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Valuing Heritage in Macau: On Contexts and Processes of Urban Conservation

Thomas Chung

Abstract: This paper examines the evolving values of urban heritage in Macau in terms of the various conservation approaches and mechanisms employed, and the shifting emphases on heritage and development within the context of continuity and change in Macau. Accumulated over four centuries of cultural interchange, the richly layered Historic Centre of the former Portuguese-administered outpost attained World Heritage status in 2005. After situating the problem pertaining to the multifaceted nature of heritage valorisation, the city's trajectory of urban conservation leading up to the 1999 retrocession will be traced, and germane issues concerning heritage management vis-à-vis effects of post-handover urban developments assessed. As the latest culmination of value imbalances and conflicts arising from urban change, the Guia Lighthouse controversy will be critically appraised to speculate on a timely re-evaluation of Macau's heritage conservation process.

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Keywords: Macau, China, value in heritage, urban conservation, Guia Lighthouse

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Introduction: The Multiplicity of Values in Heritage

From the moment artifacts inherited from the past come to be consciously protected so as to represent cultural traditions and continuity within change, the problem of conserving heritage has been framed by interrelated sets of values. In the modern era, scholarly literature has variously deliberated on how the meaning of heritage in the city is grounded in diverse aspects of value – as historical, usufructory and pedagogic legacy, as conducive to urban character, place identity and social cohesion, as political leverage or economic and tourism resource (Shankland 1975; Appleyard 1979; Tunbridge 1984; Rose 1986; Aplin 2002). Considering values as extrinsic to physical entities, ultimately ascribed by people and therefore multifaceted (Cameron 2006: 72), one begins to comprehend heritage as a “value-loaded concept” (Hardy 1988: 333) susceptible to multidimensional contestation (Shaw and Jones 1997: 3). As such, popular bias for the “intrinsic” value in the “pastness” of heritage can be seen as merely privileging one aspect – the nostalgic impulse lamenting irrevocable loss (Lowenthal 1985: xvii). As constructed attributes subject to continuous revisions that reflect changing socio-cultural contexts, values in fact permeate all aspects of conservation: 1) heritage definition and identification, 2) rationales and purposes, 3) for whom is heritage conserved, 4) appropriate strategies for its upkeep, interpretation and effective management. Integral to the question of value is the issue of scale, whereby different scales of heritage (local, regional, national, global) bring into play disparate values and concerns (Aplin 2002: 2, 20-21).

By allowing comparison, value in its multiple senses has become central to heritage management of historic cities (Zancheti and Jokilehto 1997). What determines the extent and degree of conservation is the relative assessment of different values, a kind of “social calculus” that evaluates both principles and utilities, material and symbolic dimensions, both *states* (conditions) and *processes* (practices) of urban culture.¹ Establishing the shifting attitudes and contexts of value formation, balancing which values to regenerate or discard, and determining conservation actions, constitute phases of a non-linear process which involve often intense negotiations between stakeholders. Ultimately, insofar as conserving urban heritage is bound up with contesting values and their convergence towards safeguarding what is perceived as commonly valued urban resource, it is already implicated in the decision-making process in planning and development of the built environment (Tunbridge 1984; Rose 1986).

1 Zancheti and Jokilehto (1997) actually defines urban conservation as the process that “seeks to coordinate and regulate the process of continuity and change of an urban structure and its values”.

In the case of Macau, the interest in recounting its trajectory in urban conservation within the theoretical framework outlined above is threefold. First, to assess how well it conforms to the typical heritage-versus-development model found elsewhere, in which efforts in salvaging heritage are often consequent to rapid urban growth, and whereby outcomes are conditioned by consensus-seeking actions and socio-political complications of the time (Kong and Yeoh 1994; Steinberg 1996). Second, to document the specific combination of prolonged Portuguese presence, dominant socio-economic influences such as gambling and related infrastructure developments, and latterly the 1999 handover and World Heritage status which together present a uniquely complex scenario for urban conservation. Third, the dynamic process by which different values dominate and recede, collide and reconcile, in combination with the two previous factors and in relation to successive historical moments and spatial scales of concern, is examined to discover evolving biases and balances, accords and dissonances, accomplishments and contradictions in conserving Macau's heritage.

From Monument Preservation to Urban Conservation

The first concerns for Macau's heritage preservation began when the government started registering architectural monuments in 1953 and appointed a task force in 1960 to draft and lay down protection measures (MWHN 2004a). Monuments and buildings of public interest that showcased architectural and historical grandeur were identified as a collection of isolated specimens. Churches, palaces and fortresses were included, while certain buildings of cultural or anthropological interest, such as Chinese temples, were omitted. Following preservation trends of the day, this static approach of piecemeal, object-oriented conservation complemented the preference for gradual change within Macau's political situation at that time. Recalling Appleyard's (1979: 23) claim that preservation has its original motive in patriotism and power, the initial selection of enduring landmarks to include "national monuments" (Marreiros 2003) possibly also served to reinforce the legitimacy of the Portuguese administration, whose authority in Macau was historically far from supreme. Politically, this chronic weakness was further undermined after the December 1966 riots, which resulted in the tacit arrangement of decision-making by consensus between the government and local elites as well as influential pro-China intermediaries representing China.

By the 1970s, the territory's predominantly pre-industrial urban form underwent considerable transformation as the city's largely stagnant economy began flourishing through export-oriented light industries, mainly driven by

garment and textile manufacture overspill from Hong Kong, and the availability of cheap labour supplied from an earlier refugee influx (Feitor and Cremer 1991). The other major factor triggering economic recovery was gambling, organized through the granting of the monopoly casino franchise to the newly-formed syndicate Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau (STDM) in 1962, and the growth of ancillary enterprises encompassing hotels, transportation services, as well as related tourism.

The urban expansion of the late 1970s and early 1980s that followed has been cited a result of the intense economic growth that laid the foundations for Macau's modern economy. Yet it also coincided with parts of the city's existing built form succumbing to redevelopment pressures (Taylor 2001; Duncan 1986). In response, the Heritage Committee (Committee for the Preservation of Architectural, Landscape and Cultural Heritage) was promptly formed in 1976 to support the first legislation protecting Macau's architectural patrimony (Marreiros 1991). For the first time a list of protected properties and sites was published, and it was during this period of minimal resources that the fundamental framework for later heritage policies was established. Despite the reluctance of the private sector to participate, the government began purchasing selected designated heritage for preservation and reuse. The restoration of a long-neglected row of 1920s colonial-style houses along the Avenida Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida, together with rehabilitating the private Lou Lim Ieoc Chinese garden into a public park nearby, have been lauded as early successful cases of this initiative (Marreiros 2003).

The next key step for Macau's urban heritage was the creation of the Cultural Institute in 1982, whose responsibility it was, and remains to date, to implement cultural and heritage policies, in conjunction with promoting related activities, training and research. In the same year, the aforesaid restoration scheme and the sensitive development of the Pousada de São Tiago blending ancient fortress with themed hotel and restaurant both received Heritage awards from the Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA). This recognition of conservation projects for their significance in terms of both preservation and tourism benefits, together with the commissioning of a PATA expert task force to assist in developing strategies to balance development needs with maintaining Macau's rich heritage as a tourism asset, provided the necessary impetus for further consolidation of conservation efforts. A revised heritage law that included "protected areas" was passed in 1984 to formalize more comprehensive categorization and stipulations of various conservation measures. Decree Law no. 56/84/M: *Defence of the Architectural, Environmental and Cultural Heritage* superseded the first heritage legislation Decree Law no. 34/76M promulgated in 1976. While the Heritage

Committee was restructured under the Cultural Institute, tax incentives were introduced to motivate private owners to undertake self-initiated preservation. By the end of 1984, the complete renovation and reuse of classified buildings by two banks and a supermarket demonstrated the possibility of such private sector cooperation (de Bastos 1986).

Commissioned conservation strategies, high-profile projects, and legal inclusion of “protected areas” all suggest a shift towards adopting a more dynamic approach to architectural heritage. Besides recognizing the importance of groups of structures, squares and streets, Macau’s authorities also began to refer to international charters and recommendations. This seems to be in line with heritage strategies elsewhere, which moved beyond passive protection of singular landmarks towards valuing the “historicity of townscapes” or rehabilitating larger historic precincts within which individual or groups of monuments can be contextualized (Slater 1984; Yeoh and Huang 1996). Also emerging at the time was the notion of urban conservation that involves the creative reuse and reshaping of existing building as well as social fabrics which can evolve and adapt to present-day conditions (Lowenthal 1985; Steinberg 1996).

For Macau, such ambitious and comprehensive conservation studies for several sensitive old districts were concurrently drawn up by 1984. One of these “Urban Intervention Plans” (UIPs) focused on the Avenida Almeida Ribeiro, an important east-west traffic artery cutting across the city’s core. Besides documenting architectural typologies, urban spaces, land occupation and usage, and identifying heritage clusters and conservation areas, socio-economic surveys were also carried out to understand the area’s urban character in-depth and how its fabric evolved. Pragmatic recommendations on building height restrictions, maintenance and renovation of old buildings, as well as future insertions came to be formulated together with strategic policy proposals on the implementation process, compensation mechanisms and assessment of the area’s commercial and tourism potential. More importantly, the study called attention to the irreplaceable socio-cultural benefits arising out of the conservation of the area’s urban scale, morphology and vitality as the motivation for transforming heritage into investment opportunities (Prescott 1993: 57). Although carefully devised, the UIPs never attained official approval, remaining as Macau’s only informal terms of reference concerning planning and design interventions in heritage areas.

From the mid-1980s onwards, the government increased the scope of policies and programmes to encourage retention and active reuse of historic fabric, as well as repairing and restoring the architecture to maintain visual appeal and cultural character. Strategies ranged from “mothballing” of dilapidated structures to prevent collapse, preserving iconic symbols such as

the Ruins of St. Paul's, to more provisional facade renovations or repainting, from continuity of usage and upkeep, adaptive reuse, to fragmentary preservation and infill of new structures.² Besides the Cultural Institute's lead in maintaining and rejuvenating selected sites, in the late 1980s private charitable organizations such as the Orient Foundation (Fundação Oriente) also invested in preservation of historic buildings and gardens. Overall during this period, an array of conservation approaches were employed, from *surface* to *deep* (Appleyard 1979: 24), passive to active, from cosmetics to interventions, accompanied by varying degrees of public-private involvement.

As for heritage legislation, when Decree Law no. 83/92/M was gazetted in 1992, with refinements and additions, Macau's cultural heritage came to be categorized into four types, providing successive levels of protection to the designated properties themselves (Table 1). "Protected Areas" safeguard immediate surroundings and settings around the classified heritage that are "spatially or aesthetically integrated with, and which facilitates their perception, thus forming an essential part of that heritage". Any demolition or repair works on buildings within the protected areas need to be authorized; they must abide by the detailed regulations that could include restrictions on "building height, setback, site coverage, construction volume, exterior finish and facade, and roof appearance". (Imon 2008: 724)

At a time when Macau, like other cities in the region, pursued modernization with an emphasis on economic progress, many view the city as relatively successful in terms of salvaging invaluable urban heritage against great demands for redevelopment, especially when compared to cities like Hong Kong or Singapore. Hong Kong, with a much shorter history, largely chose to relinquish its built colonial patrimony to the exigencies of market economy, while Singapore has arguably forged a developmental path whereby heritage is managed with qualified success within the main thrust of sanitized and planned progress (Kong and Yeoh 1994). On the surface the "success" of Macau's urban conservation combines government-led as well as private initiatives, robust regulations and institutional safeguards and a nascent awareness of the potential for heritage tourism. Despite an absence of overall development planning, the piecemeal nature of policy-making favoured continuity over radical change. In the early 1990s, property excess from local real estate over-speculation relaxed investment pressure to redevelop inner city plots. Consequently, sufficient important heritage fragments have been allowed to remain for some to claim the successive Macau administrations' conservation efforts as a "triumph of incrementalism" (Taylor 2001: 340).

2 Taylor (2001: 346-354) identifies and discusses each of these categories, considering their rationale and illustrating them with examples.

Table 1: Cultural Heritage Classification

	Type	Description	Example
a)	Monuments	Buildings, sculptures and structures of outstanding historic value	Churches, temples, and fortresses including the facade and ruins of St. Paul’s, the A-Ma temple, the Guia Fortress
b)	Buildings of Architectonic Interest	Edifices whose significance and quality reflect important periods in Macau’s history	Moorish Barracks, the Post Office Building, the Military Club
c)	Classified Complexes	Groups of buildings in urban settings	Buildings lining the Avenida Almeida Ribeiro, architectural cluster around Senado Square, and those at the Rua and Beco da Felicidade
d)	Classified Sites	Original natural or artificial landscapes with special aesthetic, anthropological and historic values	Camões Garden, Guia Hill and Barra Hill

Source: Own compilation, adapted from Macao Decree Law no. 56/84/M 1984.

Yet the situation was arguably more ambivalent. A contrasting stance contends that, had initiatives been implemented sooner to curb unregulated developments, much more could have been saved.³ For some critics, the Heritage Law of 1984 had in fact come too late to reverse the previous decade’s “damaging effects” of generic modern developments replacing traditional fabric (de Bastos 1986). The weak administration most probably kept the UIPs informal for political expediency. In the end, those meticulous guidelines – allegedly enforced for lesser developments on Taipa island but ignored for contentious ones on Macau peninsula – only exerted limited influence, especially outside protected zones and designated heritage fragments.⁴ While conservation regulations acknowledged the expanded

3 Henry Kamm reported that Hong Kong’s Chinese developers have begun wrecking Macau’s historic fabric, “replacing them with concrete housing and high-rise office buildings”. *New York Times*, 22nd April 1981 (quoted in Porter 1999).

4 Wan, Pinheiro, and Korenaga (2007) describe the current frustration of local architects, when the UIP is no longer applicable, and arbitrary decisions subjected to personal or political interest are made.

scope of urban heritage, uneven application compromised their effectiveness to regulate profit-driven developments and uphold codified values in practice.

Transition, Cultural Legacy and Fabricated Heritage

What is beyond doubt is that heritage preservation formed an integral part of the Portuguese administration's attempt to perpetuate its cultural legacy in Macau. Nevertheless, since the signing of the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration in 1987 that resolved Macau's retrocession to China, the main vehicle for bolstering cultural identity somewhat shifted beyond the valuing of existing built heritage. Once the process and timetable leading up to the handover in 1999 were agreed, the Lisbon and Macau governments embarked on an ambitious programme of "cultural remembrance" designed to celebrate Macau as a unique colonial outpost city, one that embodies over four centuries of tolerance, coexistence and fusion of cultural differences. During the twelve-year transition period, the multiplying of museums, erection of monuments and sculptures are complemented with the staging of artistic events, festivals, as well as promotion of Macau's languages, cuisine, performing arts and related academic discourse; all contributing to cultivating the image of the Portuguese as benign settlers and cultural benefactors (Cheng 2002). Together with a brand new Cultural Centre, the spate of museum projects provide repositories and venues for diverse histories and cultural content, while the inauguration of 13 new public monuments and statues in the final seven years of Portuguese administration is meant to commemorate the spirit of *amizade* or Luso-Chinese amity and understanding. The political subtext of this co-operative "friendship" relates to the nuances of Chinese foreign policy, after the Tian'anmen massacre in June 1989, of playing off the "friendly" Portuguese against the "hostile" British in respect of the imminent transition of Macau and Hong Kong (Edmonds and Yee 1999).

While the "friendship landmarks" officially represent the "cordial relationship between the two national authorities and the harmonious co-existence of the two peoples" (Cheng 2001: 48), closer scrutiny uncovers a more ambivalent situation of unfavourable public reception, persistence of cultural asymmetry, and colonial stereotyping in artistic representation. Unlike the slow-evolving traditional urban fabric that has been integrated into the local consciousness, such as those age-old colonial-style edifices along the Avenida Almeida Ribeiro, these pristine mnemonic icons tend to be conspicuous for their physical dominance and as alien intrusions in the city. Locals view them as divorced from everyday life and relevance, and

complained about squandering public funds to pay for such extravagant pieces of “fabricated heritage” (Cheng 2001). The further weakening of the Portuguese administration’s legitimacy since the 1990s increased their willingness to co-operate with China in order to ensure a smooth transfer to Chinese rule (Edmonds and Yee 1999). In turn, this contributed to the government’s anxiety to fashion newly-contrived heritage for their representational value, partly for fear of the rapid dissipation of Lusitanian presence after the handover. With the tacit backing of the Chinese authorities, the Macau government continued to fabricate such *amizade* constructions right up to 1999.⁵

After the resumption of Chinese jurisdiction on 20th December 1999, Macau was endowed with its new status as a Special Administrative Region (SAR), following Hong Kong two years earlier. Operating under the rubric of “one country, two systems”, it is obliged to maintain its pre-existing way of life and capitalist economy for the next five decades. The fledgling SAR government, in its attempt to maintain stability as well as autonomy, continues the fostering of Macau’s multicultural identity. In fact, several have noted the pressing need to cohere and enhance a distinctive cultural identity, in particular sustaining the vitality of Macau’s “Latin strata” in order to maintain the city’s uniqueness against the inevitable onslaught of mainland influence (Ngai 1999; Ptak 2001).

As the most tangible manifestation of cultural interchange in Macau, the surviving vestiges of hybrid Luso-Asian architecture, landmarks and urban spaces are clearly seen to embody substantial usufructory value worth passing on, as the cultural inheritance with which future generations could identify. Yet during the transition phase, “instant heritage” were enthusiastically installed to represent “friendship” and “cultural understanding”. Arguably these politically safer tributes highlighted a more unified and neutral message conflating Macau’s “co-operative” attitude⁶ with Portuguese cultural benevolence. Pre-handover heritage, by comparison, are much more heterogeneous, harbouring more ambivalent and contestable meanings including colonial associations and cultural dissonance that were less

5 The slogan of “cultural understanding” also extended to practical projects such as the second Macau-Taipa “Friendship” Bridge (*Ponte de Amizade*, 1994) connecting the peninsula to the outer islands.

6 Such “co-operation” also effected the removal of symbols that offended Chinese sensibilities, including the well-publicized dismantling in 1992 of the prominent equestrian statue of Governor Amaral, the notorious governor who was assassinated for his attempt to assert Macau’s autonomy from China in the late nineteenth century (Porter 1993).

amenable to expedient reappropriation, and more likely to hamper the political imperative for a “smooth” transition.

From Revitalizing Urban Fabric to Attaining World Heritage Status

While the architectural decor and visual ambience of preserved monuments and clusters appealed to tourists and conservationists, there were concurrent social concerns that the real needs of residents have not been sufficiently attended to. For the population residing in dense modern blocks away from the city’s historic centre, their daily rhythms were very much detached from it. Observing this scenario, Taylor (2001) argued for the need to distribute the benefits of historic preservation throughout society, whether it is through extending the emphasis to the background urban fabric, integrating heritage with district planning, increasing private sector involvement in heritage revitalisation or enlarging the spectrum of citizens participating. For Taylor, Macau’s post-handover challenge lay in building on past achievements while seeking to mobilize urban conservation as inducement for envisioning change by bringing it into mainstream community life.

Here, what is noteworthy is how the Macau government’s programme of improving public open spaces over the last two decades aided the city’s urban conservation. By the early 1990s, a series of decisive projects rehabilitating public squares involved pedestrianization, repaving, redecorating and installing user-friendly street amenities as part of a comprehensive approach to revive its distinct urban ambience. Prominent cases include the Leal Senado and St. Dominic’s squares, St. Augustine square (1987-1994), St. Francisco square (1995), Taipa Old market (2003), Cathedral square (2004). Detailed case study analyses concluded that by closing off traffic and returning the open spaces to pedestrians, the spruced-up squares can act as catalysts recuperating the synergy between architecture, urban space and social interaction. Adapted to contemporary economies and accessible to citizens and visitors alike, the “liberated” squares actualize their potential for reactivating commercial and public life; their renewed vitality arguably demonstrating the notion of heritage sustainability (Pinheiro, Cheong, and Chan 2005). The urban landscaping linking the Leal Senado (Loyal Senate – *Largo do Senado*) and St. Dominic’ squares at the heart of the city is an oft-cited example of successful rehabilitation, whereby research into the squares’ historico-cultural significance informs the actual works such as adding landscape elements that capture east-west congruence, renovating all bordering colonial buildings as well as retaining shopfronts and updating commercial activities (Caldeira Cabral and Jackson 2000: 118-122).

It is well recognized that Macau's urban physiognomy grew out of the lengthy confluence of the tradition of Luso-Mediterranean cities with that of vernacular Chinese settlements. From Macau's formative years onwards, the fortified Christian city, ordered by strategic placements of civic and religious institutions, was surrounded by the Chinese city with the bazaar at its heart. Together with the hilly peninsular topography and specific urban functionalities, a unique spatial pattern of squares (*largos*), public courtyards, and narrow contour-hugging streets and alleys (*ruelas, travessas*) evolved to house its civic life and culture (Baracho 2001; Marreiros 1991). Yet over the years and certainly by the 1980s, a lot of the open spaces and squares had become prone to dilapidation, cut up by vehicular traffic, or were serving as convenient locations for carparks. What the succession of revitalization schemes for major squares and streetscapes achieved was a kind of urbanistic mediation weaving individual monuments and historical ensembles back into the surrounding city fabric. As such, the projects realized the concept of "area conservation" that moved towards an integrated approach of physical restoration supporting social reconnection (Appleyard 1979; Tunbridge 1989: 316; Steinberg 1996).

According to Pinheiro (2006), this effective linking of scattered monuments and clusters to elucidate Macau's historical urban structure was instrumental in formulating the notion of a cultural heritage corridor, one that was eventually recognized by UNESCO when World Heritage status was granted to the final list of 32 urban elements (including 23 monuments, 1 street, 1 garden and 7 squares) in July 2005.⁷ The official title of the "Historic Centre of Macao" therefore acknowledges the fundamental importance of open spaces in reciprocity with architecture as being the constituting ingredients of Macau's exceptional urban heritage. In fact, when the Chinese State Administration of Cultural Heritage first submitted Macau's bid to UNESCO World Heritage Centre in 2002 under the title of "Historic Monuments of Macao", the locations of the original 12 proposed sites were deemed too fragmented (SCMP 2005a).⁸ It was only after visitations of ICOMOS⁹ experts in 2004 and 2005 that public spaces, streets and squares as well as extra monuments were incorporated, forming an identifiable "heritage

7 For complete listing of the nominated core zone, see Supplementary Document: The Historic Monuments of Macao 2004: 6-14.

8 It has been noted that the intention to apply for World Heritage status already germinated with Macau's Portuguese administration, although the idea was eventually abandoned due to technical difficulties (*East Week* 2008).

9 The International Council for Monuments and Sites is an advisory body to UNESCO.

corridor” that roughly recalls Macau’s old Christian city centre (MWHN 2004b).

The World Heritage Committee’s decision to inscribe Macau’s historic core, not only as individual artifacts but as a cohesive urban entity, ultimately recognizes it as being a living embodiment of the city’s urban culture, one that has been permeated by diverse cultural and regional influences and experiences. It has also been deemed to possess the oldest, most intact and consolidated array of striking architectural heritage of predominantly European influence interwoven with Chinese settlements. Together with Macau’s strategic geographical location and historical significance as a longstanding conduit and entrepôt between China and the West, the “Historic Centre of Macao” is selected for bearing witness to the important exchange between the Portuguese and Chinese peoples in the “various fields of culture, sciences, technology, art and architecture over several centuries”, and therefore considered to carry a wider cultural legacy of “outstanding universal value” (WHC 2005).¹⁰

The scope of the inscribed properties correlates to two zones on peninsular Macau that are interwoven with the city’s oldest urban quarters and encompass its principal topographical features. The strip stretching from the peninsula’s southwestern tip to its centre includes the older St. Anthony, St. Lawrence and Cathedral parishes together with Barra Hill and Mount Hill. In this larger zone, a linear route links up relevant sites and monuments, tracing the city’s original progression from the Chinese harbour to the Christian city. Commencing at one end is the waterfront A-Ma Temple and Barra Square, with its association to Macau’s maritime discovery. It passes through Lilau Square, the first western residential settlement, St. Augustine’s Square, the urban social focus, onto the commercial and political centre at Senado Square and St. Dominic’s Square. It then traverses the Ruins of St. Paul’s and Macau’s “acropolis” on Mount Hill, terminating at Camoes Square and the Protestant Cemetery. A smaller second zone on Guia Hill on the peninsula’s eastern side is defined by Guia Fortress, within which the Guia Lighthouse and Chapel are also located. It is the compact sequence of sites together that convincingly narrates the city’s urban evolution as well as illustrating its multicultural traditions that makes Macau’s “Historic Centre” remarkable.

Apart from the two core zones (16 hectares), two corresponding buffer zones (107 hectares) are designated to further protect “the immediate setting

10 The World Heritage Committee’s decision is based on the cultural criteria (ii), (iii), (iv), and (vi) as set out in the “Decisions adopted at the 29th Session of the World Heritage Committee, Durban 2005” in WHC-05/29.COM/22, 130-131 (WHC 2005).

of the nominated property, important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection” (WHC 2008: 103-104). This protective function of buffer zones is especially applicable to Macau, since many of its nominated institutions and particularly churches adhere to the Portuguese tradition of seeking highpoints or prominent locations in relation to mundane residential settlements (Baracho 2001). To address this issue in Macau’s urban character, the World Heritage Committee singled out this key relationship, specifically recommending that Macau should strive “to develop the management system so as to retain the existing structural and visual integrity, and to maintain the principal sightlines of the nominated area within its contemporary setting” (WHC 2005: 131).

Macau’s successful inscription as a World Heritage city in July 2005 brings with it a whole host of privileges as well as responsibilities. Primarily, it can be seen as justified recompense for accumulating over 20 years of preparation since its first systematic concern for heritage preservation took shape in the 1980s. From designating individual monuments, restoring building clusters, to urban fabric revitalization (following the point to line to plane evolution in conservation approaches), the attainment of World Heritage status confers international recognition of a certain maturity in how Macau values its cultural landscape. Politically, it fulfilled China’s expressed expectations of the city since 2004, when the Chinese central government put aside other sites and confirmed Macau’s bid to be its sole nomination in 2005 for inclusion in the World Heritage list. Macau’s top officials were quick to express their gratitude to China for its unwavering support throughout the nomination process, dubbing the success as a “momentous achievement of enormous significance”. (see SCMP 2005b; JDC 2007a). Financially, World Heritage recognition promises the prospect of economic benefits through tourism. Steps were taken to capitalize on the World Heritage brand and its potential to attract more visitors and leverage spin-offs in related service industries like hotel and retail (*The Standard* 2007). To market its newfound tourism product, the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) launched the “2006 Macau World Heritage Year” in February 2006. A year-long operation to strengthen Macau as a cultural tourism destination comprised global image projection, overseas promotion, advertising campaigns and soliciting local retailer support. From “heritage passports” to publicity stunts and copious media coverage, it indeed appeared that attention became preoccupied with exploiting the “Macau World Heritage” brand.

Yet there have been cautions against packaging heritage predominantly as a tourism product for passive consumption. Back in 2002, Richard Engelhardt (UNESCO’s Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific) has already argued for the urgent need to bring about “a complete 180-degree

mind shift in [Macau's] tourism industry". Instead of maximizing the commodification of "cultural capital", he advocated a fundamental reorientation such that tourism becomes an active agent conducive to the safeguarding of heritage as cultural assets (Engelhardt 2004: 38). Also warranting attention are responsibilities such as safeguarding the Historic Centre's "outstanding universal value", amplifying public outreach and encouraging mainstream discourse on urban conservation.

Heritage Consciousness and Discourse in the Post-liberalisation Era

Since the launching of Macau's bid in 2002, the SAR government has expended much effort both locally and abroad to raise heritage awareness in relation to Macau's inscription process. An extensive range of related promotional and educational activities targeted at different local communities aimed to communicate the value of Macau's monuments and to enhance citizens' exposure to and interest in heritage conservation. Formalized contact with regional and international communities range from organizing conferences and seminars, arranging tours and exhibitions, to facilitating academic research and publications; while longer-term educational initiatives including campaigns and competitions as well as curriculum additions attempt to cultivate appreciation among younger generations (MWHE3 2005).

One such occasion was the 2002 conference "The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision", at which Engelhardt identified a paradigm shift in the global perception of heritage conservation that has enabled Macau's nomination in the first place. It was an appreciation that sustaining a city's living urban morphology (evolution of urban structure and patterns in its historic fabric) through public space revitalization provides an integrated conservation strategy. Engelhardt also raised the notion of "total heritage", stating that the imperative is to move conservation beyond specialists into a broad-based community stewardship anchored in local institutions and grass-roots groups with shared responsibility and ownership. This stewardship ethic and hands-on role for committed local actors would be well-placed to develop long-term visions by which "local communities can benefit financially from the enhanced conservation [...] while at the same time maintaining their social and spiritual traditions intact". For Engelhardt, how heritage is "protected and develop, used and replenished", how past urban wisdom is understood and kept alive for future development will determine the thriving of culture, although he concedes that it will be no easy task for a "living, densely-populated and fast-growing" place like Macau (Engelhardt 2004). This sentiment regarding the challenge facing Macau is also echoed in the

same conference by Chief Executive Edmund Ho in his conference publication message as well as Cultural Affairs Bureau president Heidi Ho in her preface. Both confirm that as Macau “seeks to be a modern tourist and gambling city in the Asia-Pacific region” (i.e. with tourism and gambling being the government’s main focus for development), the key question remains the co-ordination of heritage conservation with urban development, while the latter further hopes to diversify tourism and planning opportunities within an interconnected system (Lung 2004: ix-xii).

These comments must be read in reference to the unprecedented economic development and accelerating urban change Macau experienced following key policy decisions. First is the landmark opening up of the gambling concession after the expiry of STDm’s 40-year monopoly. By 2002, the tripartite splintering and subsequent subdivisions of the casino license, and the arrival of experienced Las Vegas casino operators with their integrated gaming approach heralded innovative casino developments and major investments in the related hotel, entertainment and convention/exhibition sectors as well as high-end residential complexes. Then in August 2003, the Beijing government introduced the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) which relaxed restrictions on mainland visitors to Macau (and Hong Kong), leading to a dramatic upsurge of mainland tourists. Related infrastructure constructions include a planned harbour tunnel and proposed citywide elevated rail system, as well as the huge inter-island reclamation between Taipa and Coloane that created the Cotai area, where many of the large-scale mega-casinos are located. With all the massive infusion of foreign capital, economic expansion overwhelmingly driven by gaming-induced commercialization, rapid population inflow (visitors, immigrants, and migrant labourers) and attendant physical transformation, it is not surprising that status quo has been disrupted and certain social and urban imbalances have become exacerbated. While GDP growth has been soaring, commentators have also pointed to social inequalities such as the widening gap in the disproportionate income distribution between rich and poor and unequal utilization of resources (Zandonai 2008).

Following the liberalisation of gaming and related policies, ensuing development demands have extensively impacted on Macau’s urban environment. Given Macau’s overall territorial compactness, its effects have inevitably been encroaching upon the nominated Historic Centre as well as endangering other cultural heritage sites. Most of the mega-casino resorts with convention centres, hotels and other supporting facilities are located in the reclaimed land at the Outer Harbour or Cotai to avoid direct infringement with the Historic Centre. However, derivative developments such as luxury apartments or commercial towers are often constructed close to or right up

against the World Heritage buffer zones. With the desire to prioritize these developments emanating from the top tiers of government, scarce land resources tend to be surrendered for erecting land-hungry facilities for tourism and gaming. This leads to public amenities and other social provisions often being overlooked, while overloaded traffic networks and inefficient public transport systems worsen congestion and pollution. In the post-liberalisation era, such urban conditions rekindle the familiar conservation-redevelopment debate. In contrast to Engelhardt's ideals which appear theoretical and somewhat divorced from actual circumstances, local scholars monitoring first hand the deterioration in the quality of urban life begin to call attention to specific deficiencies in heritage management and problems of enforcement when development dominates, identify their interconnected causes and offer remedial suggestions.

Wan, Pinheiro, and Korenaga (2007) for example have observed using actual cases studies that urban development projects tend to be treated in an ad hoc manner on a case-by-case basis and therefore prone to government-based or even private interests. This scenario is attributed to the chronic lack of strategic planning within which to formulate an integrated conservation and management framework, as well as the absence of enforceable heritage design guidelines for regulating new interventions in old districts (the UIPs being no longer applicable). Within Macau SAR's planning administrative structure, poor inter-departmental coordination and communication also expose a fragmented approach in which conservation projects are often "initiated, planned and implemented according to each departments' interests and [...] their own subjective criteria" (Wan, Pinheiro, and Korenaga 2007: 21). Using the extreme case where an actual classified building is demolished to give way to a sports complex as part of a larger urban transformation project, Wan, Pinheiro, and Korenaga (2007) argue that heritage laws seem to be giving "more tolerance to heritage demolition than protecting them."

The resulting heritage-vs-development conflicts that have recently arisen have confirmed, as Imon (2008) discerns, that economic considerations have taken precedence over cultural ones. To combat these adverse impacts of urban change, he looks to the notion of urban sustainability that balances equitable sharing in cultural resources on a par with economic and environmental ones. McCartney and Nadkarni (2003) meanwhile draw attention to the fact that Macau's built heritage is founded on its multicultural vibrancy and historical character of toleration and receptiveness to external influences. A warning is issued against the current overemphasis on gambling-related sectors and the potential threat of lucrative developments causing irreparable damage to Macau's variegated past, ultimately leading to "an unfortunate paradox wherein the hand that fed was also the hand that killed".

Their plead is therefore for gaming to derive synergies with heritage conservation, and for the necessity to consider sustaining the cosmopolitan milieu and socio-cultural dynamism with fitting economics that would ensure the continuing enrichment of Macau's cultural identity (McCartney and Nadkarni 2003).

While these empirical evaluations stress specific concerns in terms of planning coordination, resource equity or multicultural awareness, they all agree on two fundamental conditions without which the current incompatibilities in managing Macau's heritage could not be properly addressed or resolved – first, the need for public participation and education; and second, the formulation of a flexible yet coherent urban vision coupled with effective statutory instruments to safeguard Macau's cultural significance. There have also been calls for cultural impact assessments and the setting up of a dedicated statutory heritage authority agency to oversee and monitor overall direction (Wan, Pinheiro, and Korenaga 2007).

Until very recently, Macau's public have been excluded from the planning and conservation decision-making process, save limited consultations restricted to trade-related organizations and certain professional bodies. The top-down approach, coupled with the lack of public dialogue meant that the unaccountable process has been abused and open to manipulation in the past, rendering existing heritage protection regulations ineffectual. Well-publicised cases of heritage being ruined include the gutting of old buildings in the Leal Senado area, only leaving their facades (SCMP 2004); the demolition of classified monuments such as the Sir Robert Ho Tung primary school and the removal of the mansion on Avenida Horta e Costa except the front facade (Wan, Pinheiro, and Korenaga 2007: 20). Without any formal consultative channels for local voices and an embryonic civil society, this invariably results in confrontations and protests when the detrimental effects of short-sighted planned or ongoing projects become intolerable. Local calls for collaboration of all stakeholders reiterate Engelhardt's advocacy for active community engagement. Based on informed participation, localized involvement is seen to complement professional and institutional efforts in envisioning responsible heritage stewardship.

The second appeal urges for a city vision which can strategize development in conjunction with conservation by cultivating long-term planning horizons, and in which the compartmentalized bureaucratic structure can be overcome by the establishment of an authority dedicated to monitoring the overall direction and coordination of heritage protection while working in partnership with local actors (Wan, Pinheiro, and Koranaga 2007; Imon 2008). Conservation experts overseas have also deliberated on the matter of relating the vision for Macau to the city's cultural significance. For Lamarca

(2002), a vision aspires to an ambitious but achievable future, while cultural significance concerns the assertion of a place's cultural identity, its distinguishing characteristics that justify its inclusion in the World Heritage List. Larmarca therefore considers it crucial for heritage conservation not to be "relegated to the backstage of economic development", but to assume equal importance as the burgeoning gambling industry in Macau's future, for as he put it, in order to be inscribed, "UNESCO [...] will demand no less" (Lamarca 2002: 34).

In a similar context, Stovel (2004) argued in 2002 that irrespective of World Heritage inscription, Macau's challenge lies in effectively sustaining the vision of citizens benefiting from "its many heritage values". His recommendations for a well-managed historic city correspond to the notion of "total heritage" envisaged by Engelhardt. Besides respectful re-employment of existing urban forms and vestiges, incorporating conservation aims and mechanisms as a core criterion for evaluating development options, and involving locals in decision-making, heritage must be made the centre of public attention. The issues at stake, such as the lasting protection of the city's qualities being fundamental to maintaining Macau's essential character and therefore key to evolving its cultural identity, must be openly debated. Stovel believes that "with strong public awareness, comes support, and ultimately the political will necessary to sustain heritage goals" (Stovel 2004: 120). In more ways than one, these pronouncements pinpoint the crux of Macau's problem, and anticipate the complications of the post-liberalisation era.

We have seen how the World Heritage label has magnified attention to the multi-faceted aspects of valuing Macau's heritage, from cultural to urban and social, from political to economic, and has generated the interplay of the various prospects and constraints. Crucially, conservation has begun to occupy a high profile in public consciousness. A specific heritage discourse was being built up, initially drawing from international and more theoretical perspectives. In turn, local on-the-ground interpretations emerged to reveal social and material consequences of poor planning and entrenched contradictions in gaming-dominated developments. Calls for increased participation and strategic urban vision testify to the critical recognition of heritage as the point of negotiation of possible meanings. By mid-2006, such questioning was translated into real action. Dismayed by the swift demolition and reconstruction of Ha Wan market (first built in 1954) near the Inner Harbour, activists campaigned to fight off plans to relocate a school that would obscure A-Ma temple's harbourfront connection. In June 2006, protests also halted government plans to pull down the "Little Blue House" – a de-listed 77 year-old mansion whose location borders the old and modern quarters (SCMP 2006). Successive heritage-related fiascos spawned a politics

of conservation whereby interested groups publicly contested the issues at stake. Eventually, this sustained heritage politics precipitated the Guia Lighthouse controversy when unrestrained urban growth is blamed for undermining Macau's World Heritage value.

Contesting Heritage: The Case of the Guia Lighthouse

Figure 1: View Showing Guia Lighthouse within the Guia Fortress, at the Summit of Guia Hill



Source: Thomas Chung.

The Guia Lighthouse, together with the Guia Chapel, are set within the Guia Fortress that sits atop Guia Hill, Macau peninsula's highest point (rising 94 metres above sea level), making the ensemble the most prominent of Macau's World Heritage Sites. The fortress itself was built between 1622 and 1638 to fend off Dutch invasions at that time, while the 17th century Portuguese-style chapel within houses elaborate frescoes that were only uncovered during

routine conservation work in 1996 and meticulously restored two years later. Displaying both Chinese and Western religious and mythological motifs that are considered rare in the region, the murals exemplify Macau's World Heritage pedigree of "cultural fusion and understanding". Adjacent to the chapel stands the Guia Lighthouse, inaugurated in 1865 as the first Western-style lighthouse along the Chinese coast. The 15-metre high tapering cylindrical tower has an observation deck encircling a central rotating lantern at its summit. Renovated and reopened in 1910, the lantern's beacon operates to this day, providing dramatic illumination of Macau's night sky. As important symbols of Macau's military, missionary and maritime past, the fortress, chapel and lighthouse cluster crowning Guia Hill, together with the Ruins of St. Paul's topping Mount Hill, constitute Macau's most recognizable icons.

Figure 2: View Looking Downhill from Guia Fortress



Note: New headquarters of the China Liaison Office – light grey building under construction with metal roof structure for lower portion, in centre of image. Note grey building to extreme left of image is the existing China Liaison Office building.

Source: Thomas Chung.

The Guia Lighthouse controversy broke out in October 2006 after three controversial high-rise building projects announced in the media caused a public outcry amid fears that the imposing new constructions would affect the views of and from the Guia Fortress. A mix-use residential/commercial tower 135 metre high was planned for one of seven plots of land slated for development along Avenida do Doutor Rodrigo Rodrigues at the southern foot of Guia Hill. Two plots away, the new headquarters of the Liaison Office of the People's Republic of China government in Macau was designed to a height of 99.12 metres (chosen to commemorate Macau's retrocession to China in December 1999).¹¹ The third major project approved was a 126 metre tall 34 storey residential block on Guia Hill's southwest slopes. Although not strictly within the World Heritage buffer zone, the contentious developments are just outside the "Protected Area" designated since 1992, and critics point out that once all the plots are occupied, the 300 metre long strip of what has been dubbed "super high-rises" would form a "wall of concrete" substantially blocking the sightlines of the Lighthouse ensemble from below (SCMP 2006). Seen as a major negative intrusion into the setting of the World Heritage site, activists are adamant that this "screening effect" also threatens to sever the bond between the lighthouse and the ocean, thereby destroying the spatial relationship symbolising the maritime and trading port culture on which Macau's cultural significance is founded.

Few would have noticed that the debated land parcels were excluded from the Guia Fortress buffer zone for the World Heritage application in 2005. Yet when news filtered through of developers being granted rights to develop buildings higher than Guia Hill itself only 200 metres away, conservationists and concerned legislators were quick to query the government's reasoning (Pina 2006). It transpired that there were indeed strict provisions for height control preserving urban visual connections for Guia Hill and the Nam Van area further south. Decree 68/91/M "Outer Harbour Reclamation Area Urban Intervention Plan" and Decree 69/91/M "Nam Van Bay Renovation Plan" were passed in April 1991. However the two decrees in question were considered obsolete and were repealed by the Chief Executive Order 248/2006 issued in August 2006, thus abolishing the 20.5 metre height limit previously set. The official dispatch states that as "original conditions [in 1991] for setting the regulations have changed, [the existing decrees] are no longer able to match Macau SAR's contemporary social and economic development". It also explicates the basis for revocation as being to

11 Construction actually commenced in February 2006, and completion was originally planned for the end of 2007 to coincide with the 8th anniversary of Macau SAR's establishment (MPD 2007b).

“ensure systematic and rational land use” by considering the “scarcity of land resource” and to implement “development needs of the gaming sector, one of Macau’s economic pillars”. It further reveals that unpublished amendments have been progressively made to those decrees to adjust them to Macau’s evolving urban conditions (MOG 34/2006: 1062-63). The lifting of height restrictions has been reportedly linked to the disgraced ex-Secretary for Transport and Public Works Ao Man Long before his arrest in December 2006 and conviction in January 2008 for the massive public works corruption scandal that shocked Macau (MPD 2007a).

If one understands the above reasoning in terms of developmentalist economics, then resource transfer to support the mainstay industry may present itself as a feasible short-term tactic. Yet if read against the context of valuing Macau’s World Heritage status, the explanation would appear alarmingly at odds with the expert advice mentioned earlier – of ensuring conservation stands equal to gambling and not consigned to the economic backstage, of balancing development against cultural concerns, and of opening up consensus-building public debate. Indeed, relaxing past height restrictions amounts to an open invitation for developments to maximise commercial gain. The resulting schemes, deemed to compromise the lighthouse’s visual connections to its surroundings, directly triggered the controversy. As cited, the safeguarding of the “visual integrity” of inscribed monuments in their settings¹² was the World Heritage Committee’s specific counsel for Macau given its unique urban disposition. The perceived jeopardy of this very point is an indication of ineffective management mechanisms under development duress, potentially turning heritage sites into isolated “oases surrounded by featureless and meaningless outlying areas serving more directly the needs of business” (Stovel 2004: 119).

Furthermore by annulling height controls in sensitive areas barely one year after World Heritage enlistment, the government is seen to lack sincerity, favouring commercial returns over preventing damage to World Heritage. The core question is the serious contradiction to earlier promises to educate the general public of the cultural value of heritage and appreciate its significance for continuity, as well as to invest substantial resources into protecting Macau’s Historic Centre (JDC 2007a). Bureaucratic responses to challenges by activists drew attention to the difficulty of overriding private

12 Integrity is defined as the material completeness or intactness of a monument or artefact. For question of cultural landscapes or historic cities, it is about identification of elements that make up the whole, such as urban fabric and structure, mutual relationship between identified elements and whole within setting that defines the historical significance of single historic structures within overall context (Jokilehto 1999).

projects already legally approved with commercial transactions ongoing, as well as the precedence of tall buildings erected outside the protected area prior to inscription. While unpublicized revisions to relevant rules undermined the government's legitimacy, the patent disregard of public sentiment and of UNESCO's recommendations arguably galvanized public discontent into earnest citizen action from the beginning of 2007. A string of street campaigns, signature collections and petitions gathered widespread public empathy and media attention, even generating an art exhibition dedicated to the issue (SCMP 2007a; MDT 2007). Eventually by July 2007, perhaps to placate the unprecedented civic activism, the government confirmed a 90-metre height restriction on buildings near Guia Hill to address the issue of the endangered views. Concurrently, the China Liaison Office also announced the lowering of its tower design from 99.12 metres to 88 metres to satisfy public opinion (MPD 2007b).

Meanwhile, local citizen organizations invited two conservation authorities from China to scrutinize the conundrum in Macau, with both concluding that it was "very worrying" (JI 2008a). Neither did the UNESCO experts' visit in August 2007 expressing their concerns provide any better outcome. Unaware of the gravity of the situation, the SAR government's response to UNESCO's query for clarification maintained that reversing already consented proposals would be problematic (SCMP 2007b). This "continuous negligence" prompted two concern groups to send public appeal letters to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in August and October 2007 respectively – to bring the Lighthouse's predicament to international attention, to describe the perceived flaunting of World Heritage guidelines, and to urge for immediate and serious evaluation and action on UNESCO's part to avoid further damage to the world's heritage.¹³ Three months after UNESCO's initial query for clarification, for which no response was forthcoming, the SAR government received a "letter of concern" in late November 2007 from the PRC National Committee for UNESCO and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage in Beijing requesting an explanation of the conservation of its heritage sites, specifically in relation to constructions adjacent buffer zones. Issued after the World Heritage Committee wrote to the Chinese government expressing their concern on the matter, the letter urged for coordination of such matters and implementation of measures that "strike a balance between urban development and heritage conservation" (MPD 2008a).

13 League of Guia Lighthouse Protectors (MPD 2007c), and Guia Lighthouse Protection Concern Group (MPD 2007d).

The fact that publicised pleas from civic groups have attracted UNESCO's attention enough for a national-level missive is evidence that with World Heritage status come more external scrutiny and accountability, and wayward conduct or delay in addressing complaints could bring unwanted notoriety. For concerned legislative councillors Au Kam San and Ng Kuok Cheong, this "warning letter" provides timely motivation for Macau's administration to publicly show its determination to clear Macau's reputation as a "culprit vandalising world heritage vistas" by cancelling all those contentious high-rise developments (JDC 2007b). In mid-January 2008, the World Heritage Experts Commission eventually confirmed that while no "displeasing incidents" have yet occurred, "improvements and adjustments to deal with grey areas" are necessary to "reinforce Macau's [...] world heritage outlook" (MDT 2008a).¹⁴ Macau then sent a delegation to Beijing, purportedly to account for and diffuse the embarrassing situation, as well as to discuss workable remedies (JI 2008a).

Macau's eventual written response to UNESCO World Heritage through the Chinese National Commission vowed to "put forth the biggest effort" to "ensure that current and future construction projects will not deteriorate the urban environment outside the buffer zones" (MDT 2008e). This is materialized in the form of the Chief Executive Order 83/2008 promulgated on 11 April 2008, which sets forth new maximum height restrictions for the surroundings of the Guia Lighthouse. The buffer zone, enlarged from 2 km² to 2.8 km², is split into 11 zones with height limits ranging from 5 m to 90 m that are determined by the proximity to the lighthouse itself. Visual corridors from the lighthouse to four major landmarks are preserved – the Outer Harbour (harbourfront where lighthouse lantern directly illuminates); the Mount Fortress (historic military fort on Macau's other high point); Golden Lotus square (one of the *amizade* locations and popular tourist attraction); Tap Seac square (large public square flanked by Avenida Conselheiro Ferreira Almeida). Falling within a height limit of 52.5 m, the 126 m residential tower will have to conform to the new rules, with any surplus levels removed. However, the seven contentious plots retain their recently set 90 m limit, thus allowing the China Liaison Building to proceed as planned. Meanwhile, an inter-departmental working group has been established to mediate with affected developers regarding compensation which may be monetary or through land swaps (TCP 2008).

14 In all this, media reports have alluded to how the China Liaison Office, as representing Chinese government in Macau, has been implicated and the negative impression it has projected, pointing to an astonishing lack of sense of crisis which in itself is worth reflection (JI 2008a).

Public reaction to the new regulations is divided. The business sector welcome the “careful decision”, while neighbourhood associations qualify that with a call for more comprehensive urban planning. Ng Kuok Cheong and a concern group claim that the restrictions came late, but are still positive, albeit with major reservations about the 90 m limit. Likewise, the League of Lighthouse Protectors are disappointed with that maximum height and question its “scientific basis”. Reiterating their propositions for the foot of Guia Hill to be landscaped, and the revival of the original 20.5 m height limit set by the Portuguese administration, the group also highlighted that it is unreasonable to use the public purse to pay for civil servants’ blunders (to compensate affected developers) (JVK 2008). More sceptical critiques suggest that the legalizing of the 90m limit areas may result in them filling up with buildings that high, and the vague definition of “visual corridors” could in future reduce vistas to narrow slots between urban canyons (JI 2008b). Yet despite lingering doubts on the effectiveness of the new decree and the administration’s determination to uphold the visual safeguards,¹⁵ the sense of imminent crisis subsided when in July 2008 UNESCO’s published list of endangered World Heritage did not include Macau (MDT 2008c).

As a navigational landmark whose exact longitude and latitude position (113° 32’ 47” E and 22° 11’52” N) has been adopted as Macau’s official geographic coordinates, the Guia¹⁶ Lighthouse literally illuminates Macau’s position. The threatened obscuring of this symbolic beacon of the city whose image is printed on currency results from the unfortunate combination of human and government errors, from uncoordinated negligence to development-driven irresponsibility. From media exposure to reprimands by locals and activist groups to international caution, these reactions are poignant indications of the disorientation in Macau’s urban conservation. The latest batch of corrective measures (revised height limits, realigned buffer zones), although satisfying those in the “better late than never” camp, is still seen as arbitrary by dissenters, who cite the more stringent regulations previously in operation during the Portuguese administration (MDN 2008).

The real risk and embarrassment of losing World Heritage status and its attendant privileges so soon after being inscribed may well have forced Macau’s administration to improve its indifferent stance. When announcing the new decree, the government for once conceded that Macau would soon “pay the price” for not properly protecting heritage sites (MDT 2008c). A

15 The Guia Lighthouse Protection Concern Group sent a second letter to UNESCO in June 2008 to report that the 126 m building has risen to 80 m when the new decree stipulated a 52.5 m limit (MPD 2008b).

16 “Guia” in Portuguese translates as “guide”.

two-month consultation on proposed amendments to the “Cultural Heritage Protection Law” was introduced in March 2008 to collect public opinion on how legislation can coordinate development, prevent encroachment on cultural heritage, and to better “protect the values of the “Historic Centre of Macau’s long-term development” (MDT 2008b). As heritage took centre-stage in public debate throughout the controversy, the voicing of conservational concerns and the government’s receptiveness tentatively herald a maturing stride for Macau’s citizen participation. How genuine the intention is to entertain community stewardship and actively accept the “paradigm shift” in heritage conservation that Engelhardt spoke of remains to be seen.

Conclusion: Towards Enlightening the Conservation Process

Recalling the multivalent contestability of valorisation in urban heritage and the need for recurrent negotiations responding to contextual shifts, this paper has attempted to delineate how the conservation process in Macau has evolved. From restrained postwar beginnings of traditionalist preservation, to the formative regulatory groundwork of the 1970s, the fragmented incrementalism and erratic enforcement of the development-prone 1980s; followed by a politically-slanted preoccupation with fabricating *amizade* monuments during the transition, the laudable revitalisation of streets and squares in the 1990s; culminating in the Historic Centre’s World Heritage recognition in 2005 with its attendant tourism-gearred commodification. In the post-liberalisation era, with unprecedented development pressures, heritage-related planning malpractices became increasingly interrogated by a rising heritage consciousness, via international warnings and supplemented by local diagnosis.

The Guia Lighthouse controversy is examined to illuminate Macau’s current predicament in heritage management, one in which value imbalances are triggered by developments resulting from opaque land concessions and irregular legislative manoeuvring. As a particular instance of the broader tendency for dispensing with heritage to facilitate gambling-driven growth, the confrontations were sparked off when value disparity between government and dissenting stakeholders intensified, especially when Macau’s World Heritage value was perceived to be endangered. The high-profile incident not only highlighted disjunctions between policy and public interest, lack of governmental transparency, and heritage activism; it also demonstrated how heritage values can be constructed, contested, rejected or renewed in the course of conservation politics. It further exposed how values

across scales – simultaneously as local plight, national concern and globally recognised status – can alternatively affect and effect each other.

The latest government actions to curb rampant development and assurance on “long-term value protection” appears to give hope to a vision of cultural significance that envisages citizens profiting from the cultural value of heritage – that of education, identity affirmation and enriching urban culture. In April 2008, the Macau government introduced an indefinite moratorium on granting any new gaming concessions, and will not approve more land for new casinos in the near future. Yet major inconsistencies persist and fresh controversies are brewing.¹⁷ Here, one is reminded of the oft-quoted assertion that “the price of heritage is eternal vigilance” (Aplin 2002: 352). For Macau, to become a well-managed historic city entails maintaining public watchfulness and campaigning for the balanced, cross-scalar judgments of values and tradeoffs in development decisions through open debate and inclusive participation. Specifically, this includes honouring its role as custodians of World Heritage, exercising due responsibility as a privilege rather than a burden. More importantly, a decisive strengthening of political will, oriented towards accountable stewardship of cultural heritage and integrated within built environment planning, is indispensable. Eventually, instead of being an unwanted blemish to be blocked out, it is hoped that the Guia Lighthouse controversy would serve as an instructive episode in enlightening the process of valorising Macau’s unique urban heritage.

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