

Macao 澳門

Cooperation Zone

A SHARED HORIZON

Five years after its launch, the Guangdong–Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin has become central to the next phase of Macao's development

PLATFORM ROLE

Macao makes the Spanish connection



INTERVIEW

Inside FAOM's greater mission



MUSIC

The remarkable life of pipa virtuosa Wu Man



Echo the Wind Wanderer

26 / 07 - 11 / 10 / 2026

Artist : **Ekokaxi Wang**

Curator : **Zhang Qianyuan**

Local / Venue :



Macao Museum of Art



Lion Lobby, MGM COTAI





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

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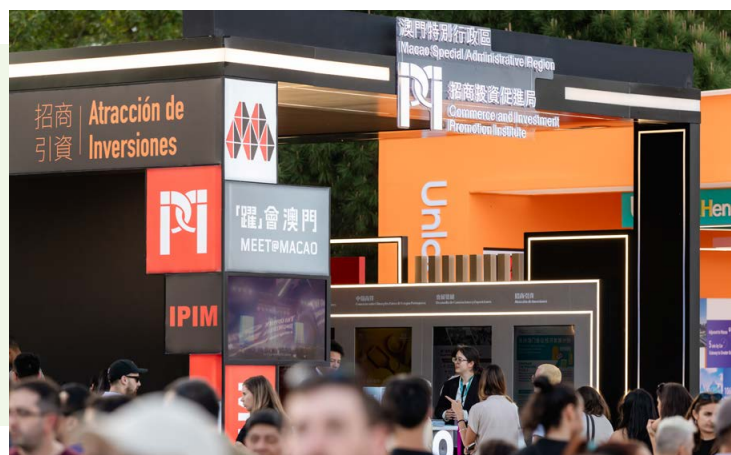


TWO CITIES, ONE FUTURE

From streamlined boundary crossings and shared public services to industrial policy and institutional reform, the Guangdong–Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin – celebrating its fifth anniversary – advances the “One country, two systems” principle [PAGE 6](#)

Macao's next global link

How the MSAR is boosting its international role by bridging China with Spain and Latin America [PAGE 28](#)





Beyond workers, building community

Macao Federation of Trade Unions chairman, Lam Lon Wai, explains how FAOM has evolved into one of the city's most influential civic organisations, extending far beyond labour issues [PAGE 50](#)



The business of sport

International sporting events are helping reshape Macao's economy. But can they deliver lasting benefits beyond the final whistle? [PAGE 68](#)

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Macao to unveil Third Five-Year Plan in August, says CE

The Macao Special Administrative Region Government expects to publish its Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development (2026–2030) this August, according to Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai.

Speaking during a plenary session of the Legislative Assembly, Mr Sam said the administration remained on track to release the blueprint, which is expected to guide the city's economic and social development over the next five years.

He also said the government's work programme for the first half of 2026 had delivered

positive results. Looking ahead, the administration would seek to capitalise on the opportunities created by the national 15th Five-Year Plan while pressing ahead with its policy agenda for the remainder of the year to meet its annual objectives.

A central priority, Mr Sam said, would be to advance Macao's appropriate economic diversification in a measured and orderly way. In that regard, the government will continue to drive four flagship development projects: the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, the Macao International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone, the



Macao Technology Research Industrial Park, and the Macau International Airport Hengqin Upstream Cargo Terminal.

BRICS development bank makes first bond issuance in Macao

The New Development Bank (NDB), the multilateral lender established by the BRICS bloc of emerging economies, has completed its first bond issuance in the Macao Special Administrative Region, marking another step in the city's efforts to strengthen its role in diversifying cross-border investment and financing activities.

The June issuance, valued at

50 million U.S. dollars, took the form of a Lotus bond, with the proceeds earmarked for projects in Brazil. The securities are held in custody by the Macao Central Securities Depository.

In a statement, the NDB described the transaction as "an important milestone in the New Development Bank's efforts to diversify its funding sources and expand its presence across various markets".

The Monetary Authority of Macao said the issuance was "a practical manifestation of Macao's capacity to play the role of a financial services platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries."

Headquartered in Shanghai, the NDB was founded in 2015 by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa under the BRICS grouping.

Ng Wai Han appointed Secretary for Economy and Finance

Ng Wai Han was appointed Secretary for Economy and Finance of the Macao Special Administrative Region Government in June. Sworn into office on June 15, Ms Ng pledged to work closely with her team under the leadership of Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai to deliver the government's economic and financial agenda.

Looking ahead, Ms Ng said she would draw on her years of public service to accelerate Macao's

appropriate economic diversification.

A career civil servant, Ms Ng was appointed deputy director of the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau in 2020 before later becoming its director. In May 2025, she took over as director of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, the position she held immediately before joining the government as Secretary for Economy and Finance.

BY THE NUMBERS

86 athletes

The size of the Macao delegation for the 2026 Asian Games, to be held in Japan from September 19 to October 4, with Macao competing in 15 events

APEC MINISTERIAL MEETING CHARTING THE FUTURE OF TOURISM FOR ASIA-PACIFIC

Representatives from the member economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) gathered in Macao in June for the 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting, where ministers and senior officials explored how digital innovation and closer regional collaboration could shape the future of tourism across the Asia-Pacific region. Held at the China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform Complex as part of the APEC China 2026 programme, the

event saw delegates note that tourism is an important driving force for regional economic development, with a solid foundation, abundant potential and promising future.



THE HENGQIN

Text **Viviana Chan**



EXPERIMENT

An aerial photograph of the Hengqin Island skyline. The image shows a cluster of modern skyscrapers, including a prominent blue glass tower in the center. The island is surrounded by water, and a bridge is visible on the right side. In the background, there are green hills and mountains under a clear blue sky.

The Guangdong–Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin was a bold blueprint when it was launched in 2021. Five years on, Guangdong and Macao now jointly plan, administer and develop a shared territory, testing how far the “**One country, two systems**” principle can evolve in pursuit of deeper integration

Five years after its launch, the Guangdong–Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin stands as one of China’s most closely watched experiments in regional integration. It offers a new model for shared governance, economic cooperation and public administration.

Fong Fong Tan, director of the Livelihood Affairs Bureau of the Cooperation Zone, describes this transformation as a “profound shift” from “physical connection to chemical reaction” – a metaphor that captures the evolution from simple geographical proximity to genuine social, industrial and institutional integration.

Separated from Macao by only a narrow stretch of water, Hengqin Island is about three times the size of its neighbour, covering 106.46 square kilometres. Encompassing almost the entire island – excluding the land leased

to the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) for the existing campus of the University of Macau – the Cooperation Zone occupies a unique position within China’s plans for the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area. It is also a cornerstone of Macao’s long-term strategy to diversify its economy.

The zone combines preferential tax policies, simplified customs arrangements and measures designed to make it easier for holders of Macao identity (ID) cards to settle, establish businesses and pursue careers in Hengqin.

The changes are increasingly reflected in daily life. As of February this year, more than 30,000 Macao ID card holders were living, working or studying in the Cooperation Zone.

Passenger traffic through Hengqin Port – located at one end of the Lotus Flower Bridge, which connects the island with Macao – has grown from around 20,000



daily crossings when the port opened in 2020 to an average daily flow of more than 260,000. In a record first, annual passenger movements surpassed 30 million in 2025, more than triple the figure recorded in 2021.

Last year, some 3.5 million vehicles crossed the boundary, roughly two-thirds of them Macao single-plate cars, under a special policy allowing eligible Macao-registered vehicles to enter and travel within Hengqin Island.

Director Fong observes that the creation of a familiar living environment encourages Macao ID card holders to settle in Hengqin. She describes the Cooperation Zone's approach as advancing three types of connectivity: "hard connectivity" via infrastructure, "soft connectivity" through aligned rules and institutions, and "heart connectivity" by nurturing closer community ties across the boundary.

Rewriting the rulebook

Established in September 2021, the Cooperation Zone marks its fifth anniversary this September. More than an industrial park or economic development zone, it represents an attempt to reshape the relationship between two jurisdictions operating under the "One country, two systems" framework. The project combines institutional reform, industrial policy and regional planning

on a scale without precedent in China's approach to cross-boundary governance.

The origins of the project stretch back to August 2009, when the State Council approved the "Overall Development Plan of Hengqin", identifying the island as a demonstration zone for cooperation between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.

Momentum gathered a decade later with the publication of the "Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area" in 2019, jointly issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council. Two years later came the "Master Plan of the Development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin", followed in December 2023 by the "Overall Development Plan for the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin", issued by the National Development and Reform Commission.

The project is being developed in three phases and enjoys strong backing from the country's central leadership. The first phase concluded in 2024, coinciding with President Xi Jinping's visit to Macao during celebrations marking the 25th anniversary of the city's return to the motherland. During the visit, President Xi toured Hengqin and reviewed the achievements of the Cooperation Zone.

"Practice has proven that the central authorities' decision to develop Hengqin and establish the Cooperation Zone is completely correct," he said at the time.

In June, Xia Baolong, the nation's most senior official responsible for Hong Kong and Macao affairs, led a four-day inspection tour of Zhuhai and the Cooperation Zone, accompanied in Hengqin by Macao SAR Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai.

According to the project's master plan, when the second development phase is completed in 2029, Hengqin and Macao will have established "a system of highly coordinated economies and deeply integrated regulations". Official targets envisage around

The Cooperation Zone governance process emphasises joint consultation, providing a breakthrough and broad practical space for promoting coordinated regional development

Fong Fong Tan

Director of the Livelihood Affairs Bureau of the Cooperation Zone

40,000 Macao ID card holders working in Hengqin and approximately 60,000 living there alongside 25,000 Macao-invested enterprises.

By the end of the third phase in 2035, those figures are expected to rise to around 80,000 Macao ID card holders working in the Cooperation Zone and approximately 120,000 living there.

Shared governance

Part of the innovation of the Hengqin experiment lies in its governance model: a framework built around four principles shared by Guangdong and Macao – “extensive consultation, joint contribution, joint governance, and shared benefits”.

“The process highlights joint consultation, creating opportunities for breakthroughs and providing broad practical scope for advancing coordinated regional development,” said Director Fong of Hengqin’s Livelihood

Affairs Bureau. She notes that officials from Guangdong and Macao now collaborate, exchange views and deliberate together. This evolution has transformed Hengqin and Macao “from close neighbours to teammates working shoulder to shoulder to pursue the appropriate diversification of Macao’s economy”. In her view, the mechanism ensures that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”.

Lou Shenghua, a professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Macao Polytechnic University, told Macao Magazine that the system has elevated cross-boundary governance “from a relationship of coordination to one of integrated development”. Through joint decision-making, delegated implementation and closer alignment of rules, he says, the model has gradually reduced what he describes as “institutional transaction costs” between Hengqin and Macao – the practical barriers



Passenger traffic through Hengqin Port surpassed 30 million in 2025



The Cooperation Zone system has elevated cross-boundary governance from a relationship of coordination to one of integrated development

Lou Shenghua
Scholar at Macao Polytechnic University

created when different legal, regulatory and administrative systems interact.

The framework has a clearly defined institutional structure. The Administrative Committee of the Cooperation Zone operates under a “dual director” system, jointly headed by the Governor of Guangdong province and the Chief Executive of the Macao SAR. Major plans, policies and projects require decisions from both sides. An Executive Committee, led by Macao, is responsible for industrial development, investment promotion and livelihood-related affairs, while Guangdong oversees areas including local security and judicial matters.

The latest meeting of the Cooperation Zone’s Administrative Committee was held in June. During the gathering, Macao SAR Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai stressed that the project must deliver tangible results as planned and remain accountable to both the central authorities and society.

To support the continued construction of the Cooperation Zone, the Macao SAR Government has also established a leading group dedicated to promoting

its development. At the group’s latest meeting in July, Mr Sam stressed that Hengqin’s development should be regarded as Macao’s own responsibility.

Lowering barriers

Institutional innovation will ultimately translate into something practical: the easier movement of people, goods and businesses.

At the Macao–Hengqin boundary, a “joint inspection and one-time release” clearance model has already been introduced: passengers only need to queue once and have their identity documents examined.

Since March 2024, the Cooperation Zone has also operated a “separated-line management” customs system, creating a “first line” between Macao and Hengqin while maintaining a controlled “second line” between Hengqin and the rest of the Chinese mainland. The arrangement allows goods entering Hengqin from Macao to benefit from preferential customs treatment, while goods moving from Hengqin into the rest of the country through the “second line” are subject to national customs regulations.

Citing official figures, Prof. Lou says these customs arrangements have reduced Macao–Hengqin clearance times for businesses by more than 70 percent since their introduction. By November 2025, 2,331 enterprises had registered with customs to benefit from the system, an increase of 41.6 percent year-on-year.

The process of rule alignment also extends to professionals. Prof. Lou identifies talent mobility and mutual recognition of professional qualifications as among the Cooperation Zone’s most significant breakthroughs. Instead of requiring dual certification or additional Chinese mainland examinations, the new system allows professionals from Macao and abroad to qualify through approved registration mechanisms.

The Cooperation Zone has introduced the nation’s first “convenient practice recognition list for overseas professional qualifications”,



The first five years should be seen mainly as a foundation-building stage. The key task for the next stage is to turn these institutional advantages into real industrial capacity

Maggie Fu Xiaoqing
Scholar at the University of Macau

covering fields such as law, finance, accountancy, healthcare, architecture, urban planning, tourism and social work. The list contains 49 items tailored to Macao professional qualifications, allowing eligible professionals to register and practise in Hengqin without having to take additional examinations.

The results are clear. Between January and November 2025, approvals for talent admission increased by 102.8 percent, while approximately 1,700 Hong Kong and Macao professionals now practise across the boundary.

For Prof. Lou, the significance is that Macao's professionals are gaining something close to a "Greater Bay Area licence", expanding their opportunities beyond the city's market. Doctors, lawyers, accountants and architects, he says, are no longer operating as "outsiders" but becoming part of a broader Chinese mainland "professional community".

In his opinion, the achievements represent "both a milestone and a foundation". As

integration deepens, he argues, Hengqin is becoming a place where Macao residents can conduct business and develop industries.

Macao moves into the zone

The success of integration will ultimately be judged not only by infrastructure or economic indicators, but by whether Macao ID card holders experience Hengqin as a place where daily life can continue with minimal disruption.

For Director Fong, education and healthcare stand out as key areas of Hengqin-Macao convergence, where cross-boundary integration delivers tangible benefits for families.

In the education sector, the Cooperation Zone has established a complete educational ecosystem spanning childcare, primary and secondary schooling through to higher education. Macao students enjoy the same admission arrangements as locally registered Chinese mainland students in Hengqin schools. As of April this year, more than 800 Macao students were enrolled in educational institutions across the zone.

The flagship project is the Hengqin School Affiliated to Hou Kong Middle School, the Chinese mainland's first school dedicated to Macao students, adopting Macao's curriculum framework and teaching materials. The school has a student body made up of 98 percent Macao pupils. Director Fong describes it as "a vivid example of educational integration under the framework of 'One country, two systems'".

Healthcare presents a similar test of whether institutional integration can translate into everyday convenience. Over the past five years, the number of medical institutions in the Cooperation Zone has increased from 22 to 72, according to Director Fong. The new branch of the First Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University Hengqin Hospital is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2026 and is set to commence operation in early 2027.

More significant, however, is the growing alignment of professional systems in healthcare. Macao medical practitioners



can now register to practise in Hengqin. By May this year, more than 190 had done so, according to figures provided by Director Fong. Since 2024, Macao's healthcare subsidy e-voucher programme has been extended to the Cooperation Zone, allowing Macao ID card holders to use their vouchers directly through the "Macao One Account" mobile platform.

For younger generations, Hengqin is being positioned as a place to build careers and establish businesses. By May this year, the zone had recognised – and provided targeted support to – 277 Macao youth start-ups and established 10 innovation and entrepreneurship bases for Macao young people, offering more than 310,000 square metres of incubation space, according to Director Fong.

She says the shift is visible in changing attitudes. Where young people once approached Hengqin cautiously, crossing the boundary has increasingly become part of everyday life.

Diversification driver

The economic purpose of the Cooperation Zone has always been closely linked to one central objective: helping Macao diversify its economy. Five years after its establishment, researchers point to early signs that the foundations of a broader economic structure are taking shape.

In 2025, Hengqin's gross domestic product (GDP) reached 54.7 billion yuan. Foreign trade recorded particularly strong growth, rising by 70 percent, with exports doubling.

The momentum continued into 2026. During the first five months of the year, the value-added output of designated-size industrial enterprises surged by 197.7 percent year on year, while GDP increased by 5.5 percent. By the end of May, the number of Macao-funded enterprises registered in the Cooperation Zone had reached almost 8,000, accounting for 15.8 percent of all businesses in the zone and representing growth of 42.6 percent over three years.

Prof. Lou says Hengqin has gradually developed a more diverse economic base combining high-growth services, advanced manufacturing and foreign trade. The relationship between the two places, he argues, resembles a "front shop, back factory" model: Macao provides international links, professional services and brand advantages, while Hengqin offers space, industrial capacity and access to wider Chinese mainland supply chains. Such complementarity could help address one of Macao's longstanding economic limitations – its lack of a significant manufacturing sector and limited land resources.

Maggie Fu Xiaoqing, a professor of finance and business economics at the University of Macau's Faculty of Business Administration, told Macao Magazine that the most important achievement of the past five years is that economic diversification "has become more operational". Modern finance, technological innovation, Chinese medicine and healthcare, and cultural tourism now have clearer platforms for development, she says.

"The first five years should be seen mainly as a foundation-building stage," Prof. Fu stated. "The key task for the next stage is to turn these institutional advantages into real industrial capacity."

She says successful technology industries require more than policy support and available space. They also depend on research capability, skilled talent and effective mechanisms for transferring

knowledge from laboratories to businesses.

In recent years, the University of Macau has sought to strengthen those links through platforms such as the Zhuhai UM Science & Technology Research Institute (ZUMRI) and UMTec Limited, connecting university research with industrial needs. Other higher education institutions from Macao are following a similar path.

For a small economy such as Macao's, Hengqin provides a much larger arena for gradually building a chain "from basic research to applied research, technology transfer, enterprise cooperation, and industrial application", Prof. Fu said.

Testing the future

The deeper significance of integration, in her view, is the shift "from physical connectivity to institutional connectivity".

✓ The Hengqin School Affiliated to Hou Kong Middle School follows a Macao curriculum





▲ The Macao New Neighbourhood Health Station is the first medical institution established by the Macao SAR Government on the Chinese mainland to be directly operated and managed by Macao's Health Bureau

Where integration was once measured through bridges, roads and transport links, the more important question now – in financial matters, Prof. Fu's area of expertise – is whether capital, credit information and resources can move efficiently across the boundary.

Cross-boundary initiatives such as the Electronic Fence (EF) account system and cross-boundary wealth management schemes represent attempts to “balance financial openness with risk control”, she said. Rather than opening markets immediately and completely, Hengqin provides a controlled environment in which new forms of financial cooperation can be tested.

But “opening channels is only the first step”, she noted. The greater challenge is building a complete financial ecosystem involving products, institutions, professionals, regulatory systems and market demand.

Education and research infrastructure will form another pillar of Hengqin's development. The Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, being jointly developed

by Hengqin and Macao in three phases and scheduled for completion by 2030, is expected to accommodate 20,000 students, faculty and staff. Director Fong says the project will become an important platform for cultivating talent and supporting technological innovation across the Greater Bay Area.

For Prof. Lou, the priority for the Cooperation Zone must shift from aligning rules to integrating them – bringing the legal and regulatory systems of Hengqin and Macao closer together within a more coherent framework, in accordance with the national 15th Five-Year Plan and the Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Macao SAR (2026–2030).

Prof. Fu argues that success should not be judged only by the number of policies introduced or enterprises registered. It should be measured by “whether firms can grow, whether talent can stay, whether capital can support productive activities, and whether Macao's industrial structure becomes more resilient”. ■

Hengqin's four pillar industries gain momentum

Text **Viviana Chan**

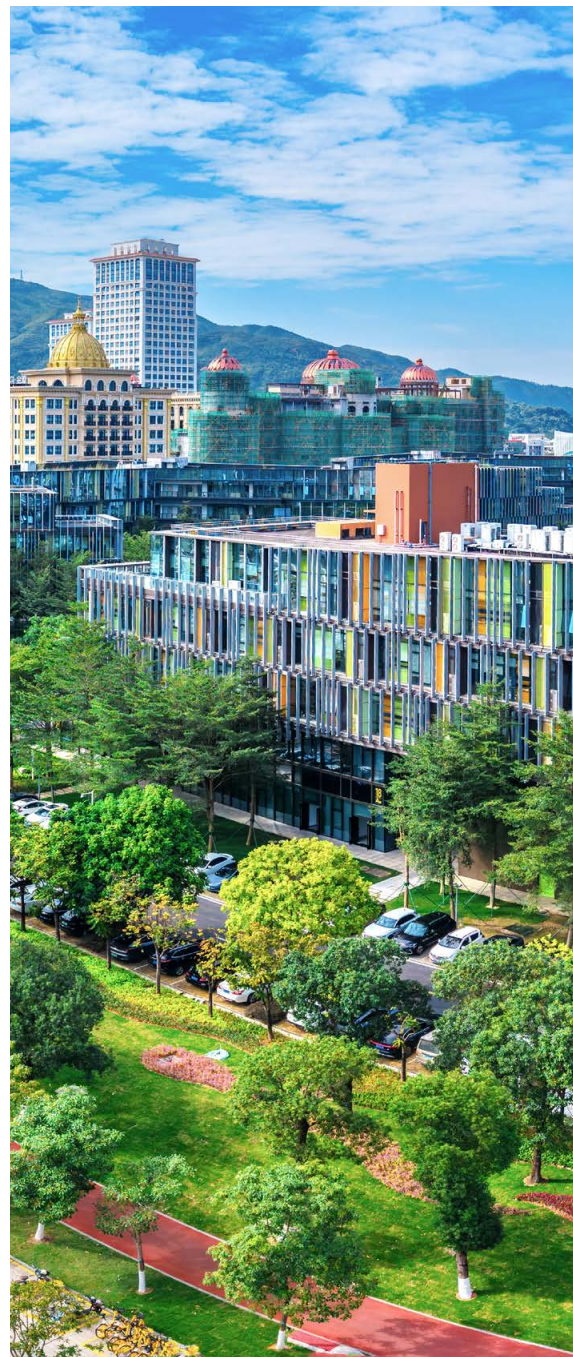
Five years after the launch of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, its four designated strategic industries are beginning to move beyond policy ambition and into measurable economic activity. What was conceived as a blueprint to help diversify Macao's economy is now evolving into an experiment in cross-boundary development, with the neighbouring jurisdictions testing new models in technology, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), finance, tourism and business collaboration.

When Alan Ho Hoi Meng, president of the Macao Association of Convention, Exhibition and Tourism Sectors, reflects on how far Hengqin's exhibition industry has progressed, he begins with the figures. In 2023, six events were held under the "one event, two venues" model, in which a single conference or exhibition is split between Macao and Hengqin. Today, he says, more than 10 such events are staged each year, with as many as five taking place simultaneously during one recent month.

One recent example was the "Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Water Forum", held in June. The main venue was Hengqin's Tianmu Qintai Conference Centre, while Macao hosted a satellite venue and organised technical visits for participants.

"This shows that the connection between Macao and Hengqin has become closer," said Mr Ho,

who is also president of the Hengqin Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone Convention and Exhibition Industry Association. "Over the past five years, as Hengqin's hardware facilities have gradually increased, MICE [Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions] links





The Macao-Hengqin Youth Entrepreneurship Valley (Inno Valley HQ) is one of several hubs in the Cooperation Zone aimed at supporting business development 

between Macao and Hengqin have become increasingly close.”

The figures suggest the model is gaining momentum. In 2025, Hengqin hosted more than 500 convention and exhibition events, with more than 20 adopting the cross-boundary format,

according to the Cooperation Zone’s Industrial Development Bureau.

A four-cluster blueprint

The 2021 “Master Plan for the Development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation

Zone in Hengqin” set out an ambitious vision: to cultivate four “new industries” that would help promote Macao’s diversified economic growth. These priority sectors comprise scientific and technological research and high-end manufacturing; TCM and other Macao-branded industries; cultural tourism, conventions, exhibitions, commerce and trade; and modern finance.

That strategy has since been further developed. The Cooperation Zone’s industrial development plan for 2025–2029 groups the four sectors into four themed districts – International Health Island, Digital Island, Vitality Island and Wealth Island – each intended to build complementary industrial ecosystems.

Wu Chuangwei, director of the Cooperation Zone’s Industrial Development Bureau – renamed from the Economic Development Bureau following an institutional restructuring in June – says the emphasis is now on removing obstacles to deeper integration. “The focus is on breaking down barriers to cooperation between Hengqin and Macao, improving industrial support, and stimulating market vitality,” he told Macao Magazine.

The four sectors underpinning Hengqin’s industrial development strategy closely mirror those identified in Macao’s own “1+4” economic diversification strategy. Building on the city’s established strengths in integrated tourism and leisure, the “1+4” policy seeks to foster the growth of four Macao emerging industries: ‘big health’, modern financial services, high-tech industries, convention and exhibition, sports, as well as the commercial and trade sectors.

For Director Wu, the first five years of the Cooperation Zone have been about turning top-level planning into tangible outcomes. “Over the past five years, more than 300 innovative measures connecting Hengqin and Macao have been implemented, creating a series of nationally distinctive pilot reforms in customs clearance, industrial development, finance, public services and the rule of law,” he said.

Lao Ngai Leong, a Macao deputy to the National People’s Congress and a businessman with investments in Hengqin, argues that the transformation is not merely quantitative but structural. “From a near-blank starting point, the four new industries have moved towards scaled implementation,” he told Macao Magazine.



The focus is on breaking down barriers to cooperation between Hengqin and Macao, improving industrial support, and stimulating market vitality

Wu Chuangwei
Director of the Industrial Development
Bureau of the Cooperation Zone



▲ Hengqin's industrial development vision aims to support Macao's own "1+4" economic diversification strategy

He attributes much of that progress to what he describes as a “system-first” approach. Measures including Hengqin’s “separated-line management” customs system, preferential 15 percent corporate and personal income tax rates for eligible industries and professionals, and tax arrangements aligned with those in Macao for Macao identity card holders working in the Cooperation Zone have, he says, helped dismantle long-standing barriers to the movement of people, goods and capital.

High-tech hub in the making

Scientific research, advanced technology and high-end manufacturing have become central to Hengqin’s industrial ambitions, with policymakers seeking to position the Cooperation Zone as the bridge between Macao’s research strengths and the manufacturing capacity of the Chinese mainland.

The integrated circuit industry has emerged as one of the clearest examples of that strategy. More than 100 semiconductor-related companies have

established operations in the Cooperation Zone, while value added in information transmission, software and information technology services increased by 18.0 percent in 2025, according to the Industrial Development Bureau. Industrial investment rose by 154.0 percent during the year and accelerated by a further 285.4 percent in the first four months of 2026, as major Chinese technology companies, such as solar energy producer Sungrow, e-commerce giant JD.com and robotics and personal mobility manufacturer Ninebot, have expanded into Hengqin.

For Mr Lao, however, the statistics tell only part of the story. What distinguishes Hengqin is a development model that links “Macao R&D” with “Hengqin industrialisation”.

“The parks, laboratories and innovation platforms provide the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ foundations for technology companies and talent to settle,” he said.

Director Wu points to several flagship institutions that illustrate the model in practice. Among them is the Chinese Medicine Guangdong Laboratory in

Hengqin, which has developed a large language model for TCM diagnosis and treatment, and the Guangdong Institute of Intelligence Science and Technology, whose researchers have unveiled what is described as the world's first refrigerator-sized, brain-inspired supercomputing system.

Setting up an innovation ecosystem

For Mr Lao, the evolution of the Cooperation Zone reflects a broader shift in industrial policy: development has moved “from piecemeal investment promotion to chain-based investment promotion.”

The distinction is significant. Rather than attracting isolated companies through individual incentives, Hengqin is attempting to build complete industrial ecosystems in which research, manufacturing, finance and commercialisation reinforce one another.

The ecosystem approach is fuelling the development of TCM in Hengqin. By the end of April, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Science and Technology Industrial Park of Co-operation between Guangdong and Macao (GMTCM Park) had attracted 238 registered companies, including 91 funded by Macao investors. The businesses span three interconnected clusters: innovative pharmaceutical developers, high-end research platforms and manufacturers specialising in ‘big health’ products.

For officials, the park's importance lies not only in the number of companies it has attracted but also in the production model it is pioneering. Under the framework of “registered in Macao, produced in Hengqin”, companies can combine Macao's recognised quality standards and branding with Hengqin's greater availability of land, factory space and industrial infrastructure.

Director Wu says the arrangement has created opportunities that were previously beyond the reach of many Macao businesses. “The model effectively opens up broad space for scaled-up production.”

Following the launch of the first flagship product under the “Hengqin production, Macao supervision” model, six companies have received



From a near-blank starting point, the four new industries have moved towards scaled implementation

Lao Ngai Leong

Macao deputy to the National People's Congress

approval for 29 health food products to carry the official Macao-supervised manufacturing label, according to the Industrial Development Bureau.

The sector is also beginning to generate tangible technological advances. One Hengqin company has secured regulatory approval for innovative surgical navigation and microwave ablation systems.

The MICE factor

If technology and TCM illustrate Hengqin's industrial ambitions, the tourism and MICE sector offer perhaps the clearest example of how integration between Macao and Hengqin is unfolding in practice.

For Mr Ho, a MICE industry veteran, the guiding principle can be summed up in a simple phrase: “MICE + industry.”

He points to sectors including TCM, biomedicine, integrated-circuit research and cross-boundary e-commerce, all of which are establishing a presence in the Cooperation Zone. Rather than existing separately from the exhibition industry, these businesses increasingly provide its commercial foundation, generating demand for specialist trade fairs, conferences and professional forums.

Increasingly, the two places are carving out



➤ Several large-scale projects under development in Hengqin are poised to further support the Cooperation Zone's industrial development

complementary roles. Macao provides the international platform, business networks and event-management expertise, while Hengqin offers the land, large-scale venues and logistical capacity that the city itself lacks. The emergence of a joint “Macao-Hengqin MICE” brand is, in Mr Ho's view, an indication that the relationship is maturing.

Promotion has likewise become coordinated. While Macao's investment promotion authorities market the joint brand overseas, particularly in Southeast Asia, Hengqin's industrial agencies promote it across major Chinese mainland cities.

The Cooperation Zone is also taking on an increasingly important behind-the-scenes role, becoming a logistical base supporting Macao's exhibition industry. Measures introduced in 2024 have further streamlined the movement of exhibition materials across the boundary, facilitating the storage in Hengqin of equipment

between events and reducing administrative barriers for organisers operating in both jurisdictions.

The same principle of integration is increasingly shaping tourism. A “group in, group out” policy introduced in Hengqin in 2024 allows eligible Chinese mainland tour groups to make multiple crossings between Hengqin and Macao under a single visa endorsement within a specified period. The arrangement enables tour operators to market the two places as a single itinerary without travellers needing to apply repeatedly for new travel permits.

Official figures suggest demand has grown rapidly. According to Director Wu, Hengqin welcomed 16.5 million visitors in 2025. The zone's major hotels recorded 5.15 million guest stays, with an average occupancy rate of 61.1 percent. By April this year, the “group in, group out” scheme had processed more than 36,000 tour groups

and 168,000 travellers, while value added in the accommodation and catering sector rose by 17 percent in 2025.

A gateway for investment

Modern finance has become another pillar of Hengqin's development strategy, with policymakers seeking to build a financial ecosystem capable of supporting the Cooperation Zone's wider industrial ambitions.

For Mr Lao, the past five years have seen the sector evolve from a series of policy experiments into a broader and more sophisticated financial marketplace. Activities now extend beyond traditional banking to include private equity, cross-boundary leasing, green bonds and wealth management.

That expansion is underpinned by a series of institutional reforms designed to facilitate the movement of capital across the Macao-Hengqin boundary. Among them are EF (Electronic Fence) accounts – a multifunctional free trade account system that simplifies cross-boundary

fund transfers within a ring-fenced regulatory framework – alongside wider renminbi settlement arrangements and the preferential 15 percent tax regime.

For Macao businesses, Mr Lao argues, the Cooperation Zone provides opportunities that the city's relatively small domestic market cannot easily offer. "Hengqin has the convenience of taking in Macao capital," he said. The zone, in his opinion, broadens investment options for Macao enterprises while creating greater access to projects rooted in the real economy.

Its appeal, however, is not confined to local investors. Mr Lao believes Hengqin occupies a distinctive position within the Greater Bay Area by combining the advantages of the "One country, two systems" principle with access to a regional market of more than 88 million people and Macao's internationally recognised commercial and legal practices.

In his view, the Cooperation Zone has the potential to serve two complementary roles: as an entry point for overseas companies seeking

✓ Integration between Macao and Hengqin also extends to the tourism sector





Over the past five years, as Hengqin's hardware facilities have gradually increased, MICE links between Macao and Hengqin have become increasingly close

Alan Ho Hoi Meng

President of the Hengqin Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone Convention and Exhibition Industry Association

access to southern China, and as a platform from which Chinese mainland enterprises can expand internationally, namely by drawing on Macao's longstanding commercial links with Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries.

Those international ambitions are increasingly being supported by dedicated institutions. Macao and Hengqin have jointly established a service centre for trade with Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, occupying around 250,000 square metres. They have also launched a joint investment fund with an initial capitalisation of one billion yuan to support projects involving those countries.

Talent for the long run

Behind the headline investment figures lies a more fundamental challenge: attracting skilled professionals and persuading them to stay.

Recognising that talent will be as important as infrastructure in determining the Cooperation Zone's long-term success, the authorities introduced a revised talent policy last April. The

measures include grants of up to 10 million yuan for overseas high-level talent projects and up to one million yuan for technology ventures established by young Macao residents.

According to the Industrial Development Bureau, the Cooperation Zone now hosts 35 national and provincial innovation platforms, 237 national high-tech enterprises and 46 postdoctoral research stations. Since the zone's establishment, 17,000 instances of high-end and in-demand professionals have benefited from the preferential 15 percent personal income tax rate.

For Mr Ho, however, developing human capital is not simply a matter of financial incentives. As the exhibition industry becomes increasingly specialised, he argues, employers need professionals with a broader range of skills.

"You cannot only know languages," he said. "You also need to understand marketing and planning."

Mr Lao cautions that industrial infrastructure alone will not determine whether the Cooperation Zone's strategy succeeds. "Hengqin cannot focus only on building hardware platforms," he said.

Housing, schools, and cross-boundary social security arrangements, he argues, are equally important if highly skilled professionals are to build long-term careers in the Cooperation Zone rather than treating it as a temporary workplace. If talent does not stay, the platforms themselves risk becoming hollow.

Mr Lao takes an even longer-term view. Preferential policies and modern infrastructure may attract companies initially, he notes, but they are not enough on their own to sustain economic growth: there needs to be a market.

Looking ahead, Director Wu says the priority for Hengqin is to align more closely with Macao's "1+4" diversification strategy while avoiding head-to-head competition through differentiated positioning, a clear division of labour and complementary development models. This will be achieved by "integrating the advantages of both places, coordinating investment promotion efforts, improving industrial platforms, and innovating cooperation mechanisms." ■

One neighbourhood, two cities

Text **Viviana Chan**
Photos **Cheong Kam Ka**

On a weekday morning in the Macau New Neighbourhood complex in Hengqin, two routines unfold a few residential towers apart.

Abby Huang walks her elder son to kindergarten at the Hengqin School Affiliated to Hou Kong Middle School – a journey of about five minutes from her door. A short distance away, Nancy Leong, having dropped off her own child, drives her Macao single-plate car across Hengqin Port to her office in Macao’s Nam Van district. On a good day, the journey takes under half an hour.

One crosses the boundary each morning to work in Macao; the other has moved her family from elsewhere on the Chinese mainland to build a new life in Hengqin. Their routines, ordinary as they may seem, reflect how far cross-boundary living between Macao and Hengqin has developed in five years.

The setting for both women is the same: the Macau New Neighbourhood, the first integrated livelihood project built exclusively for Macao identity (ID) card holders in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Developed by Macau Urban Renewal Limited, a Macao government-owned company, the residential complex contains about 4,000 flats located roughly a six-minute drive from Hengqin Port. It is built around a school, a health station, and elderly and family service centres. Residential units went on sale at the end of November 2023.

The community was conceived as a testing ground for extending Macao’s public services onto Hengqin soil – and the experiment is perhaps best judged through the details of everyday life. Ms Leong was among the first residents to move in, about two years ago; Ms Huang bought a unit in 2025 and settled there earlier this year.

A natural move

For Ms Leong, the decision to buy a home in Hengqin was almost instinctive. “The moment the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government launched the New Neighbourhood project, I bought – I didn’t think twice,” she told Macao Magazine.

“My grandmother was from Hengqin, so I’ve always known the place,” she said. “I was here when Hengqin still had no high-rises.”

What has changed most, in her view, is the ease of movement between Macao and Hengqin. She drives to work through Hengqin Port, where the clearance process that once caused delays has gradually become smoother.

“There’s face recognition now; before, you could only scan a card. It just keeps getting better,” she said.

Driving remains her preferred option, but she recalls how time-consuming the journey once was before the opening of the Hengqin Line of the Macao Light Rapid Transit system. “With the light rail now, it’s far more convenient.”



Residential units at the Macao New Neighbourhood complex went on sale in late November 2023

One frustration remains. Macao single-plate vehicles such as hers are currently restricted from leaving Hengqin for other parts of Zhuhai. “Hengqin is, after all, your own home,” she said.

That restriction is expected to ease. Authorities announced plans in April to allow Macao vehicles with Hengqin entry permits to travel throughout Guangdong province from the neighbouring island, with implementation expected later this year.

Ms Huang’s family had previously lived in Zhongshan, Guangdong province. Her husband, who is from Macao, travelled into the city daily for work, while Ms Huang herself grew up on the Chinese mainland.

When her elder son reached school age, the family moved to the Macao New Neighbourhood. She had considered schools in Macao, as well as Hong Kong-and-Macao education streams offered by Chinese schools, but chose the Hengqin School Affiliated to Hou Kong Middle School.

“The whole school is made up of Macao students, and many of the teachers were brought over from Macao. The content and the learning are closer to Macao’s,” she said.

The school, the first on the Chinese mainland for children of Macao residents, opened in September 2024 and is operated by Hou Kong Middle School, an educational institution based in Macao.



The moment the Macao SAR Government launched the New Neighbourhood project, I bought – I didn't think twice

Nancy Leong

Macao ID card holder living in the Macao New Neighbourhood complex

Before her Hengqin flat was ready, Ms Huang sent her son to school from Zhongshan by car. “Two to two-and-a-half hours a day,” she recalled. Now, living in the block beside the school, the difference is immediate.

Ms Leong, whose walk to the school gate is similarly short, expects her child to remain there. “The Hou Kong Middle School already has a strong reputation in Macao. We’ll definitely keep him there.”

Healthcare integration has been a more gradual process. Both mothers use the neighbourhood health station for everyday medical needs.

The facility is the first medical institution established by the Macao SAR Government on the Chinese mainland to be operated and managed directly by Macao’s Health Bureau. Although the long-term goal is to replicate the model of Macao’s public health centres, some limitations remain because of regulatory differences between Macao and Hengqin.

“It’s very convenient to see a doctor,” Ms Leong said. “For a cold or a fever, it’s fine.”



The New Neighbourhood’s aim is to build a system that blends Macao’s way of doing things with local management in Hengqin

Luo Ping

Head of the Macao New Neighbourhood office of the Women’s General Association of Macau

Efforts to expand services are continuing. The number of Macao-registered medicines available at designated institutions, including the neighbourhood health station, has increased to 545, from an initial batch of 296 approved in April 2024.

Official figures show that between November 2024 and the end of November 2025, the station recorded about 6,500 consultations for Macao ID card holders, most of them walk-in appointments.

Macao-Hengqin integration at work

Luo Ping, who heads the Macao New Neighbourhood office of the Women’s General Association of Macau, one of the SAR’s largest civic organisations, observes the process of integration from the front line.

The gradual easing of boundary-crossing procedures, she told Macao Magazine, “has driven a same-city way of living” – reducing the time cost of crossing the boundary and making it increasingly normal to work on one side while living on the other.



The whole Hengqin School Affiliated to Hou Kong Middle School is made up of Macao students, and many of the teachers were brought over from Macao

Abby Huang

Macao New Neighbourhood complex resident

Her organisation monitors residents' needs through regular home visits and surveys conducted with a Hengqin research institute. The feedback has helped shape practical improvements, including the installation of the Macao Government Services 24-hour Self-service Centre in the neighbourhood.

Ms Luo acknowledges that Macao-Hengqin integration remains an ongoing process. Childcare is one area where differences between the two systems are still visible.

"In Hengqin, places generally only take children from age two or three," she said, explaining that this can create difficulties for dual-income families. While the Women's General Association provides childcare services for younger children in Macao, its remit in Hengqin does not cover the same provision.

The wider challenge, she said, is institutional. "To build a system that blends Macao's way of doing things with local management in Hengqin – something Macao ID card holders can accept and that local laws and regulations can also accommodate."

Even her own office reflects that approach. Its 16-member team includes supervisors from Macao and staff from both sides of the boundary. "This in itself," she said, "is a model of Macao-Hengqin integration at work."

A real sense of belonging

Other Macao civic organisations, including the General Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Macao and the Macao Federation of Trade Unions, have also established branches in Hengqin.

Public services may bring people across the boundary, but a sense of belonging is what turns a development into a community. Ms Luo has seen the change in the people who visit her office. Her organisation has brought aspects of Macao's social-service model into the neighbourhood, from volunteer programmes to family mediation.

During this year's Dragon Boat Festival, the office invited a master of intangible cultural heritage bamboo weaving to teach residents. "Then families wrapped rice dumplings together, and went to visit households in need," she said.

Ms Leong rejects the idea that life in Hengqin is less convenient than in Macao. "In Macao I still have to go downstairs to the supermarket to buy fish. Here I press a button on an app and it's delivered to my door," she said.

Even payments have adapted. She uses her Macao e-wallet in Hengqin to pay in patacas and exchanges renminbi only "when I want a slightly better rate".

The pilot dual-currency payment scheme, allowing residents and visitors to make small mobile purchases in either patacas or renminbi, was introduced in September 2024. By August last year, it had expanded to six major commercial districts within the Cooperation Zone.

Life in the Macao New Neighbourhood has also developed the rhythms of a familiar community. Residents organise seafood group purchases through neighbourhood chats, weekend ball games and barbecues.

"Since moving to Hengqin," Ms Leong said, "I really don't go back to Macao for anything except work." ■

COOPERATION

GOING GLOBAL WITH THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD

Text **Tiago Azevedo**

How Macao is building on two decades of success as the country's gateway to the Portuguese-speaking world to expand trade and business ties with a much larger international community stretching from Europe to Latin America

For more than two decades, Macao has served as the country's platform to the Portuguese-speaking world, drawing on its centuries of cultural exchange, bilingual legal system and long-standing commercial relationships.

Since the establishment of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao) in 2003, trade between China and Portuguese-speaking countries has grown from around US\$11 billion to US\$225.8 billion in 2025,

according to the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM).

The Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government is now preparing to take that role a step further, as it works to extend its reach to Spain and, progressively, to the wider Spanish-speaking world. For IPIM, the strategy represents a natural evolution rather than a fundamental change of direction.

"Over more than two decades, Macao has developed an irreplaceable role as a bridge between



China and Portuguese-speaking countries,” IPIM noted in a written reply to Macao Magazine. “Building on this success, Macao is now extending the platform’s reach to Spain and Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America,” aiming, “through a dual Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking strategy, to

evolve from being a ‘precise connector’ between China and Portuguese-speaking countries into a broader gateway linking China with the wider Latin-language world,” IPIM added.

The initiative is also closely aligned with China’s national development priorities.

“President Xi Jinping has

described the country’s 15th Five-Year Plan not only as a blueprint for the country’s development, but also as a ‘list of opportunities’ for the rest of the world,” IPIM observed. “Macao is actively embracing these opportunities and strengthening its role as an important gateway



IPIM set up a booth during an event in Spain to promote the advantages of investing in Macao and Hengqin



Macao's Chief Executive met in April with the Second Vice-President of the Government of Spain and Minister for Work and Social Economy, Yolanda Díaz Pérez

for China's opening up in the new era."

The plan gathered considerable momentum earlier this year during Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's first official overseas visit since taking office. Leading a delegation of around 120 representatives from Macao, Hengqin and the Chinese mainland to Portugal and Spain, Mr Sam used the trip to underline the Government's intention to expand Macao's international platform beyond its focus

on Portuguese-speaking countries.

Spain, a deliberate choice

As the European Union's fourth-largest economy, Spain combines a modern industrial base with deep historical, cultural and commercial links to Latin America. Geographically neighbouring Portugal and sharing many legal and institutional characteristics with Portuguese-speaking countries, Spain provides what IPIM considers the ideal "starting point"

for extending Macao's platform into the Spanish-speaking world.

The April visit produced tangible outcomes. During six days of meetings, the delegation participated in more than 220 business-matching sessions, resulting in the signing of 109 cooperation agreements. Of these, 61 were concluded in Portugal and 48 in Spain, covering sectors ranging from technology and healthcare to tourism, professional services and cross-border investment.

At the same time, IPIM signed strategic cooperation agreements with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Spain and the Federation of Chinese Business Associations in Spain, while establishing official working relationships with ICEX – Spain Trade and Investment and the investment promotion authorities of the Community of Madrid.

Those agreements are intended to create the foundations needed for sustained commercial cooperation. “The initiative will gradually expand to Spanish-speaking countries across Latin America,” representing a market of about 500 million people, IPIM stated. “Rich in natural resources and highly complementary to China’s economy, these markets offer significant opportunities for Chinese mainland companies expanding overseas.”

According to the institute, Macao’s role will be to help facilitate those connections while providing businesses with practical support, professional services and access to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

For Rui Pedro Cunha, president of the General Assembly Board of the Macau Portuguese and Spanish-Speaking Countries Entrepreneurs Association,

the plan represents the logical next chapter in a story that Macao has been writing for more than two decades.

“Macao already has a solid foundation as the platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries,” he noted in commentary to Macao Magazine. “What the association intends to do now is to extend this experience into a broader China-Portuguese-Spanish-speaking countries cooperation framework,” Mr Cunha explained.

In the initial phase, he said, Spain will be one of the association’s “key priorities”.

“Spain is an important European economy, and it can also serve as a gateway for Macao and mainland enterprises to better understand and connect with Spanish-speaking markets,” he noted. “At the same time, the association will not treat the Spanish-speaking world as one single market. Different markets have different strengths. Spain has clear advantages in tourism, MICE [Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions], professional services, green finance, renewable energy, high-end manufacturing and technology.”

Latin American markets meanwhile “offer major opportunities in agriculture, food and beverage, energy,

infrastructure, e-commerce, digital economy, healthcare and consumer markets,” he explained.

Mr Cunha added: “The approach will be to use Spain as an important starting point and bridge, while gradually learning and expanding into Latin American markets according to industry demand, our member’s needs and available cooperation partners.”

Turning strategy into business

Macao’s success in expanding beyond the Portuguese-speaking world will depend on whether companies see the city as a useful place to invest, find partners and develop projects.

IPIM’s role has evolved significantly in recent years, mirroring the MSAR Government’s broader economic strategy. Under the “1+4” economic diversification strategy, greater emphasis is placed on attracting industries that complement Macao’s long-term development and strengthen its role within the Greater Bay Area.

The trade body said it is “shifting” its promotional efforts “from expanding investment scale to improving quality and optimising industrial structure”. Rather than

pursuing investment indiscriminately, IPIM is focusing on enterprises capable of contributing to Macao's emerging industries while taking advantage of the city's unique international positioning.

Three sectors have become the immediate priorities. The first is high technology, "with emphasis on biopharmaceuticals, digital technology, integrated circuits and aerospace technology," the institute noted.

Working alongside the Macao science and technology research industrial park and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, the MSAR Government aims to create an innovation chain in which "research and development is carried out in Macao, and the products are commercialised and industrialised in Hengqin".

The second priority is modern financial services. Macao has long aspired to strengthen its financial sector, and officials increasingly see opportunities to develop specialist services connecting China with Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking markets. Wealth management, private equity and financial technology form part of that strategy.

According to IPIM, market interest is already

emerging. By May this year, 56 financial institutions had entered discussions about establishing operations in Macao.

The big health industry forms the third pillar, with Macao striving to attract leading companies involved in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), biopharmaceuticals and healthcare services. Officials believe the city's established relationships with Portuguese-speaking countries provide an effective channel for promoting the internationalisation of TCM while encouraging wider collaboration in medical research and pharmaceuticals.

"The objective is to build an industrial investment ecosystem capable of attracting high value-added companies that closely align with the city's long-term industrial positioning and contribute to sustainable economic development," IPIM observed.

Boosting support for investors

Beyond identifying priority sectors, IPIM is expanding practical support for investors. Businesses entering unfamiliar markets often face practical challenges ranging from regulatory requirements and legal procedures to finding trustworthy local partners.



The approach will be to use Spain as an important starting point and bridge, while gradually learning and expanding into Latin American markets

Rui Pedro Cunha

President of the General Assembly Board of the Macau Portuguese and Spanish-Speaking Countries Entrepreneurs Association

Thus, IPIM has spent recent years developing services intended to accompany companies throughout the investment process rather than limiting its role to initial introductions.

One of its flagship initiatives is the China-Portuguese-speaking Business Navigator, a one-stop service providing project matching, market intelligence, investment consultancy and business facilitation.

Between January and May this year, the service handled more than 200 new projects, reflecting growing demand from companies seeking to explore opportunities

Building a practical link

Rui Pedro Cunha, president of the General Assembly Board of the Macau Portuguese and Spanish-Speaking Countries Entrepreneurs Association says expanding Macao's platform role beyond Portuguese-speaking countries is a natural evolution, but one that requires a pragmatic and long-term approach.

Mr Cunha identifies the diversity of Spanish-speaking markets as the first major challenge. "Spanish-speaking countries cover very different legal systems, tax rules, business cultures, levels of market development and regulatory environments. For enterprises, this means that entering Spanish-speaking markets requires careful preparation, local knowledge and reliable partners," he stated.

"We need to gradually build more direct, regular and trusted channels with chambers of commerce, enterprises, government-related institutions, professional bodies and overseas Chinese business communities in Spanish-speaking markets," he noted.

Mr Cunha also believes interest alone is not enough. Many companies are attracted by the opportunities these markets offer but lack practical knowledge on market entry, risk assessment and partner selection. The association therefore intends to focus on cross-border training, legal and tax support, business matching, investment-risk awareness and market-entry guidance.

"Macao's advantage is that it already has experience in reducing trust costs between China and Portuguese-speaking countries," he noted.

To translate that vision into tangible opportunities, the association is pursuing several initiatives. It plans to strengthen partnerships with overseas business organisations.

Planned activities include policy briefings, market-entry seminars, business-matching sessions, company visits, trade missions and investment promotion events. The association has already supported initiatives in Hengqin and Macao focused on Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking markets.

Mr Cunha said the organisation also aims to offer a one-stop support service for Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking businesses interested in Macao, Hengqin and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, providing guidance on regulations, business registration, financing and local partnerships.

For Chinese enterprises expanding overseas, he advocates a "going global together" model, allowing companies to share costs, exchange information, reduce risks and strengthen their bargaining power.

According to Mr Cunha, the association also plans to launch international branding initiatives, including the "Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking Countries Outstanding Entrepreneurs Awards" due to be held in October 2026.



The entrepreneur delegation visited an industrial start-up park in Spain

in both directions. Among them are the establishment of manufacturing facilities in Brazil and Angola by Chinese Fortune 500 companies, together with procurement arrangements linking one of China's ten largest grain and edible oil enterprises with Brazilian commodity suppliers, according to data from the institute.

Trade fairs have become another important

mechanism, with IPIM ensuring that companies are introduced to carefully selected partners through dedicated business meetings, allowing discussions to move quickly from initial contacts to concrete commercial negotiations.

During its flagship exhibitions in 2025, IPIM organised more than 2,200 business-matching

meetings, facilitating over 240 cooperation agreements. Around 500 companies attended presentations introducing Macao's investment environment and development opportunities, leading to 148 investment proposals from enterprises based in Portugal, Brazil, Indonesia and other international markets. Nearly one-third of those companies have

✓ IPIM President Che Weng Keong introduced Macao's business environment at the 'Macao-Spain Economic and Commercial Cooperation Promotion Seminar'



since completed company registration procedures in Macao, it disclosed.

For Mr Cunha, those practical services are exactly what will determine whether Macao's broader strategy succeeds.

The association's positioning "is to serve as a 'connector' for enterprises," he added. "This means the association is not only creating a general exchange

platform, but also helping enterprises identify real partners, understand market entry requirements, access professional services, participate in MICE activities, and move from initial contact to concrete cooperation."

Through this integrated network, Mr Cunha said the organisation hopes "to provide one-stop support for overseas enterprises entering Macao, Hengqin and the Greater Bay Area, while also helping Macao and mainland enterprises expand into Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking markets".

This, he noted, "is also closely aligned with Macao's latest direction of strengthening its platform function," including the development of the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries (CECPS) in Hengqin.

From policy to partnerships

Rather than creating new institutions from scratch, IPIM is increasingly using the city's established conventions and exhibitions to introduce overseas companies to Chinese mainland partners, showcase emerging industries and facilitate investment. That experience now provides an important foundation for

expanding cooperation with Spanish-speaking countries, the trade body noted.

The annual International Infrastructure Investment and Construction Forum & Exhibition (IIICF) is one example of how that strategy is already taking shape. Since its launch, according to IPIM, the event has welcomed almost 150 ministerial-level representatives from Spanish-speaking countries over the years and has "successfully hosted 12 editions of the China-Latin America Infrastructure Cooperation Forum". This year's edition, which concluded in June, marked another important milestone: for the first time, ministers and senior representatives from Latin America were invited to visit the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, "laying the groundwork for closer collaboration between Macao and Spanish-speaking Latin America," IPIM stressed.

That approach will also be evident at this year's Macao International Trade and Investment Fair (MIF), scheduled for October. For the first time, the exhibition will include a dedicated Spanish-speaking Countries Pavilion. Running alongside MIF, the Products and Services Exhibition of Portuguese-speaking



Countries (Macao) is already recruiting exhibitors internationally and “is expected to attract companies from both Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking markets”.

The same thinking underpins the institute’s overseas trade missions. In July, IPIM took part in a business delegation organised by the Shunde Import and Export Chamber of Commerce to Brazil and Argentina, further strengthening multilateral trade and investment networks.

Earlier this year, another delegation of more than 40 companies travelled to Brazil, facilitating several cooperation agreements in the biopharmaceutical sector and “helping participating enterprises establish access to Latin American markets,” IPIM said.

For Mr Cunha, this gradual approach is essential. The city’s experience with Portuguese-speaking countries provides an important advantage in that respect.

Unlike many jurisdictions seeking to establish new international partnerships, Macao already understands the importance of acting as a trusted intermediary rather than simply promoting commercial transactions.

“Following the Chief Executive’s visit to Spain [in

April], Macao’s cooperation with Spain has entered a new stage,” he said, noting that members of the association participated in the visit and established closer contacts with Spanish business organisations.

Those relationships are already being reinforced through cooperation with institutions such as the Spanish Chamber of Commerce in South China and the Macau European Chamber of Commerce, while the association has also established links with several Spanish organisations that it hopes will become long-term partners.

A gateway to larger markets

Officials also emphasise that Macao’s international appeal cannot be understood in isolation. Its greatest strength lies in the way it connects with neighbouring Hengqin and the Greater Bay Area. According to IPIM, this integrated approach “offers companies from Spanish-speaking countries a unique gateway into the Chinese mainland market”.

“Companies establishing operations in Macao and Hengqin can simultaneously benefit from Macao’s free port status, simple and competitive tax system, and free movement of capital, while also

enjoying easier access to the mainland market and Hengqin’s industrial support ecosystem,” the institute stated.

The Greater Bay Area is home to more than 86 million consumers and ranks among China’s most economically advanced regions. For overseas businesses, “the Greater Bay Area’s highly integrated industrial and supply chains also provide comprehensive support in manufacturing, research and development, logistics and related services”.

Ultimately, however, it is the companies that decide whether opportunities become commercial realities, Mr Cunha noted. “Hengqin and the Greater Bay Area are essential to this process. Macao has the platform, cultural, legal, financial and international networking advantages, while Hengqin provides industrial space, policy support and project landing capacity,” he said.

“The association will continue to promote the ‘Macao + Hengqin + Greater Bay Area’ model. This includes supporting one-stop services for overseas enterprises coming in, helping local and mainland enterprises go global together, and linking enterprises with professional services in finance, law, tax,

✓ In April, multiple cooperation projects were signed during promotion seminars held in Spain



compliance, MICE, logistics and market development,” Mr Cunha added.

The organisation also hopes to “strengthen cooperation” with the CECPS in Hengqin, so that “policy resources, business resources, academic resources and enterprise needs can be better connected”.

Looking ahead over the next five years, Mr Cunha expects the “greatest opportunities” to emerge in sectors where the Chinese mainland, Macao

and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries possess complementary strengths. These include “trade and investment, MICE, cultural tourism, agricultural products and food trade, cross-border e-commerce, green finance, renewable energy, healthcare, biomedicine, technology innovation, professional services and education,” he added.

“The association believes there is strong potential in using Macao as a platform for Portuguese- and

Spanish-speaking products to enter the Chinese mainland market, including food, wine, agricultural products, cultural products and lifestyle brands,” Mr Cunha noted.

Chinese mainland enterprises in the fields of technology, healthcare, renewable energy, infrastructure, e-commerce and professional services “can use Macao as a springboard to understand and enter Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking markets,” he concluded. ■

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

EXTREME VISION: PIONEERING THE FUTURE

Text **Tony Lai**

After two failed startups, Macao entrepreneur **Chan Chan Kit** has now successfully built one of China's rising artificial intelligence companies by prioritising long-term opportunities over short-term trends. Following Extreme Vision's listing in Hong Kong, he believes the next generation of local entrepreneurs should also grow beyond Macao

Before establishing Extreme Vision, a prominent artificial intelligence (AI) company in China, Macao entrepreneur Chan Chan Kit had already learnt one of the toughest lessons in business: failure is the best teacher.

He and his partners failed twice prior to their success with Extreme Vision. Their first

venture – a job-search platform for blue-collar workers in the Chinese mainland – emerged while Mr Chan, who turns 34 this year, was still a university student. The second was closer to home, an attempt to digitise restaurant ordering and delivery in Macao. Neither venture succeeded. Yet those early setbacks left the team with a sharper understanding of what

算法商城的大小模型 协同实践



▲ Chan Chan Kit co-founded Extreme Vision in 2015

truly matters when building a technology company: demand matters more than novelty, and hype is no substitute for good timing.

Those lessons shaped the strategy Mr Chan and his partners would later apply to Extreme Vision, a company specialising in AI systems. Rather than trying to outrun larger and better-funded competitors in an already crowded field, they chose to focus on a market they believed would take years to mature. “We’re just ordinary young people without abundant resources, so we have to choose industries that may only take off in five to 10 years, giving us time to trade for space to grow and expand the business,” he remarks.

They set their sights on AI more than a decade ago, long before it became today’s

global buzzword. Shenzhen Extreme Vision Technology Co., Ltd. was established in 2015. Over the following years, the business expanded beyond its original base, relocating its headquarters to Shandong province in 2021 and rebranding as Shandong Extreme Vision Technology Co., Ltd. Earlier this year, the company reached another milestone by listing on the main board of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, having already served more than 3,000 clients across the Chinese mainland, Macao and Hong Kong.

Models for success

Currently, AI computer vision solutions and large model systems form the company’s two core business lines. The first uses AI to

interpret and analyse images and videos, extracting information that can be applied to real-world situations. “Our eyes can identify things, for example, who a person is, which is facial recognition. They can also tell whether there’s a fire at a site, which is what we call fire detection,” he says in an interview with Macao Magazine. “Put simply, what AI computer vision solutions do is automate the work that the human eye does.”

The technology already has a wide range of practical applications, from automated quality inspection and object detection to facial recognition and hazard monitoring. Traffic enforcement provides one of the clearest examples of computer vision deployed at scale. Such systems can identify speeding, detect seatbelt non-compliance, flag mobile phone use while driving, and spot failures to yield to pedestrians, wrong-way driving and lane guidance violations.

Extreme Vision’s second growth engine is newer, but equally ambitious. Its large model solutions are built around large language models and multimodal models that help organisations automate complex workflows, generate content and extract insights from vast datasets, improving productivity, customer service and decision-making.

“Our large model solutions serve as the underlying AI operating system for enterprises,” Extreme Vision’s chairman and general manager says. “The trend for the future is that a company may no longer have 10,000 employees. It could be 1,000 people plus 9,000 agents, including AI or machines.”

The challenge, he argues, lies in bringing those people and AI agents together effectively. “The key is how 1,000 people and 9,000 agents collaborate, how workflows are stitched together, and how system security is built in. That’s what our large model solutions are designed for: a future in which companies will have large numbers of humans working alongside machines.”

For Mr Chan, the technology itself is no longer



© COURTESY OF EXTREME VISION

the biggest hurdle. As AI becomes increasingly accessible, success depends less on developing the underlying models and more on ensuring they deliver measurable value to customers. That philosophy has become a defining feature of Extreme Vision’s approach as it seeks to expand both within China and overseas.

Value creation and hybrid talent

Extreme Vision’s listing prospectus illustrates the scale the company has achieved. As of September 30, 2025, it had completed more

I don't think there is any industry that doesn't and won't need AI. The difference is only how deeply it's used and how much potential it unlocks

Chan Chan Kit

Extreme Vision's chairman and general manager

than 6,000 projects since its establishment and recorded a product repurchase rate of more than 80 percent. It also operates an AI computer vision algorithm marketplace, enabling enterprises to select from an extensive library of algorithms. By September 2025, the marketplace featured 1,517 algorithms, including 148 developed in-house and 1,369 co-developed with third-party developers. Together, they cover more than 100 industries, ranging from smart transportation and urban management to retail, utilities and manufacturing.

Despite the breadth of applications, Mr Chan believes AI's greatest potential still lies ahead. "From a practical standpoint, I don't think there is any industry that doesn't and won't need AI. The difference is only how deeply it's used and how much potential it unlocks," he notes.

He points to examples in the Chinese mainland, where local governments have introduced AI-powered tools on public-facing websites to answer citizens' enquiries, often identifying the relevant regulations and guidance more quickly – and more consistently – than a human operator could. "At its core, AI is a supplement to human work and, to some extent, a substitute," he adds. "As long as an industry relies on people, it will need AI."

Of the more than 3,000 clients the company has served, Mr Chan says over 95 percent are based in the Chinese mainland. They include government departments, state-

owned enterprises and private companies. Most of the remaining clients are in Macao and Hong Kong, often involving projects for public-sector organisations. Working across different jurisdictions, he explains, requires the company to continually refine its algorithms to meet varying regulations, operational requirements and enforcement practices.

As the AI industry has evolved, so too have the challenges of building an AI business. In the company's early years, technological capability was the biggest constraint. Mr Chan now believes the real challenge lies elsewhere: creating value for clients. "The core issue is that AI is meant to empower industry, but AI teams don't understand the industry and industry teams don't understand AI, leaving a gap to be filled," he illustrates.

Bridging that divide, he argues, requires a new type of professional with expertise in both technology and business. "We need more consultant-type talent and industry-integration talent to fill that gap. Then companies will be enabled to truly use AI as a tool to lift productivity, calculate internal returns and other purposes," he says.

To address that need, Extreme Vision has increasingly recruited industry specialists and consultants before training them in AI technologies and placing them in customer-facing roles, where they can help clients identify practical applications rather than simply introducing new technology.

From Macao to Qingdao

Extreme Vision's three executive directors – Mr Chan and his partners Luo Yan and Chen Shuo – have been friends since their university days at Sun Yat-sen University in neighbouring Guangdong province. Each brought a different area of expertise to the business. Mr Chan studied business, completing a bachelor's degree in supply chain management before earning a master's degree in enterprise management from Peking University. The other two partners, meanwhile,

built careers spanning computer science, mathematical statistics and biotechnology.

Their entrepreneurial journey reflects a broader wave of innovation that emerged across China during the 2010s, encouraged by national policies promoting mass entrepreneurship and innovation. Even while at university, the three friends believed technology could provide an opportunity to build something with lasting value. After two unsuccessful ventures, they turned their attention to AI, initially exploring opportunities in Macao before formally establishing Extreme Vision in Shenzhen more than 10 years ago.

For Mr Chan, beginning in Macao was both a personal and strategic decision. Born and raised in the city, he was naturally drawn to launching the business there. Macao also offered valuable research resources through its universities, while its client base – despite the city's relatively small size – included government departments, integrated resort operators, banks and higher education institutions that could serve as early adopters of emerging AI technologies.

As the company grew, however, the founders realised that building an AI business requires substantial upfront investment, together with access to specialised talent. Financing and recruitment quickly emerged as significant challenges that were difficult to overcome in Macao at the time.

That reality gradually shifted the company's centre of gravity to Shenzhen, where a more mature venture capital ecosystem and a deeper talent pool provided the resources needed to support rapid expansion. In Mr Chan's view, Shenzhen's greatest strength lies not simply in the size of its market, but in the complete financing ladder available to technology companies, from early-stage investment through to later funding rounds, as well as its concentration of highly specialised technical professionals.

The company's next move took it further north, relocating its headquarters to

Qingdao in Shandong province in 2021 and adopting its current corporate identity. Mr Chan sees Shandong as an ideal base for an industrial AI company. As one of China's largest provincial economies, it has a broad and diversified industrial base that includes chemicals, coal, advanced manufacturing and numerous other sectors.

Since 60 to 70 percent of Extreme Vision's clients come from industrial areas, Shandong is an ideal environment for developing AI applications at scale before replicating successful solutions across the rest of the country.

Overseas expansion

The company's growth has been striking, as per its own disclosures. According to figures included in its listing prospectus, revenue more than doubled from 101.6 million yuan in 2022 to 257.3 million yuan in 2024. Revenue also increased by 71.7 percent, from 79.4 million yuan in the first nine months of 2024 to 136.3 million yuan during the corresponding period in 2025.

Its Hong Kong initial public offering (IPO) in March raised 499 million Hong Kong dollars. The proceeds have been earmarked to strengthen research and development, recruit top-tier multidisciplinary talent, acquire critical technical services, expand its marketing network and accelerate overseas expansion.

Mr Chan says the company's immediate priority is to strengthen both of its core businesses – AI computer vision and large model solutions – while helping more enterprises integrate AI into their operations.

"We hope that, after further optimising our operations, we can help more Fortune Global 500 and China's top 500 companies build the next generation of AI underlying operating systems," the company's chairman states.

International expansion is now the next major milestone. Mr Chan says the company has already held discussions with potential partners and customers in markets including

Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan.

With a track record built in the Chinese mainland, and with China and the United States widely regarded as the world's two leading AI powers, he believes the company is well positioned to compete internationally.

"We've come out of the Chinese market, one of the world's most competitive environments," he notes. "In terms of product competitiveness, Chinese tech products today are extremely strong. Compared with the U.S., the technology can be similar, but the cost can be as low as one-tenth."

Importance of Macao identity

Alongside the company's rapid growth, Mr Chan has also received recognition for his own entrepreneurial achievements. He has been named on the Forbes "30 Under 30 Asia" list and on Hurun China's "Under 30s to Watch" list.

Despite leading a company whose operations now stretch beyond Macao, Mr Chan says the city continues to shape both his identity and the way he does business. He argues that local governments on the mainland pay close attention to companies founded by entrepreneurs from Macao and Hong Kong, often maintaining regular contact to understand the challenges they face and identify ways to offer policy support. He also points to a range of initiatives designed to encourage Macao residents and businesses to establish themselves beyond the city.

For that reason, he encourages young entrepreneurs in Macao to think beyond the city's boundaries. The mainland, he explains, offers a dense network of incubators and start-up platforms that enable founders to build entrepreneurial networks far more quickly, transforming introductions into partnerships, as well as providing recruitment opportunities and new business ventures.

Macao's own start-up ecosystem has improved significantly in recent years, he acknowledges, but it cannot match the

mainland's market size or depth of demand.

"If you want to develop a technology business, tapping the mainland market is an inevitable step," he points out. "One defining feature of tech start-ups is the heavy upfront investment. Before listing, we had already raised a cumulative 400 million to 500 million yuan. From starting from scratch to reaching break-even, we invested at least 300 million yuan. That kind of investment is hard to recoup if the business is limited to Macao."

Trailblazer over trend chaser

Mr Chan's final piece of advice to aspiring technology entrepreneurs is simple: don't chase whatever happens to be fashionable. Trendy sectors inevitably attract both capital and competition. By the time a field becomes the latest investment craze, it is often already crowded with well-funded market leaders, making it far more difficult for newcomers to establish themselves.

Instead, he believes entrepreneurs should identify industries with long-term potential, areas that may still be underdeveloped today but are likely to become mainstream over the next decade.

To illustrate the point, he quotes a line widely attributed to Lei Jun, the Chinese billionaire entrepreneur and founder of Xiaomi: "Stand in the path of the wind, and even a pig can fly." Beneath the humour lies an important lesson: entrepreneurs who recognise where an industry is heading – and position themselves early – can benefit from powerful long-term momentum.

"It's hard for new start-ups to break through in crowded, popular sectors," Mr Chan stresses. "But areas likely to grow over the next decade, such as AI in healthcare and AI in genetic engineering, still have relatively low penetration and fewer entrenched players, which can translate to more attractive opportunities."

"We need to seize the moment as these sectors move from niche to mainstream. That's where the opportunities and growth will be," he highlights. ■

TRADE

MACAO CHAMBER EYES INDONESIA'S GROWTH POTENTIAL

Text **Tony Lai**

With **China–Indonesia ties** on the rise, Macao can serve as a funding platform for Chinese mainland companies expanding into the Southeast Asian nation, while also boosting tourism and health-related exchanges, says the head of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce in Macau

When Macao entrepreneur Johnny Sitou Tek Lam first set up a company in Indonesia in 2002, he recalls encountering only a few Chinese mainland or Macao firms. More than two decades later, that environment has shifted: Chinese capital, suppliers and companies are now a familiar presence in Indonesia's business scene.

That shift carries implications for Macao. As president of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce in

Macao, Mr Sitou sees the city as a potential financing platform for mainland small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) expanding into what he describes as one of Asia's fastest-growing economies. Beyond capital, he believes there is scope to deepen Macao–Indonesia exchanges across sectors ranging from Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) to tourism.

The macroeconomic data reflect these closer ties. Chinese authorities say China has been Indonesia's

largest trading partner for 13 consecutive years, with bilateral trade reaching US\$167.49 billion in 2025. The Chinese embassy in Jakarta has also noted that China has ranked among Indonesia's top three sources of foreign direct investment (FDI) for a decade, with Chinese FDI into Indonesia totalling about US\$7.5 billion last year.

Mr Sitou is not surprised by the strength of the relationship, which in 2025 marked the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between



📍 Johnny Sitou Tek Lam says Macao and Indonesia can strengthen cooperation in a variety of fields

the two sides. “Indonesia has a population of over 285 million and a very young demographic, with a median age of around 30,” he said in an interview with Macao Magazine. “That makes it an enormous market, and it has attracted a lot of Chinese companies, especially over the past decade.”

The entrepreneur has watched mainland manufacturers steadily recalibrate supply chains

into Southeast Asia, with Indonesia and Vietnam often at the top of the list. Labour may not be the cheapest in the region, he added, but the trade-off is access to a vast domestic consumer base and an industrial policy that rewards localisation. “Indonesia’s long-term fundamentals are compelling, as the country prioritises and protects Indonesian businesses. If you manufacture locally,

you are, in effect, treated as an Indonesian enterprise,” Mr Sitou stated.

Indonesia’s economic momentum has also remained steady. Its gross domestic product (GDP) expanded 5.11 percent in 2025 to 23,821.1 trillion Indonesian rupiah (US\$1.37 trillion), making it the largest economy in Southeast Asia and among the world’s top economies by nominal GDP, based on data from

the International Monetary Fund (IMF). On a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis – an output measure adjusted for differences in prices and living costs – Indonesia already ranks as the world's

seventh-largest economy.

Even so, the scale of the Indonesian market has not attracted a proportionate presence from Macao businesses or investors. While the

mainland and Hong Kong have demonstrated strong investment appetite in the archipelagic state, with Hong Kong also among Indonesia's leading sources of FDI, Macao companies



🟢 The current board of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce in Macau was inaugurated in July 2025

remain relatively scarce, Mr Sitou noted. This reflects the city's smaller corporate base and narrower sector mix, he added.

Beyond his own business, which supplies mainland-made equipment for oil operations in Indonesia, he pointed to only a handful of Macao firms active there, mainly in areas such as fruit cultivation, electric vehicles and employment agencies that bring Indonesian workers to Macao.

Diverse opportunities

Despite Macao's limited corporate footprint in Indonesia, the chamber president argues that the relationship should not be judged solely by company numbers or investment amounts. As Macao seeks to diversify its economy, he sees scope for the city to act as a practical funding hub for mainland firms building operations in Indonesia.

He points to his own experience, with his company using Macao to raise capital to support its Indonesian operations. "Borrowing costs are much higher in Indonesia, as the interest rate there typically runs about 8 percent to 12 percent," he said. "In Macao, I can borrow in yuan at around 3 percent to 4 percent to settle my payments to mainland suppliers," he explained.

"An interest-rate gap of roughly four to eight percentage points is significant. Macao can lean into that advantage of lower interest rate to attract mainland SMEs looking at Indonesia or the wider Southeast Asian market," he continued. Just as important, he added, is the free flow of capital, as Macao allows funds to move in and out more freely than the mainland, where capital and foreign-exchange controls apply.

Finance, however, is only one part of Macao's diversification strategy. Under the "1+4" framework, the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government has identified four emerging economic pillars alongside tourism and entertainment: the "big health" sector, notably TCM, high-end manufacturing and technology, modern finance, and sectors including sports, culture, conventions and exhibitions.

Against this policy backdrop, Mr Sitou sees Indonesia as a natural partner, particularly in the health sector. He points to opportunities to deepen cooperation in the TCM sector, noting that Indonesia's geography – comprising some 17,000 islands with a tropical climate – supports

the cultivation of a wide range of botanicals that are difficult to grow in Macao or the Chinese mainland. One example is dragon's blood resin, valued for its haemostatic properties in TCM, and found largely in Indonesia and Malaysia.

"Macao, potentially together with nearby Hengqin, could work with Indonesia's herbal-medicine units on extraction and processing," he said. "The aim would be to bring semi-finished botanical inputs to Macao for manufacturing into TCM ingredients and then supply mainland pharmaceutical companies."

Drawing more Indonesian visitors

Tourism offers another avenue for closer ties. As Macao seeks to broaden its visitor mix beyond Greater China – with plans for two new centres to promote economic, trade, tourism and cultural exchanges with Northeast and Southeast Asia – Mr Sitou sees Indonesia as a natural priority market.

Official data show Indonesia was Macao's fourth-largest international source market in the first half of 2026, with 87,907 arrivals, down 16.0 percent year-on-year. This followed a 13.7 percent increase in 2025 to 208,043 visitors,



a 12-year high. The latest half-year result accounted for 6.2 percent of Macao's international arrivals.

With nearly 90 percent of Indonesians identifying as Muslim, Mr Sitou said that expanding Muslim-friendly options – such as halal-certified restaurants that meet Islamic requirements in food preparation, storage and service – would help improve visitor comfort and confidence. “But from

what I've seen, when Indonesians travel overseas their expectations are often less demanding than at home,” he noted. “Many simply avoid pork, rather than insisting on halal-certified restaurants.”

The businessman suggested that marketing may ultimately play a more decisive role. “The MSAR Government and other stakeholders should step up promotions in Indonesian

shopping malls, position Macao as an easy-to-reach destination with a wide range of offerings, and work with local travel agencies and credit-card partners on packaged deals,” he said. “That's likely to be more effective in bringing in more Indonesian visitors.”

From businesses to public bodies

Turning such ideas into action is part of the

Macao, potentially together with nearby Hengqin, could work with Indonesia's herbal-medicine units on extraction and processing

Johnny Sitou Tek Lam

President of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce in Macao

mission of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce in Macao, established in 2016 to deepen exchanges between Macao and Indonesia. Its functions span people-to-people links, business cooperation and engagement with government departments.

According to Mr Sitou, the chamber organises delegations to Indonesia each year. In addition to attending Trade Expo Indonesia (TEI), these visits typically include meetings with local business associations and site visits aimed at identifying new opportunities. Last year, for instance, a delegation from Macao's food-and-beverage sector toured major Indonesian shopping malls and held discussions with experienced restaurant operators to better understand the local market.

Exchanges also flow in the opposite direction. The chamber supports Indonesian businesses in participating in Macao's trade fairs, including the Guangdong & Macao Branded Products Fair organised by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM). Trade fairs such as these provide platforms to showcase products and explore partnerships with counterparts in Macao and neighbouring Guangdong province.

The chamber also acts as a connector at the government level, namely by helping link Indonesian travel associations and agencies with the Macao Government Tourism Office to support efforts to attract more Indonesian visitors. It has also facilitated coordination among Air Macau, the Consulate General of Indonesia in Hong Kong and the Jakarta airport operator to improve flight timings on the direct Macao-Jakarta route. "If the government or businesses have any needs, we do our best to see how we can help," Mr Sitou affirmed.

The chamber's members include Macao companies and entrepreneurs operating in Indonesia, as well as members of Macao's Indonesian Chinese community, an identity

Mr Sitou himself shares. Like many overseas Chinese families in Southeast Asia during the 1960s, his family left Indonesia amid political and social upheaval and resettled in Macao. His father, Situ Meisheng, previously served as a personal assistant and Chinese interpreter to Indonesia's first president, Sukarno.

Mr Sitou estimates that thousands of overseas Chinese from Indonesia have since made Macao their home, with second- and third-generation families, including his own, now deeply rooted in the city. Yet Indonesia continues to play an important role in his household. He often tells his two daughters that if they want to build something of their own, Indonesia deserves serious consideration, not only because of family heritage, but also because of the country's long-term potential.

"China is a huge market, but the supply chain is already highly developed, and competition is intense unless you have a very distinctive edge," he said. "Indonesia is still in the early stages of industrialisation, and many parts of its supply chains aren't mature yet. If you spot a gap, you can fill it. For businesspeople, that's an opportunity." ■

INTERVIEW

MORE THAN A LABOUR GROUP: FAOM'S COMMUNITY-WIDE IMPACT

Text **Cherry Chan**
Photos **Lei Heong Jeong**

For more than 75 years, the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) – one of the city's largest civic organisations – has been a cornerstone of the community. While best known for championing workers' rights, its work extends far beyond labour issues to encompass education, healthcare, youth development, elderly care, and a wide range of community services, says FAOM chairman **Lam Lon Wai**

How was the Macao Federation of Trade Unions established?

Before the Federation of Trade Unions was formally established, the city was home to 12 labour associations representing different industries. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, these organisations came together in response to a call from the Chinese mainland and jointly established the Macao Federation of Trade Unions.

The resulting organisation, known in Portuguese by the acronym FAOM, was officially founded in 1950. Since then, it has operated as a federation of member associations and recently celebrated its 76th anniversary, marking more than seven decades of service to the community.

What are FAOM's core principles?

Although FAOM has continually expanded its services in response to changing social needs, its core values have remained constant. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China, patriotism and the protection of workers' rights became its immediate priorities.

After Macao's return to the motherland and the establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) in 1999, under the principle of "Macao people governing Macao" with a high degree of autonomy, the federation broadened both its civic engagement and its services to the public. Today, its work is guided by four core principles: patriotism, the protection of workers' rights, civic participation, and community service.



➤ Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) chairman Lam Lon Wai, lifelong educator and community leader

What support programmes are available for people in the labour market?

FAOM works closely with the government's Labour Affairs Bureau to support workforce development. One of its flagship initiatives is the Macao Integrated Tourism and Leisure Enterprises Vocational Skills Competition, now in its eighth edition, which provides employees with an opportunity to demonstrate professional excellence across a range of industries.

The federation also operates three specialised training centres tailored to current labour market demands.

The Amateur Continuing Study Centre, established in the 1980s, was originally created to provide evening education for workers who had been unable to complete their formal schooling. While accounting and Portuguese language courses were once among its most popular offerings, today's curriculum includes subjects such as artificial intelligence (AI), internet safety, and video production, reflecting the changing needs of the modern workplace.

The FAOM Vocational Skills Training Centre provides practical instruction in a wide range of trades, including hairdressing, childcare, electrical work, and plumbing, helping workers develop industry-specific skills.

FAOM's third training centre focuses on gastronomy. It serves both as a training facility and an accredited examination centre for culinary qualifications, helping to develop many of Macao's hospitality professionals while enabling them to obtain nationally recognised certifications.

How many service points does FAOM currently operate?

FAOM now comprises 73 member workers' associations, alongside 10 organisations with honorary member status. To deliver its services effectively, the federation operates more than 40 service points throughout Macao.

In addition to job placement and vocational training, FAOM provides services

across education, youth development, culture, sport, women's affairs and social welfare, making it one of the city's largest and most interconnected community service networks. These initiatives form what the federation describes as a "whole-chain" support system, designed to assist workers throughout every stage of life.

By meeting the personal and family needs of workers, FAOM aims to ease everyday pressures, allowing people to participate in the workforce with greater confidence and security.

Can you elaborate on FAOM's childcare and education services?

To support households where both parents work, FAOM established a network of nurseries for children below the age covered by Macao's compulsory education system. The federation now operates four nurseries across the Macao peninsula, Taipa and Seac Pai Van.

Alongside childcare services, FAOM advocates policies that strengthen family support, including longer maternity and paternity leave, to give parents more time to bond with their newborn children.

As children grow older, the federation provides educational opportunities through institutions such as Lou Hau High School. Founded 76 years ago, the school was established through community donations to provide children from working families with access to education and a pathway out of poverty.

The federation also operates the Macau Kung Luen Vocational & Technical Middle School, whose curriculum focuses on practical, industry-oriented skills that prepare students for a smooth transition into the workforce.

What medical support services does FAOM offer?

Recognising that the cost of healthcare once prevented many workers from seeking timely treatment, FAOM complemented the opening of its first school in 1950 by establishing its

first medical clinic the following year.

With support from the business community, Kiang Wu Hospital and local healthcare professionals, the federation founded Clínica dos Operários de Macau to provide affordable, high-quality medical care for workers. Today, FAOM continues that mission through three clinics serving residents across Macao.

What support does FAOM provide for retired workers and senior citizens?

FAOM views ageing as a continuum rather than a fixed stage of life. While many seniors begin accessing the federation's elderly services at around the age of 60, the organisation recognises that older people have diverse needs, health conditions, and lifestyles.

For active and independent older residents, the federation's day centres offer a wide range of cultural, recreational and sporting activities. These centres provide valuable opportunities to socialise, build friendships and remain engaged with the community.

As individuals become more vulnerable and require practical assistance, including those with reduced mobility, FAOM provides hot meals, mobility support and personal care services to help them maintain their independence.

For those who require full-time care, the federation operates a fully staffed nursing home in Ká Hó, providing round-the-clock support for elderly residents with more complex needs.

What specialised cultural and sports services does FAOM offer?

The federation's cultural initiatives extend well beyond traditional community services. In 2006, cities across the Chinese mainland began establishing Workers' Book Houses, a movement that has since expanded to more than 100,000 facilities nationwide. The Macao Federation of Trade Unions Workers' Book House became the first such facility within the Macao, Hong Kong and Taiwan regions.

The book house opened in 2023, with

A community leader passionate about education

Lam Lon Wai's path to leadership at the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) began in the classroom.

A teacher by training, Mr Lam spent years working in education. His connection with FAOM grew through his work at what is now Lou Hau Middle School, an educational institution operated by the federation, where he later became vice-principal.

"My key task at the time was being the contact point between the school and FAOM," he recalled.

Working closely with FAOM gave Mr Lam a deeper understanding of the federation's work and gradually led him into its wider operations. Over time, he took on a series of responsibilities within the organisation, before becoming its chairman in January.

At FAOM, Mr Lam says he has been given opportunities to contribute to public affairs across a broad range of policy areas. During his career, he has served on the Consultative Committee of the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau (now the Municipal Affairs Bureau) and the Urban Planning Committee. He is currently a member of the Macao Legislative Assembly and participates in national affairs as a Macao delegate to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Despite these wider responsibilities, Mr Lam continues to remain closely connected to his roots in education. He serves as president of the Macao Association for Staff and Workers' Education Promotion.





the support of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. It is much more than a library. It promotes Chinese culture through workshops on traditional crafts, including seal carving, printmaking and paper-cutting. A dedicated section also showcases and sells speciality products from provinces such as Jiangxi, Guizhou and Yunnan, giving local residents an opportunity to learn more about different parts of China while supporting regional development.

FAOM also operates a sports complex that provides workers with a place to exercise and relax. The facility traces its origins to a modest sand football pitch near today's Praça de Ferreira do Amaral, where workers gathered after their shifts to play sport.

As Macao developed, the venue relocated near the Border Gate and expanded into a modern sports complex with a football pitch, swimming pool and many other facilities. Today, it serves not only workers but also the wider community, with local schools regularly using the venue for physical education classes.

What role do FAOM's youth-focused programmes play in supporting young people in Macao and preparing them to participate in society?

The federation established its Youth Committee in 1990 to support young workers before gradually expanding its remit to serve young adults across Macao. Through a range of civic and professional development programmes, it aims to equip participants with the skills and confidence to contribute to society.

One such initiative is the Macao Youth Political Talent Training Program, which brings together expert speakers to discuss the city's political development, encouraging participants to think critically and contribute constructively to public affairs. Another long-running project is the AGOM Youth All-Round Emcee Competition Series of Macau, now in its 21st edition. The competition nurtures public speaking and presentation skills, with many

of today's professional event hosts in Macao having once taken part in the programme.

A central objective of these initiatives is to strengthen young people's sense of national identity and belonging. Educational exchange visits to the Chinese mainland are organised regularly, giving participants the opportunity to observe the country's social and economic development first-hand.

In what ways does FAOM participate in Macao's political sphere?

Civic participation is one of FAOM's four guiding principles, reflecting its belief that civic engagement is essential to supporting the MSAR Government's vision of building a better Macao together as a society.

The federation encourages involvement at multiple levels. For younger people, it provides opportunities to participate in community committees, advisory bodies and its own political affairs committee, enabling them to gain practical experience and develop a deeper understanding of public affairs.

FAOM also participates in the Legislative Assembly through legislators affiliated with the federation, contributing to discussions on public policy. The labour sector is also represented by 59 members on the Chief Executive Election Committee. FAOM encourages these representatives to examine governance philosophies and election platforms carefully before casting informed votes.

Through different channels of participation and with the support of the country, FAOM also enjoys opportunities to contribute to national affairs.

How does FAOM contribute to the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area?

As one of Macao's longest-established community organisations, FAOM has steadily expanded its presence across the Greater Bay Area.



FAOM operates a network of schools and other educational facilities

Recognising the growing number of Macao identity (ID) card holders living and working in Guangdong province, the federation opened its first service office in Zhuhai in 2018. Since then, it has established five additional service points, in Zhongshan, Jiangmen, Nansha, Guangzhou and Hengqin.

Together, these six centres assist Macao ID card holders with practical matters, including housing, legal issues and everyday living. They also organise community activities and share information on social media to help Macao people stay connected and informed while living elsewhere in the Greater Bay Area.

What are FAOM's main goals for the future?

We intend to continue developing innovative programmes, with particular emphasis on economic development and vocational training. A strong economy benefits both employers and employees because our future is shared.

One of our priorities is to nurture talent across a broad range of industries, supporting Macao's economic diversification. In the past, generic career fairs brought together a wide range of employers from many sectors, which made it more difficult for job seekers to identify suitable opportunities. We now organise sector-specific recruitment events, enabling employers and candidates to connect more effectively.

Expanding training provisions is another key objective. Alongside our three existing centres, we are establishing a new training facility in Hengqin focused on emerging industries. Given the increasingly close links between Macao and Hengqin, the centre is intended to support Macao ID card holders who choose to live or work there.

Overall, we remain committed to working closely with the MSAR Government and contributing to Macao's long-term development. ■

EDUCATION

THE SILICON BLACKBOARD: CHINA'S AI LITERACY DRIVE

Text: **Victoria Man Sok Wa**

The Chinese mainland has launched an ambitious plan to **weave artificial intelligence into every stage of education**. The initiative seeks to cultivate a generation capable of working alongside intelligent machines while embedding AI literacy across society by 2030

For years, education reform on the Chinese mainland focused largely on building the foundations for digital learning. Initiatives such as the “Ten-Year Education Informatization Plan 2011-2020” and the “Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan”, launched in 2018, broadened access to digital resources by expanding broadband connectivity in schools, replacing traditional

blackboards with interactive whiteboards and introducing digital textbooks. Yet these efforts remained primarily focused on technology infrastructure.

Building on these earlier initiatives, the growing importance of artificial intelligence (AI) in education was reflected in April, when five central government departments led by the Ministry of Education jointly unveiled





Students attend an AI lesson at a middle school in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region 

the landmark “AI + Education Action Plan”. The strategy – informed by prior government guidance in this field – sets out an ambitious vision to transform classrooms across the country by accelerating the adoption of AI, redefining teaching methods, and building an education system designed for the AI era.

Rather than treating AI as a specialist discipline, the plan frames AI literacy as both a civic necessity and an economic imperative. It calls for a universal framework that spans compulsory education, vocational training, higher education and lifelong learning, ensuring that AI becomes a core element of education at every stage of life.

Schools are encouraged to introduce structured AI courses and integrate the subject into local curricula through clearly defined learning objectives, teaching content and recommended classroom hours appropriate to each educational level.

The strategy also seeks to narrow regional disparities. Rural and remote schools will be supported through national digital platforms, such as the National Smart Education Platform, launched by the Ministry of Education in 2022, which provides nationwide access to courses, textbooks and interactive learning resources.

Underlying the policy is a broader vision of AI’s role in society. Rather than defining future competitiveness solely by who develops the most sophisticated algorithms, policymakers argue that prosperity will increasingly depend on how effectively ordinary citizens learn to collaborate with intelligent systems.

The view reflects AI’s growing importance to China’s economy. Official figures show that the country’s core AI industry was worth more than 1.2 trillion yuan (approximately US\$174 billion) in 2025, with more than 6,200 AI companies operating nationwide. By the end of last year, more than 30 percent of manufacturing

enterprises with annual revenues exceeding 20 million yuan had incorporated AI technologies into their operations.

Beyond curriculum reform, the action plan proposes embedding intelligent teaching systems throughout the learning process. AI-assisted grading, tutoring and question-and-answer systems are intended to reduce teachers' administrative workload while improving educational outcomes. The goal is to create a comprehensive national AI learning ecosystem by 2030.

A top-down educational revolution

At the launch of the AI + Education Action Plan, Zhou Dawang, director of the Ministry

of Education's Department of Science, Technology and Informatization, outlined the government's ambition: "We will build a general AI literacy system for all stages of education and for the whole of society."

The strategy rejects the idea of AI as a specialist elective confined to a handful of students. Instead, it promotes interdisciplinary teaching throughout primary and secondary education, while encouraging schools to incorporate AI into after-school activities, study tours and other forms of practical learning.

Several regions had already begun implementing pilot schemes for AI education even before the action plan was announced. Beijing introduced a citywide strategy in 2025



▲ Middle school students use virtual reality headsets to learn about AI at an innovation education centre in Qingdao, Shandong province

requiring every primary and secondary school to provide at least eight hours of AI instruction each academic year. According to local officials, by the end of last year the adoption rate of AI across schools at different educational levels in Beijing had reached 87.7 percent.

The transformation envisioned by the action plan extends even further in higher education. Universities are encouraged to make AI a foundational subject for all students, regardless of discipline, while developing teaching materials tailored to different academic fields. Institutions are also expected to expand interdisciplinary AI programmes that bridge traditional subject boundaries.

Many universities have already begun adapting to these priorities through “X + AI” dual-degree programmes that combine specialist expertise with AI training. Among the most prominent examples is Fudan University in Shanghai, which has launched 41 such programmes, including an innovative pathway that combines a PhD in a traditional discipline with a master’s degree in AI. Notably, the first doctoral cohort came not from computer science but from journalism and communications. The university has also introduced more than 100 AI-related courses, ranging from introductory modules to highly specialised subjects.

A human-aligned classroom revolution

For Yi Dai, assistant professor at the City University of Macau and a researcher specialising in the intersection of technology and education, the AI + Education Action Plan represents far more than a technological upgrade. It signals a fundamental reassessment of what knowledge, intelligence and learning should mean in the age of AI.

Dr Dai identifies two central ambitions underpinning the policy. The first is a redefinition of human agency.

“Universal AI literacy does not mean everyone must learn to code. Its essence lies in nurturing critical thinking, the ability to collaborate with



Universal AI literacy does not mean everyone must learn to code. Its essence lies in nurturing critical thinking, the ability to collaborate with AI

Yi Dai

Assistant professor at the City University of Macau

AI, and the skill of asking precise prompts,” Dr Dai told Macao Magazine. The greater challenge, he argues, is ensuring that learners preserve the qualities machines cannot replicate: empathy, creativity and imagination.

The second dimension is educational fairness. Dr Dai argues the action plan is not just about spreading technology, but about building a new kind of national literacy, akin to the “eradication of illiteracy” campaigns of the 20th century. Its aim is to ensure that students in resource-constrained regions enjoy the same opportunities as those in major Chinese cities, he says.

To achieve this, the plan shifts the focus from merely providing digital tools to fundamentally redesigning the educational ecosystem. AI is intended to become an integral part of teaching itself. The government plans to establish national standards for AI literacy among teachers, supported by tiered training and assessment frameworks tailored to different professional roles. AI knowledge will also become part of teacher qualification examinations and certification processes.

The reforms extend beyond formal education.

Vocational institutions are encouraged to integrate AI into traditional industry-related programmes, equipping students with skills suited to rapidly evolving workplaces. Lifelong learning also features prominently, with plans to provide high-quality digital resources, including micro-courses and micro-credentials, enabling workers to update their skills throughout their careers.

The strategy has already begun to take tangible form. In May, the Chinese authorities released two new educational resources for primary and secondary schools: the “AI Literacy Education Handbook” and the course series “Ten Lectures and 100 Questions on AI Literacy”. Developed through collaboration between universities, schools and technology companies, the materials are intended to provide a structured national framework for AI education.

The handbook is divided into four volumes covering lower primary, upper primary, junior secondary and senior secondary education. Its progression mirrors pupils’ cognitive development. Younger children encounter AI through illustrated stories, while older primary pupils are introduced to basic problem-solving activities. Junior secondary students begin exploring core technical concepts, and senior secondary learners are encouraged to examine interdisciplinary applications alongside emerging developments in AI.

Bridging the industry–classroom chasm

Technology leaders argue that the success of China’s AI education strategy will ultimately depend on how effectively classrooms keep pace with the relentless speed of technological innovation.

That is the opinion of Joe Liu Cheuk Yin, president of the newly established Greater Bay Area (Macao) Artificial Intelligence Development Association. Having built businesses spanning fintech, digital marketing, public utilities and AI, Mr Liu has seen first-hand how quickly the gap

can widen between academic instruction and industry practice. While new AI models and tools emerge almost every month, he notes, school curricula often take years to develop, approve and revise.

“The greatest disconnect today does not stem from students lacking diligence,” Mr Liu told Macao Magazine. “It is the fact that the pace of technological development has already far outstripped the speed at which traditional curricula can be updated.”

For Mr Liu, the AI + Education Action Plan is an attempt to close that gap by compelling education systems to anticipate, rather than merely respond to, future labour market demands.

“Future employment competitiveness will no longer hinge on ‘what you know’, but on ‘what you can successfully accomplish by leveraging AI’,” he said. “When basic AI usage becomes universalised, the true competitive gap will be driven by high-order human capacities: the ability to ask the right questions, critically judge information, execute cross-disciplinary integration, and transform raw creativity into tangible outcomes.”

As AI becomes embedded in workplaces around the world, Mr Liu believes human qualities will become more valuable rather than less. “In this environment, human-to-human communication, empathy, leadership and ethical value judgement become more critical than ever before, because while technology drives hyper-efficiency, genuine trust and care remain fundamentally human attributes.”

Dr Dai believes the divide between education and industry can be narrowed through what he describes as “scenario twinning” – feeding anonymised, high-fidelity virtual replicas of real-world workplaces and business challenges into sector-specific AI models used in schools. Such systems would allow students to work on problems drawn from factory floors or commercial environments almost as soon as they arise, with AI tutors handling routine feedback while human



Future employment competitiveness will no longer hinge on 'what you know', but on 'what you can successfully accomplish by leveraging AI'

Joe Liu Cheuk Yin
President of the Greater Bay Area (Macao)
Artificial Intelligence Development Association

teachers focus on developing judgement, craftsmanship and complex decision-making.

The Macao proof of concept

Macao is already beginning to translate elements of the national strategy into practice. The Education and Youth Development Bureau has announced that, from the 2026/2027 academic year, it will fund “AI experimental classrooms” in local schools. A dedicated grant under the School Development Plan subsidy programme will support the creation of these facilities, while new AI teaching materials and the first phase of a smart teaching platform – featuring automated question banks, examination paper generation and marking tools – are intended to provide teachers with more personalised support for lesson planning and assessment.

Meanwhile, with backing from the Macao Science and Technology Development Fund, Dr Dai and his research team have developed the Macao Smart Education Platform to create what they call a “Digital Twin Learner” capable of enabling real-time adjustments to the learning process.

By monitoring indicators such as eye movements and blinking frequency, the system can detect signs of fatigue. If a pupil has been studying continuously for around 45 minutes and their blink rate falls, the platform automatically adjusts colour temperature and virtual viewing distance through an augmented reality interface, helping to reduce eye strain without interrupting concentration.

The team has also sought to overcome the limitations of general-purpose large language models, which can struggle with specialised subjects such as classical Chinese and advanced mathematics. Instead, they have adopted a process known as “reasoning distillation”, compressing the logical capabilities of large AI models into smaller, localised Small Language Models (SLMs) trained on local curricula, textbooks and examination standards. These models power Subject Teaching Agents (STAs), which provide personalised, subject-specific instruction and adapt their guidance in real time according to each student’s progress.

“China’s scale has already positioned it as the world’s largest living laboratory for intelligent learning, and the AI + Education Action Plan offers a powerful blueprint for the future,” Dr Dai said. “Yet the true measure of success will not rest solely on algorithms or efficiency gains, but on how wisely technology is woven into the fabric of human teaching.”

Dr Dai cautions that highly personalised AI learning, while capable of increasing engagement and motivation, must be deployed carefully to avoid undermining resilience or weakening the collective experience of the classroom.

For Mr Liu, the defining characteristic of successful education in the AI era will not be teachers’ technical expertise, but their judgement, compassion and ability to connect with students. “AI can provide standardised solutions, but only teachers can recognise emotions, nurture resilience and offer encouragement that no algorithm can replicate.” ■

WU MAN GIVES THE PIPA A GLOBAL VOICE

Text Emanuel Graça

From child prodigy at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music to one of the world's most celebrated musicians, **Wu Man** has spent more than three decades redefining the pipa's place on the international stage – not by preserving tradition unchanged, but by constantly expanding the instrument's possibilities



Born in Hangzhou in 1963, Wu Man discovered the pipa almost by chance.

“My parents weren’t musicians,” she said in a recent interview with Macao Magazine. “They were music lovers. My father was an artist. They thought the pipa looked very elegant and beautiful for a girl to play. That’s how I started.”

At the age of just 13, she was accepted into Beijing’s Central Conservatory of Music, where she was soon hailed as a prodigy. She would then go on to become the first musician to receive a master’s degree in pipa from the prestigious conservatory – a milestone that reflected both her extraordinary talent and the instrument’s growing academic recognition.

By the late 1980s, she had already established herself as one of China’s leading young performers of traditional music.

At the height of that early success, however, she made an unexpected move.

She decided to further pursue music in the United States. When she arrived in 1990, she entered a world where almost no one knew either her or the instrument she had devoted her life to mastering.

“It was curiosity,” she said. “I was looking for opportunities. I wanted to learn more.”

The reality proved challenging.

“The first few years were definitely difficult,” Ms Wu recalled. “Nobody knew Chinese culture. Everyone knew Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and martial arts, but very few people knew what the pipa was.”

This move would become the first step in a career that would make her one of the instrument’s most influential ambassadors.

Gaining global perspectives

More than 35 years later, those uncertainties have given way to an international career that has fundamentally reshaped perceptions of the instrument. Yet Ms Wu rejects the idea that her collaborations were ever intended to modernise Chinese music.

“I don’t see differences,” she said.

“Whether I play jazz, Central Asian music, traditional Chinese music or contemporary music, it’s all music. I need to understand that musical language and then find a way for the pipa to interpret it.”

The result is a career that refuses to be constrained by genre. Asked whether she considers herself a traditional Chinese musician, a contemporary artist or a world musician, she dismisses every label.

“I don’t have any label. To me, I am a musician.”

Working alongside musicians from different traditions has not diluted Ms Wu’s understanding of Chinese music. Instead, she believes it has deepened it.

“I play traditional pieces very differently from 20 or 30 years ago,” she said.

“Everything makes more sense to me.”

She points to an unexpected example. After collaborating with musicians from Azerbaijan, she recognised striking similarities between their vocal traditions and music from western China.

“The intonation, the ornamentation, the little vibrato – it was very much like Chinese music. I learned from them... Now I understand Chinese music much better.”

Living abroad also gave her a fresh perspective on her own musical heritage. “Sometimes when you leave somewhere and then look back, everything becomes very clear.”

Performing in Macao

That philosophy was reflected in the programme she curated for her recent appearance with the Macao Chinese Orchestra in June, where she performed not only as a musician but also served as artistic director. The concert brought together well-known Chinese classical music, contemporary work by Chinese composers living overseas and music inspired by Central Asian traditions.

Despite having performed previously in Macao, this was Ms Wu’s debut with the Macao Chinese Orchestra.

“I’ve known the Macao Chinese Orchestra for a long time,” she said. “They’re amazing. They’re exactly like Macao. They keep tradition but they’re also creative and innovative. They’re very open-minded and bring different things together.”

During a rehearsal break in Macao, she introduced the pipa that she had specifically chosen for this journey.

Some pipas, she says, have a darker, warmer tone; others are brighter and more penetrating. The pipa selected for the Macao performance was made in Beijing and, according to Ms Wu, is better suited to performing with an orchestra. It is one of five she owns, each designed to meet to the different demands of the repertoire.

“The pipa is a four-stringed lute and is about 2,000 years old,” she said. “It was introduced from Central Asia to China, and has now become very much a Chinese instrument.”

Over the past three decades, Ms Wu has carried the pear-shaped instrument from China to concert halls in New York, London, Paris and beyond, introducing the pipa to audiences who, through her work, now encounter it in symphony orchestras, chamber music festivals and contemporary music premieres.

“It has a unique sound,” she said. “It can be lyrical, dramatic, percussive, colourful or meditative.”

Pipa pioneer

Widely regarded as the world’s foremost pipa player, Ms Wu has built a career that reads like a catalogue of firsts.

She has premiered hundreds of new works and performed with leading orchestras, from the New York Philharmonic to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She has collaborated with the internationally renowned Kronos Quartet for more than three decades and played a pivotal role in the Grammy Award-winning Silkroad Ensemble’s exploration of musical exchange across Asia, the Middle East and beyond.

Recognition has followed. In 2013, she became the first performer of a non-Western instrument to be named “Instrumentalist of the Year” by Musical America. A decade later, she received the National Heritage Fellowship from the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts – one of the country’s highest honours for folk and traditional arts.

She also became the first artist from China to perform at a White House state

✔ She performed with the Macao Chinese Orchestra in June





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Ms Wu continues to maintain a demanding international performance schedule

dinner, appearing at the 1999 banquet hosted by President Bill Clinton in honour of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji.

Then in 2021, she went on to earn an honorary Doctorate of Music from the New England Conservatory in Boston.

Her discography now spans nearly 50 albums, including the 2024 “Music from the Dunhuang Caves”, which brings to life 25 ancient pipa scores discovered in the Mogao caves in Gansu province.

Driven by discovery

In recent years, Ms Wu has devoted increasing attention to what she calls her “Return to the East” initiatives, travelling through remote regions of China to document endangered musical traditions and introduce rural musicians to international audiences. The work inspired the documentary “Discovering a Musical Heartland: Wu Man’s Return to China” and international tours featuring performers who had rarely, if ever, appeared outside their home regions.

Alongside her touring career, she continues to teach as a visiting professor at Beijing’s Central Conservatory of Music and as a distinguished professor at conservatories in Zhejiang and Xi’an, while giving masterclasses across China.

“I really want to explore educational initiatives,” she said. “How can I share my experience with the younger generation?”

Although she acknowledges that many young people in China are drawn to Western instruments such as the piano, she believes traditional instruments continue to attract strong interest. “There are still many young people learning traditional instruments.”

Her advice has little to do with competitions or career planning. “First of all, you have to love music.”

Then comes the principle that has guided her own life. “Be open-minded. Listen to all kinds of music. Don’t hesitate. Step outside. You never know what will inspire you.”

That spirit of curiosity continues to shape her career. Her 2026-2027 season includes a creative residency programme at Brown and Harvard universities, performances with Kronos Quartet and international touring with the Aga Khan Music Initiative. She will also perform alongside Yo-Yo Ma and Rhiannon Giddens at the Silkroad Ensemble’s 25th anniversary celebrations at Carnegie Hall and take to the stage at the world premiere of a new pipa concerto by U.S. composer Mason Bates in Los Angeles. In China, she has an artist residency with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and orchestral performances across the country.

Ms Wu laughs when asked why she continues to maintain such a demanding schedule.

“I really love music,” she said. “I want to meet people and learn something that inspires me.”

Even her listening habits reflect that restless curiosity. Her playlists range from Central Asian recordings and Chinese opera to contemporary chart music.

“I do listen to K-pop,” she admitted with a grin. “Sometimes it’s very inspiring.” ■





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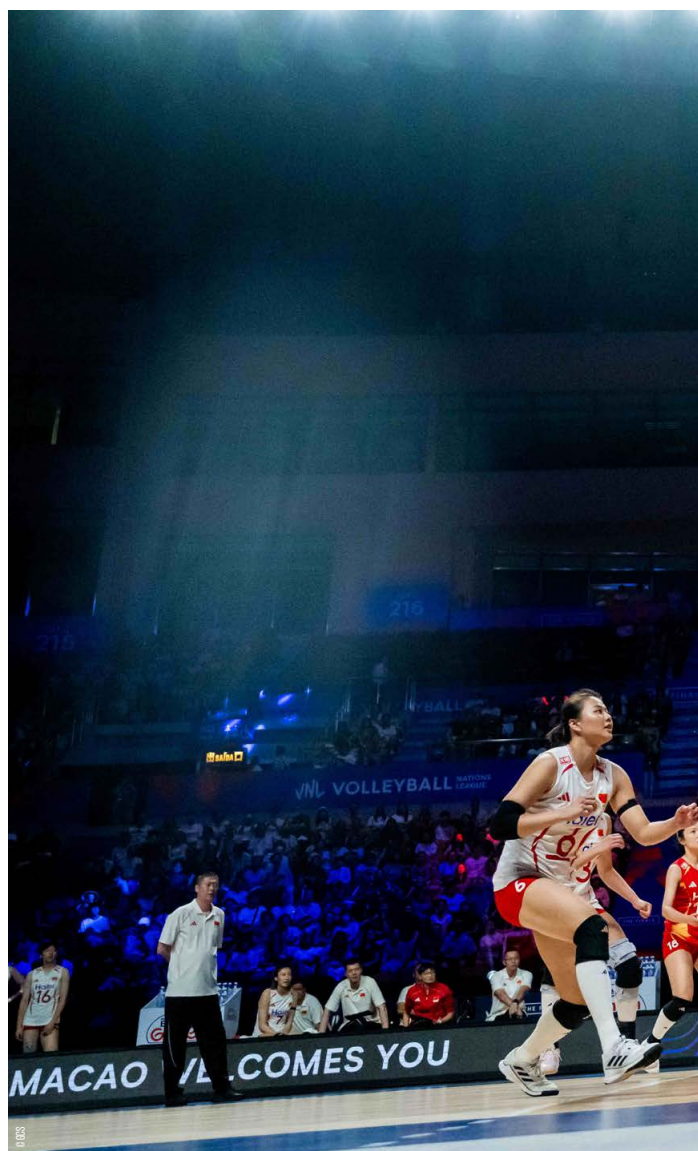
THE WINNING

Text **Guilherme Rego**

International sporting events have become a defining feature of Macao's annual calendar. Beyond the excitement they generate, they are expected to attract visitors, strengthen the city's global profile and support economic diversification. But how much value do these competitions really create, and what more is needed for Macao to become a genuine "City of Sports"?

Following Macao's hosting of the final round of the 2026 FIVB Women's Volleyball Nations League, one question inevitably follows: what does the city gain from staging major international sporting events?

Over the past decade, Macao has steadily expanded its sporting calendar, growing from seven major events in 2019 to more than 20 during 2025. As the city pursues economic diversification,



STRATEGY

✔ The Women's Volleyball Nations League is now a regular feature in Macao's sports calendar



sport has become an increasingly important element of that strategy.

From the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) Men's and Women's World Cup and the NBA China Games to the Macao Grand Prix and the UFC Fight Night, Macao's investment in international sporting events now extends well beyond the competitions themselves. Increasingly, success is measured not only by attendance, but also by the ability of these events to attract visitors, raise the city's international profile and generate wider economic benefits.

"Sports tourism is not a new phenomenon," says Glenn McCartney, associate professor in

Integrated Resort and Tourism Management at the University of Macau (UM). "What has changed is how seriously destinations now approach it. In the past, it was often seen as a by-product of hosting events, but today there is a much greater emphasis on measuring its economic impact, its contribution to tourism and its role in broader development strategies."

This growing emphasis reflects the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government's "1+4" strategy for adequate economic diversification. Introduced to promote more balanced and sustainable long-term growth, the policy seeks to consolidate the integrated tourism and leisure industry



➤ The NBA China Games 2025 took place at The Venetian Arena in October 2025, featuring the Brooklyn Nets and the Phoenix Suns

while accelerating the development of four emerging industries: “Big Health”, with a focus on Traditional Chinese Medicine; modern financial services; high and new technologies; as well as the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) sector, with the hosting of large-scale international events.

The approach was further reinforced through the gaming concession contracts that came into effect in January 2023, which require integrated resort operators to invest in non-gaming projects, including sports. At the time, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) said attracting visitors through these initiatives would contribute to the local economy by increasing spending on accommodation, dining and entertainment, while further promoting Macao as a destination extending beyond its gaming reputation.

More than a game

Assessing the value of major sporting events is not as simple as counting spectators or ticket sales.

Professor Penny Wan at the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) argues that the return on investment of major sporting events should be measured through a combination of financial, tourism and social indicators, with visitor spending among the most important.

The broader tourism figures offer some indication of why Macao continues to pursue this strategy. According to Statistics and Census Service data, visitors whose primary purpose was attending sporting events or shows spent an average of 3,632 patacas per trip in 2025. That made them the city’s second-highest spending visitor segment after MICE travellers and well above the overall visitor average of 2,472 patacas.

“There have been noticeable improvements in sports tourism since the introduction of the new concessionaire contracts,” Ms Wan says.

“The integrated resort operators... have the resources – sports venues, hotel accommodation, food, entertainment,



What really drives value in sports tourism is consistency. Events like the Macau Grand Prix succeed because they are recurring fixtures, building recognition, loyalty and anticipation over time

Glenn McCartney
Associate Professor at the University of Macau

talent and financial resources,” she explains. “Tourists who are drawn to integrated resorts to attend sporting events will find everything they need in one place.”

Building an event economy

For Prof. McCartney, one of the key challenges is moving beyond isolated competitions and developing a portfolio of recurring events capable of generating sustained economic and tourism benefits.

Speaking to Macao Magazine last year, Samuel Tong Kai Chung, president of the Macau Institute of Management (MIM), made a similar observation. “From the perspective of a tourism centre, sporting events can create a stable visitor flow and a fixed annual activity calendar, becoming a key tool for smoothing out seasonal peaks,” he stated.

An idea that Prof. McCartney reaffirms: “What really drives value in sports tourism is consistency. Events like the Hong Kong Sevens or the Macau Grand Prix succeed because they are recurring fixtures, building



📍 The 72nd Macau Grand Prix, in November 2025, attracted 116,000 spectators

recognition, loyalty and anticipation over time.”

The UM scholar points to the Singapore Formula One Grand Prix as an example of how a sporting event can evolve into a much broader economic platform.

“It’s held at night and surrounded by a festival atmosphere, with live performances taking place alongside the race,” he explains. “The experience extends well beyond the Grand Prix itself.”

Macao has increasingly adopted a similar philosophy. In recent years, the Macau Grand Prix and the Macau Food Festival have been deliberately aligned, creating opportunities for visitors to extend their stay and spend across

multiple sectors of the economy. In 2023, event-demand analytics company PredictHQ estimated that the Macau Grand Prix generated approximately 11.6 million U.S. dollars in consumer spending, including 5.8 million U.S. dollars spent on restaurants alone.

That broader economic effect was particularly evident in November 2025. The Macau Grand Prix coincided not only with the Macau Food Festival but also with the Macao leg of the 15th National Games, creating one of the busiest periods on the city’s sporting calendar. Within the space of a few days, athletes, racing drivers and spectators from across the country and overseas converged on Macao.

The Macau Grand Prix attracted 116,000 spectators, a 15-percent increase on the previous year's edition and the highest attendance ever recorded for the traditional four-day format. Speaking after last year's event, Sports Bureau acting president Lei Si Leng told reporters that the overlapping calendar of sporting events had filled Macao with "a joyful sports atmosphere," describing the overall results as "very good".

The broader tourism figures reflected that momentum. According to Macao's statistics bureau, the city welcomed 3.35 million visitors in November 2025, up 18.1 percent from a year earlier, while international arrivals rose 13.6 percent.

The trend is not limited to motorsport. The 2026 ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup, staged in Macao for a third consecutive year, drew near-capacity crowds for the semi-finals and finals at the 16,000-seat Galaxy Arena. Likewise, the first UFC Fight Week promoted by Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd – under a four-year strategic partnership – attracted nearly 20,000 spectators across three days of events.

Following the UFC event in May 2026, the company said hosting the competition had "proven effective in boosting visitor arrivals, extending the length of stay, and injecting vibrant momentum into the local economy". It added that extensive global broadcast coverage had also "significantly elevated Macao's visibility on the international stage".

For Prof. McCartney, these immediate benefits can also produce longer-term gains for the destination. "Visitors may come for an MMA [Mixed Martial Arts] fight or another major event, and then return weeks later, even when nothing is on, simply because they enjoy the city," he explains.

Beyond the competition

If recurring events are essential to building a sustainable event economy, Prof. McCartney believes international visibility is equally important. One of the less obvious aspects of



There are noticeable improvements in sports tourism since the introduction of the new concessionaire contracts

Penny Wan

Professor at the Macao University of Tourism

sports tourism, he argues, is the distinction between hosting an international event and generating genuine international impact.

Simply attracting overseas athletes, teams and officials does not automatically raise a destination's profile. The real test, he says, is whether an event succeeds in projecting the city to audiences beyond its borders through media coverage, sponsorships and destination marketing.

Recent international competitions suggest Macao is increasingly achieving precisely that. Reflecting on the 2026 ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup, ITTF president Petra Sörling noted that "major platforms delivered extensive multi-angle coverage and helped drive over 420 million cumulative viewers across key TV broadcasts".

The 2025 NBA China Games provide another example. While each game attracted around 14,000 spectators in 2025, Sands China estimates that the event generated approximately three billion online impressions across Chinese mainland social media platforms. Around the games, the company organised close to 100 supporting activities, including NBA House, fan engagement initiatives and Macao's first NBA flagship

store. The event is due to return this October, when the Dallas Mavericks and the Houston Rockets face each other in Macao.

A 'City of Sports'?

The steady expansion of Macao's sporting calendar has undoubtedly enhanced the city's reputation as a destination for major international competitions. Yet whether sport can become a lasting pillar of economic diversification remains an open question.

Prof. Wan believes Macao enjoys several structural advantages. Chief among them

is the close collaboration between the MSAR Government and the city's six integrated resort operators, allowing world-class venues, accommodation, entertainment and hospitality to be combined within a compact, easily accessible destination.

At the same time, she cautions that Macao's ambitions face significant challenges, including competition from neighbouring regions. The limited number of flight connections "may also hinder event organisers from considering Macao as a destination for major sporting events," she says.



📍 The 2026 ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup Macao brought world-class table tennis back to the city for a third straight year



Macao is investing 1.34 billion patacas in the first-phase redevelopment of the former greyhound racetrack into a multi-sports park

Prof. Wan also believes that becoming a genuine sporting city requires “much more than successfully hosting international competitions”.

“Macao needs athletes capable of achieving success at the highest international level,” she says. “Residents also need to embrace sports and physical activity more widely. It is developing, but more effort is needed.”

Prof. McCartney shares that view, arguing that the next stage of development lies in fostering a stronger sporting culture within the community.

“I think we need to do more with grass-roots sports, schools, professional coaching, and the use of venues and facilities,” he states. “A ‘City of Sports’ generally is the development of sports culture.”

Supporting those ambitions is a significant programme of public investment in sports infrastructure. Macao is currently investing

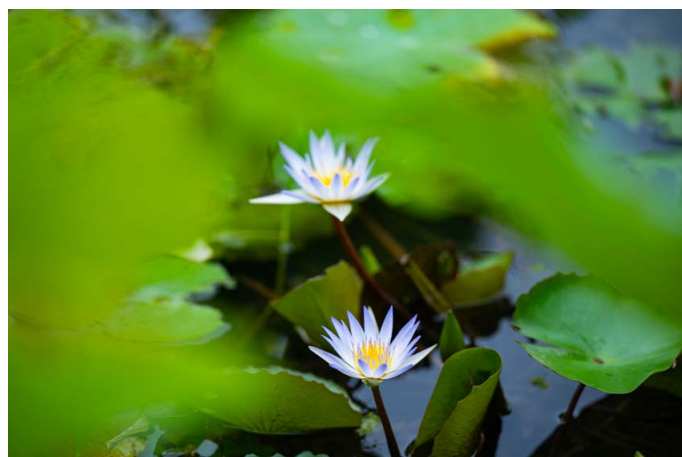
across a few major projects designed to expand participation in sport while strengthening the city’s capacity to host international events. The largest is the redevelopment of the former Canidrome greyhound racetrack – with a first-phase construction budget of 1.34 billion patacas – into a multi-sports park, featuring indoor swimming pools, climbing facilities and a range of community sports amenities.

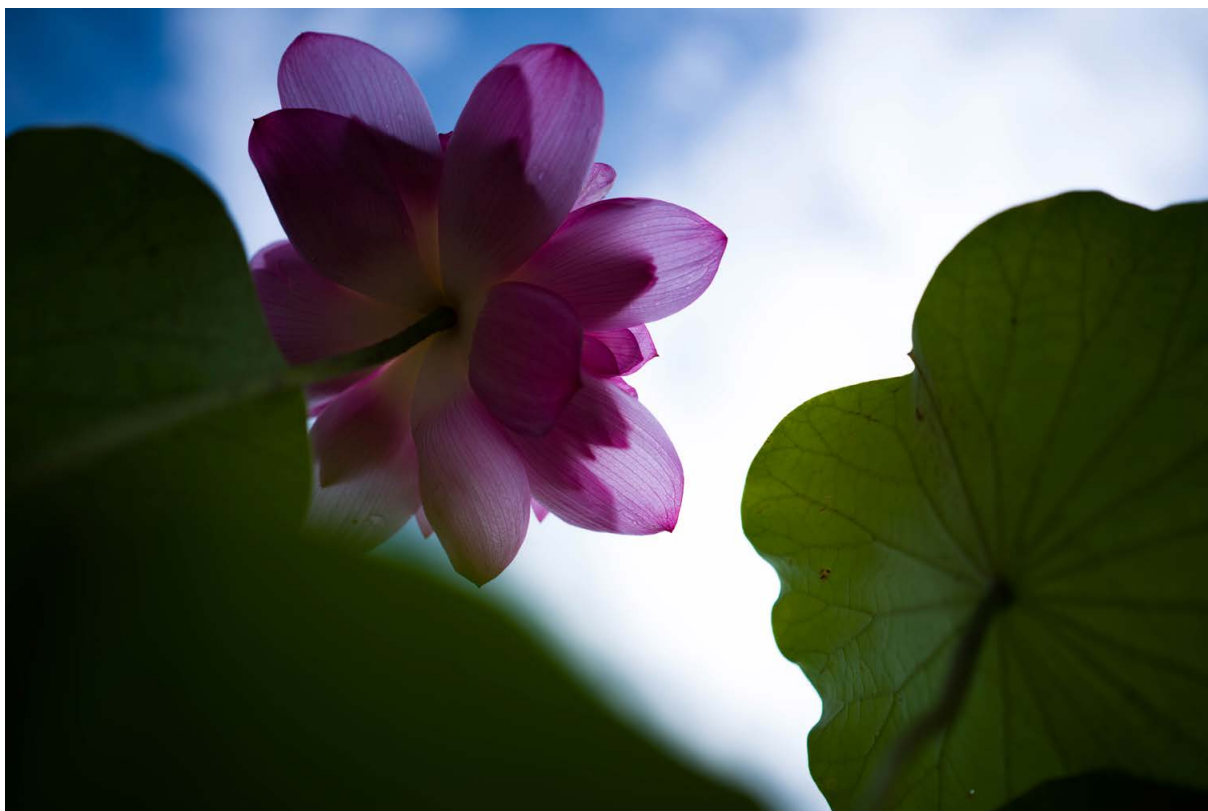
These investments reflect a broader ambition that extends beyond attracting headline events. They are intended to provide residents with better facilities, nurture sporting talent and create a stronger foundation for future generations of athletes.

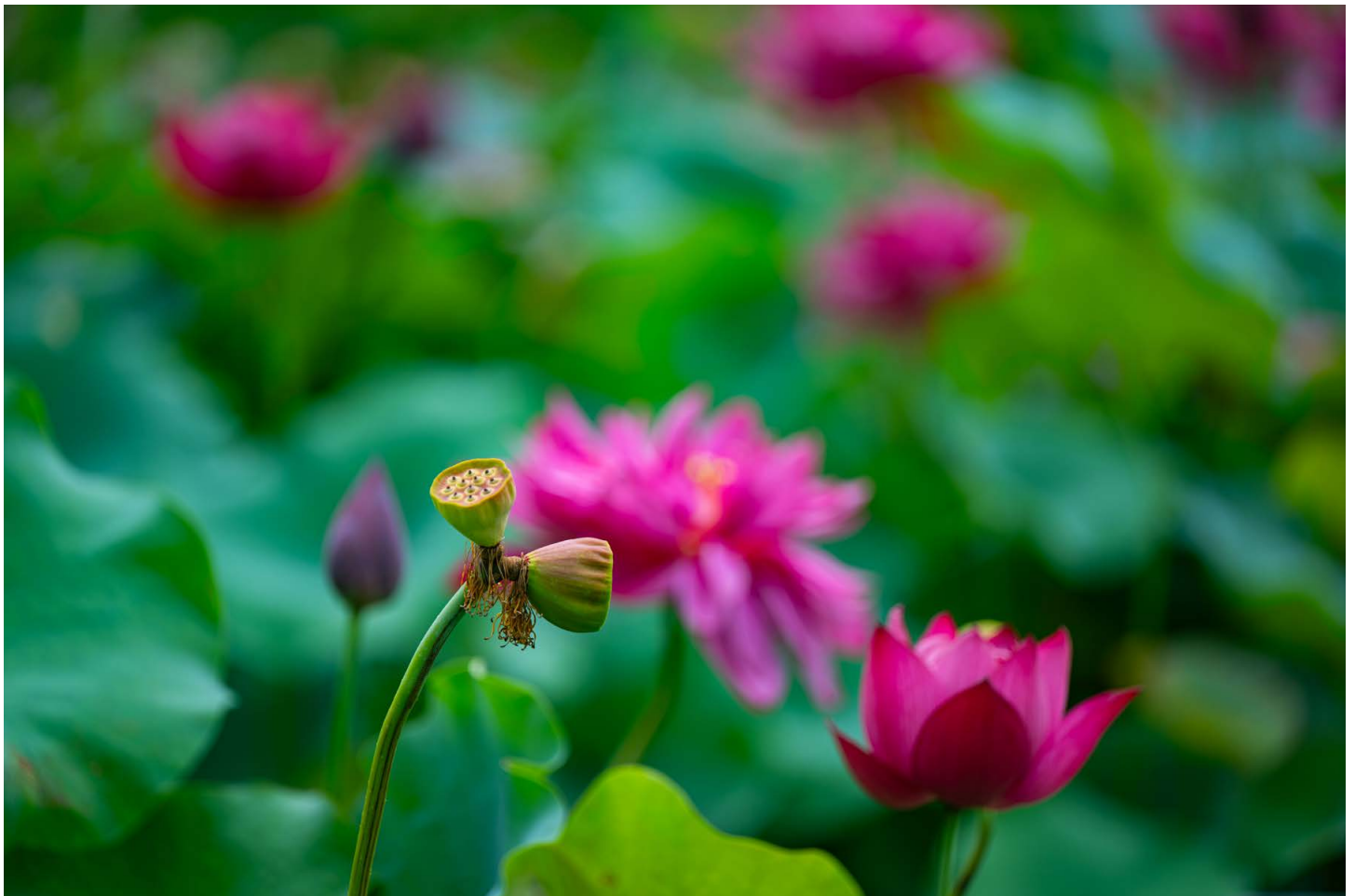
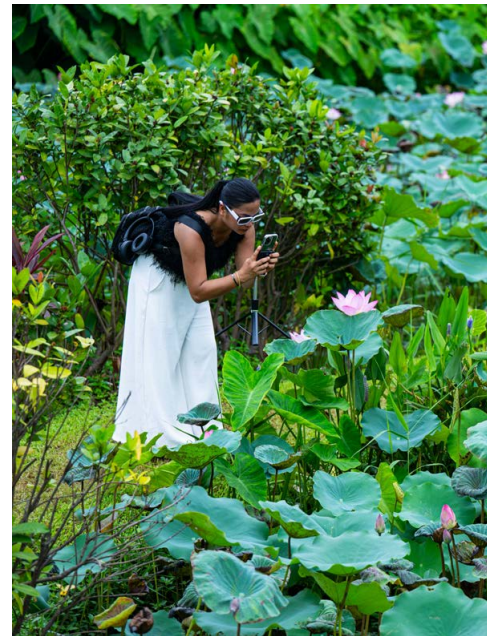
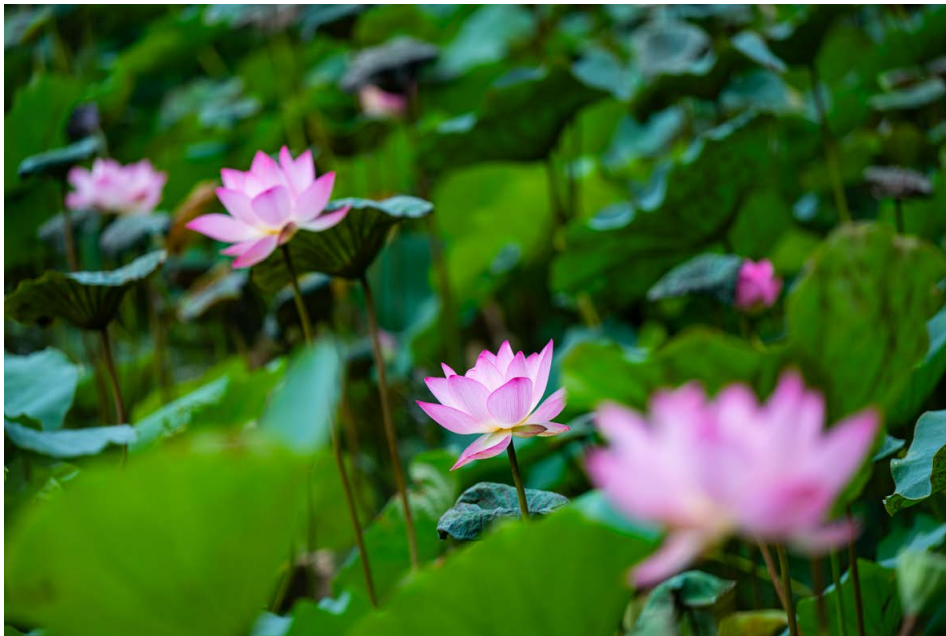
Sport alone will not determine Macao’s economic future. Rather, it has become an increasingly important component of a wider diversification strategy that seeks to strengthen tourism, broaden the city’s international appeal and create new opportunities for development. ■

The quiet beauty of the lotus

Photo feature by Cheong Kam Ka









Each summer, the lotus lends a splash of colour to Macao as thousands of blooms transform parks and public spaces across the city. Organised by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), the annual **Lotus Flower Festival** pays tribute to the elegant aquatic plant that serves as Macao's official floral emblem. The 2026 festival, held from June 12 to July 17, featured more than 9,000 potted lotus plants. The centrepiece, on Avenida da Praia in Taipa, showcased an array of lotus varieties alongside bamboo-inspired features and ornamental stone arrangements.



BRICK & STORY

BEYOND THE FAÇADE: THE SECRETS OF LOU KAU MANSION

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

Lou Kau Mansion stands as a lasting reminder of the influence and prosperity of the Chinese merchants who helped shape **19th-century Macao**

Tucked away in a narrow pedestrian street within the Historic Centre of Macao, the blue-grey façade at No. 7 Travessa da Sé is easy to overlook. Yet beyond its entrance lies one of the city's finest surviving examples of late Qing architecture, offering a rare glimpse into the wealth, ambitions and cosmopolitan outlook of Macao's Chinese merchant elite.

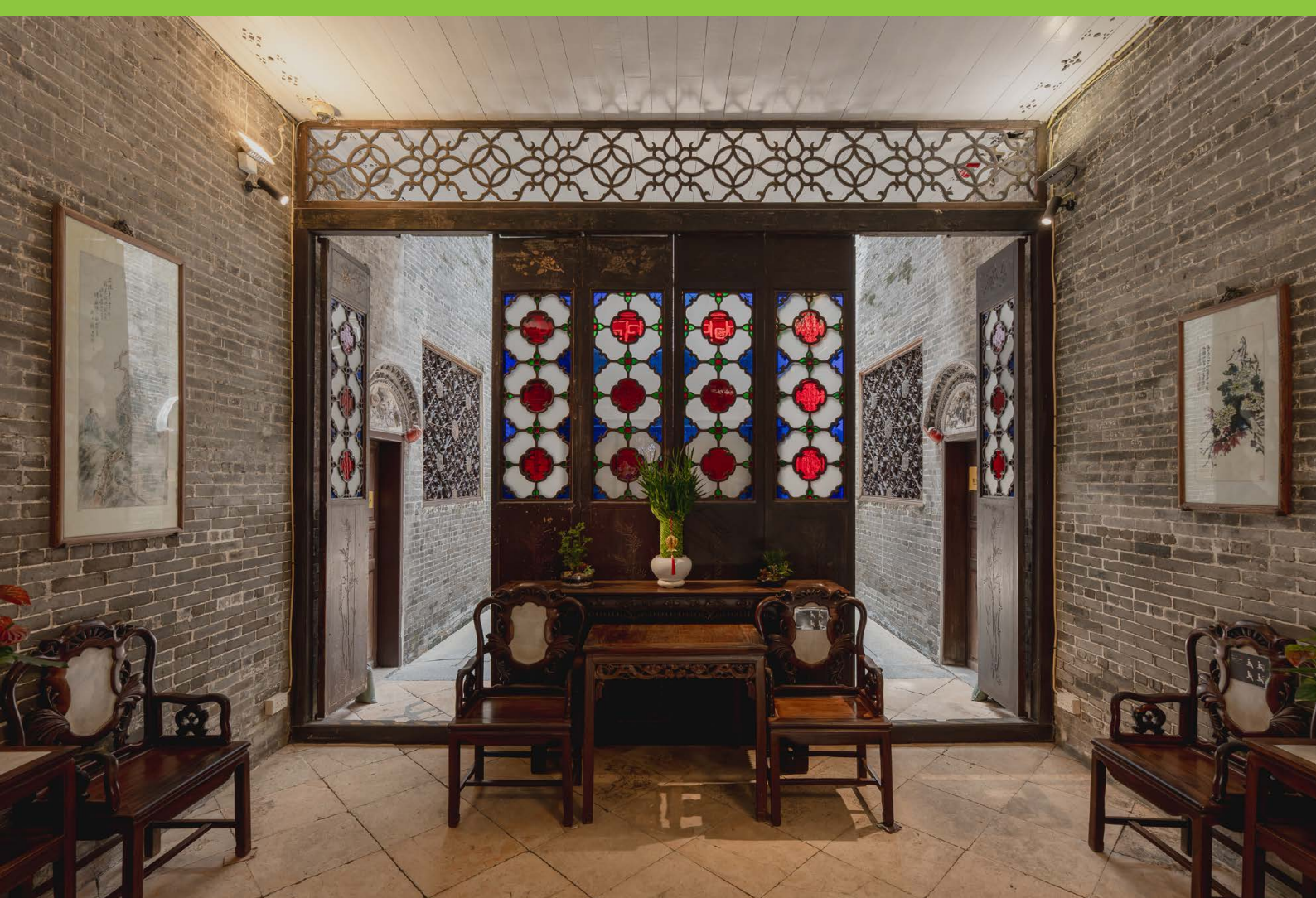
Lou Kau Mansion, completed in 1889, is among the best-preserved examples of a Xiguan mansion, a residential

style that originated in Guangzhou's Xiguan district before spreading across southern China. According to inscriptions on the eaves of the left courtyard, the mansion was commissioned by Lou Wa Sio, better known as Lou Kau.

Born in Xinhui, Guangdong province, in 1848, Lou Kau eventually moved to Macao where he began working in currency exchange before establishing his own banking house. He later secured permission from the Portuguese administration to operate

gambling businesses, eventually becoming one of Macao's wealthiest Chinese merchants during the late 19th century. He also played a significant role in local public affairs. The mansion served as the family's residence.

He and several associates paid a substantial sum for an eight-year gambling licence in Guangdong. Three years later, a newly appointed governor banned gambling throughout the province and refused to compensate investors for the remaining years of the licence. In his later years, he



📍 Lou Kau Mansion underwent an extensive restoration programme between 2002 and 2005

was burdened by debts he could not repay, and passed away in 1907, aged 59.

His eldest son, Lou Lim Ioc, inherited the mansion and continued to expand the family's businesses, becoming one of Macao's leading merchants. After his death in 1927, however, the family's fortunes declined over the following decades. Properties were sold or rented out, including the mansion itself, which was eventually divided among as many as 20 households at one time. Unsurprisingly, years of

neglect left the building in an increasingly fragile state.

By the 1960s, the property had come under public ownership. It was first declared a heritage site in 1976, with its status confirmed in 1992. Between 2002 and 2005, the Cultural Affairs Bureau undertook an extensive restoration programme – the first large-scale conservation project involving a traditional Chinese residence after Macao's return to the motherland.

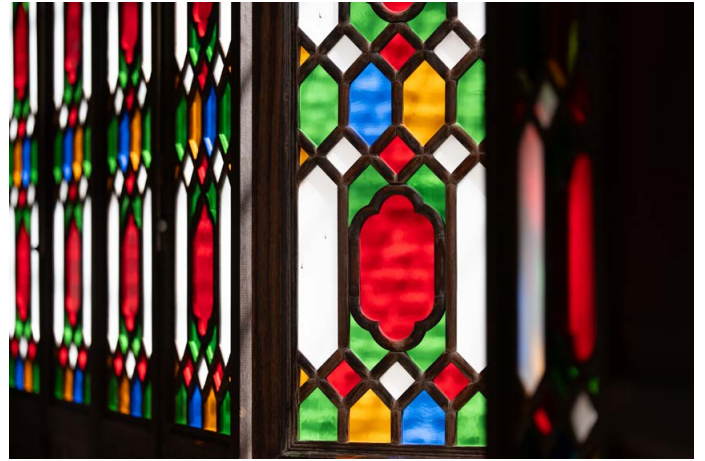
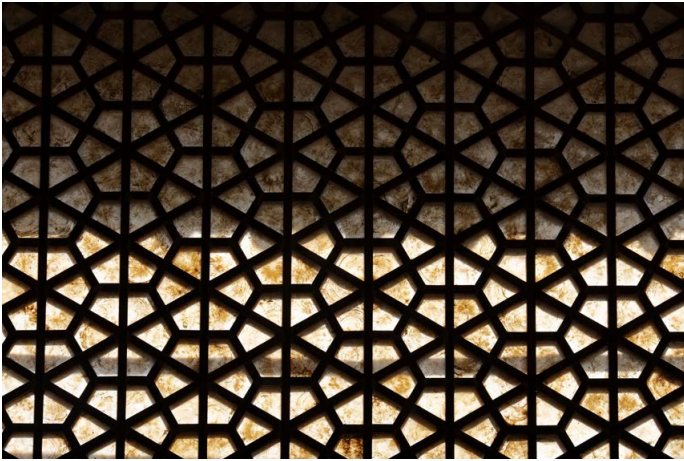
The project also served as a reference for the restoration

of Mandarin's House, which was completed in 2010. In 2005, both properties were included in the Historic Centre of Macao, when it was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Architecture of fortune

Stepping inside Lou Kau Mansion is to enter a carefully ordered world in which architecture expresses status and prosperity.

The residence follows a strict three-by-three grid. Two courtyards along the central axis separate the three principal halls



📍 The mansion's architecture is rich in intricate details

on the ground floor – the Entrance Hall, the Sedan Hall and the Senior Hall – reflecting the hierarchical organisation of a traditional Confucian household.

The upper floor contains the Worship Hall and the family's private quarters.

Feng shui shaped the mansion's layout, but symbolism extended far beyond its overall design. In Lingnan architecture, typical of southern China, decorative elements such as the house's refined

plasterwork were equally important expressions of prosperity and good fortune.

Although unmistakably Chinese in its layout, the mansion's architecture reveals the international influences that flowed through Macao during the late 19th century. Traditional Lingnan brick carvings, plaster mouldings and carved timber transoms sit alongside windows fitted with Western-style blinds, as well as colourful glass, reflecting

a fusion of Chinese and imported styles.

"Look up, and you'll notice perforated wooden ceilings reminiscent of Macao's churches – a technique borrowed from the West and echoed in Latin America – alongside delicate vents carved with geometric motifs," prominent local architect André Lui Chak Keong, a specialist in cultural heritage, told Macao Magazine.

"Inside, the oyster-shell windows' hexagonal motifs

symbolise longevity, echoing the shell of the golden coin turtle in Chinese tradition,” he said. The Manzhou windows, a type of glass window imported from abroad during the late Qing dynasty, “embody Guangdong’s cosmopolitan trading background and were popular among wealthy merchants who had privileged access to imported materials.”

For Mr Lui, the mansion’s greatest appeal lies in details that many visitors never notice.

“Stand outside the mansion and you may notice curious X-shaped cast-iron plates fixed into the upper brick wall. Many mistake them for decoration, but they conceal a clever secret. These anchor plates connect to iron rods running deep through the timber beams, a technique borrowed from old Dutch and Portuguese houses to keep the heavy brick walls from bowing outward. It’s a subtle yet brilliant example of foreign engineering safeguarding a Chinese home.”

Restoring a hidden masterpiece

Surrounded by the Portuguese-inspired façades of Cathedral Square and Senado Square, Lou Kau Mansion stands apart, not only because of the prominence of its

original owner but also because of its distinctive architectural character.

“Its charm lies in the surprise,” Mr Lui said. “From the street, you see an old Chinese structure, but step inside and you discover a world of intricate wood carvings and stained glass. The exterior conceals the richness within.”

Having studied heritage conservation in Portugal and France, Mr Lui witnessed the restoration while working at the Cultural Affairs Bureau. By then, the mansion had deteriorated significantly. The roof leaked, vegetation covered large sections of the tiled roof, and conservation specialists feared the building might survive only another two decades without intervention.

One of the greatest challenges was sourcing authentic replacement materials. Oyster-shell windows had disappeared locally, and conservators spent a year searching before locating suitable shells in Shanwei, Guangdong, in 2002. The mansion’s fragile Manzhou windows, with their handcrafted stained glass, also required painstaking restoration using replacement glass imported from France.

Since reopening to the public in 2005, the mansion has evolved from a restored residence into a cultural



Lou Kau Mansion is not only an educational model for Xiguan mansion preservation, but also a living testament to Macao’s 19th-century world

André Lui Chak Keong
Architect

venue. Its courtyards regularly host traditional Chinese music performances, puppet theatre and craft demonstrations, allowing visitors to experience the building as a living space rather than a static museum.

For Mr Lui, the mansion represents far more than a successful conservation project.

“Lou Kau Mansion is not only an educational model for Xiguan mansion preservation, but also a living testament to Macao’s 19th-century world – where East met West in the romantic lifestyle of rising Chinese merchants alongside the city’s expatriate elite.” ■

The streets that made me

Text Rui Pastorin

Name

André Couto

Age

49

Title

Racing driver

Place of birth

Lisbon

No. of years living in Macao

45

Macao in one word

Home



Is there one place in Macao that helped shape you as a racing driver?

The Guia Circuit is incredibly special, just like the Macau Grand Prix itself. I remember watching Ayrton Senna win in Macao in 1983. From then on, I watched the Grand Prix every year. I was one of those enthusiastic kids collecting autographs and stickers whenever I could.

The Guia Circuit is one of the toughest street circuits in the world. Has racing there made you a better driver everywhere else?

Definitely. Long before I raced Formula 3 in Macao, I already knew the Guia Circuit extremely well. I spent years going around it in different cars – sometimes as a passenger, sometimes driving – and even on motorbikes. You get to know every corner and every street. When you eventually race Formula 3 on the Guia Circuit, other tracks feel a little easier. I've always believed that if you can be fast in Macao, you can be fast anywhere.

You've raced all over the world. What does it mean to compete with 'Macao' on your helmet?

The best part is representing the people I grew up with. Macao is a special place, and I started my racing career here with one dream: to compete in the Macau Grand Prix. To go on and represent Macao internationally – and do well – is an incredible feeling. Winning the Macau Grand Prix was my dream, and I think, in a way, it was also a dream shared by many people in Macao.

After travelling so much, what instantly tells you that you're home?

The food and the smell of the streets.

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think about growing up in Macao?

It's where I grew up and where I met the most important people in my life. Anyone who has lived in Macao for a long time will probably tell you it's a special place. It's a city that's constantly changing, while still keeping its own character.

Did growing up in Macao give you any lessons that still help you today?

Growing up in Macao gave me a normal childhood, just like any other kid. But from an early age, I always had the mindset that I wanted to win. You have to surround yourself with the best people possible. As you progress in sport, there comes a point when you need to leave Macao to compete internationally. The people you meet often have different ways of working and different mindsets. School and everyday life in Macao were just one part of my life. Competition was the other. If you're driven to compete, you develop a different mindset because you have to make sacrifices to achieve your goals. You give up many things that come with an ordinary life.

If a visitor had just one day to experience Macao, where would you take them and why?

If I had to choose just one place, it would be San Ma Lou in downtown. That's Macao.

What's the one local food every visitor has to try?

Going for yum cha and eating dim sum. I love the tradition of people gathering for lunch at dim sum restaurants, which is one of the city's most authentic experiences.

What's your message for young people in Macao who dream of becoming athletes?

Never give up on your dreams. If you truly believe in them, go for them. Never stop believing in yourself, even when other people don't.

What makes Macao different from anywhere else you've been?

The lifestyle is unique. Compared with many other cities, life here feels easier because everything is close by. You can always meet someone, unlike in bigger cities where people often live far apart and have hectic schedules. We can all be busy here too, but we still find time for each other. Of course, there's also the Macau Grand Prix. It's known around the world and it's the city's biggest international event. Nothing else really puts Macao on the world stage in quite the same way.

Festival

LETTING CREATIVITY RUN FREE

Designed to spark the imaginations of people of all ages, the annual Macao International Children's Arts Festival (MICAF) returns with a packed programme. Organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, this year's festival presents live performances, creative camps, workshops and interactive events. MICAF, now in its third edition, also offers free weekend activities until the end of August including the Children's Fun Book House – a pop-up bookshop at the Macao Cultural Centre – and a series of outdoor events at the Macao Cultural Centre Plaza featuring live performances, games, water play and art workshops.

NOW THROUGH AUG 30 | MULTIPLE LOCATIONS | WWW.ICM.GOV.MO/MICAF



© HANDOUT BY CULTURAL AFFAIRS BUREAU

Science

A BUG'S-EYE VIEW OF MACAO'S BIODIVERSITY

Macao's lesser-known natural heritage is now on display through "Rediscovering Macao's Wild: 135 New Insect Records – An Exhibition of the Entomological Legacy of Dr Emmett R. Easton in Macao", which showcases more than 1,400 insect specimens collected by the late entomologist. The collection includes 135 species that were newly recorded in Macao's insect checklist. Dr Easton played a pioneering role in documenting Macao's insect fauna during his time at the University of Macau in the 1990s. He passed away in 2025 at the age of 87.

NOW TO AUG 28 | WU YEE SUN LIBRARY AT UNIVERSITY OF MACAU | 10AM TO 7PM | FREE ADMISSION



© COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF MACAU

Sports

TABLE TENNIS ROYALTY

Now a regular fixture on the international table tennis circuit, Macao is cementing its reputation as a leading destination for hosting major sporting events. Organised by the city's Sports Bureau and World Table Tennis (WTT), and co-organised by the Macao Table Tennis General Association, WTT Champions Macao 2026 brings together many of the world's highest-ranked men's and women's players, who will compete for a total prize fund of US\$800,000. Past champions include China's Wang Chuqin in the men's event and Sun Yingsha (pictured) in the women's event, with both players having won the Macao competition multiple times.

FROM SEPT 8 TO 13 | MACAO EAST ASIAN GAMES DOME | [HTTPS://WTTMACAO.SPORT.GOV.MO](https://WTTMACAO.SPORT.GOV.MO)



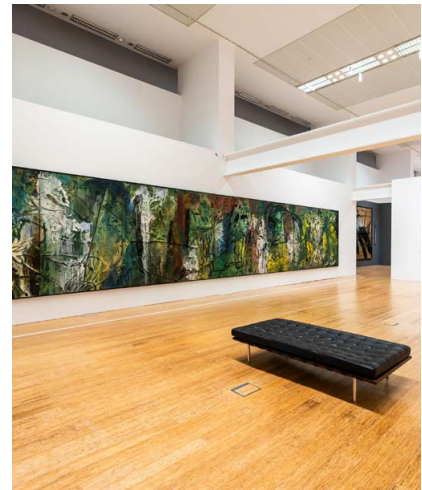
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Arts

CELEBRATING MIO PANG FEI'S ARTISTIC LEGACY

Marking the 90th anniversary of late artist Mio Pang Fei's birth, "East-West Contemplations: A Retrospective of Mio Pang Fei" brings together 90 paintings, mixed-media works, installations and manuscripts tracing the evolution of one of Macao's pioneering contemporary artists. The exhibition highlights Mio Pang Fei's concept of "Neo-Orientalism", reflecting his artistic philosophy of "taking the spirit of Eastern culture as the essence with the use of Western modern languages". Born in Shanghai, Mio Pang Fei lived and worked in Macao for decades before his death in 2020.

NOW THROUGH OCT 11 | MACAO MUSEUM OF ART | 10AM TO 7PM (LAST ADMISSION 6:30PM) | CLOSED ON MONDAYS | FREE ADMISSION | WWW.MAM.GOV.MO



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Photography

A CITY REFRAMED

The Archives of Macao, under the Cultural Affairs Bureau, has played a vital role in collecting, restoring and preserving archival materials that chronicle the city's history. A selection of its historical photographs is now on display at the "City in Rephotography" exhibition. The showcase adopts a comparative approach by presenting archival images alongside contemporary rephotographs taken from the same locations. By juxtaposing views from different eras, it traces the transformation of Macao's streetscapes, everyday life and urban infrastructure, offering visitors a unique glimpse into how the city has evolved over time.

NOW THROUGH SEPT 30 | ARCHIVES OF MACAO | 10AM TO 6PM | CLOSED ON MONDAYS AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS | FREE ADMISSION | [HTTPS://WWW.ARCHIVES.GOV.MO/EN/](https://www.archives.gov.mo/en/)



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Experience

INSIDE THE WORLD OF MAK MAK

Macao's official tourism mascot, Mak Mak, has become a well-known ambassador for the city since its creation in 2018. The "Mak Mak Experience Hub" features four themed zones showcasing the mascot through a range of interactive displays and activities. The space also includes a selection of cultural and creative products inspired by Mak Mak herself. On weekends and designated public holidays, Mak Mak invites cafés and light-snack stalls to make surprise pop-up appearances, giving visitors a chance to experience the flavours of Macao in a colourful atmosphere.

NOW THROUGH JAN 3, 2027 | RITZ BUILDING (SENADO SQUARE) | 12PM TO 6PM (11AM TO 7PM ON WEEKENDS) | FREE ADMISSION



© HANDOUT BY MAMO



POOLS TO THE PEOPLE

As summer settles over Macao and temperatures climb, few pleasures are more inviting than a refreshing swim. For residents and visitors alike, the city's network of public swimming pools offers a welcome respite from the heat, as well as an affordable way to spend time with family and friends.

With indoor and outdoor facilities spread across the Macao peninsula, Taipa and Coloane, there is no shortage of places to cool off. Only Macao's

oldest public pool which opened in 1952 – the Estoril Swimming Pool – is temporarily closed to facilitate construction work on the adjacent Macao Central Library's new complex. The Olympic-size pool, set in the heart of Macao's cultural district near Tap Seac Square, holds a unique place in the city's collective memory.

While we look forward to Estoril Swimming Pool's return, splash out at one of the other 10 public pools on offer across Macao this summer!

Can you find these 11 Macao public swimming pools?

- BOSCO**
(D. BOSCO COLLEGE SPORTS CENTRE)
 - TAMAGNINI BARBOSA**
(TAMAGNINI BARBOSA SPORTS CENTRE)
 - LIN FONG**
(LIN FONG SPORTS CENTRE)
 - SUN YAT SEN**
(DR. SUN YAT SEN SWIMMING POOL)
 - ESTORIL**
(ESTORIL SWIMMING POOL)
 - AQUATIC CENTRE**
(OLYMPIC SPORTS CENTRE - AQUATIC CENTRE)
 - CARMO**
(CARMO SWIMMING POOLS)
 - TAIPA CENTRAL PARK**
(TAIPA CENTRAL PARK SWIMMING POOL)
 - UNIVERSITY OF MACAU**
(UM SPORTS COMPLEX)
 - HAC SA PARK**
(HAC SA PARK SWIMMING POOL)
 - CHEOC VAN**
(CHEOC VAN SWIMMING POOL)
- (Words can go in any direction)

Z	W	R	B	S	S	N	G	V	T	P	I	E	E	Z	I	A	I
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F	R	Q	F	Z	N	X	F	X	A	Y	Q	R	Q	W	T	Q	P
H	N	A	W	E	C	O	A	T	E	T	A	I	X	C	U	Y	L
V	A	A	B	W	Y	C	E	C	R	B	S	L	R	A	D	M	A
J	H	C	D	R	C	S	J	W	I	E	G	E	T	K	I	W	R
P	E	V	S	F	H	O	I	N	C	I	U	I	N	Y	K	C	T
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U	N	I	V	E	R	S	I	T	Y	O	F	M	A	C	A	U	T
G	J	A	J	J	H	D	L	F	Y	S	Y	F	N	A	N	Y	Y





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