

Negotiating Geographical Knowledges

As the last remaining socialist country with perhaps the fastest economic growth in the world today, China presents a challenge to critical thinking about globalization. It is imperative that the question of alternatives and other possibilities and potentialities be raised in any attempt at theorizing or conceptualizing the process of globalization. Globalization is generally perceived as the result of the collapse of Soviet-style socialism, as well as the unprecedented expansion of transnational capitalism. While avowedly Eurocentric in its hegemonic formations, globalization also sets up an indispensable structural context for analyzing what happens in the world today. Therefore, globalization must be grasped as a dialectical process: it refers at once to an idea, or an ideology – that is, capitalism disguised as a triumphant, universal globalism – and a concrete historical condition by which various ideas, including capitalism in its present guise, must be measured. China's challenge to globalization can be perceived in both senses, first to global capitalism as an ideology and then to the "new world order," or "world-system," as an accepted reality. China has become increasingly integrated into the global economic system, yet retains its ideological and political self-identity as a third-world, socialist country. Will China offer an alternative?

(Liu Kang, 1998, p. 164)

Globalization has emerged as a common term, yet is an unwieldy conceptual idea used in diverse contexts and to signal, or disguise, a variety of different cultural, economic, and political positions. It is fundamentally associated with the increasing internationalization of capitalist practices, through firms and transnational corporate activities in the world economy, backed and challenged by political forces, accompanied by cultural forms, and mediated by local resistances. In the contemporary geographical imaginary, coastal south China is one area of the world whose economic processes and social relations, in dialectical formation with the world economy, have contributed to contemporary understandings about globalization. South China's rise has also destabilized the national order of things on the Chinese domestic scene. These events, though, were not entirely new to the late twentieth century. For most of its history, the south China coast has been an internationalized

transboundary region, the primary zone of contact between the larger empire of which it has been a part and the world economy. It has also been a region of social activism and revolution. Despite the totalizing qualities of some globalization narratives, regions, like coastal south China, continue to be distinctive in particular ways. The focus of this analysis is that basic geographical problem – the tension between the forces of globalization and the production of local and regional difference.

The book that follows has had several points of intellectual origin. One of those points was the recognition that much of post-Second World War scholarship about the south China coast, and especially about the period of the nineteenth century, when China faced Western demands for free trade (how much has changed in a century?), bore all the marks of Cold War era politicized debate. In the 1990s the political rhetoric of the Cold War era was refashioned into discourses of neoliberalism, which continue to promote Western political economic goals in new “globalized” ways. Another pivotal concern was the set of methodological disjunctures between research paradigms in China area studies and contemporary theoretical approaches in geography and related fields, and resulting gaps in knowledge about regional formation in China. The interrogation of prevailing paradigms and the formation of other modes of explanation have been in order. The most important concern was understanding that most of the material processes that constitute a regional formation in coastal south China coast are transboundary, transnational, and, in a few significant ways, simultaneously transhistorical in nature. Coming to terms with these perspectives meant that the analysis had to treat regional space as a set of dynamic, scaled processes, which would frame a globalizing regional formation in relation to the territorial coherence of the dynastic era and twentieth-century state-making project in China. What follows is a course of unbounding south China, to raise complex questions about the implications of historical geographies for understanding contemporary regional formations, and their imaginations; how regional formations, materially and discursively, are responses to other territorial transformations and processes of globalization; the ways in which regional formations emerge in contexts of economic restructuring; whether articulating regional formations may lead beyond the problems of statist paradigms and nationalisms; and how in a transhistorical maritime region, oceans connect rather than divide.

This chapter introduces these issues to set forth larger-scale contexts of understanding China in the contemporary world order, and also to begin to establish how what we may know about a country and its regions are regularly partial and shifting accounts of more complex processes. My strategy is to place an unfolding geography about south China

in the history of its scholarship, and at the same time, to call into question some of the ways in which that scholarship has been written. This is a critical and contextualist approach, which combines theoretical orientations with understandings of regional realities, and seeks to mediate between ideas about the conceptual space of flows in transboundary space economies, located geographies of production and exchange, and cultural spheres of agency and symbolic meaning. The first half of the book concerns historical geographies of the south China coast and their contested representations, in the sense of what Felix Driver (1992, p. 35) has assessed less as “a prop for the present,” and more as a means of articulating between geographical realities and understandings of the past, and their conditions and representations in the present. Instead of a linear accounting of the regional past, the historical analysis recalls how history matters in situated and lived geographies – that is, explorations at the intersection of place/space, time, narrative, and body – and in doing so substitutes for progressivist history a regional geography formed of diverse places and landscapes of disruption and discontinuity. These geographical reorientations establish the means for understanding causal relations at the basis of many questions about the contemporary regional formation, the rise of the south China coast under reform. The next sections begin with an empirical account of contemporary regional transformation, but with the recognition that the apparently factual description is a partial view of what must be assessed in a broader and historicized theoretical analysis.

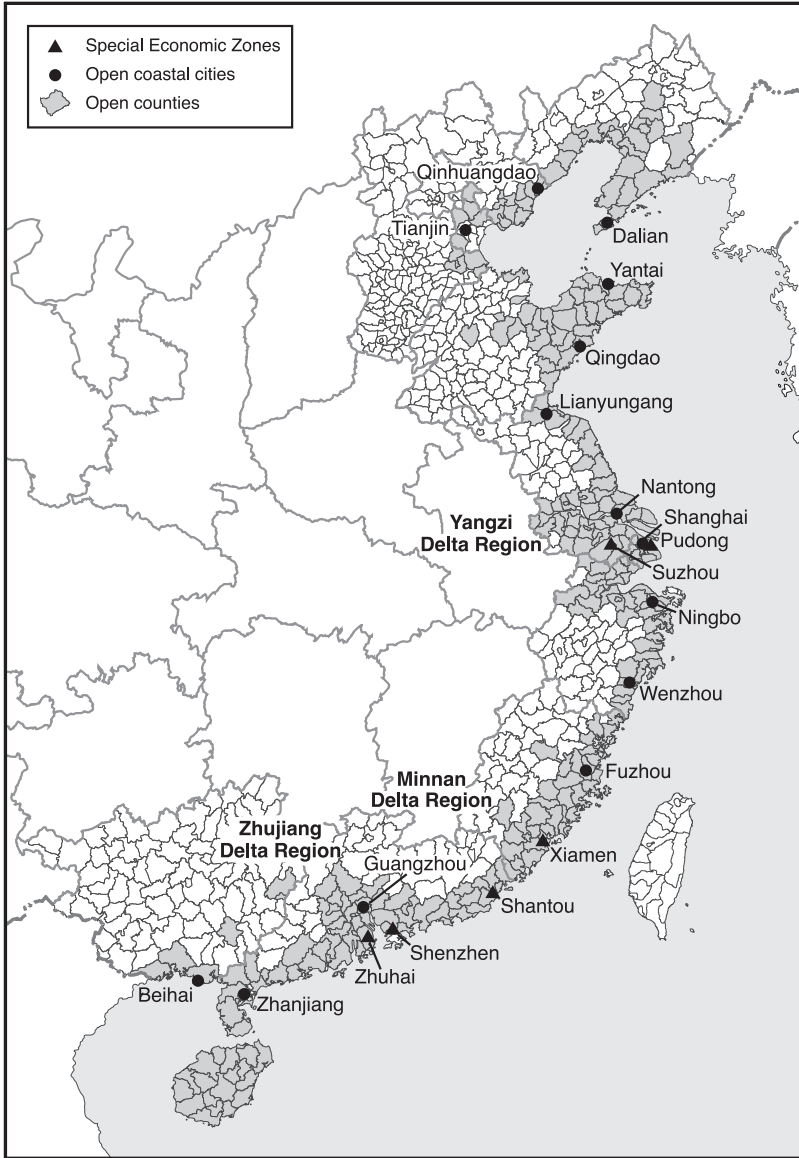
Region of Reform

The south China coast erupted on the world economic map in the final quarter of the twentieth century, compelling widespread interest in special economic zones, capital flows, the global shift in low-wage manufacturing industries, Chinese overseas business networks, and the rise of China as a potential economic superpower. The process of economic reform was formally initiated at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress Central Committee in Beijing in December 1978 and has unfolded incrementally in diverse market-oriented economic policies. China’s economic transformation has been wide-ranging and complex, and while central state policy has appeared to drive reform, innovative economic practices undertaken by local and regional officials have also substantially led reform initiatives.¹

The geographical foundation of the export-oriented sector of reform was the “open policy” and its system of special economic zones, open cities, and open development regions, all established by the state to

concentrate foreign investment and export-oriented manufacturing in coastal China. China's leadership established the four original special economic zones (SEZs) in Guangdong and Fujian provinces, which are the two homeland provinces of the majority of Chinese overseas. At the time of their selection, the first four SEZs were not important locations in China's existing administrative system, but were strategically linked to historic trading economies or Chinese overseas communities, or both. Two of the cities, Shantou and Xiamen, are centers of historic trade and emigration and had also been open ports under the treaty system.² The other two cities, Shenzhen and Zhuhai, were border frontiers with Hong Kong and Macao, respectively. The geographic specificity of reform wove the economies of Hong Kong and Macao into Guangdong province fifteen to twenty years ahead of the scheduled repatriation of the two colonies. Through the 1980s, economic relations between Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the coastal zones of Guangdong and Fujian provinces became so closely tied that the greater part of Hong Kong's former manufacturing industry relocated to Guangdong, and the majority of external investment in Fujian had come from Taiwan (Luo and Howe, 1993). By 1997, Hong Kong had already served as the major source and conduit of capital and manufacturing expertise for southern China.

The successful establishment of the four SEZs led to a series of special open cities and development zones which enlarged the spatial scope of reform. As Dali Yang (1997, p. 30) has assessed, "These special zones grew at a torrid pace and prompted Deng Xiaoping to urge . . . that more coastal cities be given various special policies." In 1984, Beijing announced the opening of fourteen coastal port cities to trade and foreign investment. As economic activity grew beyond the special zones, the state kept pace by designating open counties and open regions. In 1985, the state established three open economic regions, which formed areas of concentrated economic transformation: the Zhujiang delta in Guangdong, the Minnan delta region in southern Fujian, and the Yangzi delta region encompassing Shanghai and its hinterland in the Su'nan area of Jiangsu province (map 1.1). As a result of this geography of export-oriented reform, Guangdong and Fujian rapidly changed places in the hierarchy of provincial significance, from middling and low economic importance, respectively, to become the first provinces in China under reform to receive foreign investment.³ In 1988, the State Council named Hainan Island the fifth SEZ and the thirty-first province of China, and declared all coastal provinces open to foreign investment. In 1990, the State Council finally granted Shanghai its own special zone, the gargantuan 350 km² Pudong New Area across the Huangpu River from central Shanghai. The geographical nature of reform put the south China coast at the center of domestic economic planning for the first time in Chinese



Map 1.1 Coastal areas opened to foreign investment, 1996
 Source: Zhongguo duiwai jingji maoyi nianjian (1996/7); line work by Jane Sinclair.

history. In the process, the south coast between Shanghai and Hainan transformed from a relatively peripheral Chinese region into a series of port city-based boom towns tied to the world economy. The state continued to open coastal counties to foreign investment so that by the middle of the 1990s open areas formed a continuous sub-provincial open coastal zone. As the SEZs in Guangdong and Fujian shed their experimental status, cities and provinces across China, especially in the interior, began to press the central government for their own special development privileges.⁴

From social science perspectives on world economic activity, the rise of the south China coast has appeared as evidence about how foreign investment and export-oriented development can turn a once remote maritime frontier into a magnetic center of regional change. The World Bank's influential publication *The East Asian Miracle* confirmed the role of SEZs in China's new internationalized economy: "An export-push strategy has been central to China's rapid development since the government opened the economy to the outside world in 1978. Mechanisms have included export-oriented special economic zones (SEZs) and open cities; export incentives for domestic enterprises and foreign investors in targeted sectors, and for some firms, mandatory export targets. Success has been spectacular: in five years, exports grew nearly tenfold to \$72 billion in 1991" (Panagariya, in World Bank, 1993, p. 144). Enough literature in the same vein has been published on this subject to stock a small library.

Representing South China

On the world scale, the transformation of the largest central planned economy into a market economy – in China's terms, a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics – has challenged other countries and global economic institutions to reconceptualize China's role in the world order. Inside China, the world's largest national population negotiates yet another massive rupture in the organization of production, consumption, and daily life. The scale and rapidity of economic transformation in China have been staggering. Compared to cataclysms in China's twentieth century, understanding China in the new millennium is a relatively reasonable project, since information about China's changing condition is now widely available. Yet in the intensive interest to publish materials about China's transformation as rapidly as it has unfolded, accounts of the reform experience have often lacked contextual and space-time dimensions and have typically disregarded relevant geographies and regional histories. The goal here is to examine some of the scholarly perspectives on rapid growth in south China as an exercise in repre-

sentations, and to clear the ideological ground in order to build a different kind of account of the transboundary region. Critical assessment of two reform era representations of China, the SEZ “experiment” and the “miracle” economy approach, suggest ways of seeing beyond normative political economic discourses.

Special zone “experiment” meets “miracle” development

Deng Xiaoping, recently emerged from a power struggle to capture the leadership of the Communist Party in the wake of the death of former Chairman Mao Zedong, introduced the geographical component of China’s export-oriented reforms as an “experiment.” In 1979, a Communist Party document named Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Shantou and Xiamen “experimental special economic zones” (*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, 1984, p. 416, n.113). The language eased in the new policies and helped quiet opponents of reform.⁵ Yet after just months of SEZ implementation, notions of experimentation faded as realities of new economic activity began to result in completely new geographies of production and accumulation, and consequent new geometries of power. Deng Xiaoping promoted the success of the SEZ experiment by highly publicized site visits. In 1984, during a tour of Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Xiamen, Deng encouraged the use of international capital and expertise, and invited Chinese overseas investment. In 1992, at a critical juncture in the second decade of the reform era, after a period of high inflation following the Tiananmen crisis, Deng purposefully conducted another southern tour of the SEZs and exhorted officials to stay the course of reform and intensify rapid growth. As the new economic practices taking place in SEZs were sanctioned at the highest levels, they became geographical symbols of nationalist reform ideology (Crane, 1996). What was once SEZ “exceptionalism” became normative practice, as cities and towns across China implemented the special zone concept, often without official permission.

The success of the reform program has typically been measured in terms of economic growth. From 1979 to 1999, China’s economy grew at an average annual rate of 9.7 percent. In the first decade of reform, China’s economy grew at an average annual rate of 9 percent. China’s economy slowed especially from 1989 to 1991, and began to improve again after 1992. From 1993 to 1997, China’s economy again maintained a relatively high growth rate around 9 percent. Even in 1998 and 1999, after the economic downturn in the Asian region, the annual growth rate maintained between 7 and 8 percent (*ZGTJNJ*, 2000). Throughout, the high national growth rate was achieved by higher than average

growth rates in the southern coastal provinces, especially in the first decade of reform. Coastal provinces regularly led the country with double-digit growth rates, and at its peaks in Guangdong, in 1985 and 1992, the rate was as high as over 20 percent per annum (*ZGTJNY*, 1986, 1993). But the use of aggregate economic figures abstracts and homogenizes space, as well as a vast array of diverse and transforming conditions under reform. Economic accounting measures, even as they record and legitimize economic policies, absorb and mask particular kinds of differences in the economic landscape. Separated from historical and geographical context, these contemporary measures of China's economic growth have presented a new China as another "miracle" economy.

The miracle economy position originated in economic analyses about Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea, during the period from the 1970s to 1997, and was a collective product of writings by social scientists, the World Bank, and the media, in their attempts to forge general explanations for high-growth economic conditions in Asia.⁶ These four Asian economies, variously termed the NIEs (newly industrialized economies), the NICs (newly industrialized countries), the Four Tigers, or the Four Dragons, became in certain ways models for China's export-oriented economy.⁷ The miracle position has been intensively debated, and was only fundamentally sidelined by the events of the so-called Asian financial crisis that set off in Thailand in 1997. Proponents of the miracle position have attributed rapid regional growth in Asia to a set of economic policies associated with the neoliberal regime, including privatization and free market policies, and a diminished role of the state. But Robert Wade (1990, 1993a, b) and other regional specialists have cautioned against the totalizing quality of the miracle position, which has not considered differences among Asian countries, and the fact that across Asia the state has actively intervened in economic planning and articulated industrial policy. Nevertheless, part economic theory, part ideological platform, perspectives derived from the neoliberal regime, especially in its US-based worldview, have been powerful determinants of which research topics scholars privilege and what conclusions they find.

The miracle account would also understand China's decision to open to the world economy as evidence of the failures of communism, the global success of Western economic systems, and a vindication of the entire Cold War project. But the leading Asian account of China's policy shift reflects Chinese leaders' recognition of rapid development on non-Western terms in the NIEs, and while on initial state visits in the region after 1976 (Shirk, 1994; Yabuki, 1995). The four NIEs share with China a Confucian cultural base, and Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore are all majority Chinese populations. In China's enduring historic perspec-

tive, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore are peripheral islands of Chinese immigrants that developed well beyond the conditions of the motherland, a frank upset to the ideological remnants of the Chinese world order. In reform planning, China adapted policies of the NIEs and invigorated these historic connections to tap capital flows for SEZ development. Thus the Asian account of China's economic transformation understands a regional cultural economy in which establishing the SEZs was one event in the articulation of a regionally based "Confucian capitalism," an alternative, albeit in many ways a discursive one, to the hegemony of Western forms. At this juncture we would do well to keep in mind Arjun Appadurai's (2000, p. 13) recognition that "actors in different regions now have elaborate interests and capabilities in constructing world pictures whose very interaction affects global processes. Thus the world may consist of regions (seen processurally), but regions also imagine their own worlds."

Area studies debates

The disjunctures suggested by these different methodological approaches have also played out in Asian area studies fields. By contrast to economic approaches, organizations of knowledge generated in area studies arenas have more dependably maintained historical and cultural perspectives. They have also maintained greater distance from prevailing theory in disciplinary fields, and, in the need to evolve culturally appropriate approaches, have tended to question methods derived from the Western societal experience. In China area studies, research on the arrival of the West, especially the period of the nineteenth century when European powers forced China into a "semi-colonial" status, necessarily pierced the nation-state boundaries of the area studies paradigm and engendered a first significant wave of transnational research. The historiography of this period has stirred some of the field's most contentious debates. The following sections assess the area studies debates through changes in the China field to establish how the globalization of knowledge is pressing scholars to rethink their approaches to international research.

China's "response to the West"

For China scholars concerned with the relationship between China and the West, John King Fairbank's account of foreign trade under the treaties established a research paradigm that would endure for two decades after its initial appearance in the 1950s: what was the nature of China's

“response to the West” (see Teng and Fairbank, 1954)? This theme influenced many scholars in the middle decades of the twentieth century, including Rhoads Murphey, who was among the final doctoral students in geography at Harvard University.⁸ Murphey (1953, 1970) focused on the conditions of Shanghai and general questions about the roles and impacts of the “treaty ports” in China. The response to the West perspective treated open ports as nodes of Western practices, and assessed how Chinese society reacted to Western forms of knowledge, economic activities, technology applications, and religious beliefs. Based on such perspectives, the treaty port appeared to have begun its existence in the nineteenth century as a unique type of city. As Paul Cohen (1984, p. 9) evaluated the “response to the West” perspective, “This conceptual framework rested on the assumption that, for much of the nineteenth century, the confrontation with the West was the most significant influence on events in China.” In the early 1970s China scholars began to openly question these Western-oriented approaches, and Joseph Esherick (1972) challenged the Fairbank school for its tendency to construe China as a nation that reacted to Western policies and institutions. Esherick renamed this preoccupation with China’s response to the West the “impact-response” school of Chinese historiography. Against this backdrop, Cohen (1984) called for a “China-centered” view of Chinese history. Partly as a result of these shifts in historiographic method, China scholarship has moved toward localized studies of social and economic history.⁹ These debates, however, did not foreground the complexities in China area studies scholarship engendered by China’s opening to the world economy.

In the face of rapid regional development and similarly intensive needs to account for it, few social scientists have paused to consider larger epistemological questions about *how* to understand Asian political economy. In other terms, what Edward Said’s *Orientalism* achieved for the humanities, in demonstrating how Western writers constructed partial and problematic ideas about Asia, has not substantially influenced social scientific analysis. One alternative reading has emerged from André Gunder Frank (1998) in a new account of world economic history. Contrary to widely accepted views of European economic hegemony from the time of the Renaissance to the middle of the twentieth century, Frank has argued that the Asian region, with China at its center, really dominated the evolving world economy until less than two centuries ago. By this account, only in the early nineteenth century did China cede central world economic position to Europe and the West. The gross fallacy in scholarly analysis that led to the misunderstanding of Asia’s position in world history, according to Frank, has been widespread dependence on Western theory and philosophy. Scholarly analysis based in Western

European social thought, from all points on the political spectrum – the “Marx–Weber” complex – has constructed a hegemonic world view of Western exceptionalism, based on assumed superiority of “rationality, institutions, entrepreneurship, technology, geniality, in a word – race” (Frank, 1998, pp. 4, 20). Frank’s position underscores the socially constructed bias obtainable in Western accounts, in which race as “whiteness” is practically synonymous with Western society, however rarely the subject is foregrounded. According to this argument, Europe’s early modern position in the world economy is better understood as having tapped into accumulation strategies of existing Asian markets and trade, rather than having developed them. On these terms, the rise of Asian regional economic power in the late twentieth century represents a return to historical conditions rather than a sea change.

The critiques mounted by both Cohen and Frank share a certain antipathy toward Western political and economic theory. Yet as Arif Dirlik (1996) has pointed out, the complication of pledging allegiance to a China-centered approach has denied the significance of approaches originating in the West and appropriately applied or adapted in the Chinese and larger regional contexts. For example, the concept of modernization has taken on new contexts and meanings as deployed by the state and the intelligentsia in China and the NIEs. Rapid economic growth in Asia partially undid the Western teleological narrative of modernization theory, and led to ideas about different cultures of capitalism, Chinese capitalism, and Confucian capitalism in “Greater China.” While some China scholars called for an approbation of the application of Western models and Western world views to China, their views, once appropriate in leading the paradigm shift from imperialist orientations to less ethnocentric scholarship, have been in part swamped by forces of intellectual globalization, in which the flow of ideas represents not one point of origin, linear flow, and singular interpretation, but mutual influence, and new confidences about reinterpretations to suit specific cultural and regional circumstances. In the contemporary context, Chinese adaptation of once Western models has been the very result of the economic reforms that propelled China into the world economy after 1978.

Restructuring area studies

In its reflection of the Cold War world, area studies research served to organize knowledge about countries and continents for international security analysis. On the other hand, area studies has been the professional arena of internationalists who have eschewed Western models and pursued area studies on culturally appropriate terms. This latter point

creates its own problems on the intellectual high ground of theory. Bruce Cumings (1997b, p. 8), an active critic of the area studies debates, wrote about Asian area studies as “an opera-bouffe which goes as follows: China (or Japan, etc.) is an ‘area’. Area studies, as we all know, are a-theoretical. Therefore ‘area studies’ should be abolished – except for that ‘area’ known as America, which is far too idiosyncratic and complex to yield to abstract theory, and, of course, no foreigner can really understand it either.”¹⁰ The conventions of area studies practice have tended to keep fields circumscribed, organized around Asia, Africa, Latin America, and so on, and, in distancing from theoretical approaches, distinct from the disciplines and scholarly debates over globalization. By contrast, scholars based in disciplinary perspectives have tended to emphasize current method and theory over complex area analysis. Similarly, theorizing globalization has arguably been dominated by scholars who do not reliably maintain comparative area expertise (see Featherstone, 1990; Jameson and Miyoshi, 1998). The area studies–theory divide is also reflected in epistemological divisions between national and transnational positions. The organization of area studies research in the national “container” of the nation-state prevailed through most of the twentieth century. As Vincente Rafael (1994, p. 91) has written, “by privileging the nation-state as the elementary unit of analysis, area studies conceives ‘areas’ as if they were the natural – or at least the historically necessary – formations for the containment of differences within and between cultures.” The contemporary emergence of research on transnational processes has broken down the traditional spatial biases of area studies, but has not dependably bridged divides between national and transnational approaches.

In addition to the area studies–theory divide, area studies has also been plagued by the epistemological separation of classical from modern research fields, so that many area specialists divide regional history into distinct “classical” and “modern” periods of study. A related topical division is the separation of cultural from economic subjects. Such historical divisions have the effect of organizing academic work by assigning the classical period and cultural subjects to the humanities, and the modern era and economic subjects to the social sciences. This observation holds true for the majority of economic analyses of China’s reform era, which regularly do not consider cultural contexts, or relevant events of the Maoist era, the rest of the twentieth century, the Qing dynasty, or any other period. This particular (dis)organization of knowledge reflects the problems of the methodological divide between the humanities and social sciences in the academy, arguably undergirded by the legacy of modernization theory (Rostow, 1960). Modernization theory proposed a linear trajectory of societal organization from tradi-

tional to modern stages of evolution, and based on the territorial unit of the nation-state and the experience of the industrialized West. In applications of modernization theory, and in addition to the problems of Western ethnocentrism and imperialism embedded in the model, the evolutionary stage perspective tended to be rendered dualistically, which divided the Chinese past and Chinese historiography into a traditional era before Western contact, and a modern era of significant contact with the West.

In the United States, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) hold power to influence research directions in area studies scholarship. By the later 1990s, SSRC committees began advocating funding research on globalization, local-global relations, and how such work should move beyond “existing political boundaries, which limit how problems or questions should be framed” (Abraham and Kassimir, 1997, p. 24). While such new directions in area studies emphasize transnational and transboundary issues, the shifts may still be read in the context of dominant US political interests. As Cumings (1997a, p. 9) would see it, the SSRC and ACLS initiated this restructuring only when the world focus of political economic power shifted after the end of the Cold War. Cumings points out that expectations of area studies experts have shifted from subjects like analyses of Communist political strategies to “informed judgements on ‘Chinese economic reforms’,” which leads straight back to where we started, with special economic zones.

China area studies and the “macroregion”

The conventions of area studies practice left a legacy of research frameworks whose dualistic epistemologies, in Western impacts and local responses, tradition and modernity, culture and economy, challenged scholars to evolve more complex approaches. In the search for alternatives, one model China scholars widely embraced is a regional approach called the “macroregion.” The macroregion model is based on a geography of watersheds, and was derived from location theory and regional systems theory, which were popular traditional methods in economic geography and related fields in middle of the twentieth century. After the 1970s, location theory and regional science lost influence in geographical analysis, but the macroregion continued to be used in China area studies without substantial modification or replacement (Cartier, 2002). Most regional research in China area studies has used the macroregion concept, but with time, increasingly less as an analytical tool and more as a locational device (cf. e.g. Schoppa, 1982; Rowe, 1984,



Map 1.2 Macroregions and natural watersheds.

Source: Skinner (1977b) and *The Conservation Atlas of China* (1990); line work by Jane Sinclair.

pp. 8–9; Naquin and Rawski, 1987; Esherick and Rankin, 1990, pp. 17–19; Spence, 1990, pp. 91–3; Dean, 1993, pp. 21–3; Leong, 1997, p. 19; Wigen, 1999, p. 1185). Continued reference to the macroregion model in the face of the decline of location theory in geography must reflect a lack of engagement between China area studies and advances in geography, and the area studies–disciplinary divide in the academy. Diverse approaches in regional analysis have characterized geography since the era of regional systems theory but have not appeared in China area stud-

ies. The following discussion summarizes some of the critical issues about the macroregion approach and its derivation from methods in disciplinary geography.¹¹

From the 1970s and through the 1990s, most urban and regional research on late imperial China was influenced by the work of G. William Skinner and two approaches he evolved for studying the urban hierarchy and regional economies in China: the “macroregion”, and its derivative framework, the “marketing systems” model. The marketing systems model was based on central place theory, a type of location theory, and a study of marketing towns in Sichuan province.¹² Central place theory accounts for the size and distribution of settlements within an urban system, and, in his assessment of Sichuan, Skinner (1964, 1965a, b) found the pattern of towns to represent the classic hexagonal pattern of the central place model. The macroregion, a neologism, was the more popular of the two approaches, and combined the idea of a system of marketing towns with concepts from core–periphery models and regional systems theory. Based on recognition of regional variations in economy and urbanization rates in Han China, Skinner (1977a, b) posited the existence of nine macroregions whose areas corresponded to drainage basins or watersheds (map 1.2). Skinner promoted general use of the models, and his prominence in the field of China area studies lent considerably to their popularity among area studies scholars.

Skinner’s focus on marketing towns distinguished the existence of important settlements in productive agricultural areas, and the origins of the towns in increasing local diversification of the agricultural economy. This insight demonstrated how local level settlements that arose from the agricultural economy were integrated into the larger Chinese urban system but, importantly, that their existence was fundamentally economic, the result of local retail economies, and not owed to the establishment of an administrative center by the imperial order. This realization, while apparently a relatively simple contrast, helped to lead the move away from the dominance of imperial history from the perspective of the capital to locally and regionally based social and economic studies of Chinese society. Understanding an integrated system of economic settlements also helped to break down the rigid stereotypical assumptions about social life in China being divided into rural and urban realms, and notions that the rise of a system of economic settlements must be tied to the development of industrial capitalism.¹³

Skinner readily borrowed from the geographical literature to develop the models, but did not heed the many critical analyses of their limitations. He also did not present a data analysis of marketing towns in Sichuan, but nevertheless found there the classical hexagonal geometry of settlement distribution predicted by central place theory. Because

marketing town distribution differs empirically in shape and arrangement, Richard Szymanski and John Agnew (1981, p. 39) critically evaluated the application of central place theory to Sichuan province as “diagrammatic and without mathematical basis.” The macroregion was also presented as a theoretical model and was never systematically applied to the nine macroregions of Han China, with the exception of the southeast coast macroregion (Skinner, 1985). This was a problematic approach to research design, however, since location theory does not theorize long distance trade, which has been the basis of the regional economy on the south coast. Similarly problematic, location theory is inherently ahistorical, and does not conceptualize the origins and evolution of social and economic activity (see Smith, 1989). Location theories are based on principles of neoclassical economics, in least cost locations as a function of transportation, and have their origins in economic landscapes of industrializing Europe, which raises questions about their suitability for a “China-centered” approach.

In his application of the macroregion model to the southeast coast, Skinner (1985) also historicized the model through the concept of cycles of regional development, a related systems model. The historical analysis for the southeast coast defined the level of economic activity to be high during the Yuan dynasty of Mongol rule when the port of Quanzhou, just inland from Xiamen in Fujian, functioned as the center of lucrative long distance trade. After this period, Skinner held that the coastal economy fell into precipitous decline as a result of imperial trade proscriptions during the early Ming period. The arrival of the Portuguese and Spanish to the coast of China in the sixteenth century led an economic resurgence in the region from about 1520 to 1640, explained Skinner, but another round of trade prohibitions from the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth centuries plunged the regional economy into decline once again. About the coastal economy at the end of the imperial period, Skinner (1977a, p. 279) concluded, “This dark age for the Southeast Coast was ended only in the 1840s, when Fuzhou and Xiamen were opened as treaty ports.”

Skinner explained growth and decline of regional trade activity from the perspective of imperial trade policy, based on accounts of the region from the perspective of the capital. Local histories, by contrast, widely noted how mariners regularly circumvented trade bans. Based on analysis local and official histories, Ng Chin-keong’s (1983, p. 53) definitive study of the maritime economy of the south China coast from 1683 to 1735 demonstrated that imperial trade bans did not end the lucrative coastal trade, and “moreover, the more restrictive the law was, the more lucrative the trade became.” Dian Murray (1987, p. 10), in her work on

coastal piracy, observed “the junk trade was at its height during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Chinese merchants monopolized the exchange of ‘Straits produce’ from Southeast Asia – rattan, seaweed, and pepper – and thwarted European attempts to supply these goods to China.” Sarasin Viraphol (1977, p. 7), writing about the long distance trade with Siam, concluded that the junk trade was at its height at the end of the eighteenth century and during the early decades of the nineteenth century. After exhaustive study of the tea trade on the southeast coast, Robert Gardella (1994, p. 33) concluded that “Skinner greatly overstates the case of an alleged economic depression along the littoral in the early to mid-Qing era, and neglects the impact of interregional and international trade upon the interior or peripheral zones of Southeast China over the same span of time.” Indeed, the macroregion analysis did not distinguish between the activities of Western mercantilists and the regionally important junk trade with Southeast Asia, Taiwan, the Liuqius, and Japan. By attributing the return of trade to Western mercantile powers, Skinner also foregrounded the significance of the treaty ports and the tradition and modernity dualisms that characterized the so-called impact-response school of Chinese historiography.

The macroregion approach reflected basic problems in both traditional economic geography and traditional regional geography. Traditional regional geography assessed diverse regional characteristics in the context of bounded political regions or physical regions. Physical regions include drainage basins or watersheds, and regional differentiation based on watersheds has been a particularly common approach in China, where major rivers effectively act as latitudinal divides. But traditional regional geography largely described patterns of regional phenomena, and identified regions as if they are “natural” and “out there” rather than socially produced (Pudup, 1988). Among a range of limitations, absent from traditional regional geography and traditional economic geography were concerns about causal processes and transboundary activities. China is a country of diverse, contending, and ultimately coherent regions, yet adherence to the macroregion approach maintained focus on patterns of economic activities and settlement distribution in the context of prescribed regions. As Martin Heijdra (1995, p. 31) has observed, the macroregion and marketing systems models have been “adopted as a whole by historians with only the most minimal revisions, to such a point that direct spatial investigations of phenomena are excluded from most current research.”¹⁴ Reduced to a mapped location, the macroregion is the physical region of a watershed and another “research container.”

Transboundary Cultural Economy

By comparison to geography's traditional concern with spatial patterns, theoretical invigorations of human geography in the late twentieth century advanced analysis of geographical processes: historicized processes that produce patterns of human activity (over descriptions of patterned activity); factors of scale in how local, regional, national, and global processes are mutually influential and transformative (as opposed to static conditions captured at singular scales); aspects of human agency and difference among and within culture groups (as opposed to the ascription of human impacts to generalized characteristics of principal culture groups). The concern with process prioritizes examination of the conditions of geographical formation and transformation and dynamic events in space–time relations. The emphasis on scaled processes breaks open the conventional boundaries of nation-states and political administrative geographies of provinces and planning regions to examine questions about transboundary processes and their causal roles in regional formation. The idea of transboundary processes also reflects caution around the “transnational,” in the way that the term explicitly codes the national scale. A transboundary perspective, while subject to being read as a reification of bounded space, instead recognizes the existence of boundaries and bounded territorial space, the processes that have given rise to them, the many processes that transcend them, and, critically, how dynamic regional processes are commonly based in transboundary activities. It also signals the possibility of different scales of activity and still recognizes the embeddedness of regions in political geographies. In south China, the transboundary perspective elides questions over national sovereignty between China and Taiwan.

The transboundary region in south China is also a regional cultural economy. In economic geography, the idea of a regional cultural economy has emerged from a rethinking of political economy so that it “must employ cultural terms like symbol, imaginary, and rationality if it is to understand crucial economic processes such as commodification, industrialization, and development” (Peet, 2000, p. 1215). The regional cultural economy also recognizes, after Appadurai (2000, p. 13), how “regions also imagine their own worlds.” In the case of south China, alternative regional discursive projects, about rapid economic growth or located cultural complexes, have left us with partial and often ideological accounts of regional processes. This transboundary region is simultaneously China's maritime frontier, the hearth of the Chinese diaspora, a zone of miracle development, a place of global-relative poverty, as evidenced by the rise of “container migration” at the turn of the millen-

nium, and anchored by China's two largest and most internationalized cities, Shanghai and Hong Kong. The legacy of the culture–economy split in social thought, and the parallel problem in traditional regional geography, about systematic or functional regions, based on economic activity, versus unique regions, based on distinctions of local culture and ways of life, has divided these topics (see Entrikin, 1991). Thinking about the transboundary regional economy works to overcome such divides and compels a central perspective for analysis, by bringing together cultural and economic subjects and concerns about both the regional conditions of place and the spatial processes of regional economy. In the regional cultural economy, “economic imagination derives from the cultural history of a people” (Peet, 1997, p. 38), which means that regional imaginations take social forms and contribute to the invention of particular economic strategies. These imaginations and social forms need to be theoretically emplaced.

The transboundary cultural economy insists on a cultural economy perspective to establish a regionality that interlinks culture, as a basis of economic organization, with transboundary economic activity. This concept of region is a mediating spatiality, which both supports and fundamentally questions tendencies of the processes of globalization and their historic forms. This alternative conceptualization borrows ideas from the *Rethinking the Region* project, in which John Allen, Doreen Massey, Alan Cochrane (1998), and others have assessed England's southeast, the Greater London Metropolitan Region, as an actual and discursive region produced under the neoliberal regime inherited from the Thatcher government. *Rethinking the Region* examines a “growth region” by focusing on the characteristics of growth mechanisms, but it does not measure or map growth. Instead the authors recognize how a high growth region is also a “discontinuous region” of locally uneven development. In the discontinuous region spatial disjunctures in patterns of characteristics necessarily emerge, rather than being hidden in only hypothetically homogeneous space. The discontinuous region is both a reality and a methodological strategy which signals how places and localized economies within regions may differ and still intersect to constitute a known regional entity. The analysis understands place and region as constituted out of spatialized social relations, and questions and narratives about them, which then serve as a basis for rewriting regional geographies, and, in turn, contribute to reshaping identities and how they are represented. The study also acknowledges that there can be “no complete ‘portrait of a region’” (Allen et al., 1998, p. 2), which compels us to face how studies of places and regions are undertaken for particular purposes – “whether theoretical, political, cultural” – and to acknowledge what those purposes are.

Where literatures of geography and globalization intersect, Neil Smith (1997, p 182) has interpreted globalization as an ideological growth complex, and finds in globalization the reinvention of modernization theory, “the latest stage of uneven development,” and “an increasingly pure form of imperialism.” Smith’s perspective also suggests the difficulties of writing about globalization and its spatialities, because to yield to alternative and “local” readings of globalization would appear to back away from rigorous critical analysis of the problems of neoliberalism. Yet that is precisely the opportunity to engage, the conceptual open space between the realities of the neoliberal regime as the contemporary paradigm of would-be global development, and combinations of cultural, political, economic – and historical – ideas and events whose causal processes are resulting in new regionalities, which simultaneously support and deny globalizing processes. It is important for particular reasons to recognize the significance and effects of economic growth and the ideological complexes which support growth, but unlike most of the scholarship about south China, the present project does not focus on the nature and causes of growth – because those discourses, in turn, however unwillingly or unwittingly, continue to privilege growth. As J. K. Gibson-Graham (1996) has argued, constant privileging of capitalism’s hegemonic characteristics, like the growth imperative, results in marginalizing or making invisible a range of important economic subjects. Globalization’s effects are highly uneven and so its material geographies must be located, place-based, and regional. Regionality in this sense is a concept for alternative dialogues about would-be global processes.

Region, Place/Space, and Scale

Contemporary ideas about regions have coalesced around several themes: the emergence of the region as the geographical sphere most suited to framing interactions of complex social processes in an era of globalization, the cultural conditions of economic regions, spatial unfixing of regions and regional identities, the significance of interrogating regional representations, and how understanding scale relations contributes to the possibilities of all this (Cartier, 2001b). Regions, whether administrative and bounded like Guangdong province, or imaginary and unmapable by conventional means, like the transboundary economic region at the basis of Greater China, are social and political constructions, and exhibit, and are products of, scale relations. Regional formations are also constituted through emplaced cultural practices. This section develops perspectives on the connections between region, place, space, and scale in order to think through how to em-

place the regional cultural economy, and as a basis for identity formation.

The concept of place must inform contemporary understandings of regional formations, yet different intellectual lineages have characterized the scholarship about place. Differences between a social theoretical treatment of place and a phenomenological view of place may be reasonably bridged if we understand place through contemporary theorizations in both geographical and philosophical literatures. Alan Pred (1984, p. 280; 1986, pp. 6–7) theorized place “as historically contingent process that emphasizes institutional and individual practices as well as the structural features with which those practices are interwoven.” Pred’s theorization foregrounded the importance of human agency in the formation of place, and distinctively, in ideas about the importance of biography and in the limits of contextualized power relations. Doreen Massey’s (1994, 1995) concept of place as the “spatial reach of social relations” has focused on the social relations of production that influence the experience of place and create the conditions in which places form and are embedded. These perspectives on social relations necessarily concern scaled social processes, from local to regional, national, and global, so that place can no longer be thought of in its traditional sense as local, bounded, and fixed in character. Rather, place must be dynamic, contested, and multiple in its representative identity positions, as places are buffeted by political and economic events which are also negotiated and resisted through activities of local agents (Massey, 1994, p. 5). Both Pred and Massey have distinctively treated place formation as bound up in multiple social processes.

Recent philosophical treatments of place – as the ontological basis of human existence – in the work of Jeffrey Malpas (1999) and Ed Casey (1996, 1997) have further established the significance of the concept of place in humanistic fields of inquiry. Malpas’s (1999, p. 176) emphasis on an ontological inquiry into place finds identity formation and its basis in human subjectivity as “necessarily embedded in place, and in spatialised, embodied activity.” This view of place depends on understanding an interplay of interconnected concepts, including agency, spatiality, and experience, in which embodiment is “one’s extended, differentiated location in space . . . [and] essential to the possibility of agency and so to experience and thought” (Malpas, p. 133). In other words, to be embodied is to be emplaced. The embeddedness of subjectivity in place finds expression in memory and narrative, which serve to structure representations of place and identity (see also Schama, 1995). These relations are necessarily historically constituted: “To have a sense of the past is always, then, to have a sense of the way in which present and future conditions are embedded within a complex ‘history’ that is articulated

only with respect to particular individuals and concrete objects as they interact within specific spaces and with respect to particular locations” (Malpas, p. 180). Malpas’s view then, even as it is tied to a phenomenological legacy, opens up to a material grounding, and, in his own words, “need not be viewed as incompatible with other projects that attempt to fill out more particular, especially socio-cultural, features of our relation to place” (Malpas, p. 197).

Casey’s (1997, p. 239) philosophy of place traces the concept of place in the history of Western philosophy and ultimately depends on understanding the body as “the very vehicle of emplacement.” This recognition of the situatedness of the body resonates with theorizations of scale and subjectivity in feminist geography (Rose, 1993; McDowell, 1999). Conceptualizing the relation between place and body establishes a critical distinction between place and region, which serves as a corrective to earlier work that has simply treated region as larger-scale place, in apparent detours around the problems of minimally developed concepts in regional geography (see Entrikin, 1991; Johnston, 1991). Casey’s (1996, p. 46) view of place also depends on place relationality (rather than place uniqueness): “It is undeniable that the concreteness of place has its own mode of abstractness: that is, in its relationality (there is never a *single* place existing in utter isolation) and in its inherent regionality (whereby a plurality of places are grouped together).” In Casey’s terms, regions “affiliate” places, which is not a definition of geographical contiguity but rather a recognition of the interplay of diverse and sometimes disparate actual places in regional formation. Thinking about place as complex social relations and through embodied subjectivity yields approaches for understanding the emplaced contexts of social relations in a transboundary regional economy.

Henri Lefebvre’s writings on space provide important approaches to understanding the relationship between the concepts of space and place, and, specifically, how in the course of capitalist development space has been abstracted from place (Lefebvre, 1991). The Lefebvrian project gives more emphasis to political and economic processes, and inherits its concern for a historical and dialectical approach from Hegelian dialectics, by contrast to the Heideggerian legacy in the work of Malpas and Casey. Lefebvre set forth a “conceptual triad” to account for the production of space, or all the ways in which social processes carve out particular kinds of spaces through spatial practices (perceived), representations of space (conceived), and representational space (lived) or spaces of representation (after Stewart, 1995, p. 610). Spatial practices are the located and embodied human activities of production and reproduction and ritualized activities of daily life, which are characteristic of particular societies. Spaces of representation are lived spaces of cultural systems, produced through common use and practice. Representations

of space, by contrast, are conceived and abstract spaces, typically born of the activities of modern planning and land ownership. Lefebvre located the difference between actual lived space and conceptualized space at the heart of understanding how societies appropriate space from place and produce new spatial forms. Through these concepts, and different categories of space (e.g. abstract space, social space, absolute space), Lefebvre evolved a dialectical understanding of the relationship between space-in-the-abstract and the cultural embeddedness of place. This Lefebvrian matrix allows a critical negotiation of the place/space dilemma, which goes far to overcome the problems of dualistic approaches (Merrifield, 1993) and other epistemological divides. The Lefebvrian approach also shares common ground with the recent philosophical treatments in its concern for embodied spatial practices at the basis of place-based experiences, and, with Massey, in concepts of scale.

Scaling social processes

In a discussion about scale, John Agnew (1994; see also 1989, 1993) proposed the idea of the “territorial trap” to account for the ways in which the hegemonic view of the nation-state, as the most common international geographical construct, has historically denied the use of other spatial scales in political economic analysis. The nation-state remains the central organizational principle of the world system, yet the emergence of discussion around scale has arisen in response to new spatialities engendered by processes of globalization. In revisiting the “territorial trap” thesis, Agnew (1999, p. 190) concluded that contemporary economic processes make analysis based on a nation-state territoriality less compelling: “today . . . development is increasingly a process determined by the relative ability of localities and regions within states to organize access to global networks.” In this reassessment, the significance of diverse scales emerges around regional formations, and the role of places and regions in articulating globalizing processes in the context of nation-state territoriality. To contextualize these issues, the first part of this section focuses on administrative scale as the result of state-making strategies.¹⁵ The second part of the discussion concerns theoretical perspectives on non-administrative scale relations in order to establish a basis for framing complex processes of *mobility* in the transboundary cultural economy.

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre also raised questions about dynamic qualities of state formation, and how the state stabilizes and continually adjusts political-territorial scale – global, national, regional, and local – as an accumulation strategy (Brenner, 1997, 2000). These ideas

inform an understanding of China's long-term territorial coherence. The scaled administrative system of imperial China after the Ming dynasty – empire, province, city, county, and town – worked to stabilize the regions and knit the empire into a coherent whole. Stability, though, was not a static geography of bounded territories but an active and highly managed basis for the empire's massive accumulation strategies, especially through taxation, in cash and in kind, as officials funneled grain tribute from administrative territories to the capital. This spatial process engendered the commitment of officials in part because it mirrored their own desires: the imperial system of official examinations was also a system of scaled opportunities, a tiered set of examinations whose sequential passage earned appointments at correspondingly higher levels of scale in the urban hierarchy (Ho, 1962). Passage of the highest level examination, the metropolitan degree, won appointment to imperial bureaucracies in the capital. The millennial longevity of the Chinese empire is arguably the result of brilliant scale strategies, in the replication and reenactment of imperial power at all levels of administrative scale.

Changes in administrative scale strategies regularly accompany changes in political regimes. In the Maoist era, the state set up the *hukou* (permanent household registration) system to maintain societal control and prevent rural to urban migration by defining citizenship on the basis of either rural or urban residence. By separating rural and urban spheres, the *hukou* system created a spatial hierarchy of settlement status in a pyramidal order, from villages at the bottom to major cities at the top. Each higher level of settlement represented greater opportunities for state benefits, including school entry, job opportunities, and more (Mallee, 1996, pp. 4–5). This surveillance regime maintained control over the movement of individual lifepaths by tying people to their place of registration, and disallowing people from moving from rural to urban areas and up the urban hierarchy (see Cheng and Selden, 1994). It stabilized agricultural productivity and minimized demands on urban services. In China under reform the most stringent elements of the *hukou* system have given way, as the state effectively allowed millions of people to leave farm work, establish non-farm enterprises, and migrate for jobs. But the state did not ultimately yield control over administrative scale in loosening up the *hukou* system; it made administrative scale more porous and used it instead to propel surplus rural labor into new economic activities.

In many ways the spatiality of reform has been about the state loosening up control over administrative scale. Decentralization of power to the provinces under reform, and especially fiscal decentralization, whereby most provinces have been allowed to keep a greater portion of their own revenue, has challenged central government powers.¹⁶ Yet arguably what is different is not that the center has lost power *per se*, but that the state

has allowed greater flexibility between levels of administrative scale, and simultaneously opened up the national scale to allow greater intersections at all levels with global economic activity.¹⁷ One reform era policy, *chexian gaishi* (abolishing counties and establishing cities), “scaled up” counties by making them higher level cities, which directly facilitated economic growth because cities have independent power to contract larger foreign investment projects and decide land use transformations (Zhang and Zhao, 1998). What has not changed is that these policies are also accumulation strategies, new articulations of scale and administrative geography adjusted by the state to increase production and promote economic growth in China under reform.

Globalizing processes have arguably pried loose the fixity of administrative scales, which in turn, and as reinterpreted by the state, have become more permeable and, in some cases, resilient. Globalization’s appearances in new spatialities have also made us more aware of the importance of non-administrative scale configurations. The complexities of such new scale articulations do not necessarily correspond to bounded territorial regions and so cannot be disciplined by the map. Before we explore some theoretical issues, consider that one important aspect of non-administrative scale complexity is human *perspective* on relations of scale. From some distance, at a large scale, mapping coastal south China might seem a reasonable project. But the reality is that on the ground within this non-administrative region, the lie of a regional boundary line cannot be fixed. This reality about scale, that at larger scales, distinctions of human phenomena in space are more easily categorized, patterned and delineated – at the expense of difference – lets us understand how regions are constructed, and that regions are not objective, clearly defined spaces (until apparently we put a boundary on a map – another construction!), but rather represent belief in the homogeneity of a particular region. The lesson to be drawn is that insisting on beginning from any fixed scale is deeply antithetical to understanding dynamic processes of human realities. From a theoretical perspective, scaling social processes must allow any number of scales, different and changing scales – even simultaneously existing different types of scale – and flexible conceptualization defined by the social processes at stake. Because scaled activities and cultural imaginaries evolve as a result of diverse human processes over time, a scale framework should be viewed not as concretely fixed in a transhistorical sense but as changing to reflect transformations in social processes and human-environmental conditions. Yet thinking about scales alone yields a spatial metaphor of a tiered layer cake, or, in another common object metaphor, a set of nested Russian dolls. More realistically, levels of scale, as spatial imaginary, are discontinuous and dip and merge at discrete and changing points of

contact, connected by activities of diverse agents, as people and institutions. Social processes articulate and move through scale relations. As Erik Swyngedouw (1997a, p. 169) has explained, “the theoretical and political priority, therefore, never resides in a particular geographical scale, but rather in the process through which particular scales become (re)constituted.”

Scaling the region necessarily implicates dynamic interscalar relations, and grasping how social processes work through, transcend, and recreate scale. This issue is close to the conceptual tension about theorizing between the forces of globalization and the production of local and regional difference. What this tension speaks to is the real absence of linear causality characterizing social processes and instead reflexive and recursive aspects of human activity in spatial relations. The philosophical approach of dialectics has been useful for conceptualizing mutually constitutive scale relations and explaining dynamic interrelations among scaled processes (Howitt, 1993; Merrifield, 1993). David Harvey’s (1996) treatment of the dialectical approach emphasizes its ability to question relations between subjects and objects, causes and effects, and understand relationships in constant and reflexive process, “entailing multiple changes of scale, perspective [and] orientation” (Harvey, 1996, p. 58). Processes in dialectical relations contain ripe sites for change, as transformation arises out of the tensions characteristic of complex interrelationships among multiple and intertwined activities, institutions, people, and events, but, importantly, often in different places and implicating different scales. In the logic of scale configurations, the transboundary cultural economy is a region of multiple and convergent trans-scale processes in dialectical relations. The transboundary cultural economy finds its historic embeddedness in diasporic journeys, through material processes of travel, migration, and capital relocation, which have linked places in south China across the world. The spatial relations of diaspora have been the context for regional and subethnic identity formation, in which social processes simultaneously transcend scales and converge in others, tying the threads of common experience among people in mobile and cosmopolitan communities with their overseas counterparts. Formed in processes of high mobility and ties to diverse places, people of south China and the Chinese overseas may have multiple and hybrid identities which are suited to particular places and events experienced along the diasporic lifepath (Wang, 1988; White and Cheng, 1993). In the context of identity formation, dialectical scale relations may be thought of as a set of “translocal” (Clifford, 1997) processes for the ways in which the translocal are those multiple places of attachment experienced by highly mobile people.¹⁸

The significance of place in the Chinese cultural imagination is an important transhistorical force of geographical orientation and individual

and group identity formation. As Mingming Wang (1995, p. 33) has written, ideas about “place (*difang*) are intrinsic to the Chinese formation of social space and . . . ways of being in society.” In China the pivot of identity formation has historically evolved in cultural conceptions of place and region, and also in scaled relations, from the village or town or city to the province and nation. Historian Bryna Goodman’s study of native place sentiment and *huiguan* (native place associations) in Shanghai sets forth the located context of identity formation:

For migrants who sought a living in Shanghai, native-place identity expressed both spiritual linkage to the place where their ancestors were buried and living ties to family members and community. These ties were most frequently economic as well as sentimental, for local communities assisted and sponsored individual sojourners, viewing them as economic investments for the community. (Goodman, 1995b, p. 5)

In this passage, place identity appears as a geographical imagination, a sentiment reenacted by diverse travelers. Place here is also scaled, from a home site of ancestral ties to community, county, city, and province, since *huiguan* commonly represented provincial, prefectural, or county-level associations. The second sentence of the quotation, in its emphasis on a cultural economy of long distance ties among members sharing a community of origin, suggests how place in Han Chinese society has been understood as actual located places, in villages, counties, and cities, and how it also works as a concept of social relations in spatial terms. This understanding of place exemplifies contemporary geographical conceptualizations, especially in Massey’s idea of place as the spatial reach of social relations. Massey’s (1995, p. 61) theorization of place sees “space as social relations stretched out,” which makes place “the location of particular sets of intersecting social relations, intersecting activity spaces, both local ones and those that stretch more widely, even internationally.” This concept of place subsumes scale relations in trans-scalar activity spaces, which are all of the diverse activities and their emplaced contexts to which people are connected in their daily lives. Malpas’s understanding of places as nested, how “Places also open out to sets of other places through being nested, along with those places, within a larger spatial structure or framework of activity,” also invokes scale relations. This nested character of places is a dimensionality or scaled quality that “makes possible a particular form of differentiated unity – a unity that would seem to play a particularly important role in the organization of memory” (Malpas, 1999, p. 105), here the place sentiments of migrants in Shanghai.

Still, how do various social processes actually work through discrete

and changing sites of spatial activity? Culture and economy do not move, people move, and people significantly propel economic activity. How social processes work though scale must lie in human and corporate agency (after Giddens, 1984), as diverse agents negotiate or propel trans-scale activities. People on the move are agents of culture and economy, as individuals, corporate or state bodies, and they act in the interest of particular scales in order to realize certain goals. Varied types of high mobility – concerning people, goods, ideas, and forms of capital – characterize regional processes, and it is the movement of people, in their embodied individual and group contexts, that sends and delivers goods, carries and spreads ideas, and makes capital flow. Thus, the individual, through embodied practices, becomes the mobile agent of trans-scale activity and occupies and moves through the places of interscale negotiation. Understanding the body and bodily practices as socially constructed, mobile and variable – that bodies have histories and geographies – opens doors to diverse cultural milieux. In Casey's (1996, p. 34) terms, "To be located, culture also has to be embodied."

Historically, the Confucian concept and imperial institution *li* (ritual, ceremony) was the most important value that symbolically tied individuals, in the bodily performance of ritual activities, to the empire and values of the imperium. *Li* also generally defined the understanding of appropriate forms of societal behavior and conduct; it was the essence of self-rule in imperial society, as opposed to rule by regulations or law (Dutton, 1988). This is not the Western notion of ritual as activity of traditional religious belief. This is ritual as the embodied experience of symbolic culture in situated lifepath events, including seasonal and annual holidays, family and firm gatherings, and major life passages at times of births, weddings, and funerals. The significance of *li* itself in Chinese society was, critically, hierarchical and scaled. Angela Zito (1997) has conceptualized how *li* operated as a discourse and form of correct embodiment that tied the emperor's ritualized activities, in performing annual imperial sacrifices and producing calligraphic texts, into a state discursive formation of extraordinary power. The emperor served as the supreme embodiment of *li*, and local officials reenacted the imperial rituals and textual practices at all administrative levels down to the county, so they were well known at all scales. Performing *li* was utterly culturally symbolic and a transhistorical experience, in which Chinese civilization was simultaneously individually embodied and collectively reproduced through successive emperors and dynasties. What endures is the concept of embodiment as a situated, social and cultural practice: how the state and elites control society through the body and the individual through symbolic bodily qualities, and the site of the body as the mobile agent of trans-scale activity. An understanding of embodied ritual practices informs how individuals,

families, and communities folded into a historic Chinese body politic and understood cultural Chineseness, and how individual and group identities formed through embodied life practices.

Historically and in the contemporary era the *jia* (the extended family as an economic unit or household), the hometown or native place, in the terms, *laojia* (informal spoken usage), the *jiaxiang* (common general usage), and the *guxiang* (literary usage), and the *qiaoxiang* (village of Chinese overseas) have existed as ideas and realities about individual and family located origin in China (Naquin and Rawski, 1987, pp. 33–54; Ebrey and Watson, 1986, pp. 1–13). In traditional China and up through the end of the dynastic period, the *jia* existed as much more than an economic unit; it was “a metaphor for the state and the foundation of correct – and hierarchical – relationships” (Naquin and Rawski, 1987, p. 34). The foundations of correct social relationships included embodied ritual practices through which Han society reproduced the norms of the imperial state in symbolically scaled relations, from the scale of millions of individual households to the one imperial household in the capital.

Lineage organization and lineage systems in China have varied regionally, with broad scale differences between north and south China. While village settlements prevailed across Han China, it was in southern China, especially in parts of Guangdong and Fujian, that the single lineage village prevailed. In work on regional distinctions in lineage organization in Guangdong and Fujian, Maurice Freedman (1958, 1966) found that village society operated on three levels: the local lineage at the village level, a higher order lineage of several villages, and at a larger level of the clan, which existed not as a territorial area but as a belief or imagined symbolic geography. Based on contemporary fieldwork in the Zhujiang delta, David Faure found a more abstract and symbolic place-oriented character of lineage organization. Faure (1986, p. 10) interpreted that rites at the ancestral hall did not necessarily focus on ancestors, but rather on local and regional deities, which “represents, in religious terms, the villagers’ mental map of the community and its vicinity, a map which does not coincide with the lineage.” Most places also had a local *tudi gong* (earth god) and other locality gods. Their cult practices were distinguished by procession festivals that made a “tour of the boundaries,” which ritually secured the territory under their purview. The medium for these processions was incense; and a ritual officer, the master of the incense burner, followed the sedan chairs that bore the statues of the gods in procession festivals. In some communities, the procession stopped at every household, where the master exchanged burning incense sticks with the same from each household. In this way, “the burning tips and smoke of incense each year inscribe that territory and its thresholds, taken in from outside, re-consecrating each domestic

altar as an installation of that territory, a place in a geography of places of origin” (Feuchtwang, 1992, pp. 23–24). The smoke of incense was the medium of communication with the gods, and the procession festival was the set of embodied spatial practices in village place-making. Because the local earth god acted as the intermediary between the stove god, in each household, and the city god, the relationship between locality gods represented a nexus of social relations that bound households, villages, neighborhoods, and cities into a scaled symbolic community (Naquin and Rawski, 1987, pp. 41–2).

In China under reform, returning to one’s native place or home town remains in many senses a culturally symbolic if not ritualized journey that invokes these deep layers of historic social practices and forms of cultural symbolism on new terms. Interest in these journeys, especially when undertaken by prominent persons, is keen. In 1997 the Governor of the US state of Washington, Gary Locke, traveled to China on a trade mission and toured south to visit his *jiexiang*, Jilong village, in Taishan county of Guangdong province. Surrounded by an entourage of local officials and distant relatives, reporters followed him and especially chronicled his movements, as he bowed before the family altar, in the house where his father was born, and kneeled to burn incense and offer a sacrificial pig at the site of his great-grandfather’s grave (Zimmerman, 1997). Locke accepted these roles and so emplaced himself within a Chinese cultural ecumene. Taishan people claimed his origins, just as they proudly proclaimed his status as a government official on a big character poster: “Governor Gary Locke returns to his home town.” This was more than a symbolic cultural event, as local officials were able to use the occasion of Locke’s visit to secure funding for infrastructure improvements around the village. Understanding Jilong as Locke’s *jiexiang* represents the idea of translocal cultural identity, tied simultaneously and diachronically to functionally disparate communities. For Locke, born in Seattle, the collective lifepath represented by his male forebears laid claim to his symbolic identity, and its representational economic power, in Guangdong. Through processes of high mobility, (e)migration, and citizenship, ideas about place become processural and spatialized, and exist as trans-scale, translocal, and transhistorical aspects of human experience that continue to undergird transformation of the regional economy and remake regional meaning.

Contextual Geographies

The regional geographies presented in this book are contextual accounts, historic and contemporary, that provide ways of seeing the situated complexities of regional realities and transformations. Whereas a linear his-

torical narrative would seek to explain or legitimize present geographies, a contextual approach opens up windows on the complicatedness of actual geographies, and so cannot feign to present a complete portrait of any one region. The material is organized to make important connections, between sometimes disparate fields of knowledge, with the concern to transmit complex understandings about places and the region in coastal south China. Two interrelated parts form the main structure of the book. The historical geographies are largely contained in chapters 1–4, followed by more contemporary perspectives in chapters 5–8. Yet each of the chapters also conjoins historical and contemporary material in order to consider a range of time–space questions about the relationship between past and present, in the problematics of scale, potentially transhistorical conditions and their transformations, juxtapositions of elements from cultural and economic spheres, and ethical considerations around the spatialities of difference.

The second chapter, “Region and Representation,” compares changing regional representations of the south China coast and emphasizes the understanding of regions as both discursive, historically constructed entities, and sets of dynamic geographical realities, in order to recover both regional meaning and the realities of formative geographical processes. In representative images, from historic perceptions about the natural environment to concerns about bodily conduct and alternative life practices, the historic “south” in China emerges less as a defined place than as a *process* – of mobility, experience, and coming into difference. China’s transhistorical concerns about regionalism have reemerged in the contemporary period and as new regional formations have contested the power of the capital. The idea of Greater China as a region is indicative of these complex regional positionings, especially as perspectives about its geographies shift from different vantages, in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and beyond. Seeing different regional geographies in the idea of Greater China brings into focus how the spatialities of regions serve epistemological purposes for making sense of complex geographical processes.

The south China coast is a historic maritime cultural economy whose conditions in many ways challenged the orthodoxies of agrarian Han society. The third chapter, “Maritime Frontier/Mercantile Region,” recovers the significance of historic social formations as a basis for understanding regional trading economies, mercantile practices, coastal urban development, and Chinese settlement in Southeast Asia. Notions of frontier marginality about south China owed to northern worldviews, whereas in local terms the south coast was a center of international maritime trade and tribute system ports. The normative causal explanation about the origins of the regional maritime economy in south China, in a low

per capita arable land ratio, which supposedly compelled people to “make fields from the sea,” may be reasonably reinterpreted in understandings of maritime coastal cultures which antedated Han in-migration, and later in uneven holdings of land wealth. The distinctive coastal origins of port city settlement between the Yangzi and Zhujiang river deltas challenge accepted models of urbanization for China, which have held that early settlement developed in productive agricultural regions and as a result of administrative settlement from the north.

The internationalization of the south China coast has a long history. The arrival of Western powers in the nineteenth century was one of the more recent phases of encounter, distinguished by being the most imperialist, and bound up in illegal trafficking of opium by Western mercantilists. Chapter 4, “Open Ports and the Treaty System,” focuses on Ningbo, Fuzhou, and Xiamen, the smallest of the first five cities opened to foreign trade and residence in the nineteenth century. By comparison to Shanghai and Canton, the term “treaty port” has more often obscured the nature of these places, where foreign interests never gained a significant presence, and merchant groups and emergent civil society movements existed as the major forces of social and economic organization through the twentieth century. Geographical characteristics of merchant organizations, based in regionally specific dialect groups and *huiguan*, maintained control over local economies and long distance trading networks, and were a basis for social organization in the Nanyang. The transboundary cultural economy substantially emerged in this era as people from the south coast increased frequency of travel between south China and especially the British colonies of Malaya and Singapore.

The economy of the south China coast convulsed and stalled after 1949 as Maoist directives sought to rearrange the national space economy. Chapter 5, “Revolution and Diaspora,” examines how the first phases of the revolution evolved in south China and found support in *huaqiao* (Chinese sojourners) or overseas Chinese communities. As the socialist revolution unfolded in China, Maoist directives marginalized the overseas Chinese and people with overseas connections. The simultaneous process of decolonization in Southeast Asia resulted in new nation-states and nationalisms, and *huaqiao* diminished ties with China, claimed local citizenship, and remade local communities. In the Southeast Asian region, Malaysia is an especially interesting country in which to assess issues around Chinese identity formation and postcolonial nationalism. Malaysia has the largest Chinese minority population on a world scale, and the significance of the history, size, and settlement of the Chinese population has significantly intersected with the state-making project in the postcolonial period. This chapter culminates in a landscape analysis of the conservation of a historic Chinese cultural site in Melaka, Malaysia, which affords

a perspective on how Chinese overseas have retained homeland identities while also establishing themselves within postcolonial orders.

For readers more concerned with the conditions of south China under reform, chapter 6, “Gendered Industrialization,” presents a challenge to existing literatures of the reform experience. By contrast to the bulk of analyses, this discussion does not explain regional restructuring in terms of the measured successes of economic growth. Instead, the chapter reviews reform from the perspective of the gendered space economy of development, and as the result of the intersections between five major reforms: the one-child policy, the household responsibility system, the loosening up of the *hukou* system, the open door policy and its dependence on low wage manufacturing, and the dismantling of the state-owned enterprises. The discussion foregrounds the gendered conditions of south China under reform because these issues, however typically marginalized, are central to China’s successful human development. Women’s labor has been the main source of surplus value in the export-oriented sector in south China, and the migration of women to regional manufacturing centers has resulted in new divisions of labor and new patterns of household formation. The analysis argues that the patriarchal state and normative economic policy have transferred “male bias in the development process,” leading to uneven conditions for women, including diminished status in education and employment.

In the 1980s, export-oriented manufacturing was at the center of rapid growth in coastal south China. By the 1990s, industries associated with land development emerged as high growth sectors. Chapter 7, “Zone Fever,” examines how SEZ development – originally a “disarticulated” element of reform in special areas set aside from general land use practices – became the basis of an uncontrolled development regime by the 1990s. SEZs were the located sites of policy experimentation with industrial land development, which Hong Kong property developers and elite state interests identified a basis for earning super profits. “Real estate fever” threatened the stability of the reform process by 1997, and the state began to issue policies to protect arable land. The impacts of development on China’s arable land resources became the focus of debate, which served to elide problems of the rapid growth imperative at the basis of reform. The discussion examines the transboundary regional economy through implementation of the China–Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park, a flagship industrial park, which underscores how the central government promoted large-scale special zone development through the middle of the 1990s. At the end of the decade, the collapse of provincial trust and investment corporations associated with real estate development in Guangdong and Shanghai ultimately signaled the problems of the regime of rapid development and an end to real estate fever.

Shanghai and Hong Kong are the two leading cities of the south China coast and China's most internationalized urban areas. Chapter 8, "Urban Triumphant," assesses the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) and the resurgence of Shanghai in the 1990s against the backdrop of wider regional interests in a Chinese cosmopolitanism. By contrast to the anti-urban ideologies of the Maoist era, under reform the cities of the China coast have reemerged as leading centers of transnational economic activity and cultural production. In the 1990s the primary destination of FDI shifted from Guangdong to Shanghai and the Yangzi delta, and Shanghai elites engaged the city's history of internationalism in attempts to establish Shanghai as China's leading world city. Debate over the 1997 Hong Kong handover has faded as the SAR has maintained its economic position among Asian capitals and joined a favored position in China's urban hierarchy. Hong Kong and Shanghai are China's centers of human and capital mobility, and the spatial processes at work in these cities are both the agents and subjects of globalization and its alternative forms.

Processes of regional formation in south China, contemporary regional conceptualizations, and the emergence of discussion around regionalism, as a set of responses to globalization, form the subjects of the epilogue. Focus on regional formations restores a measure of reality to would-be global tendencies of spatial expression by exposing material processes of globalizing capitalism, and the unevenness of development. In their material and representational forms, regional formations and their symbolic meanings serve as alternative bases of subnational and supranational power. These scale positions alternative to the national both question and confirm the significance of regionality in an era of globalist thinking. The apparent slippages in regional meaning suggest the conceiving of geographies that are less encumbered by paradigmatic characteristics of the nation-state and globalization rhetorics, and instead form a basis for unmapping economic development and the diverse world views it pretends to entertain.

NOTES

- 1 For discussions of the nature of economic reform see especially Dorothy Solinger (1993), Barry Naughton (1995), and George Lin (1997).
- 2 The treaty port era is the semi-colonial period in Chinese history from 1842 to the start of the Second World War; see chapter 3.
- 3 Susumu Yabuki (1995, p. 117) charts changes in provincial rankings by economic growth.
- 4 Major cities in the interior also received special privileges in the early 1980s, including Chongqing in 1983, followed by Wuhan, Xi'an, Shenyang, and

Harbin. The state gave these major industrial cities, along with Guangzhou and Dalian, independent economic management power equivalent to the level of provinces (see Solinger, 1993, p. 160). In 1992, five cities along the Yangzi and 18 provincial capitals in the interior were granted the same privileges as the open coastal cities. The state also allowed border provinces to set up border open cities. Still, coastal provinces regularly received about 90 percent of the total foreign investment; see Dali Yang (1997, pp. 33, 55). State decision-making about the selection, location, and size of the SEZs was a highly politicized process; see, for example, Jude Howell (1993) about the process of establishing the SEZ at Xiamen.

- 5 Deng Xiaoping had to first confront alternative reform proposals before his own prevailed; see Susan Shirk (1993) and Li Chengrui and Zhang Zhuoyuan (1984). Market-oriented reforms prevailed in part because real wages declined through the Maoist era. Yabuki (1995, pp. 61–80) has calculated that real wages, indexed to cost of living, finally recovered to the equivalent of the 1957 Maoist era peak in the early 1980s.
- 6 The World Bank (1993) was the leading institutional agent promoting the notion of “miracle” development. Jonathan Rigg (1997), has summarized the problems of the miracle debates. The economist Paul Krugman (1994) has debunked the miracle on different grounds. Krugman argued that growth in Asia will be short-lived based on the example of the former Soviet Union, where growth was based on rapid growth of capital inputs, but not on corresponding increases to factor productivity. Dwight Perkins, an economic historian and area specialist, has argued in a 1991 essay that China had already experienced gains in efficiency of production by the 1980s.
- 7 Coastal south China has been touted as the fifth member of this would-be group of economic “beasts.” For an example of this perspective, see Yun-Wing Sung et al. (1995). Considerable and not unproblematic vocabulary is associated with the dragon and tiger metaphors for describing the NIEs, especially a range of adjectives including “tame,” “paper,” “on the prowl,” “toothless,” and much more. Some analysts have pointed out that discourses surrounding the NIEs sound like media coverage of sports teams rather than complex societies.
- 8 For an account of the demise of the Geography Department at Harvard see Smith (1987).
- 9 While the “impact-response” approach was dated within twenty years among researchers, numerous textbooks on China and East Asia adopted and repeated the paradigm long after scholars had rejected it. See the discussion by Cohen (1984, pp. 10–11).
- 10 Cumings was writing in partial response to debates over the influence of rational choice theory in the academy, and its privileging of game theoretical analysis in international political economy at the expense of area studies expertise.
- 11 This discussion is an abbreviated version of my 2002 essay, “Origins and evolution of a geographical idea: the macroregion in China.” This book is a partial response to the problems of regional analysis and in China area studies.

- 12 Skinner conducted fieldwork there in 1949–50, but as Graeme Johnson (1998), has noted, Skinner was forced out by the war; Philip Huang (1985, p. 24) pointed out that the duration of the field work in Kao-tien-tzu (Gaodianzi) was three months.
- 13 In this regard, the marketing systems model also appeared to represent a partial answer to the challenge left by Max Weber, regarding the limitations of the Chinese urban system as a base for economic expansion.
- 14 In a more strident criticism, Frederick Mote (1995, p. 66) wrote, “We can speak of a Skinnerian age in studies of Chinese urban history in the last two or three decades, under which many historians believe that his system provides the only reasonable basis for analyzing all urban, in fact most social phenomena. It is fair to note that in the seventeen years since Skinner first adumbrated his brilliantly suggestive hypotheses, they have in many minds (perhaps also in Skinner’s) hardened into something resembling an iron-clad law of Chinese history. The Skinner system’s elevation to the status of doctrine has had the effect of tending to divide the field into those who accept it as established truth, and those who find it in part erroneous and therefore reject it *in toto*.” The situation Mote described has resulted in either the use and acceptance of the Skinner models, or avoidance by omission. Mote also notes how no comprehensive focused reviews of the models have been published and neither have any organized retrospectives on Skinner’s body of work taken place.
- 15 For contemporary geographical literature on scale see work by Richard Howitt (1993, 1998), who applies scale to emancipatory geographies and cautions what scale is not; Erik Swyngedouw (1997a, b), who best theorizes the social construction of scale; and Neil Brenner (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000), who discusses debates about the relationship between the nation-state and globalization.
- 16 For especially regional discussions of fiscal decentralization see Solinger (1993), Yang (1994, 1997), and Yabuki (1995, ch. 11). In 1980 Guangdong and Fujian provinces received a special set of fiscal policy relations with the central government that allowed them to retain a greater percentage of revenue. Guangdong’s arrangement was to remit to the center one billion yuan annually, while Fujian received a 150 million yuan annual subsidy; these amounts were fixed for five years; see Shirk (1993, p. 157).
- 17 In research on new roles of large cities in China under reform, for example, such as the fourteen open port cities and other large cities given independent decision-making powers, Solinger (1993, pp. 205–22) has described this scale shift as one “from hierarchy to network,” in which the state has expected major cities to organize economic activity with other cities and counties. Such urban networks are also scaled.
- 18 James Clifford (1997, p. 7) has used the term translocal “to articulate local and global processes,” but my intent is to argue for a complex and material – as opposed to metaphorical – scale framework.