

# *Migration and Making of a Multicultural City*

## *-A Case Study of Returned Overseas Chinese in Macao*

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**Abstract**—Migration and the dynamics of city formation are reciprocally correlated. Southeast Asian Chinese migrated to Macao since the 1960s, bringing ethnic food, clothing, ceremonies and customs from their host countries to this heterogeneous city. Thus, the making of multicultural city was incorporated with diversified components from Portuguese influence, Chinese communities and Southeast Asian features. Based on the oral history of the migration stories and the interview-based fieldwork in Macao, we retell the stories that Portuguese Macao accepted Southeast Asia Chinese after anti-Chinese riots. We examine what they brought to Macao, including cheap labour, capital and multicultural components. Moreover, due to their efforts, the city now remains a strong connection based on kinship and fellow-villager networks with Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam et al.

**Keywords**—migration; making of a multicultural city; returned overseas Chinese (*Guiqiao*); Portuguese Macao

### I. INTRODUCTION

The making of Macao<sup>1</sup> as a multicultural city started from the Age of Discovery, and the city is still changing, fast. Once a fishing village, it then was propelled to be a trade post from Portugal to China and to Southeast Asian countries, and later to be the first place where western missionaries visited China. Through years of historical channel, Macao's urban pluralism has mainly formed into two parts: those from Portuguese influence and those characteristics from Southeast Asian countries. Many literatures have focused on the former one [1], little attention so far has been paid on the latter. Since ethnic features from southeastern Asia as food, clothing, ceremonies, and other customs have diversified the outlook of the city, it is high time to explore deeper about the historical reason and mechanism of the city formation. Who brought the ethno-cultural features of Southeast Asia into this subtropical city, and since when? How those ethnic features were incorporated into the making of the city and thus influenced the people dwelling on? What do those ethnic features mean to the city and the regional economy, especially in times of current global issues?

### II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### Mobility among people from China and Southeast Asia

<sup>1</sup>For the name of the city, "Macao" is an English expression often used after 2000, while Macau is a Portuguese one used before 2000.

began in an earlier time when people barely had the concepts of country and cross-border. Cultural exchanges and moving were common with no restriction. Five migration waves from China to the Southeast Asia contributed Chinese communities in Southeast Asia [2], and among them, Coolie labor trade was the latest one. As a meeting point of two historical world trade lines: Lisbon-Goa-Nagasaki and Manila-Mexico, Macao witnessed the notorious Coolie Trade. A large number of villagers from Fujian or Guangdong were sold to plantations or mines in Southeast Asian countries, South America and other regions. No official statistics showed the exact number of this slave trade ("piglet trade" in Cantonese), but the number of barracks as a slave station can be an evidence. In 1865, Macao had eight to ten Barracoons, and later in 1866 the number of slave trade agents grew to 35 to 40, and to more than 300 in 1867 [3]. Later on, most Southeast Asian countries, having been claimed as colonies of western countries, developed those new industries as manufacturing, railways and shipping, and thus the demands for skilled workers increased. Chinese migrants thrived since then.

Not until the 1950s, most Southeast Asian Chinese gained their identity in host countries, either with permit of permanent stay, or of long-time stay. Thereafter, even though some of them still remained low-status position, most Chinese people started their own business as "middleman" in trade and commerce, with certain occupations as agents, labor contractors, rent collectors, money lenders, and brokers [4]. They soon achieved economic success, and gained a name "Asian Jews". In Myanmar, for instance, Chinese owned 1,046 rice factories before Ne Win Government started to confiscate all the industries in the 1960s, and that accounted for 80% of local rice industry [5]. In Cambodia, up to 1960s, the percentage of employment for Chinese people in occupations with the hierarchal social status were respectively as 0% as peasant and fisherman, 31% as workers, 95% in commercial industry, and one percent as professional and in government [6]. Hence, despite of their economic success, most Southeast Asian Chinese remains lower social and political status, and even being expelled from their host countries.

In the 1960s to 1970s, Southeast Asian countries started a series of anti-Chinese riots, as Indonesia in 1965, Myanmar in 1967, Malaysia in 1969, and Cambodia from 1975. Among more than one social consequences caused by those activisms, forced ethnic migration was not the least one. To take Chinese dwellers in Rangoon for instance, tens of thousands of

Myanmar Chinese returned back to their hometowns, more than 100,000 people to the United States, 40,000 to 50,000 in Thailand, 20,000 in Macau, and 120,000 in Taiwan. A total number of 300,000 Myanmar Chinese distributed in more than twenty countries and regions [7].

### III. WHAT THE MIGRANTS BROUGHT TO MACAO

Macao was one of their destinations of migration, and those migrants changed the city's demographic features, its economy structures, and enriched its multicultural outlooks. From the 1960s on, returned oversea Chinese (with its Chinese pronunciation as: *Guiqiao*) came to reside in Macao, when in its transition from Portuguese colonialized rule to a Chinese one. Looking back on those basic facts helps us understand how a multicultural city was formed gradually.

#### A. An Increase of Population

Macao's population in the 1960s was around 169,299, decreased by 9.8%, compared with the total number of 187,772 in the 1950s. The declining of population was due to the wartime that people were fleeing to Hong Kong, and some back to Mainland China after the Civil War and the Japanese War. On the contrary, the number increased by 46.9% in the 1970s. Returned oversea Chinese accounted for part of the increase. The first waves of migration were more than 5,000 Indonesia Chinese coming to reside in 1966 to 1967, and then followed by 20,000 Myanmar Chinese from around 1967 to the beginning of 1970s, over 8,000 Cambodian Chinese from 1975. The second ones started from the late 1970s to the early 1980s when China's Opening-up Policy allowed more workers in those overseas Chinese state-owned farms to migrate to Hong Kong or Macao for family reunion. Up to 1978, the number of overseas Chinese in Macao amounted to around 26,000 people, and to over 50,000 people in the mid-1980s. Up to 2001, the number grew to more than 70,000 people, 16% of the total number of population as 435,235 [8].

TABLE I. NUMBERS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN CHINESE RETURNED TO MACAO

Major host countries	Number of migrants and their occupations in Macao		
	mid 1960s to 1970s	Late 1970s to 1980s	Occupations
Indonesia	5,000	3000	Manufacturing workers, construction workers, real estate agents, taxi drivers, restaurants owners, retailer, carpenters, doctors and nurses
Myanmar	20,000	10,000	
Cambodia	8,000	-4500*	

<sup>a</sup>. Notes: 4000 to 4500 Cambodian Chinese migrated back to the host country after the political situation became more stabilized in the 1980s.

#### B. Cheap Labour and Small-sized Capital in Local Economy

Macao's economic structures changed within a bigger context of global economy. In history, it was an important entrepôt for merchandise trade between China and other countries, while its local industries were weak. In the 1950s, its pillar industry was manufacturing, as producing incense, matches and firecrackers. In the 1960s, after the casino licenses were open to bidding, hospitality and tourism prospered,

leading to the development of public transport. The number of tourists in Macao was 700,000 in 1960, 1.26 million in 1965, and over two million in 1972. This could be further proved by those Returned Overseas Chinese who first came to Macao in the 1960s: "taxi was only available upon appointment, because fewer passengers would take it. Two Patacas (MOP\$) could cover any place within Macao city, while most people still chose to walk to where they want to go, even it was a long distance." Later on, after the Casino Lisboa was built, transport and its related facilities were in demand as more tourists came to the city, so "we put money together to buy taxi, 9000 to 10000 Patacas for one taxi and its license." At that time, most of them took three to four jobs to earn money. They help build Macau-Taipa cross-sea bridge and reservoirs. Moreover, due to their roles as cheap labour, some Hong Kong garment factories moved to Macao.

In addition to their roles as workforce, those migrants of returned overseas Chinese save their money in Banco Nan Tung (Nantong Bank) upon arrival, which later in 1987 changed its name into Bank of China (Macao Branch). Meanwhile, as required by Portuguese Macao government, migrants needed to pay to dwell in Macao. Indonesian Chinese came in waves around the year of 1966, and needed a deposit of 500 Macau Patacas. Later, Myanmar Chinese were required in 1960s to pay at least 15,000 MOP to purchase apartments as a qualification of residence. Those apartments, one interviewer recalled, "were far from convenient locations and not in good condition. Edf. Tong Pak, for instance, was in Rua de Tome Pires, where neither could I live in, nor started a business in."

#### C. Evolution of Community-based Networks and Business

Macao in the 1960s was in a power transit from Portuguese rule to a Chinese one. Its colonial period ended around 1974, when Portugal was in a political turmoil till the Carnation Revolution. So Macao was actually in a state of autonomy. When Southeast Overseas Chinese migrated back, they established "the Association of Returned Overseas Chinese Macau" in 1968. According to one of the organizer, they chose their identity as "returned overseas Chinese" (*Guiqiao*) as what was practiced in mainland China, instead of the "overseas Chinese" (*huaqiao*), because they believed Macao was part of China's territory. Worth to notice that, Macao was still governed by Portugal at that time, and China and Portugal had not yet established diplomatic relations. Another noticeable fact was their citizenship. To take Myanmar for instance, the first generation of Myanmar Chinese most held Chinese passports and resided in their host country as Chinese for even many years. For the later generation who was born in local, they was only issued with a permit for long-stay, which required them to live in one place for a longer term. Therefore, when they migrated back since the 1960s, they either held a Chinese passport or a paper certificate of "statelessness". Moreover, their wealth and assets were deprived in different degree. In Myanmar all the wealth were confiscated, while in Indonesia, all the currencies with large denomination were cut in half. Due to their political and economic deprivation, many had difficulty in entering Portuguese Macao. For a passport and a visa, they had to pay from 500 to 20,000 Patacas. In face of those constraints and potential bribery, the Association sent

delegates to negotiate with the then Portuguese Macao government in 1970. They won the negotiation by decreasing the deposit to 200 pataca and later on being cancelled in the 1980s. Since then, the returned overseas Chinese organized more associations to help each other fit in, as listed in Table II.

TABLE II. NUMBERS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN CHINESE RETURNED TO MACAO

Name of Association	Year of foundation
Returned Overseas Chinese Association of Macau	1968
Black Cat Sports Association of Macau	1971
Macau Association of Mutual Help of Myanmar Overseas Chinese	1971
Cambodian Overseas Chinese Association (original: Cambodian Welfare Association)	1975
Myanmar Overseas Chinese Clinic	/
Myanmar Returned Overseas Chinese Federation of Macau	1992
Association of Cambodia Overseas Chinese of Macau	2002
Macau Indonesia Friendship Association	2007
Macau Friendship Association of Returned Overseas Chinese from Vietnam, Cambodia & Laos	2010
Indonesia Returned Overseas Chinese Association	2011
Macau Myanmar Overseas Chinese Association of Promotion in Industrial & Commercial	2013
Myanmar Macau Economy, Trade, Culture & Tourism Promotion Association	2013
Myanmar Overseas Chinese Association of literature	2014
Macau and Indonesia Islamic Association	2014
Cambodia Overseas Workers (Macau) Job Service Association	2015
Myanmar Chamber of Commerce in Macau	2015
Myanmar-Macao Exhibition and Trade Promotion Association	2015
Macau-Myanmar Friendship Association	2015
Macau Myanmar Youth Chamber of Commerce	2015
Indonesia Returned Overseas Chinese Culture and Art Friendship Association of Macao	2016
Indonesian and Chinese Friendship Association of Macao	2016

#### IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF RETURNED OVERSEAS CHINESE AS A GROUP

Today, returned overseas Chinese are among the third biggest sub-ethnic group, besides Guangdong people and Fujian people. The previous experience of dwelling in foreign countries helped them grow some new group characteristics:

Firstly, they are with multicultural backgrounds due to their migration experiences. They most remain traditions from Lingnan culture, as either themselves or their parents grew up in those “Qiaoxiang” [9, 10] with customs of Guangfu, Chaozhou or Hakka. Meanwhile, they experienced the Islamic culture or the Hinayana Buddhist culture in Southeast Asia. Their shared languages or dialects, customs and memories made a bond among themselves. Thus, the annual culture festivals were held in Macao, as Water festival (Maha Thingyan) and Myanmar New Year, and the Southeast Asia food carnival.

Secondly, they built social and international networks across countries based on kinship or villager-based networks. A survey in July, 2018 showed that the kinship of returned overseas Chinese has spread throughout more than 60 countries and regions. The ways of contact are business, family reunion,

tourism and other cultural exchanges, and some activities are on yearly basis.

Thirdly, even till now, they retain the habit of earning money from hard-working and thrift and saving money for future. As what they practiced in Southeast Asian countries, most of them established self-owned business based on kinship and social network.

Fourthly, they exert a higher expectation on their later generation’s education. The second and third generations often accept higher education, easier to be adapted to a second language or dialect. “Even though I was born and raised in Macau, I still have relatives, friends back in Yangon,” which provides more than one feasible access to start a business, said one interviewer, who is a second generation of returned overseas Chinese.

#### V. CONCLUSION/SUMMARY

Chinese social network is hard to track. We tried to collect oral history and to conduct an interview-based survey among those associations and communities. Oral history and interviews have their weak points, merely inaccurate information about some certain dates or places, and about the traumatic experience of deprivation. However, the information can be the supplement of the statistic and cold facts. Based on our research, we found that Macao and most Southeast Asian countries have connections and exchanges based on people’s communication.

Conversely, official statistics seems to neglect those individual and communities-based exchanges. So far, Macao’s trade with Southeast Asian countries is little, with only a small percentage of exports to Vietnam (0.4%) and Singapore (0.1%), and no statistics to show Macao has imports from Southeast Asia [11]. Conversely, Macao’s biggest trade partners in terms of exports are respectively Hong Kong (64.6%), Mainland China (15.8%), EU (1.3%) and USA (1.1%), while in terms of imports are mainland China (34.1%), EU (26.2%), Hong Kong (8.4%). Compared with the neighboring Hong Kong, Macao seems to be more self-contained, and yet it is not the truth.

Based on policies of free visa and Macao’s regional roles, there is much room to improve the trade relationship between Macao and Southeast Asian countries. Some suggestions are 1) ethnic features could be selected as niches put to the regional marketing of tourism. Macao has world-class hospitality and exhibition centers, which provided accesses for more opportunities of business cooperation. 2) Universities and Macao Foundation could work together to provide more scholarship for more dialogues among youths with different background.

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