

# Heritage, the illusion of inheritance and the volatility of memory: A reflection on the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, Macau

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# Heritage, the illusion of inheritance and the volatility of memory: A reflection on the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, Macau

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## ABSTRACT

'Heritage', in our daily usage of the word, refers to those items that we inherit from our ancestors and that best represent our collective memory and cultural identity. While heritage and collective memory are allegedly entangled, such a correlation may not be so straightforward when we situate a modern-day 'heritagised' item in the *longue durée* of time to see how it becomes signified as such, and when we look closer at how collective memory can differ across time. In addition, how must one take into account the malleability of memory when relating it to the fixating notion of heritage? This article returns to the ideas of 'collective memory' and 'inheritance' behind heritage. Based on the archival studies of the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus (*Procissão de Nosso Senhor Bom*

*Jesus dos Passos*, 苦難善耶穌聖像出遊) in Macau, the author postulates that such an event, for its capacity to accommodate different significations, its distinct relationships with multiple people groups and its continued survival into the present, can shed new light on our understanding of heritage. This brief paper, in the end, proposes that any 'heritagised' item exists like a medium that can be related to, and imprinted with distinctive meanings by, diverse groups, which, in turn, renders the idea of 'passing down' possible.

## Keywords

collective memory, individual memory, inheritance, Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, Macau

## Introduction

Since the dawn of culture, humankind has always been busy recovering traces of foregone times in order to preserve their existence. Lineage and genealogy, where facts have constantly been blurred with fantasies, have been formed and revised so that a given community can sustain itself by claiming to be an 'orthodox inheritor' of a piece of history. For this reason, to propagate a specific identity and authority, individuals or groups would maniacally search for their past and retrieve what 'heritage' they should have inherited. As David Lowenthal (1998) and David Harvey (2001) demonstrate

in their studies of historical cases, this has been an ever-present human phenomenon. Eelco Runia (2007) also expresses that we have an increasing desire to commemorate the past so that we can always be reminded of our cultural identity and patrimony. We are ardently establishing ever more heritage and linkage with the past in modern days.

From the outset, 'heritage' seems to be always related to one's interpretation of history and one's memory of the past. These *lieux de mémoire* are where a community crystallises and realises their communal

memory and identity (Nora 1989), and they are the virtual gathering point where an 'imagined community' can be formed (Anderson 2006). Eventually, they have also become the tools and weapons for nationalism and nation-building (Nora 1989; Smith 2006). Heritage serves to give a community a sense of space where its members imbue it with meanings and emotions (Rose 1995; Kuusisto 1999; McDowell 2016; Smith 2021). Yet heritage is never inert. It can be a place of resistance, a 'bastion' to guard one's identity and culture (Nora 1989, 12) or a contested place (Bender 1993; Pantazatos 2015). Its institutionalisation also serves to propagate a specific authority, in line with Smith's Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) (2006, 29). Besides the politics of heritage, many studies have also elucidated the relationship between heritage and economic and tourism management, among others (McKercher and Du Cros 2002; Smith 2006; Pine II and Gilmore 2007; MacCannell 2011; Monterroso Montero 2021).

As seen from the aforementioned theses on the instrumentalisation and discourses of heritage, the idea of heritage has been politicised with various connotations. While it appears that they all build upon the same presumption – that heritage and the memory of its community are related (so that pieces of heritage can subsequently be treasured, propagated, contested, preserved, destroyed, or be unique enough to manifest a surplus on the market) – the linkage between heritage and memory has become gradually taken for granted and debased in the arguments presented above, where the *subsequences* of heritage are rather stressed and delineated. At the same time, in our daily usage of the term 'heritage', everyone would readily accept these connotations, transforming the notion of heritage into a platitude altogether (Choay 2014; Monterroso Montero 2021). What is fundamentally the relationship between memory – individual, unstable and nevertheless imposing – and heritage – fixating, commanding and nevertheless narratable? And how does this relationship render the phenomenon of 'inheritance' possible?

Taking a step back from looking into what a piece of heritage should be and how it could be of use, this article re-examines the relationship between two of the most important ideas behind cultural heritage – memory and inheritance. First, a theoretical framework will be presented, which deals with (1) the existing discourses of the relationship between heritage and memory, and

(2) the arguments on collective and individual memory. Building on this foundation, by investigating the case of the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus in Macau, which, as will be shown in the following archival studies, itself has accommodated different individual memories and has been connected to different communities of different stances, this paper proposes how heritage *per se* can be understood in terms of memory. It allows us to rethink how heritage can be conserved, at the same time being re-created by, and continuously interact with, the surrounding communities that are also concurrently evolving.

## Theoretical framework

To present a well-grounded case study and to reach a novel and sound proposition of a relationship between heritage and memory, it is helpful to first review the theories discussed therein. Of particular help are Françoise Choay's delineation of the origin of *patrimoine* ('heritage'), *monument* ('monument') and *monument historique* ('historical monument'); Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire* ('site of memory'); Maurice Halbwachs's arguments on collective memory; and Jan and Aleida Assmann's further exploration of Halbwachs's idea.

### ***1. Heritage: to inherit, to remind or to be remembered?***

In her historical account where she traces the emergence of cultural heritage, Françoise Choay (2014) highlights how the word 'heritage' – *patrimoine* – has shifted from its original signification to take up new meanings, from the familial, economic and legal level to any connotation that is determined by the adjective that precedes the word. Thus, we have notions like 'cultural heritage', 'natural heritage' and 'intangible heritage'. Concurrently, the idea of 'inheritance' seems to be shared as much as confounded among these various uses. For one, the original meaning of 'heritage' lends to the word's subsequent usage as items that a group has 'inherited' from preceding generations, which make a group how it is now. In this sense, heritage is further vested with the ideas of culture and collective identity, for a group would find in its heritage the essence that best represents the values and beliefs the group holds, and that makes every individual member of the group cohere. This thus explicates the desire and fever to institute lineage with the past and to claim different items as one's heritage, as portrayed in the introduction.

Laurajane Smith (2006) reflects that during the nineteenth century, when nationalism prevailed, buildings and sites that are deemed historically, aesthetically or religiously significant began to be labelled as 'monuments', for their grandeur and beauty remind their beholders of the nationhood they represent. Citing Choay and Peter Carrier, she also asserts that 'the monument became "a witness to history and a work of art" that took on a commemorative role in triggering certain public memories and values' (Smith 2006, 19). The idea of 'monument' – and 'monumentality', for their greatness, pompousness and intricacy that are judged to uphold certain essence or ideals possessed by a specific group and culture – becomes yet another layer of signification 'heritage' entails. Eventually, monument *as* heritage is also institutionalised, being, for instance, one of the principal definitions in UNESCO's Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972). In this definition, monuments, as well as other categories of cultural heritage, are valued for their 'monumentality', besides their being 'passed down'. But how can we account for this shift of meaning of heritage from collectively inherited objects to monumental items? Choay again offers a possible answer in her exposition of the word's etymology.

Referring to Alois Riegl, Choay differentiates 'monument' from 'historical monument'. Monument, according to Choay, derives from the Latin root *monere*, which means to advise, to recall or to evoke. Thus, far from being a neutral item, a monument elicits a living memory through emotions. It is an affective aide-mémoire. It is established such that the later generations can remember the present events, personage or beliefs, and it is constructed such that the past can reverberate with the present. It manifests the here-and-now, and it is created to preserve the present identity of a community. A monument is therefore defined by its relationship with the living memory (Choay 2014, 17–18).

It is not hard to see a parallel between Choay's delineation of the idea of 'monument' and Pierre Nora's thesis on *lieux de mémoire*. Echoing Choay's presumption that one creates monuments to counter the disquieting present, Nora portrays that our felt time is accelerating, that we sense that the present starts to slowly look 'different' according to our memory and that we are no longer living in '*milieux de mémoire*', real environments of memory (1989, 7) Therefore, we create *lieux de*

*mémoire* – sites of memory – so that our memory can be externalised, crystallised and preserved.

While both Choay and Nora relate memory with materiality, they also address the volatility of memory. Nora asserts that memory is in 'permanent evolution' and is 'open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting' (1989, 8). Choay, on the other hand, asserts that a monument, for its primary aim to remind the people of a piece of memory, is exposed to the assault of time: 'forgetfulness, disaffection and disuse' renders a particular monument forgotten and makes it fall (2014, 25). Therefore, once a monument cannot be related to any living memory of any living person, it will shed its value. But does this not reveal a contradiction between her understanding and UNESCO's promotion of 'monument'? Besides, Choay's 'monument' does not stress any 'monumentality' as implied in our current understanding of the word. A monument can be a building or a statue, but it can also just be a festival, a tool, a painting or a diary.

Such a contradiction is, as Choay highlights, the consequence of the blurring between 'monument' and 'historical monument'. From the 17th century, Europeans tended to use the word 'monument' to refer to something other than its mnemonic value. Monument became illustrative of something 'magnificent, durable and glorious'; it denotes 'power, grandeur and beauty' and promotes 'grand designs' and 'an aesthetic sensibility' (Choay 2014, 18–20). The ideal to evoke memory has, therefore, been gradually substituted by the ideal of beauty. Simultaneously, while we no longer create *ex nihilo* monuments that serve to remind us of our memory, we designate existing items as containers of our past. We 'select' and 'convert' items surrounding us into 'witnesses of history', removing or ignoring their original purposes (Choay 2014, 24–25). Monuments of our ancestors become historical monuments of our time. The idea of 'monumentality' that we know today is thus conditioned by this historical background, joining hand in hand with the ideal of heritage in the 19th century as depicted by Smith (2006). Therefore, UNESCO's monuments are truly Choay's historical monuments.

Nora's concept *lieux de mémoire*, on the other hand, also encompasses the reuse of items to be accommodated with new memories and meanings. She contends that right because their 'capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning

and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications', allows *lieux de mémoire* as a phenomenon to exist. That an item can persist as a *lieux de mémoire* is precisely due to its continuous 'failure to have become what its founder hoped' (1989, 19–20), because only then can such an item be always selectively bestowed with new meanings and memories, converting it to new witness of one's memory (Chan 2022).

From being inherited in a familial sense to being treasured for its cultural and historic relevance, from being an aesthetically pleasing item demanded to be remembered to being an emotive item capable of being vested with ever-newer memories, the notion of heritage, parallel to and overlapping with the ideas of '*monument historique*' and '*lieux de mémoire*', always implies some memory works performed by the community surrounding the piece of heritage in concern. Yet such a relationship between memory and heritage will be problematised when related to the second idea behind our understanding of heritage – inheritance.

## **II. Memory, inheritance or inheritance of memory?**

UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), as well as the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, better known as the Faro Convention (2005), which are seen by many as a response to the older Convention, intends to divert the interpretation of heritage from an imposing, aesthetic and historical perspective and place it back among the living people who really perform and are connected with specific pieces of heritage. These conventions emphasise the heritage's capacity of being passed down and continuously attended to (but not solely in its scientific, historical and artistic significance), in how heritage and its surrounding groups can be engaged in a respectful and responsible dialogue (but not in how one must unconditionally care for and remember specific heritagised items), and in how heritage can be continuously be related to a generation's memory and its idea of the past. The idea as well as the action of being passed down and received – 'inheritance' – is reinstated.

But while one may still talk about the 'inheritance' of heritage, is it sensible to assert that through the passing down of heritage the memory from our ancestors can also be passed down? If memory is ultimately an individual if not a generational phenomenon, how can it be inherited

from one person to another, and how can it be shared among generations?

One may think of Maurice Halbwachs's thesis on collective memory (1992) in resolving this problematic. According to Halbwachs, every individual memory can only function in social situations; individual memory is first and foremost embedded in a collective framework, thus collective memory. Such a collective memory pretends to be a reservoir of cultural and social symbols and tools that everyone from within that culture or community may relate to and utilise, such that every individual event can be narrated and made sense of, becoming therefore individual memories. In this way, living the collective memory, one does not need to relive a historical event to have that imprinted in one's individual memory – through education, communication, artistic expression or cultural interaction, one can fathom the past. In the same vein, even though no one from a community necessarily shares the same memory, since they are gathered precisely because they share the same collective memory, they are able to acknowledge the same set of cultural symbols and, using these symbols, can reflect on which items best represent their culture and cultural identity. Thus, drawing from a 'common past' through a collective memory, they claim certain items as their heritage, and thus they assume the position of 'inheritors' of this common past.

While Halbwachs's argument provides the *condition* from which a common past and a collective memory can possibly arise, in tracing how the memory of an individual event can be shared and eventually 'collectivised', Aleida Assmann reasons that when individuals of the same age witness the same 'incisive historical events', they then tend to have 'generational memory', which is a form of 'social memory'. They still have a direct memory of a particular event, yet when the memory is no longer 'embodied' but 'mediated', when not every individual possesses a living memory of an event, it becomes 'political', in the sense that it homogenises a specific group in periodic rituals and commemorations, and 'cultural', in the sense that it becomes rather performative, open for 'reinterpretation' and 'reassessment' (Assmann 2006, 213–215, 221). On the other hand, Jan Assmann differentiates 'cultural memory' from 'communicative memory', where the former is distant from everyday life, 'exteriorised and objectified', provides relatively stable symbols to one's culture and identity, and serves for a 'concretion of identity', whereas the latter acts as a reserve of symbols

that are more malleable in our daily life's interlocution, vernacular and eventually individually gestured (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995, 126–130; Assmann 2011, 110–111, 117).

While the above scholars have expounded on how individual memory can eventually be shared and subsumed collectively, Halbwachs (1992), for one, recognises that under the same collective framework, there can be multiple individual ways to adapt to and make use of the framework. But he has little to say about the phenomena where different, even contradictory, significations of the same piece of heritage can be observed within the same community (e.g. this may be most remarkable in the postcolonial context, where some from an ex-colony would view a person as a bringer of modernisation while others would view the same person as a war criminal), how collective memory can evolve across time, and where individuals from allegedly different cultural groups and communities with different collective memories can understand the same item.

Intriguingly, Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka relate cultural memory with cultural heritage:

Through its cultural heritage a society becomes visible to itself and to others. Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society. (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995, 133)

In comparison to Halbwachs, Assmann and Czaplicka appear to be more prudent in placing the evolution of collective memory onto the ecology of its society, thus implying that cultural memory can see influences from the myriad and volatile individual memories therein. Aleida Assmann, on the other hand, asserts that memory is fundamentally individualistic, 'perspectival and idiosyncratic', 'fragmentary' and 'transient', where 'every living individual occupies a specific place in the world which is not interchangeable', and the narrating of individual memory eventually employs 'emplotment' (2006, 212–213), which hinges on individual reasoning and experiences.

Nevertheless, none of them argues for an 'inheritance' of memory: they at most provide frameworks and conditions where one's memory can possibly 'influence'

and 'mingle' with the other's memory through *first* being disembodied, mediated and intervened by some sort of symbols and gestures. Such a reading of the dynamics of memory, together with the phenomenon that heritage can be designated with different memories, emotions and significations, will be further supported by the following case study. Despite the limited space of this article, a concise archival portrayal of this centuries-old procession will be shown.

### **The Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus: from a Spanish cult to Macau's heritage**

After the Portuguese navigators had secured their settlement in Macau around 1557, besides their primary preoccupation to further expand their trading routes to the mainland of China, Japan and other Southeast Asian nations, they diligently mapped out their missionary work in the Far East. This was the result of an earlier event: in 1494, the Portuguese and the Spanish empires resolved to divide the world into two missionary hemispheres according to the Treaty of Tordesillas (Stock 2015). As early as 1561, the first Jesuits arrived in Macau. From then on, missionaries from various orders began to found churches and be stationed in Macau, which also acted as a jumping-off point to further their trips to other places in Asia. On 23 January 1576, the Diocese of Macau, which was the first diocese established in the Far East, was created, confirmed by Pope Gregory XIII and decreed by King Sebastian of Portugal (Lach 1994; Serrão 1985).

Although both expanding their commercial status and carrying out their missionary 'duties' can be seen as the reasons why the Portuguese would have first set sail to Macau, the religious life of the Portuguese proved to be way more vibrant and enduring than their mercantile endeavours. The interdiction of the Macau–Nagasaki trade route in the 1640s, the rise of other colonial powers such as the Dutch and the English, as well as the establishment of Hong Kong as a British colony in 1841, contributed to the downturn of Macau's position as a commercial hub as early as the 18th century. At the same time, the presence of the Portuguese and their administration was never acknowledged (not to mention the long-standing ambiguous Portuguese and Chinese stances over in whose possession Macau was) until the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Trade (1862) and the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Peking (1887).

On the contrary, the 'public expressions of Catholic religious piety have been a constant feature of life in Macau' (Morgan 2021, 1). When, in 1832, Ljungstedt made his observations of Macau, he noted that, besides significant Catholic festivities such as Christmas, Easter and Sundays, there were numerous festivals dedicated to the Virgin Mary and different saints, multiple 'holy days' commanded by the Holy See and some 30 days where the devout believers can hear a Mass (Ljungstedt 1836, 12–13). Even during the last century, new celebrations and processions were created, such as the Procession of Our Lady Help of Christians and the Procession of Our Lady of Fátima (Morgan 2021). Churches, chapels and *confrarias* – 'brotherhoods' or 'confraternities' that supervised specific festivities and administration of particular churches – were continually founded.

The Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, or simply the *Passos* as it is known by the Catholics, is one of these religious events that survive today. We do not know when the first instance of the *Passos* took place in Macau, but the description of the procession itself first appears in 1708 in the archives (Cultural Heritage of Macau n.d.a). However, various sources suggest that as early as 1586, the Spanish Augustine friars, who travelled from the Philippines to Macau and founded Saint Augustine's Covent near today's Saint Augustine's Church, had already introduced the cult of the Passion of Jesus and practised it since then (Anonymous 1965; Ljungstedt 1836).

Although the cult of the Passion of Jesus may be a Spanish one, the fact that it could take root in Macau and eventually be taken up by the Portuguese might not be surprising. In 1580, there was a crisis of succession in mainland Portugal. King Philip II of Spain, a grandson of King Manuel I of Portugal, seized the opportunity to claim the Portuguese throne. The two crowns were, therefore, united, and the Iberian Union was thus established, until it was dissolved in 1640. During these 60 years, Spanish influence affected Portugal as well as its overseas holdings, including Macau. In terms of trading, Macau welcomed one of its prosperous eras for being the link between the two hemispheres, receiving trading groups from both Goa and Manila. In terms of missionary work, Macau began to accommodate a diversity of religious orders, such as the Augustinians and the Dominicans from Spain, allowing them to establish churches and practise their faiths. It is for this reason that the Spanish could first disembark in Macau, rendering the eventual

assimilation of the *Passos* into Macau's culturescape possible.

Be it as it may, the Augustinian friars were expelled from Macau in 1717, and the *Passos* ceased to take place. In the following years, there was a scarcity of food in Macau. According to the records at the Senate of Macau, in 1721, there were groups of Chinese locals who urged the Senate to continue the *Passos*, for they attributed the cause of the famine to the cancellation of the *Passos*. They pleaded to the government:

To make that man with the stick behind his back walk through the streets, [while the Chinese would be] offering the expenses. (Anonymous 1965, 138, my translation)<sup>1</sup>

In the same year, the *Passos* was once again carried out and, miraculously, the calamities in Macau improved. Since then, the *Passos* has not skipped a single year.

In the 19th century, after the Portuguese kingdom had abolished all religious orders within its territories, the Confraternity of Our Lord the Good Jesus of the Passion was created to continue the respective rituals and to manage Saint Augustine's Church (Anonymous 1873; 1884; Teixeira 1975; 1976). Even in 1911, when the Portuguese Republic decreed that all religious practice should be confined within designated religious buildings, intending to minimise the ecclesial influence in the newly formed secular state, the *Passos* as well as other processions in Macau appeared to be little affected. This is because, for a long time, the processions in Macau were largely sponsored and organised by prominent individuals and the confraternities rather than the churches or the clergy themselves. They were not 'created by or in response to encouragement from either ecclesial or civil authorities' (Morgan 2021, 7). Apparently, by that time, many of the processions in Macau had long since lost some of their religious implications, taking up instead a popular significance.

From the bulletin published by the diocese in the 1960s to the video clip taken by Rádio e Televisão de Portugal in 1972 and my own observations in 2023, the route of the *Passos* and the rituals therein have remained much the same. It always entails a two-day procession – except that it was reduced to a one-day ritual between 2020 and 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It always takes



**Figure 1**  
The Passos before the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo from the official website of Cultural Heritage of Macau. <https://www.culturalheritage.mo/en/detail/2464/1>.

place on the first weekend of Lent, the period of 40 days before Good Friday. A *Novena*, where Mass is held for nine successive days in Saint Augustine's Church, antecedes the procession on Saturday. During this period, the image of the Passion of Jesus, in which Jesus, wearing the crown of thorns and half kneeling, carries a cross on his back, is removed from behind the altar and placed in the transept so that he can be venerated by the public within their reach. On Saturday evening, a Mass and a sermon take place, and the bier on which the image, now veiled by purple curtains

with golden fleece, is installed will depart from the church, carried by six friars from the Confraternity of Our Lord the Good Jesus of the Passion. This marks the beginning of the *Procissão da Luz* (the Procession of the Light, because the cortège held torches that shone through the city centre before the installation of electric light). The police band accompanies the cortège, and the procession slowly proceeds through the city centre of Macau until the image reaches the cathedral. Another sermon is held, and the image stays there overnight.

DESPESA	
1	Subscrição do <i>Boletim Oficial</i> ..... \$ 10,00
2	Festividade de Nosso Senhor Bom Jesus dos Passos ... 130,00
3	Dito, de Nossa Senhora das Dóres..... " 32,00
4	Dito, da Santa Mónica..... " 24,00
5	Dito, de Santo Agostinho..... " 41,00
6	Cantores na festividade de Nosso Senhor Bom Jesus dos Passos ..... " 95,00
7	Orquestra para a Missa solene, dito, dito ..... " 35,00
8	Música nas procissões de Sábado e Domingo, dito ..... " 75,00
9	Gradificação aos serventes..... " 27,00
10	Missas durante o ano económico..... " 58,00
11	Velas para serem bentas e para a festividade ..... " 250,00

**Figure 2**  
An excerpt from the Confraternity's budget plan for the year 1924–1925. It shows that, besides the Passos (item number 2), which costs comparatively more than the other items, the Confraternity was also responsible for other processions such as that for Our Lady of Sorrows, for Saint Monica and for Saint Augustine. None of these three exists today (Teixeira 1975; 179).

On Sunday morning, after a Mass is held in the cathedral, a girl in white, acting as Veronica who, according to tradition, helped Jesus on his way to Calvary and wiped the blood and sweat off his face, will appear, singing a solemn tune. The image of the Passion of Jesus is now unveiled. Together with Veronica, the image leaves the cathedral and returns to Saint Augustine's Church. The route, however, is longer than the way of the procession to the cathedral. The cortège stops at seven places, representing seven of the 14 stations of *Via Dolorosa*. The Bishop of Macau, the clergy from different religious orders and the devotees, children and youths in white and purple holding standards, candles, flags and other symbols of the Passion also join the image. At each stop, the leading priest reads a prayer. Veronica then faces the image and sings

a verse, slowly revealing the contours of Jesus's face on her scroll. Concurrently, the friars and the believers kneel before Jesus. This process is repeated at every stop, until the image arrives at Saint Augustine's Church. The whole Passos is concluded with a sermon.

As the historical documents show, there were always 'fine-tunes' in terms of the route of the Passos. For example, in 1708, the procession on Saturday evening proceeded from Saint Augustine's Church to Saint Dominic's Church, situated some five hundred metres from the cathedral. In 1712, the procession started from Saint Lawrence's Church, passing by Saint Augustine's Church, and reached the cathedral on Saturday night. On the next day, having departed from the cathedral, the ritual was concluded at Saint Dominic's Church. From then on, the trajectory of the Passos became stabilised (Ljungstedt 1836; Anonymous 1965; 1974), except when Saint Augustine's Church was undergoing renovation and during the pandemic the last few years.

While such bigger frameworks – when and where to celebrate the Passos – have been relatively constant,

many finer features of the Passos do not survive today. For instance, Ljungstedt reports:

The Redeemer [was] supported by eight of the most distinguished citizens. The bishop with the secular and regular clergy, the governor, ministers, nobility, the military, and the whole Roman Catholic population, it may be said, assist, deeply affected by the scene. (1836, 154)

The Passos before the Covid-19 pandemic had at least two differences compared to the description above. First, the cortège has shrunk in both the number of participants and the diversity of roles. Since 1910, when Portugal became a republic, no nobility has been present, and since some years before the transfer of sovereignty of Macau in 1999, the military hasn't participated either. Besides, as delineated, many religious practices have become largely popular in nature. As *Religião e Pátria* reported in 1965, there was already no involvement from the colonial government. Also taking into account the political uncertainty in both Portugal and China from the 1960s to the 1980s, the disconnection of the Passos from



Figure 3 Map showing the route of the Passos as well as the churches alongside. The blue line traces the route taken on Saturday evening, from Saint Augustine's Church to the cathedral. The red one depicts the returning route on Sunday. Picture created by author.

authority increased. To this day, it can be said that the Passos engages solely those who are believers.

Second, the image of Jesus has also changed. Specifically, the image in Ljungstedt's time required *eight* bier-bearers, while, in 1972 as well as now, *six* men carry the image (Rádio e Televisão de Portugal n.d.). Indeed, the archives reveal that there were at least three different images used from Ljungstedt's time until 1911: in 1876, a new one was brought from Paris to replace the preceding one, which 'had already existed in Saint Augustine's Church for a century'. Concurrently, there was also a smaller one, which was not used in the Passos but was stored in the chapter room of the Confraternity. In 1911, because the new one had been used for more than 30 years, the Confraternity resolved to use the smaller one instead, 'since the one that has been carried until now would not be appropriate, both because of its exaggerated proportions and of its excessive weight, that it greatly exhausts the friars to the point that they want to evade the work, as seen from experience'. However, the Macanese friars in Hong Kong objected to the plan furiously and, in a lengthy letter to the Confraternity, they wrote that 'the old traditions should always be conserved and respected, as was done by our forefathers [...] and that the friars from Hong Kong will always be ready to carry the heavier platform if you provide this devout privilege to them'. Yet the Confraternity in Macau rejected this proposal, and the image was once again replaced (Teixeira 1976, 194–197, my translation).

In addition to these changes, many practices which could be seen as an expression of devotion have also disappeared. For instance, believers, presumably Macanese, would light candles, spread petals and burn incense in front of their houses when the cortège passed by – these rituals could have been forgotten by today's generation. Certain Macanese families would also have the privilege to light up petroleum lanterns along the route on Saturday night, while other designated individuals would hold *tochas orodíficas* – 'fragrant torches' – which were, in reality, sulphur torches, surrounding the image along the procession. To manifest extreme dedication, some devotees would also be seen lingering 'barefoot under the platform', while 'one or other woman [...] takes off her shoes to fulfil the vow in moments of extreme affliction' (Anonymous 1974, 30, my translation). Besides, the election of Veronica would have been a huge annual event among the Macanese and Portuguese communities.



**Figure 4**  
The Passos in 1972. Six friars are seen carrying the image. Photo from 'Noticiário Nacional: Procissão Do Senhor Dos Passos Em Macau', Rádio e Televisão de Portugal. 26 February 1972. <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/procissaoem-macau/>.

Every young girl, particularly those from prominent families, would see such a position as a trophy, and for this reason, they would work hard and build up a reputation among their circles to win the post. However, as time goes by, while various Macanese families have emigrated to other places, and while some of the practices have been simplified due to the lack of manpower or even banned due to safety reasons, the aforementioned practices are almost no longer observed (Anonymous 1974; 2017; 2021; Teixeira 1976).

The involvement of the Portuguese in the Passos has also decreased. Today, the Macanese and the Chinese Catholics are largely the one participating in and organising the Passos. Even those Macanese – but not necessarily the Portuguese – who are now dispersed globally will also return to Macau to participate in this annual procession, as long as they are available. The Passos, according to many Macanese, is a symbol for them, in which they can feel united. It is through the Passos, as well as other processions, that the Macanese are assured of each other's presence and their culture.

Though it has been an event in which Catholics of different ethnic and cultural origins actively participate, there was not much reflection on the Passos coming from the Chinese community until the turn of the millennium. Approaching 20 December 1999, the destined day when the sovereignty of Macau would be transferred from Portugal to China, the Passos as well as other Portuguese



**Figure 5**  
A devotee seen burning candles and laying petals as the cortège passes by.  
Photo from 'Senhor Bom Jesus dos Passos', Revista Macau, February 2017.  
<https://www.revistamacau.com.mo/2017/02/07/senhor-bom-jesus-dos-passos/>.

legacies started to be seen instead as witnesses of history, and thus 'heritage', as the government and the public would have it.

One of the scarce Chinese sources on the reflection of the Passos comes from Father Pedro Chung Chi Kin (鐘志堅). Sharing how he witnessed the Passos in his childhood and how it has constantly made impressions in his mind, he states:

Though the Passos can be seen to be a folkloric tradition, after all, such a religious practice entails a history of more than a hundred years. It still retains its religious appeal. It not only touches the individual on the three levels of emotion, mind and spirit but also through a long-term collective experience, a call for a collective identity is also formed. This allows the devotees in Macau to bear a uniqueness. (Chung 2004, my translation)<sup>2</sup>

It is not hard to see how he converges the ideas of the Passos being 'folkloric', being a religious practice and being localised after its long history. It is also interesting to read how he, without mentioning 'heritage' a single time, asserts that the Passos is a place where he and other believers share a common value and that he will continue to interact with it.

In 2005, the Historic Centre of Macau was enlisted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From then on, the legislation concerning Macau's own cultural heritage as well as the inventorisation of intangible cultural heritage



**Figure 6**  
Children of predominantly Macanese origin carrying different instruments symbolic of the Passion of Jesus during the Passos in the 1970s (Anonymous 1974, 30).

has been debated, consulted and reviewed. In 2014, the Cultural Heritage Protection Law took effect, and in 2017, an inventory of 15 intangible cultural heritage items, including the Passos, was prepared (Cultural Heritage of Macau n.d.b). The public consultation in 2019 to officially enlist the Passos as one of the items of intangible cultural heritage is worth a closer look.

In the official consultation document, the following appears in the section that describes the Passos:

Macau holds the oldest Catholic Diocese in the area of East Asia, conserving a lot of rituals that are valued for their longevity and specificity to the place. The Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus, having a history of more than three hundred years, is representative of these rituals. It is also the largest traditional religious practice that is still carried out today in Macau. This religious festivity contains a richness of characteristics that is specific to Macau; it is an important embodiment of the

multiplicity of the religious and cultural essence of Macau. The abundance and the representativeness of the cultural qualities inherent to the Procession are a witness of the cultural exchange between the East and the West. The Procession gains the participation of the general public [...] Every year, a large number of tourists are attracted to participate in and experience this Procession, which also reveals Macau's liveliness as a hub of cultural exchange. (Cultural Institute 2019a, my translation)<sup>3</sup>

During the consultation period, 1,168 opinions were received, 1,023 of which concerned the Passos. Of these, 790 (77.2 per cent) were in favour of the inclusion of the Passos in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, while the others (22.8 per cent) were not. To summarise, the proponents thought that the Passos could be seen as the embodiment of Eastern and Western cultures and religions, that it can attract many people and tourists to participate, that it accords with their personal beliefs, that it is a significant annual event, that it can be seen as a demonstration of respect to diverse beliefs in Macau, and that it forms a part of the citizens' memory. On the other hand, the opponents reflected that religions should not be categorised as heritage, that the Passos is not special at all, that it does not correspond to their personal beliefs,

that it is not popular in society, and that it is not relevant to Macau.<sup>4</sup>

In the end, the Passos was officially enlisted as one of the 12 intangible cultural heritage items of Macau.<sup>5</sup> In the following years, however, the Passos was greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which altered the layout of the ritual. In 2023, the Passos returned with its full itinerary and contents. Many citizens and tourists were attracted to this event and walked along with the procession. Yet shopkeepers who have not seen such a pompous event for the last three years, friends of the helpers who walked the Passos, legislators, journalists, photographers and even a few practitioners of other beliefs were all drawn to this event. Who knows whether the Passos is for them an occasion to practise their faith, to meet somebody they know, to experience the uniqueness Macau offers or to stay close to those who appear in the same occasion?

### Towards an organic understanding of heritage

Now that a historical portrayal of the Passos has been presented through the above archival studies, some nuances may allow us to rethink the notion of heritage. Precisely, we can see that multiple groups have engaged



**Figure 7**  
The Passos in 2023. Veronica is showing Jesus's image on her scroll before Saint Augustine's Church, the last of the seven stops of the Passos. Photo taken by author.

with the Passos: the Confraternity which manages the organisation of the Passos; the Chinese Catholics who predominate as the participants of the Passos today; the Macanese who perceive the Passos as a cultural symbol; the people of Macau who vote for, or against, the inclusion of the Passos as the official cultural heritage; the government that views the Passos as an embodiment of Macau's history and special identity, even the Chinese locals in the 1720s who believed that the image and the Passos were related to the famine; and the Hong Kong Macanese who asserted that the older, heavier image was the true tradition that the friars should have respected. If we follow Halbwachs's idea of collective memory, can we say that they are all of the same community, because, regardless of their different views, they can all refer to the common Passos? But how, then, can we explicate these differences if they are all living the same collective memory? If, indeed, they are of different communities with different collective memories, does it not mean that they could have their own ways of understanding the same Passos, which is in reality not completely the same among their views?

The Passos can be vested with different meanings: as a religious cult; as a religious expression and, eventually, national identity by the Portuguese (Morgan 2021); as a symbol of unity; as an event to practise one's faith, even as a 'folkloric' and 'naively popular custom' (Anonymous 1974, 31); as a unique stage where different people are brought together; and ultimately as a piece of heritage. The case shows that the memory works the Passos entails is, in the end, an individual and individualistic phenomenon, and everyone has their own ways of interpreting the event, though different interpreters may share a more or less similar set of cultural symbols (Assmann 2006). The Passos, in addition, for it has manifested different significations by different individuals, is a result of 'its identificatory appropriation' with its surrounding individuals, whose individual memories, in turn, exhibit 'the constitution and tendencies of a society' (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995, 133).

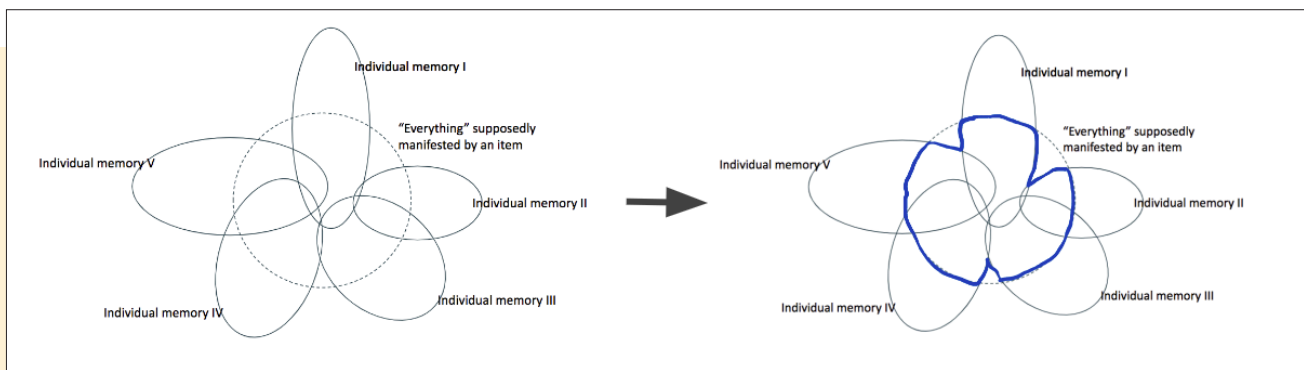
But the case of the Passos does not merely elucidate that memory is individual: it appears to reflect a sort of paradox. On the one hand, though the Passos has formed different relationships with different communities, they all have the memory of a Passos in their minds; on the other hand, though the appearances and the meanings of the Passos are evolving, the Passos still appears to be 'passed

down'. I contend that it is but a paradox in appearance, for there are fundamentally as *many* Passos as there are beholders of the Passos, and there is fundamentally no 'passing down' of any item as heritage.

To begin with, a signification for the Passos must first be yielded by any individuals for them to be able to relate to the Passos. Such a relation, in turn, allows the individuals to 'receive' the Passos so that they can eventually make sense of and practise it. Since individuals will 'emplot' in their own way to narrate their own signification for the Passos (Assmann 2006, 212), every signification, and thus every relationship with the Passos, will be different. In continuously practising and making sense of the Passos, a feedback loop between the Passos and the individuals forms. Subsequently, their relationship with the Passos is enhanced in specific ways, and only in continuously practising it and relating it with oneself can the Passos survive today. For the very same reason, because such a hermeneutical relationship can be formed between any individual and the Passos, there are fundamentally as *many* Passos as there are beholders of the Passos, though there is *optically* only one Passos – the one that exists in front of every individual's eyes.

If indeed such a hermeneutic cycle is formed between any individual and the Passos, and if any community is formed by such individuals who relate with the Passos in specific ways, then it is safe to say that the constitution of any given community's memory is porous: two individual memories may overlap in some parts (Assmann's delineation of generational or social memory) and, *ad infinitum*, if the overlapping parts of a specific number of individual memories are expansive, chances are that they may come close and form a community. Thus, collective memory is truly this 'collection' of the overlapping parts of all the individual memories concerning a specific event or item (Figure 8). In the same vein, two communities, though possibly having exclusive perspectives of the Passos, may also share some overlapping significations towards the Passos: the Spanish and the Portuguese overlap in that they are Catholics; the Portuguese and the Macanese understand each other in that they attend the same procession; the public and the government of Macau are both inhabitants of Macau who witness the Passos annually, and so on.

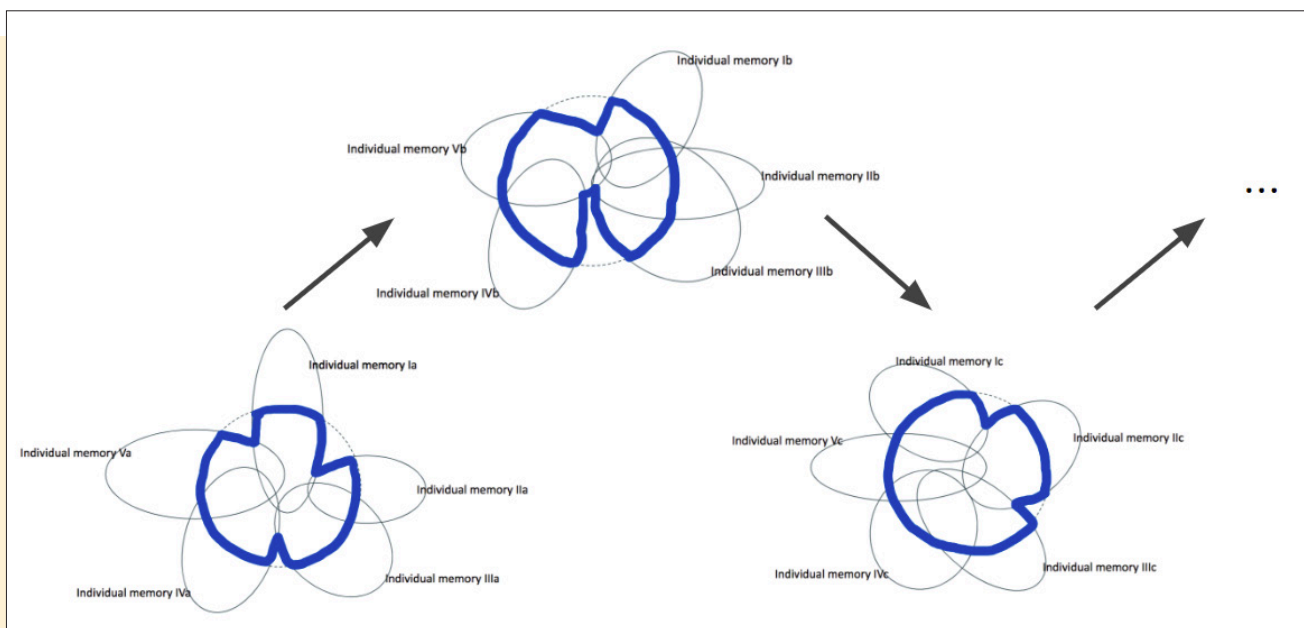
For the same reason – for the communities' commonness and exclusiveness among each other



**Figure 8**  
The dotted line includes 'everything' supposedly entailed by an item, while the other five solid circles show how, for example, five individual memories, in yielding significations for the item, may overlap with each other. Only those areas where the dotted circle overlaps with a solid circle – in other words, the part where signification can be given by being related to an individual – are truly constituent of the individual's memory of the item. The 'collective' memory of the item, thus, is truly the 'collection' of the overlapping parts of all the individual memories concerning the item – the part enclosed by the blue line.

– when one 'inherits' the Passos from the other, one must *remember* and *not remember* some aspects of the Passos so that they can claim the Passos as theirs, ignoring concurrently some of its original intentions (Nora 1989). In Danièle Hervieu-Léger's words, the Portuguese memory must first be 'readjusted' so that the Passos can resonate in their memories and they can align with the Passos (2000, 145). In other words, the Portuguese must first have 'left' their own exclusive memory and, thanks to their memory's overlapping with the Spanish,

they could understand the Passos. Thus, readjusting their individual memories collectively, they eventually formed a relationship with the Passos, assimilating it and practising it. The Passos's 'Catholicness', which is common among the two groups, undermined its 'Spanishness'. Applying such a reading of the dynamics of memory to the above case study, the Passos can thus be recycled, reused and re-signified by different communities (Nora 1989; Hervieu-Léger 2000), shedding its original connotation and taking up new attributions. It also provides an explanation of the



**Figure 9**  
While individual memories can evolve, and while different people have different individual memories, their relationship with the item also evolves, so the 'collection' of those individual memories changes. Nevertheless, in that individual memories can always relate to the item collectively, an illusion of 'inheritance' is manifested. 'Heritage', on the other hand, is the name given to the result this succession of the blue area.

possibility of the shifting from 'monument' to 'historical monument', where the mnemonic devices of a foregone time can be reinvested with contemporary values, converting it to a piece of 'heritage' judged to be processed by a specific group (Choay 2014).

This leads to the resolution of the second part of the paradox portrayed above: there is fundamentally no 'passing down' of any item as heritage. 'Inheritance' – in the context of heritage – is illusory, for no item really passes down to us (Figure 9). Rather, by dint of a delve into, and a reworking of, our memory, we have the agency to relate ourselves with an item, giving it significations and values, and engaging ourselves in an intimate relationship with it, 'claiming it as if it were our belonging' (Chan 2022, 142).

## Conclusion

Memory remains an individual phenomenon and experience. Collective memory is the overlaps of various individual memories, the 'collection' of all those individual memories concerning a specific item. Simultaneously, as the case of the Passos shows, precisely because of the existence of the mismatching parts and the changeability of individual memory, such a collection of individual memories can evolve, different communities can understand the same item and a community can still understand an item though it is altered. All these lead back to the fact that it is precisely the individual memory, not a collective memory, that is manifesting itself in yielding significations for an item in any seemingly 'collective' situation. The Passos – I mean the significations of the Passos – is where these individual memories meet.

'Heritage', therefore, is the phenomenon where the volatility of memory can successfully create the illusion of inheritance. A community does not passively 'inherit' an item, but every individual from the said community, in their own way, relates their own individual memory to the item, renders this item narratable in accordance to their own historical world view and eventually claims it as theirs in their individual ways collectively, and 'heritage' is the name given to this result. Any item given the name 'heritage', in the end, is but the temporary 'container' of the collection of all those 'disembodied' individual memories at a specific time. It is a symbolic and gestured medium, consisting of a 'mediated' face – where the beholders cast their individual ideas in relation to it – and a 'mediating' face – where

the 'heritagised' item intervenes and 'mingles with' the beholders' individual memory.

The Passos is metaphorical in allowing us to understand heritage in novel ways: just like how the Passos awaits the spectators to relate it to their own memories so as to make sense of it, the signification of heritage lies in the people. The whole pomp – the idea of heritage – would be senseless if no one actively attempted to understand it, and it would disperse before it actually exited the beholders' eyes. 🇬🇧

## ENDNOTES

1. 'Para que fizesse andar pelas ruas aquele homem do pau às costas, oferecendo-se para [os] gastos.' (Anonymous 1965)
2. '若視苦難善耶穌敬禮是一種民間習俗，畢竟這項宗教習俗有過百年的歷史，他是有其宗教的感召力，不單令個人在情、意、靈三層面上有所觸動，而且透過長期的集體經歷，就形成一種身份認同的作用，為澳門教會的教友塑造一個特性。' The complete document, which is in Traditional Chinese, can be viewed in this link: <http://archive.hsscol.org.hk/Archive/periodical/spirit/s063g.htm>.
3. '澳門擁有東亞地區歷史最悠久的天主教區，保留了很多具時代意義及地方特色的禮儀，苦難善耶穌聖像出遊就是當中的代表之一，具有超過三百年的歷史，是澳門現存最大規模的傳統宗教實踐之一。該活動保留了具有濃厚地方特色的宗教實踐，是澳門本地多元的宗教文化精髓的重要體現，其豐富並具有代表性的文化內涵，是澳門東西方文化交流的見證。活動得到市民普遍的參與[...]每年都吸引大批旅客來澳參與體驗，亦充分表現澳門作為多元文化交匯兼容城市的活力。' The complete document, which is in Traditional Chinese, can be viewed in this link: [https://www.gov.mo/zh-hant/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/03/%E9%A0%85%E7%9B%AE%E5%88%97%E5%85%A5%E3%80%8A%E9%9D%9E%E7%89%A9%E8%B3%AA%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96%E9%81%BA%E7%94%A2%E5%90%8D%E9%8C%84%E3%80%8B%E5%85%AC%E9%96%8B%E8%AB%AE%E8%A9%A2\\_%E4%B8%AD%E6%96%87%E7%89%88.pdf](https://www.gov.mo/zh-hant/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/03/%E9%A0%85%E7%9B%AE%E5%88%97%E5%85%A5%E3%80%8A%E9%9D%9E%E7%89%A9%E8%B3%AA%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96%E9%81%BA%E7%94%A2%E5%90%8D%E9%8C%84%E3%80%8B%E5%85%AC%E9%96%8B%E8%AB%AE%E8%A9%A2_%E4%B8%AD%E6%96%87%E7%89%88.pdf).
4. The complete result, which is in both Traditional Chinese and in Portuguese, can be viewed in the document through the link: [https://www.gov.mo/zh-hant/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/10/ICM-Intangible-Report-\\_final-1003.pdf](https://www.gov.mo/zh-hant/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/10/ICM-Intangible-Report-_final-1003.pdf).
5. They are: Cantonese Opera, Cantonese Naamyam (Narrative Songs), Taoist Ritual Music, Belief and Customs of A-Ma, Belief and customs of Na Tcha, Festival of the Drunken Dragon, Herbal Tea Brewing, Religious Woodcarving Figures, Patuá Theatre, Macanese Gastronomy, Procession of Our Lady of Fátima, and the Procession of the Passion of Our Lord the Good Jesus.

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