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The Uber affair is soon to reach a conclusion, and one that only taxi drivers and taxi owners are happy about.

Macau taxis are renowned across Asia and for the worst reasons: they are scarce, dirty, uncomfortable and smelly to a point where a ride usually ends with the realization of how bad the service is. Its drivers either do not or refuse to speak English, often rude and arguably the worst drivers in the streets, with constant abrupt breaking and rapid accelerations. This is not to mention refusing to take passengers, forcing customers to pay increased fares during typhoons or rush hour and constantly talking on the phone. A ride in a Macau taxi is one of the worst experiences this city has to offer and everybody knows that. This includes our Government officials, who want to promote Macau as a tourism capital in Asia but are apparently doing nothing about it – including putting no pressure on taxi owners to improve the conditions of the vehicles or raising the level of customer service by its drivers.

On the other hand, Uber is everything you would want in urban transportation: it comes to your door, it smells good, drivers are often kind, speak English and can actually drive. You don't even have to pay them directly, and the whole experience is very professional, clean and smooth. Cynics would say that service is better because the drivers need a good rating, but I would argue that this is exactly what taxi service is lacking: inspections and evaluations by local regulators.

So it seems Uber is cheaper, more comfortable and provides better service to locals and tourists. The Government knows this but chooses to do nothing – arguing that there is no local legislative regulation (true) and that Uber operates illegally without specific regulation (not necessarily true). These claims triggered a man-hunt by the police for Uber drivers (shameful). Tourism agencies – and there are hundreds in Macau – are allowed to take customers from point A to point B at a certain price, whether it is or is not included a travel package.

Casinos take their customers in unregulated shuttle services all around Macau. These transportation services are not regulated directly as such, but only through their travel agency and gaming licenses, which are evidently not able to appropriately regulate the activity of transportation – drivers or vehicles are not licensed as such, but only “registered” without any criteria.

And now, at the same time as the pro-Uber demonstrations and the app-giant announcing that it cannot continue to be punished for trying to offer its (legitimate and excellent) service to the community, a new app is being portrayed as the Holy-Grail of taxi service in Macau.

Considering the timing of the announcement, the way it was praised immediately by DSAT and the fact that it is “non-profit”, I wonder who is behind it. However, I would not be surprised if the ultimate shareholders are taxi owners or the usual Macau entrepreneurial suspects... Taxi-Go is seemingly everything Uber is, but only to those who do not care to see it, since the low-grade taxis and drivers are the same and you need to pay more and in cash for the same unpleasant experience as before. Nothing will change, expect now you must try to get one of the few taxi drivers who will be actually using Taxi-Go, as no one realistically believes that the taxi drivers we know will be efficiently answering app calls to pick you up, let alone magically become clean, comfortable and customer friendly.

All things considered, there is nothing that justifiably explains why the Government is not allowing Uber to operate freely, as it does almost everywhere in the world. For all the sensible reasons: because of free competition, improved transportation services, enhanced support to local tourism and simply because they are countless times better than Macau taxis. **Gonçalo Mendes da Maia, Partner, MdME**

in Macau Daily Times



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