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PERSPECTIVES FOR THE SPANISH INTERVENTION IN MACAO IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse some essential events concerning the relationship between Spain and Macao in the middle of the 19th century. Macao remained as a privileged spot for the commercial activities of Spain in China after the opening of the international ports agreed upon in the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842. This encouraged Spanish diplomatic representatives to render special attention to the Portuguese enclave. This became the origin of a shocking proposal for the military conquest of Macao and its surrounding territories by one of these representatives, Sinibaldo de Mas. Although this proposal was never taken under consideration, it helps us to better understand the role Macao played in Spanish strategies in China. Years later, Mas participated as a mediator when the Chinese government attempted to regain sovereignty over Macao by paying an economic compensation to Portugal. The involvement of Sinibaldo de Mas in this project has a strong symbolic meaning, making him a key agent in the relations between Spain and Macao in the 19th century.

Resumo

Este artigo propõe analisar alguns acontecimentos fundamentais relacionados com as relações entre Espanha e Macau, em meados do século XIX. Depois da abertura dos portos internacionais, estipulada no Tratado de Nanjing em 1842, Macau ocupava um lugar privilegiado no âmbito das actividades comerciais espanholas na China. Este facto levou a que os representantes diplomáticos espanhóis prestassem especial atenção ao enclave português. Assim, nasceu a proposta da conquista militar de Macau e dos territórios adjacentes por parte de Sinibaldo de Mas. Esta proposta, apesar de nunca ter sido tomada em consideração, revela a importância de Macau na estratégia espanhola para a China. Anos depois, Mas fez de mediador, quando o governo Chinês tentou reaver a soberania sobre Macau, através do pagamento de uma compensação económica a Portugal. A participação de Sinibaldo de Mas neste projecto, tem um forte simbolismo, convertendo-o numa personalidade chave no que diz respeito às relações hispano-macaenses no século XIX.

要約

本稿の目的は、19世紀中葉におけるスペイン＝マカオ間の関係について、いくつかの重要な出来事を分析することにある。1842年の南京条約による国際貿易港の開港以後も、マカオは中国でのスペインの商業活動において特権的な港であり続けた。それによりスペインの外交代表者たちはこのポルトガルの植民地に特別な関心を寄せざるを得なかった。さらにこの状況は外交代表者のひとりであるシニバルド・デ・マスによるマカオとその周辺の軍事的領有に対する衝撃的な提唱の原因となった。この提唱は決して前向きに検討されたわけではないが、我々が中国でのスペインの外交戦略においてマカオが担った役割をより良く理解するのに役立つ。数年ののち、マスは清朝政府がマカオに対する主権をポルトガルに経済的な見返りを支払うことで取り戻そうとした際に、仲介者としての役割を果たした。シニバルド・デ・マスのこの計画への関与は、19世紀のスペイン＝マカオ間の関係において彼が重要人物となったという点で、非常に象徴的な意味を持つと考えられる。

Keywords:

Macao, Spain, Zongli yamen, Philippines, Sinibaldo de Mas, Robert Hart

Macau, Espanha, Zongli yamen, Filipinas, Sinibaldo de Mas, Robert Hart

マカオ、スペイン、フィリピン諸島、シニバルド・デ・マス、ロバート・ハート

1. Macao in the Spanish horizon

By late 1849 the Spanish Secretary of State in Madrid received a proposal for the military takeover of the Portuguese possession of Macao. It was signed by Sinibaldo de Mas, the Plenipotentiary Minister for Spain in China at that time, whose main purpose in Asia was to negotiate a treaty of friendship and commerce with the Qing empire. In the report, sent precisely from Macao on the 15th of September of the same year, the main Spanish representative in China didn't just describe the interest and benefits the conquest of the Portuguese *entrepôt* would provide to the Spanish crown, but also suggested the adventurous possibility for carrying out a cautionary armed intervention that would allow Spain to widen the territories under its control. Despite the fact the Spanish authorities in Madrid never paid too much attention to the report – it is even possible that the Secretary of State never read it – and took no step, it is actually one of the best symptoms of

the dubious and indefinite role that Spain played in the process of foreign aggressions in mid-nineteenth century China, as well as of the importance of Macao to the Spanish envoys in Qing China.

Sinibaldo de Mas was not a typical diplomat. He was a complex and defiant character who took part in some of the most crucial events that characterized the relations between China and Spain during the first decades after the Treaty of Nanjing (1842). Throughout his life, Sinibaldo de Mas always kept a very strong empathy with Portugal. He is one of the most important representatives of the Iberist thought, a current that aimed to unite the monarchies of Spain and Portugal and that, at that time, was quite influential amongst the Portuguese intellectual and political elites. In 1851 Sinibaldo de Mas published *A Iberia* in Lisbon, a decidedly propagandistic work prefaced by Latino Coelho. It had been written two years before in Macao, where Mas had benefited from a solid network of contacts, including some of the highest hierarchs of the Portuguese colony. This allowed him to be sensible to the political and economic evolution of Macao and to have access to privileged information usually denied to the majority of Europeans.

Mas was not, however, the only Spanish diplomat who enjoyed a privileged relationship with Macao. The first Spanish General Consulate in China was established in November 1853 in that city and, significantly, the person assigned to occupy that charge was Nicasio Cañete, former Spanish Consul in Lisbon for many years. Moreover, for decades, the only Spanish companies to be found in China were based in Macao, and this port remained the most important destination for the Manila trade on the Chinese coast until the late 19th century. The rising of international ports like Shanghai and Hong Kong profoundly affected the evolution of maritime routes and the development of commercial networks in East Asia, but the Spanish merchants kept their loyalty to their old ports, Macao amongst them. This was significantly one of the reasons mentioned by Sinibaldo de Mas in his 1849 project to illustrate how convenient it would be to conquer the Portuguese enclave.

Actually, from the beginning of its surrendering to Portuguese control, Macao took an outstanding position in the China trade in the Philippines. As it had been for hundreds of years, since the beginning of the 19th century the Chinese manufactures reaching Manila in Spanish vessels had usually been shipped from that Portuguese port. Guangzhou became a secondary destination, according to the decrease of agents from the Royal Company of the Philippines there. Finally, in 1834 the Company ceased its activities and two years later there were no Spanish residents in Guangzhou.¹ There-

¹ To read about the evolution of Spanish traders in Guangzhou, see Morse, H. B., *Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1636-1834*, Taipei, Chengwen, 1975, vol. III,

fore, during the following decades Xiamen was the only port remaining as a stronghold for the Spanish commerce, although far from the importance of Macao and darkened by the illegal involvement of Spaniards in the coolie trade there. The opening of international ports agreed upon in the Treaty of Nanjing represented no challenge to this situation. Not even Hong Kong – by far the most emergent commercial metropolis since the mid-1840s – managed to overcome Macao as the main commercial *entrepôt* for Spain.²

In the middle of the 19th century, the Spanish activities in the China coast gathered around three different yet intimately related spheres: diplomats, trade and missionaries. Macao assumed an indisputable role in the first two. Only the Spanish missions did escape the gravitational strength of the Portuguese territory, since the majority of the Spanish missionaries had their field of action in the province of Fujian. Therefore Macao reasonably occupied a privileged spot in the mind of the most part of Spaniards who maintained direct links with China in that period. In the next pages I will focus on the aforementioned diplomatic sphere of action, since it is the most evocative and the one which best characterizes the relationship between Spain and Macao in the decades that followed the opening of the treaty ports in China. I will specifically analyze two fundamental events regarding that relationship, both commanded by the same individual: the proposal of conquest elaborated by Sinibaldo de Mas in 1849 mentioned above, as well as his mediation, almost two decades later, in the negotiations between China and Portugal to return Macao to the Chinese sovereignty in 1868.

2. A diplomat's search for an empire

Sinibaldo de Mas was a peculiar character. He went beyond the usual Spanish observer of Qing China. He was indeed a strong-willed representative of mid-nineteenth century European ideals and values. From his early youth, Mas had studied several languages, which always allowed him to accommodate into the international circles of the societies he visited.³ His

pp. 162-163, 173; vol. IV, pp. 187-1898; Morse, H. B., *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* (Taipei, Chengwen, 1978), vol. I, pp. 71-73; and Fu, Lo-Shu, *A Documentary Chronicle of Sino-western Relations (1644-1820)*, Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1966, p. 374.

² According to the statistics Sinibaldo de Mas sent to Madrid in 1855 about the number of ships and embarked cargo in the Chinese coast, the most visited ports by the Spanish traders were, in the following order: Macao, Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Xiamen. See Mas, Sinibaldo, *La Chine et les puissances chrétiennes*, Paris, Hachette, 1861, vol. II, p. 412.

³ The only complete biography of Sinibaldo de Mas was published by Homs i Guzmán, Antoni, *Sinibald de Mas*, Barcelona, Edicions de Nou Art Thor, 1990; although containing some major mistakes, it offers a very complete vision of the school years of this character.

voyages throughout the European empires strongly influenced his colonial ideal, particularly the implementation of the British models of representation of the Orient.⁴ Mas was always in favour of a firm relationship with the Chinese authorities (a position which not always was possible for an empire in crisis, such as Spain) and unconditionally defended the idea of a shared colonial enterprise with all the Euro-American nations in China. Considering this, he was “the least Spanish” of all the agents sent by the Government of Madrid to the Chinese coast. He was also the one who distanced the most from the conservative plans advocated by most of Spanish diplomats. Like other great representatives of the colonial principles in China, he defended the need to introduce the modern values of European civilization – reason, universality and liberalism – to the Chinese officials with whom he had contact. For all these reasons Mas is, without a doubt, the most outstanding individual in the field of Sino-Spanish relations in the 19th century.

Nevertheless, Mas is not a well-known figure in the context of the Sino-European relations. He had a very versatile personality in many fields such as literature, linguistics and even music, in addition to his diplomatic career. In his younger days he developed an interest in translating and writing drama and poetry and, later, studied law, economics, politics and geography. Asia became then a constant presence for the rest of his life. He led a vast diplomatic mission (1834-1842), taking him to Greece, Turkey, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Persia, India and the Philippines. His mission consisted on gathering governmental, commercial, political and military information and data about all the countries he visited. As a result of this voyage, he published in 1844 an essential work for the development of Philippine Studies in Spain entitled *Informe sobre el Estado de las Islas Filipinas en 1842*.

In 1843 he started his first trip to China and, after a short stay in Manila, he reached the coast of the province of Guangdong in early 1844. One year later he published in Macao *L'Ideographie*, an attempt to create a universal writing system inspired on the Chinese language and script, which he had already began to study. Still in Macao he wrote one of the works that gave him most recognition, *A Iberia*.⁵ He returned to the Peninsula in 1845, where

4 We must not forget that China, especially from the first Opium War on, was part of the 19th-Century construction of “the Orient”. About the question of Orientalism in the historical representation of China, see Dirlik, Arif, “Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism”, *History and Theory*, vol. 35, n. 4, 1996, pp. 95-117.

5 It first appeared in 1851, translated to Portuguese. The first Spanish edition was published in 1853, however without the name of the author; only in 1854 did his name appear. Concerning the importance of his stay in China when writing *A Iberia* and the development of his Iberian ideal, see the article by Meireles Pereira, Maria da Conceição, “Sinibaldo de Más: el diplomático español partidario del iberismo”, *Anuario de Derecho Internacional*, n° XVII, 2001, pp. 351-370, that, even though containing a few biographical mistakes, it identifies the group of Iberists Mas met in Macao.

he continued to publish several literary works. That same year, he initiated his second trip to China, lasting until 1851. As a result of this second voyage and the contacts he made during his stay, Mas wrote three books about China in French, all of which were published in Paris, the most important one being *La Chine et les Puissances Chrétiennes* (1861). He not only was the most prolific Spanish writer about the Chinese world and East Asian countries but also the most authoritative thinker on these issues. After a few years without occupying diplomatic charges, between 1864 and 1868 he still made a third travel to China, in which he managed to sign the Sino-Spanish Treaty of Friendship and Commerce. At the same time he succeeded to connect himself even more to the city of Macao.

Although nowadays Sinibaldo de Mas is not mentioned very often, he was the most preeminent Spanish character of his time in China. He was capable to formulate global analyses deserving the attention and the respect of contemporary experts from nations like the Great Britain, France or Portugal, analyses to which Spain was completely oblivious.⁶ The *Revue Orientale et Américaine* commented on his work *La Chine*: “it is a substantial collection, in which we recognize the erudite diplomat concerned with achieving new facts to mark a real progress in the scholar world.”⁷ Regarding the same work, another contemporary French magazine remarked: “Due to the events or authority of the information, the book deserves to be remarked by the curious and jealous spirits for accuracy.”⁸ But it was in Portugal where he was more acclaimed and appreciated. In 1864, the Portuguese diplomat António Feliciano Marques Pereira, published a column about him in the Macao magazine *Ta-Ssi-Yang-Kuo*, of which he was the editor:

“Mister Mas was able to deserve an even bigger reputation in Europe of very knowledgeable in the matters of China, ever since the first

6 John Bowring defined him as a “very understanding and versatile” person. There were also more critical opinions, such as Robert Hart (although his view changed through the years), who in his personal diary characterized him as a ridiculous man. See Smith, R., Fairbank, J. K., Bruner, K. F. (eds.), *Robert Hart and China's Early Modernization. His Journals, 1863-1866*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 190.

7 Original text: “c’est un recueil substantiel, mais dans lequel on reconnaît plutôt le diplomate appréciateur que l’érudit préoccupé de consigner des faits nouveaux, de nature à signaler un progrès réel dans le domaine du monde savant”, in *Revue Orientale et Américaine*, vol. VII, Paris, 1862, pp. 326-327.

8 Original text: “Par les faits ou l’autorité des renseignements, le livre [...] mérite d’être signalé aux esprits curieux et jaloux de l’exactitude”, in *L’Année littéraire et dramatique*, vol. IV, Paris, 1862, p. 371. Other compliments on the work of Mas can be found in *Revue nationale et étrangère, politique, scientifique et littéraire*, vol. VII, Paris, 1861, pp. 159-160, which states that: “Les deux volumes de M. de Mas, composés avec une méthode excellente, écrits dans un style simple et clair qui ne vise jamais à l’effet, nous ont paru d’une lecture tout à la fois très-intéressante et très-instructive”; or in *Revue critique des livres nouveaux*, vol. XXV, Paris, 1857, pp. 364-365.

time he came to this Empire as a Minister. His most recent book *La Chine et les Puissances Chrétiennes*, maybe the most regarded work of many – and there are quite a few – dedicated to this matter by occasion and after the war of 1860, would be enough to justify the fact that His Excellence is very much regarded in this area.”⁹

3. In the footsteps of Ferreira do Amaral

The life of Sinibaldo de Mas was linked to Macao from his very first visit to the Chinese coast, although it was in his second stay that he consolidated his relation with this city. The fact that his proposal to take over Macao was written just three weeks after the death of governor João Maria Ferreira do Amaral on the 22nd of August in 1849 has a very strong meaning. Even more significant was his role in this affair as a mediator between the authorities of Macao and the Chinese officers. When Ferreira do Amaral decided to expel the Chinese customs administration and refused to continue paying the annual tax that the Portuguese authorities had been reimbursing for three centuries, the governor was murdered (according to Chinese sources, as a result of a farmers’ rebellion) and his corpse was found beheaded and without one of his hands.¹⁰ Sinibaldo de Mas, already the Plenipotentiary Minister of Spain, successfully mediated and negotiated with the Chinese authorities, so they would return Amaral’s head and hand to the Macao Government.¹¹

In his proposal to occupy Macao, Mas appears as a heir of the determined policies adopted by Ferreira do Amaral, who had sought to end once and for all the administrative duality of the Portuguese possession. As I will try to show, the Spanish diplomat’s report clearly follows some of the decisions taken by the deceased Portuguese governor. Not in vain, the report sent to the Spanish Secretary of State on the 7th of September of 1849 starts by mentioning the death of Amaral and the problems it created to Portugal,

9 Original text: “[O] Sr. Mas soube merecer ainda mais particularmente uma reputação europeia de muito versado nas coisas da China, desde que veio a primera vez a este Império na qualidade de Ministro. O seu último livro “La Chine et les Puissances Chrétiennes”, obra talvez a mais festejada de quantas –e não têm diso poucas– se dedicaram ao assunto por ocasião e despois da guerra de 1860, bastaria a justificar plenamente o conceito em que S. Ex^a é tido nesta especialidade”, in *Ta-Ssi-Yang-Kuo*, 11th of August of 1864, cf. Vasconcelos de Saldanha, António. “Aproximar Macau e a China num entendimento amistoso”, by Vasconcelos de Saldanha, A., by Dos Santos Alves, J. M. (eds.). *Estudos de história do relacionamento Luso-chinês. Séculos XVI-XIX*, Instituto Português do Oriente, 1996, pp. 328-329.

10 Conceição, Lourenço Maria da, *Macao entre Dois Tratados com a China, 1862-1877*, Macao, Instituto cultural de Macao, 1988, pp. 50-57.

11 See Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España [hereafter AMAE], H2361, n^o 140, Macao, 14th of November of 1849.

admitting even “the impossibility of Macao to continue to be under the rule of the foresaid Power [Portugal]”.¹²

In the first part of his report, the Spaniard tried to elucidate the opportunities Macao could provide to the Philippine trade, showing at the same time how it was an enclave with a poor economic balance for the Portuguese government. Consequently, he warns that in the near future there were only two options for the colony: either to become the territory of another western Power or to return to Chinese sovereignty. In the first part of his analysis Sinibaldo de Mas sets aside England, because it already had its own colony in Hong Kong, as well as France, the United States and the Netherlands, because of a lack of interest or resources. According to his point of view, the only possibility for Macao was to go under Spanish rule, a project that could be fulfilled with no difficulty. As a justification he pointed out several reasons.

According to Mas, if that territory had to leave the Portuguese sovereignty, the people of Macao themselves would prefer to be Spaniards, because of linguistic resemblances and the proximity to the Philippine Islands, which could become an ally for the people of Macao. To further confirm his ideas, Sinibaldo de Mas points out that, little after the death of Ferreira do Amaral, the President of the Council of the Government of Macao himself offered “to write to the Viceroy of Canton proposing that Macao would go under the protection of Spain”, hence showing the inclination of the Macanese to accept the Spanish flag.¹³

Mas also states that with the assimilation of Macao under the Spanish domain, the Philippine commerce would improve to a great extent. Furthermore, it would also become a shelter for the Spaniards residing in the Philippines in case of a revolt in the colony and a strategic spot in case of a war with England. Moreover, he considers Macao “a much more colourful, comforting, healthy and fresh place for the summer than Canton or Hong Kong”, which in case of a new armed conflict between China and the European powers would become an allure bringing important fiscal profits to the Spanish government.

His proposal was not limited only to the territory of Macao, but it also involved the conquest of the adjacent island of Xiangshan – “*Ançãõ*”, “*Amçãõ*” or “*Ansam*” in some of the Portuguese sources of that period, a territory that

12 AMAE, H1445, nº 116, Macao, 15th of September of 1849. All the notes on the following pages will be extracted from this very document.

13 Even though Mas does not mention his name in this document, Bishop Jerónimo José de Mata was occupying the position of President of the Council at that time. In the introduction of his work *A Iberia*, Mas described de Mata as an enthusiastic Iberist.

was several times larger than Hong Kong with a population of half a million, as he himself remarked quoting Chinese sources of that time –. In the light of Sinibaldo de Mas's bizarre interpretation of the clause of the most favoured nation, included in all the international treaties signed by China from 1843 on, the taking of the island by the Spanish troops would be regarded as legitimate by the Qing Government, just as the British takeover of Hong Kong had been accepted:

“The Chinese Government has given an island to Great Britain and has written several documents and has spoken to us officially, that all the Europeans are equal regarding the privileges and presences. So being, if England possesses an island, why should they not give us one other?”

He also states that these military actions would not be a challenge for Spain, since the Spanish troops would find no armed resistance in Xiangshan.¹⁴ If a war against China finally broke out, Mas added, Spain would be, military speaking, undoubtedly superior and no foreign country would support the Qing government. Moreover, Sinibaldo de Mas still speculated about the possibility of a full-fledged military attack along the Chinese coast to defeat the Qing resistance:

“I assure Your Excellency we could capture both war and commercial ships crossing the seas and rivers of China (which would bring benefit to all foreign countries). We could bomb and burn Canton and all the cities of the coast, starting from Hainan and reaching Tien-tsing [Tianjin] by the doors of Sequim and in the end compel the Mandarins to capitulate and to receive payment and a due compensation for the expenses. Believe me Your Excellency when I say there is no overstatement regarding this matter.”

Without taking into consideration the unusual historical circumstances that stirred up Mas' proposal, these ideas about the taking of Macao and the invasion of Xiangshan are difficult to justify. The Spanish government

¹⁴ It was not the first time a Spanish representative would boast about the invasion of the Chinese territory. Almost from the very beginning of the Spanish presence in the Philippines in the XVI century, there was talk about the possibility to conquer China following the same strategies they had applied in South America. See Ollé Rodríguez, Manel, *La Empresa de China: de la Armada Invencible al Galeón de Manila*, Barcelona, El Acantilado, 2002 and by the same author, *La Invención de China: percepciones y estrategias filipinas respecto a China durante el siglo XVI*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2000.

acted with extreme caution in China and one of its political premises was neutrality and no belligerence. At first sight, it is surprising that a Spanish diplomat would advocate even the possibility to carry out any kind of military engagement, not to mention the suggestion that the Spanish navy could bomb the whole Chinese coast, from Tianjin all the way to the south.

However, we can better understand Mas' proposal if we take into consideration the political events that motivated it. Although it was an internal document for the government in Madrid, it is most certainly a reaction to the death of Amaral. Mas repeatedly declared himself to be an admirer of the former governor's stern and defiant policies towards the Chinese government. Actually, Sinibaldo de Mas regularly kept a strict and intransigent attitude regarding the Chinese authorities and always reclaimed for Spain the same treatment given to the great European powers. In this particular case, his proposal closely follows Amaral's plans in two fundamental points. Firstly, it turns Macao into a completely legal colony with real sovereignty, in this case under the Spanish rule, pushing aside the dual administrative model that had existed in Macao for centuries. Secondly, not only does he propose to widen the territory but also to implement a tax policy that, according to Mas, would bring large and necessary benefits to the Spanish crown, as a way to finance the eventual Spanish administration in Macao:

“Including the population of Macao, it will result in half a million people. In Spain the people pay about 4 pesos fortes per year and in England about 11 to 12. But supposedly to accomplish a charitable and popular domination, would we only ask 1 peso in Hiang-shang [Xiangshan] per inhabitant, it would still be a rent of 10 million reales for the Government that possessed it, which is more than enough money to cover the coming expenses.”

We should remember that, in accordance with the instructions received from Lisbon, Ferreira do Amaral had propelled the application of a compulsory tax for all the inhabitants of Macao, including the Chinese who until then had been outside the Portuguese jurisdiction.¹⁵ Sinibaldo de Mas, without any doubt, took this measure into consideration while elaborating his report. Therefore, the Spanish diplomat's plan doesn't stop with the possibilities of a conquest. He had in mind an ambitious project to replace the Portuguese administration and expand the territories under its control, in order to reactivate the increasingly waning Spanish colonial network in the

15 Wu, Zhiliang, *Segredos da Sobrevivência. História Política de Macau*, Macau, Associação de Educação de Adultos de Macao, 1999, pp. 95-96.

Pacific Ocean. Nevertheless, the perception from Madrid was very different. His letter received no significant response whatsoever and there are even no margin notes from the secretary that archived the document. Sinibaldo de Mas was a diplomat representing an empire already vanished.

4. Sinibaldo de Mas and the purchase of Macao

Even though his proposal was received with silence, Mas kept attentive to the situation of Macao for the rest of his life. In the following years, although he didn't formulate comparable projects, he dedicated many thoughts and reports to the Portuguese *entrepôt*, in some occasions reclaiming again a Spanish military intervention. In 1866, for example, he predicted harsh times for the city, advancing the possibility that warships built in Europe and bought by the Chinese government could be lined up together to block the port of Macao. This, he observed, could mean the ruin of the city and its obvious reclaim by the Chinese army. Under such developments, the Spanish Plenipotentiary indicated that it would not be "very honourable for Spain, Portugal's neighbour in Asia and Europe, to witness the events impassively".¹⁶ The prediction made by Mas did not come to realize, but a year and a half later his will to intervene in the future of Macao became true, although in a way he hardly would have ever expected.

Sinibaldo de Mas was certainly the diplomat most favorable to this kind of ideas, but he wasn't the only one, since we can find analogous projects from other Spanish representatives. In 1859, for example, the Spanish Consul-General in China Nicasio Cañete, based in Macao, advocated in favour of an alliance between Portugal, the Netherlands and Spain to pressure the Chinese government and sign a treaty similar to the one that the great powers had signed in Tianjin six months before. Despite the fact he was a diplomat with a remarkably moderate personality, Cañete, who actually credited the idea to the Plenipotentiary of Portugal, proposed to the Secretary of State to send a few gunboats from the Spanish navy for that purpose:

"I believe it is a very insightful idea and I do believe that it would produce the result we are aiming for if the representatives of these three nations got to the point of presenting themselves to Shanghai, or as a last resource to Peiho [Beihai], even bearing only two warships each. This would still be a great force, counting on the moral

16 AMAE, H2362, n. 156, Macao, 25th of April of 1866.

support that the Plenipotentiaries of other powers would provide if needed. So being we could very well overcome any difficulty or antagonism from the Chinese government.”¹⁷

The new developments in the Opium War – as the Anglo-French troops were transiently defeated in the hands of the northern Chinese armies – quashed these prospects and Cañete shifted to a more conservative stance, advocating the Spanish neutrality under the possibility of any military confrontation.

We find an even more similar example to Sinibaldo de Mas’ proposal in a document written by the alternate Consul in Xiamen in 1861 referring to the island of Taiwan.¹⁸ He assured that it would be convenient for Spain to “regain” the island, since it would bring important monetary profits, representing at the same time a highly strategic site between the Philippines and the Chinese coast. Considering that the Qing forces there consisted only on seven hundred “undisciplined and badly organized” men, according to this Consul it would not be hard for Spain to control the island:

“If Spain made a few sacrifices, with a thousand men only and two or three warships, we could be the absolute owners of the Island. This domain would bring us numerous benefits in every way and we would particularly avoid the presence of new neighbours constantly threatening the Philippine Archipelago.”

The difference between what happened with Sinibaldo de Mas’ project years before was that in this occasion the secretary who read the report thought that the information from the consul was worth taking into consideration by the Overseas Minister and redirected the report. Even so, the consul’s ideas had no effect.

Nevertheless, a few years later Sinibaldo de Mas would once again assume an important role in the Sino-Spanish interactions, deeply connecting his name to Macao and Portugal. During his third trip to China, Sinibaldo

17 “Muy acertada creo esta idea y estoy en la persuasión de que había de producir el resultado que nos prometemos, si llegaran a presentarse en Shanghai, y en último extremo en el Peiho [Beihai], los representantes de estas tres naciones, aún cuando cada uno de ellos no contase sino con dos buques de guerra; pues con esta fuerza y con el apoyo moral que en caso necesario nos prestarían los Plenipotenciarios de las demás potencias, pudiera muy bien vencerse cualquier dificultad ó repugnancia de parte del gobierno chino”, in AMAE, TR141-003, nº 6, Macao, 13 de Enero de 1859.

18 AMAE, H2362, n. 5, Emuy, February 1st of 1861. We have not identified the name of the author of the letter, who briefly occupied the charge of Consul in Xiamen.

de Mas acted as the head negotiator for the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between Spain and China, signed in October 1864. The signing of this treaty, which benefited from the favourable political circumstances of that time, became a personal success for Mas, who a year later was even allowed to reside in Beijing, due to a secret clause that turned Spain into the fourth foreign nation to possess a legation in the Qing capital.¹⁹ However, by the middle of 1867, due to complex and unclear circumstances, the relationship between Mas and his superiors in Madrid deteriorated to the extent that he renounced his position as Plenipotentiary Minister, stopped acting as a diplomat and had to abandon the Spanish legation in Beijing in 1868.

These circumstances favoured the plans that Robert Hart, the Inspector General of the Chinese Maritime Customs, had for Macao. These plans had been previously accepted by the Prince Gong, the main political figure of the time in China and the head of the Zongli yamen, the institution responsible for the management and regulation of the relations between China and the foreign countries. In 1862, after years of fruitless negotiations with the Macao authorities, the representatives of the Qing government almost came to an agreement to sign a treaty between China and Portugal that would normalize the status of Macao. However, this treaty was never signed and its policies were never implemented.²⁰ The relationship between both parties was locked once again and Lisbon decided that the *status quo* was to be kept, since they knew the Qing state would never renounce to the sovereignty of Macao. Likewise, with the lack of a friendly agreement in the planned terms, the Zongli yamen decided that the only alternative to solve the situation of Macao was to take the initiative in the negotiations. Therefore, it was necessary to start a new type of strategy to resolve the problem of Macao.

Robert Hart is one of the most known and outstanding characters in the network of cultural relations between China and the foreign countries throughout the 19th century. He is a model representative of the imperial project that the great western powers were unfolding in China. With his extraordinary knowledge of Chinese language and culture he became a loyal official to the Chinese government and gained the trust of his (Chinese) superiors. Hart designed and taught characteristically western models of organisation. The solutions he proposed fitted the requirements of the international system of relationships that the western colonial powers were trying

19 About the Spanish treaty of 1864 and the secret clause that stipulated the establishment of a temporary delegation in Beijing, see Martínez-Robles, David, *La participación española en el proceso de penetración occidental en China: 1840-1870*, Barcelona, Institut Universitari d'Història Jaume Vicens Vives, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2007; Doctoral thesis available on the following site: <http://www.tesisenxarxa.net/TDX-0813107-162929/>.

20 See Conceição, *Macao entre Dois Tratados com a China*, pp. 17-26.

to impose in all the continents. The best example is his attempt to resolve the situation of Macao: he suggested a plan for the recovery of that port consisting on a monetary compensation in exchange for the definitive abandonment of any Portuguese claim on that territory, thus taking advantage of the economical difficulties that the Portuguese administration was facing. Hart's proposal was well accepted by Prince Gong and the Zongli yamen. Besides the monetary payment, Hart had in mind that the negotiations for the transference would be held directly with the Lisbon government, discharging any contact with the Macanese authorities, with which there was a vast history of misunderstandings and hostility.²¹

To hold the negotiations with the Portuguese government, the Zongli yamen needed a mediator with diplomatic experience and capable of negotiating with foreign countries. Sinibaldo de Mas' exit from the Spanish diplomatic party at that time turned out exceptionally convenient. He was a well-known figure among the foreign community, and Robert Hart and Prince Gong had kept important contacts with him years before. By the end of 1867 the first conversations between Hart and Mas were held. Mas kept valuable contacts with the Portuguese government. Latino Coelho, who was a deep supporter of Iberist ideas with a heavy political relevance and who in 1868 had become the Minister of the Navy and Overseas, had written the earnest foreword of Mas' work *A Iberia* and had maintained a strong relationship with him.²² Besides, the Spanish agent had talked to Hart about his relationship with another relevant Iberist he had met in Macao several years before and to whom Mas put all his hopes, Carlos José Caldeira, stepbrother of José Maria Caldeira do Casal Ribeiro, who had been Minister of Foreign Affairs between May 1866 and January 1868.²³

Thus, in the middle of 1868, after reaching a generous economic agreement with the Zongli yamen, Sinibaldo de Mas secretly left China towards Europe bearing imperial credentials (*guoshu*) authorizing him to negotiate in behalf of the Chinese government.²⁴ Notwithstanding, Mas died in Madrid little after his arrival, in October 1868 and so the mission was aborted and

21 For a deep analysis of the attempt to purchase Macao planned by Hart and the Zongli yamen, which we will describe in the following paragraphs, see Vasconcelos, "Aproximar Macau e a China num entendimento amistoso", and Martínez-Robles, *España en el proceso de penetración occidental en China, 1840-1870*, pp. 299-321.

22 Meireles, "Sinibaldo de Más: el diplomático español partidario del Iberismo", pp. 357-368.

23 *Ibid.*; Fairbank, Bruner, Matheson, *The I. G. in Peking*, vol. I, p. 46.

24 There is a copy of the credentials that named Mas an agent of the Chinese government in the Archive of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 01, 22, 5, 5, 1 (*Aomen dang*), "Communication of the Credentials for Portugal, 5th month of the 7th year of the Tongzhi era" (July of 1868).

Macao's situation remained with no solution for decades, until the signing of the Lisbon Protocol and the Treaty between Portugal and China, in 1887. In 1891, Hart talked again about the possibility to revive "the old 'de Mas project'",²⁵ and there were even negotiations with a few representatives of the Portuguese government. But Portugal made it quite clear that it would never sell Macao, nor any of its colonies. It was the last attempt to fulfill the mission that Sinibaldo de Mas wasn't able to complete in 1868.²⁶

Conclusions

The strained opening of the international ports after the signature of the Treaty of Nanjing did not challenge the pre-eminence of the former traditional trading spots for the Spanish merchants in China: Macao continued to be the main port for the China-Manila trade, thus maintaining its core position in the thoughts of the Spanish government as well as of its representatives in China. It is in this context that the report written by Sinibaldo de Mas about the possibilities of Spain assuming the control of Macao and the island of Xianshan must be understood.

Macao is the place where the Iberist ideas of Sinibaldo de Mas took a much more mature form, as shown in the publication of *A Iberia* years later, a work written precisely during his stay in China and which was well received mainly in Portugal. In the introduction of *A Iberia*, Mas admits that he reached the conclusion that it was necessary to unite both Spanish and Portuguese crowns during conversations with some important intellectual and political characters from Macao. This way, his letter about the Spanish takeover of Macao had its grounds in the Iberist thought, which Sinibaldo de Mas explicitly defended in some of the paragraphs of this work.

That intellectual position allows Mas to analyze the Macao situation from a global perspective. His ideas about the Iberian Union let him to cross a significant frontier in the political background of that time such as the concept of *nation*. Mas does not analyze the situation of Macao – nor of China in general – from a Spanish perspective, even though he is the main Spanish diplomat in China at that time. It's not a coincidence that the first edition of *A Iberia* appeared in Portugal, or that Mas published his main

25 Chen Xiafei, Han Rongfang (eds.). *Archives of China's Imperial Maritime Customs: confidential correspondence between Robert Hart and James Duncan Campbell, 1874-1907*, Pekín, Foreign Languages Press, 1990-1992, vol. II, p. 1276.

26 Regarding the development of the project to purchase Macao after Sinibaldo de Mas died, see Vasconcelos, "Aproximar Macau e a China num entendimento amistoso", pp. 381-391.

works about China in France. His ideals were not restricted to a Spanish point of view, nor circumscribed to national perspectives; actually many of his works on China, more celebrated abroad than in Spain, testify that Sinibaldo de Mas analyzed East Asian realities from a characteristically European perspective. This is evident in the vigorous and even belligerent spirit of some of his actions and decisions as a diplomat in China, as the report analysed in this paper shows. Sinibaldo de Mas is a strong advocate of the idea of the West, which he understands as a unitary body of nations sharing common goals and strategies to carry out the colonial enterprise in China. It makes sense, then, that in his interactions with the Chinese authorities he followed a series of premises that adjusted to the intellectual colonial enterprise raised by imperial powers like the Great Britain, and that at the same time he opposed the instructions he received from his own government in Madrid.

In this sense, Mas is one of the actors that allowed the pedagogical project of imperialism become a reality in China.²⁷ Although he is not a figure of the same relevance as other characters in this pedagogical project, such as Thomas Wade or the above mentioned Robert Hart, Sinibaldo de Mas assumes repeatedly and consistently the pedagogic enterprise, which imposed on China very specific ways of understanding and categorizing the world. For example, Sinibaldo de Mas demanded to bring to an end the use of the imperial seal in his official negotiations with the Chinese authorities: to ask for the emperor's signature instead of the imperial seal was a symbolic but undissimulated way to introduce China into the international principles that ruled the relationships between Western "civilized" countries. In other words, it was a pedagogical performance that would contribute to make the country abandon the "barbarian" ways – as the ethnocentric discourse of that time would represent it – that had regulated its relationship with the foreign countries in the past in order to let China become a part of the community of "civilized nations", to use the words Mas himself mentioned a few times.²⁸ To him, as well as to other representatives defending the European colonial ideas, the imperial signature was as crucial as the notion of equality between nations or even as the idea of the universal Law.

The intervention of Sinibaldo de Mas in the negotiations to purchase Macao in 1868 represents an exceptional recognition of his person by the Chinese government, which had been made to accept not only the practical

27 The concept of *Pedagogy of Imperialism* is taken from Hevia, James, *English Lessons. The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth Century China*, Durham, Hong Kong, Duke University Press, Hong Kong University Press, 2003.

28 AMAE, H1445, Macao, the 10th of August of 1849.

demands of the great Western powers but also their own theoretical dimension: the opening of international ports, the payment of compensations, the residence of foreigners in Beijing and so on, brought deep institutional and jurisdictional changes, showing that the Chinese state had assimilated the theoretic principles that were radically changing itself and that were leading its entry into the colonial network dominated by those great powers in Asia. This way, from the hand of one of the greatest pedagogues of those principles, Robert Hart, and from one of its most attentive apprentices, the Prince Gong, Sinibaldo de Mas assumed a main role in this civilizing enterprise. Although his sudden death put a stop to this project, his own participation makes him one of the most distinct figures of this period.

For all of this, during the first decades that followed the treaty of Nanjing in 1842, Macao became the reflection of the Spanish position inside the new international community that was growing in the Chinese coast. And at the same time it reveals to be the best measure to calibrate the dimensions of a character like Sinibaldo de Mas, intimately linked with this Portuguese enclave until his final days.