

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE HOKKAIDO CONFERENCE**  
**ON NORTH PACIFIC ISSUES**

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Note:

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2. The views expressed in this paper represent the personal opinions of the author do not necessarily reflect NIRA's position.

It is a pleasure to be in Sapporo again and for the first time in this spectacular hall, Sapporo Convention Center. This is my eighth opportunity to participate in the Hokkaido Conference on North Pacific Issues and it is an honour to be the final speaker in what has been an interesting day of presentations and discussion. We have heard a great deal about the difficult and complex issues facing the governments and people of a still dangerous region in which there are no easy solutions.

Part of our purpose today is to celebrate the fifteen years of the Hokkaido Conference. And there is much to celebrate. Considering its longevity, continuity, combination of private and public meetings, and occasional inter-sessional activity, the Hokkaido conferences can also be viewed as the Hokkaido process. I have been asked to examine the nature and evolution of the Hokkaido process and also to offer some ideas about its future direction. What contributions has it made in past? How can it stay relevant to a changing regional situation?

### **The Hokkaido Process**

At some point it would be worth considering commissioning a history of the Hokkaido meetings that would systematically examine its initial objectives, evolution, leadership, participants and agenda. As a participant in about half of the meetings, I'll try to identify some of the features of the Hokkaido process that can be seen as distinctive and significant.

First, it is the longest running series of annual multilateral meetings on economic, political and security issues in a regional alternatively identified as Northeast Asia and the North Pacific. A pioneer in regional dialogue, it began before the Cold War ended and continues into what might be labeled the post-9/11 era.

Second, all of the meetings have taken place in or close to a single city. Sapporo is a gateway between continental Northeast Asia and the maritime North Pacific but is not a national capital. Nor have all the participants come from research institutes in their national capitals. The geographical setting and distance from the seat of political and economic power in Tokyo have perhaps given the process a somewhat more relaxed and creative atmosphere. The organizers have also made special efforts to make the participants and ideas available to a broader audience through public forums like this one.

Third, participants have come from a region defined as the North Pacific. This includes seven countries, Japan, China, Russia, North and South Korea, Canada, the United States and, in the spirit of geographical flexibility, Mongolia. The North Pacific is not a coherent region as seen in a common identity, consciousness or formal governmental institutions. Beyond the common experiences of a winter with snow, what makes the grouping interesting is the growing number of interactions among the countries in the region and the fact that it connects Northeast Asia and North America, treating Canada and the United States as integral parts of the region rather than as "external" powers.

Fourth, it has taken an inclusive approach. It has involved the participation of researchers and occasionally officials from smaller and medium sized countries like Mongolia, Canada and South Korea along with the major powers of China, Russia, Japan and the United States. Especially important has been the concerted effort to include North Koreans in the discussion. Though not always successful, the door has been open. Rather than being restricted to allies and friends, the spirit of the meeting has been inclusive of the “non-like-minded”.<sup>1</sup> Discussions have been candid and frank but the intention has been to build understanding rather than condemn or confront. At the beginning, as now, North Korea is not deeply integrated economically, socially or institutionally into the region, as if surrounded by an invisible wall. The Hokkaido meetings have been part of the effort to remove that wall, not by force of arms but by dialogue and exchange.

Fifth, the agenda has consistently focused on a range of political, security and economic issues with a frequent emphasis on the Korean peninsula. What has been distinctive is that the discussions have not just concentrated on problems and immediate issues but have invariably been forward looking in considering new directions for institution-building and cooperation.

Sixth, though the topics have been policy relevant and many of the participants have been influential in policy circles in their respective countries, only a few officials have attended the meetings and there has been no concerted effort to formulate policy options or recommendations. Rather, the focus has been on broad discussion among participants largely drawn from leading research institutes. The closed-door discussions have usually been open-ended and explicitly aimed at establishing an atmosphere that encourage participants to speak freely about their concerns and perspectives. This has not always succeeded but the cumulative effect has been to produce a comfort level where sensitive issues can be aired.

Seventh, there has been a mix of long-term and revolving participants but the bedrock in funding and management has been the long standing cooperation between the North Pacific Advanced Research Center and the National Institute of Research Advancement. Organizers of meetings are aware of how challenging multi-party cooperation can be. NORPAC and NIRA are to be applauded for the skill and foresight in managing a complex joint venture.

### **Regional Dialogues in a Changing Context**

How is the region changing and what implications does this have for the Hokkaido process?

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<sup>1</sup> In those years when DPRK participants have not been present, the participation of academics associated with Korea University in Tokyo has been an unusual and valuable part of the process.

The most obvious change is that there are now at least a dozen other dialogue channels involving some of the same participants, focusing on similar issues, and emphasizing an “inclusive” approach aimed at bridging divides among the like and non-like minded. Most aim to have North Korean participation, though have not been more successful achieving it on a regular basis. Some of these are tied to larger processes like the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP), some to regional institutions like ERINA’s annual meetings, and others to a durable set of partnerships like the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue organized by the University of California or the East Asian Energy Forum organized by the Nautilus Institute. If we look to a broader East Asian or Asia Pacific configuration, the number and range of multilateral dialogues is even larger, with approximately a hundred “track two” meetings in regional security alone in 2002.<sup>2</sup>

Related, institutes involved in dialogue activities, the Hokkaido process among them, are much better connected and networked than even five years ago. In addition to conferences and workshops, the number of exchanges has expanded considerably and the internet allows regular communication, distribution of materials and personal contacts.

Looking more broadly, the expansion of track-two policy dialogues and the emergence of various networks and epistemic communities are only one part of a much more densely textured set of relations in the region. Tadashi Yamamoto, one of the most creative and effective of the community builders in this part of the world, outlined in his remarks earlier today just how much the pattern of international relations is changing. The level of economic and human interactions across the Pacific and especially within Northeast Asia and East Asia have increased substantially. Last month, for example, Korea did more trade with China than it did with the United States. And we have been told by our Hokkaido hosts that visitors from other parts of Asia are becoming the dominant part of the tourism business here.

The level of activity at the governmental level has also deepened and widened, some of it conducted through bilateral summits and diplomacy as well as through a thickening web of inter-governmental institutions. There is not a Northeast Asian or North Pacific regional institution, though some have hopes that the Six Party Talks on the Korean peninsula will move forward. But the countries of the sub-region are involved in larger regional processes, chief among them APEC, the ARF and the new ASEAN Plus Three process. Overall, the region is no longer allergic to multilateral institution building and in fact is aspiring to quicken the pace of multilateral cooperation.

The leadership propelling this regionalization and regionalism is coming from several quarters, among them the private sector, the research and academic communities, local governments and in some

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<sup>2</sup> Many of these meetings have been chronicled in the *Dialogue and Research Monitor* available on-line at <http://www.jcie.or.jp>.

instances national governments. One of the most important developments has been the rise of Chinese interest in regional institutions. The transformation of Chinese diplomacy has been as striking as the transformation of the Chinese economy. Ten years ago Chinese diplomats and officials were a combination of skeptical and hostile in approaching regional institutions, especially on political and security matters. Even five years ago they were tentative and often defensive in the roles they played. In the current phase Chinese are not only participating regularly in virtually all regional meetings they are playing leadership roles in several of them, particularly the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the ASEAN Plus Three process, and the Six Party Talks.

The role of the United States remains important and complex. The Bush administration has not been a strong supporter of multilateral institutions, preferring unilateral action, coalitions of the willing and alliance arrangements for dealing with its security agenda in many parts of the world. And there are some in Washington who are nervous about the rise of institutions in East Asia in which the United States is not involved. Yet, as Professor Scalapino argued earlier today, the Bush administration is pursuing a multilateral approach to the current North Korean nuclear problem.

### **Implications for Regional Dialogues**

These developments have implications for regional dialogues. As multilateralism is building momentum the case for meetings to establish comfort levels and lines of communication is no longer as persuasive. This is not say that there is too much dialogue or that soft, open-ended processes like the Hokkaido conference are no longer relevant. But it is to recognize that multilateral dialogues have entered a new phase in which there are higher expectations of innovation and impact.

One function of track-two dialogues is to facilitate and promote inter-governmental action. There is certainly a great deal of analytic work that needs to be done by governments as well as research organizations on incipient processes like the Six Party Talks. Whether we are on a path to deeper engagement with North Korea or coercive diplomacy against it through instruments like the Proliferation Security Initiative, there are numerous topics that demand careful yet open discussion in settings like the Sapporo meetings.

Measuring the impact on government is not easy. How can we demonstrate that dialogues make a difference? My Canadian colleagues, under pressure from government agencies to show effectiveness and justify public funding, have been trying to develop an index that measures the influence of dialogues on policy changes and specific governmental decisions, the rhetoric or words that are used by policy makers, and the human connections that are established in non-governmental meetings that equip individuals entry into senior governmental positions.

Some of our Asian colleagues (and many of our North American ones too) are skeptical about this kind of measurement exercise, claiming that the causal relations are far from clear and that the time frame needed to measure progress is decades rather than months or year. Some also add the real objective is not a change in thinking or behaviour but a more basic form of trust-building that is content with an exchange of views and mutual understanding. But even those who see trust building as an end in itself are under new pressure to demonstrate that trust is in fact being built, not just that people are sitting in the same room.

Another potential role for dialogues is that they deepen the level and quality of non-governmental interactions in producing high-quality research that may help government or the private sector but that is valuable in its own right. In this respect it may be time for discussions that reach a broader audience in our universities and research institutes, including students, journalists and the attentive public. Here the quality of not just dialogue but also publications is essential.

And there is a broader audience that needs to be engaged in the process. While governments continue to play pivotal roles in regional relations, some of the most creative and effective actors in forging cooperation and working at the ground level on issues related to environment, development and engaging North Korea are our non-governmental organizations. And they are also doing important analytic work. They have begun to play a more prominent role in regional dialogues in Southeast Asian and Asia Pacific but in Northeast Asia and the North Pacific they have not yet been fully or effectively integrated into dialogue activities. Tadashi Yamamoto correctly claimed earlier today that we need more “track 2.5” dialogues that are both more independent of governments and that connect to emerging forces in our civil societies.

### **Whither the Hokkaido Process**

It is widely acknowledge among the participants in the Hokkaido meetings that they have played a valuable and unique role in pioneering discussion and exchange among research institutes in the region. It has done an admirable job of establishing a relaxed atmosphere and bringing together an interesting set of people. But what should be done in a next phase when there is more competition for attention and resources and in which governments and civil societies need a more precise kind of assistance?

First, the agenda and organization may need adjustment. A general exchange on a broad set of issues may be right for part of the meeting but there is also a need for concentration on a single topic for at least part of the time. It is intellectually and administratively difficult to define such a topic and to insure that participants prepare in advance and stick to it. One device may be to commission two or three papers in advance of the meeting to focus discussion. The product, as Professor Scalapino suggested, could be a summary report designed not to seek consensus at a lowest common

denominator but to point to the range of opinions and their implications for policy options for the relevant actors, whether those be governments, universities or civil society actors.

As for topics that would benefit from this kind of approach, many suggestions have been offered. Let me suggest three. The first is continued discussion on Korean peninsula with particular attention to the different kinds of multilateral and regional cooperation that will be necessary to deal with the North Korean nuclear issue and the broader problem of integrating North Korea into the region. A second is the emerging agenda for human security, or what some prefer to call non-traditional security in the region related to the environment, migration, communicable diseases etc. This is not just a matter of looking at “new” issues but also looking at the changing structures of governance for addressing them and the changing roles of government and non-governmental actors. A third relates to the emergence of the knowledge economy and the implications that this has for reducing barriers to exchange of people, ideas and services beyond conventional areas of free trade.

The list is of course not exhaustive. And it would be impossible to look at all of these issues in a single year. But they give an indication of the kind of policy-relevant areas that need intellectual and policy attention and could be the focus of constructive conversations in future years.

Finally, it is obvious that the participants in the Hokkaido process have enjoyed and benefited from their involvement. Some have suggested that it is time to consider rotating the location. In any event, it is both reasonable and a measure of relevance to see if the participating institutes are able to make a financial or in kind contribution to the expansion of the Hokkaido process.

I thank you for your kind attention.