
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Modernizing Macao, the Old-Fashioned Way: Macanese and Chinese Entrepreneurship in the Colonial City, 1877–1884

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In 1877, Miguel Ayres da Silva and his Chinese partners were authorized by the governor of Macao to reclaim a portion of the city's riverfront. Councilman Silva was one of the first native-born Portuguese, as the aristocratic mixed-blood Macanese called themselves, to bypass traditional employment in the administration or the military and to become a renowned entrepreneur. His project, in line with the government-promoted restructuring of the inner harbor from the 1850s to the 1870s, employed the modern principles of progress and sanitation and set the tone for a new age of centralized urban planning in Macao.

The 1877 riverfront reclamation would be the first urban extension to be carried out under the supervision of the newly created Public Works Department. From the early 1870s on, a new generation of engineers, coming both from the metropolitan schools and from the military schools of the Portuguese State of India, promoted a modern European model of urban governance throughout the Empire. In Macao, this meant favoring the Portuguese government's claim of full control over the territory to upgrade both the city's insalubrious additive pattern and its inhabitants' autonomous practices of appropriating space.

However, Silva's blatant disregard for government regulations in the construction process, as well as the ensuing succession of patched up settlements, resonated profoundly with Macao's old-fashioned and informal methods of city-building. By focusing on Silva's approach to the 1877 reclamation project, this essay looks at the transition from century-old bottom-up practices to the Public Works top-down model, a contested process that reflected both the ambitions and the contradictions of modern Macao.

Introduction

On July 2, 1877, the newly appointed governor of Macao, Carlos Eugénio Correia da Silva, issued a local ordinance granting Miguel Ayres da Silva permission, under a six-year concession contract, to reclaim a large portion of the city's riverfront (BG, no. 27, July 7, 1877). The ordinance justified the concession with the claims that it would improve public prosperity by creating new ground on which to build commercial and industrial structures and that it would enhance public health by eliminating an insalubrious point of siltation. The ordinance even asserted that the concession would improve the flow of the Pearl River by realigning the pier wall, thus giving the riverfront a more regular profile.

By that time, the riverfront had been under constant restructuring for more than twenty years, with several one-off projects successively reclaiming new ground, from the northern Porta do Cerco border to the southern Barra end of the Macao peninsula (**Figure 1**). In his request to carry out the reclamation, dated January 22, 1877, Silva explicitly referred to the 'precedents of such concessions, granted by [previous] Governors to citizens Vicente de

Paula Portaria, Apon, Bernardino de Senna Fernandes and others' (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00205) to support his claim, which shows that from the 1850s to the 1870s, government-promoted efforts to restructure the inner harbor had been achieved through a series of concessions, negotiated on a case-by-case basis with the city's notable entrepreneurs. Although this premise can also be confirmed from the comparative analysis of the general historical maps, as well as from sporadic references in published discourses, technical reports, local legislation, and the occasional Chinese source, neither official decisions nor any attempt to control these previous concessions had ever been publicized by a public office.

The ordinance of July 2, 1877, that authorized Silva's reclamation project came precisely at a time when Portuguese central government was seeking to implement the institutional prerogatives of the Regeneration¹ throughout the whole of the Empire. In terms of city planning, this liberal turn meant that the rules were changing from a more or less informal system, based on a sort of local tradition of self-government, where projects were decided between the entrepreneurs and the municipality or, in the case of the overseas territories, the governor, needing neither public approval nor for validation by either metropolitan or local financial and



Figure 1: The Macao peninsula in 1866. Reinterpretation of the 1866 historical map ('Macau com as Ilhas e Costas Adjacentes feita por Mr. W. A. Read, C.E. 1865–6', Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France) superimposed on Macao's 2015 cadastral map. It shows the location of the Chinese Bazaar facing Praia Pequena bay (red box), the setting for Miguel Ayres da Silva's 1877 reclamation plan, as well as the inner harbor extension and realignment plans from 1856 to 1866 (red hatching).

technical bodies, to a centralized system where the public works departments acquired the essential role of providing expertise and surveillance, alongside civil or military governors. This emphasis on achieving a state of 'political-administrative rationalization', as architect Anni Günther puts it (2002: 37), had been, in turn, a prerogative directly inherited from the Portuguese *ancien régime*, with the purpose of putting territorial administration under the aegis of the State.

In Macao, the administrative procedures brought about by this transition in governance were surely at the source of the production of substantial archival documentation regarding Silva's project. They also must have enabled the emergence, or the strengthening, of the middleman role between private Chinese capital and the Portuguese administration in the formalization of urban projects. The emancipation of the former interpreter into a proper comprador role fit right into the ambitions of a new generation

of educated Macanese, of which Silva was one of the first representatives.

This essay is part of a broader study on Portuguese overseas action and administration in the long 19th century's 'age of imperialism' (Porter 1994: 2) and its burgeoning 'world urban system' (King 1991: 1–7). In line with recent postcolonial urban studies on Asian indigenous modernities (Yeoh 2003; Hosagrahar 2005; Glover 2008; Kidambi 2016), the purpose of this wide-ranging study is to reflect on the globalizing impact of modernization at the imperial scale, where metropolitan and overseas territories are intertwined and subjected to a similar and concomitant transformation process, stemming from the advancement and expansion of industrial science and technology. In this respect, this essay aims at presenting a globally aware case study which, in turn, may contribute to a better informed, more locally aware, global narrative of the urban modernization process.

The Road to Progress: Institutionalizing Public Works

Although a national plan of global development and progress had been an aspiration of early liberal governments, it was only with the political truce of the Regeneration period (1851–1868) that institutions of the Portuguese State acquired the stability to pursue it. Reflecting the purposeful and ambitious emphasis on material improvements that this modernizing plan was about to take, one of the most significant steps of the first Regeneration government was to emancipate the Public Works Department (Direcção das Obras Públicas) from the Ministry of the Kingdom (Ministério do Reino). Thus, on August 30, 1852, a national ordinance was published, establishing an independent Ministry of Public Works, Commerce and Industry (Ministério das Obras Públicas, Comércio e Indústria), headed by one of the most decisive figures of the Regeneration, the military engineer António Maria Fontes Pereira de Melo. In the ordinance's preliminary report, Fontes Pereira de Melo signed a manifesto for the rationalization of governance as a means to achieve material progress:

The new economic situation that presents itself to modern Nations by the immense industrial development that characterizes this century brought the need to subdivide the departments of Public Governance, charged with overseeing and managing, in the name of general interest, the major groups of private interests. [The Ministry of Public Works] will connect the administration with the industries; ... will facilitate transactions and promote affordable transport by building good communication routes; will organize industrial credit and establish professional teaching, without which the industries can hardly progress, as they know not how to improve their processes by taking advantage of the prescriptions of science. ... Real improvement [of Public Treasury] cannot come from petty and irrational economies, but necessarily results from increasing taxable matter,

which can only be achieved by promoting the industries, building communication routes, enabling education, fomenting credit, in a word, by improving the conditions of national labor. (DG, no. 206, September 1, 1852)

The notion of societal, economic, and political renewal through material progress, very tangibly epitomized by the railway, was crucial in European urban milieus from the 1830s on. Within the circle of the Portuguese liberal elite, this renewal through material progress was associated with the idea of freedom stemming from the philosophy of the French Polytechnique graduate Michel Chevalier, a Corps des Mines civil engineer and economist. His theory on the 'political economy of material improvements' nourished political thought prior to and throughout the entire Regeneration period. In this intellectual context, sociologist David Justino links Fontes Pereira de Melo with the Saint-Simonian thinkers (2016: 29–30). Fontes' founding discourses echo Chevalier's premises that freedom, particularly for the working class, or, in the Portuguese case, for the hinterland folk, would only come through 'material progress', understood as State investment in land and water communication routes, by which 'men and goods' could be brought closer together (Chevalier 1838: 3–11).

It is also true that, both in political circles and in public opinion, from the very beginning of his tenure as minister of Public Works, Fontes Pereira de Melo became so intrinsically and personally linked with the Regeneration policy of material improvements that both the policy itself and its driving ideology began to be referred to as Fontism (*fontismo*). However, as has often been pointed out in Portuguese historiography, Fontes was probably less a trailblazing ideologist of the 'religion of progress' (Justino 2016: 63) than a voice of his time, even if a particularly active and politically influential one. The generation that ended up building and institutionalizing Fontism was born in the 1820s, shared the benches of the Lisbon Polytechnical School (Escola Politécnica de Lisboa), moved in the elite circles of the capital's cultural associations, indulged in a range of editorial activity, and enlisted in promising careers in the military engineering corps. Through conferences and lectures, specialized periodicals, and articles in journals for a broader audience, they spread the progressive gospel of material improvements, sharing the writings of Saint-Simonian authors and debating contradictory views on the material or immaterial expressions of that progress.

Many of these young *savants*, profoundly convinced of the societal implications of the material improvements theory, would end up taking public office, be it as governors (civil in the metropole and military in the overseas jurisdictions), as ministers of Public Works, Treasury, Overseas Territories, and Kingdom departments, and sometimes even ascending to head of government. They were the framework of a true *république de savants*² that was at the heart of the Portuguese constitutional monarchy. By the 1870s, the Public Works and the Public Health Departments represented the dual expertise, technical and scientific, provided

by the Saint-Simonian central government, as a result of the 'political-administrative rationalization' effort of previous decades (Nonell 2002: 37).

Social Forces and Economic Prowess in Macao

In July 1877, when the inner harbor reclamation ordinance was published, Miguel António Ayres da Silva was a young man of 33. He and his brother, Pedro Nolasco da Silva, one of the most prominent intellectuals in the history of the territory, were at least the fourth generation of their family to be born in Macao (Forjaz 1996: 763–781). Both brothers were also members of the City Council (Conselho Municipal) or, as they were called in Macao, city senators (*senadores*). Miguel Ayres was less of a public figure than his older brother, partly because of his unusual choice of career in real estate development, but most probably because of his untimely death in 1886 at the age of 42, which may also account for the scarcity of archival sources detailing his life. Given his experience in urban planning and undoubtedly due to his connections not only to the Portuguese colonial government but also to the Chinese entrepreneurial community, he was often mentioned in collaborative missions with the government, as a member of the 1883 Macao Improvement Committee, for example, or as a representative of the City Senate on the Technical Council for Public Works (Conselho Técnico de Obras Públicas).

Coming from the long-established and well-respected Silva family, Miguel Ayres was therefore one of the first in his generation of native-born Portuguese, as the aspiring aristocratic mixed-blood Macanese called themselves, to drift away from traditional employment in commerce, administration, or the military and make a name for himself as an entrepreneur and landowner. Probably highly educated, as his brother had been, at St. Joseph Seminary (Forjaz 1996: 765), he would certainly have learned to speak not only the Macanese patois, but also Portuguese, Mandarin, and Cantonese. This was likely not the standard education for the Macanese who, in the last quarter of the 19th century, were frequently depicted in both Portuguese and European sources as living through a sort of cultural and moral decay linked to the involvement of some of these families in the coolie trade, which had allowed, until its prohibition in 1874, for a sort of financial resurgence in Macao (Pinheiro 2010: 64–68).

Associated with *ancien regimes* that everywhere in the modern world were giving way to more liberal societies, the Macanese were often depicted in travel writing, such as that of the Austrian diplomat Joseph Alexander von Hübner. In *Promenade autour du monde*, he describes the Macanese as a 'half-blood Portuguese' mixed race (1871: 599), belonging to a bygone or even mythical time when men came to Macao to make their fortunes:

There are no more than a dozen pure blood Portuguese families in Macao today. In this number are not comprised the doctors, the civil and military officers that the government sends at certain times and who, miserably paid, are repatriated when their time is over. The time when Portuguese

employees would come here to make their fortunes belongs to history or, better said, to myth. Nobody prospers here anymore, apart from coolie brokers or gambling-house owners. ... The Chinese element is constantly gaining ground, which is only natural. The Chinese represent life; the Portuguese, sleep, or death. That's why we see the Chinese establish themselves in quite a few of the beautiful, old Portuguese houses. ... While English and German residents depart because they are no longer able to do business, while the Portuguese element, through a series of multiplied infusions of Asian blood, taints and extinguishes itself, the Chinese, by means of its wonderful activity and sobriety, achieve what its government couldn't, neither by force, nor by ruse: it comes, under the very shadow of the Portuguese flag, retaking possession of the territory formerly conquered by the Lusitanian heroes. (Hübner 1871: 634, 637)

Hübner's typical 19th-century Euro-centric vision equated the ethnic mixture of the Macanese with what he perceived as their physical and moral decay, which, in turn, signified the decay of the city itself, as well as of the centuries-old Portuguese presence in China. In contrast, the thriving Chinese community was depicted as a growing menace to the future of the city, at the same level of importance as the geopolitical shifts after the Opium Wars:

The causes of decadence of commercial activity are: Chinese competition and the opening of the treaty-ports. Everything conspires for the ruin of Macao. And yet this was the great emporium of the first Portuguese merchants; it was, since mid-16th century, a beacon of Catholic science in the Far-East. It still is today the place that connects this branch of the Portuguese race to faith and civilization. (Hübner 1871: 637)

Indeed, Macanese families were strongly attached to the old 'divided sovereignty' system (Santos 1998: 7). They had built their fortunes by negotiating, through their seats at the City Senate, the legitimacy of the Portuguese presence and privileges through proximity with the Qing officials who, up until this point, had wielded absolute power over the district's land and construction policies. The eviction of the mandarins, as well as the local institutional reform engaged by Governor Ferreira do Amaral in the 1840s, ultimately led to the development of a more liberal climate in the city, allowing other social and economic forces to thrive under the shadow, as Hübner put it, of the Portuguese imperial flag. These forces were, of course, the local entrepreneur families of Fujian and Guangdong origin, which had been growing in power and influence since the establishment of the gambling and commodities concession system, also in the 1840s.

Due to the historic conflict between Macanese families, who represented local Portuguese interests, and the central Portuguese government, the former were often depicted in a somewhat derogatory way in metropolitan

sources. Dr. Lúcio Augusto da Silva, for example, although himself of Goan Portuguese descent, wrote in his 1865 public health report:

The profession of foreign Europeans is commercial. The Portuguese, for the most part, are public officers, civil and military, or navy. Their descendants follow those same professions, also finding employment in commerce. With the exception of the typographic art, in which some of the Macanese engage themselves, there are neither Portuguese nor foreigners in this city engaging in the arts and crafts, in which only the Chinese employ themselves. (BG, no. 34, August 21, 1865)

Francisco Pinheiro, while describing Macanese aristocratic habits, quotes George Staunton, an 18th-century British diplomat, in stating that the Macanese ‘avoided “undignified” manual work, preferring to beg than to do any rural, artisan or industrial work’ (2010: 64). Pinheiro describes them living in their ‘large Mediterranean-style mansions’ (2010: 64), the *fidalgos* (as Charles Boxer calls them in *Fidalgos of the Far East*), ‘like small kings with large entourages of slaves ... of different origins: African, Indian, Malay, Polynesian and Asian’ (2010: 80).

Writing in 1855, Melchior-Honoré Yvan, a French physician and politician, confirms this idea that the Macanese indeed cultivated a *fidalgua* status: ‘There are some remains of aristocracy amongst them, and their European descent seems to regulate their privileges in proportion as it is more or less decided’ (Jorge and Coelho 2014: 136). They were, however, in the author’s view, very much lacking in formal education, particularly the women. This was a result of the suppression of most of the religious orders, whose colleges and convents historically provided education, which began with the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portuguese territories by the Marquis of Pombal in 1759, and was finally established for all congregations with the post-civil-war decree of 1834. Government-sponsored secular instruction had not followed and, therefore, in the small provinces such as Macao, the choice of education was very limited for young boys. For girls it was nonexistent.

Silva was definitely engaged with improving education, not just in relation to the activities of the Association for the Promotion of Education of the Macanese (est. 1871), but also by his own initiative as entrepreneur. Indeed, by the end of the troubled construction process of his reclamation in September 1883, he freely decided to donate to the City Senate, as a senator himself and, incidentally, current holder of the Fantan gaming concession, a set of buildings situated on the new grounds to be used as a municipal fish market. The rents collected from this new market, he specified in his donation request, had to be used to fund a ‘primary and complementary school’ run by the Senate, in which Portuguese, geography, and history would be taught. This fund was also to be used to establish a school library and museum, as well as to acquire school supplies for ‘destitute students’ (MO, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00580). After being approved by the Government

Council, presided over by Governor Tomás de Sousa Rosa, the new fish market opened in February 1884 (BG, no. 8, February 23, 1884), marking the conclusion of Silva’s urban extension enterprise.

Project and Controversy

The reclamation project of January 1877 was not the first concession in the history of the inner harbor realignment and extension to be granted by the Portuguese government. It was not even the first time a Macanese name had been linked to this sort of property development; quite a number of collaborations, despite the apparent social factors opposing them, had already occurred between Portuguese descendants and Chinese entrepreneurs.³

However, these were all rather small-scale operations, whereas the scope of Silva’s plan was similar to earlier ambitious inner harbor realignment projects led by Chinese entrepreneurs, such as merchant Apon’s Chinese Bazaar rebuilding and extension following a ravaging fire in 1856, or Vong Lok’s New Bazaar reclamation in the 1870s.⁴ It would also be the first institutionalized modern urban plan to be carried out in Macao, as well as the first Macanese-led real-estate development in the history of the city.

According to the local ordinance of July 2, 1877, that authorized the concession (BG, no. 27, July 7, 1877), its purpose was to reclaim an extension of the old Chinese Bazaar riverfront, by drawing a straight line between its northern and southern points (**Figures 2 and 3**).

The concession contract accompanying the local ordinance established that the reclamation was to be completed within a three-year time frame, to which were added three more years for the construction of projected commercial and industrial buildings. The concessionaire – Silva – was to faithfully respect the project report and plans that had been previously approved by the Technical Council of Public Works (Conselho Técnico de Obras Públicas). He would also be obliged to submit to government inspection, provided by the director of Public Works, ‘to this end considered as the government’s permanent surveyor’ (BG, no. 27, July 7, 1877). Otherwise, regarding all constructions lining the new riverside street, the concessionaire was obliged to build them ‘over similar arcades [*arcadas iguais*] according to a uniform plan. In the inner streets, although the construction system may be different, it should also be uniform’ (BG, no. 27, July 7, 1877).

Silva’s urbanization plan for the new reclaimed ground was fairly straightforward (**Figure 3**). It merely applied an orthogonal grid over 19,000 square meters, using the waterfront line as its reference. A main perpendicular street was drawn roughly at the middle, connecting the new riverside street to the heart of the old Bazaar, the Largo do Pagode (Chinese Temple square), and hence to its key thoroughfare, the Rua das Estalagens (Inns street). Silva would later name this 8-meter-wide new street after himself. The rest of the grid was composed of 6-meter-wide secondary streets: a longitudinal one, named Rua Nova do Comércio (New Commerce street), and five transversal ones, which would receive the names of the highest-ranking colonial officers in charge at the time (including a

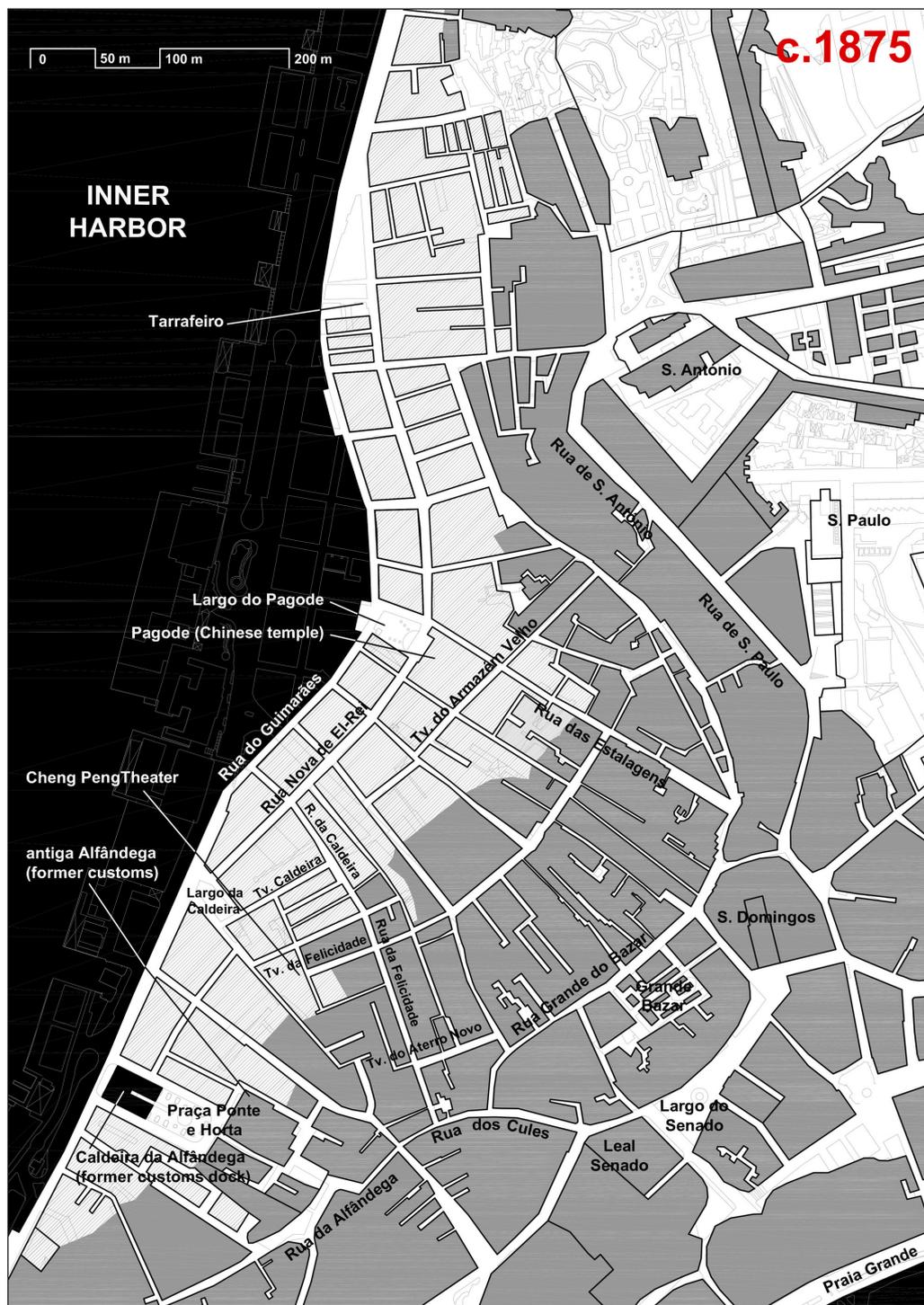


Figure 2: The Chinese Bazaar circa 1875. Configuration hypothesized based on a comparative reinterpretation of the 1866 (see Fig. 1) and 1884 (see Fig. 3) historical maps superimposed on Macao’s 2015 cadastral map.

Pedro Nolasco street, probably in honor of Silva’s father), aligned as well as possible with the preexisting perpendicular streets.

By the end of summer 1877, construction was probably already under way, only to be halted by the administration roughly one year later, on the grounds that Silva was breaching the concession contract. The complaint that led to this decision was filed by Public Works Director Augusto César Supico, right at the beginning of the reclamation work, claiming that Silva had deliberately started construction of the river wall using a different technique

than that established in the contract. Silva argued that only 10 meters of the wall had been completed in this alternative manner, as an experiment. By the time Supico’s second complaint was finally taken into consideration by the administration and construction was effectively halted on October 4, 1878 (BG, no. 26, June 28, 1879), a 120-meter wall had already been erected. In other words, one third of the reclamation project was completed (BG, no. 41, October 11, 1879).

In the meanwhile, Supico’s commission as director of Public Works had come to an end. On September 27,

system of the river wall to accommodate Silva's preference for the rock-fill, and included the requirement of a 10-year guarantee of the project's safety and stability. However, no further alterations would be allowed (BG, no. 26, June 28, 1879).

After this slight disruption, work proceeded, seemingly as expected, until the completion of the reclaimed area. Indeed, despite Quintanilha's protests, the reception of the work and the order to continue with the three-year term for urbanization and construction of the industrial and commercial buildings were again established by provincial ordinance on March 4, 1881, signed by the new governor, Joaquim José da Graça (BG, no. 10, March 5, 1881). By September, however, Quintanilha had issued a new order to stop construction on the new reclamation. This time, he accused the entrepreneur of beginning to build his properties without having previously submitted the corresponding projects for approval, once again breaching his contract. To add insult to injury, when the Public Works director finally decided to intervene, sending an officer to halt the work, Silva's contractor refused to yield, thus undermining Quintanilha's authority as public inspector (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00365). Even so, the latter's ordeal regarding Silva's reclamation was coming to an end; by March that same year, Quintanilha had completed his commission in Macao and was already set to be replaced by Constantino José de Brito, an engineer from Goa, at the head of the Public Works Department (BG, no. 21, May 21, 1881).

Having taken office in November (BG, no. 47, November 19, 1881), Brito would thus inherit the mess the new inner harbor reclamation had become. Things had gotten so out of hand that, in January 1882, the district attorney for Macao wrote to the government's secretary-general in these terms:

The alignments of streets and buildings have been done in utter contravention of the [1877 contractual] plans accepted by both parts, notwithstanding the repeated indications and warnings the Public Works Director has issued as government inspector. It is therefore time, in my view, to act vigorously against the concessionary, using the instruments

of the law in accordance with the gravity of his actions. Therefore, ... I propose that: 1. The concessionary be intimated to stop all work immediately; 2. That he otherwise be intimated to start tearing down, according to the Public Works Director's instructions, all contravening buildings, within 24 hours; 3. That he be notified that, if he doesn't abide perfectly, immediately and completely to the previously stated instructions, his contract will be terminated by local ordinance ... and the reclamation adjudicated again to a new concessionary. (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 4)

This time, the main issue at stake was the 1877 contractual clause regarding the obligation to provide all buildings overlooking the waterfront on the new reclamation site with regular arcades, according to a previously approved uniform pattern. This clause had probably been put in Silva's contract to fulfill the architectural prerogative of having the new riverfront buildings follow the 1867 inner harbor realignment model, continuing the visual pattern of arcades north of Ponte e Horta square, thus reframing the old Bazaar and, through this façade uniformity, giving the inner harbor a sort of modern look (**Figure 4**).

It was obvious from the start, however, that Silva did not much care for embellishing his façades, and even less for homogenizing the riverfront. He clearly saw this clause as a nuisance which, if abided to, would end up costing him dearly in terms of ground-floor surface. Already back in October 1879, fresh out of his first controversy with the Public Works Department, Silva had sent the governor what seems to have been his initial plan and elevation (**Figure 5**) for 'the first block in the riverside street reclamation' (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 1). In the accompanying letter, Silva wrote that this elevation had already been approved by the City Senate, adding, 'By this project you may see that that I intend to fulfill religiously the 11th clause of the concession contract, both in reference to the arcades and to the uniformity of the construction plan' (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 1). Silva must have been aware that this plan most certainly did not correspond to the expectations of the government contract, as it presented a *faux* arcade of almost flat



Figure 4: 'Inner harbor circa 1880' (Jorge and Coelho 2005). Reprinted by permission.

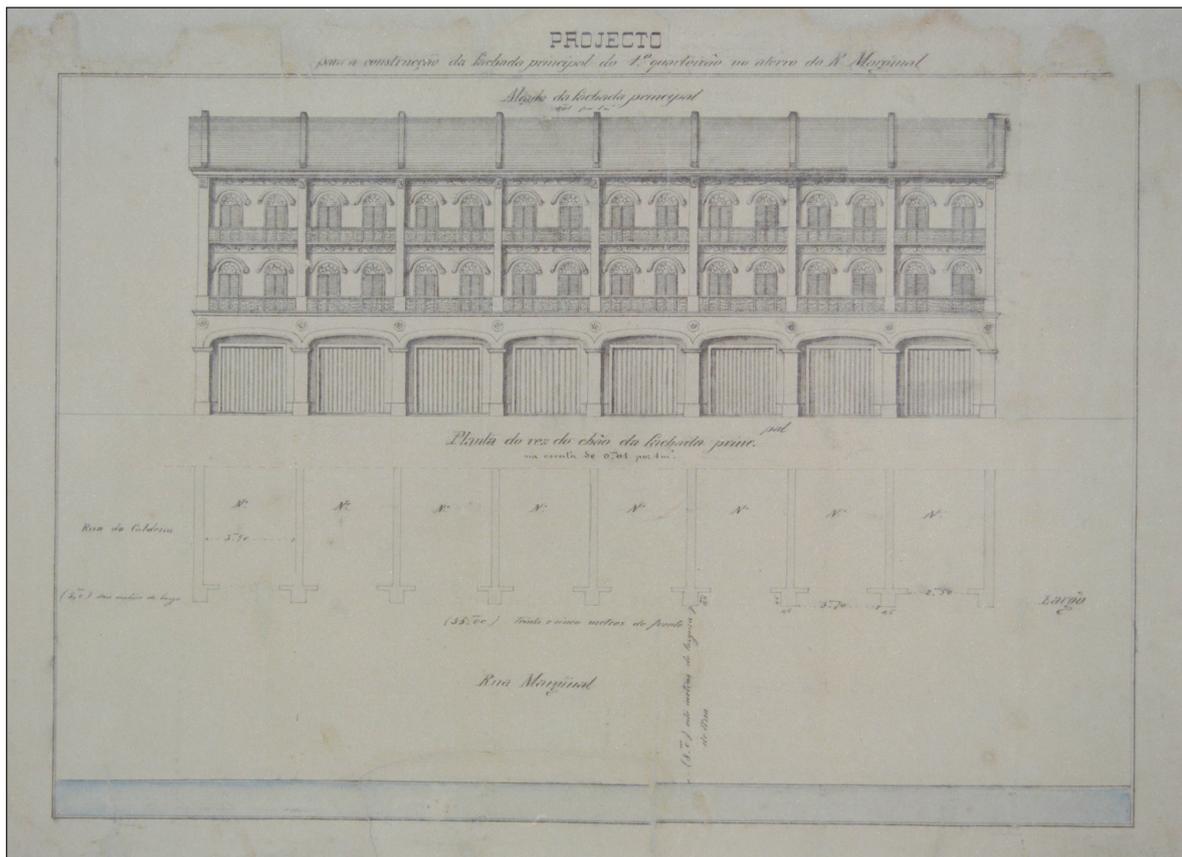


Figure 5: 'Projecto para a construção da fachada principal do 1º quartirão no aterro da R. Marginal.' October 1879, AM, MNL.03.18.Cart (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278).

arches, whereas the 1860s model recommended a covered public gallery built into the surface of the private plots, made of a succession of rounded arches. While claiming otherwise in his letter, it was nevertheless clear from this drawing where the entrepreneur stood regarding the obligation to build an arcade. Also clear from these short statements was who Silva relied on for institutional validation: not the Public Works Department, of course, who had proven too hung up on upholding the contract, but rather his own City Senate.

Indeed, all through the extremely contested construction process, Silva would unashamedly endeavor to take advantage of any legal loophole or jurisdictional overlap between these two institutions that might allow him to have his way with the arcade issue. This tendency to use the approval of the Senate as *fait accompli* must have rubbed Quintanilha the wrong way, prompting Governor Joaquim José da Graça to appeal to the Ministry of Overseas Territories for help in clarifying who was in charge of what. The answer came from Minister Viscount St. Januarius on March 22, 1881, confirming that, both in terms of the laws in force overseas and in terms of the concession contract, the Senate was indeed authorized to deliberate as it saw fit. With this in mind, the minister also made indisputably clear that the Public Works director had final say in all matters of construction permits or building regulations.

Following his October 1879 plan, Silva formally submitted a request, on August 30, 1880, to have the contract

altered again, this time to suppress the obligation of building the front arcade (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 3). Two days later, the Public Works director informed the governor that he considered Silva's request wholly unsubstantiated as, in his expert view, the arcades would not only improve the ventilation of the upper floors, 'which are the most important and the only ones fit for housing families,' thus freeing them from 'the fetid exhalations of salted fish,' but would also benefit street traffic, giving it more space and 'sheltering the passers-by in the seasons of great heat and rain' (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 2). A few weeks later, Chief Medical Officer Lúcio Augusto da Silva weighed in:

The houses that are to be built in the new reclamation, as all houses in the riverside street, will face the West and, as such, from noon, will be exposed directly to sunlight which, without the arcades, will overheat the shophouses' walls and enter them, making them not just unpleasant for those who work there, but also prejudicial to the foodstuffs deposited therein, for the heat and humidity that last four months in this city are the two most important causes of effluvia. These excesses do not equate to good hygiene. Even more so, the owners of the shophouses selling salted fish currently without arcades, with the purpose of attenuating the sun heat during the better part of the day, put up in front of them some ridiculous canopies, low

and strung by their extremities to weights positioned in the middle of the street, thus encumbering public traffic. Conversely, the arcades, judging by the shophouses that have them, won't prevent the much-needed air and light from entering those establishments. ... In this case, however, the beauties of architecture, modest as they may be, go hand in hand with the principles of hygiene (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 3).

Paying no mind to these 'prescriptions of science' (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 3), and following to the letter the authorization to proceed with construction granted by the local ordinance of March 4, 1881 (BG, no. 10, March 5, 1881), Silva and his associates began to build their shophouses at the end of summer. The outrage this sparked in government circles was hardly a reason, from the entrepreneur's point of view, to halt construction. Probably to set minds at ease, however, he did present a new plan for the reclamation's first block along the riverside (Figure 6). This plan basically reprises the one from October 1879 (Figure 5), juxtaposing an arched gallery supporting a balcony on the first floor with the shophouse façades. This gallery was to be built over the 8-meter-wide riverside street. As a result, the street would be reduced to a width of 6.70 meters, ceding 1 meter (plus a pillar width of 30 centimeters) to the narrow walkway. A year before, at the time of the discussion with both the Public Works director and the chief medical officer, Silva had already taken a stand on the issue of the width of the riverside

street, stating, in one of his numerous requests, that if he were 'forced to build the arcades on his own property, for which he must pay the corresponding government tax, he wouldn't feel obliged to leave those arcades available for public use as if they were a public way; on the contrary, he would have them closed for the private use of his tenants, as would be his right as landlord' (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 3). Thus, in the end, the October 1881 plan was just another way of expressing, without actually having to repeat the words yet again, his firm intention not to build even a square meter of the contested arcade.

At his arrival in Macao, Constantino José de Brito's inspection of the whole matter was clear and irrevocable. Writing to inform the governor of his opinion, he argued, regarding the projected arcade:

Such an arcade does not meet the end for which it is planned, becoming rather an encumbrance and a nuisance for commerce, instead of serving it as benefit and comfort, and in such case it is better that it not exist at all The riverside street must have a 7.6-meter-width and, being reduced to 6.7 meters, it seems that the concessionary intends to build the arcade over the ground destined for public traffic. Now, when the contract was established, it was decided that the reclaimed ground would be destined for roads and buildings; moreover, it was decided that the buildings standing over the riverside street would have arcades. It is therefore evident that the arcades must be constructed in

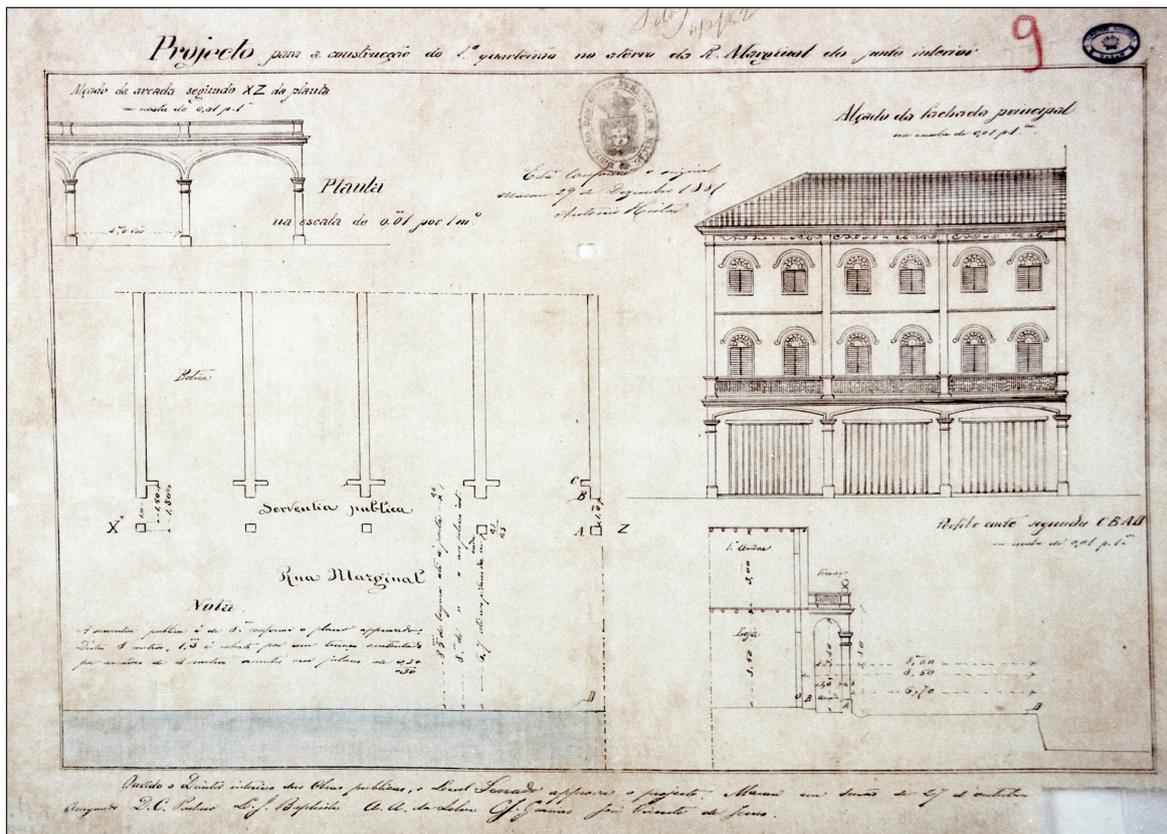


Figure 6: 'Projecto para a construção do 1º quartearão no aterro da R. Marginal do porto interior.' October 1881, AM, MNL.03.18a.Cart (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278).

the ground destined for the buildings and, if this clause didn't suit the concessionary, he had the freedom of not having taken the concession. (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 4)

In response, both to Brito's considerations and to the following district attorney's plea for legal action against Silva (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 4), Governor Graça issued a local ordinance, on March 6, 1882, effectively altering the contractual clause regarding the construction of the arcades, thereby exempting the landowners from this obligation. Despite the diligent inspection of the Public Works Department, read the ordinance, 'unexpected circumstances had occurred that it had been impossible to remedy without halting construction, at a time when the buildings were already so advanced that demolishing them would imply the loss of great capital, not just by the concessionary but also by other individuals that had bought the already aligned and divided plots in good faith' (BG, no. 10, March 11, 1882).

Moreover, the ordinance described the plan submitted for the arcade as 'only serving as an obstacle to public traffic and considerably diminishing the main street's width' (BG, no. 10, March 11, 1882). It is better that it not exist at all, Brito had written, which was precisely what happened in the end. No one would be hindered by this decision, claimed the governor, other than the aesthetes concerned with the regularity of the riverfront buildings.

And what importance did aesthetics have in face of 'the city improvement resulting from the construction of this group of shophouses, so well advanced, and that already represents a valuable capital from which will come important profits to the public treasury, besides its importance for commerce, navigation and for hundreds of people that will find work in the new district' (BG, no. 10, March 11, 1882).

Finally, the ordinance also established a compensation for this exemption, in the form of an indemnity to be used for the construction of a new police station. This idea had been suggested by Silva in his request of January 10, 1882, probably written in the wake of the district attorney's menacing letter. To persuade the governor to agree to forgo the arcades, Silva and the other four Chinese owners of the seven riverfront blocks offered to pay a penalty for each shophouse facing the riverside street (AM, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/00278, Doc. 4).

In the end, as Silva had intended, no arcades were ever built (**Figures 7 and 8**).

Conclusion

In Macao, the civilizing effort of the Portuguese Regeneration period was mostly put into urban development as a means of establishing State hegemony over the territory, in the same way and with the same techno-scientific, judicial, and governance tools concurrently used in the metropole and throughout the Portuguese Empire. This



Figure 7: Macao inner harbor in the 1880s. From Largo da Caldeira looking north (Miguel Ayres da Silva's buildings are on the far left) (Jorge and Coelho 1993). Reprinted by permission.



Figure 8: Rua do Visconde de Paço de Arcos, Macao inner harbor, in the 1880s (Miguel Ayres da Silva's buildings are on the right). Instituto Cultural de Macau (Soares 2014). Reprinted by permission.

effort, however, almost immediately had to compensate for the colonial government's endemic lack of resources and consequently its dependence on local economic and social forces and their inner dynamics, making city-building a proverbial land of opportunity for the local Chinese fortunes, much as it had throughout the treaty ports following the First Opium War. After enabling a first cycle of urban expansion and restructuring projects by the city's Guangdong and Fujian entrepreneur families, the governments of the 1870s witnessed a new generation of Macanese of Portuguese descent, emancipated from both the old divided sovereignty system and the former role of middleman, wanting their share in the modernizing enterprise.

The tribulations of these projects reflected the difficulties, for modern State-building institutions, such as the emerging Macao Public Works Department, of bypassing traditional, informal city-building practices in their attempt to establish an effective system of centralized planning. In the end, the Public Works experts, despite their best efforts to enforce modernized regulations and practices, were reduced to mere observers of the entrepreneurs' controversies that unfurled under the accommodating watch of an imperial government, a situation that resonated profoundly with Macao's old-fashioned traditions of informal city-building. Notwithstanding, the result was indeed an all-new modern district, rationally designed and perfectly optimized, thus demonstrating that the transition from these century-old bottom-up practices to the

top-down model of Public Works reflected both the ambitions and the contradictions of modern Macao.

Therefore, these Macanese and Chinese entrepreneurs can hardly be portrayed according to, for example, Brenda Yeoh's depiction of British-Singapore Asian 'powerless masses', devising 'passive counter-strategies' to deflect colonial control (2003: 15, 125). Nor can their actions be read as James Scott's 'weapons of the weak' (1985), intended to thwart the Portuguese central government's claim on urban management. Rather, the dialectic of power at play in this particular circumstance seemed to be one of consensual negotiation, with urban space as currency, and satisfaction ensuing for both parties: the entrepreneur maximized his property investment while the government received something in return, be it penalties, property tax, or simply, by showcasing its liberal policies, the enhancement of the appeal of the territory within the Pearl River Delta region.

This particular power negotiation, described by Linda Weiss and John Hobson as 'infrastructural power' (1995), seems to transcend the colonial context, as it can be found in any situation where governance, regardless of how progressive it claims to be, is inherently dependent on local communities. By considering that these practices may be, in certain contexts, built-in characteristics of state power, this 'historicized' theorization (Chang and King 2011: 284) helps to counter the dichotomic narrative of the colonizer/oppressor vs. colonized/oppressed, depicting a much more ambiguous and nuanced reality, in which a central

government and local communities assert their respective powers through the negotiation process itself. The central government appears, in the end, less as an enforcer of modernity as a 'tool of empire' (Headrick 1981) and more as modernity's enabler, or rather, its vector, in the form of techno-scientific, judicial, and governance knowledge.

Notes

- ¹ The descriptive name of the Regeneration (Regeneração) historical period (1851–1868) borrows that of the political party founded by the Duke of Saldanha when taking office as head of government, following his military coup of May 15, 1851. The *Partido Regenerador* takes a centrist turn in the wake of the ideological divide of the previous civil war, in a bid for political peace, to fulfill the liberal goals of economic and societal renewal and progress through State investment in the transport and communications infrastructure (Serrão 1971: 553).
- ² Reprising the phrase 'La République n'a pas besoin de savants!', attributed to the president of the revolutionary court when sentencing the chemist Lavoisier to death in 1794 (Saraiva 2006: 25).
- ³ For instance, Bernardino de Senna Fernandes, cited by Silva as one of the previous beneficiaries of the inner harbor concessions, appears in the secondary sources as guarantor in the 1869 Vae-seng lottery concession granted to Chinese merchants Ho Guai and Apon (Lin 2015: 33–41). As for Vicente de Paula Portaria, he appears in the primary sources in relation to the 1867 construction of the Ponta e Horta square (BG, no. 21, May 27, 1867), together with a fellow illustrious Macanese and future funding member of the Association for the Promotion of Education of the Macanese, the real-estate owner Maximiano dos Remédios. There was also Portuguese-born Bernardo Estêvão Carneiro, contractor to the new dock at Praia do Manduco of 1863.
- ⁴ For more on Vong Lok, Ho Guai, and the Macao Chinese entrepreneurs, see Lin (2017). For a study of their role in the city's urban development during the third quarter of the 19th century, see Campinho (2019).

Author's Note

All translations are by the author.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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