



HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

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Joining the International Community of Slavists

Japan's scholarly interest in Russia dates back exactly two hundred years. In 1783 the first Japanese study on Russia, Heisuke Kudo (1734–1800), *Akaezo fūsetsu kō* (Studies from Accounts on the Red Ainus), was written and submitted to the Shogunate authorities in Edo (present-day Tokyo). The author was a physician of the Chinese school in the service of the feudal lord of Sendai, located to the north of Edo. Some years earlier rumors that strange foreigners landed on the shore of the northern island Ezo (present-day Hokkaido) had reached the capital. The physician became interested in the incident and identified the foreigners as Russians. His sources of information were Dutch books on Russia which one of his friends had translated for him. As we know, Holland was the only window on the world of Tokugawa Japan which was pursuing a strict isolationist policy. The Russians were called 'Red *Ainus*', because the first Russians appeared in Ezo, the old home of the *Ainus*, an ethnic minority in Japan, and wore red caftans. He thought that the home of the 'Red Ainus,' Russia, was the Kamchatka Peninsula, supposedly situated to the east of Holland.

Not only did some Russians come to Japan, but also a number of Japanese found their way to Russia. Since the isolationist policy forbade travel abroad, those who went to Russia were not normal travellers, but shipwrecked fishermen and sailors. Some of these hapless people, sent drifting onto the shore of the Aleutian Islands or the Kamchatka Peninsula by nature's violence, were taken to St. Petersburg and received in audience by Peter the Great and his successors. There were only a few who found their way home. Among them was Kōdayū of Daikokuya (1751–1809), a captain from a wealthy merchant family. His ship was wrecked on the way from a small port near Nagoya to Edo. Of the original seventeen crew members who shared his fate, only three were lucky enough to survive and see their homeland again. Kōdayū was a man of keen intelligence and considerable education. During the 10 years he spent in Russia, his command of Russian seems to have become fairly good. The Russians liked him and his stories a great deal. He was one of the few men who could leave a public house in St. Petersburg without paying the charge; on the contrary, he usually had more money in his pocket, because the girls found his stories interesting enough to pay for them. Indeed, Catherine the Great twice invited him to her palace in Tsarskoe Selo to tell about his adventures and his country. The Czarina felt so great a compassion for his personal tragedy that she ordered Lieutenant Adam Laksman (1766–1803?) to transport him back home.

On his return home, however, Kōdayū was immediately placed under house arrest by the Shogunate authorities and spent the rest of his life in Edo under close surveillance. The captain was both interrogated by officials and interviewed by inquisitive intellectuals. His accounts, *Hokusa bunryaku* (Report on a Drifting Voyage in the North), Edo 1794, compiled and carefully edited by Hōshū Katsura-

gawa (1751–1809), a scholar of high calibre who was well informed on Russian affairs through Dutch sources, provide extremely interesting and amazingly accurate information on many aspects of the life of contemporary Russia: politics, the administration, the economy, social institutions, education, religions, culture, architecture, foods, etc. The value of his accounts as historical documents has been recognized by Soviet historians. In 1978 a Russian translation of his work was published in Moscow: *Kratkie vesti o skitaniakh v severnykh vodakh*, 472 pp.*

Two hundred years have passed since Japan discovered Russia. Our studies of Russia and Eastern Europe have made great progress during the last two centuries, particularly in the last two decades.** The basic attitude of our scholars towards the subject-matter, however, has undergone little change. Keenly aware of our isolation and the necessity to overcome it, we have tried hard to learn about things abroad through narrow and often accidental channels, such as overseas publications and accounts of our compatriots, and enlighten our public about world affairs. Our eyes have, therefore, been fixed on our own people, and we have seldom tried to address world opinion or overseas colleagues. In other words, we feel more as Japanese than as citizens of the world republic of Russian and East European specialists. This is why we have been beneficiaries of world scholarship, but seldom contributors to it. This is not to say, however, that no original contributions have been made by us. Certainly there are some, but they have seldom become known to the outside world. To overcome isolation is not enough. We must go further and join the international intellectual community. We believe there is sufficient reason to launch, on the bicentennial anniversary of the first Japanese book on Russia, a new journal whose task it is to help bring about intellectual communication between Japanese and overseas specialists in Russian and East European studies.

We have been publishing the journal *Surabu kenkyū* (Slavic Studies) for 25 years. This is a basically Japanese language journal. Many authors, foreign as well as Japanese, have contributed to it in various European languages. The bulk of the articles published in the journal, however, are written in Japanese. At the same time we have been making efforts to provide every Japanese language article with a sum-

* For Russian studies in Tokugawa Japan, I owe a lot to Mr. Toshiyuki Akizuki, historian-bibliographer and head of the Northern Literature Division of the Central Library, Hokkaido University in Sapporo.

** For a history of our Slavic studies since the Meiji Restoration, see Takayuki Ito, "Slavianovedenie v Iaponii: Istoriia, uchrezhdeniia i problemy," in: *Surabu kenkyū* (Slavic Studies), no. 25 (Feb. 1980), pp. 127–147 and a slightly different and abridged version of the same article "Istoriia i sovremennoe sostoianie slavianovedeniia v Iaponii," in: *Sovetskoe slavianovedenie*, 1980, no. 2 (Mar.–Apr.), pp. 93–105. The article was translated into Korean and published in: *Sino-Soviet Affairs*, Seoul, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 49–95. The strongly enlarged and completely up-to-date German edition: *Slavistik und Osteuropakunde in Japan* will appear in two parts in: *Osteuropa. Zeitschrift für Gegenwartsfragen des Ostens*, 1983, no. 5 (May), pp. 1–13 and no. 6 (Jun.), pp. 1–16. A summarized Chinese translation of the German edition came out in a Peking journal in December 1982, but the title of the journal cannot be identified. Neither a Japanese nor an English version is available yet.

mary in one of the main European languages. But our endeavor to strengthen international communication this way has born little fruit. Most of the libraries abroad which subscribe to our journal send it straight to the Asian Books section and put it together with all kinds of publications in Chinese characters. Few Slavists imagine that important contributions in their field might be found among those stacks. So, articles appearing in our journal, not only in European languages but also in Japanese with a summary in a European language, are seldom read by our overseas colleagues.

The Board of Trustees of the Slavic Research Center in Sapporo has recently taken the decision to found a European language journal, *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, separated from *Surabu kenkyū*. It is a great pleasure for us that the first issue of the new journal is now ready to be sent to our subscribers. We call on all interested colleagues at home as well as abroad to give us their support. Our desire is that our journal may serve as a bridge for academic communication between Japanese and foreign Slavists. The tradition-honored *Surabu kenkyū* will continue appearing, but as a pure Japanese language journal with summaries in European languages. We look forward to the day when Slavic studies will no longer be monopolized by European languages. We will then welcome foreign colleagues' contributions to *Surabu kenkyū* in our language as well.

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