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Japan and Soviet Communism By Tatiana
Linkhoeva

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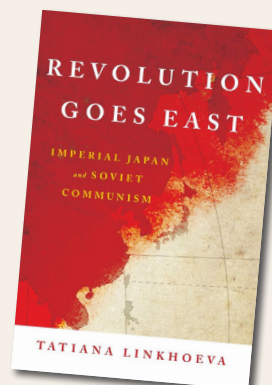
BOOK REVIEW

Revolution Goes East: Imperial Japan and Soviet Communism

By Tatiana Linkhoeva

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Reviewed by YOSHIKAWA Hiroaki



Tatiana Linkhoeva's *Revolution Goes East: Imperial Japan and Soviet Communism* is the first comprehensive work focusing on an enigma at the heart of the modern history of Japan but ignored for dozens of years after the end of the Cold War: namely, how the Japanese reacted to the outbreak and subsequent progress of the Russian revolution during the 1920s. Studies on the Japan-Soviet relationship during the interwar period have to date developed separately, some dealing with the ideological or military conflicts between their governments, and others only with the revolutionary movement led by the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). By contrast, Linkhoeva's book avoids this dichotomy between rulers and resisters, and chooses rather to examine a wide range of discourse from right to left. She emphasizes the fact that views on the Russian revolution were not uniform, but complex, even within the same group.

Part 1 concerns Japanese domestic and foreign policy toward the Soviet Union and International Communism. The first two chapters give an overview of the Japanese formation of an image of Russia before the Meiji period, and show how Russia emerged as a major issue in Japanese public opinion from the beginning of the February revolution to the Japanese intervention in Siberia. Taking up Pan-Asianist views, the third chapter demonstrates that Mitsugawa Kametarō and Ōkawa Shūmei affirmed the October revolution as an “anti-Western revolution,” and that their sympathetic attitude drove even the influential imperialist politician, Gotō Shinpei, to negotiate the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Of course, some military officers and bureaucrats took a hostile attitude to the Soviets; nevertheless, the instability of the situation in China determined their policy. Geopolitical factors outweighed ideological ones, as Japan and the Soviet Union realized it was in their mutual interest to cooperate in defending their influences in China. So, Tokyo and Moscow drew closer diplomatically, but this meant domestically a higher risk of communist expansion within the empire, and prompted legislation against anti-imperial ideas. As Linkhoeva points out in chapter 4, the liberals criticized the tide of communist and socialist radicalism spreading out of Russia, and thus agreed with the anti-communist policies, ending up as victims of the Peace Preservation Law during the 1930s.

Part 2 handles the discourse on the Russian revolutions by Japanese leftist groups: anarchist, communist, and national socialist. The fifth chapter explores how Ōsugi Sakae and his fellows strongly criticized Bolshevik avant-garde theory and dictatorship from early in the 1920s, to the extent that they were unable to stand in solidarity with other revolutionary movements, got isolated, and consequently committed to terrorism after the Great Kanto earthquake. In the sixth chapter, with its focus on the early years of the JCP, Linkhoeva insists on the autonomy of the JCP and the diversity of members' ideas, whereas researchers have traditionally emphasized the top-down control of the Comintern over the JCP. The problem here is the perception of the Chinese revolution during the 1920s: the Comintern took a keen interest in, and offered enthusiastic support for, the Chinese and East Asian revolutionary movement. At the same time, however, the JCP remained skeptical, because Marxist theory held that the Chinese and Korean socioeconomic level was less developed than in Japan, and so their revolutions were at a different stage. Moreover, the JCP's leading figure, Yamakawa Hitoshi, was opposed to the Comintern on the grounds that Japan was at a more advanced stage even than Russia, and thus could not introduce the Bolshevik way into the Japanese revolution, until Yamakawa's group (the so-called Rōnōha) lost its influence in 1927, and the JCP became "bolshevized."

Chapter 7 clarifies the ambivalent and distinctive view of the National Socialists, mainly through an examination of Takabatake Motoyuki's thought. In Takabatake's view, the October revolution was a political revolution from above, not a social revolution from below. This fact revealed an error on Marx's part, namely that proletarian revolution originates in the regions of Europe. As a nationalist, Takabatake strongly opposed the communist movement and the Soviet expansionist policy in East Asia, but as a socialist he approved of Lenin's elitism, totalitarianism, and dictatorship. He looked up to the Soviet state as a national socialist model capable of overcoming capitalism. His political movement never became popular, but his ideas drove some bureaucrats to create the national mobilization system (the New Regime Movement) during the 1930s.

Revolution Goes East succeeds in its attempt to draw a comprehensive picture based on various primary historical materials, and a huge quantity of secondary sources in Japanese, English, and Russian. Given that the Russian and Soviet factors have constituted a major missing link in East Asian studies, I regard as extremely significant Linkhoeva's efforts to uncover many unknown facts and figures in the history of Japanese-Soviet relations. She also introduces to the English-speaking reader an extended body of Japanese scholarship. However, it must be said that the conclusion to part 1—that the Japanese empire advocated coexistence with the Soviet Union diplomatically while repressing communists domestically—is already well known, owing to Sakai Tetsuya's classic contribution. Again, the author's criticisms in part 2 of the Japanese communists' perception of Japanese particularity (that is, superiority) have been made many times in the past twenty years. It is difficult for the reader to identify the author's own distinctive perspective.

Revolution Goes East is itself too broad in scope, and it also lacks a comparative perspective. The author argues at the end that the "Russian Revolution did not have the same meanings in Asia as it did in Europe or Russia itself," and that "it was understood differently in Japan than in the rest of Asia because Japan was not a colonized country but rather a colonizer" (p. 217). If this is indeed the case, our author would have been better off using previous studies to compare how the reception of the Russian revolution

in Japan differed from China and the West. The uniqueness and location of the Japanese people's experiences of the Russian revolution could be made clear simply by careful research of secondary literature, for instance work by Cœuré and Koenen. And if we can find commonalities as well as differences in the Japanese, "European," and "Asian" images of the Russian revolution, we might then finally be able to construct an unexpected axis of comparative history. Having said that, *Revolution Goes East* is indispensable for thinking more deeply about the history of Japan in the first half of the twentieth century from an international perspective, and for reflecting more carefully on the history of the Soviet Union and communism in the East Asian world.

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