





# The Future of Macao's Past: An Epilogue

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## INTRODUCTION

"We want to make sure that Macao's application for UNESCO World Heritage listing is not just to boost Macao's image, but to have real and positive effects on the community in the long run."

Dr. Daniel C. W. Tse  
Chairman of the *Macao Vision* Conference Academic Committee  
(Quotation from his Opening Address for the *Macao Vision* International Conference)

The Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region has made it clear that it is determined to strengthen its efforts in conserving its cultural heritage and to be on a par with other world cities. The question is how to do it and what approaches should be taken. This leads to the questions raised by Dr. Tse in his Opening Address:

1. What can we do with our heritage in light of the exciting developments we face in this new era of Macao?

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SBS, MBE, HKIA, RIBA, JP. Professor, arquitecto registado, fundador e director do Programa de Conservação de Arquitectura da Universidade de Hong Kong. Mestrado em Arquitectura e em Estudos Asiáticos pela Universidade do Oregon. Nomeado pelo Governo da RAEHK como membro do Conselho de Administração da Autoridade de Renovação Urbana, na qual é Presidente da Comissão de Planeamento, Desenvolvimento e Conservação, emitindo directrizes para o design e conservação urbanos. O Professor Lung também tem sido conselheiro do Governo nas políticas e estratégias relacionadas com a protecção da herança em Hong Kong, desde que foi nomeado para o Conselho de Antiguidades em 1989, e para Presidente em 1991. Também é membro da Comissão de Cultura e Herança.

**Previous page:** General view of St. Paul's Ruins, early 20th century. Part of the walls of the former College of Mater Dei is still visible. Arquivo Histórico de Macau (Macao Historic Archives).

2. How do we make extra mileage out of it?  
3. How can it bring enrichment to our community life?

4. How do we share our rich cultural heritage with the rest of the world?

This conference Epilogue summarises the views and expert opinions expressed in the Conference, which has been described by Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region, Mr. Edmund Ho, as a reference for Macao's long-term planning and urban development. Although it concludes the three-day conference held in Macao, it marks an opening chapter in Macao's heritage conservation, as aptly put by T. S. Eliot in the last verses of *Four Quartets*, *Little Gidding* (1943):

*What we call the beginning is often the end.  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.*

It is from this end of the conference that I begin my Epilogue. In writing, I have a single purpose in mind: how best this summation of views can help lay the foundation for conserving Macao's heritage as well as for planning its future. I have, therefore, taken the liberty of summarizing views expressed in the conference according to three main aspects, namely,

1. cultural significance;
2. conservation and urban development;
3. economic value of heritage conservation.

## CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The essential ingredient needed for a city to excel and become a world city is the attitude of its citizens towards culture and heritage. A government should therefore consider the funding given to develop facilities in the city a long-term investment to enhance the level of cultural sophistication of its citizens. The ultimate benefit of a culturally sophisticated city is the sense of pride and belonging

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developed among its citizens, which is the critical element that holds an urban society together and sustains it into the future.<sup>1</sup>

Macao already has a cultural system of its own through its historical development under the former Portuguese administration. Macao's unique blend of the East and the West—the Cantonese roots and the Portuguese legacy—defines its cultural character in the broad sense. The historical process is what shapes the cultural characteristics and heritage in the forms of architecture, the built environment, customs, traditions and cuisine, all of which are the cultural assets that define cultural identity.

The cultural mission and vision of Macao, therefore, is to remain a place of exchange between the orient and occident (*significance*), whose dominating mainstay is its authentic, sustainable and well-managed cultural heritage (*role of culture*). This cultural heritage, supported by the modern entertainment, tourism and convention industries (*overall development strategy*) under the “one country, two systems” principle, will serve to enhance the quality of life of the local community (*ensuring sustainability*).<sup>2</sup>

The question is thus not about forming a specific new culture, but to recognize what Macao already has, and to further develop and refine it for its own sustainable future. This can be achieved by no other means than the education of the public, all half a million people of Macao, and, in particular, the younger generation who will be Macao's future leaders: politicians, community and business leaders, and professionals. They are the people who will make decisions that will affect the future cultural identity of Macao, so they should be made aware of Macao's history and cultural heritage through education, and learn to appreciate and treasure them.

## CONSERVATION AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Macao has the potential to establish itself in the world as a great cosmopolitan city, especially once the new gaming industries are in place and running. This is largely due to the government and the community's readiness to accept new ideas and new trends, and, more importantly, the local people's willingness to open themselves to outsiders—international investors, expatriate workers and foreign tourists—and accept

them as members of the Macao community. This ‘open-door’ policy has to be maintained in order to sustain the image and characteristics of Macao as a cosmopolitan city.

Macao has many unique historic buildings and sites, and almost each and every one of them possesses great cultural significance and distinct character. Hence, every effort has to be made to cater for the long-term management of these heritage buildings and sites. In addition to the overall conservation plan executed by the Cultural Institute's Cultural Heritage Department, the specific requirements of each site are met through individual site management regimes. This issue will become more pronounced should certain places in Macao be declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In this respect, UNESCO has a framework of guidelines that are intended to protect designated World Heritage Sites from over-exploitation and to assist managers in fulfilling their role by understanding what makes the site significant and protecting it from the numerous threats. Based on these guidelines, specific conservation plans can be refined for individual buildings and sites.<sup>3</sup>

It is equally necessary to have regular public consultations to encourage citizens' participation in and commitment to the conservation effort. These are measures that help to ensure good conservation practice. In addition, Macao has to train its own people to meet this challenge, and at the same time, invite overseas experts to assist. Tertiary institutions in Macao have a key role to play in offering not only research and technical assistance for Macao's heritage conservation, but also, and more importantly, providing professional training in the field of heritage conservation.<sup>4</sup>

On a macro level, there needs to be a tie-in between the overall conservation and management policy for all heritage buildings and sites in Macao and the plethora of plans for the future development of the city. In the planning process, mechanisms such as ‘cultural impact assessment’ (CIA) have to be implemented in order to provide for a fair and equitable, transparent and legal instrument whereby all the stakeholders are able to follow and arrive at a common goal.<sup>5</sup> The new city and the old city need to be examined in an integrated and holistic manner. At times, when conservation effort comes to a standstill because the redevelopment of a historic site becomes a critical issue, the ‘transfer of development rights’ (TDR)



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mechanism can be employed. Historic cities like Hoi An (Vietnam) and Bath (U.K.) are good examples of how comprehensive conservation of the whole city or conservation area has been implemented.<sup>6</sup>

It is understandable that given the current economic situation, there is a need to place more attention on the competing demand for land, creating opportunities for more employment and higher profit for landowners. It is therefore not surprising that developers may prefer to give priority to redevelopment and new construction rather than conservation. For individual owners of heritage buildings and sites, it is probably not their preferred option to invest in conservation and adaptive reuse of their properties. Although such an attitude is shortsighted, it is accepted by the community in general. Given such a situation, the government should seize the opportunity to take a bold step forward before things become irreversible, and act as the promoter of conservation projects not only as an opportunity to educate the public but also as a means to prepare for a sustainable cultural future.

The development of Macao will be focused on the economy, and, in particular as a service provider for the gaming and tourism industries. The nature of such economic development, if left unchecked, may result in a society increasingly dominated by speculators and opportunists who see Macao as no more than a transitional place where money is quickly made and freely spent. Such a negative societal development would severely undermine Macao's ambition to become a world city in culture and cultural heritage. Fortunately, this matter has been recognised, and the next issue will be how to prevent this situation from emerging.

## ECONOMIC VALUE OF HERITAGE CONSERVATION

The idea of using heritage as a venue for good business is nothing new in Macao. Sixty percent of Macao's retail revenue comes from shops located in the conservation zones. Such successful examples can demonstrate to the public the economic value that heritage conservation can bring. The highly successful pedestrianisation of Largo de Senado, in terms of the increased business brought to shop owners and the enrichment of the physical and socio-economic

environment, is an exemplary case of demonstrating to the community the benefits of conservation.<sup>7</sup>

In considering the protection of heritage buildings and sites, economic viability often comes up as the prime motivation. For the die-hard fundamental conservationists, who prefer to turn historic buildings into monuments and museums, to entertain the idea of reaping economic returns from conservation is akin to committing a sin. However, not every old building can be qualified as a monument or is suitable for turning into a museum. Besides being a dead-end approach to conservation, monuments and museums are, more often than not, expensive public liabilities that have to be sustained with continuous governmental funding (which is, after all, the taxpayers' money, lest we forget). Precedents have proven that successful conservation projects are very often those that are also economically self-sustainable.

The mindset of local people tended to be that once old buildings lack the desired modern facilities, they should be replaced without any consideration of rehabilitation. Subsequently, many old buildings have been demolished rather than given a new lease of life through adaptive reuse. The crux of the problem is the lack of understanding and appreciation of the benefits of adaptive reuse. The following cases illustrate the importance of how local public will has contributed to the success of adaptive-reuse conservation projects.

Case 1: Phuket. The local community—residents, merchants and the municipalities—collectively agreed that Phuket's old town area should be renewed through conservation. This strong public will in support of conservation resulted in the renovation and renewal of many popular tourist spots, and has since boosted Phuket's tourist industry.<sup>8</sup>

Case 2: Penang. This is a case of a bottom-up approach in conservation, in which local residents have been directly involved in drafting the plan for the conservation of the old town. The progress of the project, which is currently half completed, is continuously driven by the residents, who are the direct stakeholders. Today, the revived old town has attracted many visitors, who not only experience a well-conserved traditional setting, but a strong sense of community spirit as well.<sup>9</sup>

As the two cases have shown, the greatest economic benefit in conservation projects is revenue through *tourism*. More conserved heritage buildings

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and sites means more cultural activities and facilities, which will in turn attract more tourists. Tourism is becoming the world's number one industry. The 'cultural industries' (as North Americans love to call them) create employment and have major job-creation impacts.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

After listening to the comments and opinions from conference participants, it is my opinion that if Macao strives to become a world city, the government will need to continue its spending on heritage conservation. The primary social objective of such a venture is to improve the quality of life of Macao's residents as well as to raise the level of public awareness of their own heritage. This will help to foster a strong sense of pride and understanding among the people of Macao. Without a visionary government, it will take many more generations of people before society will come to recognize the uniqueness of its heritage and identify with its own culture.<sup>10</sup>

What is now important for the Macao SAR Government to do is, in my opinion, to find ways to digest and implement the multitude of suggestions given in various public forums, such as this conference.

In this respect, I would offer the following remarks in concluding this Epilogue:

1. It would be desirable for Macao's different government administrative departments to work closely together towards matters relating to cultural heritage and its conservation.

2. It would be desirable to generate and arouse a greater interest in cultural heritage-related issues among the different sectors and communities in Macao.

3. It would be desirable to set up a statutory agency to advise the highest authority on cultural heritage issues and to oversee the overall direction in developing and protecting Macao's cultural heritage.

4. It would be desirable to keep a close monitoring on the development of the UNESCO World Heritage Nomination and to refine a conservation policy and site-specific conservation plans for future maintenance and protection of the nominated sites.

5. It would be desirable to establish a mechanism whereby a certain percentage of the revenue generated from tourism would be reserved as a sinking fund or foundation to support heritage conservation work.

I would like to end this Epilogue with a famous quotation from T. S. Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1920): "Tradition . . . cannot be inherited, and if you want it, you must obtain it by great labour." **RC**

## NOTES

- 1 I have addressed the point 'why cities need cultural development' on many occasions, and particularly in a paper entitled "Why Do Great Cities Spend Resources on Developing Arts, Cultural and Recreational Facilities and Programmes?" presented in *4 Asia-Pacific City Development Forum*, held in Taipei, organised by Taipei Municipal Government on November 1&2, 2001.
- 2 See: Ferdinand Lamarca, "Cultural Significance and Vision of Macao: Are They Compatible? If Not, How to Make Them Compatible?" in *The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision Conference Kit* (Macao: Cultural Institute, 2002), 64-65.
- 3 See: Herbert Stovel, "Approaches to Managing Urban Transformation for Historic Cities," in *The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision Conference Kit* (Macao: Cultural Institute, 2002), 84.
- 4 See: Amita Baig, "The Politics of Cultural Significance in *The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision Conference Kit* (Macao: Cultural Institute, 2002), 77.
- 5 In one of the workshop sessions, rapporteur Raymond Chan Wai Kin, a MSc (Conservation) student at The University of Hong Kong, made the following remark: "The CIA is an important tool in the consultation process. It reveals the socially and culturally

significant context of a conservation project and allows the authority to make an inventory of the social needs and requirements, and a justification of their action. A CIA should be prepared by specialists and documented as part of the public document for displays."

- 6 For TDR, see: Harold Kalman, "Adaptive Re-use: Learning from Vancouver," in *The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision Conference Kit* (Macao: Cultural Institute, 2002), 158.
- 7 See: Christopher Pound, "Lessons from World Heritage Experience," in *The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision Conference Kit* (Macao: Cultural Institute, 2002), 108.
- 8 Case quoted from Yongtanit Pimonsathean, "Current Issues Concerning Adaptive Re-use in the Conservation of Urban Cultural Heritage," in *The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision Conference Kit* (Macao: Cultural Institute, 2002), 131-138.
- 9 Case quoted from Laurence Loh, "New Use – New Fit," in *The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision Conference Kit* (Macao: Cultural Institute, 2002), 140-147.
- 10 See: Yongtanit Pimonsathean, "Current Issues Concerning Adaptive Re-use in the Conservation of Urban Cultural Heritage," in *The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision Conference Kit* (Macao: Cultural Institute, 2002), 135-136.