

China opens mega-bridge linking Hong Kong to mainland

October 23 2018, by Dake Kang



The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge is seen in Hong Kong, Monday, Oct. 22, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Oct. 23. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

China on Tuesday opened the world's longest sea-crossing bridge linking Hong Kong to the mainland, a feat of engineering carrying immense economic and political significance.

Chinese President Xi Jinping presided over a ceremony in the city of Zhuhai to open the 55-kilometer (34-mile)-long bridge linking it to the semi-autonomous regions of Hong Kong and Macau. Digital fireworks exploded on a screen behind him as leaders of the three cities watched.

The \$20 billion bridge took almost a decade to build while incurring major delays and cost overruns. It includes an undersea tunnel allowing ships to pass through the Pearl River delta, the heart of China's crucial manufacturing sector.

Its opening will cut travel time across the delta from several hours to just 30 minutes, something China hopes will bind the region together as a major driver of future economic growth. Heavily regulated traffic using permits issued under a quota system will begin flowing on Wednesday.

The bridge forms a physical link between the mainland and Hong Kong, an Asian financial hub that was handed over from British to Chinese control in 1997 with the assurance it would maintain its own legal and economic system for 50 years.



Photojournalists take photos of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge in Hong Kong, Monday, Oct. 22, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Oct. 23. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

That carries major political significance for Xi's administration, which has rejected calls for political liberalization in Hong Kong, sparking fears Beijing will clamp down further on civil liberties before the end of the "one country, two systems" arrangement in 2047.

The bridge's opening also comes a month after the inauguration of a new high-speed rail link from Hong Kong to mainland China that runs along a different, shorter route. That line has vastly decreased travel times but also raised concerns about Beijing's growing influence because mainland Chinese law applies within part of the line's Hong Kong terminus.

To Claudia Mo, a Hong Kong democratic politician, the bridge's political significance outweighs its practical usefulness.



The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge is lit up in Hong Kong, Monday, Oct. 22, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Oct. 23. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

"It's not exactly necessary, because Hong Kong is connected to mainland China in every way already, by land, by air, by sea," Mo told The Associated Press.

"But they still need it as a political symbol or icon to remind Hong Kong people ... that you are connected to the motherland, with this very grand bridge. It's almost like an umbilical cord."

In Zhuhai, however, sentiments revolved around economic growth and national pride.



The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge is seen against the sunset in Hong Kong, Monday, Oct. 22, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Oct. 23. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

Airline pilot Liu Gang said he'd been eagerly anticipating the opening of the bridge, calling it a symbol of the mainland's increasingly close ties with Hong Kong and Macau.

"It'll bring us even closer together, make us more flexible, economically and in many other ways. We're now one family," Liu said Monday afternoon while strolling along a walkway and shooting photos of the

structure.

Luo Fengzhi, who works in real estate, cited the bridge as evidence of China's growing economic and engineering prowess.

"For Chinese people, this makes them feel proud," she said. "I hope that every patriotic Chinese person can come and see this great feat of engineering, and I welcome foreigners to come and see for themselves as well."



A man walks past a beach as the Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge are seen at the back in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Monday, Oct. 22, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Oct. 23. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



Visitors chat with a lifeguard on a beach as they look at the Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Monday, Oct. 22, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Oct. 23. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



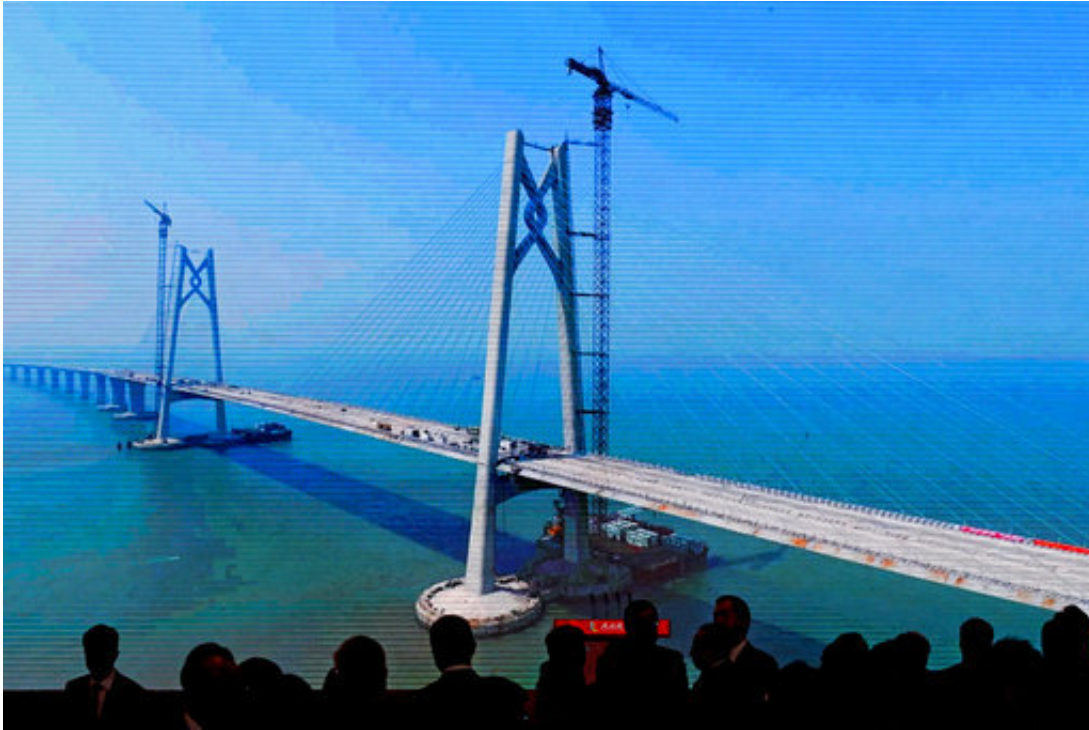
Workers clean a pavilion as the Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge are seen at the back in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Monday, Oct. 22, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Oct. 23. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



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Invited officials are silhouetted on a projector screen showing the construction of the China-Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge ahead of the opening ceremony at the immigration building in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Tuesday. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



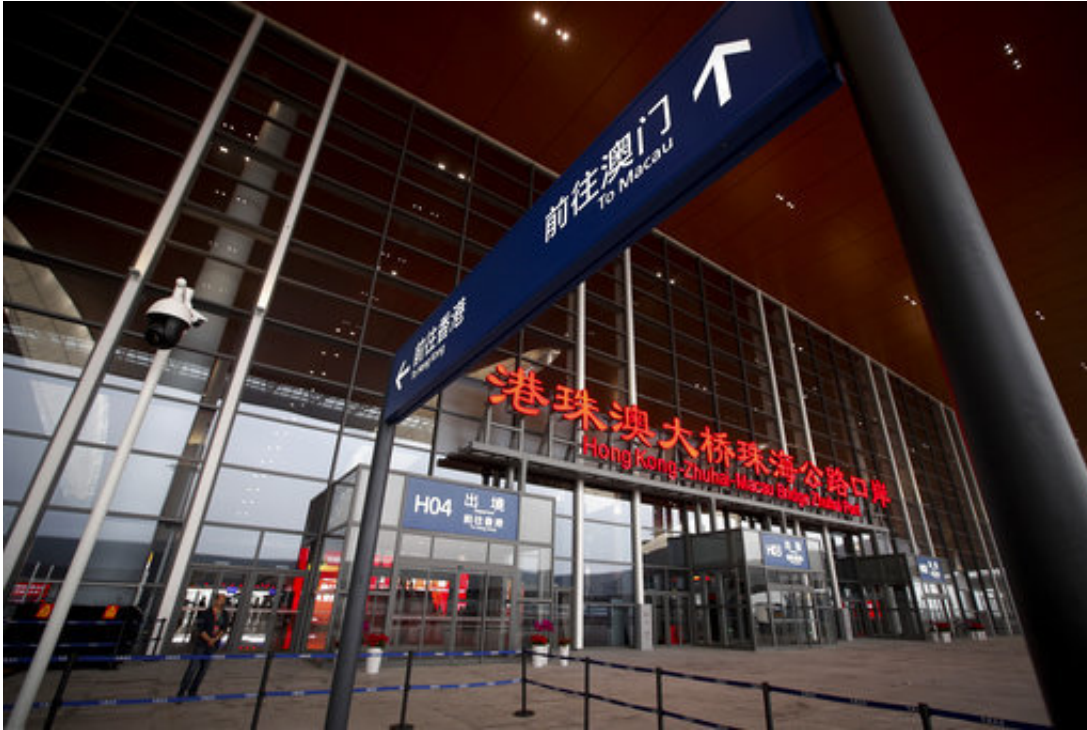
An officer walks by the immigration building for the China-Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge ahead of the opening ceremony in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Tuesday. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



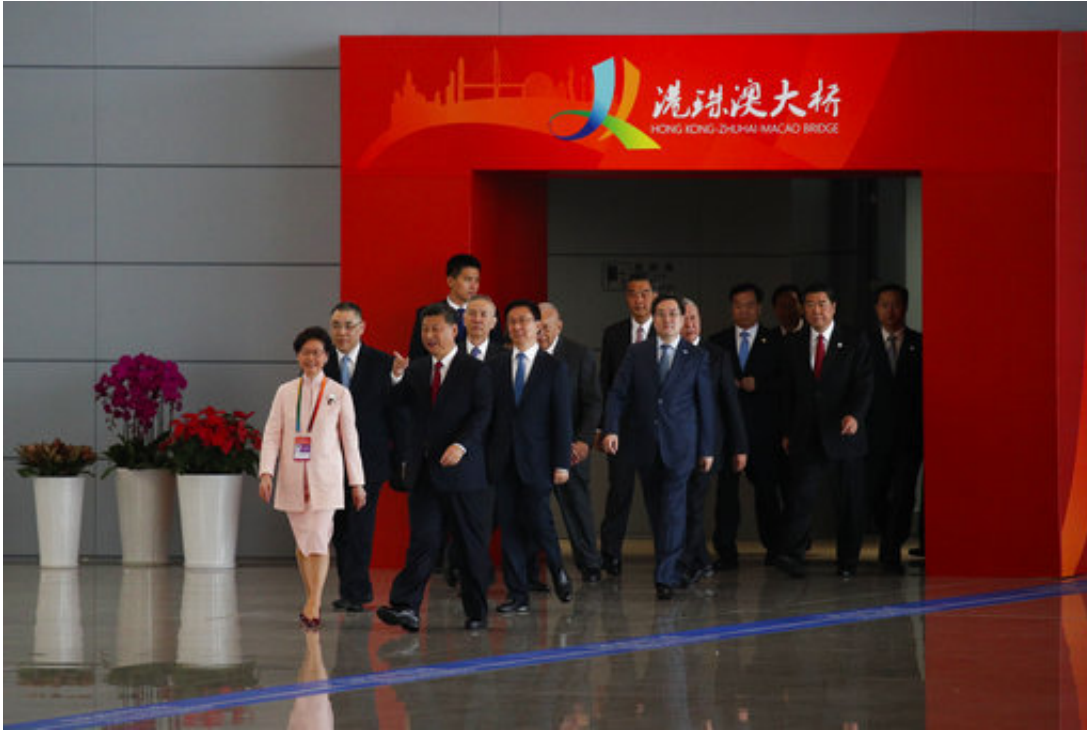
Hostesses walk by a billboard displaying the China-Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge ahead of the opening ceremony at the immigration building in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Tuesday. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



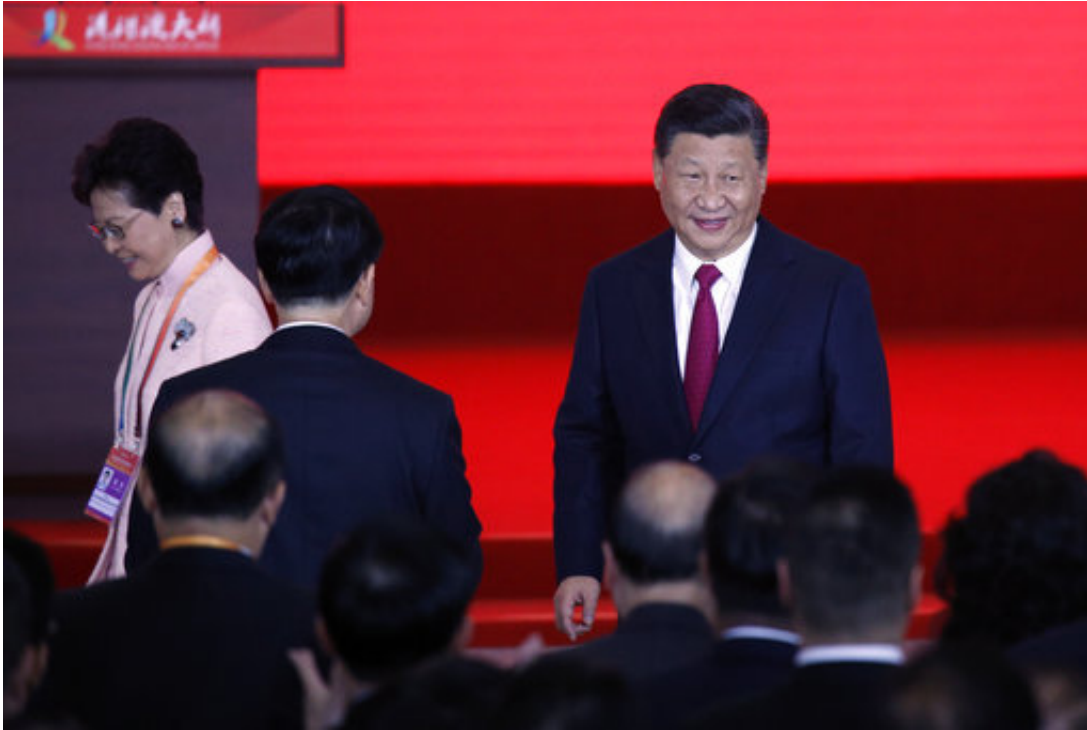
A policeman and his dog patrol at the immigration building for the China-Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge ahead of the opening ceremony in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Tuesday. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A security officer stands guard at the main entrance of the immigration building for the China-Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge ahead of the opening ceremony in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Tuesday. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



Chinese President Xi Jinping, front right, chats with Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, front left, as they arrive for the opening ceremony for the China-Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Tuesday. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



Chinese President Xi Jinping, right, and Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, left, arrive for the opening ceremony for the China-Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



Chinese President Xi Jinping, third from right, chats with Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, fourth from right, as they arrive for the opening ceremony for the China-Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018. The bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), will have opening ceremony in Zhuhai on Tuesday. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



Chinese President Xi Jinping applauds on stage after official opening of the China-Zhuhai-Macau-Hong Kong Bridge, the world's longest cross-sea project, which has a total length of 55 kilometers (34 miles), in Zhuhai in south China's Guangdong province, Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

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