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## Karafuto 1945: An examination of the Japanese under Soviet rule and their subsequent expulsion

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Karafuto 1945: An Examination of the Japanese Under Soviet Rule and Their Subsequent  
Expulsion

By Cameron B. Carson

## **Introduction**

The year 1945 saw the end of the Second World War, which claimed millions of lives from both civilians and members of the military. 1945 was also the beginning of another type of conflict, namely the Cold War, which the USA and USSR fought through proxy and filled both with fear. One of the issues that many historians overlook between the two superpowers is the repatriation of Japanese nationals who were left in a remote part of the former Japanese Empire that fell under the control of the USSR in the closing days of the war. This paper will look at the stories of the Japanese nationals left behind on Sakhalin Island (or “Karafuto” as it was known to the Japanese) after it was invaded and subsequently occupied by the USSR in August 1945. In particular, this paper will examine the differences between Soviet administrative accounts, American journalistic accounts, and Japanese civilian accounts regarding the administration, treatment, and eventual expulsion of the Japanese population.

Academia has paid little attention to the experiences of Japanese nationals living in the former Karafuto prefecture, and Karafuto is usually relegated to a footnote or a list of former parts of the empire. In many of the recent studies on Japanese nationals stranded in areas of the former empire, the focus has been on those left in northeast China, Manchuria, when the military of the USSR invaded in the closing days of the war. According to *When Empire Comes Home* by Lori Watt, 1,550,000 Japanese nationals were stranded in Manchuria at the closing of the war. Watt presents research on the abuses against Japanese civilians by the military of the USSR and native Chinese civilians, many of whom had suffered exploitation at the hands of the Japanese government. Karafuto’s native inhabitants had been subjugated to assimilation by the

Japanese government but there weren't any recorded reprisals against the Japanese population and most, holding Japanese nationality, left on the repatriation ships. John Dower's book, *Embracing Defeat*, a detailed work on postwar Japan immediately after the surrender, devotes an entire chapter to the repatriation, but again only focuses on the experiences of those who repatriated from Manchuria, mentioning Karafuto only as a location from which other Japanese nationals returned.

The word used to refer to these people in Japan is 引揚者 (Hikiagesha), which means *repatriates* or more literally "pulled up people." Although one might be inclined to call them refugees since they returned to the Japanese home islands after the close of Second World War, they do not completely fit the United Nations definition of a refugee since many of them left during an organized repatriation. According to the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, "A refugee is someone who fled his or her home and country owing to a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." This definition, however, came too late for the Japanese repatriated from Sakhalin, many of whom returned between 1946 and 1948. Because of this, I will use the English term "repatriates" instead of calling them "refugees."

As the USSR and the United States were very different in terms of ideology and systems of governance, the accounts written by the Soviets, the Americans, and the stranded Japanese on the island differ greatly in their depiction of Japanese life under Soviet rule. The Japanese civilian accounts are primary sources, as I was able to interview a group of five former repatriates who left the former Karafuto Prefecture as children. Their accounts validate many of the reports in the Soviet and American

accounts but are far more detailed as they are firsthand experiences. As this paper will argue, accounts written by Soviets tend to focus on the benefits of their governance of the former Karafuto Prefecture, whereas accounts written by the Americans tend to focus on the brutality of Soviet rule, and the imposition of the Soviet system on the population. Neither of these accounts, however, portrays the totality of the experience of the Japanese. The firsthand accounts I gathered do not focus so much on the politics of the new Soviet administration, but instead emphasize personal experiences of postwar life in Karafuto and the repatriation, which do not appear at all in Soviet or American journalistic accounts.

### **A History of Sakhalin Before 1945**

The Sakhalin Oblast of the Russian Federation is the jurisdiction responsible for governing the island of Sakhalin--a 30,500 square mile island off the coast of the Russian Far-East, and across the Soya Strait from Japan's Hokkaido Island. (Steven 1971, 7) It is home to 580,000 people, most of who have lived on Sakhalin for many years, making it culturally Russian. However visitors to the capital city, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, may be surprised to see a large Asian architectural style building standing in the central district. It is currently a regional history museum, but it is also one of the last remnants of a past that most Sakhalin residents have only heard about, as the history museum was once the centerpiece of the capital city of Toyohara, an outpost of the Empire of Japan.

The 50<sup>th</sup> parallel cuts roughly across the middle of Sakhalin, and the land south of this parallel was once part of the Empire. Although largely forgotten by most in Japan today, over 408,000 Japanese, Ainu, and Russians who escaped the USSR after the 1917

Revolutions once lived in southern Sakhalin, or Karafuto Prefecture as it was known during the period that it belonged to the Japanese Empire.

Several nations argued over control of Sakhalin since its first exploration. The signing of the Treaty of Shimoda (1855), by Japan and Russia, nullified an earlier Chinese claim to the island and provided that both Russian nationals and Japanese nationals would be able to inhabit the island without having to renounce their nationality. Both Japan and Russia, under the Treaty of Shimoda, acknowledged Sakhalin Island as a territory under the sovereignty of both countries. (Steven 1971, 63) However, the island in its entirety fell under the sovereignty of the Russian Empire after the signing of the Treaty of St. Petersburg (1875). (Steven 1971, 78)

Japan still retained privileges in Sakhalin after signing the Treaty of St. Petersburg. One of the Treaty of St. Petersburg's stipulations was that Japanese nationals retained the right to live and work on the island. Japanese nationals built up a strong and vibrant fishing industry that began to alarm the government in St. Petersburg. The government imposed taxes on the fishing industries, even though the Japanese consulate authorities protested. More restrictive rules passed in 1899 by the imperial government in St. Petersburg ordered that all members of the fishing industry were to be Japanese nationals. This situation continued until the Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904.

Relations between the Russian Empire and the post-Meiji Restoration Empire of Japan deteriorated after the ending of the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 gave China's Liaodong Peninsula to Japan and allowed Japan to exercise influence over Korea. The Triple Intervention of Russia, France and Germany encouraged Japan to not occupy the Liaodong Peninsula, which it consented. Russia, however, leased the peninsula in 1898

from China, sparking anger in Japan. When Russia refused to acknowledge Korea as being in Japan's sphere of influence, Japan went to war. The Russo-Japanese War was a devastating blow to the Russian Empire as Japan defeated Russian forces and decimated the Russian fleet at the Battle of Tsushima, which took place in the strait between Japan's Home Islands and Korea. Japanese forces invaded Sakhalin in July of 1905 and the Treaty of Portsmouth (1905) divided Sakhalin roughly in half at the 50<sup>th</sup> Parallel, splitting it between the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan. (Steven 1971, 85) Many citizens on both sides saw the failure to retain or conquer the entire island as a point of national shame. (Steven 1971, 88) The Japanese-controlled southern half of the island became the Karafuto Prefecture of the Empire of Japan. This was to remain the status quo until the summer of 1945, forty years later.

On March 31, 1907, Japan established Karafuto Prefecture, ending military rule on its half of the island. A prefectural governor, whose powers ranged widely from control of the police to educational policies, ruled Karafuto. (Steven 1971, 88) Settlers from Japan began to slowly migrate to Karafuto. The Hokkaido Takushoku Bank offered low-interest loans to those brave enough to make the journey north. Karafuto had vast quantities of natural resources, most notably ore deposits, coal veins, vast forests, and waters which allowed fishing to become a large industry in the first years of Japanese control. Japan's Kuhara and Mitsubishi companies also gained access to northern Sakhalin's oil fields, which were not under Japanese sovereignty, extracting 12 percent of its domestic oil consumption between 1920 and 1925. (Beasley 1987) Japan also briefly occupied the northern half of the island after the October Revolution of 1918 brought the

Soviets to power; however, Japanese forces withdrew from above the 50<sup>th</sup> Parallel and the USSR and the Empire of Japan established diplomatic relations in 1925.

Japan's expansion into Northeast Asia eventually sparked the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, and after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Japan began to fight a war on two fronts. Japan and the USSR had signed the Sino-Japanese Neutrality Pact on August 13, 1941, ensuring that neither side would fight each other. This treaty also included the acknowledgement of the independence of Manchukuo (a puppet state of Japan) and Japan's recognition of the Mongolian People's Republic as a sovereign nation. However, with the tide of the war turning against Japan, the Allied Powers agreed at Yalta that if the USSR were to enter the war against Japan that all of Sakhalin would be returned to the USSR. (Vishwanathan, 1973) The USSR denounced the neutrality pact on April 5, 1945. On August 8 of that same year, the USSR delivered a declaration of war to the Japanese Ambassador in Moscow. "The Soviet Government considers that this policy is the only means able to bring peace nearer, free the people from further sacrifice and suffering and give the Japanese people the possibility of avoiding the dangers and destruction suffered by Germany after her refusal to capitulate unconditionally. In view of the above, the Soviet Government declares that from tomorrow, that is from Aug. 9, the Soviet Government will consider itself to be at war with Japan." The invasion of Karafuto began the first day of war between the Empire of Japan, and the USSR when the Soviet Army bombarded the frontier post at Handenzawa, and crossed into Japanese territory. (Steven 1971, 149)

## **Soviet and United States Journalistic Accounts**

The Red Army spent three days bombarding the Handenzawa Frontier Post. (Sevela and Kriukov 2001) Fighting was fierce on both sides, with many casualties on both sides when Soviet forces landed at the ports of Maoka, Esutoru, and Toro. Fighting lasted two weeks until August 25<sup>th</sup>- when the Red Army captured Karafuto's capital city, Toyohara –ten days after the Showa Emperor announced the Empire of Japan's unconditional surrender. The region was under military rule until September, when the Civil Administration Department of South Sakhalin and the Kurils was established under command of Dmitrii Kriukov, a colonel in the Red Army. Colonel Kriukov wrote an account of his tenure as the head of the Civil Administration Department of South Sakhalin and the Kurils, which provides from a Soviet perspective a detailed account of the lives of the Japanese who remained and Soviet policies toward them. Colonel Kriukov wrote his memoirs in 1975, thirty years after the invasion of Karafuto, and although the accounts are detailed, due to the sensitive nature of the issue in the USSR at the time, they were not published until after the collapse of the USSR, after Colonel Kriukov's death. Since they are from the perspective of a Red Army Colonel, they praise the Soviet administration and treatment of the Japanese inhabitants while providing a very detailed account of the last days that the Japanese people inhabited the area south of the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel.

At the time of the invasion of Karafuto, civil society disintegrated, and according to Colonel Kriukov, several of the Red Army Generals allowed their battalions to damage infrastructure and to rob, pillage, and destroy locals' property. It is clear the higher-level commanders regarded Karafuto as “liberated Russian lands” and were irate at the

destruction. For these reasons, many of the Japanese slaughtered their cattle, closed their shops, and gathered in Karafuto's port cities to escape before the Red Army reached them. Colonel Kriukov remembers that restoring order was difficult. The new Soviet administration tried various approaches to restoring order to both the Japanese and Soviet sides of the conflict. One involved encouraging the Japanese who had crowded the port cities to return to their homes in various parts of the Department of South Sakhalin, the newly established unit covering the territory that was formerly the Japanese-controlled prefecture of Karafuto. Colonel Kriukov's account puts the number of Japanese civilians trying to escape at roughly 60,000. (Sevela and Kriukov 2001) These large numbers far exceeded the shelter and edible food available, and diseases began to develop. Kriukov writes, "There was no proper food around, so they ate grass, raw vegetables, bad fish. Dysentery, typhus, and other diseases were spreading." (Sevela and Kriukov 2001) Colonel Kriukov goes on to state that the Soviet forces provided food and medical care, which prevented epidemics and also encouraged the Japanese to return to their residences, as the border, between the former Karafuto Prefecture and the Japanese Home Islands had been closed. To the Soviet forces in the area the Soviet government issued a statement saying that the Japanese were free citizens, and the Soviet forces were to respect Japanese nationals' habits and were not to touch their possessions. Additionally, Soviet citizens and Japanese citizens were not allowed to fraternize. The last governor of the Karafuto Prefecture, Ōtsu Toshio was placed under house arrest, and ordered to issue laws and directives from the Soviet government in his own name. In a conversation between Colonel Kriukov and former governor Ōtsu, Kriukov stated, "You'll govern on behalf of the Military Government, like your Mikado governs on behalf of MacArthur."

(Sevela and Kriukov 2001) Colonel Kriukov states that once social order was restored and the new system was installed, people began to enjoy how the rule of the USSR improved their lives. Japanese civilians had heard that the American occupation of the Japanese Home Islands was hellish, and reports of American troops stealing, and fraternizing with young women were widespread. Colonel Kriukov's account does not indicate exactly how this information was circulated, as the border had been closed at the end of the invasion, but we can assume that at least some of the reports came through the new bilingual, Japanese and Russian, newspapers and radio. It also appears that some Japanese began to request Soviet citizenship, although this was almost never granted. (Sevela and Kriukov 2001) He also states that intercepted letters sent by Japanese residents included support for the new Soviet administration. It is not said how or why the letters were intercepted. The letters include some of the following views:

“Russians are kindhearted, good people. Now I get better pay working eight hours instead of twelve...I thought things would be bad for us after the war, but on the contrary they got better.” -Mizukawa Masao.

“We have decided to stay in South Sakhalin...the Russians treated us humanely...They gave us a peaceful life here and also much land for free...We have all applied for Soviet citizenship.” - Nine Separate Signatures (Peasants from Maguntan)

Some also included newly found gender equality, as seen in this intercepted letter from Maeda Yoshiko: “We don't have to serve the men anymore. All of us were given work and we get the same pay as men...Now we live like Russian women; we even play sports together.”

The USSR rarely granted Soviet citizenship to the Japanese residents, and Colonel

Kriukov cites that the Soviet Foreign Ministry wouldn't allow it, due to opposition from the Americans, and that preparations for the repatriation of Japanese nationals were being planned. (Sevela and Kriukov 2001)

According to Colonel Kriukov's memoirs, the repatriation was agreed to by both the USSR and the US in an agreement, 'for the return of Japanese nationals from Soviet and Soviet-controlled areas', signed in 1946, and provided that both US and USSR authorities would set a schedule for repatriations ships, American passenger ships, carrying between 2,000-3,000 people each, to carry the Japanese nationals to Japan. The first repatriation ship actually left Sakhalin for Hakodate, Hokkaido a couple of weeks before hand. According to Colonel Kriukov, who headed the repatriation commission, those leaving for Japan would be able to take household goods, excluding currency, and had to be dressed warmly. (Sevela and Kriukov 2001) The Soviet authorities established several transit camps were established in Maoka, the departure port in South Sakhalin for those leaving for Japan. People left in three groups, first went the bourgeoisie, then the factory workers and peasants, and last of all, doctors, priests, teachers, and others who had special skills needed by the remaining Japanese population. Those who requested to leave earlier could present petitions, but Colonel Kriukov only remembers about one hundred people doing so, and strangely enough, petitions asking to be granted Soviet citizenship also came, reasons being from worries about food shortages on the Home Islands to women concerned about their rights. (Sevela and Kriukov 2001) The first official repatriation ship left the port city of Maoka in 1947, bound for Hokkaido. Repatriation ships came and went until May of 1948. Colonel Kriukov states that at this time, the entire Japanese population had left. (Sevela and Kriukov 2001)

Events of the invasion reported by Colonel Kriukov are secondhand but come from Soviet military briefings. His reports of restructuring the administration of the former Karafuto Prefecture into the Civil Administration of South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands however, are firsthand, vivid, and are extremely detailed in the methods used to implement the Soviet system, which was much different from the previous Japanese system. The United States journalistic accounts of the implementation of the Soviet system are secondhand, coming from either escapees during the initial months of the occupation or the first wave of Japanese repatriates in 1947. Colonel Kriukov mentions the repatriation in his memoirs, but is described as an agreement from the higher levels of government of the USSR and the United States, and one that he could do nothing to change. Colonel Kriukov's attitude towards the Japanese is one of concern, but is dismissive, as the Japanese nationals were going to US-occupied territory.

Newspapers in the United States also reported on the new administration in the former Karafuto Prefecture. A newspaper article from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, published on August 14, 1945, titled "Reds Invade Sakhalin" reports, "Japanese broadcasts said Russian marines had landed on Karafuto, Japanese owned southern half of Sakhalin Island north of Japan and established two beachheads." (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 August 1945) It goes on to say that the invasion went through the frontier and the two coastal cities of Ambetsu and Esutoru. Another report from *The Atlanta Connection*, lists the names of the captured towns as "Shikuka, Naioro, Usioro, Unart and Maoko [Maoka]." (*The Atlanta Connection*, 22 August 1945, 1)

In newspaper articles published by newspapers in the United States, southern Sakhalin's former Japanese name, Karafuto, appears only a few times, only prominently

in a small map in an article called “Jap Repatriates Life Russian Veil on South Sakhalin,” published by the *Christian Science Monitor* on December 14, 1946. In all other articles, any reference to the island is either ‘Sakhalin,’ or ‘South Sakhalin.’ Although this is perhaps unintentional, it is in line with the Soviet idea that southern Sakhalin was liberated Russian land. The same article reports what Japanese repatriates, who had arrived at the Hokkaido port city of Hakodate, told of life under Soviet rule. The article reports that poor farmers from Russia made them think that the USSR planned on turning southern Sakhalin into a Russian colony. The former mayor of Maoka, Takahashi Katsujirō served under the Soviet administration until June 1946, but not before an almost fatal run in with the Soviet military. “The Mayor himself took charge of the attempt to evacuate some fifteen hundred women and children. And while engaged in this effort, Russian sailors picked him up. He was taken with 15 others to a near-by pier and stood up in a line and machine-gunned. Thirteen were killed, but the Mayor and one other escaped with near fatal wounds. The Mayor hid under a boat on the pier for two days until found by a Japanese girl who managed to get him to a hospital.” The Mayor was reinstated after Soviet officers visited his hospital room and told him there had been a case of mistaken identity. An earlier article written after an interview with nine Japanese escapees from Karafuto states that the food situation was bad because the Russians had seized the potato crop, leaving only rice. Fishermen also had a similar experience, and were not compensated with money or food. “Each time he [The Fisherman] was given enough oil for his next trip but no other compensation, he said. The general Russian policy was to work the civilians as much as possible and give them nothing...”

The article ‘Tell of Russian Communization of All Sakhalin,’ published by the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on December 11, 1946 reports the events told by Japanese repatriates at Hakodate, but in a noticeably more critical form. The first section of the article states that Japanese nationals were required to turn over their land to cooperative farms. A farm board paid out farmer’s wages once the harvest had been delivered. In regards to civilian life, “All major industries-food, fishery, mining, paper mills, railways and communications- are under direct state control...The former *Karafuto Nippo*, a Japanese newspaper has been re-christened *New Life with Russians* as publisher and editor. It is exclusively a Communist party paper and no other publication is permitted.” (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 December 1946) The article also notes that the movie theaters now show only Russian films, and exposes on Japanese militarism. Industrial production was a fraction of what it was under Japanese rule. Interestingly, it devotes a paragraph to the fishing industry, which was very strong at the time of the partition in 1905. “Russians reopened fisheries by requisitioning Japanese fishermen. All hauls are delivered to a fishing board and fishermen are paid wages only. The hauls are usually limited because the Russians won’t permit the Japanese to operate far from shore.” (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 December 1946)

Japanese and American authorities seemed to be wary of escapees from the former Karafuto Prefecture. “Because of the tightened Soviet vigilance, the Japanese believe few legitimate refugees are now escaping. Most current arrivals are felt to be Soviet spies and agents with special missions in Japan. Many, police say, are unwilling victims who left their families behind as hostages.” (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 September 1946)

Another article in the *Christian Science Monitor* reports that the army had forbidden the opening of the schools. “It assembled all teacher and school principals two months ago, however, and gave them a brief indoctrination in Communist theory. They then permitted limited revival of schooling, using less than half the former school buildings and cutting daytime attendance to about three hours.” (*Christian Science Monitor*, 16 December 1946)

Even though the Red Army had invaded and occupied the former Karafuto Prefecture, American newspapers published accounts of the occupation and life thereafter. These accounts, for the most part, portray the lives of the Japanese left behind much differently from what Colonel Kriukov wrote in his memoirs. Most of these accounts come from either Russian reports, or from Japanese who either left during the official repatriations, or who quietly left the newly formed ‘Civil Administration Department of South Sakhalin and the Kurils.’

The first stories in American newspapers of actual living conditions under Soviet administration don’t really come into publication until 1946, when the *Chicago Daily Tribune* published a testimony from a group of Japanese people who escaped to Wakkanai at the northern tip of Hokkaido. According to Azuma Sadurō, the invasion at Maoka left five hundred civilians dead. Another member of the group, Miura Tsukuzoema told that the food situation was poor due to the Red Army looting the harvest. A similar account by Segawa Uwajirō stated that while he was allowed to continue fishing, the authorities confiscated the entire catch, and while he was only compensated in fuel for his vessel, there were some types of work that people were paid in rubles. (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 22 April 1946) More articles were published when the

first repatriates, transported officially, arrived in the Japanese home islands. Another article from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, dated November 2, 1946, reported that many new Russian settlers had moved to the area bringing their possessions and livestock. It states, “23 collective farms have been established...The first large group of teachers, mainly from the central part of the Soviet Union and the Urals, has recently arrived to open schools. A southern Sakhalin shipping company has been organized and railway services have been restored...passenger traffic has assumed normal peace time proportions.” (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 November 1946) Yet another article appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* one month later. It states that Japanese repatriates had reported that most farmland had been collectivized and that farmers on these lands were not allowed to travel. Other articles state that most other industries from food to fisheries to railways were under control of the Soviet state. A radio station, broadcasting in Russian had been established in Toyohara, but it only broadcasted five to ten minutes in Japanese per day, and the Japanese language broadcasts were translated Soviet reports. Movie theaters only showed Soviet-leaning films, and only left-leaning Japanese authors were published, such as Kobayashi Takiji. (*Christian Science Monitor*, 16 December 1946) These reports, although few in number do not necessarily repudiate the accounts of Colonel Kriukov; however, US newspapers wrote the accounts in a way that put a negative spin on the events unfolding in the former Karafuto.

US journalistic accounts don't give a detailed account of the actual repatriations or the agreements between the USSR and the US led to an official repatriation scheme. When the repatriation is mentioned in US journalistic accounts, it is a small issue as other

issues such as the policy of collectivization by the Soviet administration are the focus of the articles.

### **Previous Scholarship**

Researcher; Mariya Sevela, from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris published an article in January of 1998 in the history magazine *History Today*. She records the memoirs of some of the former adult residents of Karafuto. Sevela notes that the Red Army battalions that marched into Karafuto surprised most of the interviewees. She writes, “What my informants all remembered was their amazement at how miserable the ‘conquerors’ looked. Women would exclaim ‘poor things!’, when referring to the Soviet soldiers and shake their heads with a sigh.” (Sevela, 1998) Many of the soldiers were poor, and other residents noted that some marched in wearing peasant’s pants, which had been stolen. Other things were stolen, Sevela notes, including shoes and fountain pens. “These incidents of robbery ranked among the most unpleasant memories of the Soviet army’s presence in Karafuto.” (Sevela, 1998)

Mariya Sevela’s article describes her interaction with the repatriates from Karafuto in 1998, and the stories they told her. Many of the still-living former Karafuto residents are members of the Zenkoku Karafuto Renmei (All Japan Federation of Karafuto), an organization with members of diverse backgrounds, united only by the fact that all had to leave the former Karafuto after the close of Second World War. Sevela notes that the Red Army battalions that marched into Karafuto surprised most of the interviewees. Former residents reported that things quickly changed, and that radio sets and automobiles were confiscated, and that many of the bourgeoisie were eventually sent

to prison camps either in the northern part of Sakhalin or on the mainland. Beforehand, they were used as advisers to the new civilian government.

### **New Interviews**

I also wanted to gather primary sources by meeting with former Karafuto residents, now living in Japan. I decided that while I was on my study abroad at Ritsumeikan University, in Kyoto Japan, I would try to contact the Zenkoku Karafuto Renmei (All Japan Federation of Karafuto). After my first semester, I wrote a letter to the Karafuto Renmei's Tokyo office, telling them that I was interested in meeting with people who used to live in Karafuto. They sent me a response that a group from the Kansai region meets monthly in Nagaokakyō, a city on the south border of Kyoto. I was later contacted by phone and told by an English-speaking member who to meet, and what his cell phone number was. On a rainy Saturday, I took the local train from Kyoto Station to Nagaokakyō station, arriving about ten minutes ahead of schedule.

The one I was to call's name is Sudō Toshihirō. I met him in the plaza next to the Nagaokakyō train station. He was an older man who warmly greeted me and led me to the room in the multi-purpose Banbio Center next to the station. I entered a room with five other people sitting around a table. Each warmly greeted me. Some seemed eager to share their stories; others seemed a bit reluctant and even suspicious of my intentions so I promptly introduced myself to break the ice. They asked me why I wanted to speak with them and after telling them that I was writing a thesis for my university, I said I was fascinated by the small amount of information I had read previously and wanted to hear their stories. They nodded and told me that we should begin as they only had the room for

an hour. I took out my phone, and my Japanese-English dictionary, and told them that if any of my questions made them uncomfortable, they didn't have to answer. They all nodded, and began to tell their stories.

Kondō Yoshiko, the daughter of a physician, was born and raised in Toyohara, the capital of Karafuto Prefecture, along with five siblings, an older brother, two younger brothers, and two younger sisters. She was ten years old at the end of the Second World War. Kondō Yoshiko remembers that she and many others were hungry. Sudō Toshihirō, who was thirteen years old in 1945, remembers that in the initial days of the invasion and occupation by the Red Army, there was a lack of rice, sugar, and sake. His father was a government official in the government of Karafuto Prefecture. Sudō was born in Toyohara, but lived and was educated in Otomari. He also stated that life after the Soviet invasion was hard and that his family was very hungry due to the food shortages. Kawada Toshio, who was living in Mototomari in 1945, also remembers that there was no rice or sugar. Shōtsu Masaaki, the son of a salaryman from Fukui Prefecture who became a middle school teacher after the Soviet administration was established, said that one of the reasons there was a lack of food was that the crops that were cultivated as a food sources had been decimated, and so there was nothing to eat at first. Eventually, the thirteen-year-old Shōtsu was given a job in a bread factory, building and stoking the fires for the ovens. His compensation at his job was bread, and he remembered one might sometimes get a good loaf, or sometimes a bad loaf. “Russians who worked the guns thought they were generous with bread?” laughed the others in the group in sad disbelief.

Eventually, the food situation stabilized, as Tanaka Jōji remembered. There was no rice or sugar, but there was bread, fish, and vegetables. As an eleven year old in 1945,

he too was given a job in agriculture, harvesting vegetables and potatoes that he was able to eat at times. He was paid in a mixture of Soviet rubles and Japanese yen, unlike Shōtsu who was paid only in bread. This was a benefit to him and his family, as they used it to buy bread, salt and sugar in the winter when supplies ran out. He remembers that at times various goods were substituted for currency, and said that one time he bought bread with an assortment of flowers.

The repatriates I met with in Nagaokakyō willingly recounted their experiences of repatriation to the home islands, although I noticed that it seemed to pain them to talk about this aspect of their lives more so than when they spoke of life under Soviet administration. Although Colonel Kriukov remembers that the repatriations began at the beginning of 1947, some people left earlier. Kondō Yoshiko and her family left Karafuto in 1945 well before the official repatriation began. Her voice, becoming stronger and quicker with each word, remembered that one day a soldier came to their home in the capital, Toyohara, and ordered her family to get out, and that they would be leaving Karafuto. There was not time to take anything, including basic necessities. Her father, a physician, was ordered to remain behind by the new authorities, and he did not join the family in Sapporo, her mother's hometown for several years. This was before the official repatriation began, and it is likely that Kondō Yoshiko's family left on one of the unofficial and technically illegal crossings that would occasionally occur between Russian-occupied Sakhalin and the Japanese home island of Hokkaido, which like the rest of Japan was under US occupation at the time. Shōtsu Masaaki's family left quickly too. He remembers the exact date, August 16, 1945. But only his mother and younger siblings were able to leave Karafuto at this time. Shōtsu Masaaki and his father didn't

repatriate until 1947, when they joined his mother and siblings in Fukui Prefecture. Tanaka Jōji's family was also split up by the repatriation. He and his mother left for Gifu Prefecture, his parent's birthplace, while his father and two older brothers remained in southern Sakhalin for an additional two years. Only Kawada Toshio's and Sudō Toshihirō's families repatriated as a whole. Kawada Toshio's family, which included his father, mother and his two siblings left for Gifu Prefecture in 1948, towards the end of the repatriation period. Sudō's father was a government official in Karafuto, and as the Soviet administration retained many of the officials until the last days of the repatriation period, it is likely that the Sudō family left the former Karafuto Prefecture in the late 1940s, although he didn't specify which year. His family went to Shimane Prefecture, before moving to Kyoto Prefecture. When I asked them how they restarted their lives on the home islands, all said that they had assistance from their relatives, and were grateful for the help their families received. All had heard stories of repatriates who had no extended families to return to and thus endured great hardship in restarting their lives. When I asked if they knew of any Japanese that stayed behind, they told me Japanese women who married Korean men lost their Japanese nationality after the war, and thus were not able to go to the home islands. There were other Japanese that stayed on in the former Karafuto Prefecture for various reasons, but their numbers were very small.

## **Conclusion**

The accounts of this now mostly forgotten location in history vary widely, as many accounts of historical events do, but this paper has been an examination of why this is so. The Karafuto repatriates I interviewed were children at the time of the end of

Second World War. Their view of life being difficult is probably accurate. Most likely, as children, they would not have had a full knowledge of the political context of the time, and they would have seen events for what they were--rationing of limited food supplies, forced expulsion from their homes at the time of the Soviet invasion, and a separation that tore families apart for years at a time. The quote, exclaimed by several of the former Karafuto residents I interviewed: "The Russians who operated the guns thought they were generous by offering bread," can be interpreted as them seeing the USSR as a conqueror who threatened their families and way of life, and a hypocritical offer of food when scarce food was rationed by the new Soviet administration.

The USSR account reports many of the same events but shows them in a more positive light. Colonel Kriukov saw rationing of the food supplies as a precautionary measure, as many of the Japanese farmers burned their crops when the invasion came, and the rationing system was the only way to keep feeding the population equally. In Kondō Yoshiko's account of being forced from her home, as well as other accounts, the Red Army commits atrocities; however, according to Colonel Kriukov, who demanded that order be restored on "recovered Russian lands," all property was now property of the Soviet State--it was not to be damaged. He also reported that although some Japanese nationals had unofficially departed for the Japanese home islands during this time, like Kondō Yoshiko's family, that the Soviet administration restored order and encouraged civil society to continue as it did before the invasion.

The American accounts increasingly portrayed the actions of the USSR's administration as deplorable, although they substantiate Colonel Kriukov's account of collectivization and rationing. The ideologies of the United States and the USSR were

quite different, considering that the United States was a capitalist, multiparty democracy, and the USSR was a one-party, socialist state in which the state owned all property. The US journalistic accounts highlight these differences through their criticism and focus on atrocities of the Soviet system. The plight of the Japanese still living in the former Karafuto Prefecture is not focused on. The stories in the US accounts came from Japanese nationals who had either escaped or repatriated from the new “South Sakhalin,” but didn’t focus on the plight of the Japanese themselves, but rather reported the new Soviet administration’s policies as an issue.

The first Soviet Governor of the Civil Administration Department of South Sakhalin and the Kurils, Colonel Dmitrii Kriukov vividly portrays the first years of Soviet rule over the Japanese population in his account. It does describe the implementation of the Soviet system, and in some cases he even writes of the feedback he received from Japanese residents; however, he describes the negative aspects of life on the island as being a result of lingering pre-war attitudes. He argues that dissenters were either not adapting culturally or still believed the wartime propaganda taught in the former Japanese Empire. He does say that although the military forces of the USSR did loot and treat the Japanese and their property badly at first, it was under his orders that Japanese property be respected, as it was now under the Soviet state’s ownership. His account of the repatriation confirms the accounts that Japanese nationals were not allowed to take currency, and what personal affects they were allowed to take had to be under a certain weight limit. He blames this on the immigration officers, which weren’t under his jurisdiction, and the US Forces, and reported that the US forces confiscated pro-Soviet brochures upon their arrival in the home islands. Ultimately, while much of

what he says may have happened, due to the political climate in the USSR, both at the end of Second World War, and when he first penned his memoirs, it is likely that he exaggerated the positive aspects.

The United States Journalistic accounts only begin to report the events in the former Karafuto after the first Japanese nationals arrived in the Japanese home islands. The articles state that the information reported was from Japanese nationals who either returned or escaped from Karafuto, the only information reported on the actual repatriation of the Japanese. The articles then go on to describe the new Soviet administration, portraying it in a negative light, seeing that the Soviet system was ideologically at odds with the American system. The articles are sympathetic to the people who were the enemies just a few years before, and negatively portray the actions of their former Soviet allies.

The Japanese interviewees from the Karafuto Renmei also validate Colonel Kriukov's and the US journalistic accounts, mentioning the collectivization of industries and the rationing of food. However, their stories focused on the repatriation of their families, and the hardships that came with it. Colonel Kriukov's, and the US accounts do not state that teenage and adult males of the families were sometimes required to stay behind in order to work in the newly collectivized industries. In fact, Colonel Kriukov's account states that families were able to all repatriate together, but that the skill level of the repatriates would be a factor in when they, as families, were allowed to apply to leave. Most of the repatriates I interviewed had fathers that stayed behind and were involved in either the prefectural government or some other technical field that was vital to the Soviets; at least until Soviet citizens could take their place. Colonel Kriukov's account

does not state that some people were forced to leave Karafuto by members of the Red Army during the invasion, instead stating that the Japanese were encouraged to return to their homes and to continue in their daily lives. I was surprised that when asking the interviewees whether life was better under the Japanese administration or the Soviet administration, all replied that the Japanese administration had been better. I speculate that this was due to Karafuto's remote location in the former Japanese Empire, and its abundance of resources that weren't available in other parts of Japan, which suffered food shortages during the war.

Ultimately there were large ideological differences between the three sources, Soviet, American, and from the repatriates themselves. With the US and the USSR moving into the Cold War, both sides demonized the other, blaming them for the hardship in the lives of the Japanese, but ultimately neither focused on the conditions of the repatriation itself--the event that affected the Japanese nationals the most. Their stories have largely been overlooked as all but a few Japanese left Karafuto and integrated into Japanese society. The stories of their experiences have taken a back seat to the events that happened on the Japanese home islands during the war years. Academia has focused on the experiences of Japanese nationals in Manchuria, where over one million were stranded in an area vaster, harder to control, and thus more violent. Both Lori Watt's *When Empire Comes Home*, and John Dower's *Embracing Defeat*, only mentions Karafuto as a location from which people returned.

Further research into repatriates, and their experiences, from other former Japanese territories, Korea and Taiwan, must be done in order to further learn how these people resettled into Japanese society after their repatriation. Documenting the

experiences of those still living is important, as studying the effects of having to begin new lives, may show how the repatriations from former territories affect modern Japanese society, even though these events happened three generations ago.

Many of the Japanese of Karafuto have assimilated into Japanese society. Those who were children, such as those I met, comprise of a majority of the repatriates that are still alive today and many still belong to the Karafuto Renmei, bonded by their experiences. The existence of this group has the benefit of emotional support and community building for the former repatriates who could identify with one another while rebuilding their lives. Eventually, they too will pass into history like most memories of Japan's northernmost territory.

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