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Personal identity and ethnic ambiguity: naming practices among the Eurasians of Macao*

The embarrassment of limits is a general feature of social organisation

Erving Goffman (1963: 148)

This paper is an attempt to explore the relationship between personal identity and ethnic identity from a perspective that sees culture, to use Sangren's words, 'as a dialectically unified process of self and collective production' (1991: 80). I will be focusing on naming practices in a multiethnic context in such a way as to show that the negotiation of name conferral and uses, functions not only as a means of situating the person and of achieving personal strategic aims but also of constantly defining the sociocultural system or systems involved (cf. Herzfeld 1982: 288). The Portuguese-speaking Eurasians of Macao are a particularly good test case for this study as they live in a marginal condition and thus provide us with a clearer perception of the practical limits of these sociocultural systems (cf. Terrades 1992).

The background

Macao is a place that defies simple description, and what is generally known about it is often misleading. It is usually assumed that it has the same status as its neighbour, the British colony of Hong Kong, but this is not the case. To understand the Macanese, the differences between Hong Kong and Macao are central to the discussion.

When the Portuguese first began building houses in Macao around 1547, the status of the settlement was unclear. Commercial conditions, and in particular the prohibition of commerce with Japan, meant that the wealthy Chinese of the Pearl river delta greatly appreciated Portuguese merchants and their regular boats travelling to and

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from Japan. The local authorities agreed to turn a blind eye to the presence of these 'foreign devils' in their territory even although they were suspicious of what they might get up to. This suspicion eased slightly after 1564 when the Portuguese helped the governor of Guangdong suppress the mutiny of a maritime defensive unit. It subsequently became clear that the Portuguese were willing to pay customs taxes as well as reasonable demands for bribes; eventually the Portuguese came to pay also a ground tax for Macao.

In this way was established what the Chinese historian K. C. Fok (1991) calls 'the Macao Formula' – an ambiguous situation in which the Portuguese were allowed to govern themselves independently without, however, having full sovereignty over the territory or its Chinese subjects. The latter remained under the authority of the imperial magistrates present in Macao, where there was also an imperial customs office.

This situation only altered after the foundation of Hong Kong in 1840. In the decades that followed in the shadow of British power, the Portuguese implemented a colonial policy, evicting the Chinese magistrates and customs officials and establishing territorial government as well as a limited, and always reasonably ineffectual, military presence. By that time, however, the *Macanese* were long in existence: their integration into the colonial system that lived on until the end of the 1960s was shaped by the long history that had preceded it.

The existence of communities of this type largely explains the survival of the Portuguese colonial empire throughout much of the nineteenth century. Gervase Clarence-Smith notes the importance

of the existence of communities which, for convenience sake, we will call Creole, even though this word was not used at the time. The Creole were people of all races, who had been born in the colonies, spoke Portuguese or a Creole type of Portuguese, were Catholic, were regulated by the Portuguese civil law and were subjects of the House of Bragança. They provided the personnel for the intermediary and lower sectors of the bureaucracy, of the administration, and of the Church, in reward for very meagre salaries. They were resistant to the local tropical diseases that killed metropolitan Portuguese by the thousand and they kept excellent relations with indigenous states and societies. The creation of these communities had constituted an intentional policy during certain epochs of the Asiatic and Brazilian empires and remained, in the nineteenth century, the greatest colonial strength of Portugal.

(Clarence-Smith 1985: 12, author's translation)

Historical records indicate that the original Portuguese settlers preferred Malay women from Malacca. These were sent to Portuguese outposts in the Southeast Asian seas, such as Macao, with the specific intention of marrying them to Portuguese men (Teixeira, 1965). Later on, when Christians were evicted from Japan, Japanese Christians were brought to the territory. The Portuguese in Macao were under the authority of the Viceroy of Goa in India where a strong Creole elite had been formed and, in turn, the Portuguese presence in Timor, tenuous as it may have been at times, was managed from the territory. There were therefore people constantly travelling back and forth between these and other Portuguese settlements in the Far East. In Macao itself, Chinese women were always present, both as purchased slaves and concubines and as orphans raised by the many Christian charitable institutions that always existed

there. Practices such as the sale of daughters and the abandonment of female infants are an integral part of the patriarchal complex that has traditionally characterised Guangdong province (Watson 1980).

So long as they were Catholic, spoke Portuguese and had a Portuguese name and lifestyle, these people as well as their children were treated as subjects of the King of Portugal and did not owe allegiance to the imperial magistrates. This is a characteristic of the Portuguese expansion which distinguishes it, for example, from that of Great Britain. David Livingstone remarked upon the differences in attitudes when he encountered it in southern Africa in the 1850s:

It was particularly gratifying to me, who had been familiar with the stupid prejudice against colour, entertained only by those who are themselves becoming tawny, to view the liberality with which people of colour were treated by the Portuguese. Instances, so common in the south, in which half-caste children are abandoned, are here extremely rare. They are acknowledged at table, and provided for by their fathers, as if European.

(Livingstone 1982 [1857]: 371)

My point is not, of course, that there was no discrimination along racial lines (Boxer 1963), but that this discrimination functioned within a system which tended to integrate rather than expel the children of interethnic marriages. As an informant of mine put it, 'A um mestiço de português, chamava-se português. A um mestiço de inglês, chamava-se *half-cast*'. ('A Portuguese half-cast was called Portuguese; an English half-cast was called half-cast.') Contrary to the Portuguese in Macao, the British in Hong Kong were unwilling to accept their children by native women as part of their own community (Hall 1992). This gave rise to very distinct social contexts, so that, for example, in Hong Kong it was normal to distinguish between Eurasians and Portuguese, even although the Portuguese of Hong Kong were practically always from Macao and the product of centuries of interbreeding. Peter Hall, a distinguished Eurasian genealogist, states that, in Hong Kong in 1907, 'The population figure included some 9,000 sailors and soldiers and about 10,000 non-Chinese (Europeans, Portuguese, Indians, Malays, Eurasians and Africans)' (Hall 1992: 10).

The term Macanese by which such people were commonly referred to indicates their close relation to the history of Macao. It is important to understand that a Chinese person born in the territory still today denies that he or she is a Macanese. The reason for this is to be found in the system of double sovereignty that characterised the Macao Formula. The Chinese of Macao were ruled by Chinese magistrates and were not allowed to reside permanently in the Christian citadel. To this day, when asked where they live, old Chinese people often answer that they live in *O3 Moon4 Gaai1*, the Macao Road.¹ They lived outside the citadel and Macao was not recognised by the Chinese authorities as an independent administrative entity, being part of the district which today is called *Jung1 Saan1* (Mand. Zhong Shan). Similarly, the Cantonese term for Macanese is *to2 saang1 jai2*, literally earthborn children, or locals.

In sum, neither the Portuguese nor the Chinese have ever been specifically identified by Macao. Rather, Macanese identity is historically linked to a small group of Eurasian families that connect today's city with the citadel founded in the 1540s. It does not matter that in every generation there are new Macanese families, born of new

1 As far as possible, I use Sidney Lau's (1977) system of romanisation. I am grateful to Monica Chan for her help.

cross-ethnic couples, for they are integrated into this historically legitimated group, mainly through the Portuguese-language schooling system. All are today trilingual in Cantonese, Portuguese and English (with descending levels of proficiency), but until the 1950s they spoke their own Creole language that, apart from Portuguese, owed as much to Malay as to Chinese (Batalha 1974 [1958]: 27–28).

During the colonial period the Macanese slowly established themselves as an administrative and intermediary elite. They have never been the richest people in Macao – these have always been Chinese – nor have they ever held the top administrative posts – these have been occupied by Portuguese people specifically sent from Goa and, later on, from Portugal. However, they play a central role, without which Portuguese administration would be impossible. Numerically, they have usually been in a minority. Today they number roughly 7,000 in a population estimated at between 300,000 and 500,000.

During the 1950s and 1960s a new Chinese salaried middle-class started to appear in the territory. As they were based in the private sector, they left untouched the Macanese monopoly of the public sector. Inevitably, however, they came to compete with the Macanese for legitimacy of control over the territory. In 1967, this caused one of the social earthquakes that are so characteristic of Macao's history. Accompanying the onset of the Cultural Revolution in China, the Chinese ended roughly a century of colonial rule. This did not, however, mean that the Portuguese had to leave the territory. To everyone's surprise, even although the Portuguese military had no means of protecting Macao from Chinese forces, the People's Republic declined to take over the administration of the territory. It is thought they correctly perceived that it would end Macao's usefulness to China as an interface with the rest of the world.

As a result, yet another characteristically ambiguous solution evolved through which the Portuguese implicitly agreed to accept the presence in the territory of an informal shadow government whose control over the Chinese population was established through a complex system of associations (both activity-specific associations and residents' associations, *gaail fong*). As part of the decolonisation process that followed the establishment of a democratic regime in Portugal in 1974, the Portuguese authorities again offered to hand over Macao to the People's Republic of China. At that time all military personnel were withdrawn from Macao, leaving behind a police force staffed mostly by Chinese immigrants. It was only in 1987, however, that China was finally able to devise a formula allowing it to administer Macao and Hong Kong without destroying their significance for the Pearl river delta: 'one nation, two systems'. In 1999, three years after Hong Kong is handed over to the People's Republic, the Portuguese will finally withdraw from Macao.

These developments confront the Macanese with an identity problem. Until now they have been Macanese *because* they are Portuguese and *not* Chinese. After 1999, however, they can only remain if they are willing to become part of the Chinese population of the territory. This is not the place to explore fully the problems and responses generated by this quandary. I will limit myself to stating that the Macanese were very quick to understand that their Portugueseness now has very distinct implications. During the colonial period, and still today during this interim period, Portugueseness constitutes an important symbolic capital which allows the Macanese to retain their traditional monopoly over the middle-ranges of the administration in the city. Soon, however, it will become a hindrance. Ever since the late 1960s, when they lost the battle of legitimacy to the budding Chinese middle-class, the Macanese have

been taking an increasingly conciliatory approach to ethnic relations. In the second half of the 1970s, for example, marriage patterns altered radically (Pina-Cabral and Lourenço, 1992). Traditional interethnic marriages were asymmetric, with Macanese and Portuguese men marrying Chinese women of lesser social prestige, and Macanese men and women of prestigious families marrying among themselves or with Portuguese persons. Today the dominant strategy is for men and women to marry Chinese people of the same socio-economic status. Similarly, the traditional preference for speaking Portuguese in the home has given way to increased integration into the Cantonese-speaking world.

Ethnicity and the person

Until roughly the time of the Japanese occupation of China during the Pacific War, the Macanese managed to reproduce a Creole culture that had fashioned itself during the centuries of relative abandonment to which Macao had been relegated between its heyday in the early seventeenth century and its relative resurgence in the mid-nineteenth century. The *patoá*, a language no longer spoken by anyone in the city, was the main feature of this culture, but a culinary tradition and distinct ways of dressing accompanied it also. By the mid-twentieth century, however, most of this had been abandoned. If they were going to rely on their capital of Portugueseness, the Macanese had to stand up to the colonial prejudice of the European Portuguese who, because of improved transport, began to arrive in growing numbers. By the time the final confrontation with the Chinese middle-class arrived in the late 1960s, the Macanese had lost most of their Creole culture.

The result is that the Macanese live between two cultural worlds to which they have relative easy access. Their first language has always been Cantonese, for it is that which they speak with the *amabs* who raise them. Before the 1970s, however, parents often discouraged the use of Cantonese at home; even in cross-ethnic families, the Lusophone father often punished his children physically if they spoke to him in the maternal language. Such practices were correctly perceived as necessary to maximise the capital of Portugueseness that guaranteed Macanese survival. Since then, particularly after the Portuguese military left the city, Cantonese has slowly become the home language of most Macanese – even those who have no Chinese ancestry. A major influence here has been the growth and strength of the Cantonese-speaking television of Hong Kong.

Today, even though they continue to be schooled predominantly in Portuguese, the Macanese are situated in a world where two cultural traditions overlap. They have a sense of common origin and common destiny; they have an elite which represents them; they hold the monopoly over an important sector of activity – so it can be said that they constitute an ethnic group (Pina-Cabral and Lourenço 1992). Nevertheless they do not, properly speaking, have a culture. Their cultural disposition is constructed by reference to the Cantonese world and the Portuguese world – and it has to be noted that the two strands are often irreconcilable. One of the major referents of Macanese ethnic identity is Catholicism – and this, to a certain extent, provides a fixed point of reference; however, ever since they started approaching the Chinese middle-class, the Macanese have begun to veer away from the staunch Catholicism of former decades. They have maintained some distinctiveness in forms of speaking Portuguese and Cantonese and in food habits, but these are relatively insignificant differences.

Concerted and repeated attempts have been made by Portuguese and French colleagues (e.g. Amaro 1992) to devise some form of phenotypic characterisation of the Macanese. From what I have said, however, it must be clear that any such attempt is bound to failure; precisely what characterises the Macanese is their phenotypic variability (Teixeira 1965). Today, one becomes a Macanese because one is socialised in that way, and we have no evidence that it was ever any different in the past. There are numbers of Chinese men and women who, having been brought up for one reason or another as Macanese, adopt full Macanese identity. There are people of African Creole origin who, having lived for generations in Macao, are treated as full members of the community. And there are all sorts of combinations with Japanese, Malay, Timorese, Goese, Indian and European ancestries.

It must nonetheless be admitted that, living in Macao for any length of time, a person learns to identify a Macanese. There are corporal dispositions and attitudes, and forms of speaking, gesticulating and personal presentation that mark the group out. These, however, are fugitive signs and the Macanese are constantly manipulating such visible signs of distinctiveness for strategic ends. Their personal identity develops in a context of greater uncertainty and, at the same time, of greater freedom than that of the European Portuguese or the Chinese.²

Here I find it useful to refer to Erving Goffman's notion of stigma to describe the process of ethnic identity management. He defines stigma as 'the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance' (1963: 9). This may appear a contorted and negative way of formulating ethnic group identification. Nevertheless, it becomes more significant when we consider that, in the same author's words, 'stigma involves not so much a set of concrete individuals who can be separated into two piles, the stigmatised and the normal, as a pervasive two-role social process in which every individual participates in both roles, at least in some connections and in some phases of life. The normal and the stigmatised are not persons but rather perspectives' (1963: 164–5).

This formulation appears to me relevant if we are going to attempt to describe the emotional and experiential context of ethnic identity management in multi-ethnic social contexts. Indeed, ethnic identity functions as a stigma in all contexts in which one is forced to interact actively with people from another ethnic group. This is particularly the case in situations like this one in which cultural diversity is marked and in which prejudice flows in both directions with equal strength. Even although Chinese prejudice against 'foreigners' (whom they normally characterise as *gwai2*, ghosts) expresses itself differently from European prejudice, there is no denying that it is at least quite as prevalent.³

2 I am as yet uncertain to what extent this is compounded by differences in the construction of personhood so many observers have noted between the European and the Chinese traditions. For example, Mayfair Yang reports that the Chinese construction of the person is 'relational' and that 'the boundaries of personhood are permeable' (1989: 39). How would this affect the children of cross-ethnic marriages? Informal observation in Macao points to schooling as being the most central formative influence.

3 Interestingly, judging by Francis Hsu's comments, Chinese racial prejudice is, in some sense, more akin to Portuguese prejudice than to that of other European colonialist nations: 'The Chinese had always regarded all non-Chinese as "barbarians". Yet this fact had not prevented intermarriage, residential mixing, social intercourse, and entry into officialdom by Muslims and members of other minorities' (1989: 993). See, however, Dikötter 1992.

Compared to a Chinese and a European, a Macanese is a person who possesses many of the attributes that would qualify him or her as a full member of either ethnic group. This is the case both in cultural terms – for the person speaks the language, has a name in that language, and knows and appreciates the food habits that normally accompany social intercourse – and in phenotypic terms. It may be rather difficult to tell whether a certain person of mixed ancestry is, or is not, Chinese or Portuguese. However, at the same time, such a person carries a stigma, a sign of difference, which means that they are either cast outside the established ethnic universe or, more preoccupying still, kept to the margins of that universe.⁴

Being Portuguese is just as stigmatising in a social situation dominated by Chinese ethnic culture, as being Chinese in a Portuguese context. However, the Macanese find themselves constantly in the borders of ‘passing’ – that is, altering the referents of one’s identity. In situations where an individual’s parents are fully Chinese but the person opts for a Portuguese formulation of his or her social self, the personal uncertainty that results is characteristic of passing. Taking into account the existence of ethnic prejudice, the Macanese are constantly meeting with social situations in which they are uncertain of acceptance or rejection. This was, incidentally, one of the major problems that confronted me as a fieldworker. The solidity of my Portugueseness meant that potentially I could be a bearer of prejudice. My very presence in the field elicited this dynamic of personal uncertainty. ‘Mixed social situations make for anxious unanchored interaction’ (Goffman 1963: 29). People are anxious because they do not know what to expect.

Here, then, we can start to approach the emotional infrastructure of the forms of relating interethnically. Anthropology does not provide us with a ready language to deal with the emotional aspects of social relations. If, however, we presume that society and culture are not given, but have to be constantly recreated via the process of personal interaction, we are forced to take into account the emotional frameworks of such a process. One of the first characteristics of Macanese behaviour that confronts a person who arrives in Macao is what I call the ‘dynamic of despise’ – a process through which a person, feeling that she is the object of prejudice, attempts to shift the burden of that prejudice onto some other person.

Goffman insists that the formation of a stigmatised individual is characterised by three processes: firstly, the interiorisation of the culture’s general value system; secondly, the realisation that he or she does not fit into that system; and thirdly, the learning of a series of methods for overcoming the impediments caused by the stigma. If we then look at ethnic identity as a stigma, we can perceive that this process does not always occur in quite this fashion. For example, a Chinese person who never interiorises the values of western society, develops a simple hostile reaction to the apparent denial of these values with which she is confronted in cross-ethnic interaction. The same applies to a European Portuguese person.

For the Macanese, however, as well as for the orientalised Portuguese or for the westernised Chinese, the situation of cross-ethnic interaction is more akin to that described by Goffman’s model. Indeed, in the Macanese case, a process of personal ambivalence characteristically develops from the overlapping of cultural references.

4 In Goffman’s terms, ‘an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us’ (1963: 15).

This means that mixed social situations lead to personal anxiety – the ‘touchiness’ of Macanese that all external observers usually identify – and to the attempt to ‘cover’: that is, ‘To restrict the display of those failings most centrally identified with the stigma’ (Goffman 1963: 126).

This process is, however, dynamic. When the stigmatised person sees one of her kind behaving in a way that exposes her stigma, she feels repelled. As she identifies herself with the actor, she experiences shame. This shame, in turn, is transformed into something to be ashamed of. Finally, she responds either by attempting to, so to speak, ‘purify’ the behaviour of the other person, or by distancing herself from the other person by imposing prejudice. This process of self-alienation leads directly to what Goffman calls ‘a self-betraying kind of stratification’ (1963: 131).

Such stratification and its collateral effects are characteristic of a type of snobbery that is often encountered in Macanese circles. No one is completely excluded from it, for it functions along various axes and is based on the long memory so characteristic of small and relatively closed communities. However, those persons and families who retain the greatest capital of Portugueseness – locally known as ‘traditional families’ – as well as those that are richer and/or more educated, are prone to discriminate against poorer, less educated families and against people whose family origin is based on recent intermarriage between a Chinese woman and a Portuguese man. A person who is discriminated against develops a sense of ambivalence about her personal identity. She finds solace for the anxiety that ensues by attempting to ‘cover’ her sense of personal weakness through the exposure of others.

The nature of the Macanese as a group is the product of these procedures of inclusion and exclusion as they develop over time in relation to the external conditions that motivate people’s interests. At one time when the capital of Portugueseness was the major source of security and survival, the negotiation of Portugueseness was central to Macanese everyday life. Discrimination operated strongly, to the point where, for example, a member of a traditional family preferred his daughter to remain single rather than marry a Macanese whose claims to Portugueseness were slighter. Socialisation, too, was deeply affected by that preoccupation: parents smacked their children if they failed to speak Portuguese at home; children who managed to enter High School did not mix socially with children who, lacking good Portuguese, were forced to attend the Commercial School.

As the importance of this capital became less apparent, in the 1970s and 1980s, it also became less of a tool of social identification. People started experimenting with new forms of identification with the Cantonese culture which surrounded them. Now as 1999 approaches, the management of personal identity has begun to shift in other directions. For example, a Macanese man of considerable prestige once explained to me that he had changed his signature in the mid-1980s. He eagerly pointed out to me that, after a rather florid version of his Portuguese name, he now used a simplified version of the Chinese character for his Chinese name.

Names and naming practices are thus one of the most important ways through which processes of personal identification are effected. Before attempting to show how naming practices have changed for the Macanese, I will briefly characterise the differences between the Portuguese and the Chinese naming systems.

Naming systems

Whilst the Portuguese system allows a considerable margin of manipulation as far as surnames are concerned, the Chinese system is absolutely coercive in this matter. Contrarily, whilst the Chinese system permits an enormous amount of personal fancy and manipulation at the level of first names, the Portuguese system is surprisingly conservative and coercive.

Curiously, the above formulation does not correspond to the vision that most Portuguese people have of their naming practices. If asked, most Portuguese persons will answer that parents are free to choose the first name of a child but that they are not free to choose the surname. It is said that a person must receive, after her first name, her mother's father's surname followed by her father's father's surname. It was, therefore, with some surprise that, on starting to study bourgeois family practices in the city of Oporto, I discovered that many people did not in fact name themselves and their children in this way (Pina-Cabral 1991).

It became apparent to me, first, that the stress on agnatic links implicit in this ideal system went against the predominant tendency of favouring uxorilateral ties; second, that people favoured prestigious surnames and tended to forget less prestigious surnames, whether they were the mother's or the father's; and, third, that people attached emotional significance to surnames, manipulating their use according to whether or not they liked the relatives described by that surname. For example, I had a student who, during her undergraduate degree signed her papers as Ana X. A few years later a certain person, Ana Y, made an application to collaborate with me in a research project. I was surprised to discover that it was the same person. I thought that she might have got married, but I was told that what happened was that she had had a major row with her mother over her parents' divorce. In a spirit of vengeance, from then on, she stopped using her mother's rather more prestigious surname, adopting instead one of her father's.

Furthermore, as most people in Portugal have rather long names (usually comprising three to four surnames), it is common practice to use in everyday life an abbreviated form. This can be simply a choice of one of the first names and one or two of the surnames, but this too can be manipulated. Later on, when choosing what names to give their children, people tend to opt for the names by which they are known. For example, a famous doctor at the turn of the century was known by a combination of his mother's surname and father's surname, Manuel XY. He married a wealthy woman and their children received the mother's father's surname, being called ZY. His daughter's son, in turn, received the mother's and the father's surnames, being called YW. This did not satisfy him, however, as he wanted to have a share of his grandfather's fame. Thus, he chose to be known as XY. As this is a 'good name', bringing with it prestige, this is the name that he passed on to his children.

It is also common to find that people use different combinations of names for different professions. For example, a doctor or a lawyer who is also an artist may opt for a pseudonym. But this is not the most common option. Rather, he may be known in one profession by one particular combination of his surnames and, in the other profession, by a different combination. So he is known as Dr. Luís Z, but he signs his paintings as Luís X dos Y.

It is rather interesting that, contrary to what most people believe, Portuguese law is written in such a way as to permit this wide margin for manoeuvre in the attribution

and use of surnames.⁵ Indeed, if we take into account the family system of the Portuguese middle-classes we can clearly understand the relevance of such a system. Family links are most important, but there is no principle of descent. People have to have the freedom to choose the kinship links they want to activate and those they want to leave dormant. As family name is one of the major ways of identifying families, there has to be a way of manipulating it.

In this process, however, there is a contradiction. Whilst, on the one hand, paternal filiation is given greater symbolical precedence (cf. Pina-Cabral n.d.), the widely prevalent uxorilateral preference in extra-domestic family ties means that one of the mother's surnames often represents the person in a way she deems to fit better with her personal identity.⁶ This contradiction is believed by people to jeopardise their personal worth, but only in a minor way. Thus, it is impolite to ask a person what right she has to her name – although it is equally common to talk behind her back about it.

All this, of course, is complete anathema to the Cantonese, whose view of the family is deeply marked by patrilineality. The predominance of agnatic ties remains unchallenged, even though we may be witnessing today, as a result of urbanisation and of new attitudes to female participation in the labour market, softening of the exclusion of married daughters from family life. This means that Cantonese people are given their father's surname. Moreover, even though Chinese people are so numerous, there are very few Chinese surnames. Most people are called one of the old hundred family surnames (*Baak3 Ga1 Seng3*). Thus, to them, there is something ridiculous and inappropriate in Portuguese surnames, both by reference to the liberality of attribution and to the inventiveness of the names. For example, the last four governors of Macao were called: Chicken Axe; Watermelon; Myrtle Turnip; and Rock Scallop.

Considering this, it is interesting that one of the commonplaces of Portuguese ethnocentrism in Macao should be an incomprehension of the Chinese system of first names. For the Portuguese it is considered very bad taste, and personally humiliating, for a person to receive a name which is not traditional. Preferably, the name should not mean anything and should be attributed in honour of an ascendant lineal kinsperson. Most parents opt for one or two of a very reduced list of traditional first names: Manuel, António, José, João, Pedro, etc.⁷

Contrary to the case of surnames, Portuguese law is very strict in matters of first names. In the name of the 'defence of purity and of the linguistic and onomastic

5 'Surnames are chosen from among those that belong to both parents or to one of the parents of the registered person or to which use they have a right; it being possible, in the case of there being no surnames, to choose one of the names by which the parents are known' (Vilhena de Carvalho 1989: 108, author's translation).

6 It is worth noting that the French system is far more constraining, markedly favouring the father's name. Although attitudes to this are changing in line with changes in gender roles and family practices, opinion polls indicate that there too the symbolic precedence of agnatic links has survived. However, there being less choice, the potential for contradiction between the ideal system and the actual naming practice is lesser than in Portugal. 'Le nom de l'homme conserve sa prépondérance parce que lui sont encore associées des valeurs symboliques du passé, que de nouvelles vertus lui sont parfois attribuées et qu'enfin, pour apparaître comme nom de famille, le nom de la femme doit entrer en concurrence avec le nom de l'homme' (Valetas 1992: 29).

7 As seems to be the case in the United States. Here too the naming of male children is more conservative and less varied than the naming of female children (cf. Lieberman and Bell 1992: 519).

patrimony' and in accordance to a so-called 'art of naming' at which the Portuguese are supposed to excel (Vilhena de Carvalho 1989: 60, 83), the law and its practitioners impose considerable constraints on what a citizen may call his or her children. There are limits to the number of names (*ibid.*: 71); to their spelling (*ibid.*: 76–7); to their relation to the gender of the person named (*ibid.*: 78–9); to political references (*ibid.*: 80); and to what is thought as 'excessive' imagination or eccentricity (*ibid.*: 60, 83). Furthermore, people cannot be called after animals, things or qualities; they cannot have inventive names (*denominações de fantasia*); and they cannot have the same name as their siblings (*ibid.*: 84).

There is a list of possible first names, which prohibits all others except in special circumstances. The process of decision in cases where parents insist on giving the child a name which is not on the list are notoriously protracted. During these years the child is considered to be bureaucratically non-existent, which means that parents lose all rights to child allowance and the child cannot cross borders.

Chinese first names, on the contrary, are fully personal. Considerations such as the astrological moment of a person's birth, or personal life options are an integral part of a person's choice of name. In fact, contrary to Portuguese practice, the name should mean something and have a meaning which carries semantic implications for the bearer. The following are names of acquaintances of mine in Macao: Crystalline Purity; Born in Macao; Grandiose Light; Spring Palace; Pure Unity; Beautiful Lotus; Red (the reference here may either be to Mao or to the auspiciousness of the red colour – that depends on the intensions of the person's parents).

People will readily change their first names if they are not happy with them. Moreover, until the systematic use of public registers became obligatory, most men were known by at least three first names: the one they had received in childhood, the one that the father gave the son at the time of his marriage; and the name that he chose to be known by among his friends. At a moment of crisis in his life, an aged friend of mine decided, for example, to change his name: as he was a man with modern views but was not a communist, he called himself Healthy Criticism.

The Portuguese are very suspicious of people who use different surnames in different circumstances; if a Portuguese person decides to change her first name, this usually means she wants to change her public identity in some very radical way. People whose name has gone out of fashion or has acquired new, potentially comic implications, usually prefer to be known by abbreviations or diminutives rather than change the name. Thus, whilst a person using different surnames in different contexts does not appear ridiculous or suspicious to a Portuguese person, the fact that most young Chinese people in Macao are known by an English or Portuguese first name of their own choice, strikes the Portuguese as absurd. For a Chinese person, on the contrary, the readiness with which a Portuguese person will discard her father's surname in favour of her mother's, or of some personal recombination of surnames, is seen as an indignity and a sign of lack of filial piety.

Interethnic naming

Since the two systems are so different, it is not surprising that dual systems of naming should have developed in Macao: it is common for Portuguese people to have a Chinese name and for Chinese people to have a Portuguese or English first name. The

two processes, however, are not symmetrical, as one might expect from the difference in the naming systems.

The Chinese usually adopt a European alias and an alphabetical transliteration of their Chinese surname. Thus, they will present themselves as John Tam or Philip Tse or Mário Lam. Their full Chinese name remains the official designation, but they identify themselves completely with these forms of treatment, preferring them to be used even in the company of other Chinese. Contrarily, the Portuguese (Macanese or otherwise) who adopts a Chinese name, seldom uses it on formal occasions. The name is rarely more than a gesture of politeness and a way of facilitating reference among the Chinese. A Macanese man emphatically stressed: 'Our name properly speaking is the Portuguese name, the Chinese name is only a convenience.' This same person explained to me why he was not capable of telling me the Chinese names of his friends and family. He did not know them, as he had no use for them. 'If I were to refer to them by that name', he said, 'they would be furious. They would immediately retort, "Have we arrived at 1999 already, that you should be calling me in such a way?"'

During the colonial period, European and Macanese men were usually known to the Chinese by a Chinese name. Many had nicknames. When these were prestigious, the descendants still remember them. Since beards were a prestigious and manly attribute among the Chinese, a number of Macanese told me that their grandparents were called 'Big white beard', 'Black beard' or 'Old man with a beard', etc. Most often, however, people were known by a Chinese transcription of their first name – Ian Lei Gei (Henrique), Eh Moon Do (Edmundo), Ah Baak Do (Alberto), etc. – or less often of their surname – Ka Baak Lo (Cabral), Ma Dei La (Madeira), etc.

I have been told by descendants of some of the oldest Macanese families that, in pre-colonial times, their families had Chinese surnames. It is interesting, however, that they no longer know what these were. The Chinese surnames which people are using today are all quite recent. In some cases they date to the post-war period, but on the whole they were acquired in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, when a Portuguese or a Macanese person has children in Macao, it is common for these to adopt Chinese names in which the first syllable of the Chinese transcription of the father's name is used as a patronym. As the integration with the Chinese middle-class develops, Macanese people rely increasingly in their Chinese names. These – instead of being purely personal identifications, mostly used by others in substitution of the European names that are considered difficult to pronounce and memorise – are now assuming the status of full names. Moreover, people are not exercising the freedom that Portuguese tradition allows in the use of surnames. To the contrary, the new Chinese names are all patrilinear.

This trend was already apparent in the way the Macanese gave Portuguese names to their children. Macanese families are known by patronyms which pass patrilineally.⁸ One speaks of the Manhões, the Rodrigues da Silva, de Sennas Fernandes, the Pancrácios, etc. An older informant claimed that 'In Portugal it is customary to give the mother's surname to the child, not here. In my family this is the way we do it and I think this is the case also with the other families, with few exceptions.' These exceptions are precisely those cases in which the mother was a European Portuguese

8 Thus, the mother's name is forgotten, particularly if she is Chinese. Concerning the 'amnesia' of Chinese names in Macanese genealogies, cf. Pina-Cabral and Lourenço 1992; see also Watson 1986.

(this was considered a prestigious match in colonial days, as it increased the capital of Portugueseness). In other cases, daughters were given the father's surname as well as the mother's, whilst sons were given only the father's surname. Another variant was for there to be two separate male full names in the family, both of which were passed agnatically. In one instance, the great grandfather was called António Ferreira Batalha, the grandfather José Marcos Batalha, the father António Ferreira Batalha, and the son José Marcos Batalha. He claims that, if he had himself had a legitimate son, he would have named him António Ferreira Batalha. As we have seen, such a strict unilaterality in naming is absolutely contrary to Portuguese practice.

Whilst the adoption of Portuguese or English first names by Chinese is not problematic, the adoption of European family names is a different matter. This practice is perhaps the greatest area of embarrassment, for it is characteristically associated with 'passing', that is the adoption by the individual of a different ethnic identity and therefore of a different social persona. In theory, it could function in much the same way as the Portuguese use Chinese names. In practice, it causes feelings of unease on the part of the Chinese and is usually interpreted as disqualifying the person on two counts. He is a renegade, having left his people, but he is also guilty of being without filial piety. It is presumed that a person who does not use his father's name will also fail to keep the ceremonies of ancestral reverence.

The adoption of a Portuguese name can, however, take on two different forms, each with distinct implications. First, there are Portuguese surnames that correspond directly to a Chinese name, e.g. Leong = Leão, Kok = Costa, Vong = Fão. These people may revert, in Chinese circles, to their Chinese name without any risk of personal embarrassment. The adoption of a Portuguese form, however, indicates that they are integrated into Portuguese-speaking society; they can be said to have abandoned the group but they cannot be said to have betrayed their ancestors. I am familiar with persons who, having lived their whole life within the Macanese camp, are now slowly reverting to a Chinese identity.

Second, however, there are those who suppress their Chineseness completely, adopting a Portuguese surname totally and finally. This might be the surname of their godparent, the surname of their wife, the nickname of their father, or the name of a saint (Xavier) or an advocacy of the Virgin (Rosário, Conceição).

This problem of surname change has deep roots in Macanese history. Until 1841, the Qing Dynasty government prohibited all Chinese subjects from converting to Catholicism. This meant that, until then, all Chinese converts had to abandon their Chinese ethnic identity: they cut their hairpiece, symbolising the end of their allegiance to the Qing; they dressed in western clothes; they adopted a Portuguese name; and they were taken in by the Portuguese community. Whatever subsequent discrimination they suffered at the hands of this community depended in good part on the role they played in the life of the city.⁹ This option, however, involved a deep

9 Already in 1958 Graciete Batalha was quite clear about this, stressing also the importance of schooling: 'if a Chinese [*chinês puro*] is baptised, uses a Portuguese name, frequents our schools, assimilates our language and our culture, he passes automatically to be considered by the Macanese as one of them' (1974 [1958]: 9, author's translation). Interestingly, she claims, nevertheless, that they will not be referred to as *filho da terra* (*to2 saang1 jai2*, lit. local born child) by other Macanese. I have established myself that today they are. This divergence must simply be read as a further manifestation of the ambiguity of their belonging, not as indicating change over time.

stigma. In the eyes of Chinese Confucian morality, this person had committed the gravest of sins against filial piety.

At the period of establishment of the colonial era, in 1846, the 'personal parish' of Saint Lazarus was founded in Macao to respond to the needs of the new converts who, in the new political situation, could now be Catholic yet remain ethnically Chinese. In that parish, registers were kept in a mixture of Chinese and Latin and, in contrast to earlier practice, people could now preserve their Chinese surnames, even though they normally received a Catholic name (as converts still do today) in Portuguese or Latin.

Prejudice against Catholics, however, remained strong among the general Chinese community. The following quotation taken from an interview with a Chinese Christian refers to his youth in the 1930s – incidentally he has retained his Chinese patronym –

When I was a child, we used to carry a cross on a chain on our chest. Immediately the other boys would attack me. They attacked me in the sense that they insulted me singing: [here follows a kind of sing-song possibly in Cantonese, which I have failed to identify]. It was just like all children everywhere. No hatred properly speaking. How do you say it: 'You have no fathers, you are men that ...' Yes, because in those days the Chinese government of the Qing Dynasty forbade Chinese converts. They forbade the Chinese to convert to the Catholic religion. In that sense the Chinese who entered the citadel of Macao, were baptised and adopted a European surname: de Assis, Jesus, António, etc. In that sense they committed a grave sin before the other Chinese, it is as if they ignored the existence of their ancestors.

The historical process is here rather compressed and the speaker does not refer to the fact that the problem was not limited to the use of surnames. In those days, the Catholic Church prevented converts from continuing with the rites of ancestral reverence. This, of course, has changed since the Vatican Council, but the sense of shame has also withered, now that so many urbanised Chinese tend to forgo most of these ritual practices. The fact is that the best option for these converts until the end of the colonial period was still to shift ethnic labels, to 'pass', to become Macanese. The result, however, is that they enjoyed only a fragile identity. They were 'discreditable', in Goffman's terms; that is, in their daily lives, they had to assume that their stigma was not known or immediately perceived by those around them (1963: 14). But they had a skeleton in the cupboard, and they knew that the other Macanese families often talked about them behind their backs and that what was described as their lack of 'European blood' or 'European origin' was used as a tool within the process of 'self-betraying stratification' which we identified above.

Interestingly this process of passing does not seem to have finished with the end of the colonial period. It is difficult to know what will happen to the present-day adolescents, but I have met people who are thirty to forty years of age who adopted a Macanese identity, having abandoned their Chinese name. This is usually a response to schooling. If they were sent by their parents to a Portuguese school, they soon found out that they were left outside Chinese circles. In order to integrate into Macanese circles, they were led to opt for a European identity.

Often the situation is compounded by the existence of complex conjugal situations. Macanese men of prestige have always adopted the practice of keeping other women apart from their official wives. This is a practice that, in Macao, is largely associated with the Chinese cultural environment. Illegitimacy could be a stigma, but

it did not have the implications it had in Europe of fatherlessness.¹⁰ These people were usually recognised by their fathers and felt close to them, even although they were at times kept away from the father's main family. Cases of prolonged bigamy are very common. Recently, for example, a house was sold and the proceeds were divided among twelve children. They were all legally registered children of a Macanese man who died formally a bachelor, from four different Chinese mothers.

Cases such as this can lead to complex familial situations, where the reference to name can appear in different forms. For example, a Chinese convert who becomes an important man may well have a Macanese wife. Her children will inherit the father's prestige and fortune. If the man is very important and the wife belongs to a good Macanese family, the children are secure in their ethnic position; they are not very discreditable. Such a man is likely to have had a child from a servant or concubine, however. If the latter were Chinese, the child is likely to retain a Chinese identity and may be named with the father's Chinese name. He is ignored for purposes of inheritance, but the link with the father does not simply vanish. The father is likely to help him in his education, lending him some of his prestige, even if in a clandestine way, for everyone knows whose child he is; the source of his discreditableness is also the main source of his social position. If he comes to marry a Macanese or a European Portuguese woman, he is likely to adopt her family name and their children are likely to be known by the woman's family name.

For a Portuguese researcher, who does not speak Cantonese fluently, it is easier to identify situations of change of ethnic reference in the direction Chinese/Portuguese (Macanese) than in the opposite direction. Some of the most influential people in the colonial period were in this position. Situations of passing from the Macanese/Portuguese world into the Chinese world are less easy to identify. Such transits do occur, I am told, and one of the most influential figures in Hong Kong and Macao is a man who originated in the Eurasian world of Hong Kong and was deeply associated with Macanese society during the first part of his life. Since then, however, he has passed into the Chinese ethnic camp and makes considerable effort to pressure people to 'cover' his passage – that is, to prevent it from being widely divulged.

The study of Catholic marriage records makes one very aware of the complexity of naming situations in which people find themselves. In truth, for some people it is not easy to make a simple identification of ethnic reference. Some of these people 'passed' during their adult lives. Others started their lives in a process of Macanisation but ended their lives in re-Sinification. For example, a certain Mariano Vong da Conceição (where does he get his Portuguese surname?) is the son of a Chinese man (Fernando Vong) and a woman with a Portuguese name (Mariana da Costa). Even although one of his marriage sponsors was Portuguese, he married a Chinese woman. Today the family is classified by all, and considers itself, Chinese.

The following examples of three men show that when people are confronted with an ethnic option, the motives for their decisions are largely imponderable, embedded in their personal histories. These are the sons of Chinese men who emigrated at the turn of the century to South America. Sometime before the war in the Pacific, they brought their South American or half-caste wives and their children back to south China. Because of the background of their mothers, these children had phenotypic

10 'The legal status of a marriage did not determine the status of heirs, who could inherit at their father's will' (Ebrey 1991: 6).

characteristics identifying them as not wholly Chinese. They therefore had an option as to how to resolve the ethnic identification question. All three men are approximately the same age and started adult life in Macao as civil servants, later on moving to the private sector of the economy, albeit at different moments in their lives.

The first man successively married various Chinese ladies, and used throughout his life an anglicised version of his father's name. In spite of working in sectors connected with the Portuguese administration – he often functioned as an intermediary in cross-ethnic business deals – he is considered Chinese by most of those who know him in Macao. The second man is one of three brothers who in childhood used their Chinese father's name and played in a Chinese football team. The one whose story I know best, however, married a Macanese lady. From then on he adopted the ambiguously Hispano-Portuguese nickname by which his father had been known in South America, handing it on to his Lusophone children as a patronym. These children systematically attempt to 'cover' their father's passing. The third man never used his father's Chinese name. The father died when he was a child and his South American mother brought him up in Macao as a Macanese, using her Spanish family name as a surname. He presents himself as full Macanese and, to me at least, he spoke with derision of 'the Chinaman'.

Conclusion

Macao is a place where sociocultural change is very easily observable. It is a border town, dependent for its survival on an equilibrium between political forces which are largely unpredictable and which, over recent decades, have been changing positions. Though for long periods it was a dormant and irrelevant outpost of the Portuguese empire, the winds changed and it became a place for making fast money, and for hard and dangerous living.

The last two decades have seen unprecedented economic and population growth, and the conditions exist for yet deeper changes in the near future. The capital of Portugueseness that yesterday was a matter of life or death for the Macanese, is today losing some of its relevance. People who spent their lives covering up the stigma of 'passing' are now confronted by new uncertainties, for the future of the city is Chinese. At the same time, the illegitimate children of Portuguese and Macanese fathers who entered the Chinese ethnic camp as a means of overcoming prejudice from their legitimate relatives, are now attempting to reclaim their paternity in the Portuguese courts to obtain Portuguese passports with which they may be able to escape in case the People's Republic of China proves incapable of governing Hong Kong and Macao (Santos 1991).

It is not only the Macanese who are changing. As the Chinese middle-class integrates itself into a global culture – by way of modern education, consumerism, and the mass-media – cross-ethnic relations become less contaminated by incomprehension. Furthermore, the perceived threat of 1999 is quite as strongly felt by the Macanese as by the Chinese middle-class. Gradually, the political life of the city has seen the greater participation of the Chinese population.¹¹ It is not to the area of

11 A clear sign of this change, is the election of a pro-democracy member for the Legislative Assembly in 1992, in spite of the strenuous efforts to prevent this undertaken by the conservative sectors of the Chinese community of the city (who have been pro-PRC since 1966/7).

power created by the shadow government of the People's Republic of China that the Chinese middle-class looks to express its fears and press its claims; they look to the formal government controlled until now by the Macanese and Portuguese, that they have in the past largely ignored. On the one hand, this encourages ethnic friction, as it threatens the individual position of Macanese politicians; on the other hand, it favours the creation of an objective convergence between the interests of the Macanese and the Chinese electorate, so diffusing the friction it has stimulated.

A Macanese politician who I asked to describe his family history, kindly agreed to spend long hours discussing it with me, yet he never told me that his grandparents were converts who adopted a Portuguese name; I was told this by other families, who have different skeletons in their own cupboards. Circumstances change, however, and what is today a stigmatising piece of information may tomorrow become a trump card. Two years later, the same politician delivered a speech in the Local Assembly in which he claimed allegiance to the Chinese electorate because he himself 'only has Chinese blood in his veins'.

The Macanese person is thus constantly confronted with 'the embarrassment of limits' to which Goffman referred (1963: 148). I hope I have succeeded in showing that this affects not only the nature of the integration of the Macanese ethnic community, but also the nature of ethnic relations in Macao as a whole. As political, economic and cultural conditions change, so does each person's positioning towards ethnic belonging, both in terms of socialisation and in terms of subsequent strategic aims. As 1999 approaches, the inhabitants of Macao are preparing themselves for a major upheaval in the political, economic and cultural conditions of their lives. It is not only personal dispositions towards cross-ethnic relations that alter; it is the very framework of ethnic differentiation that slowly, as the generations pass, assumes a new form.

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