

**Public Administration Reform in Macau: A critical study from the handover to the present time**

**Reforma da Administração Pública em Macau: Um Estudo Crítico desde a Transferência de Soberania até à Atualidade**

**Leung Sok Ieng<sup>1</sup>**

**Ansoumane Douy Diakite<sup>2</sup>**

**ABSTRACT:** Macau's bureaucratic system is the product of a historical and cultural mixture. It is enriched and shaped by the colonial past, cultural influences, and evolving governance structures. It is highly influenced by the Portuguese colonial government. Since 1999, Macau has returned to China as a Special Administrative Region and undergone a significant transformation from colonial to special administrative status. The former public management system in Macau operated on a patronage basis, drawing on many Portuguese bureaucratic governance styles. After the handover, the emerging new public management system in Macau places greater emphasis on collaboration and partnership, fostering close cooperation among the government, the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders to achieve common objectives. Thus, the aim of this study is to identify the emerging management system in Macau that reflects both bureaucratic governance and new public management practices. This article ultimately concludes that the success of this ongoing transformation depends on whether it can move beyond mere administrative efficiency, and gradual integration into e-governance and services, and cultivate a unique, tailor-made "citizen-centered" governance model in Macau.

**KEYWORDS:** New public management; public administration; Macau's handover; public administration reform; e-government.

---

<sup>1</sup> Leung Sok Ieng is a PhD Candidate in Government Studies, University of Saint Joseph, Macau. She has worked in the public sector for 26 years and has been involved in administrative and financial-related work and cultural activities production during all these years.

<sup>2</sup> Ansoumane Douy Diakite holds a PhD in Government Studies. He is an Associate Professor at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) in Macau, where he has held numerous academic leadership roles since 2009. He currently serves as Head of the Department of Law and Public Policy, Coordinator of the Macau Academy of Comparative Alternative Dispute Resolution, and oversees several graduate programs, including the Master of Community Development and the Master of Lusophone and Public International Law.

**RESUMO:** A administração pública de Macau é o resultado de uma mistura histórica e cultural. É enriquecida e moldada pelo passado colonial, pelas influências culturais e pelas estruturas de governação em constante evolução, o que evidencia a forte influência do governo colonial português. Em 1999, Macau regressou à China como Região Administrativa Especial e sofreu uma transformação significativa, deixando de ser um território colonial para assumir o estatuto de Região Administrativa Especial. O antigo sistema de administração pública em Macau operava sob o clientelismo, inspirando-se em diversos estilos de administração pública portuguesa. Após a transferência de soberania, o novo sistema de administração pública emergente em Macau enfatiza a colaboração e a parceria, fomentando uma estreita cooperação entre o governo, o sector privado, a sociedade civil e outras partes interessadas para alcançar objetivos comuns. Assim, o objetivo deste estudo é identificar, na administração pública emergente em Macau, elementos que reflitam tanto a governança burocrática quanto as novas práticas de gestão pública. Este artigo conclui que o sucesso desta transformação em curso depende da sua capacidade de ir além da mera eficiência administrativa, integrando gradualmente o governo eletrónico e os serviços digitais e cultivando um modelo de governação único, personalizado e centrado no cidadão.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Nova administração pública; administração pública; transferência de soberania de Macau; reforma da administração pública; governo eletrónico.

## **Introduction**

Macau's bureaucratic system is the product of a historical and cultural mixture. It is enriched and shaped by the colonial past, cultural influences, and evolving governance structures. It is highly influenced by the Portuguese colonial government. As a former Portuguese colony for more than 400 years, Macau has inherited a distinct bureaucratic system that retains elements of the old public management style from Portuguese governance, characterized by centralized decision-making and adherence to rules and procedures (Ostwald, 2020).

Since 1999, Macau has been returned to China as a Special Administrative Region and has undergone a significant transformation from colonial to special administrative status. After the handover, Macau was monitored under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework and continued to follow many of the former government's management styles. Macau's public administration operates under a centralized, bureaucratic hierarchy in which decisions are made at higher levels, and lower levels follow established protocols and procedures. Public decision-making processes are often not open to the public, resulting in a top-down approach to governance (Lo, 2013).

Public services are governed by strict rules and regulations (Scott & Lam, 2011). This emphasis on formal procedures ensures consistency but can lead to inefficiencies and slow response times (Scott, 2011). The old public management model prioritizes compliance with regulations and policies over innovation or customer service. This can hinder adaptability to changing public needs (Asian Bank, 2020). Accountability is often exercised through administrative oversight rather than performance, thereby limiting the effectiveness of evaluating public service outcomes. This imbalance underscores the Macau government's need to effectively address public expectations (Lo, 2014). Given the emerging need to change, it was decided to gradually implement the program, reflecting the new public management practices.

New Public Management (NPM) is a public sector reform approach that emerged in the 1980s and gained prominence in the 1990s. It advocates applying private-sector management techniques and market mechanisms to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and performance in public-sector organizations (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). It challenges the traditional specialization of bureaucracy, by focusing on cross-functional teams and collaboration (Pollitt, 2003). Since NPM focuses on outcomes rather than processes, it aims to facilitate more flexible methodologies for goal achievement (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). It adopts competitive, market-oriented mechanisms that may enhance adaptability (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Furthermore, NPM emphasizes the decentralization of authority and suggests more agile decision-making at subordinate levels (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). By treating citizens as customers, the management style tends to strengthen a sense of responsibility and places greater emphasis on citizen feedback. This, therefore, led to paying closer attention to the changing needs of society (Aberbach & Christensen, 2005).

The reform of Macau's governance system involves decentralizing and delegating authority to lower levels of administration and granting increased autonomy to local entities (Lam, 2019). Such a transformation is consistent and aligns with the characteristics of NPM. The new public management system in Macau employs a merit-based recruitment process, in which officials are appointed based on their competencies, qualifications, and performance rather than their affiliations or tenure. In 2011, the Macau government implemented a major reform: Recruitment and Selection of Staff in Public Administration. Under Administrative Regulation No. 23/2011 (Regulamento Administrativo n. ° 23/2011), officials and civil servants are hired and appointed based on public examination results and competencies, thereby ensuring fairness and meritocracy in the recruitment process (San, 2016). Contrary to the NPM, the former public management system in Macau operated on a patronage basis, with appointments influenced by connections to the ruling class (Lee, 2018).

Thus, the new public management system in Macau emphasizes collaboration and partnership, fostering close cooperation among the government, the private sector, civil society, and other

stakeholders to achieve common objectives. As far as the old public management system in Macau is concerned, it was considered far too prone to neglect the needs and perspectives of external stakeholders (Santos, 2016). Another dimension of the emerging management system in Macau is the commitment to sustainable development, placing particular emphasis on environmental conservation, social responsibility, and economic viability, while the old public management system in Macau frequently exhibited a short-term orientation, with officials prioritizing immediate gains over long-term sustainability (Choi, 2017).

As this study will explore more on the management system in Macau, it requires more than just adopting external efficiency models. To truly succeed, Macao's public administration must continue to evolve towards a unique, citizen-centric, and tailored model that prioritizes local residents' needs and digital habits.

## **1. Public administration in Macau before the handover**

### **1.1 Unsuitable administrative in Macau before the handover**

Macao was under Portuguese colonial rule for more than 400 years from the mid-sixteenth century until 19 December 1999. Despite the existence of civil service regulations, little effort had been made to reform performance management prior to the handover (Lam, 2012).

During this period, the establishment of Macau's judicial and administrative system was strongly influenced by Portuguese practices. The administrative systems prioritized strict adherence to legal procedures and responsibilities, consistent with the traditions of the bureaucracy and the old public management. Before the handover, Macau's civil service was rigidly hierarchical. The upper and middle levels of management were mostly held by Portuguese, with little local Chinese representation. Most of the high-level administrators were appointed by the President of Portugal and sent from Portugal to Macau. They had little understanding of Macau's local culture and traditions, leading to many policies that were not adapted to local needs (San, 2016).

### **1.2 An administrative system characterized by Portuguese leadership and local subordination**

In 1976, Macau was redefined by the new Portuguese Constitution (Article 5) as "Chinese territory under Portuguese administration ruled by a statute in conformity to its special situation" (Fischer & Klatté, 2011; Parlamento Português, n.d.). While under Portuguese governance, the colonial bureaucracy in Macau was characterized by a politicized leadership from the Metropole, namely Portugal. The public service workforce comprised Macanese and local Chinese, who were hired solely for junior posts. Civil servants in Macau were expected to implement policies formulated and delegated by the Portuguese upper level. At that time, civil servants focused on policy adherence

and implementation, with little institutional autonomy (Lo, 2014). While still under Portuguese colonial governance, the administrative culture focused on implementing and executing top-level decisions, with limited autonomy in decision-making (Bardach, 1998).

Several behaviors developed among Macau's civil servants during that period. A risk-averse culture emerged among them due to the fear of being blamed for mistakes. This was reinforced by a range of systemic and institutional factors (the requirement to obey and follow orders from senior management) that limited their ability to critically evaluate policies and make recommendations for change (Hood & Jackson, 1996).

Not until the late 1990s were local Chinese officials increasingly recruited, trained, and promoted to senior executive roles to prepare for a secure and stable transition. Since then, the need for a more technocratic and self-administrative bureaucracy has become increasingly significant for ensuring administrative continuity.

During and after the transition, Macau's administration at the time enjoyed a relatively high degree of self-governance, managing local municipal affairs without direct interference from the Lisbon government. Since then, Macau has been governed under the Basic Law with the administrative status of a Special Administrative Region (Gonçalves, 2019).

## **2. Macau's public administrative reform after the handover**

It has been argued that after the handover, the "One Country Two Systems" regime prompted Macau to develop a public administrative framework that reflected a colonial-era bureaucratic structure, with relatively high autonomy in policy decision-making (Wong & Cheung, 2020; Gao, 2014). At the same time, there was a need for Macau to develop its own public administration that followed the principles of, yet was distinct from, the mainland Chinese model (Lam, 2019).

Macau has always faced the great challenge of transitioning from a Portuguese colonial bureaucracy to a "special administration region" under Chinese sovereignty since 1999. Signed in March 1987, the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration granted Macau fifty years of high autonomy after the return of sovereignty. Under the "One country, two systems" principle, the Macau government manages its own legal system, based on the Portuguese civil law tradition, and distinct from mainland China's socialist legal system (Godinho, 2007). China is responsible for national security and foreign affairs, while Macau exercises autonomous control over policies relating to legal affairs, public security, public administration, monetary, customs and immigration policies.

It has been argued that Macau's decolonization process was not merely about regaining independence from Portugal, but also about reclaiming its cultural and historical identity as a Chinese territory (Ho, 2020). To the Portuguese government, Macau holds a meaning as a place and a hallmark

of memory. It represents a transition from colonial rule to a high level of self-autonomy. After the handover, the place still retains many characteristics of Portuguese economic and cultural influence, and continues to follow any of the judicial structures (Chung & Tieben, 2009). Macau's official languages remain Chinese and Portuguese, reflecting its historical bilingualism (Moody, 2008). Macau's public administration retains elements drawn from both the Portuguese and Chinese systems (Lo, 2007).

In Macao, a former Portuguese colony with a Portuguese administrative tradition, the post-1999 governance model has retained many features of traditional public administration. It was often described as "reactive" rather than "proactive," characterized by prioritizing strict adherence to procedure over actual outcomes. However, under increasing pressure to modernize and improve efficiency, the Macao SAR government has selectively adopted NPM-inspired reforms. Dunleavy and Hood argued that NPM represented a paradigmatic shift from traditional public administration by emphasizing decentralization, market mechanisms, performance measurement, and managerial autonomy (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994). These features are argued to be relevant for Macau's public administrative reforms (Chou, 2011). NPM was needed to shift Macau from a traditional, rigid public management style to one that was customer-oriented and achieved results.

In the early 2000s, the Macao SAR government introduced reforms aligned with NPM principles, including performance appraisal systems for civil servants, the creation of semi-autonomous agencies (e.g., the Cultural Affairs Bureau, Macao Foundation, Sports Bureau, and Tourism Bureau), digitization, and e-government initiatives. All these reform measures are rather incremental and not very significant for structural changes in the bureaucratic hierarchy. The reforms also adopted a series of performance-oriented measures to improve government operations and culture (M. L. Zhu, 2005; W. G. Zhu, 2009).

"In Macau, the pressing need has been codification and localization of the territory's legal system after the implementation of the Basic Law system." (Gao, 2014). Macao continues to consolidate its existing administrative system. By reinforcing the traditional administrative leadership and governance model, the implementation of the Basic Law has consolidated the significant powers of the Chief Executive's Office and a small number of executive elites (Wong, 2005; Zhan, 2005). This arrangement is widely considered suitable for Macao because it facilitates effective coordination between the executive and legislative branches, thereby enhancing trust between the Macao government and the central government of China (Zhuang, 2009)

Despite the implementation of all these reforms, it is alleged that the adoption of NPM within them has been overly gradual and selective, shaped by the region's post-colonial administrative legacy, legalistic governance culture, and political conservatism. It is argued that such an approach to reform

was too slow to accommodate the ever-changing needs of the citizens (Gao, 2014). What challenges does the Macau government confront in tackling the ongoing administrative reforms?

### **3. Challenges faced by the Macau government in the public administration reform after the handover**

After the handover, the Macau government still inherited much of the colonial government's style and was influenced by Portuguese administrative culture, which has been characterized as rather easygoing and relaxed (Liu, 2017). But it also appears to be highly bureaucratic, slow, overweight, heavy, and self-serving rather than public-serving (Wong & Cheung, 2020). Macau's bureaucracy has retained many of the characteristics of the Portuguese colonial administration, including a strong emphasis on hierarchy, centralization, and administrative control. Ho argues that this legacy continues to shape Macau's governance and administrative systems, which may affect the progress on reforms (Castro, 2003; Ho, 2020). Consequently, public sector reform in Macau failed to address fundamental issues such as poor personnel practices, insufficient experience and training among civil servants, overlapping roles among departments, language barriers, and legal lag. Reforms were considered unnecessary during an economic recovery and legally infeasible within such a rigid, law-based administrative system. Such a hierarchical environment hindered the government from keeping pace with the ever-changing and fast-moving technological world (He et al., 2025)

#### **3.1 Insufficient working incentives**

Macau's civil servants' performance appraisal system is quite relaxed. The performance appraisal system should be a primary formal incentive mechanism to motivate employees to work hard. However, the motivator seemed to lose that function. In the first years after the handover, more than 90% of the civil staff were rated "excellent" or "satisfactory", and only a small proportion received a "poor" rating. Performance appraisal became largely ineffective because it could not distinguish between remarkable and average civil servants.

According to 2016 data from the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau of Macau, over 90 per cent of civil servants received ratings of "Outstanding" (five points) or "Highly Satisfactory" (four points). The then Secretary for Administration and Justice, Chan Hoi Fan, considered this distribution to be irregular and irrational. The performance appraisal system provided insufficient differentiation among capable, high-contributing and average civil servants. Because almost everyone received a positive, encouraging rating regardless of actual output, and modestly capable civil servants received the same performance-based rewards as hard workers, this potentially weakened work incentives and diminished morale among those civil servants who strive for

excellence. Consequently, there was no incentive to improve performance to move to a higher level. Although the performance assessment policy was implemented after the handover in 2004, its effects were less than satisfactory in its early stages.

Furthermore, the rigid structure of government suppresses the incentive among qualified staff to pursue excellence. Promotion opportunities are typically limited to staff within the same department. There is no effective mechanism for transferring talented employees to other departments with vacancies. This lack of mobility severely hinders career development opportunities. Such a limitation discourages elite and ambitious staff who struggle to overcome career development bottlenecks (Chou, 2004).

### **3.2 Department role duplication**

The duplication of roles across government units led to significant inefficiencies in administrative management. For example, both the Sports Development Bureau and the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau were responsible for managing sports facilities and venues. The Lands, Public Work and Transport Bureau and the Civil and Municipal Affairs Bureau took care of public traffic management. Similarly, the Cultural Bureau and the Civil and Municipal Affairs Bureau are involved in the organization of performing arts activities, the management of public libraries and museums, and the formulation of art and culture policies.

Such administrative functional overlaps created problems and inconvenience for the public. For example, in order to apply for restaurant licenses, business owners needed to obtain approval from the Civil and Municipal Affairs Bureau, Tourism Bureau, the police and fire services, the health bureau for public health approval, the Labour Employment Bureau for the proper allocation of local and foreign workers, Land, Public works and transport bureau, and even the Cultural Bureau if sites were part of cultural heritage or located within the Historic Centre of Macao. Such a complicated, time-consuming application procedure takes at least half a year to process, thereby consistently discouraging business incentives.

### **3.3 Limited experienced civil service workforce**

Probably owing to the colonial government's delayed implementation of localization policies, the civil servant team right after the handover was quite young and inexperienced. The delay in the localization policy was attributed to the expectation of retaining Macanese interest and preserving Portuguese culture, which were common in the colonial territories. By the end of 1997, only 14.81% of director roles and 40.00% of deputy director roles were held by local Chinese. Portuguese senior officials were largely replaced by the local Chinese civil servants only after the handover. As a result,

the senior civil servants were young and inexperienced. In 2001, only 15% of director/chief-rank civil servants were aged 45 or older. Since many high-ranking civil servants lacked significant administrative capacity and were inexperienced in tackling risks, they were inclined to be rather obedient to higher levels. This reduced the risk of bureaucratic resistance, which often hinders progress on structural reform (Chou, 2004).

### **3.4 Language barrier**

The other barrier to the efficient implementation of reform was linguistic. Before the handover, all official documents and legal rules were still in Portuguese. According to an interview conducted by Chou on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004, with a former senior official responsible for law translation, only a small number had Chinese translations, and many of these were quite incomprehensible owing to tight translation schedules, resulting in low-quality translations. Such a language difference might delay the administrative process. Staff with deep knowledge of the law might not be experts in its daily execution and supervisory work. On the other hand, more general functional officials were uncertain which provisions of the ordinance had been violated and were following, as they were all in Portuguese or incomprehensibly translated Chinese. Training in translating between Portuguese and Chinese was necessary to address the language problems. However, since training times were initially not counted as official work hours, the incentive to attend was diminished.

### **3.5 Legal lag**

Macau has been deeply influenced by Portuguese colonial rule and the continental legal tradition. Unlike common law regions, where executive power is sufficient to initiate structural reform, continental law regions such as Macau face substantial legal barriers and difficulties due to the need for complex amendments. For instance, fundamental laws strictly regulate the organization of government departments; therefore, establishing, abolishing, or modifying the functions of any agency requires legislative amendment. Similarly, personnel structures, performance appraisals, and staff transfers all require amendments in the decree before the execution of practice. However, the lack of bilingual and legal experts hindered the legislative process (Chou, 2004). As a result, the introduction of reform measures to address the core administrative issues could not be implemented expeditiously.

## **4. The implementation of the new public management in Macau's public administration reform**

As its citizens have become more educated and critical, the traditional "reactive" old public management and the slow, colonial-style administration of Macau may prove less than adequate for Macau's development and insufficient to tackle the challenging, changing world. Accelerating reform

is necessary to strengthen the government's capacity to address the varied developmental needs of citizens and maintain social stability across the territory.

A major historical weakness in Macao is that government departments inherited administrative systems that were rather insensitive and inflexible to changing human needs and circumstances, and that usually operated as isolated islands not sharing data (He et al., 2025). Thus, the overlapping of departmental duties led to redundancy and slow service. Acceleration is needed to overcome these silos and fragmentation (Chou, 2011). NPM emphasizes efficiency and service orientation, performance-motivated administration, and output-oriented performance, intended to make the government and the public sector look and act like the private sector, thereby becoming more efficient, competitive, and responsive (Kim & Han, 2015). The alignment with NPM will facilitate and support more effective promotion of additional administrative reform. The following reforms by the Macau government align with the elements of NPM.

#### **4.1 Motivation**

Soon after the handover, the government services in Macau were still allegedly rarely customer-driven and not designed from the customer's point of view (Chou, 2004). Customer-oriented reform programs were then undertaken. The government introduced performance pledges, set up one-stop service centres, and established a complaint policy for government departments. Under the pledge, the performance of the government department was supervised and evaluated. If the service provided was unsatisfactory, or the government department failed to implement the given policy objectives effectively or inadequately, it will be held accountable. This reform reflects the "service quality" element of NPM. With the establishment of the performance indicator, the effects of the services will be quantified and made subject to public oversight. The focus of the civil service shifted from internal bureaucratic rules to the satisfaction of the external citizen. This aligns with the primary doctrine of "Customer-Driven" (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) and the "quality and performance oriented" approach of NPM (Lynn, 2006), which aims to fulfil the needs of the customer rather than those of the bureaucracy. If a pledge is broken, the department is held responsible for the inefficiency, which is consistent with the element of accountability in NPM. (Lynn,2006).

Regarding the working incentives of civil servants, the existing performance appraisal system needs improvement. Under the current assessment system, over 90% of civil servants receive "Excellent" or "Very Satisfactory" ratings. This "everyone wins" approach devalues high performance and fails to fully reflect civil servants' abilities, potentially undermining their motivation. The former Director of the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau of Macau, José Chu, suggested introducing additional rating levels beyond "Excellent", "Very Satisfactory", "Satisfactory" and

“Poor” to allow for greater variation in performance. He also suggested that those who get the “Excellent” or “Very Satisfactory” should be kept within the 60%-70% range to avoid the “everyone wins” situation. Department heads should be instructed to allocate scores more realistically; perhaps only the top 3 to 4 staff who truly exceeded expectations would receive an “Excellent” rating, while employees with consistent performance would receive a “Very Satisfactory” rating (Jiang et al, 2025).

The other major problem with the existing performance appraisal system is that some performance indicators still rely on qualitative descriptions, such as loyalty, honesty, and integrity, and thus lack observable and measurable behavioral anchors. Evaluation results often heavily depend on the evaluator's subjective judgment and are easily influenced by interpersonal factors. The appraisal system should establish more objective, quantitative and operational standards, to ensure that the evaluation process is justified in clear, objective and verifiable criteria. If performance evaluation criteria are quantifiable, supervision cannot conceal differences between high and low-performing employees. The achievements of high-performing employees are recognized by indicators, while low-performing employees are encouraged to improve (Jiang et al, 2025).

Under the current performance appraisal system, the appraiser is the sole evaluator of the appraisee. This will easily lead to bias in the assessment process. It is suggested that a third-party unit be established to handle any complaints regarding the evaluation, thereby eliminating bias in the assessment process. According to Administrative Regulation No. 20/2017 - Management System of Complaint Handling for Civil Servants, a Complaint Handling Management Committee was established. The establishment of the committee was neutral and was intended to ensure that the purposes, principles, and rules applicable to complaint handling were followed. It will make recommendations and take measures to comprehensively improve complaint management.

It is also suggested that citizen participation be introduced into the performance appraisal of Macau civil servants. Under the old system, employees would feel frustrated because their “service value” was not recognized by their superiors. However, with citizen participation, for example, through satisfaction surveys or service feedback, the work performance of the civil servants can be acknowledged and valued by the public. Civil servants will be more cautious and put more effort into their work since they will be supervised and evaluated by the public. They will be motivated to provide qualified service because they know it will be recognized by the “end users” (Yan, 2011). Such a reform will relate to the “accountability” and “responsiveness” of the NPM, since citizens can quantify and measure the quality through participation and designated indicators.

## **4.2 Department restructuring**

In the early 2000s, the Macau government implemented reforms aimed at departmental restructuring. In 2001, the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau assumed certain responsibilities previously held by the Provisional Macau Municipal Affairs and Provisional Islands Macao Municipal Council. The Unitary Police Service was responsible for the Judicial Police and security forces, which had previously been two separate administrative units. Macao Prisons was removed from the Legal Affairs Bureau and became an individual unit. The new Office for the Development of Telecommunications and Information Technology was established and assumed responsibility for telecommunications policy, which had previously belonged to the Post Office. The Coloane-Taipa Reclamation Office merged with the Incineration and Discharge Water Office to form the newly established Office for Infrastructure Development. The New Birth Registration Bureau merged with the Deceased Registration Bureau to form the Civil Affairs Registration Bureau. Many of the above-mentioned reforms, however, had little success in addressing the problems of role overlap and inefficiency within the departments.

This matched with the NPM principle of "disaggregation of units in the public sector" (Hood, 1991) and "improved public service demand" approach (Lynn, 2006). By reducing the size and reshaping the roles of government departments, it emphasizes less rigidity and hierarchy and greater cost-efficiency. According to an interview conducted by He, Tan, Leong, Huang, & Junio, citizens stated that the services have become more convenient and efficient (He et al., 2025). This departmental restructuring aims to reduce administrative procedures, eliminate redundant personnel, improve resource allocation, and establish a "one-stop" service model. (Chou, 2004; He et al., 2025). This is consistent with the NPM's principal goal of efficiency (Hood, 1991) since similar services will no longer be fragmented but will be provided by a single department.

### **4.3 Training, transfer and performance appraisal**

To train professional civil servants, the government reviewed and introduced the civil service appraisal framework to strengthen the performance quality of the civil service team. Together with this, annual reviews and meetings were required for all civil servants, including officials at the director and chief levels so as to ensure they all undergo appraisal and receive feedback for performance improvements. Appraisal commissions were established across all departments to verify results and ensure transparency and impartiality.

The government also encouraged the staff transfer system and hoped that staff would have opportunities to transfer or be promoted to other departments. Previously, promotions and personnel reallocation were limited to a single department. Personnel mobility is hoped to encourage the appropriate allocation of human resources.

As a result, to improve work efficiency, raise morale, and strengthen the work enthusiasm of civil servants, the Macao government introduced a performance appraisal program for public administration personnel in 2004. According to the law and regulations enacted by the Macao government (Law no. 8/2004: Principles on the Performance Appraisal of Public Administration Staff; Administrative Regulation no. 31/2004 - General Performance Appraisal System for Public Administration Staff; Administrative Regulation No. 11/2007 - Reward System for Staff Performance in Public Administration), promotion is related to whether the required training hours have been completed and qualified. Civil servants are required to complete and pass prescribed training courses relevant to their job duties before they can be promoted to an upper rank or job level. The implementation of the appraisal system reflects the element of “explicit standards and measures of performance” (Osborne, & Gaebler, 1992) and the “quality and performance-oriented” approach of NPM (Lynn, 2006).

#### **4.4 Legislative Reform**

Law reforms have been executed recently. One important development was the Personal Data Protection Law (Law No. 8/2005), which established data privacy standards in 2005 and facilitated the establishment of the Office for Personal Data Protection in 2007 (Office for Personal Data Protection [GPDP], n.d.). More recently, the Macao Cybersecurity Law (MCSL), which took effect in December 2019, requires public institutions, private infrastructure operators, and internet service providers to strengthen cybersecurity management and to report potential risks (Deloitte, 2019).

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai of Macau, in his recent 2026 Policy Address, entitled “Striving for Reform to Improve Efficiency and Focusing on Overcoming Diversity”, stated that intensified efforts will be made to advance legislative reform. The major direction of governance should be to deepen administrative and legal reforms, further improve governance efficiency, and maintain social harmony and stability. Improvements and amendments to the laws have been scheduled to formulate a mid-term legislative plan for 2027 and to implement the annual legislative plan in an orderly manner. In addition, the number of laws and administrative regulations enacted in recent years has increased significantly compared with the previous decade (Table 1). And more revisions of major legal codes, namely the Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Civil Code, Civil Procedure Code, and Commercial Code, as well as other legislative work, will also be initiated in the coming years. This feature aligns with the NPM since it often emphasizes deregulation to minimize the strict statutory constraints that prevent public managers from being flexible. By launching new laws and amending existing laws and regulations, the government will remove a major bureaucratic obstacle to efficiency.

Year	Law	Administrative Regulation	Year	Law	Administrative Regulation
2025	14	18	2015	15	31
2024	27	38	2014	10	20
2023	23	43	2013	13	27
2022	19	55	2012	17	26
2021	21	49	2011	12	42
2020	27	45	2010	14	25
2019	22	37	2009	24	36
2018	19	38	2008	16	26
2017	16	34	2007	7	22
2016	11	30	2006	10	20
Total	199	387	2015	138	275

**Table 1.** Number of laws and administrative regulations enacted in the intervals “2016 – 2025” and “2006 – 2015”

Source: The table is made by the author for the purpose of the paper, with the data found in the following sources: Legislative Assembly of the Macau Special Administrative Region, <https://www.al.gov.mo/zh/law/>; Legal Affairs Bureau, <https://www.bo.dsaj.gov.mo/cn/home/>

Interval	2016 – 2025	2006 – 2015	% of change
Total No of Laws	199	138	↑ 30.65%
Total No of Administrative Regulations	387	275	↑ 28.94%

**Table 2.** Comparison between the in the interval “2016 – 2025” and “2006 – 2015”

Source: The table is made by the author for the purpose of the paper

#### 4.5 E-Government

According to Granier and Kudo (2016), technological advances promote community development, fostering an environment that enables members to engage in collective action and develop innovative solutions to common problems. Such characteristics are essential for Macau’s government if it aims to advance public administration reform (He et al., 2025). They align with the NPM goal of making operations more efficient.

Before, government websites were primarily designed as one-way communication platforms to distribute information to the public. Those functions generally available on the platforms include providing read-only information (such as organisation structures, email, and contact information), downloadable forms, and offering email correspondence services. Citizens can make payments, schedule appointments, and even file complaints through the websites. According to the “*Planning*

*and Implementation of Electronic Governance*” (Commission of Audit of Macao SAR, 2018), the progress of e-government implementation during the first 16 years was slow. For citizens, the e-government was limited to information provision.

In the late 20th century, e-government became a key focus of public administration reform. The government has invested heavily in upgrading its digital platforms and e-services. Over the past decade, the introduction of the government’s unified digital platform, “Macao One Account,” which allows citizens to handle most government service inquiries and applications, has been a great success. Government websites gradually shifted towards two-way transaction tools, which eventually became widespread. The Coronavirus Epidemic (COVID-19 pandemic) accelerated the trend of using government to a high level. During the pandemic and the widespread lockdowns, quarantine measures required individuals to stay at home, limiting outdoor activities. Both the government and the public were pushed to use digital services, affecting billions of people (Iong & Phillips, 2025). Civil servants at that time were required to work from home, making it necessary to shift from “on-site” to “online” working modes.

The reasons for using e-government services are convenience, the absence of time and location constraints, and alignment with global trends. The government announced that it has undertaken to design more user-friendly e-services. Citizens will not be required to visit government departments in person, as the entire process will be conducted online (Macao Magazine, 2024). Such an approach would reduce the number of visits to various government departments and minimize duplicate document submissions while also providing cost-effective services by reducing administrative costs and time spent on document assessment for both the government and citizens. The move from paper-based to digital administration processes will definitely improve efficiency. E-government is not just an add-on but a driver of reform, as digital processes can help to improve and simplify the bureaucratic structure.

Such a reduction in administrative redundancy will narrow the hierarchical structure and improve efficiency, both classic NPM strategies. It has shifted from an executive-led concept to a user-oriented one. The aim is to maximize convenience and minimize disruption to residents' daily routines (Macao Magazine, 2024), demonstrating a clear commitment to prioritizing citizen needs. This change reflects the implementation of NPM, as one of its core principles is to serve citizens as clients and maximize their satisfaction, rather than treating them as objects of public administration. According to an article published in the Journal San Wa Ou in 2025, as of February 2025, the number of registered users of the “Macao One Account” platform has exceeded 634,000. According to statistics provided by the Statistics and Census Service, the total population of the Macao Special Administrative Region was 686,600 at the end of the third quarter of 2025 (Statistics and Census Service [DSEC], 2025),

implying that the use of “Macao One Account” reached more than 92% of the total population. Such high usage penetration indicates that convenient service delivery is crucial to citizens.

Moreover, some government departments have implemented horizontal or vertical integration to simplify information exchange among different government units. Such an improvement helps the government collect more accurate, efficient data, which is crucial for the success of policy implementation. By advocating for data literacy and cross-departmental data sharing, e-government aligns with the NPM’s principle of collaboration. It helps reinforce interdepartmental communication and address problems holistically, rather than acting in isolation. New Performance Management (NPM) relies on clear standards and performance indicators and typically uses data to make decisions. The data collected from the cloud computing centre helps the government to analyse the real needs. The trend is to shift from intuition or rule-based to evidence-based, a shift that also aligns with NPM’s characteristics.

## **Conclusion**

Macau’s bureaucratic government system reflects an inheritance of centralized Portuguese governance with the integration of the Chinese sovereign system. The reform of public administration taking place in Macao reflects a complex relationship between a deeply entrenched colonial legacy and the dynamic needs of a modern Special Administrative Region under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework. The government has gradually shifted from an economy-driven approach to focus more on administrative reforms, citizen prioritization and service efficiency. However, issues such as the colonial legislative framework, the overlap of government departments, and an inexperienced elite remain great challenges for public administrative reform. The transition has demonstrated a gradual integration in the New Public Management (NPM) model, especially revealed by the widespread of e-government and e-services.

The implementation of the “Macao One Account” and cloud data management help to break the information barrier and promote collaboration between departments. The government is encouraged to introduce policies based on the data collected. In order to keep pace with the always-changing digital world, the Macau government is pushing forward legal amendments, encouraging the need to address citizens’ needs when formulating the policies.

Ultimately, Macau's successful public administration reforms cannot simply replicate Western models. Macau's unique demographic needs demonstrate that reforms must be tailored to local conditions and be “citizen-centered”. In future, attention should be placed on close and critical examination of cross-border data governance, human capital development, digital entrepreneurship, and comparative case studies beyond Macau so as to have a better understanding of smart city

governance within diverse innovation systems. It is important to have interaction between public services and citizens' habitual usage of them. This intimate relationship and social cohesion remain a defining characteristic of the small city of Macao SAR (Tang, 2016). It was noted and argued that the emotional factors play an important role in the success of implementing 21st-century government reforms. Consequently, prioritizing a "citizen-centered" approach is identified as a critical success factor in modern governance strategies. In the coming era, the government will need to balance efficiency, convenience and human-centered services while producing public services. As a result, Macau needs to develop a governance style tailored to its own needs rather than simply adopting overseas experiences.

## REFERENCES

- A Report of Human Resources of Macao Special Administration Region Public Administration, 2001, Macao, Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau, 2002, pp. I-46.
- Aberbach, J. D., & Christensen, T. (2005). "Citizens and Consumers: An NPM Dilemma." *Public Management Review*, 7(2), 225-245.
- Amaro, Ana Maria (1993), *Filhos da Terra (Sons of the Earth)*, Macau: Instituto Cultural de Macau.
- Angeliou (2014) as cited in He et al., (2025)
- Asian Development Bank. (2020). *Decentralization and Local Governance in Asia*. Asian Development Bank.
- Bardach, E. (1998). *Getting Agencies to Think Actively*. In *Getting Agencies to Think Actively* (pp. 1-24). Brookings Institution Press.
- Centre for Macau Studies of the University of Macau, *Opinion Survey on the "First Policy Speech of the Chief Executive of Macao Special Administrative Region Delivered on 29th March, 2000"*, p.7.
- Cheng, Christina Miu Bing (1999), *Macau: A Cultural Janus*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Choi, J. (2017). The Role of the Chinese Community in Macao's Governance. *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*, 21(1), 1-15.
- Chou, B. K. (2004). *Public Sector Reform in Macao After the Handover. China perspectives*,

2004(52).

Chou, B. K. P. (2011). *New Public Management in Macau: Does it Work?* In *Public Administration in Southeast Asia*. CRC Press.

Chui, Wing Hong & Lo, T. Wing (2022) "Responsive Governance in Macao: Balancing Tradition and Innovation" *Public Administration and Policy*, 25(1), 74-87

Chung, T., & Tieben, H. (2009). Macau: ten years after the handover. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 38(1), 7-17.

Commission of Audit of Macao SAR. *Planning and Implementation of Electronic Governance 2018*. Macao: Commission of Audit of Macao SAR; 2018

Deloitte. (2019). *Macau Cybersecurity Law*.  
<https://www2.deloitte.com/cn/en/pages/risk/articles/macau-cybersecurity-law.html>

Dunleavy, P., & Hood, C. (1994). From old public administration to new public management. *Public money & management*, 14(3), 9-16.

Exmoo News, 21/12/2017, " 公務員評核逾 90% 獲高分 ". Retrieved from:  
<https://www.exmoo.com/article/48916.html>

Fischer, M., & Klatte, S. (2011, March), *Decolonization: Portuguese territories*. In *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law [MPEPIL]*. Retrieved from  
<http://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e927>

Gao, J. (2014). Public administration research in Hong Kong and Macau: A review of journal articles published from 1999 to 2009. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 44(2), 168-186.

Godinho, J. (2007). "Macau Business Law and Legal System." LexisNexis.

Gonçalves, A. M. (2019). Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions: The Downfall of The "One Country, Two Systems" Policy. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 9(10).

Government of Macao Special Administrative Region Statistics. Available at  
[http://www.macao.gov.mo/index\\_en.html](http://www.macao.gov.mo/index_en.html). Accessed March 7th 2003.

Granier, B., & Kudo, H. (2016). How are citizens involved in smart cities? Analysing citizen participation in Japanese "Smart Communities". *Information Polity*, 21(1), 61–76.  
<https://doi.org/10.3233/IP-150367>

He, Y., Tan, F., Leong, C., Huang, J., & Junio, D. R. O. (2025). Realizing innovation and sustainability: A case study of Macau SAR's smart city development capabilities. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 47(4), 1309-1327.

Ho, C. P. (2020). Decolonization and Macau's Path to Self-Determination. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 79(2), 117-134.

Hood, C. (1991). A public management for all seasons? *Public Administration*, 69(1), 3-19.

Hood, C. C., & Jackson, M. W. (1996). *Administrative Argument: Putting Sincerity into Practice*. Dartmouth Publishing.

Human Resource Statistics, <http://www.safp.gov.mo/external/chin/info/statistics/showdata.asp?table=1>, Accessed February 7th 2004.

Hung SY, Chang CM, Kuo SR. User acceptance of mobile e-government services: An empirical study. *Government Information Quarterly*. 2013;30(1):33-44. DOI: 10.1016/j.giq.2012.07.008

Iong, K. Y., & Phillips, J. O. (2025). Challenges Encountered in Designing and Implementing E-Government Services: A Case Study of the Hard-to-Reach Groups in Macao SAR, China.

Jiang Suni, Cheong Pak San, Chan Kin Sun (2025), "從目標管理探討澳門公職人員績效評核發展方向", 《行政》第三十八卷, 總第一百四十六期, 2025(2), 129-146. Retrieved from [https://www.safp.gov.mo/static/2023/09/16/WCM\\_009131.pdf](https://www.safp.gov.mo/static/2023/09/16/WCM_009131.pdf)<https://www.safp.gov.mo/static/2025/12/16/b05007fe-1668-46e6-a0ec-7718d6c2ed0d.pdf>

Journal San Wa Ou, "「一戶通」開戶人數已逾 63.4 萬, 05/02/2025", Retrieved from : <https://www.waou.com.mo/2025/02/05/> 「一戶通」開戶人數已逾 63.4 萬

Kim, S., & Han, C. (2015). Administrative reform in South Korea: New public management and the bureaucracy. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 81(4), 694-712.

Lam, J. (2012). Performance Management in Macao: A Study of the Civil Service Bureau. *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*, 12(2), 1-15.

Lam, J. (2019). The Evolution of Macao's Governance System. *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*, 23(2), 1-15

Lao, S. (2018). The Evolution of Macau's Identity: A Historical and Cultural Perspective. *Journal of Chinese Studies*, 71(1), 15-34.

Lee, S. (2018). The Impact of the Handover on Macao's Economy. *Journal of Economic Development*, 50(1), 1-15.

Lin, M. J. (2005). Challenges and strategies for public administration reform in Macau [in Chinese]. *Journal of Public Administration in Macau*, 68, 413-433.

Liu, B. (2017). History and Context of Public Administration in Macau. In *Public Administration in Southeast Asia: Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, Hong Kong, and Macao*, ed. E. M.

Berman, New York: Routledge, 463-473.

Lo, S. H. (2014). The study of public administration in Hong Kong and Macao: Evolutionary paths and implications. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 22(1), 20-44.

Lo, S. S. H. (2013). "The Politics of Controlling Organized Crime in Greater China." Routledge

Lo, Sonny & Scott, Ian (2023). "Public Administration Reform in Macao: Challenges and Prospects" *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 35

Lynn Jr, L. E. (2006). *Public management: Old and new*. Routledge.

Macao Association for Internet Research. *Internet Usage Trends in Macao 2020*. Macao SAR: Macao Association for Internet Research; 2020

Macao Association for Internet Research. *Internet Usage Trends in Macao 2024*. Macao SAR: Macao Association for Internet Research; 2024

Macau Magazine. [Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau Launches e-Government to Care for Citizens throughout their Lives]. Macao, SAR: Macau Magazine; 2024. p. 158

Macau's Bureaucratic System: A Historical Perspective by J. P. Ostwald (2020)

Meneses, J.P. (2023). Special Report – “Macau is already a smart city”. *Macau Business*. <https://www.macaubusiness.com/special-report-macau-is-already-a-smart-city/>

Monteiro, A. (2009). Tourism market in Macau over the past ten years [in Chinese]. *Journal of Public Administration in Macau*, 84(2), 293-307.

Moody, A. (2008). "Macau English: status, functions and forms." *English Today*, 24(3), 3-15

Nambisan, S., Wright, M., & Feldman, M. (2019). The digital transformation of innovation and entrepreneurship: Progress, challenges and key themes. *Research Policy*, 48(8),

Office for Personal Data Protection. (n.d.). *About the GPDP*. Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region. Retrieved from <https://www.gpdp.gov.mo/>

Osborne, D., & Gaebler, T. (1992). *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Personal Data Protection Act, Law No. 8/2005, Macao Special Administrative Region (2005). <https://www.gpdp.gov.mo/>

Pessanha, L. (2007). Lucky lottery and investment enlargement in Macau [in Chinese]. *Journal of Public Administration in Macau*, 77, 699-729.

Pollitt, C. (2003). *The Essential Public Manager*. Open University Press

Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2011). *Public management reform: A comparative analysis - New public management, governance, and the neo-Weberian state* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2017). *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis - Into the Age of Austerity* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Promoting the integration of "Macao One Account" into the life of the elderly, 85% of Life Proof were issued electronically]. 2024. Available from: <https://www.gov.mo/zh-hant/news/1056626/>

San, P. L. P. (2016). Civil service training in the Macau Government. SHARPENING THE SWORD OF STATE, 141.

Santos, M. (2016). Macao's Economy: A Study of the Territory's Economic Dependence on Portugal. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 75(4), 1-15.

Scott, I. (2011). "The Public Sector in Hong Kong and Macau."C55

Scott, I., & Lam, N. M. K. (2011). *Gaming, Governance and Public Policy in Macao*. Hong Kong University Press.

Statistics and Census Service. (2023). *Macao in figures*. Macao, SAR: DSEC; 2023. "Household Survey on IT Usage 2023. Macao: Department of Statistics and Census Service; 2023".1 <https://www.dsec.gov.mo>

Statistics and Census Service. (2023). *Macao in figures*. Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region. <https://www.dsec.gov.mo>

Statistics and Census Service. (2025). *Macao in figures*. Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region. <https://www.dsec.gov.mo>

Tang WK. The reform on government public relations in the age of sensibility. [Public Administration in the 21st Century: "Opportunities and Challenges"International Symposium Paper]. Macau: University of Macau; 2016

Tiwana, A., Konsynski, B., & Bush, A. A. (2010). Research Commentary—Platform Evolution: Coevolution of Platform Architecture, Governance, and Environmental Dynamics. *Information Systems Research*, 21(4), 675–687. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1100.0323>

Wong, K. K., & Cheung, A. B. L. (2020). Bureaucratic Autonomy and Policy Making in Macau: A Study of the Policy-Making Process in Macau. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 29(122), 133- 148

Wong, Y. (2005). Continue to deepen and consolidate the executive-led political systems [in Chinese]. *Journal of Public Administration in Macau*, 69, 891-895.

Yan Haina (2011), "澳門公務員績效評估中的公民參與", 《行政》第二十四卷, 總第九十一期, 2011 No.1, 41—58. Retrieved from [https://www.safp.gov.mo/static/2023/09/16/WCM\\_009131.pdf](https://www.safp.gov.mo/static/2023/09/16/WCM_009131.pdf)

Zhan, Z. Y. (2005). Analysis and forecast of the current governance model of Macau special administrative region [in Chinese]. *Journal of Public Administration in Macau*, 69, 935-954.

Zhu, M. L. (2005). Promote the ethos of civil servants, build an efficient government. *Journal*

of Public Administration in Macau, 67, 101-113.

Zhu, W. G. (2009). A review of the public personnel system reform in Macau SAR over ten years after the handover [in Chinese]. *Journal of Public Administration in Macau*, 86, 833-842.

Zhuang, J. F. (2009). The content of the "Macau model" under "one country, two systems". *Journal of Public Administration in Macau*, 68, 777-806.