

TEACHING CHINA'S ECONOMIC RISE: Faculty Development in the Greater Pearl River Delta

P. Richard Bohr

College of Saint Benedict & Saint John's University
Chair, ASIANetwork Board of Directors

Twenty-five years ago, Deng Xiaoping initiated China's monumental shift from Maoist central planning to market capitalism in an unprecedented experiment to lift one-fifth of humanity out of poverty. Emulating the export-driven economic surges of Japan in the 1970s and the Four Asian Dragons (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) in the 1980s, China's economy took off during the 1990s. Now fully open to the global economy through membership in the World Trade Organization, China has become the world's third-largest trading partner and its fastest-growing economy, its recent annual GDP growth of 8-10% far surpassing the world average of 1.2%. This economic achievement is without precedent in world history.

Deng's reforms began in the Greater Pearl River Delta (GPRD), where the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau are linked to Guangdong, China's wealthiest province¹



Greater Pearl River Delta Region

Constituting only 50 million Chinese (ten million of whom work in 53,000 GPRD factories) and 0.5 percent of China's land mass, the GPRD generates 34 percent of the country's exports, 30 percent of its foreign direct investment, and 19 per cent

of its GDP. With an annual economic growth rate of 15% and a *per capita* annual urban income of U.S. \$5,000 (compared to \$1,000 in cities and \$300 in villages outside the GPRD), the region is the world's sixteenth-largest economy and its tenth-largest exporter.² Is it any wonder that the world should refer to this driver of China's economy—already being replicated in the Yangzi River Delta around Shanghai and North China's Beijing-Tianjin corridor—as Asia's "Fifth Dragon"?³

In recent years, such popular books as *China, Inc.*, *The Chinese Century*, and *China: The Gathering Threat* highlight the growing importance of the GPRD-U.S. trade and investment relationship, and they portray China as both America's unparalleled market opportunity and its fiercest economic rival.⁴ But few U.S. liberal arts colleges are teaching their students about the profound social, cultural, and political consequences of China's industrial revolution. To overcome this deficiency, ASIANetwork (AN) and the Hong Kong-America Center (HKAC), outreach arm of five Hong Kong universities, secured \$65,000 from the U.S. Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program to organize a faculty development study tour of the "Fifth Dragon" from June 25 to July 18, 2005.

The "Fifth Dragon" participants, selected in an open competition, included five economists, three political scientists, two business and management faculty, two historians, a sociologist, an anthropologist, and a religion scholar from 15 AN member schools: American University, Augustana College, Central Washington University,

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Colby College, Connecticut College, Dickinson College, Gettysburg College, Lafayette College, Marietta College, Occidental College, St. Vincent College, University of Redlands, Warren Wilson College, Washington and Lee University, and Webster University. Dr. Glenn Shive, HKAC Executive Director, and Dr. Christopher Smith, Professor of Geography and Planning at CUNY/Albany and 2004-05 HKAC Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence, planned the program and accompanied the delegation. Professor Chia Ning, my colleague on the AN Board, organized the project on the U.S. side, and I accompanied the delegation as group leader.

At its orientation meeting in conjunction with last April's AN conference in Whittier, California, participants divided into five GPRD-specific thematic groups to study the 1) development of new business enterprises and their interaction with Chinese and international markets; 2) impact of rapid economic growth on Chinese society, especially migrant workers from other parts of China; 3) new economy's influence on traditional Chinese high and popular cultures; 4) role of national, provincial, county, and local governments in fostering economic and social change; and 5) evolution of regional planning strategies and the impact on the environment of hyper-economic growth. Each group compiled readings for in-depth analysis of its theme as well as for exploring the larger question on everyone's mind: To what extent is the

mind-boggling pace and scope of the GPRD phenomenon a portent of China to come?

Throughout the itinerary, we got a first-hand sense of the GPRD's historical roots, rapid integration, and future prospects as well as the ways in which the region fits into the Chinese government's strategy of economic development through nationwide urbanization. We began in Hong Kong, on the eastern side of the Pearl River's mouth. Site visits and discussions with academic, government, business, and religious leaders illuminated Hong Kong's historic role as bastion of Western law, global commerce, and Christian missions since it became a British colony in 1842. Tours of its vanishing factory neighborhoods dramatized the transfer of Hong Kong's industrial base — built up by business tycoons fleeing Mao's China after 1949 — to the manufacturing cities popping up from the GPRD's rice paddies during the 1980s and 1990s. A tour of the HIT container port (the world's largest) illuminated South China's growing integration with South and Southeast Asia and highlighted Hong Kong's role as indispensable service, logistics, management, and financial center in transferring global investment into the GPRD, especially since the colony's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.⁵ We also witnessed the final preparations for the inauguration of Hong Kong Disneyland, a global attraction which is sure to keep Hong Kong at the forefront of world cities.

On the western end of the Pearl River's mouth and soon to be connected by 17.4-mile bridge to Hong Kong is the former Portuguese colony of Macau, where Mediterranean-style churches, libraries, and merchant houses showcase Macau's four centuries as Western entrepôt and its recent emergence as an affluent center of tourism, finance, and gaming (the dollar value of which now outpaces Las Vegas) since Macau rejoined China in 1999.

After crossing into Guangdong, we explored, on both banks of the Pearl River, gleaming cityscapes, shopping malls, factories, public facilities, museums, art galleries, temples, and the Chen lineage school. The western side, from whose villages and towns thousands of Chinese fled anti-dynastic rebellions,

Western imperialism, and famine after 1850, balances agriculture and urban growth. The denser urbanization of the eastern side is epitomized by such skyscraped cities as Shenzhen. Twenty years ago, Deng Xiaoping designated this once-sleepy market town of 30,000 bordering Hong Kong's New Territories as the first of four Special Economic Zones (SEZ) to integrate Chinese labor and abundant raw materials with global markets and foreign investment, especially through "Greater China" comprising Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and 51 million overseas Chinese.⁶ The city's seven million inhabitants have flocked there from all over China. A center of electronics manufacturing, Shenzhen has more Ph.D.'s per capita than any other city in China, boasts its own container port, serves as China's leading exporter outside of Hong Kong, and is the Chinese headquarters of Wal-Mart, China's sixth largest export market. Many anticipate the new culture emerging there to spread throughout China.

From Shenzhen, we passed through Dongguan, a sprawling textile manufacturing center, and then arrived at Guangzhou, long-time capital of South China at the Pearl River Delta's apex. Thanks to an increasingly-efficient freeway system, the city will soon be a mere 45 minute drive from Hong Kong and Macau. Here we encountered traditional Cantonese culture and the birthplace of the Christian-inspired Taiping Rebellion, Sun Yat-sen's 1911 Republican Revolution, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist China, and Mao Zedong's Communist Revolution. Now an automotive and service center, the Guangzhou megalopolis has gobbled up its neighbors to become half the size of Tokyo.

It was then on to two former treaty ports-turned-SEZ's: Shantou (north-

eastern Guangdong) and Xiamen (southeastern Fujian). These culturally- and ethnically-distinct coastal cities had long sent shrewd merchants throughout China, Asia, and the world. Back home, their global mentality and market orientation are now inspiring business innovations and attracting new investments. Xiamen, across the Taiwan Strait, enjoys an intimate commercial interdependence with Taiwan. The speed of Xiamen's urbanization was driven home one afternoon spent with Ye Wende, former party secretary of Lin Village celebrated in a recent book.⁷ Once well outside Xiamen's city limits, Lin Village is now completely engulfed by urban

sprawl and—as their opulent new villas attest—its inhabitants are getting rich from real estate developments and foreign investment in modern garment factories exporting to the European Union.

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lighting such important GPRD issues as geographic identity, economic integration, urban/regional planning, environmental management, social transformation, cultural change, and the growing role of private higher education. We had enlightening discussions with entrepreneurs, government and NGO leaders, city and regional managers, and American Chamber of Commerce and U.S. consular officials. We also talked with migrant workers, cab drivers, and shopkeepers. These encounters revealed many people's buoyant optimism about the GPRD's march to urban prosperity, especially regarding the growth of a middle class, consumer culture, and civil society in the wake of economic openness and globalization. We were struck by the movement of millions of rural Chinese into the GPRD—the largest internal migration in human history, in fact—and the activism on behalf of worker safety, women's rights, and migrant education

being provided by a growing number of NGOs.

Throughout the itinerary, participants wrote in their journals, e-mailed their reflections to friends back home, and met in their working groups and plenary sessions to discuss their findings. A highlight of the trip was the opportunity to interact with Chinese professors and their students. At three universities, we each offered lectures in our fields of expertise and gave panel presentations to seek students' reactions to our delegation's observations. At Sun Yatsen University, for example, we mentored 73 students from forty universities in Hong Kong/Macau, China, and the United States at a three-day student leadership conference on "Urbanization in the Pearl River Delta." In eight workshops, we exchanged views with the next generation of leaders who will face tough policy choices on both sides of the Pacific. We also held a joint seminar on preparing curriculum materials regarding a rapidly-changing China with Midwestern community college teachers who had just completed a Fulbright-funded China-wide study tour organized by the University of Michigan's Midwest Institute.

In various forums, the delegation summarized its conclusions as follows: 1) The emerging GPRD has unleashed an unbridled entrepreneurial spirit often unfettered by Communist Party patronage but which needs greater support of the rule of law, transparency, and global standards. 2) Internal migration is certainly boosting economic development, but migrants, especially young women, are often "ghosts in the city" without access to education and other means of upward mobility. 3) The globalization and commercialization of culture is often the death-knell to local popular and high culture. 4) Rapid economic growth is seen as crucial to the regime's survival, but there is greater need for regional efficiency and coordination among government jurisdictions to avoid wasteful spending on five underutilized airports within a one hundred mile radius. 5) Given rising demographic pressures and intensifying pollution, planning agencies need to do more on behalf of sustainable urban development and environmental stewardship. The Fifth Dragon's bottom-

line worry concerns the danger to China's internal stability arising from the obvious and growing gap between the consuming urban rich (30% of the population) and struggling rural poor (70%).

Since the beginning of the Fall 2005 semester, the Fifth Dragoners have integrated GPRD material into thirty existing courses and three new courses. In coming semesters, GPRD content will be infused into a projected 19 existing courses and six new courses to enhance curriculum in Asian Studies, international business, global studies, and international service. In addition, participants have developed two new PRD-related websites (which incorporate the power point lectures we attended) for classroom use.

Participants are also pursuing 13 GPRD-related research projects, presenting their findings at venues on and off campus, and are preparing two GPRD panels at the forthcoming AN conference on April 21-23, 2006 (see pp 3-7 of this newsletter for the conference program). For the benefit of their AN colleagues, participants will post their new curriculum materials on the AN website and publish their papers in future issues of the AN newsletter. Two returned delegates have begun to study Chinese language, and several others have initiated e-mail relationships with colleagues they met in China. Four delegates intend to return to the GPRD for further research. And I hope that others will submit proposals to the Freeman-funded Student-Faculty Fellows Program to return to South China with up to five students for further investigation. To enrich K-12 education, I hope participants will publish articles in *Education About Asia* and integrate their findings at Freeman Foundation-funded National Consortium for Teaching about Asia workshops, many of which are based at AN member colleges.

In addition to faculty development and curricular expansion, the Fifth Dragon delegation benefited from institutional contacts which will enhance student and faculty exchange. Two participants' colleges will initiate student exchanges with a university in Hong

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Kong and with Shantou University, and my own institution's annual South China study tour during May Term has been strengthened by contacts I made on the trip.⁸

In conclusion, I believe this Fulbright-Hays funded project—the first in AN's 13-year history to receive public support—was an effective use of the U.S. Department of Education grant. Instead of trying to obtain a cursory China-wide overview, our delegation studied a single region in depth. Having developed an understanding of the GPRD's role in China's economic rise and future promise, we are able to help our students anticipate the next step in the GPRD's development—integration with eight contiguous provinces into a Pan-Pearl River Delta (PPRD) running up to the Yangzi River—and for an even more prosperous China which is crucial to America's economic and geopolitical future.

The Fifth Dragon project goes to the heart of AN's mission: infusing Asian Studies into the liberal arts curriculum by bringing its member and other institutions together for interdisciplinary collaboration in faculty, curricular, and pedagogical developments in the effort to prepare our graduates for the personal and professional challenges of the "Asian Century." It is this rationale which is inspiring AN and HKAC to apply for a second Fulbright-Hays grant to take another group of AN-member professors next summer to study the historical and cultural roots of today's GPRD.

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Endnotes

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- ⁸ For further details of the participants' follow-up activities to the GPRD study tour, please see the various reports posted on www.asianetwork.org.