

Traditional Bonds Hold Key to Identity

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ACADEMIE DE LA LATINITÉ

TEXTES DE REFERENCE

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Macau, the first and last Western settlement in China, is reverting back to its motherland. The transitional period of 12 years has tried to lay the foundation for a smooth reversion of power. But there are unresolved problems, among which is the issue of preserving and developing Macau's unique cultural identity, crucial for the implementation of the "one country, two systems" formula.

Although the Basic Law of Macau specifies that the present socio-political and legal system should be preserved, except for some "colonial" aspects, and that the SAR government has the right to work out its own cultural policies, there are still many grey areas to be clarified, such as: what is the cultural identity of Macau or uniqueness of Macau's cultural heritage; how to preserve and develop this identity to serve Macau and China?

Fortunately, more people have begun to realize that once Macau loses its cultural identity, and degenerates into another small Chinese city, its survival would be at stake.

Macau's cultural identity has been created over four centuries.

For three centuries before the Opium Wars, Macau contributed a lot to the world history as a bridge bringing East and West, China and Europe, closer in trade and culture.

In the first three centuries of Macau's existence as an important trade entrepot, we can say that the China-Europe relationship through Macau was mainly based on mutual benefit and mutual respect. Trade brought intensive cultural exchange between East and West.

Almost from Macau's foundation, a church presence was established. Macau became the center of the first diocese of the Catholic church in East Asia en 1575.

In 1594, the St Paul College, the first Western-style university in the Far East, was established to train the Jesuits in the Chinese language, culture and customs, before their missionary work in China. The Jesuits who were from different European nations became the first generation of Sinologists.

They, together with their Chinese counterparts trained in Latin languages, brought about a two-way exchange of culture, by translating and introducing Western mathematics, astronomy, physics, architecture, medicine, weaponry, art of printing, music, fine

arts, among other things, to the East, and introducing Chinese philosophy, literature, medicine, tea, porcelain, lacquerware, architecture and painting to the West.

This significant cultural interchange was one of Macau's greatest contribution to history.

The ruins and façade of St Paul Cathedral, with its oriental design elements, is a symbol of Macau's cultural identity. The multi-cultural identity involves the co-existence, interaction and blending of both East and West.

The cultural blending resulted in the creation of a hybrid community, the Eurasian Macanese. This community of Macanese, with bilingual or multilingual cultural characteristics, has played an important role in the history of Macau.

The Macanese are the ones that have been bridging the cultural gap between the Portuguese and the Chinese. The Macanese, who called themselves *filhos de terra* (natives of the place), have the strongest sense of belonging among the local population.

The cultural interflow through Macau in the early days had a great social impact on both East and West. On the one hand it contributed to a deeper understanding of the East and to a new style of art, the Rococo style.

On the other hand, many influential thinkers and leaders in China including Dr. Sun Yat Sen, most of whom came from areas near Macau in the south had access to Western learning, either in Macau or in China through Macau.

During World Wars I and II and after the 1949 Revolution, Macau remained an open window to the West, with some free flow of immigrants, capital and trade.

This is quite positive for Macau in a sense that the very old traditions of Chinese folklore and customs, and some of the old Chinese cultural heritage, which have already been destroyed in China are still intact and well preserved in Macau.

The old temples and shrines of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as the related traditional practices from birth to death, are still a part of present-day social life of many Macau residents.

For the Chinese, Macau has been a springboard to foreign lands, and has become a city of migrants. The earliest settlers were the seafarers and fishermen from Fujian, who brought with them the culture of Ah Ma, the goddess and protector of seafarers.

Most of the old Chinese residents of Macau have relatives abroad. The diaspora became stronger during

the nefarious “collie trade” in the 19th century, the darkest page in Macau’s history.

Macau became a shelter for refugees during World War II. After the war, Macau again became a temporary stopping point for repatriated overseas Chinese. This endless influx and outflow of migrants has given the local Chinese community a strong character of mobility and a weaker sense of belonging.

The Chinese community in Macau, unlike in Hong Kong, has a longer history of exposure to the West, in which Chinese culture had to co-exist with Western culture. This co-existence and interaction seems to produce different results compared with Hong Kong and other cities in China.

In this small territory, there was no way for Europeans to assimilate the ancient Chinese civilization, and no way for the Chinese to reject Western culture. The two sides learnt from each other and avoided conflict.

As a result, the religious freedom in Macau was well preserved. Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam and the Bahai faith have co-existed.

It has become a unique phenomenon in Macau, when the Bishop and the Chief Buddhist Monk appear together at major ceremonies, bestowing their blessings.

The adaptation of the Western political and legal system to the local Chinese community in this century, especially after 1974, is another important experiment, especially for the new immigrants from China.

Many Western values have been accepted by the local Chinese, especially by those who are better educated.

The increasing percentage of Chinese voters during the local election and the ever-growing demand among the local Chinese to defend the existing freedoms and the rule of law, is a striking example in the positive sense.

This co-existence shows that the axis is Chinese and Portuguese, or Sino-Latin, surrounded by other communities in East and Southeast Asia, as well as small clusters of people from Europe, Africa and America.

Macau is indeed a multi-racial and multi-cultural society.

Chinese leaders starting from the Ming emperor, down to Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, all knew and know how to preserve this identity to benefit China, and Deng was smart enough to call it the “one country, two systems” formula, a bridge to link China with the world. Each bridge should have its own identity.

The successful implementation and efficient operation of the second system is an important condition in preserving Macau's identity and enabling Macau to play the role of a bridge.

Outsiders have the responsibility of watching and closely monitoring whether the second system in both Hong Kong and Macau would not degenerate into the first system.

It is important to ensure that ultra leftist and ultra nationalistic tendencies left over from Mao's time will not influence the operation of the second system. People with these feelings regard Macau's cultural heritage, especially is Latinity, including the Portuguese language, as colonial trash, and should be thrown overboard.

Shortsightedness, factionalism and ethno-centric ideas could undermine the “one country, two systems” principle, destroying Macau's future.

Macau, as a second bridge, should not duplicate what Hong Kong is doing. Instead, it should base itself on its own cultural identity and extend itself along the traditional links with Europe, especially Latin Europe and the rest of the Latin speaking countries.

To develop Macau into a second bridge linked to Europe and Latin speaking countries falls in line with

China's strategy of diversifying its international ties to achieve a better balance among the different poles.

Macau should therefore take advantage of its own identity, and focus on the following efforts:

1) Concentrate on European and Latin studies, such as:

a) Languages — Portuguese/Latin languages as well as other European languages for Asian students, especially Chinese students, as well as Chinese (Putonghua and Cantonese) for foreign students, especially those coming from Latin speaking countries: translation techniques from Chinese into different Latin languages and vice versa; comparative cultural studies between Chinese and European/Latin cultures.

b) Law — European continental law (not just Portuguese law) and comparative law studies between European and Chinese laws and study experiences in regional coordination and integration.

c) Public administration — not only to meet the needs of Macau but also for the region, in close cooperation with institutes in Europe.

d) Tourism — to train professionals for the industry.

e) Business administration — comparative studies of different models, especially Chinese and

European models, with especial emphasis on consultancy.

To attain this goal, it is necessary to reform institutions of higher learning.

2) To build Macau into a facilitator of inter-regional business. In the next century, there is a growing need to bring Europe, the Far East and South America closer.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute the majority of businesses in these areas. They need assistance, facilitators or catalysts to avoid risks, to learn more about the markets and different business cultures. It is exactly in this field that Macau can play a role as a facilitator.

The EU-Macau Agreement on Trade and Cooperation, signed in 1992 and extending beyond 1999, is an important tool in developing EU-Macau relations and developing Macau's intermediary role between Europe and China. Existing links are also important.

3) To upgrade and diversity Macau's tourist industry.

Macau's long history has created immense resources to develop cultural tourism with its own identity and to provide a chance for becoming the "dragon head" for regional tourism in the Delta area.

To achieve the goals I have outlined, it is necessary for the SAR government, primarily to tackle the problem of public security; secondly, to reform the public service.

The preservation and development of Macau's cultural identity is not only crucial for implementing the "one country, two systems" formula, but also to boost the economy and maintain stability and prosperity in the future.

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