

MACAU, AN INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Miguel Brito Correia / Portugal

Pousadas de Portugal , Europa Nostra and ICOMOS-Portugal

Abstract

Located in southeastern China, some 60km away from Hong-Kong, Macau was a Portuguese administrated territory from 1557 to 1999. For centuries, Macau was the only foreign commercial outpost in China and the gateway to Christian missionaries in far-east Asia. Today the city, including the islands of Taipa and Coloane, constitutes a Special Administrative Region under Chinese sovereignty that retains a unique heritage, both tangible and intangible, of four and a half centuries of cultural coexistence and interchange. Since the 1960's, Macau has one of the largest population density in the world, which causes a tremendous pressure on soil use and therefore an immense threat on its built heritage. Highrises now stand alongside historic buildings, most dating from mid nineteenth to early twentieth century, but others from much earlier, like forts, churches and Chinese temples. The original coastline has been drastically altered by the creation of ever larger embankments that transformed an area of 14,9km² in 1900 into an area of 28,3km² in 2000. The aim of this paper is to analyse the impact on Macau's heritage of the urban densification and the alteration of the original city's relation with the sea, resulting from the embankments.