## Comments on the UGI 2011 Regional Geographic Conference, United and Integrated with the World, 14-18 November 2011, Santiago, Chile.

The UGI 2011 conference was an excellent venue to share knowledge, generate research opportunities, and engage in international scholarly networking to advance the strategic agenda of interdisciplinary, interactive, and transnational border studies spearheaded by the Hokkaido University's Slavic Research Center in at least three important ways.

First, the poster session—featuring about 100 posters on individual research projects—highlighted the unique role of the Slavic Research Center in promoting and organizing advanced academic networks on Eurasian border research. The SRC poster presentation by Prof. Akihiro Iwashita stood out among all other posters—which I have examined—because it combined scholarly findings, key issues for future investigation and, vitally, it mapped out the structure of global epistemic communities showing a clear gap concerning the study of border issues in Eurasia—the world's largest and most populous continent with some of the most critical issues concerning borders. The poster also had catchy and engaging graphics and, as I watched, conference participants who walked by invariably paid attention and many of them stopped by to ask questions of Prof. Iwashita and pick up the illustrated information poster and copies of the Eurasia Border Review journal. I am not surprised that the handouts were all gone well before the conference's final day. It is lamentable that Eurasian border research still lacks a cohesive institutionalized network of international scholars and yet it is inspiring that SRC has taken the lead to build such network. This is commendable. In my experience, academic network building is not only highly rewarding, but also instrumental to generate valuable contributions to knowledge under high information volumes. Yet it is also a hard, slow, grinding process, and Prof. Iwashita's poster presentation was an important step along this long and arduous road.

Second, the conference allowed Prof. Iwashita to put together a cogent, substantively rich, international panel on political geography with four papers focusing on critical border relationships involving Russia, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Having attended many dozen similar conferences over the last 17 years, I was positively impressed with attendance (up to 30 attendees throughout the panel, including the first vice president of UGI, Prof. Vladimir Kolosov of the Russian Academy of Sciences) and with the dynamism and thematic coherence of presentations. For me, presenting on this panel, was also an opportunity to present original research based on opinion surveys in the Russian Far East and I will be contributing the paper to the Eurasia Border Review for publication. As I understand it, other panelists are considering joining me and submitting their papers to the journal as well. It was also encouraging to see that our panel gave the opportunity to an erudite young doctoral candidate, Christopher Len, to present his research to a diverse, distinguished audience, to generate good discussion, and to score a nice round of applause. Engaging young and upcoming scholars such as Len is vital for building long-term research initiatives such as Eurasian border studies.

Finally, as it frequently happens, participation in UGI 2011 generated serendipitous ideas for future research and collaboration through extra-curricular activities. In particular, I was considering making a cross-border trip to Argentina, but I had to change my plans after finding out the complex border-crossing requirements and understanding the amount of time involved. We got specific information, including the need to etch the number of license plates in the glass of the car windows—a procedure that takes several days. We also read reports about multi-hour wait times at the border crossing. While touring Santiago—where buying a map proved to be impossible—Prof. Iwashita and I realized that despite public and professional needs, systematic information on border crossing quality worldwide is unavailable, and that generating, visualizing and disseminating such information would be a research project that is likely to contribute to knowledge and attract research funding.

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