

New Aspects of “The Case of Richard Sorge”. A View From Modern Russia (2017–2022)

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Abstract

Due to the expiration of a number of previously classified materials related to the activities of the Soviet special services during the Second World War, and also due to the especially high public interest in the “case of Richard Sorge” in the last 5 years, a military historian and Doctor of Historical Sciences Mikhail A. Alekseyev introduced into scientific discourse a large number of previously unknown Russian-language documents on this case. These documents are of paramount interest to researchers. For example, it is the first publication of the materials that definitively answer the questions of whether Sorge was a double agent and of what the real reason for the failure of the network of Soviet military intelligence in Japan in 1941 was, as well as of many other pieces of important documentary evidence of the activities of the Soviet secret services in that country.

Soon after that, the authors of this article for the first time made a complete translation of the memoirs of Ishii Hanako, Sorge’s Japanese wife, which were analyzed in detail and commented on by the authors of the book *Another Sorge. The Story of Ishii Hanako*. The memoirs of Ishii Hanako give a chance to take a fresh look at Richard Sorge’s personality, his goals in studying Japan and his approaches to this issue, to form a more personal and, at the same time, objective picture of his character. Together with the case of the “Special Folder” of the Central Committee of the CPSU on perpetuating the memory of Richard Sorge, declassified in 2020, for the first time in history, these materials

allow us to fully evaluate Ishii Hanako's effort to preserve the memory of Sorge in Japan during the period from 1945 to 1964. By comparing the memoirs, the documents of the Soviet side, and by carrying out the research and analytical work, the authors have reached a new level of understanding of the "case of Richard Sorge."

In 2017–2022, a number of new materials devoted to the same case were published in Japan. They reveal the level of awareness of not only Japan's government and law enforcement agencies, but also of the emperor himself, as well as the division of powers of the special services in the liquidation of Sorge's intelligence network.

Key words: Richard Sorge, Ishii Hanako, Soviet intelligence in Japan.

Despite the fact that 79 years have passed since the execution on November 7, 1944 of the outstanding Soviet intelligence officer, journalist, and orientalist Richard Sorge, interest in his case continues to persist not only among numerous fans of spy sagas, but also among professional historians. Researchers do not confine themselves to rereading already known materials, but are trying to work in the field of what is called "sorgeology" – long-term research of the Sorge case with varying thoroughness, orientation, and activity, discovering more and more new materials, despite the difficulties of an objective nature. For example, in 2019, documents of the Japanese police were published with regard to the changes to the Law on Public Security that were made in May 1941 in anticipation of an imminent war and that are of undoubted interest in the light of our theme [Zoruge jiken shiryō shūsei 2019, p. 32–37]. No less important are the materials published at the same time about the report of the Minister of Justice Iwamura Michiyo on the Sorge case addressed to the Emperor of Japan on May 13, 1942, which clearly said that the German journalist Richard Sorge was a Soviet military intelligence officer and Ozaki Hotsumi was a long-time advisor to the Cabinet of Ministers of Japan. However, the statement made by the *Asahi* newspaper on May 16 of the same year spoke only

about the arrest of certain “Communist International spies,” and Ozaki was mentioned as an “employee of the South Manchurian Railway” [Shōwa Tennō jitsuroku 2019, p. 712]. These are very important and, apparently, not the only materials from the Japanese side that will help to better understand the case of the Soviet intelligence officer included in Japan in the list of the 100 people who influenced the history of that country in the 20th century.

Unfortunately, in late 2019, the leaders of the Japanese Society for the Study of the Ozaki-Sorge Case¹ informed its members that the Society terminated its work after about half a century of existence, releasing 50 written bulletins containing reports on the topic, and holding 10 symposia in different countries of the world. The reason for the self-liquidation was the age of the majority of the members and, primarily, the leadership, which, on average, was over 75 years. The decision coincided with the outbreak of the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic, and, until very recently, no changes were expected in this area. However, in late 2021, the former leaders of the Society sent a circular letter to all interested parties with a new notice: in 2022, it intends to return to research in “sorgeology” in full, including international symposia.

Unfortunately, one of the main problems of “sorgeology” in general and Japanese Sorge studies in particular is extremely poor communication with foreign colleagues, which is caused by the language barrier and by some other difficulties, including the narrow circle of “sorgeologists.” In this regard, for example, Japanese researchers learned about the book by the British journalist Owen Matthews *An Impeccable Spy* [Matthews 2019] immediately after its publication in the West in the English language, but most of the publications on the

¹ In Japanese discourse, the “Sorge case” is traditionally referred to as the “Ozaki-Sorge case.” The first place is given to the study of the fate and worldview of Richard Sorge’s closest assistant, Japanese journalist and political scientist Ozaki Hotsumi, which is unusual for the Russian reader, but logical for the Japanese who are primarily interested in studying the biography of their compatriot.

same topic, which are published in Russian with enviable constancy, remain unnoticed. As a result, an incorrect picture of the research on the Sorge case may arise: in Russia, practically nothing is known about the progress of Japanese colleagues in this area, while Japanese researchers, in turn, are only fragmentally acquainted with Russian works, and only materials published in English become common property.

Also, because of the above-mentioned narrowness of the circle of “sorgeologists” and the desire of some authors to broadcast their vision of the issue depending on the state of affairs, active myth-making in covering Sorge’s biography has been a serious problem for decades. For instance, an article entitled *Busts of Sorge Are Erected One After Another. Putin’s Administration Seeks to Restore the Honor of the Great Spy*,² published in Japan in March 2021 by a well-known Sovietologist Professor Nagoshi Kenrō of Takushoku University, seriously reported that there is a real Sorge boom in Russia today, and the Russian authorities allegedly use this as a propaganda tool in their confrontation with the opposition.

As the main argument for this conclusion, Professor Nagoshi used the abundance of busts of Sorge in Russia (the authors of this article have counted seven of them throughout the country, and at least two of them are in school territories) and naming after Sorge a recently opened station of the Moscow Central Railway Ring in 2016. Where there were not enough arguments to justify the conclusion, the Japanese author, whom a reader who is not deeply familiar with the theme can take for a serious researcher, easily invented them, attributing, in particular, to one of the authors of this article statements and quotations that do not belong to him. For instance, “Kulanov [in the book *Sorge. A Discordant Spy*] writes that Sorge ‘severely criticized the harmful and irresponsible management system in Soviet intelligence’” or “Aleksandr Kulanov ... said at a ‘round table’ on the Russian *Kultura*

² Nagoshi Kenrō. Zoruge no kyōzō o zokuzoku to konryū ano ōmono supai no meiyo kaifuku o isogu pūchin seiken no omowaku. 12.03.2021. *President online*. <https://president.jp/articles/-/44047?page=1>

TV channel last year: ‘In Russia... secret documents about Sorge are declassified one by one, and his popularity is growing rapidly.’” It would be enough to read the book referred to by Nagoshi [Kulanov 2018] and see again the program available on the Internet³ to find out that these words were invented by the Japanese author.

Such publications look especially regretful with regard to the fact that, in the last five years, a significant number of new materials have been published in Russia, including those that introduce many important, previously unknown documents into scientific discourse. A significant part of them were previously kept under secrecy labels of varying degrees. Now they are freely available, which refutes the thesis favored by many authors that too many documents are classified in the Sorge case, and this does not allow for an objective approach to their study. In reality, the problem is not the absence of documents, as enough of them have already been published to reconstruct the bigger part of Sorge’s life and the particularities of his work (as a journalist and as an intelligence officer), but the unwillingness to study these documents. It should be noted that the most significant contribution to the publication of previously unknown materials on the Sorge case in the last five years has been made by Professor Mikhail A. Alekseyev, Doctor of Historical Sciences and a historian of military intelligence.

Works by Mikhail A. Alekseyev

After the publication in 2010 of the book “*Yours Ramsay.*” *Richard Sorge and Soviet Military Intelligence in China. 1930-1933* [Alekseyev 2010], which revealed with unexpected completeness the hitherto unknown and unexplored pages of Sorge’s biography relating to his work in the Shanghai illegal residency of the 4th Directorate of the Red

³ Observer. Richard Sorge. A New Spy Mania. Broadcast of 11.11.2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2VaXBe1NFs>

Army Headquarters, M. A. Alekseyev published two more books that continued, developed, and deepened his previous research. In 2017, he published two volumes about the Japanese period of the spy's work: *"Loyal to You, Ramsay." Richard Sorge and Soviet Military Intelligence in Japan. 1933–1938* [Alekseyev 2017a] and *"Loyal to You, Ramsay." Richard Sorge and Soviet Military Intelligence in Japan. 1939–1941* [Alekseyev 2017b].

The first volume consists of 863 pages, including 670 references, several dozen biographical references to intelligence officers and Japanologists, the names and fates of many of whom were not previously known at all or known only in fragments. In fact, only the reference section opens a hitherto unknown page of Soviet military Japanese studies, and not only military ones. For example, the outstanding Japanese scholar V. M. Konstantinov, who worked in the post-war period at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, has so far been known primarily as a translator and researcher of materials devoted to Daikokuya Kōdayū's journey to Russia. Now we have information about his activities as a military intelligence officer and one of the curators of the Sorge group, which allows us to hope to more fully restore the biography of the remarkable orientalist in the future.

The second volume, covering the events of the last and most intense stage of the Ramsay-Inson residency in Tokyo in 1939–1941, comprises another 687 pages, including 925 links to documents, among which a significant amount is occupied by materials on repression in military intelligence agencies and in the Red Army as a whole, including multi-page interrogation protocols that give a fairly complete and clear picture of the difficult situation that prevailed then in the Soviet special services and specifically in the Japanese direction. In particular, these documents make it possible to clearly understand one of the most difficult and continuously discussed moments in Sorge's biography: the attitude of the Soviet military leadership towards him and his reports from Tokyo – from the direct curators in the Intelligence Department to the People's Commissar of Defense and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief I. V. Stalin.

The documents published by M. A. Alekseyev remove many previously controversial issues. For example, there is a widespread version that, by assigning a new codename to the Tokyo resident in May 1941 – “Inson” to replace “Ramsay,” under which Sorge had been working since 1930, Moscow sought to show a change in its attitude towards the agent and the information transmitted by him [Georgiyev 2000, p. 73]. However, the documents show that in April–June 1941, the 5th Directorate of the Red Army (as military intelligence was called at that time) carried out another large-scale organizational reform. In its course, almost all the working codenames of legal and illegal intelligence agents abroad were changed. All intelligence officers in Tokyo received new codenames beginning with “I”. For instance, the military attaché of the Soviet Union in Japan, who headed the legal residency of the 5th Directorate, Colonel I. V. Gushchenko, received the name “Ikar,” the radio operator of the illegal residency, Max Clausen, turned from “Fritz” into “Isop,” Sorge’s main Japanese source Ozaki Hotsumi was renamed from “Otto” to “Invest,” and Ramsay became “Inson” [Alekseyev 2017b, p. 387].

The extremely high saturation of documents in the entire three-volume work by M. A. Alekseyev makes this publication not only the most complete, but also the most important work about Sorge. Moreover, by documents we mean not only numerous telegrams and cipher messages from Moscow to Shanghai and Tokyo and back, some of which were published before, but also entire layers of materials previously unknown to researchers. For example, to a large extent, the books reveal the financial support of Sorge’s residencies in China and Japan. This is important not only in itself, but also allows us to trace the dynamics of the Centre’s attitude to “Ramsay,” because every fluctuation of this attitude – from distrust to favor and vice versa – was immediately reflected in monetary terms. When Sorge was believed, he and his residency received funding in the requested amounts (which happened extremely rarely); when not, the cash flow was immediately reduced, forcing the spies to literally seek means of subsistence. Considering that the three-volume book contains documents not

only from the time of Sorge's work for military intelligence, but also partially from the time of his service in the Comintern, including in the Department of International Relations (in fact, the world Communist intelligence), and there were exactly the same rules regarding financing, it becomes clear how difficult it was for our intelligence officers, when, for some reason, the Center did not believe them. This, in turn, led to poor-quality work of some resident agents who were ready to report any information, including what they simply invented, if only it suited Moscow.

One of the main advantages of M. A. Alekseyev's book is also the possibility to trace the peculiarities of the attitude towards Sorge and his work in Japan by the leadership of Soviet military intelligence caused by the Stalinist repressions of 1937–1941. M. A. Alekseyev cites not only materials from that period that allow us to observe the change in this attitude after each wave of arrests in intelligence services, but to correlate these events with much later (mid-1960s) testimony of those who survived the purges. This creates a much more objective view of the events that took place around the activities of the illegal Tokyo residency.

Directly related to this theme are two other issues that are constantly discussed in connection with the Sorge case:

1. Was Ramsay a double spy working not only for the USSR, but also for Germany?

2. Why did Sorge's residency fail, and who is to blame for this?

Answering the first question, the author presents many documents, the most important of which are two cipher messages sent to Sorge by Deputy Chief of Military Intelligence Artur Artuzov on July 25, 1936. Here are excerpts from them: "You and Gustav [intelligence officer Gunther Stein, who worked with Sorge at that time – A.K., A.S.] can supply all kinds of articles and forecasts regarding the situation in your area to both Kot and friends [the military attaché of the German Embassy in Japan, Colonel Eugen Ott and embassy staff – A.K., A.S.]. And the more conscientiously and carefully you do this, the more firmly you will connect with them. Only, do not duplicate the entire documents.

Or it may happen that Kot will share them with his friends, and then it will turn out that ‘a friendly calf sucks two mothers.’ It may entail unpleasant complications” [Alekseyev 2017a, p. 433]. And, on the same day, in another letter: “Remember that your most basic task continues to be the preservation and strengthening of the exceptional relationship you have created with Kot, the deepest growing into German circles, which, in the moments of the most difficult situation, will be your only sources of information of exceptional importance and at the same time provide the most reliable protection for you. This is the most important and crucial task you should always have in front of you” [Alekseyev 2017a, p. 435]. The entire paragraph in the letter was underlined by Artuzov himself.

Thus, the leadership of the Soviet military intelligence sagely insisted on the deep introduction of Sorge into the circles of the German embassy in Tokyo as a specialist on issues related to the politics, economics, and even (as we will see later) culture of Japan. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind not only Artuzov’s warning about the need to share information with the Germans very carefully, but also the understanding of the fact that Sorge could not give any interesting secret information about the Soviet Union to Berlin, even if he suddenly wanted to – he simply did not have such information. When Artuzov and his colleagues were arrested during the repressions, they were charged with unsubstantiated espionage (including in favor of Germany), and under torture they named among their “accomplices” almost all colleagues they knew, including the resident agent in Tokyo – “Ramsay.” This became the official reason for the accusation of Sorge of working for German intelligence, which, unfortunately, is played up by ignorant authors to this day.

As for the second question – about the reasons for the failure of Sorge’s residency in Tokyo and the identification of those responsible for this, M. A. Alekseyev also cites many previously unknown documents. They testify that the basis for taking Soviet intelligence officers under strict counterintelligence control by the Japanese special services was the fact that, in December 1939, Sorge and Clausen were brought into direct

communication with employees of the legal residency, i.e., the military attaché office of the USSR plenipotentiary mission in Japan. The military attaché office was initially under continuous surveillance by numerous Japanese special services: the Kempeitai military gendarmerie, the police, and the foreign department of the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs. Alekseyev cites in this connection the opinion of retired Lieutenant General of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation S. A. Kondrashov, who, in 1964, was one of the authors of a, at the time, secret document – the Conclusion on Archival Materials Regarding Richard Sorge: “The main reason for the failure of R. Sorge’s residency was the irresponsible and vicious system of the residency’s leadership on the part of the former command of the Red Army Intelligence Directorate, resulting from the unfounded assessment of Sorge as a Japanese-German spy and disinformant that developed during the personality cult” [Alekseyev 2017a, p. 594].

Thus, the works of M. A. Alekseev should be particularly noted, as they can be considered the basis for the development of “sorgeology” not only today, but also for many years to come, since they contain a huge array of information, including previously unknown data declassified specifically for these publications.

“Another Sorge” by Ishii Hanako and Materials of the Russian State Archive of Modern History (RGANI)

In 2020, the Russian Foreign Ministry officially announced the assignment of rights to Richard Sorge’s grave at Tokyo’s Tama Cemetery to the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Japan. Previously, these rights had belonged to the heiresses of the niece of Ishii Hanako, who was called “Sorge’s Japanese wife” in the Russian press. At the same time, her role in the biography of the famous intelligence officer was either ignored altogether, or, which is especially typical for Western authors, and, in recent years, for some Russian ones, she was charged

with actions that had no connection with reality, including relations with the Japanese police. The ambivalent situation regarding Ishii Hanako looked all the more strange because Sorge's burial in Tama was arranged solely on her initiative and by her personal efforts in 1949 (let us recall that in the USSR Sorge was recognized as a Soviet intelligence officer only in 1964), and the remains of Ishii herself, who died in July 2000, are buried in the same crypt. Thus, the Russian embassy received the rights not only to the burial of Richard Sorge, but also to her grave, and now it will officially take care of it. Would it have been possible if this Japanese woman had really been the culprit of the destruction of the Soviet residency? Of course, anything happens in history, but it seems that the work of M. A. Alekseyev mentioned above completely removes all charges from Ishii. Surprising, however, remains the silencing of her role in the "Sorge-Ozaki Case."

The current situation looks especially strange due to the fact that, starting from August 1964, Ishii gave dozens of interviews to Soviet and later Russian mass media, in which she spoke in great detail, with her characteristic directness and frankness, about Sorge, about herself, and about the events that brought them together. Until that time, in the period between 1949 and 1964, she was no less active in communicating with the Japanese press, and if there was interest in the theme, with media representatives from other countries as well. Moreover, Ishii Hanako wrote three small books of memoirs about the Sorge case and her own fate. They were eventually combined into a common publication called *Ningen Zoruge*, which can be translated as "Human Sorge." The last publication of the three-volume book took place in 2003 [Ishii 2003, p. 364], which was probably due to the release in Japan of a two-part feature film *Spy Sorge* directed by Shinoda Masahiro. However, Ishii's book has never been translated from Japanese into any other language, although attempts have been made to translate some of its small excerpts.

Ishii Hanako hoped during her lifetime that her memoirs would be translated into English, German and, necessarily, into Russian and considered the Russian translation as a tribute to Richard Sorge, who

was born in the Russian Empire and served the Soviet Union. This wish was never fulfilled during her lifetime, and then it turned out to be too late: the heiresses of Ishii Hanako did not give permission to publish the manuscript in full. Nevertheless, the authors of this article have recently made a complete translation of the book of Ishii Hanako and processed it. As a result, in 2021, the Moscow *Molodaya Gvardiya* publishing house, which has repeatedly published works by Russian authors about Sorge, including numerous publications of his biography in the series *The Life of Outstanding People*, released a new book called *Another Sorge. The Story of Ishii Hanako* [Delone, Kulanov 2021]. It highlights several blocks of questions.

The study of the memoirs of Ishii Hanako made it possible to better understand many aspects related not only to the purely personal attitude of a Japanese woman to her lover (which, of course, is of interest in itself), but also to restore the overall picture of the work and private life of an intelligence officer in Japan in 1936–1941. (Richard and Hanako met and parted forever on the same day – October 4, Sorge’s birthday, but with a difference of 5 years). The memoirs clarified some, including deeply personal, aspects of their relationship, which, for some unknown reason, are still hushed up by the authors of works about Sorge. For example, Ishii Hanako’s work as a hostess should be taken into account. Understanding the specifics of this Japanese profession explains a lot about this woman’s relationship with Sorge, but only at first glance it looks like a relationship between an ordinary hostess and an ordinary client. The importance of Ishii Hanako’s memoirs lies, among other things, in the opportunity to trace the dynamics of this relationship, which eventually turned from, so to speak, business, into a real romantic relationship, and then into sincere and pure love.

Hanako tells about the lifestyle of a man hidden from prying eyes, whom she sincerely took for a German journalist until the last moment. Some excerpts from this part of the book have been translated before – for example, a description of Sorge’s house or a typical routine of his working day [Georgiyev 2000, p. 111], but never in full. Separate attempts were made to reproduce in Russian the communication

of Richard and Hanako in Japanese.⁴ But the text of the translation was subjected to considerable literary editing, which created a completely wrong idea about Sorge's brilliant command of the Japanese language, and, therefore, about his working abilities as a journalist and intelligence officer.⁵ In reality, Sorge's Japanese was far from perfect. For example, for Sorge's elderly maid, the meaning of his dialogues with Hanako was often unclear.

Sorge's peculiar attitude to the Japanese language, which, perhaps, can be called careless (Hanako writes that, having reached a certain level, Richard completely lost interest in studying it), sharply contrasts with Sorge's interest in Japan in general. This included not only politics and economics, which was natural, given his occupation, but also the history and culture of the country.

It is widely known that, after his arrest, 800 to 1000 books about Japan were found in Sorge's house – mostly in European languages. Ishii Hanako recalled that she was really confused when Sorge asked her if she had read *Kojiki* (*Records of the Deeds of Antiquity*, a work of the 8th century) and began to praise the novel *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*, 11th century), about which the girl at that time had no idea [Ishii 2003, p. 26]. The situation was about the same with regard to Sorge's acquaintance with Japanese visual culture: "When Sorge had free time and he was at home, he read, looked at *ukiyo-e* collections, opened an encyclopedia on the history of Japanese culture and even studied *gagaku* music" [Ishii 2003, p. 74]. This may seem like a minor touch to the personality of an amateur Japanese scholar, but if you think about it, it is extremely important for understanding the peculiarities of Sorge's intelligence work. The fact is that, for most of the period of

⁴ Ovchinnikov, V. V. Chem Rikhard Zorge prityagival lyudei [How Richard Sorge Attracted People]. *Rossiyskaya gazeta*. 13.07.2007. <https://rg.ru/2007/07/13/zorge.html>.

⁵ Klimov, D. "Razvedchik Zorge" gonitsya za "matritsei" ["Spy Sorge" Chases the "Matrix"]. *BBC*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/life/newsid_3007000/3007540.stm.

Ramsay's work in Tokyo (from 1933 to 1938), the German diplomatic mission in Japan was headed by Ambassador Herbert von Dirksen, an admirer and brilliant connoisseur of Japanese traditional art, who said that "the truly refined or, in other words, 'restrained' classical art of Japan had to be studied intensively, combining this passion with attachment to the country itself" [Dirksen 2001, p. 127].

In his home country, von Dirksen won the recognition of orientalists and was elected president of the German Society of East Asian Art, and Sorge was one of the few people who could talk with him about this art almost on equal terms, which allowed the Soviet intelligence officer to strengthen his position in the embassy, to follow the instructions of the Center. Ishii Hanako's memoirs were written without regard to the historical events and the situation of those years. For instance, Hanako's fleeting mention of Sorge's flight to Manchuria in May 1939 – just at the beginning of the Soviet-Japanese conflict on the Khalkhin-Gol River – and of the trinkets brought from there, coupled with a mention of his personal acquaintance with Chiang Kai-shek's wife, allows us to restore another little-known page of Sorge's work in China, and such examples are plentiful in the book. Especially interesting is the comparison of the dates in the memoirs with the known excerpts from the working correspondence of the Center and Ramsay. Reading, for example, in the memoirs about the only joint vacation, only a few days long, which Richard and Hanako spent together in the resort town of Atami in late 1936, we learn that their trip there on December 12 was sudden.

For Hanako, the reasons for the suddenness remained unknown, but proceeding from Sorge's correspondence with Moscow, we can assume with a high degree of probability that in this way he marked the end of an extremely important intelligence operation to inform Moscow about the steps taken by Japan and Germany to conclude the Anti-Comintern Pact signed on November 25. The head of military intelligence, Semyon Uritsky then recommended Sorge and Clausen to be awarded with orders (the country's leadership did not support this initiative), and Sorge arranged for himself a vacation, the only one in 6 years [Delone, Kulanov 2021, p. 75, 81–82].

Despite the fact that the execution of Sorge and Ozaki has been repeatedly described in various publications, Hanako's story about her meeting with an execution witness, the former prosecutor of the Tokyo City Court, Yuda Tamon, revealed the reason for choosing the day of Sorge's execution – November 7, 1944. There are many versions as to why that particular day was chosen, but here is what the participant of the events witnessed:

"November 7 is the day of the October Revolution, was it specially chosen?" I decided to clarify the information I had previously read in an interview with Yuda.

"It would be untrue to say that there was no intent in this. We thought that this day was really suitable to be the last in his life, so the choice of this date may have had the meaning of a kind of compassion for the Way of the Warrior. And, besides, the execution had to be carried out within five days, and since the 8th was the last, they decided to do it on the 7th. Moreover, the air raids had become very powerful by that time, and there was a fear that in case of a delay we would not be able to carry out the execution," accidentally blurting out the true state of affairs at that time, he added:

"The weather was fine that day, as it is today, and I remember there was an air raid that evening too" [Delone, Kulanov 2021, p. 336].

Yuda's important slip of the tongue regarding the need to carry out the execution within five days indicates that the final decision was made on November 2 or 3, 1944. This means the collapse of the popular version that as early as November 6, Japan tried to negotiate with the Soviet Union about the exchange of Sorge.⁶ The fate of the spy had already been decided by that time, and the Japanese were only waiting for a day without American bombing to hang Ozaki and Sorge as soon as possible.

Finally, in connection with fake reports spread on social networks that the ashes of the executed Sorge were found by American intelligence

⁶ Roshchupkin, V. Neizvestnyi Zorge – chast' III [Unknown Sorge – part III]. *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kurier*. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/50562>

officers (!) and reburied at the Tama cemetery with military honors (!), the detailed story by Ishii Hanako, with the mention of the smallest details, about how she sought the right to find out where Sorge was buried after the execution seems to be extremely important. She writes in detail how persistently the Japanese authorities and the American occupation command prevented her from carrying out the exhumation, and how a lucky chance in the person of the Zōshigaya cemetery caretaker helped her find the grave of her lover at the last moment – if she had been a little late, his ashes would have been scattered to the wind. Sorge's remains, removed from a common grave on November 16, 1949 and transferred to a box "resembling a fruit box," were cremated by Ishii on the same day, but there was nowhere to rebury the ashes, and Hanako spent the first night in an embrace with the urn heated from the ashes that had just been burned. It took Ishii Hanako another year to earn money for a place for his grave by selling memories of Sorge to magazines, and only on November 8, 1950, he found eternal rest at the Tama cemetery.

The study of Ishii Hanako's memories allows us to reveal the personalities of many people whom she mentions only in passing in her book, sometimes without even guessing about their true role in this story. This is, for example, the situation with Kawai Teikichi, a former subagent of the residency who worked for Ozaki Hotsumi in Manchuria under the codename "Ronin." Kawai was arrested by the Japanese police back in the 1930s in China, but managed to divert the accusation away from Soviet intelligence, received a short sentence, and was imprisoned for the second time during the failure of the group in Japan. Despite the fact that he heroically withstood all these misadventures, after the war Kawai was recruited by American intelligence and, among other things, carried out surveillance of Ishii Hanako (which, of course, she had no idea about) because of her extensive connections in the Japanese left-wing movement and attempts to establish contact with the Soviet authorities. Ishii's repeated attempts to persuade Soviet representatives to pay attention to the "Sorge case," by that time widely known in Japan and throughout the world (Hanako recalls articles, books, and even a feature

film already made about Sorge by that time) remained unsuccessful for a long time. Only 20 years after the execution, due to the fact that a new film about Sorge was released, the USSR agreed to recognize Sorge as its spy, and Ishii Hanako was one of the first to learn about it. How and why this happened becomes clear from the recently declassified case from the “Special Folder” of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

RGANI Materials

The Russian State Archive of Modern History (RGANI) declassified File No. 34-A/2-b/7 of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR (GRU GSh of the USSR Armed Forces) – about R. Sorge, kept in what was called the *Special Folder of the Central Committee of the CPSU*.⁷ The file contains a significant array of documents on the history of the recognition of Richard Sorge’s feat in the USSR, starting with a note sent to the Central Committee by the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Pravda*, P. A. Satyukov, on October 1, 1964⁸ about his readiness to publish the essay *Comrade Richard Sorge*, prepared by the newspaper columnist V. V. Mayevsky. From the memoirs of Ishii Hanako, we also learn about her meeting with Mayevsky and their joint trip to the Tama cemetery, together with the correspondent of *Pravda* in Tokyo, V. V. Ovchinnikov. This was the first official visit to Sorge’s grave by Soviet citizens. It is unclear from the text of the note when exactly and who exactly had the idea of recognizing Sorge’s feat, but Satyukov mentions that “the factual side of this issue has been verified by KGB officers. Comrade Semichastny [at that time the Chairman of the KGB at the USSR Council of Ministers – A.K., A.S.] considers it expedient to publish the material, especially due to the fact that a French film about Sorge will be shown in Soviet cinemas in the near future.”

⁷ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47.

⁸ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 1.

It is also clear from the file that Satyukov's note was preceded by the collection of materials not only by the KGB: on September 12, 1964, the Department of Administrative Bodies and the International Department of the Central Committee supported the "proposal of the USSR Ministry of Defense."⁹ Apparently, we are talking about a reference from the Ministry of Defense (not declassified) and a letter from the former head of the Main Intelligence Directorate Marshal F. I. Golikov sent on September 10 to Secretary of the Central Committee L. I. Brezhnev, Chairman of the Committee of Party and State Control A. N. Shelepin, Chairman of the KGB V. E. Semichastny and head of the Main Intelligence Directorate P. I. Ivashutin.¹⁰ At the time, Golikov even put forward a proposal "to speed up the writing of a book for the mass reader about Soviet military intelligence," obviously using the Sorge case as a convenient reason and basis for the publication, as well as "to consider the proposal to transfer Richard Sorge's ashes to Moscow with proper honors and with the installation of a monument on his grave." Thus, the news that appeared in the Russian media in the winter of 2021–2022 about the possible transfer of Sorge's ashes from Japan to Russia and the comment of the Russian Foreign Ministry on this matter¹¹ are not a new idea.

As for the reference, it was signed by the Minister of Defense of the USSR Marshal R. Ya. Malinovsky and, in addition to a brief summary of Sorge's feat, contains two interesting points.¹² First, it is a documented

⁹ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 17.

¹⁰ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 3, 4.

¹¹ Speech and answers to questions by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov at the "government hour" in the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Moscow, January 26, 2022. https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1795942/

¹² RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 21-22.

definition of the reasons for the group's failure: "... mainly due to improperly organized connections with officers of the Soviet legal apparatus in Japan," which, however, may lead to a misconception that the initiative to establish such ties came from Sorge. The above-mentioned studies of M. A. Alekseyev refute this view. Second, among Malinovsky's proposals were the conferment of the title of Hero of the Soviet Union to Sorge, the construction of a monument to him in Moscow and the naming of one of the streets after him, as well as the provision of material assistance to the surviving relatives and friends of the spy.

Golikov's proposal that the grave be transferred was not accepted. The Central Committee focused on the problem of awarding Sorge and his close associates, which turned out to be not an easy task. Only the wording on conferring on Sorge the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union was revised three times. Below are the versions:

1. "...for exemplary performance of special tasks in the interests of protecting the Soviet state and the cause of socialism, for services in the fight against fascism and the threat of war and for the dedication, steadfastness, and courage shown in doing this" – September 1964¹³;

2. "...for heroism and courage shown in the interests of defending the Soviet state, the great cause of socialism and peace" – September 1964¹⁴;

3. "For active and successful intelligence activities on the eve and during the Great Patriotic War and the courage and heroism shown in doing this..." – September 1964¹⁵

¹³ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 16.

¹⁴ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 20, 24.

¹⁵ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 37.

4. “For outstanding services to the Motherland and courage and heroism shown in doing this...” – 5 November 1964¹⁶

Interestingly, Ishii Hanako, who did not know until the autumn of 1941 about the true purpose of Sorge’s stay in Japan, never – neither during the war nor later – correlated his activities with causing any harm to Japan. Having often talked with him about politics, she knew for sure that Sorge loved, knew, and understood Japan, sincerely admired its history and culture, realizing that the country was going through perhaps the most critical period in its existence. Ishii Hanako was sure that the main goal of Sorge’s whole life was to fight not against Japan, but for peace, and Tokyo became only a “battlefield” in this battle. Having learned after Sorge’s arrest that her lover was a Soviet intelligence officer, she defined for herself the meaning of his stay in Japan practically the same way as it was done almost a quarter of a century later in Moscow, in the second version of the wording of the award to Sorge: “defending the Soviet state, the great cause of socialism and peace.”

As a result, however, the last wording was adopted, and on January 14, 1965, a meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU held a meeting, the protocol of which, marked “TOP SECRET. A SPECIAL FOLDER,” was partly filed in the cited case. It classified the decision to provide a one-time monetary assistance to the family of agent Sorge – to Serb Branko Vukelić in the amount of 10 thousand rubles, and to “Japanese citizen Ishii Hanako” – 5 thousand rubles. At that time, these were serious funds with which it was possible to buy, respectively, two or one *Volga* cars. The secret protocol of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU dated March 27, 1965 determined the secret method of transferring money for Ishii. The equivalent of 5 thousand rubles was 1,991,388 yen and, “for reasons of secrecy,” the sum was handed over to her through “representatives of the Soviet Committee of War Veterans and friends of Comrade Richard Sorge” as compensation

¹⁶ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 14, 15.

for organizing the burial of the remains of the spy and the installation of a monument on his grave in Tokyo.¹⁷

But the main thing, of course, was not the amount of aid and the ways of its transfer, but the fact that, in the winter of 1965, Ishii Hanako was actually recognized as a surviving member of Sorge's family. On April 7 of the same year, a decision was made to invite Ishii Hanako to the Soviet Union for treatment (she suffered from a chronic form of tuberculosis with numerous complications) at the expense of the USSR Ministry of Defense.¹⁸

Summarizing the above, we can say that the period of 2017–2022 was a time of new important discoveries in the Sorge case, at least from the Russian side. A huge amount of information based on materials from the archives of the Russian Defense Ministry and the Russian State Archive of Modern History has been declassified. This made it possible to eliminate many previously existing gaps in the Sorge case and to look at this case comprehensively and much more objectively and broadly. The analysis of the memories of Sorge by his “Japanese wife” Ishii Hanako served the same purpose. Her work, which initially seemed subjective and deeply personal, when projected onto the historical background and the new information received about the Sorge case, turned out to be extremely important for understanding the system of Sorge's work as an intelligence officer, the principles of his introduction to the German embassy and the depth of his study of Japan. Earlier, on the basis of official documents, memoirs of Sorge's colleagues, his own *Prison Notes* and other materials, we saw the result of the intelligence officer's work, whereas now we have an inside look at how he prepared for this activity and how he lived in Japan, and this is truly “Another Sorge.”

¹⁷ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 44.

¹⁸ RGANI. Archive fund 3. Inventory number 50. Archival unit 47. Document number 43.

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This article was originally published in Russian. The reference for primary publication is as follows: Kulanov, A.E., Sharova, A.B. New Aspects of “The Case of Richard Sorge”. View From Modern Russia (2017–2022). *Yearbook Japan*, 2022, Vol. 51, pp. 184–205. (In Russian.)

DOI: 10.55105/2687-1440-2022-51-184-205