Empires and the Making of the Modern World, 1650–2000

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This new monograph series seeks to explore the complexities of the relationships among empires, modernity and global history. In so doing, it wishes to challenge the orthodoxy that the experience of modernity was located exclusively in the west, and that the non-western world was brought into the modern age through conquest, mimicry and association. To the contrary, modernity had its origins in the interaction between the two worlds. In this sense the imperial experience was not an adjunct to western modernization, but was constitutive of it. Thus the origins of the defining features of modernity – the bureaucratic state, market economy, governance, and so on – have to be sought in the imperial encounter, as do the categories such as race, sexuality and citizenship which constitute the modern individual.

This necessarily complicates perspectives on the nature of the relationships between the western and non-western worlds, nation and empire, and ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’. To examine these issues the series presents work that is interdisciplinary and comparative in its approach; in this respect disciplines including economics, geography, literature, politics, intellectual history, anthropology, science, legal studies, psychoanalysis and cultural studies have much potential, and will all feature. Equally, we consider race, gender and class vital categories to the study of imperial experiences.

We hope, therefore, to provide a forum for dialogues among different modes of writing the histories of empires and the modern. Much valuable work on empires is currently undertaken outside the western academy and has yet to receive due attention. This is an imbalance the series intends to address and so we are particularly interested in contributions from such scholars. Also important to us are transnational and comparative perspectives on the imperial experiences of western and non-western worlds.

Portuguese Colonial Cities in the Early Modern World

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ASHGATE
CHAPTER 6

Charity, Ritual, and Business at the Edge of Empire: The Misericórdia of Macau

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The confraternities found in Portugal and its empire called Misericórdias are often considered to have emerged as part of the medieval European tradition of fraternal piety aimed at gathering devout laymen and women for communal worship and performing charity. While this claim largely rings true, several features made these groups unique. Firstly, the Misericórdias originated in Portugal at the end of the fifteenth century in a climate of Christian lay devotion that owed much to medieval antecedents. Their central devotion was to the figure of Our Lady of Mercy, and were dedicated to performing the 14 spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Yet despite their roots in Marian devotions, Franciscan piety, and the spiritual current known as the devoto moderna, the Misericórdias constituted a new manifestation of communal piety in the Portugal of the late fifteenth century.

The Misericórdias were founded at the instigation of members of the Portuguese royal family and enjoyed royal protection during the sixteenth century. This patronage was formally confirmed at the Council of Trent, where a special status was accorded to the Misericórdias which, unlike other lay confraternities, answered to the Portuguese crown rather than to ecclesiastical authorities. As such, they were different from other religious bodies: they maintained a devotional character outside of secular or regular ecclesiastical institutions. This feature helps to explain why they could be found wherever there was a Portuguese colonial presence, or even simply a Portuguese merchant community. The number of Misericórdias proliferated to such a point that even settlements that ceased to be part of the Portuguese Empire or were never under Portuguese administration could boast one.

There was more to the popularity of these confraternities than just official favor. Indeed, Portuguese communities both in Europe or overseas felt that the Misericórdias were a logical way of organizing charity for the poor. Moreover, these institutions created an arena of power for local elites, and sometimes
even performed financial services for them. In short, there was a convergence of interests between the Portuguese crown, seeking to appear as the benevolent patron of a unified set of confraternities, and secular elites, aiming to control important parts of civic life such as poor relief, local administration, public devotions, and urban politics. As a result of the history of their creation and development, the Portuguese Misericórdias can be considered different from the other confraternities that bear the same name and invocation. Neither the Italian nor the Spanish Misericórdias performed such a wide variety of charitable activities, nor were they diffused around the globe on such a vast scale.

Scholarly analyses of the Misericórdias first appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, but it was Charles Boxer who first examined them on a par with the other institutions of local power that he judged to be fundamental in the Portuguese Empire, the Câmara (municipal councils). Boxer considered both institutions to be the keys for understanding the local dynamics of power and government. As mentioned in the introduction to the present volume, he drew primarily on printed sources to present a comparative overview of local institutions in four cities of the Portuguese empire: Macau, Goa, Bahia, and Luanda. Though his analysis centered on the role played by the Câmara in imperial administration, Boxer considered the Misericórdias as their twin. More recently, in the 1990s, scholars have analyzed the Misericórdias at the level of the Portuguese empire. These examinations stressed the differences among the confraternities found across the empire, while recognizing their common religious and administrative principles. As should be expected, local conditions provide much of the explanation for this diversity. Important factors included the ethnic makeup of the population, the ways in which the Portuguese related to the indigenous or imported populations, and the organization of the local economy. Significantly, however, a given area's relationship with the metropolis affected the different procedures and social habits of its local Misericórdia. And as the essay by J.S.A. Elisonas in this volume reveals, this Portuguese model of charity was not limited by the bounds of empire and left its mark on forms of confraternal piety in cities such as Nagasaki and Kyoto.

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2 The most comprehensive study of a Misericórdia in the Portuguese empire remains A.J.R. Russell-Wood, Fidelidade e Filantropia: The Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Bahia, 1550–1755 (London, 1968). I have analyzed the Misericórdias at the global level, see Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, Quando o Rio se faz Pobre: Misericórdias, Caridade e Poder no Império Português (Lisbon, 1997).

escape loss of social standing as a result of sexual misbehavior. It was for these reasons that historians have considered charity as a device for social control and have stressed its repressive character. Yet gender issues are also important when considering the Misericórdias as institutions: women could contribute to the confraternity's coffers as donors of property, but not as members in equal standing with men except in some rare cases of widows who took the place of their husbands. Women were often the main recipients of charity, especially when they were orphaned or widowed, but they were not relevant actors as dispensers of charity within the institutional framework of the Misericórdias.

In the colonies, the Portuguese created institutional scenarios that mirrored those existing in Portugal. The Misericórdias were extremely convenient for colonial elites not only because of their familiar procedures, but also because the confraternities could adapt to local economies when they required large funds in deposit. The Misericórdias could amass large sums of capital through bequests and donations, or through the deposit of unclaimed inheritances, that could be invested in the local economic activities by lending them on interest or be used by local elites for their own purposes. For example, where sugar planters in the Recôncavo of Bahia could finance a sugar crop while awaiting the revenues from the previous year, merchants in Macau could prepare expeditions to trade opium in Maritime Asia. It was this capacity to accumulate liquid capital that was the unique advantage of the Misericórdias, one that was unmatched by any other local institutions, Câmaras included.

In the case of the Misericórdia of Macau, recent scholarship has described it as a proto-banking institution controlled by the city's merchants who were engaged in maritime trade. It's members counted the newly-arrived Portuguese settlers who established themselves primarily through marriage to the daughters of Portuguese men who married Chinese women. Charles Boxer's work remains a key reference for the historiography of Macau. His analyses, covering a span of more than 300 years, retain most of their validity since he examined most of the available documentary sources.


4 See C.R. Boxer, Fidalgos in the Far-East 1550–1770: Fact and Fancy in the History of Macao (The Hague, 1948); C.R. Boxer, The Great Ship from Amazon: Annals of Macao and the Old Japan Trade, 1555–1640 (London, 1963); C.R. Boxer, documents that he did not examine were mainly serial records that would be open for electronic analysis only after the 1980s, including the records of the Misericórdia analyzed here. The primary focus of this chapter will be on the strata of Macau’s population who benefited from the help of its Misericórdia, and on the image that the confraternity projected at a local level. As shall be shown, the practice of charity in this port city was mainly episodic, festive, and spectacular, designed to proclaim the social and religious values of its Catholic minority. The following analysis begins with an overview of the social makeup of Macau, aimed at situating the Eurasian Portuguese among the city’s overwhelmingly Chinese population. An example of the typical conflicts between the local elites follows, employing an analysis of a judicial conflict to reveal some of the key issues related to the self-image and procedures of the Portuguese colonial male population. The final section presents an examination of the Misericórdia’s specific charitable activities with a focus on women, since they seem to have been considered one of the most deserving segments of Macau’s poor.

A Catholic Island in a Chinese Sea

By the second half of the eighteenth century, Macau was a small city of 20,000 inhabitants, 15,000 of whom were Chinese immigrants who remained separate from the Christian population except for matters of commerce. The remaining 5,000 formed the Christian population of the city, comprised of those of Portuguese birth or ancestry, their slaves (from a wide variety of African and Asian ethnicities), and Chinese converts. One of the main characteristics of Macau’s Christian population was that it was overwhelmingly female. As shall be shown, that situation had an enormous impact in the Misericórdia’s charitable activities. The number of reinités (native-born Portuguese) was surprisingly low; a list drawn up in 1775 mentioned only 107 names of Portuguese-born residents in the three parishes of the city, São Lourenço,


Sé, and Santo António. This pool supplied the local institutions, namely the Senado da Câmara (municipal council) and the Misericórdia. By contrast, a list of vízinhos elaborated in 1625 listed 437 Portuguese and Spanish men and 403 jurubas, or converted Chinese, making a total of 840 men. Some years later, in 1635, António Bocarro mentioned 850 casados (married reiníos), but stated that there were many other Christian married men who were converted Chinese. Nevertheless, it is possible that the number of Portuguese-born men had decreased by 1775. The men of the Eurasian population were the merchant elite, soldiers, and sailors. The clergy was also a significant portion of the population, whether from the four male religious orders of the city or from the secular clergy, found in the three parishes and cathedral. Ever since its origins in the middle of the sixteenth century, Macau was always a transit point for missionaries heading for Japan, China, and Southeast Asia.

Although the fundamental unit of social organization in Macau was the Portuguese household under the control of a married man (Casado), these were multiethnic units. It should first be noted that there were no Portuguese women in the city. Rather, the male Portuguese settlers would marry Asian or Eurasian women. This factor remained largely unchanged from the 1630s, when the traveler Peter Mundy remarked that there was only one Portuguese-born woman living in Macau, and that the wives and women servants of the Portuguese were all Chinese. Contemporary sources testify to the coexistence of several ethnicities within the same household, either as blood kin or as servants and slaves. One of the best windows into the relationship between these different household elements appears in the bequests where the Misericórdia was to inherit property only in the event that the designated heirs did not survive in order to take possession of it. It is worth noting that some of these bequests were made by converted Chinese or Japanese exiles and many were from women who were not Portuguese-born. There were both boys and girls (always a majority) from China, from Japan, Korea, Siam, Timor, Java, Bengal, Makassar, among other places. In spite of the fact that they were considered property to be disposed of, provisions were made for their futures. Many were freed from slavery and others were given a sum that would enable them to marry. Here again, women received preferential attention—most of the freed slaves were girls, and it is often indicated that they had been born in the house of the testator, or that they had been raised there since childhood.

It is likely that, from the perspective of social integration, the worst conditions in Macau were reserved for those converted Chinese without Eurasian kin. Expelled from the Chinese community, they would often complain about their situation. In this respect, they were similar to the members of the Confraria de Jesus, who explained, in a letter probably written by the Jesuits, that their status was by far inferior to that of the city's non-Christian Chinese. The brothers of this confraternity described themselves as being drawn from 'the best among the Chinese', and as people who had renounced Chinese law and professed loyalty to the king of Portugal. Curiously, they claimed to have founded the Macau Misericórdia but were afterwards chased from it by the Portuguese. Their list of complaints ran long: they were not free to travel to Canton to trade; they were forced to participate in defense duties; they were not allowed to wear cloaks that might conceal their poverty; the Portuguese were not obliged to repay debts to them and often placed the money that they inherited by default (against the will of the dead) on the financial market; and they were verbally abused and ill-treated. These converts emphasized that their status was inferior to that of some of their relatives who were not Christian, and, as a result, they saw no advantage in conversion. It is also significant that there was a divide between the converted Chinese and the chamas, os gente da terra. Other confraternities included the one dedicated to Nossa Senhora dos Remédios, located in the parish of S. Lourenço and whose membership included the gente da terra, that is, the men and women who were not considered Portuguese despite having Eurasian blood.13

The population of Macau attributed to a special status to the city until well into the nineteenth century. Martinho de Melo e Castro (1770–96), a former

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9 'Lista de a gente efectiva que ay em esta Ciudade (de Macau) amy vinosos, como estragantos, forasteros e gente de la terra. Ano de 1625,' Biblioteca Pública de Évora, Évora (= BPE), Cod. CXVI/1–5: fols. 251–34; and António Bocarro, O Livro das Planox de todas as Fortalezas, Cidades e Posições do Estado da Índia Oriental, ed. Isabel Cid, 2 vols. (Lisbon, 1992), vol. 2, p. 261. See also C.R. Boxer, Macau na Época da Restauração, p. 28.
10 The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608–1667, ed. Richard Carnac Temple, 5 vols. in 6 books (Cambridge, 1907–36), vol. 3, p. 242. In fact, sources document two women referred to as Portuguese, Beatriz de Sousa and Francisca Luisa Pereira, who left legacies to the Misericórdia during the 1630s. See Historical Archives of Macau (= HAM), Santa Casa da Misericórdia, cod. 302, Testamentos 1592–1849, fols. 34v–5v and 55. It must be noted that this source documents a total of 110 testators for the period between 1592–1692, 39 women and 71 men.
11 HAM, Santa Casa da Misericórdia, cod. 302, Testamentos 1592–1849.
12 Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (= AHU), Lisbon, Macau, Caixa 1, doc. 38, dated before 24 February 1644.
13 AHU, Macau, Caixa 12, doc. 8, 21 November 1778.
Secretary of State to the Marquis of Pombal and later the Minister of the
Colonies to Queen Maria I, wrote in horror in a 1783 report that in Macau,
the Portuguese were completely dominated by the Chinese. The Portuguese
did not own the land (they paid rent to the Qing dynasty mandarins), their
boats paid custom duties, and they could not enslave the Chinese except by
purchase. When a Portuguese individual killed a Chinese man, the Chinese
authorities forced their Portuguese counterparts to surrender the criminal,
who, if found guilty, was executed or charged a fine. The primary Qing
authorities entrusted with supervising the behavior of the Portuguese at
Macau were in Canton, but there were mandarins located a short distance
from the city walls that were built in 1622, the year the Dutch attacked the
city. These mandarins resided just off Macau peninsula at the Casa Branca
(White House). Not only were the Portuguese controlled by the Chinese,
but they had to cope with the outbursts of xenophobia from segments of
the Chinese population who tended to consider Europeans barbarians.

Travelers who described Macau were unanimous in referring to the city's
extreme dependency on the Chinese, a fact which served to underscore
the precariousness of the Portuguese presence there. Similar refrains can be
found in accounts of Macau produced over the course of the early modern
era. One such example from the seventeenth century comes from the pen of
Matteo Ricci, the founder of the Jesuit mission to China. When informing his
Chinese hosts about his origins, he wrote to colleagues in Europe, he preferred
to mention Macau and the Portuguese there because of the difficulties it
might create for his missionary work. Another example can be found in the
writings of Friar Domingo Fernández Navarrete, a Spanish Dominican who
lived in China between 1658 and 1670 and who criticized the Portuguese for
paying a rent to the mandarins for the soil they occupied. He also denounced
the fact the Qing authorities exacted customs duties at Macau.

The only economic activity of the Portuguese in the city was maritime trade.
Investment in land was not possible, simply because there was no available
space on Macau peninsula for farming or breeding livestock (the total land
area was only three square kilometers). The only real property that could be
owned was houses, frequently mentioned in the bequests to the Misericórdia.
The presence of the Portuguese was completely dependent, economically
as well as politically, on the good will of the Chinese. Moreover, the city's
status vis-à-vis Lisbon or the Estado da Índia was ambiguous. In theory, the
municipal council, the city's main authority, obeyed the viceroy in Goa. But
in practice this body was accorded a great deal of autonomy. Distance was
the primary factor responsible for this state of affairs—it took almost a year
to travel between Macau and Lisbon and the trip was very dangerous, sometimes
killing more than a half of the travelers. Another factor was that Macau
had originating from the initiative of a few merchants and missionaries who had
learned how to deal with the Chinese, and that the crown had largely failed to
understand the relationship between them. Some royal representatives never
appear to have realized that it would be impossible to resist the Chinese, who
could make the city starve by cutting the food supply or destroy it outright.
The Portuguese community in Macau, however, was well aware that they
were the weaker member in a negotiating relationship, and knew that every
problem could be solved as long as there was enough money to satisfy the
Chinese demands. The Chinese, in turn, regarded the city as a useful opening
to commerce, and, obviously, as a source of profit.

Conflicts often occurred between crown appointees and the members of
the local elite who presided at the Senado da Câmara and the Misericórdia. Bishops
and governors sent from Lisbon repeatedly misunderstood the status of the
Portuguese in Macau, thinking it equivalent to that found in other lands of the
king's conquistas. Still other conflicts arose from ill-tempered individuals shortly
after their arrival from Portugal who aimed at exercising forms of authority
that clashed with the autonomy of these two very powerful local institutions.
Nevertheless, the institutional picture of the city has to include the influential
presence of the city's ecclesiastical bodies. Macau was the seat of a bishop,
and there were several religious orders and brotherhoods that counted different
segments of the population as members. Of these ecclesiastical institutions,
the religious orders were the most important groups. By the beginning of the
seventeenth century, the map of Macau's male religious orders of the city
had been laid out. Of the four which were established in the city, the Jesuits
were the first to arrive, in 1565, from Portugal via Goa. Later in the sixteenth
century, the Franciscans, Augustinians, and Dominicans would arrive from
Manila. And in 1633, a convent of Poor Clares was founded by Franciscan nuns from the Philippines (see Figure 6.1).

That the Jesuits were important figures among the city's ecclesiastical elite
goes without saying. Recent historiography has confirmed the Society of

44 On the building of the city walls, see Manuel Teixeira, Macau no Séc. XVII (Macau:
Direção dos Serviços de Educação e Cultura, 1982), p. 35.

55 Matteo Ricci, Lettere (1580–1609), ed. Piero Corradi (Macerata, 2001),
esp. pp. 403 and 515–16.

56 Domingo Fernández Navarrete, Tratados Históricos, Políticos, Económicos y Religiosos de
la Monarquía de China (Madrid, 1670), pp. 362–5.

57 Vale, Portugueses em Macau, pp. 145–50; and Bouter, Portuguese Society, p. 64.

58 See AHU, Macau, Caixa 1, doc. 8, 16 October 1621. In this report, the ouvidor
informed the king about the religious houses in Macau, their number of residents, and
Jesus as the main driving force behind the missions in China, in spite of the other religious orders that competed with it. Travelers unanimously referred to the Jesuit church of São Paulo, atop a large stone staircase, as the most impressive building of Macau. Such an important group also had impact on the internal life of the Macau Misericórdia. The Jesuits were accorded a role in the group’s electoral proceedings, a privilege that never appears to have occurred in Portugal. By contrast, in Lisbon, the Misericórdia’s chaplains performed that role in the group’s voting procedures. In Macau, the Jesuits were not only in charge of the spiritual preparation of the voters before the electoral act, delivering a sermon in one of the two days of the election procedure, but they also helped to vet the lists of electors. The Jesuits were also the guardians of the funds of the Misericórdia, which was obliged to request money by sending Chinese errand boys to fetch funds when needed. And in 1735, Coim, Damião Pereira Pinto, the city’s governor, was overwhelmed by the evidence of financial fraud in the confraternity. He went so far as to suggest to King João V that the Misericórdia be administered directly by the Jesuits of the Society’s Province of Japan.

Insiders and Outsiders: A Typical Conflict among the Portuguese-born Community

Conflict was the order of the day between Macau’s urban institutions. Tensions always ran high when representatives of the metropolitan authority attempted to impose their will upon the city’s other bodies. One extended example from the rents and property that they possessed. Although the number of people living in the Jesuit headquarters were exceptionally high at the time on account of the refugees from Japan, the document is fundamental for understanding the differences in scale between the Jesuits and every other male religious house in the city.


20 Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon [-BNL], cod. 723, fols. 189v–90v.

21 Compromisio da Misericórdia de Lisboa, (Lisbon, 1619), chapters 4 and 5. This subject was dealt with in chapters 6 and 7 of the 1627 Compromisio of the Misericórdia of Macau but the interference of the Jesuits was not stated. See Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon [-BA], Jesuitas na Ásia, Série China (24), 49–V–6, Compromisio da Misericórdia de Macau, 1627.

22 AHU, Macau, caixa 4, doc. 16, 25 December 1735.
the middle of the eighteenth century, more specifically between October 1746 and the end of 1747, shall suffice to illustrate the recurrent conflicts involved in these relationships of status and power involving the Misericórdia, other local institutions, and crown representatives. The first of these, as will be shown, had a chronic bias against outsiders who did not conform to the behavioral norms of the Macanese community. In the end, this conflict would become a struggle between the bishop and the Misericórdia, while the city's governor looked on from the sidelines with an ambiguous attitude towards the parties involved. The main protagonists in the story were the bishop, Frei Hilário de Santa Rosa (bishop from 1739–50), and the chaplain of the Misericórdia, João da Costa, a member of the secular clergy. Two governors, two provadores (chief deputes of the confraternity), a few clergymen attached to the cathedral, as well as the Jesuits played roles as mediators. The narrator of the story, based on a contemporary account, was a Jesuit, who was clearly not a neutral observer and who did not refrain from making negative comments about the bishop's behavior. In addition to this narrative, notarial documents that were produced during the conflict have also survived which shed light on the political situation in Macau.

The bone of contention emerged when the bishop showed his displeasure that the chaplain of the Misericórdia refused to participate in processions when he was summoned by the prelate, and thus threatened publicly to arrest him. Hearing about this situation, Governor Cosme Damião Pereira Pinto advised the bishop not to wander about the city without an errand boy who could immediately report his detention at the Alfajub (ecclesiastical prisons), and therefore permit the governor to secure his release. In the meantime, the bishop notified João da Costa that he was suspended from hearing confessions. Santa Rosa first attempted to seize Costa by sending his agents to arrest the priest while he was at the house of a widow, a woman who cooked for him. In reporting this episode, the Jesuit narrator declares himself in favor of the chaplain by shedding positive light on how Costa had protected the woman's sexual honor—the widow, Catarina de Araújo, had made a vow of chastity and had refused a wedding proposal by an important local merchant, Manuel Vicente Rosa. Araújo acted strongly against the arrival of the bishop's officers at her house, denying them entry and thereby protecting the priest.

A second incident pitted the Misericórdia against the bishop in clearer fashion. The bishop's secretary and usher (meirinha), both members of the Misericórdia, notified João da Costa of the bishop's decision against him inside the premises of the confraternity. For Luís Coelho, that year's provador,

this incident was reason enough for the expulsion of the churchman's two representatives from the confraternity. He cast them out after a meeting of the Misericórdia's governing board and refused to admit them after repeated entreaties by the bishop.24 The governor then interceded on behalf of the bishop, but Luís Coelho threatened to abandon the office of provador, making it revert to its former holder (Cosme Damião had been provador the year before). The Jesuits intervened at this point, sending their Provincial, Estêvão Lopes, who spoke with the bishop and afterwards asked Luís Coelho to reconsider. Coelho's reply came in the form of a threat that the provador and the other members of the Misericórdia would abandon the brotherhood, destroying it. The bishop, after the Jesuit Provincial briefed him on the situation, saw no other solution than to ask the governor and previous provador, Cosme Damião, to replace Coelho as provador, and, with the necessary powers, expel Costa from his chaplaincy. The Misericórdia's reaction was swift: A text was written by the juiz ordinário (a magistrate who belonged to the Câmara) and posted at 12 places around the city. The governor refused the bishop's request that he serve as provador, in response to the threat of self-extinction of the Misericórdia and by the fact that the confraternity's pamphlet had been placed in front of his house. By that time, Luís Coelho had declared his willingness to travel to Goa to inform the viceroy of the situation. Of course, letters requesting that the viceroy confirm the Misericórdia's rights were already on their way to India.

This turn of events brought chaplain Costa to a delicate juncture. He was willing to accede to the bishop's demand that he retract his statements, but the Misericórdia refused to readmit the prelate's emissaries. The contemporary account makes it clear that the bishop had been effectively cornered, no one in Macau would back him up. Yet there was also a second important issue. In a curious declaration, Coelho told Estêvão Lopes, the Jesuit Provincial, that while Jesuit priests could enter his home as far as the kitchen, the Misericórdia was the king's house and therefore off limits. For the narrator of the account of the events, the bishop then made the worst strategic error: he declared he would excommunicate chaplain Costa if his two men were not readmitted to the confraternity. In the meantime, a letter from the viceroy in Goa supported the Misericórdia's claims and the bishop attempted, unsuccessfully, to be elected provador.

Violence marked the climax of this conflict in Macau. The bishop sent a representative with two officers from the garrison to arrest Costa (this fact demonstrates the ambiguous position of the governor, who placed the

23 BA, Jesuítas na Ásia, Série China (47), Bulcão de Bispo de Macau, Fr. Hilário de Santa Rosa, Santa Casa da Misericórdia, 1746-1747: fol. 259-80.

24 The Misericórdia were ruled by a council of 13, headed by a provador, who was the primary authority within each confraternity.
conflict the governor was careful not to be openly hostile to the Misericórdia, he took sides with the bishop. During the affair, provador Luís Coelho boasted that he had been able to successfully resist the Chinese as a member of the Camara a few decades earlier. Not only was he a typical element of the city's Portuguese-born merchant community, but he was committed to the rights and privileges of the confraternity.

The Jesuits also played an interesting role as mediators of the conflict. Despite their attempts to remain aloof from the conflict, the account's Jesuit narrator shows a clear preference for the Misericórdia and an open dislike of the bishop. It should be noted that Frei Hilário de Santa Rosa was a Franciscan friar, a fact which served the narrator, whose order was in the midst of the Chinese Rites Controversy with the Mendicant orders, as a pretext for the following comment: 'The bishop, as a friar, wants to have conflicts; and as I see it, they will not lack; 'the bishops in this city think that they are God'.

Frei Hilário left for Portugal in 1750 and resigned his post as bishop instead of remaining, as was customary, until his death. Curiously, his three successors in the office until 1803 would also resign. While not all of these men had conflicts with the local residents, they all found it difficult to make themselves obeyed. For instance, later in the eighteenth century these bishops would be the most dedicated agents of metropolitan colonial policies. Dom Alexandre da Silva Pedrosa Guimarães, who served as bishop between 1772 and 1789, worked in close connection with the Conselho Ultramarino in Lisbon and was the primary informant of minister Martinho de Melo e Castro. Significantly, the members of the bishop's chapter repeatedly petitioned the Queen to be admitted as members in the Misericórdia at that time.

One should not think that the Senado da Câmara was absent from this controversy. Despite the fact that there are few explicit references to the city council, the body's members were among the main protagonists. Not only were the members of the Câmara and the Misericórdia recruited from the same pool of local merchants, but the juíz ordinário, who wrote a broadsheet against the bishop which was affixed in 12 places across the city including the vicinity of the governor's residence and the bishop's headquarters, was also a...

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35 The chaplains of the Misericórdia could not be compelled to participate in processions. The confraternity was a lay institution under royal protection and thus the bishop could not insist on his authority inside its premises. Moreover, the Misericórdia could expel any member without consulting other institutions and the compromissos did not allow the confraternity to readmit any member before a year had passed after the expulsion. In fact, the bishop was only acting within his rights when he excommunicated the chaplain after the knife incident.
city official. Who else but the Senado da Câmara could have given such strong support to the Misericórdia? After all, both institutions were the loci of the residents’ power over the king’s representatives.

The Eurasian Merchant Community and the Misericórdia

The merchants of Macau, the city’s economic and government elite, were always few in number. At certain junctures, such as in 1699, the Portuguese population was so small that there were not enough eligible men to fill the slots of the Senado da Câmara or the Misericórdia. Nevertheless, the Misericórdia of Macau, like its counterpart in Manila, did not impose a strict divide between noble and non-noble members. Plebeian brothers were generally master craftsmen, and the group’s founding charter acknowledged that there were no Portuguese who performed themselves such activities. Membership in the Macau confraternity was to be restricted to 300 brothers, but that number doubled to 600 when Dom João IV, perhaps as a reward for the city’s loyalty to his cause in the revolt against Spain, granted it an equal number of members as the Misericórdia of Lisbon. As such, virtually any Portuguese man permanently resident in the city could be admitted in the confraternity, provided that he was not a Chinese convert.

Did the number of members in the Macau Misericórdia ever reach that limit of 600? Thankfully for the historian, the Macau confraternity observed a custom that had fallen into disuse among its counterparts in Portugal starting in the last decades of the sixteenth century. Whenever an important decision was to be registered, most brothers were summoned to sign the official acts. They never counted more than 150 men. Even if we take into account that many Portuguese could be absent from the city at sea, the figure remains strikingly low. Significantly, this custom was also employed by the Senado da Câmara when it summoned the city’s primary residents of the city, although it is unclear what criteria were used for determining which individuals could achieve that status. While it is clear that men who were not nascidos (Portuguese-born) were present at such gatherings (some Luso-Chinese names appear in the lists), it is impossible to uncover what made them eligible. Could it be the mere fact that they were wealthy and respected? Or that they supplied richly endowed brides for the Portuguese?

Until the final years of the eighteenth century the pattern of formation of this Portuguese merchant elite began with single men born in Portugal who settled in Macau. They married the daughters of the Portuguese merchants, who were Eurasian. It appears that the Macanese merchant elite joined the upper ranks of this society through the door of the city’s local garrison. One contemporary document states that soldiers should be preferred over ignorant and illiterate sailors as prospective husbands of orphans with dowries. These men should nevertheless show signs of their willingness to become useful to the city by dedicating themselves to trade and participating in civic government. Family ties also accounted for some of the Portuguese immigration to Macau, especially when nephews traveled to join their resident uncles. In any case, the possibilities for prosperity in business relied heavily on a marriage to a Luso-Chinese woman.

This pattern seems to reflect the same trends involved in the creation of colonial elites throughout the Portuguese empire. But there was a crucial difference. For instance, whereas in Bahia merchants transformed themselves into merchant-planter through marriage into the sugar-planter families or by the acquisition of land, the Macanese elite could not invest in land since the city had no backcountry. The only available way to cultivate capital was through the money market and maritime trade. Significantly, some testaments left by Macanese individuals stated that the money bequeathed was to be ‘kept alive’ through money lending, or what they termed dinheiro vivo. In fact, most of the funds that circulated in credit conceded by the Misericórdia had

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32 Manila is one of several examples of cities outside the Portuguese empire that possessed a Misericórdia of the Portuguese type, founded by Portuguese merchants and also serving as a proto-banking institution. On the Misericórdia of Manila, see Juan O. Medranda, ‘Origin of the Misericórdia of Manila: Ad Veritatem (Manilla),’ vol. 2/2 (2003): pp. 423–62. For Macau, see BA, Jesuistas na Ásia, Série China (24), 49-V-6, Compromiso da Misericórdia de Macau, chapter 2.
33 Arquivos Nacionais da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon [AN/TT], Chancelaria de D. João IV, 1644, liv. 16: fol. 156. See also Compromiso da Misericórdia de Lisboa, 1619, chapter 1 and BPE, Compromisso da Misericórdia de Goa, 1634, Cod. CXVI/2-3, fols. 1-46.
34 For examples demonstrating that the Câmara used the same procedure, see AHU, Caixa 2, doc. 6, 10 January 1688; AHU, Caixa 13, doc. 12, 22 January 1691; and AHU, Caixa 12, doc. 46, 1 December 1779. Cf. Boxer, Estudos...História de Macau, vol. II, pp. 203–7; and Vale, Portugueses em Macau, p. 32.
36 A very useful genealogic tool available for the study of Macanese families is Jorge Forja, Famílias Macauenses, 3 vols. (Macau, 1996).
37 HAM, Serra Casa da Misericórdia, cod. 302, Testamentos 1592–1849.
their origin in legacies and bequests; one bishop went so far as to declare that in Macau everyone engaged in trade, even the dead. Macau's merchant community was engaged in regional commerce with other areas of South and South East Asia. In the eighteenth century, opium from Bengal took center stage as one of the most profitable products. Commercial links with Portugal were few; there were no significant transfers of merchandise or wealth from Macau to Portugal. Merchants established themselves for life in Macau. A return trip to Portugal took, under good circumstances, five years to complete and the few who survived more than one trip from Europe to Macau in the course of their lifetimes were either missionaries or diplomats. Such men, however, could not leave the city at their pleasure, but had to request permission from the king to return to Portugal. In such a context, it is not difficult to understand why the activities of the Misericórdia were overwhelmingly concerned with issuing credit. The brotherhood was the city's primary moneylender, followed by the Círculo and the convent of the Poor Clares. Needless to say, the merchant elite controlled these three institutions. Moreover, it is important to note that, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, credit represented more than 80 percent of the money flow through the coffers of the Misericórdia. Only 20 percent of its budget was related to charitable concerns, and this percentage also included liturgical and administrative expenses.

Numerous sources document the longstanding tradition of money lending in Macau, although the volume of capital involved as well as loan contracts are known only for the second half of the eighteenth century. The interconnectedness of the city's different communities through money loans is also known. Charles Boxer's work mentions the respostas, that is, money lent to the Portuguese by the Japanese during the period when the city's economy was dominated by the silk trade. Testators that left legacies to the Misericórdia from 1592 to 1692 often stated that capital was to be placed on the market. And, writing in 1635, António Bocarro mentioned the risks of lending money to the Chinese since the Portuguese would find it impossible to track them down inside the Ming Empire if they chose to flee their debts by leaving the city.

By contrast, recent scholarship suggests that, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the money flow of the Misericórdia went as far as Canton and that Portuguese merchants engaged in credit activities with the money that they had borrowed from the funds of the confraternity. Lending to the Chinese, for instance, was highly profitable, although it was interpersonal, that is, the Misericórdia did not do business with them directly or on an institutional basis. Merchants borrowed from the brotherhood's funds and subsequently lent privately to the Chinese. The Misericórdia distinguished between land credit and sea loans (garbos da terra and garbos do mar). Interest on the former was less than 10 percent and the latter was between 20 and 25 percent, depending on the risks involved in the voyage. For the Chinese, though, these rates were double. They paid 16 and 20 percent interest for land credit and 40 percent for sea credit.

Needless to say, the Misericórdia of Macau often came under suspicion, just like its metropolitan and imperial counterparts, of financial fraud. These concerns were demonstrated not only in the constant flow of legislation, local and royal, aimed at imposing a degree of order on the money-lending business and creditors, but also in the accusation of rigged elections in the Misericórdias, whenever there were reasons to believe that debtors manipulated electoral procedures. Accusation of mismanagement of funds by the Misericórdia, as well as of fraudulent use of its credit facilities were common occurrences for the confraternity, and complaints against it were often dealt with by the Conselho Ultramarino in the seventeenth or in the eighteenth centuries.

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39 In 1795, the Misericórdia asked Prince Regent Dom João to allow the exacting of two taels by each opium box for the purpose of helping widows, orphans and other poor women. See AHU, Caixa 20, doc. 9, 1795.
40 See, for example, AHU, Caixa 3, doc. 1; Caixa 5, doc. 22; and Caixa 6, doc. 4.
41 On the Misericórdia's involvement in trade, see Souza, Survival of Empire, pp. 28–9; Pires, A Vida Marítima, pp. 55–84; Vale, Portugueses em Macau, pp. 250–59; Pierre-Yves Manguin, Os Portugueses em Macau e Portugal—Aspectos políticos e comerciais de uma relação privilegiada, 1773-1802 (Macau, 1999), pp. 189–90.
42 Sá, 'Garbos da Terra,' pp. 50–51.
43 Boxer, Great Ship, p. 147.
44 HAM, Sua Casa de Misericórdia, cod. 392, Testamentos 1592–1849.
47 At least in theory, the Macau Misericórdia was part of a wider network of Misericórdias whose 'head' was the Goa Misericórdia, that is, the Misericórdias of the cities, towns, and fortresses that belonged to the Estado da Índia. Nevertheless, the Macau Misericórdia corresponded little with the 'mother house' in Goa. Correspondence was limited to expediting the legacies and wills of the persons who died in Macau, since correspondence with heirs in Portugal or other parts of the empire was centralized by the Misericórdia
In Macau, the Misericórdia ran three institutions: a hospital for the Portuguese, a leper house and a foundling home, complete with a foundling wheel. The numbers of the individuals admitted to these facilities were nevertheless small and not very visible in city life. Just as was the case elsewhere in the Portuguese empire, the Misericórdia cared for the destitute members of the Portuguese community and to the Christianized populations (in this order). Contemporary reports note that the Portuguese were careful not to admit the Chinese into the main hospital since, if they died in Portuguese care, the Chinese authorities could exact a fine. The only hospital that accepted the Chinese was the leper house and sources make clear that its services were exclusively for the converted ones. The ruling board of the Misericórdia claimed (falsely) that there was no tradition of charity among the Chinese, but it was known that, once they chose to convert, Chinese Christians were expelled from their former communities and thus entirely dependent on help from the Christians. The same discriminatory practices were used with regard to the dowering of women. In 1710, the Câmara wrote to every parish priest in the city to ask for a list of the most needy orphans and widows who were daughters of Portuguese men, with specification of their social status.

On the whole, the two adult hospitals boarded a total of between 40 and 50 people and the number of foundlings cared for by the Misericórdia never surpassed 100. Yet the overwhelming majority of the poor of Macau does not appear to have been institutionalized, as the continual presence of reference to beggars in contemporary sources indicates. The last three decades of the eighteenth century were marked by successive legislative measures against begging and female prostitution, but such efforts should be understood as part of the Portuguese crown’s increasing concern with vagrancy during those years. Beggars were perhaps the primary constant in the city’s history during the early modern period. The fact that Macau’s population was dominated by an overwhelming proportion of women who were born locally accounted for one of the causes of the presence of female beggars, but obviously there were also male mendicants, although in fewer numbers, including Portuguese ‘shamefaced’ poor, as well as Chinese vagrants.

Women were one of the main concerns of the Misericórdia, but most of them never boarded in an institution since charity directed at them consisted mainly in the provision of dowries to poor orphaned girls. Many of the brotherhood’s testators gave generously, endowing a given number of dowries to be distributed each year. It was common practice for a Misericórdia to create a recolhimento (house of seclusion) to provide women with a safe place to reside while they awaited a dowry. The recolhimento opened by the Macau brotherhood was a late creation, founded only in 1726 and confirmed by the viceroy the following year. It is not known how long the institution lasted, since one of the few sources making explicit reference to it is the group’s charter. This document stipulates the recolhimento’s capacity of 30 women lodged at the Misericórdia’s expense, with others being lodged at their own expense. The proportion of residents was to be two orphans to one widow and the regulations made it clear that only the daughters of the Portuguese should be admitted. Preference for admission followed this sequence: first, the daughters and widows of the members of the Misericórdia (and among those whose fathers were provedores or members of the ruling board); then the daughters of Macau’s citizens (and among these, those women whose fathers and husbands had served in the Câmara for longer terms); finally, the daughters of the Portuguese who were presumably not members of either institution. It would have been impossible, in any case, for the recolhimento to help a large number of prospective brides from a broad cross-section of

of Goa. Also, the Macau Misericórdia imported legislation from Goa, because it did not correspond directly with the Misericórdia of Lisbon. Its charter combined regulations of Lisbon and Goa, adapting them to local specificities as it is stated in the introduction. See BA, Juntadas da Ásia, Séries China (24), 49-V-6, Compromisso da Misericórdia de Macau, 1627, fols. 346v-8. Specific legislation issued either by the king or the viceroy for the Misericórdias of Lisbon, Goa, Malacca or even Macau was compiled by the Macau Misericórdia. See HAM, Misericórdias de Macau, cod. 300, 1552-1766. Other matters were dealt with directly with the Conselho Ultramarino in Lisbon. Yet such regulations proved to be useless only if specific situations required them for strategic purposes. Otherwise, the everyday administration of the confraternity was almost completely independent of outside oversight and the group was its privileges (in the rare instances when other authorities attempted to impose upon it). The autonomy of the Macau Misericórdia is also demonstrated by the fact that its charter was adopted in Nagasaki. See José Justino de Andrade and Silva, Colleção Chronicalica da Legislacao Portuguesa Completa e Anotada, 10 vols. (Lisbon, 1854-59), vol. 3, p. 191.


the population. The institution was, of course, restricted to the Luso-Chinese community (despite the claim found at the beginning of the statutes stating that it was intended for all of the city’s orphans and widows). Moreover, no Chinese doctor was permitted to enter its infirmary.52

An analysis of the daily accounts of the Misericórdia between the years from 1757 to 1774 reveals the centrality of public ritual almsgiving in the activities of the confraternity. On a single religious event, the Misericórdia could offer a few coins as alms to almost 5,000 individuals (a figure that broadly coincides with the city’s Christian population). Such alms were likely given to the non-Christian Chinese who presented themselves as well. Curiously, the Dutch also used similar charitable practices. In spite of the Calvinist rejection of begging and almsgiving, by the 1770s the Dutch East India Company’s representatives in Macau distributed alms to over 1,000 women and children every Saturday.53

The Misericórdia held its general distributions of money twice a year, once during the Holy Week and again on 2 July. As such, they were part of a larger cycle of Catholic rituals that took place in the city in the Misericórdia, as well as the other civil and ecclesiastical institutions, participated.

All year round, the Catholic culture of the Macanese Christian community offered opportunities for highly visible displays of the group’s charitable activities. As was the case in other Portuguese cities, the Corpus Christi procession was one of Macau’s main events. This event glorified the city’s main authorities, in particular the bishop and Senado da Câmara.54 The city also possessed a high number of patron saints who were celebrated on their annual feasts: Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception), St. John the Baptist, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Catherine of Siena.55 According to the Dutch traveler Houckgeest, who delighted describing the feasts as he observed them in the 1770s, most of these events included puppet shows. He was especially fond, as a good Protestant, of recounting the practices of Macau’s idolatrous Catholics. At the feast of St. John the Baptist, figures representing Herod, Salome, and her maid were burnt during the evening. St. Anthony of Lisbon was the patron saint of the garrison, and his feast lasted from the 31 May to 13 June. During this period, the saint was proclaimed governor of the city through a solemn act whereby the governor handled the staff (vara), a symbol of authority, to the saint’s likeness. St. Anthony was also taken in procession to the Franciscan convent, so he might pay homage to his spiritual father, St. Francis of Assisi. During the Holy Week, a crucifixion and descent from the cross were performed inside the Dominican church through the medium of a puppet show that was the object of a detailed (and cynical) description by this author.56

It is unclear if other ritual traditions recounted in other sources continued to be performed in the eighteenth century. It is known that the Jesuits trained over 100 local children to participate in theatrical performances. Peter Mundy describes one such event that took place on 25 November 1637, during which children performed episodes in the life of St. Francis Xavier, mimicked a battle between the Portuguese and the Dutch in a dance, and other numbers in which children sang, danced, and played musical instruments.57 Other non-religious rituals, such as public games, were held in Macau in the 1630s. Mundy describes chivalric ones, with a distinct medieval character, at which one half of the participants dressed as Moors and the other as Christians.58

The Misericórdia was one among several institutions that used ritual to affirm the Catholic culture and political presence of the Portuguese population amidst a multitude of Chinese men and women.59 The confraternity organized the Mundy Thursday procession, with its group of flagellants, where there would be a ceremonial washing of the feet prior to the marching of the procession, the Correio. In Macau, there was a crucial difference in the way that these rituals were performed. While in Portugal this was an inversion ritual during which the feet of 12 poor individuals were washed, in Macau it was the provider’s duty to wash the feet of the mendigos, the other members of the ruling board.60 The confraternity also held a huge feast on 2 July (the feast of the Visitant of St. Elizabeth by the Virgin), and a “Procession of the Bones” on 1 November. This was a ceremony traditionally performed by the Misericórdias

54 AHU, Caixa 5, doc. 20, 1745; and AHU, Caixa 6, doc. 6 § 21, 1747.
55 Bones, Portuguese Society, p. 48.
56 Travel of Peter Mundy, vol. 3, p. 274.
57 Ibid., p. 265.
58 Some of these celebrations and processions are documented in the daily expense book of the Macau Misericórdia. See HAM, Sessa Casa da Misericórdia, cod. 277, Livro da Conta do Risco do Mar e Risco da Terra, 1755–1775. "The MundyThursday and All Saints’ Day processions were regulated by the confraternity charter. See Jesuítas na Asia, Série China (24), 49–V–6, Compromisso da Misericórdia de Macau, 1627, Chapters 28, 30 and 31.
59 Ibid., “Ordem que há-de haver para o lavatório dos pis na Misericórdia em quinta-feira das endonças,” at fol. 407–8. This is legislation copied at the end of the statutes, not included in chapters.
during which the brotherhood would process solemnly to the site of public executions to recover the bodily remains of the executed and bring them to its church for a Christian burial ceremony. So important was this ritual that the Macau group’s charter recommended that some bones should be saved for the next procession in the following year, in case no criminals were executed in the previous year.\(^\text{41}\)

Conclusions

When analyzing city life in Macau, the historian’s primary concern is not with measuring the extent to which the Portuguese influenced the Chinese (since this was negligible). Rather, the most puzzling question deals with how the Portuguese population never lost its particular identity in the face of the strong potential for sinification. Evidence of the strong pull of Chinese culture can be found in many areas; in dress (despite of the habit of wearing wigs and using umbrellas), in material culture such as food and furniture; and also in language (the Macanese spoke a Creole dialect called *patuá* which was a mixture of Portuguese, Spanish, Cantonese, and Canarín from the Karnatic coast of India).\(^\text{42}\) Perhaps one can claim that the Macanese managed a very successful ambivalent use of two different cultures. Whatever the case may have been, the city’s culture had a strong gender divide: men spoke and wrote Portuguese and dressed as Europeans while women represented the Chinese or Eurasian side of the colony’s culture. One of the reasons why Macau’s culture kept its Portuguese character was the permanent influx of immigrants from Portugal.

Historians and anthropologists have remarked upon Macau’s resilience, and very rightly so. After all, it lasted as a colony from the 1550s until its handover to the People’s Republic of China in 1999. The city offers a good example of the limits of acculturation. Despite its weak ties to Portugal, Macau managed to preserve significant elements of its Portuguese identity. And it did this as a fragile settlement confronted by a culture that, if not overtly and permanently hostile to the Europeans, was nevertheless the dominant force in the area. The city’s *Misericórdia* played an important role in the maintenance of a Portuguese identity among the colonial mercantile elite. Besides contributing to the survival of the maritime trade through money lending to Portuguese merchants, it gave occasion for the performing of Catholic rituals of charity, where the most fragile members of the population, women, took center stage as recipients of charity.

\(^\text{41}\) Ibid., chapter 31.

\(^\text{42}\) These issues have recently been analysed by João de Pina-Cabral, who deals mostly with nineteenth- and twentieth-century Macau. See Pina-Cabral, *Between China and Europe*, p. 40. Archival material permits the extrapolation of his claims onto more distant eras. Numerous documents attest to the Chinese women’s manners, and especially that they could not speak Portuguese. See AHU, Macau, Caisa 7, doc. 37, 22 December 1774. The attempt by the bishop to reform their customs such as through the obligation to learn Portuguese, to dress in Western manner, and to have only one female servant, was vigorously contested by the *Senado da Cidade*.