

“One Country, Two Systems” and the Realization of the Complete Reunification of China: A Synthesis of Narrative Reviews

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Abstract

This study is a review of the paper on “one country, two systems”. First, this analysis considers “one country, two systems” as a policy, but not a traditional national-level policy. This policy works as a governance policy. Second, Beijing also regards one country, two systems as a long-term and stable strategy. Objectively, the implementation of “one country, two systems” in Hong Kong and Macau has expanded a new theoretical and practical field for the original political and economic structure of China. Of course, it is the high degree of autonomy and strong self-healing capacity of “one country, two systems” that makes it the best policy tool to the Realization of the Complete Reunification of China.

Keywords

“One Country, Two Systems”, the Complete Reunification of China, National Governance, “Hongkong, Macau and Taiwan”

1. Introduction

Beijing proposed “one country, two systems” (OCTS) to solve the Taiwan issue, but OCTS was first used to solve the Hong Kong and Macau issues. The reunification of Hong Kong and Macau with China 2000 years previously was a concrete attempt of OCTS in the process of the Complete Reunification of China. The proposal of OCTS is a national governance framework and constitutional power distribution arrangement made by Beijing based on the real situation, which not only expands the theoretical and practical space of OCTS in the traditional Chinese national governance system, but also provides a new solution for international governance. Of course, the practice of OCTS in Hong

Kong and Macau must be optimized and adjusted according to the development of Hong Kong and Macau societies. In terms of concrete practice, OCTS not only provides sustainable and strong impetus for the return of Hong Kong and Macao in the process of national reunification, but also for the development of Hong Kong and Macao after the return. The implementation of OCTS in Hong Kong and Macao provides realistic experience for the implementation of the OCTS solution for Taiwan. This study is conducted as a Literature Review in order to systematically review and sort out the theories and practices related to OCTS in order to provide some reference for the OCTS Taiwan proposal.

Although the scope of this literature review is based on the journals included in CNKI¹, to increase academic authority, the articles in this literature review also cover non-mainland Chinese journals as well as English journals.

2. “One Country, Two Systems” as the Cornerstone for Achieving the Realization of the Complete Reunification of China

In order to realize Beijing’s so-called “the Realization of the Complete Reunification of China”, it cannot be a castle in the air, but must have a certain foundation. And here OCTS can provide very strong support for Beijing’s insistence on the Complete Reunification of China at the “ideological-theoretical” and “practical-legal” levels.

On the one hand, OCTS provides a strong theoretical source for China to achieve complete reunification. Not only is OCTS part of constitutional theory hotly debated by constitutional scholars (Luo & Chen, 1988; Wang, 1990; Wang, 2000; Yang, 2010; Wang, 2016; Zou, 2013), it also provides space for theoretical discussions in other disciplines (Li & Yao, 2020; Zhang & Chen, 2009; Ren, 2022) and expands the scope of OCTS, expanding the theoretical outreach of it.

In essentially, OCTS is primarily a discussion about the distribution and application of the state’s constitutional power system, which belongs to the realm of political science and constitutional law. For the academic community in mainland China in particular, the discussion on one country, two systems have opened up a very broad theoretical space for the discussion of traditional constitutionalism.

For a long time, political science in mainland China has focused on the discussion of the logic of the operation of the state under Marxist thought, and constitutional law has been a discussion of state power mainly also under the logic of Marxist thought. With the return of Hong Kong and Macao, the theoretical study of OCTS has also sprung up (as shown in **Figure 1**).

In addition, taking the research in the field of administration as an example, the academic discussion has not only discussed the administrative structure of

¹CNKI is the most widely used database in mainland China with the largest.

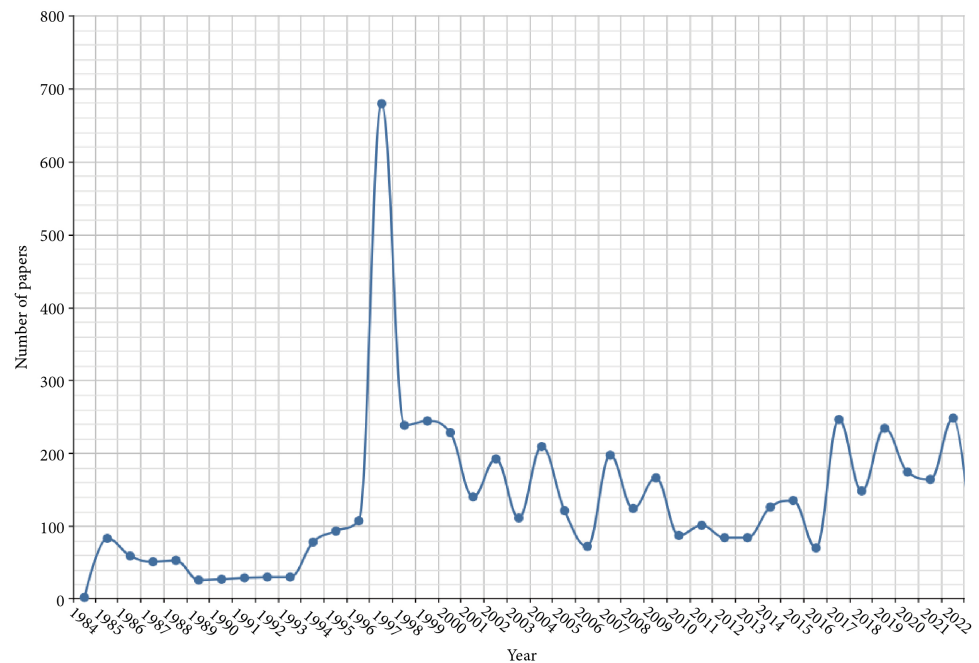


Figure 1. Year Distribution of OCTS Research in CNKI.

the SAR government within Macau or Hong Kong S.A.R. (Chen & Li, 1999; Zhuang, 1988), but more recently, the discussion has taken the integration and common development as the starting point to discuss the interface between the administrative systems of Hong Kong and Macau and the new development reached through the institutional interaction (Zhong & Hu, 2017; Mao & Yang, 2019). In other words, it has evolved from a purely administrative issue to a question of “how to bring into play the inherent dividends of administration” (Dai & Peng, 2013). Even the large number of people moving between Guangdong and Hong Kong and Macao has led to discussions on sociological and anthropological issues (Wang, 2020b; Yan, 2020).

On the other hand, the successful implementation of OCTS in Hong Kong and Macao has provided a vivid and realistic experience and foundation for the realization of the complete reunification of China.

OCTS is an institutional innovation. From the introduction of the concept of OCTS to the establishment of the Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions, and then to the development of the compatibility of one country, two systems and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, it is a process that has been accumulated over time. It is well known that there is bound to be a considerable period of time from the birth of a political idea to its institutionalization, and this journey is an ephemeral process rather than a linear occurrence (Guo & Wen, 2021). Therefore, how to make OCTS more legitimate in the process of complete national reunification of China?

One of the most important ways to strengthen the legitimacy of OCTS in the process of national unification is to use the smooth functioning of OCTS in Hong Kong and Macau. Based on this logic, it can be deduced that Beijing is bound to

support the development of OCTS in the Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions before the complete reunification of the China. Of course, this support is more a reflection of the fact that the Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions will continue to receive policy dividends from Beijing that are different and more supportive than those from the Chinese mainland.

Through the above two dimensions of discussion, we can understand why OCTS can be the basis for “the Realization of the Complete Reunification of China” at both theoretical and practical levels. However, OCTS has always been born out of China’s unique political and economic environment (Zhang, 2019; Zou, 2009). And China’s own political and economic environment has certain peculiarities. To further understand OCTS as the basis of “national unification”, it is necessary to analyze OCTS in the context of the political and economic environment with Chinese characteristics.

2.1. Long-Term and Stability: Beijing Regards “One Country, Two Systems” as a Strategic Plan

Beijing has long been considering OCTS as a strategic plan. Since it is a strategic plan, this means that the implementation of OCTS must be long-term and stable. By “long-term” here, Beijing sees OCTS as a long-term policy tool that is being or will be used in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Before the return of Hong Kong and Macau to China, Beijing’s leaders promised that “Horse races go on, the stocks will be traded and night clubs stay open”², and this was also stipulated in the Basic Laws of Hong Kong and Macau after the return:

The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China

Article 5 The socialist system and policies shall not be practiced in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years.

The Basic Law of the Macao Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China

Article 5 The socialist system and policies shall not be practiced in the Macao Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years.

From the perspective of the development of Hong Kong and Macau after the handover, OCTS as a policy tool must also be a long-term requirement. From the perspective of development, OCTS can bring a huge policy dividend, which can support the development of Hong Kong and Macau in a longer period of time. For Beijing, the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong and Macau after their smooth reunification is not only a matter of Beijing’s “Face-International

²Deng Xiaoping explained to Margaret Thatcher the idea of “one country, two systems” with a very graphic analogy that after Hong Kong’s return to China, “horse races go on, the stocks will be traded and night clubs stay open”.

reputation”, but also a matter of Taiwan’s perception of OCTS. Therefore, it also extends that OCTS must also have “Stability” in the process of implementation.

Based on the requirements of long-term and stability, we believe that the “50 years of no change” mentioned above in the Basic Law of Hong Kong and Macau is more of a political terminology. In reality, “one country, two systems” will certainly continue to be implemented. At least it is a different system of social operation from the one in China (Tian, 2018; Kang, 2018; Tian, 1997). Therefore, OCTS is used as a strategic plan for Beijing based on the long-term nature of the political tool and the stability of the development of policy dividends. As shown **Figure 2**, we compare the policies on local autonomy that are being implemented or will be implemented in China in terms of the degree of autonomy.

2.2. More Autonomy: “One Country, Two Systems” as an Institutional Guarantee Arrangement for the Realization of the Complete Reunification of China

From the perspective of distribution of power, the implementation of OCTS and OCTS in Hong Kong and Macao is based on the logic of “Delegation of Power” (Wang, 2012; Chen, 2017). It is undeniable that Hong Kong and Macau would be in violation of the original meaning of “One country” in OCTS if they were under the “Logic of Power-sharing”.

On the one hand, as an important node in the national governance system, the Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions, as the local government of the People’s Republic of China, the government of Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions is given the greatest degree of autonomy. For example, powers other than military and diplomatic, such as finance and setting currency (Guo & Chen, 2010; Zeng, 2002; Deng & Du 2018). At the same time, Beijing has also promised greater autonomy in the OCTS Taiwan solution to the Taiwan issue left over from the Chinese civil war, such as the promise to retain part of the military (Lin, 2001; Lu et al., 2011).

On the other hand, for the Chinese administrative system, the Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions, as local governments of the People’s Republic of China, are at the same administrative level as other local governments. The granting of autonomy by the central government at the provincial administrative level is not unique to the OCTS model of Hong Kong and Macau. In the Chinese administrative system, “regional ethnic autonomy” is also

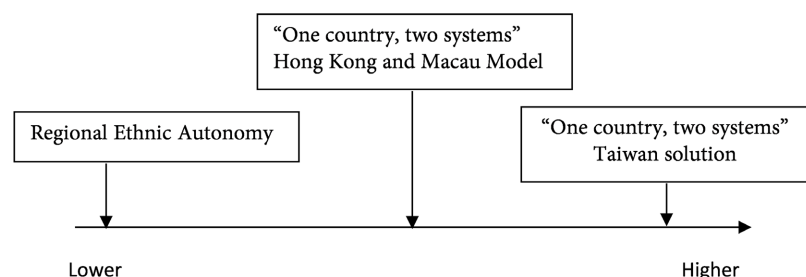


Figure 2. Comparison of high and low levels of autonomy.

a practical way of granting autonomy to local governments (Zhou, 2005; Wang, 2014).

The “Regional Ethnic Autonomy” is a political management system for ethnic minority regions in mainland China. The purpose of this system is to maintain social stability in minority regions, while taking into account the special historical, cultural and economic circumstances of minority regions. The core idea of the “regional ethnic autonomy” system is to give representatives of ethnic minority regions more autonomy and decision-making power in order to promote the development of ethnic minority regions. The OCTS is the political administration system of mainland China over Hong Kong and Macau. The purpose of this system is to ensure a high degree of autonomy for Hong Kong and Macau while maintaining the unity of China as a whole. The core idea of the OCTS system is to implement the political system of “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong and Macau people ruling Macau” in Hong Kong and Macau, while also taking into account the special historical, economic and cultural environment of Hong Kong and Macau (Mou, 1999).

Therefore, the main difference between the “Regional Ethnic Autonomy” and the OCTS is that the former is a political system for the ethnic minority regions in mainland China, while the latter is a political system for Hong Kong and Macau. In short, there are obvious differences between the two in terms of purpose, social system, rights, and scope, as shown in Table 1 below.

Both the OCTS solution for Taiwan and the OCTS model for Hong Kong and Macau are political arrangements proposed by the Chinese government to address the status of these regions vis-à-vis the mainland. However, there are some critical differences between the two propositions. Specifically, the OCTS solution for Taiwan is an idea proposed by the Beijing to solve the problem of reunification of Taiwan with the Chinese mainland. Under this solution, Taiwan would be granted a high degree of autonomy and would be able to maintain its own political, economic and cultural systems (Wang, 2020a; Lin & Bai, 2019; Liu, 2019).

On the other hand, the OCTS model for Hong Kong and Macau is a model

Table 1. Comparison between the system of regional ethnic autonomy and the system of “one country, two systems”.

	Regional Ethnic Autonomy	“One Country, Two Systems”
Purpose	To solve the ethnic problem and maintain social stability	To solve the unification problem left over from history and realize the unification of the motherland
Social System	Socialist system	Capitalist system
Rights	To have autonomy as provided by the Constitution, regional national autonomy and other law	High degree of autonomy except for foreign affairs and national defense
Scope	Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi and other ethnic minority concentrations	Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan

that has been implemented and is being implemented today. Under this model, Hong Kong and Macau are considered part of China, but are granted a high degree of autonomy, with their own legal and economic systems and political structures independent of the mainland. The OCTS model for Hong Kong and Macau has been in place since the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997 and the transfer of sovereignty over Macau to China in 1999, respectively.

Whether it is the regional ethnic autonomy mentioned earlier or the OCTS Hong Kong and Macau model or the OCTS Taiwan solution, all are institutional guarantees for Beijing to achieve national unification. It is just that the three have made different institutional arrangements for different practical needs. The main difference between the three is the degree of autonomy.

2.3. Endogeneity and Externalities: “One Country, Two Systems” Provides a Strong and Continuous Impetus for Regional Development

The discussion on OCTS and “regional development” is an extension of a discussion in the field of so-called OCTS, which was originally based on the main dimension of political science and constitutional law, to other social sciences (Qin, 2019; Liang & Wang, 2019). And “regional development” can be discussed from the perspectives of economics, political science, human geography, etc. Regardless of the perspective from which the relationship between OCTS and “regional development” is discussed, it can be discussed in a hierarchical manner in terms of the endogeneity and externality of the relationship.

From the perspective of endogeneity, OCTS will generate endogenous dynamics to drive regional development. Specifically, OCTS will bring about institutional differences between the two systems, which will not form a gulf because of the differences in the operation of the two societies, but rather bring about complementary advantages in the system. In short, the “institutional differences” brings the driving force of regional development. Of course, some people question whether such endogenous dynamics are sustainable, and whether the development drive brought about by institutional differences can be sustained. We believe that with the development of the regional economy, such a drive-in certain industry will inevitably reduce the intensity. However, as long as there is a system difference, there is bound to be information differences, and “information Lag” will certainly bring such a development drive.

Take Shenzhen and Hong Kong as an example, Hong Kong as a special administrative region under OCTS, its financial services industry is in its absolute pillar of industry. As an important node of global economy and trade, Hong Kong is on par with New York and London. When Shenzhen and Hong Kong are driven by the difference in systems, and at the same time, Shenzhen is driven by the economic “spillover effect” of Hong Kong and the “front factory and back store” model (Luo & Shen, 2010), Shenzhen’s GDP surpassed that of Hong Kong in 2019 (Lin, 2019). In other words, Hong Kong’s absolute advantage over Shenzhen in financial services diminishes. Despite the weakening of Hong Kong’s ab-

absolute advantage in financial services, for Shenzhen, the two places are in different social systems, and the two places will always have different administrative mechanisms such as financial laws, financial regulation, and business administration, and still have considerable advantages. And as an important node in the economic system of South China, Shenzhen's economic radiation to South China and the whole country is huge. Although the city's GDP has surpassed that of Hong Kong, it is still not as well recognized as Hong Kong in the global financial industry.

When we refer to externalities, we mean the external driving force of OCTS on "regional development". Of course, the externalities here are relative to the internal aspects of OCTS. The external drivers include the needs of the central government in Beijing for regional economic planning strategies and the needs of domestic and international industrial chains. In short, OCTS has a positive correlation to the relevant regional development (Huang, 2008; Li, 2018).

Of course, the relationship between institutions and economic development has long been proven to have a causal relationship. The relationship between institutions and the economy is a close one. Institutions are the rules, systems and practices in social, political and economic systems that determine the manner and scale of economic activity. Economic institutions have a significant impact on economic growth and prosperity. They determine the way resources are allocated and how the benefits are distributed. Fair and transparent institutions help promote economic growth and prosperity, while unfair and non-transparent institutions can lead to economic stagnation and corruption. At the same time, economic activity can influence institutions. Economic growth and prosperity can promote political and social stability, while also driving reforms and institutional change. For example, rapid economic growth can promote the formation of democratic institutions, while economic decline and instability can lead to political unrest and institutional instability.

"Institutions, Infrastructure, and Economic Growth" by Daron Acemoglu and Verdier (2000). This paper argues that institutions play a crucial role in determining the level of economic development and that the quality of institutions is a key determinant of economic growth. "The Role of Institutions in Growth and Development" by Dani Rodrik (2000). This paper provides empirical evidence that institutions play a key role in promoting investment and economic growth. "Institutions and Economic Performance: Cross-Country Tests Using Alternative Institutional Measures" by Stephen Knack and Philip Keefer (1997). This paper provides evidence that institutions are a significant determinant of economic performance and that countries with better institutions tend to have higher levels of economic growth. "Institutions and Development: A View from below" by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson (2006). This paper argues that institutions that protect property rights and provide secure markets are crucial for economic development and growth, while those that do not are likely to lead to poverty and underdevelopment.

Thus, the relationship between institutions and the economy is mutually influential and interdependent. To promote economic growth and prosperity, governments and political institutions need to develop and maintain fair, transparent, and effective institutions; at the same time, economic prosperity and growth need to be supported by healthy, stable, and just institutions.

3. Optimization of “One Country, Two Systems”: Amendment and Interpretation of the Basic Laws of Hong Kong and Macau

We consider that the Basic Law of Hong Kong and Macao is the institutional guarantee of one country, two systems, and the self-optimization of OCTS is being reflected in the dimension of the amendment of the Basic Law of Hong Kong and Macao and the interpretation of the Basic Law of Hong Kong and Macao.

The law revision process in the Macao Special Administrative Region and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is similar in many respects, but there are some differences.

In both Macau and Hong Kong, the process of amending laws begins with the government proposing changes to existing laws. These proposals then go through a series of stages, including consultation with relevant stakeholders, review by the Legislative Council, and approval by the Chief Executive. However, there are some differences in the specifics of the process in the two S.A.R.s. For example, in Macau, the power to propose changes to laws rests primarily with the government, whereas in Hong Kong, both the government and individual members of the Legislative Council have the power to propose changes. In addition, the Legislative Council in Macau has less power to review and amend laws than the Legislative Council in Hong Kong, which has more power to review and propose amendments to laws. Another difference is that in Hong Kong, the process of amending laws is subject to review by the judiciary, which can declare laws deemed unconstitutional null and void. This is not the case in Macau, where the power to interpret the constitution and decide on the constitutionality of laws is in the hands of the central government in Beijing.

In sum, while the law revision process in the Macao Special Administrative Region and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is similar in many respects, there are some differences in the specific details of the process, including the powers of the Legislative Council, the role of the judiciary, and the power to propose amendments to laws.

The procedures for the interpretation of the Basic Laws of Hong Kong and Macau by the Chinese Central Government are set out in the Basic Law itself. According to the Basic Law, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress has the power to interpret the Basic Law.

The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress's procedures for interpreting the Basic Law are as follows:

Request for interpretation. The government of Hong Kong or Macau, the Chief Executive, or one-third of the members of the Legislative Council of either S.A.R. may make a request for interpretation. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress decision. The National People's Congress Standing Committee will then consider the request and make a decision on whether to interpret the Basic Law. The decision will be binding on the Hong Kong or Macau government and the courts of the S.A.R. Implementation. After the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress makes the interpretation, it will inform the Hong Kong or Macau government and the courts, and implement it immediately.

It should be noted that the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress's power to interpret the Basic Law has caused controversy in both Hong Kong and Macau, as some believe it undermines the S.A.R.'s autonomy and judicial independence. In summary, the process of interpretation of the Basic Laws of Hong Kong and Macau by the Chinese Central Government includes a request for interpretation, a decision by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and the implementation of the interpretation.

In conclusion, judging from the implementation of the "one country, two systems" mechanism by the Hong Kong and Macao Special Administrative Regions, "one country, two systems" has institutional vitality (Chen, 2007; Zhao, 2007). And, are institutionally resilient. This is all a clear manifestation of the self-optimization of "one country, two systems".

4. Discussion: "One country, two systems" Is the Best Way to Solve the Taiwan Issue?

In the process of China's complete national reunification, Hong Kong and Macau were successfully returned to China in 1997 and 1999 respectively. The Taiwan issue is difficult to solve because of its special and complex situation. However, if we work hard on it, it will be made one day. When it comes to how to solve the Taiwan issue, the OCTS Taiwan solution undoubtedly provides us with the best solution approach.

First, it is in the common interests of compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Chinese mainland and Taiwan, as the two parties to solve the Taiwan issue, must take into account the greatest well-being of compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. The OCTS Taiwan solution can retain the existing social system and social welfare in Taiwan to the greatest extent possible, and can provide better development opportunities for compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait with the "Institutional Lag".

Second, the OCTS Taiwan Solution is peaceful, just, and in the regional and international interest. The implementation of the OCTS Taiwan solution must be carried out in a peaceful social atmosphere. If China's national reunification process is completed in a non-peaceful manner, it will definitely threaten the interests of the region and other countries. This is one of the justifications for the

OCTS Taiwan solution.

Once again, through the practice of Hong Kong and Macau, the fact of social development in Hong Kong and Macau also proves that OCTS can be successfully practiced. Not to mention the greater degree of autonomy of the Taiwan solution.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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