

World Heritage in Macau and its Blocked view problems

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Abstract

This paper discusses the problems affecting blocked views of Macao cultural heritage sites. The study found that Macau's heritage structures are increasingly facing challenges related to blocked views, which threaten their historical and aesthetic integrity. Through case studies like the blocked view of Guia Lighthouse in Nov. 2018, its incident was found that the Macao Historical Centre had been repeatedly warned by UNESCO about these blocked view problems. At the same time, the Macao government urgently needs effective management strategies to protect the heritage and historical value of Macao's cultural landmarks in visual side. This study contributes to the broader discussion on cultural heritage conservation and provides actionable insights for policy makers and conservationists aiming to mitigate blocked view problems in cultural heritage conservation.

Keywords

Macau, World heritage, architecture, Visual protection.

1. Introduction

Located in the Pearl River Delta Special Administrative Region of the South China Sea, Macau is known not only for its dazzling casinos and vibrant business environment[1]. but also for its fruitful cultural heritage and unique historical background. During the Portuguese colonial period, Macao became a melting pot of Southern European and Portuguese cultures, forming a unique cultural landscape in fusion aspects of east and west including art, science, technology and architecture. With the rapid economic development of Macao, the cultural influence of Macao has expanded significantly, beyond the influence of the past colonial period.

As the only city in China that is open to gambling, Macau is also one of the four largest gambling cities in the world, and the gambling industry has been inseparable from the local habitants in Macao, including culture, economy and politics. It can be said that gambling is the most influential activity in Macao. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, gambling has been recognized as illegal in mainland China. The Chinese government and people are opposed to gambling. However, in Macao, the local people have formed a culture of relying on the gambling industry to survive, and some scholars believe that gambling can be regarded as a unique gambling culture in Macao[2, 3].

2. Attributes of Representation of Macao Cultural heritage:

2.1. Visual representation of cultural heritage

The Macau government has identified the historic District as a tourist attraction. In Chinese social media, including little red book, Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, Kuai Shou, etc., apart from the photos related to casinos and hotels, the most common photos are about the historical city of Macau. The frequent use of Macau's historic sites in social media posts

highlights the city’s unique blend of Eastern and Western influences, which is visually captivating[4, 5]. Not just characters’ photos, but candid landscape and heritage photos. This of many people using Macau's traditional neighborhoods as a backdrop do not just reflect visitors' love of Macau's interesting old architecture or traditional food. It also reflects that the main representation of Macau's heritage is through vision. In other words, the main way to display Macao's cultural heritage, especially the historical city of Macau, is through visual communication[6].

2.2. Representation of high public attributes:

The UNESCO representation of Historic Centre of Macao is associated with tourism industry. Many of the cultural heritage buildings in Historic Centre of Macao have open to the public for years. At the same time, due to Macao's developed tourism industry, there are many tourists around the cultural heritage. At the same time, on festivals and weekends, bands and orchestras perform under the Ruins of Saint Paul's. On weekdays, there will also be teachers or professors to lead students for teaching activities. By figure.1, the representations of heritage and public access. Of cause, it can be concluded that Macao heritage is mainly biased towards entertainment and education. This reflects the high level of public access to Macao's cultural heritage[7].

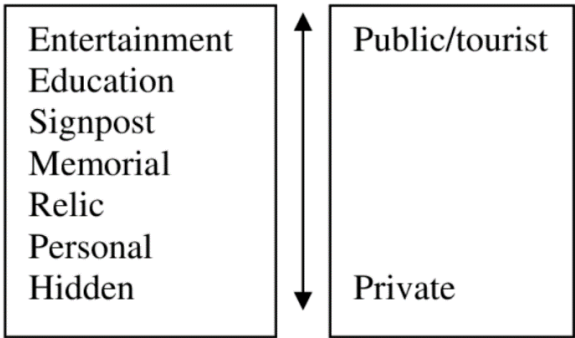


Figure 1 Representations of heritage and public access

2.3. Official Heritage representation

To discuss Macau's heritage, the first thing to understand is that unofficial heritage played an important role in local culture before the handover. Harrison point out the unofficial heritage refers to a property that has no legislative protection from the authority[8]. These unofficial heritages in Macau include folklore, cults, local festivals and community events that unaccepted by Portuguese authority at colonized per. Since the return of the Macao Special Administrative Region to China in 1999, increasingly restrictive cultural policies have made access to Macau's unofficial heritage difficult. Authorities set up their own cultural heritage websites and refused to include those that might exist. Since the successful application of the Historic Centre of Macao to become a UNESCO Cultural Heritage in 2005[9], the most influential heritage of Macau has been completely transformed into an official heritage, such as the Historic Centre of Macao, Portuguese cuisine, gambling culture, etc. because In 1974, the Portuguese government proposed to return Macao to China, and in 1979, it once again recognized Macao as Chinese territory. This idea of peace has been accepted by the Chinese people and the Chinese government[10, 11]. This idea was accepted by the Chinese authorities after the political transition, the imagination of Macau in Macau museum has been described as a land of peace, without the impression of being colonized[12].

3. Macau heritage and blocked View Problems:

3.1. Overtourism and tourists' arrival breaking the heritage views

Statistics show that in 1999, Macau received about 7 million tourists a year; In 2018, Macao received 28.213 million tourists. On an area of only 118 square kilometers, the density of tourists is crowded. For tourists, crowded scenic spots can not only be depressing[13], but also affect the appearance of the world cultural Heritage. From the perspective of behavioral geography, individual travel is subject to the integration of time and space and objective constraints, and tourists tend to travel routes that maximize time and cost efficiency. At the same time, the shape of Historic Centre of Macao becomes linear, and at the same time many cultural heritage buildings are getting linear as well. However, in the middle of many scenic spots such as Zheng's compound, Ruins of Saint Paul's and so on, which do not charge tickets for large traffic and large density of shooting points, due to the excessive number of tourists, it has affected the visual effect of cultural heritage structures. Simply put, in the tourists' camera, too many tourists affect the picture instead. The following is a comparison of the photos of the Ruins of St. Paul's in 2021 and 2024. It is also a comparison between the COVID-19 period and the fully open period[14,15]. When tourists head to the square in front of the large number of tourists, the humid and hot temperatures will make the tourists living further north, living in mainland China's tourists feel more unpleasant.

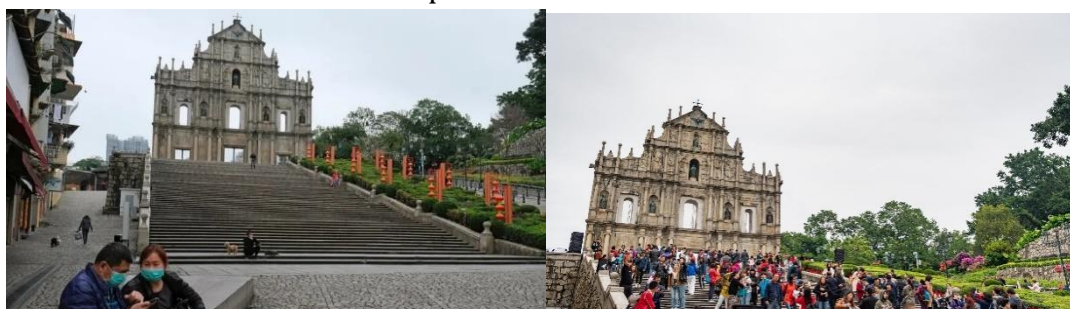


Figure 2 Photos of Ruins of Saint Paul's in COVID-19 period and Now

3.2. The outstand building attract lots attention

Macau is experiencing simultaneous housing problems. According to the Macao Bureau of Statistics and Census (DSEC), the population of Macao in the first quarter of 2014 was 636,200. The population of Macau in the first quarter of 2024 is 686,400. Over the past 10 years, Macau's population has been on an upward trend. Due to the lack of natural resources and mineral resources in Hong Kong and Macau, land and housing resources have become hot resources in both places. Starting from 2003, Chinese government developed and published a series of normative documents of protecting world heritage in China. On the Conservation issues presented to the World Heritage Committee in 2023, which was the closest document reveal a new target of protection. Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) will focus more on prevention of impacts on the overall 'setting'. According to the seven State of conservation reports submitted by Macao to UNESCO over the past seven years and the Decisions adopted by UNESCO, UNESCO has decided in 2008, 2009, 2011, 2017, 2019, 2021. Documentation on UNESCO website (Document Source:(WHC/23/45.COM/7B) (WHC/21/44.COM/7B) (WHC/19/43.COM/7B) (WHC/17/41.COM/7B) (WHC-011/32.COM/7B) (WHC-09/32.COM/7B) (WHC-08/32.COM/7B) all have mentioned the problems and suggestions for housing problem[16]. The high building directly occluded the heritage. For example, the landscape conservation crisis suffered by the Guia Lighthouse in 2017. Housing problems in Macao affected the environmental consistency of Nominated Core Zones. And the lack of a proper management system has also encouraged builders to follow suit, further ruining the landscape[17].

The Macau government used to try to impose strict building height restrictions to ensure that the World Heritage Site is visually protected. In 2008, the Macao government issued the government's regulations on building height restrictions in the area around the Guia Lighthouse, which divided 11 areas to give different height limits, among which three areas were limited to 52.5 meters above sea level. There are four zones with a height limit of 46 to 47 meters above sea level, and the two maximum building heights must not exceed 90 meters above sea level[18]. The law was intended to prevent local architecture from interfering with the visual aspects of Macau's cultural heritage. Especially when visitors look from the foot of the mountain to the lighthouse on the top. However, the events of 2017-2018 have made residents feel that such laws regarding the height of houses are ineffective in protecting cultural heritage[19]. And turned into a protest. In 2018, the Liaison Work Office of the Central People's Government Office in the Macao Special Administrative Region was starting construct at Lot 136 of Macao. Since the design height of the building is 99.9 meters, it is higher than the height specified by the regulation. After protests from conservation groups, the height of the building was eventually reduced from 99.9 meters to 88 meters, below the maximum height of 90 meters. The objective result, however, was that the lighthouse landscape was severely damaged. Some scholars believe that the case of Guia Lighthouse proves that the Macao government has neglected the protection of cultural heritage in urban planning[20]. As can be seen from the historical photos, the new construction has had a significant impact on the landscape of Guia mount since 1996[21].

3.3. The outstand building attract lots attention

From the map of Macau, the residential area is about 100 meters away from Macau Ruins of São Paulo. For these old historical buildings, the Macao government has not carried out restoration work. This does not mean that the Macao Government has been negligent in complying with the interests of the residents. The Macao government was following Article 11 of the Venetian Charter in the heritage protection: The valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected, since unity of style is not the aim of a restoration[22]. this is because the Macao government defines Macao's indigenous culture as a fusion of Portuguese and Chinese cultures[4]. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that the modern architecture in Macao is not the destruction of Macao's cultural landscape. And, of course, Modern architecture such as Grand Lisboa Macau also works as a part of Macau culture in the historic city of Macau. As the most prominent building in the city of Macau, the New Lisboa Hotel is synonymous with opulence and luxury. Its golden exterior wall and sharp shape show tourists the wealth and luxury of Macau. Its appearance was controversial, but it was a success for development company STDM. Because for a building, the worst thing that can happen is to be ignored. At the tourist destination, be a boring structure is a greater sin than to be ugly. But for visitors, ugly buildings can be a disaster. For those who visit Macau to see World Heritage sites, ugly, visually outrageous buildings ruin the visitor's visual experience. But for those who come to Macau for World Heritage purposes, the eye will be drawn to the hotel's exterior. This ignores the World Heritage buildings that can also be seen on the other side of the sea, such as Guia Lighthouse and churches.

4. Find solutions

Do Macau authorities really need to address this potential problem that could lead to fewer tourists interested in cultural heritage? Under the premise that the number of tourists entering Macao from 2015 to 2019 has increased year by year, SWOT analysis presented by shows that Macao has a single tourism industry structure, and the gambling industry accounts for a relatively high proportion. Meanwhile, more than 70% of the tourists listed shopping/shopping as the purpose of travel in the questionnaire survey of Macao's official government. The single

industrial structure is considered by Macao authorities as one of the biggest problems facing Macao, and it is necessary to continue to promote the development stage of cultural tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to solve the problem of visual obstruction of cultural heritage.

For some developing countries, their economic strength is insufficient, and they may need international support to ensure the protection of World heritage, but according to the report submitted to UNSECO[21], Macao never applied for international assistance since its entry into the World Heritage list[17].

Macao has established official departments and NGO related to cultural heritage protection. But faulty laws and inadequate oversight have led to the blocked view problem at the Guia Lighthouse.

The lack of laws requires the help of more research institutions. Through cooperation with universities, they should conduct corresponding research on tourists' expectations of World heritage sites, to formulate compliant laws for protection.

5. Conclusion

The characteristics of Macao's local heritage are closely integrated with the World Heritage of Macao's Historic City. At the same time, the developed tourism brought by gambling has brought a lot of pressure on the protection of cultural heritage buildings, while the regulation on heritage protection is still in the development stage and needs to continue to study and discuss. Since Macao's cultural tourism is based on photos and videos, starting from the visual aspect can directly strengthen the competitiveness of Macao's cultural heritage. At present, the protection of Macao's cultural heritage needs to be discussed from various aspects, including the visual pressure brought by tourists and the visual damage to the landscape brought by Macao's own development.

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