
Transformation of a boundary regime: the Hong Kong and Mainland China case

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Abstract. Since 1997 the border between Hong Kong and Mainland China has been officially referred to as a *boundary*, instead of a *border*. In this paper the author analyses to what extent actual changes in cross-border interactions support this notional change. It points to an ongoing step-by-step integration process on the functional level. The main empirical basis of this analysis is a survey on cross-border trips in 1999, supplemented by additional data. In looking at the changing boundary regime between Hong Kong and Mainland China the author also develops a framework for the study of border regimes and their transformation in general.

1 Introduction

The changing political world map, a challenge for map publishers throughout the 1990s, is a major conceptual challenge for political geography as well. The concepts of *internal* and *international borders* got blurred. Borders within the European Union appear more internal than external now, some within the former Soviet Union are not yet fully international, and there are territories with incomplete sovereignty, such as Montenegro, Kosovo, Cyprus, or Palestine, whose borders are even more difficult to



Figure 1. The border to Hong Kong in Futian District of Shenzhen (photograph by the author).



Figure 2. Sharp contrasts in land use between the urban fringe of Hong Kong and the nearby central business district of Shenzhen as a very obvious physical manifestation of the boundary (photograph by the author).

categorise. Whereas many European cases are already the subject of geographical border research, this paper looks at an example in yet another political and cultural context, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China.

When revising a map for a new atlas edition, I recently found the border to Mainland China removed, as it is now just an internal one. However, physical evidence such as in figures 1 and 2 suggests it might be too early to change the maps. Using the term *boundary regime* to describe the openness of boundaries, I examine the transformation of the Hong Kong and Mainland China boundary. Recent data on cross-boundary travellers, as an indicator for openness, show a marked increase. The data will here be analysed with regard to characteristics of travellers, purposes, and destinations to gain better understanding of the reasons and consequences of the transformation.

2 The context of geographical border research

Borders and border regions can be seen as zones of conflict or contact (Prescott, 1987). Geographical border research, as part of political geography, initially concentrated on the conflicts. Only in the past decades has the focus shifted towards the study of border contacts (Minghi, 1991; van Geenhuizen and Ratti, 2001; Wastl-Walter and Kofler, 2000). Borders are now seen as not just allowing contacts with the other side, but even adding value to these contacts by maintaining cultural and economic discontinuities, which would otherwise disappear. These discontinuities can be of benefit to the border regions. Case studies mostly focus on Europe (Leimgruber, 1991; van der Wusten, 1994) and North America (Herzog, 1990; Martinez, 1994). In Asia research concentrates on so-called transborder *growth triangles* and their role in industrial development, drawing on different production and accumulation regimes to increase

the region's comparative advantage (Fau, 1999; Ho and So, 1997; Toh and Low, 1993; Wu, 1998). The Hong Kong case is mostly seen in this context, and from a distinctly economic geography perspective.

The rising attention to border studies is the result of two seemingly contradictory trends. On the one hand globalisation and integration processes reduce the impact of national borders; on the other hand a growing quest for territorial sovereignty adds new borders. Today the key flows of people, money, and information among the world cities are not seen as being particularly related to their national context. Castells (1989) introduced the concept of a *space of flows*, where national boundaries are of minor importance. Taylor (1996) observed *multi-identities* of people relating to more than one country and, with the strong relation of boundaries and identity in mind, found national borders increasingly outdated. However, they still have an effect in blocking trade and business (Helliwell, 1998) as well as migration (Hirst and Thompson, 1995, page 420). After all, most people still spend their lives by and large in their country of birth. Beneath the global networks national contexts still exist. We link our identity to them, and—seemingly as a reflex to the challenges of globalisation—the desire for homely nation-states is rising. As a consequence, states disintegrate and conflicts arise in ethnically mixed areas. Indeed, the numbers of independent states, and therefore boundaries has grown significantly over past decades (Newman and Paasi, 1998, page 197f).

Border research sees the number of study objects rising and simultaneously their complexity increasing. Kolossov and O'Loughlin (1998) propose considering borders on five different scales, from *global* to *local*. Apart from the *national* level they introduce *substate regions* and *macroregions (blocs)* as categories. However, it can be argued that the differentiation does not have to stop at five levels—neither if based on different layers of identity nor on the dividing effect of the border. For example, on the macroregion level the German–Swiss and the German–Polish borders, both EU borders, hardly fall into one category. On the substate level Guangdong's boundaries with Hong Kong and with neighbouring provinces differ fundamentally in all terms. For a better comprehension, the term *border regime* and five *different approaches* to the investigation of borders will be introduced.

2.1 Border regimes and their transformation

The classification of a border regime as *open* or *tight* refers to the way regulations and their enforcement discourage or prohibit the crossing of the border by people, or information, goods, and money. It will here be used in a broader sense as the *openness* of the border (Rietveld, 2001), considering economic and psychological deterrents as well. Often the psychological borders are stronger than the legal barriers. In this definition, an open border regime is one that is hardly noticed, or at least does not deter people from crossing the border. Generally, tight border regimes have stronger spatial impacts.

As a border itself is already just a snapshot of an ever-changing political geography and of interstate relationships (Donnan and Wilson, 1999, page 46), border regimes are even more in flux. Prescott (1987, page 63) distinguishes *evolution in definition and position* of a border from *evolution in the state's role and function* at a border. In the Hong Kong case we are looking at the latter (although 1997 also saw minor changes in the position of Hong Kong's boundary). To recognise further the politically planned character of the transition I shall use the term *transformation* instead of evolution. The process has been planned with a long-term perspective since the early 1980s, and Hong Kong's Basic Law puts the official end of the transformation only in 2047.

To highlight the political change on 1 July 1997, what was previously called the Hong Kong and Mainland China *border* has since then been officially referred to in Hong Kong as a *boundary*. Linguistically this seems to overstate the subtle semantic difference between the English terms *border* and *boundary*. The former is used not only for international borders, but also, for example, for the borders of states in the USA or Australia. In the context of political geography Prescott (1987, page 12f) discriminated between a *border* and a *boundary*, a distinction which Donnan and Wilson (1999, page 45) rightly criticised as containing “considerable overlap and confusion”. In the Hong Kong case the change in language is simply a symbolic act, to stress that the border regime has changed from external (international) to internal status. This is politically important, but does not necessarily affect the border’s spatial impact or its perception. Obviously, a deeper examination of the issue requires a differentiation in perspective or approach.

2.2 Five approaches to geographical border research⁽¹⁾

2.2.1 Political approach

Borders can be seen as a legal construct, separating political entities with different laws and jurisdictions. Whether and how they are secured and controlled depends, among other things, on the relationship between the entities involved. This is the context for political geography to differentiate between *internal* and *external* borders, as in Hong Kong’s use of *border* and *boundary*. Border research would look at the legal set-up, mutual agreements, and the political geography of countries.

2.2.2 Physical approach

Borders can have a considerable physical impact on the cultural landscape, linearly as a fence (figure 1) and two-dimensionally as noticeable differences in land use (figure 2). Open borders tend to be less visible. Consequently, assessing a border regime can include the mapping of land-use and physical features.

2.2.3 Socioeconomic approach

Some *borders of wealth* separate spheres with different living standards and job opportunities, as in our case. This can be investigated with socioeconomic data from both sides and with the narratives of residents and migrants. Wealth gaps tend to produce a tighter border regime on the better off side.

2.2.4 Functional approach

Borders can be seen as discontinuities in interaction networks, which tend to be more intense on either side than between both. Typically, borders allow some interactions while blocking others. Thus Ratti (1993, page 244f) complements the image of a barrier with that of a filter. This perspective explores institutional and personal transborder links and the flow of people, goods, information, and money.

2.2.5 Psychological approach

Last but not least, borders are a sociopsychological construct, marking territories of groups of people with different identities, experiences, and cultural influences. Identities are in turn also formed by drawing borders between the self and the other (Massey and Jess, 1995, page 162; Sibley, 1995). Sometimes these psychological borders prove to be stronger than the actual ones (Scheiner, 2000). Methodologically a psychological approach may use interviews and mental maps.

⁽¹⁾ See Breitung (2001, page 24).

3 The Hong Kong and Mainland China boundary

The British initially saw the New Territories as a buffer zone and did not interfere too much in the residents' lives and their traditional connections to Shenzhen. During World War 2 the border along Shenzhen river was still relatively open, which led to tremendous population fluctuations during the time of war (Yeh, 1996). Not until the 1950s were any fences erected, and only the surge of immigrants in the wake of the Cultural Revolution led to a tighter border regime (Wesley-Smith, 1998, page 164). From 1974 to 1980 the colonial government followed a *touch-base policy*, sending immigrants back to Mainland China, if found in the New Territories, but allowing them to remain once they reached the urban area. With the introduction of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and the New Towns in Hong Kong, the concept of the New Territories as a buffer zone has been outdated since the 1980s. The border is now heavily fortified. It can only be crossed at the following points (figure 3):

(a) The three checkpoints for cars are Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To, and Sha Tau Kok. The latest and biggest, Lok Ma Chau, was opened in 1989 (since 1994 on a 24-hour basis for cargo). As only cars registered on both sides can pass through, there is little

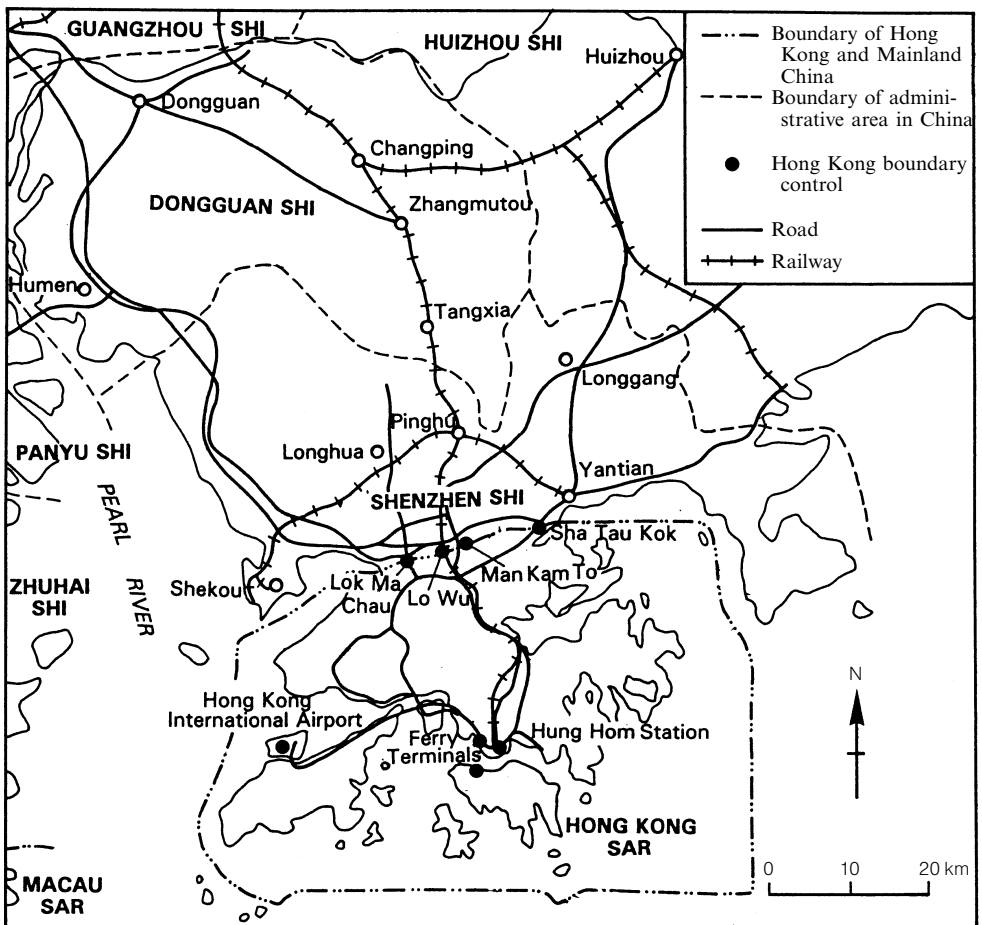


Figure 3. Map of Hong Kong and the surrounding Pearl River Delta Region (design by the author, cartography by I B Wong).

individual cross-border car traffic, but the number and patronage of licensed buses are growing.

(b) Passengers mainly rely on the Lo Wu border crossing at the end of the Kowloon–Canton Railway (KCR) commuter line in Hong Kong. The border bridge and facilities there have reached or exceeded saturation, despite improvements and longer opening hours (6.30–24.00). Only the few through trains to Guangzhou or Beijing use customs and immigration facilities at the Hung Hom terminus of the KCR.

(c) Regular ferries operate from two passenger terminals in Hong Kong to twenty-four destinations in China, mostly the Pearl River Delta (for example, Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Shenzhen Airport).

(d) Hong Kong International Airport is well connected to the Mainland, mostly on longer routes. Guangzhou and Shantou in Guangdong are also served on a daily basis.

Because of the autonomous status of Hong Kong, border controls are exercised separately on both sides, and people crossing the border are checked twice. Hong Kong citizens are generally free to travel to the Mainland, and travel permit schemes for Mainland citizens include a group tour scheme for sightseeing, a business visit scheme, and two-way and one-way permit schemes mainly for family reunions. Visits are also granted to work, receive training, or study in the SAR, to take part in certain events, or to transit to and from overseas countries with the necessary visas and tickets (Security Bureau, 2001).

The one-way permit scheme is based on a mutual agreement in 1980, which first allowed for 75 persons per day to immigrate. The number was raised in stages to 150 per day (Skeldon, 1997, pages 266, 269). Since 1995 there has been no further increase, but the number of applicants far exceeds the quota. Applications must be submitted to the local authorities in China, who allegedly handle them neither equally nor transparently. While waiting, spouses can apply for a two-way visa. It is a common breach of regulations, carrying generally a modest fine, to overstay its expiry, especially in order to give birth in Hong Kong, and thereby gain Hong Kong citizen status for the child. Additionally there is illegal immigration, mainly by boat, in spite of the frequent patrols and high-tech detection equipment of the Hong Kong police.

4 Analysis of cross-border trips

The number of passenger border crossings more than doubled from 1992 to 1999, and it continues to rise. Most of the increase was in Lo Wu and for buses through Lok Ma Chau, which shows a significant gain in regional mobility. The longer distance modes of transport increased less significantly, or even decreased (table 1).

Behind the regional mobility data are personal and commercial interactions such as visits and commuting for work, business, school, shopping, or leisure, often based on family ties, friendship, property owned, or corporate links. In the following subsections I analyse the motives and activities involved and relate them to the concept of a changing border regime. The focus here is on cross-border trips, rather than trade and financial transactions (investment), as those developed earlier and have therefore

Table 1. Cross-border trips by control point 1993–99 (source: Census and Statistics Department, 1996; 2000, table 6.9).

Year	Lok Ma Chau	Man Kam To	Sha Tau Kok	Lo Wu	Hung Hom Ferries	Airport	
1993	650 498	519 245	406 278	18 315 174	1 447 229	3 435 344	1 413 609
1995	1 257 328	517 049	449 373	21 370 205	1 109 047	3 528 216	1 520 473
1997	2 612 384	478 369	556 081	27 862 423	809 757	3 411 787	1 629 538
1999	4 803 727	496 768	600 193	38 119 215	934 355	3 016 898	1 560 399

already been widely discussed (for example, Li, 1995; Lin, 1997; Sit and Wong, 1989; Sung, 1998).

The analysis is based on various surveys (Census and Statistics Department, 1997; 1999; 2001; DAB, 1999; MDR, 2000), in particular a cross-border travelling survey for the Hong Kong Planning Department with 45 709 interviews over two weeks in October and November 1999 at all checkpoints (over 1% of all trips during the fieldwork period). This survey (MDR, 2000) was the first of its kind in Hong Kong, and very comprehensive even by international standards.

It found 86% Hong Kong and about 7% Mainland residents among the cross-border travellers, with 46% of the former and 21% of the latter travelling regularly (at least once a month). Regular visitors from the Mainland are mostly business travellers. The travel patterns are a reflection of a highly asymmetrical border regime. Whereas travel permits from the Mainland to Hong Kong are typically issued for single sightseeing trips or multiple business trips, Hong Kong residents need no specific travel permit. In their case, work or business-induced trips are complemented by a growing number of regular private trips. The following analysis looks at the regular cross-border travellers (see table 2).

4.1 Business and work trips

Of the Hong Kong residents regularly travelling to the Mainland 42% do so for business or work. Other surveys (Census and Statistics Department, 2001) noted a rise in Hong Kong residents working in Mainland China from 45 600 (1989) to 122 300 (1995) and 190 800 (2001). Most of them were employed in Hong Kong: 40% worked in manufacturing, 44% in trade and catering, and 16% in other services. With 35.7% having tertiary education they were better qualified than the Hong Kong average (25.1%), their median age was 3 years higher, and 82% were male. They stayed on average 4 days in Mainland China (only 14% stayed more than one week). These people are important links between Hong Kong and Mainland China. On the company level they link headquarters and departments in Hong Kong with the production lines on the other side and perform tasks such as quality control, staff training, and operational development. Beyond the company level they facilitate a transfer of culture and lifestyle in both directions and establish personal links. Many of these links have since developed into marriage or similar partnerships.

4.2 Transborder families

This is reflected in 75 100 Hong Kong residents recorded in the 1999 survey (MDR, 2000) regularly travelling to Mainland China to see spouse or children and 34 400 living in Shenzhen mostly because they have family there. As only a few Mainland residents can regularly travel to Hong Kong to visit relatives or friends, most couples

Table 2. Regular cross-border travellers, by main purpose.

627 300 Hong Kong residents living in Hong Kong and regularly travelling to Mainland	34 400 Hong Kong residents living in Mainland China and regularly travelling to Hong Kong	22 600 Mainland residents living in Mainland China and regularly travelling to Hong Kong
42% business or work 17% shopping or leisure 12% visit spouse or children 7% vacation in own property	41% business or work 23% visit relatives or friends	71% business or work 11% visit relatives or friends

Note. Figures are estimations based on 45 709 interviews during the two-week fieldwork period and the actual border-crossings during this period according to official immigration statistics (source: MDR, 2000).

meet or live on the Mainland side. In some cases one partner commutes to Hong Kong for work (table 2), and about 1200 children (over 60% boys!) commuted across the border to Hong Kong schools in 1999, while their families were awaiting one-way permits for family reunion in Hong Kong (MDR, 2000; Szeto, 1997).

In 1996 a survey found about 112 000 transborder marriages with on average 2 children who were born and still lived in the Mainland. Of the marriages 24.7% were contracted after 1990, and the Hong Kong partners (88.6% of them men) were on average 45 years old. Remarkably, the share of women on the Hong Kong side had increased from 6.8% in 1991 to 11.4% in 1996 (Census and Statistics Department, 1997). Additionally, many nonmarried or extramarital relationships can be assumed. A controversial survey in 1999 estimated that of 791 300 children of Hong Kong residents living in Mainland China, 64% were born outside registered marriage (Census and Statistics Department, 1999). This survey was instrumental in the dispute on the right of abode for these children, which led to a reinterpretation of the Basic Law denying the right of abode in children born out of wedlock or before one parent became a Hong Kong resident. The remaining number of children, who qualify for the right of abode, was estimated at 97 600.

Whereas young family members try to move to Hong Kong, some elderly Hong Kong residents move to the Mainland to reduce the cost of living, enjoy a quiet living environment, or return to their hometown. Given the financial insecurity for the elderly in Hong Kong, this trend is well received here. Houses for the aged have been built with Hong Kong money for Hong Kong people in Guangdong (Lee, 1997), and seniors moving to Guangdong enjoy social welfare from Hong Kong at their new place. Despite complaints about costly health service and funerals on the Mainland, over 1000 elderly from Hong Kong subscribed to the scheme in the first 18 months (Kwok, 1998). The most popular destinations were Guangzhou, Dongguan, and Zhongshan. These elderly have Hong Kong relatives, thus also creating new transborder family ties. Family and social relationships, compared with work and business contacts, bring a new quality of cross-border interaction, contributing greatly to the removal of psychological barriers.

4.3 Shopping and entertainment across the border

Familiarity with places through business and private contacts puts them on the mental maps for other activities as well. People now cross the border for massages, haircuts, or tailor-made clothes, and trips to discos and karaoke bars are popular among Hong Kong's youth. Of the Hong Kong residents visiting Shenzhen regularly 28.3% go primarily for shopping and entertainment (MDR, 2000). Many others presumably combine such visits with business trips and family visits. Surveys in 1999 and 2000 found more than one third of the people in Hong Kong and 93% in the northern New Territories had been to Shenzhen for shopping, many of them regularly (DAB, 1999). Most of the respondents spent under HK \$400 (about US \$50) per visit on the following goods and services (more than one answer was possible):

restaurants, entertainment	75%	purchase of household items	24%
purchase of clothes, shoes	56%	purchase of electrical appliances	15%
facial treatment, massage	39%	Cantonese opera	6%

The area around Lo Wu displays a remarkable cluster of retail stores, hawkers, and since 1994 the Lo Wo Commercial City boasting 46 450 m² of retail area (figure 4). With shop rentals at 50% and salaries at about 25% of those in the northern New Territories shops and service providers in Shenzhen are very competitive (Hang Seng Bank, 1999), but curiosity and the different atmosphere are also incentives to frequent them.



Figure 4. The Lo Wu Commercial City (left), situated right next to the border gate (right) (photograph by the author).

4.4 Residence across the border

Until very recently, only people with relatives and friends or close work contacts in the Mainland chose to live across the boundary and become regular commuters. Other groups are still deterred by the hassle of boundary crossing and by psychological barriers. But with sales prices for flats in Shenzhen up to 80% lower than in central Hong Kong (Li, 2000; Ko, 2000), moving across the boundary increases the floor space and living standards. According to a study by the Hong Kong China Relation Strategic Development Research Fund in 2000 more than one million Hong Kong residents were interested in moving to Shenzhen in the coming ten years. Already 10% of all property sales in Shenzhen go to foreigners, mostly Hong Kong people. Especially high in demand are places near Lo Wu (figure 5, over) and Lok Ma Chau (Futian district), where a cross-border rail link is planned to open by 2005 (Li, 2000). For the time being, most buyers see the purchase of property in Guangdong primarily as an investment. Many flats are rented out to people who do not cross the border. Still, the fact that proximity to Hong Kong features as a main locational advantage is obviously in anticipation of a more open border regime with streamlined procedures, better transport infrastructure, and a further reduction in psychological barriers.

4.5 Spatial patterns

The distribution of cross-border trips shows some distinct spatial patterns. Business-related trips are generally longer distance than those with a private purpose, such as shopping or visiting relatives. Shenzhen now has more private than business visitors, even among the regulars (figure 6 and table 3, over) For shopping and leisure it is almost the only destination, and as a residence for transborder families it is by far the most popular. Dongguan, as the neighbouring area (figure 3), is mainly a place to go for business and work, but 30% of those travelling regularly to their own premises also

go to Dongguan. Popular places for residence in Dongguan are located alongside the railway line to Hong Kong (for example, Zhangmoutou). Places on the western side of the Pearl River Delta are relatively unpopular, apart from business trips. They account for under 7% of Hong Kong residents' places of work in Mainland China (Census and



Figure 5. Billboards advertising property in Shenzhen to entrants of the Special Economic Zone in Lo Wu. They are erected right at Shenzhen River, between the Chinese and Hong Kong control points (photography by the author).

Table 3. Main purposes of Hong Kong residents, who regularly travel to Mainland China, by destination.

Purpose	Shenzhen (%)	Dongguan (%)	Guangzhou (%)	Huizhou (%)	Panyu (%)	Zhongshan (%)	All places (%)
Business or work	30.9	59.9	64.2	37.9	44.3	61.1	43.0
Family or friends	25.7	18.8	23.1	44.1	23.4	11.9	24.1
Shopping/leisure	28.3	4.0	3.7	1.6	4.1	4.2	17.4
Sightseeing	8.2	4.6	5.5	6.4	11.8	8.3	7.6
Own property	5.5	12.3	2.2	8.0	15.5	14.3	6.8
Other	1.3	0.5	1.3	1.9	0.9	0.2	1.1
Total persons ^a	333 081	101 689	55 842	17 072	15 316	12 572	604 440

^a Figures are estimations based on 45 709 interviews during the two-week fieldwork period and the actual border-crossings during this period according to official immigration statistics (source: MDR, 2000).

Statistics Department, 2001), whereas 37% go to Shenzhen, 25% to Dongguan, and 11% to Guangzhou.

Interactions with Hong Kong had a strong impact on the development of the Pearl River Delta Region, both economically (Lin, 1997) and culturally (Guldin, 1995). They are responsible for the growth of Shenzhen and Dongguan to cities of 7.0 and 6.4 million, respectively, according to the 2000 national census (*Yang Cheng Wan Pao* 2001). Shenzhen has now more inhabitants than Hong Kong. This led to a spatial reorientation of the Pearl River Delta Region from Guangzhou to Hong Kong (Sanjuan, 1997) and of Hong Kong towards the New Territories (Breitung, 2001). Although still at an early stage, a transborder metropolitan area is emerging.

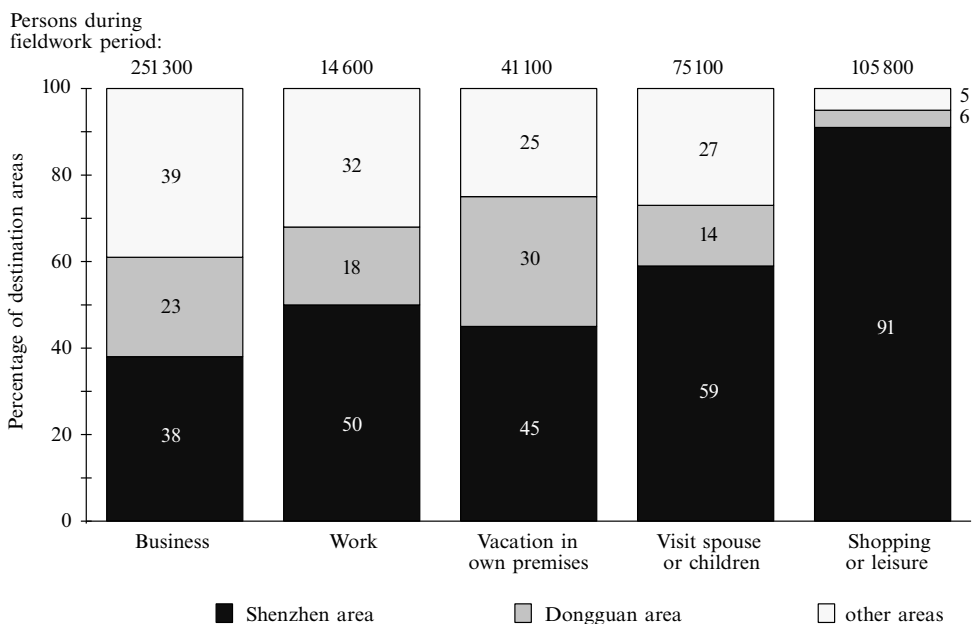


Figure 6. Destinations of Hong Kong residents, who regularly travel to Mainland China, by main purpose. The figures are estimations based on 45 709 interviews during the two-week fieldwork period and the actual border crossings during this period according to official immigration statistics (source: MDR, 2000).

5 Future perspectives

As the distance between Hong Kong and Shenzhen matches normal commuting distances in metropolitan areas, this development is likely to accelerate. The only obstacle is the border in all its five aspects. Like a filter it blocks free transit from Mainland China into Hong Kong, a political–legal aspect perpetuated by the wealth gap. Physically, border crossing is restricted to a few checkpoints, and psychologically the mental maps have just begun to go beyond the wall. However, when we look at increasing interaction (economic and personal) and decreasing psychological barriers a new openness appears. To continue the path of gradual integration, the following measures would be helpful:

- (1) increasing the number of control points (for example, KCR West Rail, Deep Bay link),
- (2) keeping checkpoints open around the clock,
- (3) introducing through trains from Hung Hom to Shenzhen and Dongguan in order to take pressure off immigration facilities in Lo Wu and shorten travelling time,

(4) introducing commuter cards to speed up immigration procedures for regular commuters (as Singapore has for commuters from Malaysia),
 (5) relaxing restrictions on family reunions by increasing the daily quota of 150,
 (6) funding more schools with a Hong Kong curriculum in Shenzhen,
 (7) in the long term it might be desirable to shift the SAR boundary northwards, beyond Shenzhen. Despite political reservations the current legal set-up would allow this move (Yeh, 1996, page 308). It would be a major step towards integration and solve many technical problems of the transborder metropolitan area.

The gains from increased integration would be planning benefits (for example, for housing in Hong Kong) and political benefits in view of China's national integration. Hindrances are the strong gradient of wealth (and thus immigration pressure) and Hong Kong's autonomy, which should not be affected. In view of the hindrances and planning conflicts the Hong Kong government will have to address the following issues:

- (a) the conflict between the political aim of integration and its restrictive immigration policy, especially for people with family in Hong Kong,
- (b) the conflict between autonomy and planning coordination,
- (c) the conflict between spatial integration and nature protection in Hong Kong's northern New Territories,
- (d) the choice of transport for commuting: the border presents a unique chance for a rail-based commuting system, but pressure to allow more car traffic will grow.

6 Conclusion

Hong Kong's integration with Mainland China appears a smooth and long-term transformation without abrupt changes in daily life or border regime. The political handover in 1997 was a symbolic act. It did not come with any substantial change in the *legal* or *physical set-up* of the border regime between both territories. Consequently, symbolic steps like the renaming from border to boundary and the change of flags receive particular attention. However, despite the formally unchanged boundary regime, empirical evidence points to a strong *functional integration* process under way. The interesting point for border studies in general is the different impression received, depending on the approach. A key factor in this is the *psychological aspect*. The increase in transborder families and property transactions suggests that an avant-garde of Hong Kong people has already overcome psychological barriers, which still exist in the minds of most others and large parts of the local administration.

Economic links, leading to personal links as well, have facilitated the psychological change. In turn, mental openness creates new interactions, which accelerate the process further. The role of the *socioeconomic aspect* is ambiguous. Obviously, the big wealth gap between Hong Kong and Mainland China causes strong immigration pressure and determines negative attitudes in Hong Kong. Thus, it is the main hindrance, and only when the socioeconomic divide is gone, will it become an option to abolish the border entirely. On the other hand, we also have to see the wealth gap as a key agent in creating interactions. The wage and price differential is the motor behind processes, such as outward processing and shopping in Shenzhen. This motor can further increase cross-border interactions, before these very interactions will have a levelling impact on the price, wage, and wealth gap. A fully (and symmetrically) open boundary regime would probably not be possible before that stage, and will then probably come with a tighter boundary regime between Shenzhen and the rest of China.

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