



JOÃO MARIA FERREIRA DO AMARAL STATUE, Macau (SAR), China

22.1884, 113.54347



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Executive Summary

João Maria Ferreira do Amaral was the Portuguese Governor of Macau between 1846-1849, his commitment to formalizing Macau and Portugal's colonial relationship, led to his assassination by Chinese peasants. He became emblematic of the ambiguous colonial relationship between the two countries, leading to his statue being removed during the decolonization of Macau, and sent to Portugal, where it stands to this day.

Introduction

Installed on July 24, 1940, the Amaral statue commemorates João Maria Ferreira do Amaral, the Portuguese Governor of Macau between 1846-1849. The statue was dismantled in October 1992. A controversial figure in Macao's history, Amaral had demanded Portuguese sovereignty over Macau and the extension of Macau's borders into mainland China in the mid-19th century, leading to his murder by Cantonese peasants in 1849. The Amaral statue was officially dismantled in 1992 under the demands of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, though there were opposing views between local Chinese and Portuguese citizens who remember the governor's legacy differently. After being dismantled and removed in Macau, the statue was shipped back to Lisbon, where it was stored in a box and housed in the warehouse of Lisbon's Directorate-General for Patrimony for almost a decade. It was only in 1999 that the last Portuguese governor of Macau, Rocha Vieira, decided to place it in a discreet garden in the residential neighborhood of Encarnação, in Lisbon, where it now stands.

Background

History of the Monument

During the 1940s, Portugal was under the *Estado Novo* (New State) rule of the dictator António de Oliveira Salazar, who sought to construct a nationalist imaginary for the Portuguese society, especially by establishing national myths and heroes to be commemorated.¹ Elaborating this memory, and consolidating it through tangible cultural heritage, was a way for the New State to value Portugal's Imperial influence over territories around the world, including Macau.² In this context, the Portuguese colonial administration decided to erect monuments and sites to promote the urbanisation of Macau and to celebrate a hundred years of Portuguese sovereignty over the territory. Under this commitment, the administration built the *Praça de Ferreira do Amaral* (Ferreira do Amaral Square) in Macau, in which they placed the imposing statue of João Ferreira do Amaral.³

Physical Appearance of the Monument

¹ Mário César Lugarinho. "Violência e interpretação, leituras da história de Macau." *Revista do NEPA/UFF* 10, no. 20 (2018): 42-43.

² *Ibid.*, 44.

³ *Ibid.*, 38.

The bronze monument stands four metres-tall and depicts Amaral on horseback wielding a whip in combat motion; the statue rests atop a 12.7 metres-tall concrete foundation and weighs over four tons.⁴ The sculpture was built by the Portuguese artist, Maximiliano Alves, who portrayed Amaral in a position of glory and determination, which was conceived to resonate the governor's poignant defence of Macau as a Portuguese territory.⁵ On the front and back of the foundation are two plaques with Amaral's biography, while the left and right sides of the foundation are adorned with the Portuguese coat of arms.

Contestations over General Amaral

Unlike Hong Kong, which was ceded to the British as a colony, Macau was never formally ceded to Portugal through a treaty. The enclave had a fragile status of being 'administered' by Portugal on the basis of a trade settlement negotiated in 1557. The degree and legitimacy of Portuguese sovereignty over the territory had remained ambiguous until Amaral demanded Macau to become a Portuguese colony during his tenure, which resulted in his murder in 1849 in a night time ambush by Chinese peasants, who severed his head and hand.⁶ Reportedly, Chinese authorities had put a bounty on Amaral's head, due to his decision to expel Chinese customs officials from Macau.⁷ Another factor which led to Amaral's downfall was his plans to extend Macau's northern territory into mainland China, which would have put Chinese residents under the jurisdiction of Macao's senate in contravention of a long-established Sino-Portuguese agreement.⁸

While Portuguese records attribute the reason for Amaral's murder to his attempts at opening Chinese trade routes, Chinese history books describe him as an invader who 'closed the Chinese Custom House in Macau, expelled Qing officials and demolished the Xiangshan County Macau representative office, destroyed the Chinese farmers' plants and their ancestors' graves'.⁹ Amaral's controversial legacy forms the bedrock to the contested statue, persisting more than a century after his death.

Contextualizing Sino-Portuguese Relations

Amaral's calls for Portuguese sovereignty over Macau formed part of a long-standing political

⁴ João Botas. "Estátua Gov. Ferreira do Amaral: mais alguns dados." João Botas, October 29, 2013.

⁵ Helena F. S. Lopes. "Ruins of Macau in Historical Photographs of China Collections – part two." *VisualisingChina*, September 24, 2020.

⁶ Antoaneta Bezlova, "Macau: Handover ends debate on colonial enclave," *IPS- Inter Press Service*, November 24, 1999.

⁷ Harold Bruning, "Controversial Macao statue pulled down," *United Press International*, 1992.

⁸ Hendrik Tieben, "Urban Image Construction in Macau in the First Decade After the Handover 1999-2009," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38, no.1 (2009): 49-72.

⁹ Adam Lee, "Statue taken down in Macau," *South China Morning Post*, October 29, 1992.

tension regarding Macau's ambiguous status. This ambiguous legal status continued after his death, despite China and Portugal signing the 1887 Treaty of Peking. The Qing Dynasty understood the treaty (and its prior trade agreement forms) to grant Lisbon only the right to 'administer' Macau perpetually, whilst the Portuguese believed that Lisbon was given the right to 'occupy' the enclave, which would seal its sovereignty over Macau as a colony. In reality, the former was more likely the case.¹⁰

Portuguese authorities had precarious control and authority over Macau, to the degree that even the inflow of population from the mainland could not be controlled until China agreed for a customs office to be set up at the Zhuhai-Macau border in 1990.¹¹ The isolated geographical position of Macau meant that it was dependent on external resources and food supplies, resulting in the Portuguese government often having to concede to Chinese pressure. Portugal's limited political might as a 'weak' colonial power thus made calls for its sovereignty over Macau inflammatory and outrageous, given long-implicit acceptances that the Macau government was unable to rule the enclave without China's consent.¹²

In December, 1987, the governments of the Republics of Portugal and China signed a declaration officialising the compromise to handover Macau's sovereignty to China in December, 1999. Under this agreement, the Chinese government concurred with granting Macau the status of a special administrative region with financial independence and a high degree of autonomy, except on foreign affairs and defence matters.¹³ The transition period defined, from December 1987 to December 1999, was envisioned as token of gratitude from China to Portugal for facilitating the negotiations. This way, Portugal could claim to have been the first European power to settle in Asia and the last one to leave, as the United Kingdom left Hong Kong in 1987.¹⁴

At the time, it was predicted that over four-hundred thousand people would flee Macau before the handover took place. Nonetheless, reports claim that several colonial officials and western businessmen remained in the territory.¹⁵ On a personal report, João Figueira, a native of Macau of Portuguese-descent, narrated his remembrance of the moment the transition took place through the People's Liberation Army:

¹⁰ Herbert S. Yee and Sonny S. H Lo, 'Macau in Transition: The Politics of Decolonization', *Asian Survey* 31, no.1 (1991): 905-919.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 907.

¹² *Ibid.*, 908.

¹³ Declaração Conjunta da República Portuguesa e da República Popular da China e seus anexos I e II sobre a Questão de Macau [1987] Resolução da Assembleia da República de Portugal n.º 25/87.

¹⁴ "Macao, the end of the Portuguese Empire." *Tellerreport*, December 12, 2019.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

'In the early days they arrested a lot of people from the Falun Gong religious group and it was rumored that the authorities were going to attack Western people. My parents felt fear and we went to live in Bali for a couple of years , but we returned to see that things were quiet.'¹⁶

Notwithstanding, there are claims that some citizens saw the People's Liberation Army positively because of their fight against the mafias and organised crime that ruled the local casinos established in Macau around the 1940s, under the effort to promote the territory's urbanisation and touring sector.¹⁷

History of the Contestation

Calls for the statue to be dismantled came from Lu Ping, the Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. Ping argued that the statue symbolised colonialism and ought to be removed prior to Macau's 1999 handover.¹⁸ The Amaral statue was a particular site of contestation despite sculptures of prominent Portuguese officials which were also placed conspicuously around Macau. Such sculptures were part of the efforts of the Portugal and Macau governments' public projects concerning the cultural identity of Macau, in which the harmonious Sino-Portuguese relationship was a noticeable point of emphasis. While having precarious political control over Macau, Portugal was keen on maintaining cultural influence over the enclave. However, Amaral's controversial historical legacy and the prominent placement of the statue at the Macau waterfront was the main trigger of the controversy, as the waterfront is argued by scholars as the 'central space of representation and the focal point of image construction of the Macau peninsula'.¹⁹

Decision-Making Processes

The removal of the statue was a top-down agreement between Lisbon and Beijing, with little consultation from the Macau locals.²⁰ Different perceptions were held by local Portuguese and Chinese (which made up the majority) residents regarding Amaral's legacy in the area. For the local Portuguese descendants, Amaral was seen as a hero who established free trade with China and strengthened the enclave's autonomy vis-a-vis China.²¹ Lu Ping's remarks were therefore seen as highly insensitive, to which Governor Carlos Melancia (1987-1991) said was a 'very deliberate' remark that may impair Sino-Portuguese relations.²²

¹⁶ "Macao, the end of the Portuguese Empire." *Tellerreport*, December 12, 2019.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Adam Lee, "Statue taken down in Macau," *South China Morning Post*, October 29, 1992.

¹⁹ Hendrik Tieben, "Urban Image Construction in Macau in the First Decade After the Handover 1999-2009," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38, no.1 (2009): 57.

²⁰ Mariita Eager, "Old governor's statue to rest in Portugal," *South China Morning Post*, August 10, 1992.

²¹ Herbert S. Yee and Sonny S. H Lo, "Macau in Transition: The Politics of Decolonization," *Asian Survey* 31, no.1 (1991): 911.

²² *Ibid.*

In contrast Chinese locals saw Amaral as a tyrant that leveled Chinese cemeteries for roads. Ultimately, the concerns of the Chinese majority and the balance of power within Macau (concerning Portugal's weak political authority, dependence on external resources, and thus dependence on friendly Sino-Portuguese relations) meant that Chinese pressures were given into, culminating in the statue's removal. Such political dynamics can be inferred through Melancia's successor, Vasco Rocha Vieira (1991-1999) who publicly stated that the statue was an 'unnecessary evocation of a moment of conflict' between China and Portugal.²³

The dismantling of the statue began in mid-October 1992 and was officially removed on October 28th that year. No government officials were present for the statue's removal, while a crowd of two hundred locals gathered to witness it.²⁴ The statue was shipped back to Portugal, where it remained stored in the warehouse of Lisbon's Directorate-General for Patrimony for almost a decade.²⁵ It was only in December 1999 that Rocha Vieira, the last Portuguese governor for Macau, decided to place it in the Garden Alameda da Encarnação in the calm residential neighborhood of Encarnação, close to Lisbon's airport in the outskirts of the city, for public display.²⁶

Nevertheless, governor Vieira declared that his initial intention was to place the statue in the *Jardim Botânico Tropical* (Tropical Botanical Garden), also known as the Colonial Garden, close to the neighborhood of Belém, in Lisbon. This declaration came in face of criticism by locals on the decision to place the statue in the Encarnação neighborhood, as it has no direct links to Macau or Portugal's colonial history. Nonetheless, João Amaral's family, through two of his great-great-grandsons, Augusto and Joaquim Ferreira do Amaral, claimed that the garden at Alameda da Encarnação was a good location for the statue. Furthermore, the relatives of Amaral were in accordance with the decision to remove the pedestal in which João Amaral stood, as it represented the Portuguese domination over Macau. It is worth mentioning that the great-great-grandson Augusto do Amaral is an investigative historian, and Joaquim do Amaral was the Public Works Minister at the time.²⁷

²³ Harold Bruning, "Controversial Macao statue pulled down," *United Press International*, 1992.

²⁴ Adam Lee, "Statue taken down in Macau," *South China Morning Post*, October 29, 1992.

²⁵ João Paulo Meneses. "A maldição da estátua de Ferreira do Amaral." *PontoFinalMacau* WordPress, May, 18, 2011.

²⁶ Helena F. S. Lopes. "Ruins of Macau in Historical Photographs of China Collections – part two." *VisualisingChina*, September 24, 2020.

²⁷ João Paulo Meneses. "A maldição da estátua de Ferreira do Amaral." *PontoFinalMacau* WordPress, May, 18, 2011.

Nonetheless, the square in which the monument was situated in Macau still holds the name of Ferreira do Amaral, apart from a street close to the square's premises that also maintained the name of the Portuguese ex-colonial governor of Macau.²⁸

Summary and Conclusions

While the Amaral statue is highly controversial, contested narratives were unequivocally resolved through the historically established power-dynamic between the Chinese, Portuguese and Macau governments. While Portugal and Macau locals of Portuguese descent desired for Macau's cultural identity to be reflective of the enclave's Portuguese influence and four-century long administration, factors including the Chinese local majority, impending handover of 1999, and long-standing dependence on Chinese consent for its foreign administration meant that Chinese pressures tipped the balance of contestations. The fact that Portugal re-erected the statue in Lisbon is also telling of how Portugal views its history in Eastern Asia, and how despite its compromises with China, Amaral remains a celebrated figure of the country's past.

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The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

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The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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