In February and March 2002, Muneo Suzuki, a Member of Parliament, who was said to take the lead in the mutual friendship between Japan and Russia, was accused of looking after his own interests on the pretext of the economic assistance to Russia and the Northern Territory. In the disputes in the Committee of the Diet the fact was exposed that he had unduly mediated in the construction of some equipments on the Kuril Islands dealing in favor of his connected enterprises. He was arrested on suspicion of the corruption, and though he denies the suspicion he is recommended to retire.

He is, however, very favorable among the pro-Japan political group in Russia including Russian ambassador in Japan, Aleksander Panov. Because Suzuki has a different opinion on the Northern Territory problem from that of the Foreign Ministry of Japan which claims the restoration of the package of the Northern Territory (Kunashiri, Etorofu, Shikotan and Habomai Islands). He does not insist on the package restoration. Though he reserves the clear-cut plan of the solution of the problem, it seems that he intends to restore Sikotan and Habomai at first, leaving the other two islands untouched. At the same time he endeavored to enlarge the economic assistance to Russia. He often visited Russia and talked with political leaders without consulting the Foreign Ministry of Japan.

He intended to exercise his influence definitely in making of the course of the post-Cold War Japan-Russian relations. His intention to
improve the rigid method of Japan-Russian negotiations on the Northern Territory is appropriate. However, he should take the responsibility for the facts that he intervened in the internal affairs of MFA and corrupted by receiving a bribe in order to do effect in his behalf.

The exposure of a series of corruption was resulted in turning back in the successive policy on the Northern Territory Problem. As Mr. Suzuki was appreciated as the favorite mediator by Russian partners, they seem to miss him regardless of their official indifference\(^1\). Is there an alternative way for the solution of the territory problem?

1. The Kuril Islands in the Northern Territory Problem

The essence of the problem concerning the territory in conflict between Japan and Russia is in the naming of the problem used in Japan. Although in foreign countries the “Kuril Islands problem” is a more familiar name, most of Japanese now call it “the northern territory problem”. The name was settled officially in 1960s. Before then the Japanese had called it “Kuril Islands problem” or “the southern Kuril Islands, Habomai Archipelago and Shikotan problem”.

The Kuril Islands consist of 23 islands, linked on a chain of volcanoes on the sea between Kamchatka and Hokkaido. The southern Kuriles include Kunashiri and Etorofu( Iturup ). Habomai Archipelago and Shikotan Island are not Kuril islands but the coastal islands of Hokkaido. Geographically and administratively in pre-war Japan, Kunashiri and Etorofu are treated in one group, while Habomai Archipelago and Shikotan, in another group.

The reason why the Japanese government prefers the name “northern territory” to “Kuril islands” comes from the assertion that Kunasiri and Etorofu are not included in Kuril islands. Exactly speaking, it insists that
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Kunashiri and Etorofu are not included in the Kuril Islands which are placed out of the sovereignty of Japan in the San-Francisco Peace Treaty signed in 1951. At the Peace Conference Andrei Gromyko, Soviet representative plenipotentiary, demanded to amend the contents of the treaty which the United States and Britain had prepared without consulting with the Soviet Union. However, this demand was never accepted. The Soviet delegates refused to sign the Treaty and withdrew from the Conference.

In the Peace Conference Kunashiri and Etorofu were regarded as part of the Kuril Islands. In the Article 2 of the Treaty Japan abandons the sovereignty of the Kuril Islands. At the same time the Article does not regulate to whom belong the abandoned islands. Mr. Gromyko claimed that the islands occupied by Soviet Union since 1945 ought to belong to Soviet Union, but the claim was rejected.

On the other hand, Shigeru Yoshida, Japanese representative plenipotentiary and prime minister insisted that Kunashiri and Etorofu, the southern part of the Kuril Islands, have belonged to no countries except Japan since the old times, but he didn’t succeed in the exclusion of these two islands out of the Kuril Islands to be abandoned. Even now there is no legal possessor of the Kuril Islands in the world.

In Japan at the 12th National Diet in 1951 Kumao Nishimura, director of the Treaty Department of MFA, affirmed that the southern Kuril Islands (Kunashiri and Etorofu) were included in the abandoned Kuril Islands in the relevant article of the Peace Treaty. The premier Shigeru Yoshida was common with this interpretation with some complaint. As regards Habomai and Shikotan he insisted that they were the part of Hokkaido and Mr. Nishimura added that the majority of the Allied Nations would regard these islands as the parts of Hokkaido.

In 1950s the name “Kuril Islands Problem” was popular to the Japanese. The League of the Former Inhabitants on Chisima (Japanese
name of the Kuril Islands) and Habomai was organized in order to appeal to the government for the compensation and restoration of their lost possession.

In 1960s “Northern Territory” took place of “Kuril Islands-Habomai-Shikotan”. The Japanese government interpreted that Kunashiri and Etorofu were not included in the “Kuril Islands” which had been abandoned in the Peace Treaty. The reason why the Japanese government changed the interpretation of that article of the Peace Treaty was its search for a reasonable pretext for the restoration of these islands.

The government mentioned two points for the justification of restoration of these islands. Firstly, the Soviet Union had occupied them unjustly, violating the principle of no enlargement of territory set by the Allied Nations in the Second World War. Secondly, the four islands had been the proper territory of Japan and never had been belonged to any other nation before the occupation by Soviet Union.

These points of view are reasonable and sufficient to claim sovereignty over these islands. It is not necessary to add an incorrect interpretation of the article of the Peace Treaty, I consider.

2. Historical Retrospect

The claim of the Japanese government is based on the Japan-Russian Treaty of Trade and Friendship concluded in 1855. This was the first treaty that Japan and Russia officially concluded. Both countries had been engaged in exploring the Kuril Islands for 200 years. The second article of the Treaty provided that the boundary line was demarcated between Etorofu(Iturup) and Urup, and “all the Island of Etorofu belongs to Japan, all the Island of Urup and the Kuril Islands to the north of it (Urup) belong to Russia” in the Japanese text( underlined by Saito ).
In this text it was not clear whether the Kuril Islands are only the islands situated to the north of Urup, or all the Kuril Islands including Etorofu and Kunashiri situated to the south of Urup. From the former viewpoint, Kunashiri and Etorofu are excluded out of the Kuril Islands. Japanese government supports this interpretation in its behalf.

The original text of this treaty were written in French and Dutch, and then translated into both Russian and Japanese. In the French original text the underlined phrase as follows: les autres îles Kouriles, située au nord de cette île. In this text we ought interpret that the islands situated to the north of Urup are the other part of the Kuril Islands. Therefore Urup, Iturup and Kunashiri are the other part of Kuril Islands.

Both in Dutch and Russian texts the underlined phrases mean the same as in French. Only the Japanese text lacks the words “the other (les autres)” This fault in translating to Japanese cannot be ignored. Haruki Wada argues that it was not a fault but a deliberate deed by the translator. Whether it is true or not, the interpretation by Japanese government is not reasonable in two points. Firstly this interpretation is based on the mistaken translation of the original text. If Kunashiri and Etorofu were not the Kuril Islands, Urup should not be the Kuril Islands, too. The government does not touch it. Secondly the Kuril Islands are geographically on the chain of volcanos from Kunashiri to Shumushu.

By the way, the Japan-Russian Treaty of 1855 did not provide the status of Sakhalin because of their different claims, leaving the island the coexistent territory of both nations without the demarcation.

Afterwards the conflicts between Japanese and Russians on the Sakhalin escalated to incendiaries and murders. To settle these troubles the governments of Japan and Russia had several talks. In 1875 the Treaty of Exchange of Sakhalin for Kuril Islands was concluded. The Treaty provided that the northern Kuril Islands from Urup to Shumushu belonged to Japan.
in compensation for Sakhalin belonging to Russia. Both sides were satisfied with the Treaty. Theoretically I regard this Treaty as the principle to be considered on the territory problem in the future.

In 1905 Japan gained possession of the southern part of Sakhalin as a result of successful war with Russia in 1904 – 1905.

After the October Revolution in 1917, the Soviet Government was obliged to recognize the “imperialist” Peace Treaty of 1905, though it had wished to abrogate it. The Japan-Soviet Fundamental Treaty concluded in 1925 provided the succession of the Treaty of 1905. In spite of humiliation leaving the southern Sakhalin subject to Japan, Soviet Government was liberated from Japanese military intervention continued since 1918, and opened diplomatic and economic relations with Japan.

During the Second World War Stalin initiated the revision of the demarcation of the territory. In 1943 after the Moscow Conference of Three Allied Foreign Ministers, he proposed to US Secretary of State, Cordel Hull, the restoration of Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands in compensation for entering the war against Japan. In 1941 Japan and the Soviet Union had concluded the Neutrality Pact, which would be in force until April 1946. The expression of the restoration of the Kuril Islands in Stalin’s secret proposal (underlined by Saito) is very tricky. Because the islands that can be restored is only the northern part of the Kuril Islands from Shumushu to Urup which had been possessed by Russia until 1875. The southern part, Kunashiri and Etorofu (Iturup) had never belonged to Russia and the Soviet Union. At that time Hull seemed not aware of the Kuril Islands. Stalin took advantage of his partner’s ignorance on the history of the islands.

Afterwards the US State Department studied on the Kuril Islands hearing the reports of the specialist. The president Franklin D. Roosevelt was informed of it. However, the “resotoration” of the Kuril Islands was
changed to “handing over” them, in the process of the US-Soviet talks at the Yalta Conference in 1945.

In the Yalta Agreement there were two provisions, that is, the restoration of the southern part of Sakhalin and the handing-over of the Kuril Islands (underlined by Saito). The US government decided to accept the territorial demand of Stalin in order that the Allied Army would have the resistant Japan surrendered by the assistance of the Soviet forces. The United States understood the difficult conditions of the Soviet Union which would dare to infringe the Soviet-Japanese Neutral Pact. The US government agreed to Stalin’s claim to the Kuri Islands, changing the word “restore” to “hand over”.

In August 1945 the Soviet Far Eastern Forces were ordered to attack the Japanese forces. The Second Far Eastern Front took charge of the occupation of the southern Sakhalin and the northern Kuril Islands to the north of Urup. The Pacific Fleet was ordered to occupy Kunashiri, Etorofu, Habomai and Shikotan. They were occupied in the end of August to the beginning of September 1945. Why Shikotan and Habomai were included in the operation areas? Geographically they are the coastal islands of the Hokkaido, situated out of the Kuril volcanic group, and were under jurisdiction of Hokkaido. Therefore they cannot be classified into the Kuril Islands. The occupation of them was beyond not only the assigned boundary in the Yalta Agreement, but also the framework of Stalin’s revanchism.

In February 1946 the Soviet Union set up the Southern Sakhalin District under the Khabarovsk Region to absorb the southern Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands including Habomai and Shikotan.
3. Disputes in Japan - Soviet Talks

As the Soviet Union did not sign the Peace Treaty at San Francisco, Japan – Soviet relation has been vacuum de jure. In 1955 the Soviet Union and West Germany had the diplomatic relation on the tide of the easing of the strained world politics. In Japan there were three urgent problems to be solved through the negotiations with the Soviet Government. Firstly, the fishery business demanded the long term agreement with the Soviet Union to stabilize the fishing in the northern sea.

Secondly, the former war prisoners and civilians have been detained in the Soviet Union since the Second World War and their families appealed to the government for their homecoming without delay. Thirdly, the habitants deported out of the occupied Kulil Islands, Habomai and Shikotan claimed to their lost possessions and the fishery rights.

In June 1955 Japan and the Soviet Union began talks for a separate peace treaty. Regarding the demarcation of the boundary in the north, Japanese point of view was as follows: 1. Habomai and Shikotan belong to not the Kuril Islands but the Hokkaido. 2. Kunashiri and Etorofu are excluded of the Kuril Islands abandoned by Japan in the Peace Treaty of San Francisco. 3. Japan had possessed the Kuril Islands de jure and in fact. The Soviet Union rejected these arguments, depending on the Yalta Agreement, the Potsdam Declaration and the Order No 1 of the Allied Forces. As the last of three arguments seemed the least persuasive, it disappeared in the process of negotiations.

In 9 August Jakov Malik, Soviet Plenipotentiary, proposed to hand over Habomai and Shikotan to Japan (underlined by Saito) after the conclusion of the peace treaty. Judging from the expression “hand over” the Soviet Union does not recognize those islands as the part of the Hokkaido. Shun-iti Matumoto, Japanese Plenipotentiary, was very glad of the change of the
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Soviet attitude. He felt that the conclusion of the peace treaty would be realized soon. Because, before his leaving Japan for the talks the Japanese government had ordered him that Habomai and Shikotan should be restored absolutely. On the other hand, Kunashiri and Etorofu should be restored, but not so absolutely. Matsumoto informed of the Soviet proposal on telegram expecting a favorable answer. He received from the Foreign Ministry a new order that he had to negotiate to restore Kunashiri and Etorofu as well as possible and restore Habomai and Shikotan unconditionally.

Why did Japan turn the course for the territory to the uncompromising one? Because the US Government was afraid that the Soviet Union would possess legally the Kuril Islands, and had informed Japan that the Yalta Agreement was provisional for the Allied war aim and had no final effect. John F. Dulles, Secretary of State, said that the USA would require the annexation of the Okinawa Islands if Japan recognized the possession of the Kuril Islands by the USSR in the Peace Treaty.

On 30 August Matsumoto claimed the restoration of Kunashiri, Etorofu, Habomai and Shikotan. On 6 September Malik told that Kunashiri and Etorofu were part of the Kuril Islands and belonged to the USSR. He told that the USSR would return Habomai and Shikotan to Japan on the condition that Japan would prepare no military bases (underlined by Saito). After all the talks were interrupted and Matsumoto was ordered to come back. In Japan Democratic Party in power was united with another conservative party, Liberal Party, which aimed to restore all the four islands.

In the second talks in London in 1956 Japan and the Soviet Union were irreconcilable on Kunashiri and Etorofu, though Malik proposed to return Habomai and Shikotan unconditionally (not touching the forbidden military bases). Though the talks were succeeded in Moscow, Japan and the
Soviet Union failed in the demarcation of the northern boundary. In October they could not conclude a peace treaty but publish the Joint Declaration. In the article 9 of the Declaration it was provided that Habomai and Shikotan be handed overt to Japan after the conclusion of the peace treaty in the future.

In 1960 the Soviet Government, afraid of the military threat posed by the new US – Japan Security Treaty, informed Japanese Government that they would not hand over Habomai and Shikotan while the US Army, which was antagonistic to the USSR, would exist in Japan. After that the Soviet Government refused to talk with Japan on the issue of the territory. On the other hand Japanese government treated the four islands as the official territory in the maps published in Japan.

In 1981 in the stagnation of the Japan – Soviet relations, the Japanese government defined the 7 February, on which the Japan – Russian Treaty of Trade and Friendship was concluded in 1855, as the Day of the Northern Territory in order to develop the movement for the restoration of the territory in the national scale.

Perestroika in the USSR allowed to improve these depressed relations, and Japan – Soviet talks reopened. Some variants on the concerned islands have been proposed by Soviet new leaders, publicly and privately. The Japanese former habitants visited the graves on the northern islands. Mutual relations were enlarged not only in the cultural and economic fields but also the political one. In April 1991 Michael Gorbachev, President, visited Japan for the first time in the history as the head of the USSR. He talked with Japanese prime minister, Toshiki Kaifu and published the Joint Statement, in which Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashiri and Etorofu were named to be decided on the possession to prepare the peace treaty. In December the USSR collapsed without more effects on the Northern Territory.
4. Post-Cold War Phase of the Northern Territory Problem and Perspective

The new Russian Government succeeded the talks with Japan aiming at Russo - Japanese Rapprochement. Japan increased the economic assistance to CIS, especially in the Northern Territory under the name of the Urgent Humanistic Assistance.

In October 1993 Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia visited Japan and talked with Moriteru Hosokawa, Prime Minister of Japan. They published the Tokyo Declaration Regarding the Japan-Russian Relations, which was the foundation for the development of the mutual relation. There are characteristic descriptions as for the Northern Territory in the Declaration. The President and the Prime Minister had the common acknowledgement that the unfavorable heritage of the past be conquered. The problem of the concerned Four Islands ought to be settled on the ground of historical and legal facts and in conformity with law, justice and the documents made by the mutual undertaking, in which were included all the treaties and the agreements in the Soviet era. Two nations continued to negotiate to conclude a peace treaty early.

The effects of the Declaration are resulted in the rapprochement by the increase of mutual visits of political leaders, and even of the military leaders, and the remarkable curtailment of the Russian forces on the Northern Territory. The glass-root exchange was enlarged between the Japanese on Hokkaido and the Russians on the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin.

In November 1997 Yeltsin and Ryutaro Hashimoto, Prime Minister of Japan, talked “without neckties” in Krasnoyarsk. They intensified the friendship and trusteeship more than the former top leaders had ever done. This unofficial and openhearted dialogue brought forth the epoch-making
agreement. They agreed to do their best in order to conclude the peace treaty in conformity with the Tokyo Declaration by 2000. For the first time in the latest negotiations the time limit of the conclusion of a peace treaty was indicated. The reaction to it was contrasted between in Japan and Russia. In the former they received it fervently and in the latter they reacted chilly or angrily. They were common in suspecting the realization of it except some optimists, as there was no definition on the concrete plan in the agreement. Yeltsin and Hashimoto avoided the time limit for the conclusion of the peace treaty by the expression “to do their best”. Besides, it seemed doubtful that Yeltsin would remain in power until 2000.

The agreement was very efficient to Russia in the financial spheres. Hashimoto-Yeltsin Plan consisted of six tasks of the big investments in the Russian enterprises. It helped Japan off the blame that Japanese investments to Russia were by far less than the European ones. Hashimoto supported for Russia to take part in the APEC. It was a favorite proposal to Russia whose foreign policy was taking the balanced course between West and East by the name of “Eurasian diplomacy” in contrast to the policy shifted to Europe by the former Minister of the Foreign Affairs, Andrei Kozyrev.

After Krasnoyarsk talks under the chairmanship of both foreign ministers was organized Japan-Russian Joint Committee for the Problem on the conclusion of the Peace Treaty in order to accelerate the negotiations in the higher level. In the conciliated atmosphere Japan proposed an idea that it might put off the real restoration of the Northern Territory if Russia would recognize the sovereignty of Japan on all the four Islands. Russia did no official response to it.

There are difficult problems in post-Soviet Russia according to the sovereignty of the territory. Some local administrations have often insisted on the sovereignty of the territory under their governance on the pretext of
self-government or democracy against the claim of Moscow. The Governor of Sakhalin Region Administration rejected the restoration of the Kuril Islands to Japan notwithstanding that Russian Government would resolve the territory problem between Japan and Russia excluding the local representative from the negotiations. The other internal problems such as Chechen Conflict, the depression after the default and the majority of the opposition parties in the Parliament, interrupted Yeltsin to unite the public opinion regarding the territory problem. The Russians easily remember the wretched status of the minority (the Russians) in Estonia and Latvia.

On the last day of 1999 Yeltsin resigned from the president and succeeded Vladimir Putin. The Japan-Russian peace treaty was not concluded by the end of 2000. It brought the Japanese a little disappointment although they had foreseen it. Because they were informed that there was another scenario of the way to resolve the Northern Territory.

There was a possibility of the settlement of the Peace Treaty in conformity with the Japan-Russian Joint Declaration in 1956 as the both governments prepared the negotiations on the condition of the agreement in Krasnoyarsk. In that case Habomai and Shikotan would be naturally restored ahead of Kunashiri and Etorofu. This scenario seems more realistic and legal than the package restoration of all the Islands.

The initiative of this scenario was taken not by the Foreign Ministry but by the cabinet, Deputy of Cabinet Secretariat, Muneo Suzuki. He has accompanied Prime Ministers on the official talks with Yeltsin and Putin since 1998 and was dispatched as a special envoy to Russia and the Central Asia. In March 2001 Putin and Yoshiaki Mori, Prime Minister of Japan, talked in Irkutsk and published the Statement, in which they confirmed that the Declaration in 1956 was the fundamental legal document settled as the
starting point of the process of negotiations regarding the conclusion of a peace treaty. The legal status of the Declaration was recognized in the official documents for the first time since 1960.

It seems that Suzuki, who participated in the signature of the Statement in Irkutsk, determined to accelerate the preparation for the peace treaty on the condition of the Declaration. He has exerted the influence into the Foreign Ministry through specialists—officials to change the course of the policy towards Russia. Soon the Foreign Ministry chose the course of simultaneous searching for the restoration of every two Islands. He succeeded in his scenario. His failure was in his character for profiteering.

In March 2002 the Foreign Ministry abdicated the new course and returned to the old course after Suzuki lost his political position.

Now the outlook for the settlement of the Northern Territory is not promising at all. The movement for the restoration for it among the Japanese is on the ebb except definite groups. However, the human relations between the Japanese and the inhabitants on the Islands have effects on the local and civilian levels. They propose various ways for the resolution of the Northern Territory Problem\textsuperscript{12).} Some of them appear strange, but they will be considered seriously in the new order in the globalization.

If the Northern Territory, with inhabitants of the Russians and other nations, were to be returned, the Japanese would be really faced with an actual minority problem. Japan must prepare appropriate legal measures for this eventuality.

In 2002 Parliament of Russia adopted the law of the land. The conflicts will occur between ex-owner Japanese and new Russian owners concerning the ownership of the same land. How will Japan and Russia take measures
to meet the situation?

The Ainu, the minority in Japan and mainly inhabited on the Hokkaido, had lived on the Kuril Islands more ancienly than the Japanese. They were excluded from the islands by the Japanese government in the beginning of the last century. Although they have demanded the rights of former occupants, it was ignored by the Japanese, both the government and the organization of ex-inhabitants on the Northern Islands. The rehabilitation of the rights of the aborigines is justified in the United Nations. The rights of the Ainu ought to be secured in conformity with the international agreements.

It is widely recognized that the problem of the Northern Territory ought to be settled on the bases of law and justice. Besides, we have to consider the ecology, security and the infrastructure of co-habitation.

2) The political leaders of the USSR said that the islands belonged to Russia. Even now most of leaders in Russia have the same point of view.
8) Donald C. Hellmann, Japanese Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics: The Peace Agreement with the Soviet Union (Berkley, 1969), translated by Akio Watanabe
9) Shun-ichi Matsumoto, The Rainbow hanging over Moscow (Tokyo, 1966) p.51
10) Ibid., p.84 We don’t know whether Malik really used the word “return” or not, because the archives regarding those negotiations are closed still now both in Japan and Russia.
12) http://www.nemuro.pref.hokkaido.jp