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REPORT

Second Global Conference On Economic Geography

25-28 June 2007, Beijing International Convention Center, Beijing, China

In June 2007, the Second Global Conference on Economic Geography (SGCEG) was held successfully in the capital city of China, Beijing. The Institute of Geographical Sciences and Natural Resources Research (IGSNRR), Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, jointly organized the conference. The Organizing Committee comprised of three executive members: Professor Weidong Liu from the IGSNRR (Co-Chair), Professor Henry Yeung from NUS (Co-Chair), and Dr. Mary Ma from the IGSNRR (Conference Secretary). Some 12 other international members also served on the Organizing Committee. The conference was also organized in collaboration with the Geographical Society of China (conference secretariat), the Division of Geography, China National Natural Science Foundation, and economic geography study/research groups or the equivalent of the Association of American Geographers, the Royal Geographical Society-Institute of British Geographers, the Canadian Association of Geographers, the Institute of Australian Geographers, and the International Geographical Union Commissions on “The Dynamics of Economic Spaces” and “Local Development”. General financial support and sponsorship was received from the following organizations and institutions:

- Bureau of Personnel and Education, Chinese Academy of Sciences
- China National Natural Science Foundation
- Institute of Geographical Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences
- Academic Research Fund, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore
- *Economic Geography* (Clark University)
- Taylor & Francis Publishers
- Wiley-Blackwell Publishers

This SGCEG is the sequel to the first highly successful Global Conference on Economic Geography held in Singapore, 5-9 December 2000. With almost 200 academic participants from 30 countries, the Singapore conference was significant in spurring on economic-geographical dialogue in a sustained manner worldwide. Some 150 high quality papers were presented and the Singapore conference resulted in two special issues in leading geographical journals (see *Journal of Economic Geography* 2001 and *Environment and Planning A* 2002), as well as numerous other articles, chapters, and reports.

The SGCEG was conceived as another major contribution to the advancement of economic geography as a significant field of global academic enquiry. Almost seven years have lapsed since the Singapore conference. The global economy has experienced tremendous transformations since the late 1990s. For one, it witnesses much stronger integration of cross-border economic activities. The rise of emerging economies, particularly China and India, has significant economic-geographical implications. The continual economic integration within the European Union and the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) requires new research insights from economic geographers. At the more micro-scale, economic geographies are much more implicated in our everyday life, from our consumption practices and productive work to our activities in labour and financial markets. The Organizing Committee of the SGCEG believed that the timing (mid 2007) was appropriate for a second global conference on economic geography. As one of the key sub-disciplines in Geography, it was time to discuss and debate current and new research agendas in economic geography. It was also a critical time to continue our rethinking of the relationship between the sub-discipline (within human geography) and the wider social science community.

In organizing this second global conference on economic geography, the Organizing Committee had three specific objectives:

1. The conference will provide a forum for constructive cross-regional dialogue among economic geographers from all regions and countries. Such dialogue is critical for the advancement of the subject.
2. The conference will provide an opportunity for economic geographers from outside Asia to interact with geographers and other interested social scientists from within the host region. While acknowledging the Anglo-American influence in much of the recent work in economic geography, we recognize that there is a considerable stock of knowledge in the Asian region that contributes to our understanding of regional and global economic geographies. In short, the conference will enhance the global interdependence of networks of economic geographers.
3. The conference and its associated activities will enable economic geographers from outside the Asian region to experience (first-hand) the dynamics of economic transformations in China and East Asia. Through carefully designed field trips, both within and outside of Beijing, the capital city of China, the conference will offer insightful educational experiences that can be brought home for the benefits of students and institutions, similar to those available during the Singapore conference in 2000.

Judging by the substantially greater number of participants in the SGCEG from a much larger group of countries (39 states), we can now report that the SGCEG was a success. Some 373 out of a total of 394 paid participants finally turned up in Beijing (see Table 1). The SGCEG became the largest-ever global conference dedicated to economic geography. Together with a large team of graduate student helpers from the IGSNRR and partners of participants, we had over 400 people in the conference venue most of the time. These people genuinely seemed to enjoy and learn from the field trips, the plenary and regular conference sessions, and the social events that ran throughout the four days in Beijing. Indeed, at times, one felt that this was a truly global affair, with people from countries like Malaysia, Vietnam, Japan, Brazil,

Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, the UK and the US in dialogue during the sessions, or sharing a lunch time table of sumptuous buffet Chinese food. The same global dialogue was also extended to the conference banquet and fieldtrips.

Table 1. Total paid participants by their institutional affiliations

Australia	12
Austria	1
Bangladesh	1
Brazil	1
Canada	24
China	56
2.5Czech Republic	5
Denmark	4
Finland	8
France	7
Germany	18
Greece	2
Hungary	2
India	7
Iran	8
Ireland	2
Israel	3
Italy	2
Japan	10
Luxembourg	2
Malaysia	2
Mexico	5
Netherlands	13
New Zealand	6
Norway	7

Poland	5
Rumania	1
Russia	4
Saudi Arabia	1
Singapore	10
Slovenia	1
South Korea	12
Sweden	9
Switzerland	3
Taiwan	7
Tunisia	1
Turkey	2
UK	43
USA	81
Vietnam	6
Total	394

Due to an unprecedented large number of papers to be presented, the conference programme was packed with four plenary lectures and some 330 papers in six parallel sessions running on three full days. The session themes were diverse, representing both the versatility and scope of economic geography. It is impossible to summarize the nature of the topics and papers that were presented. Fortunately the official conference web site will be maintained for some time at <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/geoywc/econgeog.html>. Interested readers can download the full conference programme book that includes abstracts of all the papers that were presented. It is important to note, however, that the quality of the presentations were of consistent high quality.

On Monday 25 June 2007, the conference was officially opened by Professor Jiayang Li,

Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Professor Lily Kong, Vice Provost of the National University of Singapore. Their welcome speeches were followed by the first plenary lecture delivered by Professor Susan Hanson from Clark University, USA. Susan was no stranger to most participants. She has been an editor of three leading geography journals - *Economic Geography*, the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, and *The Professional Geographer*. She is a past president of the Association of American Geographers and has served as Director of Clark's School of Geography (1988-1995; 2002-2004). For her contributions to

geography, Susan was elected as a Member of the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2000. Her plenary lecture was entitled “People and place in economic geography: learning from women’s entrepreneurship”. In this lecture, she made a strong plea for a feminist perspective on global economic change at different spatial scales. In the evening of 25 June, Professor Dadao Lu, a highly respected academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, gave an overview of the development and applications of economic geography in China. His mandarin lecture was interpreted in English by Associate Professor Yu Zhou from Vassar College. Professor Lu offered important insights into how economic geographers in mainland China were able to make very impactful contributions to national and regional development in China.

On Tuesday 26 June evening, the third plenary lecture was given by Professor Gordon Clark, the Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography and Head of the Oxford University Centre for the Environment, Oxford University, UK. Apart from being a recipient of prestigious fellowships, Professor Clark is also one of the four geographers listed in the subject “Social Sciences, General” on the ISI HighlyCited.com that includes the top 250 preeminent individual researchers in each of 21 subject categories who have demonstrated great influence in their field as measured by citations to their work. As one of the world’s leading experts in pension fund, Gordon focused on how pension fund governance can be understood from an economic-geographical perspective. His insightful lecture was followed by a full wine-and-food reception generously sponsored by *Economic Geography* – the oldest journal for economic geography published quarterly at Clark University, USA, since 1925.

After two days of intensive conference sessions and receptions, participants were involved in one of the two full-day fieldtrips on Wednesday 27 June 2007. The first fieldtrip was conducted in the Beijing Economic and Technological Development Area (BDA). Organized by Weidong Liu, Baoling Wang, and Fox Zhiyong Hu, the BDA fieldtrip commenced with a brief introduction to BDA in the morning by Dr. Fox Hu, who set the research context and highlighted some prominent economic-geographical issues related to BDA. This was followed by presentations by local hosting institution (i.e., the Management Committee of BDA), which introduced both the industrial economy and urban planning of BDA. The remainder of the schedule after lunch consisted of a bus tour in BDA and a visit to Nokia’s Xingwang Industrial Park in BDA. The Xingwang Park is one of the largest telecom-equipment manufacturing centres in the world, consisting of Nokia’s assembly plant and major suppliers as well as Nokia’s design centre.

The second fieldtrip was conducted in the Zhongguancun High-Tech Area. Organized by Jici Wang, Yu Zhou, and Xin Tong, it included a visit to Tsinghua University Science & Technology (S&T) Park and a bus tour to Zhongguancun Central Square in the morning, and then a visit to Shangdi IT Industrial Base in the afternoon. It commenced with briefings on the development of Zhongguancun, including: (1) an introduction to the role of universities in the development of this high-tech zone by the Director of Tsinghua University S&T Park; and (2) an introduction to the institutional and historical context in which Zhongguancun has been growing rapidly during the last two decades. The first stop of this trip, Tsinghua University S&T Park, is a science park run by a leading university in China (i.e., Tsinghua University), reflecting the relationship between university and industry in the development of

high-tech clusters. The second stop, Zhongguancun Central Square, exemplifies strong government intervention in urban regeneration in the central area of Zhongguancun, which leads to a dramatic change in urban landscape in the last few years. The third stop, Shangdi IT Industrial Base, is an industrial zone planned by the government that was originally intended to host IT manufacturing activities. It has since been changed to be an office work area because most IT manufacturing has moved to southern China.

On the final day of the conference (Thursday 28 June), a whole series of intensive sessions were held. The conference finale was the plenary lecture by Professor Gernot Grabher from the University of Bonn, Germany. Gernot is co-editor of *Economic Geography*, the *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* and the *Regions and Cities* Book Series of the Regional Studies Association (Routledge). His research is organized around three key themes: a long-standing interest in the economic geography and economic sociology of networks, economic geographies of the temporary organisation of projects, and organizational practices and new ecologies of innovation. In his lecture, Gernot offered cutting-edge research findings on how project organizations in different settings have enabled customers to link up with producers and suppliers in novel ways that engender innovation and creativity.

After four days of highly interactive conference activity, we can safely report that participants felt much (re)invigorated in their passion and interest in economic geography. The impact of the conference is likely to be significant through the future work of participants and their publications in leading journals. This likely impact is further testified by the conference participation of editors from many leading journals in Geography, e.g. *Economic Geography* (entire team of five editors), *Environment and Planning A* (four out of six editors), *Progress in Human Geography* (managing editor), *Journal of Economic Geography* (Associate Editor), *Regional Studies* (two editors), and *Geoforum* (co-editor). As Co-Chairs and organizer, we hope the delegates have left Beijing with a stronger sense of personal and academic missions that enable them to produce the next generation of cutting-edge scholarly research in the field. Meanwhile, we hope they have enjoyed the stay in Beijing (and China) and will have fond memories of the Second Global Conference on Economic Geography.

Henry Yeung and Weidong Liu

Conference Co-Chairs

13 July 2007