
Cinematic Narratives of Macao: Foreign Perspectives and Portuguese Portrayals

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Abstract: This article delves into history of cinema in Macao, exploring the contrasting viewpoints of foreign Western filmmakers and Portuguese filmmakers during the colonial administration. It reveals a prevalent tendency among the foreign filmmakers to portray the territory through a negative lens. In contrast, the study analyses the historical narratives of Portuguese cinema in Macao. It shows a consistently positive portrayal, shaped by Portuguese filmmakers. The article unravels the intricacies of filmmaking dynamics in Macao, shedding light on divergent cinematic perspectives by focusing on the careers of Ricardo Malheiro and Miguel Spiguel. This examination serves as a compelling lens for understanding the broader dichotomy between foreign and Portuguese representations of Macao, this culturally rich territory.

Keywords: Macao, colonial films, Western cinema, Portuguese colonialism, Hong Kong

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Introduction

This article explores the history of cinema in Macao by focusing on the contrasting perspectives of foreign, i.e. non-Portuguese, Western filmmakers and Portuguese filmmakers. It begins by highlighting the prevalent tendency to associate the territory with negative characteristics in films directed or produced by foreigners in Macao during its Portuguese administration. Next, it examines the historical narratives of Portuguese cinema in Macao and contrasts them with the perspective of the foreign filmmakers. It shows how a positive portrayal of this former colony was consistently created by Portuguese filmmakers or those supported by Portuguese entities.

The article carries out a detailed analysis of the professional careers of filmmakers Ricardo Malheiro and Miguel Spiguel to unravel the complexities of filmmaking in Macao. By examining their career paths, creative choices and thematic inclinations, the study aims to shed light on the factors influencing the divergent cinematic perspectives on Macao. This examination of individual filmmaking experiences serves as a compelling lens through which to understand the broader dichotomy between the foreign and Portuguese representations of Macao.

Many Portuguese filmmakers filmed in Macao, but it was foreign Western directors who “discovered” and showed this Portuguese colony as a cinematic space to the world (LOPES 2016). For foreign directors, Macao was the backdrop to many spy, romance, suspense, and comedy films, but it was seldom a “Portuguese” or a “Chinese” city. It was an exotic place where Western characters lived out their romances and adventures. The locals – Portuguese, Chinese, and Macaense – played the same role as the city (Macao) and were part of the set, supporting characters that gave the footage the exoticism that the scripts and, consequently, the audience enjoyed.¹

The choice of Macao as a location resulted from several things that Hollywood and the European film industry looked for outside their own urban centres. Macao and Hong Kong possessed features that were not so easily found in other cities in Asia and the East – we call this group of features the *exotic occidentality of the East*.

What is this exotic occidentality of the East? It was a way of being and acting in the East, living, working and, in this case, filming in Euro-Asian locations administrated by Europeans where the Western *modus vivendi* and *faciendi*

¹ This reality can be seen in the following Western films, directed or staged in Macao: *Macao l'enfer du jeu* (1939); *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955); *Forbidden* (1953); *Macao, Ferry to Hong Kong* (1959); *Out of the Tiger's Mouth* (1962); *The Peking Medallion* (1967); *Histoire Immortelle* (1968); *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974); *Cleopatra and the Casino of Gold* (1975).

were assured for those with European ancestry. In these cities, supposedly under the European *pax*, there were fewer risks of filming being interrupted by political and social instabilities or Western production crews having to deal with political and social environments hostile to their presence.

Macao and Hong Kong were doubly exotic for the American audience: they were both European and Asian. But did not the European colonies and ex-colonies in Africa and Asia offer the same filming conditions and provide the same exoticism? Partially yes. Like Macao and Hong Kong, other territories were administrated by European powers, and the audiences were familiar with a series of clichés and imaginaries created by cinema – Western cinemas of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries inherited the narrative and visual traditions, as well as cultural assumptions, on which popular Orientalism was based, and filmmakers discovered how popular these subjects could be (BERNSTEIN and STUDLAR 1997: 3). Still, most of these cities were marked by Western architecture, with Western restaurants and people dressed in a Western style, among other distinctly European aspects, i.e., they did not correspond to the exotic standards they wanted to show.² In addition, in the aftermath of World War II, with its ongoing decolonisation and independence processes and civil wars in the former European colonies, making films whose scripts were essentially stories about Western characters made for Western audiences became increasingly difficult in Africa or Asia – either for security or practical reasons, since cities were undergoing political, cultural, and demographic decolonisation processes. However, in the cases of Macao and Hong Kong, this did not happen, as we shall describe below.

Despite some exceptions, the Portuguese films made in Macao until 1974 were mainly short documentaries produced with public funds. In contrast, foreign productions made in Macao were mostly feature films financed by private capital. Most productions were not entirely filmed in Macao – the city's images shown in the final cut correspond to the so-called “partially filmed in Macao” caption. Some of the reasons why Macao was filmed for these foreign productions were

² Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, writes about the vision of the Orient to which the Western public was accustomed and which it wanted to see represented in the cinema: “On a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war of 1975–1976 a French journalist wrote regretfully of the gutted downtown area that ‘it had once seemed to belong to ... the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval’. He was right about the place, of course, especially so far as a European was concerned. The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it had happened, its time was over. Perhaps it seemed irrelevant that Orientals themselves had something at stake in the process, that even in the time of Chateaubriand and Nerval Orientals had lived there, and that now it was they who were suffering; the main thing for the European visitor was a European representation of the Orient and its contemporary fate, both of which had a privileged communal significance for the journalist and his French readers” (SAID 2014: 1).

related to its geographical proximity to Hong Kong and Continental China. For example, in the film *Ferry to Hong Kong* (1959), part of the story happens on a boat that connects the British and the Portuguese colonies. There were also films in which Macao replaced Hong Kong (e.g., *Dragon: the Bruce Lee Story*, 1993) or Continental China (e.g., *Shanghai Surprise*, 1986). In some of these films the Portuguese names of the streets or the buildings could be seen, which looked strange. When Macao was indeed Macao in films, it was shown mainly as a crossing point, a non-place. For example, in *The Man with The Golden Gun* (1974), agent 007 travels to Macao to meet the Portuguese gun dealer Lazar.

Macao depicted in Western non-Portuguese cinema

While Macao had been filmed by foreign directors and mentioned in their films before, its territory and local reality were never the primary inspiration for a feature film until *Macao, l'enfer du jeu* (1939). This film is based on the famous novel by Maurice Dekobra, published in 1938 about Macao. According to the author, it is a city of pleasure resorts and arms dealers. Paradoxically, the first significant production with the word *Macao* in its name distributed worldwide was filmed not in the former Portuguese colony but in a studio in Nice (France). Chinese and Indochinese workers were recruited as extras in the Paris area.

In *Macao, l'enfer du jeu*, the Portuguese colony is portrayed as a place of gambling and arms trafficking. However, unlike other foreign films staged or filmed in Macao, it contains scenes indicating that Macao was a Portuguese territory. According to Luís de Pina's research, Portuguese Censorship may have ordered cuts that removed the Portuguese atmosphere of this film, which may explain the small impact of *Macao, l'enfer du jeu* in movie theatres and the press in Portugal (PINA 1991: 7).

The same negative connotations can be found in the fictional feature film *Macao* (1952), a studio production made in Hollywood. The movie was directed by the Austrian-American Josef von Sternberg. Of the films shot in Macao and Hong Kong that are mentioned in this article, *Macao* is probably the most famous and influential in terms of the actors, the people and the company involved in its production. The film's contents made the Portuguese Censorship forbid its showing on national soil (PINA 1991: 9).

The idea of Macao as a getaway place, a crossing point or a holiday destination for the people of Hong Kong transmitted by Hollywood productions can be found in *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955). This feature film, more famous for its soundtrack than its screenplay, tells the story of a Euro-Asian couple that faces many obstacles in a society not yet accustomed to interracial relationships. It was partially filmed in Macao, where the couple decide to spend

a few days away from the disapproving looks they get in the British colony of Hong Kong.

Less known but also one of the films that shows Macao as a crossing point and a refuge, *Forbidden* (1953), starring Tony Curtis, was released two years before. This film tells the story of Eddie, its main character, who is hired by a mobster from Philadelphia to locate his wife and take her back to the USA. Eddie finds his boss' wife in Macao and, while doing his job, saves the life of the owner of one of the city's casinos, who coincidentally is engaged to the woman he is looking for.

Different from *Macao, l'enfer du jeu* and *Macao, Ferry to Hong Kong* (1959) tells the story of Mark Conrad (Curd Jürgens) who, after being expelled from Hong Kong, travels aboard Captain Heart's ferry (Orson Welles) to Macao. However, his entrance into the Portuguese colony is refused, and Conrad remains in a sort of purgatory between the two European colonies. Throughout the film, there are visual and oral references to Macao. Even though it is not a film about Macao, it shows the real city of Macao and not the reality staged in European and American studios.

In the 1960s, three other films perpetuated Macao as a city of gambling, corruption, and prostitution, where gangsters seemed to act freely. The American production *Out of the Tiger's Mouth* premiered in 1962. This drama tells the story of two refugee children from Continental China who end up in a brothel in Macao after their grandmother entrusts their fates to an unscrupulous boatman who had promised to take them to their uncle in Hong Kong. The film wanted to alert the international community to this type of problem.

Two other feature films whose stories unfold in cultural and architectural settings of the type of East-meets-West were released in 1967: *The Peking Medallion* (1967)³ and *Via Macao* (1967). They are both European productions of the spy/gangster/romance genres previously explored in other productions.

Peking Medallion was filmed in a studio in Berlin, where the atmosphere of the Portuguese colony was recreated and only partially filmed in Macao and Hong Kong. This co-production – French, German (West Germany) and Italian – explores the clichés of the corrupt and violent underworld of the Portuguese colony. One of the film's passages seems to summarise what would become a cinematic commonplace about Macao: “From the four corners of the Earth... From the four corners of Hell... the search for the Peking Medallion drew them to Macao, the deadliest city in the world!”

³ Watch the full film at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TT-8_ufYoo (accessed 11 October 2024). This film was exhibited internationally under different titles: *Die Holle von Macao*, *The Peking Medallion*, *O Medalhão de Pequim*, *Os Corruptos*, *The Corrupt Ones*, *Hell To Macao*, *Los Corrompidos*, etc.

Via Macao, directed by the French Jean Leduc and produced by the Spanish producer and Portuguese resident Felipe de Solms (RAMOS and MARTINS 2023), also explores the universe of arms trafficking and espionage on the territory. Like other productions, it expresses Hollywood clichés like the romance between the leading character and the *femme fatale*, usually a Western woman he finds in the East. This film, however, has the particularity of being directed and starred in by Leduc and Solms, two filmmakers with previous connections and works in Continental Portugal and its colonies (RAMOS and MARTINS 2021: 172–175). Nonetheless, it preserves the image of Macao as a city of crime and espionage that had been developed by previous foreign productions.

A year later comes *Histoire Immortelle* (1968), a television film directed and starred by Orson Wells, inspired by a story by Karen Blixen that takes place in Macao in the 19th century. In this production, the city of Macau was recreated in French studios, with only glimpses of the scenery. The idea was not to present a realistic image of Macao, but rather to suggest that it was a remote port city where Westerners lived out adventures and romantic stories. The depiction of the architecture and the local Chinese and Portuguese population was merely to give the place an exotic and unique atmosphere.

In the year James Bond “visited” Macao, 1974, scenes for *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold* (1975), an action and adventure *blaxploitation*⁴ film, were shot in the territory. Once again, the two European colonies in China were the stage for action scenes, espionage, and fights against crime associated with gambling and casinos. In this film, both main characters, the heroine and the villain, are women – reminiscent of the social activism that prevailed in the West at the time, especially in the USA, namely female empowerment and the struggle for racial equality.

As mentioned above, this article focuses on foreign Western films. However, the study of foreign Asian productions filmed in Macao is a valuable perspective for future research. Many of them were produced in Hong Kong and mainly portrayed Macao as a place of gambling, nightlife and adventure – e.g. *Pedicab Driver* (1989); *Casino Tycoon* (1992); *The Longest Nite* (1998) or *Casino* (1998).

Macao through the lens of two Portuguese filmmakers: Ricardo Malheiro and Miguel Spiguel

The Portuguese from Europe and the colonies had to wait until the 1950s to meet cinematic Macao through the lenses of their compatriots. National directors and producers certainly made other films, but this was the decade when projects financed – fully or partially – by public funds arrived on metropolitan screens.

⁴ *Blaxploitation* is a subgenre of ethnic American films primarily directed at the Afro-American community.

Ricardo Malheiro and Miguel Spiguel, a Turkish based in Portugal, were the two directors responsible for most Portuguese films about Macao.⁵

Actor, director, and producer Ricardo Malheiro had extensive experience making propaganda documentaries in Portugal and its colonies; he filmed and produced two films about Macao, namely *Macao – Cidade do Nome de Deus* (1952)⁶ and *Viagem Ministerial às Províncias do Oriente 3 – Macao* (1953)⁷. These were two of the films he made between 1949 and 1954. During these five years, the director/producer filmed all the Portuguese colonies, including the territories administrated by Portugal in India and Timor, which, due to chronology and distance, were probably the two Portuguese colonies where the fewest national cinematic productions had been made (RAMOS and MARTINS 2021: 165–167; RAMOS 2020; 2021).

The documentary *Macao – Cidade do Nome de Deus* is essentially a tourism film with a bias of political propaganda. The narrator starts by mentioning the centuries-old Portuguese administration and, as the images flow, describes the main public (administrative offices, hospitals, markets, schools, radio and even the municipal kennel), military and civilian buildings of the colony. Like other colonial documentaries, it presents a unique and positive perspective of the territory; its socioeconomic development, resulting from public investment, is one of the main messages. It also shows the powerful architectural and cultural components and their contrasts with the vernacular oriental brands. As regards the local population, curiously, it only mentions the “Chinese” in order to praise their hospitality. Finally, the documentary ends by showing Macao as a place of peace and a cultural melting pot, demonstrating the “huge kindness, understanding, and love of the Portuguese people”. This documentary is the fruit of its time, and we can perceive the narrative of Luso-tropicalism⁸ and race equality of the Portuguese Empire. On the one hand, among other things, it mentions that education is meant for all children, regardless of colour

⁵ About Miguel Spiguel work and biography, see PIÇARRA (2015).

⁶ See <http://www.cinamateca.pt/Cinamateca-Digital/Ficha.aspx?obraid=3504&type=Video> (accessed 11 October 2024).

⁷ See <http://www.cinamateca.pt/Cinamateca-Digital/Ficha.aspx?obraid=2393&type=Video> (accessed 11 October 2024).

⁸ Lusotropicalism is a mixture of the theories Gilberto Freyre proposed in the 1930s and formalised in the 1950s about the exceptional Portuguese racial character (and, therefore, the Brazilian). Freyre’s work promoted that Portugal was a more benign and racially tolerant coloniser than other European powers, that Brazil would one day be an Arcadia, composed of a mixed-race population, and that the vast Portuguese Imperial World was ultimately, despite some problems, a successful interracial experience (ANDERSON et al. 2019). In short, the Lusotropicalist assumptions include the idea that the Portuguese have a unique ability to have harmonious relationships with other people, their adaptability to the tropics, and their inherent lack of prejudice. Together with colonial ideology, these ideas were widely diffused in Portuguese society after World War II (VALENTIM and HELENO 2018: 32–42).

Scenes from the movie *Macao – Cidade do Nome de Deus*. © ANIM National Archive of Moving Images of the Portuguese Cinematheque.

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Fig. 1. Avenida Almeida de Almeida Ribeiro, considered one of the city's main thoroughfares.

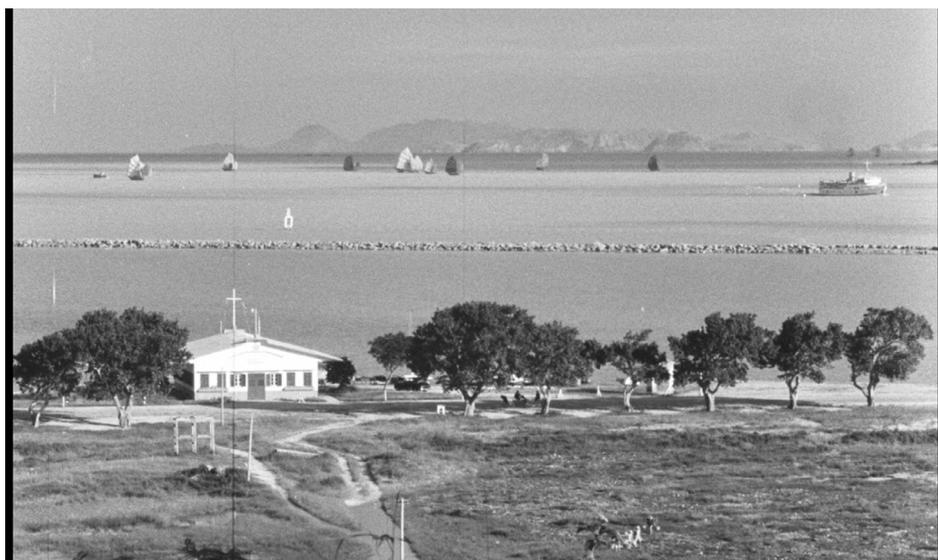


Fig. 2. Porto Exterior, located in the eastern part of the Macau Peninsula.



Fig. 3. The ruins of St. Paul's Church (Ruína da Igreja de S. Paulo). They are part of the Historic Centre of Macau, which has been classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.



Fig. 4. Chinese junks in Praia Grande Bay (Portuguese: Baía da Praia Grande).

or creed, and the word “colony” is not used, but on the other, the ideals of “Christianisation” and “Occidentalisation” of people and territories prevail, as well as the terms “yellow culture” and “Chinese folk”.

Viagem Ministerial às Províncias do Oriente 3 – Macao (1953), an Agência Geral Ultramarina (AGU)⁹ production, is one of three episodes of a documental series about the visits of the Minister of Overseas, Admiral Manoel Maria Sarmiento Rodrigues, to the Portuguese colonies of India, Timor, and Macao. It is basically a news story about his visit to Macao between June and July 1952.¹⁰ It essentially shows the Minister’s inaugurations and official visits during his stay. Since there is no direct speech, the spectator is guided by the narrator, who explains the actions. Also, it praises the symbols of Portugal in the colony and the benefits of the Portuguese administration. Ricardo Malheiro repeats many images and a few sentences that appeared in the 1952 documentary, which mentioned that the swimming pool was “inaugurated” by the Minister, and the one from 1953 shows its inauguration. Ricardo Malheiro, as did Felipe de Solms and other directors, took the chance to film other things while they were on location, or they reused editing “leftovers” to make other documentaries and thus take advantage of their stays. The film conveys virtually the same messages as the previous one, but there is more emphasis on the “local Portuguese way” despite the cultural and ethnic polychromy of the city and its population, and clearly distinguishes the “Portuguese community” from the “Chinese community”. Once more, the Chinese people are praised for their traits (e.g., curiosity).

Benefiting from some temporal distance, Miguel Spiguel’s films seem to have “absorbed” more comprehensively the new Portuguese colonial speech formulated after the constitutional revision of 1951¹¹. We also propose the hypothesis that, as a foreigner, Spiguel had a different way of “looking” at the Portuguese colonies while respecting the constraints imposed by censorship. The footage he filmed in Macao can be used to study his way of making propaganda.

His experience as a filmmaker in Macao started in the mid-1950s when he directed and produced two short documentaries: *Macao, Jóia do Oriente* (1956) and *Ação Missionário no Oriente* (1956). The opening of his first film includes intertitles with this acknowledgement:

⁹ The AGU - General Overseas Agency was a Portuguese public institution, founded on the 30th of September 1924 and dedicated to the communication and promotion of the Portuguese Colonial Empire.

¹⁰ After visiting the Portuguese colony, the Minister of Overseas also visited Hong Kong and Japan.

¹¹ The constitutional review of 1951, which determined, among other formal aspects, the replacement of the terms “Empire” and “colonies” by, respectively, “Overseas” and “overseas provinces”, was a way of internationally distancing Portugal’s image of the epithet of colonising power (ALEXANDRE 2017: 198–218).

To His Excellency the Governor of the Province, Admiral Joaquim Marques Esparteiro, to the most distinguished Doctor Pedro José Lobo, and all the official and private entities, Fernando Macedo and Miguel Spiguel thank you for your collaboration in this documentary.

This introductory note explains the film's production and Spiguel's connections in Macao, which would facilitate his future works (and funding) in the territory. The relationship with Doctor Pedro José Lobo¹² is possibly the most important. This short film follows the form and contents of Malheiro's films. Several monuments, residential neighbourhoods, institutional buildings (such as Leal Senado, the former seat of the Portuguese government, and the building of the Banco Nacional Ultramarino), and social infrastructures (e.g., hospitals, hotels, inland port, swimming pool complex) are filmed. Then, streets and local businesses are filmed. Hybrid culture is particularly emphasised: symbols of oriental tradition (e.g., tiger dance; pagodas) and European influence (e.g., modern architecture). For example, the monument to Camões is shown among oriental monuments like pagodas.

Ação Missionário no Oriente has a different focus and follows a theme that gradually disappears from colonial documentaries: European missionary work, Portuguese in this case, in the world. This film evokes the importance of Portuguese missionaries in the East and their action in Macao.

Later, he directed a documentary for the series *Portugal, além da Europa, Pescadores de Amangau* (1958), financed by Pedro José Lobo's company, P.J. Lobo & C.^a. A sort of sociological documentary, it shows, and comments on the typical aspects of the lives and relationships of the fishermen who live in their boats docked in Macao (PINA 1977: 38).

In 1960, Miguel Spiguel directed and produced *Macao* (1960),¹³ accompanied by Aquilino Mendes as co-producer (PINA and CRUZ 1989). Among other tasks, Aquilino Mendes oversaw photography and assisted him in several documentaries he made in Portugal, the colonies, and even Malaca.¹⁴ *Macao* is a typical example of how Portuguese colonial cities were described by colonial documentaries: the colony is shown as a peaceful, beautiful, and adorned territory where one can feel Portuguese culture. According to its narrator, everyone lives peacefully despite the cultural melting pot, with no distinction between races or creeds. For example, Mozambican soldiers are filmed among the men performing military service in the colony.

¹² On Doctor Pedro José Lobo, see RAMOS and MARTINS (2023).

¹³ Watch the full film at <https://arquivo-cave.defesa.gov.pt/details?id=17497&ht=macau&detailstType=Description> (accessed 11 October 2024).

¹⁴ In Thailand, Spiguel directed *Malaca* (1960), a documentary about the traces of Portuguese culture in this territory.

In 1966, Miguel Spiguel directed what we consider his most curious work in Macao, the feature film in colour *Operação Estupefacientes*, composed of the segments *O Importador de Ópio*, *Doca de Patane* and *Mayana*, with a total of 55 minutes, which later led to three autonomous short films. This docudrama's narrative focuses on Polícia Judiciária de Macao's (PJM) fight against drug trafficking and use, namely opium. *Doca de Patane* introduces a slightly marginal side of Macao, showing fewer noble areas of the city, different from the images of casinos and monuments that represented it at the time. The film is a eulogy to the fight against drug trafficking and use in Macao. One of its most curious aspects is that real PJ officers play the leading roles. As for *Mayana*, it is a mixture of the genres of tourism film and educational romance. Miguel Spiguel was able to direct a film alerting the harm of drugs that was simultaneously a propaganda film of the territory and the Portuguese administration's measures to fight drug trafficking and use. Miguel Spiguel makes a cameo appearance at the end of the film, providing authenticity to the story and the message he is trying to convey. This trinity of short films reveals a negative side of the Portuguese colony that mainly affects the Chinese community, which the propaganda is forced to address. This film deserves credit for showing another, more obscure, side of the territory and the drama of the refugees from Continental China, which is present, though not expressed explicitly, through its lead actress, Mayana Martin, a refugee from Shanghai.

Working with Aquilino Mendes again, Miguel Spiguel produced two documentaries about Macao: *Macao Industries*, *Macao Knitters*, and *Macao de Hoje*. The first, spoken in English, was 10 minutes long and served the primary purpose of promoting the local economy, especially the textile company Macao Knitters. As regards the second documentary, its range was more comprehensive, and it tried to show the Portuguese colony's modernity, which was characterised as follows: "from the development in width to the growth in height, this is the equation of today's Macao". The documentary shows how casinos and tourism are the main drivers of the local economy, moving the colony towards rapid development. Its perspective differs from other Portuguese propaganda documentaries since this production clearly recognises the economic importance of casinos and the resulting tourism.

The last three films Miguel Spiguel made in Macao were *Macao Industrial* (1974),¹⁵ *Uma Pérola Chamada Macao* (1974),¹⁶ co-directed with João Botelho, and *Macao* (1977), a Doperfilme production¹⁷ released after the director's

¹⁵ Watch the full film at <http://www.cinamateca.pt/Cinamateca-Digital/Ficha.aspx?obraid=4676&type=Video> (accessed 2 October 2024).

¹⁶ Watch the full film at <http://www.cinamateca.pt/Cinamateca-Digital/Ficha.aspx?obraid=7821&type=Video> (accessed 2 October 2024).

¹⁷ On Doperfilmes, see CUNHA (2018a).

death in 1975. There is little to be added to what has been said already. These titles are emblematic of other Portuguese films produced in Macau, presenting a uniformly positive vision of Macanese society.

Other Portuguese productions about Macao

As far as we can tell, the first Portuguese productions filmed in Macao and distributed or exhibited in Continental Portugal were made between 1923 and 1924. Of the three titles that have been identified, we only know the director of *Macao* (1924), Manuel Amor Antunes,¹⁸ who was also responsible for the four Portuguese documentaries about the Portuguese colony in China produced in the 1930s. The other two films were identified by José Matos-Cruz with the following titles: as *Aspectos de Macao* (1923), a Castelo Lopes production, and *Asas de Portugal, Saudação aos Aviadores do Raid Lisboa-Macao* (1924), a film about the first plane trip between the Portuguese capital and Macao (MATOS-CRUZ 1999). However, the condition of the cataloguing and conservation of the material precluded any meaningful analysis of its contents.

The films directed by Manuel Amor Antunes were mere captures of Macao's daily reality, similar to the static shot documentaries of the early 20th century; its *prises de vue* had an incipient cinematography that shows the amateurism of its cameraman. The footage filmed in the 1920s was reused in short documentaries that were exhibited in Portugal in the 1930s (J. NÓVOA 1998; A. NÓVOA 2003).

In addition to the early productions of António Amor and the structured, organised work of Ricardo Malheiro and Miguel Spiguel, there were other Portuguese filmmakers who made documentaries and reportages about Portuguese India. Among these, the work of João Mendes and Filipe de Solms deserves special mention, as they included this colony in their general perspective on the Portuguese overseas territories. The documentary filmmaker João Mendes,¹⁹ one of the most active Portuguese filmmakers of the 1950s and 1960s, directed the 20-minute documentary *Portugueses no Mundo*, produced by Felipe de Solms²⁰ in 1954. The film pays tribute to the effort and faith invested by the Portuguese people to create a nation of people of different races and religions united by the Portuguese flag. Every Portuguese colony was filmed for this purpose. It is an exaltation of Portuguese colonialism, unveiling the narrative of the multiracial and multicontinental nation that was under development.

¹⁸ About Manuel Antunes Amor's productions, I write above, in the section "Macao through the lens of two Portuguese filmmakers".

¹⁹ On João Mendes, see A.B. (1942), P.A. (1951), MENDES (1952), B. (1959), ROSA (1989), ROSA (1997), RAMOS and MARTINS (2021).

²⁰ On Felipe de Solms's professional and biographic pathway, see *Oito filmes sobre a África Portuguesa* (1950), *Diário de Luanda* (1951a), *Diário de Luanda* (1951b), de SOLMS (1952), *Plateia* (1968), MORENO CANTANO (2017), CUNHA (2018b), RAMOS and MARTINS (2021).

Caminhos Longos: Macao through the eyes of the locals

Caminhos Longos (1955) was the first fictional feature film made in Macao that was directed and produced by a local company. Its production began in 1954, and it premiered in Cine-Teatro Vitória (present-day Banco Tai Fung) at Rua dos Mercadores (Macao) in 1955. The movie is spoken in Portuguese and Mandarin. The film's story unfolds in the aftermath of the final phase of the Chinese Civil War (1946–1949). It addresses the issues of Portuguese refugees in Shanghai and the many Chinese people who, due to the war and the rising prices, moved to Macao, where some settled and others stayed for some time before travelling to other latitudes. According to the researcher Ana Catarina Almeida Leite, although it addresses less positive aspects, this feature film and other Portuguese productions were part of the Portuguese authorities' effort to clean Macao's image as a place essentially devoted to gambling and crime (LEITE 2021).

The cast chosen for *Caminhos Longos* is quite interesting because the origins and life experiences of the actors intersect with those of the characters. Wong Hou – who was born in China and had already participated as an actor and director in productions filmed in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong – plays the role of Tam Meng, a man who is trying to rebuild his life, torn by the vicissitudes of the war in his home country, in Macao. However, once in his host territory, Tam Meng enters the world of crime until he finds the way of redemption. The actress Lola Young was born to a French mother and a Chinese father in Paris and lived in many places in the East. Her father was a high officer of the Chinese Nationalist Government. In *Caminhos Longos*, Lola plays the role of Dolly, a seductive Euro-Asian who is hired to work in a dancing nightclub in Macao. For its part, the Portuguese Irene Matos plays the role of an upper-middle-class young woman who moves to Macao with her parents. Her character's life seems to mimic her own life story. Irene Matos, daughter of Portuguese parents, was born in Hong Kong, where she spent most of her life, and settled with her parents in Macao in the last years of the Chinese Civil War. As for the actress Chung Ching, born in Continental China, she studied at the Catholic School of Santa Rosa de Lima in Hong Kong and plays the role of the young Chinese Catholic Teresa Vong, an affectionate nurse who is trying to recover spiritual purity, after receiving advice from a priest. Finally, José Pedro da Silva Valador, a Portuguese man from Alenquer who lived in Macao while performing military service as an expeditionary soldier, interprets Duarte Silva, an agent from Polícia Judiciária. The young agent is the personification of the zealous and dynamic agent who puts duty before his own interests. It is a prototype of the excellent policeman and the good public servant who tries to impose law and morals in the Portuguese colony and always listens to his heart more than he strictly enforces the law (*Eurásia Filmes* 1954).

The film's whereabouts are unknown, and the press published only a few images from it. However, this group of character types seems to agglutinate different views of Macao expressed in Western fiction films and Portuguese documentaries.

In synch with the aspects explored in Western fiction films about Macao, *Caminhos Longos* examined the drama of refugees, the underworld of casinos and nightclubs (dancing) and the prostitution associated with them. Criminal and gangster activity is present in the character of Tam Meng. The fascination for investigation and espionage while fighting crime is incarnated by Duarte Silva. East-meets-West is found in the European and Euro-Asian characters circulating between the two territories, whose cultural habits and language distinguish them from the Chinese community. And finally, there is the interracial romance. But there is also a more positive and nationalist Portuguese perspective of the territory, which is given to us by Duarte Silva, a public servant who tries to impose law and morals in a territory that is an oasis of peace in a China devastated by the Civil War. Silva's work does not seem easy because he faces several, apparently interconnected, problems: the refugees' drama and the world of vice, prostitution, and crime, which appears to come from the outside, as shown by the character of Tam Weng. However, this agent is benevolent and cares about every character, regardless of their origins. Though we cannot prove it, Duarte Silva appears to be the personification of Macao's Portuguese Administration.

In line with the two visions of Macao mentioned above, the positive one (portrayed in Portuguese productions) and the negative one (associated with gambling and crime, depicted in Hollywood and European productions), two particular aspects can be distinguished. In the first, Portuguese nationalist actors are depicted as combating criminality, whereas in the second, the deficiencies of Macau's social fabric are accentuated, encompassing matters such as refugee crises, prostitution, and gambling. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the perspective of those of Luso-Macanese descent. The character Teresa Vong serves as a representative example of Catholicism within the context of Macanese religious practice, particularly within the mix-raced and Sino-Catholic communities. It must be emphasised that Catholicism is an essential element of the Macanese identity. Local Christians bear witness to the reality of religious persecution carried out by the Mainland Chinese authorities, particularly in light of the arrival of Catholic refugees and other religious minorities.

The drama of the refugees and the manner in which they were incorporated into the territory emerge as another issue addressed from the local perspective. The director's use of these characters appears to indicate an early emphasis on

a theme that was subsequently explored in international productions such as *Out of the Tiger's Mouth* (1960). The character of Duarte Silva represents the perspective of the locals on combating crime. This reflects a tangible reality that differs from the depiction in Portuguese documentaries. It is, however, noteworthy that the fight against crime is the responsibility of the Polícia Judiciária, rather than being undertaken by vigilantes or foreign agents, as is often depicted in European and Hollywood productions. This distinction serves to illustrate that Macau is not a lawless territory ruled by gangsters and casino owners. While organised crime is indeed a significant issue, it is addressed by the Portuguese Administration.

The story of the film's production company, Eurásia, and its director and technical crew is also a product of the territory's political, social, and demographic history. The production company was founded by Eurico Ferreira, born in Lisbon, José Silveira Machado, from the Azores, and Doctor Pedro José Lobo, born in Timor and a member of Macao's political and business elite. The company was founded with high hopes, and *Caminhos Longos* would be its Trojan Horse to enter the national and international markets. After its first production, the three partners already had two other productions planned, as they said:

...a film with distinctly Chinese characteristics, a comedy criticising the modern society, a drama about people in the triangle of Hong Kong – Manila – Singapore, a film that will feature the Portuguese province of Timor as its background, an enchanting drama set in the Southern seas, etc., and later releasing its first super-production filmed in colour, based on one fact of our (Portuguese) age of discoveries (XV–XVII). In addition to producing, Eurásia Filmes also distributes films and is especially focused on divulging Portuguese cinema.

(Eurásia Filmes 1954)

Regarding its credits, *Caminhos Longos* was produced by Pedro Silveira Machado, a local personality connected to the arts and the radio, who wrote the script with Eurico Ferreira, a Portuguese director based in Macao. Local stories inspired part of the narrative. Filming was conducted by the experienced cameraman and contributor of Macao's Propaganda Services, Albert Young,²¹ and the soundtrack was created by Doctor Pedro José Lobo, the film's original sponsor. The feature *Caminhos Longos* was followed by *Macau em Marcha* (1956). We could not retrieve any information on its content. According to the

²¹ Albert Young filmed several Chinese and Hong Kong productions. He collaborated with Macao's Propaganda Services, for which he filmed the documentaries *Os C.T.T de Macau*, *Um dia em Macau* and *Macau Terra Portuguesa*. At the invitation of the Macao General Government, he worked with the filming crews of filmmakers Ricardo Malheiro and Miguel Siguel, with whom he filmed in Macao, the State of Portuguese India, and Timor. On Albert Young, see STOKES and BRAATEN (2020).

research conducted by José Matos-Cruz, it was an official production (MATOS-CRUZ 1999).

The last Portuguese film productions about Macao

Between 1969 and 1971, Solms and Leduc filmed the news report *Le Portugal D'Outremer Dans Le Monde D'Aujourd'Hui* (1971). This production, entirely spoken in French, portrays every Portuguese ultramarine province. The first was Macao, followed by Timor, São Tomé, Cabo Verde, Guiné-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique. The narrative paradigm is always the same: socio-economic development, local traditions, multiculturalism, and peaceful coexistence among the different ethnic and religious groups that compose the population in the different territories. There is only one exception: the Colonial War problem is addressed in the chapters dedicated to Guinee-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique. The news report features several interviews, and Marcello Caetano²² is one of the interviewees. The film has the particularity of featuring dialogue, a rarity among the Portuguese colonial documentaries, which are almost exclusively based on narration. As of the mid-1960s, monologues by “experts” or individuals with “administrative responsibilities” were included in an attempt to legitimate and reinforce the films’ message and information.

In 1974, the last year of Estado Novo, António Lopes Ribeiro directed the film *Macao, Portugal and China*. The film was produced by Telecine-Moro²³, which between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, produced a set of documentaries on the Portuguese colonies. The experienced director had already made several documentaries of colonial propaganda, but this was the first specifically about Macao. Lopes Ribeiro shows us Macao as a city of gambling, casinos, and traditions, but from a positive perspective, allowing the audience to envision the traces of Oriental and Portuguese culture. The old contrasts with the new at a time when casinos were no longer a taboo for the Portuguese Administration.

Conclusion

The history of cinema about Macao until 1974 reflects its geography, demography, and realities. Attempting to capture Macao’s reality through a camera is like using a kaleidoscope, where tilted mirrors create images, showing different combinations at every moment.

The tilted mirrors are a metaphor for Macao’s skewed realities that were filmed

²² Marcello Caetano (1902–1980) succeeded António Oliveira Salazar as President of the Council in the Portuguese Dictatorial Regime, Estado Novo (1933–1974).

²³ On Telecine-Moro, see RAMOS and MARTINS (2023).

over these years. The tiny crystals inside the kaleidoscope represent the cultures and places that, together, offer cinematic visions of this Portuguese colony – a colony that was not always portrayed as Portuguese in cinema. Sometimes Macao was Portuguese, but in other cases, it was Chinese or Macanese.

The portrayal of Macao in foreign Western films and Portuguese films reflects contrasting perspectives shaped by cultural contexts. In Western cinema, Macao often appears as an exotic, lawless non-place, a fantastical setting where Westerners navigate a mysterious oriental backdrop. The locals are depicted as ambiguous figures, often under the control of casino owners, arms dealers, or gangsters, adding to the city's dangerous and alluring image. These films prioritise action, adventure, and romanticised encounters between Western heroes and exotic femme fatales, focusing on a sensationalised vision of East-meets-West.

In contrast, Portuguese films present a more grounded and introspective image of Macao. Documentaries depict it as a Portuguese territory with a complex social fabric, where Europeans and Chinese coexisted, their lives shaped by economic struggles and gradual development. The peaceful coexistence and cultural blending are often attributed to the “Portuguese way of being in the world”, reflecting a more measured and colonial view of Macao's identity. However, despite this portrayal, the realities of the Macanese community, with their distinct Euro-Asian identity and overlooked cultural heritage, remain marginalised in both types of films.

In summary, while Western films emphasise Macao as a place of exoticism and intrigue, focusing on its oriental mystique and chaotic environment, Portuguese films offer a more historical and colonial narrative, highlighting Portuguese influence but neglecting the complexities of the local Macanese population and negative aspects. Both perspectives create incomplete images of Macao, shaped by the cultural lens of the filmmakers.

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