

# The Tumen River Area. Building a new paradigm of multiculturalism and cooperation for Northeast Asia is its borderlands

Ilhong Ko

The Tumen River Area has a dual identity. Located where the borders of China, North Korea, and Russia meet, the area's peripheral nature played an active role in the establishment of ethnic Korean communities in the region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the 21st century, the area has gained a new identity. It acts as a gateway between China and South Korea, and China and North Korea, and is therefore one of the few places in the world where ordinary Koreans from the North and South may unknowingly brush shoulders with one another. This dual identity, as both the borderlands and a key hub of Northeast Asia, provides the Tumen River Area with an ideal background against which a new paradigm of multiculturalism and cooperation in Northeast Asia can emerge.

In this issue of News from Northeast Asia, we examine the efforts that are taking place in the Tumen River Area to establish such an atmosphere of multiculturalism and cooperation.

In 'Tumen River Forum: providing a platform for peace, prosperity, and harmony in East Asia', Xu Yulan of Yanbian University introduces the goals of this forum and its

outline. The role of the Tumen River Area in establishing new strategies for multilateral economic cooperation is addressed by Yanbian University's Quan Zhenan in 'New opportunities and strategies for multilateral economic cooperation in the Northeast Asia region'. Finally, the way in which the ethnic Korean authors of the Tumen River Area have found a way to arrive at true multiculturalism and reconciliation

is examined by Jin Hu Xiong, of Yanbian University, in 'Contradictions, communication, and reconciliation between the ethnic Koreans of the Tumen River Area and the South Korean people'.

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## Tumen River Forum: providing a platform for peace, prosperity, and harmony in East Asia

Xu Yulan

The Tumen River Forum, launched in 2008, is an international academic forum co-hosted by China's Yanbian University and the Republic of Korea's Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies. The purpose of this forum, which will usher in its twelfth annual session this year, is to uphold multiculturalism in East Asia, by focusing on practical issues, by seeking consensus, and by enhancing cooperation. The forum endeavors to build up a collaborative and innovative platform where intelligentsia, political leaders, and business elites can come together to discuss international cooperation in the Tumen River Area.

As the geographical center of Northeast Asia and a nexus of its cultures, the Tumen River Area is greatly important in terms of its geographical advantages and potential for significant development. Regional joint efforts are essential in order to utilize the area's advantages and potential for increased competitiveness. It is believed that by enhancing mutual understanding, the countries of the wider region will be able to build up an environment of sound cooperation, characterized by win-win cooperation and openness, and construct a community of shared cultures and economy marked by harmony, economic integration, and cultural inclusiveness, which features the Tumen River Area at its core.

Over the past decade, the Tumen River Forum has played a key role in boosting cultural exchanges in this distinctive region, creating a peaceful and collaborative environment, and promoting regional

harmony and common prosperity. The forum's eleven successful annual sessions have been attended by many distinguished scholars from China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Japan, the United States, Russia, and Mongolia. Buoyed by the multicultural atmosphere that characterizes the forum, these scholars have freely exchanged the results of their research and have engaged in extensive, in-depth discussions over the pressing problems concerning regional cooperation and development in the area, in addition to providing perspectives and advice for the overall development of the area. The key themes for the forum in 2017 and 2018 were, respectively, 'International exchanges and cooperation in the Tumen River Area: towards a community of a shared future' and 'Review and outlook: pathways to common prosperity in the Tumen River Area.' The forum has also set up close strategic partnerships with participating universities and research institutions from the above mentioned countries.

The Tumen River Forum has come to exert an increasing academic and social impact. It is now an important platform supporting and enhancing regional collaboration and exchanges, featuring sub-forums on philosophy, economy, literature, culture, etc. To expand the scale and scope of regional collaboration, the forum has also recently set up two roundtables. One is a roundtable for officials, entrepreneurs, and scholars, focusing on regional economic cooperation; the topic in 2018 was 'The Development of Wangqing in the New Era'. The other



Above: Participants of one of the sub-forums of the 2018 Tumen River Forum (Image provided by the organizers of the Tumen River Forum). Below: Official photograph of the participants of the 2018 Tumen River Forum. Image provided by the organizers of the Tumen River Forum.

roundtable, entitled 'China-DPRK scholar's dialogue', centers on regional political collaboration and is attended exclusively by scholars from China and the DPRK. In 2018, the two topics addressed at this roundtable were 'DPRK's tourism and China-DPRK tourism cooperation' and 'China-DPRK cooperation and peaceful development of Northeast Asia'. The 2018 roundtable was attended by five scholars from China and five scholars from the DPRK, the latter of whom were all based at Kim Il-sung University.

The Tumen River Area, bordered by China, DPRK, and Russia, and acting as an important hub of exchange in human resources between China and South Korea, provides an ideal background against which discourse on multiculturalism in Northeast

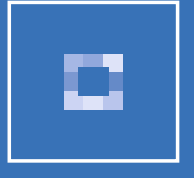
Asia can develop. Ultimately, the Tumen River Forum aims to provide a platform where a new paradigm of 'Northeast Asian multiculturalism' can emerge and concrete efforts for its continuation can be shared.

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### Notes

- 1 The key themes and session themes of the Tumen River Forum from 2008 to 2016 can be found at the Korean Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS) webpage; <https://tinyurl.com/kfasSFT>

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