

# The Realistic Foundation and Construction Path of the Integration of Guangdong and Hong Kong Qualification Framework

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**ABSTRACT.** *In the context of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Guangdong lifelong education qualification framework can be co-built with the developed qualification framework of Hong Kong, China. According to the research, conclusions can be drawn that Through the establishment of a common mechanism, study of standard experiences, and the development of local advantages, such a cooperative docking can be achieved. This would also ensure the establishment of a security mechanism jointly composed of internal self-assessment, external professional security, and stakeholder security, as well as enhance the modernization of education in Mainland China and optimize Hong Kong's talent and industrial structure. This would in turn help build the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and provide practical experience for the construction of China's national qualifications framework.*

**KEYWORDS:** *qualification framework, Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, policy research*

## 1.Introduction

The construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (hereinafter referred to as the "GBA") is an important regional strategy of Chinese government. The Chinese Government State Council issued the "Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development Planning Outline" (hereinafter referred to as the "Outline") in 2018.The Outline also clarified the strategic position and development direction of the GBA, and clearly proposed "exploring a new model for coordinated joint development, deepening the comprehensive and pragmatic cooperation between the nine cities in the Pearl River Delta and Hong Kong and Macau, promoting the convenient and orderly flow of people, materials, funds, and information, providing new momentum for the development of Hong Kong and Macao as well as setting an example for the closer cooperation between Mainland China and Hong Kong and Macao." However, during the process of implementation,

the integration of the GBA is facing huge challenges, compounded by a relatively weak and stagnating governance ecology. Especially in non-productive fields, such as education and human resources. Although they play a fundamental role in ramping up social and economic development, but since they do not directly generate economic value and also require huge investments, often in weak positions and lacking effective policy support, they tend to be unable support socioeconomic development.

The integration of the qualification framework can provide a new path for the talent flow in the GBA. The Guangdong qualification framework has already started to explore and practice the process of connecting with the qualification framework of Hong Kong. The qualification framework is a basic support system for the construction of a lifelong learning system, and its value is to achieve effective communication and connection at all levels and types of education. It inherently contains the functions of regional education cooperation and cross-border education. According to incomplete statistics, in order to promote the construction of a lifelong learning system, more than 160 countries and regions around the world have established a "qualification framework" and various types of docking cooperation practices have been formed[1]. At present, there is no national qualification framework in China, only local practice of in specific area. In 2008, the Education Bureau of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region formally introduced the qualifications framework and established a quality assurance mechanism based on law, Guangdong Province released the Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework in the form of local standards (hereinafter referred to as the "GDQF"). The qualifications framework of Hong Kong has been integrated with the European Union and New Zealand QF. The design of the GDQF can form a perfect connection with the HKQF and other local frameworks, but no substantive cooperation. This article compares the practice of the qualification framework of Guangdong and Hong Kong, and offer suggestions for the docking mechanism of the qualification framework of the Greater Bay Area.

## **2. Overview of Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and Guangdong Qualifications Framework**

### **2.1. Hong Kong Qualifications Framework**

The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework was officially launched in 2008. Prior to the launch, consultations were completed, industry associations were formed, legal frameworks were prepared, and quality assurance mechanisms were established. After the formal launch, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Mechanism and Specification of Competency Standards was set up, and Industry Training Advisory Committee of various industries was established, which have fully mobilized the industry, promoted the qualification credit system, prepared the competency standards, established the qualification roster and the qualification framework funds. Especially in 2018, the SAR government injected 1 billion Hong Kong dollars and carry out international exchanges and cooperation. Based on the

success of Hong Kong's qualification structure, the mainland education community has also agreed to adopt it[2].

The social basis for the implementation of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework is its institutional environment. Hong Kong's government agencies rely on advisory bodies and statutory bodies for policy consultation and technical services, and implement a "multiple co-governance" social governance model[3]. Under the leadership of the government, the society is jointly involved in social governance through a variety of subjects[4], including public sector (non-governmental sector), third sector, private institutions, professionals. Taking the education field as an example, Hong Kong's higher education implements decentralized governance[5]. Many management functions are performed by public institutions and universities. Along with strong flexibility, it is also conducive to maximizing professional strength to the greatest extent. When considering the implementation of the qualification framework as an example, the main institutions involved are: Hong Kong Education Bureau, HKQF, The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), Industry Training Advisory Committees and so on. Among them, only the relevant education bureaus are government agencies, so their activity space is more flexible and it is more convenient to communicate and coordinate. The educational institutions, industry associations, employers can have good interaction and cooperation with various regions around the world.

## 2.2 Guangdong Qualifications Framework

The Guangdong Lifelong Education Credit Bank is the executive body of the Guangdong Qualifications Framework. It was established with the permission of the Guangdong Provincial People's Government in 2014 and is affiliated with the Guangdong Open University. It is an extension of the government with the main function of implementing credit accumulation and conversion policies. It has certain legitimacy Guarantee. As early as 2004, the Ministry of Education put forward the establishment of an information system for credit accumulation and transformation in the vocational education system in the "Several Opinions on the Progressive Implementation of the Credit System in Vocational Schools." The Long-Term Planning first proposed the construction of a credit bank, which is a specific measure to build a learning society and implement the concept of life-long education and life-long learning. In 2010, after the promulgation of the National Medium- and Long-Term Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020), the Ministry of Education issued The "Notice on the Pilot Reform of the National Education System", which clearly put forward a series of ideas such as the construction of learning achievement certification, "credit bank" system and the construction of a talent overpass. In the process of practice, Guangdong Credit Bank explored a model for the construction of credit banks based on qualification framework[6]. In 2018, the Guangdong Provincial People's Congress announced the "Regulations on Vocational Education in Guangdong Province" containing the content of promoting lifelong education through credit accumulation, transfer and exchange into legal regulations. In China, There is a consensus on the definition of "Credit Bank", which

is borrowing from the model of the bank, with credits as units of measurement, and unified certification and accounting of various learning results of learners[7]. And formed a wider range of construction practices.

Guangdong Credit Bank is led and coordinated by the Guangdong Provincial Education System Reform Leading Group. It is hosted and managed by the Guangdong Provincial Department of Education and has a systematic top-level design. The entire system is composed of a decision-making body management committee, an advisory body expert committee, and a quality assurance agency. And the executive institution Credit Bank Management Center. Among them, the Credit Bank Management Committee is composed of relevant provincial agencies and related universities[8-9]. The advisory body of the credit bank is composed of an expert committee composed of 21 well-known experts at home and abroad, and the executive institution's credit bank management center is attached to Guangdong Open University, which is composed of more than ten staff to complete the relevant work. Only the quality assurance agency has not been established. As a systematic public policy, the construction of the quality assurance mechanism is the key to the entire policy system and the implementation of monitoring functions. The credit bank quality assurance mechanism based on the qualification framework is an integral part of the overall operation mode of the credit bank. Based on the response to national policies the credit bank's actions have a certain legitimacy foundation, but because the quality assurance mechanism has not been established, it lacks sufficient legitimacy. Due to the complicated system, environment and other factors involved, the nature and type of this institution cannot be determined.

### **3. Comparison of the current status of the qualification framework of Guangdong and HK**

By comparing the qualifications structure of Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework and HK, we can have a deeper understanding of this innovative process. The practices in the two places share a common cultural cognitive foundation, so there is a high degree of element similarity. However, their respective social environments are different, which is manifested in different legal systems, different social structures, and different educational systems. The practice of the two places also reflects certain differences on the basis of commonality. Combining of commonalities and differences, we can clearly see the development direction of the Guangdong qualification framework, and the possibility of cooperation between the two places. In the context of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, suggestions can be provided for the construction of the national qualification framework.

The same elements: There is a high degree of similarity in organizational structure, value concept, standard rules, and activity mode between Guangdong QF and HK QF, but this similarity is mainly reflected in the similarity of elements. Above, there is still a big difference in the internal dynamic mechanism of the two. In the practice process of the qualification framework, the experience of the Hong Kong has been fully learnt by Guangdong, which will be the foundation for the cooperation in the future. Imitating successful organizations is also a common

strategy used by innovative organizations from which can improve their legitimacy.

**Different mechanisms:** Compared with Guangdong, HK's qualifications framework has more experience in legitimacy and quality assurance, and they are established by different procedures. First, the role of the actors is different. The main actors in the Hong Kong qualification framework are Government, Professional associations, industry associations and so on. As there is a tradition of multiple governance in Hong Kong, so the professionals and industry associations have played a very important role. In particular, according to Hong Kong laws, public institutions can exercise Larger powers. However, Guangdong qualification framework is mainly promoted by national administrative agencies, and its scope of action is limited by public policies and regulations. There are no problems when conducting mature social governance work. When reforms being implemented, there is a dilemma of inaction. Because there is no prescribed path in the existing policy space, the difficulty and resistance are greater. Secondly, the dynamic mechanism is different. Benefiting from Hong Kong's case law tradition and developed industry associations, the quality assurance system of the qualification framework is relatively effective. The qualification framework of Hong Kong is closely linked to social needs, which is also one of the reasons why qualifications certified by the qualification framework can be recognized by the society. Finally, the professional principles are different. The academic assessment regulations of the Hong Kong qualification framework are the professional principles of education formed by the self-growth of the Hong Kong education community. However, the Guangdong qualifications framework is based on a standardized approach. In the field of education, there is a lack of recognition in standardization. It is a waste of institutional costs in coordinating existing educational professional standards and other standardized issues.

**Close connection and field formation:** In the process of construction of the qualification framework, a structured field has been formed between the qualification frameworks of different regions. The implementation of the new system will not only build a new organization, but also developed organizational fields of the public Policy fields focusing on specific problems. Organizational fields are boundary fields defined by specific problems, and form a new relationship system and a specific social interaction mode according to certain values. Taking the qualification framework as an example, the policy of building a learning society and building a life-long education overpass has formed a corresponding organizational field and has produced complex legality issues. Since the developed of the field, the Guangdong qualification framework has paid full attention to QF of Hong Kong. The degree of interaction among the cooperative organizations has increased. The structure of domination and collusion has emerged. With the development of common consciousness, Hong Kong and Guangdong will form a new organizational field.

#### **4. Path for docking of Guangdong and Hong Kong qualification framework**

Before the national qualification framework has been carried out, Guangdong Province has issued regional qualification frameworks in the form of local standards

and maintains close ties with the Hong Kong qualification framework, laying the foundation for the docking of qualification frameworks. The details are as follows:

To establish a common mechanism in order to achieve international development. Under the background of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Guangdong-Hong Kong cooperation is an opportunity to direct the development of the lifelong education qualification framework to the international direction and benchmark international education and teaching standards. Led by the government departments of the two places, through the cooperation of colleges, industries and other associations, the cooperation can be institutionalized and normalized. Firstly, establish a regular system and formulate specific norms. Secondly, set up an exclusive agency, or authorize existing agencies to take charge of related work. On the basis of a general mechanism, extensive cooperation should be carried out

Learn from Hong Kong 's experience can help to improve the modernization of the mainland 's education system. Hong Kong has an experience in establishing institutional normative elements. This experience is not only derived from its more than ten years of qualification framework practice, but also from Hong Kong 's long-term successful higher education. With the formation of internationality and professionalism, the construction of the Guangdong Qualifications Framework can clearly enhance its internationality and professionalism at the same time. On the one hand, the qualifications framework is an international practice in the field of education and human resource. The qualification framework also consists of a variety of regional qualification frameworks. The construction of the Guangdong qualification framework should be fully integrated with the international qualification framework. In the context of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, cooperation between Guangdong and Hong Kong should be used as an opportunity to cooperate with various countries in the world. Achieving higher quality education cooperation in the region, using Hong Kong as a transit and buffer, can not only absorb international experience, but also ensure the quality of China education system. On the other hand, it is important to mobilize social forces such as universities and industries to play a key role in the practice of qualification framework, from which the professional elements can be introduced into industry associations in Guangdong. As social systems are constructive, organizations generated basing on cultural systems and concepts. Through the practical work of setting competency standards based on the qualifications framework in various industries, it promotes the institutionalization of industry associations, improves their professionalism, promotes the benign development of the industry, and thereby improves the matching of talents and industries, and optimizes the economic structure. In the context of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, we can learn from each other's experience on the basis of the differences in the industrial structure of the various regions within the Bay Area, complement the structural differences, and form a scale effect.

Explore local advantages and maximize complementary between different areas. In the past decades, Guangdong and Hong Kong have each launched exploration and practice of lifelong education practices, especially Hong Kong has

many experience in the fields of vocational education, reemployment training, on-the-job training, etc. Remarkable achievements have been made; although Guangdong 's practice in the field of lifelong education is later than that of Hong Kong, it has also laid a certain foundation. Comparative research on the lifelong education system of the two places can provide experience for the joint construction of human Resource Management System. More importantly, the industrial structure and talent structure in each area of the Bay Area have their own characteristics, and also form a complementary situation. In the context of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, local advantages should be fully utilized. It is important to develop local training model depend on respective industry, and maximize the impact of its advantages in the context of regional development.

### **5.Conclusion**

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area spans two types of social systems and three types of education systems. The internal culture of the Bay Area is quite different, and the social and economic development is uneven. There are certain difficulties and challenges. However, the Guangdong-Hong Kong qualification framework cooperation carries huge potential significance in the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Flexible and transparent talent evaluation system can help to gather talents from various countries, and provide strong support for the in-depth cooperation in the area. In the context of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the continuous promotion of the docking of the qualification framework can reintegrate the Greater Bay Area , upgrade efficiency through improving systems, integrating resources and coordinating relevant mechanisms .Under the strategy of the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, it is undoubtedly important to study the interconnection of the qualifications framework. It will surely provide useful experience for the construction of China's national qualification framework.

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