The geopolitics of cross-boundary governance in the Greater Pearl River Delta, China: A case study of the proposed Hong Kong—Zhuhai—Macao Bridge

Chun Yang*

Department of Geography, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong

Abstract

The new generation of border studies in the past two decades has focused on the analysis of cross-border integration and the functionality of cross-border regions. Cross-border governance as 'reterritorialization' has evolved into a key expression of regionalization and of dynamic changes in territorial relations in the context of globalization. So far, most research has concentrated on Europe and North America. This paper aims to investigate the geopolitical relations in the cross-border governance of the Greater Pearl River Delta (Greater PRD), a sub-national cross-boundary region in China. The proposed Hong Kong—Macao—Zhuhai Bridge (the Bridge) is offered as a case study. Debates about the Bridge elucidate the complex and dynamic power struggles in the evolution of the cross-boundary integration in the Greater PRD in the unique and evolving context of "one country, two systems". Complex relational geometries are exemplified by the changing attitudes and roles of various levels of governments involving the central, Guangdong provincial, Zhuhai and Shenzhen municipal, Hong Kong and Macao SAR governments, as well as concerned businesses and NGOs in the debate. Through the case, this study explores complicated power relations in a distinctive pattern of multi-level governance in the Greater PRD.

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Keywords: Geopolitics; Cross-border integration; Cross-border regions; Multi-level governance; Greater Pearl Delta; China

* Tel.: +852 2241 5458; fax: +852 2559 8994. E-mail address: chyang@hkucc.hku.hk

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Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed a new generation of the study of borders and borderlands (Newman, 2006). A major focus has been the analysis of cross-border cooperation and the functionality of cross-border regions, especially in Western Europe and North America, with the establishment of supranational institutions such as the European Union (the EU) and North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) (Perkmann & Sum, 2002). The development of these regional associations has prompted discussions about shifting scales of governance and the changing role of nation-states (Bache & Finders, 2004). The process of ‘state rescaling’ has been captured as a shift from government to governance, the latter term embodying a range of actors operating outside the regulatory framework of traditional state institutional forms. Scale has predominantly re-modeled much of recent literature on border studies. Brenner (1999) suggested, for example, shifts in different directions of the ‘reterritorializations’ of governance: ‘upwards’ to international organizations, ‘downwards’ to cities and regions, and ‘horizontally’ across nations, regions and communities. Cross-border governance has thus evolved in the last decade into a key expression of regionalization and of dynamic changes in territorial relations (Gualini, 2004; Kramsch & Hooper, 2004).

Thus far, the discourse of cross-border cooperation and governance has emanated mainly from empirical studies conducted in a few major regions, particularly in North America and Western Europe (Blatter, 2004; Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Recently, cross-border studies have expanded to East Asia, and from the supranational to the sub-national level, a process that has been referred to as “microregionalism” (Breslin & Hook, 2002; Chen, 2005). In comparison with the expanding literature on supranational regional integration, microregionalism refers to processes of growing regional interconnectedness that occur ‘below’ the national level which cuts across national borders (Breslin & Hook, 2002: 8). The commonly cited cases include the Singapore—Malaysia—Indonesia growth triangle (Grundy-Warr, Peachey, & Perry, 1999; Sparke, Sidaway, Bunnell, & Grundy-Warr, 2004), the Greater China region (Chen, 2005; Sum, 2001) and the Hong Kong (“HK” hereafter)—Pearl River Delta (“the PRD” hereafter) region, etc (Chan, 1998; Shen, 2003; Yang, 2006; Yeung, 2003).

The cross-boundary region of HK–PRD or the “Greater PRD” consists of the PRD economic region1 under the jurisdiction of Guangdong Province, and the Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of HK and Macao which are directly governed by the central government. The Greater PRD has been identified as a sub-national cross-border2 region under the unique framework of the “one country, two systems” (“OCTS” hereafter) (Yang, 2006; Yeung, 2003). The PRD has been extensively studied as a successful development model, largely powered by foreign investment from HK which constitutes the largest source of

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1 The administrative sphere of the Pearl River Delta Economic Zone (Zhujiang Sanjiaozhou Jingji Qu) was designated by the Guangdong Provincial government in October 1994. The existing PRD region includes two vice-provincial level cities (Guangzhou and Shenzhen), seven prefecture-level cities (Zhuhai, Foshan, Jiangmen, Zhongshan, Dongguan, Huizhou and Zhaoqing), nine county-level cities (Zengcheng, Conghua, Huiyang, Taishan, Kaiping, Emping, Heshan, Gaoyao and Sihui), two counties (Huiedong and Boluo), and a number of city districts under the jurisdiction of the prefecture-level cities and above (see Fig. 1).

2 The boundary between HK and the PRD remains different from other administrative boundaries in China, despite the changes from international border to an internal administrative boundary after 1997. Under the unique framework of “one country, two systems”, HK is a Special Administrative Region and HK’s boundary with the Mainland continues to resemble the international border as it was before 1997.
funds (Lin, 1997; Sit & Yang, 1997). Responding to intensive interactions between the PRD and HK, especially after the territory’s reversion to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, academic and public-policy research have explored cross-boundary integration of the region (Enright, Scott, & Chang, 2005; Lin & Tse, 2005; Shen, 2003; Smart & Lin, 2004; Yang, 2004). These studies focused primarily on the socio-economic analysis of the emergence and management of the cross-boundary region. Although recent studies have attempted to investigate the governance of the region (e.g. Hu & Chan, 2002; Shen, 2003; Smart & Lin, 2004; Yang, 2005), political dimensions, especially the power relations among the various levels of governments and actors are still poorly understood. In this context, this paper attempts to provide a geopolitical analysis of cross-border governance in the Greater PRD region, with a comprehensive exploration of the power relations involved in the debate about the proposed HK–Zhuhai–Macao Bridge (“the Bridge” hereafter) in the last two decades.

The paper consists of four sections. It begins with an overview of theoretical perspectives on border studies in the ‘borderless’ and ‘detterritorized’ world, especially the emergent cross-border governance in cross-border regions. This is followed by an empirical investigation of the paradigm shift inherent in the cross-boundary integration and governance of the Greater PRD. Then, the geopolitics of cross-border governance, especially the power relations among multiple levels of governments and concerned stakeholders, are analyzed using the Bridge as a case study. The paper concludes with a discussion of the theoretical relevance of the Bridge debates to the larger issue of cross-border governance in the era of globalization, and of the policy implications for institutionalization and governance of the Greater PRD.

Fig. 1. The administrative sphere of the Greater Pearl River Delta.
Cross-border regions in the ‘Borderless’ world

Cross-border governance in a multi-level polity

Globalization might have exerted significant impacts on cross-border flows of capital, population and information, but we still live in a hierarchical world of rigid ordering in which borders have become part of our daily lives (Newman, 2006). Since the 1980s, discussions on increasing regionalization have varied from free trade areas to visions of new city-regions as key nodes in a networked global economy (Bunnell, Muzaini, & Sidaway, 2006; Scott, Agnew, Soja, & Storper, 2001; Sparke et al., 2004). Although ‘global cities’ have been identified as the most important places which are becoming globally linked to their national environment (Sassen, 1991), discussions of the ‘rise of the regional state’ together with the emergence of cross-border regions have centred on the declining importance of the nation-state and the increasing relevance of ‘regions’ (Perkmann & Sum, 2002; Storper, 1997). Many border regions are no longer ‘peripheral’ in the national or international context. Instead, they have revamped their characters, changing from ‘front lines’ of sovereign states to socio-economic ‘contact zones’ for neighboring institutional societies, especially in North America and Europe (Anderson, O’Dowd, & Wilson, 2003; Blatter, 2004).

In the context of neoliberal globalization, urban and regional development issues are being interpreted within the governance framework (Kohl & Warner, 2004). The multi-scalar processes of globalization (Dicken, Kelly, Olds, & Yeung, 2001; Yeung, 2000) imply that globalization is not only imposed on national or local communities by external forces, such as foreign direct investment, but also imposed on internal forces, (re)construction of certain discourses, and power struggles within local or national communities. As Jessop (2002) and Paasi (2001) have emphasized, defining regional spaces and scales within which governance takes place are inherently contested processes, incurring negotiations among various actors and groups as well as between the state and civil society. It is not surprising to find that governance becoming more complex and the outcomes of political negotiations becoming much harder to predict (John, 2000). Such changes have generated a host of new interpretations: the contemporary ‘hollowing out of the nation-state’ (Jessop, 2002; Ohmae, 1995); the varied forms of ‘multi-level governance’ (Hooghe & Marks, 2001); the “reterritorialization of the state” (Brenner, 1999), the ‘glocalization’ of local politics (Swyngedouw, 1997) and the “scale-switching” of the regional “spatial fix” (Marston, 2000). The last decade witnessed local authorities — in tandem with the private capital — relying increasingly on the planning and implementation of large-scale development projects. These included museums, waterfronts, exhibition halls and parks, business centres, and international landmark events. These efforts have served to reinforce the competitive position of their metropolitan economies in the rapidly changing local, national and global competitive milieu (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, & Rodriguez, 2002). In addition to various levels of government, such actors as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a key role particularly in a global informal politics (Taylor, 2005). In practice, it is the combination of these formal (state-based) and informal institutions as “a set of interlocking but separate bodies” that “produce the system of global governance” (Halliday, 2000: 334).

Cross-border governance capacities are described as dual processes of both formal institutionalization and informal integration (Kramsch & Hooper, 2004). Recent proliferation of cross-border regions can be interpreted as a result of the increasing ‘decentralization’ of cross-border governance. This implies a shift from the central state level, to the local and regional realms, often in conjunction with supranational integration (Perkmann & Sum, 2002). “Multi-level governance” (MLG), as it originated and has developed extensively in the EU, proposes that
‘decision-making competencies are shared by actors at different levels rather than monopolized by state executives’ (Hooghe & Marks, 2001: 27; Jessop, 2004). Recent endeavors have started to apply the MLG model to cross-border governance beyond Europe, for example, in Greater China (Sasuga, 2001) and the Greater PRD region (Yang, 2005). It is argued that, similar to the EU, decision-making competencies in the Greater PRD have tended to disperse across multiple levels of government ranging from central to provincial (Guangdong in this case), and to the HK and Macao SARs and the other municipal, city and county levels of the PRD, as well as to businesses, NGOs and other stakeholders on both sides of the boundary. The most obvious differences between the Greater PRD and the EU are the lack of an effective regional authority in China, which results in a ‘backstage’ role of the central government under the unique political framework of OCTS (Yang, 2005). More importantly, the transition to multi-level governance is a highly political process that is both stimulated and constrained by power relations. The result is an increasing fluidity, complexity and diffusion of authority (Sasuga, 2001).

**Emergent politics of cross-border governance**

Cross-border regionalism may be viewed as part of a process of “relativisation of scale”, of which the most notable manifestation is the constitution of a new geography of overlapping, experimental and often unstable territorial domains of governance and regulation (Gualini, 2003). The politics of cross-border governance has thus gone beyond the traditional version of the inter-city relationships (Bache & Flinders, 2004). For instance, membership of the EU has changed ‘intergovernmental relations”, the interaction between government units of all types and levels, from dyadic to triadic relationships between local-regional governments, national governments and supranational government (Rhodes, 1986). The case of the Indonesia–Malaysia–Singapore Growth Triangle manifests the complex geographies of power subvert efforts to cross-border regionalization as a straightforward geopolitical corollary of ‘globalization’ (Sparke et al., 2004).

In the case of the Greater PRD, Hu and Chan (2002) have argued that an examination of regional integration and governance will enable a better understanding for the quest to improve the regional ‘competitive advantages’ of the PRD. Reviewing the Bridge controversy, Li (2006) attempted to explore its impact on HK’s hub position in South China. More specifically, Shen (2004) explores the role of the HK government in cross-border urban governance of the region. He argues that a tension-free model of regional integration has never existed in southern China, as a result of the complexities of the governance network and the interaction between what he terms geo-economic and geopolitical ‘time-space envelopes’. With the application of the MLG model, Yang (2005) argues that the Greater PRD needs to set up a regional level authority similar to the supranational institutions of the EU, in order to foster cross-boundary cooperation within the region. Nevertheless, little effort has been made to examine the political dimensions, especially the power relations of different levels of governments and relevant stakeholders in the region and their impacts on cross-border governance of the Greater PRD. This paper therefore aims to investigate how the inter-governmental networks operate at various scales and the extent to which they have changed and influence the cross-boundary governance of the region.

**Cross-boundary integration and governance of the Greater PRD**

*From market-driven to institutionalized integration*

Before China’s opening and reform in 1978, hardly any cross-border interaction existed between HK and the Mainland. Since 1978, a mechanism for cross-border interaction was
established, primarily driven by the transplantation of small and medium-scale labour-intensive manufacturing activities from HK to the PRD. The cooperation between HK and the PRD during the 1980s and 1990s was market-driven in the absence of a formal integration framework. The cross-border interaction between HK and the PRD was characterized by a “bottom-up” paradigm in which initiatives are made predominantly by entrepreneurs from HK and the local governments of the PRD (Shen, 2003). This situation has changed after HK’s reversion to Chinese sovereignty in 1997: since the late 1990s, government-involved and institutionalized economic integration has been emerging in the Greater PRD (Yang, 2004). The most dramatic transformation in the post-1997 period has been the establishment of inter-governmental communication between Guangdong provincial and HKSAR authorities. This is epitomized by the establishment of the HK–Guangdong Cooperation Joint Conference (HGCJC), which was inaugurated in March 1998 and proposed by the former Chief Executive of HKSAR, Tung Chee-hwa. Another milestone in the institutionalization of the HK–PRD cross-boundary governance was the signing of the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) in June 2003. The CEPA, the first bilateral free trade agreement for both the Mainland and HK, comprises three components dealing with the trading of goods, services and investment facilitation. It is a so-called WTO-plus package, because smaller HK companies stand to benefit from the opening-up and liberalization on the Mainland beyond China’s WTO commitments with lower thresholds. The CEPA institutionalizes and facilitates deeper functional regional integration between HK and the Mainland (Yang, 2004).

Since 1997, governments on both sides of the boundary have become more involved in cross-boundary integration. More specifically, the HKSAR government has played a proactive role in the transition. This represents a dynamic paradigm shift in the government’s role in economic development and cross-boundary cooperation with the PRD, from “passive, reactive and status quo ‘intervention’” into a “proactive market enabler” (HKSAR 2002/03 Budget Speech, www.budget.gov.hk/2002/eframe.2.htm). Since the late 1990s, especially after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, HK business interests have been the most significant driving force promoting cross-boundary cooperation with the Mainland, particularly in the PRD region. The most salient example is the free trade agreement between HK and the Mainland proposed by Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce on the eve of China’s accession to WTO, which subsequently evolved into the CEPA.

**Dynamics of cross-boundary cooperation and inter-city competition**

Accompanying the increasing cross-boundary cooperation characterized by inter-governmental communication and the emerging institutionalization of cross-boundary integration, inter-city competition in the region has intensified since the late 1990s. The notable examples of such keen competition in the Greater PRD lie in infrastructure developments, such as ports, airports and logistic centres (Enright et al., 2005). Moreover, major players in the region are struggling to become its economic centre, or “dragon head”\(^3\). Regional competition within the Greater PRD is mainly denoted by the rivalry among major regional cities: Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou.

The inter-relationships among HK, Guangzhou and Shenzhen and their respective positions in the region have changed significantly in the past decade. HK has become the dominant

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\(^3\) “Dragon head” (Long Tou in Chinese) here refers to the leading cities of the whole region (i.e. the Greater PRD) in the terms of economic strength.
metropolitan hub for the Greater PRD. In 2004, HK’s GDP accounted for 48.3% of the Greater PRD, while the shares of Guangzhou and Shenzhen were only 14.8% and 12.3%, respectively (Table 1). Yet in the OCTS framework, HK is excluded from the administrative sphere of the PRD and has been mostly isolated from the PRD regional planning efforts within the PRD. This isolation is sometimes justified in terms of HK remaining ‘international’ rather than becoming too ‘regional’ and too closely linked with the Mainland (Shiu & Yang, 2002). On the other hand, although HK has played a pivotal role in the rapid growth of the PRD as an economic engine, the Guangdong provincial government and local level governments of the PRD are reluctant to accept HK’s position as the leading economic city in the region. HK has never been fully and explicitly treated as an integral part of the regional planning and coordination for the Greater PRD. In fact, the new PRD Urban Conglomerations Plan, completed in mid-2004 and enunciated with the participation of the State Ministry of Construction, defined the region’s urban system as a pattern comprising of “dual-cores and multi-centers”. Guangzhou and Shenzhen serve as the two principal regional centres with Zhuhai as the subsidiary regional centre (Guangdong Provincial Government, 2004). Although the HK and Macao SARs are now taken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Greater PRD</th>
<th>HK</th>
<th>Macao</th>
<th>PRD</th>
<th>GZ</th>
<th>SZ</th>
<th>Shares of Greater PRD (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land area (km²)</td>
<td>42,828</td>
<td>1103</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41,698</td>
<td>7434</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered population (million persons)</td>
<td>34.51</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>27.14</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (2000, million persons)</td>
<td>47.92</td>
<td>6.71</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>40.77</td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP (US$ billion)</td>
<td>336.98</td>
<td>162.75</td>
<td>10.31</td>
<td>163.92</td>
<td>49.71</td>
<td>41.34</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita GDP (US$, on census population)</td>
<td>7032</td>
<td>24250</td>
<td>23544</td>
<td>4021</td>
<td>5001</td>
<td>5897</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail sales consumer (US$ billion)</td>
<td>81.05</td>
<td>24.57</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>55.54</td>
<td>20.23</td>
<td>11.06</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports (US$ billion)</td>
<td>444.10b</td>
<td>258.86</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>182.43</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilized foreign direct investment</td>
<td>27.08b</td>
<td>13.63</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>13.05</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HK, Hong Kong; GZ, Guangzhou; SZ, Shenzhen.
The exchange rate used in Table 1 are 2003 and 2004: US$1 = HK$7.8 = RMB8.28 = MOP8.02.

Table 1
Shares of main cities in the Greater PRD (2004)

- ^a^ Data of the PRD is extracted from the fifth national census which was carried out in 2000.
- ^b^ These are simple summations of the export figures and foreign direct investment figures for the Greater Pearl River Delta region. Note that these figures include double counting, i.e. intra-regional trade and investment, so should be adjusted.
- ^c^ The total was calculated as (PRD total exports + HK total exports + Macao total exports)−(HK exports to China + HK imports from PRD + HK exports to Macao + Macao exports to HK + Macao exports to China + Macao imports from PRD). HK’s and Macao’s imports from PRD were estimated from their respective portions in total Guangdong exports.
- ^d^ Estimated by subtracting the Hong Kong and Macao source FDI into the PRD and the estimated Chinese portion of FDI into Hong Kong and Macao.
into account more than previously, their planning departments have not played an active part in the regional planning process.

Even within the PRD region, the fortunes of Guangzhou and Shenzhen have been in sharp contrast. Historically, Guangzhou has been the dominant political, cultural, commercial and urban centre for South China, both before and since the founding of the PRC. However, since the 1980s, there is a general agreement that Guangzhou has lost its “dragon head” position (Lin, 1997; Sit & Yang, 1997). During the 1980s and until at least the mid-1990s, Shenzhen prospered, while Guangzhou was left behind, in real terms. However, since the late 1990s, the Guangdong provincial government has adopted measures to strengthen Guangzhou’s central position within the Province. For example, Guangdong’s tenth five-year plan (2001–2005) places Guangzhou at the core of emerging Greater PRD inter-city rapid transit system and highway network. The incorporation of former county-level cities of Panyu and Huadu in 2000 in an enlarged Guangzhou increased the total land area from 1400 to 3719 km². Guangzhou’s urban development plan formerly emphasized expansion only to the east, but it now contains proposals for both eastern and southern extensions. In addition, Guangzhou’s new Baiyun international airport has been designated as one of China’s three aviation hubs (Beijing and Shanghai). Historically, Guangzhou has always been a centre for light industry, but the municipal government is now promoting and developing heavy machinery industries. The plan calls for Guangzhou to have three vehicle plants and become China’s fourth-largest automobile production base (after Shanghai, Changchun and Wuhan), and industrial areas along the shoreline, deep-water ports, logistics centers and high-tech industrial areas will be developed in the coastal town of Nansha. It is argued that the “dragon head” is shifting in this emerging polycentric city-region (Yang, 2006; Yeh & Xu, 2006).

The PRD should be understood as a region in the sense that the term is used within the sub-discipline of economic geography, rather than as an administrative entity. It is worth noting that though restructured since the era of Opening and Reform, China’s economy continues to be governed administratively (Ma, 2005). At the administrative level, HK is a SAR, similar to a province or a centrally governed municipality, but it is directly administered by the Central government. The PRD in the jurisdictions of Guangdong includes two vice-provincial municipalities (the provincial capital Guangzhou and the Special Economic Zone in Shenzhen) as well as seven prefecture-level municipalities, nine county-level cities and two counties. The Greater PRD is thus labeled “one region, multiple administrations” (Yang, 2005). Such diversified administrative jurisdictions and multiple governing bodies may complicate the process of coordinating regional policies and planning within the PRD and between the PRD and HK.

The geopolitics of cross-boundary governance in the Greater PRD: a case study of the proposed Hong Kong–Zhuhai–Macao Bridge

Background

Geographically, the PRD is divided into the eastern and western regions, separated by the Pearl River. Although there is substantial literature on the PRD, only recent attentions have been paid to the uneven development of the two sides of the river, especially their distinct interactions with HK (Yeung, Shen, & Zhang, 2005). The growing gap between the eastern and western regions of the PRD is indicated by the fact that, although they had similar GDP levels in 1980, the combined GDP of Shenzhen and Dongguan in 2004 was four times that of Zhuhai and Zhongshan (Table 2). In 2004, moreover, the eastern PRD, with just 28.6% of the total PRD
land area, accounted for 45.6% and 66.8% of the total foreign direct investment and exports in the region, respectively (Table 3).

After two decades of rapid development, rising labour costs and land shortage have become matters of some concern in the eastern PRD in the new millennium. It comes as no surprise to find, therefore, that the western PRD has been identified by HK as the expanding hinterland of the future. However, at present, transportation between HK and the western PRD mainly relies on ferries or highways circling the vast PRD region, resulting in an increase in transport time and cost. More importantly, most of the existing land border control points are concentrated along the boundary between HK and Shenzhen, which results in heavy traffic and congestions at the customs gateways. Proposals for a bridge are therefore intended to provide a long-term relief to border congestion in the eastern PRD (Shiu & Yang, 2002).

Evolution of the Bridge proposals

The idea of building a land route connecting HK, Zhuhai and Macao can be traced back to nearly two decades. Since then, a number of proposals about how best to make the link between HK and the western PRD have been put forward by the three involved parties. These varied proposals include seven major alignments as follows (Fig. 2 and Table 4).

1) A Northern Alignment. The earliest proposal for the Bridge was proposed in 1983 by Gordon Wu, Chairman of the Hopewell Holdings Limited of HK. As a HK businessman, he has been a pioneer of the PRD’s infrastructure construction, notably building the Guangzhou—Shenzhen Expressway and the Guangzhou—Zhuhai Expressway. The proposed bridge then was initially called the Lingding Yang Bridge, which would span from Tuen Mun in northwest Hong Kong to Tangjia Bay in northeastern Zhuhai (Shiu & Yang, 2002). The proposal was supported by the former mayor of Zhuhai, Liang Guangda and was submitted to the then British colonial government in HK in 1992. However, it was given the cold shoulder by the HK government. The relatively small flow of people, vehicles and freight, and the unfavorable geopolitical conditions at the time were the major barriers. Even so, the major setback came from the central government in Beijing, mainly as a result of Liang’s personal relations with the central government. The State Council gave the go-ahead for the bridge to be proposed as a study item in 1997, but it remained at the concept level and was effectively shelved for more than 10 years (Shiu & Yang, 2002).

2) A Southern Alignment. Proposals for a southern bridge have emerged from Guangdong in spite of negative response from HK side. In 1998, three scholars, Qian Zhaojun, Zheng Tianxiang and Luo Zhangren from Zhongshan University in Guangzhou proposed a Bridge further south than the original Lingding Yang Bridge Proposal. This would link HK, Zhuhai, Macao, and a deep port in Wanshan Islands. It was supported by the Guangdong Provincial Centre of Development Research in early 2001. However, this southern alignment proposal did not elicit a response from HK side.

3) A Central Alignment (Single Y-shaped Alignment). In May 2001, Gordon Wu revised his original proposal for the Bridge, proposing instead to link HK’s new Chek Lap Kok

...
International Airport with Macao and Zhuhai on the western side of the Pearl River Estuary. He also proposed to build new container terminals on the northwest coast of Lantau Island, so as to strengthen HK’s position as the air and sea transport hub for South China. This proposal is usually known as the “Central Alignment”. It is also sometimes referred to as the “Single Y-shaped” Bridge, with twin landing points in Zhuhai and Macao on the western side of the Bridge.

4) A Tunnel Plan. The HKSAR government’s original attitude towards the Bridge, expressed in a consultancy study, was that such a link to the western PRD would not be taken into consideration of construction at least until 2020 (Hong Kong Planning Department, HKSAR, 2000). However, there was something of a wake-up call in April 2002, when Guangdong province released a plan to build a tunnel to link Zhuhai and Shenzhen (Shiu & Yang, 2002). The HKSAR government feared that such a link would effectively marginalize HK in the regional development of the PRD, by cutting-off a large portion of the intermediate hinterland of HK. The concern expressed in HK was even greater in

Table 3
Regional disparities: the eastern and western PRD (2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utilized foreign direct investment</th>
<th>Exports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount (US$ billion)</td>
<td>Share of the PRD (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central PRD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among which, Guangzhou</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern PRD</td>
<td>5.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among which, Dongguan</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huizhou</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenzhen</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western PRD</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among which, Foshan</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangmen</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhaoqing</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhongshan</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhuhai</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD region</td>
<td>11.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data for Zhaoqing and Huizhou cover the whole city.

2002 because HK’s economy had remained in the doldrums for 5 consecutive years, while cities such as Shanghai in the Yangtze River Delta were increasingly challenging the Greater PRD’s dominance in attracting multinational corporations and foreign direct investment.

5) A Double Y-shaped Alignment. Since the late 1980s, Guangdong has amended its thoughts on the alignments of the Bridge several times. In February 2004, Guangdong’s executive Vice-Governor Tang Bingquan and the Mayor of Shenzhen Li Hongzhong announced that the Bridge should be extended on the eastern side to provide a link to Shenzhen, in a so-called Double Y-shaped Bridge (South China Morning Post, 14 February 2004). Earlier understandings between the Guangdong Province, the HKSAR and Macao SAR governments favored a “Single Y-shaped” Bridge linking the two SARs with Zhuhai, without a landing point at Shenzhen. Although Mr. Li urged HK to look at the mutual benefits of the new proposal, rather than seeing it only as competition, the HKSAR government worried that a “Double Y-shaped” Bridge would take freight from the southwest region bypassing HK to rival ports on the eastern side of the PRD, especially in Shenzhen. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the Guangdong provincial government changed its plan as part of a strategy to displace HK as the regional logistics centre. The development of Nansha port in southern Guangzhou, situated at the centre of the estuary of the Pearl River, is another part of the strategic plans to fulfill this goal. Whereas the “Single Y-shaped” Bridge would consolidate HK’s role as the logistics centre of the region and undermine the Nansha project, as well as the future development of Shenzhen ports.

Fig. 2. Comparison of various proposals for the Bridge.
6) **Consensus on the alignment and landing points.** In August 2003, the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) publicly agreed to proceed with the Bridge project after meeting with officials from the three parties concerned. The commission favors the “Single Y-shaped” design put forward by HK, instead of a “Double Y-shaped” design favored by Guangdong. The head of the National Communications Ministry Zhang Chunxian, reiterated, “we have fully considered the interests of all the cities, in particular HK” (*South China Morning Post*, November 30, 2004). After heated debates, it appears that a decision was taken to leave Shenzhen out of future plans for the Bridge. As Chen Shanru, Director of the Guangdong Development and Reform Commission pointed out, “as the bridge name says, it includes HK, Zhuhai and Macao” (*The Standard*, May 25, 2005).

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### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Proponent(s)</th>
<th>Alignment</th>
<th>Date proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Northern Alignment (Lingding Yang Bridge)</td>
<td>Gordon Wu, Hopewell Holdings, Hong Kong</td>
<td>From Tangjia, Zhuhai via Qi’ao Island and Neilingding island to Tuen Mun, Hong Kong</td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zhuhai municipal government</td>
<td></td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Alignment (“Single Y-shaped” Bridge)</td>
<td>Gordon Wu, Hopewell Holdings, Hong Kong One Country Two Systems Research Institute</td>
<td>An artificial island off the coast of Zhuhai and Macao to Tai’O, Hong Kong. Separate bridges from Zhuhai and Macao to the Bridge.</td>
<td>May 2001 September 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Southern Alignment</td>
<td>Centre for Development Research, Guangdong Provincial government Qian Zhaojun, Luo Zhangren and Zheng Tianxiang</td>
<td>A joint bridge-port project, with a deep-water port near Wanshan island in the Pearl Estuary. Bridge alignment further south at the mouth of the Pearl Estuary</td>
<td>Early 2001 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhuhai-Zhonshan Tunnel Plan</td>
<td>Ou Guangyuan, Vice-governor of Guangdong Province</td>
<td>Deep water tunnel link Zhuhai and Shoukou, Shenzhen</td>
<td>April 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A “Double Y-shaped” Alignment</td>
<td>2022 Foundation, Hong Kong Tang Bingqun, Deputy Vice-governor, Guangdong Provincial government and Li Hongzhong, Mayor of Shenzhen</td>
<td>One side of the Bridge linking Zhuhai and Macao (one “Y”), and the other side linking with Shenzhen and Hong Kong (the other “Y”).</td>
<td>Autumn 2002 Early 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus on the Alignment and Landing points</td>
<td>The second meeting of the Bridge Advance Work Group</td>
<td>The final consensus is the single Y-shaped alignment with HK landing point in San Shekwan at Lantau Island, Gongbei in Zhuhai and Dongfang Mingzhu in Zhuhai.</td>
<td>April 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Alternative Bridge (Zhongshan-Shenzhen Bridge)</td>
<td>Shenzhen municipal government</td>
<td>Link between Zhongshan in the western and Shenzhen in the eastern PRD</td>
<td>March 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Compiled from Shiu and Yang (2002), newspapers and websites.
When the Bridge is completed, the time taken to travel between HK and Zhuhai and Macao would be shortened to around 30 min. In the long run, it is felt that such new links will facilitate the development of the western side of Guangdong province as well as for the whole southeast China region. The link, referred to as “completing the loop”, will enhance the competitiveness of the Greater PRD region as a fully integrated region in terms of transportation (HKTDC, 2002).

7) Unfinished debate. The debate on the Bridge seems unending. Although a consensus has been achieved on the alignment and landing points of the Bridge, recent disputes have focused on more practical aspects (www.hk.news.yahoo.com, April 26, 2006). The first dispute, for example, is related to the sources of capital investment. Both Guangdong and Macao governments have expressed their unwillingness to invest in the project. For HK, business like Hopewell would like to invest, if the design of the Bridge fits their interests. The second dispute involves the arrangement of the checking points on the three sides of the Bridge, i.e. HK, Macao and Zhuhai. While HK prefers a co-location of the checkpoints on the Bridge, Guangdong insists on building separate infrastructures. Other disputes include environmental assessment, permits of vehicles going through the Bridge, etc. It is obvious that the final decision will be made by the central government.

It is worth noting that in March 2006, Shenzhen Municipal government released a plan for an alternative bridge that would link Zhongshan (a city to the north of Zhuhai in the western PRD) with Shenzhen. This proposal was inserted into the five-year plan of road transportation for Guangdong Province (Shenzhen Daily, March 22, 2006). Since this version is within the sole jurisdiction of Guangdong Province, it could be built much earlier than the other Bridge which is cross-boundary in nature and under delicate negotiation among the different parties. This alternative would certainly be a great challenge to the HK–Zhuhai–Macao Bridge in the future, in terms of volumes of cargoes and passengers (www.southcn.com, March 22, 2006).

Power struggles in the Greater PRD: the case of the Bridge

The difficult negotiations around the Bridge proposals have been described by Gorden Wu as like having “five mothers-in-law” (i.e. the five concerned government) (Interview with Wu, September 2002). Actually, negotiations involve six relevant governments at different levels, including: 1) the central government in Beijing, 2) the Guangdong Provincial government, 3) the Zhuhai municipal government, 4) the Macao SAR government, 5) the HKSAR government, and 6) the Shenzhen municipal government. In addition, power struggles have also been found between HK businesses, NGOs and other interested parties. The result is a multi-scalar and multi-actor power struggle.

The central government’s involvement

In January 2002, in response to the request of the HKSAR government, and in the face of the keen competition within the PRD, the central government set up a mechanism called the “Conference on Coordination of Major Infrastructure Facilities between the Mainland and HK” (“the Conference”). The establishment of the Conference signifies the direct involvement of the Central government in coordinating infrastructure in HK and the PRD. It is notable that under this mechanism the Guangdong provincial government is sidelined (Li, 2006; Shiu & Yang, 2002). To ensure the successful implementation of the OCTS principle and HK’s continual
stability and prosperity, it appears that the Central government is willing to act in HK’s favor, suppressing the localism tendencies of Guangdong. In June 2003, reports surfaced in the HK press that the NDRC, the Central government agency charged with examining the costs and benefits of all major infrastructure projects, would recommend to China’s State Council that the Bridge be given the go-ahead. In the same month, Premier Wen Jiabao, reiterated support for the Bridge during his visit to HK in November 2002.

Provincial governments changing attitudes towards the Bridge

The Guangdong provincial government plan

The Guangdong provincial government’s attitude towards the Bridge has experienced several dramatic changes over the past two decades. Since the late 1990s, Guangdong has continually promoted the proposal. However, after HK changed its mind on the Bridge in the early 2000s, the Guangdong provincial government started to express some reservations. As mentioned earlier, a “double Y-shaped” alignment of the Bridge was put forward in early 2004, proposing a link with Shenzhen. In March 2006, Shenzhen and Guangdong proposed an alternative bridge to link Zhongshan and Shenzhen within the jurisdiction of Guangdong, despite the earlier plan of a link including HK supported by the central government. It is clear that Guangdong is articulating local interests in cross-boundary integration, especially those of the deep-water container ports in Shenzhen and Nansha in Guangzhou.

Zhuhai’s dream

Within Guangdong province, Zhuhai was the original proponent and once one of the most eager localities to have the Bridge built. The historical lack of infrastructure is one of the main reasons behind the relatively underdeveloped economy on the western bank. Zhuhai has for decades sought to cast off its backwater status. All the proposed alignments that would link Zhuhai with HK and the eastern PRD seem to be acceptable by Zhuhai, although it might have its own idea on the landing points of the Bridge in the city. Zhuhai preferred the Bridge to land on the western part of the city which is underdeveloped, while HK insisted on the Bridge enter the eastern part of Zhuhai city centre (Shiu & Yang, 2002). Zhuhai has however played a modest role in the Bridge debate, partly related to its past inefficient infrastructure investment, especially the international airport which handled only 13 flights per day in 2004, and called “a white elephant project” by the media (http://unn.people.com.cn/GB/channel2/3/14/200106/14/71326.html, accessed on March 23, 2005).

Shenzhen’s intentions

Shenzhen has been a late participant in the debate on the Bridge. Although the Bridge will primarily serve HK, Zhuhai and Macao, its construction will invariably affect passenger and freight flows in the entire PRD, and consequently the growth potential of all places in the region. This is because container traffic from the western part of the PRD will bypass Shenzhen and go directly to the container terminals in HK. This will obviously impinge on the drawing power of Chiwan and Yantian container ports in Shenzhen. This is perhaps why the Guangdong provincial government wanted to change the alignment of the Bridge from a “Single Y-shaped” to the “Double Y-shaped” design. The HK SAR government actually favored a Single Y-shaped Bridge, fearing a Double Y-shaped Bridge would take freight from the southwest region past the SAR and on to rival ports in the PRD, such as Yantian and Shekou ports in Shenzhen. Thus, Shenzhen has been left out of the current plans for the bridge, with the agreement of
the central government. The recent proposals for an alternative bridge to link with Zhongshan demonstrates the extent to which Shenzhen’s leaders are worried about their city being marginalized in the east–west transport linkages through the Greater PRD.

**Macao’s eagerness**

The original (1980s) proposals for the Bridge bypassed Macao, which then opposed the alignment and appealed to the former premier Zhu Rongji. To ensure that this did not happen, scholars and business groups in Macao proposed some alternative plans. These proposals called for a more southern route, with the landing point on the west side of the Pearl Estuary being closer to Macao. Since early 2000, Macao has become more eager to see the construction of the Bridge. Shortly after taking over the Chief Executive position in Macao, Mr. Edmund Ho expressed his hopes that the Bridge would provide a direct link between Macao and Lantau Island, the site of the new “Disneyland” development, the airport and other tourist attractions (Shiu & Yang, 2002).

**HK’s dominant role in the Bridge debate**

**Changing attitudes of the HKSAR government**

In April 1997, on the eve of HK’s return to Beijing’s sovereignty, the Planning Department of the HK government appointed MVA Consultants to conduct a study on new cross-border road connections. The study, completed in March 2000, forecasts that the bulk of traffic flow between HK and Mainland would be in the eastern part of the PRD up to the year 2020 (Hong Kong Planning Department, HKSAR, 2000). Since 2002, however, the attitude of the HKSAR government towards the Bridge has changed dramatically as indicated by Policy Addresses of the Chief Executives since 1999. HK has turned from an opponent to a proponent, and has played a predominant role in promoting the Bridge. In the meantime, many sectors of HK businesses have expressed their support for the Bridge (Shiu & Yang, 2002) and influential interests have supported the proposal.

**Controversy in HK business**

However, there has been some opposition within the realm of HK business. As Yeung (2000) argues, commercial and financial interests have dominated Hong Kong’s executive and legislative councils, and have had a great deal of influence on political affairs and government policy. Although the HKSAR government has come to support the Bridge, skepticism was most notably promoted by Hutchison Whampoa, the dominant firm of HK’s port facilities. The chairman of Hutchison, HK tycoon Li Ka-Shing and his deputy Canning Fok, criticized the Bridge proposal in 2002. Fok argued in June 2002 that the Bridge is not only costly but also lacks any obvious economic benefits. He further argued that the extensive network of ferries in the PRD is sufficient to tie HK with the western side of the PRD (Shiu & Yang, 2002). Another reason for their concern is related to the profits of their own port terminals. Besides having

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5 They include Victor Fung, Chairman of the Hong Kong Airport Authority; C. C. Tung, Chairman of Oriental Overseas Group; Raymond Kwok, Vice Chairman and Managing Director, Sun Hung Kay Properties; the Federation of Hong Kong Industries; the Hong Kong Association of Freight Forwarding Agents; the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, and the Hong Kong American Chamber of Commerce.
a large stake in HK’s container terminals, Hutchison owns a 48% stake in the Yantian container port of Shenzhen. Competition from a proposed new terminal in Lantau Island would detract from its business in Yantian and other facilities in HK. With the Bridge, the centre of gravity in the area’s shipping trade would shift westward — to the relative disadvantage of Hutchison. In fact, the Bridge plan goes to the heart of many issues shaping HK’s future. For example: How much should this port city invest in new container — terminal facilities? Where should they be located? Should the current inner-city port be redeveloped? Tycoon Li Ka-Shing opposed the project, which could see some of his container shipping business diverted to cheaper rivals in China, as a result of better road access and proposed new ports. Although Li expressed that he would not oppose the Bridge if it is mainly used for passenger transportation rather than for goods (Apply Daily, July 11, 2002), the opposition of Mr. Li and Hutchison Corporation has been one of the biggest obstacles for the Bridge.

Participation of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Unlike the situation on the Guangdong side, where the Bridge has primarily been promoted by relevant government departments and scholars, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in HK have actively participated in the debates. The One Country Two Systems Research Institute, a privately funded research institute is one of the proponents for the single Y-shaped alignment. It was another policy think-tank, the 2022 Foundation, an influential privately funded, organization, sponsored by a group of business leaders representing various private sectors in HK, proposed the “double Y-shaped” alignment. Another think-tank which has been involved in the debate over the Bridge is the Mainland–HK Relations Strategic Research Foundation, which supported the original proposal for the Bridge (i.e. the Lingding Yang Bridge). Other NGOs, especially environmental groups, such as Friends of Earth and Green Power, have expressed their opposition to the project and have tried to bring pressure upon the government.

Conclusions

Critical border studies have undergone a renaissance in the last two decades. Attention has turned to the bordering process rather than the border per se (Newman, 2006). The geography of powers in the Greater PRD has demonstrated how the concept of multi-level governance can be useful in examining cases outside the EU. On the one hand, cross-border integration between HK and the PRD has shifted authority to the central government, indicated by the establishment of CEPA. On the other hand, intensive inter-city competition is evident at the provincial, municipal, city and county levels of government and an active role on the part of business interests and shareholders. This is exemplified by the ongoing debates on the alignments and landing points of the Bridge among Guangdong provincial, Zhuhai and Shenzhen municipal, HK and Macao SAR governments, as well as business interests and NGOs. The results are a complex geopolitical and geo-economic re-making of regional space. This paper has only addressed the complexity of such intertwined processes in a limited way, but it is an initial attempt to shed light on the multi-level power relations in the integration of the Greater PRD as a sub-national cross-boundary region in China.

The Bridge debate over the last two decades has epitomized the complex political, economic and social power relations in the cross-boundary governance. Unlike the EU case, and in

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6 The sponsors include Li & Fung Group, Sun Hung Kai Properties, Hang Seng Bank and HK Dragon Airlines.
absence of any regional authorities governing cross-boundary issues, the central government has played a “backstage” role. Yet, cross-border governance of the region has being constantly reshaped by other key participants. Local governments in Guangdong no doubt have increased their bargaining powers during the course of authority decentralization from the central government since the Opening and Reform initiated in the late 1970s. This may to some extent explain the recent alternative bridge proposed by Shenzhen and Guangdong that lies wholly within Guangdong’s own jurisdiction, despite the consensus alignment supported by the central government. With the increasing cross-boundary integration in the Greater PRD, the geometries of power have become more complicated. Moreover, complex and dynamic power struggles in the evolution of the cross-boundary cooperation in the Greater PRD are heightened in the unique and evolving context of OCTS. As this case indicates, power relations in cross-border regions demand more empirical investigation and comparative studies.

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