



## COLONIALISM AND ARCHITECTURE IN MACAO

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by  
Diogo Burnay

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"A Portuguese who had fallen asleep in Lisbon and, by magic, woke up in Hong Kong, would not be able to recognise where he was, but he surely would know that this city was not a Portuguese city. If the same Portuguese woke up near by the Nine Islands and, further on, he could see, from the ship, the Chapel of our Lady of Guia, then the Hospital of S. Januário, the S. Francisco Barracks and the houses along the Praia Grande, beyond those, the houses of the Chunambeiro and finally on the top of the hill, the Chapel of our Lady of Penha. He would then say to himself, I don't know what city this is, but I am definitely looking at a Portuguese city by the seaside. After arriving at the Porto Interior (Inner Port ), the same Portuguese would feel lost again: What is this? What kind of boats are these? What kind of strange people are these? What sort of house is that one that I have never seen one like that before? Am I dreaming or am I awake? After this, still under the same impression, he would then go to the Leal Senado (Senate) Square. After rubbing his eyes, as to wake up from a somewhat surreal dream, he would then look at the Leal Senado (Senate house) and the prison granite building and feel reassured that all that was surrounding him was indeed Portuguese. After strolling around the Praia Grande, he would want to see the Chunambeiro<sup>1</sup>, then to visit the several churches, all undoubtedly Portuguese.



Figure 1- View of Praia Grande Bay (ca. 1905). From Beltrão Coelho 1989: 57.

Today, in spite of all this, this is not so. The city has, for the last thirty years, sadly lost most of its Portugueseness. The government and the locals have been, without almost no hesitation or interference, spending millions of Patacas (the local currency), to replace the good by the worst one can possibly imagine, ruining and denationalising the city. What was either typically Portuguese or typically Chinese has been destroyed. We had a city as no-one had in the Far East, a city worth of being visited. Today we have a shapeless and uncharacteristic city of which almost every attraction and picturesqueness have been removed without a trace. I still remember, when I arrived to Macao, listening to foreigners admiring and contemplating the city".<sup>2</sup> Silva Mendes (1929)

Though this text is not contemporary, it has been quoted many times by different authors as having a somewhat timeless characteristic. Manuel Vicente already pointed out that the way Silva Mendes "depicted the transformations of the city still seems to prevail nowadays with a certain degree of sincerity"<sup>3</sup>.

What seems to me to be also extremely interesting in Silva Mendes text, is one's necessity and consequent ability to feel reassured by being able to recognise and to be identified with the images of a city far away from the mother land.



Figure 2- View of Praia Grande Bay. Photo by Au Vincent. From Beltrão Coelho 1992: 46.

Is there a modern colonial architecture in Macao?

Was there in Macao, as Silva Mendes stated, an exclusive Portuguese colonial architecture?

Is the development of Macao as a port city, only related with other Portuguese colonial port cities, or also with other port cities worldwide that are related to each other through the development of colonialism, imperialism and of the world-economic system?

What were the counter-colonial influences in the developments of colonial architecture?

Colonial architecture has been generally described as an import of eclectic and neo-classical forms from the motherlands and cores of Empires to their respective peripheries. This notion mainly based on a formal approach does not seem to provide a adequate answer for some of these questions. Even considering that the forms and architectural languages of most colonial buildings are sometimes a direct import from either metropolitan, imperial or other peripheral forms and norms, the modes of production and the technological means had always to be adapted somehow to local, either climatic, social, political or other, conditions. A fine example of this was the fact that the church of S. Pauls was built in the coast of China mainly with Japanese workers that, as it seems, were not experienced to carry out the stone work; or at least, the church was built with construction techniques that were completely unknown in this part of the world.

In trying to perceive what the relations might be between colonialism and architecture, namely modern architecture, architecture and building have to be understood, as Anthony King suggested <sup>4</sup>, on a global scale, in relation with regional and international, political, economic, social and cultural aspects of the world economic system.

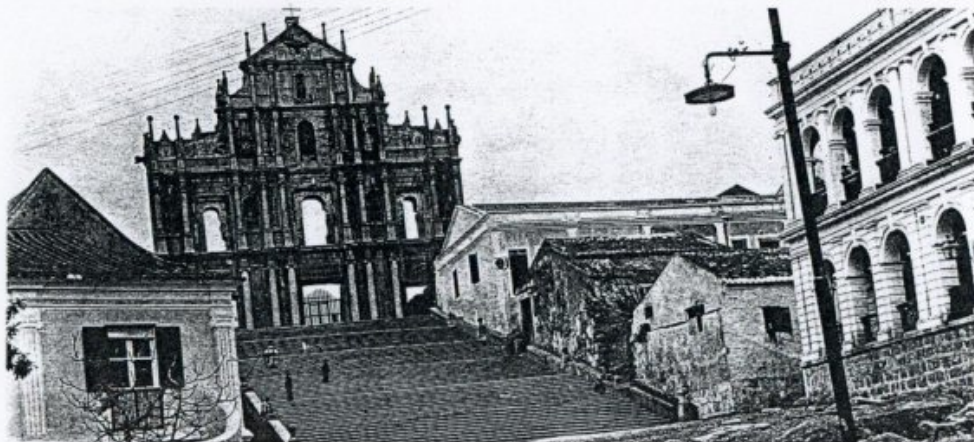


Figure 3- The Ruins of St.. Paul's (ca. 1900). From Beltrão Coelho 1989: 53.

## MACAU- FROM COMMERCIAL ENTREPÔT PORT TO COLONIAL CITY

City of production, consumption and colonial administration

The 'institutions of colonialism' (King, 1990: 34), mainly associated with the development of the State and of Empire' (Said, 1993: 8) started to be built by the Portuguese colonialists as soon as they established themselves in Macau in the middle of the 16th century. With the previously set purpose "to spread Faith and Empire" (Valente, 1993: 100), the religious congregations, almost directly dependent of Rome, were the organising cores of the city, around which the Portuguese built their houses" (Figueira, 1988: 11).

These institutions and their buildings, through their relation with the city, their forms and architectural styles, were also clearly both representative and instruments of the imposition of social, political and cultural change, and the resulting social and racial segregation, which was brought by an Imperial and consequently (Said, 1993: 8) colonial presence.

By the turn of the 17th century the city had become an European centre at the gates of China, a clear "extension of the international urban cities" (King, 1990: 140), as it was planned as much as a typical Portuguese medieval port city to operate in the empire network as a vehicle for economic dependency and consequently dependent urbanisation.



Figure 4- Macao at the end of the XVIIth century. From Basto da Silva 1993: 13.

A century later the Praia Grande developed as a waterfront promenade where the colonial government and some of the foreign commercial companies built their headquarters. These buildings were mainly designed at the 'core' of the colonial cultural and technological production. They were a reproduction, not only of eclectic and classical metropolitan forms, but also of ideals and concepts of imperial and consequently colonial luxury and opulence perpetrated by either Portuguese or European, namely English architects (Calado, 1987: 28) that inflicted much of the spatial and racial segregation into the colonial city.

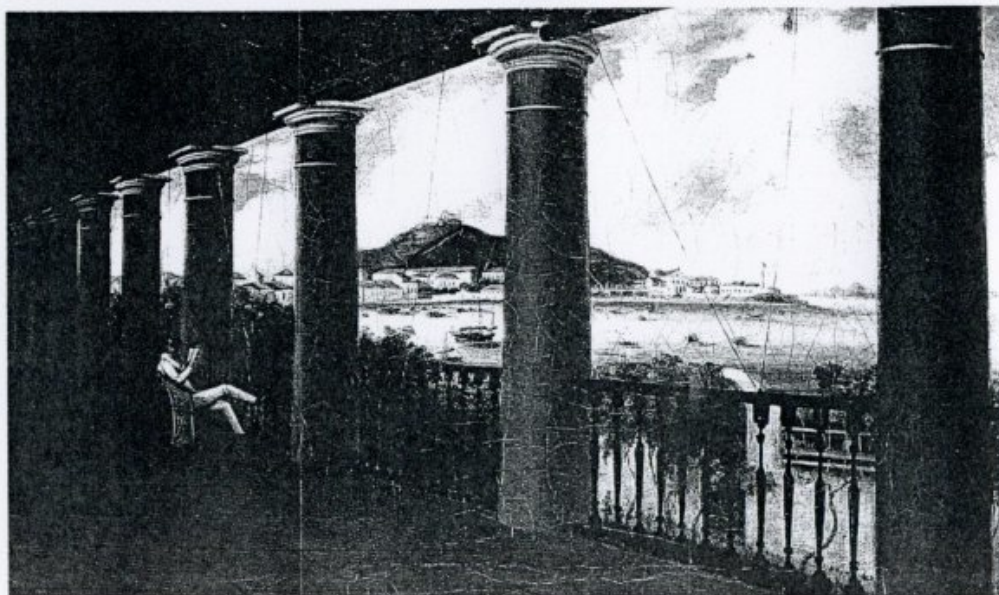


Figure 5- View of Praia Grande from the North, by George Chinnery, 1774-1852. From HKMA, 1983: 64.

Figure 6- View of Praia Grande from Nathaniel Kisman residence, 1843. From Gonzaga Gomes, 1994: 33-34.

After the establishment of the 'unequal treaties' and the seizure of the whole peninsula of Macau and Taipa and Coloane islands, the urban planning and sanitation introduced in the second half of the 19th century were related also to certain changes in the modes of production at the imperial core. These were based on principles of western rationality, technology and legislation proclaiming the beginning of the triumph of professionalism. The plans for the 'New Avenues' embodied also a reproduction of western urban planning models as they were implemented through a series of improvements and expropriations, obliterating what was left of the agricultural production thus also reinforcing the somewhat certainty of the high degree of economic, political and cultural interdependent relations between the colonial city of Macao and the capitalist colonial world-economy (King, 1990: 49).

The most significant institutions of colonialist architecture that were built during this period of romantic opulence, social representations of pleasure and trade prosperity, were conspicuous reproductions and transgressions (Vicente, 1982: 15) of the neo-classical ideals and forms of what was already an international development of European architecture.

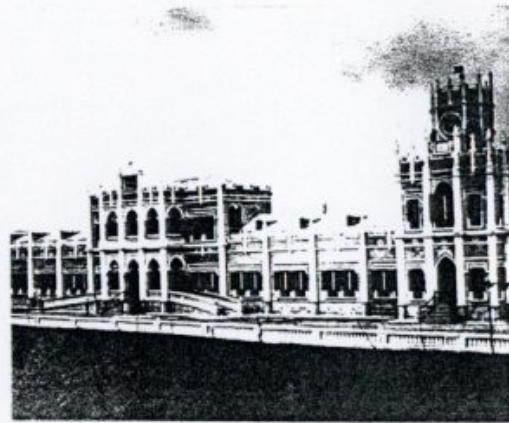


Figure 7- The Historical Archives and Educational Services buildings. From Figueira, F. Marreiros, 1988: 267.

Amongst some of the colonial institutions built in the second half of the 19th century were the Lighthouse (the first in the South coast of China) in 1865; the D. Pedro V theatre <sup>5</sup>, designed by Germano Marques; the Military Club in 1870; the Moorish Barracks in 1874, designed by Cassuco, an Italian architect; the Military Hospital, inspired by the S. Rafael Hospital in Brussels, in 1874 designed by the Baron of Cercal, a Macanese from the local elite and the Bela Vista Hotel. These were institutions of colonial administration and social control, developed by the centralised State in the metropolitan society and transplanted to the colonies, appearing as built form in the city - the prison, the lunatic asylum, the Hospital and the chamber of commerce, bringing "new categories of consciousness and a new social and moral order" (King, 1990:33). These buildings were mostly built at a privileged location within the city and were clear expressions of a neo-classical luxurious romantic fantasy and also nostalgic colonial presence (Vicente, 1982: 17) .

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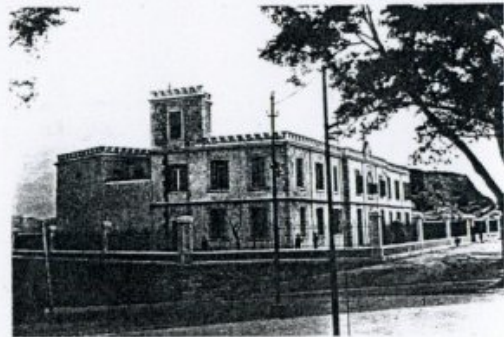


Figure 8- The Guia Chapel and Lighthouse, (c.a. 1880). From Beltrão Coelho, 1989: 35.

Figure 9- The S. Januário Military Hospital, (c.a. 1880). From Beltrão Coelho, 1989: 33.

Figure 10- The Military Club. From Beltrão Coelho, 1989: 92.

Figure 11- The Central Prison , 1915. From Beltrão Coelho and Jorge C., 1993: 55.



## MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN MACAU

### Architecture, Modernism and Colonialism in Macao

In the heart of the city, the opening and the consequent expropriations, of the Avenue Almeida Ribeiro <sup>6</sup> were a somewhat haussmanian imposition by the government that caused a great deal of social and political controversy. The new Avenue, one one hand, cut across the maze of alleys of the Chinese Bazar, dividing it, cutting it in two. This caused much protest from the Chinese population. On the other hand, connecting the Praia Grande, the core of the colonial system in Macao to the Bazar, the core of the Chinese business <sup>7</sup>, caused much criticism amongst the Portuguese Colonial Officers. The criticism at that time of the great majority of the Portuguese was rather more related to a western based notion of technological progress and to the scientific quality of urban planning as a quantifiable and measurable device in the process of modernising and beautifying the city.

The first concrete buildings, mostly private houses or small palaces, were built in Macao as early as in the 1900's. Even if set at a certain distance from the paradigms and paradoxes of the 'new' Modern and International architecture and the European debates centred in new technological, social and political programmes generated after the first World War (the 'War to end all wars'), the private house (bourgeois single family house with a garden attached) was in Macao the main vehicle through which innovations, though mostly at a technological level, were introduced at the periphery.



Figure 12- The Almeida Ribeiro. From Beltrão Coelho, 1989: cover.

These houses were clearly still 'social representations of a luxurious production of pleasure and desire' (Vicente, 1982: 15-16). They were typically reproductions not only of metropolitan forms, but also of imperial forms, transported from other peripheral cities of other 'colonial systems', which were then considered as metropolitan cores within the periphery, and thus incorporated in a larger and global trans-imperial and trans-colonial network. Amongst these houses, the Tseng Kwai Iu house in the Hospital street designed by the Portuguese architect Rebello de Andrade represented a shift from the symbolic to the functional and technological reproduction of colonial metropolitan architecture. This was achieved mainly through the attention given to specific climate conditions by the arcade and the recessed facades, which were the first 'air conditioned' architectural devices (Marreiros, 1984: 32) and the creation of interior cross ventilation in the whole house.

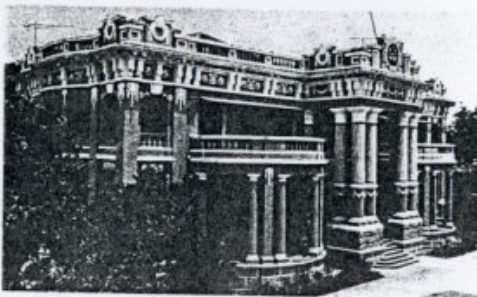
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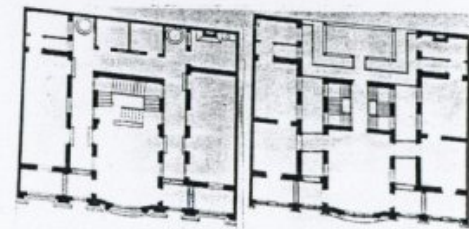
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Ground Floor Plan

First Floor Plan

Figure 13- The Casa Branca. From Andrade, 1981: 18.

Figure 14- The Vila Alegre. From Andrade, 1981: 16.

Figure 15- Plan of Tseng Kwai Iu house (1920). From Figueira, F. Marreiros, 1988: 257.

Figure 16- The Tseng Kwai Iu house (1920). From Figueira, F. Marreiros, 1988: 257.

The emergence in the colonial city in the 1930's of modernism (Figueira and Marreiros, 1988:19) or modern architecture was not an expression, of a break with the past, but of a shift from romantic symbolism to technological rationalism, within the tradition of colonialist reproduction and representation of the metropolitan forms.

Modern town planning and legislation were still mainly means of social and cultural control device (King, 1990: 59).

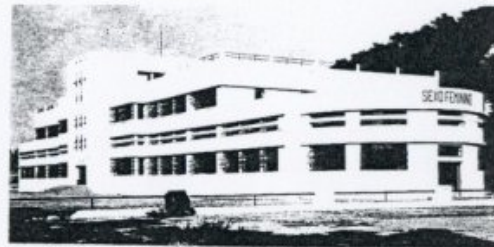
The institutions of colonialism and their architectural forms that were built during this period of time were also conspicuous technological and social reproductions and representations of the rational and western based modern principles of sun, light and air.

These technological changes in the modes of production were still mainly means of furthermore perpetration of western imperial and colonial notions of civilization.

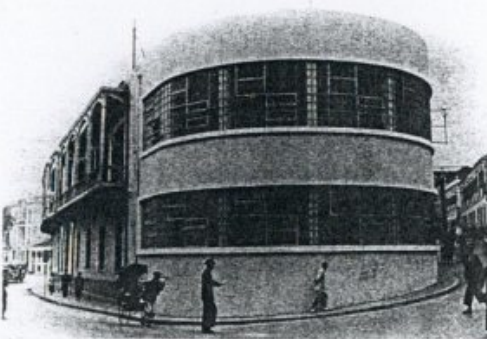
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Figure 17- Arch. Mitchell Greig, Guillien House. From Figueira, F. Marreiros, 1988: 207.

Figure 18- The Luso-Chinese School. From Figueira, F. Marreiros, 1988: 213.

Figure 19- The Public Works Department Building, 1937. From Beltrão Coelho, 1990: 125.

Figure 20- The Central Hotel. From Andrade, 1981: 49.

The local Portuguese, Macanese and/or Chinese engineers, draughtsmen and self-proclaimed artists were the ones, that through a rather more pragmatic approach to the building environment, established a more radical technological reproduction and representation of the new metropolitan forms and norms of the modern and international style. They were the designers of many of the colonial institutions of modernism that were built during the 1940's and the 1950's in Macao.

The public buildings and social housing programme of the Government in the 1950's were also instrumental in perpetrating the shifts from the romantic and symbolic to the rational and technological imbedded in colonial and imperial modernism. Whilst the colonial buildings such as the Administration Headquarters and schools that were mainly instrumental in maintaining the colonial status quo were designed at the Overseas Department at the core of the colonial system, social and public housing was mainly designed by Ernesto Freire, who was a senior draughtsman at the PWD.

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Figure 21- Infante D. Henrique Nacional Lyceum . In *Arquitectura Portuguesa*, nº 12, Dec/Jan.1987/88: 68.

Figure 22- The Administration Headquarters. From Figueira, F. Marreiros, 1988: 218.

Figure 23- Housing for colonial Officials of the Post Office Department. Courtesy of Macao Post Office.

Figure 24- Ernesto Freire, Post Office Workers Social housing. From Figueira, F. Marreiros, 1988: 216.

At the beginning of the 1960's, architects from the Overseas Ministry at the metropolis started to come to Macao to work for the government. Amongst some of these architects were Manuel Vicente, José Maneiras, Natália Gomes, Henrique Mendia, João Fernandes and Jorge Silva. Some of the most significant modern colonial buildings built in the 1960's were still designed at the imperial core by the architect Chorão Ramalho. Amongst these were the Pedro Nolasco High School, the Avé Maria Kindergarten and some private houses for the hierarchically most superior colonial workers in Macao. Though there was already a decay of the modern movement in Europe, these architects brought completely new modes of productions and of representations of town planning and of metropolitan forms. Much of the social housing and urban planning that was carried out in the 1960's, though they were different in their formal and cultural production, they were still carrying with themselves the colonial tradition of reproduction and representation of the social, economic, political and cultural dimension of the metropolitan core.

By the end of 1966 the Chinese riots in Macao compelled the colonial modes of production to be adapted to the increasing realities of the spread of the Cultural Revolution in China and of Chairman Mao teachings, which had become a new sort of eastern colonialism.

Even after the Democratic Revolution in Portugal in 1974 and the de-colonisation period at the western cores within the post-modern modes of production, the colonial and world social, economic, political and cultural systems tradition still prevails in time and in Macao.

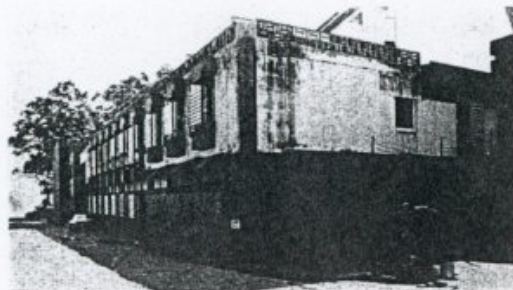
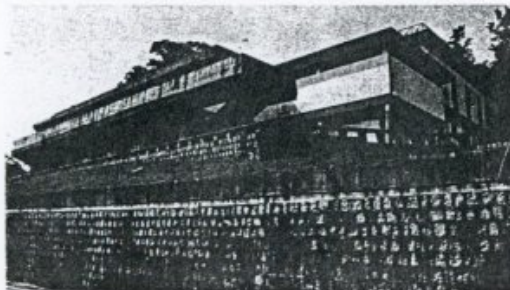


Figure 25- Arch Chorão Ramalho, Avé Maria Kindergarten. From Andrade, 1981: 49.

Figure 26- Arch Manuel Vicente, Helen Liang Kindergarten. From Andrade, 1981: 49.

## NOTES

1. Between 1625 and 1664, cannons were casted by Manuel Bocarro in his small factory in Chunambeiro in Macao for the city walls and fortresses and for China. Later the Senate offered to the Viceroy of Canton one of this cannons (casted in 1627), which was taken by the English after the seizure of the city in 1841 and then taken to the Tower of London (Montalto de Jesus, 1992: 83). Although in a rather early and unforeseen stage, this peripheral production did play its role in what was to become a global development of a capitalist world-economic space, in which goods were transported from the periphery for core consumption (King, 1990: 4) and reproduction.
2. Silva Mendes was a colonial worker who came to Macao as a teacher at the turn of the century. During his staying in Macao he published several articles in the local Portuguese newspapers. Some of his most famous ones were compiled in two books on Chinese art and philosophy. He was pretty much considered as one of the colonial intellectuals living in Macao at that time. In some of his writings there are also aspects that leave some of the issues related to imperialism and colonialism somewhat untouched and unchallenged. What it seems to me to prove this is exactly his description of the kind of reassurance one would get just by being able to recognise oneself in a colonial setting, far away from the core, the motherland.
3. Manuel Vicente quoted Silva Mendes text, published in 1929, in an article he wrote in 1982 for *Sábado*, a weekly magazine published by the Macao Government. There was from the 1980's onwards an economic boom that almost brought most of the old and colonial traditional city fabric to a halt. Manuel Vicente also mentioned the transgression and distortion related to the transport, import and implementation of a colonial architecture that would be one of the most important cultural productions of collective identity, luxurious pleasure, and imperial nostalgia, amongst others.
4. See King, A. (1989) *Urbanism, Colonialism, and the World- Economy: Cultural and Spatial Foundations of the World Urban System*, London: Routledge.
5. The theatre was an ideological programmatic source of display, consumption and reproduction of the colonial world culture. It was also a building type that brought social and racial segregation as the Europeans and the Macanese watched the shows and the Chinese watched them at the back of the stage. This seems to have been a somewhat accepted generalised notion about the social role of the theatre and cinema house as projects submitted to the government up to the 1930's had in their plan drawings the indication of this racial segregation. There was the Foyer, the stalls and the pit, the central seats, the stage and behind it, the space for the Chinese.
6. The first name for, what was to become (at least desired by some and condemned by others) the most modern and beautiful avenue of Macao, was no one else but the hero of the Passaleão, the consecrated Colonel Nicolau Mesquita, the one who had saved the honour of the colony and of the sovereignty of the Portuguese Empire in Macao just after the Ferreira do Amaral, the Governor of Macao was murdered in the 1840's.
7. Fernando Távora stated that the "opening of the Avenue Almeida Ribeiro across the Chinese old quarters embraces the two rather different urban areas of the city by cutting across the hill that had before separated the Portuguese from the Chinese" (Távora, 1983: 6). There is also a Chinese legend that the peninsula of Macao is part of a big dragon that includes part of the province of Guangdong and that the opening of the avenue cut off the tail of the dragon. For more information regarding legends and superstitions in Macao, see Gonzaga Gomes (1951) and Ortet (1988).

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