

# Time-space Punctuation: Hong Kong's Border Regime and Limits on Mobility

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## Introduction

Chinese people seem to be increasingly on the move, as this special issue emphasizes, among the diaspora, and especially among residents of the People's Republic of China after it re-opened to the capitalist world after 1979. We argue, however, that an emphasis on mobility can be misleading unless we also pay close attention to factors that inhibit movement. Foremost among the inhibiting factors are international borders. The notion of a "world without borders" is only realized by the world's elites. For ordinary people, borders are substantial or even insuperable barriers.

One of the most powerful metaphors for globalization has been David Harvey's idea of "time-space compression," in which the speeding up of economic and social processes by transportation and communication technologies has in effect shrunk the globe. As with all metaphors, it both offers important insights and is potentially misleading. The world is not shrinking in any uniform manner. Compression is uneven for different kinds of actors, objects and ideas.

In this article, we set out the concept of *time-space punctuation*. We offer this approach as a complement to time-space compression, not as a substitute. Even a combination of both metaphors distracts attention from other representational approaches to globalization, such as accounting, visibility or filtering.<sup>1</sup> Punctuation conventionally identifies arbitrary symbols that break up the flow of speech. Here we extend this idea to other arenas. The world is punctuated by barriers, the most important of which are national borders. For some people and things, borders act as periods, full stops denying legal entry. For others, they are like semi-colons, requiring visas and work permits. For the global elite, by reason of their citizenship status or their assets, borders are like commas, slightly slowing movement at various checkpoints, particularly if they have access to VIP lanes or private jet facilities at ports of entry. The metaphor can be extended. In these post-9/11 days, certain people move around the world with the equivalent of asterisks attached to them, having been placed on "no-fly" or other watch lists. Others,

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<sup>1</sup> We are indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for this point.

such as guest workers, move with parentheses, allowing their presence only under certain conditions, such as continual employment with an approved employer. As Pallitto and Heyman demonstrate, a key strategy for achieving “some degree of checkpoint control under conditions of intense local and global mobility is categorizing travelers and goods, moving some through checkpoints quickly and easily, in order to concentrate time and attention on others.”<sup>2</sup> Border scrutiny profiles problematic cases while facilitating the passage of others.

Time-space compression is actually less novel than are hard borders limiting movement between countries. Despite slower transportation and communication technologies, much of the world and its people were closely interconnected a century ago,<sup>3</sup> but most countries kept out only selected types of people, such as those who failed to pass medical tests. Earlier, separations between polities often took the form of imprecise and shifting frontiers rather than precise borders. The border as a hard-edged and policed discontinuity between states is more novel than global interconnectivity.

This article attempts several tasks. First, it encourages caution in emphasizing human mobility as a central feature of a new “global age,” and explores why borders might be buttressed against certain types of crossings. Second, it suggests that since 9/11, security concerns have begun to trump economic liberalization.<sup>4</sup> Secure borders are in conflict with easy cross-border flows, although technology reduces restrictions on desired flows while intensifying surveillance. We then turn to Hong Kong’s border before and after 1997, with an emphasis on its only land border, with China. The continuance of a serious “punctuation” function for this border, despite the resumption of Chinese sovereignty in 1997, raises questions about postcolonial Hong Kong. This border punctuates a region that has become intensely economically and socially integrated. These barriers to mobility have an important impact in restructuring both Hong Kong and its neighbouring region of China. Hong Kong is an unusual case which draws out the complexities of bordering. It was unusually open throughout its colonial history, but currently maintains a carefully policed border despite its reunion in 1997.

Securitization is having a much greater impact on movements between Hong Kong and the rest of the world, particularly through intensified systems of surveillance promoted by the United States. In addition to concerns about terrorism, security in relation to disease vectors has become much more important in the wake of SARS, mad cow disease and avian flu. According

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<sup>2</sup> Robert M. Pallitto and Josiah McConnell Heyman, *Theorizing Cross-Border Mobility: Security, Identification, and Identity* (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>3</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, “The localization of anthropological practice: from area studies to transnationalism,” *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1998), pp. 117-133; Nancy Foner, *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York’s two great waves of immigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Higgott, “After Neoliberal Globalization: The ‘Securization’ of U.S. Foreign Economic Policy in East Asia,” *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2004), pp. 425-444.

to Malaysia's health minister, "We must remember that in this region, we are more likely to be invaded by microbes than by a foreign army."<sup>5</sup>

### **Borders and state regulation of mobility**

Borders are usually only selectively opened. Conditions may reverse trends towards liberalization. The pressure of contemporary issues surrounding borders and security raises the risk that our analyses overemphasize novelty, neglecting continuities and lessons that can be drawn from the past in planning for the future.

It was only with the Westphalian state system, developed since the seventeenth century, that clearly defined borders coterminous with state authority and rules became a fundamental part of what we now understand as a "normal" nation-state. Previously, authority was subdivided between kings, the church and the landed aristocracy. Authority gradually diminished as one moved from the centre to the peripheries of control. By contrast, the modern state is based on the conception that a region of physical space "can be conceived of as a corporate personality" in which sovereignty should be undiminished throughout the territory ruled.<sup>6</sup> Decolonization and the United Nations have helped complete a regime of sovereignty in which a state is a "territorial unit demarcated by boundaries and ... the world is carved up politically into discrete, territorially demarcated political units."<sup>7</sup> Yet "failed states" continue to be a concern.

Borders serve important roles for modern states: protection of sovereignty, economic protectionism, the screening out of undesirable products, people and sources of contagion, and the collection of duties. The latter function can be surprisingly important: in Ghana's case, it generates nearly 70 percent of government revenue.<sup>8</sup> Border-based controls are not the only way of regulating unwanted entry into a nation. Heyman argues that governance distributed throughout the interior would be more effective at preventing illegal migration than border patrols and inspection.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, borders are a very important institution for a variety of regulatory efforts. Indeed, it is argued that "if a state cannot regulate what passes across its boundaries, it will not be able to control what happens within them."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Abraham, *Twenty-First Century Plague: The Story of SARS* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher K. Ansell, "Restructuring Authority and Territoriality," in Christopher K. Ansell and Giuseppe Di Palma, eds., *Restructuring Territoriality: Europe and the United States Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ansell, *Restructuring Authority and Territoriality*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Brenda Chalfin, "Border Scans: Sovereignty, Surveillance and the Customs Service in Ghana," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2004), p. 398.

<sup>9</sup> Josiah M. Heyman, "Ports of Entry as Nodes in the World System," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2004), pp. 303-327.

<sup>10</sup> Krasner, quoted in Chalfin, *Border Scans*, p. 398.

Enthusiasm for globalization among academics in the 1990s occasionally escalated into hyperbole about the emergence of a “world without borders”<sup>11</sup> or the replacement of a world based on a “space of places” with a “space of flows.”<sup>12</sup> Even the proliferation of research on borders from the 1980s on tended to emphasize how they were crossed and transgressed rather than the restrictions that they placed upon connection and hybridity.<sup>13</sup> Despite emphasis on a world in motion, only 175 million people, 3 percent of the world’s population, live outside the country in which they were born.<sup>14</sup> For most of the world’s people, movement across national borders is still difficult and expensive. Inequality in movement between the world’s privileged countries and peoples and those who are disenfranchised leads Cunningham to refer to the “gated globe.”<sup>15</sup>

Attention to cross-border mobility is related to the rise of what the regulation school calls “post-Fordism” or “flexible accumulation.” Globalization seems new primarily because the Fordist economy, experimented with as early as the 1920s but only fully put into place after World War II, inhibited movement of capital and labour. Fordism constructed more self-contained economic systems than in the nineteenth century, resulting in “de-globalization.” The breakup of the Fordist system since the 1970s diminished abilities to control the flow of capital and goods, and increased the bargaining power of transnational corporations vis-à-vis nations and labour.

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, globalization was predominantly about reducing national barriers in the world economy, and developing supranational agencies such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the G-7. According to Richard Higgott,

the subordination of security policy to economic policy, was the dominant characteristic of U.S. policy in the late twentieth century, that is, the era of neoliberal globalization proper; basically that period from the time of détente and the collapse of the Soviet empire through to the financial crises of the second half of the 1990s.<sup>16</sup>

Since 9/11, however, this relationship has been reversed, so that

U.S. economic policy is increasingly framed as a security question and globalization is now seen not simply through rose-tinted neoliberal

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<sup>11</sup> Kenichi Ohmae, “How to invite prosperity from the global economy into a region,” in Allen J. Scott et al., eds., *Global city-regions: trends, theory, policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Manuel Castells, *End of Millenium: The Information Age Volume 3* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Pablo Vila, *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders: Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Hilary Cunningham, “Nations Rebound?: Crossing Borders in a Gated Globe,” *Identities: Global Studies on Culture and Power*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2004), pp. 329-350.

<sup>15</sup> Cunningham, Nations Rebound?.

<sup>16</sup> Higgott, *After Neoliberal Globalization*, p. 429.

economic (deregulatory and liberalizing) lenses, but also through the less-rosy-colored lenses of the national security agenda. Specifically, economic globalization is seen not only as an economic benefit, but also as a security 'problem.'<sup>17</sup>

Facilitating movement across borders is now seen less as contributing to prosperity and more as a risk that must be mitigated. With securitization, the trajectory of borders is no longer one of eased movement, but of "hardening" or "smartening."

In parallel, the academic preoccupation with mobility is being replaced by widespread attention to new security agendas and their impact. Nations are "being (re)imagined as bounded, organized spaces with closely controlled, and filtered, relationships with the supposed terrors of the outside world."<sup>18</sup> Borders and ports of entry have been under escalating pressure. Cross-border economic integration in regions such as North America has suffered. Heyman notes three important effects of securitization on borders.<sup>19</sup> First, there is "an increasing treatment of a variety of cross-border flows—migration, drugs, and cash—as security issues." Second, it has promoted the use of advanced technology, such as biometrics, in border control, to identify possible dangerous individuals and to speed the passage of frequent travelers.<sup>20</sup> Third, "pressures on ports have increased enormously" since "national security concerns favor more thorough and effective inspections, with attention to a wider range of putatively risky people and items."<sup>21</sup>

A third factor plays into the politics of borders: cultural ideas about which people share a common identity or destiny. Borders exist in part to keep out people who are regarded as alien or foreign. Sometimes they are dissolved or liberalized in order to facilitate the joining of groups believed to be in some way the same despite being divided by a boundary on the map. The most ambitious such attempt has been the creation of the European Union, which can be seen as a cultural project to foster a European identity as well as an economic venture to create a single market. Reunifications, such as between East and West Germany or South and North Vietnam, are other examples. Just as nations are imagined as communities, the borders separating them may be imagined away. Culture is not independent of other influences, so that economic interactions and interests can encourage shifts in cultural interpretation and affiliation. Borders should be seen as "both cause and consequence of regional identities."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Higgott, *After Neoliberal Globalization*, p. 432.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Graham, "Introduction," in *Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Heyman, *Ports of Entry as Nodes in the World System*, p. 321.

<sup>20</sup> See also Kelly A. Gates, "Biometrics and Post-9/11 Technostalgia," *Social Text*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2005), pp. 35-53.

<sup>21</sup> Heyman, *Ports of Entry as Nodes in the World System*, p. 321.

<sup>22</sup> Werner Breitung, "A tale of two borders: separation and exchange, Macao's and Hong Kong's borders with the mainland," *Review of Culture*, vol. 9 (2004), p. 9.

In this paper, we analyze the shifting interaction of security, economy and culture on the restructuring of Hong Kong's borders, and their influence on what kind of people and goods can cross the border, and how. The three factors are not mutually exclusive, but there are usually trade-offs when one or the other becomes pre-eminent. Technology or administrative measures can help to reduce the conflict between them. To understand how these dynamics develop, we discuss the agencies that manage the border, and their adoption of new technologies and organizational frameworks with which to deal with the various demands and pressures.

### **A brief history of the Hong Kong border to 1997**

Until 1950, borders were less significant for Hong Kong than for most other political territories. Its only land frontier was with China, generally open for travel in both directions before 1950. Hong Kong's free port status meant that goods were not kept out for reasons of economic protection. With its economy serving as an entrepôt facilitating trade between China and the West, colonial officials and the economic elite encouraged as much trade and movement through the port as possible. People moved freely across the border, unless they were politically or medically suspect or had previously been deported (a key element of colonial social control over the Chinese population).<sup>23</sup> Socially and economically, Hong Kong was part of the Pearl River Delta region. Most scholars argue that there was no conception of "Hong Kong people" as a social identity. They were Cantonese, or Hakka, or Chiu Chau people, with roots in their home place. The 1925 strike (which lasted 16 months from June 2005 to October 1926) illustrates this situation. Around 250,000 Hong Kong workers, of a total 800,000, took part in the strike and returned to Guangdong. Chesneaux describes the labour dispute as "one of the longest strikes in the history of the international labor movement, or at least one of the longest on a large scale."<sup>24</sup> Close ties across the border facilitated the departure of workers and their dependents.

Hong Kong also facilitated the emigration of Chinese to the rest of the world.<sup>25</sup> Hong Kong came to be a key centre for the global Chinese diaspora.<sup>26</sup> The resulting networks facilitated investment and trade, and provided havens when political uncertainties faced residents of Hong Kong, as during the fifteen years before 1997. These linkages also facilitated Hong Kong's role

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<sup>23</sup> Alan Smart, *The Shek Kip Mei Myth: Squatters, fires and colonial rule in Hong Kong, 1950-1963* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Jean Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labor Movement, 1919-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 295.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Sinn, "Xin Xi Guxiang: A Study of Regional Associations as a Bonding Mechanism in the Chinese Diaspora. The Hong Kong Experience," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2 (1997), pp. 375-397.

<sup>26</sup> James L. Watson, "Presidential Address: Virtual Kinship, Real Estate, and Diaspora Formation—The Man Lineage Revisited," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 63, no. 4 (2004), pp. 893-910.

as an intermediary between China and the capitalist economy under the post-1979 reform.<sup>27</sup>

Agnes Ku argues that closing the border fostered a Hong Kong identity, in contrast to the earlier period which stressed the impermanence of all Chinese residence in Hong Kong.<sup>28</sup> According to Steve Tsang,

three or four decades ago, the local inhabitants were mostly illiterate or semi-illiterate immigrants, who had for the most part come to Hong Kong either as Chinese sojourners before 1949 or subsequently as political or economic refugees. They were not to any extent noticeably different from their fellow countrymen elsewhere in China. Today, the vast majority of Hong Kong's population are educated, locally born permanent residents who are easily distinguishable from the Chinese on the mainland.<sup>29</sup>

John Carroll has criticized these interpretations, offering evidence that a Hong Kong identity had emerged among at least a subset of Hong Kong's residents well before World War II, particularly those who were born there and were involved in business and public affairs.<sup>30</sup>

While concerns about disorders across the border had emerged repeatedly in Hong Kong over the years, it was only in 1950 that the border was closed. What changed about the perception of the refugees that were flowing in? Below is one rationale given at the time for the restrictions:

The ingress of over 700,000 refugees from mainland China since 1949 has had a marked effect on the labour situation in the Colony, the chief characteristic of which is an excess of unskilled labour. Previously the ebb and flow of the working population was closely aligned to the economic opportunities in Hong Kong and China. The refugees, however, have shown no desire to return to the mainland, even though Hong Kong is unable to offer to all the prospect of earning a reasonable living.<sup>31</sup>

The closure was also influenced by the relationship between London and Washington in the Cold War era. Steve Tsang notes that in early 1949 the chiefs of staff committee assessed the most serious threat to Hong Kong

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<sup>27</sup> Peter T.Y. Cheung, "Managing the Hong Kong-Guangdong Relationship: Issues and Challenges," in Anthony Gar-on Yeh, Yok-Shiu F. Lee, Tunney Lee and Nien Dak Sze, eds., *Building a Competitive Pearl River Delta Region: Cooperation, Coordination, and Planning* (Hong Kong: Centre of Urban Planning and Environmental Management, University of Hong Kong, 2002), pp. 39-56; Josephine Smart and Alan Smart, "Personal Relations and Divergent Economies: A Case Study of Hong Kong Investment in China," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1991), pp. 216-233.

<sup>28</sup> Agnes Ku, "Immigration Policies, Discourses and the Politics of Local Belonging in Hong Kong (1950-1980)," *Modern China*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2004), pp. 326-360.

<sup>29</sup> Steve Y. S. Tsang, *Democracy Shelved: Great Britain, China, and Attempts at Constitutional Reform in Hong Kong 1945-1952* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>30</sup> John M. Carroll, *Edge of empires: Chinese elites and British colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Commission of Labor in David Faure, *Society: A documentary history of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997).

to be an influx of refugees, while an additional threat was thought to be Communist-inspired strikes. “The Committee was not of the opinion that the Chinese Communists would invade the colony, but it considered that the local security forces would need to be reinforced by a brigade group if they were to be capable of coping with both an influx of refugees and a Communist guerrilla attack from across the border.”<sup>32</sup> Whether or not the fears were justified, they affected colonial governance. Closing the border reduced the flow of potential infiltrators and unreliable refugees who might increase the already precarious security situation of the British colony. The commonalities with contemporary concerns in the United States are striking.

The end of cross-border integration coincided with Maoist isolation from the capitalist world economy to produce sharply divergent patterns of development on the two sides of the border. For Guangdong, its many ties with Hong Kong and overseas Chinese turned from an advantage to a disadvantage. They were seen as reason for suspicion by the communist authorities, an attitude that ironically joined Governor Grantham and Mao. Separation fostered a shift in economic strategy in Hong Kong from colonial port to labour-intensive manufacturing. Despite border restrictions, a continuing flow of illegal migrants from China helped fuel economic expansion in Hong Kong. In some periods, the flow was considered to be too heavy by the Hong Kong authorities, such as the large influx in 1962 (resulting from the famine induced by the Great Leap Forward and a temporary reduction of border controls on the Chinese side) which initiated a diplomatic crisis.<sup>33</sup> Cross-border movement never completely ended, with Hong Kong residents occasionally visiting their relatives, and Hong Kong importing food and other products. Informally, links were even greater. Hong Kong was particularly crucial during the embargo imposed as a result of China’s entry into the Korean War as a place where the embargo could be circumvented through smuggling. Chinese trade officials felt that as long as the Western embargo continued Hong Kong would be a “primary base” to offset the pressure of economic sanctions.<sup>34</sup> Formal controls on movement of people or things do not mean that they are in fact controlled. Controls may create incentives to breach the borders for the heightened profits that may be available. Smuggling has continued to be an important cross-border activity.

Developments in China continued to have undeniable effects on Hong Kong’s options. Among other things, it was seen as making democratization impossible.<sup>35</sup> The security dimensions of the situation also constrained

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<sup>32</sup> Tsang, *Democracy Shelved*, p. 103.

<sup>33</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 295.

<sup>34</sup> S.G. Zhang, *Economic Cold War: America’s Embargo against China and the Sino-Soviet Alliance 1949-1963* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press), p. 157.

<sup>35</sup> Tsang, *Democracy Shelved*.

the government's options in dealing with the huge squatter problem. This situation ultimately led to the Resettlement Programme, which was later transformed into a broad-based public housing programme, the consequences of which have had ramifications through every dimension of Hong Kong's economy and society.<sup>36</sup>

The period of separation and divergent development began to come to an end with Chinese economic reforms and the Open Policy after 1978. Hong Kong, as the most enthusiastic pioneer of the new opportunities (due to proximity, strong economic complementarities, regulatory advantages, cultural familiarity and social connections), rapidly transferred the bulk of its manufacturing activities across the border and developed a wide range of other forms of economic, social and cultural cooperation.<sup>37</sup> The signing of the 1984 Sino-British Agreement to return Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 hastened greater integration and some degree of convergence. The settlement also had the effect of heightening the sense of difference between themselves and mainlanders for many Hong Kong residents, and the transition strengthened Hong Kong identity, particularly after the Tiananmen and July 1 protests.<sup>38</sup>

### **The border after 1997**

Despite Hong Kong's post-1997 status as a Special Administrative Region of China, its border still operates in a manner more similar to those between nations than like internal boundaries within a state.<sup>39</sup> Border controls are seen as necessary for the maintenance of one country and two systems. Asymmetry of the controls has produced a semi-permeable boundary in which the movement of people from Hong Kong to China is largely unimpeded, but movement from China to Hong Kong is still very difficult for most in the PRC. In terms of punctuation, movement into China for Hong Kong citizens is a comma, although the vast numbers can cause significant delays even for this privileged status. For Mainlanders, the border resembles either a semi-colon, requiring visas, or a full stop. In 2003 certain liberalizations were adopted to attract Mainland tourists, and the control regime is currently

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<sup>36</sup> Smart, *The Shek Kip Mei Myth*.

<sup>37</sup> Alan Smart, "The emergence of local capitalisms in China: Overseas Chinese investment and patterns of development," in Li Si-ming and Tang Wing-shing, eds., *China's Regions, Polity and Economy: A Study of Spatial Transformation in the Post-reform Era* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000), pp. 65-95; Smart and Smart, *Personal Relations and Divergent Economies*; Alan Smart and Jinn-Yuh Hsu, "The Chinese diaspora, foreign investment and economic development in China," *The review of international affairs*, vol. 3, no. 4 (2004), pp. 544-566.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon Matthews, *Global culture/individual identity: searching for home in the cultural supermarket* (London: Routledge, 2000); Agnes S. Ku and Ngai Pun, "Introduction: remaking citizenship in Hong Kong," in Agnes S. Ku and Ngai Pun, eds., *Remaking citizenship in Hong Kong: community, nation and the global city* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp. 1-15.

<sup>39</sup> Chun Yang, "Multilevel governance in the cross-boundary region of Hong Kong-Pearl River Delta, China," *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 37, no. 12 (2005), pp. 2147-2168.

in another phase of change. A survey of border-crossers in 1999 found that only 7 percent were Mainland residents.<sup>40</sup> The denial of citizenship rights of entitlement to social welfare and freedom of movement are crucial to the nature of the urban region that has arisen.<sup>41</sup>

The border is not an anachronism, but serves important, although increasingly contested, functions. It protects three highly valued circumstances: the political status quo; major differences in factor price markets; and Hong Kong's demographic stability. The border, in other words, preserves and stabilizes some important and potentially threatening differences, yet economic development is generating numerous forms of pressure for further opening and greater cross-border cooperation.<sup>42</sup>

Without a boundary that controls certain kinds of movement, the guarantee of distinctive social and economic organization for Hong Kong until 2047 would be harder to ensure. As Breitung points out, the clearly fixed "expiry dates" for Hong Kong's border with China may be, along with Macao's, unique.<sup>43</sup>

The first border-related crisis in the postcolonial era was the right of abode issue.<sup>44</sup> The decision by Hong Kong's Final Court of Appeal that the Basic Law granted the right to enter and reside in Hong Kong to all children of Hong Kong residents set off a serious constitutional crisis. The estimated 1.67 million PRC residents who would be entitled to enter Hong Kong at present (692,000 of the total) or in the second generation (983,000 of the total) were accused of posing a threat to Hong Kong's economy, environment and society. The large numbers reflect past integration of the region, resulting from illegal immigration from China to Hong Kong, and substantial numbers of Hong Kong men taking first or second wives or mistresses in China.<sup>45</sup>

Before July 1, 1997, children of Hong Kong residents born in China had no right of abode, although some were permitted entry. One hundred and fifty persons per day were allowed to move to Hong Kong using a "one-way permit" system operated by the PRC. Under Article 24 of the Basic Law, "children born to a Hong Kong permanent resident outside Hong Kong have the right of abode in the HKSAR."<sup>46</sup> The Provisional Legislative Council

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<sup>40</sup> Werner Breitung, "Transformation of a boundary regime: the Hong Kong and Mainland China case," *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 34, no. 10 (2002), p. 1755.

<sup>41</sup> Alan Smart and Josephine Smart, "Local citizenship: welfare reform, urban/rural status, and exclusion in China," *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 33, no. 10 (2001), pp. 1853-1869.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas P. Rohlen, *Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta: "One country, two systems" in the emerging metropolitan context* (Stanford: Institution for International Studies Discussion Paper, 2000), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Breitung, A tale of two borders.

<sup>44</sup> Alan Smart, "Sharp edges, fuzzy categories and transborder networks: managing and housing new arrivals in Hong Kong," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2003), pp. 218-233.

<sup>45</sup> Graeme Lang and Josephine Smart, "Industrialization, migration and the 'second-wife' in South China," *International Migration Review*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2002), pp. 546-570.

<sup>46</sup> Johannes Chan, "Judicial independence: controversies on the constitutional jurisdiction of the Court of Final Appeal of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region," *The International Lawyer*, vol. 33, no. 4 (1999), p. 1016.

introduced a system by which to prove a right of abode, a person must apply in the Mainland for both a one-way permit and a certificate of right of abode from the Mainland authorities. On January 29, 1999, Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal decided that this certification was in conflict with the Basic Law and unconstitutional.<sup>47</sup> Translated into punctuation terms, those who have rights to abode shouldn't suffer from a whole series of delaying semi-colons.

Hong Kong's government asked the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress to reinterpret Article 24 of the Basic Law. The provision was reinterpreted to restrict eligibility to those whose parents were Hong Kong residents at the time of their birth (restricting the second generation) and supported the continuation of the quota system, while converting some semi-colons into periods. Hong Kong's chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, justified the move by arguing that Hong Kong could not afford the influx of Mainlanders who would otherwise flood into the SAR. Chief Executive Tung argued that "What we face is a problem of unplanned population, which Hong Kong as a society will not be able to bear. Besides the financial burden, we face the scenario of possible declining in living standards."<sup>48</sup>

Leung highlights the continuities of the government's anti-migrant discourse with colonial perspectives, but notes a "new twist to the old story that Hong Kong is being threatened by a huge exodus."<sup>49</sup> That is, in a planned transformation to a knowledge-based society, the "problem with the would-be immigrants is not just that there are too many of them. They are also the wrong kind of people."<sup>50</sup> This is illustrated by the simultaneous development of new programmes to recruit highly skilled individuals from the Mainland. The border came to have a more complex syntax of punctuation marks, a trend highlighted by the increasing reliance on Mainland tourists from particular parts of China as a core element of Hong Kong's economic growth.

The rich Mainland consumers and tourists streaming in are now seen as potential saviours, rather than bearers of apocalyptic threats. A report by the Bank of East Asia suggests that Hong Kong's future might be based on becoming "China's city of consumption."<sup>51</sup> In 2006, there were 13.59 million Mainland tourists, 53.8 percent of the total, and they now spend more

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<sup>47</sup> Albert Chen, "Constitutional crisis in Hong Kong: congressional supremacy and judicial review," *The International Lawyer*, vol. 33, no. 4 (1999), p. 1025.

<sup>48</sup> Sources for the quotes in this paragraph can be obtained in Alan Smart "Sharp edges, fuzzy categories and transborder networks: managing and housing new arrivals in Hong Kong," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol. 26, no. 2 (2003), pp. 218-233, with an expanded discussion of the right of abode issue and debate.

<sup>49</sup> Hon-Chu Leung, "Politics of incorporation and exclusion: immigration and citizenship issues," in Agnes S. Ku and Ngai Pun, eds., *Remaking Citizenship in Hong Kong: Community, nation and the global city* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 107.

<sup>50</sup> Leung, Politics of incorporation and exclusion, p. 108.

<sup>51</sup> Bank of East Asia Economic Research Department, *Hong Kong: China's Consumption City* (Hong Kong: Bank of East Asia, 2003).

per capita than tourists from any other country. Given Hong Kong's slower growth and other economic difficulties since 1997, the gap between the SAR and the richer parts of China has diminished faster than might have been expected. Increasingly, economic opportunities are seen as located north of the border, rather than in Hong Kong. Greater economic integration could be promoted by liberalizing the border regime, which might improve Hong Kong's prospects, but at the risk of encouraging a decline in Hong Kong's real estate prices towards those prevailing in the Pearl River Delta. This situation has prompted a very cautious approach to facilitating greater movement across the border.<sup>52</sup>

These circumstances have created a complex situation for identity politics. Economics and culture encourage ambivalence about greater integration with China. Of the three factors that we suggested earlier are the most influential on structuring border management, security issues have been notably absent in our discussion so far. It is in the realm of external relations—particularly with the United States and with regard to emerging infectious disease risks—rather than in domestic politics, that security concerns have had the most significant impact in recent years. In the next section, we discuss the agencies that are in charge of Hong Kong's border and ports of entry, and how the global security agenda impacts on their operations.

### **Managing the border**

Maintaining border controls on a border as busy as that between the HKSAR and the rest of China is a challenging and expensive proposition. Passenger traffic through all ports of entry in 2005/6 was 208.9 million, up from 153 million in 2003. Of this total, 146 million in 2004 was land travel, up from 115.5 million in 2003.<sup>53</sup> The total labour force of the Immigration Department was 6,111 in 2006, growing from 200 when the Department was established in 1961. Not all of this staff is directly involved in border crossing related activities: they are also responsible for Hong Kong ID cards, for example. The other main agency responsible for regulating the border, the Customs and Excise Department, has an establishment of 5,202 posts. Hong Kong charges no tariffs, but its excises on petroleum, liquor and tobacco amounted to HK\$6.62 billion in 2005 (about 3.1 percent of total revenues). Together the two departments account for 6.87 percent of Hong Kong's total civil service workforce. Staff in other departments have responsibilities for issues related to people and goods crossing the borders. A task force

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Smart and George C. S. Lin, "Border Management and Growth Coalitions in the Hong Kong Transborder Region," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2004), pp. 377-396.

<sup>53</sup> Information in this section that is not otherwise attributed has been located on the Web sites of the Immigration and Customs and Excise Departments, available online at <http://www.immd.gov.hk> and [www.customs.gov.hk](http://www.customs.gov.hk).

established in 2003 to improve enforcement against illegal employment (i.e., people on visas that do not allow employment) included representatives from the Security Bureau, Police, Correctional Services, Labour, Lands, and Food and Environmental Hygiene. New threats from infectious diseases such as SARS and Avian Influenza are increasing border surveillance costs for Health Services and Agriculture.

The government hopes to exclude the “wrong kind” of people from the Mainland and elsewhere, as well as controlling the entry of the “wrong kind” of products (contraband goods) and capital (laundered money), while still maximizing flow of the right kinds through the territory for economic growth. Managing these conflicting demands is a difficult balancing act, particularly in an international environment where “leaky borders” are seen as a serious security threat, and may thus also have an impact on economic access. As the director of Immigration wrote:

On the one hand, the Department has responsibilities to curb illegal immigration and fight against immigration-related crimes. On the other hand, it also needs to provide ways and means to facilitate the entry of visitors, businessmen and investors who can contribute to Hong Kong's economy. The Department has to strike a balance between exercising effective immigration control and providing travel convenience, ensuring the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong are maintained.<sup>54</sup>

A major factor in increasing security concerns has been pressure from the United States. Cooperation on anti-terrorism is of central importance for a nation desiring to maintain easy access to the United States. As Kenneth Juster, undersecretary of Commerce for Industry and Security, stated,

with globalization, both our economic well being and our security are now more closely intertwined than ever before. Today, the health of any nation's economy ... is dependent on security, including the security of borders, transportation systems, computer networks, and mail systems. ... therefore, the United States launched ... in the fall of 2002, the STAR [Secure Trade in the APEC Region] initiative ... to commit APEC economies to accelerate action on screening people and cargo for security before transit, increasing security on ships and airplanes while en route, and enhancing security in airports and seaports.<sup>55</sup>

Because of Hong Kong's central role in cross-Pacific trade, the initiatives have particularly impacted on the shipment of goods.

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<sup>54</sup> Immigration Department of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, *Immigration Department 2001 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report* (Hong Kong: Immigration Department, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Kenneth I. Juster, “Keynote Address of Kenneth I. Juster, Under Secretary of Commerce for Industry and Security, at the Update 2003 Export Controls and Policy Conference, October 20, 2003,” online, cited 13 June 2006, available from <http://www.bis.doc.gov/News/2003/Update2003Keynote.htm>.

At the same time that full stops must be placed on the movement of people and things which are not welcome within the SAR, surveillance processes must neither impinge on those for whom borders should be gentle commas in their global movements, nor involve excessive expense. Technology is key in balancing these conflicting demands, although far from new. In 1976, Immigration introduced the TRINDEX System. With this system, “the analysis and matching of the sizeable travel records of residents and tourists were computerised.”<sup>56</sup>

The Automated Passenger Clearance Systems, or e-Channels, are the current leading edge of border technology. They were first introduced on December 16, 2004 at Lo Wu Control Point, with 104 e-Channels in place by April 2006. The plan is that 270 e-Channels will be installed in all entry ports, which will yield an estimated saving of 217 posts of immigration service officers, since the average processing time per passenger is about 12 seconds. E-channels rely on smart Hong Kong ID cards, which include biometric information necessary for implementation. The integration of Hong Kong with China creates a mammoth task of controlling flows without inhibiting economic growth. In order to understand the complexity of managing the Hong Kong border, it helps to imagine a national border separating New York City from New Jersey. Controlling the movement of goods is also a massive task. In 2006, Hong Kong container ports handled 23.5 million twenty-foot container units, while air cargos amounted to 3,414 tonnes. The amount of sea traffic that needs to be monitored is immense: 70,910 ocean-going ships and 365,190 coastal vessels moved through Hong Kong waters in 2003.

The United States Customs Service promotes the Container Security Initiative, which screens and clears containers before they arrive at US ports, and penalizes ports and shippers that do not participate in the Initiative. The customs services of 26 countries have joined the Initiative since 2002. Since Hong Kong is the largest single supplier of United States-destined containers, 10 percent of the total, its participation was “crucial.” Hong Kong has again used technology to facilitate screening, incorporating two giant scanners (one checking for radiation, the other for dense objects with gamma rays) through which container trucks are driven. This technology has not yet been adopted in US ports, which rely instead on the use of intelligence to target specific containers for inspection, using a newly developed computer programme known as the Automatic Targeting System to analyze information provided by shipping agents. Reluctance to invest in security-enhancing technology which foreign ports are being induced to adopt puts a rather different perspective on the public controversy in 2006 over the takeover of a number of US port operations by Dubai Ports, which some worried would threaten security.

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<sup>56</sup> Immigration Department, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report.

Hong Kong's global financial role has also involved it in "Operation Greenquest," an "interagency effort led by the U.S. Customs Service to bring the full scope of the U.S. Government's financial expertise to bear against systems, individuals, and organizations that serve as sources of terrorist funding."<sup>57</sup> To be in the fast lane in the more securitized globalization of the twenty-first century, places as well as people have to have the right stuff to obtain crucial privileges in the management of border crossing, or suffer greater slowdowns resulting from intensified inspection.

### **Public health security**

The closing and opening of borders to selected goods (including live animals) and people as a means of food safety regulation and disease control has a long history.<sup>58</sup> While the economic impact of such measures was mostly contained within the local area in past centuries, increasingly it assumes a greater global presence. The politics of border securitization has become increasingly complex as local decisions are influenced by higher authorities. Hong Kong's tight integration with the global economy buttresses its economic success, but it has also shown itself to be a potential source of economic disruption from emergent infectious disease outbreaks.

Hong Kong is almost entirely dependent on imports for its food provisioning to meet the daily needs of over 7 million people. When bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or mad cow disease) was identified in Canada in May 2003, Hong Kong imposed an immediate ban on Canadian beef and beef products.<sup>59</sup> Like many countries, Hong Kong has an automatic border closure policy in food safety that kicks in as soon as certain conditions are met. However, Hong Kong has been faster in re-admitting Canadian beef imports than many other jurisdictions. Since November 30, 2004, imports of boneless beef from animals under thirty months are permitted. China still has a complete ban. Hong Kong went from being Canada's 15th-ranked beef export market in 2003 to third in 2006, accounting for 2.5 percent of Canada's exports. Macau, with its population of only 470,000, is even more striking, moving up from 29th-ranked export market for Canadian beef to fourth, importing 14.4 kg per person. This may reflect heavy beef consumption in the casinos. It also suggests that Canadian beef is still moving into China indirectly.

A ban on live chickens from China was imposed in 1997 and in subsequent avian flu outbreaks. The global commodity supply chains quickly covered

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<sup>57</sup> Juster, Keynote Address.

<sup>58</sup> Ilona Kickbusch and Evelyne de Leeuw, "Global public health: revisiting healthy public policy at the global level," *Health Promotion International*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1999), pp. 285-288.

<sup>59</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Opening Doors to the World: Canada's International Market Access Priorities- 2005* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2005).

the shortfall from other source countries, including frozen chicken from the US and Thailand. The ban on live chickens from China in 1997 and 2003 had a devastating impact on local retailers, the transportation sector and restaurants. The economic multiplier effects, coupled with public panic on the infectivity of avian flu in people, created a pervasive atmosphere of fear and pessimism that aggravated the downturn of the Hong Kong economy after late 1997. Fears that avian flu might mutate into a human pandemic continue to haunt health security agencies.

It is the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak in 2003 that highlights most clearly the vulnerability of Hong Kong's economy to the cost of border securitization in response to global flows of infectious agents. The early mismanagement of SARS by the Chinese government is well documented.<sup>60</sup> The Chinese officials under-reported the number of infected cases and held off the World Health Organization for over five months before international health experts were allowed into the country to assess the situation in April 2003. By then, SARS had spread from Guangdong to Hong Kong, Beijing, and later to Taiwan, Canada, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam. By July 2003 there were a total of 8437 known cases with a fatality rate that ranged from 6.5 percent in Hong Kong to 17 percent in Taiwan.<sup>61</sup> Hong Kong recorded a total of 298 deaths, and China 348 deaths.<sup>62</sup> Most countries issued a travel advisory against the infected countries. Canada required travelers returning from the infected regions to exercise self-quarantine, and multiple surveillance and disinfection procedures were installed at all international airports and selected border points. Travel to and from Hong Kong quickly diminished to a trickle, causing major economic losses in all businesses related to travel, trade and production. Not only was the local economy in Hong Kong hard hit, the rest of the world was also gravely affected. A conservative estimate put the worldwide economic losses attributed to SARS in the range of US\$5 billion to US\$10 billion.<sup>63</sup> The total social and economic costs of the SARS outbreak and its mismanagement on Hong Kong may never be known, but the people of Hong Kong will remember 2003 as a dark chapter in its contemporary history marked by fear, anxiety, economic uncertainty and sorrow.

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<sup>60</sup> Abraham, *Twenty-First Century Plague*; Joan Kaufman, "SARS and China's Health-Care Response: Better to be Both Red and Expert!" in Arthur Kleinman and James L. Watson, eds., *SARS in China: Prelude to Pandemic?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 53-68; John Overby, Mike Rayburn, Kevin Hammond and David C. Wyld, "The China syndrome: The impact of the SARS Epidemic in Southeast Asia," *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2004), pp. 69-95.

<sup>61</sup> Alexis Lau, "The Numbers Trail: What the Data Tells Us," in Christine Loh and Civic Exchange, eds., *At the Epicentre: Hong Kong and the SARS Outbreak* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press), p. 91.

<sup>62</sup> Lau, *The Numbers Trail*, p. 91.

<sup>63</sup> David Pilla, "Disaster on the wing," *Best's Review*, vol. 106, no. 7 (2005), pp. 76-80.

The SARS and avian flu crises have altered the global landscape for monitoring public health risks. They have made it very clear that surveillance capacities had previously been flawed. For example, no public health warnings had been disseminated to hospital authorities in Toronto before the first cases showed up there, despite reports that had been appearing for months previously in Hong Kong newspapers about a new form of atypical pneumonia. Surveillance capacities have been expanded in most countries and ports of entry, and legislation and international agreements have increased the powers of national and international public health agencies. However, Hong Kong's reliance on food imports, particularly from China, makes control an extremely challenging task, particularly given recent evidence that China's food safety controls have been deeply flawed. Fears about food contamination and counterfeit products from China have reinforced ideas among Hong Kong people about the differences between themselves and their counterparts in the rest of China, and encouraged a reluctance to consume China-sourced products.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that an adequate understanding of people on the move requires attention to the barriers that may inhibit their movement. Our use of punctuation as a metaphor is intended to highlight dimensions of globality that have been neglected in comparison to the emphasis on interconnectedness, neoliberal deregulation and the "shrinking" of the world through transportation and communication. Even if we are (almost) all connected, the speed by which we can move towards the points of connection varies by many magnitudes. The use of the metaphor of punctuation is not intended to suggest that it is uniquely valuable, but only that it is a helpful correction to the pervasive compression metaphor. Punctuation adds diversity to what otherwise is an aggregate measure that misleads as much as it informs. Focusing on the barriers to movement for people, which have been increasing for most of the last century, begs the question: For whom is the world being compressed? The conditions of mobility vary even more than do differences in wealth.

There are many different kinds of barriers, including the national basis of professional certification, the portability of pensions, the differential valuation of human capital, and the costs of re-establishing one's domicile. Many obstacles, however, are secondary effects of the way in which welfare and regulatory regimes are divided up within a global mosaic of national systems. Borders mark the limits of these organizational regimes, although extraterritoriality of rules may occur, particularly for the more powerful states. In order to understand contemporary mobility, we cannot concentrate only on how time-space compression enables movement. We also need to consider how nations continue to punctuate the globe's surface, and thus inhibit,

channel and modulate the paths of mobility. Borders do not interrupt and modulate movement in the same ways for all people, leading to differential opportunity structures for the world's populations. Borders generate distinctive landscapes of connection, possibility and risk.

Hong Kong's border regime has unique characteristics. In many ways, it is the most open economy on earth. At the same time, it maintains a very exclusive border separating it from the country of which it is a sovereign part, and manages it to provide protection to powerful economic interests in real estate, distribution, retail and transportation. The anomalous nature of this border allows us to scrutinize contemporary border processes in ways that we might take for granted with more "normal" kinds of borders. Most importantly, it highlights the way in which the role of borders in restricting mobility has been increasing and diversifying rather than fading away under the compressing dynamics of globalization. Hong Kong was an exception to the deglobalization tendencies of the three decades after World War II, as it held to its tenets of *laissez-faire* and its livelihood based on the facilitation of international movements. While economic integration with China after 1979 seems to have intensified the time-space compression of Hong Kong's economy and society, ironically political integration with China after 1997 has heightened the importance of the border. The maintenance of two systems under one country seems to require a hard border, while increasing contact appears to have had the effect of underlining the cultural differences between Hong Kong people and their Chinese counterparts. Security concerns have also focused attention on Hong Kong's borders, but in different ways. Greater surveillance in order to prevent terrorism has mostly been imposed on Hong Kong as a result of American concerns and Hong Kong's importance in facilitating China trade, but concerns about health security and food safety have been directed both towards China and outwards. In both cases, though, greater concern with the border as a screen against the movement of contraband and contaminants or otherwise undesirable entities has been the result. Rather than movement towards either greater openness or greater exclusivity, the trend has been towards more complex forms of discrimination and differentiation. Instead of applying the same treatment to all residents of the Mainland, some categories are recruited, such as affluent tourists from particular regions or those with certain skills, while others, even with a formal right of abode, are discouraged from entering. Transshipment of goods and capital is facilitated by sophisticated technologies to identify those with threatening contents, and people and foods are screened for dangerous microorganisms.

This study has practical implications as well. The way in which Hong Kong is managing this border may be resulting in a loss of competitive advantage for the Pearl River Delta region of which it is part, in comparison for example with the Yangzi Delta Region. With increasing fears about terrorism and emergent infectious diseases, border management is a key site

for technological and organizational innovations attempting to optimize the conflicting demands for greater security and cost-effective mobility. This is especially true for places like Hong Kong that rely on facilitating the movement of goods, capital, and people through its territory. How these conflicting pressures can be reconciled is a crucial question for all territories, but particularly for those that have relied on openness as a key element in their economic strategies.

*University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, March 2008\**

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