



The Portuguese Influence on Chinese Benevolent Societies

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The Santa Casa de Misericordia was the first global charitable organization in the world. They supervised the collection of donations, the opening of schools, healthcare, and welfare throughout the entire Portuguese Empire. What is surprising is that despite the success of the Misericordia, especially in Macau, non-Catholic religious organizations did not develop competing or parallel organizations. Well, at least we thought from all published sources we examined. After receiving a suggestion from Professor McDaniel, I decided to look at the Chinese Benevolent Societies that while not particularly religious, did engage in social welfare activities in China. I researched them and discovered a strong link in Macau. It seems that the Misericordia in Macau did have a strong influence on the rise of Chinese Benevolent Societies. This link has never been fully researched or written about in any language it seems. I stumbled upon a striking case of cross-cultural exchange, which would end up having a great impact on the role of religion in Asia.

Over the past year, under the guidance of Professor McDaniel, I continued research on this subject and started preliminary work on a scholarly article with Professor McDaniel on the very idea of charity and trans regional aid organizations in Asia that looks at the origin of this practice in Macau in the 1560s to 1750s. Thanks to generous funding from the Mary L. And Matthew S. Santirocco College Alumni Society Undergraduate Research Grant and the Barthmaier Grant, I was able to continue and expand my initial research by traveling to Lisbon, Portugal where I spent a week working and consulting with scholars at the Fundacao Oriente and the Santa de Misericordia de Lisboa. These research experiences helped grow my repertoire of research skills, broaden my understanding of Sino-Portuguese relations in the context of religion, as well as expand my Portuguese language skills.

