

Two Patacas

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Macao SAR's unique history has yielded different yet equally elegant versions of the same banknote



A Southern lion features on the front of the Chinese note.

MACAO, a special administrative region of China, is one of only a handful of places in the world where different commercial banks issue their own versions of the same banknotes.

While still under Portuguese rule in 1901, the colonial government gave the Banco Nacional Ultramarino the exclusive right to print pataca banknotes. As part of the negotiations that led to the Chinese handover in 1999, a second commercial bank, the Bank of China, was also authorized to issue legal tender. Today both banks share the right to print banknotes, each producing different yet equally elegant new versions of the 20-pataca note, the region's most widely used denomination.

The front of the Chinese note features a Southern lion, a fixture of the Spring Festival, when lion dancers leap through the streets to the sound of beating drums and clanging cymbals and gongs—spreading good fortune for the new lunar year. The lion represents openness, inclusiveness, and determination to forge ahead, according to the Bank of China, whose 160-meter-high local branch building towers behind the lion in a vivid violet spread. To the left is a flowering lotus, Macao's floral emblem, representing prosperity.

The reverse features Macao's science center, designed by Chinese-American architect I. M. Pei, and its planetarium,

where 3D constellation exhibits are beamed onto a domed ceiling, in a nod to the region's science and technology scene.

The 161-year-old Banco Nacional Ultramarino's 20-pataca note explores Macao's maritime roots. Featuring old and new facades of the bank's headquarters and a map of Macao from 1780, the Portuguese note is decorated with sampans and sailing junks, a compass, lotus flowers, and a banyan tree. It uses cartographic imagery to chart the port city's evolution across centuries of seafaring history, according to De La Rue, the company that designed the note.

Macao operates its own legal, economic, and administrative systems under the "one country, two systems" framework. Although it covers only 12.7 square miles, it's one of the world's most densely populated places—and among the richest, with a per capita income of about \$67,500 a year. Its economy is driven primarily by tourism and gaming, earning it the title "world's casino capital."

Macao's blend of Chinese and Portuguese cultures makes it a unique melting pot, where old meets new, and East meets West. The 20-pataca note honors the city's enduring traditions while celebrating its continuing leaps into the future. **F&D**

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The Banco
Nacional
Ultramarino's
old and
new Macao
headquarters.



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