

Regional Context : Geography and Economy

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Foshan City is located at the center of Guangdong Province, at the inland apex of the Pearl River Delta, less than 50km from Guangzhou, Zhongshan, Jiangmen, Zhuhai, Zaoqing and Dongguan, and just over 100km from Macao and Hong Kong.

Formed by the confluence of three rivers as they run to the South China Sea, the Pearl River Delta occupies an area of some 9,000 square kilometers and has a population of 48 million residents (including Hong Kong and Macao).

There is a three-level hierarchy of urban systems in the Pearl River Delta. At the top are two primary cities: Guangzhou and Hong Kong. At the second level are the cities of Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Dongguan, etc. Below these are the urban centers of the 22 county-status cities and about 300 urbanized towns scattered across the region.

More than half of the region's population is concentrated in three city clusters that form an approximate isosceles triangle. At the apex of the triangle is the Guangzhou/Foshan cluster. At a distance of about 120 kilometers from the apex are the Hong Kong/Shenzhen cluster to the southeast, and the Macao/Zhuhai cluster to the southwest. A pattern of urban development is presently emerging along both the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong corridor, and the Guangzhou-Zhuhai-Macao corridor.

Even while Hong Kong operated as a separate country, China's Pearl River Delta region was closely linked to Hong Kong through their relationship in trade and commerce. Since the implementation of the "Open Door" policy in Mainland China in the late 1970s, a large number of Hong Kong manufacturers relocated factories to the PRD region which is known for comparatively low operational and labor costs. This added to the phenomenon of "Front Shop, Back Factory" economic cooperation in the region. As a result, Hong Kong's economy has been transformed from a labor-intensive, light-industry oriented center to a major regional financial and logistic hub with service industries making up its current economic foundation.

The Pearl River Delta's annual GDP growth rate averaged approximately 20 percent per year during the 1980s and 1990s. In 2002, the region's gross domestic product reached US\$113 billion, and it exported \$112.5 billion worth of goods - 9.2 percent and 34.6 percent of China's totals respectively. The region's economic prowess continues to grow today. The challenge faced by Foshan is focusing planning efforts to capture a portion of this economic boom while making Foshan the most livable of Chinese cities.