



Identity Politics And The Reconstruction Of Cultural Heritage In Macau

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Abstract

Theoretically, reconstruction of a national identity is one of the leading tasks of a newly established postcolonial regime. Such a reconstruction indicates a process of nation building targeted at consolidating a sense of togetherness about common history, memories, symbols and cultures, and the belief in the importance of practices beneficial to governance. It aims at cultivating political allegiance to the state and feelings of identification with the territory and fellow citizens. Through this process, a new regime secures the willing respect and obedience of its citizens, as well as its legitimacy. Contrary to common wisdom, the process of identity making is not a clear process of differentiating ‘the other’ from ‘the self’ and repressing ‘the other’ but is instead a process of incorporating the identities of ‘the other. The case of Macau is unique in showing that the making of a national identity may not be the prime goal of a new regime and that the regime may not be antagonistic to the features of ‘the other’ colonial attributes and local identities that it has inherited. Rather the new government has cultivated a hybrid identity, including local, national and international identities, believing that these can advance not only nation building but also the economic goals beneficial to governance. Portugal and Portuguese identity has always been very difficult to define. Being the origin of an empire whose evaluation is still polemic, the Portuguese have been seen in very different ways by their European contemporaries and as well as their colonial ‘subjects’. The present study is an attempt to understand aspects of Portuguese legacy and the dimensions of ‘interculturality’ in Macao.

Keywords: Heritage, Colonial Legacy, Identity, Legitimacy, Interculturality

Introduction

No other city in China has the kind of rich colonial history that Macau does. It began 500 years ago, when in June 1513 Jorge Alvarez landed in Southern China. At that time Macau was an insignificant fishing village. Its location and lack of value in the eyes of the Chinese made it an ideal location for the Portuguese, and it became the “first port to be settled permanently by Westerners in the Far East”. Many of the details and dates that followed soon after are uncertain. Indeed the very terms of the Portuguese stay is still a topic of debate. B. V. Pires argues that the Portuguese were involved in illegal trading along China’s coast. He argues they did not gain any kind of official clout to found a settlement in Macau until they eventually defeated pirates in a 1556 battle. However D. E. Mungello theorizes that the Portuguese had attempted to open official relations with China as early as 1517 but were rebuffed by the Chinese emperor and makes no mention of any battle with pirates. Regardless, the local authorities did reach some agreement with merchants

from Portugal sometime around 1555, and there are instances of money being exchanged between the two parties though at least at first these payments appear to have taken the form of bribes.¹²

By 1576 the Portuguese had gained such a foothold in the area that the Catholic Church made Macau a Diocese. Money began pouring in to construct cathedrals throughout the city. The Jesuits had some success in converting Chinese literati though an anti-western backlash would destroy much of the physical evidence of their influence. Nonetheless, they did have a significant role in education and science in the region even establishing a printing press with moveable type as early as 1588, and it was in Macau that the Bible was first translated into Chinese. These early decades would be a time of great economic prosperity for the city as Portuguese traders became the middlemen for the lucrative trade between Japan and China. However their economic prosperity brought increased competition and on July 24, 1622 the Dutch assaulted the city. Their attempt failed, even though the Portuguese were heavily outnumbered. The Dutch would continue their attempts to gain a foothold in China until 1627, and although their attempts failed they marked the beginning of the end for Macau as the sole gateway of the West to the East. Continued interest in China led to the forced opening of other ports on China's east coast decreasing Macau's importance, while the closing of Japan to the West in 1639 also hurt Macau's lucrative trade operation there. The final blow came while Portugal was busy with a revolt against Spain in Europe, when the Chinese Imperial Palace decided to open up a Custom's house in 1684.³

The period from 1750 to 1840 would be rather uneventful for Macau as commerce remained restricted to local trade. Porter claims that it was during this time of peace and stability that "Macau became a refuge for European traders and Protestant missionaries whose efforts were now focused on growing trade at Canton". The influence of this period are apparent in Macau's culture, cuisine and architecture which began to fuse Chinese and Portuguese cultures. However the "growing trade at Canton" began to involve England more and more as they looked to trade opium that was being grown in the Indian colony for tea which had become immensely popular back in Britain. This would lead to the greatest blow to Macau's economy, which came in 1841 when the British occupied Hong Kong Island. This possession would soon surpass Macau as the financial hub of Southern China, and Macau's economy nearly collapsed. In an attempt to counter the decrease in revenues the Portuguese made gambling legal in 1844. This decision resulted in Macau becoming a centre for all manner of illegal activities.⁴

Macau nonetheless would see an increase in revenue through this attempt, and to this day casinos remain the dominant force in Macau's economy. Their success is in large part due to their "comparative advantage... in tourism: a relative lack of restrictions on entry and departure, low rates of taxation and high rates of return, as well as access to the rapidly developing south china region". Each of these is a carryover from Macau's colonial days which allowed for more lax restrictions than those of mainland China. Yet as commerce dwindled the government in Macau would gain greater autonomy, as after centuries of mixed relations between the Chinese government and Portugal, the two sides finally came to an agreement on March 26, 1887. This agreement made Macau an official colony of Portugal though the borders remained a matter of some dispute for decades to follow.⁵

Nearly a century later a seemingly unrelated event would carry significant consequences, when then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang agreed to sign the Sino-British Joint Declaration. The Britain promised to return the New Territories, Kowloon and Hong Kong back to China when the lease term expired. In return China agreed to implement a "One Country, Two Systems" policy, which stated that for fifty years Hong Kong citizens could retain a capitalist economy and some political freedoms. This decision was deeply relevant for Macau, for this same system would also be implemented there. On December 20, 1999 Macau became the last colony to be handed back over to the PRC (People's Republic of China), thus ending Portugal's colonial rule.⁶

This article aims to trace the unique process of reconstructing the identity of the Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau) and its people after the political resumption to China in 1999, and the political and economic significance of the reconstruction. As in other postcolonial contexts across the globe, identity is an arena of political contest where various discourses that embody re-appropriation of political traditions and legacies criss-cross. The success in reconstructing a postcolonial identity in Macau, in stark contrast to Hong Kong, another special administrative region (SAR) of China, has fabricated its relatively smooth reintegration with China and enhanced the legitimacy of the new Macau government. What makes the case of Macau particularly interesting is that a sense of national identification was not the prime task in the reconstruction of a new Macau identity. Rather, there was a process of incorporating the identities of “the other” through which multiple identity components that push the hybridity, coloniality and historicity of Macau to the forefront are deliberately promoted. In consequence, the growth of nationalism, or more specifically, economic nationalism, was boosted. The advancement of national assimilation in Macau has met little resistance.⁷

Unlike other postcolonial regimes which are independent sovereign states, Macau is a SAR whose primary goal after reunification should be national reintegration. Hence, the cultivation of a national identity may not be the prime task if the existing local identities do not threaten national reintegration as in Macau. However, what is intriguing is that the new Macau government consciously strengthens the coloniality inherent in the original identity, and encourages people to take pride in their colonial past. The colonial legacy in the old identity has not been repressed as in other postcolonial regimes and Hong Kong but rather is boosted in the name of the internationalization of Macau. In addition, the new government not only endorses the existing local identity, but has also actively remoulded an originally weak local identity to make it a strong one. This article attempts an in-depth analysis of the official discourse of Macau’s identity after political resumption, explaining the various historical, communal and economic factors that inevitably limited the government’s options in identity reconstruction, as well as the political and economic significance of such a reconstruction.

Identity Reconstruction

This article adopts a poststructuralist view of the concept of identity. Identity is conceptualized as the “sameness” of the features of individuals by which they are recognized as members of a community. While the process of finding our identity is a process of defining “the self” and finding our “sameness” with other people, this cannot be achieved without also defining who we are not, who “the other” is and what others differ from us (“differences”). Theoretically, reconstruction of a national identity is one of the leading tasks of a newly established postcolonial regime. Such a reconstruction indicates a process of nation building targeted at consolidating a sense of togetherness about common history, memories, symbols and cultures, and the belief in the importance of practices beneficial to governance. It aims at cultivating political allegiance to the state and feelings of identification with the territory and fellow citizens. Through this process, a new regime secures the willing respect and obedience of its citizens, as well as its legitimacy.⁸

Many have argued that the construction of a national identity is a process of defining who we are, which, however, cannot succeed without simultaneously contrasting ourselves with others. In the process, certain features of the community of ‘we’ are constructed, emphasized or exalted by the regime while others are denied, relegated to secondary importance or eliminated. The process of selection of features is strategic, and constrained by the cultural repertoires of the original communal identity and the regime’s pragmatic governance considerations. One would expect that in making a postcolonial national identity, the colonial attributes in the existing identity are often repressed or eliminated, and local identities are relegated to secondary importance or incorporated.⁹

In Anna Triandafyllidou's study of Greek nationalism, rival nations (external significant others), and ethnic minority or immigrant communities (internal significant others) perceived as a threat were defined as different from "the self" and excluded as part of the nation. Indeed, history shows that resistance to colonialism constituted nationalism, as in Latin America and postcolonial Africa, and it is important to incorporate people's existing cultural and ethnic identities in order to build a national identity successfully, such as in bridging Basque and Catalonia nationalism in Spain. Post-handover Hong Kong is a good case where official efforts to rebuild a national identity have been thwarted because of the government's failure to recognize the tenacity of the local identity.¹⁰

The case of Macau is unique in showing that the making of a national identity may not be the prime goal of a new regime, and that the regime may not be antagonistic to the features of "the other"— colonial attributes and local identities – that it has inherited. Rather, the new government has cultivated a hybrid identity, including local, national and international identities, believing that these can advance not only nation building but also the economic goals beneficial to governance. Contrary to common wisdom, the process of identity making is not a clear process of differentiating "the other" from "the self" and repressing "the other" but is instead a process of incorporating the identities of "the other." Furthermore, predominant in the process is the government's economic concerns which, however, do not preclude its success in fostering its political legitimacy and the people's sense of national unity. As in many semi-democracies in East Asia and China, it is assumed that cultivation of consensus on the importance of economic development can help enhance a regime's political legitimacy and its people's political unity. The following analysis illustrates the special features of the process of identity making in post-handover Macau, including the political economy aspects.¹¹

If identity is a social construction, then it is revealing that in Macau the predominant emphasis in the process of identity construction is on economic and constitutive strategies. Roger Smith argues that identity construction is a politicized process embedded with competing narratives of a political, economic and constitutive nature. Political narratives foster trust in the worth of an identity by promising the people enhancement of their political power through institutions and policies as well as protection from all external enemies. Economic stories promote accounts of interests, arguing that a particular identity advances each member's economic wellbeing. Constitutive stories endow members of the community with shared identities, as defined by their common religion, race, ethnicity, language, culture, history and so on.¹²

Relatively speaking, both economic and constitutive stories of the new Macau identity have been prominent in the official discourse. Around the world, an emphasis on economic stories as a government strategy of identity making is not rare. In post-handover Macau, the economic stories focus on the economic benefits of its reintegration with China, thus revealing the intertwinement of political and economic dynamics of identity making by which political legitimacy and unity are achieved by economic narratives. The study on Spain by Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz reiterates Smith's theory and demonstrates that the democratic right to elections can help legitimate claims to obedience, and can reconstruct national feelings on firmer ground. However, the remote possibility of full democratization in Macau as a SAR of China has made the new government highly cautious of the use of measures of political empowerment like these. Rather, depoliticized stories that stigmatize politics as potentially divisive and harmful to stability and prosperity are frequently told.¹³

With regard to the role of constitutive stories, scholars such as Cathryn Clayton, Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith and Arthur Neal similarly argue that in the process of identity construction, the past is selectively remembered or forgotten, and the hopes and fears of the people are inherited by the newly reconstructed identity. In Macau, the constitutive stories put forward a re-reading of the city's past as peaceful and devoid of conflicts, its place as an international city, and the people's cultural identity as a hybrid of eastern and western cultures. During the process, we see significant reconstruction of Macau's collective memory and the past.¹⁴

Traditional Identity

Macau was leased out to Portugal in the 1550s by the Ming Dynasty of China as an entrepôt for foreign trade. Scholars have observed that, during most of its rule, the colonial government was remote from the Chinese population in Macau. In fact, a secret pre-agreement was signed in 1979, in which Portugal and China agreed that Macau was Chinese territory under Portuguese administration. Portugal was basically waiting to return Macau to China before 1999. In 1987 China and Portugal signed an agreement on the handover of Macau. In 1999, following Hong Kong, Macau was reverted back to China as a SAR ruled under the principle of “one country, two systems.”¹⁵

Theoretically speaking, in colonial Macau, a local ethnic Macau identity should be a more important defining feature of the “self” in the understanding of the Macau people relative to other components, such as the national self. However, this is not quite true, as seen from the data below showing the ambivalence in the people’s local identification.

In a survey conducted in 1999, 62 per cent of respondents reported that they had a good overall impression of Macau and around 54 per cent believed that most people in Macau were sincere, reliable and trustworthy. In addition around 72 per cent were concerned about Macau’s future. Nevertheless, the survey also indicated that only 38.8 per cent felt proud to be a citizen of Macau and 45.9 per cent felt no pride at all. Only about a quarter of respondents were proud of Macau’s cultural diversity, while about 40 per cent claimed that there was nothing to be proud of. Overall, the data suggested that the people generally liked the place, notably its small town culture, and were emotionally tied to it, but found little satisfaction in their political and legal status as Macau citizens. This ambivalence in relating to the place came from the different levels or aspects of satisfaction, or no satisfaction, that they could derive from being a Macau person. All these ideas and sentiments later became the new government’s problems to tackle when cultivating a new identity.¹⁶

Relative to the local identity, Macau people’s Chinese identity was predominant even before the handover. A survey conducted in 1999 found that 74.1 per cent of respondents felt proud of being Chinese, and most of them identified with Chinese history, culture and ethics. There may be several reasons for this. Demographically speaking, although the population contains a mix of people of different origins, ethnicity and social classes in 1999, 95 per cent of the population of Macau were ethnic Chinese. Furthermore, Beijing had been able to maintain its influence in Macau even before 1999 owing to its collegial relationship with Portugal and the fact that pro-Beijing Chinese groups in Macau had served as effective intermediaries between the government and the general public, who were by and large excluded from the colonial polity, since the 123 riots in 1966.¹⁷

In fact, these groups were so successful that politics in Macau after 1966 has been commonly characterized as “consensus politics” or “interest group politics,” and Macau has been widely regarded as a nationalistic society relative to Hong Kong. Obviously, before the handover, a Chinese identity was a defining feature of the “self” understanding of most of the Macau people vis-à-vis the colonial ruler and people of other races in Macau. Its predominance also helps explain why the making of a national identity is not the prime goal of the new government as Macau has been in the strong grip of Beijing.¹⁸

Despite Macau’s long colonial history and its Mediterranean-European architecture, the current assumptions of the international character of the city’s culture and the people’s westernized orientations are probably overstatements. By the time the Portuguese left, only about 2 per cent of Macau’s 450,000 people spoke Portuguese, with the other 98 per cent speaking Cantonese and other languages. The colonial government was remote from the Chinese population and the Chinese and Portuguese communities in Macau were relatively distant from each other. Before the handover, a colonial identity was seen as “the other” in the “self” understanding of most of the Macau people. It should be noted that the Portuguese

administration had for years “exoticized” Macau but not its people by putting forward the idea of Macau as a point of encounter between the Portuguese-speaking world and China. Particularly since the 1980s, the colonial administration spent a huge amount on historical preservation.¹⁹

In addition, some cultural agents were formed which signified the colonial administration’s intention to leave a Portuguese presence in Macau. Notable examples include the museum industry, the Macau Foundation, the Centre for Macau Studies and its publication *Macau Studies* and the *Review of Culture* published by the Cultural Affairs Bureau formerly the Macau Cultural Institute. As will be analysed below, the Macau promoted by the colonial administration was a cultural hybrid, which has been further elaborated by the new government. Interestingly, while in colonial Hong Kong Britain had sought to continue its influence by consolidating the popular beliefs of the legitimacy of free trade, the rule of law, freedom and democracy, in colonial Macau Portugal aimed to achieve the same objective by propagating the narrative of Macau’s identity as constituted by both Portuguese and Chinese culture.²⁰

Economic factors have also limited the options available to the new government in reconstructing an identity besides the original communal identity and the colonial legacy outlined above. Macau’s economy has heavily depended on gambling and tourism. In the last decade, revenues from gambling alone persistently constituted over 30 per cent of Macau’s total income. Also, between 1996 and 1999, Macau suffered from economic recession. Indeed, Macau’s economic dependence on gambling and tourism has made it necessary for the new government to maintain the city’s tourist attractions, such as its small-town, colonial (perhaps exotic) and Mediterranean-European character. Furthermore, the pre-handover economic recession had pushed the government to adopt immediate and pragmatic measures to alleviate economic hardship. In order to do this, it benefits governance, if the government can motivate the people to identify with the regime and its goals. This explains why cultivating a strong sense of local belonging in the people has become an essential government task. Since building up closer economic ties with China would certainly quicken economy recovery in Macau, there is also little surprise that integration with China is encouraged by the government and nationalism is promoted. Hence, the government’s attempt to make a new identity is partly embedded with economic considerations.²¹

Despite the impact of the original communal identity, colonial legacy and economic factors, the new Macau identity in the official discourse is not a replica of the old one. As analysed, in government narratives local and national identification are depicted as deeply connected with one another as Macau has become part of China. The narratives on nationalism are both political and economic in character. In addition, international, national and local identities are often linked up, as using Macau’s colonial past and hybrid character and going international have all been justified as good means of serving both China and Macau economically and politically. The processes of reconstructing the three components of the new identity are indeed intertwined. The following sections analyse the features of the official discourse.²²

Local Component

During the first few years after its establishment, the new government embarked on practical measures to deal with imminent social problems such as issues of public order, and these measures have successfully enhanced its legitimacy. Together with this, its initial strategies in building a sense of belonging among the people were also sufficiently pragmatic and down-to-earth (in its own words, *min-ben* or people-oriented) by focusing on the livelihood issues of ordinary people. Indeed, the importance and urgency of consolidating a local identity was envisaged by the new government from the very outset. As stated above, a new regime may eliminate or repress the existing ethnic identity, that is “otherize” it, because such an identity is potentially subversive to national reintegration.²³

Nevertheless, in Macau the new government consolidated the local identification in the “self” understanding of the people. This indicates that the existing ethnic Macau identity is perceived as politically unthreatening and would not be able to do any harm if reconstituted in pragmatic and depoliticized narratives. The local community, in the initial narratives, was one with problems that needed an immediate cure. And the Macau government, with its *min-ben* approach operating gracefully within the “one country, two systems” framework, was constructed as the right cure for the problems. For example, chief executive Edmund Ho of the government stated that: “We should continue to emphasize the principle of ‘putting the people’s interests first,’ and further implement this in both long-term and short-term policies.”²⁴

A pragmatic common vision of society was set for the people. Most of the initial social goals proclaimed by the government were very down-to-earth. They included achieving certain minimal standards of governance, such as maintaining social order and political stability, establishing the legitimacy of the government, building people’s trust in the government, improving people’s livelihood, and enhancing social cohesion. As time progressed, the narratives expanded and changed focus. Emphasis was then put on the desirable conflict-free character of the Macau community, including its small-town culture and intimacy, which had constituted many local people’s common memory. In doing so, this part of Macau’s past was selected and remembered to promote a sense of local identification and construct new possibilities for society. Two related descriptions of the city are notable. Macau is first depicted as a caring community where the spirit of mutual help and harmony prevail, and humanitarianism is part of its tradition. The citizens are for and will help one another. And such features have made Macau unique. For example, it claims: “Kind-heartedness, a high degree of diversification, strong acceptance and mutual integration are among our most valuable human traditions. They are also the central attractions of our society. These qualities have enabled Macau to retain a reputation in China and elsewhere in Asia for its uniquely warm and caring atmosphere.”²⁵

Indeed, few people would question the relative lack of social conflicts in Macau’s recent history. But to say that Macau has always been peaceful and harmonious is obviously an exaggeration. The riots are blatant exceptions to the official discourse on the character of Macau, as are the demonstrations held by lower-class workers in recent years. Despite that, the government’s depoliticized version fits in well with its scarce attention to democratization in this policy address. Democratization as a political goal is rarely mentioned. When it is spoken of, it is not concerned with institutional development but is rather associated with improving the advisory and consultation structure, transparency and accountability under an executive-led government. Secondly, Macau is conceived as a city of dual character: a dynamic and modern tourist city on the one hand, and a historical and cultural city on the other. While the former trait signifies its new and commercialized aspect, the latter represents its historic and spiritual side. Instead of contradicting each other, the two concepts of Macau identity sit in harmony.

Hence, from the depiction of a community of problems to a historical community of potentials, we see the expansion of the language of identity construction used by the Macau government. This also indicates an increased base from which members of society can find their commonness. It is worthy of note that the local component of the new Macau identity is composed of an interesting mix of elements including caring, harmonious, historical, colonial and international characters which engender a range of future potential for Macau. The rise of local identification of the people of Macau after political resumption is obvious. For instance, a survey found that 78 per cent of respondents believed that there had been significant changes in Macau since political resumption, and another 78 per cent said they trusted their new government. Another recent study revealed that 65.8 per cent of respondents felt proud of being people of Macau. So, as a result of economic and political considerations, selected ideas about Macau and its people in the original communal identity are incorporated into the official discourse on the new identity, which serve to strengthen local identification. As stated, this local component must not threaten national reintegration. And

in fact it cannot, because it is basically depoliticized and well integrated with the national identity, as will be analysed below.

National Component

As argued a national identity has always been a defining element of the “self” understanding of most of the Macau people before the handover. This helps explain why, since 1999, government propaganda on nationalism has been relatively indirect and less aggressive compared with that on local identification, although the importance of nationalism is reiterated in the official discourse. It should be noted, however, that the theme of increasing national sentiment often appears alongside the idea of reinforcing Macau residents’ sense of belonging. The love for country and the love for Macau are presumed to be one concept or simply two sides of the same coin in the official discourse. But nationalism is certainly not downgraded in the official discourse. It is only repackaged as economic nationalism. There has been a lot of discussion about the nature of Chinese nationalism. Broadly speaking, Chinese nationalism refers to a flexible combination of the elements of ethnic Han identity, cultural pride, and cultural, political, international, popular, state and economic nationalism. Although economic nationalism as a component of Chinese nationalism has received relatively little scholarly attention, this brand of nationalism has become prominent among the Chinese since the 1980s when China adopted an economic open-door policy. Issues that do not assist in the economic development of China, including political issues and reforms, are put aside as secondary.²⁶

Unlike the national identity prevalent in Macau before 1999, which was probably cultural or factional in nature, the national identity emerging after reunification has strong economic intent besides cultural and ethnic ingredients. Local and national identity have been well negotiated by tying economic interests to economic development in mainland China. On many occasions, the Macau government has advocated broad and efficient economic integration with China, as well as economic collaboration with neighbourhood provinces such as Zhu Hai. In addition, the international advantages of Macau, engendered by its colonial and historical past, are seen as serving both national and local interests. Along with the Macau government, China has also picked up a pragmatic and economic reading of Macau’s colonial past. The three elements of the new Macau identity are indeed intertwined in their making. As stated in Ho’s 2006 policy address:

With the committed support of the motherland, we have already made considerable progress in building a trading and service platform with Portuguese-speaking countries and regions. Riding on this success, we will continue to exploit our unique advantages, in terms of language skills, networks of contacts, and historical heritage, in order to foster business co-operation between the Mainland, Macau, Portuguese-speaking countries and the worldwide Chinese business community.

At least five minor discourses on the economic nationalism promoted by the Macau government can be seen from the above example. First, China is perceived as a land of economic opportunity and Macau will always enjoy strong support from the central government. Second, in the economic nationalism promoted in Macau, the success of the model of “one country, two systems” lies in the integration of the territory and the country, in particular, in economic development. In fact, the implementation of the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement has elevated the close economic and trading partnerships between Macau and the Mainland to new heights. As perceived by the government these have become strong pillars that support its policy of diversifying local industries. The partnership arrangement has also created favourable conditions for strengthening co-operation with other countries in the region.

Third, Macau benefits and will continue to benefit from its special position in the “one country, two systems” experiment. This is the advantage of being part of the experiment. So, instead of perceiving the model as a limitation to development, as some people in Hong Kong believe, this is seen as an opportunity for Macau. Fourth, making good use of the economic opportunities available and flourishing economically is being nationalistic, because it demonstrates to others the success of the “one country, two systems” model and the advantages of reunification with China. And lastly, it is believed that Macau has a unique role to play in the trade development between China and the Portuguese-speaking world because its colonial heritage has endowed it with the required international edge.²⁷

International Components

Like the local component, the colonial legacy – as “the other” in the original communal identity – is not eliminated or repressed by the government but rather is boosted in the name of the internationalization of Macau. It is believed that this may cultivate social cohesion, advance economic goals and benefit nation building. Although Macau was portrayed as a community of problems at the beginning of the regime, descriptions of the city’s merits and qualities gradually multiply in the government narrative, and emphasize the international aspect of Macau engendered by its colonial history. Macau is portrayed, as it was during the colonial administration, as a famous historical and cultural city with plentiful experience of European culture, and as a meeting point of Eastern and Western cultures. It has a diverse and harmonious culture, and is tolerant of differences.

To quote the policy aims of the Secretariat for Social Affairs and Culture in 2002: “Having experienced the peaceful coexistence of multiple cultures for more than 400 years, Macau has become a melting pot where the Chinese culture and other cultures are mutually accommodating, and the ethics of tolerance, openness, and diligence flourish.” But to say that the new government accepts outright the coloniality of Macau is not completely true. In fact, its reading of Macau in this respect is not entirely the same as that of the colonial administration. Hence, it is interesting to explore the concept of “a historical and colonial Macau” as understood by the colonial and new governments. The quarterly journal *Review of Culture*, a well-known cultural tool started by the colonial administration in 1987 which has lasted to the present, provides good illustrations. In the first issue of the journal, it was written that cultural pluralism or cultural hybridity was the staple of Macau, as it was “a culture rooted in Western, European and Portuguese civilization and a culture with an Eastern, Asiatic and Chinese matrix.” Although a meeting point of different cultures, Macau was tranquil because of the peaceful relationship between China and Portugal.²⁸

In addition, pragmatically speaking, Macau’s hybrid cultural identity should be continued as neither China nor Portugal would derive any benefits from its disposal. Obviously, as observed, Portugal aimed to maintain its presence in post-handover Macau by endorsing the narrative that Macau’s identity was a hybridity constituted by both Portuguese and Chinese culture. It was part of both Portugal and China. After 1999, the new government of Macau continued this narrative but slightly twisted it. An examination of the themes of articles in the *Review of Culture* published after political resumption suggests several observations on the new government’s concerns in building up a new cultural identity. First, most articles are on Macau, which reflects the journal’s primary interest. Second, most are on history, art and religion rather than politics, political culture or social issues. This testifies to the idea that the Macau identity promoted by the new government is basically cultural and non-political. Third, the period covered by the articles is largely the 1800s or late Qing. Again, this reflects the new government’s emphasis on the historicity of the Macau identity and, importantly, on Macau’s being part of China. Thus it is understood that the promotion of the new identity can be more effective if people recognize that Macau had an identity and a part to play in the world, and that what it gained from its colonial past will continue to help it flourish in the future. But significantly, this understanding has to be rooted in a nationalistic recognition that Macau has never been separated from its motherland.²⁹

Just as under the colonial administration, the Macau promoted by the journal after political resumption is one that is historical, cultural and non-political. Nevertheless, in maintaining the belief in the historicity of Macau, the journal editors have also been cautious to emphasize its status as a window of China to the European-Mediterranean world, and its Chineseness as greater than coloniality. As illustrated by the editorial of a 1998 issue, published one year before political resumption: The study of Macau history must free itself entirely from the old framework of “colonial history,” and stop being blinded by the view that the historical progress of Macau in the last four centuries is the continuation of Portuguese expansion. Just as the sovereignty of Macau belonged to China, Macau has been employed as an open port, “a place that civilizes the foreigners” from as early as the Ming Dynasty. It is by this twist in emphasis on the historicity of Macau that the new government continues to promote the international or culturally hybrid character of Macau. The international component, that should be an “other” in the “self” understanding of the people after handover, is linked with the national and local components in the project of identity making. It is also used to form other constructions of the community’s long-term vision. First, the government openly calls for the people’s dedication to nourishing an international component of their identity, such as by “integrating with the world” and getting in touch “with the best culture all over the world.”...“As an international city as well as a free port, Macau openly embraces the trend of globalization.” It is hoped that all these endeavours will improve Macau in the end, turning it into a quality community of educated citizens with an international perspective.³⁰

Second, like the promotion of the local and national components, there is an economic intent embedded in the government’s emphasis on the international theme. It is commonly believed that the international positioning of Macau is economically strategic, which facilitates its role in bridging China and the Portuguese-speaking world and its entrance into trade relations with that part of the world. To cite Ho’s 2007 policy address: One emphasis of the government’s work will be fostering partnerships between Macau enterprises and their counterparts in the Mainland and neighbouring regions, while enhancing multi-lateral economic and trade co-operation with Portuguese-speaking countries. I would like to stress again the necessity ... to strengthen the concept of motherland, broaden international horizons, and pursue openness and co-operation, to promote the harmonious development and common prosperity of Macau and the entire region.³¹

Indeed, the international and national aspects of the new Macau identity are often found to merge in the official discourse, in which the coloniality and hybridity of Macau are usually exaggerated. Both however, are regarded as beneficial to the economic development of Macau and China. For instance, since 2003 the Macau government has reiterated the importance of “reaching out and inviting in” as the basic strategy for promoting Macau as a platform for economic co-operation and trading services between China and Portuguese-speaking nations. From time to time, Macau is said to enjoy the comparative advantages of being such an economic platform, with the links of its local ethnic communities, returned overseas Chinese and residents of Portuguese origin. Importantly, this policy of the Macau government has had full support from China. Also since 2003, Macau has been active in facilitating actual exchanges between China and Portuguese-speaking nations. For example, in 2004 and 2006, Macau hosted respectively the first and second Ministerial Meeting of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries and in 2004 and 2007, the first and second China and Portuguese-Speaking Countries Airports Conference. In 2005, the Macau government extended its international relations through official visits to Portugal.³²

Conclusion

This article examines the reconstruction of the new Macau identity and its significance to governance in post-handover Macau. The new identity comprises the local, the national and the international components, with Macau characterized as a historical, colonial or cultural hybrid and economic object. In fact, the Macau identity after 1999 represents a re-appropriation of the image of colonial Macau propagated by the Portuguese administration since the 1980s. And it is intriguing to find that in Macau, identity making has been a process of incorporating instead of repressing or eliminating the identities of “the other.” Through the process, multiple identity components are deliberately incorporated and promoted for political and economic reasons. The above discussions also points to important areas for future research, including a comparison of the politics of identity reconstruction in Macau and Hong Kong, the nature and development of Macau’s civil society, the reception of the hybrid identity by the people of Macau, and what the SARs reveal about China’s strategies of nation-building.

In short, the new Macau identity in the official depiction is composed of local, national and international components. Macau is small but global, both commercialized and cultural, and new and historical. The charm of its identity appears to lie in its diverse and paradoxical character, but even more so in offering the people a romanticized memory of the colonial past, and its economic reading of the benefits of a particular way of remembering the past and reintegration with the motherland. This process of identity making is unique in showing that, from economic and political considerations, the prime goal of the new government is not to build a stand-alone national identity. Rather, it has integrated its nationalistic reading of Macau and the people with selected ideas of the original communal identity – the local and international identities – which should be expected to be features of “the other” and be excluded from the “self” understanding of a postcolonial Macau identity.

Since 2000, occasional protests have been organized by mainly lower-class workers to express their dissatisfaction with the problems induced by rapid social and economic development. Also politically, the departure from its formal status as a colony plus the promise of gradual democratization laid down in the Basic Law have flared up expectations of an opening up of the power structure. However, considering the sporadic nature and small scale of the protests and almost complete lack of public resistance to the Macau government’s legislation on article 23 of the Basic Law recently, the people of Macau are generally satisfied with their government and the status quo. This reflects the success of the government’s identity project.

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