

Paul Richardson

JSPS Postdoctoral Fellowship (Short Term) at the Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University

I am extremely grateful to have received the opportunity to pursue my research through a JSPS short-term fellowship. It has been a fascinating experience to work alongside some of the leading experts in my field, who have all proved generous in sharing their time, knowledge, and contacts. The Slavic Research Center is Japan's leading centre on Area Studies focussed on Russia and Eurasia. Working with the eminent faculty here has given me new perspectives into my research on Japanese-Russian relations, particularly a more nuanced understanding of inter-regional engagement. Meeting with academic specialists, as well as leaders in business and government, has given me unique insights into how relations with Russia can be developed, and also the influence of regional actors on policy making in the centre. In a wider, theoretical context, it has also provided me with a chance to develop my interests in definitions of sovereignty and territory. This region provides a fascinating case-study of how shifts in economic and geopolitical power are exposing fundamentally different conceptions of sovereignty.

My stay at the Slavic Research Center has been hugely rewarding and I have also been able to work on a number of publications and a book. Both the freedom and support of JSPS and my host institution have been greatly beneficial. I have co-edited the journal *Eurasia Border Review* and also joined professional affiliations in Japan such as the *Japan International Border Studies Network*. The University of Hokkaido has proved to be a wonderful place to be based with a vast, leafy campus – complete with streams and a farm – which is only a few minutes on foot from the central station. Although, winter never seems to end, the snow-clad campus is a beautiful site and with winter-sports and a snow festival, there are still highlights during the long freeze. Nearby *onsens* (hot springs) and the local student's favourite food – soup curry – help you stay warm. While Japanese language is a challenge, staff and students at the university are invariably friendly and willing to help. Also at all the major research universities in Japan there is a large contingent of foreign researchers, with whom you can expand your friendships and contacts beyond Japan.

Time has passed too quickly while on JSPS and it still feels like the beginning of my time in Japan. However, it will certainly not be the end of my research connection and affiliation with the country. I would advise any participant to seize the chance to travel while on JSPS. The more you see of this remarkable and diverse country, the more you will want to build a permanent connection. I sincerely thank JSPS, the Slavic Research Center, and my host, Professor Akihiro Iwashita, for the opportunity and support they have given me.