

The Borderlands of Northeast Asia

Ilhong Ko

Borderlands are places where different social, political, and economic systems come into contact with one another. Borders may act as barriers, hindering interaction, but they may also act as bridges facilitating contact between different cultures and traditions. Borderlands are diverse in nature; some borders can be extremely porous whereas others are guarded with great vigilance. In this issue of *News from Northeast Asia*, we examine the borderlands of Northeast Asia.

The way in which even the hardest of borders can be a node of cross sections rather than a place of severance is examined by Hyunjo Jung of Seoul National University in “Porous Borders and a Negotiated Sense of Place: Re-imagining Kaeseong Industrial Complex as the Borderlands”.

In “Tsushima, an Island of Hybridity”, Todoroki Hisroshi of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University explores how the people

of Tsushima Island have negotiated a borderland existence from ancient times. The borderlands of Okinawa, located around its American bases, are remnants of war.

However, Keun-Sik Jung of Seoul National University reminds us, in “Shuri Castle as a Symbol of Peace in East Asia”, of a different, more peaceful, type of borderland identity that had been present in the islands during the era of the Ryukyu Kingdom.

The meeting of asymmetrical systems that takes place in the borderlands results in great economic opportunities, as well as hybrid regional cultures. This fact is well illustrated by Li Yinhe of Yanbian University in “Hun Chun: An International Cross Border Economic Region”.

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Porous borders and a negotiated sense of place. Re-imagining Kaeseong Industrial Complex as the borderlands

Hyunjo Jung

‘Borderlands’ is the fuzzy area where different powers compete; a place of multiple oppressions and violence. As implied by the Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa,¹ a border is a porous area rather than a clearly fixed line; it becomes a node of cross sections rather than a place of severance. The hardest border, if any in the real world, would be the national boundary between the two Koreas. The DMZ, the most intensively armed zone in the world, symbolizes the clash between the two most powerful ideologies of the modern world. It has come to be regarded as an almost sacrosanct place where two irreconcilable nations maintain a distance from each other.

Such an infusible boundary, laden with power and hostility, is nevertheless sometimes dissolved. One momentous event was the construction of the Kaeseong Industrial Complex, located just 1.5 km north of the DMZ’s Northern Limit Line and 60km from Seoul. Until its suspension in 2016, 125 companies based at the complex were hiring 55,000 Northern Korean workers on an annual basis, and the cumulative gross product had reached 1,506,490,000 dollars. In order to operate the complex, both governments constructed a road and railroad within their territories, which were later connected. South Korean corporations (such as the Korea Electric Power Corporation, Korea Telecom, Korea Land Corporation, and Hyundai Asan) provided infrastructure, including power, communication, and all facilities for the industrial complex, while North Korea transferred the right to use land (66.1 km² for 50 years). Both governments cooperated in making new laws and rules for this area, which had become open to common governance for the first time since the separation of the two Koreas. The Kaeseong Industrial Complex Foundation, the administrative organization established by South Korea, ran almost 300 shuttle buses covering 5 routes to carry 55,000 North Korean workers every day. The buses were all manufactured by Hyundai, provided by the South Korean government and firms of the complex, yet driven by North Korean drivers.

The intermingled co-operation of Kaeseong Industrial Complex by North and South Korea generated numerous ‘contact zones’ for both parties: spaces where geographically and historically separated groups or individuals come into contact with one another.² They are places where borders may facilitate connections rather than act as barriers. Many scholars have explored Kaeseong Industrial Complex from the perspective of contact zones, where the mental landscape of the people of the North and the South come to be integrated through daily interactions.³ It is a place of ‘Choco Pie-zation’, a metaphor that symbolizes the cultural translation and capitalization of North Korean tastes through the circulation of Choco Pies, the South Korea daily snack that was a favorite among North Korean workers, provided by South Korean firms. In addition to Choco Pies, innumerable goods and ideas came to be circulated among the people in the complex, and eventually beyond its walls. They spread to the city of Gaeseong (Kaeseong), changing the fashion of women, the building materials of individual houses, and dietary habits (such as caffeine addiction, thanks to South Korean instant coffee mixes, another favorite snack provided daily within the complex).

These examples illuminate merely the surface of bigger and deeper transformations that occurred. The changes that emerged in Kaeseong Industrial Complex demonstrate how the borderlands may operate within and beyond its territory. This may also bring about changes to our thoughts and imaginations of the faces and minds of North Koreans and vice versa. Cracks were created in the world’s hardest boundary through the building of infrastructure and the flow of materials; it was made porous through roads, communication, and the migration of people between the borders, as well as through transculturation. The boundary was also made porous by North Korean workers commuting on South Korean shuttle buses, which traveled around vast areas of the city of Kaeseong and three other adjacent provinces.

As Doreen Massey claimed in her essay of global sense of place, the identity of place is never inwardly created or discovered but negotiated through social relations outside the place.⁴ Kaeseong Industrial Complex as a borderland shows how a tiny piece of land may act as a bridge towards bigger social transformations by making cracks in the borders from the bottom up. This case demonstrates the need to change our

geographical imagination of the borderlands, from margins to node of interactions where new social relations and experiments emerge.

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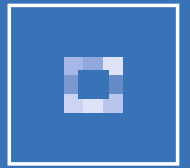
Notes

- 1 “to survive the Borderlands/you must live sin fronteras/be a crossroads”, Anzaldúa, G. 1999 (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, p.217.
- 2 Pratt, M.L. 1992. *Imperial Writing and Transculturalism*. Routledge; Carter, P. 1992. ‘Making contact: history and performance’, in Carter, P. (ed.) *Living in a New Country: History, Travelling and Language*. London: Faber and Faber.
- 3 Lee Y.W., et al. 2016. *Connecting Divided Minds: the Contact Zone of North and South Korea*. Seoul: Sahoi Pyeongron; Paek, Y. 2019. ‘Spatial Features of the Gaesong Industrial Complex as a Contact Zone’, *Cultural and Historical Geography* 21(2):76-93.
- 4 Massey, D. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. University of Minnesota Press.



Railway yard of Panmun Station at the Kaeseong Industrial Complex. Photo reproduced under a creative commons license courtesy Christian Latze on Wikipedia.

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The Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) is a research and international exchange institute based in Seoul, South Korea. The SNUAC’s most distinctive feature is its cooperative approach in fostering research projects and international exchange program through close interactions between regional and thematic research programs about Asia and the world. To pursue its mission to become a hub of Asian Studies, SNUAC research teams are divided by different regions and themes. Research centers and programs are closely integrated, providing a solid foundation for deeper analysis of Asian society.

Tsushima, an island of hybridity

Todoroki Hiroshi



Aso Bay viewed from Mount Jo. Photo reproduced under a creative commons license courtesy Saigen Jiro on Wikipedia.

Tsushima is located closer to the Korean peninsula than Japan; it is less than 50km away from the Korean island of Geoje. From the Kankoku Lookout in Waniura, at the northern end of Tsushima, the landmarks of Busan, South Korea's second largest city, can be seen on clear days and even its fireworks at night. Since the beginning of history, the island has been a geopolitical mirror of Korea and Japan; its people have survived by negotiating the politics between the two. Indeed, the reason that the people of Tsushima are described as 'cunning' in a number of historical and literary documents may be due to their strategies for survival.

Over 90% of Tsushima consists of mountains and a ria coastline meaning that there is almost no flatland for agriculture. Residents can only make a living with fishery and hunting. This has resulted in an economic dependence on Korea, its closest neighbor yet a foreign country. Tsushima's particular relationship with the Korean Peninsula and the rest of the islands of the Japanese Archipelago is illustrated in the earliest historical account of the island, which appears in the Biographies of the

Wuhuan, Xianbei and Dongyi in the 'Book of Wei' of the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*. The passage mentioning Tsushima describes the navigation route from Korea to Japan: Daifang Commandery – Geumgwang Gaya – Tsushima Province – present-day Iki Island – present-day Kyushu.¹ It demonstrates that Tsushima was a key point in maritime travels to Japan from ancient times. The passage also mentions Tsushima's farmlands and the underdeveloped nature of its traffic routes.

After the middle ages, Tsushima became a base for Japanese raiders and the powerful So clan was able to monopolize trade rights with Joseon by controlling the raiders. The system of governance by So clan endured through the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592 and up to the Meiji Restoration. The So clan established Japanese settlements at three Joseon ports for trade and diplomatic purposes, and it was due to such economic and diplomatic concessions acquired from making use of its geopolitical position that Tsushima could survive and the So clan's governance could be continued.

Tsushima's prosperity depended on peace between Korea and Japan, and therefore the island endeavored to avoid war even before

the 1592 invasion. Upon unifying Japan, Toyotomi Hideyoshi sent word to Tsushima to request the King of Joseon for his surrender. Joseon obviously declined. Even when Joseon eventually sent a diplomatic envoy [*Joseon Tongsin*] to Japan, it was under the condition that Tsushima was to give up the leader of Japanese raiders. However, when peace negotiations fell apart and the invasion of 1592 commenced, Tsushima became an informant of Toyotomi, guided the Japanese troops, and even participated in battles.

After the end of the war, Tsushima acted as mediator for conciliatory diplomatic relations between the Tokugawa Edo Bakufu and the Joseon Dynasty in order to survive. When the Joseon Dynasty demanded a statement of apology for the invasion and the Bakufu refused, Tsushima forged an apology and succeeded in dispatching a mission for reconciliations. Once diplomatic relations were recovered, Tsushima was able to maintain its trade concession once again and even re-established a Japanese settlement in Busan. It was through such trickery and diplomatic aptitude that Tsushima was able to successfully act as an intermediary between Korea and Japan.

The Korean understanding of Tsushima is well illustrated in the journals of the Joseon *Tongsinsa* diplomatic envoys to Japan. The chief of the 1764 envoy, Jo Eom 趙暉, noted, as he sailed near the shores of Tsushima, that the pulse of the Korean Peninsula's mountain range (the Baegdudaegan Mountain Range) is even connected to Tsushima through the Straits of Korea.² In this case, Jo Eom appears to be using nature to state his view that Tsushima was originally a subordinate area of Joseon. In a more explicit passage, he states that Tsushima had changed its belonging from Joseon to Japan without his knowledge.³ Indeed, at the time there was a wide spread awareness that Tsushima was *de facto* subjugated to Joseon even though it was officially within the Japanese domain.

Even in the modern era, the ties between Tsushima and Korea have been inseparable. In the late Joseon Dynasty, the island acted as a place of exile for independence fighters (such as Choi Ik Hyeon). Many residents of the island are said to have visited Busan to buy goods for marriage.

In the 21st century, the number of Korean tourists visiting Tsushima drastically increased, leading to a multifold increase in investments on the island. However, as a result of the souring of relations between Japan and Korea in 2019, visitors to Tsushima have decreased by almost 90%. This illustrates that, even in present times, the livelihood of Tsushima's residents is directly related to Japan-Korea relations, as it has always been in the past. Tsushima is a geopolitical community that shares its destiny with both countries. The island's hybrid identity has played a key role in ensuring a sustainable existence. How the residents of Tsushima will negotiate the troubled political currents and use the island's hybridity to their advantage will be a litmus test for Northeast Asia in 2020.

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Notes

- 1 始度一海千餘里、至對馬國、其大官曰卑狗、副曰卑奴母離、所居絕巒、方可四百餘里。土地山險、多深林、道路如禽鹿徑。有千餘戶。無良田、食海物自活、乘船南北市糶。(三國志魏書 烏丸鮮卑東夷傳)
- 2 蓋聞石脈在水中、相連於我國長鬢地境、而自豐崎入海數十里、則或露出或隱伏 (海槎日記)
- 3 蓋此馬島本是朝鮮所屬、未知何國何時入於日本… (海槎日記)

Shuri Castle as a symbol of peace in East Asia

Keun-Sik Jung

On 31 October 2019, Okinawa's Shuri Castle was completely destroyed by fire. The soul of the Ryukyu Kingdom, which had carefully been restored for 30 years starting in 1989, burned down entirely. For Koreans, this tragic event brought back memories of the 2008 fire that destroyed the wooden structure of Namdaemun (Soongrye Gate), the southern gate of the Joseon capital. Just as Korean history had unfolded under the watchful gaze of Namdaemun, Shuri Castle had stood witness to the fates of Ryukyu and its hybrid people. This piece was written in order to commemorate Shuri Castle, a symbol of peace in East Asia.

Shuri Castle became the seat of power of a unified Ryukyu Kingdom with the founding of the Sho Dynasty. The tablet that read 'A Country of Good Proprieties' [守禮之邦],

which adorned Shurimon (the southern gate) and the tablet featuring the inscription 'Land of Chinese Mountains' [中山之土], a gift from Emperor Kangxi of Qing Dynasty that hung in the main hall of Shuri Castle, symbolized the kingdom's status as a tributary state of China. In the early 17th century, the Ryukyu Kingdom was invaded by the Satsuma domain of Japan, which subsequently controlled the kingdom to profit from entrepôt trade with China. Nevertheless, the fact that the Ryukyu Kingdom signed a trade treaty with the United States in 1854 demonstrates how it had remained an independent kingdom.

The Ryukyu Kingdom's misfortunes began with the Meiji Restoration. In 1872, the King of Ryukyu became the king of a mere 'domain'; in 1879, the domain was abolished, Ryukyu became Okinawa Prefecture, and the king was degraded to a noble and forced to relocate to Tokyo. The latter process is known

as the 'Ryukyu Disposition', but Professor Namihira Tsuneo of Ryukyu University, who has studied this period in detail, argues that as this term reflects only Japan's position, the more objective term 'Ryukyu Annexation' should be used, in the way that Joseon is regarded to have been formally 'annexed' by Japan.

Following the Manchurian invasion, Japan pursued a strategy of assimilation of the colonies into subjects of the emperor, in order to strengthen the role of the internal colonies as key components of the empire; on the other hand, it also carried out a policy designating important historical monuments as places of cultural heritage in order to elevate the pride of its colonial residents. It was in this wider context that Shuri Castle was designated as a national treasure, just as the Japanese Government General of colonial Korea had designated Namdaemun as Korean Treasure No. 1. However, the hills of Shuri Castle were taken over by the headquarters of the 6th Division of Japanese troops to prepare for the Pacific War. The aftermath was terrible. In May 1945, as the American campaign to capture Okinawa was carried out, the Japanese headquarters and Shuri Castle were completely damaged by bombardment from warships. The monument of cultural

heritage containing Ryukyu's soul had disappeared completely.

During the American occupation, the government of Ryukyu was established and Ryukyu University was built on the ruins of Shuri Castle. As a result of the Cold War in East Asia, the American presence became permanent. The US military base in Okinawa proved its value through the Korean War and the Vietnamese War. Along with the other military bases deeply embedded in East Asia, it allowed the US to operate as a living power in the region.

The Ryukyu government restored Shuri Castle in 1958 but the restoration of the main hall took more time. Ryukyu at this time did not belong to Japan; only the potential sovereignty of Japan had been recognized. It was in 1972, during the Vietnamese War, that Ryukyu was 'returned' to Japan, becoming Okinawa Prefecture once again. After Ryukyu University was moved in 1979, Okinawa Prefecture and the Japanese government made plans to rebuild Shuri Castle. The actual restoration began in 1989, and the construction of the main hall, south hall and north hall buildings was completed in 1992. The castle became a park open to visitors. In 2017, it was visited by 2.85 million people.

Hun Chun, an international cross-border economic region

Li Yinhe

Hun Chun is situated in the borderlands of China, North Korea, and Russia. This fortuitous geographic location has allowed the region to become an international logistics hub for Northeast Asia. The Tumen River Development Program, proposed by Jilin Province in 1990, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that followed in 1991, laid down the building blocks for the region's development.¹ The end of the Cold War in East Asia led to improved international relations in the region, and brought about the possibility of multilateral, rather than bilateral, economic cooperation. Globalization has led to an increase in the frequency of cultural exchange. As a result of this, Hun Chun has become an extremely hybrid place in a short period of time.

The Border Economic Cooperation Zone in Hun Chun is a national border economic cooperation zone that was approved by the state council in September 1992, with a planned area of 21.77 square kilometers. In April 2000 and February 2001, the state council approved respectively the establishment of the Hun Chun Export Processing Zone and the Hun Chun Russia-China Trade Zone within the cooperation zone, implementing a 'three areas in one' management mode. In April 2012, the state council approved the establishment of China's Tumen River Region (Hun Chun) International Cooperation Model Zone, which ushered in the historical opportunity for leapfrog development.

The Hun Chun Export Processing Zone is one of the first 15 export processing zones in China, with a planned area of 2.44 square kilometers. With the continuous adjustment of national industrial policies and increasing requirements for the transformation and upgrading of export processing trade, export processing zones experienced rapid development. They feature a characteristic industrial pattern of woodwork processing and seafood processing, supplemented by cross-border e-commerce and bonded logistics. At present, the planned area has been adjusted to 1.038 square kilometers, and the area consists of 'seven connections and one leveling'. The Hun Chun China-Russia Trade Zone covers an area of 9.6 hectares. It was put into trial operation in December

2001, and officially put into operation in June 2005. It is the only border trade functional zone open to Russia in Jilin Province, meeting the need for the development of border trade.

At present, there are 808 registered enterprises in the Border Economic Cooperation Zone, including 41 foreign-funded enterprises from eight countries and regions including Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia, the United States, Hong Kong. It has successively introduced a number of well-known enterprises both at home and abroad, and has come to develop a characteristic industrial system. In the Cooperation Zone, the non-ferrous metal industry is gradually maturing, while the aquaculture processing industry is rapidly

developing, and the textile and garment industry continues to grow. The development of new and high technology industries has accelerated and the tertiary industry has emerged.

These developments taking place in the Cooperation Zone have meant that Hun Chun has come to experience the full force of globalization. An increase in the cross-border flow of goods has been accompanied by the flow of information, capital, services, and people. The result of this has been the emergence of a fluidity and hybridity in the region. This is best observed in its cityscape, an example of which is the system of signage used in Hun Chun. Following the guidelines of the Hun Chun government, all of the signs in the city are in three languages: Chinese,

Korean, and Russian. The 'three language landscape' of Hun Chun demonstrates how the region's fluid and hybrid nature has brought about unique regional cultural characteristics.

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Notes

- 1 Matsuno, S. 2011. 'International Cross Border Economic Regions in East Asia, Greater Tumen Region (GTR) and Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)', *Ritsumeikan International Affairs* 10:143-158.



The 'three language landscape' of Hun Chun. Photo by the author.



Naha Okinawa Japan Shuri-Castle. Photo by CEphoto, Uwe Aranas. Photo reproduced under a creative commons license courtesy Uwe Aranas on Wikipedia.

Shuri Castle was used to project the image of Ryukyu's past, as a place of coexistence and peace. This tied in with Okinawa's strong tradition of peace movements that had taken root around the US military base. Amidst the attempt to relocate Kadena air base to Henoko and the resistance that emerged, many peace activists in Okinawa further called for the removal of US bases to Guam. However, the geopolitical atmosphere of the region changed in 2010 with the sinking of the Cheonan warship in the West Sea of Korea, and calls for US military base transfers from Okinawa fell silent.

In the 30 years since its restoration, Shuri Castle stood as a beacon of peace in East Asia. Its presence acted as a reminder that these islands, which have played such a crucial role in US strategies in East Asia, were once a peaceful and prosperous place of trade. It is therefore hoped that Shuri Castle will be soon be restored so that it may once again project our aspirations for peace East Asia.

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