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# Nostalgic tourism ain't what it used to be: What makes a destination engender nostalgia?

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## **1) Introduction**

Increasing attention has been devoted in the literature to the popularity of nostalgic tourism, which could be viewed as a separate form of tourism whose motivation is of a personal nature. Scholars have during the last few decades published research articles on nostalgic tourism from the perspectives of anthropology, sociology, psychology, management and marketing (Davis, 1979; Graburn, 1995; Wildschut, Sedikides, Routledge, Arndt & Cordaro, 2010). From a sociological point of view, nostalgia is defined as “a sentimental or bittersweet yearning for an experience, product, or service from the past” (Baker & Kennedy, 1994, p. 169). From an anthropological perspective, Graburn (1995, p. 166) commented that nostalgia tourism is travelling “with a wish for the past” and it is a personal effort meant to slow down one’s life cycle, to indulge in one’s earlier stage of life or as a way to counter rapid changes. Stern (1992) suggested that nostalgia can be reflected on one’s own identity, social identity and collective memories. Most of the existing work on this theme focuses on the definition of nostalgia, categorization of nostalgia, tourists’ motivation for engaging in nostalgic tourism, nostalgic activities undertaken at a destination as well as tourists’ consumption patterns in the course of a nostalgic tour.

The present study adopts an interpretive qualitative approach which aims to reveal whether there is a prospect that any destination could be reckoned as a nostalgic destination by some and, if it were to be the case, to identify the elements of the destination that has the potential of fostering nostalgic feelings. Apparently different destinations may have different catalytic elements as regards inspiring nostalgia, but could it be possible that they have some elements in common? This paper uses Macau as a research locus to identify the potential markers that can attract the tourists to a destination suitable and promotable for a nostalgic journey. Macau’s rich history and cultural recourses made it known as a cultural and gaming tourism destination rather than a nostalgic destination (Wong and Qi, 2017; Wong, 2013). Macau thus is an interesting case to illustrate how a destination can provide a sense of nostalgic feelings to tourists; those who would choose to visit Macau repeatedly are the ‘prime suspects’ of being motivated at least partly by nostalgia in a tourism context. The rest of the paper begins with a section providing an overview of the literature. It is followed by a short introduction to the research locus; afterwards comes a

methodology section which covers data collection and analysis. Section 5 presents the findings meant to provide a better understanding on how a destination is perceived by tourists as a nostalgic destination as well as what elements are perceived to be catalysts which can trigger one's nostalgic feeling towards a destination. The last section concludes.

## **2) Overview of Cultural Tourism and Nostalgia**

Much tourism is motivated by human curiosity and desire to experience the otherness, the extraordinary and novelty (Lee & Crompton, 1992). These were once the hallmarks of having mass tourism in the world of modernism. However from a tourist point of view, particularly as of the result of globalization and technological revolutions, many conventional tourism resources from all over the world are fast homogenizing. The extraordinary and the novel are getting harder and harder to find. The same brands of international corporate hotel chains and luxurious products have their hotels and shops located at places anywhere where tourism is developed in the world. On the other hand, ancient "hardware" built a long time ago, and presently known as "heritage assets" which contribute to satisfy tourists' search for the extraordinary differentiates one destination from another (Lowenthal, 1985). This is perhaps the reason for the popularity of cultural tourism that is taking place worldwide. Another contributing factor is that now people travel around the world with a wish to confirm and experience first-hand what they have been told about the world through their schooling, mass media and possibly word of mouth. They also may have learned about the destination in the course of earlier visits, a case of particular interest here.

Cultural tourism is defined as "visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle of a community, region, group or institution" (Lord, 1999, p.3). Stebbins (1996) considers that cultural tourism is a serious form of leisure which is the opposite form of casual leisure that most of the mass tours are offering. Reisinger (1994) comments that tourists who undertake cultural tourism tend to experience the variety of cultures that are different from their own. McKercher & Chow (2001) suggested that the larger the cultural distance between tourists and the host's culture, the higher

probability that a cultural tourist will visit that cultural destination. In general the literature suggests that the focus of cultural tourism is often on the appreciation of others' cultural systems rather than on one's own (Reisinger, 1994; Stylianou-Lambert, 2011; Holbrook & Schindler, 2003; Russell, 2008).

MacCannel (1973) initiated the academic discussion of the tourist with the vision of one who is burdened by the wears and tears of daily life and the familiarity of an habitual urban environment and is longing for observing and experiencing a simpler life, new cultures and nature. Thus tourism, in the work of MacCannel is akin to the undertaking of a religious pilgrimage with an aim to "purify and recharge the soul", to uncover the 'true self', to experience 'authenticity'. In the work of Graburn, a possible reason for the existence of the particular case of nostalgic tourism is that it is indeed a search for more authentic experiences but with a focus on one's own social and cultural systems, a journey to find connectedness with one's own originality and rooted communities (Graburn, 1995: 167).

In the study of MacCannell (1973) appears the earliest and fundamental idea behind theming a nostalgia tourism model. Afterwards more research articles were published on the theme of nostalgic tourism (Davis, 1979; Havlena & Holak, 1991; Graburn, 1995; Stern, 1992; Baker & Kennedy, 1994). Importantly, nostalgic tourism appears to be an independent form of tourism which is no longer categorized under cultural tourism. According to Marchegiani & Phau (2011), there are two kinds of nostalgia for one's past, namely historical nostalgia ("the way it was") and personal nostalgia ("the way I was"), corresponding to two forms of authenticity, object authenticity and existential authenticity. Historical nostalgia refers to how things were in the past. The tourist's interest in this matter need not be a personal experience; to the contrary, it could simply be a desire to take part in a historical moment. When an individual feels historical nostalgia, he or she may get a sense that the past might be better than the present. In the words of Graburn (1995), it is "a wish for the past". This is congruent with Sterns' argument (1992) that a person could be pondering having a glimpse at some primal golden age, and by engaging in historical nostalgia, indulge in the good old time of a particular era.

As regards personal nostalgia, Davis (1979) suggests that it is a personal effort to reconnect oneself with one's own ancestry lineage, origin of one's own cultural system(s), and personal memories of the past. For instance, an individual may travel to a place where he/she was brought up and where fragmented childhood memories could be reassembled. Some people travel for learning more about the past of a particular object or a cultural system that no longer exists in their current living place (Havlena & Holak, 1991; Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). Only by travelling to a particular destination will allow an individual to uncover the silent past, according to Fairley (2003) and Teye and Timothy (2004); it is the reason why nostalgic tourism emerges as an independent form of tourism.

Dann (1996) explains that the reason that people care for and are eager to search for the meaning of the past is due to a confirmation of their own social and cultural identity. Nostalgia is a psychological state that could be "triggered" by an individual's memories. It is the fundamental part of social bonds, self-regard and generate positive affect (Wildschut, Sedikides, Arndt & Routledge, 2006). Research shows that the emotional production of nostalgia could be positive, negative or mixed. The emotion of "bittersweetness" has been mentioned frequently, and it has been noted as a complex human attachment which is a combination of positive and negative feelings. Holak and Havlena (1998) state that human's psychological traumas or losses can all lead to a realization of the incompleteness of life. There is thus an urge to search for a reconnection of the past with an assumption that some delightful and precious memories of one's past are retained (Belk, 1990).

People usually remember the experience of the first success or the first-taste of freedom, positive emotion attachment will be strongly marked with a particular event (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). On the other hand, some scholars report that unpleasant feelings could be generated as well by a nostalgic tour (Best & Nelson, 1985; Hertz, 1990; Peters, 1985). The generated emotion is then under the "distress and loss" category (Wildschut et al., 2006). According to Peters (1985), even though the past has been lost and cannot be relived, one would look back

occasionally and replay some moments of life for grieving and other emotional needs. There is a special form of nostalgic tourism that is under this 'distress and loss' category. In Rosaldo (1989)'s work, it is called "imperialist nostalgia". It could be a nostalgic tour undertaken by those who experience repentances and visit from the Western world from which themselves or their ancestors may have destroyed life through colonization or exploitation of others' resources.

A small literature on the tourism industry has examined the roles of nostalgia on branding a destination, product distribution and consumer behavior (Fairley, 2003; Chen, Yeh & Huan, 2014; Leong, Yeh & Chang, 2015), and a consensus is that nostalgia is one of the important motivations for tourism and influences the consumption of cultural resources. A nostalgic themed attraction would be a key component of an attraction's image and provides satisfaction to the visitors who are searching for such an experience (Chen, Yeh & Huan, 2014). Leong, Yeh and Chang (2015) discovered that if nostalgia forms a part of a destination image, such a partial image can have an influence on the experiential value and re-visit intention. Travelling in a group to a destination with potential for nostalgia creates a platform to share the contexts in which people have common memories and helps reinforce their identity as a unique cultural group (Fairley, 2003).

There are four types of nostalgia according to Dann (1996); they are: "quest for paradise", "simple life", "the bygone era" and "return to childhood". The "quest for paradise" stands for an escape from one's daily life and the core motivation to visit to a destination is relaxation and rejuvenation. The "simple life" stands for a cooling-off period through going back to nature; it also refers to the needs of escape from the daily urban routine and techno-modernity. Conversely "the bygone era" stands for reappraising the land's history and social activities of earlier times, towards which some degree of fascination is felt. Lastly, 'return to childhood' refers to the sense of the objects associated with a personal 'rooted experience' from yesteryear, like fish and chips to a British or hot dogs to an American, things associated with an individual's cultural identity. In other words, based on Dann (1996)'s suggestion, any destination in fact can become the nostalgic destination of someone and it can offer more than one thematic nostalgic experience.

The remaining question worthy of further investigation is the one of identifying what exactly is it that can trigger an individual's nostalgic emotions during a visit to a destination. The concept of Tourist Attraction System is a useful one for this task. 'Tourist attraction system' was first suggested by MacCannell (1976) and further explored by Leiper (1990). This theory explains how 'markers' function in promoting 'sights' for 'tourists awareness'. MacCannell (1976) defines a sight as the central element of an attraction. Gunn (1988) uses "nucleus" to denote a sight. The nature and the role of a marker, as defined by MacCannell (1976) is that a marker is information that is given on a sight, like an information board next to a heritage site, information that people can find on the internet or pamphlets given by local tourism office. A marker thus provides a linkage between a tourist and a sight (Culler, 1988; Leiper, 1990). While people are attracted to visit a sight, there must be at least one marker to waken the tourists' awareness of the existence of that particular sight. Urry & Larsen (2011) view a marker as a symbol that tourist can use in order to recognize a sight in an attraction system and if the marker performs its role, then the attraction is 'collected' by the tourist's gaze. Markers in the tourist attraction system literature indeed inspires the authors of the current paper on the issue of identifying the elements that can engender nostalgia and can trigger a tourists' emotional attachment to the destination, as a marker does.

### **3) About Macau**

The core objective of the current research is to look for what are the potential markers that can make a tourist perceive a destination as a nostalgic one. Apparently different destinations may have different kinds of markers, but could it be possible to find what some of them are in common? Revealing these markers can contribute to scholarly knowledge about the questions of under what conditions a destination can engender nostalgia. Macau is the research locus and it was chosen because it has rich historical and cultural resources and, at the same time, has considerably changed in a couple of decades, meaning that it has a present different from its recent past. The new gigantic luxurious casino hotel complexes have not only changed the



geographical landscape of Macau, but also its cultural one. To an extent, Macau today can be divided into two parts, the old and the new Macau.

‘Old Macau’ mostly refers to the remains of the city that the Portuguese settlers founded in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The inscription of “The Historic Centre of Macao” on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005 has helped Macau government repackage Macau as a destination which is famous for its cultural and heritage tourism (Leong, Yeh & Chang, 2015; Wong and Qi, 2017). Macau is also a place in China that was spared the destructive forces of the Cultural Revolution; as a result, some relatively old buildings, traditions and customs were preserved. For instance, one can still visit a temple to the Goddess Nu-Wo while most of her shrines and temples in Mainland China were demolished during the Cultural Revolution and many were never built again. There are very few places in China where one can find the shrines of Goddess Nu-Wo, Macau and Taiwan for instance are two of the exceptions. More generally, the old part of Macau still displays much of its original cultural landscape (Wong, 2013). Could it be the case that in Macau there are still some old traditions, rituals of passages, food, customs, or cultural landscapes that can seed the mind of visitors with nostalgia? If so, then Macau is an ideal research locus for the current research.

#### **4) Methodology**

An interpretive qualitative approach was adopted in this research. Guiding thematic questions were developed to help the informants to stay focused during the research process and allow them to share freely about their experiences, stories, memories and feelings (Patton, 2002). In particular how the informants perceive Macau as a nostalgic destination and what are the markers that are commonly mentioned are questions of interest. A total of 15 informants were invited to participate in the thematic interviews. Face-to-face individual interviews or online ones were conducted in Cantonese, Mandarin and English. Each interview lasted between 35 minutes and an hour. The interviews were conducted in January and February 2018. The interviewees were visitors who had visited Macau before 2002 and re-visited it in 2016 or 2017, so that they can compare the local past with the present. The timeline of 2002 delineate the old

Macau from the new Macau. It is because the gaming concessions were opened in 2001 and since then mega casino and hotel complexes were built in Macau, attracting incommensurably more visitors and changing the landscape, turning part of the territory into the 'Las Vegas of the East'.

The age of informants ranges from 18 to 65 years old. Some of the interviewees spent their childhood in Macau and were re-visiting it after years of residence in other countries where they settled. Some other informants were tourists who simply decided to re-visit Macau. Informants were recruited to participate in the research through personal connection as well as random sampling. Regarding random sampling, the interviewees were invited to participate in the current research at a renowned tourist attraction, Mount Fortress, a tourism attraction located next to the landmark of the Ruins of St. Paul. It is easier to have interviews undertaken at this location because this fortress is often visited by tourists who have more time for cultural and heritage explorations. McKercher and Wong (2013) pointed out that tourists who join the all-inclusive package tours often did not have time to look at Monte Fortress as they were in a hurry to visit casinos and shops. It is mostly the re-visitors who do not join a tour who will know about Macau Fortress and have time to visit it. The tourists who visit the Monte Fortress are therefore not on a tight schedule and make patient interviewees. Once they have agreed to take the interview, the researcher arranged for it to be conducted in a quiet place nearby. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed into English. The guiding questions, such as the reasons to re-visit Macau; are there any places or objects or items that the informant would like to re-visit or buy again and why; if there is any linkage in the items or objects or places in Macau that is associated with the informant's past; how informants would describe Macau; all these guiding themes aim to find out what elements were perceived by the informants as making Macau a suitable place for a nostalgic visit. Probing questions were asked for further clarifications.

Content analysis was adopted in this qualitative study. Common categories were identified and they were put under a common theme for further meaningful interpretation. The unit of analysis is each interview case report in which the researchers looked for common patterns, words and expressions among different cases of what they shared on a particular research question. The steps of analysis followed the protocols of conducting a qualitative research evaluation as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2014).

## 5) Findings

### 5.1 The symbols of the old and of the new Macau

From the informants' perception, both old and new Macau co-exist in the city. The informants pointed out that the area and buildings within the Historic Center of Macau, such as the Ruins of St. Paul, Senado Square and A-Ma Temple belong to the old Macau, and those sites are the iconic heritage buildings of the city. The informants consider them to be "the old part of Macau" because "the style of the buildings" gives them a sense of historical feeling; "they have been here in Macau for hundreds of years". In addition, they made the important remark that those are also the sites they had visited in their previous visit(s). Nevertheless, the majority of respondents identified the physical changes of Macau. Daniel shares his memory of the Lighthouse of Guia Fortress and his recent re-visit experience:

*"The sunset view was amazing [over there]. I remember clearly since it was the last attraction for that day...Macau didn't feel like a city of China. It felt like a foreign city. It gave me a strong colonial atmosphere. And now the image of Macau is about hotels, a prosperity place. But I remember the colonial scenery."*

The majority of the informants' comments echo Daniel's description of the physical changes of Macau. They all pointed out that there were "more casinos", "many tall buildings", and "Macau has become more prosperous" All of these comments present a fact that Macau has changed

from a 'town', to a 'city of gaming' and a 'modern city' in the tourists' eyes. In particular, the new Macau is very visible to the informants, such as those hotels and casinos. Serena said:

*"The look of Macau is different now, when you see it from Mount Fortress. Now it looks more modern, also more buildings. It was not like that in the past...how to say...I do not know how to describe, but the Macau now...it is more modern compared with the old time. Macau was more touching in the past."*

While modern development of Macau makes Serena feel that Macau is different from what it was in the old days and she said she could no longer find the "touching" feeling as she did in the past. However, Serena later claims that she could still find elements that are familiar and memorable to her, in particular when she recalled the memory of eating shark fins together with her family in Macau years ago. To Serena, eating shark fins and walking through those small alleys that, within Rua de Felicidade, represents experiencing the old part of Macau and the sights satisfied her nostalgic longing. It was 'as before'. One can sense the nostalgic dimension of her feelings when she was asked for her reasons to go and eat shark fins every time she comes to Macau. Serena stated:

*"I do not know why I go to eat fin actually. I just followed (researcher: followed who?). They said the taste was very nice. I followed my family. Since they wanted to eat over there, maybe they wanted to taste it like before...Firstly it is a psychological need, secondly maybe I want to experience the nostalgia feeling. Yes... like my family we are very keen in eating shark fins in Macau, even though waiters have changed and sometimes the taste of shark fins vary, still, I want to go back to that place, to that shop and have that bowl of fins. Also, some relatives who come back once a year from Canada and America, if they come to Macau they must go to those restaurants and have that bowl of shark fins."*

Strong emotional attachment words were used by her to express her nostalgic feelings, such as “must go”, “I want to go back to this place”. It seems that by going to Rua de Felicidade, the old part of Macau which is preserved as it was in the 1930s can allow Serena to experience a nostalgic feeling when she visits Macau. Serena likes the old Macau because she and her family have collective memories of it, as do her travelling mates. It is a place where her families had fun in the past. To Serena, while the new part of Macau carries no memory nor can provide any nostalgic feeling, the soul of Macau seems to still exist and can be found in the old quarters of the city. It is the old part of Macau that she said can offer her “happy memories” and give her comfort. Serena is not the odd one out; the majority of the informants concurred and said, that though nothing stays the same, as the city develops and the hardware of the city has been changed and enlarged, the soul of the old Macau “still lives in the software” of the city.

## **5.2 The software of Macau**

Apparently the hardware of Macau still plays a role in generating nostalgic feeling, for example merely walking through a particular district such as Rua de Felicidade is an illustration of how a piece of hardware can trigger nostalgic feelings. Yet, it is the software or the soul of Macau, such as eating shark fins with the family or realizing with relief and delight that the same old restaurant still exists, that are the core markers of the site. Only three informants expressed that they felt that the soul of Macau is no longer there as the software has changed as well. They attributed these changes to the environmental and economic changes, such as Macau today is “more crowded”, “having more tourists”, and “more chain-stores” and “spends more in Macau as everything has become more expensive.

Elaine mentioned economic changes. She is someone who spent her childhood in Macau, and later emigrated to England. She remembers that everything in Macau was cheap in the old days and that one could enjoy one’s holiday even with little money. Yet now everything in Macau has become more expensive. Elaine said:

*“The noodle dishes are smaller now, and more expensive... [The old Macau] It's gone. Things are expensive, accommodation is expensive.”*

Though things have become more expensive in Macau, Elaine claimed that she still could feel nostalgic feelings towards Macau as triggered by her childhood memories. Food and some small snacks in Macau to her were the key markers. Elaine said:

*“[I went to have] curry fish ball and sausage in Ilha Verda area... it gives me a sense of nostalgia, a taste that I miss... Ilha Verda changed a lot and now it's full of tall buildings, instead of wooden house.”*

Elaine's case to an extent is illustrative. Although she complained about the prices as well as the noticeable physical changes in the hardware, she still said that she could find her nostalgic feeling when in Macau. Apparently, it was strongly associated with the software of Macau; it is the snack food of Macau which triggered her nostalgic emotions. The majority of the informants corroborated this and stated that they could find the old feeling in Macau that they miss and that is why they chose to re-visit it. The catalysts are also associated with the software of Macau, such as food, people and the warm hospitality that they still find in Macau. Some informants even see these soft markers as unique characteristics of Macau that one can no longer find anywhere else. Their nostalgic feeling was mostly triggered by their past personal experience via those soft markers in Macau and they see it as a nostalgic destination that recalls their memories of their past.

### **5.3 Warm hospitality, people and food**

The majority of the informants, who have seen and experienced the changes of Macau, have created their own symbols for the old Macau. As re-visiting tourists, the majority stated that

apart from visiting the conventional tourist attractions, they are more attracted to search for and discover authenticity by experiencing the local daily life. They pointed out places such as “the small streets and alleys” , Rotunda de Carlos da Maia (三盞燈), Rua do Cunha (官也街) and Rua de Cinco de Outubro (十月初五日街) which are the typical old areas where they can feel the Old Macau as well as those places and the software inside those areas triggered their nostalgic emotions. A sense of searching for historical nostalgia was noted. Wendy went to Rotunda de Carlos da Maia and shared her first time visitation impression and she said:

*“It was a part of an old area of Macau. It was the first time I've been there. It made me realize that Macau is still a place like that. It's a vintage area with a market inside. An old street. Also, it has a lot of food that seem to be appetizing. I've tried a bowl of curry noodle, and curry fish something like that. It tastes very good and the taste is really different from the food in the tourism area. It reminded me how they tasted like when I was a child...I feel the warm hospitality in Macau, people are enthusiastic, they are chatting and talking with each other.”*

Wendy found ‘real food’ and experienced the hospitality of Macau in Rotunda de Carlos da Maia. The street, the market and the food are the symbols of the old Macau, and she commented that the food tasted much better than in regular restaurants and is unique to this area. The warm hospitality of Macau is also considered to be valuable, as Serena commented that today many tourist destinations are rather commercial, yet Macau still to an extent, preserves its renowned sincerity and warm hospitality. Serena (born and living in Hong Kong) met a lot of Macau locals and she commented:

*“When I visit Macau I usually go to some attractions, to experience the hospitality and culture from the locals... you could have a chat with the owner if you have time... They [the locals] make me feel that I am welcome and I receive warm hospitality. (The research asked whether it felt good when you go to a place*

*that can give you a sense of warm, welcome and familiar feeling.) I have friends from Macau, they do give me warm hospitality, when I come to Macau I feel warm and feel welcome.”*

Ivy, whose husband is a professor and met some former local students, also mentioned the hospitality. The students took them to some local restaurants and they like to explore the local life. Due to the fact that the couples are no longer interested in shopping, to Ivy, to “experience the special thing in that destination” is more interesting and important, she shared:

*“Once there are some students took us to try congee in the morning...The former Macau student, when he learned that we would like to explore the small streets and alleys of Macau, suggested us to visit the Nam Peng Cafe. (The couples were explained that Nam Peng Café is one of the few vintage cafés in Macau; it goes back to the 1950s. The interior decoration still keeps the original design of an ordinary café of the period. It is true that today you can seldom find such a café with such a long history. In Macau, there are still a few such old cafes offering food and beverage mostly to locals.) Ivy continued and said: we wonder what it would offer. And when we went there, we found out that it is selling some sandwiches, and beverages. I think the boss is very cool, he said "what do you want?" (In a cool voice).”*

Some informants commented that Macau food has a typical and unique flavor; they called this local taste as ‘Macau flavor’. In particular, some signature food items can no longer be found in any another place. Serena says *“the food's flavor seems to be a bit different. When I bite, I feel Macau flavors.”* Different people have their own views on food uniqueness; they remember the taste and they wanted to experience it again. Such food experience becomes a compulsory element to be included in their journeys to Macau and, importantly, it is a marker to the person, which reminds him/her of the destination and of the unique flavor of its food. To Joe, his



experience of Phoenix egg rolls was a nostalgic marker to him. He said that he was addicted to Phoenix egg rolls because:

*“they could evoke some of my past memories that I think I must have tasted it before when I was young”.*

In addition, some informants would go to a particular shop for the particular food items in Macau, in order to recall their first experience of having eaten such food in which they indulged in their past. Katherine shared her story about croissants which triggered a childhood memory of both Macau and her father:

*“Every time I would buy two tuna croissants [in Lafayette Bakery]. It's my favorite. I like it since I was a kid. My father told me that bakery shop is nice and he bought it for me every time when he travelled to Macau. Since then when I grow older and travel to Macau, I always buy it every time I go there... I feel like I have been back to the old time when I was a kid or teenager”.*

The above excerpts provide a general picture of the research phenomenon, that is, nostalgic feeling need not be triggered by physical objects, but by the software of a tourist destination, particularly those components that are no longer available in the place where the tourists live. Different individuals may have their own markers which connect the individuals to the destination itself. In the case of Katherine, buying croissants in Macau triggered her nostalgic feeling and to her, Macau itself is a nostalgic destination which is full of nice memories for her and her father through the tuna croissants purchased from a particular bakery shop in Macau. While personal nostalgia apparently vary from one individual to another, in the case of Macau, distinctiveness could be identified especially from the “Macau flavor” and “its people” and the “warm hospitality” that Macau can offer. To the informants, these have become the uniqueness of the Old Macau which still exist and they can no longer easily find it elsewhere. Historical nostalgia thus emerged and contributed to promote Macau as a destination for a nostalgic journey.

#### 5.4 The marker: Travel partners, memories and events

Another issue is worth noting. Whether the informants see Macau as a nostalgic destination depends highly on whether their memories of Macau are enjoyable. Importantly which traveling partners were with the informants at the time they first travelled to Macau or what activities they participate in while there are the key markers that may trigger tourists' nostalgic feeling when they revisit Macau. The informants would re-visit the places and do the same activities maybe because in their current visit, they travelled with the same group of people again, or they would go to a particular place or to eat a certain type of food again. Based on informants' sharing, they want to do certain things again in Macau which is often related to their personal memories. In addition, many informants have the experience of coming to Macau with their parents or friends. Sam, Ling, Bella and Ivy used to tours in Macau, they all enjoyed the traveling experience with their companions. Reunion is culturally significant to those informants, it is also a chance to talk about the past, recall and share travelling moments with their travel partners. Ling, who is a mother of two kids, used to take them to the Panda Portuguese Restaurant in the past. She says:

*“We always talk about having a meal at the Panda Portuguese Restaurant, but it is always fully booked! We had been there in the past, riding bikes, walking around and shopping...”*

Many informants would re-visit places and do the same activities that they enjoy, and try to recreate the palatable memories that they had with the social group they travelled with. Sofia was one of the members who belong to the Portuguese folk dancing group of Macau, she used to perform with the group, she would also go to some parties, concerts and cultural events during her one-year stay in the city in 1988. She said, “I had an active social life in Macau; I belonged to groups and went out with friends.” When she came back to the city in 2016, she went to a Portuguese concert and she shared her feeling with the researcher:

*“I could meet some friends who live in Macau nowadays. I really love it and I still miss Macau, missing the Portuguese things in there badly. I really enjoy going back to Macau. Macau is in my heart forever.”*

This informant has memories of Macau; she finds some places memorable because she has her own story about them. Whenever she goes back to them, she remembers what happened in the past. Those places became her own markers of Macau. Sofia continued:

*“I’ve found memories in places, such as the church of St. Dominic, the Mount Fortress and the Ruins of St. Paul. I have strong memory of all these places...they are mainly associated with some special moments I experienced in Macau, I have strong connection with those places.”*

To sum up, the majority of informants experience nostalgic feelings in Macau and they think the old Macau still exists. Personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia feelings both show in their re-visit intention and their nostalgic feelings are triggered by the meaningfulness and distinctiveness of certain objects/activities/places in a destination which link them to the destination.

## **6) Discussion and Conclusions**

It seems to be true that any destination can be a nostalgic destination as long as the visitors find themselves to be elated when there and they have been there before. Macau is a case in point: while often regarded simply as a cultural city or a city of gambling, it can as well be a nostalgic destination. According to the data analysis, Macau is a nostalgic tourism destination because it can provide certain types of cultural experiences which can trigger memories from the past, and as well as some distinctive activities or food that can only be found in Macau.

The findings suggest that for a destination to be one for nostalgic tourism, it needs some support

from hardware and software elements, particularly the latter. While it is impossible to insure that all hardware remains unchanged, the software, or the soul of a destination may be regarded as the component which is more likely to be preserved. Moreover, it is often this software that becomes a common marker which triggers visitors' nostalgic feelings towards the destination. It recalls images of about what happened there in the past. This study it aims to reveals what are the common markers which can trigger fond memories and thereby, later, nostalgia for some by interviewing tourists who chose to repeatedly visit Macau. The findings support Baker and Kennedy (1994) view that the real, simulated and collective nostalgia can be triggered by lived and learned memories. They confirm that people would re-visit a place not only because of the hardware, but also the soft part.

For most of the informants, re-visiting Macau brings pleasure because it concretely reactivates past memories, by them living the same events at a different, later time but at the same place. Their nostalgia feeling also indirectly portrays the old part of Macau which to them can offer the nostalgic feelings to the tourist and that is also the part that they miss. There is a surprising finding in the current study. Regarding which part is the old Macau, while the conventional official promotion of the old Macau is mostly related to the Historic Center of Macau, the informants perceived that the Historic Center of Macau is only old in terms of the style of its architecture. However, the interviewees could no longer find the same nostalgic feeling when they re-visit the Historic Center of Macau due to the changes of the city, including the change in tourism atmosphere, having lots of chain stores and a multitude of tourists. These new elements that are a manifestation of modernization do not carry collective memory from the informants' point of view. To the contrary, the informants claimed that they could enjoy the nostalgic feeling by experiencing local style of hospitality, meeting local people and trying local cuisines and those feelings took place mostly in the small alleys and streets of Macau which are both geographically and culturally remote from the mega casino hotel complexes. The reason perhaps has more to do with the fact that when the informants originally visited Macau, its economy had not yet taken its leap forward. The Macau they visited in the past was not a cosmopolitan city but a laid back town. Furthermore, some objects in Macau which trigger personal nostalgia and collective nostalgia as pointed out by the informants are mostly related to the food and the local

people's warm hospitality that they could find in the less touristy areas.

While thousands of symbols (both in tangible and intangible forms) that exist in a destination, tourists consume sites and objects to satisfy their own travelling needs. In the current study, it shows clearly that it is the markers (including the software of the city as well as the personal memories of an individual) that link a tourist to a particular place in a destination and it is indeed through the markers that nostalgic feelings towards a destination is found. Such findings corroborate the study of Leiper (1990) about the tourist attraction system. The current study further illustrates that a tourist with a memorable travel experience that this experience itself becomes the marker of a destination. While previous research played an important role in informing the design of this research, the current study goes beyond seeing markers from a commercial perspective (Leiper, 1990; McKercher and Wong, 2013). In the current study, the markers which link an individual to a particular destination which can trigger a tourist's nostalgic feeling may include one's personal and collective memories, as well as the memorable past, when an individual did undertake certain activities with his or her travelling partners in the destination. It is these common markers which enable any destination to be experienced as a nostalgic destination. Commercial in-destination markers, such as travel agencies and official governmental agencies may wish to promote Macau as a nostalgic destination based on some of the traditional food and places of Macau which appear to be common and efficacious markers for tourists who have a propensity to nostalgia.

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