

**IN RETROSPECT OF
THE 15TH 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.

1. From Free Dialogue to Better Understanding and Confidence Building

Fifteen years ago in 1989, it was relatively difficult for researchers and experts of seven North Pacific countries (United States, Canada, Russia, China, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan) to meet at one place because of the differences in political situation and socio-economic conditions among these countries. Dialogue took place mostly through bilateral conferences or meetings among only few of the countries. Hence, the National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA), with the strong support of the people of Hokkaido, took the initiative to create a forum enabling such rare gatherings to take place. By having the venue for the forum at Sapporo or Hokkaido, far away from Tokyo and other major cities, NIRA encouraged international participants to engage in unfettered and free discussion without the pressure of possible political biases that such cities may bring about. In addition, at the first conference in 1989, when then President of NIRA, Mr. Shimokobe, emphasized that each participant should speak as an individual scholar not as a representative of his country, a free and uninhibited environment was established, thereby making the Hokkaido Conferences a unique forum through which meaningful dialogue could take place. Thus, the first Conference was held without any preset or fixed agenda.

Discussions at the Hokkaido Conferences have convened a wide range of issues, ranging from strengthening and developing a regional security system to fostering economic cooperation in the North Pacific region. In recent years, discussion topics have extended to global issues such as energy, food, environment and infra-development for the creation of an inclusive regional cooperation framework. In doing so, the Conferences have contributed significantly to enhanced understanding and cooperation, the first step toward resolving the problems that plague the North Pacific region where distrust and tension still remain.

On a personal note, the Hokkaido Conferences provided me with the rare opportunity to meet and speak with leading scholars from North Korea, Russia, China and Mongolia for the first time in my life. It was also at the Hokkaido Conferences that I was able to meet old and new friends, including the chairmen of North Pacific Region Advanced Research Center (NORPAC), the presidents of NIRA, directors and leaders of Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and Mongolian leaders, all of which have allowed the Korea Development Institute (KDI) to engage in bilateral research cooperation with institutes

from different countries. Unfortunately, KDI thus far has been unable to build any cooperative research or educational program with North Korea (DPRK) but the Hokkaido Conference has enabled the two countries to make significant inroads toward gaining better understanding.

What has allowed the Hokkaido Conference to flourish for the past 15 years is primarily due to the provision of an environment that nurtures and fosters free and meaningful discussion in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. That is, the Conference embodies the intended characteristics of Track II, a forum that allows researchers from think tanks from eight different countries (Mongolia being the eighth country to join the Conference) to engage in free dialogue in a supportive setting -- discussions that have had positive ramifications for the region as a whole. The Conference has contributed significantly to setting the backdrop and building the confidence requisite for creating a new order of cooperation in the North Pacific region.

2. From Dialogue to Action

Over the past fifteen years through the Hokkaido Conference, some noteworthy and distinctive features have developed:

(a) The Importance of Multilateral Approach

In the North Pacific Region, unlike Europe and other parts of the world, there are principally bilateral cooperation and treaties with little multilateral arrangement. A forward-looking approach to the value of multilateral cooperation in terms of both security and economic development in the North Pacific Region has been developed with hopes of implementation of such forms of cooperation.

(b) The Need of a Network Center and Expanding the Scope of Interchange

The Conferences have fostered the growth of institutional and individual networks. In order to further strengthen the network among research institutes, it would be useful to create a network center that promotes the exchange of information on research subjects and research results. Such a network center could effectively facilitate the creation of a database on research information regarding the North Pacific region and promotion of joint research projects for the realization of regional cooperation. In

addition to strengthening the existing network, the scope of interchange of academic researches among countries should also be supported.

Meanwhile, the region itself has undergone several important changes:

- > Increased diplomatic interaction in Northeast Asia and the choice for a limited form of multilateralism in the context of the 6 Party Talks;
- > China's growing regional role, not just as an economic and trade dynamo but also as a responsible multilateral player and initiator;
- > Intensification of economic, political, and human interactions with the signs of a nascent East Asian regionalism that involves an effort at institution and identity building (examples include the ASEAN Plus Three process and a host of bilateral and regional initiatives); and
- > A more assertive U.S. post 9/11 and changed relations among the great powers, partly due to their common interest in counter-terrorism.

Amidst these changes, what seems to be perennial or constant are unresolved problems from the Cold War era -- territorial disputes, divided countries, and lingering perceptions and attitudes. The most important of these at the current moment is the continuing uncertainty and danger and risk on the Korean peninsula.

3. Hokkaido Declaration

In the face of these changes, where might the Hokkaido Conference go and what should be its targets in the future? In commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the Hokkaido Conference and, in order to promote peace, stability and the economic development of the region among the governments, citizens and people in the North Pacific region, participants at the conference have recommended establishing a new organizational framework among government and civil society that facilitates North Pacific cooperation.

In recognizing the array of complex security challenges currently facing the region, the participants have come forth to declare the following as concrete measures:

- (1) Establishment of Bilateral and Multilateral Free Trade Agreements in the North Pacific region to promote trade liberalization and openness;

- (2) Establishment of a North Pacific Energy and Environment Community for balanced economic growth in the region, including the development of natural gas through cross-border projects as well as building international infrastructure such as pipelines, power transmission lines and railways. Joint studies and projects on environmental issues must be also performed;
- (3) Establishment of a Regional Development Bank in order to fund energy development and improve infrastructures in the North Pacific region as well as to resolve environmental issues;
- (4) Establishment of a Dialogues-Based Security Organization, a multilateral consultative organization that will discuss and address security issues on a permanent basis in order to apply preemptive diplomacy in the North Pacific region where political and military tension still exists.

In order to realize the foregoing, mindful of the fact that civil society plays an influential role in enhancing regional cooperation, the participants at the Conference have recommended that a framework for Track II dialogue in the North Pacific region should be secured by utilizing the network of research institutes that has been cultivated over the long history of the Hokkaido Conference.

4. Role of NIRA and NORPAC

In closing, I would like to briefly express my personal views on what I believe should be the future roles of NIRA and NORPAC. But first, I would like to note that the Hokkaido Conference, with its free, multilateral, and Track II approaches, would not have been so successful if not for the strong support of the people of Hokkaido and the leadership of NIRA. To this end, the conference has continued for fifteen years and established itself as a preeminent forum in which open and frank dialogue could take place and thereby open doors for confidence building and closer cooperation among the research institutes of the eight countries in the North Pacific region.

In order to realize the objectives set forth and declared at the Fifteenth Conference and move “from dialogue to action,” the roles of NIRA and NORPAC should be further strengthened. NIRA, the leading research institute in Japan, the second biggest economy in the world, should assume a greater role. NIRA should play a predominant role in establishing itself as the network center of research institutes in the region and promoting effective cooperation of research activities for the security and

economic development in the region.

Participants at the Conference truly appreciate the warm hospitality of the people of Hokkaido. Along with the people of Hokkaido, NORPAC's generosity has made it possible for so many participants to attend the Conference year after year. In the future, the leaders of NORPAC should assume the new frontier spirit of the North Pacific region in much the same way that Hokkaido was known as the frontier of Japan. Hokkaido, which has served as the venue for the conference, is located in what could become a pivotal area for the North Pacific region. Accordingly, the leaders of NORPAC should be able to draw greater interest from local governments, private organizations, universities, and the general public toward the ultimate objective of attaining regional cooperation.