

Report on the 1st ABSj Seminar, 27 November 2016

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The newly-created Association for Borderlands Studies Japan Chapter held the first of its seminars in Tokyo on a somewhat wet Sunday afternoon in November 2016. The seminar consisted of two sessions, and was introduced by the current head of the Chapter, Professor Naomi Chi of the School of Public Policy at Hokkaido University. Professor Chi provided those in attendance with the background to the founding of the Japan Chapter and its relations with the main body of the Association for Borderlands Studies, which continues to seek to expand its scholarly remit. The Chapter's role in this expansion was shown in the composition of this seminar, which sought to examine Border issues in Japan and the wider Asia-Pacific while appealing to a new audience for this form of scholarly analysis. In order to appeal to as great an audience as possible, the first session was held in English and dealt with Prospects and Challenges to Sino-Russian Relations, while the second was in Japanese and examined issues surrounding Border Control and Immigration Policy in Japan.

The prospects and challenges to the Sino-Russian relationship was examined through the lens of disputed territory through a paper by Marcin Kaczmarek (currently a visiting Professor at Hokkaido University) entitled "Sino-Russian Mutual Support in Territorial Disputes: the cases of Crimea and East and South China Seas", which was discussed by Akihiro Iwashita and moderated by Edward Boyle, both of Kyushu University. Marcin began by explaining that his central question was to examine how Russia and China did (or did not) support one another in their respective territorial disputes, and how these issues serve to influence the relationship between the two countries. As he noted, this question is not one that has been much dealt with, having received no attention in the existing scholarly

literature and with the connection being only infrequently made in official statements between the two parties. As he made clear, however, the shift in both countries attitudes towards their disputes is clearly discernible and has potentially serious implications for both their neighbours and the world as a whole. The question therefore seems to be whether these parallel processes are linked and how they influence on another.

Marcin began by highlighting the fact that the situation had shifted considerably since the 1990s, when these countries were offering mutual support for each other's territorial integrity in the face of separatist concerns over Chechnya, Tibet and Taiwan. These references disappeared in the 2000s as both states came to feel secure enough to no longer talk about their sovereign borders as barring overseas intervention within their territory. Rather, both have shifted from defensive to offensive territorial issues, in which their generally understood borders are no longer accepted, and both have become states seeking to challenge and reinterpret international law in support of their claims, rather than invoke it in the face of challenges. In as far as both are therefore on a collision course with the rest, the mutual support of each for the other may be expected to be a crucial ingredient in how these disputes are mobilized.

In looking in more detail at the disputes, though, it is difficult to find these structural factors reflected in each state's policy towards the others' disputes. China has been very reluctant to comment on Crimea, has abstained rather than vetoed UNSC resolutions, and has clearly opposed both the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and the invocation of a popular referendum as a justification for territorial revisionism. Russia has also stayed largely silent on China's disputes, and appears to be uninvolved except to the extent that China's actions accord nicely with its own suspicion of the United States and multilateral processes. While there have been, for example, recent military exercises by the two that focused on amphibious landings, mutual support over the territorial

disputes themselves appears to be more driven by a shared anti-Americanism than any genuinely shared interest.

As Marcin pointed out, though, rather than this absence of open support for the other's disputes as necessarily reflecting the weakness of the relationship between the two powers, it may rather indicate how much stronger it is today than in the early-1990s. Relations between the two are these days much more multidimensional, and thus less reliant on continued proclamations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other. In fact, he argued that expressions of open support would represent a qualitative shift in the relationship, and surmised that such a shift would first be visible in Russia's behaviour now that they are the weaker half of the partnership.

This analysis was supported by Professor Iwashita in his commentary, where he highlighted the two-step nature of Sino-Russian cooperation. The first stage, that of mutual security guarantees, can be seen as absolutely essential to the relationship of the two states, and is a condition that has been met. The second stage can be characterized as foreign policy cooperation between the two states, which while valuable is not essential for their relationship. It is clear that the territorial issues with which China and Russia have recently been wrestling come under this second stage, in which support of the other is a bargaining chip opened to being cashed in exchange for alternative benefits. While this therefore reflects the shifting dynamics of foreign cooperation, as Marcin noted in his response, there are deeper structural issues that are serving to increase Russian dependence on China, which are being accelerated by Russia's own attempt to 'pivot' towards the Pacific.

Time was then given for members of the audience to engage with the paper. Hiroshi Yamazoe of the National Institute for Defence Studies astutely commented on the differences between China's slow shift in the direction of offensive capability, and thus a more aggressive territorial approach, versus Russian opportunism in its seizure of Crimea in 2014. Naomi Chi asked about the effects of the

US election on the relationship, which Marcin pointed out was unlikely to be significant given the closeness between Russia and China visible even at the height of the previous 'reset'. Masaki Kakizaki of Temple University wondered under what conditions China would change its position on Crimea and vice-versa, while this moderator asked about the significance of Russian 'passportization' and whether there was a distinction between sovereignty and territorial integrity in how these disputes were being mobilized by the two governments. Marcin's paper certainly highlighted both the transformation in both states' stances towards their territorial disputes, while also clarifying the deeper structural factors that have brought their approaches into line and suggest that continued cooperation may indeed ultimately result in the kind of qualitative shift in relations that was noted.

The topic of the second half of the seminar was border control and immigration policy in Japan was moderated by Machiko Hachiya of Kyushu University, and we were fortunate enough to be granted an outline of the current situation from a practitioner, with Hiroshi Kimizuka, currently Director of the Adjudication Division at the Immigration Bureau, able to provide us with the lowdown on "Administration of Immigration Control in Japan". From a comparative perspective, the extremely low proportion of foreign residents in Japan remains a source of fascination, even as the percentage of the foreign born population creeps slowly up towards 2%. The discussion within Japan remains steadfastly centred on the issue of the economy, and in particular how to bring in sufficient workers for the economy of a nation with a declining population, and it is through this lens that the categories of Japan's current immigration system have been established. Based on a powerpoint distributed to all the participants, and making reference to a booklet produced by the Justice Ministry, the presentation naturally focussed on the question of how these pre-established categories are being implemented.

It was therefore the two commentators who provided a more holistic take on Japan's policy. Professor Junichi Akashi of Tsukuba University also made note of the fact that immigration is largely discussed in relation to 'Abenomics', with any shift in policy focused on maximizing the human capital available to keep Japan, Inc. running. There remains little effort in Japan to make a positive case for immigration that goes beyond economics, and this is shown in the manner in which the immigration is dealt with as a political issue. The example offered by Professor Akashi was a diagram within the powerpoint presentation, which positioned the impact of the immigration system on a graph examining 'humanitarian' versus 'economic or cultural' issues. He noted that this interpretation of the effect the system has is far too narrow to account for its outcomes, both politically and in terms of securitization, for instance.

The other commentator, Naomi Chi, also made reference to the narrowness of the debate, pointing to the absence of positive images in the discussion of immigration, particularly by contrast to a country like Canada, for instance, where the homepage for the Immigration Authority's website is filled with smiling images of people from a diverse array of backgrounds. In Japan, by contrast, specific information on foreigners tends to be offered in connection with crime and other illegal activities, and there is a lack of interest in questions like the position of stateless people in the country. As she noted, while many of her students appear to be motivated to join the Immigration authorities with the intention of facilitating the entry of more foreigners into Japan, it seems that once they join the Bureau, this motivation either disappears or is overlain with new, more practical, concerns. In response, Kimizuka highlighted that this gap between initial aims and day-to-day experience in the Bureau is indeed present for many of those who come to work there, but that the response was either to quit or to become inured to the discrepancy.

The difference between academic perspective on the work on immigration and their actual practice was in fact one of the main issues that emerged from the discussion. As Junichi Akashi had noted, when he had begun researching Japan's immigration system, there was very little work being done, and all of it was essentially highly critical. There was therefore no relation between the work of those operating within the system and those studying it from the outside. The situation today is certainly better, as the system has slowly developed more stakeholders, like groups of lawyers or NGOs, while the bureaucrats themselves are more willing to engage with those from outside the system, as shown by the presence of one at a seminar like our own. Nevertheless, the gap highlighted, while certainly closing, is still very much in evidence, and does in a way reflect the depoliticized way with which questions of immigration are dealt with in Japan. As Kimizuka highlighted, this is also reflected in the frequency of foreigners being associated with crime, in that it appears to be a social problem with an obvious policy prescription (of tightening immigration and not letting them in in the first place). Japan is hardly the only country with a tendency to displace social problems onto those coming from outside its borders, but is exceptional in the way in which discussion remains so focused on the economy.

The ABSj was thus exceptionally fortunate for the opportunity provided by Hiroshi Kimizuka in coming along to talk to us, and hope that it is the beginning of a research project encompassing Japan's border policies in an international perspective. The first steps towards this will begin next year, when the new Jean Monet grant awarded to the Borders in Globalization project begins, incorporating Japan, including several of the participants present at the ABSj seminar, as one of its points of comparison in a holistic examination of EU border policies. While Japan has long been an outlier in immigration policy, the trend internationally is clearly away from the move toward open borders and back towards more restrictive policies. This, together with an increasingly populist

economic nationalism, appears to indicate that vast areas of the world previously held up as immigration exemplars for a restrictive Japan are now shifting towards a position on borders that resembles that long criticized in Japan. What the results of this shift will be, of course, remains to be seen, but it promises to be absolutely crucial to definition of both domestic and foreign policies in coming years.

It just remains for the ABSj to thank all of those who participated, and we look forward to continuing the conversation begun here long into the future.



Edward Boyle, Martin Kaczmarek and Akihiro Iwashita