

Report on "Debunking the Myths of Northeast Asia's Borders" Symposium

Sunday 5 February 2017: Nishijin Plaza, Kyushu University, Fukuoka

Organized by: Center for Asia-Pacific Future Studies, Kyushu University

NIHU Area Studies Project for Northeast Asia,
Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, Hokkaido University

Supported by: Association for Borderlands Studies Japan Chapter

Kyushu University Border Studies

Eurasia Unit for Border Research

Debunking the myths of Northeast Asia's borders
February 5, 2017
13:00~18:00

Program
13:00-13:10 Opening Remarks
(Hyogo-Naomi Chihiro, College of ABS & Hokkaido University)

13:10-13:40 Keynote Speech
Moderator: Jong-Seok Park (Kyushu University)
Beom-Shik Shin (Seoul National University)
"The Changing Strategic Triangle in Post-Cold War Northeast Asia"

13:40-15:10 Session 1: Political Geography & International Relations
Moderator: Elizabeth Boyle (Kyushu University)
Commentator: Joonhan Huh (Kyushu University)
Takashi Yamashita (Kyushu University)
"Multi-scalar Geopolitical Effects on Local Elections: Okinawa in Northeast Asia"

15:20-18:00 Session 2: Russian Foreign Relations in Northeast Asia
Moderator: Sergei Golunov (Kyushu University)
Commentator: Yukiko Hama (Tsuda College)
"Evolution of Russo-Japanese Relations under Putin and Abe and the Korean Peninsula: From the Korean Perspective"

18:00-18:10 Panel Discussion
Moderator: Akihiro Iwashita (Kyushu University)
Commentator: Paul Richardson (University of Birmingham)
Akihiro Iwashita (Kyushu University & Hokkaido University)
"The Abe-Putin Yanaguchi Sumitri Ends a History: An Epitaph to the Northern Territories"

Venue:
Kyushu University Nishijin Plaza
2-16-23 Nishijin, Sawara-ku, Fukuoka-shi, Fukuoka-ken, 814-0002 Japan

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A somewhat grim winter day was the setting for a symposium held in early February in Fukuoka that sought to examine common perceptions of territorial borders in northeast Asia and debunk a few of the myths attached to them along the way. From the Japanese perspective, the immediate context for the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the tail end of the previous year, which despite the high hopes that engendered in advance on the Japanese side, was widely seen as ending with advantage Russia...again. This symposium reinforced rather than challenged that view, rendering the greyness of the day into an oddly apt setting to consider issues surrounding the region's borders.

Introductory remarks to the symposium were delivered by Akihiro IWASHITA (Kyushu University & Hokkaido University) and by Jong-Seok PARK (Kyushu University) in place of the chair of the Association for Borderlands Studies Japan Chapter, Naomi CHI (Hokkaido University), who was sadly prevented from joining us in Fukuoka itself. As both of these welcome speeches noted, the symposium was testimony to the work that has gone into establishing border studies as a distinct field of inquiry within Japan, which was reflected in the foundation of the Japan Chapter of the Association for Borderlands Studies the previous year. The strong institutional foundations that have now been established for the field will enable it to make a distinctive contribution in a number of areas in the coming years, and remains particularly relevant given the disputed borders that still exist between Japan and all of its closest neighbours.

The Keynote Speech was delivered by Beom-Shik SHIN (Seoul National University) on "The Changing Strategic Triangle in Post-Cold War Northeast Asia", and highlighted the importance of understanding such border disputes within a wider regional context. Shin's paper pointed to Russia as having recently regained its position in Eurasia as well as in Europe over recent years, having largely lost its strategic status in North East Asia during the 1990s. Shin's paper sought to highlight the implications of Russia's efforts and opportunities in the region through an examination of the strategic triangles that exist between states engaged in the area. For Shin, the most important of these strategic triangles remains the one little utilized by policymakers in the United States, which is that



existing between the US – China – Russia. Shin sought to argue that through the activation of such a triangle within US policymaking, it would be possible for Russia to become an asset for the US in the region, rather than merely a problem.

Shin’s Keynote Speech succeeded nicely in setting up the importance of international relations to border practices and interstate relations in Northeast Asia. The following session, entitled “Political Geography and International Relations” and moderated by Edward BOYLE (Kyushu University), consisted of two papers that sought to engage with topics that had traditionally been taken for granted within the more formalist world of international relations, although due to the attention granted them within political geography they have been receiving more attention recently. The first, delivered by Takashi YAMAZAKI (Osaka City University) on “Multiscalar Contextual Effects on Local Elections: Okinawa in Northeast Asia”, focused explicitly on the importance of scale to understanding political geography in the region. Yamazaki’s analysis pointed to the distinctive revisionist geography of Okinawa and its connection to the relative location of American bases to voting districts. Nevertheless, his conclusion that it was the more peripheral areas of the prefecture, in remote northern Okinawa and on outlying islands, that are inherently more conservative and behave as such at the ballot box is a conclusion that echoes beyond Okinawa. Given the way that this observation tallies with the experience of Japan as a whole, and it would have been interesting to have reflected on this at greater length, particularly in the light of the session commentator Jonathan BULL’s (Hokkaido University) excellent question on what was the “larger story” being given a “local telling” here.



The second paper “Special Zones and Territorialities of East Asian Developmental States”, given by Bae-Gyoon PARK (Seoul National University), focused on the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) on the Korean peninsula. As with Yamazaki, Park pointed to the importance of questions of scale, noting how national-level zoning practices frequently grew out of local efforts to encourage economic development. It also specifically focused on the notion of ‘territory’, another concept traditionally left unexamined within international relations despite being the focus of a great deal of interest within political geography

in recent years. The territory of these economic zones in the Republic of Korea is simultaneously that of what is termed an East Asian Development State, and Park’s presentation usefully pointed to the contradiction visible within these practices of zoning, in that they bring the government’s goals of nationalizing its space and developing its territory into conflict with one another. For Park, zoning strategies emerge as a compromise between these two imperatives above, leading to the emergence of “islands of industrialization” as the outcome of complex interactions at multiple scales. He pointed out how these nationalized zoning practices in East Asia conflicted with their deployment for region-building within a European context, usefully pointing to a distinction between understandings at opposite ends of Eurasia. While unfortunately there was little time for questions at the end of the session, the combined efforts of the two presenters brought home how much remained to be considered in seeking to understand the political geography of Northeast Asia and the borders existing between the states that constituted it.



After a short break, the participants returned to the fray for the second session on “Russian Foreign Relations in Northeast Asia”, consisting of four papers and moderated by Serghei GOLUNOV (Kyushu University). The first paper was given by Ik-Joong YOUN (Hallym University) on “Developments of Russo-Japanese Relations under Putin and Abe and the Korean Peninsula: From the Korean Perspective” provided an extremely detailed examination of how the December 2016 Meeting in Yamaguchi and Tokyo had come about. The thrust of Youn’s paper was somewhat dispiriting for Japan and those seeking to salvage something from the wreckage of the December meeting, as he emphasized how economic cooperation of South Korea with the North had been effectively silo-ized and had little effect on efforts at rapprochement. Given Russia’s signalling of the increasing strategic value of the Kuril Islands themselves, through the markedly increased infrastructure investment that has been occurring there since the late-2000s, it would appear extremely unlikely that Japanese participation in economic development on the island will yield the sort of benefits that Japan is looking for. This is particularly obvious when the issue is examined in the light of Park’s paper on the nationalizing character of economic development zones in East Asia. Nevertheless, it remained unclear how the Russia – Japan – South Korea strategic triangle, to borrow the language of the keynote, could be a factor in resolving the issue of the Northern Territories, which is ultimately, as with the Dokdo-Takeshima issue, only perceived as a territorial dispute from the Japanese side.



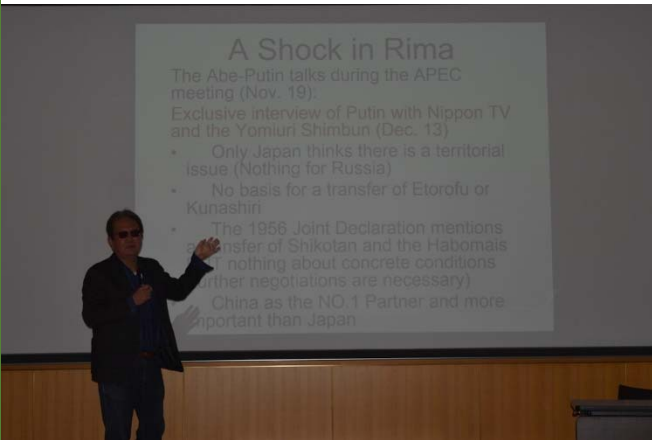
Local perceptions were the focus of Alibay MAMMADOV’s (Hokkaido University) paper on “Northern Territories Issues and the Views of Former Japanese Residents and Their Descendants”, which presented the results of surveys conducted of the former residents of the Northern Territories expelled when Russia seized the islands at the end of the Second World War, as well as their children. As had already been pointed to in earlier surveys conducted by Akihiro Iwashita and the Hokkaido Shinbun, there is a considerable difference in the perception of these disputed territories held by those most invested with them when this is compared to how the dispute is presented in Tokyo. Mammadov’s results confirmed that former residents were much more pragmatic in their attitude towards negotiations over the islands, with many prepared to settle for much less than the return of all four islands long demanded by Japan. He also brought out some interesting differences in attitude between those resident in Sapporo and Nemuro, which suggests that actual proximity to islands to some extent influences attitudes held about them. This influence of local context on politics recalled many of the themes engaged in by Yamazaki in his talk during the previous session, and it would be interesting to follow up such a survey in the aftermath of the latest meeting between Abe and Putin.



The third paper, “Patience and Pragmatic Patriotism: Putin’s approach to the territorial dispute with Japan”, was given by Paul RICHARDSON (University of Birmingham). Richardson argued that Putin had succeeded since the 2000s in controlling the course of negotiations over the islands. This was achieved by seeming to veer in his pronouncements between what might be termed the “legal-judicial approach”, which emphasized the 1956 Declaration that offered the transfer of the two smaller islands of Shikotan and the Habomais as a precondition for peace negotiations between the two sides, with one stressing Russia’s territorial integrity. As Richardson noted, there is no clear distinction between the two approaches, with both often being offered up at different times to different audiences. The latest round of negotiations, unsurprisingly in view of recent Russian geopolitical gambits, reflects the dominance of Russia’s territorial integrity as a motivation for



negotiations, and also points to Russia’s desire to project, at least, an image of uncompromising strength. Nevertheless, given the underlying pragmatism demonstrated by Putin, the possibility for a further change in circumstances should perhaps not be ruled out entirely.



This, though, was not the opinion given in the fourth paper, “The Abe-Putin Yamaguchi Summit Ends a History: An Epitaph to the Northern Territories” by Akihiro Iwashita. The Yamaguchi summit was interpreted as an unmitigated disaster for Japan, with Abe’s desperation for a deal to show the Japanese public revealed in the somewhat desperate gambit of the letter from the former residents to Putin. As Iwashita noted, the presentation of this letter by Abe to Putin possessed the character of a petition submitted by a provincial governor to his overlord, both implying and appealing to Putin’s superior authority over the islands in question. While Abe may have considered this somewhat

humiliating spectacle necessary to achieve his aims of a resolution over the islands, the absence of any mention of territorial issues in the agreements signed at the meeting and Putin’s apparent willingness to humiliate his Japanese hosts suggests that Abe’s gamble has badly failed. For Iwashita, this appears to have ended the possibility of a settlement to Japan’s advantage, although for this author at least, the numerous flip-flops on this issue by Putin, highlighted by Richardson in the previous paper, mean that a further reversal should not be ruled out. It may yet be premature to inter these islands in the graveyard of Japan’s dreams.



Commentary on the panel was provided by Yukiko HAMA (Tsuda College), who spoke about the potential performative value of events like the letter as political symbols, before a lively discussion occurred, whose contents will unfortunately have to remain embargoed for the time being. The symposium as a whole successfully demonstrated that there is a great deal more work required on East Asian borders

before we are able to get a handle on the full range of cross-cutting and overlapping effects stemming from local and national border processes. We anticipate making great progress in doing precisely this in the future.

Edward Boyle (Kyushu University)

