

Update from the International Geographic Union's (IGU) Santiago Conference

This year, the IGU's Regional Geographic Conference was held in Santiago, Chile between the 14th and the 18th of November. Following on from last year's Conference in Tel-Aviv, Israel, this was only the second occasion for the event to be held in South America, following one held in Brazil many years ago. Even for a conference that pops up all over the globe, organizing such events in South America remains a struggle. The influence of the host institute at these conference's remains paramount and in contrast to last year, this year's setting of a Military School and the strict policy of admission meant the event proceeded with due solemnity. While last year's first day was dominated by the opening lectures, this year's was to-the-point, and was followed by a storm of indigenous music and dancing. With the cocktail party also a perfunctory affair, having paid registration fees of nearly 500 dollars, participants were heard expressing their dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, with 9 sessions spread over 5 days held simultaneously in English and Spanish, the event displayed a level of competence and professionalism unmatched by us civilians.



The panel jointly organized by the 'Major Regional Powers in Eurasia' Cross-disciplinary Research Program and our own Global COE 'Reshaping Japan's Border Studies' (although as the IGU Conference does not accept panel proposals, all the participants had their paper's accepted individually) took the theme of North-east Asian borders and engaged in a heated debate tracked by the local research community. Presentations were given by the China scholar Christopher Len (University of Dundee) covering Central Asia and also touching upon Japan, by Alexander Bukh (Tsukuba University, Japan) on his developing study of Russo-Japanese relations, by Mikhail A. Alexseev (San Diego State University), the initiator of migration studies in the Russian Far East, and with one from myself rounding out the panel. While none of the four of us are geographers, with members of the political geography commission such as Anton Gosar (University of Primorska, Slovenia) and Vladimir Korosov (Russia) eagerly joining the discussion, we certainly succeeded in blowing a fresh breeze through the world of political geography.



At the poster session we unveiled our poster for the 12th BRIT Conference, to be held next year jointly by Fukuoka and Pusan under the Global COE's aegis, while in front of this was a screen set up to show photos and slides, as well as the films produced by the GCOE, to the assembled delegates. I really felt that we succeeded in both getting across the thrill of border studies, and all in a presentation style that had not been done before.



The geographic conference itself lasted for four days, but for about a week either side of this, a variety of tours and retreats were on offer to the assembled participants. Bringing together opportunities to see local realities while learning about them from experts with the conference itself is certainly the convention style developed by BRIT and ABS, who seek to interweave opportunities to examine border regions into the schedule. With the 2013 Regional Geographic Conference confirmed for Kyoto, our Global COE Program is looking forward to offering its cooperation again.

Akihiro Iwashita (GCOE)