

Transformation of Macau policing: from a Portuguese colony to China's SAR

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Abstract This study examines policing in Macau and identifies major forces that have shaped its transformation over past decades. Prior to 1999, Macau was a Portuguese colony. Its criminal justice system inherited key features of the Continental system, including two independent law enforcement agencies: the Judiciary Police and the Public Security Police. In the colonial era, expatriate commanders drawn from the military or legal professions headed both departments, while the rank-and-file was composed mainly of local Chinese. This policing mechanism, together with the 'laissez-faire' policing philosophy adopted by colonial leaders, created segregation between policing agencies and the community. Citizens preferred minimal interaction with police, since they were skeptical about their professionalism, capability, and reliability. Macau became part of the Peoples' Republic of China in 1999. The de-monopolization of the gaming industries in 2002 brought huge GDP growth, but generated internal social conflict. Growing public demand for accountable governance motivated a series of governmental reforms, some of which have extended to policing. These reforms have improved the transparency of policing, but it remains to be seen if they will ultimately succeed in generating public trust in the police forces.

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of a transformation in policing as Macau shifted from Portuguese colonial rule to becoming a Special Administrative Region (SAR) governed by the People's Republic of China (PRC). Macau was originally a fishing village located in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province, Southern China. It is now a small city, with a permanent residential population of about half a million, known primarily for its gambling and tourism industries [27]. Macau was ruled by

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