

Portuguese-Macao Border Dispute: Sovereignty and Colonial Resistance in the Early 20th Century

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Abstract: At the beginning of the 20th century, China was beset by internal and external threats, with Macao as a focus between China and Portugal. In their unending series of formal agreements, Macao was gradually transformed into a colony, and this greatly angered the Chinese society. Xiangshan Xunbao, which was formed in 1908 by Zheng Bian, Liu Sifu and others, becoming a platform for anti-colonial discourse. It exposed Portuguese aggression, condemned the Qing government's feeble response, and advocated for increased attention to the demarcation of Macao's borders. Meanwhile, it highlighted the complexities of the demarcation and helped to mobilize anti-colonial sentiment and social forces. This paper analyses the historical role of Xiangshan Xunbao, its impact on Chinese society, and its symbolic importance in the broader struggle against colonialism and the defense of national sovereignty.

Keywords: Xiangshan Xunbao, Macao border dispute, Sino-Portuguese relations, national sovereignty, public opinion resistance

1. Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century, China found itself in a crisis of political and institutional conflict on the one hand and external aggression on the other. The regime in the late Qing dynasty occurred over Chinese territories, but the influence of Portugal began in the mid-16th century, interjecting the sovereignty of Macao (Matias, 2014). Through signing the mixed series of treaties, for example, the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Peking in 1887, Portugal understated its hold on Macao, which received vehement opposition from texts, significant scholars, Chinese nationalist groups, and revolutionary factions categorizing it as the invasion of Chinese sovereignty (Wan, 2019). The revolutionaries who wanted to liberate their country from the feudal lords and colonialism wished to stand up against this colonial invasion.

In September 1908, the revolutionaries from Tongmenghui, such as Zheng Bian and Liu Sifu, jointly set up Xiangshan Xunbao as a channel to advocate against colonialism and nationalism in defense of Portuguese rule in Macao (Qiu & Wang, 2014). Through the newspaper, revolutionary ideas were disseminated, fueling opposition to colonialism and encouraging the public to resist Portuguese control. This paper looks at Xiangshan Xunbao in the Macao border dispute and the advancement of China in the defending of national sovereignty.

2. The border dispute between Macao and the rise of the Xiangshan Xun Bao

2.1 The historical background of the border dispute between Macao

Macao's border dispute was dated back to the mid-16th century when Portuguese first arrived in Macao and gradually established a foothold on what was originally an island within Xiangshan County (Chaoqun, 2024). Through trade and colonization, Portugal progressively expanded its influence over Macao. By the mid-19th century, Portugal sought to formalize its colonial status, declaring Macao a Portuguese colony in 1844. In 1849, Portugal further undermined the Qing government's authority in Macao, effectively preventing China from exercising its sovereignty over the territory (Xie, 2024). The signing of the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Peking in 1887 officially granted Portugal permanent colonial rights to Macao, legitimizing its colonial presence. This succession of unequal treaties and acts of aggression provoked widespread dissatisfaction and protests within Chinese society, and the issue of Macao's border demarcation gradually became a central point of contention between China and Portugal.

2.2 The background to the establishment of Xiangshan Xunbao

With the escalation of the Sino-foreign confrontation since the Qing dynasty, the issue of the Macao border has become one of China's primary concerns. Radical slogans emerged throughout the nation before long, in part because of the dissemination of colonialism and disintegration of the rule of the Qing Dynasty, and one of the reasons was the colonial expansion of

Portugal in Macao and the disintegration of the internal power in China during the reign of the Qing dynasty (Krebs, 1998). Xiangshan Xunbao was then established on September 16, 1908, supported by Tongmenghui, aimed to mobilize the people against feudal and colonial power and advocate for China's independence.

The founders of Xiangshan Xunbao realized the indifferent attitude of the Qing government towards the expansion of foreigners, especially regarding Macao, so they wanted to force the authorities to take the necessary measures through the method of public voice to put pressure on Portugal in the field of the boundary. This factor enables this newspaper to disseminate revolutionary messages calling for forming a united and sovereign nation against colonialism. It also echoed Sun Yat-sen's opinion, that absolute independence could only be achieved by overthrowing feudal autocracy and imperialism (Croddy, 2022). Xiangshan Xunbao developed inside consciousness of China, and its engagement in demarcation made it a part of revolutionaries criticizing colonial power.

2.3 The stance and public opinion orientation of Xiangshan Xunbao on the Macao issue

Since its inauguration, it has explicitly declared itself against colonialism, most notably Portuguese colonialism in Macao. The newspaper firmly stood for nationalism, which was welcomed by the increasing revolutionary mood in China during that period (Lee, 2005). It repeatedly vilified the Portuguese colonial aspirations while portraying the Macao border issue as a Microcosm of Chinese sovereignty and pride.

Xiangshan Xunbao published different media forms to criticize Portugal's violent behaviors. For example, an editorial in August 1909 denounced the dredging of the Xiangzhou River as a territorial invasion and urged everyone to act immediately (Xie, 2024). Due to the newspaper's political cartoons and editorials, some of their actions were seen as confrontations with China by angering the populace. It also condemned the type of appeasement policy of the Qing government as 'to discuss with colonizers is to disarm.' As an opinion leader, Xiangshan Xunbao helped develop the anticolonial idea and convened social power to demarcate Macao's borders.

3. The public opinion and influence of Xiangshan Xunbao on the Macao border issue

3.1 Exposing Portugal's aggressive actions and criticizing the weakness of the Qing government

Xiangshan Xunbao was a principal informant of Portugal's aggressive conduct in Macao, a principal territorial incursion within China. The newspaper often stressed significant instances of Portuguese provocation, such as the overthrow of the Qing administration in Macao and the subsequent growth of Portuguese colonialism through projects such as the deepening of the Xiangzhou River (Ferreira Santos Lopes, 2017). However, as recently as August 1909, the magazine Xiangshan Xunbao condemned the dredging as an act of grab for territory, characterizing it as an encroachment on Chinese sovereignty and as the unambiguous expression of a colonialist attitude of the Portuguese. These encroachments need to be actively opposed, which was also reflected by the editorial's message: China had to awaken to the menace of colonialism.

As the leading organ that directly influenced the opinions of its readers, Xiangshan Xunbao summarized Portuguese imperialism as a direct threat to China's territorial integrity. An article on September 1, 1909 described Portugal scheming to strip the Qing authority of Macao. Making these actions look like a threat, and the newspaper propagated anti-colonial sentiments in the crowds (Krebs, 1998). Because of its precise news report and nationalist appeals, Xiangshan Xunbao located itself at the leading edge of the emerging nationalist discourse, which outlines hostile Portuguese and immobility of Qing government, offering readers the opportunities to fight for China's sovereignty.

3.2 Mobilising social forces: guiding civil resistance and promoting the struggle for border demarcation

Unlike most of the international reports denouncing Portugal, Xiangshan Xunbao called for social forces to rise against colonialism. That is why the newspaper placed the border issue in Macao in the context of China's concern for its national dignity and sovereignty and asked every group of people, businessmen, scholars, and even everyday people to act (Krebs, 1998). Hu reported in 1909 when some merchants in Xiangshan launched a campaign of 'expelling Portuguese from Macao.' Such a local move, Xiangshan Xunbao declared, was the way through which other social agents could rally to fight colonial interferences. After the setup of Xiangshan Xunbao, trading companies in Beijing, Shanghai, Xiamen, and overseas Chinese from Honolulu and Tokyo united to contribute to the fight for the demarcation of Macao. Encouraged by such newspapers, these groups not only took a stance for the cause but also contributed significant amounts of money to the cause as well. Their financial and moral support gave added testimony to the strength of the newspaper in moulding public opinion and rallying all types of groups and segments of society in the struggle against colonialism.

Together with reporting on specific incidents of workers' defiance, Xiangshan Xunbao called for the creation of significant social organizations to protect the borders of China. The newspaper promoted the creation of the "Macao Border Demarcation and Maintenance Association" to mobilize civil forces in a collective movement of anticolonial resistance (Ferreira Santos Lopes, 2017). Through disseminating information like this, Xiangshan Xunbao contributed to creating a mentality to unite and defend the territorial integrity of China for all equal Chinese citizens. The strategy of mobilizing social force was necessary in raising awareness of the Macao issue at the national level and played a part in China's anti-colonial movement.

3.3 Interference and Influence on Sino-Portuguese Border Negotiations

During the Sino-Portuguese border negotiations concerning Macao from 1909 to 1910, Xiangshan Xunbao assumed the role of public opinion watchdog, actively intervening in the negotiation process (Mendes, 2004). The publication consistently exposed the Portuguese representatives' arrogant attitude and the Qing government's compromising tendencies in the negotiations, urging the government and the populace to remain vigilant. Through the publication of editorials and political cartoons, Xiangshan Xunbao effectively captured and reflected the widespread dissatisfaction and protests from various sectors of society regarding the negotiations.

For instance, the cartoon "The Sentiment of the People in the Demarcation" (Figure 1), published in Xiangshan Xunbao, vividly illustrates the Qing government's negotiation weakness and incites public discontent with the government's foreign policy.

3、劃界之民氣³ (圖 3)

劃界，
 不了生不了了之。
 旗幟口號：訪團、拒電
 烘烘民氣，
 昏天黑地。
 彼何人斯？
 但嗤以鼻。



Figure 1. "The spirit of the people"

Through sustained pressure from public opinion, Xiangshan Xunbao exerted a notable influence on the negotiation process, compelling the Qing government to adopt a firmer stance on the Macao issue. Although the outcome of the negotiations did not entirely align with the expectations of the revolutionaries, the coverage and promotion by Xiangshan Xunbao successfully elevated the Macao border issue to the forefront of public discourse, drawing increased attention both domestically and internationally and prompting Chinese society to reconsider notions of national sovereignty and territorial integrity (Mendes, 2013).

3.4 The symbolic significance of Xiangshan Xunbao on the Macao border issue

The public impression that Xiangshan Xunbao has created about the Macao border issue shows the Chinese people's unyielding spirit toward their foreign invasion and sovereignty. The journal did more than enlighten the people in Portugal regarding the nation's colonialism; it also helped wake up the entire country and the spirit of liberation. By doing so, Xiangshan Xunbao raised the society and assembled different sectors, which played an essential role in guarding Macao's borders and China's territorial integrity (De Oliveira Amado Mendes, 2004).

Compared with Shen Bao, which was less radical and more supportive of the Qing government, Xiangshan Xunbao demanded direct action against colonialism. Shen Bao sought to delegitimize foreign aggression as merely a foreign policy that could be overcome through diplomacy; on the other hand, Xiangshan Xunbao asserted that colonialism was an irrecoverable antagonistic force of the enemies to freedom, which should be collectively resisted. Because of its revolutionary approach, it was a rebellion against foreign imperialism and the submission of the Qing dynasty government (Krebs, 1998). Thus, Xiang-

shan Xunbao's campaign on the Macao border was also one of the histories of China's early twentieth-century anti-colonial struggle for independence and change, fostering newspapers. At the same time, Shen Bao sought to sustain continuity.

4. The historical role and social impact of Xiangshan Xunbao

4.1 Anti-colonialism and a tool of public opinion for the preservation of national sovereignty

During the early twentieth century, Xiangshan Xunbao had the essential function of uniting the people against colonialism and defending the nation by orienting the opinion. In a sequence of political critical reports and editorials, the newspaper stimulated Portugal's colonial motivating factors and mobilized the Chinese society to counteract the foreign escalation (Qiu and Wang, 2014). Through building up concern on Macao's issue, Xiangshan Xunbao played an essential role in promoting the sovereignty's cause in China.

It was difficult for Xiangshan Xunbao to perform its role because it encountered a lot of interference in the form of censorship from the authorities of the Qing dynasty, who considered this newspaper to be rather dangerous to their reign. Unfortunately, its ideas were offensive to the moderates, so people who could have benefited from it could not read it (Croddy, 2022). The Qing government tried to suppress it continuously and stop the spread of its articles, mainly to the lower classes of society. Nevertheless, Xiangshan Xunbao had a significant function in publicizing against the colonialism of Portugal in Macao and stirring anti-colonial motions in the following period. Although it struggled with the authorities, it still contributed to the preparation for the contestation of Chinese sovereignty.

4.2 Enlightenment and promotion of the Chinese revolutionary movement

During the Macao border dispute, Xiangshan Xunbao carefully organized several public opinion campaigns, greatly enhancing the nation's understanding of its sovereign rights based on these campaigns (Ferreira Santos Lopes, 2017). The intrusions of the Portuguese and the inefficiency of the Qing government highlighted by the newspaper's reports provided the demand for protection of the Chinese territory and sovereignty urgency. It can effectively explain the Macao conflict as a violation on a national level and activate people to join the safeguarding of the country's territory.

As a critical engagement with hegemonic discourses of the imperialist powers and the domestic feudal authorities in China, Xiangshan Xunbao's revolutionary ideas are comparable to other revolutionary thinkers of that period, including the leaders of the Chinese revolution, Sun Yat-sen and Liang Qichao. Both sought to forge a 'national imagination' and build China beyond the colonial world (Chaoqun, 2024). However, among the revolutionary presses, Xiangshan Xunbao had several drawbacks, such as the desire of the author to become popular among conservatives, the lack of experience in calling to the masses, self-education, and propaganda among the educated. Despite the apparent shortcomings, the magazine played an essential role in the anti-imperialist movement in China.

4.3 Historical impact on the issue of border demarcation of Macao and its symbolic significance

Concerning the campaign about the demarcation of Macao's borders, public opinion education produced a swift effect and has provided an abundant historical reference for later generations. Xiangshan Xunbao, the Macao border issue, became an essential focal point in domestic and international concern and action for Macao sovereignty (Zandonai & Amaro, 2018). This powerful public opinion established a firm social background upon which China's position on the Macao issue was a significant factor in negotiations between China and Portugal.

Furthermore, ideas of anti-colonialism and sovereignty asserted in Xiangshan Xunbao have been included in the national memory of China in modern history. The demarcation of the territorial borders in Macao is not just a local issue; it is a struggle for the independence of the Chinese nation and its sovereignty (Zandonai and Amaro, 2018). The position that Xiangshan Xunbao has taken in this historical course has equipped the mountain with profound spiritual significance as a symbol of the Chinese people's fight against colonial dominance and the battle for a unified nation.

4.4 A model of public opinion struggle in modern China

To some extent, the public opinion struggle about the Macao border issue, as reflected in Xiangshan Xunbao, can be regarded as a typical model of modern Chinese public opinion warfare. The publication used public opinion to reveal the aggressors' criminal actions and involve the intentions of social forces in the struggle, which can guarantee support for the defense of national sovereignty (Matias, 2014). Therefore, it is worth mentioning that the strength of public opinion needs to be emphasized during social transformation. The cases described concerning Xiangshan Xunbao underscore public opinion's potential to support national interests and advance social progress. These suggestions can be a valuable reference for China's national independence movement and social reform.

5. Conclusion

Xiangshan Xunbao became a leading player in creating critical public opinion in the case of the Macao border conflict and became an essential part of China's struggle against colonialism. Altogether, the newspaper disclosed Portugal's colonization, condemned the Qing court's policy of inaction and stirred up the society's opposition to imperialism. Despite the controls and restrictions, its inflammatory effect as an instrument of the revolutionary consciousness of China and as an anti-colonial propaganda tool was great.

However, it is necessary to admit the importance of Xiangshan Xunbao for the modern anticolonial struggle. Xiangshan Xunbao challenged foreign control by mobilizing public opinion in ways that can still be relevant in current battles against neocolonialism and imperialism. As it depicted colonialism as an encroachment of national sovereignty, such movements could similarly refer to the same arguments against economic and political oppression. Media activism for resistance remains influential, primarily when state and foreign investment nexus exists.

Therefore, further studies in elucidating the function of Xiangshan Xunbao concerning the modern nationalist movements in China and other postcolonial countries are crucial. Moreover, future research may further explore how modern conversational platforms, such as traditional newspapers, uphold revolutionary discourses. This paper presents Xiangshan Xunbao's study as a helpful insight into China's anti-imperialist history, which can be useful for modern scholars pursuing national liberation and against oppression in current world.

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