

【研究ノート】

**Lack of Consensus over the Disputed ‘Kurile Islands’ Range :
‘Kuriles’ as a Part of ‘Chishimas’.
Japan’s Komeito Party’s Exceptional Approach, 1967–1991**

Yakov Zinberg*

Abstract

The article aims to restore a critical chronological perspective of Japan’s Komeito political party’s evolving position regarding Russo-Japanese territorial dispute, commonly known as the “Northern Territories” issue. Positions concerning the contested islands range are being disputed not only between Japan and Russia but between Japan’s major political parties as well. Komeito, a long-term political ally of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, in that particular sense, presents a significant research target.¹

Keywords: “Northern Territories”, Komeito, Kurile Islands, Chishimas, territorial dispute

The Komeito put forward its first-ever action program regarding the ‘Northern Territories’ issue in October 1967. It was primarily related to three factors, all of which served to incite inter-party rivalry.

Expectations of further progress of the Soviet—Japanese negotiating process might be regarded as the first such factor. According to the Japanese media sources, during the first regular Soviet—Japanese consultation held in Moscow on 20—25 July 1967, the then Soviet Prime Minister, Aleksey Kosygin, on July 22, stated addressing the then Japanese Foreign Minister, Miki Takeo, that “the Soviet government wished to conclude a peace treaty with Japan” and offered, on a

* Professor, School of Asia 21, Kokushikan University, Tokyo, Japan

1 For the background review, see Zinberg, Yakov. “Formation of the Liberal Democratic Party’s Position on the ‘Northern Territories’ Issue: Inter-Party Rivalry as a Bone of Contention.” *Bulletin of Asian Studies*, March 2019.

personal basis, to consider a possibility of concluding an “international agreement through diplomatic sources.”²

While the Joint Statement issued on July 25 did not mention the ‘Northern Territories’ issue explicitly, on August 7 the Japanese diplomatic sources informed that the Soviet side had confirmed that “the intermediate agreement was related to the territorial issue.”³

In response, on September 22, 1967, the then ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) proceeded to form a ‘Special Committee on the Northern Territories Issue.’ During its first meeting held on October 13, Kossygin’s offer was assessed positively, particularly concerning the Soviet Union’s lasting position of refusing to recognize the territorial issue’s existence.⁴

Acting earlier, on September 5, the then Head of the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) International Department, Matsumoto Ichiro, submitted to the then Foreign Minister, Miki Takeo, the JSP’s suggestion regarding resolution of the ‘Northern Territories’ issue, which had been formulated on September 4.⁵ The JSP’s document made it clear that the JSP Secretary-General, Yamamoto Kouichi, intended to hold a meeting with Kossygin during his visit to Moscow on the occasion of a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the October socialist revolution and discuss with him the territorial issue.⁶ Further, in late October, the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), in turn, responded by issuing the “Political Course regarding the Northern Territories.”⁷

Under such particular circumstances, the Komeito, sensing acute need to engage in inter-party rivalry and expecting a ‘breakthrough’ in the Soviet—Japanese relations, proceeded to form its own “Special Committee on the Northern Territories” on September 21.⁸ The decision to put forward and announce the Komeito’s action program regarding the ‘Northern Territories’ issue was made during a meeting of the Komeito Diet deputies on September 20 on the Diet premises.⁹

2 Mainichi Shimbun (newspaper). 18 October 1967.

3 *Hoppo Ryodo Kankei Shiryo Soran*. Tokyo: 1977, p. 539.

4 Ibid.

5 Asahi Simbun. 5 September 1967.

6 Ibid.

7 Mainichi Shimbun. 26 October 1967.

8 Komei Shimbun. 22 September 1967.

9 Ibid.

The meeting was immediately preceded by a visit to Hokkaido of the Komeito's Vice Secretary-General, Watanabe Ichiro, member of the Lower House "Special Committee on Okinawa and Other Issues", who went there with a group of other Diet members to examine views of the residents about the territorial issue. The trip lasted from September 3 to September 8.¹⁰ Watanabe provided detailed reports on the Hokkaido visit results in the Komeito's newspaper printing organ and the party's monthly journal.¹¹

The Komeito's "Special Committee on the Northern Territories" consisted of seven members, including Komeito's Secretary-General, Yano Jun'ya, Vice Secretary-General, Watanabe Ichiro, and Head of the Foreign Policy Committee, Kuroyanagi Akira.¹² The Committee was formed to formulate the party's concept of the "Northern Territories reversion," which had to provide an adequate basis for Komeito's subsequent efforts to influence Japanese public opinion.

The second factor that must have influenced the formation of the Komeito's position in October 1967 is represented by the problematics of negotiations between Japan and the U.S. regarding reversion under Japan's administrative control of the Ryukyu Islands, including Okinawa where major U.S. military bases were stationed. On the eve of the then Japanese Prime Minister Sato Eisaku's official visit to the U.S., which was scheduled to take place in November 1967, all the political parties' activities were filled with eager anticipation of a constructive bilateral agreement.¹³

Public opinion polls that were conducted in Japan and Okinawa in 1967 by the nation's leading newspaper, the 'Asahi Shimbun', demonstrated that 85 percent of the polled, both in Japan and Okinawa, stood for the reversion of Okinawa to Japan.¹⁴ This, in turn, gave rise to various linkages between the 'Northern Territories' issue and the problematics of Okinawa reversion.¹⁵ Thus, slightly earlier, on July 21, 1967, 'Special Committees on Okinawa and Other issues' of both Houses of the National Diet for the first time adopted resolutions which appealed for the "return" of

10 Ibid.

11 Komei Shimbun. 20 September 1967; Komei (journal). October 1967, No. 69, pp. 82-88.

12 Komei Shimbun. 22 September 1967.

13 Komeito made public the party's conception in its journal in October 1967. See footnote 11 above.

14 Watanabe, Akio. *The Okinawa Problem: A Chapter in Japan - U.S. Relations*. Melbourne University Press: 1970, p. 3.

15 Mainichi Shimbun. 9 September 1967; Asahi Shimbun. 27 October 1967; Mainichi Shimbun. 27 November 1967.

both the 'Northern Territories' and Okinawa.¹⁶

The resolutions were adopted at the beginning of the then Foreign Minister Miki Takeo's official visit to the Soviet Union. According to the text of the Lower House Special Committee's resolution, the deputies demanded that the government should apply more vigorous efforts in response to the Japanese people's will to secure the "return of our immemorial Northern Territories of the Habomais, Shikotan, as well as Kunashiri, Etorofu and others".¹⁷ Speaking in support of the draft resolution in the Lower House, the Komeito deputy, Watanabe Ichiro, appealed to Foreign Minister Miki Takeo to apply all his efforts for the sake of resolving the 'Northern Territories' issue.¹⁸

Finally, the third factor that must have caused Komeito's active intrusion into 'Northern Territories' politics was the party's recent formation. Hence, the acute need to secure a wider support base among the electorate. Against the background of the 1960s, this could be achieved primarily by utilizing a "fragmentary seizure" of respective support bases of the already established political parties. In the course of the 31st general election to the National Diet's Lower House, which took place on January 29 1967—the very first such occasion for Komeito—the party won 25 deputy seats (5.1 percent), gaining in toto 5.38 percent of votes and ranking as the 4th after, respectively, the LDP (57 percent of votes), the JSP (28.8 percent), and the DSP (6.2 percent).¹⁹

Employing several data sources, Komeito's study team concluded that in 11 electoral districts, overall, about 50 percent of votes gained by the Komeito had initially belonged to the LDP and JSP support bases. In contrast, the other half was gained by means of employing the party's own resources.²⁰

These data testify to the enormous importance that the Komeito must have attributed to disseminating its views among the LDP and the JSP supporters. As regarded the 'Northern Terri-

16 Hoppo Ryodo Kankei Shiryo Soran, p. 539.

17 Proceedings of the 'Special Committee on Okinawa and Other Problems'. 55th Diet, No. 19. National Diet Lower House, 21 July 1967, p. 1.

18 Ibid, p. 3.

19 Tsuge, Masao (ed.). *Kokusei Senkyo-to Seito Seiji. Sogo Bunseki 1945-1976*. Seiji Koho Senta: Tokyo, 1977, p. 87; *The Diet, Elections, and Political Parties*. "About Japan" Series 13. Foreign Press Center: Tokyo, 1995, p. 145.

20 Tsuge, Masao, pp. 88-89.

teries' issue, in the autumn of 1967, the Komeito chose the LDP to be a primary target of its critique, plausibly because of the ruling party's peculiar susceptibility to criticism in foreign policy matters for which it was deemed exclusively responsible ever since 1955.

The Komeito's primary ever published documents on the 'Northern Territories' were the "Komeito's Claims concerning the Northern Territories" [北方領土の関する公明党の主張] and the "Road to the Return of the Northern Territories [北方領土返還への道].²¹ The "*Claims*" was printed in the party's newspaper organ, the 'Komei Shimbun,' on October 12, 1967, while the "*Road*" was printed in the 'Komei Shimbun' on the following day, October 13.²²

The "Claims" contained three parts. The first part of this document was entitled "The Northern Territories Area Claimed for the Return". The second part was entitled "Policy Measures concerning the Return of the Northern Territories". The document's third part carried the title "Urgent Measures for the Period Preceding the Return of the Northern Territories."²³ It contained three sections, which were in turn subdivided into 14 subsections. The sections were entitled, respectively, "To Secure Safe Fishing," "To Provide Sufficient Compensation for Repatriates," and "To Plan the Formation of the Governmental and Parliamentary Organs". The first part of the "Claims," referring to "historical process" and "international law standpoint", defined the territories subject to "return" as comprising the following three components of contested islands:

1. The Habomais and Shikotan
2. Kunashiri and Etorofu (the Southern Chishimas)
3. The Kurile Islands (Middle/Northern Chishimas) —from the Island of Uruppu (inclusive) to the island of Shumshu.

The Habomais and the Shikotan were defined as a part of Hokkaido and Japan's "immemorial territories". Kunashiri and Etorofu were in turn defined as Japan's "immemorial territories" which, until the end of World War II, had never been an "object of any diplomatic negotiations."²⁴

Finally, referring to the "Kurile Islands (Middle/Northern Chishimas)" — from the Island of

21 For convenience, further referred to as "Claims" and "Road".

22 See Komei Shimbun. 12, 13 October 1967.

23 Both documents were printed in the party's journal, Komei, in December 1967. See Komei, December 1967, No. 62, pp. 32-35.

24 Ibid.

Uruppu (inclusive) to the Island of Shumshu—the “Claims” proceeded to define them as the “Kurile Islands” which were renounced by Japan according to provisions of the San Francisco Peace Treaty (S.F.P.T.). Moreover, it was also indicated that Kunashiri and Etorofu were not included in that particular group of islands.

The “Kurile islands” were specifically defined as corresponding to the “Middle and Northern Chishimas”. Besides, it was indicated as well that their sovereignty remained unresolved. The “Kurile Islands” were defined by the “Claims” as Japan’s “immemorial territories” in reference to two specific factors. Firstly, the “Claims” referred to the historical background of their transfer under Japan’s sovereignty following provisions of the 1875 Russo—Japanese agreement reached as a result of, according to the “Claims,” “peaceful diplomatic negotiations.” Secondly, the ‘Claims’ indicated that the “Kurile Islands” did not meet those requirements of the ‘Cairo Declaration’ that could serve to bring about their renunciation by Japan, implying that these islands were not “taken by violence and greed.”²⁵

The second part of the “Claims” contained three specific policy measures applying to territorial demands. Firstly, it was advised to claim an “immediate full return” of the Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu. Secondly, the “Claims” mentioned a “request” to define the “Kurile Islands (Middle/Northern Chishimas)” as either belonging to Japan or placed under the trusteeship of the United Nations Organization, with Japan serving as the chief administrative authority.

Thirdly, the “Claims” offered to “pave the way towards the return of the “Northern Territories” by appealing to hold trilateral talks between the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R., and Japan on that subject. According to the “Claims,” since the Soviet Union exercised full control over the Habomais and Shikotan (a “part of Hokkaido”) and Kunashiri and Etorofu (“Japan’s immemorial territories situated outside of the “Kurile Islands”), it was necessary to convene an international conference following provisions of Article 26 of the S.F.P.T.²⁶

According to the party newspaper organ, the ‘Komei Shinbun’, the “Road” was a further “logical and political” confirmation of the “Claims.”²⁷ It is also worth noting that the preamble to the “Road” indicated that “Kosygin’s statement” regarding a possibility of concluding an interim bi-

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Komei Shinbun, 13 October 1967.

lateral agreement provided a powerful stimulus to the formation of the Komeito's initial position on the territorial issue. In particular, authors of the party's document referred to "Kosygin's statement" as a proof that a "major shift" had occurred in the Soviet position, which until then denied the existence of the territorial issue, cherishing a hope that behind a thick wall "at long last, a faint light appeared".²⁸

The initial section of the first part of the "Road", entitled "Full Return of the Northern Territories", suggested to divide the 'Northern Territories' into two particular groups of islands following considerations of both the historical and the legal character: the first group contained a "bloc" of islands — namely, the Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri and Etorofu—which until the end of World War II had never been a part of any foreign state, while the second group comprised eighteen "Kurile Islands" stretching from Uruppu (inclusive) to Shumshu, or "the so-called Middle and Northern Chishimas".²⁹

It is worth noting that this particular classification differs from the one offered in the "Claims" where the 'Northern Territories' were divided into three groups. This discrepancy might be explained by the emphasis on a different set of factors. Specifically, the 'two groups' classification offered in the "Road" put a primary emphasis on the historical factors: thus, according to the Road, "while Japan's immemorial territories" of Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu had never been an object of any bilateral treaties and agreements, the islands of the second group, the "Kurile Islands," even though they also were Japan's "immemorial territories", had been initially "subjected to aggression from Russia," later "returned" to Japan following 1875 Russo—Japanese agreement, and then renounced in favor of the 'Allied Powers' following the S.F.P.T. provisions.³⁰

While, similarly to the 'Claims,' the "immemorial territories of Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri and Etorofu" were subdivided into two groups containing (1) the Habomais and Shikotan and (2) Kunashiri and Etorofu, the reasoning applied in the "Road" reflects a different approach to the status of the Habomais and Shikotan. The "Claims" referred to them as a "part of Hokkaido" and hence not a part of the "Kurile Islands", the "Road" additionally proceeded to refer to the Habomais and Shikotan as Japan's "immemorial territories" recognized as such by "all the countries."³¹

28 Komei (journal). December 1967. No. 62, p. 35.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

Besides, the "Road" defined the Habomais and Shikotan as the islands that were "as a result of the LDP's "feeble foreign policy" designated for "return" occurring after the conclusion of the Soviet—Japanese peace treaty.

As concerns the party's specific territorial claims, the "Road", unlike the "Claims", puts forward two claims, ignoring the issue of the trilateral consultation: (1) immediate return in a single bloc" of the Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri and Etorofu and (2) a request addressed to the "Allied Powers" demanding full reversion of Japan's sovereignty over the "Kurile Islands (Middle/Northern Chishimas)".³² It is worthwhile noting that the "Claims" did not mention a "single bloc return" proposal. Overall, discrepancies between the 'Claims' and the 'Road' might be viewed as complementary features serving to form a wide-ranging image of the issue.

Speaking of the Soviet Union's position regarding the 'Northern Territories' issue, the document, while referring particularly to the fact that the Soviet Union was not a signatory to the S.F.P.T., asserted that the Soviet Union possessed no rights and carried no obligations concerning the S.F.P.T. provisions. Besides, it was asserted that the Komeito refused to recognize the 'Northern Territories' renunciation as accomplished in favor of the Soviet Union."³³

Finally, as it applied to the Yalta Agreement, the "Road" declared that since it was the Potsdam Declaration that discussed Japan's capitulation while the Soviet territorial war gains were stipulated only in the text of the Yalta Agreement, Japan, which had not taken part in the Yalta Agreement, was not obliged to observe the latter. Referring to that position, the Komeito claimed that the Soviet Union's territorial gains based on the Yalta Agreement's provisions were "unfounded."³⁴

Besides, the 'Road' claimed that the Yalta Agreement was a secret trilateral political agreement and that "Great Britain and the United States had officially declared", from the standpoint of international law, that it carried no force. Nevertheless, the "Road" proposed to carry out a unique project, which implied reaching a trilateral agreement between the U.S.A., Japan, and the Soviet Union and was expected to lead to the "return" of the "Northern Territories" to Japan. At the same time, Komeito proposed securing a prior agreement between the U.S.A. and Japan to exert

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid, p. 39.

34 Ibid.

powerful political pressure on the Soviet Union. Specifically, Komeito suggested to first conduct negotiations with the U.S. and define the limits of both the "Kurile Islands" and the "islands belonging to Hokkaido."³⁵

The "Road" also suggested demanding immediate withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the "Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri and Etorofu zone," referring to the alleged fact that following provisions of the 1956 Joint Soviet-Japanese Declaration, "the wartime occupation ended." Besides, concerning the "Kurile Islands," authors of the "Road" considered it appropriate to address the issue after concluding the trilateral consultations and request that these islands should achieve the status of the U.N. trusteeship territory administered by Japan, or be recognized as transferred under Japan's sovereignty.³⁶

Even though inclusion of the trilateral consultations project into a political party's action program was rather innovative, such a scheme was hardly unique as it applied to the territorial issue. Thus, while on a visit to Japan, on September 15, 1967, the U.S. Senator Michael Mansfield put forward a proposal to hold a joint conference of representatives of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Japan to assist in the resolution of both the Okinawa and the 'Northern Territories' issues.³⁷

However, on the next day after Senator Mansfield had made his "Shimoda Statement" named so after the name of the city in which Mansfield delivered his speech during a meeting of the so-called Japanese—American Civilian Assembly, Chief Secretary of the then Japanese Cabinet, Kimura Toshio, leveled criticism at Senator Mansfield's proposal. Kimura considered it possible to convene the trilateral conference only after the reversion of Okinawa to Japan, provided the Soviet—Japanese negotiating process would have reached an advanced stage by then.³⁸

The Komeito also criticized Senator Mansfield's proposal. Specifically, the then National Diet Upper House Komeito deputy, Kuroyanagi Akira, cited two reasons why the Okinawa and the 'Northern Territories' issues could not be "mixed": firstly, he warned that it could be impossible to resolve the Okinawa issue before finding a resolution of the 'Northern Territories' issue and, secondly, he foresaw various complications related to the Soviet Union's interference in a "so-

35 Ibid, p.45.

36 Ibid, pp. 45-46.

37 *Hoppo Ryodo Kankei Shiryo Soran*, p. 539.

38 Mainichi Shimbun. 6 September 1967.

phisticated and delicate” problematics of administering Okinawa and managing the presence of the U.S. military bases on the island.³⁹

The Komeito’s official documents issued after the “Claims” and the “Road” had demonstrated a similar approach to the territorial issue. Thus, the “Action Course for 1972”, which was placed on the agenda of the Komeito’s 10th Party Congress, briefly expressed the party’s position in a section entitled “Conclusion of the Japanese—Soviet Peace Treaty and Return of the Northern Territories” as follows: firstly, the Habomais and Shikotan were defined both as a “part of Hokkaido” and Japan’s “immemorial territories”; secondly, Kunashiri and Etorofu were defined as “immemorial territories” which until the end of World War II “had never been a subject of diplomatic negotiations”; thirdly, the islands to the north of Uruppu inclusive were defined as “immemorial territories” which as a result of “peaceful diplomatic negotiations” between Russia and Japan were transferred under Japan’s sovereignty; fourthly, it was specified that while Japan had lost the title to the islands north of Uruppu inclusive following provisions of the S.F.P.T., their status remained unresolved.⁴⁰

It has to be indicated that at the end of January 1972, the then Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, paid an official visit to Japan within the framework of regular bilateral consultations of which the first one had been held in Moscow in 1967. It was reported that on the eve of Gromyko’s visit to Japan, the then Japanese Prime Minister, Sato Eisaku, appealed to the President of the United States to mediate in the Soviet—Japanese negotiations regarding the ‘Northern Territories’ issue.⁴¹ Appearing in the National Diet on January 29, 1972, Sato related that during his meeting with Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister “gave his consent to negotiations regarding the conclusion of a peace treaty” during that year.⁴²

Accordingly, the Komeito’s position expressed in the “1972 Action Course” was explicitly formu-

39 Kuroyanagi, Akira. “Seifu-no Okinawa Henkan-e-no Shisei-o Tadasu”. *Komei* (journal). November 1967, No. 61, p. 81. In October 1967, the Komeito made public its program for the resolution of the Okinawa issue. See “Okinawa-no Hondo Fukki-e-no Michi. Komeito-no Okinawa Henkan Koso”. *Komei* (journal), October 1967, No. 60, pp. 78-91.

40 Komei Shimbun. 4 May 1972; the documents abstain from referring to the “Chishimas” as consisting of “southern, middle and northern parts.”

41 Asahi Shimbun. 9 January 1972; Yomiuri Shimbun. 24 March 1972.

42 Asahi Shimbun. 1 September 1972; *Hoppo Ryodo Kankei Shiryo Soran*, p. 546.

lated in anticipation of the intensification of bilateral negotiations, which was pointed out in the text of the party's document. Slightly before the publication of the "1972 Action Course" the Komeito deputy, Saito Minoru, during a meeting of the National Diet Lower House 'Special Committee on Okinawa and Northern Issues' put a query addressing the then Japanese Foreign Minister, Fukuda Takeo, about the government's position in case the Soviet Union would demand "demilitarization of the islands or their detachment from the sphere of application of the US-Japan Security Treaty" in return for territorial concessions in favor of Japan. Fukuda offered a vague reply, which did not exclude a possibility of making certain concessions to the Soviet side's likely demands.⁴³

Further, on the eve of the first-ever "Northern Territories Day" which was to be observed on February 7, 1981, following the government's decision taken in January of the same year, the Komeito's newspaper organ, the 'Komei Shinbun,' printed an article entitled "The Northern Territories and Komeito's Claims".⁴⁴

The article summarized major ideas and principles contained in the "Claims" and the "Road" of 1967, including critique concerning the LDP policies. According to the 'Komei Shinbun' article, it was "obvious" that the term "Chishima Islands" applied in the S.F.P.T. indicated the "Middle and Northern Chishimas" ("Kurile Islands") firstly because the Potsdam Declaration, by referring to the Cairo Declaration, had confirmed validity of the 'territorial non—aggrandizement' principle and, secondly, as based on provisions of the 1855 and 1875 bilateral Russo-Japanese agreements.⁴⁵

Stressing the demands for "return" of the "Middle and Northern Chishimas", the article indicated that since these territories had not been initially appropriated by Japan by "violence and greed," their "occupation" by the Soviet Union had to be regarded as illegal and their "belonging to Japan" could be claimed with confidence.⁴⁶

On the eve of an official visit to Japan of the then President of the former Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, which took place in April 1991, the party's newspaper organ issued a review article

43 Asahi Shinbun. 17 March 1972.

44 Komei Shinbun. 6 February 1981.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

entitled “Expected Evolution of the Northern Territories problem.” The article briefly referred to the party’s demands for the “return” of the “Four Islands”, this time choosing to ignore the issue of the “Middle and Northern Chishimas” specifics.⁴⁷

The article devoted special attention to the analysis of the impact of the ‘Cold War’ between the Soviet Union and the U.S. upon evolution of the ‘Northern Territories’ issue. In particular, the authors suggested that against the background of the collapse of the ‘Yalta system’ in Europe, it was natural to reconsider the Soviet Union’s de facto control over the “Chishima Islands” based on provisions of the Yalta Agreement. Besides, the authors specifically indicated that constructive changes in the Soviet Union’s position occurred only after “the end of the Cold War had turned into a decisive factor” of international politics.⁴⁸ The Komeito joined all the other political parties of Japan in unanimous support for the National Diet resolutions that on the eve of Gorbachev’s historic visit were adopted by both Houses of the National Diet, appealing for the resolution of the bilateral territorial issue.⁴⁹

As concerns a critical issue of the ‘Kurile Islands’ stretch, the “Road”, firstly, criticized several statements made by Yoshida Shigeru at the San Francisco Peace Conference on September 7, 1951, when he delivered a speech as Japan’s Ambassador Plenipotentiary. According to the “Road”, the former Prime Minister, while having clearly defined the status of the Habomais and Shikotan, at the same time failed to appreciate and let the audience know the importance of a proper definition of the ‘Kurile Islands’.⁵⁰ According to the ‘Road’, in his speech, Yoshida mentioned that the Habomais and Shikotan were a “part of Hokkaido” but referred to Kunashiri and Etorofu as “two islands of the southern part of the Chishima Islands”, implying Japan’s having had to renounce her territorial rights concerning these islands. However, citing historical testimonies, Yoshida remarked that imperial Russia raised no objections to Japan’s sovereignty over Kunashiri and Etorofu.⁵¹

Secondly, the “Road” proceeded to criticize Nishimura Kumao, Head of the governments’ Trea-

47 See “Kitai Sareru Hoppo Ryodo Mondai-no Shinten”. *Komei Shimbun*. February 21, 1991.

48 Ibid.

49 *Komei Shimbun*. 10 April 1991.

50 *Komei (journal)*. December 1967, No. 62, p. 44.

51 For a full text of Yoshida’s address see *Hoppo Ryodo Mondai Shiryo Shu*. Hoppo Ryodo Mondai Taisaku Kyokai: Tokyo, 1972, pp.113-117.

ties Department at the time of conclusion of the S.F.P.T. for the reply he had given on October 19, 1951, to a query put by the Lower House deputy, Takakura Teisuke.⁵² Addressing the government during deliberations conducted at the meeting of a "Special Committee on Peace and Security Treaties", Takakura inquired about a proper definition of the range of the "Kurile Islands". In reply to the query, Nishimura clearly stated that the "Chishima Islands" as they appeared in the S.F.P.T. included "the Northern and the Southern Chishimas", implying, as also followed from Nishimura's subsequent comments, that Kunashiri and Etorofu made up the "Southern Chishimas". Besides, replying to Takakura, Nishimura pointed out that the Habomais and Shikotan were "not included" in the range of the 'Chishimas'.⁵³

Yoshida Shigeru indirectly participated in the Takakura—Nishimura verbal exchange by entrusting Nishimura on the spot with a reply to Takakura's inquiry. In that regard, the Komeito blamed the LDP government for having indirectly recognized Japan's obligation to renounce her sovereign rights concerning Kunashiri and Etorofu by admitting their being a part of the 'Kurile Islands'.⁵⁴ Besides, while making a positive evaluation of a reconsideration of the status of Kunashiri and Etorofu, which was accomplished in October 1961 by the then Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato, the "Road" expressed profound dissatisfaction with the fact that it had taken the government many years to offer an adequate assessment, calling it a "disgrace".⁵⁵

One of the best—known statements by Ikeda Hayato in which he attempted to refute Nishimura's statement of October 1951 was made on October 3, 1961, during Diet deliberations in reply to a query put by the LDP deputy, Kono Mitsu, who asked to assess Nishimura's statement. In response to Kono's query, Ikeda briefly stated that since Yoshida Shigeru, in his speech at the San Francisco Peace Conference, pointed out that Kunashiri and Etorofu had always been Japanese territory, Nishimura's statement "was wrong."⁵⁶

The inability of the Japanese government to explain adequately why Kunashiri and Etorofu

52 Komei (journal). December 1967, No. 62, p. 44.

53 See Nishimura's statement in *Hoppo Ryodo Mondai-ni Kan-suru Kokkai Rongi, 1946-1952*. Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan Chosa Rippo Chosa Kyoku: Tokyo, 1992, p. 44; for Komeito's critique see Komei (journal). December 1967, No. 62, p. 44.

54 Komei (journal). December 1967, No. 62, p. 44.

55 Ibid.

56 *Nihon-no Ryodo Mondai*. National Diet Lower House, Foreign Affairs Committee Research Section, Lower House Research Series No. 66. September 1971, p. 103.

were plausibly not to be considered to be a part of the 'Chishima Islands', and in particular the difference per se between the terms 'Kurile Islands' and 'Chishima Islands' as they were applied in the S.F.P.T., served to create considerable confusion. As a countermeasure, on June 17, 1964, the Secretary of the Japanese Foreign Ministry issued a Circular Note strictly advising the "concerned circles" to stop an arbitrary use of the term "Southern Chishimas" concerning Kunashiri and Etorofu as well as to stop indicating those islands as a part of the "Chishima Archipelago" on maps. A brief commentary informed that the official position recognized that Japan had renounced its sovereign rights to the "Kurile Islands" following provisions of the S.F.P.T., indicating also that the term "Kurile Islands" stood for "Chishima Islands" in Japanese translation, i.e. that the two terms were interchangeable. At the same time, the Circular Note pointed out that the official position did not consider "our immemorial territories "Kunashiri and Etorofu" to be a part of the "Kurile Islands".⁵⁷

Consequently, the Circular Note advised not to refer to Kunashiri and Etorofu as the "Southern Chishimas" forming a false impression that these two islands belonged to the "Kurile Islands" to which Japan had renounced her sovereign rights.⁵⁸ It appears that intending to resolve a very difficult issue of the status of Kunashiri and Etorofu, the Japanese Foreign Ministry only succeeded in creating an even more complicated problem, in effect placing the two islands in a geopolitical vacuum of being neither a "part of Hokkaido" nor a "part of the "Kurile Islands" or the "Chishima Islands".

On the other hand, designating Kunashiri and Etorofu as a "southern part of the Chishimas", i.e. identifying the 'Chishimas' and the 'Kuriles' as overlapping groups of islands, could certainly raise a large number of difficult questions, in particular regarding a quality of the translation of the S.F.P.T., in effect compromising both Yoshida Shigeru personally and his Cabinet, and, more generally, even undermining authority of the LDP rule. The Komeito, a latecomer on the political scene, turned into the only known Japanese political party openly viewing the 'Chishimas' and the 'Kuriles' as NOT the overlapping groups of islands.

High anxiety about the 'Chishimas' — 'Kuriles' discrepancy made itself known at the initial stage of the 'Northern territories' issue evolution. Thus, addressing the government during the

57 For a full text see <https://www.ne.jp/asahi/cccp/camera/HoppouRyoudo/HoppouShiry-ou/19640617Tsutatsu.htm> (Accessed on December 1, 2020)

58 Ibid.

Lower House Budget Committee meeting on January 31, 1950 the then Democratic Liberal Party deputy, Sasaki Morio, noted that what was commonly thought of among the Japanese people as the "Chishima Archipelago" must have differed from the term "Kurile Islands" that had been applied in the Yalta Agreement.⁵⁹

Besides, he mentioned that according to various written sources, the "Chishima Archipelago" was originally divided into the "Northern and the Southern 'Chishimas'" by the a strait separating Etorofu from Uruppu and indicated that according to the Russo— Japanese agreements of 1855 and 1875 "Etorofu, Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri" were recognized as Japanese territory. Sasaki, in effect, inquired about the "legitimate" definition of the 'Chishimas'.⁶⁰

Replying to Sasaki's query, the then Head of the government's Parliamentary Affairs Section, Shimazu Hisahiro, apparently identifying the terms 'Kurile Islands' and 'Chishima Islands' as standing for the same group of islands, commented that provisions of the Yalta Agreement had not specified the exact range of the "so-called Chishima islands" and that it was impossible to clarify the range "at the present moment". However, Shimazu, referring to provisions of the Potsdam Declaration, added that the government considered it proper for the Allies to decide which particular "minor islands" would be "left as "Japanese territory", also indicating that "consequently" Japan had to comply with the definition of the "Chishima Islands" as offered by the Allies. Shimazu also mentioned that he was aware of a peculiar background of the "Southern and Northern Chishimas", typically implying that the Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu constituted the "Southern Chishima Islands."⁶¹

On yet a different occasion, during the Lower House deliberations on October 20, 1951, after the S.F.P.T. had been concluded but before its ratification by the Japanese Diet, the then Liberal Party deputy, Ogawa Masanobu, in turn, inquired about a difference between the terms "Kurile Islands" and "Chishima Islands."⁶² The reply to his query given by the then Parliamentary Vice Foreign Minister, Kusaba Ryuen, presented an interpretation which is different from the well— known position stated by Nishimura Kumao a day earlier, on October 19, and in fact, makes up a

59 *Hoppo Ryodo Mondai-ni Kan-suru Kokkai Rongi*, p. 44; it is worth noting that Sasaki implied that Habomais, Shikotan, Kunashiri and Etorofu made up the "Southern Chishimas".

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid, pp. 175-180.

concept that became a founding principle of the Komeito's unique position regarding definitions of both the 'Chishima Islands' and the 'Kurile Islands'.⁶³

Particularizing, Ogawa asserted that it was common knowledge, both in Japan and elsewhere, that the 'Kurile Islands' stood for a group of islands lying to the north of Uruppu inclusive. Further, referring to Nishimura Kumao's statement and complaining about its confusing content, Ogawa indicated that, to his surprise, Japan seemed to have renounced her territorial rights to "all of the Chishima Islands" rather than only the "Kurile Islands", clearly implying that the two terms did not have the same meaning. Confused and bewildered, Ogawa asked Kusaba to provide further adequate comments.⁶⁴

In reply, Kusaba made it clear that while it was common "currently" to view the "Chishimas" as a single whole, the "Chishimas" were in fact subdivided into the "Northern, Middle and Southern Chishimas". Kusaba also made it clear that the term "Kurile Islands" corresponded to a range of islands, which made up the "Northern and Middle Chishimas," definitely implying the islands to the north of Uruppu inclusive.⁶⁵

However, on October 19, Nishimura Kumao, while replying to the query put by Takakura Teisuke, did make it clear that the S.F.P.T. mentioned "the Chishima Islands" which included both the Northern Chishimas and the Southern Chishimas, clarifying further that the term "Southern Chishimas" implied Kunashiri and Etorofu.⁶⁶

The crucial difference between the statements of Nishimura and Kusaba lies in the fact that while Kusaba's statement points at the reality of differing meanings of the terms "Kurile Islands" and "Chishima Islands", thus raising the issue of quality of the translation of the S.F.P.T. into Japanese, Nishimura's statement clarifies what was meant by the term "Chishima Islands" in the Japanese translation of the text of the peace treaty and at the same time recognizes a basic similarity between the terms "Kurile Islands" and "Chishima Islands" as they were applied in the treaty.

The desperate attempt to resolve the 'Kuriles vs. Chishimas' discrepancy with the help of the

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

Japanese Foreign Ministry's Circular Note of June 17 1964 might be viewed as an additional hindrance to an adequate understanding of the issue. However, as far as Japan's political parties are concerned, the Komeito's choice of rationalizing the 'Chishimas—Kuriles' discrepancy by letting the two terms remain different, particularly against the background of the Foreign Ministry's Circular Note of June 1964, makes up a highly unique feature of the Komeito's position regarding the 'Northern Territories' issue. At the same time, this choice has uniquely contributed to a remarkable lack of consensus among Japanese political parties concerning the territorial issue in question.