

# A Public Historical Perspective on The Evolution of Social Policies in The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

Peihong Li \*

School of Foreign Language, Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology, Guangzhou, China

\* Corresponding Author Email: lph@ldy.edu.rs

**Abstract.** In order to appreciate how historical events influence regional social policies, this study employs the lens of public history to explore the development of social policies in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). This article looks at the unique characteristics of social policies in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao over the course of many historical eras in light of the GBA's rapid socioeconomic growth. This article highlights the unique advantages of the GBA by comparing and contrasting the regional cooperation and policy development of the San Francisco Bay Area and the European Union. The study uses a mixed-methods approach to find patterns and possible future directions for the development of GBA's social policy by combining cross-regional comparison with historical document analysis. Findings indicate that GBA benefits from unique regional strengths in areas like integration, social equity, and sustainable development. The study concludes that public history provides valuable insights for policymakers, enabling them to address contemporary challenges more effectively by incorporating historical perspectives into policy formulation. This approach not only ensures that valuable lessons from the past are preserved but also enhances the ability of GBA's policies to foster regional cohesion and respond to future socio-political dynamics.

**Keywords:** Greater Bay Area; Public history; Social policy.

## 1. Introduction

In order to appreciate how historical events, influence regional social policies, this study employs the lens of public history to explore the development of social policies in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). This article looks at the unique characteristics of social policies in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao over the course of many historical eras in light of the GBA's rapid socioeconomic growth. This article highlights the unique advantages of the GBA by comparing and contrasting the regional cooperation and policy development of the San Francisco Bay Area and the European Union. The study uses a mixed-methods approach to find patterns and possible future directions for the development of GBA's social policy by combining cross-regional comparison with historical document analysis. A case study of the policy evolution in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao is examined, and a comparison between the regional policy development of the San Francisco Bay Area and the European Union is used to establish the future course of GBA's social policy. The purpose of this paper is to provide policy makers with historical experience and to inform GBA policy making in the areas of social equity, sustainable development and regional integration.

## 2. Influence and support of public history on social policies

Public history emerged in the United States in the 1970s with a focus on applying the results of historical research to contemporary social issues. In the formulation and implementation of social policy, public history provides valuable historical experience for understanding how past history shapes current decision-making. Professor Leung Yuansheng of Hong Kong believes that public history has three major meanings for the society: 1. It is the history of application, providing resources for the society and solving problems. 2. It is the history of the majority, the people and the masses. 3.

It is the historical research done by historians concerned about public affairs and collective interests [1].

By relating historical events to current problems, public history helps shape social policy and helps decision-makers draw valuable lessons from past achievements and mistakes. Its goal is to benefit society by addressing present issues from a historical perspective. The primary goals of social policy are to address social problems, enhance well-being, and promote sustained economic expansion. The relationship between history and policy is particularly crucial in the GBA because of its varied historical, cultural, and institutional foundations. In addition to illuminating the causes of societal problems, public history offers practical solutions that honor local customs, values, and life experiences.

### **3. Historical Evolution of social policies in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area**

#### **3.1. Social policy of Guangdong**

After the reform and opening up in 1978, Guangdong's social policies have undergone a significant shift. Early policies focused on economic growth were gradually extended to social welfare areas such as housing, healthcare, and education. As the vanguard of China's economic reforms, Guangdong's policy history is heavily influenced by its past and closely linked to developments in Hong Kong and Macao. Under the combined influence of government intervention and market orientation, these policies are still evolving [2]. Shenzhen's talent policy, for instance, has undergone several phases, starting with the attraction of technical talent from Hong Kong and Macao and ending with the "Peacock Plan," which aims to encourage the gathering of highly skilled inventive talent to support the region's innovative development [3].

By these measures, Guangdong has not only supported regional economic development but has also aggressively pushed cross-border collaboration in public services and social welfare with Hong Kong and Macao, setting the groundwork for the Greater Bay Area's integration.

#### **3.2. Social policy of Hong Kong**

Hong Kong's social policy is deeply influenced by its colonial history and the "one country, two systems" framework. During the colonial period, the Hong Kong government intervened less in social welfare and its policies were more laissez-faire [4]. With the development of the economy, the government has gradually increased its investment in housing, health care and education. After the reunification in 1997, Hong Kong's social policies were further restructured, which not only retained its unique legal and political system while integrating with the mainland, but also promoted cross-border cooperation with Guangdong and Macao in social policies, especially in the fields of labor mobility, education and social services [5].

Hong Kong's policies are more integrated into the regional integration process of Guangdong, Macao, and Hong Kong, while maintaining their independence. Owing to its dual origins, Hong Kong is in a perfect position to serve as a mediator in the Greater Bay Area partnership, providing essential support for the sharing of resources and the coordination of policies among the three regions.

#### **3.3. Social policy of Macao**

During the Portuguese colonial period, Macao's social policies were relatively underdeveloped, and social welfare was mainly provided by charity organizations and market mechanisms. In fields like healthcare and education, Macao has steadily amalgamated with the mainland since its return to China in 1999. The government of Macao has ample resources to support the notable advancement in social welfare that has been made possible by the casino industry's quick development [6]. As the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area accelerates, Macao has fostered increasingly close collaboration with Guangdong and Hong Kong in social policy domains,

particularly in public services such as healthcare and education [7]. The historical context and policy features of Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao are entwined in the development of social policies within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), creating a tight relationship and interaction.

#### **4. Influence of historical experience on social policy**

The public history perspective provides a powerful tool for understanding the impact of historical experience on GBA's social policy.

Guangdong's experience in reform and opening up has shaped a policy framework that balances market and government intervention, making it a leader in GBA policy innovation in areas such as labor mobility and educational cooperation [2]. Hong Kong's social policy decisions are still influenced by the colonial era's legacy of minimal government engagement, especially in the housing and health care sectors [4]. In the colonial period, Macao lacked experience in public participation in social policies. After the reunification, it gradually changed to a more participatory policymaking mode, and the public's demand for government accountability increased, which promoted the improvement of social welfare [6].

On the whole, the public historical perspective provides a valuable empirical framework for comprehensively understanding the evolution of policies in the three places, emphasizes the importance of historical experience in policymaking, and offers important inspiration for the future development of social policies in the Greater Bay Area.

#### **5. Comparison of the Greater Bay Area with the European Union and the San Francisco Bay Area**

By comparison, the GBA's growth potential is much more evident than the EU's and the San Francisco Bay Area's. Yang Zhenjie and other academics claim that in the framework of "one country, two systems," GBA provides unique advantages for regional cooperation [8].

The Greater Bay Area (GBA) exhibits greater geographical proximity and economic interconnectedness compared to the European Union and the San Francisco Bay Area. The cross-border cooperation within the European Union, alongside technological innovation in the San Francisco Bay Area, illustrates that institutional diversity and resource integration can effectively foster regional economic development and social progress, thereby providing a significant reference point for the GBA [9]. By promoting policy coordination and cross-border cooperation, GBA can enhance its competitiveness globally and become a world-class urban agglomeration and economic center of the future [10].

#### **6. The future direction of GBA's social policy**

Hong Kong has a special bridging role in the Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macao Greater Bay Area collaboration because of its dual cultural heritage.

In addition to being a vital resource for resource sharing and policy coordination, Hong Kong can also significantly contribute to the promotion of coordinated regional development. In the future, Hong Kong will likely continue to be a major player in the development of regional policy. Its global perspective and institutional advantages will support effective resource flow and deep market integration, which will raise the three locations' combined competitiveness even more.

Furthermore, the GBA must tackle issues of social justice, lessen the wealth divide, and guarantee that everyone benefits from economic expansion. By learning from history, public history can guide policy makers to build more inclusive and sustainable social systems [11].

## 7. Conclusion

This study reveals that the social policies in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area are significantly shaped by historical experiences, and regional integration has created new opportunities for coordinated policy development. To effectively address contemporary social issues and support long-term growth, GBA policymakers must draw on past experiences. The primary goal of this paper is to bridge the historical gap in social policy research within the GBA and offer insights for fostering social cohesion. Additionally, the cross-regional analysis provides a valuable perspective for future research on regional policy development. In the future, the author will maintain a keen interest in the ongoing development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The results of this study hope to provide some new ideas and directions for future researchers studying Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

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