

# Performing Macao. Beyond the Script: Unlocking Language and Culture Through Drama Education

doi 10.64493/INV.21.3

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artigo recebido: 20.08.2025  
artigo aceite para publicação: 7.10.2025

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Corderi Novoa, M. (2025). Performing Macao. Beyond the Script: Unlocking Language and Culture Through Drama Education. *Invisibilidades - Revista Ibero-Americana de Pesquisa em Educação, Cultura e Artes*. <https://doi.org/10.64493/INV.21.3>

## Abstract

The arts enhance learning by providing a creative, pressure-free context that fosters self-expression beyond rote memorization methods. Drama pedagogy, applied here to language learning, draws on Macao's unique history — a Portuguese enclave in China from 1557 to 1999, blending cultures through centuries of trade and cultural exchange. This hybrid society emerged from deep Portuguese–Chinese interaction, shaped by socio-economic change, Jesuit influence, heritage sites, and even casino culture, making Macao a model of intercultural dialogue and resilient identity. The paper links this cultural richness to language education through three drama-based activities: one reenacts the 16th-century creation of the first Portuguese–Chinese dictionary by Jesuits Matteo Ricci and Ruggieri with their pioneering Romanization system; the second activity uses sound painting to explore ten historic heritage sites. In the third activity, students roleplay solving a theft at Casino Lisboa, practicing Chinese grammar structures through drama-based observation, communication, and collaboration. These drama activities provide opportunities to learn about the Chinese language and culture and can be adapted to different languages, including English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and others.

Keywords: Macao, drama pedagogy, performative language teaching, Chinese language learning, Cultural heritage.

## 1. Introduction

The arts are key factors that enable students to learn better. They create a meaningful context in which participants feel free to create and express themselves without the pressure of traditional pedagogical methodologies that are based on memorization and repetition. There is a direct link between the benefits of the arts and education (Catterall, 2002). In this article, we focus on drama pedagogy applied to language learning with some original didactic approaches based on the history of Macao.

In the past, the term “theater” was considered a final product, where actors perform a play following a script in front of an audience, while the concept of “drama” was seen as a process, where participants are actors and spectators at the same time. Although both can be beneficial for education, drama is more flexible and can be easily adapted to the language classroom; therefore, the term “drama pedagogy” was coined.

In the field of drama pedagogy, Spolin (1986) conducted groundbreaking work by connecting drama games and language learning in the classroom, emphasizing that these activities improved students' communication skills, including oral and written expression, as well as nonverbal communication.

Later, the concept of “Performative Language Teaching (PLT)” was first coined by Schewe (2013) as an umbrella term that integrates various dramatic techniques and overcame the separation between drama and theater that existed in the 1980s. Then Piazzoli (2018) defined PLT as an approach based on second language teaching, highlighting its vast repertoire of dramatic tools applicable to language education and didactics.

In 2010, the European Union (DICE Consortium, 2010) carried out a two-year research project aimed to evaluate the impact of drama in education, specifically on five of the eight Lisbon Key Competences (Communication in the mother tongue, Communication in foreign languages, Social and civic competencies, Autonomous learning, and Cultural awareness and expression). The remaining three Lisbon Key Competences: Mathematical and scientific knowledge, Digital competence, and Initiative and entrepreneurship, were acknowledged but not the primary focus of the study. The DICE study was conducted across 12 countries (Portugal, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Serbia, Palestine, Norway, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and Romania) and adopted a multidisciplinary approach involving 4,475 participants (students aged 13-16 years). The methodology included experimental groups that engaged in over 100 PLT activities, while the control groups followed traditional educational methods. Research findings confirmed that PLT significantly enhanced the five targeted key competences and validated PLT as an effective educational strategy for holistic competence development.

Many researchers have investigated how PLT helps improve language learning: Stinson and Freebody (2006) demonstrated how PLT improved oral language skills with high school students of English in Singapore; Galante and Thomson (2017) showed that PLT significantly improved oral fluency in Brazilian Portuguese-speaking English learners in Brazil compared to traditional methods; and Corderi Novoa and Garcia Mayo (2024) verified that Spanish learners of Chinese in Spain improved their oral fluency thanks to PLT.

The final objective of this paper is to create several PLT activities that happen

in different epochs of Macao and that are designed for learners of Mandarin Chinese (but that can also be easily adapted to any other language) and that can easily be implemented in the language classroom. We hope that students can go beyond the script and unlock language and culture through drama in education (PLT). We believe that this can be useful for language teachers and language learners, allowing them to practice their target language in a specific context in time and space. We chose Macao because for centuries it has been an example of peaceful cultural and linguistic exchange and dialogue among civilizations, between Portugal and China, between the West and the East.

2. Macao’s Historical Evolution: From Ming Dynasty Concession to Global Gateway

Macao is a special administrative region of China located on the southern coast of the country, next to the province of Guangdong. The English name is “Macao”, in Portuguese it is “Macau”, in Chinese it is pronounced Àomén and written in two different ways (Simplified) 澳门, and (Traditional) 澳門。The first inhabitants of Macau were immigrants from the Chinese provinces of Fujian and Guangdong, two groups of people who worshiped Māzǔ (媽祖), also known as the “Empress of Heaven” or Tiānhòu (天后), who is the most revered sea goddess in Chinese coastal regions (Zhang, 2023). Mazu’s beliefs and customs were inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. The name Macao comes from the Chinese 媽閣澳 (Mā Gé Ào), where 媽 (Mā) refers to Mazu, the sea goddess, the goddess of sailors. 閣 (Gé) means pavilion or temple — referencing the famous A-Ma Temple, and 澳 (Ào) is a bay or inlet — the geographic feature that gave Macao its name. Therefore, 媽閣澳 (Mā Gé Ào) means “Bay of the A-Ma Pavilion,” which Portuguese sailors phonetically adapted into “Macau” (Egerod, 1969).

2.1 Colonial Genesis under Ming Sovereignty

Macao’s establishment followed Portuguese mariners’ arrival in 1557 at the Pearl River Delta during Portuguese King Manuel I’s reign (1495–1521), when Portugal dominated Indian Ocean trade routes (Braga, 1949). Crucially, Portuguese settlement occurred through negotiation, not conquest. In 1557, Chinese Ming authorities permitted temporary residency while retaining sovereignty—evidenced by Guangzhou officials’ oversight, judicial jurisdiction over serious crimes, and annual land rent payments. This established the “Macao model”: Portuguese administrative autonomy beneath enduring Chinese suzerainty (Cartwright, 2021; Gunn, 1996).

2.2 Resisting Imperial Encroachments

According to Boxer (1963), during the Iberian Union (1580–1640), when Spain annexed Portugal, Macao uniquely resisted Habsburg authority. In 1583, the formation of a municipal council (Leal Senado) created a de facto capital for Portuguese loyalists overseas. This institutional defiance solidified Macao’s identity as a bastion of Portuguese sovereignty despite geopolitical turmoil (Anders, 1992).

2.3 Nineteenth-Century Colonial Pressures

Portugal’s post-1840s attempts to alter Macao’s status—including unilaterally declaring it a free port (1845) and ceasing rent payments (1849)—were rejected by Qing officials. The 1887 Sino-Portuguese Treaty formalized Portuguese “perpetual occupation” while affirming Chinese sovereignty, stipulating Portugal could not transfer Macao without China’s consent (Ball, 1905). This legal duality defined Macao until its 1999 handover (Wordie, 2013). In Table 1 below, there is a summary of the history of Macao:

Period	Governing Framework	Sovereignty Assertion
Ming-Qing (1557-1849)	Portuguese municipal administration under Chinese oversight	Annual land rent paid to Xiangshan County
Post-Opium War (1849-1887)	Portuguese unilateral administration	Qing rejection of sovereignty claims
Treaty Era (1887-1999)	"Perpetual Portuguese occupation"	Treaty clause prohibiting transfer without Chinese consent
Post-1999	"One Country, Two Systems" Special Administrative Region (SAR)	Chinese sovereignty with Portuguese cultural guarantees

Table 1: Key Events in Macao’s Political Status.

All the historical, cultural, and political factors that have shaped Macao’s unique identity have an extraordinary influence on how the region has evolved over the centuries and help us navigate its dual heritage of Chinese cultural roots and Portuguese influence (Clayton, 2009).

2.4 Macao: A Tapestry of Cross-Cultural Exchange at the Edge of Empires

Historical, political, and social factors have shaped the multilingual landscape of Macau, creating a unique coexistence and functional distribution of Portuguese, Cantonese, Mandarin, and English languages in various domains such as education, government, and daily communication (Zhang & Yang, 2022). According to Lam & leong (2022), post-1999, Macao retained Portuguese as an official language, civil law traditions, and cultural linkages. Lisbon maintains consular representation, while Macao’s streets preserve Portuguese toponyms. Crucially, Portugal formally adheres to the “One China” principle while supporting Macao’s autonomy under the Basic Law. In “Portuguese Language Increasingly Popular in Macao as City Sharpens Bilingual Edge” (Channel News Asia, 2025), Professor João Veloso, Head of the Department of Portuguese at the University of Macau (UM), highlights a surge in Portuguese language enrollment amid Macao’s economic diversification beyond the gaming industry. UM teaches Portuguese to more than 1,000 students, with mainland Chinese students outnumbering locals. The UM, where Veloso teaches, also offers degrees in Portuguese and serves as a critical hub for Portuguese-language education. Veloso attributes this trend to professional opportunities in business,

diplomacy, and trade with Lusophone nations like Brazil, noting that students view Portuguese as a strategic asset for engaging with markets where “China is a big market for Brazil”.

Veloso stresses Macao’s unique position as a bilingual hub (Chinese/Portuguese), facilitating trade between China and Portuguese-speaking countries. Businesses leverage Macao’s multilingual talent to access the Greater Bay Area’s vast economy, with Portuguese-speaking start-ups in biotech and Medtech courting Chinese investors. Veloso also argues that Macao’s official Portuguese status—a legacy of its colonial past—enables it to serve as a “bridge” for Sino-Lusophone relations, especially amid shifting global dynamics. He concludes, “China is one of the biggest countries... and one tiny place [Macao] that has Portuguese as an official language has to make a difference”, emphasizing institutional efforts to transform linguistic heritage into economic and diplomatic capital.

Cheng & Wong (2023) carried out a sociolinguistic analysis of multilingualism in Macau, examining the use and status of Portuguese, Cantonese, Mandarin, English, and other local languages. The authors investigated language attitudes, proficiency, and usage patterns among different demographic groups. They find that while Cantonese remains the dominant language, there is a growing influence of Mandarin due to economic integration with mainland China. The study also highlights the role of English as a global lingua franca and the cultural significance of Portuguese as a legacy of colonial history. The linguistic landscape of Macao can be explained as “Multilingualism and Code-Switching”. Macao operates through overlapping linguistic spheres. See Table 2 below:

Language	Speaker Percentage	Primary Domains	Notable Influence
Cantonese Chinese	80.1%	Mother tongue of the majority. Commerce, daily life, media.	Gambling terminology, folk religion.
Mandarin Chinese	15.6%	Government, education.	Rising with mainland integration.
English	4.9%	Tourism, gaming, higher education <i>lingua franca</i> , and finance.	Corporate communication.
Portuguese	0.6%	Legal system, historical texts, toponyms	Creole substratum, cultural identity
Patúa – Macanese Patois	Less than 0.5%	Ceremonial and cultural.	Cultural treasure, Macao heritage.

Table 2: Language Distribution and Domains in Modern Macao.

The Patuá-speaking Macanese community (Eurasian descendants) speaks Patuá, also known as Macanese Patois, which is a Portuguese-based creole language. It emerged in Macao in the 16th century, following Portuguese settlement. The Macanese community developed distinctive folk traditions blending Cantonese,

Malay, Sinhalese, and Portuguese elements. Historically, Patuá was spoken within households, especially among lower and middle-class Macanese families, and primarily by women. It was used for informal communication, storytelling, and community bonding (Remedios, n.d.). Today, its use is largely ceremonial and cultural, such as in theater performances by groups like Dóci Papiaçám di Macau, which stage plays in Patuá with Portuguese and Chinese subtitles (Sá Machado, 2020). Though marginalized historically, Patuá is now celebrated as a cultural treasure, representing the Macanese heritage and resilience. Though this language now faces endangerment (Endangered Languages Project, n.d.).

Macao is a mix of cultures. Centuries of contact among all the languages coexisting in Macao generated enduring loanwords and lexical hybridization. For example, from Chinese to Portuguese: 茶chá (tea), 功夫gōngfu (kung fu), etc. Also, from Portuguese to Cantonese: pátio (courtyard), bacalhau (salted cod), etc. Moreover, from English to Macanese: sandwich (san daa wich), minced (minchi, reflecting the dish’s key ingredient—minced meat, usually pork), etc.

Macao has a significant translation heritage and pioneered Sino-European linguistic mediation. According to Hsia (2016), between 1583 and 1588, Jesuits Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci created the first Chinese dictionaries in Macao (a topic we will expand in the next chapter). Also, Macao was the origin of the “Chinese Documents” (1693–1886), that is, Chinese Qing governance archives with Portuguese translations, now UNESCO Memory of the World (Gunn, 1996).

3. Bridging Worlds: Matteo Ricci, Diego de Pantoja, and the Jesuit Mission in Ming China

The late 16th and early 17th centuries witnessed an extraordinary cultural and scientific exchange between Europe and China, primarily facilitated by the pioneering efforts of Jesuit missionaries. Among these, the Italian Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and the Spaniard Diego de Pantoja (1571–1618) stand as monumental figures. Their work in China, beginning from their strategic base in Portuguese Macao, represented not merely a religious mission but a profound intellectual encounter between civilizations. Their linguistic studies, cultural adaptations, and arduous journey to the imperial court in Beijing left an indelible mark on Sino-Western relations, establishing frameworks for cross-cultural understanding that resonate centuries later.

3.1 Foundations: Early Lives and Call to China

Matteo Ricci (利玛竇 Lì Mǎdòu) was born in Macerata, Italy, in 1552. Educated in law, classics, and sciences at the Roman College under mathematician Christopher Clavius, he joined the Society of Jesus in 1571. Driven by missionary zeal, he volunteered for Asia and reached Goa in 1578. In 1582, Alessandro Valignano (范礼安 Fàn Lǐ’ān), Visitor of Jesuit missions in Asia, summoned him to Macao to prepare for China’s evangelization. Valignano’s strategy emphasized cultural adaptation: mastering language, respecting local customs, and leveraging Western sciences as tools for dialogue. Ricci abandoned Buddhist robes for the silk of a Confucian



scholar, growing a beard and hair to resemble the literati. This “accommodation method” was rigorously enforced in Macao, transforming the Jesuits into cultural intermediaries rather than colonial evangelists (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.; Shih & Encyclopaedia Britannica Editors, 2025; Wikipedia contributors, n.d; Yuan, 2022).

Diego de Pantoja (庞迪峨 Páng Dí'é), born near Madrid, Spain, in 1571, entered the Jesuits in 1589. Excelling in theology, philosophy, and languages, he was inspired by missionaries’ accounts of Asia. Despite family opposition, he departed for Lisbon in 1596, reaching Goa and finally Macao on July 20, 1597. His assignment shifted from Japan to China due to regional conflicts, leading him to study at Macao’s St. Paul’s College under Valignano’s direction (Caraballo, 2021; Kiddle Encyclopedia, 2025; Moncó, 2012; Wikipedia contributors, n.d.).

### 3.2 Macao: Crucible of Linguistic and Cultural Preparation

Macao, a Portuguese enclave since 1557, served as the strategic gateway for Jesuits entering China. For Ricci and Pantoja, it was an intensive training ground. Valignano founded St. Paul’s College (Colégio de São Paulo) in Macao at the end of the 16th century, where both missionaries received systematic instruction. It became one of the first Western-style universities in East Asia, combining religious, linguistic, and scientific education. It played a key role in training missionaries like Matteo Ricci for work in China. Ricci arrived in August 1582 and immediately began language studies under Michele Ruggieri (罗明坚 Luó Míngjiān), the first Jesuit dedicated to learning Chinese. The college combined theological training with practical preparation for cultural immersion, housing printing presses, a library, and scholarly resources (Cartwright, 2021).

Ricci’s Linguistic Innovations: Between 1583 and 1588, Ricci and Ruggieri pioneered linguistic tools critical for future missionaries. During their stay in the city of Zhaoqing, they compiled the first Portuguese Chinese dictionary (Ruggieri & Ricci, 1583–1588). The dictionary represented a major linguistic innovation by organizing entries into three distinct columns: Portuguese terms on the left, corresponding Chinese characters on the right, and in the center, a Romanized transcription of Chinese pronunciation marked with diacritical signs to indicate tonal variations (Assunção, Neto & Fernandes, 2019). The manuscript was lost in the Jesuit Archives in Rome until 1934, when Pasquale d’Elia rediscovered it. It was finally published in 2001 under the editorial direction of John W. Witek (2001).

Ricci was the first Western scholar to develop a Romanization system for Chinese characters with diacritical marks to indicate tones—a revolutionary step in Chinese linguistics, laying the groundwork for later lexicographical works. This work is recognized as a groundbreaking contribution to Chinese linguistics and missionary history. His goal was to help European learners—especially Portuguese speakers—pronounce Chinese words using the Latin alphabet. Ricci’s romanization system was an alphabet-based transcription. He used Latin letters to represent Chinese sounds, creating a bridge for Western learners unfamiliar with Chinese characters (Assunção, Neto & Fernandes, 2019).

Also, regarding Chinese tone indication, while Ricci’s system did not use modern marks like those in Hanyu Pinyin (e.g., mā, má, mǎ, mà), he was aware of tonal distinctions. Therefore, he attempted to reflect them through spelling

variations or annotations. In addition, Ricci applied this system in his Chinese Portuguese dictionary (Ruggieri & Ricci, 1583–1588), allowing Portuguese speakers to “sound out” Chinese words phonetically. Although Ricci’s system was not standardized or widely adopted, it laid the groundwork for later Romanization efforts such as Wade–Giles and Hanyu Pinyin. Ricci’s academic recognition is validated by scholars like Luo Changpei (1951), who credit the Jesuits with revolutionizing Chinese phonology by replacing traditional fanqie notation with alphabetic transcription, simplifying tonal indication.

On the other hand, Spaniard Diego de Pantoja spent nearly two years (1597–1599) at St. Paul’s in Macao (Sunquist, 2001), mastering Mandarin and classical Chinese while adopting Chinese dress and customs. His training included geography, astronomy, and music—skills deemed essential for gaining imperial favor (Ramos Riera & Bonet Planes, 2024). Pantoja did not directly participate in the creation of the first Portuguese Chinese dictionary (Assunção, Neto & Fernandes, 2019). However, Diego de Pantoja was a close collaborator of Matteo Ricci and played a significant role in the Jesuit mission’s cultural and linguistic exchange efforts. He arrived in China later and worked extensively in Beijing, contributing to the dissemination of Western knowledge and the development of Chinese–Western dialogue (Folgado García, 2025).

According to Hsia (2016), the Jesuits’ goal was to get to Beijing, the capital. Their journey from Macao to Beijing (1583–1601) overcame political barriers by offering scientific knowledge. Ricci and Pantoja impressed Ming officials with maps, clocks, and astronomy, gaining access to the imperial court (Jesuits Europe, 2018). Matteo Ricci and Diego de Pantoja were the earliest Westerners granted permission to live within Beijing’s Forbidden City during the Ming dynasty. In 1601, Ricci received an invitation from the Wanli Emperor, who valued his knowledge of cartography, astronomy, and calendar reform. Pantoja joined Ricci on this mission and likewise entered the imperial court, where he played a role in fostering scientific and cultural dialogue. In Beijing, they reformed the calendar, translated Euclid, and promoted East-West dialogue. Ricci also translated Chinese-language religious texts and was the author of the famous world map 大瀛全图 Dà yíng quán tú in 1584, which placed China, the Middle Kingdom, at the center of the World Map (Yuan, 2012).

Ricci and Pantoja’s Macao years were foundational, transforming them from European clergy into literati capable of navigating Ming China’s intellectual world. Their linguistic rigor—Ricci’s lexicography and Pantoja’s epistolary records—and their scientific diplomacy redefined East-West engagement (University of Saint Joseph, 2024). Despite their contributions, rising anti-Christian sentiment in China at the time led to Pantoja’s expulsion in 1617. He died in Macao a year later. Ricci, buried in Beijing’s Zhalan Cemetery following a special imperial decree, became a symbol of enduring cultural respect (Sunquist, 2001; Hsia, 2016).

### 3.3 Drama game 1: Matteo Ricci’s first Portuguese Chinese dictionary.

This game is intended for students who are learning Chinese characters in the classroom. The approach is drama in education: The students are given

the historical contexts of Jesuit missionaries in Macao and perform a role while learning Chinese characters in a fun, embodied, and more engaging way.

**Students’ Chinese level:** all levels, with a focus on beginners.

**Students’ ages:** all ages.

**Group Size:** in pairs, and then the whole class plays together.

**Duration:** 30-40 minutes.

**Objectives and Connection to Language Teaching**

To help students better memorize the Chinese characters, their pinyin (transcription), and their meaning, a structured approach is needed. To acknowledge the Jesuits’ pioneering contributions to Chinese language learning and teaching.

**Rules / Procedure**

The teacher tells students they are Jesuits learning Chinese at the famous St. Paul’s College (Colégio de São Paulo) in Macao at the end of the 16th century. The students can choose to play the role of one of the four famous Jesuits mentioned before, that is, Matteo Ricci (利玛竇 Lì Mǎdòu), Michele Ruggieri (罗明坚 Luó Míngjiān), Diego de Pantoja (庞迪峨 Páng Dí’é), or Alessandro Valignano (范礼安 Fàn Lǐ’ān). They are going to create a dictionary together, starting with students working in pairs. Then the teacher tells them that each pair of students will be given two Chinese characters, along with the combination of these characters, their pinyin, and their meaning. They will have to create an entry for the dictionary in their target language (Portuguese, English, Spanish, etc.) with a drawing for each character. Once they have it, they must become the characters and prepare a silent performance that embodies the characters and their combination.

Give students around 10 minutes to prepare the drawings and the performance. Then the teacher asks for volunteers to demonstrate the process to the rest of the class. For example, a pair of students had to work on characters 8, 9, and 10: (8) 火 huǒ fire + (9) 山 shān mountain = (10) 火山 huǒ shān volcano. The students draw fire and a mountain on the blackboard, and then they use their bodies to perform a volcano, with movement and sounds, but no words. The other classmates must guess the meaning. At the end of the activity, the teacher will give them the whole “Macao dictionary” as in Table 3 below:

Character	Pinyin	Meaning	Mnemonic
1. 人	rén	person	Looks like a person walking with two legs apart.
2. 口	kǒu	mouth	A square opening — imagine a mouth wide open.
3. 人口	rénkǒu	population	A person and a mouth — people who speak make up a population.
4. 日	rì	sun; day	A window with a crossbar — think of the sun seen through a window.
5. 月	yuè	moon; month	Shaped like a crescent moon with lines marking its phases.
6. 明	míng	bright; clear	Sun + moon together — ultimate brightness.
7. 火	huǒ	fire	Flames rising upward — two sparks on the sides.
8. 山	shān	mountain	Three peaks in a row — a mountain range.
9. 火山	huǒshān	volcano	Fire on a mountain — a volcano erupting.
10. 木	mù	tree; wood	A trunk with branches — a tree in full form.
11. 休	xiū	to rest	A person leaning against a tree — resting in the shade.

Table 3: Jesuits Dictionary in Macao.

**4. Macao’s World Heritage as Cultural Synthesis**

Macao is a fantastic mix of cultures. For example, there is a special coexistence of religious worship: folk deities like Mazu (goddess of seafarers) were venerated alongside Catholicism, with processions incorporating both traditions (Barreiros, 1999). Beyond architecture, Macao nurtured a unique fusion practice, such as the integration of azulejos —Portuguese ceramic tiles (initially influenced by Islamic zellij from Morocco) — adorned Chinese temples and shops, creating a distinct Macanese decorative tradition (Daily Art Magazine, 2025).

The UNESCO-listed historic centre of Macao (inscribed 2005) embodies cultural entanglement. Its 22 monuments and eight squares fuse aesthetics: St. Paul’s Ruins (Christian motifs with Japanese craftsmanship), Na Tcha Temple (Taoist shrine abutting baroque church), and Moorish-style Lou Kau Mansion. This architectural ensemble constitutes China’s oldest, largest, and best-preserved Western architectural legacy (Macao Government Tourism Office, n.d.; UNESCO, 2005).

In this section, we will present 10 significant locations in Macao spanning 1525–2025 that will be part of the next dramatic activity.

#### 4.1 A-Ma Temple (1488–present)

The oldest Taoist temple in Macao is dedicated to the seafaring goddess Mazu. Its construction began in 1488 (Ming Dynasty), and it expanded by 1828. The temple complex blends Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, and folk elements, reflecting Macao’s syncretic spirituality. As we explained in section 2 of this paper, the name “Macao” derives from “A-Ma Gau” (Bay of A-Ma). The site remains active for worship and is part of the UNESCO World Heritage listing (UNESCO, 2005; Wordie, 2013).

#### 4.2 Ruins of St. Paul’s (1602–1835)

Originally St. Paul’s College (1602–1640), the first Western university in Asia, and the adjacent Church of Mater Dei. The complex was destroyed by fire in 1835, leaving only its baroque façade—a fusion of European, Chinese, and Japanese craftsmanship. The façade features Christian icons alongside chrysanthemums (Japan) and peonies (China). Today, it symbolizes Macao’s Jesuit legacy and cultural hybridity (Meneses, 2016).

#### 4.3 Senado Square (Largo do Senado) (16th c.–present)

Macao’s civic heart since the Portuguese settlement. The wave-patterned cobblestones and pastel Neo-Classical buildings (e.g., Leal Senado, Holy House of Mercy) reflect Mediterranean urban design. It hosted public events, markets, and protests, evolving into a UNESCO site representing Lusophone administrative and charitable institutions (Cultural Affairs Bureau of Macao SAR, 2005).

#### 4.4 Guia Fortress (1622–1865)

A military complex built after the Dutch invasion attempt (1622). Includes Guia Chapel (1622) with frescoes merging Chinese and Western motifs, and Guia Lighthouse (1865)—China’s first modern lighthouse. The fortress’s strategic hilltop location underscores Macao’s colonial defense history. Controversies over urban development near the site (2007–2016) highlight heritage conservation challenges (Yu & Chan, 2014).

#### 4.5 Mandarin’s House (1881–present)

The 60-room residence of Chinese reformer Zheng Guanying (1842–1921), blending Cantonese courtyard design with European features (French windows, false ceilings). It served as a clan compound and later fell into disrepair before restoration (2001–2010). It exemplifies Sino-Western aristocratic life and intellectual exchange (Cultural Affairs Bureau of Macao SAR, 2005).

#### 4.6 St. Joseph’s Seminary and Church (1728–present)

Founded by Jesuits for training missionaries to China and Japan. Its church (1758) features a dome rivaling St. Paul’s and holds relics of St. Francis Xavier. The Seminary became a hub for Western science and linguistics, housing rare texts. It remains a key Catholic institution and UNESCO site (Pereira, 2010).

#### 4.7 Dom Pedro V Theatre (1860–present)

Portuguese merchants funded Asia’s first Western-style theatre, which hosted opera, political assemblies, and charity events. The neoclassical green-and-white structure in St. Augustine’s Square symbolizes European cultural transplantation. Restored in 1993, it remains a performance venue (Coates, 2009).

#### 4.8 Na Tcha Temple (1888–present)

A tiny Taoist temple dedicated to the child-God Na Tcha, built beside St. Paul’s Ruins after an 1888 plague. Its juxtaposition with Catholic ruins signifies religious coexistence. Annual festivals integrate processions and Cantonese opera, reflecting living traditions (Chan, 2019).

#### 4.9 Lilau Square (Largo do Lilau) (16th c.–present)

Macao’s first Portuguese residential quarter, centered on a natural spring. The proverb “Drink from Lilau, never leave Macao” underscores its cultural mythmaking. Surrounding townhouses mix Portuguese tiles with Chinese brickwork, illustrating early settler life (Brockey, 2014).

#### 4.10 Casino Lisboa (1970 – present).

Funded by Stanley Ho and partners, Casino Lisboa introduced European-style gaming to Macao and changed the city. It is also an iconic postmodern building in a prime location. Today, it is operated by SJM Holdings. It continues to serve as a cornerstone of Macao’s gaming scene, now flanked by the Grand Lisboa, which is a lotus-inspired skyscraper that epitomizes modern luxury and sophistication (Campos, 2012).

Gambling legalization (1850s) made Macao Asia’s sole casino jurisdiction until 2006. Today, casinos generate over 80% of government revenue and employ 30% of the workforce (Chen et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2015).

#### 4.11 Drama game 2: Sound painting Macao.

This game is intended for students learning Chinese vocabulary. The approach is drama in education: Students are placed in several historical locations in Macao and use sounds to identify key places.

Students’ Chinese level: all levels, usually more suitable for beginners.

Students’ ages: all ages.

Group Size: a small group of 4-6 students, with guessing, and the whole class plays together.

Duration: 10-20 minutes.

#### Objectives and Connection to Language Teaching

To help students better memorize the vocabulary of locations in Chinese. To better discover a city or a location.

#### Rules / Procedure

4-6 students are blindfolded with masks or use their hands to cover their eyes. Their objective is to guess the location where the other classmates, who can see, will perform for them.

The teacher writes on the blackboard or on the PPT the list of 10 places that we studied about Macao: A-Ma Temple, Ruins of St. Paul’s, Senado Square



(Largo do Senado), Guia Fortress, Mandarin's House, St. Joseph's Seminary and Church, Dom Pedro V Theatre, Na Tcha Temple, Lilau Square (Largo do Lilau) and Casino Lisboa.

While the 4-6 students are blindfolded, the teacher silently points out one location to tell the rest of the classmates which one they will have to perform. It is better to time this activity to around 60 seconds. The teacher tells the blindfolded students before the start that they must listen silently for 60 seconds and try to guess the location; they are not allowed to speak while listening to their classmates. The teacher should give the signal to the rest of the classmates that the activity is starting, for example, saying "Start!" while clapping the teacher's hands. Now the rest of the classmates make sounds that you could hear in the selected location for around 60 seconds. They can use any object or part of their body to make the sounds, but they are not allowed to say words or sentences. After 60 seconds have passed, the teacher makes the signal "Finish!". Then the classmates stop making sounds, and the blindfolded group can finally take off their masks. The teacher asks them one by one, "Where are you?" and they guess the location. Finally, the teacher gives the answer, and they can play again or change to a new group of 4-6 students to be blindfolded and guess the location.

Also, you can play this game with sounds and words or sentences that people could use in the selected location. For example, if the location is Casino Lisboa, the classmates could say words such as:

"All in!" (the bold declaration at a poker table when a player pushes all their chips forward).

"Hit me." (the classic blackjack request for another card).

"Cash me out, please." (What you would say to a dealer or cashier when you are ready to turn chips back into money.)

This Sound painting drama activity is more difficult to guess if students use only sounds, but it is more challenging and engaging for students who can be more creative. If you play the game with words, it is much easier to guess, and students can also practice more words and sentences in the target language.

#### 4.12 Drama Game 3: Mystery of the Theft at Casino Lisboa

This game is intended for students learning Chinese, but it could be easily adapted to any other language. The approach is drama in education: students are placed in the role of policemen or guests at the famous Casino Lisboa in Macao. A priceless object has been stolen from the casino, and the students must use their observation and Chinese language skills to solve the case.

Students' Chinese level: All levels can participate, but the activity is especially suitable for intermediate students who are familiar with prepositions, 把字句 (the Ba structure), 被字句 (passive voice in Chinese), and the particle 了 to express change.

**Students' ages:** all ages.

**Group Size:** 6–20 students, divided into two groups.

**Duration:** 30-40 minutes.

**Objectives and Connection to Language Teaching Language Focus:**

- Prepositions in Chinese (在, 上, 下, 里, 外, 旁边, etc.)
- The "Ba" structure 把字句 (e.g., 把门打开了 open the window)

- The Passive Voice in Chinese with "Bei" 被字句 (e.g., 门被打开了 the door was opened)
- Particle 了 to express change (e.g., 灯关了 the light is off)
- Skills:
- Speaking, listening, observation, teamwork, and memory.
- Cultural Awareness:
- Set in Macao, famous for its casinos and multicultural environment.

#### Rules / Procedure

##### 1. Setting the Scene

- The classroom is set up to resemble a room in Casino Lisboa, with various objects (books, chairs, watches, bags, etc.) placed around.
- The teacher explains that a priceless object has been stolen, and the police (students) must investigate.

##### 2. Group Division

- Divide the class into two groups: Group A (policemen) and Group B (guests/ staff).
- Group A leaves the classroom after carefully observing the room and its objects for 2–3 minutes.

##### 3. Making Changes

- While Group A is outside, Group B makes five changes in the room.

Examples:

- Move an object (e.g., 把椅子搬到门口)
- Open or close a window (e.g., 窗户被打开了)
- Turn on/off the lights (e.g., 灯关了)
- Exchange clothes, watches, wristbands, rings, etc. (e.g., 手表换了)
- Change the position of a bag (e.g., 书包放在桌子下了)

##### 4. Investigation

- Group A returns and, together with Group B, discusses and tries to discover the five changes.
- All discussions and interactions among the students playing a role must be in Chinese, using the target structures.

Example Sentences

- Prepositions:
- 书包在椅子下。(The bag is under the chair.)
- 灯在门的上面。(The light is above the door.)
- The "Ba" structure 把字句:
- 把窗户打开了。(Opened the window.)
- 把椅子搬到桌子旁边了。(Moved the chair next to the table.)
- The Passive Voice in Chinese with "Bei" 被字句:
- 灯被关了。(The light was turned off.)
- 门被打开了。(The door was opened.)
- Particle 了 for change:
- 桌子换地方了。(The table has been moved.)
- 手表换人了。(The watch has a new owner.)

##### 5. Swap Roles

- Groups switch roles and repeat the activity.

##### 6. Debrief

- Teacher reviews the language used, corrects mistakes, and highlights good examples.

- Optionally, students can write a short police report in Chinese about the changes they discovered.
- The teacher should encourage creativity in making changes.
- For beginners, provide a list of helpful vocabulary and sentence patterns.
- For advanced students, add a role-play interrogation or written report.

## 5. Key Institutions and Figures in Drama in Education in Macao

Drama in Education in Macau has developed into a multifaceted field supported by government institutions, schools, universities, and community organizations. While historically viewed as an extracurricular or amateur activity, drama has increasingly been integrated into formal education and recognized as a powerful pedagogical tool for personal development, cultural expression, and social engagement (Chan, 2022).

### 5.1 Key Institutions of Drama in Education in Macao

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#### 5.1 Key Institutions of Drama in Education in Macao

Before the 1990s, drama in Macau was primarily an amateur cultural activity, often used as an educational tool to transmit values and ideas. Local drama clubs and school theatre societies were the main venues for cultivating theatrical talent. The turning point came in 1989 with the establishment of the School of Theatre at the Macao Conservatory. As the only government-backed institution dedicated to professional theatre training, it has played a pivotal role in cultivating local talent and promoting drama as both an art form and an educational medium. The school's curriculum has evolved to include acting, directing, and stage production, and it collaborates with local and international artists to enrich its offerings (Chan, 2022).

At the tertiary level, the University of Macau (UM) and the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) have integrated drama into their educational frameworks. UM's Drama Society, under the Students' Union, has gained national recognition through original productions such as *Message*, which won awards at the 2024 Golden Hedgehog College Theater Festival. This success highlights the university's commitment to fostering student creativity and leadership in the performing arts (University of Macau, 2024).

USJ has also contributed to drama education through research and teacher training. A recent doctoral study by Leong Si Kei explored the use of Drama-in-Education (DiE) in secondary English classrooms, revealing both enthusiasm and challenges among local teachers. The study advocates systemic support to integrate DiE more effectively into Macau's secondary education (Leong, 2024).

At the secondary school level, Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School in Macau has been a pioneer in integrating drama into the curriculum. Educator Shihan Lin led a curriculum development project focused on Cantonese musical theatre, combining ensemble technique lessons, rehearsals, and performance-based assessments. This initiative not only enhanced students' artistic skills but also

promoted cultural appreciation and language learning (Lin, 2025).

In addition, one of the most innovative school-level initiatives is the Cantonese Musical Theatre Curriculum Project at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School, Macau. Led by educator Shihan Lin, this project combines musical theatre with ensemble technique lessons and performance-based assessments. It demonstrates how drama can enhance language learning and cultural appreciation while fostering collaboration among students and educators. The project also involves collaboration with local artists and international educators, demonstrating the potential of community-driven curriculum development (Lin, 2025).

Another notable initiative is the Educational Drama Tour organized by CEM (*Companhia de Electricidade de Macau*). Since 2017, this program has brought interactive environmental-themed dramas to over 10,000 students across 17 primary schools. The performances are designed to be participatory, allowing students to engage directly with the content and themes such as sustainability and energy conservation (CEM, 2020).

### 5.2 Community Engagement and Social Impact of Drama in Macao

Community theatre in Macau has flourished alongside institutional efforts, often serving as a platform for cultural preservation and social dialogue. One notable example is the K.I. Drama Club, which focuses on producing original works by local playwrights and promoting "Macao Drama" as a distinct cultural form. These productions often explore themes of identity, history, and social change, and are staged in schools, community centers, and public spaces (Pun, 2012).

Community organizations have also played a vital role in expanding access to drama education. The Hiu Kok Drama Association, founded in 1975, is one of Macau's most prominent independent theatre groups. It operates the Hiu Kok Laboratory, a black box theatre that stages contemporary Cantonese productions and trains young performers (Macao Lifestyle, n.d.).

Drama has also been used as a tool for social work and youth development. A study by Lou and Chung (2018) documented a drama-based intervention that improved self-esteem and career outcomes among underperforming secondary students. This approach highlights drama's potential to support emotional and social growth in educational settings.

Community organizations and NGOs have also embraced drama as a tool for social development. For example, drama-based interventions have been used to support underperforming students, improve self-esteem, and foster career readiness. Lou and Chung (2018) documented such a program, demonstrating the potential of drama to address emotional and social challenges in educational settings. Furthermore, active local theatre groups (such as the Grey Tree Theatre Company, Rolling Puppet Alternative Theatre, and many more) and their artists provide diverse additions to Macau's drama ecosystem.

### 5.3 Macao's Government Support for Drama in Education

The Macao SAR Government has increasingly recognized the value of drama in education. Through the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau, it supports diverse school systems and encourages curricular innovation. The



government's commitment to 15 years of free education and its promotion of extracurricular activities have created a favorable environment for drama education to flourish (Government Information Bureau of the Macao SAR, 2023). In addition, the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR Government's "Cultural Talks" program brings together professional tutors in various fields, including drama, dance, and design.

The Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR Government has played a pivotal role in institutionalizing drama education. One of its flagship initiatives is the "Commissioning Performing Arts Productions" program, which funds original works by local theatre companies. In its latest round, six productions, including musicals, children's theatre, and experimental plays, were selected for premiere between 2025 and 2026. These productions receive full financial backing and logistical support, with the aim of positioning Macau as a "City of Performing Arts" and a hub for cultural exchange in the Greater Bay Area (Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR Government, 2024).

Complementing this initiative is the Black Box Theatre at the Macao Cultural Centre, inaugurated in 2023. This state-of-the-art facility provides rehearsal and performance space for young artists and theatre groups. Designed with flexibility and accessibility in mind, the venue supports experimental and community-based productions, reinforcing the government's commitment to cultivating local talent and expanding cultural infrastructure. (Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR Government, 2023).

Similarly, the Macao International Children's Arts Festival employs workshop-based and family-oriented pedagogical models (Macao News, 2025). It offers a wide array of programs, including theatre for babies, puppetry, and multimedia theatre, often incorporating "Children's Packages" that require adult accompaniment. This methodology emphasizes early artistic exposure and intergenerational learning, using drama as a tool for family bonding and creative development from a very young age (Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR Government, n.d.).

Further policy support is embedded in the Macao Youth Policy (2021–2030), which is the Macao government's official framework for youth development (Education and Youth Development Bureau of the Macao SAR Government, 2021). It emphasizes comprehensive development, social participation, cultural literacy among youth, and the integration of arts education into both formal and informal learning. The policy encourages integration of arts education—including drama—into learning environments and supports youth associations that promote creative expression and civic engagement.

#### 5.4 Influential Figures in Drama Education in Macao

Chao Shu Lei is widely recognized as a central figure in the development of drama education in Macao and is often described as the "Father of Theatre Drama" in the region. After completing his studies in Theatre Education in the United States, he established the School of Theatre at the Macao Conservatory and subsequently founded the Macao Fringe Club. Throughout his career, Chao has consistently promoted the creation of a distinct form of "Macao Drama" that embodies local cultural identity. His initiatives have highlighted the value of original playwriting and active community involvement in theatrical practice. In

recognition of his contributions, he received the Medal of Merit in Culture in 2004 (Pun, 2012).

The so-called "Macao Drama" movement has emerged as a defining strand within the territory's theatre landscape, characterized by its insistence on cultivating works that embody a distinctly local sensibility. Advocates such as Chao Shu Lei, together with groups like the K.I. Drama Club, have argued that institutional and financial support should prioritize plays written by Macao authors and rooted in the city's own cultural experience. This orientation reflects a conviction that theatre ought to serve as both a chronicle of Macao's social history and a mirror of its collective identity, rather than relying primarily on adaptations of foreign models (Pun, 2012).

Hui Koc Kun, widely known by his nickname "Big Bird," has played a central role in shaping Macao's contemporary theatre landscape as artistic director of the Hiu Kok Drama Association, one of the city's longest-standing independent companies. Under his leadership, the association has championed Cantonese-language theatre while also cultivating younger generations of performers. Through the Hiu Kok Laboratory—a small black box venue—Hui has fostered experimental and educational projects that actively involve youth and community participants. His efforts highlight the importance of sustaining local creativity and talent development in the face of pressures from more commercially driven entertainment (Cheong, 2023).

#### 5.5 The Macao Fringe Festival

The Macao City Fringe Festival, organized by the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR Government, is a prime example of community-engaged art. Its core concept, "All around the city, our stages, our patrons, our artists," drives a wide array of participatory methods that dissolve the line between artists and the public (Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR Government, 2025).

The Macao City Fringe Festival offers a wide variety of **Immersive Performances**: Audiences become active participants in the city of Macao, whether roaming the city as in *Drifting Dairies*, shaping the story in *The Monster*, or joining Step Out's site-specific "performance walks." These walks—like *Lin Kai With No River* or *The Rise and Fall of Long Tin Troupe*—blend maps, street encounters, and ritualistic processions to connect people with local history and critique colonial legacies.

In addition, the festival offers Workshops and Co-Creation: skill-based sessions such as clowning or family acrobatics that foster creativity and bonding. At the same time, open platforms like the *Art Exhibition for All* invite public contributions and spontaneous improvisation, affirming the idea that anyone can be an artist.

#### 5.6 Conclusion about Drama in Education in Macao.

A rich interplay of institutional support, school-based innovation, community engagement, and individual leadership shapes drama education in Macau. As the region continues to invest in cultural and educational development, drama will remain a vital tool for nurturing creativity, empathy, and civic responsibility among students.

Drama-in-Education in Macao is shaped by a rich interplay of institutional leadership, innovative school programs, influential educators, and community engagement. As the region continues to invest in cultural and educational development, DiE will remain a vital tool for nurturing creativity, empathy, and civic responsibility among students.

## 6. Conclusion: Macao as an Example of Dialogue Among Civilizations

According to Saxton (2024), Macao's exceptionalism lies not merely in hybridity but in its institutionalization of coexistence. Unlike colonial settings where dominant powers suppressed native cultures, Macao maintained dual governance where Chinese sovereignty and Portuguese administration coexisted through pragmatism—evidenced by Qing magistrates adjudicating Portuguese disputes. This generated what historian Ye Nong terms coexistence without assimilation (Ye, 2006).

Contemporary challenges—gambling dependency, Patuá decline, identity pressures—test this model. However, Macao's resilience endures through its UNESCO heritage stewardship, Lusophone diplomatic niche, and integration into the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. As Brazilian sinologist Giorgio Sinedino (2024) notes, Macao's bilingual graduates increasingly mediate China-Portugal exchanges, ensuring its "bridge" function persists post-colonialism.

Ultimately, Macao exemplifies how micro-territories can negotiate imperial pressures to forge enduring syntheses. Its streets—where azulejo tiles adorn Taoist temples and bacalhau shares menus with dim sum—remain monuments to intercultural possibility, offering the world a model of "harmony without uniformity" profoundly relevant in an age of civilizational tensions.

In this paper, we presented three illustrative dramatic activities designed to enhance language learning through the rich historical and cultural tapestry of Macao. Drama, as both an art form and a pedagogical tool, nurtures not only linguistic competence but also the cultivation of empathy, openness, and intercultural understanding. By inhabiting diverse roles, learners engage in perspective-taking that broadens their worldview and deepens their human connections. In an age increasingly shaped by technology, digital screens, and artificial intelligence, the presence of the arts in education becomes essential, reminding us of the distinctly human qualities that no machine can replicate. Thank you for having travelled this journey beyond the script, bringing to life Macao while unlocking language and culture through drama education, and affirming the arts as a vital bridge between language, culture, and the human spirit.

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