

*Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian
Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan*

by Sho Konishi

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Sho Konishi's *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* begins with an extraordinary encounter in Hakodate in 1861: a meeting onboard a United States ship between the American ship's captain, the Russian Consul General Iosif Goshkevich, and a Russian passenger heading to San Francisco. The traveler was Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876), the notorious revolutionary (and ideological rival to Marx) and one of the most recognized anarchists in world history. Yet this extraordinary meeting was also a tale of smuggling. Bakunin had escaped from a Siberian prison and was making his way from Russia to the West via the Far East, stowing away on the new Vladivostok-Hakodate shipping route. After this initial tale of under-the-radar intrigue, *Anarchist Modernity* uncovers many others. In exploring these "Japanese-Russian nonstate transnational intellectual relations" (26) from the Meiji Restoration (1868) historiography to *Tao Te Ching* translations in Moscow, Tolstoyism, and the nonwar movement at the *Heimin shinbun*, and on to cooperative practices and entomology research, *Anarchist Modernity* seeks to uncover an entire world of bustling creative activity that operated largely unseen beneath the state,

beneath institutions such as churches, party politics, or schools, and importantly beneath the language and discourse of Area Studies, East and West, and even the history of global modernity itself. Often centering on the practice of translation, these Japanese-Russian intellectual exchanges stealthily constitute "... a transnationally formulated temporality and corresponding order of knowledge and practice that I call cooperatist anarchist modernity" (3). As these encounters pile up throughout the book, a better picture emerges of the importance of Russian thought in modern Japan. Yet Konishi goes beyond mere cataloging and develops a theory about what these connections mean. The original Bakunin "chance meeting [comes to represent] the beginning of an anarchist vision of progress founded on principles of mutual aid in Japan" (3) that opens the way to a better future. As Konishi shows, without attention to this sustained interaction with Russian thought "feeds the historiographical tendency to view Japanese interest in 'Western thought' as similarly contradictory and random" (297).

Like the introduction, chapter one begins with an extraordinary encounter, or almost. Here the meeting would have been between the future lecturer of Russian at the Tokyo Foreign Language School (TFSL), Lev Mechnikov and the revolutionary leader Saigo Takamori. Though this specific meeting never took place since Mechnikov arrived in 1874 after Saigo had resigned from government service to teach in his private academies in Kyushu, Mechnikov arranged the meeting in Europe with Saigo's brother Tsugumichi.

Missed connections aside, Mechnikov's stay in Japan from 1874-1876 was clearly influential both in Japan and in anarchist circles in Europe. We learn not only that Mechnikov moved anarchism away from the "Bakuninist ruthless destruction of the old order to a vision of universal human evolutionary development," but that he apparently did so based on what he witnessed of the early Meiji Restoration. Mechnikov's history of the Restoration was yet another case of linguistic smuggling. It also stood in contrast to more pessimistic Western

observers from Isabella Bird to Ernest Satow. For Mechnikov, the opening of Japan (*kaikoku*) was a first step in a world historical development toward cooperative living that “resulted from the long-term development of people’s everyday life that had made the formation of a new government possible” (60-61). Konishi argues that it was Mechnikov’s experience in the early Restoration that pushed him to extend the non-Darwinian mutual aid tradition of Russian evolution to human history and development. One of the joys of under-the-radar chance encounters between intellectual luminaries described in the book is the argument that the later reception of Pyotr Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid* in Taishō Japan, especially at the Sapporo Agricultural College (chapter four), in some ways echoed the popular Restoration itself filtered through the Japanese-Russian anarchist networks and interpretations. This linking of a non-Darwinian, mutual aid theory of Russian evolutionary thought applied to social progress reappears in chapter six. Here, though, Konishi remains at the level of translation as a transnational practice. As such, he does not delve into the details of what Mechnikov actually saw that for him provided this spark of a new sense of “opening” *kaikoku*. Still it is hardly criticism to say that here and elsewhere throughout the book Konishi points to many other dissertations and books yet to be written.

The details do come in the translation projects of the TSFL’s Russian language program begun by Mechnikov. Konishi sketches out the ties between TSFL, Mechnikov, and the Popular Rights and Liberty Movement (*jiyūminken undō*) leaders with ties to the school such as Nakae Chomin. From this focus on Japanese-Russian transnational translation projects, Konishi can offer a history of networks that tie the Populists and Popular Rights movements to Futabatei Shimei (early translator of Gogol and founder of the modern Japanese novel with *Ukigumo*), and Futabatei’s students and friends Yokoyama Gennosuke and Matsubara Iwagorō. These last two are often seen as early Japanese social scientists and early “muckraking” journalists of the “social problem” (*shakai mondai*). In Konishi’s telling, they were inspired by

Futabatei's translations of Russian depictions of the St. Petersburg poor. Situating them within this Japanese-Russian tradition effects a slight but important change in the development of social science in Meiji Japan as here it is not the high level desire for social facts coming from the conservative and much more statist German Historical School of Lujo Brentano, Gustav Schmoller, and Max Weber. Instead, it is just one more instance of a subterranean, non-state, non-institutional collaboration seeking to create its own distinct theory of modernity and progress. Here we find another theme running through Konishi's book: for Japanese anarchists, Russian Populism represented a critique of Western metaphysics and another path to modernity. That new path was neither a turn to Western assimilation nor a vision of Pan-Asianism, but instead "toward a possibility of an anti-hierarchical, moral society beyond either school (99)." This crucial insight struck me in its similarity to the way another group of Asian revolutionaries looked to Lenin for an internal critique of the West while still allowing for modernization.

Chapter two, "Anarchist Religion," shows more than the occasionally noted but under-examined popularity and significance of Tolstoy (and "Tolstoyism") in Japan. It also deepens the transnational interaction of translation and religious conversion—again often happening outside formal institutions and beneath the surface of terms and language. The chapter begins with an account of Konishi Masutarō, a member of the Russian Orthodox Church in Japan sent by Father Nikolai to study at the Kiev Theological Seminary. In both Kiev and later in Moscow, Konishi Masutarō would lecture on *Tao Te Ching* as a point of contact with Japanese Orthodoxy and the best source for the future (cultural and spiritual) development of Japan. During these well attended lectures at Moscow University and the Moscow Psychological Society, Tolstoy learned of Konishi Masutarō's *Tao Te Ching* Russian translation project and asked to help. Working out of Tolstoy's home, Konishi Masutarō and Tolstoy were drawn to this Chinese text which had "no room either for the authority of the nation-state" or much to the chagrin

of Konishi Masutarō's patron Nikolai "for the institution of the Church" (105). Chapter two shows in fascinating detail how, though some of the terms remained, the meanings of Christianity and *shūkyō* (religion) were drastically altered as the translation collaboration became a joint project to "reconfigure Christianity, elements of Western modernity, and for Konishi [Masutarō], the imperial Confucian moral order in Japan" (112). The goal was a "universal religion" based on ethical practice wholly within the confines of human reason.

Beyond the story of the Russian *Tao Te Ching*, chapter two also explores the breadth and depth of Tolstoyism in Japan. An enormous number of translations appeared in journals such as Tokutomi Soho's *Kokumin no tomo*, the *Heimin shinbun*, and *Rikugo zasshi*. Japanese readers, notably Tokutomi's brother Roka (mentioned in chapter six) undertook pilgrimages to Tolstoy. And, of course, Uchimura Kanzō's "nonchurch movement" (*mūkyōkai*) was strongly influenced by Tolstoy. These stories of conversion to "Tolstoyan religion" and "religious anarchism" go a long way to rectifying the "major lacuna," the historiography of Japanese intellectual history and Tolstoyism. In another pleasant surprise that remains inexplicable from the lofty view of interstate and Church relations—all of this occurred with help from Japanese [Russian] Orthodoxy while Tolstoy was not only denounced, but pictured as burning in hell in Russian Orthodox cathedrals.

As Konishi emphasizes, this theory is one based on Reinhart Koselleck's temporality grounded in lived experience. It differs from both open-ended accumulation and crisis of Western modernity and a rejection of a folkish Pan-Asianism. Konishi argues it is an anarchist spatio-temporality that exists alongside not just standard nation-state based histories, but also against the uneven conjunction of the past and the industrial present (an internally driven modernity examined by Harry Harootunian in *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*). Indeed, Konishi has shown that possibly the first introduction of Nietzsche in Japan came in a piece on Tolstoy that

negatively compared the founder of a universal religion of reason against the German example of a “decadent European thought” (127). We rightly know a great deal about this other critique of Western metaphysics from Nietzsche to Anesaki Masaharu, Watsuji Tetsurō, and others. However, we can now also include a very different critique of transnational progress of Kropotkin, Mechnikov, Reclus, Arishima, Ishikawa Sanshirō, and countless other names (more than 600) in the encyclopedia of Japanese anarchism Konishi mentions in the introduction.

This anarchist religion based on human virtue counters the more institutional and didactic project of Inoue Tetsujirō and Nitobe Inazō, who built a theory of the religious or moral national subject around the term *jinkaku* as a hierarchy of person (*jin*) and rank (*kaku*). Richard Reitan has recently examined this latter tradition in *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan*. In direct contrast to both the national subject (*kokumin*) and the Marxist “masses” (*taishū*) is the account of the creation of both the object of knowledge and the political subject of the “*heimin*” as it developed in opposition to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. In this third chapter, possibly the book’s most exciting, Konishi refrains from fully defining the *heimin*. Instead, after showing that the standard translation of “commoner” retains too much of a connection to hierarchy from its roots in the Tokugawa system of rulers and ruled, he lets the myriad expressions of *heimin* instantiate the “invention of the people without the state.” These include the pages of the *Heimin shinbun* and *Myōjō*, the famous anti-war poem by Yosano Akiko “Brother, Don’t Give Up Your Life,” woodblocks by Yamamoto Kanae, and playful cartoons of daily life by Ogawa Usen, many reproduced in the text. This anti-*kokumin* discourse, of course, was not lost on the Meiji state. It shut down the *Heimin shinbun* in January 1905. Soon a “transnational *heimin*” as a basis for a new vision of international society found fascinating expression and built deeper networks including inside the POW camps of the Russo-Japanese War.

Chapter four “The History Slide” (*rekishi no jisuberi*) continues

this discussion of networks of international society. Konishi fully develops the explicitly anarchist vision of modernity, and not just its critique, but a vision of a new path. In this chapter, the multiple threads of collaborations between non-state and non-institutional congeal into a specifically anarchist vision of global modernity that differs from the standard nationalist or Pan-Asianist paths. It is the return of Mechnikov's ideas on the Restoration as a revolution in daily life meditated now by Kropotkin's thoughts on non-Darwinian mutual aid. There is also an interesting theory that the term "winter period" misses much of what was happening, once again, under the surface. The term was used to refer to the lack of "events" in the Japanese left following the crackdown on alternate visions of the future after the execution of Kotoku Shusui, Kanno Sugako, and others in the Great Treason trial of 1911. Instead of great events, Konishi describes a "shift in historicity" from the march of Hegelian Reason to "a theory of social change and moral knowledge and action" as the significance of lived time (Koselleck) made the present a privileged moment of individual intervention in time—something that would become the "rectification of history" (210). The rectification was necessary as contrary to the success story of achieving Great Power status in the victory over Russia for anarchists like Arishima Takeo, Kōtoku Shūsui, Ōsugi Sakae, and Ishikawa Sanshirō. To Konishi's list, one could add Tanaka Shōzō, for whom the war marked the moment of exhaustion of Western modernity. Far from culminating in success, the war marked a moment of retrogression. Through Kropotkin reading groups organized by Arishima at night and "in polemic with" the stated curriculum of the Sapporo Agricultural College, a vision of a new mode of progress based on everyday life of the little people (Tanaka called this actor a "*tada no hitori*") began to form. This mode directly opposed the social Darwinist common sense of international diplomacy.

Chapters five and six on Esperanto clubs and mutual aid-inspired popular science constitute what Konishi calls an "anarchist cultural revolution." In these contexts, the translation projects and the discursive

networks developed to such an extent as to become part of daily life and thought in Japan in the 1910-1920s: “Mechnikov did not know Kōtoku. Kōtoku did not know Arishima. Arishima did not know Tolstoy. Kropotkin did not know Konishi. Nakae Chōmin did not know Kropotkin.... Yet each was related to the others through the sharing and translation of knowledge of anarchist modernity” (243-244). Konishi offers a long discussion of the wild popularity of Esperanto, so popular even those thought of as nativists such as Yanagida Kunio were practitioners. From there, *Anarchist Modernity* moves to making indirect points about a vision of continual change and progress. The discussion most interesting to the reviewer of this title is about the Ainu expert (and brother of the Polish dictator Józef Piłsudski) Bronislaw Piłsudski. For Konishi, Piłsudski sought to “protect” the Ainu from the depredations of modernity as currently practiced, but also without any paternalistic ideas of preserving an unchanging cultural essence. There is more work to do here on the relation of Esperanto to a new vision of the colonial margins, but this sense of change and development without hierarchy is of course part of Kropotkin’s Mutual Aid. This same influence also leads to the large translation projects of the last chapter on popular biology and largely non-Darwinian science in chapter six. This last chapter includes a wonderful discussion of the entomologist Jean Henri Fabre, who is obscure in his native France, but to this day enjoys enormous popularity in Japan, including thousands of Fabre figurines sold in 7-Eleven convenience stores.

The final chapter, “Nature in Culture, Culture in Nature: Phagocytes, Dung Beetles, and the Cosmos,” is as ambitious and sprawling as it sounds. But in many ways its inclusion is earned by the networks and translation practices that preceded it in the previous five chapters. As Konishi warned (promised) in the introduction, “Only with knowledge of the anarchist notion of progress and Russian-Japanese nonstate transnational intellectual relations does anarchists’ dynamic role in translating and popularizing these four scientists (the entomologist

Jean Henri Fabre, Ilya Mechnikov, brother of Lev from chapter one, Kropotkin, and Darwin) make sense.” (26) He asks why Japanese anarchists expended so much effort to take on the massive project of translating these thinkers. He answers that they all offered a vision of a non-hierarchical universe without a center, and thus without a node of ultimate authority. Decades before Deleuze and Guattari, for many anarchists at the time, a main model of this horizontal network without power was the rhizome. Further, the vision of evolutionary biology examined here, like Mutual Aid, focused on the necessity and benefits of symbiosis at all levels—from the universal, to the global, to even the individual whose internal processes mirrored those larger systems in requiring dynamic interaction. This last level of symbiosis within the human body was the work of Ilya Mechnikov, the Nobel Prize-winning scientist and brother of Lev Mechnikov mentioned in chapter one.

In the epilogue to *Anarchist Modernity*, Konishi argues again for the breadth and depth of this terrain of cultural production beneath official sanction and support. He pays special attention to the way these anarchist practices found their way into children’s literature and were located outside schools in local shrines, farmhouses, churches, “the second floor of the Nakamura sweetshop in Tokyo,” pubs, *Heimin* clubs, and, importantly, “dormitories within the imperial universities” (330-331). He follows this trend of knowledge production from below in the Free Education Movement, the Children’s Free Arts Movement, and finds its influence in popular children’s magazines like *Shonen sekai* (Boy’s World) and *Akai tori* (The Red Bird) (333) and even in Yanagi Sōetsu and the Shirakaba School.

From here, he moves to a discussion of the differences between the anarchist and the everyday Marxist theories and suggests the “limitations of Marxist theories of everyday life and space that are widely used today by scholars for understanding cultural and social trends in modern history at large” (339). For Konishi, a focus on Marxian analysis—which is not fully defined here—has prevented historians from seeing the world

of life uncovered by Konishi's exhaustive and fascinating uncovering of these translation and conversion practices. Not only is this uncovering due to Konishi's rare skill with both Japanese and Russian sources and a sharp theoretical approach. It is also due to anarchism's admirable devotion for identifying and struggling against authority in all its varieties and refusing to reduce it to class struggle alone. Indeed, this issue formed the crux of a major dispute between Sakai Toshihiko and Ishikawa Sanshirō in the early 1900s, when the two activists argued over the proper role of party discipline and the nature of a revolution. In fact, it is precisely in the next paragraph after discussing the limits of the Marxian everyday that Konishi turns to Ishikawa's own theory of anarchist democracy as "the life a people on the soil." Ishikawa used this phrase as a gloss of his term *domin seikatsu* or *domin kurashi* or finally *demokurashī*.

Still, Ishikawa's extremely interesting and important intervention into the evolutionary and cultural debates of the 1930-1940s lacked a strategy adequate to the specificity of capitalist dynamics following the Manchurian Incident in 1931 when the Kwantung Army made the first move on the establishment of Manchukuo. Ishikawa's confrontation with fascism, according to the reviewer's belief, meant the non-institutional bias of his *demokurashī* that provided such a liberating and even emancipatory spark, linking the individual to transnational and even cosmic in the 1920s, became a problem with the descent into total war of the late 1930s. Ishikawa could posit but ultimately not fully practice his theory of federated communes that would replace the state. We need more work on this anarchist confrontation with fascism not only in Japan but globally, in both historiography and theory. That said, though Konishi does not mention them here, both the local banks based on rural mutual aid examined by Tetsuo Najita in *Ordinary Economies in Japan: A Historical Perspective, 1750-1950* and the extraordinary postwar "production control" (*seisan kanri*) movement offer reasons to continue to take seriously both Ishikawa and Konishi's project in this crucial

period.

Still, while Konishi is clearly right to focus on the majority of Marxist analyses of everyday life as lacking the creative spark of lived experience, especially the dominant Kōza-ha school, there is the decidedly minority Marxian view of everyday life that the reviewer would suggest as adequate to a critique of the language of cooperatists ideology of the Co-Prosperity Sphere. Of course, thinkers like Tosaka Jun come to mind. Tosaka wrote extensively on everyday space and the “principle of everydayness” as a form of cultural criticism until he was imprisoned and forced to stop publishing in 1938. With his analysis firmly set in class struggle and attuned to the mediations and mystifications of capital that trickle down into daily life, in his masterpiece *The Japanese Ideology* (日本イデオロギー論 *Nihon ideorogiron*) Tosaka showed how the Japanization of cooperation stemmed from an imperial hermeneutic that mimicked the money form of capital. To fully critique the explicit use of cooperation and harmony in the Japanese empire, we might need some sort of critical apparatus like Tosaka’s—if only to illuminate the distortion (or to use a recent term by Mark Driscoll) the imperial state’s “grotesqueing” of the myriad cooperatist practices Konishi has uncovered here.

None of this should be considered a criticism of Konishi’s extraordinary book. On the contrary, *Anarchist Modernity* intervenes in a way that can only improve both the anarchist and Marxian critique of power, empire, and everyday life. It represents an intervention that cannot be ignored or casually dismissed as if nothing new had happened in either tradition since the famous Marx-Bakunin debates of the 1870s. *Anarchist Modernity* is timely, as well. As with the new studies of the Japanese empire and fascism mentioned above, Konishi’s work resonates with Karatani Kojin’s *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange*. By reading these two together, we clearly see Tolstoyism and “religious anarchism” based on reason as a real movement toward reclaiming in a secular form the imperative to

improved life found in nineteenth century religious movements. Such a re-secularization is a necessary step for Karatani's arrival at a global republic based on reciprocal exchange. The exchanges in both books are much more conducive to low level practices and thus suggest a way to reclaim the political efficacy of the small scale action of Konishi's translation and Karatani's consumer boycotts.

One issue remains: how do we fit anarchist history and analysis into this broader, post Manchurian Incident story? It seems to have much in common with earlier studies of anarchism as the hidden wellspring of practice, from Arif Dirlik's *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* to recent work by David Graeber, in which the analysis is largely Marxist, but the anarchist solution comes from an undefined space outside. How do we work out the issues of scale and mediation without either the co-optation by the state as in the Co-Prosperity Sphere or the more recent devolution into libertarianism? *Anarchist Modernity* should be part of an answer. Thus, given the extraordinary history recounted here, it is not a criticism to say that a major debate remains on the adequate scope and scale of cultural and political movements or whether the analysis or practice should be Marxian or anarchist. Indeed, these are necessary, helpful, and productive debates. *Anarchist Modernity* is a very welcome addition to the discussion. In the end, it suggests that we do not have to completely decide. In reading this conclusion to *Anarchist Modernity*, the reviewer is reminded of the likely apocryphal line often attributed to Henri Lefebvre, "I am a Marxist today so that we can all be anarchists tomorrow."