

Living with Borders – Overcoming Borders

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OF BORDERS AND BORDER PEOPLE

Macao people are border people. They live close to a political border, and this border has a very significant impact on their lives. Their identities, their thinking and their everyday choices are influenced by this spatial setting – as much as they are influenced for example by living in a Chinese, post-colonial or urban environment. This article sets out to examine the influence of the border, the way people live with it, take advantage of it or overcome it in their daily life. It can be seen as a part of Macao cultural studies and as a contribution to the broader field of research on borders and “borderlanders”.

Cultural and social geographers have been looking at what they call borderlanders or border people in various regional contexts (Martinez 1994, Wilson and Donnan 1998, Häkli and Kaplan 2002). Theirs is a socio-cultural approach, as it is concerned with the people and societies affected by borders, and in turn affecting the character of the border regime with their acting and thinking. It is also a geographical approach because it looks at these people in the context of a particular spatial setting. People are borderlanders because of the region they live in and this region’s proximity to the border. It is therefore also a matter of scale. Political borders have an impact on the whole country, but the small-scale impact on the adjacent areas is a specific one that deserves special attention.

What then is typical of borderlanders? Much depends on the degree and direction of openness of the border and on the cultural and economic gradient going along with it. Overall, some case studies show that borderlanders can benefit from their knowledge of and access to two or more different regulatory systems. They may have more choices for example in terms of shopping, housing, marriage and labour markets. They may also have special intercultural skills.

Whether or not they establish cross-border personal networks, activity spaces or even identities again depends on the situation (e.g. Klemenčič) and Bufon 1994, Schulz 2002, Sandtner and Eder 2002. It is possible that in addition to the different layers of spatial identity (national, regional, local), an explicitly transborder regional identity emerges.

Most of the above-mentioned research concerns European or North American borderlands. There have also been a number of publications on socio-cultural aspects of the Hong Kong and mainland China border (Sklair 1986, Guldin 1995, Smart and Smart 1998, Breitung 2002, So 2002), but not much on Macao. Several authors have recently written about the issue of Macao people’s identity (e.g. Ngai 1999, Cheng 1999, Ghosh 2002, Berlie 2002). Their focus was mainly on the post-colonial co-existence of Portuguese and Chinese cultural elements. My preceding article (pp. 6-17 of this issue) introduces the Macao-Zhuhai border in comparison to the Hong Kong-Shenzhen border from a variety of perspectives, such as political, functional, and socio-cultural. This article will now apply the socio-cultural “borderlanders” approach to the Macao case, and it mostly will refer to qualitative data collected in interviews.

The particular objectives of these interviews were:

- to find out everyday experiences with the border
- to assess whether the border is a barrier to contacts and activities
- to understand the impact of the border on identities and lifestyles
- to review changes regarding these three issues.

Additionally to quantitative surveys (see p. 13 in this issue), we conducted qualitative interviews with 22 residents of Macao and one of Zhongshan. The interviewees were contacted through personal networks. Efforts were made to match their characteristics (age, sex, occupation, place of birth) with the most recent



Macao census. However, it cannot be expected that a sample of 23 respondents will be truly representative. Therefore, it would be unreasonable to draw any quantitative conclusions from the interviews. They serve rather to get a better understanding of the reasons and attitudes observed from the above-mentioned quantitative surveys.

The interviews were open-ended but guided by a prepared list of questions. Their duration varied from 45 to 90 minutes. The interviews were mostly held in Cantonese, according to preference of the interviewees. The records have been translated into English by the interviewers. The following discussions are mainly based on these interview transcripts.

THE BORDER IN MACAO PEOPLE'S LIVES

According to the 2001 Macao census, 44 per cent of the Macao residents were born in Macao and 47 per cent in the mainland. 79 per cent of those born in the mainland were from Guangdong (DSEC 2002, 29). Similarly, slightly less than half of our interviewees were born in Macao and likewise in Guangdong. The two exceptions were an Indonesia-born Chinese, who came to Macao as a child, and a Hong-Kong-born, with his

father and grandfather from Macao. Only two of the Guangdong-born were from outside the Pearl River delta region. Most respondents grew up either in Macao or in close proximity. Among their hometowns are Zhongshan, Zhuhai, Guangzhou, Foshan, Dongguan and Xinhui. Those born in Macao were, with just one or two exceptions, the first generation in their family to be born in Macao.

It seems that most families had relatives in and close contacts with the mainland, since all of the respondents had been to China as children. Only the Indonesia-born Chinese did not travel to the mainland before the age of 18. For the others, their first visit was when they were 5 to 6 years old on average. One girl, now 18 years old, lived in Guangdong with her grandmother in her childhood, although she was born in Macao. A similar case is described by a mainland woman who came to Macao in 1998 to give birth but now raises her child in Zhuhai. Among the mainland-born women, marriage, childbirth and family reunion, were common reasons to come to Macao. Most of the males came in search of work when they were in their twenties, mostly in the 1970s or 1980s. Some had relatives in Macao, but very few had seen Macao before immigrating.

View of Macao border checkpoint looking towards Gongbei. (Photo by GCS)



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The interviewees described their first impressions of Macao quite differently. While some were impressed by the colonial architecture, night life or tall buildings, many stated they were initially rather disappointed. Macao was not much different from the mainland, except that at that time already it had a lot of factories and supermarkets and more things to buy. Two people pointed out that the Northern District right behind the Barrier Gate is particularly messy and gives a bad first impression to the city. This district has been built mainly in the 1990s and is home to the majority of Macao's recent immigrants. It is the most "Chinese" neighbourhood of Macao (Clayton 1999).

The Macao-born interviewees had either no particular memory of their first visit to the mainland, or they got a rather bad impression. Most of them described it as dirty, backward and underdeveloped. Their impression of mainland people at that time was according to their own statements shaped by either their own bad experiences or by prejudices.

CROSSING THE BORDER

Border-crossing in the early days was described as more difficult and troublesome than today. There was no generally available travel document for entering the mainland like today, and people had to join a labour or neighbourhood association in order to gain a card proving their "correct political attitude", as one respondent put it. At the Gongbei border, they had to show this card, upon which they would be issued a recommendation letter, including the purpose of the trip, some information about family members etc. This letter would prove their identity when carrying out their activities in the mainland. Apart from this procedure, some respondents remember a very unfriendly attitude of border officials and interrogations in the so-called "black room". Another person recalled frequent computer breakdowns on the mainland side in the past, on which occasions everyone had to wait until the technical problems were solved. While the Gongbei border is remembered as crowded and troublesome, there were only random checks on Macao side. One respondent recalled:

"There were only several custom officials and several tables. We stood in line one by one, and the officials just selected some people and checked their ID card. Therefore it was fast to pass."

TABLE 1. PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE OF INTERVIEWEES AS COMPARED TO A HYPOTHETICAL REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE ACCORDING TO THE MACAO 2001 CENSUS

	2001 Census		sample
	%	of 23	of 23
Sex			
female	52	12	12
male	48	11	11
total	100	23	23
Age			
below 10	12	3	0
10+	18	4	3
20+	14	3	6
30+	18	4	6
40+	19	4	2
50+	9	2	4
60+	10	2	2
total	100	23	23
Place of birth			
Macao	44	10	9
Mainland	47	11	12
Hong Kong	3	1	1
others	5	1	1
Occupation			
student	38	9	4
worker	21	5	2
clerk	8	2	2
sales/service	9	2	2
professional	5	1	4
administrator	2	1	4
unemployed	3	1	1
retired/housewife	13	3	4

This practice is the reason why no reliable data on border-crossers before 1998 can be obtained from Macao. In the official statistics, the number of departures of Macao residents at the Barrier Gate is given as 7,098 in 1996, 5,217 in 1997 and 4,403,810 in 1998 (data provided by the Statistics and Census Service of the Macao SAR Government). Of course, the pre-1998 data

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is meaningless, as it represents only random checks. Starting with 1999, the figures become reliable. The rapid increase in border-crossings can therefore better be seen from the Zhuhai statistics (Table 2), although even these figures are not without inconsistencies.

This rapid increase made organisational changes and a massive expansion of the border facilities necessary. On the Zhuhai side (Gongbei), a new building with 66 checking lines was inaugurated in 1999, and a new building on the Macao side has just been completed. In one of our interviews, a National People's Congress member and superintendent of the Zhuhai border checkpoints explained the changes from his experience:

“Before Macao's handover in 1999, both software and hardware in the border checkpoint were bad, the facilities were poor, the personnel training backward, and the time for passing through the checkpoint was long. From 1979 to 1999, the number of people travelling through the border checkpoint increased a lot. The officials in the checkpoint faced great pressure, and their qualifications were relatively low. The personnel organization was basically a military one. The turnover rate was high, the quality of work varied and concentration towards work was low. After reform, the personnel organization has been changed to a civil servant one, improving the work attitudes and teamwork spirit. The job training has been intensified, a reward-and-punishment-system has been established and the rules and regulations have been perfected. For example, officials are forbidden to receive any “red pocket money” (i.e. bribes).

Besides, the completion of the new border checkpoint is an improvement in hardware. The central computer greatly improves control and supervision of all operations in the checkpoint. An “ID-card-style” home-return-permit has been introduced, and the technique of computer-controlled border crossing is still improving. Last but not least, the supervision office was established, in which people from different sectors of society from both Zhuhai and Macao are appointed as members. The supervision office members can comment to the border officials when they recognize any problem at the border. They have annual meetings to listen to the people's comments.”

Most of the interviewees confirmed the positive changes in attitude, organisation and technology. One of them noted for example:

TABLE 2. BORDER-CROSSERS AT GONGBEI BORDER IN ZHUHAI

Year	Persons in 1000
2001	46,410
2000	38,570
1999	30,140
1998	28,000
1997	28,190
1996	27,760
1995	25,000
1994	23,480
1993	22,960
1992	21,100
1991	19,602

Source: *Zhuhai Yearbook* of various years.

“The most significant change regarding the border was the computerisation. In the past, the checking procedure was done by hand. The process was inefficient and quite annoying. With the return of Macao and the new border building in operation, the conditions have been developed to an advanced level, making the procedure of crossing the border more efficient and convenient. Besides the facilities, the checkpoint environment and the manner of the customs officials have improved.”

However, most respondents still consider the checkpoint on the Macao side more convenient and the officers more friendly. Many people also emphasized that despite all the improvements, it can be quite troublesome to cross the border, especially on weekends and public holidays.

While the airport, Lianhua Bridge and ferry services from the Outer Harbour have increased the number of designated checkpoints from two to five, still 97 per cent of all border-crossers to the mainland use the Barrier Gate. Few of our respondents have ever used any other checkpoint, but they use the Barrier Gate on average 2-3 times per month (excluding one extreme case of a person who goes more than once a day). Macao Government figures indicate that the average Macao resident travels more than 40 times per year to the mainland (calculated from *Macao Yearbook 2001*, Tables 3.1.1 and 3.2.20). This figure is slightly distorted by people, who cross the border many times

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a day to earn money from petty smuggling. Excluding those people, the figure may be about 10 per cent lower, but still more than three times per month.

There are two very common types of petty smuggling which can be observed and which have also been mentioned by many interviewees as particularly remarkable border-crossing experiences. Firstly, some foods, such as meat, cannot be brought into Macao legally by individuals. This has, in private, been explained as intended to protect the interests of the officially licensed importers. However, those goods are available much cheaper in Zhuhai than in Macao, which leads some people to even tie slices of meat onto their legs inside their trousers when crossing the border. Although it may seem appalling, this is not an uncommon sight at the border. Secondly, many people help shop owners and businessmen carry duty free goods across the border (Mei 2002, Xia 2002). This is not strictly illegal as long as each person takes only the maximum allowance of alcohol and cigarettes, but Zhuhai authorities try to stop it because it costs them a great amount in import duties. A significant number of families, mostly residents of the Northern District near the Barrier Gate, view this kind of petty smuggling as their work. They send their children or ask strangers to carry pre-packed bags with one bottle of wine and a carton of cigarettes to Zhuhai. This would earn them

about 25 patacas each time, of which they would typically pay the carrier 15 patacas (Mei 2002). Referring to all these trading and smuggling activities, one interviewee said, “The border is like a market more than a border.”

These phenomena show that the border does work as a barrier for individual consumers. This barrier is enforced by control and penalties. One respondent, for example, mentioned that her purchases of food have been confiscated once; another has been suspected of smuggling. He recalled being “rudely” searched and interrogated by Gongbei customs officials, who did not even apologize when they found nothing. On the other hand, the practice of petty smuggling also shows that controls and penalties are not strong enough to stop people from taking the risk. Particularly impractical is the so-called “no-man’s-land” between the two checkpoints, where neither side can take action against petty smuggling.

Difficulties are also encountered with the enforcement of immigration control. A few hundred illegal immigrants are detected annually in Gongbei, when they try to pass hidden in cars or even big luggage, or using forged or other people’s travel documents (Mao 2003). Many more presumably cross the waters between Zhuhai and Macao illegally or overstay their visitor visas. Moreover, even more common than illegal

immigration is the phenomenon of “labour tourism”. It is now relatively easy to visit Macao for several months for tourism, business or family reunion. Many mainland people come on such visas and work in Macao, for example in restaurants, on construction sites, as domestic helpers or prostitutes. Although it is illegal, one interviewee reported that she has seen an agency offering such domestic helpers, who ask much less salary than Filipinas. The public opinion regarding this kind of “labour tourism” is divided, since it brings down some

The number of mainland visitors to Macao has greatly increased since a new policy on individual travellers was introduced in summer 2003. (Photo by author)



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Petty traders at the Barrier Gate. (Photo by author)

wages and some costs at the same time. The increasing openness of the border makes both price and wage levels of Macao and Zhuhai converge, and customs and immigration control are fighting an uphill battle to prevent this from happening.

A TRANSBORDER LIFESTYLE

Although most people cross the border very frequently, few of them venture further than to Gongbei and Heungzhou in Zhuhai. Some travel to other places in the Pearl River delta region to visit relatives or do business, but most interviewees only visit Gongbei and spend their time there shopping, relaxing, eating or otherwise entertaining themselves. This restricts their activity spaces to a relatively small area beyond Macao. Many are unfamiliar with anything beyond the Gongbei shopping mall. Most respondents do not know many streets and bus lines in Zhuhai. The fact that they do not bring a map with them does not indicate familiarity, but a lack of practice in map use (they find it easier to ask their way around instead of looking it

up on a map). All of them are significantly more familiar with places in Macao than in Zhuhai. The border does, therefore, make a difference in terms of activity space and familiarity. The border is also a barrier to personal contacts, at least for the younger generation. People of all ages cross the border frequently, but few in the younger generation have personal contacts on the other side. Six out of eight respondents under 30 years of age have no friends in the mainland, but only three out of ten over 30 years of age have none (four respondents did not mention this issue). The typical difference is that older people have always had close contacts with the mainland, and their reasons for travelling are a mixture of social contacts and consumption, whereas younger people tend to travel with Macao friends and for consumption and entertainment only. One respondent referred to making such trips as a trend that affected her, although she was not that interested in the mainland.

Besides this, the interviews have also shown another group, who can be described as the true border

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people. They view both places as parts of their usual activity space, dividing their work, family life, studies and social contacts between them. The following are examples of those border people:

- Mr. A lives in Macao, but crosses the border 1-2 times per day. He is one of those with a dual car licence, which allows him to drive on both sides. He had a factory in Zhuhai before and still does business in the mainland. He has many personal contacts on both sides and is engaged in political activities (NPC Delegate, Superintendent of Zhuhai border checkpoint). Although he owns an apartment on the mainland, his family, home and principle work place are in Macao.
- Mrs. B is a mainland resident. She has lived in Zhuhai since 1989, where she met a man from Macao. They married and she gave birth to a child in Macao in 1998. Since then she has lived in Macao on two-year visas. She would want to receive a Macao ID card, but actually prefers to live in Zhuhai because of the living environment and her personal contacts.
- Mr. C was born in Zhuhai but emigrated early to Macao. He later found a wife in Zhuhai, who followed him to Macao and gave birth to two children. They all have Macao ID cards now, but moved back to Zhuhai. Mr. C still works in Macao and actually has a second apartment there, where he often stays overnight. His family sometimes stays there too, but mostly in Zhuhai, where the children go to school.
- Mr. D is from Zhongshan. He emigrated to Macao in 1979, but returned later. He now lives in Zhongshan again, but frequently travels to Macao.

One more respondent also had an apartment in the mainland, and another a dual car licence. As an interesting note, while Mr. C wants his children to enjoy a better school education in Zhuhai, we found two cases where children daily crossed the border the other way round to attend a Macao school. This is usually the case when the wife from across the border has no residence permit for Macao yet. It may also become more common as commercial housing areas for Hong Kong and Macao people are built in Zhuhai and especially Zhongshan. Some respondents mentioned friends living in such areas. They apparently are friendly with their mainland neighbours and do

not feel isolated. In a way Macao's Northern District and these commercial housing areas are both locations where the boundaries between Macao and Zhuhai people already are blurred.

We asked our interviewees whether they could consider living in Zhuhai and working in Macao or the other way round. Most of them would not, because crossing the border is still too troublesome and time-consuming. They would find such a life unstable and inconvenient, especially as the border checkpoint closes at midnight. Working in Zhuhai was seen as more acceptable than living there. However, a number of respondents would accept moving to Zhuhai. Some even found it preferable because of the price difference and better environment. 'Then I can earn money in Macao and use only little to live in Zhuhai. Great!' one respondent said.

According to another woman, many men also consider living in Zhuhai because they have more choice of wives there. Although not mentioned by the interviewees, it is well-known that this extends not only to legitimate marriages but also to so-called "second wives" and extra-marital affairs. This is indicated, for example, by a literature project at the University of Macau, in which students wrote stories about crossing the border. Interestingly, the largest number concerned cross-border extra-marital affairs (Kelen 2003). Apart from consumption and work, this is obviously also an important borderlander issue.

THE PERCEPTION OF PLACE

Comparing the development of Macao and Zhuhai (and in some cases Zhongshan) over the last decade, almost all interviewees stress the rapid development north of the border. They remember for instance:

"Zhuhai was very underdeveloped in the past. There was no blacktop road but only roads with yellow mud. The population was small and mostly relied on the fishing industry. Gradually, after it became a special economic zone, it developed, built up many industrial districts and absorbed investment from Macao, Hong Kong and other developed areas. Zhuhai received more and more immigrants from other provinces, providing plentiful cheap labour.

In the past, there were many mountains, which now have been removed and have become flat ground

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Macao's new border checkpoint, opened in early 2004. (Photo by GCS)

with new buildings on it. Many small houses or shops, made of steel, were irregularly built on both sides of the road. They have long since disappeared, and the roads have been re-constructed”.

Apart from state and foreign investment, they attribute a great part of the development to Macao people's consumption. Therefore, the area around the border developed first. One interviewee, who had delivered goods from Macao to Zhuhai in her childhood, noted:

“Nowadays people deliver goods from Zhuhai instead of delivering to Zhuhai. This is a significant switch in this decade. More and more China-made goods enter the market. Some of them are not easily available in Macao. Macao people seem to enjoy shopping in big markets or department stores, which are rare in Macao.”

In that way, Macao people contribute their money to developing Zhuhai, as one respondent put it. Regarding Zhuhai's development, it was also lauded that the Zhuhai government “has a vision” and exercises

good planning, which distinguishes it from other mainland cities:

“Zhuhai now impresses people with an image of a dynamic and green city. It is a big difference compared to the past, when it was a typical Chinese city.”

The two changes mentioned most often are significant improvements in the road and transportation system and in the environment and greening of Zhuhai and Zhongshan. No one said anything negative about the development of Zhuhai.

They were more critical of Macao's development. Many respondents deplored the relative stagnation or slow growth of the economy, especially before the Handover. They mentioned rising unemployment, cross-border consumption, the relocation of factories and strong reliance on tourism and gambling as serious problems. Some respondents claimed the economic levels are converging, but others still point to significant differences, mainly because Macao is more international and enjoys the special administrative system. Progress was noted in the field of politics and administration,

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with the government being closer to the people than before, and in terms of new construction projects. In Macao too, a lot of new infrastructure has been built, especially on reclaimed land. The size of the territory keeps growing, and there are no more fields and empty land between the city and the border. Apart from physically growing closer, Macao and Zhuhai also become more similar due to the universal style of the new high-rise buildings.

Reclamation and construction was mentioned as one issue affecting the quality of life in Macao, as was the high population density and lack of greenery. However, most interviewees still agreed that the quality of life in Macao was higher than in Zhuhai. Macao people are materially richer and enjoy more freedom; the working conditions, cleanliness and life-style in the mainland are not on the same level, although some new commercial housing estates create a high living standard in some areas. Those preferring the quality of life in Zhuhai and Zhongshan refer to favourable price-levels, better supply of goods and more space and greenery.

“Life in Zhongshan is better than in Macao: Simply put, life in Zhongshan is relaxing, while it is pressured in Macao. People in Macao spend most of their time working in order to earn their living. This way of life Zhongshan people can hardly get used to.”

Even more than towards the quality of life, the interviewees were divided on the issue of lifestyle. Some found significant differences in lifestyle, dressing, ways of consumption and ways of entertainment, whereas others claimed “the lifestyle is almost the same, because both of them are Chinese societies” or “people in both places like to have karaoke and shopping when they are free” or even “people in both places share the same value that the living quality will be good only if you have money.” There is no doubt that the cross-border contacts are so close that the people of both sides are mutually influenced. Therefore, many people found that the differences are getting smaller.

Apart from the mutual influence, there is also the strong influence of Hong Kong on both. The Zhongshan resident interviewed by us compared the influences of Hong Kong and Macao:

“I cannot think of any impact that Macao has in Zhongshan, since Hong Kong’s impact is so dominating. Most significantly, most Zhongshan people watch Hong Kong television channels. Their information on Hong Kong they receive directly from

Hong Kong, including the living habit, eating culture, and dressing style. That is why Macao’s impact on Zhongshan is invisible. But in respect of personal contacts, Macao seems to have more than Hong Kong. It may be due to the convenience in transport between Macao and Zhongshan.”

IDENTITIES AND THE PERCEPTION OF PEOPLE

All interviewees were asked to describe their identity as for example “Macao person”, “Macao Chinese” or just “Chinese”. Such questions are commonly used to identify the relative importance of different spatial identities (DeGolyer 1997, Chung 2004). Normally, people have various layers of spatial identity, such as national, provincial and local, which are individually more or less important. Identifying the relative attachment to a national or regional – perhaps even transborder – identity may help in understanding the degree of division caused by a political border (Sandtner and Eder 2002).

In our interviews, the majority of respondents described themselves as Chinese, based on reasons such as “I was born in China”, “my father is a Chinese”, “because of my strong feeling of nationalism” or “because Macao people are not different from Chinese”. Many stressed that this feeling has never changed and will last forever. Others did tell about changes in their identity. For example, G. described herself as Chinese when she lived in the mainland but as Macao Chinese after settling in Macao, since her life changed significantly then. Interestingly, two people responded that the answer would depend on the person who asks. If asked by a foreigner, they would identify themselves as Chinese or Macao Chinese respectively. If the questioner is a mainlander, the answer will be Macao person. It seems to be a matter of geographical scale, and of distinction from the person who asks. A significant number of people chose to combine national and local identities by calling themselves Macao Chinese or Chinese Macao person. One girl explained that on the one hand she sees Macao as her “mother country, which gives a feeling just like parents. This feeling is greater than it is with China,” on the other hand her family members were mainly born in China, and they are rather traditional, which affects her identity too. Another respondent would prefer to call himself a Macao person, as this would give him advantages, but

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he feels he cannot because he was born in China. So, he chose the term Macao Chinese. Others use Macao person or Zhuhai person (although now living in Macao) to identify themselves. The only one who indicated that his feeling of identity has changed because of the handover was the one Macanese. He said that he considered himself Portuguese until 1999, but now prefers the term Macanese.

Given that many people refer to their local identity in a stronger way than to their national identity, we wanted to find out what exactly distinguishes Macao people from Zhuhai or mainland people. Confronted with this question, most interviewees claimed that in their view there is no significant difference between the people on both sides of the border, either because they would treat all people the same or “because we are all Chinese and we speak Cantonese”. However, many admitted that it is easy to distinguish whether a person is from Macao or the mainland from his style of dress, speech and behavior. Some also added that Macao people generally tend to look down upon mainlanders. They then provided many reasons for this, often revealing strong prejudices. In some cases, even people who have immigrated themselves or claimed to treat everyone equal expressed quite negative views of mainlanders during the interviews, including both people who gave their identity as Chinese, and people who stressed the local component of identity.

The characteristics most often attributed to mainlanders are low education, low ethical standards and social conscience, bad behaviour and bad taste. Some quotations:

- “Mainlanders show more rude and selfish behaviour than Macao people.”
- “They are of bad taste in what they wear and sometimes are impolite.”
- “Most of them like to do things like cheating and stealing.”
- “They are casual, throwing rubbish around and don’t care about their personal appearance.”
- “Mainlanders are commonly badly educated no matter what occupations they have.”
- “Mainlanders are usually dirty because they litter and spit.”
- “Some mainlanders do any evil thing to earn money. ...Most Macao people and Hong Kong people would not do any evil thing to earn money.”

Very few explicitly attributed positive characteristics to mainlanders (“hard working”, “tough”) or negative ones to Macao people (“lazy”, “go to work late”). Some pointed out that the attitudes towards the mainlanders are improving, due to (a) more contacts and better communication, (b) the development in the mainland and (c) the purchasing power of mainland tourists, which is seen as crucial for Macao’s economic well-being. But still, “Mainlanders seem to have a different way of thinking.” There is no distinction between Zhuhai people and other mainlanders, probably because many Zhuhai residents come from different provinces. This fact, according to one respondent, undermines understanding and creates distance. In that way, the special status and history of Zhuhai deepens the dividing character of the border. On the other hand, there are many cultural and kinship links, especially to Zhongshan, but Zhongshan is separated by a stronger rural-urban divide from Macao. This points to another issue mentioned in the interviews. Even within the mainland there are huge discrepancies between urban and rural residents and between the rich and the poor. One interviewee described this as follows:

“In the mainland ‘the rich are millionaires; the poor are beggars.’ Many people are getting very rich. They spend money like splashing water. However, common people still have to live economically.”

To put the replies further into perspective, we also asked the interviewees to compare the closeness of Macao and mainland people with that of Hong Kong and mainland people. Virtually all agreed that Macao people are closer to their mainland compatriots than Hong Kong people, and that both relationships are getting closer in recent years. While some consider the stronger economic ties between Hong Kong and the mainland a factor promoting closeness, other factors are seen as overriding this effect. Such factors are the geographical proximity and convenience of cross-border travelling, the higher percentage of Chinese and their many relatives and friends in nearby mainland areas, the stronger international connections of Hong Kong (compared to Macao, which mostly relies on the contacts to the mainland) and better government relations. Additionally, it was claimed that mainlanders like Macao people more than Hong Kong people. “Hong Kong people are too proud of Hong Kong. They think Hong Kong is better than Macao and the

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1. "Don't come on weekends or public holidays."
2. "Ai! I've been waiting for half an hour. It's my turn now."
3. "Your Home Visit Permit will expire soon. Renew it as soon as possible."
(cartoon indicating border bureaucracy in *New Generation*, April, 2002).

mainland." One respondent said that "many Hong Kong people don't know much about the mainland. This is not the case in Macao."

DO NOT TEAR DOWN THIS WALL!

This title is adapted from a famous speech of then president Ronald Reagan in front of the Berlin Wall. At that time, Berlin was borderland as well, in many, though not all, ways comparable with Macao. West-Berlin was surrounded by a wall. Its residents could relatively easily leave this enclave, but their compatriots in the surrounding socialist part of the country could not as easily come in. One of the big differences was that there was no talk about sovereignty but about bringing down the wall and allowing people to move around freely. People could have been aware of the economic and socio-cultural difficulties of simply removing the border, but when the chance was there in 1989, there was no serious discussion about preserving the wall. The border was seen as restricting the freedom of people on both sides – the freedom of East Germans to enjoy consumption and colourful life in the capitalist enclave, and the freedom of the enclave residents to venture beyond its boundaries without being checked at the border.

Surprisingly, there is no comparable sentiment among the Macao people interviewed. Their mainland compatriots are only gradually welcome to share the capitalist lifestyle in Macao, and Macao residents do

not feel seriously hindered in their movements. Asked whether they feel enclosed by the border, they pointed to the media and the freedom to travel.

"It is so easy to get the Jetfoil to go to Hong Kong, or to go to Zhuhai, and Macao has worldwide connections. There are also all kinds of information available. It is really not a feeling of living 'like a bird in the cage,' our life in Macao is very free."

Macao people are used to being borderlanders. They live with this situation, take advantage of it and do not feel isolated.

Therefore, the vast majority of our interviewees insist on keeping the border and border control in place. Only the Zhongshan resident and two Macao residents said they would like to see the border go. All others are too worried about issues such as security, immigration and the labour market. Some quotations:

"I am afraid of the crowd of people that will come and damage the labour market in Macao."

"The organized crime from the mainland will come to Macao and worsen the public security."

"I am worried that the drug problem in the mainland would influence Macao's youth."

"The people are different, and the living standards are. The border cannot be abolished."

"Border control needs to be tight and Macao's characteristics should be preserved."

"Macao would lose its bridge function. This would affect Macao a lot."

"Mainland people with infectious diseases would infect Macao people quickly and easily."

"Some poor mainland people would enter Macao and engage in evil things such as robbery."

"The border is not an obstacle but a symbol of a special administrative government."

"Abolishing the border would be like opening the door of your home."

Even a mainland immigrant who lives in Macao without a Macao ID card and describes the border as very troublesome for her would not want to abolish the border. She said:

"The security would be bad. Everyone could enter Macao if they wanted. Many poor Chinese people would come to Macao and search for opportunities to become rich. Macao people would not be safe any more."

The border is seen as a filter and protective wall rather than a hindrance. The general view is that this filter or wall should stay in place and its operation be

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optimised. For example, the gradual increase in the influx of mainland tourists in 2003 was welcomed in order to support Macao's economy, but for many people the upper limit has already been reached. However strong the reservations are against any drastic further integration, all respondents welcomed a close co-operation between the governments of Macao, Guangdong and Zhuhai. About half are content with the current degree, and the other half suggested closer ties on questions such as fighting cross-border crime, promoting tourism and the economy, facilitating the

flow of information and improving the flow of cross-border traffic. For most Macao people, this is the way to go: Increase co-operation but preserve the border and Macao's special urban, Chinese, post-colonial, capitalist—and borderland—identity. **RC**

Author's Note: Most of the information is taken from interviews with Macao people conducted between April and October 2003. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese and quotations are adapted from the English transcripts. I owe thanks to Siotou Ian, Yentle Lao, Cheng Cheng Ho and Kaori Shiu for conducting the interviews and helping a lot in the process of research.

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