Projecting Post-colonial Conditions at Shanghai Expo 2010, China: Floppy Ears, Lofty Dreams and Macao’s Immutable Mobiles

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Abstract

Recent years have seen increased academic attention in urban studies on the flows of city artefacts and images. Conceptualised as ‘immutable mobiles’, the Macao Pavilion and its associated objects on show at Shanghai Expo 2010 are examined for the ways they encouraged and regulated uniformed flows of people and city images. Specifically, these immutable mobiles projected Macao’s lofty dreams of paradoxical affinity to and difference from mainland China—the city is a steadfast Special Administrative Region of China, but the immigration flow of Chinese citizens has been tightly regulated. This paper unpacks the ways in which urban actants articulate and perform such contradictory imaginings of the (im)mobilities of this post-colonial territory. Accordingly, it provides a basis for further study of post-colonial conditions in Macao, and adds to post-colonial research on mobilities in and of Chinese urban spaces.

Introduction

Mega events such as World Fairs, Expos, cultural festivals and sporting events have long been used in urban revitalisation projects (Getz, 1991; Richards and Wilson, 2004). While recent studies of city marketing, imaging and tourism have pointed to the popularity of events as a tool to market places and cities in particular (Law, 1993; Robertson and Guerrier, 1998; Schuster, 2001; Waitt, 1999, 2003), these studies have tended to focus on the production of urban images for global consumption and, to date, little is known about ways in which images and objects of cities actually travel...
and are consumed, negotiated or ignored by visitors and residents. The mobilities paradigm in urban studies (Clifford, 1992; Cresswell, 1993, 1999; Featherstone, 2004; Gogia, 2006; Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006) has brought new insights into a variety of movements and flows: of people, ideas, designs, images, commodities and capital (see Appadurai, 1990, 1996) and the ways in which travelling objects or ‘immutable mobiles’ work to direct flows of people, images and ideas (Latour, 1987). Specifically, the turn to mobilities has brought renewed vigour in conceptualising corporeality, automobiles and mobility (Featherstone, 2004; Gogia, 2006; Pooley et al., 2006; Thrift, 2004; Urry, 2004), materiality and stability/movement/stoppages/dikes (Law, 2006; Normark, 2006; Tolia-Kelly, 2006), technology and the transnational projection of religious activities (Kong, 2006), the projection, travel and performance of city images (Bunnell, 2004a, 2004b, 2007) and mobility as resistance (Cresswell, 1993, 1999).

This paper seeks to build upon the efforts of the mobilities paradigm in urban studies to understand the production and consumption (or not) of Macao’s efforts at imaging itself at the Shanghai Expo 2010 and their implications for Macao tourism, governance and Chinese citizenry. Specifically, the argument is presented here that the Macao pavilion and its components should be conceptualised as Bruno Latour’s (1987, pp. 226–227) “immutable and combinable mobiles” and that their creation are to be seen as the result of the workings of what Latour calls ‘centres of calculation’. Speaking about the formation of scientific knowledge, Latour argues that knowledge is not created in the minds of individuals. Rather, it is the product of diverse events and actions, distributed across a broad terrain and orchestrated by specific associations between human and non-human actors/actants. In Latour’s (1987, p. 267) line of thought, objects such as writings, documents and illustrations are stable inscriptions that help to bring about new knowledge formation as they focus the gaze and actions of other entities as they travel. He calls these stable and mobile objects ‘immutable mobiles’.

The Macao pavilion’s most appealing exhibits comprised the rabbit-shaped pavilion itself, the Tak Seng On pawnshop replica, interactives for other heritage sites, such as Mandarin’s House, and its emotionally intelligent robot guide. Overall, these exhibits functioned as immutable mobiles shaping the expo visitors’ understanding of Macao city and its tourism and reinforcing the concept of Macao as a privileged but loyal Special Administrative Region of China. Since its creation in 1851, the World Exposition (Expo) has been both a platform reflecting urban changes and an agent inducing city transformations (Leung, 2008; Ross and Staw, 1986) and the Shanghai Expo 2010 in China with the by-line of “Better City, Better Life” proved no exception (Wan, 2008; Wu, 2009; Xia and Gu, 2006). Academic research, when reporting on popular imaginings, refers to Macao as the “Las Vegas of the East” (for example, Gu and Gao, 2006; McCartney, 2005) and a casino dystopia (Sheng and Tsui, 2009). Building upon recent critical works on Macao (for example, Simpson, 2008 and Breitung, 2009), a new understanding of Macao’s symbolism must go beyond simple and static references to established city images or urban models to provide more insight into its post-colonial relationship with China. Administered by the Portuguese for nearly 450 years until 1999, Macao has seen a growing economy built on a series of dangerous and unsavoury industries. From the less desirable barter trade (rather than the tribute system the Chinese emperors favoured) to the dangerous fireworks and
explosives to the very capitalistic casino gaming (which sit uneasily with communism), Macao occupies an awkward position within Chinese territory and has a complex relationship with policy-makers in Beijing and the wider Chinese citizenry on mainland China.

Consequently, this relationship is ‘unpacked’ by examining Macao’s travelling objects or Macao’s ‘immutable mobiles’ (Latour, 1987, p. 267) at the Shanghai Expo. To this end, the methodological approach taken is to uncover a set of ‘lofty’ discourses orchestrated by the official institutions that drew on ideas of the ‘science’ of cultural heritage management to fit in with the Expo’s theme, the allure of Chinese mythology, the notions of the ‘creative city’ and political persuasions of ‘one country—two systems’. Such discourses work to produce real travelling objects: the floppy-eared Imperial Jade Rabbit pavilion and the Kungfu-themed Tak Seng On pawnshop replica. The ‘lofty’ dreams and the materiality that articulated and projected them are performed, negotiated and/or resisted by a constellation of human and humanoid agents including university student volunteer guides, government officials, the robotic pavilion guide and the celebrity pavilion designer. The production of their discourses and utterances was analysed to facilitate understandings of how such narratives affect the symbolism of the pavilion and its components works towards the maintenance of boundaries around the spaces of the Special Administrative Region. The second discussion section provides an analysis of the ways in which actants use and deploy the immutable mobiles to regulate flows of specific types of people and images. The paper concludes by considering the ways in which dikes and flows, promoted and sustained by the Macao pavilion and its associated immutable mobiles, affect the ways in which ideals and discourses in Macao’s tourism and Chinese citizenship are scripted, circumvented, reworked and negotiated.

Understanding the Expo

The world is, today, an explosion of a series of flows and movements (Appadurai, 1990; Gogia, 2006; Hannam et al., 2006; Kong, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006). Marketing approaches have centred their attention on the production of city images to be consumed by a wider and often global audience of investors, visitors and tourists (Law, 1993; Richards and Wilson, 2004; Waitt, 1999) and the economic and social impacts of such image production and projection (Crompton and MacKay, 1994; Ritchie and Smith, 1991; Roche, 1994, 2000; Waitt, 2003). However, while benefiting the branding and planning of cities, such business- and impact-centred approaches have failed
to capture the full range of societal implications. They have assumed that the images created are actually consumed.

The mobilities paradigm in urban studies has reminded scholars that the travel of city images, aspirations and their associated corporeality and materiality is far from being straightforward, warranting further investigation. Interests in flows of city images and artefacts, in particular, have prompted an emerging set of studies interrogating both the production and consumption/contestation of such movements and projections (Coleman and Crang, 2002; Gogia, 2006; Law, 2006; Normark, 2006). For example, Bunnell (2004a) interrogated the 20th Century Fox movie *Entrapment*’s cinematic representation of the Petronas Towers. He examined the ways in which resistances to (and non-consumption of) the cinematic production of Kuala Lumpur’s iconic landmark by the filmmakers are constituted within the need for domestic political legitimacy and the display of international investibility by the ruling United Malays National Organisation government, and appropriate ways of seeing and being on the part of ‘fully developed’ citizens.

Law (2006) has used the metaphor of a river to discuss the spatial implications of travelling animals, the mobile diseases they may carry and the mitigation measures they evoke. In particular, Law argues that recent attempts by international organisations in curtailing foot and mouth disease can be likened to the process of managing rivers via the construction and maintenance of dikes to bring about regulated and reduced outbreaks of the disease. The engineering of ‘fluid uniformity’ (Law, 2006) also brings about the creation of what Latour (1987) calls ‘immutable mobiles’—travelling objects that retain a degree of permanence and tangibility that help to facilitate operations in the control and creation of standardised flows and in discursive formation.

In Latour (1987) and Law’s (2006) conception, photographs and posters of the movie *Entrapment* discussed by Bunnell (2004a) will serve as immutable mobiles for the propagation of the notions of an ‘under-developed’ Malaysia for a global audience. This current study utilises the same notions of flows, dikes and immutable mobiles in the understanding of the Macao objects on show at the Shanghai Expo 2010 and their implications for post-colonial citizenship, urbanism and tourism.

Existing studies for expositions and mega events are numerous. Two studies, however, are vital to this research. Ley and Olds (1988) was amongst the first to report the power relations embedded in world expositions. Using the case of Vancouver Expo 1986, Ley and Olds demonstrated the propagation of dominant meanings through the mass culture of world expositions. They also documented the type of resistance(s) that such an attempt on cultural hegemony brings. In a more recent piece, Power and Sidaway (2005) delivered a piercing and illuminating critique of the past imperialism and changing identities of Portugal, as seen through Lisbon’s Expo 1998. Using an analysis of the 1998 exposition, Power and Sidaway’s work provided a broader reflection of what constitutes the West and non-West and contributed to an understanding of a more multifaceted modernity.

While not focusing on expos, Cheng’s (1999) work dissected the cultural history of a territory subjected to the political and cultural shapings of both Beijing and Lisbon. More recently, Clayton (2009) observed how the small territory of Macao and its people came to terms with both Portuguese colonisation and a reversion to Chinese rule, with an analysis of the implications of such geopolitical shifts for the cultural identity of the city. Both Cheng and Clayton’s works are reminders that Macao’s post-colonial conditions are understood more
fully—beyond the narrow temporal timeframe of the historical period after ‘independence’—by inquiring into the lingering tensions and broader cultural politics between Portugal and China. Reflecting on post-coloniality, Sidaway (2000, p. 596) asserts that there is no singular post-colonial condition and that research into post-coloniality should be sensitive to an array of conditions including imperialism, once-colonised societies, neo-colonialism, quasi-colonialism and internal colonialism. Sidaway’s (2000, p. 607) reflection also provided a reminder that, while the critique of Western societies provided initial starting-points for a post-colonial inquiry, one should not expect a straightforward pathway out of the constellation of theoretical and practical questions and issues. This study builds on such perspectives to examine how such post-colonial conditions manifest in the Shanghai Expo, how such politics are constituted within the cultural and political ‘need’ to regulate flows of peoples and objects, and how such regulation was orchestrated with the help of Macao’s objects on show.

The materiality and mobilities of objects and subjects on display in the first official Exposition supported by the Chinese imperial government was examined by Fernsebner (2006). Such movements of materiality and governed subjects should be seen within the context of burgeoning work in the role of mega events and nation-building in capitalist societies (Roche, 2003, p. 100). Hobsbawm (1992) suggests that the long-lasting appeal of these events and their popularity derive from their functions in marking time with historical milestones in a society characterised by incessant intergenerational change. Roche (2003) approaches these mega events by relating them to the interpersonal and public experience that governs the structuring of time in contemporary global society. This previous research portrays expos as iconic displays of modernity and as international chronologically markers of time, history and ‘progress’. For example, in Fernsebner’s (2006) study of the Nanyang Exposition that took place in 1910, insights were uncovered as to how the exposition was framed within the context of national survival at a time when the Qing Dynasty China had lost substantial ground in commerce and trading. Goods and items were sourced from all over China to be displayed for a global audience (Fernsebner, 2006).

Despite the formal departure of its colonisers, contemporary China contains varying and multiple forms of post-coloniality (Wang and Xie, 1997). The shift from socialism to a market economy has created new subjectivities and new identity demands. For instance, Gerth (2003) argues that a shift towards mass consumption in China has brought about new meanings for Chinese nationalism. Anagnost’s (1997) work, in turn, demonstrated the different breaks in the national narratives of China and the fragmented ways in which citizens were governed in recent Chinese history. For instance, Taiwan is seen today as a renegade province by Beijing and Tibet and is administered as an autonomous region. In addition, China allows, under its “one country—two systems policy”, the administration of the former colonies of Macao and Hong Kong as ‘independent’ political entities. For example, the two Special Administrative Regions’ pavilions at the Shanghai Expo were listed under the label of “country pavilions” alongside, for instance, the French pavilion, the British pavilion and the Malaysian pavilion. From the works of Cheng (1999), Clayton (2009) and Simpson (2008), for example, one is reminded that the ‘autonomies’ of the two SARs were the outcome of negotiation with the departing Western powers and are still a subject of constant negotiation between Beijing and the territories’ business and social elites.
As is to be expected, the Shanghai Expo was much larger than what dynastic China hosted a hundred years ago. In fact, it is the largest exposition to date. It is the largest world’s fair in history in terms of exhibition area, number of participating countries and number of visitors (Chappell, 2011). Themed “Better City, Better Life”, the Shanghai Expo sought global media attention as a huge opportunity to hold an international event to showcase China’s and other countries’ efforts concerning sustainable development and urban planning. The pavilions at the expos and the images they projected should not be studied merely as passive marketing messages—they brought about real consequences. The next sections consider the embedded and performative aspects of such symbolism for the understanding of Macao’s post-colonial relations with China.

**Constructing Immutable Mobiles and Dikes around the SAR Space**

Like Latour’s pre-printed astronomy forms and Law’s Portuguese carracks as travelling nodes performing and co-ordinating Portuguese colonisation in the 14th century, the Macao objects on show at the Shanghai expo promote and perform specific key political messages. Created to focus the photographic lens of journalists, tourists and other visitors, the Macao pavilion and the Tak Seng On replica, were intended as immutable mobiles endorsing and promoting post-Mao political discourses.

To date, World Expos have been the highest platform for showcasing national and regional technologies and cultures. The 2010 World Expo will take place in Shanghai, China. To receive an invitation to participate in the 2010 Shanghai World Expo is Macao Special Administrative Region’s Government’s great honour. Macao will construct two pavilions for participation in the expo: a Macao Pavilion and a Tak Seng On Pawnshop Museum replica. The **Macao Pavilion will stand next to the Chinese Pavilion** and the Tak Seng On Pawnshop Museum will be amongst the other buildings in the Expo’s Urban Best Practices (The Macao Government Office for the Preparation for Shanghai Expo, 2010; translated by the authors; emphases added).

Recognising the world expos as stages for presenting the latest know-how and traditional cultures, the Office worked towards Macao citizens sharing its sense of pride and achievement in qualifying for the Shanghai World Expo. It was a chance, as seen by the Macao Government Office (hereafter, the Office) for Macao to showcase its technologies and culture. In this case, it chose first to display Tak Seng On, an old pawnshop restored and adapted as a pawnshop museum-cum-culture centre-cum-library for Jinyong novels. A deeper analysis of the rhetoric also indicates the loyalty to China’s central government as the Office wrote of the closeness and proximity of the Chinese and Macao pavilions (see Figure. 1).

The positive tone underlining the territory’s return to the motherland was strengthened when the Office proclaimed

Macao celebrated the 10-year anniversary of its return to the motherland last year. This year marks the year of the World Expo. Through participation at the World Expo, Macao shall present to the world the better life after the handover, thereby reflecting “The handover has made Macao better” … Culturally speaking, Macao embodies more than 400 years of East–West cultural interaction. Economically, since the handover and enjoying the ‘one country—two systems’ policy, Macao’s economy has grown steadily, the society has progressed rapidly and the
standard of living has improved. Despite recent economic setbacks in Asian and global economies, Macao has, in the past 10 years, maintained an average of 13 per cent economic growth. In 1999, Macao’s GDP per capital was US$13,000 and in 2008, Macao posted a GDP per capita of US$39,000—the second highest GDP per capita in Asia. (The Macao Government Office for the Preparation for Shanghai Expo, 2010; translated by the authors).

Here, the inconvenient history of Macao’s administration and colonisation by the Portuguese was lexically recrafted as “more than 400 years of East–West cultural interaction”. To assert Macao’s loyalty to the motherland, the text on the official website for the Office proclaimed, in almost manifesto style, that “Macao shall present to the world the better life after the handover, thereby reflecting ‘The handover has made Macao better’”. In almost the entire website, “cultural interaction” becomes lexical shorthand for 400 years of messy Portuguese presence, use and ultimately colonisation of the Chinese peninsula. Ironically, in the last part of that manifesto, the Office opted for a most capitalistic way of laying claims to its assertions of “a better life” after the territory returned to Beijing and the Communist Party by flashing most explicitly, its economic figures, such as rapidly increasing GDP and resilience in the face of recent global economic recession. (However, the key source of Macao’s wealth—gambling—is rarely, if ever, alluded to.) Such pro-Beijing rhetoric and lexical strategies persist in its description of the design, inspiration and positioning of the Macao pavilion. An anonymous official revealed

We are very fortunate here in Macao. China cares for us. You can see this in the policies regarding gaming and also China’s concern with our economic diversification. In the expo, you can see our special status too. The Macao pavilion is just next to the China one. So, you see, in terms of design, we want our Macao pavilion to serve as a welcoming

Figure 1. Macao’s Imperial Jade Rabbit Pavilion (centre) and its proximity to the Chinese Pavilion (left). (Photo: Connie Loi).
pavilion to help usher in the good luck and wishes. In the mythology, the jade rabbit helps the Moon Goddess usher in her treasured guests.

From the official’s words, one can see how the Office pays tribute to China’s care and protection of the territory by pointing explicitly to the favoured and advantageous status Macao enjoys as a Special Administrative Region under the ‘one country—two systems’ policy. It is also indicative of a special status that includes the monopolistic right in the whole of China to operate the lucrative casino gaming business. Hong Kong, the other SAR of China, does not enjoy such a privilege. While this is apparent in the research interview conducted, it was not articulated at the expo. The relative silence on the casino and gambling business is likely to be an attempt to downplay the role of the gaming industry in light of the existing negative image the industry conjures. It may also be seen as an effort to reconcile differences between élites of the motherland and Macao. Comparatively smaller donations to Sichuan earthquake victims and high-profile corruption cases in Macao’s civil service might have prompted the Office to declare that the pavilion symbolises that “Macao is a part of China, and The Country is in Macao’s heart”.

Borrowing Law’s (2006) metaphoric use of flows and dikes, the double act of making Macao appear exclusive can be said to be acts of constructing and maintaining the ‘dikes’. It could be considered exclusive as a result of being the only place under Chinese sovereignty that is allowed to operate casinos. Consequently, Macao society has grown much more affluent than the rest of mainland China. However, Macao is a Special Administrative Region (together with Hong Kong), where local autonomy is given over to a type of policy development and governance in which immigration from the mainland is tightly regulated. While tourism from the mainland brings economic benefits and is encouraged, it is also closely monitored by both the Macao SAR and the Beijing authorities. The immutable mobiles on show at the Expo directed media, official and touristic attention to such political dikes. These dikes currently keep out mobilities of a less desirable nature: Chinese citizens without sufficient professional qualifications or capital investments to obtain immigration and workers without work permits. The construction of such political and cultural dikes also created a ‘safer’ and more reassuring environment for the Macao population fearful that their city may get ‘overrun’ by Chinese immigrants following the departure of the Portuguese administration. However, the construction and establishment of such political dikes necessitate careful and dedicated maintenance. This is evidenced in the SAR’s efforts at reconciling the differences and its celebration of its shared cultural links with the motherland.

**Manning the Dikes, Projecting City Images and Mobilising Tourists from the Motherland**

This conscientious manning of the political dikes is done through the use of Chinese traditions and Chinese martial arts or kungfu. Formerly a lynchpin in Macao’s wheeling and dealing gambling industry, the pawnshops, a traditional Chinese banking system which pays out cash for surrendered jewellery and luxury watches, is recognised as part of the territory’s cultural heritage. A full-size replica of the conserved Tak Seng On pawnshop building travelled to and was on show at the Expo. In real Macao, what used to be an unsavoury place to go to when one was penniless is now restored and adapted as a
three-in-one cultural complex consisting of a pawnshop museum, a Macao cultural centre and a library dedicated to popular Hong Kong wuxia, or martial arts genre novelist, Louis Cha (who goes by the pen name of Jinyong). The Office states its interpretation of its Urban Best Practice to visitors accordingly

Tak Seng On is a product of the Macao’s environment. It witnessed Macao historical changes and reflects the society’s economy. At the same time, it reflects the rich architectural styles of Macao City. Today, Tak Seng On is a Macao cultural heritage and has received attention and protection from society and government and is modelled on public–private co-operation in adaptive reuse of historical buildings. In so doing, it is given an extra layer of cultural depth. As such, it is chosen as an Urban Best Practice in the Shanghai World Expo. Today, Tak Seng On is one of Macao’s historical landmarks, embodying Macao’s local culture … In 2004, Tak Seng On received an “Honourable Mention” at the UNESCO Heritage Conservation in Asia-Pacific Awards (Macao Government Office for the Preparation for Shanghai Expo, 2010).

Drawing on a discourse of cultural tourism that portrays cultural heritage management as a ‘science’ entailing the systematic use of professionally endorsed guidelines by trained heritage and tourism workers in the pursuit of a sustainable use and appreciation of places of cultural and heritage values (du Cros et al., 2007; Imon, 2006), the Office championed the Tak Seng On project as its Urban Best Practice. Instead of dwelling on its possibly unpleasant past, the Office speaks of its “rich architectural styles” and how they enhance the aesthetics of the historical city. It can also be interpreted as an attempt to showcase a more Chinese example of Macao’s heritage in order to help bridge the differences between the SAR and its motherland. However, such manning of the political dikes requires extra scaffolding to strengthen its message from the more ‘universal’ appeal of Jinyong, an extremely popular Hong-Kong-based best-selling wuxia (kungfu and chivalry genre) novelist. According to the volunteer student docents, this was by far the most popular segment of the Tak Seng On tour. Guiding visitors through the exhibits in the replica pawnshop, docents will tell visitors this

Jinyong is the most widely read author of contemporary Chinese literature. To date, he has written many popular wuxia (martial arts and chivalry) novels. Thus goes the saying “where Chinese people can be found, there is bound to be a Jinyong novel”. So here you can see, on display, many Jinyong novels. Macao people hold Jinyong’s works close to their hearts.

According to the student docents, the appeal of Jinyong to the Chinese audience far exceeded the attraction of cultural heritage messages and exhibits. They came to see the scrolls of calligraphy and other objects in the famed novelist’s private collection. His popularity appeals not only to Chinese of the mainland specifically but to the Chinese diasporas more generally as well. Macao people are said to “hold Jinyong close to their hearts” and this love for chivalry and kungfu is said to be demonstrated in the high level of martial arts competency of the territory’s kungfu sportspeople on display in the video. The linking of what are supposed to be the works of the Hong-Kong-based novelist is used in this case to help promote Macao’s martial arts heritage; this in turn, is used to help promote Macao’s successful adaptive reuse project—a case of kungfu discourse lifting the visitor experience of a cultural heritage attraction (see Figure 2).

Efforts at manning the political dikes that separate Macao and mainland China
and keeping the motherland assured and at ease with its politically different SAR are augmented by referring to the territory’s long association with a Chinese visionary. Persuading the tourist gaze to be cast a little further, the student volunteers encouraged the visitors to interact with the multimedia displays to find out more about the territory and to visit Macao in person in order to discover its mainland connections for themselves.

More than a hundred years ago, a famous Chinese historical figure forecasted the hosting of a world expo in Shanghai. He is the acclaimed philosopher and the founder of contemporary Chinese thought, Mr Zheng Guanyin. In his seminal piece *Cautious Words for a Prosperous Time*, he wrote: “To prosper the people, one ought to promote commerce. To facilitate commerce, one needs to convene business meetings and fairs. To hold a business convention, one needs to start from Shanghai”. Such visionary words were written during Zheng’s sabbatical in Macao.

By juxtaposing Macao and Shanghai in narratives using the works of Zheng Guanyin, the students urged the visitors to come and visit the historical house that gave him the inspiration to write those visionary lines. Zheng, whose *Cautious Words for a Prosperous Time* was said to influence both the revolutionary thoughts of Sun Yat-Sen and the socialist ideals of Mao Zedong, lived in a grand courtyard house in Macao. Called ‘The Mandarin’s House’, it is a flagship conservation project of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Macao, this courtyard house has since been conserved and has recently opened its doors to visitors. The dikes created around the SAR space do not only function to keep out the mobilities of some undesired peoples and objects. They seek to usher in and regulate flows of standardised, uniform and monitored flows of

![Figure 2. A billboard in the Taipa area, Macao, advertising Tak Seng On’s participation and its Jinyong wuxia-themed costume-role-playing at the Shanghai Expo. (*Photo:* Authors).](image-url)
people and objects as well. In this case, the Macao pavilion, Tak Seng On replica and other immutable mobiles from Macao have worked towards the attraction of yet more tourists and tourist revenues for the SAR. An unnamed student volunteer spoke of her pride that Tak Seng On was one of the most popular attractions at the Expo.

We are very proud of the fact that Tak Seng On is one of the most popular attractions in the Urban Best Practices zone. We have more engaging and interesting exhibits here. In the other urban best practices pavilions, you only see exhibits illustrating green-living, sustainable development and high-tech living concepts. But here, we have a lot more and that’s why we are attracting more visitors (student docent A).

This also led an unnamed student docent to wonder if what they were doing was a mere tourism gimmick.

I do not think what we have here illustrates or represents Macao’s achievements and the ‘essences’ of her cultures. It is more like marketing for tourism. It is a bit of a gimmick despite our efforts. If you ask me, honestly, I feel we should not have so many Jin Yong and wuxia-related exhibits as they distract and pull visitors away from the real history and culture of the pawnshop industry and of Macao (student docent B).

Student docent B’s quote is illustrative of the official preference for fast visitor flows and high visitor numbers over cultural ‘accuracy’—that is, the lack of concern about the visitor experience, or even the adherence to the Expo’s overarching theme of “Better City, Better Life” as the crowds surged past the exhibits. Student docent B’s words are interesting. Perhaps self-conscious that she was being interviewed by a heritage management teacher, she was quick to point to the ‘inauthentic’ use of a Hong Kong novelist and his wuxia narratives and characters in the showcasing of Macao. This concern with mass numbers also points to the tourism imperative and the continued official desire to attract greater numbers of tourists to Macao, often regardless of their interest in culture. As seen from the marketing efforts at the expo, the political space of the Macao SAR and its political-economic relationship with the mainland require not niche or specialised tourists and visitors, but steady, uniform and standardised flows of group package tourists and gambling tourists to line its coffers.

The dikes around the SAR also permit the inflow of certain select groups of desired immigrants. On 9 June 2010, Robo-Guide Jack, Asia’s only English-American robot convention guide and interpreter, reminded Macao’s Chief Executive Mr Chui Sai On to bring him back to Macao (Macao Daily, 2010). Jack is a cutting-edge emotionally intelligent robot presented to the Office. The programmer had the robot imitate an immigrant who had developed an intense sense of place and affinity for Macao, so that the apparently warm and affectionate Jack accosted the Chief Executive with, “Please remember to bring me back to Macao!” (Macao Daily, 2010). At a time when immigration and the influx of foreign labour in the casino, hospitality and tourism industries have created tense domestic politics, robo-guide Jack’s innocuous request to become robo-citizen is interpreted by the Chief Executive’s bureaucratic entourage as a request for immigration and granting of permanent residency in the affluent Chinese territory (Macao Daily, 2010). The entourage laughed at the humanoid’s request (Macao Daily, 2010).

Narrating Jack’s words, plight and situation is not a case for claiming fully human agency for emotionally intelligent robots. Rather, the aim is to claim the narrative...
spaces of the Shanghai Expo as a performed urban space—it is an urban space to the extent that real urban ideals are represented and consequences enacted. Due to the steep difference between the affluence of the citizens of the two SARs and the availability of employment opportunities, many Chinese citizens from neighbouring cities in the Pearl River Delta region aspire to work, reside and live in the territories. However, Deng Xiaoping’s policy declarations that the two SARs of Macao and Hong Kong will stay unchanged for 50 years have led to solidity in the dikes that keep out many Chinese citizens and their aspirations to live in Macao and Hong Kong.

Despite the solidity of the policy and cultural imaginings of the SAR space and its consequent regulation of people and object mobilities, the Expo’s discourses sustaining the dikes are not supported and consumed by everyone in Macao. The dikes, in real life too, are constantly negotiated and strained. In addition to the unhappiness Chinese backpackers expressed at the regulations and constrained freedom they possess when entering the Macao SAR, documented in Ong and du Cros (2011), this study observed that the policy and cultural imaginings which the Macao SAR government sought to endorse and promote do not have the agreement of some residents back in Macao. For instance, an interpretation contrary to the one endorsed by the Macao SAR government is apparent in local gossip. The ‘Jade Rabbit’, pronounced in both Putonghua/Mandarin and the local dialect Cantonese, sounds very much like “on the verge of vomiting”. Local residents who do not like the rabbit design make fun of such lexical (mis)connections.

Furthermore, the rabbit lantern was a childhood phenomenon in Hong Kong, Macao and Guangzhou, up until the 1970s. Macao youth today appear unlikely to have had personal connections and experiences with the lanterns in the way that the current generation of decision-makers did. Growing up in the company of on-line gaming, Wii and virtual pets, they are likely to form a silent majority, unmoved by the designer Marreiros’ and the Macao SAR government’s interpretation of Macao childhood and Chinese mythology and the Office’s choice of symbolic images for the territory’s participation at the Shanghai Expo. This political and cultural message associated with the Macao pavilion was further subjugated when its designer made it a platform to contest and advocate greater protection of architectural and design copyrights in Macao, alleging that the Macao SAR government had altered the Macao pavilion without his approval.

Conclusion

Having drawn a record 73 million visitors, the Shanghai Expo 2010 is a noteworthy site for urban analysis. In particular, Expo 2010 was invested with the aspirations, typologies and urban politics of all the participating cities. While the business aim of expos in China has arguably remained unchanged since China’s first expo in 1910, it is pertinent to note the transformations in ideals and discourses shaping the Shanghai Expo. This study has located such an analysis within Macao’s participation in Shanghai Expo with the aim of understanding the city’s post-colonial relations. A post-colonial Chinese city celebrating its 10th anniversary back in Chinese rule, Macao is a significant site for such an inquiry. While popularly seen as objects for tourism marketing, the Macao items on show at Shanghai Expo 2010 are cultural and political ones as well. Drawing on actor–network theory-informed approaches to mobilities pioneered by Law (2006) and
to travelling objects by Latour (1987), this analysis has lent weight to the argument that cultural and political messages and discourses are not created solely in the minds of politicians and their aides. Rather, they are collectively created and the help of many is enlisted, including the role that some travelling objects (of some permanence) play and the performance of some human actors. This is especially so in the ways in which the objects focus the attention of volunteers, media and tourists on the messages to be created, distributed and consumed.

Analysis of the production, distribution and consumption (and negotiation) of such discourses, aspirations and ideals has revealed that the Macao pavilion, its Tak Seng On pawnshop replica and other associated travelling objects at Shanghai Expo 2010 are immutable mobiles created to help the Macao SAR government to promote the cultural and political imaginings of Macao as both a loyal and an exclusive Special Administrative Region, and to help visitors to subscribe to this interpretation. Specifically, this paper has argued that (im)mobilities of objects and peoples are not innocent and it has demonstrated the ways in which such regulation takes place. By travelling to Shanghai, the Macao objects on show have helped to create a sense of materiality and permanence which expo visitors can deploy in their understanding of the city. These immutable mobiles have helped visitors to focus their gaze and attention on various aspects of the Special Administrative Region: that it is a place with Chinese characteristics and loyalties, while at the same time being exotic and exclusive. It is also worth noting how differently Macao was inscribed by Portugal at Lisbon’s Expo98 (Power and Sidaway, 2005) and China at the 2010 exposition. Both cases describe a situation where Macao is included as a part of a national and territorial imaginary and, in both cases, Macao sits on the margins and edge of such engagements. Portugal, Power and Sidaway (2005, p. 875) described the ways in which narratives and objects at the expo in Lisbon articulate Macao’s fringe role in Portugal’s nationalistic expansion and enduring maritime presence as an ‘overseas’ province and how post-colonial re-orientations brought about a reluctant change in its identity to that of a ‘Chinese territory under Portuguese administration’. In the case of Macao, its objects on show articulate that Macao is now a loyal but distinctive city within the ‘one country—two systems’ configuration. The objects also performed an urban identity at the expo that leveraged on Portuguese presence, colonisation and administration as forms of cultural capital for the attraction of inflows of desired tourists, migrants and capital and the galvanising of a general goodwill from the motherland. Downplayed, was the economic and tourism reality of Macao—that despite Beijing-sanctioned efforts at diversification, gaming still forms the bedrock of the territory’s economy and tourism.

Thus, through gazing at, interacting with and experiencing the Macao that is on show, the Macao SAR government has hoped to reaffirm its relations with the motherland (mainland China) and its status as an internally autonomous city with monopoly rights to operate casinos and to promote in-flows of investment and standardised and regulated tourism from Macao’s hinterland. However, such desired in-flows can only happen when undesirable and inappropriate ones are constantly kept out. In the case of Macao, and as demonstrated by the Macao Chief Executive and his entourage’s response to robo-guide Jack’s programmed desire to be in Macao, it is not easy to gain residency in Macao. Macao is then projected as an unreachable utopia for Chinese visitors. The objects on show at the expo—the main Macao Jade
Rabbit pavilion, the Tak Seng On pawnshop replica (Macao’s item in the Best Urban Practice Area), their associated images and inscriptions and even the emotionally intelligent robo-guide Jack—helped to organise such (im)mobilities by promoting desired ones and by sustaining conditions that help to maintain the dikes and their divides. Such cultural and political imaginings, however, are not consumed and shared by some Macao residents and Chinese visitors. Local gossip and visitor dissatisfaction at being excluded from the SAR demonstrate strains in the SAR’s political dikes.

Consideration of the durability of such political and cultural dikes and Macao’s past and present histories of being located and locating itself on the fringes of Portuguese and Chinese political and cultural imaginations, brings about questions for the present and new questions for the future. The political and cultural dikes represented by the Macao pavilion and its associated objects articulated that sense of marginality and uncertainty associated with Chinese citizenship. In addition to contributing to an understanding of the geopolitics represented at the Shanghai Expo, this study has also sought to contribute to a broader literature on the projection and travel of city images. While there have been two decades of work focusing on the production of city images for global circulation, this paper has contributed by posing questions about and responding to the material and discursive ways in which the aspirations, ideals and images actually travel. Conceptualising Macao’s participation as a joint effort between human actors and non-human actants consisting of immutable mobiles, this paper has sought to further the understanding of a territory’s participation in a world exposition beyond a study of representations commonly used in existing world exposition studies.

Specifically, in considering key non-human travelling objects that helped organisers, volunteers and visitors to project and think about Macao’s urban image and identity, this paper has demonstrated that members of Macao society—designers, volunteers, a wuxia novelist and kungfu exponents—were often co-opted and enrolled into the production and distribution of political and cultural imaginings. This is not unlike the way that survey forms, maps and statistical charts were part of the scientific process in Latour’s (1987) work. In doing so, this study has sought to open the processes so often ‘black boxed’ and unaccounted for in studies that examined world expositions and popular and political culture. This study also contributes by going beyond the oft-invoked scale of the nation in existing studies of international expositions and mega events to look at the citizen mobilities into and of their Special Administrative Regions and their implications for a greatly differentiated People’s Republic of China.

New questions regarding Macao’s identity as a post-colonial city within a new and stratified Chinese urban and national system were dealt with by demonstrating the ways in which a SAR space is created and reinforced and the various ways in which these political and cultural dikes have been sustained and strained. The creation of such a SAR space is a key feature of Macao’s post-colonial condition. However, as Sidaway (2000) and Yeoh (2003) insist, there is a multiplicity of post-colonial conditions. This study has sought to provide a fragment to the post-colonial puzzle. Macao’s post-colonial narrative did not follow a ‘triumphant victory over Western colonisers’ theme. Rather than seeking a distinct and complete break from Portuguese colonisation, this SAR space was co-created through negotiations between Beijing and the then departing Portuguese administration and was maintained by policies aimed at reassuring Macao residents that
reintegration with the People’s Republic of China will not bring about significant disruption to their lives. As Macao travels to Shanghai, aspects of Portuguese colonisation were creatively used to draw and enrol mainland Chinese tourists into Macao’s touristic networks and to generate economic benefits for the territory.

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