

Challenges and Opportunities to Macao as a Language & Culture Platform of China-Lusophony in Context of Belt & Road Initiative

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Abstract

Many articles and experts emphasize the important role of Macao to promote connection and cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries. With unique location and historical reason, Macao enjoys advantages to realize its mission. This article will analyze Macao's challenges and opportunities in view of language. Portuguese-Mandarin bilingual talents will be a significant factor to enhance relation, this article reviews the current Portuguese language education in mainland China, and Chinese language education in Lusophony BRI countries. Then, it explains the challenges and opportunities for Macao to continue Portuguese-Mandarin bilingual talents base construction.

Keywords

Language Platform; Macao; BRI; Lusophony Countries.

1. Introduction

Belt and Road Initiative (hereafter referred to BRI) was unveiled by President Xi in 2013. During Xi's official visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, he announced the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road respectively. Until 2015, at the Boao Forum for Asia, the Chinese government issued *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Belt and Road*, which marked that BRI was entering into a new phase of all-round construction [1]. By 2021, there are six Lusophony countries which have signed documents to join the BRI. They are Portugal, Timor Leste, Angola, Mozambique, Cabo Verde, and Equatorial Guinea [2]. The priorities of BRI are policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bond. What the BRI means to Lusophony countries? Portuguese-speaking countries (hereafter referred to PSCs) occupy geostrategic positions in the BRI. Some PSCs have already owned partnerships with China, but some are not. For those have not yet formally established partnerships with China, BRI is a good way to achieve potential cooperation [3]. The aim of the initiative is to strengthen ties of cooperation and integration, Macao SAR (hereafter referred to Macao) could play an important role to promote the connection between China and PSCs.

It is a common sense that language will help each other to communicate. Portuguese is one of official languages in Macao, and Macao shares a similar culture and colonial history with other PSCs. Therefore, Macao is expected to be a bridge between China and PSCs. Some experts hold opinion that Macao doesn't play a significant role in BRI, nevertheless, with a unique history and special location, Macao should act as a platform to be a one-stop service center for PSCs in

commercial and financial sectors in the context of BRI [4]. This article will exam the role of Macao in BRI in perspective of language. question.

2. Portuguese Language Education in China and Chinese Language Education in BRI Lusophony Countries

To explore possibilities for Macao in promoting language education and cooperation between mainland China and BRI Lusophony countries, it is necessary to make it clear the current situation of language teaching in those countries. However, there is no accurate data related to this topic. Language learning can be done at school, at a private language training center, or even by learner himself at home. In this article, Portuguese courses taught in Chinese universities and Confucius Institutes in BRI Lusophony countries are taken into consideration to have an overview of the current situation.

According to Jabotá's research, in mainland China, there are 2631 universities totally. But only 53 universities run Portuguese language courses in 2020, which range from program of bachelor's degree, master's degree, and optional course [5]. During 2010 to 2020, around 20 universities have opened Portuguese courses in first time. In 2016, the new students who were enrolled with Portuguese Major reached to 600 [6]. The Portuguese language learners in China is still very little.

The connection between China and the whole world is more and more strong, the demand to learn Chinese in foreign countries is higher and higher. Lack of qualified Chinese teachers has become a problem. To promote Chinese education in international communities, Confucius Institutes have been set up worldwide. Now, all six BRI Lusophony countries have set up Confucius Institute/classroom [7].

Table 1. Confucius Institutes in BRI Lusophony Countries

Country	Confucius Institute or Classroom at	Cooperation Chinese University	Set-up Year
Portugal	University of Minho	Nankai University (Tianjin)	2005
	University of Lisbon	Tianjin Foreign Studies University	2008
	University of Aveiro	Dalian University of Foreign Languages	2014
	University of Coimbra	Beijing International Studies University & Zhejiang Chinese Medical University	2016
	University of Porto	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	2019
Mozambique	Eduardo Mondlane University	Zhejiang Normal University	2012
Cabo Verde	University of Cabo Verde	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	2015
Angola	Agostinho Neto University	Harbin Normal University	2016
Equatorial Guinea	National University of Equatorial Guinea	Zhejiang International Studies University	2016
East-Timor	Institute of Business	Shanxi University	2019

Beside Portugal, there is only one Confucius Institute/Classroom in each BRI Lusophony countries. In 2016, Confucius Institute at National University of Equatorial Guinea only opened 2 courses of Chinese language with capacity of 25 students each [8], in 2021, Confucius Institute at Agostinho Neto University plans to open 60 vacates for new learners [9]. Confucius Institute at University of Cabo Verde has 12 Volunteer Chinese Teachers who were dispatched by China in 2017, the cumulative number of students to learn Chinese have reached to 500 [10].

3. Challenges of Macao to Promote Bi-languages Talents' Education (Portuguese - Mandarin)

3.1. What is the Macao's Plan?

Since the Opening-up Policy has been implemented by the central government of China, the development of international commercials and cultural exchanges between China and the world is more and more frequently and deeply. Why does China need Macao to promote the connections to Lusophony countries?

It is very necessary to know what Macao's language policy is. In Macao's Basic Law, it is clearly written that official languages of Macao are Chinese and Portuguese. In Education and Youth Development Bureau's plan, it encourages and supports more and more private schools to open Portuguese classes. Macao needs to promote the construction of bilingual talent training base [11]. Besides language training plan, in Macao's language policy, it has another part, called "Language and Culture Policy". One principle of this policy is to make Macao becoming a society that "Chinese culture is the mainstream, and to maintain diverse cultures co-exist" [11].

Under the language policy, XU did research, positioning Macao's role in China-Lusophony culture exchange and describe the path to strengthen the influence of Macao. XU applied theory Cultural Buffer to view Macao's role in China-Lusophony relations. In the context of BRI, it brings another opportunity for Macao to develop. XU mentioned, Macao has played a role as "buffer area" in cultural exchanges between east and west world in the history. Currently, Macao is constructing a virtual bridge of communication in Chinese-Lusophony culture connection, which covers wide areas, multi-levels, and high class [12]. For most Chinese people, they may only know Portugal is a Portuguese-speaking-country. How to introduce other PSCs to China is an urgent task to Macao. This is also the Macao's advantage in China-Lusophony relations.

However, according to recent surveys, Portuguese-speaking-population quickly decreases in these years. KONG mentioned in her article that "Even though both Mandarin and Portuguese are official languages in Macao, in reality, Mandarin totally surpassed the Portuguese, and became the dominant language in daily life." Portuguese only appears in official documents or very few formal occasions [13]. This part shows the plan of government of Macao SAR in promoting Portuguese education and presents the real situation of Portuguese in Macao. Next part will focus on what did Macao do in Portuguese education and try to find out what are challenges for Macao to continue the language education.

3.2. What did Macao do?

3.2.1. Basic Education (From Primary School to High School)

Secretariat for Social Affairs and Culture launched policies on language annually. In 2016, Macao government planned to train qualified Portuguese teachers and to organized summer camp to learn language in foreign countries; in 2017, government mentioned that it would increase special scholarship for new students in universities who are going to study Portuguese related subjects, and it would communicate to universities in Portugal regarding to offer examination-free opportunities; in 2018, Macao government said that it would continue to establish "Portuguese-Mandarin Bilingual class" in primary and middle high schools; in 2019, Macao government enlarged "Portuguese-Mandarin Bilingual class" to Grade 3 in primary schools and Grade 3 in middle high schools, and it increased quantities of scholarship for graduates from high schools who intend to study Portuguese related majors in universities, furthermore, government started to promote a project that set up friendly relationship between schools in Macao and Portugal [11].

3.2.2. Higher Education (University)

There are 10 universities in Macao, by 2021, 5 universities (University of Macao, Macao Polytechnic Institute, City University of Macao, University of Saint Joseph and Macao University of Science and Technology) have run Portuguese-related courses in Bachelor, Master and Doctor Degree. Among of them, City University of Macao just started Portuguese Language Major in 2020. According to statistics of Education and Youth Development Bureau, in academic year 2019/2020, 1516 students in total were studying Portuguese-related courses in Bachelor, Master and Doctor's Degree [14], occupied 4% of all students in Macao.

Macao University organizes Portuguese Language Summer Course every year. The program started in July 1986. Now, the reputation of the program spread out especially more and more universities in mainland China open Portuguese Language courses [15]. Regarding to exchange programs. Some universities in Macao accept a few students from famous universities who run Portuguese Language Course, such as Beijing International Studies University, Beijing Language and Culture Universities, Beijing Foreign Studies University, etc.

3.2.3. Other Institutions

Instituto Português do Oriente (hereafter referred to IPOR), is an institution to promote Portuguese language and culture in Asia, its headquarters locates in Portugal. IPOR at Macao is founded on 19th September 1989. It runs regular courses and intensive courses to Macao residents. Another one is Camões Institute is an official organization to promote Portuguese language, Portuguese culture, and international aids. It has 3 three centers in China, located in Beijing, Shanghai, and Macao. Forum Macao is a platform to enhance economical and commercial cooperation but is also puts education and human resources as its objective. Forum Macao has held Cultural Week of China and Portuguese-speaking countries for 13 years.

3.3. Challenges for Macao to Promote Portuguese Education

3.3.1. Current Portuguese Language Education Policies are not Working Well

Statistics shows, in 1991, around 1.8% of population use Portuguese as their first language to speak every day, to year of 2011, this percentage decreases to 0.7%. Another index, language proficiency status, shows that 3% of population can speak Portuguese in 2001, and the data drop to 2.4% in 2011. Macao government launched a series of policies in basic education and higher education to enhance Portuguese language proficiency for Macao students, however, the result isn't positive. The residents who can speak Portuguese occupy very little in Population, and some occasions which Portuguese language required only are needed in some sectors of government. This hinders development of Portuguese in Macao [13]. After analysis of current Portuguese language education, it is obvious that the main target of the policies is local people in Macao. Macao is an international tourism destination, for residents, English capability is more important than Portuguese. For those students who are studying Portuguese in universities at Macao, most of them come from mainland China. It is very hard for them to immigrate to Macao according to the current immigration policy.

3.3.2. The Role as a Platform to Connect China-Lusophony is not irreplaceable

China is more and more open to the world, the governments in all levels, the companies, and the institutions could establish cooperation with PSCs stepping over Macao. For people of mainland China, these PSCs are still very unfamiliar, and for small companies of China, the situation is the same. Macao government should reconsider its role to promote mutual understanding for China and Lusophony countries.

3.3.3. Cooperation with PSCs in Education Area is not Deep

According to data delivered by Education and Youth Development Bureau, in year of 2019, before the outbreak of Pandemic Covid-19, there are only 290 registered students who come from PSCs in universities at Macao, it just occupies 0.8% of whole students in Macao [16].

4. Conclusion

In context of BRI and improvement of Chinese soft power in international community, more and more universities started to open Portuguese language major, especially in recent 10 years. What should be paid attention, universities which run Portuguese bachelor's degree program have been in much widely in territory, from first tier cities, for example Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, to central cities, southwestern cities. Some universities in Macao do accept exchange program students from mainland, but only concentrate on those small groups of universities, such as Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing International Studies University, Beijing Language and Culture University etc. Compared to new trend, those universities who newly open Portuguese bachelor's program received little support. As a platform to connect China-Lusophony in perspective Portuguese language, Macao government should take responsibility to train qualified Chinese-Portuguese bilingual talents not only in Macao, but also take measures to play a significant role in mainland China and PSCs as well.

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