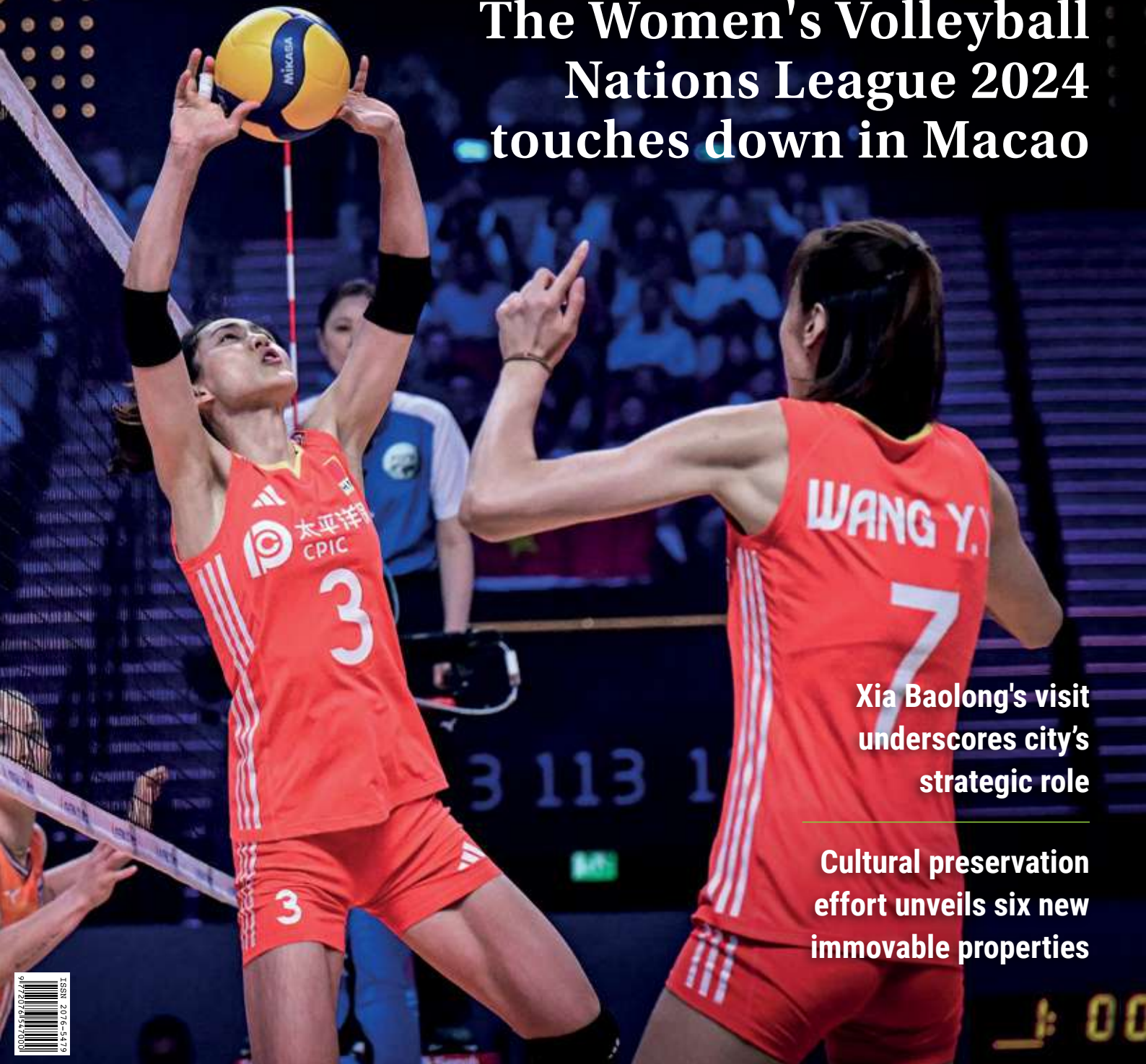


# Macao

# 澳門

## The Women's Volleyball Nations League 2024 touches down in Macao



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underscores city's  
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**COVER IMAGE**

On the second day of the Women's Volleyball Nations League competition, the powerhouse host team from China mounted a comeback after dropping the opening set, ultimately beating Netherlands in a 3-1 victory. The second week of preliminary rounds for the Women's Volleyball Nations League took place in Macao between 28 May to 2 June. The top teams will then converge on Bangkok for the finals, scheduled for 20-23 June - Photo courtesy of Volleyballworld

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## 'A pearl in the palm'

Xia Baolong, the nation's top official for Macao affairs, heaped praise on the Special Administrative Region during his weeklong visit in May. He also laid out a roadmap for its continued success.

Text **Christian Ritter**

In May, Macao played host to the nation's top official for affairs in the Special Administrative Regions (SARs). Xia Baolong spent a week in the city, on a fact-finding mission that saw him meet with local leaders and community groups, as well as tour some of the city's sports facilities and

the new Macao Bridge. Xia aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of Macao's current situation, at a grassroots level, in order to strengthen the shared vision for its future.

Xia heads both the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Communist Party of the China Central Committee and the State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office. He last visited Macao a year ago.

During his latest visit, which took place between 13 and 20 May, Xia referred to Macao as the "pearl in the palm" – an ancient Chinese idiom signifying something very precious. He praised Macao's progress since its handover from Portuguese to Chinese administration in December 1999, noting that the once sleepy territory had "developed into an international metropolis" under the successfully implemented "One Country, Two Systems" principle. That principle, Xia elaborated, enabled Macao to thrive economically and socially, maintain stability and continuously improve residents' lives.

### Growth in landmass, growth in output

The official backed his observations up with data. The city's landmass, he pointed out, has grown by more than 10 square kilometres in the past 25 years thanks to intensive land reclamation efforts. The national government had also granted Macao jurisdiction over 85 square kilometres of coastal waters and set aside more than 106

square kilometres of its own land, across the narrow body of water separating the SAR from Hengqin, for the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. These expansions effectively brought Macao's total development area to almost 225 square kilometres.

"Macao is no longer a tiny city," Xia noted.

This physical growth has been accompanied by an ever-expanding economy. Between 1999 and 2019, the territory's gross domestic product (GDP) has soared: increasing from around 50 billion patacas to 444.5 billion patacas over the 20 year period. Xia also praised Macao's healthy fiscal reserves.

Looking to the future, he praised the local government's "1+4" strategic approach to economic diversification. The strategy aims to strengthen Macao's role as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure – its economic backbone – while developing four emerging industries: health and wellness (incorporating Traditional Chinese Medicine), modern financial services, high and new technologies, and the hosting of large-scale international events (including business conventions, sporting fixtures and concerts).



Adding to the city's reputation as a good place to do business are its low business tax rates and status as one of the most open economies for trade and investment, according to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Xia specifically acknowledged Macao's role in facilitating trade between China and the nine Portuguese-speaking countries, a group that forms a multilateral economic cooperation union known as Forum Macao – which has a permanent secretariat based in the SAR.

Macao's more general role on the international stage was also growing, Xia said. The SAR has formalised strong economic and trade relationships with over 120 countries and regions and is a member of more than 190 international organisations (as 'Macao, China'). Its passport holders enjoy visa-free access or visas on arrival in 145 countries and regions, enabling residents to travel far and wide with ease.

#### Leaning into Macao's cultural riches

Xia expressed his admiration for Macao's vibrant multiculturalism, visible in the diversity of languages currently spoken in the city as well as in its historical architecture. He noted

that the friendly coexistence between different ethnicities so easily observed in Macao was something for its people to be proud of; it reflected the territory's unique position as a place where Chinese and Western cultures have intermingled for centuries.

This cultural richness was a very special asset, Xia asserted. Something recognised internationally, by the likes of UNESCO – which has inscribed Macao's Historic Centre on its World Heritage List and pronounced Macao a Creative City of Gastronomy. Xia also highlighted the city's safeness, another attribute lending itself to Macao's status as a wonderful tourism destination.

At a meeting with members of the Macao Chamber of Commerce during his visit, Xia outlined four suggestions that could help the SAR meet its development targets. Firstly, he urged greater efforts around promoting economic diversification, focusing on the "1+4" strategy. Secondly, he highlighted the importance of integrating Macao into national development plans, including the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). He also encouraged the local government's ongoing commitment to developing the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Xia's third suggestion was to further enhance Macao's international influence by expanding on existing connections with the European Union, Southeast Asia, and Portuguese-speaking countries. Finally, he stressed the need to foster a strong sense of patriotism and loyalty within Macao, ensuring broad social consensus on development goals.

Xia added the national government's support to the picture: "We must fully support the chief executive and the MSAR government [to govern] in accordance with the law, better leverage Macao's unique status and advantages, promote high-quality economic and social development, and work together to make Macao's 'golden business card' shine even brighter," he said.



Ho Iat Seng

While in the city, Xia praised what he saw as Macao's six key advantages: the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, sufficient development space, a highly internationalised business environment, its strong economic foundation, a unique blend of Chinese and Western cultures, and a strong tradition of patriotism and loyalty.

#### Commitment to Macao's future

Following Xia's visit, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng noted that the top official "fully affirmed the progress made by Macao in all aspects of work." He reiterated the local government's commitment to enhancing Macao's global standing and detailed steps the local government would take to achieve the goals suggested by Xia.

Ho emphasised that the city's economic diversification strategy was already bearing fruit, with new data indicating that the long-dominant gaming industry had contributed to less than 40 percent of last year's GDP – a significant reduction implying the government's five-year plan for diversification was running ahead of schedule.

Xia's visit to Macao highlighted the city's achievements and its strategic importance to China. His praise and suggestions provided a clear roadmap for Macao's future, emphasising economic diversification, integration into national development plans, and enhancing international influence. With the support of the central government and the commitment of local leaders like its chief executive, Macao is poised to continue its transformation into a vibrant international metropolis, making its "golden business card" shine even brighter. ●







Xinhua News Agency

## Strengthening Sino-Lusophone ties at Forum Macao

When representatives from the 10-member forum met in person earlier this year for the first time in eight years they pledged to cooperate on a raft of new measures – spanning trade, aid, the environment and more.

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**

The Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (better known as Forum Macao) has become a model of partnership between countries with different social systems, cultural backgrounds, and developmental stages, according to one of China's most senior officials.

Li Hongzhong spoke of the pivotal role Forum Macao had played in fostering both commercial and cultural ties among its members over the past two decades in his keynote speech at the forum's 6th Ministerial Conference's opening ceremony in April.

"Since its establishment [in 2003], trade between China and Portuguese-speaking countries has increased 20-fold, and China has become one of the most important economic and trade partners for Portuguese-speaking countries," said Li, a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

Li emphasised that progress and development, particularly with regard to environmental initiatives, were afoot. "New cooperation in addressing climate change, green development and the blue economy has emerged," he said.

Six new measures designed to promote cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) were included in

Forum Macao's new three-year action plan, which has been signed by all 10 member states. The measures range from improving cross-border financing and quarantine facilities to offering scholarships to able students from PSCs to study in China to providing medical aid to Asian and African PSCs. The national government has also pledged to deepen Macao's role as the forum's platform.

Li hailed the win-win results of cooperation and steadfast dedication to peace. At a time when the world was experiencing unprecedented changes, the vice-chairman assured those in attendance that China always followed through on its promises. He said that the country was willing to work alongside PSCs, "injecting more certainty and positive energy into global stability and prosperity."



Member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Li Hongzhong



Senior officials from all 10 of the forum's member states took part in the three-day conference, held at the China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade

Service Platform Complex, located near Macao's Legislative Assembly building. Around 1,000 people attended in total, including director of the Macao Liaison Office, Zheng Xincong, and Foreign Ministry Commissioner Liu Xianfa. The conference focused on enhancing collaborative efforts between members, fostering mutual assistance and promoting a shared vision for humanity.

While the Ministerial Conference normally takes place every three years, the global Covid-19 pandemic and scheduling issues meant this was the first time representatives had met in person since 2016. Forum Macao's member states are China along with Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor-Leste.

At the welcome ceremony, Chinese Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao commented on the enduring ties between members of Forum Macao. To illustrate, he quoted an ancient Chinese saying: "A partnership forged with the right approach defies geographical distance; it is thicker than glue and stronger than metal and stone." The minister reiterated that there were many opportunities an ever-modernising China brought to the world, including to its fellow Forum Macao members.

### Deepening Macao's role as a Sino-Lusophone facilitator

Wang also spoke positively of Macao's performance as a platform between China and the PSCs. He said that the city, as a Special Administrative Region of China, had "fully leveraged the institutional advantages of 'One Country, Two Systems'."

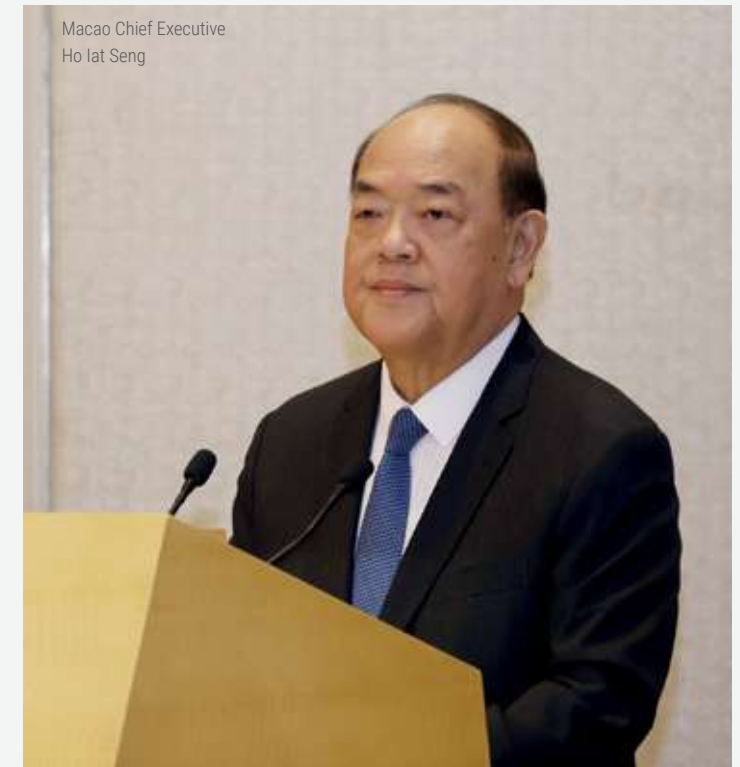
And it appears that the city's involvement in Sino-Lusophone affairs is poised to intensify: one of the six measures forum members signed during the Ministerial Conference was to "deepen Macao's role" as the forum's facilitator. The deepening would be achieved through developing an international bond market denominated in yuan and patacas and establishing a China-Portuguese-speaking countries' science and technology cooperation platform in Macao, among other initiatives.

Macao Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng hosted a dinner for the conference participants during the three-day event. There, he promised that aside from the city's role as a Sino-Lusophone facilitator, Macao would continue to participate in and support the development of the Belt and Road Initiative and promote the high-quality development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

"At a time when the world economy is facing profound changes, solidarity, mutually beneficial cooperation and a joint response to challenges are even more important," he said.

Ho also highlighted the "significance" of the 6th Ministerial Conference's timing. This year is both the 25th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland, and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Macao Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng



### NEW MEASURES

- **Promote trade and investment**, including through improving cross-border financing and quarantine facilities, supporting enterprises from PSCs to participate in the China International Import Expo (CIIE) and the compilation of a China-Portugal trade and investment guidebook.
- **Expand industrial cooperation**. Have China assist PSCs to enhance their agricultural capabilities and enact more bilateral air transport agreements between Forum members, for example.
- **Strengthen development cooperation** through the likes of implementing a series of small-scale yet impactful livelihood projects in Asian and African PSCs.
- **Promote human resources cooperation** via training schemes and scholarships for PSC citizens in both China and Macao.
- **Advance medical and health cooperation**. This will be in the form of increased cooperation with PSC hospitals, dispatching foreign aid to Asian and African Portuguese-speaking countries, and establishing Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) industries in certain PSCs.
- **Deepen Macao's role** as a platform through developing a financial services platform for China and PSCs and an international bond market denominated in yuan and patacas, as well as supporting the establishment of a China-PSC science and technology cooperation platform in Macao.



Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao





### Forum Macao receives praise and feedback from PSC members

Each Portuguese-speaking country's representative at the Ministerial Conference took the opportunity to offer feedback on Forum Macao usefulness as a platform for multilateral cooperation. Timorese Vice Prime Minister Francisco Kalbuadi Lay highlighted the "important role" the forum played in facilitating infrastructure projects between China and PSCs, for instance.

In addition, he noted its contributions to his tiny Southeast Asian nation's food security, improvements in living conditions and sustainable coastal management. Lay is also Timor-Leste's coordinating minister for economic affairs and minister of tourism and environment.

Portugal's new minister of economy, Pedro Reis, hailed the "good understanding" held between China and his own country. He called for "joint reflection" on the forum's existing financial mechanism (namely via its cooperation fund), saying Portugal believed there was room to intensify support measures for businesses in the PSCs – particularly small and medium-sized enterprises.



### Mutuality, amity set Forum Macao apart

Harald Brüning, director of Macau Post Daily

Forum Macao is, I am sure, one of the world's most mutually beneficial and most amicable international entities. It is also a beacon of peace in the fragmented and troubled world's increasingly violent rivalry.

Over two decades after its founding, Forum Macao includes all of the world's nine countries that have Portuguese as their official language (or one of their official languages – Equatorial Guinea and Timor-Leste), with a total population of 290 million. Including China's 1.4 billion inhabitants, Forum Macao represents about one-fifth of the world's population.

The amazing thing is that an organisation representing such a huge number of people is headquartered in one of the world's smallest territories by size (33.3 square kilometres) and population (around 680,000): Macao. Of course, Macao is one of the world's oldest existing entrepôts – its history dates back to the mid-

16th century – and a free port set up in the mid-19th century. The territory has the right historical background and constitutional framework to host Forum Macao.

One of the forum's various outstanding features is that it comprises 10 countries that are able to maintain friendly economic, commercial and cultural ties even though their political systems are quite different and are ruled by parties that represent a wide range of political directions – socialist, social democratic, liberal, conservative, et cetera. However, unlike other international entities, Forum Macao does not intend to impose certain socio-political values on its members. It does not pursue the West's purported approach of "shared values".

Nine of the 10 Forum Macao are members of the emerging Global South, while Portugal is a country that is firmly anchored in the West, being one of the 12 founding members of NATO in 1949 and a member of the now 27-member supranational European Union.

Regarding political openness towards its membership, Forum Macao is similar to the intergovernmental organisation BRICS, which has now nine members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates). They also have rather different political systems but, notwithstanding the stark "otherness" as far as their respective methods of governance are concerned, have been able to form an intergovernmental organisation of emerging countries collectively defending their national and collective interests.

Forum Macao doesn't, obviously, operate in a political vacuum. It is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, and, most importantly, President Xi Jinping's proposals and actions concerning the creation of a Global Community of Share Future for Humanity. The forum is also, to a certain extent, the result of the famed Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence marking their 70th anniversary this year.

Considering that six of Forum Macao's 10 member states are from Africa, I think it's appropriate to mention their continent's philosophy of *ubuntu* (meaning 'humanity' in Bantu); a value system that stresses the interconnectedness of individuals with their respective societies and natural conditions. Ubuntu has also been translated as the African concept of 'I am because we are'.

I think the concept stressing the existential importance of the human collective for each individual hits the nail on the head. Certainly, philosophy is a global phenomenon, and we can all benefit from each other and become friends through mutual respect – and learning from and with each other. I think that's what Forum Macao has been doing for over two decades and will continue to do involving four of the world's five (or seven) continents.

### Creating wealth to benefit us all

It is now up to entrepreneurs from the participating countries to take up the mantle of wealth creators – for themselves and their respective countries. That's what Forum Macao is all about: creating wealth benefitting all of us individually and, above all, collectively. Pursuing individual wealth without one's fellow human beings in mind is counterproductive. Entrepreneurs need buyers to purchase their products and services, and buyers need to earn enough money to be able to make the purchases. It's a two-way street.

Forum Macao needs the involvement of more entrepreneurs who, let's be realistic, are more important for economic progress than merchants. While merchants buy and sell goods, entrepreneurs are proactive businesspeople developing new products and services and, consequently, taking major risks.

Forum Macao Secretary General Ji Xianzheng told local broadcaster TDM in April that the forum's Cooperation Fund between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries had by then supported 10 projects worth almost US\$500 million. The fund was set up in 2010 and activated in 2013. According to Ji, the forum has so far supported projects in Brazil, Mozambique, Portugal and Angola.

For Macao, the forum will continue to ensure its participation in international relations at a relatively high level, thereby promoting its international image as a service hub for economic, commercial and cultural contacts on the global stage – in the Portuguese-speaking world in particular. It's also Macao's contribution to assisting the nation in extending and reinforcing its global network pursuing mutually beneficial and amicable relations with a commercially and politically significant segment of the international community.

Win-win shall remain the ultimate aim of Forum Macao. ●



SPORTS

# Women's volleyball tournament makes a comeback

The Volleyball Women's Nations League returned to Macao in 2024, featuring top teams like Italy, Japan, Brazil, China, and the Netherlands, with Brazil and Italy emerging as standout performers.



29 May #38

	NETHERLANDS	1	25	23	23	21
	CHINA	3	21	25	25	25

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**  
Photos courtesy of **Volleyball World**



28 May #33

	THAILAND	3	25	20	25	26
	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	1	22	25	17	24

The Volleyball Women's Nations League (VNL) returned to Macao in 2024, bringing together five of the world's top teams for an intense six-day tournament. Italy, Japan, Brazil, China, and the Netherlands battled it out in Pool 3 of the competition, showcasing the highest level of women's volleyball talent.

Brazil emerged as the standout performer, winning all four of its matches convincingly. The Brazilians' undefeated run included a 3-0 shutout of Thailand, further cementing their status as one of the pre-tournament favourites. Italy and Japan also had

strong showings, each winning three of their four games, with their only losses coming against the Brazilians.

One of the key storylines from the Macao pool was Japan's rise in the world rankings, positioning them as the leading contender for the Asian Olympic quota in Paris. While China had long been considered the region's volleyball powerhouse, Japan's impressive performances in Macao have demonstrated their growing strength. This shift in the rankings underscores the continued evolution and competitiveness of women's volleyball in Asia.



28 May #34

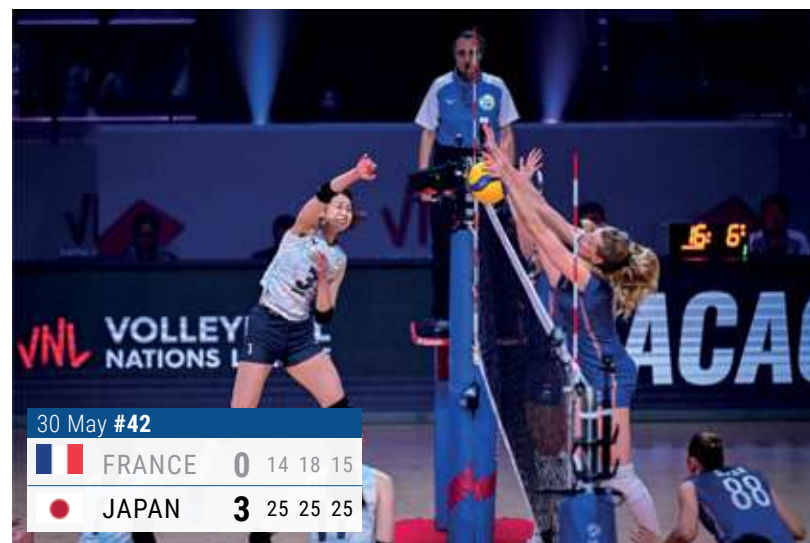
	BRAZIL	3	24	26	19	25	15
	JAPAN	2	26	24	25	20	11



29 May #37

	ITALY	3	25	25	25
	FRANCE	0	15	14	14





The return of the VNL to Macao was a priority for the local authorities, and it was a move that paid off in spades. “We obtained this authorisation and therefore we are very pleased to have the return of the Volleyball Women’s Nations League,” said Pun Weng Kun, the Director of the Sports Bureau of Macao in an interview with *Revista Macau*.

The presence of the national team was a major draw for the local fans, who turned out in force to support their home team. “There was a great welcome from the residents of Macao,” Pun noted, highlighting the importance of hosting the tournament in the MSAR.

The tournament also served as a significant boost for Macao’s sports tourism industry, as the influx of players, coaches, and fans helped to drive economic activity in the region. “Hosting the tournament in the MSAR can promote the deep integration of

sports, tourism and other related industries, benefiting the promotion of the development of synergies between the integrated tourism and leisure industry and the sports sector and significantly increasing the ‘Sport +’ collaborative effects,” Pun explained.

After the six-day tournament in Macao, Poland is leading the rank of the preliminary phase of Pool 3, followed by Brazil, Italy, Japan, Türkiye, Canada, China, USA, the Netherlands, Serbia, Dominican Republic, Germany, Thailand, Korea, France, and Bulgaria.

After Macao, the pools in Hong Kong and Fukuoka, the finals will take place in Bangkok, Thailand, at the end of June, where the six top teams will qualify directly for the 2024 Paris Olympics, while the next two highest ranked teams compete in a final qualification tournament. The host nation and defending Olympic champion also receive automatic bids regardless of their VNL performance.







Today, the VNL stands as one of the premier international competitions in women's volleyball, showcasing the sport's global appeal and the incredible talent of the athletes. The tournament in Macao was just the latest chapter in this rich and storied history, as the world's best players battled for glory on the court.

The origins of volleyball, both for men's and women's versions of the sport, can be traced back to 1895 when William G Morgan, a physical education instructor in Holyoke, Massachusetts, invented the game. While Morgan is credited with the basic concept, the distinct development of the women's game happened through the collective efforts of many individuals and organisations over the course of the 20th century. ●







## BUSINESS

# Macao welcomes PATA: Transforming Asia Pacific tourism

With Macao playing host to the annual Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) summit, delegates were able to experience a taste of the exciting dining, cultural and city-based experiences that will help the SAR go from strength to strength in a changing world.

Text **Craig Sauers**  
Photos courtesy of **PATA**

PATA attendees pose for a group photo outside one of Macao's biggest attractions, the Ruins of St Paul's

For tourism professionals, the annual Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA) summit is a must-attend event. It brings together national tourism leaders, influential startups and key stakeholders, from hoteliers to travel agents and experts in fields such as aviation and technology. More importantly, the event offers a glimpse into the future of this crucial industry.

Through official presentations, roundtable talks and discussions that occur on the sidelines, PATA's summit highlights the trends and innovations driving growth in Asia Pacific, a region welcoming more than half a billion international visitors annually.

The host city often plays a major role in shaping these discussions. This year, from 15-17 May, Macao hosted the PATA summit with the timely theme: "Reimagine Tourism".

Macao's leaders seized the chance to showcase the SAR's strengths, welcoming over 450 delegates to three days of insightful talks at an integrated resort in Cotai.

Above all, they took advantage of the opportunity to raise Macao's profile as a travel destination.

### CHALLENGES IN A CHANGING WORLD

From the start, the PATA summit reflected the changing landscape of travel in Asia.

After years of disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourism sector is still rebounding across the region. But the industry itself has also changed, according to dozens of delegates who gathered for roundtable discussions to kick off the first sessions open to members of the public.





Jonathan Low



Peter Semone



Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes

Jonathan Low, CEO of the Global Success Learning Academy, executive committee member of PATA Malaysia and host speaker throughout the three-day summit, cited the challenges many Asia Pacific operators are dealing with today. Those include everything from finding, retaining and upskilling talent to navigating the rising cost of flights and accommodation to dealing with the way digital technology has enabled consumers to plan and book trips without travel agents.

Meanwhile, in a panel discussion that centred on travel opportunities in China, Peter Semone, PATA's chairman, trumpeted the country's incredible potential to attract millions more inbound visitors and

establish itself as one of the world's top travel destinations. But he also cited the challenges that could hold it back, from language barriers to technological disruptions.

"China is not just a country - it's a civilization that has so much to offer in terms of history and knowledge," Semone said to an audience so large that it quickly became standing room only.

"But China is misunderstood [by international travellers]. China struggles to communicate the great aspects that it has. Tourism is focused on just a few places: Shanghai, Beijing, Xi'An, Guilin. But that's not [all it has to offer]," he added.

Retention, technological disruption, attracting global travellers in a saturated market. For Macao,

these potential hurdles come with an additional challenge: local business and government leaders are embarking on an ambitious plan to diversify the tourism industry.

In her opening remarks, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), highlighted the excitement - and potential pressures - the year ahead might have in store for the SAR.

"2024 is a momentous year for Macao. It is the first of a five-year development plan for economic diversification," she began, alluding to Macao's ambitious "1+4", or "Tourism+," development plan, which aims to weave culture and creativity, sports, MICE, gastronomy, and health and wellness into the tourism sector.

Yet these challenges also present opportunities "to show the new dynamics of Macao as a world centre of tourism and leisure after the pandemic," added Senna Fernandes, highlighting the SAR's rich culinary and cultural experiences, as well as its MICE readiness.

While Macao's strengths are clear, local travel leaders must promote and communicate them better, as the make-up of today's travellers evolves.

"In 2019, 8 million people visited Macao on group tours," she said. "Last year, out of 28 million visitors, only about 1.2 million were on group tours. Tourism operators need to diversify their packages to be more specific for different types of travellers."



SCAN HERE TO WATCH  
A RECAP OF THE PATA  
OPENING CEREMONY



SCAN HERE TO WATCH THE  
PATA VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS





Pansy Ho

## TECHNOLOGY, SUSTAINABILITY AND CULTURE RESHAPING TOURISM

Those efforts could take on additional importance in an era increasingly dominated by technological innovations and one thing is certain: technology, including AI, is already influencing travel in Asia Pacific.

Day three began with a presentation from Caroline Bremner, senior head of travel research at Euromonitor International. She shared data showing that Asia Pacific travellers valued customised experiences. “[The] personal touch is absolutely vital,” Bremner said. But she quickly added that they have also embraced technology.

“Asian consumers are using tech more than other regions to make travel more seamless,” she explained.

That includes AI, she said, a resource that everyone in the industry should embrace as “another tool in the toolbox.”

Its impact is likely to go beyond making travel smoother, though.

Speakers throughout the final day of the summit spoke of the growing importance of sustainability. “More travellers are paying attention to green development. They will pay a little higher for green tourism,” said Liu Shijun, the vice chairman of the World Tourism Alliance. In many cases, speakers explained, AI is helping operators cater to these demands. Sarah Wang, regional director of the World Travel & Tourism Council, noted that Hilton Hotels has used AI to reduce food

waste while Microsoft has used AI and big data to reduce emissions across the aviation industry.

As important as it is for businesses to adopt technology, PATA underscored that they will also need to embrace sustainability. “It is coming at us like a 10-tonne truck,” said Hannah Pearson, regional director for the Adventure Travel Trade Association and director of Pear Anderson, a research-based consultancy specialising in the Southeast Asian and Muslim travel industry. “We have to have a workforce that understands this and is ready to drive it.”

While these outside forces are rippling through the industry, PATA speakers emphasised one element that could offer a measure of stability and drive sustainable growth: culture.

In a deeply personal discussion with Semone, Pansy Ho, chair of Shun Tak Holdings, spoke fondly of her heritage and the role that culture has played in Macao’s tourism industry. “In Macao, we have always combined the development of our cultural programmes alongside promoting tourism,” she said. “Our heritage is part of our everyday life.”

PATA made clear that as Macao transforms its tourism offerings, culture will continue to be its differentiating factor.

Over the three days of the summit, delegates learned to make egg tarts and *azulejo* tiles. They took exciting nighttime excursions to discover the city at night when it becomes its most colourful. They savoured the globe-spanning flavours that so captivate travellers.

Above all, they experienced the cultural qualities that have positioned Macao to move from strength to strength as the “1+4” development plan takes off and the industry evolves. ●

Over 450 delegates attended the three-day summit

(Centre) Delegates learned how to make one of Macao’s signature pastries – egg tarts



Hannah Pearson







Q&A

## Expanding and rebranding

Formerly known as the Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM), UTM officially rebranded on 1 April this year. Rector Fanny Vong explains why this seemingly small change will have a big impact on the school – as well as students and employers in Macao and beyond.

Text **Craig Sauers**  
Image courtesy of  
**Macao University  
of Tourism**

Macao University  
of Tourism Rector  
Fanny Vong

Rare is it that a school changes its name. It is even more unusual for one that ranks in the global top 10 of its core programmes to rebrand.

But for the Macao University of Tourism, known by its Portuguese initials UTM, changing names was an important step forward, a matter of semantics that held deeper meaning.

Formerly known as the Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM), UTM officially rebranded on 1 April this year. The move from institute to university, according to the university's leadership, better represented the quality of programmes available to students. Although it was only founded in 1995, making it remarkably young amongst its peers, the school has grown rapidly. In 2023, it ranked among the 10 best places in the world to study hospitality and leisure management.

As the school's prestige has expanded, so has its student body. Currently, UTM has about 1,800 degree-seeking students. Since 2019, it has also welcomed post-graduate students.

In other words, UTM has outgrown its status as an institute and is ready for a new future as a university. This change may seem subtle, but it will have an impact on the university and Macao alike. Take it from Fanny Vong. In a recent interview, the UTM rector discusses the school's growth, new courses that meet the needs of hospitality today and the partnerships that will benefit

Macao as the school's graduates embark on careers in an evolving world.

**Walk us through your history as a higher education institute.**

We're celebrating our 30th anniversary next year. In education, that isn't a long time. But we've been part of many significant milestones. The first was in 1995, when the school was formally established. That was a recognition by the government that tourism was going to be an important industry for Macao and we needed to nurture high-quality talent to contribute to it.

When the government liberalised the gaming industry [in 2001], it brought a lot of foreign investment into Macao and spurred a huge demand for manpower and human resources. Employers weren't just looking for hands, but rather brains, people who could conceptualise and manage projects and properties. So UTM kept growing. We launched new programmes, we expanded in size.

Then came 2017. When Macao's higher education law was passed [allowing tertiary institutions to launch new courses of study], we could offer postgraduate programmes for the first time. That lifted our profile. We no longer just provided bachelor's degrees, but also master's and doctoral programmes. That gave us the whole profile of a university.





#### **How has the official change to university affected UTM?**

We can be more ambitious and offer even more postgraduate programmes to meet the huge need [for high-quality talent] not only in local markets, but also in the mainland.

It also helps us gain a better foothold in international markets. Many of the most renowned universities around the world are well known because they are able to offer high-level programmes. We aim to do the same.

#### **What else has changed now that UTM is officially a university?**

As a university, there is no escaping your three major responsibilities. Number one is teaching. The second is research, pushing the frontier of knowledge. The third is community service.

We encourage students to come up with projects that support the community, especially Macao's culture and heritage. Our students have helped to gather information about history, legends, stories – things that might be forgotten otherwise.

#### **How many students are enrolled at UTM today?**

Our degree-seeking student body is currently around 1,800. For non-degree, continuing education programmes, we have around 15,000 participants each year.

Currently, we graduate around 400 students a year. But that number is growing because we have expanded our intake. Last year, around 600 students enrolled at UTM. That was record-breaking. This year, we anticipate an increase of over 30 percent as we continue expanding our offerings – we'll be launching several new programmes soon.

#### **What relationship does UTM have with Macao employers?**

We have very close connections with industry leaders. We've always responded to their needs quickly. Whatever employers need in terms of training, or in manpower development, we have been able to provide through corresponding programmes.

We work on two fronts: we provide timely, opportune training programs to meet immediate needs. But we've also launched programmes to satisfy long-term needs for high-calibre professionals in our industries and society.

#### **How have Macao's plans to diversify the economy affected UTM?**

We are following the "1+4" strategy – the government's economic diversification strategy – very closely.

UTM has always been good at offering programmes that satisfy the needs of the tourism sector, such as integrated tourism.

But we're also aware that we need to diversify our programmes and follow the trends. When we talk about tourism and hospitality, we're not talking about jobs based on manual skills anymore. The world is changing. We have to equip our students with new sets of knowledge and skills. That is why we are modifying our programmes.

#### **How are your programmes changing?**

Two years ago, we launched a master's programme in smart hospitality and tourism technologies. Last year, we launched another master's in digital marketing. We are trying to blend traditional and new – with a focus on technologies such as AI and big data – so that when our graduates enter the workforce, they will be more creative, knowledgeable and adaptive.

Technology will absolutely change manpower requirements in the tourism industry of the future. We want our graduates to have [a familiarity] and be more aware of how it can enable them to work better.

#### **Could you highlight partnerships you've established with other universities?**

We have established "3+1" dual bachelor's programmes with a few hotel schools in Switzerland. Students finish the first three years

at UTM. For the last year of their studies, they go to Switzerland, and then they get degrees from both institutions – one from us, one awarded by our Swiss partner. We have also established a "1+1" dual master's programme with the University of Queensland in Australia, and another with the University of Surrey in the UK.

#### **How have these programmes benefitted students?**

These are great ways of expanding our students' horizons, to get them out of Asia so that they can understand how other parts of the world offer the best possible hospitality experience.

I think the students come back with a sharper worldview. They also help graduates when they're job-hunting. Employers will look at their CVs and be pleased to see that they already have this international exposure. In this industry, you'll always be working in multicultural settings. The earlier you are exposed to workplace diversity, the better equipped you will be to succeed.

#### **What are the university's future aspirations?**

Our number one aim has always been to provide good quality education. We'll never deviate from that. But we also want to diversify our programmes. Health and sports tourism can be the foundation for many industries. We must continue developing students who are multi-skilled, multitalented and versatile enough to jump over to other sectors and spur growth. ●



With 95 years of history,  
Hotel Central remains  
the tallest building in  
Macao's historic centre

TOURISM

# Bringing Hotel Central back from the brink

Before Hotel Central fell into serious disrepair, it counted bona fide secret agents and famous authors amongst its clientele. Thanks to a local man with a childhood dream, this iconic slice of Macao's heritage has finally reopened its doors.

Text **Kenny Fong**  
Photos courtesy of **Hotel Central**

Macao's Hotel Central was a trailblazer in its day. Once lauded as the tallest hotel in Macao, the teal-coloured feat of early Modernism boasted the city's first elevator and a colourful clientele – several of whom contributed to the intrigue that continues to add a certain *je ne sais quoi* to the property. Never mind the fact its heyday was well and truly over by the late 1960s.

It enjoys a prime location, situated just steps away from the Senado Square, Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, and St Dominic's Square. This strategic positioning is significant, as these landmarks were all designated as classified immovable properties back in 2018, underscoring their cultural and historical importance.





**THE RISE AND FALL OF HOTEL CENTRAL**

Hotel Central was conceived as a complementary addition to Macao's new main avenue, Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (better known by its Cantonese name, San Ma Lo). The area was a maze of winding, residential alleyways prior to 1918, when the city's Portuguese administrators decided a major thoroughfare was needed to improve traffic flow.

"[They] had the intention of building a hotel on such a great, new and

prosperous avenue, so they launched an open tender," explains Sio, who's an enthusiastic expert on the hotel's history.

A decade later, that hotel opened as the Hotel President. A rebrand followed in the early 1930s, courtesy of a new pair of owners: one big in the casino industry, the other a pawnshop mogul. The President became the Grand Central (and later, 'New Central', before settling on the more straightforward 'Central'). It also acquired an exclusive gaming concession from the Portuguese authorities.

The decor of the historic hotel pays tribute to Macao's Eastern and Western heritage

(Opposite page, left) Simon Sio hopes that the newly renovated Hotel Central will thrive for another century

(Opposite page, right) Sio's collection of antique clocks and telephones are displayed in the lobby and the hallways of the hotel's residential floors

Given the hotel's placement within this storied district, its recent renovation project was closely overseen by the local Cultural Affairs Bureau. This oversight ensured that the updates to the Hotel Central were carried out in a manner that respected the surrounding heritage sites and preserved the area's distinctive character.

While the building - its retro red rooftop sign adding stature to its once-formidable 11 storeys - still towers above more subtly hued neighbours occupying the historic area near Senado Square, it can no longer claim to be the tallest anything. Its interior was in such a state of disrepair by the 2010s that most thought it a hopeless case. Not local property developer

Simon Sio, however. When Sio heard a sale was looming, he decided it was high time to awaken Hotel Central from its slumber.

Sio's company purchased the hotel in 2016 for more than 1.5 billion patacas. It then invested a further 400 million patacas in restoration works. Despite embarking on an extensive and much-needed makeover, Sio's team managed to preserve much of the heritage hotel's original charm and character. In fact, the revamp expressly celebrates not only the building's history, but Macao's as well. Sio, who grew up next to Hotel Central, sees the two as inextricably linked.

This May, after eight years of toil behind closed doors, the property reopened to the public.







The lobby of Hotel Central is elegantly furnished with furniture and items from yesteryear

(Opposite page) The rooms in the Hotel Central are decorated and furnished in a manner that is reminiscent of the '20s, '30s and '40s

In the years that followed, Hotel Central continued to grow in both size and status. It saw its eighth storey added in 1937, thanks to an economic boom Macao experienced as wealthy exiles from the mainland settled here during the Second Sino-Japan War (1937-1945).

In 1941, Hotel Central's owners requested to build three

more levels. They sought to maintain a competitive edge over the newly erected Grande Hotel, which was a slightly taller nine storeys. However, citing safety concerns, local officials rejected the proposal. The subsequent legal battle made it all the way to Portugal's Supreme Court of Justice, which ruled in favour of a compromise. Hotel Central could

indeed grow to 11 storeys, but only in accordance with a fresh plan – using lightweight materials – put forward by the architect Chau Chi Fan. Chau was the only Chinese architect to have studied in the US at the time.

The extension helped secure a few more decades' prominence, during which the hotel welcomed many high-profile guests like Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond spy novels. Fleming visited the hotel in 1959 and his stay made such a strong impression on the writer that he included it in his 1963 travelogue, *Thrilling Cities*.

"Fleming described the hotel in great and profound detail," says Sio. "He wrote of the extravagance and indulgence of Hotel Central during that era, as well as the prosperous image that it projected."







The Palace Restaurant has been reimagined as a high-end restaurant that serves delectable dishes such as confit egg yolk tart and abalone Wellington

(Opposite page) On the wall of the Palace Restaurant is a painting that features the movers and shakers of Macao's history such as Stanley Ho and Fu Tak-lam

## A SECOND WIND

Sio first heard about plans to sell the hotel back in 2009. He quickly initiated negotiations with its co-owners, the Fuk and Kou families, but the process took seven years to complete.

"In the end, I bought 64 percent of the shares that the Fuk clan were in possession of through a tender process, and then negotiated again with the Kou clan, purchasing the remaining 36 percent of their shares," he shares. "Afterwards, I consolidated all the property rights and became the owner."

Bringing the hotel back from the brink proved even more difficult,



beginning with its foundations – which needed extensive, labour-intensive stabilisation work. Sio has been dedicated to preserving the hotel's original character throughout the renovation, even though starting from scratch would have been easier. He has painstakingly replaced materials that were past their prime with new versions that looked and felt the same. Ageing structural components were swapped out with modern improvements that, Sio hopes, will ensure the building withstands at least another century.

A further nod to the building's history comes in the form of a ground floor gallery, displaying

artefacts and information from across Hotel Central's rich history. The exhibition was specially curated by University of Macau history professor Ieng Weng Fat.

Heritage also permeates the 114 guest rooms, with different levels harking back to different eras. The 5th and 6th floors have a 1920s theme; the 7th and 8th are 1930s-inspired; while the 9th and 10th pay homage to the 1940s. The first three floors are gearing up to house high-end retail outlets, while the fourth floor is home to both the hotel's lobby and restaurant. The latter is a reimagining of Hotel Central's original Palace Restaurant, established in 1977.



The supreme room features a balcony with breathtaking views of Macao's cityscape

(Opposite page) The hotel's rooftop will be open to the public, allowing them to see the historic centre from a spectacular angle



Its new menu features a selection of classic Macanese recipes, the likes of Portuguese coconut chicken and oxtail soup, along with international cuisine.

The hotel's top level, meanwhile, features a viewing area where guests and visitors can gaze out at 360 degree views of Macao's old town.

In recognition of the extensive and stellar work that went into renovating the building, the

prestigious China Tourism and Culture Starlight Awards named it the "Annual Designer's Boutique Hotel" earlier this year.

#### FULFILLING A CHILDHOOD PROPHECY

Reviving Hotel Central has been a labour of love for Sio. His connection to the property runs deep: as a child, in the 1960s, he treated the still opulent hotel as

his personal playground. Those halcyon days ended when its staff unceremoniously removed him from the premises. They did not approve of "filthy kids entering the hotel to play," Sio laughs.

"They grabbed me by the collar and threw me out on the footpath," he elaborates. "As a naive child, I pointed to the hotel and said angrily, 'One day, when I'm rich, I'm going to

buy you.'" Then he scurried back to his family's home across the road.

Sio is quick to note that he didn't actually purchase the property as an act of comeuppance. Through breathing new life into Hotel Central, he sincerely hopes to revitalise the historic district in which his formative years were spent. And see Macao achieve its potential as a tourism destination with global appeal. ●





## CULTURE

# Meet Macao's six newest immovable properties

Bringing the total number of protected cultural heritage sites in the city to 165, these special buildings include *Português Suave* residences, the former home of Sun Yat-sen's first wife, and the city's most consequential abattoir.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**  
Photos courtesy of  
**Cultural Affairs Bureau**

An aerial view shows how the once-proud Chio Family Mansion expanded over time

(Opposite page)  
The government constructed the Mong Há Villas to provide housing for civil servants

For a tiny territory, just 33 square kilometres in size, Macao certainly boasts a surfeit of unique, impeccably preserved feats of architecture. That's largely thanks to its rich history. Being an indelible part of China with almost 500 years of Portuguese administration under its belt, Macao's built landscape is like no other. Famously, it's a place where cathedrals rub shoulders with pagodas. In 2005, the city's Historic Centre was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Since then, the local government's own list of protected cultural heritage properties has grown to 165 – the last six of which were added in March this year. This small yet eclectic group reflects the city's East-meets-West

character through both their remarkable architecture and historical purpose. Amongst them, you'll find *Português Suave* residences for civil servants, a neo-Arabic memorial to Sun Yat-sen and the city's most consequential abattoir.

## CHIO FAMILY MANSION

One of Macao's most prominent families, members of the Chio clan can trace their lineage back to Emperor Taizong of the Song dynasty (he reigned from 976 to 997). Later generations moved to Macao in the mid-17th century, initially settling in Mong-Há Village. Many Chios were hailed as great academics, often achieving stellar results in the imperial examinations.



In the mid-19th century, father and son duo Chio Un Leok and Chio Yun Ching founded Macao's first private school. The pair also played an important role in spreading Confucianism in Macao. Chio Yun Ching became known for his staunch promotion of Chinese residents' interests under Macao's then-Portuguese administration.

The mid-1800s was also around the time that some members of the Chio family relocated to Travessa da Porta, where their namesake mansion sits to this day. The narrowness of the alley, located off busy Rua dos Mercadores and very near the Ruins of St Paul's, belies the sprawling scope of the Lingnan-style residence. Construction started at number 26 Travessa da Porta, but spread into number 24 as the family grew. More people

meant more add-ons to the home and by 1875, four additional blocks had been erected at each corner to ensure everyone could be accommodated. The main premises comprises an ancestral hall, wing rooms, hallways and several yards.

The complex slowly began emptying out in the 1960s, after witnessing almost a hundred years of Chio family life. The entire premises, unoccupied since the mid-1990s though still containing various pieces of the family's furniture, is now owned by the Cultural Affairs Bureau and undergoing restoration work.

## THE MONG HÁ VILLAS

These pretty *Português Suave* row-houses in Mong Há were built in the early 1950s, to house

junior civil servants and their families. Painted crisp mint with white trimmings, the arched front windows, arcade porches and upper-level balconies of 10 of the 12 two-story houses look out onto the tree-lined Avenida do Coronel Mesquita. The other two houses have the same appearance, but are located on the street running perpendicular: Estrada de Coelho do Amaral.

*Português Suave* was an architectural style promoted during Portugal's Estado Novo period, part of the Second Portuguese Republic. There are several fine examples of this determinedly 'Luso' version of mid-century design in Macao. Visually, the style incorporates art deco elements with ornamentations and motifs borrowed from Portuguese regional architecture of earlier centuries.



Senior officials were afforded the far larger apartments in the second Mong Há property added to the list

(Opposite page) The Dr Sun Yat-sen Memorial House brings a new architectural influence to the list with its neo-Arabic style



The Mong Há Villas were the result of a major influx of migrants from the mainland who, in the early 20th century, put pressure on Macao's housing stocks (and raised rents). To ease the squeeze, the city's administrators came up with a plan to build a series of affordable housing complexes for modestly paid public servants – including the Mong Há villas.

The villas' layouts are identical. There's a living room, dining room, kitchen and bathroom on the ground floor of each, then two bedrooms and a second bathroom

on the upper floor. Courtyards occupy the rear of the complex.

Since 2017, the Cultural Affairs Bureau has been taking over each villa as its tenant departs. The homes are generally in excellent condition and the bureau is taking care to preserve their facades and spatial characteristics in a revitalisation project that will see them used to hold arts exhibitions and retail outlets. The aim is to turn their bright corner of Mong Há into a charming cultural attraction.

#### SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS' HOMES

After the success of the new row-houses for lower-ranked civil servants (including the Mong Há Villas), the head of the Macao's Post, Telegraph and Telephones Office proposed building a selection of more salubrious homes for its senior employees. These were completed in 1954, in the same Português Suave-style and colour scheme as the villas. They are also located in Mong Há, on Avenida do Coronel Mesquita and Rua de Francisco Xavier Pereira.

The four semi-detached buildings each contain two generously proportioned apartments; one on the upper floor, one on the lower (eight families could be accommodated in total). Significantly larger than the villas and boasting distinctive semi-circular living rooms, these apartments each had three bedrooms, a storage room, servants quarters and a garage. Their inhabitants also had access to a communal garden.

The Cultural Affairs Bureau has transformed both the apartments of one of the buildings into the carefully curated Xian Xinghai Memorial Museum. Perhaps the



most outstanding Chinese composer of the 20th century, Xian was born in Macao in 1905 and remains celebrated for his *Yellow River Cantata*.

#### DR SUN YAT-SEN MEMORIAL HOUSE

Hailed as the pioneer of China's democratic revolution, Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) has close ties with Macao. While the doctor who ignited a revolution that overturned 2,000 years of imperial rule was born in Guangdong Province, his father spent much of his early life in Macao. Sun himself moved to Macao in 1892, where he worked at Kiang Wu Hospital as the first Chinese doctor to practise Western medicine.

Sun spent just over a decade living between Macao, where he treated patients, and Hong Kong – where he conspired to bring down the Qing dynasty. During this time, he befriended Francisco Hermenegildo Fernandes, a Portuguese printer and translator who shared his anti-imperialist philosophy and later settled in Macao. In 1895, after the doctor incited an unsuccessful uprising in Guangzhou that blackened his name with China's imperial

rulers, Fernandes helped smuggle Sun out of Macao and into Japan.

As a token of his gratitude, Sun gifted his Portuguese friend many of his belongings. These are now on display at the Dr Sun Yat-sen Memorial House, located at 1 Rua de Silva Mendes, in São Lázaro District.

Sun never actually lived in this house, which was in fact built in 1931 – after his death. The three-storey neo-Arabic structure was a replacement for the house Sun had purchased for his first wife, Lu Mu-zhen, and their three children back in 1912. That original residence was destroyed in 1931 because of an explosion at a nearby munitions warehouse. The house, with its ornate verandahs, remained Lu's home until her death in 1952.

The building opened to the public as the Dr Sun Yat-sen Memorial House in 1958. Today it is a boutique museum, full of artefacts and exhibits honouring the remarkable life and many chapters of its famous namesake. The Memorial House is located very near the Lou Lim Ieoc Garden, where Sun was received during his first visit to Macao after the 1911 Xinhai Revolution successfully led to China becoming a republic.





### THE COLOANE PUBLIC HEALTH STATION-TURNED-CUSTOMS OFFICE

Coloane didn't get its first public health station until the 1930s due to the island's sparse population. The low-slung, Modernist structure initially hosted clinic hours on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays with a doctor trained in Western medicine – dispatched from Conde S Januário Hospital. Only simple illnesses were treated at this *posto sanitario* ('public health station' in Portuguese). Anyone with a serious ailment was sent to Macao Peninsula, where more advanced medical assistance was available.

However, most Coloane residents at the time were Chinese and unfamiliar with Western medicine. They tended to favour traditional cures and seek remedies from local herbalists. As such, the *posto sanitario* saw little traffic. By the early 1970s, the station had been abandoned.

Later that decade, its building was repurposed as a customs office manned by

the police. Initially it served as a declaration point for Hengqin merchants bringing agricultural products by boat into Macao to sell. In the 1980s, the Macao Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau also set up shop in the building; for a time, it was where typhoon warnings were hoisted from.

From the 1990s onwards, Macao residents travelling by boat from Coloane to Hengqin have had to pass through the former *posto sanitario* and complete their formalities in the building. In 2001, the Macao Customs Service officially took control of the building. It was renamed the Customs Office of the Port of Coloane and Ká-Ho and has served that purpose ever since.

The pale yellow building itself is a fine example of Modernist architecture with Art Deco influences. It also boasts an admirable feat of form and function: this cantilevered sun shield encircles the office, protecting those in need of its services from sun and rain. ●

This seemingly humble slaughterhouse in Barra captures a transitional period in Macao's modern history

(Opposite page)  
The massive cantilevered sun shield is the most striking feature of this health station-turned-customs office

### BARRA'S FORMER SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Within walking distance of one of Macao's most iconic buildings, the 500-year-old A-Ma Temple, is a former slaughterhouse (mostly) erected in the 1880s. Despite its more earthly purpose, the slaughterhouse complex holds cultural and architectural significance for the city. Painted buttery yellow with red ochre trim, its buildings are some of the few left epitomising the municipal construction style of 19th-century Macao.

Importantly, the Barra slaughterhouse also represents Macao's progressive modernisation. The city's sole abattoir for much of the 20th century, it underwent significant changes over time – mainly in response to calls for better sanitation and to accommodate a growing volume of cattle and pigs entering the territory for slaughter.

The complex included a quarantine area, barns and holding pens, a killing zone and facilities for butchering animals whose meat supplied local markets.

It was at this dock-side location where meat processing and transportation was gradually standardised in Macao, with improvements to sanitation and machinery making operations ever-safer and more efficient.

The Barra slaughterhouse remained in operation for 100 years. Then, in 1987, the service was relocated to a newly built slaughterhouse in Green Island, the northwestern part of the Macao Peninsula. While part of the original slaughterhouse has been converted into offices for the Municipal Affairs Bureau, echoes of the building's past remain – including metal tracks across its ceiling from where carcasses were once hung.







ARTS & CULTURE

# *Intimate reflections*

WITH TWO **Macao artists**

Local artists Lai Sio Kit and Leong Chi Mou are members of the Macau Youth Art Association. In their most recent exhibition at Tap Seac Gallery, they offered two very different creative interpretations of their city.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**  
Photos **Lei Heong Jeong**

Lai Sio Kit (opposite page) and Leong Chi Mou bring out different aspects of the city in their art

With summer afoot, Macao's art scene blooms, treating the public to a feast of exhibitions that included "Waiting: An Act of Faith". Organised by a collective of 16 local artists whose works spanned a wide range of media (from traditional oil painting to ship timber to plexiglass), the exhibition was displayed at one of the city's eminent cultural nexuses: the Tap Seac Gallery.

In its name, "Waiting: An Act of Faith" hinted at the struggle many artists experience during the creative process, when progress is often hounded by uncertainty, doubt, and anticipation. Waiting in this sense is far from a passive state but an active and essential part of the artistic journey.

The exhibition, which ended on 28 May, was organised by the Macau Youth Art Association, an artist-run collective that started out as the youth committee of the Macau Artist Society – an organisation that dates back to the mid-1950s. Due to an increasing number of young artists living and working in Macao, the association became a not-for-profit art organisation in 2019. Today it's dedicated to nurturing an emerging generation of creative talent and introducing Macao's art market to their rich realm of output.

*Macao* magazine caught up with two of the collective's artists, Lai Sio Kit and Leong Chi Mou, to learn about their creative processes and the work they had on display.



(Centre) Lai Sio Kit explores the realm of oil paints, harnessing their plasticity and potential for endless artistic possibilities

Lai Sio Kit in his studio



#### LAI SIO KIT: PAINTING THE 'CITY'S SKIN'

Macao-born Lai had always wanted to become a painter. While the Macau Youth Art Association's director has never been one to shy away from artistic experimentation (he's worked with sculpture, drawing, wood blocks and mixed media), Lai specialises in a tried and tested medium: oil painting. He earned a master's degree in that very field from Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2009, and it's what he teaches upcoming artists to master today.

"Oil painting is a skill that was invented to depict scenes realistically," explains Lai, who is in his early 40s. "This medium has a high level of plasticity, so it has never been phased out [by other types of paint]. You create many possibilities with oils."

To date, Lai has more than 20 solo exhibitions under his belt. His work can be broadly divided into two themes: cityscapes and the natural world. The first is inspired by Macao's rooftops, in particular those of older buildings with tin sheds perched on their upper terraces.



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An oil painting is traditionally regarded as something displayed on a wall. But could it be extended into a new form of art?

– Lai Sio Kit

The artist enjoys spending time in these quiet spaces that he says lend themselves to creative contemplation. Their bird's-eye view they offer also gives Lai an alternative perspective of his home town. "This view is like seeing the city's skin," he notes.

Last year, Lai exhibited his series of tiny abstract oil paintings – thousands of squares resembling the aged tiles that cover so many of Macao's building exteriors. "They are the patterns of the city; some in the Portuguese style, and some are Chinese," he describes.

That artwork, titled *As Time Goes By*, was displayed as a massive mosaic pasted across the host gallery's walls, ceiling and floor. Viewers encountered an immersive experience designed to make them question the perceived limitations of oil paintings.

"An oil painting is traditionally regarded as something displayed on a wall," Lai explains. "But could it be extended into a new form of art? For this exhibition, I explored the formats in which oil paintings could be presented. I spread the tiles all over the gallery, hoping to interact with the space [in a new way]."



A bird's-eye view inspired the dynamic clouds of Lai's *White Shades* series

(Opposite page) Leong understands that, for some, the draw of exhibitions is to take selfies with the art



### A LOVE OF THE NATURAL WORLD

Nature is the painter's other refuge. An avid hiker, Lai relishes the forests of the mainland, Taiwan and Japan. He also regularly visits Coloane to soak up its green spaces. His nature-inspired art tends to focus on small details. Cloud movements, for instance, or the subtle details of trees.

Lai's 2023 series titled *White Shades* came about after a flight over China's Xizang, during which he'd observed clouds swirling around the mountains beneath his plane. Captivated by what struck him as a kind of cloud choreography, Lai began exploring ways to capture their serene kineticism on canvas.

"The clouds and the snowy mountains offered me a peaceful feel," the painter shares. "In each *White Shades* painting, I used one dominant, dark colour, such as blue or grey. Then, on top of that, I detailed my application of various lighter colours to suggest the light in the dark and the movement in still imagery."

A large artwork from *White Shades* was Lai's contribution to the collaborative exhibition displayed at Tap Seac Gallery. It is an arresting painting, with urgent strokes of white paint daubed over a deep blue background, evoking the image of clouds being blown across the night sky. Measuring 2 metres wide and 1.7 metres high, Lai mentioned that it is uncommon to find exhibition spaces in Macao that can accommodate paintings of this size.



### LEONG CHI MOU'S ANTI-ELITISM TAKE ON ART

While Lai is known for his sombre palette and meditative themes, the artist Leong Chi Mou's work exudes a distinct playfulness. He uses oil-based paints, but also embraces acrylics, gold lacquer and silver leaf – among other forms of pigmentation. Leong doesn't limit himself to a traditional canvas base, either. His installations often involve plexiglass, electric wires or household objects.

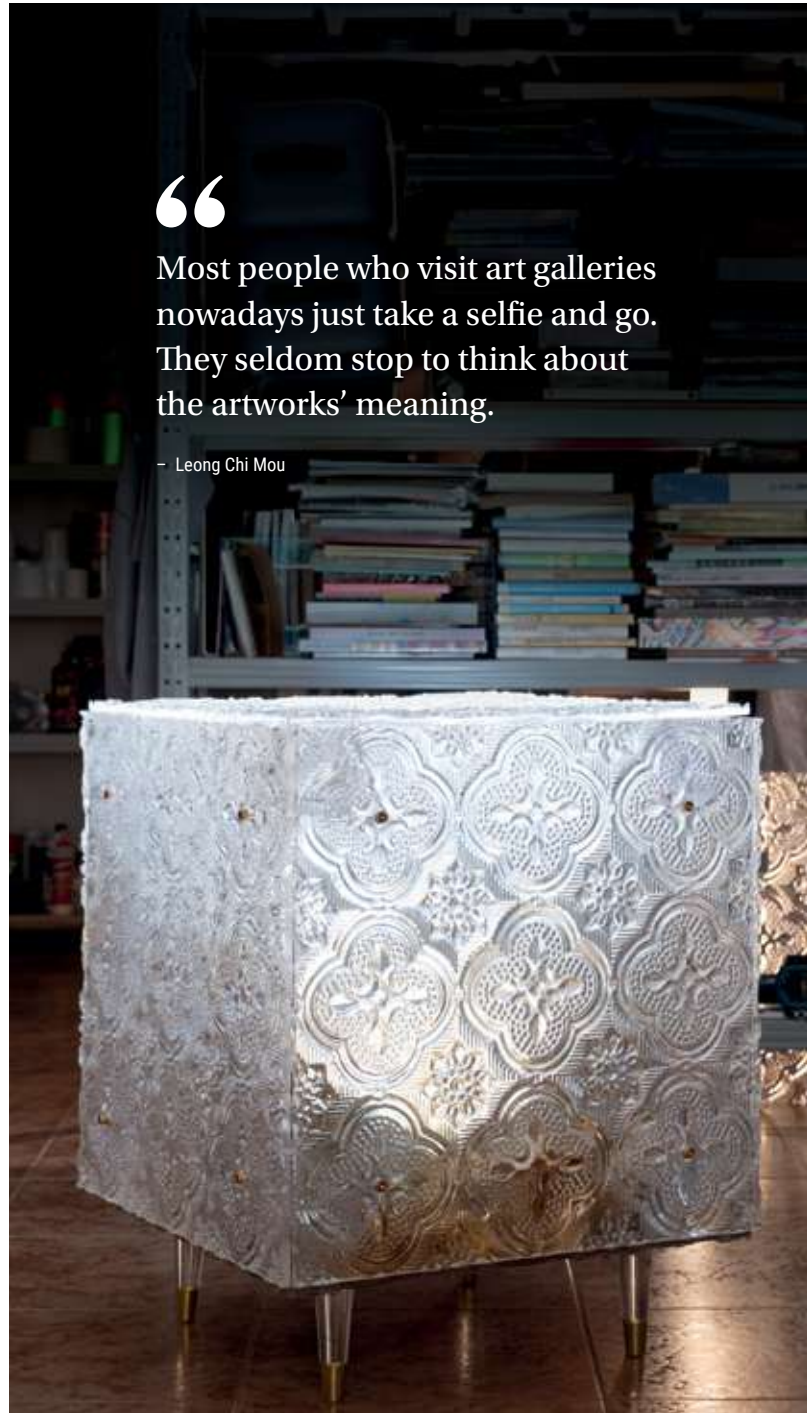
Leong, in his early 30s, rejects the notion that great art should be the realm of the cultural elite. In fact, he's on a mission to tear down barriers between art and the masses. Case in point: Some of Leong's favourite places to find materials for his art are hardware stores and supermarkets, much like his pop art predecessors.

"I tend to use materials that are widely seen in everyday life in my work," he says. "These materials contain a language. They speak to my practice and also speak to

my audience by making art more accessible to the public, not just for the elites."

Leong's introduction to art came via television, where he copied traditional Chinese painting techniques from shows as a child growing up in the mainland. He and his family moved to Macao when he was 12 years old and as a teen he began spray painting graffiti-style words on empty walls (with their owners' permission). That's when he began seeing himself as an artist.





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Most people who visit art galleries nowadays just take a selfie and go. They seldom stop to think about the artworks' meaning.

– Leong Chi Mou

Leong's piece blurs the line between furniture and art

(Opposite page) Leong draws on Macao's architectural history to create a floral motif for his plexiglass sculpture

“It was the first time I realised my work was actually being shown publicly,” he explains. “So, I thought about how to beautify it while also maintaining a radical and rebellious character.” Later, he took up photography. Then he studied oil painting at the Macao Polytechnic Institute's art school.

Leong enjoys weaving topics of public discourse into his art to make it of the zeitgeist. For example, his 2023 piece *Love From Bay Area* was a voice-activated fan made out of three vehicle registration plates – one from Macao, one from Hong Kong and one from Guangdong Province. The administrative intricacies of obtaining all three registration plates was a hot topic at time, and Leong says he was curious about the sort of person who could manage it.

### 'GOOD LOOKING BUT USELESS'

His work in “Waiting: An Act of Faith” takes the form of a large cabinet made of transparent acrylic plastic and metal. Leong calls the piece *Faidoennakel* – a take on the Portuguese for ‘made in Macao’ (*feito em Macau*). He wanted the word to sound like a Western brand, intending it as a metaphor for consumerism in the art world. Leong got the idea while thinking about *when*, exactly, most people in Chinese society buy artwork. It tends to be when they are furnishing their home, he says. So, they buy art at the same time as functional furniture – as something to fit in with the rest of their decor, not based on its artistic meaning alone. He also owns a Mona Lisa-brand toilet, which struck

him as a humorous merging of art and appliances.

Leong's plexiglass cabinet was made to resemble a style of decorative glass window commonly seen in Macao buildings built between the 1950s and 1980s. The window features a floral motif, more specifically a begonia. According to the artist, these windows are “part of the architectural characteristics of Macao and part of the city's history.”

*Faidoennakel* is meant to spark conversations around what art actually is. While the piece looks like a cabinet – ie furniture – it is nailed shut, so not functional. Is that what makes it art? Leong, however, holds no illusions on what his exhibit will most likely end up being used for: a background for selfies, he laughs. “Most people who visit art galleries

nowadays just take a selfie and go,” he says. “They seldom stop to think about the artworks' meaning. So, I've created this good-looking yet useless example of both artwork and furniture for people to take selfies with.”

The exhibition “Waiting: An Act of Faith” offered a diverse experience, catering to those seeking selfies, inspiration, cultural enrichment, or new additions to their art collections. The pop artist Leong expressed his anticipation for the local community's connection with art during the exhibition. Meanwhile, Lai applauded the city's support for homegrown artists like himself and other members of the Macau Youth Art Association, emphasising the importance of working hard to blaze a trail. ●



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## ARTS & CULTURE

# Guangcai porcelain: Macao's all but forgotten artform and industry

At age 70, Lei Iat Po believes he's the youngest Guangcai porcelain master left in Macao. And he's working hard to keep his beloved craft – and a beautiful piece of the territory's cultural heritage – alive.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**  
Photos **Cheong Kam Ka**

Ceramic artist Lei Iat Po integrates local cultural motifs into his porcelain works

For the past 60 decades, much of the Macao-born ceramic artist Lei Iat Po's life has revolved around Guangcai porcelain. He'd always been into painting; the 70-year-old recalls his grandfather rewarding him for a particularly beautiful goldfish he'd painted as a young boy. Later, he worked at his father's porcelain factory in Areia Preta, in the north of Macao. Then Lei went on to open his own Guangcai operation in the mainland before returning to Macao.

Guangcai, also known as Cantonese porcelain, is an elegant style of ceramics characterised by its fine quality, gilt and bold colours. Traditionally manufactured for

foreign markets, the centuries-old craft is known for combining Eastern and Western imagery. While Guangcai first emerged more than 300 years ago, on the mainland, the mid-late 20th century saw it boom in Macao. It became an important yet relatively short-lived export industry for the city.

Lei is one of few practitioners left in Macao, and fears the artform is at risk of being forgotten. His efforts to keep Guangcai alive and relevant have earned him numerous awards – including a National Craftsman Cup (gold) at the The GHM Greater Bay Area Arts and Crafts Expo in 2018. That same year, he was recognised as a Macao Arts and Crafts Master by the Macao Arts and Crafts Association, with a judging panel composed of Guangcai experts from the mainland. Guangcai itself made it onto Macao's list of Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2020, to Lei's intense satisfaction.

### 'WEAVING GOLD' INTO PORCELAIN

Guangcai porcelain was invented during the Kangxi period of the Qing dynasty. An art lover, the Kangxi Emperor invested heavily in China's ceramics industry. It was he who reopened the imperial kilns of Jingdezhen, in Jiangxi Province. The country's porcelain capital had been neglected prior to his reign.



While Jingdezhen's exquisite white porcelain laid the foundation for the Guangcai tradition, Guangcai itself originates in Canton (now Guangzhou), Guangdong Province. Porcelain 'biscuits' (bowls, vases and plates that had been shaped and fired but not yet glazed) were transported from Jingdezhen's kilns to workshops in Canton for embellishment. That process involved skilled Guangcai craftsmen meticulously applying lavish gold trim to a biscuit's still-porous surface to achieve the glitzy hallmark of Guangcai porcelain, then overglazing it with colourful, auspicious imagery depicting the likes of pak choi, butterflies, birds, flowers, and roosters (often to the bespoke demands of Western traders). A second firing followed, at a subdued temperature, giving the resulting piece its luxuriant sheen.

Guangcai is sometimes described as being 'woven with gold and layered with jade'. Weaving with gold is in reference to what Lei believes to be the ceramic style's aesthetic inspiration: Cantonese embroidery. "In Cantonese embroidery, gold threads are woven on the cloth as a base layer," he explains. "On top of that, you embroider auspicious motifs, such as dragons, phoenixes, bats, fruits and flowers. The composition is dense and rich in imagery."

Guangcai was one of China's staple exports when the Canton System (1757-1842) was in place - the period when all foreign trade flowed in and out of Guangzhou.

#### HOW MACAO'S OWN GUANGCAI MASTER LEARNED HIS CRAFT

During World War II (1939-1945), a lot of Guangzhou's Guangcai porcelain factories shut down. Many of their workers fled to Macao and Hong Kong, where they put their knowledge and skills to good use and introduced both

cities' existing ceramicists to the specialised techniques of Guangcai. According to Lei, most of Macao's porcelain factories were based along Rua de Pedro Nolasco da Silva, in central Macao, at the time, and northern Macao's Areia Preta. Their customers were mainly based in the US and Europe.

Lei's father worked closely with the Rua de Pedro Nolasco da Silva ceramicists in the 1960s; he made the wooden bases used alongside porcelain wares. As kids, Lei and his brothers would help out at these factories. He clearly remembers the excitement of being 7 years old and earning enough money to visit the cinema.

In 1974, his dad opened his own porcelain factory. Lei moved into it and began observing the Guangcai artisans at work. In his eyes, the whole process was fascinating. Soon, his father asked a master kiln operator with the surname Chiu to teach Lei how to fire the glazed ceramics. Chiu had some rather unorthodox advice for his apprentice: start smoking cigarettes.



Image courtesy of Lei Iat Po



"Back then, there was no thermometer," Lei says. "I had to man the kilns by watching the intensity of the flame, and Chiu said the best way to pick up that skill was to learn to smoke. From cigarettes, I learned to discern the intensity of a flame, and that helped me judge if the kiln was at the right temperature."

If the flame burned too hot it would damage the porcelain, and the wares would be thrown away "like rubbish", says Lei. A kiln that wasn't hot enough, meanwhile, would fail to produce the waterproof, shiny surface required of Guangcai.

These days, kiln temperatures are regulated automatically and "it is certainly more convenient," Lei notes. "You can set the timer and go to sleep." But the craftsman is grateful he learned the hard way, believing his hands-on experience at the kiln to have made him better at his job.

After mastering the kiln, Lei learned how to apply gold paint to porcelain's edges. And that was as far as the factory workers were prepared to teach him. Lei summed their reluctance up with an old Cantonese saying: "When a student learns the knowledge, the teacher will lose their job." Instead of painting roosters and pak choi, he was relegated to unpacking the endless boxes of white porcelain biscuits arriving from the mainland and Japan (Jingdezhen had long-lost its monopoly on making porcelain by Lei's time; high quality products could be sourced from elsewhere in the mainland and overseas).

In the end, Lei taught himself how to execute the Guangcai painting style. He'd diligently practise in his own time, leaning into the natural artistic talent he'd shown as a boy.

Some of Lei's works customised according to Western clients' requirements and tastes





Image courtesy of Lei Iat Po

The artist working on a large vase

## TRANSITIONS

By the early 1980s, the mainland's Guangcai industry had bounced back. The tides changed: stiff competition from Guangdong Province forced many of Macao's Guangcai factories to shut up shop, or switch to producing other products. Lei's father's factory began sewing garments, for instance. This came as a blow to Lei, who loved the art of Guangcai. But he knew he needed to be pragmatic: by then he had his own family to feed. So, he put his artistic aspirations on pause to work first as a button maker, then for Banco Nacional Ultramarino.

As it turns out, he didn't stay away from Guangcai for long. In 1986, Lei and a number of other Macao ceramicists banded together to capitalise on Guangdong's

Guangcai boom. They established their own porcelain factory in Zhuhai, initially sharing a furniture merchant's premises. The business grew quickly. Before long Lei's factory was employing 300 workers, who did everything in-house: from manufacturing the fine porcelain biscuits to painting Guangcai's signature designs.

By the end of the 1990s, Guangcai market was overcrowded. Lei's enterprise couldn't stay afloat amidst all the rival factories, and supply was outstripping demand. Again, he was forced to pivot – though not so dramatically this time. Lei reinvented himself as an independent, small-scale maker and teacher of Guangcai porcelain.

These days, Lei works out of a studio in Zhuhai while also conducting ceramics classes for hobbyists in local arts centres like Porcelarts Macau. The year 2023 was a big year for him. Not only was he invited by the Centro de Cultura e Artes Performativas Cardeal Newman de Macau to hold a series of Guangcai painting workshops (as part of the event, "Reuniting Porcelain: An extended experience of Macao's Canton Porcelain"), he also staged his first solo exhibition at local creativity incubator 10 Fantasia.

Lei titled his show "Kong Ngee Guangcai", the name of his father's old porcelain factory (meaning 'the art of light'). "That show was only about me," he says. "But I hope to

witness more exhibitions of Macao-made porcelain artwork in my lifetime. More exhibitions about the industry." Lei points out that Macao already plays host to many ceramics exhibitions of remarkable work from the mainland and Hong Kong. In his view, it is important to showcase home-grown porcelain, too.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

There are about 40 of the old Guangcai masters left in Macao, according to Lei. The men stay in touch via a WeChat group, of which he – already a septuagenarian – is the youngest. Lei admits he's worried that the delicate art of Guangcai will someday vanish in Macao, along with his generation. There aren't many people with the time and energy to master such a painstakingly precise craft: just learning to paint decent Guangcai-style designs can take up to a decade, Lei sighs.

Ideally, he would like to see the government do more to subsidise and promote what he believes is a unique part of the city's artistic heritage: "It certainly carries significance," he says.

When Lei reflects on other industries that have fallen by the wayside (fireworks manufacturing and shipbuilding are examples), he says he sees the efforts taken to celebrate and honour their contributions to the city. Both the former Iek Long Firework Factory and the Lai Chi Vun Shipyards have been turned into museums of sorts; they are places where people can gather to learn about fascinating yet often overlooked chapters of Macao's history. ●







All images on this spread courtesy of Leong Chong Leng

## SPORTS

# The wushu way

In *wushu*, Macao has proven itself to be small but mighty. The SAR has become one of the world's top performers, rivalled only by lands with far larger populations. Credit for this incredible run of success goes to forward-looking investments in the martial arts.

Text **Kenny Fong**

(Opposite page) Leong Chong Leng practises a variety of unarmed martial arts and can deftly handle weapons such as the sword and double chain whip

Leong (right) training 1,200 tai chi practitioners at Tap Seac Square for the 1999 handover performance

When Leong Chong Leng immigrated to Macao in 1978, he says most parents had one rule for their children: they could not take up martial arts, a practice associated with fights and crime.

The SAR has come a long way since then.

Martial arts have boomed in Macao. Whether it is tai chi or *wing chun*, a branch of kung fu preserved as an intangible cultural heritage, the different disciplines have courted many thousands of practitioners.

Some, like Leong, a martial arts champion in the 1980s and 1990s, have even won global competitions as representatives of Macao.

It is in Leong's sport of wushu where Macao has truly punched above its weight.

At the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou last year, Macao won four medals in wushu, including one gold, as star athlete and Silver Lotus recipient Li Yi was crowned champion in women's *changquan*, one of three wushu disciplines. Just weeks later, she became world champion in *qiangshu* at the 2023 World Wushu Championships in Dallas, Texas.

Her win in Dallas was one of 11 medals won by Macao – five gold, two silver and four bronze – placing the city in third place.

To compete with global powerhouses, Macao and its athletes have had to focus on sustainable progress. The city's success in the sport is the result of discipline, dedication and steady investment. Not least the establishment of the Wushu General Association of Macau (WGAM).







Xinhua News Agency

Li Yi helped Macao bag gold in several competitions including the World Wushu Championships and the Asian Games

(Right) The four medals that Macao earned during the 19th Asian Games were all from wushu events

(Opposite page) Lei Man Iam brought the Chen-style of tai chi to Macao during the late 1980s

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF WUSHU**

Wushu, meaning ‘martial technique,’ is a display- and contact-based competitive discipline based on several Chinese fighting techniques. As a sport, though, it is relatively young.

The development of organisations such as the Shanghai Jing Wu Physical Association and the inaugural Chinese National Wushu Games in Shanghai in the early 20th century helped to codify and modernise martial arts traditions. Later, the founding of the International Wushu Federation (IWUF) in 1990 created the first global governing body, which catalysed its growth outside the country. The sport has since expanded to 155 national federations under the IWUF, and it has twice been shortlisted for inclusion in the Olympic Games.

As a tradition, though, wushu has existed perhaps for millennia. The IWUF believes its history goes as far back as the Bronze Age (3000 to 1200 BC).

Xinhua News Agency



Even so, the martial arts did not arrive in Macao until the late Qing dynasty (circa 1644-1911). Later, when the imperial Japanese army invaded China, many Chinese residents fled to Macao, bringing wushu with them. They established schools, and soon the martial art took off.

**HOW MACAO BECAME A HOTBED FOR WUSHU TALENT**

In 1982, Ho Yin, the father of Macao’s first chief executive, Edmund Ho, set out to establish a wushu association to elevate the martial arts. Ho passed away in 1983, putting the project on hold, but his son would bring his vision to life. On 28 June 1988, the WGAM was founded.

“The martial arts world has always been a patriotic community,” explains Leong, who today coaches wushu and is a vice president of the WGAM. By uniting athletes in an official organisation, “[wushu practitioners] would be able to support the nation in times of need.”

Despite its martial roots, wushu has largely grown as an artform.

For years, the different practitioners and their institutions would gather for the annual National Day Celebration on 1 October. They would perform and compete at Cinema Alegria, or the Campo dos Operários (a sports ground where the Grand Lisboa now stands), or the Tap Seac Football Ground, which was replaced with Tap Seac Square in 2007.

Wushu masters in Macao such as Chiu Chuk Kai, known for the ‘praying mantis’ style; Man Chong

Kong, a proponent of Choy Li Fut, one of the city’s most popular forms of wushu; and Lei Man Iam, a teacher of Chen-style tai chi, have illuminated its diversity, fluidity and complexity.

These events and teachers helped to establish wushu as a sport of purity, focus and discipline.

When the WGAM was founded, the city’s leading athletes and emerging talents had more formal competitions and pathways to develop. Today, with 118 affiliated organisations and close to 10,000 members, the WGAM plays an indispensable role in competitive wushu in Macao.



Image courtesy of Rui Lei



According to Leong, the association holds a number of regular competitions each year, including the Macau Wushu Championship and the Macau Junior Wushu Championship, both essential recruiting events for the junior and senior national teams. Leaders such as Leong do not solely focus on gold medal winners, either. The competitions, he explains, often bring candidates who display potential for excellence to the WGAM's attention, even if they did not win gold.

Thanks to the WGAM, Macao has so far supported three Asian Games winners: Li Yi, as well as Jia Rui and Huang Junhua, who won gold in men's wushu in 2010 and 2018, respectively.

### TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Success in any athletic endeavour requires commitment. Wushu is no different. "The hours are very long," says Leong. Elite athletes train from 6 pm to 9 pm every night but Sunday all year long. "If you don't train consistently, the physical gains from your earlier training will disappear," he explains.

But Macao athletes have bought into the intense training programmes, and the WGAM in turn has provided new opportunities that have helped them reach new heights.

The teams regularly train with some of the best wushu athletes in the mainland. "Sometimes we train in Beijing, Fujian and the different provinces," Leong says. "We do short-term training in whichever place has a higher level of wushu [mastery], especially during the summer."

The Macao government has been essential for these off-site training trips, covering expenses for up to 30 athletes each time. The government has also given the association's junior and senior martial artists access to its Athlete Training and Development

Centre, where they can train using top class facilities and equipment. The Sports Bureau collaborated with the WGAM to establish the Macau Wushu Youth Academy as well. This academy launched in 2007 and has proven itself vital to training Macao's next generation of wushu talent.

The investments have paid off beyond Macao's recent run of medals on the global stage.

Wushu's image has evolved since Leong arrived. The WGAM has stressed *wude* (武德), the martial arts code of conduct, to frame its inherent sense of camaraderie and respect for others. By promoting the benefits of wushu, tai chi and other martial arts on the body and the mind, the WGAM has helped Macao residents improve their well-being. Martial arts are not solely the domain of elite athletes; rather, they can be the foundation for a healthy and active lifestyle.

Wushu may be young as a competitive sport, but it is growing rapidly. A wushu tournament took place alongside the 2008 Olympics in Beijing as an unofficial sport – the first time the International Olympic Committee allowed such an event, owing to its cultural significance. In 2026, it will debut at the Youth Olympic Games held in Dakar, Senegal. The Olympic Committee has promised to deliberate on the sport's future in the Olympic Games following that event.

It is clear that wushu is on the rise. Thanks to the government's continued investment in the sport, Macao athletes could soon add more impressive international titles to their growing mantle of medals, though they cannot yet compete in the Olympics due to Macao's status as a non-member of the International Olympic Committee. ●



Jia Rui taking part in the *daoshu* event at the 12th World Wushu Event held in Malaysia in 2012

(Right) Huang Junhua won bronze in the male *nanquan* event at the 19th Asian Games



Xinhua News Agency



Established in December 2019, the Athlete Training and Development Centre has various facilities, including a five-floor training hall

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GREATER BAY AREA

# A new bridge brings opportunities to the GBA

The soon-to-open Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge will do more than reduce travel times between two Guangdong cities. The 24-kilometre cross-sea highway represents an increasingly unified Greater Bay Area, and the potential that holds for broader China.

Text Craig Sauer  
Photos Xinhua News Agency

The Lingdingyang portion of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge is high enough to accommodate the world's largest container ships

In early 2023, the builders of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge set a world record. They paved more than 22,600 square metres of asphalt in a single day, about the same as five football pitches. This achievement represented more than a fascinating piece of trivia. It made China's sizable ambitions in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) clearly known far and wide.

While it may not be the world's longest bridge across the sea – that title belongs to the 55-km Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge slightly further south – the 24-kilometre, eight-lane Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge underscores the tantalising potential of the GBA. And the investment that the country is willing to make in order to realise it.

To date, the cross-sea highway project has been eight years in the making. It boasts two artificial islands and an underwater tunnel almost seven kilometres long. With the concrete poured and the roads

paved, the bridge is nearly ready to open to traffic. When it does, the physical links between Shenzhen and Zhongshan – indeed, the entire GBA – will be stronger than ever.

## ADVANCING ECONOMIC GROWTH

The GBA has been a focal point for the country for decades. The framework for a unified economic region in south China has existed since at least the early 2000s, although it was previously referred to as the Pearl River Delta. The union of the two Special Administrative Regions (SARs) – Hong Kong and Macao – with nine mainland metropolises enticed policy planners with its outward looking economic potential. When the country's leaders unveiled the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development Plan in 2019, it was official recognition that the region's moment had arrived.



The GBA is home to a collective population of 86.3 million people, spread across 11 cities – including Guangzhou and tech hub Shenzhen, home to the likes of Tencent, Shein and DJI Innovations. As such, the region has long played an outsized role in China's economic contributions.

In 2023, the total economic output of the GBA came in at around 14 trillion yuan (15 trillion patacas). That was 11 percent of China's gross domestic product, from a region that amounts to just 1 percent of the country's land area and 6 percent of its total population.

The 2019 development plan laid out a vision to leverage the GBA's strengths via a roadmap that would transform the GBA into a centre for technology and innovation. Notably, the country's leaders declared that this development would be built around infrastructural connectivity. The announcement made sense: academics have spoken of the crucial role infrastructure plays in both China's domestic and international development projects, most visible in its Belt and Road Initiative.



The nascent GBA's first record-breaking infrastructural achievement actually opened before its development plan was unveiled, in the form of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (known as the HZMB). Construction commenced in 2009 and the bridge opened at the end of 2018. Physically and symbolically, it united both SARs and the mainland. The first cross-boundary land link between the cities created a one-hour living circle in the Pearl River Delta, boosting tourism, finance and business. On 13 February this year, the fourth day of the Lunar New Year, more than 144,000 passengers used the HZMB – setting a new single-day record.

#### FROM THE REGION TO THE WORLD

Now, the country's leaders believe the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge could expand the GBA's global impact. Bao'an International Airport in Shenzhen is the mainland's third busiest airport, recording more than 50 million passenger trips in 2023, according to official data. Travel between the airport and Zhongshan used to take up to two hours by car, a 100-kilometre journey skirting around the Zhujiang River Estuary. The bridge will slash that time to just 20 minutes.

Links like these are increasingly vital to the region's economy. Zhongshan is one of south China's most important industrial centres.

The 55-kilometre-long HZMB snakes its way across the Pearl River Delta

(Opposite page) Initially underutilised, recently the HZMB has set record after record for daily trips



**Alignment of SZL and road network in its vicinity**

- Major roads
- Expressways
- Roads under construction or under planning
- Administrative boundaries for municipalities or cities



Courtesy of Guangdong Transport Planning Institute

In recent years, the city has set out to transform its industries, especially manufacturing. In the first quarter of 2024 alone, Zhongshan broke ground on 69 projects worth nearly 64 billion patacas collectively. Most are related to advanced manufacturing, including 5G integrated semiconductors and new-generation optical communications, according to Zhongshan officials.

The city is undergoing an industrial overhaul, with its business parks and science centres being renovated to foster new ideas and advanced products. With the new bridge in place, Zhongshan’s industrial developments are not only closer than ever to Shenzhen’s tech start-ups (a mutually beneficial situation), but to international markets as well.

Zhongshan is rapidly growing, and the city is seeking to expand job prospects and investment potential. At the Zhongshan Municipal High-quality Development Conference in February, the city made a full-throated recruitment pitch to global talent. More than 100 key enterprises and scientific research institutes in Zhongshan jointly called for over 1,100 talented individuals to start businesses in the city.

That same month, at the 2024 Zhongshan Talent Introduction



Conference, the city welcomed more than 100 Chinese doctoral graduates from top global universities around the world – including Stanford, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard in the US, and Oxford University in the UK. The conference encouraged China’s top talent not only to contribute back home, but specifically in the burgeoning GBA.

**INVESTING IN THE FUTURE**

From Zhongshan to Hong Kong to Macao, China’s historic hub of trade and commerce is looking to the future. Holding true to the belief that infrastructure can drive growth, the nine cities and two SARs that make up

the GBA are witnessing tremendous developments that even include a game-changing new airport – the tentatively named Pearl River Delta Hub Airport (or Foshan Gaoming International Airport) in central Guangdong Province, which should have a passenger capacity of over 30 million by 2035.

When the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Bridge opens, it won’t just reduce travel times for car passengers. It will also lay the foundation for future growth across the GBA. The new bridge can unite the GBA like never before, drive development and transform entire industries. While there remain challenges to overcome, the opportunities are clear. ●

The new bridge will help fuel Zhongshan’s rapid development



HISTORY

# Flying into the unknown

One hundred years ago, Portuguese pilots undertook a remarkable journey, flying a small plane from Portugal to Macao over three and a half months. The expedition, led by Sarmento de Beires, Brito Pais and Manuel Gouveia, was a milestone in the history of aviation.



Courtesy from Museu do Ar-Portugal

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**  
Research **Jacinto de Jesus Tavares**

While her pilots survived the perilous journey, the *Pátria* was not so lucky

(Opposite page) José Manuel Sarmento de Beires (left), António Jacinto da Silva Brito Pais (centre) and Manuel António Gouveia made the historic – and dangerous – flight

In the aftermath of World War I, aeroplanes began to rule the skies.

Following French pilot Louis Blériot's historic crossing of the English Channel in 1909, the first public flight took place in February 1919. Soon, major powers, seeking to enhance their colonial prestige, began undertaking long-distance air travel – Portugal included.

Three Portuguese aviators – pilots Sarmento de Beires and Brito Pais and mechanic Manuel Gouveia – aimed to leave their own mark on aviation history.

The aviators attempted to fly from Lisbon to Madeira aboard the *Black Knight* in 1920 but failed. Undeterred, they regrouped and redirected

their efforts towards the South Atlantic crossing. However, Gago Coutinho and Sacadura Cabral had beaten them to it in 1922. And so the aviators shifted their focus once more, this time to Macao.

Departing 7 April 1924, the pilots this time would make history.

Although their small aircraft eventually crashed in China, brought down by a typhoon just 800 metres from the Hong Kong border, their journey was nevertheless a success. It demonstrated not only the increasing capabilities of aeroplanes for long-distance travel, but also the determination and pioneering spirit of early aviators.





Beires (left) and Pais pose alongside the original *Pátria*



### BUMPY SKIES AHEAD

For the voyage ahead, the three men elected to fly a Breguet 16 Bn2, equipped with a 300 horsepower engine and additional fuel tanks to extend its range.

Manufactured at the workshops of the Grupo de Esquadilhas de Aviação República in Amadora, near Lisbon, the plane was christened *Pátria* ('motherland'), the name proudly displayed on its fuselage.

In the early hours of 7 April 1924, the *Pátria*, piloted by Beires and Pais, took off from Milfontes, in the south of Lisbon. Gouveia, their mechanic, joined them later in Tunis.

The pilots got caught in a storm, which forced them to fly at a low

altitude over the Bay of Algeciras and make an emergency landing in Málaga. It was the first of many life-threatening challenges they would face.

"The engine failed due to a lack of gasoline, which, due to inertia, did not flow through the pipes," Beires wrote in the flight logbook.

Two days later, they arrived in Oran – a key aeronautical centre in Algeria – at La Sénia airfield, where they were welcomed by military aviators.

On 12 April, the *Pátria*, escorted by two French planes, continued its journey to Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, where it landed six hours later at Kassar Saïd airport. From there, Gouveia would join them for the rest of the voyage to Macao.

Images courtesy of National Geographic História (Portugal)

On 14 April, the three set course for Tripoli, in modern-day Libya, flying over the desert.

Beires vividly described the scene. "To the northeast, the houses of Tripoli shone in the sunlight. And as we approached, the city was a surprise, an amphitheatre over the sea, with a port - two granite arms embracing a small body of water - some ships, and the sandy airfield, six kilometres to the east, in a clearing surrounded by palm trees."

They rested for two days and resumed their journey on 16 April. However, strong winds forced them to make an emergency landing in Al-Khums. Two days later, the weather improved, and they set off again for Benghazi.

At an altitude of 2,400 metres, they were suddenly caught in a sandstorm. "It was dangerous to descend. The heat, the sand, the thin air could force us to land. For a moment, I lost the sense of the aircraft's horizontality. The red mist and the burning light of the sickly sun made me dizzy ... When we reached the bottom of the gulf, we experienced horrible moments. We lacked air. We



drank water every minute. Our blood throbbed violently in our veins," wrote Beires.

Their ordeal finally ended when the wheels of the *Pátria* touched down on the Benghazi airfield after a 900-kilometre flight.

### THE RACE TO MAKE HISTORY

On 20 April, the Portuguese airmen continued their journey towards Cairo – a day after an Englishman named Archibald Stuart-MacLaren had departed in an attempt to circumnavigate the world. No one was waiting for them upon arrival – the telegram sent from Benghazi arrived late – yet this was a momentous occasion.

Upon arriving in Cairo, the *Pátria* became the first Portuguese plane to cross North Africa.

Leaving Egypt would prove to be a challenge, however. On 23 April, while taking off, the plane burst a tire, damaging the landing gear. Since no replacement was available, they decided to use the landing gear from an English plane, a DH.9 that closely resembled the Breguet 16.





When they resumed their journey, they flew towards Rayak, Lebanon. Leaving behind Suez and Palestine, the *Pátria* flew smoothly at an altitude of 600 metres, passing over Lake Tiberias, Beirut and the picturesque mountains.

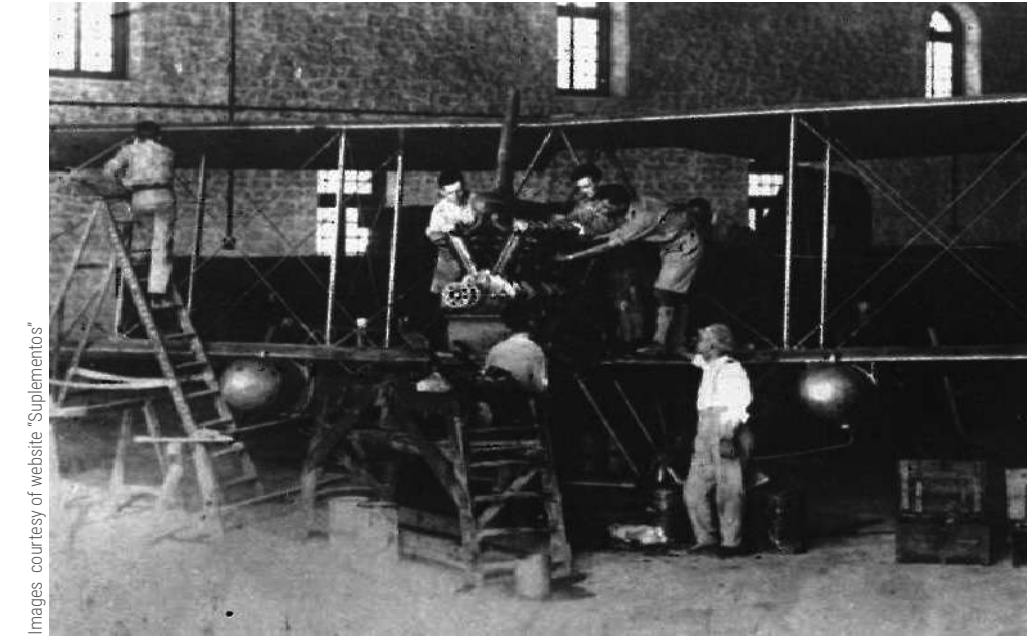
On 26 April, the aviators left Riyaq, cruising at an altitude of 2,700 metres as they made their way toward Baghdad. After a two-hour journey, they landed in Iraq. Around the same time, French pilot Pelletier Doisy also arrived. He was en route to Tokyo – one of many attempts in that time to push the boundaries of aviation science and human experience.

For the Portuguese, the next leg to Bushehr, in Iran, would prove challenging both physically and logistically. Intense heat battered the aviators over the 900-km journey. Their departure was briefly delayed as the authorities required a visa to leave the airfield, a matter resolved with the exchange of a few rupees.

On 2 May, they landed in Bandar Abbas, Iran, after flying 670 km, and spent the night at the residence of the English consul. The next day brought new challenges, including a flight across the hostile desert.

Shortly after takeoff, they encountered a sandstorm. “Heaven and earth disappeared before our eyes. A strange mist of sand and water vapour, driven by the furious lashings of an angry, tremendous wind, enveloped the *Pátria* as it entered like a train into a tunnel,” wrote Beires.

The crew managed to navigate



Images courtesy of website “Suplementos”

through the sandstorm, and as they approached their destination, the weather improved. After a gruelling six-hour flight, they touched down at the scorching Drigh Road airfield in Karachi. The worst was yet to come.

#### A NEARLY FATAL ATTEMPT

Early the next morning, the *Pátria* took to the skies, facing unfavourable weather conditions yet again.

“Visibility worsened with each passing moment. Despite our attempts to climb to a higher altitude in search of cooler air, the *Pátria* began to descend slowly, unable to sustain itself in the rarefied and scorching atmosphere.

“Gouveia struggled to breathe, while Pais perspired profusely. I summoned all my remaining energy and nerves to keep fighting, but by [10:35 am], we found ourselves

just 300 metres above the ground. The descent intensified amidst a sandstorm. Exhausted and aware of my own state ... we made the decision to land. Near a native village, I spotted a well-defined sandy area. I reduced the engine power and prepared for landing with the last ounce of energy I had left,” Beires wrote.

As they neared the ground, a powerful gust of wind engulfed the plane, causing it to break upon impact. The aviators, miraculously, escaped unharmed. Locals from a nearby village helped them transport the wreckage to a train station. Their journey had come to a halt outside Jodhpur in India’s Thar Desert.

The journey to Jodhpur, where the *Pátria* was originally scheduled to land, took two hours on a sweltering train. Out of courtesy and tradition, the city’s maharaja (Hindu monarch) accommodated the



One last photo in the early hours of 7 April 1924 before they set off from Milfontes, Portugal

(Opposite page) They carefully inspected the airplane in Karachi after surviving yet another sandstorm

aviators in his palace. Despite the regal surroundings, the three were restless. They wondered how to proceed with their mission.

Telegrams flew back and forth between Lisbon and Jodhpur. Portugal promised to provide another plane, a de Havilland DH.9A, and reiterated its commitment to the mission.

However, waiting for a replacement plane would entail significant delays. Instead, the pilots suggested purchasing another plane in India. Lisbon supported the idea, and the journey continued.

#### SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS

They acquired the de Havilland aircraft for 4,700 pounds while what was left of the *Pátria* was packed and sent back to Lisbon.

On 30 May, the new plane, named *Pátria II*, took off in the early hours of the morning, heading towards

Ambala in the Indian state of Haryana. During the two-hour flight, an English military plane flew nearby so that its pilot provided operating instructions.

On 1 June, *Pátria II* arrived in Calcutta, after a calm journey of 850 km over the fertile Ganges region and the Parasnath hills. The sailing was smooth again, but not for long.

The aviators arrived in Rangoon, Burma (now Yangon, Myanmar) on 6 June, after flying over the perilous Arakan Mountains. But the landing in Rangoon, on a horse-racing field, proved as challenging as flying over the mountain range.

Beires described making three attempts at landing, manoeuvring the aircraft lower even than the gilded Shwedagon Pagoda while skillfully avoiding a web of telephone wires.

Three days later, the *Pátria II* touched down in Bangkok without incident, as the final stages of their expedition neared.



### THE FINAL STRETCH

Setting off early on the 12 June from Ubon Ratchathani, they embarked on a nearly 900-kilometre journey to Hanoi. As they flew over the South China Sea, the engine began to falter. Concerned, Beires and Pais considered making an emergency landing. But they carried on, determined to reach their destination.

The weather conditions worsened, and visibility diminished, forcing them to navigate carefully over rice fields. Landing in these fields came with the risk of overturning the aircraft.



*Patria II* near her unexpected landing site: a Chinese cemetery

(Opposite page) 'Glory to the aviators' commands the text honouring the flight's two pilots, Pais and Beires

After a tense flight, they landed in Son Tay, near Hanoi, around midday. To ensure they didn't lose visibility, they had to fly just 20 metres above the ground during the final phase of the flight.

On 20 June, they made their final push, departing for Macao,

more than 1,000 kilometres ahead. Leaving Tonkin Bay with its brownish cumulus clouds behind, they flew with a sense of determination and anticipation. The engine operated admirably, and the weather looked clear.

Suddenly, the plane encountered increasingly intense showers, forcing them to climb to 2,800 metres in an attempt to escape the storm. The weather did not improve, and both the voltmeter and generator stopped working. Seizing an opportunity when an opening appeared in the cloud cover, they descended closer to the ground.

Amidst the relentless downpour, they broke through to the Isthmus of Macao, flying over Ilha Verde and Portas do Cerco. There was just one task to complete: land the plane.

In the inclement weather, their odds of landing safely were low. Pais informed Beires that they should head north towards Canton. But the strong winds made it impossible, and they had to alter their course to the east, towards Hong Kong.

It was a harrowing experience, lasting a mere five minutes. In the typhoon, the *Pátria II* was tossed around like a leaf in the wind. The engine gradually lost power until it stopped, exhausted. Flying over the railway line to Canton, they prepared for a forced landing.

The pilots found a small field near a Chinese cemetery and took a leap of faith, coming to a stop in just



100 metres. The plane hit a hedge, causing damage to the propeller and landing gear. The *Pátria II* could fly no longer, but it had taken the aviators to Asia.

### LEAVING THEIR MARK

Although they were unable to land in Macao, the population had heard the sound of the *Pátria II* piercing through the rain. Beires and Pais made their way to a small Chinese town near the emergency landing site, about 800 m from the Hong Kong border, where no one spoke English. Continuing their walk in the pouring rain, they reached Hong Kong.

On 21 June, the Portuguese Navy gunboat *Macao* conducted an extensive search for the plane. It was feared the aircraft had crashed in the sea, but the gunboat was able to locate the stranded aviators. The plane was dismantled and placed aboard the navy boat, and on 25 June, Beires and Pais, accompanied by their disassembled aircraft, arrived in Macao.

Their extraordinary adventure covered a staggering distance of 16,760 kilometres in 117 hours and 41 minutes of flight time. But in an instant, Sarmiento de Beires, Brito Pais and Manuel Gouveia solidified their places as pioneers, etching their names – and the name of Portugal – into the illustrious history of aviation. ●





ZOOM

# Tides of tradition





Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**  
Photos **Xinhua News Agency**

The dancers carry carved wooden dragon heads and tails on their shoulders, recalling the celestial dragon of legend

The Drunken Dragon Festival in Macao originated from a tradition in Xiangshan District (known as Zhongshan today), Guangdong Province, where a celestial dragon was believed to have descended to save the people from plagues. The festival, celebrated on the 8th day of the 4th lunar month, involves a dragon dance and offerings of ‘longevity rice’ to pray for good weather, fishing and health.

In the Ming dynasty, the “Drunken Dragon” celebration was already noted in the Chronicles of Xiangshan District. Between the 19th and 20th centuries, Xiangshan fish merchants collaborated with those in Macao to develop the Drunken Dragon Dance tradition in the territory, making it a

symbolic celebration of unity among all fresh fish distributors.

After periods of suspension, the festival was revived in 1946 and has since been celebrated annually, with the fish trade sector establishing the 8th day of the 4th lunar month as the Fish Merchants’ Union Day. While the fishing industry has declined over the decades, the festival has only grown. Today, it serves as a token of unity for union members and reminds residents of this important piece of Macao’s history.

In 2011 and 2017, the Macao Drunken Dragon Festival was recognised as an item of national and local intangible cultural heritage in China. ●





Furious sprays of rice wine punctuate the dance as the 'drunken' dancers entertain crowds along the parade route





Not all of the rice wine is expelled in a storm-like display – men also drink from the ceremonial flask as the ritual unfolds



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