

CHGO-7
MACAO: A Tourist's Eye View

4 Kotewall Road, 4th Floor,
Hong Kong.

April 21, 1962.

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Institute of Current World Affairs,
366 Madison Avenue,
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte,

Last week after the sweat of end-of-term exams, Brenda and I decided to go away for a few days vacation. To go away from Hong Kong for a few days' vacation means only one place - Macao. Nearly all the Hong Kong European and American residents and several of her tourists seem to go there for at least one trip during their sojourn in Hong Kong. Whether they go back again seems to depend very much on the individual. Some are enchanted by the place and go back again and again and others are so disenchanted that they're happy to leave after a few hours.

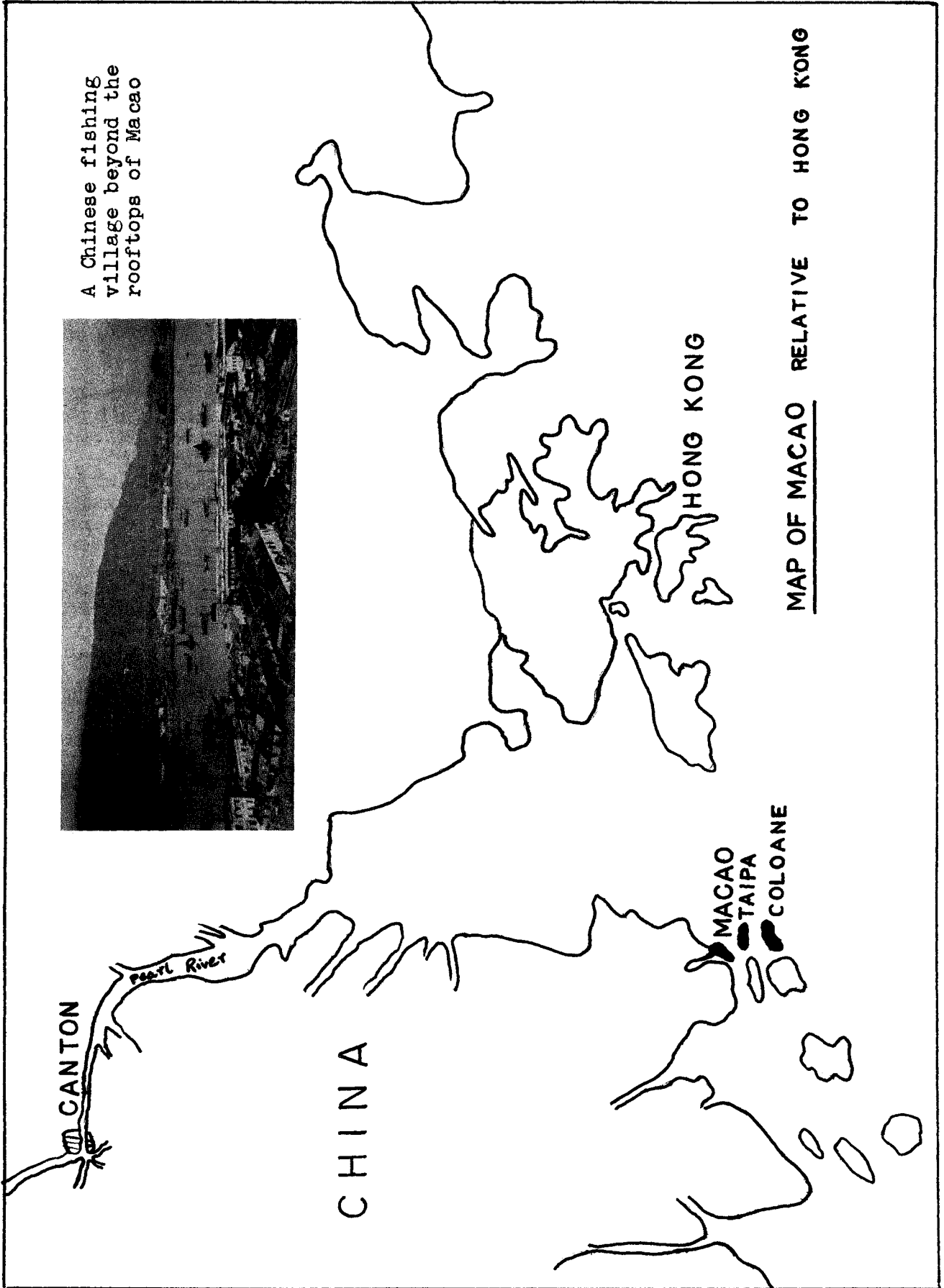
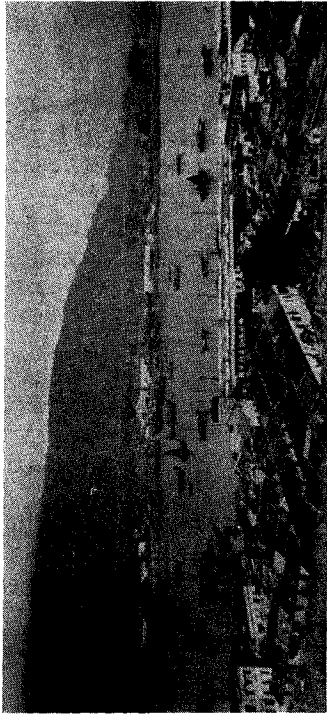
What follows is mainly a description of the impressions and experiences of our first visit. I would stress that they are first-sight observations and impressions. I have not read deeply about Macao and I interviewed no governor or high officials. I spoke only to pedicab drivers, hotel waiters and casino attendants. But Macao is so small that even during superficial visits it is possible to see most aspects of life in this sleepy forgotten land.

First of all a few statistics about the place. Macao is an overseas Portuguese Province. Its total area is only six square miles and this is made up of the tip of a peninsula and two small islands. It lies on the western side of the Pearl River estuary, about thirty five miles West of Hong Kong and fifty-five miles South-Southeast of Canton (see map). It has been under Portuguese occupation since 1557 and has officially been a Province since 1887. Its population of about 300,000 is mostly Chinese, only 5,000 are of Portuguese stock. Before Hong Kong was ceded to Britain, Macao had served as the principal trading post for commerce between the West and China. But as Hong Kong developed, Macao's importance gradually declined. Its harbour has silted and become unsuitable for modern



The remains of St. Paul's Cathedral

A Chinese fishing village beyond the rooftops of Macao



MAP OF MACAO RELATIVE TO HONG KONG

merchant ships. In 1960 the total value of imports was U.S. \$31 million and total value of exports U.S. \$13½ million. Of this, the trade with China amounted to only U.S. \$1 million of imports, a quarter of which was rice, and U.S. \$174,000 of exports. Imports were principally cloth, rice and wood, exports primarily garments, cloth and firecrackers. America prohibits the import of textiles from Macao because of the difficulty in determining the origin of the goods.

By using public transport it is theoretically possible to get from Hong Kong to Macao by three different routes. You can fly there in fifteen minutes in a four seater Piaggio amphibian for a cost of H.K. \$50. You can go by ferry boat in three hours for a charge ranging from \$4 steerage to \$20 first class cabin, or you could (if you were allowed) go overland by train to Canton and by bus from there to Macao. In practise nearly everyone chooses the second alternative.

In the Chinese idiom, Macao is a low dragon's back rising from the muddy waters of the Pearl River estuary, its three or four humps supporting - uncharacteristically - Roman Catholic churches or Portuguese forts. On its western flank the dragon is separated from China by a half mile strip of water, and it is connected to China in the North by a narrow bridge. To the South, the dragon's tail re-emerges twice above the yellow waters to form the Portuguese islands of Taipa and Coloane.

The waterfront on the western side is a hive of industry. This is the side where the ferries dock, the ferries to Hong Kong, to the two Portuguese islands, and to Canton. The latter reminded us of a toy Noah's Ark with small square glassless windows through which we could just discern confined and crowded bunks. This side of the peninsula is also where the boat dwellers anchor their sampans and junks. Like the boat people of Hong Kong, these people spend their whole lives on the water, shopping from small sampans that ply between them, and even spending their honeymoons on a special boat which is hired out to newlyweds - but they rarely learn to swim.

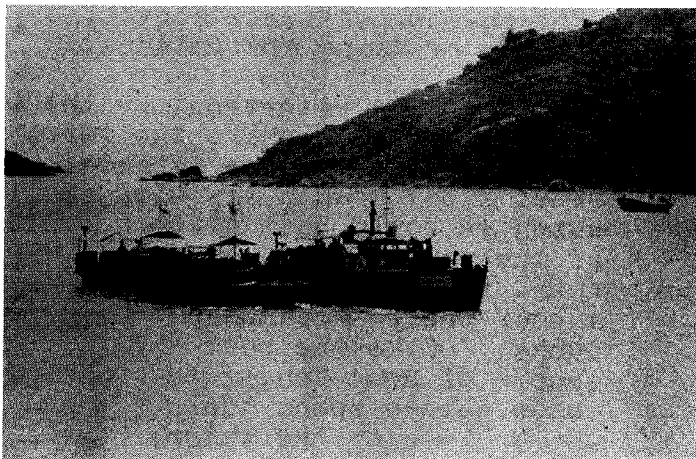


The southern-
most hump on the peninsula,
which is crowned with a spired church, overlooks this western waterfront, and the fascinating view it affords absorbed our attention for an entire morning. With the help of binoculars we could watch the activity in Macao; on the boats; and across the half mile strip of water on the Chinese Mainland. There we could see blue and khaki clad sentries patrolling briskly between small

Macao's western waterfront

round pill boxes. Beyond them life appeared to go on in much the same way as it does in the many similar areas of Macao and Hong Kong's New Territories: children were playing in the school yard; fishermen were hunting shell fish along the muddy shore; labourers were working in the fields; and boat builders were building junks. Perhaps one thing was different. For the Chinese, the selection of a propitious burial site is an important and highly individual matter. Feng-Shoei (wind and water) is the name given to the local brand of geomancy which is widely used in the selection of a favourable location. The direction a particular site faces, whether or not it overlooks water, whether any nearby natural feature bears any resemblance to a dragon or other animal of portent - all this and much besides influences the determination of a propitious site for the grave. The result is that certain hillsides where the Feng-Shoei is particularly good, are liable to be covered with large semicircular stone graves. These can be seen all over the New Territories, and for the most part they are kept in a good state of repair. The Chinese hillside we could see from our Macao vantage point apparently had excellent Feng-Shoei and held numerous graves. But, and this was the difference, there were no new ones and the old ones were badly neglected. It would be interesting to know whether the Communists have managed to convince the local people that geomancy is a waste of time, or whether they have used geomancy to their own advantage.

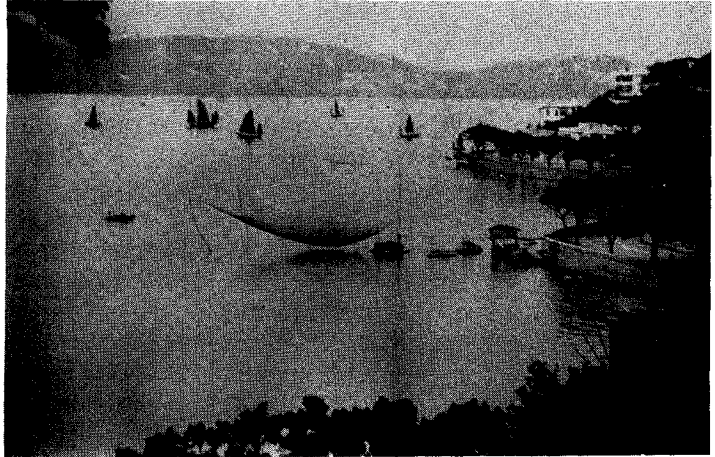
Both Chinese and Portuguese patrol boats cruise continually up and down among the fishing boats. We watched a Chinese patrol boat pull up alongside a junk, ask questions and move on. We were told that the fishing junks are licensed in both Macao and China and must land a part of their catch in both places, but it is no secret that they can get a better price for their fish in Macao. This obviously leads some fishermen to land more than the allowed share on this side, so that part of the job of the patrol boats is to check on this practice. Their main job, however, seemed to be that of keeping a watch for escaping refugees. That they are not completely successful is evident from reading the Hong Kong newspapers. Just about every day a small group of twenty or thirty people manage to get across, although a number drown in the attempt. When they arrive in Macao they are taken to the police station to register, and are given special identity cards which entitle them to free food and shelter. The Chinese Nationalist Government in Taiwan gives each refugee 20 pacatas (about U.S. \$3.40) and they are lodged and fed by the Catholic authorities for ten days. After that they are on their own.



Chinese patrol boats

Not all would-be escapees are successful. The penalty for those who are caught, however, does not appear to be severe at the present time. A Chinese friend recently told me that providing a captured refugee does not have an 'anti-revolutionary record', his punishment is usually one month in jail.

There is a striking contrast between the bustling, industrious western waterfront of the town and the south and eastern waterfront which is peaceful and serene. It is lined by the Praida, a wide avenida shaded by Banyan trees and bordered by pastel washed, shuttered houses. Fishermen lean over the sea wall, pedicabs go quietly by and life goes on at siesta tempo. Only the dark soldiers from Portuguese Mozambique stand out in the sun, on guard in their red fez headgear outside the large pink Government House.



The quiet southeastern shore of Macao

Between the two waterfronts, so different but barely a mile apart, lies a picturesque jumble of Chinese and Portuguese buildings, cobbled streets, Chinese tiles, beautiful stone walls, churches, temples and shops. Unlike Hong Kong, where British civil servants come for a short tenure of duty, the Portuguese in Macao have become a part of the society. Many were born there and have never seen Portugal. They can nearly all speak Chinese and there appears to be a much more thorough blending of the East and West than has taken place in Hong Kong.



The Letter Writer

The cost of living is much less in Macao than in Hong Kong, and Western style houses can be rented for a tenth of the price they would fetch here.

Another difference between Hong Kong and Macao is that in Hong Kong there are no pedicabs, whereas in Macao they are probably the most used type of transport, having almost completely replaced the rickshaw. A pedicab is basically a tricycle with a double seat and shade cover over the rear wheels. Driving a pedicab is not considered a degrading occupation (in contrast to pulling a rickshaw) and having tried pedalling one, much to the amusement of the other pedicab drivers, I can testify that it is not particularly hard work. Most Chinese in Macao speak Cantonese, but in the course of four rides I found two who could

talk Mandarin. One of the drivers was from Peking, and was obviously well educated. Not only was his Mandarin a delight to listen to, but he spoke fluent English which he could also read and write. He came to Macao nine years ago and has been trying to get a steady job ever since. "But" he said, "For men it is very difficult to get jobs in Macao. The few factories mainly employ women. My only hope is to get a job in Hong Kong, but before I can be admitted I must have promise of employment." I asked him if he owned the pedicab. "Oh no," he said, "A new pedicab costs 700 pacatas (U.S. \$125). I rent this from a company for 2 pacatas a day (35¢). For each ride, regardless of distance, we are officially allowed to charge only 50 avos (about 10¢). It is especially difficult these days because I try to send food parcels twice a month to my mother in Peking".

In the centre of Macao there is a small Protestant cemetery. It lies quiet and serene, hidden from the outside world behind high walls. A small plaque above the locked doorway bears the title "East India Company Protestant Cemetery, 1821". Despite its neat but forgotten air, this cemetery has become renowned. For the 156 men, women and children whose tombstones are here, were the people who helped to pave the way for the forthcoming century of contact and conflict between China and the West. They were missionaries and their wives, traders, sailors, soldiers and government officials. The inscriptions on the graves tell their own story. One of particular interest is that of Robert Morrison, whose inscription tells us that he was the first Protestant missionary to China; that he spent 27 years there, during which time he compiled and published a dictionary of the Chinese language; that he spent several years on a Chinese version of the Holy Scriptures; and that he died in Canton in 1834. Another inscription tells about Edmund Roberts, special Diplomatic Agent of the United States to several Asiatic courts, who executed treaties of Amity and Commerce with the Courts of Muscat and Siam, and who died in Macao in 1836. A third tombstone is dedicated to the Right Honourable Lord Henry John Spencer Churchill, 4th son of George 5th Duke of Marlborough, and who as captain of H.B.M. Ship "Druid" was Senior Officer in the Canton Seas.

He died in 1840. Like the Portuguese forts, and the impressive facade of St. Paul's Cathedral, this graveyard is a reminder of a past which, whatever else, was certainly more hopeful of the future than present day Macao appears to be.



The Protestant Cemetery

No report on Macao would be complete without some mention of the gambling. A number of years ago Macao was known as one of the great "sin cities" of the world. Its Rua des Felicidade was the centre of many nefarious

activities. Opium smoking, prostitution, and gambling were all practiced freely. Now, the use of opium is illegal and supposedly stopped, but ubiquitous government posters showing sinister pictures of coffins and addicts are sufficient testimony to the fact that it has not been completely eliminated. Most of the prostitutes are reported to have moved to Hong Kong. But gambling is still big business. As our pedicab driver pointed out, "In Macao everyone gambles. There are gambling houses for the rich and gambling houses for the poor".

On March 30 this year, Hong Kong businessman Stanley Ho signed an agreement with the Portuguese Government in Lisbon which could transform Macao from its present sleepy state into what a recent article in the "Far Eastern Economic Review" called the "Monte Carlo of the East". Mr. Ho's company won an eight year gambling franchise with a bid offering H.K. \$3.6 million in taxes and reinvestment of 90% of its earnings in Macao. The remaining 10% is to be given to charity. In addition he must build a new casino, a modern hotel of 100 rooms, and pay most of the bill for dredging Macao's silted harbour. In fact he intends to do much more than this. Present plans call for two hotels, one Chinese and one Western with a total of 300 rooms, two casinos, a new 1,000 passenger ferry boat to Hong Kong and possibly a 70 passenger hovercraft which will cut the travel time from Hong Kong to one hour. All this is to be completed within twelve months or so. A golf course is also planned for the nearby island of Coloane and another company is building a greyhound racing track. At present only about 5% of the tourists to Hong Kong visit Macao; with the increased facilities Mr. Ho hopes to increase this to 10%. However, the bread and butter of the business will probably be the wealthy Chinese residents of Hong Kong.

There is one activity in Macao which the casual visitor is not likely to see - and that concerns gold. Portugal did not sign the Bretton Woods Agreement on gold transactions and so Macao is legally permitted to buy and sell gold freely. Most of it comes into Macao by air via Hong Kong from Australia and Canada. Once there, it is sold to groups who, in most cases, then smuggle it via Hong Kong into South East Asian countries. Macao profits by charging approximately 16 pacatas an ounce on all transactions.

Macao is a curious blend of many places and many things. It reminded me in different ways of a number of other places I have visited in the past few years. The eastern side was reminiscent of a small Mediterranean town, the western side more like parts of Hong Kong, the piece of old China that it really is. The atmosphere of a bygone grandeur and the gambling reminded me of Manaus, that other Portuguese-speaking city which is now only a shadow of its former self, tucked away in the heart of the Amazon jungles. As an enclave within Communist walls, with all the consequent drama of refugees and intrigue, it was reminiscent of Berlin. Such a combination should make it an irresistible tourist attraction, and given Mr. Ho's schemes, this seems to be the one hope of sorely needed increased prosperity in the immediate future.

Even the most casual of tourists must wonder what the future holds in store for Macao. Most political experts believe that eventually, Macao, like Hong Kong, will almost certainly revert back to China. Just when this will happen is of course the vital question in considering the future of these places. Unlike the Nationalist regime before 1949, the Communists have not been particularly vociferous in their demands for the return of Hong Kong and Macao. At the moment Macao has its uses to the Communist regime. The balance of payments is in China's favour, and it thus provides a source of much needed foreign exchange. But more important, Macao residents send considerable quantities of food and payments for fertilizer to relatives on the Mainland. It doesn't seem likely that the Communists will wish to stop this flow at the present time. From Portugal's point of view it is a little more difficult to see what purpose Macao serves. Unlike Goa, it is not a source of wealth, in fact it would seem to be more of a liability than an asset.

Sincerely,



C.H.G. Oldham.

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