

## Introduction

Pre-war Japan was a quasi-constitutional monarchy dominated by a military clique (*gun-bu*), economic oligarchy (*zaikai*), and emperor regime (*tennō-sei*). Japanese people were largely denied civil rights and freedoms of speech, publication, or association. Despite this most oppressive of environments, early Japanese socialists and other progressives boldly translated and circulated a range of works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Plekhanov, Stalin, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kollontai, Lunacharsky, and Trotsky. Japan used to be one of the world's publishing hubs for Marxist books and pamphlets, until the late 1930s when Japanese society was almost totally subdued by the fascist and militarist regime, so much so that leftist and socialist publishing activities became impossible. The fact that the world's first *Collected Works of Marx and Engels* was independently edited and published by Japanese Marxists and progressive intellectuals between 1927 and 1933 indicates Japan's unique and prominent position in the world history of Marxism.

An even more unique fact, though, is that, although there were no Trotskyists in pre-war Japan, many of his writings (more than 150 books and articles) were translated into Japanese and published between 1918 and 1941. His works had an impact not only on Marxists and other progressives (especially in Japanese literary circles), but also on Japanese government officials. This article examines in greater depth these unique facts about Marxism in pre-war Japan.

## Introducing Socialism into a Modernizing Japan

Addressing the peculiarities of development in the historically belated countries, Leon Trotsky writes that:

the laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism. *Unevenness*, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for the lack of a better name, we may call the *law of combined development*, by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms.<sup>1</sup>

---

1 Trotsky 1937c, 5–6.

This characterization fits the historical development of pre-war Japan as well. In the Edo period (1603–1868), Japan's feudal regime had maintained an isolationist foreign policy (so-called *sakoku*) for more than two hundred years. Meanwhile, industrial capitalism had arisen and become highly developed in the Western countries, and these countries had formed powerful and centralized modern national states with massive regular armies and sophisticated weapons. They had then started down the road of world imperialism and, though competing and conflicting with each other, successfully colonized vast areas of Asia. When the Western powers finally reached the remotest (from the European and North American perspective) small islands of Nippon, the Tokugawa government (called the Edo Bakufu), whose political and economic power was in a state of decline due to its overlong domination and outdated feudal economic foundations, opened up the country to the West without war or conflict. After a period of *Sturm und Drang* ten years following that, a new semi-modern nation state, the Meiji government, emerged.

Along the lines of the Marxian law of uneven and combined development, which originated with Trotsky, as soon as the new regime in Japan was established it took on the form of a hyper-centralized state with a theocratic emperor model, and embarked on the capitalist industrialization of the country from above. Simultaneously it began to expand the military and adopted an imperialist foreign policy toward other East Asian countries. In order to compete with the far stronger and richer Western powers, the Meiji government, under the slogan of "Enrich the nation, strengthen the military" (*fukoku-kyōhei*), launched full speed into industrialization and militarization while still retaining semi-feudal culture and traditions, and did so in the absence of any serious liberal democracy.

Under these conditions, a first generation of Japanese intellectuals actively imported liberal and democratic ideas from Europe and America and translated them into Japanese. In so doing, they frequently had to coin new Japanese words; for example, *jiyū* freedom, *byōdō* equality, *shakai* society, *minshu* democracy, and *kenri* rights.<sup>2</sup> Under their influence, a mass movement known as Jiyū Minken Undō emerged, which advocated civil liberties and a democratic parliament and was founded by middle-class Japanese.

These two features of the Meiji government – rapid industrialization coupled with a centralized monarchist state and reckless militarization coupled with imperialistic diplomacy – caused the immiseration and impoverishment of the newly formed Japanese working class (mainly female), and invoked military conflicts with other countries in East Asia. Accordingly, some middle-class intellectuals rapidly transitioned in their thinking from bourgeois democratic ideas to socialist, anarchist, or semi-Marxist ideas. Again, due to the law of combined development, just as the Japanese state combined the earliest phase of industrialization with the latest phase of capitalism (i.e., aggressive imperialism),

---

2 Some of these newly coined words were later exported to China.

these intellectuals combined humanitarianism and democratic liberalism with socialism and anti-imperialism.

To take an example, one of the most famous Japanese socialists, Kōtoku Shūsui, was at first a dedicated follower of Nakae Chōmin – the famous liberal thinker who translated Rousseau’s *On the Social Contract* – but soon after became one of Japan’s early socialists. As early as 1901 he openly declared in a newspaper article, “I am a Socialist,” and in the same year published his book *Teikokushugi: Nijūseiki no Kaibutsu* (Imperialism: The monster of the twentieth century), in which he denounced imperialism, militarism, and the narrow-minded patriotism of the capitalist countries, including Japan.<sup>3</sup> This critical analysis of imperialism was published sixteen years before Lenin’s *Imperialism*.<sup>4</sup> In 1903 Kōtoku and Sakai Toshihiko, another early socialist, set up the ‘people’s association’ called Heimin-sha and launched *Heimin Shimbun* (*People’s Paper*), a weekly newspaper which would become one of the most influential leftist journals in Japan. Its inaugural issue featured the *Heimin-sha Sengen* (a manifesto of the People’s Association), a collective declaration of Japanese socialists that combined the central slogans of the French Revolution, “liberty, equality, fraternity,” with typical socialist demands for nationalization of the means of production and transportation and radical pacifism demanding the total disarmament of every country.

The early Japanese socialists ardently imported and studied socialist books and translated them into Japanese, just as intellectuals of the previous generation had imported and translated Enlightenment literature. Marx and Engels’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party* was among them. In 1904 Kōtoku and Sakai boldly translated this most dangerous book from its English edition and printed it (except chapter 3) in *Heimin Shimbun*.<sup>5</sup> The newspaper issue that carried the translation was immediately banned and both translators arrested by police. In prison Kōtoku read Kropotkin, the famous Russian anarchist, and by the time he was released had converted to anarcho-communism.

After his release Kōtoku and many other anarchists and socialist activists were arrested in May 1910 for an alleged terrorist conspiracy to assassinate Emperor Meiji, although the evidence against the defendants (including Kōtoku) was mostly circumstantial or fabricated. Twenty-four of the twenty-six defendants were sentenced to death, and half of

---

3 Kōtoku Shūsui 1952 [1901].

4 Lenin’s *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* was written in Switzerland in 1916 and published in Russia in early 1917. Kōtoku’s *Teikokushugi* also pre-dates other notable works. Bukharin’s *Imperialism and World Economy* was published in 1915, Hilferding’s *Das Finanzkapital* (Finance capital) in 1910, and Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study* in 1902.

5 This was the first translation of *The Communist Manifesto* to emerge in Asia. The first Chinese partial translation (1906) was largely based on this Japanese translation. See Liu Mengyang 2017.

them, including Kōtoku, were executed in January 1911. About two weeks before he was executed by hanging, Kōtoku said in a letter written to his attorney: “You asked me to comment on this affair. But now I have nothing to say, and even if I wanted to say something, I have no freedom to speak. What I expect is just that in 100 years’ time somebody will talk about it instead of me.”<sup>6</sup>

This so-called High Treason Incident (Taigyaku Jiken) horrified Japanese people, and socialists and anarchists were branded monstrous terrorists. The socialists went to ground, and the incident led to a shift in the late Meiji period toward greater control and repression of ideologies deemed potentially subversive. Sakai Toshihiko eked out a living by selling non-political writings or by ghostwriting.<sup>7</sup> But it was also during this period that Japanese socialists studied and learned German literature, above all works by Marx and Engels. This experience would form the foundation of an upsurge of Marxist publications from 1917. After the First World War erupted in 1914 and created a big war boom in Japan, the Japanese working class expanded enormously, and trade union movements grew rapidly. It was in these circumstances that an internationally historic event occurred that affected Japan as it did everywhere: the 1917 Russian Revolution.

### Impacts of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the Creation of the Communist Party

The first generation of Japanese socialists (the Meiji-era socialists) was a rather mixed group consisting of Christian socialists, social reformists, anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, semi-Marxists, and other socialists. They formed a vague continuum of mixed socialism. One reason for this was that they established their views on the basis of a few foreign books and pamphlets imported largely from the English canon. For example, in his preface to *Shakaishugi Shinzui* (The essence of socialism) published in 1903 – the most popular book of socialist literature written by any Japanese author in the Meiji era – Kōtoku Shūsui suggests that the book is based on his reading of just eight English books including – besides Marx and Engels’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx’s *Capital*, and Engels’s *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* — the American institutionalist economist Richard Ely’s *Socialism and Social Reform* and the famous Christian socialist and social reformist William Bliss’s *A Handbook of Socialism* and *Encyclopedia of Social Reform*.<sup>8</sup>

But the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the Communist International founded in 1919 radically changed this situation. They caused at least four significant changes within

---

6 Kanzaki Kiyoshi 1971, 494. Unless stated otherwise, all translations of Japanese sources cited in the article are my own.

7 Kuroiwa Hisako 2010.

8 Kōtoku Shūsui 1953, 8.

Japanese society and Japanese socialism. First, they created interest in Marxism and socialism among intellectuals and common workers who had hitherto shown no interest in such things. Marxism thus acquired a mass foundation in Japanese society for the first time. Second, they opened up for Japanese socialists an immense Marxist world (above all, the German and Russian Marxist world) and on this basis introduced to Japan Marxism fully as a distinct knowledge system. In this sense, Japanese progressive intellectuals and workers took Marxism seriously as they received it via Bolshevism.

The third change was that the Revolution and the Comintern provided the first serious opportunity for Japanese socialists to analyze the Japanese state and society in a strictly Marxist way, and to take a true revolutionary course based on proper scientific analysis. Before that, they had groped their way forward with the help of a few foreign books and pamphlets, efforts that were too elementary and dilettante to establish robust and authentic Marxist political views about Japanese peculiarities. Fourth, the Revolution and the Comintern irrevocably destroyed the continuum of mixed socialists and drew a definite line between Bolshevik communists and other socialists. Thus, from the early 1920s Japanese socialists were divided into two opposing groups: one comprising dedicated followers of the Bolsheviks, the other formed of anarchists who were acutely critical of the Bolsheviks. But no small number of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists became communist followers after they visited the USSR and heard speeches by Bolshevik leaders like Lenin and Trotsky in early 1922.<sup>9</sup>

When the Japanese Communist Party was secretly founded as a branch of the Comintern in July 1922, these political divisions between Japanese socialists became more important and entrenched. Most prominent socialists, with the exception of the dedicated anarchists, participated in the creation of the Communist Party, including Sakai Toshihiko, Yamakawa Hitoshi, Arahata Kanson, and Kondō Eizō. But the party's first incarnation was virtually wiped out the following year by fierce repression from the monarchist government. In the year in which the Great Kantō earthquake killed more than 105,000 people, many communists (for example, Kawai Yoshitora, a leader of the Communist Youth) and anarchists (for example, the most famous among them, Ōsugi Sakae) were murdered by the police, and about 6,000 Japan-resident Koreans were killed by Japanese mobs.<sup>10</sup> After the death of Ōsugi Japanese anarchism declined rapidly. In addi-

---

9 Ishiko Yasukuni 2008, 63.

10 These tragic incidents were not only racist and chauvinist atrocities but also a form of class repression since a lot of Koreans living in Japan, disproportionately more than Japanese, had become socialists, anarchists, active trade unionists or other left militants, resembling Jews in Europe.

tion to these factors, almost every party leader believed the creation of the Japanese Communist Party to be premature and they decided to dissolve it in 1924.

Two years later, in 1926, the Communist Party was reconstructed (as the so-called second Communist Party), but by then opinions and views among communists and Marxists were divided on many issues: how to characterize Japanese capitalism, what attitude to take toward the Japanese emperor, what organizational principles should underpin the Party, and so on. Accordingly, many influential socialists did not participate in the second Party, and instead formed a semi-independent Marxist group, which theoretically and politically continued to be more or less loyal to Bolshevism, but which was organizationally separate to it. These group members (Yamakawa, Arahata, Sakai, etc.) began to publish the monthly magazine *Rōnō* (Workers and Peasants) in 1927 and thus were later dubbed the *Rōnō-ha* (the *Rōnō* Group). In contrast, other Marxist intellectuals who did participate in the second Party published an academic book series entitled *Nihon Shihonshugi Hattatsu-shi Kōza* (Series on the History of Development of Japanese Capitalism) beginning in 1932, and thus later came to be known as the *Kōza-ha* (the *Kōza* Group). Thus, instead of the old division between Marxists and anarchists, a new division within the Japanese Left emerged: between the *Kōza* Group and the *Rōnō* Group. Many subsequent controversies and discussions occurred and developed between them, and this theoretical and political division endured into the post-war period.

### Upsurge in Marxist Literature between the 1920s and the Mid-1930s

Even with this division of Marxists and the harsh police repression, Japanese Marxist and pro-Marxist intellectuals and activists published a vast number of Marxist books, pamphlets, and journals from the 1920s to the mid-1930s. Before 1917 only a few books relating to Marx and Marxism were published;<sup>11</sup> for example, Nishiyama Kōjirō's *Karl Marx: Jindō no Senshi, Shakaishugi no Chichi* (Karl Marx: A humanitarian fighter and father of socialism) in 1902. Nishiyama was a leftist publisher and manager of *Heimin-sha*. He was arrested together with Kōtoku and Sakai when *Heimin Shinbun* printed the translation of *The Communist Manifesto*. As Nishiyama's book title suggests, Marx was presented not as a revolutionary communist in contrast to other socialists, but rather as a humanitarian and merely one of a larger group of socialists.

But, as mentioned, the 1917 Russian Revolution dramatically changed all that. Furthermore, the so-called Rice Riots (*kome sōdō*) and big waves of factory strikes in Japanese cities between 1917 and 1920, which began because of escalating rice prices, strongly

---

11 Besides books, a few translations of Marx's works appeared in Japanese journals before 1917. For example, Marx's *Wage Labour and Capital* was translated in serial form in *Bokutaku* between March and December 1909. See <http://www.fitweb.or.jp/~taka/lkjdex.html>.

influenced the Japanese public and changed the social atmosphere.<sup>12</sup> Again, under the law of uneven and combined development, Japan jumped from being a country with the least developed Marxism to among the most. In a 1918 report Trotsky already predicted such big political leaps for Japanese working people:

Information has reached us in recent months that a powerful revolutionary strike movement has developed in Japan, involving about two million workers, under the slogan: "Rice and peace!" These were our slogans, except that instead of "bread" the Japanese say "rice" [...]

We look upon the Japanese working class as a backward working class. That is true. In the mass it is extremely backward. But weren't people saying to us only yesterday, about the working class [...]. We replied: "If we built our hopes only on the consciousness of the proletariat as a whole, as it is today, then, certainly, your criticism would be correct. But there is an objective logic, the logic of our centralized industry, the logic of Russia's Tsarism, the logic of the counter-revolutionary nature of the Russian bourgeoisie and of the insignificance of the petty-bourgeois democratic elements, the logic of the international situation. This external, objective logic will be transformed into an historical stick that will drive the Russian working class, at first even in conflict with its consciousness, on to the road of the conquest of power."

We were proved right. The same can be said of the Japanese working class, which entered even later than we did the path of historical development, and which is obliged to develop even faster.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, from 1918, the Japanese working class and the country's intellectuals rapidly created many trade unions, every kind of left cultural association (of proletarian literature, poetry, films, arts, and theater), workers-and-peasants parties, Marxist and social science reading clubs, settlement movements, and so forth. Here we can see the combining of the most elementary needs of the Japanese working class for culture, knowledge, and democracy with the most developed of Marxist politics.

Thus, Japan experienced an extraordinary upsurge in the publication of Marxist literature from the 1920s to the mid-1930s. More than 1,500 books of Marxist literature appeared in Japan in this fifteen-year period. The upsurge had already begun by 1919,

---

12 Imoto Mitsuo 2018. Imoto correctly points out that in past research about the Rice Riots, most Japanese researchers presumed the events began with rural conflicts between peasants and rice merchants in 1918, but in fact they were preceded by workers' vast strike movements in Japan's big cities from mid-1917.

13 Trotsky 1979, 533–535. For details of Trotsky's views of Japan, see Nishijima Sakae (Morita Seiya) 2001.

when about twenty books and pamphlets concerning Marx and Marxism appeared. After 1920 Marxism-related literature ballooned. We know from imperfect research undertaken by Kubo Seijirō that during the four years between 1920 and 1923 about 100 books were published, and during the three years between 1924 and 1926 more than 180 books were published.<sup>14</sup> In 1927 alone more than 200 Marxism-related books were published. In 1928, 1929, 1930, and 1931, around 200 books were published annually. In 1932 more than 100 books appeared. Even in 1933 around 100 books were published. This huge number of publications is even larger than the annual number of publications relating to Marxism that appear in Japan today, even though today's population is double that of the 1920s. Despite repeated bans and strict official censorship,<sup>15</sup> which forced several left publishing houses to close down, and the imprisonment of many writers and publishers, Japanese people persistently and boldly continued to publish Marxist literature.

Here this history has three noteworthy points. First, the range of literature these Marxist and leftist publishing houses published was much wider than Bolshevik or later Stalinist literature, or even than specifically Marxist literature itself. They published a great deal of anti- or non-Bolshevik literature, particularly Kautsky, Plekhanov, Rosa Luxemburg, Otto Bauer, and Hilferding. And they published not only Marxist literature but a vast range of Western cultural and scientific literature, for example Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Goethe, Maupassant, Andre Gide, Rousseau, Kropotkin, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Darwin, Thomas Mann, Adam Smith, Ricardo, Mendel, and Henri Poincaré. Thus, Japanese Marxists provided the broad educational and cultural canon of the modern period for Japanese working people. It may be no exaggeration to say that it was Marxism or even Bolshevism that introduced, in broad terms, modern civilization and democratic consciousness to the Japanese working class.

Second, because the same books were frequently translated by different people, and were printed by different publishing houses, many different translations of the same books were printed during this short period. Moreover, when any translated book was banned, it was quickly reprinted at another publishing house. When any publishing house was forcibly closed by police, its manager and workers immediately set up a new one.

Third, a series of big publishing projects were planned and carried out in a surprisingly short amount of time. The most famous example was the original Japanese edition of the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, at twenty-seven volumes (thirty books).<sup>16</sup> This

---

14 See <http://www.ric.hi-ho.ne.jp/jlme/>.

15 Many “dangerous” words like *kakumei* revolution, *dokusai* dictatorship, *hōki* revolt, and *kyōsanshugi* communism were censored as well as whole sentences considered revolutionary.

16 Even this collection, however, did not include *The Communist Manifesto*. This was because the Japanese authorities believed the *Manifesto* to pose a strong threat to public order, and so wherever it was published it was quickly banned. Thus it was left out of the collection in order

edition, which was the first semi-completed collection of Marx and Engels's works in the world, was published by Kaizō-sha between 1928 and 1933. A great number of Marxist and other progressive intellectuals collaborated on the project, long before any such initiative emerged in Germany (East Germany) or even Soviet Russia. In addition, the *Important Collected Works of Lenin* (thirty volumes) was published by Hakuyō-sha between 1928 and 1936, and the *Collected Works of Stalin and Bukharin* (sixteen volumes) was published between 1928 and 1930.

The intensification of the war in China from the early 1930s put an end to this extraordinary history of socialist translating, publishing, and writing in Japan. But its effects lingered into the post-war period, and endured as a base upon which later developments in Marxist thought and organization occurred in Japan.

### Trotsky and his *The Bolsheviki and World Peace*

Less than six months after Japan accepted unconditional surrender in August 1945, Marxist books began to reappear, and in 1946 several dozen Marxist books were published and thousands of trade unions were organized, even more rapidly than in the 1920s. It could be argued that Japan's post-war history began with this renewed upsurge in Marxist publications and explosive development in the labor movement. It represented a kind of continuity with the mid-1930s, but there was one difference. From the 1920s to the mid-1930s vast amounts of non-Leninist or anti-Stalinist books were also translated and published. In contrast to this, during the decade or so after the end of the Pacific War, such Marxist books were rarely published. Trotsky's works were the most notable example of this omission.<sup>17</sup> This is because during more than a decade after the end of the Second World War, world Marxism, including in Japan, was almost totally dominated by Stalin and Stalinism.

It is little known that the first Japanese translation of a book by the Bolshevik leadership after the 1917 Russian Revolution was in fact not Lenin's but Trotsky's, namely, his *The Bolsheviki and World Peace*, published in Japanese as *Kagekiha to Sekai Heiwa* in May

---

to maximize its chances of remaining in circulation.

17 The only exception in this period was Yamanishi Eiichi's translations of Trotsky's works (*The Problems of the Chinese Revolution*, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, and *What Next: Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*), who was the first Trotskyist to emerge in post-war Japan. As will be described, in Japan's pre-war period those who translated Trotsky's works were either non-Trotskyists or even non-Marxists. In contrast, in the post-war period (at least until the 1990s) those who translated Trotsky's works were largely Trotskyists, or at any rate, anti-Stalinist Marxists. Such a dramatic shift of translating agents of Trotsky's literature from the pre-war period to the post-war period obviously reflected the change in the political situation between the two periods.

1918.<sup>18</sup> The abovementioned bibliography of Marxist publications in pre-war Japan compiled by Kubo does not include it.<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, Trotsky was the preeminent leader, alongside Lenin, of the October Revolution. Both were regarded worldwide as the chiefs of the Soviet government and the Bolshevik party. Japanese intellectuals and socialists took the same view.<sup>20</sup> Thus after the 1917 Revolution succeeded, people naturally wanted to know their ideas and translate materials that conveyed them. Responding to this demand, Murofuse Kōshin, a national liberal and journalist in the Taishō era (1912–1926), translated into Japanese the English translation of *The Bolsheviks and World Peace*, published in the United States in 1918. (See Fig. 1.)

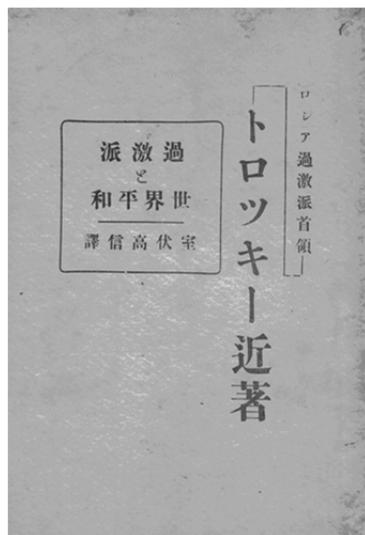


Fig. 1 Cover of the Japanese version of Trotsky's *The Bolsheviks and World Peace* from 1918

To tell the truth, when Trotsky wrote this book he was not yet a Bolshevik, and so its original title was *Der Krieg und die Internationale* (War and the International), first pub-

18 Trotsky 1918a, 1918b.

19 Kubo's list includes only two Marxism-related books published in 1918. Likewise, it does not include the Japanese translation of Trotsky's *From October to Brest-Litovsk* (1919), published in 1920. See Trotsky 1920.

20 Between 1918 and 1923 Japanese intellectuals and journalists discussed both Lenin and Trotsky as a pair. See, for example, Anonymous 1921; Murofuse Kōshin 1921; Nobori Shomu 1918; Yamakawa Hitoshi 1920, 1921. Even in 1925, when Trotsky had already fallen from power in the USSR, Murofuse Kōshin wrote: "the November Revolution would not have occurred without both Lenin and Trotsky. And also, in the absence of either of them the Revolution would not have occurred" (Murofuse Kōshin 1925, 287).

lished in German in late 1914.<sup>21</sup> But when the October Revolution achieved victory and Trotsky's name became famous worldwide, the American left journalist, Lincoln Joseph Steffens, translated the book into English and the title was changed to one perceived as having greater popular appeal. Steffens's translation was one of very few works by Bolshevik leaders in English at the time when Murofuse translated it into Japanese. Trotsky's book was critical to Japanese readers understanding the perspective of Bolshevik leaders of the time. Accordingly, its publication in Japanese carried a cover page with the sub-heading 'the latest book by Russia's Bolshevik chief Trotsky', as can be seen on the right-hand side of the image above.

In addition to Murofuse's translation, the book, or some parts of it, was translated and published in five different journals.<sup>22</sup> Since there were no communists per se in Japan at the time, it was largely bourgeois intellectuals and nationalists who translated and published this revolutionary book. For example, in his short introduction to a partial translation of *The Bolsheviks and World Peace*, Oka Teiji, a liberal nationalist, wrote:

This piece is a digest of Trotsky's book (*The Bolsheviks and World Peace*). Needless to say, whether we bring down Bolshevism or improve it, first of all we have to understand what Bolshevism is. I will be happy if this piece can contribute to comprehension of what Bolshevism is.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, Japanese intellectuals had some knowledge of "Bolshevism," above all via Trotsky, and perhaps ironically, via a book he wrote in his non-Bolshevik days.

This was, however, actually not a matter of irony. It was precisely Trotsky's views on peace and revolution in his 1914 book that had become the commonly shared agenda of Russian revolutionary workers, peasants, and soldiers, as well as of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, by 1917. Lenin and the Bolsheviks had previously adopted quite a different viewpoint on peace and revolution. When the First World War erupted, they had adopted a position of so-called revolutionary defeatism, insisting that in this imperialist war the defeat of one's own country would be the least of all evils. Thus they considered Trotsky's 1914 view – that struggle for peace and an immediate truce would bring the working masses to the revolutionary struggle for power – as a misguided and non-revolutionary pacifist position. However, events in Europe progressed along the lines of Trotsky's prediction, especially in Russia. The Russian working masses and soldiers enthusiastically demanded immediate truce and peace, and finally overthrew the Tsarist regime. So Lenin

---

21 Trotsky 1914.

22 *Sinshakai* (May 1918); *Nippon Keizai-shinshi* 23.3–9 (March–August 1918); *Rinri Kōen-shū* 190 (June 1918); *Dainippon* 5.6 (June 1918); *Demokurasi* (December 1919).

23 *Dai-nippon* 5.6 (June 1918), 45.

and the Bolsheviks changed their minds and accepted Trotsky's political perspectives. Thus Trotsky's 1914 book, even if written before he turned to Bolshevism, in fact does presciently capture the Bolshevik position on peace and revolution after early 1917.<sup>24</sup>

Many of Trotsky's books and articles were subsequently translated and discussed among Japanese Marxists and progressive intellectuals. Most of his key works published before 1927 in Russia were translated into Japanese; for example, *From October to Brest-Litovsk* (1919), *Literature and Revolution* (1923), *Problems of Everyday Life* (1923), *On Lenin* (1924), *The Lessons of October* (1924), *Toward Socialism or Capitalism?* (1925), *Where is Britain Going?* (1925), and *Europe and America* (1926). His literary and cultural books in particular were ardently translated and discussed.

### Internal and International Impacts of the Japanese Translation of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*

The most unique thought of Trotsky's is, of course, his theory of permanent revolution. But his books and articles that discuss this theory were almost wholly untranslated and unpublished in pre-war Japan.<sup>25</sup> Instead, his theories and views on literature and culture had a massive influence on Japanese communists and progressive intellectuals. For example, his *Literature and Revolution* was published in Russia in 1923, and its second edition, which additionally included his speech about the Communist literature policy, was published in 1924. Shigemori Tadashi, a Japanese left journalist (who later became an anti-communist), translated the book from the original Russian into Japanese in 1925.<sup>26</sup> The speech by Trotsky included in the second edition was also further translated in 1927.<sup>27</sup> As already mentioned, the full-fledged introduction of Marxism into Japan occurred in combination with

---

24 For details on this point, see Nishijima Sakae (Morita Seiya) 1991b; Nishijima Sakae (Morita Seiya) 1995.

25 The exceptions were "Rōdōsha Shikken no Yoki" (The prospects of the proletarian dictatorship), *Heimin* 16 (June 1918) and "Roshia Kakumei no Keizaiteki Kiso" (The economic foundation of the Russian Revolution), which was a translation of the introduction to Trotsky's *1905* and was included in Kaji Ryūichi 1925. And the partial English translation of Trotsky's *Results and Prospects* (originally published in Russia in 1906), *Our Revolution* (published in 1918), was known among some Japanese intellectuals such as Murofuse and Kawakami Hajime, the most prominent Japanese Marxist economist, so in the early 1920s they favorably discussed Trotsky's revolutionary theory. See Murofuse Kōshin 1920; Kawakami Hajime 1922. But their examples were exceptional in pre-war Japan.

26 Trotsky 1925a. Parts of this book were also translated in several leftist journals and books: *Kaizō* (February 1924); *Shinjin* (July 1925); *Bungei Sensen* (August 1925), (May–September 1926); Okazawa Hidetora 1930.

27 *Bungei Sensen* (June 1927); Trotsky 1930c.

a massive hunger for modern and sophisticated culture among Japanese working people. Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* satisfied both. So, around this time, many proletarian writers and communist literary critics eagerly introduced and discussed his theorizing. Also, Trotsky's *Problems of Everyday Life*, first published in Russia in 1923, with a second edition in 1924, was translated into Japanese in 1925 (twice) and in 1927.<sup>28</sup> These books similarly impressed Japanese socialists and other progressive cultural intellectuals.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1924 and 1928 Trotsky's theories and views on literature and culture became "a kind of fashionable mode."<sup>30</sup> Trotsky's nonsectarian literary theory, with its notion of "fellow-travelers" of communism, was an antidote to the cultural sectarianism that Japanese communists of the day tended to fall into. "Fellow-travelers" refers to people who, although not communists nor dedicated followers of communism, are passive or semi-passive sympathizers and indirect recipients of the Revolution and of Soviet power. Trotsky looked upon cultural fellow-travelers as valuable aides to socialist cultural construction in the transitional period in a backward country like Russia. He opposed, often fiercely, the more sectarian literary theory of Lunacharsky and Bukharin.<sup>31</sup> Trotsky instead insisted upon the necessity of the relative autonomy of art and literature from the leadership of the Party and Marxism. As he wrote in 1923:

The Marxian method affords an opportunity to estimate the development of the new art, to trace all its sources, to help the most progressive tendencies by a critical illumination of the road, but it does not do more than that. Art must make its own way and by its own means. The Marxian methods are not the same as the artistic. The Party leads the proletariat but not the processes of history. There are domains in which the Party leads, directly and imperatively. There are domains in which it only cooperates. There are, finally, domains in which it only orients itself. The domain of art is not one in which the Party is called upon to command.<sup>32</sup>

This viewpoint was particularly important since soon the Stalinist bureaucratic control over art, literature, and other fields of culture would come to dominate in Soviet society

---

28 Trotsky 1925b, 1925c, 1927. Trotsky began to write a special introduction for the Japanese version of *Voprosy vyta* (*Problems of Everyday Life*) in 1925, but this piece was not completed and remains in his archives at the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

29 For example, Tsuchida Kyōson, a liberal critic and philosopher in the Taishō era, went into the details of Trotsky's *Problems of Everyday Life* in 1925. Tsuchida Kyōson 1933.

30 Shida Noboru 1990, 72.

31 Works by Lunacharsky, Bukharin, and Volonsky on literature and culture were also translated into Japanese between the mid-1920s and the early 1930s. Lunacharsky and Bukharin opposed Trotsky, but Volonsky stood with him.

32 Trotsky 2005, 179.

(and then, more or less, in the communist parties around the world), and alongside it any semblance of critical spirit would be snuffed out.

It is interesting to note that Trotsky's literary theory also affected Miyamoto Kenji's view of modern Japanese literature from the late 1920s to the early 1930s.<sup>33</sup> Miyamoto led the Japanese Communist Party for a long period from the late 1950s. But the young Miyamoto was one of the Marxists greatly impressed by Trotsky's literary theory. Above all Miyamoto was fascinated by Trotsky's views on "fellow-travelers (*dōhan-sha*)."<sup>34</sup> He found here the possibility of Marxist but nonsectarian criteria for assessing modern bourgeois literature in Japan.<sup>34</sup>

Trotsky's literary influence was not restricted to Japanese intellectuals. Because a number of Japanese translations, including Trotsky's, were exported to China, and many Chinese intellectuals of the day were able to read Japanese, the impact of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* spread among Chinese revolutionary circles via its Japanese translations. For example, Lu Xun, the most prominent Chinese revolutionary writers, was greatly influenced by the book. Lu bought its Japanese translation in August 1925 and often quoted from it, even translating part of it into Chinese.<sup>35</sup> Like Miyamoto, Lu placed much value on Trotsky's theory of "fellow-travelers," because he considered himself a "fellow-traveler" of the Chinese revolutionary movement. He wrote, "Trotsky is a critic who profoundly comprehends literature."<sup>36</sup> Lu was further impressed by Trotsky's following view.

When one speaks of revolutionary art, two kinds of artistic phenomena are meant: the works whose themes reflect the Revolution, and the works which are not connected with the Revolution in theme, but are thoroughly imbued with it, and are colored by the new consciousness arising out of the Revolution. These are phenomena which quite evidently belong, or could belong, in entirely different planes.<sup>37</sup>

Lu thought that people "thoroughly imbued with revolution" or "thoroughly imbued with internal consciousness of revolution" should be called *kakumei-jin* (the revolutionists), which was the term Shigemori used in his translation of Trotsky's book.<sup>38</sup> For Lu, Sun Yat-sen, Lenin, and Trotsky were all *kakumei-jin*.

---

33 Shida Noboru 1988.

34 For details on this point, see Shida Noboru 1990.

35 Nagahori Yūzō 2011. According to Nagahori, Lu bought other Japanese translated books by Trotsky.

36 Nagahori 2011, 23.

37 Trotsky 2005, 187.

38 Nagahori 2011, 30–36.

## The Rise of Stalinism and the Continuing Translation of Trotsky

As we have seen, Trotsky's literary and other thoughts had some influence on Japanese communists and other leftist literary critics. But when Trotsky and his Left Opposition comrades were expelled as anti-Party elements from the Russian Communist Party in 1927, traces of Trotsky's influences were quickly obliterated from the writings and thoughts of Japanese communists. And like elsewhere in the world, with the rise of Stalinism, Trotsky began to be violently criticized by the Japanese communists.

For example, Katayama Sen, a Japanese leader in the Comintern, who was staying in the USSR at the time, repeatedly attacked him in several Japanese journals.<sup>39</sup> Katayama had previously been a close friend of Trotsky's. When Trotsky stayed as an exile in the United States for a temporary period in early 1917, Katayama, who had been there since 1914, collaborated with him to prepare to publish an English-language Marxist journal called *The Class Struggle*.<sup>40</sup> The journal was actually issued from July 1917 after Trotsky had left America. When Katayama moved to Soviet Russia from America in December 1921, Trotsky and other Bolshevik leaders went out of their way to meet and greet him at the train station.<sup>41</sup> But as Trotsky's reputation declined from the mid-1920s, Katayama disassociated himself from Trotsky, and when Trotsky was expelled from the Party, Katayama joined the attacks on him.<sup>42</sup>

But, even after 1928, people in some circles continued to, though more or less critically, translate his books and articles. This was in spite of no Trotskyist group existing in pre-war Japan, nor oppositional communists. It is likely that Japan was the only country in the world where, even though a vast body of Marxist literatures circulated, and a number of communists resided, not a single Trotskyist or Left Oppositionist appeared among the ranks of the communists. Nonetheless, Trotsky's books and articles continued to be translated by three broad groups.

The first was the Rōnō Group. As mentioned, the Rōnō Group was politically more or less loyal to the Comintern, but organizationally independent of it. So even as the communists all at once attacked Trotsky, some members of the Rōnō Group still felt

---

39 Katayama Sen 1928a, 1928b, 1928c.

40 Katayama Sen 1967, 301.

41 Watanabe Haruo 1969, 115–116.

42 To his credit, although Katayama attacked Trotsky in the Stalinist style, he also had the honesty to write: "It was Leon Trotsky who constructed the new Russia by organizing the Red Army, the main pillar of Soviet Russia. When you think of revolutionary Russia, you have to call to mind Trotsky beside Lenin" (Katayama Sen 1928a, 159). In the same year Trotsky severely criticized Katayama in his article "Who is leading the Comintern today?". See Trotsky 1928, 251–252.

considerable sympathy toward him and his ideas. Some even translated him into Japanese when his new books appeared abroad. For example, Trotsky's autobiography, *My Life* (1930), was translated by Aono Suekichi, a member of the Rōnō Group. This translation was published as two separate volumes in Japan in 1930.<sup>43</sup> In his preface to the first volume, Aono wrote:

Someone will say Trotsky is an originator of so-called "Trotskyism," a traitor of Leninism, a reactionary who was expelled from Soviet Russia by Stalin, and so on. And they will say that someone who translates a book of such a man must be a follower of "Trotskyism" and is trying to help his reactionary work. [...] To speak frankly, that is quite wrong. I am neither a follower of so-called Trotskyism nor a "friend" of his in any sense. But that is one thing. The fact that this book vividly describes the internal dynamism of the development of the revolution is another.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, Aono wrote in his preface to the second volume that: "my expectation that my year's work will substantially contribute to studying and understanding revolution will be satisfied, I believe, by the strong fascinating power of this book."<sup>45</sup>

By the late 1930s, however, even among members of the Rōnō Group, such a high estimation of Trotsky gradually disappeared. For example, when *The Revolution Betrayed*, one of his most famous books published after his exile, was translated collectively by Arahata Kanson and other members of the Rōnō Group, in his preface Arahata wrote:

What I want to clarify here is that among our translators there is no commonly shared opinion about the book in terms of its worth or faults. Perhaps each of them has their own views. [...] For myself, to be sure, I think that the kinds of internal details of the USSR that Trotsky revealed and attacked in his characteristically brilliant style, and in the bitter and ironical tone of his book, were not totally based on wrong-headed speculation or intentional fabrication and distortion, and at least some of his discussion points out the disease and deficiencies of the USSR. But, nevertheless, in the end I was not able to agree with his assertions. [...] In short, no matter how much I take Trotsky's book in a spirit of goodwill, my individual impression is that Trotsky's ideas and his way of thinking about the real situations of socialist development of the Soviet state don't go a single step beyond mere abstraction.<sup>46</sup>

From this, we can see that Stalinism's effects had influenced not only the communists but also other Marxists in Japan by 1937. But the fact that several members of the Rōnō

---

43 *Jiko Bakuro* (Revealing myself), published in July; Trotsky 1930a, and *Kakumei Razō* (The real portrait of the Revolution), published in December; Trotsky 1930b.

44 Trotsky 1930a, 5.

45 Trotsky 1930b, 6.

46 Trotsky 1937d, 295–298.

Group including Arahata did translate *The Revolution Betrayed*, shows that the group at least had not turned completely Stalinist.

The second group was a non-Marxist, non-communist mixed group of intellectuals and journalists, whether nationalist, liberal, or social democrat. They were freer from the influence of Stalinism than the Rōnō Group, and translated Trotsky's writings for different purposes. Some were political (e.g., demeaning the reputation of the USSR), others were out of intellectual curiosity. There were also journalistic motivations.<sup>47</sup> Koike Shirō, a nationalist social democrat, translated Trotsky's *On Lenin* in 1931. In his preface, Koike wrote that

from the point of view of the current Communist leadership, Trotsky appears to be an anti-communist and a formidable people's enemy who endangers the revolution. [...] But whether he is right or wrong has no relevance here. What Trotsky has written in his book reveals such a human face of Lenin, with whom he collaborated over many years, that it should be deemed worthy of the full-hearted gratitude of human history.<sup>48</sup>

Like the Rōnō Group, Koike, though keeping his distance from political problems surrounding Trotsky, valued the literary significance of his book. But, unlike the Rōnō Group, this second group maintained a relatively neutral position on Trotsky even in the late 1930s. For example, Miura Hayao, a liberal intellectual who studied Italian literature, also translated Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* in 1937 but, in contrast to Arahata, wrote the following in his preface:

Because so many people discuss the internal situation of the USSR in so many different ways, I can never fix upon a criterion for judgement of it. [...] But there is no more concrete revelation of lies and fabrications about the USSR than this book. [...] On top of this, unusually for him, Trotsky has refrained from any ideological propaganda, and has calmly and objectively written this book. This fact basically ensures its universality.<sup>49</sup>

Typically for this second non-aligned group of intellectuals, Miura's assessment of Trotsky's book is couched in language that conveys a sense of rationality and objectivity in his discussion, rather than any impression of political support.

The third group that translated Trotsky's writings was a group of state officials and semi-official persons. We might wonder why people involved in Japan's militarist and semi-fascist regime would want to translate Trotsky's writings. But the translations were

---

47 For example, one of the most popular Japanese journals, *Bungei Shunjū*, printed a translation from the original Russian of part of Trotsky's *History of Russian Revolution* (1930), first published in English in 1932. See Trotsky 1931b.

48 Trotsky 1931a, 1.

49 Trotsky 1937b, 271–272.

for knowledge-gathering purposes: official announcements of the Soviet government frequently distorted and overestimated the real situation in the country, so Trotsky's writings helped Japanese state officials understand actual conditions in Soviet Russia.

Above all, it was the South Manchuria Railway Research Department (Mantetsu Chōsabu)<sup>50</sup> that played an important role in the translation of Trotsky's work. The institute was established by Gotō Shinpei, the first director general of the South Manchuria Railway, in 1907 as a semi-official research center in Northeast Asia. With the expansion of the Japanese incursion into the area, the institute's range of work was widened and extended. To the degree that the repression of Marxists by police became harsher in Japan, many converted leftists entered the Research Department because they had intimate knowledge of not only Marxism but also the Russian language. They actively engaged in the translation of Trotsky and other Marxists.<sup>51</sup>

### Total Suppression of Marxism and the Moscow Trials

Because of the fierce repression of the Japanese Communist Party, particularly after the 1931 Manchurian Incident, a vast number its leaders (e.g., Sano Manabu and Nabeyama Sadachika) and rank-and-file members disavowed communism and converted (*tenkō*) into followers of Japanese nationalism and the emperor system. The Party was totally crushed and practically ceased to exist by the mid-1930s. In line with that, from the mid-1930s, Marxist publishing activities rapidly declined. Around fifty Marxism-related books and pamphlets were still published in 1936, and less than thirty such items appeared in 1937. By 1938 this number dwindled to less than ten. A few communists who unyieldingly refused to *tenkō* were brutally tortured and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, often dying as a result of torture or illness.

One such victim was Iwata Yoshimichi, a member of the central committee of the Communist Party, who was arrested and tortured for several days by the Special Higher

---

50 For details see Kusayanagi Taizō 1979.

51 Between 1930 and 1937 in several journals published by the South Manchuria Railway Research Department Trotsky's articles were translated: "Sutarin no Seisaku Hangeki: Tou no Genjō to Sayoku Hantaiha no Kadai" (Against Stalin's policies: The situation of the left opposition and its tasks), *Sovieta Rempō Jijō* 1.4 (1930); "Stalin to Shina Kakumei" (Stalin and the Chinese revolution), *Sovieta Rempō Jijō* 2.6 (1931); "Shin Ziguzagu Seisaku to Shin Kiki" (New zigzags and new dangers), *Sovieta Rempō Jijō* 2.10 (1931); "Sovieta Keizai no Kiki" (The Soviet economy in danger), *Sovieta Rempō Jijō* 4.2 (1933); "Torotsuki no Kirofu Jiken Hihan: Sutaain no Kanryō Seiji to Kiurofu no Ansatsu" (The Stalinist bureaucracy and the Kirov assassination), *Tōa* (March 1935); "Dai-yon Intanashonaru to Sorenpo" (The Fourth International and the Soviet Union), *Sovieta Rempō Jijō* 8.2 (1937).

Police (*tokkō*) and then killed in November 1932. He was just thirty-four years of age. Kobayashi Takiji, the famous and talented proletarian writer, was arrested and tortured awfully by the *tokkō* on February 20, 1933, and on the same day murdered. He was aged twenty-nine. Noro Eitarō, a brilliant and prominent Marxist economist, though he was a tuberculosis patient when arrested, was mercilessly tortured by police and died in hospital in 1934. He was thirty-three. Iijima Kimi, a factory worker and leader of the trade union movement, was arrested in 1933. She was infected with tuberculosis in jail and died in 1935, aged twenty-four. On her make-up compact, found among her possessions after her death, were inscribed two words: “struggle or death.”<sup>52</sup> The total numbers of murdered communists during the crackdown amounted to roughly 1,700 before the end of the Second World War.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, between 1936 and 1938 public interest in Trotsky greatly increased in Japanese society. This was largely due to the three Moscow Trials held in the USSR that shook Japan and the rest of the world. As is well known, the show trials led many Bolshevik leaders and communist activists to annihilation. Most of them were falsely condemned as anti-revolutionary Trotskyists and agents of German fascism or Western imperialism. At the First Moscow Trial, held in August 1936, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Mrachkovsky, Ivan Smirnov, and other defendants were sentenced to death and were immediately shot. At the Second Moscow Trial, held in January 1937, Radek, Piatakov, Sokolnikov, and other less famous defendants went on trial, and thirteen of them were shot. Radek was spared death on account that he was to be used as an informant against other Trotskyists and Right Oppositionists. At the Third Moscow Trial, held in March 1938, Bukharin, Rykov, Rakovsky, Yagoda, and other defendants went on trial. Apart from three defendants, the rest were shot (the three who were not shot died in prison in 1941).

How did the Japanese public and intellectuals react to the trials?<sup>54</sup> During the first trial and its aftermath many intellectuals, right and left, though perplexed and confused, still vaguely believed the prosecutors’ allegations, not least because all the defendants confessed their “guilt” at the trial. However, during the second Trial many intellectuals, above all nationalists, changed their minds and came to consider the whole trial a setup since the prosecutor had insisted that the defendants had collaborated with Japanese high officials. While Japanese left and semi-left intellectuals still tended to believe the proceedings of the second Trial, Japanese nationalists indignantly attacked it. For example, Nakaba Kameichi, a journalist and nationalist, wrote in March 1937:

---

52 See [https://www.jcp.or.jp/akahata/aik4/2005-08-18/2005081812faq\\_01\\_0.html](https://www.jcp.or.jp/akahata/aik4/2005-08-18/2005081812faq_01_0.html).

53 See <https://www.jcp.or.jp/akahata/aik4/2005-02-17/2005-02-17faq.html>. None of the criminals responsible for these murders were ever punished even in post-war Japan.

54 For full details, see Nishijima Sakae (Morita Seiya) 1991a.

The allegation [at the second Trial] that Japanese officials incited the defendants to destroy the West-Siberian Railway, and overturn troop trains in Soviet Russia, was an unbelievably fantastic fabrication. [...] Their [the defendants'] confessions [...] are no less than a mean trick to instigate anti-Japanese enthusiasm in Russia.<sup>55</sup>

In these circumstances, public interest in Trotsky, the man who was described as *the* mastermind behind all the defendants at the trials, naturally heightened in Japan. In the pages of the popular newspapers (the *Asahi*, *Mainichi*, and *Yomiuri*), reports of the three Moscow Trials often quoted Trotsky's comments. Trotsky's open letter about the first trial was translated in a Japanese journal in 1936.<sup>56</sup> In addition, between 1936 and 1938 a dozen of Trotsky's articles and statements about the Trials were translated and printed in Japanese journals.<sup>57</sup>

Almost everyone in Japan who criticized the Trials and the Stalinist regime was nationalist, national socialist, or ex-communist at this time. They did not have any political sympathy for Trotsky and his revolutionary ideas. However, there was just one person who not only strongly condemned the Trials and the Stalinist regime, but also defended Trotsky and his comrades. His name was Nobushima Eiichi, a militant anarcho-syndicalist.<sup>58</sup> Nobushima translated Trotsky's important pieces about the Trials and the character of the Soviet state,<sup>59</sup> and himself wrote several articles criticizing the Trials.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, he wrote the following letter in English to Alfred Rosmer, a member of the Commission of Inquiry of the Moscow Trial.<sup>61</sup>

Tokyo, May 9th, 1937

E. K. Nobushima

---

55 Natsuba Kameichi 1937, 27.

56 Trotsky 1936.

57 *Minsei* 276 (October 1936); *Nihon Hyōron* (December 1936); *Gaikoku no Sinbun to Zasshi* 372 (March 1937); *Serupan* (March 1937); *Nihon Hyōron* (April 1937); *Gaiji-keisatu-hō* 180 (July 1937); *Seikai-Ourai* (August 1937); *Soren-no-Chishiki*, published by Seinen-shobō (1937); *Kaizō* (June 1938); *Jikyoku-geppō* (June 1938).

58 For details of Nobushima, see Shida Noboru 1991.

59 For example, Trotsky 1937a.

60 Nobushima's articles criticizing the trials appeared in the following journals: *Gendai Shimbun Hiban* (October 1936); *Gendai Shimbun Hiban* (December 1936); *Gendai Shimbun Hiban* (February 1937); *Serupan* (March 1937); *Gendai Shimbun Hiban* (May 1937); *Nihon Hyōron* (June 1937); *Nihon Hyōron* (July 1937); *Jikyoku to Jimbutsu* (January 1938).

61 This letter is included in the Trotsky's Papers archive at the Hoover Institution, Houghton Library, T2: 15171–15172. Katō Tetsurō, a Marxist political scientist in Japan, discovered the letter in 1987. See Katō Tetsurō 1991.

Dear Comrade

I am an anarcho-syndicalist of long standing in Japan, and know your name and activity for a long time. I was once a reader of *La Verite* edited by you.

Since last August when the Trotskyite trial began in Moscow, I was truly [the] only one in Japan, who defended the Trotskyites and exposed the Stalinist intrigues. I have written many articles to prove that the Soviet system which is the last guarantee of the proletarian victory is being put in danger by the Stalinist bureaucracy. I based myself in my contention chiefly on materials supplied by *La Revolution Proletarienne*, edited by the Monatte-Louzon group. Some journals which printed my article were already sent to Finidori, one of the editors of the *Revol. Pro.* [...]

Of course, I will continue my work to defend the proletarian victims of the Stalinist bureaucracy and although I am not a Trotskyite, I will defend the Trotskyites as well as the anarcho-syndicalist victims, for both of them are condemned with the downfall of the Soviet regime, and its place taken by the bureaucracy.

In the sense, I want to be counted among those who are standing for an impartial inquiry on the trials of Moscow, and expect to receive regularly your bulletin on the progress of the inquiry. Of course, you are assured that a proper due to the expense of the inquiry will be vowed by me unconditionally. [...]

For more than five years I read now of the Trotskyite organs, I translated Trotsky's "Class Nature of the Soviet State" from its English edition published by Guy Aldred of Glasgow. If you are kind enough to inform me by return mail with the addresses of the publishing offices of Trotskyite organs in French, English, and German, which I understand.

I will be greatly obliged to you.

Yours fraternally for justice and truth,  
E. K. Nobushima

When Trotsky was assassinated by a Stalinist agent in August 1940, Nobushima wrote an obituary for him. While Nobushima paid his respects to this great Marxist, he disagreed, sometimes vehemently, with Trotsky's ideas, insisting that a new class relation quite different from the capitalist or feudal class relation had gradually developed in the USSR, and that the Fourth International, whose victory Trotsky had so strongly believed in, would face eternal difficulties.<sup>62</sup>

---

62 Nobushima Eiichi 1940, 107.

## The Final Phase, and Some Conclusions

From 1940 to the end of the Pacific War in August 1945, Marxist and any other oppositional thoughts and activities totally disappeared from Japan. Nevertheless, between 1940 and 1941, Trotsky's writings attacking Stalin and Stalinism sometimes appeared in translation in Japanese journals. Most prominently, Trotsky's *Stalin School of Falsification*, published with an introduction by Max Shachtman in the United States in 1937, was wholly translated and printed in several issues of the journal *Tōa Kaihō* [*Emancipation of Asia*] between 1940 and 1941.<sup>63</sup> Yet this serial translation was the last possible time any of Trotsky's work could be published.

After the Pacific War began in December 1941, the whole nation and its people were mobilized for war. The history of pre-war Marxism in Japan practically ended in 1941, but some Japanese Marxist intellectuals hid Marxist books in their ceilings or in closets, buried them in the garden, or retained only German texts, which Japanese policemen generally could not read. Some secretly continued to study Marxism and this is why, as previously mentioned, a second upsurge in Marxist publications occurred as soon as the war ended.

By way of conclusion, it is possible to summarize the basic features of the development of Marxism in pre-war Japan as follows. Under the law of uneven and combined development, Japanese intellectuals were forced to compress the modern Enlightenment stage of history, and the development of early socialist consciousness, into a short period of time, and under the same law, Japanese workers were forced to combine the need for modern culture and democracy with Marxism and Bolshevik communism. This condition gave the development of Japanese Marxism an explosive character. Reflecting this, publishing activity in relation to Marxist literature, in spite of harsh police repression, quickly reached a level that was close to the highest in the world.

But this law of combined development had another side. On the one hand, the law combined people's cultural and democratic needs with the ideologies of Marxism and communism, but, on the other hand, this circumstance politically weakened independent liberal and social democratic circles in Japanese society. The latter divided into two basic camps from the mid-1920s: a communist Marxist camp and a monarchist nationalist (or national socialist) camp. In Western countries there were broad and thick sedimentary layers of liberal and social democracy. These layers formed, on the one hand, political barriers against communism. On the other hand, they provided the underlying democratic and cultural foundations for communism. So, even if the communist surface layer was fractured, there were still more thick and strong layers of liberal and social democracy

---

63 Trotsky 1940–1941. The introduction by Max Shachtman was also translated in this journal.

underneath.<sup>64</sup> But in Japan these political layers of liberal and social democracy were very weak and very thin from the beginning. Moreover, almost intellectuals belonging to these categories were concurrent nationalists. This caused both the salience, and isolation, of Marxism in Japanese society. Moreover, as mentioned above, in the 1920s these layers divided into bipolar camps: communist Marxism and monarchist nationalism. So the Japanese communists who put away their doctrine (communism), instead of becoming liberal or social democrats, simply made a transition to nationalism or national socialism loyal to the emperor system. The fact that Japan's nationalism during wartime took on a facade of anti-Western imperialism contributed to the nationalist conversion of communists and socialists. Likewise, some Japanese communists who came to doubt Stalinism, instead of becoming oppositional communists like the Trotskyists, directly crossed over into the camp of monarchist nationalism.<sup>65</sup> This situation, in turn, further isolated Japanese communists and further facilitated their conversion.

Not only brutal repression by the Japanese state, but also these complex circumstances made possible the replacement of the explosive prosperity of Marxism with its total disappearance in an astonishingly short amount of time. Just as the Japanese state plunged into over-expansionist imperialism with very fragile economic foundations, Japanese intellectuals and workers rushed toward a Bolshevik communism with very weak political foundations. This explains both the explosive growth of Japanese Marxism from the early 1920s and its precipitous decline from the mid-1930s.

## References

- Anonymous. 1921. "Rēnin to Torotsukī no Rōdō-kumiai-ron" [Lenin and Trotsky on trade union], *Dōhō* (May), 6.
- Imoto Mitsuo. 2018. *Kome Sōdō toiu Taishō Demokurashii no Shimin Sensen* [The civil united front in the rice riot and Taishō democracy]. Tokyo: Gendaishichō-shinsha.
- Ishiko Yasukuni. 2008. *Rōnō-ha Marukusu-shugi: Riron, Hito, Rekishi* [*Rōnō Marxism: Its Theory, People and History*], vol. 1. Tokyo: Shakai-hyōron-sha.

---

64 The German fascists had to totally destroy these political layers from below, as well as from above, through the violent method of civil war in order to establish their totalitarian domination. And one of the main reasons why the German fascists adopted the aberrant policy of exterminating Jews was that they saw Jewish people as political, cultural, and economic nodes of these civil layers in European society. We can see this horrific policy as having the political purpose of shattering these historically piled up layers to pieces.

65 On this point, Japanese anarchists were no exception. For example, the above-mentioned Nobushima also converted the camp of Japan's nationalist imperialism in the early 1940s. See Nobushima Eiichi 1944.

- Kaji Ryūichi. 1925. *Kindai Roshia Shakai-shi Kenkyū* [A Study of the social history of modern Russia]. Tokyo: Dōjin-sha.
- Kanzaki Kiyoshi. 1971. *Jitsuroku Kōtoku Shūsui* [The true life of Kōtoku Shūsui]. Tokyo: Yomiuri-shimbun-sha.
- Katayama Sen. 1928a. “Torotsukī no Botsuraku” [The fall of Trotsky], *Keizai Ōrai* (April), 159–167.
- Katayama Sen. 1928b. “Torotsukī-ha no Inbō” [The conspiracy of Trotsky’s faction], *Bungei Sensen* (February), 86–89.
- Katayama Sen. 1928c. “Torotsukī-hantai-ha Zenpai su!” [The complete defeat of Trotsky’s faction], *Marukusu-shugi* 47 (March), 96–105.
- Katayama Sen. 1967. *Waga Kaisō* [My memoir], vol. 2. Tokyo: Tokuma-shoten.
- Katō Tetsurō. 1991. “Rekishi no Shinjitsu to Shinri eno Sekkin” [Approaching the facts and truth of history], *Ashikabi* 14 (February), 140–148.
- Kawakami Hajime. 1922. *Shakai Soshiki to Shakai Kakumei ni kansuru jakkan no Kōsatsu* [Some considerations on social organization and the social revolution], Tokyo: Kōbundō-shobō.
- Kōtoku Shūsui. 1952. *Teikokushugi: Nijūseiki no Kaibutsu* [Imperialism: The monster of the twentieth century]. Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten. First published 1901.
- Kōtoku Shūsui. 1953. *Shakaishugi Shinzui* [The essence of socialism]. Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten. First published in 1903.
- Kuroiwa Hisako. 2010. *Pan to Pen: Shakaishugisha Sakai Toshihiko to “Baibunsha” no Tatakai* [Bread and pen: Socialist Sakai Toshihiko and the struggle of “Baibunsha”]. Tokyo: Kōdan-sha.
- Kusayanagi Taizō. 1979. *Jitsuroku Mantetsu Chōshabu* [The real history of the South Manchuria Railway Research Department]. Tokyo: Asahi-shimbun-sha.
- Liu Mengyang. 2017. “Nihon Baikai no ‘Kjousan-tō Sengen’ Kan-yaku to Yakugo no Hensen: ‘Heimin’ kara ‘Musansha’ heno Utsurikawari wo Chūshin ni [Translation of *Manifesto of the Communist Party* into Chinese in Japanese media and evolution of its terms in translation: The transformation from ‘Heimin’ to ‘Musansha’], *Higashi-ajia Bunka Kōshō Kenkyū* 10 (March), 371–385.
- Murofuse Kōshin. 1920. “Puroretaria no Dokusai Seiji” [The dictatorship of the proletariat], *Hihyō* (November), 2–20.
- Murofuse Kōshin. 1921. “Sovieta Roshia” [Soviet Russia], *Kaizō* (March), 36–44.
- Murofuse Kōshin. 1925. Torotsukī no Eikyū-kakumei-ron [Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution], *Jiyūjin wa Kaku Kataru* [A free man speaks] (second edition). Tokyo: Hihyō-sha.
- Nagahori Yūzō. 2011. *Rojin to Torotsukī: Chūgoku ni okeru “Bungaku to Kakumei”* [Lu Xun and Trotsky: Literature and Revolution in China]. Tokyo: Heibon-sha.

- Natsuba Kameichi. 1937. "Sekishoku Daimaō Stalin wo Kataru" [Talking about Stalin, the red great satan], *Dainichi* 146 (March), 23–28.
- Nishijima Sakae (Morita Seiya). 1991a. "Nihonjin wa Mosukuwa Saiban wo dō mitaka?" [How did Japanese people see the Moscow trials?], *Ashikabi* 14 (February), 157–180.
- Nishijima Sakae (Morita Seiya). 1991b. "Dai-ichiji Taisen wo meguru Rēnin to Torotsukī" [Lenin and Trotsky on the First World War], *Ashikabi* 15 (August), 110–125.
- Nishijima Sakae (Morita Seiya). 1995. "Dai-ichiji Sekai Taisen to Torotsukī no 'Heiwa Kōryō'" [The First World War and Trotsky's "Peace Program"], *Torotsukī Kenkyū* 14 (February), 3–36.
- Nishijima Sakae (Morita Seiya). 2001. "Torotsukī no Nihon-ron" [Trotsky on Japan], *Torotsukī Kenkyū* 35 (July), 5–27.
- Nobori Shomu. 1918. "Rēnin to Torotsukī wo Ronjite Rokoku no Shōrai ni Oyobu" [Considering the future of Russia by discussing Lenin and Trotsky], *Shin-kōron* (May), 44–55.
- Nobushima Eiichi. 1940. "Torotsukī no Saigo" [The death of Trotsky], *Gekkan Roshia* 64 (October), 104–107.
- Nobushima Eiichi. 1944. "Dai-tōa-sensō no Seiji-teki sho-mondai" [The political problems of the Greater East Asian War], *Kokusai-hyōron* (October), 6–9.
- Okazawa Hidetora. 1930. *Sovēto Roshia Bungei Riron* [A literary theory of Soviet Russia]. Tokyo: Kamiya-shoten.
- Shida Noboru. 1988. "Torotsukī no Bungaku Riron" [Trotsky's theory of literature], *Ashikabi* 9 (April), 62–86.
- Shida Noboru. 1990. "Haiboku no Bungaku no Tanjō: Miyamoto Kenji to Torotsukī" [The birth of *A Defeated Literature*: Miyamoto Kenji and Trotsky], *Ashikabi* 13 (August), 72–85.
- Shida Noboru. 1991. "Torotsukī wo Yougoshita Nihonjin: Nobushima Eiichi no Hito to Shisō" [A Japanese who defended Trotsky: The person and ideas of Nobushima Eiichi], *Ashikabi* 14 (February), 149–156.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1918a. *Kagekiha to Sekai Heiwa*. Tokyo: Uedaya. Translation by Murofuse Kōshin of *The Bolsheviks and World Peace* (1918b below).
- Trotsky, Leon. 1918b. *The Bolsheviks and World Peace*, trans. Lincoln J. Steffens. New York: Boni & Liveright.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1920. *Roshia Kakumei Jikki* [The real history of the Russian Revolution]. Tokyo: Nihon-hyōron-sha. Translation by Kayahara Taijirō of *From October to Brest-Litovsk*, New York: Socialist Publication Society, 1919.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1925a. *Bungaku to Kakumei* [Literature and revolution]. Tokyo: Kaizōsha. Translation by Shigemori Tadashi of *Literatura i revoliutsiia*, Moscow: Krasnaia nov', 1923.

- Trotsky, Leon. 1925b. *Musansha Bunka-ron* [A theory of proletarian culture]. Tokyo: Juhōkaku. Translation by Mutō Naoharu of *Problems of Life*, trans. by Z. A. Yengero-va, intr. N. Minsky, London: Methuen.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1925c. *Roshia Kakumeika no Seikatsu-ron* [Russian revolutionary's theory of life]. Tokyo: Jigyō-no-nihon-sha-shuppanbu. Translation by Nishimura Jirō of *Vo-prosy byta*, Moscow, 1924.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1927. *Tenkanki no Bunka* [Culture in the transitional period]. Tokyo: Chūgai-bunkakyōkai. Translation by Oka Issaku of *Problems of Life*, trans. Z. A. Vengerova, intr. N. Minsky, London: Methuen, 1924.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1928. "Who is leading the Comintern today?," *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1928–29)*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981, 227–265.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1930a. *Jiko Bakuro* [Revealing myself]. Tokyo: Arusu-sha. Translation by Aono Suekichi of the first half of *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography*, New York: S. Scribner's Sons, 1930.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1930b. *Kakumei Razō* [The real portrait of the revolution]. Tokyo: Arusu-sha. Translation by Aono Suekichi of the second half of *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography*, New York: S. Scribner's Sons, 1930.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1931a. *Renin no Yokogao* [The portrait of Lenin]. Tokyo: Shunyōdō. Translation by Koike Shirō (details unknown).
- Trotsky, Leon. 1931b. "Nigatsu Kakumei no Shinsō: Kōtei botsuraku-kyoku" [The truth of the February revolution: The death agony of the monarchy], *Bungei Shunjū* (February), 114–120.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1936. "Noruwei Hōshō eno Kōkaijō" [Open letter to the justice minister of Norway], *Serupan (Serpent)* (December), 78–79.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1937a. "Sovieta Kokka no Kaikyūteki Seikaku" [The class nature of the Soviet state], *Nihon Hyōron* (April), 305–315. Translation by Nobushima Eiichi.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1937b. *Stalin Seiken wo Abaku* [Revealing Stalin's government]. Tokyo: Shinchō-bunko. Translation by Miura Hayao of *The Revolution Betrayed*, trans. Max Eastman, New York: Doubleday, 1937.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1937c. *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman, vol. 1. New York: Simon and Shuster. First published in 1932.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1937d. *Uragirareta Kakumei* [Revolution betrayed]. Tokyo: Kaizō-sha. Translation by Arahata Kanson et al. of *The Revolution Betrayed*, trans. Max Eastman, New York: Doubleday, 1937.
- Trotsky, Leon. 1940–1941. "Soren-pō no Kokka Kōzō oyobi sono Seikaku" [The state structure and its character of the Soviet Union], *Tōa Kaihō* (December 1940–June 1941). Translation of *The Stalin School of Falsification*, translator unknown.

- Trotsky, Leon. 1979. "On Guard for the World Revolution," *How the Revolution Armed: The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky, Vol. 1: The Year 1918*, trans. By Brian Pearce, London: New Park Publications, 515–545.
- Trotsky, Leon. 2005. *Literature and Revolution*, ed. William Keach, trans. Rose Strunsky. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.
- Trotsky, Leo. 1914. *Der Krieg und die Internationale* [War and the International]. Zurich: "Borba."
- Tsuchida Kyōson. 1933. "Torotsukī no Katei Shakaika-ron" [Trotsky's view of the socialization of the household], *Kekkon-ron* [On marriage], Tokyo: Daiichi-shobō, 164–208.
- Watanabe Haruo. 1969. *Omoide no Kakumeika-tachi* [My reminiscences of revolutionaries]. Tokyo: Hōga-shobō.
- Yamakawa Hitoshi. 1920. "Kakumeika toshite no Rēnin to Torotsukī" [Lenin and Trotsky as revolutionaries], *Kaizō* (September), 2–36.
- Yamakawa Hitoshi. 1921. *Rēnin to Torotsukī* [Lenin and Trotsky]. Tokyo: Kaizō-sha.