

Report on **“Cartographic exchange and territorial creation: rewriting northern Japan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”**

Paper presented by KUBS’s Edward Boyle (Faculty of Law, Kyushu University)

The Dissemination of Cartographic Knowledge:

Production – Trade – Consumption - Preservation

Session II – Territory, Sovereignty and Borderlands (chaired by Ferjan Ormeling)

Friday, October 13, 2016, Center for Advanced Academic Studies, Dubrovnik



The 6th International Symposium on the History of Cartography was held at the Center for Advanced Academic Studies in the city of Dubrovnik, nestled magnificently against the Dalmatian coast of Croatia, from 13-15 October 2016. KUBS’s Edward Boyle gave a paper in the Second Session of the opening day on Territory, Sovereignty and Borderlands, entitled “Cartographic exchange and territorial creation: rewriting northern Japan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”. In it, he sought to examine the construction of the region known as Yezo to the north of Japan and the transformation of this region from a vague frontier area to a bounded space represented on both Japanese and western maps, and connect this transformation to the emergence of the imperial state and its extension and recognition of territorial control. What is crucial is the relational nature of this construction, the manner in which states came to grant different parts of the earth’s surface different, and largely agreed upon, ontological status.

While concerned with this process over a longer historical period, these mechanisms by which certain portions of the earth’s surface come to be divided off from others and granted specific meanings are obviously still operative in the present, and responsible for much of the current geopolitical tension in East Asia. Although not really central to this paper, it is part of a larger project that seeks to connect the period in which the notion of the territorial extent of a sovereign state came to be widely-recognized with our current political moment. This was also emphasized in another of the session’s papers by Eric Losang and Imre Demhardt, on “Changes of Sovereignty and Cartographic Advance: Cartographic Implications of the Spanish-American War”. Their analysis of how cartography functioned during and in the aftermath of this conflict in the distinct theatres of the Philippines and Puerto Rico both highlighted a certain continuity with regards to more recent examples of imperial or overseas adventurism and the contingent processes by which such cartographic roles find their expression. The final paper by Natalia Erman similarly pointed to the central role played by one center of production, the Russian city of Smolensk, in the cartographic recreation and remapping of Russia’s western borderlands over a long period.

With discussion excellently directed by the session chair, Ferjan Ormeling, the session really highlighted how the contemporary production of borders, that is most starkly visible in times of intense geopolitical stress, fits into a much longer history of boundary production both on and off the map. This was also brought home in the subsequent session on semiotics and place names, which brought Ferjan’s paper on colonialism in Dutch school atlases into dialogue with Mirela Altic’s examination of early modern Dubrovnik’s location along the cartographic faultline between Venice, Austria and the Ottomans and Peter Kang’s look into Dutch toponym’s on early maps of Taiwan. Again, the geographically-situated examples which were brought to the fore in these diverse examples once again spoke directly to more contemporary concerns, in a manner that made it clear that while the conference was superficially about cartography’s history, the wider processes in which this history was made not only find an echo in the present, but continue to shape more immediate events in our contemporary political situation.