

Ethnic Estrangement and Social Mobility in Macao: Perspective of Youth on Intergenerational Transfer of Ritual and Tradition

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Abstract. Focus groups were conducted to 28 young adults aged 18 to 25 years from different ethnic backgrounds in Macao, namely Chinese, Portuguese, and Macanese, to gain their perspective on intergenerational transfer of ritual and tradition in Macao, whilst experiencing two major milestones in the past two decades, specifically the political reintegration with the People's Republic of China in 1999 and the release of gambling licenses to non-local stakeholders in 2002. Findings show the current young adults in Macao were conscious of on-going socio-historically ethnic estrangement in society and developed sense of acceptance and intense social mobility by pursuing higher education, multilingualism, and career.

Keywords: Ethnic Estrangement, Intergenerational Transfers, Macao, Social Mobility, Youth.

1. Introduction

Macao, the 29.5 km² enclaves in the hub of Pearl River Delta, underwent two major milestones in the past two decades, namely the political reintegration with the People's Republic of China in 1999 after 450 years colonisation by Portuguese, and the release of gambling licenses to non-local stakeholders in 2002. Despite doubts and fears that the "handover" would diminish its *East meet West* culture, Macao blossomed economically and showed great effort in preserving the uniqueness of Macao, i.e. to restore the enclave's unique cultural heritage, which earned them UNESCO's approval as world heritage site in 2005. Long gone the small fisherman village of 30,000 people in the 15-century, as flood of worldwide immigrants (Chinese, South East Asian countries, Australian, and others) were added to already complex population in Macao. Latest Macao statistic census in 2013 showed that the local population comprised of 582,000, with main language spoken Cantonese, Chinese, English and Portuguese.

With this dynamic growth in Macao, we are challenged to explore the intergenerational transfer in family values and practices in Macao. Being the generation who grow up experiencing the transition of Macao from Portuguese sovereignty to China, young adults in Macao are the manifest and become the profile of Macao citizen. Even though both Cantonese and Portuguese are the official languages in Macao [1]-[3] ethnic groups in Macao are socially separated from one another, due to socio-economic history, culture and education level. Therefore Macao youth are a distinct source to understand the social interaction and mobility between ethnic groups from. In order to gain their perceptions and experiences of these changes, the study conducted focus group discussions [4] to young adults from Chinese, Macanese and Portuguese ethnic groups.

2. Intergenerational Transfer in Macao

2.1. Intergenerational Transfer

For cultivation of culture, intergenerational transfer must occur in terms of family values and daily practices. Intergenerational transfer [5], [6] is a process allowing for the recognition of previous generations and of the modalities that situate a human being in relation to the generations that preceded that individual's birth (vertical transfer) and the intra-generational transfer between generations (horizontal transfer) as one of the fundamental mechanisms resulting to social mobility; either continuity or change in human culture. The vertical transfer from parents to children entails, among others, genetic inheritance, congenital characteristics (i.e., cultural knowledge, skills, behaviour patterns, social orientations, and parenting practices) within the cultural contexts. Language, education, career and gender equality are components needed for social

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mobility. Higher education is perceived to be a good modality for better career and thus promote social mobility. Parents are generally motivated to transfer a given content to their offspring while the young adults are also open to horizontal transfer from their peers.

2.2. Macao: Family ritual and tradition

- **Macao Chinese.** Macao Chinese, as majority of population are from Cantonese speaking Guangzhou and Fujian provinces in China and greatly influenced by Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. One of the most significant intergenerational transfers in the Chinese culture is *filial piety* [7], [8], which is also shared by other Asian countries. Filial piety refers to the behaviours of the younger generation caring for the previous generations such as financial and psychological support, and as a symbol of repayment for upbringing, love and respect received from parents. However, filial piety practices are challenged by economic reforms, such as more working wives, which also weakened the social foundation of family care for the elderly [9]. In Macao, Chinese grandparents are more likely to offer assistance to ease the nursing and caring of the grandchildren, which would strengthen intergenerational relationships through improving mutual communication and understanding, closer emotional ties and increasing the opportunities of interdependence between the generations. Before the 1999 handover, the educational system was not well established [10], [11]; Macao Chinese were mostly omitted from obtaining jobs requiring higher education [12]. Whereas Catholic and Christian missionaries who came centuries ago from Portugal and other European countries were successful to introduce the religion to Macao, most of the Chinese are still observing their long Chinese beliefs embedded in a confusion culture [8].
- **Macao Portuguese.** The profile of Portuguese in Macao can be divided to those who had immigrated to Macao during colonisation and those who recently moved to Macao for better work and life opportunity. Most of them are Christian beliefs, send their children to Portuguese or English speaking school in Macao and continue tertiary education elsewhere. Their population has never exceeded 1% in Macao, however, up to now; the Portuguese remain mostly in elite Portuguese speaking bureaus and government officials.
- **Macanese.** A unique group evolving from centuries of intermarriage between Portuguese men and Asian or African women from the Portuguese colonies form the so-called Macanese identity evident in Patua (the Creole language) and unique Macanese arts, daily practice and cuisine [11]. China government use Macao as a ground for economic co-operation among Portuguese-speaking countries in the world [13], [14]. Since the governing Portuguese hardly learned Chinese and the local Chinese were not studying Portuguese at school, the Macanese (who speak both Portuguese and Cantonese, [15]) have become significant bureaucrats who bridge the cultural gap and often held important post in the government, as well as other sectors [1], [15].

2.3. Methodology

• Participants.

Young adults (N=28, 14 females and 14 males, ethnic background Chinese (N=14), Portuguese (N=5), and Macanese (n=9).), mean of age 22.61 years old, were recruited with purposive sampling. All participants have lived in Macao for at least seven years and had either a Macao permanent residence status or travel documents (passport). The seven years requirement was in line with the Macao government policy for those who were granted a permanent residence status although being born in another country (including China). It was also considered a meaningful length of time within the territory to have experienced the intergenerational transfer. All participants had graduated from secondary schools, 23 participants have university or college degree, and three has master degree. Most of participants still live with their parents, as well as grandparents.

• Focus Group, Data Collection and Analysis.

A total of six focus group discussions[4], [16] were conducted in English, consisted of four or five participants, and had representatives from at least two of the three main ethnic groups in Macao (i.e. Chinese, Macanese and Portuguese) and lasted approximately 90 minutes. Participants were encouraged to talk freely about the topic of intergenerational transfer, specifically on relationships between generations, family's approach to education, marriage, career and religion or beliefs, and the influence of Macao's environment to their upbringing. All data was transcribed and analysed using in-depth thematic analysis.

2.4. Perception of Macao Youth

- Who are Macao people?

The multicultural Macao creates ambiguity in identity among the youth. For many, Macao is their birthplace (some might be born in Hong Kong, as their parents wished for better means of expertise and hospitalization options, and obtained Hong Kong permanent residency), place they grew up, therefore they identify themselves as Macao citizen. However, the same perceived Macao identity is not applicable for Portuguese, as due to their genetic make-up and culture, they are very different compared to the Chinese in Macao, and they prefer to be called Portuguese Macao. With the increasing number of overseas workers in Macao, number of English speaking population is greater than Portuguese speaking population; thus the Portuguese and Macanese become ethnic minority in Macao.

- Ethnic estrangement

The youth reported ‘unwritten’ separation among the older generations: the Portuguese being the ruling society, the Chinese being the labour force, and the Macanese as intermediaries [1], who lived side-by-side, but not interacted with each other. The social discourse between older generations of Portuguese and Chinese were limited to work-related, and there were no intentions to go beyond employment, thus demotivated them to make an effort to learn each other language. The youth in Macao claimed that the split in society is narrowing as each ethnic groups gear towards improving Macao for the next generation, in terms of education and prospect in life, following with their own family value and practice. Among the young adults, we can see a *sense of acceptance*, passing from previous generation responding to this situation. The young adults prefer to be tolerant and being acceptance to the different practices among ethnic groups, determine to seek mutual benefit in order to maintain harmony in Macao. They also acknowledge that the existence of other ethnic groups in Macao is not a new phenomenon, as Macao has been an international hub for centuries.

- Intergenerational transfer in Macao Chinese society

The “Macao” born Chinese, whose families were brought over during Portuguese colonization to work in Macao, is still very traditional Chinese, and observes filial piety. The eldest son will continue family name. Children are supposed to bear the responsibility for tending to the elderly [17]. The other Chinese group, those who migrated to Macao to escape from the Communist regime in China back in early 20th century; and those who migrated to Macao after the 1999, speaks Putonghua, adapts and learns Cantonese in Macao, and forms a nuclear family leaving their elderly parents back in Mainland China. They make frequents trip to visit their birthplace, where most of the elderly live during Chinese New Year celebration.

The transition period before handover caused anxiety for many Chinese families, who are politically not in line with China and opted to move to overseas. Some families were simply sceptical and apathetic that they were even not aware of the travelling document option offered by Portuguese government during that time, due to lack of attempt to obtain information out of their social circle. However, there are also Chinese families who are actively involved in the future of Macao, who believe in *one country two systems* approach, and who build up patriotism and devotion for the better Macao. The compulsory and free education for primary and secondary level has equalized the opportunities to higher earnings for students from different gender and socio-economic status. Chinese female has the same opportunity in achieving higher education as their male colleagues. The current young female adults are evidently enjoying the same status, regardless their ethnic groups. The new booming Macao means more opportunities and better life, as the Chinese in Macao enjoy high salary as well as improvement in education, lifestyle, social and medical services in Macao [18].

- Intergenerational transfer in Macao Portuguese society

The expansion of Macao economy give the Portuguese community a good reason to live in Macao, as the language, laws and many government administration system still following Portuguese system. The Portuguese mostly work in middle to high-level government officials, or law and educational sectors, remains in their own society, circle of Portuguese speaking. Among the Portuguese community, there are two different groups, divided by their attitude towards the other ethnic groups; (1) the “Macao” born Portuguese, means those who have been living in Macao in three or four generations, and consider Macao as their home; (2) the new comer Portuguese, means those who migrate to Macao due to the uncertainty economic future in Portugal. The first group are more tolerant and acceptance to other ethnic groups, they consider Macao as their home, and raising their children as Macao people. They are actively involved with the Chinese community to preserve and to promote Macao culture. In the same time, they also maintain strong tie with relatives back in Portugal, and prefer to have their children to pursue higher education in Portugal. The second Portuguese group is still uncertain on their future in Macao, and still considers Portugal as their home.

Portuguese young adults realized the needs to acquire local language in order to have better grip of what is happening in Macao, and expanding their social circle. While studying in Portugal, they complained about

culture shock, that the Portuguese in Portugal are totally different than the Portuguese in Macao, and somehow, they had false expectation of life in Portuguese; thus sweet memories on previous frequent summer holiday in Portugal were replaced by bitter need to adjust and to adapt. They feel much more at home in Macao, than in Portugal. The youth boasted about more opportunities in Macao compare than Portugal, and that the future in Macao is very bright due to income from the gambling industry, therefore they would prefer to have their “own” culture, which is only understood among Portuguese or Macanese in Macao.

- Intergenerational transfer in Macanese society

As for the Macanese, their social circle is the most mobile among other ethnic groups in Macao. The Macanese can ease their way to both Chinese circle, as well as Portuguese circle, due their language ability and understanding of the culture. Macao youth also reported an increasing number of intermarriage between the Macanese and Chinese, more Macanese are speaking Cantonese than Portuguese at home, and less Macanese are Catholic believers. Therefore more Chinese culture was adopted into the Macanese culture, and young Macanese hardly understand Patua language.

- Relationships between generations.

To support families, increasing number of both husband and wife has to work. The number of nursery and day care in Macao are inadequate to help taking care children age six months up to kindergarten age. Childcare duty thus shift from parents to: in Chinese community, grandparents are reported to assist family in raising their grandchildren; whereas in the Portuguese or Macanese community, a domestic helper were hired to take care of the household and children. Chinese children are used to have their grandparents around them. However, the Chinese families, whose grandparents are not in Macao, have to rely heavily on the domestic helper –same as the other ethnic groups- thus their children grew up without fully experiencing grand parenting, and are not exposed to the act of their parents in taking care the elderly, except for annual visit or financial support.

- Social Mobility

Education. Most Portuguese and Macanese families have at least high school degree in three generation, and current young adults mostly have tertiary qualification. They sent their children to Portuguese or English school, and prepare their children to pursue higher education in Portugal. The Chinese counterparts are slowly catching up, and paying more attention to academic achievement of their children. Families invests heavily in their children education, by hiring tutors, private piano or violin lessons, ballet, art class, sport clubs, as well as sending their children overseas to boarding schools and universities.

Language. We are witnessing the increasing utilization of English, in Macao, in the service sector especially for hospitality, tourism, and banking; as well as in government documents and websites. Putonghua and English language are being integrated into the school curriculum; three international schools are established in the last decade, in Macao. The expanded in education and tourism sectors contribute to the development of multilingual community in Macao; in which the young adults find to be favourable yet challenging. The Portuguese participants showed a hint of regret not to try to speak Putonghua, even though they learned it in school.

Career. Older generations in Macao still think that obtaining a position in government bureaus is the best long-term career options. Many Portuguese families came after the handover and obtaining good positions in laws, education, and government socials. Portuguese youth voice their concerns on the economic downturn in Portugal, as well as in other Portuguese speaking countries such as Brazil, that option to come back to Macao is ideal. Youth in Macao still rely on their parent’s social network to land a good job. For Chinese and Macanese youth, getting a well-paid job in casino has become the best option [18]. The Portuguese young adults are pursuing different career compared to their Chinese counterpart, as they would like to focus more on non-gambling industry related sectors.

Commitment. While Portuguese young male adults don’t have the pressure from families for marriage, their female counterparts keep encountering occasions when their parents talked about having family and children. The Portuguese youth prefer Portuguese or at least English speaking partner, open minded personalities and have the same religion, which are Catholic or Christian. Even though their parents prefer if they tie a knot with the other Macanese, more and more Macanese are dating other ethnic groups. Chinese young adults showed their concern on their parent marital life; father being aloof and mother devoted all her life for children and taking care of the elderly; lack of compassion and harmony. Female Chinese are particularly are sceptical on the value of marriage, and doubt if marriage is really necessary. They are open for relationships with all ethnic groups, and wishing to have equal parenting responsibility and effort in raising their offspring.

Religion. Previous higher status due to converting to Catholicism is no longer observed among young adults in Macao, nor the conduct or practices among Chinese tradition, such as preparing offerings, or burning incense. The young Macanese mentioned that nowadays, the old tradition to have the Chinese bride or groom being baptized before marriage is no longer observed. Religion has no longer give special status, but more on fulfilling spiritual needs. Among the participants, almost all declared to have no religion, or any other beliefs; however, they still celebrate the highlight of the religious events, as a part of the family tradition.

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4. References

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