

**O'Regan, J. P. (2011). Further Note on Foreign Death in China: A Rejoinder. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, 51, 301-304.**

### **John O'Regan**

I noted with interest and pleasure Mark MacAlpine's 'Further note on Foreign Death in China' in 'Notes and Queries' Volume 50 concerning my article about the same in Volume 47. First, I am grateful for the corrections to the 'two minor errors' which he points out, and second, I am delighted to have received an unexpected mention in the fiftieth anniversary edition, even if it is in relation to two mistakes—one in a footnote and one in the main text. MacAlpine is right to say that: 'Cleverly Street was not named after Osmund Cleverly, but his younger brother Charles St George Cleverly, Hong Kong's second Surveyor General.' My error came from reading Father Manuel Teixeira's *A Voz das Pedras de Macau* (1980) in which this erroneous attribution also appears, and using that as the source for my footnote. There is a certain irony that it should have been from Teixeira that I gathered my own error as it was he who took Lindsay Ride to task for suggesting that the date on the lintel of the Old Protestant Cemetery in Macau—1814—refers to the date when the English East India Company's charter was renewed. In Teixeira's view it was simply an error on the part of the authority responsible for cutting the inscription, because it should have said 1821, which was the year the cemetery opened. I agree with Ride for reasons I give in my article, so I won't repeat these here.

The second error relates to the symbol of the 'Eye of Providence' or 'All-seeing Eye', which I describe as 'Masonic' in my article, and which appears on the tomb of Capt. Frederick Jpland (1818-57). MacAlpine is of course correct when he says that the symbol 'could well be Masonic, but need not be'. I note in my article, however, that the origin of symbols such as this one is pagan, so they are clearly also pre-Masonic. The reason I describe it as Masonic in my article is because in the nineteenth century the symbol was co-opted by Christians and by the Freemasonry movement in particular, and it is not unusual in this period to find it on tombs of persons who were in life masons. It may be, however, that Jpland was not a mason, in which case the eye is merely symbolic of God's omniscience, and mine is perhaps still a 'half error' for not being more precise.

In the spirit of confession and correction, I would also like to draw the attention of readers to a small number of additional 'errors' in my article, which have irked me since it was first published. The first is that in drawing up the shortlist of tomb types, which appears on p. 142 in the printed version, I replaced, at the last moment, 'Duff' with 'Fitzgerald' to provide the example of the flame spouting from the urn on the latter's tomb which I wished to include, but neglected to change the description from 'chest tomb' to 'pillar', and so the erroneous appellation has gone into the record.

For my article I was very fortunate to have as my editor the late Geoffrey Bonsall. He was, as his obituary in Volume 50 notes, 'no run-of-the-mill proof reader, and he was a very careful "detail man"'. I wish to endorse that wholeheartedly. His 'invisible hand' is beneficially present in parts of the article in ways which only I as the author can see, and I am very grateful for that. For reasons which I am not aware of, however, a proof copy of the edited version of my article was not sent to me for checking prior to publication. I do not blame anyone for this, and certainly not Geoffrey Bonsall. It just happened that way. But if it had been sent to me, then I might have been able to iron out some further anomalies in my paper, which I am happy to be able to correct now.

The title of my article was 'Foreign Death in China: Ritual, Symbolism and Belief in the Old Protestant Cemetery in Macao'. It is, to be sure, a delightful title, but in my original submission I had written, 'at Macao' (*sic*). Geoffrey Bonsall changed the preposition to 'in' and updated 'Macao' to the more contemporaneous 'Macau'. I had been grammatically aiming for a nineteenth-century cadence in the reading of my title, but I think the 'in' works just as well. I had also intentionally opted for 'Macao' rather than the more contemporary 'Macau' because during the time the cemetery was open (1821-1857) this was the spelling in current use, as well as the one which appears on all the tombs. The title is therefore at odds

with the rest of the article, where the earlier spelling is preserved. Following publication, I queried the spelling anomaly, and received a very generous as well as apologetic email from Geoffrey Bonsall regretting the change in spelling and explaining that he had changed it to ‘Macau’ because the other spelling was no longer current. I did not mind really, especially as what followed was a brief series of exchanges with him on the China trade artist, George Chinnery (1774-1852), who is buried in the cemetery, and about whose handwriting he was an expert. Being a discourse analyst and occasional forensic linguist, I found his views on Chinnery’s distinctive scrawl fascinating, and we had a good discussion about it.

We know about the immediate aftermath of Chinnery’s death from the reminiscences of W.C. Hunter in his book *Bits of Old China*<sup>1</sup>. In my article I quote Hunter’s account of this, but due to an unfortunate typesetting error, Hunter’s lines were accidentally disordered. I am pleased, therefore, to be able to set this straight and give readers the ordered account as it actually appears in Hunter’s book.

After seeing his effects placed in his studio we sealed the doors, left his servant Augustine and several Chinese in charge, and I came home to bed at 5 o’clock. ... Everyone supposed ... from his wonderful eating powers, that his stomach would be found in a most deranged state. An autopsy was made by Doctor Watson, our Macao medico, who attended Chinnery in his last illness, the morning of his death, about 10 o’clock, at which Stewart and myself were present. On examining the brain it was evident that he had died of serious apoplexy, while the stomach was wonderfully healthy.<sup>2</sup>

My interest here was in the practice of autopsy for discerning the cause of death of ‘ordinary’ persons—i.e., as opposed to the customary dissection of executed felons—which in the 1850s was still lacking the medico-legal recognition that we regard as commonplace today. Like others before him, Hunter appears to have believed that by participating as an observer in the autopsy, not only was he giving his seal of approval to the ‘furthering of medical science’, but in another more subtly affirmative way was marking himself out as a ‘westerner’ in a foreign land; for ‘science’ in the hands of the ‘Fan Kwae’ (番鬼)<sup>3</sup> was a distinctly ‘civilised’ pursuit.

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<sup>1</sup> W.C. Hunter, *Bits of Old China*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench and Co, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> Hunter, *Bits of Old China*, pp. 273-74

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘Fan Kwae’ (番鬼), meaning literally ‘Foreign Ghost’, was the popular term for foreigners of Caucasian appearance in and around Canton at the height of the opium trade in the early to mid-nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, particularly in Hong Kong, this phrase was supplanted by the much more familiar epithet ‘Gweilo’ (鬼佬), which is popularly used by both local Chinese and Caucasian residents in the HKSAR today.