

Macao 澳門

The Macao connection: LRT's new era in Barra



**70TH MACAU GRAND PRIX MAKES
A HISTORIC COMEBACK**

**BRUSH STROKES OF HISTORY
WITH GEORGE CHINNERY**



2023 Illuminar Macau Light Up Macao 幻彩耀濠江 璀璨遊樂場

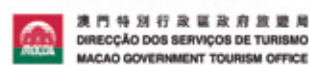
Passeio Deslumbrante
The Dazzling Wonderland

2023.12.2

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PUBLISHER

Government Information Bureau of the Macao SAR
15th Floor, China Plaza Building, Avenida da Praia Grande, 762 – 804, Macao
T +853 2833 2886 F +853 2835 5426 info@gcs.gov.mo

DIRECTOR
Chan Lou

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Amelia Leong Man Ieng

EDITOR
Eva Lei Sao Iok

MEET OUR TEAM

PRODUCER AND DISTRIBUTOR

Macaolink News and Information Services, Ltd.
Av. do Dr Rodrigo Rodrigues 600-E, Edif. Centro Comercial First Nacional 2406, Macao
T + 853 2835 5315 F +853 2835 5466 contact@macaulink.com.mo

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Gonçalo César de Sá
cesardesa@macaulink.com.mo

MANAGING EDITOR
Mariana César de Sá
marianasa@macaulink.com.mo

EDITOR
Amanda Saxton

TRANSLATOR
Mani Fong

STAFF WRITERS
Erico Dias, Kenny Fong, Sara Santos Silva

SENIOR DESIGNER
Sandra Norte

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Vivianna Cheong, Christopher Chu, Aidyn Fitzpatrick,
Gilbert Humphrey, António Sampaio

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Cheong Chi Fong, Lei Heong Ieong,
Eduardo Leal, António Sanmarful

PROOFREADER
Anna O'Connor

PRINTER
Welfare Printing Company, Ltd. Macau

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COVER IMAGE

The LRT now extends its reach to the Barra district on the Macao Peninsula, bringing convenience and connectivity to a whole new level. Photo by Ng Chi Yui

Contents

10 Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng’s 2024 policy blueprint
Macao’s vision prioritises economic recovery, diversification, national security, infrastructure development and technological advancements.

14 Forum Macao faces the future
The Forum had its 20th anniversary in October, when top officials from China and the nine Portuguese-speaking countries got together to reflect on its successes and consider new directions.

20 Macao’s LRT: past, present and future
The Light Rail Transit is ushering in a new era of transportation for the city with the opening of a new line that connects Taipa to the Macao Peninsula.

26 A rush to remember
In November, the 70th Macau Grand Prix roared into town with its biggest turn-out yet. Adrenaline pumped for racers and onlookers alike. And amidst the crashes and combustion, 2023’s batch of champions emerged triumphant.

32 Generations: a Finnish-Macanese education
Macao has a new, progressive international school that melds Nordic pedagogy with the innate multiculturalism of Macao. According to Generations’ co-founder, the happier the child, the more he or she will learn.

36 Giulio Acconci: Macao’s own Renaissance man
One half of the pop-rock band Soler, Giulio Acconci is much more than a musician. He showed Macao magazine one of his favourite spots in the city, where he spoke openly about his roots, inspiration and upcoming projects.

42 Cooking with history: A restaurateur looks back to forge ahead
Macao’s Portuguese culinary heritage is in safe hands. Poised to expand beyond the St Lazarus District, an ambitious family of eateries reflects on its role in the city’s post-gaming future.



48 An old *bing sutt* brings baking to the masses
For the past 80-odd years, Chion Chau café has borne witness to the ebbs and flows of Macao. Today, it’s run by a father-and-son team who are moving with the times while remembering the past.

54 Mak Mak: The face of Macao tourism
Visitors to Macao may have spied a charismatic black-faced spoonbill at the city’s border crossings, or purchased her image on a keepsake. Mak Mak, you see, is Macao’s official tourism mascot – dreamed up by local designer Tou Chon Wai.

62 ‘My calendar is my god’
There are plenty of opportunities brewing for businesses involved in AmCham, says its chairman, Charles M Choy. From better integration with the GBA, to getting involved with medical tourism at Macao’s brand new hospital.



66 Welcome to George Chinnery’s Macao
The English artist spent more than 25 years documenting early 19th-century Macao through paintings and sketches. Architecturally, much of what he depicted pre-dated him by centuries – and still endures to this day.

74 For scuba divers seeking serenity, nothing beats Atauro Island
Off the coast of Timor-Leste, this hidden gem is a former prison that’s home to legends, cultural richness and some of the most biodiverse waters in the world.

80 Dazzling wonderland: The unveiling of ‘Light up Macao 2023’
The event transforms the city into a shimmering spectacle with light installations and interactive shows, enhancing tourism and community economy.

CONGRATULATIONS ON

THE 24TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
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CONGRATULATIONS ON
THE 24TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MACAO SAR





Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng's 2024 policy blueprint

Macao's vision prioritises economic recovery, diversification, national security, infrastructure development and technological advancements.

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**

Macao's Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng recently shared his policy address for 2024, outlining a detailed and ambitious vision for the Special Administrative Region (SAR). His roadmap for the future encompasses a broad array of sectors and themes, ranging from economic recovery and diversification to enhancing national security, improving infrastructure and fostering technological advancements.

A highlight of Ho's address was the revitalisation of Macao's economy. He took note of the numerous – 51 in total – public projects that were undertaken as of November of this year, each with a budget of over 100 million patacas. These initiatives

collectively aimed to stimulate economic activity and job growth, providing a much-needed boost for the region's economy. The CE's economic forecast was optimistic, citing a striking year-on-year GDP increase of 71.5 percent in the first half of 2023 and a substantial surge in visitor numbers, though this can be mainly attributed to the re-opening of the borders after the Covid pandemic.

Economic diversification was a key theme in Ho's address. Reflecting on the city's traditional reliance on the gaming industry, he emphasised the government's efforts to strengthen the local bond market and other sectors. Macao was recognised as the Best Convention City in Asia in August, a testament to the city's ongoing mission to diversify its economic portfolio and attract a wider range of industries and visitors.

Ho complemented the economic vision with an emphasis on enhancing the standard of living and developing local infrastructure. He highlighted the introduction of new training programs and youth internships targeted at upskilling the local workforce and fostering a culture of lifelong learning. Furthermore, he noted the opening of the Islands District Medical Complex – set to open in December – which promises to significantly improve healthcare services and facilities in the region.

Technological advancements also featured prominently in Ho's speech, showcasing the SAR's commitment to digital transformation. Macao is preparing to launch its first digital ID card, a move that aligns with global trends towards digitisation and is expected to streamline various administrative processes for residents.

The Macao One app, a multipurpose digital platform, has received positive feedback from over half a million registered users, indicating a successful adoption of digital services by the local population.

Ho outlined a detailed and ambitious plan for the SAR in his 2024 policy address



Looking forward: 2024 and Beyond

As he turned his gaze to 2024, Ho outlined several priorities. Amidst an unstable global geopolitical landscape, bolstering national security emerged as a central focus. This involves ensuring the region's stability and safety while also maintaining its distinct identity and culture.

Further diversifying the economy was another key priority. The CE highlighted the potential of medical and sports tourism, sectors that offer significant opportunities for growth. He also pointed to the revitalisation of parts of the old city to attract a more diverse range of visitors, thereby expanding the city's cultural and tourism offerings. Aiding this effort will be the expansion of Air Macau's network and greater utilisation of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. Additionally, special initiatives will be launched in celebration of the 25th anniversary of Macao's handover next year to further boost tourism.

Attracting investment in the tech sector was identified as a priority for the coming year. This focus extends particularly to the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, a region with high potential for technological development. Alongside this, the recruitment of top talent across different sectors is seen as essential for driving innovation and fostering economic growth.

On social welfare, Ho confirmed the continuation of cash handouts to eligible residents under the "wealth partaking scheme". More than 4,600 public housing flats are expected to be completed before the end of 2024, further underlining the commitment to social welfare.

Other notable plans for 2024 include:

- Land reclamation for the airport's expansion, beginning in the latter half of 2024
- Phasing out motorcycles and buses powered by traditional fossil fuels, and enforcing the ban on importing plastic cutlery
- Refurbishing historic buildings and protecting intangible heritage to promote cultural tourism
- Inviting topflight mainland educators to elevate local education standards
- Streamlining air transfers to Hengqin and the movement of people, goods and finance between Macao and Hengqin
- Facilitating cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries via Forum Macao's 6th ministerial conference and related events
- Improving real-time traffic management in the city

Ho's 2024 policy address, along with the subsequent Q&A session, set forth a clear vision for Macao's path in the coming year. It charts a course towards economic recovery, diversification, enhanced livability and technological advancement for its residents. With many promising initiatives on the horizon and a commitment to addressing the challenges ahead, Macao's journey into 2024 looks to be a transformative one. The city is poised not only to recover from recent economic challenges but also to emerge stronger, more diverse, and more resilient than ever before. ●

Ho fielded questions from reporters in a Q&A session after his address



Forum Macao faces the future

The Forum had its 20th anniversary in October, when top officials from China and the nine Portuguese-speaking countries got together to reflect on its successes and consider new directions.



The long-postpone tri-annual meeting brings together representatives from the mainland, Macao and nine Portuguese-speaking members states

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**

Twenty years after Forum Macao's inception, representatives from the mainland, Macao and nine Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) gathered to applaud its many accomplishments. Celebrations included a seminar dubbed "New Era, New Start" – held at the Pavilion of China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform which opened on 20 October and will be on show until 20 December – in which top-level officials discussed the Forum's future. There, they expressed a desire to play more active roles in Greater China's economic development. Especially with regards to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao-Greater Bay Area (GBA), the burgeoning megalopolis established by President Xi Jinping in 2017.

The seminar unfolded against a backdrop of significant shifts in the

Chinese and global economies. Navigating the Covid-19 pandemic, of course, has been the last few years' priority. Positive developments have included the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the GBA, which encompasses Hengqin's Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone. Both have opened up promising avenues for investments and interactions between China and the PSCs, with Macao acting as their essential go-between.

Goods trade between China and the PSCs – Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor-Leste – totalled US\$214.8 billion in 2022, and reached US\$161.5 billion in the first nine months of this year. The accumulated value of contracting projects in 2022 was US\$131.7 billion, according to official Chinese sources.

Officials praise Forum Macao's achievements

At the seminar, Macao Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng praised the Forum's impact. "Forum Macao has served as an important platform and link for China and PSCs to carry out mutually beneficial and friendly cooperation during the past two decades, gradually becoming a propeller for advancing all-round cooperation between the two sides" he said.

Ho highlighted how, through providing local businesses with collaboration opportunities, the Forum had helped bolster Macao's international influence and diversify its economy. He commended the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone initiative, established by China in 2021, for its potential to invigorate Macao's long-term development and strengthen its role as a Sino-Lusophone platform.

The secretary-general of the permanent secretariat of Forum Macao, Ji Xianzheng, remarked on the effectiveness of the Forum as a conduit between China and the PSCs. He acknowledged the wide range of activities the Forum facilitated. From trade and investment to industrial developments and people-to-people exchanges.

Timorese Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Minister Bendito dos Santos Freitas, meanwhile, underscored the fact that PSCs act as springboards into other markets on four continents: Europe, Africa, South America and Asia.



Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng



Secretary-general of the permanent secretariat of Forum Macao, Ji Xianzheng



(Left to right) Timor-Leste's foreign affairs and cooperation minister, Bendito dos Santos Freitas; Cabo Verde's minister of foreign affairs, cooperation and regional integration, Rui Alberto de Figueiredo Soares; director of the Brazilian ministry of foreign affairs' China, Russia and Central Asia department, Pedro Murilo Ortega Terra; Shi Wenju; and Portugal's former secretary of state for the economy, Pedro Cilínio

Opposite page:

- ① Photograph by Edson Lima from Angola
- ② Dish prepared by Mozambican chef at the Lusophone gastronomic show
- ③ *Santomean Mothers* acrylic painting by Osvaldo Reis from São Tomé and Príncipe
- ④ Brazilian band Choro Livre
- ⑤ *The Fire Boy* acrylic painting by Nela Barbosa from Cabo Verde
- ⑥ Photograph by Wasikowskha from Guinea Bissau
- ⑦ Dish prepared by Equatoguinean chef at the Lusophone gastronomic show
- ⑧ Dish prepared by Portuguese chef at the Lusophone gastronomic show
- ⑨ *Eternal Prayer* painting by Lao Chon Hong (Natalie) from Macao

Cabo Verde's minister of foreign affairs, cooperation and regional integration, Rui Alberto de Figueiredo Soares, noted that the Forum had "brought together cultures, economies and peoples that might otherwise have remained distant." He urged all member states to continue their good work, while promoting tourism and improving market access opportunities.

The director of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' China, Russia and Central Asia department, Pedro Murilo Ortega Terra, added that promoting the Portuguese language in China and trade with small and medium-sized companies "should be priorities for Forum Macao." Terra also noted that Brazil was considering reinstating a permanent Forum Macao representative in the GBA.

Calls for change in the China-PSCs Cooperation and Development Fund

The China-Portuguese Speaking Countries Cooperation and Development Fund (PLP)

was created a decade ago, by the China Development Bank and the Macau Industrial and Commercial Development Fund. It started off with US\$1 billion. Half of that has since been invested in areas such as clean energy, infrastructure, agriculture and manufacturing, announced Shi Wenju – who presides over the body that manages the PLP – at the seminar. Shi emphasised the need to continue exploring sub-lending mechanisms by regional financial institutions.

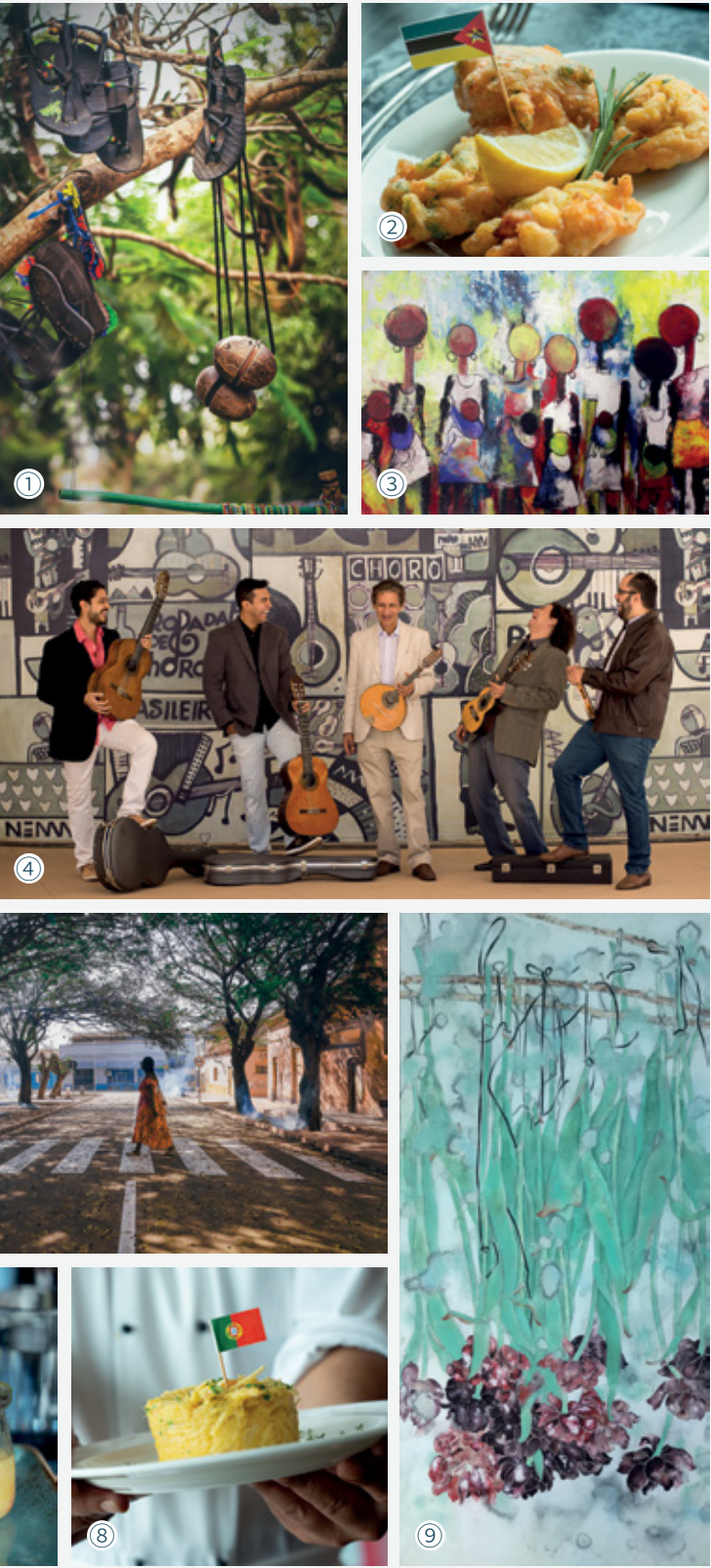
The PLP's future was hotly debated during the seminar. Portugal's secretary of state for the economy, Pedro Cilínio, was of the view that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) needed more support from the fund, while the Forum's former deputy secretary-general, Rodrigo Brum, proposed creating a separate fund dedicated solely to development.

"The question of the fund is probably the most important question for the development of investment projects by the PSCs," Brum said.

Forum Macao showcases culture from both China and the PSCs

In conjunction with the seminar, Forum Macao organised the 15th Cultural Week of China and Portuguese-Speaking Countries. The week celebrates the territory's multicultural characteristics, and brought together artists from Macao, China's Yunnan province, and each of the nine Portuguese-speaking countries. Music and dance performances, art and gastronomic exhibitions and a craft fair took place.

Ji Xianzheng described the festivities as "creating a solid basis of friendship for Sino-Lusophone cooperation." Together, the seminar and Cultural Week showcased Forum Macao's enduring commitment to uniting nations and cultures, forging new connections, and charting a promising course for the future. ●



Forum Macao's future will be defined by four diplomatic directions



*Francisco Leandro,
Associate-professor
and deputy-director of
the Institute for Global
and Public Affairs –
University of Macau*

Forum Macao stands as a diplomatic success story. Looking back across the past two decades, the platform played a major role in aligning China and the Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) after the Macao administration's return to China. It has provided a permanent platform for small, Portuguese-speaking island nations to develop commercially. It has also oiled bilateral relations between China and the Lusophone countries, as well as between the PSCs themselves.

As a diplomatic entity, the existence of Forum Macao relies on tri-annual inter-ministerial conferences. Thus, the future of the Forum will be shaped by the diplomatic endeavours of each member's representative delegation. There are four main pillars here, as outlined below:

1. China

China has high expectations for the Forum and intends to advance it as a successful instrument for promoting trade, international cooperation and modernisation. China also wants Macao to diversify its economy and sees the Forum as a means of doing this, though ensuring it plays a more active role within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area – which holds great potential for PSCs.

In addition, China sees the Forum as a way to promote its Belt and Road Initiative.

2. Brazil and Portugal

The two major PSCs, who already have robust bilateral relations, regard Forum Macao as complementary to their existing relationship. They value it more

as a promoter for the Portuguese language in business dealings. Brazil is, of course, a member of BRICS. BRICS is the primary sphere for its close diplomatic relationship with China.

The South American giant would like to see a major rearrangement of the Forum's Lusophone representatives, and to make it an intergovernmental platform – rather than the mechanism for multilateral cooperation it currently is.

Portugal, meanwhile, has high expectations that Forum Macao will help attract greater Chinese investment into its private sector industries. The technology, marine, and renewable energy areas in particular.

3. The Portuguese-speaking small island states

As countries getting a lot out of Forum Macao, Cabo Verde, Timor-Leste, and São Tome and Príncipe are motivated to intensify the Forum's current forms of cooperation. They are eager to advance their respective relationships with China, with support from Forum Macao – especially with regards to leveraging their competitiveness at regional level. These relationships span education, small businesses, technology transfers,

local infrastructure, renewable energy, sustainability, the blue economy, tourism and health industries.

The PSC island states see their representatives in Macao as assets that facilitate supplementary non-sovereign forms of cooperation. They are also interested in the creation of new funds to support development projects.

4. The African Portuguese-speaking countries

Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Equatorial Guinea are keen to engage in higher levels of cooperation with China, through Forum Macao. They are moderately motivated to expand the areas that the Forum is involved in, as a means of promoting continuous commercial dialogue with China and to advance their own economic diversification efforts. They also support the idea of a new joint investment fund.

African PSCs are looking for more balanced forms of cooperation that promote long-term sustainability and social inclusion. They are particularly interested in using the Forum to boost competitiveness at regional level, in a wide range of sectors. The African PSCs wish to increase Forum Macao's domestic visibility and the use of Chinese yuan as international currency.

The Greater Bay Area holds great potential for Portuguese-speaking countries



*Rodrigo Brum,
Economist and
former deputy
secretary-general
of Forum Macao*

While celebrating the 20th anniversary of Forum Macao, it is of the essence to look to the future. Forum Macao defines its guidelines and objectives in ministerial meetings meant to bring together the member countries every three years. After an extended period of postponement, it is now of special importance that any new directions be both carefully considered and suitable for rapid implementation.

Forum Macao already has a long history of indisputable successes. These include improved dialogue and increased internationalisation between member countries. There have been training and capacity building initiatives; the mutual dissemination of opportunities and knowledge. It's all been made

possible by the creation of an effective infrastructure for development, trade and economic relations between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs).

This infrastructure comes in the form of a permanent secretariat based in Macao, and in the representative bodies of participant countries. For China, Macao has been a gateway to the outside world for many centuries, particularly to PSCs. Furthermore, the city is situated in what is considered one of the most open and economically vibrant regions of China – the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

While the SAR's authorities have made great efforts to transform Macao into a city of international business tourism, other

sectors and activities should also be developed to fulfil the desired economic diversification. Macao's history and location will shape its future role as one of China's two Special Administrative Regions (SARs).

Here, I wish to elaborate on opportunities the GBA holds for Macao and – via Forum Macao – for Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs). It is worth noting that the GBA is home to 86 million people. That is five percent of China's total population (and slightly larger than the entire UK). Fifty percent of people live in three cities: Guangzhou (18.8 million), Shenzhen (12.6 million) and Dongguan (10.5 million). The combined gross domestic product of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Guangzhou alone is more than US\$300 billion. More importantly, the GBA's economy is forecast to grow faster than the rest of China in the coming years.

The international community is becoming aware of this opportunity and the potential for doing business within the GBA (and through it, with China). To name just one example, a community of South American countries has long been actively involved in Zhuhai –

with yearly conferences, trade fairs and even a major presence in a convention centre in Hengqin. The PSCs' companies and entrepreneurs should follow closely behind.

One should stress that the Chinese market is too vast for the relatively small size of companies from most PSCs. In fact, most companies from these countries are tiny – fragile when compared with their Chinese counterparts. This fact forces their strategic decisions to be directed at a fraction of the whole Chinese market. And the GBA immediately stands out as a viable segment. What's more, it is open to international companies and aware of the importance of PSCs; they are viewed as a group of countries that have support and recognition from the central government in Beijing.

Because of that support, major initiatives and endeavours from PSCs will be warmly welcomed and – I am sure – realised. Such is the quality of planning and commitment always demonstrated by the Chinese authorities and entities involved.

SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Macao's LRT: past, present and future

The Light Rail Transit is ushering in a new era of transportation for Macao. Within the next few years, people will seamlessly travel between the Macao Peninsula, Taipa, Coloane and Hengqin – without the hassle of finding a carpark, hailing a cab, or packing into crowded buses.

Text **Kenny Fong**

Macao's light rail has come a long way since it was first proposed more than 20 years ago. Back then, zipping around the fast-developing city by tram felt like a pipedream. Then Chief Executive Edmund Ho set the plan into motion in 2002, when he vowed that the government would “solve [Macao's] urban transport issues ... by introducing a brand new mass transit system.”

A year later, his project was making headway: the government had initiated a feasibility study into what constructing a light rail transit (LRT) system would actually entail. But construction didn't start happening in earnest until 2011.

Fast forward eight more years and Macao's first electric railway was up and running. The 9.3-kilometre, 11-station, 10.2-billion-pataca Taipa Line, which started carrying passengers in December 2019, stretches from Ocean Station, at the Taipa end of the Sai Van Bridge, to the Taipa Ferry Terminal.

Opening the Taipa Line was a watershed moment for Macao. It offered a glimpse into how this quick, quiet and environmentally friendly form of public transportation could help alleviate the traffic problems plaguing the city. Over the coming years, additional LRT routes will connect Taipa to the Macao peninsula, Coloane and Hengqin – reducing people's reliance on often-gas-guzzling cars and buses.



LINES CURRENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Three new lines are currently under construction: the Seac Pai Van Line, the Hengqin Line and the East Line. The Taipa-Barra extension became operational on 8 December. As the name suggests, it's a 3.4-kilometre line that will run from Ocean Station to Macao Peninsula's newly built Barra Station via the enclosed lower deck of the Sai Van Bridge.

Work on the 1.18-billion-pataca extension venture began in August 2018. It should have been finished by March 2023, but the pandemic and poor weather led to delays.

A shorter offshoot in Cotai, the Seac Pai Van Line, is also nearing completion. This 1.6-kilometre-long stretch boasts just two stations, Seac Pai Van and Island Hospital. The latter, handy to the new Islands District Medical Complex, is being built to connect with the original Taipa Line. The Seac Pai Van Line is a 939-million-pataca project that started in September 2021 and is scheduled for completion by February 2024.

The 2.2-kilometre Hengqin Line, which also has just two stations, is a considerably more expensive venture at 3.46 billion patacas. It starts with the HE1 station, linking up with the Taipa Line's Lotus Station. Then, the Hengqin Line heads along a viaduct that gives way to an underwater tunnel. This gets it across the Shizimen waterway, which separates Macao from the mainland. The line should be ready for passengers by November 2024.

An aerial view of the newly opened Barra LRT Station, expanding public transit access in Macao

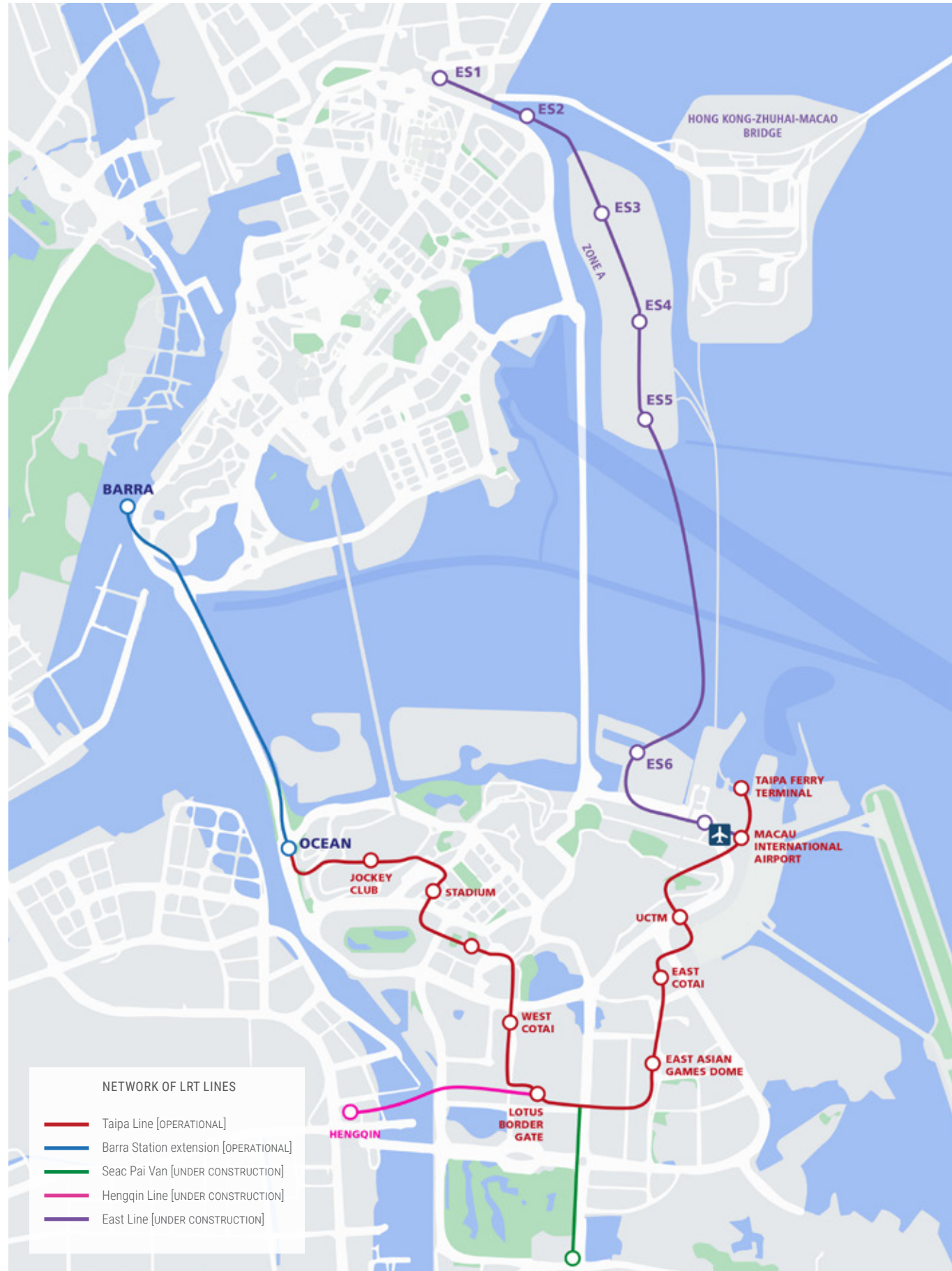


By far the most ambitious of Macao's upcoming LRT routes is the 7.7-kilometre East Line. It's been split into 'north' and 'south' segments for construction purposes. When it opens, tourists and locals will be able to travel all the way from the Border Gate (Macao's gateway to Zhuhai, on the northern-most border with the mainland) to Taipa by rail, entirely underground. All going to plan, the East Line will be up and running in 2028.

The 2.9-kilometre northern part consists of three underground and cost 4.47 billion patacas.

The longer southern segment meets its northern counterpart at Station ES4 in New Urban Zone A, a 1.4-square-kilometre piece of reclaimed land in northeast Macao that's reserved for urban development, and makes its way south to the Taipa Ferry Terminal (where it intersects with the Taipa Line) via a series of tunnels – all serious feats of engineering.

The East Line's opening will be a momentous day for public transportation in Macao. Twenty percent of the city's population are concentrated in the northeastern districts of Iao Hon and Areia Preta, near the Border Gate, where there is high demand for more efficient public transport. The East Line will also help to meet the future transportation needs of 100,000 or so residents expected to occupy New Urban Zone A – when it's completed in 2026.



WILL THERE BE A WEST LINE?

The idea of a West Line, connecting Barra Station to the Border Gate, has been floated as well. In its 2021-2030 land transportation master plan, the Transport Bureau suggested that an extra 6-kilometre LRT line would be of use to about 250,000 people. It did not go so far as suggesting an exact route. The government is still studying the feasibility of this proposed line.

Even if Macao's LRT system rounds off with just four lines, it will have gone a long way towards fulfilling the government's promise. The Taipa Line alone has made getting around much easier: visitors, for example, can now travel from their hotels on the Cotai Strip to the tourism mecca

of Rua do Cunha, in the heart of Old Taipa, without having to stress over traffic. The process is as simple as strolling to the Cotai East or West Stations, waiting for a train (which appear every 5 to 10 minutes) then hopping off at Pai Kok Station for the pleasant walk to Taipa Village.

The future of public transport in Macao lies firmly with the LRT. When the Taipa-Barra extension and Seac Pai Van Line kick in, very soon, there'll be a seamless travel option between the Macao Peninsula, Taipa and the Islands District Medical Complex. Eventually, the city's 24 kilometres of light rail (at a total cost of around 25 billion patacas) will conveniently connect Macao's far-flung districts – plus Hengqin – in a way that's never been experienced before. ●



Cheong Chi Fong

Barra Station, completed earlier this year, is a key step in linking the LRT to the Macao Peninsula

(Opposite page) The East Line will connect the city from the Border Gate all the way to Taipa – including future residents of New Urban Zone A

SPORTS

A rush to remember

In November, the 70th Macau Grand Prix roared into town with its biggest turn-out yet. Adrenaline pumped for racers and onlookers alike. And amidst the crashes and combustion, 2023's batch of champions emerged triumphant.

Text Staff writer

Macau Formula 4 Grand Prix winner Arvid Lindblad in full focus before the final race

What a comeback. The Macau Grand Prix experienced its biggest-ever audience turn-out in November, as drivers from around the world tested their mettle on the twisting turns that make Macao car racers' Mecca. Onlookers flooded the grandstands for the famed fixture's 70th anniversary, watching future stars, former winners, and female racers battle it out around the Guia Circuit.

While the Grand Prix was one of the few annual events to soldier on through the pandemic years, it happened on a significantly smaller scale.

This year, international drivers (both veterans and rookies) were back, along with their counterparts from Macao, Hong Kong, and the mainland. Everyone is eager to join

the ranks of legendary racers like Michael Schumacher, Ayrton Senna, Mika Hakkinen, and Lewis Hamilton. These Formula 1 superstars have all made their mark on the Guia Circuit at some point in their illustrious careers.

The Macau Grand Prix is a Formula 3 and 4 street race that began as a treasure hunt in 1954. Its most recent iteration boasted 11 different events held across two consecutive weekends: an assortment of Formula 4, Formula 3, GT (grand tourer), and motorbike races. All vehicles hurtle around the same 6.12-kilometre route, known as the Guia Circuit. It's widely regarded as one of the world's most challenging street circuits – with hills, tight bends, and a long straight where a driver can really press his or her pedal to the metal.



Xinhua News Agency



THE OPENING WEEKEND

The Grand Prix opened on 11 November with the Macau Formula 4, won by 16-year-old British racer Arvid Lindblad. Lindblad quickly recovered from a crash in his first practice session – which happened to be his first time on the Guia Circuit – to lead the Macau F4 qualifiers and final. His teammate (and Macao's own) Charles Leong slotted in second, just 0.27 seconds behind.

Another notable name in this year's Formula 4 race was Filipina Bianca Bustamante. The 18-year-old scored promising times in practice laps, but her luck turned come race day: the dream died with a collision on the Lisboa bend.

"My first Macau Grand Prix was a rollercoaster of emotions," Bustamante later posted on her website. "I was super excited to tackle the Guia Circuit, and it was truly an honour for me ... Despite the fact that we were not able to finish in the last race, I'm very grateful for all the lessons I learned at Macao."

The Greater Bay Area GT Cup (Formula 3) was another highlight of the weekend. Hong Kong's Darryl O'Young won the race for the third time. China's Ling Kang came close on O'Young's heels.

The TCR Asian Challenge, meanwhile, took place across two sessions. Hong Kong-based drivers won them both: Lo Sze Ho and

Thong Wei Fung. Hong Kong's Tse Ka Hing won the Macau Roadsport Challenge and China's Luo Kailuo won the Greater Bay Area GT Cup (Formula 4).

A FOUR-DAY THRILLER

The second Grand Prix weekend spread its six races across four days. Britain's esteemed motorcyclist Peter Hickman scooped his fourth win in the Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix, fending off nine-time champion and fellow Brit Michael Rutter – who bowed out due to mechanical issues. Another Brit, Davey Todd, came second.



Eduardo Leal

(Opposite page) Two-time Macau Formula 4 winner Charles Leong came in second place for his first run out against international drivers

(Middle) Spectators on the Grand Stand cheering on during the Formula 4 race

Filipina Bianca Bustamante gearing up before the qualifying race



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Spectators with a view
of the Lisboa Bend

(Bottom) Hitech
Pulse-Eight and British
driver Luke Browning
in delight after winning
the Macau Formula 3
Grand Prix



Their race was not without drama. Its opening lap saw its first female entrant, Dutch rider Nadieh Schoots, smash into an already crashed contestant. Neither motorcyclist was seriously hurt, but the crash caused a lengthy delay.

Swiss Raffaele Marciello was hot favourite for the Macau GT Cup-FIA GT World Cup. He dominated the practice laps and, as predicted, comfortably won the final. Edoardo 'Mr Macao' Mortara followed. This Swiss-Italian-French racer earned his nickname through winning 10 different races at various Macau Grand Prix events over the years.

Luke Browning, from Britain, was victorious in the Formula 3 Macau Grand Prix-FIA F3 World Cup. Qualifying rounds had Browning in pole position, followed by his teammate Alex Dunne, from Ireland, then the Italian Gabrielle Miní. In a thrilling final, however, Dunne (along with Swedish-Bosnian Dino Beganovic) crashed at the

Lisboa bend, knocking himself out of the running. Another driver's car also went up in flames. The top three drivers at the end of the race were Browning, Dennis Hauger (from Norway), and Miní.

Hong Kong's Adrian Chung won the Macau Grand Prix 70th Anniversary Challenge, held on the event's final day. China's Martin

Cao and Britain's Max Hart won their respective heats of the Macau Touring Car Cup. Couto finished 9th place in the first race and hit the barriers at the Lisboa Bend in the second. Hungarian Norbert Michelisz and Belgium's Frédéric Vervisch won their respective heats in the Macau Guia Race.

Roaring engines. Pit lane theatrics. Burning rubber. Burning cars. The 70th Macau Grand Prix was not short of drama. But the best part? A record-breaking 145,000 people were there to witness the action. That's significantly more than the 86,000 who attended pre-pandemic, in 2019 – a phenomena boding well for the iconic motor-sporting event's future, which is intrinsically linked to Macao's. ●



(Above) A stretch of race cars at the Macau Touring Car Cup – China Touring Car Championship

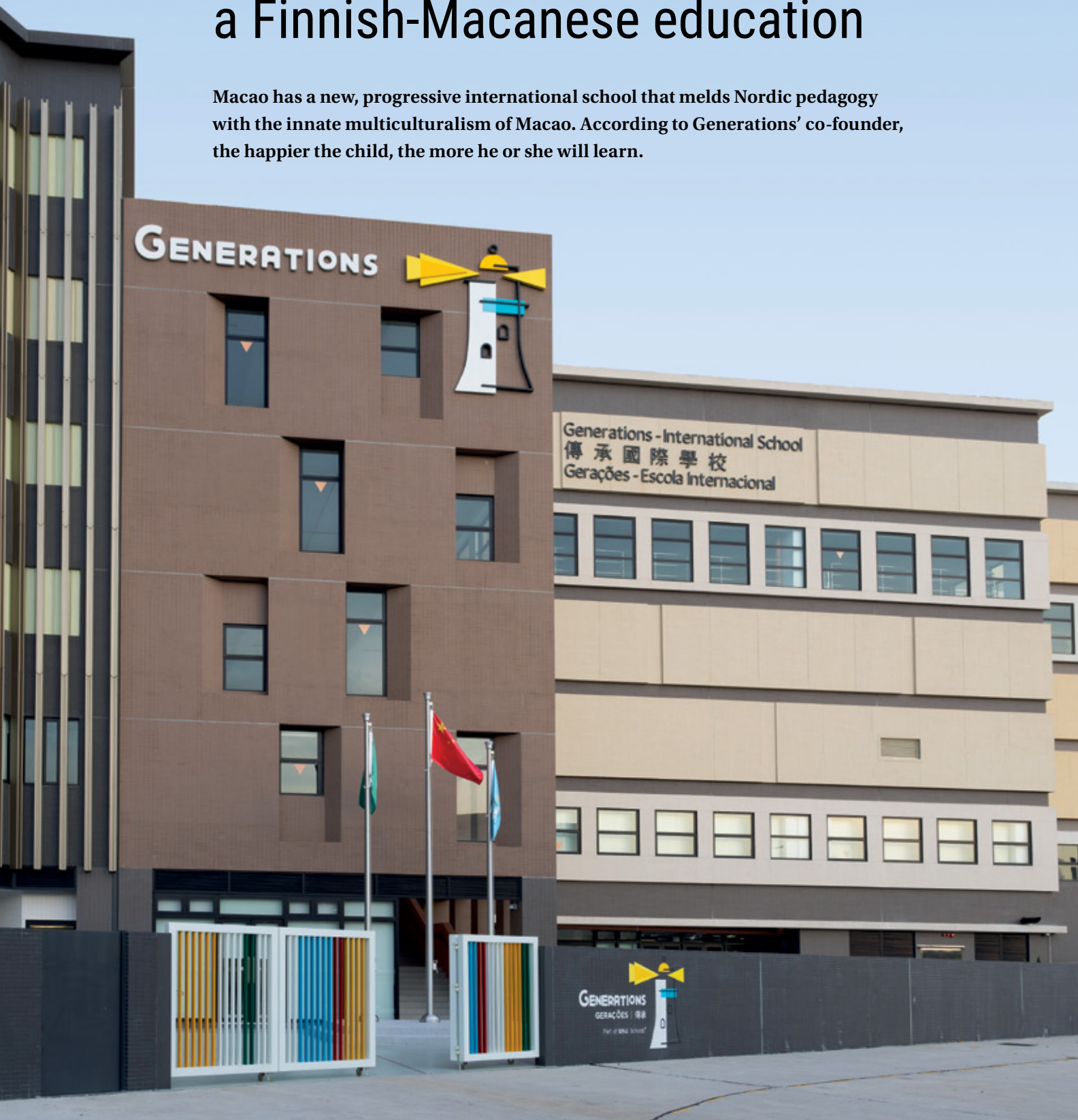
(Bottom) Britain's Peter Hickman leading the pack at the Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix before claiming his fourth victory at the Guia Circuit



EDUCATION

Generations: a Finnish-Macanese education

Macao has a new, progressive international school that melds Nordic pedagogy with the innate multiculturalism of Macao. According to Generations' co-founder, the happier the child, the more he or she will learn.



Text **Aidyn Fitzpatrick**
Photos **Lei Heong Ieong**

Generations emphasises children's well-being and encourages their natural curiosity while arming them with the skills to succeed

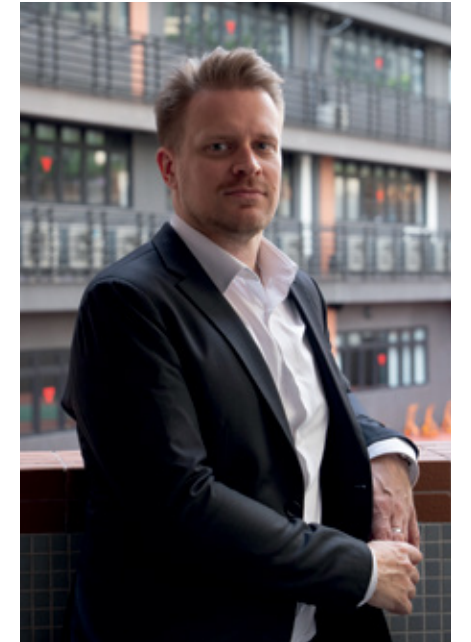
(Right) Finnish-born Pekka Eksyma heads the innovative new school, based on a system developed in his homeland

(Below) Generations co-founder Edith Jorge looked at schooling around the world before settling on the Finnish model

Macao has added a novel international school to its educational mix: Generations, also known by its Lusitanian name Gerações. There'll be a strong emphasis on children's emotional well-being and personal growth within its five-storey campus, as well as a modern trilingual curriculum (students will speak, read and write English, Chinese and Portuguese).

As of now, Generations has opened its doors to students in years K1 to P3 (higher years will follow). The school – which is located in Coloane – has Finnish foundations. Principal Pekka Eksyma – who hails from the Nordic country – describes the Finnish model of learning as all about fostering “children's natural curiosity and tendency to inquire and learn in the early years and focus on the skills to succeed in life.”

Students at Generations receive a holistic education. There are lessons in



traditional subjects, but also yoga, access to psychologists, and freshly prepared meals devised by Portuguese dieticians. Classes at Generations are small, and each child follows an individualised learning plan. Uniforms, created by Portugal's Maria Cristina Lopes, are casual, colourful and full of thoughtful details. The aim, according to the school, is to create the kind of alumni who will further global “peace, cooperation and development.”

In the 2022/2023 school year, there were 75 schools in Macao of which eight were public schools, while the remaining 67 were private. Several are international, offering Canadian, British and Portuguese curricula. With its Finnish approach, Generations further widens the educational options for Macao families.



THE ORIGIN STORY

Generations was co-founded by ex-investment banker Edith Jorge, her father Nuno Jorge (president of the Organization of the Families of Asia and the Pacific), and Macao government Executive Councillor Leonel Alves. Edith Jorge serves as its CEO.

The Jorge family's connection to Macao dates back 450 years, and is partly chronicled in an evocative 1993 memoir by Edith Jorge's aunt, *The Wind Amongst the Ruins*. "My ancestors," its author writes, "built their houses on the slope of the highest hill [and] lived next to each other."

Before establishing Generations, Jorge spent about a year researching educators and institutions across Asia, Europe, and South America – to find a model for what could work in Macao. "I wanted to first understand what the strong points were and the challenges those societies faced," she says. Jorge conducted a thorough analysis of her findings, comparing schools, the people involved in them, and the countries they served before settling on Finland's *sisu* system. *Sisu* is a Finnish concept that implies tenacity and resilience.



Freshly prepared meals curated by Portuguese dieticians help nourish young minds at Generations

(Opposite page) Generations believes learning through play is essential to developing young minds

"When I came across the Finnish case, one by one, things started to make sense," Jorge told *Macao* magazine. "It presented itself as, in our view, the best fit: facing head on the issue of happiness, the issue of instilling a sense of self worth in children, while never compromising their ability to be competitive in the outside world."

"Happiness" is a word not often used in the context of the high-pressure educational environments found in many cities in the regions, but that is something Jorge wants to change.

"What we believe in is the notion that academic excellence is not incompatible with a happy existence, in which children can be children," she says. "Hence our belief in learning through playing, which means conferring a lighter, more natural way of learning – teaching both content, but most importantly, life skills. The happier the child is, the more and better he or she will learn."

MEETING LOCAL – AND SPECIAL – NEEDS

Located at the end of the Cotai Strip, Generations' classrooms are light-filled; decked out in modish neutrals and pale wood. The school has recruited no fewer

than five teachers from Finland, two with master's degrees in special needs education.

Special needs students are uniquely catered to within the *sisu* system, which Generations' principal says places great importance on inclusivity. "The way that special needs education has changed in recent years is the way we include the students with special needs in the everyday life of the school instead of excluding them in separate groups," says Eksyma, who is the former designer of global education services at Finland's University of Oulu.

While there's a distinctively Nordic air to Generations, it is a Macao school at heart. Visitors entering the Macau Sino-Luso International School Association – as the non-profit entity behind the school is called – offices are greeted by a large mural harking back to the territory's past. Created from tiles inspired by the famous Portuguese *azulejos*, it depicts a Chinese sailing junk bobbing beneath the watchful edifice of the Guia Lighthouse. A stylised lighthouse forms the school's logo, with its strongest beams symbolically shining from east to west.

Nuno Jorge and Alves told *Macao* magazine in a written statement that multiculturalism is "an important part of the idiosyncrasy of Macao that must be transmitted" to the school's pupils. "Macao, which was an almost deserted peninsula in the early sixteenth century, has become a city with an extremely rich human experience, where people, from different backgrounds, over time, have left indelible marks." They aim to continue that legacy.

MACAO'S FUTURE

There is also, perhaps, something very 'Macao' about Generations' willingness to import the best of another culture in the name of getting the job done.

"I would say we wish to nurture a strong intellectual flexibility, which comes naturally to what we believe are typical Macanese [people]," Edith Jorge says. "This mental flexibility reveals itself in a natural propensity to learn languages, to understand different cultures and incorporate them in our own, in weathering storms and celebrating achievements and good fortune."

She describes the Macanese approach to life as "relaxed and cheerful," placing importance on "social interaction that is maximised by the ability to effectively communicate, which entails much, much more than just speaking a certain language."

The school is also keen to align itself with Macao's big-picture goals. The territory is in the process of positioning itself as the tech-driven, economically diversified and exclusive bridge between the Lusophone world and the rest of China – in particular the Greater Bay Area. In that context, Generations' emphasis on a trilingual education is no accident.

"Greater cultural connection with Portuguese-speaking countries will be one of our main objectives," say Nuno Jorge and Alves. "We intend to be an institution which develops staff and talents that can contribute to the future, to the new impetus of the social, cultural and economic development of Macao." ●



ARTS & CULTURE

Giulio Acconci: Macao's own Renaissance man

One half of the pop-rock band Soler, Giulio Acconci is much more than a musician. He showed *Macao* magazine one of his favourite spots in the city, where he spoke openly about his roots, inspiration and upcoming projects.

António Sanmarful

Text **Sara Santos Silva**

A creative spirit since childhood, Acconci excels as a graphic designer, actor, artist, and musician

Giulio Acconci (right) and his twin brother Dino Acconci

*M*acao magazine met up with Giulio Acconci one sunny afternoon in November, at an ultra-secluded location chosen by the musician, artist, and entrepreneur: the old weather observatory, perched atop scenic Penha Hill.

Not many people know about this heavily-graffitied (yet scenic) hideaway, though a young couple and their dog did happen to be there, too. It didn't take long for the couple to recognise Acconci – who is, after all, one of the city's best-loved local celebrities. They requested a photo. Acconci graciously obliged.

"It makes me happy," he says, when asked whether being an inescapably familiar face ever grows old. "It's better to be remembered than forgotten."

STARTING SOLER

The son of an Italian father and Burmese mum (an ethnic Karen), Giulio and his twin, Dino, were born in Macao, in 1972. The brothers were exposed from an early age to arts and music by culturally minded parents.

The boys' dad, Oseo, was an architect by trade – but also a skilled sculptor who carved busts out of marble and clay. "My father always saw himself more as a technician than an artist," Acconci reflects, adding that the outside world tended to consider him the latter.

Oseo arrived in Macao in 1939, the same year World War II broke out. He immediately got to work for the Catholic diocese, designing schools and churches, including the tent-shaped Our Lady of Sorrows in Ka-Ho Village. Oseo's best known work, however, was probably a massive, Art Deco-style mosaic at the soon-to-be demolished Hotel Estoril. Considered an icon of Macao's urban history, Oseo's 60-year-old mural will be relocated to the city's new Central Library.

The Acconci twins' mother, a nurse who loved to sing, was their musical muse. In the '90s, while living in Italy, Giulio – or 'Julio', his more Lusophonic stage name – and Dino christened their pop-rock band 'Soler' after what they'd believed to be her maiden name. However, they later discovered that Soler is a special honorific in Karen culture, granted to those who'd achieved an important feat. Their mother inherited it from her father, the first in their village to earn a university degree.



Image courtesy of Giulio Acconci

The Acconci brothers, Giulio (left) and Dino, from Soler, sharing their musical passion on stage



Image courtesy of Giulio Acconci

CREATION AT THE CORE

Music is not Giulio's only creative outlet. The 51-year-old also paints, sculpts, acts and does graphic design. "All of these art forms are part of what I always wanted to do," he enthuses.

Some of Acconci's recent digital figurative paintings will soon be on display at the Venetian, in a joint exhibition with another artist. Acconci also recently made his silver screen comeback in the locally produced feature film *Dreaming Girls*. He portrays Zhou Yiming, a music teacher seeking meaningful purpose in his life. Acconci admits that this rather serious character was out of his comfort zone, as comedy is his preferred genre. But he enjoyed the role nonetheless: "I am always

very happy and proud to work with local productions because I think we need to make a lot more films [in Macao] and I like to be in the mix," he says.

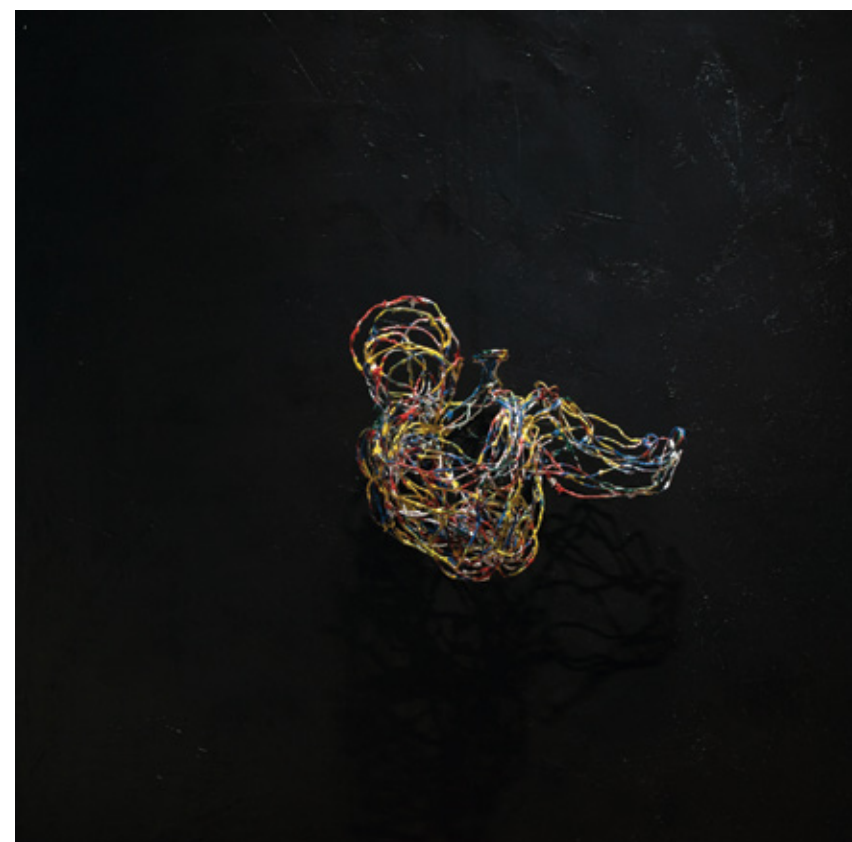
Prior to *Dreaming Girls*, Acconci starred alongside his brother in the Taiwanese action film *Black & White Episode 1: The Dawn of Assault*, from 2012, an adaptation of the eponymous TV show. His first foray into acting was an instructional Hong Kong TV series aimed at teaching English to children in a fun, engaging way.

Acconci says he draws inspiration for his various artforms from a wide array of sources. "I am inspired by people, everyday things, nature, trees. I also eavesdrop a lot. I listen to people and watch how they behave," he explains.

In Soler, Giulio is a frontman who sings and plays bass. Dino also sings, and plays guitar. Over the years, they added other musos to the mix. The band moved from Italy to London and then, in 2000, returned to Macao where it signed a record deal with Hummingbird Music. Fame quickly followed. Soler's distinct sound was especially appreciated in Hong Kong, where its 2005 album *Double Surround Sound* took the neighbouring SAR by storm.

The band went on to release six more albums, including the soundtrack for the Taiwanese feature film *Young Dudes*, directed by Yin-jung Chen. That record earned Soler the prize for Best Music at the 2012 Taipei Music Festival.

Rahul Viswanath



Perfetto by Giulio Acconci
Wire and gesso on canvas
120 x 120 cm
2022

Guardians of the Forest
by Giulio Acconci
Wire on canvas
120 x 120 cm
2022



A DIVERSIFIED FUTURE

Acconci is a man who embraces the future. He is constantly dreaming up new ways to create, make an impact and expand his legacy. The Macao-based creative has several projects in the pipeline. Right now he is working on a collaborative venture into fashion, via a lifestyle brand boasting apparel and watches. He'll be responsible for product design.

As an artist both prolific and approachable, Acconci is often asked to support local initiatives – invitations he readily accepts if they're for cultural or charitable purposes. Through these partnerships, he's become deeply involved in his local community. He is always glad to direct his talents towards good causes.

“

Ever since I was a kid, I wanted to be a performer.

– Giulio Acconci

The New Voice of GBA – a televised competition that identifies and promotes vocal talents in the Greater Bay Area – is just one of Acconci's ongoing, pro bono projects. He's on the panel of judges. As someone who knows the music realm inside and out, Acconci is perfectly positioned for the role and says he's enjoyed developing fledgling careers within his industry over the years.

“Ever since I was a kid, I wanted to be a performer, be in front of a camera,” he enthuses. Now, helping others share the limelight is what makes him happiest. ●



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Austin Neill



BUSINESS

Cooking with history: A restaurateur looks back to forge ahead

Macao's Portuguese culinary heritage is in safe hands. Poised to expand beyond the St Lazarus District, an ambitious family of eateries reflects on its role in the city's post-gaming future.

Sakaori



Image courtesy of PRRC

Text **Christopher Chu**

Albergue SCM, with its *calçada portuguesa* courtyard, has become a creative and cultural hub in Macao

(Right) Albergue 1601 is among the best-known restaurants in the city

(Opposite page) The St Lazarus quarter offers an authentic taste of Portugal in the heart of Macao

The walk from Macao's Portuguese Consulate to St Lazarus' Church takes barely five minutes. Each day, tourists and locals stroll between these two landmarks, crossing an invisible border as they go – the place where, centuries earlier, a wall divided the Macao Peninsula. Today, the emergence of artistically laid cobblestones – *calçada portuguesa* – are all that mark the transition from modern Asian entertainment hub to quaint Lisbon suburb or, Macao's St Lazarus quarter.

Inside this historic neighbourhood, beneath the camphor trees, you'll find Albergue SCM (Albergue da Santa Casa da Misericórdia). Once a hostel for war refugees, its low, marigold-yellow buildings now house a creative and cultural hub that includes one of the city's best-known restaurants: Albergue 1601. Olden day Portuguese

paraphernalia lines its lobby; the sounds of *guitarra portuguesa* fill the halls. The place is popular enough that there's usually a gaggle of hopefuls at the door, waiting for a table to become free.

"I'm surrounded by history here," smiles one co-founder of Portuguese Restaurants & Retail Concepts (PRRC), which owns Albergue 1601 and several other eateries in the city. Local resident Asai, who requests to go by first name alone, says all PRRC's ventures prioritise authenticity. "During my first visit to Portugal in 2012, I instantly fell in love with everything – the cuisine, the people, the culture. When I came back to Macao, I recognised the opportunity to develop a unique culinary experience for a city that shares nearly five centuries of Luso-Asian heritage."



Chef Pedro Almeida infuses passion and creativity in his dishes at Albergue 1601, 3 Sardines, Portucau and Pastéis de Chaves, while also brewing up new experiences at Lázaro Brew

(Opposite page)
The traditional Portuguese pastel de nata has proved especially popular in Macao

St Lazarus felt like the right place to develop more such projects. Walking distance from Albergue SCM is 3 Sardines, a Portuguese-style tavern known for its sharing platters and pitchers of sangria. Its customers are also surrounded by nostalgic decor, including six vintage aeroplane seats that once soared the skies with Air Portugal.

Around the corner and up an outdoor staircase, just behind the 17th-century Mount Fortress, the bakery Pasteis de Chaves sells its name-sake meat-filled pastries alongside *pastel de natas* and *pastel de coco* (Portuguese egg tarts and coconut cake, respectively).

Asai is proud that, within a small pocket of the city, PRRC offers its patrons the whole gamut of Portuguese fare. “When guests come to St Lazarus, they can ‘depart’ Macao and ‘arrive’ in Portugal, passport-free,” is how he puts it.

O PRATO DO DIA: DISH OF THE DAY

Executive Chef Pedro Almeida oversees the menus of all PRRC’s restaurants. Almeida hails from the northern Portuguese city of Chaves (to which the aforementioned eatery and pastry pay homage). For six years, the expatriate has regularly tweaked his dishes to maintain fresh appeal – while staying true to familiar flavours that satisfy old-fashioned taste buds.

“Everyone is a foodie in Macao,” says Almeida. “We can never be complacent when preparing our dishes.” Asked whether continuous reinvention of traditional fare is a challenge, the chef makes it clear that he sees the process as a labour of love.

PRRC’s emphasis is on authentic food and ambiance, aiming to let its patrons experience Macao’s unique food culture. And it has several new projects on the boil.

The soon-to-open Porto e Lata, a tin can café beneath the iconic Ruins of St Paul’s. There, foodies will have an opportunity to indulge port wine and Portugal’s famous canned seafood amidst nautical surrounds; fishing nets and model *rabelo* boats contributing to the harbour-side theme.

While the likes of tinned tuna has rather humble connotations in most parts of the world, the Portuguese do

it differently. Their stylish *conservas* are a delicacy: anchovies or sardines in olive oil for instance – forever fresh thanks to the miracles of canning. Portugal’s cannery industry dates back to the mid-19th century and is one of the country’s cherished culinary traditions. The tins themselves feature exquisite artwork depicting what’s within.

At Porto e Lata, diners will be able to enjoy a wide array of *conservas* served alongside breads, cheeses, and salads.

Another new PRRC specialty shop is Ginja do Senado. This place is dedicated to *ginjinha*, a Portuguese liqueur made by infusing morello cherries in brandy. The sweet beverage is believed to have roots in 15th-fifteenth century Lisbon, though became a hit a few hundred years later. Ginjinha actually has a historical connection to Macao. At the 1926 Mong-Ha trade fair, the liqueur’s best-known maker – Espinheira – was awarded a medal for its delectable product.

Before too long, PRRC will open a second bakery, this one specialising in the Portuguese sponge cake *pão de ló*. Similar to the Chinese *zhibao dangao* in appearance, the European version has a distinctively gooey interior and is baked in a clay pot.



Sardines are a beloved element of Portuguese cuisine and a quintessential summer treat

(Centre) Ginja do Senado honours the sweet Portuguese liqueur ginjinha, a morello cherry-infused brandy

(Opposite page) A symbol of Portugal, the Barcelos rooster is often depicted with vivid colours and heart motifs



There is another higher-end dining experience in the works, too – marking the group’s first foray beyond the Macao Peninsula. The new restaurant will be in Taipa, inside one of five historic ‘Taipa Houses’ that once housed Portuguese civil servants. It will operate alongside the Macanese Living Museum and the Universal Gallery and Bookstore.

Like Albergue SCM, the Taipa Houses are intertwined with Macao’s East-meets-West cultural identity. They are emblematic of 1920s Portuguese architecture, located next to Our Lady of Carmel Church (erected in 1885) and mere metres away from Tin Hau Temple (a Chinese

construction dating back to 1785). The Taipa Houses also featured in *Shanghai Surprise*, a mid-1980s romantic comedy starring Sean Penn, Madonna and Beatles singer George Harrison.

O PRATO SEGUINTE: THE NEXT DISH

Asia says he hopes PRRC’s pão de ló and gourmet canned fish will join the ranks of the pastel de nata in becoming edible ambassadors for Macao’s Portuguese heritage. He likes the idea of souvenirs that rekindle tasty memories of Macao and promote the city’s gastronomic delights from beyond its borders.

PRRC is in the non-edible souvenirs game, too, incidentally. “Macao is truly a hub for acquiring unique items from other PSCs (Portuguese-speaking countries),”

Lei Heong leong



says Asai. PRRC has shops dedicated to selling *azulejos* – Portuguese-style tiles – and *Galo de Barcelos* (the Rooster of Barcelos) figurines. It also supports Albergue SCM’s seasonal Lusophone Market, where people flock to buy Portuguese wines, Mozambican cashews and coffee beans from Timor-Leste.

These sorts of initiatives are helping boost Macao’s post-pandemic tourism recovery, according to Pamela Chan, managing director of Taipa Village Destination, a marketing company that fosters sustainable heritage developments. “Neighbourhoods like Taipa Village not only offer architectural uniqueness but have sustainable historical draw factors pulling

interests in,” she says. Chan describes increasing numbers of tourists filling Taipa’s narrow, pedestrian-only lane, Rua do Cunha as an example. There, they buy souvenirs and fill up on local snacks made directly on-site.

The initiatives also help the city diversify its economy. In fact, the Taipa Houses, is an ideal place to reflect on Macao’s evolution across the centuries. While these pristinely preserved buildings seem almost frozen in time, you can watch the neon lights of Cotai’s casinos light up the night sky from their stately verandas. And, soon, you’ll be able to indulge in exquisite Portuguese cuisine that is as excellent a reason as any to pay Macao a visit.

Bom apetite! ●



Image courtesy of PRRC

FOOD AND DRINK

An old *bing sutt* brings baking to the masses

For the past 80-odd years, Chion Chau café has borne witness to the ebbs and flows of Macao. Today, it's run by a father-and-son team who are moving with the times while remembering the past.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**
Photos **Lei Heong Leong**

Extra flaky egg tarts made Chion Chau a hit with Japanese clientele

(Opposite page) Leong Tat Veng, 78, started working at the original Chion Chau in the 1960s

Chion Chau café looks and sounds like any old-fashioned *bing sutt*. Upon entering, you are greeted with loudly chattering customers and old furniture. Wooden tables and plastic chairs seat two or four; there are hanging fans to beat the heat. A tall rack of sheet pans stands at the entrance, laden with glorious golden egg tarts, fresh-baked wife cakes and pineapple buns – irresistible to passersby, particularly those hailing from Japan.

This quirk of clientele comes courtesy of a Japanese travel writer who, about 10 years ago, stumbled upon the shop and was blown away

by its egg tarts. Chion Chau makes their take on this classic extra flaky: no less than 243 layers of pastry can be counted, for those who have the time. Impressed, the writer featured the café in his new guide book to Macao, and invited its owner, Leong Tat Veng, on the first overseas trip of his life. “He asked me to bring boxes of my egg tarts to Japan, because he really wanted local people to taste them,” Leong recalls. “It was my first time taking a flight and, when I landed, the egg tarts were still warm.”

Ask the 78-year-old what Chion Chau's best pastry is, however, and he'll advocate for his wife cakes.

This other much-loved classic consists of flaky pastry filled with candied winter melon and almond paste. They're very popular: “In the Mid-Autumn Festival this year, a tourist from the Chinese mainland bought around 120 wife cakes for his neighbours in the village,” says Leong, with some pride.

The veteran baker's dedication to his trade has earned Chion Chau a place in the Macao Government Tourism Office's Distinctive Shops Programme. This initiative aims to preserve the city's indelible heritage through promoting small businesses that, in turn, contribute to Macao's unique culture. It safeguards

traditional trades and craftsmanship, in other words. The Distinctive Shops Programme filmed a series of promotional videos about Chion Chau, which screen on platforms like TikTok and Dianping, as well as at Macao's Border Gate. These alert mainlanders to the delicacies that await them on a trip to Macao.

FROM ZERO TO HERO

Leong, a native of Shunde, Guangdong Province, moved to Macao in 1962. Just 17 years old, he was looking for a job – with only a good attitude to offer at the time. A bakery in the city's northwest agreed

to teach the willing worker the ropes. Later, Leong honed his baking skills in a series of Hong Kong-style diners.

Meanwhile, an already time-honoured *bing sutt* – meaning, ‘cold drinks room’ – was doing a roaring trade on the Rua de Cinco de Outubro, in the heart of Macao's historic Old Town. This was the city's original Chion Chau, which started out as a roastery brand in Guangzhou before opening branches in Macao and Hong Kong in the 1940s. Somewhere along the line, it transitioned into a *bing sutt*. Leong's cousin worked at Chion Chau in the 1960s, so wangled a job there for Leong.



In 1970, when Chion Chau's owner relocated to Hong Kong, Leong scraped together enough money to purchase the business. His first major challenge was a severe staff shortage. A 10-strong operation previously, many of the shop's workers headed to Hong Kong with the old owner. Leong was left with just two staffers: one handled baking (alongside Leong), the other managed the drinks counter. Making coffees and assorted teas may look easy, says Leong, but making them well requires skill. And when the *bing sutt* got busy, the job was too big for one guy – who could be required to prepare 20 different orders in a single minute, as well as remember who had paid for what.

Leong, who admits he is not great at this arduous task himself, soon hired another person to help his drinks guy out.

In the early days, most of Chion Chau's customers were unskilled labourers from the mainland. "During break time, they came and had deep-fried buns filled with shredded coconut," Leong recalls. "The buns were pretty much the same size as our plates. They were filling."

The original premise was a three-storey building a few shops down from Chion Chau's current site. When that old building was slated for demolition in the '90s, Leong wanted to stay in the Rua de Cinco de Outubro. "Most of



When Leong first took over Chion Chau, staff was in short supply leaving just two people to bake

(Centre) Leong considers his wife cakes to be Chion Chau's best pastry

(Opposite page) Chion Chau resembles an old-fashioned *bing sutt* in its stripped-down aesthetic

our customers were locals and we wanted to stay in the community," he says. Interior design-wise, nothing has changed much between then and now. The *bing sutt* is basic, but well-scrubbed and functional. "Back in the sixties, there was not such a thing about design and decoration," says Leong. "As long as the café is clean, we are in business," says Leong. It's a philosophy he's maintained over the decades.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Leong's youngest son, Leong U Chong, spent his childhood as dad's little helper in Chion Chau's kitchen. Even at home, he loved making cakes. The 28-year-old remembers pouring over his mother's recipe books and developing a talent for Western fare: sponge cakes, cheesecakes and croissants. Whenever he ran out of ingredients, he'd run over to Chion Chau to stock up.



When U Chong graduated from high school, he joined the Chion Chau team. “At that time, I wasn’t thinking of taking over the business,” he says. “I’d just finished school and thought my parents worked very hard, so I wanted to help them out.” The experience taught him the difference between baking as a hobby and baking as a profession. The café was understaffed at the time, so there was a lot of rushing down from the first-floor bakery to the ground-floor cashier and back up. There were many recipes to memorise, cakes to make, and customers to serve – all as quickly as possible. “When I baked at home, I could take my time,” U Chong says.

It was stressful, he notes, and he did consider throwing in the towel. But a daily sense of achievement made U Chong stick it out. “I remember once, there was a crowd waiting,” he

recalls. “I’d just finished a sheet pan of coconut tarts and thought I might as well take them down. Those customers simply marvelled at the sight of them. I could hear their ‘wows’ all the way from upstairs and they really meant a lot to me.”

U Chong started running the business alongside his father in 2016. His favourite pastry is a pineapple bun – a soft bun covered with a thin, crumbly cooking dough – of which Chion Chau sells two sizes: big and small. “Other eateries put red bean paste into the big ones, but ours are filled with custard,” U Chong says. “As for the small ones, they don’t have any filling. People usually eat them by putting in a slide of butter.”

In addition to learning on the job from his dad, U Chong spent six months on a baking course organised by the Macau Federation of Trade Unions. That gave him the confidence and skills to start revising Chion Chau’s long-standing recipes, he says. U Chong has made the bread they sell softer, so elderly folk find it easier to chew. And his tarts have less sugar in them than Leong’s, as younger generations don’t like things too sweet. “My goal is to attract the masses,” U Chong explains.

But there are some trends in Macao’s hospitality scene the young baker would like to see reversed. He remembers a strong community spirit back when he helped out as a child, something that seems to have faded away. “Nowadays, people come in looking at their phones, eat fast, and then go,” U Chong says. “I hope, in the future, young people come in and have a chat instead of being distracted by social media. I hope they will treat Chion Chau as a place to enjoy having a rendezvous with their friends.” ●

Coconut tarts have a moist, custard-coated grated coconut filling and a crisp, tender and buttery shortcrust pastry

(Inset) Leong U Chong (right) started working for his father, Leong Tat Veng (left), after graduating from high school

(Opposite page) Leong U Chong learned to bake as a child, helping in Chion Chau and experimenting with Western pastries

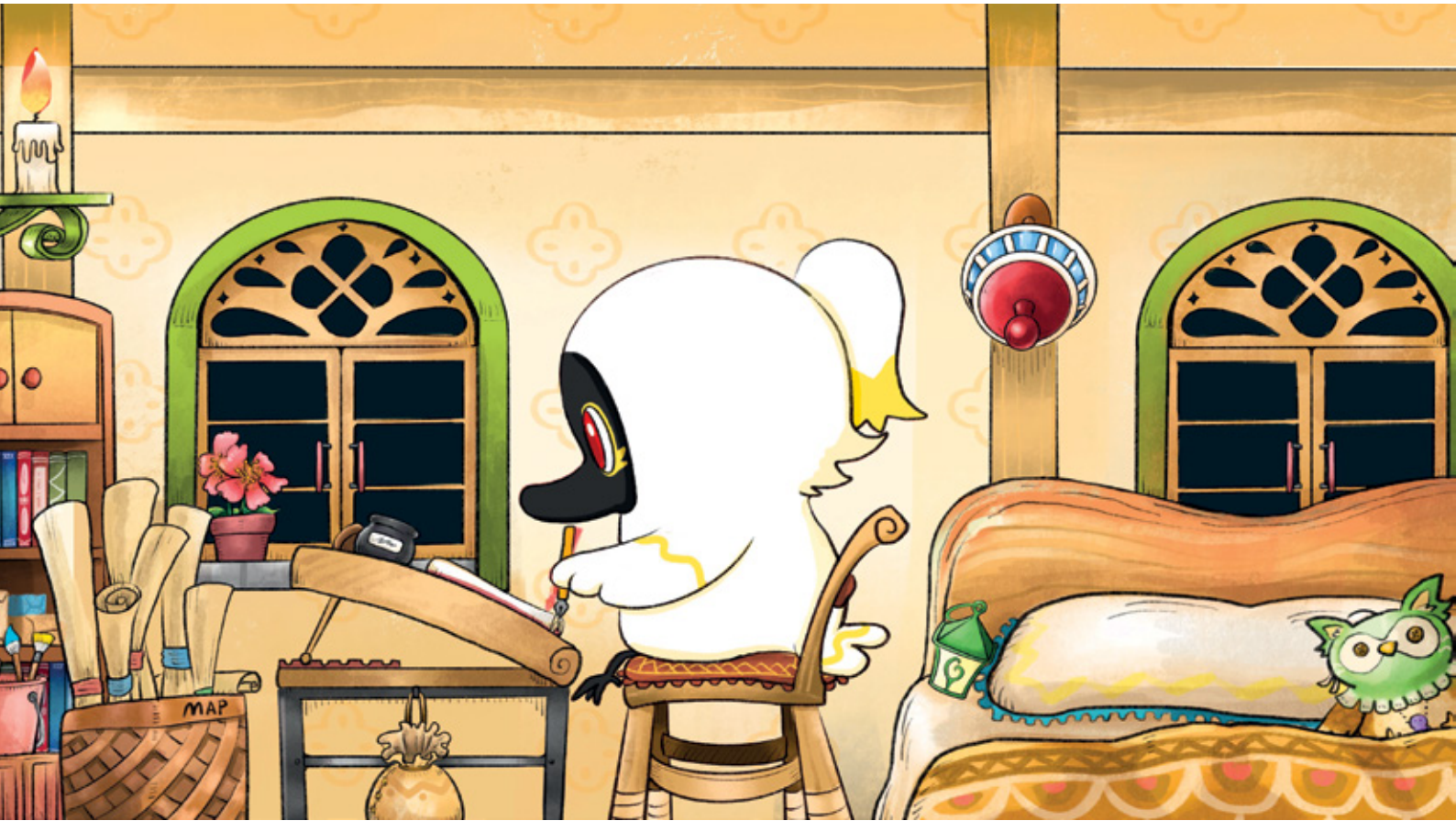


SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Mak Mak: The face of Macao tourism

Visitors to Macao may have spied a charismatic black-faced spoonbill at the city's border crossings, or purchased her image on a keepsake. Mak Mak, you see, is Macao's official tourism mascot – dreamed up by local designer Tou Chon Wai.





Text **Gilbert Humphrey**
Photos courtesy of
Tou Chon Wai

(Opposite page) Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office, presents a cheque to Tou Chon Wai, whose creative flair captured the essence of Macao in the form of Mak Mak

Tou Chon Wai, the artistic mind behind Macao's mascot, Mak Mak

Many places around the world have a tourism mascot. Australia has Ruby the Roo, an animated kangaroo urging would-be travellers to “come say g'day” and Singapore's got a half-lion-half-fish named Merli. In 2019, Indonesia adopted three characters to be its tourism mascots: Pongo the orangutan, Rhino the Javan rhinoceros, and Para the bird-of-paradise.

These mascots tend to be anthropomorphic creatures, acting as ambassador-type figures to a country, province or city. The concept is thought to originate in Japan, where they're called *yuru-chara* (one of the most famous is Kumamon, a stunned-looking black bear with red cheeks – created to promote the Kumamoto Prefecture). Successful *yuru-chara* tend to be very cute, as Macao's own take on the concept certainly is.

The SAR's tourism mascot, Mak Mak, emerged out of a competition

launched by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) back in 2017. She's a jaunty black-faced spoonbill, who made her debut in April 2018 – and now primarily hangs out at border checkpoints.

HOW MAK MAK CAME TO BE

Local illustrator and graphic designer Tou Chon Wai is the man behind Mak Mak. His concept beat 110 other entries in the MGTO's contest, and earned him a 50,000 pataca prize for his efforts.

Tou says he first learned about the black-faced spoonbill – an endangered migratory species endemic to East Asia – at primary school. These wading birds with paddle-shaped beaks breed on small, rocky islands off North Korea's west coast in spring, then spend winters in Macao, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, among other places.

According to World Wildlife Fund Hong Kong, there are only about 6,100 individual black-faced spoonbills left in the world. Each year, only about 30 of these manage to hatch chicks successfully. Black-faced spoonbills tend to spend time in shallow rivers.

In the past few years, the number of black-faced spoonbills that visited Macao in winters stood at around 50, and they mainly live in the Cotai Ecological Reserve, according to wildlife photographer João Monteiro.

“I thought a bird that regularly returns to Macao was a very good design concept [for a tourism

mascot],” Tou, 32, says. It took him less than three hours to come up with his winning sketch, though he says he'd had a Mak Mak-like character in mind for some time. He named her after the first syllable of ‘Macao’.

Mak Mak has the black face, beak and legs of her real-life counterpart, along with their distinctive red eyes. Her beak, however, is comparatively stubby. To make it clear that Mak Mak is indeed a spoonbill who hangs out in Macao, she wears a hat inspired by the Guia Lighthouse and a chest badge based off the Chapel of Our Lady of Guia's cross-shaped window. Sometimes she carries a green lantern.

Image courtesy of Macao Government Tourism Office



António Semmarful

All images on this spread courtesy of Macao Government Tourism Office



“In the evening, you can see the Guia Lighthouse flashing light like a beacon of hope,” says Tou. He hopes Mak Mak has a similar effect on people; that she “leads them to Macao, which is such a beautiful city.”

According to the MGTO’s website, the mascot has an optimistic, mischievous and adventurous personality. It also describes her favourite foods: nuts, codfish and – somewhat improbably – mashed potato.

TOU CHON WAI: MAK MAK’S CREATOR

Tou remembers doodling a lot during his school years, and says he began drawing more seriously after graduating from the Macau Pui



Va Secondary School in 1983. He decided to pursue a creative career, so enrolled in a graphic and advertising design course at the Macao Polytechnic Institute (now Macao Polytechnic University).

Tou graduated in 1988, the same year his Mak Mak design officially became Macao’s tourism mascot. He was already working at a graphic design company when he received an email from the MGTO announcing that he’d won first place.

“I was so excited that I shouted in the office,” Tou says. The excitement continued as he started seeing Mak Mak splashed across billboards and all sorts of tourism promotions around the city.

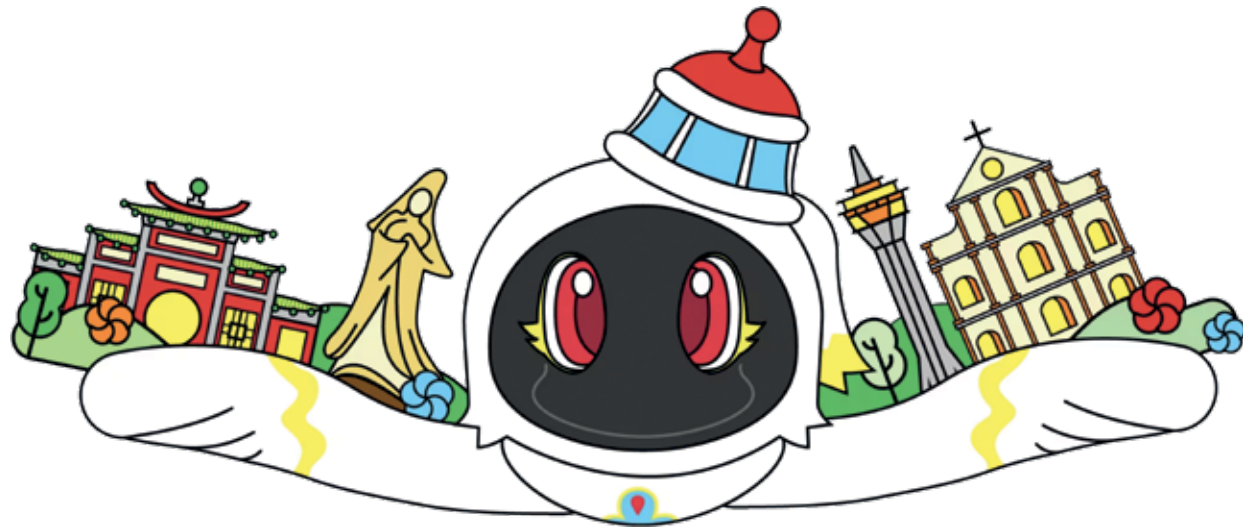
Tou admits that he entered the competition for the prize money, but says he now enjoys his accomplishment more than reward.



“When I see Mak Mak on the street, I feel extremely happy,” he says. “I feel very lucky to see my own creation being projected onto different places in Macao.”

The MGTO owns Mak Mak, the brand (a stipulation of the competition), but Tou is still involved in some aspects of the mascot’s development. He sometimes lends a hand when new Mak Mak products are being designed, for example.





'AN ICON FOR SELFIES'

The MGTO's director, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, says the bureau plans to expand Mak Mak's influence through partnerships with more local brands and through themed activities that promote local industries.

"Mak Mak is becoming popular in our Macao promotional work and has been an icon for selfies and photo opportunities for tourists visiting the city", she says.

While the mascot is perhaps best known by tourists from the mainland and Hong Kong – Macao's top two sources of tourists – Senna Fernandes says there are no limitations to Mak Mak's geographical reach.

"We have no constraint in bringing Mak Mak to our roadshows [in other countries] and other promotional activities; Mak Mak likes to fly and meet new friends," she stresses. She'd also like to see more people buying Mak Mak merchandise, which includes

toys, stationery, clothes, travel accessories and snacks. While these can be purchased through a few consignment shops and online, local tourist guide Murni Denize thinks they should be made more widely available.

"Mak Mak is a symbol of Macao and tourists should be able to buy her products easily," says the 50-year-old local Chinese-Indonesian, who is licensed to guide Indonesian, English and French language tour groups. But Denize thinks it's more important to lift the cheeky spoonbill's profile with tour guides.

"I once asked my fellow tourist guides if they knew where to buy Mak Mak souvenirs and one of them asked, 'What is Mak Mak?'" recalls Denize, who suggests local tourism authorities offer workshops on ways to incorporate the bird into their programmes.

Mak Mak's creator, Tou, has even bigger dreams for the mascot. "I hope that in the future, the Mak Mak brand will become more international, more diverse and not just limited to advertisements. I hope we can do more, like release a Mak Mak video game or movie," he says. ●

RUNNER-UP STARS OF THE MASCOT CONTEST

Mak Mak may have won the MGTO's design contest for a tourism mascot, but other entrants deserve a mention, too.

OKI BY TANG WAI IAN



Second place was awarded to OKI, the brainchild of Tang Wai Ian. OKI is a friendly female elf with an adventurous spirit, embodying a deep fondness for exploring Macao's new and exciting facets. Her design is particularly striking, featuring pale blue wings that allow her to soar around the globe promoting Macao. OKI's attire

is a thoughtful nod to the city's cultural fusion, with a green and red outfit that echoes the intricate patterns of Portuguese tiles, and her face adorned with stars that mirror those on the Macao SAR flag. These elements combine to showcase the charisma and cultural harmony that Macao represents.

HOLLY BY LOI WENG KUN



The third-place mascot, Holly, designed by Loi Weng Kun, presents a jubilant lotus flower with a bridge-shaped smile, symbolising the city's extensive connections across the seas. Holly's colour scheme of white and mint green is a classic reflection of Portuguese architectural aesthetics, further emphasising the cultural blend of

Macao. Adding to Holly's design is a blue bib, embroidered with her name, which sits around her neck like a statement piece. Holly's embodiment of the city's spirit extends to her backdrop, which features the white silhouettes of the Ruins of St. Paul's and A-Ma Temple, further reinforcing the cultural interplay of East and West that is so characteristic of Macao.

The event, a collaborative effort by the Cultural Affairs Bureau and the Cultural Industry Fund, not only highlighted the winners but also celebrated the diverse interpretations of Macao's identity through the lens of local and international designers.





Q&A

AmCham's Charles M Choy: 'My calendar is my god'

There are plenty of opportunities brewing for businesses involved in the American Chamber of Commerce, says its Macao-born chairman. From better integration with the Greater Bay Area, to getting involved with medical tourism at Macao's brand new hospital.

Text **Gilbert Humphrey**
Photos courtesy of
Charles M Choy

Charles M Choy, chairman and founding member of AmCham, is hard at work reactivating a chamber stymied by Covid

Charles M Choy has a lot on his plate. The Macao-born businessman is co-chairman of the city's namesake malt-based beverage – Macau Beer – and the managing director of his family's business, Vaian Group (which both manufactures handbags and sells herbal cough syrups). He's also a founding member of the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham), and its current chairman. As if that wasn't enough, Choy sits on the board of the 130-year-old Tung Sin Tong Charitable Society.

Here, Choy sits down with *Macao* magazine to talk about his role at AmCham and the chambers' role in Macao's business scene.

Tell us a bit about your background, and how AmCham got started.

I studied economics and sociology at the University of Chicago, graduating in 1991. Then, I worked for a year in the US before relocating to Bangkok to join my father's business, Vaian Group.

In 1996, I came home to Macao, where Vaian is headquartered.

There weren't so many foreigners here at that time, but US investors were starting to invest in the city – particularly in gaming. Soon, more business people from the US, Australia and Europe started moving to Macao. Meanwhile, I was meeting them all. Getting an understanding of their needs and ambitions, and how they related to Macao's future development.

In 2007, myself and 12 others decided to formalise these meetings and found AmCham. We now have about 100 corporate and individual members.

What is AmCham's role in Macao?

With Macao being the place where East meets West, I think it's important for locals like myself to understand more about our visiting friends – the people who are helping facilitate development in Macao. AmCham is a good platform for us to get together.

It is a very essential platform for the large mass of US investments in Macao. We provide guidelines on local business practices, and updates on Macao's rules and regulations. Leaders from these organisations also sit on our board.

What are your main roles and responsibilities as chairman?

I'm in my third tenure as chairman, the last started in 2019. Before Covid, I focused heavily on networking with communities that had potential US-related trade and development opportunities.

Now, we are in the recovery phase. I am trying to reactivate everything. We saw expats leaving during the pandemic and, I think, they're gradually coming back. AmCham is slowly reheating its networking activities and connections with counterparts.

Basically, the role is about advocating for trade and business exchanges between the US and Macao.

What is AmCham's biggest challenge nowadays? What are your upcoming projects?

Well, Covid just ended. I think a lot of us in the business world are trying to catch up – so, that's one challenge.

Personally, I will be making more efforts to enhance communications between US businesses in the US and Hong Kong with businesses in Macao, to create more opportunities for developments and investments here. I think that's also going to be a challenge.

Soon, we're going to offer a trip to the GBA [Greater Bay Area] to check out business opportunities there. That will likely include a tour of the Macau Beer brewery in Zhuhai. We also want to visit the Islands District Medical Complex in Cotai. It's due to open on 20 December. As you know, this is no ordinary hospital. It's a medical services project that Macao is trying to introduce as a medical tourism venture.

What is the GBA's significance to AmCham?

I think it's essential for our American community in Macao – and anyone related to American businesses here – to understand how Hengqin and the entire GBA integrate with Macao. The GBA is key to Macao's diversification plans over the coming decade. It's very important for our members to get to know more about the region through visiting it in person.

Where's AmCham's focus going to be in the coming decade?

We know the gaming licences have been renewed for another 10 years, so that will be the backbone of AmCham's focus, I think. Not all our focus, but a lot of it – because these investments are significant. They are the foundation of a lot of jobs, activities and developments in Macao.

AmCham will also be focusing on its internal and external relationships. After 16 years, we are deeply rooted in Macao society. But we always want to improve AmCham as a platform for business exchanges in Macao and the surrounding areas.



How do you manage to juggle all your work responsibilities?

My calendar is my god, and I have my assistants prepare it for me. I do my work with the allocated time slots.

What do you do in your free time?

I enjoy having dinner or a drink with my friends, preferably involving Macau Beer, of course. When I have the time, I also travel to Japan with my [Japanese] wife to visit my parents-in-law. ●

For the 26th MIF, the AmCham Corner featured members' development plan in Hengqin and the wider GBA

ARTS & CULTURE

Welcome to George Chinnery's Macao

The English artist spent more than 25 years documenting early 19th-century Macao through paintings and sketches. Architecturally, much of what he depicted pre-dated him by centuries – and still endures to this day.

Text **Aidyn Fitzpatrick**
Photos **Lei Heong Jeong**

A self-portrait of George Chinnery, one of Macao's most famous artists, painted in 1888

A lot has changed in Macao in the past 200 years, not least the physical size of the territory. In the 1820s, as a trade post for the Portuguese in China, Macao's landmass was less than a third of its current area. Places that exist today thanks to land reclamation projects were shorelines and sea when the English artist George Chinnery made his highly evocative sketches. What's remarkable, however, is just how much of Chinnery's version of the city remains the same.

Chinnery was born in 1774, in London, though he spent most of his adult life in Asia. He sailed for India at the turn of the century, where he established himself as a leading artist in the British community. In 1825, Chinnery relocated to Macao and lived here until his death in 1852. His remains lie in the city's Old Protestant Cemetery.

Drawings, oil paintings and watercolours made by Chinnery during this period depict Macao as an enchanting city of Portuguese architecture, cobbled streets and Chinese temples. He captured bustling hawker markets and

wealthy European families, as well as poignant landscapes.

Chinnery has gone down in history as a rambunctious character. He was immortalised as Aristotle Quance in James Clavell's novel *Tai-Pan*, and again in Timothy Mo's celebrated novel *An Insular Possession*, appearing as the corpulent painter Augustine O'Rourke. While literature has portrayed Chinnery a debt-laden hedonist, he was also a genuine talent. Patrick Conner, who wrote the first in-depth study of Chinnery's life and work, called him "an international star, a really extraordinary artist" and praised his "incredibly fluent drawings of the China coast."

Here, *Macao* magazine offers a taste of Chinnery's legacy. Familiar scenes and structures reveal just how much of the city appears, architecturally at least, untouched by the passage of time. Ultimately, this is testament to Chinnery's artistic knack – but also Macao's commitment to balancing the demands of development with cultural conservation.



RUINS OF ST PAUL'S

The Ruins of St Paul's – named for the college that once stood on this site – is Macao's most iconic landmark. The distinctive edifice that survives today was part of the Church of Mater Dei, built by the Jesuit order in the early 17th century. It was one of the largest Catholic churches in Asia until a devastating fire burned all but the façade to the ground. The blaze took place during a typhoon in January 1835; Chinnery made his sketch a mere three months earlier.

The craftsmen who worked on the Church of Mater Dei (meaning 'mother of God') were Japanese Christians banished from Japan in the 1580s. Their carvings in the church's façade are rather

unorthodox. They incorporate the likes of dragons and Chinese-style guardian lions, as well as nautical motifs including a Portuguese ship.

While Chinnery's pen and ink drawing, *The Church and Steps of St. Paul*, does not reveal these details, what he did capture is essentially what modern-day visitors get to see. There is little to suggest a roof and four walls stand behind the façade, or that Chinnery's experience of the building would have been of a fully functional religious complex instead of the ruins found there today.

Archaeological remains of St Paul's College can also be seen at the present-day site, hinting at the opulence of what was once the first Western-style university in East Asia.



Chinnery's sketch (right) captures the long staircase and imposing edifice of an intact St Paul's Cathedral – all that remains of the cathedral today (left)

(Opposite page) Rough sketches of vendors and a hand holding a bowl nod to the bustling markets around the Holy House of Mercy (left) which is still a pedestrianised area today (right)

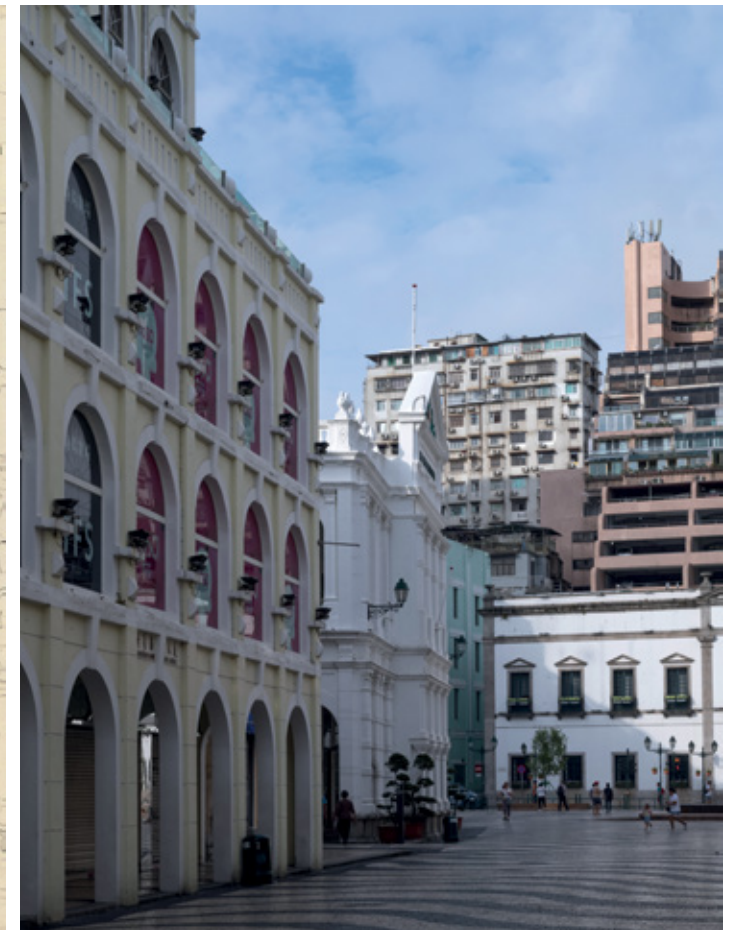
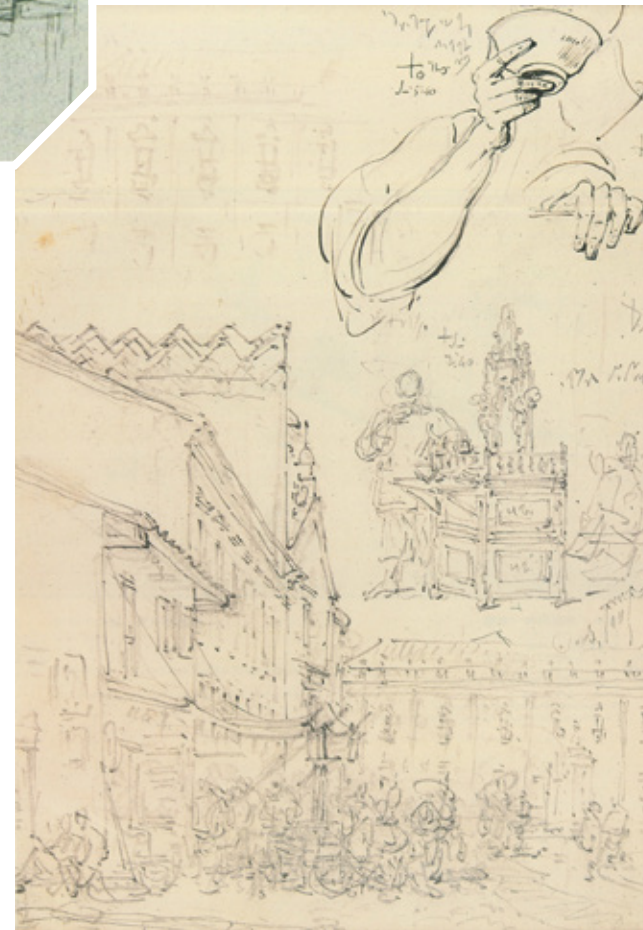
HOLY HOUSE OF MERCY

The Santa Casa da Misericórdia ('Holy House of Mercy' in English) sits just south of the Ruins of St Paul's. This famous Portuguese charity was established in 1498 to protect vulnerable members of society, such as the sick, disabled and very young.

The Macao branch was set up in 1569, by order of the then-bishop of Macau, Belchior Carneiro Leitão, in a purpose-built neoclassical building on Senado Square. One of its primary roles was to support the widows and orphans of sailors lost at sea, and it also housed the city's first Western medicine clinic.

In Chinnery's sketch, you can spy the Holy House of Mercy's triangular

cornice poking out from around a larger building in the foreground (it is the stark white structure in the photograph). When he drew his *Crowd outside the Casa da Misericórdia and Leal Senado* in 1840, the institution had been offering social welfare services to the city for 271 years. Little has changed, in that regard, though the Holy House of Mercy now houses a valuable collection of Catholic relics, too. These bear testimony to the history of Western culture introduced to China through Macao. Relics include the skull of the Bishop Belchior Carneiro Leitão along with the cross he was buried with. Macao's Holy House of Mercy Museum also displays the institution's original, handwritten commitment, dated 1662.



ST DOMINIC'S CHURCH

A three minute walk across Senado Square takes you to the baroque, lemon yellow St Dominic's Church. Chinnery made several drawings of charming St Dominic's around 1825; by then it had already served as a place of worship for almost 240 years. Most sketches featured hawkers and market stalls out in front, suggesting the square was a popular place of trade at the time.

St Dominic's was built not by the Portuguese, but by Spanish Dominican priests who came to Macao from Mexico. The building has had several functions since then, and was even the home of the first Portuguese-language newspaper in Macao – *A Abelha da China* (the 'China Bee'). *A Abelha da China* was a short-lived endeavour, launching in 1822 and winding up less than two years later.

Hawkers dot the area in front of St Dominic's Church is Chinnery's Macao

(Opposite page) While the buildings around it have changed, Chinnery would easily recognise the brilliant yellow St Dominic's of today



In 1834, less than a decade after Chinnery helped immortalise the church, Portugal's then-prime minister, Joaquim António de Aguiar, decreed that all religious institutions within the Portuguese empire be dissolved and their assets seized by the state. During this period of secularisation, St Dominic's building was a barracks, a stable, and an office – before returning to its original religious purpose in the later 19th century.



Land reclamation has left the St Francisco Barracks landlocked

(Bottom) The rocky shores captured in Chinnery's sketch are a far cry from the neat railing and paved streets surrounding the barracks today

ST FRANCISCO BARRACKS

One of the most striking changes Macao has undergone since Chinnery's day has been the extensive reclamation of land from the sea. This is evident when comparing the artist's sketch of the St Francisco Barracks with a recent photograph.

The former attests to the fact that the site's sturdy brick wall was once the waterfront; Chinnery depicts a figure fishing off now-vanished rocks at its base, and junks sailing by. But today, as the photograph shows, the curved wall is ringed by the busy Avenida da Praia Grande – not Praia Grande Bay.

The barracks began life in the early 17th century as an artillery battery, with a long-barreled cannon that could fire a 16 kilogram ball a distance of almost 2.5 kilometres, and a convent. The convent was demolished in 1864, to make way for barracks for soldiers. The barracks currently serve as headquarters to Macao's security forces and police.



A-MA TEMPLE

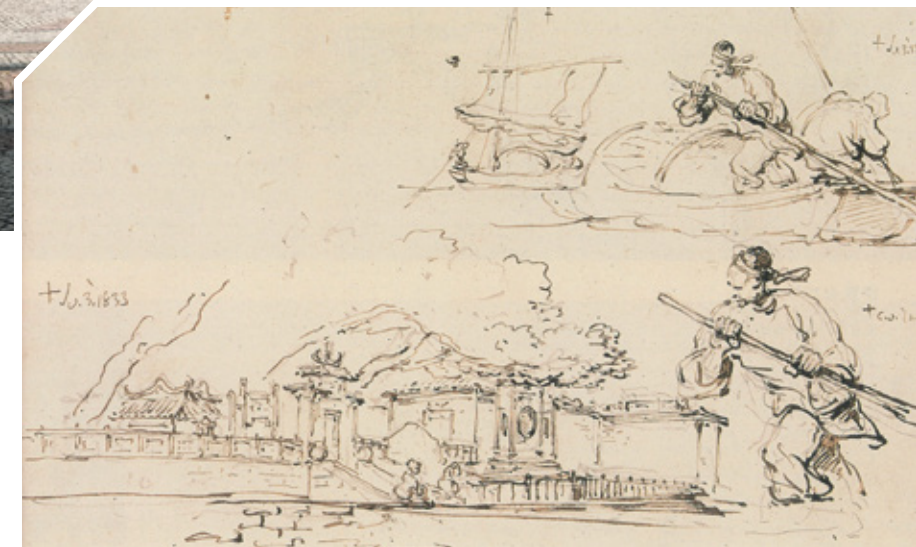
Built in 1488, on the peninsula's southwestern shore, the A-Ma Temple predates the Portuguese administration of Macao. It was already of great antiquity when Chinnery sketched its distinctive gate pavilion and guardian lions in 1833.

The temple is dedicated to the Chinese sea goddess Mazu (also known as Tin Hau or simply A-Ma, meaning 'mother'). Some believe it is the source of the territory's name; that 'Macao' is a Portuguese rendering of the Cantonese *A-Ma-Gau*, or 'mother's bay'.

Chinnery's drawing, *The A-Ma Temple with two sketches of a boatman at his oar*, appropriately links the sacred structure to seafarers – Mazu's

principal devotees. The temple merges Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Chinese folk beliefs within its six-building complex.

Chinnery's artwork reminds viewers that Macao is a city where history gracefully entwines with the present. His drawings serve as a portal to the past, and offer evidence of the history's ongoing role in the culturally rich life of Macao. ●



Dynamic sketches of boatmen emphasize the early industry's ties to the sea goddess A-Ma and her temple

(Top) While the city's economy has changed dramatically, A-Ma Temple remains a treasure of Macao

Text **António Sampaio**

Atauro Island is among the most biodiverse marine habitats in the world

(Bottom) Women in Atauro handle diving, going in fully clothed to spearfish

PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

For scuba divers seeking serenity, nothing beats Atauro Island

Off the coast of Timor-Leste, this hidden gem is a former prison that's home to legends, cultural richness and some of the most biodiverse waters in the world.

A little over 20 years since it gained independence, Timor-Leste is starting to imagine a future as a tourism destination. When that dream becomes reality, the pearl of this Portuguese-speaking Southeast Asian nation may be Atauro Island – a few hours north from the capital, Díli, by boat.

Time meanders slowly on tranquil Atauro, which is about 140 square kilometres in size. The sparse tourism infrastructure that exists is centred around the island's biggest drawcard: its ocean. Atauro is without a doubt one of the best swimming, snorkelling and diving destinations in the region. Scientists have even deemed it one of the most biodiverse marine habitats in the world.

Atauro's women have known this for a long time, of course. Traditionally, tasks at sea on this island are divided by gender. Men paddle wooden boats out to the reefs; women, armed with home-made harpoons, dive down into the water. These powerful divers – known as *wawata topu* inside their country, and the 'mermaids of Timor-Leste' outside of it – enter the sea fully clothed and in goggles, to spear the fish that help feed their families. Generations of women often dive together on Atauro.



Dugongs, a shy marine megafauna, are a special sight around the island

Recently, for the First Atauro Festival – promoted by Timorese President and Nobel Prize winner José Ramos-Horta – men and women swapped places, and a group of wawata topu raced each other in small *beiros*. Prisca de Araújo, 52, sweat running down her face, proudly lifted the small crude wooden oars above her head to commemorate her win, just beating Querima Soares, 37, and Mariana de Araújo, 48. “We are all family, Bikele fishermen”, explains Prisca as she posed for the country’s main leaders, including Ramos-Horta.

In 2012, two marine conservationists (Mark Erdmann, from the US, and Australian Gerry Allen) carried out the first official survey of Atauro’s sealife. The men

determined it had the seventh highest biodiversity of anywhere within what’s known as the Coral Triangle. The Coral Triangle spans the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste. A few years later, their more detailed study identified 252 species of coral reef fish in Atauro’s waters – a concentration higher than anywhere else on the planet.

But Atauro’s waters don’t just teem with fish. They’re home to dolphins and an array of whale species, too. Visitors often spy blue whales, humpbacks, melon-headed whales, and more. Then there are the gentle, ponderous dugongs (or, sea cows). These rare vegetarian sea mammals are shy, however, so only the luckiest travellers get to see them.



President José Ramos-Horta (centre) and the men of Atauro Island take use the harpoons commonly used by women to fish

(Right) Women in Atauro celebrate their own victory in the paddling race at the First Atauro Festival



All this is to say: Atauro is paradise for scuba divers. The Aquatic Diving School’s Cássio Schumacher, who is based in Díli, told *Macao* magazine that a lack of promotion was the island’s main reason for remaining sleepy. “Atauro has world-class diving, with reefs considered among the most biodiverse in the world – that is how special the marine life is here,” he said. Schumacher added that there are highly experienced diving operators waiting to guide visitors to all the best spots. “So come to Timor ... the reefs will leave an incredible memory,” he urged.

Landlubbers will find plenty to charm them, too, especially in July. This is when an annual festival celebrating the betel nut harvest takes place. For one day only, much of the island gathers near Abaktedi village. The exuberant festival is held at an altitude of 700 metres, in the shadow of the island’s highest mountain, and features *lian-nain* – old-timer storytellers – who retell the legend of the islanders’ three ancestral brothers. The festival marks the brothers’ truce after protracted conflict, and at its heart is about reaffirming peaceful relations between Atauro’s communities.

Betel nuts are a specialty stimulant in various parts of southern Asia and the Pacific. The ‘nuts’ themselves are in fact seeds from areca fruit. They increase one’s heart rate, as well as feelings of alertness and well-being (though also pose health hazards). Before being consumed, the fibrous areca seeds are ground up with quicklime and wrapped in glossy, heart-shaped leaves from the betel plant, which give the end product its name. When chewed, betel nuts produce a red juice that gets spat out on the ground – but not before dyeing users lips, tongues, and teeth a shocking crimson.

Atauro's festival also showcases villagers' impressive seed harvesting abilities. Fearless tree climbers, be they young or old, shimmy up towering areca palms using knotted palm leaves to hasten their ascent. Near the tops of these slender trunks, they lop off heavy bunches of orange fruit. Down below, thousands of festival attendees converse, dance, drink palm wine and, of course, chew *pua* (the local name for betel nut). Makeshift markets sell handicrafts and locally grown produce, including avocados, oranges, the giant, potato-like *kumbili*.

The festival is quite the experience for a visitor to drink in, immersed in a confusion of Portuguese, Timorese and local dialects. Someone will surely tell you the story of the aforementioned brothers (Komateu, Leki-Toko and Kutu-Kia) and the significance of *pua* in their tale – which translates into a significance in Atauro's unique culture. As legend has it, the brothers' famous fights caused tremendous trouble for the island. They were bad enough to dry out the land and prevent fish baskets from filling. When the quarrelsome men finally agreed to make peace, they cemented their agreement with a *pua* ceremony. There, they divided the land and sea into three regions, firing arrows to mark where their territory lay.

Ever since, Atauro's annual betel nut festival has served as a reminder

Traditional Timorese fishing boats are designed to remain steady amid ocean waves



Faiz Zaki

that the island is at peace – no matter what's going on in the rest of Timor-Leste. “[Betel nuts] are the source of life for Atauro,” an old lian-nain told *Macao*. “This festival is very, very old. And it will always continue.”

Atauro has known strife, however. The Portuguese, who colonised Timor-Leste in the late 16th century, used it as a prison island to house criminals and political prisoners from across its territories. It was the Portuguese who built the infamous ‘hole in the ground’ jail in Vila Maumeta, a coastal town. Today, all that remains are three stone squares marking the underground cells in which these prisoners were held. During World War II, the Japanese – who occupied Timor-Leste – also used the island as a holding pen for prisoners.

Atauro's last stint as a prison was during the '80s, when Timor-Leste's Indonesian occupiers used it as a place to detain thousands of guerillas for the freedom movement (known as Fretilin). In Vila Maumeta, a stone monument was erected in 2017 to honour these exiled men and women. It bears the flags of both Timor-Leste and Fretilin, along with the words: “The isolation of Atauro did not extinguish the spirit of resistance leading to national liberation.” After Timor-Leste won its independence from Indonesia in 2002, most of the

Atauro exiles returned to their original villages. But some stayed, boosting the island's population – which now numbers a little over 10,000.

While Timor-Leste is a Catholic country – courtesy of the Portuguese – most of Atauro's inhabitants are Protestant. Animism, however, was the main religion on the island all the way up until the early 20th century, when a Dutch mission arrived from nearby Indonesia. Catholicism didn't reach Atauro until 1951. Vila Maumeta's Bread and Fish Monument commemorates the first 21 islanders baptised into the Catholic faith by Father Hornai.

Earlier this year, tourists from around the world flocked to Timor-Leste to view a once-in-a-century solar eclipse – which sparked a surge of visitors to Atauro. But eclipses aside, few foreigners make it all the way to the island. It is becoming something of a hidden secret for Timor-Leste's expatriate crowd, however. Especially those who love scuba diving.

Fátima Alves, a Portuguese teacher working on the mainland, has completed around 600 dives off Atauro's coastline since taking up the sport in early 2019. “The waters are calm, the sea is beautiful, and there's a huge amount of animal life,” she says of the island. “And one of the best things is that there's no crowds. In many scuba hotspots, you have more divers than fish. Not at Atauro.”●

ZOOM

Dazzling wonderland: The unveiling of 'Light up Macao 2023'

The event transforms the city into a shimmering spectacle with light installations and interactive shows, enhancing tourism and community economy.

Light up Macao 2023 is a dazzling city-wide event running from 2 December 2023 to 25 February 2024. The extravaganza, themed "Dazzling Wonderland", presents 36 light installations, 20 interactive setups and mapping shows across 34 locations in seven districts, aimed at enriching nighttime entertainment and stimulating the local economy.

Signature installations are located in various districts and mapping shows are scheduled

every night throughout the event. "Light up Macao 2023" is a collaboration between governmental entities and the city's integrated resorts, showcasing the synergy of tourism, technology, architecture, history, culture and creativity.

Having successfully created a spectacular spectacle for the past seven years, "Light up Macao 2023" continues the tradition, promising to be an unforgettable visual journey that both residents and visitors will cherish. ●

① Violin melodies echo amidst a field of twinkling lights, as an audience gathers on the first night of the 'Light up Macao 2023'

② Edoardo Tresoldi's 'Etherea', a 10-meter tall installation, is a fusion of neoclassical, baroque inspirations and light effects

③ Bathing in the 'Sparkle of Lights', Cathedral Square transforms into a festive, musical spectacle each evening with one-minute light shows that breathe life into the fountains, trees, and cobblestones

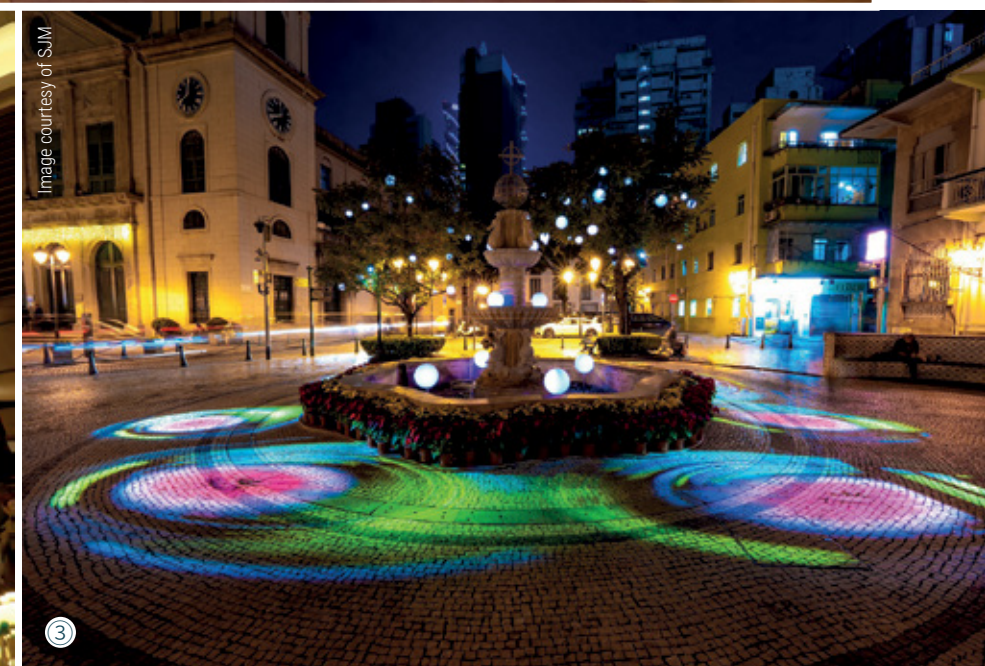


Image courtesy of Wynn Macau

Image courtesy of SJM



④ The Moorish Barracks, takes on a new dimension during the "Light Up Macao 2023". In collaboration with MGM and local artist Lok Hei, dynamic animations are projected onto the building, telling the transformative tale of the city

⑤ Joy and wonder fill the air as children explore the radiant magic of the shimmering city



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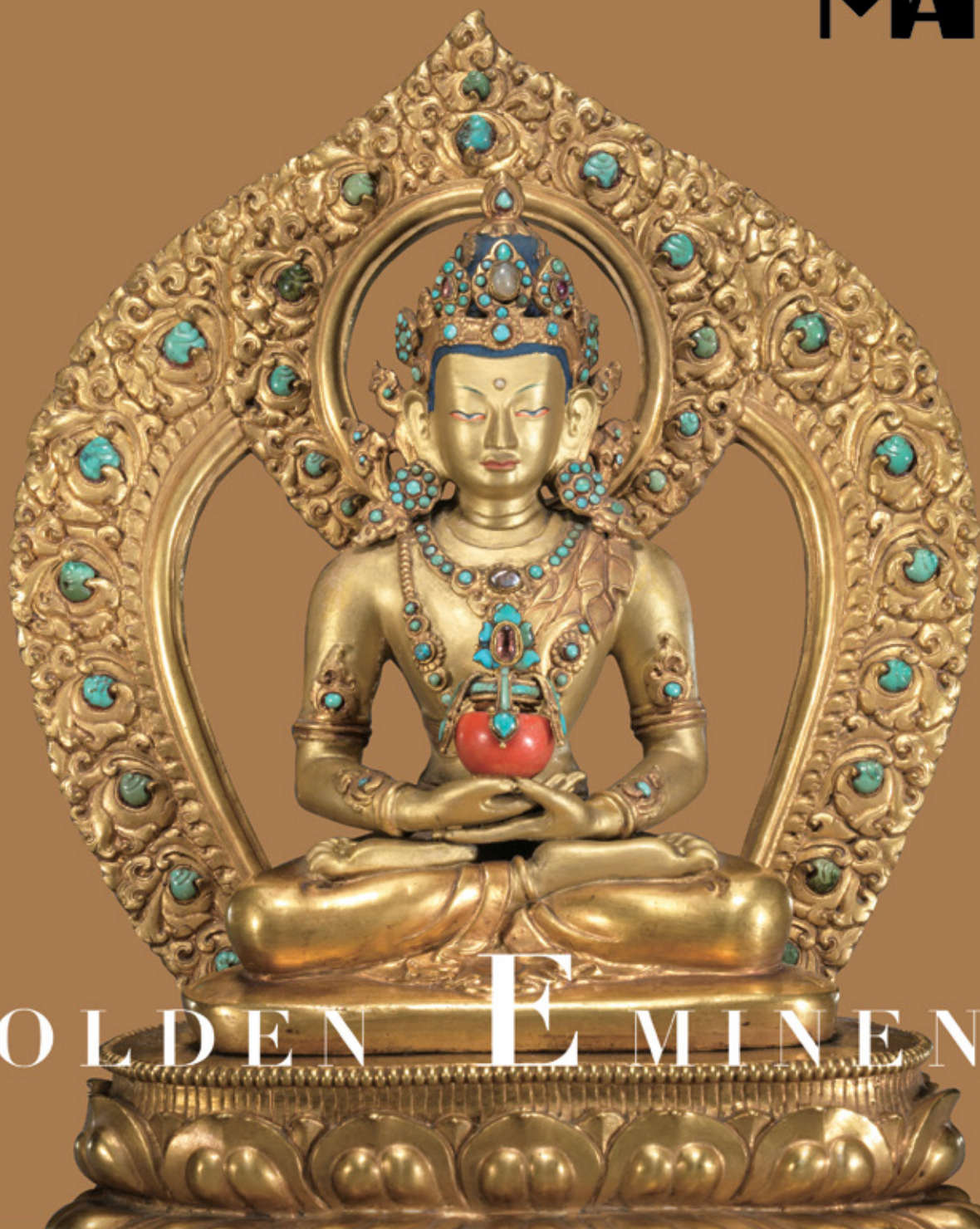
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