

SOVEREIGNTY

AT THE

EDGE

Macau

& the

Question of

Chineseness

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Cathryn H. Clayton

Published by the Harvard University Asia Center
Distributed by Harvard University Press
Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London 2009

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Printed in the United States of America

The Harvard University Asia Center publishes a monograph series and, in coordination with the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, the Korea Institute, the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, and other faculties and institutes, administers research projects designed to further scholarly understanding of China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea, and other Asian countries. The Center also sponsors projects addressing multidisciplinary and regional issues in Asia.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Clayton, Cathryn H., 1966–

Sovereignty at the edge : Macau & the question of Chineseness / Cathryn H. Clayton.

p. cm. -- (Harvard East Asian monographs ; 324)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-674-03545-4 (cl : alk. paper)

1. Chinese--China--Macau (Special Administrative Region)--Ethnic identity.
2. Chinese--China--Macau (Special Administrative Region)--Attitudes. 3. Ethnicity--China--Macau (Special Administrative Region) 4. Group identity--China--Macau (Special Administrative Region) 5. National characteristics, Chinese. 6. Macau (China : Special Administrative Region)--History--Transfer of Sovereignty from Portugal, 1999--Social aspects. I. Harvard University. Asia Center. II. Title.

DS796.M29C43 2009

951.26'06--dc22

2009039516

Index by the author

♻ Printed on acid-free paper

Last figure below indicates year of this printing

18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09

For my parents, Jackie and Paul

For Luca, and for Thomas

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of a process that began long ago when I was a graduate student in the anthropology department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and has continued through reconceptualizations and revisions in Macau, Boston, Torino, and Honolulu. In the course of its evolution into its present form, I have incurred many debts of many kinds—financial, intellectual, emotional, culinary—each indispensable in its own way. Although a full list of my benefactors over the years would be too long to include here, I wish to make mention of the following people and institutions who were instrumental in seeing this work (and its author) through the long process of its creation. Although they in no way should be held responsible for its shortcomings, they deserve a very large share of credit for its merits.

Gail Hershatter has been my most constant mentor ever since my first encounters with China as an undergraduate at Williams College; her commitment to me and to this project has been above and beyond the call of duty, and her sympathetic skepticism at key points along the way has been indispensable in saving me from myself. I have always been grateful for Anna Tsing's ability to see in my work far more than I am able to express and for her generosity in sharing that vision with me. And my graduate advisor, Lisa Rofel, helped shape my thinking about culture and power in ways too far-reaching for me to even articulate. Their close readings of earlier drafts of this manuscript were crucial to shaping its final form.

A three-year National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship while I was at UC Santa Cruz allowed me to focus my time and energies on the conceptualization of this project. A summer FLAS funded my study of Cantonese at the Yale-in-China Center at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in the summer of 1997. The field research upon which this book is based was made possible with funding from the National Science Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the Instituto Cultural de Macau. I would also like to thank the Committee for Scholarly Exchange with China for help in setting up research contacts at the Central Academy of Social Sciences and the First Historical Archive in Beijing. Finally, in 2003–4, an An Wang Postdoctoral Fellowship at Harvard University's Fairbank Center for East Asian Research allowed me the time, space, and intellectual environment to reconceptualize the dissertation.

The interlocutors and friends who enabled my fieldwork in Macau are too many to enumerate. I have long been gratified and inspired by their patience with my questions and their generosity with their time and information. Special thanks are due to Louella Cheng Chi Wai, who softened my landing in Hong Kong in 1997 and has been an unfailing source of support and friendship ever since; to Professor K. C. Fok, Cuc Kim Nguyen Fok, and Gary Ngai for the many kindnesses they extended to me and the many doors they opened for me when I first arrived in Macau; to my erstwhile colleagues at the Fundação Sino-Latina—Lita do Rosario, Yvonne Zhang, Florence Ho, Li Jian, and Anabela Monteiro—on whom I could always count for help, advice, and a good laugh; to Rui Simões—fellow fieldworker and frequent accomplice in the midday consumption of *mak-yuh beng*, a certain kind of fishcake, deep-fried and dipped in vinegar—whose humor lightened even the most frustrating days of fieldwork; and to the staff of the Museu de Macau and the Instituto Cultural, especially Ana Maria Catarino, Teresa Fu Barreto, and Carlos Moreno, for receiving me with openness, candor, and enthusiasm. I hope that my respect for their work is clear even when my analysis is critical.

Also deserving of special mention are Chan Meng Chak, Chan Wai Kan, Chen Meijuan and Chan Chak Chan, Chan Jileung, Mar-

garida Cheung, Chiu Man Yin, Joe Chui, Rui and Inês Costa, Ho Sang Wong, Agnes Lam, Leong Iao Cheng, Carlos Marreiros, the Maryknoll sisters, João Nuno Riquito, Helena Rodrigues, Shirley Sam, Elizabeth Sinn, Sit Wing Tou, the late Rev. Carl Smith, Vong Chau Son, Wang Chun, and the students in the Macau Culture and Society course I taught at the Instituto Politécnico de Macau in the spring of 1998 and at the University of Macau from 2001 to 2005. To those of you (and others) who may recognize yourselves in these pages, I hope the shock is not too great to bear.

Over the years, various individuals have read, listened to, and commented on the manuscript in part or in its entirety. I thank the following people for their contributions: Ann Anagnost, Cherie Barkey, Steve Caton, Lynda Chapple, Tim Choy, John Clayton, Rob Culp, Virginia Domínguez, Lieba Faier, Judith Farquhar, Richard Handler, Shelley Drake Hawks, Cori Hayden, Michael Herzfeld, Engseng Ho, Lyn Jeffery, Jon Keeseey, Eileen Otis, Alisa Puga, Annie Reinhardt, Carlos Rojas, Nina Schnall, Dan Segal, Shao Dan, Shen Hsiu-hua, Tim Simpson, Glenn Timmermans, and Paul Van Dyke.

I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for the Harvard University Asia Center. Their comments provided encouragement as well as excellent suggestions for honing the argument of the book.

Finally, I would like to thank Luca Macchiarulo for his unwavering support and confidence in me and Thomas Clayton Macchiarulo for his giggles, which made the final months of revisions a happier, if slower, task. This book has been a part of our lives for as long as we have been a family, and I for one am looking forward to turning over a new page together.

C.H.C.

Contents

	<i>Maps and Figures</i>	xii
	<i>Notes on Conventions</i>	xiii
	Introduction	i
1	Sort-of Sovereignties	33
2	Outlaw Tales	59
3	The Nonexistent Macanese	99
4	Educating Locals	133
5	Culture in Ruins	176
6	The Rubbish Heap of History	221
7	Outlawed Tales	262
	Conclusion	299
	Reference Matter	
	<i>Notes</i>	317
	<i>Glossary of Cantonese Characters</i>	361
	<i>Works Cited</i>	363
	<i>Index</i>	399

Maps and Figures

Maps

1	Map of China showing the location of Macau	xvi
2	Macau and Hong Kong	xvii

Figures

1	Broken Tooth and Rambo	89
2	Triads' revenge	91
3	Macau SAR flag	138
4	Maps of Macau before and after land reclamation	184
5	Ruins I	200
6	Restorations I	201
7	Restorations II	204
8	Ruins II	210
9	Museum of Macau: the Time Corridor	242
10	Museum of Macau: Hawker-cries of Macau	247

Notes on Conventions

The name “Macau” is often rendered “Macao” in English; in the years since the handover, the Special Administrative Region government has adopted the latter spelling as the official English name of the city. Nevertheless, as a matter of personal preference, I have chosen to use the Portuguese spelling throughout this book. However, the English version occasionally appears in quotations from English-language sources, and in these cases I have left the original spelling unchanged.

Somewhat more complicated is the problem of the romanization of Chinese words. Although Cantonese is the dialect spoken by more than 85 percent of Macau’s population and is the principal spoken language in Hong Kong, most of Guangdong, and parts of Guangxi province, there are several different systems of romanization (I know of at least four). The Hong Kong and Macau governments, for example, have different systems, and because the Portuguese alphabet does not have the letters “w” or “y” or the hard “g” sound, the Macau system looks quite alien to anyone familiar with the Hong Kong system or with the *hanyu pinyin* system for romanizing Mandarin Chinese. For the purposes of this book, the problem has been alleviated by the ability to insert Chinese characters into the English text; where possible, I have simply included the Chinese characters rather than their romanizations. Where the Cantonese pronunciation is important to my argument, I have used the Yale romanization system. In the few cases in which quotations from Portuguese sources include Cantonese romanizations, I have left the

Portuguese transcription system unchanged. Finally, I use the *hanyu pinyin* in cases where the original quotation was spoken or written in Mandarin, as well as in transcribing terms or place-names (such as *te-se* or *Beijing*) commonly used in the PRC, even if they were originally uttered in Cantonese. In transcribing authors' names, I follow the authors' preferences where they are provided; otherwise, I use *hanyu pinyin*.

The inclusion of Chinese characters poses a problem of its own: for, although it is commonly supposed that Mandarin and Cantonese are spoken differently but written the same, this is not strictly true. Readers of Mandarin Chinese will notice the use of several characters not found in any Mandarin dictionary. These are standard characters for transcribing the sounds of spoken Cantonese into written form, used widely in the popular press in Hong Kong and Macau. A glossary of these characters, with Mandarin Chinese and English equivalents, is provided at the back. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Chinese and Portuguese into English are mine. Interviews were conducted in Cantonese, Mandarin, English, or Portuguese, depending on the preference of the interviewee. Where I use direct quotes from interviews, I indicate explicitly or implicitly the language in which these interviews were conducted.

Finally, unless otherwise indicated, all the names in this study have been changed to protect informants' confidentiality. It is something of a fashion among many educated Macau and Hong Kong residents to be called by Portuguese or English first names; I have followed the conventions of my interviewees in assigning Chinese or Western-language pseudonyms. Because of Macau's small size and the political sensitivity of the topics under discussion, in some cases I have deemed it necessary to mask other markers of identity as well, such as age, occupation, and even gender.

The following abbreviations are used in the text and notes:

AMRB	<i>Aomen ribao</i> 澳門日報
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DSEJ	Direcção dos Serviços de Educação e Juventude
ESLC	Escola Secundária Luso-Chinesa Luís Gonzaga Gomes
EU	European Union

FEER	<i>Far Eastern Economic Review</i>
ICM	Cultural Institute of Macau
JTM	<i>Jornal tribuna de Macau</i>
KMT	Kuomintang
MGTO	Macau Government Tourism Office
MOP	Macao pataca (currency)
PRC	People's Republic of China
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SCMP	<i>South China Morning Post</i>
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
STDM	Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Map 1

Map 2

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Introduction

What remains of the São Paulo Church stands atop a small hill near the geographic center of the Macau peninsula. If you approach it on foot from the city's main square below, the four-story buildings that hem in and hang over the narrow cobbled streets hide it from view until the very last moment; then, as you emerge from the shady labyrinth of shops and cafes and the press of shoppers and diners into the strong sun of the flagstone plaza, it surprises you. You knew it was there; you were, in fact, following the signs pointing in this direction; but you were not prepared for something quite this striking.

What remains of the São Paulo Church is its stone façade. The church, along with the seminary and fortress of which it formed a part, was built in the first two decades of the seventeenth century; in the thirty-fifth year of the nineteenth century, it burned to the ground and was never rebuilt. By the late 1990s, its four-story façade had come to be a monument in its own right. Look at the façade up close—run your hands along its cool granite surfaces; pose, as do hundreds of tourists every day, for a photograph in front of its main arch; listen to the tour guide explain how it was designed by Italian Jesuits and built by Japanese stonemasons; crane your neck upward to examine the bas-relief carvings (called a “sermon in stone”)¹ that decorate each tier—and you will find a solid, coherent, tangible whole, analogous if not identical to a thousand other monuments in a hundred other cities. Walk through its portals to investigate the inside, however, and you will see that there is no inside; stand at the base of the long flight of stone steps leading up to it, and you

will see blue sky through its windows. The effect is probably unlike anything you have seen. This transparency, this unanticipated juxtaposition of stone and sky, of presence and absence, makes the monument unique.

Between 1990 and 1995, the Macau government spent approximately \$23 million patacas (US\$3 million) to restore this edifice.² The façade was cleaned, its foundation strengthened, the vegetation of neglect cleared away, and the ground behind it paved with stones in a way that marked the foundations of the nave, apse, and crypt; the original chapel annex was turned into a small gallery of Catholic sacred art from Macau, Timor, and Goa. With its restoration, the government officially adopted the São Paulo façade (also known as the São Paulo Ruins) as the city's icon. Throughout the 1990s, its image adorned the backs of coins, the dust jackets of books, the pages of tourist brochures; its silhouette was featured in television commercials advertising Macau as a weekend destination; miniature plaster casts of it were for sale in shops around the city and were given as gifts by government officials to visiting dignitaries. In 1998, when I asked a classroom of Macau Chinese middle-school students to draw a picture on the theme "My Macau," most of them sketched the São Paulo Ruins.

It is no coincidence that the Macau government took this monument as its *ex libris* during the long decade of the 1990s, also known as "the transition era"—an era in which Macau, a small city on the south China coast that had been governed by Portugal since the mid-sixteenth century, was preparing to be transferred from Portuguese to Chinese administration. This was also the era in which the city's Portuguese government mounted a massive campaign to convince the population, 95 percent of whom identified as Chinese, that they possessed a "unique cultural identity" which made them different from all other Chinese people—a difference resulting from the 450-year history not of Portuguese colonialism but of the existence of a deferential Portuguese state on sovereign Chinese soil. This project required a recasting of Macau's image: no longer would Macau be viewed, as it often was by its own residents and by observers around the world, as a colonial backwater, the last, far-flung colonial possession of a nation that was itself often figured as being on

the margins of modern European civilization. The state would repeatedly remind the world of the city's true historical identity as a "four-century-old meeting-point between East and West," the earliest and most enduring site of amicable, respectful relations between Chinese and Portuguese people. No longer would it be portrayed, as it had been in countless gangster films both Chinese and American, as a cultural desert (文化沙漠) and a gambling town (賭城) whose culture was little more than the detritus of a mobile and materialistic population. To the contrary, it was an exemplar of the kind of tolerant, multicultural society that could result from a form of shared sovereignty unique in the modern world. No longer would Macau's residents be seen as abject colonial subjects corrupted by centuries of collaboration. Rather, they were bearers of a form of Chineseness at once more traditional and more cosmopolitan than any other—a form of subjectivity that could serve not only as a model for the rest of China but also as an inspiration for a globalizing world in which encounters between cultural others seemed increasingly to lead either to fundamentalisms and ethnic violence or to a destabilizing loss of cultural identity. Where the city had long been home to a series of communities divided by language, nationality, ethnicity, and ideology, the Portuguese government hoped to create a unified Macau identity fashioned around allegiance to the place, Macau, and to a particular understanding of the history that had made that place unique.

From one perspective, the São Paulo façade was an obvious choice for the emblem of this project: ancient, monumental, immediately identifiable and centrally located, an artifact of a once-mighty institution now sufficiently distanced from the material conditions of its production that its meaning could be powerfully reinterpreted. Both product and symbol of the cooperation between Europeans and Asians, it represented Macau's "glorious past," when the city had been a hub for commercial and cultural exchange between civilizations. The stone expressed wordlessly all the elements of the legacy the Portuguese state hoped to be remembered by.

It also expressed what this legacy could mean for the future. It may seem ironic that this last-minute attempt to monumentalize the history of Portuguese rule in Macau—in many ways a classic case

of colonial nostalgia—gained the support of the staunchly anti-imperialist Chinese Communist Party. But this period of decolonization was also one of integration into the Chinese nation-state, which in turn was in the process of integrating itself into the world in new (capitalist) ways. The “one country, two systems” (一國兩制) formula, which Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China’s economic reforms, had developed in order to facilitate the integration of Hong Kong and Macau into the People’s Republic of China, both allowed and required Macau to maintain the political, economic, social, and cultural “system” that had evolved under Portuguese rule. If Macau’s system could be defined as a harbinger of China’s role in bringing about global harmony through the civilizing effects of international trade—rather than as the outcome of the exploitation, racism, and “national humiliation” (國恥) associated with colonialism—the São Paulo façade would be a proud symbol not just of the city’s past but of the future of the nation and the world.

From a different perspective, however, this choice was high irony. A mere façade, a ruin, the burned-out remains of a former glory, a pile of stones that had lain untouched and crumbling for more than 150 years, until, just at the last minute, someone decided it should be patched up and polished and commodified—was this really the statement about Macau’s culture and identity that the Portuguese wished to make? From this perspective, it reflected the transparency of the departing colonial state’s last-ditch effort to whitewash the effects of its presence; indeed, some residents of Macau, both Chinese and Portuguese, suggested that the Portuguese wanted to leave a “cultural legacy” in Macau because in more than four hundred years of colonial rule they had left nothing else—not a robust economy, not a flourishing democracy, not a well-ordered society, not a well-educated populace. Others suggested that Beijing’s acquiescence in making the ruins a symbol of Macau’s unique system highlighted the incongruities of the CCP’s claim that the one country, two systems formula was a “patriotic” measure, when in fact that formula was designed to maintain, in a form every bit as concrete as the ruin itself, the borders, institutions, and social distinctions begotten by colonialism. These ironies, pointed out to me on more than one occasion by long-term residents of Macau, were apparently lost on

the state and on the tourists who came to be photographed in front of the ruin.

The state's transformation of the São Paulo façade from a decaying ruin into a symbol for the future paralleled its simultaneous attempt to bring Macau itself into existence in a new form: as a tangible, unified cultural whole, a system that would be both product and symbol of its own remarkable history; a place with a unique cultural identity that would provide not only a foundation for the city's continued prosperity but also a model for a multicultural world. The creation of this Macau involved more than the cleaning, patching, and polishing of the city and its history; it required a different way of imagining the world-scale processes that had brought the city into existence, as well as a different way of imagining both Macau's and China's relationship to the modern world. The leaders of the Portuguese state in Macau, in collaboration with certain members of the community and with the support of Beijing, managed to create a remarkably coherent vision of this new Macau and of the collective subject of the Macau people, defined by their sense of belonging to Macau and their pride in its history. But like the São Paulo façade, what you saw when you looked at this Macau depended on your perspective. From one angle—that found in world history books in China and elsewhere, which told an agonistic story of imperialists vs. nationalists, the march of progress, and the victory of secular modernity over the tyranny of sacred tradition—this vision of Macau looked like an ideological distortion of historical truth, a transparent attempt to paper over the ruinous effects of an illegitimate colonial power. But from a different angle, it called into question the truth claims of the modern anglocentric world order that had relegated both Portugal and China to its margins, and attempted to rescue from it a different and more subversive history. This book examines the work that went into making this Macau, its successes and its failures. It attempts to keep in focus both the tangible contours of its presence—the history of its construction, the way people interacted with it, and its place in the social, economic, and political landscapes of China and the world—and the thin blue sky visible through the gaping apertures in its structure, the absences it highlighted and the questions it provoked.

Sovereignty

One of the central questions this process provoked was that of sovereignty. Far away, in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, a huge clock counted down the days and seconds until December 20, 1999, when the People's Republic of China would resume administrative sovereignty over Macau. This event, called "the handover" in English and *huigui* 回歸, meaning "return," in Chinese, would end almost 450 years of Portuguese rule in Macau and the history of European imperialism in Asia. It is not surprising that such a momentous political transition would spark discussions about the interpretation of the past and its role in shaping the future. A similar phenomenon had occurred in the two other territories most closely analogous to Macau: Hong Kong and Taiwan. Both of these were, like Macau, capitalist economies with histories of colonial rule that had complicated political relationships with the PRC. In Hong Kong, which had been returned to Chinese control in 1997, the transition had provided the impetus for debates about the nature of local identities defined in contrast to the national and about the role of British colonialism in producing these identities (Abbas 1997, R. Chow 1998, Fung 2001, H. Siu 1996). And in Taiwan, the transition from dictatorship to democracy sparked a surge of interest in defining the cultural identity of the "Taiwan people," a surge that strained almost to the breaking point the island's relationship with China as well as with Chineseness (Melissa Brown 2004, Tu 1996, Weller 2001). But to a far greater extent than in Hong Kong or Taiwan, in Macau the transition process brought into question the meaning of sovereignty itself. What was "sovereignty" if Macau's past could be construed as "not colonial"? What had been the nature of the hundreds of years of Portuguese presence in Macau? Was the one country, two systems formula a completely new invention or the reiteration of an older, more fluid notion of sovereignty that had held sway in—indeed, that had allowed the city to attain—its moment of glory in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?

A settlement governed by the Portuguese had existed in Macau since around 1557. In April 1987, representatives of the governments of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Portugal had

signed the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration on the Question of Macau, stipulating that on December 20, 1999, the territory would become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the PRC. This declaration kicked off the long decade of the transition era: twelve years of change, uncertainty, and mounting (indeed, by the time I left in the autumn of 1999, almost paralyzing) anticipation. During this era, the 450,000 residents of Macau faced preparations for decolonization and the rollercoaster effects of an economy whose increasingly transnational linkages caused it to boom and then crash, entering a recession in 1994 that only worsened with the Asian financial crisis of 1998. But this was also a period in which the city was gearing up for integration into the PRC under the one country, two systems formula. This formula had three main principles: “no change for fifty years” (五十年不變), “Macau people ruling Macau” (澳人治澳), and “a high degree of autonomy” (高度自治). It was touted as a pragmatic way to quell fears about the forced integration of the capitalist economies of Hong Kong and Macau into the socialist system of the PRC and to ensure that they would continue to prosper despite their change in political status. As in Hong Kong, the specific implications of these policies were spelled out in Macau’s Basic Law, which would act as the SAR’s constitution. The effect was to impart to residents of the two cities the sense that, although the handovers were momentous occasions, marking the end of centuries of European colonialism in Asia and a step on the road toward the reunification of China, the only palpable change would be the replacement of European (colonial) officials with local (Chinese) talent. At the same time, however, the Chinese government repeatedly emphasized that the one country, two systems formula was a “historically unprecedented” policy and that great care would be required to ensure “continued stability and prosperity and a smooth transition.”³ Such caution was warranted, for in many ways the formula begged more questions than it answered: What precisely was it that would not change? Who exactly were the “Macau people”? How much autonomy would be enough? What would be the correct balance between emphasis on the one country and the two systems? What, after all, defined a “country”? And what made a system recognizably systematic? In this sense, the one country, two

systems formula amounted to nothing less than an experiment in sovereignty.

The topic of sovereignty has burst back into the social sciences since the mid-1990s. While practical and philosophical debates have raged over whether formal nation-state sovereignty as we knew it should (or could) be defended, mourned, or finished off once and for all, a revitalized political anthropology has addressed the socio-cultural impact that various (and variously changing) practices of sovereign power have, especially on the lives of those whom they marginalize or exclude. In this book I build on the insights of this rich field, but I also propose a different approach: studying sovereignty not as a universal political theory or structure but as a mode of imagining power that becomes meaningful to people through its articulation to culturally and historically specific symbols, experiences, and desires. Recalling F. H. Hinsley's reminder that sovereignty is not a fact but a claim about how political power is or should be exercised (Hinsley 1966), I am interested in how these claims come to be meaningful to people in the everyday. I suggest that they do so through their articulation to cultural and historical experiences that do not translate easily across social and linguistic contexts. In this interpretive approach, I am inspired by Lisa Rofel's work on Chinese modernity, in which she focuses not on what modernity "is" and who has it but on how it is "imagined, pursued and experienced" differently across cultural and historical contexts (Rofel 1999: 3). As with modernity, sovereignty is "a story people tell themselves about themselves in relation to others" (Rofel 1999: 13; see also Geertz 1973).

To be clear: to say that sovereignty is a story is not to trivialize it or to deny the materiality of the institutions through which such power is exercised; it is, rather, to recall that these institutions themselves are the products of particular ways of thinking about power and its exercise that are in turn products of the human imagination. Sovereignty is a story about the nature of power that is far from being contained in a single, coherent plotline that has the same moral and the same denouement the world over. To the contrary, it is full of twists and contradictions, competing and tangential storylines, tellings and retellings, contingencies, surprises, and false

beginnings and endings, as different narrators take up the tale for different purposes, using its language to express various experiences of domination and to effect various projects of power.

It is a story with life-and-death stakes. But these high stakes often obscure its nature as story; to my mind, this is one reason that social scientists have had such a hard time coming to terms with the question of sovereignty in the late twentieth century. In the interests of highlighting the difference this approach to sovereignty can make, I offer here my own story of the study of sovereignty. Much of the classical scholarship on sovereignty viewed it as a theory and practice of state power, defined as “supreme [or final or absolute] authority within a given territory or society” or simply as “supreme coercive power.”⁴ In the twentieth century, political scientists distinguished between two historical forms of sovereignty: in its premodern conception, sovereignty was concentrated in the body of the king, whose authority derived from his claim to a divine or hereditary mandate; at the edges of the realm, “borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another.” Supremacy was relative: sovereignty could be shared among two or more powers (B. Anderson 1991: 19; see also Thongchai 1994). By contrast, in the modern version, the authority of the state derives from its claim to represent the people it governs, and “state sovereignty is fully, flatly and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory” (B. Anderson 1991: 19). In this sense, modern sovereignty is an either-or proposition: a modern nation is either sovereign or subjugated; the state either has or loses the mandate of the people it represents; a citizen can stand either inside or outside the imaginary line (made very real by checkpoints, barbed wire, and men with guns) that marks the absolute spatial limit of the sovereign’s power over her. The usual story is that modern sovereignty developed in Europe and spread around the world in response to European imperialism, eclipsing both the “premodern” form of sovereignty and other forms of political organization until, by the second half of the twentieth century, the idea that the source of the sovereign’s legitimacy resided in “the people”—as expressed in the doctrine of national self-determination—had become fundamental to the practice of international politics. This story of sovereignty,

in which the world is made of clearly bounded territories inhabited by peoples with a unified and continuous past and future who are the autonomous subjects of their own history, became the only legitimate form of recognition in the international political arena, the principal scale of economies, the proper subject of history, and the pre-eminent mode of organizing geopolitical space. It was also the ideal locus of culture, identity, and community (Handler 1988). As Michael Tsin (1999) demonstrates, in early twentieth-century China (as in other places at other times), it took an enormous amount of effort to convince people to believe in this story; but by the late twentieth century, it had become so commonsensical, in China as elsewhere, that it was difficult to think around it when talking or writing of the political.

In the 1990s, the possibility of thinking about politics without sovereignty was highlighted by two more or less contemporaneous influences. First, the relevance of the ideal of nation-state sovereignty was called into question by the acceleration of transnational movements of people, capital, and culture. Some theorists predicted the disintegration of nation-state sovereignty in the face of transnational institutions of capitalism (Camilleri and Falk 1992, Miyoshi 1993, Ōhmae 1990 and 1995, Horsman and Marshall 1994). State sovereignty, it seemed, was being replaced by the power of transnational corporations, institutions, and nongovernmental organizations; people began to speak of abstractions such as “the market” or “neoliberalism” as exercising a sovereign power of their own, defined now as a “supreme power over a set of people, things or places” (Latham 2000: 2). At the same time, it appeared to many that these political and economic transformations were engendering new modes of organizing space, culture, power, and community that would undermine the sovereign sensibility: diasporas, civilizations, cosmopolitanisms, localities, empires.⁵ Others, however, endeavored to show that despite global reconfigurations, nation-state sovereignty was in no danger of disappearing: nation-states were managing to strengthen their power thanks precisely to those globalizing forces that appeared to be eroding it, and the logic and rhetoric of national sovereignty continued to haunt even those “displaced” economic and cultural

formations apparently challenging its limits (Basch et al. 1994, Helmreich 1992, Ong 1997, Sassen 1996).

Second, as the work of Michel Foucault gained influence in North America, so did his emphasis on the need to move away from studying the structures, institutions, and relationships—such as The State or The Law—that most loudly proclaim themselves to be about power. Sovereignty was, for Foucault, already dead, replaced by a distinctly modern mode of exercising power he dubbed “biopower” (Foucault 1978). Biopower refers to relations of domination and submission structuring those aspects of life that seem most distant from the centers of power: daily routines, forms of knowledge, sexuality, and the “care of the self,” even the very idea of a self capable of believing that it is a free, autonomous individual, standing apart from state and society.⁶ In this sense, Foucault was interested in the creation of subjects: that is, how one becomes both “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (Foucault in Dreyfus 1983: 212). Studies inspired by this approach have examined, among other things, the techniques through which states or other “supremely powerful” institutions create citizens as governable, “normal” subjects, often in contradistinction to an array of deviants (criminals, illegal immigrants, refugees, racial others, terrorists, radicals, and the insane).⁷ Aihwa Ong, for example, in her ethnography of Cambodian refugees in California, explores “the technologies of government—that is, the policies, programs, codes and practices (*unbounded by the concept of culture*) that attempt to instill in citizen-subjects particular values . . . in a variety of domains” (Ong 2003: 6; italics added).

Others have been inspired by Giorgio Agamben’s rejection of the distinction between sovereignty and biopower. Agamben (1998) suggests that biopolitics, rather than being a distinctly modern mode of power, has always been at the core of the exercise of sovereignty, and that, conversely, the logic of sovereignty continues to structure the practice of biopower, a fact that makes the study of sovereignty more relevant than ever to understanding the intersections of politics and culture in contemporary life. Scholars inspired by this approach have shifted the focus of inquiry to the examination of how

the body and other forms of “bare life” have become targets for the exercise of sovereign power (see, e.g., Anagnost 2004 and Farquhar and Zhang 2005), and to situations of “*de facto* sovereignty” in which individuals and institutions do not seek legitimation in the law but simply act as sovereign by exercising their capacity to “protect or kill with impunity” (T. Hansen and Stepputat 2006: 296; see also Mbembe 2003).

The fact that compelling evidence can be mustered to show that sovereignty is both disappearing and proliferating, simultaneously diminishing and intensifying, suggests to me that when we attempt to define sovereignty as a universal, it disintegrates. If, for example, we define sovereignty as “the ability to kill, punish and discipline with impunity” (T. Hansen and Stepputat 2006), we see sovereign power everywhere: in the democratically elected government and the military dictator; in IMF policies and the petty gangster who gets away with murder; even in the schoolyard persecution of the geeky kid.⁸ Yet we also see it nowhere: for what, after all, is impunity? It is a static and to my mind impoverished view of power relations that accepts at face value the claim implicit in the idea of impunity: that power is an all-or-nothing affair.⁹

Thus for all their contributions to our understanding of the permutations in the theories and practices of sovereignty, I find these approaches curiously unable to explain what I most want to understand: how, why, and when the modern story of sovereignty continues to be one that people want to keep telling and hearing, despite the violence that continues to be committed in its name. What does sovereignty mean to people—does it, in fact, mean the same thing to all people? What symbolic weight does sovereignty carry such that a wide variety of actors vie to use this language to claim legitimacy? How does this language exceed or escape the uses to which it is put? And what happens when people start imagining not just a different sovereign, but a different story of sovereignty?

In thinking about this set of questions, I find the Foucault-inspired approach to sovereignty too sterile: it sees sovereignty as a zero-sum game involving anonymous, rational structures and processes (the State, the Law, the Economy), abstract forces and ideologies (“capitalism,” “the media,” “neoliberalism,” “globalization”),

and the regulation of “flows” and “populations” rather than people. Roger Rouse (1995) has argued that the benefit of many studies of transnationalism is that they succeed in reconciling the best of marxist and post-structuralist analyses: they incorporate a focus on emergent cultural forms without losing sight of the role of capitalism. Yet it seems to me that many such studies also succeed in combining the weaknesses of both approaches. By reifying such structures as “the state” and “capitalism,” they run the risk of imbuing abstractions with agency, intentionality, a unified will to power. By focusing on the techniques of governmentality through which states create subjects, they provide a mechanistic vision of the reproduction of power that leaves us no way of understanding the often surprising actions and interpretations of those subjects—some of whom are responsible for the formulation and execution of precisely the techniques in question.

Yet the second approach—which focuses on concentration camps, Rwandan refugees, Cambodian killing fields, US secret prisons, violence, terror, and brutality—I find equally limiting. Its appeal is understandable. It was precisely the violent and terrifying events of the twentieth century that led European and American intellectuals to reflect on the nature of sovereign power, and it is the violent and terrifying events of the early twenty-first century that have led many to despair of it. These representations of the surreal and traumatizing excesses of sovereign power provide an antidote to the language of rationality that pervades discussions of modern state power from Weber through Foucault but does so little to explain the irrational, destructive, and very uneconomical violence exercised by states otherwise considered thoroughly modern.¹⁰ My fear, however, is that this approach reduces the study of subjectification to the study of victimization and the study of power to the study of injustice—both of which leave us unable to conceptualize of how anyone could ever consider modern sovereignty a legitimate, let alone desirable, mode of political organization.

Before calling for an end to sovereign thinking, then, I believe we must take a closer look at what is being thought, imagined, experienced, and changed when various agents (states, other institutions, or individuals) take up the story. Rather than defining what makes

sovereignty sovereignty and then setting out to examine its effects in the world, I suggest that the question might better be studied ethnographically in ways that illuminate how a particular story of sovereignty becomes meaningful to the people in whose name it is exercised. This has two implications. First, we need to look at how particular sovereign projects mobilize symbolic resources (linguistic, aural, visual, textual) in order to make sovereignty matter—to shape the way people think about themselves, their past, and their future—as well as at how these projects might fail. And second, we cannot be content to study sovereignty as, in Ong’s words, “unbounded by the concept of culture.” We need, rather, to approach it as a story that, although it may be globally hegemonic in its contemporary usage, does not translate transparently across languages or social contexts.

In 1990s Macau there were no independence activists; the Portuguese were not fighting to maintain control of the city, nor was anyone challenging (overtly, at least) the PRC’s right to assume sovereignty over it. In fact, the Portuguese state embarked on its project of creating the Macau people as a collective subject largely by denying that it ever had wielded full sovereignty over Macau. It attempted to demonstrate that the history of the Portuguese presence in Macau had been the history of a different kind of sovereignty, a shared sovereignty that did not fit the definition of supreme coercive power. Ironically, this situation made possible a conversation that questioned the nature, limits, and effects of sovereignty far more profoundly than a direct contest about sovereign power over Macau would have. The difficulty the state encountered in convincing Macau residents of their “unique cultural identity” draws attention to the kinds of work required to make any story of sovereignty compelling. It had to crosscut powerful notions of blood, language, territory, and state entailed in the usual story of modern sovereignty and replace them with a shared sense of belonging to the place, Macau, and all that it supposedly stood for: tolerance, hybridity, openness, and peaceful coexistence.

But “the state” in this instance, as in all instances, was not simply an “effect” or a set of technologies. It comprised actors who themselves had their own historically and culturally specific experiences

of what sovereignty could and should mean.¹¹ A large number of Portuguese civil servants in Macau (including the last governor, General Vasco Joaquim Rocha Vieira) had come to Macau from Angola or Mozambique, and many had fought there, on the losing side, in the brutal wars of independence during the 1960s and 1970s. Other civil servants, born and raised in mainland China, had emigrated to Macau to escape the destructiveness of Maoist anti-imperialist revolution. Still others, born and raised in Macau, had never felt part of any nation-state and were suspicious of any state's claim on their loyalties. Meanwhile, a range of Macau Chinese intellectuals, both inside and outside state institutions, argued that although the Portuguese presence in Macau had been colonial, the form it had taken, rather than creating a hybrid culture, had allowed "traditional" Chinese culture to develop more "naturally," free from forcible intrusions by states (as in the PRC) or dilution by globalizing economic forces (as in Hong Kong).

Thus the narrative and physical sites in which the meaning of sovereignty was most fiercely contested during the transition era were precisely the points at which the meaning—or meaninglessness—of the collective subjectivity of Macau people was called into question. The exigencies of the transition to Chinese rule meant that these questions took on heightened political significance. But their significance was not only political. In this sense this book examines not just the immediate social and economic effects of the transfer of sovereignty from one state apparatus to another. Nor do I wish to confine the analysis to the "technologies" or methods through which either sovereign state (Chinese or Portuguese) tried to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the people it governed. Rather, I am proposing a study of colliding interests, histories, and theories of sovereignty and subjectivity: a study of the politics, possibilities, and impossibilities of collective subjectivity at the spatial, temporal, and conceptual edges of sovereignty.

Chineseness

The second question provoked by the edifice of Macau identity was that of Chineseness. What made China China, or Chinese people Chinese, such that the Chinese in Macau were "different"? I hesitate

to pose this question, even though it was the structuring absence of the entire transition. I hesitate not because of its paralyzing unanswerability—after all, it is no less answerable than the question of what makes humans human, which animates anthropology—but because, as we shall see, the way it is usually addressed tends to close down conversations and turn off audiences of all kinds.

The usual story is one in which the link between sovereignty and subjectivity can be keenly felt. It goes like this: the onslaught of Western modernity (which, in this story, can be pinpointed to 1842, when the British won the Opium War and forced the Qing dynasty to sign the Treaty of Nanjing, effectively bringing to an end that dynasty's status as the "highest or supreme power" in its own territory) meant the end of traditional China, the slashing of ties to a historical-cultural ground, and the shattering of a monolithic and vaguely defined sense of Chineseness into the sharp-edged shards of identity—national, regional, ethnic, class identities—that informed the violence and upheavals of China's twentieth century, regrettable but necessary on the march toward modernization. Indeed, Western approaches to the study of China reflect this trend. Two generations ago, anthropologists worked with a conception of Chineseness as a set of cultural values and practices that structured the institutions of family, village, nation, and state and distinguished them as essentially Chinese. This approach mirrored Confucian ideologies in which being Chinese meant being part of a cosmological entity, *tianxia*, that encompassed the social, political, and moral order and was given unity by a singular state headed by the Son of Heaven. With the collapse of that state and the imperial ideology that underpinned it emerged a sense of Chineseness as a modern national identity, involving concerns with territorial integrity, sovereignty, and citizenship, informed by Social Darwinist ideas of competition and survival in a world in which national extinction was a real threat. During the Maoist era, when the Chinese Communist Party claimed its mandate as the representative of the "people's democratic dictatorship," class-based concepts of the "national popular" came to dominate conceptions of Chineseness within the borders of the PRC (Shi 2003), and place-names such as "mainland China" and "Taiwan" became imbued with a significance that was primarily political,

rather than geographic, linguistic, or cultural. In recent years, the concept of “Greater China,” and the work of authors such as Tu Weiming, Wang Gungwu, and Aihwa Ong, have definitively broken the link between the state and cultural identity and showed that Chinese communities existing outside the borders of a Chinese nation-state are no less “authentically” Chinese than those in the so-called heartland. Although these authors maintain a consciousness of the importance of the Chinese state as an institution that may legitimate itself by laying claim to various concepts of Chineseness (cf. Chun 1996a), they argue that in the end, this state and the territory under its control are but “one among many sites within and across which Chinese transnational practices are played out” (Ong and Nonini 1997: 12). On one hand, this approach has been crucial to understanding the possibilities of Chinese cultural difference within and across nation-states. On the other, however, the removal of the state from the discussion often works to strengthen the power given to culture and to non-state structures of autonomy: Chineseness at the turn of the twenty-first century is, in this formulation, about cultural formations that are, as often as not, beyond the state’s reach. It begs the question of Chineseness by locating its coherence and recognizability in a set of cultural practices that may encompass a wide range of diversity, but whose status as “Chinese” is never interrogated. It is this that allows us to speak of Chinese transnationalism, Chinese modernity, and Chinese cosmopolitanism, as if everyone knows what “Chinese” means.

What does “Chinese” mean? When I have raised this question with my Chinese students and colleagues in Macau, many of them find the answer both obvious and inarticulable, something that only a foreigner would ever ask about and only a Chinese person could ever understand. It is a sentiment, a feeling, they say; it is a “sense of history,” a “glow of fraternity” (Lee Kuan Yew, quoted in Ong 1999), a mode of being that simply lies beyond the realm of the analyzable. Many sinologists, especially in the social sciences, find the question too vague, too unwieldy—How does one study what is taken for granted? How does one measure sentiment?—and dangerously polarizing, for it seems to invite either essentialisms or deconstructions that are both empirically unsustainable and politically indefensible.¹²

Scholars who do not study China may find the question irrelevant or off-putting, not least because of the exceptionalism, obscurantism, and civilizational discourse it often provokes—the references to millennia worth of unbroken historical continuities and the conjuring of ageless and hermetically sealed systems of philosophical, socio-political, and ideological organization that make China the exception to any global theory and Chineseness fundamentally different from other conceptions of collective selves. Yet among many scholars who identify as Chinese, the question is a supercharged one: having been, at least since the early twentieth century, so closely identified with questions of patriotism, national humiliation, and despair over China’s “predicament,” some Chinese intellectuals find the question of what it means to be Chinese emotionally exhausting (see Link 1992; see also several contributions to Tu 1994b). Others feel trapped by the insistence that Chinese intellectuals must always address Chinese problems (C. T. Hsia 1999; see also Ang 2000, R. Chow 1998, Chun 1996b, and L. Lee 1994). Beginning with such a question would seem to doom any book to failure, since most people don’t care, and others care too much.

But I will insist on posing this question, for I believe that ethnography is uniquely capable of providing the kind of answer that can open conversations across disciplines and areas. The question of Chineseness is of concern to others besides China scholars. The categories through which we have understood Chineseness and its transformation since the mid-nineteenth century are precisely the “universal” categories through which anthropologists and historians have constructed an understanding of how the world has come to be as it is in the early twenty-first century. These categories derive from or are informed by the modern story of sovereignty: national vs. transnational, colonial vs. post- (or neo-)colonial, local vs. global, enclaved vs. deterritorialized, traditional vs. (post-)modern. The prevalence and persuasiveness of these binaries as ways of understanding the forces transforming the world seem to grow with each economic downturn, each act of ethnic warfare. Insofar as these binaries are taken as solid footing for political action, this solidity is often illusory; insofar as they provide analytical coherence, this

coherence often comes at the expense of understanding the historicity and cultural specificity of these categories themselves.

Although the presumed coherence of the category “Chinese” has been challenged in recent years by theorists such as Ien Ang, Rey Chow, and Allen Chun,¹³ there has been little ethnographic work that takes up their challenge: “not to dispute the fact that Chineseness exists . . . but to investigate how this category operates in practice, in different historical, geographical, political and cultural contexts. . . . How and why is it that the category of Chineseness acquires its persistence and solidity?” (Ang 2001: 40). It is impossible to address this challenge, however, simply by examining how purportedly universal categories or processes (such as “globalization” or “sovereignty”) have affected articulations of Chineseness, for this again begs the question of precisely who is being affected (cf. Shi 2003). Rather, the task is to examine how certain categories of experience (such as national sovereignty, colonialism, native-place ties) are identified as meaningful to or even constitutive of Chineseness at particular times and places, and thus how Chineseness—like any other form of collective subjectivity—becomes a possibility for some, an imperative for others, and an impossibility for the rest.

Examining how Macau was narrated as existing at the juncture of all these persistent binaries can provide insights into the limitations of the forms of collective subjectivity circumscribed by the assumptions of modern sovereignty. One such form is that of identity itself, a term that (as we have seen) the Portuguese state used frequently to express the idea that Macau residents shared something that set them apart from all other Chinese people. It is little coincidence that, as Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have pointed out, the concept of identity rose to prominence in the social sciences during the middle years of the twentieth century, when the ideals of self-determination and national sovereignty were redrawing world maps. They argue that the concept of identity entails a sense not just of belonging or connectedness but of uniformity or sameness within the group, across space and through time, that distinguishes it from other similar groups separated by clearly demarcated boundary lines (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Viewed in this way, it becomes clear

that identity is not something that all people naturally have but a particular way of conceptualizing affinity and difference deeply influenced by the logic of national sovereignty. Significantly, Wang Gungwu (1988) has argued that Chineseness was never conceptualized as an “identity” until the twentieth century. Thus, on one hand, in suggesting that Macau residents had an identity setting them apart from all other Chinese people, the Portuguese state indirectly but no less effectively questioned their Chineseness; on the other hand, in challenging the usual story of modern sovereignty, it prompted some Macau residents to reject the very assertion that the term “identity” could give expression to their own sense of who they were, individually or collectively.

In some ways, of course, Macau is undeniably Chinese. Consisting of a tiny peninsula attached to the mainland, plus two of the dozens of islands scattered across the silty, salty waters along the coastline where the Pearl River meets the South China Sea, Macau is geographically as much a part of the Chinese subcontinent as the cities of Xiamen or Qingdao. By the time of the transition, its population numbered something under half a million people, nearly 60 percent of them born in the People’s Republic of China. Over 95 percent of residents identified themselves in the census as “Chinese.” Chinese had been one of the city’s official languages since 1988 and was the native tongue of well over 90 percent of its inhabitants. By most standards, it would be difficult to make the case that Macau and its people were anything other than Chinese. Indeed, early in my fieldwork, when I explained my interest in exploring Macau’s “difference” to a Western researcher who had recently concluded a study of Chinese religion in Macau, he told me sadly, “Macau Chinese are just Chinese. They are just Chinese who like to drink coffee.” This intractable Chineseness of Macau residents, their apparent lack of interest in or understanding of what made them different, was a constant source of frustration for government officials and others engaged in the identitarian project in Macau, and it heightened their sense of the urgency of this task. They contrasted Macau “natives” with those in other Portuguese colonies (most notably in Africa), remarking that everywhere else the Portuguese had gone, they had managed to make Portuguese the *lingua franca* of the colonized peo-

ples and to incorporate them more firmly into the Portuguese cultural universe. The difference, they would tell me, is in the culture. Chinese culture is “strong,” whereas African culture is “weak”; Chinese culture is resistant to change and hybridization, and this is why Chinese people always live together and remain Chinese wherever in the world they go. As everyone knows, they would say, even those non-Chinese invaders who from time to time had managed to take control of China (Xianbei, Mongols, Manchus) ended up losing their own traditions and becoming “sinified.” This understanding of the power of Chinese culture to draw everything into itself while remaining fundamentally unchanged was expressed by frustrated Portuguese administrators trying to drum up interest in Portuguese language and culture, as well as by Chinese residents proud of their “traditional” and “conservative” ways. Given this understanding of culture in general, and of Chinese culture in particular, Macau’s transfer to Chinese sovereignty should not have made much of a difference. Indeed, as Ah Man, a Hong Kong-born man who had made Macau his home, told me, Macau was already so Chinese he didn’t think anyone would even notice the handover: “I think we’ll wake up one day and remember, ‘Oh right—it was last week! Oh it was yesterday, oh, right!’”

In other ways, however, what became clear from my study was that the handover, which would integrate Macau for the first time ever into a Chinese nation-state, would make a difference. During the transition era one heard constant reminders of the precariousness of Macau’s Chineseness. Although Chinese was an official language, it was a dialect (Cantonese) unintelligible to national leaders in Beijing. Approximately 30 percent of Macau’s ethnic Chinese residents held Portuguese passports. Visas to enter Macau were difficult for mainlanders to obtain, and special permits were necessary for Macau residents to enter the PRC, where they were charged higher prices for state services than their mainland “compatriots.” Although more than half the city’s population had emigrated to Macau from mainland China, most had come because Macau provided an alternative to the conditions of poverty and political violence that had characterized life in many parts of China during the previous half-century. The question of what would happen to Macau after the

handover, when it “became Chinese,” was the subject of frequent and anxious conversation.

This ambivalent Chineseness was highlighted for me in the first ethnographic conversation I ever had about Macau. It occurred in California in February 1996, with a young woman (let us call her Susana) who identified herself as Macanese—a member of Macau’s Eurasian community, many of whom have lived for generations in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Australia, and Portugal. When I told her I was investigating Macau’s cultural identity, she told me that she thought Macanese culture was like a certain Macanese delicacy, which she described as “sort of like a wonton, but different.” She felt this summed up the relationship of Macanese culture to Chineseness: the Macanese were sort-of Chinese, but different.

At first I appreciated this comment primarily in the spirit in which it had been uttered, as a metaphor of difference, and it stayed with me for the duration of my fieldwork. I had hastily scribbled down notes on our conversation but later discovered that I had neglected to write down the name of this “sort-of wonton.” When I arrived in Macau I made a point of trying to find it, sampling as many wontonesque dishes as I could in restaurants around the city. I came across several variations on wontons in the noodle shops and dim sum restaurants of Macau (shrimp wontons, pork wontons, vegetarian ones; fried, steamed, boiled; in soup or dry, with noodles or without) and found one or two varieties that I had never heard of anywhere else—the black-pepper wonton, for example. Yet although each was different from the others, they were nonetheless wontons and listed as such on menus. As time passed and my search continued, I found myself beginning to contemplate the wonton itself, wondering less about the identity of the “sort-of wonton” and more about the category against which it was being defined. What made the Macanese “sort-of wonton” less completely “Chinese” than the *jiaozi*, the *baozi*, the *tangyuan*, the *shaomai*, or any other of the regional variations on dumplings that, although they are not wontons, share the undisputed right to be listed in the index of Chinese cuisine? It was not until I attended a going-away party for a Macanese friend during the last month of my fieldwork that I came across the *apabico* and knew that I had found it.¹⁴ Although there are probably

as many recipes for apabico as there are Macanese cooks, the one I sampled consisted, as far as I could tell, of a rice-flour skin filled with minced pork, mushrooms, and dried shrimp, shaped into a walnut-sized globe and steamed. With its thicker, chewier skin and saltier, heavier filling, the apabico I had certainly was different than your average wonton. But I found nothing intrinsic to the apabico that could answer my question: When does a wonton stop being a wonton and begin to be something else?

I do not mean to trivialize the complex and deeply felt senses of belonging and alterity that are at issue in discussions of Chineseness and Macanese-ness by equating them with a choice of items on a Chinese fast-food menu. But I do think Susana's metaphor is instructive here. When I first arrived in Macau for preliminary research in the summer of 1996, I was immediately struck by the way that the discourse of the departing Portuguese government echoed that of my first informant: the state was trying to get the broad range of Chinese residents of Macau to think of themselves as "sort-of Chinese"—"Latin Chinese" was the phrase used in one publication (Macau Government Tourism and Information Bureau 1979)—whose quickly disappearing difference was the only thing that would guarantee the city's continued importance and economic viability in the region. But wherein lay this difference? The state suggested that it lay in their experience of the unique mode of sovereign power it had exercised for hundreds of years. But when I returned to Macau in 1997 and stayed for two years of fieldwork, I was able to hear, along with the state's noisy, self-congratulatory declarations about Macau's unique cultural identity, a more subtle conversation about the meaning of, and relationship among, sovereignty, history, and subjectivity, not simply in Macau but in the world: a conversation that was not only about the value of Macau's difference but also about what Chineseness meant and where its limits lay. Thus the sort-of wonton and the edifice of Macau identity together help us pose the question of Chineseness in a more palatable way: not by attempting to answer once and for all the question of what makes Chinese people Chinese, but by asking when, why, and in what forms the category of Chineseness becomes persuasive as an expression of community and commonality. In Macau on the eve of the

handover, several different stories of sovereignty and Chineseness and the relationship between them were being told at the same time. These stories informed the attachments, decisions, and day-to-day lives of a wide range of Macau residents, and allowed different relationships between sovereignty and subjectivity to become thinkable even as they provided a sense of why, at times, it may not be desirable to think them.

Locations

The territory of Macau comprises a small peninsula and two islands (Taipa 氹仔 and Coloane 路環) on the western bank of the Pearl River Delta, along the coast of Guangdong, one of the southernmost provinces of the People's Republic of China (see Map 1). By most standards, Macau is tiny. As of 1998, it covered a land area of just under 24 square kilometers (about nine square miles), but most of its population lived on the 3.5-square-mile peninsula, whose length and breadth it was possible to cover in the space of an afternoon walk. With a total population of approximately 450,000, Macau had the highest population density in the world.

Until 1995, when the Macau International Airport opened, there were only two points of entry into the city: from the north, one could walk or drive across the border from the Zhuhai Special Economic Zone (SEZ); or from the east, one could make the trip from Hong Kong, a distance of some forty nautical miles.¹⁵ The high-speed ferries and jetfoils that plied the route to Hong Kong day and night made the trip in about an hour; these boats, which delivered the vast majority of the seven or eight million tourists who visited the territory each year, were owned and operated by the Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau (STDM), the privately held company that also owned all the casinos that were the mainstay of Macau's economy.¹⁶

In the eyes of Beijing and the world, it seemed, Macau was little more than an afterthought to its larger, more prosperous, and better-known neighbor Hong Kong, which had preceded Macau in "returning" to Chinese rule on July 1, 1997. The similarities were obvious. Both Hong Kong and Macau were colonies of European powers located in southern China; both had capitalist economic systems

based largely on their role as commercial entrepôts; both were relatively small, largely urban coastal enclaves; both had populations that were more than 95 percent ethnic Chinese and predominantly Cantonese speakers; both underwent “consensual decolonization” at roughly the same time; and both became special administrative regions (SARs) of the People’s Republic of China, governed by the one country, two systems policy. In Macau as in Hong Kong, the specific implications of this policy were spelled out in detail in the Basic Law, which would act as a “mini-constitution” after the handover. In both cities, joint liaison groups composed of representatives from Beijing and London or Lisbon were set up to negotiate the specificities of the transition to Chinese rule. In this sense, the political transition in Macau was virtually an exact copy of the process in Hong Kong: it followed the same sequence of procedures; the Basic Laws of the two territories were, word for word, almost identical; and the mechanisms for choosing Macau’s new chief executive, electing and appointing its legislature, “localizing” its civil service, and aligning its legal system with the constitution of the PRC were modeled closely on those developed for Hong Kong.

Yet, as several Macau residents involved in the transition process pointed out worriedly in the years before the handover, Macau was *not* Hong Kong. Economically, Macau had nowhere near Hong Kong’s wealth, infrastructure, or potential for growth. With less than 2 percent of Hong Kong’s total land area, and just 7 percent of Hong Kong’s population, many economists argued, little Macau did not have the natural or human resources necessary to become an economic “dragon” (W. C. Ieong and Siu 1997).¹⁷ Unlike the diversity that characterized Hong Kong’s economic structure, Macau was heavily dependent on casino tourism: in 1997, nearly 60 percent of government tax revenues came from the gambling industry alone. Although Macau had enjoyed a boom in export-processing, manufacturing, and real estate in the 1980s, thanks in large part to cheap land and labor, the city’s near-total dependence on Hong Kong and PRC capital meant that its growth spurt was short-lived; by 1996, in a region characterized by double-digit growth rates, Macau had the only economy to register negative growth. The financial crisis of 1998 only exacerbated this trend, as tourism from Hong Kong and

southeast Asia slowed to a trickle. Whereas some people feared, or hoped, that the strength of Hong Kong's economy would lead to the "Hong Kong-ization" of China after 1997, in Macau the fear was that its economic weakness would cause Macau to be "swallowed up" by neighboring Zhuhai.¹⁸ Liang Guangda, the mayor and Communist Party secretary of Zhuhai, was rumored to have boasted as much.

The political systems of the two cities also had little in common. Macau's legal system was based on European continental law, not British common law as in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, the gradual process of localizing the bureaucracy had started after World War II, as ethnic Chinese were groomed to take top leadership positions in the government and Chinese was made an official language; in Macau this process began late, proceeded slowly, and proved cumbersome. Macau's political culture was characterized by a greater degree of bureaucratic corruption, lower levels of mass participation, and a stronger presence of "pro-Beijing" factions and civic organizations (such as neighborhood associations, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and the Federation of Labor Unions) than in Hong Kong (S. H. Lo 1995, H. S. Yee 2001). The fact that Beijing exercised far greater control over Macau than it did over Hong Kong was seldom disputed. The public's sense that the local government lacked any real economic or political autonomy was captured nicely in a joke I heard several times in the mid-1990s, in which the Portuguese governor was portrayed as sitting at a table with Stanley Ho (the Hong-Kong based billionaire head of STDM) on his right hand and the head of the New China News Agency (Xinhua she, the PRC's official representative in Macau) on his left: whenever the governor wanted to do anything, the joke went, he first turned to his right to ask Ho for the money and then to his left to ask Beijing for permission to spend it.

In terms of social structure, too, Macau was often compared unfavorably to Hong Kong. One young and politically well-connected ethnic Chinese businessman told me that the way that Macau's civic institutions had developed under Portuguese rule meant that political and economic power were not just linked but fused into a fossilized and unassailable conservatism: "There are no political parties in Macau," he said, "there's only the [Chinese] Chamber of Commerce.

New ideas in business are not tolerated, as the old men who are in charge see them as a challenge to the political status quo. If you want to innovate, you have to go to Hong Kong.” Macau’s smaller middle class, lower levels of education, more widespread “stepping-stone mentality” (A. H. Yee 1989), and larger proportion of recent immigrants (as of 1996, less than 40 percent of Macau’s population had been born in Macau) were often cited as reasons that Macau did not have the dynamism or stability of Hong Kong:

More than 50 percent of Macau’s 400,000+ population are newcomers who have arrived from the mainland since 1978. Most of them have a low level of education. They know almost nothing about Macau, and identify themselves as Chung Kuo Yan (Chinese) rather than Ou Mun Yan (Macau-ese). Even among the old residents, many just regard Macau as a springboard to move overseas, to get better jobs and opportunities abroad. The sense of belonging here is much weaker than in Hong Kong where people are proud of being Heong Kong Yan (Hong Kongese). (Ngai 1999: 126n1)

For all these reasons, it seemed to some that the promise of one country, two systems, although intended to ensure Macau’s autonomy and protect its “system,” would simply demonstrate the extent to which Macau had, instead of a system, a chaotic jumble of differences that reflected the shortcomings of Portuguese colonialism. The problem was not just that it would be impossible to maintain Macau’s “uniqueness” without more clearly defining, systematizing, and institutionalizing these differences; this impossibility also threatened to undermine the coherence and validity of the one country, two systems policy. For if Macau had no clearly identifiable system, on what basis could Macau people claim autonomy? Thus to a greater extent than in Hong Kong, the transition in Macau entailed a conversation about the significance of difference: the nature and extent of Macau’s differences from the PRC as well as from Hong Kong, their loci, and their causes; which differences should be identified, celebrated, and preserved, and which were signs of “backwardness” and irrationality that needed to be overcome. Some people argued that the last thing Macau needed was more difference; rather, it should become as similar to Hong Kong as possible. Others argued that Macau’s differences, properly identified, systematized, and harnessed for political and economic advantage, could and

should form the foundation for the city's long-term autonomy, stability, and prosperity.

Among the proponents of the latter view, the loudest voice was that of the departing Macau Portuguese government.¹⁹ According to the state, Macau residents—as well as the PRC and the rest of the world—needed more than anything else to become aware, as Governor Vasco Rocha Vieira put it in 1998, of “the uniqueness of the culture of Macau.” They needed to understand that this culture was the result of “450 years of coexistence between communities that are different but that respect each other in the tolerance and acceptance of these differences.”²⁰ References to Macau’s “unique cultural identity” and its historic role as a “bridge between East and West” cropped up constantly in speeches and government publications. Guarantees of protection of the city’s “cultural heritage” were included in the Basic Law and other legislation. The state built monuments to the “friendship between the Chinese and Portuguese people”; it published, or sponsored the publication of, hundreds of books and magazines exploring various aspects of Macau’s culture and identity. It poured millions of dollars into projects that would institutionalize this identity: the restoration not just of the São Paulo Ruins but of dozens of historical buildings and monuments; the construction of ten new museums; the introduction of Macau history into the middle-school curriculum; the sponsorship of international conferences that were always televised on the evening news; and the staging of a staggering variety of cultural events (festivals of food, music, art, and film; performances of folk dance, fado, bullfighting, Chinese opera; competitions of fireworks displays, lion dancing, photography, calligraphy, children’s dances; and, of course, the annual Macau Grand Prix). All these were taken as evidence of Macau’s wealth of culture and its identity as a hybrid city that gave equal importance to “East” and “West.” By mid-1998, the public sphere was so saturated with references to Macau’s “unique cultural identity” and “crossroad of cultures” that a Portuguese acquaintance confessed to me, “If I hear the phrase *cruzamento de culturas* one more time, I think I’m going to puke.”

At first glance, this may appear to be little more than what another Portuguese acquaintance called “anticipated nostalgia.” As he

put it, in 1987, when the Portuguese government realized its days in Macau were numbered, “they wanted to preserve something of the past, some legacy of the Portuguese presence in Macau that would endure beyond the handover.” But the question of Macau’s difference came to have a more than passing relevance to a larger set of individuals, groups, and civic institutions in Macau, across ethnic divides, who feared that the recent influx of mainland immigrants and capital, combined with the departure of the Portuguese and the city’s absorption into the Chinese nation-state, would cause Macau to disappear into an undifferentiated “China.” Although they often differed in how they defined what was unique about Macau, most agreed that if measures were not taken to instill in Macau people a stronger sense of their difference from mainlanders and Hong Kongers, Macau as they knew it would soon cease to exist.

Meanwhile, economists and planners (both Chinese and Portuguese) came to see cultural identity as the answer to Macau’s economic woes. As a tiny territory with a shallow harbor, one of the highest population densities in the world, low levels of education, rising costs of land and labor, and no natural resources to speak of, it was generally believed that Macau could not compete with its neighbors (Hong Kong, Zhuhai, Shenzhen, and the rest of the Pearl River Delta) in any of the industries that allowed those regions to experience phenomenal economic growth: export-processing, shipping, international finance, the promise of high-tech. Put crudely, it seemed that the only way Macau could compete economically in the twenty-first century was to have something other regions did not have: and the only two things Macau had that its neighbors did not were a legal code that permitted casino gambling and its history of Portuguese rule. Because revenues from gambling already constituted such a significant proportion of the GDP, “culture” seemed to be the way to go (see, e.g., Chau 1999, Fang 1998, and Ngai 1995). If Macau could diversify into cultural tourism, the reasoning went, it could attract a wider tourist base and provide a corrective to the dangerous overdependence on gambling. If it could maintain its Portuguese flair after the departure of the actual Portuguese people, it could flourish (as it once had flourished) as an *entrepôt*, a bridge between China and “Latin-speaking countries” (southern Europe,

Latin America, and parts of Africa) that would provide an alternative to the Anglo-American focus of Hong Kong. Thus a variety of bureaucrats, developers, businessmen, and tourism industry leaders began to argue the need for “fusing cultural and economic interests by finding a lucrative way to preserve the unique essence of Macau’s culture and history” (Ngai 1995). This was a strategy that gained support from Beijing, and by 1997, the phrase “Macau’s unique cultural identity” had become every bit as ubiquitous as the image of the São Paulo Ruins. What this book examines are the volatile effects of the intersecting claims about sovereignty and Chineseness that underlay these attempts to systematize Macau’s uniqueness under the seemingly sanitized sign of the Ruins.

The Story

Like the São Paulo Ruins, the structure of this book depends on the play between presence and absence. The massive and very public attempt to bring Macau into being as the site of a local identity that would be meaningful to all its residents is the stone from which the ethnography is fashioned; yet what makes this material remarkable is everything that wasn’t there. Chapter 1 sets the scene with a brief account of how the history of Portuguese expansion in Asia, and of Portugal’s and China’s hazy and overlapping claims to sovereignty in Macau, provided the foundations for Macau’s “system” as well as fodder for latter-day reinterpretations of this history. The attempt to create and instill in Macau residents a sense of their own unique identity did not take place in a vacuum: events and controversies that had nothing to do with debates about Macau’s culture and history nonetheless shaped and colored public responses to the state’s initiatives. Two such controversies are the subject of Chapters 2 and 3 of this book. The first centered on a wave of violence perpetrated by Chinese organized crime and on the Portuguese government’s inability to combat its effects; the second was sparked by the Chinese government’s attempt to define whether and how China’s nationality law would apply to Macau residents. Although these were not fieldsites in the conventional sense, these topics were what everyone in my fieldsites was talking about when they were not trying to answer my questions—and sometimes when they were. But as I gradu-

ally discovered, they were more than just background noise; these controversies themselves were also debates about how a sovereign state should act, and how Chineseness should be defined. Although they were not intentionally engaging with the Portuguese state's assertions about its history of shared sovereignty and the unique hybrid identity that resulted, each provided a different perspective on the unintended yet very concrete effects that such a discourse could have.

My formal fieldsites were the institutions, places, or projects through which the Macau Portuguese state and a range of its interlocutors gave materiality to their vision of Macau as a bridge between East and West and of the history of Portuguese governance as the source of Macau's uniqueness. Four middle schools where the effort to introduce Macau history as a classroom subject highlighted the problems of what "the local" could mean in a place like Macau; the architectural heritage projects through which the state attempted to map its own version of Macau history across the city; and the Museum of Macau, where many Macau residents found their city's pasts represented in unexpectedly compelling ways: material from my interviews and encounters in these sites form the three central chapters of the book and provide the basis for discussions of scale-making, place-making, and value-making projects as sites for the articulation and contestation of sovereign claims. Chapter 7 draws together the themes and arguments of the previous six through an exploration of three alternative articulations of Macau's "uniqueness." Both the content of these alternatives and the ways they were suppressed, ignored, or overlooked as part of the public debates about Macau identity chisel out in finer detail some of the reasons why the emerging state orthodoxy on "Macau's unique identity" seemed at times to be falling on deaf ears. The discomfiting distance these individuals felt between "official" articulations of identity, nationality, and citizenship on one hand and their own daily experiences of belonging and alienation on the other suggest that forms of subjectivity structured by the precepts of modern sovereignty are unable to give expression to the fundamental ambivalence that lay at the heart of Macau Chineseness and, by extension, at the heart of all collective subjectivities. It also suggests that the idea of

“flexible citizenship,” in which individual subjectivities are shaped more by the forces of transnational capitalism than the moral-political affinities of national sovereignty, may be too quick to overlook the continuing power of these affinities in the lives of even the most flexible of citizens.