

Freemasons in China: the Portuguese link

Gonçalves, Arnaldo M.A.

Researcher in the Institute of Political Studies, Catholic University of Portugal

Email: arnaldogonc53@gmail.com

Preface

The emerging of freemasonry in China in the 18th century has been reported a British invention, coming from the historical conflict, the Opium War, that involve Great Britain and China in a dispute about the trading routes in the Eastern Chinese coast and commerce of the narcotic product among the Chinese population. In the outcome of this bloody war the British were entitled to several extraterritorial concessions, namely the island of Hong Kong, concession areas in Canton and other (Chinese) ports that were fundamental to secure the routes of its trade and presence as new Imperial power in the East. In the ships that made the trade of opium from Britain to China, and silk, porcelain or tea towards London, travel beyond sailors, merchants, military personnel, bureaucrats, business men, intellectuals or lawyers that look to start a new life in Chinese land. Freemasonry clubs were part of the British tradition and meeting places for the gentry and the administrative bureaucracy that followed the trace of East India Company ships.

Easily, Masonic lodges emerged in the cities where the British built their settlements, separated from the Chinese township and where the English ways of life were recreated for the benefit of the merchant and expatriate community. Taking Hong Kong (and Kowloon) as spoils of the bloody confront that align it against the Celestial Empire, Great Britain recreate, in the arid scraps of the island, a bourgeoning city build according with British rules and oddities, ruled by the common law and imperial regulations. As lodges emerged in the island in sort of gentlemen clubs, the Chinese bourgeoisie was let, carefully, outside them. Only after the foundation of the People's Republic of China, in 1949, this situation would change following the exodus of British families running away from the political turmoil (in China) that led any foreign presence impossible. The British lodges firstly created in China divided themselves by Hong Kong and Taiwan, in the first creating districts subordinated to the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland and Ireland, and in the second entering into a process of gradual autonomy that led to the creation of a Grand Lodge of China (Taiwan), a corps that for longtime was not recognized by British freemasonry, for reasons that are implicit.

Differently to this record, there is evidence that led us believe that freemasonry came to the East years, before than has been argued, originated in Macau, a colony of Portugal and that happen in the first half of the 18th century. In 1759, a ship named "Prince Carl" of the Swedish Company of the Eastern Indian Islands arrived at Macau. The freemasons that travel in this ship brought a letter of patent to meet in Lodge in any port they coast, and eventually they did it in Macau. They initiate profanes and associate Portuguese and other foreign freemasons that lived already in the colony. Its impact was determinant: as the ship transported employees of the Company (and other people) to

Canton it is admissible that some sort of Masonic grouping becomes active in Chinese land¹.

Thereafter, an independent segment of European freemasonry took root in Macau, formed by members of the local communities, and facilitated by the use of the *franca* language of the East, the Portuguese. Macau came under Portuguese rule in the middle of the 16th century (1557), as premium of the assistance given (by Portuguese ships) to Chinese Imperial authorities in the persecution of pirates that scourge the (Chinese) ports². Portuguese presence was never disputed by the Chinese authorities or foreign powers and this situation extended till the 19th century when China was defeated (by the British navy) in the Opium War³. In 1862 a treaty was signed between the Portuguese monarch and the Imperial Chinese government. Macau became a colony of Portugal and later a dependent territory, being clear that Lisbon had no sovereign power over that piece of land but just an administrative political power⁴. That situation has been qualified as “divided jurisdiction”, with the Portuguese local authorities governing the expatriate community and the Imperial authority of Canton directing the bulk of the Chinese district. This situation will last till the end of the 20th century when an Administrative Special Region was installed, dependent on Beijing and Portugal, the first European power to come to the East, was the last to left in December 1999.

Living with considerable autonomy from the far-way Portugal, the Portuguese community furthered the interchange of cultures, philosophies, moods of leaving, and even religious practices between the Caucasian minority and the Chinese majority. Insofar, Macau emerged as a very cosmopolitan and open city where distinct social practices were broadly tolerated. Different from what happened in Hong Kong, interracial marriages with Chinese, Indian or Malay women were mostly common, forming gradually a half-brad group named “Macanese” that interlinked the Portuguese with the Han Chinese. Freemasonry accompanied this path of societal compromise and some lodges and Masonic groups emerged incorporating Portuguese, expatriates and relevant members of the Macanese community, along the administrative bureaucracy, the local companies, the liberal professions and the circle of intellectuals that formed a ferment local society. Two of them, Camilo Pessanha and Wenceslau de Morais, were members of the intellectual movement of “symbolism” at earlier 20th Century, applauded poets, and usual presence in the clubs and socialite events of the local bourgeoisie. Both were freemasons and members of a Portuguese lodge named Luis de Camões, dependent on the Grand Orient of Portugal. Camilo Pessanha would progress till the 18^o Degree Rose-

¹ There is an ancient tradition associated with the Knights Templars or the Teutonic Knights that explains that the ritual meetings took place whenever necessary. The requirement of the Three Lights and the tracing-board to a meeting being considered regular is, relatively, recent.

² Conceição, Lourenço Maria (1988). *Macau entre dois tratados com a China* (“Macao between two treaties with China”). Macau: Cultural Institute of Macau, p. 8.

³ In 1602 the Dutch form a company for the purpose of trading to India and in 1609 they cruised the coasts of China leading them to form a settlement in the Island of Formosa (actual Taiwan). In 1622 they made an attack on Macau but were repelled by Portuguese troops.

⁴ In 1688 the Imperial government create a customs-house in Macau (Ho Pu)

Croix of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite according with documents existing in its personal papers⁵.

The different logic of the colonization of both empires, the raising influence of the Chinese in the life in Macau, the hegemonic vision of Britain as grand power in the Indic and Pacific Oceans made any coordination between the two crafts basically impossible⁶. In the second half of the 18th century, the Chinese authorities in Canton impose to the European employees of the large Companies of the East India to live outside the city, consolidating indirectly the Portuguese domain in Macao⁷. The two Masonic communities lived apart, divided by the mother languages used by the executive powers, Great Britain and Portugal, although there are reasons to believe that contact between freemasons of Hong Kong and Macao existed. This division would aggravate during the 19th and 20th centuries, part of it by historical developments happening in Portugal where liberal and absolute kings alternate; the first, allowing freemasons to perform their activities, recruiting new members and increasing the number of lodges; the seconds, persecuting freemasons and crashing the lodges.

Portuguese freemasons were deeply involved in the liberal movements of the 19th century, and as it was summarized elsewhere, participated in the political movements that push the overthrow of monarchies of divine power, and help the creation of constitutional monarchies, everywhere in Europe⁸. Portuguese Craft, although a British invention, adhere enthusiastically to the French stylish *club de reflexion* and to a more cosmopolitan and politicized participation, in the affairs of the profane world. As reflex, Macau's lodges and ritualistic practices were more liberalized than its counterparts in Hong Kong. A basic point of this divide is the opposite attitude concerning regularity.

Freemasons in China and Macau

Freemasonry first lodge in China has been reclaimed as a creation of the Grand Lodge of England or the Swedish Grand Lodge, dated around 1788. Arthur Waite invokes the authority of the *German Handbook of Freemasonry* to argue that a Lodge of St. Elizabeth existed in Canton City, prior to 1865 and was the oldest Lodge in China. In time it vanished letting the space for two district Grand Lodges under the Grand Lodge of England⁹. No reference is made to Macau, by the American historian, that probably

⁵ Pessanha's collection of personal papers is part of a collection existing in the Portugal National Library and originated from private donations. In <http://purl.pt/14369/1/apresentacao.html>

⁶ The British fight with the Portuguese and the Dutch for territories and trade in India and in June 1637 four East India Company's ships anchored close to Macao looking to trade directly with Chinese merchants. This was considered an intrusion by the mandarin authorities and the Captain-General of Macao was invited to push the British out of neighboring waters. He demanded the English fleet to leave the city what would happen. Puga, Rogério Miguel, "Images and Representations of Japan and Macao in Peter Mundy's Travels (1637)", *Bulletin of Portuguese/Japan Studies*, 2001, Vol. 1, New University of Lisbon, Portugal, pp. 97-109, in <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/redalyc/pdf/361/36100106.pdf>.

⁷ Boxer, Charles Ralph (1991). *Estudos para a História de Macau. Séculos XVI and XVII* ("Studies for the History of Macao: 16th and 17th centuries"), 1st Tome. Lisbon: Orient Foundation, p. 178.

⁸ Gonçalves, A.M.A, "A Shortened History of Freemasonry in Portugal," *Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry*, http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/arnaldoGeng.html#_edn1

⁹ Waite, Arthur Edward (1970; new edition 1996). *A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*. New York: Wings Books, p. 105.

ignored the existence of the territory administered by Portugal or followed acritically the British sources without taking other into consideration.

What can be said is that, during the 19th century, two district Grand Lodges existed, one - the Northern China district - gathering five lodges located in Shanghai, that come to be eleven; the other - the Southern China district - associating seven lodges under its jurisdiction, later extended to nine. But the Western Masonic presence was not restricted to English lodges as it has been argued; in 1908 there were Scottish, American and German lodges at work in China, because other expatriate communities leaved there participating intensely on trade¹⁰. Adding to it one should take in consideration the existence of a Triad Society, named Thian-Li-Hui, or Heaven Earth League, that had significant activity during the abovementioned and contacts with European Crafts¹¹. This society, whose rituals resemble mostly Masonic traditions, was lately involved in the Patriotic movements that led to the overthrown of the Celestial Empire and the foundation of the Republic of China, headed by Sun Yat-sen, a Freemason¹².

One century before, following the installation of the Portuguese in Macau, Freemasons participated, randomly, in activities organized by foreign crews of European ships, which rest in Macau ports before sailing throughout Chinese waters. An important part of the trade was opium and was in the hands of British entrepreneurs. The more intense period of it took place between 1770 and 1800, with British merchants stretching around the several branches of the Pearl River and the islands close to Macau. This situation provoked a harsh reaction from the Imperial government (of China) that forbidden the circulation of those ships¹³. The largest British companies took refuge in Macau that between 1800 and 1820 became the largest centre of business activity in the region. In July 1820, the Imperial government made known a proclamation forbidden the trade of opium along the Chinese territory and threatening to punish severely anyone (Chinese or foreigner) who disrespected the banning. The British traders moved to Hong Kong, Lintin and Lantau, more apart from Canton, but Macau remain the centre of the entrepreneurial activity till 1839, when the first Opium War exploded. The chief of the British fleet, Commander Elliot, offered military help to the Portuguese authorities to defy the Chinese prohibition but Macau government opt by keeping its neutrality; the British fleet departed¹⁴.

In this historical background is fairly to say that Masonic activity happened in Macau before traveling to China following the path of the Opium War, the defect of the Imperial Qing government, the occupation of Hong Kong and Kowloon and the

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Callery, Joseph Marie and Yvan, Melchior (1853). *L'Insurrection en Chine, Depuis de son origine jusqu' a la prise de Nankin*. Paris : Librairie Nouvelle.

¹² Sun Yat-sen, the founder of Modern China, was probably initiated in a Lodge at S. Francisco, U.S. He was a close friend of several freemasons in Macao where he practiced medicine, lived during civil turmoil in mainland China. After becoming President of China he kept correspondence with one of them, Constâncio José da Silva.

¹³ Marques, António Henrique de Oliveira (1998). *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente* ("History of the Portuguese in the Extreme Orient"), 3^d Vol. Lisbon: Orient Foundation, pp. 30.2

¹⁴ Coates, Austin (1982), *Macau and the British. 1637-1840*, 2nd edition, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

imposing of extraterritorial concessions in Canton and others Chinese cities¹⁵. In the footprint of the British army, merchants, consuls, protestant missionaries, lawyers, physicians, and entrepreneurs move to those cities. Masonic lodges were formed and the district grand lodges took shape¹⁶.

The Masonic Craft in Macau

In the interim what happen in Macau? In its *History of Portuguese Freemasonry*, Oliveira Marques quotes the annuary of the GOL (1922) saying that a lodge named "Luis de Camões", and numbered 383, existed in Macau and practiced the Scottish Rite. Oliveira Marques names a local official of the Portuguese garrison - Domingos Gregório Rosa Duque - as the official point of contact¹⁷. This fact is confirmed by Albert Mackey that asserts that, in 1909, the Grand Orient of Portugal ("Grande Oriente Lusitano") created a lodge named Luis de Camões in Macau and the Grand Orient of Italy one in Shanghai¹⁸. Since one century before, Portuguese and foreign lodges met in Macau, namely an English lodge "Amity" that appears numbered 407 in a 1768 register of Lodges subordinated to the first Grand Lodge of England; and a Lodge associated with the Grand Lodge of the State of Alamaba (United States) whose name remains unknown. The Lodge "Luis de Camões" is presumably a re-erect of the former Lodge, with the same name, mentioned by Mackey and that for a while ceased to meet¹⁹.

There are some crude explanations for the lack of historical registers about Masonic activity in Macau; some of the reasons are endogenous and others, exogenous. In the first type we may consider the geographical distance from the motherland and the sporadic participation of local Masters in the activities of the Grand Orient in Lisbon. A second reason would be the always-tense relationship between the Episcopal Church and the local intellectual liberal circles that Freemasons integrate, making the identification of Freemasons (as such) rather risky. In the periods of political turmoil in Portugal, conservative clerics demand strong repression over Masonic lodges and freemasons, as they see them as enemies of faith and the Church. This outcome has an immediate impact in Macao where the Episcopal Church had a determinant presence formed by several grassroots organizations, the bishop's entourage and the Order of

¹⁵ In the 19th century, Western powers, often through coercion, secured unilateral extraterritorial rights for their citizens in China, Egypt, Japan, Morocco, Persia, Siam, and Turkey in the belief that these "uncivilized" states were incapable of establishing justice. In China opposition to extraterritoriality was but one phase of resistance to foreign control, which included the treaty port system and territorial concessions in the major cities. Check Columbia Encyclopedia "extraterritorially".

¹⁶ A good account of this is Kowok, Albert Ping-ki, "The History of Freemasonry in China- a Case Study", a paper presented to the *International Conference on the History of Freemasonry*, Freemason's Hall, Edinburgh, May 2007.

¹⁷ Marques, António Henrique de Oliveira (1983). *A Maçonaria Portuguesa e o Estado Novo* ("Freemasonry and the New State"), 2^d edition. Lisbon: Publicações Dom Quixote, p. 109.

¹⁸ Mackey, Albert, Haywood, H.L. (2002). *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Part I. Whitefish, Massachusetts, U.S.: Kessinger Publisher, p. 199.

¹⁹ The Portuguese researcher João Guedes argues that a Masonic lodge, named Luis de Camões, was formed in Macao with the patronage of Lodge Lusitânea, a lodge created in London by Portuguese exiled, and subsequently put under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of England. Its research paper originally published in *Macau Review* is reprint in <http://aescadadejacob.blogspot.com/2010/05/subsidio-para-historia-da-maconaria-em.html>

Jesuits; this religious order hold, in exclusivity, the sector of public and private education in the colony. Periodically, as it has been stated elsewhere, the Church took advantage when an absolute king reined in Portugal to command the local authorities and the police to lay a heavy hand over the Masonic activities and liberal circles²⁰.

Lastly, there are no documents that confirm the regular visit of Grand Inspectors of the Craft to the local Lodge, as it is so common today, everywhere. It is also doubtful that the Lodge organized any sort of register about members, minutes of meetings, dates of initiation, increase of salaries or exaltation of members because these registers may fall in the wrong hands of the police. A very last explanation is that the Craft has suffered, during the 19th century, years of division and secession, divided by different Grand Orients (Grand Orient of Portugal, Masonic Confederation, Grand Orient Lusitano). Only in 1869 the Order was unified under the gavel of the Count Parati, in a form of a Grande Oriente Lusitano Unido (“United Grand Orient Lusitano”)²¹.

It is basically unknown the policy of recruitment by the local Portuguese lodge but descriptions of the life in the colony, during the first half of the 20th century, point out that the brotherhood was composed of government staff, members of the military (the garrison of Macao), liberal professionals, and probably members of the local clergy, sympathetic to liberal and republican ideals in fashion in Europe. It has been advanced that most of the Governors of Macao after Adrão Silveira Pinto, that governed the colony between 1837 and 1843, were freemasons. Three historical figures had a special role in local freemasonry and deserve a particular reference. The first is António Alexandre de Melo, the second Rodrigo Rodrigues and the third Camilo Pessanha.

António Alexandrino de Melo was born in Macau in June 7, 1837, son of the Baron of Cercal, Alexandrino António de Melo, which in April 5, 1867, received from the King of Portugal the title of Viscount of Cercal. António Melo took a degree of engineer in the Stonyhurst College, Sussex (England), learned foreign languages and became consul of Italy, France, Vice-consul of Brazil and Consul of Belgium, in Macau. He planned several buildings in Macau that became historic spots: the Military Hospital of St. January, the *Grémio Militar*, the Chapel of the Cemetery of St. Michael and the structure that become known as the Palace of the Government²². Another historical spot, the *Chácara de St. Sancha*, was sold by Manuel Duarte Bernardino to António’s father, remaining within the family for years and then sold by the widow to Herbert Fullarton Dent, the owner of Dent & Co, a trader of opium. This palace was later sold to the government when the business man left to Hong Kong and became the residence of all governors after that. António Alexandre de Melo was locally known as a Freemason and a relevant figure in local society hosting in its house several social and cultural events. The *Grémio Militar* later redenominated *Club Militar* still exhibits today signs of Masonic symbolism in its façade and interior. Alexandrino de Melo died in Marseille in May 21, aged sixty-eight.

²⁰ Gonçalves, A.M.A, “A Shortened History...”, *ibidem*.

²¹ Grainha, M. Borges (1912). *História da Maçonaria em Portugal* (History of Freemasonry in Portugal). Lisbon: Editora Limitada.

²² Teixeira, Padre Manuel, *Residência dos Governadores de Macau* (“Residence of Macau Governors”), Macau: Direcção dos Serviços de Turismo e Comunicação Social, no date, pp. 21-3.

Another figure is Rodrigo Rodrigues a physician, member of the Portuguese Republican Party. He graduated in 1902 in Lisbon in tropical medicine, started its medical career by becoming an Army physician, then joining the colonial service. He turned to be Governor of Macau between 1923 and 1925²³. He was esteemed as intellectual, appreciated by its sense of justice and equilibrium between the Portuguese, Macanese and Chinese ethnic groups, keeping also a close relationship with the Church. The Governor encouraged a fair and scrupulous management of public affairs, combating corruption and waste²⁴. It is unconfirmed if he maintained any Masonic activity in Macau or was a member of Lodge Luis Camões.

Camilo Pessanha was one of the most remarkable poets of the Portuguese Romanticism, born in Coimbra in September 8, 1867, where he studied law. Just subsequent to its graduation he departed to Macau arriving on April 1894, to occupy the position of teacher in the public school; he accumulated it with coordinator of the Property Register²⁵. He was a compulsive collector of Chinese art, a researcher on Chinese history and culture, being above all a distinct poet. He lived with a Chinese woman that gave him a son, João Maria. At early 1900's he traveled to Portugal, twice, for medical treatment. He maintained correspondence with two leading poets of the Romantic Movement: Fernando Pessoa and Mario de Sá-Carneiro. Pessoa loved to recite Pessanha poems in the intellectual circles in Lisbon and in 1915 he got permission to publish several poems (of Pessanha) in *Orpheu*, the cultural review of the Symbolic movement. Pessanha was initiated in a Lodge, in Coimbra, under the jurisdiction of the Grand Oriente Lusitano²⁶. In Macao, he became member of Lodge Luis de Camões, where he was raised to Fellowcraft and Master, occupying most probably the function of Master of the Lodge. In June 16, 1916 he became Chevalier of the Orient, 15th Degree of AASR and later Chevalier Rose-Croix, 18th Degree.²⁷ These distinctions were unusual and prove the high esteem Pessanha enjoyed among the Portuguese *intelligentsia*, in Lisbon, and the social circles in Macau. In 1920, his book of poetry *Clepsidra* was published by Ana de Castro Osório, owner of the publishing house *Lusitânea*²⁸. He passed away in March 1, 1926, aged fifty-nine; he was buried in the Cemetery of St. Miguel (Macau) in a simple civil ceremony.

After the coup d'état that led to the dictatorship of the *New State*, under Salazar, the Masonic activity cease to exist in any part of the Portuguese Empire, namely in Macao. Following the Carnation Revolution of April 24, 1974, the Grande Oriente Lusitano (GOL) retake, in full, its activities and promoted the "raising of columns" of a third

²³ Dias, Alfredo, "A Questão do Ópio Duas Cartas" ("The question of Opium; two letters"), *Macau Review*, 2^d series.

²⁴ Teixeira, Padre Manuel (1981). *Toponímia de Macau. Ruas com nomes de pessoas*, "Toponímia of Macau. Streets with names of people" 2nd tome. Macau: Imprensa Oficial, pp. 165-7.

²⁵ He asked Ana Castro Osório, a writer and colleague at the University, in marriage but she rejected him. This has been of the reasons for its departure to Macau. Ana Castro Osório was a leading intellectual figure in Coimbra society, a Freemason and a constant figure in Pessanha's imaginary.

²⁶ Pires, Adelto, *Camilo Pessanha: retrato por inteiro* ("Camilo Pessanha: a full-body Picture"), *Storm* revue, in <http://www.storm-magazine.com/novodb/argmais.php?id=544&sec=&secn=>

²⁷ Instituto Português do Oriente, *Clepsidra de Camilo Pessanha* ("Clepsidra of Camilo Pessanha; on the 70th anniversary of its first edition"), Macau.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

Lodge in Macau. This Lodge was, according with different sources, consecrated in late 1980s, during the tenure of Carlos Melancia, as Governor of Macao; it integrated members of the Portuguese Government, liberal professions, Macanese community and has been active till today²⁹. In 2007, a Triangle of the Grande Legal Lodge of Portugal was created in Macau by decree of the third Grand Master of the Portuguese Regular Craft and become a regular Lodge under the name *Luz do Oriente* (Light of Orient) in 2012³⁰. A second Masonic grouping is in process to be established in Macau under the name Triangle *Sun Yat Sen* and currently is subordinated to the *Lodge Pentalfa* No. 97 in Lisbon, a Lodge of the Grand Legal Lodge of Portugal working in the York Rite³¹. Since then the two main branches of international freemasonry have been active in Macau.

Freemasonry in China is resumed to Hong Kong and Macau, although contradictory reports acknowledge the existence of some type of Masonic activity in mainland China, restricted to expatriates living in Shanghai and Beijing.

²⁹ Gonçalves, A.M.A, “A Shortened History...”, *ibidem*.

³⁰ See site <http://luzorienteblogspot.com/>

³¹ See site <http://sunyatsenlodge.wordpress.com/>