

Macao 澳門

A National Day opening for the Macao Bridge



Sam Hou Fai:
Macao's chief
executive designate



**What we can
learn from China's
ancient bronzes**

ISSN 2076-5479
91772076547000

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COVER IMAGE
The Macao Bridge, which opened on National Day, is part of a new era of connectivity for the city

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A National Day opening for Macao Bridge

Macao marked the National Day of the People’s Republic of China with a momentous inauguration: after four years under construction, the fourth Macao-Taipa bridge opened to traffic and much fanfare. The new, eight-lane structure promises to be nothing short of a game-changer for the city.
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The architect Nunu Soares is determined to build a better Macao. His passion for the city he calls home is evidenced through numerous community initiatives. At the heart of his vision is the CURB, an organisation he founded to enhance Macao residents’ sense of place.
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How breaking found its footing in Macao

With the sport’s inclusion in the 2024 Paris Olympics, breaking is having its time in the sun. Find out how some of Macao’s pioneering B-boys graduated from practising headstands in their parents’ living rooms to wowing the crowds in ‘cyphers’ around the world.



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Autumn is upon us, meaning António Chao is back roasting chestnuts at his favourite spot in the heart of the old town. Meet the man keeping this family tradition alive, using the same trusty roasting machine his father did to prepare sweet-yet-smokey snacks beloved by locals and tourists alike.
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Ten companies from around the world took turns at dazzling the city in this year’s annual pyrotechnics competition. China’s Dancing Fireworks Company was the one that emerged triumphant.



Sam Hou Fai
on election day

POLITICS

Introducing Sam Hou Fai: Macao's chief executive designate

Sam Hou Fai has been a guiding force in Macao's legal system since the early 1990s. Now, after a decisive election result, the former judge is preparing to lead the Special Administrative Region into its sixth-term government. Sam has pledged to champion a dynamic Macao while safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests.

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**

After winning 394 votes from Macao's Chief Executive (CE) Election committee on 13 October, Sam Hou Fai became the Special Administrative Region (SAR)'s CE designate. On 25 October, the State Council officially appointed Sam to serve as Macao's sixth-term CE. The former president of the Court of Final Appeal will start his five-year tenure on 20 December, the same day the SAR celebrates its 25th anniversary.

At the State Council meeting, Premier Li Qiang said that the Central Government will maintain its firm commitment to the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle, allowing Macao to be governed by its own people and with a high degree of autonomy.

In the new CE designate's acceptance speech, he said he was humbled and excited for the opportunity to serve the city he "deeply loves". Sam promised to lean on the wisdom of Macao's people, utilising their strength to unite society and improve the livelihoods of everyone who calls the SAR home. Sam added that the love and

support of his own family had encouraged him to take on this new role, and he thanked his long-time former colleagues for being at his side throughout his 25 years at Macao's highest court.

The 62-year-old vowed to listen to public opinion, promote transparency and equip the SAR to flex its unique advantages as a key player within the country's Greater Bay Area during his tenure as CE.

Sam also promised to fully, accurately and steadfastly implement the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle while safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests. As per Macao's Basic Law, its CE is accountable to both the Central Government and the SAR.

Shortly after the election's result was announced, the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in Macao hailed Sam's win as "pioneering and emblematic". The office acknowledged that this was the first election to take place since amendments to the SAR's CE Election Law took effect, enforcing the principle of patriots governing Macao.



The current CE, Ho Iat Seng, extended his sincere congratulations to Sam, describing his successor as possessing a deep understanding of public sentiment. Ho said that Sam had demonstrated many outstanding qualities that were considered essential for the post of CE by the Central Government, including strong governance capabilities, love for the nation and Macao, and a high level of recognition within Macao society. He expressed confidence that Sam would adhere to the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle while promoting fresh advances for the SAR's next phase of development.

The CE and CE designate met in person at Government Headquarters the day after the election, and both promised to cooperate to ensure an orderly, well-executed leadership transition in December. Ho said he would issue an order providing the government with all the necessary resources to support and assist Sam as he prepared to form a new administration, for which Sam said he was grateful. Ho assured Sam that

the current government would continue to safeguard the stability and development of society as the SAR headed towards its 25th anniversary celebrations.

Hong Kong SAR CE John Lee was also quick to offer a congratulatory message, saying he looked forward to working closely with Sam in the future. Lee said that both SARs were committed to making new and greater contributions to building the country into a great modern state and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

A FIVE-POINT PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

When Sam unveiled his political platform in late September, he said that his administration would guide Macao through its next five years by "upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground." Sam outlined five key priorities for his upcoming term during that address.

Economic diversification would be one cornerstone of the new administration, he explained, building on the strong



foundations established during the current fifth-term government. While integrated tourism is set to remain the SAR's economic mainstay under Sam, the former judge stressed the importance of regulating the gaming industry to ensure its healthy development in accordance with the law, while encouraging growth in other sectors.

Public sector reform would be another cornerstone: Sam said he was committed to delivering transparent governance. He promised to further enhance the government's decision-making capabilities while improving coordination between its executive and legislative branches, and to always

uphold judicial independence. He said his administration would be characterised by open lines of communication with all sectors of society.

Sam also reaffirmed that national integration was crucial to Macao's progress. He said he aimed to see the SAR fully contribute to national development, strengthen its leadership in the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and participate more actively in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. He also expressed his desire for Macao to play a pivotal role in China's international relations through its connections with Portuguese-speaking countries and the Belt and Road Initiative.

The CE and CE designate met at Government Headquarters the day after the election

(Opposite page) Members of the Electoral Affairs Commission count votes on election day

(Opposite page) The new chief executive designate delivers his acceptance speech after his decisive win was announced

Sam Hou Fai announced his intention to run for the role of Macao's chief executive in August

Education, science, and technology would be focal points, too. Sam said he intended to cultivate local talent while attracting highly qualified professionals from abroad, to ensure Macao's sustained growth and competitiveness.

Sam's final priority related to improving Macao residents' quality of life. He promised to address key concerns around housing, healthcare and employment, building a better environment for everyone.

WHO IS SAM HOU FAI?

Born in Zhongshan, Guangdong Province, in 1962, Sam earned a law degree from Peking University

and pursued further studies in Portuguese law and culture at the University of Coimbra in Portugal. Sam has lived in Macao for more than half his life, and has been intimately involved in its legal system since the early 1990s.

When Macao was handed over from Portugal to China in 1999, Sam was appointed president of the Court of Final Appeal, the SAR's highest judicial body. He held that position until late August, when he resigned in order to focus on his candidacy for the role of CE. During his time at the court, Sam also served as president of the Council of Judicial Magistrates and as honorary chairman of the Macao Basic Law Promotional Association.

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Conferência de Imprensa

28 / 2024



Sam officially announced his intention to run for CE on 28 August. Throughout his campaign, Sam has consistently emphasised his commitment to building a dynamic and culturally vibrant Macao that's grounded in the rule of law. He has repeatedly expressed his confidence that, with strong leadership from the Central Government and collective efforts from the community, Macao will continue to thrive

under the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework.

"Right now, Macao is welcoming the best period of its development," the CE designate said in his acceptance speech after the election. "Let's grasp the opportunities and meet the challenges, work hard together and reform. We strive for development and prosperity, and to build our homes in a better way together." ●



POLITICS

‘The best development landscape in Macao’s history’

During his National Day speech in October, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng reflected on the work of the fifth-term government. His words radiated gratitude for the Central Government’s staunch support of the Special Administrative Region, and appreciation for the Macao people.

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng speaks during the commemorative reception for the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China

In his National Day speech marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Chief Executive (CE) Ho Iat Seng congratulated the Central Government on “achieving remarkable success in national development”. Naturally, Macao’s administrative return to the motherland was one such achievement, and Ho expressed his gratitude for the Central Government’s staunch backing over the past 25 years.

He said that, with the leadership of the central authorities and support from the mainland, all sectors of Macao had come together to “create the best development landscape in its history.”

Ho described the past quarter century as “a brilliant chapter in the successful practice of the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ principle with Macao characteristics.” He also praised “the

Chinese path to modernisation in the new era”, a concept outlined in the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Referencing the session, which took place in July, Ho spoke of the ambitious blueprint the Central Government had created for the nation. “Learning about and implementing [the blueprint] is now a significant political task for the Macao Special Administrative Region, and will remain so for some time to come,” he said.

The CE also reflected on the past five years of Macao’s developmental trajectory. Ho said that Macao’s government had remained committed to the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ principle throughout his term, and had strived to elevate all sectors within the territory to new heights. He outlined the six tasks the Special Administrative Region (SAR)’s Government had focused on over the past five years.

1. IMPLEMENTING A HOLISTIC VIEW OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Ho highlighted the government's success in amending the Law on Safeguarding National Security and related regulations to better protect the country, continuously improving organisational structures and enforcement mechanisms. The chief executive also noted that the government had broadly united and strengthened the patriotic forces that loved both the nation and Macao.

2. PROMOTING APPROPRIATE ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Reducing Macao's reliance on the gaming industry has been another major focus in the past five years. The CE hailed the '1+4' strategy, which aims to develop the key emerging sectors of health; modern financial services; high tech industries; and large-scale conventions along with sports and cultural events. This strategy forms the backbone of Macao's first comprehensive plan for appropriate economic diversification – which also involves implementing a new talent recruitment scheme designed to attract highly qualified professionals to the city.

Ho pointed to the many figures indicating Macao's robust post-pandemic recovery since the territory lifted its Covid-19 restrictions. For example, gross domestic product reached 204.3 billion patacas for the first six months of 2024, fast approaching its 2019 equivalent. Macao's

fiscal reserves are currently higher than they were before the pandemic, the overall unemployment rate is very low and visitor numbers are rebounding quickly.

3. IMPROVING RESIDENTS' WELL-BEING

Ho noted that the government had ensured investment in social resources and implemented a series of beneficial measures to promote sustainable development of social security systems, while continuously optimising housing, healthcare, education, and elderly-care services. The government is now implementing a five-rung housing ladder policy, involving investments of 15.9 billion patacas. He also pointed towards the recently opened Macao Union Hospital, which is set to take healthcare in the city to new heights.

4. ENHANCING EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Regarding governance, Ho said that the government had completed restructuring plans for 41 public departments and 19 autonomous funds in order to improve its operational efficiency. He highlighted a focus on developing systems of e-governance, citing the launch of the 2.0 version of the Macao One Account service as an example of this in action. For fresh progress on public administration reform, Ho noted that the government had refined systems for the delegation of power, and strictly implemented staff management, with the aim of creating a loyal, responsible, and efficient civil service.

5. BUILDING BETTER INFRASTRUCTURE

Over the past five years, Ho said that nearly 80 billion patacas had been invested in public works projects, including the Light Rapid Transit system, the newly opened Macao Bridge and extensive land

reclamation projects. He also spoke of projects designed to future-proof the city, such as a crucial rainwater pumping station to combat flooding during extreme weather events, the promotion of new-energy vehicles and strengthened environmental protection efforts.

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng with senior officials from the Central Government and his own administration toast the prosperity and future of the country during the commemorative reception for the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China





Macao hosted a ceremonial flag-raising at the Lotus Flower Square as part of its National Day celebrations, hoisting the flags of the motherland and the Macao Special Administrative Region

6. FURTHERING NATIONAL INTEGRATION

The CE described Macao as having “seized national development opportunities ... in order to create new prospects for the city”. As the SAR’s leader, Ho oversaw the official establishment of the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. Since then, Macao authorities have worked hand-in-hand with their counterparts in Guangdong Province to accelerate the two regions’ integration. Milestones have included the establishment of a special two-tier customs system and numerous incentives for Macao residents to live and work in Hengqin.

Through capitalising on its historic ties with the Lusophone world, Macao has also strengthened its role as a

commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries.

GIVING THANKS

Ho urged Macao to lean into its unique advantages and make “even greater contributions in the great rejuvenation of the nation.” He drove home the importance of adapting to changes and grabbing opportunities, including those presented during the Third Plenary Session.

Ho concluded his speech by reiterating his heartfelt thanks to the Central Government and everyone who “consistently cared about and supported Macao’s development”. That included Macao’s residents, for whom Ho expressed his sincere appreciation. ●

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THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF
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ECONOMY

A National Day opening for Macao Bridge

After more than four years of construction, the fourth Macao-Taipa bridge was inaugurated on National Day. It promises to ease traffic congestion, boost regional connectivity and support the city's efforts to become a World Centre for Tourism and Leisure.

Text **Amanda Saxton**
Photos **Xinhua News Agency**

The Macao Bridge was inaugurated on 1 October, coinciding with the National Day of the People's Republic of China. At a ceremony held that morning, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng described the bridge as a "splendid gift" that complemented the dual celebrations being held this year: the 25th anniversary of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

The approximately 3.1-kilometre structure is the fourth link between the Macao Peninsula and Taipa, and the closest one to the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB). Its opening is expected to streamline travel from the mainland city and the neighbouring SAR to Macao's south. The bridge's southern terminus in Pac On, where the inauguration ceremony took place, is close to the Taipa Ferry Terminal, the Light Rail Transit system and the international airport. The northern entry point is located in Zone A, a reclaimed residential area connected to the HZMB's Macao port of entry.

In his speech, Ho said that the new bridge would improve the well-being of residents, promote Macao's economic diversification and support the city's efforts to become a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure. He also emphasised that the bridge was a key infrastructure project supported by government policies aimed at enhancing urban planning and promoting sustainable development. Ho reaffirmed the government's commitment to further infrastructure projects that would bolster Macao's role within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.



Many high-ranking officials from the local and central governments attended the inauguration, including Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng (fifth from the right) and Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Ho Hau Wah (fifth from the left)

(Opposite page) Around 21,000 residents walked across the Macao Bridge two days before the official inauguration

The chief executive acknowledged the Central Government's support in building the bridge, noting that Xia Baolong, Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Communist Party of China's Central Committee and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, took the time to personally inspect its progress earlier this year. Ho also expressed gratitude for Beijing's continued backing of Macao under the 'One Country, Two Systems' framework.

With its eight lanes (four in each direction), the Macao Bridge is

expected to reduce traffic congestion by diverting about 30 percent of vehicles from the nearby Amizade (Friendship) Bridge during peak hours. Unlike the city's other bridges, this one features wind protection barriers, that could allow traffic to pass during typhoons. However, authorities are still gathering data before approving the bridge for use in more severe weather. While the bridge lacks a pedestrian walkway, one lane in each direction is reserved for motorcycles.

Construction on the Macao Bridge began in March 2020, and Macao

residents have closely followed its development – celebrating every milestone. Earlier this year, thousands participated in a competition to name the bridge, submitting suggestions to a selection committee. In the end, 'Macao Bridge' was chosen from a shortlist that included New Urban Bridge Silver Jubilee Bridge, Kiang Hoi (Chinese for 'Mirror Sea') Bridge and Hou Kong (Chinese for 'Oyster River') Bridge.

The Sunday before the bridge opened to traffic, around 21,000 residents braved scorching temperatures to walk across the new structure, capturing photographs to commemorate what has already become a historic day for Macao.

The new bridge joins three other sea crossings between Macao and Taipa. The first, the 2.5-kilometre Governor Nobre de Carvalho Bridge, was designed by the acclaimed Portuguese engineer Edgar Cardoso and opened in 1974. It only has two lanes. The 4.4-kilometre, four-lane Amizade Bridge followed two decades later, while the 2.1-kilometre, six-lane Sai Van Bridge opened in 2005. ●



SPORTS

Mainland Olympians inspire local athletes to 'give their all'

Macao recently had the honour of hosting a large delegation of the nation's top-performing Olympians. The national heroes, many of them gold medalists, offered candid advice and encouragement to young residents eager to make their own marks in sporting history.



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

The delegation of Chinese Olympians visited several spots in the city, including Rua da Felicidade, during their stay

(Opposite page) Chinese table tennis player Sun Yingsha (front) attends the welcome ceremony for the delegation

A delegation of mainland Olympians, fresh from the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, visited Macao in September for a memorable three-day tour. During their stay, the high-profile athletes spent time with local sports talent, learning about the city and sharing valuable insights. They encouraged Macao's aspiring athletes to trust their teammates, embrace challenges and "give their all" in pursuit of their sporting dreams.

Led by Gao Zhidan, the director of the General Administration of Sports, the 65 Olympians and eight coaches represented 16 different events. Among the group were many gold medalists, including table tennis sensation Ma Long, star diver

Quan Hongchan and freestyle swimmer Pan Zhanle.

"When you find something you're passionate about, you will go all out and hope to make it the best," Ma told an enthusiastic audience. "After playing for so many years, I still pursue the dream of table tennis, and I hope to continue winning glory for my country in the Olympic Games."

A selection of Macao's aspiring young athletes also had the opportunity to learn from their Olympic heroes, including members of the female artistic gymnastics team – which won gold in its category – and the first Chinese table tennis mixed doubles Olympic champions, Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha.



Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng welcomed the delegation to the city with a grand banquet. During Ho's speech at the event, he encouraged local youths and athletes to look up to the Olympians as role models. He urged them to learn from the athletes' tenacity, hard work and patriotism, and to carry forward the spirit of sportsmanship. The delegation also visited several iconic landmarks during its time in Macao, including the Rua da Felicidade pedestrian zone and the Monte Fort.

AN 'UNFORGETTABLE' VISIT

Before leaving Macao, members of the cohort reflected on their visit. Li Yuehong, who won gold in the men's 25-metre rapid fire pistol event, said he had "felt the enthusiasm of the general public for sports." Li added he hoped the advice he'd imparted to Macao's young people here would inspire them to carry forward Chinese sportsmanship.

Xu Shixiao, gold medalist in the women's double 500-metre canoeing sprint, described the "wonderful and unforgettable" visit – her second to Macao – as a special opportunity to interact with local residents. She also expressed her sincere gratitude to the local government for organising the trip.



Women's BMX freestyle champion Deng Yawen offered encouragement to the determined young athletes of the Special Administrative Region (SAR), urging them to persevere with their dreams and not be discouraged by setbacks arising along the way. "Hard work does not always yield results, but not working hard certainly does not," she said. "As long as one is willing to work hard, the results will manifest themselves in different places."

Table tennis star Fan Zhendong, who won gold in both the men's singles and men's teams events, said he found the opportunity

to spend time with his fellow medalists in a relaxed setting outside of their intense training sessions to be "valuable".

MAKING HISTORY AT THE PARIS OLYMPICS

The 2024 Paris Olympics saw the mainland team achieve impressive results. Its 40 gold medals were a record for China at an overseas Olympics, surpassing the 39 bagged in London in 2012. The team also scored 27 silver and 24 bronze medals, meaning China scooped the second-highest overall medal count at this year's Games: 91.

The Chinese Olympians posed for selfies with young students from Macao

(Opposite page) Olympic swimmer Pan Zhanle waves to attendees in Macao, fresh from his gold medal-winning performance in Paris (bottom)



Gold-medal winning weightlifter Hou Zhihui (centre) receives a warm welcome from Wavey the Peacock

China’s best-ever haul came on its home turf in 2008, when the mainland earned 100 medals including 48 golds. This year it trailed only the United States, which won 126 medals in total, 40 of them gold. Japan came third in the rankings, with a total of 45 (20 of them gold).

In terms of individual sports, China bagged most of its golds in diving events – a whopping eight. Shooting, table tennis and weightlifting events

each saw mainland athletes nab five golds. It was Li Wenwen’s gold in the women’s +81 kilogram weightlifting division that pushed China’s gold medal count over its previous record, while tennis star Zheng Qinwen made history as the first Asian gold medalist in the Olympic women’s singles category. In terms of overall medals, China did best in swimming with a total of 12 gongs: two golds, three silvers and seven bronzes.

Hong Kong’s team, meanwhile, won a grand total of four medals: two golds in fencing and two bronzes in swimming. Taiwan, competing under the name Chinese Taipei, bagged seven medals: a gold each in badminton and boxing, and bronzes in artistic gymnastics, shooting, weightlifting and boxing. Macao didn’t send any athletes to this year’s Olympics as the SAR is not a member of the International Olympic Committee.

After the Games ended, the Central Government issued a statement praising the Chinese team for its performance. “You have vigorously promoted the Chinese sports spirit and the Olympic spirit, striving to win

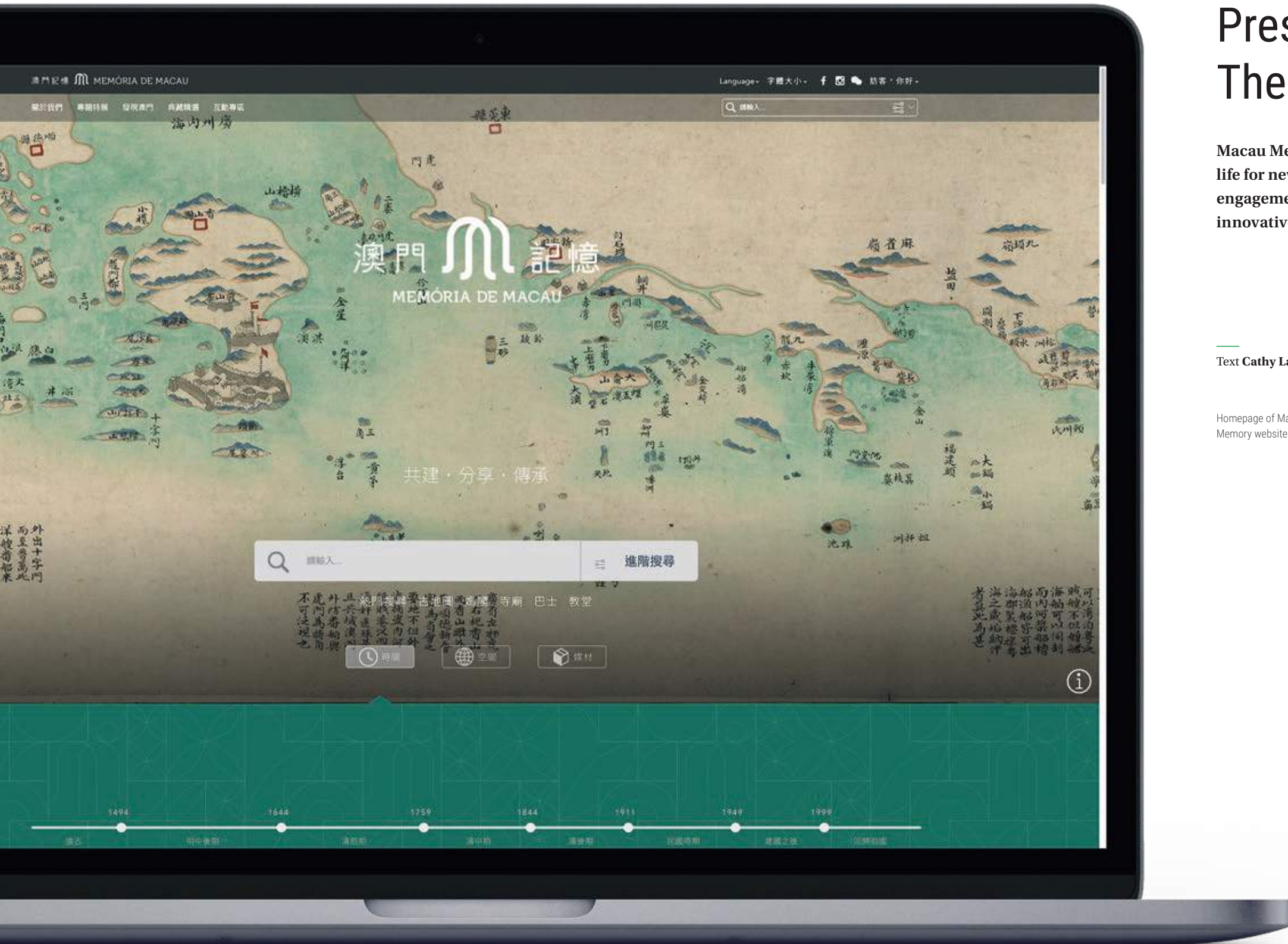
medals not only for your athletic performance but also for your moral integrity, sportsmanship and clean competition,” it read.

During the Olympians’ visit to Macao, then-acting Sports Bureau President Luís Gomes expressed his hope that residents of the SAR would draw inspiration from the athletes’ remarkable achievements. He emphasised that these Olympians are not only models of perseverance and the courage to overcome challenges in pursuit of the highest goals but also symbols of patriotism. Their dedication to their sport and their country, Gomes noted, makes them powerful role models for the next generation, embodying both athletic excellence and national pride. ●

(Left to right) Table tennis player Ma Long (left) and diving athletes Quan Hongchan and Chen Yuxi pose for photographs with their welcome bouquets; Chairman of the Chinese Table Tennis Association Liu Guoliang (centre) poses with China’s winning table tennis team at the Paris Olympics



Visit www.macaumemory.mo



HISTORY

Preserving a legacy: The Macau Memory project

Macao Memory is a vibrant digital archive bringing the territory's history to life for new audiences. The project also serves as a platform for community engagement and identity-building, earning recognition from UNESCO for its innovative approach to preserving heritage.

Text Cathy Lai

Homepage of Macao Memory website

Time spent in Macao always evokes a strong sense of nostalgia. This is a city where the old and new collide, making it easy to imagine travelling back in time. To August 1715, perhaps, the day the Italian Jesuit and artist Giuseppe Castiglione first set foot in the territory. Or to the Macao's border gate in September 1839, alongside local officials and 100 soldiers there to welcome the Imperial Commissioner of the Qing dynasty, Lin Zexu.

With help from the online platform Macao Memory, you can be transported back in spirit. A treasure trove for history enthusiasts, this multimedia archive allows visitors to explore historical photographs, personal narratives, cultural artefacts, oral histories and interactive virtual exhibitions that bring old stories of Macao back to life.

Macao Memory was launched in 2019 by the Macao Foundation, and is one of many ways the foundation promotes the city through cultural, social, economic and educational

initiatives. The project aims to foster a sense of belonging and pride in residents by curating a journey through history for the modern age. Testament to Macao Memory's success, it received a Star of Discovery award at UNESCO's most recent World Heritage Committee conference – which took place this past July in New Delhi, India.

"This recognition highlights that we have a 'Macao solution' that can contribute to the international community in the realm of heritage education," Wu Zhiliang, one of Macao Memory's initiators, told *Macao* magazine. "It was also a meaningful gift to celebrate the 75th Chinese National Day and the 25th anniversary of Macao's reunification."

The long-serving president of the Macao Foundation's board of directors (and the author of many Macao-related books), Wu sees the city's historical significance as far surpassing its pint-sized landmass and population.

“

Our goal is for Macau Memory to be a platform where everyone can actively participate in its creation by sharing their memories and experiences.

– Wu Zhiliang

António Sammartini

Macao Foundation
President Wu Zhiliang

“There has always been a demand for a common space for everyone connected to Macao, whether they currently live here or have once called it home, to bring their memories of the city to life,” he says.

DELVING INTO THE ARCHIVES

Wu and his team came up with the idea for Macau Memory in the early 2000s, while attending a UNESCO Memory of the World conference. “We observed that many countries and territories had been investing in similar projects by digital means,” Wu says. “These projects carried the same purpose. To enhance the sense of belonging and cohesion among their citizens.”

Curating historical materials for the Macau Memory site is a meticulous, highly inclusive operation. Since its inception, the Macao Foundation has worked with local associations, educational institutions and international organisations to both learn from their experiences and gather materials. Initial guidance was sought from counterparts in Beijing, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The team also received generous support from religious associations such as St. Joseph’s Seminary, the Society of Jesus and even the Vatican Apostolic Library, which together supplied more than a thousand historical images and documents as well as several hundred old maps.

As the project gained momentum, the National University of Singapore

(NUS)’s namesake museum and the Hong Kong Maritime Museum jumped on board. Through sharing historical maps and geographical drawings, these collaborators have helped enrich the archive of Macau Memory to provide users with a more comprehensive understanding of Macao’s historical context.

A STORYTELLING PLATFORM FOR ALL

When visitors enter the Macau Memory site, they are met by an intriguing old map of Macao. Users can look for specific content using keywords in the search bars or explore by clicking on categories like ‘Time’, ‘Space’ and ‘Media’. Navigating the site unearths historical events and imagery from Macao’s past; expect vintage street scenes, daily life and old artefacts like toys, chess sets and school certificates.

“As long as visitors know the when, where or how of the specific piece of history they’re interested in, they should be able to find it quite efficiently,” Wu explains proudly.

Macau Memory could have been a passive repository of documents, but its creators had far bigger ambitions. “We don’t want Macau Memory to be just a database for researchers or a resource for students completing assignments,” says Wu. “Our goal is for Macau Memory to be a platform where everyone can actively participate in its creation by sharing their memories and experiences.”



Ban Zhang Tang's Shanghai Barber Company, 1987, by Jorge Manuel da Veiga Alves

(Opposite page) The Macau Memory website has a collection of photographs of the city and its festivities, many of which date back to the early 20th century

To achieve this, the team has also sourced material from regular people, happy to share their personal memorabilia for the greater good. To date, over 200 individuals (and 100 institutions) have contributed to the project. This approach has seen Macau Memory gain long-scroll landscape paintings that depict the city during the mid-Qing period, and a special collection of photographs taken by Portuguese photographer José Neves Catela in the 1930s, capturing the daily lives of residents. Treasures like these ensure that while there is an academic aspect to the archive, it's also rich on a human level.

Macau Memory has employed a number of interactive strategies to foster engagement with its audience. There are online quizzes, voting initiatives and community talks. According to Wu, the platform has organised around 150 in-person discussions to date, on topics ranging from religion to the city's urban development. These sessions have proven incredibly popular. Macau Memory is also active on a number of popular social media channels.

Wu describes the platform as dynamic, allowing community traditions and narratives to be passed down to future generations

and spread across the world. "The unique historical significance of Macao is not just a source of pride," he says. "We believe that if our experiences are shared widely, they can have a direct positive impact on building a community of shared destiny for people around the world."

Macau Memory reminds Wu of an old Chinese saying: "Rain moistens everything gently and silently." The proverb implies that while positive influences can be subtle, their impact strengthens over time. "As we continue to build our digital collection, our ability to tell Macao's story grows ever stronger," Wu explains.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As the project continues to evolve, efforts are underway to enhance its accessibility and reach, including through the launch of a sister-site called School Memory that chronicles Macao's local schools' history. For example, visitors can learn how Fathers Germán Alonso and Luigi Minella founded Colégio Mateus Ricci back in 1955, for the children of immigrants from the mainland. They can also find rare photographs of student performances dating back to the 1950s, and digital copies of early graduation records. The Macau Memory team plans to eventually include more content in Portuguese and English, so that Macao's story will be able to resonate with a broader audience.

But Wu says it's the art of storytelling itself – whatever the language – that is the most crucial factor for projects like Macau Memory. According to him, this entails conveying both a "message and morals".

"With the Macau Memory website, I believe we've established a foundation that enhances our chances of sharing the Macao story that people inside and outside the city can understand." ●

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With the Macau Memory website, I believe we've established a foundation that enhances our chances of sharing the Macao story that people inside and outside the city can understand.

– Wu Zhiliang



ARTS & CULTURE

What we can learn from China's ancient bronzes

The Macao Museum of Art's latest exhibition showcases more than 150 exquisite bronze artefacts, primarily funerary goods unearthed after thousands of years. These bronzes convey messages from ancient Chinese civilisations whose enduring influences still reverberate today.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**
Photos **Xinhua News Agency**

Sanxingdui human mask
(c. 1250–1046 BCE)

Step into “The Splendour of Chinese Bronzes” exhibition at the Macao Museum of Art (known by its Portuguese initials, MAM), and find yourself transported thousands of years into the past. The time-worn sheen of ancient metalwork draws you closer, and some pieces – like a mysterious mask from the Sanxingdui archaeological site – may even appear to stare back. This particular mask, a relic dating back to the late Shang dynasty (c. 1250–1046 BCE), still baffles archaeologists today. With its protruding ears and insect-like eyes, who (or what) could it be?

While precise answers remain elusive, archaeologists believe these types of masks were probably positioned atop poles during religious ceremonies, representing ancestors. Today, they serve as a silent reminder of an early Chinese society's depth and complexity. Sanxingdui, in Sichuan Province, has offered up a wealth of treasures from the realm of ancient Chinese metallurgy – many of them hailing from the Shu kingdom, a civilisation that existed more than 3,000 years ago. The site was first discovered in the 1920s, though excavations only got underway in the 1980s.

MAM's exhibition, which runs until 10 November, contains bronzes from civilisations across China. The more than 150 artefacts on loan from the National Museum of China hail from the Xia (c. 2070–1600 BCE) to the Western Han (c. 202 BCE–8 CE) dynasties. And they aren't just feasts for the eyes; these bronzes convey history. While they are all examples of funerary goods, meaning they were specifically made to be buried in tombs, their forms represent a myriad of purposes, from ancestor worship to military communications. Each artefact tells its own story, but together they weave a larger narrative of insights into the lives, beliefs and systems that shaped ancient China.



Bronze ding (ritual food container) with thunder pattern (c. 1046–977 BCE)

(Centre) Bronze *ling* (ritual wine vessel) with tile pattern (c. 770–680 BCE)

(Opposite page) Ceng Bo Fu bronze *yi* (ritual water container) (c. 770–680 BCE)



Macaolink

A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST

One of the exhibition's most captivating sets of objects comprises a three-legged bronze cauldron, or *ding*, and two-handled containers known as *gui*. These date back to the middle Western Zhou dynasty (c. 1046–771 BCE) and their inscription reveals they were cast by a man named Si to honour his father. It recorded Si's hopes for his descendants (he wished them lives filled with prosperity) and that he had received praise and rewards from the king.

Ding and gui are ceremonial vessels that, while no longer used in everyday life, have a special linguistic legacy in China. The word 'ding' is associated with strength and the phrase "inquiring of the ding" suggests a quest for power. The word

'gui' appears in the Cantonese term "nine large gui", referring to a grand feast. Examples like these show the threads still connecting ancient China to the present day.

Inscriptions are common on bronzeware; they often detail personal achievements or political events. Duke Huan of Tian Qi (c. 400–357 BCE), an important leader in present-day Shandong Province during the Warring States period (c. 481–221 BCE), had a bronze *dui* cast in the 14th year of his reign that included an inscribed record of tributes he'd received from other leaders. That *dui* – a spherical food container fashioned from two semi-sphere bowls, sporting a number of loop handles – is also on display in MAM's exhibition.

Some of the inscriptions are people's names, executed in beautiful

calligraphy. A *ge* (dagger-axe) from the Warring States period, is inscribed with the name of the highly successful statesman Lü Buwei, who died in 235 BCE, in today's Sichuan Province. Lü Buwei administered the state of Qin, a feudal kingdom, which introduced strict rules around weapon-making: each item was required to bear the names of its bladesmith and the state's current leadership.

BRONZE CASTING, THE CRAFT

China's Bronze Age began around 2000 BCE and lasted about 13 centuries. Early bronzes were cast in a single take – a process requiring immense precision. Later artisans developed the piece-mould casting technique, allowing for more intricate designs and larger vessels.

The first step in piece-mould casting involved fashioning a model of the desired object from clay. That solid core was then covered with another layer of clay, which – when dry – would be cut away in sections (the 'pieces' the technique derives its name from). The original model would be shaved down to a smaller version, and the layer of pieces reassembled around it to make the outer walls of a mould. Molten bronze would be poured in, solidifying in the cavity complete with any incised decorations. After the bronze cooled, the mould was broken away to reveal the finished object.

MAM's exhibition contrasts two *jia* (ritual wine vessels) cast using each method, their differences illustrating the evolution in casting techniques.

Bronze is an alloy of copper, tin and lead. It oxidises over time, developing a distinctive greenish hue. This effect is very apparent in a bronze *yue* (battle axe) adorned with an openwork human face, from the late Shang dynasty, that's included in the exhibition. 'Openwork' is the term for designs that appear lace-like, where parts of the metal are cut away to create open spaces.

However, a few pieces in the exhibition have managed to retain their original dark golden colour, even after thousands of years. The 'Qin Gong' bronze *hu* (another style of ritual vessel) from the early Spring and Autumn period (c. 770–476 BCE) is one such example, its surface remarkably well preserved due to the environment in which it was buried.

AN AESTHETIC EVOLUTION

“The Splendour of Chinese Bronzes” offers visitors the chance to see how bronze craftsmanship evolved over centuries – beyond the style of casting. Early Shang dynasty ritual wine vessels, such as the *jue* and *gu*, are characterised by simplicity. They were often found in tombs: the more a burial site included, the higher the status of the tomb’s occupant.

Over time, with the evolution of casting methods, decorations also became more elaborate. The exhibition features sophisticated wine vessels bedecked with lotus-shaped crowns, or with realistic bird motifs on their lids. As different cultures interacted more, as the northern nomads did with people living on the Central Plains, their designs merged and morphed – reflecting increasing integration within China.

Later bronzes, such as a pair of kneeling figures from the Western Han dynasty, show an extraordinary attention to detail. These figures – one male, one female – once held umbrellas (the canopies are now lost). Their exquisitely cast facial features and costumes reflect regional characteristics. Archaeologists think the couple originally belonged on top of a bronze drum, indicating the person they were buried with had very high social status.

Dagger-axe inscribed
with Lü Buwei’s name
(c. 280–221 BCE)

FANTASTICAL BEASTS

The intricate imagery adorning later bronzes is particularly intriguing: depictions of mythical two-bodied creatures are not unknown. The faces of these beasts are typically highly stylised and symmetrical, with distinct nasal bridges between the eyes and snout. In the exhibition, an ancient chariot’s axle cap from the early Spring and Autumn period displays a mysterious combination of creatures that archaeologists still haven’t figured out the meaning of. There’s a tiger devouring a person’s head, along with two snakes and two additional human heads.



Bronze nao (musical instrument)
cast with an elephant motif
(c. 1250–1046 BCE)

Phoenixes, turtles, fish and dragons are more common motifs on Chinese bronzes, along with abstract patterns representing clouds and thunder. These forms of imagery reflect an ancient Chinese belief in the interconnectedness of the natural and supernatural worlds.

The exhibition also features a bronze *nao*, a percussion instrument from the late Shang dynasty, decorated with elephants. Nao were used in military contexts, and according to the ancient text *The Rites of Zhou*, their sound was a signal that troops should retreat. In this piece, the elephants face each other head-to-head – a motif that

was popular from the Shang to early Zhou periods.

Exploring the exhibition, taking in the explanations that accompany each exhibit, it becomes clear “The Splendour of Chinese Bronzes” offers up far more than physical relics. It provides visitors with a tangible connection to the people who were buried with these objects, and to those who remained above ground.

These precious bronzes, crafted to be symbols of power and means of connecting with the divine, serve as a testament to the ingenuity and artistry of ancient China. Through them, we can glimpse a world that, while distant in time, still resonates today. ●

ARTS & CULTURE

The Macao International Music Festival: Where tradition meets innovation

Macao's highly anticipated music festival returns with another vibrant programme of timeless classics and emerging talents, as well as remarkable maestros taking heritage to new heights.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**

Chinese classical musician
Wu Man plays her pipa
alongside artists from
Iran and India, in the
supergroup DoosTrio

The 36th Macao International Music Festival draws inspiration from a line in Giacomo Puccini's opera, *Tosca*. Its theme, "And the Stars Shine", likens its featured artists to a bright constellation in the night sky. These artists represent musical traditions from around the world, each offering their audience a rare and innovative musical dialogue.

The festival opened on 4 October with a grand performance of *Tosca* staged by Russia's illustrious Mariinsky Theatre in partnership with the Macao and Mariinsky Orchestras, under the formidable Valery Gergiev's baton. The programme also includes US jazz legends Herbie Hancock and Wynton Marsalis, a multimedia reimaging of that much-loved seasonal classic *The Nutcracker* and many more performances. However, its highlights may be two novel collaborations merging ancient Chinese instruments with unexpected companions.

In the lead up to the festival, *Macao* magazine spoke with prominent figures behind these cross-cultural projects: DoosTrio's five-time Grammy-nominated Chinese *pipa* player Wu Man and Tsung Yeh, currently conductor emeritus of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

OLD FRIENDS FROM THE ANCIENT SILK ROAD

DoosTrio is a supergroup that has created a whole new sound for itself; a blend of Wu's *pipa* with the

Iranian musician Kayhan Kalhor's *kamancheh* and the tabla drums of India's Sandeep Das. While these longtime friends have made music together for over 25 years, DoosTrio has only existed since 2023, when the group embarked on a successful tour around the US. Wu explains that every single one of the DoosTrio's performances are unique, because she, Kalhor and Das all thrive on improvisation.

"Each of us will add melodies and scales from our cultures," says Wu, who at age 61 has been playing the *pipa* for more than half a century. "For myself, I want to play melodies with strong Chinese characteristics, such as 'Jasmine Flower', a folk song from my hometown of Hangzhou."

She also explains that the word *doos* represents love in Persian, reflecting the trio's shared passion for traditional music. While their musical backgrounds are different, the three artists find that playing their respective instruments together unleashes the complementary natures of their cultures. "Around 2,000 years ago, the *pipa* came through Central Asia and Persia to the Central Plains of China; it is like an old friend to these regions," Wu says. "In ancient times, [our instruments] came from the same root, and it means a lot to us to perform them and our traditional music together."

Her lute-like *pipa* resembles an elongated pear, and plucking its strings creates a bright, lively tone. Kalhor's soulful *kamancheh* has a round body, a long neck and a bow.

Das' tabla, meanwhile, consists of a pair of hand drums with a wide tonal range perfect for intricate rhythms. In unison, they create an exciting soundscape running the gamut of human emotion.

Wu describes the pipa as highly versatile, with iterations found all the way along the ancient Silk Road. "Over the years, performing alongside artists from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and India ... I feel like I'm exploring the ancient languages of the pipa." Wu believes her instrument takes on a different personality depending on the context in which she plays it.

"In my hometown, it gives you a strong Jiangnan flair," the veteran musician says. "For example, when used for the popular tune 'The Moon over the River on a Spring Night,' the pipa fills your imagination with the full moon high up in the night sky. But when it works with the Iranian kamancheh, it gives you something else entirely."

Macao was able to experience DoosTrio's Asian debut on 13 October, at the historic Dom Pedro V Theatre.

Wu is also leading an improvisation workshop while in the city, offering local musicians the opportunity to explore the pipa's diverse personas. "The pipa has had its roots in Chinese music for around 2,000 years," she says. "Today, it is still here, meaning it has its lasting value. This is not only a Chinese instrument, but also a world instrument."

'FIESTA NIGHTS IN MACAO'

Drawing the festival to a graceful close on 4 November, at the Londoner Theatre, is another cross-cultural collaboration – this one between the famed Portuguese fado singer Mariza and the Macao Chinese Orchestra. The concert will be conducted by Tsung Yeh, the Shanghai-born maestro known for his ability to bridge Eastern and Western musical traditions. Yeh, 74, was the world's first conductor to simultaneously direct both a Western symphony orchestra and a Chinese orchestra: the Singapore Chinese Orchestra and the South Bend Symphony Orchestra, in the US.

During Yeh's time with the South Bend Symphony Orchestra, a tenure spanning from 1988 to 2016, the conductor worked with famous country singers like Emmylou Harris and Barbara Mandrell. And he sees similarities between the fado genre and country music's respective propensities for storytelling. "I can find some of Mariza's singing relates to certain American country singers," he notes.

Yeh sees crossover between fado and traditional Chinese music, too. Aside from their folk roots, he says the styles share a deep sentimentality: "I don't want to use the word 'grief,' but there is a bit of sadness in it." Yeh adds that some Chinese traditional instruments, including the *erhu*, pipa and *guzheng*, bring a melancholic quality to music that feels perfectly suited to fado, which is known for its mournful themes.



Pedro Sacadura



(Opposite page) Renowned conductor Tsung Yeh (top) teams up with the Macao Chinese Orchestra and Portuguese fado singer Mariza for the closing performing of the music festival

Wu Man performs with the Silk Road Ensemble at the Mondavi Center in Davis, California



Max Whittaker

During his two decades leading the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, Yeh worked with local pop musicians like Kit Chan and Dick Lee, blending their contemporary styles with traditional Chinese instrumentalism. That's also the vibe he's bringing to the International Music Festival.

"For this East-meet-West show, I hope to bring Chinese plucked-string instruments and Mariza's music – including the guitar – together, melding them into one," Yeh says. But he wants to highlight the genres' differences, too. "All music needs drama, and if you only meld them together, that's not good enough – it helps if you also have a conflict," he elaborates. "Then, if you treat the conflict well, it will make people feel a sense of excitement." Yeh would like his Macao audience to expect a "happy surprise" come November, stemming from the seldom-experienced collision of traditional Portuguese and Chinese musical styles.

Yeh's collaboration with Mariza will follow a 10-minute piece by British composer Eric Watson, titled "Fiesta Nights in Macao". According to Yeh, Watson's composition lets the audience hear "the rich characteristics of Macao, such as the sounds of mah-jong."

The maestro sees the Macao International Music Festival as an opportunity to showcase the city's distinctive musical identity. "I hope to develop work that carries Macao flair," he says. In Yeh's view, that flair is best expressed with fusion of Cantonese and southern European styles, using traditional Chinese plucked-string instruments and guitars.

Macao's status as a cultural melting pot is on full display during its International Music Festival. Musicians from around the world converge in the city, offering audiences an opportunity to experience a wide range of musical styles throughout October and into November. This year's programme promises to be a celebration of Macao's rich heritage as well as its dynamic, outward-looking future. ●



ARTS & CULTURE

The soulful songbird

Elisa Chan is a rising R&B star whose song about sloths earned her the prestigious 2024 Golden Award. As she approaches her 30th birthday, Chan reflects on how personal growth has shaped her evolving music career.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**
Photos courtesy of
Elisa Chan

Elisa Chan's life has always revolved around music. The 29-year-old's childhood memories are of singing competitions and her father performing Cantonese opera at Macao's Cinema Alegria. So, it wasn't exactly a surprise to find herself on stage at local broadcaster TDM's annual music awards back in July. But scooping Best of the Pop's biggest prize, the Golden Award, was still a thrill for the songstress. Adding Best Producer, Best Arrangement and a Favourite Song award to her collection of accolades made the event even sweeter.

Chan saw her success as a sign her musical journey was right on track. "Over these years, I'm happy that I have not given up on my music career," she tells *Macao* magazine. "I persist in expressing myself through music and I create results."

She also reveals that her prize-winning song "Desire 404" was inspired by a sloth – a cartoonish one printed on a T-shirt along with the legend, "do it tomorrow." This message resonated with Chan. While the word "sloth" is synonymous with laziness, Chan preferred to think of the tropical tree-dweller simply living his best, stress-free life. She found herself fascinated by sloth characteristics and habitats, so dreamed up what she describes as a 'sloth's wonderland' for her latest work.

"I wanted to emphasise the playfulness of a place that you can escape to, stop overthinking, put aside all desires and live for the moment," Chan explains. Hence the song's title (a 404 error message, of course, is what a browser displays when a web page can't be found).

A combination of Chinese and English lyrics in "Desire 404" encourages listeners to "do things in your own way" and find joy in days that aren't especially productive. Its accompanying video features original artwork by Macao illustrator Ana Lam that depicts a cheeky sloth swinging from a branch, dangling a computer mouse from his claws. Broken monitors are strewn across the jungle floor, sticky notes stuck to their blank screens.

The song, a funky R&B-style number, is more upbeat than Chan's usual soulful offerings – which include covers of her musical idols, powerful female performers whose songs tell stories. Her teenage favourite artist is Canada's pop-punk starlet Avril Lavigne. "Her style was magnetic and she had such a rockstar aura," the singer-songwriter says. "Avril's music always lifted my spirits." Lavigne's influence is particularly strong in Chan's fashion sense: she favours a punk aesthetic, and often sports fishnets.



Elisa Chan persists in expressing herself in her music

(Opposite page) "Desire 404" also has a one-take performance video of Chan singing with a live band

'REMEMBERING WHO WE TRULY ARE IS IMPORTANT'

As noted, Macao-born Chan had a musical upbringing. "My whole family loves singing, and now when we get together for dinners, we often book a restaurant with karaoke," she shares. Chan remembers playing with a toy piano as a child, but her voice had always been her favourite instrument. Chan's talent shone in school singing competitions and she later performed as lead vocalist in a school band formed with a couple of classmates.

Her first big-time brush with the music industry happened a decade ago, via local auditions for *The Voice of China 2014*. She made it to the final 15 Macao contestants during her last year of high school, performing the

song "Just Tonight" by US rock group The Pretty Reckless. The experience was momentous, Chan recalls. "I felt over the moon to be there as a high school student. The only thing I was thinking about was to enjoy myself on the stage and give my best to perform a song I love."

It wasn't long before she landed a contract with a Macao-based talent management company. Under their guidance, a hard-working Chan released a handful of singles while wrapping up school and later working at a café. When that contract ended in 2018, Chan decided to be an independent artist. And she quickly realised she was the sort of woman who could do things on her own: from writing lyrics and musical compositions, to the production and distribution of her works.

Her first single from that new era, "Indigo", also marked her debut as a composer. "The song's name comes from the colour of our veins," Chan says. "I want to express that unhappiness happens in our lives for a reason. Many people want to forget these times, but they are what make us strong and who we are today."

While Chan is a solo artist, she never feels alone in Macao because she's so well supported by friends in the local music community. "We jam melodies together, and I made the adjustments to the notes – it works very well," she says.

The singer's toolkit consists of a pen, paper and the recording device on her smartphone. She says her inspiration tends to come from chance encounters in day-to-day life, and that her music is a reflection of her own interests and quirky personality, of self-discovery, and life-lessons gleaned along the way.

One idea Chan's long been fascinated by is that of a girl who wakes up in the midst of an identity crisis. She explores this concept in her 2019 single, "Glimmer", which opens with the line (in Chinese), "Open your eyes and look at the mirror, I saw an unfamiliar face."

"I think when we have to handle many things simultaneously, we forget who we are," Chan says of the song's subject matter. "We have many faces to deal with different situations. We must adapt to these, but remembering who we truly are is important."

Her 2023 track "Leftover" was inspired by an experience in her own kitchen. "I once made soup for myself and my roommate, and my roommate wanted to throw what we didn't end up eating away," she says. "It made me think about all the

people that contribute to a person's life, only to get tossed aside when they're no longer useful."

"Leftover" went on to win Best Composition and Best Arrangement at last year's Best of the Pop awards.

'WE'RE LIKE A BIG FAMILY'

Having received recognition from *Best of the Pop* two years in a row, Chan appreciates how much the event does for Macao's music scene. "Macao is a small city, and so is the music industry – we're like a big family," she says. "Best of the Pop is an invaluable opportunity to meet friends who support and give feedback to each other. Although it's a competition, we support each other more than try to beat each other."

These days, Chan's main focus is on writing new material while performing at events around Macao and the Greater Bay Area. In addition,

she hosts the occasional TV show and works as a voice actor. But she's also a devoted cat-mum. Chan's eight feline companions often feature in her music videos. Asked how she manages to look after so many pets, Chan cites an old Cantonese saying: "To feed one more mouth, we just need one more pair of chopsticks".

As she nears the end of her twenties, Chan says she's been listening to her all-time favourite Adele's album, *30*, on repeat. In it, the British pop sensation muses on life at this milestone age – something Chan finds herself doing more and more. "I think Adele's album is mostly about self-care," she says. "And as I turn 30, I think I need to put more care into myself. Writing music is what allows me to learn more about myself, and I find that to be a very important part of the process." ●



ARTS & CULTURE

The vulnerable virtuoso

Benjamim Soares is a folk-rock songwriter who has always approached the music industry at his own pace. Now, with two new Best of the Pop awards under his belt, things are ramping up for the artist: he sees the recognition as a turning point.

Text Sara Santos Silva
Photos courtesy of
Benjamim Soares

Macao musician Benjamim Soares has spent years flying under the radar. That's by choice, more than anything – he's never been one to seek the spotlight. But the 28-year-old was too talented to avoid it forever. At local broadcaster TDM's Best of the Pop awards in July, Soares' "Tired of Running" secured the prize for Best Composition and was also one of several to snag a Favourite Song Award.

Executed with Soares' signature folk-rock sound (a blend of Jack Johnson and the Counting Crows) the song's lyrics speak to bruised feet and aching lungs. "I think people often run away from what they feel is the most authentic version of themselves because it's also the most scary," Soares shares, acknowledging his own familiarity with this brand of exhaustion.

"Tired of Running" is about realising it's time to make changes in your life. As Soares puts it, he wrote the song asking himself this question: "What if you stopped running away from the person you know you want to become, or the path you want to take?" For Soares, the safe option would be to focus fully on his career as a videographer and photographer.

Lately, however, he's felt pulled to more seriously pursue his potential as a professional musician. Soares says that his feeling of vocation has only intensified since Best of the Pop.

'THERE'S A LOT OF VULNERABILITY INVOLVED'

Soares was raised between Macao, the mainland city of Zhuhai and Kenya. He believes his multicultural upbringing shaped his interest in story telling – be it through music, photography or video.

"I think being in many unfamiliar environments gave me the impetus to be self-reflective in an effort to make sense of the world, people, myself and the things that I saw," he says. "Maybe that's why I like to tell vivid stories and explore topics about the 'human experience' in my songs."

The gift of a guitar set a 10-year-old Soares off on his musical journey – and he's also learnt to play the piano. But despite his long relationship with music, Soares says he sometimes experiences an "internal resistance" when it comes to introducing his songs to the public. "Music is scary and there's a lot of vulnerability involved," he says.

That hasn't stopped him from participating in musical events and competitions around Macao, and lending his skills to local bands.



In 2021, he and his bandmates performed an original set-list at a Hac Sa Beach concert, and he has released two solo singles to date.

While Soares is constantly writing new material, he admits that he tends to keep his musical endeavours rather private. A tight inner circle of friends are his preferred audience, though he does enjoy performing live around Macao.

Success at Best of the Pop could be a turning point for the musician. Crucially, it's given him a much-needed boost in confidence. "It feels great to get recognition for music that I've put a lot of heart and work into," Soares says. "Through this competition, my music got to reach new ears. People told me that the song and message resonate with them, so that's really motivating – and I'm grateful to TDM for that opportunity."

The songwriter believes his multicultural upbringing helped shaped his world view and musical style

(Opposite page)
Benjamim Soares is a talented pianist, and also plays the guitar



MUSIC THAT RESONATES

While Soares’ music is introspective and personal, its reflective themes strike a chord with listeners. He taps into universal experiences and emotions: struggles with inertia, self-doubt and trepidation. “I think people can relate to [these things] in many different aspects of life,” he says.

The artist’s musical influences are diverse, though his roots lie in early 2000s alternative rock bands. “I listen

to new artists every week and find inspiration from all the different genres, from metal to country and EDM, to synth pop, rock, et cetera,” he notes. His eclectic tastes infuse his own music with a rich, multifaceted quality.

Soares is currently putting the finishing touches on a new single, “Elation with Sadness”, and describes the project as a significant step forward in his musical evolution. “It’s a big song for me, in terms of its sound, and I’ve been working on it for a while,” he says.

‘EMBRACE THE FACT THAT IT WON’T ALWAYS BE EASY’

While Soares says Macao provides him with plenty of creative inspiration, the city’s compact size comes with understandable limitations. “Growing as an artist to the level where one can do music full time is a bit difficult here,” he admits. On the plus side, Macao is increasingly well connected with both Hong Kong and mainland. “These are big markets with a lot of talent and things happening, so they’re definitely places to consider,” he says. Soares says he’d love to collaborate more with neighbouring artists and producers who share his artistic vision.

He’s also optimistic about Macao’s own burgeoning music scene. Soares envisions a future where the city regularly hosts an even wider variety of bands and musical genres, attracting audiences from around the region. Fluent in English, Cantonese and Mandarin, Soares is perhaps uniquely positioned to thrive in the multicultural musical milieu he dreams of.

“I am hoping the industry develops to a point where local artists have more places to showcase their music and can be supported in connecting to bigger markets,” he says. Of course, Macao is already home to a number of well-regarded music festivals, like the hush! Beach Concerts series and the Lusofonia Festival – which Soares will be taking part in later this month.

With Soares poised to play a more prominent role in Macao’s music industry, he has some advice for the city’s aspiring musicians. “Embrace the fact that it won’t always be easy to be an artist, just keep trying to make great music,” he urges. “It doesn’t have to be perfect, you just have to authentically share your own feelings, perspectives and your experiences [because] that’s how people will connect with your music and with you.” ●





HERITAGE

Meet Macao's placemaker

Over the past two decades, the architect Nuno Soares has made Macao his home. But this Portugal-born visionary wants the city to feel more like home for everyone, and he's achieving his goal through a wide range of community initiatives.

Text **Sara Santos Silva**
Photos courtesy of **CURB**

Portuguese architect Nuno Soares established the Centre for Architecture and Urbanism in 2014

A passionate architect with a love for Macao, Professor Nuno Soares has made remarkable contributions to the city's urban landscape while fostering a sense of belonging among residents. Since 2014, most of his efforts have been realised through the Centre for Architecture and Urbanism (better known as CURB), a non-governmental organisation established by Soares. He's been living here for far longer, however. The Portuguese national fell in love with Macao for its unique cultural blend back in 1997, during his first visit, and decided to make it his permanent base in 2003 – relocating from Lisbon.

In addition to his work with CURB, the father of two heads the University of Saint Joseph's architecture and design department. Soares also runs his own architecture firm, Urban Practice, which is behind the UNESCO-listed Macau Cathedral's award-winning lighting design.

"My mindset as an architect is to improve the settings where human activities take place," he tells *Macao*

magazine. "That's what drives me across all three areas of my life, and it's also my contribution to the city I call home."

MOBILISING THE PEOPLE

A research-driven creative centre, CURB occupies the top two floors of the Inner Harbour's Ponte 9 building. The industrial-looking structure's sprawling rooftop area boasts unobstructed views of neighbouring Zhuhai's Wanzai residential district, which serves as the backdrop for many of the centre's events.

CURB functions as a bridge between governmental institutions, policymakers, industry professionals (from architects to designers to engineers), academics and civil society in Macao. Its overarching aim is to improve the quality of life in the city through effective collaboration. Community engagement is a critical part of CURB's remit: Soares wants every resident to feel like they have a personal stake in Macao's future.

CURB's vibrant rooftop overlooking Macao's waterways



Indeed, the CURB team is all about building connections. It recently organised the Treasures of the Greater Bay photography competition, for example – a celebration of vernacular architecture across the 11 cities of the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area. Vernacular architecture is defined by its functional adaptation to the local climate, geography and social conditions, creating a close connection between structures and the communities they serve.

“These buildings and spaces are one of the basic units of the city, they are immovable ... always passively waiting for people to explore,” CURB’s website reads. The centre hosted the Treasures of the Greater Bay awards ceremony at the end of last month.

Perhaps the most successful example of CURB’s community engagement in action was a 2018 initiative dubbed “Open House” – the Asian debut of a worldwide architectural event. Other organisations in Hong Kong and Taiwan have since followed suit with their own versions of the concept. Macao’s two-day Open House event gave the public a rare opportunity to explore 50 private and government-owned buildings that are typically off-limits to visitors.

For Soares, Open House’s standout site was northern Macao’s D. Maria II Electrical Substation on Rua Padre Eugénio. The building was designed by his late friend, the celebrated architect Vicente Bravo Ferreira, and operated by Companhia de Electricidade de Macau

(CEM) in the late 1980s. “It’s just like entering a time capsule, as the building’s characteristics have been immaculately preserved since its creation,” Soares says.

The Guia Lighthouse, part of the UNESCO-listed Guia Fortress complex and one of the most cherished symbols of Macao, was also part of the Open House initiative. Built in 1865 and offering spectacular views across the city, the lighthouse is only open to the public on a few days each year.

“Open House was one the most rewarding and impactful events we’ve organised because we were able to mobilise people, including over 120 volunteers and over 30 private estate owners,” Soares recalls. “It wouldn’t have been possible without the support of the community.”

Open House also showcased buildings that, although not officially listed as heritage sites, add colour to the rich tapestry of the city’s urban landscape. Their architectural styles ranged from Portuguese neoclassical to ultra-contemporary. Each building represents a moment of architectural excellence in Macao, says Soares. And they clearly resonated with the public: thousands of people showed up for the tour.

‘A CELEBRATION OF URBAN CULTURE’

Soares is a cycling enthusiast; it’s a hobby he picked up while studying in Italy, at the Polytechnic University of Milan. He’s always believed in Macao’s potential to

be a bike-friendly city (given its predominantly flat landscape), so came up with the idea for an annual cycling event, On the Move. First held in 2018, it offers participants a leisurely cycle through the city – with an architectural twist.

CURB brought Open House, a global architectural event, to Macao in 2018

(Below) The Treasures of the Greater Bay competition encourages photographers to capture the unique architecture of the area





CURB calls this Magic Carpet, and Macao's take on it homed in on traditional craftsmanship. CURB produced a video documenting six artisans engaged in the likes of incense-making, bamboo scaffolding and Portuguese tile-painting. The centre's aim was to shine a light on industries at risk of fading away, and to give residents a chance to learn the crafts themselves during workshops.

"We have to do our part to preserve these traditions," says Soares. "We had wanted to include neon sign fabricators too, but unfortunately it was too late for that. There's not a single neon signmaker left in Macao today."

Looking ahead, CURB's preparing Macao's first edition of In-Situ, a placemaking biennale which will happen in 2025. This initiative is designed to draw people into unexpected public spaces that might be dilapidated or flying under the public's radar for whatever reason. Each site will be decked out with installations by local and international artists.

"By taking part in different placemaking events in other places, namely Europe and Hong Kong, we've built up the knowledge to kick off our own," Soares said. "The idea is that we get people to discover their city in different ways." ●

(Opposite page) On the Move invites people to see Macao and its architectural gems from a new perspective – and to make an art installation along the way

The centre's rooftop at its Ponte 9 headquarters is the setting for many of the events it hosts



On the Move events follow a predetermined route that allows for stopovers at notable buildings, giving riders the chance to explore Macao's hidden architectural gems and learn their stories. The group is always joined by a video artist documenting the ride as it happens, capturing footage to incorporate into a video installation that eventually gets screened atop CURB's rooftop.

"The initiative is a celebration of urban culture that manages to attract people with various interests, from biking to history, art and cinema," Soares says. The next On the Move ride will likely take place before the end of the year.

THE MAKING OF A PLACE

Another of Soares' passion projects relates to placemaking. Last March, CURB borrowed an initiative from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) School of Architecture that explores the concept of 'place' beyond architecture and urban planning.



SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH THE VIDEO

Text **Erico Dias**
Photos courtesy
of **Kaka Lam**

Breaking has gained significant attention this year, thanks to its debut as an Olympic sport. However, few are aware of the vibrant “B” scene quietly bubbling away in Macao. Veteran B-boy Kaka Lam believes he may have inadvertently introduced the street dance style, which originated in New York City, to the Special Administrative Region around 2001, back when he was still studying at Saint Paul School.

Now 37, Lam recalls the moment that sparked his journey: discovering a videotape in a local clothing store that promised to teach viewers the basics of breaking. Intrigued, he bought it and, along with four friends, set out to learn. “We watched the video in slow motion, trying to understand every movement and technique,” Lam says. Each of them took responsibility for mastering one or two moves before teaching the rest of the group.

As they progressed, the young teens started practising their toprocks, six-steps and headstands in public parks and squares as well as in local dance studios. According to Lam, who now teaches breaking part-time while working as a freelance designer, the scene reached its peak in 2009. He says about 200 locals were involved in breaking classes and competitions back then, though numbers have since declined.

Lam was an active competitor during that period, racking up dozens of wins both locally and overseas. His most memorable success came in 2010, in Hong Kong, when he and his partner defeated around 90 other teams from across Greater China. Their win earned them the opportunity to compete in the US for the first time. But Lam’s always been more focused on the journey than destination: “Innovation is what I look to get out of it,” he says. He also appreciates the opportunities the sport has given him to travel.

“Breaking is an international culture, and exchanges and competitions have allowed me to get in touch with more of the world,” Lam says.

These days, Macao’s breaking pioneer spends more time organising and judging competitions than taking part in them himself. According to him, competitions aren’t merely a way to find out which B-boy or B-girl’s the best—they’re platforms to raise the sport’s profile with the public. Lam says he was happy to see breaking’s inclusion in the 2024 Paris Olympics, perhaps the biggest awareness raiser of all when it comes to sports.

SPORTS

How breaking found its footing in Macao

Breaking (also called as breakdancing) may be relatively unknown in Macao, but a dedicated group of B-boys and B-girls has kept the scene alive for more than two decades. From humble beginnings in living rooms and public parks, local breakers like Kaka Lam and Paulo Mesa now represent Macao in battles around the world.

Veteran B-boy Kaka Lam believes he was among the pioneers who introduced breaking to Macao



One of Macao's top breakers, Paulo Mesa

(Opposite page)
Mesa showcased his impressive breaking skills at the 2023 Macao Battle Boat



'YOU DON'T HAVE A SET OF RULES'

Another local B-boy, Paulo Mesa, shared Lam's excitement when the Olympics news was announced (it will not return for the 2028 Games in Los Angeles). The 29-year-old told *Macao* magazine the added exposure had given the sport "a mainstream platform that can create more opportunities for us B-boys and B-girls, opening doors for people who want to do it full time."

Mesa isn't a full-time breaker, but he's about as close to that as you can get in Macao – where the sport remains relatively obscure. The B-boy both teaches and competes in the sport, while also working full-time as an entertainment rigger. "Whatever time we have and money, we try to compete," he says of his breaking crew, Supernova. "It's hard, but when you love something and are passionate about it, it's worth it." So far, Mesa has travelled to the

mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Vietnam for competitions.

A self-described "big sports guy", Mesa is also into skateboarding, surfing and basketball – but they all feed into his biggest passion, breaking. "Having different kinds of hobbies and interests inspires your creativity, which can then translate into breaking," he explains.

"That's the wonderful thing about breaking. You don't have a set of rules; you get to insert a lot of cool styles, individuality, character, originality and even musicality into your moves. It's all about self-expression, right?"

ORIGINATING IN THE BRONX

Indeed, breaking has always been highly improvisational. It first emerged in the early 1970s, at the disco clubs and street parties of the Bronx, New York City, where the dance form quickly became a staple of hip-hop culture. With no formal choreography, B-boys and B-girls had the freedom to invent moves and sequences based on the energy of the moment. That spontaneity (known as freestyling) remains essential during face-offs, where breakdancers respond to their opponents on the fly.





Mesa juggles his full-time job with his passion for breaking, explaining that B-boys will compete regardless of their time and financial constraints

(Opposite page)
Lam with his crew
Flame Illusion in 2011

Stars of that hip-hop zeitgeist were the Rock Steady Crew, Grandmaster Flash and Run-D.M.C. Common moves that evolved back then include toprock (performed standing upright), downrock (ground-based manoeuvres), freezes (posing in a static position, such as a handstand) and power moves (high-energy and acrobatic).

According to Mesa, breaking had reached a new, wider audience by the early 2010s thanks to video streaming platforms. That's how he started picking up the basics, through watching so-called cyphers (the circular space formed by a group of breakdancers, where individuals take turns showcasing their moves) and battles online. "Some of the first moves I learned that way were handstand freezes and cartwheels," he recalls.

But Mesa's first ever encounter with breaking was in person, when he was about 13. He remembers watching a local crew of B-boys and B-girls – likely including Lam – holding cyphers during the annual Macao International Fireworks

Display Contest next to Macao's Nam Van Lake. "I was captivated by the energy and skill on display," Mesa says. "That's what actually inspired me to learn about breaking online."

'PASSING THE TORCH'

At first, Mesa didn't know anyone else breaking in Macao. But his reputation as a budding B-boy was growing, and he was soon approached by another dedicated fan of the style – Macao-born Filipino Ruperto Abelgas, who prefers to go by Rupz. "Rupz came up to me and asked me to teach him the windmill and cricket [two breaking moves]," Mesa says of their meeting. He remembers Abelgas taught him some other moves in return, and inspiring him to take breaking more seriously.

Together, the pair started looking for a more senior B-boy who could hone their skills further. Fortunately, they found a supportive mentor in local breaking pioneer Rock Lee (now known as Zi Yang), a friend of Lam's. "He kind of gave us a whole hour or two explanation of what breaking really means, showing us different moves and how they're supposed to be done," Mesa says. "We were just little kids sitting on the floor looking up at him, wide-eyed. It was like, 'Wow, this guy is the real deal.'"

That was around 2010, and Mesa says he also got to know Lam around that time – describing him and Zi as the breakers who "put Macao on the map". The community warmly welcomed Mesa and Abelgas, despite their young age: "People were happy to see us because it was like passing the torch, having this new generation come around."

After four months of staying up late to practice, typically in their families' living rooms, Mesa and Abelgas entered their first competition organised by senior B-boys in Macao. While they didn't fare well, Mesa says he believes he and his

friend "earned some respect" for their passion. And not long afterwards, in 2010, they reached the semi-finals at a junior competition in Hong Kong. Their first win came as a trio, with another friend named Thai Jai (Mesa also won a solo event at the same competition).

"It was memorable because it was unexpected," Mesa says. "We were just young kids taking on bigger people and that proved that we were actually good."

More recently, Mesa tried out for the Macao breaking team. After a long selection process, he ranked No. 1 out of the 20 selected participants. "Reflecting on my growth, I believe I can confidently say I'm one of the top breakers in Macao right now," Mesa says with pride.

Macao's breaking scene is smaller now than it was 15 years ago, but those

in the know – like Mesa and Lam – are deeply passionate about its survival. They point out that while some B-boys and B-girls are highly competitive, like Mesa, others practice breaking for the fitness benefits. Many of Mesa's breaking buddies are actually firefighters and policemen using the sport to improve their strength and agility.

Mesa's eager to see the scene expand, and can envision himself organising more local events in the future as a way to give back to his community. "But my primary goal now is to continually improve my skills and represent Macao on larger platforms," he says. "By showcasing our talent, I hope to inspire the next generation and create more opportunities for breakers in Macao." ●



SCAN THE QR CODE
TO WATCH THE VIDEO

TRADITION

A legacy roasted in time

The sweet, smoky aroma of Cheng Kei's roasted chestnuts has marked the arrival of autumn in Macao for over 80 years. In a rapidly evolving city, these old-fashioned snacks now offer a comforting taste of tradition.

Text **Craig Sauer**
Photos **Lei Heong Ieong**

António Chao started roasting chestnuts with his father more than 40 years ago

As the brisk autumn breeze rolls into Senado Square, one can't help but notice an aroma of roasted chestnuts wafting through the air. It's accompanied by a distinctive sound: the clangour of chestnuts tumbling inside their roasting drum, thwacking the metal sides as it rotates. This 50-year-old, custom-made contraption is the secret to the best roasted nuts in Macao, says veteran *caldarrostaio* António Chao – who has been carrying on his family's tradition for decades.

Located on Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (also known as San Ma Lou), Chao's stall has been a seasonal go-to for generations of locals. His father started roasting chestnuts under the business name Cheng Kei around 80 years ago, and that same

stall is one of the last places in Macao where you can still buy the earthy delicacy. Chao joined his dad in the 1980s, then continued on his own after his father died just over a decade ago.

As the Mid-Autumn Festival winds up each year, Chao reopens his stall. He mans it throughout winter and into the spring, selling just one product: sweet-yet-smokey chestnuts. Chao carefully selects each nut for its size and texture, and has perfected his roasting technique to guarantee the creamiest kernel within its charred shell.

"I will keep running this stall until I can't," says Chao, whose dedication has made Cheng Kei a symbol of consistency in the rapidly changing Special Administrative Region (SAR).



Chao's stall is located in Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, right where his father started roasting chestnuts around 80 years ago



REINVENTING THE ROAST

In the early days, roasting chestnuts was a laborious process. Chao's dad used a paraffin pump to fuel his burner, monitoring the flame like a hawk to ensure an even heat – all while turning a crank by hand to keep the drum rolling. Each batch took nearly 45 minutes to finish.

A few decades in, while watching a concrete mixer roll by, the caldarrostaio had an idea that would transform the way he worked. He enlisted a friend to build a semi-automated roasting machine that mimicked the rotating barrel of the mixer. This invention saw Chao's father become the first chestnut vendor in Macao to mechanise his operation, which sped up the roasting process considerably.

"We've used the same machine ever since, for more than 50 years," says Chao, who is of the 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' mentality. The special containers he uses to keep his roasted chestnuts toasty have been going for almost as long as the roaster.

These containers are also crucial to Cheng Kei's success. If you put freshly roasted chestnuts

straight into a paper bag, explains Chao, steam builds up and they go mushy. The containers encourage airflow, keeping their exterior crispy and insides perfectly tender.

FOLLOWING IN HIS DAD'S FOOTSTEPS

Growing up, Chao hadn't intended to follow his father into the chestnut business. He simply stepped up to help out when his dad was short-staffed. But what was supposed to be a temporary situation happened to suit them both.

Chao learned the job from his father and even today, embodies the meticulous work ethic the older man instilled in him. As the chestnut season approaches each September, Chao starts his day early, sorting through hundreds of chestnuts to select only the finest.

"They can't be too big or too small," he explains. "If they're too big, they don't roast well. If they're too small, they get over-roasted easily. Of course, selecting the best chestnuts is all about experience. There are so many steps and things I look out for, from purchasing and washing the chestnuts to leaving them to dry. It can take three or four days to identify and prepare the ones I like."



Chao's stall usually stays open until 10 or 11 at night

(Opposite page) Chao sometimes takes three or four days to identify and prepare the best chestnuts from the hundreds he has bought

By the early afternoon, Chao is at his stall, working the roasting machine. He buries his chestnuts in a special type of sand that turns black when it gets hot, then – when the nuts are done – he separates them from sand with a large mesh strainer. It's a method commonly used in Asia. While Chao's stall usually stays open until 10 or 11 pm, peak holidays can see his hours stretch even longer. It's a tough job, he admits, requiring focus and endurance. The chestnuts sometimes explode like firecrackers when they're too hot, and often Chao has to reach into the furnace-like machine with gloved hands to fix problems on the fly. But Chao says he wouldn't trade his work for anything.

HOLDING ON TO TRADITION, AND LETTING GO

During the off season, Chao finds other ways to support his family, working part-time as a jeweller and more recently obtaining his taxi licence. But when autumn arrives, he returns to the chestnut stall, relieved to be back carrying on his father's legacy.

The chestnut trade isn't exactly booming, however. While recent decades' influx of tourists from the mainland have spurred Macao's economy, roasted chestnuts don't hold much novelty for mainlanders as the treats are readily available in many parts of China. Chao says his stall used to be very popular with visitors from Southeast Asia,

though most tourists tend to be more interested in asking for directions these days. "If I got paid for the number of questions I answer, I'd be a rich man," Chao jokes.

The city's growth has also shifted local habits. "Nowadays, locals tend to avoid [Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro] because of the crowds," he says. Moviegoers were a staple customer for a long while, but Chao says that competition in the snacking arena has diluted his patron-base.

Still, Cheng Kei has its loyal customers – people who've been buying chestnuts from the stall for decades. "These people are my friends now," says Chao. "They don't even need to order. I'll start packing their chestnuts when they're walking towards me, because I already know how much they want."

Despite the stall's impressive longevity, Chao doesn't expect the chestnut tradition to continue with his children or grandchildren. "I don't want them to work under the scorching sun or torrential rain like I've had to over the years," he says. His three daughters have all grown up and forged their own career paths.

For now, though, Chao has no plans to stop roasting. Cheng Kei's chestnuts will continue to warm the hands of passersby on winter days, offering both a taste of the past and a fleeting reminder of a rapidly changing Macao. "As long as I can still earn enough money for my wife and I, and I'm able to work," says Chao, "I'll be here." ●



PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

How Chinese investment is shaping Timor-Leste's future

The Timorese ambassador to China Loro Horta explains how Timor-Leste's budding partnership with China has the potential to dramatically transform the tiny Southeast Asian nation's fortunes. As a Portuguese-speaking country, Timor-Leste is a member of Forum Macao – which serves as a platform for Sino-Lusophone relations.

Text **Loro Horta**, *Ambassador*
Photos **Xinhua News Agency**

(Opposite page) Chinese President Xi Jinping shakes hands with his Timorese President counterpart, José Ramos-Horta, during the latter's visit to Beijing in July

The new container port in Tibar, built by China Harbour Engineering Company, started operations in 2022

Since Timor-Leste achieved independence on 20 May 2002, our relationship with China has flourished remarkably. China was not only the first country to recognise Timor-Leste as a sovereign state but also among the earliest to establish an embassy in our country. Over the years, this partnership has yielded fruit, with China funding several key infrastructure projects, including our Presidential Palace, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense. Additionally, Chinese firms have secured contracts worth over US\$1 billion for major projects such as the Tibar port and two power plants.

In September 2023, a landmark agreement between Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão and Chinese President Xi Jinping elevated our relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This historic accord underscores our mutual commitment to strengthening ties. A state visit to China by President José Ramos-Horta this July, accompanied by the largest delegation ever sent by Timor-Leste, exemplified our dedication to this growing partnership. The state visit followed



Image courtesy of the Embassy of Timor-Leste

the country's participation in the 6th Ministerial Conference of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries, also known as Forum Macao.

While the high-level visit signalled a promising new chapter in Sino-Timorese relations, the real challenge lies in translating these agreements into tangible outcomes. It is crucial that we move from rhetoric to concrete action, especially on our side.

The capital of Dili sits nestled between the mountains and the pristine waters of the Ombai Strait

(Opposite page) Coffee is the country's largest non-oil export and its industry employs around one-third of the population

China's involvement in Timor-Leste, though significant, remains modest compared to its extensive presence in other Southeast Asian nations and Portuguese-speaking countries like Angola and Mozambique. There is considerable potential to expand our collaboration, as evidenced by the strong interest from Chinese companies in sectors ranging from oil and gas to mining, agriculture, renewable energy and tourism. Since becoming Timor-Leste's ambassador to China last October, I have observed an almost daily influx of Chinese companies eager to explore opportunities in our country.

President Ramos-Horta has emphasised the need to develop a comprehensive strategy to maximise the benefits of our engagement with

China. A key priority is to reduce our dependence on oil and gas and foster growth in agriculture. This approach fully aligns with our goals of economic diversification and job creation.

SCOPE FOR GROWTH

Developing Timor-Leste's agricultural sector and improving rural infrastructure could create thousands of jobs in rural areas and mitigate the large-scale migration to urban areas that is already causing serious social problems. It would also help address food insecurity in the country.

China has already assisted numerous countries in developing their agricultural sectors and has extensive experience in this area. While some



Jack Nugent

Chinese enterprises have begun boosting our rice production, there is a lot of scope for growth. China's CITIC Group, one of the world's largest conglomerates, has offered to conduct an in-depth study that could form the basis of a national development strategy for Timor-Leste's agriculture sector, potentially leading to investments in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

No nation is better positioned than China to support this effort. China can offer not only expertise and funding but also a valuable export market for our agricultural products, which currently is mostly limited to coffee – the country's largest non-oil export.

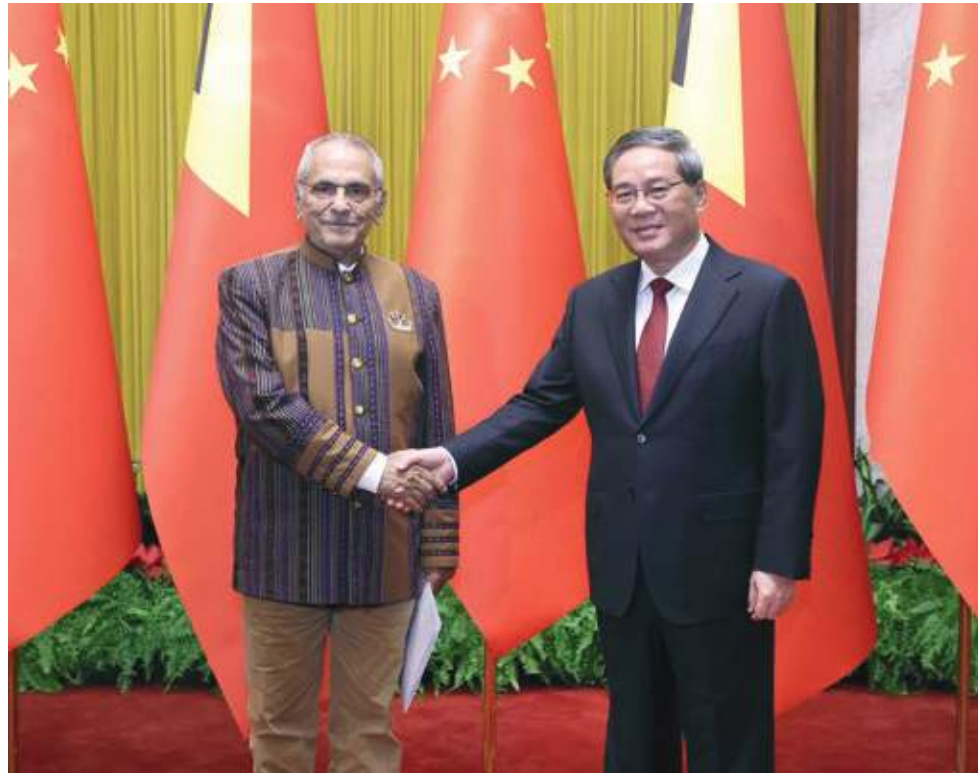
Fisheries present another area of abundant potential. Timor-Leste has over 700 kilometres of coastline, much of it unexplored. In April, the Shanghai Maritime University offered to send its advanced

oceanographic research vessel to survey Timor-Leste's maritime resources.

China, with the world's largest and most advanced commercial shipping industry, could assist in developing our own fishing fleet. Timor-Leste is already negotiating the purchase of its first modern fishing vessel from a Chinese company.

Tourism has long been neglected in Timor-Leste, but it also brings substantial opportunities, particularly in ecotourism. Recent biological surveys led by Conservation International have found Timor-Leste to possess some of the most biodiverse waters in the world. It's home to some 400 reef-building coral species, creating an environment similar to Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Several Chinese companies have expressed interest in investing in hotels and other tourism facilities in Timor-Leste.

President José Ramos-Horta also met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang during his state visit to China



In 2019, 155 million Chinese tourists travelled abroad. If Timor-Leste could capture a tiny fraction of that market, we could generate substantial revenue and create thousands of jobs. A promising development will be the expected launch of direct flights from Xiamen, Fujian Province, to Dili.

Timor-Leste's largest and most developed industry remains oil and gas extraction, which accounts for about 80 percent of the country's GDP. Significant untapped reserves, particularly in the Greater Sunrise gas fields off the south coast, present massive opportunities for investors. The Timorese government is seeking investors to develop these fields, and at least two major Chinese state-owned companies have expressed interest in partnering on this multi-

billion-dollar project, which has the potential to create thousands of jobs.

Other opportunities include onshore oil exploration and the extraction of commercially viable manganese and gold deposits that have been identified in the eastern part of the country. Negotiations are also underway with a Chinese company to explore high-quality marble reserves.

EAGER TO WORK TOGETHER

Many investors may underestimate Timor-Leste as a small market of just 1.3 million people. However, investing in Timor-Leste could open doors to larger markets. The country is expected to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) next year, providing

access to one of the fastest-growing consumer blocs in the world. Timor-Leste also benefits from preferential trade agreements with the European Union and Australia, allowing for low-tariff exports of agricultural produce and other products.

While significant investment in ports, roads and telecommunications is still needed, Timor-Leste is making strides. This year, the first fibre optic sea cable linking Timor-Leste to Australia will bring us 5G connectivity. The government is also upgrading Dili's international airport, with Chinese companies bidding for parts of the project. China has extensive experience building high-quality airports and offers highly competitive prices and efficiency.

Amid global geopolitical tensions, Timor-Leste is eager to work with China. We have very friendly feelings towards China, as demonstrated by our support for the 'One China' principle, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Thousands of Chinese nationals live in Timor-Leste, and several prominent political figures have Chinese origins.

Timor-Leste and China already have the foundation for a robust Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, most recently reaffirmed in July. The two countries, one small and the other vast, have signed a range of promising agreements this year and we all look forward to seeing them come to fruition. ●

Chinese President Xi Jinping holds talks with President José Ramos-Horta at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing



HISTORY

Xi'an: A city bridging China's history and future

The Terracotta Warriors are world-famous, but Xi'an's story is far from restricted to an illustrious past. A delegation of Macao journalists recently visited the ancient city – and found a modern metropolis where innovation and heritage go hand-in-hand.

Text **Amanda Saxton**
Photos **Xinhua News Agency**

People flock to Xi'an to see the Terracotta Warriors in situ, standing tall in the mausoleum's excavation pits

Many places are defined by a single, monumental architectural feat in their history. Cairo, in Egypt, has its mysterious pyramids. The Cambodian city of Siem Reap is home to the Angkor Wat temple complex. Jordan has the rose-hued ruins of Petra. These are places where long-gone civilisations' achievements still echo loudly, through the archaeological evidence left behind. And their modern economies lean heavily on the allure of history, on attracting visitors eager to experience remnants of the past.

This is not the case in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, even though it

has the credentials. The area's 2,200-year-old Terracotta Warriors are, undeniably, one of the world's most significant archaeological discoveries. An immortal army made of clay, poised for battle, buried in the vast necropolis of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China (221–210 BCE). By the time these life-sized soldiers, horses and chariots were unearthed in 1974 by farmers digging a well, they had spent millennia underground.

There are over 8,000 Terracotta Warriors and nearly 700 horses standing in excavation pits outside

of Xi'an. While the scale of the emperor's entombed army is awe-inspiring, it's the intricate details of each sculpted figure that move viewers the most. From afar, they seem like an army of clones. But up close, no two faces are the same. Each figure has unique facial expressions, clothing and even hand gestures, reminding us that history was populated by individuals as complex as those around us today.

However, Xi'an refuses to be defined solely by its past. The city has evolved into a thoroughly

modern metropolis drawing not just tourists, but investors, entrepreneurs and students from across the globe. It is a world-leading science and technology hub, a financial centre, and a crucial cog in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Today, many visitors reach the historic capital aboard the ultra-high-speed train from Beijing. In August, our delegation of English and Portuguese-speaking journalists from Macao travelled to Xi'an on one such train – hurtling along at 300 kilometres per hour – as part of a government-backed media tour.

After several days spent exploring the area, we left with a deeper appreciation for Xi'an's unique blend of history and innovation.

Our visit was well-timed, as ties between Macao and Xi'an are poised to strengthen. Direct flights between the two cities resumed in August, following the addition of Xi'an to the Facilitated Individual Travel scheme in March. These developments are expected to boost economic, cultural and tourism exchanges between the Special Administrative Region and the mainland city of 13 million people.



Each warrior's face was carefully crafted and unique, adding to their life-like appearance

THE NEW SILK ROAD

Trains were a recurring theme for the media tour. Our delegation's first destination was the China-Europe Railway Express Assembly Center, a place where old and new converge in a way that is strikingly symbolic. Xi'an, once the starting point of the ancient Silk Road, is now home to a modern logistics hub that connects China to Europe, reaffirming the city's ongoing role as a vital artery of trade and cultural exchange.

The Assembly Center is a crucial hub for China's ambitious BRI – a global infrastructure development project aimed at building trade networks reminiscent of the original Silk Road. The centre has grown

dramatically since opening in 2013. That inaugural year, just 46 trains rolled out of Xi'an's International Port Station, while 2023 saw that number swell to over 5,300. This year, authorities estimate the equivalent of about 980,000 20-foot containers will pass through the station.

Railway tracks lead directly from Xi'an to international destinations including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Germany, Poland and dozens of other countries. While the caravans that departed Xi'an for Europe more than 2,000 years ago were famous for transporting silk, today's modern trains are loaded with commodities ranging from laptops to footwear to cars.



The life-sized clay soldiers and horses were made to accompany Emperor Qin Shi Huang into the afterlife

BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE

Our next stop was the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, where the Terracotta Warriors are located. Like the pyramids, Petra and Angkor Wat, the mausoleum is designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and its clay inhabitants are famous worldwide. Visting them in person is a bucket-list item for many.

While a small number of the soldiers and their horses do travel the world, gracing museums in countries as far-flung as New Zealand and the United Kingdom, the desire to experience the terracotta army in situ is a powerful thing. The massive hangar-like structure protecting the excavation pits,

where most of the warriors remain, is a major tourism draw for Xi'an. Since 1979, more than 150 million people have visited the pits.

While the actual Terracotta Warriors stand in silent formation, their story comes alive in a stunning live-action performance, *The Resurrected Legion*. This powerful show, following the lives of two brothers and their roles in the Qin dynasty's uprising, combines traditional Chinese performance art with holographic projections in a purpose-built theatre very near the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor. Audiences move through different rooms during the performance, each space representing a chapter in the brothers' journey from their family's village to the remote battlefield.



The Resurrected Legion's cast are all trained in martial arts

The experience is highly emotive. The 28 actors and 300 extras – each a trained martial artists – display impressive discipline, agility and commitment to their roles. While the characters they represent are fictional, they – like their terracotta counterparts – help humanise the legendary battles that shaped ancient China.



WHERE THE PAST BECOMES A PLAYFUL PRESENT

The Qin is not the only dynasty visitors can't help but encounter in Xi'an. Remnants of the opulent Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) are also on display – especially at the heritage theme park Tang Paradise and at Datang Everbright City. Our media delegation visited both, gaining visual insights into why this period was considered a golden age of Chinese civilisation. Xi'an, of course, was the Tang dynasty's capital.

Located to the city's south, near the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, Tang Paradise takes the form of a vast imperial lotus garden with a central lake. It's dotted with modern reconstructions of Tang-era architecture, all beautifully illuminated at night. Lakeside sculptures are also part of the light show, and strolling around the garden after dark feels like stumbling into a fairy tale.

Nearby, Datang Everbright City offers a more urban representation of Tang life. This 2,100-metre-long pedestrian street is lined with art installations, period-style buildings and vibrant light shows, immersing visitors in the grandeur of the era with a modern twist. The area comes alive at night, drawing thousands of shoppers, foodies and amateur photographers. Many visitors don elaborate period costumes, complete with ornate

headdresses, and peruse snack stalls while looking regal. Often their shoes are the only giveaway that they have not stepped out of a historical painting.

PRESERVING THE WRITTEN WORD

The media delegation's final stop was the Xi'an branch of the National Archives of Publications and Culture, a spectacular feat of modern architecture set against the backdrop of the Qinling mountains.

Tang Paradise and Datang Everbright City (opposite page, bottom) offer visitors a taste of Tang dynasty opulence, with a modern twist



Xi'an's branch of the National Archives of Publication and Culture contains more than 2 million copies of historical texts

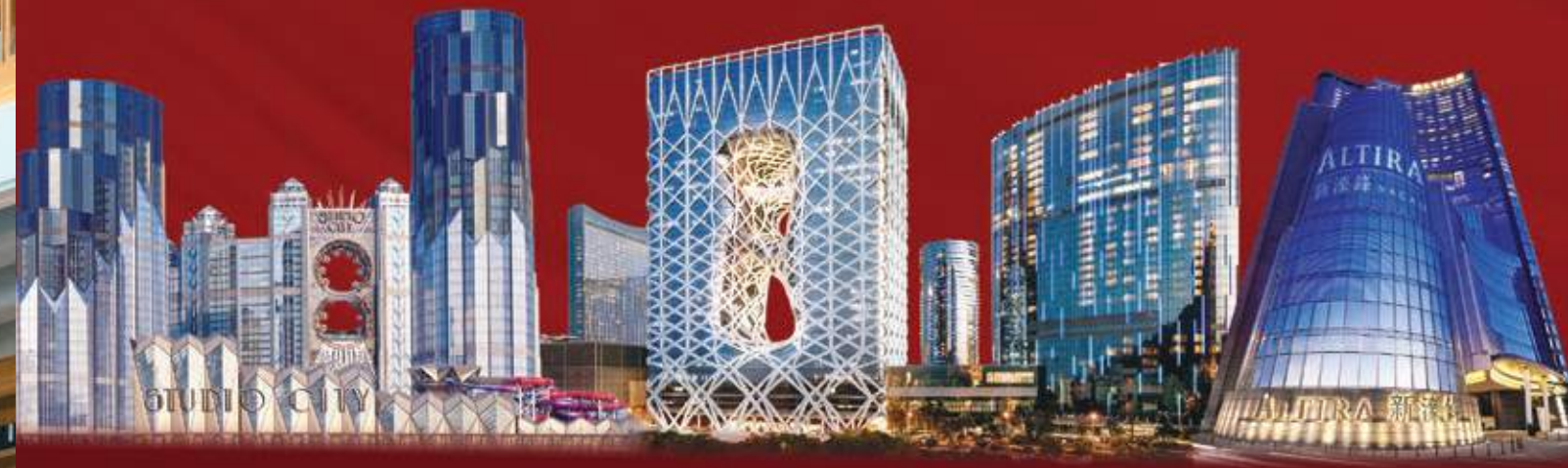
The facility, which opened in 2022, is home to around 2.09 million copies of historical texts and 160 terabytes of digital resources.

Xi'an's archive is one of four in China, alongside similar facilities in Beijing; Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province; and Guangdong Province's Guangzhou. Often described as "seed banks for Chinese culture," these archives were designed to safeguard and showcase the country's written heritage. Each archive has a different focus; Xi'an's highlights works from the Tang dynasty and the country's northwestern culture.

The serene, carefully manicured grounds of the archive invite contemplation on Xi'an's rich history and thriving present. Once the heart of imperial China and the starting point of the Silk Road, the city has managed to remain a successful hub of commerce and culture to this day. That's impressive proof of its ability to evolve through the ages; to never rest on its laurels. The Terracotta Warriors may draw millions of visitors each year, but they are just one facet of a city that continues to grow and innovate, blending its deep historical roots with the nation's modern development. ●



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Macao's international fireworks contest lights up the sky

Xinhua News Agency



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③

- ① Hundreds gathered to watch the 32nd Macao International Fireworks Display Contest
- ② China's entrant, the Dancing Fireworks Company, put on a dazzling display that won it the competition
- ③ A representative from the winning team (left) receives a cheque from the Macao Government Tourism Office's Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**
Photos **Government Information Bureau**

The 32nd Macao International Fireworks Display Contest took place across five spectacular evenings in September and October. It gave 10 pyrotechnic companies from around the world the chance to enthrall viewers with their creativity and expertise.

China's Dancing Fireworks Company secured the top prize, which was announced at an awards ceremony on 6 October. The silver medal was awarded to the Pyro-Klass Fireworks Company from Russia, while the bronze went to Japan's Marutamaya Ogatsu Fireworks Company.

The competition – taking in the National Day holiday period – also featured pyrotechnic teams from France, Spain, Canada, Italy, the Philippines, Portugal and Thailand. Last year, the United Kingdom won the competition, with China and Japan following close behind.

In her speech at the awards ceremony, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes thanked the teams for travelling all the way to Macao to deliver their dazzling displays of light and sound.

“Not just lighting up Macao’s night sky, they also brightened Macao’s golden calling card as an international metropolis,” Senna Fernandes said. ●



④ Prize-giving ceremony for the 32nd Macao International Fireworks Display Contest

⑤ Russia's Pyro-Klass Fireworks Company earned second place

⑥ Japan's entrant's elegant display, as viewed from Kun Iam statue on Macao's waterfront



9



10



11



8



⑦ This year's contest also featured a team from Portugal

⑧ One team travelled all the way from Canada to participate

⑨ Thailand's team put on an especially colourful show

⑩ The French team's pyrotechnic prowess delivered pom-pom-like explosions in the sky

⑪ Spain's offering was equally exciting



12 The team from the Philippines put on a spectacular show for the city

13 The Italians were also very strong contenders in this year's contest



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