

Macau: a society with no political party – based on the comparison with Hong Kong

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper attempts to explain the phenomenon that Macau has a parliament (Legislative Assembly) and mass suffrage but no political parties.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper reviews the development process of “parliament – mass suffrage – political party” in Hong Kong and Macau and tries to explain why Macau does not have a party using comparative research methods.

Findings – The political party development of Hong Kong and Macau was influenced by both the (former) colonial power and China, and whether there were political parties in these two regions was the result of the game between China and the (former) colonial power. China hoped to limit the development of party politics in the two regions. Since Britain felt reluctant to cooperate with China, political parties in Hong Kong developed. At the same time, Portugal chose to defer to China, which led Macau not to have a political party.

Originality/value – Existing studies have yet to explain why there are no political parties in Macau, and this paper is the first attempt to do so.

Keywords Association, Party, Political, Hong Kong, Macau

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In recent years, the constitutional development of Hong Kong and Macau has drawn wide attention from the international community (Cochrane *et al.*, 2019; European External Action Service, 2021; Lo, 2021). Those two regions have significant similarities: (1) Western countries colonized them for a long time. (2) They were all Chinese territories before Western colonial rule. (3) They were predominantly Chinese societies, even under colonial rule. (4) They both underwent a transfer of sovereignty in the late 1990s. (5) They both underwent limited democratic reforms before the transfer of sovereignty. (6) Both of them are currently Special Administrative Regions of China. However, even if their histories are similar, they still differ in their political structure. For example, it is generally believed that there are no political parties in Macau, while political parties in Hong Kong have gained some development. How did these differences come about? This paper tries to analyze it.

2. Literature review

A minimal definition of an association is “a formally organized named group, most of whose members – whether persons or organizations – are not financially recompensed for their participation” (Knoke, 1986). A political party or a party refers to a voluntary association, whose



declared aim is to be represented in and to lead the institutions of government in a given state or political community (Yanai, 1999). Political parties can be regarded as unique associations. Associations have a long history, while political parties originated in a modern democracy.

Only a few countries have no political parties among more than 200 countries or regions today. Political parties are generally considered an essential part of modern democratic politics. American scholar Schattschneider (2003, p. 1) pointed out, “the rise of political parties is indubitably one of the principal distinguishing marks of modern government. . . . modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties.” Indeed, the growth of the functions and independence of political assemblies and the expansion and multiplication of voting rights often lead to the rise of political parties (Duverger, 1959). Heidar and Koole (2003, p. 1) put it more bluntly: “the trinity of parliaments, parties and mass suffrage.”

Although the theories above hold solid explanatory power on a large scale, there are exceptions. For example, some independent small island states that strongly subscribe to democratic values, standards and institutions do not have political parties. In all, six such cases exist, namely, Belau (Palau), the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru and Tuvalu. Anckar and Anckar (2000) explain this in those article Democracies without Parties, by the Extreme smallness, extremely archipelagic geography and intense cultural resistance.

Even if D. Anckar and C. Anckar extend the theory, we can find exceptions – for example, Macau. As a region under the colonial rule of Western country for a long time and now enjoying a high degree of autonomy under China’s “one country, two systems” policy, Macau has had its legislative assembly since 1920 and modern political elections later. Moreover, the conditions in Macau are different from those of archipelagic countries, except for a smaller population. However, it is generally believed that no political party is involved in the Legislative Assembly election in Macau. On the contrary, relevant activities are carried out mainly by associations, which are called “association politics” (Lou, 2017) by scholars.

Of course, some may argue that Macau, a special administrative region of China, is only a regional nonsovereign entity and therefore has no political parties. But it also seems to lack sufficient explanatory power. It is worth noting that Hong Kong, which is only a hundred miles away from Macau, has a similar historical context and political status, and has political parties. Although some scholars believe that political parties in Hong Kong are underdeveloped (Ma, 2018), we can still observe many political parties and their activities.

Although the phenomenon concerning the absence of political parties in Macau politics has been concerned, the existing research focuses more on its characteristics and the comparison with the advantages and disadvantages of party politics without analyzing the causes of its formation. This paper tries to explain it.

3. What is a political party, and whether there is a political party in Macau

Concepts are the basis of analysis in social science (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 176); however, concepts in political science are often ambiguous (Heywood, 2015), such as the concept of “political party.” Indeed, due to the diversity of the development of political parties, no single definition can resolve all disputes over the concept of political parties – as scholars have observed: definitions of political parties vary from polity to polity (Avnon, 1995). One possible way is to solve the core controversies faced by specific research objects based on consensus, thereby defining terms clearly.

Based on existing studies and combined with political practice in Hong Kong and Macau, this paper defines *political parties* as durable political organization that openly selects candidates to compete for political offices in elections. Among them, “openly selecting candidates to compete for political offices in elections” is the core element – most of the literature regards it as a key feature for identifying political parties. For example, Downs

(1957, p. 25) defines a *political party* as a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election. According to Aldrich (1995, p. 3), political parties are collective entities that organize the competition for political offices. Other scholars have emphasized that political parties are unique in that they are particularly oriented toward elections while maintaining a collective character that is established by a common label (Pomper, 1992; Ankar and Ankar, 2000). Janda (2022, p. 11) also points out that the term “avowed representatives” is important when political parties are involved in elections, which means that they (candidates) must openly identified with the party name or label. However, this core element cannot fully explain the development of political parties in Hong Kong and Macau. Therefore, the following disputes need to be resolved at the same time.

First, suppose an organization participates in the Legislative Assembly election but will be dissolved soon after the election (such as the “nominating committee”). In that case, it is temporary - can such an organization be counted as a political party? Although a few scholars believe that nominating committees and other informal organizations are political parties (McHenry, 1952), more researchers emphasize that political parties should be durable organizations (Morse, 1896). LaPalombara and Myron (1966) argued that political parties should have continuity in organization. Duverger (1959), in his classic work, also distinguishes electoral committees, or nominating committees, from modern political parties.

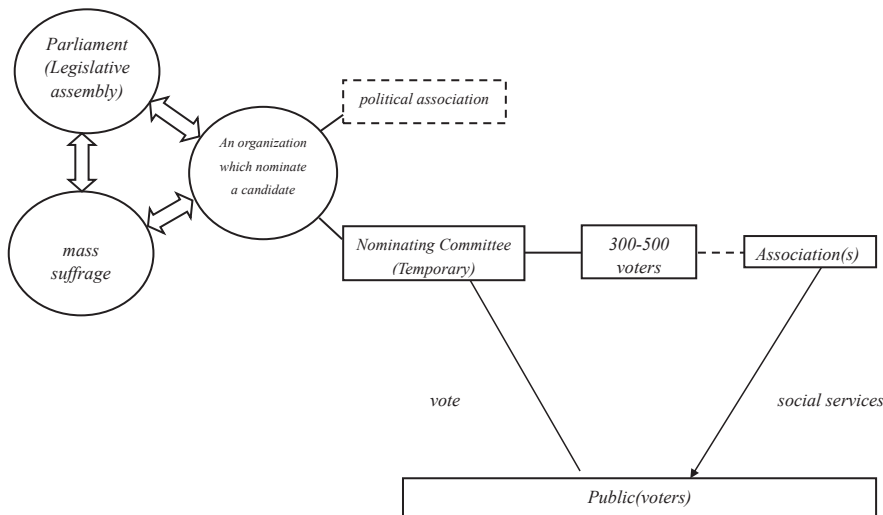
Second, if an organization purports to be a political party (There are two main forms of this purport: (1) registration as a political party or a political association under the political party law, and (2) purport of being a political party (political association) in one’s name or constitution), but in practice, they do not directly participate in elections, can such an organization be called a political party? From existing research, these organizations can be regarded as a type of political party in the broadest sense (Shively and Schultz, 2022). However, more literature excludes it from the concept of “political parties.” For example, in the article *Democracies without Parties*, the author studied six countries without political parties, but these countries are not without organizations named political parties. According to the article, in one of these countries, Kiribati, there exists an organization (Gilbertese National Party) under the name of a political party. However, this organization and similar organizations are not *nominating candidates for elections*, so the article argues that there are no political parties in the country (Ankar and Ankar, 2000).

Based on the above analysis, the definition concerning the political parties in Hong Kong and Macau should be clarified. It should include two elements at the same time: (1) It openly selecting candidates to compete for political offices in elections; (2) it is durable organization. At the same time, if an organization purports to be a political party and does not participate in open elections, then it is not a political party in this article, and at most it can be called as a “quasi-political party.”

After defining political parties, we can judge whether there are political parties in Macau. According to the definition in this article, we examine Macau’s political practice (see Figure 1), and we believe that there is no real political party in Macau – this conclusion is consistent with the basic understanding of Macau academic circles.

Under Macau law, there are two types of organizations eligible to nominate in elections. The legal terms are “political association” and “nominating committee”. They are organizations that might be considered as political parties, but whether they are truly modern political parties can be analyzed in detail.

First, political association: It is a legal term used after the Macau handover to China, and before the handover, another term – civil association – was used. These two terms are confusing. Under Macau law, the primary function of these organizations is to “participate in elections.” Are they political parties? Opinion No. 14/VI/99 of the Committee on Constitutional Rights, Freedom, and Protection of the Macau Legislative Assembly answered.



Source(s): Created by authors

Figure 1.
Association and
electoral politics
in Macau

The document stated that “political associations are actually political parties,” but the term “political party” was deliberately not used in the legal text. Thus, according to the definition of this paper, when an organization registers as a civil/political association, it also means that it purports to be a political party. According to the data collected by the authors, three organizations (see Table 1) have registered as civic/political associations in Macau since 1976.

However, it is worth noting that among the above three organizations, only the ADIM and the CDM directly participated in the Legislative Assembly elections in 1976 and 1980. Since then, these organizations have never directly nominated candidates in elections. Not only that, after the handover of Macau, the ADIM and the CDM almost disappeared and rarely appeared in media reports – this also means that they stayed away from elections – because

Name	Before the handover	After the handover
Macau Citizens Association (Portuguese: Associação para a Defesa dos Interesses de Macau-ADIM)	Registered as a “civil association,” and directly participated in the Legislative Assembly elections in 1976 and 1980	Has not been re-registered as a “political association” and will no longer participate directly in Legislative Assembly elections
Macau Democratic Association (Portuguese: Centro Democrático de Macau-CDM)		Re-registered as a “political association”, but will no longer participate directly in Legislative Assembly elections
New Macau Association* (Portuguese: Associação de Novo Macau-ANM)	Registered as a “civil association”, and it has never directly participated in Legislative Assembly elections	Has not been re-registered as a “political association” and has not directly participated in the Legislative Assembly election

Note(s): *In its 1993 constitution, the New Macau Association calls itself a civil association (Portuguese: associacao civica). However, according to an interview with the association’s director, it is not registered as a civil association to the government

Source(s): Created by authors

Table 1.
Civil associations/
political associations
in Macau

participation in elections means extensive contact with the public. These organizations should not be considered as political parties. Alternatively, it can be said that around 1980, the ADIM and the CDM could be regarded as political parties, but after that, they should not be labeled as political party organizations. In addition, the ANM has never participated in the Macau Legislative Assembly elections as a civil/political association.

Second, nominating committee: Since 1984, all candidates for Legislative Assembly elections in Macau have been nominated by the nominating committee. However, nominating committees are temporary organizations whose greatest value may be in demonstrating that a group of candidates can command the support of a significant number (300–500) of voters. According to Macau law, the nominating committee will be dissolved after the election process is completed; they often last less than a year. So it is clear that they should not be considered as political parties either.

However, one can easily observe that in Macau, there are often associations (one or more) behind these nominating committees that provide various support – these associations provide social services to the public during ordinary times. During elections, they will mobilize the public to vote for the nominating committee, which includes members of the association. Generally speaking, associations do not directly participate in the elections in Macau (so they should not be called political parties). However, they have a decisive influence on the results of elections, so the political form of Macau is called “association politics.”

Compared with Macau, Hong Kong, which has a similar history, has a different situation in the development of political parties. In the 1960s, there were quasi-party organizations in Hong Kong, but they gradually disappeared. In the 1980s, the British Hong Kong authorities promoted political reforms and implemented local elections. By the 1990s, political parties emerged in Hong Kong.

4. Politics and political parties in Hong Kong

There are political parties in Hong Kong, and the theory of “the trinity of parliaments, parties and mass suffrage” can effectively explain it.

Today’s Hong Kong has three parts: First, Hong Kong Island was ceded to Britain by the Qing government in 1842 with the Treaty of Nanking; second, the Kowloon Peninsula was ceded to Britain by the Qing government in 1860 with the Convention of Peking; and third, the New Territories were leased to Britain for 99 years by the Qing government in 1898 with the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory. Until the 1980s, there were no elections for the governor and the legislature in Hong Kong, and the governor appointed members of the Legislative Council. As a result, Hong Kong had no political parties until the 1980s.

However, in the 1960s, there were organizations in Hong Kong under the name “political parties”. Much of this has to do with the “decolonization” movement. After the Second World War, the United Nations Charter established the “*the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples*”, and the decolonization movement swept the world. For various reasons, Britain began to gradually abandon its colonies around the world. In the process of British decolonization, an important task was to popularize and copy the British political model in the colonies to be abandoned, which also became an explanation for the British decolonization movement: they did not lose the will to rule, or even the power. But they don’t think they have the right to rule forever. Instead, the onus is on them to spread to other countries the advantage they have won over the centuries (Darwin, 1984). At that time, Hong Kong also seemed to be part of the British decolonization framework, so between 1945 and 1952, the British government formulated five different constitutional reform programs for Hong Kong (Miners, 1989). Although these reforms were never implemented, they inspired some to create political groups, such as the United Nations Association of Hong Kong (UNAHK), founded by Ma Man-fai in 1953 to push for autonomy for Hong Kong. An article

published in 1964 stated that the UNAHK was probably the closest thing to a political party in Hong Kong (Wilson, 1964). In 1963, on the basis of the UNAHK, Ma Man-fai founded the Hong Kong Democratic Self-Government Party. Soon after, the core members of the party formed separate organizations: the Labor Party of Hong Kong (founded in 1964), and the Hong Kong Socialist Democratic Party (founded in 1964). These three organizations named “Party” were active in the 1960s, but due to the lack of organizational foundation, the British decolonization movement did not spread to Hong Kong (did not bring Hong Kong autonomy or parliamentary elections), these organizations slowly disappeared in the long river of history. Therefore, it is often not regarded as the substantive development of political parties in Hong Kong. As defined in this paper, these organizations can be called quasi-political parties.

The transition took place around the 1980s, when the lease on the New Territories was about to expire, and meant that there was a definite crisis in British governance of Hong Kong. In March 1979, the Chinese government invited Governor of Hong Kong, Crawford Murray MacLehose (served from November 1971 to May 1982) to visit Beijing in an official manner. When he met with Chinese leaders, Deng Xiaoping made it clear that “China must take back Hong Kong in 1997.” (Chung, 2001). This prompted the British to reconsider the development of parliamentary democracy in Hong Kong, taking tentative steps toward real political reform (Pepper, 2000).

China and Britain began talks on Hong Kong’s future in 1982, after Britain held its first district council elections in the city. In the words of Professor Ma (2010), this is a strategy of “advance to attack and retreat to defend.” According to the memoirs of British Prime Minister Thatcher (1993, p. 259), Britain’s negotiating aim was to exchange sovereignty over the island of Hong Kong in return for continued British administration of the entire Colony well into the future. If the British can continue to govern Hong Kong, after all, District council elections are only held at the grassroots level. This will not change the structure of colonial governance; and if the British can no longer govern Hong Kong, they could further expand democratic elections to Hong Kong’s parliament, as was the practice before the British left the colony.

However, when Mrs. Thatcher visited China in 1982, China again made clear its hard line on taking back Hong Kong. This leaves Britain helpless, but as a former superpower. Britain, of course, will not compromise easily with China – in an internal meeting on January 28, 1983. Thatcher (1993, p. 488) proposed “[Britain] should now develop the democratic structure in Hong Kong as though it were our aim to achieve independence or self-government within a short period, as we had done with Singapore”. On April 20, 1984, Geoffrey Howe, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, issued a statement in Hong Kong, explaining the negotiation policy adopted by the British government, and announced that the Hong Kong government would continue to develop toward a representative system in the days to come (Wang, 2019).

China did not want the Western capitalist democracy to develop rapidly in Hong Kong. However, in order to win the hearts and minds of Hong Kong, China has to follow up the British constitutional reform and make a commitment to promote Hong Kong’s electoral political development. In 1984, Zhao Ziyang, then Premier of the State Council, said in a reply letter to the Hong Kong University Students’ Union, reassured them that it would be a matter of course that the future Hong Kong SAR would implement a democratic political system (Cheung, 2021). This must have formed a “bidding war” between China and Britain on the constitutional development of Hong Kong.

As a result of the “bidding war,” and Hong Kong’s concern about the city’s future, a number of political groups have emerged in Hong Kong, such as Hong Kong observers (established in 1975), Meeting Point (established in 1983), Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People’s Livelihood (established in 1986), etc. These political groups were very active at that time and created an unprecedented upsurge of political discussion in Hong Kong (Xia, 2017).

The rising enthusiasm of the people in Hong Kong for political affairs has prompted China and the Britain to respond further. On the British side, the British government of Hong Kong carried out great strides in constitutional reform in Hong Kong: On November 21, 1984, the British Government of Hong Kong published a white paper entitled “Further Development of Representative System in Hong Kong”(That is, after the signing of the draft Sino-British Joint Declaration on September 26, 1984, and before the formal signing on December 19, 1984), to propose that 24 Members of the Legislative Council be elected indirectly (Wang, 2019), On February 10, 1988, the British government of Hong Kong issued a white paper on *The Further Development of Representative Government in Hong Kong*, specifying the introduction of directly elected seats to the Legislative Council in 1991. China, on the one hand, expressed dissatisfaction with the British attempt to accelerate the reform of its constitutional, but on the other hand, the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region adopted by the National People’s Congress of China in 1990 included the goal of double “universal suffrage” (Article 45 and Article 68). In this environment, the party is ready to emerge.

In order to participate in the direct election of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong in 1991, United Democrats of Hong Kong (UDHK) was established in April 1990, which is regarded as the first political party in Hong Kong (Cao, 2016). In the Legislative Council election in September 1991, the UDHK was the biggest winner in the first direct election of the Legislative Council, with 14 candidates and 12 elected (Cao, 2016).

The UDHK was not named after a political party, but the development of political parties in Hong Kong has become unstoppable. After the 1991 election, Legislative Councillor Allen Lee Peng-fei thought that with the changes in the composition of the Legislative Council, it was necessary to form an office with some like-minded councilors to fight against the UDHK and set up Co-operative Resources Centre (CRC) in early 1992. In 1993, the CRC was renamed the Liberal Party (Cao, 2016). From then on, Hong Kong ushered in a very active political party era.

5. Politics and political parties in Macau

The development of Macau’s “parliament–election–political party” system has several similarities and differences with that of Hong Kong. Similar to Hong Kong, as a region under the colonial administration of Western country, it was inevitably influenced by the Western capitalist political system, and thus began to develop parliamentary democracy before the handover.

However, Portugal’s democracy political came late. Portugal only overthrew the monarchy in a revolution in 1910. Soon afterward, in the late 1920s, Portugal entered the era of the Salazar dictatorship, which lasted for more than 40 years. Portugal, including the colonies, imposed strict restrictions on free association. Political parties certainly lacked the soil to survive.

It was not until 1974, when Portugal had the “Carnation Revolution” and established a democratic government that Macau ushered in a new opportunity for constitutional development.

The Carnation Revolution was obviously influenced by the global decolonization movement. Although the global decolonization movement was surging after Second World War, Portugal did not voluntarily give up its colonies for a long time, which led to the outbreak of anti-colonial wars in several colonies of the country (Marques, 1998). The war put a heavy economic burden on Portugal (Marques, 1998), partly leading to the outbreak of the Carnation revolution in 1974. After the Carnation Revolution, the democratic government of Portugal quickly gave up its colonies. For the colonies that had not been given up for the time being, such as Macau, on the one hand, it recognized Portugal’s “administrative management” power in the Constitution, and on the other hand, it gave Macau greater autonomy. This has a profound impact on the development of Macau’s constitutional.

First, it brought political associations to Macau. The “Carnation Revolution” quickly spread to Macau. Under its influence, some people soon established political organizations in Macau. According to its 1999 constitution, the CDM claims to have been founded on April 30, 1974, five days after the Portuguese Revolution. Subsequently, another political organization was established, called the ADIM. In 1975, a total of 14 political organizations participated in the Constitutional Assembly election in Portugal. The ADIM and the CDM were the only two political organizations outside Portugal. But Macau had only one seat in the Constitutional Assembly, which was eventually taken by Diamantino de Oliveira Ferreira from the ADIM.

Second, it will bring a period of political stability to Macau. On February 27, 1976, Portugal promulgated the Organic Statute of Macau (Portuguese: Estatuto Orgânico de Macau - EOM), which established the constitutional affecting today. According to the EOM, the governing bodies of Macau are the Governor and the Legislative Assembly. The Governor is appointed or removed by the President of the Republic. The Legislative Assembly is formed by direct election, indirect election and appointment.

According to the EOM, the government in Portuguese Macau promulgated Decree 3/76/M of March 23, 1976, to regulate associations and civil associations. In the same year, Macau held its first legislative assembly election since the “Carnation Revolution” (popularly known as Macau’s first Legislative Assembly election). The ADIM and the CDM participated in the Legislative Assembly election in the name of civil associations. The big winner in the election was the ADIM, which obtained 54.955% of the votes, thus winning 4 of the 6 directly elected seats. And the group’s principal founder, Carlos Augusto Correa Paes D ‘Assumpcao, was subsequently elected the chairman of the Legislative Assembly. In 1980, in the second Legislative Assembly election, the ADIM went further, winning 59.337% of the direct election votes and four seats again. In addition, one of their members, Delfino Jose Rodrigues Ribeiro, was elected to the Legislative Assembly through indirect elections, which means that the ADIM have five seats in the Legislative Assembly, accounting for one-third (29.4%) of the total number of seats (17). They also hold the presidency of the Legislative Assembly (see Table 2).

In general, eight years after the promulgation of the EOM was a golden age for developing political party organizations in Macau.

It is a pity that the political party has only been active in Macau for 8 years, and then fell into decline. Since the ADIM was too strong, it caused dissatisfaction with the Governor, and was subsequently attacked by the Governor.

According to the EOM in 1976, the directly elected seats are only 1/3 of the total seats in the Legislative Assembly (the first Legislative Assembly has 17 seats, and there are 6 directly elected seats). Therefore, it is difficult for a certain organization to control the Legislative Assembly and challenge the governor’s authority. However, due to Macau’s special social and political structure and the excellent performance of ADIM in the election, the Legislative Assembly of Macau has brought an opportunity to counter the governor.

During the colonial rule, Macau was a typical Chinese society, with most people, including the local Eurasian Macanese, speaking Cantonese. Since the language barrier, the governor, who represented the sovereign body of Portugal, had to rely on native Portuguese to

Year	ADIM		CDM	
	Direct election	Indirect election	Direct election	Indirect election
1976	4	0	1	0
1980	4	1	1	0

Source(s): Created by authors

Table 2.
Performance of ADIM
and CDM in the 1976
and 1980 Legislative
Assembly

communicate with the Chinese population (Sheng and Wan, 2017). This led to the formation of two political forces with different interests among the Portuguese. One was the Governor who represented the national interests of Portugal, and the other was the Macanese who represented the local interests of Macau, and the Legislative Assembly was mainly composed of them.

In the early stage of Macau, political parties (civil associations) were organized by Macanese. Although a single political party did not have many seats in the Legislative Assembly, this special political structure made it possible for different political parties and factions in the Legislative Assembly to unite and form a greater force to pressure the governor.

Wu (2010) argues that during the first and second Legislative Assemblies of Macau from 1976 to 1984, the Legislative Assembly controlled by Macanese and the governor representing the sovereign body of Portugal had almost irreconcilable power disputes and conflicts. In 1980, for example, Macau legislators tried to limit the governor's power. Mr. d'Assumpção, a Macau barrister and chairman of the Legislative Assembly, and three legislators put forward a proposal to amend the Constitution of the Organization of Macau, calling for the establishment of a legislature elected by 24 members and giving legislators the right to vote no confidence in government officials (Lo, 1989). With the escalation of the conflict between the two sides, the governor, Vasco Leotte de Almeida e Costa (served from June 1981 to May 1986), finally proposed to the President of Portugal to dissolve the Legislative Assembly.

It is especially worth noting that Mr. Costa dissolved the Legislative Assembly on February 28, 1984. In fact, Legislative Assembly elections should have been held that year. In many people's eyes, such a move may not have been necessary. But for Mr. Costa, there may be enough significance – on the one hand, to provide a deterrent to Legislative Assembly and on the other, to make the most of the post-dissolution period to make changes to the electoral system.

Actually announced on the day before dissolving the Legislative Assembly, on February 27, 1984, Macau the decree no. 9/84/M (on the set consultation and voter registration matters of the Legislative Assembly election), announced that it enlarge the voting rights of Macau, will be open the right to vote to no Portuguese nationality of Chinese residents, such, can be formed in the Legislative Assembly and Chinese native Portuguese checks and balances. Moreover, the Governor also introduced policies to encourage Chinese participation in elections. Indeed, the introduction of the new policy has greatly changed the electoral landscape in Macau. The number of registered voters in 1984 was 67,604, 16 times that of 1980 (4,195), and the number of voters in 1984 was 28,970, 11 times that of 1980 (2,600) (see Table 3).

Since Chinese are the overwhelming majority in Macau, it is clear that “civil association” based on Mancuese have little advantage if Chinese voters are mobilized. Therefore, facing the 1984 Legislative Assembly election in Macau, the civil associations (political parties) that had a significant advantage in the previous election had to switch to a new strategy in the election. For example, the ADIM formed a Joint (Portuguese: Uniao Eleitoral - UE) nominating committee with the Chinese Association and won four seats in the Legislative Assembly again with 58.87% of the votes.

Table 3.
Number of voters in the
Legislative Assembly
elections of Macau in
1976, 1980 and 1984

Year	Registered voters	Voter turnout
1976	3,647	2,826
1980	4,195	2,600
1984	67,604	28,970

Source(s): Created by authors

The expansion of voting rights in Macau in 1984 was a new opportunity for the development of political parties, but the expedient “nominating committee” proved an unexpected success. Perhaps this “success” has hindered the development of political parties. In the subsequent elections, people are not eager to participate in the Legislative Assembly seat contest as a political party again.

After that, another important civil association, the ANM, was established in 1992. However, they chose the same strategy as the ADIM and the CDM when they competed for the Legislative Assembly, namely, they put forward a list of candidates in the name of the nominating committee instead of the organization itself.

Therefore, since 1984, there has been no direct participation of civil and political associations in the Legislative Assembly election in Macau. In other words, political parties have disappeared from Macau since 1984.

6. Macau and Hong Kong: similarities and differences

At the beginning of this article, we emphasized that Macau and Hong Kong have too many similarities. Indeed, the forms of political institutions in Macau and Hong Kong are very similar – both are based on the colonial system and stipulated by the Joint Declaration signed between China and the colonialists (Britain/Portugal) of Hong Kong and Macau. The policies of the joint declaration became the core content of The Basic Law, the constitutional document of the two places after the handover.

Political parties are the inevitable result of parliamentary politics and mass elections. Parliamentary politics and mass elections stem from constitutional arrangements. Therefore, it can be considered that the attitude, power and behavior of Macau and Hong Kong’s former colonial power (Portugal/Britain) and China are the key factors to determine whether political parties can develop in these places.

China is the sovereign owner of Macau and Hong Kong. Its attitude toward the development of political parties in Macau and Hong Kong is ambiguous. Due to the presence of the Britain, China has made many public commitments to develop democracy in Hong Kong since the 1980s. In addition to Zhao Ziyang’s statement mentioned above, Lu Ping, former director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of the State Council of China, said: “How Hong Kong develops democracy in the future is a matter entirely within the sphere of Hong Kong’s autonomy, and the central government cannot intervene” (Jacobs, 2014). If translated into institutions, these attitudes will provide space for party politics to develop.

However, others say it is clear that China’s rulers do not want party politics to grow in Macau and Hong Kong. Indeed, Lu Ping has said Hong Kong does not need party politics (Lo, 1997; Chu, 2000; Hong Kong LegCo, 2007; Cao, 2016) [1]. The constitutional documents of Macau and Hong Kong, the Basic Law, do not mention the concept of a “political party,” which also reflects this attitude. Therefore, it can be confirm that China does not want to develop parties or party politics in Macau and Hong Kong.

As colonizers, Portugal and Britain did not want to develop democracy and political parties in the region when they governed it. As China’s People’s Daily said: “In 150 years, the country that now poses as an exemplar of democracy gave our Hong Kong compatriots not one single day of it” (Jacobs, 2014). As for Macau, it developed party politics in the 1970s at the same time as the young Portuguese (democratic) Republic. However, as the power of the party grew, the party was severely suppressed by the governor representing the Portuguese central government.

However, when a country wants to withdraw from a colony, its options may vary. A colonial overlord might try to promote democracy in the colonies, including party politics, to seek to *withdraw with dignity*. Britain did this in its “decolonization” process. Of course, there are many ways to “*withdraw with dignity*” (Carroll, 2007). Before the handover of Macau,

Portugal's main work was to improve social welfare and strengthen municipal construction. For a colonial power, the attitude and strategy often depend on the specific situation.

Before the handover, Macau and Hong Kong developed limited democracy, which led to the emergence of modern party organizations in the two regions. However, the political parties in Hong Kong have been able to develop for a long time, in contrast, the politic. It is essentially the result of the game between China and the colonial powers of Macau and Hong Kong (see [Figure 2](#)).

As the former "empire on which the sun never sets," Britain defeated China many times in the 19th century, and Hong Kong was the spoils of war in the 19th century. The advantage of history makes it difficult for Britain to accept that it has to give up Hong Kong. Therefore, there will be two tendencies when it has to give up the right to govern Hong Kong. One, favoring the development of British-style democracy in Hong Kong – part of its proud culture, part of its *withdrawal with dignity*; -second, Britain tends to go in the opposite direction with her rival China – at the very least, it is unwilling to submit to China's arrangements easily. As analyzed above, China does not want Hong Kong to develop (at least not rapidly) modern democracy and party politics. Therefore, to a certain extent, it strengthens the drive of Britain to develop modern democracy in Hong Kong.

Driven by the combination of the above two reasons, since the 1980s, Britain has been committed to the rapid development of British-style democracy in Hong Kong. Since Christopher Francis Patten (served from July 1992 to June 1997), the last Governor of Hong Kong, took office, he has even adopted a policy of accelerating the democratization process. At that time, China was highly dissatisfied with Mr. Patten's actions. Lu Ping even angrily called him a "sinner condemned by history" ([Jacobs, 2014](#)). However, since both sides are countries with significant international influence, China cannot come up with too many substantive restrictive measures. Therefore, despite strong opposition from Beijing, Patten's political reform plan was successfully passed by the pro-democracy-dominated Legislative Council on June 30, 1994, and implemented in the 1995 Hong Kong Legislative Council election. This kind of game objectively provides space for the development of political parties in Hong Kong so that the development of political parties in Hong Kong becomes an irreversible trend.

Portugal, on the other hand, was an early maritime power, but it was long gone. Legally, the Portuguese never acquired sovereignty over Macau, and their status in Macau is more due to the "generosity" of the Chinese. As early as 1976, they clarified China's sovereignty

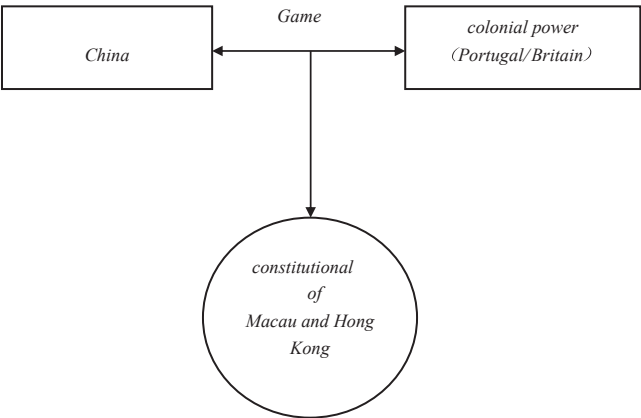


Figure 2.
The development of
Macao and Hong
Kong's constitutional
before the handover

Source(s): Created by authors

over Macau in the Constitution, and it is only a matter of time before Macau is returned to China. When China wants to take back Macau, their best option is to accept it and try to get more “generosity” from the Chinese. As a result, the negotiations between China and Portugal on the future of Macau went much more smoothly than the negotiations between China and Britain on the future of Hong Kong.

In 1984, the Governor expanded the right to vote to suppress the increasingly powerful Macau Portuguese political party, ADIM and CDM. However, considering that Macau will soon enter the so-called transitional period (that is, 12 years from the signing of the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration to Macau’s handover), the Portuguese should not restrict party politics but rather prefer to further develop modern democracy and party politics in Macau, which can be interpreted as the “withdraw with dignity” of the Portuguese.

Portugal wanted a “withdraw with dignity” too, but, unlike Britain, realized that it needed to do so on terms that did not antagonize China. They risk losing their interests if they offend China - and the Portuguese calculated that they need to gain benefit from China with the handover of Macau. The Portuguese governor, Carlos Montez Melancia (served from July 1987 to April 1991), even admitted that the Portuguese Government and entrepreneurs can use Macau as a bridge to enter the Far Eastern markets (Lo, 1989).

So Portugal’s “withdraw with dignity” was based on the premise that it would promote democracy without offending China, by reinstituting municipal councils and holding municipal elections – which China may not like, but at least it did not explicitly object to it. In addition, they put more energy into improving residents’ benefits and infrastructure construction.

Since Portugal would not deliberately suppress the development of party politics in Macau, why did Macau society form a surprising “tacit consensus” not to develop political parties after the 1980s? It may be explained further by Macau’s electorate structure. Macau is a society with an absolute majority of Chinese. After opening voting rights to the Chinese in 1984, the Chinese associations in Macau organized the nominating committee independently or jointly with the Portuguese associations so that their representatives shall constitute the majority of directly elected seats. If we take a glance at the Chinese associations in Macau, most of them are “Love China and love Macau” groups, a designation that implies close ties to the Chinese government or the Communist Party of China.

After the handover, the political structure of Macau and Hong Kong is that China has both sovereignty and jurisdiction for Macau and Hong Kong and is the leading force for the development of Macau and Hong Kong’s Constitutional. The former colonial power (Portugal/Britain) could exert influence under a joint declaration with the Chinese government, but this influence was limited.

For more than ten years after Macau and Hong Kong’s handover to China, their Constitutional has undergone a certain development on the basis of maintaining stability. However, the Chinese government has never advocated the development of political parties in Macau and Hong Kong. For example, the legislation stipulates that the chief executives of the two regions cannot be affiliated with any political party, which is detrimental to the development of political parties. In Macau, political parties have not appeared again. The reason is roughly the same as before the handover. China does not want Macau to develop party politics. Behind those nominated members are almost all “Love China and Love Macau” associations that closely linked to the Chinese government. The power of the opposition (pro-democracy camp) is too weak thus no organization has broken the tacit consensus that “Macau does not have a Party.”

Following the release of the white paper on *The Practice of the “One Country, Two Systems” Policy in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) in 2014*, especially after the enactment of the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong SAR, some political parties in Hong Kong, including the Hong Kong’s Civil

Party, announced their dissolution or prepared to dissolve (Chau, 2022). Paraphrase, in Macau, with the “patriot governing Macau” principle of the seventh Legislative Assembly in 2021, the former “civil association” active in society – it has not even registered as a “political association” – the ANM launched Candidates were eligible for candidates.

The above facts confirm the words of Lu Ping – (Macau and Hong Kong) do not need to develop party politics.

7. Conclusion

According to the existing studies, “the trinity of parliaments, parties and mass suffrage” refers to political parties that will arise when a country or region has parliamentary and mass suffrage. However, this framework cannot explain Macau’s current situation. Indeed, Macau has a parliament and mass suffrage, but there are no political parties, or say, political parties that have only existed in Macau for less than a decade. However, in Hong Kong, which has a similar history as Macau, political parties gained some development.

This paper compares the course of constitutional development of Macau and Hong Kong argues that the political party development of Hong Kong and Macau was influenced by both the (former) colonial power and China, and whether there were political parties in these two regions was the result of the game between China and the (former) colonial power. China hoped to limit the development of party politics in the two regions. Since Britain felt reluctant to cooperate with China, political parties in Hong Kong developed. At the same time, Portugal chose to defer to China, which led Macau not have a political party. After the handover, the Chinese government’s influence on Macau increased, so political parties have not developed in Macau until now.

Note

1. The authors of this article did not find the most original literature, but multiple literature sources indicate that Lu Ping has expressed similar views. The sources of these documents have different words. Lo (1997) said “In 1986, Lu Ping said that political parties would be unsuitable and useless for Hong Kong.” Chu (2000) said “Lu Ping commented that party politics was harmful to the stability of Hong Kong.” Lee Wing-tat, a member of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, 24 October 2007, said in a speech to the Legislative Council, “Lu Ping, already expressed his dislike for party politics.” Cao (2016) said, “Lu Ping has said publicly that Hong Kong does not need party politics.” This paper adopts the word of Cao Xudong.

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