

Macao 澳門



Heritage trees

ROOTED IN TIME, GROWING WITH THE CITY

How ancient trees have shaped Macao – and may now play a role in securing the city’s sustainable future

Macao’s newest district takes shape



Women’s Association: building community



Bi Feiyu and the quiet art of writing



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Scheme for Supporting the Development of Macao FIRST-STORE Economy

Supporting non-local brands in opening their FIRST STORES in the Macao Special Administrative Region

Eligibility

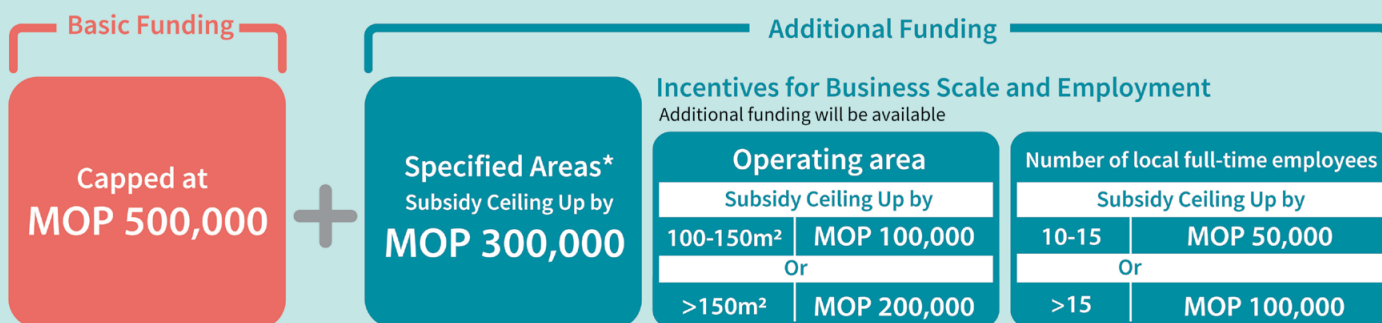
Eligible international brands, particularly those from Portuguese-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries, and the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Taiwan region, which has established their first brick-and-mortar stores in Macao since 1 August 2025, or those intending to set up their First Stores in Macao

Funding Amount

The limit of the sum of basic funding and additional funding is **MOP 1,000,000**

The scheme aims to support the initiation and operating expenses of non-local brands when establishing their first brick-and-mortar stores in Macao

The funding will be settled in reimbursement in three instalments



* "Specified Areas" include Zona de Aterros do Porto Exterior, Areia Preta and Iao Hon, Barca, Barra/Manduco, Fai Chi Kei, Doca do Lamau, Tamagnini Barbosa and Ilha Verde



Details and Application

Enquiries

Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute

Tel: (853) 2871 0300

Fax: (853) 2872 6777

E-mail: ece@ipim.gov.mo

www.ipim.gov.mo

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PUBLISHER

Government Information Bureau of the Macao SAR
15th Floor, China Plaza Building, Avenida da Praia Grande, 762 – 804, Macao

TEL. (+853) 2833 2886 | FAX (+853) 2835 5426
info@gcs.gov.mo | www.gcs.gov.mo

DIRECTOR

Wong Lok I

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Amelia Leong Man Ieng

EDITOR

Eva Lei Sao Iok

PRODUCTION, MANAGEMENT AND DISTRIBUTION

TEAM Publishing and Consultancy Ltd.
Avenida da Praia Grande, No. 763,
Lun Pong Building, 9th Floor, Unit B, Macao

TEL. (+853) 2835 3934 | FAX (+853) 2835 3934
macaomagazine@teampublishing.com.mo
www.teampublishing.com.mo

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Tiago Azevedo

MANAGING EDITOR

Emanuel Graça

SUPPORT SERVICES

Katrina Wong

PRINT RUN

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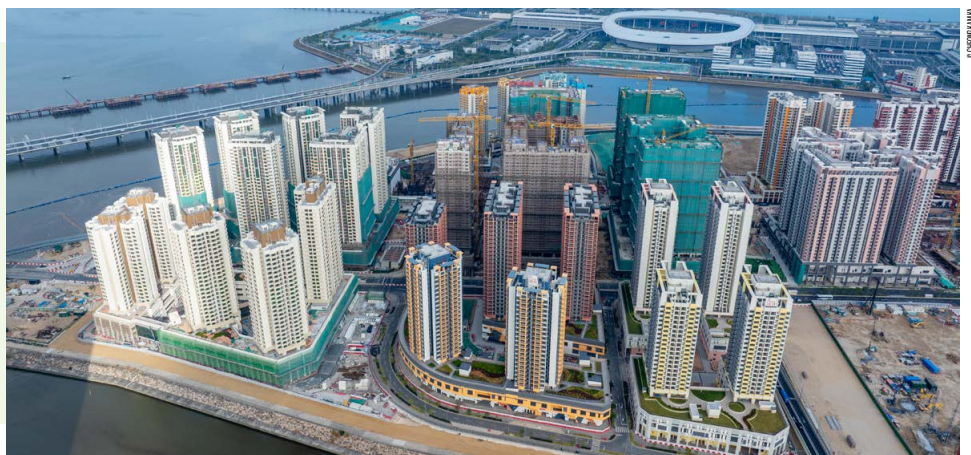


ANCIENT TREES: MACAO'S LIVING HERITAGE

Heritage trees have stood through centuries of urban transformation and are now safeguarded by policy. For experts, these living landmarks not only preserve the city's cultural memory but also play a vital role in supporting biodiversity and enhancing urban resilience [PAGE 6](#)

The rise of New Urban Zone A

From reclaimed land to a growing neighbourhood, the city's newest district is already offering high quality of life [PAGE 28](#)





A legacy of empowerment

In service for more than seven decades, the Women's Association continues to support women, families and youth while still expanding, says chairwoman Lau Kam Ling [PAGE 40](#)



Deep in thought with Bi Feiyu

The award-winning author shares how slow reading, solitude and careful craft shape both his writing and his life [PAGE 58](#)

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Chinese retail brands take the world stage [PAGE 52](#)

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Kam Chin Pok races into a cycling career [PAGE 70](#)

Heritage and devotion at Pak Tai Temple [PAGE 80](#)

Macao in cocktails: Bruno Santos on mixing history and flavour [PAGE 84](#)

New Government Guidance Fund to drive economic diversification

The Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) has announced plans to establish a Government Guidance Fund aimed at channelling private capital into priority sectors and strategic industries, in a move designed to support the city's economic diversification.

The fund, which is expected to be formally established later this year, will operate under the principle of "government guidance and market operation" and follow what officials describe as a "patient capital" philosophy. It is intended to support the commercialisation and industrialisation of scientific

and technological innovation projects, while creating higher-quality employment opportunities for local residents.

The MSAR authorities plan to inject an initial 11 billion patacas into the fund. The Government Guidance Fund is expected to reach a total size of 20 billion patacas once private capital contributions are included.

The fund will be supervised by the Chief Executive and managed on a day-to-day basis by a government-appointed management entity. A guidance committee will also be established, comprising government officials, industry professionals, academics and representatives from relevant sectors, to provide strategic direction and oversight. ■



First-store scheme attracts more than 40 applications

The Macao Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) has received more than 40 applications for the first phase of the "Scheme for Supporting the Development of Macao First-Store Economy", according to a press release.

The scheme will run for three years and includes six application

phases. Successful applicants may receive subsidies of up to 1 million patacas. The primary aim is to attract international brands, as well as brands from Greater China, to open their first outlets in the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR).

IPIM said the brands involved in the first round of

applications originated mainly from the Chinese mainland, Portugal, Thailand, the Hong Kong SAR and Taiwan region. Around 87 percent of the applications involve partnerships with Macao companies.

Applications for the second phase of the scheme will be open from May 1 to July 31. ■

Recycled water system begins operations

Since March, recycled water has been integrated into Macao's public water supply network for the first time. For now, the system serves the Seac Pai Van public housing complex and the campus of the University of Macau, where the recycled water is used for non-potable purposes such as toilet flushing and the irrigation of green spaces.

The introduction of the system coincided with the start of operations at the Coloane Recycled Water Plant. Once the plant is

expanded, the recycled water supply network is expected to extend to areas near Avenida Wai Long in Taipa and to Cotai.

A second recycled water plant is also planned for the artificial island of the Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macao Bridge.

Recycled water refers to domestic wastewater that has undergone advanced treatment so that it can be reused safely for non-drinking purposes. It is distributed through a dedicated network entirely separate from the potable water system. ■

BY THE NUMBERS

13.92 billion patacas

Macao's merchandise exports for full-year 2025, a year-on-year increase of 3.2 percent

68%

Percentage of internet users in Macao using online government services in 2025

2025.2025

NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS INTEGRATING INTO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In March, the Chief Executive, Sam Hou Fai, attended the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. During the meeting, delegates approved the outline of the country's 15th Five-Year Plan, a policy blueprint that will guide China's development from 2026 to 2030. The national plan will also serve as a guideline for Macao's Third Five-Year Plan for Social and Economic Development, which is scheduled to be unveiled later this year. ■



GUARDIANS OF TIME

Text Marco Carvalho

Scattered across temple courtyards, historic squares and busy streets, Macao's ancient trees are silent witnesses to centuries of change. Rooted in tradition yet vital to modern urban life, these enduring giants bridge culture, science and history, and stand as a living link between the city's **past and its future**



Two camphor trees in the courtyard of the Albergue SCM have stood there for over two centuries

Beneath a canopy of weathered branches and the faint curl of incense smoke, time seems to slow at Kun Iam Temple, a Buddhist temple dedicated to the Goddess of Mercy. Here, in the temple’s courtyard, a Jambolan plum tree rises with quiet authority, its gnarled trunk and sweeping limbs a

testament to centuries of life. Long before Portuguese poet Luís de Camões penned his verses or Tang Xianzu, the Ming Dynasty playwright famous for “The Peony Pavilion”, roamed the streets of Macao in the 16th century, this tree was already rooted and blooming.

The “*Syzygium cumini*” – also known as the Malabar

plum – is believed to be around 515 years old. It stands among 658 ancient and heritage trees officially protected in Macao, according to the latest assessment from the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM). Ancient and heritage trees are living monuments that have endured storms, upheavals



◀ The large hackberry tree inside the courtyard of the Sir Robert Ho Tung Library is 175 years old

and the steady march of urban change. Their survival, however, is not merely a matter of resilience; it is also a reflection of cultural intention.

Across Macao, many of the city's oldest trees are found within temple grounds, where nature and belief intertwine. For feng shui master Mickey Hung, this is an example of cultural significance and reflects a long-established set of metaphysical beliefs.

"It is no coincidence that ancient trees often stand in front of Macao's temples. Take, for example, the two century-old banyan trees in front of the Kun Iam Temple and Tin Hau Temple, in Cheok Ka Village," Mr Hung said. "They are more than just greenery; these ancient trees, with their lush foliage and enormous canopies, act like loyal guards, gathering auspicious Qi [vital energy] from all directions in front of the temple gate and gently building it inside. Their thick trunks and dense crowns slow down the wind, preventing Qi from being scattered, making the Qi field around the temples more stable and harmonious," he explained.

The feng shui master, a well-known proponent of Eastern metaphysics, often walks the city with his students, tracing the invisible flows that shape its



In Macao, the specific attributes of ancient trees make them the ideal choice for man-made protective shields

Mickey Hung
Feng shui master

energy. To him, these trees are "living textbooks on feng shui", natural structures that temper wind, cast shade and cultivate balance within an increasingly dense urban fabric.

"In modern feng shui practices, especially in a place as land scarce as Macao, it's difficult to find natural 'backing mountains', like in ancient times," Mr Hung noted. "In Macao, the specific attributes of ancient trees make them the ideal choice for man-made protective shields. They act as the city's lungs, absorbing the 'Turbid Qi' [stagnated energy] and 'Sha Qi' [negative energy] from roads and dense buildings, releasing oxygen through photosynthesis, while also smoothing and softening chaotic energy flows," he explained.

"The huge canopies of ancient trees block the sun, lower ground temperatures and create a micro-environment that is cooler in summer and warmer in winter," the feng shui master added. "The lush trees within the Camões Garden, for instance, keep the garden's temperature noticeably lower than the surrounding streets."

Where tradition meets science

If feng shui offers one lens through which to understand these ancient trees, science provides another; one that increasingly echoes similar conclusions.

Research conducted by Professor Allen Zhang Hao, head of the School of General Education and Languages and

associate professor at the Department of Construction, Environment and Engineering at the Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (THEi), underscores the ecological value of old-growth trees in cities like Macao. “Ancient trees play a crucial role in urban diversity and cannot be replaced by younger trees,” the scholar stated.

“Their complex structure and morphology, wide canopy and extensive root system provide a wide range of microhabitats that can support a rich community of flora and fauna,” said Professor Zhang, who is also Programme Leader of Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Horticulture, Arboriculture and Landscape Management at THEi. “The cavities, dead branches and cracks are all supporting different species. Ancient trees offer food, shelters and reproductive sites. They also serve as stepping stones for species movement across fragmented landscapes in urban areas,” he added.

Beyond biodiversity, their environmental contributions are both measurable and significant. Acting as natural regulators, these trees store substantial amounts of carbon, filter pollutants and mitigate rising urban temperatures.



The ecological and cultural significance of ancient trees is invaluable to a city

Allen Zhang Hao
Programme Leader of Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Horticulture, Arboriculture and Landscape Management at THEi

“Large trees, with greater canopy cover and total leaf area, have a larger capacity to remove air pollutants and a higher carbon storage and sequestration. Also, the large canopy will lower the air temperature through transpiration cooling and canopy shading. The latter reduces the heat absorption and re-radiation of urban structures”, Professor Zhang observed.

“During the city planning, the preservation of ancient trees should be considered as one strategy for the climate action plan of a place. The economic value brought through the mitigation of the urban heat island effect should not be overlooked in the decision-making process,” he added. “It should be noticed that there are also other tangible and

intangible benefits derived from the other ecosystem services of an ancient tree.”

Silent witnesses of a changing city

In Macao, where space is scarce and transformation constant, these trees do more than support ecosystems: they also anchor memory.

For Carlos Lo Ka Nok, research assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Macau, ancient trees function as living records of the city’s evolution. “We can still find old trees within both the urban and rural landscapes of Macao. Their distribution reveals the historical urban fabric of the past. The history of these old trees provides a crucial insight into Macao’s urban development,” he stated.



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➤ An ancient pagoda tree is a prominent landmark standing in front of the Dom Pedro V Theatre

As the city expanded, landscapes shifted and ownership changed, trees remained, transitioning from private or communal assets to protected public heritage. “During urbanisation, former rural and private spaces were progressively transformed into public urban areas. Consequently, trees transitioned from being private property or collectively owned by villages to falling under the jurisdiction of municipal authorities,” Professor Lo explained.

He added: “Once relevant, their role in providing sustenance to city dwellers diminished, but it was replaced by increasingly important functions such as air purification, ornamentation and shade provision.”

Their placement continues to reveal traces of the past. Clusters of old trees hint at former gathering spaces, while the presence of non-native



The history of these old trees provides crucial insight into Macao’s urban development

Carlos Lo Ka Nok
Research assistant professor
at the University of Macau

species reflects centuries of trade and exchange.

“In my experience conducting historical research in towns and villages, the distribution and age of old trees allow me to roughly infer the spatial layout of a particular village over the past one or two centuries,” Professor Lo, who is also a vice-president at the Macao Heritage Ambassadors Association, said.

“In traditional rural settings the shade provided by trees was utilised effectively, with people gathering beneath them to cool off, thereby creating public spaces. Within Chinese villages, for instance, the old banyan trees often formed gathering spots for people to chat and exchange information,” the scholar added.

“Trees have distinct growth cycles and maximum lifespans and trees planted in different periods reflect different historical eras. During the Qing Dynasty, when trade between Macao and Southeast Asia flourished, species were imported from Southeast Asia and were planted in Macao and the surrounding areas. The Portuguese authorities in Macao began

ANCIENT TREES BY THE NUMBERS

Macao’s classification of ancient trees follows guidelines established by the National Greening Committee of China, which categorises them by age. Trees with exceptional ecological or cultural value may also be designated as valuable trees, regardless of age. According to the latest records, Macao is home to:

Category	Age	Number
First-grade ancient trees	500+ years	1
Second-grade ancient trees	300 – 499 years	6
Third-grade ancient trees	100 – 299 years	646
Valuable trees	No age limit	5



📍 Ancient trees, such as this 113-year-old Bodhi tree in Coloane, play an essential role in urban diversity

importing various tree species from overseas,” the researcher explained. “Now the most common tree in Macao, the ‘*Ficus rumphii*’, likely originated from Southeast Asia and became an important landscape element for decorating city streets.”

Amid Macao’s ever-changing skyline, these ancient trees offer a rare sense of continuity. Rooted in place yet evolving with their surroundings, they stand as quiet custodians

of both nature and history.

“The ecological and cultural significance of ancient trees is invaluable to a city. The preservation of ancient trees in a city like Macao, with rapid urban development, helps ameliorate the negative environmental impacts,” Professor Zhang affirmed. “Culturally, ancient trees are living monuments that showcase the local history and symbolise the cultural identity within an evolving landscape”, he stated.

The scholar cautioned however that as rapid urban development will in likelihood “affect the growing environment” of ancient trees, “a regular tree monitoring and care programme must be in place,” a step, he said, was “often ignored”.

“Raising public awareness about the irreplaceability of ancient trees is crucial for supporting their conservation during urban development,” he concluded. ■

TREES TELL STORIES OF THE PAST

Five hundred years standing

Hidden within the courtyard of Kun lam Temple stands a towering tree that has watched over the site for more than 500 years, silently bearing witness to the transformation of its surroundings. It is believed to be the oldest tree in all of Macao.

Its presence predates not only the current temple structures, built around 1821, but possibly even the earliest shrine established on the site.

The tree belongs to the species “*Syzygium cumini*”, commonly known in English as Jambolan plum tree or Java plum tree. It is a tropical evergreen tree native to the Indian



subcontinent and Southeast Asia, widely recognised for its small, astringent, purple-black edible fruit.

The tree stands in the courtyard just behind the temple entrance; beside it stands another Java plum tree, some two decades its junior. It is believed that, when the temple was constructed, the builders deliberately preserved them, designing the buildings around their trunks so that architecture and nature could coexist. This decision reflects the traditional Chinese philosophy of harmony between humanity and the natural world.

The last ancient olive tree

The species “*Canarium album*”, commonly known as the Chinese white olive, is a fast-growing evergreen native to East Asia, valued for its edible, nutrient-rich fruit, which is widely used in cooking and traditional medicine.

Ancient specimens are rare in Macao. Only one tree in the territory is known to be more than a century in age, standing in Guia Hill Municipal Park. Rising to approximately 18.5 metres, the tree is lush and verdant, its broad canopy spreading like a parasol when viewed from a distance.



In ancient China, the white olive carried rich symbolic meaning. Its distinctive flavour – bitter at first, then sweet – made it a powerful metaphor for honest counsel or effective medicine: initially unpalatable, yet ultimately beneficial. The association earned it the nickname “remonstrance fruit”, and it became a recurring subject in classical poetry. Song dynasty (960-1279) scholars including Su Shi, Ouyang Xiu, Huang Tingjian and Mei Yaochen are renowned for having composed verses inspired by it.

A presence from another era

Near Lou Lim Ieoc Garden, along Avenida de Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida, a row of large trees stands with trunks nearly a metre in diameter, rising from the middle of the pavement. One of the camphor trees (*Cinnamomum camphora*) here is estimated to be around 230 years old.

In recent years, the Macao authorities have redesigned this stretch of pavement to improve pedestrian movement while protecting the trees' growth. The walkway beside the trees was widened, creating safer and



more comfortable conditions for pedestrians without disturbing the roots.

These trees are living reminders of a much earlier landscape, from a time when Avenida de Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida did not yet exist. Old maps show that the area where the old camphor tree now stands was once Long Tin Village, surrounded by fields and ponds. It is believed that a road once passed beside this tree, linking the small village to the old city of Macao.

The library's oldest resident

In the rear garden of the Sir Robert Ho Tung Library stands a hackberry tree (*Celtis sinensis*) with a canopy spanning more than six metres. The large tree is estimated to be around 170 years old.

The building that now houses the library was originally constructed before 1894. The property changed hands several times before being purchased by Sir Robert Ho Tung in 1918. After his death in 1956, his descendants fulfilled his wishes by bequeathing the premises for the establishment of a public library – it officially opened to the public in 1958.

By around 2002, the original library building faced a shortage of space and plans for expansion began. During site inspections, it was concluded that both the front and rear gardens were integral to the distinctive character of the library and should

be preserved as much as possible. The final design was adapted to ensure that the hackberry tree would continue to thrive, and the new extension opened in 2006.



Roots of continuity

Along the Hac Sá Reservoir Fitness Trail, a Hong Kong machilu (“*Machilus chinensis*”) stands tall and resilient, its dense canopy a deep sea of green. The tree has a trunk diameter at breast height of 1.5 metres and is estimated to be more than 210 years old.

It is one of the few ancient trees to have survived the wildfires and pest infestations that devastated Coloane’s forests in the 1960s and 1970s, when large areas of woodland were destroyed and very few old trees remained.

In 1999, at the time of Macao’s return to the motherland, the first Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region, Ho Hau Wah, planted another *Machilus chinensis* on Small Taipa Hill. Since then, each newly inaugurated Chief Executive has



continued the tradition by planting the same species at the same place. The current Chief Executive, Sam Hou Fai, did so in March last year.

The lost jackfruit trees

Jackfruit (“*artocarpus heterophyllus*”) is native to India and was later introduced to Guangdong, where it began to be cultivated before spreading to Macao. Known for its large size and sweet flavour, it is sometimes referred to as the “queen of fruits”.

The most famous jackfruit trees in Macao were once said to grow in Camões Garden. The poet Zhong Qishao visited the garden with friends in 1816 and was so captivated by the scenery that he left behind a verse. Likewise,



Wang Zhaoxuan, a noted poet and political figure of the late Qing dynasty, also wrote about the jackfruit trees of Camões Garden in his poems about Macao.

The jackfruit trees recorded in 1816 were still visible when Wang Zhaoxuan wrote around 1918. Over time, however, as Camões Garden underwent a number of changes, the trees gradually disappeared. Today, the oldest remaining jackfruit tree in Macao, at more than 210 years old, stands in Ká-Hó Village.

From convent to garden

The St. Francis Convent was established in Macao in 1580 by Spanish Franciscan friars and later came under the care of Portuguese Franciscans. In 1834, the local



authorities assumed control, eventually demolishing the convent between 1862 and 1864, to make way for a military barracks. Part of the former convent grounds were transformed into Macao's first public garden, designed in a distinctive Southern European style. In 1935, the opening of Rua Nova à Guia reduced the garden's size, but its character remained.

Amid all these changes, a star fruit tree ("Averrhoa carambola") has stood on the site – today's St. Francis Garden – for more than 260 years. This small evergreen tree is a living witness to a time when the sea still lapped close to the garden. That proximity ended in the 1920s, when land reclamation pushed the shoreline further away, leaving the tree to endure the city's transformation.

Life amid the gravestones

Frangipani ("Plumeria rubra cv. Acutifolia") is a flower of summer, yet its branches are stark and gnarled – particularly those of the white-flowered frangipani trees in the Protestant Cemetery next to Camões Garden.

The cemetery was established under the guidance of Reverend Robert Morrison (1782–1834), who arrived in Macao in 1807 as Chinese interpreter for the British East India Company. With an increasing Protestant population in Macao, it became urgent to find a suitable burial site.



In 1821, following the death of his wife, Rev. Morrison requested that the British East India Company acquire a plot of land for the interment of its staff and other deceased Protestants in Macao. The cemetery remained in use until 1857. Its layout has survived intact ever since.

The frangipani trees may have been added to the cemetery more than 160 years ago, intended to adorn the burial grounds. Today, their vigour serves as a reminder that life and death are intertwined, two sides of the same coin.

Protecting the city's roots

Text **Tiago Azevedo**

In a city where land is scarce and urban development moves quickly, safeguarding trees that are hundreds of years old requires more than admiration. It requires law, science, planning and collective care, efforts that continue to be implemented and improved over the years, the city's Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in comments to Macao Magazine.

Today, the bureau added, Macao has developed a comprehensive legal and administrative framework to protect these living heritage assets, combining cultural heritage legislation, urban planning policies and technical conservation measures.

At the heart of Macao's protection system is Law No. 11/2013 on Cultural Heritage Preservation, which formally recognises ancient and remarkable trees as part of the city's cultural heritage. By placing these trees under statutory protection, the law acknowledges that they are not simply elements of greenery but unique historical witnesses and ecological treasures.

According to Article 106 of Law No. 11/2013, IAM "is responsible for the assessment, formulation and updating" the database on ancient trees, and "continuously includes trees that meet the criteria for ancient and valuable trees into the List of Protected Ancient and Valuable Trees," IAM stated.

The legislation provides clear safeguards. It prohibits the illegal felling or damaging of protected trees and establishes penalties for violations. It also defines the responsibilities of public authorities and property owners, ensuring

that conservation is a shared responsibility and that protection extends beyond public parks and squares to include trees located on private land.

"IAM is not only responsible for the management and maintenance of ancient and valuable trees under its jurisdiction, but also provides technical support to the owners of other ancient trees whenever necessary, so as to actively promote the entrusted management of ancient trees," the bureau highlighted.

Mapping arboreal heritage

Behind the legal framework lies years of scientific work. Between 2011 and 2012, the Macao authorities invited specialists from the South China Botanical Garden of the Chinese Academy of Sciences to conduct an in-depth survey of the city's ancient and valuable trees.

The survey documented trees more than a century old, rare species and specimens associated with "historical events or commemorative significance," IAM noted. The survey's findings were later published in "The Charm of Trees", a book designed to educate the public about Macao's arboreal heritage.

Scientific cooperation with the relevant authorities in the Chinese mainland has continued. IAM works closely with experts from the Guangzhou Institute of Forestry and Landscape Architecture, who regularly visit Macao to assist with "technical, research, consulting and other support in the areas of conservation, risk assessment, pest control and other areas".

✓ Macao boasts several false Bodhi trees that are more than a century old

According to the IAM, caring for heritage trees requires careful monitoring. The bureau maintains a systematic inspection programme that categorises trees according to their health: “endangered” trees are inspected monthly; “normal” specimens quarterly; and “healthy” trees every six months.

Specialised technologies – including tree tomographs and root radar systems – allow arborists to “detect trunk cavities or map underground root systems”. These tools help experts diagnose problems before they become serious, IAM stated. Maintenance work may include pruning, pest control treatments and structural supports designed to prevent collapse while preserving the tree’s natural form.

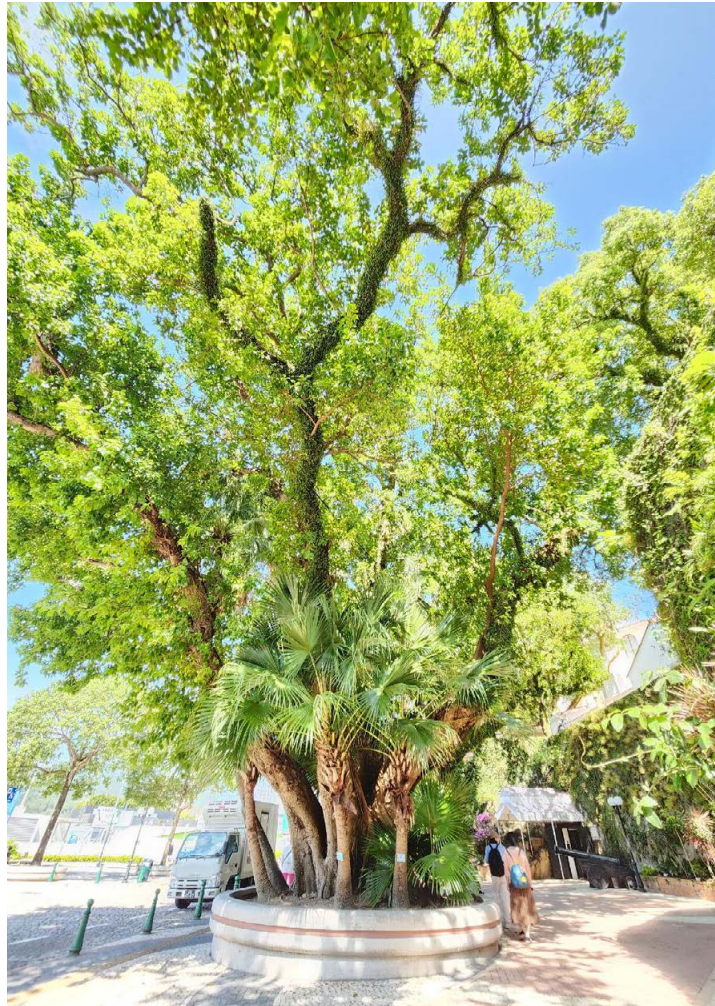
Training programmes for local professionals further strengthen the city’s capacity to care for its oldest trees. In addition, IAM said it cooperates “with the Guangzhou Institute of Forestry and Landscape Architecture to enhance the technical capacity of local maintenance, and pest and disease control of ancient and valuable trees through regular exchanges with experts from the Chinese mainland”.

Watching over the giants

Protecting ancient trees in Macao often means balancing conservation with urban development. With narrow streets, dense neighbourhoods and limited space, many trees grow in challenging environments.

To improve conditions and enhance the growing environment of ancient trees, IAM said it “actively communicates” with other relevant departments. “For instance, it conducts joint inspections with the Cultural Affairs Bureau and provides advice on ancient tree conservation to urban planning and public construction departments, so as to facilitate the formulation of better plans,” IAM stated.

The bureau also works with planning and public



works departments to widen tree pits, install permeable paving materials and reduce soil compaction to “promote the growth of ancient trees”. In some cases, support structures are installed to stabilise ageing trunks.

Cooperation between departments is essential. For example, conservation measures were implemented for trees within the Historic Centre of Macao, including environmental improvements around a tree in St. Augustine’s Square.

Urban planning can also adapt to protect individual trees. At Largo do Estaleiro, traffic lanes were adjusted and support frames installed to protect a kapok tree whose trunk grows at an angle. Meanwhile, the design of a public car park in Rua da Cordoaria was refined after consultation



SHAMPOO/GETTY IMAGES

👉 IAM staff perform regular checks on the city's heritage trees

with IAM to ensure nearby trees would remain undisturbed, the bureau observed.

While Macao already has a solid legal framework, experts believe the next step is to move from protecting individual trees toward a more integrated ecological strategy.

Teng Kai On, president of the board of directors of Macao Urban Planning Institute (MUPI), highlighted that the list of ancient and notable trees “is dynamically updated, demonstrating the Government’s commitment and responsibility in conserving these trees”.

Supporting long-term care

According to the expert, “from the perspectives of ‘having laws to follow’ and ‘substantive protection’, a foundational framework is established”. However, he added, “to achieve a leap from ‘individual protection’ to ‘systematic stewardship’ and ‘proactive value creation’,” additional steps can be taken.

One proposal is to conduct a comprehensive planning study mapping all ancient trees across the city, progressing to a “systematic integration into spatial blueprints,” Mr Teng suggested. This would identify their roles as ecological nodes and cultural landmarks, allowing them to be integrated into broader urban systems such as green corridors, ventilation pathways and heritage districts.

“This study should not only map their locations but also assess their value as ecological network nodes and cultural landscapes. Based on this, different grades and categories should be defined, with corresponding protection methods and utilisation strategies,” the expert explained.

Mr Teng added: “These findings should then be organically integrated with other planning elements like the green space system, ventilation corridors, and historic district conservation, achieving coordinated protection under a ‘multi-plan integration’ framework.”

Another idea is to introduce stronger incentives for conservation on private land. Possible measures include “special subsidies, tax incentives,” or planning tools such as “transferable development

rights and density bonuses,” as well as establishing an “Ancient Tree Conservation Fund,” the head of MUPI said.

Technical guidelines for construction near ancient trees could further reduce accidental damage. “These should regulate root detection, protective construction methods, pavement material selection, and underground space utilisation, providing clear and scientific technical pathways for both development and conservation, thereby reducing damage caused by ignorance or rough construction practices,” Mr Teng explained.

A joint effort

The expert however noted that protecting Macao’s ancient trees is not only the work of government agencies. Community participation should be increasingly encouraged through initiatives such as an “Ancient Tree Adoption Scheme”, inviting businesses, schools and civic groups to help care for these living landmarks.

Public engagement should be strengthened, Mr Teng added, through educational campaigns and activities “like the ‘Macao Green Week’, transforming ancient tree conservation from a government-mandated responsibility into a citizen action shared and built by society”.

Like all living organisms, ancient trees face the realities of ageing, disease and natural decline. Macao’s coastal climate brings additional challenges, including typhoons and extreme weather, IAM noted.

“Different tree species have different lifespans. In particular, large trees, old trees and ancient trees tend to accumulate more problems due to their long growth period,” the bureau stated.

Regular pruning, risk assessments and structural reinforcements help reduce these dangers while preserving the trees’ dignity and vitality, the bureau added.

Yet despite the pressures of time and urbanisation, many of Macao’s ancient trees continue to thrive. Through law, science, planning and public engagement, Macao is ensuring that the city’s heritage trees will continue to shade its streets and squares for generations to come. ■

Planning around nature

Text **Tiago Azevedo**

Macao's ancient and valuable trees – scattered across temple courtyards, cemeteries, village squares and roadside verges – form a living archive of the city's past. With more than 600 trees officially classified as ancient or valuable, preserving them is far from straightforward, experts say.

Balancing heritage conservation with development pressures, infrastructure demands and competing land uses presents a complex challenge for urban planners, architects and policymakers alike. Despite such pressures, these trees continue to play a crucial role in Macao's ecological resilience, cultural identity and urban character.

With Macao's urban environment defined by its extraordinary density, ancient trees perform essential ecological functions, playing “a critical and multi-layered role in maintaining urban biodiversity,” said Teng Kai On, president of the board of directors of the Macao Urban Planning Institute (MUPI).

According to Mr Teng, each mature tree acts as a complete ecological system. “An ancient tree constitutes a structurally complex and functionally complete ‘micro-ecosystem’. Its expansive canopy, robust trunk, deep root system, and associated epiphytic plants provide habitats, foraging grounds, and breeding sites for birds, insects, small mammals, ferns, mosses, and microorganisms,” he told Macao Magazine. These complex structures create “stable ecological niches” that newly planted trees cannot replicate for decades, he added.

Academic research reinforces this perspective. A study published in the *Landscape and Urban Planning* journal notes that Macao's more than four centuries of urban history have left behind a remarkable collection of heritage trees with important ecological, historical and botanical value. Despite intense urbanisation, these trees persist as rare living remnants of the city's earlier landscapes.

“Macao has developed an exceptionally high population density and ultra-compact mode, yet it permits survival of interesting and diverse heritage trees,” wrote professors Allen Zhang Hao and Po Ying Lai from the Faculty of Design and Environment of the Technological and Higher Education Institute (THEi) of Hong Kong, and Jim Chi Yung from the Department of Geography, University of Hong Kong.

These trees “provide valuable insights in landscaping, tree management, urban ecology and urban history,” the scholars stated in a research paper titled ‘Species diversity and spatial pattern of old and precious trees in Macau’.

Vibrant ecological hub

The research also highlighted how species diversity varies depending on location. Roadside trees are the most numerous but show the lowest diversity due to limited planting choices and harsh environmental conditions. Parks, religious sites and historic gardens, by contrast, support greater variety and often shelter the oldest specimens.

“Ficus” species, particularly banyan trees, dominate the list of heritage trees in Macao. Their

resilience and adaptability allow them to survive the stresses of urban life, including restricted soil, pollution and physical disturbance, the research paper noted.

While urban trees constitute an essential landscape component in cities, “few can survive over centuries under the harsh or degrading urban environment,” the scholars highlighted. “The outstanding remnant trees demonstrate tolerance and adaptability under prolonged urban pressure,” they added.

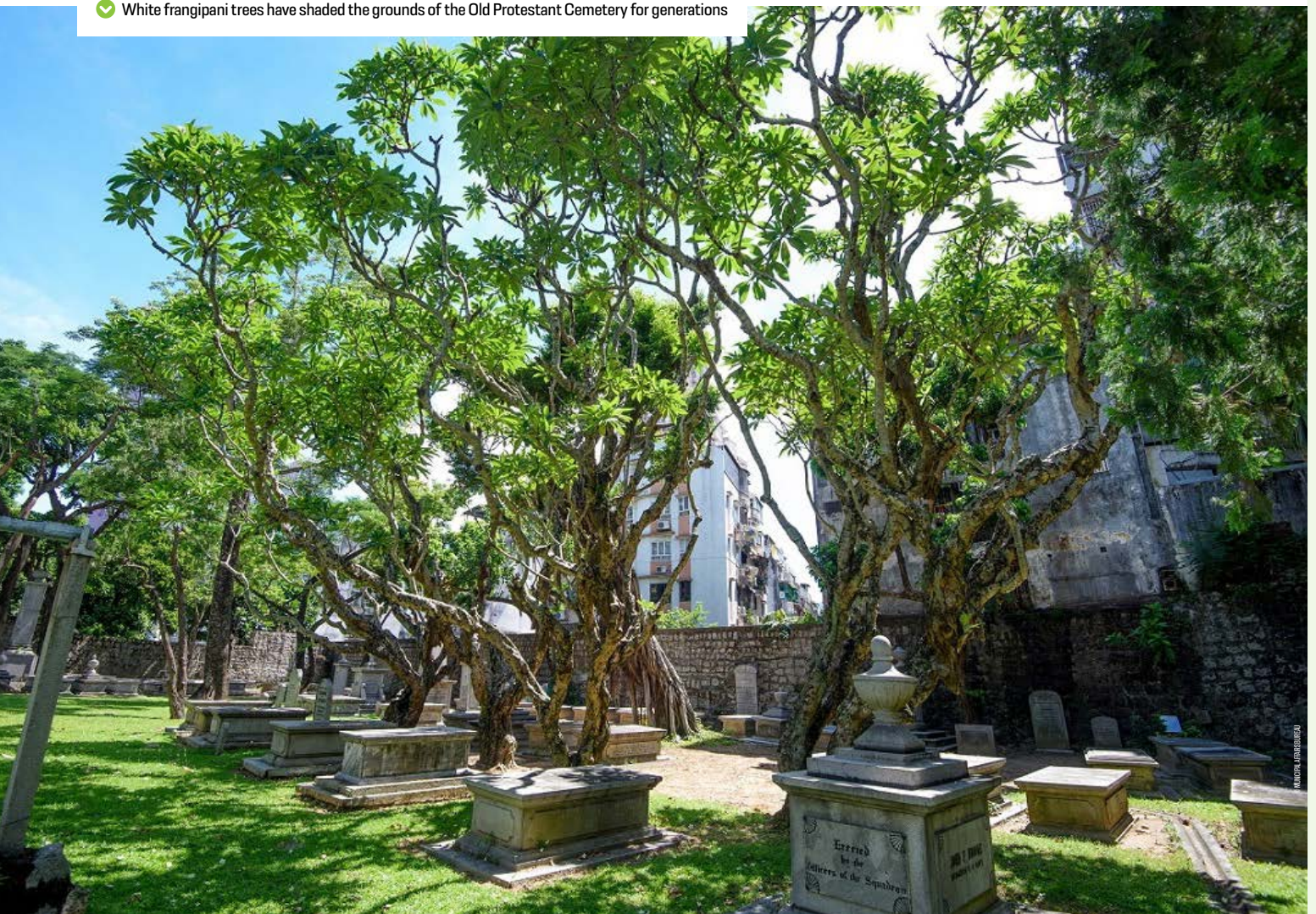
Within Macao’s fragmented landscape, Mr Teng noted, these ancient trees function as ecological “nodes”, with each specimen “supporting local wildlife and helping connect different green spaces across the city”.

Protecting them, the MUPI president said, means more than preserving individual trees: “It’s about safeguarding a vibrant ecological hub, which is crucial for improving Macao’s overall ecosystem service functions and ecological resilience.”

Beyond biodiversity, ancient trees provide environmental services that are increasingly recognised as essential to sustainable cities. Their broad canopies cast shade that cools surrounding streets and pavements, helping to counter the urban heat island effect.

Leaves also capture airborne dust and pollutants, improving air quality. At the same time, trees absorb carbon dioxide through photosynthesis, contributing to climate mitigation, noted the urban expert.

✔ White frangipani trees have shaded the grounds of the Old Protestant Cemetery for generations





An ancient tree constitutes a structurally complex and functionally complete 'micro-ecosystem'

Teng Kai On

President of the board of directors of MUPI

Mr Teng described these benefits as part of the city's "green infrastructure".

"Ancient trees provide ecosystem services that are large-scale, efficient and long-lasting," he stated. "Urban planning should actively identify and integrate these benefits into the city's environmental strategies."

One way to do so is by designing small public spaces around heritage trees. Pocket parks, street-corner gardens or shaded rest areas allow residents to enjoy these natural assets while preserving their ecological functions, he observed.

Such approaches should be aligned with the broader concept of nature-based solutions, using urban planning strategies that harness natural systems to address environmental challenges.

Witnesses of history

While their ecological value is significant, the cultural importance of Macao's ancient trees is equally profound. Many are closely tied to historic sites and collective memory, and have long served as gathering places and symbols of continuity.

Architect André Lui, who has extensively studied Macao's architectural heritage, emphasises that the relationship between buildings and landscape has long been recognised in the city's conservation policies.

"Since the early classification process in the 1970s, trees have been considered part of Macao's heritage, not just buildings," he explained in comments to Macao Magazine. The first preservation body established in 1976 was named the Commission for the Safeguard of Architectural, Landscape and Cultural Heritage, reflecting the understanding that natural elements were inseparable from the built environment, he added.

Currently, several of Macao's heritage trees are in historically significant sites. The Old Protestant Cemetery, for instance, contains mature specimens that have shaded the grounds for generations. At the A-Ma Temple, some trees have appeared in visual records dating back to the 19th century.

French traveller and painter Auguste Borget, who visited Macao in the 1800s, created detailed sketches of the A-Ma Temple and its surrounding landscape. In his writings, he praised the site for the harmony between architecture and nature.

This relationship echoes "Chinese architectural philosophy, which places strong emphasis on integrating buildings with their natural surroundings," Mr Lui highlighted. "For architects, the natural environment must always be part of the project," he added. "Existing landscape and vegetation should be considered from the beginning."

Ancient trees often influence how urban projects are conceived and designed, the architect noted. In some cases, development plans in Macao have been modified to preserve mature trees valued by local communities. These decisions reflect a growing recognition that natural heritage contributes to a city's identity and quality of life.

MUPI's Mr Teng argues that planning must go beyond simply protecting the tree itself. Instead, it should recognise the broader relationship between the tree, its location and the people who interact with it. He described this approach as the "tree-place-people-event" perspective. Preserving valuable trees, he added, must "move towards the holistic inheritance and revitalisation of their cultural landscape and the spirit of their place".



Chinese architectural philosophy places strong emphasis on integrating buildings with their natural surroundings

André Lui
Architect

Urban design can also help communicate the stories behind these living landmarks. Interpretive signage, art installations and digital guides can highlight their historical significance, while cultural tourism routes may incorporate them as distinctive stops along the city's heritage trails.

The goal, Mr Teng said, is to transform ancient trees from isolated conservation points into “emotional landmarks” recognised by residents and visitors alike.

The pressures of development

Despite increasing awareness of their value, protecting ancient trees in Macao is often complicated by practical constraints, with the most obvious challenge being land scarcity. “Persuading all stakeholders to ‘reserve’ land for ancient trees within the severely limited total land area is the most pressing challenge,” Mr Teng acknowledged.

Another difficulty arises from property rights, the urban expert noted. Some ancient trees stand on private land, where their preservation may restrict potential development. Although legal protections exist, compensation mechanisms for affected landowners remain limited, an imbalance that can sometimes create tensions between public interest and private economic considerations, Mr Teng suggested.

Urban infrastructure might add another layer of complexity, as modern cities require extensive underground networks for water supply, sewage systems, electricity cables and telecommunications. Road widening projects and drainage improvements often involve excavation that can disturb the root systems of nearby trees.

“Balancing the need to meet modern urban operational functions while preserving sufficient, unpaved, and utility-free soil space for the survival of ancient trees presents a significant technical challenge for engineering design,” Mr Teng stated.

Engineers and planners, the urban planner added, must coordinate closely when designing infrastructure near heritage trees. Solutions may include rerouting underground utilities, installing root protection systems or maintaining permeable soil zones that allow roots to breathe and absorb water, he explained.

Equally important is monitoring throughout the entire life cycle of development projects, from initial design to construction and long-term maintenance. Mr Lui emphasises the importance of thorough research into the natural environment before any project begins.

“Over the years, I think Macao has respected its nature and environment, even amid such rapid development, ensuring the city's sustainability,” the architect said. “It also helps that the city has a legal framework to safeguard valuable trees, with a list that is regularly updated and provides vital data for the city's urban development.”

Conserving ancient trees also requires cooperation across multiple sectors of society. Government departments, developers, residents and environmental groups may each have different priorities, and because the benefits of ancient trees – such as biodiversity or cultural value – are difficult to quantify in financial terms, reaching a consensus could prove challenging, Mr Teng stressed.

“The planning process must serve as an effective platform for negotiation, seeking the greatest common denominator among diverse demands through scientific assessment, public discussion, and scheme comparison,” the head of MUPI stated. ■

DEVELOPMENT

LIFE TAKES ROOT IN NEW URBAN ZONE A

Text **Tony Lai**

Macao's New Urban Zone A is moving beyond the drawing board and into daily life as residents settle into **newly completed public housing**, followed closely by shops and social services. What began as a demand for housing is now evolving into a community experiencing a high quality of life

From Areia Preta, the sea stretches outward, with the Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macao Bridge standing on the horizon. Nearby, high-rise towers cloaked in green safety netting rise steadily, while construction sites hum with the rhythm of trucks and workers in motion. This is the usual scene university student Jason Lei passes each day on his way home to Tong Kai building in Macao's New Urban Zone A.

Jason Lei moved into the flat with his parents at the start of the year and is still

finding his footing. "It's definitely more spacious here, as it is new, still developing," he noted. "In just over two months ... I've already seen more people moving in."

He is part of the first wave of residents settling into the city's new district, one of Macao's five reclaimed urban zones. Designed to eventually house close to 100,000 people, the area is envisioned as a fully integrated community, blending residential living with commerce, culture, leisure and transport.





◀ The Tong Kai building was one of the first residential towers to be completed ▶

The five reclaimed zones – A to E2 – trace their origins to a 2009 land reclamation project aimed at expanding Macao's total area. Zone A, the largest at 1.38 square kilometres, completed its main land formation and seawall works in 2017, laying the groundwork for vertical growth.

In 2024, the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government formalised its blueprint in the Official Gazette through the Detailed Plan for Eastern District-2. The plan outlines land use across the area, positioning it as a liveable neighbourhood, a commercial hub and a waterfront landmark. It also highlights broader goals: advancing housing policy, diversifying the region's economy, building greener spaces, enhancing waterfront access, prioritising public transport and

making use of underground infrastructure.

Of the 76 land plots, 49 – covering 433,649 square metres – are allocated for housing.

In time, will flourish

Even so, the first completed developments are beginning to translate vision into lived experience. Three parcels – home to Tong Kai, Tong Chong and Tong Seng buildings – were finished last year, welcoming their first residents. Data from Macao's Housing Bureau showed that a total of 2,223 units – out of 3,017 dwellings in the three towers – had been sold as of mid-March, with most households already receiving their keys.

Leong Wai, a retiree in his 60s, moved with his family into Tong Chong building at the start of the year. For him, public



↗ The New Urban Zone A spans an area of 1.38 square kilometres



➤ Pharmacy Qualipharm opened its Zone A branch in February this year

|



➤ Nearly two-thirds of the land plots in Zone A have been allocated for housing

housing offers stability, a welcome contrast to the fluctuations of private rents.

Like many early residents, he is adjusting to a neighbourhood still catching up in services. Every other day, he travels to nearby districts, such as Areia Preta or Iao Hon, for groceries. Without a car, he relies on buses, which he describes as “workable,” and improving. “The bus frequency has improved over the past few weeks. I can reach most parts of the city by taking buses and transferring between routes. Since I don’t go out during rush hour, it’s pretty good for me.”

Regarding amenities, his outlook is measured. With a small population so far, retail options remain limited, pushing residents to shop elsewhere. “But we’ve seen a new supermarket open recently,” he noted. “When more people live here, more businesses will open to meet demand.”

He draws a familiar comparison: “This area is like Taipa decades ago. There weren’t many people or businesses at first, but given time, it would flourish.”

Meeting day-to-day needs

Last year, to support early residents in New Urban Zone A, the MSAR Government tendered five commercial units earmarked for essential services such as a supermarket, pharmacy, eatery and bank. Incentives, including rent-free periods, were introduced to encourage businesses to set up in the still-developing district.

By February, two shops – a supermarket and a pharmacy – had already opened, according to a statement from the Housing Bureau. Authorities say they will continue to monitor occupancy and help remaining tenants complete licensing procedures.

“The MSAR Government is committed to improving facilities and supporting amenities in New Urban Zone A and will continue to monitor occupancy in the district,” the bureau stated. “We will press ahead with helping the remaining leased units complete procedures



... with the aim of opening as soon as possible to better meet residents’ daily needs.”

A second batch of retail spaces is also in preparation, with another tender expected later this year. The mix will likely include food outlets, convenience stores and general retail, gradually reducing reliance on neighbouring districts.

Among the early arrivals is pharmacy Qualipharm, which opened its Zone A



Rendering of Macao's New Urban Zone A 

branch just before Lunar New Year. Business has been modest so far, reflecting the district's gradual population growth.

"Compared with our other outlets, where we serve a mix of residents and tourists, this shop has mostly residents so far, especially older customers buying medication and supplements," Ms Lau, a shop manager, said. "That's expected. It's still a very new area, and volume should pick up as more people move in."

That growth is already underway. More housing projects are nearing completion, with thousands of additional units at various stages – from awaiting occupancy permits to interior fitting and structural construction – pointing to a steady rise in population in the coming years.

According to data from the Housing Bureau, three newly built affordable housing projects in the area – totalling 2,808 flats – have been completed and are awaiting the respective

occupancy permits. Two other affordable housing projects, with 2,446 apartments, and four social housing developments, providing 4,088 homes, have been topped out, with interior fit-out work under way.

Further behind in the construction cycle, five additional affordable housing projects, providing 5,415 units, are now in the tower structure phase.

Social services support

Alongside commerce, a network of social services is beginning to take shape. Several organisations have established a presence in the district, offering support ranging from childcare to family services and vocational training. These include: a nursery run by the Macau Tung Sin Tong Charitable Society; a family and community integrated service

centre run by the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM); and a Caritas Macau facility offering family support, vocational rehabilitation and developmental training.

Tam Kuai San, a deputy director at FAOM, describes their role as both practical and personal: offering emotional support and sharing daily life information. Just as important, she said, their staff keep close contact with residents during the transition period, proactively identifying their day-to-day issues and relaying feedback and recommendations to relevant Government departments.

“Our aim is to help ease practical inconveniences, reduce the stress of adjustment, and support residents as they build stability and a sense of belonging in this new neighbourhood,” Ms Tam explained.



➤ Major roads in Zone A were opened as residents started to move in

Residents' feedback so far has centred on familiar concerns, transport gaps, limited amenities and minor building issues, she added.

Transport remains both a challenge and an opportunity. While bus services are improving, attention is turning to the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) East Line, currently under construction. Once completed in 2029, it will link New Urban Zone A with Taipa and the northern districts, with trains running at short intervals during peak hours.

"The New Urban Zone A is still in the development phase, and residents are moving from 'having a home' to 'living well'," Ms Tam said. "As they navigate the adjustment challenges that come with a new environment, they're also looking ahead to more spacious homes, better services and a higher quality of life."

Service providers are adapting as well. Paul Pun Chi Meng, secretary-general of Caritas Macau, said that for organisations on the ground, the challenge lies in responding to evolving needs in a district still finding its rhythm. Facilities are expanding gradually, with new services – such as vocational training and childcare – already being introduced.

The Caritas Macau centre in the new district currently offers 100 places for vocational and skills training for people with intellectual disabilities and neurodivergent individuals. Since March, it began providing nursery services for families.

Quality of life

"When New Urban Zone A was first planned, the idea was to address the housing shortage. Now it's no longer just about housing; it's also about quality of life," Mr Pun observed. "If people feel something is lacking, they should raise their views through the proper channels, and the Government will take those views on board and make improvements."

The district's early stage also presents opportunities to experiment. One example is the use of reclaimed water for non-potable

purposes, a system more feasible to install here than in older neighbourhoods, and that will later be expanded to other reclaimed zones.

"There are also a lot of land resources in New Urban Zone A for development," Mr Pun added. "These could translate into more sports, social and cultural facilities that lift everyday life for residents."

The planning framework published in 2024 supports that potential. Beyond housing, three plots, with a combined area of 15,255 square metres, are earmarked for commercial use. Another 17 plots, totalling 207,722 square metres, are designated for public facilities, including government services, education, social services, culture, leisure and healthcare.

For legislator Song Pek Kei, this mix is key to the district's long-term role.

"As a major integrated community and development zone for Macao's future, New Urban Zone A carries higher expectations from society," she said. "Beyond actively addressing residents' needs, it should be planned in line with modern urban-development principles, with comprehensive facilities that can also facilitate the city's economic diversification and integration with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area."

As a major integrated development area, New Urban Zone A is expected not only to meet residents' needs but also to contribute to the city's broader economic and social ambitions. Its proximity to the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge positions it to attract both local activity and visitors, while demographic trends – such as an ageing population – underscore the need for more leisure spaces and elderly services.

"With land resources so precious, the Macao Government needs to make the best use of every inch of land to build a more liveable Macao," Ms Song stated. ■

96,000

Number of people expected to live in New Urban Zone A

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

CTM BETS ON AI TO DRIVE MACAO'S SMART FUTURE

Text **Emanuel Graça**
Photos **Cheong Kam Ka**



These are busy times for telecom provider CTM. In line with the vision set by the Government, the company has been expanding its work in **AI, big data and cloud services**, moving swiftly to build the digital infrastructure underpinning Macao's smart city ambitions

Macao's leading telecommunications provider, Companhia de Telecomunicações de Macau, S.A. – widely known as CTM – is accelerating its push into artificial intelligence (AI) and next-generation digital infrastructure, positioning itself at the centre of the city's transition towards a smart, diversified economy. Backed by an extended operating concession, the company is investing in AI applications across sectors ranging from transport to tourism and multilingual customer support.

With ambitions to develop localised large language models (LLMs) – including a Portuguese-language platform aimed at strengthening Macao's role as a bridge between China and the Portuguese-speaking markets – CTM is also embedding AI into its own network operations, cybersecurity systems and future 6G readiness.

Ebel Cham Pou I, CTM's vice president for commercial services, says the company

is committed to providing Macao with advanced integrated communications by adopting new technologies and accelerating digital transformation. She notes that CTM has been an early adopter worldwide of technologies such as fixed-mobile dual 5.5G to deliver smart solutions across different industries.

“Telecom technology-wise, Macao ranks in the top layer globally and in China. We have already built a 5.5G mobile service together with a 5.5G fixed internet service. Not many markets have launched this kind of high-technology service,” Ms Cham said in an interview.

“At the same time, 100 percent of our mobile customers have already upgraded to 5G services. In terms of fixed internet service, about 50 percent of our clients have already upgraded to at least 1Gbps internet service.”

She emphasises that CTM has positioned itself as a key enabler of smart transformation across Macao and has prioritised

the development of AI and big data applications.

“Over the past year, CTM has been promoting the vision of ‘digital Macao’, [which involves] building an advanced backbone to support the whole of Macao to digitalise,” she said. “We already completed this vision: in terms of telecom technology, we are already at a high global standard.”

The vision has now evolved into what she calls “AI digital Macao”. “That means CTM will put full force and resources into promoting faster adoption of AI across different industries and also to end customers.”

Localised solutions

Ms Cham notes that the 2026 Policy Address delivered by Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, emphasised the use of AI in government services and across the economy as part of efforts to turn Macao into a smart city. “This is a good opportunity not only for CTM, but also technology companies, to do business.”

One of the company's priorities is integrating AI algorithms into localised models. For that, it is partnering with Baidu, the Chinese technology giant specialising in Internet services and AI.

"We localised the Baidu AI platform," Ms Cham said. "We are already investing so that end users, government departments and the business sector can rely on our AI digital platform to deploy their AI



We are already investing so that end users, government departments and the business sector can rely on our AI digital platform to deploy their AI applications

Ebel Cham Pou
CTM's vice president for commercial services

applications or create their own AI developments."

In addition to Baidu, CTM is partnering with Alibaba, Tencent and other solution providers from the Chinese mainland to introduce AI services and applications to Macao.

Given that the MSAR's economy relies heavily on tourism and services, one of the first AI business solutions developed by CTM was in customer service, supporting eight languages. "Because Macao is welcoming an international tourism base, multi-language communications – either oral or written – are very important," Ms Cham said, identifying retail, catering and government service as potential application scenarios for the technology.

A key project for the company is the development of a Portuguese-language LLM, with potential applications in report generation, audio and video translation, Portuguese-language consultation and e-commerce customer service.

LLMs are a type of AI designed to understand, generate and work with human language. They are trained on extremely large amounts of text – books, articles, websites, reports and other written material – so that they can recognise patterns in language and

produce text that sounds natural and coherent. Portuguese, along with Chinese, is one of the official languages of the MSAR.

"We want to build something unique," Ms Cham said, adding that CTM plans to unveil the initial phase of its Portuguese-language LLM system later this year. "On one hand, we can serve the MSAR Government and, at the same time, help link Macao as a bridge between China and Portuguese-speaking countries."

In transport, CTM plans to deploy applications such as real-time traffic monitoring and dynamic alert systems using Internet of Things (IoT), big data and AI technologies, as well as integrating Baidu Maps to support smart mobility and tourism.

Ms Cham acknowledges that a major challenge for AI development is the availability of skilled professionals. To address this, CTM has launched youth programmes, competitions and internal training initiatives focused on AI.

Internal transformation

Established in October 1981, CTM has long been the leading telecommunications provider in Macao, offering mobile, fixed-line, fibre broadband and enterprise



CTM's network management centre

solutions. The company operates seven retail shops across the city. Its controlling shareholder is CITIC Telecom International Holdings, while its ultimate parent company is the state-owned conglomerate Citic Group.

Last September, CTM saw its public telecommunications service concession contract extended until the end of September 2027 under a “one-year fixed contract, one-year rolling contract” arrangement. As part of the extension, at the start of 2026, CTM reduced fees for several services, including residential and business broadband services.

The company has also been advancing



Currently, we see more than 10,000 people on average using AI applications on CTM's network

Thomas Ng Si lu
CTM's vice president for network services

its own internal digital transformation by integrating AI into network management operations, says Thomas Ng Si lu, CTM's vice president for network services. The firm is focusing on enhancing 5.5G, 50G PON, AI and other advanced technologies as part of its 10GB network infrastructure development, to provide much faster internet access and capabilities that can support the expansion of digital services that businesses and government offer online.

“For example, we employ AI in power consumption management, improving operational efficiency and power consumption,” Mr Ng said.

AI is also used to predict potential network failures before they occur. “Before impacting people, we can rectify the fault,” he explained, noting that many successful cases were recorded last year.

AI is helping to maintain communications during severe typhoons. “Under severe weather conditions, we can manage power usage more effectively to extend the battery life” of backup systems at mobile communication base stations, he said, noting that this is particularly important if the electricity utility provider CEM shuts

down power stations in areas at risk of flooding.

AI will also be essential for the future adoption of 6G telecommunications, potentially as early as 2029, Mr Ng argues.

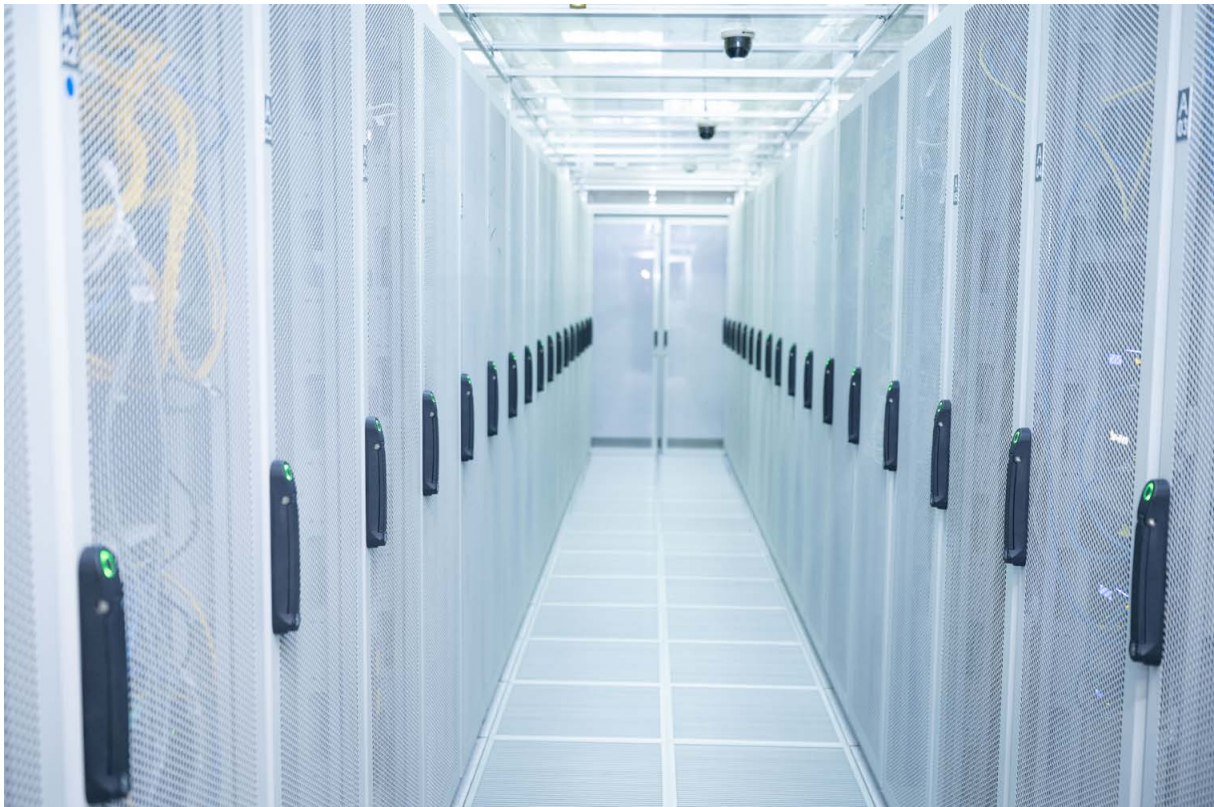
“Without this AI capability, we cannot handle this complicated network.” The next step for CTM is therefore the development of an autonomous network system, “injecting more AI” into operations.

The upgrades anticipate a surge in demand for faster, better network services as AI adoption increases community-wide. “Currently, we see more than 10,000

people on average using AI applications” on the CTM network, Mr Ng said. “I can see that this figure will keep increasing.”

He added: “Until 2030, I can see a lot of new AI applications being developed and computing power being required. CTM will work with the Government to improve this and serve society and our customers better.”

Complementing CTM’s efforts, regional cooperation remains essential to ensure Macao is connected both globally and regionally, particularly with the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation



▲ The telecom provider has been increasing resources to support smart transformation across Macao



CTM makes significant investment in technologies to make sure that we have all kinds of protection infrastructure that can respond to cyber threats

Jennifer Angulo Hai Yan

CTM's director of information technology

Zone in Hengqin and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

"Macao is very small. We must work together," Mr Ng said, adding that emerging sectors such as the so-called low-altitude economy will also require advanced telecommunications infrastructure.

Tackling cybersecurity

As AI reshapes industries and infrastructure, cybersecurity is emerging as one of the

most critical challenges facing telecommunications networks. At CTM, AI is now playing a central role not only in services and network management but also in defending digital infrastructure against increasingly sophisticated cyber threats.

Jennifer Angulo Hai Yan, director of information technology at CTM, says the company has significantly increased investment in cybersecurity protection systems. "CTM makes significant investment in technologies to make sure that we have all kinds of protection infrastructure that can respond to cyber threats that happen day in and day out," Ms Angulo noted.

"With the emerging trend of AI and quantum computing, everything is moving at a faster pace. We need to make sure that we have the right skill set and the right technologies to take corresponding actions towards those threats."

According to Ms Angulo, the company's cybersecurity strategy is built around three pillars: processes, people and technology. Staff training and awareness are considered as important as technological investment, particularly as cyberattacks become more complex and automated.

"We make sure that our staff are well trained, so that they always stay on high alert."

CTM operates its own specialised security and service operation centre, responsible for monitoring and protecting network infrastructure around the clock. The unit plays a crucial role in maintaining the stability and security of Macao's telecommunications systems, which underpin government services, businesses and daily communications. "They're basically a team who protects Macao's network every day, around the clock," Ms Angulo said.

AI is increasingly being used on both sides of the cybersecurity battle. While attackers are using AI to develop more sophisticated threats, telecom operators are also deploying AI tools to detect anomalies, respond to incidents and automate security operations, Ms Angulo said. "We also rely on AI in our operations so that our people can focus on more specialised tasks."

Looking ahead, she believes the rise of AI and other technologies will fundamentally change how networks are protected and managed. Cybersecurity will require new skills, new operating models and constant adaptation. "The coming trend is that the skill set is going to be different; how we operate, how we protect, everything is going to change." ■

INTERVIEW

EMPOWERING MACAO WOMEN

Text **Cherry Chan**
Photos **Lei Heong leong**

Founded more than 70 years ago, the Women’s General Association of Macau – known as “Fu Lun” in Cantonese – has evolved into one of the city’s most established non-government organisations. **Lau Kam Ling**, the association’s chairwoman, talks to Macao Magazine about how it has helped women in Macao advance in the labour force and how it is now expanding into the Greater Bay Area

What footprint is the Women’s General Association of Macau (“Women’s Association”) leaving on Macao today?

It has been 76 years since the establishment of the Women’s Association. Currently, we have more than 60,000 female members aged 18 and above, drawn from all sectors of society.

The association also has more than 500 full-time staff and over 2,000 volunteers of all ages. It comprises seven functional departments covering areas such as social affairs, women’s rights, culture, recreation and sport, and youth development. We operate 28 service centres and work closely with

community groups and affiliated organisations to meet the needs of various age groups and sectors of the community. In recent years, our services have also expanded to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

How has the Women’s Association evolved over the years to meet the changing needs of the community?

The association’s growth has closely tracked Macao’s social development and changing needs.

Between 1989 and 1999, a rise in the birth rate drove strong demand for childcare services. In response, we opened six nurseries,

The association's growth has closely tracked Macao's social development and changing needs



helping families manage the pressures of raising young children while enabling more women to enter the labour force.

Following the establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) in 1999, community organisations assumed a more prominent role in grassroots governance and social service provision. With the support of local authorities, we established our first family service centre in 1999, laying the groundwork for a network that now spans the city.

Over time, the association has evolved, embedding itself into many aspects of daily life and responding to residents' aspirations for a better quality of life.

In recent years, youth development – particularly for young women – has become a growing focus.

We place strong emphasis on young people, recognising them as the future of Macao. We are committed to supporting youth organisations and centres, while delivering

targeted programmes for younger generations.

One flagship initiative is the International Affairs Training Program, launched in 2014. Now in its 13th edition, it has trained more than 1,000 participants and enabled over 200 outstanding individuals to attend international conferences. The programme has become a key platform for empowering women in Macao.

Another initiative, the Association of International Affairs Exchange and Training of Macao, was launched in 2024 and is open to participants of both genders. In partnership with China Foreign Affairs University, the association introduced its first foreign affairs training course in 2025. This course aims to help young people better understand China's diplomatic landscape and foster a global outlook.

We have also launched a range of additional youth programmes aimed at improving talent development and supporting young people in building careers locally or internationally, while enabling them to share the stories of China and Macao with wider audiences.



The Women's General Association of Macau operates a network of nurseries across the city

A legacy of support and advocacy

For over three decades, Lau Kam Ling has stood as a steadfast guardian of women's and children's welfare, devoting her life to community work in Macao.

Her journey in public service began to take shape when she became a member of the Women's General Association of Macau in 1994, a decision that laid the foundation for her dedication to women's rights and welfare. In 2022, Ms Lau rose to the position of chairwoman, a role that allowed her to amplify her impact even further.

Beyond Macao, she also serves on the executive committee of the All-China Women's Federation, a state-backed organisation dedicated to advocating for women's rights and interests across the People's Republic of China.

Ms Lau's influence extends far beyond the Women's Association. She is a member of the Talent Development Committee, which offers advice to local authorities on talent cultivation policies. Additionally, she serves on the Monitoring Committee on Discipline of Public Security Forces, contributing her expertise to upholding discipline and integrity within the region's security sector.

When reflecting on her role as the leader of the Women's Association, Ms Lau shared that her vision is guided by a commitment to "caring for women and children, and serving the community".

She describes the association as a vital bridge connecting Macao's residents with the city's Government – a bridge that ensures voices are heard and needs are addressed. "We are frequently consulted on a wide range of issues," Ms Lau explained. "It is our responsibility to convey the public's concerns and needs to officials in a timely manner, so that no voice is left unheard."

The Women's Association, founded on May 21, 1950, has grown and evolved alongside the city itself. Throughout the decades, it has remained true to its core of focusing on women's and children's welfare while adapting to the ever-changing needs of Macao's society.

Recalling the association's early days, Ms Lau fondly remembers its original mission: "to unite all women in Macao and promote the welfare of women and children".

In the 1950s and 1960s, during China's nationwide literacy campaigns, the association played

a crucial role in bringing education to women in Macao. "We launched literacy classes in Macao for women, as well as evening schools for working women to help them improve their educational levels and empower them to take control of their own lives," she said.

Education has always been at the heart of the association's work, and this commitment has endured for more than 70 years. Today, the association runs a network of nurseries and schools across Macao, a legacy that began in the early 1950s. "We opened our first nursery in 1952 and a school for members' children in 1955," Ms Lau said. "At that time, many women were burdened with childcare, which prevented them from pursuing careers. Our nurseries and schools relieved that burden, allowing them to focus on advancing in the labour market."

Over time, the Women's Association's reach has broadened. The association is now active across a wide range of sectors, from elderly care and family services to healthcare, culture and leisure, and nurturing young people. This is a sign of its enduring role in the social fabric of Macao.

How is the association continuing to expand its social services portfolio?

There are initiatives at various levels to meet the community's needs. Some are in collaboration with the MSAR Government, local community groups and affiliated units. The Women's Association, together with six other community groups, has partnered with the Health Bureau and the Social Welfare Bureau to launch a new programme this

year providing comprehensive healthcare support to pregnant women and mothers of newborns. The initiative brings together 13 service centres to deliver coordinated family and community integrated care.

Our "Happiness in Harmony" Family Integrated Services Center continues a support programme for expectant mothers and new parents, which was first introduced in 2019. In Taipa, we have in place a "canteen for



the elderly” programme, providing meals and services for older residents in need.

Last year, we opened a new child support centre to offer early intervention training and personalised therapy for children with developmental disabilities, alongside support for their families.

In addition, we run initiatives aligned with Macao’s strategic positioning, including cultural exchange activities between China and Portuguese-speaking countries. In 2014, we launched our triennial “Family-Friendly Employers Award Scheme”. It encourages employers to foster more supportive working environments.

The Women’s Association has developed a presence in Macao’s political landscape. What areas does the group focus on?

Since the establishment of our association, we have been dedicated to serving the community. We first engaged in the political sphere alongside other community groups. Since 2017, we’ve run for seats in the Legislative Assembly under our own association’s platform. Besides the Legislative Assembly, we also have representatives in various civic councils and committees.

Our goal is to advocate for women, children and families from a legislative perspective, while also nurturing civic-minded leadership skills in patriotic and Macao-loving individuals. Today, more than 30 of our members sit on civic councils and committees, contributing to policymaking and governance.

Our focus is on the promotion of family-friendly policies and women’s empowerment. One example is maternity leave: we have actively advocated for longer leave periods and, within our own organisation, already provide 90 days of maternity leave. We encourage other employers to follow suit.

How is the Women’s Association extending its work into neighbouring Hengqin and the Greater Bay Area?

In response to the call for supporting Hengqin’s development, we have actively encouraged Macao residents to live and work in the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone. Our Guangdong office opened in 2021, and we also run a Hengqin-Macau Parent-Child Activity Center. Both facilities provide support for local families.

In 2024, we launched the Macau New Neighbourhood Family and Community Service Center in Hengqin. It offers comprehensive, professional social services that meet Macao’s high standards.

Our focus is on the promotion of family-friendly policies and women’s empowerment

Are there plans to expand the association’s footprint in Hengqin?

The second phase of the development of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin is now underway. We have outlined a series of initiatives designed to integrate Macao women into national development and enhance our association’s contribution to it.

First, we will strengthen existing service platforms and brands. Taking the establishment of the Cooperation Zone and the fifth anniversary of the inauguration of our Guangdong office as opportunities, we will continue to optimise the work of our Family and Community Service Center in Hengqin.

Second, we plan to expand cooperation in the Greater Bay Area. We will continue to support integration and collaboration among women in the region, regularly organising study tours and exchanges for women and youths to learn about life on the Chinese mainland. In addition, we will explore cooperation with other organisations to host women-focused activities and services, promoting the co-construction, sharing, and

澳門婦女聯合總會

Associação Geral das Mulheres de Macau The Women's General Association of Macau



➤ Lau Kam Ling became chairwoman of the Women's General Association in 2022

interconnection of maternal and child health services throughout the Greater Bay Area.

Third, training professional service teams in the region is another priority. We intend to establish parent-child and youth volunteer teams, strengthen partnerships with universities and professional institutions, and build development platforms for family mediation, domestic services, and skilled workers. By adapting Macao's service styles and aligning them with the actual needs of the Greater Bay Area, we work to promote better integration in terms of social affairs and community governance, to create a high-quality Greater Bay Area.

What are your future plans for Macao?

This year marks the start of Macao's Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development. We will seize this opportunity to unite and support women, focusing on three key areas.

Firstly, we will promote patriotism and love for Macao. We will study the doctrines discussed in the fourth plenary session of the

20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the 2026 sessions of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. We will also conduct and enliven patriotic education activities to pass on our patriotic DNA.

Secondly, we will actively support Macao's development. We will work with the MSAR Government in law-based governance, uphold the executive-led system, and act as a bridge between the Government and the community. We will take part in political consultation, offer policy advice, help improve governance, and support the principle of 'patriots governing Macao'.

Finally, we will keep serving women, children, and families. We will modernise community services with artificial intelligence and other tools, and strengthen support in family care, elderly services, health and education. By expanding our community platforms and building a full support network, we will meet their needs for a better life, and build a more wonderful home for all in Macao. ■

COOPERATION ZONE

DUAL-CURRENCY PAYMENTS BOOST REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Text **Viviana Chan**

The pilot dual-currency payment programme in Hengqin currently operates across six major commercial districts



A dual-currency payment system in Hengqin is quietly reshaping how Macao ID holders spend there. Permitting payments in Macao patacas through familiar mobile apps, the scheme reduces financial friction and contributes to **cross-boundary integration** to make everyday life much more seamless

With the Guangdong–Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin rolling out a pilot dual-currency payment system across major commercial districts, Macao ID holders in Hengqin can now pay daily expenses directly in patacas using their usual mobile payment platforms in Macao, including MPay and mobile banking apps from local banks such as Bank of China Macau Branch and Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (Macao). There is no longer a need to transfer funds to a Chinese mainland electronic wallet or convert patacas into renminbi in advance.

The pilot dual-currency payment scheme was first introduced in September 2024 at the Macau New Neighbourhood development, allowing residents and visitors to make small mobile purchases in either patacas or renminbi at the complex’s merchants. Located in Hengqin, the integrated housing estate is solely targeted at ID holders of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR).

By August last year, the pilot dual-currency payment programme had expanded to six major commercial districts within the Cooperation Zone. Policies in the zone – occupying the entire Hengqin Island, immediately adjacent to Macao – include tax incentives, simplified cross-boundary procedures and measures allowing Macao ID holders to work and live in Hengqin more easily.

The Cooperation Zone is widely seen as a central component of Macao’s long-term economic strategy and a major experiment in cross-boundary governance within the Greater

Bay Area development plan. The introduction of dual-currency payments formed part of a package of 30 financial support measures for the Cooperation Zone issued in February 2023 by the People’s Bank of China, the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission, the China Securities Regulatory Commission, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, and the Guangdong provincial government.

According to official information from the Cooperation Zone, the system is built around a “one device, one QR code” model that integrates payment channels from both Macao and the Chinese mainland. Merchants need only a single terminal to accept electronic payment tools from both sides. For people whose income mainly comes from Macao and is denominated in patacas, but who live or spend regularly in Hengqin, the change significantly reduces the time, costs and psychological barriers associated with cross-boundary fund transfers, observers say.

Payment convenience

Most commercial districts participating in the scheme are areas frequently visited by people from Macao for everyday spending, including restaurants, retail outlets and lifestyle services.

Macao ID holder Huang Chengbin, deputy director-general of the Macao Civil Alliance for Building Development, who relocated to Hengqin at the end of 2019, recalled that during his early years there, payments mainly relied on Chinese mainland mobile apps like WeChat Pay or Alipay, both of which required

linking a Chinese mainland bank card.

“In the past we had to withdraw patacas in Macao, exchange them for renminbi cash, bring the cash to Zhuhai within the cross-boundary cash declaration limits and deposit it into a bank account,” he said.

Another option was to transfer funds through the Macao version of Alipay, but the process was limited. “Each transfer was only around 3,000 yuan to 5,000 yuan, and it took time to process.” Mr Huang noted that if funds were transferred through traditional banking channels, arrangements often had to be made half a day in advance.

“If I wanted to go out for dinner tonight, I would have to transfer money this morning. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to pay,” he said. Although electronic channels later reduced transfer time to around an hour, the process still required planning.

Today, under the “one device, one QR code” system, he simply opens MPay and pays directly using funds linked to his Macao bank card and bank account. “Now all my spending can be handled within one app. Points, records, everything is in the same system. I don’t have to switch between Alipay, WeChat or MPay anymore.”

For Mr Huang, the change represents more than technical convenience. “In the past, coming to Hengqin felt like travelling for work or tourism because you had to switch payment systems. Now it feels seamless, like an extension of daily life in Macao.”

He believes the shift has shortened the psychological distance between Hengqin and Macao. “In the past you would remind yourself that this is the Chinese mainland and you needed another payment method. Now you barely think about it,” he said.



➤ The Seng Pan Coffee branch in Hengqin was among the first to adopt the dual-currency payment system

Mr Huang also noted that MPay is already accepted in many scenarios in Hengqin, including petrol stations, and occasionally offers promotional discounts. “Both petrol stations in Hengqin accept MPay. Sometimes you get discounts like 5 or 10 yuan off a 200-yuan purchase,” he said.

He hopes the service will expand further to include more scenarios such as taxi services and online platforms. As a resident who frequently travels between Macao and Hengqin, Mr Huang believes payment facilitation could also help attract small and medium-sized Macao enterprises to set up operations in Hengqin.

Looking back over the past few years, Mr Huang said he has witnessed Hengqin-Macao integration evolve from “hard connectivity” to “soft connectivity”. “In the beginning transfers took half a day, then



In the past you would remind yourself that this is the Chinese mainland and you needed another payment method. Now you barely think about it

Huang Chengbin
Deputy director-general of the Macao
Civil Alliance for Building Development

two hours. Now payments are instant. The change in time efficiency is obvious,” he said.

From two to one device

While Macao ID holders experience a seamless transition, the integration of payment systems has also brought operational benefits for Macao-backed businesses operating in Hengqin.

Jessica Tong, owner of Seng Pan Coffee – one of the first Macao brands to open in the Macao New Neighbourhood residential project – has seen the evolution of dual-currency payments from the early pilot phase to the current stage.

With more than 20 years as a brand in Macao, Seng Pan Coffee chose to open a café in the Macao New Neighbourhood because of its community orientation towards people from Macao. “The whole environment feels like a small Macao. Most of our customers are Macao ID holders – about 90 percent are people we already knew,” Ms Tong said. Because the customer base is clearly defined, she believes offering familiar pataca-based mobile payment methods helps increase the willingness of customers to spend.

When dual-currency payments were introduced in the second half of 2024, merchants could accept both patacas and renminbi. However, before the full rollout of the “one device, one QR code” system, two separate payment terminals were still required.

“In the past we needed two machines: one for MPay payments in patacas and another Chinese mainland terminal for payments in renminbi,” Ms Tong explained. The arrangement not only occupied counter space but also increased the time staff needed to switch devices during busy periods.

“Now everything can be processed with one machine, which has simplified the workflow considerably,” she said.

With the integrated system, staff training has also become simpler. New employees can learn the payment process more easily, reducing errors that might affect the customer experience.

Under the current arrangement, merchants can maintain both pataca and renminbi accounts. When customers pay in patacas via MPay, the funds are deposited directly into the merchant's pataca account and vice-versa. If renminbi exchange is required for mainland procurement or operational costs, settlement can be conducted according to the daily bank exchange rate.

"There are no additional service fees," Ms Tong explained. If there is no immediate need for conversion, funds can remain in the pataca account for flexible use, she added.

Merchants can also apply to transfer settlement proceeds back to their corporate bank accounts in Macao if needed. Compared with previous arrangements that required complex procedures to remit income back to Macao, the new system offers greater flexibility, Ms Tong said.

In addition to payment integration, consumption incentives recently introduced for Macao ID holders have also helped increase customer traffic. She noted that MPay users who hold a Macao ID can participate in promotional campaigns within designated commercial districts and participating merchants. The subsidy portion is reimbursed to merchants through the promotional mechanism, so it does not represent an additional burden for businesses.

Ms Tong observed that the proportion of transactions settled in patacas at her café has risen significantly since the promotion began. "Recently many customers are paying in patacas through MPay," she said.

Financial logic of everyday integration

From a financial and policy perspective, Hengqin's dual-currency payment initiative goes beyond improving consumer convenience. Oriol Caudevilla, board director and secretary-general of the Global Impact FinTech Forum (GIFT), a non-profit fintech think tank that helps facilitate social, financial and digital inclusion, described the scheme as "a very positive and meaningful development".

Speaking to Macao Magazine, the financial



Everything can be processed with one machine, which has simplified the workflow considerably

Jessica Tong
Owner of Seng Pan Coffee



When friction at the point of payment is reduced, people are more likely to travel, spend and participate in cross-boundary activities

Oriol Caudevilla
Board director of the Global Impact FinTech Forum



📍 The pilot programme is viewed as a step towards deeper regional integration within the Cooperation Zone

expert said that although the arrangement may appear technical at first glance, it signals a deeper level of financial integration within the Greater Bay Area, particularly at the level of retail transactions and everyday life.

“When residents can transact seamlessly across boundaries using familiar currencies and payment tools, it shows that integration is no longer confined to large-scale finance or infrastructure projects, but is increasingly embedded in daily economic activity,” said Mr Caudevilla, until recently honorary fellow at the Asian Institute of International Financial Law of The University of Hong Kong.

From a regional perspective, he noted that the expansion of dual-currency payment systems between Macao and Hengqin reflects the evolving role of the Cooperation Zone as a practical testing ground for institutional and financial innovation. In the longer term, he said it is plausible that similar dual-currency or interoperable payment models could emerge in other parts of the Greater Bay Area.

“The fact that these systems are being deployed in major commercial districts

suggests strong confidence in both the technical robustness and regulatory coordination behind the initiative.”

Mr Caudevilla emphasised that the development should not be viewed merely as a step forward in consumer convenience. “Convenience is certainly an important outcome, but the broader significance lies in the structural progress it represents,” he said.

According to him, the initiative demonstrates that payment systems, regulatory frameworks and operational standards are becoming sufficiently aligned to support real-time cross-boundary retail transactions – an essential building block for deeper economic integration. “This reflects a mature stage of technical coordination that moves beyond parallel systems towards genuine interoperability.”

In practical terms, payment convenience can have a tangible effect on cross-boundary consumption patterns and mobility. “When friction at the point of payment is reduced, people are more likely to travel, spend and participate in cross-boundary activities,” Mr Caudevilla said. ■

A PARADIGM SHIFT: THE RISE OF CHINA'S NEW RETAIL POWERHOUSES

Text Viviana Chan



Collectible Pop Mart figurines on display in a store in Europe

Once cast as the world's factory floor, China is fast emerging as a source of globally recognised consumer brands. From technology firms to lifestyle labels and collectible-driven retailers, a new generation of Chinese companies is pushing into overseas markets with growing success. Backed by design and innovation, they are beginning to reshape perceptions of what **"Made in China"** means

For decades, China was synonymous with manufacturing scale rather than brand power. From electronics to apparel and household goods, products stamped "Made in China" were often exported as low-cost commodities or sold under foreign labels. That perception is now shifting, as a new cohort of Chinese companies seeks to build global identities of their own.

Today, shoppers in cities such as New York City or Paris can step into a store run by Urban Revivo and browse its trend-led collections. They might then stop for a cappuccino at Luckin Coffee, which recently opened an outlet in Manhattan, before heading home in an electric vehicle made by BYD.

According to Professor Matthew Liu Ting Chi, from the Faculty of Business Administration at the University of Macau, China's accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2001 marked the beginning of a profound transformation. Over a quarter of a century, the country has evolved from a "manufacturing giant"

into a "manufacturing powerhouse".

This shift, he argues, reflects a move beyond the traditional "Made in China" model towards "Intelligent Manufacturing in China" and "Quality Manufacturing in China". Where earlier growth relied heavily on labour-intensive production and cost advantages – often with firms operating as original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), producing for third parties – the new model places far greater emphasis on innovation, marketing and brand identity.

"Intelligent Manufacturing in China", Prof. Liu explains, integrates artificial intelligence and information technology to enhance competitiveness, while "Quality Manufacturing in China" focuses on craftsmanship and brand reputation. Together, they support the emergence of higher-value brands with cross-cultural appeal. As Prof. Liu puts it, companies are moving from "functional satisfaction based on cost-effectiveness" to "added value based on meaning and quality".

Early Chinese brands expanding abroad largely competed on affordability and durability. Today, a new generation is pursuing more sophisticated strategies. Technology firms such as Huawei emphasise innovation and advanced engineering, while retailers such as Pop Mart focus on emotional engagement and aesthetic identity.

This reflects a broader shift in global consumption, particularly among younger consumers. As material abundance increases, so too does demand for brands that offer not just function, but identity, experience and cultural resonance.

Emotional and social value

This transformation is especially visible in the way newer brands connect with their audiences. "Younger consumers have begun to pursue emotional value rather than simple cost-effectiveness," Prof. Liu said.

He points to Pop Mart's "blind box" model as a case in point. Each sealed package

luckin coffee



⬆ Since last year, Luckin Coffee has established a foothold in Manhattan, New York

contains a random figure from a themed series, turning the act of purchase into a moment of anticipation and surprise. The experience itself becomes part of the product, encouraging collectability and social interaction.

By the end of 2025, Pop Mart operated 185 overseas stores across 19 countries, including 85 in the Asia-Pacific region, 64 in the Americas and 36 in Europe. Last year, it opened its first outlets in Germany, Denmark, Canada, and the Philippines, and established flagship stores in Bangkok and Sydney. The firm's overseas revenue nearly quadrupled in 2025, surpassing 16 billion yuan.

The rise of the “experience economy” has helped Chinese brands shed the low-cost image

that once defined them. Competition is no longer about simple functional claims – “my towel absorbs more water than yours” – but about lifestyle and identity, Prof. Liu notes.

Such transformation can be seen at household and consumer goods retailer Miniso, which has elevated itself through collaborations with companies such as Sanrio and The Pokémon Company, licensing some of the world's most recognisable characters for its product lines. Once likened to a “10-yuan store”, it now emphasises design and emotional connection. By mid-2025, it operated more than 3,300 outlets outside the Chinese mainland, with overseas revenue rising 29.4 percent in the first half



When the brand itself becomes a value output, a quality declaration, or even an aesthetic symbol, it gains higher evaluation and pricing power

Matthew Liu Ting Chi
Scholar at the University of Macau

of the year, to more than 3.5 billion yuan.

Other brands are also experimenting with ways to translate cultural appeal across borders. Beverage retailer HeyTea has partnered with French luxury brand Fendi, while emerging player Whoa Tea is positioning its outlets as social spaces tailored to local markets – for instance, in Saudi Arabia.

Beverage retailer Luckin Coffee has also been prioritising quality and brand development as part of its international expansion strategy. Last year alone, the company opened 30 new stores in Singapore, 70 in Malaysia and nine in the United States.

As Prof. Liu observes, “when the brand itself becomes a value output, a quality declaration, or even an aesthetic symbol, it gains higher evaluation and pricing power”.

A new image

For many Chinese retailers, Southeast Asia has served as a natural first step in overseas

expansion. Cultural proximity, familiar consumer preferences and close links to existing supply chains make the region an attractive testing ground before entering more competitive Western markets.

Yet expansion beyond Asia requires more than simply exporting products. Companies must navigate unfamiliar regulatory environments, cultural expectations and consumer behaviours.

Thais Moretz, founder and chief executive of THAE Consulting, has spent years advising firms from China and Brazil on international growth. She says perceptions of Chinese brands are shifting significantly.

“In many cases, Brazilian clients are surprised by the level of sophistication and technology in Chinese products,” she said. “They realise that Chinese companies are no longer competing only on price – many are now competing directly with American and European brands in terms of quality and innovation.”

This shift is evident across industries, from manufacturing to electric vehicles, where European carmakers are increasingly seeking partnerships with Chinese firms to tap into their technological expertise.

This evolving perception has transformed the way foreign businesses approach the Chinese market. According to Ms Moretz, some companies still rely on China for large-scale manufacturing and cost efficiency, while others are increasingly focused on emerging Chinese consumer trends, technological advances, and design innovation.

“In reality, these interests coexist,” she added. “The entrepreneur who wants production volume and competitive pricing still finds China to be a strategic partner. At the same time, there is growing curiosity about Chinese technology, design capabilities and home-grown brands that are gaining global visibility.”

Global brand builders

The international reach of Chinese companies is already visible across multiple sectors.

For instance, DJI has established a global reputation in drone technology, while fast-fashion platform Shein has built a vast customer base through its data-driven model.

BYD, meanwhile, has emerged as one of the most remarkable success stories, now leading worldwide electric vehicle sales. The company overtook Tesla last year as the world's biggest electric automaker.

Chinese service platforms are also expanding. Ride-hailing company DiDi has gained traction in Brazil through its local platform "99", offering both transport and delivery services.

"In the short term, I believe many Chinese service companies have strong potential internationally," Ms Moretz said. "Brazilians have discovered that Chinese companies can offer efficient services, competitive pricing and reliable technology."

She notes that Chinese firms tend to adopt a cautious but deliberate approach to internationalisation. "They often begin by supplying products as OEMs, building experience and capital. Only after developing expertise and market understanding do they invest aggressively in their own brands."

This pattern, Ms Moretz said, shows a broader business mindset. Chinese brands "do not enter a market expecting to fail," she explained. "When Chinese entrepreneurs are ready, they invest seriously and commit significant resources to making the business succeed."

Gaining retail prominence

Closer to home, a similar shift is visible in the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao. Once dominated by Western and Japanese labels, premium retail districts in both cities are seeing a growing presence of Chinese mainland brands. Karry Ma, a specialist in integrated resort retail, says this reflects changing consumer tastes and stronger brand positioning.

"In the past, Chinese brands were not very visible in premium retail environments in Macao or Hong Kong," she said. "But today



There is growing curiosity about Chinese technology, design capabilities and home-grown brands

Thais Moretz
Founder and CEO of THAE Consulting



Today we see more Chinese mainland brands entering premium retail environments in Macao and Hong Kong, and they are doing so with much stronger brand identities

Karry Ma
Specialist in integrated resort retail



Consumers in London can buy HeyTea's beverages



Plush toy display at a Miniso store in Amsterdam

we see more Chinese mainland brands entering these spaces, and they are doing so with much stronger brand identities and design concepts.”

Integrated resorts and large shopping complexes in Macao and Hong Kong, she argues, provide an ideal platform for these brands to reach international audiences. With millions of visitors passing through each year, they offer a powerful platform for global exposure.

“Retail environments in integrated resorts are highly experiential,” she said. “Consumers are not just shopping – they are exploring, socialising and sharing experiences.”

This has led to a growing emphasis on what Ms Ma describes as “spatial storytelling”, where store design becomes a form of non-verbal communication.

“Spatial aesthetics are essentially a brand’s first introduction,” she said. “Visual environments are one of the fastest ways to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps.”

For many consumers, particularly tourists encountering these brands for the first time, the store itself serves as the primary point

of engagement. Retail spaces designed like galleries or exhibition spaces – as seen with Pop Mart – aim to transform shopping into a fully immersive experience.

“In lifestyle and luxury retail today, consumers are not only asking ‘What do I need?’,” Ms Ma said. “They are asking ‘What do I want to experience?’ A space that sparks curiosity and encourages people to stay longer has already achieved the first step in brand engagement.”

Such environments also lend themselves to social media. Distinctive interiors become shareable moments, amplifying brand visibility far beyond the physical store.

“When consumers post photos online, they are not just sharing a product – they are sharing the atmosphere of the brand,” Ms Ma said. “For emerging Chinese brands, this creates a powerful form of organic communication.”

As more Chinese mainland brands establish themselves in Hong Kong and Macao, both cities are increasingly serving as testing grounds – places where retail concepts are refined before being rolled out on a global stage. ■

LITERATURE

SLOW READING, DEEP THOUGHT: LESSONS FROM BI FEIYU

Text **Victoria Man Sok Wa**
Photos **Lei Heong leong**

In a world increasingly defined by speed, **Bi Feiyu** – one of China’s most acclaimed contemporary novelists – embraces stillness. Literature, he insists, like life itself, is a journey to be savoured slowly

After decades of writing, award-winning Chinese mainland author Bi Feiyu says he has reached a deeper understanding of what it truly means to craft a novel.

“We all know that a novel creates a world of its own, but in my case, my life and

my literature have become inseparable,” Mr Bi told Macao Magazine in an interview. “Because I write in Chinese, my existence has lived within that language: I feel through it, I express myself through it, and it has shaped my world.”

He elaborates that fiction

is not a mirror of reality, but an expression of values and aesthetics closely linked to the author. “Strictly speaking, fiction has no direct connection with real life – it is imagined, not reality. Yet when we write, our novels are guided by a system of values. Every



Because I write in Chinese, my existence has lived within that language: I feel through it, I express myself through it, and it has shaped my world

Bi Feiyu

Encounters with Macao

Bi Feiyu has visited Macao many times, often invited by friends and universities. “The city is very appealing when it comes to cuisine,” he told Macao Magazine, though he admitted Macao is unlikely to feature in his near-term literary projects. “A responsible writer cannot write about a place without deep understanding of its life and culture.”

In March, he returned as a guest speaker at the 15th edition of the Macao Literary Festival – The Script Road. “[I came] to meet more Macao readers, to make new friends,” he said.

He is optimistic about Macao’s literary future. “This is a place of rich cultural exchange and a slower pace of life. As more people from the Chinese mainland arrive, they bring not only language but also culture. That exchange will strengthen Macao’s literary future. I believe that.”

Mr Bi recalled meeting young local writers during a previous visit. “I spent time with them discussing writing together. There were three or four who impressed me greatly. What they need most is time and patience.”

Comparing Macao’s younger voices to those from the Chinese mainland, he notes: “People in Macao have a calmer cultural mindset. They are more composed, quieter. Compared with places like Shanghai, Hong Kong, Beijing, Tokyo or London, the pace of life in Macao feels slower, more settled. It’s not so competitive, not so exhausting.”

For Mr Bi, Macao’s potential lies in its slower rhythms and status as a city of exchange. “Many communities from Europe, Southeast Asia and elsewhere have lived here. The richer the exchange, the greater the possibility for literature to flourish.”

writer works within such a framework, and alongside it there is also an aesthetic dimension. These values and aesthetic pleasures are not imaginary; they are essential to life itself.”

Writing, he says, has shaped his very identity. “I now possess a constant set of values and a lasting sense of aesthetic taste, and together they have made me who I am today. Through decades of work, I have become this particular version of myself, rather than someone else. Writing and I influence each other, and that mutual influence is what makes me happiest.”

A life of award-winning literature

Born in 1964 in Xinghua, a county-level city in Jiangsu Province, Mr Bi – whose first name, Feiyu, means “one who flies across the universe” – grew up in a household steeped in words. His parents taught Chinese language, and his sisters also pursued degrees in education.

“I lived in such a family,” he recalled, “so becoming a writer was inevitable.” By the mid-1980s, he was already publishing short stories, launching a career that has spanned nearly four decades.

Now based in Nanjing, Mr Bi worked as a literary editor and today teaches creative writing at Nanjing University. He is celebrated



Bi Feiyu was a guest speaker at this year's Macao Literary Festival – The Script Road



📍 In 2011, "Massage" earned Bi Feiyu the Mao Dun Literature Prize, China's highest national literary award

for his nuanced portrayals of women and a storytelling style that blends everyday language with settings drawn from small towns and familiar cityscapes.

Domestically, Mr Bi has won the Lu Xun Literature Prize twice: in 1998 for his short story "The Lactating Woman", and again in 2003 for his novel "Three Sisters". In 2011, "Massage", exploring the lives of blind massage therapists and the intimate dynamics of their community, earned him the prestigious Mao Dun Literature Prize, China's highest national literary award.

Internationally, his works have been translated into more than 20 languages. "The Moon Opera", translated into English by Howard Goldblatt, one of the foremost translators of modern and contemporary Chinese literature, and Sylvia Li-chun Lin, was longlisted for the 2008 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, a literary award in the United Kingdom. The novel follows Xiao Yanqiu, a former Peking opera performer who, decades later, is offered the chance to return to the stage in her signature role, but her growing obsession with the character gradually

blurs the line between performance and reality.

With the translation of "Three Sisters" – also by Mr Goldblatt and Ms Lin – Mr Bi won the 2010 Man Asian Literary Prize. That is arguably his most recognised work internationally: the story of three women from rural China striving to build a life amid the turbulence and uncertainty of the 1970s and 1980s.

His novels have also inspired cinema: "Blind Massage", directed by Lou Ye, from the Chinese mainland, won best feature film and best adapted screenplay at the 2014 edition of the

prestigious Golden Horse Awards. Mr Bi co-wrote the screenplay for the 1995 film “Shanghai Triad”, which was directed by the acclaimed Chinese mainland filmmaker Zhang Yimou.

He also enjoys a following in France, where in 2017

*Literature is
a good friend
invisible to others,
but visible to me*

Bi Feiyu

the Ministry of Culture awarded him the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Order of Arts and Letters). These accolades underscore his status as one of China’s top contemporary novelists.

A work of solitude

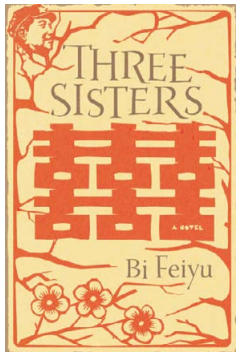
Pragmatic about recognition, Mr Bi notes: “Prizes make a writer happy for a moment, but then the moment passes. They don’t change your life. Of course they are important; they bring joy, but once the ceremony is over, it’s finished. No one carries a literary prize in their heart forever.”

For him, the true reward

lies in the companionship of his own works. “I treat all of my books with great care. Readers respond differently; some books are more popular, some less so. A few have won prizes, others have not; some have sold well, others have struggled,” he said. “That is the readers’ choice. For me, I value them all equally, because when I was writing each one, they accompanied me through a period of my life. Each book was part of my journey, and I cannot say I prefer one over another.”

Solitude, he believes, is a defining trait of a writer’s life. “I was born a solitary





person, and I chose writing,” he reflected. “A writer must learn the skill of living with oneself. Many people do not understand this, nor do they know how to be at ease in their own company. They call it loneliness. Yet if one has the ability to live with oneself, solitude becomes something entirely different – it is deeply enjoyable.”

Writing itself, he adds, has become a lifelong companion. “Literature is a good friend invisible to others, but visible to me.”

The art of slow

In an era dominated by rapid social media and fleeting attention, Mr Bi champions what he calls ‘slow reading’. “In today’s fast-paced world, speed is everywhere. Short videos have changed habits, and quick reading is often necessary to absorb information efficiently. But we must remember that life is not about speed. Some works can be read quickly, but when you want to savour them, the process should be slow.”

He stresses that slow reading enriches maturity.

“In your teens and twenties, the ability to read quickly is a good thing; you gain more knowledge than others. But if, by the age of 40, you have not learned to read slowly, to think as you read, to taste the language, then you are not truly fortunate.”

The metaphor is simple, he adds. “Speed is never the goal. It is the same with cooking: we don’t cook to be fast; we cook to make food delicious and nourishing. Occasionally, when busy, you may rush, but if you eat fast food every day, that is a problem.”

His objection to artificial intelligence in writing reflects this philosophy. Mr Bi has publicly said he views the craft as a means to experience and express the world through words, an enjoyment he values above any improvement AI could bring to his work.

Choosing literature

Mr Bi is candid about challenges facing young authors today. “Forty years ago, the environment was better. We had more time to

write. Today, life pressures are greater, and writing demands enormous time. If too much time is spent on writing, life itself may suffer.”

Yet he remains hopeful. “No matter how difficult life becomes, there will always be people who choose literature. I firmly believe that.”

He acknowledges that Chinese literature has achieved greater international recognition, with more translations and a wider readership than 30 years ago. He has also contributed on a more academic level: his 2017 collection “Literary Lectures” – a series of talks on Chinese literature delivered at leading Chinese universities – was published in English in 2022.

Nonetheless, Mr Bi remains grounded. “We cannot say that Chinese literature holds a high position yet. English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese writers still dominate. Since not many foreigners can read Chinese, Chinese literature occupies only a small proportion globally, which does not match the size of our country. For Chinese literature to gain a stronger place, it will take time, and better works.”

Patience, he concludes, is essential. “If we write long enough, and well enough, the future of Chinese literature will certainly improve.” ■

TAIPA VILLAGE CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

THE TAIPA ART

Text Margarida Vidinha

The 10th anniversary of the Taipa Village Cultural Association tells a story not only of exhibitions and events but of community engagement. What began as an effort to expand the experiences available to tourists visiting Old Taipa Village has evolved into a **cultural anchor for the neighbourhood**

It is a quiet afternoon in Old Taipa Village. Pastel façades glow in the sunlight as the streets hum with life: tourists pause for photographs while locals slip into cafés where Chinese and Portuguese flavours mingle. Amid the narrow lanes and alleyways of this quarter steeped in heritage stands the Taipa Village Art Space, run by the Taipa Village Cultural Association, which this year celebrates a decade of placing art at the heart of the community.

On show at the gallery until May 15 is “Show-Off 4.0: Three Collectors’ Exhibition by José Isaac Duarte, Luís Pessanha and Chao Iok Leng”. The “Show-Off” series presents selections of works amassed over the years by local art collectors. This edition brings together economist José Isaac Duarte, legal consultant Luís Pessanha and artist Chao Iok Leng. The premise is simple yet compelling: inviting residents of Macao to share their private art collections with the public, while reflecting on what they collect, why they do so and the long-term meaning of that passion.

In essence, that idea captures the spirit of the Taipa Village Cultural Association: bringing art and community closer together – not only exhibitions, but experiences; not only events, but encounters.

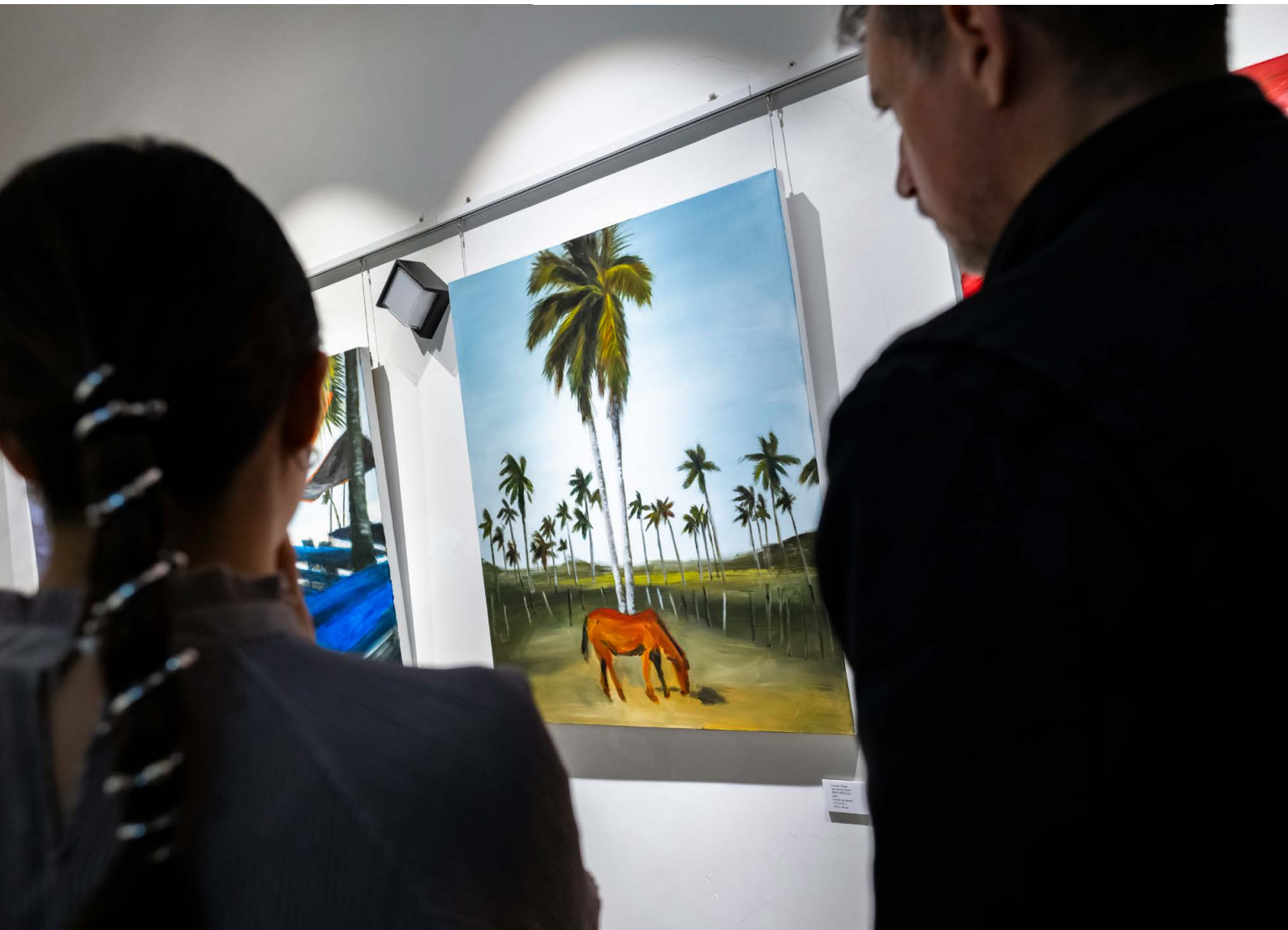
Founded in 2016, the association emerged from a straightforward yet ambitious vision – to extend the Old Taipa Village experience beyond dining and tourism and establish a cultural pulse for the neighbourhood. The aim was to position the district as an artistic destination within Macao.

“We wanted visitors to stay longer, to discover hidden gems, to feel the artistic spirit of the village,” Pamela Chan Weng Sun, vice-president of the association’s board, told Macao Magazine. Reaching the 10-year mark, she added, is about more than longevity. It is about the connections formed along the way.

The association’s board president, João Ó, expresses a similar view, describing Old Taipa Village as “a location unlike any other in Macao”. Being involved in the organisation’s

CONNECTION

The Taipa Village Cultural Association aims to position Old Taipa Village as an artistic destination in Macao 



work, he says, has been both a “privilege” and a “deeply educational experience” – a decade spent discovering how art can reshape a place.

The first steps

From the outset, the association set an ambitious tone. To mark the formal opening of the Taipa Village Art Space in October 2016, it invited local graffiti pioneer P.I.B.G. to present his first solo exhibition. The gallery has since relocated – it now sits on Rua dos Mercadores – but that moment remains a “meaningful and symbolic” milestone, according to Ms Chan.

A steady rhythm soon followed, with around four exhibitions each year. Over the past decade the association has organised more than 40 exhibitions and about 15 community events, adding a new cultural dimension to Old Taipa Village.

The curatorial approach has also been distinctive. Rather than competing with

established art institutions, Mr Ó explains the association focused on emerging contemporary artists. “Our job has been to find new talents with motivation but no platform,” he said.

Among the early discoveries was Portuguese-American conceptual artist and photographer Hugo Teixeira. Based in Macao as an English-language teacher, he first exhibited at Taipa Village Art Space in early 2017 and returned in 2020. His work is currently on display at the Guangdong Museum of Art in Guangzhou as part of the Guangzhou Image Triennial 2025, which runs until May 5.

International collaborations have also broadened the gallery’s reach. In late 2022 the association invited acclaimed Portuguese illustrator André Carrilho – who spent part of his teenage years in Macao and has contributed to publications including the New York Times, Vanity Fair and Harper’s Magazine – to present works drawn from



When we invite artists, they bring their families, their friends, their networks. Each person has their own circle of connections. That’s how the village fills with life

Pamela Chan Weng Sun
Taipa Village Cultural Association
board vice-president



▲ The “Frank Lei: Cuba ‘92” exhibition, held in 2025, paid tribute to the late Macao-based photographer and artist Frank Lei (1962–2022)

his travel sketchbooks. More recently, in February, the gallery concluded an exhibition by the American painter and printmaker Elizabeth Briel, who spent two decades living in Asia before relocating to Paris in 2024.

“We wanted international artists who could engage in a dialogue with Macao itself, with the village,” Mr Ó said. Over time the formula became clear: four exhibitions a year, typically three by local artists and one by an international guest, balancing local roots with global exchange.

Community beyond the gallery

The association’s impact extends well beyond its art gallery walls. It regularly organises family-oriented events such as its Easter programme, which brings local families into the village each spring for Easter egg hunts.

Its influence can also be seen in the streets of Old Taipa Village. In 2021, working with the Cultural Affairs Bureau, the association

invited Macao artists Vitorino Vong and Jane Ieng to create murals on stairways at Travessa da Boa Vista and Escada do Coxo.

“We transformed ordinary stone stairs and plain white walls into striking paintings,” Ms Chan said. “It became very attractive for tourists to take photos and share them online.”

Other murals and graffiti have been commissioned by the association in Old Taipa Village and elsewhere in Macao.

The group has also sought to promote social inclusion. In 2017, through a partnership with the British Council, it hosted “Dream with Love”, a photography exhibition aimed at encouraging greater acceptance of people with disabilities.

“It was very meaningful,” Ms Chan said. “It addressed social inclusion, diversity and empowerment.”

The Taipa Village Cultural Association’s journey has not been without challenges, particularly in the early years. “We had to

work within the available funding,” Ms Chan recalled. “But it encouraged us to keep moving.”

Space has been another constraint. Over the past decade its gallery has relocated several times, each move requiring adjustments to the type and scale of projects that could be presented. “You have to be flexible, adjusting the scale of the art to fit the space,” Mr Ó said.

Then came the pandemic. While many cultural institutions closed temporarily, the Taipa Village Cultural Association continued organising exhibitions, adapting them to comply with health regulations.

“We didn’t stop,” Ms Chan said. “Maybe fewer people came, but those who did

valued the intimacy. In a way, the lockdown created closeness: people were stuck in Macao, so they found reasons to gather.”

Looking ahead

Over the years the association has hosted events spanning a range of art forms, including music, film screenings and workshops that invite the wider community to participate.

“These moments capture the essence of the Taipa Village Cultural Association,” Mr Ó said. “Art as community, culture as celebration.”

Some initiatives have ventured outdoors. In 2022, local sculptor Wong Ka Long installed two three-metre-high bamboo



◀ Last year, the Taipa Village Art Space hosted “The Flavours of Sichuan” exhibition by American photographer David Hartung, a long-time Asia resident (pictured, centre)

Our job has been to find new talents with motivation but no platform

João Ó
Taipa Village Cultural Association
board president



structures in a public display.

“Outdoor work is very challenging but joyful,” Mr Ó said. “It’s for everyone. You don’t need to go inside a space – it’s like offering something to the city, to the village.”

As a non-profit organisation, the Taipa Village Cultural Association provides artists a platform to present their work without the pressure of sales performance. “It’s about inner emotions, about seeing the world through each other’s eyes,” Mr Ó said.

He added that art can also play an important role in everyday wellbeing. “It’s important for citizens in terms of mental health. Art is like therapy – relaxing, like reading a book.”

As the association marks its 10th anniversary, its leaders are already looking ahead. One forthcoming project, a new edition of its “Walking Culture” exhibition series, will scatter artworks across the village, inviting passers-by to encounter art in unexpected places. Featuring more than a dozen local and international artists, the event aims

to be both celebration and experiment.

The expansion of cultural infrastructure in Macao – from museums to integrated resorts – also presents opportunities for collaboration.

“Worldwide, museums collaborate with local communities,” Ms Chan said. “I hope these new facilities open up to associations like ours, so we can bring local art into their beautiful spaces.”

One memorable episode still makes the organisers smile: a collector from Hong Kong wandered into the gallery while exploring the neighbourhood and purchased a work on the spot.

“It was a surprise,” Mr Ó recalled. “That’s what we seek – those moments of discovery, when art connects unexpectedly.”

Ms Chan sees such encounters as part of a wider network of relationships. “When we invite artists, they bring their families, their friends, their networks. Each person has their own circle of connections. That’s how the village fills with life.” ■

PROFILE

KAM CHIN POK'S ROAD TO SUCCESS

Text **Victoria Man Sok Wa**

Kam Chin Pok's cycling journey stretches from the streets of Macao, where he first rode as an amateur, to the demanding circuits of Asia and Europe as a professional rider. Now a member of the China Anta-Mentech Cycling Team, the 23-year-old is learning what it takes to **compete at the highest level**

For Macao rider Kam Chin Pok, cycling has become a passport to the world. Still in the early years of his career, he has already competed across several continents, representing both his home city and his professional team, the China Anta-Mentech Cycling Team. The squad, built around riders from China's national programme alongside international athletes, operates in a lifestyle defined by constant travel, rigorous training and the pursuit of excellence.

"I enjoy living in the

moment," Mr Kam told Macao Magazine. "While I'm young, I want to see how far I can go. Later in life, I may not have the same chance to travel and compete like this."

Just last February, he was in Saudi Arabia competing in the Asian Road Cycling Championships. In the men's elite individual road race, he finished 30th, less than five minutes behind the winner and within the first half of the field.

Mr Kam's route into cycling was unplanned. As a teenager he experimented with tennis, badminton

and even jiu-jitsu before discovering the pleasure of riding a bicycle in secondary school. "I was about 16 or 17 when I first started riding with classmates." What began as casual weekend rides soon evolved into league races, where his natural ability quickly became apparent.

"At first it was just fun," he said. "Then I realised there were local leagues in Macao, and I thought: 'Why not give it a try?'"

Even though Mr Kam only trained for two months before participating in his



📍 Kam Chin Pok competing in the men's individual time trial at last year's National Games

first Macau Cycling Road Race, he placed second in the junior group.

A rising rider

A major turning point came at China's 2019 National Youth Games, in Taiyuan, the capital city of Shanxi province. That was when Mr Kam joined the Macao SAR team and represented the city for the first time.

“That was my first taste of competition at senior level,” he said. “It made me realise I wanted to take cycling further.”

The COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly accelerated his progress. With many team and contact sports suspended, cycling offered an escape route. Mr Kam trained independently, without a coach or structured

programme, gradually building the stamina and technique needed to compete at higher levels.

His persistence paid off when he entered the Tour of Poyang Lake in Jiangxi, in 2023, a professional race that introduced him to the broader Chinese cycling scene. Soon afterwards he spotted an announcement that the China Anta-Mentech



👉 The Macao rider joined the professional China Anta-Mentech Cycling Team in 2025

Cycling Team was recruiting riders nationwide. The squad currently consists of just 16 members, including Chinese national team athletes and international cyclists from Estonia, South Africa, the Netherlands, France and Italy.

“I saw the opportunity to become a professional cyclist and an extraordinary chance to improve myself, so I tried my best for it.” In 2025, Mr Kam secured a place on the team – the only rider from Macao to do so.

Pursuing a passion

At the time, Mr Kam was studying civil engineering at the University of Macau. Pausing his studies to pursue a professional cycling career was not an easy decision.

“My family were half supportive, half worried,” he admitted. “In Macao, being a professional athlete isn’t common. But they knew it was my passion.”

The risk was real. Contracts in professional cycling are typically renewed each season and depend heavily on results. Every race becomes, in effect, an audition for the following year.

“Of course there’s pressure,” he said. “But I want to show what I can do. Many riders in China dream of joining a team like this. I have to fight for my place.”

Even before turning

professional, balancing training with academic life had already tested his endurance.

“I used to go to class during the day, then train in the evening. After that I still had to finish homework and revise for tests late at night. It was exhausting, but I felt it was worth it.”

The effort paid off. Professional status brought not only opportunity but also a demanding new routine centred on travel, training and competition.

“I didn’t have a big plan,” he said. “I just wanted to enjoy the moment and see what results I could achieve while I’m young.”

Since last year, Mr Kam’s life has revolved around an intense international racing calendar. Winter months from December to February are devoted to training and preparation. From March to October the racing season takes over.

Roughly half the year is spent in Europe, competing in countries such as Turkey, Spain and Greece. The rest takes him across Asia, with races in China, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia. Alongside his professional commitments, he continues to represent Macao in major competitions.

“Europe is on another level,” Mr Kam said. “The competition is deeper, the race routes are tougher

and the atmosphere is incredible. A single race can have hundreds of riders, with teams working strategically. It’s not just about individual strength – it’s about teamwork.”

Within a typical six-rider squad, Mr Kam frequently plays a supporting role, protecting the team’s lead rider from the wind, helping control the pace of the peloton and ensuring supplies move efficiently through the team.

“We help our leader conserve energy for the final sprint,” he explained. “It’s about sacrifice and strategy.”

Daily life abroad follows a strict rhythm: morning training sessions or competition, afternoon recovery, and constant monitoring by a network of specialists, from nutritionists to physiotherapists. Yet the constant travel also brings moments of quiet discovery.

“Since I’m always in different countries, I love walking around, sitting on a beach or exploring local markets.”

Living in the moment

Mr Kam’s rise has been marked by steady progress, but some milestones stand out. At the men’s individual road race at China’s 15th National Games last November, he produced the strongest performance

among Macao's five entrants. Of the 104 riders who started, 98 completed the course, with Mr Kam finishing 30th, showcasing his ability to compete with some of China's leading cyclists.

"Finishing 30th wasn't entirely satisfying. Road cycling results often depend heavily on the course... This race was held on flat roads, which don't suit my

strengths. I believe there is room for improvement, but I was pleased with how I performed."

In a first, the 15th National Games took place across the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The road race competition was the first-ever cross-boundary road cycling race in National Games history, staged through the collaboration

of Guangdong, Macao and Hong Kong, and partially using the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

During the Games, Mr Kam also competed in the men's individual time trial, held in Zhuhai. He finished in 26th position. It was his second time at the country's largest quadrennial sporting gala, after joining in 2021 the Xi'an edition.

Despite racing internationally with his professional team, Mr Kam says representing Macao carries a special significance. "When I wear the Macao colours, it feels different," he explained. "It's about pride – showing that athletes from a small place can compete internationally."

Another defining moment came when he received the Young Cyclist Award at



Cycling gave me opportunities I never imagined – travelling, meeting people from different countries, competing at the highest level

Kam Chin Pok



📍 Cycling competitions have taken Kam Chin Pok across the world

the Sanmenxia Along the Yellow River International Cycling Invitational, in 2024, his first major honour at international level.

“My condition during the race, together with the teamwork with my fellow riders, was excellent,” he recalled. “Winning that award felt like a real achievement.”

Despite his growing list of achievements, Mr Kam remains measured about the future. “I don’t think too

much about it,” he said. “I want to enjoy this lifestyle, see what results I can achieve, and inspire others.”

For him, cycling is not only about rankings or medals but about the discipline of training, the thrill of competition and the friendships formed along the way. He believes sport should be embraced as a way of life rather than merely a path to success.

His advice to younger athletes is straightforward:

“Know what you want, and don’t worry too much about the future. Respect the present moment.”

In the short term, his focus is on upcoming competitions, including the 2026 Asian Games, to be held in Aichi prefecture, Japan, from September 19 to October 4, and the National Road Championships, in Liaoning, scheduled for the second half of June. Beyond that, he hopes eventually to be worthy of earning the title of International Master of Sport, the highest recognition in the Athlete Technical Grading System, awarded by the General Administration of Sport of China to national athletes demonstrating elite-level performance in international competitions.

Mr Kam also plans to return to university at a later stage, pursuing studies in sports science to deepen his understanding of training and performance. “I want to keep improving, compete with Asia’s best, and maybe one day coach or teach.”

Ultimately, he hopes his journey will encourage more young people in Macao to take sport seriously. “Cycling gave me opportunities I never imagined – travelling, meeting people from different countries, competing at the highest level,” he said. “I want others to see that it’s possible.” ■

A 450-year legacy of faith and exchange

Photo feature by Antonius Photoscript





In 2026, the **Catholic Church in Macao** marks a milestone that is both spiritual and historically significant: the 450th anniversary of the establishment of its diocese. Founded on January 23, 1576, it was the first Catholic jurisdiction in East Asia. The anniversary has been designated as a year-long jubilee, continuing until January 2027. Four and a half centuries on, the Diocese of Macao remains a visible thread in the city's social and cultural fabric. Its influence extends beyond religious life into education, social services, healthcare, and support for those in need, reflecting a legacy that is as civic as it is spiritual.





BRICK & STORY

TIME TRAVELING AT PAK TAI TEMPLE

Text **Cherry Chan**
Photos **Lei Heong leong**

Pak Tai Temple endures as a bridge between past and present – a place where devotion, heritage and community converge in the heart of Old Taipa Village

Visitors strolling through the heart of Old Taipa Village, along Rua do Cunha and Rua do Regedor, encounter a lively tourist enclave, its streets lined with shops and cafés. It is difficult to imagine an earlier landscape, when the ground beneath their feet bordered a small bay rather than solid land.

Taipa itself was once formed of two separate islands, each defined by its own hill. By the mid-20th century, land reclamation — aided by natural siltation — joined them into what is now Taipa Island.

Pak Tai Temple predates this transformation. Historical records indicate that it was built between 1843 and early 1844, a timeline supported by a carved stele installed on site in 1882. The inscription refers to the “Year of the Water Rabbit” for the temple’s construction, widely understood by scholars to point to 1843 or early 1844.

Dedicated to Pak Tai, the Taoist God of the North – also known as the Great Emperor Xuanwu or Black Emperor – the temple reflects the maritime roots of the community it served. Revered for his power to



command floods and fire, Pak Tai was long venerated by fishermen seeking protection, favourable weather and a safe return.

His origins stretch deep into myth. One tradition places his human life in the era of the Yellow Emperor, between 2697 BC and 2597 BC, as a prince who renounced worldly power to become a Taoist recluse.

By the Song dynasty (960–1279), Pak Tai worship had entered the imperial court and later gained additional prominence during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

A temple shaped by sea

When the Pak Tai Temple was first built, Taipa was a small fishing settlement, explains Chan Chi Seng, head of the Associação

de Moradores da Taipa, speaking to Macao Magazine.

In front of the temple once stood shipyards where vessels were repaired before returning to sea. Nets were laid out to dry in what is now Largo de Camões, the square directly before the temple. Facing the waterfront at the time, the temple's orientation reflected the community's



Historical records suggest the Pak Tai Temple was built between 1843 and early 1844 

reliance on the sea – and its need for divine protection.

Since 1968, the neighbourhood association has overseen the temple’s upkeep, continuing a tradition of local stewardship. Conservation efforts are supported by Macao’s Cultural Affairs Bureau, and the complex is listed as a protected monument.

Much of the structure remains unchanged. The statues, the layout – they are the same as they were decades ago, according to Mr Chan.

The temple is organised around a central chamber dedicated to Pak Tai, flanked by side halls housing other deities: Va Kuong, the god of fire; Empress Kam Fa, protector of children; Kuan Tai, the deified military commander celebrated for his righteousness; Master Lu Ban, patron of craftsmen; and the God of Wealth.

Unlike many temples in Taipa, the main chamber was originally designed to accommodate offerings and worship within a larger interior space. The complex itself is more expansive than most temples found across Taipa and Coloane.

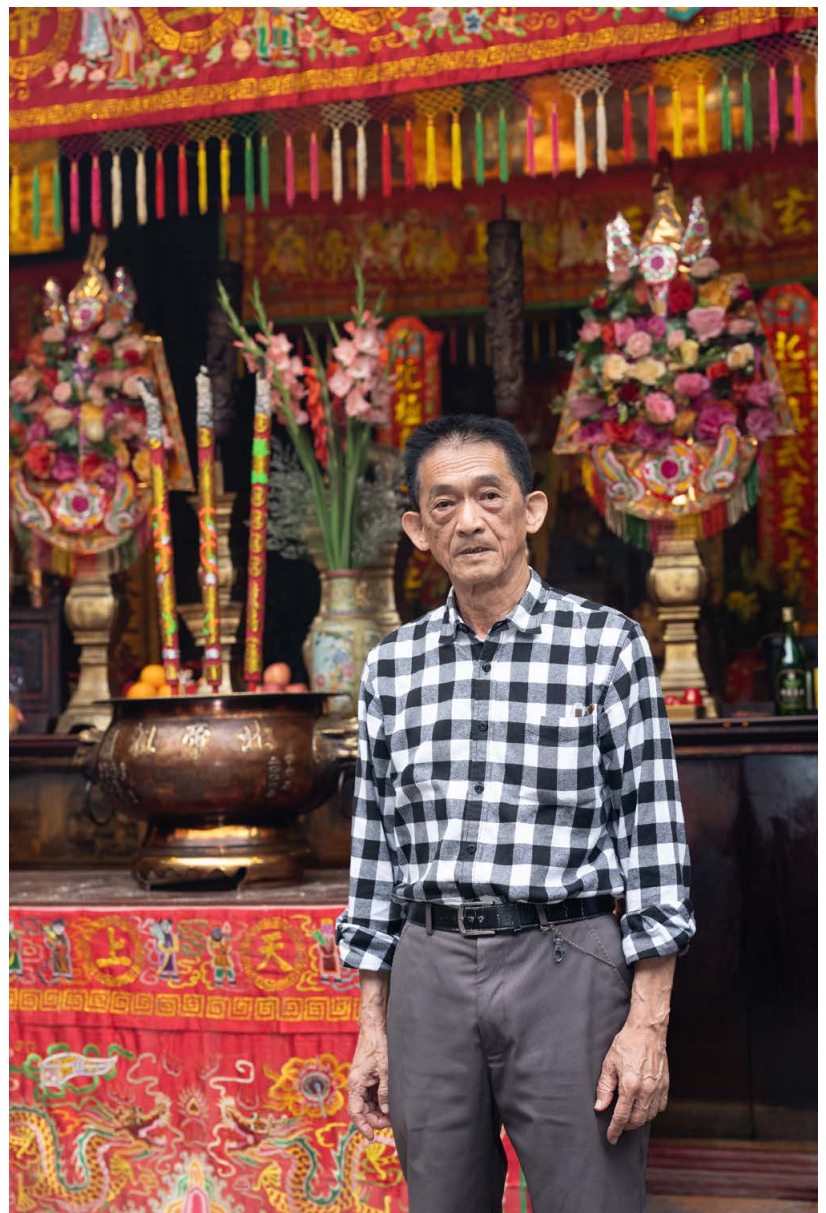
Pak Tai is symbolically associated with both a tortoise and a snake – motifs that appear in the temple, where the deity is depicted seated with his feet resting upon the two creatures. Above the entrance, frescoes

and carved details frame the lintel, while inside hangs a large wooden plaque bearing the inscription “The God of the North”.

The temple also preserves older place names etched in stone using Chinese characters – “Long Tao Wan”

Temples today offer peace of mind rather than a specific blessing

Chan Chi Seng
Head of the Associação de Moradores da Taipa





📍 The temple was originally the spiritual centre of a fishing community

and “Tam Zai” – echoing earlier identities of Taipa long since absorbed into the modern cityscape.

“Pak Tai is the main god, sitting in the middle. The other deities were gradually invited for worship over time, but exactly when they arrived is impossible to determine,” Mr Chan said.

Enduring traditions

In its early years, the temple was the spiritual centre of a fishing community, where families prayed for safe voyages and abundant catches. As urban development reshaped Taipa and traditional fisheries declined, its role evolved.

Today, visitors arrive for reasons that extend beyond maritime concerns. “People might ask for health, business success,

or family stability. Temples today offer peace of mind rather than a specific blessing,” Mr Chan said.

Yet tradition endures in the annual Pak Tai Celebrations, held on the third day of the third month of the Chinese lunar calendar. This day is celebrated as Pak Tai’s birthday and falls on April 19 this year. Spanning several days, the programme at Pak Tai Temple includes ritual ceremonies, four nights of Cantonese opera performed for the deities, and a community gathering that brings the festivities to a close. It is the largest festival in Macao dedicated to the deity.

A temporary bamboo mat-shed theatre rises in Largo de Camões to host the performances. “We try to accommodate as

many people as possible, but the square has a fixed size. Devotees witness the ceremony, while others might attend for the art,” Mr Chan said.

“The number of spectators depends on the weather,” he added. “We invite a troupe from the Chinese mainland each year, offering the public a chance to appreciate the art form.”

Inscribed on Macao’s Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2020, the celebrations underscore the enduring relevance of traditional Chinese folk practices. For many, the operatic performances – staged in an open-air, ceremonial setting – offer a rare chance to experience the art form as it was traditionally seen in bygone days. ■

Stirring up Macao's mixology scene

Meet creative mixologist **Bruno Santos** who tells the story of Macao's past through his locally inspired cocktails

Text **Rui Pastorin**

Photos **Cheong Kam Ka**

Name

Bruno Santos

Age

44

Title

Operations director at Macao Bar Concept (MBC), International Bar Association (IBA) president

Years living in Macao

40

Macao in one word

Beautiful

What got you hooked into mixology?

That takes me back almost 20 years. I love to cook, but to work in a kitchen means you are not interacting with guests. I love to communicate, to make people happy. In bartending, I am in direct contact with them and I can also create. So, it was a mix of passions: creating, serving and interacting.

A drink you've made with your key ingredient.

We had a very popular drink many years ago called the "Mango Lat Chiu", mixing this iconic fruit with "lat chiu", which means chilli in Cantonese, and was introduced through the presence of the Portuguese in the Orient. Macao and Portugal were the soul of this drink.

Does Macao ever creep into your cocktail creations?

My goal has always been to connect stories and history with liquids. This is the base of my inspiration. We go through a lot of local ingredients and local stories to connect and build a menu and, most importantly, connect ingredients with history.

What's a cocktail ingredient that tastes like Macao?

Local fruits and botanicals. I have been studying Macao's little botanical treasures for a long time, and the city is quite diverse in terms of botanicals. There's a lot of fruit trees and herbs. One of the most popular fruits that grows in Macao are mangoes, so I would say mango is my key ingredient here.

Five essentials for a bar to impress?

The most important is hospitality. You don't really need to have the most beautiful venue, but if you have the most beautiful soul, no matter where it is, you will always feel at home. And if you are at home, you're comfortable. Second, having an impressive and accessible menu, well balanced and that can cater to different tastes. Third is having a team, because you cannot impress a guest all by yourself; you really need a team to provide quality service. Next is the ambience, especially the lighting and music. And last but certainly not least – innovation, which captivates people to visit your bar.

What's in store for Macao's mixology scene?

We will organise this year the World Cocktail Championship (WCC), from October 19 to 24. The world knows that Macao is going to be the cocktail competition capital this year and we are very proud of that. We really want people to come to Macao and fall in love with the city. We are expecting at least 700 bartenders and about 2,000 visitors. And, for the first time, we'll have an "amazing mixologist race," with bartenders running around the city, finding ingredients and creating a cocktail at the end.

What's the cocktail that reflects Macao's unique heritage?

The 'Porto Flip'. It's made with port wine, which is one of the most iconic Portuguese spirits, and egg yolk. I think it will represent Macao really nicely, with the presence of the Portuguese and a velvety, silky mouthfeel that evokes Asia. And then you can twist it with a lot of regional herbs and roots.



Festival

DANCES WITH DRAGONS

The Festival – or Feast – of the Drunken Dragon is a distinctive folk tradition rooted in Macao’s fishmonger community and listed on China’s National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Items. Held annually on the eighth day of the fourth month of the Chinese lunar calendar (this year falling on May 24), the festival is a vibrant celebration of local culture. The highlight is the Drunken Dragon parade, in which men perform an extraordinary ritual: they dance while simultaneously spraying rice wine from their mouths and carrying wooden dragon effigies carved from head to tail.

MAY 24 | MULTIPLE LOCATIONS, INCLUDING KUAN TAI TEMPLE, SENADO SQUARE AND RED MARKET | FREE ADMISSION



Religion

TIME-HONOURED PROCESSION OF FAITH

On May 13 each year, Macao observes the Procession of Our Lady of Fátima, a Catholic ritual commemorating the apparitions of the Virgin Mary reported in Fátima, Portugal in 1917. The city held its first procession 12 years later, in 1929, and the event has since become a deeply rooted annual tradition, now recognised on Macao’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The procession features two young girls and a boy dressed in traditional Portuguese costume, representing the three shepherd children who claimed to have witnessed the Virgin Mary’s appearances in Fátima.

MAY 13 | 5PM | ST. DOMINIC’S CHURCH TO THE CHAPEL OF OUR LADY OF PENHA | FREE ADMISSION



Nature

WILDLIFE WONDERLAND

Seac Pai Van Park in Coloane has recently opened three new outdoor wildlife attractions. The Pavilion of Amphibians and Reptiles, spread over 1,080 square metres, houses more than 40 animals from 26 species, including indigenous creatures as well as animals rescued or confiscated from illegal trade. Nearby, a newly constructed Aviary provides a spacious home for a variety of birds beneath its steel dome. Visitors can observe the birds from multiple vantage points, with platforms positioned at different heights around the enclosure. Completing the trio is the 640-square-metre Butterfly-Friendly Garden, planted to create a haven where colourful butterflies can feed, breed, and thrive.

OPEN DAILY | 6AM TO 10PM | FREE ADMISSION



Expo

NEXT STOP: THE WORLD

Since its debut in 2013, the Macao International Travel Expo (MITE) has grown into one of the city's top annual tourism-related events, offering locals and visitors a window into the world of travel. The event showcases an array of destinations and products, inspiring new travel ideas for holidays at home and abroad. Beyond its appeal to the public, MITE serves as a professional platform for local, national and international exhibitors, buyers and industry partners. Business-matching sessions, thematic seminars and promotional activities enable participants to share information and forge new deals.

APRIL 10, 11AM-7PM; APRIL 11, 10AM-7PM, APRIL 12, 10AM-6PM | COTAI EXPO AT THE VENETIAN MACAO | FREE ADMISSION | FURTHER DETAILS AT WWW.MITEXPO.MO

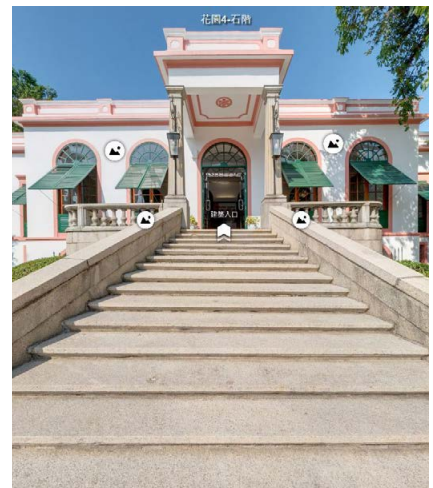


Virtual tours

CLICK TO EXPLORE

The Cultural Affairs Bureau has launched online virtual tours at four additional sites within the UNESCO-listed Historic Centre of Macao. The new virtual tours available for exploration include: the Protestant Cemetery, the Headquarters Building of the Orient Foundation ("Casa Garden"), the Headquarters Building of the Marine and Water Bureau (formerly the Moorish Barracks), and the Guia Lighthouse interior. The virtual tours offer 360-degree panoramic views of each site and its surrounding environment. Visitors can also enhance their experience by using their own VR headsets.

FREE ACCESS | AVAILABLE IN CANTONESE, MANDARIN, PORTUGUESE AND ENGLISH | WEBSITE: VR.ICM.GOV.MO



Exhibition

EXPLOSIVE HERITAGE

"A Century of Iec Long Firecracker Factory in Radiance – An Exhibition on the Resonant History and Aesthetic Memory of Macao Firecrackers" brings together over 400 artefacts ranging from original manuscripts and firecracker-making tools to vintage packaging labels. The display traces a century of the city's firecracker industry, a sector that thrived throughout the 20th century, providing visitors with rich insight into its cultural and historical significance. Organised into six thematic chapters, the exhibition captures both the aesthetic appeal of the craft and a behind-the-scenes look into firecracker production.

NOW THROUGH AUGUST 31 | 11AM TO 7PM | SANDS GALLERY – THE GRAND SUITES AT FOUR SEASONS HOTEL MACAO | FREE ADMISSION





ALL ROADS LEAD TO MACAO

Visitors strolling through Macao are often struck by street names that could easily belong in Lisbon, such as Rua da Felicidade, Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro and Travessa do Enleio. For local residents, these names are simply part of everyday geography. Written in Portuguese alongside Chinese characters, these names reveal a layered urban identity shaped by

more than four centuries of cultural contact.

Today, the tradition endures: under the city's current bilingual framework, Portuguese and Chinese names are used for various thoroughfares, from bustling avenues to quiet alleyways, preserving a nomenclature that has become inseparable from Macao's East-meets-West fabric.

Can you find these 10 types of Portuguese-language roadways commonly found in Macao? (English equivalents are provided in brackets.)

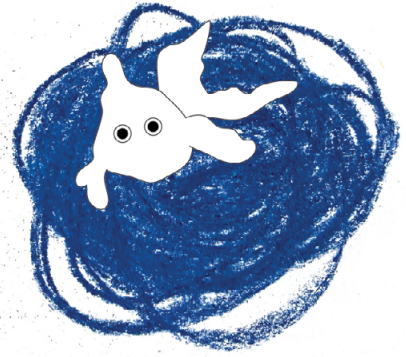
- ALAMEDA (BOULEVARD)
- AVENIDA (AVENUE)**
- BECO (ALLEY)
- CAMINHO (WAY)
- ESCADA (STAIRWAY)
- ESTRADA (ROAD)
- LARGO (SQUARE)
- ROTUNDA (ROUNDBABOUT)**
- RUA (STREET)**
- TRAVESSA (LANE)

(Words can go in any direction)




塔石藝墟


FEIRA DE ARTESANATO DO
TAP SIAC

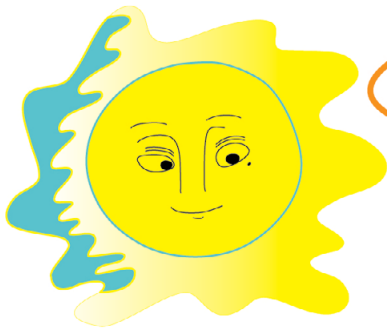


2026 04.23 - 26 04.30 - 05.03

TAP SIAC
CRAFT
MARKET

 澳門文化局IC | a

 藝墟 | a




藝墟 Feira de Artesanato
Craft Market



主辦
Organizador
Organizer



澳門特別行政區政府文化局
INSTITUTO CULTURAL do Governo da Região Administrativa Especial de Macau

協辦
Co-organizadores
Co-organizers





第十四屆澳門國際旅遊（產業）博覽會
14.ª Expo Internacional de Turismo (Indústria) de Macau
14th Macao International Travel (Industry) Expo



10-12
04.2026

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Pavilhões A, B e C da Cotai Expo
Venetian Macau
Halls A, B and C, Cotai Expo
The Venetian Macao

Global Convergence,
Future Horizons
薈萃環球
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www.mitexpo.mo
info@mitexpo.mo
(853) 2870 3707
(853) 2870 1083

