

## **Border-knowledge through Border-observation :** **Report on the Excursion to Nemuro and Rausu (GCOE-SRC Summer School)**

This year, the GCOE Summer School participants went on a two day excursion to Nemuro City and Rausu Town on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of August. Nemuro City is the easternmost administrative district of Japan (with the exception of Minami-Torishima Island and, of course, some units in the “Northern Territories”), and is only 3.7 kilometers distant from Kaigara Island, an islet of the Habomai Archipelago. The Habomais are, of course, one part of Japan’s “Northern Territories”. We made a two day trip with the aim of learning about a Japanese border problem on-site in Nemuro City and observing the “closeness” of Kunashiri Island from Rausu Town. The distance between Rausu and Kunashiri is just 26 kilometers, much closer than that between Niigata and Sado Island (34 kilometers).

Soon after arrival at Nemuro-Nakashibetsu Airport at nine o’clock in the morning, eighteen participants (including eleven foreign guests) headed for the Northern Territories Exchange Center (NIHORO) in Nemuro City. The Mayor of Nemuro City, Mr. Shunsuke HASEGAWA, gave a welcome address, in which he enthusiastically explained the importance of the retrocession of the Northern Territories to Japan. This territorial problem with the Russian Federation, Mr. HASEGAWA emphasized, is a serious impediment to the economic development of Nemuro City, where fishery is a key industry. In fact, the marine area around the Habomai Archipelago is one of the richest in the world. After his warm welcome speech, we watched the DVD “Unknown Northern Borders: ‘Karafuto and the Chishima Islands’,” produced by our GCOE project, and listened to two lectures by Dr. ITANI Hiroshi and Prof. IWASHITA Akihiro. Dr. ITANI gave us basic information about the history of Japanese-Russian exchange stretching back to the time of the Japanese castaway Kodayu’s audience with the Empress Catherine II in St.Petersburg at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, while Prof. IWASHITA’s lecture was about the contemporary situation of the Northern Territories. Both lectures stirred up active discussion from the foreign participants, who, in turn, eagerly listened to the curator’s explanations about the Northern Territory exhibition at NIHORO after lunch.



After NIHORO, we visited the Nemuro City Museum of History and Nature. Among the various historical and natural exhibitions, the most impressive for me were the photos of the Port of Nemuro at the height of its prosperity, where we could see fishing boats large and small, floating almost body-to-body. Then we proceeded to Cape Nosappu, the eastern end of Japanese territory, to see and “feel” the Japanese border. However, the closer we came to the Cape, the denser the fog became and, unfortunately, we could see the Northern Territories neither with our eyes nor through a

telescope. Locals said that such heavy fog is very common in August. On the first day, the border with Russia remained “invisible,” as noted by Professor IWASHITA.

In the evening, we had a dinner party at an Italian restaurant in Nemuro City, in which Mr. ISHIGAKI Masatoshi, vice-mayor of Nemuro City, and some other officials of the Nemuro City Office took part. Here, they faced a barrage of questions from the foreign participants about the Northern Territories issue and Nemuro’s stance towards it. I would like to highlight one interesting exchange. One foreign participant asked: “How is the relationship between the Russian residents of the Northern Territories and the former Japanese islanders? What do they think of each other?” A Nemuro city official answered as follows: “The former Japanese islanders were expelled by the Soviet Government, while the present inhabitants on the islands were those obliged to come and replace them. They experienced living together for a couple of years. Therefore, both sides do not think of the other as the enemy, but, rather, they seek to understand one another’s position.” This answer I found really surprising. I had lived in the Tokyo area until recently, and this reply made me think that I did not know local feelings about the Northern Territories problem.

The next morning, we headed for Rausu Town on Shiretoko Peninsula, hoping to actually see the Northern Territories this time. On the way, at the Port of Odaito in Bekkai Town, located around 75 kilometers from Nemuro City, we took a one-hour “seal-watching” cruise in the Bay of Notsuke. Once again, dense fog prevented any sight of the Northern Territories. Back aboard our charter bus around 11 o’clock, heading north towards Rausu Town along the shore of the Okhotsk Sea, the fog started to clear in Shibetsu Town, the northern neighbor of Bekkai Town. Then the sun came out at last and the ridge line of a shore appeared, vaguely, ahead of us beyond the Nemuro Strait. Kunashiri Island, perhaps?

We took lunch in Rausu Town, where we tasted the baked local fish “Hokke,” which was delicious. After a brief rest, we visited the Rausu-Kunashiri Observation Tower, where the ticket lady told us that, “It was cloudy until an hour ago!” From the top of the Tower, we could see Kunashiri Island very clearly. Finally our border became “visible.” This was really my first experience in physically gaining an appreciation of Japan’s territorial border. I am from Gunma Prefecture, located in the middle of Honshu, and have never been aware of our maritime borders.

Thus, we accomplished the main purpose of our excursion, to see the Northern Territories and experience the problem on-site. We learned about the perspective of the locals, which let us see the Japanese border problem in a fresh light. Personally, it raised my awareness of the Northern Territories problem. This trip might be very valuable for foreign participants, too, providing findings in Nemuro and Rausu for comparison with other regions with border issues.

Finally, I would sincerely like to express my appreciation and thanks to the Nemuro City Office for their hospitality, arranging our visits to NIHORO, the Nemuro City Museum of Culture and Nature and Cape Nosappu. Some of the City Office even took part in our dinner party, despite their busy schedules. I would also like to thank all the participants for their eagerness to learn about our Northern Territories problem and cooperation during the program.

Tetsuro CHIDA(GCOE Program Research Fellow)