

Current Conditions of the Remains of Shrines in Sakhalin

— Preserving and Utilizing Japanese Cultural and Historical Heritage During the Karafuto Era —

Igor Anatolievich SAMARIN

This study focuses on the historical background, current conditions, and future directions of preserving and utilizing Japanese cultural and historical heritage in Sakhalin, formerly Karafuto, during the Japanese occupation (1905–1945). It also provides the first detailed descriptions of the remains of shrines.

A project to preserve Japan's historical and cultural heritage in Sakhalin met with negative reactions at first. But since Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev introduced perestroika reforms in 1985, Japanese rule has been recognized as part of Sakhalin's history and various exchange programs have been organized, such as cultural exchanges between the Sakhalin Regional Museum and the Historical Museum of Hokkaido (now Hokkaido Museum) and economic exchanges between Sakhalin and Hokkaido. Moreover, the governor of Sakhalin issued the law to protect historical and cultural assets in 1999, and an academic conference titled "Sakhalin's Culture: Past Experiences and Future Perspective" was held the following year. Since then, international symposiums on the protection of historical and cultural heritage during the Karafuto era have taken place regularly to promote various projects to compile a list of Japanese heritage properties (existing buildings and remains) in Sakhalin, evaluate them for preservation, and publish historical documents. These projects include, for example, transferring guardian lions in Karafuto Gokoku Shinto Shrine to the Sakhalin Regional Museum, restoring a victory monument in Tomarioru Shrine, and preserving the building of the former Hokkaido Takushoku Bank Odomari branch.

A list of the remains of shrines suggested for restoration, maintenance, and installation of information boards includes Karafuto Gokoku Shinto Shrine in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk (formerly Toyohara City); a monument for the landing of the Japanese Sakhalin Expeditionary Army in the Merei area and a monument for loyal souls in Nagahama Shrine in Korsakov (formerly Odomari); Higashi Shiraura Shrine in Dolinsk (formerly Ochiai); a monument for the opening of Sakhalin Island in the Shiranushi area and Honto Shrine in Nevelsk (formerly Honto); Chiritoru Shrine in Makarov (formerly Chiritoru); Esutoru Shrine in Ulegorsk (formerly Esutoru); and Maoka Shrine in Kholmsk (formerly Maoka). The information boards will explain the names of shrines and deities, founding years and building exteriors.

These projects will help Sakhalin play a more important role as a crossroad connecting islands in Asia-Pacific countries and the European continent, promote exchanges among peoples and nations, and develop new approaches to preserving Japanese heritage in Sakhalin.