

## **Japan's Karafuto Governorate (1905–1945): History and Social Memory**

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*Abstract.* The history of colonies under the rule of the Japanese Empire in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has not been explored well enough so far. For example, the history of Karafuto Governorate (1905–1945), which existed in southern Sakhalin, is covered very little, while some aspects of its history are not known at all. This article focuses on the history of Karafuto Governorate's formation and its socio-economic structure, namely territorial development after the Russo-Japanese war, its role and status in the colonial system of Japan, the use of the island's main economic resources and the creation of socio-cultural space, as well as along the memorialization of the colonial past of the Japanese Empire's northern borders. In addition, this article describes the process of the governorate's liquidation (it started after the accession of southern Sakhalin to the USSR after the Second World War) followed by passing the governance to the Soviet administration, co-residence of Soviet and Japanese people on the same territory in 1945–1948, the deportation of Japanese people and the fate of the Korean population of the island. The article gives examples of how the memory of the Japanese presence on Sakhalin Island is preserved in Japan and Russia today.

*Keywords:* Karafuto Governorate, colonization, Japanese Empire, Toyohara, the Second World War, social memory.

### **Historical Background**

From the moment relations between Russia and Japan were established and up to the end of World War II, Sakhalin Island was a territory which the two countries repeatedly divided between themselves. As per the Treaty of Saint Petersburg of 1875, the entire island became territory of the Russian

Empire, while Japan got in exchange the group of the Kuril Islands stretching up to the Kamchatka Peninsula. The strategic importance of the island can hardly be overestimated, as it safeguards the mouth of the Amur River, i.e. the main river route from Eastern Siberia to the Sea of Okhotsk and further to the Pacific Ocean. In addition, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, rich coal deposits were found there, which made it possible to supply fuel to the Russian warships in the Far East. However, the extreme remoteness even from the administrative centres in Eastern Siberia, as well as the adverse climate, made the development of these territories extraordinarily difficult. Beginning from 1869, the main method of their development was the re-settlement of exiles and convicts. After serving their term of punishment, convicts sent to hard labour on Sakhalin did not have the right to leave the island and had to stay there to live as exiles. Their life changed dramatically after 1905, and the war brought about unexpected relief.

Throughout the Russo-Japanese war, the main battle ground was southern Manchuria, but after the Russian fleet was defeated in the Battle of Tsushima Strait, the insecurity of Russian territories in the Far East became fully evident. On 24 June 1905, the Japanese fleet launched a landing operation in southern Sakhalin. After a short resistance, the few Russian military units and militia detachments laid down their arms in late July 1905. [Vysokov (ed.) 2008, p. 374].

Through the Portsmouth Peace Treaty of 1905, the southern part of Sakhalin, i.e. the territory below the 50°N parallel, passed under the control of the Japanese Empire. A joint Russian-Japanese demarcation commission was set up to carry out topographical works on the ground, which resulted in boundary delimitation. Thus the first land border appeared between Russia and Japan.

Russian subjects were allowed to decide for themselves whether to stay or to leave. The majority of the population were exiled settlers who welcomed the news with great enthusiasm and, taking advantage of the removed restriction of movement, soon left the island. They went to other regions of the Far East, which fact seriously alarmed the authorities in Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk and Vladivostok. They were concerned about the arrival of a great number of migrants from a potentially criminal environment. In 1906, the Sakhalin penal colony was closed, and the few prisoners that were there at the time were transferred to the Nerchinsk penal colony. As a result, the northern part of the island which remained Russian territory was virtually depopulated. The situation did not improve even when free migration to the island as allowed in 1908: in two years only 400 people moved there [Burykin 2009, p. 4].

## Young Colonial Empire and New Colony

The situation was different in the southern part of the island where the Japanese established a new colony. During the first few years, the territory of southern Sakhalin was under the rule of the military, and in 1907, control was handed over to the civil administration of the newly created Karafuto Governorate.

The creation of colonies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a kind of confirmation of Japan's status as an empire, which the country sought throughout the entire Meiji period. In fact, for the first time in its history, Japan made it one of its priorities to pursue an active (and even aggressive) foreign policy. After 1905, i.e., as a result of the two wars through which Japan acquired a number of large colonies, the world's leading powers recognized Japan as a member of their elite club.

Japan's three major colonies (excluding the Liaodong Peninsula rented from China) were Korea, the island of Taiwan and Sakhalin. Along with the Kuril Islands and the Ryukyu archipelago, they constituted the concept of *gaichi* (outer lands 外地). Hokkaido Island belonged to the category of *naichi* (inner lands 内地) together with the proper Japanese islands, but in fact its development required the same strategies and expenditure that were applied to Karafuto Governorate. Thus, the empire took on an enormous burden without having sufficient experience for that. The development of the colonies was a new thing, and in this the Japanese also had to learn and adopt European experience. Remarkably, in 1908, a department of colonization was even created at the University of Tokyo.

Japan's colonies were not the same; they had very different social, ethnic and economic characteristics. For instance, Korea and Taiwan were territories with an obvious predominance of the local population. Japanese immigrants there accounted for no more than 7 per cent of the total population. As for Sakhalin, here, on the contrary, 239 thousand immigrants from the mainland had been compactly brought in by 1930, which made up 98 per cent of the population [Vysokov (ed.) 2008, p. 428].

Unlike, for example, the island of Taiwan, Karafuto Governorate was not a "jewel of the Japanese Empire". Its status and prestige were substantially lower. Whereas Korea and Taiwan were ruled by governor generals who had very broad powers, Karafuto was controlled by civil servants of a lower rank. [Molodyakov, Molodyakova, Markaryan 2009, p. 51].

Initially, its capital was at Otomari (now the port of Korsakov). Later, when Karafuto's administrative centre, Toyohara (now Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk), was built, the government was transferred there. The island became gradually inhabited by Japanese colonists.

The Japanese government made capital investments in the development of Karafuto's economy – in building new cities and making motor and rail roads. The development of economic resources was proceeding quite rapidly. The local economy has certain climatic and geographical differences from that of the mother country. Sakhalin became the only place densely populated by a great number of Japanese people where the Japanese dietary product, rice, was imported from the mainland and other colonies. Karafuto's economy was based on the fishing, wood-working and coal-mining industries. Sakhalin, sparsely populated and never intensively developed until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, became the number 1 supplier of wood in the empire. Starting from the 1920s, forests were intensively cut down, mainly for the pulp and paper industry. Paper production laid the foundation for the thriving business of the famous Oji Paper Company. Its factories emerged all over the governorate. Around them appeared settlements of workers who were employed in these factories, such as Shiritoru (now Makarov), Esutoru (now Ulegorsk), and Tomarioru (now Tomari). In 1941, these factories produced 70 per cent of Japan's paper and pulp [Burykin 2009, p. 10].

Rich coal reserves on Sakhalin formed the backbone of its economy. Coal production here increased and came out on top as compared with the other colonies in the 1930s. This became particularly visible after 1937, when Japan launched war in China [Miki Masafumi 2017, p. 166]. At the same time it is important to recall that the Japanese concessionaires, by agreement with the USSR, after 1925 received the right to develop several coal concessions in the northern, Soviet part of Sakhalin, which was essential for the increasingly militarized Japanese economy.

In fishing, Sakhalin began to play the same role as Hokkaido, being a place for catching northern species of fish. The major centres of the industry were the ports of Otomari (Korsakov), Honto (now Nevelsk) and Maoka (now Kholmsk).

### **Ideology and Symbols of Karafuto Governorate**

When expanding the territory of their empire, the Japanese cared not only about the economic and social development of the new lands, but also about the ideological development of the new space, creating their mental and memorial justification. Karafuto Governorate was established as a result of the war with Russia, and it was this event that became the starting point of its history. Associated with it are numerous monuments and historical symbols. For instance, at the site of the Japanese landing in the summer of 1905 a stele was erected in memory of this event near Otomari (Korsakov).

The year 1908 saw the beginning of the construction of the Toyohara Jinja, the main Shinto shrine of the governorate's new administrative centre bearing its name. A few years later, the construction of the Karafuto Jinja was started nearby. This sanctuary, unlike the one in Toyohara, had a special status. Being in fact a branch of the Yasukuni Jinja, it was dedicated to officers and soldiers who died during the fighting in 1905. The Karafuto jinja was considered "the patron of the north of the Great Japanese Empire" [Komarovskiy 2002, p. 295]. Soon in the yard of the sanctuary they installed a funnel from the cruiser *Novik* which took part in the battles with the Japanese fleet at the height of the Russo-Japanese War<sup>1</sup>.

In Otomari (Korsakov), in proximity to which the Japanese landing operation took place, a sanctuary was also built at the burial place of the soldiers who perished in the summer of 1905. Also, a trophy 230-mm gun from the cruiser *Novik* was installed on a pedestal there [Samarin 2005, p. 12–13].

The new governorate was to have a symbolic connection with the main territory of Japan. This connection could be shown by means of visits of the imperial family members to the new territories. In 1925, Karafuto was visited by the heir to the throne, the future emperor Hirohito (Showa). During his visit to Toyohara there were numerous special events, in which not only the Japanese people participated. His Highness was to see members of other peoples. The passage of the heir was accompanied by dances and songs of the Ainu and Orochi; even a deer race was arranged. Thus the Empire demonstrated its grandeur and emphasized its historic mission in relation to smaller nations. On the occasion of the heir's visit to the governorate, a memorial column was erected in Toyohara [Fedorchuk 2013, p. 12–14].

Besides the heir, in the late 1920s, Sakhalin was visited by another two members of the imperial house; both were military men. The visits were supposed to remind of Russia's propinquity and of victory over Russia. It was not by chance that it was they who visited Sakhalin. In 1929, Karafuto was visited by Prince Fushimi no miya Hiroyasu, who devoted his life to marine affairs and made a career in the Navy. He took part in the Japanese Navy's operations during the Russo-Japanese War. Two years later Prince Kan'in visited Sakhalin. This prince made a career of a professional military man. He took part in the Russo-Japanese War and subsequently paid an official visit to Russia during World War I. Commemorative columns were also erected on the occasion of their visits [Fedorchuk 2013, p. 53–55].

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<sup>1</sup> The cruiser *Novik* took part in the defence of Port Arthur. In the summer of 1904, after a long journey, it approached the coast of Sakhalin to replenish its coal stock. *Novik* accepted the battle with the enemy's cruisers, after which it was scuttled. After the war, the vessel was salvaged and commissioned in the Japanese Navy as *Suzuya*. In 1913, it was decommissioned for scrap.

The governorate was gradually gaining not only symbolic, but quite tangible, practical ties with the mainland. In 1935, air communication was opened between Toyohara and Sapporo on Hokkaido. By that time a flight chain had connected the capital and the major cities in the north-east of Japan, and with transfers to Aomori and Sendai one could fly further to Tokyo.

In 1935, the anniversary of the governorate was celebrated quite magnificently. A new edifice for the local history museum was built then and soon put in operation. The author of the project – architect Kaizuka Yoshio – made it in Japanese colonial style – Teikan yōshiki (or Nihon shumi). Actually lots of buildings in Japan and its colonies of that time (1920–30<sup>th</sup>) were built in this style. The building itself is usually western-like and roof is in Japanese style. It symbolizes amazing combination of Western progress and unique Japanese traditions.

The museum was designed to expand and memorialize the geographical and historical space of Karafuto, to emphasize the unity of the cultural space and the ties between the past and present of the Japanese Empire. The museum had collections related to the history of Karafuto's development and to the small ethnic groups that inhabited its territory, such as the Ainu, the Nivkhs and some others. In the museum's yard there was a small park with all the trees and shrubs growing on the territory of the governorate.

### **Joint Residence: Russian and Japanese People in 1945–1949**

World War II spared the territory of Karafuto. And though in the late 1930s a fortified area was constructed on the border with the USSR, yet during all the years of the war, Soviet and Japanese border guards did not look at each other through sighting notches, but only through binoculars. In 1945, the population of the governorate was about 400.000 [Amano Naoki 2017]. Most of them were Japanese, but there were also Koreans (see below).

The Soviet army crossed the border of Karafuto on August 11, 1945. Except for local skirmishes, the Soviet troops practically did not meet with any resistance. Just as the occupation of Sakhalin by the Japanese troops in 1905 was a rapid and nearly bloodless epilogue of one war, the arrival of the Soviet troops and the 2-week blitzkrieg forty years later became the equally rapid epilogue of another war. As for the non-combatants in large cities, fearing artillery strikes and air raids, they left their homes in an organized way and went to the mountains; the cities emptied. The operation to occupy southern Sakhalin was completed two weeks later. Soon after Japanese scouts began to appear in the cities in order to

find out about the situation. After interacting with Soviet patrols, residents started to return, in an organized way again, to their homes.

The Headquarter of the Second Far East Front set up a civil affairs department that was responsible for arranging peaceful life in the occupied territory. At the same time, the Japanese institutions, except for the police, continued to work and functioned until 1946. Technicians and engineers continued to work at their facilities for a longer time. The governor of Karafuto, Ōtsu Toshiro, also remained at his workplace. When the Soviet administration of the territories was established, Ōtsu, along with many of his subordinates was removed from post as a government official and interned in Khabarovsk. The Soviet civil administration was put in place in February 1946 [Amano Naoki 2017, p. 320].

Soon, Vice-Premier of the Council of Ministers Anastas Mikoyan arrived in southern Sakhalin with an inspection trip. As with East Prussia, in the territory of which Kaliningrad Region was created, a development and settlement plan was drafted for the former governorate of Karafuto. In 1947, Toyohara was renamed as Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, and at the same time Sakhalin Region was formed to include both parts of the island and the Kurils. [Vysokov (ed.) 2008, p. 455–456].

The Japanese remained to live on the island for another few years, and the period between 1945 and 1948 was an amazing period in the two countries' history, when so many Russian and Japanese people constantly interacted and watched each other. It was an important life experience, albeit with elements of ideological absurdity. The Japanese were inevitably involved in ideology-driven Soviet life: former residents of militaristic Japan were now forced to celebrate Soviet holidays and take part in May Day demonstrations. The Soviet people, for their part, were amazed by the Japanese way of life. They were struck by the absence of sidewalks on the streets and by the lack of central heating despite the harsh climate.

The autumn of 1945 brought about the start of repatriation of the Japanese people, during which about 380,000 people were sent to Japan. It was done jointly by the USSR, USA and Japan. Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk (ex-Toyohara) became a kind of collector where people were brought from Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. It must be noted that the Soviet side did not want the Japanese to leave too soon. The post-war economy needed local hands until enough Soviet settlers arrived. The Japanese were moved out only by whole families, and breaking up families was not allowed. Every week two ships took out 1,500 people. Between December 1946 and July 1949, about 290,000 Japanese were removed from South

Sakhalin in five trips. By 1949, the Japanese population had been repatriated from Sakhalin [Amano Naoki 2017, p. 328].

Together with the Japanese, the few Ainu were also removed. But the fate of the Sakhalin Koreans brought during the war for heavy work in coal-mining and fishing was deplorable. Militaristic Japan had recruited people from one of its colonies to maintain the economy of another colony. After 1945, the USSR refused to return these people to their homeland for the same reason – a shortage of labour in the economy of the now Sakhalin region. According to different estimates, in Karafuto at that time there were 23,000 to 50,000 Koreans [Kuzin 2010, p. 80]. They all had to stay in the USSR. In addition, in 1950, murderous war broke out in Korea, and the country was divided into two camps. Even when it became possible to return, there was only one option – to become a citizen of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In 1957, the leaders of North Korea and of the USSR reached an intergovernmental agreement that the Koreans living in the Sakhalin region could determine their place of residence for themselves. Some did just that. However, those people whose relatives remained in the Republic of Korea had to wait for a reunion for many decades, and many did live to see it at all. A monument in the form of a halved funnel, which was opened in Korsakov in the autumn of 2007, became a symbol of grief and separation from one's homeland.

### **Karafuto-Sakhalin: Elimination and Preservation of Memory**

The forty-year presence of the Japanese in South Sakhalin left its mark, but the new government handles this legacy in different ways. In 1949, the Sakhalin Regional Executive Committee ordered to destroy the traces of the Japanese presence. The sanctuaries Toyohara Jinja and Karafuto Jinja were demolished. The columns installed to commemorate the visits of the members of the imperial family were demolished, too, but strange as it may seem, their pedestals could not be destroyed as they were made of very strong concrete. These concrete blocks are still in place [Fedorchuk 2013].

Residential buildings in large cities were gradually pulled down; instead, buildings of typical Soviet architecture were put up, while the same street layout was maintained. Gradually, the cities completely lost the Japanese appearance. With rare exceptions, the Japanese architecture disappeared. Oddly enough, the building of the Governorate Museum remained intact and even continued to be used for its intended purpose. Today it houses the Sakhalin State Regional Museum.



Economic and industrial facilities were preserved, since they were badly needed in the poorly developed Soviet economy. Technological memory providing evidence of the Japanese presence on the island proved to be more durable due to its functionality, which is best seen on the example of the operation of the railways. By 1945, in the south of the island, about 700 kilometers of railway tracks were laid and 618 bridges were built [Kostanov 1997, p. 40]. The standard for the Japanese track was the so called Cape gauge – 1067 mm, which was narrower than the Soviet gauge (1520 mm). The spiking of the track to the Russian standard had not started until 2000. It is planned to complete the works in 2020.

It is widely known that for the Japanese an important condition for both individual and national identification is the cult of their ancestors, which is implemented in particular in increased attention to preserving the graves of relatives. For those who left Sakhalin in the late 1940s visiting the graves of their ancestors became a matter of paramount importance and, consequently, a subject for discussion between the leaders of the USSR and Japan. In 1965, consent was given for Japanese citizens to visit cemeteries in Sakhalin Region according to a strictly specified schedule, with a limited number of facilities to visit and under close supervision by the local KGB and party agencies. It is surprising that in the texts of party and government documents this process was terminologically perceived as “reception of Japanese tourists” [Prussakova 2000, p. 142].

Japan, too, preserved the memory of Karafuto Governorate, but with certain particularities. In 1957, the All-Japan Federation of Karafuto, *Zenkoku Karafuto Renmei* (全国樺太連盟), was established. The purpose of this organization to this day is to coordinate ties between the governorate’s former residents. It has provided assistance in publishing works on the history of the former Japanese colony and preservation of its memory in the present-day Sakhalin region [Miki Masafumi 2010]. In Sapporo, in the former building of the Hokkaido administration there is a museum room – *Karafuto Kankei Shiryōkan* (樺太関係資料館), which is part of the tourist space dedicated to the history of northern Japan. Here one can see documents, photographs and other evidence of the Japanese life on the island which has long been a part of another country.

## Conclusion

The nearly semi-centennial history of the Japanese colony is an experience of the political, social and economic development of a new space, which hap-

pened very rarely in Japan's history. Throughout their ancient and medieval history, the Japanese showed little inclination to acquire new lands beyond their own territory. In large part, the history of the Land of the Rising Sun is a history of hermitage and non-interference in the affairs of neighbours. The course towards building an empire, which became part of the modernization project in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, resulted in the country's defeat in World War II, also creating great difficulties in relations with neighbours – China and the countries of the Korean Peninsula. In contemporary Japan the attitude to the political history of that period is clearly negative. However, it should be noted that the history of Karafuto Governorate is probably a rear and somewhat forgotten instance of conflict-free ethnic expansion. The fact that after 1945 these territories became part of the USSR (and then the Russian Federation) did not in the least degree complicate relationships between ordinary people. Both after 1905 and after 1945, Sakhalin Island did not become a subject of any serious mutual claims. Today the Karafuto period (*Karafuto Jidai* 樺太時代) is the history of ordinary people who, though they lived outside contemporary Japan, should not be forgotten. This past is an integral part of the historical memory and national identity of the Japanese people rather than of the Japanese state.

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