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Portuguese Traces in Macao's Public Spaces: A Travelogue

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Abstrak

Keberadaan Makau sebagai wilayah administratif khusus di Republik Rakyat Tiongkok, secara historis menyimpan peninggalan Portugis tidak hanya dalam aspek budaya, namun juga dapat ditemukan pada citra tata ruang kota tersebut. Tak heran jika wisatawan yang berkunjung ke Macau kerap membayangkan dirinya sedang berada di Eropa. Tulisan ini mengkaji tentang keanekaragaman peninggalan Portugis di Kota Macau dalam sosiologi ruang kota dengan metode pengumpulan data berupa observasi (pengalaman) dan catatan perjalanan. Hasilnya menunjukkan kuatnya pengaruh budaya Portugis di negara ini, karena Macao merupakan koloni Eropa tertua di Tiongkok. Sejarah mencatat Macau dijadikan sebagai pos perdagangan Portugis setelah kedatangan Jorge Alvares di Tiongkok bagian selatan pada tahun 1570. Makna kekuasaan Portugis yang tampak dalam rancangan konstruksi budaya dan ekonomi ruang kota menarik untuk dikaji dalam kajian mengenai hal tersebut. sosiologi ruang kota.

Kata Kunci: *Warisan Portugis, Ruang Publik, Macao*

Abstract

Macao's existence as a special administrative region in the people's Republic of China, historically holds Portuguese heritage not only in cultural aspects, but can also be found in the city's spatial image. It is not surprising that tourists visiting Macao often imagine themselves as being in Europe. This paper examines the variety of Portuguese heritage in Macao City in the sociology of urban space with data collection methods in the form of observation (experience) and travel notes. The results show that the strong influence of Portuguese culture in this country, because Macao is the oldest European colony in China. History records that Macao was used as a Portuguese trading post after the arrival of Jorge Alvares in southern China in 1570. The meaning of Portuguese power that appears in the design of cultural and economic constructions in urban space is interesting to analyze in the study of the sociology of urban space.

Keyword: *Portuguese Heritage, Public Space, Macao*

INTRODUCTION

As Visiting Macau is a matter of pride and pleasure, which has been felt by many history, culture, economy and tourism enthusiasts. The reason is because this former Portuguese colony (de Matos, 2020) holds traces of a unique past heritage in terms of its socio-cultural, economic and public spaces (A. Ahmadin, 2024). The charm of Macau has bewitched and hypnotized many tourists so that everyone who visits Hong Kong, always feels incomplete if they have not visited Macau. Finally, Hong Kong and Macau seem to be an inseparable tourist package.

The phenomenon of visitors' fascination with Macau has at least become an important discussion in a book entitled "Macau: The Imaginary City" written by Jonathan Porter. In his writing, he describes how many people who visit Macau give him a very deep impression, especially on the imagination. Macau is imagined as a dream or as a city that is not entirely real or not from the real world. One interesting label from this article is that Macau is portrayed as a unique city but also as fragile and even as an enduring threshold in the tug-of-war between western and eastern cultures (Porter, 2018).

As a former Portuguese colony since the 16th century, Macao retains much of its European heritage. This is possible because history records that Macao is the oldest European colony in China and was once a Portuguese trading post after the arrival of Jorge Alvares in southern China in 1570. Furthermore, history records that the Ming Dynasty, which ruled at that time, had leased Macau as a commercial center or trade center that remained under Chinese rule. This status lasted until 1999, when Macao's sovereignty was handed back to the People's Republic of China. This long history of Portuguese rule has caused Macao to emerge as a country with European characteristics, both in terms of urban space and some of the culture of its people.

The strong influence of Portuguese culture in Macao, including in the aspect of urban public space, is interesting to study, especially from the perspective of the sociology of urban space. There are at least two main points of interest in this paper, namely first, the forms of Portuguese (European) social and cultural space construction that characterize Macao until now. Second, how the spatial consequences are caused, especially in relation to the attractiveness of urban space and its function as a tourist attraction. This is important as the impression and even the principle of many people that if they do not have the opportunity to visit Europe then just visiting Macau is enough. The reason is because in many ways, especially in public space and urban architecture, Macau represents the atmosphere of a European city.

To get a complete explanation of the forms of social and cultural space construction

in the Portuguese style in Macao, this study uses a historical approach with the intention of synchronic dialogue between present reality and the past. In addition, this study is also interestingly linked to the sociology of space approach in relation to spatial practices, representative space, and spatial representation. Thus, the combination of historical sociology and sociology of space approaches will produce a more comprehensive discussion of urban public spaces.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a sociology of space research that is descriptive in terms of data presentation and analysis (M. Ahmadin, 2022). The data type of this research is the physical and symbolic evidence of Portuguese influence in the social, cultural, and economic fields that appear in public spaces in Macao City. The data collection process is done through direct observation and literature study related to the topic of study (Aminzade, 1992). Source critique was conducted by comparing statistical data (Schabenberger & Gotway, 2017) and official government archives with data in the field related to the topic studied. The data analysis is carried out by linking the theory or concept with the reality or phenomenon that appears in the process of observation and a series of experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Macao Profile and Short History

Geographical facts show that Macao is a small territory with an area of less than seventeen square kilometers and demographic facts show that the city has a population of about after million. The position of this Portuguese-bureaucratic Chinese city, not only known as a trading center but also as a religious center that developed since the 16th century. The culture shows the complexity with which different ethnic groups live in different worlds. While Cantonese make up around 85 percent of the region's population, there are also other Chinese groups, particularly from Fujian and Shanghai. There are also around 7,000 Macaense (Macanese, a Portuguese-speaking half-breed). In terms of government, there are a small number of continental Portuguese who are mostly government officials, while the Macaense occupy lower-level government positions (Ptak, 2001).

In a book titled "Macau: The Imaginary City", the history of Macau as a commercial and cultural center begins in the 17th century, founded by the Portuguese in 1557. In the 18th century Macau developed as a Eurasian community and became a Chinese city in the 19th century. A century later Macau became the center of modern manufacture in the late 20th century and has been returned to the People's Republic of China since 1999. Macau as

a port city is a nexus of cultural encounters and interestingly, the meeting point between the expansive Portuguese Empire and the introspective and closed Chinese Empire. It is also explained that Macau's geographical position on the periphery of two worlds or at the crossroads of isolated yet globalized roads, the port city is a unique cultural and social fusion in the narrative of cross-cultural exchange (Porter, 2018).

Another reference explains that Macao was the first port on the coast of China to come under the control of a foreign power and that it was a pioneer in the early relationship between East and West. In addition, Macao is also mentioned as an important place for cultural and economic exchanges between China and Portugal over a period of four centuries. In fact, this famous port city played an important role in the process of spreading Christianity and became a base for Europeans trading with countries in the Asian region from Vietnam to Japan (Ptak, 2001).

Exploring the City's Public Spaces

On Thursday afternoon, November 2, 2017, I had the opportunity to visit public spaces and attractions in Macao. The first tourist attraction I visited was the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral. This Christian house of worship is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Yin & Jia, 2024). This Portuguese-style church built in the XVII century (Avelar, 2017), in historical records, is said to have once been a center for Christian religious education (Chi - Hou*, 2004). From the womb of this academy, Christian scientists were born in the Supreme Court, Beijing (Witek, 2015). According to history, in 1835 there was a great fire in which the red rooster engulfed and destroyed the building. All that remains of the incident is the front wall of the Cathedral (Bain, 2011). What we see when we visit this location today is the front wall that remains from the fire of yesteryear. Interestingly, this heritage is "timeless" and has been preserved to become a tourist destination that people are reluctant to miss when visiting Macao.

Under the hot sun that afternoon, I stood in front of the ruins of this church and looked at the surrounding buildings with European architecture (Delanty & Jones, 2002). It was a beautiful sight that was certainly not only interesting for photography or taking selfies, but its historical value was no less tempting to identify. The surpassing side of these old and unique buildings makes us curious to visit them. Too busy enjoying the scenery around the church ruins (Wieczorek, 2019), I was a few steps behind our group that was already moving.

It wasn't long before I saw two Chinese women (Leung et al., 2001) standing not far from where I was and they happened to be taking pictures too. I immediately asked for help to take a picture with my cellphone camera, but she invited me to take a photo together using her camera. I just agreed with the hope that after that I would also have

documentation through my cellphone. But what happened? After we took a photo together using his camera and being snapped by his friend, instead he just left smiling like someone winning something. I just realized that I was fooled by the two Chinese women, who I assumed were still students. In essence, I had failed to make a pictorial documentation of myself with my cell phone. "But never mind. Haven't I gotten dozens of pictures by snapping myself?", I said to myself.

From the ruins of this church, I then walked down Senado Square, a plaza that is a landmark of Macao (Wang et al., 2018). The classic European-style architecture of the building gives it a distinctive and alluring feel. "Very European", that's the right expression to describe this place or label the situation. Then don't forget there is one tourist attraction that is no less interesting, namely the Leal Senado Building (Sheng & Tang, 2013), the first city hall in Macao (Pinheiro, 2005). Historically, this building, built in 1784, was once the center of Portuguese military power (Sim, 2017).

Another trace of Portuguese power and heritage that I visited was the Venetian Hotel & Resort. It's the biggest mall in Macao with an amazing interior design. In this place I got to see a replica of the Venice canal and Gondola (Spurr, 2016). It is said that the Godlier (boatman) was imported directly from Europe (Leone, 2019). At the canal replica in the middle of the shopping center, I saw visitors queuing to enjoy the boat ride facility while taking pictures. They seemed to really enjoy the small boat.

On the edge of the canal replica, I also saw someone singing nostalgic songs (Chou & Lien, 2014) accompanied by classical guitar strumming. It wasn't only the Caucasians who enlivened this place. Some Indonesian visitors were also spotted and even had time to chat with me. "I'm from Banyuwangi, mas," the hijab-wearing woman replied when I asked her. According to her, she and several family members deliberately vacationed and visited Macau. Just like my group, they were also in Hong Kong a few days earlier.

Is the Portuguese legacy just that? Of course not. A favorite spot loved by tourists in Macao is the Barrier Gate or Portas do Cerco (BORDERS, 2009). This place is an important historical witness to the construction of Macao in 1870. The gate has a fountain and a number of greenery around it. Don't forget that in this place we also witnessed the poetry of the famous Portuguese poet, Luis de Camoes written on a green wall (de Almeida, 2018). Not satisfied with the view of the fountain? Come visit Camoes Garden (Wong & McKercher, 2011). The oldest urban park in Macao also features a fountain with a bronze statue of "Embrace" (Lo, 2009). This statue symbolizes the centuries-long friendship between Portugal and China (Edmonds & Yee, 1999). This park is also a public space (Geuth et al., 2023) that is widely used as a place to relax, hang out, and as a means of exercising in the morning.

For history and culture buffs, you can also visit the Museu de Macau. In this museum, you can see various collections that are historical evidence of the encounter between Chinese and Western cultures (Guerreiro & Piedade, 2007). You can even get information about art and tradition in Macao. In addition, we can also enjoy witnessing the history of journalism in China, namely St. Dominic's Church (Chu & Mariani, 2020). Historically, it was in this church with Portuguese and Spanish architecture that the first Portuguese newspaper in China was published. In its development until now, this place is a sacred art museum with a gallery that has a collection of 300 artifacts. There were many other places I wanted to see that day. But it was getting late and that meant we had to rush to the hotel to rest.

The Meaning of Space and Socio-Economic Construction

If we refer to the formulation of space introduced by Lefebvre (Schmid, 2008), then we will recognize two different types of space production, namely natural space and social space. In relation to these two types of space, he then developed the concept of space into three types (Gottdiener, 1994), namely: (1) Spatial practices, namely perceived space or physical organization of space, such as human routines and activities in daily life; (2) Representations of space, namely imagined space such as the type of space created by urban planners and architecture; and (3) Representational Space, namely lived space includes experiences about space that are individual and subjective. This lived space is constructed through symbols, images, and personal emotions (Lefebvre, 2014).

The first typology of space can be seen in the phenomenon of social and cultural life in Macao, which shows the style of European society. A unique phenomenon of daily life (M. Ahmadin, 2024) is the tendency of Eastern and Western people to live together and complement each other in Macao. The second type of space is characterized by the European-style architecture of buildings located at several points in Macao. The ruins of St. Paul's Church, one of Macao's main attractions, is certainly not the only space that represents the European style in the country (Wang et al., 2018). If you take the time to visit Carmel Garden, a small public space located in the eastern part of Taipa Village, you will see a fantastic natural landscape of beautiful flowers on a hill surrounded by European-style buildings.

European-style public spaces (Fana et al., 2021) can also be found at Senado Square, a plaza that is a landmark of Macao City where the architecture of the building is classic European style. In addition, we also usually visit the Venetian Hotel & Resort, the largest mall in Macao with an extraordinary interior design. In this place, I got to see a replica of the Venice canal and Gondola. It is said that the Godlier (boatman) was imported directly from Europe (Spurr, 2016). Another interesting public space is the Museu de Macau, which

holds various collections in the form of historical evidence of the encounter of Chinese and western cultures, and many others. The third type of space relates to the expressions and forms of meaning that arise from visitors when they interact symbolically and then feel like they are in Europe. The image of Macao, which represents the meeting of Eastern and Western cultures, means a unique situation that is rarely found elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

As a former European colony, Macau still retains its Portuguese heritage in terms of social, cultural and economic aspects. Walking through the public spaces of the city of Macau will present us with an interesting and very alluring view, because it is as if we are in Europe. The construction of public spaces in typical European style in Macao is a representation of political and economic power packaged in architectural symbols and various other cultural products. Just like cities in former European colonies, the most dominant influence is architecture. It is interesting in Macao because to this day the nuances of the city's public spaces are still thick with European style. The condition of the urban public space from the aspect of tourism is very beneficial because it is a distinctive feature as well as an attraction for tourists to visit Macao. The more tourists visit the city of Macao, it is certain that it will contribute significantly to the economic development of this country.

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