

# Tourism and Political Change



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## The Implications and Effects of the Handover of Colonies – Macau

### Contents

Background to Macau's development	2
Impact of Portuguese administration	3
Casino liberalisation policy	4
China's 'one country, two systems' policy	6
Challenges in developing Macau as an international tourism destination	6
A future Las Vegas of the east?	9

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

# 5 The Implications and Effects of the Handover of Colonies – Macau

Glenn McCartney

## Background to Macau's development

A 'Handover' of a city or destination implies that it is being returned or given back to its original nation, perhaps through political process, economic necessity, or re-position of power. History has shown the colonisation (or administration) of many destinations, both West and East, by European nations through their advanced naval and military positions. The Portuguese were one of the first naval powers to begin this global journey of establishing settlements on other continents. Through this process, Macau became one of the first ports (over 450 years ago) to act as a trading post between East and West. Macau has journeyed through a series of political and administrative changes during this time. Initially established in 1557 as an overseas settlement of Portugal, from 1582 the isthmus at the southern tip of China was run under a leasehold agreement with China. Unlike Hong Kong which was to be formed three centuries later, Macau was not conquered or established as a result of war but was through trade and merchants and the efforts of Portuguese maritime adventurers rather than a strategy of colonisation designed in Lisbon (Pons, 1999). While today Macau and Hong Kong are both Special Administrative Regions within the People's Republic of China and though their beginnings are based on different reasons, their course of history and development are intrinsically linked.

British involvement and settlement in Macau for what would be a relationship lasting over 200 years through trade and commerce would later lead to the establishment of Hong Kong. The British arrived in Macau in 1637 under orders from King Charles I. It was through their business dealings in Macau that two Scotsmen, William Jardine and James Matheson, would meet. With interests and dealing in the opium trade, Jardine, Matheson and Company was formed in 1832, and is still one of Hong Kong's most significant and influential trading companies to this day. It was also through the opium trade that the British had to move from Macau to Hong Kong Island. This island was later ceded 'forever' to the British under the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 which had followed British forces advancing as far as Nanking and the Chinese suing for peace (Coates, 1988).

It was only in 1887 that sovereignty of Macau actually changed hands to the Portuguese from the Chinese agreeing that 'Portugal will forever administer Macau' (Cheng, 1999: 1).

Cheng (1999: 26) also writes ‘It seemed that the Portuguese never paid attention to the issue of sovereign rights over Macau until the British officially acquired these over Hong Kong...It was only then realized that while Hong Kong was held by right, Macau was held on sufferance’. Again the British influence, acting from a position of power in the region, was a major factor, as was the trade of opium. This administrative agreement for Macau was placed as a point of protocol in a treaty of amity and commerce between Portugal and China (Coates, 1978). It was also to be the last time the British would influence Macau governance.

This period, with the Portuguese assuming sovereign power in the 1887 treaty was viewed differently to the three centuries previously when China could execute sovereign power over Macau. ‘This was undoubtedly an unequal treaty that a foreign power forced on China. It not only violated the international law but also ran counter to the concept of equal treatment and ran counter to the general people’s desires’ (Jeong and Jeong, 2004: 138–139). It was thus felt that this amounted to illegal occupation of Chinese territory. Yet history was to show that these assertions of perpetual occupation of Macau and Hong Kong would not stand the changing landscape of both the political sentiment back in Portugal and the United Kingdom as well as developments resulting from the post-Cultural Revolution China. Within 150 years both Hong Kong and Macau would be handed back to China with the establishment of two SARs (Special Administrative Regions) within the People’s Republic of China.

By 1979, China and Portugal had already agreed on ‘Macau as a Chinese territory under Portuguese administration’ (Cheng, 1999: 1) and that on Macau’s return to Chinese rule on 20 December 1999, it would be created a Special Administrative Region. This would be a second such region, with Hong Kong’s handover set for two years earlier. In 1974, after Portugal’s own revolution, there had been an unsuccessful attempt to return Macau to China, and a new Macau constitution written by Lisbon ended direct elections in Macau, dividing power between the Governor and Macau legislators, in essence, giving more control to the Chinese. A secret agreement was signed in Paris in 1979 and made public in 1987. This recognised Macau sovereignty as belonging to the PRC (People’s Republic of China) with the Handover, with conditions to be discussed at a later stage. This was later achieved with the Joint Declaration on the Question of Macau signed by the Prime Ministers of Portugal and China (Afonso and Pereira, 1991).

## **Impact of Portuguese administration**

Under Portuguese rule, Macau was characterized as a ‘minimally-integrated social political system’ (Lam, 1991: 323). After 400 years, the only official language was Portuguese and the Governor was appointed by the President of Portugal to whom the Governor needed to report. Executive positions such as undersecretaries and other senior levels of the Macau Government were staffed by political colleagues of either the President or Governor. Language alone acted as a barrier to interaction and engagement with Chinese society or in business or politics. With very few formal channels to communicate and interact between Chinese society and Portuguese bureaucrats, a general distrust could be found among Macau Chinese residents (Lam, 1991). Limited participation and decision making prior to the Macau handover meant that local Chinese suddenly found themselves suddenly in highly elevated government posts with critical decisions needing to be made on Macau’s future. Issues had been left unresolved under the previous Portuguese

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