

Preface

The world is changing rapidly; the collapse of the communist regimes, integration of the regions, globalization, and the wars against 'the World Powers' and 'the Terrorists'. The Slavic Eurasian regions, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have been inside factors and actors as well in the whole process of making a new world order in the 21st century. We stand before a new task to rejuvenate area studies including not only 'our' regions, but also 'other' regions.

Hypothetically we understand that Slavic Eurasia, the space of the former communist countries, may be a mega-area in the historical context, loosely combining several meso-areas inside. Meso-areas are shaping themselves under the agencies of external integration forces from their neighboring regions: for example, an emerging East European meso-area under the integration forces of EU enlargement; a Central Eurasian meso-area (mainly Central Asia and the Caucasus) under the banner of Islamic revival as well as 'new Silk Road' projects for transport corridors; and a Siberian & Far-East meso-area under the banner of East Asian vital economic growth. We suggest that the meso-area could be a notion definable by the interrelationship between external and counter integration forces.

In this extension, it was a tremendous opportunity to invite the leading scholars of ICCEES (International Council of Central and East European Studies) and to discuss the current situation and the future of Slavic Eurasian Studies freely and interdisciplinarily at the Slavic Research Center (SRC), Hokkaido University, on 27th May 2004. The conference was organized by the 21st Century COE Program, entitled *Making a Discipline of Slavic Eurasian Studies*. This is a goal which SRC is pursuing through a special scientific research fund granted by the Japanese Ministry of Education's 21st Century COE (Center of Excellence) Program Committee from August 2003 through March 2008.

SRC has been organizing annual international symposia in Sapporo since the 1980s, and from the mid-1990s onward carrying out comprehensive and interdisciplinary joint research projects regarding changes in the Slavic Eurasian world. Through these academic activities, the institution is now not only the national center for Slavic Eurasian area studies in Japan, but also an internationally recognized research engine. Following these developments, SRC has started the COE program in order to make contributions to rejuvenating and advancing international Slavic Eurasian area studies in accordance with the new historical environments of regional integrations and globalization.

The COE program includes various kinds of research and graduate education projects, such as research projects of meso-mega area studies; foreign visiting fellowships; doctoral candidate scholarships; and post-doctorate fellowships. Details of these projects are available on our web-site (<http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/index-e.html>), where the program's research products are also readable, including the Slavic Eurasian Studies series. We

would like to involve you and your colleagues in this program and to create closer and deeper cooperation with overseas and domestic scholars.

This volume includes the papers of the conference held on 27th May 2004, given by the members of the ICCEES executive committee and a special guest speaker from Korea. Besides, the book comprises also a paper written by the COE program leader relating to meso-mega areas, the core idea of the program.¹

It is our hope that this volume will contribute to the purpose of creating new horizons for the future development of Slavic Eurasian area studies in the 21st century.

May 2005, Sapporo

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¹ Originally published in Kimitaka Matsuzato, ed., *Emerging Meso-areas in the Former Socialist Countries: Histories Revived or Improvised?*, Slavic Eurasian Studies No. 7 (SRC, Hokkaido University, 2005), pp. 19–41.