

Book Chapter

Macau's Higher Education in the Past 20 Years

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Keywords

Macau; Higher Education; Education Policy; Sustainable Education; Education and Society

A Multi-Cultural Society

In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese settled in Macau, forming a uniquely multicultural environment by blending Eastern and Western cultures. Throughout the last 400 years, Macau has been a unique melting pot of East and West cultures, creating a distinctive multicultural environment that has lasted for over four centuries [1]. Traditional Chinese culture has communicated with, collided with, and merged with western culture in Macau for more than four centuries. For a considerable period of time, Macau was the only official window through which China was able to exchange foreign goods with other countries.

Throughout Portugal's rule over Macau, the Chinese have always constituted the largest portion of the population. The Chinese living in Macau generally speak a dialect of Chinese called Cantonese [2]. Although Portuguese was the official language of the Portuguese government in Macau at that time, it was mainly used in administrative management and judicial governance, as well as among the Portuguese minority in the city. In fact, in the streets and alleyways of Macau, the dominant language is still the Cantonese dialect. The Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China returned to the motherland on December 20, 1999, and in accordance with the Basic Law of the Macau SAR, the official languages of it are Portuguese and Chinese. As a result, Macau has developed the characteristic of having “three written languages and four spoken languages”, with English being a popular language, as opposed to Hong Kong SAR, which has “two written languages and three spoken languages”. There is no doubt that Portuguese has been used for centuries in Macau, yet the number of people who use Portuguese on a daily basis here is relatively small, and the scope of its use has always been limited. Despite the fact that Portuguese and Chinese are both commonly used as language barriers in public schools in Macau, the number of these schools is still very small [3]. The majority of private schools in Macau still use Chinese and English as the languages of instruction.

Early Period of Higher Education in Macau

In the middle of the 16th century, as Portugal's overseas trade expanded, Macau became a Portuguese settlement, and it gradually developed into an important hub for Sino-European exchanges and an important gateway for European culture into China. In 1594, the first western-style university in China, St. Paul's College, was established in Macau, a Catholic higher education institution established by the Jesuits [4] Portuguese and Chinese education is very important due to the needs for trade, missionary work, and non-governmental exchanges.

The Portuguese community in Macau has enjoyed a long history of promoting and educating its citizens, dating back to the establishment of the first Chinese-Portuguese school for Chinese children in Macau in 1797 by the Macau Council, and the establishment of *Colegio Imaculada Conceicao* in Macau in 1864, as well as a Chinese school founded in 1906 [5]. It is well known that Macau's history of higher education dates back to the University of East Asia, which was established in 1981 as its first university. Since the university was established more than forty years ago, it has gradually developed into a situation where numerous universities are simultaneously growing. They each cultivate talents with higher levels of education in culture, science, and technology, promoting cooperation and exchanges between Macau and other places in these fields.

Modern Period of Higher Education in Macau

Since Macau's return to China, it has achieved a number of world-renowned achievements in the areas of economics, culture, society, and education. The development of higher education in Macau is particularly noteworthy, considering the particular circumstances of its social and historical environment. A review and summarization of Macau's higher education over the past 20 years can assist in contributing to the sustainable development of the educational system in Macau, a multicultural society that has a rich cultural heritage. In 2003, the outbreak of SARS had greatly influenced the education in Macau, and twenty years later, at the end of 2022, Macau loosened the policy

of anti-epidemic measures after three years of suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic. In Macau, the higher education system has changed greatly in the past 20 years, and this period of rapid development that has been marked by the two global pandemics is worth highlighting.

As a result of the study of higher education in Macau, Pang et al. [6] have successfully overcome the difficulties of incomplete data collection and unsystematic document collection. They have successfully managed to integrate detailed and comprehensive data materials with professional academic concepts. The book is an attempt to explore the higher education sector in Macau in a new way. It is divided into five parts. It is a history of higher education in Macau that is recounted in the first part of the book by describing its development before and after it returned to China, while the second part examines the laws and policies that govern higher education in Macau. The third part discusses the scale, structure, and enrollment policies, while the fourth part describes the academic situation and international development. Last but not least, we conclude the last chapter by reviewing the achievements and experiences of Macau's higher education as well as the opportunities, challenges, and strategies for its sustainable development as seen through the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GGBA) perspective. There are three critical aspects of this book: The first feature of this research is to maintain a holistic, overall view of historical research, identify the development of Macau's higher education since its return, and provide a systematic review of the successful implementation of "one country, two systems" throughout the past 20 years in Macau since its return. In addition, it examines major issues related to higher education in Macau, including the size and structure of institutions of education, legal policies, enrollment systems, research and academic development, international development, and scientific research. For the formulation of future development strategies for Macau's higher education sector, it provides an effective decision-making basis. Furthermore, it proposes a number of development proposals in response to the overall development of Macau's society.

It is inevitable that Macau's higher education will become more open and inclusive as a bridge for China's opening up and exchanges. This is not just a requirement for Macau's long-term sustainable development, but it is also an embodiment of the GGBA concept itself. Despite Macau being one of the core cities of the GGBA, its higher education has achieved remarkable results since it returned to Mainland China. It is nevertheless significant to note, however, that Macau still has a significant gap in terms of higher education compared to Hong Kong and Guangdong. There are several reasons for this gap, including the endogenous restrictions imposed by the micro-society of Macau, as well as the limitations imposed by the historical development of ideas and systems. The development of the GGBA will not only further accentuate Macau's insufficiently competitive higher education system on a global scale, but it will also become an integral part of the higher education system in Macau over the long run. Meanwhile, the lack of land, the underdevelopment of the Higher Education Law, and the imbalance of quality and quantity are considered to be the chief problems of Macau's higher education. Macau should seize the opportunity of the construction of GGBA, maximize its advantages, focus on improving higher education quality to develop the regional education industry. Within the 23 years of Macau's return, ten universities have constructed a micro-higher education system with impressive achievements. However, behind the achievements lies a development dilemma that Macau has to deal with. The construction of GGBA is not only a rare opportunity, but also a substantial challenge for Macau's current higher education system. Clearly defining the deficiencies of Macau's higher education in terms of cooperation and competition in GGBA is necessary if Macau is to participate actively in the higher education undertakings in GGBA, as well as make the best use of the high-quality resources found in this Greater Bay Area.

It is apparent from the construction of the GGBA that it is imperative to continuously deepen the mutually beneficial cooperation between the three places, further establishing win-win regional cooperation that facilitates the coordinated development of the regional economy, and gives Hong Kong and

Macau a renewed sense of self-confidence. In order to achieve this goal, the construction of the GGBA will greatly contribute to the development of higher education in Macau in the long run.

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