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RUSSIA AND RUSSIANS IN POPULAR JAPANESE LITERATURE IN THE FIRST HALF OF 20TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The image and perception of one country in another have a huge meaning in bilateral relations of these countries. On the one hand, the existing image of a country reflects the nature of established relations on various levels. On the other hand, it can have an influence on them. The perception of Russia in Japan in the first half of the 20th century is very complicated and consists of numerous contradictions as in different periods Russia was an enemy, a friend, a partner or a friend and a potential enemy at the same time. One of the most recent methods of studying the nation's opinion is to analyse national literature more closely. Japanese literature in Meiji (1868 – 1912), Taisho (1912 – 1926) and early Showa (1926 – 1989) periods is full of links to Western countries including Russia. The reason is simple. Japanese society tried to learn and adopt the best ideas from Europe and the USA to develop and enrich their own industry and culture. Therefore, the Japanese daily life was loaded with the things which came from the West. The aim of this article is to understand what Russia was known for among the Japanese society in this period.

Key words: Japanese literature in the first half of the 20th century, image of Russia, Japanese-Russian relations.

Famous Japanese literati at the beginning of the 20th century were not only very talented, but they also were very well paid for their works. The sales of a certain newspaper depended directly on the writers, so many editors were hiring the most famous authors and published their writings [1. P. 46]. That means that a lot of people had access to them and the ideas and views in the novels were widely spread. In this research seventeen works of seven most famous authors of that period (such as Kikuchi Kan, Natsume Soseki, Nagai Kafu, Tanizaki Juichiro, Takeo Arishima, Saneatsu Musyanokoji, Yasunari Kawabata) and numerous short

stories of Ryunosuke Akutagawa were searched for any mention of Russia or the Russians. All of the writings were published within the period of 1905–1939, after the Russian-Japanese War ended and before the World War II started.

Eleven of the seventeen novels mention Russia and almost every novel mentions the West (except “The Izu Dancer” by Yasunari Kawabata) and among 26 short stories and three essays of Ryunosuke Akutagawa analysed, eighteen short stories and all the essays contain links to the West and seven short stories and one essay mentions Russia.

Table 1.

The total number of links regarding Russia and the West in the Japanese literature

	Russia, Russians	Western countries
Total number of links	56	383
Among them:		
Russian literature	28	
Russian-Japanese War	16	
Russian art and science	5	
Russian politicians	2	
Nikorai-do (Holy Resurrection Cathedral)	2	
Japanese-Russian relations	2	
Russian cities	1	

The table above presents that about 13.5 % of all the links are about Russia and the Russians, which shows that Russia took a significant place in the Japanese society mind. Also, it is important to mention that among characters met in novels who were “non-Japanese”, the Russians are being described in the most

detailed way compared to others. Moreover, one of the short stories of Ryunosuke Akutagawa named «Woodcock» is completely devoted to the Russian reality and the main characters there are Ivan Turgenev and Leo Tolstoy. Further we consider closer the content of the links regarding Russia and the Russians.

The highest number of links is related to Russian writers and Russian literature which indicates that Japanese society's interest lay mostly in this sphere. One interesting fact is that a big number of the links included in this group is related to L. Tolstoy (10), which points out that the writer was very popular among the Japanese reading public in the first half of 20th century.

The other writers are mentioned as follows: Dostoevsky (5), Gorky (3), Turgenev, Chekhov, Gogol, Andreev, Chirikov (one time each) and also Russian literature was mentioned as itself without any correlations with specific authors four times. All of these writers are mentioned as outstanding people or as authors of their best works (Dostoevsky works: "The House of the Dead" in Akutagawa's "Monkey", "Crime and Punishment" and "The Brothers Karamazov" in Akutagawa's "Spinning Gears"; the novel of Turgenev "Fathers and Sons" in Kikuchi Kan's "Madame Pearl"). Dostoevsky's name is mentioned five times, but all of the links are placed exclusively in the works of Akutagawa, who gives the Russian author a very good estimation in the following lines: "of course, I loved Dostoevsky even ten years ago" [2, p. 618], "In front of him there was "the end of the century" rather than just books" [2, p. 627].

The writer Gorky's name can also be found only in one novel ("Botchan" of Natsume Soseki). No estimation is given there. Gorky is mentioned only as "one Russian writer" and also there is a play of words as the writer's name pronunciation is very similar to one fish name "goruki", which novel's characters found pretty funny.

Russian literature has been mentioned as a whole category. In the same novel "And Then" of N. Soseki there are two scenes that show interesting thoughts regarding it. The first thought is this: "The uncertainty that took so much space in the Russian literature Daisuke explained with the climate condition and political oppression" [3, p. 231]. One interesting fact is that Russia was already described as a country with the existence of political oppression long before the events in the end of 1930s (the novel was written in 1909). In the second scene the main character describes one friend of his as a big follower of Russian literature and says a serious writer should not admire Russia too much and only the one who participated in the Russian-Japanese War can speak of it [3, p. 250]. It is very likely the meaning of these lines is that Russia being highly praised thanks to its famous writers is a different country, which can be judged not by books, but by real mutual contacts one of which was the Russian-Japanese War. At the same time this mention repeats again, how widely Russian literature was spread among intellectuals of that time. The other two links regarding Russian literature take place in N. Soseki's "Botchan" and in the novel "Madame Pearl" of K. Kan. The last one also confirms its popularity [4, p. 170]

The second group includes all the links regarding the Russian-Japanese War (15) and has two particular features. The first one is that all of the links were found only in the novels written before 1917, meaning the war remained important as the memories of it were still

fresh. Sometimes it was mentioned just as the War so everybody knew what war it was.

Moreover, half of the links are placed in Natsume Soseki's novel "I am a Cat" published in 1905, the time the war was still going on. Therefore, the more time passes by, the less important the war becomes in the daily life of the Japanese. And the second issue is that despite the well-known fact that during the war Russia was illustrated in Japanese mass media in quite an unpleasant way (which is obvious as Russia was the main enemy), no negative image of Russia was met on the pages of Japanese fiction in the context of the war. Partly it can be explained by the fact that almost immediately after the war both countries became good partners in different fields: economic, political, cultural, etc. A lot of war veterans also felt respect for Russian soldiers and officers, admitting their brave behaviour during combat operations, although no positive image of Russia was met either.

All the links regarding the war were put into the text due to the following reasons:

- To specify the time when the story is happening ("Father returns", "I Am a Cat", "The Gate")
- To condemn the war ("Sansiro", "And Then")
- To draw an analogy between the scenes in the novels and real combat operations ("I Am a Cat")
- To mock the popularisation of the war among common people ("I Am a Cat", "And Then")

As for the third group (Russian art and science), it is comparatively small. It consists of the links regarding Russian composers (2), scientists (1) and the Russian ballet (2). The rest of the links are quite sporadic and cannot be united in a particular group.

The mentioned Russian composers are A.P. Borodin and M.A. Balakirev and their music namely "The Sea Ballade" written in 1870 (in the text it is called just "The Ballade") and "Islamey". Two of them are found in the same novel "Madame Pearl" in the scene with a concert for the *haut monde* where those works are being played. This scene can tell Japanese intellectuals also paid high tribute to the Russian music.

The only scientist mentioned in the analysed texts is a chemist S.V. Lebedev, who invented polybutadiene synthetic rubber. His name was found on the pages of "Sansiro" by N. Soseki.

In the tale "Elegy" and novel "Snow Country" by Yasunari Kawabata there are links to the Russian Ballet and Isadora Duncan as one of its most outstanding representatives. The main character in "Snow Country" Simamura translates the articles about the Russian Ballet written by French authors. The photo of Isadora Duncan was printed on the cover of the album lying on the table. Therefore, we may make a conclusion the Russian Ballet, very popular in the world, was also very well-known in Japanese society. Despite the fact that Isadora Duncan was not a Russian, her life was strongly connected with Russia and Russian dance school that is why her name was also included.

The other mentions are quite sporadic. Two times there were references to Lenin's name, one in an essay "Aphorisms by a Pygmy" and one in a short story "The Life of a Stupid Man", both by R. Akutagawa. The first one says Lenin was an ordinary hero, but that was the

most incredible fact about him [2, p. 688]. The second tells about one Russian who is composing a poem dedicated to Lenin where he is being described as a person full of contradictions.

In the novel "The Woman" (1919) by T. Arishima Japanese-Russian relations were touched twice. The first time it was mentioned as a headline of one newspaper's article devoted to bilateral relations in China. There is no more extra context but the fact that China was mentioned proves that this territory remained one of the important issues in relations between the two countries. The second time Japanese-Russian relations were categorised as unstable as well as Japanese-American relations and the society felt the oncoming storm. At the same time people already forgetting the war time were enjoying the life and were not concerned about the events in China so remote from their own country [5, p. 254]. This description of the public spirit is based on the position of Japan after the World War I, when the country was one of the winners and experienced economic growth. It is very likely the society was not busy thinking about the situation in other countries while their own life was being filled with new benefits.

The name of Holy Resurrection Cathedral (mostly known as the Temple of St. Nikolas) was found twice in different writings. The first one is the novel "And Then" by N. Soseki. Daisuke, the main character in this novel, said he went there to watch the Easter prayer service. The second piece of writing with the mention of the temple is the short story "Kappa" by R. Akutagawa. There is a scene where one building is described as ten times more imposing than the Nikolas's Cathedral [2, p. 467]. Both links allow us to think that Nikolas Temple was important for Japanese society both from the architectural point of view where it exemplifies a "great building" and from the religious one (the Japanese attend services there).

The last category of the links is called "Russian cities" and there is only one mention. The interesting thing this is not a capital city, such as Moscow or St. Petersburg, or cities close to Japan like Vladivostok, but Samarkand which was found in the essay "Spinning Gears" by R. Akutagawa (1927). The main character, the author himself, dreams about "healthy nerves" and for that he needs to go somewhere to Madrid, Rio de Janeiro or Samarkand. Based on this context it can be said the city of Samarkand was not mentioned as part of the USSR. The city is very likely shown here as an independent unit with its own history and culture, the culture of Central Asia. The country affiliation is not important here.

Therefore, based on the links analysed, there can be distinguished a certain image of Russia in Japanese literature, which is multi-faceted and vague at the same time. On the one hand, Russia is mainly associated with its writers and in Japan Russian writers are not only very popular, their ideas and opinions are considered valuable (especially it concerns L. Tolstoy). The Japanese are also fond of Russian culture, namely music and ballet. On the other hand, all the rest of the elements forming the image of Russia are very uncertain. There are many links to the Russian-

Japanese War, but almost nothing regarding Russia itself, except the word "bear" as a symbol of this country. Sometimes it is possible to find such collocations as "political oppression" and "climatic conditions". Without any certain meaning there is a name of a Russian scientist Lebedev, and such significant political figure as Lenin was described mainly as a symbol rather than a real person.

Nevertheless, the Russian characters input in the narrative are very colorful. In the listed works we came across five or six Russians who were given the following characteristics: good manners, severity, poverty, good physical condition, snow-white skin and passion about own ideals.

The most interesting character among them is Countess Shlemskaya. She is a white Russian emigrant who fled to Japan hiding from the revolution and earned her living by teaching in Tokyo in a local dance school. Despite the fact that Shlemskaya's character plays no significant role in the story and all the words she says are "No", "no good", "walk with me", almost nine pages are devoted to her description.

The image of the countess is presented very highly. As the main character, Shlemskaya appears as a heavenly deity, absolutely superior to the physically imperfect Japanese, including himself and his beloved. Though this is not because the countess is Russian. Most likely, here the dance teacher acts as a representative of the white race, the world of the West, which had a tremendous impact on Japanese culture and mentality. Suffice it to say the novel itself contains many references to Western countries (31): movie actors, European songs, American dances, Vogue magazine, different brand names, etc. And everything that has to do with the Western culture evokes delight and veneration in the protagonist.

One of the consequences of worshiping the West in Japan was a complex concerning one's body. Meshcheryakov says that the Japanese had a great desire to become taller in order to catch up with the more physically developed Europeans and various attempts were made in the society to achieve this result, such as making a recommendation to sit on a chair and not in the *seiza* position (on one's lap) [6, p. 30]. This trend is well reflected in the novel:

– She is engaged with passion. That is so right!

– Indeed, Shlemskaya loves her job! Japanese teachers are far from her, and Europeans, even women, are very strict. It is very nice! And look - she does it without a break for an hour or two ... It is tiring in such a hot season. I offered her an ice cream, but she refused. During the class, she doesn't need anything ...

– It's amazing how she doesn't get tired?!

– The Europeans are well trained, not like us." [7, p. 355]

Another feature Meshcheryakov speaks of is admiration for the white skin of Europeans. It was considered a standard of beauty. In addition, in the early twentieth century, in the era of racial prejudice, white skin was considered as a sign of dominant nations, all other shades were perceived negatively. It would be enough to bring the combination "yellow menace" which was widespread in the press of that time. The

Japanese, largely adopting the ideas of the West, also adopted the concept of "beautiful white skin."

In the novel, the whiteness of Countess Shlemskaya appears one of the outstanding features in the description of her looks: "But most of all these hands were distinguished from Naomi's hands by their extreme whiteness. The skin was so clear that the pale blue veins seemed as a delicate pattern on marble. Until now, caressing Naomi's hands, I often told her "You have beautiful hands, white, like a European woman!" But, alas, now I realised that Naomi's hands are completely different from those of Shlemskaya, they were simply dark..." [7, p. 360]

Therefore, the main merits of the countess praised by the protagonist are not due to nationality, but racial affiliation. The protagonist of the novel, being a representative of the middle class, has a low probability of direct contact with a European from high society. For this reason, a Russian white emigrant is introduced. She has high origins, but experiencing financial difficulties due to the unstable situation in her own country, she is forced to deal with middle-class society.

At the same time we can clearly identify the stereotypes inherent in Russian people, such as severity, pride, poverty, endurance and poor knowledge of the English language.

In general, the image of the Russian aristocrat placed in the novel corresponds to how the Japanese perceived Russian white emigrants. They seemed refined and proud. [8, p. 19]

As was mentioned earlier, there is a short story "Woodcock" by R. Akutagawa, in which not only the main characters are Russians, but the whole action is taken place in Russia, specifically at the Tolstoy's estate "Yasnaya Polyana" in 1880. Even the characters' speech is built taking into consideration the colloquial features of the Russian high society of that time (such as use of the French language). This work describes Tolstoy as a very stubborn person with elements of eccentricity and a tendency to put himself above others. It is not the first time when Akutagawa brings to the foreground the writer's negative traits (in "Spinning Gears" he also speaks of his great insincerity). This sharply contrasts with the generally recognised image based on the love of Japanese society for Tolstoy, as a writer, teacher, and great person. But also Tolstoy sincerely admires rural children and their ability to give interesting figurative expressions based on their life experiences, while adults cannot demonstrate this. The other main character, I. Turgenev, is depicted as a courteous, amiable man with good manners, which should not be surprising since he was a representative of the nobility. He is also represented as a non-conflict person. He was ready to reconcile with Tolstoy (according to the story there was a fight between two writers), "if he had noticed even the slightest sign of

goodwill." [2, p. 423]. Also in the text, several times both writers are referred to as "the author of Fathers and Sons" and "the author of Anna Karenina", which emphasises the importance of their contribution to the world literature.

Despite the fact that it is completely focused on Russian writers, this short story does not give anything meaningful to the idea of a Russian person. To a greater extent, the appearance of Turgenev and Tolstoy as the main characters is a consequence of the great popularity of Russian literature in Japan.

Summarising on the basis of the obtained data, it can be argued that at the beginning of the twentieth century there was a considerable interest in Russia in Japan, and despite great contradictions in relations between the countries, a negative image of Russians was not found in the texts of fiction. The interest in the northern neighbor was also mainly conditioned by Russian literature and white race affiliation. As a result, the image of Russia in Japanese society was vague and based on fragmentary information.

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