Symptom of Environmental Change in Siberian Permafrost Region

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Editors:
Ryusuke Hatano and Georg Guggenberger

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Preface

A joint research exchange program entitled ‘JSPS Core-to-Core Program’ for up-scaling the evaluation of the symptom of environmental change in Siberian permafrost region is being undertaken by Hokkaido University, Japan, and Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany, together with V.N. Sukachev Institute of Forest, Institute for Biological Problems of Cryolithozone, Permafrost Institute, and Institute of Soil Science and AgroChemistry, Siberian Branch of Russian Academy of Sciences under the funding support from Japan Society of the Promotion of Science (JSPS). The aim of this program is to establish a good collaboration among the researchers from Japan, German, and Russia and to develop and expand the collaboration to other countries in the future. We have been focusing our research activities on the conservation and rehabilitation of Siberian Taiga forests ecosystem under the influence of Climate Change.

With an objective to exchange our scientific research findings and the future research plans, we organized an international symposium on “Symptom of environmental change in Siberian permafrost region” at the end of November 2005 in Hokkaido University. This proceeding is the outcome of the symposium.

A large area of Siberia is characterized by permafrost. Although precipitation is often as low as in the desert, water melted from the permafrost layer during the summer nurtures a large larch-Taiga area. The Siberian Taiga has been a carbon sink for a long time and has stored 500 Gt carbon, which is 21% of the total terrestrial carbon. Recently, however, forest burning in Siberia has occurred in an area of about 20 million ha every year, which is estimated to release as much CO$_2$ as the annual CO$_2$ emission of Germany or Japan.

There are many causes and feedback mechanisms controlling ecosystem functioning in Siberian permafrost ecosystems. The loss of vegetation alters the cycling of carbon and nitrogen, and stimulates melting of the permafrost due to change in heat balance. The melting of permafrost causes methane emission from the ice and increases the amount of soil water. These processes change the quality of soil and stimulate greenhouse gas emissions and nutrient discharge. Furthermore, a rise in temperature by the end of 21st century in Siberia is supposed to be one of the most pronounced globally. Degradation of the Taiga ecosystem is supposed to further stimulate the warming processes.

However, there are huge uncertainties in the quantitative evaluation of greenhouse gas emissions and nutrient discharge because of insufficient monitoring data. Thus, data collection of status quo and analysis of controlling factors of greenhouse gas emissions and nutrient discharge are highly required to evaluate the effect of the disturbance of Siberian Taiga on global environmental change. The technique for scaling up of point data is also required to evaluate the large scale of Siberian permafrost region.

This proceeding includes 28 papers, which are grouped in 6 chapters: Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Carbon and Nitrogen Dynamics, Forest Disturbance and Management, Microbiological Functions, Geocryological Function, and Geographical Information. Although the knowledge and information presented here are still inadequate to understand the environmental change in Siberian permafrost region, we hope that the proceeding will be an initiation of exploring new horizons in the Siberian research.

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Ryusuke Hatano, Professor, Hokkaido University
Georg Guggenberger, Professor, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg
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