

WORKING PAPER

**China-Europe Academic and Cultural Cooperation:
From a Portuguese Perspective**

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Abstract

Traditionally an ally of the USA, Portugal has maintained a surprisingly dynamic and productive dialogue with China in the recent years. During the (still ongoing) coronavirus crisis, we can clearly observe the up-and-downs in the Sino-Portuguese relation, which has been constantly impacted by mainstream of the US media. Based on our information and observation, we hold that Portugal has subtly adjusted its position to China, arguably more attuned to a pro-Atlantic rhetoric, while still maintaining its pragmatism, as can be seen in Portugal's recovery programme presented to the EU. In consequence of this reposition, we can reveal and foresee some profound changes in the Sino-Portuguese academic and cultural cooperation, which are our main concern and which, in our opinion, can be reflected in other European countries.

This paper will be divided into three parts. In the first part, we shall discuss the main impact of Portugal's reorientation of its Atlantic strategy upon the Luso-Chinese relation, especially upon the academic and cultural dialogue between Portugal and China. In the second part, we will pay special attention to the Confucius Institutes as well as the Chinese community in Portugal. Using first-hand information, we propose to consider practical ways to cope with the new challenges and obstacles, as well as to bridge the (still significant) cultural gap between the two countries. In the third part, we propose to discuss the Sino-Portuguese academic and cultural cooperation in a post-pandemic world, underlining its opportunities in the near future.

Between Portugal and China there is a link so ancient, so close, yet so subtle, that too many times has it been unjustly overlooked or even ignored. Many know about the worldly famous English tea tradition; not many know that it was Catherine of Braganza (1638-1705), a Portuguese princess and later Queen of England (1662-1685), who brought the habit of drinking Chinese tea to Britain. Actually, while most of the European languages use variants of “tea” to

call the famed Chinese beverage (as we have *té* in Spanish, *tè* in Italian, *thé* in French, *Tee* in German), only in Portuguese it is called “chá”, conspicuously similar to the pronunciation in Mandarin Chinese (茶, chá). This is not surprising, considering that Portuguese navigators arrived in South China as early as 1513 (by Jorge Álvares) and the Portuguese Kingdom once dominated the maritime commercial route from Europe to Canton. Proofs of this early contact with China still persist in Portugal, and not confined in one place: in the island of São Miguel, in the Azorean archipelago, we can find the oldest and only tea plantation in Europe (Gorreana Tea Factory), still using techniques imported from China, via Macao; at the ancient campus of the University of Coimbra, we can see the New Cathedral of Coimbra (Sé Nova), on whose magnificent façade was modelled the Church of the Mother of God (Ruins of St. Paul’s) in Macao. Other proofs of the intimate link between Portugal and China may not be so obvious to the eyes, but definitely notable to the taste: Portuguese brought *Citrus x sinensis* (Laranja-doce, Sweet Orange) from China and made it popular around Europe and even worldwide. In some languages, this fruit is even called “Portugal”, as in Bulgaria (*portokal*) and Arabic. All this being said, we cannot deny that the direct contact between Portugal and China, began in the early modern age - an age when great geographic discoveries constantly expanded and shaped the horizon of the mankind -, has been deeply influential and productive in a commercial as well as in a cultural sense. It has widely permeated into the daily life of the Portuguese and European people. Nevertheless, the abundant cultural legacy of China-Europe communication via Portugal still awaits profound and comparative study: its huge potential remains to be fully explored; its vitality, though striking, has recently been impacted and challenged by the setbacks of the pandemic as well as by the vicissitudes of world politics. In this paper, we propose to face the reality by understanding the complexities and potential of the Luso-Chinese cultural dialogue from a historical perspective. Based on this insight and on our experience, we hope to search for practical and creative ways to unlock Portugal’s strategic power for a more productive academic and cultural cooperation between China and Europe, taking into account the obstacles imposed as well as the opportunities offered by the current political orientation.

1. The academic and cultural dialogue between Portugal and China: an overview

Historically, the cultural dialogue between Portugal and China was greatly mediated by the Jesuit College in Coimbra – the first Jesuit College in the world. Founded in the 16th century, its vestige still can be seen today at the University of Coimbra (as one of the earliest universities in Europe, it was founded in 1290 by King Denis of Portugal and permanently fixed in Coimbra

in 1537 by King John III). According to the Belgian sinologist Nicolas Standaert, the Jesuits embarked on the China mission were very international (one third from Portugal, the others from Italy, France and other European countries); though limited in number (“less than 400 foreign Jesuits arrived in China in the course of two hundred years between 1582 and 1773, and a number of them did not even stay a long time”), they exchanged philosophical, astronomical and mathematical knowledge with Chinese intellectuals and brought back valuable information about China which caused a profound influence upon European culture, or, as Standaert put it, “an immense mental displacement in Europe”, “since then China never disappeared from the European mindset” (Standaert, 2013:25-27). We may think of several excellent examples that illustrate this fascinating cultural interaction between Europe and China, via Coimbra/Portugal: the legendary Italian missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) who cultivated friendship with Chinese elite intellectuals like Xu Guangqi (1562-1633); the Portuguese missionary Francisco Furtado (1589-1653) who, together with the Chinese scholar Li Zhizao (1571-1630), translated into Chinese the influential Coimbra commentaries on Aristotelian philosophy (*Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis*); the famous Flemish missionary Ferninand Verbiest (1623-1688), who succeeded Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1591-1666) as the Jesuit director of Beijing Astronomical Observatory and Head of the Mathematical Board. The Jesuit records of experience in China and descriptions of the sophisticated Chinese educational, examination and bureaucratic system deeply stimulated European elite intellectuals. One great example is Voltaire (1694-1778), the Patriarch of the European Enlightenment himself, who, “against the European habit of dismissing as inferior remote civilisations, such as that of China, which he had extolled in order to expose the ridiculous vanity, exclusiveness and fanaticism of the “barbarous” Judaeo-Christian outlook that recognised no values besides its own” (Berlin, 2013:212). Taking the historical facts into account, we can have a clear idea of how far and wide was the influence of the academic and cultural dialogue between Portugal/Europe and China. Some curious aspects are worth noticing in this early cultural interaction, which can be characterised as a “prolonged series of reciprocal contacts on the basis of a political and cultural equilibrium” (Standaert, 2013:25). As Standaert pointed out, although retaining their cultural superiority, the Portuguese and European missionaries were obliged to learn Chinese, to filter European ideas through Chinese language and thought patterns, as well as to “comply with the demands of the Confucian cultural imperative” (Standaert, 2013:27). The predominance of the Chinese language in the cultural exchange worked also to the advantage of the missionaries, as they could directly access the genuine sources of Chinese culture. It is no wonder that Portugal was a pioneer of sinology: Joaquim Afonso Gonçaves (1781-1841) wrote the first (published)

compendium on the teaching of Chinese grammar; the General Library of the University of Coimbra still conserves the most ancient dictionary of Portuguese-Chinese, compiled around 1582 by Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) and other Jesuits.

However, after the first blossom of a rather vibrant cultural interaction, the direct contact between Portugal and China became more limited, and eventually eclipsed by other China-Europe cultural dialogues. The following centuries seem to be a long period of hiatus, when Portugal's interest in Chinese culture became scarce and deeply influenced by French taste, as can be seen in the *chinoiserie* decoration at the King John's Library at the University of Coimbra (inaugurated in 1717), delicate and delightful, is but an expression of exotism and fantastical imagination. The teaching and learning of Chinese language in Portugal, once unique and pioneering, were also put on hold, as the Jesuit society itself was expelled from the University of Coimbra by the reforms of Marquis of Pombal (1699-1782). A statesman of the Age of Enlightenment with a mind of an entrepreneur, Marquis of Pombal greatly incentivized the silk industry in Portugal. The link between Portugal and China during these times seemed to become mostly commercial and almost exclusively mediated by Macao. There, the judge and poet Camilo Pessanha (1867-1926) acquired knowledges of Chinese language (Cantonese dialect) that inspired him to write some of the most memorable poems of the anthology "Clepsydra". Nevertheless, it should be noted that the Chinese influence in Pessanha was strongly filtered by the tastes of French symbolism.

Despite the aforementioned hiatus in the academic and cultural dialogue between Portugal and China, it is worth noticing that more than half a millennium Macao has been playing a key-role in the Luso-Chinese relations, actively articulating Portugal's gigantic oversea network which stretches from the Atlantic through Indic to Asian Pacific. As the Portuguese historian Luís Filipe Barreto pointed out, the intercultural understanding and commercial cooperation between Portugal and China via Macao have been made possible mainly by generations of coastal groups and families characterized by their openness, flexibility, pragmatism and erudition (Barreto, 2013:21). These commercial and cultural agents are distinguishingly cosmopolitan. Again, according to Barreto (2013:19-21), Luso-Chinese relations have always been more than bilateral, but multilateral. Not only Portuguese and Chinese, but also other Asians - "Indians, Malayans, Japanese", as well as other Europeans – "Italians and Spanish" and Africans were involved in the network powered by Macao. Furthermore, we should pay special attention to the indispensable contribution of the overseas Portuguese and Chinese ("portugueses e chineses ultramarinos") – Portuguese and Chinese

communities living in national and international spaces of “Indic, European, African and American Atlantic, Southeast Asia and American Pacific”, while retaining a strong connection to their ancestral land. Barreto underlined that before Portuguese arrived in China, the Luso-Chinese commercial relation had already begun, more precisely, “in 1509, Malacca”. As we know, the South Sea (Nanyang, 南洋) and the Southeast Asia have always been a cultural melting pot. How Portuguese oversea communities interact with South Sea/Nanyang Chinese is a topic worthy of further studies and can definitely, in our opinion, provide valuable insights for the international collaboration in building the 21st Century Maritime Silkroad.

As we have seen, the links between Portugal and China have largely been economic and cultural exchanges. The formal diplomatic relations were established in 1979, after the 25 April Revolution in Portugal and coinciding with the Chinese economic reform. The two countries peacefully negotiated the transfer of sovereignty of Macao, which occurred on 20 December 1999. Since then, China’s interest in Portugal and Lusophone countries has been increasing, which is clearly reflected in the higher education sector. Before 2000, there were only three universities in Mainland China offering undergraduate courses in Portuguese Language and Culture (Beijing Foreign Studies University - BFSU, Shanghai International Studies University – SISU, and Communication University of China). Now (September 2021) there are 57 institutes of higher education in Mainland China offering Portuguese courses, the latest two being Hebei Normal University and Hunan Normal University. This astonishing crescendo in the recent years was greatly stimulated by, in our opinion, the vibrant economic and cultural exchange between Portugal and Brazil (both in BRICS and G20 blocs) as well as the active participation of the Lusophone countries (Portugal, East Timor, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde) in China’s Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). For instance, Portugal was the first country in Western Europe to sign the BRI-MoU with China, as well as the first EU member state to establish a Blue Partnership with China, and the first country in the Euro zone to issue renminbi-denominated bonds. The Sino-Portuguese cooperation covers a wide range of areas: economics, commerce, investment, energy, sciences and technology, sea, finances, education, culture and tourism. Naturally, in the Portuguese academia, driven by the dynamics of Luso-Chinese cooperation, there has also been an increasing interest in China. Let us take the University of Coimbra (UC), Alma-Mater of all the universities in the Lusophone world, as a clear example: in July 2013, UC hosted the exposition “From the Sun to the South” (“Do Sul ao Sol”), proudly presenting its crucial role in Sino-European cultural and scientific dialogues in the 16th and 17th centuries, openly confirming the willingness to revive its leading role as a global university.

From then on, the rectorate of the UC has been active in responding to proposals of cooperation from China, as well as in seeking to enhance its cooperation with Chinese partners. In November 2014, a delegation of Beijing Normal University visited the Law Faculty of the UC (this author assisted the meeting as interpreter), proposed an exchange programme which was welcomed by the UC. In July 2016, UC established its Confucius Institute - the 4th in Portugal and the only one specialized in Chinese Medicine in the Iberia. In April 2017, Mr. Zhou Qiang, president of the People's Supreme Court, visited the Law Faculty of the UC. In October 2018, with the support of the Chinese Ambassador in Portugal, Mr. Cai Run, a delegation of the UC (consisted of the former Vice-Rector Joaquim Ramos de Carvalho, former Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities José Pedro Paiva, former Dean of the Law Faculty Rui de Figueiredo Marcos, and this author) paid a visit to Beijing and Shanghai, which was extremely fruitful: not only had we developed our dialogue with China's gigantic think-tank – Chinese Academy of Social Sciences - CASS, as well as with the two leading foreign studies universities in China – BFSU and SISU; we also established cooperation with new partners - China University of Political Science and Law (CUPL), and the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Fudan University. This intensive visit to China paved way to the creation of the Sino-Lusophone Academy (inaugurated in June 2019) of the UC, an especial and pioneering project of the UC's rectorate (as is the CI at the UC). As a multidisciplinary platform with a priority in the jurisprudential studies, the Sino-Lusophone Academy (Academia Sino-Lusófona, ASL) aims to promote the development of relevant knowledge concerning the relations between China, Portugal and Lusophone countries, as well as to transfer that knowledge to entities interested in the strengthening and consolidation of these relations. On this platform, there are two centres directly engaged in cooperation with China: the first one is CASS-UC Center for China Studies, whose formal establishment in December 2018 was witnessed by President Xi Jinping of the P. R. China and by the Portuguese Prime-Minister António Costa; the second one is BFSU-UC Center for Sino-Lusophone Studies, formally created in April 2019 and with a special focus on the research and learning of the language, literature, culture, history and society of the Lusophone countries. Even challenged by the pandemic, the Sino-Portuguese dialogue through these two centers never stopped. On 25 May 2020, CASS-UC Center for China Studies successfully held the forum “The New Green Silk Road under the Great Changes: Sino-EU (Portugal) Cooperation”.

The period between 2018 and 2019 can arguably be considered the golden years in the academic and cultural dialogue between Portugal and China. Unfortunately, the crisis of the

Covid-19 pandemic forced a general suspension of exchange programmes, and there is still no foreseeable date to reinitiate much necessitated mutual visits. Most importantly, deeply impacted by the reorientation of EU's policy towards China, the academic and cultural cooperation between Portugal and China, specially from the Portuguese perspective, will inevitably undergo drastic changes.

In his “Strategic Vision for the Economic Recovery Plan of Portugal 2020-2030” (we commented at length on this plan in our working paper “Glimpses at the Possibilities and Challenges in a Post-Pandemic Europe: From a Portuguese Perspective” for China-CEE Institute), engineer António Costa Silva already pointed out a “new geopolitical cycle” (Silva, 2020:4) in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, advocating for a reorientation of foreign policy in Portugal and in Europe, in terms of avoiding the crossfires of the ever fierce competition between the USA and China, while constructing a “balancing platform” with other “great democracies as Canada, India, Japan and Australia” (Silva, 2020:9). Under this geopolitical guidance, Costa Silva strongly argued for the necessity of shorten the international supply chains of certain products of vital importance, reducing the “dependence upon China” (Silva, 2020:10). Although China is still counted as a commercial partner, perceived as one of the “emergent markets”, “multilateral cooperation projects”, “international commercial network” and “target-market”, it obviously doesn't share the same priority, nor does it appear alongside Portugal's North-Atlantic allies (USA and UK), as well as South-Atlantic allies (Brazil/South-America; Angola/West-Africa), in the “integrated consortium for climate and ocean studies” (Silva, 2020:32). This reorientation leaves a lot of question marks on the possibilities of further Luso-Chinese academic cooperation.

We cannot deny that the reorientation in Portugal's geopolitical strategic view – cooling down Luso-Chinese relations while tilting towards the Atlantic axis – came at no surprise. As early as 2019, at the apex of the Luso-Chinese cooperation at governmental level, Portuguese president Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa unambiguously stressed that, Portugal and China are not allies, but partners. Portugal's allies are Europe, USA and other Lusophone countries. In alignment with EU's repositioning of China as “a cooperation partner, a negotiation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival” (as stated in the EU-China Relations factsheet on 20 June 2020), Portugal prioritized the EU's cooperation between India, not China, during its Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first semester of 2021. A clear example of Portugal's new attitude towards China can be seen in the high-level forum “EU-Asia: Challenges and Future” (“UE-Ásia: Desafios e Futuro”) hosted by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon,

on 16th April 2021. In this forum, the brief “EU-China Relations in times of systemic rivalry”, prepared by Lucrezia Poggetti from Mercator Institute for China Studies in Berlin (MERICS) was presented. In the aforementioned brief, the close relations between China and certain member states of the EU (such as Hungary and Greece), are viewed as detrimental to the cohesion of the EU, since they seem to create opportunities for “Eurosceptic governments” to explore “alternatives other than EU” (Poggetti, 2021:5). As a consequence of this concern, Poggetti advocates for stronger integration of EU state members to counter the systemic rivalry of China, which implies more coordination with the USA (Poggetti, 2021:20) as well as more adherence to the Indo-Pacific strategies – a method considered necessary to diversify EU’s commercial nexus and to “avoid an excessive dependence in relation to China”, as France, Germany and Netherlands have already done (Poggetti, 2021:13). It is also worth noticing that, as Poggetti reveals, in order to counter China’s influence in different domains, Brussels is “leading conversations with its member states on how to combat foreign interference in institutions of higher education as well as in organizations of research” (Poggetti, 2021:17). Though not explicitly mentioned, it can be inferred that activities developed by Confucius Institutes in Europe, as well as other EU-China joint education and research programmes, can be targeted and scrutinized. How this “combat” will impact the existing academic and cultural cooperation between Portugal and China remains to be seen. Countering more pessimistic views, this author holds that the time-honoured Luso-Chinese academic and cultural dialogue will endure current difficulties and may even offer insights and flexibilities to Euro-Chinese relations. This could happen, if Portugal and China keep a realistic and serene view of their relations, and most importantly: if both countries keep on investing in education of bilingual/multilingual talents capable of conducting intercultural communications. Then, and only then, will the dangers of antagonistic speech as well as prejudices and cultural arrogance be effectively diminished. To bring out this result, beneficial to both Portugal and China, the Confucius Institutes and Chinese community in Portugal have important roles to play, as shall be discussed in the next point.

2. The urgency of the people-to-people understanding: roles of Confucius Institutes and Chinese community in Portugal

Unlike other European countries such as Germany, France and Sweden, where Chinese teaching and research were already prosperous before the creation of Confucius Institutes, Chinese studies in Portuguese academia suffered a long-time hiatus, as has been mentioned in

the previous point. Consequently, the Confucius Institutes (CI) in Portugal have been crucial in re-establishing Chinese learning in Portuguese universities. The oldest CI in Portugal is the CI at the University of Minho (in the Northern city of Braga), established in 2006 as a joint project with the Nankai University in Tianjin. The University of Minho also offers the undergraduate and master programme of “Oriental Studies: Chinese and Japanese Studies”, coordinated by Sun Lam, former local director of the CI. Collaborating with Tianjin Foreign Studies University, the CI at the University of Lisbon was established in 2007, which also has been supporting the undergraduate programme of “Asian Studies”, a joint education programme created by a consortium consisted of the University of Lisbon, the Catholic University of Portugal and the Cultural and Scientific Centre of Macao (in Lisbon). The University of Aveiro also has an extremely dynamic CI (in collaboration with Dalian University of Foreign Languages) since 2015, offers a Master Programme in “Chinese Studies – Society, Territory, Economy and Business”, together with ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon. The CI at the University of Coimbra, in collaboration with Beijing International Studies University and Zhejiang Chinese Medical University, as has been mentioned, was created in 2016 – though not a pioneer, it enjoys a multidisciplinary platform with great potential, working closely with the CASS-UC Center for China Studies and the BFSU-UC Center for Sino-Lusophone Studies. The newest CI in Portugal is the CI at the University of Oporto, a joint project established in 2018 with Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (MoU signed during the presidential visit to Portugal). It has been speculated that there can be another CI at the University of Évora, but there is still no update.

In our opinion, the CIs in Portugal are fundamental, not only because they are entities that can provide quality Chinese language classes, promote Chinese culture and organise HSK tests for local communities – these are all important, but more significantly: the CIs work actively on the “first line” of intercultural communication, dealing directly with people-to-people understanding between different realities. In Portugal – a country renowned for its safety and rich touristic resources -, universities tend to be highly international, making it an ideal place to cultivate deep and mutual understanding between different peoples. For instance, more than 16% of UC’s students are international, most of them from Lusophone countries (Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, East Timor) and Europe. As a result, the CI at the UC has received students and collaborators from many countries around the world, not only Portugal and China, but Brazil, Italy, Indian, Vietnam, East Timor and the USA. Since we switched to the online teaching mode in March 2020, even

our Portuguese students become more diversified: we have students who are residents in Madeira Island, Oporto and Guarda (inland city, near the border with Spain) and attend classes at home. In this context, we actively encourage our students to be engaged in a dynamic interchange of knowledge, and the result has been beneficial to all. From the perspective of a local director, this author firmly believes that, the multilateral exchange of knowledge, more than bilateral exchange, could be more fruitful to a CI. In the specific case of the UC, it is also vital that we keep in mind the interculturalism which has been the key to the successful commercial and cultural dialogue between Portugal/Europe and China/Asia (via Macao), as has been elucidated in the previous point. In the last semester, on 24 April 2021, Professor Guo Liangyan organised a “Presentation of Proverbial and Popular Expressions” for the HSK-2 level students of our CI. Portuguese, Brazilian and Italian students shared their impression about learning Chinese proverbial and popular expressions, and presented several interesting cases of their languages. The event was highly enjoyable and fruitful to all the students and the CI staff. This semester, we are going to repeat this successful experience in the end of November. This author has also been trying to introduce more international components to UC’s academic dialogue with China, as well as to showcase the openness and diversity of Chinese culture. For instance, in the past semester, in cooperation with the Eurasia Foundation in Tokyo, with the support of the Vice-Rector of the UC João Nuno Calvão da Silva, this author coordinated a series of fifteen lectures about Eurasian cultural exchange. We chose the great Chinese writer Lu Xun as the topic of our participation, underlining the importance of Lu Xun’s contact with European culture via Japan, as well as the impact of Lu Xun on other modern Japanese and Korean writers. Professor Kang Younok, Korean sinologist, also contributed with a lecture on the Chinese characters and intercultural exchange in East Asia. From the warm feedback of the audience (on average, each lecture was attended by around 65 students, mainly UC students from Portugal, Brazil and Angola), we delighted to see that our students were able to enlarge their cultural horizon and get more intercultural sensibility.

In the current context, it is urgent to promote this mutually beneficial people-to-people understanding in the academia, as well as in the society. In Poggetti’s brief, a survey conducted in the second semester of 2020 by the Pew Research Centre was cited to confirm that “the opinions about China in Europe had turned more negative” (Poggetti, 2021:4). We should not forget: a lot of people in Europe draw their impression of China from TV and social network, dominated by media giants such as CNN and BBC. Speaking as a resident in Portugal since 2008, even before the pandemic, it was not easy to watch on TV an unbiased, ideologically

neutral, let alone minimally interesting, report or documentary about China. During the Covid-19 pandemic, in syntony with mainstream Euro-American media, it is no surprise that news about China on main Portuguese TV channels (RTP1, SIC, TVI) have been mainly negative. In the end of this year, TVI is going to substitute its 24-hour news channel (TVI24) with CNN Portugal. This being said, in the foreseeable future, people in Portugal will be even more exposed to negative news about China; the social environment will likely be worse to Chinese communities in Portugal. Thus, it is important that Chinese communities, the CIs and all the friends of Chinese/Asian culture in Portugal stay calm and united, in order to navigate through these troubled times, and to prevent the horrible “Asian Hate” waves, which are still high in the USA.

In our opinion, the most efficient way to counter the negative social environment is by strengthening and diversifying the channels of academic and cultural dialogue between Europe and China. People in Portugal who are interested in Chinese language and culture should have easier access to knowledge and quality cultural products (including books, trust-worthy online resources, with updated information) about Ancient and Modern China. According to our experience in the CI at the UC, it is important to provide the knowledge and services which meet the specific needs of the local academic and social community.

On one side, our CI has provided, on request of other departments of the UC, lectures about Chinese language and culture. To give a few examples of the current year: in February and May, this author was invited to deliver two lectures on Confucianism, one for students enrolled in the course of Oriental Religions, coordinated by Professor João Gouveia Monteiro, president of the Academy for Encounters of Religions and Cultures at the UC (APECER); another one for graduate students enrolled in the course of History of Religions, coordinated by Professor Rosário Morujão, also the Vice-President of the APECER. The students’ curiosity and enthusiasm greatly exceeded our expectation, and we are determined to cooperate more with our colleagues from the department of History. From March to May, to support the optional course “Luso-Chinese Law”, coordinated by Professor Ana Gaudêncio from the Law Faculty, this author gave a lecture on fundamental aspects of Chinese culture, Professor Guo Liangyan presented the metamorphosis of Chinese characters, while Professor Guo Yihao (from China University of Political Science and Law) introduced the encounter of Chinese and European law systems in the early modern period. The feedback was very positive and we shall continue to work closely with the Law Faculty.

On the other side, our CI at the UC has organised several cultural activities tailored to our students' preference. In pre-pandemic times, we organised several lectures and expositions to showcase the classical Chinese culture and traditional Chinese medicine. In order to attract students to these cultural activities, we usually had to do a lot of promotional work, which was both time consuming and arguably not eco-friendly (too many unused flyers and posters). Based on our observation and after exchanging ideas with our students, we realised that our young students (mostly between 18 to 40) prefer more tangible, relaxing and entertaining cultural experiences, especially gastronomical experiences. Portuguese geopolitical strategy may lay higher emphasis on the Atlantic axis, nevertheless, culturally, Portugal has unmistakable Mediterranean features: frequent friend and family gatherings, parties with good wine and food are indispensable to people's life. This cultural characteristic, which is caused by geographic conditions and long-term influence of Catholic and Arab traditions, makes Portugal (as well as Italy, Spain, Greece and other countries in the Mediterranean) visibly different from countries in Northern Europe, where society and culture are more centred on the individual. It also creates more harmony with Chinese culture, where warmth in the community life is also highly valued. Inspired by this discovery, in June, we invited all the students, collaborators and friends of the CI at the UC to participate in a picnic on the riverside. To our delight, our students enthusiastically responded, some even came a long way from Oporto and Lisbon. In the picnic, zongzi and other Chinese snacks were warmly shared; Professor Guo Liangyan taught students to fly kites; people from different cultural backgrounds linked together by their interest in Chinese food/culture. In our opinion, we should not underestimate CI's ability to bring together international, and Chinese communities in relaxing cultural events: deep friendship and mutual understanding can only start with these small, but steady, steps. We firmly believe that, only through personal experience can the hatred, distrust and prejudices stirred up by noisy antagonistic discourses be neutralized. It should be noticed that in a typical antagonistic speech, which exploits cultural ignorance and arrogance, the "otherness" of a different culture is usually exaggerated and often dehumanized. Through direct contact with the CI and the Chinese communities in Portugal, local people may find that Portuguese/European culture and Chinese culture are not completely at odds. Better still, equipped with necessary language skills, local students will be able to directly access and reflect upon information about China, thus no longer dependent on the second-hand and ideologically tainted sources.

The pandemic has already taught us a painful lesson about the importance of social cohesion. In the future, in order to respond more efficiently to the biological, as well as social

challenges similar to the Covid-19 crisis, the academia should continue to encourage mutual learning, creating better conditions to advance exchange of knowledge and culture. In this process, bilingual and multilingual interlocutors are extremely helpful. In Portugal, it means more investment in the education of multilingual talents (Portuguese, Chinese, English and other European languages) and more cooperation with Chinese universities (both in Mainland China and in Macao). The Polytechnical Institute of Leiria (IPL) provides a good example to follow: there has been, since 2016, a unique 4-year undergraduate programme in Portuguese-Chinese/Chinese-Portuguese Translation, in cooperation with the Polytechnical Institute of Macao (IPM) and Beijing Language and Culture University. The CIs in Portugal regularly receive interns from IPL, who can efficiently assist in the teaching, translation, cultural activities and other daily works. Based on the positive experience with the IPL interns at the CI, this author sees great potential in Luso-Chinese cooperation in training translators, interpreters, language teachers, historians, jurists, as well as other cultural agents who can be greatly beneficial to both countries.

It should be mentioned that, during the year of 2020, Hanban, the former headquarter of the Confucius Institutes, has completed its reform. The newly established Center for Language and Education and Cooperation will continue to support Chinese learning around the world. Hopefully, under the more flexible foundational structure, the CIs will be more capable in targeting areas of mutual interest and in stimulating joint work between host and Chinese universities. A dynamic academic and cultural dialogue between Portugal and China, in a time when Europe is consciously building up its “China competence” (we are thinking of Germany, through the recent “Chinakompetenz” project promoted by its Federal Ministry of Education and Research), will be exceptionally meaningful.

3. Sino-Portuguese academic and cultural cooperation in the post-pandemic world: a foresight

In our opinion, Portuguese and Chinese scholars, researchers, students and people who care for a healthy cooperation between Europe and China should actively work together, searching for knowledge and wisdom in our more-than-half-a-millennium cultural and economic exchange to provide valuable lessons for today. As has been mentioned in the previous point, the CIs in Portugal could unite Portuguese and Chinese universities in educating bilingual/multilingual talents able to secure a free and efficient communication between

different cultures. In this point, we would like to call attention to certain aspects that constitute the uniqueness of the Portuguese culture. A serious and profound study of these aspects has not yet been given its due in the Chinese academia, although it could, we believe, be extremely useful and inspiring for the Sino-Portuguese cooperation in the current and post-pandemic time. A Luso-Chinese academic and cultural cooperation can be centred on studies and debates about these aspects in Portuguese culture and history:

Special attention should be paid to the openness and fusional tendency in Portuguese culture. Portugal, founded in 1143 by King Afonso Henriques, is one of the oldest dynastic and national states in Europe and in the world. Its border is among the most stable ones. Culturally, however, its frontier is not so definitive, but open to multiple influences. Its civilizational roots are not only Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian, but also Arab (N.B.: The Arabic existence in the Iberian Peninsula dates from the Arab-Berber conquest led by Tariq Ibn Ziyad in 711, to the conquest of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand in 1492). In Portugal, the religious co-existence, as well as the lively exchange of knowledge, skills and products between Christian, Jewish and Arab people were protected by wise leaders such as Sisnando Davides, Mozarab nobleman who governed Coimbra in the era of Reconquista. In this sense, Portugal is profoundly familiar with the intellectual exchange between East and West. The fusional and synthesizing tendency of Portuguese culture, as a melting pot of Eastern and Western elements, is widely discussed by modern Portuguese intellectuals and poets like Teixeira de Pascoaes and Fernando Pessoa. A deeper understanding of Portuguese culture should necessarily cover its cosmopolitan feature in different period of its long history.

Naturally, studies with special attention to the inclusiveness and interculturality of Portuguese/Lusophone culture should also focus on the Portuguese language itself: around 3.7% of the world's population speak it as a mother tongue. In November 2019, UNESCO recognized the importance of the Portuguese language in linking people around the world, by defining 5 May as the World Portuguese Language Day. Since then, this special day has been celebrated by Portuguese global diaspora and Lusophone communities around the world, which include nine members of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (“Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa”, CPLP): Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, East Timor and Equatorial Guinea. The economic importance of the CPLP is obvious: according to IMF, the nine member states, combined, could be the 6th larger economies of the world. To understand the unities and diversities of the CPLP, naturally, requires a closer look to the literatures of Portuguese expression, as well as other

cultural phenomena. Literature, especially great literature, will help us to better understand the deepest concerns and the highest aspiration of different peoples who are linked by the Portuguese language. In this respect, Portuguese/Lusophone and Chinese scholars can exchange a vast amount of knowledge and ideas. In Chinese academia, studies of Portuguese literature which formerly focused on Portuguese and Brazilian writers, have been gradually taking a global turn by including more and more African authors: Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) and Peking University are leading this new tendency. In harmony with this demand, in last year's conferences on Portuguese Literature, organised by BFSU-UC Centre for Sino-Lusophone Studies and designed principally for Chinese undergraduate students, we invited the renowned Professor José Carlos Seabra Pereira, president of the Inter-university Centre for Camonian Studies, to deliver the closing lecture entitled "Inter-connection of Literatures in Portuguese Language". In the future, similar lectures, workshops and in-depth exchange of views could be organised in Portugal and Macao for Chinese students and scholars. Excellent platforms such as AULP (Associação das Universidades de Língua Portuguesa; Association of the Universities of Portuguese Language), whose members include seven institutions in Macao (University of Macao, Polytechnical Institute of Macao, Macao Institute for Tourism Studies, Saint Joseph University, Macao City University, International Institute of Macao and Institute of European Studies in Macao) and whose next presidency (2021-2024) shall be University of Coimbra, could be mobilized for the purpose.

Portuguese culture is profoundly cosmopolitan/global; besides, it is distinguishably maritime. Not only Portugal but all the Lusophone countries share their borders with sea. By sea is Portugal connected with North, South and Central America, as well as Africa. In this respect, deeper studies about the maritime culture and the history of the Atlantic axis in Portuguese diplomacy could provide, in our opinion, new insights for Sino-Portuguese, Sino-European or even Sino-American relations.

Although Portugal's position in the European Union is arguably peripheric, its strategic position on the Atlantic Ocean inevitably shapes it into a converging point, with significant balancing power, between Europe, America and Africa. Even before the Maritime Expansion, Portugal forged its most important alliance by sea, with England. The Luso-British Alliance is known as the most ancient diplomatic alliance of the world, since the Treaty of Windsor in 1386 and the marriage in 1387 between Princess Philippa of Lancaster (daughter of John Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster) and King John I of Portugal. Dona Philippa, the English Princess and Portuguese Queen, has been venerated in Portugal as an exemplar mother and educator of the "Illustrious

Generation” (“Ínclina Geração”) – great princes (among them, Prince Henry, the Navigator) who came to shape the future of Portugal.

The Azorean Archipelago, discovered during the Maritime Expansion, occupies the central position between the North America and the Western Europe. During the WWII, neutral Portugal allowed British and US military to use the Lajes Air Base. Since then, the Lajes Air Base has been crucial to the Luso-American liaison, and since 1949, also to the NATO. It played an important role during Cold War, and in recent times, in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Besides, it should be noted that the strong transatlantic alliance between Portugal and the US has also a solid historic basis – ever since the foundation of the US. Portugal was the first neutral country to recognize the USA. As António Neto da Silva, President of the Association of Portugal-USA Friendship, well pointed out, the first (and still fully functioning) US consulate was opened in Ponta Delgada (São Miguel Island, Azorean Archipelago); the US founding fathers cheered with Madeira wine to the Declaration of the Independence (Silva, 2018:18). Portuguese diaspora in the USA is quite notable, with more than 340 associations, such as Portuguese American Leadership Council of the US and National Organization of Portuguese-Americans, representing the interest of Portuguese communities (Silva, 2018:19). Portugal’s abundant touristic resources also attract America’s attention. In June, 2021, the Forbes magazine elected five most beautiful Portuguese cities to visit (other than Lisbon): Oporto, Cascais, Coimbra, Guimarães, Santarém. In July, in the TIME magazine’s list of “the World’s 100 Greatest Places 2021”, two are in Portugal: the city of Coimbra and the village of Arouca. During the pandemic, foreigners have manifested an increased interest in purchasing luxurious holiday houses in Portugal. Notably, most of these interested foreign buyers are Anglo-American.

We can thus better understand the multi-layered importance of the Atlantic axis for Portugal, not only in a geo-strategic level, but also cultural and economic. Portugal’s close relation with its Atlantic allies (USA, UK, Brazil) is extremely important to leverage its negotiating power inside the EU, as has been clarified by the economist António Rebelo de Sousa (Sousa, 2018:70). Portugal, as we have seen, is focusing on the Atlantic nexus to develop its Blue Economy. As a country blessed with a large extension of the continental platform (Portugal has the 20st largest Exclusive Economic Zone of the World and the 3rd in Europe), it strongly inclines to explore the great potential of the vast EEZ with long-time allies. Nevertheless, in our opinion, China and Portugal can still cooperate in education and research of the maritime culture, maritime tourism e services, as well as in the development of floating

wind energy, high-tech aquaculture, biodiversity protection, among other components of Blue Economy. Chinese universities can also establish connection with the University of Madeira and the University of Azores. Macao, Guangzhou, Quanzhou, and other historical port cities in China can dialogue with Portuguese port cities, promoting sustainable and cultural tourism while providing business opportunities for local companies.

In a time of great changes, deep and mutual understanding between different peoples in the world is more important than ever. During the pandemic, the resilience of the Sino-Portuguese/European friendship has been constantly challenged. Nevertheless, a look into the past can remind us of the cultural and economic exchange between Portugal and China that had left enduring marks in people's life. Through more than 500 years, the prosperity of this exchange has been carefully maintained by wise and practical mind, its flexibility secured by cosmopolitan Macao. Based on this shared past, and facing a shared future, we hold that the Sino-Portuguese academic and cultural cooperation should strengthen the interculturality and invest more effectively in the education of bilingual and multilingual talents who can contribute to the mutual learning between China/Asia and Portugal/Europe. In this respect, the Confucius Institutes and the Chinese communities in Portugal should be encouraged to facilitate the cultural contact, as well as language learning, for local communities. Portugal's Chinese studies, as well as China's Portuguese/Lusophone studies, can be built up by Luso-Chinese cooperation and should always pay special attention to the deeply rooted cultural and historical aspects. As the French scholar Raymond Aron well said, "a true understanding of the past recalls us to the duty of tolerance; a false philosophy of history breeds only fanaticism" (Aron, 2017:159).

In the near future, Portugal's relation with China will inevitably be influenced by the reinforcement of the maritime, as well as transatlantic priority in its strategic plan. How to balance the cooperation with the allies and with the partners shall be the next challenge to Portugal. We trust that, with experiences and know-how calmly accumulated in more than half a millennium, Portugal is able to define its own particular way to maintain a healthy dialogue with China, contributing to the world peace and cohesion. In a time when European countries are pressed with the seemingly either-or question of preferring China or India in the cooperation with Asia, Portugal in fact needs not face the same pressure: just as Macao is an excellent platform for Luso-Chinese cooperation, Goa has the same important role in Luso-Indian

dialogue. For China, maintaining a high-level cultural dialogue with Portugal is also highly important, as it can provide new insights and possibilities for China's dialogue with South, as well as with North Atlantic countries.

We are living in troubled times. On 15 September 2021, AUKUS, a new geopolitical pact between Anglophone powers was unveiled: the US and UK agreed to assist Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines, while Canberra cancelled a multi-billion contract for non-nuclear submarines with France. In our opinion, either the EU decides to stress China's role as business partner or as systemic rival, it will have to define its own strategy with China. EU, unlike the USA, is not designed to be another "Super-National State". In the words of the Austrian writer Robert Menasse: "The USA were avant-garde in the 19th century, while the EU is so in the 21st century" (Menasse, 2015:117). In the relation between the Western countries and China, EU will also seek to be avant-garde, not a follower. In this respect, we believe a deeper academic and cultural dialogue between Portugal and China can contribute greatly.

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