A Study of Karafuto in the Sea of Japan Rim Regions after the Russo-Japanese War by Considering Reports of the Vocational Inspection Team from Niigata Prefecture, Japan

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Abstract This study focuses on the economic importance of Karafuto, the southern part of Sakhalin Island, in terms of its disputed status as a Japanese or Russian territory. The author focuses on the Sea of Japan Rim Region. Shotaro Kazama, Chief Secretary of the Niigata Chamber of Commerce, edited ‘A Report of inspection for business of Vladivostok and Karafuto’ which was published in 1907 after the Russo-Japanese War. Niigata Prefecture had sent a team to inspect not only the merchants in Vladivostok but also the fishermen in the territorial waters of the Far East of Russia, where, in 1907, Japanese rights were still unsettled. One of the reasons for inspecting the activities of the merchants and fishermen was to document the widespread circulation of soy sauce, dyeing, and weaving as a precondition to establish a Japanese territory in Karafuto. By developing their networks, the merchants had established the Port of Niigata and the markets between Vladivostok and Karafuto as part of a direct regular voyage in the Japan Sea. Niigata Prefecture expected its team to obtain information about economic conditions in these regions. This study clarifies that the inspection team was dispatched by Niigata Prefecture as part of its regional policy in 1907. Niigata Prefecture’s proposed regional framework, “The Sea of Japan Rim Regions,” was similar to the Japanese Imperial Region, in which colonial areas were set up around the Japanese Islands. The author considers the political framework that existed in the Sea of Japan Rim Region near Niigata Prefecture as part of “petit Japanese imperialism” after the Russo-Japanese War.

Key words Niigata Chamber of Commerce, Vladivostok, Karafuto, Sea of Japan Rim Region, Russo-Japanese War

Introduction

This study considers the economic importance of Karafuto (South Sakhalin) from the differences and similarities between the economies of Vladivostok and Karafuto in North East Asia near Japan. The author pays attention to the Sea of Japan Rim Regions as the geographical framework proposed by Niigata Prefecture.

Sakhalin has been considered as not a part of Primorye but as an island in the Far East that differs from other areas under Russian administrative control. Karafuto has been considered to have been lumped in with Hokkaido by many Japanese researchers under the North Eastern Area in Japan (Takeno 2008). Although the relationship between Japan and Russia in this area has been mostly focused, especially on practically fisheries and forestry, some monographs about Karafuto such as those of Miki (2012) and Nakayama (2014) have appeared in recent years.

Karafuto has not only been associated with Hokkaido but also jointly worked with each prefecture on the Sea of Japan side through a significant portion of Japanese history. However, few researchers have paid attention to the relationships between Karafuto and each prefecture on the Sea of Japan side. Although one of a few documents described an investigation into fisheries and woodsmen in Akita Prefecture by Nozoe and Tamura (1977, 1978), the author will focus on Niigata Prefecture. Niigata Prefecture dispatched a team to inspect not only Vladivostok but also Karafuto for business purposes in 1907, and it edited ‘A report of inspection for business in Vladivostok and Karafuto’ in 1907 (Table 1). This report is one of a few documents in which the political and business establishment in Niigata Prefecture had considered connecting with Karafuto after the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Although Niigata Prefecture had relations with Primorye in Russia, it sustained few ties with Karafuto or Sakhalin. This report is also one of the precious records in Japanese about trade between Niigata Prefecture and Karafuto. This study clarifies the aforementioned topic by considering the differences between Vladivostok and Karafuto from the government of Niigata Prefecture’s perspective.
Because Vladivostok, which was a military port town at the distal end of the Muraviyov Peninsula, faces to the Sea of Japan, it has had relations with various regions in Japan since the 19th century. It had especially deep ties with the Kyushu region, Hokuriku region, and Niigata Prefecture. Although it was a part of the territories of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), the Russian Empire (1721–1917) annexed it in 1860.

The Vocational Inspection Team by Niigata Prefecture in the Meiji Era (1868–1912)

Economic situation in Niigata Prefecture

Although Niigata stood as a base for physical distribution in feudal times, it had been treated as a part of ‘Ura-Nihon,’ which meant the economically undeveloped regions of Japan, because the Meiji Government constructed railway networks solely on the Pacific side (Abe 1997). Niigata Prefecture had the second highest population in Japan, behind only Tokyo Prefecture, in 1886. However, it decreased to rank third in 1901. The number of migrants from Niigata Prefecture to Hokkaido was the highest in Japan, and it caused a clear drain on the local population around 1900.

Situated in the Hokuriku region on the Sea of Japan side in Central Japan, the Port of Niigata quickly started to trade overseas (Hashimoto 1990). Although Niigata Bussan Kaisha (the Niigata General Trading Co.), which acted in concert with the Mitsubishi Group, opened itself to trade with Vladivostok in 1879, its account seemed too geographically limited to cause the Russians any concern. The Niigata Chamber of Commerce was established about 1881 and it started to construct a port in the city. However, the Japanese government planned to construct the Port of Niigata as part of its state policy for the first time during the Meiji era (1868–1912) because large ships found it hard to enter the mouth of the Shinano River (Niigata Shoko Kaigisho 1931: 4). As a result, the government only investigated the construction of the Port of Niigata and did not construct it.

As a fishery for salmon and trout started up in the late 1880s, the trade relationship between Japan and Russia progressed. Oie Shosen1 built and operated a regular liner between Niigata, Hakodate, Otaru, Karafuto, and Vladivostok thanks to a Japanese government subsidy in 1896 (Niigata ken 1988: 573–574). Around 1904, most of the trade from the Port of Niigata concerned marine products and fishing gear. In particular, people focused on Karafuto, which was a better place to buy salmon and trout than Primorye, so exports from Karafuto of these fish had been increasing rapidly.

Although trade costs between Japan and the Far East of Russia were generally balanced in 1897, Japan’s imports exceeded its exports due to an increase in the number of fisheries in the northern seas for the first time in the 20th century. The reason for this was an increase in the import of oil and marine products. In particular, the amount of rice was decreasing; the amount of exports of fruit and coal increased after the Russo-Japanese War. The Ports of Miyazu (Kyoto Pref.) and Tsuruga (Fukui Pref.), which dealt with citrus fruit, the Port of Tsuruga, which dealt with Western clothes, and the Port of Otaru, which dealt with coal, apples, and beer, had ranked highly in terms of the amounts of money passing through them. However, the lower ranked Port of Niigata was not profitable, except for marine products because of the increase in the northern seas’ fisheries after an excess of imports.

Czarist Russia abolished the free trade system in the Port of Vladivostok and began to place importance on the Port of Dalian in China. It decided to close the Port of Vladivostok in 1909. Because imports to Japan from European Russia had been increasing, the quantity of trade between Japan and Russia had been maintained. Whereas the Ports of Kobe and Yokohama on the Pacific side exported a lot of textiles, the ports on the Sea of Japan side, which exported some vegetables and fruits, benefitted.

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1 Oie Shosen was a company that conducted trade with Russia.

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Table 1. Contents of a report by the Niigata Chamber of Commerce in 1907

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Niigata Shogyo Kaigisho (1907: Table of Contents).
The purpose of the Niigata vocational inspection team

Etsusa Kisen, which was founded in May 1885 by capitalists in Niigata City and on Sado Island (in Niigata Prefecture), opened routes between Niigata and Ryotsu on Sado Island and between Ryotsu and Hakodate. After Etsusa Kisen expanded some routes and made the Port of Niigata a base, it developed and became one of the five big shipping companies in Japan at that time (Kusunoki 1947).

However, the trading partners of Niigata were limited generally only to Vladivostok because most of the trade in the Port of Niigata consisted of marine products and fishing gear. As the Port of Niigata became more developed, a direct voyage to Vladivostok was determined. Routes to Vladivostok were not cruises but direct voyages because most of the trade to and from the Port of Niigata consisted of perishable foods.

In 1907, the Niigata Prefectural assembly decided to give compensation to every operator of a direct voyage to Vladivostok. Etsusa Kisen began four voyages to and from Vladivostok from April to October every year because it had hoped to develop the Port of Niigata. As a result, “the Vladivostok Boom” occurred, as Niigata Prefectural Commercial School2 students went on excursions there, and trade companies and a Russian consulate were established in Niigata Prefecture. However, Niigata Prefecture staff felt that reports needed to be published because some members of the assembly considered it necessary to refute views opposing the voyages.

Osaka Shosen3 conducted cruises around the Sea of Japan, and Oie Shosen opened a direct voyage between Tsuruga and Vladivostok thanks to government subsidies. However, Etsusa Kisen found it difficult to operate direct voyages to Vladivostok. After Etsusa Kisen stopped these voyages in 1913 because of the stoppage in prefectural subsidies, a direct voyage between Niigata and Vladivostok was restored just before 1926.

The journey and contents of vocational inspection

The vocational inspection team started a voyage from the Port of Niigata to Vladivostok on the 16th of July 1907 and stayed there until the 24th (Figure 1). Although the vocational inspection team planned to go to Karafuto first, it changed its voyage plan and went to Origa Bay. Many members wanted to inspect the fishery there. The team departed from Origa Bay on the evening of the 26th, arrived at Otaru in the early morning on the 28th, departed on the 29th, arrived at the Port of Korsakov on the 31st, and moved to Otomari on the 1st of August (Figure 2).

They found some products from Niigata Prefecture at stores in Otomari. However, these products were considered hard to transport to Otomari and Vladimirovka (after Toyohara) on the Suzuya Plain, to where many Japanese were immigrating, because distribution channels from Niigata to Karafuto were connected via Otaru on the Sea of Japan side at that time. They were welcomed by people from Niigata who were living in Vladimirovka. After many people migrated from Niigata to Hokkaido, some of these migrants moved from Hokkaido to Karafuto. More immigrants from Niigata were living in Karafuto than in Vladivostok. However, products of Niigata were hard to collect and distribute at Otaru and then transport because the road between Vladimirovka and Maoka was still under construction. After the inspection team saw Otomari and Vlasimirovka, they departed on the 3rd of August and arrived at Niigata via Otaru and Hakodate on the 10th.

Overview of Industries in Karafuto from the Report of the Inspection Team

In this chapter, the author looks at industries in Karafuto mentioned in a report by the Niigata Chamber of Commerce in 1907 (Niigata Shogyo Kaigisho 1907). The population of Japanese was about 48,000 around 1920, and most of them in Vladivostok were from Kyushu. However, only 25 immigrants had come from Niigata Prefecture. The only prefectures that had sent fewer immigrants were Ishikawa, Shimane, and Aomori.

In 1901, the Japanese population was about 37,000 in Vladivostok, while it was only about 1,000 in Vladimirovka (Figure 3). Most Japanese residents in Karafuto were fishermen who came from Tohoku and
Hokkaido before the Russo-Japanese War. In particular, about 60% of the people who had moved from Hokkaido came from Niigata Prefecture.

Agriculture

Reports indicate that agriculture was not worth serious attention in the suburbs of Vladivostok. Although Karafuto had about the same rank for reclamation areas as Hokkaido, the report estimated that regulations of landownership were much stricter than in Hokkaido and the Far East of Russia. Vladivostok and Karafuto were both considered to be poor places to emigrate from Niigata Prefecture for purposes of cultivation.

Fisheries

The Japanese pioneers who came from Niigata Prefecture worked in fisheries in Vladivostok. They also went to the coast of Karafuto, where fishing grounds had opened up in the second half of the 18th century after fishing expeditions. As many more skilled Japanese fishermen flocked to the coasts of the Far East of Russia, the Russian Government felt compelled to close these fishing areas. Although fishing grounds around Karafuto remained open because these were Japanese territories, Niigata Prefecture felt it necessary to investigate them. The purpose of the inspection team’s visit to Origa Bay was to collect information on the regulations.

Merchants

Although Japanese companies such as Sugiura Shoten (a commercial establishment) and Matsuda bank were very prosperous in Vladivostok, the city had unexpectedly few Japanese merchants relative to Niigata Prefecture, despite the short distance. A report stated that the favorite products in Vladivostok from Niigata Prefecture were rice, soy sauce, and pears at that time.

Most of the rice coming to Vladivostok was from Korea and Kyushu, but the demand for rice from Niigata

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Figure 2. A vocational inspection route in Niigata Prefecture in 1907.
Prefecture was increasing because it was a favorite of Japanese residents. However, merchants from Niigata Prefecture stopped exporting rice due to a levy system in 1901. After that, they tried to export unhulled rice and to widen their market. Although most soy sauce was from Nagasaki Prefecture at first, Niigata Prefecture's became popular due to its good quality and low price after direct regular voyages from Niigata to Vladivostok started. Because most trade between Niigata and Vladivostok involved food, direct regular voyages had to provided fast transport.

Karafuto had few merchants. Among Japanese products, mostly soy sauce was sold there. Otaru products accounted for 60% of soy sauce, and the rest of the competition was between the Kanto District and Niigata Prefecture. Because Otaru had circulated its soy sauce better because of its direct regular voyage, Niigata Prefecture considered these voyages to be necessary. Because Vladivostok and the Karafuto area had merchants for not only soy sauce but also dyeing and weaving, they must have jointly expected a direct regular voyage across the Sea of Japan to develop the merchant trade, just as Niigata Prefecture did.

Conclusion


The purpose of the inspection team was to observe not only the merchants in Vladivostok but also the fisheries regarding the unsettled Japanese rights in the Far East of Russia in 1907. Because Karafuto had been established as a part of the Japanese Empire's territories, the inspection team did not need to observe the fishery rights. The main purpose of the inspecting merchants was to check the widespread circulation of soy sauce and the dyeing and weaving business there. If a direct regular voyage had been established to Vladivostok or Karafuto in the Sea of Japan from the Port of Niigata by Etsusa Kisen as a carrier, Niigata Prefecture would have expanded its trade more.

Abe (1997) considered Japan to consist of ‘Omote-Nihon,’ which was the economically developed part of Japan on the Pacific side; ‘Ura-Nihon,’ which was undeveloped area along the Sea of Japan side; Hokkaido and Okinawa, which were domestic colonial areas; and overseas colonies (Figure 4). This study clarified that Niigata Prefecture dispatched an inspection team with the aim of accessing the huge of markets in North East Asia in 1907. The regional framework of ‘The Sea of Japan Rim Regions,’ which was proposed by Niigata Prefecture, was similar to the Japanese Imperial Region, which set up colonial areas around the Japanese Islands. The author considers that the regional framework of ‘the Sea of Japan
Regional structure of 'Modern Japan' around 1910.

Figure 4. Regional structure of 'Modern Japan' around 1910.

Rim Regions' by Niigata Prefecture may be called "petit Japanese imperialism" after the Russo-Japanese War.

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Notes

1. Oie Shosen was one of the ship owners who had gone from Osaka to Hokkaido via the Sea of Japan in Kaga (a part of Ishikawa Prefecture).
2. After the Niigata Prefectural Commercial School was opened as a private Niigata Commercial School by Hokuetsu Ko-shokai in 1883, it became publicly owned in 1887. In 1910, it had two departments offering three-year courses in commercial shipping and machine engineering (Niigata shi 1969: 245).
3. Osaka Shosen was established by founders who were connected with Osaka financiers in May 1884. Although it had been a typical Japanese shipping company, it became Shosen Mitsui (M.O.L.) after merging with Mitsui Senpaku in 1964.

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