

## **Borderlands Forum at Tsushima Island: The Bridge between Korea and Japan**

December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010

### **Report on the International Panel :Global Trends in Cross-Border Relations**

On November 11-12<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the fourth Borderlands Forum was hosted by the Slavic Research Center. The fourth following the very first one in Yonaguni Island of Okinawa, second one in the Ogasawara (Bonin) Islands, and last year in Nemuro City in Hokkaido. It has been a year since I joined the Global COE team at the Slavic Research Centre, and the Nemuro Borderlands Forum was the very first one I attended. I am reminded of the memorable speech by Mayor Takarabe in Nemuro last year when he officially announced the hosting of the fourth forum here in Tsushima. And 11 months later, there we were gathered in Cultural Centre in Tsushima. This event had been co-hosted by the Tsushima City Hall, the Economic Association of Kyushu (Kyushu Keizai Chousa Kyokai), the Japan Society for Island Studies, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Japan and SRC.

I had the honour of chairing the international panel and we had the privilege of having four distinguished panellists for the international panel: (1) Professor Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (Univ. of Victoria, Canada); (2) Carsten Yndigegn (University of Southern Denmark, Norway); (3) Jekuk Chang (Dongseo University, Korea); and (4) Hiroshi Kakazu (Meio University, Japan).

Professor Brunet-Jailly presented about the situation of U.S.-Canada border relations before and after the Sept.11 incident. 99% of prominent scholars in the media have stressed the hardening of the border between U.S. and Canada however, Prof. Brunet-Jailly explained that this itself showed the lack of understanding by many—even prominent scholars. He stressed that just because the government has taken hold of border as policies does not make it harder to cross but changes the culture of crossing itself. In order to illustrate this (contrary to popular belief about the hardening of borders between U.S. and Canada post 9.11) North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Free Trade Agreements (FTA) have increased the economic integration between the two countries and the “new border” is much more efficient than before. Finally, he outlined some of the government cooperation between the two countries to establish standardized procedures.

Professor Carsten Yndigeegn spoke about the constant phenomena of rebordering and debordering that has followed the expansion of the European Union (EU). He introduced the case of the Oresund region as an example of European cross-border cooperation. The building of the Oresund Bridge made a remarkable impact on the cross border cooperation and “debordering” of the border in this region. Medicon Valley (life sciences sector) and the Oresund University are some of the achievements through the cross-border cooperation. Of course, such cooperation comes with positive and negative effects but the Norwegian case poses as a effective case study for us to consider and apply to the Japan-Korean cross-border relations.

Professor Jekuk Chang presented on the trans-border regional cooperation between the city of Busan (Korea) and Fukuoka (Japan). The question he started with is as follows: why regional cooperation? He demonstrated that it is necessary for a new paradigm for Japan-Korea relations and also to overcome the threat factor as regional cities. And as all relationships go, between friends, between men and women, and of course in the bigger context between countries, it is as Prof. Chang mentioned a “love-hate relationship” and this is true for Japan-Korea relations as well. In order to overcome the obstacles between the two countries, it is crucial to move away from the tradition of centralized discourse that linger in Seoul and Tokyo. He had also stressed the movement toward a new era for Japan-Korea relations not dependent on the center, but from the local and regional cities. The voices of local cities must be heard for the pluralisation and diversification as well as for the multi-dimensional relations between two countries. For this we must facilitate the exchange of people, culture and most importantly economy between the two cities, thus although it is in the brainstorming stage the concept of the super economic sphere of Busan and Fukuoka will become vital for both countries. The establishment of Busan-Fukuoka Forum, Asia gateway 2011, the Pusan-Fukuoka joint graduate school on business administration, the founding of discount flight company Air-Busan are some achievements which is just a beginning of greater cooperation between the two cities.

Prof Hiroshi Kakazu presentation reminded us once again that Japan is a very resourceful and prosperous island country which has a potential for great development for not only national but regional economies as well. As he mentioned, “small does not necessary mean poor and small can be beautiful.” I was reminded of the Japanese idiom “柔よく剛を制す” literally meaning the “small will overcome the big.” However, there are also real threats that face the remote islands in Japan which is the sharp decline of

population but these islands all have very unique history and culture. However, he stressed that they are fighting back. He also introduced some achievements for new industries as well as bi-lateral and multi-lateral initiatives toward island networking for the creation of socio-economic zone including Taiwan and the southern islands of Japan. Even though security and territorial issues have posed as challenges, there are models of dispute settlement that we can learn from and overcome such challenges for sustainable development.

The discussant, our very own Professor Akihiro Iwashita from SRC, brought the discussion back to our comfort zone focusing on the Slavic Eurasia. He focused on two ideas: (1) The transition of border conflict zone from land to sea and the need to increase the awareness of Japanese people of border issues that surround the country; and (2) People living on the border or borderland do not believe in nationalism, and have distrust towards their central government. Prof. Iwashita stressed the need to hear the voices of the people living in the border area because they represent the reality of the situation in their respective areas. In other words, there is a great perception gap between the periphery and centre, therefore, initiatives promoted by projects such as ours are significant and vital to facilitate the discussion on border issues in Eurasia.

In the discussion, intriguing questions were raised by many in the audience. Some of the questions that were posed included the comparison between U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico border; the perception gap that exists between Fukuoka and Busan; how to overcome the unfortunate histories of countries in Asia and Europe; and the difficulty of establishing a new form of “geopolitics” in Japan to raise awareness regarding border issues in Japan.

The presentations at the international panel gave us an insight in the global trends of cross border relations, exchanges and cooperation, which could pose as critical and significant case studies for us here in Asia. It is no coincidence that such panel took place in a place that is a bridge that connects Japan and Korea—Tsushima. We were able to get a glimpse of what the Korean envoys may have experienced, nearly 400 years ago here in Tsushima. We must think in retrospective; the history of cross-border relations did not just this century. The moral of the story is as such: learn from our past and the present. The future will follow.

(Written by: Naomi Chi, SRC)