

"Hoppoken" Exchanges (1)

International Interaction between Hokkaido, Japan, and Other Northern Regions in the World

Fujiaki HONDO

Abstract

Hoppoken communication and exchanges these days appear to have become stereotyped and sluggish. There may be several reasons for this which will be discussed, such as budget cuts, political environment, lack of leaders, institutional fatigue, and bewilderment as to where to go next. The Northern Intercity Conference of Mayors and the Winter Cities Conference led by the City of Sapporo seem to have been a success. By following past traces of the unique international involvement by both the Prefecture of Hokkaido and the City of Sapporo, some measures are being searched to revitalize Hoppoken activities.

Key Words

Northern Regions, Northern Forum, Northern Intercity Conference of Mayors, Northern Regions Center (NRC), Sapporo International Communication Plaza

Introduction

Some decades ago the Prefecture of Hokkaido, Japan, advocated and initiated a closer contact with other areas in the northern regions of the world in order to share expertise for the betterment of living conditions for its citizens. The City of Sapporo followed and proposed the same kind of relations with cities in other regions. A unique kind of international communication has been fostered for many years since then. However, Hokkaido's international interaction faces a turning point these days. It appears to have grown weary during a period of lassitude. I suggest possible solutions to the problems. On the other hand, Sapporo's communication system appears to be in good shape. By looking back at the traces of both interactions, I would like to propose a way to rejuvenate this unique method of international communication.

1. Historical Background

"Hokkaido, the northernmost island of the Japanese archipelago, had been developed by the pioneer immigrants who had come from the southern Japan.Because of a cold and harsh climatic condition compared to a mild climate in the south, the pioneers had suffered throughout these years. It demanded not only strenuous efforts but also perseverance. Thus, both the Government of Hokkaido and the people of Hokkaido have typically been south-oriented and dependent on the Central Government."(1)

"Hokkaido, located in the northernmost part of Japan, is less developed, is cold and snowy, and provides harsh living conditions, which have made financial and manpower assistance from the Japanese central government necessary in the past decades. This has deprived its immigrated inhabitants of the spirit of psychological self-reliance and independence." (2)

Something drastic had to be done for a change. The concept of Hoppoken (Northern Regions) was thus advocated. The advocator of "Hoppoken" exchanges was Naohiro Dogakinai, former governor (1971 ~ 1983) of the Prefecture of Hokkaido, Japan. He emphasized its importance at the outset of 1970s , facing the fact that Hokkaido's slow development had been due to the follower's attitude of the people living there; their attention had, and most probably has, been toward its capital city, Tokyo; they were so used to begging the Tokyo Government to aid them.

One look of Part One of the contents of "HOPPOKEN TODAY - Toward A New International Community"(3) explains itself;

PART ONE. What is the Concept of Hoppoken?

1. Local features of Hokkaido
2. The historical background of development
3. Hokkaido in imagination
4. Adverse impact of South-orientation
5. Hoppoken Map
6. Seasonal Mortality Calendar
7. Advantages of snow

Around 1965, Dogakinai, when he was the administrative vice minister of the Hokkaido Development Agency, hit upon the idea of changing the point of view of Hokkaido people; to view the is-

land of Hokkaido latitudinally, instead of the conventional viewing of "from the north to the south." This idea was distinctly adopted in the third comprehensive development plan of Hokkaido in 1968. Mainichi News Press, one of the three major national newspapers in Japan, took the initiative to establish "the Hoppoken Research Institute," which was officially organized in 1971. The Institute was dissolved and absorbed into the current Northern Regions Center in 1978, a central organization promoting various international exchanges among the northern lands. (4)

Later during his gubernatorial days, he energetically propelled the project in a concrete fashion.

2. Hokkaido Prefectural Government' Initiative ----- "Northern Forum"

Its Achievements

This newly proposed international commitment was named "The Concept of Northern Economic Regions" at its outset. Economic interaction in the northern regions of the globe was targeted primarily, since the principal aim of this project was to revitalize Hokkaido's economy. In the meantime, however, there emerged an increasing demand to place an equal amount of importance on cultural exchanges as well. A variety of exchanges started. Athletes, artists, scientists, scholars as well as their works and achievements were exchanged between Hokkaido and the regions in Canada, Scandinavia, Northern China, and Far-eastern Russia. Part Three of the contents of "HOPPOKEN TODAY - Toward A New International Community" manifests its outline (5);

PART THREE. The Hoppoken of Tomorrow

1. Expanding exchanges

Exchange in the Field of Science

Technological Exchanges

2. Economic Exchanges

Economic Exchanges with Alaska and Canada

Economic Exchanges with the Soviet Union

Economic Exchanges with Northern Europe

3. Hope for Tomorrow

Significance of the Hoppoken Exchanges

Subject for Tomorrow

The Importance of the Economic Exchanges

Alongside, an international conference involving those areas was proposed to promote ex-

changes, and came into effect. It was named "The International Conference on the Human Environment in the Northern Regions." Its first conference was held in Sapporo, Japan, in the fall of 1974 with the attendance of representatives of eight States from the U.S.A., eight Provinces from Canada, three cities from the Nordic Countries, and the organizer Hokkaido. After the second conference in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in 1979, the conference was held in Anchorage, Alaska, USA, in 1990 under the re-named "International Conference of the Northern Regions." The success led the participants to form a permanent international organization called "The Northern Regions Forum" in 1991.(6)

With its headquarters in Alaska, the Forum seeks co-operation in a diversity of fields. Each participating region is expected to make an innovative proposal in the field it is most interested in or concerned about. For example, the issue of alcoholism is handled by Alberta, Canada, that of reindeer-raising by Lapland, Finland, that of air-traffic by Heilungkiang, China, and that of air and sea pollution survey by Hokkaido, Japan.(7) Likewise, other similar issues common to the colder regions have been proposed and discussed, and research has been done to find the road to their betterment.

Among the achievements we can now find in Hokkaido as a result of such cultural, academic, sport, and economic information-sharing are; cross-country skiing and curling, various styles of winter festivals, drastically improved house building materials and technology, landscape designs, and playground equipment.(8)

One other product we can be proud of through the international exchange is a number of sister-town relationships established between the participating regions.(9)

Tasks to Be Delved Into

Almost thirty years have passed since the first international get-together, and a sort of 'conjugal boredom' has slipped in. Long-lasting economic depression is another factor. One other crucial factor is the difference in the stance toward the international commitment. Participants from the West appear to have a tendency to expect, from the daily contact and the regular conferences, immediate effects and a greater economic outcome. On the other hand, those from the East, or rather Asia, are based on a long-term vision. This stance difference seems to have produced additional difficulty in keeping the smooth operation of the conference.

3. Sapporo Municipal Government's Initiative ----- "Northern Intercity Conference of Mayors" & "Winter Cities Showcase"

Its Achievements

While Hokkaido had been taking an initiative in developing international communication with the northern regions overseas, the Sapporo Municipal Government, for some years, carefully watched and paid close attention to how far the Hokkaido Prefectural Government would go with regard to Hoppoken activities. Along with the Edmonton Conference, the City of Sapporo announced it would organize and host the first northern city conference in Sapporo in February 1982 to seek solutions of the issues common to the northern cities. Thirty cities including from the United States, Minneapolis, Boston, Buffalo, Portland; from Canada, Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton; Stockholm; Oslo; Helsinki; Copenhagen; Munich; Khabarovsk, Russia; and Harbin, China, participated in the talks of the four areas; Urban planning of northern cities, Smooth traffic systems in the winter, Comfortable housing, and Culture, arts, sports, and recreation in the north. Since then, ten conferences have been held in the cities in the northern region every two or three years. Each participating member city shares expertise in a diversity of areas to pursue more comfortable living conditions for its citizens.(8)

Tasks to Be Delved Into

The most recent conference held in Aomori, Japan, in 2002, gives a hint of the future direction. The participating municipalities constantly look for the means to upgrade the living conditions for their citizens only by making industrial promotion and expanding the budget scale. The Aomori Conference, on the contrary, proposed "a shrinking of the town."(9) The citizens will be urged to get back to the city center so that they can fully enjoy a more comfortable living environment, city transportation, and cultural events particularly in the wintertime. With the citizens gathering in and near the city center in the high-rise apartments, the city government will be able to save a tremendous amount of tax money in the long run, without needing to allocate all-direction public transportation systems or to shovel off deep snow in the suburban area. By so doing, municipalities can cut costs and at the same time offer a superior quality of cultural, and medical , opportunities to their citizens.

4. What should be considered and targeted in the coming years

The Hokkaido-led "Northern Forum' and its affiliated "Northern Regions Center (NRC)" have

recently been encountering hardships in pursuing the goals. NRCs regular communications with other member regions have been fewer and fewer year by year due to, first, the budget cut and, secondly, the retirement of the leader of strong conviction, Naohiro Dogakinai. The once-dominant foreign visitors to the NRC number remarkably less in the last several years.

Some prompt action for a fundamental change is needed right now to keep Hoppoken exchanges continuing. One idea is to dissolve the present NRC and instead organize a brand-new executive organization in Hokkaido which would consist of representatives from every member region of "The Northern Forum." This organization aims at a cost-conscious and result-oriented structural character so that each member region is willing to pay for its support while they work for the new international organization.

As for the Sapporo-led "Northern Intercity Conference of Mayors" and "Winter Cities Showcase (international trade fair)," it is obvious that the conference and the trade fair themselves have been quite successful. It is proved by the fact that an increasing number of cities in the northern region express their wish to take part in this conference. Communications via Sapporo City's International Bureau and Sapporo International Communication Plaza have been daily and regularly thriving, and a great number of ordinary citizens are involved in the direct and indirect activities to achieve the goals set in the conferences.

Notes:

1. Hoppoken Today -Toward A New International Community (English Edition), p.ix & p.3
2. Hoppoken Jidai (Japanese Edition), p.11
3. Hoppoken Today -Toward A New International Community (English Edition), p.xi
4. Hoppoken Jidai (Japanese Edition), pp.164-184
5. Hoppoken Today -Toward A New International Community (English Edition), p.xi
6. Hoppoken Jidai (Japanese Edition), pp.211-231; International Communications in Hokkaido (Japanese Edition), pp.13-14
7. Hokkaido no Kokusaika no Genjo, p.16
8. Hokkaido no Kokusaika no Genjo, p.26-7
9. International Communications in Hokkaido (Japanese Edition), p.11
10. Hoppoken Jidai (Japanese Edition), pp.319-320
11. Northern Intercity News, Vol.13, No.1

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