




RESEARCH ARTICLE

Modern urbanscapes of Macau's vice economy

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Abstract

Gambling has been Macau's principal industry and a major source of income for the city for nearly 180 years. However, surprisingly little has been said about its urban impact and connections to a wider economy of *vice*, e.g. opium, pawnbroking and prostitution, which was consolidated in the second half of the nineteenth century mostly by the hands of a Chinese entrepreneurial elite. This article takes a novel approach to examining Macau's early colonial development by historicizing the city's modern economy from a different, mostly neglected urban angle. It shows that the development of vice businesses promoted the diversification of commercial activity, real estate development and the creation of public facilities, defining a type of *ordinary* urbanization, business-led rather than government-oriented, that affected Macau's urban character and identity in durable ways.

Introduction

When the liberalization of gambling was enacted in Macau in 2001, the industry was far from a novelty in the former Portuguese colony. On the contrary, its rapid transformation into what the media and scholars quickly labelled the 'Las Vegas of the East' only marked a new, rather intense turn in a long history of gambling activity, which has been the city's mainstay industry for nearly 180 years. Before the current era of mega-resorts was launched, Macau had embraced a period of uptown casinos. Before casinos materialized in the urban landscape, the first few luxury hotels made their way into the city. Before hotels began catering to avid gamblers and visitors, there were modest gambling parlours burgeoning in a popular Chinese quarter of the city. Before those, gambling was up and running on the streets. As Macau transitioned from being a rather regional and slightly obscure gambling town to the world's leading gambling destination in 2006,¹ knowledge about its long and vibrant gambling past seemed to belong to more specialized circles or anecdotal stories that

¹ A position that it held for nearly 15 years before the trend was reversed due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism and visitation from 2020 to 2022 and the gradual implementation, during the pandemic, of stricter political controls on financial movement and transactions.

envisioned the city as the ‘Monte Carlo of the East’. The success of its latest phase of gambling has somewhat dimmed this longer past, conferring a sense of currency on the industry that has been reinforced by formidable growth and patronage embodied in the frenzied chip stacking sounds marking the daily rhythms inside the city’s busy gambling halls. Since early forms of betting were legalized in 1846 as part of an economic reshuffling strategy, the city’s government has routinely and steadily depended on the revenue generated by gambling to revive its economy.

Although this past has been the object of different historical narratives, one aspect that is remarkably absent from Macau’s gambling history is an understanding of gambling’s urban history. Overall, recent scholarship on gambling has emphasized the industry’s grip in city affairs and the economy and society,² with some of these works shedding light on gambling’s questionable social, human and urban consequences in such places as Macau, Las Vegas and Singapore.³ Gambling’s unrelenting impact in whole city economies and urban fabrics can be linked to the scope and scale of recent casino development, which has been unprecedented over the past 20 years or so.⁴ This is particularly noteworthy in Macau, where the industry has been marked by incremental expansion rather than contraction, showing great adaptability and resilience to the local environmental and global context. However, the same line of urban enquiry has not been applied in history, at least for Macau, specifically, although the city is a privileged location for observing and assessing how the development of a new urban economy, driven by gambling, has affected the built environment. For one, Macau’s history of gambling is long and dynamic, marked by different phases and changes to the industry – technological, legal and cultural – as the city is one of the longest and most durable institutionalized gambling settings in the late modern world.

Although increasingly present in Macau’s economy and society in the second half of the nineteenth century, little has been written about the ways that gambling has contributed to Macau’s urbanization, participating in modern processes of city formation and growth, ultimately providing the Portuguese colony with a modern sense of identity. References to its materiality, urban dimension and transformative impact during the early colonial era are presented as isolated examples or as context (to some other history, colonial or economic). It is thus a history that lacks an urban angle. How did gambling development both form part of and shape the urban landscape? How far was it linked to a wider urban economy that brought further changes to the

²A. Stokowski, ‘Gaming and tourism: issues for the new millennium’, in A.A. Lew, M.C. Hall and A.A. Williams (eds.) *A Companion to Tourism* (Oxford, 2004), 399–409; J. Hannigan, ‘Casino cities’, *Geography Compass*, 1 (2007), 959–75; S.H. Lo, *Casino Capitalism, Society and Politics in China’s Macau* (Cambridge, 2020); T. Simpson, *Betting on Macau: Casino Capitalism and China’s Consumer Revolution* (Minneapolis and London, 2023).

³T.W. Luke, ‘Gaming space: casinopolitan globalism from Las Vegas to Macao’, *Globalizations*, 7 (2010), 395–405; C. Balsas, ‘Gaming anyone? A comparative study of recent urban development trends in Las Vegas and Macao’, *Cities*, 31 (2013), 298–307; S. Al, *The Strip: Las Vegas and the Architecture of the American Dream* (Cambridge, MA, 2017); K.W. Lee, *Las Vegas in Singapore: Violence, Progress, and the Crisis of Nationalist Modernity* (Singapore, 2018); J. Ng, *Dreamworld of Casino Capitalism: Macao’s Society, Literature, and Culture* (Amherst, 2019).

⁴Stokowski, ‘Gaming and tourism’, 405; Hannigan, ‘Casino cities’, 961; W.R. Eadington, ‘The economics of casino gambling’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 13 (1999), 176–7; D. Bromberg, ‘Gaming in Southeast Asia’, in C.H.C. Hsu (ed.), *Casino Industry in Asia Pacific: Development, Operation, and Impact* (Amherst, 2006), 78–83.

cityscape and city life? These are two of the questions addressed in this article. Herein, gambling is situated within a larger network of modern *vice* businesses (e.g. opium, pawnbroking and prostitution), most of which were consolidated in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Contrary to perpetuating the study of Macau's modern gambling in isolation, this article contextualizes the activity within a network of trades that were connected by convention, social practice or businesses design, shedding light on the city's colonial modernity in its initial momentum and social and economic complexity. By tracing the impact of Macau's vice economy on the urban landscape, the article further identifies processes contributing to city formation from both a material and cultural perspective, thus, historicizing Macau's modern economy in its urban form. Finally, I argue that private capital facilitated economic growth and innovation while promoting urban change, for instance in the form of real estate development and the emergence of new occupations, signalling a type of ordinary urbanization fostered by commercial interests that built on a desire for the mundane. Macau's vice economy was making the administration prosperous, but what was happening 'on the ground'?

Gambling, a neglected urban force

References to gambling as an original and increasingly important source of income for the Portuguese colonial administration abound in narratives of Macau's economic survival, as the city withdrew from its maritime role in southern China following the takeover of Hong Kong by the British in 1843 and the subsequent relocation of most British and foreign activity to the neighbouring region and the opening of the treaty ports.⁵ It is a well-established fact that, over the course of several decades, Macau depended largely on opium and gambling revenue to keep its finances afloat.⁶ The city's early reliance on gambling had never actually waned and continued building momentum through the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gambling had grown considerably by 1866.⁷ By the 1870s, taxes generated by the opium and gambling licences enabled the Portuguese administration to circumvent a new financial shortfall created by the prohibition in 1874 of the coolie trade, one of Macau's main businesses in the nineteenth century.⁸ At the end of the nineteenth century, nearly 61 per cent of Macau's income derived from opium

⁵J. de Pina-Cabral, *Between China and Europe: Person, Culture and Emotion in Macao* (London, 2002); R. Nield, *China's Foreign Places: The Foreign Presence in China in the Treaty Port Era, 1840–1943* (Hong Kong, 2015), 1–22.

⁶After gambling was made legal, monies from its direct taxation (*Ditta pas as cazas do jogo china*) constituted the largest share of the city's public revenue, followed by the Chinese lottery and sale of cooked opium. For years 1858–63, see *Boletim do Governo de Macao (BGM)*, 8 (4 Oct. 1862), 176–7, and *BGM*, 9 (12 Oct. 1863), 184. Other government records confirm that these three industries were still the main source of public revenue at the turn of twentieth century, representing 59% of city funds in 1893–94 and 81% in 1905. *Relatório do Governo (RG) 1911*, Província de Macau, 116; M.P. Chagas, *As colónias portuguesas no século XIX, 1811 a 1890* (Lisbon, 1890), 190; B. da França, *Macau e os seus habitantes: relações com Timor* (Lisbon, 1897), 179.

⁷J. Porter, *Macau. The Imaginary City: Culture and Society, 1557 to the Present* (Boulder, 2000), 94.

⁸J. Asome, 'The indentured coolie trade from Macao', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, 54 (2014), 176. Macau was also struck by a catastrophic typhoon in 1874, which caused remarkable devastation. G.C. Gunn, *Encountering Macau: A Portuguese City-State on the Periphery of China, 1557–1999* (Macau, 2005), 74; Porter, *Macau. The Imaginary City*, 92–3.

and gambling businesses, with opium monopolies amounting to 19 per cent of the total, and gambling taxes levied reaching nearly 42 per cent, including lotteries and fantan (番攤), then one of the most popular table games in southern China⁹ – and one of the most enduring games in Macau – with fantan amounting to 22 per cent of the city's total revenue in the period 1898–99.¹⁰ About a decade later, in 1910, nearly 73 per cent of the Portuguese administration's income came from taxes levied on the opium and gambling monopolies, including 41 per cent from fantan.¹¹ Frederic Penfield, an early twentieth-century travel writer, conveyed what this meant for the city and its administration, when he reported that gambling in Macau in the first decade of the twentieth century was 'a business – all the business there is, and the concessions for the fan-tan and lottery monopolies pay for everything, practically making taxation unnecessary'.¹²

There is a broad literature addressing different aspects of gambling's existence in Macau in the second half of the nineteenth century, when it was no longer a newly legalized activity – the first gambling houses appeared in the mid-nineteenth century – but was still new enough to be shaping its place under a colonial regime that was experimenting with possibilities for expanding its tax base, as well as consolidating its political image. Traditionally, such studies have focused on different phases of the industry's chronological development; its impact on government revenue and economic reinvention; the changes in its legal and regulatory framework, gambling modalities and culture; and the modernization of the industry proper.¹³ At the same time, it seems to be a common feature of works examining Macau's turn-of-the-twentieth-century urbanization to downplay or disregard the development of gambling and its material reality. More often than not, references to the city's urbanization during this era either overlook urban forms and practices related to gambling and connected commercial activities, or only occasionally tie such developments to the expansion of Macau's tax base due to their prominent role in sustaining the city's economy. Seldom do such works describe the location of Macau's first gambling- or opium-related ventures, and relate their development with changes that were

⁹Fantan derived from divination practices, and it is said to have its origins in the Han dynasty. It involves gambling based on drawing from a random number of hidden coins or tokens, which requires the player to guess a number out of one, two, three or four. X. Paulès, 'Gambling in China reconsidered: *Fantani* in South China during the early twentieth century', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 7 (2010), 181–2.

¹⁰RG 1911, 116.

¹¹*Ibid.*; Pina-Cabral, *Between China and Europe*, 29, 81.

¹²F.C. Penfield, *East of Suez: Ceylon, India, China and Japan* [1906] (New York, 1912), 283.

¹³W.R. Eadington and R.C.S. Siu, 'Between law and custom. Examining the interaction between legislative change and the evolution of Macao's casino industry', *International Gambling Studies*, 7 (2007), 1–28; Paulès, 'Gambling in China reconsidered'; H. Loughlin and C.W. Pannell, 'Gambling in Macau: a brief history and glance at today's modern casinos', *Focus on Geography*, 53 (2010), 1–9; J.A.F. Godinho, 'A history of games of chance in Macau: Part 1 – Introduction', *Gaming Law Review and Economics*, 16 (2012), 552–6; J.A.F. Godinho, 'A history of games of chance in Macau: Part 2 – The foundation of the Macau gaming industry', *Gaming Law Review and Economics*, 17 (2013), 107–16; C. Reis, 'O jogo em Macau: A arrematação de duas lotarias no início do século XX', *Ler História*, 77 (2020), 83–105; Y. Yu 於一貧, 'Aomen bocai ye yu shuishou guanli de lishi yange' 澳門博彩業與稅收管理的歷史沿革 [The historical evolution of Macau's gaming industry and tax administration], *Shuishou yu shehui* 稅收與社會 (2000), 50–1; G. Hu 胡根, '1872 Xianggang jin du dui Aomen bocai ye de yingxiang' 1872年香港禁賭對澳門博彩業的影響 [The impact of Hong Kong's 1872 gambling ban on Macau's gaming industry], *Aomen yanjiu* 澳門研究 (2009).

intrinsic to Macau's modern transformation, some of the features of which were economic diversification, new occupational horizons and rational planning.

A few interpretations could be offered to justify this absence in urban-focused writings on Macau. On the one hand, it is likely that gambling – and the vice economy it helped maintain – has been held in low regard by scholars examining urban matters under colonial Macau. Originally, gambling was a rather localized and second-rate affair, although some accounts of the time describe the occasional presence of illustrious Chinese and foreign visitors in the Chinese quarter (*bairro china*).¹⁴ Its growth and the development of other seedy businesses, such as prostitution, which existed in a rather symbiotic relationship,¹⁵ might have been perceived as rather degrading and thus not worthy of attention. From the point of view of the history of ideas, we should perceive the endeavour to capture, categorize and describe the 'Portuguese city' – historically, the European and the Chinese settlements developed in separate areas – and its urban attributes, with the occasional and nominal mention of its Chinese and Asian architectural and urban counterparts, as inherently advantageous to the colonial project.¹⁶ As Anthony King has argued, 'irrespective of the nature and degree of theoretical investment in these accounts or of the moral, political or cultural positionality adopted towards the subject of colonization, the constitution of the discourse on colonial urbanism is in the language of the colonizer, English (generally) or French and Spanish'¹⁷ – and, in our case, Portuguese.

Works devoted to categorizing and describing Macau's built environment often fall under the architectural or urban planning strand of research, or both. In *História da arquitectura em Macau*, for instance, the focus is on urban plans and regulations, with practically no allusion to gambling, except for a brief passage on seventeenth-century Macau which states that it 'had its place at various points throughout the bazaar' – a term ensuing from the official Portuguese expression 'Bairro Chinez do Bazar', used to designate the city's main Chinese quarter.¹⁸ While this and those previously mentioned sources confirm that the practice of gambling developed in a predominantly Chinese area, authors have failed to shed any great light on the urban forms and transformative components that were associated with the development of the activity after it was legalized. In an earlier work, *Macao Architecture. An Integrate of Chinese and Portuguese Influences*, the emphasis is on architecture, sacred and other, with gambling only providing the economic context of late nineteenth-century

¹⁴B.R. Curtis, *Dottings Round the Circle* (Cambridge, 1876), 187–8; C.A. Gunnison, *In Macao* (San Francisco, 1892), 18–19; Conde de Arnos, *Jornadas pelo mundo* (Porto, 1895), 141; França, *Macau e os seus habitantes*, 179. For a brief description of the atmosphere of the first gambling houses in Macau, see Loughlin and Pannell, 'Gambling in Macau', 2–3.

¹⁵Regulamento das casas toleradas em Macau, *Boletim Oficial do Governo da Província de Macau*, Suplemento ao no. 32 (11 Aug. 1898), 291; I. Nunes, 'The singing and dancing girls of Macau: aspects of prostitution in Macau', *Review of Culture*, 18 (1994), 61–84.

¹⁶J.M. Fernandes, 'Macau da cidade antiga à arquitectura recente', *Arquitectura Portuguesa* (1987–88), 62–73; M.L.R. Costa, 'The history of architecture in Macau', *Review of Culture*, 38–9 (2001), 13–66; J.M. Afonso, 'Macau: uma experiência de urbanismo estratégico e higienista dos finais do séc. XIX e começos do séc. XX', *Revista de Cultura*, 38–9 (1999), 221–48; J.M. Fernandes, 'Macau, entre os séculos XIX e XX, urbanismos e infraestruturas de 1820 a 1920', *Revista de Cultura*, 35–6 (1998), 77–94.

¹⁷A.D. King, 'Writing colonial space. A review article', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37 (1995), 542.

¹⁸'O jogo...ocupava o seu lugar em vários pontos ao longo do espaço do Bazar'. M.L.R. Costa, *História da arquitectura em Macau* (Macau, 1997), 28.

Macau: 'No permanent industry existed. The revenue was mainly raised by gambling monopolies.'¹⁹ Another volume dedicated to Macau's history of architecture and urbanization, 澳門建築 (*The Architecture of Macau*), addresses themes of urban design and transformation during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – again, with only ancillary mention of gambling houses or gambling's presence and influence in the built environment. Nevertheless, the authors do elaborate somewhat on the pawnshop business, which in Macau and elsewhere (e.g. mainland China, Southeast Asia) has had a close relationship to the development of gambling.²⁰

On the other hand, and in contrast, there is some truth in the notion that the construction of Macau's new port facilities on the east side of the peninsula, the opening of public arteries²¹ or the construction of new public infrastructure (e.g. sewers) were urban matters *par excellence* and so more deliberately dominated the focus of the Portuguese administration's spatial planning strategies, and, later, the attention of scholars writing on urban affairs. Similar to architectural elements, such public projects were also monumental in nature, defining most of the administration's efforts to modernize Macau while raising the city's profile both in regional and imperial networks. The plans for and construction of Macau's Outer Harbour, in particular, occupied the Portuguese administration for decades. Indeed, not much had been accomplished before the turn of the twentieth century to improve Macau's harbour facilities, save for the few piers and wharfs set up at the Inner Harbour and the wall built to protect the bay at Praia Grande.²² There was thus an irresistible appeal to promote Macau's infrastructural development, which was picking up more or less at the same time as gambling was taking root, with its commercial ramifications also becoming more visible in the urban landscape. At no point, however, have gambling and its vice equivalents been considered an urban force capable of moulding, at least to some extent, the cityscape and urban life. Acknowledging the 'ordinariness' of Macau's urbanization is one of the shortcomings this article aims to address.

The viable turned durable: vice businesses and the rise of Chinese elites

Commercial gambling in Portuguese Macau emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, following the establishment of a *de facto* colonial government in 1846 with Governor João Maria Ferreira do Amaral, who was the first to see in gambling a viable economic option for the colony. By levying taxes on what consisted of a popular activity among the city's Chinese population,²³ the Portuguese administration sought to buy its way out of bankruptcy following the takeover of Hong Kong by the British after the Chinese defeat in the First Opium War (1839–42). By 1840, gambling was already

¹⁹W.S. Kwan, *Macao Architecture. An Integrate of Chinese and Portuguese Influences* (Macau, 1970).

²⁰Y. Wu 吳堯 and R. Zhu 朱蓉, *Aomen jianzhu 澳門建築 [The Architecture of Macau]* (Hong Kong, 2013). See, in particular, ch. 4, and 89–95.

²¹San ma lou (Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro) being the most notable example. J. Cody, 'Cutting fabric – Macau's San Ma Lo', *Dialogue, Architecture + Design + Culture*, 30 (1999), 52–9.

²²P. Habertzettl and R. Ptak, 'Macao and its harbour. Projects planned and projects realized (1883–1927)', *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient: BEFEO*, 78 (1991), 299. See also Wu and Zhu, *The Architecture of Macau*, 85–6.

²³Loughlin and Pannell, 'Gambling in Macau', 2; Porter, *Macau. The Imaginary City*, 94.

extensively practised with the connivance of the authorities, who were paid to ignore it.²⁴ Some early detailed descriptions of Macau's gambling dens can be found in French accounts from 1844, which stated that they were tolerated by the mandarins overseeing the city's Chinese population.²⁵ Pursuing gambling as part of its economic policy for Macau, the Portuguese also embraced a well-established historical pattern according to which jurisdictions around the world that opted to legalize casinos and gambling parlours in different eras were, more often than not, either resource poor or under economic pressure.²⁶ As a matter of fact, before gambling houses were legalized in mid-nineteenth-century Macau, other forms of gambling had been authorized, with both Western and Chinese lotteries introduced in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1810, the government approved the first Portuguese-style lottery for charitable purposes under the Holy House of Mercy, establishing a lottery-issuing centre the same year.²⁷ In 1847, it legalized the first Chinese lottery, *pacapio* (白鴿票 *baige piao*).²⁸ Horse-racing also found its way into Macau's incipient list of gambling offerings as early as 1842.

The Portuguese colonial administration's resort to gambling thus embodied a two-way strategy. First, it was devised as a means to raise public revenue following the decisive loss of Macau's tactical position in the China trade due to the collapse of the Canton system (1757–1842) that ushered in the Treaty Port era. In this regard, it certainly helped that the newly established British administration of Hong Kong had passed a law in 1844 banning gambling from its territory.²⁹ Second, gambling should be understood within the context of the economic restructuring that took place after the official end of the coolie trade cycle around 1874,³⁰ when Macau was forced to abandon its dependence on an exclusively re-export economy, and small-scale industries began developing in tandem with a rudimentary service sector side-by-side with trade.³¹ As with many industries that emerged in the former Portuguese colony, gambling's beginnings were inconspicuous, initially developing under individual contracts for specific games.³² Once it was declared legal in 1847, individuals or parties running any form of gambling business were required to pay a contract fee

²⁴Porter, *Macau. The Imaginary City*, 94.

²⁵X. Paulès, 'Les limites de l'influence du modèle de Las Vegas dans l'offre de jeux de hasard à Macao: apports d'une mise en perspective historique', *Études chinoises*, 33 (2014), 138.

²⁶Eadington, 'The economics of casino gambling', 187; see also J. Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis* (London, 1998), 145.

²⁷Carta Régia de 5 de junho 1810 concedendo uma loteria annual em Macau, *Collecção da legislação novíssima do ultramar*, 2 (Lisbon, 1867), 303; Reis, 'O jogo em Macau', 88–9.

²⁸Godinho, 'A history of games of chance in Macau: Part 2', 111; V. Zheng and P.S. Wan, *Gambling Dynamism: the Macao Miracle* (Berlin, 2014), 195.

²⁹Ordinance no. 14 of 1844. An ordinance for the suppression of Public Gaming in the Colony of Hong Kong, *The Ordinances of Hong Kong* (London, 1866), 31–2. However, gambling continued to be widely played in Hong Kong, with repeated references to illegal fantan rings being broken. Pina-Cabral, *Between China and Europe*, 94.

³⁰Asome, 'The indentured coolie trade from Macao', 176.

³¹R. Ptak, 'Macau and the Sino-Portuguese relations, ca. 1513/1514 to ca. 1900. A bibliographical essay', *Monumenta Serica*, 46 (1998), 392.

³²Fantan licences were largely annually issued monopolies (*regime de exclusivo*) until 1889, and for periods of up to six years thereafter. Godinho, 'A history of games of chance in Macau: Part I', 555. As of 2009, fantan was played in eight casinos in Macau: Casa Real, Casino Ponte 16, City of Dreams, Grand Lisboa, Jai Alai, Lisboa, Sands and Venetian. Paulès, 'Gambling in China reconsidered', 186.

– a form of a licence that would entitle them to run the business – and were bound to a number of regulations, which included paying deposits and making periodic payments (usually monthly), as well as fines for illegal operation.³³ The first licences were granted in 1849 to the commercial exploitation of fantan and in 1851 for the pacapio lottery.³⁴ In time, a monopolistic structure allowed gambling operators to gain economic advantage while enabling the Macau Portuguese government to reap the maximum possible public revenue from their activities.³⁵ In 1930, Hou Hing Company (豪興公司), headed by Fok Chi Ting 霍芝庭 (1877–1937), was the first to win the bid for all concessions of licensed games, thus virtually achieving a monopoly on gambling by gaining rights of exclusivity to exploit all forms of games approved in Macau.³⁶ In 1937, the government granted a single gambling licence to Tai Hing Company (泰興公司), headed by Fu Tak Iam 傅德蔭 (1895–1960) and Kou Ho Neng 高可寧 (1878–1955), formally marking the beginning of the monopoly era in Macau.³⁷ This era lasted until 2001, with the 40-year gambling monopoly of the *Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau* (STDM), controlled by Stanley Ho Hung San 何鴻燊 (1921–2020), being the longest phase.³⁸

Originally, most past gambling businessmen were Chinese with commercial interests in other ventures, which signalled their increasing control over Macau's economy. More often than not, gambling investors were also coolie brokers. At times, they combined these functions as opium lords. As a matter of fact, many of the fortunes amassed by the Chinese in the nineteenth century came from the opium trade (e.g. processing, packing, transportation and sales).³⁹ Individuals such as Lou Kau 盧九 (1848–1908), Kou Ho Neng and Fu Tak Iam embodied this Chinese economic momentum. Lou was, arguably, Macau's first modern tycoon, having either monopolized or jointly controlled different vice businesses for nearly 30 years.⁴⁰ In 1897, along with his nephew Lu Guangyu 盧光裕, Lou established Heng He (恒和公司) to underwrite the lottery sales for the Holy House of Mercy.⁴¹ He was also the man behind the famed Yi An Company (宜安公司), which was essentially a social club that operated in the business of opium and lottery (pacapio).⁴²

³³Eadington and Siu, 'Between law and custom', 4–5.

³⁴Godinho, 'A history of games of chance in Macau: Part 2', 113; Pina-Cabral, *Between China and Europe*, 94. Officially, fantan was the only game offered by gambling establishments until 1930 and remained the most popular until the 1960s. Paulès, 'Les limites de l'influence du modèle de Las Vegas', 142.

³⁵Eadington and Siu, 'Between law and custom', 10.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷Godinho, 'A history of games of chance in Macau: Part 1', 553. See also P. Cortés and A.L. Vilela, 'Uncle Stanley, the dancing king of gambling who promised and delivered the moon', *Gaming Law Review*, 6 (2022), 149–50.

³⁸Cortés and Vilela, 'Uncle Stanley, the dancing king of gambling', 160. Ho's earlier partners were Teddy Yip, Yip Hon and Henry Fok. Lintner provides a fascinating description of their business trajectories and how they became partners. B. Lintner, *Blood Brothers: The Criminal Underworld of Asia* (New York, 2003), 103–6.

³⁹G. Ma 馬光, '1846–1946 Aomen yapien wenti tanxi' 1846–1946 澳門鴉片問題探析 [An investigation into the Macao opium question, 1846–1946], *Aomen lishi yanjiu* 澳門歷史研究, 9 (2010), 144.

⁴⁰G.Z. Lin 林志志, 'Lu Jiu jiazhu Aomende xiandai hua' 盧九家族與澳門的現代化 [The Lou Kau family and the modernization of Macao], *Wenhua zazhi* 文化雜誌, 80 (2001), 125.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 125.

⁴²*Aomen zhengfu xianbao* 澳門政府憲報 [Macau Official Gazette] 1881年6月10日第23號附報, 148; Z.L. Wu 吳志良 and Y.Z. Yang 楊允中, *Aomen baike quanshu* 澳門百科全書 [Encyclopedia of Macau] (Macau, 2005), 440.

Kou's commercial portfolio, in turn, ranged from opium monopolies and gambling licences, including a gambling monopoly in 1937 under Tai Hing Company, to pawnshops (Tak Seng On 德成按), that were, in practice, financial institutions providing liquidity via loans to patrons of opium dens, fantan houses and brothels.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, a new entrepreneurial class took advantage of the emergence of the 'modern Asian city' (e.g. Shanghai, Bombay, Tokyo) as an economic engine, cultural centre and site of governance to pursue a variety of goals.⁴³ Chinese economic power and its growing political influence in Macau during this era were tied to the expansion of foreign trade and the rise of compradors (買辦 *maiban*).⁴⁴ Having built their fortunes as middlemen between the Hong merchants (行商 *hangshang*) and foreign tea, silk and opium traders, the representatives of this mercantile class controlled businesses that were multigenerational and often multinational.⁴⁵ Complex social exchanges during the era of the Canton system, which had transformed Macau into China's most important logistics outlet for foreigners, led to some Chinese individuals and clans becoming more corporatist, especially following the establishment of the British in the China trade, with Macau being their main basis of operation before the occupation of Hong Kong.⁴⁶ Embracing the ambiguity that marked their position as a new economic elite associated with foreigners in China but free of central control, compradors were effectively agents of global capitalism.⁴⁷

Hao argues that the comprador-merchant's managerial skills were as crucial to China's early industrialization as was his capital.⁴⁸ Macau's riches, however, derived principally from commercial rather than industrial activity. To a large extent, the design of Macau's economy from the beginning of the Treaty Port era into the late nineteenth century reflects the city's critical need to specialize in activities that were not offered in Guangzhou or Hong Kong because they were highly discouraged under the more stern and watchful Chinese and British administrations. While progressively assuming control over the city's economy, Macau Chinese businessmen had filled their portfolios with a mixture of seedy businesses – ranging from opium and coolies to gambling, prostitution and smuggling – that have existed or subsisted for shorter or longer periods of time under international pressure and outcry (e.g. coolies), strong Qing condemnation (e.g. opium) or simply social stigma and disapproval (e.g. prostitution).⁴⁹ The shaping of modern Macau as a city of 'forbidden

⁴³K. Stapleton, *The Modern City in Asia* (Cambridge, 2022), 1, 10.

⁴⁴Y. Hao, 'A "new class" in China's treaty ports: the rise of the comprador-merchants', *Business History Review*, 44 (1970), 446–7; G.Z. Lin 林廣志, *Aomen zhi hun: wanqing Aomen huashang yu huarenshehui yanjiu* 澳門之魂: 晚清澳門華商與華人社會研究 [Soul of Macau: Chinese Merchants and Chinese Communities in Macau in Late Qing] (Guangzhou, 2017).

⁴⁵Gunn, *Encountering Macau*, 77.

⁴⁶P. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade. Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong, 2005). See in particular ch. 1, 'Forging the Canton system'; R.M. Puga, 'Early British presence in China: the first Anglo-Portuguese voyage to Macao', in C.X. George Wei (ed.), *Macao – The Formation of a Global City* (New York, 2014), 107–20; A. Coates, *Macao and the British, 1637–1842: Prelude to Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 2009), 123–38.

⁴⁷L. Chua, 'Imperial negotiations: introducing comprador networks and comparative modernities', *Architectural Histories*, 8 (2020), 1.

⁴⁸Hao, 'A "new class" in China's treaty ports', 449.

⁴⁹G. Weulersse, *Chine ancienne et nouvelle: impressions et réflexions* (Paris, 1901), 76; Pina-Cabral, *Between China and Europe*, 80; Gunn, *Encountering Macau*, 71–3; Eadington and Siu, 'Between law and

pleasures' encouraged the emergence of a new economy and new patterns of taste and consumption and changed the face of the city. Novel businesses and architectural forms, for instance gambling houses, opium dens, tolerance houses and pawnshops, appeared; at the same time, Chinese merchants' deep pockets and business acumen contributed to further urbanizing Macau through the diversification of commercial activity, real estate development and the creation of facilities to serve the public, as will now be discussed.

The *tangan* and the emergence of Macau's original 'entertainment district'

Macau's original gambling houses offered only one game, fantan, and were thus referred to as *tangan* 攤館.⁵⁰ The one-game-only offer was seemingly the rule for about 80 years when finally, around 1930, the Portuguese authorities allowed Macau's then fantan houses to offer another ancient Chinese dice game called *daxiao* 大小,⁵¹ also known as *sicbo* 骰寶 and *daisai* 大細. French historian Xavier Paulès claims that the number of *tangan* operating in Macau would have ranged from 16 to 26 from their beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century until the 1930s.⁵² By the end of the 1860s, there are records of 16 gambling houses providing regular annual revenue to the government.⁵³ A brief note on the game of fantan in *Le Monde illustré* stated that 16 gambling houses were operating in Macau in 1893,⁵⁴ while the *Summary of Chinese Shops in Macao on 13th February 1896, by Trade* lists a total of 19, 16 of which had opened in the previous 10 years.⁵⁵ The number stands at 20 in the early twentieth century.⁵⁶ Accounts vary, however, with other historical records suggesting that the number of fantan houses may have reached some 200 in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ A first-hand account by Harry Franck, an American travel writer, also seems to suggest that *tangan* continued to exist in great numbers in the first quarter of the twentieth century, with the author claiming that 'scores if not hundreds of bright signs' announced the presence of gambling houses in Macau.⁵⁸ In a subsequent passage of the same book, *Roving through Southern China*, the author states that gambling goes on 'in dozens of establishments in every down-town street'.⁵⁹ While Franck's narrative could be taken as alluding to Macau's gambling vibrancy rather than a literal description of the urbanscape, many

custom', 5; Porter, *Macau. The Imaginary City*, 93–4; P. Forêt, 'De la vertu au vice: l'espace des loisirs à Macao (1910–1930)', in H.J. Gilomen, B. Schumacher and L. Tissot (eds.), *Freizeit und Vergnügen / Temps libre et loisirs* (Zurich, 2005), 173–85; Ma, 'An investigation into the Macao opium question', 145.

⁵⁰ Paulès, 'Les limites de l'influence du modèle de Las Vegas', 138; Porter, *Macau. The Imaginary City*, 94.

⁵¹ Paulès, 'Les limites de l'influence du modèle de Las Vegas', 138–9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 138.

⁵³ Porter, *Macau. The Imaginary City*, 94.

⁵⁴ 'Le jeu de fant-tan', in E. Desfossés (ed.), *Le Monde illustré*, Paris: Année 37e, no. 1876 (11 Mar. 1893), 147.

⁵⁵ Recenseamento Geral da População da Província de Macau, feito em 13 de Fevereiro de 1896, *Boletim Oficial da Província de Macau*, no. 2 Suplemento ao no. 6 (12 Feb. 1897), 131.

⁵⁶ Penfield, *East of Suez*, 284.

⁵⁷ Although scholars later claimed that the estimate in question, by Chinese comprador and reformer Zheng Guanying 鄭觀應 (1842–1922), was an exaggeration. See Z. Hao, *Macau: History and Society* (Hong Kong, 2011), 75, 235.

⁵⁸ H. Franck, *Roving through Southern China* (New York and London, 1925), 217.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

businesses might have been short-lived in what was likely a competitive environment. In all probability, small-scale gambling parlours and houses were a popular commercial and social feature of colonial Macau, having legally operated for decades and continuing to function overtly without licences even after a monopolistic structure was put in place by the Portuguese administration.⁶⁰

Porter describes fantan establishments as ‘rows of three-story gambling houses with gaudy signs [that] crowded the narrow streets side by side near the center of town’.⁶¹ The Oriental Company (大東公司 *dadong gonsi*), a gambling venture established c. 1904 by Xiao Yingzhou 蕭瀛洲 and a Portuguese Eurasian whose family had settled in Shanghai around 1855, José Gonçalves Roliz (羅利茲 *Luo Lizi*),⁶² was described in such fashion, as a three-storey Western-style building (為一幢三層洋樓 *wei yi chuang san ceng yang lou*).⁶³ Other visual sources (including photographs) portray similar establishments, though there is little indication of their location.⁶⁴ In his eyewitness description of early twentieth-century Macau, Franck also states that such establishments were ‘all three stories high, with coolies crowded about the long, mat-covered tables below, and up-stairs... is the place [for] those of the better class’.⁶⁵ Other authors claim, however, that *tanguan* buildings were usually of one or two storeys. Describing the architecture of early fantan houses, Paulès states that it was ‘as specific as it [was] intimately linked to the local context’. The ground floor of the *tanguan* was occupied by a large table where the draw would take place and bets were placed, while the upper floor, when it existed, consisted of balconies that overlooked the gambling table. From there, patrons observing the game could lower their stakes using small baskets tied to ropes, which would maximize both the number of players and, potentially, the number of bets – especially considering that early Macau legislation on gambling (1858) forbade *tanguan* to hold more than one gaming table, although owners of such gambling houses could own up to 20 establishments each.⁶⁶

For nearly a century, Macau’s gambling houses flourished in busy commercial areas highly populated by Chinese residents, gathered in a cluster of streets located at the old Chinese quarter – the Chinese bazaar – west of the *Senado* (municipal council), which was the centre of the Christian city’s political, religious and civic life. Despite this trend to form a spatial enclave, the opening of gambling establishments was seemingly not restricted by any specific land or planning regulations. A gambling contract published in 1858 stated that the company in possession of the licence could operate fantan houses anywhere in Macau, ‘from the Border Gate to

⁶⁰Eadington and Siu, ‘Between law and custom’, 10.

⁶¹Porter, *Macau. The Imaginary City*, 94.

⁶²In Shanghai, the Roliz family opened Companhia Oriental Portuguesa and Agence Roliz, specializing in food, cosmetics, alcohol, tourism, insurance and shipping. Nicolau Tolentino Fernandes was another Macanese involved in the fantan and opium business; I was unable to identify many others. Around the time of his activities, thousands of Macanese left the city for Hong Kong or Shanghai. J. Forjaz, *Famílias de Macau* (Macau, 1996), 282, 542; A.G. Dias, *Diáspora macaense: Macau, Hong Kong, Xangai (1850–1952)* (Lisbon, 2014), 103–4.

⁶³Z.L. Wu 吳志良, K.J. Tang 湯開建 and G.P. Jin 金國平, *Aomen bian nianshi 澳門編年史 [Macao Chronicles]* (4th edn, Guangzhou, 2009), 2, 125.

⁶⁴Macao, China (Portuguese Concession): view of the entrance to a first class gambling house. Undated photograph (photo by George Rinhart), *Corbis Historical*, VV15390, 1900; W.H. Ho, ‘Rua da Felicidade circa 1900’, *The Past of Macau: Collection of Postcards* (Macao, 1994).

⁶⁵Franck, *Roving through Southern China*, 217.

⁶⁶*Boletim do Governo de Macau*, 4 (29 May 1858), 121.

the A-Ma temple area' (*desde as Portas do Cerco até a Barra*), from the north to the south of the Macau peninsula.⁶⁷ Nearly half a century later, this clause still applied. In a government ordinance from 1907, Chinese merchants Xiao Yingzhou and Lu Guangyu, Lou Kau's nephew, of the Macau Fantan Headquarters (澳門番攤總公司 *aomen fantan zong gongsi*) were granted a gambling licence (1907–12) to operate fantan houses at any location between 'the Border Gate and the A-Ma temple area' (關閘至媽閣 *guan zha zhi ma ge*), as long as they requested permission from the government before setting up shop.⁶⁸ The limits of Macau's 'gambling district' thus seem to have been set rather spontaneously by the choices that a number of syndicates and companies, which had acquired rights to exploit the activity, made when deciding where to set up business.

An early reference to a certain 'Rua do jogo' (gambling street) appeared in a brief note published in Macau's *Official Gazette* in 1869.⁶⁹ In *Au pays des pagodes*, published in 1900, Alfred Raquez refers to the same street, which the author states was located near the Ruins of Saint Paul's (*São Paulo*), and claims that it 'hosts a certain number of gambling houses owned by Chinese'.⁷⁰ About the same Rua do Jogo, Manuel V. Basílio explains that it is the original name of a street that was later to be called Rua das Estalagens (草堆街 *caodui jie*), in reference to the inns (*estalagens*) which opened there, arguably among the best accommodation offerings in Macau at the time due to the intense gambling activity nearby.⁷¹ Other gambling parlours were located on Rua da Felicidade (福隆新街 *fulong xin jie*) and Rua de Cinco de Outubro (十月初五日街 *shi yuechu wu ri jie*),⁷² then the main artery of the Chinese district before the opening of Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (新馬路 *xin malu*) in the early twentieth century.⁷³ One such establishment was the Sun Tai Gambling House (順泰銀牌 *shuntai yinpai*), operating on Rua da Felicidade.⁷⁴ Victor Sit also claims that most gambling establishments could be found at Rua da Felicidade and adjacent alleys, including Beco da Felicidade and Travessa da Felicidade (福隆新巷 *fulong xinxiang*), as well as near Rua de Cinco de Outubro.⁷⁵ The Oriental, mentioned earlier, opened at Rua dos Guimarães (海邊新街 *haibian xin jie*).⁷⁶ In 1911, Kou Ho Neng opened a fantan house at Rua da Caldeira (白眼塘橫街, 福隆下街 *baiyan tang heng jie, fulong xia jie*).

Most of these streets were located at the heart of the Chinese Bazaar, particularly the 'Bairro da Felicidade', which was the result of Chinese-initiated real estate

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸*Aomen zhengfu xianbao* 澳門政府憲報 [Macau Official Gazette], 1907年3月16日第11號.

⁶⁹'Na madrugada do dia 19 manifestou-se incendio n'uma casa da Rua do jogo, o qual foi logo apagado', *Boletim da Provincia de Macau e de Timor (BPMT)*, 15 (22 Mar. 1869), 70.

⁷⁰'Près des ruines, la Rua de Jogo abrite un certain nombre de maisons de jeu toutes tenues par des Chinois'; A. Raquez, *Au pays des pagodes: notes de voyage: Hongkong, Macao, Shanghai, Le Houpe, Le Hounan, Le Kouei-Tcheou; avec preface par le General Tcheng Ki-Tong* (Shanghai, 1900), 58.

⁷¹M.V. Basílio, *Sítios com histórias*, vol. I (Macau, 2021), 155.

⁷²Gunn, *Encountering Macau*, 88.

⁷³M.V. Basílio, *De Patane a Lilau: pátios, becos e travessas de Macau* (Macau, 2018), 38.

⁷⁴Macao, China: exterior view of a gambling house in Macao, the Monte Carlo of the Far East. Undated photograph (photo by George Rinhart), *Corbis Historical*, VV15387, 1900.

⁷⁵V. Sit, *Macau through 500 Years: Emergence and Development of an Untypical Chinese City* (Singapore, 2013), 121.

⁷⁶Wu, Tang and Jin, *Macao Chronicles*, 2, 125.

development and land reclamation projects in the 1860s to 1870s. The Bazaar would later host the main cluster of nineteenth-century vice businesses in Macau.⁷⁷ Projects to improve living conditions in the Chinese quarter, including sanitation and targeted planning, materialized at the turn of the twentieth century.⁷⁸ In a 1903 urbanization plan brought forward by the Public Works Department, which recommended improvements in areas that would ‘benefit the vast majority of the Chinese’, it was suggested that the expenses be borne principally by the latter to avoid a further financial burden on the government.⁷⁹ Changes proposed targeted streets such as Rua das Estalagens and Rua da Felicidade. Gambling acted as a force of attraction pulling in other vice activities, including pawnshops, that were regarded – at least from a business perspective – as complementary.

Nowhere was this spatial overlap more evident than in Rua da Felicidade and the surrounding streets, including Pátio da Felicidade (福隆圍 *fulong wei*), Travessa do Bazar Novo (新市巷 *xinshi xiang*) and Rua da Barca da Lenha (柴船尾街 *chai chuanwei jie*), which were known for their high concentration of brothels (*lupanares*).⁸⁰ Regulations on prostitution in the second half of the nineteenth century mandated that soliciting should take place far from places of public interest such as schools, public institutions and temples⁸¹ – which made the Chinese quarter a strong contender – or allocated exclusively to several streets situated in the district.⁸² This may explain why Bairro da Felicidade is often referred to as Macau’s red-light district. However, such a specific description is not entirely accurate because other vice businesses – gambling parlours, opium-smoking dens, clubs and pawnshops – were also found there.⁸³ Rua da Felicidade and Travessa da Caldeira (gambling and opium), Pátio da Felicidade (gambling), Rua Barca da Lenha (opium) and Travessa das Virtudes (道德巷 *daode xiang*) and Rua do Bocage (蓬萊新街 *penglai xin jie*) (pawnshops), were just some of the streets associated with such trades.⁸⁴ At the turn of the twentieth century, James Dyer Ball, a Hong Kong civil servant and noted scholar of Chinese language and culture,⁸⁵ wrote that ‘the native quarters of Macao

⁷⁷W.D. Wang 王文達, *Aomen zhanggu* 澳門掌故 [Macau Tales] (Macau, 1999), 224–5; Basilio, *Sítios com histórias*, 195–7; B.V. Pires, ‘The Chinese quarter one hundred years ago’, *Review of Culture*, 2 (1988/89), 57.

⁷⁸See, for instance, Archives of Macao (AM), ‘Plan for the construction of an avenue spanning from the Inner Harbour to Senado Square and the improvement of streets in the Chinese bazaar area, 1900’, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/27094.

⁷⁹AM, ‘Plan for the construction of an avenue spanning from Senado Square to the coastal street of the Inner Harbour and the widening of Rua dos Mercadores, Rua do Mastro, Rua do Aterro Novo and Travessa da Cordoaria, 1903/02/11’, MO/AH/AC/SA/01/27073.

⁸⁰Nunes, ‘The singing and dancing girls of Macau’, 73; Sit, *Macau through 500 years*, 121.

⁸¹Regulations issued in 1872 stated that prostitutes had to reside in neighbourhoods assigned by the police and away from temples, courts, schools and other public establishments. Regulamento para as meretrizes e casas toleradas em Macau, *BPMT*, 18 (8 Jun. 1872), 99.

⁸²Regulamento das casas toleradas em Macau, 1898, 291. Before the urbanization of Felicidade, prostitution was confined to parts of the Christian city (*intra-muros*), such as Rua do Bazarinho (水手西街), Rua de Alleluia (蘆善德巷) and the Chunambeiro area (燒灰爐). *Boletim do Governo da Província de Macao, Timor e Solor*, 6 (13 Sep. 1851), 145–6.

⁸³Nunes, ‘The singing and dancing girls of Macau’, 73.

⁸⁴Based on the streets where prostitution was allowed in 1898, listed on Regulamento das casas toleradas em Macau, 1898, 291.

⁸⁵P.E. Hamilton, *Dictionary of Hong Kong Biography* (Hong Kong, 2020), 14.

abound with native shops of all kinds and descriptions',⁸⁶ confirming the socio-economic dynamism and complex and vibrant urban life of the area.

Opium's missing geography and unexpected social impact

Scantier than existent descriptions of gambling businesses at the turn of the century, information about opium-related commercial ventures, including opium shops, smoking dens, warehouses and factories, both approved and clandestine, is either too general or scattered.⁸⁷ Perhaps there was nothing particularly specific or remarkable about opium houses, shops and depots, but as opium had fulfilled a purpose analogous to that of gambling by providing the Portuguese administration with one of its greatest sources of revenue for decades, one would expect this economic reality to be matched by an abundance of details regarding its materiality and urban presence over time. This is not the case, however. This paucity of information is the more astonishing considering that opium, as a business, precedes the legalization of gambling in Macau, having given the city, which was placed at the core of China's international trade for roughly three centuries, a certain reputation as a critical hub for opium import and smuggling.⁸⁸ Therefore, although the drug has helped fuel the city's economy for nearly two centuries, we know little about its contribution to Macau's urban development.

Opium was reportedly introduced to China by Muslim traders during the Tang dynasty (618–907), when it was used as medicine. The Western opium trade in China, by European merchants – initially Dutch and Portuguese, but chiefly British – started in the seventeenth century⁸⁹ and developed through different phases until well into the twentieth century. Opium was said to have been brought to Macau in the 1720s,⁹⁰ but the Portuguese crown had only granted the city a monopoly on the opium trade in Portuguese Asia in 1802.⁹¹ Until the collapse of the Canton system following the end of the first Opium War (1839–42), most opium had entered China through that city – directly or via Macau.⁹² By all odds, Western trade in opium marked the upscaling of sales to China underlying a general trend towards

⁸⁶J.D. Ball, *Macao: The Holy City: The Gem of the Orient Earth* (Canton, 1905), 62.

⁸⁷The economic, political, legal and social history of opium in China has been extensively covered. Works that have specifically addressed the social life of opium, highlighting consumption trends and practices (e.g. opium dens), as well as opium urbanization, also exist but tend to focus rather on China, broadly or, more specifically, on Canton, Shanghai and Hong Kong. See X. Paulès, *Histoire d'une drogue en sursis: l'opium à Canton, 1906–1936* (Paris, 2010); X. Paulès, 'Les fumeurs d'opium à Canton dans les années 1930', *Études Chinoises*, 23 (2004), 141–80; Y. Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁸⁸Ma, 'An investigation into the Macao opium question', 142.

⁸⁹Coates, *Macao and the British*, 65; M. Connelly, 'Comercio y consumo de opio en China', *Estudios de Asia y África*, 25 (1990), 386.

⁹⁰J.G.B. Fernandes, *Apontamentos para a historia de Macau* (Lisbon, 1883), 18; Hao, *Macau: History and Society*, 58–9.

⁹¹Ma, 'An investigation into the Macao opium question', 144; M.H. do Carmo, 'O Anfião', in M. Castelo-Branco (ed.), *Portugal-China: 500 anos* (Lisbon, 2014), 201–4.

⁹²T. Brook and B.T. Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839–1952* (Berkeley, 2000), 32. Chapter 1 describes in detail the different phases of the opium trade in China. See also chapter 8, 'The first opium crises', in Coates, *Macao and the British*, 123–38; Puga, 'Early British presence in China', 107–20; Connelly, 'Comercio y consumo de opio en China', 389.

the use of opiates as a recreational drug.⁹³ In the nineteenth century, opium routed through Macau headed to places such as Australia, America, Mexico and Japan, as well as China, arguably the world's biggest opium import market. Processing workshops operating in the city refined raw opium for export. Over time, drug production, redistribution and consumption patterns in China shifted in response to political oscillations, following the enactment of more or less strict regulations, attempts to curb smuggling or international censure. These fluctuations have strongly affected the availability of the drug in and through Macau, with clamp downs on opium smoking in mainland China arguably leading to an increase in consumption and, presumably, the number of drug smokers in Macau.⁹⁴ In addition to distribution, opium dealers in Macau were engaged in manufacturing, with the business running through monopolies under a farm system that allowed Chinese syndicates to process, pack and sell opium, monopolizing both the domestic and export markets.⁹⁵ Macau thus earned its position as an opium emporium, existing simultaneously as a place of distribution, production and use, with the drug remaining legal there until the end of World War II, when its sale and consumption were finally banned.⁹⁶

More importantly perhaps, and particularly after gambling was legalized, opium was viewed by the Portuguese government – as well as practical Chinese businessmen – as a service complementary to gambling that could be offered to Chinese patrons. On the one hand, gambling and opium salons co-existed in several streets (e.g. Rua Felicidade, Travessa da Caldeira). On the other, rules for operating opium houses in Macau were included as part of the fantan business in official documents from 1882 and 1885, with the aim of generating a steady flow of gambling expenditures and contract fees,⁹⁷ which is something that it effectively did. There were 52 opium-related businesses in Macau in 1896, 14 of which were opium shops and 38 of which were cooked opium shops.⁹⁸ The same year, owners of opium dens (*donos de casas de fumar opio*) were listed as a new occupation. There were 18 of them – 7 located in the Bazaar, 9 in the Patane (another developing Chinese district) and 2 in the neighbourhood of Santo Antonio.⁹⁹ Another occupation first recorded in the 1896 Census consisted of those engaged in the processing of cooked opium (*preparadores de opio cozido*), of whom there were 161.¹⁰⁰

By 1935, the Portuguese government had licensed 27 retail opium shops and 69 smoking dens.¹⁰¹ In the early 1940s, the number of smoking dens dropped slightly

⁹³Initially, Europeans made the drug available in a blend of tobacco and opium, called *madak*. Brook and Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes*, 6.

⁹⁴Gunn refers particularly to restrictions placed after the 1911 revolution. *Encountering Macau*, 84.

⁹⁵Opium manufacturing was legalized in 1846 with the arrival of Ferreira do Amaral: A.L. Gomes, *Esboço da história de Macau, 1511 a 1849* (Macau, 1957), 346; Gunn, *Encountering Macau*, 83. Opium monopolies appeared in 1851: Fernandes, *Apontamentos para a história de Macau*, 18. Occasionally, opium brokers from Hong Kong also moved their opium farm production to Macau and other places, such as Penang: Brook and Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes*, 118.

⁹⁶Decreto-lei, 933, of 28 May 1946. All opium dens were shut down by 1947.

⁹⁷Eadington and Siu, 'Between law and custom', 5.

⁹⁸Recenseamento Geral da População da Província de Macau...1896, 131.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹S. Shipp, *Macau, China: A Political History of the Portuguese Colony's Transition to Chinese Rule* (Jefferson, NC, 1997), 78.

to some 50, totalling thousands of beds, while the number of opium retail outlets had drastically increased to more than 80.¹⁰² Most of the opium businesses were situated near gambling parlours, especially around Rua da Barca da Lenha and its parallel street, Rua da Felicidade.¹⁰³ The street sign of Travessa da Felicidade still hints at the original address of Lou Kau's Yi An's Club, where wealthy Chinese gathered to smoke opium and play, and includes in smaller font, between brackets, the name '(宜安街)' 'Yi An street'. According to Yi An's statutes, however, fantan could not be played in the premises – only games such as dominoes, cards or Chinese chess.¹⁰⁴ In 1890, Wenceslau de Moraes, a Portuguese naval officer and writer, reported on the existence of opium dens in close proximity to gambling saloons and brothels, especially at Rua da Felicidade.¹⁰⁵ Close to the gambling action, opium smoking dens were thus located in an area with a high concentration of Chinese population and trades.

The former location of Macau's *Official Gazette (Imprensa Nacional)* – turned into another government department in 2021 – at Rua da Imprensa Nacional, once hosted an opium and tea trader, Herbert Dent & Co., at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the street was called Rua dos Prazeres (風順上街 *feng shun shang jie*).¹⁰⁶ Another opium facility, actually a factory, was located between Rua da Alfândega and Ponte e Horta Square in an old alley named after the product, Travessa do Ópio, which no longer exists.¹⁰⁷ The building, which has also disappeared, was described as 'lower and long, with features of an old Portuguese building'.¹⁰⁸ One of the most evident material traces of this history, however, is located somewhat at the outskirts of Macau's original vice district. Fronting Ponte e Horta Square, along what was then Macau's western seashore at the Inner Harbour area – now transformed by land reclamation – sits the building of a former opium warehouse erected in 1880. Georges Weulersse, a French student visiting Macau in the late nineteenth century, wrote that the warehouse was one of the city's 'institutions and riches', as it was an important source of revenue for the government. He added that 'the preparation of the precious narcotic occupies 300 workers, and the factory has probably the only steam pump that exists in Macau'.¹⁰⁹ In 1996, the building was converted into a clinic and activity centre for elders, operated by Tung Sin Tong (同善堂), one of the oldest Chinese charity associations of Macau, founded in 1892.¹¹⁰ The foundation of the charity itself, underwritten by men such as Lou Kau and Kou Hou Neng, both of whom were involved in the opium trade, reveals how Chinese capital was channelled into serving the common good. The establishment in 1890 of Macau's first Chinese hospital, Kiang Wu (鏡湖醫院 *jinghu yuyuan*), has also been linked to the new Chinese entrepreneurial class,

¹⁰²Sit, *Macau through 500 Years*, 119.

¹⁰³Basílio, *Sítios com histórias*, 210–11.

¹⁰⁴*Macau Official Gazette*, 1881, 148.

¹⁰⁵W. Moraes, 'Na Rua', in *Traços do Extremo Oriente* (Lisbon, 1895), 40.

¹⁰⁶At numbers 2 and 4. The company, which in 1888 was situated at Rua da Sé, moved to Rua dos Prazeres in 1910: Basílio, *Sítios com histórias*, 25–6.

¹⁰⁷M. Teixeira, *Topomímia de Macau*, vol. I (Macau, 1979), 195.

¹⁰⁸Um edifício baixo e comprido, com as características de uma antiga edificação portuguesa', J. do Inso in *ibid.*, 195.

¹⁰⁹Weulersse, *Chine ancienne et nouvelle*, 76.

¹¹⁰B.B. da Silva, *Cronologia da história de Macau* (3rd edn, Macau, 2015).

including the Lou Kau family, who were involved in the hospital's foundation and management.¹¹¹ As part of a formula in which financial success was returned to the community, these elements suggest that opium's role in urbanizing Macau is arguably larger than what has been acknowledged so far.

Pawnshops and the making of urban landmarks

Pawnshops are financial institutions that provide collateral-based lending. A long-established monetary practice, pawnbroking seems to have first developed in China in Buddhist monasteries around the fifth century AD, standing as the 'earliest known credit institution'.¹¹² During the Ming dynasty (1366–1644), it was reported that 'one or more pawnshops would be found in every city and town and in many villages' in China.¹¹³ By the early 1800s, there is ample evidence of pawnshops operating in many parts of Asia, with China being host to some 25,000 shops.¹¹⁴ In Macau, the business developed rapidly from the 1800s onwards, especially following the rise of the gambling economy.¹¹⁵ As early as 1850, it was reported that the licensing fees for pawnshops started to be a visible source of revenue for the Macau government.¹¹⁶ Similar to opium monopolies, modern pawn lending was also organized under a farm system according to which investors would 'rent' a franchise for the pawn business and keep any profit that might result from it. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were some 26 pawnshops in Macau employing 188 workers.¹¹⁷ The city's Portuguese government regulated pawnbroking in 1903 with rules that specified all matters pertaining to the operation of different categories of pawnshop, according to their capital, loan regime and interest rate (Dong 當, On 按 and Ah 押), providing protection to the interests of both pawnbrokers and pledgers.¹¹⁸

Although pawnbroking was not a recent invention, the architecture of pawnshops assumed a quite distinctive character during colonial Macau, especially at the turn of the twentieth century. The most profitable ventures were tall structures that stood out in the urban landscape, ranging from two to six or even seven storeys high.¹¹⁹ Pawnbroker towers were among Macau's first commercial landmarks, emerging as new Chinese architectural structures. The buildings resembled 'watchtowers with small air vents on the façade and crenulated tops' and were thus similar to other watchtower structures found along the Pearl River delta, in particular around the township of

¹¹¹ Lin, 'The Lou Kau family and the modernisation of Macao', 131–3.

¹¹² M.T. Skully, 'The development of the pawnshop industry in East Asia', in F.J.A. Bouman and O. Hospes (eds.), *Financial Landscapes Reconstructed: The Fine Art of Mapping Development* (New York, 1994), 3.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4, 5.

¹¹⁵ F. Gao, 'Traditions and reforms of the regulation of pawnbroking in Macau – a comparative analysis', *International Company and Commercial Law Review* (2015), 204.

¹¹⁶ Godinho, 'A history of games of chance in Macau: Part 2', 114.

¹¹⁷ Wu and Zhu, *The Architecture of Macau*, 93.

¹¹⁸ Regulamento das casas de empréstimos sobre penhores da cidade de Macau, aprovado pela Portaria Régia n. 192 A, 28 Oct. 1903, *Boletim Oficial Governo da Província de Macau*, 4 (9 Jan. 1904), 11–13; Gao, 'Traditions and reforms of the regulation of pawnbroking', 206.

¹¹⁹ As shown in archive images of the era, e.g. postcards (AM, MO/AH/ICON/MTL/MO/062), as well as old pawnshop buildings that still exist in Macau.

Kaiping.¹²⁰ Macau pawnshops also resembled their Canton counterparts at the time, where pawnbroker towers could arguably be among the highest buildings in existence,¹²¹ although the façades and towers of Canton pawnshops were larger and more monumental than those of Macau. While visiting Amoy (Xiamen) in the late nineteenth century, British travel writer Constance Gordon-Cumming¹²² noted: ‘we turned to the old city and walked for some distance on its walls, whence we had an excellent view looking down into the town. The walls are much smaller than those of Canton. I saw no tall pagodas, nor great square keeps, such as those which in Canton and Macao look so important, though they are only pawn-shops!’¹²³

In general, a typical pawnshop building was composed of a fortified tower at the back, taller than the front unit, which served as storage for pledges, which included jewellery, furniture and clothing items. In Macau, Tak Seng On, a seven-storey pawnbroker tower opened in 1917 by gambling tycoon Kou Ho Neng, is a typical example of such turn-of-the-century construction. Analogous to a few other buildings of the same type in Macau, it is still well preserved today, although none of these buildings operate as pawn businesses anymore – in effect, most of them are closed, and have not been revitalized, with the exception of Tak Seng On itself, which has been turned into a museum. Historically, given their complementary and close commercial relationship with gambling parlours in Macau, most of the shops were established in areas near the latter – at Rua do Bocage, Rua Cinco de Outubro, Rua de São Domingos (板樟堂街 *ban zhang tang jie*), Travessa das Virtudes (only the façade remains after the interior was destroyed by a fire in 2001) and Almeida Ribeiro, to name only a few.¹²⁴ In a passage from Luís Gonzaga Gomes’ *Chinesices*, first published in 1944, the author lists the location of some of the pawnshops that existed back then, including Travessa da Caldeira, Rua dos Ervanários (關前正街 *guan qian zheng jie*) and Rua Dr Soares (蘇雅利醫士街 *su yali yishi jie*).¹²⁵ Although the tall towers have gone from contemporary pawn businesses – security systems have become more sophisticated and pledges smaller (jewellery and watches instead of furniture and garments) – pawnshops continue to exist in Macau in a symbiotic relationship with gambling, confirming the old Chinese adage: ‘where there is gambling, there is pawnbroking’ (一賭一當 *yi du yi dang*).

Conclusion

The impact of the relentless development of gambling on Macau’s urban fabric has been a regular feature of the city’s growth for nearly two centuries. Although more recent changes have been quite fast and furious, it is indisputable that gambling’s past

¹²⁰The Macao Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China. *The Historic Monuments of Macau. Application to UNESCO for Inscription on the World Heritage List under the Terms of the World Heritage Convention*, 2005, 32–3; Wu and Zhu, *The Architecture of Macau*, 93.

¹²¹Pawnbroker warehouses, Canton. George Trobridge, Collection; *University of Bristol – Historical Photographs of China*, reference numbers: Tr02-090 (www.hpcbristol.sjtu.edu.cn/visual/tr02-090, accessed 4 Jul. 2023) and Tr02-091 (www.hpcbristol.sjtu.edu.cn/visual/tr02-091, accessed 4 Jul. 2023).

¹²²H. Laracy. ‘Constance Frederica Gordon-Cumming (1837–1924): traveller, author, painter’, in *Watriama and Co: Further Pacific Islands Portraits* (Canberra, 2013), 69–92.

¹²³C.F. Gordon-Cumming, *Wanderings in China* (Edinburgh and London, 1886), 119.

¹²⁴Details about pawnshop locations can be found at *Cultural Heritage of Macau*: www.culturalheritage.mo/en/search?filter=pawnshop&sort=0, accessed 5 Jul. 2023.

¹²⁵L.G. Gomes, *Chinesices* (3rd edn, Macau, 1994).

imprints can still be retraced, either in the archives or in the built environment. More importantly, as I have shown herein, gambling is part of a rich and complex urban history that has been largely neglected. In addition to its capacity to generate significant revenue for the Portuguese colony, the initial power of gambling lay in its symbiotic relationship with other businesses, such as opium smoking, prostitution and pawn-broking. Whereas gambling might not have drastically changed the city's layout in a snap, it played a significant role in the establishment of Macau's first modern 'entertainment' district, an enclave consisting of Rua da Felicidade and its surroundings at the heart of the old Chinese quarter (i.e. the Bazaar) located between the Inner Harbour and the outer edge of the Chinese settlement, where several vice businesses converged. These depended on Chinese capital, the providers of which were part of a new Chinese economic elite. The spatial overlap between the different strands of Macau's new urban economy contributed to its social dynamism and cultural distinctiveness.

The *tangan*, as a new kind of business, and the pawnshops in their novel urban form, also emerged as original Chinese architectural structures and left their imprint in the cityscape. The development of facilities destined to serve the common good, such as the first Chinese hospital and the Tung Sin Tong charity organization, both funded partly through revenue derived from the opium business, further defined the scope of a new urbanization type, business-led rather than government-oriented. Pawn towers, in particular, added a layer of complexity to this process and marked the beginnings of Macau's verticalization. Over time, gambling development in the monopoly era that began in the 1930s would also cause a shift in Macau's gambling centre.

The original arrangement, according to which gambling activity overlapped with patronage – both situated in the Chinese district – would, therefore, be discontinued as gambling gradually migrated and developed in new areas at the threshold of the old Portuguese citadel, or even within it, where some of the first casino-hotels emerged as symbols of Macau's new modernizing efforts towards a more service-based economy. Changes created by the development of the city's vice economy thus fostered a rupture within the original urban pattern, which for centuries had been marked by the development of a 'Portuguese city' alongside growing Chinese quarters. The spatial separation that had defined Macau's urban configuration for centuries into separated Portuguese and Chinese 'zones' inside the peninsula was broken off. In this sense, gambling and the vice economy that it both supported and drew upon were important urban agents of spatial integration, breaking with the historical 'zoning' norm. Finally, it may be argued that Macau's modernizing endeavours subscribed to urbanization processes that were both ambitious (e.g. new port facilities) and ordinary, with the city's vice economy – initially, a rather improvised combination of opium, gambling and prostitution – emerging as an intrinsic force, harnessing private rather than public resources and undeniably shaping Macau's urban fabric, colonial image and identity over time.

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