

September 5th at Sapporo Station, my name is Jin Suzuki. I live in Sapporo.

All I knew about the Northern Territories is what I learnt from text books without a sense of reality. The incident happened in 1945.

21 days before departure, 16th August a Japanese fishing boat was seized by a Russian patrol ship. Then, one person was shot dead.

Since 1945 the Northern Territories have been under Russian occupation. For all those people who live in Nemuro, the town that faces the Northern Territories, the war is not yet over.

Nemuro Station, seven hours from Sapporo. As we get off at Nemuro Station strong sea winds reminds us that this is a fishing town.

Hirotohi Kawata who was once a resident of the Northern Territories showed us around. Mr. Kawaka is the director of the Chishima and Habomai League formed by ex-residents of the Northern Territories. They have been actively campaigning for the return of the Northern Territories.

Mr. Kawata brought us to Cape Nosappu.

Any family who remained on the islands faced forced repatriation. In 1948 they were reunited with their families in Nemuro.

Strong waves keep breaking at Cape Nosappu. Though we can clearly see the islands. I could not help saying how close the border really is. Each time, Mr. Kawaka corrected me "it is not a border, it's Japanese territory".

Since 1945 numbers of Japanese fishermen were captured.

On the coastline there are remains of ships that Russian police abandoned.

There are several monuments on the Cape. One has an engraving of "Tatsunosuke Takasaki" Mr. Takasaki came to this land from China with other Japanese. He dedicated his life to the economic development of the area. His last project was to retrieve the Northern Territories to Japan.

As no progress was seen on the Northern Territories issue, fishermen from the village became frustrated. As head of fisheries he negotiated with Russian officials to make an agreement to permit the gathering of seaweed. They had to pay large sums for the right to fish, though it was priceless to be able to fish safely for a certain period of the year. For local fishermen Tatsunosuke Takasaki was like a god. In 1963, a year after the agreement was concluded, Mr Takasaki died.

This monument is a symbol of the Northern Territories movement. It's called "The Bridge between the Islands". This was brought from Hateruma Island, the most southern end of Japan.

Even after independence Japan was partly under occupation for a while.

In 1972 Okinawa was returned to Japan from American occupancy, is it the Northern Territories next? This monument holds such wishes of the people.

Mr. Kawata sometimes shows around others experiencing border problem issues against Russia "everyone is surprised how passive the Japanese government's approach is. Even though your land was taken as a result of war, if you start another war to regain the land it only starts an endless conflict. It may take longer, but if we can regain our land by talking it through, it would be a great example to all the countries it can be solved peacefully".

This is where we landed to get to Shana town. Here, there was a road to Pettobi, so we could use a car. You see, it's a big island. To get there, it's not a walkable distance. We could easily come across bears. There are many bears in Etorofu and Kunashiri. Even on our free visit they bring hunting guns. As we walk we can see bears footprints everywhere. Mr. Miyauchi visited his homeland twice on a free tour. He really wanted to take his son to visit the island, but he was too busy with his work at that time. "by the time my son is fully grown, I hope the islands return" Mr> Miyauchi says. "Just recently, there was an incident

where Japanese fishermen were captured. I don't want my son to experience that".

It's a really sad incident. Apparently, from the news report, they were not aware that they were entering territorial water. They didn't realise they were in a risky area, so they crossed to the Russian patrol ship then got shot dead. How sad that is.

The captain of the ship may be aware of that roughly, May be he was, but say, here is the border on the sea. Fishermen want more catch, if they could they may drift towards the border as they carried on. How would they know? The captain may not be aware of that but the fishermen working on the boat would definitely not be aware of that at all, because they were so busy catching fish. The captain of the ship must have been working on the sea for so long, he may be aware of it, especially if the ship has radar and latest equipment. For that reason the captain may be aware of entering territorial water though the fishermen would definitely not be aware of where they were because they were too busy working, pulling nets, pulling baits on then pulling another net and.... You see.

Either the ship was entering the territorial water or on the water, fishermen had no idea. So there happened to be a Russian patrol ship there and they got shot. It is a sad incident.

I had two older brothers. The eldest one was taken to war in 1940, he died in 1942 at Guadalcanal. And the 2nd oldest brother died when he was 2 or 3 on the island. I am actually the third of the brothers.

The trouble is, even though we are having a hard time finding our catch Russian fishermen catch so much in their territorial sea. It's a vast amount. From a fisherman's point of view, we don't want them to do that because it affects the prices. If only our catch is on the market, it would be 2,000 – 3,000 Yen, but it's 1000 Yen now. Prices can go under 1000 Yen sometimes. It's because a vast amount of catch from Russia is imported in, then processed at this port, then distributed at this port, then distributed in Japan.

Since 1945, so, 61 years have passed since the occupation, the situation has not changed or got worse because a fisherman was shot dead by coast guards. It is almost like war is still going on. As an ex-resident of the Northern Territories, what do you think we can do resolve this issue? You see, I've only known this issue from what I read in text books. But I stood at the Cape yesterday shocked to see how close the islands are to the mainland, your homeland, your fisheries are right in front of you. I am sure you have been holding

onto this bitter feeling for over 60 years. Do you have anything to say to our government about this?

Of course, I have things to say, but what can I say. This is an issue that only a few of use have a say about it. It cannot be changed. It is not an easy issue. I wish the government would get off their back side to tackle this issue. I am and have been wishing for the government to focus on this issue.

I don't have much time now, 61 years have past by. I was 20 when the war ended, so I am 81 years old now. I don't know how many years I have left.

Would you like to go back to your homeland while well enough to establish your home?

I went to Shikotan Island and Shuisho Island three times, in 1998, 2003 and 2005. I could only go to where my house was twice. The foundations were rotten and were gone.

An owner of this Inn and a lady that works here also comes from the four Islands of the Northern Territories.

Is this your mother?

Yes this is my mother. She died when I was four given birth to the second sister after me. She could not recover from it. She was hospitalised in Nemuro but buried on our Island. So we brought this with us and a monk on the Island gave a prayer for my mother. I cannot describe the feeling.

So you couldn't visit for a long time?

Well we accompanied a monk for prayers three times, but the last time my sister managed to come and brought this photo.

What was it like when you withdrew from the Islands?

It wasn't a "withdraw" it was "runaway"

Did you see Russians when you left?

Of course we did, we saw them. We were given caramel by them.

So when Russians invaded, well, landed on the Islands did you spend time with them?

Russians did not live there. They came to patrol from time to time. My older sisters who were over 15 ran away and hid Russian army. I wouldn't hide. My younger sister and I were quite fine.

Those Russian army officers rode Japanese horses bareback. Yes, we all rode bareback back then, there were so many of them. So my sister and I were alone at home but my older sisters had run away and were hiding. I loved my younger sister so I stayed at home.

What about your father, way?

I'm not sure what, but my father was not at home at the time.

The Russian solders came to your home?

Yes, that's right. It was raining so maybe they wanted to avoid the rain so they called us. Come, come, like this, so I was well, scared but I went and left my sister there and I approached them. They told me to put my hand out, like this, to open my palm. It was

caramel in my hand! This is for you, this is for your sister, he pointed at her, this is for this and that person. He was talking to his interpreter and gave me a few while pointing out some pictures of my family on the wall. I was so happy that I got those sweets. We didn't have such things at all! Then after the Russian left, my next door neighbour came to my house and said to me, what did they give to you, show me? Then the old man took half of my caramel away from me!

So when was it that you finished your move, was it September 1945?

We kept moving back and forwards. My father was originally from Toyama prefecture then moved to Shuicho Island. He developed some land and built a house. He did not have any where else to go. When Russians came we ran away and left the Island. But when they were not there we went back to the land, back and forward. We heard a rumour that the Russians had gone so we rushed back to the Island to get what we needed. It was February the following year, my uncle who lived on Habomai Islands came to pick us up. He said, this will be the last time ok?

We spent two days working closely with the people who had lived on the Islands. So, what can we do next? We arranged to meet with Professor Kimura, a Northern Territories expert in Sapporo.

Is the strong wish of the ex-residents of the Northern Territories reflected in the government's strategy?

It is a debatable issue if the ex-residents wishes are reflected in the governments approach. In a sense, yes, it is reflected. These 61 years the government has been working on it continuously. They also opened community meetings in every prefecture regarding this issue. Also there is a subsection solely dedicated to this issue under the ministry of foreign affairs as well as the interior ministry. They are an active medium. They hold regular meetings in Nemuro City and surrounding areas. However, it is taking as long as 61 years to solve this issue so some ex-residents are discontent with the government that it's not focusing enough to settle this issue. Especially as this year is the 50th anniversary of the Japan-Soviet joint declaration held in 1956.

As long as 50 years ago, Khushchev, executive secretary of the Soviet Union that they could return two islands out of the four. So it can be said that residents in the Nemuro area

are strongly suggesting that it could be worthwhile to take up an offer of a two island return and carry on talks afterwards to retrieve the other two islands. I'm sure you felt that two when you visited.

Since 1956, during this 50 year period there were fishermen captured, yet they was no death. Following the incident there are two different reactions among people in Nemuro City. One is unless all four island return to Japan this kind of tragedy will go on. Another opinion is, if only two islands were returned to Japan we could have avoided such a tragedy. So the Nemuro area is now debating over four or two islands. It is the first time that people talk about this issue like this. Some say it may be a reasonable line.

That is a difficult point. First of all Japan has already made a big compromise. These four islands have never been occupied by Russia before. In 1855 the Shomoda treaty was concluded to peacefully agree that the four island are Japanese territory. 20 years later, in 1875 the Sakhalin Chishima exchange treaty was concluded resulting in Japan agreeing to give away the south half of Karafuto Island in exchange for the whole of the Chishima Islands. Then the Japan-Russia war broke out. At the end of the war the Portsmouth Peace Treaty was signed in New Hampshire, USA, In the presence of President Franklin Roosevelt. After the peace talks South Chishima was returned to Japan. The after the Soviet Union was formed, the Soviet government followed the agreement. However, in 1945, Stalin launched an attack, abrogating the Soviet-Japan Neutrality Pact. Not only that, when the San Francisco Peace Treaty was concluded Gromyko, the Soviet diplomat, boycotted the treaty.

So after that, Japan has been approaching the Soviet Union for this issue to be settled between the two countries. However, this aroused the situation in which the Chishima Islands were given away to the Soviet Union before. So, Japan asking Russia to give it back does not match the consistency.

I visited Sakhalin last week, where the first Japanese embassy was placed. It's now Russian territory. In Sakhalin there is natural gas and oil that has been found. So, the Japanese government must be feeling unfortunate. What can we say? It may be retribution for Pearl Harbor.

Now the four Islands are what Japan is asking for. From beginning to end, It is our minimum and maximum. The Japanese government is keeping this line. They have been negotiating on this same level.

There was a principle set after World War Two which territorial borders should not be decided by victory or defeat. It is stated on the Atlantic Charter, so that is why America returned Okinawa to Japan.