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The Russo-Japanese War  
and Japanese concept of territorial identity  
in the Sakhalin Island

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## Introduction

Sakhalin Island is located at north of Japan, between the sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan. Sakhalin is a big island, the length is more than six hundred miles and the total area is approximately 29,700 square miles. In the south it is separated from Japan by twenty-five miles. The distance between Sakhalin and the Russian Maritime regions, near the Amur River is in one point only eight miles.

At the beginning of 1905 there were about 33,000 inhabitants, on the island, of whom about 29,000 were Russians, many of them political convicts, the remainder being mostly Ainu (Cassell 1905).

The territorial treaties that Japan and Russia signed at the end of the nineteenth century, brought a certain normalisation into their diplomatic relations, and signed the end of Russian expedition into the Far East regions, which started at the end of seventeenth century.

During these travels, Russia had for the first time some contacts with Japan. The deepest cultural differences and a different system of interrelations affected immediately the possibility of good relations between the two. One of the results of these cultural misunderstandings was the issue over the Sakhalin and Kuril Island's legal sovereignty.

Japan considered the islands own sovereignty since the period of the mythic kingdom of the first Emperor Jimmu Tenno. Indeed, in the '*Nihongi*' (Chronicles of Japan) there were indications that the islands were part of the Japanese territory (Lasserre 2000).

The geographical position of Japan, and their conservative attitude (Japan never changed her imperial dynasty) developed a concept where borders were not political creation but linked with culture and myths. Japan did not need to delimit her borders because she never felt culturally or military threatened.

The sovereignty over the islands were temporarily resolved in 1875 with the San Petersburg treaty, in which Russia established her domain over the whole Sakhalin Island while Japan received the sovereignty over the Kuril Islands archipelago.

In 1898 Russia confirmed her position in the Far East area with the lease for twenty-five years of Port Arthur (Lushun) part of the Chinese Empire. In 1903 Russia took new initiatives in the north of Korea, and finally she undertook the colossal investment in the Trans-Siberian and the Chinese Eastern Railways. From 1900 to 1904 she occupied with her troops cities and routes of Manchuria. Contemporarily, Japan moved her commercial, political and expansionistic interests in the same area, so that the Russian enterprises became an obstacle for the new Japanese interests.

At first Japan tried to protest against Russia, and looking for peacefully negotiations. So, in April 1902 they signed an agreement in which Russia would have withdrawn her troops from Korea and offered some concession to Japan.

In 1903 Japan and Russia made a new deal; Japan could send some troops to Korea in order to counterbalance the Russian military presence. The new agreement envisaged also economic relationships with Russia. However, Russia did not respect the signed agreement, because she underestimated the political and military power of Japan.

In 1904, Japan considered the Russian troops in Manchuria threatening their new expansionistic politics, in particular because naval and economic interests linked to the railways (Nish 1985).

Russia knew that could not effort a war against Japan, though she had reinforced her military presence in the region; she had not finished the Transiberian, which was important for supplying her troops.

Nevertheless, Russia was confident that Japan would not have started the war. But she was clearly wrong. The official justification of Japan's attack was that Russia had threatened Japanese interests and security in the region. The Japanese army, the cabinet and some of her people openly supported the war. We may argue that other reasons were involved in this war, among the most

important, the economic, geopolitical, and last but not least, the cultural and identity's related aspects.

By the seventeenth century, Japan should reach some territorial compromises with Russia, the borders were artificially and legally delimited, but the Japanese concept of border never changed, consequentially the 1875 treaty was perceived like a temporary truce.

The only possible solution for a complete restoration of the ancient and imaginary (not artificially delimited) borders was for Japan the complete sovereignty over Sakhalin and Kuril Islands.

The war, on Japanese point of view, could have been a good expedient to resolve in definitive way this territorial problem.

Then the Japanese army completed the Sakhalin annexation

The Japanese were elated with their success. The Emperor Meiji sent congratulatory messages to General Haraguchi and Admiral Kataoka. Haraguchi received a hero's welcome at Ueno Station when he returned to Tokyo on 28 September. Most Japanese observers were convinced that all of Sakhalin would be incorporated in the Empire (Stephan 1971).

The joy for the sovereignty over Sakhalin had short time. The Russian, at the peace conference of Portsmouth, refused any territorial concessions. After a long debate, the two delegations reached the agreement where Japan gained only the South part of the island, with the boundaries limited to 50<sup>th</sup> parallel.

Although Japan with the 1875 treaty had succeeded in acquiring the sovereignty upon Kuril Islands, they still missed Sakhalin to complete their imaginary political-cultural dimension.

In this article I shall argue that the Russo-Japanese War, was not only a clash for the political and economical supremacy in the Far East regions, but also a way for a territorial annexation where the reasons were neither political nor economical, but cultural.

## The Japanese Concept of Territorial Identity

Japan is formed from four main islands and a certain number of tiny islands; this disposition helped since ancient times the develop of a peculiar concept of borders.

The sea is the unique border that separates Japan from the other nations; the sea is a natural border, which could connect or disconnect two territories. However it is not a fix border, and is not a visible border.

The sea did not exhaust the perception of a physical border, but the Japanese people needed a metaphysical conception that could delimit the sense of self, the sense of nation, and the imagined national-cultured definition of Japanesenees. Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands are part of this imaginary border, so that Japan claimed, and still claims, the sovereignty over these islands because these territories are part of their inherent territories.

Kimura defines this concept as

An assertion that each nation possesses land that is regarded historically and legally as part of that particular country alone, due to the fact that it has belonged to that nation from ancient times without becoming the possession of any other nation (Hiroshi 1998,6).

In fact the islands are geographically no too far from Japan's main islands. Japan asserts to have had since ancient time trade contacts with the Ainu, the Kuril and Sakhalin's natives. The knowledge of the so-called *basho* system, a ritual exchange of gifts that linked one group to another proved such a link, so that the long relationships that Japanese people had with Ainu, let them believed that Ainu there part of their same ethnic group.

Professor Ito Abito who is an anthropologist working at University of Tokyo, has pointed out:

When the Yamato court (4<sup>th</sup> AD-6<sup>th</sup> AD) came to prevail throughout the archipelago, a sense of indigenous identity gradually manifested itself in the islands' inhabitants. At the same time, however, the inhabitants of the farther fringes of the archipelago during the early period of the Yamato State appear in records under independent names, as ethnic minorities. On the other hand, one could also say that by incorporating local ethnic minorities on the northern and southern peripheries under their rule, they have, in effect voluntarily relinquished their racial homogeneity. One could also say that in the effort to further unity by making the ethnic minorities thus incorporated under their rule into subjects under an emperor system, the illusion of a uniform homogeneous single race was elevated into a kind of national ideal. In Japan following the Meiji Restoration, which sought to create a modern state and society stressing the correspondence between the concept of race and awareness of the land and the nation, the ethnic identity of the Ainu and the Ryūkyūans has in a sense been denied (Abito 1997).

According to Professor Ito Abito, the Ainu population had a Japanese identity and the Japanese language was derived from Ainu language. The credence that the racial and language homogeneity corresponds at a unique Japanese border was believed since ancient time. In 1735 Mogami Tokunai, one of the most Japanese explorer, met the Ainu during an expedition to Sakhalin and the Kuril Island. He lived with Ainu, and he studied the uses and the culture of this community. In his texts he affirmed that the Ainu were part of the Japanese race because they had the same Japanese physical aspect, 'they needed only to be taught the Japanese culture and religion' (Keene 1969, 134).

The assertion of Mogami, encountered some opposition, especially from the Matsumae Clan, that from 1603 established his domain on the Ezo territory (Hokkaido Island) and all islands at North of Ezo. The Matsumae Clan, believed the Ainu to be closer to animal than human beings, though they integrated Sakhalin and the Kuriles in their domain. In 1672 they established the first permanent Japanese settlement in Sakhalin, and by 1700 the island was listed in the official register of the Matsumae Clan as Karafuto Island, with twenty-two villages and stations (Amidon 1957).

At the end of eighteenth century another Japanese scholar and explorer, Honda Toshiaki, wrote in his memories and referring to the legend of Jimmu's visit to the Kuriles, (Keene 1969) affirmed that the Ainu were part of Japanese race, because their inhabitants were direct descendants of the Emperor.

### Brief history on discover of Sakhalin

In the middle of seventeenth Century, a group of Russian adventures reached the Sakhalin Island, with the scope of lucrative trade. They sailed around the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin, drew maps and took the first contact with the native populations. These first contacts opened new ways for further Russian expeditions, but until the end of the seventeenth century we have not prove to direct contact between Russia and Japan.

Some Japanese scholars argued that in the '*Nihongi*' (Chronicles of Japan) completed in 720 BC, there were indications that the islands were part of the Japanese territory (Lasserre 2000). At the early of seventeenth century, the Tokugawa clan took power in Japan, and gave to Matsumae clan jurisdiction over Ezo.

Ezo was a vague territory with not definite borders, enclosing a large area that included Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Kuril Island. During the seventeenth century, the Matsume clan established control over Sakhalin, with some fishing stations, villages and settlements. In the same period, the central Shogunate received some reports with vague information about the Russian presence on Sakhalin and Kuril Islands, in order to verify the validity of this information, they

organised some expedition on there. In 1780 they organised the first mission direct to the Kuril Islands and in 1785 another mission with the same aim was organised to Sakhalin.

Although the explorers did not find any Russian presence in the area, the Shogunate decided to apply a direct control over the territories with a special commission. In 1805 was organised a third mission to Sakhalin, in order to verify the new shogunate policy. The reports of Kinshiro Toyama and Sadayu Muragaki heads of the third mission confirmed the validity of this prudent policy. At the same time, Russian started with the annexation of the North part of these territories. They knew the existence of the Japanese Empire, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century they sent some missions with the aim to discover if Japan had settled some parts of the islands, and to open new trade routes.

The Rezanov's expedition was one of the most famous missions that Russia organised to Japan. Rezanov was the director of the Russian-American Company and was appointed by Russian government like Ambassador. He arrived to Nagasaki in March 1804 and made regular application for the trade permission. The Shogunate took six months before deciding to refuse the Rezanov's application, and on September 1804, the Shogunate invited Rezanov and his crew to leave Nagasaki.

After this bad experience, Rezanov sailed to Sakhalin in order to discover if Japan had settled the island. Rezanov did not find Japanese garrisons or troops, only a few number of fishing villages.

He sent to the Tzar his official report, and included within it, his controversial idea about a possible Russian occupation of Sakhalin.

I do not suppose that Your Highness would change me with a crime when with my worthy co-workers, such as Khvostoff and Davidoff....., I should next year go down to the shores of Japan to destroy their settlement of Matsuma, to drive them out from Sakhalin, and to spread terror on the shores so that by taking away, in the meantime, their fishing areas and thereby depriving 200,000 of their men of subsistence, the sooner to compel them to open up trade with us...(Amidon 1957,12).

Rezanov didn't received from the Tzar any reply, and he decided to carry out his project, and instructed his naval officer Kvostov and Davidov to follow his plan.

Before acting his plan, he issued a set of conflicting orders, and then he left. The officials decided to follow the first instructions, and in September 1806 they destroyed and burned in the Sakhalin Island some fishing villages. After the attack of Sakhalin, the Russian moved to Kuril Islands and attacked some Japanese settlements on Etorofu (Iturup).

The report of the Russian's attack arrived at Shogun not before April 1807.

The Bakufu (shogunal government) was scared about this terrible news, and immediately they organised some measures for the defence of the north territories, commissioning at first the geographical exploration of Sakhalin. The expedition on Sakhalin started in the spring of 1808, and like head of the expedition was appointed Mamia Rinzo.

Mamia Rinzo was the better surveyor in Japan, and his knowledge about the northern areas was excellent.

When Mamia was 24 years old made his first experience like assistant surveyor in Ezo, where he remained until 1811. During this time, he surveyed and charted the southern Kuriles. In 1807 he was in Etorofu when the Russian attacked the Japanese settlements in Sakhalin and Kuril. During this expedition Mamia Rinzo made an important discover, the insularity of Sakhalin; in fact the sea separating Sakhalin from the Asiatic mainland was called 'Mamia Strait' and this denomination is still used by the Japanese today.

Fourth years later the Russian attack, Japan took revenge. A Russian officer, Captain Vasilii Golovnin incautiously arrived at Tomari (now Golovnino) on Kunashir island. He was captivated alongside his sailors from the Japanese troops and kept as prisoners for two years.

He was released in 1813, when Russians apologised for the Kostov and Davidov raids saying that they were not authorised by the Russian government (Rees 1985).

After the conclusion of this incident, the relations between Japan and Russia normalised, and both countries seemed to lose interest in the territorial issues concerning Kuriles and Sakhalin.

In 1849 the Russian Captain Nevelskoy circumnavigated Sakhalin, and after forty years since the Mamia's discover, the Russian learned that Sakhalin was an island.

The positive Nevelskoy's report pointed mainly on the strategic position of the island and on the possibility to the ice-free port, persuaded Nicholas Muraviev, the governor in the Far East, that Sakhalin could be a valuable addition to the Russian Empire.

Between 1852 and 1853, Russian government invited Nevelskoy to organise another expedition to Sakhalin. After this second expedition, in April 1853, the Tzar ordered the colonisation of Sakhalin, a group of men were sent to the island and started the building of garrisons and villages.

At the same time, the Tzar tried again to open direct negotiation with Japan, with the intent to discuss the issues concerning their borders and the possibility to open regular trades.

In 1853, Admiral Efimii Vasilevich Putiatin arrived at Nagasaki with a letter from the Russian foreign minister. The Russian asked for the delimitation of the Japanese borders in the North, and the opening for a certain number of ports for the Russian vessels. The Japanese government took time for a deep consideration of the Russian proposal. The Japanese ancestral laws forbade any trade permission with foreign, but the Dutch, to whom was allocated the Nagasaki port. Yet, the Bakufu, loyal to ancestral laws, refused the Russian proposal regarding the permission of trades, but agreed to make some negotiations concerning the delimitation of the borders.

Putiatin and the Russian delegates proposed to transfer the sovereignty over Sakhalin to Russia, but the Japanese government answered that they needed an investigation on the borders, and they send a special commission to Sakhalin. During the investigation, as alternative, Japan suggested the division of Sakhalin at the line of the fiftieth parallel.

The Russian delegates insisted that Sakhalin should belong to the Russian Empire, and the situation seemed to remain unresolved, when the outbreak of the Crimean war, put Russian in a difficult position.

The Russian strategic efforts and diplomacies moved to the western front, and Putiatin should sailed to Shanghai.

One year later, Putiatin came back in order to resolve the problem of borders and traders with Japan. The situation became favourable to Russia; in fact the dying Tokugawa regime was too weak for any form of political opposition. In 1854 Japan was forced to sign with US and Great Britain some 'Unequal treaties', so had to do Russia, however Russia succeed in opening three ports for her traders, Shimoda, Hakodate and Nagasaki. Although Russia had the availability of some important Japanese ports, there was still an open issue: the borders. This problem was resolved by the Shimoda treaty (7 February 1855) which the Japanese sovereignty over Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashir, Iturup, the South Kuril Islands, and the Russian sovereignty over the north part of the chain, while Sakhalin was shared between the two empires.

The shared control of Sakhalin resulted really difficult to manage and created good reasons for new future clashes.

Few years later in 1859, Count Muraviev sailed to Japan with the aim to reopen negotiations over Sakhalin.

Muraviev arrived to Japan during the last days of the Tokugawa regime, he found the country in such a political confusion, that three men of his crew were attacked and murdered in a local market. Muraviev made regular application for legal action and for new negotiations, but the Japanese government was unable to satisfy his demands and consequently he decided to stop the negotiations (Amidon 1957).

In 1862, Japan started new negotiations with Russia, the first meeting was hold in San Petersburg, where the Japan diplomatic delegation asked for a solution of this controversial situation. Both part claimed Sakhalin as their own, and was impossible to reach a compromise to maintain the unitary control of the land; so, they decided to send in Sakhalin two expert teams for a

deeper study of the situation. Unfortunately, Japan was unable to send the team to Sakhalin, her political system was in collapse, and nobody managed this mission. In 1864 The Japanese Yamato Koide, made a new tentative to reach an agreement, but Russia refused the negotiation, claiming that Japan in 1862 did not attempt its obligations.

In 1866, Koide organised another diplomatic mission to San Petersburg.

The Japanese mission asked again for a clear delimitation of the borders of Sakhalin. The Russian claimed the transfer of the whole island, and like counterproposal offered to Japan the sovereignty over the northern Kuriles and some fishing rights in Sakhalin. Japan refused the offer, and proposed to Russia like temporary solution the respect of the 1855 agreement.

The Russian accepted this temporary solution, and in March 1867 the countries signed a group of regulations. These conventions stated that the island would be common possession of both, with the same right to built colonies and trading post.

In order to colonise more land as possible, Russian inaugurated its policy of transferring convicts on the island. Japan that suffered political and administrative changes was too weak for an opposition (Stephan 1971).

Between 1870 and 1873, Japan came out with a new proposal:

The purchase of South Sakhalin. Russia rejected it.

In 1874 the new Japanese government was determinate to resolve the Sakhalin issue. Takeaki Enomoto the new Japanese ambassador was sent to San Petersburg with the instruction to find a definitive solution.

Takeaki Enomoto proposed to Russia two alternatives: the discovery and delimitation of natural boundaries in Sakhalin, or the partitioning of sovereignty over the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin. After a short period of negotiations, Russia accepted the second proposal, the Russia sovereignty over Sakhalin in exchange with the whole Japanese sovereignty over Kuril Islands.

In 1875 Takeaki Enomoto and Prince Alexander Gorchakov signed at San Petersburg the treaty that declared Sakhalin Russian sovereignty, and the Kuril Island Japanese.

Japan obtained some fishing rights in the Area, and the right to trade alongside the sea of Okhotsk and Kamchatka coast.

Amidon argued that in this treaty, Russia got the better bargain. The economical and political potentialities of Sakhalin cannot be compare with the Kuriles.

Japan was economically and politically too weak to carry on long debates, after the Meiji revolution the Japanese Empire needed to be totally rebuilt. Their economical, political, strategic and social structures collapsed with the end of the previous regime. Japan needed her borders safe and good diplomatic relations with Russia.

After the San Petersburg treaty, Russia transformed Sakhalin in a gigantic prison, and experienced for the first time the results of this immense labour camp (Stephan 1971). The relation between the countries remained friendly until 1904, when clashes upon the sphere of influence in Korea and Manchuria brought the two countries within a new conflict.

## The Japanese invasion of Sakhalin during the Russo-Japanese war

The Sakhalin's invasion started at the final stages of the war on July 7<sup>th</sup> 1905 under the command of Lieutenant-General Haraguchi, and Admiral Kataoka, The preliminary operations were exclusively naval.

The Japanese fleet did not encounter any resistance, and at noon of July 7<sup>th</sup> the troops landed. In the same time, some Japanese warships approached Korsakovsk and come under the fire of a Russian fort.

The battle was really poor, The Russian gunners scored no hits, and Korsakovsk became the first city to be occupied by Japanese troops.

The Russia government made no particular efforts in troops and equipment for the defence of Sakhalin. Governor Liapunov mobilised more or less 6,000 troops; most of these were formed by convicts. The governor promised the convicts the freedom or some penalty reductions if they would accepted to fight for the defence of the island.

The convicts, principally unprepared, put of fewer efforts on the defence of the island yet the Japanese army could complete his mission quickly.

On the morning of July 8<sup>th</sup> the Japanese advanced from Korsakovsk and after a bitter engagement the town was occupied. The Russians retreated northwards to Vladimirovka, (today Iuzhno Sakhalinsk).

On 24<sup>th</sup> July, a second Japanese force landed on West Coast of Sakhalin and occupied Aleksandrovsk, at that time the capital of Sakhalin.

Aleksandrovsk was a town of 400 houses and 2,000 inhabitants, and the residence of the governor Liapunov (Cassel 1905, 186).

After the occupation of Aleksandrovsk, the Japanese pushed the enemy inland, cutting the opposing forces into two isolated groups, one in Debrinskoe and the other in the Onor region. Bereft of reinforcements and supplies, Sakhalin's military governor, Lieutenant General Liapunov asked for a 'cessation of hostilities' on 30 July (Stephan 1971).

The whole campaign had occupied seven days, 182 Russian died, and 278 managed to escape across the straits. The news that the Japanese troops conquered Sakhalin raised hopes for an annexation, and some nationalistic sentiments. On 31 July General Haraguchi proclaimed the establishment of a military administration over the island, and the following month were created civilian administrations, temples and new structures in preparation for a formal annexation (Stephan 1971).

### The Sakhalin's issue during the Portsmouth Peace Treaty

On May 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> 1905, Japan defeated the Russian fleet, which had sailed from the Baltic Sea eighteen months before. Even before this battle, Japan asked Roosevelt to mediate an end to the war. Although Japan was winning, they were outnumbered by the Russians and could not support any more the cost of the war. The Russian Tzar, however, finally relented after seeing his Baltic fleet destroyed and Sakhalin invaded by Japanese troops. During August and September 1905, the US president Roosevelt, in the role of peacemaker organised the peace conference.

The Russian negotiators were Count Witte, and Baron Rosen, the former Russian ambassador to Tokyo. The Japanese part was formed by Baron Komura, Minister of foreign affairs, and Takahira Kogoro the Japanese Minister to the United States.

The success or the failure of the Conference depended entirely over the Japanese request, in particular the Sakhalin sovereignty and the indemnity of the war. The others request in the entirely contest appeared like John Albert White wrote 'only extra demands with less important' (White 1964, 282).

The Russian delegation went to Portsmouth Conference with the firmest prohibition to cede any portion of Russian soil in exchange for peace. The Russia government believed that the transfer of territory could produce bad relation between nations, like in 1871 the Franco-German relations, still disturbed because of the cession of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany. On August 23 the ambassadors started to speak on Sakhalin problem.

Both parties examined the validity of their historical claims. Komura asserted that by seventeenth century Japan could claim its historical right over the island, and declared that geographically Sakhalin was a continuation of the Japanese Island chain and formed a natural part of it.

The proximity between Sakhalin and Hokkaido was so close that the possession of the island by other countries could constitute a danger to the security of Japan.



Witte replied to Japan that the island was an important point for the security of the Russian Amur region, and the possession by any other power except Russia could constitute a menace for their borders. Sakhalin, he stressed, in the Russian hand had played only a defensive role. Never it was used like base of operations for hostile acts against Japan. He concluded that would be better to leave the island under their sovereignty.

Japan stressed that Russia in reality had not an effective need of Sakhalin. Russia used the island, like a prison, for Russian, he stressed, Sakhalin is only a piece of land without any economical, political or social interest. In contrast he emphasised how Japan could develop the economical resources and the importance that these could have for their country.

During the debate, the Japanese ambassador highlighted when in 1899 Russia changed in contrast with the 1875 laws (San Petersburg Treaty), the fishing regulation. This new regulation that limited the number of fishing areas open to Japanese subjects created in a short time clashes and a progressive degradation in their diplomatic relation.

Witte, acknowledged that Japan had effectively more interests and needs in the Sakhalin fisheries and agriculture than Russia, but he emphasised that these interests no means necessitated Japanese political control, he declared formally that Russia will grant to Japan fishing rights in and around the island.

Komura stressed that the bad use that Russia had done of the island was a disturbing factor in his country. The escaped criminal and political convicts terrorised for a long time the Hokkaido region, and their adjacent islands.

Witte answered that this matter was in the jurisdiction of the minister of interior, and reassured Komura that if Russia would continue to use Sakhalin like a prison, measure would be taken to prevent annoyance to Japan (White 1964, 285).

The indemnity issue was the second problem that was discussed at the Conference. Japan, in his peace proposal, declared that Russia should reimburse the actual expenses of the war, but the Russian refused the Japanese request for indemnity on the basis that only 'vanquished countries reimburse expenses of war, and Russia is not vanquished' (Issues Discussed at the Portsmouth and Peking Conferences).

The Russian knew the real situation of Japanese forces; although Japan was winner in the main battles they showed lack of reserves, and an effective weakness in their strategic movements. Russian refused to pay the indemnity threatening a new war if Japan as not acknowledged the Russian deals. If the position regard the indemnity was not negotiable, the Sakhalin issue was again matter of discussions.

Witte suggested a compromise, the partitioning of the island. The northern part, essential to the security of the Russian Amur region under their sovereignty. The southern part Japanese. He required in case of agreement, the freedom to navigate long la Soya (or la Perouse) strait.

Komura responded that the people of Japan had waited half a century for the opportunity to resolve the Sakhalin issue, and now they cannot accept the partitioning of the island.

At this stage, Komura asked again for the indemnity. He emphasised that Sakhalin was under their occupation, and the withdrawal of the troops from the northern part would be an act of retrocession for which Japan could require compensation. He suggested the sum of 1,200,000,000 yen and at least the partition along the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel (White 1964, 285). The Russian answered that they would refuse to conclude peace as long as Japan continued to insist upon an indemnity. The conference remained at this deadlock for 2 or 3 days, when thanks to Roosevelt and his role like peacemaker the situation changed. The Tzar in open transgression to the Russian principle that no Russian territory must be surrender or ceded to the enemies, consented the partitioning of Sakhalin, at 50<sup>th</sup> parallel. He justified that the southern part of the island had been under the Russia sovereignty for so short time that it could hardly be thought like Russian. About the second issue, the indemnity of the war, he did not change the previous position. In the last session Komura announced that Japan would withdraw the indemnity request if Russia would recognise their occupation of Sakhalin.

Witte refused. Komura stated that Japan would withdraw from the northern portion of the island if Russia would recognise the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel as the boundary between the countries. Russia accepted. Sakhalin was partitioned at the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel. Among the trees and fields there were no barbed wires, but iconography milestones with respectively the Russian griffin and the Japanese chrysanthemum.

## Conclusion

The complex reasons that brought Japan and Russia into the conflict seemed avoid the Sakhalin issue. The problem over the Sakhalin sovereignty seemed resolved in 1875 with the San Petersburg treaty.

In this conflict Sakhalin was not matter of clashes, and Russia made no particular efforts to fortify the island. The Japanese invasion of Sakhalin sounded at the Russia like foolish and strange.

The Japanese concept of territorial borders is different than Russian. Japan never developed in her history the concept of fix borders. The geographical disposition of Japan, the lack of any territorial invasion and a conservative attitude (never Japan has changed the imperial dynasty) helped this process.

As Hasegawa writes:

Until Russia moved south, they had felt no need to establish clear borders with their neighbours. In fact, until then they had no concept of *national borders*. During the Tokugawa period, the Matsumae domain was given jurisdiction over Ezo, but Ezo's demarcation was vague, comprising a large area that included Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Kuril Island (Hasegawa 1998, 19).

It is understandable how Japan in this conflict, launched an invasion against this island. They justified this attack as a just restoration of the historical rights violated in the humiliating treaty of 1875, but they forgave that the treaty was signed in a peace period, and without any constriction between the parts.

When the Portsmouth treaty was signed, and Sakhalin was partitioned at the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel of latitude, Japanese people had reactions of disappointment and dissatisfaction. The fact that the Japanese troops had to withdraw from the north of Sakhalin was not only a territorial loss, but also the end of their imperialistic dreams.

In the future Japan tried again to conquer the part of the land that was lacking at the realisation of their empire. The Japanese occupation of north Sakhalin during the period of Bolshevik revolution can show.

Today the 'Northern Territorial issue' is one of the most diplomatic, controversial and complex problems that see Japan and Russia opposed. This problem can show how culture, heritages, and sense of 'imaginary communities' are stronger than political, diplomatic and economical problems.



<http://www.mattmerkulov.narod.ru/photoalb/index.htm>

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