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THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND THE EMERGENCE OF JAPANESE ANTICOMMUNISM

This article deals with the Japanese political and military response to the February and October revolutions. Between 1918 and 1925, Japan took advantage of the power vacuum in Northeast Asia and intervened in the Russian Civil War in order to pursue new opportunities for enrichment and expansion. This article demonstrates that Japanese anticommunism originated during the Intervention and was largely a reaction to the Korean communist anti-imperialist movement, which threatened the stability of the Japanese empire. The article demonstrates how discourses of communist revolution, its containment and the issue of imperialism became entangled in Japan's empire.

The Russian Bolsheviks viewed Imperial Japan as a major threat to the survival of the Soviet state and the world proletarian revolution. In 1917, Imperial Japan was the only Asian empire; it formally incorporated Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910), and since its spectacular victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 enforced aggressive policies in Northeast China and the Russian Far East. After the collapse of tsarist Russia, Japan took advantage of the power vacuum in East Asia and, nominally, under the auspices of the Allied Intervention to contain the Bolshevik Revolution, deployed considerable armed forces to the Russian Far East, Eastern Siberia and Northern Manchuria between January 1918 and May 1925. Japan's direct interference in the Russian Revolution and its efforts to expand its colonial control in the region set in motion a chain of events that had profound repercussions for the pre-Second World War history of both the Soviet Union and East Asia.

The few existing Western studies have focused chiefly on the diplomatic and political history behind the decision to intervene, and have rightly argued that the rationale behind the Japanese Intervention was a logical continuation of Japanese efforts, largely on the part of the army and the navy, to expand its continental empire.¹ Soviet historians also argued that Japanese interventionist actions had always been dictated by the desire to use the opportunities in Northeast Asia to expand the empire and solidify its strength on the continent.² This article deals less with the campaign history and more with how it shaped the understanding of the empire among the Japanese ruling elite and the educated public. I discuss how the imperialist engagement with the Russian

Revolution, and the direct clash with the Russian and Asian Bolsheviks, was responsible for the emergence of anticommunism in Japan. What has been often overlooked is that the Russian Revolution and the Japanese Intervention sparked a national liberation struggle among Koreans and Chinese aimed against the Japanese empire. Therefore, I argue that Japanese imperial anticommunism was concerned first and foremost with the security and stability of the empire against foreign radicals (first Koreans and later Chinese), behind whom, the Japanese believed, always lurked the Russian Bolsheviks. The military and part of the political and intellectual elite became convinced that as long as Soviet Russia exercised power and influence on the Japanese imperial borders in Mongolia and Northeast China, the safety and security of the Japanese nation and empire (chiefly in Manchuria) was threatened.

The February revolution

On 18 March 1917, the leader of the majority Seiyūkai party and soon to be prime minister Hara Kei (1856–1921) wrote in his diary:

A revolution has erupted in Russia, and the Tsar has abdicated. The situation in Russia is strange. Just as [we saw] in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, a revolution has once again come and constitutional politics are taking hold in Russia. This time, the abdication of the Tsar is truly a great political change. There are complicated reasons for this change, but it seems to emanate from the rise of the pro-German [anti-war] group.³

Hara Kei's remarks reveal that the Japanese political elite saw similarities between the February uprising and the Russian Revolution of 1905, which forced the tsarist autocracy to pull out of the Russo-Japanese War, issue Russia's first written constitution and establish a parliament. In early 1917, Japan was looking anxiously at the events in Russia, largely worrying about Russia's involvement in the Great War. During the war, because the European powers had pulled out of Asian markets, Japan was able to triple its exports of arms, shipping and textiles, and thus transformed from a primarily agricultural to an industrial state. Japan's population grew to become the fifth largest in the world, after China, the United States, Russia, and Germany. Moreover, in 1914 the Japanese empire included Taiwan, the Pescadore islands, Korea, and Russia's former concession in southern Manchuria. By the end of the war, Japan had vastly expanded its presence in China and the West Pacific, ejecting German forces from Quingdao and German Micronesia. The notorious Twenty-One Demands to Beijing in 1915 transformed Japan into the main player in the scramble for an informal empire in China. When the Demands were partially accepted by Beijing, Japan gained new advantages in Manchuria no longer enjoyed by Russia. In short, the First World War proved to be extremely advantageous for Japan, and it was now concerned to preserve what it had gained and make the most of the turmoil the February Revolution caused in international affairs.⁴

The Japanese establishment and the public did not fail to notice the causes of the February Revolution, but in general sympathized with popular protests, which were interpreted in Japan as expressions of popular revolt against autocracy and feudalism,

and as such were often compared to the Meiji Revolution of 1868.⁵ The Japanese regarded the equivalent of the Russian autocracy to be the feudal Tokugawa shogunate (hereditary military government) and not the Japanese emperor, who was widely considered as modern, democratic and progressive. The Japanese media did not fail to point out that Russia lagged some half a century behind Japan in its civilizational development; the Russian constitution, for instance, was adopted seventeen years after the Japanese one (1889). In fact, no one in Japan, not even Japanese leftist radicals, thought to compare the Romanov with the Japanese dynasty, let alone follow the Russian example in overthrowing the monarchy. As the view of the Russian monarchy as a relic from a bygone era, destined to disappear, became prevalent in Japan, the execution of Nicholas II and his family in July 1918 went unnoticed. Thus, both the political elite and the general public welcomed the February uprising as Russia's belated entry into the modern age. The diplomatic archives reveal that the Japanese government had high hopes for the revolution, anticipating that it would encourage Russia to modernize and thus be better able to continue the war.⁶

Reflecting on what Japan should make of the unfolding situation in Russia, Japanese diplomatic and military reports from Russia began to suggest that the Tokyo government urgently consider the newly available territorial opportunities for Japan in Northeast China and the Russian Far East. As early as March 1917, Ishizaka Zenjirō, army Major General and military attaché at the Japanese embassy in Petrograd, advised the government to seriously consider exploring a military invasion in Siberia and Harbin since the Russian influence was bound to wane there.⁷ Concerning Russian public opinion, the reports maintained that anti-German 'patriotic' Russians would welcome the Japanese forces. As Russia was disintegrating, there was no state authority to prevent the country from plunging into the kind of chaos and disorder that could affect neighbouring countries. Therefore, Japan, the reports insisted, had every right to colonize the Russian Far East, Siberia and North Manchuria, or at least to acquire special rights in those territories.⁸

The October revolution and the Japanese intervention

In contrast to the February Revolution, the Bolshevik political takeover was viewed very negatively. Japanese diplomatic and newspaper reports described the October Revolution as a coup carried out against the people's wishes by a militant group of 'extremists'. Japanese officials viewed the Bolsheviks as an independent, power-hungry militant group doomed to collapse soon. Their success was deemed largely accidental and in no way was the coup considered an epoch-changing event. Japanese reports from Russia also popularized rumours of an international Jewish conspiracy, and promulgated the idea that not only Trotsky and Zinoviev but also Lenin himself were Jewish. They also echoed rumours already widely circulating in Europe that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were, in fact, German agents.⁹

Japan's negative attitude towards the Bolsheviks came not only from the latter pulling out of the First World war, but much earlier. In December 1917, Trotsky announced that the new government was cancelling all the obligations and debts of the Tsarist and Provisional governments, including vast sums owed to Japan from the arms trade. This damaged Japanese enterprises such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi, whose

property was then subsequently confiscated by the new Soviet authorities. Moreover, Soviet Russia was threatening to publish secret diplomatic Tsarist archives, including a secret Russo-Japanese anti-American agreement of 1916, which, it was feared, would damage Japan's already tense relations with the United States and Britain. The Bolshevik takeover was assessed, therefore, only in terms of the damage it might inflict on Japan's foreign relations. The Japanese establishment was aware of the ideological component of the October Revolution, but they regarded it as specifically a Russian affair, unlikely to be replicated elsewhere. The socialist revolution, it was thought, came out of the particular circumstances that Russia faced: a long history of tsarist autocracy, the toll of the Great War and the subsequent lack of state authority.¹⁰

With the October Revolution, the balance of power in East Asia was broken, and the Japanese focused their interests on the territories formerly under Russian influence – including Siberia, Manchuria and Inner Mongolia – as well as on the opportunity to exert more control over Chinese domestic politics. To take advantage of the power vacuum in East Asia, Japan, nominally under the auspices of the Allied Intervention to contain the Bolshevik Revolution and maintain the eastern front against Germany, deployed considerable armed forces to the Russian Far East, Eastern Siberia and Northern Manchuria between January 1918 and 1925. Despite agreement among the Allied Intervention forces on limiting the total number of troops to seven thousand, and in opposition to the cabinet and the Privy Council in Japan, the Army General Staff asserted the 'right of supreme command' and launched a full-scale assault, deploying more than seventy-two thousand troops (one-third of all of Japan's active service troops) to Vladivostok and the Trans-Baikal region. Japan was also given command of allied troops in Siberia. In January 1918, the Japanese troops entered Vladivostok and by the end of October 1918, the Japanese army occupied the region between Irkutsk and Vladivostok along the Trans-Siberian railway, and the city of Nikolaevsk at the mouth of the Amur River (some 1,600 km north of Vladivostok), in addition to deploying 60,000 troops to northern Manchuria.

Due to ongoing disagreements between political factions concerning Japan's actions in Siberia, the Japanese government did not officially announce its decision to intervene in Russia until 2 August 1918, noting the disorder of Russian politics, the threat of German expansion into the Russian Far East and the rescue of the Austro-German prisoners of war as reasons for the decision. The government issued a promise to withdraw once order was restored and renounced any intention to infringe on Russian territorial sovereignty and internal affairs.¹¹ Notably, no actual enemy was identified and no 'threat of Bolshevism' mentioned in official government statements. Consequently, it is safe to say that initially the Siberian Expedition, as it is known in Japan, was not envisioned as an anticommunist counterrevolution. Nor were the Japanese much concerned with the Bolshevik threat, ideological or military, to the Japanese metropole in the first post-revolutionary decade. Instead, they looked forward to new opportunities for realizing long-cherished plans for control over Northeast Asia.

Japan barely concealed its ambitions to expand its sphere of influence beyond those territories granted to it by Russo-Japanese conventions.¹² In fact, the Japanese made their first move not (as conventionally prescribed) in January 1918 when the Japanese troops landed in Vladivostok, but rather in Manchuria in December 1917.¹³ On 22 December 1917, Vice Chief of the Army General Staff Tanaka Gi'ichi instructed that Japan 'must take over' after the Russian withdrawal from the Chinese Eastern

Railway Zone (CER), a corridor through Manchuria that Russia leased from China and which connected Siberia to Vladivostok via the city of Harbin (the ‘Manchurian Petersburg’). Tanaka argued that the disintegration of Russian power in the East provided an excellent chance to gain a foothold in Harbin and the CER for any future expansion into Northeast China and, following that, Asiatic Russia.¹⁴ As Japanese historian Hara Teruyuki argued, the Siberian Expedition’s two major objectives were the acquisition of the CER and the oil-rich region of northern Sakhalin.¹⁵

In a move to stall the spread of Russian Bolshevism, the Japanese forced China to sign the Sino-Japanese Joint Defence Agreement on 16 May 1918. According to the Agreement, the Japanese army was granted access to all Chinese territories, permission to explore natural resources, and the exclusive right to provide the Chinese Army with arms, equipment and training. A Chinese estimate from October 1918 counted 25,000 Japanese soldiers in the CER alone.¹⁶ But instead of weakening Bolshevik influence in the region, the Japanese counterplay for the CER had the ironic effect of precipitating China’s eventual political allegiance with Russia. In 1924, the Peking government recognized the USSR, concluded a series of Sino-Soviet agreements and, to counteract Japanese influence, tacitly acknowledged Soviet ownership of the CER, thereby restoring Russian advantages in Manchuria. After restoring its control over the CER, the Soviet government began implementing communist propaganda and activities at the CER and in Manchuria. Soviet railway managers were particularly successful in bringing the Chinese trade unions of officers and CER workmen under the influence of the Communist International (Comintern), to the great alarm of the Chinese and Japanese governments, and especially the Japanese Army command.¹⁷

Between 1918 and 1925, Japan’s plans for China went hand-in-hand with its plans for Siberia. Early in 1918, Tanaka proposed the creation of an independent Siberian state free from communism, which would flourish economically through an alliance with Japan. The Japanese general staff was convinced that the establishment of a Siberian republic would increase pressure on China to accept Japanese economic and strategic influence in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia.¹⁸ Considering that Finland, Poland and the Baltic states gained independence after the Russian Revolution, such plans were not unrealistic. With this aim, the General Staff and Tanaka, then its vice-chief, undertook every effort to set up a puppet government headed by the Cossack Ataman Semenov. The Japanese government initiated a Japanese yen area in northeast Asia by issuing and circulating banknotes of the Bank of Chosen (the central bank of Japanese colonial Korea) and gold-backed Japanese military notes in Manchuria, Siberia and the Russian Far East. The Bank had nine branches and offices in Siberia and its currency was favoured by the locals over the discredited Russian currency. It was used for tax payments in the Far Eastern Republic (1920–22) and subsequently in Soviet Russia. Around four percent of the banknotes issued were to be found in Siberia by the end of 1921, and seventeen percent of the Bank’s total lending was in Manchuria and Siberia by the end of 1924. The Vladivostok branch of the Bank operated until 1930. Throughout the 1920s, eighty percent of the trade that passed through the port of Vladivostok was handled by Japanese trading firms.¹⁹ Tanaka’s ideas, and the economic measures the Japanese government and business undertook in the Far East during the 1920s, foreshadowed the establishment of the puppet state Manchukuo in 1932 and the later concept of a ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere’, Japan’s expansionist

programme from the late 1930s, which aimed at empowering and enriching Japan at the expense of its Asian neighbours.²⁰

With the Siberian Expedition, Japan became the only country to actively intervene in the Russian Civil War. In the Russian Far East, the Japanese drove the Bolsheviks underground and, in one infamous incident, burnt alive the local Bolshevik commander, Sergei Lazo, in the firebox of a locomotive. The Japanese allied with Admiral Kolchak, the leader of the White movement, who provided the Japanese government with considerable leverage against the Bolsheviks on a range of matters, including the use of Russian natural resources.²¹ The Japanese also supported Cossack atamans Grigorii Semenov, Ivan Kalmykov and Roman Ungern-Shternberg, whose names became synonymous with the worst atrocities of the Civil War. On the surface, Japanese policy seemed to be contradictory because the Cossack atamans did not acknowledge and often undermined Kolchak's authority. However, the Japanese secretly considered the activity of the atamans to be a major destabilizing force, one which would create such chaos in Russia that foreign intervention would seem a lesser evil, even to those who presently opposed it.²² Atamans, who controlled parts of the CER and wreaked havoc on the communication and supply line between the Allied Forces and the White Army in Western Siberia, were also useful to the Japanese as a means to put pressure on the Allies and the White administration of Harbin to gain more control of the CER.²³ In addition, the Japanese tried to cultivate the national aspirations of the indigenous peoples, but they had little idea how to win them over. Despite the pan-Asianist rhetoric, they regarded Siberian indigenous people as simple 'tribes' and 'wild' peoples. Japanese soldiers and officers felt themselves to be culturally superior to the indigenous populations and often engaged in the plunder of their property.²⁴

The White forces, in turn, harboured strong patriotic and often racist suspicions of the Japanese. In many cases, they were staunch champions of Russian Orthodoxy and nationalism and fiercely opposed any Japanese plans for domination in the region. Moreover, the Siberian press, local Russian merchants and the intelligentsia showed a great aversion to the Japanese presence in the region. They feared a sell-out of resources and the enslavement of the population by the 'Japanese pygmies'. The Japanese, on the other hand, were arrogant enough to demand unrealistic concessions from General Horvat in Harbin and later from Admiral Kolchak, including the demilitarization of Vladivostok and unlimited access to mining, timber and fishing resources throughout Siberia and the Far East. It is not an exaggeration to say that Japanese support for the atamans and abuses inflicted by the Japanese army drove the local population into the arms of the Bolsheviks. In short, Japan's failure to achieve its aims was the result of its failure to develop an effective political strategy in the region. Instead, it relied principally on military force and never managed to create more than short-lived alliances of convenience with local forces.

The Siberian Expedition had a profound influence on the social and political views of Japanese soldiers. However, the impact seemed to be different between rank-and-file soldiers and senior officers. The Japanese Army command was right to worry about the radicalization of rank-and-file soldiers in the midst of radical Russia, especially because social unrest in Japan was on the rise. In the summer of 1918, Japan passed through its most dramatic social crisis, the Rice Riots, which involved over one million people, the scale of which has not been surpassed since. Many enlisted soldiers, a large percentage of which came from impoverished families, were first sent to quell

the riots and then deployed directly to Siberia. Having endured the trauma of suppressing the unrest of farmers whose plight they understood all too well, they began to question military and government authority. Numerous cases of low morale, evasion and insubordination were documented in official military reports from Siberia and in soldiers' personal diaries.²⁵ The army carefully monitored the attitudes of soldiers in fear that they would sympathize with the Bolsheviks, as happened in the Russian and German Imperial Armies. The Japanese command was well aware of the crucial role soldiers played in the Russian and German Revolutions, and took measures to prevent it, especially after it became known that Russian and Japanese communists had established a small printing workshop in the Siberian town of Chita to produce Bolshevik propaganda leaflets, which were then distributed among Japanese soldiers and also sent to Japan.²⁶

Despite this vigilance, there were quite a few acts of insubordination. Many new conscripts refused to read the oath of loyalty to the army and some even mutinied against their superiors. Some conscripts used service as a mere opportunity to travel to Manchuria and Russia. Those who complained were often branded as 'socialists' – and, in a few cases, they indeed were. Matsushita Yoshio, first lieutenant of the Hirosaki 25th infantry regiment, wrote a private message to Takayama Gizō, the president of the Kyoto branch of the labour union Yūaikai, in which he criticized the Siberian expedition and Japanese actions in Asia from a socialist viewpoint, and reported a growing sympathy among junior officers for socialism. The message was seen by chance and published in June 1920 by the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun*. The article caused an uproar in the public and the army. One month later, on personal orders from the War Minister Tanaka Gi'ichi, Matsushita was dismissed from the army. There were other similar cases. After being suspended for 'disturbing behaviour', Nagayama Naoatsu, first artillery lieutenant of the Hiroshima field artillery 5th regiment, went to Tokyo in January 1921 and made contact with the Socialist League and the labour movement leaders. He was discharged from the army with loss of rank. Kōsaka Makoto, first lieutenant in the Korean 73rd infantry regiment, influenced by Bolshevik ideas, encouraged his old subordinate, policeman Takazawa Suetaka, to join the Bolsheviks. Both runaways were captured.²⁷ Kuroshima Denji (1898–1943), drafted and sent to Siberia in 1921, wrote one of the most famous anti-militarist accounts of the Siberian expedition, *Military Diary (Guntai Nikki)*.²⁸ Kuroshima eventually joined the proletarian literature movement and in 1930 published the anti-imperialist novel *Militarized Streets (Busō seru shigai)* based on his trip to China.²⁹ Just as the Army command had feared, the disenchanted and radicalized Japanese rank-and-file and junior officers connected their anti-war sentiments with the larger issue of anti-militarism and the demand for total social reform back home.

Senior officers, however, developed strong anti-Bolshevik attitudes. Their anti-communism stemmed as much from the violent clashes they had experienced with the Russian Bolsheviks and Korean partisans as from the extensive anti-Red propaganda launched by White Army officers inside Japanese garrisons. It was known that officers of the White Army distributed *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the Japanese garrisons in the Russian East, and many Japanese officers also came to believe that Bolshevism was part of the Jewish conspiracy to overtake the world. *The Protocols* had already been introduced to Japan during the Siberian Expedition, first by Higuchi Tsuyanosuke (1870–1931), an early graduate of the Russian Orthodox Nikolai Seminary in Tokyo and the

Theological Seminary in St Petersburg, who was a professor of Russian language in the army during the Intervention. In 1921, Higuchi published his collected lectures under the title *The Jewish Peril (Yudayaka)*, thus coining the Japanese term. The first translator of *The Protocols* into Japanese was another officer, Shiōten Nobutaka, who became anti-Semitic during his service in Vladivostok.³⁰ Participants of the Siberian Expedition, officers Nishihara Kamezō, Nakajima Masatake, Araki Sadao, and Saitō Kijiro, became prominent political and military players during the 1930s, and their anticommunism undoubtedly shaped their subsequent policies for Northeast Asia and the Soviet Union. General Araki Sadao (1877–1966), War Minister between 1931 and 1936, and a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War and the Siberian Expedition, likened the spread of Bolshevism in Asia to that of tuberculosis in the human body, referring in particular to the examples of anti-Japanese pro-communist uprisings in Korea and Taiwan. Araki repeatedly declared in the early 1930s that Japan's mission was to keep Bolshevism out of the Far East and protect the rest of the world from the Red Terror. Araki's chief objections to communism were its so-called 'internationalism', which he saw as a denial of patriotism, and its attack on the divine origin of the imperial family. Araki expressed the commonly held view that the Soviet Union's foreign policy was a continuation of tsarist policy:

It is only the interior constitution that has changed in Russia. The USSR is an active volcano spouting its lava in any direction where there is least resistance. The USSR, just like tsarist Russia in old days, will maintain its offensive character.³¹

According to Araki, Japan's opposition to the Soviet Union was an act on behalf of 'mankind and civilization', and he claimed that no moral pressure from the United States or Britain should be exerted on Japan in her dealings with the USSR, including the 'preventive measures' Japan would attempt in overtaking Manchuria.³²

The 'Bolshevized' borders

By 1920 it was obvious to everyone that the Allied operation, aimed at replacing Lenin's Bolshevik government with a White Russian administration more sympathetic to Allied interests, had failed. By November 1920, all foreign troops except the Japanese withdrew from Russian territories. The Japanese Army made no plans to evacuate, however, and the so-called Nikolaevsk Incident in the spring of 1920 provided an opportunity to prolong the Japanese Expedition. Japanese forces had occupied Nikolaevsk in the summer of 1918, largely to protect the considerable Japanese fishery business in the region, until the town was attacked by guerrillas under Iakov Triapitsyn. In what is known as the Nikolaevsk Massacre, more than 700 Japanese officers and town residents were killed, in addition to 8,000 Russian citizens. The Soviets, who captured and executed Triapitsyn in July 1920, claimed he was an anarchist, not a Bolshevik.³³ The Japanese Army seized this opportunity to start a propaganda offensive at home. Newspapers reported gruesome stories about the murdered 5,000 Japanese citizens (rather than the actual 700), including women and children. The number of murdered Russian people was omitted. Press conferences of war journalists attracted considerable crowds. Around the country, memorial services were held with members of the imperial

family in attendance. The murdered military officers were enshrined at Yasukuni, the national religious memorial for the war dead. The Nikolaevsk Incident was the tipping point after which Japanese public indifference to the events in Russia yielded to passionate anti-Bolshevik attitudes.

The reports from Russia also featured new important protagonists: radicalized Korean and Chinese rebels. In a memorandum to the United States Department of State from 3 February 1920, as well as in an official announcement from 31 March, the Japanese government explained that political conditions in the Russian Far East gravely affected affairs in Korea and Manchuria, and that this was the main reason that Japan could not withdraw its troops immediately. The Nikolaevsk Incident bolstered the argument for Japanese annexation of a portion of the Russian Far East to shield the Japanese inhabitants of Manchuria and Korea from similar destruction at the hands of the Bolshevik Russians, Koreans and Chinese. On 23 June 1920, the Japanese army announced:

The current [Nikolaevsk] incident obviously shows that Russia cannot control the rebellious Koreans in Siberia. For Japan, as a neighbouring country, this is a very serious matter and we advanced to those territories in order to safeguard the Japan Sea. The Japanese troops will withdraw as soon as a stable political authority [in Siberia and the Far East] is established. Now, we establish the region from the Russian maritime area to Vladivostok as our self-defense territory. This is separate from the expedition's previous objective. It has been developed with the desire to clearly establish the region of Japanese self-defence.³⁴

Under this pretext, the Japanese Army occupied and held the northern part of Sakhalin Island until 1925. South Sakhalin had been under Japanese control since 1905. Under the auspices of the Navy, the extraction of natural resources (especially oil) in Sakhalin and colonization by Japanese settlers intensified.³⁵ Soviet journalists even opined that the Japanese deliberately provoked the Nikolaevsk conflict in order to justify further occupation of Russian territory.³⁶

How much was the Bolshevik threat a matter of genuine concern, and to what degree was it an outcome of manipulation and propaganda by the military? There is no doubt that the Japanese government and police were concerned with the domestic Japanese socialist movement, and more importantly with the growing anti-Japanese anti-imperialist movement among the Koreans. Japanese socialism had a long-standing tradition harking back to the late 1890s. The movement, however, was nearly defunct after the so-called High Treason Incident of 1910, in which twenty-four leading socialist activists were tried and twelve were executed for having plotted to assassinate Meiji emperor. The harsh suppression of socialism at home was related, however, to the events in colonies – Japan's formal annexation of Korea in 1910 and the assassination of one of the most powerful Japanese politician, Itō Hirobumi, the author of the Meiji Constitution and four-time prime minister of Japan, in Harbin in 1909 by a Korean radical. After the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, as a matter of caution, the Japanese government decided to prevent any contact between Russian and Korean radicals and Japanese socialists. But it was only in 1921 that the Japanese government engaged with radical leftist movement at home. There were no arrests and no increase in police surveillance of Japanese socialists between 1917 and 1921.

After a Japanese communist was arrested almost accidentally at a port after a drunken night in a restaurant with geishas, the police discovered with him a large sum of money he obtained from Comintern agents in Shanghai. It was the first, surely surprising and alarming, evidence for state officials that Japanese socialists had established contact with Russian Bolsheviks. Conservative bureaucrats seized upon this opportunity and drafted a bill for a new law, based largely on English laws and legal theories dealing with sedition. The Law to Control Radical Social Movement (*Kageki shakai undō torishimarihō*) was intended to stem the flow of radical propaganda coming into Japan and prevent the Japanese from working in concert with foreign radicals. In other words, the concern was not with the domestic radical movement per se, but with the foreign leftist radicals, who were ‘trying their best to make our country red’.³⁷ What is most interesting is that the bureaucrats, in the process of drafting the bill, faced the problem of defining socialism, anarchism and communism, and the differences between them. The officials were generally ignorant about communism, which was reflected in the fact that neither *kokutai* (national monarchical polity) nor *seitai* (a form of government), terms that were to generate considerable debate in 1925 before the promulgation of the anticommunist Peace Preservation Law, were included in the bill. In other words, communism was not recognized in 1921 as a threat to the monarchical state; it was regarded as a political movement of foreign (Russian and Korean) radicals, which could be driven out by tightening border controls.

The Japanese colonial administration’s gravest concern was, however, about the intensifying and violent anti-Japanese activities of radicalized Koreans in the early 1920s. Korean immigrants settled in the Russian Maritime Province starting in the 1860s, but the big influx of population occurred after Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War, especially in 1908–09 when large numbers of regular Japanese troops forced Korean guerrillas out of their homeland and into China and Russia. In 1902, there were 32,410 Koreans residing in Russia; by 1923 there were some 107,000 (17 percent of the total population); and by 1926 that number had risen to 168,000.³⁸ Vladivostok became the centre of congregation for Korean political refugees and participants in the struggle against the Japanese regime, including top opposition leaders. Beginning in 1908, regular skirmishes took place between Korean guerrillas operating from the Russian territory and Japanese troops stationed on the Korean side. Attacks on the Japanese intensified after Japan annexed Korea in 1910. After the shocking assassination of former Resident General Prince Itō Hirobumi in October 1909 at Harbin station by a Korean militant from Vladivostok, the Japanese government intensified its pressure on Russia to suppress the Korean insurgents. In 1911, Russia and Japan signed the Treaty of Extradition, allowing the extradition of political criminals who aimed to suppress the activities of Russian socialists in Japan as well as rebellious Koreans in Russia. In general, the Japanese government and mass media paid close attention to anti-Japanese activities in the Russian Far East.³⁹

During the First World War, some 4,000 naturalized Koreans were drafted into the Russian Army and, like their Russian fellows, most of them returned home as Bolsheviks. They became instrumental in further radicalization of Koreans in the Maritime Province.⁴⁰ Moreover, the landing of Japanese troops in Vladivostok in April 1918 pushed the Korean communities to pledge support to the Soviet government in the hope that it would guarantee Korea’s national independence. Aspirations for both social and national independence revolutions among the Koreans in Russia resulted in

the creation of a Korean section of the Irkutsk Communist Party in January 1918 and the Korean Socialist Party in Khabarovsk in June 1918. Finally, it was again a Korean from Vladivostok who initiated the establishment of the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai in August 1919. The March First Independence Movement of 1919 in Korea, which saw thousands of unarmed Koreans confronting the Japanese colonial police in demonstrations for independence, caused a stir in the Russian Far East and, as a result, in 1920 an independent Korean government was proclaimed in Khabarovsk. Moderate Koreans organized meetings and demonstrations in Khabarovsk and Vladivostok but were suppressed by the White authorities, often at the request of the Japanese expeditionary administration. More radical Koreans organized guerilla groups in early 1919 and conducted anti-Japanese operations on Russian and Korean territory, quickly retreating either to the Chinese territory in Manchuria or back to the Russian Far East. Many Korean political exiles returned to Korea from Russia to participate in the national liberation movement. The Japanese military authorities in Korea reported that Koreans 'were coming from Russian territory into the Jiandao area with weapons, which are now much more accessible than before'. In one instance in 1920, 'certain Koreans who were in collusion with the Bolsheviks had actually attempted an armed invasion of the Korean border and burned a Japanese Consulate'. The situation worsened in 1920 and there were rumours that an armed invasion of Korea was underway.⁴¹ It is important to note that the Japanese military and the press downplayed the nationalist moment and treated Korean uprisings as the result of Bolshevik manipulation. The Koreans had been portrayed in Japan as a people incapable of revolting and organizing, while the external Bolshevik influence seemed more plausible.

Historians have devoted much attention to the connection between Woodrow Wilson's self-determination slogans and the rise of anticolonial nationalism in China and Korea after the First World War.⁴² However, for contemporary Japanese officials, this connection was not that obvious. What was clear to them was that Russian Bolsheviks instigated and materially supported Korean and Chinese resistance movements. The Japanese were troubled to observe Koreans groups and Bolsheviks drawing closer together and even collaborating in overtaking several towns in the Far East, including organizing military assaults on the Japanese in the process. On the first anniversary of the March First Movement in Vladivostok, a Russian Bolshevik concluded a speech with these words: 'We will not be satisfied with the Japanese withdrawal from Siberia. We expect you to restore the independence of Korea under the guidance of the revolutionaries'. This provocative speech was duly reported by the Japanese to Tokyo. A German journalist informed the Japanese in September 1922 that, according to a Soviet diplomat, 'the main object' of propaganda schools in Moscow, Tomsk, Omsk, Irkutsk, and Tashkent was 'to stir up Korea against Japanese rule'.⁴³ The last straw for the Japanese officials was the discovery that a Korean communist organization in Shanghai had established contact with Japanese leftists in 1920 with the aid of the Comintern and become a conduit between them and the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ The establishment of a radical communist network that connected Russian, Korean and Japanese leftists was perceived by the Japanese Army and government as a direct threat to Japanese imperial dominance in the region.

From 1920 on, after the White authority in Siberia and the Maritime Province fell and foreign troops were evacuated, Japan took it upon itself to deal with Korea. Since by this time Koreans, including naturalized Koreans in Russia, were considered by the

Japanese as subjects of the Japanese empire, Foreign minister Uchida Kōsai ordered the consuls in Manchuria and Vladivostok to do everything possible to crush rebellious Korean organizations within their jurisdiction. Mass arrests were made starting in late 1919 on the Russian-Korean and Chinese-Korean borders, especially after a Korean from Vladivostok threw a nearly fatal bomb at the newly appointed Governor General of Korea, Admiral Saitō Makoto, in Seoul Station in September 1919. The Japanese forces in Russia were aided by additional forces dispatched from Korea.⁴⁵ In 1919–20, the police force of the Korea Government-General repeatedly crossed the border and conducted raids on suspected radical camps in Manchuria. In April 1920, the Japanese executed a general attack in several cities: several hundreds of Koreans were murdered, and another one hundred were arrested and later executed by drowning in the Bay of Ullis near Vladivostok. Captured Bolsheviks were handed over to the White forces. In 1921, a Sino-Korean-Japanese security organization, the Manshū hominkai (Manchuria People's Protection Society), was created with the sole purpose of patrolling the borders of southern Manchuria against the guerilla Bolshevik Koreans. All those apprehended were shot, which meant that the Protection Society was basically a death squad.⁴⁶

Due to the pressure at home and from its former Allies, on 24 June 1922, the Japanese government announced the withdrawal of all Japanese troops from the Maritime Province of Siberia and from North Manchuria. However, the Japanese continued to occupy Sakhalin because of its vast natural resources. The Army Command also insisted on staying in southern Manchuria because it was proven that the Red Army and Bolshevik Chinese and Korean agents had penetrated Manchuria from the TransBaikal region.⁴⁷ It was believed that Manchuria and Inner Mongolia remained vulnerable spots that could become gates through which the social disease of Marxism and Soviet military forces might pour into the territory of the Japanese empire.

Thus, in 1929, Ishiwara Kanji, a chief strategist of the Manchurian campaign, drafted a memorandum titled 'A Kwantung Army Plan for the Occupation of Manchuria and Mongolia (Kantōgun Man-Mō ryōyū keikaku)'. He claimed that as long as there was Russian power and influence in North Manchuria, Japanese safety was under threat. In order to solve the 'Manchuria problem', the Japanese must penetrate the whole of Manchuria and establish a self-defence line from the Amur River to the Greater Khingan Range. He proposed the Hulunbuir desert area as the centre for the defensive zone, viewing it as a natural obstacle to the Red Army's push to the East. In future, Ishiwara insisted, the whole Russian maritime region would have to come under Japanese influence. Ishiwara's ideas were profoundly shaped by the experience of the Siberian Expedition and were essentially a continuation of the line of reasoning the military had developed in the period between 1918 and 1922.⁴⁸ Especially after the Manchurian Incident of 1931, it became a matter of common belief among the military elite that Bolsheviks of various nationalities threatened not only the unity of the empire but also the political power structure on the home islands.⁴⁹ The creation of the Japanese puppet state Manchukuo in 1932 was, many believed, a precautionary measure: the establishment of a steady, prosperous anti-Bolshevik state on the Soviet border would serve as an inspiration for the 'five races' – the Manchus, Japanese, Chinese, Mongols, and Koreans.

Conclusion

The Japanese elite and general public perceived the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks' ideological claims through Japan's engagement in Siberia and the backlash it caused in the region. One of the most important outcomes of this engagement was that, contrary to its proclaimed goal, the Expedition stimulated the 'Bolshevization' of Asia and antagonized Russians, Koreans and Chinese against Imperial Japan. Japanese failures in Siberia, their subsequent concerns for Manchuria and the Comintern-backed Korean and Chinese anti-imperialist movements set the parameters of Japanese imperial anticommunism. The emergent peculiarity of Japanese imperial anticommunism was that it converged with the colonial problem due to the eruption of the Korean nationalist movement. Rather than perceived as an internal threat to social morality, and to social and political foundations, communism was predominantly associated with the foreign (Soviet Russia) and colonial (Korea and China) assault on imperial security. Although the ruling elite was wary of possible internal subversions, which could be initiated by the radicalized Japanese Left, communism was mostly discussed in the context of foreign affairs.

The argument that in Imperial Japan's attitude towards communist Russia geopolitical and ideological concerns were tightly entangled is aided by looking at the normalization of relations between the two countries. Soviet Russia was interested in breaking its diplomatic isolation in the Far East, while those in Japan critical of cooperation with Britain and the United States favoured rapprochement with the Soviet Union to enhance Japan's position in Manchuria. On 25 January 1925, after four years of negotiations, the Soviet-Japanese Basic Convention was concluded. Japan recognized the USSR, withdrew from Northern Sakhalin and cancelled the debts of tsarist Russia in return for mineral, forest and oil concessions in Northern Sakhalin for a period of forty-five years. Soviet Russia, in turn, restored its sphere of influence in Mongolia and Northern Manchuria, and its control over the CER. As a result, the Soviet Union and the Japanese empire shared an informal border in Manchuria and Mongolia more or less peacefully until the end of the 1930s, when conflicts at Lake Khasan in 1938 and Khalkhin Gol (or Nomonhan, as it is known in Japan) in 1939 erupted, after which the Japanese Army decided to stop its push to the north.⁵⁰ The Soviet Union's consolidation of power in the region, and restoration of the sphere of influence lost in the post-revolutionary turmoil, convinced the Japanese ruling elite and the public that the geographical and strategic foundations of tsarist and communist foreign policies were essentially the same. Significantly, the expression 'Soviet Imperialism' gained currency in Japan once the Red Army entered Outer Mongolia in 1921, and the Mongolian People's Republic, essentially a Soviet satellite state, was established in 1924. Apart from the Japanese communists and their sympathizers (which, however, was a very sizable minority), the Japanese ruling elite and the public saw the Russian Revolution not as an attempt to build an alternative social order, but as a replacement of the old tsarist leadership with a new – communist in name – ruling elite.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. Morley, *The Japanese Thrust into Siberia, 1918*; Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention, 1918–1922*. In Japanese, Hara, *Shiberia shuppei*.
2. See, for example, Reikhberg, *Razгром iaponskoi interventsii*; Shishkin, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Dal'nem Vostoke*; Raginskii, *Militaristy na skam'e podsudimyykh*.
3. Hara, *Hara Kei Nikki*, vol. 7, 142.
4. Frattolillo and Best, *Japan and the Great War*.
5. Kikuchi, *Roshia kakumei*, 14.
6. Asukai, 'Roshia kakumei to Nikō jiken', 269.
7. Kikuchi, *Roshia kakumei*, 27.
8. See also report by Kawakami Toshitsune (1861–1935), the president of the Southern Manchurian Railway, who travelled across Russia from June to October 1917 at the request of Japanese Foreign Minister; Lensen, *Japanese Recognition of the USSR*, 127.
9. Japanese newspapers relied heavily on the British Reuters and uncritically accepted the negative British position toward the October Revolution.
10. For post-First World War Japanese political and diplomatic history, see Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention*.
11. Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention*, Chapter 3. The same day some sixty papers were banned to quell any public opposition to the Expedition.
12. Less than two years after the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Russia and Japan drew together in an entente and became fully-fledged allies in 1916. Co-existence was based on the notion of divided 'spheres of influence' in the Far East as well as the shared desire to stop an American advance in North China. Northern Manchuria and Outer Mongolia were earmarked for the Russian sphere of influence, while Southern Manchuria and Inner Mongolia were assigned to the Japanese sphere of influence. Consequently, when the Japanese annexation of Korea was announced on 22 August 1910, Russia expressed no objection; Saveliev and Pestushko, 'Dangerous Rapprochement'; and Lensen, 'Japan and Tsarist Russia – The Changing Relationships, 1875–1917'.
13. The Imperial Japanese Army performed a feasibility study for joint troop deployment with foreign armies under the guise of protecting the safety of Japanese nationals as early as November 1917; Ono, 'The Siberian Intervention and Japanese Society', 96.
14. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention*, 185.
15. Hara, 'Japan Moves North'. For the importance of the Northeast China factor in the Siberian Intervention, see Wolff, 'Open Jaw', 339–59.
16. The Chinese public strongly opposed this agreement, rightfully regarding it as another version of the Twenty-One Demands of 1915. Chinese students left Japan in protest and organized anti-Japanese groups in China, among which the Beijing students were the most active. Some historians argue that Japanese plans for Siberia indirectly provoked the May 4th movement of 1919 in China. Japan, which competed with the United States over supplies to the Chinese army, helped to reinstall a loyal cabinet of ministers in March 1918; Guqi, *China and the Great War*, 235–6.
17. *Ibid.*, 195–6.
18. Humphreys, *The Way of the Heavenly Sword*, 26; Stolberg, 'Japanese Strategic and Political Involvement in Siberia and the Russian Far East', 46.
19. Ono, 'The Siberian Intervention and Japanese Society', 104.
20. Hara, 'Japan Moves North', 61.

21. Hosoya, 'Nihon to Koruchaku seiken shōnin mondai'. Kolchak was wounded during the Siege of Port Arthur in the Russo-Japanese War and spent four months as a prisoner of war in Nagasaki, Japan.
22. As historian Norma Pereira noted, 'Indeed, for the Japanese, part of the appeal of the atamans was their refreshing disregard for all the civil libertarian niceties so dear to ... westernizing Russians who modelled themselves on the principles of Paris, London, and especially Washington'; Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*, 55–6.
23. Wolff, 'Open Jaw', 357.
24. There were numerous reports that Japanese soldiers and officers did not pay in shops and would often beat shop owners with rifle butts if confronted. There were also reports of the rape of local women.
25. Hara, *Siberia Shuppei*, 421.
26. The Comintern was very keen on establishing a printing shop in Chita and enrolling Asian radicals in the Eastern Workers Communist University in Moscow; see, Adibekov and Wada, *VKP (b), Komintern i Iaponia*, 254 (Doc. 272).
27. Fujiwara, 'Nihon guntai ni okeru kakumei to hankakumei', 85–123.
28. His short story, titled 'Outpost' in English, was translated into Russian as 'Golovnoi Dozor' and published in *Znamia* (1933) by Roman Kim (1899–1967), a Korean born in Vladivostok who worked for the Soviet Intelligence and was a professor of Japanese history and literature in Moscow. Roman Kim authored the first Soviet study of Japanese fascism in 1923; 'Japanese Fascism', *Novyi Vostok* 4 (1923).
29. Another account of the Siberian Expedition was Matsuo Katsuzō's *Siberia shuppei nikki* (Diary of the Siberian Expedition). On Kuroshima, see Kuroshima and Cipris, *A Flock of Swirling Crows*.
30. Goodman and Miyazawa, *Jews in the Japanese Mind*, 81.
31. Lensen, *Damned Inheritance*, 482. Araki became a leader of the Imperial Way Faction (Kōdōha), a group of young nationalist officers who attempted the February 1936 rebellion. Their failure forced Araki to resign. After the Second World War, he was convicted as Class A war criminal to life imprisonment but was released for health reasons in 1955.
32. Lensen, *Damned Inheritance*, 373–4.
33. Gutman, *The Destruction of Nikolaevsk-on-Amur*.
34. Kobayashi, *Nisso seiji gaikōshi*, 225.
35. Hara, 'Japan Moves North', 55–65.
36. Varneck and Fisher, *The Testimony of Kolchak*, 334.
37. Mitchell, 'Japan's Peace Preservation Law of 1925: Its Origins and Significance', 331.
38. Wada, 'Koreans in the Soviet Far East, 1917–1937', 32.
39. However, the Russian government did not agree to extradite Korean guerrillas to the Japanese administration in Korea; Hara, 'The Korean Movement'.
40. On the 'Korean factor' of Japan's intervention in Siberia, see Scalapino, *Communism in Korea*; Dokusan, 'Nihon teikoku-shugi no Chōsen shihai to Roshia kakumei'; Hara, 'Kyokutō Roshia ni okeru Chōsen dokuritsu undō to Nihon'; Kobayashi, *Nisso seiji gaikō shi*, 213–24.
41. Seoul Press reported on 2 October 1920 that 300–400 Koreans, allegedly under the leadership of a Russian, attacked and burnt the Japanese embassy in the town of Hunchun in North Manchuria. In a matter of days, Chinese soldiers joined the rioters and attacked the Japanese and the Japanese embassy again. Japanese officials insisted that the rioters were Korean Bolshevik partisans and included fifty Russians.

- Eventually, the wave of protests spread around the whole of North Manchuria, with 40,000 people involved; see Pak, *Koreitsy v Sovetskoi Rossii*, 73–93; and Lee, *Revolutionary Struggle in Manchuria*.
42. Han, *An Imperial Path to Modernity*, 105.
 43. Lensen, *Japanese Recognition*, 13–14.
 44. Even after the normalization of Soviet-Japanese relations, communist propaganda did not stop. During the 1920s, Japanese fishermen were frequently in contact with the Russians and often subjected to Communist propaganda: ‘The propaganda was disseminated by pistol-packing Japanese and Korean Communists, who came to the Japanese fishing sheds allegedly under the protection of the Soviet secret police, made speeches, and distributed printed material’; Lensen, *Japanese Recognition*, 349.
 45. Hara, ‘The Korean Movement’, 15.
 46. Esselstrom, *Crossing Empire’s Edge*, 73, 79–81.
 47. The Japanese had been encouraged by the military and civilian White Russian organizations, which protested against any accommodation with the communists. To win Japanese support, they inveighed against the danger which Bolshevism posed for Japan, one of the few remaining pillars of law and civilization in their eyes. White Russian officers and soldiers reminded the Japanese that their blood had run together in the common struggle against the Reds and called upon them not to take the ‘insane step of surrendering the war materials in Vladivostok’. ‘The time has come’, Major General Tkachev wrote in 1922 to the Japanese delegates at the Changchun Conference, ‘when the enemies of mankind are directing their blows in your direction too and long to raise the flag of the International atop sacred Mt. Fuji’; Lensen, *Japanese Recognition*, 82.
 48. Central army headquarters in Tokyo did not envisage any military action north of the South Manchuria Railway, since intrusion into a region considered to be within the Russian sphere of influence might provoke a Soviet military response; Peattie, *Ishiwara Kanji and Japan’s Confrontation with the West*, 97–100.
 49. Esselstrom, *Crossing Empire’s Edge*, 7–8.
 50. Coox, *Nomonhan: Japan Against Russia, 1939*.

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