



# A Short Comparative Study Las Vegas vs. Macau

**Jean A. Berlie**

Faculty of Liberal Arts, The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK), Hong Kong, China.

**How to cite this paper:** Jean A. Berlie. (2023) A Short Comparative Study Las Vegas vs. Macau. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 7(8), 1692-1696. DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2023.08.039

**Received:** July 24, 2023

**Accepted:** August 21, 2023

**Published:** September 15, 2023

\***Corresponding author:** Jean A. Berlie, Faculty of Liberal Arts, The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK), Hong Kong, China.

---

## Abstract

The long history of Macau is symbolically linked with the Portuguese-speaking world. MSAR is now part of the Belt and Road Initiative. For the future development of tourism in 2023—the new touristic orientation programmed by the government SAR. Las Vegas is considered as the gambling capital of the world. However, it's definitely the gambling center for the United States. Macau was a former number one casino city of the world between 1999 and 2018 and did attract many international visitors but it is in fact Asia's casino playground. Half of the visitors to Las Vegas come from the Western United States. The rest comes from abroad, mainly from Western Europe. Many visitors from Las Vegas come here for family reason or sightseeing. Gaming tables are essential and it is Macau's supremacy, not the slot machines. For its new touristic orientation Macau has to attract and follow the best of Hong Kong.

## Keywords

Casino Capitalism, Gambling tables, Portugal, Slot machines, Tourism

---

## 1. Introduction

The Portuguese extended the boundaries of their world until they encountered China. Despite the Portuguese defeat in 1521, the Ming Chinese fleet was impressed by the Portuguese canons and so asked them to stay in the coast to fight the pirates. Finally Macau became a Portuguese land and a trading port in 1557. It later was linked with Guangzhou harbour.

The long history of Macau is symbolically linked with the Portuguese-speaking world. MSAR is now part of the Belt and Road Initiative, the global Silk Road of China. For the future development of tourism in 2023—we have now a new orientation touristic programmed by the government of the Special Administrative Region. The central street San Ma Lou is an essential axis not far from the Temple of Mazu, the Goddess of the historical city of the Pearl River Delta.

Gambling in modern Macau leans more towards baccarat, hence higher stakes. You'll find more table games than slot machines overall in Macau. In Las Vegas, it's the opposite. Gambling leans more towards slot machines with few table games. The following Table 1 shows the supremacy of Macau over Las Vegas, but Las Vegas tourists prefer slot machine and stay more days.

In 2022, there were 5,605 gaming tables in Macao. The number of gaming tables in Macao increased gradually until 2019, but dropped considerably during the coronavirus pandemic.

History favored the Portuguese Territory for more than five hundred years. Developed commerce and gambling started in Macau in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it is an impressive long time. At present, "Macao is one of two Special Administrative Regions of the People's Republic of China and gambling is legal there"...Gaming industry was regenerated by Stanley Ho has become a large part of Macao's economy

(<https://www.acgcs.org/articles/the-history-and-development-of-casino-gaming-in-macau>).

Las Vegas has a large variety of games Blackjack, Craps, Roulette, Baccarat & mini baccarat, Poker, Pai gow

poker, Three Card Poker, Caribbean stud poker, Let It Ride, Pai gow, Casino War, Ultimate Texas Hold'em, Big Six wheel, Texas hold 'em, High Card Flush, and Deuces Wild Poker. However the total number of gaming tables in Las Vegas is ridiculous, 68 only. Note well that in Macau only MGM has 750 gaming tables (see Andrew W. Scott.19.12.2022. MGM allocated 750 tables and 1,700 slot machines for its new concession – IAG (asgam.com)).

In 2023, targeting the city's main tourism is a Government challenge for Macau, but in Las Vegas and Singapore the development of tourism is not a problem. The statistics of the visitors in Las Vegas show that 99% of them stay overnight, and in Macau it is only 50% of the visitors. Is it possible for Macau to improve these statistics? In fact Macau has 113 hotels with a total of 37,634 rooms, along with 47 budget motels with 1,513 rooms. That sounds pretty impressive until you compare with the 148,690 hotel rooms in Las Vegas, of which 'only' 93,359 are at hotel. Each hotel has an average of 2,000 to 3,000 rooms available

(<https://www.casino.org/blog/las-vegas-vs-macau-comparing-the-worlds-playgrounds/>).

Interestingly, almost everyone who travels to Las Vegas stays in a hotel, typically for a minimum of 2-3 nights, while in Macau, tourists tend to only visit for 1-2 days and only half of the visitors remain one night only.

In 2002, in a very short time with American and Australian Foreign Direct Investment, new casino licenses and many new Mainland visitors Macau was transformed into one of the world's most lucrative casino gaming and entertainment city (Lo., 2020, p. 35).

In 1986, Susan Strange (1923-1998) defined the Western financial system stimulating economic growth through the proliferation of casinos. For Strange, Casino Capitalism represents a system exposing the development of a financial system that has increasingly escaped the calming influences of democratic control: "Gamblers in the casino are almost beyond [...] the control of governments"

## 2. Macau Casino Capitalism

This study is inspired by Sonny Lo in 2020. How Casino Capitalism works in Macau? How the main gaming industry of Macau works and integrates the Special Administrative Region of China and its complex present political system initiated on December 20, 1999. It is really a synchronic global view including the Greater Bay Area and the Belt and Road Initiative. Policies exist and include civil society, interest groups, mass media and citizens and it is possible to say that Macau is due to a certain degree to personal rule (Lo., 2020, p. 74). The Macau government under the Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng did provide more subsidies and assistance packages to help Macau people and the small and medium enterprises. In the same period of time up to the present time, Macau's extraordinarily low rates of COVID-19 infections and no casualty is related to the competent leadership of the government and also the public's high compliance to mandatory health measures. This success has to be advertised as did Sonny Lo under the name "social welfarism" with the urban fabric and political economy of the city's casino capitalism which endowed the government with surplus funds and an infrastructure that enable the implementation of an array of strict measures that few other regions of the world could afford to subsidize (Lou, 2021). It is interesting to compare Las Vegas as America's Macau and Macau as China's Las Vegas.

Although gaming was illegal in 1864 as Nevada joined the Union, it was legalized later in 1869. Progressive political groups succeeded in seeking a ban on gambling in October 1910, but this was relaxed later in the 1920s; and in 1931, casinos were legalized to stimulate the economy, increase tax revenues and even reduce criminal activities.

The eldest daughter—and successor of the gambling tycoon Stanley Ho (1921-2020) after winning a monopoly license in 1961 from Portugal (1921–2020)—Ms Pansy Ho is well established in both Casino cities in America and Asia. She is the main chairwoman of STDM who in 2023 with new government auction will control many casino licenses. Giant multinational casino corporations and their gaming operations in both Macau and Las Vegas can be seen as the cultural expression of neoliberalism, the institutional and spatial changes. While Macau combines the Portuguese culture with the Chinese tradition of favoring gambling, Las Vegas was historically a place for transit for many peoples. Macau and Las Vegas are undergoing a process of fluctuation and casino liberalization. Macau has undergone a process of casino liberalization since 2002, when franchises were internationalized. Both Macau and Las Vegas are geographically and strategically located (Luke, 2010, p. 195; Lo., 2020, p. 2).

Between 2004 and 2014, operating a casino in Macau was a lucrative industry. In 2022 a small recovery is expected. Casino industry includes around 40 casinos in Macau and more than 140 in Las Vegas. Macau's MGM managing director Ms Pansy Catalina Ho Chiu-King, eldest daughter and successor of Stanley Ho, is the chairwoman of one of Macau's big conglomerates MGM Macau on the peninsula and MGM Cotai on the Cotai Strip. Pansy Ho's China Holdings will have a new MGM license planned in 2023 for ten years. She also runs other hotel ca-

sinos in Las Vegas. Ms Pansy Ho is also the managing director of Shun Tak Holdings and Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau (STDM) which controls under the government leadership Macau's license system. Only six companies—SJM, Melco, Galaxy Entertainment, Wynn Macau, Sands China and MGM China—are licensed to run casinos in Macau. Each purchased a “concession,” auctioned by the government, permitting them to open gaming. In these six concessions were renewed in 2022-2023. In the prestigious family Ho no one is as able as the chairwoman Pansy to take control; she would best serve the empire and this will benefit to all in the family. Politics and society relations in Macau and Hong Kong are an important point is Macau's five hundred years of history starting in the Ming Dynasty with Portuguese influence.

This internationalization is also reflected in the number of daily papers in Macau 3 Portuguese dailies compared to 13 in Chinese and two in English. In comparison, before 2020 in Hong Kong, the number of dailies was respectively around 14 in Chinese and seven in English. In 2023 in HK, there are more than one hundred newspapers including on line papers. At present, the Macau version of “one country, two systems” is increasingly a model for Hong Kong.

When the British made concessions, as they did in the Sino-British negotiations, they tried to ensure that the people of Hong Kong would have concrete guarantees from the PRC authorities after 1 July 1997. Hence, the British colonial authorities, unlike their Portuguese counterparts, did not adopt the principle of appeasement (Lo., 2020, p. 202).

On 27 July 1970, when the former Prime Minister Antonio de Oliveira Salazar died Beijing government was very respectful with Portugal; this sort of recognition was never given by the PRC to a British leader. The Hong Kong SAR Government has basically followed Haddon-Cave's governing philosophy since 1 July 1997. The first chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa (1997–2005), maintained Haddon-Cave's noninterventionist aspects in the protection of the rule of law, property rights, open markets, low taxes and free trade. It also intervened in the adoption of educational reforms and the provision of more housing units for the needy. However, with the onset of the Asian financial crisis in 1997–1998, the Tung government abandoned the plan until June 2000. One major difference between Macau and Hong Kong is the relatively weak local identity of the former versus the comparatively strong local identity of the latter. Hong Kong has traditionally prided itself as a monetary and financial center where the free market economy, the rule of law and an international city flourish. Macau was backwater in developmental strategies. In fact, as argued in this book, Macau did and does have a governing philosophy combining casino capitalism with social welfarism, which has become increasingly prominent since the internationalization of the casino industry in 2002 (Lo., 2020, pp. 210-211). Macau has a larger bureaucracy in terms of its proportion to the population the ratio of civil servants to the total population is 1:20. Hong Kong however has a ratio of civil servants to the total population is roughly 1:38, but has a lot of public corporations and statutory bodies, like the “Hospital Authority, Housing Authority and Airport Authority”, which have a large staff. These public corporations and statutory functions help the government to perform various functions. The degree of public satisfaction with the performance of Macau is high.

Only six companies—SJM, Melco, Galaxy Entertainment, Wynn Macau, Sands China and MGM China—are licensed to run casinos auctioned by the government, permitting them to open gaming rooms. The city's six incumbent casino operators were awarded licenses that run from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2033.

Sonny Lo believes that Macau's Chinese are utilitarian, family-centered, materialistic, pragmatic and politically opportunistic (Lo., 2020, p. 262). Beijing's role in Macau's casino capitalism is multidimensional, complicated, contradictory, functional and political. Its intervention in Macau's casino capitalism is merely a matter of degree. Beijing's most prominent role is to confer legitimacy upon Macau's politico-administrative state during the entire process of rapidly developing casino capitalism.

In 2008, the chief executive of the Macau SAR proposed a Wealth Partaking Scheme (WPS) to share the achievements of economic development with residents. The relative present decline of Macau's economic performance in 2020, means that the WPS would continue in the long run as a sustained social welfare policy.

The Casino Capitalism considers very seriously the integration of Macau with the Greater Bay Area (GBA) which was developed on 23 October 2018 with the inauguration of the symbolic Mega Bridge-Zhuhai-Macau by Xi Jinping and the Chiefs Executives of Macau (Fernando Chui) and Hong Kong (Carrie Lam).

To show the importance of Guangdong Province in 2012 Cantonese identity is important among the Chinese of Macau: 20% of hundred households interviewed in Macau declared to be simply Chinese and around 50% of the identity of these interviewees was “Chinese of Macau”. To most Chinese in Macau, the GBA represents a further

socio-economic integration of Macau's Casino Capitalism and the Mainland (Lo., 2020, pp. 155, 192, 198; Berlie, 2012).

Macau casino revenue jumps by 1,054% in April 2023 and this is the third straight month with Macao Operators experiencing year-over-year revenue increases.

### 3. The Key Question: Las Vegas and Macau Main Differences

Las Vegas is considered as the gambling capital of the world. However, it's definitely the gambling center for the United States. Macau was a former number one casino city of the world between 1999 and 2018 and did attract many international visitors but it is in fact Asia's casino playground.

49 percent of visitors to Las Vegas come from the Western United States. The rest comes from abroad, mainly from Western Europe. Many visitors from Las Vegas come here for family reason or sightseeing.

Gaming tables are essential and it is Macau's supremacy, not the slot machines, giving the number of gaming tables year by year for Macau between 2012 and 2022 (see the following Table 1).

**Table 1. Number of gaming tables in casinos in Macao 2012-2022**

5,485	5,750	5,711	5,957	6,287	6,419	6,588	6,739	6,080	6,198	5,605
(2012)	(2013)	(2014)	(2015)	(2016)	(2017)	(2018)	(2019)	(2020)	(2021)	(2022)

See Zhang Wenyi. Statista gaming tables in Casinos in Macao, 18.6.2023.

In 2022 Macau generates 5.3 billion USD in gross revenue but it is followed by a period of decline for Macau which now wants to become a more touristic city. Unfortunately, there are few hotels in the MSAR Special Administrative Region of China. Alongside with China's economic rise and the development of a rich Chinese upper class, Macau's gaming and gambling industry has seen an enormous boom between 2010 and 2018.

Las Vegas is 2023 America's largest gambling market. However, revenues from gambling tables in Macau are roughly six times higher than in Las Vegas, but the American gaming city generates huge tourism revenue from its hotels. Macau has only 113 hotels and some 38,000 rooms compared to Las Vegas with more than 148,690 hotel rooms.

In 2022 Macau has still 30 casinos. One of the best known is called MGM under Pansy Ho who is heiress of Stanley Ho the King of the Casinos of Macau and undisputed master of the modernity of Macau's casino industry.

"According to estimates, more than 70% of the Macao Special Administrative Region's total fiscal revenue in 2009 came from gambling taxes". Macao has recently become the greatest casino city in the world before 2022.

With around 200,000 slot machines Las Vegas in 2022 is the number one Casino city of the world. However, despite being much larger in number, slot machines made significantly smaller revenue than gaming tables at just 0.4 billion U.S. dollars.

The majority of the tourists coming to Macau are from China and Hong Kong. Tourism to Macau is already a big business. The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) announced 35.8 million stopover and day tourists visited Macau in 2018, an increase of 9.8 percent over 2017. On average, 98,092 visitors arrived in Macau in 2017; 3.56 million visitors arrived in one month. Macau's Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) has revealed the SAR total of 5.7 million visitor arrivals in 2022, down 26 percent year-on-year due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This number of tourists will increase in 2023 and could reach 30 million in one year.

In 2022, 38.8 million visited the city of Las Vegas and this number can be reached in 2024 in Macau too. So Macau statistics of the Casinos will possibly increase in 2023 and 2024 and reach revenue of 6 billion USD in 2024.

Starting in 2023, the coming new importance of tourism in Macau will be crucial for its economy and development. This new development of Macau has to take care of its historical synarchy, an interesting study of Fairbank Macau Portuguese history with its integration of the past which is actualized and an attracting concept taking care of the long history of Macau and its integration with the world and Asia during the long presence of the Portuguese in China. Fairbank, the "underdone liberal," consistently held to his belief in universal, legal, and democratic modernization assessed by Western standards, yet continued to insist that 'the Chinese side of the story had to be examined'.

## 4. Conclusion

Numerous projects will restart the economy of Macau in particular the idea to promote tourism as an important new way to improve the Casino economy of Macau in 2023. The Macau government will certainly continue to put forth “efforts to improve the quality and standard of gaming project development, strengthen gaming industry regulation, and express grave concern about the various social problems caused by gaming liberalization in order to promote healthy and sustainable growth in the gaming industry”. Shortly, the new goal in 2023 is to transform Macau into an important tourist destination.

## References

- ACGCS. The History and Development of Casino Gaming in Macau.  
<https://www.acgcs.org/articles/the-history-and-development-of-casino-gaming-in-macau>.
- Berlie Jean A. (2012). The Chinese of Macau. A Decade after the handover.
- Chan Chi, Li Wai Lim, & Leung Eugene. (2016). The History of Gambling in Hong Kong and Macao.  
10.1007/978-981-10-1068-2\_1.
- Fairbank, John K. (1957). Article called ‘Synarchy under the treaties’. University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson C. (1999). “The developmental state: odyssey of a concept”, in Woo-Cummings, M. (ed.), *The Developmental State*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Las Vegas-Macau: <https://www.casino.org/blog/las-vegas-vs-macau-comparing-the-worlds-playgrounds/>.
- Lio H.L.M. and Rody R. (2009). “The emotional impact of casino servicescape”, *UNLV Gaming Research and Review Journal*, Vol. 13 No. 2, 17-25.
- Lo S. (2020). *Casino Capitalism, Society and Politics in China’s Macao*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Lou L. (2021). “Casino capitalism in the era of COVID-19: examining Macau’s pandemic response”, *Social Transformations in Chinese Societies*, ISSN: 1871-2673, March 26.
- Luke, T. W. (2010). “Gaming space: casinopolitan globalism from Las Vegas to Macau”, *Globalizations*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 395-405, September.
- Macau versus Las Vegas. (2019). “Las Vegas vs. Macau: which is the capital of casino gambling?”. *Business Matters*, May 16.
- Porter Jonathan. (2019). *Macau the Imaginary City. Culture and Society, 1557 to the Present*. Routledge.
- Schult, S. (2020), “Macau gaming revenues plunges 97% in April”, May 4.
- Scott Andrew W.19.12.2022. in Macau, MGM allocated 750 tables and 1,700 slot machines for new concession – IAG ([asgam.com](http://asgam.com)).
- Strange S. (1923-1998). *Casino Capitalism*. 1986 rep1997.
- Zhang Wenyi. (2023). Number of gaming tables in casinos in Macao 2012-2022.