

Development and its Discontents in the
Pearl River Delta: Walmartization,
Dormitory Labor Regime and
Environmental Challenges

Erik Baark, Yun-chung Chen, Ngai Pun,
and Alvin Y. So

Division of Social Science, HKUST

Lead themes

- **The history of Hong Kong shows the significance of a model that relies on integration with China's economic development and international markets**
- **However, this development model has had unsustainable social and environmental consequences**
- **Moreover, it is increasingly being challenged by counter-movements that seek to identify better institutional and regulatory regimes**

Emblematic Moments

- **The first emblematic moment with China's Open Door policy initiated 1978 created opportunities for rescaling of capitalist development with the PRD region**
 - **Creation of the "World's Factory"**
 - Wal-Martization of global commodity chains
 - Dormitory labour regimes
- **The second emblematic moment of Hong Kong's return to China in 1997 enabled a convergence of capitalist and socialist development models across the border**

Timeline and Emblematic Moments

	British Colony					SAR of PRC
Entrepot economy		Cold War Industry		Regional and global integration		
				Dormitory Labour Regime		
						Walmartization
				Environmental pollution		
1842	1900	1949	-----	1978		1997

Walmartization and Dormitory Labour Regime

- Shifting of power – within the commodity chain – from manufacturers to wholesalers
 - Manufacturers in the PRD experience cut-throat competition and lower cost/wages and labour standards
 Race to the bottom!
 - Underpinned by a dormitory labour regime that ensures proletarianization of migrants from poorer parts of China
 - Generate labour protests and organized resistance
- Increasingly challenged by activities of NGOs in Hong Kong and PRD working together
 - Labor unions and anti-sweatshop movement cooperating between HK and PRD

Environmental Pollution and the Search for Governance

- Development models on both sides of the border marginalized environmental sustainability
- Formal governance initiatives at the local and regional scale have largely failed to make an impact
 - Basic institutional framework has not changed – protecting the interests of capital (utilities, transport, and manufacturing)
- Agency NGOs and media have undertaken campaigns to raise public awareness and influence public policies, but with little success

An Alternative Socio-economic Development Model for PRD?

- Democratization movement in Hong Kong under transformation?
 - From a “middle-class” movement implicitly accepting global neoliberalist ideals to a working class anti-liberal movement?
- The resurgence of labour movements in Hong Kong and PRD
 - Visible and collaborative efforts to oppose the effect of a new international division of labour
 - A source of different imaginaries for development models?