



Dr. Ho Yin Lee

Moderator

Session Summary 1

Sub-Theme 1: Cultural Significance

[C]ultural significance, though deeply rooted and profoundly determined, must be as dynamic and evolving as culture itself. Paradoxically, cultural significance is both highly specific and hugely variable. The manner in which we address this therefore has to be flexible and deeply sensitive. Amita Baig

The above quote fully captures the essence of the first conference session on cultural significance. The three speakers presenting papers at this session were Dr. Christina Miu Bing Cheng, Dr. Ferdinand Lamarca, and Ms. Amita Baig.

Dr. Cheng started off the conference by addressing the identity of Macao. She described Macao's identity as being shaped by many Janus scenarios, which are manifested in the myriad of churches and temples; the images of 'Eastern Vatican' and 'Far East Las Vegas'; and the Portuguese and Chinese cultures. The peaceful co-existence of these pairs of contrasting faces is what constitutes the identity of Macao. Furthermore, Macao's identity is predicated on a 400-year fusion of eastern and western cultures, and this fusion has been manifested by the emergence of the Macanese group and the Macanese cuisine.

Dr. Lamarca then addressed the critical issue of whether new developments will have an adverse impact on the cultural significance of Macao, by analysing the compatibility of Macao's vision and cultural significance. He suggested that the various visions of Macao, as stated by the gambling industry and in such government documents as the *21st Century Macao City Planning Guideline Study*, may be incompatible with Macao's cultural significance. At best, cultural heritage will be the partner of the gambling industry in attracting tourists, and, at worst, cultural heritage will be relegated to backstage.

To conclude the session, Ms. Amita Baig addressed the importance of considering the political dimension when assessing the cultural significance of a



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place. Although governments do not define culture, they are the policy-makers who determine development. Thus, there must be a recognition that vested interests may exist, which might interfere in the determination of the cultural significance of an area. For culture to develop in a healthy manner, there must be an accurate grasp of the cultural significance of the place, and to achieve this, governments must consult local communities.

From the issues raised in this session, it was evident that one of the major tasks facing Macao is the formation of one unified vision statement that can guide not only cultural development but also the overall development of Macao. This vision statement should be compatible with the established cultural significance of Macao. In addition, both the government and the community should work on developing a strong and continuous dialogue. Macao is not aiming to protect just one building or site, but urban heritage, in other words the entire urban fabric. It will be difficult to implement any conservation management plan for the urban fabric without the support of the community. However, if stakeholders are involved from the beginning, namely by defining cultural significance, and thereafter actively participate in decision-making throughout the process, management plans will have the support of the people. To do this, however, governments must shift from the role of decision-maker to moderator. Government officials, acting as moderators, need to possess such skills as conflict resolution and consensus building in order to facilitate productive dialogues. By empowering the people, Macao can ensure that its cultural significance is respected, and its urban heritage can continue to be cherished, protected, and promoted by future generations.