

**Comments on the International Forum on Development and Opening-up in the China Border Area and Regional Cooperation with Neighboring Countries, Heilongjiang University, Harbin, November 28-29, 2013.**

The international forum “Development and Opening-up in the China Border Area and Regional Cooperation with Neighboring Countries” took place in Harbin, China, on November 28-29, 2013. Organized by the Research Center for Chinese Borderland History and Geography of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (RCCBHG CASS) and hosted by Heilongjiang University, the international forum, with simultaneous interpreting between Chinese and Russian, was an exchange between Chinese and foreign experts examining the problems and prospects of development and cooperation in China’s border areas as well as its adjacent regions both at national and international levels. Although at our very own Slavic Research Center (SRC) of Hokkaido University, within the GCOE Border Studies Program, I have had the opportunity to take a part in a number of academic meetings focusing on border issues and interact with border specialists, it was my first participation in such a meeting in China that was organized by the RCCBHG CASS, one of the few (if not the only) research institutions focused ‘purely’ on border studies in Asia.



Although the geographic scope of the forum was limited to China’s borderland and its neighboring regions, the participants raised highly diverse issues exploring border matters from a wide range of perspectives. Border security and sustainable development, border trade and energy cooperation, migration and tourism and many other matters were discussed.

As my research interests focus on Sino-Central Asian relations, I was pleased to find out that the Central Asian region attracted much attention at the forum and was extensively discussed by Chinese colleagues as well. Given China's grand strategy to develop its western regions, Central Asia that borders Xinjiang is of increasing strategic and economic importance to Beijing. China's top leader Xi Jinping's recent "Silk Road Economic Belt" proposal that aims to set the roadmap for the Sino-Central Asian relations in the coming decade indicates Central Asia's increasing role not only in developing China's far western province but also in its overall foreign policy. The participants from Central Asia see considerable potential in the "Silk Road Economic Belt" as current conditions for China-Central Asia cooperation are comparatively favorable. Although huge efforts are still needed to develop the region (e.g., infrastructure, environmental protection, etc.), border disputes between Central Asian countries and China have been completely resolved and all parties have a strong political will to strengthen cooperation for peace and prosperity in the region.

Informal communication between participants at lunch or dinner time as well as during a city tour of Harbin at night on the first day was another great chance to exchange ideas. In particular, meeting with some old friends was one of my most enjoyable moments at this forum.



Finally, attending this forum was another great experience to learn about 'borders' importance' and I would like to thank the RCCBHG CASS and its Director Prof. Xing Guangcheng as well as the SRC and my research supervisor, Prof. Iwashita Akihiro for this opportunity. I look forward to our next meeting with Chinese colleagues.

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