

Urban regeneration and the sustainability of colonial built heritage: a case study of Macau, China

I. Chaplain

School of Language and Translation, Macau Polytechnic Institute, China

Abstract

This paper presents a case study of late twentieth century urban regeneration in the former Portuguese colonial territory of Macau – now designated as a Special Administrative Region of China (Macau SAR). Regeneration in this context is defined and discussed here under the headings: regeneration through reclamation; regeneration through infrastructure investment; regeneration through preservation.

The new Macau SAR Government continues to differentiate Macau from its neighbours by promoting the legacy of a tourist-historic city with a unique architectural fusion of both West and East as an integral feature of the destination's marketing strategy. However, regeneration of urban space through reclamation has led to a proliferation of high rise buildings with arguable architectural merit which diminish the appeal of the overwhelmed heritage properties and sites. Future plans for the development of the territory are outlined, including major projects designed to enhance the tourism product through purpose-built leisure and entertainment facilities.

1 Introduction

The urban regeneration of the City of Macau can be attributed to significant developments which occurred in the last century of its four hundred years of existence as a Portuguese occupied territory located in China's southern province of Guangdong – formerly known as Canton.

Since it was designated as a city in 1586, the City of Macau alone has doubled in size mainly due to the strategies undertaken by various consortiums – the most successful of which has been under the auspices of the casino and entertainment company established by Stanley Ho. The revenues accrued from Mr Ho's private

sector enterprises have contributed more to the regeneration of the city than any urban or architectural planning initiated by the Government sector. Moreover, without Mr Ho's commitment to sustaining the legacy of colonial heritage, the buildings which remain as a testimony to the Portuguese patrimony would have been consigned to archives and displays mounted in museums in Lisbon. Macau today is a City of 500,000 people whose income derives mainly from tourism-related products and activities based on the preserved cultural legacy.

The future for this legacy is in doubt as Mr Ho relinquishes his monopolistic hold over the casino industry and entrepreneurs with ideas for more radical projects for regenerating the city threaten surviving structures and contested spaces by eradicating vestiges of the City's colonial past.

2 Regeneration through Reclamation

Twentieth century regeneration of the City of Macau evolved rapidly after the first major reclamation project in the outer harbour created space for building the Lisboa Hotel and Casino – the flagship of Stanley Ho's enterprise registered under government decree as the *Sociedades Turismo Diversões de Macau* (STDM). Port facilities and rapid sea transport services in the form of jetfoils were developed to cater for passengers mainly from Hong Kong embarking on a visit to the casinos on a daily basis or for a weekend excursion.

By the early 1980s, land had been added to the outer harbour extending from the Lisboa Casino to the Jetfoil Terminal. New hotels were soon built on the reclaimed area to cater to the demands of the excursionists – one of the first being established by the Mandarin Oriental Group which now includes a casino in its complex. The road constructed along the waterfront became the main feature for the annual Macau Grand Prix with its starting point, complete with control tower and pit stops, located between the Mandarin Oriental Hotel and the Jetfoil Terminal. Reclamation in the 1990s along this road extended the waterfront further allowing more land for the construction of office and residential complexes dwarfing the structures built during the first reclamation.

As the Outer Harbour was developed as the main entry point for expanding tourist traffic arriving by sea, the Inner Harbour overlooking mainland China witnessed an increase in sea cargo traffic as well as crossings through the land border to the north of the city after the Chinese Government relaxed border controls. Until the early part of the twentieth century the peninsula was divided by a small island, Ilha Verde, but after reclamation this area was transformed into a zone known as *Areia Preta* for industrial and residential property expansion. It is this area which has earned Macau the distinction of being one of the most densely populated cities of the world.

Since 1982, the population on this side of the border has also witnessed a parallel expansion over the border in the new cities of Zhuhai and Zhongshan. Many of the manufacturing industries established in Macau have since relocated to these cities where labour is more plentiful, skilled and cheaper. The Inner Harbour has thus declined in economic importance with even the traditional Macau fishing communities moving their operations into China. Compared to

the Outer Harbour development zones, the Inner Harbour and the northern part of the city retains little of its colonial built heritage. The only significant restoration project to be undertaken is the creation of a tourism zone around the Portas do Cerco (Border Gate) with its landmark portal distinguishing the historical uniqueness of this postcolonial territory from its neighbouring modern conglomerates where little remains of the architectural traditions of Guangdong Province.

The waterfront on the south side of the reclaimed land on which the Lisboa Casino Hotel was constructed was left undisturbed as the historical and nostalgic Praia Grande promenade until 1982. This zone features the sites and properties which represent the power and grandeur of the Portuguese colonial presence in the territory. The palace and residence of the former Governors of Macau sited on the original waterfront now have their views obscured by the massive reclamation project begun in 1982 as the Nam Van Lakes Project.

This project differs from other attempts to increase the land space for more building, as the main features of the intervention are three lakes created to preserve the ambience of the waterfront and at the same time solve the problems of pollution and silting which had negatively affected this ambience. The reclaimed land formed between these lakes was earmarked for the imposing Macau Tower and entertainment complex recently completed and opened in December 2001. This stands as yet another testament to the contribution which Stanley Ho has made to the regeneration of the city. Beneath its shadow are new Government buildings including the Legislative Council presided over by the new Chief Executive of the Macau SAR – Edmund Ho.

The overall appeal of this reclamation project has been spoilt however, by the presence of unfinished high-rise structures devoid of architectural merit standing on the former curve leading onto the Praia Grande. They are monuments to the political reversals which curtailed a boom in the euphoric climate of investment leading up to the Portuguese Handover in 1999.

3 Regeneration through Infrastructure Investment

The relationship between Stanley Ho's company STDM and the Government of Macau has been manifested in unparalleled investments in the regeneration of the City. As mentioned earlier, the growth of the casino industry has led to improvements in infrastructure, services, but especially in tourism product development. A considerable proportion of the investment was diverted into a fund for the restoration and preservation of the colonial built heritage. This fund was placed under the auspices of the Fundação Oriente – an organization which invests in various projects including historical properties and sites in ex-colonies such as Goa and at home in Portugal. There has been criticism that much of the funding for restoration in Macau has been channeled to sustain the activities of the Foundation rather than with the Cultural Institute established in Macau. Following the Handover in 1999, this Institute is charged with the task of determining the future for restoration and preservation of buildings and structures which will inevitably deteriorate. It is unlikely that the Government or the com-

munity it represents will approve the scale of investment carried out prior to the Handover to protect the colonial heritage.

Investment in Macau's economy during the later part of the twentieth century also came from outside the territory. As China moved towards a market economy with unprecedented relaxation of rules governing the establishment of private enterprise on the mainland and overseas, the new breed of entrepreneurs and speculators mainly from Guangdong Province looked to Macau and elsewhere in the region for opportunities to generate capital and increase wealth.

The reclaimed land made available in the territory for building was rapidly transformed into swathes of high rise apartments and office blocks despite the glut of similar properties superfluous to the needs of the community. The City rapidly took on a patchwork quality with a variety of architectural styles mostly following the crudely functional appearance of modern structures in neighbouring China. It is quite evident that little thought was given to blending modern styles with the historic features of the City or its landscape. As the investment poured in, reclaimed land was swallowed up leaving a bloated cityscape with no redeeming features.

One of the most ambitious and significant investments made by the Macau Government prior to the Handover in 1999 was in the construction of the new Macau International Airport. Work began in March 1992 on the creation of an artificial island adjoining the Macau peninsula between the City and the islands of Taipa and Coloane. The airport occupies an area of 181 hectares of reclaimed land of which 115 comprise the artificial island.

The airport has the capability to handle jumbo-sized cargo flights and six million passengers a year operating 24 hours a day. The general layout of the main component parts of the airport was designed with a view to the gradual expansion of the airport's capacity. A plan for connecting the embankments between the islands of Taipa and Coloane will mean a substantial increase in area to allow the construction of a rail connection to Mainland China. However, within the same period, other airports were built including the new Hong Kong Airport Chek Lap Kok (also constructed on reclaimed land and on an artificial island), and international airports in neighbouring Shenzhen and Zhuhai.

With the added investment of its own airline, Air Macau, the new Macau SAR Government is striving to compete by expanding routes and exploit the potential of the growing domestic tourism traffic from PRC and Taiwan (still classified as international).

The construction of the airport has had a significant impact on the regeneration of the City of Macau – particularly on the provision of infrastructure and transport services to link the islands of Taipa and Coloane. The island of Taipa has grown from an isolated appendage to the City to a conurbation in its own right with ubiquitous high-rise apartments packed on an area of less than 4 sq. km. Further expansion has occurred as land has been reclaimed joining the neighbouring island of Coloane and the China controlled island of Hengqin.

Hengqin Island covers about 90 sq km with land for development set aside in the mountainous area around 40-50 sq. km. The development scenario is that the

demands of the population from the overly and congested City of Macau could be diverted to the three zones of the islands of Taipa, Coloane, and Hengqin Island which has a current population of only 3,000. A sub-centre of Macau could thus be formed with zones developed along the coast of Hengqin offering new entertainment and recreational facilities. The disadvantage of this scenario however, is the land ownership issue. The scheme would require support from the China Central Government and the Guangdong Provincial Government since Hengqin is under their jurisdiction and not part of the Macau SAR. However the potential investments and advantages which could accrue from this plan would undoubtedly appeal to all parties – including the populace of the City of Macau living under pressure in the confines of its deteriorating environment.

An alternative scenario which has already progressed beyond the planning stage, is the development of the Macau SAR into two cities and eight zones including the islands of Taipa, Coloane and Cotai City – a zone created by the reclamation of land between these two islands – all lying within the territorial boundaries of the Macau SAR. This plan allows for the old City of Macau's retention of buildings and spaces of historical and cultural significance including those used for public administration and services. The Cotai Reclamation Area between Taipa and Coloane will be developed into a new town with an area of 6 sq. km. capable of housing 100,000 to 150,000 people. This area will be the junction point for joining Macau with the Guangdong-Zhuhai Highway and Railway. It will also be home for future industrial development of Macau and supporting facilities. The central area between the mountains east and west of Taipa will continue to have commercial and residential mixed buildings. The land along the northwestern side of Taipa will be expanded for development of entertainment facilities, and middle to high-class residential housing. The northeastern and eastern tip of Taipa will be expanded according to actual demands for industrial and air transportation use. The southwest side will be used for sports and entertainment and the Macau Jockey Club and Racetrack. Coloane Island will retain most of its natural habitat with emphasis on creating nature conservation areas. It is anticipated that by creating a large number of green areas on reclaimed land between lakes and canals, the territory can add the appeal of outdoor tourism attractions and facilities for recreation to complement the marketing of the cultural legacy contained in its historic buildings and purpose-built museums.

Regeneration through investments in infrastructure will alleviate some of the pressure on the tourist-city of Macau though, despite the belated implementation of plans to create traffic-free pedestrian areas, many visitors are still deterred from venturing outside the main historic centres.

As the City of Macau and its environs undergoes the process of regeneration following the Portuguese handover, future land use is predominantly determined by plans for creating new industries to replace the traditional manufacturing companies which have re-located outside the territory. The tourism and entertainment industries have also attracted the interest of both local and foreign investors eager to exploit the opportunities which will be created when Stanley Ho's monopoly is relaxed. Ground has already been broken for a new theme park located on the Outer Harbour zone with a pseudo-traditional seafaring environment with shop-

ping and entertainment facilities – including an artificial volcano. A film studio is planned for the Cotai zone which will create employment for professionals and local skilled labour.

Significantly, land has been set aside for the creation of sports facilities in preparation for Macau hosting the Asian Games in 2004. A stadium has been built adjoining the Jockey Club on Taipa Island and water sports are becoming more popular with residents of Macau and Hong Kong as amenities and facilities are improved.

4 Regeneration through Preservation

The preservation and creation of squares and green areas was one of the key elements of the outgoing administration's plan to regenerate the city while alleviating the deleterious impacts of modernization. It is a continuing source of pride that so many properties and sites have been preserved in such a small area relative to the size of the ex-colony of Goa for example. The Old City of Goa has been fortunate to be awarded the title of World Heritage Site by UNESCO guaranteeing an international commitment to sustainability, whereas Macau City has to rely entirely on its own community for a commitment to sustainability. Unfortunately lack of appreciation, knowledge and expertise as well as finance may be the factors which diminish this commitment.

The most substantial commitment to the preservation of the City and its environs occurred during the period from 1982-1997 under the auspices of the Cultural Institute of Macau and the Cultural Heritage Department which pursued the long term aim of 'Na Afirmação De Uma Identidade' (Affirmation of Identity). It was held that "more than any written legislation or officially signed agreement, the soul of people familiar with its identity will always seek to keep that to which it is entitled in maintaining its lifestyle" (Durão [2]). Two Decree-Laws were drafted to approve the initiation and implementation of preservation projects which have contributed significantly to the regeneration of the City. It should be noted that the official list of monuments, buildings of architectural interest, classified areas and sites contain elements of both Portuguese and Chinese heritage. In terms of regeneration this meant that culture and tradition was revived in key historical areas of the City especially in the following examples.

Most tourists begin their exploration of the City at the Largo Do Senado and São Domingos. This pair of squares lies at the true heart of the City centre. Closed to traffic since 1985, both squares have since been laid with meticulously placed cobbles in the traditional style of many squares found in the cities of Portugal. The ubiquitous fountain completes the picture of a southern European city. The squares are flanked by buildings all constructed at the end of the last century except the pristine white Santa Casa da Misericórdia which was built in the 18th century although it was completely renovated in the 19th century in the style of the period. The building dominating the square is the Leal Senado, the seat of the City's local governing body and intimately associated with many of Macau's historic events and a monument in its own right. A library

containing books and archives on Macau's history and an art gallery are now housed inside.

The second square contains the magnificently restored São Domingo Church housing a museum describing the history of the Church and the restoration work completed just before the Portuguese Handover. The square itself is built in a neo-classical style with an extensive set of facades and balconies supported by narrow metal columns and railings of iron fretwork along both floors above shops at ground level. Restoration, begun in 1996, meant that the set of buildings, which were already severely deteriorated, could be harmonized.

For many architects and conservationists, the crowning glory of Macau's regeneration is the zone surrounding the Ruins of St. Paul's Church with its distinctive ornamental façade and sweeping steps – the most recognizable monument to the Christian missionaries of Asia. Various buildings reflecting their period and the stylistic trends of the 19th century and early 20th century form a significant urban grouping along the street linking Largo Do Senado and Largo de São Domingo to the Ruins of St. Paul's and the area surrounding it. The whole area is now again traffic-free to encourage tourists to meander in comfort and patronize the tempting antique furniture stores or browse through the assorted wares on display in souvenir and handicraft shops. On the hill overlooking the ruins and the streets surrounding them is the commanding Monte Fortress – its site and buildings now converted for use as a museum dedicated to the architecture and lifestyle of the City.

Another area which was the subject of a major regeneration project, albeit controversial, is the hundred year old Rua Da Felicidade. This site consists of a street with a group of modest houses stretching along what is called in English, "Happiness Street" which might be referred to colloquially as a red light district. The restoration of the street was intended to maintain the area's links with its past as well as making the buildings suitable for the use for which the local inhabitants maintain was innocuous – namely commercial enterprises run by respectable merchants. The preservation aim was to create a coherent, traditional appearance. The houses have been plastered and painted in red and gray hues in order to protect the brickwork. The mother-of-pearl used in the mouldings on the first floor was painstakingly restored while less expensive features adopted on the ground floor including iron doors and customized opaque glass for the windows. Canvas awnings were installed in all the buildings as they would originally have been used in the street.

Outside the centre of the City there are few restored historical areas which create an impression that the city has been regenerated with colonial heritage preservation as a benchmark. On a hill behind the Largo Do Senado, the only other restored square which is reminiscent of those which can be found in the cities and towns of Portugal is the Largo De Santo Agostinho. This was formerly the site of the original Portuguese city with several important buildings located along the streets running from the square. In the years leading up to the Handover, few Portuguese Christians congregated in the beautiful Church of Santo Agostinho – preferring the grandly named Sé Cathedral close to the Largo Do Senado – though the building has considerably less architectural merit. Opposite the

Church of Santo Augustinho is the charming São Pedro Theatre fallen yet again into a state of neglect after various attempts to regenerate its ambience and function.

Other remaining sites and properties representing the colonial influence on the development of the City are located among the tightly packed high rise buildings and confusing patterns of streets which have obliterated evocative images of a unique culture and way of life. Churches which were at the heart of the communities which once had their own characteristics, are now isolated monuments. They have long since ceased to function even as centres for Christian education or spiritual support to the community. Visitors from mainland China view them with curiosity but not the awe and respect that might be shown by those domestic tourists from India who experience the spectacle of Old Goa.

5 Conclusion

In a short paper discussing the sustainability of the colonial built heritage in the city and its relevance to future planning and development Taylor [3] made the recommendation that preservation should be considered as only one element in a broader effort to institute more effective urban planning in Macau, which should include specific regulations on building densities, traffic management, creation of public amenities, and environmental protection. He urged the authorities to focus their preservation activities on districts as well as landmarks, and integrate these districts into the economic life of Macau rather than isolating them as living museums.

One interesting observation made in this paper is that, according to a local architect Manuel Vicente, only a small number of basic building styles were used in Macau in the most significant historic building period. The sense of harmony that to some extent still exists in the historic landscape of Macau can be attributed to this factor as does the basic similarity in building volumes – two to three storeys, the use of pseudo-Iberian architectural elements in many buildings – the rounded arch, the tiled roof, the external window shutters. These elements however, are rapidly disappearing and in consequence, the harmonious and appealing features of the urban landscape. Taylor concludes his paper with the observation:

“While Macau has succeeded in preserving and in some cases revitalizing many significant landmarks, it has been much less successful in combating an overall deterioration in the perceived quality of the physical environment, and totally unsuccessful in conserving the historic townscape” (Taylor [3]).

It is salutary to compare Taylor’s assessment to the concluding remarks made in a more comprehensive study of Goa by Sir James Richards twenty years after the Portuguese left their colony:

“No-one wants, of course, to perpetuate the pre-1961 atmosphere of a decaying Portuguese colony. On the other hand, since the separate identity of places provides one of the pleasures of foreign travel, and since Goa’s identity includes an element drawn from the after-glow of imperial greatness, looking backwards, even with a touch of nostalgia, need not be wholly disapproved of. We do the

same in Rome and Mexico and Mughal India and many other places. And in Goa we do not have to look back to a far distant past; for Goa is still in the process of discovering what form its cultural identity will take when it no longer has the Portuguese language and life-style from which to refresh itself" (Richards [4]).

The apparently smooth political transition following the Handover of Macau by Portugal has not however, engendered a respect for the cultural legacy inherited by a community for which local and international politics have served the schemes of the power brokers but has yet to address such issues as a sustaining the advantages accrued from the socioeconomic development of the region.

This case study is part of ongoing research documenting the preservation of colonial built heritage in former territories and colonies in Asia. Unfortunately there is not only a lack of funding for preservation efforts initiated and implemented by cities such as Macau, but also no combined agenda or support for research efforts to document for preservation planning, the disappearing legacies in the region. Cities such as Georgetown in Penang, Malaysia, for example share many of the characteristics and problems of Macau. Georgetown is threatened with the type of regeneration that diminished the appeal of the cityscape of Singapore until the authorities realized the importance of saving its colonial era built heritage reflecting the cross-cultural influences that contributed to the foundation of the independent city state. For residents and tourists alike, the appeal of restored environments such as Boat Quay and Clarke Quay, Little India, and Burgis Street compensate for the negative impact which modernization has had on the character and soul of the city. It seems the new architects commissioned to represent the soaring spirit of these communities are obsessed with the iconization of the high rise rather than the elevation of pride in the historical legacies of charming mansions alongside humble but evocative dwellings set in squares and sheltered precincts.

Among the lessons to be learned from the preservation of the Portuguese colonial built heritage still extant despite extensive regeneration of the City of Macau, is that little would be achieved without the culture of entrepreneurship on which the success of this tiny territory was founded. In fact the atmosphere of a decaying Portuguese colony described by Sir James Richards was already gripping Macau until the entrepreneur Stanley Ho intervened and convinced an intransigent regime, deluded by visions of the perpetuation of a glorious empire, that progress could co-exist with the preservation of the status quo. However, the sustainability of the colonial built heritage of Macau depends now on convincing the new custodians of the legacy that further preservation planning meets the demands of the various stakeholders involved.

Prior to the Portuguese Handover, a top-down approach to urban planning and conservation was employed where internal decisions were made within government organizations with minimal involvement of stakeholders within the community. In the future, a more integrated heritage management approach is required which, according to Hall and McArthur [5], "reinforces the complex nature of the ownership of heritage by recognizing that the opinions, perspectives and recommendations of external stakeholders are just as legitimate as those of the planner or the 'expert'." The result of this approach, it is argued, will have a

far greater impact on the success of implementing preservation initiatives so that they are sustainable in the long term.

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