and religious interests. Macau’s role as a port city can be best understood from Aristotle’s doctrine on navigation and the network of Alexandrias. The dependent relationships between Macau and other port cities, in particular those along the Portuguese sea route to the East, had intricate commercial and religious networks. The municipal establishment of *Leal Senado* (in 1586) similar to the Greek notion of *polis*, has provided Macau with commercial and civic stability since the sixteenth century. The dynamic between a dependent trading system and a self-sufficient governing body is closer to the Aristotle’s doctrine than Plato’s. Thus, Macau was first seen only as the Portuguese’ far eastern point but soon became a commercial and religious center of her own in eastern Asia. Up to today, the interest of Macau lies in the practice of the symbiotic relationship between a self-governing entity for stability and an open interactive network for opportunity.

LABYRINTH AND BA-GUA

Labyrinth is devised to confine Minotaur, *Minos*, the evil. The idea of good life may not be obtainable and achievable, but the control of the evil is conceivable for everyday life. The figure of labyrinth symbolizes that the possibility of good life can only be feasible by restraining the adverse elements. The Chinese *ba-gua* is a divine instrument to avoid bad luck. For the Chinese, avoiding bad luck is just as fortunate as getting good luck. Two mythical origins, the labyrinth confining evil verses the *ba-gua* avoiding evil, reflect opposite directions of searching for the possibility of fortune. Nevertheless, both labyrinth and *ba-gua* have a common blessing for a good beginning of building settlements, churches, temples and houses, particularly in Macau.

When the Portuguese arrived, Macau was a small fishing village. The Portuguese, being allowed to stay, built little temporary dwellings around churches as their civic, military, and religious centers. Only later did the city develop into a more definitive structure. Till the beginning of the 18th century, Macau architecture was dominated by churches, fortresses and the city wall. Initially the Portuguese had not been permitted to build churches, which were interpreted as military buildings, at strategically important places such as hill tops and on the coastlines. However, frequent Portuguese fights against pirates and the first attacks of the Dutch in Macau, might have convinced the Mandarins that fortification of Macau was in their interest. By the time of the infamous Dutch invasion (1622), Macau was already a well defined city, with fortification of the city including Monte Fortress, the Fortress of Nossa Senhora de Bompardo, the S. Tiago da Barra Battery, the Fortress of Patane. The fortresses were linked together by a network of walls, giving Macau the look of an European medieval town.

The main city wall, which went from the easily recognizable Monte Fortress to Guia Hill, marked the line of the Christian city (*Cidade Cristã*), where the Portuguese lived. The city wall, which resulted from the defensive system built to protect the Portuguese, dominated the urban development up to the 20th century. The

Chinese city (*Cidade Chinesa*) was located outside the walls of the Christian City and called *Wangxia* village by the Chinese, which means "looking back to Xiamen" a coastal city in Fujian province.

The "ritual procedures" are an important part of road system which developed in the Christian and Chinese cities. Ritual, pagentry, parade, and carnival mark routes of procession. Citizens participate in street events. Both the Christians and the Chinese contribute their wealth, power and knowledge to the city's growth and character. In the Christian City the urban pattern appears to be essentially Mediterranean, with *largos* (squares), public courtyards and narrow streets. The main axes which are open to the sea normally are perpendicular to the Inner Harbor and the *Praia Grande*. The Portuguese built all the important civic, military and religious buildings to articulate "joints" of the street network creating the *largos*. The result is a widening of the streets at the connections to *largos*, which appear to flow like streams broadening their ends to a lake. The remains of the Christian City still has a labyrinthian urban pattern which emerged from everyday life.

The Chinese City developed a network of commercial and residential streets. The Chinese towns or cities did not have the similar tradition of public life at "squares" as the European. Wandering the streets is always an important part of the Chinese quotidian life, allowing for the assimilation of public, social, commercial, and leisure purposes. The Portuguese *largos* also enrich the intricate street life of the Chinese City. The expansion of the Chinese City has followed the pattern of population increase and added one more lively layers of street life to the Christian City after the demolishing of the city walls.

What makes Macau architecture truly remarkable is the symbiotic representation of the Portuguese and the Chinese. The European/Portuguese buildings exist in greater splendor in Portugal, and there are numerous examples of Chinese traditional architecture in Southeast China. However, the symbiotic relationship of the two exhibited in one building is unequally characteristic to Macau's invention, and thus has served as the prototype of the first generation of "Western-influenced" architecture for China and East Asia.

Some magnificent buildings on the *Rua da Praia Grande*, for example, were European only from the outside. This three or four-story building, built in the late 19th century, has European/Portuguese facades, but its layout is purely Chinese. Like a typical Chinese building, these European buildings on the *Rua da Praia Grande* contain a group of individual dwellings, or rooms, around a central courtyard in symmetry. The central position accommodates the top rank of social hierarchy, such as, the main hall, the ancestry hall, the master bedroom and studio, or the elder son's bedroom and studio. Back rooms are designated for less prominent members of the Chinese household as such for the other sons, daughters, concubines, and servants.

Except for fortresses and a very few old churches, the Portuguese architecture introduced in Macau has always been subject to the interpretation of local workmanship.⁴ Before the 1940s, a local draftsman had to send his building drawings to Portugal to obtain an architect's signature before applying for building permit. These draftsmen conceived a European building from memory or pattern books. The result was a careful, sometimes over-interpreted, arrangement of facades set up to conceal the quotidian life within the layout. Very often the building facades might be in conflict with the building plans, or incoherent with the whole. Interestingly, the technical inconsistency of design composition is usually where local creativity came into play. Ornaments and building details such as reliefs, motifs and sculptures were introduced, which depict local mythology from Chinese beliefs and tradition. Certainly, a local craftsman had space to exercise his imagination while making ornate details to conceal construction mistakes and to express characters of buildings. The symbiotic result in cultural archetype and other architectural traditions, such as *feng-shui*, amalgamated into a vivid, rich, naïve, charming and often ironic architectural discourse.

The construction of São Paulo exemplifies how the symbiosis of

European and Chinese architecture is taking place in Macau. The ruins of São Paulo today are the remains of the second Jesuit church, built primarily by Japanese Christians exiled from Nagasaki, between 1602 and 1638. It is believed that the architect was Carlos Spinola, an Italian Jesuit. The geometric composition of the facade is baroque, while the details and symbolic features are Chinese. The grand facade was built from local granite and divided into four horizontal spans, crowned by a triangular pediment. This European facade, however is richly decorated with reliefs, such as liturgical scenes, Chinese pictograms, and mythological monsters. During the construction, the European architects neither could, nor wanted to, control all the details of construction being carried out by Japanese Christians and local workers. The chief architect Spinola stayed with his project in Macau only from 1602 until 1604 and left the completion of the cathedral to locals. The symbiotic expression was labored through mediating between a European framework and a set of Chinese expression of meanings.

The founding of Macau was a result of historical accident by the Portuguese navigators. Because of her marginality of cultural geography, Macau can accommodate the Portuguese desire to establish a settlement for trade and the Chinese will to designate an entry port for foreigners. At the margin of two cultural worlds centered in Lisbon and Beijing, Macau has the advantage of space and time for maturing her quotidian culture of metropolis. The meaning of place lies in its quotidian practices. A history of city development in Macau is about drawing figures on the ground and casting shadow on the land, whose symbiotic vitality constructs the possibility for now and future, whose symbiotic imprint is the life of Macanese, neither Portuguese nor Chinese, nor assimilation. A labyrinth only has two exits, life and death. What lies in between has to rely on *ba-qua* in the journey of life to avoid bad luck.

NOTES

- ¹ Plato was worried about the politics of Athens; he attributed the evil elements in it largely to the influence of mariners and maritime traders who from Piraeus constantly intervened in Athenian political life.
- ² For a discussion on the civic life and its territory, see Chap. I in Gottmann, *The Significance of Territory*.
- ³ Aristotle also lays the ground for the trilogy of elements constituting a state: the population, the territory, and the unity of the system of government. That trilogy is still quoted in most basic texts on the state in law and politics.
- ⁴ See Carlos Marreiros, "Traces of Chinese and Portuguese Architecture," chap. in Cremer, *Macau*.

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