

**“ Outside” China: strategies of local identity the case  
of Macao Chinese**

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The aim of this paper is to discuss where we should situate the Chinese residents of Macao, a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), within the Chinese overseas debate. Once a Portuguese outpost, and later a colony in China, Macao’s society has been essentially marked by the Chinese element, due to successive and long-term cycles of migration from the regions usually identified as the origin of the Chinese Diaspora - Guangdong and Fujian. As a result, Macao is today a city where the majority of the resident population, being Chinese, originates from another place, e.g. Mainland China or Hong Kong.

However dubious the issue of Macao’s sovereignty has been throughout the centuries, the city has undoubtedly existed as a part of the Chinese territory, highly dependent on commercial and political connections within a regional, Chinese sphere and a global, international sphere. Drawing particularly from Wang Gungwu’s idea of “External China,” Macao can be therefore understood as part of this policy area from both a historical and a contemporary perspective, following its handover to the PRC in 1999, when the city was conferred a high degree of autonomy for a period of 50 years.

The existence of a controlled border between Macao and the Mainland, plus the fact that the Macao Chinese residents may possess not only the Macao SAR passport, but also other foreign citizenships, e.g. Portuguese, lead us to argue that the assumption of dual or multiple citizenship complicates their categorization as Tongbao (compatriot). Even though the Macao Chinese have more often than not kept a close relationship with Mainland China in the long-term (e.g. ancestry and cultural identification), we could argue that different historical and socioeconomic dynamics have also informed the way they identify with China and construct their identities. Therefore, we intend to discuss the nature of strategies and processes that, intertwining within a local and a national sphere, may have been involved in the construction of Chineseness “outside” China, thus beyond the perspective of the Chinese Central Government. Our final aim

is to suggest that the ethnographic approach offers the chance to examine this issue from a different, local angle.