

Report on **“The Second International Conference of Political Geography on Migration and Borders, 2016”**

Hosted by: Yunnan Normal University, Beijing Normal University,
Sun-Yat Sen University and Carleton University

Yunnan Normal University, Kunming, China

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In late August 2016, Yunnan Normal University in the southwestern Chinese city of Kunming welcomed a number of Chinese and foreign participants to a conference on Migration and Borders. The majority of those in attendance were geographers, many of whom had also attended the International Geographical Congress in Beijing the previous week, but they also included those like the current author who had also managed to gain admittance. The goal of the conference was to seek to bring the two main themes of borders and migration into dialogue, and see if there were new ways by which these vital issues in the contemporary world could be made to speak to one another.

The evening of the August 27 saw the opening keynote address by Rachel Silvey (University of Toronto), who's initial work on rural-to-urban migration within Indonesia has subsequently followed these migrants overseas, where she examines the frequently precarious and exploited situations in which they end up. The prevalence of this migration and its absolute increase appears to be reproducing and intensifying, rather than mitigating, existing inequalities, also apparent in the manner in which restrictive immigration policies merely serve to fuel illegal migration. The centrality of borders in demarcating space and justifying their maintenance was made readily apparent.

The following day saw an opening plenary session that sought to broaden the terms on which the debate was held, with presentations ranging from great power competition to the current situation within a stretched European Union. Participants then divided into a number of concurrent sessions. KUBS member Edward Boyle spoke first in the session on 'Migration and Security', giving a paper entitled "Local concerns, regional visions, national security: towards a multi-scale theory of borders in Asia" that utilized the Indian Northeast as a means to attempt to grapple with larger questions of how to scale our understandings of borders. Also noteworthy was the preponderance of papers that interpreted 'security' through the rubric of energy. Valuable commentary was provided by Jussi Laine (University of Eastern Finland).

After lunch saw another round of concurrent sessions, with particularly interesting papers from Ian Baird (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Victor Konrad (Carleton University) detailing the transformations in borderland governance occurring within Yunnan itself, along China's

borders with its neighbors. Two further papers in the session, by Yang Zaiyue (Yunnan Normal University) and Liao Yahui (Yunnan University), provided the historical background to the presence of the Kokangs in Myanmar and their recent (2015) seeking refuge in China due to conflict occurring across the border. Finally, Li Cansong examined changing land use patterns in Myanmar in a presentation that seemed to suggest that aspects of James Scott's famous 'zomia' have not yet quite gone away. Mention must also be made of a panel largely made up of papers on India, with the papers read by Mirza Zulfiqir Rahman (IIT Guwahati) and Jasnea Sarma (National University of Singapore) being both on Northeast India and thus of particular interest to this author, who's research in the region was only possible in the first place through the good offices of Mirza. The three of us reviewed the possibilities for further work in the region, with a research trip being planned for January.

The concluding plenary of the day asked the question whether 'Migration and Borders – A New World Order?'. Three shorter presentations by Vladimir Kolosov (Russian Academy of Sciences), Martin van der Velde (Radboud University) and Randy Widdis (University of Regina) sought to provide some first steps towards answering that question, offering between them a more global and historically-focused appreciation of the complexities involved in answering such a question. The final plenary by Brenda Yeoh (National University of Singapore) subsequently shrank the discussion geographically, focusing on the experiences of migrant domestic workers in Singapore as well as the social changes that both triggered and were brought about by their expanding importation. The transformation of the quintessentially global city being brought about through issues of borders and migration acting in concert both served to emphasize the multiple scales at which we see such aspects occurring as well as the necessity of getting a better grasp on the social processes both informing and resulting from such transformations. This was the crux of the question mark sat behind notions of a 'World Order'.

Following a field trip to the Yunnan Nationalities Villages on the morning of the 29th, a further attempt was made to get to grips with this question in the final Roundtable Discussion that afternoon. A number of issues raised during the workshop were made explicit, including the feminization and commercialization of migration as an industry, the twin phenomena of migration without moving and movement without migration, and the resulting fragmentation of political space that appears to be encouraging its more extensive securitization. Note was also made of the methodological contrast between the positivism of the Chinese scholars versus the anthropological or postmodernist influences that were visible among most of the foreign participants. This contrast only served to make the need for cooperation all the more obvious, and this workshop was a valuable step in that direction. It remains for this participant to thank the organizers, and Victor Konrad in particular, for the opportunity to take part.