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

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Period</th>
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<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>British Colony</td>
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<td>1900</td>
<td>Entrepot economy</td>
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<td>1949</td>
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<td>1978</td>
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<td>1997</td>
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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?