

Ritual and Memory: Identity Construction of Massive Macanese Reunions¹

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ABSTRACT: As a special ethnic group in Macao and an outcome of Oriental-Western cultural communications and inter-ethnic contacts, Macanese people are of great research value in sociology, ethnology and cultural studies. This article analyses the situations of three categories of the Macanese reunions, i.e. religious rituals, traditional celebrations and thematic celebrations. Four points are maintained in this article: a. religious activities as “rituals” are god–man and man–man interactions; b. with application of social media, traditional celebrations as “ceremonies” are “the invention of tradition”, old and new; c. homage to “model” and historic glories carry significant meaning to thematic reunions as “celebration”; d. cultural identity of Macanese people is an important premise for defining their ethnicity.

KEYWORDS: Macanese community gatherings; Collective memory; A ritual view of communication; Ethnic identity.

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Introduction

Construction of ethnic identity is achieved through construction of meanings, just as Stuart Hall pointed out, “Meaning does not inhere in things, in the world. It is *constructed*, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice — a practice that produces *meaning*, that makes things mean.” (Stuart Hall, 2003, p.24) Therefore, interpretation of meanings becomes a unique research method to study the ritual view of communication. Following are the questions to be dealt with in this article: a. What have been sublimated and magnified by “rituals” in the forms of religious observance, thematic reunions and traditional celebrations? b. What have been outcast and what have been revered? c. How do they re-create, resume and innovate traditional culture? d. To what kind of identification do they relate?

1. “Ritual”: Meaning Constructions of Interactive Observance in Religious Belief

The basic framework in ritual classifications is Secularity/Divinity. Divine wills have been practiced through life of ancients in a traditional or underdeveloped cultural period. British sociologist Anthony Giddens drew a conclusion based on Durkheim’s research on ceremonies and rituals. Durkheim identifies with Marx in that divine power or religion about gods turns into decadence. The traditional idea of God falling means God is dead. However he also claims that religion will survive through transformation in another sense. (Anthony Giddens, 2009, p.685) This article takes Sunday Mass and “the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord, the God Jesus” every March for case study as the majority of Western Festivals are religious and originated in the unity of man with God.

1.1 Interactive Rituals in Religious Activities

Religious faith of Macanese people dates back to centuries ago. In earlier times when resources were scarce and transportation and communication were not as developed, churches served as important social settings, and Sunday Mass served as an important social agenda.

“Why do we attach importance to churches activities? That’s because every Sunday Mass, the one in the morning, the grandest at the Cathedral (Sé), is the most important gathering for Macanese people. Everyone was dressed up as if attending feasts as we place great value on inter-family and interpersonal communication. Actually, it’s somewhat like the scenario of the small-town churches in foreign films, you know. Things like ‘How’s everybody? How are you doing?’” (Daniel Fok, 2019)



The Procession of the Passion of Our Lord, the God Jesus. Photo by Zhou Yanshan.

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While Sunday Mass is a routine social communication in Macanese life, “The Procession of the Passion of Our Lord, the God Jesus” is deemed as mourning ritual among the ethnic groups of Macanese. The two-day Procession starts from an evening Mass hosted by the priest at the St. Augustine’s Church on the first day. At 7pm, accompanied by the Public Security Police Force Music Band, the figure of Jesus is carried by the clergy members to march from the St. Augustine’s Church to the Cathedral. From starting point to destination, followers are seen kneeling down or nodding along the route, some even light candles or place offerings along the streets, in this way they greet the figure of Jesus and the procession. Likewise, Mass is hosted by the priest at the Cathedral the next day afternoon. “The Procession of the Passion of Our Lord, the God Jesus” starts after the prayer before the procession during which the dialogue between the priest and the assembly goes as follows:

Priest: Because of your suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane,

Response: Lord forgives us.

Priest: Because of your suffering of the whipping, because of your suffering of the crown of thorns...



The Procession passes in front of the Dom Pedro V Theatre. Photo by Zhou Yanshan.

The dialogue is a key agenda for followers to get immersed in mourn and grieves. When the figure of Jesus is carried out of the church in the chants of followers, silence falls on the procession afterwards and the Police Force Music Band begins to play. There are never wanting, some grey-haired followers, beads in left hand, walking stick in right hand, who are walking with the procession under the accompany of Philippine maids. The route begins from the Cathedral, passing St. Dominic’s Church, the Consul General of Portugal in Macao, Site of Diocesan Press, Government Headquarters of the Macao Special Administrative Region, St. Lawrence Church, and returns to St. Augustine’s Church. There are praying rituals at every designated station where the followers sing psalms and kneel down in the street.

In religious rituals, Mass is a face-to-face interpersonal communication and an interactive ritual between man and God. Participation of the 3-hour of “Way of the Cross”, tearful followers touching the figure of Jesus, is a communication between man and God, a spiritual exchange among religious communities.

1.1.1 Identification in Interactive Rituals

History is an intellectual resource, a process of constant accumulation and interpretation. Sorting of these glorious souvenirs builds a connection between the cultural identity of the ritual viewers and the “dynamic history”. Durkheim claims that one’s faith would be reinforced when he sees the returning of distant past and feels thrilled by such grandeur. (Durkheim, 2006, pp.495–496)

“I was baptized when I was born, and I remain a Roman Catholic. So is my sister. And so will be my kids if I will have some one day. For people like me, though baptized as Catholic, it doesn’t mean I harbor no respect to Buddhism. Honestly, I worship Buddha, and Tai-sui as well. And I

have interest in Islamic too, so I read about Islamic in the previous years.”

(Paula Cristina Pereira Carion, 2019)

“I’ll go to church if they need me to help out, but I can’t make it every week. Same case with my two sons. I never make them to, neither in faith nor in baptism. Yes, I will take my grandson to baptism too, just do what a Macanese is supposed to do. Baptism for kids, it’s a tradition, and a family heritage too. If you ask me why, I don’t really know, just a practice ...something like the One-month-old Banquet for Chinese babies. Baptism for us is the One-month-old Banquet.”

(Ana Maria Manhão Sou, 2019)

Religion has been shrinking from public and social political fields and is unable to maintain the control over the world, thus religious faith tends to be something personal. “Believe in god without belonging to the church” becomes a more and more wide-spread phenomenon. At present, in religious activities, whether the eighth-generation Carion family or the family of Ana (Macanese families that have a relative shorter history in Macao), will perform baptism for their offspring even though they themselves may not attend Mass every week. They respect the freedom of religious choices of their family. Religious choices and subconscious decision-making are regarded as re-identification.

2. “Ceremonies”: Meaning Construction of Reunion for Traditional Celebrations

While rituals mainly fall under the category of religion, ceremonies are more about sociology and anthropology. As Turner put it, “I consider the term ‘ritual’ to be more fittingly applied to forms of religious behavior associated with social transitions, while the term ‘ceremony’ has a closer bearing on religious behavior associated with social states, where politico-

legal institutions also have greater importance. Ritual is transformative, ceremony confirmative.” (Turner, 1967, p.95) Western scholars believe that the reunion of social communities doesn’t mean consensus for value, but compliance, that is, people agree to treat things in a certain manner. (Peng Wenbin, Guo Jianbin, 2011)

Traditional celebrations concerning Macanese life are Spring Festival, Christmas, Mid-autumn Festival and Dragon-boat Festival, among which Spring Festival and Christmas are taken for case study here. As a western religious festival, Christmas shares the common cultural significance with Chinese Spring Festival — reunion. Therefore, Christmas will be analyzed under the category of traditional holidays according to its social conventions and festival significance.

2.1 Old and New—The Invention of Traditional Rituals

Traditional heritage is a mixture of various replicas and conventions. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger put out “the invention of tradition” as they find that many European traditions “appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented”. (E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, 2004, p.5) In outlining the new-era culture map, the invention of traditions doesn’t emerge out of thin air, but reverts to traditional rituals for growth, selection, reconstruction and transmission.

Today, with the development of communication technology and the universal application of mobile terminals, the identity connection becomes alienated despite increasingly reinforced physical links among people. Hence, nationality, ethnicity and religious belief turn out to be special symbols for identification, as is also clearly stated in “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination” by American sociologist David Harvey.

Christmas and Spring Festival are two of the most important traditional festivals for Macanese people. In the description of research participants,

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both are symbols of reunion, during which family reunion dinners and Opening Spring Festival banquets are indispensable. In traditional Chinese culture, there are inner links between “family” and “Spring Festival”. Global mobility and Macanese migration lead to the increase of international immigration. The bond that links the “acquaintance society” turns loose and results in “dual migrants” culturally and geographically, people who leave their land of origin but miss the old culture as they fail to blend in local mainstream culture. Aliens of “rootlessness” can be found anywhere in the world, and the same sense of “rootlessness” also confuses Macanese in Macao, who are seen as “Portuguese” in Macao but “Chinese” in Portugal, hence the continuous migrant cycle of exile, yearn, nostalgia and return. Traditional celebrations as Christmas and Spring Festival are rituals of reunion, however, there are significant differences among different family forms and different generations.

“I’m deeply impressed with Christmas reunion. Just like Chinese people celebrating Spring Festival, we gathered at our ancestral home. It has been quite a few years since last time as the relative who had been taking care of the ancestral home has passed away. He used to prepare loads of special foods for Christmas, such as tacho, home cooked turmeric pork, things only for traditional Macanese. He would make sure everything was ready for the dinner party, catering to a large family of more than a hundred people, just behind the Ruins of St. Paul’s. Small kids always received Christmas gifts and the elder ones got lotteries.”
(Paula Cristina Pereira Carion, 2019)

“As for me, I usually went to my uncle’s home because it was more spacious there. Mostly we were chatting and eating. There were courses like Bolo-rei, typical Portuguese cake. Apart from some special courses, there wasn’t much dif-

ference from our daily meals... Now with social apps like wechat, we will send greets like ‘Merry Christmas’ to family group.”
(Alexander Alves Rodrigues, 2019)



Tacho, traditional Macanese dish served on Christmas Eve.
Photo courtesy of Rufino Ramos.

Greetings from social apps become “the invention of tradition” — the same greetings, concerns and wishes have been transplanted from traditional forms to online social media in the forms of likes, emoji, video, pictures and voices. Tradition is never something external even though under the enormous impact of subcultures, fast food or alien cultures. It remains as an internal cultural psychology, yet to be awakened and reverted. The organizers strive to incorporate the accepted elements of conventions from the familiar cultural symbols, set a common code of conduct, and construct a new cultural identification with view to achieve the fundamental cultural purposes.

2.2 Cultural Identity of Macanese People

According to Taiwanese scholar Jiang Yi-huah, cultural identity refers to a sense of community belonging felt by a group of people as they share common historical traditions, social conventions and conformity, and numerous collective memories. Consistency displayed in bond of blood, ethnicity, language, region, and religion forms an overwhelming inner power to bond individual with cultural community emotionally. In the process of globalization, blood and geography connect overseas Macanese with those in Macao, as “the same origin” is regarded as an important indicator of cultural identity.

Apart from “originalness”, British scholar Steve Fenton places more emphasis on social construction and social mobilization of ethnicity (blood and culture) as well as the classifications system based on them. The concept of community might be a complete fabrication, despite the fact that obviously there’s something wrong with shared blood and culture. Traditions are solid foundations for social life and community, with the cultural identity of Macanese people being demonstrated via a pattern of backtracking and root-seeking for lasting ethnic culture.

“To what does the Macanese identity mark link today? First, it might be, I suppose, a sense of belonging, a sense of belonging to Macao. Maybe he is not living in Macao, neither is he born here, but this sense of belonging makes him feel connected to Macao. I guess you’ve read about ‘Imagined Community’ by Benedict Anderson. In my eyes, Macanese are pretty much of imagined community, because identity is a construction that means, you will build your identity on something. What matters is that you believe it’s something real even if it may not be real. A sense of belonging to Macao matters most.”
(José Luís de Sales Marques, 2019)

“However, people also talk about lifestyle, something Macanese — foods taking the second place. It doesn’t make any sense if a Macanese doesn’t love Macanese cuisine. Definitely you will love it if you are. You know what I mean? Better if you can cook some, and a minchi will just do for a Macanese.”
(José Luís de Sales Marques, 2019)

Macanese cultural identity can be geographically and culinarily defined by their sense of belonging to Macao and preference of Macanese food. Technically, geography is not the identification indicator of “originalness”, while cuisine provides a direct referential

index for Macanese identity from a cultural aspect. Who should take the responsibility of identity reconstruction, social mobilization and categorization when facing with cultural ruptures and transitions? The answer is that government, social communities, social elites and mainstream media are supposed to play an important role in the invention of rituals.

3. “Celebrations” — Meaning Construction of Thematic Reunions

In Macao, people are closely involved with communities. While the agenda of celebration rituals sees an increasing level of diversification, a “retrospective” discourse strategy is applied among the thematic reunions. The significant relationship between cultural identity and historical memory is deemed as a common sense concerning the issue identification. This article maintains that thematic reunions are conjunctions between nobility and pleasure, but disagrees to equate “ceremony” with “revelry”.

The thematic reunions in this article include Day of Camões on June 10, June 24, triennial Reunion of the Macanese Communities and the Reunion of the Juvenile Macanese Communities. All of them are well-planned, well-organized and theme-related Macanese gatherings.

June 10 is Portugal Day and anniversary of the death of the prestigious Portuguese poet Camões. In 1977, Portuguese authorities officially named this date as “Day of Portugal, Camões, and the Portuguese Communities”. There is a flag-raising ceremony at the Consulate-General of Portugal in Macao. After that, on every Portugal Day Macanese people gather at Garden of Luís de Camões to commemorate the works of this poet. Students and non-governmental societies gather at the stone cave in the garden where Camões supposedly composed his famous epic *Os Lusíadas*. They offer flowers, sing Portuguese songs in chorus and recite his poems.

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Portuguese and Macanese visit the statue of Luis de Camões. Photo courtesy of International Institute of Macao.

The Feast of Saint John on June 24, originally a Christian holiday, is now a commemoration of the victory of Battle of Macao in 1622 during the Dutch–Portuguese War. The celebration was held at Hac Sa Beach before the Handover, and was suspended for a few years and resumed in 2007 in the form of carnival along the street outside Macao Holy House of Mercy (Santa Casa da Misericórdia).

“To be frank, the Feast of Saint John is quite a mixture of the East and the West... Now we turn it into a carnival, not just for sake of reunion, but to commemorate its history in this way. In fact, many of those who were born after 1999 don't know much about date of June 24, 1622... The occasion used to take place at Hac Sa, and now we do it along the street near The Macao Holy House of Mercy.”

(António R.J.Monteiro, 2019)



Accessories stall on the Feast of Saint John. Photo courtesy of International Institute of Macao.

With the increasing number of overseas Macanese emigrants, the first “Reunion of the Macanese Communities” was held in 1993. The routinely triennial event aims to bring the overseas Macanese back to Macao, with an exception of one occasion a year ahead of schedule due to the Handover. The Reunion was organized by the Association to Promote the Education of the Macanese (Associação Promotora da Instrução dos Macaenses) before the Council of the Macanese Communities (Conselho das Comunidades Macaenses) was founded, with government support before and after the Handover. The role of liaisons was

majorly assumed by the 13 overseas Macao Houses (Casas de Macau) until the Council of the Macanese Communities took the responsibility of integrating and connecting global Macao Houses and planning the Reunion. There are 800 to 1,000 participants, aged above 45. The Reunion agenda includes seminars, academic exchanges, tours of World Heritage sites and Mass services.

The triennial Reunion of the Juvenile Macanese Communities (Encontro da Comunidade Juvenil Macaense) began in 2009 since there are age gaps among those who return to Macao for community reunion. The first two occasions were sponsored by the Council of the Macanese Communities, and the Macanese Youth Association (Associação dos Jovens Macaenses) took the torch since 2015 because the

former began to function as liaison. There are over 100 participants, aged between 18 and 45. The major difference between the two events lies in the cause of organization, the numbers of participants, ages and event agenda.

3.1 Ritual Conjunction of Nobility and Pleasure

Thematic celebrations are elitist in “ceremonies” but popular in styles. The combination of popularity and elitism in rituals makes an important strategy in thematic celebrations. The union of “celebration” and “ceremony” means the union of “pleasure” and “nobility”. “Celebration” is the major component yielded from emotional power while “ceremony” maintains the formality and structure. Although rituals are frequently related to solemnity and serenity, reverence



Group photo of the participants of “The Reunion of the Macanese Communities”, 2016. Photo courtesy of International Institute of Macao.

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and worship, order and regulations, Durkheim doesn't deny the value of pleasure in rituals, and thinks that games affect the comfort that worshipers derive from rituals, because entertainment is a formality of spiritual reproduction, and that is the primary goal of fervent worship. (Durkheim, 2006, p.58)

According to American anthropologist Grimes, games are the origin and outcome of rituals. The performances we get ourselves involved with are a game itself, a moment of cultural creation. (Ronald Grimes, 2008, p.30) In thematic celebrations, like the Reunion of the Macanese Communities and the Reunion of the Juvenile Macanese Communities, the traditional ceremonial framework has been abandoned and new practices are adopted, like drama performances, sightseeing and interpretations of priests. Also, through the imitative learning of the dragon dance and lion dance, as well as Macanese cuisine, these activities contribute to achieve the collective ecstasy in fervent worship and appeals to more of the younger generations.

“Many of us are old-time Macanese, who moved abroad and now come back. They have quite a lot of stories to tell. How they missed Macao and the things here in Macao. What it was like in the past and what it is like now. They take photos too. It's a nice thing to bring them back. It's a memory. I believe Macao government has done a great job offering them opportunities to return, once in three or four years. They also bring their grandchildren along to see what Macao was like in the past. There's even music of that time too, live show of bands like 'Tuna Macanese', and they bring their own bands too and sing songs.”
(Ana Maria Manhão Sou, 2019)

“Ours is the gathering of the young people, aged from 18 to 45. It's supposed to be more dynamic, so we figure out some activities each

time. Take last gathering, we taught them to cook Macanese food, minchi. And sightseeing too, the World Heritages are must-go. The most popular one this year was dancing classes, Portuguese folk dance in the morning, dragon dance and lion dance in the afternoon. We provided them with a marvelous opportunity of cultural experience, Portuguese tradition as well as Chinese tradition.”

(Paula Cristina Pereira Carion, 2019)



Young Macanese learning Lion Dance.
Photo courtesy of International Institute of Macao.

Splendid and elegant as some of the sites are, participants are mobilized by singing and dance, emotional exchanges are displayed in greeting exchanges, and in this way, symbol consumption of the view of old-time Macao. In applause and cheers of audience, the rituals of social gathering communicate emotional bonds through “celebration” and develop a sense of belonging. What matters is not imposing or commodifying the meaning, but turning the event into an outdoor church, integrating “pleasure of nobility” and “nobility of pleasure” into community behaviors and situations. The two-way communication between realistic meaning and pleasure, and the demonstration of aesthetic and entertaining significance, contribute to reclaiming the sense of belonging to Macao and collective memory.

3.2 Life-community and Collective Identity

According to Max Sheler, the social forms of life-community are family, clan, tribe, aboriginal, and “people” in a non-political sense of the term. Psychological contagion may result in little or no mutual understanding between individuals, but there is an “inherent comprehension” among members of life-communication, including a decent portion of fellow feelings. Strictly speaking, a life-community is not composed of individuals, but “members”, who share certain particular self-ruled common experience. (Manfred S. Frings, 2006, p.90)

During the 2016 Reunion of the Macanese Communities, *Doci Papiaçam di Macau* re-performed their “Unga Tea di Dream” (A Tea for a Dream) after its previous show during the Macao Art Festival, which can be regarded as agenda repetition. The protagonist of the drama, Camila, a struggling young visiting scholar under the influence of a cup of “ten-thousand-year tea”, was turned into a time traveler back to the old-time Macao, where she was inquired by people she encountered, “Who are you? Whose daughter are you?” The drama is a re-creation of the scenario, the people and the life of old-time Macao. Repetition is persuasion in communication, reminding the audience of highly credible sources and the content itself, strengthening emotional bonds. The drama expresses the wish to “stay here” through the protagonist, that’s an emotional call for memory of the past, and a call for the individual diaspora members. The drama ended with “Macao Champurado” in chorus, conveying the core meaning of the work — “Those who belong here will surely stay, and those who are afar will surely return.”²

Compared to traditional celebration and religious rituals, the performances at thematic reunions focus on certain remarkable themes, thus providing symbolic resources for expressive activities. The ritual viewers gain collective identity by marking the collective memories for Macanese group and expressing positive energy as well as cultural diversities of Macao.



Macanese at a masquerade. Photo by Zhou Yanshan.



Miguel de Senna Fernandes at a masquerade. Photo by Zhou Yanshan.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of three categories of massive Macanese reunions, i.e. religious rituals, traditional celebrations and thematic celebrations, and supported by the reflections of participant observation and in-depth interview with numerous subjects, the article comes to the following conclusion: stable indicators as blood, facial features, language and religion will be applied in defining identity and ethnicity and cultural identity. The significance of massive reunion lies in the calling of entity and collective memory through inspiring ritual emotions, and the ritual contexts involve interactive contextual strategies and symbolic objects.

This article maintains that religious activities as “rituals” are god–man and man–man interactions, that homage to “model” and historic glories carries significant meaning to thematic gatherings as “celebration”, and that with application of social media, traditional celebrations as “ceremonies” are “the invention of tradition”. **RC**

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NOTES

- 1 This article is part of the academic result under the project of the Faculty Research Grants of MUST (Strength Team Research Grants, STRGs)-Ref. No: FRG-18-016-FA.
- 2 The lyrics were from the song “Perdido” (Lost) in the context of the story of a girl who dived into a dream that made her travel to a much older time of Macao. The hidden question is: what/where Macanese belong to? The lyrics are in patoá: “Quim sâm daqui, logo ficâ/ Quim di longi, returná”.

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