



Title	Voruga no Kakumei : Sutârin Tôchika no Nôson [Revolution on the Volga: The Soviet Countryside under Stalinist Rule, 1929-1934]. By Hiroshi Okuda. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1996. xxi+700+10 pp.
Author(s)	Hirooka, Naoko
Citation	Acta Slavica Iaponica, 15, 140-142
Issue Date	1997
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/40137
Type	bulletin (article)
Note	Book Review
File Information	15_140-142.pdf



[Instructions for use](#)

VORUGA NO KAKUMEI: SUTÂRIN TÔCHIKA NO NÔSON
[Revolution on the Volga: The Soviet Countryside under Stalinist
Rule, 1929-1934]. By Hiroshi Okuda. Tokyo: Tokyo University
Press, 1996. xxi+700+10 pp.

The first full scale Japanese version of Russian regional history has been written. The theme is the confrontation between the authority and the peasant on grain procurements and the collectivization of agriculture, in the case of the Middle Volga. The author, Okuda has painstakingly analyzed massive amounts of data, to say nothing of published materials, from the central and regional (Penza, Samara, Orenburg) archives. One of the great assets of this volume is to show us a train of realistic paintings (*kartiny*): the plenipotentiaries with turned up collars on their overcoats dashing for the countryside; the peasants fierce hostility towards authority and vice versa; agonizing cries; cannibalism, due to the famine in the countryside in the Volga, and so on. Simultaneously, his analysis is not limited to the regional but extends to the whole of Russia. Okuda was deeply absorbed in the Middle Volga, so he was able to shed light on the interrelationship between the four levels of authority; the central, *krai*, *raion* and *selo*.

Okuda has coherently pursued Soviet peasant history. His peasants exist, first of all, to cultivate and run farms, sometimes to drink and quarrel owing to their own rule. The theme of his first book entitled *The Soviet History of Economic Policy; Market and Promysly* (1979) is the correlation between the forced destruction of *kustarnye* industry in the countryside and collectivization. And in his second book *The Process of Forming Collective Farms: The End of Peasant Commune* (1990), we can see animated peasants who avariciously longed for land and shrewdly availed themselves of Soviet farming land policy and so on. As with the former books, this third volume has been received by Japanese scholars of Soviet history epochally.

As many Japanese scholars of Soviet history, Okuda, all the more for his field, has been deeply affected by the works of Yuzuru Taniuchi (so his second book was dedicated to Taniuchi and V.P. Danilov). But the delicate divergence of a few points of view cannot pass unnoticed. The first is about "Ural-Siberian Method (USM)." In place of the extraordinary measures, the introduction of USM was in fact an extraordinary measure itself ("an institutionalized extraordinary measure"), Taniuchi pointed out, and at the same time emphasized the character of communal regulation in USM (method of "social influence"). Okuda stresses the following: State grain procurements through USM were indeed planned as every household's allocation and if a peasant did not completely fill his quota, there would be punishment, not of the whole commune, but only of that person, according to article 61 and 107 of the criminal code. (pp.44-49) The second is about the abolition of peasant communes. Taniuchi did not directly refer to it in villages but indicated that by making use of USM for the justification of rule, the character of communal regulation in USM transformed the Party apparatus and it is the core of Stalin political system. Okuda insists that a peas-

ant commune in the first place is a peasants' body on the land, and to cease distributing the land to its members means the direct abolition of the commune and for peasants to receive wages according to quality and quantity of their works spells the complete annihilation of the commune. (cf. *The Process of Forming Collective Farms*, p. 676) He does not refer to the influence of USM toward Stalin's regime but it seems to be deliberate. He alludes to Taniuchi's overestimation of the influence of USM. His interpretation of USM urges us to reconsider a controversial point of view to Taniuchi's schema.

Instead of USM, Okuda puts the accent on the feature of military and secret plots of the liquidation of *kulachestvo* as a class. In these plots were mobilized many Red Army soldiers (two thousands in *Krai*); guns were given to the Party activists, and the Red Army and OGPU kept in close contact with each other. Furthermore, in these plots by OGPU, an official directive of censorship of personal correspondence was issued, and it had a decisive influence on Soviet society. (pp. 121-128) He also inscribes in detail, each of the three categories of *kulak*. (pp. 135-149)

The relationship between the central and the local Party organizations is one of main themes of this volume. The central Party organization ordered the local organizations to implement plans absolutely. *Krai* was condemned as a "catastrophe," even for the uncompleted 0.8 percent of grain procurement plan. (p.73) The local organizations resisted unreasonable demands from the center but in the end had no choice but to make every endeavor to completely accomplish their mission. In the process of all the efforts made by the local organizations, "the excesses" and "the distortions" of the Party line were criticized by the center, but they simultaneously demanded more additional implementation to those local organizations which had already accomplished the plan. Okuda delineated both the areas of countryside which were robbed of grain, money, and even peasants themselves, and the local Party activists who were pressured by the center and suffered the malevolence of the peasants to the risk of their lives.

Okuda revealed that the famine had continued since 1929 in the Volga. But his description of the famine does not stress Stalin's inhuman and immoral policy. In particular, the outbreak of the Great Famine not only resulted in the unreasonable quota of grain but also in the poor harvest. Besides a drought, the reduction of draught animals (mainly horse and cattle), the inappropriate sowing period and a disregard for the fundamental principles of agriculture as the result of the pursuit of the present campaign and ideological agrarian theory, and the loss of harvest including thefts. These reasons for the famine, and at the same time for the general agrarian crisis were structured in the Soviet countryside. He implies that the outbreak of a famine was not astonishing but inherent in the Soviet agrarian structure. And in the "fighting alert" campaign activists were obliged to watch working peasants every day. Collective farms, as the lower organizations of directive economy, were inefficient organizations which expended 20-30 percent of all funds for its administrations. (pp. 289-292, 645-646)

In an epilogue Okuda explains the formation and the duration of the Stalin regime. Quoting Bukharin's discourse that (Stalin's) "doctrine of the intensification of the class struggle" inevitably introduced the thesis of a civil war, so the central Party apparatus could not fundamentally recognize any faults in its policies. Okuda also

argued that many activists in the countryside were young men who were excluded from *skhod* and did not want to work as peasants (“the youthfulness of the Revolution”). The problem of the popular support of the Stalin regime is a more important issue. Okuda points out that a hypothesis of any popular support is nonsense in the serious famine in the countryside. The silent peasants whose “feelings of being welfare recipients” and “dependent mood” (*izhdivencheskie nastroeniia*) were reproached by the authority, in effect “supported” the Regime. They were “the people who expected that they discharged their obligations and should be helped by the State in exchange.” (p. 696) That is to say, they joined a collective farm only to flee from starvation, and easily seceded from it if it did not help them sufficiently, they used seed aid for food because they regarded a collective farm as a State organization and themselves as the State’s people. They made effective adaptations to collective farms which denied their allotment of land and in effect were not permitted to return to it. Instead of voluntarism they accepted the “dependent mood.” And probably this mentality has been the root cause of the current agrarian crisis in Russia.

The distribution system was only adapted in the city, not in the countryside. And in 1931 as the despair at agricultural village life increased, many peasants got all their family away from their village. “In collective farms only the people that could not get away stayed.” (p. 598) Additionally, the classless term “peasant” had not been used for a long time since Stalin regime, but in the secret directive (*instruktsiia*) of Stalin and Molotov dated 8th of May in 1933, which declared the expiration of massive repression on “the peasant,” the term was used again. About that time in the Soviet countryside the homogeneous status of “the peasant” seemed to be formed. So we would easily understand that not only materially but also in the aspects of welfare (especially in medical services), education and culture a large gap has existed between the city and the countryside in Russia.

Besides the above mentioned, thought-provoking issues are affluent in this volume. The author scrupulously describes the important problems in this area about refugees from Kazakhstan and the deportation of Germans from the Volga. The closure of churches coinciding with collectivization made peasant women get angry and escalated into a massive organized riot, *bab’i bunt*. For the peasant *selo*, that is, the center of market and of *kustarnye* industry, and the site of a church, is both the center and symbol of resistance (p. 356) and so on. However, the problem of *bab’i bunt* and what made the peasants who were indifferent to church on the Revolution have such attitudes are not explicitly resolved yet (in spite of L. Viola’s and others’ preceding articles). We should gain and rethink many points of view from *kartiny* of collectivization which Okuda presented.

This volume will remain for long time a standard work on the collectivization of agriculture in the 1930s.

Naoko Hirooka