

Analysis of the Development and Influence of Constitutional Monarchy in Britain and France

Siheng Cai^{1,a,*}

¹*Basis International School, Guangzhou, 510663, China*

a. Henrycai15016@gmail.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: In the contemporary, the British monarchy stands as a steadfast symbol of tradition and continuity, juxtaposed against the prevailing dominance of French republican ideals, which champion the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. This article embarks on an exploration of how historical events have left an indelible mark on present-day national political systems, employing a comparative analysis of the British and French constitutional monarchies. It meticulously scrutinizes the divergent paths these two nations have taken within the realm of constitutional monarchy. The analysis underscores that Britain's evolution has been characterized by a gradual and stable transformation, culminating in the establishment of a ceremonial monarchy. In contrast, France's journey has been tumultuous, marked by revolutionary fervor and a transition between monarchy and republic. The study sheds light on the pivotal influence of radical factions and the multifaceted challenges encountered by countries on their quest for constitutional governance. Moreover, it delves into the contemporary roles of monarchs in political systems, the place occupied by royal families in society, and their significant role in shaping national identity.

Keywords: constitutional monarchy, British monarchy, French revolution, historical development, political systems

1. Introduction

A constitutional monarchy is a form of government in which the monarch's authority is restrained by a constitution and governed by the principles of the rule of law. Throughout history, different nations have exhibited notable variations in their implementation of this system. Contemporary European constitutional monarchies and republics share their origins in the transition from medieval monarchy [1]. While both Britain and France have traversed the path of constitutional monarchy development, distinct disparities characterize their respective journeys. To comprehend these distinctions, this article undertakes a historical examination through a comparative lens. It aims to provide a profound insight into the roles played by monarchies within their respective political frameworks and to dissect the impact of historical events on their unique trajectories. Delving into the modern evolution of British and French constitutional monarchies also invites a more profound examination of the monarchy's functions, the place of the royal family in society, and their contributions to the formation of national identity. Furthermore, this article intends to unveil the enduring influence of constitutional monarchy on the political landscapes of both nations.

2. The Birth and Development of the British Constitutional Monarchy

The British constitutional monarchy's emergence and evolution exemplify a significant shift in political authority from absolute rule to a system based on constitutional principles and the rule of law. This transformation can be traced through key historical events that reshaped the relationship between the monarchy and its subjects.

One crucial moment was the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215[2]. This document curtailed King John's unchecked authority, establishing the precedent that even a monarch must abide by the law. While its immediate impact was limited, the Magna Carta laid the groundwork for future developments in British governance.

Another pivotal event occurred during the English Civil War (1642-1651), as King Charles I clashed with Parliament over power distribution [3]. Parliament's victory and Charles I's execution marked a departure from absolute monarchy, emphasizing the importance of constitutional limits on royal authority. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 further transformed the monarchy. William III and Mary II's accession curtailed royal powers, and the Bill of Rights in 1689 enshrined constitutional monarchy principles, including parliamentary supremacy and the prohibition of arbitrary royal authority [4].

In stark contrast to the tumultuous convulsions of the French Revolution, England's odyssey towards constitutional monarchy was characterized by a series of gradual reforms and negotiated settlements. This evolutionary approach enabled the nation to maintain a semblance of stability while embracing the principles of constitutional governance.

3. The Birth and Challenges of the French Constitutional Monarchy

3.1. The Development Process of the French Constitutional Monarchy

The French quest for constitutional monarchy took a radically different path compared to its British counterpart. It was a tumultuous journey marked by sweeping societal upheaval, intense revolutionary fervor, and profound political transformation.

At its core, the story of the French constitutional monarchy is intertwined with the causes and phases of the French Revolution, an event that would forever alter the course of European history. The revolution, ignited in 1789, was characterized by a profound desire for liberty, equality, and fraternity, but it swiftly evolved into a relentless struggle for power and the redefinition of the entire political landscape [5]. One of the earliest and most significant developments during the French Revolution was the overthrow of the Bourbon Dynasty and the establishment of the French First Republic. The monarchy, symbolized by King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, faced mounting public discontent and economic crises. The storming of the Bastille in July 1789 marked the beginning of the revolution and the end of absolute monarchy in France [5].

This transition, however, did not lead immediately to a stable constitutional monarchy. Instead, it set in motion a series of radical transformations that reflected the revolutionary fervor of the times. The French Revolution's early years saw the rise of political clubs, such as the Jacobins, who pushed for more radical changes, including the execution of King Louis XVI in 1793 and the Reign of Terror.

3.2. The Bourbon Dynasty Restoration and Challenges

Amidst the turmoil of the revolutionary period, the Bourbon Dynasty was briefly restored in 1814 following the fall of Napoleon. The Charter of 1814 was an attempt to establish a constitutional monarchy in France. It provided for a constitutional framework that included a bicameral legislature and recognized certain civil liberties. However, this restoration faced significant challenges. One of the foremost challenges came from the ultra-royalists, who sought to restore the monarchy to its pre-

revolutionary glory, with little regard for constitutional constraints. Their resistance to progressive reforms and their insistence on preserving aristocratic privileges posed a formidable obstacle to the development of a stable constitutional monarchy [5].

3.3. July Revolution and 1830 Charter

The Bourbon monarchy's fragile existence was shattered by the July Revolution of 1830. This uprising, fueled by public discontent and demands for political change, culminated in the abdication of Charles X and the ascent of Louis-Philippe to the throne. The July Revolution led to the drafting of the Charter of 1830, which attempted to strike a balance between monarchical authority and constitutional principles. The Charter of 1830 created a constitutional monarchy under Louis-Philippe, known as the "Citizen King." It expanded suffrage and introduced constitutional reforms, but it did not satisfy all factions within French society [5]. The July 1830 Law, which limited voting rights and reinforced property qualifications for participation in elections, generated discontent among segments of the population.

In essence, the birth and development of the French constitutional monarchy were marked by a series of revolutionary upheavals, attempts at constitutional reforms, and challenges posed by both extreme royalists and republican elements. France's journey towards constitutional governance was marked by intense political and social conflict, as contrasting visions for the nation's future collided.

4. Comparative Analysis of Constitutional Monarchies in England and France

Within the framework of constitutional monarchies, England and France embarked on distinct historical trajectories, reflecting their unique political, social, and cultural contexts.

4.1. The Evolving Role of Monarchy in Political Systems

In England, a gradual transformation transpired, wherein the monarchy assumed a predominantly ceremonial and symbolic role. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 cemented the principle of parliamentary supremacy, substantially curtailing the monarch's authority in favor of elected representatives in Parliament. Consequently, the monarch's functions became primarily ceremonial, with actual political power vested in elected officials. Conversely, France's journey exhibited greater variability. Initially, the French Revolution abolished the monarchy, establishing a republic. Subsequent endeavors, however, led to the restoration of the monarchy within a constitutional framework in 1814. The role of the French monarchy remained a contentious issue. Charles X's attempt to reassert absolute monarchical authority in the 1820s triggered the July Revolution of 1830, resulting in his replacement with the more limited monarchy of Louis-Philippe. Consequently, the role of the French monarch oscillated more frequently between absolutism and constitutionalism, mirroring deeper political divisions.

4.2. The Impact of Historical Events on Development

England's transition to constitutional monarchy unfolded through negotiated settlements and incremental reforms, punctuated by transformative events such as the Magna Carta, the English Civil War, and the Glorious Revolution. These pivotal moments were marked by relative stability, facilitating a smoother shift from absolute monarchy to constitutional governance [2]. In contrast, France's trajectory was characterized by intense upheaval, particularly during the radical phase of the French Revolution, which culminated in the execution of the king and an experimentation with republicanism. Subsequent shifts, including the return to monarchy under Louis XVIII and Charles

X, as well as the July Revolution [5], led to frequent and abrupt changes, contributing to the volatility of the French constitutional monarchy.

4.3. The Influence of Extreme Factions and Obstruction of Reforms

In England, despite occasional disagreements and conflicts, the establishment of a constitutional monarchy encountered no equivalent extreme factions or obstructive forces. This transition benefited from a relatively united political elite committed to constitutional principles. Conversely, France's journey was marred by the influence of extreme royalist and republican factions. The intransigence of extreme royalists and their resistance to constitutional reforms during the Bourbon restoration periods, coupled with republican uprisings, resulted in significant political instability, hindering the establishment of a stable constitutional monarchy [3]. The disparities between the constitutional monarchies of England and France arise from their distinct historical experiences. England's gradual evolution and relatively stable transitions contributed to a more ceremonial monarchy and parliamentary supremacy. In contrast, France's tumultuous journey, characterized by frequent revolutions and political shifts, led to a monarchy with fluctuating powers and greater political instability.

5. Modern National Political Development and Constitutional Monarchy

In the contemporary era, constitutional monarchies have evolved considerably from their historical origins, and the role of monarchs in modern politics differs significantly from their historical counterparts. This section delves into the modern evolution of constitutional monarchies, highlighting the roles of monarchs in contemporary politics, the position of royal families in society, and their influence in shaping national identity. It underscores the distinctions between historical developments and contemporary roles.

5.1. The Modern Evolution of Constitutional Monarchy

France, underwent numerous political transformations in the aftermath of the Revolution. Notably, the coronation of Napoleon temporarily reinstated royal authority in France, albeit briefly. It would take nearly a century for stability to be fully reestablished. In contrast, the evolution of the British monarchy into a "constitutional monarchy" was a more protracted yet considerably stable and amicable process. Whether concerning matters of religion or finances, the British monarch consistently operated within the constraints imposed by Parliament, preventing a return to the era of absolute royal authority and arbitrary rule. In modern England, the constitutional monarchy has solidified its role as a ceremonial and symbolic institution. The British monarch, while retaining certain constitutional responsibilities, plays a largely symbolic role in the government's day-to-day affairs [6]. The powers once wielded by the monarchy have shifted to elected representatives in Parliament, reflecting the principles of constitutional governance established over centuries.

5.2. The Role of Monarchs and Royal Families in Contemporary Society

In contemporary England, the British royal family continues to be a prominent and cherished institution. Historians of the twentieth-century British monarchy have tended to separate the crown's "efficient" role from its "dignified" functions, to quote from Walter Bagehot, in ways that preclude an examination of the ongoing connections between royal politics and ritual symbolism [7]. While the monarch's powers are limited, they remain a unifying figurehead and symbol of national identity. The royal family plays a significant role in ceremonial and diplomatic functions, bolstering tourism and cultural ties. The monarchy of the 20th and 21st centuries has evolved into an institution primarily

dedicated to serving its subjects. The House of Windsor, with Queen Elizabeth II as a prominent figure, embodies tradition, continuity, and stability in British society. Queen Elizabeth II articulated this commitment as early as 1947 when she was a princess, expressing her belief in dedicating her life to serving the nation. France, in contrast, has undergone numerous political transitions since the 19th century, leading to the establishment of the French Republic. While France has had emperors, presidents, and prime ministers, the role of a constitutional monarch has not been revived. The French royal family no longer wields any political power and is not part of the modern political landscape. The concept of a constitutional monarchy has largely faded from contemporary French politics.

5.3. Shaping National Identity and Contemporary Roles

The British constitutional monarchy has played a significant role in shaping national identity. William Kuhn was right in this respect, if not in others, when he emphasized that the modern monarchy “appeared to be allied ... to Britain's democratic system [8].” The monarchy is associated with a sense of tradition, continuity, and stability in the United Kingdom. The royal family's public engagements, charitable work, and representation at state events contribute to a collective sense of identity that transcends political divisions. In France, the republican ideal has largely supplanted the role of monarchy in shaping national identity. The principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity that emerged from the French Revolution have become foundational to French national identity. The absence of a constitutional monarchy in contemporary France underscores the enduring legacy of the republican values that have shaped the nation.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has shed light on how historical events have molded contemporary national political systems, employing a comparative analysis of the British and French constitutional monarchies. It has revealed the distinct trajectories of development in Britain and France within the realm of constitutional monarchy.

Britain's development has been marked by continuity over a long span of time. While it maintains the concept of constitutional monarchy, the role and functions of the monarch have shifted to become more symbolic. In contrast, France's path has been marked by significant upheavals, notably the French Revolution, which left an enduring imprint on the country's shift toward a republican form of government.

It is important to note that this article has focused exclusively on the content related to constitutional monarchy in the United Kingdom and France. However, the influence of constitutional monarchy has extended beyond these two nations, impacting countries across Europe and even Japan. Future research endeavors could consider broadening the scope and employing diverse research methodologies, such as quantitative analysis, to delve deeper into this subject, fostering more comprehensive and insightful discussions.

Acknowledgement

I extend my sincere appreciation to my parents and teachers for their unwavering support and guidance throughout this journey. Your belief in me and your valuable insights have been instrumental in my growth and achievements.

References

- [1] Tridimas, G. (2021). *Constitutional monarchy as power sharing*. *Constitutional Political Economy*, 32(4), 431-461.
- [2] Linebaugh, P. (2009). *The Magna Carta manifesto: Liberties and commons for all*. Univ of California Press.

- [3] Carpenter, S. D. (2004). *Military Leadership in the British Civil Wars, 1642-1651: 'The Genius of this Age'*. Routledge.
- [4] Bedard, P. (2022). *The Queen and Boris: An Analysis of the British Monarchy's Historical, Political, and Constitutional Influence on Brexit*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- [5] Carlyle, T. (2019). *The French Revolution*. Oxford University Press.
- [6] Geddes, S. (2021). *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy: European Monarchies Compared*. *Can. L. Libr. Rev.*, 46, 27.
- [7] Bagehot, W. (1966). *The english constitution* (Vol. 28). Cornell University Press.
- [8] Kuhn, W. (1996). *Democratic royalism: The transformation of the British monarchy, 1861-1914*. Springer.