

The Land of the Lotus Flower A Haven for the Diasporised

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Plate 1. The Land of the Lotus Flower.
Photograph by the author.



Plate 2. Liang Piyun, ca. 2002.
Courtesy of Professor Shi Yidui.



Macao—the Land of the Lotus Flower—has played an indispensable role in succouring the desperate (Plate 1). This former Portuguese enclave was once a sanctuary for European missionaries and Japanese Christians fleeing religious persecution;¹ and a transitory shelter for the uprooted Chinese during the socio-political turmoil in China. It has, moreover, proved itself to be a city of anchorage—a haven for people taking root there.

Liang Piyun 梁披云 (alternative spelling in Cantonese: Leung Pai-wan), also known as Liang Xueyu 梁雪予 (1907-2010) (Plate 2), settled in Macao after having become diasporised.² Born in Quanzhou, Fujian province, Liang was an intellectual, educationalist, social activist, calligrapher and poet. In his youth, he advocated ‘national salvation through education’ in the aftermath of the collapse of the Qing Empire (1644-1911). The dawn of the 20th century in China was a chaotic epoch that saw mass migrations of distressed Chinese abroad; and a period of intense ideological ferment as well.

At the peak of the first phase of the civil war between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party (1927-1936),³ Liang Piyun was uprooted from his home soil. He migrated to Malaya (reconstituted as Malaysia in 1963) in 1933 and settled

in Indonesia in 1936. He later came back to China but had to flee again to Indonesia just before the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Given the bloody anti-Chinese outbreaks in Jakarta in 1965, he left for Beijing but decamped to Macao in 1966 at the start of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).⁴ He lived a displaced and nomadic life, roving and roaming in Southeast Asia during the tumultuous era of calamitous changes, and Macao came to be his permanent destination and resting place. He was the archetype of a rootless diaspora, floating like duckweed, looking for a safe shelter.⁵

By employing Liang Piyun’s experience of diasporisation as an example, this paper seeks to address Macao as a haven for the returned overseas Chinese, or the diasporised. It discusses Liang’s contributions to the promotion of education in his hometown Quanzhou, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, and Macao, as well as his concerted efforts to uphold Chinese calligraphy as a cultural legacy in Hong Kong and Macao. Predicated on Liang’s classical poems, it examines how he adjusted and situated himself; and underwent regeneration and reinvigoration in the Land of the Lotus Flower. In his golden years he was honoured as the pride of Macao.

A PAEAN TO THE LOTUS

Macao has been poetically described as the Land of the Lotus Flower (Lianhua Di 蓮花地), or Island of the Lotus Flower (Lianhua Dao 蓮花島), because of its cartographic shape resembling a lotus. The Macao peninsula itself is likened to the flower or bud; and the narrow isthmus that connects peninsular Macao to Zhongshan county, Guangdong province, is likened to the stem (Plate 3).

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Plate 3. A blooming lotus flower. Courtesy of Ms Caroline Y. L. Lai.

Macao’s cartographic resemblance to the lotus is reflected in naming places. One of Macao’s oldest temples (near the Border Gate) is called Lotus Peak Temple (Lian Feng Miao 莲峰庙), which was believed to have been built in 1592 (Tang, 1994: 197). The hill that this famous temple leans against is known as Lotus Peak Hill (Lian Feng Shan 莲峰山). The Pearl River surrounding Macao is lyrically dubbed Lotus Ocean (Lianyang 莲洋).

Macao has also been alluded to as the lotus flower in literary renditions. Wu Li 吴历 (1632-1718), a notable painter-scholar, arrived at Macao in 1681 to start a new life as a Jesuit novice. He noticed, ‘The hill of Haojing [Lotus Peak Hill of Macao] looks like a [lotus] flower’ (*Haojing shan xing ke ler hua* 濠境山形可类花) (Wu, 1909: 45b). Zheng Guanying 郑观应 (1842-1921), an influential comprador-merchant, spent most of his lifetime in Shanghai. But he stated, ‘My residence is actually in the Land of the Lotus Flower’ (*Nong jia zheng zhu lianhua di* 侬家正住莲花地) (Zheng, 1995: 183).

More recently, after China resumed sovereignty over Macao in December 1999, the lotus flower, in white, was adopted as the floral motif on the regional flag.⁶ In the vicinity of the Forum de Macao is Lotus Square, where a large bronze sculpture sits – ‘Lotus Flower in Full Bloom’ (*Sheng shi lianhua* 盛世莲花) (Plate 4). It was presented by the State Council of China in 1999. In short, Macao is redolent with the image of the lotus.

Macao’s association with the lotus is reminiscent of an elegant prose written by Zhou Dunyi 周敦颐 (also known as Zhou Lianxi 周濂溪) (1017-1073),

a Neo-Confucian philosopher of the Northern Song dynasty. In ‘A Paeon to the Lotus’ 爱莲说, Zhou writes, ‘I am only fond of the lotus, rising from the dirty mud yet remaining unstained, bathing in clear water yet not beguiling’ (*Yu du ailian zhi chu yuni er bu ran, zhuo qin lian er bu yao* 予独爱莲之出淤泥而不染，濯清涟而不妖) (quoted in Dong, 2011: 47). The prose remains Zhou’s most beloved work and evokes powerful symbolism shared by Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist traditions in China. The lotus is generally linked with purity and serenity, and is a trope to insinuate transcendence from earthly confinement. By extension, it comes to symbolise rebirth, immortality, enlightenment, spiritual growth, and self-regeneration (Tresidder, 1997: 126-127; Vries, 2004: 364-365).

As different literary texts illustrate, Macao has multifarious ‘visages’ on parade after becoming a Portuguese settlement. It has been portrayed as a stepping-stone for adventurers (Torga, 1989); a drifting island where people on the move merely pass by (Yi, 1990); and a temporary asylum for midway sojourners (Pan, 1993). Quite different from a sense of impermanence and rootlessness, Macao can impart a reality of permanence and rootedness. It readily displays its ‘visage’ as the Land of the Lotus Flower that can transcend limitation and offer peace and security. Metonymically, it stands for a safe harbour for anchorage where the desperate can take root and regenerate.

AN EDUCATIONALIST IN A NOMADIC LIFE

Liang Piyun was born into a gentry-scholar family. His father Liang Shengji 梁绳基 (1882-1924) passed the imperial civil service examination at the county level for the elementary *xiucai* 秀才 degree at the age of fifteen (Liang, 2003: 98), and soon became a scholar-turned-merchant. Merchants and traders had been traditionally discriminated against, if not disdained by the other classes, but during the second half of the 19th century in China there was no rigid social hierarchy between merchants and gentry. It even turned out to be a fashion for a scholar to become a merchant (Wu, 2010: 15). Liang Shengji proved to be a very successful merchant, and was a pioneering investor in the rubber industry in Malaya (Liang, 2015: 11-12). His connection with Malaya perhaps paved the way for his son’s flight later.

In the turbulent times following the demise of the impotent Qing dynasty, Liang Piyun was nurtured with

a good education. He had been tutored by his father on classical Chinese literature since boyhood and received a mission education in his early teens. In 1924 he was admitted to Shanghai University (founded in 1922) and gained a Bachelor Degree in 1926. He then moved on to Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan, twice (1926-1928; 1930-1931) as a graduate student in the School of Political Science and Economics (Liang, 2015: 21-23).⁷

In his youthful days, Liang already placed a heavy emphasis on education against the backdrop

of mass rural illiteracy. Under the circumstances of China’s humiliating defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the ensuing ‘scramble for concessions’ by Western imperialist powers on Chinese soil, in 1905 a new educational ideology was born that associated universal literacy with national wealth and power. That year significantly marked the abolition of the imperial civil service examination system, which was established in the Sui dynasty (581-618). The same year also unprecedentedly saw the promulgation

Plate 4. Large bronze sculpture ‘Lotus Flower in Full Bloom’. Photograph by the author.



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of a modern school system. The pursuit of universal literacy for nation-building and economic development became the touchstone of China’s modernisation at the turn of the 20th century, and literacy programs were of national concern. Glen Peterson has observed:

By the early 1920’s, China reformers and revolutionaries were firmly committed to the idea of universal literacy as key to China’s modernization... Individuals and organizations representing a diverse spectrum of ideological viewpoints began to work actively to promote literacy in China’s countryside (Peterson, 1997: 15).

An urban intellectual of vision, young Liang Piyun was imbued with a strong sense of national reform, and was supportive of the literacy campaign in the 1920s. He advocated education as a means to save the battered and withered country, and envisioned a strengthened and modernised China. He called for ‘national salvation through education, national revival through education, and national strength through education’ (*jiao yu jiuguo, jiao yu xingguo, jiao yu qiangguo* 教育救国、教育兴国、教育强国)(Gao, 2010: 83).

In 1928 Liang came back from Waseda University to Xiamen 厦门, a sub-provincial city of Fujian, where he worked as the Chief Editor and Director of the newspaper *Minguo Ribao* 民国日报 (Republican Daily News). In 1929 he founded Liming High School (Liming Gao Zhong 黎明高中) in his hometown Quanzhou, and was elected principal at the age of 22.⁸ In 1930 he went back to Waseda University for his studies, but returned to Quanzhou when Japan invaded China in 1931 (Liang, 2015: 73).⁹

With his involvement in revealing the corrupted governance of the Chinese Nationalist Party (almost dominated mainland China from 1928 to 1949), Liang was targeted for retaliation. In 1933 he was uprooted from his hometown and began a nomadic life in diaspora. Liming High School was also brought to a halt a year later. He fled to Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, where he earned a living by teaching at Confucian Middle School (Zunkong zhongxue 尊孔中学) (founded in 1906) and was employed as the Chief Editor of the Chinese newspaper *Yiqun Bao* 益群报 in 1934 (Liang, 2015: 103).

Liang’s nomadic adventure continued. He went on to Medan, north Sumatra, Indonesia in 1936 and acted as the Principal of Su Tung Middle School (Sudong zhongxue 苏东中学) (founded in 1931). During that time, he founded the periodical *Su Tung Monthly* 苏东月刊. In 1939 he entered Malaya again. Joined by the local Chinese who were zealous about education, he set up Zhonghua Middle School (Zhonghua zhongxue 中华中学) in Kuala Lumpur and took over the helm as the first principal (Deng, 2004:5 4-56).

The Chinese migrant community constituted a marginalised minority group in Southeast Asian countries, and the Chinese there were largely segregated from other ethnic groups. Liang’s dedication for education, on the one hand, helped safeguard the traditional Chinese cultural practices and language; and, on the other hand, helped sustain their cultural identity and increase their cultural awareness. More broadly, the education system at the Chinese schools might encourage the creation of a Chinese nationalist identity among the Chinese students, as well as reinforce Chinese cultural values. On the importance of education for the preservation of Chinese cultural identity in Southeast Asia, it has been argued:

No single institution has been more effective in maintaining a sense of China’s cultural heritage than have Chinese schools; their curricula and medium of instruction ensured that Chinese cultural values were transmitted to successive generations of young Chinese (Cushman and Wang, 1988: 33).

Indeed, Liang’s passion for education played a significant role in upholding Chinese cultural traditions and identity in Indonesia and Malaya.

In 1940 Liang was invited to join the entourage of Chen Jiageng 陈嘉庚 (1874-1961),¹⁰ a highly respected leader of overseas Chinese, and to embark on a ‘consolation’ tour to a war-torn and impoverished China. Upon his return to Malaya, he was imprisoned, because he had set foot on Chinese soil (Gao, 2010: 82). In 1943 he was back to his homeland and took up the mantle of the Principal of the National Fujian Music Professional School. A year later he was transferred to National Haijiang Professional School in Quanzhou, in the same capacity as principal. In 1947 he was appointed Director of the Provincial Department of Education of Fujian under the regime of the Republic

of China, founded by the Nationalist Party (Liang, 2015: 158).

Prior to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China by the Communist Party in October 1949, Liang was torn between the frictions of the two political entities (the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party). He was on the verge of being assassinated, but managed to escape to Hong Kong in August 1948 (Liang, 2015: 167-168). In early 1950 he continued his nomadic itinerary and reached Jakarta, where he was employed as manager in the Nanguang 南光 Company, which dealt with cotton trade. In 1952 he became the Chief Editor of the Chinese monthly journal *Huaqiao Daobao* 华侨导报 (founded in September 1952). Meanwhile, he helped to tutor Chinese teachers in classical literature and Chinese history at home. In 1963 he founded the Chinese newspaper *Huoju Bao* 火炬报 and was chief editor (Huang, 1991: 249-250; Xu, 2013: 67). Liang’s experiences in the editorial affairs provided a sound foundation for his similar ventures later.

Liang was fervently interested in publishing reading materials for the Chinese people in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. For the Chinese communities in these two cities, Chinese-language newspapers/periodicals were important to spread information, and to disseminate knowledge and inspiration to the reader. These reading materials also helped foster a sense of identity and community cohesion.

Liang was a devout educationalist. Even after he had settled in Macao, his concern for education in his hometown Quanzhou was unabated. Since the closing down of Liming High School in 1934, he re-established Liming College fifty years later in 1984, which was later renamed Liming Vocational University. Obviously, he had a preference in naming academic institutions as *liming* 黎明, meaning dawn, or the coming of light. Dawn represents understanding (Vries, 2004: 161) and symbolises creation, youth, and beginning (Olderr, 1986: 36). The beginning of the twilight embraces hope and strength that Liang has long aspired in education. When he was 91 years old, he was still enthusiastic about education and reiterated his staunch belief—national salvation and strength through education (*Recreativo de Macau*, 23 December, 1998). Throughout his life, Liang was incessantly concerned about education in his homeland and in the overseas places he had been staying.

AN ESCAPE FROM THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE

Liang Piyun survived the deadly outbreaks against the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. The Indonesian Massacres of 1965-1966, one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century, were set in motion following a *coup d’état* in which six army generals were kidnapped and executed on the night of 30 September 1965. The state-sponsored purges aimed at eliminating the then-powerful Indonesian Communist Party, and local communists or their sympathisers. But soon Chinese-Indonesians, intellectuals, and countless others were targeted for persecution and reprisal. The anti-Chinese uprisings spiraled into massive killings in Jakarta, central and east Java, and Bali.¹¹ Half a million people or more, many of whom had no connection to Communism, were estimated to have been killed, while hundreds of thousands of others were held in detention centres for years (Cochrane, 2016: 1).¹²

From 1966 to 1967, it was reckoned that about 5,000 ethnic Chinese from Indonesia sought refuge in Macao (Liang, 2015: 206). In the nick of time, Liang left Jakarta for Beijing in early 1966. Having experienced the hazardous times at home and abroad, he perhaps acquired an acute sense of the imminent anti-revisionist movement—Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution. This decade-long violent class struggle kicked off on 16 May 1966 when Communist Party leaders issued a top directive to rid society of ‘members of the bourgeoisie threatening to seize political power from the proletariat’ (Mai, 2016: A1).¹³

Liang might have been aware of the even more perilous situation in his motherland—‘jumping from the frying pan into the fire’, as the saying goes. At a precarious moment, he escaped the ‘fire’ and safely arrived at Macao in September 1966 (Xu, 2013: 65). The Land of the Lotus Flower came to be a sanctuary sheltering Liang in times of adversity; and a haven for his reinvigoration, if not rebirth from the fire.

The 1960s saw the fractured impact of Communism and mounting insurrections against ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. The anti-Chinese riots in Burma (renamed Myanmar in 1989),¹⁴ and internal strife/killings in Vietnam and Cambodia also drove many diasporic ethnic Chinese to seek asylum in Macao. In view of the increasing number of the displaced returnees,¹⁵ Liang Piyun established the Association of

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Returned Overseas Chinese Macao (Aomen Guiqiao Zhonghui 澳门归侨总会) in June 1968, with its headquarters in Rua de Sacadura Cabral. He was the founding president, and continuously acted as president for eleven terms (three years for one term) until 2001.

In commemoration of the inauguration of the Association, Liang composed the following seven-character poem in 1968, in which his diasporic sensibility is revealed:

澳门归侨总会成立

榴花似火紫薇然
万里归来笑语喧
同气连枝期望切
酣歌舜日与尧天
(Liang, 1991: 146)

On the Establishment of the Association
of Returned Overseas Chinese Macao

The flowers of pomegranate and myrtle are
brightly blooming
In joyous spirit we return from thousands of
miles away
Like branches from the same tree, we aspire to
Toasting to the sun of Shun and to the sky
of Yao
(my translation)

In the poem, Liang expresses his joyous return from abroad, which hints at a stark contrast to the bitterness of life in diaspora. The summer flowers of pomegranate and myrtle perhaps signify the warmth and happiness he feels after settling in Macao. The poet also yearns for the heyday of the distant past, as suggested by ‘the sun of Shun’ and ‘the sky of Yao’. Emperors Yao and Shun are often viewed as symbols of the utopian days of peace and stability in the Xia 夏 dynasty (ca. 2100-1600 B.C.) in ancient China. Liang’s nostalgia for Chinese soil is embedded in the poetry.

When mainland China was in the vortex of the Cultural Revolution and was unavailable to, if not unsuitable for, those returned overseas Chinese, Liang tried to unite them in Portuguese Macao. This backwater turned out to be the best substitute for their sojourn. The coming into being of the Association, at that crucial moment, served the purpose of ‘community building’.

Similar to *huiguan* 会馆, or Chinese congregations, the Association functioned as a rendezvous for its congregants, and constituted ties to one another and to the native places from whence they came. It helped to foster a sense of belonging for the returnees, to ameliorate their anxieties from being marginalised and, not least to resolve their identity crisis in the diasporic community.

As its members were largely outside Chinese territory for a long time, and some of them were not competent in other languages, the Association provided lessons in Cantonese, Putonghua and English. Apart from the education programs, recreational activities were organised for youngsters. Also, the Clinic of the Association of Returned Overseas Chinese Macao was inaugurated in September 1974 offering Chinese and Western medical consultation (‘Special Issue of the 45th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Association of Returned Overseas Chinese Macao’, 2013: 43-44). Under the shield of the Association, its members were nurtured with succour and social services. Like Liang Piyun, some returnees were intellectuals and professionals, and they soon joined the workforce holding decisive positions in both private and public sectors. They *de facto* helped building Macao.

In 1978 Liang composed the following poem commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Association:

归侨总会十周年

万里归来百战身
十年生聚镜湖滨
收将四海孤雏泪
看取神州雨后春
(Liang, 1991: 184)

On the 10th Anniversary of the Association
of Returned Overseas Chinese Macao

From thousands of miles away I survive battle-
like hardship and return
Regenerating for a decade by the side of the
Mirror Lake
I wipe away the tears, like an abandoned
orphan from abroad
And welcome the rain-cleansed spring on the
mainland
(my translation)

The poem tells of Liang’s grievous suffering abroad, and his regeneration by the sea in Macao, which is poetically known as the Mirror Lake. With the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, he ‘wipes away the tears’, and feels relieved. In the last line, he likens the political disorders to the rainy weather. As spring symbolises rejuvenation and revival (Olderr, 1986: 127), as well as spiritual wisdom and salvation (Tresidder, 1997: 190), he employs the trope of ‘the rain-cleansed spring’ to denote fresh hope for a better future.

A PASSION FOR CALLIGRAPHY

Liang Piyun was a proficient calligrapher, showing scholarly élan in his works. He had practised calligraphy since his youth, and modelled his work on the styles of established masters, such as Ouyang Xun 欧阳询 (557-641), Yan Zhenqing 颜真卿 (709-785), Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101), and Zhao Mengfu 赵孟頫 (1254-1322), to name a few. Especially, he studied calligraphy from his contemporary, Yu Youren 于右任 (1879-1964),¹⁶ and acquired profound calligraphic skills.

According to his autobiography, he was not interested in calligraphy in his teenage years, nor did he pay much attention to during his university days. It was a turning point when Liu Yuwen 刘郁文, his senior friend and an expert in calligraphy, presented him with some ancient calligraphic rubbings just before he was leaving for Waseda University. He was enlightened by these gifts, which kindled his interest in calligraphy (Liang, 2003: 98). It was not until 1950 when he worked for the Nanguang Company in Jakarta that he seriously practised calligraphy, which became his favourite pastime (Shi, 1997: 19).

Liang’s passion for calligraphy flared up after he had met Chiang Da 蒋大 again in Jakarta. Chiang Da, an avid calligrapher, was his former classmate at Shanghai University. In 1953 Liang composed three poems recounting the wonderful time when he was involved in compassionate scholarly discussions with Chiang and shared his enthusiasm in calligraphy (Liang, 1991: 72-73). Moreover, in 1969 he wrote another poem after dreaming of Chiang. Liang was nostalgic for those ‘good old days’ when they espoused common ideals and were indulged in composing poetry and writing calligraphy during their leisure time in Jakarta (Liang, 1991: 147-148).

Calligraphy, known in Chinese as *shufa* 书法, or the way of writing, began as pictographic representations of phenomena in the natural world over 3,000 years ago, and is still in use today. Playing a formative role in Chinese civilisation, *shufa* is an integral part of Chinese culture and is highly revered as an artistic tradition. It is the art thought to possess the power to evoke the forces of nature, to promote social and ideological values, and to assert the creativity of individual artists (Harrist, 1999: xviii).

Shufa evolved from the earliest known writing in China on oracle bones (tortoise plastrons) and ox scapulae for divinatory communications and rituals by the rulers in the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600-1100 B.C.). Beginning in the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1100-256 B.C.), calligraphic inscriptions were cast on bronze vessels to document important events of powerful rulers and clans. In the same era, writing on bamboo and silk became common. Later, writing was also engraved on stone, or more often brushed on paper. In the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), the careful definition and classification of scripts began; while calligraphy engraved stelae were widely erected to assert ideology and public values.

The rise of calligraphy as a major art occurred at the fall of the Han dynasty and in the early Six Dynasties period (222-589).¹⁷ This period saw the burgeoning of critical and theoretical texts on the art of calligraphy, and the emergence of an art market. This period also witnessed the development of a specialised language of appreciation and assessment that metaphorically equated effects of brushwork with forms in nature or the physiology of the human body (Harrist, 1999: 3-4). During the Six Dynasties, a person’s calligraphy was generally viewed as an externalisation of the writer’s mind and personality. It was believed that calligraphy directly embodied the physical presence and creative personality of the individual writer, pointing to the essential link between writing and the human body. In this respect, Robert E. Harrist, Jr. expounds:

Good calligraphy has ‘bone’, ‘muscle’, and ‘flesh’. Concentrated in the strokes of calligraphy are the impulses that animate the writer’s body, arm, hand, wrist, and fingers, transmitted by the brush to the writing surface. This physical manifestation of the writer’s presence parallels the revelation of character, temperament, and mood, as well as the scholarly and artistic cultivation that calligraphy is thought to embody (Harrist, 1999: xix)

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The view of calligraphy embodying an artist’s identity and disposition still endures today.

It was in the Eastern Jin period (317-420) that the works of calligraphy were most central to the history of writing. Calligraphers displayed changes of speed and brush direction that were different from previous formal types of writing. This new type is known as the running and cursive script (*xingcao* 行草). Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361) was one of the innovators and the most famous of all calligraphers. Together with Yan Zhenqing, these two masters have dominated the history of calligraphy in China.

Calligraphy as an aesthetic phenomenon has different script types—seal (*zhuan* 篆书), clerical or official (*lishu* 隸书), regular or standard (*kaishu* 楷书), running or semi-cursive (*xingshu* 行书), and cursive (*caoshu* 草书). Around the third century, seal and clerical scripts were gradually replaced by standard, running, and cursive scripts in daily use.

The elevation of calligraphy to an art more depends on the visual effects rather than the literary contents that were subjected to aesthetic evaluation. Kao Yu-kung has pointed out that ‘the physical presence of the words, not their content, is the object of appreciation’ (Kao, 1991: 70). As a medium of artistic expression, calligraphy is appreciated as a form of art, apart from the meaning it communicates as language. For the sake of achieving aesthetic effects on the received forms of characters, writing calligraphy has to undergo rigorous training and practice in order to produce beauteous written communication.

Having received a proper training in traditional Chinese studies since childhood, Liang Piyun attained virtuosity in classical poetry and calligraphy. After he



Plate 5. The first issue of *Shu Pu* (*Calligraphy Magazine*), 1974. Photograph by the author.

had settled in Macao, his passion for calligraphy was rekindled. He was imbued with enormous enthusiasm in upholding calligraphy for its abiding significance as an artistic tradition in Chinese culture. So much so that he frequently travelled between Macao and Hong Kong engaging in two stupendous ventures.

TWO STUPENDOUS VENTURES

In retrospect, Liang Piyun had already acquired rich editorial experience when he was in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. With adequate knowledge gleaned from the publication sphere; and with an ambitious

plan to undertake a huge project on calligraphy, he founded *Shu Pu* 书谱 (*Calligraphy Magazine*) (Plate 5), a bi-monthly journal on calligraphy, in Hong Kong.

In the Foreword of the first issue, published in December 1974, it was stated that calligraphy had been developed as a creative art, and its different styles reflected specific epochs. *Shu Pu*’s main aims were to promote and sustain the cultural legacy of calligraphy; to arouse the general public’s interest to appreciate this art form; to introduce theories and analyses; and to elevate writing techniques (*Shu Pu*, 1974: 2). Each issue contained rubbings of distinguished stelae and calligraphic works from leading masters.

Shu Pu had a wide circulation and attracted a large readership. It reached more than 20 countries and regions, where classical Chinese characters were used. During the traumatic times of the Cultural Revolution, a period of smashing the ‘Four Olds’—old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits, the coming into existence of this calligraphy journal outside

mainland China appeared to be a rare cultural oasis in a vast desert. For those who loved calligraphy, *Shu Pu* quenched their thirst.

This monumental project received substantial donations from the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and was supported by Liang’s devoted friends, as well as his student Li Bingren 李秉仁 (1924-1977). Residing in Hong Kong, Li Bingren was taciturn and upright; and was a favourite of Liang (Xu, 2013: 60). Liang greatly praised Li’s admirable literary refinement in a poem composed in 1973, ‘Embodying a depth of spirit in profoundly skillful writing/Introducing ideas and collecting materials with great innovation’ (my translation) (*miao bi shenghua gai you shen, pan luo shi cui jin nang xin*) 妙笔生花盖有神，攀萝拾翠锦囊新 (Liang, 1991: 162).

Li Bingren was appointed Director of *Shu Pu*, but he died a relatively early death of a heart attack at the age of 53. Losing his right-hand man, Liang composed the following mournful poem in 1977:

视秉仁殒
艺文应不朽
年岁太堪伤
忍泪更何语
魂兮归有乡
(Liang, 1991: 181)

Attending Bingren’s Funeral
Literary achievement of his should be lasting
It is too heartrending for this age
With no words to say anything but to refrain
from rolling tears
Wishing his soul could return to the native place
(my translation)

The poem delineates a scene of sheer pathos. With unspeakable agony, Liang pays his final respects to young Li Bingren. The deepest sorrow is manifested in the teacher-father’s mourning for the passing away of his beloved student-son. Since Li’s death, Liang had to shoulder the mission without a very helping hand.

In 1981 Liang composed the following two-stanza poem expressing his undaunted determination to publish *Shu Pu*, despite financial and personnel problems:

书谱七周年纪念席上
七年真一瞬
回首百辛酸
守阙抱残惯
鉏荒理秽难
未容谢衰老
讵自怯风澜
腊尽梅须放
相期共岁寒
(Liang, 1991: 206-207)

On the Commemoration of the 7th Anniversary of *Shu Pu*
Seven years lightly flit by
All the austere predicaments are recalled
Getting used to the pedantic ways of toil
Digging out old habits and cultivating anew
are arduous
Senility cannot be an excuse
Let alone the fear of the stormy waves
Like the plum blossom in full bloom in winter
With you, I hope to overcome the biting coldness
(my translation)

Shu Pu had been published for seven years in Hong Kong, yet Liang still confronted immense difficulties. In the last two lines of the poem, he encouraged his partners by employing the metaphor of the plum blossom, which will bloom most vibrantly amid the winter snow, thus symbolising perseverance, strength and the ability to overcome adversity. Liang’s concerted efforts at the helm in *Shu Pu* were less than rewarding; and much to the chagrin of the ardent reader, it closed down in 1990 after surviving sixteen years and publishing 92 issues. It cost HK\$4 for the first issue and increased to HK\$16 by the last one.

Soon after founding *Shu Pu*, Liang embarked on another colossal project by editing *Zhongguo Shufa Daci Dian* 中国书法大辞典 (*Chinese Calligraphy Glossary Dictionary*) (Plate 6). The two-volume calligraphy dictionary came into being with passionate supports from a group of his scholar-friends, who contributed writings on diverse topics. It was published in 1984 and cost HK\$500. In the Preface, Liang said that *Shu*

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Plate 6. Volume I and II of *Zhongguo Shufa Daci Dian* (*Chinese Calligraphy Glossary Dictionary*), 1984. Photograph by the author.



Plate 7. *Xuelu Shigao* (*Poetic Manuscripts of the Snow Cottage*), 1991. Photograph by the author.

Pu could only meet the demands of the general reader, and he aspired to edit a sweeping calligraphy dictionary that would be far more useful for those who had a deeper interest in calligraphy as a research subject. He also bemoaned the fact that among numerous varieties of Chinese dictionaries, a sophisticated dictionary of calligraphy could not be found (Liang, 1984: 1). These remarks seemed to make plain the *raison d’être* for the project.

The dictionary is a comprehensive work comprising six parts: calligraphic styles, terminologies, biographies of well-known calligraphers throughout history, ancient calligraphy, treatises and utensils. It contains abundant illustrations of all kinds of scripts, with an entry of millions of characters. Extensively circulated around the world where there were Chinese, it was a much sought-after dictionary for studying and appreciating the art of calligraphy. In promoting calligraphy through a bleak period, Liang Piyun was a persevering vanguard in publishing *Shu Pu* and *Zhongguo Shufa Daci Dian*.

THE POET’S ‘EVENING GLOW’

Since Liang Piyun’s youthful days, he had constantly composed poetry and was an acclaimed poet. In 1991, a collection of his classical poems, compiled from three small volumes (*ji* 集), was published in *Xuelu Shigao* 雪庐诗稿 (*Poetic Manuscripts of the Snow Cottage*) (Plate 7). *Xuelu* (snow cottage) may refer to Liang’s other name, Xueyu 雪予. The poems published were all written in calligraphic running script, which illustrated Liang’s well-trained and sturdy brushwork. Spanning sixty years from 1928 to 1988, these poems were either composed of lines of *wuyan* 五言 (five-character) or *qiyán* 七言 (seven-character).

Xuelu Shigao appears to be his autobiography in lyric expressions, and unveils an exclusive repertoire of his undergoing. Liang narrates his light-hearted travels, down-trodden experiences, impressions on places he visited, encounters with friends, and commentaries on current affairs at home and abroad. In addition, he chronicles his involvement in various kinds of activities at different phases of his life. His poetic works are characteristically a natural flow of personal feelings as exemplified in those discussed above.

In the Afterword of *Xuelu Shigao*, Huang Xiaofeng 黄晓峰, Executive Editor of the Cultural Institute of

Macao (now the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Macao SAR), recalled that when he visited Liang during the Chinese New Year in 1986 he accidentally ‘discovered’ and read Liang’s dust-covered manuscripts. Upon Huang’s suggestion to publish them, Liang humbly declined the offer as he considered his own poems ‘lacking excellence’ (*you que zhuan jing* 有阙专精). It was not until early 1991, when the Chinese section was set to open, that Huang earnestly repeated the request. Huang was eventually successful in obtaining his consent to publish most of the manuscripts (Huang, 1991: 251-252).

Liang Piyun’s other literary works, some of which were selected out by him for inclusion in *Xuelu Shigao* (Liang, 2013: 266), were edited by his son, Liang Chongqiu 梁仲虬 (b. 1931). They were published in *Xuelu Shigao Jiwaichao* 雪庐诗稿集外钞 (*Additional Volume of Poetic Manuscripts of the Snow Cottage*) in 2013. Containing classical poems, new poetry, couplets to friends and writings celebrating/commemorating special events, this collection offers glimpses of his early poetic talent (poems composed at thirteen and fourteen years old) and his other oeuvres up to the age of 98 in 2005.

In *Xuelu Shigao*, Liang depicts his Macao days in the following four-stanza poem, composed in 1968:

澳门杂诗

长堤散策过南湾
曲径盘回入翠鬟
云树低昂天一角
朝来爽气满松山

层楼百尺卜安居
清浅蓬莱且倚栏
浩浩烟涛春涨雨
那愁风雨乍暄寒

沙鸟飞飞一镜泓
远帆归处水云平
诘朝鱼市争肥美
忘却冲波犯险行

露槛盆栽学种花
欣欣兰菊渐抽芽
凭窗细与春风说
惜取芳菲照晚霞

(Liang, 1991: 143-144)

Rambling Thoughts on Macao

Along the embankment of Praia Grande¹⁸ I stroll
Winding paths lead to verdant hills
Clouds touch boughs at the sky’s corner
Fresh air in Guia Hill at dawn fills

A flat of a hundred feet is cosy
Reclining by the railings, as if in a placid Arcadia
The rain-drenched spring is veiled in mist
Yet I am unruffled by the sudden windy and
rainy coldness

Over the crystal waters seagulls are flying
On the idyllic sea homebound sails returning
With an abundance of fish in the morning
market
The poignant experiences of the forlorn sea are
out of memory

On the balcony I learn growing flowers
Orchids and chrysanthemums are beginning
to sprout
By the window, I gently eulogise my delight to
the spring wind
And savour the floral fragrance in the evening
glow

(my translation)

The poet paints a tranquil picture of his regenerated life in Macao. He goes for a morning walk along the Praia Grande promenade and saunters to Guia Hill, where the scenic view is captivating. Even though his dwelling is small, he feels relaxed and is not annoyed by the chilly and misty spring-time. In a solipsistic state, he watches the seagulls and homebound junks. In the fish market, where there is a bumper harvest of seafood, he tries not to remember the dangers of the pernicious sea voyages. He also portrays a leisure mood in gardening. His attentiveness in horticulture perhaps has a reference to the pastoral poet, Tao Qian 陶潜 (372-427), of the Eastern Jin dynasty. Tao Qian learned, on retirement, how to plant and farm, as a heartfelt appreciation of the cycle of nature.

In the autumn of his life, Liang was cherished with spring-like freshness. Macao’s landscape and seascape constitute an antidote to washing away his bitterness in life and purifying his desolation. He is

immersed in Arcadian bliss, as indicated by the last two lines: ‘By the window, I gently eulogise my delight to the spring wind/And savour the floral fragrance in the evening glow’. Apparently, he settles and adjusts well, and has a good time in the peaceful Macao days.

Liang pens a panegyric to the poetry of the sea. He employs the imagery of the calm sea to hint at regeneration, liberty and serenity, but the destructive forces of the titanic nature of the sea; and the political tidal waves he has witnessed at home and abroad are ruled out. For the nomad-poet, the Land of the Lotus Flower is the best and safest harbour, where he can anchor and lead a nascent life in the ‘evening glow’.

THE PRIDE OF MACAO

Liang Piyun’s golden age was glittered with splendid involvements in the socio-cultural milieu. Besides being the founding President of Pen Association of Macao (Aomen Bihui 澳门笔会) (founded in 1987), he was President of Chinese Poetry and Verse Association of Macao (Aomen Zhonghua Shici Xuehui 澳门中华诗词学会) (founded in 1990), and the Macao Cultural Research Association (Aomen Wenhua Yanjiuhui 澳门文化研究会) (founded in 1993). These Associations may help building a better community for cultural development and academic pursuits in a city densely dotted with casinos; and perhaps serve to rescind Macao’s image as a city of sin.

A native of Fujian himself, Liang particularly showed concern for the fellow Fujianese in Macao.¹⁹ He was one of the founders of the Fujian Clans Association Macao (Aomen Fujian Tongxianghui 澳门福建同乡会), established in 1990. In that same year, he founded Macao Fujian School (Aomen Fujian Xuexiao 澳门福建学校) with the aim of nurturing ‘steadfast, diligent and ingenuous’ (*zhengzhi qinpu* 正直勤朴) students (Gao, 2010: 83). The Fujianese do not speak the same language as the Cantonese,²⁰ though they share a nationality. Given the cultural differences, Tracy C. Barrett has pointed out, ‘The establishment of schools unique to the native place or dialect represents a concerted effort to indoctrinate young Chinese students in the way of their native place in spite of the cultural confusion engendered in the young people’ (Barrett, 2012: 116).

In the arts circle, Liang enjoyed great esteem as an eminent calligrapher. Playing the role of a cultural



Plate 8. The 90-year-old Liang Piyun demonstrated writing calligraphy in the gathering of calligraphers/painters from Beijing and Hong Kong in Macau in November 1997. Photograph by the author.

bridge between Beijing and Macao, the 90-year-old Liang participated in the cultural exchange gathering of renowned calligraphers and painters from both places held in Macao in November 1997, and demonstrated writing calligraphy (Plate 8). For the first time after the return of Macao to China, Correios de Macau (Macao Post) issued a set of four stamps²¹ with the theme of ‘Arts in Macau—Chinese Calligraphy’ in March 2000. Four Chinese characters, *zhong guo shu fa* 中国书法 (Chinese calligraphy), in brushwork, were written by four artists and each printed on the four stamps creating the central image of the complete set (Plate 9). The 93-year-old Liang was invited to write the character *zhong* 中. The other three calligraphy masters were Lin Ka-sang 连家生 (writing *guo* 国), Lok Hong 陆康 (writing *shu* 书), and So Shu-fai 苏树辉 (writing *fa* 法).

As part of the programs of the 14th Macao Arts Festival, ‘Liang Piyun Calligraphy Exhibition’ (*Liang*



Plate 9. “Arts in Macau—Chinese Calligraphy” in March 2000 featuring four Chinese characters, *zhong guo shu fa* (Chinese calligraphy). Photograph by the author.

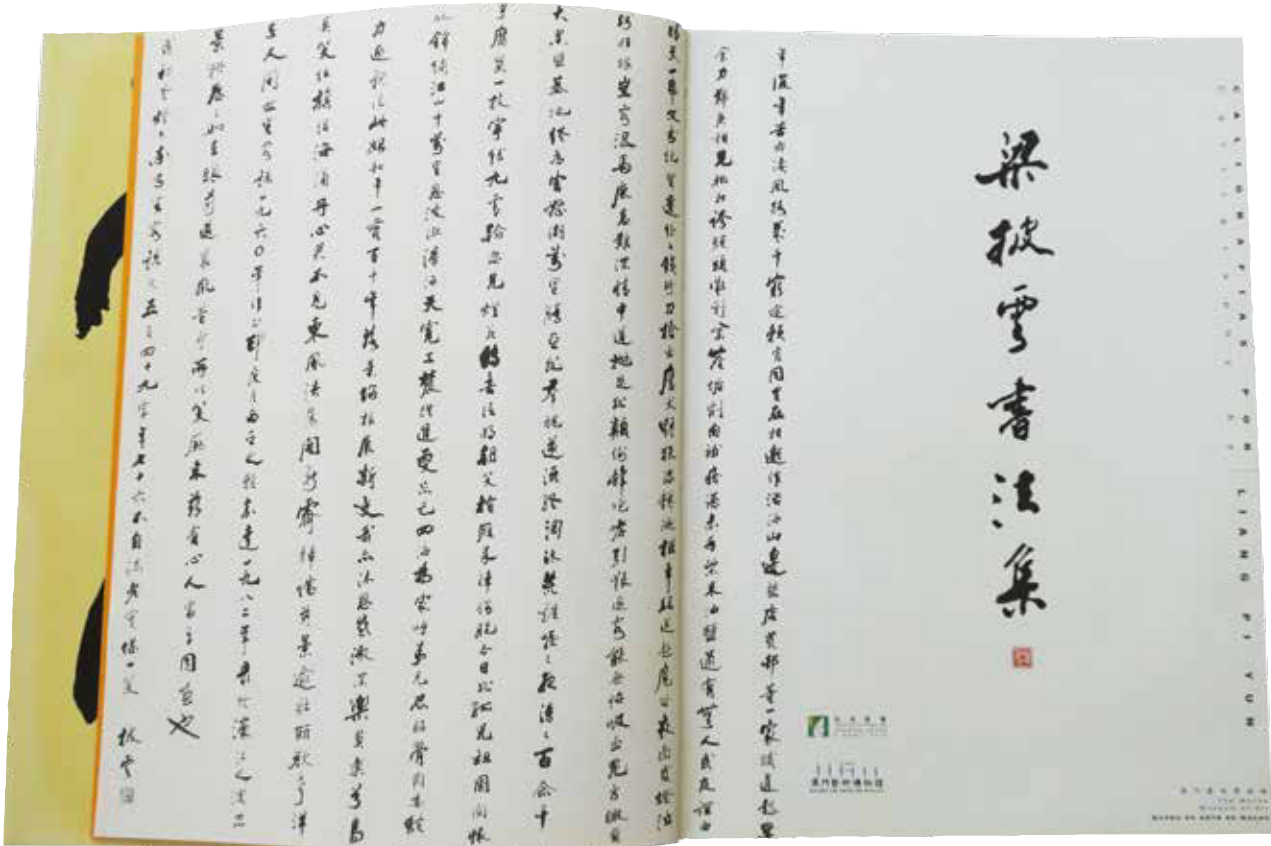


Plate 10. *Calligraphy by Liang Piyun*. Macao: Macao Museum of Art, 2003. Photograph by the author.

Piyun shufa zhan 梁披云书法展) was organised by the Macao Museum of Art in 2003. More than 60 pieces of his oeuvres were displayed, and the exhibits were published in *Calligraphy by Liang Piyun (Liang Piyun shufaji 梁披云书法集)* (Plate 10). That these cultural manifestations testified to the recognition of Liang’s artistic excellence have, to some extent, purveyed Macao’s ‘visage’ as a city of culture.

In the political arena, Liang represented Macao and served three terms (6th, 7th, and 8th) as a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)(Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi 中国人民政治协商会议)²² from 1983 to 1998. In March 1997, Liang’s 90th birthday was celebrated in Beijing, where he was congratulated by the Macao CPPCC delegates (Plate 11).

Macao has always prided itself on nurturing outstanding personages. Liang Piyun has become the pride of Macao and was thrust into the limelight in his golden years. In 1998 he was awarded Doctor of Arts *honoris causa* by the University of Macau. The Medal of

Silver Lotus (*Medalhas de honra de Lótus de Prata*) was bestowed on him by the Macao Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China (MSAR) in 2001; and the Medal of Grand Lotus (*Medalhas de honra de Grande Lótus*)²³ in 2007. Liang’s remarkable contributions to the well-being of Macao were officially recognised.

CONCLUSION

Macao’s geographical size is no more than a mere speck on the south China coast, yet it has played a pivotal role as a city of anchorage providing shelters to the returning overseas Chinese in times of surging anti-Chinese uprisings in Southeast Asia. Unlike former British Hong Kong (with control over Chinese immigration), the Portuguese enclave opened the door for the desperate visa-free. It was not merely a temporary abode or a stepping-off place for midway sojourners and refugees, but it was also a sanctuary where people could take root as no other better places were available and



Plate 11. Celebration of Liang Piyun’s 90th birthday in Beijing, congratulated by the Macao CPPCC delegates. Image reproduced from Macao Daily News. 7 March 1997.

suitable for them. The tiny port city at the periphery of southern China indeed saved many lives.

The well-educated Liang Piyun was a man of vision, aspirations, and perseverance. He lived through a chaotic period of economic, social, and political upheaval after the disintegration of the Qing Empire. His fate was inseparably woven into the turbulent history of China and Indonesia, let alone Malaya. Having been uprooted from the motherland, he underwent continual displacement in diaspora. Like floating duckweed, he was the archetype of the drifting Chinese craving to anchor in a safe pier amid the treacherous ebb and flow of political currents. His nomadic and deterritorialised subjectivity well illustrates that he was a chameleon in search of a shelter for survival. He managed to reach a destination, where he could reinvigorate and recover from the unpleasant past and go through transformation, and where he was immortalised with an aura of glamour on his impressive roles as an educationalist, calligrapher, poet and social activist. Macao offered Liang asylum; in return, he

emerged as an honourable contributor to the benefit of Macao.

In March 2005, together with his wife, Chen Xueru 陈雪如 (1907-2005), the couple’s 100th birthday was jointly celebrated in Macao.²⁴ The momentous occasion was attended by a swarm of friends and relatives, as well as social and political dignitaries. In December 2007, a symposium on Liang Piyun’s artistic achievements and cultural endeavours was held in Macao commemorating his actual 100th birthday. Macao was a diasporic haven *par excellence*, where Liang Piyun could find solace and gain honour, and where he lived a long life. In January 2010 the diasporised poet rested in peace aged 103 in the Land of the Lotus Flower. **RC**

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NOTES

1 Japan started to expel proselytising missionaries from Nagasaki in 1635, and the Sakoku Edict of 1638 finally put the full measure of expulsion into law. The suppression prompted Western missionaries and Japanese Christians fleeing to Macao. See James C. Boyajian, *Portuguese Trade in Asia under the Habsburgs, 1580-1640* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 233-234. In the wake of the prolonged Rites Controversy (1610-1742), Emperor Qianlong (reigned 1736-1796) issued an Imperial Edict in 1784 forbidding all missionaries to enter into China, under pain of execution. Most of the missionaries had to retreat to Macao. See Beatrice Leung, *Sino-Vatican Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 29.

2 The term ‘diaspora’ has long been used in relation to the Jewish Diaspora, but now it can be expanded to describe a process of migration and dispersal of any people from their original homeland, and also the condition of living in diaspora. Almost any migrant group is now labelled a diaspora. See Sunil S. Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 57. Liang became diasporised as he had undergone the experience of migration and exile in Southeast Asia.

3 After the fall of the Qing dynasty, there were two ideologically opposed parties—the Nationalist and the Communist, struggling to regain control of China. The civil war between these two forces was interrupted by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). In 1946 the second phase of the struggle started and lasted through 1949. The conflict eventually resulted in two *de facto* states, the Republic of China in Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China on mainland China.

4 In the ten devastating years of the state-backed purges and anarchic clashes, China underwent massive socio-political upheaval that drove innumerable politicians, intellectuals, and civilians to their deaths. The official death toll was more than 1.72 million. See Jun Mai, ‘China “must learn” from Cultural Revolution’, *South China Morning Post*, 18 May, 2016, p. A1.

5 Here one might consider the work of Sunil S. Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

6 The regional flag of Macao has a green base with a white lotus flower in the centre. The flower sits atop a stylised bridge and sea water, symbolising its role as a port city. Above the flower are five yellow stars, which signify the relationship between Macao and its sovereign state.

7 Since the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912) brought forth a reforming government, Japan had emerged as a modernised nation and rose to a pre-eminent imperial power on the international stage. From the late 19th century, Tokyo became a regional metropolis and exerted a forceful attraction for students (also revolutionaries and political exiles) from across Asia and beyond. See Sunil S. Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*, pp. 59-60.

8 Liang was 23 years old in 1929 by traditional Chinese age reckoning.

9 On 18 September 1931 Japan launched a full-scale invasion of Manchuria, northeastern China, leading to the establishment of Japan’s puppet state of Manchukuo 满洲国. The invasion, part of the Second Sino-Japanese War, is referred to as the ‘September 18 Incident’ (*jiuyiba shibian* 九一八事变), also called the ‘Mukden Incident’ (*fengtian shibian* 奉天事变) (Mukden was the former Manchurian name of Shenyang, Liaoning province). The Japanese occupation lasted for 14 years until the end of World War II.

10 Chen Jiageng (alternative spelling: Tan Kah Kee), a patriotic businessman and philanthropist, was a prominent figure in the overseas Chinese community of Southeast Asia. He was actively

involved in fund-raising to aid China, and devoted himself to education and other public services for overseas Chinese, and for those in his hometown Xiamen, Fujian. See Huang Jinying 黄今英, *Chen Jiageng* 陈嘉庚.

11 The killings were overseen by Suharto (1921-2008), who became the country’s president in 1967, heading an authoritarian government for 31 years until 1998.

12 It was the first time after a lapse of half a century that a public discussion of the atrocities had received official endorsement. A two-day symposium on the Indonesian Massacres of 1965-1966 was held on 25 and 26 April, 2016 in Jakarta. Indonesia’s security minister, Luhut B. Pandjaitan, delivered the opening remarks. Indonesia’s government, under President Joko Widodo, has taken tentative steps towards collecting data from human rights researchers on the scale and scope of the killings.

13 Apart from the political tumult, priceless cultural relics and artefacts were mercilessly destroyed under a directive to cleanse cultural entities of representatives of the bourgeoisie. In 1981, the Communist Party formally condemned the Cultural Revolution and labelled it a ‘catastrophe’, but authorities still took care to contain public discussions during its 50th anniversary in 2016.

14 Most fleeing Burmese Chinese settled around Rua do Ultramar and Travessa do Ultramar in Macao. This area is locally known as the ‘Three Lamps District’ (Sanzhandeng 三盏灯), or ‘Little Myanmar’ today.

15 According to the ‘Special Issue of the 45th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Association of Returned Overseas Chinese Macao’ (*Aomenguiqiao Zonghui Chengli Sishiwu Zhounian Tekan* 澳门归侨总会成立四十五同周年特刊), it was estimated that there were about 50,000 diasporised Chinese from various Southeast Asian regions coming to Macao during the 1960’s and 1970’s (2013), p. 42.

16 Yu Youren was a celebrated calligrapher, scholar, educationalist, and politician during the regime of the Republic of China.

17 After the disintegration of the Han dynasty, China was ruled by a succession of six short-lived kingdoms that had their capital in present-day Nanjing, Jiangsu province. The Six Dynasties are a collective term for Wu, Eastern Jin, Liu Song, Southern Qi, Southern Liang, and Southern Chen. It was an era of disunity, political instability, and constant warfare, but people of elite social classes sought to pursue self-realisation through art, music, poetry, and religion.

18 Praia Grande Bay, locally known as Nam Van 南湾 (literally, south bay), is popular for its charming promenade and picturesque scenery.

19 Tradition has it that when Macao was still an isolated place, Fujianese fisher folks were the first inhabitants.

20 Cantonese are natives of Guangdong province, and the regional language is Cantonese, widely spoken in Macao, Hong Kong, and the Pearl River Delta region of China.

21 Drawing from distinctive influences from both Chinese and Portuguese cultures, Macao postage stamps are among the prettiest in the world.

22 CPPCC is a political advisory body, which consists of delegates from a range of political parties and organisations, as well as independent members. One term is five years.

23 The Medal of Grand Lotus is the highest award under the MSAR honours and awards system.

24 In 2005 Liang Piyun was actually 98, but in keeping with the Chinese method of counting age two years were added, so his 100th birthday was celebrated.

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