



# HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### **INDIGIRUKA GÔ NO HIGEKI: 1930 NENDAI NO ROSHIA KYOKUTÔ [The *Indigirka* Tragedy: The Russian Far East in the 1930s]. By Teruyuki Hara. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobô, 1993. 313 pp.**

A Soviet ship named *Indigirka* was wrecked off Hokkaido, Japan, on the Sea of Okhotsk in December 1939. While 429 “passengers” and members of the crew were rescued by Japanese rescue ships and fishermen, the number of deaths reached more than 600, which made this accident one of the worst disasters at sea. The rescue activities by Japanese citizens were so impressive regardless of severe weather, that they were reported widely in Japan as a story of beautiful humanism at the time. Therefore in Japan, the *Indigirka*’s disaster has been remembered as a first memorial occasion in the history of friendship between Japanese and Soviet peoples, and has been so far mentioned only in a context of two nations’ friendship.

The book under review sheds light, for the first time in Japan, on a dark history of the *Indigirka*. Needless to say, this book is not the first to have revealed that the *Indigirka* had been conveying prisoners from Vladivostok to the Kolyma concentration camps. Prof. R. Conquest already referred to the *Indigirka* as one of the transport ships conveying prisoners to the Kolyma camps in his book *Kolyma: The Arctic Death Camps*, published in 1978. And in the Soviet Union and Russia, too. Various aspects concerning the *Indigirka*’s shipwreck has been energetically discussed since the zenith of the Perestroika.

Prof. Hara’s book successfully develops those forgoing studies, while correcting some mistakes committed by them: for example, he argues the *Indigirka* wrecked in 1939 was not the *Indigirka* built in 1885 as Prof. Conquest asserted, but another *Indigirka* built in 1920 (There were two ships named *Indigirka* in the Soviet Union in the 1930s). The reason why the present reviewer mentions such a seemingly minute point is that here exists an advantage of Prof. Hara’s study. As a Japanese scholar, he was able to extensively use Japanese official documents such as archives of the Foreign Ministry, and therefore to reinforce his arguments with information attained from those documents.

Furthermore, his book is not confined in inquiring into a tragedy of the *Indigirka*’s shipwreck. The author claims that the *Indigirka*’s fate should be examined in a broader politico-economic context. In other words, behind the tragedy of shipwreck lies another much more serious tragedy, that is the GULAG and the terror system, in which the *Indigirka* itself played a certain role. He approaches to this problematic of Stalinism through three interrelated points of view: firstly, the enlargement of the GULAG system and activities of *dals’troi*; secondly, gold mining in Kolyma; and thirdly, the terror in the Soviet Far East in the 1930s.

Anyone who is going to research into the GULAG and the terror system still suffers seriously from lack of relevant information. In particular, the Soviet gold

production has been kept in strict secrecy, and no statistics of gold production have been published. Nevertheless, based upon all the sorts of information accessible, the author succeeds in tracing a history of gold mining in Kolyma as precisely as possible.

One of the most stimulating analyses in that of political developments in the Far East. Here too is clearly shown the author's advantage as a Japanese scholar. Citing the Japanese archival documents such as official reports by Japanese consuls in the Soviet Far East in addition to the Soviet materials, he vividly describes what were going on there.

He agrees with Prof. J. Stephan in that a sort of cohort was formed among the party and military leaders in the Soviet Far East during and after the Civil War period. According to Prof. Hara, as threats of Japanese military invasion increased from the beginning of the 1930s, the so-called Far Eastern cohort led by Ia. Gamarnik and V. Bliukher became more eager to claim that Moscow should give them a special favor appropriate to the strategic importance of their Far Eastern Krai. Sometimes they succeeded in getting a favor. But their demands and solidarity aroused Stalin's suspicion of their independence and therefore of an "intrigue" against him. Against the background of the rising tide of terror. Stalin embarked on sweeping the krai's leadership of "people's enemies" in the latter half of 1936. The book depicts the process of the great terror in this krai, which ended with liquidation of the "Far Eastern cohort" in 1936.

The author also pays close attention to the administrative-territorial reorganization of the krai, i.e. Its division into two kraia, in 1938. The reviewer fully agrees with the author who concludes that it was an important instrument for the Stalinist leadership to reorganize the administrative-territorial units, and that the reorganization in 1938 was a penalty or a warning to "disobedient" local leaders.

Concerned with Gamarnik's fate, Prof. Hara infers that the Riutin Affair must have played a role as a trigger of his fall, because Riutin had once worked as an associate editor of *Krasnaia zvezda* under Gamarnik and had recognized a threat from Japan as seriously as the latter had. This seems to be a reasonable argument which is worth of being further studied. Moreover, Prof. Hara suggests some possible incidents which would have led to fatal disorganization of the Far Eastern cohort, such as possible antagonism between Gamarnik and L. Lavrent'ev, or between Gamarnik and Bliukher. These are also interesting points, but because of lack of evidence, they regrettably remain as hypotheses for the present, as the author himself admits.

The book is full of stimulating arguments. The author has proved to be one of the best specialists on the history of the Soviet Far East, as well as a good storyteller.

**Kenji Uchida**  
(Daito Bunka University)