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Macao's Cultural Significance and Vision

Are They,
or Can They Be,
Compatible?

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"A nation is alive when its culture is alive."

Maxim posted at the door of the Kabul Museum

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After Macao was handed back by Portugal to China on December 20, 1999, many significant changes happened. Most important of these was the breaking of the gambling monopoly tycoon Stanley Ho had held for 40 years. The end of the monopoly has paved the way for the investment of vast sums of money by two Las Vegas-based gambling giants, and the new company of Mr. Stanley Ho. The investments mean new culture, new city-scope, new people, a new mode of economy and operation.

Mr. Ho plans to "...invest \$4.7 billion in Macao's casino industry over the next five years, building a deluxe hotel near the current Lisboa hotel and a 'supreme private club' for high stakes games (as well as) an amusement park near Praia Grande Bay and a cultural village..." (*South China Morning Post*, February 2, 2002, p. 2). The Galaxy Casino Co. Ltd., the second winning company, plans to put up the new US\$800 million Venetian Resort on a 93-hectare site which is likely to be finished by 2005 (*Hong Kong Mail*, February 4, 2002, p. 3). On the other hand, Wynn Resorts, the third winning bidder, will put up a Macao-style casino with the quality of Las Vegas (*South China Morning Post*, *ibid.*).

The question now is whether these new developments will have an adverse impact on the way of life of the people and the cultural significance of the place.

This paper first attempts to look into the cultural heritage significance of Macao and its vision. It then proceeds to analyze the compatibility of the vision of the place with its cultural heritage significance.

By way of methodology, the model developed by UNESCO in its project "Culture Heritage Management and Tourism: *Models for Cooperation among Stakeholders*" is used to analyze the compatibility of Macao's cultural significance and its vision.

CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Cultural heritage is the living memory of the people of their culture. It is expressed in many forms, both tangible – monuments, landscapes, objects and intangible – languages, know-how, the performing arts, music, etc. (Matsuura, *The World Heritage Newsletter*, March-April 2002). But what is cultural significance?

Cultural heritage significance is an assertion of the cultural identity of a place, which distinguishes it

PATRIMÓNIO II



Bhaktapur, Nepal

The capital city of Nepal during the medieval period preserved in its integrity. The walled town is famous for its monuments, traditional style, craftsmanship and unparalleled historic assemblage. World Heritage Site since 1979.



Kandy, Sri Lanka

A sacred Buddhist site. It is famous for its Buddhist monasteries and temples, including the renowned temple of the Holy Tooth. World Heritage Site since 1988.

from other places and which gives it a unique characteristic (*Asserting an Identity*, 1997). For heritage sites that have been inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List, it is the statement used to justify their inscription. Similarly, it will be the statement that will justify the inclusion of candidates, like Macao, in the list.

The cultural significance of Bhaktapur, Nepal, is its being the capital city of Nepal during the medieval period and the fact that it is preserved in its integrity. The walled town is famous for its monuments, traditional style, craftsmanship and unparalleled historic assemblage. Time has changed a lot but the place seems to be where it was centuries ago. Thus, the ambience is such that it transports visitors back in time as they step into the territory. It has been a World Heritage Site since 1979 (*Bhaktapur Municipality*, September 2001).

Ha Hoe, South Korea, a candidate, is a typical Korean rural village which has long been the home of traditional Confucian culture. The town is famous for its splendid old temples, stone pagodas, imposing houses of the nobility and the traditional thatched roofed, stone and mud houses of farmers. It is a candidate to the Heritage List (www.unescobkk.org/culture/impact/future.htm).

Kandy, Sri Lanka is sacred Buddhist site and is famous for its Buddhist monasteries and temples,

including the renowned temple of the Holy Tooth. Kandy sits in a river valley nestled in a spectacular mountainous landscape. The place became a heritage site in 1988 (*ibid.*).

Hoi An Ancient Town, Viet Nam is an important port town dating from the 15th to the 19th century preserved in its integrity. Inscribed in 1987, it is the only old town in Viet Nam kept mostly intact. Most houses there are of traditional architecture from the 17th to 19th century and situated along traditional narrow roads. Many annual festivals as well as the traditional way of life of the people, their religions, customs and cuisine have been preserved (*Case Study of Hoi An*, 2000).

Lijiang, China is a network of traditional villages at the eastern end of the silk trade route... the ancient last stop for caravans before heading up for the Himalayas. Inscribed in 1985, it is a beautiful historic town dating from the Song Dynasty. Today the town is a well-preserved domestic tourist destination situated in a spectacular location at the foot of the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. Many old customs have survived, including the music and rituals of the Naxi people who have a unique culture blending Chinese, Tibetan and indigenous traditions (www.unescobkk.org/culture/norad-tourism/workshop).

HERITAGE II



Ha Hoe, South Korea

A typical Korean rural village which has long been the home of traditional Confucian culture.
A candidate to the Heritage List.



Hoi An, Vietnam

Important port town from the 15th to the 19th century in Southeast Asia preserved in its integrity.
Inscribed in 1987, it is the only old town in Viet Nam kept mostly intact.
World Heritage site.

Melaka, Malaysia, a candidate to the Heritage List, was a trading post for British and the Portuguese due to its strategic location on the Euro-Asian mercantile route. It is characterized by traditional temples, traditional houses and shop-houses and a coexistence of diverse styles, reflecting the multi-ethnic population of Malays, Babas and Nyonyas (Chinese and local), Chitty (Indian and local), Portuguese descendants, Chinese, Indians and Arabs making Melaka a center of diverse cultural activities. It is a candidate to the Heritage List (www.unescobkk.org/culture/impact/future.htm).

Historic Town of Vigan is “the last surviving colonial trading post in Southeast Asia.” Established in the 16th century, the place is the best-preserved example of a planned Spanish colonial city in Asia, and reflects a unique fusion of Asian building design and construction with European colonial architecture and planning (*Medina, Lamarca and Goulart*, October 2001, p.1). It became a World Heritage site in 1999.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MACAO

What is the cultural significance of Macao? From the text of the invitation program for this conference, one statement captured it succinctly for this paper writer – “an international trading port and a cultural

melting pot between the East and the West since the 16th century.”

Macao is a tiny island in the vast Southeast Asia that has nurtured the mutual influence of two cultures, that of the Portuguese and that of the Chinese, making possible a rich European and Asian blend of cultural heritage. The resulting style of architecture reflects traditional Chinese architecture and that of southern European. Structures with mixed architectural elements are many. Thus, the unique culture of Macao was created through co-existence and mutual absorption (*21st Macau City Planning Guideline Study, 1999-2020*, p. 12).

VISION

Vision is a statement of an attractive, ambitious but achievable future. It is an expression of what people want their community to become several years from now (*Development Academy of the Philippines*, 1999).

Shown below as an example is the vision statement of the Historic Town of Vigan. This was forged by a multi-sectoral group in a workshop facilitated by the archbishop of the place way back in 1995.

“Vigan as bustling center of tourism, commerce and trade, will have a community that deeply treasures

PATRIMÓNIO II



Lijiang, China

A network of traditional villages at the eastern end of the silk trade route... the ancient last stop for caravans before heading up for the Himalayas. Inscribed in 1985, it is a beautiful historic town dating from the Song Dynasty.



Melaka, Malaysia

Trading post for British and the Portuguese due to its strategic location on the Euro-Asian mercantile route. It is a candidate to the Heritage List.

our rich cultural and historical heritage and a people who are god-fearing, self-reliant and empowered led by transformed leaders who are credible, decisive, pro-active and development-oriented” (Medina, Lamarca and Goulart, October 2001, p. 1).

This is what the people of Vigan have wanted their place to be since 1995. Their dream is very attractive and ambitious. But it has been achievable. Vigan is now a city, a vibrant and bustling center of tourism, commerce and trade.

CONSISTENCY OF VISION AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

For the vision of the place to be relevant, it has to be consistent and compatible with its cultural significance. There are four components in analyzing the appropriateness and consistency of the vision with its cultural significance as developed at the UNESCO-sponsored conference in Lijiang, China in October 2001 entitled “Culture Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Cooperation among Stakeholders.” They are as follows:

1. statement of cultural significance;
2. over-all development strategy;
3. role of culture in the development strategy; and

4. measures for ensuring sustainability of the strategy.

Using the vision statement of Vigan as an example, the statement of cultural significance is this – “the last surviving colonial trading post in Southeast Asia.”

The line in the vision that says “bustling center of tourism, commerce and trade” is compatible with the cultural significance. From 1995 up to the present and beyond, Vigan has wished to see itself as it was in the past, but now at a much more vibrant level, where goods and commodities continue to be exchanged productively and profitably.

Second, the over-all development strategy is the “promotion of tourism, commerce and industry as tools for economic empowerment.”

Third, the role of culture in the development strategy is that it is “...the center around which tourism, industry and commerce revolve.”

Fourth, the measures for ensuring sustainability and success of the strategy are the following: 1) god-fearing, self-sufficient and empowered people; and 2) credible, decisive, pro-active and development-oriented leaders.

This example clearly shows that culture becomes the center in the over-all development strategy. In more specific terms, culture is the **mainstay** of tourism.

HERITAGE II



Historic Town of Vigan, Philippines
The last surviving colonial trading post in Southeast Asia.
Established in the 16th century, the place is the best-preserved example of a planned Spanish colonial city in Asia.
It became a World Heritage site in 1999.

Tourists come to the place, foremost, to see the living heritage of the place. On the other hand, tourism becomes an effective tool for culture heritage conservation. This is the model developed in the international conference “Culture Heritage Management and Tourism: Models of Cooperation Among Stakeholders.”

THE VISION OF MACAO

The vision of Macao is culled from documents of the Macao City Government such as the *21st Century Macau City Planning Guideline Study 1999-2020*, *Asserting an Identity* and from statements of high-ranking officials of the government and a gambling tycoon as published in dailies.

According to Mr. Stanley Ho, the gambling tycoon who lost the monopoly but who has remained one of the three key players in the industry, Macao shall become the “...**place of exchanges between the Orient and the Occident.**” The strategy with which to realize this is investment in gaming-related projects as well as in cultural undertakings and tourism in general (*South China Morning Post*, February 19, 2002, p. 2). While Mr. Ho envisions the construction of a deluxe hotel and high-stakes club, he also desires the establishment of a “cultural village” depicting Chinese

and Latin lifestyles in the early 19th century in Macao’s old quarter in the Inner Harbor.

Mr. Francis Tam Pak-yuen, Secretary for Economy and Finance and Head of the Casino Tender Commission, on the other hand, envisions Macao to be “**an international convention center and holiday resort**” (*South China Morning Post*, February 9, 2002, p. 1).

The *21st Century Macau City Planning Guideline Study* has the following vision for Macau:

- International tourist leisure resort... whose dominating mainstay should be modern entertainment and tourist services led by the gambling industry;
- A definite stop-over point for travelers from the mainland and overseas through multi-faceted tourism...;
- Showcase of development of China in the 21st Century under the principle of “one country, two systems”; and
- City specializing in external business, trades and transportation in the South China Economic Ring.

Finally, Ms. Heidi Ho, President of the Cultural Institute of Macao has this grand vision for Macao – **A City of Culture.**

The Institute explains this vision in terms of the following:

Heritage management as a sustainable resource associated with the general cultural benefit of the local community and the quality of progress of the tourism industry.

To preserve the cultural heritage of the place, the Cultural Institute of Macao was established in 1982. In 1984 and 1992, two decrees were issued concerning the creation of the “Committee for the Defense of the Architectural, Environmental and Cultural Heritage of Macau.”

To attract tourists, the government has developed a homepage, CD-ROMs, a City Guide and other brochures about the cultural heritage of the place. Second, it has introduced the Culture Heritage Tours of Macao. Third, it has vigorously supported academic research on the history and cultural heritage of the city.

To enhance the awareness of citizens as to the value of their heritage, the government seeks to educate the citizens on the city’s cultural heritage

PATRIMÓNIO II



Macao

"An international trading port and a cultural melting pot between the East and the West since the 16th century."

Photo by Wong Ho Sang, 1998 (IC Archives).

through informative exhibitions, seminars, educational games and competitions, among others.

All these strategies have been crafted with the end view of making Macao a City of Culture.

ATTEMPTS AT FORMULATING A VISION

From the statements gathered, this paper writer formulated some statements for comment by the

participants of this conference, and for possible input to the succeeding workshop. They are as follows:

1. Place of exchanges between the Orient and the Occident fueled by investments in gaming-related endeavors as well as in sustainable cultural undertakings under the "one country, two systems" principle, for the general benefit of the local community;

2. Place of exchanges between the Orient and the Occident whose dominating mainstay should be

HERITAGE II

modern entertainment and tourist services led by gambling industry, supported by its sustainably managed cultural heritage under the “one country, two systems” principle, for the welfare of the local community;

3. An international convention center and holiday resort propped up by investments in gaming-related endeavors as well as in cultural undertakings under the “one country, two systems” principle; and

4. A stop-over point for travelers from the mainland and overseas, whose dominating mainstay should be modern entertainment and tourist services led by gambling industry, supported by its rich cultural heritage under the “one country, two systems” principle.

ARE MACAO'S VISION AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE COMPATIBLE?

The paper writer now proceeds to analyze the compatibility of Macao's vision with its cultural significance using the UNESCO framework. Two statements of vision will be used for analysis. The first vision is as follows:

Place of exchanges between the Orient and the Occident fueled by investments in gaming-related endeavors as well as in cultural undertakings under the “one country, two systems” principle for the general benefit of the local community.

First, the statement of cultural significance of Macao is this – “an international trade port and cultural melting pot between the East and the West since the 16th century.”

In the proposed vision, the line “place of exchanges between the Orient and the Occident,” appears to be consistent with its cultural significance because Macao still envisions itself as place where enhanced trade and commerce, tourism and culture shall flourish.

Second, the “promotion of investments in **both** gaming-related endeavors as well as in sustainable cultural undertakings” becomes the overall strategy for further economic empowerment.

Third, concerning its role in the development strategy, the promotion of culture heritage is co-equal tool for economic development.

Fourth, the measures for ensuring sustainability and success of the strategy are the “... support of the

Central government” (*China Daily*, February 18, 2002, p.1) and the “adequate administrative autonomy of Macao based on the ‘one country, two systems’ principle.”

Parenthetically, for completeness and greater clarity, there are vision statements that include the clientele and the effect of development strategies on them. This paper writer did this.

The clientele in this case is the local community of Macao and the impact of the promotion of investments in both gaming-related endeavors as well as in sustainable cultural undertakings is their **total development**.

This issue becomes very relevant in the light of the experiences of other heritage sites, like Bhaktapur and Hoi An where tourism has benefited only a few (UNESCO, *Summaries of Case Studies*, 2000). Accordingly, Macao dreams, or should dream, that it is the local community that will benefit more from development.

The second vision of Macao below is again analyzed in terms of its compatibility with its cultural significance using the UNESCO framework.

“Place of exchanges between the Orient and the Occident whose dominating mainstay should be modern entertainment and tourist services led by gambling industry, supported by its sustainably managed cultural heritage under the “one country, two systems” principle, for the welfare of the local community”.

As in the previous analysis, the line “place of exchanges between the Orient and the Occident,” appears to be consistent with its cultural significance.

Second, the “the promotion of modern entertainment and tourist services led by gambling industry” becomes the overall strategy for further economic empowerment.

Third, concerning its role in the development strategy, “the promotion of cultural heritage is consigned to the ‘backstage’ in the drama of economic development.”

Does this not draw Macao away from its cultural significance? But from all indications, this is the development strategy that the government is bent on adapting!

Fourth, the measures for ensuring sustainability and success of the strategy are the “... support of the Central government” (*China Daily*, February 18, 2002,

PATRIMÓNIO II

p.1) and the “adequate administrative autonomy of Macao based on the ‘one country, two systems’ principle.” It is similar with the first vision.

CONCLUSION

None of the two possible visions of Macao presented above can make cultural heritage the primary consideration for tourism or the center around which tourism revolves. At best, as with the first vision, culture can hope to be co-equal or a partner of modern entertainment in attracting tourists.

At worst, culture can be relegated to the backstage of economic development where the mainstay is the gambling industry.

Therefore, the challenge for Macao SAR Government, especially, the Macao Cultural Institute is to muster all its efforts in promoting the cultural heritage of the place as a partner of equal significance of the gambling industry in attracting tourists.

UNESCO, to the mind of this paper writer, will demand no less if the place wishes to be inscribed in the World Heritage List. **RC**

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