Property Rights, Land and Territory in the European Overseas Empires

Direitos de Propriedade, Terra e Território nos Impérios Ultramarinos Europeus

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Traders, middlemen, smugglers: the Chinese and the formation of colonial Timor (18th-19th centuries)

Paulo Jorge de Sousa Pinto[1]

Abstract: The Portuguese colonial history of Timor started in the initial years of the 18th century, after the successful settlement of a captain general on the island. It was a troubled process due to the fierce resistance exerted by local powers, the hostility of the local "Black Portuguese" and the Dutch rivalry regarding the control of the island and its resources. Despite the important role played by Chinese communities in the historical processes involving the formation of colonial Timor, it remains an issue barely studied so far. It is mainly due to their discreet presence, which corresponds to a widespread silence on historical sources. This discretion springs from the fact that those were fundamentally mercantile communities that traditionally ensured the supply and selling of goods – namely the export of sandal – in connection with local networks that often escaped the reach of the Portuguese authorities. This study intends to highlight some relevant aspects of the evolution of this shadowy presence and to provide a few research hints about the changes that occurred throughout the 18th and 19th centuries period that fundamentally materialised in the formation of resident communities in the main centres of colonial power.

Resumo: A história colonial portuguesa de Timor começou nos primeiros anos do século XVIII, após o estabelecimento bem-sucedido de um capitão-geral na ilha. Tratou-se de um processo conturbado, devido à feroz resistência oferecida pelos poderes locais, à hostilidade dos "Portugueses Negros" ali estabelecidos e à rivalidade holandesa no que respeitava o controlo da ilha e dos seus recursos. Apesar do papel importante desempenhado pelas comunidades chinesas nos processos históricos que conduziram à formação de Timor colonial, esta permanece uma questão mal estudada até aos nossos dias. Isto resulta, sobretudo, da sua presença discreta, a que corresponde um silêncio generalizado nas fontes históricas. Esta discrição decorre do facto de se tratar, fundamentalmente, de comunidades mercantis que asseguravam o fornecimento e a venda de mercadorias, nomeadamente a exportação do sândalo, em articulação com as redes locais que escapavam com frequência ao alcance das autoridades portugueses. Este estudo pretende sublinhar alguns aspetos relevantes da evolução desta presença obscura e sugerir algumas pistas de investigação sobre as alterações ocorridas ao longo dos séculos XVIII e XIX e que se materializaram, no essencial, na formação de comunidades residentes junto dos principais centros do poder colonial.

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In 1781, Willem van Hogendorp confessed to have difficulties establishing a detailed political map of Timor, so he was able to present only a blurred, general division with what he perceived as the main cleavages. According to his description, the island was divided in four main territories: the "*Dutch district*", the district of the "*black or indigenous Portuguese*", the one of the "*white or European Portuguese*" and the region "*inhabited by the people who obey the indigenous kings*" (Hogendorp 1810: 278). The first *district* had its capital in Kupang and joined several surrounding kings under Dutch government; the second was larger and based in the region of Oekussi, in the northern part of the island, ruled by "*a certain Hornay*" and assisted by Catholic missionaries; the third, the official settlement of Dili ruled by a Portuguese governor, was small and controlled a few vassal kings only; finally, the largest region, the "*region of people independent from the European*" called *Belo*, extended from west to east in the southern coast and was governed by a great number of small kings. Some preferred to trade with the Dutch, while others, with the Portuguese, and they took sides when needed, supporting one nation or the other (Hogendorp 1810: 280).

The perception of this Dutch officer was based on territorial division and political balance of the Timorese scenario, involving two colonial powers, a mixed, half-European layer of Christian *mestizos* and the fragmented mosaic of Timorese kingdoms. The common image given by contemporary European sources – and later colonial historiography – was usually less complex, providing a limited two-sided view (Portuguese vs. Dutch) and sorting local kingdoms and political power accordingly. However, they all seemed to ignore the role played by other forces that were present at the Timorese stage and who exerted considerable influence in the economic, social and political life of the island, namely the Asian trade communities and, among these, the Chinese. The Chinese trade network had been present throughout Southeast Asia for several centuries and their role was also effective in Timor since, at least, the 16th century. In few words, we may say that the demand of sandalwood, the very *raison d'être* of the European presence in Timor, was mainly exerted by the Chinese markets, and that the most important circuits of gathering, transportation and distribution of this commodity to the ports of Fujian and Guangdong were in the hands of the Chinese trade communities, even when it was channelled through Kupang and Batavia (i.e., Dutch) paths, and consequently taken as smuggling by the Portuguese.

The Chinese network extended from the Southern China ports, the Ryukyu Islands and Japan through the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, Vietnam and Siam, and it was able to successfully deal with the European challenges, namely the one posed by the Dutch VOC based in Batavia (Blussé 1988). Despite their importance, the Chinese kept a discreet presence in the endemic political turbulence of Timor. European sources are generally brief, laconic or absent mentioning the presence of these groups, because they did not take any involvement in the colonial disputes concerning land-owning, border limits or political influence and were not a menace, neither to the Portuguese nor to the Dutch official interests. The important role played by the Chinese in Kupang has already drawn some attention from scholars (Lombard-Jourdan and Salmon 1998); on the Portuguese side of the island, however, the interest by historians is still very recent (Pinto 2014).

This study aims to contextualize a few issues relating to the Chinese presence in Timor in the process of colonial settlement in the 18th and 19th centuries, focusing on the Portuguese side and establishing some research hints that may shed some light on this obscure topic.

1. Colonial status: a *protected* island?

From his stay in Timor in 1861, Alfred Russel Wallace collected the following impressions: "*The Portuguese government in Timor is a most miserable one. Nobody seems to care the least about the improvement of the country, and at this time, after three hundred years of occupation, there has not been a mile of road made beyond the town, and there is not a solitary European resident anywhere in the interior*" (Wallace 1869: 205). Similar observations about the state of Portuguese possessions in Asia were not unusual by Europeans acquainted with the British colonial system. Few years earlier, the famous geographer Richard Burton referred to Goa, the capital of Portuguese India, as a "*worse than useless colony*" and the local Christian élite as "*a strange mélange of antiquated civilization and modern barbarism*" (Burton 1851: 100). Timor was admittedly a remote island still lacking the basic precepts of a developed settlement for the 19th century colonial standards, not only from the viewpoint of British or other European travellers but also according to Portuguese officers, who were the first to regret the existing state of affairs in the island: "*Timor lies in the most awful misery and the Portuguese rule, lasting from three hundred years, has neither been able to introduce civilization into local people, nor has increased trade, created industries or developed agriculture*" (Castro 1867: xxi)[2].

In fact, not much had changed since the initial years of the 18th century, when António Coelho Guerreiro arrived in Lifau as captain-general appointed by the viceroy in Goa and successfully managed to impose his authority, although being under considerable pressure and hostility by the local, Black Portuguese warlords, namely the Costa and Hornay clans. These formed the ruling élite of groups of Catholics that came from the island of Flores in the 17th century but had forged a distinctive identity through a merging process with Timorese traditions (Andaya 2010: 400-405). Called *Black Portuguese, Larantuqueiros* (from Larantuka, in eastern Flores) or *Topasses*, they were the outcome of two centuries of a mostly informal presence of Portuguese missionaries and merchants in the region and they were what was left of the Portuguese informal empire in Southeast Asia following the fall of Melaka to the Dutch in 1641 and the general collapse of Portuguese *Estado da Índia* in the region (Boxer 1947; Boxer 1967). Although being united by a common hatred towards the Dutch and antagonizing the VOC efforts to impose strict rules on trade, these groups were divided by permanent disputes and quarrels and resisted any attempts by the Portuguese authorities in Goa to subordinate their activities under the rule of a governor.

Timor was a peripheral island to both the Portuguese empire in Asia and the Dutch East Indies. To the former, it was a remote position far away from its core positions in India, an isolated realm in a mountainous island and in a hostile environment. Its only valuable resource was sandalwood, a declining commodity exported to China through a direct link to Macao. Lacking resources to fully implement a true colonial policy, Timor was kept as a relic from a glorious past, waiting for better days. On the Dutch side, a similar situation occurred, to a certain point. In the 18th century, the island had lost any relevance in economic terms to the VOC and retained a mere strategic importance as a supporting position to Ambon and Banda (Raynal 1783: 271). As a British traveller observed in 1818, the Dutch official policy seemed to be "*to retain possession of it* [Timor] *at as little expense as possible, merely to prevent any other country from occupying it*" (King 1827: 133). The secondary importance of Kupang was clearly

[2] This quote was translated by the author.

visible in the final years of the century: it was the only Dutch post in Asia to successfully oppose British occupation (Farram 2007: 458).

From 1702 (the successful settlement of a governor, after a few failed attempts) to 1894 (the government of Celestino da Silva), Portuguese Timor lived under a fragile regime of a formal – and alleged – suzerainty by the king of Portugal over Timorese kings, who inferred their allegiance through the payment of a tax/tribute (*finta*) and the provision of military assistance against other Timorese powers, generally considered as "rebels" instigated by the Dutch. This has been labelled as a "Portuguese protectorate" regime (Thomaz 2001). However, this status may be questioned as anachronistic and inadequate, for protectorate is a modern concept of international law that implies, among other issues, a clear unequal political relation between a powerful "protector" state and a subordinated "protected" entity. In 18th and 19th century Timor, not only Portugal was far from being a powerful force in Timor – in fact, the Portuguese governors had been forced, more than once, to look for military assistance from their alleged protected Timorese kings, in order to survive –, but also what existed was not a single sovereign protected state, but a constellation of local kings and warlords with different scales of power and local prestige, who also were politically connected among them.

The label of protectorate to define the Portuguese regime in Timor derives from a deep-rooted tradition of European colonial historiography. It tended to overlook the complex mosaic of the political balance in the island into simple terms, reducing the rather intricate landscape, where different forces were active (the royal party, the Dutch, the Black Portuguese, a wide range of interlinking indigenous powers, from coastal kingdoms to lords of the mountain), to a basic West-East antagonism. These were the so-called "confederacies", *Servião* and *Belo*, who allegedly divided the island in two parts, each one becoming under Dutch and Portuguese influence (Hägerdal 2006). Moreover, the dual approach of a Portuguese-Dutch division of the island into spheres of influence that minimized the role played by local powers led to further assumptions, namely the one that perceived any Timorese king as loyal or rebel. It also reduced political tension, economic competition or military action among local rulers to the same simple expressions of fidelity or rebellion against their European overlords (Hägerdal 2007).

The European permanence in Timor, under the official cover of colonial dominion or other shallow notions, may be considered under different premises. The first one assumes that both the Portuguese and the Dutch were simple actors in an unstable political stage where others also moved. Local rulers often assumed a leading role in the conflicts that emerged, involving not only political rivalries among the Timorese but also the Black Portuguese, and these conflicts emerged from a competition over the exports of sandalwood, beeswax or slaves or from disputes on gaining access to external resources like supplies, cloth, prestige goods or other commodities. Since there was no maritime tradition in Timor and local elites had to count on external communities – the Europeans, but also the Makassar or the Chinese merchants – to acquire requested goods, it is easy to make an approach into the endemic turbulence in the island deeper than the simple image of loyalty vs. rebellion towards the resident of Kupang or the governor of Dili.

Another issue to take into consideration was the fact that European suzerainty over Timorese kings was a factor embedded in local mental frame. Timorese political tradition was able to incorporate foreign powers. These worked on a different level from

indigenous kings and chiefs and could act as political externals that were able to resolve conflicts and to low tensions, a "*stranger king syndrome*" that identified the Dutch resident or the Portuguese governor as respected representatives of distant, prestigious monarchs (Hägerdal 2012: 412-413). This is a helpful tool to better understand the long-prevailing bonds – seen by the European as a sign of local fidelity – between European colonial authorities and some Timorese kings, who considered the semi-vassal relation as almost sacred, despite the common arrogance and regretful behaviour of some governors. This may be detected in Portuguese sources relating to the tributary system created by the first Portuguese governor, António Coelho Guerreiro, which was still operative more than 150 years later (Thomaz 2001: 503; Castro 1867: 328-329). A similar relation was forged in Kupang in 1658, between the Dutch Company and five Timorese kings (Hägerdal 2008). In 1803, the semi-vassal relation between the Dutch authorities and neighbouring kings was still renewed every year, when the resident summoned the latter and presented them with Batavian commodities, in return for the gifts previously received (La Tour 1811: 299).

2. Chinese and European presences

The earliest record of Timor in Chinese texts dates back to the mid-thirteenth century, and later sources make clear references to sandalwood, the most important commodity that was carried from the island to China. However, Timor was outside the range of official Ming China interests. Fairly distant from the borders of the empire and without evident influence from Chinese civilization and culture, Timor was not in the official lists of the tributary kingdoms, whose existence was recognized by the Chinese imperial court. In the past, it would be included in the category of "*savage land without culture*", the lowest rank of human civilization, far away from the civilized centres of China. The famous admiral Zheng He never visited Timor and there is no evidence of any official mission sent from Timor, the Moluccas or Banda in Ming times.

According to the Chinese perspective, the relations between China and the countries on the Southern Seas (*nanyang*) were traditionally established under the rules of a tributary system, in which the latter accepted the eminent status of the Middle Kingdom, and put under its protection. It was more than a simple set of formal rules destined to reinforce diplomatic ties with vassal kingdoms. It actually conditioned but allowed the exchange of commodities, in which the Chinese merchant communities established in Southeast Asia played a crucial intermediary role in earlier times. However, the imposition of an official ban on private maritime activities (*haijin*) by the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) came to be a severe blow to the maritime tradition of the southern regions, namely Fujian and Guangdong.

Private trade with the outside world was forbidden and all trade came to be authorized only under the strict channelling dispositions of the tributary system. As a consequence, commercial networks established in Southeast Asia for long were suddenly considered as semi-clandestine by official command. The *haijin* posed a considerable challenge to these networks, in order to adapt and to reorganize their structures, maximizing the channels allowed by the tributary system – particularly with the Ryukyu Islands – but also creating new partnerships with other trading groups and extending their activities throughout Southeast Asia. The arrival of the European in Asia was an important factor in the survival and development of the activity of these Chinese networks. The Portuguese, after the conquest of Melaka in 1511 and a few decades of proscription in the coasts of China, were authorized to settle in Guangdong in the mid-16th century.

This was a major achievement, because Macao became the only entry door to China and the only foreign settlement authorized by Chinese authorities for more than a century.

While Macao provided a useful point of contact between China and the external world, the arrival of the Spaniards in Southeast Asia in the 1560's and the Dutch in the final years of the 16th century opened new, stimulant roads to the activities of Chinese groups operating in the region. Both Manila and Batavia were first-order centres where major Chinese settlements developed, the first one as the principal joint of the transoceanic line of commerce that exchanged South American silver for Chinese textiles, and the latter being the capital of the Dutch East India Company, which soon became a vital axis for Chinese activities throughout Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Chinese migrants became a key element in both mixed societies, mainly due to increasing labour demand. In Manila, these settlers filled the service sector, which also included various positions related to the *Galeón de Acapulco*; in Batavia, Fujianese workers become involved in construction, education and the infrastructure; indeed, one may say that without Chinese support both these cities would not have been able to exist (Gil 2011: 353-355; Blussé 1988: 52; Pinto 2013).

The Portuguese arrived in Timor a few years after the conquest of Melaka, but only in the late 16th century is it possible to detect the existence of a settlement in the neighbouring island of Solor and a more regular presence in the island. Anyway, the Portuguese presence was limited to a few spots in the coast, where sandalwood cargos were prepared and Catholic missionary work was taking the first steps. The Dutch rivals arrived in the initial years of the following century. As for the Chinese, who supplied the demand of sandalwood in their motherland markets since the 14th century, it seems that their presence was irregular until the partial lift of the trade ban in 1567 by the Ming authorities. This event permitted a global re-orientation of trade routes and an increased activity of Chinese traders and migrants in Southeast Asian ports, namely a growing presence in Sunda, in order to provide shipments of pepper to China. However, it is also possible that the institutional changes of 1567 may have revived Chinese private trade to Timor. If so, two parallel, perhaps rival circuits started to coexist relating to sandalwood exports: the Portuguese were trading through Macao and the Hokkien were supplying Fujian. This can be inferred from a message sent by the king of Portugal to the viceroy Matias de Albuquerque and the bishop of Melaka, which contains a brief reference to the Solor residents' complaints about "*the damages caused by the Hokkien* [Chincheus] *going there (Timor) for sandalwood, which they carry to China*" (Pinto 2014: 151).

1613 marks the start of the Dutch attempts to settle in Timor and in the neighbouring islands, where they tried to expel the Portuguese presence in the region. Four decades later, they successfully took Kupang from the Portuguese, who moved to Lifau. The enduring presence of two rival European powers in Timor was taking shape. They came to establish a tense, sometimes hostile relationship in the island that lasted for two centuries, until the signing of a treaty in 1859, when the central authorities in Portugal and in the Netherlands finally agreed on solving the territorial disputes on Timor and the neighbouring islands. In what regards the Chinese groups, they too followed different ways in the relationship with each one of the colonial presences.

3. Middlemen and smugglers

From the general decline of the Portuguese influence in Southeast Asia that followed the advances of the VOC in the region in the 17th century, it became evident that the

survival of Portuguese Timor depended on Macao and the ability to reinforce, to mutual benefit, the connecting links that joined both positions. Apparently, supplying the Chinese markets with Timorese sandalwood through Macao should be the best way to ensure the survival of the Portuguese presence in the island and to overcome the difficult times that followed the closure of Japan to Macanese traders in 1640. To this purpose, the viceroy of Portuguese India granted the monopoly of the *viagem* Macao-Timor to the city of Macao in 1678 and ordered the captain of Lifau to supply all sandalwood exclusively through this channel; selling it to the Dutch or channelling this commodity through other circuits was forbidden (Morais 1934: 36).

However, dramatic events in China and the specific conditions and developments in Timor frustrated the official intents of creating the intended exclusive channel. On the Macao side, the official end of the *haijin* in 1683 had immediate implications for Chinese private trade to various destinations all around the South China Sea trade. The number of Chinese ships going to such ports as Manila increased dramatically, and the number of migrants moving outside of China also jumped up (Blussé 1999: 121-122). In 1686, the Macao senate realized that the opening of China's ports was an invitation to other Europeans to conduct trade in China and an official authorization to Chinese private merchants to go abroad. This had a double effect: in the first place, Macao was no longer the only point of access to China; on the other hand, Chinese junks challenged Portuguese merchants in ports like Manila, Patani and Banjarmasin – and even in Dutch Batavia and Melaka, where, due to a new agreement, they were allowed to stop and trade. Therefore, one of the most important effects of the end of the official trade ban ordered by the Qing authorities was the reinforcement of the Chinese trade networks across Southeast Asia.

This had a direct impact in Timor. There were complaints about the scarce amounts and the low quality of the sandalwood that was shipped to Macao, which was an indication that the best timber was channelled to other circuits. After the settlement of António Coelho Guerreiro in Lifau, in 1702, it became quite clear that the *larantuqueiros* that opposed resistance to the governor – therefore being labelled as rebel in official correspondence – not only supplied the Dutch in Kupang with the best sandalwood but they also received provisions, guns and munitions in exchange. How was this clandestine agreement executed? By means of the Chinese groups based in the Dutch settlement and connected to their network agents in Batavia (Matos 1974: 310-318).

The relations between Macao and Timor were not easy. The senate of Macao complained that the governors imposed excessive duties, provided low-quality sandalwood and oppressed the crews of the ships that went to Lifau, preventing them to call at other ports. On the Timorese side, the governors reported of receiving insufficient supplies and accused the Macanese of supporting the *rebels* through purchases of sandalwood. The difficult position of the Timor-Macao link had a wider context: the Portuguese circuits were unable to match the powerful Chinese network based in Batavia, who purchased the best sandalwood in Timor and controlled the market prices in Fujian and Guangdong, in a way that was virtually impossible for the Portuguese to compete with. The problem had a clear local, practical dimension, a basic fragility that the governors were unable to solve at the time: the Portuguese did not have the material resources and the political or military strength to supervise the whole coast of the island and prevent the Chinese to load cargos of sandalwood or other commodities. Therefore, most of the production of Timorese sandalwood – already in decline in the 18th century – was drained to Batavia through the Chinese circuits. It has

been estimated that only 20 to 25% was in fact channelled by the official Portuguese circuits to Macao ("Improvement" 1843: 73; Matos 1974: 178; Hägerdal 2012: 348).

The existence of a Chinese network based in Batavia and whose connections extended to Kupang is moderately known, not only through Dutch sources but also by means of travelogues and other materials. Their presence in the Dutch capital of Timor was obvious and easily detected by anyone who visited the city (Lombard-Jourdan and Salmon 1998). But on the Portuguese side, things are much more blurred: not only the amount of information about Lifau and Dili is much scarcer than the data available for Kupang, but also the Chinese presence was more difficult to detect and to weight. One of the most interesting questions concerning the Chinese on Portuguese Timor affairs relates to the details on the effective presence and involvement of Chinese people, interests and capital in the Macau-Timor trade. Travelogues and personal reports are rare and laconic. One example is provided by the 1699 account by William Dampier, who makes reference to the presence of "*Chinamen, merchants from Macao*" in Lifau, who brought tea, rice, metal, silk and porcelain (Dampier 1709: 79). Official correspondence deals extensively with the details of the annual ship or ships that were authorized by the viceroy in Goa to go from Macao to Lifau (or Dili, after the transfer of the Portuguese capital in 1769), mentioning the quarrels involving the senate of Macao and the Portuguese governors of Timor, but very scarce information is available about the Chinese presence in these affairs. A first look *a vol d'oiseau* to available sources suggests that there were Chinese merchants from Macao behind the funding of the trade line. Because they were officially kept out of the regular voyages – reserved to the Portuguese –, they probably acted as moneylenders and had shares in trade (Pinto 2014). A stimulant hypothesis of work, still requiring further research, would be a scenario where the Chinese were the true funders of the Macao-Timor trade, controlling the commercial affairs backstage by means of Portuguese captains who acted as frontmen to the official records.

4. The "Atapupu incident"

Chinese overseas communities were well known for their discretion and distance towards local politics. Concerning their presence in Timor, it may be argued that despite their economic power and social visibility and importance – in Kupang mostly –, the Chinese had no political weight and their role was played in a mere external plan, concerning smuggling activities of sandalwood or small-scale retail trade without political relevance. It is not completely true. For one side, the Chinese from Kupang acted as proxy agents at the service of the Dutch in supporting the *rebels* that opposed the Portuguese governors, which had a political dimension that cannot be neglected. Secondly, the very drainage of sandalwood into Batavia was a way of weakening the power of the governors, decreasing the resources at their disposal, undermining their prestige among Timorese powers and, as a consequence, their political power. Be it as it may, if the Chinese groups in Timor kept away from the spotlight throughout the 18th century, their ability to intervene in political affairs and interfere in colonial disputes between the Portuguese and the Dutch emerged in the decade of 1810. It did not happen due to any shift in the traditional behaviour of the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, but because a move from the Portuguese authorities broke a *modus vivendi* and could endanger their interests in an objective way.

Atapupu is a port located in the northern coast of Timor that had been freely accessed by merchants and smugglers from early times. The shifting of the Portuguese capital

from Lifau to Dili in 1769 decreased the official surveillance on the region and the port probably became an important centre for the Chinese merchant activities. The Portuguese attempted to control the region and install customhouses, in the late 18th century and in the early 19th, but with no success, due to the opposition by the Chinese and local Timorese kingdoms. The governor José Pinto de Alcoforado e Sousa (1815-1819) moved on and occupied the position, where he raised a customhouse. The Chinese, however, reacted in a different way this time. Instead of promoting local unrest against the Portuguese, they decided to solve the issue in a definitive way. Therefore, they established a deal with local kings and convinced them to put themselves under the Dutch jurisdiction, inviting them to take possession of the port. In April 1818, and following this invitation, the Dutch resident of Kupang (Jacobus Hazaart, a Timorese or *mestizo*) boarded a ship, occupied the region and lowered the Portuguese flag (Freycinet 1828: 538-539). The Dutch obviously had a different version of the events and they never removed from the region (Farram 2007: 471-472). The event caused a diplomatic incident between Portugal and the Netherlands, but the situation *de facto* was recognized by Portugal by the Treaty of Lisbon (1859).

Conclusion

From a shadowy presence in the 18th century, the Chinese in Timor became more visible in the following times, in a double sense: on one side, the resident community in Dili and in other places increased, consisting mostly in small merchants and shopkeepers who controlled retail trade in the city. There is some scattered information still waiting for a more systematic approach, and which points to this direction. The British naturalist Henry Forbes left us an interesting description of a shop in Dili owned by Ah Ting, "*Major of the Chinese*", and of the way he did business with Timorese costumers (Forbes 1885: 418-420). More important still is his statement that the Chinese were "*look on with respect and good-neighbourly consideration*" in Dili, in the colourful mosaic of Timorese, black people from Mozambique, Goan, Bugis, Arabs and Malays that filled the streets. In the decade of 1860, the Chinese paid a capitation tax (still named *finta*), but it was probably imposed in an unfair way and the global annual value was low (Castro 1867: 374-378).

Later, in the context of the military campaigns of the governor José Celestino da Silva (1894-1908), a Chinese named Lay-Ha-Vong, who was a "*coffee farmer and merchant from Liquiçá*" was mentioned in the official reports and recommended to receive a reward for having fought with sixty of his men on the Portuguese side against some Timorese *rebels* (*Relatório* 1897: 29). Even in an earlier period, some Chinese people seem to have enjoyed social prestige and some political relevance, as may be suggested by the proposal of reformation presented in 1843 by a Chinese named A-Kem-Io, "*who has been living on that island for many years*", that covered a wide range of issues, including commercial, administrative, military and social aspects to be modified and improved ("Improvement" 1843: 71-73).

However, there was a second dimension of this increase of visibility to be considered. It was related to the plans and projects of agricultural development, mainly on tobacco and coffee cultures, which would require adequate labour force. It was also linked to the projects of political reformation that included a more direct intervention in Timorese affairs, with a certain level of local control, in the sense of transforming suzerainty into sovereignty, as Afonso de Castro put it (Castro 1867: xiii).

The recognized abilities of the Chinese by the Portuguese authorities took some governors and officers to promote the immigration of Chinese families, not only farmers but also craftsmen. It has been encouraged throughout the whole century, but due to the lack of a proper colonial plan, little was achieved and put into practice (Figueiredo 2011: 373-375, 385-386). Therefore, most of the intended increase of Chinese population was merely a virtual one. However, it is clear that the Chinese presence in Portuguese Timor shifted from a simple presence of costal traders – whether or not connected to the groups settled in Kupang remains an unsolved question – to resident communities with a wider range of professional and social roles. The consequences of a colonial approach on this presence, promoting immigration from Macao, and the real impact on Timor, in their social, economic and political aspects, remain issues largely obscure that require further research.

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