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Preface: Russia, Ukraine and Japan in Eurasia

In October 2020, the *Eurasia Border Review* began its Second Series in a tumultuous period. The world was in the throes of COVID-19, with travel restrictions and domestic lockdowns impacting on our lives in very real ways. The new series was envisaged as providing a forum able to respond nimbly and rapidly to emerging developments in the world.

Fast forward two years, and in October 2022 the world appears superficially more settled than at COVID-19's height. Daily life has returned to normal for much of Europe and America, and while East Asia remains noticeably more cautious, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have all re-opened their borders to tourists earlier this month. China's future is less certain, and much hinges on the whims of Xi Jinping, who will ultimately choose whether to maintain or ameliorate that nation's zero-COVID policy.

This return to cross-border movement, however, has been accompanied by border disruption. By far the most significant disturbance in this regard is taking place at the border between Russia and Ukraine. This has been contested by Russia since its seizure of Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014, and unilaterally breached by its full-scale military invasion of February 24, 2022. The war this has unleashed appears at present to be tilting Ukraine's way, but its final outcome, and the impact any lasting settlement will have on the world, are yet to be determined.

It therefore seems an appropriate juncture to publish a second issue of the *Eurasia Border Review*, to analyse what remains a rapidly-changing situation. This volume provides a nuanced look at what the conflict means from the perspective of border studies, and as seen from a vantage point at the opposite end of Russia from Ukraine itself. While the conflict's epicentre is a long way from Japan, its effects will inevitably be felt here too—Japanese companies are mulling over whether and how to protect their extensive investments in Russia, while the presence of Ukrainian evacuees is currently impacting upon Japan's border policies.

This publication enables a Japanese, and more particularly a Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, perspective on the current conflict to be disseminated more widely. The Center's academic engagement with the war in Ukraine is fuelled by its resonance for two priority areas of research: The East Eurasian Studies (EES) project sponsored by National Institute for the Humanities, and the Eurasia Unit for Border Research (UBRJ). It also chimes with the International Relations and Economics group (IRE) of the newly established Platform for Explorations in Survival Strategies. The three articles contained in this issue expertly set out the wider Eurasian implications of Putin's invasion, the impact of the invasion on Russia's economy and society, and the global impact which is sure to stem from Russia's brazen disavowal of international norms which its earlier incarnation, the USSR, helped to establish.

While the outcomes of the conflict remain confused and to be determined, the pieces here will help us discern the contours of the landscape within which any settlement will be reached. It is to be hoped that it provokes questions and further critical reflection on this ongoing tragedy.

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