

Networking with World's Border Studies: A Summary

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The Global COE Programme “Reshaping Japan’s Border Studies” in cooperation with the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Japan co-hosted a seminar entitled, “Toward Networking with World’s Border Studies: Japan’s Borders in Global Perspective” on December 6th, 2010 at the conference hall at the Japan Foundation.

We invited 5 speakers for the 2nd panel of the meeting, “Border Disputes and Management: Case Studies from Around the World” including Prof. Anton Gosar (University of Primorska, Slovenia; Chair of the Commission on Political Geography of the International Geographic Union, IGU), Prof. David Newman (Ben-Gurion University, Israel) , Prof. Manuel Chavez (Michigan State University, USA; Former President of Association of Borderlands Studies, ABS), Martin van der Velde (Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands; member of the Border Regions in Transition, BRIT) and our very own Prof. Akihiro Iwashita to speak about their experiences in the border organization that each are affiliated and work with.

Dr Anton Gosar from the University of Primorska introduced the function and present works conducted and promoted by the IGU as well as some of the current challenges that face political geography. He shared his experiences as the chair of IGU but also as an academic and he not only introduced the successful achievements but also those that were not so successful because it is from such failures that we are able to obtain some significant insights from.

Dr. David Newman, who is the editor of the international journal, “geopolitics” and works together with the International Boundaries Research Unit at the University of Durham as well as oversees two-track negotiations between Israel and Palestine spoke about the function and current works of the networks and negotiations that he works with, and shared with us some of the achievements accomplished as well as some of the challenges he has faced while working with policy makers and practitioners. He stressed the importance of small local border studies research centre for global understanding of border issues and to inform our friends around the world about each other’s experiences.

Dr. Martin van der Velde from the Radboud University in the Netherlands is a member of the border network, the Border Regions in Transition (BRIT) and he is also an active member of many other border networks in North America and Europe. He emphasized that the two discourses of opening borders for economic cooperation but to close borders for securitization should not be dealt as separate but as one issue. He illustrated the EU case that eliminating borders does not mean higher mobility nor higher integration but in fact we need to demonstrate something that attracts one another, that is to say that “there must be something interesting on the other side of the border.”

Dr. Manuel Chavez from Michigan State University is the former president of the Association of Borderlands Studies (ABS) in North America and works on issues related to the North American border issues, news media, international relations, border security, and governmental relationships. He introduced the work of the Association Borderlands Studies (ABS), his own research on media and border studies, and his opinion on how communication is crucial to not only to inform and raise awareness about border issues but also just as importantly to further develop border studies and to build on previous achievements.

The final panellist, one of our very own Dr. Akihiro Iwashita from the Slavic Research Centre who is also the chief organizer Global COE Programme “Reshaping Japan’s Border Studies” summarized his own work on developing border studies in Japan as well as introduce some of the achievements and challenges he has experienced. In addition, he stressed that border conflicts in Eurasia has shifted from continental border issues to sea border issues and demonstrated the paradox of the relations between nationalism and borderlands or centre-periphery relations.

As the moderator of this international panel, there was only one small anecdote I could add to at the end. It is about a boy named Goku, who is half monkey and half human, who goes on a long journey to collect seven special balls and along the way meets and picks up friends to join him on his journey. Some of you will recognize this as the Japanese animation “Dragonball.” My impression was that we, the border community as a whole, are doing pretty much the same thing... meeting new friends and asking each one of them to join the mission. Our programme is in the midst of a search for friends to join in the mission to build a network in Japan and to connect this network to other international networks to develop border studies, including those from the academic and policy sectors, in order to pave the paths for the resolution of many border

disputes and conflicts around the world, to work towards the realization of a more peaceful society without fear and threat, for the present and future generations.



Panellists at the meeting