



# A Tale of Two Borders

## Separation and Exchange: Macao's and Hong Kong's Borders with the Mainland

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Merchants from the districts of Nanhai, Panyu, Xiangshan, and Shunde, exceeding tens of thousands, come and go between Macau and the province. They frequently set up livelihoods and establish businesses in both places, unrestrained by the borders, which causes excessive lawlessness among the people. Their endless traffic is like the weaving of cloth (Zhang Zhidong 1887, cit. Porter 1996, p. 52).

The gulf that yawned between the societies separated by the trickle of the Shenzhen River in 1978 was extremely apparent... By 1995, the shock of transition that once was felt in passing through the border to China has been replaced by surprise at how Shenzhen is coming to resemble the high-rise congestion and frenetic activity of central Hong Kong (Smart and Smart 1998).

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"Barrier Gate from the Chinese side", by Auguste Borget, *A China e os Chineses*, Macao, ICM, 1990.

Victor Hugo Marreiros graphic intervention based on an 18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese engraving.



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international law and anthropology (comp. Donnan and Wilson 1999).

For political geography the relationship between borders, territory and sovereignty is of central concern. In the classical concept of nation states, sovereignty is exercised on disjunctive territories, demarcated and secured by their respective borders. This concept is now under threat from above (by globalisation and supranational bodies such as the E.U.) and from below (through independence movements), which makes borders and sovereignty worldwide increasingly ambiguous (Newman and Paasi 1998).

The cases of Macao and Hong Kong, however, are unique for various reasons:

1. Their borders do not have the status of national borders. Nor are they break-away provinces like Kosovo or Chechnya (in fact, they are not even provinces).

2. Their sovereignty is ambiguous, but contrary to cases such as Palestine, North Cyprus or Taiwan not under dispute, neither internationally nor internally.

3. Although the borders are seen as internal boundaries, they are heavily fortified, and although they are heavily fortified they are among the most permeable borders of the world considering the actual number of border-crossers.

4. Most remarkably, their current status has a relatively distant but already clearly fixed “expiry date”.

This paper looks at the consequences of ambiguous sovereignty and transitional character for the two borders, their perception and their spatial consequences. It further compares the cases of Hong Kong and Macao as similar legal constructs but very different physical and social phenomena. The author’s main argument is that integration has proceeded much further in the case of Macao, which can therefore serve as a model or pilot for the more complex case of Hong Kong.

## AMBIGUOUS SOVEREIGNTY

As implied above, borders are the territorial markers for sovereignty. Thus they are in the focus of any sovereignty dispute, when politically inspired maps are displayed in TV news and schoolbooks, and when fishing boats are attacked upon crossing imaginary lines. Academic border research started as research into border conflicts before turning to the more subtle implications of political boundaries and cross-border contacts (Prescott 1987; Minghi 1991).

Sovereignty, commonly defined as the supreme authority within a territory (Philpott 2003), is not contested anymore in Hong Kong and Macao. Portugal had, already in 1974, unilaterally relinquished its sovereignty claims over Macao and referred to the 1999 handover only as a change in administration (*transferência de poderes*). The British sovereignty claims over Hong Kong ended in 1997. The People’s Republic of China, however, created for the two territories the status of Special Administrative Regions (SAR), thereby in fact reassigning crucial aspects of sovereignty to them. Macao and Hong Kong enjoy jurisdictional, monetary, administrative and fiscal autonomy. It is actually not immediately clear from this description which aspects of sovereignty remain with the central government.

The PLA has garrisons in Hong Kong and Macao to maintain their integrity and security but does not recruit soldiers there. The Special Administrative Regions do not engage in foreign, but in external affairs, a difference that can be described as rather vague (Pereira 2002). The executive and part of the legislative branches are selected by local representatives with Beijing’s blessing, and the jurisdiction is independent and based on the two Basic Laws—which, however, can be “reinterpreted” by the National People’s Congress. Therefore, sovereignty is uncontested but de facto shared and not very clear-cut.

In particular Macao has already ample historical experience with shared sovereignty and pragmatic compromises (Montalto de Jesus 1984, Wank-Nolasco Lamas 1999, Wu 2002). This was expressed for example in the formula “Chinese territory under Portuguese administration” for the last 20 years of colonial rule, which basically meant Portugal did not claim sovereignty and China did not exercise it. Hong Kong’s case was gradually

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different. The British military power forced the Qing rulers to sign formal agreements (Wesley-Smith 1998), which left less space for ambiguities, although no Chinese regime ever recognised the British sovereignty over Hong Kong.

## TRANSITIONAL CHARACTER

A second, probably even more important, unique feature of the two boundaries is their transitional character. The dates of their abolition were already fixed at the times of their establishment. The legal construct of Special Administrative Regions is only meant to smoothen the processes of decolonisation and national integration and not meant to become a permanent phenomenon.

This “expiry date” of the boundaries has grave implications. As mentioned above, borders have socio-cultural and socio-economic functions. They matter

for people’s identities, their activity spaces, security and economic situation. If the SAR status and consequently the borders are to be abolished by 2047 (Hong Kong) and 2049 (Macao), a convergence process is predetermined. The difficult integration process in Germany shows the alternative. A premature removal of the East-German border there caused a collapse of the economy and significant out-migration, and it led to personal identity crises affecting social stability.

For Macao and Hong Kong, the understanding should be that convergence and integration will make the final abolition of the border less disruptive. In fact, the following paragraphs point out that quite some integration has already happened in recent years. As this is more related to changing identities and activity spaces than to sovereignty issues, the approach is more one of social and cultural geography rather than political geography.

“Macao seen from Lapa Island”, *Ou Mun Kei Leok*.



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THE TWO BOUNDARIES

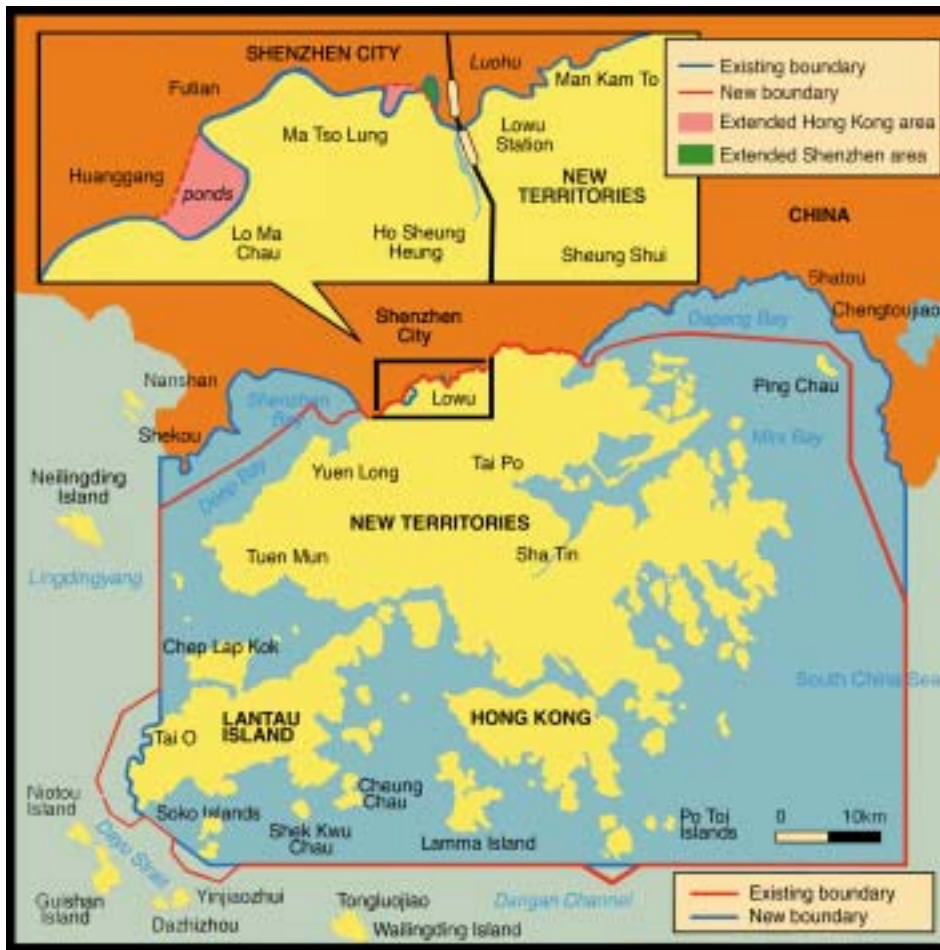
Hong Kong's first land boundary was from 1860 to 1898 in the north of Kowloon (still called Boundary Street). The current border, now also including the New Territories, was delimited first in the treaty of Beijing (1898) and then by an agreement of the Hong Kong and Guangdong governments in early 1997 (Batha 1997), which was finally confirmed by a State Council declaration in 1997 (Wesley-Smith 1998). The SAR boundaries differ slightly from those of colonial days, (a) because practicality outweighs strategic considerations now and (b) because the course of Shenzhen River, which marks the northern boundary, has changed over time.

The colonial border was initially a relatively open one, as the New Territories were a buffer zone to China, and the British did not wish to interfere in the lives of their people, including traditional connections to

Shenzhen. The first fences alongside the Shenzhen River were only erected in the 1950s, and border control was tightened in the 1960s when the stream of refugees from the mainland became unmanageable (Wesley-Smith, 1998). Today, the boundary is patrolled by police, mainly against illegal immigrants and smugglers. It is more heavily fortified than that of Macao. To the South of it lies a closed border area of about 1 to 2 km, also with a fence, which can only be entered with a special permit.

Macao's case differs in many regards. There was never any agreement between China and Portugal on the exact boundaries of the enclave. In 1573, the Chinese side built a Barrier Gate at the narrow isthmus between the peninsula and the mainland, and in 1605 the Portuguese—also unilaterally—built a defensive city wall about 2 km away from it. Neither was intended to demarcate the territory of Macao, but merely to serve practical purposes.

Serious conflict arose only in the mid-nineteenth century, when the Portuguese started to expand their territory to include the area between the city wall and Barrier Gate as well as several islands (Montalto de Jesus 1984, Wank-Nolasco Lamas 1999, Cheng 1999). Taipa, at that time two islands, was seized in 1851, Coloane in 1864 and Ilha Verde in 1890. There were numerous attempts to delimit the border, e.g. in 1862, 1887, 1909 and 1928 (Shipp 1997, appendix E), which all failed. Portuguese administration over the peninsula and the islands was accepted not formally but as a customary right.



Map 1. The boundaries of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region differ slightly from those of colonial Hong Kong (redraw after Batha 1997).

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“Neither the borders nor the questions of nationality, sovereignty and government have ever been as clearly defined as for other countries. Even the formula of ‘Chinese territory under Portuguese administration’ ... does not really clarify the status of Macau. Rather this formula confirms that Macau is unique and that it is difficult and perhaps not appropriate to define Macau in familiar legal terms” (Cremer 1987).

Like Hong Kong’s case, the Basic Law of Macao does not mention the boundary. The respective decree of the State Council in Beijing is less precise than that for Hong Kong. Comprising a map without any boundary lines visible (Map 2), it states:

“The area of the Macao SAR includes the Macao peninsula and the islands of Taipa and Coloane. The Northern Zone of the Macao SAR borders on the terrestrial area of Gongbei in the City of Zhuhai in Guangdong province. To the south of the Arch of Barrier Gate the jurisdiction is exercised by the Macao SAR. The form of administration of the land between the front Tower of the Banner of the Gongbei (Zhuhai) Frontier Post and the north of the Arch of Barrier Gate is maintained unchanged. The Macao SAR maintains its jurisdiction over the former Macao maritime areas” (Região Administrativa Especial de Macau 1999).

The latter two issues, the “no man’s land” at Gongbei and the so-called “traditional waters” (the Macao maritime areas have never been defined) have been elegantly side-stepped.

The administration of the boundary is necessarily different from Hong Kong’s. With its rather small territory, Macao cannot afford a buffer zone like the New Territories. The Barrier Gate is immediately surrounded on both sides by dense commercial and residential areas. A more than minimal closed border area must, therefore, be ruled out. Furthermore, the land boundary is only a few hundred meters long. The main challenge in terms of illegal immigration and smuggling is the maritime boundary, especially since land reclamation on both sides has significantly reduced the distance to the opposite coasts on the west side of Macao.

## BORDER CROSSINGS

**Hong Kong’s** border-crossing points across the Shenzhen River are the old Tai Po to Shenzhen road



Map 2. The Macao Special Administrative Region.

in Man Kam To and the Kowloon-Canton Railway in Lo Wu – as well as two newer road checkpoints near Sha Tau Kok (1980) and Lok Ma Chau (1989). The latter is the biggest road checkpoint. It is today operated around the clock, whereas all others close overnight. Apart from these official checkpoints there are two gates and footbridges for “tolerated border crossers”, mainly farmers who enjoy traditional land-use rights on the other side (Wesley-Smith 1998), and there is Chung Ying [China-England] Street in the divided village of Sha Tau Kok, which can be crossed by local residents.

Although most cross-boundary passenger traffic goes across the Shenzhen River – 76 per cent at Lo Wu and 11 per cent at Lok Ma Chau – about 10 per cent use other checkpoints, such as airport, ferry terminus or railway station (Table 1). The number of cross-boundary trips has increased tremendously in recent years, especially at Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau

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TABLE 1. BORDER-CROSSERS FROM HONG KONG TO MAINLAND CHINA BY CONTROL POINT, IN THOUSANDS

	Lok Ma Chau	Man Kam To	Sha Tau Kok	Lo Wu	Hung Hom	Ferries <sup>1</sup>	Airport <sup>1</sup>	Total <sup>2</sup>
1993	650	519	406	18,315	1,447	3,435	1,414	26,187
1995	1,257	517	449	21,370	1,109	3,528	1,520	29,752
1997	2,612	478	556	27,862	810	3,412	1,630	37,360
1999	4,804	497	600	38,119	934	3,017	1,560	49,532
2001	6,575	560	692	44,106	1,149	3,259	1,699	58,037

Source: Census and Statistics Department, 1996; 2000; 2002 (Table 6.9).

<sup>1</sup> Data for 2001 added according communication by Immigration Department.

<sup>2</sup> Excluding cargo and cruise ships.

TABLE 2. INBOUND BORDER-CROSSERS TO MACAO BY CONTROL POINT (1998-2002), IN THOUSANDS

	Barrier Gate <sup>1</sup>	Inner Harbour <sup>1</sup>	Cotai <sup>1</sup>	Airport <sup>2</sup>	Outer Harbour <sup>3</sup>	Total
1998	6,153 <sup>4</sup>	150	0	598	5,363	12,264 <sup>4</sup>
1999	11,632	186	0	742	5,046	17,607
2000	16,840	306	96	903	5,656	23,755
2001	20,989	162	206	934	5,890	28,181
2002	23,903	146	289	975	6,322	31,634

Source: DSEC 2000; 2002; plus additional communication by the Department.

<sup>1</sup> All from mainland China.

<sup>2</sup> About one third of the flights to Macao Airport are from mainland China (1999: 33.7 per cent, 2001: 35.9 per cent).

<sup>3</sup> All trips from Hong Kong, except for two boats daily from Shenzhen Airport starting in March 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Before computerisation of data collection in 1998, Macao residents were grossly undercounted at the Barrier Gate.

(Table 1). This increase is mainly due to short distance trips of Hong Kong residents to Shenzhen (Breitung 2002a, 2003). About 93 per cent of all trips were made by Hong Kong residents and only about 5 per cent by mainland residents (Planning Department 2002).

Whereas Hong Kong citizens are generally free to travel to the mainland, the regulations for mainland citizens are still more restrictive, although the lifting of the quota system in 2002 and a new policy on individual travellers in 2003 have brought gradual change. Entry to Hong Kong may be allowed for tourism, business, family reunions, work, training or study, particular events or transit (Security Bureau, 2002).

Macao traditionally had only one landed border-crossing point at the Barrier Gate. It was not until March 2000 that a second link was opened at the new Lotus Flower Bridge between Cotai (the newly reclaimed area between Taipa and Coloane) and Hengqin Island. Plans for a parallel rail link exist, but have not materialised yet. Checkpoints also operate at

the airport and the two harbours. Apart from these official crossing points there is a ferry service between Coloane Pier and Hengqin, which in the past could be used both ways, but is now restricted to residents of five villages on Hengqin Island.

Macao's cross-boundary traffic is hence even more concentrated on one checkpoint than Hong Kong's. 74 per cent of all border crossers and about 97 per cent of those to the mainland use the Barrier Gate (Table 2). 81 per cent of them are Macao residents, 9 per cent mainland residents and 6 per cent Hong Kong residents, which mirrors the asymmetry noted in Hong Kong. That the percentage of local residents is lower than in Hong Kong, should not surprise, given the much smaller size of Macao. What is really surprising is that the number of border-crossers in Macao reaches almost 40 per cent of that of the much bigger neighbour. Although the figures are slightly distorted by people who cross several times a day to carry duty free products and earn money from

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this, it appears that cross-boundary travelling is much more common in Macao than in Hong Kong. At the same time the rate of increase is higher as well.

## ACTIVITY SPACES

One branch of geographical research is the study of activity spaces, areas in which people move around and feel comfortable doing so. These affect our perception of places (awareness space), our interaction with others and our identity. Activity spaces can be identified for individuals or for social groups. Social criteria, such as age, education and occupation influence them, as well as external factors like the transport system and actual or perceived barriers. Thus, activity spaces may tell us something about the social and spatial impact of political boundaries (Scheiner 2000).

We got some information on cross-boundary activity spaces from surveys conducted in Macao (March 2003, with 555 respondents), Zhuhai (March 2003, with 395 respondents) and Zhongshan (February 2003, with 291 respondents) as well as one cross-border travelling survey (May 2003, with 1001 respondents). Whereas the first three surveys targeted the general city population at two different inner city

locations per city, the cross-boundary travelling survey was held at the Barrier Gate in Macao and only targeted border crossers (in both directions). It followed the example of regular official cross-boundary travelling surveys in Hong Kong (Planning Department 2002).

**Macao** appears in these surveys as highly integrated with Zhuhai in terms of activity spaces. According to the survey in Macao, only 1 per cent of the respondents have never been to the neighbouring cities of Zhuhai or Zhongshan. Among the Macao residents interviewed at the Barrier Gate, 57 per cent travel to the mainland at least once a week, and only 16 per cent less than once a month. Most of their trips are short distance: 82 per cent usually only go to Zhuhai, and 11 per cent to Zhongshan. Even more, 52 per cent usually do not travel beyond Gongbei, just behind the border. This pattern suggests that overall activity spaces are not too severely interrupted. Normally, a strong border regime would block the short-distance, everyday interactions more than occasional long distance trips.

However, two remarks appear necessary. Firstly, the patterns vary by trip purpose as 35 per cent usually go mainly for shopping, 29 per cent for leisure and 19 per cent to visit relatives, but only 9 per cent for work, 6 per cent business and 4 per cent school

View of Shenzhen with the Shenzhen River, which forms the border to Hong Kong (comp. Map 1). (Photo by author)







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(Table 3). Lower prices for goods and services are obviously the main incentive for going to Zhuhai. Whereas the border reduces work and school trips, it rather encourages shopping trips by upholding a price differential. Buying in Zhuhai is now very common (Macau Management Association 2000, Bruning 2000, Lui 2001, *Xinhua Aobao* 2002), much to the dismay of Macao's retail sector but to the benefit of the consumer and probably the economy as a whole. The possibility to buy cheaper in Zhuhai or even participate in an informal shuttle trade with goods ranging from vegetables to duty free items provides a social buffer for the lower strata of Macao's society.

The second remark concerns the asymmetry of cross-border flows. Whereas virtually every Macao resident crosses the border from time to time or more often, our surveys found 68 per cent of the respondents in Zhuhai and Zhongshan have never been to Macao and 29 per cent have no interest to go there. When they travel to Macao, their main purposes are more likely to be work, leisure or family visits than shopping.

**Hong Kong** has recently experienced a similar trend, but on a much smaller scale. Especially residents of the northern New Territories tend to go to Shenzhen in order to buy goods and services at lower prices (Hang Seng Bank 1999, Planning Department 2002), but the dimensions are still markedly different. Whereas every Macao resident crosses the boundary to the mainland statistically about 45 times a year, the figure for Hong Kong has increased from 4.7 times in 1995 to 8.7 times

in 2001. The main reasons for this difference are the geographical distance of Shenzhen from metropolitan Hong Kong, the high cost for reaching the border and differences in mentality. A trip from central Hong Kong to the border takes about one hour by train, and costs about HK\$ 40. It shall be noted that half of this fare is raised for the last 4 minutes from Sheung Shui to Lo Wu, which shows that cross-boundary activity is politically not encouraged. This is underscored by the recent decision to levy a "border-crossing tax". In Macao, in contrast, the Barrier Gate can be reached by bus (MOP 2.50) or even by foot, and suggestions for a border tax have been turned down as not being in the general interest (*Xinhua Aobao* 2002).

While the phenomenon of frequent border crossing is less common in Hong Kong than in Macao, a fast growing group of residents does cross the border very often. Those are mostly people with either family ties (e.g. spouse or children) or work in Shenzhen (Census and Statistics Department 1999; 2001). It has been estimated that 447,500 people (about equal to the population of Macao) cross the border at least once a week from Hong Kong, and 48,800 from the mainland. The latter are almost all Hong Kong residents living in Shenzhen (Planning Department 2002, Breitung 2003). Both estimates may be a bit too high, but there is obviously an avant-garde of less than 10 per cent of the population who is responsible for most of the cross-boundary trips. Their activity spaces are already as integrated as in Macao. Their

TABLE 3. PEOPLE CROSSING MACAO'S AND HONG KONG'S BORDERS TO THE MAINLAND BY MAIN PURPOSE, IN PER CENT

Main purpose	Macao <sup>1</sup>		Hong Kong <sup>2</sup>	
	all trips <sup>3</sup>	Macao residents <sup>4</sup>	all trips <sup>3</sup>	people living in HK <sup>4</sup>
Shopping/leisure	56	64	39	42
Work	13	9	9	4
Business	8	6	29	30
Family	18	19	18	20
Other purposes	4	5	4	3
Total	100	100	100	100

Sources: Planning Department, 2002 for Hong Kong; own survey (5/2003, sample size: 1,001) for Macao.

<sup>1</sup> Only at the Barrier Gate.

<sup>2</sup> At all crossing points.

<sup>3</sup> In both directions.

<sup>4</sup> Purpose for travelling to the mainland.

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The border to Shenzhen in Hong Kong New Territories. Note the sharp difference in landuse compared to p. 13.(Photo by author)

number will grow further, when border crossing becomes easier and residing in Shenzhen more common, but the situation will still differ from Macao's for geographical reasons. The New Territories, acquired and maintained by the British as a buffer zone, still function as one by keeping activity spaces separate.

## IDENTITIES

One of the reasons mentioned above for the higher degree of integration of activity spaces in Macao as compared to Hong Kong was a different mentality. People in Macao feel culturally closer to China than people in Hong Kong. Apart from the physical proximity this may be due to the higher percentage of people born in the mainland (Macao: 47.4 per cent, Hong Kong: 32.5 per cent; both according to the respective census in 2001) and the different degree of identification with the former colonial power.

Studies into the identity of Hong Kong people have identified the formation of a distinct Hong Kong (as opposed to British or Chinese) identity since 1967, when anti-colonial riots did not find the support of the majority of Hong Kong residents (Chun 1998). At that time the flaws of Maoist policies in the mainland became apparent, and on the other hand the colonial policy became more accommodating and integrative. From then until the late 1990s people in

Hong Kong identified more with Hong Kong and its government than with the mainland. Only in the wake of the Handover did the identification with China grow again, but still the majority see themselves as "Hong Kong people" or "Hong Kong Chinese" rather than "Chinese" (DeGolyer 1997, Breitung 2002b).

The situation in Macao was not the same. The Chinese population is said to have always identified more with China and less with the colonial government, which may, among other reasons, be attributed to the different education system (Ghosh 2002). While this has been confirmed by some of our interviews (see pp. 18-29 of this issue), we still found a significant local identity. In our survey, 40 per cent identified themselves as "Macao people", 27 per cent as "Macao Chinese" and only 32 per cent simply as "Chinese" (5/2003, sample size: 730 Macao residents). These figures do not differ very much from those in Hong Kong, where 33 per cent see themselves as "Chinese". Thus, while there are differences in identity, they may not be the main reason for the observed closer integration of activity spaces.

## COMPARING THE INTEGRATION PROCESSES

Both Macao and Hong Kong experience the same integration process with the mainland, but in Macao this process is already much further developed. This could be seen from the spatial (physical)

integration, from awareness and activity spaces and to some extent from the identities. For Macao residents the mainland is more visible, more accessible and more familiar than for Hong Kong residents. They make use of the advantages, particularly the lower prices across the border. They have, however, not yet developed a regional (rather than local) identity, and they have not yet developed close personal ties. Only 28 per cent of our respondents in Macao had friends in Zhuhai, and 25 per cent in Zhongshan (survey 3/2003). The other way round, 31 per cent of the respondents in Zhuhai and 27 per cent of the respondents in Zhongshan had friends in Macao.

A topic not discussed in detail in this paper is economic integration. Economically, the integration of Macao and Zhuhai (Kamm 1987, Ptak 1990, Edmonds 2002) lags behind that of Hong Kong and Shenzhen (Sung 1998). Neves (2002, footnote 3) even claims that Macao in 1998 was the least integrated of the four Chinese economies, with intraregional trade accounting for only 14.5 per cent of its total trade (Taiwan: 27.6 per cent, Hong Kong: 32 per cent, Guangdong: 88 per cent), which, however, may be partly due to re-exports of Guangdong products through Hong Kong.

The integration of Macao and Hong Kong through the legal construct of Special Administrative Region is a very interesting experiment, which can (and, for Taiwan, is supposed to) provide lessons for other integration projects in future. While, this construct allows for a transitional period until 2047 and 2049, there should be an understanding that 50 years is not eternal. Only if the time given can be used to overcome differences can the integration occur without one side feeling “swallowed” by the other. Over the past years the two borders in question have already lost a significant part of their barrier functions, but it has been noted that this applies only in one direction,

and it still strongly relies on the incentive of the price differential.

In general, Macao has better conditions than Hong Kong to successfully manage the integration process:

1. The physical proximity of Zhuhai makes it more visible and accessible, so Macao people easily include it into their individual activity spaces.

2. The relation in size between Zhuhai and Macao makes an integration of Macao (comp. Sanjuan 1997) more likely than one of Hong Kong into Shenzhen.

3. The wealth gap between Zhuhai and Macao is smaller than the one between Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

4. Due to the different colonial history and the higher number of recent immigrants in Macao, the mentality there is more open towards integration.

5. Many Macao people trace back their family roots to the immediate hinterland (Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Shunde etc.) and still have relatives there.

6. Politically, the case of Macao is much less sensitive than Hong Kong's. It is internationally less exposed.

Thus, it will be in Macao where the road map of integration will be put into action first. It will be interesting to see how the permeability of the border to Zhuhai will increase further, especially to inward flows of people, how activity spaces in terms of residence, work and school integrate further, how identities and personal contacts develop, and what technical solutions in border delimitation and administration will be found. **RC**

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