

Zhidong Hao, *Macau History and Society*, Hong Kong University Press, 2011. 294 pp.

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Although today enjoying a reputation mainly as China's city of colossal casinos, in previous centuries Macao knew an exhilarating past whose history has for the most part been recorded by writers from the West. There is nothing unusual in this; it was Portuguese and Western traders, adventurers and missionaries who developed Macao as a city and as major entrepôt. Many Portuguese—and even eminent Western historians, such as C. R. Boxer—have often been spellbound by what they saw as the heroic survival of a tiny Portuguese enclave within quasi-continental China. Unfortunately, such a perspective was not always free of chauvinism, something of which Zhidong Hao, the author of the book, is well aware. He notes in his stimulating Introduction that past records of the city were in Portuguese and that “they have been kept by the elites of society, who selected what to write and what to keep”. Understandably this situation has provoked a reaction on the part of Chinese scholars. Zhidong Hao's *Macau History and Society* is his attempt to turn the tables. But as a local historian has recently pointed out, the great danger is that in interpreting the history of the city, Chinese and Portuguese researchers often assume opposite points of view.¹

As the title of the book makes clear this investigation is not purely historical; the author is in fact sociology professor at the University of Macau. This may be the main reason why the more original chapters are

¹ Wu Zhiliang, “Reexaminar e Reconhecer a História de Macau”, Yin Guangren, Zhang Rulin, *Breve Monografia de Macau*, Instituto Cultural do Governo da R.A.E. de Macau, 2009, pp. vii-viii.

those that attempt to evaluate the historical importance of Macao by examining its social development.

The tone of the book is nicely illustrated with an opening quote from noted British sociologist Anthony Giddens on Karl Marx. After the Introduction, three initial chapters chronicle the history of Macao and serve as historical prelude to the sociological chapters that follow. At times one comes across a biased reading of historical events that is not too different from that of the Portuguese historians that the author reproaches in his Introduction. An example is provided by endnote 34, on page 222, where there is a citation from an unsearchable source by an anonymous reviewer, who declared that in the 15th and 16th centuries “poverty and misery were quite the same all over Europe”. While this statement is suggestive of historical materialism, it makes one wonder, was the person cited ignorant of the Italian Renaissance and other social and cultural developments in the West at the time?

In order to write his personal take on the city’s history Zhidong Hao has consulted a good number of Chinese and other texts, though few appear to be primary sources. But even a glance at the bibliography or the endnotes gives readers ample evidence of diligence. The eight chapters that make up the book are in fact packed close with facts and illustrations. Apart from the great effort that such research indicates, what it also betrays is that Zhidong Hao has succumbed to an inclination that afflicts many a first-time historian of Macao. Because of its pivotal location as trading centre in China, the city has attracted a wide variety of peoples from Europe, the Far East and the U.S., not to mention the Chinese mainland. In trying to make sense of many facts and disparate groups writers sometimes try to encompass the whole of the forces and events that gave rise to Macao’s rise. Chapter five in this book, for instance, sets

out to investigate religion and social development not only in Macao, but also in China. While the author points out at the outset that the chapter is not, “a full-fledged discussion of the sociology of religion in Macao and China”, he nonetheless proceeds to give an account of religious beliefs, churches, temples (with many small-sized illustrations of Macao churches), the Roman Catholic and Protestant missions, their schools and historical events that include the Rites Controversy. As the material is too vast for one chapter it ends up being cram-full of tidbits of information.

Chapter five is part of a more sociological investigation in the book, the author’s strong point, which begins with chapter four and ends with a Conclusion in chapter eight. Chapter four is entitled: “Social Interaction, The Clash of Civilizations and Cultures in Macau”. As is implied here, he takes Samuel Huntington’s much-debated thesis as point of departure, stating that, “The concept of the clash of civilizations ... could very well apply to Macau”. It could indeed, and it is in these chapters that the author’s use of Chinese sources and his study of the ethnic Chinese and Macanese populations prove more illuminating. He explores what he considers to be Macao’s own societal solution to the clash of cultures. Sixteenth-century Jesuit missionaries—who actually pointed the way towards a resolution of the problem—are also briefly mentioned here. Chapter six considers art and literature, while chapter seven looks at social problem. The Conclusion examines and attempts answers to the tricky questions of what national, political, cultural and economic identity mean in Macau.

The book is quite pleasing and instructive, and has the appearance of a textbook. It is this latter point which prompts the following observations. The author is evidently less knowledgeable of Portuguese or Western

sources in their original languages. This is excusable, but it is less so regarding those written in English (which he can presumably read), but that were accessed through Chinese translations (e.g. Anders Ljungstedt *An Historical Sketch*; Montalto de Jesus' *Historic Macao*). Many of these non-Chinese sources, whatever their merits or demerits, are fundamental for a deeper understanding of the history, society and culture of Macao. Also, it would have helped readers greatly if the material had been kept within limits and there had been less divergence from the main subject (e.g., what on earth is the tragic episode known as “The Trail of Tears” doing in this book?). There could also have been better selection of the editions of some of the books and of the writings of certain authors. By way of example, Lo Shiu-hing's books or articles on administration or corruption in the city and cross-border crime, such as the award winning *Political Change In Macao* (Routledge, 2007), not included here, could have helped update the research. And why are the names of some writers, such as Rui Manuel Lourerio, B. Videira Pires, and others, entered under different names in the bibliography? Regarding the numerous reproductions used to illustrate the text, their quality is rather uneven (see, for example, plates 4.3, 6.1, 6.3 6.6, 6.9 and 6.10). However, these comments should not detract from the merits of a book that is a valuable addition to the social history of Macao, and for which author and publishers can only be congratulated.