

Think tanks continue to develop and contribute to Macao

EDITOR'S NOTE

Recently, China celebrated the 20th anniversary of Macao's return to motherland. The special administrative region (SAR) government and all sectors of society, with the strong support of the central government, have worked together to obtain remarkable achievements in terms of economic growth and social development. In this page, scholars from Macao look back on the SAR's academic efforts in the past two decades, helping readers understand how scholarly wisdom contribute to the region's construction.

By YE GUIPING

In 2019, the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) observed the 20th anniversary of its return to China. Through two decades of development, it has made remarkable achievements in many areas such as politics, the economy, culture and people's livelihood, thanks to the

great support of the central government and the joint efforts of the Macao government and all walks of life in the SAR. Also, Macao's think tanks have played an indispensable part in enriching and developing Macao's practices of "one country, two systems," making government decisions more legitimate and democratic and promoting the region's economic and social prosperity.

Macao's think tanks came into being in the era of Portuguese Macao and peaked during the transition before reunification as many issues concerning future development needed to be researched and tackled in that critical period of transfer of sovereignty. At the time, many different types of think tanks emerged. They made special contributions to the smooth transition and stable development after the reunification. Since 2012, President Xi Jinping has made a series of important arguments and instructions on building a new type of think tank with Chinese characteristics and establishing a sound decision-making consultation system. Meanwhile, in recent years, the country has proposed the Belt and Road initiative and the

Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. To better integrate into the overall strategy of national development and to boost prosperity and progress, all sectors of the Macao society have become more aware of the importance of think tank construction. In the new era, think tanks have sprouted with the requirements of the times, and more social groups have named themselves think tanks.

At present, the local think tanks in Macao are flourishing. The SAR government has established government-type think tanks within the system and also encouraged private think tanks to contribute constructive thought. However, there are

many flaws in the development of Macao think tanks. First, the quality of the think tank team and research results vary. Second, the think tanks have failed to achieve great international recognition, lacking popularity and influence in the international community. Third, there is a shortage of leading figures and talent training mechanisms targeting think tanks, which is not conducive to long-term development. Fourth, resource integration and allocation require improvement, and the coordinated development of think tanks is insufficient.

In this regard, think tanks must first attach importance to cultivating talent, strengthening team building

and improving the quality of results. Based on these goals, think tanks should strive to internationalize research fields, research perspectives, talent teams and sphere of influence. Secondly, the lack of human resources can also be eliminated through the introduction of foreign talent and taking advantage of the resources of the Chinese mainland. Synergy requires think tanks to abandon zero-sum thinking and work together to solve common challenges, thus achieving inclusive, sustainable and shared development.

In the new era, Macao is embracing more opportunities, requiring think tanks to strive for new development. They will not only provide intellectual support for the SAR government, but also strengthen discourse and influence in the international community, especially in the Portuguese-speaking countries. These think tanks must seize the moment, confront the challenges and seek a path based on clear orientation, collaborative openness and deep cooperation, thus contributing to Macao's prosperity.

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To better integrate into the strategy of national development, the Macao society has become more aware of the importance of think tanks. Photo: FILE

People-to-people exchange helps Sino-Lusophone cultural de-bordering

By FRANCISCO JOSÉ LEANDRO

Since the retrocession, especially after 2003, Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) has been exploring mutually reinforcing paths to de-border the culture, defined by Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede in 1994 as "the collective programming of the mind." The idea is to expand existing mutual trust for pragmatic cooperation between China and all Portuguese-speaking countries, taking into account the potential of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the Belt and Road (B&R) initiative frameworks. As clearly stated by the National Development and Reform Commission, people-to-people bonds are vital to an initiative of such scale as the B&R. Thus, the creation of people-to-people bonds begins by taking steps to overcoming barriers preventing the development of mutual interest while fostering other levels of shared knowledge and understanding. People-to-people bonds de-border the cultural barriers in people's minds. Similarly, President Xi Jinping mentioned in 2015 during the BOAO Forum for Asia that it is necessary to "promote inter-civilizational exchanges to build bridges of friendship."

Currently, the SAR's role reinforces high-level bilateral people-to-people bonds, pushing formal relations, boosting the operation of informal mechanisms of proximity,

and therefore giving a closer sense of hardheaded interplay among new networks of Sino-Lusophone private economic agents. SAR has been building a Sino-Lusophone grid of exchange for mutual advancement, based on three equally harmonizing people-to-people dimensions: one, the frames of exchange; two, the instruments of exchange; and, three, the characteristics of exchange.

Firstly, the SAR has identified a set of people-to-people frames of exchange, where the operation is multi-sectorial and inter-sectorial, often departing from the empiric shared interests of China and the Portuguese-speaking countries. Among these frames stand the professional and entrepreneurial sector; the education-academic and knowledge-skills transfer sector; the opposition of overlapping social identities and the emotional intelligence of key leadership; the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the governmental and non-governmental relations sector; and the clear vision of the purpose of exchange. Particular emphasis is on continuing investment in the people-to-people education-academic sector, fostering another level of interplay with international standards.

Secondly, the SAR has shaped people-to-people instruments of exchange, functioning to generate purposeful networks for permanent dialogue and interplay, which can be perceived to be of two types: institutions and policies.

It involves such institutions as the Office of the Secretary for Economy and Finance; the Office of the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture; the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries; the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute; the Macao Foundation; the SAR external commercial delegations; the University of Macao; the Polytechnic Institute of Macao.

As for policies, there is the concept of Macao as a "one platform" and "three centers"; the SAR as a center for yuan settlement; the functional planning of the GBA; the establishment of the Macao Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement; the dynamism of the industries of meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions and the rejuvenation of local creative industries; the Macao International Film Festival; the recognition of academic degrees between the SAR and Portugal; the consistent endeavor for benchmarking for financial, gaming and tourism sectors; the promotion of sports to an international level; and finally the high number of events conceived specifically to support the China and Portuguese-speaking countries cultural relationship, namely the Script Road Festival, the Lusophony Festival, the International Parade, the Annual Fireworks Display Contest, Macao Food Festival, the International Trade & Investment Fair, and the Portuguese Speaking Countries Products and

Services Exhibition.

Thirdly, bearing in mind the previous people-to-people dimensions, it is possible to identify the dominant characteristics of these processes of human exchange. Therefore, the SAR has the following characteristics: One, it has clearly identified the main goal of people-to-people exchange as an instrument of mutual advancement through pragmatic and nonpartisan cooperation for entrepreneurship, innovation and growth. Two, it has been capable of presenting a protracted, consensual, inclusive, non-confrontational and progressive people-to-people exchange, involving ad hoc groups, with bilateral, trilateral and multilateral involvement. Three, it has been building people-to-people exchange while being events driven and focused on the enhancement of human social capital. Four, it has undoubtedly promoted a transformational people-to-people exchange, based on non-politicized and secular collaboration, seeking tangible rewards and mutual gratification. Five, it has implemented people-to-people practices, which have raised the level of multiculturalism and inclusion, without attempting to be intercultural.

Political scientist Robert Putnam asserted that "bonding social capital is good for ... mobilizing solidarity," and it has the aptitude to implicitly use emotional intelligence and to establish and develop positive and

meaningful relationships. Bonding social capital is, if not an instrument of multiculturalism, at least a path to multicultural coexistence, advancing new frameworks of connectivity. In this vein of reasoning, the SAR is the natural people-to-people exchange mechanism between China and all Portuguese-speaking countries, acting as a contributor and as a facilitator of a national Chinese policy while supplementing sovereign and non-sovereign vertical bilateral relations. Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Macao retrocession to the PRC, it seems to be the right time to remind us all that the seemingly immaterial results directly arising from people-to-people relations are the vital blood to energize long term relationships. They are the deciding motivation for the very first step of a thousand mile journey. As Steve Orins, president of the National Committee on US-China Relations asserted, "if the people-to-people relationship is weak, then there is no foundation for government-to-government relations to stand on." The SAR has delivered an excellent practical contribution of national policy towards Portuguese-speaking countries, but it has not yet reached its full potential.

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