

# Macanese, endangered species

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There are occasions when one event, a simple phrase or a word catches our attention, serving as a reminder for something that – strangely enough – does not feature in the long list of worries that a person has on a daily basis.

‘Extinction’ is one of them and way before that, another two closely linked words: ‘endangered’ and ‘species’, each becoming used at a growing frequency nowadays to describe plants, animals, people or a particular community that are at risk of just ceasing to be...

Take the Macanese, for instance. I mean, specifically the indigenous people that has ingrained roots in Macau. Truly culturally- and ethnically-miscegenated individuals, eventually globalized even before the term was coined to suit the new ‘world paradigm’.

Some (a few) still cling to their source-cum-soil and the vast majority is somewhere afar, where life and destiny chose to move and settle them. On a temporary or permanent basis, always ready to return for a visit. Deeply linked to their roots – or to Macau as a concept – most stay Macanese (or better said – macaista, or maquista, or ‘Macau filo-fila’, to use their own old-fashioned definition, meaning ‘sons and daughters’ of Macau). Some are second or third-generation born overseas.

Surely it’s not unusual to encounter cultural and social minorities living in countries or regions where political and social changes are being shaped by ruling powers of different cultures. And yet, the case of the Macanese in Macau was always peculiar, in the sense of having seldom been at the helm – sandwiched between Portugal and China – yet they were the ones who managed to help and influence decisions. As advisors and ‘in-between’ with in-as-much-as an added-value conveyed by their natural ease of shuttling between two then totally diverse worlds, with different mental structures and...taste patterns.

To put it in a simpler way, being born and raised here over a few centuries made them wide open to multiple (not always visible) external influences, cultural-shaping ones, that only frequent and long-course travellers were usually subject to...for the better and the worse.

For example, bi- and tri-lingualism seemed to be an innate and empiric capability of the local-born. It was a potential that could be later on developed with success, given the chance and the will.

Something peculiar that always amazed me was the special ‘gift of creativity’ or even ‘genius’ that some of the most talked about characters in the community showed, in a long list of names not sufficiently known to or well-researched by historians and

sociologists. Yet they were famous and widely known within the community, over generations. Along with their even longer list of anecdotes, truer than fiction. So then, what about 'endangered' and 'near extinct'? Common reasoning leads us to believe that cultural patterns did change in Macau – a lot faster and deeper than its built heritage – and that social and political changes could foresee. The surest way to smother traditions and a cultural identity is to subject it to a gradual change and give it a slightly different twist. One twist at a time. Slowly so as not to shock and arouse a counter reaction. New generations can thus be led into different patterns. Internet-wide knowledge, facebook socializing and twitters, new spelling offered by messaging on mobile phones are all swift and effortless ways to new trends and another mindset. Changing the language, the paths, memories. Severing anchors to the past. Notwithstanding floating-buoys thrown decades ago (trying not to drown) to try counter this trend – by setting in writing, image and sound whatever was left of the worthy past and present to provide a background of a Macanese identity in the future – I somehow feel that rowing in different directions we were all overtaken by the future. Without a serious, honest and uncompromising collective effort, there will no longer be an 'endangered species' to talk about..it will be gone, replaced. Farewell Henrique.