

# Macao

# 澳門

## Charting the Covid-19 outbreak

**DREAMS COME ALIVE AT THE  
59TH VENICE BIENNALE**

**MACAO'S AMBITIOUS PLANS TO  
TRANSFORM PUBLIC TRANSPORT**







## Macao 澳門

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**COVER IMAGE**

Since 18 June, the Covid-19 outbreak – which saw more than 1,800 cases over five weeks – has been stamped out by the local government and by end July, there were zero Covid-19 cases in the community. Photo by Lei Kuan

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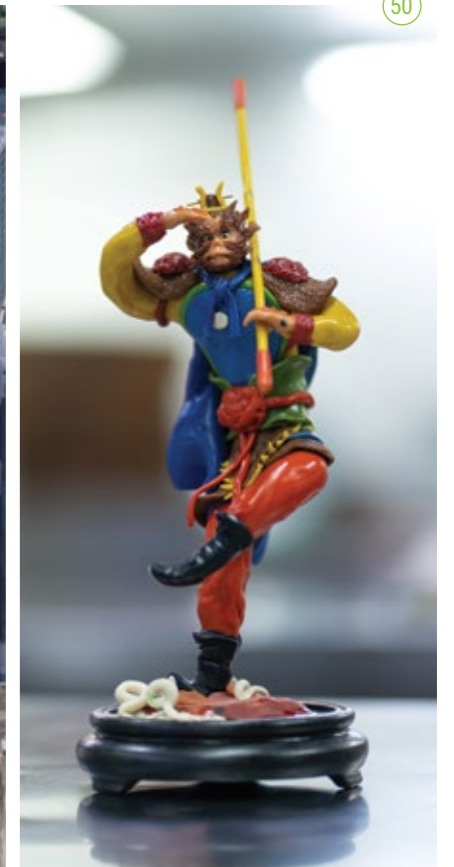
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POLITICS

## President Xi Jinping recognises Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng and his administration

The Macao government must work tirelessly on epidemic prevention and control, boost economic recovery and safeguard social stability in Macao, says the nation's leader.

Text **Christian Ritter** and  
**Gonçalo César de Sá**  
Photos **Xinhua News Agency**

President Xi Jinping (right) and  
Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng

President Xi Jinping said in Hong Kong that the central authorities fully acknowledge the work of Macao's Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng and its government.

Xi was speaking after a meeting with Ho Iat Seng, held in Hong Kong, on 30 June during a visit to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the motherland and the inaugural ceremony of Hong Kong's sixth-term government.

Stressing the need to maintain stability while pursuing progress, President Xi urged Ho Iat Seng and the Macao government to work tirelessly on epidemic prevention and control, consistently and effectively alleviate hardship affecting people's livelihood, boost economic recovery, firmly promote a moderately diversified economy, and make every effort to safeguard social stability in Macao.

Ho Iat Seng, who was also in Hong Kong for events celebrating the 25th anniversary, thanked Xi for meeting with him and vowed to make solid efforts in all aspects and resolutely safeguard the sound development of Macao.

### DURABILITY OF 'ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS'

President Xi Jinping reaffirmed the long-term durability of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in his address which focused, among other things, on the concept and practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, not just in Hong Kong but also in Macao.

Xi mentioned the Macao SAR several times in connection with "One Country, Two Systems".

Xi underlined that "One Country, Two Systems" is an "unprecedented innovation" whose "fundamental purpose is to safeguard China's sovereignty, security, development interests, and to maintain long-term prosperity and stability in Hong Kong and Macao."

The architect of the concept is none other than Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), who in the late 1970s reportedly envisaged it first for Taiwan before extending it in the early 1980s to solving the Hong Kong and Macao matters left over by history.



Xi stressed that “One Country, Two Systems’ serves the fundamental interests of not only Hong Kong and Macao, but also the whole country.” Most importantly, Xi emphasised that “there is no reason for us to change such a good policy, and we must adhere to it in the long run.”

Xi’s speech included a thought-provoking remark concerning the practice of “One Country, Two Systems” in Hong Kong in the past quarter of a century: “A review of the past can light the way forward.”

#### REQUIREMENTS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE SARs

Xi’s address also included four requirements and four proposals not just for Hong Kong but – both explicitly and implicitly – for Macao as well.

“First, we must fully and faithfully implement the principle of ‘One Country, Two Systems,’” Xi said, adding that this principle embodies a complete system and its top priority is to safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests.

“With this as a prerequisite, Hong Kong and Macao can keep the previous capitalist systems unchanged for a long time and enjoy a high degree of autonomy,” Xi stressed.

However, he also underlined that all residents in the two SARs should “willingly respect and uphold the country’s fundamental system,” which consists of the mainland’s socialist system and the nation’s leadership by the Communist Party of China.

Note that Xi’s remark mentioned “all residents” in Hong Kong and Macao – in other words, not only Chinese citizens but also foreign nationals. “Second, we must uphold the central government’s overall jurisdiction while protecting the SARs’ high degree of autonomy,” Xi said.

Among other things, he underlined that the two SARs must uphold their executive-led systems.

“Third, we must ensure that Hong Kong is administered by patriots,” Xi emphasised, pointing out that “there is no country or region in the world where its people will allow an unpatriotic or even treasonous force or figure to take power.”

Xi’s fourth point was that “we must maintain Hong Kong’s distinctive status and advantages,” such as “Hong Kong’s close connection with the world market and strong support from the motherland.”

Xi’s address included four proposals that clearly also apply to Macao: Hong Kong should further improve its governance; it should continue to create strong impetus for growth; it should earnestly address people’s concerns and difficulties in daily life; and the people of Hong Kong should work together to safeguard harmony and stability.

Xi made it a point to highlight the situation of young people in Hong Kong. He reminded audiences that Hong Kong will prosper only when its young people thrive, that it will only develop when its young people achieve well-rounded development, and that Hong Kong will have a bright future only when its young people have good career prospects. He also singled out the challenges that young first-time home-buyers in Hong Kong are facing.

Concerning the nation’s rejuvenation drive, Xi concluded his address by quoting a Chinese adage: “I would like to borrow a pair of wings from the crane to soar up to the sky.”

He used it as a metaphor for “China’s national rejuvenation having become a historical inevitability, and the successful practice of ‘One Country, Two Systems’ in Hong Kong being an important part of this historic process.” ●

President Xi Jinping speaks at the swearing-in ceremony for Hong Kong’s new chief executive, John Lee





COVID-19

## Charting the city's Covid outbreak

More than 50 days into Macao's largest Covid outbreak yet, we look back on some of the most important dates during this pandemic.

**Text** Miguel Luigi Enriquez

**Photos** Cheong Chi Fong and Lei Heong Ieong; courtesy of Government Information Bureau, Forum Macao and Macao Institute for Tourism Studies

In the middle of June, Macao suddenly detected a dozen Covid cases – its first local infections in 200 days. What followed was a flurry of rules and regulations as authorities worked to contain the outbreak to return to the city's Covid-zero policy. Testing the entire population

multiple times became a crucial part of the strategy to contain the spread of the virus, as well as locking down parts of the city and eventually enforcing a two-week “partial lockdown”. Here's a timeline of the past 50 days during Macao's largest outbreak yet. ●

JUNE

18

19

21

12 cases preliminarily test positive.



Number of confirmed infections nearly doubles to 21. All classes, government activities and events are cancelled as a state of immediate prevention is declared. The city's first round of community-wide testing takes place across the next 48 hours. Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng (pictured below) inspects NAT testing centres.



Government denies rumours of grid-style lockdown and continues to urge people to stay home. Government services extend closure until the end of the week.







Second round of testing begins while beaches, walking trails and public parks are shut. Total number of cases breach 100. Ho Iat Seng holds a press conference on Covid-19 latest developments while authorities confirm that all positive patients are infected with the BA.5 Omicron variant.



During the past few weeks, government departments such as the Permanent Secretariat to the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao) have come together to support the community at testing centres and across the city



Third round of testing begins. Government begins to distribute KN95 masks, reasoning they are more effective than other available options.



650 personnel from the mainland arrive to support containment measures. These include people to help with mass testing and medical professionals.



Education and Youth Development Bureau terminates the academic year early and says students' final grades will be based on their performance from earlier in the year.



Makeshift quarantine facilities at East Asian Games Dome opens.



Total number of Covid cases moves past 500.



Authorities begin to offer Traditional Chinese Medicine as treatment for Covid patients.







To facilitate access to different members of the population, the government launches NAT mobile buses across Macao and the Taipa and Coloane islands



Chief Executive announces “partial lockdown” between 11-17 July. Casinos and all other “non-essential” businesses ordered to shut. Going out is banned unless for urgent matters. Residents warned of imprisonment or fines if found violating new rules.



Bus drivers, taxi drivers and delivery drivers are mandated to take daily NATs.



Macao’s partial lockdown begins with public asked to stay home unless for urgent reasons to go out.

3

Macao records first Covid-19 related fatalities: an unvaccinated 100-year-old and double-jabbed 94-year-old. Both women suffered from chronic diseases. Government announces MOP 10 billion support package to aid individuals and businesses impacted by the pandemic.



6

More than 1,000 total Covid cases recorded in Macao since the start of the outbreak. Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre warns that infection rates among security, cleaning and property management groups are particularly high and urges employers of domestic helpers to arrange housing arrangements for “stay out” staff.



8

The government announces one week of mass testing. Rounds 7-10 to be held from 10-17 July. Everyone is required to get tested every other day and must take a rapid antigen test (RAT) everyday.



9

10

11



From management to teachers, staff from Macao’s tertiary educational institutions, such as the Macao Institute for Tourism Studies pitch in to help with citywide NATs



25 individuals have been prosecuted so far for violating lockdown rules, including for smoking outdoors and jogging without a mask on. Domestic helpers who don't live with their employers now need to take daily NATs.



As the government lock down buildings which have numerous Covid-19 cases – referred to as Red Code Zones – staff from the Municipal Affairs Bureau help to make sure residents receive daily food and living supplies

15

16

17

19

Government extends partial lockdown by five days until 22 July. Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong pledges an additional MOP 10 billion in economic relief measures, bringing total to MOP 20 billion.



Eligible senior citizens and people with disabilities allowed to apply for NAT exemptions.



Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng chairs a video conference to brief Zhuhai authorities on the latest pandemic measures and reaffirm the city's commitment to zero Covid-19.

21

23

24

26

27

Macao enters "consolidation period", eases some restrictions including re-opening casinos and eligible businesses. Residents will now be able to go outside and walk their dogs with some limitations.

For the first time since 18 June, zero cases were found among the community.



As part of "consolidation period", entire population must take a daily RAT while those returning to work must additionally take a NAT every other day.

Health officials announce a three-day extension of the current "consolidation period". "Stabilisation period" begins on 2 August.

Macao registers zero additional Covid-19 cases, neither in Red Code Zones and medical observation hotels or in the community. Close to 23,000 people under follow up.



Across Macao, government volunteers are seen everywhere from helping children and the elderly at testing centres to making sure hygiene standards remain high at the city's at risk zones



SOCIAL AFFAIRS

# Moving forward

Upgrades to make Macao's public transport system, including new LRT lines and a sea-crossing cable car, aim to transform the way this city commutes by the end of the decade.

Ng Chiyui

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**  
and **Miguel Luigi Enriquez**

Expanding on this existing LRT line will greatly increase ridership as residents gain easy access to more of the city

A reliable and efficient public transport system is one of the marks of a truly world-class city. Proponents argue that commuting by public transport is one of the best ways to alleviate traffic congestion and is an even greener alternative to owning an electric vehicle.

Nearby cities like Hong Kong and Singapore have highly efficient mass rapid transit (MRT) networks that transport millions of passengers each day. Expansive in scope and complemented by other means of getting around such as buses and trams, these networks make even the remotest part of the cities easily accessible by public transport.

Macao's public transport system is not yet on that level. Most locals use the existing bus network because of its round-the-clock operations. Although onboard WiFi access and real-time service updates shared via an app have improved the experience for commuters, road closures and peak hour traffic gridlock still hinder our bus network.

Meanwhile, Macao's light rapid transit (LRT) currently has just one line which covers 11 stations across Taipa and Cotai, and only about 2,000 passengers ride it daily.

Fortunately, the Transport Bureau is intent on improving the state of commuting in Macao. Recently, the bureau unveiled the land transport master plan for 2021-2030, a blueprint

that aims to expand the LRT system to cover the whole city, add a harbour-crossing cable car line and develop a web of elevated walkways to make the city friendlier to pedestrians.

When officials meet their ambitious goals, getting around Macao could look very different in only a matter of years.

## LINE BY LINE

Chief among the plans is the expansion of the existing LRT Taipa to Macao. The Barra Station should be completed by early next year and will be the first LRT station on the peninsula. The line running through Sai Van Bridge linking Ocean Station in Taipa to Barra is expected to be operational by 2024.

Another expansion project will add two new stations spanning 1.4 kilometres across Cotai, one in the upcoming Islands Hospital development and a second in the Seac Pai Van public housing complex. Nearby areas also include private residential compounds such as One Oasis and Praia Park. The project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2023.

By the end of 2025, a dedicated underwater tunnel will link Taipa to the newly-built Hengqin Station, making it easier to travel across the border to Hengqin via the Lotus Checkpoint Station.





**EAST, MEET WEST**

The government also plans to build a sea-crossing LRT section connecting the Barrier Gate border checkpoint and the Taipa Ferry Terminal in Pac On via the Zone A and Zone E1 land reclamation areas, officially known as East Line. This is expected to be completed by 2028.

Transport Bureau Director Kelvin Lam Hin San said that after the four new LRT projects are completed, Macao’s LRT network will have more than doubled from the current 9.3 kilometres to about 24 kilometres.

Lam predicted that daily LRT passenger traffic will increase from an average of 2,880 passengers per day in 2020 to 137,000 passengers per day in 2030. He also estimated that the total average passenger trips in Macao in 2030 will be about 3 million per day.

Further down the line, the government aims to build a new LRT line connecting Barra to the Barrier Gate along the peninsula’s western coast, known as LRT West Line.

However, Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo do Rosário acknowledged that construction of the LRT West Line would be “very complicated”.

He said that the current projects awaiting completion have temporarily overloaded the bureau due to a shortage of human resources, which will make it difficult for the government to come up with a blueprint for the West Line within the next decade.

But if plans to construct the West Line are successful and subsequently linked to the upcoming East Line, the LRT system will effectively cover the entire perimeter of the Macao and Taipa islands in a closed-loop

network that will include the newly reclaimed area zones.

**STRINGS ATTACHED**

The statement also noted that the government hopes to build Macao’s first cross-sea cable car between the Macao Science Centre in NAPE and the Zone A land reclamation area.

However, answering questions from lawmakers, Lam acknowledged that Macao is often affected by typhoons and that the cable car system’s reliability during such extreme weather events is still unclear.

Lam reiterated that the cable car would not be considered a major means of transport between the two areas but rather a supplementary transport facility even for residents.



Due to be completed early next year, the Barra Station will be the first LRT station on the peninsula





The Fourth Macao-Taipa Bridge is expected to be completed by 2025. It will connect Macao's Zone A to Taipa's Pac On area

In a sense, then, the proposed project will serve a similar function to Hong Kong's Ngong Ping 360 cable car: mostly a tourist attraction that links Tung Chung to Lantau, but also a faster option than riding a bus to reach hilly and steep areas. This would still amount to a major upgrade for Macao. Chongqing has a similar cable ropeway that crosses the Yangtze River, for example, and it has cut travel time between the Yuzhong and Nan An districts to a mere four minutes.

**POWER TO THE PEDESTRIAN**

To make Macao more walkable, the government is building a 10-kilometre-long system of elevated walkways across the peninsula.

Transport Bureau Director Lam said the plan will benefit around 99,000 pedestrians.

A pedestrian tunnel that runs through Guia Hill could open to the public as soon as this October. Once completed, it will link the ZAPE area and the Avenida de Horta e Costa neighbourhood, cutting the walking distance between the two from 1,100 metres to about 400 metres.

Another project will connect Montanha Russa Park to Areia Preta Urban Park via Avenida do Nordeste. Lam added that the planned Avenida do Nordeste elevated walkway will also extend to Avenida 1 de Maio before connecting to a future LRT East Line station.

Lam said that the government would also study the feasibility of building elevated walkways in the Zone A and Zone B reclamation areas, as well as around Cotai.



Cheong Chi Fong

This isn't the first undertaking of its kind in Macao. Last year, the 700-metre Avenida de Guimaraes elevated walkway in Taipa opened after almost three years of construction, and a footbridge over the Istmo Roundabout in Cotai was built in 2015.

Lam said that the government would continue to optimise the city's system of walkways to provide a safer, more effective, convenient and environmentally-friendly network for pedestrians. Rosário, however, acknowledged that the construction of elevated walkways in the peninsula would be difficult because of its narrow roads and streets.

**GREEN MACHINES**

In order to help preserve the environment, the government plans to encourage all public administration services to buy electric vehicles starting from next year. Car parks in new private and

commercial buildings will also have "slow electric charging points and the respective infrastructures for all parking spaces".

Government officials also plan to gradually increase the city's fleet of electric buses. According to government proposals, before 2025, more than 90 per cent of public buses will be powered by new energy while the number of electric taxis is also due to increase.

The local population is expected to grow by over 20 per cent to 791,000 by 2030. If the Transport Bureau achieves its plans to improve public transport and upgrade current options, Macao will make itself substantially more livable, not to mention friendlier and more convenient for visitors.

Additionally, increasing public transport usage will help reduce the use of private vehicles, which will lower levels of air pollution and make Macao's streets less congested and safer for everyone. ●





## ARTS AND CULTURE

## Dreams come alive in Venice

Local art group YiiMa head to the 59th Venice Biennale with their compelling “Allegory of Dreams”, an exhibition that sheds light on Macao’s past and explores what it means to be a human. Here are the highlights of the exhibition in Venice.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**  
Photos courtesy of  
**Macao Museum of Art**

“Office in Iao Hon” was produced as part of a study project in the revitalised estate

Scan the QR code below to watch the video shot in Venice:



One day in 2020, a bus advertisement recruiting research coordinators for Iao Hon Estate, an urban renewal project on the Macao peninsula, near the border with Zhuhai, drew the attention of painter Ung Vai Meng and photographer Chan Hin Io. The two are co-founders of YiiMa, an art group meaning ‘twins’ that was established in 2009 and officially registered in 2019. The duo collects pieces, such as press clippings, photographs and writing, from across Macao and integrates their findings into their artwork – a style they call ‘performance art documentation’.

The two were struck by the potential of Iao Hon Estate. They realised that by working as research coordinators, they would have an opportunity to speak to residents of the community and find fading memories of Macao. And so they took on the job, set out for the estate and soon discovered an office housing an enormous amount of furniture, gadgets and tools from times gone by. It was a treasure trove for the artists, and it would form their ambitious “Allegory of Dreams”, an exhibition now on display at the Venice Biennale.





Chan Hin lo

Macao's sole representatives, selected out of 24 proposals by 60 local artists, YiiMa's "Allegory of Dreams" opened on 22 April at the prestigious Italian art and culture show and will run until 20 October. Divided into four sections - "Boat of Dreamers", "Symbols of Dreams", "Space of Dreams" and "Iao Hon Dynasty" - the exhibition questions what it means to be human today through photography, performance art, videos, and sculptures produced at several private and public locations across Macao.

Once again curated by Portuguese lawyer-turned-curator João Miguel Barros, the show reunites the three visionaries after their collaborative exhibition "(De) Construction of Memory", a show held in Lisbon in 2019 that marked the 20th anniversary of Macao's handover to China.

The result is a surrealist examination of past, present and future, with the artists appearing as angels and emperors hovering over real sites. Taken together, the series forges a connection between reality and dreams, and forces the audience to remember old Macao while envisioning its future.

Ung says that the duo intended to show Macao's true colours. "The spirit of Macao, despite its small size, is inclusive and diverse," he explains. "We see beautiful churches and temples co-existing harmoniously, such as St Paul's Ruins sitting alongside Na Tcha Temple. That's what makes Macao marvellous. Different racial groups can live here, including Filipinos, Indonesians, Portuguese and more."

### SYMBOLIC METAMORPHOSES

The exhibition is a perfect fit for the theme of this year's Biennale, "The Milk of Dreams". The theme was inspired by a book penned by British-born Mexican surrealist artist and writer Leonora Carrington (1917-2011), whose ethereal, transformed imagery invited viewers to embark on journeys to explore the human condition, femininity and mysticism.

"Allegory of Dreams" lingers on one key image: angels. The section

"Symbols of Dreams" displays seven photographs taken in the shape of a Baroque church's domed ceiling, mirroring the elaborate paintings that traditionally adorned them with visions of Paradise. In the exhibition, the paradisiacal sites, as it were, include old stores, a century-old martial arts hall and an office in the Iao Hon Estate. Each work is packed with objects that belong to the sites' owners.

Such eclectic images fascinate Chan. "At a glimpse, you may find the sites very messy. But I like such

dominating power," he says. "In a good photographic hand, the whole picture can unveil many objects that are worth pondering."

On the other hand, Ung, a renowned art scholar, prefers to look at the meanings behind the individual objects. "Each object carries the owner's emotion. How come each place has so much stuff? There must be a reason why the owners keep the objects," he says. "We capture the historical context these objects convey through photography."



Chan Hin lo of YiiMa dressed as a golden angel for the opening of "Allegory of Dreams" at this year's Venice Biennale

(Opposite page) YiiMa - painter Ung Vai Meng and photographer Chan Hin lo - have worked together for more than a decade





The work "Kit Yee Tong" is the only photograph in which the artists do not wear wings in respect to the religion that the martial arts hall follows

The duo, depicted as angels, appear to fly near the ceilings in each photograph. If that sounds like it must have been strenuous, it was. The two had to stand on a ladder to frame the shots. To create a greater three-dimensional effect, one would be held aloft with a rope while he posed in the air. Then, they would move the ladder and the other would take his turn posing mid-air.

Chan took the photos with a mobile phone that was connected to a camera set on the floor. In post-production, Chan cut the photographs in half and removed the ladder from the frames. He insists that they never add additional effects or objects into the photographs but only remove unnecessary objects – all part of a highly involved process.

He also recalls how challenging it was to shoot within such small sites. According to Ung, their props were improvised, chosen because they held significance to their owners.

As for poses, the two drew inspiration from Western art, as well as their database of photographs and press clippings.

To capture Macao's cultural diversity, the duo selected their sites according to their historical context. The photographic work titled "Kit Yee Tong", for example, was shot at a century-old martial arts hall which now teaches the traditional lion dance to local people. "Macao is a dazzling city, but it [Kit Yee Tong] keeps the traditional culture [alive]. Their students and members are volunteers, and some of them are very young," says Chan.

In the middle of this section, visitors will find a 400-page book, the "Book of Heaven". The volume consists of over 300 photographic works and complements their idea of 'performance art documentation'. If you can't make it to Venice, rest assured: there's a smaller copy currently on display at the Macao Museum of Art.

#### IRONIC INEQUITIES

Another highlight is "Iao Hon Dynasty", a part of the exhibition that features two enormous photographs, each nearly 1.2 metres wide and 2.3 metres high, portraying the duo YiiMa as emperors on their thrones in the "Office in Iao Hon", the name they've given the humble setting in which they staged their shots.

The works juxtapose royalty with the working class community, an ironic image meant to poke fun at human pride. The royal imagery was

inspired by historical monarchs such as the emperors Qianlong of the Qing dynasty and Napoleon Bonaparte, with the two wearing replicas of luxury shoes used for cremation rites in traditional ceremonies. Gold leaf sheets pasted on their faces symbolise human pride.

"Gilding some sculptures ... creates a distance between the sculptures and viewers. By idolising two fake kings [in our work], we want to generate a feigned sublimity and idolisation."

YiiMa's works are full of irony, including juxtapositions of poverty with divinity and wealth







Ung Vai Meng (left) and Chan Hin Io

(Opposite page) "Boat of Dreamers" opens the exhibition and invites viewers to rethink the meaning of human existence

**ADDING NEW DIMENSIONS WITH DIFFERENT MEDIA**

Video installations enhance the message and lead viewers to think more deeply about human nature. The four-channel video piece "Space of Dreams", for instance, turns to Greek philosopher Aristotle to grapple with some of life's pressing questions. Inspired by Aristotle's seminal work, *The Four Causes* – four fundamental types of answers to the question "Why?" – the piece seeks to understand how inequities form.

"We're exploring various [artistic] expressions. The videos are kinetic and force the viewers to follow us and look at the objects of the two emperors in 'Iao Hon Dynasty,'" explains Ung. "We've applied Aristotle's thoughts on humans to ask, 'How can a person become an emperor?' In fact, it's because of one's greed."

Ung adds that this piece adheres to one of the Biennale's focuses: to explore the relationship between people and technology. "Humans put themselves in the centre of the universe. Logic and science, generally celebrated by humans, actually diverge from nature. Human relationship with science is contradictory."

**RETHINKING THE CURRENT MOMENT**

The use of the colour gold takes on special meaning in the visually compelling sculpture "Boat of Dreamers". Two angels – modelled to resemble the artists – seem to ponder something excruciating as they sit atop a golden globe situated in a boat. The boat is placed on a stand made from old ship wood, collected at a wood recycling plant for fishing boats in the Zhongshan area.

“

The ship wood ["Boat of Dreamers"] implies a connection between Macao and Venice, both of which had a rich history of navigation.

– Chan Hin Io

The sculpture evokes an image of angels embarking on a journey from Macao. This piece opens "Allegory of Dreams", setting the tone for the philosophical questions the exhibition poses.

"The ship wood implies a connection between Macao and Venice, both of which had a rich history of navigation. When creating this sculpture, we considered its visual impact, including how the viewers look at it," says Chan.

"The boat has holes, so you may wonder whether the angels are contemplating something very worrying," adds Ung. "Dreams are beautiful, aren't they? But will you give them up once you find out they are not? Humans always feel anxious, disappointed and discouraged when faced with the unknown."

By using a rich variety of different media, gleefully improvising and



revisiting old Macao, the art duo YiiMa might help Macao residents find new strength within their city. For more than two years, routine life has included lockdown, masks, quarantines, vaccinations, infections and more. Humans have faced the unknown. "Allegory of Dreams", together with the Venice Biennale, does not imply that art can give us salvation, but rather that it might help us all find the courage to face pressing issues together and rediscover the joy of being alive. ●



Macao **ABROAD**

## Healthcare by design

Vincci Lou didn't plan on becoming a user experience designer, but her open mind and adventurous, can-do attitude has taken her from a would-be career in Macao's architecture industry to a thriving career in Europe and Silicon Valley.



Text **Cathy Lai**  
Photos courtesy  
of **Vincci Lou**

Vincci Lou currently  
works as design  
director at Rune Labs,  
a software platform  
based in San Francisco

In a world full of possibilities, it can be difficult to make career decisions. Just ask Vincci Lou. From fashion design to environmental engineering to ceramic art, the 36-year-old Macao local tried it all before settling in the field of user experience (UX) design, where she designs healthcare applications that support medical professionals across the US and Europe.

Technology was not an industry Lou envisioned working in during her younger years. As a child, she dreamed about becoming an artist. From around the age of 8, she began to apprentice under Lai Ieng, a famous watercolour painter in Macao. Influenced by her parents who operated a garment factory, she also developed an interest in fashion design. When she was in secondary school at Chan Sui Ki Perpetual Help College, she started taking fashion design courses at Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre during her free time.

However, when she graduated from secondary school in 2005, she moved in the opposite direction, studying civil and environmental engineering at University of Macau (UM). "It offered a promising career path because there were a lot of big hotel and casino construction projects happening in Cotai at that time," she says. But two years later, during a two-month internship in Serbia, Lou did another 180-degree turn.

Arranged by UM, the internship offered her an opportunity to work at a construction company in Niš, Serbia, as an administrative assistant. But to Lou, the most inspiring experience happened at the dormitory, where she met people from different parts of the world, such as Oman, Spain and the UK.





Lou meets with Vice President of Product, William Newby (centre) to discuss product strategy at Rune Labs

“Many of them were my age but they were already discussing complex topics such as politics, racism and social issues. These topics had never entered my mind because they were not in textbooks,” she recalls. “At that point, I realised that I really needed to broaden my horizons and explore the world outside Macao.”

And so she did. After graduating in 2009, Lou travelled to Lisbon, where she studied for a master’s degree in environmental design at the Institute of Art, Design and Business - University. She didn’t put her creative aspirations aside, though. During her free time, Lou painted or tie-dyed T-shirts and

sold them at local flea markets. She also apprenticed under a ceramic artist and learned to make pottery.

At the same time, Lou opened herself up to networking, talking with her customers at the flea market or making new friends at events. “From my experience in Serbia, I realised how meeting new people can broaden my vision or even change my life. That’s why I kept putting myself out there to meet new people.”

And she was right. In 2010, Lou was hanging out with a group of friends at the Santo António Festival – an annual festival held each June that celebrates Saint Anthony, the patron saint of Lisbon.

The way Lou was sitting – in a cross-legged posture practised in yoga – caught the attention of Chris Dressel, a part-time yoga teacher who invited her to join his yoga class. Little did she know, he would later become an important mentor and introduce her to the world of UX design.

For his day job, Dressel owned a web development company and ran an innovation company called Kwamecorp (later rebranded as Impossible) in Lisbon, designing and developing mobile apps and digital services. The company was looking for an intern to prepare client pitch decks. “Since I have a background in engineering and know how to use the Adobe Creative Suite (a software suite offering graphic design, video editing and web development applications), they brought me onto the team,” Lou explains.

#### BRIDGING LOGIC AND CREATIVITY

In the beginning, Lou worked as an assistant and was responsible for digitising design concepts and ideas for client presentations. But under Dressel’s mentorship, Lou started to pick up some design work. She learned how to create wireframes – a tool that establishes the basic structure of a webpage or mobile app page before adding visual design elements and content – and worked with engineers to transform ideas into applications.

“UX design is about problem solving,” she explains. “We need to empathise with users’ feelings, anticipating why they seek for a

tool, what they want to gain and what problems they want to solve. We optimise their experience so that they can solve their problems painlessly and complete their goals intuitively.”

Thanks to her background in art and engineering, Lou has an ability to think both logically and creatively, which impressed Dressel. After a few months, he promoted her to full-time UX designer and within two years, she became the lead designer.

During her time with Impossible, Lou has worked on many design projects, including Samsung operating systems, management platforms for startups in San Francisco, and communication platforms for factories in China. An oncology informatics platform project for Roche, a Swiss multinational healthcare company, in 2015, solidified her passion for UX design. “It was the first time I realised that being a designer can also make a contribution to people’s health and wellbeing,” she says.

When the collaboration began, Lou was already leading several projects and managing various clients. Since she likes to work on complicated systems involving multiple users and problem solving, Impossible assigned Lou to lead the design of Roche’s clinical decision support platform.

“Basically, my team needed to design a platform which provides a patient’s current situation and overview,” she explains, “so that the oncologists, surgeons, pathologists and radiologists can access the patient’s information on a centralised dashboard when they discuss possible treatments for the case.”

“  
UX design is about problem solving. We need to empathise with users’ feelings, anticipating why they seek for a tool, what they want to gain and what problems they want to solve.

– Vincci Lou



(Opposite page)  
Lou works with engineers, neuroscientists, and specialists on therapy developer relations and product operations

That's where UX design comes in. With a goal of making the user experience as easy and intuitive as possible, Lou can help clinicians save precious time and focus on key information. "By effectively showcasing or highlighting certain important details, such as the location of the tumour, diagnoses stage or biomarkers (a biological molecule found in blood, other body fluids, or tissues), the dashboard can help doctors better understand a patient's situation and identify a more effective treatment," she says. "This gives me huge satisfaction knowing that my design might be able to help cancer patients."

After several months, Lou's leadership skills and ability to work at a high level independently wowed Impossible, and she was soon promoted to design director. She relocated from Lisbon to Impossible's newly launched San Francisco Bay Area office, where she took on more admin responsibilities, such as running workshops, recruiting and training new employees, and pitching for new clients. Within two years, she and her team launched the first version of the Roche platform.

Lou has continued to work on various healthcare projects with Roche and Samsung Digital Health ever since. In 2017, her team collaborated with Roche to create a web app, which enables cancer researchers to assess how potential immunotherapy drugs would stimulate immune cells to attack cancer cells.

#### FIGHTING PARKINSON'S DISEASE

After 10 years with Impossible, Lou took a one-year break to work as a freelancer. In May 2021, she took a full-time job with Rune Labs, a software platform based in San Francisco that helps med-tech and pharmaceutical

companies collect, organise and analyse brain data. She started as a lead product designer, and the company promoted her to design director this January.

She says Rune Labs has offered her the opportunity to work on one of the most meaningful projects in her career to date. The company is currently developing StrivePD, a program that collects electrophysiological brain readings, as well as neurological imaging data and information, to facilitate new treatments for Parkinson's disease, a brain disorder that causes uncontrollable movements such as shaking, stiffness, and difficulty with balance and coordination.

The program compiles data from three sources: deep brain stimulation (DBS) devices, a brain implant that records signals directly from the patient's brain while delivering mild electrical current to the brain for treating Parkinson's disease; an Apple watch app, which captures a range of Parkinson's symptoms, including tremors, dyskinesia (uncontrolled, involuntary movement such as wriggling and swaying of the body), sleep, gait and heart rate variability; and a mobile app, which enables patients to track their symptoms and medication usage.

Lou's team is responsible for designing a software for neurologists and researchers accessing the brain data collected by the implant, as well as the mobile app and the Apple Watch app. "The technology allows doctors to access brain data of the patient even when they are not in the hospital, and the immense amount of new data may ultimately lead to the discovery of more precise treatments," Lou explains.

"The key is to put the patient's brain data, together with data of their symptoms and behavioural health, in a meaningful and digestible format," she adds. "We arrange the same set of data



in different formats to serve different purposes for different users."

For instance, the mobile app allows patients to log medications, symptoms and side effects, which help them better understand their health status and manage the disease.

Meanwhile, the clinician dashboard helps neurologists understand their patients' statuses at a glance and identify better treatments. For researchers, the dashboard highlights patterns across groups of patients, enabling them to discover new therapies.

Looking back, Lou's career path might be a far cry from what she

envisioned, but she wouldn't change a thing. What's more, Lou believes that her upbringing in Macao has played a key role in shaping her into who she is today.

"I got to where I am today with the support of many people. They were willing to help me not only because of my work performance, but also because of my attitude," she says. "I have been praised by many colleagues for being humble, sincere and dedicated to my work. I guess that has a lot to do with the culture that I grew up in, which values integrity, responsibility and collective interest." ●



SOCIAL AFFAIRS

# A place where love and hope bloom

The Fuhong Society of Macau supports people with intellectual disabilities and those recovering from mental illness through vocational training and employment opportunities.

Text **Cathy Lai**  
Photos courtesy of  
**Fuhong Society of Macau**

Social enterprises like Happy Laundry provide important job skills and a sense of community among workers

Since childhood, Ashlee\* had always been quiet and reserved. But five years ago, when she was working as a waitress in a local restaurant, her family noticed something seemed off. Ashlee began talking to herself and ignoring people when they tried to speak to her.

Her dad brought her to the psychiatric department at Conde S Januario General Hospital, a public hospital in the Freguesia da Sé area of Macao. Doctors diagnosed her with schizophrenia, a serious mental disorder characterised by symptoms such as hallucinations, disordered thinking and behaviour.

After six months of treatment, Ashlee regained emotional stability and a sense of control. But as soon as she was discharged from the hospital, she had to face another challenge: reintegrating into society. “I was worried about how to find a job with a stable income. After all, we need stability and peace of mind in order to go through the rehabilitation journey,” she says.

Fortunately, her psychiatrist referred her to the Fuhong Society of Macau, a non-profit organisation that provides services for people with intellectual disabilities and those recovering from mental illnesses. At Fuhong, Ashlee received counselling

and vocational training for a year, before eventually accepting a job at Happy Laundry, a social enterprise established by Fuhong that provides laundry services to local businesses.

“Happy Laundry allows me to work with a team of colleagues and make new friends,” says the 35-year-old. “I am so glad to be part of this big family. Not only has it helped me find a sense of belonging, but it also offered me a chance to prove the capability of people recovering from mental illness.”

Ashlee is one of many people who have benefited from Fuhong’s services. Established in 2003 by Fátima Santos Ferreira, the former Social Welfare Bureau president, the non-profit has

helped more than 500 people through physical therapy, nursing, healthcare, counselling, and training programmes that instil communication, emotional and life skills.

Beyond everyday care, the organisation strives to empower individuals and support them on the road to reintegration and independence. “At Fuhong Society, we believe that vocational training can empower our beneficiaries by offering them the skills to be independent,” says Fuhong Director Jennifer Chau. “Meanwhile, by showing that they can contribute to society, we can help change public perception towards intellectual disabilities and mental illness.”





### CREATING MORE OPPORTUNITIES

Chau joined Fuhong as an assistant manager in 2003 after working as the secretary to Paul Pun, secretary-general of Caritas Macau. As the NGO's first employee, she has witnessed how it transformed into what it is today. Starting with a few core members in the beginning, Fuhong has evolved into a team of more than 200 employees, ranging from management staff to social workers to medical professionals, such as nurses, speech therapists and physical therapists.

However, the beginning is always the hardest. Fuhong faced its fair share of challenges when launching its first facility, the Pou Choi Centre in Fai Chi Kei, in 2003, which later relocated to Travessa da Areia Preta on the Macao peninsula under the name Pou Lei Centre in 2017. The centre provides occupational rehabilitation and employment support service to people with mild or moderate intellectual disabilities who are at least 16 years old.

"At that time [in 2003], the public still held a lot of prejudice against people with an intellectual disability or a mental illness, thinking that they may attack them all of a sudden," she says. "Moreover, since many factories have moved to [the mainland], there were very few job opportunities available for our beneficiaries."

Chau realised Fuhong must think outside the box. Drawing on her bachelor's degree in business administration and a master's in public administration, she came up with a solution. "Since there were not enough opportunities out there, we created the opportunities by ourselves," she says.

To maximise its reach, the organisation started producing gifts and souvenirs for festivals and celebratory events in 2003, from Chinese New Year and Christmas to weddings and graduation ceremonies.

In 2004, the NGO launched a charity homegoods brand, Rainbow Flower, which has a five-coloured floral logo symbolising love and hope. Under Rainbow Flower, Fuhong has produced more than 200 types of everyday items, including pillow cases, shopping bags and souvenirs, all designed and packed by the disabled workers at the Pou Lei Centre.

Since then, Fuhong has worked with various local businesses to produce tailor-made corporate souvenirs for them. For instance, the centre helped an integrated resort in Macao produce a notebook bag featuring its lion logo painted by one of Fuhong's employees in 2016.

According to Chau, it's a win-win solution for both the NGO and its workers. "By selling our own products, we can generate income for the centre and pay our workers for everything they do," she says. "More importantly, it showcases the potential and talents of people with disabilities to the public."

With a stable source of income, Fuhong can continue to expand and diversify its services and facilities. In 2005, the NGO launched the Hong Ieng Centre on Rua de Fai Chi Kei to provide physical therapy and training programmes focused on communication and emotional management skills. And to help people with disabilities discover their artistic talents, Fuhong established the Creative Art House on Travessa da Areia Preta in 2010

“

Artistic creation is one of the most effective ways to improve our beneficiaries' physical and mental health, because it is a great channel for them to express emotions, enrich thinking and develop creative potential.

– Jennifer Chau



which provides art training and promotes the products designed by participants.

"Artistic creation is one of the most effective ways to improve our beneficiaries' physical and mental health, because it is a great channel for them to express emotions, enrich thinking and develop creative potential," Chau explains, adding that much of their artwork has been printed on Fuhong's products.

Patterned day-of-the-week socks come with positive messages like 'Keep going' and 'Work like a tiger'

(Opposite page) Jennifer Chau, Director of the Fuhong Society of Macau



**LAUNCHING SOCIAL ENTERPRISES**

As Fuhong increases its impact, society has also grown more supportive. In 2022, the organisation received MOP 12.3 million in financial support from the Macao Foundation. Thanks to this and seed money provided by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) Financial Aid Programme, Fuhong has established several social enterprises to create more job opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities and those recovering from mental illness over the past decade.

For instance, in 2012, the NGO received MOP 1.7 million from IAS to open Happy Laundry, a social enterprise based in the same industrial building of Fuhong Society that currently employs 21 people with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses. The organisation also has four more in training.

The enterprise provides one-stop, door-to-door laundry services for its clients, from laundry collection to cleaning and packing to delivery. Happy Laundry is especially popular among small businesses such as gyms, hairdressers and beauty salons.

Having worked at Happy Laundry for 2.5 years, Ashlee says the job has given her the skills and confidence she needed to start a new life. "At first I was nervous but my colleagues were all very supportive and helpful," she recalls. "With their help, I gradually learned to use big laundry equipment such as industrial laundry machines, smart folding and ironing machines. I am really proud of the progress I have made."

In 2015, Fuhong established its second social enterprise, Happy

Market, with MOP 2.8 million in seed funding. Located on the same street of Pou Lei Centre, the market sells a range of second-hand products donated by local companies or the public, such as table and chair sets, kitchenware, stuffed animals, stationery and clothing. According to Chau, Happy Market employs 12 workers, who are responsible for cleaning the donated items before

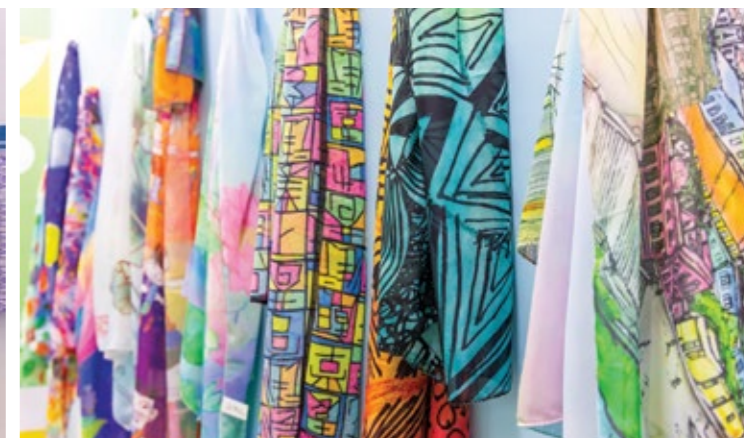
giving them away for free or selling them at a discounted price. Visitors can also buy handicrafts made and packed by Fuhong workers.

"The goal of the social enterprises is not to make a lot of money, but to sustain what we are doing – to provide employment and skill development opportunities for our employees," says Chau. Fuhong's social enterprises collectively

employ 33 people including four full-time staff who earn at least MOP 7,000 per month, she adds.

Chau praises Fuhong employees for their work ethic and dedication. "First of all, they are very loyal," she says. "Moreover, they are very reliable when performing tasks that are repetitive and routine, such as managing textiles and ironing, because they are very good at focusing on one task."

Under the organisation's charity homegoods brand, Rainbow Flower, workers design and package a wide variety of products







This kiosk near the Taipa Houses Museum sells a variety of products made by Fuhong Society of Macau's employees

(Opposite page) Today, Fuhong Society has evolved into a team of more than 200 employees from management staff to speech therapists and social workers



### AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE

As of March 2022, 15,693 people in Macao held Disability Assessment Registration Cards issued by the Social Welfare Bureau. Among card holders, 7.6 per cent were classified as people with intellectual disabilities and 18.6 per cent with mental illnesses. Other categories include physical disability (34.6 per cent), visual impairment (4.8 per cent), hearing impairment (27 per cent), speech disorders (0.34 per cent) and multiple disabilities (roughly 7 per cent).

Over the past two decades, Chau has observed growing support and acceptance for people with intellectual disabilities and mental illness in society. She attributes this to awareness events and campaigns organised by both the Macao government and local NGOs, from fundraising to exhibitions to community activities.

“These initiatives have spread a lot of information about people with disabilities, which helps the public understand that they are part of the community and there is nothing to fear,” she says.

Chau says that support has amplified in times of crisis. “When the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020, we almost needed to shut down our centres due to the shortage of protective equipment,” she recalls. “Fortunately, we quickly received donations of masks, disinfection and temperature scanners from gaming operators, local businesses, associations and individuals. Their donations have not only enabled us to maintain our operation, but have also helped some of our beneficiaries, who come from low-income families, to survive the difficult time.”

While the pandemic posed sizable new challenges for Fuhong, it also gave the NGO new direction.

Chau says Fuhong is currently hosting spiritual healing classes, such as singing bowl sound therapy and yoga classes, at its Happy Art Studio in the Nam Van Waterfront Leisure Area. These classes are open to the public and cost around MOP 100 for four classes.

“Stress and anxiety keep building up in the society as the pandemic proceeds,” Chau says. “To heal the community, we want to offer some evening activities which help people relax after a stressful day of work.”

Looking ahead, the NGO also hopes to support children with special needs, such as those with learning difficulties or mild autism spectrum disorder. “These children are not regarded as people with disabilities, in general, but they would need special care or assistance, so that they can complete their education,” she says. “We want to help them manage their emotions and behaviour through music therapy and painting classes.”

But in the long run, Fuhong’s focus will always be vocational training and employment opportunities. Chau firmly believes in their impact because she has witnessed inspiring changes among Fuhong’s beneficiaries. “I have seen many of our workers turning into positive, social and confident people after working at our centres or enterprises after some months,” she says. “This gives us huge motivation to keep going with our work.” ●

*\*Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity.*



These initiatives have spread a lot of information about people with disabilities, which helps the public understand that they are part of the community and there is nothing to fear.

– Jennifer Chau







FOOD AND DRINK

## All in the family

Lai Kei started as a street stall in 1933. Ever since, it has grown into an institution on Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida. Ambert Kong, the third generation owner of the beloved ice cream shop, discusses Lai Kei's legacy and his hopes for its future.

Text **Erico Dias**  
Photos **Oswald Vas**

Ambert Kong, the third generation owner of Lai Kei, hopes that someday his children will carry on this family legacy

For 89 years, Lai Kei has offered Macao hand-churned ice cream for any season and any reason, whether you're seeking a reprieve from the scorching summer weather or something sweet to celebrate a milestone in life.

The shop is a memory capsule of its near-century in existence, with vintage square floor tiles, hand-painted frames, banquettes separated by round tables and foldable chairs that have all been there since it first opened. Today, its vintage look is as much of a draw as its excellent ice cream, available in unique and timeless flavours like coconut, mango, peanut and classic vanilla.

Wanting to keep this living antique alive for years to come, third-generation owner Ambert Kong, 46, has maintained the shop just as it was when his grandfather, Kong Lai King, opened it.

"I was not too keen on taking over the ice cream business at first, but locals, old and young, deserve to have this memory kept alive," Ambert says.

While Ambert may have envisioned a different life for himself, today, he has no regrets about his decision to enter the family business. On Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida, many shops have come and gone, but through it all, Lai Kei is still standing.

### FROM PAINTER TO VENDOR

Born in 1914, Kong Lai King started his professional life as a ship painter in Guangzhou and then moved to an ice block factory as a machinist. During his

time at the factory, the enterprising Kong came up with the idea of making ice cream.

From an ice cream machine to cups and spoons, Kong purchased all his products from Hong Kong and started as a licensed street vendor in 1933. "He sold ice cream near the Macau Tower or the Macau Government House, since that's where the rich people lived," Ambert recalls. Six years later, Kong managed to rent a shop opposite the current location on Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida, where he also set up a small factory to make his own ice cream.

During the late 1960s, he opened Lai Kai in its current location and turned the old shop into his ice cream-making factory. There, he started producing flavours like mango, chocolate, vanilla and strawberry, as well as his famous coconut ice cream. Today, it's one of the most popular items on the menu, but it was also one of the first few Kong made. There's a reason for that.

"Whenever there was a natural disaster or war in the mainland, Hong Kong or Macao citizens donated some products to support them," he says. "There was a time when my grandfather did so too and when it ended, in gratitude locals from the mainland gave him boxes of coconut puree. My grandfather and his brother brought it all back to the shop and made the first [batch of] coconut ice cream."





This Lai Kei shop was opened during the late 1960s and since then only a few changes have been made, keeping its vintage vibes

(Centre) The cabinet is filled with Lai Kei's history. From the first soft drink bottles to the first menu and ice cream cups

(Opposite page) Four scooped flavoured ice cream with coconut, mango, strawberry and peppermint

Back then, the major entertainment centre in the area was Cineteatro Macau, today one of Macao's oldest running cinemas. Before or after a movie, locals would come to the shop for ice cream, especially couples on dates. "The target customers were locals ... as time went by, there were more tourists from Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and all over the world," Ambert says. "There were more locals who came here to eat ice cream while watching the television or listening to the radio since back then not many people owned one."

**HANDING OVER THE KEYS**

Even though he grew up around the ice cream shop, some of Ambert's fondest childhood memories came from spending

time in the city with Kong. In 1979, as Kong was getting older, he handed over much of the business to Ambert's father, Kong Kun Hong, which freed up time for him to be with his grandson. "He often took me to the garden or to buy groceries," Ambert recalls. "I loved going to have *yum cha* [a brunch of tea and dim sum] with him. We had good memories."

Still, shop duties often beckoned Ambert back to Lai Kei, where he helped his family by cleaning tables, tending to customers and, as he grew older, handling money. His role became especially important after Kong passed away in 1989 and Ambert's father took over the shop. When Hong fell ill and passed away in 2011, Ambert, the eldest son, took over.



"I was not too keen on this kind of business as I liked graphic design," says Ambert, who graduated from UCLA in the US with a degree in graphic design in 2001. "I came back not for my own [desire to take over], but because the shop had been running for many years and locals always told me not to close it as it [represents] fond memories for many people."

Ambert also admits that his lack of interest in running the family business stemmed from his childhood. During the summer holidays, while the rest of the children or his friends were out playing, Ambert would have to put in shifts at the ice cream shop.

When a ground-breaking casino-resort opened in 2004, footfall at local shops suddenly plummeted. For tourists, there was little reason to leave the resort, because everything they needed was under one roof, according to Ambert. Although many shop owners sold or rented out their spaces as sales cratered, Lai Kei's local fans urged Ambert against doing the same.





From the variety of choices, Kong prefers the mango ice cream because of its sweet and natural flavour

(Opposite page) Ice cream sandwich is another stand-out choice among customers at Lai Kei

“They said, ‘Please don’t close. My grandmother and children love your ice cream.’ They supported us, and because of that, we’re still here,” Ambert says.

So are several community relics. Lai Kei has six pieces of hand-painted art hung up on the wall, each over 60 years old. “A family came in one day and saw the paintings, and found the signature and art familiar,” Ambert says. “They said, ‘Oh it’s my father’s work,’ and showed me a few pictures. He was a school teacher and had made some advertisements for my grandfather.”

### A LONG OVERDUE OVERHAUL

After Ambert took over, he made a few changes, like replacing rusted table legs, adding a new air conditioner and wall lamps, and repainting the walls. Almost everything else remains the same. You can still enjoy 11 different flavours of ice cream, all for MOP 13 – peanut, taro, honeymelon, peppermint, coffee, sesame and more. And tourists and locals alike still flock to the shop for ice cream sandwiches that only cost MOP 17.

Ambert takes pride in using fresh market fruit and no artificial flavours in any of Lai Kei’s products. He concedes that competitors like Häagen-Dazs are “good and their packaging is eye-catching”, but still he stays true to Lai Kei’s timeless flavours, as well as his tried-and-true processes. “It’s just like how some people like Mercedes while others would prefer a Honda. But there is a lot of competition [today],” Ambert admits, as well as external pressures that could cause a family-run business like his to go under.

During the pandemic, many shop owners in Macao have struggled to pay rent. Ambert’s family has not had that problem, as they own the property Lai Kei occupies. “Besides that, we have a wide range of customers from old to young locals, government workers, singers and movie stars, so our business is still alive,” he adds. “We just want them to smile and have a good time.”

Lai Kei is still open seven days a week from 12 pm to 7 pm, but in some ways, times have changed. Ambert says locals used to love sitting in the shop during summer

holidays or on weekends, but today most customers prefer ordering online since parking is difficult to find around the shop.

But he has an ace up his sleeve, too. The store works in collaboration with Lady M and Circle K, distributing ice cream each month to their stores around the city. “They support local brands,” Ambert says. “We’re lucky to have these businesses supporting us during this period.” During events at the city’s integrated resorts, Lai Kei also sets up booths, spreading icy joy to visitors.

These new initiatives have given Ambert hope that an old-school shop like his can thrive in the future. One day his own children – he has a

10-year-old daughter and an 8-year-old son – might want to run Lai Kei, just as he took over from his father, and his grandfather before him.

“They spend a lot of time playing here and love all the ice cream,” he says. If either decides to take over the shop, they will become the fourth generation of owners to run Lai Kei. But they will also become part of a much larger family in the process.

“I like it here now, and the stories I hear from loyal customers [keep me feeling satisfied],” Ambert says. “Some come here a few months or years later and tell me about their children getting married or that they have a baby. I feel like I am part of their family.” ●





ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## Sculpting from *memory*

Lam Iok Hoi grew up seeing vendors selling dough sculptures on Macao's streets. Now, the 73-year-old ex-chef has made it his mission to keep the disappearing folk art alive.



Text **Gilbert Humphrey**  
Photos **Denzel Calangi**

The 73-year-old dough sculpture artist prefers traditional subjects like this figurine of Chinese deity Zhong Kui



A few decades ago, children in Macao didn't turn to their phones, tablets or TVs for entertainment after school. Instead they rushed to the nearest street vendor selling dough sculptures.

Included as one of Macao's 70 'Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage' items, dough sculptures originated from northern China, and can be traced back to the Han dynasty (202 - 220 BC). Dough sculptures in the past were mainly used as edible ornaments, decorations or religious figurines in worship rituals, weddings and harvest celebrations. In this folk art, dough is steamed, dyed and sculpted into figurines of Chinese deities, historical figures and more.

In the 20th century, they became popular toys for children. Today, however, only a few people still make dough sculptures. Macao-born Lam Iok Hoi is one of them - and he might be the only one doing it as a professional artist. Although the 73-year-old spent his whole life working as a chef, Lam no longer toils in the kitchen. Now he keeps his hands busy preserving this dying art.





At the young age of 13, Lam Lok Hoi began to work at a Chinese restaurant;

(Right) After a long career as a dim sum chef, Lam became a dough sculpture artist in his retirement

### DEVELOPING PERSISTENCE

Lam had a challenging early life. He lost his mother when he was only 3 years old, and his father passed away not long after, forcing him to grow up in an orphanage in Macao. By the time he was 13, he'd already begun working in a Chinese restaurant – an age that might seem young now, but was common in the early 1960s, when Lam was coming of age.

He started out cleaning the restaurant's kitchen and toilet before moving up to cleaning utensils. Eventually, he began to learn how to make dim sum. By the time he was 17, he was living by himself, making ends meet. "I didn't think about anything at that time. No matter how hard [the work] was, it was for me to survive. I just focused on living and making it," he says.

While other children rushed to buy dough sculptures after school, he did not have that luxury. But in a twist, while his childhood shaped his persistence, his career would spark his interest in dough sculptures.

Over the years, Lam worked his way up the ranks, moving from local restaurants like Dak Loi, Diamond Restaurant and Golden Crown Restaurants that were

popular in the 1960s to Zhuhai Gongbei Palace Hotel and the five-star Yindo Hotel Zhuhai, where he was the Dim Sum Head Chef for 10 years. He also worked at Mondial Hotel, Hotel Lisboa's Portas do Sol restaurant, Casa Real Hotel and the Zi Yat Heen restaurant at Four Seasons Macao, where he had a brief stint in 2010 as the restaurant's Second Dim Sum Chef shortly before he retired.

In the mid-1980s, in the heart of his career as a chef, he began to make dough sculptures as garnishes for his dim sum dishes. "As a chef, besides the cooking techniques, we must also make our dishes more attractive, so I had to keep coming up with new ideas," he says.

"I learned to make dough sculptures by myself, and I kept on practising purely for my dim sum dishes." In time, however, this work-driven pursuit became something more. Eventually, a desire to keep the dough sculpture tradition alive drove Lam to do more with the forgotten practice.

### RELIVING CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

After Lam retired as a chef about a decade ago, he started making dough sculptures more regularly, dedicating

himself to promoting the art. He made a name for himself doing it, too. Soon, he started teaching workshops in Macao to help others learn the craft, earning the support of the Cultural Affairs Bureau in the process. He has even garnered a measure of fame for his work in the surrounding regions. He says he has travelled across cities like Zhuhai, Dongguan, Foshan and Guangzhou, as well as Hong Kong, to make his sculptures at events like bazaars, festivals and carnivals, or workshops.

"I like making the dough sculptures as an artist more than as a chef because I can show different types of figurines rather than just food-related sculptures," says Lam. Those include figurines of dragon dance teams and Chinese deities, such as Guan Gong (a military general during China's late Eastern Han dynasty), Zhong Kui (the 'vanquisher of ghosts and evil beings,' often seen as a large man with a big black beard and bulging eyes) and

the Cloth-Sack Monk (also known as the Laughing Buddha).

"When I made dough sculptures as garnishes, I would only get praise from some of the restaurant guests, but now doing it as an artist, teaching children in workshops, I get to earn money," Lam admits.

Lam has so far taught around 2,000 children in the workshops he's led over the past 10 years (usually, he leads about 15 each year). All his students have been children, from the very young to teenagers. "The children have subsidies [for art workshops] from the government. Adults wouldn't pay to learn this," he jokes.

But Lam admits that he loves teaching children anyway. "They are open-minded and pure. Children follow instructions and they are naturally happy, so it makes me happy to teach them."

He has even been invited to lead workshops in the mainland, where he says he's found a deeply engaged audience.

One tradition celebrates another as dough figurines capture the energy and movement of dragon dancers on a small scale







As a chef, Lam first learned how to make dough sculptures as garnishes

(Opposite page) Lam and his students happily show off their dough sculptures;

(Below) Lam's skill and experience can be seen in fine details like curling hair and draped cloth

“The students in the mainland have to pay to join workshops so most of them will really attend the classes, whereas in Macao most workshops are sponsored by the government,” he says. “[Here] students often only register and do not turn up to classes.”

**FROM NORTHERN CHINA TO MACAO**

A long time ago in northern China, the dough sculptures, beautiful as they were, could actually be eaten, a feature that still existed in Macao’s dough sculptures a few decades back. But people these days add preservatives to the dough.

According to Lam, most dough sculptures these days are purposely made inedible so they can last longer than they did long ago, when they were made with plain dough and natural food colouring.

Now they can be kept for up to 20 years if placed in an acrylic box to avoid humidity. They are also used purely for decorations these days.

“People don’t want to throw the sculptures away after being used [once] just for a short period of time,” he says.

Even though the traditions have changed in modern times, Lam intends to see this dying artform preserved in Macao, both the time-honoured techniques and history. But it may be a tough mission. He says most of his students are not interested in making traditional figurines like the ones Lam grew up with. “They prefer to learn how to make something like Hello Kitty,” the fictional Japanese Bobtail cat character, he says.

Personally, Lam prefers teaching how to make traditional dough sculptures – the kinds he continues to make in his free time.

“This art has more than 2,000 years of history. My hope is to get more people to learn it and pass it down [to future generations].”

Despite his best efforts, Lam is not sure about its future in his hometown, where few seem interested in even buying a small dough sculpture for MOP 30-90, let alone bigger ones that can cost a couple of hundred of patacas each.

Lam also notes that there is not an association to officially promote the craft. “Nobody else is doing this. I’m the only one [trying to preserve this as a craft] so there is no association for it. Sometimes, I’m invited by the government to join exhibitions, but I always join without any association support,” he says.

“There are some multi-art associations in Macao, but none include the art of making dough sculptures.”

Nevertheless, Lam has no intention to give up his mission. “Hopefully, among the students I have taught, there will be some who will continue preserving this art so that it can be passed down.”

He also hopes that the government will continue to support its promotion in Macao to generate interest among the generations to come, which include his two young grandchildren.

“Neither of my two sons know anything about this art, but my grandson and granddaughter know a little bit about making dough sculptures,” so there may be hope for its future after all, he says.

This art of dough sculptures could be a cheap hobby for people to pursue now, as the pandemic continues to force many of us to shelter at home. Even though in-person workshops might be suspended, you can still have fun at home with family, learning to make the dough while experimenting with your sculptures.

“Of course, it takes time for your creations to become good, [but] it’s easy to make the dough and it’s not that hard to learn to make the sculptures,” Lam says. ●



Scan the QR code below to watch the video:







## SPORTS

## Fighting for more

**Muay Thai might be a fringe sport in Macao today, but its future could be brighter, as fighters, coaches and advocates seek to grow the sport among a new generation of young men and women.**

Text **Erico Dias**  
Photos **Denzel Calangi**

Tam Si Long got into martial arts at just 6 years old, her first sport being judo

**M**uay Thai has a long and rich history in Thailand. In Macao, the sport hasn't acquired quite the same legacy, to say the least. While it would be hard to compete with the birthplace of Thai boxing in any case, professional-focused Muay Thai gyms only started to appear in the city in the 1990s, and even then, they only attracted about a dozen serious athletes. But now, the Macau Muaythai Association (MMTA) hopes to build the sport from being just a niche activity. First, however, they must change peoples' minds – not to mention their mission.

In the early 1930s, Muay Thai was systemised with a set of rules. Since the 21st century, it has gained more attention after it was officially recognised as a sport by several international bodies, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (it is officially known as one word, muaythai, as the IOC does not allow official sports to have a country name in it). But Muay Thai is arguably more popular as a casual

practice for many people, either as a way to keep fit or as a form of self-defence. Today, many Muay Thai organisations aim to leverage this growing popularity to get more people engaged with the sport and its traditions on an official level. That includes the Macau Muaythai Association.

Established in 1997 by Muay Thai enthusiast and advocate Vong Veng Im, in cooperation with the Sports Bureau of Macao and the International Federation of Muaythai Associations (IFMA), the MMTA is the city's spiritual centre for the sport. But today the MMTA is stepping in a new direction. As part of the changes it's undergoing, the association aims to bring in more female athletes, educate children about Muay Thai, and find new talent to train fighters and represent Macao in the future. It's a sizable challenge, but one the MMTA, as well as Macao's up-and-coming Thai boxing talent, are ready to face.





Iao Chi Lam, the newly appointed Chairman of the Macau Muaythai Association

(Opposite page) With Muay Thai being male dominated in Macao, Tam hopes to change that by showing other women that they, too, can learn and practice the sport.

#### DEVELOPING CHAMPIONS AT HOME

When the MMTA began, its mission was rather noble. At the time, the association had around a dozen athletes, all of them men, and all focused on winning titles. “It was all about going for the belt and heroism back in the day,” says Iao Chi Lam, the newly appointed chairman of the MMTA. “From the 2000s until the early 2010s, it became more commercially driven, where fights had sponsorships and athletes wanted to do it only for the money.”

Today, the MMTA has approximately the same number of fighters, and still more men than women. But Iao has been tasked with shifting the association’s focus

to get more people interested in Muay Thai, men and women alike, and at a younger age. He might start by drawing on his own experience with the sport.

Born in Macao, Iao has been practising Muay Thai since he was 13. He insists that the sport is more than meets the eye. Rather than simply teaching athletes how to fight, he believes it can help with self-defence and weight loss. “I started practising Muay Thai because Macao, back in the ’80s, was a lot different than it is nowadays,” Iao says, hinting at Macao’s rough and tumble nature at the time. “But also, from a young age, I’ve kept my cardio going, and as I grow older, I’ve realised how important that lifestyle is.”

But Iao is aware of the challenges ahead as he tries to rebuild the MMTA for the modern age. The number of athletes has dipped and climbed over the years, and Muay Thai is not as popular in Macao as other sports, such as boxing. “It’s like running a business; you need to go along with the economy and what the market demands,” he says.

Currently, the market demands a move from its current location, as well as cultivating new target groups. The MMTA will be moving its facilities on Avenida do Almirante Lacerda to Life Project Macau, a local gym in Emperor Nam Van Centre Avenida do Infante located in Macao. “The Sports Bureau has also been supportive with the restructure,” Iao says. “They said that children should be educated at a younger age so they understand the principle of the sport before they can pursue it as recreation or a profession.”



Even before the MMTA’s official shift to focus on youth development, Macao was making waves in Muay Thai internationally. In 2018, Macao hosted the Asian Muaythai Championship. Having the event on home soil gave Macao athletes an opportunity to compare themselves against other top competitors, and it gave organisers and coaches a chance to see how other countries operate. For Iao, it was an eye-opening moment.

Iao says he was astonished by the support some teams received. “The head of sports of Kazakhstan sat beside me, and I found that amazing since it was not just the coach and athletes of the country coming to Macao to support them,” Iao says.

At the event, Macao athletes made a mark, too. Tam Si Long, 29, a student at the Macao Polytechnic University, claimed first place in her division (the senior female continental championship – Elite A – 48kg). Tam won cash prizes from the MMTA as well as the Macao government for her win, and she created a positive impact not just for herself, but for all women in the city as well. “It made people realise that [women] can also learn Muay Thai and participate in competitions,” Tam says.



“  
I’ve learned  
[how to develop]  
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hardship and let  
failure strengthen  
my will.

– Tam Si Long

Macao hosted the 2018 Asian  
Muaythai Championship, in which  
Tam claimed first place in her division

For the MMTA, Tam embodies exactly the kind of athlete the association hopes to develop. Martial arts became part of her life when she was just 6 years old. When she was young, she participated in many judo (a Japanese unarmed martial art) competitions, saying that the “taste of winning was enticing”. At 19, she joined Fighting Arts Club Macau, a sub-association of the MMTA, and was trained under her *sifu* (master), Sio Chi Hong.

“He was my mentor,” Tam says. “His philosophy was to never give up easily. From him, I’ve learned [how to develop] wisdom from hardship and let failure strengthen my will.”

Previously Tam had competed at the IFMA World Championships in 2012 and 2014 in Thailand and Malaysia, respectively – her first two official competitions. Having only started her journey in Muay Thai when she was 20, she claims that she lacked experience and technique. By the time the 2018 Asian Muaythai Championship came around, she says she was starting to peak.

The year prior, she participated in the 2017 World Games held in Wroclaw, Poland, where she fought against competitors from around the world and came home with a third-place finish. She explains that it was one of the key factors to her success in the 2018 Asian MT

Championships. “I defeated some tough opponents from countries like Russia and Poland,” she says.

Throughout her athletic career so far, Tam has faced victory as well as defeat, but the thought of giving up never occurred to her. “The outcome of your effort is not always as satisfying as you expect. I didn’t win all my competitions, but I do my best, with no regrets. That’s my mentality,” she says.

On top of competing professionally, Tam coaches at the Fighting Arts Club Macau. She has worked at the club for seven years, leading group classes as well as one-on-one sessions. From the many athletes she has worked with, though, Tam says that only two or three are qualified to participate in competitions. Most treat Muay Thai as a hobby. “It’s too difficult to [train at an elite level] in Macao,” Tam says. “Taking myself as an example, I’m an amateur boxer that needs to work [to make a living]. It’s not like other places that allow you to be a full-time athlete.”

Tam might have an opportunity to change that soon, though. She is set to join the board at the MMTA. While changing the way athletes receive sponsorships isn’t at the top of her agenda yet, she has already set a key goal for herself, one that could shape the sport for years to come. “I want to change people’s minds. To me, men and women are equal,” Tam affirms. “I won the Asian MT Championship, and through that, I want to show other women that they can do it, too.”

## MESMERISING TECHNIQUES

Muay Thai, also known as the “art of eight limbs”, dates back to the 13th century in Thailand, when it was developed as a form of combat for foot soldiers. Today, fighters draw on the sport’s battlefield legacy, using their fists, elbows, knees and shins – the eight limbs – in different combinations to wear down opponents. Every fighter develops their own style as they grow up, but there are five core forms athletes learn:

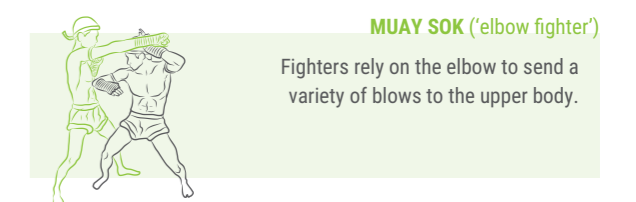
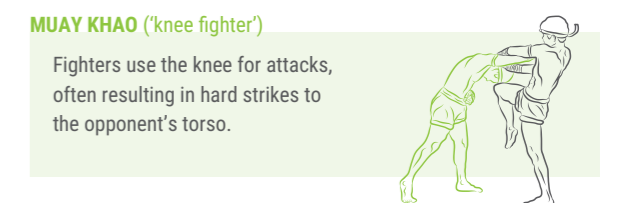
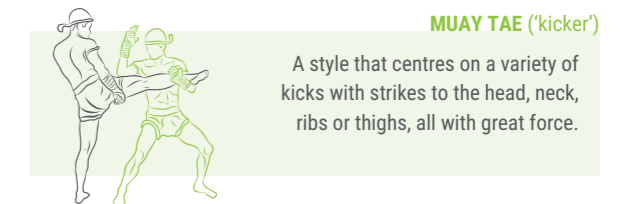
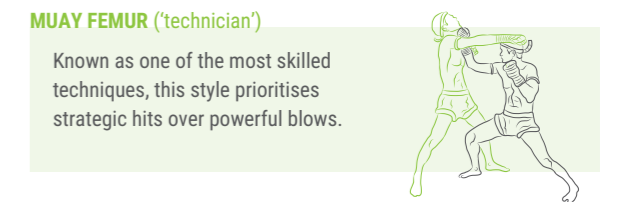


Photo courtesy of Leo Chi Lam



(Opposite page) The different types of techniques and kicks are what attracted Nicole Placé into practicing the sport when she was 14 years old

### NEXT-GEN COACH

The MMTA plays a major role in developing Muay Thai in Macao, but it isn't the only game in town. Young coaches across the city are working their way up independently. One of them is Macao-born Nicole Placé, 24, who says she got into martial arts 11 years ago after watching Angela Lee, the Canadian-American mixed martial artist (MMA) and youngest ever MMA champion, fight on television. When Placé turned 14, she began training at Warrior Fitness, a gym on Avenida Olimpica in Taipa, with coaches from the Philippines martial arts team Lakay, including Mark Eddiva, a former MMA athlete and wushu (also known as kungfu, the famous Chinese martial arts) champion.

### THE FATHER OF MUAY THAI



A familiar name among Muay Thai athletes is Nai Khanom Tom, also known as "The Father of Muay Thai". In 1765–1767, the Burmese raided Siam, known as Thailand today, in Ayutthaya, the former capital located 80 km north of Bangkok. King Mangra of Burma held a victory celebration and invited some of the finest Burmese fighters to fight against the slaves brought back from Thailand. Among them was Nai Khanom Tom.

Tom asked for a minute to prepare, and in that time he performed a ritualistic dance, today called the Wai Kru Ram Muay (a dance to pay respects to their trainer, loved ones and country). Nai Khanom Tom rained down on his opponents with a fury of elbow strikes and kicks, catching the king's attention. Tom was offered freedom and returned to Thailand as a hero, where he spent his entire life teaching Muay Thai. In honour of his name, 17 March is celebrated in Thailand as National Muay Thai day.

"Personally, I think Muay Thai is more interesting than other martial arts," she says. "You have a variety of moves and all of them just look really cool. I wanted to learn that and the more I trained, the more I fell in love with the combat side of things."

To date, however, Placé has struggled to compete as there are few other athletes in her weight class. Her coach, John Paul Fernandez, tried to set her up with a couple of official fights, but it would have required cutting down on weight. "I knew that if I did cut down to the weight that I'd be competing in, then I would not be performing at my best," she says.

Despite her lack of fighting experience, she is deeply involved with the sport. At the onset of the pandemic, Placé decided to get into coaching. She got her international certified licence from the National Academy of Sports Medicine, where she learned about the human body, exercises and science. In the middle of 2021, she joined Flex Fitness, a commercial gym, before moving to Warrior Fitness in November 2021.

"It takes some time to get used to coaching," Placé says. "I used to watch how my coaches coached me and it kind of got drilled into me, like, 'Okay, these are some of the options of coaching style or structure.'"

Like Tam, Placé also hopes to encourage more women to try the sport. She leads three classes per week and coaches privately outside Warrior Fitness, mostly with working professionals who have nine-to-five jobs. Some want to shake up their workout routine with Muay Thai, a sport they find more dynamic

than boxing. Some come to her with some experience and like the way she coaches. And others come to her as total rookies with a deep interest in Muay Thai but no experience whatsoever. Whatever their reason for working with her, Placé says her "biggest goal is to just ignite people's passion". She also hopes to shatter stereotypes about the sport. "[Some people say] that Muay Thai fights [look] very messy. I think it's a very elegant sport when you put in the time to train and you [find] your techniques. It's almost like a dance, in a way."

Although she enjoys training others, she still hopes to compete, too – first locally, and then internationally. Prior to the pandemic, she had hoped to attend a fight camp in Thailand alongside some of her pro-fighter friends.

"Thailand is the motherland of Muay Thai and I've seen results from friends who have attended the training camps there," Placé says. "I believe that it would also help me be a better coach and fighter."

Though not many athletes practise Muay Thai in the city today, the MMTA and independent coaches alike seem to have the right mindset to push the sport to the next level soon. "The younger generation will be our future fighters, so we want to put the focus on them as well as female athletes," Iao says. "We already started by putting ourselves in a position to prepare for [growth], so that's why I keep on saying, 'We focus on educating the younger kids; doesn't matter what gender,' [so that we can] have that massive pool of athletes to select from." ●







GREATER BAY AREA

## Forbidden treasures

**The newly opened Hong Kong Palace Museum is a treasure trove of ancient artefacts that aims to showcase China's 5,000-year history to the world.**

Text **Miguel Luigi Enriquez**  
Photos courtesy of the  
**Hong Kong Palace Museum**

The Hong Kong Palace Museum's exhibition space sprawls 7,800 square metres and is a treasure chest of Chinese artefacts

**H**ong Kong's West Kowloon Cultural District is no stranger to eye-catching architecture. The ambitious development, situated across the water from the Macao Ferry Pier along Victoria Harbour, is the city's largest arts centre, and it has the infrastructure to prove it, from the M+ museum's billboard-like façade to the Xiqu Centre's imposing industrial design.

The latest addition to this already impressive skyline is the Hong Kong Palace Museum, which just opened its doors last month. The HK\$3.5 billion (MOP 3.6 billion) project takes its name from the Forbidden City Palace Museum in Beijing, where most of the art pieces are on loan from.

The building's outer walls are made from golden curved aluminium panels, referencing its sibling from the imperial age. Inside, three atriums stacked atop one another connect the museum vertically, a contemporary reinterpretation of the linked courtyards in the Forbidden City.

This intricate attention to detail speaks to the museum's goal of showcasing 5,000 years of Chinese civilisation by acting as a treasure chest of ancient artefacts.

### AMBITIOUS BEGINNINGS

The Hong Kong Palace Museum came together in record time. Bernard Chan, chairman of the museum's board of directors, says that the idea came to former Chief Executive Carrie Lam about seven years ago. Prior to this, different museums across Hong Kong had regularly hosted exhibitions featuring pieces from the Palace Museum and were usually sold out. During a visit to Beijing in 2015, Lam thought Hong Kong would benefit from having its own dedicated space for national treasures.





Xinhua News Agency



Courtesy of Bernard Chan

Bernard Chan is the chairman of the Hong Kong Palace Museum's board of directors

(Above) The new museum joins contemporary art museum M+ and performance theatre Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District

“It was her idea, together with the endorsement from the Beijing Palace Museum director that got this whole thing started,” says Chan.

By October 2016, Lam had secured funding from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to build the project, and an announcement was made to the public in December with a goal to have the museum completed by July 2022, in time for the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong’s handover. Local firm Rocco Design Architects was directly appointed to design the building.

The project was initially met with some criticism by Hong Kong residents who pointed out that the public was not consulted about the museum – the standard practice for the construction of public facilities. Some also criticised the decision to directly assign an architecture company instead of having an open tender.

In defence, Chan argued that putting together the Hong Kong Palace Museum required working closely with the museum in Beijing to secure a contract for the loan of its exclusive artwork; Hong Kong officials could not afford to risk having the project being rejected by the public.

“I was told many cities want to get their own Palace Museum. Shanghai could do one also ... this kind of thing is very competitive, so you don’t want to throw it [the responsibility] to the public. What if you do a public discussion and at the end you don’t get their support? You’ll [turn] this thing into a huge embarrassment. So I think that’s why it couldn’t be done from the bottom up. It had to be done on a high level to secure the deal,” Chan said.

He added that avoiding the usual bureaucratic processes allowed them to complete the project on time and HK\$240 million (MOP 247 million) under budget.

## CURATING CHALLENGES

Building a museum of this scale on a tight deadline was challenging enough, but doing so during a time of political turmoil (2019 protests in Hong Kong) and a global health crisis added other hurdles.

In 2019, Daisy Yiyou Wang was brought onto the team as deputy director of curatorial and programming. Born and raised in Hunan province, Wang was previously based in the United States, where she worked as a curator of Chinese and East Asian art at the Peabody Essex Museum in Massachusetts and the Chinese art specialist at the National Museum of Asian Art in Washington, DC.

“In the United States, the museum business has [existed] for over 100 years, so it’s a very mature system. Doing an exhibition there is like regular warfare – you know what you’re getting into, you know what weapons you’ll use and you’ll know how long it will take. But in Hong Kong, it’s more like guerilla warfare. You have to be very nimble and you have to be prepared for unexpected situations,” Wang admits with a laugh.

One of her biggest challenges was procuring display cases for the most valuable pieces. The Palace Museum in Beijing had agreed to loan 166 first-grade cultural relics, a rating that means they are recognised as national treasures. “These are treasures [among] treasures,” Wang explains. “The Forbidden City Palace Museum has over 1.8 million objects, but only about 8,000 are considered first-grade treasures, and out of those, they gave us 5 per cent [of them].”

It was Wang’s responsibility to make sure they were appropriately stored and displayed upon their arrival in Hong Kong. She enlisted the help of Italian display manufacturer Goppion, who created the display case for the *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre. The cases had to be tailor-made, but because they didn’t have the exact dimensions of the objects at the time, Wang had to make sure the display cases were modular to make them as versatile as possible. At one point, they were worried they wouldn’t make it to Hong Kong in time because production was halted in Italy during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the end, they managed to receive the display cases in time for the artefacts’ arrival.

Transporting nearly a thousand artefacts from Beijing to Hong Kong also presented a huge logistical undertaking that had to be carefully orchestrated. “It dawned on me that you can’t just ship them all in one go.



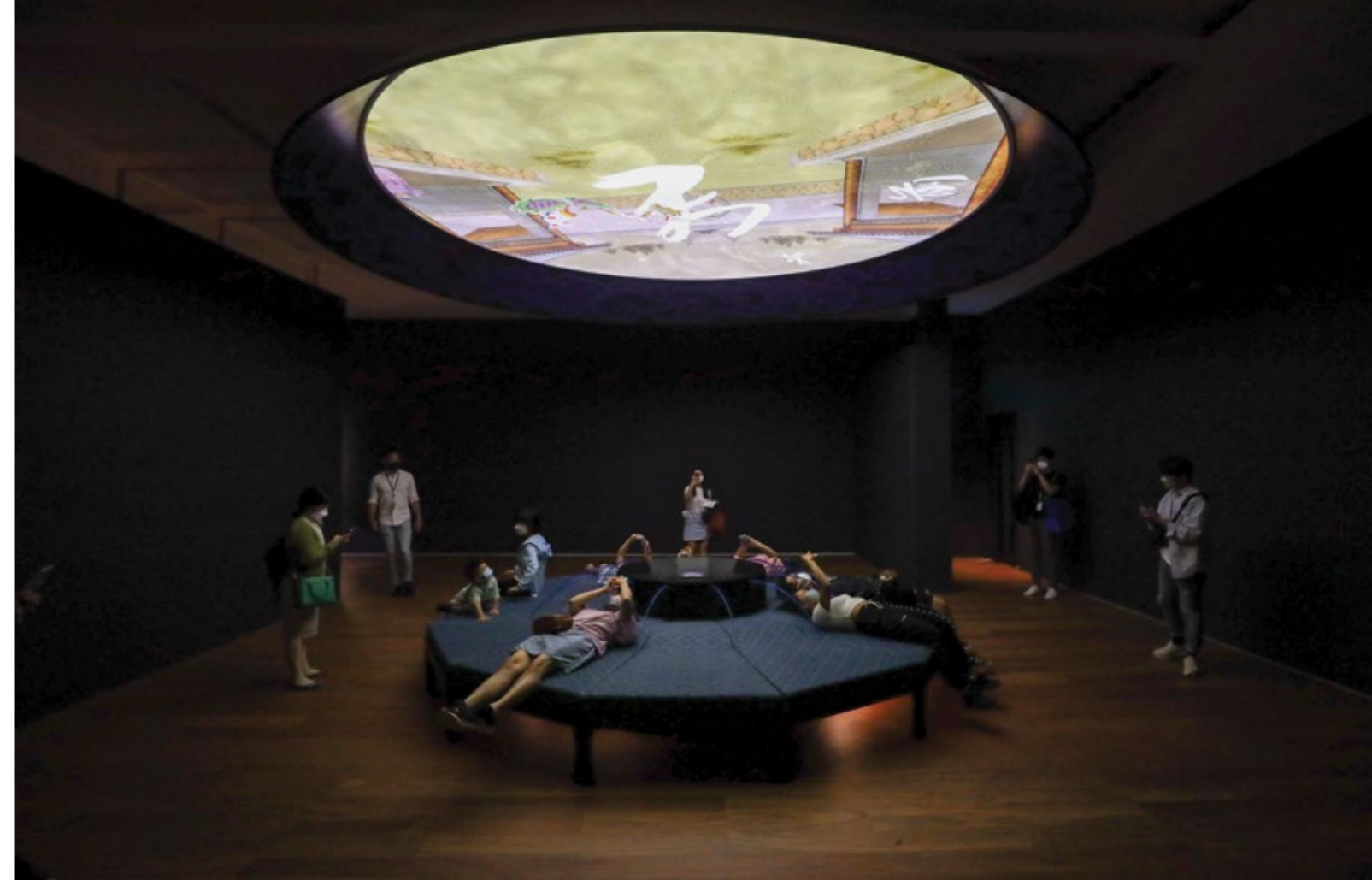
Courtesy of the Hong Kong Palace Museum

Daisy Yiyou Wang is the museum's deputy director of curatorial and programming

(Below) This vase with a spiral pattern dates back to the Qing dynasty, Qianlong period







Chan and Wang both said it was important for the museum to reach younger audiences through interactive and immersive installations

There are very specialised packing, unpacking and shipping services that are accustomed to moving treasures like this,” says Chan.

Chan also said that just insuring the items during their transit cost “a couple million US dollars”. Plus, the artefacts are so valuable that insuring them during their stay in Hong Kong involved more than 100 different insurance companies from around the world – a record feat that will cost the museum another few million US dollars per year, according to Chan.

#### FROM THE FORBIDDEN CITY TO ASIA'S WORLD CITY

The efforts paid off when the Hong Kong Palace Museum opened on time on 3 July, ahead of the city’s handover anniversary. Eighty-five per cent of the 140,000 available tickets were sold before the opening, and Wang says most tickets for weekends in August are already sold out.

With nine exhibition galleries spread out across 7,800 square metres

of space, the Hong Kong Palace Museum boasts 914 pieces on loan from the Forbidden City, ranging from painting and calligraphy to bronze, ceramics, jade, costumes, jewellery and architecture, dating back nearly 5,000 years.

“Some of these [items in the museum], many of us probably studied or saw in a textbook but this is the first time we can actually see it in person,” Chan notes. He says being able to view the relics in person will generate newfound appreciation amongst visitors.

The first two galleries serve as an introduction to the Forbidden City, showing visitors how life in the imperial palace influenced Chinese politics and culture. Chan explains that he understands that younger people may not necessarily have a natural interest in ancient items, so it was crucial for him to make the museum cater to these audiences with interactive elements.

“What impressed me the most was gallery five. That’s not where all

the great [pieces of art are], but what I like about it is we use a lot of advanced technology to create an immersive experience, mixing the old and new together,” he says. “I think the Palace Museum normally gives the impression of having a more mature audience. I want to change that stereotype.”

Wang agrees, saying that when working with the museum’s 12 curators, it was crucial for them to create something for everyone. “I think offering multiple entry points is very important for our museum. We have scholarly exhibitions, but most are [also] immersive and very interactive. There are a lot of multimedia elements. For example, there are stations where you can do calligraphy ... we have a lot of things for multi-generational families.”

#### A GLOBAL OUTLOOK

The Hong Kong Palace Museum also wants to make a name for itself beyond its counterpart in Beijing. Bernard Chan says that they are not merely a branch of the Forbidden City Palace Museum but an institution in their own right contributing a unique perspective to the art world.

“We want to take advantage of the mix of East and West in Hong Kong. We’re here to showcase Chinese civilisation to the world. The world is so polarised today; we want people to experience and understand through the exhibitions how [historically] our civilisation co-existed with other civilisations,” Chan says.

Some of the pieces date back 5,000 years while some exhibitions try to tell China’s rich history through modern means





Tickets to visit the museum during its first month quickly sold out with most weekends in August already booked out

To do this, the Hong Kong Palace Museum also features works from around the world. Currently, there are 13 pieces of art on loan from the Louvre in France. Wang says they are working on a future exhibition featuring treasures from Liechtenstein.

She encourages everyone to visit the museum as soon as they get the chance, as some pieces will only be in Hong Kong for a few months. Some of the pieces, mostly those on loan from Beijing, will probably have to go through a resting period of at least a few years – meaning,

the museum would put them in storage out of conservation concerns – before they can be displayed again, too. “To me, this is a gift to the world as much as it is a gift to the people of Hong Kong.”

Chan hopes that putting ancient works of art from different civilisations side by side will instil a potent lesson to visitors. “There are Chinese artefacts with strong Western influences and there are Chinese influences in some Western art as well. These things go back thousands of years. I think that’s a powerful message.” ●

## MUST-SEE TREASURES AT THE HONG KONG PALACE MUSEUM



*Headrest in the shape of a reclining boy*  
Ding kilns, Hebei province  
Northern Song dynasty, 960–1127  
Stoneware with ivory glaze

This headrest was produced by the Ding kilns, one of the “Five Famous Kilns” of the Song dynasty and is a rare example of its kind. The Qianlong Emperor collected several Ding ware headrests, for which he composed many poems. One of these poems reads: “On all fours, he has a focused gaze. What a pity that the child now serves as a headrest and cannot go to sleep!”



*Twelve chrysanthemum-shaped dishes*  
Imperial Kilns, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province  
Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period, 1723–1735  
Porcelain with overglaze enamels

Inspired by the shape of chrysanthemums, each of these dishes is covered with a striking, coloured glaze. Some of the colours were invented during the Yongzheng period. The dishes were part of 40 sets commissioned by the Yongzheng Emperor from the Imperial Kilns in Jingdezhen in 1733. Most of the rest of the sets have been lost.



*Flask with dragons among floral scrolls*  
Imperial Kilns, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province  
Ming dynasty, Yongle period, 1403–1424  
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue

The form of the flasks was inspired by vessels from the Middle East. Samarra Blue, a cobalt pigment imported from this area, was used to decorate the body, producing a rich and brilliant colour. The dragon is rendered in a lively manner and intertwined with meandering floral scrolls. The flask reflects the interaction between the Ming dynasty and the Islamic world.



Giuseppe Castiglione  
(Lang Shining, 1688–1766)  
*The Qianlong Emperor in Armour on Horseback* (available for viewing soon)  
Qing dynasty, Qianlong period, 1758  
Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk

Painted by the Italian Jesuit and Qing court painter Giuseppe Castiglione (also known by his Chinese name Lang Shining). Castiglione was trained predominantly in Western-painting styles but also learned traditional Chinese painting techniques during his time in China. This mix of methods is evident in this particular piece.



Zhao Fu (active mid-12th century)  
*Ten Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*  
Southern Song dynasty, 12th century  
Handscroll, ink on paper

This handscroll is the only surviving work bearing the signature of Zhao Fu. Zhao Fu was a native of Jingkou (present-day Zhenjiang province) who lived on Mount Beigu near the Yangtze River. He excelled at painting landscapes, rocks, rivers, and waves. Compared to other painters who often depicted water with lines (if at all), Zhao Fu was unique in that he used layers of subtle wet washes to evoke the ever-changing scenery of the river, creating a sense of spatial depth that animates the pictorial space.



PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

## Waking up to Angolan coffee

Once one of the world's biggest coffee producers, Angola today hopes to steel its economy by rebuilding its forgotten coffee industry.



Text Fei Pou Lo

Selective harvesting by hand ensures only the ripest beans are picked, producing the largest quantity of quality beans

Fifty years ago, Angola was one of the largest coffee producers in the world. Internal conflict, a lack of funding and a pivot toward oil has put coffee on the backburner since the 1970s. Now, the country is hoping for a return to its coffee-growing heyday.

Angolan leaders are looking to put coffee at the top of its exports. Soon, Asia might benefit from this shift in strategy, with several projects aiming to send the country's new and improved coffee beans to places like Macao.

The focus on coffee is part of broader plans to diversify the economy, which is currently dependent on oil, the country's other black gold. While oil once fuelled remarkable economic growth, price crashes in 2014 brought that growth to a screeching halt, sending the economy into a recession and illuminating deep inequities in Angolan society. According to the United Nations Agency for Trade and Development (UNCTAD), nearly half of Angolans still live in poverty, and only about 40 per cent of the nation's 31 million people have access to electricity.

But agriculture, which accounts for about 13 per cent of Angola's GDP, offers hope for change. In a 2018 review of Angolan exports, UNCTAD identified coffee as a product with the potential to deliver more sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

It's clear to see why. Globally, consumers drink around 3 billion cups of coffee a day, according to the International Coffee Organization (ICO), representing an "immense opportunity for Angola, given the suitable ecological conditions and the high quality of its beans", Pamela Coke-Hamilton, then director of UNCTAD's international trade division, told UNCTAD in 2020.

### UNIQUE CONDITIONS FOR PRODUCTION

Angola benefits from a fortuitous geography and abundant natural resources that are essential for coffee production. These include altitude (1,200-1,300 metres above sea level); rich, fertile soil; a cool to warm tropical climate; and an abundance of water.



Hand-sorting beans not only improves the quality of coffee, it provides additional jobs to the community

(Right) A worker takes a sample of the freshly roasted coffee beans

These conditions help coffee plants flourish. They are also why the country could produce around 200,000 tonnes of coffee annually in the early 1970s, when it vied with Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda for the title of Africa's biggest exporter and beans grown in its lush, green highlands provided half of its foreign exchange earnings.

After the country won independence from Portugal in 1975, it fell into a decades-long civil war, and many farmers abandoned their plantations. Even today, some former coffee fields remain littered with landmines. At the same time, in the 1980s and 1990s, oil began to overshadow coffee as a commodity for Angola. As oil drove vertiginous, if unequal, economic growth, coffee production plummeted – by 2017, Angola was producing just 8,000 tonnes of coffee annually.

Crude oil now represents more than 97 per cent of total exports, but the days of rapid economic growth powered by oil seem to be in the rearview. Oil production reached 1.8 million barrels a day in 2015, but it has since declined to 1.1 million barrels today. This makes it all the more urgent that the country

boosts its coffee-growing industry, and agriculture in general.

Angola exported at least 1,662 tonnes of coffee in the 2020 agricultural season, about 28 per cent of the 6,050 tonnes the country produced that year. Last year, however, production dropped around 12.4 per cent, marking a setback for the industry.

Still, researchers from the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) believe the conditions are right for the industry to not only bounce back, but also soar. In recent statements to Euronews, Cécile Bessou, a CIRAD researcher, stated that “there is a real motivation from local government [officials], but also from international institutions such as the European Union, to revitalise this sector”. These, she added, “are trying to innovate to bring the coffee sector in Angola back to its former glory”.

**OVERCOMING CHALLENGES**

According to UNCTAD, less than 50,000 hectares of farmland were dedicated to coffee during the 2016-17 harvest, well down from 500,000 in the 1970s, before the country plunged

into civil war in the second half of the decade. That amounts to many missed opportunities to export coffee and shore up economic disparities.

In addition to increasing production, UNCTAD says the country must also increase the value of its coffee beans by producing more sought-after varieties. Coffee prices fluctuate as much as oil prices, and producers, on average, have seen their share of what consumers pay fall to just 1 cent (US\$) per cup, according to the ICO. When prices are low, farmers might abandon coffee for other agricultural products.

Compounding these price spikes is the fact that almost all of Angola's approximately 25,000 coffee producers work on small family farms, according to UNCTAD. These families don't earn very much for producing low-quality beans, but switching their focus to high-quality, specialty Arabica beans that fetch higher prices could provide better, more sustainable income for the country's coffee growers.

To overcome those price fluctuations, it is not enough to just grow and harvest coffee. In a study conducted in Ethiopia, for example, researchers found that coffee growers could earn 30 per cent more by producing specialty beans rather than non-specialty coffee. But growing better beans is just one part of the equation. Angola must also add value by roasting, packaging and marketing the Robusta and Arabica varieties it produces.

Many obstacles could hold back progress, however, from a lack of access to financing and information to unsustainable farming methods and unproductive plants. Most of the country's plants are over 40 years old, for example, and yields are less than half of what they used to be.

To meet these challenges, UNCTAD has been working with farmers,



Map of coffee production areas in Angola

● Robusta coffee  
● Arabica coffee

government leaders, and other actors in the country's coffee sector to assess how producers and exporters can better position themselves in the global value chain. Meanwhile, several promising new projects have cropped up, providing new pathways to success for Angolan coffee farmers.

**NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH**

To witness how the industry is evolving, look to the city of Quiculungo, in Cuanza Norte province in the north-central part of Angola. Coffee cultivation in the region dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, introduced by Portuguese settlers before a Brazilian producer set up the country's first commercial coffee plantation in the 1830s. In the 1970s, Cuanza Norte produced around 200,000 tonnes of coffee beans per year. While the industry has yet to reach those lofty heights again, new projects signal growth is not far off on the horizon.







Angolan brands like Tumbwaza proudly tout their organic growing practices

(Opposite page) Few Angolans start their day with a cup of coffee as the product remains expensive locally

One of the most dynamic producers among farms in the region today is Café Cazengo. The emerging brand is one of the 25,000 small farms that produce about half of the country's coffee (the other half comes from major brands, such as Delta).

"In colonial times, it was coffee that moved [Cuanza Norte's] economy. The municipality was built around coffee," says the commercial director of the company, Camila Paula. Today, Café Cazengo is helping the region recover its former cash crop. In 2018, the company exported its beans to the US, the first Angolan coffee to be imported into the US in 40 years.

"We also have our website, where we sell internationally," adds Paula.

Among the great national producers is Fazenda Vissolela, which currently dedicates a fifth of its production area in central Cuanza Sul province to coffee – 1,000 hectares, all focused on specialty coffees like Catuai (a kind of Arabica bean), 80 per cent of which is for export. Énio Miranda, managing partner of Vissolela, told Angola's *O País* newspaper that this year's income is already "good", a promising sign for the rest of 2022.

Now, the company hopes to double its profits. "This year is the beginning of a bright future. You can bet, because coffee has always been the past, it will be the future of Angola," Miranda added.

Some companies have turned to new products to drive growth. Already a major exporter of Angolan coffee, Angonabeiro – a subsidiary of the Portuguese group Nabeiro (Delta), which has operated in Angola since 1998 – has gone from strength to strength, putting new focus on coffee capsules.

The company has built up the capacity to produce up to 10 million capsules per year, marketed under the name Ginga. The capsules are produced at the Angonabeiro coffee factory in Kikolo, a commune in the municipality of Cacucio in Luanda, Angola's capital city.

The investment in the coffee capsule filling line stems from the Production Support, Export Diversification and Import Substitution Program (Prodesi), a government scheme that supports the increase in national production of fresh coffee.

Through Prodesi, Angonabeiro has benefited from 4.9 billion kwanzas (MOP 92.4 million) in financing – on top of its own investment of 8.4 billion kwanzas (MOP 159 million) in 2021-22 – which has allowed the company to upgrade its green coffee processing lines, build new bean and ground coffee packaging lines,

and construct another green coffee processing line, as well as a coffee capsule production line.

Today, Angonabeiro has more than 100 workers, ensuring a continuous supply of coffee to all provinces from its facilities in Luanda, where the company has a 4,000-square-metre warehouse, and from the Café Ginga factory in Luanda, where the brand produces more than 400 tonnes of sugar and 200 tonnes of roasted coffee annually.

### EYEING OVERSEAS GROWTH

Coffee production in the country is still struggling to take off, as many farms sit vacant and producers opt for short-cycle crops, such as cassava, ginguba (peanuts), sweet potatoes and bananas, to increase their income, according to Gilberto Neves, co-founder of Tumbwaza, a coffee project created in 2019. Even so, Angolan coffee might soon end up in your cup.

Startup coffee brands have set out to procure the best Angolan beans, roast them and ship them as far away as Macao. Visitors to Expo Dubai 2022 were able to experience this first-hand courtesy of Tumbwaza, a project created in 2019 by two young entrepreneurs. Neves explains that Tumbwaza acquires Robusta Ambriz beans from producers in Uíge province, one of the largest regional producers of this variety of coffee, a milder kind of Robusta that is very popular in Portugal. Once purchased, they roast, mill and package the beans for shipment.

"In the province of Uíge, there are about 2,000 producers. It is with these that we have been working in order to start exporting to the European and Asian markets in the near future," says Neves, who adds that the company currently buys and processes around 300 tonnes of coffee per year, or about 5 per cent of all coffee produced in Angola.

Tumbwaza coffee has already arrived in Portugal, and this year it will be exported to South Africa and Dubai. The company also hopes to ship to Macao and the surrounding region, where coffee consumption has been growing appreciably. Since 2000, coffee

consumption in Macao per capita grew from about 1 kg per year to nearly 4 kg in 2013, the last year data was available. Despite the lack of statistics, coffee culture's growth is clear to see. Today, specialty coffee shops can be found across the city, with new cafés opening seemingly by the week.

In Angola, on the other hand, most locals don't drink coffee. "Today, coffee is even cheaper in Portugal than in the country," says Neves, who cites the country's reliance on imports to produce coffee and middlemen as factors driving up prices. That means producers must incorporate export plans into their strategies. But Neves adds that exporters face several barriers, too – chief among them, speculation on the price of beans, "all due to various intermediaries and lack of price regulation".

Despite the barriers, and despite the slow but steady progress being made in the industry, the outlook for the country's coffee production looks bright. Before long, consumers across the world, including in Macao, might start waking up to Angolan coffee. ●



George Rudy



ZOOM

# Vibrant creatures

Look at the sky, water or trees and you'll see that Macao is blessed with some beautiful flying creatures. Bird photographer João Monteiro takes us through his lens, showcasing some of the city's abundant bird life.



①

Text **Erico Dias**  
Photos **João Monteiro**

- ① As its name suggests, cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) follow cattle around to feed on insects that gather on them. During the winter, the bird is white as snow, making its orange beak stand out. But in this picture, taken during the breeding period in May, the colour of the bird's head and neck has changed to orange, while the beak has turned purple and red
- ② Cinnamon bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*), also known as chestnut bittern, is a brownish-red bird commonly found in India, China and Southeast Asia. This bird breeds in tropical and subtropical areas in May and June, similar to cattle egrets

From Mount Fortress to the trails in Coloane, Macao is gifted with extraordinary birds. According to the most recent edition of *Clements Checklist of Birds of the World* – one of the ornithology world's most important checklists – Macao has 411 bird species, with 16 globally threatened and 6 introduced species (birds intentionally brought into a region).

*The Standard for Classification of Urban Green Area in Macao* (2015) states that Macao's urban green area covers about 35.6 per cent of the city's total land area, all of which is supervised by the Department of Gardens and Green Areas of the Municipal Affairs Bureau. Half of this green space is found

in Coloane and the rest is spread across the city, from re-forested areas and parks to green belts and greenery along the streets.

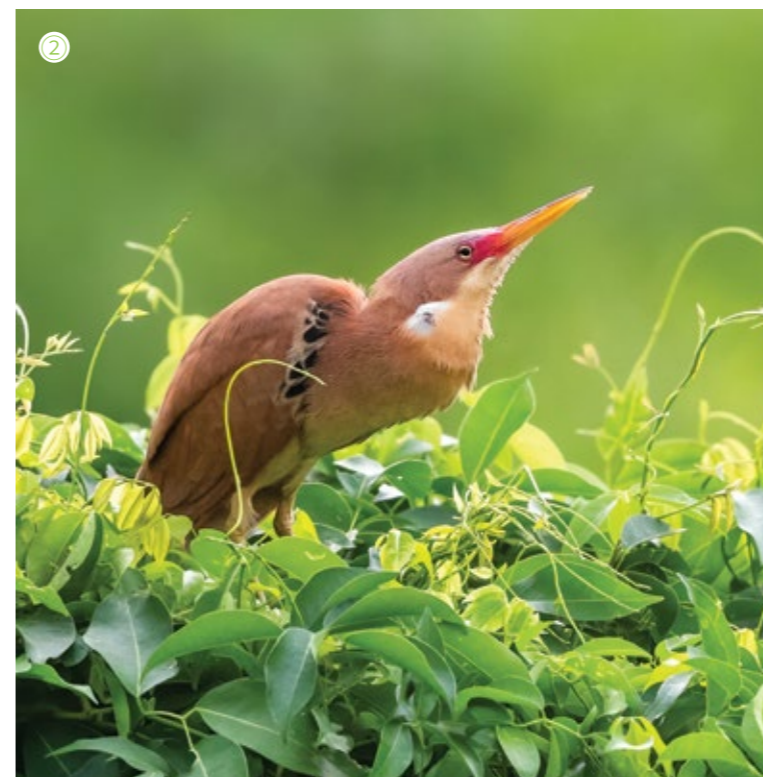
Thanks to this, migratory birds have plenty of places to settle during the spring and winter, while non-migratory birds can nest throughout the year. That makes Macao a great place for aspiring bird photographers to find subjects to capture.

João Monteiro, 55, a senior coordinator of criminal investigation for the Judiciary Police of Macao and avid bird photographer, explains that it takes a while to learn how to get the perfect shot, as you need to study the birds and environment and know the best hours to shoot. With time, he says, you figure out where and when to go, and you begin to understand the birds and their behaviour.

"Every time I go out, I take at least a thousand pictures, and from those, I pick 50 and end up editing just one or two for each bird," Monteiro explains.

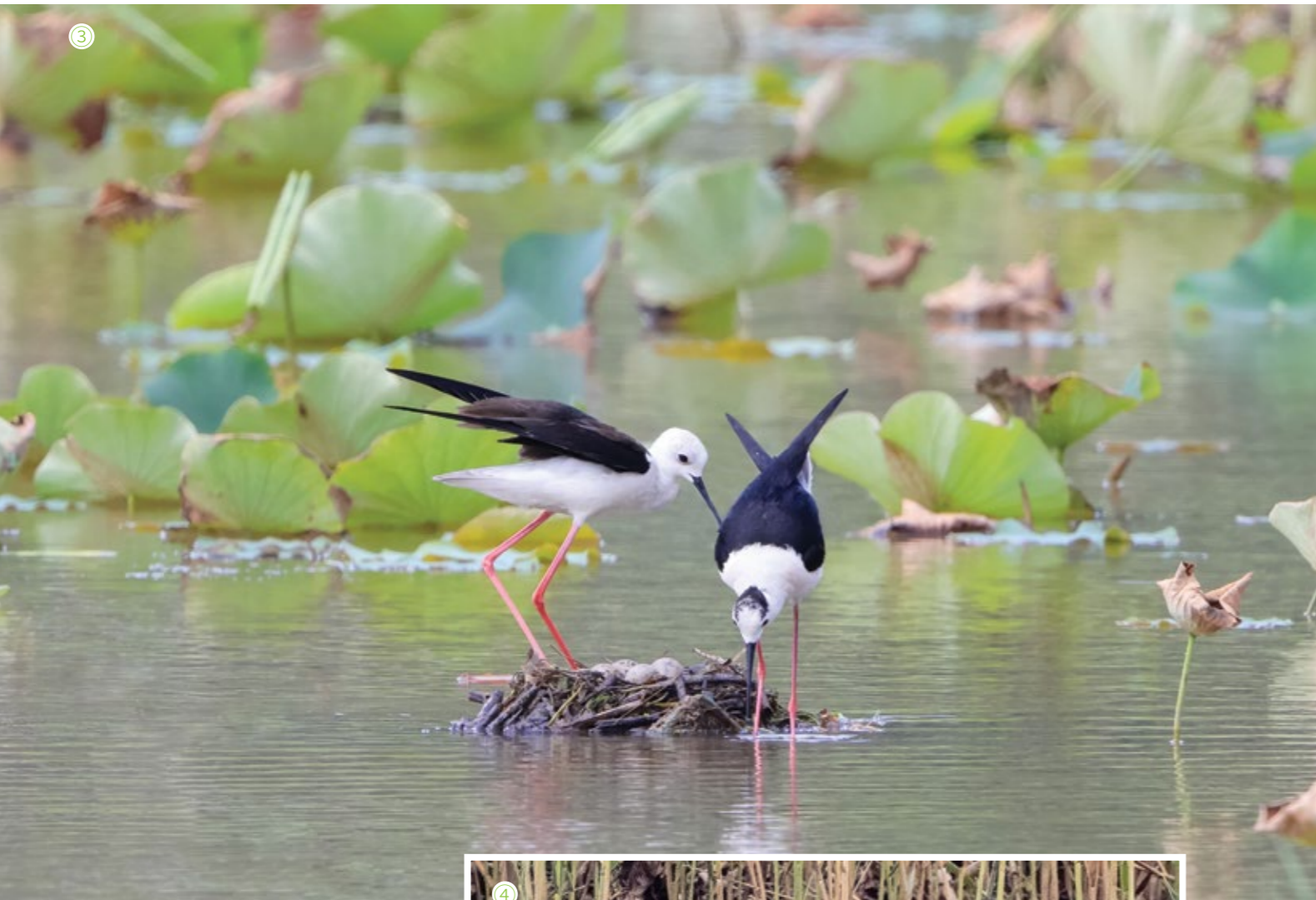
Of the many species he has captured, Monteiro picks the cattle egrets – a white heron native to warm-temperature zones – as his favourite bird, describing it as "simply pleasant." But as these images show, many distinct bird species call Macao home, from colourful leafbirds to majestic herons. For bird-watchers like Monteiro, the city is full of surprises.

"That in a cement jungle like Macao ... we have the opportunity to see so many different and beautiful birds, I think that's amazing." ●



②





③

③ The black-winged stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) is known for its black wings and beak, its long orange-red legs and its constant high-pitched warning calls. In 2021, Monteiro recalls it as the "first time seeing them breed in Macao". They arrive in late spring or at the beginning of summer

④ Female black-winged stilts normally lay four eggs, and their chicks leave the nest just an hour or two after hatching

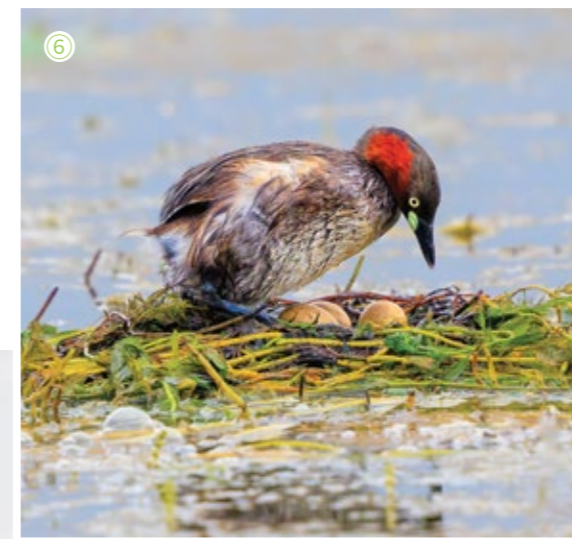


④

- ⑤ Little egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) lay up to five bluish-green eggs above ground or water, and in trees and bushes, which are then cared for and incubated by both parents. This resident bird breeds in May or June
- ⑥ Often confused for a duck, the round-looking, fluffy little grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) is a water bird that can be noisy. These are resident birds you can find year-round. When they breed in the summer, their heads and necks turn red, but in winter they change to brown
- ⑦ Little grebes lay two to three eggs per breeding season. The bird is known to breed with only one mate



⑤



⑥



⑦



### Macao has four types of migrational birds:

Resident birds (stay year-round)

Winter migrant birds (arrive in late September or October and depart in May or June)

Summer migrant birds (arrive in late February or March and depart in September or October) – these birds are relatively rare in Macao, as most migratory birds come to the city to spend the winter.

Migratory birds (stay for just a day or a week, usually in March or April and September or October) – these birds use Macao as a place to recover from the migration, which can extend from Siberia all the way to Australia and vice versa.



8



9

8 Dollarbirds (*Eurystomus orientalis*), known for their short necks and tails, can be found across Asia in February or March. These migratory birds usually stay in Macao for 15 days, but never more than a month

9 Brightly coloured orange-bellied leafbirds (*Chloropsis hardwickii*) are commonly found in many parts of China, including Yunnan and Hainan provinces, as well as Macao

10 Black-crowned night herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) mate within one or two days after pairs bond



10



⑪ Also known as the common egret, the great egret (*Ardea alba*) can travel up to 40 km an hour. In winter, the bird's beak and face turn orange. In this picture, the beak is black and the eye is red, which indicates that the bird is laying eggs – the red eye colour often lasts for only a week, before returning to its normal yellow

⑫ The Chinese pond heron (*Ardeola bacchus*) goes hunting for insects and fish early in the morning or late in the evening. Like the great egret, this bird also appears in breeding plumage alongside two chicks. In winter, the plumage changes to brown and white, similar to its babies'



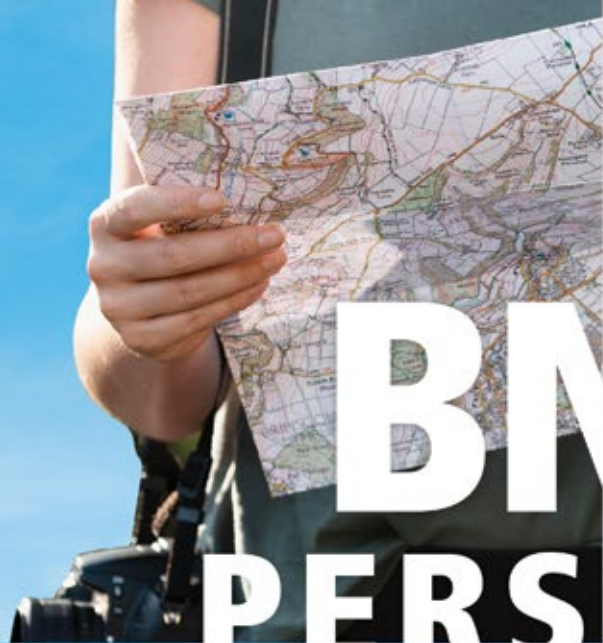
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