

Journal of the
Royal Asiatic Society
Hong Kong

香港皇家亞洲學會學報



Volume 58

2018

Macao's College and Church of St Joseph, Splendour of the Baroque in China by César Guillén Nuñez

Macao: Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao S.A.R. Government, 2017, 199 pages, 47 fig. colour. ISBN: 978-999-3703-39-6, 180 MOP

(Review by Thomas Coomans)

Amongst the monuments of Macao's historic centre, which has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2005, the building complex of St Joseph's Seminary (S. José) has a paradoxical history. First, it was not built as a diocesan Catholic seminary but as a college by the Portuguese Jesuit missionaries. Second, it dates from the middle of the eighteenth century, a time when the influence of the Jesuits and the future of Catholicism in China were seriously threatened by growing tensions between the emperor of China and the pope (the Rites Controversy). Third, the Jesuits did not use their new college for more than a few years because they were expelled from Macao in 1762 as a result of the policy of the enlightened Marquis of Pombal. Fourth, the style of the church is not the triumphant baroque typical of the Jesuits' architectural heyday—as, for instance, is the façade of St Paul's church in Macao—but a kind of late baroque, transitional to the new trends of rococo and neo-classicism.

Because of these paradoxes, Macao's college and church of St Joseph deserved an in depth contextualisation that would unravel the complexity and the significance of the buildings as well as the main agents, mostly Jesuit fathers and brothers, involved. César Guillén Nuñez—senior researcher at the Macao Ricci Institute and author of *Macao's Church of Saint Paul: A Glimmer of the Baroque in China* (Hong Kong University Press, 2009)—has authored a new book that puts the college and church of St Joseph in a broad historical and art historical perspective and stresses the remarkable mediating role of both Macao and the Company of Jesus at the intersection of the East and the West. As a linking theme through the whole book, the author refers to the Enlightenment that marked eighteenth-century philosophy, sciences, arts, politics, etc. and 'elevated reason above revelation' in one of mankind's most important paradigm shifts. One could say that building a second college and church on top of one of the other hills of Macao, the first being St Paul's (*Madre de Deus*), was an attempt to promote Catholic high education in opposition to the new secularised worldviews from Europe. The Enlightenment, however, pursued the Jesuits to East Asia and St Joseph's, all things considered, is shown to be a 'swan song'.

The book is structured in two parts that could be read as two independent publications with crossed links (thanks to the precise index). The first part sketches the broad picture in a fluently written synthesis: (chapter 1) the Company of Jesus in the eighteenth century, its role in China, and its relationships with Enlightenment; and (chapter 2) late baroque architecture from Rome and Portugal to the churches built in Beijing, 1700–30, and the Western mansions of the Old Summer Palace, 1747–59. The second part of the book focuses on Macao and St Joseph's College, built from the late 1730s to 1758: (chapter 3) St Joseph, his visual figurations and his choice as a patron saint of the college; (chapter 4) the college's construction and architecture; and (chapter 5) the church, its late baroque façade and its classic dome inspired by that of the Pantheon in Rome. Forty-seven colour pictures, including the present plan of the complex and three sections, illustrate the book.

All in all, the pages dedicated to the architecture of the college and its church are limited (p. 91–149) because of the lack of sources. The attribution of the design to the Italian Jesuit brother Francesco Folleri (1699–1767?) is rather speculative (p. 118–19) and mainly based on the foundation stone of the church that mentions Folleri as leader or supervisor of the building works (*opus... direxit*)—not as a designer of the plans (*architectus* or *creator*). At the time of the construction, Folleri was *socius* and from 1751 *procurator*, that is, the person responsible for all the material/logistic aspects of the China mission, which, of course, included supervising and financing the important works of Macao's college. There is no evidence that he had studied art or architecture before entering the Company of Jesus, aged 18, being sent to Goa, aged 20, and reaching Macao, aged 22. Folleri's stay in Beijing from 1725 to 1733, at the same time as other famous Italian Jesuits artists—the architect Ferdinando Moggi and the painter Giuseppe Castiglione—does not mean that he was involved in architectural business and acquired the skills to design the church of St Joseph's College and its remarkable dome. Therefore, the hypothesis of plans designed by a (Jesuit) architect in Rome or Lisbon and sent to Macao, should not be excluded.

Aside from this question of attribution, one would have liked to read more about how the spatial organisation of a college fitted specifically for the Jesuit educational programme, both in general and in Macao. Besides the church, a wing with classrooms, a wing with rooms for interns, and another for the community, Jesuit colleges always had a theatre room where students learned to perform on the stage, a library, and often a 'museum' with natural sciences *curiosa*. Furthermore, the wing east of the courtyard of the present seminary,

built in the 1950s, obviously replaces older structures that could have easily been traced on historic maps or old photographs. Architectural questions about spatial organisation and circulations, as well as construction techniques and materials (evoked on p. 111) are clearly not the aim of this book. César Guillén Nuñez, as a good art historian and expert on Macao's Jesuits, has concentrated his research on questions of style, attribution, iconography and historical contextualisation. His book provides an introduction to the influence of the Enlightenment on Chinese and Macau's Jesuit communities, and helps to understand the several paradoxes of Macao's college and St Joseph's Church.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY HONG KONG

THE JOURNAL

The Society has published a Journal since 1961. It was published as the *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* from 1961 until 2003, then changed to the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* and 香港皇家亞洲學會學報 and is now *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong* and 香港皇家亞洲學會學報. The Journal is available online: Volumes 1-51 at <http://hkjo.lib.hku.hk/exhibits/show/hkjo/browseIssue?book=b27720780> and all volumes at <https://www.jstor.org/journal/jroyaaisocihkb>. Members of the Society receive a copy of the Journal and a regular *Newsletter*.

ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY HONG KONG STUDIES SERIES

In 2005 the Society produced the first volume in this series, the aim being to help make available important studies of the local history, culture and society of Hong Kong and the surrounding region. Generous support from the Sir Lindsay and Lady May Ride Memorial Fund makes it possible to publish this series. The early volumes were published with Hong Kong University Press, but since 2016 the Society and the Ride Fund have worked with other publishers.

To date the Hong Kong Studies Series includes 26 titles. A list of titles that can be ordered from the Society is at <http://www.royalasiaticsociety.org.hk/hong-kong-studies-series>. A complete list appears in the Society's *Newsletter*, published six times a year, available in e-copy from <http://www.royalasiaticsociety.org.hk/new-page/>. An order form and price list is in the *Newsletter*, or may be obtained directly from the Administrator: HYPERLINK "mailto:membership@royalasiaticsociety.org.hk" membership@royalasiaticsociety.org.hk.

The Sir Lindsay and May Ride Memorial Fund was established in 2003 by the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong and is named after the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong 1949-64 and his wife, both founder members of the RASHK.

OTHER ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY HONG KONG PUBLICATIONS

Since 1980, in addition to the *Journal* and the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Studies Series, either alone or jointly with other publishers, the Society has published occasional works written or edited by members. The titles can be consulted on the Society's website at <http://www.royalasiaticsociety.org.hk/books/>. Some volumes are out of print.