

## **DISTINCTIVE URBANIZATION IN THE PERI-URBAN REGIONS OF EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA<sup>1</sup>: RENEWING THE DEBATE**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper re-opens the discussion on the issue on urbanization of peri-urban region in east and south Asia. Its distinctive features as compared to those in western countries brought criticism mainly on the concept of extended urbanization that characterized the urbanization in developing Asian countries. There are some critical reflections that will be considered to answer that criticism mainly the very basic arguments of the extended metropolis, among others the regional diversity in the urbanization trajectories and internal differentiation that is emerging in the contemporary extended metropolitan in the region. After looking back at the definition of the peri-urban region and their importance in the countries, and a case study of Guangdong in China, a policy challenges are raised.*

**Keywords:** *urbanization, peri-urban, extended metropolitan, East and Southeast Asia.*

*"There is increasing appreciation in the social sciences that context is important in understanding social, economic, cultural, political and demographic processes. An important element in context is the type of place in which people live and work...."*  
*Champion and Hugo (2003: 3)*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

During the last twenty years a lively debate has emerged concerning the processes of urbanization in East and Southeast Asia<sup>2</sup>. The debate was initially provoked by the publication of the book entitled "Extended Metropolis: Settlement Transition in Asia" (Ginsburg, Koppell and McGee, 1991.) Essays in this book made the case for a distinctive pattern of urbanization emerging in Asia<sup>3</sup> that was heavily influenced by the historical, ecological, demographic and institutional context in which this urbanization process was occurring. This was never an argument based upon some cultural set of traits that could be described as Asian as opposed to Western but rather to emphasize that the framing of the urbanization process was conditioned by the context in which it was placed<sup>4</sup>. In arguing for this position we wanted too

stress that urbanization process operates at multiple scales ranging from international ,through to national and local even to the level of individuals<sup>5</sup>. But at the same time we were particularly concerned to emphasise the importance of ‘ local contextualities’ in influencing the urbanization process. This is a phrase first introduced by Giddens(1990). In this sense the use of the term ‘local’ is very broad and include such instrumentalities as municipalities to the smallest of community organizations. The use of this concept also accepts that the local is part of process of contestation, negotiation and defeat with other scales in which the role of national and international forces can be very ambivalent. Of course, all writers in this volume recognized that the international context, in which the forces of globalization were also playing an important role in urbanization processes. The increase of foreign investment, improved communications and the growing collapse of time and space facilitated by improved technologies were creating a situation in which local – global relationships were central to the analysis of urbanization processes. But we did not want to over emphasize this role at the cost of analyzing local influences.

In reviewing these critiques of extended urbanization three positions can be noted. First there is a view that the arguments of the book were over-generalized, despite the fact the book is a collection of essays that analyzes urbanization in a number of different Asian countries. For example, Tang and Chung (2000) are critical of the view that the growth of extended metropolitan regions in China is similar to that of other Asian countries. For them the major criticism is that the idea that this form of urbanization is characterized by regional urbanization of emerging functionality and an increase in the intensity of urban-rural relationships is unacceptable. Rather they argue that the extended urbanization process in China is characterized by increasing economic competition and fragmentation particularly in the peri-urban areas. Curiously they argue that the use of case studies by researchers who have attempted to test the validity of the general thesis of extended urbanization in China are of little use in testing the model. Despite the fact that the studies of Lin, Matron and Wang all present empirical evidence that gives some support for their position.(see Lin, 1997; Matron, 2000 and Wang, 1998). Tang and Chung then go on to use a case study of Sunan to reject the arguments of these previous case studies. Secondly, there is a criticism of the thesis that urbanization in Asia will lead to a distinctive form of urbanization. This is because the approach is said to neglect the inevitability of the growth of market systems that will generate patterns of land-use, land rent and urban form that are the same as the more developed capitalist countries (Chan,1993). There is also a view that the arguments concerning distinctive urbanization in Asia hark back to some earlier formulation of Third World urbanization that were suggested by the dependency conditions of the

expansion of global capitalism at that time<sup>6</sup> Dick and Rimmer (1998) even go so far as to argue that the case for distinctive urbanization is some form of "Orientalism" in that it is a form of created knowledge that is reifying Asia<sup>7</sup>. In their view the approach of Extended Urbanization neglects the powerful forces of western technology, investment and ideas of planning that are shaping Asian urbanization processes. Thus, they view the emergence of elements of the built environment such as freeways, shopping malls, suburban housing developments as evidence that "...by the 1980's the growth processes in southeast Asian cities were again converging to a remarkable degree with those of the First World and in particular those of the US." (Dick and Rimmer, 1998:2309).

In this paper, I want to examine these critiques in the light of current developments in the extended metropolitan regions of East and Southeast Asia. On reflection it seems that is timely to reconsider some of these early arguments of the Extended Metropolis paying particular attention to the regional diversity in the urbanization trajectories and the internal differentiation that is emerging in the contemporary extended metropolis of the region. For this reason the ensuing discussion focuses on the a selection of low and middle-income countries from the region that include China, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, that in 1995 had a GNP per capita of below \$3000 US and comprised 98 per cent of the population of the region. All these countries are characterized by one or more large extended metropolitan region located in agro-ecological zones of high population density<sup>8</sup>. At the same time all these countries with the exception of the Philippines had official urbanization levels of below 35 per cent. ( See World Bank 1997 and UN. Population Division 1995). This means that urban transition was still at a very early phase in these countries and that a potentially very large population will be involved in the future urban transition over the next 25 years and this is a crucial factor underlying urban policy initiatives. In fact this debate about whether urbanization in these parts of Asia is imitating the urbanization process in the West, or is exhibiting different features, resonates in every sphere of policy formulation.

The issue of internal differentiation in the socio-economic features of the extended metropolitan regions of the selected countries of East and Southeast Asia must also be taken into account. There is certainly no disagreement between the proponents of these debates that urban form is assuming similar features between the West (particularly North America) and Asia. However, some writers argue (see Mc Gee and Robinson 1995 and Aguilar et al., (2003), that a more extended form of urbanization is occurring earlier in the urban transition than was the case in the West. It is important to stress that while some of the components of this extended metropolitan form appear

similar to the megalopolis concept of earlier years (See Gottman 1961 ) in that the more intense circulation of people, commodities and capital within the region have led to the growing importance of peri-urban regions that lie outside the cores and their immediate adjacent built-up areas. These peri-urban regions are becoming increasingly important as the locus of new economic activity and intense competition between rural and urban activities.(For China see Yang and Tian 2000) For this reason I want to focus this paper on examining the validity of these critiques of the extended metropolitan thesis by examining developments in the peri-urban regions of the selected countries. I also want to pay some attention to the policy challenges posed by the emergence of peri-urban regions for they are centrally determined by the perceptions of the areas by policy makers. In order to accomplish this task the paper is organized into four main parts.

- 1) A definition of peri-urban regions and their importance in the East and Southeast Asian Urbanization transition.
- 2) Peri-urbanization in Action: A Case Study from Guangdong.
- 3) Policy Challenges.
- 4) Conclusion. Closing the Debate.

## **II. PART ONE: A DEFINITION OF PERI-URBAN REGIONS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN THE EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN URBAN TRANSITION**

One of the most enduring components of the explanation of the urban transition relates to the spatial patterns of urban growth. Thus as cities have grown in size they have tended to sprawl outwards beyond the limits of the politically defined city core. In broad terms there are two conceptual elements involved in this process. First because this expansion generally occurs into areas of intense rural activity it involves the analysis of urban and rural relationships that has often been called the peri-urban interface (See Atkinson,1999). One aspect of this concept emphasizes that peri-urban areas form a hinterland that functions as a resource pool providing water, food, building materials, land, labour , recreation space and waste disposal cities for the urban core. Atkinson points out that this “.. functional analysis of cities and their hinterlands focuses attention on resources which remains significant as a serious issue in ecological sustainability.” (ibid:2) This issue of resource competition and depletion has been a long established component of the study of rural-urban interactions and an important component of policy responses. For example the introduction of greenbelt policies were an important component of spatial policies designed to contain the growth city sprawl. (See Hall 1973)

A second concept that is important in the study of peri-urban areas is the recognition that globalization has accelerated the flow of people, commodities, capital and information that is causing both detachment of the city core and integration with its surrounding extended metropolitan region at the same time. Detachment in the sense that the city cores are increasingly sourcing their resources such as food and leisure from a wider global market and integration in the sense that the resources of the peri-urban region such as land and water are increasingly needed. At times it seems that that these globalization processes are so technologically telescoped and ubiquitous with the creation of industrial estates, freeways, international airports etc that the integration seems dominant. But it would be a mistake to view these processes as separated. Rather they are at the nexus of global-local and urban rural relationships that is fundamentally defining the character of the extended metropolitan regions of Asia.

It would be more accurate to argue that city-hinterland relationships have been replaced by a scale of interaction that has become more spatially extended and more intense at the local level. What is more this is occurring in regions where there are a multiplicity of administrative structures often set-up to administer territories in which rural activity dominates. The influx of urban activities, migrant populations further exacerbate the administrative difficulties and increase resource competition. This creates a political environment that is very unsuited to deal with these developments. Thus peri-urban regions are a major focus of policy concern.

In the light of these conceptual elements there is considerable justification for a definition of peri-urban regions as areas occurring outside city cores and adjacent contiguous built-up areas that may extend for distances of up to 100 kilometres from the city core. Mc Gee's (1991) original definition of these areas as *desakota* located the region outside the areas adjacent to the city core that were labeled peri-urban in this model. On reflection it is probably more accurate to regard the two sub-regions previously labeled as peri-urban and *desakota* as exhibiting features that exhibit different mixes of peri-urbanization in which rural-urban conflict is more pronounced in the region close to the city core. This means that more emphasis can now be placed upon the processes of change in entire peri-urban region<sup>9</sup>. Thus Webster places much more emphasis on the driving forces that are creating peri-urban regions such as government policy, foreign direct investment particularly in manufacturing, the increase of land prices encouraging speculation that is a much more dynamic approach. This helps explain why the economic activities in the peri-urban regions are changing so rapidly and they are becoming such a vital part of the urban regional economy (Webster,2001)

The demographic and ecological context of these peri-urban regions also emphasizes their importance. First the large population base of these countries that form over 80 per cent of East and Southeast Asia's population and the concentration of the existing population in the mega-urban regions means that as the urban transition occurs huge agglomerations will emerge. Thus even if a very restrictive definition is adopted EMR's such Jabotabek, (Indonesia) Bangkok (Thailand) and the Pearl River Delta (China) will grow to an excess of 20 million by 2025. Jones 2002) What is more the process of peri-urbanization is occurring in regions of great ecological fragility which are quite distinctive from the areas into which Western cities expanded. Holland may be the most important exception to this generalisation. Thus the peri-urban regions are places of intense competition between land, labour and capital that are also competing with other parts of the city region for the provision of community social services and physical infrastructure such as waste removal systems. In such situations the core cities often command a major part of private and public capital investment as their administrations drive to make their cities globally competitive. This means that peri-urban populations are increasingly threatened by depleted resources that produce environmental stress and potential for social conflict. (see Douglass, 1991) Thus peri-urban regions become the very centre of the local-global nexus and the re jiggling of regional urban space in which policy interventions are urgently needed.

### **III. PART TWO: PERI-URBAN REGIONS IN ACTION. A CASE STUDY FROM GUANGDONG PROVINCE, CHINA<sup>10</sup>.**

In a paper of this length it is impossible to delineate the processes of change in all the peri-urban regions of the selected countries of this paper. Therefore we will examine one peri-urban region in greater detail; namely the Pearl River Delta region of Guangdong Province in China. However as a prelude to this discussion it is necessary to delineate some of the major differences between processes of urbanization in formerly socialist countries such as China and Vietnam and Southeast Asia. In general the increasing mode of engagement of China with the global economy, almost certainly accelerated by China's entry to the WTO means that urban features will become more like Southeast Asia. But for the present there are important differences, Here I rely upon an analysis presented by Webster (2001). He suggests six major features.

- 1) The main drivers of development in the peri-urban regions of China are usually local governments, or quasi-government agencies. While macro-policy is developed by the national government (e.g. the opening -up of the coastal regions of China to foreign investment and system of city - leading counties) the local authorities are primarily responsible for the

- development in the peri-urban regions. By contrast in the majority of Southeast Asian peri-urban regions the private sector is the main investor with the public sector being responsible for public infrastructure.
- 2) There are sharp differences in the fiscal systems . In China lower levels of government collect a higher proportion of taxes and area able to retain more than in most Southeast Asian countries and this further reinforces the local efforts to initiate development.
  - 3) There are sharp differences in the form of land control. In China's peri-urban regions most land is controlled by the local level organizations such as the former communes and changes in the control of land are carried out through complex systems of negotiation and land trades. In Southeast Asia land is more often privately owned and there is a vigorous land market that encourages speculation and concentration of land-ownership.
  - 4) Another issue that is important is the issue of rural –urban linkages. In the Southeast Asian experience of expansion into peri-urban areas there historically been a sharp division between urban and rural responsibilities that has led to very slow changes in the administrative structures of peri-urban areas In China some commentators have argued that the national government has been engaged in a series of policies beginning with the city-leading counties policies introduced in 1982 and the encouragement of annexation of these counties by cities that has led to a a greater reorganization of rural-urban linkages and administrative responsibility than is occurring in Southeast Asia<sup>11</sup>.
  - 5) It may also be argued that labour markets are exhibit more commonalities. While in the earlier phases of the development of manufacturing in the peri-urban regions of coastal China and Southeast Asia the labour force was recruited from local agricultural surplus labour more recently this has been supplemented by interregional migration . In China and Vietnam until recently this was characterized by illegal migration while in Southeast Asia it is still largely legal.
  - 6) Finally it may be argued that there are many similarities in the lifestyles and consumption landscapes of the peri-urban regions of China and Southeast Asia represented by the surge of suburban developments, leisure parks and industrial zones.

The differences are important to take into account the description of the processes of peri-urbanization in Guangdong Province as an aid to understanding the features of this process. Guangdong Province is located in southern China. In 2000 the National Census recorded a population of 80 million in the Province. Adjacent to the province are the two recently incorporated Special Autonomous Regions of Hong Kong and Macao that have a combined population of 7 million. Historically the core of the region was focused on the largest city , Guangzhou and the adjacent counties that

formed part of the Pearl River Delta (Zhujiang Delta). This region has been developing over many hundreds of years as one of the main rice growing regions of China and its rich alluvium provides a fertile foundation for multiple crops of rice, vegetables, tropical fruit, fish production and pig rearing using an ecologically productive system of animals-ponds- fertilizer – cropping cycles that is highly productive and labour-intensive. Over a period of centuries this system was able to support increasingly rural densities which had reached more than 300 persons per square kilometre by the latter half of the nineteenth century. This region also became one of the main centres of Chinese out-migration that fueled the Chinese diaspora throughout the world.

After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949 it continued its agricultural role including a considerable increase of food exports to Hong Kong where the population grew as it increased its population from 600,000 in 1949 to 6.2 million today. Since 1978 and the opening-up of China the Guangdong has been one of the first areas where China's new economic policies were put in place. In 1979 two special economic zones were established in Shenzhen (next to Hong Kong) and Zhuhai (close to Macao), In 1984 Guangzhou was made an open city and in 1987 the whole PRD was turned into an open economic zone in which foreign direct investment was permitted. In the period between 1986 and 1995 FDI experienced very rapid growth. Most of the investment came from Hong Kong (70 per cent) and almost two thirds went into manufacturing most of it based in the towns and villages in the of the PRD. Between 1982 and 1990 industrial employment increased from 1.8 million to 3,9 million.

A major part of this investment occurred in the intensely populated rural areas of the Pearl River Delta made-up of 13 counties and six municipalities in an area of 17,092 square kilometres. By 1995 this region had become one of the most densely populated regions of China with a permanent population density of 743 ppsk compared to 378 for Guangdong and 126 for China , Between 1980 and 1990 the population of the PRD increased by 35 per cent. This was mostly due a large in-migration but does not include many temporary migrants. If the large movement of temporary migrants is also taken into account then the population increase between 1986 and 1995 has been as high as 74.3 per cent and this means that he population density in the Delta had reached 1,173 p.p.sk. This was partly a result of rapid urbanization that rose from 30 to 52 per cent.

Predictably this development resulted in a decline in cultivated land of some 34.6 per cent in the same period and a decrease in the proportion of people in agriculture. The value of agricultural production did not decline greatly as systems of production were intensified. While this growth was reflected in a



considerable growth in the GDP of the region it also created a number of policy challenges that resulted from the competition between urban and non-urban uses. While many policy challenges existed such as the provision of housing, public services the major problems that emerged were environmental. First by the end of the 1990's a serious water shortage had developed principally due to the quality of water. Most of the water for industrial, agricultural and domestic use came from the extensive river and canal system of the Delta that was becoming increasingly polluted by industrial discharges as well as household sewerage. Most of the water for domestic consumption comes from these water systems. By 2000 it was estimated that the authorities could only treat 21% of the water to potable standards (bacteria count/turbidity) and despite the fact that the Provincial government had embarked on a vigorous campaign to improve this situation the campaign had faltered and had fallen well behind the planned investment by 2000. This was partly due to inadequate budgetary provision and partly because of administrative fragmentation as urban water supply, sewerage disposal and wastewater treatment are handled by different organizational entities. Similar problems exist with respect to air pollution and waste disposal. But mostly it may be argued that these problems were not being addressed adequately because there was a serious disjuncture between investment in the urban core of the region Guangzhou which pushed ahead with an ambitious attempt to make the city globally competitive through a new international airport, substantial inner-city redevelopment and a new conference centre and the upgrading of infrastructure in the crowded peri-urban regions. This has possibly created a toxic environment in which the SARS virus originated<sup>12</sup>. Certainly Foshan in the heart of the Delta has been identified as the possible site for the origin of the virus. Thus it would seem that the peri-urban regions while important for economic growth must also be given a priority in policy intervention<sup>13</sup>.

#### **IV. PART THREE: POLICY CHALLENGES**

On the face of it the general thrust of this paper suggests that it is more concerned with the issue of evaluating the interpretative approaches towards the understanding of peri-urban regions but the major point of this paper is to argue that the understanding of the context of peri-urbanization in the Asian context is a necessary requirement to be developing suitable policy responses. This case study of the Pearl River Delta indicates that the litany of policy challenges identified in that discussion still remain the priority for policy intervention would seem to be focused on environmental problems. Thus while the problems of conflicting land-use activities etc. still remain and can be partially solved at the local level there is a need for wider regional intervention and creation of infrastructure if the environmental problems of

peri-urban areas are to be solved. In 1995 Robinson and Mc Gee had argued that the central problem of peri-urban regions was the difficulty in creating institutional responses at the regional level. But in the period since that argument was presented the idea that regional planning can somehow present a rational response to development needs has been increasingly discarded as neo-liberal thinking has increasingly developed its agenda of deregulation, decentralization and privatization. While these latter approaches have been dominant in many of the developed market economies the ideology has been transferred to the developing countries and often been made the prerequisite of development loans. In many ways these developments clash with the largely modernist "top-down" development projects of governments in developing countries that are still concerned with accomplishing economic growth, capacity building, and sustainable societies at a national level.

There is a recognition that the national-global interface can be more effectively developed by allowing the larger city cores to develop entrepreneurial initiatives designed to give them greater competitive edge in the global system. But at the same time these city cores form parts of a functionally integrated urban region in which the problems of the peri-urban region are a major policy concern. This is well illustrated by the case study of the Pearl River delta. This means that there is a need for reconfiguration of power and management relationships in urban regional space that are increasingly characterized by fragmentation, the development of new networks and growth coalitions (see Kelly 1998). These development create a highly competitive environment in which the emergence of a myriad of polyarchic decision making units increasingly come into conflict with the transformative elements of the higher levels of government. This is illustrated in figure 3 which portrays the decisional congestion that exists in these peri-urban regions of Asia. Given the distinctive demographic, ecological and environmental problems in the peri-urban regions of these countries then it would suggest that some form of institutional response at the level of the urban region is required. In the development of these responses a broad interpretation of urban governance is required that permits contextual refinement. Broadly any institutional response at the level of the urban region would seem to suggest a twofold interpretation of governance as incorporating the exercise of political will and power within a defined urban space and secondly the management of urban spaces that are designed to make urban spaces more livable. Such a vision does not exclude the possibility of public-private sector, city-region and government-civil society coalitions being formed.

But it does involve some form of urban regional visioning that can, where necessary, adopt regional policy approaches. In this respect Brenner's

carefully articulated review of metropolitan regionalism has relevance because of its breadth. He describes metropolitan regionalism as including “.. all strategies to establish institutions, policies or governance mechanisms at a geographical scale which approximates that of existing socio-economic interdependencies within an urban agglomeration” (Brenner,2002 ). Of course the adoption of any metropolitan response will partly at least depend upon the future development of these peri-urban regions. If they eventually become built-up extensions of the urban core then the existing urban governments can take over their administration as have happened in the adjacent counties of Guangzhou. But there sheer size and number of populations of these peri-urban regions and their close integration with a volatile global economy of does not guarantee that future. (see Webster 2001 and Mc Gee 2001) When these previous features are added to the ongoing environmental problems of these regions this suggests that some form of regional intervention is required. But as Atkinson points out “The megacity regions seem to pose an insuperable problem for the theorists of a reasonable regional planning process..... Discussions of the megacities, however, whilst recognizing major problems both in the inner cities and the extended regions focus attention on contingent solutions, rather than confronting the problematique as a whole.” (Atkinson,1999:14). This suggests there must be some way of combining regional vision and contingent solutions that will produce more effective policy responses and implementation<sup>14</sup>.

Given the difficulties of creating regional wide institutional responses one direction may be to increase the amount of information available at the scale of the extended metropolitan region and its various territorial scales. Recent developments in demographic research have pointed to the need to redefine the territorial units of national censuses to capture the reality of these extended metropolitan areas. Thus use of GIS techniques can greatly facilitate the measurement of changing land use and components of the built environment in these rapidly changing urban environments. (See Champion and Hugo, 2003 and NAS 2003) There are also developing methodologies for predicting change in the land-use patterns of these regions that could be of great assistance to policy makers. (See Sui and Zeng, 2001:37-52) The various environmental problems such as pollution etc can be more effectively monitored at the level of the extended metropolitan region. In this task the development of techniques of rapid urban appraisal are becoming increasingly effective (Garrett and Downer 2002)

Ultimately, of course, the provision of information of this nature can only be effective if institutional mechanisms are created that can utilize the information for effective policy outcomes. This would seem to suggest that there are least three levels of intervention. First at the local level through

agreement and self-help. Secondly at sub-regional level such as the peri-urban regions where the distinctive features that have been elaborated can be taken into account. Finally at a regional level (EMR) where planning and control of the use of resources throughout the region can be monitored and region wide solutions can be implemented. For example the issue of solid waste disposal is a major issue in Asia today. A recent report estimates that the urban areas of Asia now spend about US\$ 2.5 billion on solid waste management per year and that this figure will increase to US\$ 25 billion by 2025 generating 1.8 million tonnes per day. The report indicates that municipal governments are usually the responsible agencies for solid waste collection but the magnitude of the problem is well beyond the ability of most municipal governments. (See World Bank,1999) The disposal of this solid waste presents one of the more intractable conflicts within EMRS because in the majority of these areas solid waste collections systems are various and the most common means of disposal are landfills located in the urban periphery. Given the general lack of financial resources the development of effective solutions for waste management in the extended metropolitan areas is very difficult. It is particularly important that systems of spatial differentiated management should be put in place. For example the financially better-off governments of the urban cores should move as quickly as possible to implement systems of solid waste disposal such as incineration that are now used in developed countries of Asia such as Japan. The local governments of the peri-urban regions should encourage local communities to use systems of solid waste disposal such as recycling that can be implemented so as to have the least environmental impact. There would have to be considerable negotiation between the various levels of government at the regional level to mediate the impact of the waste dumping from urban cores and industrial waste in the peri-urban regions. National governments and urban governments are moving to try and regulate these conflicts but the problems of monitoring their occurrence still continue<sup>15</sup>.

Ultimately, however, the success of such institutional response will depend upon political will and acceptance that local, sub-regional and regional solutions will have to involve regional visioning by Asian governments.(see Douglass,1998) To expect this to happen in the present context may be too ambitious in the context of development that is still driven by top-down modernist goals but eventually as in the some of the developed countries the impact of globally-induced economic restructuring, neo-liberal state restructuring and the reshaping of urban form will involve some form of political reorganization in what Brenner calls the “ new politics of scale” (Brenner, 2002:pg 3) Until that time the demographic and ecological contexts of the peri-urban regions demand urgent policy attention if they are not to

prevent ongoing environmental problems than can , as we have shown in the case of the Pearl River delta create problems that have global impact.

## **V. CONCLUSION: CLOSING THE DEBATE**

It is often difficult to relate academic debates to the real world and it is even more difficult in this post-modern era when grand theory has been eroded by the ambiguities of interpreting social and economic change. The relevance of resurfacing this debate about the processes of urbanization in the contemporary Asia is that it draws attention to the ongoing importance of the urban transition in Asia in a global context. The debate serves the purpose of emphasizing how diverse and multi-directional the urbanization process has become in contemporary Asia. While the urban transition seems an inevitable part of the development of Asia its diversity emphasize the need to develop both national and local strategic policies that are indigenously formulated. It is no accident that in this point of time there is reassertion of the importance of “local contextualities” and place both in theory and policy. This is an appropriate time to close the debate and get on with resolving the challenges of Asian urbanization.

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### **Notes:**

- <sup>1</sup> East and Southeast Asia refers to Northeast Asia, China and Taiwan and Southeast Asia.
- <sup>2</sup> In a similar manner there was much debate concerning the author’s earlier book on the urbanization process in Southeast Asia. See Mc Gee, (1967).
- <sup>3</sup> This book had a broader definition of Asia to include the South Asian continent and Sri Lanka.
- <sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this issue of “Asian-ness” of Asian cities see Logan (2002).
- <sup>5</sup> See Kelly and Mc Gee ( 2003) for a discussion of urbanization and multi-scaler dynamics.
- <sup>6</sup> See Mc Gee (1971) and Armstrong and Mc Gee (1984) for a discussion of Third World urbanization. For a recent review of this literature see Robinson ( 2002).
- <sup>7</sup> See Mc Gee 2002 for a more detailed response to this critique.
- <sup>8</sup> These countries were chosen because of their large population size and the pattern of historical development that has focused urban growth in areas of dense rural population. I have selected the 1995 date because it represents a reasonable base-line to evaluate changes in the EMRS that had been occurring since the mid 1970’s onwards.
- <sup>9</sup> In the original article Mc Gee (1991) described 6 features of *desakota* to include (1) high in-situ rural population density with a majority of population engaged in agriculture,(2) located close enough to the city core so that economic linkages are facilitated,(3) there is a well developed transportation network which is the foundation of an intense transactive network,(4) land-use is mixed,(4) high mobility of people and commodities, (5) increasing employment of women in non-agricultural activities(6) politically it is a grey zone in which political administrative structures are highly fragmented. ( See Mc Gee, 1991:93-94).
- <sup>10</sup> This discussion will focus primarily on China. For discussion of Vietnamese urbanization see Mc Gee( 1995) (2000) and( 2004).
- <sup>11</sup> Tang and Chung (2000) see this process as part of a totalization process whereby the national government is attempting to develop consolidation processes in the urban patterns of China.

- <sup>12</sup> Recent research into the origins of the SARS virus suggest that it may have originated by jumping from wild animals to human beings. But this still does not rule out the option that it may have been caused by some other factor such as farming practices and environmental deterioration.
- <sup>13</sup> This description of the Guangdong case study has been culled from a large number of authors listed at the end of this footnote. It should be noted that these authors devote much attention to the critical analysis of the meaning of Chinese statistics and interpretations that can be drawn from them. In the interests of brevity I have not included this analysis but the reader should be aware that all assertions about Chinese statistical data are open to debate. See Lin,1997, Lin 2001; Sit,2001; U.S Consulate General, Guangzhou,2000; Wu,1998 ; Wu and Yeh (1999); Yeh et.al2002) Zhang 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> Atkinson, 1999 has an extended discussion of these policy issues.
- <sup>15</sup> For further discussion of the macro-dimensions of the infrastructure needs of Asian cities see Yue-man Yeung (Ed.) ( 1998) and for a discussion of the use of flexible systems of infrastructure management see Guy, Marvin and Moss ( Ed. 2001).

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