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## **The Russian Vector of Japan's Policy in the Arctic**

**D. V. Streltsov**

**Abstract.** The article addresses the Russian vector of Japan's Arctic policy. The main areas of Japan's interest in cooperation with Russia in the Arctic region are energy, transport, and security. The article focuses on the developments that took place in these areas in 2019–2020, which have not yet received proper coverage in Russian historiography.

Pursuing the policy of diversification of energy supply sources, Japan turns its attention to the Russian Arctic as one of the promising areas of cooperation in the gas sector. In 2019, Japanese companies signed a contract for the purchase of a 10-percent stake in the Arctic LNG-2 project, which provides for Japanese investment worth almost \$3 billion. As one of the primary areas of cooperation with Russia, Japan also considers participation in the transport and logistics development of the Northern Sea Route, which is indispensable for the implementation of gas production projects on the Yamal Peninsula. In addition, Japan is interested in establishing clear and stable “game rules” in the Arctic, and, in this sense, the security sphere in the Arctic region is becoming one of the most important areas of cooperation with Russia.

The Russian vector of Japan's Arctic policy received an additional impetus in connection with the policy of rapprochement with Moscow conducted by the Abe cabinets in 2012–2020. The Arctic projects have become an integral part of the Eight-Point Plan, contributing to Japan's energy and economic security. Cooperation in the Arctic is directly linked not only to the projects of the development of the Northern Sea Route and Arctic projects for the

extraction and liquefaction of natural gas, but also to bilateral projects in the fields of “green energy”, development of port infrastructure, urban construction, fish processing, ecology, improving people’s living conditions, medicine, tourism, etc.

**Keywords:** Russian-Japanese relations, the Arctic, Arctic LNG-2, the Northern Sea Route, the Eight-Point Plan, diversification of energy supply sources.

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There is a significant amount of interest in the Russian vector of Japan’s foreign policy in the Arctic. Japan’s interest in Russian Arctic projects and its practical steps in this area do not only add a new connotation to the “Northern vector” of the country’s foreign policy, but, in fact, create a separate focus area in it.

This vector, however, is a relatively new phenomenon. In the post-war period, there was practically no significant interest in the Arctic or the Russian North issues either at the state level or at the level of private organizations. An important part in this was played by the critical reevaluation of Japan’s unsuccessful pre-war experience of relationships with Russia, in which the northern direction of the country’s external expansion proved to be the biggest failure. In the post-war years, Japan formulated its foreign policy on the basis of the postulate that there was a direct military threat from the North, which could not but affect the mental perception of the Arctic by several generations of the Japanese as something distant, unattractive, alien, and unrelated to the country’s urgent needs. Even polar scientific investigations after the war were initiated by Japan not in the Arctic, but in the Antarctic, as this was much easier to do both organizationally and psychologically against the backdrop of prevailing stereotypes of the “hostile North”.

The situation began to change in the post-bipolar period in connection with the country's search for a new global role. In the early 1990s, Japan started to present itself as a political power of global significance obligated to make a fair share of contribution to the study of the Arctic region, which is extremely important for maintaining the world environmental balance. The Arctic and particularly its Russian part with its rich natural and energy resources began to heighten Tokyo's interest also in the context of the policy of diversifying raw hydrocarbons supply sources. This interest rose especially after the Fukushima disaster, when Japan had to shutter a significant part of its nuclear facilities and rely on extended use of traditional energy sources, primarily natural gas as the most environment-friendly fossil fuel.

Moreover, Japan came to realize that, due to global warming, the Arctic could become a navigable region in the future. Thanks to Russia's active effort to develop the Northern Sea Route, cargo deliveries from Asia to Europe via the Russian Arctic waters are already becoming a reality. In this regard, Japan began to consider the transport and logistics area of bilateral cooperation with Russia in the Arctic as one of its priorities.

Finally, Japan's revised attitude towards the Arctic was also produced by changes in the global strategic balance of power in the world at large and in East Asia in particular. As a result, most of the world's largest powers started to try to mark their military presence in the Arctic. Japan is interested in establishing clear and stable game rules in the Arctic, and in this respect, security in this region is becoming one of the most important areas of cooperation with Russia.

The Russian vector of Japan's Arctic policy received an additional impetus in connection with the policy of rapprochement with Moscow conducted by the Shinzo Abe cabinets in 2012–2020. In May 2013, Japan, with the support from Russia, became an observer in the Arctic Council [Kurmazov 2015, p. 59]. In May 2016, during his informal meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Prime Minister Abe initiated the Japan-Russia Cooperation Plan consisting of eight points, which was highly appreciated in Russia as a bold decision challenging the G7 policy to isolate Russia after the 2014 Crimean events. Its main areas

included energy, transport, agriculture and technology, medicine, urban infrastructure development, energy, and complex development of the Far East. Many projects for bilateral cooperation in the Arctic have become an integral part of the Eight-Point Plan. Among them are projects for the development of the Northern Sea Route and Arctic projects for the extraction and liquefaction of natural gas, which are very important for Japan's national interests, contributing to the country's energy and economic security. Many projects for the integrated development of the Far East are also associated with the Arctic, as well as projects for transport and port infrastructure, urban construction, fish processing, environmental protection, improvement of living conditions, medicine, tourism, etc. For instance, Russian northern regions are interested in having Japanese technologies of housing construction in extreme climatic conditions which make it possible to achieve phenomenal heat saving through the use of modern building materials.

The main areas of Japan's interest in projects for cooperation with Russia in the Arctic are energy, transport, and security. This article aims to analyze these areas of cooperation, focusing on the changes that took place in 2019–2020, which have not yet received proper coverage in Russian historiography.

### **The Northern Sea Route**

Figuring prominently among the projects for cooperation with Russia in the Arctic is the Northern Sea Route (NSR). The length of sea communications from Japan to Europe is about 20 thousand kilometers if goods are delivered by the traditional southern route via the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal, or about 13 thousand kilometers via the NSR. In other words, transportation through the Arctic route is 40 percent shorter in distance and about 10 days shorter in time than through the southern route.<sup>1</sup> This means a substantial saving of time and fuel, which significantly reduces the cost of transportation.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the distance from Yokohama to Rotterdam is 20,742 kilometers by the southern route, while by the northern route it is 12,038 kilometers.

What also makes the NSR more attractive for Japan is that, thanks to lower fuel consumption, its use can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which is particularly important in connection with the abandoning of nuclear power after the Fukushima disaster and the forced transition to traditional energy sources. Thus, the development of the NSR is evaluated in the context of solving “green development” problems and combating global warming. In addition, the NSR is safer than the southern route because ships do not need to pass through the water areas that are unsafe in terms of piracy and terrorism, including the Strait of Malacca or the eastern coast of Somalia. In general, Japan recognizes the high degree of the NSR readiness, taking into consideration the Russian technological and infrastructure capabilities to ensure shipping, including the capacities for icebreaking support and carrying out rescue, repair, and other ancillary works. The availability of such facilities and resources reduces the risks of environmental consequences of large accidents leading to possible large-scale fuel leakage. Japan also highly values Russia's potential of pilotage service, especially in view of the shortage or even lack of highly skilled pilots in other Arctic countries, including Nordic countries. For example, special mention is made of the fact that Russian experienced pilots can unerringly determine the thickness of ice by sight and choose the right course, which their foreign colleagues cannot do [Kitagawa 2013].

At the present time, however, the transition to the NSR presents a lot of difficulties for Japanese freight carriers. First of all, the route in its present state can be used, for obvious reasons, only for a limited time within a year. Therefore, at issue are only long-term prospects related, for example, to the development of an icebreaking services network and also the extension of the shipping season due to the acceleration of ice melting.

Russia has not yet managed to fully implement most parts of the plan to improve the NSR infrastructure, build icebreaking, emergency and rescue and auxiliary fleets, and equip the NSR with land transport vehicles and aviation technology. Most of the managerial decisions on

the Arctic development have only been made quite recently [Grinyaev, Zhuravel 2020, p. 55]. For instance, the Plan for the Development of the NSR Infrastructure for the Period up to 2035 was approved by a decree of the Russian Government only in December 2019. There are no conditions for the development of container shipping and bringing in large international shipping companies and cargo owners to the NSR. It is planned to transform the NSR into the basic element of a competitive international and national maritime transport corridor not earlier than in 2031–2035 [Grinyaev, Zhuravel 2020, p. 146].

As an Arctic country, Russia, following the Polar Code of the International Maritime Organization, made effective on January 1, 2017, makes regulatory requirements for all foreign ships of the non-icebreaking type which pass through the NSR to use icebreaker escort, to have a Russian pilot on board, etc. [Leksyutina 2021, p. 17]. In this connection, Japan worries that Russia, being a monopoly service provider, will be able to establish unreasonably high transit tariffs for escort services. For instance, Japan was greatly concerned about the decision of the Russian government to restrict the right to transport LNG from the Yamal fields by Russian tankers. It should be mentioned, however, that in early December 2020, at the working Russian-Japanese meeting on cooperation in the transport sphere, the Russian side explained that, in the case of appropriate requests from transport companies, the lifting of this restriction would be considered.<sup>2</sup>

Another disadvantage of the NSR in Japan's opinion are the restrictions imposed by the bottom topography. In order to reach the Arctic Basin from the Pacific Ocean, ships have to go through the relatively shallow Bering Strait (the minimum navigable depth is 36 meters), which significantly limits the possibility of navigation for large-tonnage ships. Another big problem for Japan is that large-sized vessels can potentially inflict irreparable damage on the fragile environment of the Arctic because of the large amount of emissions and the risk of massive consequences in case of an accident. Finally, the small traffic through

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.logi-today.com/412966>

the NSR makes it very difficult for Japanese insurance companies to assess insurance risks, which in turn complicates the evaluation of the insurance premium level for ship owners [Kitagawa 2013].

Nevertheless, the development of transport communication via the NSR is not only at the assessment level but is also discussed from a practical perspective. In October 2018, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono told the Arctic Circle Assembly about the intention to encourage Japanese companies to place greater focus on business in the Arctic taking into consideration the potential possibilities of the Arctic route.<sup>3</sup> Among promising prospects for Japan, which are actively promoted by the Russian Ministry for the Development of the Far East, is the launch of a regular container line on the NSR.<sup>4</sup> Japan's interest in this route is confirmed by the fact that, several years ago, Hokkaido's prefectural administration began to assess the possibility of using the port of Tomakomai, located on the coast of the Tsugaru Strait, as a high-potential transport terminal to serve Japan's needs in the case of its transition to the NSR [Holroyd 2020, p. 324].

## **Energy**

The energy area is of primary importance for Russian-Japanese cooperation in the Arctic. It should be mentioned that this sphere on the whole is the backbone of Russian-Japanese trade and economic relations. Energy resources account for nearly 70 percent of Japan's total imports from Russia. The Japanese government considers energy to be one of the most important elements of its effort to strengthen partnership with Moscow.

Japan's interest in the Arctic LNG projects located on the Yamal and Gydan Peninsulas is not accidental. The point at issue are major

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<sup>3</sup> <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Arctic-emerges-as-collaboration-hot-spot-for-Japan-and-Russia>

<sup>4</sup> <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/10504149>



natural gas reserves accounting for about 20 percent of the world's gas resources. Leonid Mikhelson, president of the Russian Novatek gas producing company, estimates the potential of gas production on Yamal and Gydan (taking into account not only the share of Novatek but also that of Gazprom) at 130–140 million tons of LNG per year, which is 50 percent bigger than the entire annual production in Qatar.<sup>5</sup> Back in December 2017, Novatek put into operation the first gas liquefaction plant on the Yamal Peninsula with a capacity of 16.5 million tons per year in the Arctic port of Sabetta.<sup>6</sup> In 2020, the plant already worked with an average load of 114 percent of the nominal capacity and produced 18.8 million tons of LNG.<sup>7</sup>

Another project, called Arctic LNG-2, is currently (early 2021) under construction. The project, based on the hydrocarbon resources of the Utrenneye field, which amount to 1.978 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 105 million tons of liquid hydrocarbons (according to the Russian classification of reserves) on the Gydan Peninsula adjacent to Yamal, involves the construction of three LNG production lines with a designed capacity of 6.6 million tons of LNG per year each (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> The first LNG line is to be launched in 2023, while the second and the third – in 2024 and 2026 respectively.<sup>9</sup> The result will be 19.8 million tons of LNG and at least 1.6 million tons of stable gas condensate per year. The total investment is projected to reach US \$20–21 billion.

Yamal projects open up for Japan, which fully satisfies its domestic demand for natural gas with LNG imports, great prospects

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3695432>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/natural-gas/093020-japan-eyes-participating-in-kamchatka-lng-reloading-terminal-official>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.argusmedia.com/news/2188198-zagruzka-zavoda-iamal-spg-v-2020-g-dostigla-114?amp=1>

<sup>8</sup> <https://neftegaz.ru/news/spg-szhizhennyy-prirodnyy-gaz/651369-obshchiy-progress-po-artktik-spg-2-sostavlyayet-29/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/7585953>

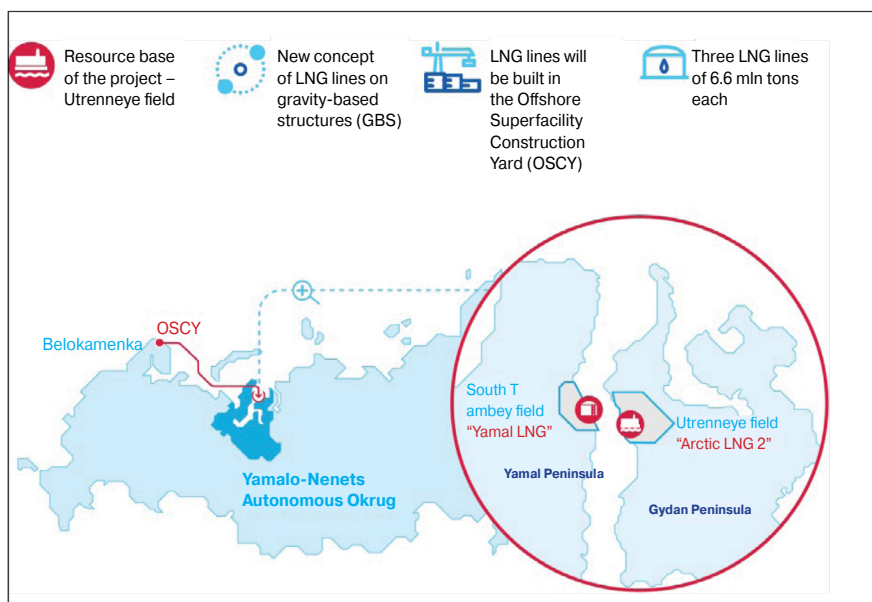


Figure 1. Arctic projects for natural gas production and liquefaction<sup>10</sup>

for ensuring a high level of energy security. Japan pursues a policy of balanced distribution of LNG supply sources in different regions of the world – the USA, Russia, South-East Asia, and the Middle East. It strives not to be in excessive dependence on one supplier or country and to exclude the factor of unforeseen risks associated with political events or natural disasters in partner countries. Table 1 shows that, among the supplier countries, there are both its reliable political allies and countries that Japan sees as ideological and political opponents.<sup>10</sup>

Along with LNG supplied by Russia to Japan from Sakhalin since 2008, Yamal gas in the future can make a significant segment of Japan's domestic market. For instance, between January and August 2020,

<sup>10</sup> <https://energybase.ru/>

Japan imported from Russia 3.629 million tons of LNG, which makes about 7.5 percent of Japan's total LNG imports. In 2019, Russia ranked 4<sup>th</sup> after Qatar among Japan's LNG supplier countries.<sup>11</sup>

*Table 1*

Japan's imports of LNG in 2019 (by country)<sup>12</sup>

| LNG Supplier Countries | Total Imports (tons) | Total Value (thousand yen) |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Australia              | 30,116,008           | 1,756,177,031              |
| Malaysia               | 9,330,527            | 492,022,088                |
| Qatar                  | 8,734,971            | 510,420,743                |
| Russia                 | 6,398,638            | 337,528,306                |
| Brunei                 | 4,320,630            | 248,174,455                |
| Indonesia              | 4,153,037            | 243,067,415                |
| Papua New Guinea       | 3,741,745            | 216,672,924                |
| USA                    | 3,695,647            | 196,835,711                |
| Oman                   | 2,894,035            | 144,333,845                |
| UAE                    | 2,168,486            | 123,767,579                |
| LNG Supplier Countries | Total Imports (tons) | Total Value (thousand yen) |
| Nigeria                | 833,291              | 32,436,813                 |
| Peru                   | 677,128              | 36,467,369                 |
| China                  | 70,560               | 2,250,297                  |
| Equatorial Guinea      | 68,819               | 3,623,685                  |
| Egypt                  | 62,119               | 3,495,559                  |
| Algeria                | 61,438               | 2,505,334                  |
| Total                  | 77,327,079           | 4,349,779,154              |

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/natural-gas/093020-japan-eyes-participating-in-kamchatkas-lng-reloading-terminal-official> (accessed on: 15.06.21)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.trade.gov/knowledge-product/japan-liquefied-natural-gas-lng>

As demonstrated by Table 1, supplies from Australia, Malaysia, and Qatar account for about 60 percent of Japan's total LNG imports. Thus, Japan's participation in the Arctic LNG-2 project would help diversify the sources of LNG supplies and decrease the country's dependence on major suppliers. Of particular importance for Japan is the fact that the cost of gas production in the Arctic is relatively low and comparable with that in Qatar. In particular, this is due to the fact that it is cheaper to chill gas below 0° C in the polar latitudes than in the thirty-degree heat like in the Middle East [Ishikawa 2019]. In addition, according to officials from the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, LNG supplies from the Russian Arctic enhance Japan's energy security, because the supply route does not pass through the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>13</sup>

From the very beginning, Japan showed interest in LNG development projects on Yamal. After the Russian government adopted the Integrated Plan for the Development of LNG Production on the Yamal Peninsula on October 11, 2010, Japanese companies became participants in the Yamal LNG project. For instance, a joint venture of two major Japanese engineering companies, JGC and Chiyoda, became a contractor for the design, equipment supply, and construction for the needs of the project. In December 2016, the venture received financial support from the Japanese Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC), which opened a line of credit in the amount of 2 billion euros to implement this project [Leksyutina 2021, p. 13]. In 2018, the Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC) signed a memorandum of understanding and possibilities for cooperation on projects on the Yamal Peninsula in the Arctic, including projects on the Gydan Peninsula. Shortly after, the Japanese gas distribution company (Fukuoka Prefecture), which supplies city gas to the northern part of the Kyushu Island, signed a memorandum of understanding with Novatek

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/natural-gas/093020-japan-eyes-participating-in-kamchatkas-lng-reloading-terminal-official>

regarding the end-consumer market entry and optimization of LNG supplies in the Asia-Pacific region, including construction of the Hibiki terminal in the Japanese port of Kitakyushu.<sup>14</sup>

After lengthy negotiations at the G20 summit in Osaka, on June 29, 2019, a contract was signed for the purchase by the Japanese side of a 10-percent share in the Arctic LNG-2 project, which gave Japan the right to receive 10 percent of the produced gas. To get this transaction, the Japanese Mitsui&Co corporation and JOGMEC outcompeted several international oil companies, including Saudi Aramco and KOGAS. Along with Novatek, which holds a 60-percent stake, and the Japanese companies, the other participants in the project are the French Total company and two Chinese state corporations – China National Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Company (CNODC) and CNOOC, each holding 10 percent of the stock.

Speaking at the Osaka summit, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe put a high value on the signed agreement, emphasizing that the transaction “facilitates Russia’s efforts to develop the Arctic and ensures sustainable energy supply to our country” [Sassi 2019]. In turn, President Vladimir Putin told the summit that Japan’s total investment in the project would amount to nearly \$3 billion.<sup>15</sup>

The record of the final investment decision on the Arctic LNG-2 was signed at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok in September 2019. Mitsui and JOGMEC, whose shares in the general package of Japanese investments were 25 percent and 75 percent respectively, figure in the project through the Dutch joint venture Japan Arctic LNG B.V.

Of great interest is the structure of the transport and logistics support for the Yamal projects. The only possible channel of LNG supply is the Northern Sea Route. This means that the tankers should be specialized LNG carriers of the 7Arc class or nuclear icebreakers should be used for escort. In 2020, about 15 specialized tankers of the Arc7 ice class

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.jetro.go.jp/biznews/2019/06/20dfaacd91922362.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://rg.ru/2019/07/01/putin-prinial-uchastie-v-sammite-g20-i-vstretilsia-s-trampom.html>

were used to serve the Yamal LNG plant.<sup>16</sup> Four of them are owned by Mitsui O.S.K. Lines (MOL), a major shipping company that is part of the Mitsui subsidiaries group. In September 2019, MOL, JBIC, and Novatek signed an agreement on cooperation in LNG transshipment projects on Kamchatka and in Murmansk, and also in construction of floating storages for transshipment of LNG from icebreaking tankers to ordinary LNG tankers. Plans to create an LNG transshipment hub on Kamchatka are evaluated in Japan in the context of supporting measures for the growing LNG market in Asia, which meets Japan's national interests. The Kamchatka hub is expected to cut the cost of maritime transportation and to reduce the delivery time to the rest of Asia. Unlike the previously established model of LNG trade, focused on long-term contracts, Arctic LNG directed to Asian markets will be sold through spot transactions. In the future, these shipments will help form a new LNG spot market in the Asia-Pacific region, which meets Japan's interests because such a market would enhance the possibility of price maneuvering in the context of uncertain demand for natural gas.

Arrangement of LNG shipments to Japan from the Yamal projects is already at the practical stage. In late June 2020, the icebreaking LNG tanker *Vladimir Rusanov* left the port of Sabetta and on July 23 entered the Tokyo Bay at the Ogishima LNG terminal, for the first time in history delivering there LNG from the Russian Arctic.<sup>17</sup>

However, it is logical to ask the following questions: why did it take several years to reach an investment agreement and why, in the end, is there only one Japanese private company in it. Initially, two trade and investment corporations with extensive experience of participation in Russian energy projects, Mitsui & Co. and Mitsubishi Corp., were to take part. But Mitsubishi refused to participate, finding the project conditions not favorable enough. Apparently, they figured that the political situation

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/natural-gas/093020-japan-eyes-participating-in-kamchatka-lng-reloading-terminal-official>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.mol.co.jp/en/pr/2020/20038.html>

around Russia was unfavorable for long-term investment, primarily taking into consideration the escalating conflict of Russia with the West, which, not without reason, was recognized as long-lasting and not having visible prospects for relaxation. The company took into consideration the risk of being put under the US anti-Russian sanctions in the case of their tightening in the future [Brown 2019].

Moreover, Japan considers Russia to be a country of high country risks, in which there is no independent judicial system and therefore the main role is played by informal mechanisms of interaction with the authorities, which often falter. In addition, there is an unpleasant memory of the political pressure put on the company in 2006: the consortium with Mitsubishi's participation had to reduce its stake in the Sakhalin-2 project when Gazprom decided to have its controlling interest.

Finally, there were certain doubts about the profitability of the project in view of the reduction of the country's needs in the long term. The payback of such projects takes decades, while the departure from carbon energy is akin to an avalanche. It is difficult to figure out the price and demand for gas in some 20 or 25 years, but this should be the planning timeframe for such projects.

In this regard, it is pertinent to note the general trend to reduce Japan's needs in hydrocarbons. According to long-term forecasts, the proportion of gas in electricity generation is expected to somewhat decrease in Japan, and therefore there will hardly be any significant rise in demand for LNG in the future.<sup>18</sup> It should also be taken into consideration that the departure from nuclear power generation that emerged after the Fukushima disaster has somewhat slowed down after the restart of the nuclear reactors that were shut down after the accident; as a result, the proportion of nuclear power generation has not decreased as much as it was initially expected. Moreover, Japan, as the leader of the movement against global warming, has to discontinue the use of hydrocarbons, relying instead on renewable sources and,

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/category/special/article/energyissue2019\\_01.html](https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/category/special/article/energyissue2019_01.html)

again, nuclear power in order to honor its commitments under the Paris Agreement.

This poses the question of what the governing motive for Mitsui to join the project was. Apparently, a significant role, if not the main one, was played by political considerations. It bears remembering that Mitsui made this decision only after the Japanese state corporation JOGMEC proposed financing 75 percent of the transaction, thereby violating its rule to finance not more than 50 percent of the total investments.<sup>19</sup> Given the high politicization of this decision, it can be assumed that it was made as a result of Mitsui's informal agreement with the Japanese government. It is not accidental that Hiroshi Meguro, head of Mitsui's representative office in Moscow, said in a public interview that the project "could not be implemented without the government's support."<sup>20</sup>

There are several possible reasons for the activization of political lobbying by Tokyo officials in favor of the participation of Japanese capital in the Russian Arctic projects. First of all, during Abe's premiership, a significant role was played by Japan's expectations regarding the imminent signing of a peace treaty and the solution to the border problem. In fact, Shinzo Abe put the resolution of this issue at the forefront of his political career. The Arctic was integrated in the economic aid program and was intended to enhance the seriousness of the Japanese prime minister's intentions to resolve this issue by creating appropriate economic incentives for Russia. In other words, Tokyo believed that joint projects on the development of the NSR and natural gas production in the Arctic would help set in motion negotiations on border delimitation [Leksyutina 2021, p. 13]. It should be mentioned, however, that these expectations declined substantially in the last period of Abe's premiership, and after his resignation they practically disappeared.

The reason for the Japanese government's active position can also be seen in the aggravation of international competition for a stake in the very

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/japans-mitsui-and-mitsubishi-take-10-percent-stake-novateks-arctic-lng-2>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.hokkaido-np.co.jp/article/508913>



attractive Yamal projects. It was mentioned above that Japan competed for a stake in the Arctic LNG-2 project with the Saudi and Korean national corporations. In turn, the French Total company managed to get 16 percent of Novatek's shares, as well as 20 percent of the shares of the Yamal LNG project and 10 percent of the shares of the Arctic LNG-2 project. In this situation, the Japanese state-owned company JOGMEC, which was granted the right to buy stakes in foreign assets as per the amendments adopted in November 2016,<sup>21</sup> stepped up its efforts in the competition for Novatek's stake, trying to keep up with Total and other rivals.

In the context of international competition for the Arctic resources, the Chinese factor came into sharp focus. Specifically, Tokyo sought to prevent China from being too active in the Arctic under the patronage of Russia and receiving unilateral benefits and advantages there. Indeed, China was far ahead of Japan in receiving substantial stakes in the Arctic projects by taking advantage of Moscow's political and diplomatic isolation after the 2014 Crimean events and the imposition of economic sanctions against Russia, which Japan had to join (Chinese companies received a 30-percent stake in the Yamal LNG project).<sup>22</sup> It is also important that the anti-Russian sectoral sanctions provided for restrictions on participation in projects for the development of natural resources in the Arctic zone, including technologies and investment, which placed Japan in a dilemma: either to "give" Russia to China and other Asian competitors not participating in the sanctions, or to bypass them, formally remaining a member of the anti-Russian sanctions bloc.

It can be recalled that, in the early 1980s, the sanctions imposed against the USSR after its military intervention in Afghanistan did not prevent Japan from continuing the economic cooperation projects that it considered important for itself, including the projects on Sakhalin, where Japan supplied large-diameter pipes, and the projects for the development

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-jogmec-idUSKBN1360UC>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2019/04/26/5cc19b4b9a794744f3d7b676>

of forest resources in Eastern Siberia and the Far East [Ozawa 2019, p. 413–415]. This tradition has been inherited by contemporary Japan, whose leaders in the post-bipolar period have repeatedly made decisions to resume and continue ODA projects with regard to those countries that fall under international sanctions for violations of human rights and democratic principles.

Another apparent motive for Japan is the realization of the need to maintain stable economic ties with Russia without making a mandatory requirement for a short-term payback on cooperation projects. Generally, Tokyo understands that economics supports politics and that economic ties with Russia can promote good-neighbourly relations between the two countries. And since business thinks in terms of profitability and payback or builds its policy on the striving to avoid risk at any cost, it is the government policies that should correct the negative consequences of opportunistic and momentary decisions. In this case, the subject of government policies should be not a separate bureaucratic structure but a flexible and, at the same time, stable system of ties between the government, ministries, and the business community, which makes it possible to mobilize administrative and material resources and to use them as efficiently as possible [Polkhova, Sergunin 2020, p. 121].

In addition to the LNG sphere, another promising area of cooperation with Russia in the Arctic region is “green energy”. Projects in this area help Japan achieve its goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. One example is the joint Russia-Japan project with the participation of the Japanese companies NEDO, Takaoka Toko, and Mitsui to create a unique wind-diesel complex in the Arctic settlement of Tiksi (Yakutia). On December 22, 2020, officials from Japan and Russia participated in an online conference that was held there on the occasion of the launch of a power generation system. In addition to the installation of three wind-driven generators specially designed for extreme cold areas, it is also planned to deliver here Japanese-made diesel generators and storage batteries for the efficient supply of electricity to the region throughout the year. This is the second example (after Kamchatka) of the introduction of wind-driven generators in the Far East. “I believe

that the facilities built in cooperation with Japan will for a long time be working for the benefit of the people of these places,” said Aisen Nikolaev, Head of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia).<sup>23</sup>

## Security

The Arctic component is inevitably present in the Russian-Japanese relations in the security sphere. Japan keeps a close eye on the development of military and political situation in the Arctic region. It did not go unnoticed by Tokyo that, in December 2014, Russia established a new Joint Strategic Command, called North and designed to protect the natural wealth of the Arctic region and to safeguard the security of the Northern Sea Route, and built six military bases which were completed by 2020 [Grinyaev, Zhuravel 2020, p. 59].

Japan's greatest concern is that China steps up efforts to consolidate its military presence in the Arctic. Back in 2012, the icebreaker *Xuelong* (*Snow Dragon*) went from China to the Arctic via the Bering Strait. In 2015, China sent another five ships to the Arctic.<sup>24</sup> In January 2018, China published an Arctic white paper for the first time, in which the Northern Sea Route was called “Polar Silk Road” and which stated China's willingness to take part in the development of natural resources and transport communications in the Arctic. In September 2018, the first icebreaker of Chinese production, *Xuelong-2*, was launched in Shanghai.<sup>25</sup> Taking into account China's intention to speedily build up its naval power of the deep-water type and to create port infrastructure around the world in order to consolidate its interests in certain regions, Japan perceives China's Arctic policies with a large dose of alarmism.

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<sup>23</sup> [https://www.hokkaido-np.co.jp/article/497749?rct=n\\_politics](https://www.hokkaido-np.co.jp/article/497749?rct=n_politics)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-military-idUSKC-NOR22DN20150902>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.sankei.com/politics/news/181115/plt1811150001-n2.html>

It should be mentioned that it is not only Russia and China that augment their military presence in the Arctic. So do the USA and its NATO allies adjacent to the Arctic. In Norway, the USA keeps permanent Marine Corps forces, the personnel of which is renewed on a rotational basis, builds tracking stations at the Russian-Norwegian border, etc. In 2018, for the first time in 27 years, Washington sent its aircraft carrier to the Arctic region during NATO military exercises.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Sweden and Finland, which are not NATO members, have started to take part in the bloc's military exercises in the Arctic. According to Prof. Toshiyuki Ito, a Japanese military expert, some countries have begun to compete in the Arctic, which is manifested in symbolic gestures demonstrating their military presence in the region.<sup>27</sup> Following this logic, in 2020, Japan, too, sent to the Arctic its battleship *Kashima* with 310 crew members and trainees on board. In late August it left Hiroshima, passed through the Bering Strait in early September and on September 8 held a communications exercise with the use of hand flags jointly with the US Coast Guard.<sup>28</sup>

Since it is China that Tokyo considers its main military and political adversary, China's military efforts are perceived as a threat to the safety of the West in general and of Japan in particular. Kobayashi Takayuki, a Diet member from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in the House of Representatives, wrote in his blog that China's activity in the Arctic "causes concerns with regard to the Chinese Navy's increasing influence in the Arctic Ocean, the Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk, in the northern part of the Pacific." The Japanese politician is especially concerned about the prospect of free movement of Chinese nuclear submarines in the Arctic, which, in his opinion, can lead to "a rapid decline in the level of deterrence of China by

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.interfax.ru/world/634200>

<sup>27</sup> <https://s.japanese.joins.com/JArticle/272541?sectcode=A00&servcode=A00>

<sup>28</sup> <https://s.japanese.joins.com/JArticle/272541?sectcode=A00&servcode=A00>

America and a serious disruption of the balance of forces in East Asia” [Kobayashi 2015].

Japan evaluates the possible placement of Chinese warships in the Arctic, first of all, in the context of a threat to its main ally, the USA. While, from the territory of China, the attack power of its Navy and missile potential is aimed primarily at the US West Coast, from the Arctic, the East Coast becomes equally vulnerable to a Chinese missile strike. Japan perceives this threat as a blow to its own strategic interests and therefore strives to make the advance of the Chinese military to the Arctic as difficult as possible. In this regard, we cannot but admit that, in the foreseeable future, the US-Japan relations will remain a major factor influencing Japan’s policy in the development of the Arctic [Doroshev 2018, p. 159].

According to some Japanese strategists, this circumstance enhances the significance of dialogue with Russia, whom Japan does not want to see as a partner of China (much less its “little brother”) in establishing rules of conduct in the Arctic. However, in the opinion of some Japanese experts, this threat does exist because of the weaker economic power of Russia as compared to China. Moreover, Japan is mindful of Russia’s gradual lagging behind China in technical potential, which is associated with the lack of appropriate resources to modernize the Russian naval forces,<sup>29</sup> and strongly appeals to the challenges and threats for Russia’s national interests related to the military penetration of China into the Arctic. Japan would not like Russia, the only Euro-Asiatic country with maritime access to the Arctic, to let the Chinese Navy in this region [Kobayashi 2015]. Japan proceeds from the assumption that Russia will seek to maintain a bilateral balance of forces with China [Hyodo 2014, p. 868], and therefore it should cooperate with Japan in order to “control” China’s advance to the Arctic.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.sankei.com/politics/news/181115/plt1811150001-n2.html>

<sup>30</sup> <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Arctic-emerges-as-collaboration-hot-spot-for-Japan-and-Russia>

## Conclusion

From the strategic perspective, the Arctic policy helps to cast new light on the role of Japan in the geopolitical landscape taking shape in the post-COVID era. Evidently, the development of the Yamal gas projects and the integration of the Northern Sea Route into the global transport and communications network make it possible to create a new logistics link that will connect Russia and Japan with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. On the roadsides of this trade and transport route are economically depressed regions of the Russian Arctic and of the Russian Pacific Coast, developed regions of post-industrial Japan, and rapidly growing industrial regions in the countries of Southeast and South Asia. This route integrates Russian gas, Japanese finance and technologies, labour resources and industrial facilities of the ASEAN and South Asia countries in a single whole. The sea communications that encircle Eurasia from the North, East, and South can provide a new logistics basis for the future economic development of both regional and world economies. In this sense, Russian-Japanese cooperation in the Arctic obtains not only regional but also world-wide dimensions. Cooperation projects can be incorporated both in the Japanese concept of the free and open Indo-Pacific region and in the concept of Greater Eurasia promoted by Russia, which will help integrate the two concepts in a form meeting the interests of both countries.

It is also important that, despite the competitive relations with China, the Arctic projects give Japan a unique opportunity to cooperate with that country on a mutually beneficial basis. Japan's participation in the Arctic LNG-2 project is in line with Japan's declared readiness to move beyond competition to cooperation with China in the sphere of infrastructure development, which was announced during summit meetings, particularly during Prime Minister Abe's visit to China in October 2018.

Russia, too, can benefit from cooperation with Japan in the Arctic. It can help Russia to move away from the undesirable tilt of economic ties towards China and to expand the list of buyers in Asia.

In addition, this is also an opportunity to expand access to Japanese technologies, especially in off-shore works and other areas of energy resource production [Morozov & Klimenko 2015, p. 45; Gutenev 2017, p. 81].

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## **Energy Strategy and Transition to Green Energy in Japan**

**Z. S. Podoba**

**Abstract.** The paper presents an analysis of the current state of green energy in Japan. The study showcases that Japan's energy strategy focuses primarily on eliminating energy deficit and, secondly, on greening the sector. After the Fukushima accident, Japan recognized renewable energy as a solution to the energy security problem and intensified government policies to stimulate investment in renewable energy. Policy incentives, primarily the introduction of feed-in tariffs, and massive investments have led to an increase in the share of renewable energy sources, especially solar PV, in the structure of electricity generation, and contributed to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions decline after 2013, as well as the improvement in the energy efficiency of the economy. By the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Japan was among the top-five countries based on installed renewable power capacity (excluding hydropower). However, the costs of electricity have been rising and the costs associated with installing renewables in Japan are very high comparing with other countries. Meanwhile, Japan is among the top-five economies with the highest CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, 90 percent of which are energy-related, and has been criticized by the international community for its ongoing support for fossil fuels.

In 2020, Japan announced an ambitious plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 by speeding up the development of key technologies such as next generation solar batteries and carbon recycling. The promotion of *hydrogen society* is called one of the most important steps towards a low-carbon economy in Japan. Achieving the goal will require a significant revision of the current

energy plan, according to which, by 2030, more than half of the country's energy will continue to be produced by fossil fuel plants.

Japan has made some progress in its green energy policy, but whether it is sustainable remains to be seen. In addition, in light of low oil prices and the COVID-19 recession, the future of renewable energy sources remains uncertain.

**Keywords:** Japan, green energy, renewable energy, greenhouse gases emissions, energy efficiency.

## Introduction

The choice of a way for the further development of the world economy is becoming increasingly urgent in the modern conditions of global instability. Although the economic system that prevailed earlier provided certain results in raising the people's living standards, the negative consequences of this system referred to as *brown economy* are significant. To survive and develop, mankind will need to adopt a new paradigm of development, which will not subject future generations to substantial environmental risks.

The concept of green economy evolving in recent decades is aimed at a more harmonious coordination of economic and environmental issues. The global interest in green economy has grown dramatically since this term was first mentioned in 1989. [Pearce, Markandya & Barbier 1989, p. 192]. After the UN had started implementing its ecological program "Green Economy Initiative", the concept became generally accepted. UNEP defines green economy as one that "improves human well-being and builds social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and environmental scarcities", as "low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNEP, 2011, Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication – A Synthesis for Policy Makers, [www.unep.org/greeneconomy](http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy)

It is the energy sector that is regarded as one of the key ones on the way to forming a new model of economy as it is the largest source of carbon dioxide emissions. The importance of this area is proven by the fact that two of 17 Goals in the field of sustainable development for the period until 2030 are associated with the development of green energy (7. Affordable and Clean Energy and 13. Climate action).

Although there is no single universally accepted definition of green energy, most experts understand it as a shift toward greater reliance on renewable resources (RES), regarded as more sustainable than relying on depletable energy and fossil fuels [Reilly 2012, p. S85]. Yet features and contradictions of the current global energy development testify that the green aspect in this sector of the economy is much more comprehensive. This viewpoint is presented in OECD publications [OECD 2011, p. 106] where it is noted that green energy implies not only the growth of investments in RES and the increase of their share in the structure of energy production and consumption, but also requires large-scale greenhouse gases (GHG) emission reductions and includes rationalizing and phasing-out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption. Moreover most important indicators for the green energy development incorporate energy efficiency improvement, the number of projects and clean technology patent applications, and government support measures.

The development of low carbon energy is of particular importance to Japan as the country facing the challenge of addressing energy security, having a high degree of dependence on fossil fuels and being one of the largest producers of greenhouse gases, 90 percent of which are originated by the energy sector.

Issues associated with the evolution of Japan's energy policy were most fully reflected in the materials compiled by the researchers of the Institute of Energy Economics, Japan, as well as in topical studies by a number of Russian authors ([Pipiya & Dorogokupets 2017, p. 38; Korneev & Popov 2019, pp. 44–53] and others). There are a number of publications both in Russian and English devoted to the development of green economy in Japan ([Streltsov 2012; Capozza 2011] and others).

However, transition to green energy in Japan has not yet received full coverage.

This paper analyses the current state of green energy in Japan based on the OECD definition and provides conclusions of its prospects and economic energy efficiency.

## **Evolution of Japan's Energy Policy and RES Role**

There are many definitions of renewable energy in literature. One way or another, they all underline that this is energy obtained through natural processes capable of replenishing themselves naturally without being depleted. There exist several forms of renewable energy including the one generated by such sources as the solar, wind, and biomass as well as geothermal, water power resources, biogas and liquid biofuels. Nuclear energy – like the solar and wind energy – is a low-carbon energy source. However, threats to safety and problems of radioactive waste disposal prevent it from getting into one line with renewables. Attributing nuclear energy to the rank of green one is still a disputable issue.

Getting down to the analysis of Japan's energy policy evolution, it should be noted that geographical and climatic factors brought about a very conservative approach to any meaningful innovations in the country. The energy strategy in Japan changed predominantly through various contingencies: economic (the oil crisis in the 1970s and the prolonged recession in the 1990s), natural and climatic (natural disasters and consequent destruction of the energy infrastructure), as well as technological (the Fukushima nuclear disaster).

Soon after World War II, the country entered the period of high economic growth rates referred to as the Japanese economic miracle. Its implementation would have hardly been possible if not for the lucrative oil deposits in the Middle East discovered in the 1960s. Oil – as an energy resource convenient to produce and, especially, transport – made it possible to rapidly increase energy production and replace coal as the

most important type of fuel in the country's energy balance. The feasibility of this strategy was in many respects ensured by low prices for this type of fuel (the nominal cost of oil remained virtually unchanged for a long period of time in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century since it was artificially restrained by the cartel of vertically integrated international oil companies, called the "Seven Sisters"). The share of the "black gold" in the structure of primary energy resources consumption in Japan exceeded 75 percent (Figure 1). The bulk of oil was delivered from the Persian Gulf countries. The level of energy self-sufficiency in Japan at that time amounted to a mere 15 percent.<sup>2</sup>

The oil shocks of the 1970s demonstrated a high degree of energy vulnerability of Japan's economy and conditioned the need for drastic changes in the country's energy strategy [Lebedeva & Kravtsevich (eds.) 1990, p. 3]. It was then that Japan began developing policies aimed at ensuring energy security. Energy saving, oil import reduction, and encouragement of alternative energy sources use were designated as long-term priorities. Yet the focus was made on the use of nuclear energy as well as coal and liquefied natural gas (LNG) rather than renewables.

These policies helped reduce the dependence on oil, and by 2003 Japan had reached the landmark limit: the share of this type of fuel reduced to 50 percent in the total primary energy consumption. By the beginning of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, nearly 40 percent of Japan's energy needs were satisfied by oil; as Japanese economists estimate, this ratio is not likely to change significantly in the following years (Figure 1).

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011 compelled not only Japan, but also many other countries of the world to reconsider their attitude to nuclear energy as an environmentally friendly, cheap, and safe energy resource. Japan had had 54 working nuclear reactors prior to the disaster (third place in the world after the USA and France),

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<sup>2</sup> Japan's Agency for Natural resources and Energy. URL: <http://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/>

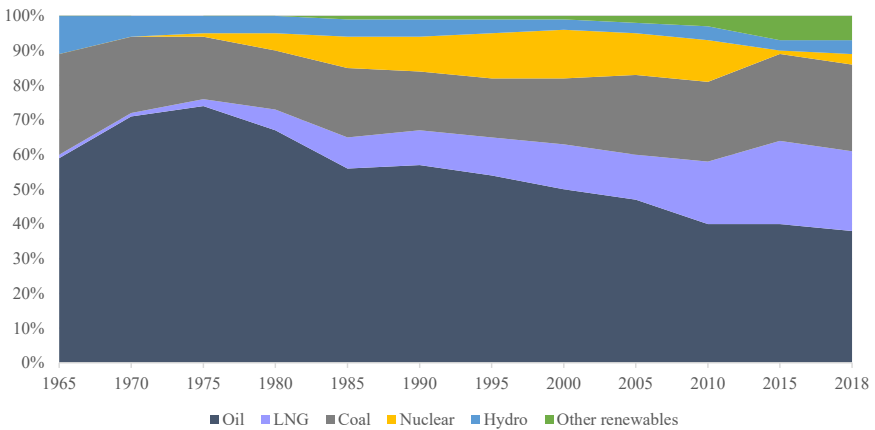


Figure 1. Structure of primary energy supply in Japan<sup>3</sup>

that provided over 25 percent of national electricity supply (Figure 2).<sup>4</sup> The disaster's consequences made Japan modify its strategy of energy and environmental security as well as temporary halt nuclear power production. It is after the 2011 that the importance of RES in the country's energy balance began to increase markedly. Yet, along with that, the use of coal and natural gas was growing even more considerably. The dependence of Japan's economy on mineral fuels increased from 81 percent in 2010 to 87 percent by 2017.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Germany, which made a decision to abandon the nuclear power by the end of 2022 and the one of coal by 2038 in favor of RES, the Japanese government started to restore nuclear power production several years after the shutdown of reactors despite the

<sup>3</sup> Compiled by the data of Japan's Agency for Natural Resources and Energy.

<sup>4</sup> Japan is the fourth country in the world by electric power consumption after China, USA, and India. Yet, the bulk of the electric power is generated with the use of mineral fuels.

<sup>5</sup> Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, Japan. <http://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/>

lack of support from the population. As of May 2020, nine reactors had been recognized as fitting the new standards of safety and had resumed operation.<sup>6</sup>

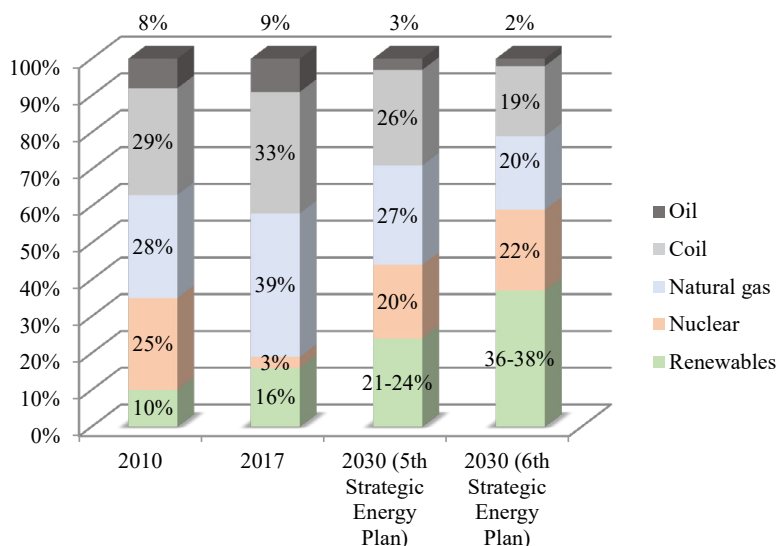


Figure 2. Electric Power Generation in Japan<sup>7</sup>

Japan's current energy policy is based on four basic principles called 3E + S: Energy Security, Economic Efficiency, Environmental protection, and Safety.<sup>8</sup>

Changes in Japan's energy strategy are reflected in the government's middle-term energy programs. They were made mandatory by the 2002

<sup>6</sup> IEA. Japan 2021. Energy policy review. [https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/3470b395-cfdd-44a9-9184-0537cf069c3d/Japan2021\\_EnergyPolicyReview.pdf](https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/3470b395-cfdd-44a9-9184-0537cf069c3d/Japan2021_EnergyPolicyReview.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Agency for Natural Resources and Energy, Japan. <http://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/>

<sup>8</sup> Japan's Strategic Energy Plan. [https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/category/others/basic\\_plan/pdf/6th\\_outline.pdf](https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/category/others/basic_plan/pdf/6th_outline.pdf)



Fundamental Law on Energy Policy, which decreed to compile long-run basic energy plans for five years. The year of 2018 saw the approval of the Fifth Energy Plan indicating for the first time that RES were to become a major source of electric power by 2050. The document did not, however, contain any specific measures of achieving this goal. In addition, although the share of renewable energy in the total electric power supply, as stated in the projected energy structure for the interim year of 2030, is supposed to increase to 21-24 percent, it will be lower than the share of thermal power plants using coal, gas, and oil (54-56 percent). The nuclear energy will account for 15-20 percent, slightly less than prior to the Fukushima-1 disaster (Figure 2).

On October, 2021, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) released the Sixth Strategic Energy Plan, which proposes to reduce the total primary energy generation and includes the following key changes in 2030 targets from the previous version of plan: increase in the use of renewables to 36%-38%; reduction in reliance on oil and coal; and addition of hydrogen and ammonia to the list of energy sources.

The largest share of power generated with the use of RES in Japan at the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was that of hydro energy (7.9 percent), the second place was occupied by solar energy (5.2 percent), the third – by biomass (2.1 percent); followed by wind (0.6 percent) and geothermal (0.2 percent) energy. According to the Sixth Strategic Energy plan, the share of each of the above RES will have increased by 2030, and the structure of electric power generation with the use of renewables will look as follows: solar energy – 14-16 per cent, hydro energy – 11 percent, wind energy – 5 percent, biomass – 5 percent, geothermal energy – 1 percent.<sup>9</sup>

Japan was among the top five countries possessing the largest renewable power capacity (not including hydropower) by the end of 2020. Japan also occupied the third place by installed solar PV capacities, the tenth – by geothermal power capacities, the ninth – by hydro power ones. These areas gained the most significant impetus in Japan [REN21 Renewables 2020, 2021].

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

It should be noted that the Japanese renewable energy is not characterized by high level of economic efficiency. Japan's installed costs for new utility-scale solar PV projects, utility-scale solar PV and offshore wind weighted-average LCOE are the highest in the world. Thus, weighted-average total installed cost of utility-scale solar PV projects commissioned in 2018 in Japan was USD 2 101/kW. For reference: these costs do not exceed 1 500 USD/kW in the United States and Australia and are below 1 000 USD/kW in China, India, and Italy. Russia (2 302 USD/kW) and Canada (2 427 USD/kW) had highest costs among the G20 countries [IRENA 2019]. Japan's high expenses are conditioned by high standards of safety measures observance and a higher level of salaries (Japan was the 18<sup>th</sup> in the world by the average wages level in 2020; the average wages in Japan are 1.6 times higher than in Italy, 2.7 times higher than in China, 5.7 times higher than in Russia, and 6 times higher than in India).<sup>10</sup>

### **Japan's Investments in Renewable Energy Sources and Fossil Fuels**

One of the most important indicators for the green energy development is the volume of investments channeled to create and maintain relevant facilities, introduce green technologies and develop projects in these fields. Global investments in renewables capacity (excluding large hydro) reached \$282.2 bln in 2019 (Figure 3). Capital expenditures on new renewables capacity exceeded the volume of investments in setting up new coal, natural gas, and nuclear energy using facilities, which testifies the shift of priorities in the global energy development [REN21 Renewables 2020].

As to the types of sources, wind energy has become the most attractive for capital inputs since 2010, taking up 49 percent of investments, which was promoted by the further reduction of capital costs and the slowdown

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.picodi.com/ph/bargain-hunting/average-wages>

in China's PV market. The solar energy accounted for 46.5 percent of all investments. The other RES showed less striking results [Frankfurt School-UNEP Centre/BNEF 2020].

Japan is one of the largest investors in RES – it took the third place in the world after China and the USA over the period 2010-2019. Japanese investments grew from \$7 bln in 2010 to \$16.6 billion in 2019 reaching the peak of 36.2 bln in 2015. (Figure 3).

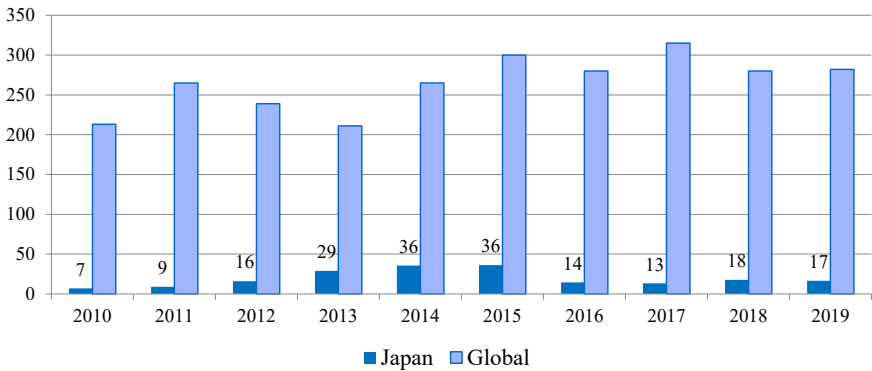


Figure 3. Investments in RES, USD bln<sup>11</sup>

As a promotion measure for the accelerating investments for RES, Japan, like many other countries, introduced the system of feed-in tariffs (FIT). Under the feed-in tariff scheme, the electric utility is obligated to purchase electricity from a renewable energy producer at a fixed price for a long-term period guaranteed by the government. The year of 2020, however, witnessed the beginning of gradual transformation of the renewable energy support provided by the Japanese government. The key change was to gradually develop a feed-in-premium (FIP) scheme, stimulating electric power producers through the market price markup. The markup can be determined in two ways: a) on the recommendation of the Purchase Price Computation Committee as in the case with feed-in tariffs, and b) using the tender

<sup>11</sup> Source: [Frankfurt School-UNEP Centre/BNEF 2020]

system. Meanwhile the reference price will vary depending on the supply and demand balance on the market. This transition is in line with the global practice as feed-in tariffs are subjected to criticism for placing an excessive burden on consumers and taxpayers because the fixed price thwarts competition.

It is noteworthy, that introduction of feed-in tariffs made a significant impact on RES development in Japan. Solar energy production facilities grew over 150-fold – from 370 MW in 2010 to 63 GW in 2019, while the share of solar energy in power generation reached 6.6 percent.

Meanwhile Japan faces the following challenges on the way to green energy:

High costs. The increase in the use of renewable energy directly depends on its production costs reduction. The costs are to be brought to the level comparable with the costs of energy production from other sources to make RES attractive.

The negative attitude to RES from local inhabitants. People frequently do not perceive them as a stable and reliable source of energy and express concerns about the safety and the disposal of installations after their service life is over.

Difficulties of renewable energy integration into the national power system. On the one hand, the energy supply system in Japan (generation and energy transmission lines) does not always cover areas suitable for renewable energy production (for example, areas with good conditions for wind energy development). On the other hand, the mass adoption of renewable energy is challenged by power grid limitations.

Unstable production of electric power from renewable sources. The volumes of electricity generated from RES such as solar energy and wind are difficult to control as they are affected by seasonal and weather conditions. That may result in the abundance or shortage of electricity, which are to be compensated for by the use of fossil fuels.

The need for new investments including foreign capital. According to the Renewable Energy Country Attractiveness Index calculated by

Ernst&Young,<sup>12</sup> Japan ranked No. 8 among 40 countries in October 2021 [EY RECAI 2021].

It should be pointed out that investments in fossil fuels in Japan still considerably exceed capital investments involved in RES. Japan continues supporting the development of oil, gas, and coal projects – both inside the country and abroad – by means of its fiscal policy and government funding mechanisms. Although Japan undertook the commitments to lower subsidies, such as the G7 declaration to phase out fossil fuel subsidies by 2025, the country's government is not transparent in presenting information on the progress achieved in this field. Some studies conclude that it would be more profitable for Japanese operators to invest in renewable energy sources such as wind or solar than to operate coal power plants after 2025 [Gray, Takamura, et al. 2019]. However, Japan's government encourages investments in fossil fuels to maintain diversification of energy sources.

Japan plans to build 22 new coal-burning facilities in the next five years. Although they will be electric power plants of a new type with high energy efficiency indices, they will emit almost as much carbon dioxide annually as all passenger cars sold annually in the United States of America, and more than the overall emissions in Norway or Sweden.

Japan's policy in this field differs from that in other developed countries. Thus, for example, Great Britain intends to give up coal energy by 2025, and France announced that it would close down coal power plants much earlier, by 2022 [Tabuchi 2020]. Japan remains the only country of the G7 that continues building coal power plants inside the country; it is also the largest investor in similar projects abroad.

Three largest banks of Japan – Mitsubishi UFJ (MUFG), Mizuho, and Sumitomo Mitsui (SMBC) – channeled \$281 bln to the projects focused on fossil fuel development throughout the world in 2016-2019.

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<sup>12</sup> This index accounts for changes in national energy policy priorities, reforms aimed at improving the investment climate, environmental policies, the private sector's participation in renewable energy projects, etc.

Moreover, the volume of these investments is only increasing from year to year [Banking on Climate Change 2019]. Japan is the third among the G20 countries by the amounts of coal industry subsidies after China and India. It is followed by South Africa, South Korea, Indonesia, and the USA. Japan also holds the second place among the G20 countries (after China) by the amounts of government investments in foreign coal projects. The main beneficiaries of Japanese investments are Vietnam, Indonesia, and Bangladesh.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the fact that, in 2019, a number of Japan's trading houses, including Itochu, Marubeni, Mitsui and Sojitz – the biggest investors of coal-fired TPSs, – announced their plans to give up or limit investing in coal projects, these statements are to be treated with caution. They are not related to the implementation of the running projects and those adopted earlier and being now under consideration. Moreover, these plans do not apply to coal-fired power stations with ultra-supercritical technologies (cutting-edge technologies of coal-fired power stations that have the lowest intensity of emissions at less than 750 g CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh).<sup>14</sup>

### **Emission of Greenhouse Gases in Japan**

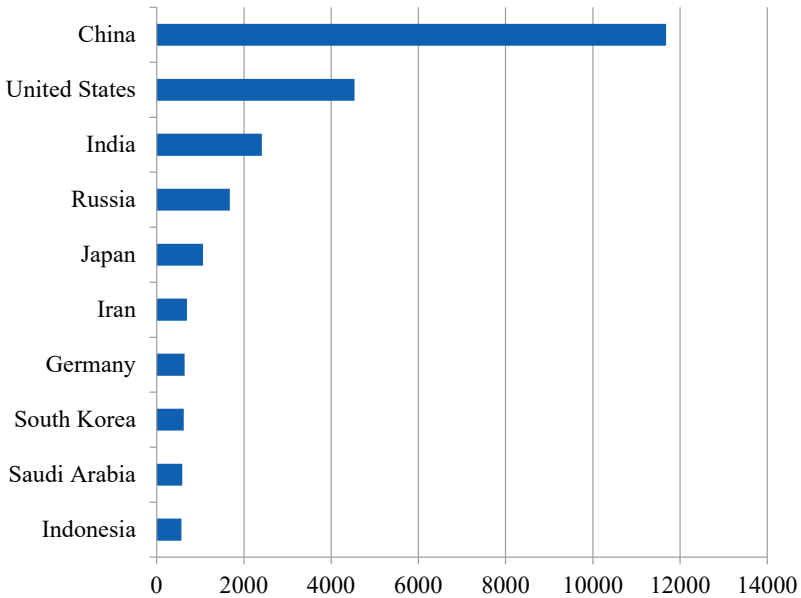
One of the most important issues related to green energy is the reduction of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emission as its concentration in the atmosphere has notably increased over the last century and now exceeds the mid-1800s level by 4 percent. The energy sector is the largest GHG emitter among all the spheres of human activity accounting for over 70 percent of total emissions [Ritchie & Roser 2020]. China, the USA, India, the EU, Russia, and Japan are the largest global CO<sub>2</sub> producers. These countries account for 2/3 of the global fossil fuels emissions (according

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<sup>13</sup> G20 coal subsidies. Tracking government support to a fading industry. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12744.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

to the 2019 data). The share of Japan amounts to 3 percent of global emissions (Figure 4). 85 percent of the emissions in Japan come from energy generation.



*Figure 4. Top 10 countries – largest CO<sub>2</sub> emitters in 2020, ml tons<sup>15</sup>*

GHG emissions in Japan had been increasing until 2013, when the historical high was recorded, followed by a gradual reduction. The most considerable emission reduction was observed in 2018-2019 and associated with the resumption of nuclear power operations as well as the expansion of renewable energy (Figure 5).

Combining efforts of all countries is of great importance in combating climate change. International negotiations on climate change are held within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) aimed at coordinating measures undertaken to

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<sup>15</sup> Source: EDGAR

address human-induced global warming. The UNFCCC was adopted in 1992 and ratified in 1994. Most countries of the world, including Japan, acceded to the Convention.

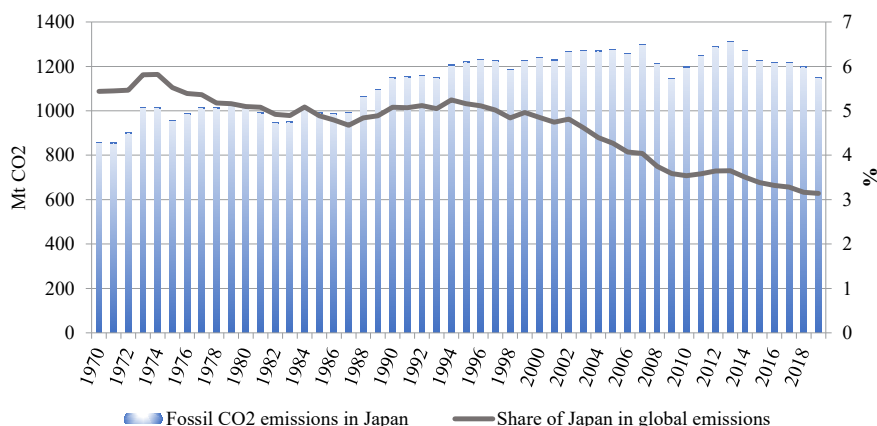


Figure 5. Fossil CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in Japan<sup>16</sup>.

The UNFCCC provides for the principle of common but differentiated responsibility considering different levels of countries' socio-economic development. It is recognized that the leading role in combatting climate change and its negative consequences is to be played by industrially developed and emerging countries which made the biggest contribution to the overall amount of anthropogenic GHG emissions in the process of their development (the principle of historical responsibility).

Realizing the urgency of more stringent measures to solve the climate change problem, in addition to the UNFCCC, the international community adopted the Kyoto Protocol (KP) in 1997. Japan was the initiator of this major international treaty on combatting global warming. The Kyoto Protocol assigned quantitative reduction and limitation commitments for anthropogenic greenhouse gases emissions to each of the countries listed in Annex I of the

<sup>16</sup> Source: EDGAR, IEA



UNFCCC. These countries were to ensure reduction of GHG emissions at least by 5 percent in the period of 2008-2012 as compared with the 1990 level.

For the purpose of minimizing economic costs of the emissions limitation and reduction commitments, the Kyoto Protocol stipulated the system of “flexible mechanisms”: Clean Development Mechanism, Joint Implementation, and Emissions Trading<sup>17</sup>. Other schemes began to appear simultaneously with the development of these mechanisms. Notably, the last mechanism became the most popular, even among the countries that had not undertaken any quantitative reduction commitments. In fact, it laid the basis for the development of a new segment of world trade – carbon market. The main driver on this market is the European emissions trading scheme (EU ETS). China is also actively developing the national system of emissions trading. There are currently several systems for trading emission quotas on various levels – international, national, and regional [Podoba & Kryshneva 2018].

Japan launched the so-called Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM). It is a system of agreements between Japan and developing countries on measures to reduce greenhouse gases emissions, with the result of this reduction being assessed as the contribution of both partner countries and Japan. Promoting the dissemination of advanced low carbon technologies through the JCM, Japan attempts to help solving the climate change problem on the global scale. This mechanism was suggested by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21) in 2015. Japan signed the JCM partnership documents with 17 countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, Middle East, and small island developing economies.<sup>18</sup>

In 2012, the Kyoto Protocol effective period was prolonged until 2020. Yet, like Russia and Canada, Japan considered its further participation in

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<sup>17</sup> For more detail about KP mechanisms and “green energy” development in BRICS countries see [Z. Podoba, D. Kryshneva, 2018].

<sup>18</sup> The Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM). <https://www.jcm.go.jp/>

the project pointless. It should be recalled that the USA never ratified the KP, while China did not undertake any commitments having the developing economy status. Despite the wide acceptance of the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms, it turned into an ineffective instrument. The Paris Climate Agreement was concluded within the UNFCCC framework in December 2015; it entered into force in November 2016 and was supposed to replace the Kyoto Protocol after 2020. The Agreement is aimed at intensifying global response to the climate change threat, including such measures as restraining the global average temperature growth below 2°C (and preferably limit the increase to 1.5 °C) compared to the pre-industrial level.<sup>19</sup> Japan ratified the Agreement in 2016, and Russia – in 2019.

The document stipulates that all countries will present national plans to overcome global climate change consequences that are to be renewed every 5 years (Nationally Determined Contribution, *NDC*). In accordance with the preliminary version presented in 2015, Japan undertook commitments to reduce GHG emissions by 26 percent by 2030 against the 2013 level (25.4 percent against 2005).<sup>20</sup> The achievement of the above goals presupposes, among other things, the use of the JCM mechanism. According to the requirements of the Paris Agreement, in 2020, Japan confirmed its commitment to the plans declared earlier.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, the emissions reduction benchmarks in Japan are presented against the 2013 level, while the USA makes comparisons with 2005, and EU – with 1990. If the above countries' benchmarks are compared with the 2013 level, it may be noted that Japan's benchmark is higher than in other leading developed countries (Table 1).

<sup>19</sup> Paris Climate Agreement. 2015, p. 3. [https://unfccc.int/files/essential\\_background/convention/application/pdf/russian\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/russian_paris_agreement.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Submission of Japan's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC). 2015. P. 1. [https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/Japan/1/20150717\\_Japan's%20INDC.pdf](https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/Japan/1/20150717_Japan's%20INDC.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. P. 4.

*Table 1*

Greenhouse gases remissions benchmarks by 2030<sup>22</sup>

| Country | Compared with<br>1990 | Compared with 2005         | Compared with<br>2013 |
|---------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Japan   | ▲18.0 %               | ▲25.4 %                    | ▲26.0 %<br>(by 2030)* |
| USA     | ▲14.0–16.0 %          | ▲26.0–28.0 %<br>(by 2030)* | ▲18.0–21.0 %          |
| EU      | ▲40.0 %<br>(by 2030)* | ▲35.0 %                    | ▲24.0 %               |

\* Benchmark indicated in the national contribution.

In addition, in 2019, Japan’s government drafted a new document titled “Long-Term-Strategy under the Paris Agreement” that proclaimed building the “de-carbonized society” in the second half of the current century and taking measures to reduce GHG emissions by 80 percent by the middle of the current century to be the major goal of the Japanese society. Achievement of sustainable development goals, joint creation of innovations, formation of 5.0 Society, a circular economy and an environmentally responsible economy are to become the main elements of the strategy’s implementation. All possible means will be used for de-carbonization in the energy sector: increased use of renewables, reduction of fossil fuels dependence, development of hydrogen energy, carbon capture and storage technologies (CCS), as well as carbon capture and utilization (CCU), energy storage systems using accumulator batteries, etc.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Japan’s Agency for Natural Resources and Energy. Japan’s Energy 2019.

<sup>23</sup> The Government of Japan. The Long-term Strategy under the Paris Agreement. Cabinet decision, June 11, 2019. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/The%20Long-term%20Strategy%20under%20the%20Paris%20Agreement.pdf>

Growing attention in Japan is focused on the efforts for creating a hydrogen-based society. The development of hydrogen energy is not only regarded as a way towards low-carbon economy, but also as a key to enhancing energy security. The country plans to put up 320 hydrogen filling stations and increase the number of hydrogen-driven vehicles by 2025. Thereafter Japan expects to become the world leader in the field of hydrogen energy. Japanese corporations have already started building a global hydrogen supply chains. In the autumn of 2020, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced that Japan must become a carbon-neutral country by 2050 at the latest.

In 2021, METI published the “Green Growth Strategy Through Achieving Carbon Neutrality in 2050”. It is based on the decarbonization of the electric power sector through more active use of hydrogen and ammonia, as well as nuclear energy and renewable energy sources. At the same time, it promotes electrification in all areas, including transport, industry, and households, as well as technologies for the accumulation and storage of electricity.

However, experts recognize that significant technological innovations are required for this strategy to be successful. For these purposes, an action plan has been developed in 14 important areas, such as offshore wind energy, fuel ammonia, hydrogen, cars and batteries, semiconductors and ICTs, ships, buildings, next generation solar energy, etc. The Strategy formulates the tasks and ways to solve them at each of the four stages: the research and development phase, the practical testing phase, extended implementation, and independent commercial use. To support innovation, the government will create a 2 trillion yen (\$ 18.3 billion) fund to help active companies develop and test technologies. In addition, tax incentives will be introduced for them, and reforms will be carried out to ease restrictions.

## **Energy Efficiency of Japan's Economy**

Measures to raise energy efficiency are usually the most rational method of “greening” the energy sector. However, many countries attach much less importance to this area than, for example, to the use of RES. As most widely interpreted, efficiency is a ratio of some economic result (GDP, a company's production, etc.) to the costs in energy units (energy resources consumption, electric power generation, power costs at an enterprise, etc.). However, the reverse indicator – the energy intensity of the economy is much more often used in the global practice.

Japan started to develop and implement the policy of energy conservation and reduction of fossil fuel consumption after the oil shocks of the 1970s and made significant achievements in this area. Thus, the energy efficiency of its economy grew 35 percent in 1970-1990, and Japan reached the highest levels of energy efficiency indicators in virtually all industries. The process, however, slowed down in 1990-2010. Environmental protection and global warming were prevailing issues in that period. The shift in priorities of the government was associated, firstly, with the fact that the traditional policy of energy conservation, based on a decrease in specific indicators of energy consumption, has largely exhausted itself, and secondly, with the fact that measures on reducing GHG emissions became a key issue on the agenda. The latter directly depended on the country's achievements in energy saving as well as on efforts to restructure the energy balance. As a result, the political goals in the energy and environmental spheres began to merge in the second half of the 1990s [Streltsov 2011, pp. 19–20].

The energy intensity of Japan's economy is one of the lowest in the world. In 2019, Japan's indicator was 2.7 times lower than that in Russia, 2.2 times lower compared to the USA, and 1.6 times lower than that in China. The steps undertaken by the Japanese government to increase the RES share and raise energy efficiency resulted in a situation where the total amount of energy necessary to generate one unit of GDP showed

a downward trend in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet, Japan's results proved to be more moderate than similar indicators of some European countries, Germany in particular (Figure 6).

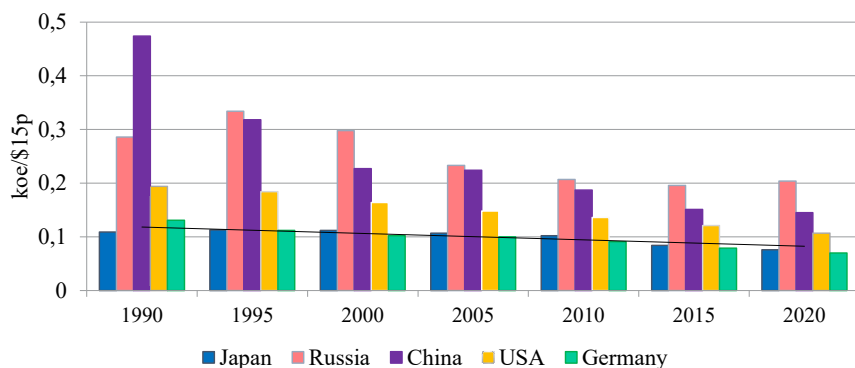


Figure 6. Energy intensity<sup>24</sup>

Japan's policy of energy conservation is implemented through encouragement of research and development in this field as well as the system of tax incentives and preferential subsidies. For example, from one-third to a half of an enterprise's investment costs on introduction of energy saving equipment and technologies may be subsidized. Companies with foreign capital also enjoy the right to these subsidies (Japan's Ministry of Economy and Trade appropriated some 700 mln yens for this purpose in 2017).<sup>25</sup>

There are no minimal energy efficiency standards in Japan, but the country has "Top Runner", a program of standards aimed at promoting energy efficient products. The program sets target indices for energy efficiency of product units for the subsequent years based on the analysis of average-weighted indicators for the current

<sup>24</sup> Source: Enerdata

<sup>25</sup> METI. 2020. Energy Efficiency and Conservation. [https://www.meti.go.jp/english/policy/energy\\_environment/energy\\_efficiency/index.html](https://www.meti.go.jp/english/policy/energy_environment/energy_efficiency/index.html)

period. Products which meet the energy efficiency standard receive a Top Runner label and get support (promotion in mass media, special marking, etc.). The program includes the following goods: automobiles, air conditioners, TV-sets, computers, refrigerators, and others (over 30 item names in total).

A set of measures has been designed to raise energy efficiency in the construction industry and buildings operation as the bulk of houses consume energy inefficiently. Thus, Japan's government promotes an initiative of building Zero Energy Houses (ZEH). Energy saving without sacrificing the comfortable habitat may be achieved through better thermal insulation, highly efficient equipment, and RES.

Finally, for purposes of raising the economy's energy efficiency and energy system sustainability it is projected to set up a new type of the decentralized electric power system with the intellectual distributed management achieved through energy transactions between its users. This system is called "Internet of Energy" and includes three components: 1) distributed energy sources, most of which will be based on RES use; 2) final consumers who own distributed small and microgeneration, as well as energy storage units, and who are ready to regulate the consumption of facilities they manage; 3) "smart networks" combining more advanced ways of power transmission with more effective distribution mechanisms.

## **Conclusion**

Japan's current energy policy and energy funding are aimed, first of all, at elimination of energy supply deficit, and, secondarily, at providing comprehensive development of green energy. After the Fukushima-1 accident Japan began to regard renewable energy as a means of addressing the challenge of energy instability and vigorized its state policy of stimulating investments in RES. Political incentives, such as introduction of feed-in tariffs, and significant investments led to an increase of renewable energy sources share, especially solar PV, in the

structure of electricity generation, and contributed to the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions after 2013, as well as to the improvement of energy efficiency. Yet, average total installed costs of renewable energy in Japan are very high compared to other countries, and electric power rates have risen considerably. All this puts a burden on consumers, reducing the potential for economic growth.

Japan's policy has been increasingly aligned with international rules in recent decades. On the whole, Japan is trying to implement its commitments under international treaties and has announced its ambitious plans to reduce greenhouse gases emissions within the framework of the Paris Agreement that exceed the intentions of other leading global economies. The goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 was set in 2020. According to the Sixth Strategic Energy Plan released in 2021, Japan aims to achieve the GHG reduction target by 2030 by reducing the total primary energy consumption and increasing the share of renewables to 36%–38%, along with adding of hydrogen and ammonia to the list of main energy sources.

Although Japan has definitely made achievements in advancing green energy, it is still unclear whether this trend is sustainable. According to the latest version of the national energy plan, the share of fossil fuels will still be higher than that of renewable energy and the share of nuclear power generation will grow significantly by 2030. In addition, Japan continues to invest intensively in fossil fuels, and given low oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic-caused recession, the future of renewable energy sources remains uncertain.

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## **Amidaist Practices in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* ("Continuation of the Biographies of Japanese Reborn Into the Pure Land")**

**A. A. Petrova**

**Abstract.** The article discusses practices for reaching rebirth in the Pure Land recounted in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* ("Continuation of the Biographies of Japanese Reborn Into the Pure Land"), composed in 1101-1111 by Ōe-no Masafusa. These practices include those mentioned in the stories as being performed during one's lifetime, intended to show one's strong devotion to Pure Land, as well as death-bed practices: the description of the death hour is the crucial point of every biography. Some of these practices belong to the Pure Land tradition (the most important to be mentioned is *nenbutsu*, "recollection of Buddha [Amida]"), while others are more likely to be attributed to other traditions (the most important one being reading and reciting the Lotus Sutra): the author obviously does not feel any need to draw a line between them. Normally, these practices are only mentioned in the text and not discussed in detail. This aspect of *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* is analyzed in comparison with other important Pure Land texts: *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* ("Japanese Records of Rebirth in the Land of Supreme Joy") by Yoshishige-no Yasutane and *Ōjōyōshū* ("The Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land") by Genshin. As compared to *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, much stronger emphasis is placed on the death-bed practices than on the lifetime actions and evidence of rebirth. Often, the text focuses on the state of mind of the dying person, his or her determination in performing

death-bed practices. In his work, Ōe-no Masafusa leans on the idea expressed in *Ōjōyōshū* that these are the last moments of life that are decisive and determine one's rebirth, illustrating it with examples.

**Keywords:** Buddhism in Japan, Pure Land Buddhism, *ōjōden*, Ōe-no Masafusa, *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, Genshin.

## Introduction

It is believed that the first historically verifiable information about Pure Land Buddhism, or Amidism, in Japan dates back to 640, but it is since the 10<sup>th</sup> century that this school of Buddhism gains popularity. Representatives of the Tendai school actively participated in its development (here, one must mention Ryōgen, 912–985), with the major role played by Ryōgen's disciple, Genshin (942–1017), who composed *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集, (“The Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land”) (985) – the first large Japanese text dedicated to the veneration of the “Pure Land” (about early Amidism, see: [Andrews 1989; Rhodes 2007; Trubnikova & Bachurin 2009, pp. 282–293]. Genshin's text is a theoretical work, consisting of a huge number of quotations (more than a thousand from over 160 various sutras and treatises). In the same time period, Yoshishige-no Yasutane (933–1002) creates *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* 日本往生極樂記, (“Japanese Records of Rebirth in the Land of Supreme Joy”) (for the Russian translation, see [Ōjō Gokurakuki 2001]), a narrative text which started the genre of *ōjōden*, “legends of rebirth in the Pure Land” – collections of biographies of people who, allegedly, gained rebirth in the *Gokuraku* (Sanskrit. *Sukhavatī*), the land of Supreme Joy of Buddha Amida, for their good deeds. Both texts laid the foundation of the tradition of Amidism, the former from the point of view of systematic elaboration of the doctrine, and the latter – from the point of view of “vitalizing” it by providing proof of the existence of the Pure Land and the means of achieving it by using the stories of concrete people [Rhodes 2007, pp. 251–252].

In 1101–1111, an aristocrat, scholar, and man of letters Ōe-no Masafusa (1041–1111) composed *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* 続本朝往生伝, (“Continuation of the Biographies of Japanese Reborn Into the Pure Land”), thinking of it as the continuation of *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* (which he states directly in the foreword). Like *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* includes 42 stories arranged in a strictly defined order. It begins with persons of high standing: two stories about emperors – Ichijō and Go-Sanjō, three stories about aristocrats – Minister of the Right Horikawa, *gon-chūnagon* Akimoto and *sangi* Ōe-no Otondo. The larger part is composed of biographies of monks of various ranks: *sōjō* (community elders), *sōzu* (community heads), *shamon* (monks), *ajari* (spiritual teachers) (25 stories), and, in the end, there are biographies of lay men (7 stories), as well as women – nuns and lay women (5 biographies). All heroes of the stories whose years of life are known from other sources lived in the 9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries (the are also many about whom there is no information except for what is present in this text), i.e. the text focuses on the relatively recent, from the author’s point of view, past.

Among others, the collection includes biographies of Genshin (this is one of the longest stories; incidentally, it mentions six works by Genshin, including *Ōjōyōshū*) and Yoshishige-no Yasutane. Generally speaking, most monks featuring in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* are representatives of the Tendai school, many of whom are somehow connected to Ryōgen and the Ryōgen-in temple in the area of Yokawa on Mount Hiei. It is there where, in 986, the community of *Nijūgo sammāi-e*, (“Gathering of the Twenty-Five Types of Concentration”) the goal of which was joint practice to reach rebirth in the Pure Land, was formed (Genshin was a part of this community, and Yoshishige-no Yasutane was close to it).<sup>1</sup> Apparently, Ōe-no Masafusa had close ties to Ryōgen’s disciples, and, therefore, his text can be called not only a continuation of Yoshishige-no Yasutane’s

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<sup>1</sup> The establishment of this community is believed to be one of the major milestones in the formation of Amidism in medieval Japan (see, for instance, [Stone 2016, p. 29]).

work, but also an attempt to reflect upon (and apply in practice) the ideas of Genshin and his circle. It is interesting to see how the Amidist practices, elaborated by Genshin in such detail in his *Ōjōyōshū*, are represented in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*.

### **Lifetime Practices to Gain Rebirth in the Pure Land**

Genshin did not deny the efficiency of various “open” and “secret” practices of the Tendai school, but proclaimed that, for the era of *mappō*, the End of the Law, the “simple way” of the Pure Land practices is most appropriate for the majority of people, the most important of these being *nenbutsu* 念佛, “recollection of Buddha [Amida]”. It is worth noting that, according to him, *nenbutsu* refers to several actions: from complex contemplation exercises based on the visualization of Amida, to simply repeating the phrase “*namu Amida Butsu*”. Genshin devotes a substantial part of his text to the description of right ways to practice *nenbutsu* (*shōshūnenbutsu* 正修念佛) [Rhodes 2007, pp. 254–256].

In *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, as well as in *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, a lot of attention is paid to the *nenbutsu* practice. Suffice it to say that the term “recollection of Buddha [Amida]” is mentioned in 29 biographies out of 42. As a rule, this term is not elaborated (and this is, again, where *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* follows its predecessor): the heroes just 修念佛 or 念佛爲業 – “practice recollection”,<sup>2</sup> but it is not stated how exactly they do it. An exception is the biography of Otsugi (37), which says: 此日故懸鐘於頸。念佛遶室。 – “On this day, having hung a bell on his neck, he was pacing the room while repeating *nenbutsu*.”

<sup>2</sup> As a rule, the heroes do it by themselves, with rare exceptions: for example, in the biography of Emperor Ichōjō (1), the “recollection” is read for him by Abbot Keien. This is where *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* differs from *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, where there are more similar cases.

The only detailed theoretical discussion of this issue is given in the biography of Genshin (9): “Someone secretly asked: “Monks’ knowledge and practice are so diverse. Which practice of perfection should be preferred?” [Genshin] responded: “First of all, *nenbutsu*.” They asked again: “In various practices, one reaches success by means of the mind. Should one contemplate *dharmakaya*<sup>3</sup> during *nenbutsu*? He replied: “[It is sufficient to] only repeat Buddha’s name.” They asked again: “Why is it not necessary to contemplate?” He replied: “To be reborn [in the Pure Land], calling is sufficient, that is why it is not necessary to contemplate. However, contemplation is not difficult. When one contemplates, the mind is clear and there are no hindrances.”<sup>4</sup>

Some stories also imply other practices connected to the Pure Land. For example, in the biography of Kanshun (11), one can find the mention of contemplation *sangannen* 三觀念, “contemplative recollection”, i.e., concentration on the images of Amida and the Pure Land. In the story of Rikō (17), the term 西方之業, “practices of the Western direction”, is used, while, in the stories about Kakuson (28) and Otsugi (37), there is 淨土之業, “practices of the Pure Land”. In the story of Ōe-no Takachika (34), it is said: 作一堂修迎接, “He built a pavilion and practiced the rite of greeting.”<sup>5</sup> The biography of Ryōhan (19) tells that, after his death, Buddhist images and sutras covered in blood were found in his secret stash, and then it became apparent that he had secretly performed practices for future rebirth.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, as Genshin and his followers did not believe the *nenbutsu* practice (and other practices of the Pure Land) to be uniquely

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<sup>3</sup> One of the Buddha’s bodies: the essential body.

<sup>4</sup> Here and later, the translation is given by the edition [Zoku Honchō ōjōden 1980].

<sup>5</sup> It is probably a reference to the ritual of mukaekō 迎講, “Welcoming Ceremony”, during which a sort of a “rehearsal” of posthumous arrival of Bodhisattvas who come to take the dying person to the Pure Land is conducted (see [Horton 2008]).

<sup>6</sup> Hereinafter, “rebirth” refers to rebirth in the Pure Land.

possible for gaining rebirth, so did Ōe-no Masafusa not consider it such, and his texts mentions other ascetic practices. These are, for example, sitting meditation *zazen* 坐禪 (29), the practice of *tosō* 斗藪 (28),<sup>7</sup> the practice of repentance *zange* 懺悔 (15)<sup>8</sup>, contemplation *gachirinkan* (10).<sup>9</sup> Two stories tell about contemplating the dead body of a deceased relative, the outcome of which was enlightenment (29 and 33). Substantial attention in the collection is paid to reading sacred texts. For example, the biography of Akimoto (5) says that he 修念佛讀經, “practiced *nenbutsu* and reading sutras” (Kōmyō in biography 23 does the same), with the former and the latter obviously perceived as actions of the same nature, equally useful for future rebirth. Reading<sup>10</sup> and copying sutras, pronouncing various mantras (*dharani*) is frequently mentioned in other stories as well. For example, Genshin’s biography provides a whole list of his lifetime “merits”:

“Recited *nenbutsu* 20 *kochi*<sup>11</sup> times. Read: the Lotus Sutra – 1,000 times, the Sutra of Perfect Wisdom (Prajnaparamita Sutra) – more than 3,000 times, the Amitabha Sutra – 10,000 scrolls. Recited: the Larger Amida Mantra – 1,000,000 times, the Spell of the Thousand-Handed One – 70,000,000 times, Vijaya Dharani – 300,000 times. Also, the mantra of Amida, Fudō, Luminous Light, Buddha Lochana – the number of this is not known. Besides, making Buddhist statues, as well as copying sutras, giving alms – all [good deeds] cannot be counted.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A practice aimed at abandoning the “three desires”: the need for clothes, food, and shelter.

<sup>8</sup> See [Marran 2013]

<sup>9</sup> “Concentration on the moon circle.”

<sup>10</sup> Obviously, in most cases, what is meant is not only reading, but also reciting the text.

<sup>11</sup> 俱胝, a number (Sanskrit: *Koṭi*): 10,000,000, sometimes also 100,000 or 1,000,000.

<sup>12</sup> In the beginning of Genshin’s biography, there is another list, somewhat different from the one quoted here, which is, it seems, a later addition.



In other stories one can also find the names of various sacred texts, but the most frequently mentioned is the Lotus Sutra,<sup>13</sup> 法華經 (literally “the Sutra of the [Lotus] Flower of the [Wonderful] Law”), which is sometimes referred to just as 法華 (literally “Flower of the Law”). It is mentioned in 10 biographies, which is comparable with *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, where it is also very important and where it is mentioned in 9 stories. Both texts clearly show that reading the Lotus Sutra is directly linked to good rebirth – this action, obviously, is thought of as one of the lifetime merits facilitating it. As the most vivid examples, one can name the story of Ejitsu (14), which says: 一生誦法華。唯求後世。 – “For his whole life, he was reading the Lotus Sutra and was striving only for future rebirth,” and the story of Kakushin (26), which ends with the words 每日誦法華三十餘年也。已及萬餘部。臨終之刻。猶誦此經。西向入滅。 – “For more than 30 years, every day he was reading the Lotus Sutra: [the number] exceeded ten thousand times. In his death hour, he was only reading this sutra and died, turning to the west.” In this respect one should also note the biography of Reverend Shin’en (16), who passionately desired to see the Buddha in his physical body and, for this purpose, diligently and for many years read and revered the Lotus Sutra. Finally, due to a miraculous dream, his prayer came true – and this led the biographer to draw the following conclusion from the story: 眞緣已奉見生身之佛。豈非往生人乎。 – “Shin’en beheld the Buddha in his physical body. So, did he not obtain rebirth?”

The quoted biography contains a quote from the Lotus Sutra – and this is notable, as the text of *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* contains few direct quotations from sacred texts, which, as a rule, are only named, but not “elaborated”. The author was, of course, absolutely confident that the texts mentioned by him were well known to the potential reader, and so no clarifications were necessary, while simply naming them was enough. In the biography of Shin’en, however, the quotation was necessary, as it

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<sup>13</sup> The full name is 妙法蓮華經, the “Sutra of the White Lotus of the Supreme Teaching” – a Mahayana sutra, one of the most revered and well-known in East Asia.

was the driving force of the plot. This is a quote from the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter: “Constantly I have dwelled on Holy Eagle Peak and in various other places.”<sup>14</sup> Guided by these words, Shin'en concludes that “various other places” must include Japan as well and, consequently, he must be able to see the Buddha in his physical body.

Such great attention to the Lotus Sutra is far from surprising, as it is the foundational text for the Tendai school, and Masafusa's connection to it has already been mentioned before. Since the times of Ryōgen, in the Enryaku-ji temple, it became a custom to combine the *nenbutsu* practice with the repentance ritual of *hokke senbō* 法華懺法, which included reciting the Lotus Sutra and repentance actions aimed at purifying the six sensing organs (this ritual was conducted four times a year). Eventually, such combination of the two practices spread to other temples and was adopted by private persons [Stone 2016, p. 40–41]. Accordingly, it is only natural that, for *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki, Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, as well as other *ōjōden* collections, *nenbutsu* and the Lotus Sutra go hand in hand, pointing the way to good rebirth.

The biographies in the *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* often emphasize conscious deep striving of the heroes towards the Pure Land and future rebirth. Let us give several examples:

Minister of the Right Horikawa (3): 生前之間唯修後世之業。學天台之教門。 – “During his life, [the Minister of the Right] only performed practices for future rebirth and studied the teaching of Tendai.”

Community elder Jinin (7): 偏期託生淨土耳。 – “He only wholeheartedly hoped to gain refuge in the Pure Land.”

Temporary junior community head Kakuun (8): 早求菩提。 – “From his younger years was striving for enlightenment.”

Monk Zoga (12): 早以發心。唯慕後世。 – “From his younger years gave an oath and only devoted himself to future rebirth.”

Monk Ninga (13): 深恐後世全棄名聞一。 – “Was deeply worried about future life, completely abandoned [striving] for [worldly] fame.”

<sup>14</sup> Translation by B. Watson.

Ajari Eijitsu (14): 唯求後世。 – “He was only striving for future rebirth.”

Monk Ryohan (19): 志求極樂。 – “His soul was striving for the Land of Supreme Joy.”

Monk Anshu (25): 偏拋人世唯期淨土。 – “He completely abandoned the world of the people and was only hoping for the Pure Land.”

Ōe-no Takachika (34): 生前之間。唯慕往生。每見佛像。必不覺之淚。 – “For his whole life, he only devoted himself to rebirth. Every time, looking at a Buddhist statue, he was always unwillingly shedding tears.”

Yoshishige-no Yasutane (31) and the spouse of Minamoto-no Mototada (42) are described as people who had compassion (*jihi* 慈悲).

Ajari Hankyū (20) was exceptionally zealous in venerating the Pure Land: “For his whole life, he devoted himself to the Land of Supreme Joy. Whether he was walking or standing, sitting or lying – he did not turn his back to the west. When he was spitting or defecating, he did not do it in the western direction. From his yearly years, he did not expose his back to the rays of evening sun.”

This is contrasted by the biography of Minamoto-no Yoriyoshi (36), about whom it is said that he came from a warrior family and therefore was killing people all his life. However, “after that, he built a pavilion and [a statue of] the Buddha, deeply repented his sins, read *nenbutsu* for many years and, finally, “left his home.” After his demise, there were many dreams about rebirth in the Land of Supreme Joy (其後建堂造佛。深海罪障。多年念佛遂以出家。瞑目之後。多有往生極樂之夢。) Ōe-no Masafusa concludes that 定知。十惡五逆。猶被許迎攝。何況其餘哉。 – “It is known that even ten crimes and five sins can be forgiven and [the one who committed them] will be accepted [in the Pure Land], all the more in such a case.”

The quoted concluding words of the biography of Minamoto-no Yoriyoshi refer not only to it, but also to the previous story (35): its hero, Minamoto-no Noritau, is described as a talented, wealthy, but exceptionally greedy person. Nevertheless, 而臨終正念得極樂迎。 – “But, in his death hour, he obtained the right state of mind and reached

the Land of Supreme Joy.” These words are followed by an important conclusion: 爰知。往生不必依今生業。可謂宿善。 – “It is known that rebirth is defined not necessarily only by the merits of the present life, but also by the merits of the previous life.” This quote makes it clear that, from the author’s point of view, striving towards rebirth during one’s lifetime and performing appropriate actions for this purpose are very good, but, under certain conditions (gaining merit in previous lives), are not necessary. Here, one can also see the reflection of ideas expressed by Genshin in *Ōjōyōshū*.

Generally speaking, it is clear that the author of *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* (as well as his predecessor, Yoshishige-no Yasutane) has no intention to single out the Pure Land practices and specifically separate them from the practices of other schools: all practices mentioned in the text are perceived as “links” of a single system, together helping to achieve the goal – obtaining rebirth in the Land of Supreme Joy (and it is no accident that the heroes of many biographies are described as possessing extensive knowledge in the field of Buddhist texts).<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, frequent mentions of the term *nenbutsu* show that this practice is still perceived as the most important one – but, first of all, it is critically important at the moment of one’s death, rather than during one’s lifetime.

## Death-Bed Practices

In his work, Genshin emphasizes the crucial importance of death-bed practices: recollection of Amida in the last moments of one’s life can, allegedly, make incomparably more for salvation than performing

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<sup>15</sup> All the above-said is linked to the approach to Amidism characteristic of recent research. According to this approach, during most of the Japanese medieval period, Amidism was not a separate movement or school, but, rather, Amidist symbols, rhetoric, and practices crossed all borders, combining with practices and rhetoric of various schools, with rebirth in the Pure Land being the “common goal” (see, for example, [Stone 2016, p. 36]).

similar actions during one's lifetime. The last thought of a dying person must focus on the hope that Amida will lead them into his Pure Land, and they must not divert their attention to anything else, with the actions described by Genshin assisting them in it [Stone 2016, p. 51–53]. *Ōjōyōshū* says:

“This single reflection [on the Buddha] at death outweighs the karmic acts of a hundred years. It this instant should pass you by, rebirth [in samsara] will be unavoidable.” [Stone 2016, p. 81]<sup>16</sup>

At this time, these ideas and practices started to spread among aristocrats (see [Horton 2004; Avdyushenkova 2015]). Their importance is clearly seen in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* as well: every biography is necessarily concluded by the description of the hero's death hour. As a rule, the description includes the actions of the person at the death hour and the evidence of this person really reaching rebirth. The biography of Ichijō (1) textually emphasizes the power of 最後念佛, the “last recollections”: 聖運有限。非力之所及。但有生前之約。必可令唱最後念仏。此事相違。此恨綿々。 – “The destiny of an emperor has a limit; this is beyond our power. But there are ties that formed during one's lifetime. One must necessarily read the last recollections. If one does not do it, there will be no end to sorrow.”

Further stories show the importance of the last recollections implicitly, “by default.” The text often mentions the firmness of the dying person's spirit, their determination in reciting the “recollection”: *nenbutsu* is read “without turmoil” (不亂), “intently” (專心), “unceasingly” (不斷), “without rest” (不懈), “wholeheartedly, single-mindedly” (一心), “hundreds of times” (數百遍). But, most often, the narration of the hero's death-bed minutes features the term *shōnen* 正念, which describes the “right state of mind” at the moment of one's death. All these words, emphasizing the ability of the dying person to take their mind under control, reflect the ideas expressed in the *Ōjōyōshū*. In this case, of key importance is the word *shōnen* 正念, as a state without which gaining rebirth in the Pure Land is simply impossible. Let us note that it is this

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<sup>16</sup> For the Russian translation of this passage, see [Avdyushenkova 2015, p. 86].

term which is used in the above-quoted biography of Minamoto-no Noritau (35): the fact that, on his deathbed, he remains in the “right state of mind” ultimately defines his successful rebirth. Interestingly, *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* does not use this term, even though its heroes are also diligent in their practice.

Besides *nenbutsu*, the heroes do the following actions in their death hour: perform ablution (沐浴), hold colored ropes in their hands (綵纒),<sup>17</sup> fast (潔齋), burn incense (捧香爐), practice sitting meditation (禪坐), read sutras (讀經), turn to the west (西向; there is also another variant described in Genshin’s biography (9): 北首右脇, “turned his neck to the north, and his sides to the right”), fold their hands into various sacred *mudra* signs (for example, Zoga (12) folds the Diamond *Mudra* 金剛合掌 when dying; and about the Minister of the Right Horikawa (3) the text says that, after his death, his hands were folded into 彌陀迎接之印, the greeting “seal” of Buddha Amida,<sup>18</sup> with the added remark that 平生不知密教。自然如此。 – “As he did not know the secret teaching, it probably became so on its own”), sing *kassatsu* (合殺).<sup>19</sup> All these practices (except for direct references to *kassatsu* and *zazen*) are also mentioned in *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*.

Among the above-named practices, the most frequently mentioned are turning to the west (in 10 stories) and ablution (in 5 biographies), while other actions deserved only few mentions. Eight stories (16, 30, 31, 33, 34, 36, 38, 41) do not describe death-hour practices at all (but, evidently, imply them). For example, the biography of *bikuni* Enmyo (41) tells about her death hour simply: 臨終之時瑞相自多。 – “During her death hour, there were many good omens,” or, in the biography of Nichien (30): 臨終之相。往生無疑。 – “According to the omens of his

<sup>17</sup> Five-colored ropes bound to the hands of a Buddhist statue, so that it helps the dying person to concentrate. Genshin writes about them in *Ōjōyōshū*, but it is surprising that, in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, they are only mentioned twice.

<sup>18</sup> Right hand raised, left hand lowered.

<sup>19</sup> On *kassatsu*, or *gassatsu*, see [Takeuchi 1996].

death hour, there is no doubt that he gained rebirth.” As one can see from the quoted passages, in the event of lack of information about the heroes performing the necessary actions at the moment of their demise, the author puts an emphasis on “good omens”, i.e., proofs of rebirth (this is also the case with other six stories, where “good omens” are described in more detail).

Often, the heroes of the biographies know about their death beforehand and gather people around them in these days (this probably relates to Genshin’s ideas that, on their deathbed, a person must be supported by an assistant or assistants). Interestingly, while *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki* often describes end-of-life visions of the dying person (in particular, it tells about the arrival of miraculous “guests”, visible only to the hero of the biography, who are to guide them into the Pure Land), in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, such descriptions are much less numerous (as an example, one can name the description of the visions of Genshin (9), or the saints who came to meet Henjō (6));<sup>20</sup> other biographies contain a couple of mentions of beautiful music (for example, biography 37), or wonderful fragrance (for example, story 42) which the dying person feels.<sup>21</sup>

Comparing *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* with *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, M. Nakao finds two important differences. First, he notes that, compared to the latter text, the former one pays much less attention to the proof that the heroes have, in fact, been reborn. Second, in his opinion, unlike *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, the description of lifetime practices assisting in rebirth is often presented as a secondary,

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<sup>20</sup> The biography of Henjō contains one of the mentions of term *raigō* 來迎, which is very important for Genshin’s *Ōjōyōshū* and which means the arrival of a host of saints to meet the dying person. The text of *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* mentions this word two times (for the second time – in the story of Ōe-no Sadamoto (33), where it is featured in a poem composed by the biography’s hero before his death).

<sup>21</sup> Much more often, the fragrance or music (or other miraculous phenomena) are observed by other people after the biography hero’s death.

“superficial” topic. Instead, *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* places much greater emphasis on the right actions of the heroes at the moment of their demise. M. Nakao believes that Ōe-no Masafusa has a lighter, more optimistic view of the problem of rebirth in the Pure Land, which, it seems, reflects the views popular among the aristocrats of that time [Nakao 1980].

In our opinion, one should speak about a certain shift of accent, rather than “lightness” or “optimism”. Indeed, Yoshishige-no Yasutane pays much more attention to lifetime practices and proof of rebirth. But, for Ōe-no Masafusa as well the piety of his heroes is important (and, as we believe, the mentions of their talents and, especially, their miraculous abilities are supposed to strengthen this impression). As has already been said before, in the only case where this is not obvious (the biography of Minamoto-no Noritau (35)), the author mentions the merits from the previous life. At the same time, for Ōe-no Masafusa, the death-bed practices are of special importance: his work takes up and illustrates with examples the idea from *Ōjōyōshū* that the final moments of one’s life are the decisive ones (essentially, at this moment, one can wipe out all the merit earned during one’s lifetime), and this is why it places such emphasis on the right state of mind and firmness of spirit at the hour of one’s death.

## Conclusion

*Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* mentions life-time and death-bed practices the goal of which is to obtain rebirth in the Pure Land. First of all, this is *nenbutsu* recollection; reading the Lotus Sutra is also mentioned frequently, but, episodically, many other practices are mentioned as well. The text pays substantial attention to death-bed practices, often emphasizing the firmness of spirit of the dying person and their “right state of mind”.

Like Yoshishige-no Yasutane in *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraku-ki*, Ōe-no Masafusa in his text does not elaborate the contents of the practices described (generally limiting himself to only mentioning them), even



though, without any doubt, he is well-versed in them and wants to show the reader their importance and value. This is not surprising given that, obviously, teaching *how* to obtain rebirth was not the goal of this text (there were other sources for this, for example, Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū*). It was created to demonstrate the “living” examples showing that it was indeed possible and to perpetuate the names of those who, from the point of view of the collection's author, were worthy of it.

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## **Commentaries and Commentary Modes in Japanese Literary Tradition Based on the Examples of the Classical Poetry Anthologies**

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**Abstract:** Classical studies were the mainstream of Far Eastern traditional culture. A survey of the relationship between classics and their commentaries is central for an understanding of the intellectual history of the countries of the Far East, of which Japan is one. Commentaries paid tribute to the canonization of literary monuments but did this without regard for the artistic and intellectual character of the classical text. Commentaries to the classical texts of ancient Japan, in particular, to the first poetic anthology *Man'yōshū* ("Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves"), are taking shape in the Heian era (9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup>) as an attempt to restore the Japanese outlook on this poetry written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in Japanese, but in Chinese characters. This classical poetry acquired a new form in the 9<sup>th</sup> century: now it was written in *kanji* and Japanese syllabary (*hiragana*). Several types of literary criticism existed: treatises on literary works, commentaries on classical monuments, compilation of anthologies (selection of literary texts for the constitution of complex collections), as well as poetic contests. Commentators mostly concentrated on understanding the meaning of separate words and phrases, but the general meaning of the text remained out of the scope of their attention.

**Keywords:** Japanese classical tradition, literary text, commentaries, *Man'yōshū*, *Kokinwakashū*.

## Commentary as a Way to Understand Classical Tradition

The most surprising quality of a medieval thinker in the Far East is that they organized their ideas around a religious or literary text and expressed them by means of commentaries. Chinese researcher Chou Yū-t'ung wrote in his work *Classical Books, Study of Classical Books, History of the Study of Classical Books* that studying classical literature became the mainstream of, first, Chinese, and, later, Japanese feudal culture [Chou Yū-t'ung 1983, p. 3]. Of similar opinion is Honda Shigeyuki, a Japanese researcher and the author of an extensive work *History of the Study of Chinese Classics*, who believed that the study of the classics had structured literature, philosophy, science, and sometimes dominated them all. The study of relations between the canonical texts of the tradition and commentaries to them is of central importance for the understanding of the intellectual tradition of the Far Eastern countries [Honda 1975, p. 25]. Japanese researcher Hiraoka Takeo wrote, for example, that, in the Song era (960–1279), the mainstream of classical literary studies and philosophy in China consisted in studying and commenting on the *Sì Shū* (“The Four Books”, 12<sup>th</sup> century), i.e., the four books of the Confucian tradition: the *Chunqiu* (“The Spring and Autumn Annals”, ?–235 BC), the *Lun Yu* (“The Analects”, or “The Analects of Confucius”, ca. 485 BC), *Mengzi* (“Mencius”, 4<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC), and the *Zhongyong* (“Doctrine of the Mean”, according to the latest findings, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC) [Hiraoka 1946, p. 37].

Like in other Far Eastern cultures, Japanese commentaries developed, first, around the central religious texts – Shinto, Buddhist, Confucian ones – and, only after that, around fiction. Here, we will mainly focus on the commentaries to the medieval literary monuments. They contributed to the canonization of literary monuments, incorporating contemporary knowledge in various fields. As early as in the early medieval period (the Heian era, 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> cc.), there appeared commentaries on ancient classical texts, in particular, on the first Japanese anthology of poetry *Man'yōshū* (“Collection of Ten Thousand

Leaves” 8<sup>th</sup> c.)<sup>1</sup> as an attempt to recreate the Japanese appearance of this poetry, written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in Chinese characters; this classical poetry looked different when written in a Japanese way, that is, with a combination of a few *kanji* with the Japanese syllabaries *hiragana* or *katakana*.

### **The Appearance of First Commentaries on a Literary Text**

The first Japanese poetic anthology is *Man'yōshū*, where all 4,516 poems were written in Chinese characters, as Japanese phonetic writing did not exist yet – it was invented (created from simplified handwritten versions of Chinese characters) only in the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. V. N. Goreglyad, a renowned Japanese Studies scholar from Saint Petersburg, writes: “There is no doubt that *Man'yōshū* is a unique phenomenon of world literature. At the dawn of its written culture, not having a full-fledged system of wiring the sounds of their native language, the Japanese wrote a huge poetic anthology, which for centuries was a literary example for their future generations and which, for more than a millennium, is an object of study of literature scholars, historians, culturologists, ethnographers, linguists, etc.” [Goreglyad 1997, p. 75]

The *kanji* were borrowed from China in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The authors of the anthology produced a way to write Japanese poems called *man'yōgana*, where *kanji* were used either phonetically or as ideograms. That is, *kanji* performed the functions of a syllabary denoting auxiliary words, paradigms of verbs, nouns, or adjectives. “Of decisive importance

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<sup>1</sup> The poems included in the *Man'yōshū* were generally called *waka* (“Japanese songs”), even though they belonged to the differing genres of *tanka* (“short songs”), *nagauta* (“long songs”), *sedōka* (“six-liners”), etc. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, many genres, except for the five-line *tanka*, consisting of 31 syllables, faded into obscurity, so later anthologies include almost exclusively only *tanka*. Therefore, *waka* and *tanka* became synonymous.

is the system of writing Japanese poems with *kanji*: phonetic writing had not been invented yet and using *kanji* to relay the meaning of the words was impractical, as they do not reflect the sound of a poem” [Goreglyad 1997, p. 76]. Such system of writing was preserved until, in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Japanese created the syllabary alphabets *katakana* and *hiragana*.

The Chinese language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family; the literary language of *wenyan*, the characters of which were borrowed, is an isolating language, i.e. one consisting of only roots. The Japanese language is not related to the Chinese, and it is an agglutinative language, in which there are changing words and auxiliary words. Therefore, the Chinese writing system was applied to a non-related language functioning by other rules.

When we look at the original texts of the *Man'yōshū*, we see rows of *kanji*, i.e., the text looks like a Classical Chinese one, but the paradox is that it cannot be read in Chinese because the auxiliary words of the Japanese language written in *kanji* would prevent a Chinese reader from understanding the text correctly. In modern academic editions, this text is presented as the “original” (*genbun*) – this word is placed in square brackets before the text. The text contains no directions on how to read these rows of *kanji* in Japanese, and Japanese scholars still argue about various ways of reading them. It does not contain any directions about the sounds or the pronunciation of these characters.

We can only rely on the centuries of canonical reading of these characters in Japanese, which “translated” these *kanji* into familiar native sounds or, rather, the sounds which were worked out by the poetry of Imperial anthologies since the *Kokinwakashū* (“Collection of Old and New Songs of Japan”, 905) and which are familiar to us. Many scholars believe that only since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the *Kokinwakashū* poetry, with its strict codification, was created, it became clear how to read the *Man'yōshū* poems.

Meanwhile, *Man'yōshū* is the first truly Japanese poetic anthology, and, before mid-8<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese poets only created Chinese-language anthologies in Chinese genres. Reading *Man'yōshū*, we can

only rely on the work of medieval commentators who recreated this text in Japanese writing as a result of centuries of academic commentaries and gave the text the appearance we see now, “domesticated” it.

This Japanese spelling out of the text is preceded by a clarification in square brackets: “*kun* reading”, i.e., Japanese reading of the Chinese characters of the original. In the Japanese version, the poems of the anthology are, generally speaking, comprehensible even to a modern reader without translation into the modern language, while the “original”, Sinicized version presents great difficulties and takes many years of training to read. A question arises: which should be considered the original, and which the copy? Is the original text, written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in Chinese characters, the original, or is the text “translated” into Japanese writing the original? The main academic series of Japanese literary classics (Iwanami Shoten, Shōgakukan, Shinchōsha) provide the “Japanese” variants of the poems (*kanji* + *hiragana*), where the “alien” text becomes “domesticated”, i.e., the text has been read in Japanese and “converted” into a more understandable form. The texts of *Man’yōshū* edited by Satake Akihiro in the Iwanami Shoten edition [Man’yōshū 1957–1962] and the texts edited by Kojima Noriyuki in the Shōgakukan edition [Man’yōshū 1990–1997] are almost identical. Does the graphics of the text influence its understanding, or are the rows of Chinese characters only an outside appearance of a “long song” (*nagauta*) by a famous ancient poet Kakinomoto-no Hitomaro (and all other poems of the anthology in various genres)? Should one ignore the Chinese characters completely or take into consideration only the Japanese variant with *hiragana*?

This is not a unique problem, and there is an earlier example: Sumer characters and Assyrian language. Most scholars, both in the Japanese and Sumer studies fields, believe that the rows of Chinese characters of *man’yōgana* do not matter for understanding the Japanese meaning of the poem, like Sumer characters do not matter for understanding Assyrian texts. Writing in *man’yōgana* is only a temporary measure, historically necessary due to the lack of an own writing system, before the syllabaries were invented in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the

process of translating the classical literary canon from Chinese characters into Japanese writing mixed with some *kanji* required a lot of effort from anonymous medieval commentators. Japanese text researchers believe that later commentaries on literary texts grew from the enormous work to “translate” Chinese characters into the mixed Japanese writing system (*kanji* + *hiragana* syllabary). The following example of a poem from *Man'yōshū*, the Japanese text of a *nagauta* (“long song” No. 36 in the fragment), written in Chinese characters in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, is not read in Chinese:

[原文] 安見知之 吾大王 神長柄 神佐備世須登 <芳>野川 多藝津河内  
尔 高殿乎 高知座而 上立 國見乎為<勢><婆> 疊有 青垣山 々神乃 奉御  
調等 春部者 花挿頭持 秋立者 黄葉頭<刺>理 [一云 黄葉加射之] <逝>  
副 川之神母 大御食尔 仕奉等 上瀬尔 鵜川乎立 下瀬尔 小網刺渡 山川  
母 依弓奉流 神乃御代鴨

The following text from *Man'yōshū*, a Japanese text, which was recorded in mixed writing, *kanji* and Japanese syllabary, apparently, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, is read in Japanese:

[訓読] やすみしし 我が大君 神ながら 神さびせすと 吉野川 たぎつ  
河内に 高殿を 高知りまして 登り立ち 国見をせせば たたなはる 青  
垣山 山神の 奉る御調と 春へは 花かざし持ち 秋立てば 黄葉かざせ  
り [一云 黄葉かざし] 行き沿ふ 川の神も 大御食に 仕へ奉ると 上つ  
瀬に 鵜川を立ち 下つ瀬に 小網さし渡す 山川も 依りて仕ふる 神の  
御代かも<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In the English translation by the Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai: Our great Sovereign, a goddess / Of her sacred will / Has reared a towering palace / On Yoshinu's shore, / Encircled by its rapids; / And, climbing, she surveys the land. / The overlapping mountains, / Rising like green walls, / Offer the blossoms in spring / And with autumn, show their tinted leaves, / As godly tributes to the Throne. / The god of the Yū River, to provide the royal table, / Holds the cormorant-fishing / In its upper shallows, / And sinks the fishing-nets / In the lower stream. / Thus the mountains and the river / Serve our Sovereign, one in will; / It is truly the reign of a divinity [*Manyōshū* 1965, p. 29]. For Russian translation, see [*Man'yōshū* 1971, pp. 81–82].



## **Types of Literary Criticism and Commentaries in the Medieval Period**

Besides translating the most important ancient poetic, mythological, and historical texts into the Japanese writing system in the early medieval period, the commentators mostly focused on uncovering the meaning of particular words and combinations of words, their subtext and factual background.

There were several types of literary criticism: treatises on literature and commentaries on literary classics. Treatises on literature, in turn, required commentaries, clarifications, interpretations, translations into the language of various eras up to the contemporary language of academic editions of classical texts. Treatises were created by teachers, outstanding poets and writers. Often, a teacher would not write anything down, but only spoke (in an allegoric way), and his words were later written down by his disciples.<sup>3</sup> Spoken word was perceived

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<sup>3</sup> This how *Lun Yu* by Confucius, the main book of Confucianism, was composed. It included the Teacher's short sayings, the descriptions of his actions, his dialogues with his disciples. The book was created after Confucius' death, and it took 30 to 50 years to finish it. Classical literature was created by "sages", i.e., the most significant poets of various eras, and the works that belong to the classics can be called exhaustive, comprehensive, all-embracing. Original views of founders of a tradition, such as Ki-no Tsurayuki in the tradition of *tanka* and Matsuo Bashō in the tradition of *haiku*, were preserved in archetypical archaic forms, and later disciples, zealous keepers of tradition, and commentators, considered and developed only some particular aspect of the tradition. For example, the founder of the classical genre of *haiku* from the school of "True *Haiku*" (Shōfu) Matsuo Bashō (17<sup>th</sup> century) did not compose treatises. He only spoke by uttering cryptic aphorisms, which were taken up and interpreted by his disciples, who composed theoretical treatises on the basis of their teacher's words.

as sacred, while written words lost their magical power.<sup>4</sup> Such treatises were usually created when a genre was born or when it reached its peak. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there appeared retrospective poetics set forth in several treatises on some classical genres (for example, a recreated retrospective poetic by an outstanding 20<sup>th</sup> century poet Masaoka Shiki, which transformed the traditional genres of *tanka* and *haiku* on a new basis).

Another type of literary criticism was refereeing on poetic tournaments held at the Imperial palace, where the best poets of the time served as judges, giving victory to some *waka* (*tanka*) poems. The mentions of the first poetic tournaments date back to the Nara era (710–794), while official tournaments at the Imperial court were held in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the first of them being the “Tournament in the House of Koretaka” (860). One of the best known, precisely dated and recorded was the “Tournament of Empress Kanpyō” (898), where 190 songs were composed, but, sadly, the results have not been preserved. The most representative tournament, where the greatest poets, including Ki-no Tsurayuki, participated, was the “Tournament in the Teijiin Palace”, and, after it, the marks given by the judges and their commentaries were preserved. This contest gives text studies scholars an opportunity to understand the classical procedure of selecting the poems, the etiquette, the relations between the poets and the judges, the motivation for the marks. There were tournaments, where a song, a flower, and model landscape were presented to the judges; such mixed tournaments were gaining popularity among the aristocracy and encouraged the introduction of new forms of contests fashionable in the Heian era (794–1192) court. Large tournaments were held under the auspices of the sovereign, while lesser ones were held in the houses or estates of courtiers and provincial aristocrats under the patronage of well-known poets.

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<sup>4</sup> In early medieval Japan, a notion of *kotodama*, “a word’s soul”, formed. It was believed that “a word’s soul” was to be obtained in the oldest Japanese-language texts, while texts written in Chinese did not possess this quality, and newer texts lost “a word’s soul”.

One more type of literary criticism was the composition of Imperial anthologies, which were created according to Imperial rescripts for several centuries since 905, when the *Kokinwakashū* (“Collection of Old and New Songs of Japan”) was created. An editing committee of outstanding poets selected the poems from a vast number of poems existing in the era, and the committee was headed by the most respected poet of the era, who played the role of a demiurge – the creator of the anthology. Overall, throughout centuries, twenty-one Imperial anthology was created. The inclusion of a poetic text into an anthology secured its author fame in posterity. In the era of samurai wars, warriors entered the capital occupied by enemies in order to, risking their life, present their compositions to the composition committee. The selections was necessary in order to make a canonical anthology out of the mass of the poems of the era (and every aristocrat-official had to compose *waka* poems), which would become an example for the future generations of poets, an ideal. The poems that had not entered the anthologies were erased from the memory of generations and ceased to exist. The canon of poetry in the anthologies proved to be very long-lasting; from the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, there are unbroken connections extending into the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It is by means of such selection that poetry was turned into classics, and the ancient anonymous compilers of the *Man'yōshū* believed that “the excessive creates chaos of the world, therefore, purification and removal of excessive writings leads to the search for true poetic word” [Kokinwakashū 2001, p. 12].

### **Compilers and the Commentator of Anthologies on Creating Poetry**

In synchronous and consecutive commentaries, classical literature was presented as a single whole, as an extending text of great significance for the state, for maintaining order and harmony. The compiler of the anthology *Kokinwakashū*, a great poet of his time Ki-no Tsurayuki, wrote: “It is poetry which, with effortless ease, moves heaven and earth, stirs the feelings of invisible gods and spirits, smooths the relations

of men and women, and calms the hearts of fierce warriors. [...] Times may change, joy and sorrow come and go, but the words of these poems are eternal, endless as the green will threads, unchanging as the needles of the pine, long as the trailing vines...”<sup>5</sup>

The Japanese poetic tradition became classics when it transformed into Imperial anthologies of state significance, which had to do with ruling the state and which maintained order and harmony in the nation. A fixed number of syllables is a sign of regular poetry. In the “Kana Preface” to the *Kokinwakashū*, poet Ki-no Tsurayuki writes that “[Ebisu] songs do not have a fixed number of syllables or the regular form of a poem”.<sup>6</sup> If there is no count of syllables, there is no poetry. In *Kakyō Hyōshiki* (“A Formulary for Verse Based on the Canons of Poetry”, 772), the earliest treatise on Japanese poetry, written in *kanbun*, Fujiwara-no Hamanari speaks about the chaos of ancient words: “Thus, ancient people were pure in customs and essence, composed words, but it came out remote, small... Among the five lines, there are grave vices and sicknesses of eight types.”<sup>7</sup> In Kisen’s treatise *Yamato Sakushiki* (“Rules of Composing Japanese Songs”, 10<sup>th</sup> century), the second, in terms of time, work on the topic of Japanese poetry, “good harmony” of poetry is connected to strict poetic form. According to Hamanari, ordering the chaos of ancient songs is done by Shinto *kami* gods, while Kisen names Bodhisattva Manjushri, named “beautiful voice” (Manjughosa) in the Indian tradition [Ermakova 1995, p. 159].

The main subject matter of ancient *utagaki* amoebaean songs are love and nature, connected to fertility as the main focus and goal of a festivity. As *utagaki* poetry was born, the importance of lyrical and natural themes and motifs in the eventual poetic tradition became linked to the rituals of fertility of rice.

<sup>5</sup> Translation by L. Grzanka in [Kokinshū 2004, pp. 35, 47]. For Russian translation, see [Kokinwakashū 2001, p. 43].

<sup>6</sup> Translation by L. Grzanka in [Kokinshū 2004, p. 36]. For Russian translation, see [Kokinwakashū 2001, p. 380].

<sup>7</sup> Rendered from the Russian version in [Yermakova 1995, p. 158].

The places where *utagaki* rituals were conducted were mountains, seashores, wilderness, river and lake banks. Sometimes they were performed in the capital, in front of the Suzakumon Gate (under Emperor Shōmu, 735? or 734?), and this ritual was described in *Shoku Nihongi* (“Continued Chronicle of Japan”, describing the reign of nine emperors, 797). 230–240 people participated in it; they were dressed in *azuchi* Eastern clothes, and songs were performed in the presence of the sovereign. But, most often, to perform *utagaki* rituals, people climbed tall mountains. Performing an *utagaki* ritual on a mountain was connected to the belief in the divine essence of tall mountains and in the mountain magic in general.

### **From Ancient Amoebaeon Songs to Poetic Anthologies**

Ancient *utagaki* songs, performed by two semi-choruses of girls and young men, entered the first book of the classical *Manyōshū*, as they were selected by an anonymous editing committee or a single compiler (this is not known for certain even now, but Japanese scholars tend to believe that something like a committee of compilers existed). They were selected from a mass of poems that have not been preserved until now and of which, according to *Hitachi Fūdōki* (“Records of the Customs and Lands of Hitachi”, 8<sup>th</sup> century), there was “a great number”. This was the first time poems were selected for an anthology, and this was later repeated several times as each new anthology was created.

This poetry was taken from the ancient *fūdōki* records (Records of Customs and Lands, 8<sup>th</sup> century), from the preserved oral forms of *utagaki*, and it was partly included in the first Japanese poetic anthology, *Man'yōshū*. This was the first written-down act of literary criticism in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, an initial form of selection, when the criteria of literary preferences were only being formed, a form of an anthology as a single work presenting poetic landscape consisting of mountains, summits,

ravines, and gorges, as an anthology was believed to be a reflection of heaven and earth. This anthology was not yet Imperial, and it appeared from an enormous poetic mass, which had been collected by the 8<sup>th</sup> century from the oral tradition, from the collections of aristocratic houses, from peasants' poetry, poetry of Azuma warriors, from the poems of the first professional court poets.

The anonymous authors of the anthology, which defined the whole consequent history of Japanese poetry by its very selection of poems, were "abandoning the unnecessary and correcting the unordered", i.e., followed Confucius [Honda 1975, p. 1]. The definition of Confucius as someone who "deletes undesirable parts, removes, corrects" [Chou Yü-t'ung 1983, p. 251] and his saying that he "transmits but does not create" [Chou Yü-t'ung 1983, p. 252] extended to the commentators of future generations: they removed things that did not match the ideal; by means of selection, they turned poetic texts into canon, into classics. They collected poems, and they deleted them, and they removed unnecessary ones while aiming for ordering; besides, they edited and composed anthologies.

The selection of poems that became canonic from the mass of poetry was the first method of literary criticism and a way to create canon. The editors were the creators of the classical canon of Japanese literature; their role was valued higher than that of individual poets, even great ones. It is the editor who was the demiurge and the creator of poetry "purified from excessive things". Selection, purification, compilation, editing are the most important and supreme activity of a commentator. There appeared great poets, sages, authors of anthologies and commentators explaining the exegesis, who were deified by their successors and whose example they followed.

The roots of this phenomenon date back to ancient India, where, in the Hindu tradition, according to John B. Henderson's book *Scripture, Canon and Commentary*, Vyasa ("compiler", "editor") is revered as the "creator" of the great epos of Mahabharata and Brahma Sutra [Henderson 1991, p. 31]. In China, Han era (206 BC–220 AD) scholars imbued Confucius with the same role; however, there is little historical

evidence that Confucius edited and “purified” important classics of ancient China, even though he “transmitted” them as he understood this process [Henderson 1991, p. 30].

### **The Role of the State in Creating Canonical Anthologies**

The canonization, identification, and editing of classical texts, both religious and literary ones, is often preceded by political will, a decree by either state or church authorities. Such decrees were issued by sovereigns, for example, by the Chinese Emperor Wu (Emperor Wu of Han), or Japanese emperors, for the purpose of creating anthologies. An example is the 905 decree by Emperor Daigo to create the first Imperial anthology, *Kokinshū* (“Collection of Old and New Songs of Japan”).

In China, authorities played an important role in creating the Confucian canon, and, in Japan, the canon of Japanese classical poetry. The canonization of a text, the creation of a “body of tradition”, classical literary or sacred texts aspiring for authoritativeness was preceded by the appearance of political, prophetic, or literary rescripts. Rulers played a great role in the formation of the classics: for example, the emperors of Later Han initiated gatherings of scholars so as to study and interpret the teachings of Confucius. Twenty-one Japanese Imperial anthology (*Chokusen Wakashū*, 10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) were created after the respective rescripts of ruling emperors.<sup>8</sup>

Modern scholars perceives the first anthology, *Man'yōshū*, as a purely literary work. In the medieval times, this work produced a large number of commentaries and imitations. Together with the mythological text of *Kojiki* (“Records of Ancient Matters”, 812), *Man'yōshū* was the main object of scholarly study of the medieval time, a source of mythological

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<sup>8</sup> The twenty-one Imperial anthology included 33,700 poems, selected over the five-hundred-year period from an unaccounted-for number of five-line *waka* poems (*tanka*).

plots, a literary example and ideal, and inspiration for poets and writers. Everybody quoted *Man'yōshū* for centuries, nay for more than a millennium; it was an inexhaustible classical text of the tradition, a source of knowledge and wisdom.

Commenting continues even now. Besides academic commentary by renowned scholars, there are also popular “folk commentaries” by lay people, who connect the *Man'yōshū* poems to the events of their lives. Commentaries to the first classics are now perceived as an aura of the tradition. *Man'yōshū* is not merely a literary monument, but a literary canon in a single text, even if “surrounded” by various interpretations.

### **Types of Commentaries and the Composition of Anthologies**

Speaking about commentaries in general, one must distinguish their various types: moral and philosophical, religious, historical and ethnographical, textological and literary ones (with the latter most often being clarifications of double and triple meanings of literary images and metaphors). The first two types mainly apply to scriptures, to the religious canon. So, is there a difference between the early medieval commentators, who were, essentially, compilers of annotations and glossaries, and who “did not know how to transmit the thoughts of sages” [Chou Yū-t'ung 1983, p. 1] and later ones, more educated, well-read in treatises and commentaries, poets and literary scholars? The problem was that most commentaries to classical literature only focused on the meaning of particular phrases and words, while the metaphysics was paid little attention by the commentators. Medieval commentators of various eras and schools adhered to roughly the same set of ideas and perceptions. For centuries, they suggested revisions of classical works, clarifications of word meanings, deepening of factual commentaries.

The classics, at least the poetic ones, have an anthological nature (organization), which the editors and compilers extracted from various sources: folk songs recorded in the *fūdōki* and ancient texts, songs



of fishermen and farmers, of guards in the border posts of faraway eastern provinces, poems from private anthologies and aristocratic houses, including the Imperial House, works by court poets, who were the first professional men of letters. It is hard to believe that the compilers and commentators did not think about the sources of poetic collections they created. The anthological canon was perceived by the future compilers of Imperial collections as self-sufficient and well-organized. Such an organized approach was facilitated by the existence of the medieval bureaucratic departments of the Bureau of Music and the Bureau of Rituals, and, later, the Bureau of poetry, which, at the state level, supported and represented art (music, literature) as a well-structured whole, corresponding to the ideal image of the state and its officials.

Japanese-language treatises on poetry, in particular, the two Prefaces to the medieval anthology of *Kokinwakashū*, written by two greatest poets and compilers of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Ki-no Tsurayuki and Ki-no Yoshimochi, set forth the principles of Japanese poetics. These Prefaces had predecessors, too: the Chinese-language *Kakyō Hyōshiki* (“Formulary for Verse Based on the Canons of Poetry”, 8<sup>th</sup> century) by Fujiwara-no Hamanari and the work by monk Kisen (*Kisen-hōshi*, one of the “six immortal poets”) *Kisen Sakushiki* (“Kisen’s Rule of Composing Poems”), also written in Chinese. However, the preface by Ki-no Tsurayuki became the most important work on the theory of Japanese poetry for many centuries. A. A. Dolin writes in his foreword to the Russian translation of *Kokinwakashū*: “These words, like the Preface by Tsurayuki in its theoretical part, were an attempt to apply to Japanese poetry the rules of Chinese verse, based on various Chinese poetics.” [Dolin 2001, p. 35]

This opinion is only partly true because, by using the Chinese poetics, Tsurayuki attempted to describe his contemporary Japanese poetics, and later create his own national poetics by means of literary criticism, i.e., separating “the bad” from “the good”, proceeding from the *waka* works sharply differing from Chinese genres. Another Preface, the Chinese one, written by poet Ki-no Yoshimochi, remains somewhat in the shadow, even

though it repeats many statements of the Japanese Preface. The value of Ki-no Tsurayuki's preface is not disputed by anyone, but the Chinese Preface went to the background for centuries. Both Ki-no Tsurayuki and Ki-no Yoshimochi created a unified text, which partly repeats itself but nevertheless creates a new attitude to classical poetry by formalizing it, creating literary reflection. This is a vivid example of parallelism in literary criticism.

The accumulation of various texts clarifying the anthology (forewords, commentaries) gives weight to the collection of poems, increases its authoritativeness, gives characteristics to eras and names. Prefaces are aimed at choosing and selecting poems for the anthology. The compiler molds the anthology, as if from clay, using other poets' works as material. An anthology is not a selection of the best poems; it is a more complex system where, for example, a masterpiece is contrasted by poems of second rank, where there is interchange between poems of various levels, topics, time. An anthology was believed to be a reflection of heaven and earth, and mountain summits had to be contrasted by deep gorges.

In the Tang era (618–907), scholar Lu Deping wrote: “*Xu* is the preface, literally it means “sequence”. The same thing as *xu* meaning “order”, i.e., the preface sets the sequence of authors' directions and follows them.” [Golygina 1971, p. 34].

Prefaces to selections and anthologies embodied the idea of an ordered collection of names and texts. The author of a preface explains the principle of ordering the contents based on genre, time, topics, authors, or seasons. Another task of the author is to join the line of preceding collections, i.e., to reiterate what he was doing in relation to the anthology's authors. The author of a preface had to point at a classic, authoritative in the tradition, to which he could refer. Thus, both Ki-no Tsurayuki and Ki-no Yoshimochi appeal to the previous anthology, *Man'yōshū*.

“This is hardly an accident that the character *xuan*, “choose, select, selection, collection,” also has the meanings “enumerate”, “line up with”, “walk in line”. Generally speaking, etymologically, the terms connected to the procedure of creating anthologies can notably be divided into several

groups [...]: one includes words with “tailoring” meaning, reflecting the idea of a “body of literature”, which must, so to speak, be “clothed” – this is where *cai*, meaning “to cut out” ..., *zuan*, meaning “fabric edge, pattern”, etc. come from. Another category is composed of words conveying the idea of a collection of equal elements, like the key term of *ji*, “gathering”, which originally meant a flock of birds on a tree, or *lin*, “forest”, or the word “garden” (*yuan*), widely used to denote literary collections and in many other Eastern traditions” [Smirnov 2014, pp. 111–113].

From all these terms of Chinese origin, in Japanese poetic scholarship, the words “select”, “collect”, “make a collection” (Chinese: *xuan*, Japanese: *sen*) and “collection”, “gather together”, “gather in a flock” (originally, “birds on a tree”, Chinese: 集 *ji*, Japanese: *shū*) are used.

### **Editing, Deleting, and Moving Texts**

Deleting undesirable passages, purifying, cutting are important instruments of creating a classical text in the Far East, according to the understanding of medieval compilers and commentators. The classics became classics when texts were moved from ancient annals, family books, records of lands and customs, things and events having to do with ritual and state affairs into the collection of canonical texts by means of selection, deletion, and editing. We have tried to show this using the example of the inclusion of ancient *utagaki* songs into the anthology of classical *waka* [Man'yōshū 1957–1962, 21]. “Excessive writing can produce chaos in the world, so he [Confucius] simplified it, so that [people of] the world [do] not try to destroy [excessive] writing and reach true essence,” wrote a Ming era (1368–1644) Chinese philosopher Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529) [Wang Yang-ming 1971, p. 21].

The anonymous compilers of the poetic anthology *Man'yōshū*, court scribe and historiographer Ō-no Yasumaro, storyteller Hieda-no Are, from whose words *Kojiki* was written, the compiler of the anthology *Kokinwakashū* Ki-no Tsurayuki – all of them selected material

necessary to create classical texts, be it myths, legends, historical facts, or poetry. In his Preface to *Kokinshū*, Ki-no Tsurayuki also serves as a commentator of the works of his contemporary great poets, whose poems he selected for the anthology.

The genres and their history, poets, styles, directions, and artistic features were established by the authority of anthologies over centuries, since the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Collections of poems concluded eras and opened new horizons in the history of literature, they demonstrated creative endeavors of generations of poets and, often repeating the works of previous anthologies, established direct connection between the centuries of the existence of classical poetry. Prefaces and afterwords to anthologies provided a starting point, showed changes in poetics, the fluidity of literary tastes of various eras. Anthologies were seen by commentators and readers as encyclopedias of traditional life; one could learn a lot of facts from them; they were sources of knowledge, along with being sources of models of literary taste.

Japanese poetry has divine origins, the first songs were composed by gods. A man's role is to follow the examples and to mimic nature; about a nightingale and a frog it is said because it is pre-human poetry, and human poetry only appears with the dialogue of demiurge gods Izanami and Izanagi, with the *waka* by god Susanoo-no Mikoto in the 8<sup>th</sup> century collection of Shinto myths and historical records *Kojiki*. Ki-no Tsurayuki calls "the marriage songs of the female god and the male god sung beneath the floating bridge of heaven" [*Kokinshū* 2004, p. 36].<sup>9</sup>, i.e., the abovementioned songs of Izanagi and Izanami, the first song. There are also references to other sources of the "first songs".

This reference to gods as the first authors of Japanese songs gave the anthologies additional aspect of a "holy scripture". In medieval Europe, there was a notion of "being possessed by a book", and one can compare to this the attitude to the classical anthologies of Japanese poetry. Even copying these collections was considered to be a "pious deed". The practice of copying classics by hand came from the custom of copying Buddhist

<sup>9</sup> For Russian translation, see [*Kokinwakashū* 2001, p. 43].

sutras, and it facilitated the preservation of the traditional texts over the centuries. In Japan, texts copied by the hand of a great medieval poet Fujiwara-no Teika (1162–1241) (*Teika hitsu bon*, “scrolls belonging to Teika’s brush”) were the most highly valued ones, and Japanese scholars believe them to be most accurate.

Commentators created common space for separate works of the canon, found connections between them and with the intellectual history of the period. Even those medieval thinkers who rejected the existing commentary traditions, creating their own instead, continued to operate within the intellectual world created by the canonical literary exegesis. The texts considered to be commentaries by the tradition could vary significantly: there were merely glosses, which explained difficult passages in the text, or geographical and people’s names, political figures, and events mentioned in the classical text.

The inclusion of commentaries in the classical text is a situation typical for medieval Japanese texts. A text was unthinkable without commentaries. And even in modern editions of the classics, a page of a canonical text consists of three parts, where the upper one contains general information about the text, the middle one is the classical text itself, and the lower one includes factual, linguistic, and other commentaries of more detailed nature, focusing on particular phrases, words, images. There are modern interpretations of what can be called commentaries, and these broad definitions include practically everything: writing, reading, context, codes, laws, etc.

Nowadays, scholars place the first commentaries in the ancient times, when the classics did not exist yet and when it was necessary to guess the meaning of words of oracles, to untangle and understand signs on divination turtle shells and deer bones, to interpret prophetic dreams. The earlier exegesis of classical texts dates back to the pre-writing times, asserts Roberto K. Ong, to interpretations of dreams, heavenly omens, etc. [Ong 1988, p. 48]. Henderson writes that, according to medieval commentators’ understanding, classical works (first anthologies, collections of myths) were created by “sages”, and commentaries were created by the “worthy ones”, i.e., those who had “secondary” knowledge

and understanding of the truth, who could interpret the canon as they understood it to be interpreted by the first priests [Henderson 1991, p. 234].

Such hierarchy between classical texts and commentaries was preserved for centuries: the key text of a religious tradition was revealed to the people by gods, and then commentators – saints and prophets, explained and developed it. The same applied to traditional literary texts. Anthologies were composed by renowned poets, and then scholars wrote commentaries on them, expanding knowledge about them and explaining them. Wang Yang-ming wrote that “through texts, we understand the general, through commentaries – the particular.”

### **Textual Problems in Commentaries**

Commentaries are mostly limited to lexical issues, and the focus is placed on explaining unclear or difficult to understand words and phrases. Their goal was to solve difficult textual problems that cause questions, to explain what the compilers and authors of the anthologies wanted to say. They explained the grammar, the etymology of words, found quotes from Japanese literature and references to classical Chinese texts, provided historical evidence. This was important not because the words of early compilers were unclear or incomplete, or excessively metaphoric, but rather because of such historical conditions as lexical and grammatical changes in the language, the loss, for various reasons, of parts of texts, which had to be explained, fragmentation of the text, the change of the form of written symbols (*kanji*), as well as more global changes in the culture.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A vivid example of an obscure metaphorical text are the saying of a great Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694). For example, about *haiku* poems, he said: “*Haiku* is wrought gold,” about creativity: “Raise your heart and return to the lowly.” These metaphorical and not always clear words were interpreted and explained by his disciples, who unfolded his words into treatises on poetry. Bashō himself wrote poetry and prose, served as judge at many *haiku* tournaments, but he did not write treatises on poetry,

The understanding that such changes happen historically is the most appropriate motive to create such conventional commentaries in every subsequent time period. Such commentaries appear almost immediately after a work is created, and as historical, cultural, and linguistic changes, which separate and distance us from the classics, pile up, they become even more necessary. Even an unsophisticated “explainer” of a text has in mind a general picture of the anthology or some other text, which is important in the tradition, or the general context of the culture. So-called sub-commentaries, which explain initial commentaries to the text, appear in key turning point eras, when the canon requires revision. Ultimately, commentaries turn from explanations of a classical text into, in a sense, an encyclopedia of knowledge about the text, and they become inseparable from it. According to this understanding, the classical text was complete, comprehensive, and exhaustive, and, therefore, the explanations were a collection of the most extensive knowledge about this text.

Literary tradition used the language of aphoristic and metaphorical sayings. Judgements and aphorisms by teachers in all fields of art and literature are deliberately fragmentary and metaphorical, often obscure and incomprehensible; they almost always relied on spoken word. Their words require special interpretation, which was done by disciples, who deciphered the words of sages in the vein of their school’s philosophy. These were the disciples who wrote down the fleeting words of teachers.

One should not believe that the initial factual and linguistic commentary deals only with particular difficulties in the text. The words and phrases requiring explanations were, for the commentators, a starting point around which they organized their knowledge. In the commentary tradition, classical texts were and are considered full, exhaustive, comprehensive, so all knowledge of them is best concentrated not outside the canon, but inside it – as commentaries. The number of commentaries to the anthologies *Man’yōshū*, *Kokinwakashū*, and *Shin*

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and he never explained his words or his judgements – this was done by his disciples belonging to Bashō’s school – Tachibana Hokushi, Mukai Kyorai, Hattori Dohō, Kagami Shikō.

*Kokinwakashū* (“New Collection of Old and New Songs of Japan”, 13<sup>th</sup> century) considerably exceeds the volume of classical texts themselves. It became a tendency to unfold commentaries into sizeable independent philological and historical studies of discrete character.

Commentaries of the (tentatively speaking) modern period became not only compendia of knowledge in all fields, but also a field to cultivate various sciences. Astronomy, phonetics, geography, grammar, etymology, medicine, and many other sciences were necessary to create correct explanatory commentaries. Besides, commentators had to deeply understand such areas of medieval knowledge as astrology, exorcist medicine, alchemy, various forms of divination (for example, using celestial omens). Commentaries developed from simple explanations into collections of various knowledge in all spheres of life, science, literature, and influenced the internal world and the knowledge of a medieval Japanese. Commentaries were one of the most important medieval forms of expressing and generalizing specialized scientific and pre-scientific knowledge (alchemy, medicine).

The genre of commentaries played its role in specializing knowledge by fields. It dominated other areas not only as a genre important for developing knowledge, but also as a form of intellectual activity focusing on the canonical text. Commentators referred to all significant literary texts of their time and “processed” them.

The necessity for commentaries was also reflected in the medieval presentation of classical texts in the form of anthologies, collections, and epitomes. Therefore, it is not surprising that most significant poets, essayists, and writers of the medieval period composed anthologies, arranged authoritative texts, paid a lot of effort to collect and concentrate canonical texts. In addition to vast and artistic poetic editions, such as *Man'yōshū*, *Kokinwakashū*, and *Shin Kokinwakashū*, smaller collections incorporating poems from several centuries, composed by famous poets and representing some elaborate compositional idea, were also popular. There were many such collections, but the most recognized one is *Hyakunin Isshu* (“One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets”, 13<sup>th</sup> century).



Compilers and commentators of medieval literary texts were raised to the level of poets, and commentaries were included in the canon. The canon itself was connected to compiling, editing, and commenting on texts. Who are the creators or *Kojiki*, *Man'yōshū*, *Kokinwakashū*, and other key texts of the ancient and medieval times – are they famous poets, founders of traditions, or anonymous collectors, editors, compilers, and, later, commentators and critics? These are the creators of the canon who make it authoritative.

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## **“Un-cinematic” and Clean: Japanese Film as Viewed by the 1920s Soviet Press**

**A. A. Fedorova**

**Abstract.** Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein, formulated some of his most influential ideas in filmmaking through his study of traditional Japanese arts. His lifelong fascination with Japanese culture and its alleged disposition for montage generated a number of in-depth, thought-provoking investigations, aimed at elucidating the theoretical underpinnings of Eisenstein’s work. This paper focuses, instead, on the historical and diplomatic circumstances surrounding Soviet intellectuals’ understanding of Japanese cinema.

Eisenstein’s *Za kadrom* (“Beyond the Shot”) was written as an afterword to Naum Kaufman’s *Japanese Cinema* (1929), published as a brochure for the first “Japanese Film Exhibit” held in Moscow and Leningrad in the summer of 1929. The exhibit was a symbolic continuation of the collaborative efforts by VOKS (the All-Union Society for the Cultural Ties with Abroad) and the Shochiku film studio to organize the famous Kabuki visit in the summer of 1928. Both the Kabuki tour and the theatrical release of Japanese films were acts of cultural diplomacy, albeit with different political undertones. While the media coverage of the Kabuki visit was chiefly directed abroad, the writings on the “Japanese Film Exhibit” were targeted inwards, at the domestic Soviet audience, creating notably different veins within the official coverage of Japanese film and theater in the 1920s Soviet press.

The study of 1920s Soviet media and archival materials documenting the organization of the first Japanese film screenings in Moscow and Leningrad

revealed a particular set of linguistic and rhetorical strategies deliberately adopted by Soviet intellectuals in order to present Japanese cinema as an ideologically non-threatening, exotic object of fascination. Soviet writers also worked to present Japanese film as a powerful model for resisting the West, one that may be instrumental in achieving the political and economic objectives set by the Soviet film industry. In their assessment of Japanese films, their production and distribution practices, Soviet intellectuals often wrote of the concept of “cleanliness,” which testified to the cultural and ideological difficulties they experienced in formulating a more nuanced, historically contextualized vision of “Japanese cinema.”

**Keywords:** Japanese film, Soviet cultural diplomacy, reception studies, film export, Soviet-Japanese cultural exchange, Kabuki theater.

At the dawn of the Cold War, viewers on both sides of the Iron Curtain experienced their “first encounter” with Japanese cinema, yet they were watching very different kinds of films. For example, while it was a hit in Western Europe and the US, Kurosawa Akira’s *Rashomon* (1950) was not theatrically released in the Soviet Union until 1966. Instead, in the early 1950s, priority was given to films that openly supported the leftist cause, such as Imai Tadashi’s *And Yet We Live* (1951), Kamei Fumio’s *Woman Walking Alone on the Earth* (1953), and Yamamoto Satsuo’s *The Street Without Sun* (1954) [Fedorova 2018, pp. 216–249]. Thus, Japanese filmmakers’ rise to fame was a worldwide yet hardly homogenous phenomenon. Each geographical locale had its own *vision* of Japanese cinema, firmly rooted in the region’s unique history, culture, and ideological background. This paper addresses the particular notion of “Japanese cinema” as channeled through the Soviet media in the 1920s. By critically examining the discourse surrounding Japan and its filmmaking in the Soviet press at this time, it aims to identify a set of meanings and political functions assigned to “Japanese cinema” within the larger context of Soviet cultural diplomacy.

One of the earliest attempts to introduce Soviet audiences to Japanese film occurred soon after the end of the Civil War, with the establishment of the Soviet Union as an independent state structure in December 1922. In July 1923, a weekly art journal published in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) – *Zhizn' iskusstva* (*Life of Art*) – issued a short article entitled *Kino v Yaponii* (“Film in Japan”). However, the article includes hyperbole and inaccuracies, indicating that the author (whose identity is unknown) had no professional training in Japanese art history. For example, the article exaggerates the use of special “masks” by Japanese actors, which convey “typified emotions” such as “shame, fear, dismay, love, grief, happiness, and so on.” While early Japanese cinema did inherit many elements from traditional stage practices – including the use of female impersonators (*onnagata*) from the Kabuki theater – the use of masks was chiefly associated with Noh performances.

Despite this mistake, the article was correct in identifying a strong desire on behalf of the Japanese film industry to export their productions to foreign audiences in the early 1920s. This goal was considered worthwhile but extremely difficult to achieve due to the “peculiar nature” of Japanese films which were “based predominantly on local myths and folklore” and portrayed as reflecting a lifestyle and a set of mores “totally alien to Europeans” [*Kino v Yaponii* 1923, p. 26].

Special credit was given to Edward Tanaka (Tanaka Kaneyuki, n/a – 1937) and his attempts to modernize the Japanese film industry. Tanaka was characterized as an “energetic film producer” who strove to create films that were truthful to “the psychology of Japanese everyday life and customary practices,” yet were easily comprehensible to the Western public in terms of style and acting technique. A British novel by Maria Fairfax titled *April* was cited as the basis for Tanaka’s first experiment in this kind of filmmaking. Before his return to Japan in 1920, Edward Tanaka worked in Hollywood [Miyao 2013, p. 16]. Alongside Henry Kotani and Thomas Kurihara, he made invaluable contributions to the development of the newly founded Shochiku Kinema, yet he was by no means “the leader” of this studio. There were other important figures, including Murata Minoru and Osanai Kaoru, and the decision by Soviet journalists

to focus exclusively on Tanaka seems rather arbitrary. While information about Japan was scarce and often inaccurate, even at this early stage one notices a link between the discourse about Japanese cinema and the dissemination of Russian/Soviet films abroad. For example, right next to the anonymous *Kino v Yaponii* there is an article about the reception of prerevolutionary Russian films and post-revolutionary émigré cinema – Alexander Volkov’s *Kean* (1924) is mentioned – in France and Britain. The European “fascination with Russian actors” eerily echoes the discourse of the uniqueness of the “Japanese acting technique” prevalent in 1920s Soviet and European film criticism.

In January 1925, Japan officially recognized the Soviet Union. The signing of the Basic Convention coincided with the establishment of VOKS (the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties with Abroad), which played a decisive role in promoting Soviet culture abroad as well as in shaping public opinion within the Soviet state regarding cultural diplomacy [Lozhkina 2011; David-Fox 2012]. In 1928, VOKS collaborated with the Shochiku film studio to invite the famous Kabuki theater to Moscow and Leningrad. Then, in 1929, joining forces with Shochiku again, VOKS opened the first “Japanese Film Exhibit” in Moscow. Kinugasa Teinosuke’s costume drama *Kyōraku hichō* (“Hrabrets iz Kioto”, “The Brave Man from Kyoto”, 1928) and a short documentary film entitled *Shimaguni* (“Strana Ostrovov”, “Island Country”) were shown in Moscow, while in Leningrad, Ushihara Kiyohiko’s comedy *Kindai musha shugyō* (“Vospitanie molodogo samuraya”, “Modern Training of a Samurai”, 1928) was screened. The screenings were accompanied by the publication of Naum Kaufman’s *Yaponskoe kino* (“Japanese Cinema” 1929), one of the first monographs on Japanese filmmaking written outside of Japan. The book is mostly remembered for its afterword, written by Sergei Eisenstein (“Beyond the Shot”, “Za kadrom”), in which he famously concludes that, unlike the Kabuki theater, *haiku* poetry, *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, and other “traditional” forms of art, Japanese cinema disregards montage, and therefore remains utterly “uncinematic” [Eisenstein 1929, pp. 72–92]. While certainly an expression of the Soviet filmmaker’s brilliant mind, these comments no doubt also

embody cultural prejudices: the number of Japanese films Eisenstein had seen prior to writing his text is open to debate. As such, his claims for the “un-cinematic” nature of Japanese cinema must be interpreted as part of larger diplomatic and representational strategies adopted by the Soviet press at this time.

Soviet intellectuals played a crucial role in establishing the “blueprint” for critically engaging with Japanese cinema, especially those who had visited or lived in Japan. Latvian-Belorussian singer Irma Jaunzem (1887–1975), praised for her performances of folk songs, toured Japan in 1926 and later published an article entitled *Theaters and Cinema in Japan (Based on Personal Impressions)*. As indicated in the title, emphasis was placed on the “personal” nature of her first-hand experience [Jaunzem 1926, pp. 8–9]. In December 1927, when scholars of Japanese literature Nikolai Konrad (1891–1970) and Andrei Leifert (1898–1937) spoke at the State Institute for Art History in Leningrad, their talk on Japanese cinema was praised for its “documentary value”, a trait attributed to Konrad and Leifert’s experience of “living in Japan for extended periods of time” and their ability to engage with Japanese cinema on a more “personal” level [S. M. 1928, p. 19]. Andrei Leifert visited Japan in 1925–1927 as a member of the Soviet Trade Mission, while Nikolai Konrad – one of the “founding fathers” of Japanese Studies in Russia – studied at Tokyo University in 1914–1917. Other Soviet “returnees” who wrote on Japanese cinema included David Arkin (1899–1957), a Soviet art critic and historian who visited Japan as part of the preparations held for the New Russian Art Exhibit (*Shin Roshia ten*) organized by VOKS in 1927. Venedikt Mart (Venedikt Matveev, 1896–1937), a poet and a writer known for his literary translations of Chinese and Japanese poetry [Suleimenova 2007], also visited. A similar tactic was adopted by the Soviet media in its coverage of the Kabuki theater: priority was given to writers known to have previously visited Japan [Ueda 2017, p. 48].

While living in Japan, Soviet intellectuals had unprecedented access to Japanese films. This unique, privileged, and direct experience of Japanese cinema made their texts stand out as particularly valid and *reliable*. However, the observations made by these Soviet intellectuals

were in fact rarely “personal” – even so, being described as such allowed for a greater aura of persuasiveness. The abundance of statistical data provided by the Soviet intellectuals also contributed to this reception. For example, in her “personal” account, Irma Jaunzem includes statistics on the number of Japanese film theaters, the ratio of Japanese and foreign films being screened there, the length of standard film programs, and their ticket prices. She also reported the monthly salary of the *benshi* (film narrators who aided silent film screenings with their live performances) who were earning up to a thousand rubles per month. Konrad and Leifert also provided data, reporting that, in 1927, there were nearly 9,000 *benshi* working in Japan, over a thousand stationary film theaters, and more than 50 million filmgoers per month.

Venedikt Mart’s account is less data driven, perhaps because he was a poet. Still, in his own highly expressive way, he emphasizes the ubiquity and the popularity of cinema in the 1920s Japan. His text opens with the following remark: “Japan has thousands and thousands of film theaters... In the evenings, even the most remote corners of Japan’s distant islands, Ezo and Kyushu, are illuminated by the welcoming lights of cinema” [Mart 1927, p. 16]. Within a span of only three months, an article remarkably similar to Mart’s appeared in the same journal attributed to “N. Osheff”. Its first line reads, “Japan has thousands of film theaters.” This could, of course, simply indicate the lack of vigilance and professionalism on the part of Soviet editors in catching repetition or even plagiarism. At the same time, it could also illustrate efforts to emphasize this “numeric” aspect of Japanese film culture. In the writings of Soviet intellectuals, we are often confronted with almost identical “readings” of Japanese cinema, articulated through remarkably similar linguistic patterns.

While the number of film theaters and film studios operating in Japan constituted one of the central topics continually addressed by the Soviet media, far less attention was paid to the actual films produced in Japan themselves. In his *Japanese Cinema*, Soviet film critic Naum Kaufman writes of the cultural differences between the Asakusa and the Ginza film districts, ruminates over the melodic “sounds of the Japanese street”,



and introduces the names of major film studios and their film stars. Kaufman never visited Japan, but this did not deter him from writing about the Japanese film industry in a highly detailed, authoritative manner. However, he does not address more artistic concerns such as the role of a film director, editing techniques, or mise-en-scene. Even more curious, in the preface to his book, Kaufman acknowledges the help of Elena Ternovskaia (1901–1938), who worked for the Soviet embassy in Tokyo. In 1928, Ternovskaia accompanied the members of the Kabuki theater to Moscow and Leningrad as their interpreter. In Tokyo, she was often entrusted with work related to the release and distribution of Soviet films [Fedorova 2018, p. 31], which made her highly knowledgeable about Japanese stage art and filmmaking. If Kaufman and Ternovskaia were authorized to enlighten the Soviet readers about the stylistic features of Japanese films, they could have easily done so. The fact that they did not suggests they were instructed otherwise.

Texts written by Soviet intellectuals who, unlike Kaufman, had lived in Japan, followed a similar pattern: instead of addressing the Japanese films themselves, they chose to focus on the mechanisms of film production, distribution, and promotion. Such a technical approach was often justified by the implied artistic inadequacy of Japanese films, considered not as culturally accomplished or relevant as Soviet or other cinemas. “For Europeans, Japanese films can only be of interest for their external, decorative elements... there is nothing the West can learn from them, yet looking at this profoundly national form of art is extremely exciting” wrote Irma Jaunzem. “Japanese movie hall in itself, for a European, is a picturesque and colorful spectacle. A vibrating sea of filmgoers in bright, magnificent clothing, an infinite rustle and waves of paper and silk fans, the talk, the laughter, the jokes,” Venedikt Mart continued in a similar vein. Japanese *people* – and not their films – were seen as the true point of attraction. It was presumably for a similar reason that, on those rare occasions when Soviet critics wrote about Japanese film texts (and not the “unique” cultural environment surrounding them), their attention was almost entirely absorbed by the Japanese actors. This tendency to marvel at their “unique” facial

expressions, body movements, and acting techniques was also prevalent among European film critics [Iwamoto 2015, p. 21].

Soviet authors were fascinated by the Japanese movie theater as a space with specific rules, customs, and behaviors. Customs such as the need to take off your shoes during the screenings; the presence of *benshi* performers and food vendors; the gender segregated seating system; and the abundance of colorful advertisements were seen as exotic and defining features of the Japanese cinematic experience. During the “Japanese Film Exhibit” organized by VOKS in 1929, great effort was put into recreating the atmosphere of a Japanese film theater. Exhibition venues in Moscow and Leningrad were decorated with “Japan-inspired” paper lanterns, panels, and curtains – even the golden folding screens left by the Kabuki theater were utilized. At the venues, young Soviet filmmakers who had previously visited Japan were hired as “special tour guides” to share their first-hand experience with the visitors. In addition to the film screenings, numerous pictures, posters, film books, and journals were exhibited. On display, there were also makeup tools used by film actors, the staff uniforms of the Shochiku film theaters, and everyday use items such as chopsticks, handkerchiefs, and wooden clogs (*geta*) [Fedorova 2018, pp. 210–211]. In this way, an enticing vision of “Japanese cinema” was created for Soviet visitors to consume.

The concept of “justified exoticism” used by Savelli and Kitamura in their study of the Kabuki visit thus comes to mind when considering the “Japanese Film Exhibit.” For Soviet authorities, the benefits of receiving the Japanese theater were largely diplomatic. The costly endeavor of inviting Kabuki was worthwhile because of the powerful publicity it would generate. In order to benefit from the tour in this way, the Soviet authorities were willing to *justify* Kabuki, which could easily have been interpreted as a “feudal” and “reactionary” art form, ideologically incompatible with the Marxist cause. The political implications of hosting the tour were directed *outwards*, and so was the media coverage of this cross-cultural event. [Kitamura & Savelli 2017].

In contrast to the Kabuki tour, the “Japanese Film Exhibit” was organized for *domestic* propaganda purposes. Unlike the media

coverage of the Kabuki performances, the writings on Japanese cinema were targeted *inwards*, and so was the language adopted by the Soviet press. The screenings of Japanese film did not require the visit of an entire troupe and thus were relatively affordable. They also held lesser diplomatic value and complexity largely for the simple fact that films were not people and thus could not “report back” to Japan. Thus, unlike Kabuki, the screening of Japanese films could function simultaneously as a symbol of diplomatic partnership with Japan while allowing for a critique of those aspects of Japan’s political system, societal structure, and diplomacy which were considered “alien” to the Soviet state. This binary effect was achieved through a symbolic division of labor within the cognitive framework of “Japanese cinema.” The vibrant culture surrounding the production and distribution of Japanese films was seen as a continuation of positive trends, already *justified* for Soviet audiences during the Kabuki visit. The actual films produced in Japan, however, served as an illustration of undesirable traits of Japanese society and were often harshly criticized for their “feudalism” and “petit bourgeoisie” mentality.

In his overview of the “Japanese Film Exhibit,” critic Daniil Rafalovich writes extensively on the film posters, photographs, film journals, and other printed materials demonstrated at the fair. Only at the end of his article – and somewhat reluctantly – does the author turn to Kinugasa Teinosuke’s *Brave Man from Kyoto*, which he describes as the exhibit’s “central showpiece”, that leaves nonetheless “a strange and contradictory impression.” The story, which revolves around tropes of tragic love and revenge, is labeled by Rafalovich as “naïve to the point of being laughable.” He goes on to write that the film action is rendered “slow and tiresome,” and that only the acting of Hayashi Chujiro should be celebrated for its virtuosity and plasticity that leave the talents of Douglas Fairbanks “far behind” [Rafalovich 1929, p. 8]. Boris Mazing echoes this perspective on the film, calling *Brave Man from Kyoto* an “actor’s film.” He writes that Hayashi Chujiro’s “incredible dynamism, plasticity, expressiveness of motions, the speediness of his animal grip, and his unparalleled fencing skills” make him an actor “truly deserving of a film entirely made

for him.” Yet, as a cinematic endeavor, Mazing concludes that *Brave Man from Kyoto* “has nothing new to offer” – its cinematography and editing are considered weak, its narrative is rendered “primitive” [Mazing 1929, p. 11]. Mikhail Bleiman attended the screenings in Leningrad and saw both Kinugasa’s costume drama and Ushihara Kiyohiko’s *Modern Training of a Samurai*. Ushihara’s romantic comedy is set at a lumber mill in the mountainous region of Nagano, where the local woodcutters are fascinated with a beautiful girl named Fujiko (played by Tanaka Kinuyo), known for her delicious home-made biscuits. (In the Soviet press, the film often appeared under the title *Fujiko’s Cookies* [“Pechen’e Fudziko” in Russian, “Fudzikini pundiki” in Ukrainian]). Both films were described by Bleiman as irrevocably “bad” (*plokhie kartiny*). Bleiman was especially angered by the films’ technical deficiencies and their meager attempts at imitating Hollywood. According to Bleiman, the narrative patterns of Ushihara’s comedy, clearly borrowed from American cinema, evolved so “clumsily” and at such a “sickeningly slow pace” that they ended up becoming utterly “meaningless.” The actors were considered the only redeeming quality of both films, whose mastery stemmed from the traditions of Kabuki theater.

Both Shochiku films are considered lost today and it is virtually impossible to either reaffirm or to rebuke the critics’ statements. It is worth mentioning, however, that, in 1928, Kinugasa Teinosuke was in Moscow, where he interacted with Soviet intellectuals, including Sergei Eisenstein. It is plausible that Kinugasa even introduced the Soviet filmmakers to his new work, *Crossroads* (1928), which was later distributed in Paris and Berlin [Nakayama, 2012]. The Soviet audiences, however, were instead presented with a less “experimental” *jidaigeki*. In fact, Kinugasa’s *Brave Man from Kyoto* was the only Japanese feature film viewed by audiences in Moscow. The decision to also release *Modern Training of a Samurai* in Leningrad and other parts of the Soviet Union was made only after the Embassy of Japan intervened, expressing discontent about the sudden exclusion of Ushihara’s modern film (*gendai geki*) from the screenings [Fedorova, 2018, pp. 208–210]. Programming decisions made by VOKS indicate that whenever possible, Soviet authorities opted for the

“archaic”, choosing films that were less *threatening*, both in terms of style and ideological content.

Films selected for the Japanese Film Exhibit thus allowed the Soviet media to denounce Japan for its strict social hierarchy, cultural backwardness, technical imperfections, and lack of creativity. The Japanese film industry, on the other hand, was celebrated for its ability to resist the West on both the cultural (*benshi* performers, unique theater design, film advertisement, etc.) and economic level. Soviet critics emphasized Japan’s “successful” competition with Hollywood, stressing that Japanese studios produced *more* films, and it was these domestic productions that occupied nearly eighty percent of the Japanese film market. The accomplishment of the Japanese of “almost completely expelling the foreign film production, and successfully catering to the needs of a large, domestic audience” was proclaimed by Olga Kameneva, the head of VOKS, as demanding particular attention from the Soviet Film Industry [Beliavskiy 1929, p. 1]. Japanese film production and distribution practices were seen as possible models for Soviet imitation. Members of mobile projection units, traveling across the USSR, were often instructed to learn from the experience of Japanese *benshi* performers [Pozner 2005, p. 337].

By focusing on the material culture surrounding cinema rather than the actual films, Soviet media was able to emphasize Japan’s cultural “uniqueness” as well as Japan’s fascination with Soviet art and Marxist ideology. Reviews of the 1929 Japanese Film Exhibit – written as manuals designed to teach readers how to *correctly* interpret the event – stressed the number of writings in Japanese periodicals dedicated to the issue of Soviet cinema. A “rather fine” caricature painting of a Soviet filmmaker, Vsevolod Pudovkin, which was published in one of the Japanese magazines on view at the exhibit, was considered particularly praiseworthy [Rafalovich 1929, p. 8]. In Naum Kaufman’s book, Japan was described as being “torn – like many other countries – between Americanism and Leninism.” Japanese intellectuals and the working class were seen as “leaning towards Soviet Russia,” while the Japanese art world was considered to be “under the great influence of Soviet culture”

[Kaufman 1929, p. 55]. These statements lacked “cinematic evidence” – presumably on purpose. In 1929, Japan’s Proletarian Film League was established, and one of its members, Okada Sozo (Yamanouchi Hikaru, 1903–1983), even visited Moscow [Kawasaki & Harada 2002, p. 153]. The demonstration of Okada’s film, however, received little attention from the press. Arguing for the leftist tendencies in 1920s Japan seemed more effective through letters; films were used instead for re-creating the “pre-modern” for Soviet audiences to marvel at, and for Soviet media to critique.

The vision of “Japanese cinema” presented by the Soviet press reveals much about the cultural diplomacy towards Japan, as well as the general attitudes toward film art held by Soviet intellectuals. Needless to say, these were often in radical opposition to the social and cultural status of film in the 1920s Japan. One thought-provoking example is provided by Irma Jaunzem, who opens her account with a reference to the “cleanliness” generally associated with Japan (*iaponskaia chistoplotnost*). Because film screenings and stage performances lasted longer in Japan than in Europe, she reasons, most spectators felt it necessary “to prepare themselves for the long hours of work” (*rabota*) by taking a proper bath beforehand. The bathhouses were often located within a theater, which offered a special ticket fare that included both a visit to the bathhouse and the stage show. This kind of practice may have very well existed back in 1926, yet it is taken out of context by Jaunzem, who sees in it the spectators’ desire to be clean for the show and as such, an expression of respect for the “high art” of theater.

In reality, the link between stage art and bathing may have been a lot more mundane. Public bathhouses had existed in Japan since the Edo period (1603–1868) and were strongly associated not only with the principles of hygiene, but perhaps even more so with the notions of pleasure and entertainment. The shogunate’s attempts to ban mixed-sex bathing were not always successful and a large number of women hired as *yuna* (female bathing attendants) were known to engage in prostitution [Nakano 1970, pp. 86–111] (still, it would be a mistake to assume that the public bathhouses in Japan existed only for sexual purposes.) It must

be noted, then, that attending a theatrical show (a form of intellectual stimulation) and soaking in a bathtub or visiting a pleasure quarter (forms of physical entertainment) were not necessarily considered as activities standing in radical opposition to each other. The hierarchies of entertainment known to Soviet intellectuals were not universally standardized.

After the Kanto earthquake (1923), an architectural style known as *miya-gata* or *miya-zukuri* (which can be translated as the “palace style”) became commonly used in the public bathhouses of the Tokyo area. The lavish design was meant to elevate the spirits of Tokyoites who were devastated by the natural disaster [Machida 2016, pp. 130–137]. Some sources indicate that the public bathhouse with a symbolic naming of “Kabuki-yu” (located in the Mukojima-ward) became the first to adopt *miya-zukuri*. Known for its use of undulating bargeboards (*kara-hafu*), this architectural style, commonly seen in Shinto shrines and other religious sanctuaries, was gradually reinterpreted as a broader sign of “otherworldliness.” The traces of *miya-zukuri* can be found in the architectural design of theater buildings (including the famous Kabukiza), as well as old bathhouses, brothels (*yukaku*), and even funeral cars (*miyagata reikyusha*) that aid people in their final, irreversible departure into the lands of paradise (*gokuraku jōdo*).

In 1917, sex-segregated seating was introduced to Japanese film theaters, further amplifying the link between cinema and other forms of public entertainment deemed by the government as low-class and in need of further legislation. This link, however, was overlooked by the Soviet press. Irma Jaunzem, for example, mentions the ban on the depiction of “kissing” in Japanese cinema, yet fails to recognize in it the government’s attempt to execute stronger control over the film industry. Unwillingness to put physical intimacy on display is interpreted as yet another manifestation of “Japaneseness”, associated with the notions of chastity and emotional restraint. In the eyes of Soviet intellectuals, not only was Japanese film theater “exquisitely clean” but so was the mind of the Japanese spectator and the content of the films he/she watched. The Soviet press emphasized the “stylistically clean” and ideologically

sterile nature of Japanese films. Mikhail Bleiman complained that both Kinugasa's *Brave Man from Kyoto* and Ushihara's *Modern Training of a Samurai* made it impossible to clarify "how and what exactly Japanese cinema advocates for" [Bleiman 1929, p. 14]. Cameraman Yuri Stilianudis, who had a chance to watch Kinugasa's *Crossroads* in Berlin – and seems to have been genuinely impressed with its stylistic achievements – wrote of his utter bewilderment with the "exceedingly trivial" narrative they served [Stilianudis 1929, p. 3]. The complaints about the lack of "ideology" in films that were actually *seen* by the Soviet intellectuals coincided with an abundance of more general statements regarding the "feudal", "capitalist", and "jingoistic" aspects of Japanese film content. When faced with the task of analyzing the actual films, however, the Soviet critics could not detect these ideological features. Their understanding of Japanese history and artistic tradition was too elementary to comprehend the subtle ideological workings of Japanese film texts.

Whenever confronted with a cultural specificity that could not be adequately explained, the notion of "cleanliness" was invoked. However, the consistent commentary on the lack of ideological meaningfulness, stylistic innovation, and narrative complexity can be viewed first and foremost as an indicator of the inability of Soviet intellectuals to distinguish these traits. The "exotic" atmosphere of the Japanese film theater and the "unique" dress of filmgoers and film actors were the most "visible" signs of Japaneseness; as such, they were readily noticed and discussed, thereby contributing to an image of a national cinema that was well-managed and well-advertised, but ideologically shallow and profoundly "un-cinematic."

This notion of external excellence, which overshadowed the lack of meaningful "content", was central to the Soviet intellectuals' understanding of Japanese cinema. There were, however, attempts to overcome this approach. Mikhail Bleiman, who was extremely critical of the Japanese films demonstrated during the exhibit, wrote just as irritably of a dominant tendency among the Soviet intellectuals "to marvel at exoticism." The "pursuit of rarity and uniqueness," also defined



as “gourmandism” (*gurmanstvo*), led to “unconditional acceptance” of everything exotic in art, a trend Bleiman considered detrimental to film criticism. In a similar vein, Boris Mazing argued for the necessity of expanding the selection of films demonstrated at the exhibit, stressing the importance of looking at depictions of a more “contemporary” Japan.

One of the first attempts to look at Japanese films from a more “cinematic” perspective was introduced in the Soviet Union via Germany. Although disappointed with the narrative simplicity of Kinugasa’s *Crossroads* (released in Berlin as *Im Schatten des Yoshiwara* (“Shadows of Yoshiwara”)) Yuri Stilianudis, in his *Letter From Berlin* published in a Soviet newspaper *Kino*, dedicated considerable attention to the film’s artistic qualities. Being a cinematographer himself, Stilianudis was particularly impressed by the film’s use of tracking shots and montage. Unlike his contemporaries in Moscow and Leningrad, Stilianudis often described the most impressive and memorable scenes in detail. He was particularly fascinated by the absence of long shots in the scene depicting the *matsuri* celebration and the peculiar use of lighting in scenes depicting the characters’ descent from the stairs. His overall conclusion was that Kinugasa’s film is a masterpiece, “a wonderful work of film art, which can make any German and American director envious.”

Stilianudis’ review is not entirely devoid of exoticism; in *Crossroads* he sees considerable influence from Kabuki and other “traditional” forms of Japanese art. Still, the tone of his writing feels different from that of his contemporaries. This may be attributed to his professional training as a filmmaker as well as his experience of watching Japanese cinema abroad as a Soviet national. In his text, Stilianudis mentions the “pleasure” he experienced while watching *Crossroads*, especially in comparison to other films being shown in Berlin around the same time, which he characterized as “hollow” and “bleak.” Among these were Hanns Schwarz’ *The Wonderful Lies of Nina Petrovna* (1929), Fred Niblo’s *The Mysterious Lady* (1928) with Greta Garbo, and Ernst Lubitch’s *The Patriot* (1929) with Emil Jannings. He describes the “overwhelming majority” of these films as exploiting “Russian topics.” No detailed analysis of these films is provided, yet Stilianudis asserts that, after watching them, it was

“particularly pleasing” to discover Kinugasa’s work. Thus, it appears that Japanese films could become an object of admiration if one could simultaneously downplay the achievements of other national cinemas, especially if they seemed to capitalize on the cultural appropriation of “Russianness.”

The Soviet press was disturbed by this cinematic rivalry with European and American film studios, many of which were amply staffed with Russian émigré filmmakers. References to Japan in Soviet film journals were often dictated by this concern. In July 1929, shortly after the Japanese Film Exhibit was held, the Leningrad issue of *Kino* reported on the release of Kinugasa’s *Crossroads* in Berlin and simultaneously complained that “due to the weakness of cultural ties with Japan, an interest shown by the Japanese intellectuals towards Soviet art is exploited by foreign film studios. German UFA’s *Taras Bulba* (based on Gogol) and *The Love of Jeanne Ney* (based on Erenburg) have been recently brought to Japan and received considerable success in Tokyo” [Bek 1929, p. 3]. News about Japan published in Soviet periodicals almost always revealed sources related to Russia, even when the connections were not obvious. On February 12, 1929, *Kino* announced the grand re-opening of “Musashino-kan”, one of the biggest “Western-style” film theaters in Tokyo. Other Japanese theaters “make people squat” but Musashino-kan has chairs, the newspaper declared, in a somewhat ironic fashion. The first film screened at the new theater was Frank Borzage’s *Street Angel* (1928). It seems odd that this particular news caught the magazine’s attention. Yet, if we turn to the Japanese brochure issued by the Musashino-kan, it becomes clear that the music accompanying Borzage’s film at the theater’s grand opening was performed by a certain Andrei Petrov – presumably, an émigré.

Writing about the Japanese film industry in the 1920s Soviet Union was an exceedingly political act. “Japanese cinema” functioned as yet another platform for promulgating policies officially implemented by the Soviet state. The Japanese film industry had little input in this process. An attempt to challenge this dynamic would occur in 1930, when Japanese film journalist Fukuro Ippei visited the Soviet Union to give a series of

public lectures to accompany the screenings of Suzuki Shigeyoshi's leftist *Nani ga kanojo o sō saseta ka* ("Chto ee takoi sdelalo?", "What Made Her Do This?", 1930). Fukuro's experience in the Soviet Union and the nature of his partnership with VOKS, as well as the reception of Suzuki's tendency film (*keikō eiga*) – strikingly different from the Shochiku films of the first "Japanese Film Exhibit" both stylistically and ideologically – constitute a topic worthy of a separate consideration.

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## Women's Comics in Russia: Initiated by Manga

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**Abstract.** In the USSR, like in many other countries, comics were mostly seen as light reading material and published in children's magazines. When a comics market formed in Russia during the 1990s, it consisted mainly of translated American and European children's comics, but first comics-only magazines aimed at teenagers and adults also appeared at that time (*KOM*, *Veles*, *Muha*, etc.). These magazines presented works made by men and for men, usually containing sexualized images of women.

There were no famous women among Russian comic artists during the 1990s, as female authors usually assisted their husbands or were known as part of comics artists duos. An example of the latter is Natalia Snegireva, who created "Keshka", a children's comics series about a cat, together with her husband Andrey. Another person is Svetlana Sorokina, who helped her husband Evgeny as a colorist and then designed book covers for the Russian edition of "ElfQuest" by Wendy and Richard Piny. The turning point for female comics artists in Russia came in the early 2000s with the growing popularity of Japanese manga and the spread of the Internet. Due to these factors, young women published comics in new magazines aimed at both children and teenagers (*Klassnyi zhurnal*, *Yula*, etc.) and at anime fans (*Poppuri anime*, *Anime Guide*, etc.). For example, *Lina* and *Kotyonok* ("The Kitten") by Enji were a romance and fantasy comics series with a girl as protagonist; *Rytsari radugi* ("The Knights of the Rainbow") from *Yula* magazine examined "girl

power” through the friendship between girls and magic adventures of Russian middle school students. Female artists who adopted the style of Japanese manga were not the only ones to open the door for new themes in comics and imagine girls as heroines, but their work definitely encouraged young girls to draw comics by themselves and participate in Russian comics festivals.

This article examines the role of manga, *shōjo manga* (comics for girls) in particular, for the birth of women’s comics in Russia and feminist themes. Its influence on the growth of women in comics both as readers and artists, the appearance of manga-inspired comics which address issues such as women’s body and trauma *Kniga tela* (“The Book of Body”) or *Razdelenie* (“Partition”) by Yuliya Nikitina; lesbian romance *Klub* by Anna Rud’; life of a young woman during the siege of Leningrad *Survilo* by Olga Lavrentieva. Besides representational contents, the birth of feminist fanzines such as those by Nika Vodvud and group “FemInfoteka” are also noteworthy.

**Keywords:** manga, Russian comics, female comics, feminism, female characters.

## In the Men’s Shadow

From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the government of the Soviet Union took a supportive stance towards women’s emancipation. As early as in 1917, the governing cabinet welcomed its first ever female member, Aleksandra Kollontai, an advocate of the feminist ideal of a New Woman and free love.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the history of the USSR, there were many examples of women in leadership positions as well as representations of strong women. Even manual labor, such as being a stacker of railroad ties, a combine operator, or a tractor driver, had female faces. The first female cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova went on a solo mission in 1963. In the art world as well, prominent sculptor Vera Mukhina gained recognition in

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<sup>1</sup> Kollontai A (1918). New Woman, from *The New Morality and the Working Class*.

the 1920-1940s. However, everyday reality of the Soviet woman was less stellar. Women were a valuable part of the full-time labor force, working full time, yet, at the same time, they were expected to shoulder all the housework and childcare. Especially married women had little free time to pursue their interests and hobbies.

Because of the Iron Curtain, the USSR followed a rather different path in regard to the feminist movement. The first feminist activists began to appear at the end of the 1970s. Tatiana Mamonova was a member of literary-art magazine *The Aurora*, writing poems and participating in exhibitions of nonconformist art. Her own gender-related trauma (negative experience with the Soviet obstetrics and rape) motivated her to gather a group of female authors and to release the first feminist self-published magazine in the USSR. They wrote about abortions, food stealing in kindergarten, and marital problems, such as domestic violence and alcoholism, etc. The magazine, *Women in Russia* (1979), was published in Leningrad (St. Petersburg). The magazine's first issue originally had only ten copies; with the distribution of more copies, the publishers risked imprisonment. Despite this precaution, in 1980, the editorial staff was exiled from the country to Vienna, and the Western media referred to them as "the first feminist exiles from the USSR" [Yasenitskaya 2012]. Therefore, despite superficial claims for gender equality, actual feminist movement was suppressed by the authorities, putting a stop to the political feminist activism in Russia virtually until the end of the Soviet era. As a result, by the time the Soviet Union was drawing near its collapse, it was lagging behind on the gender equality front. It will not come as a surprise that gender representations in the media had been prevalently patriarchal.

Among the prolific variety of printed media, comics were a niche one in the USSR. The notion of comics and comics-like media referring to themselves as comics appeared during the last years of the USSR. However, long before that, there were publications structured as comics, specifically comic strips. In the USSR, like many other countries, comics-like materials were mostly seen as light reading material and published in children's magazines.



Children's periodicals have a long tradition in Russia, beginning with the Soviet period *Murzilka*, 1924–present, *Veselye kartinki* (“The Funny Pictures”), 1956–present. These magazines contained miscellaneous materials, such as informative material, fairy tales, cut out puzzles, coloring sheets, riddles, etc. The comic strips appeared in these children's publications as well, yet they occupied a minor place and were perceived as a type of illustration, rather than comics. Most Soviet comics were short humor strips, created by famous children's book illustrators. For that reason, there were few authors who saw themselves as comics artists in the USSR, and comic strips were usually not presented as “comics” at the time. Russian comics historian Aleksey Pavlovskiy refers to the Soviet stance towards comics-like materials published in the USSR as follows: “Comics existed in the USSR, but they were reduced only to children's works. In 1986, N. Mansurov wrote that Western comics entertain, but do not educate the younger generation. The Soviet comics were not supposed to take a child away from the reality, its main goal was to arouse in children a sense of collectivism, love for the Soviet Motherland and faith in a bright future” [Pavlovskiy 2016, p. 93].

When the first comics which were actually referred to as “comics” appeared in the Russian book market during the early 1990s, they consisted mainly of translated American and European titles for children (Disney comics, Asterix series, etc.). However, soon the medium was rediscovered and adopted by Russian authors as well. The appeal of comics was recognized and Russian comics magazines started to aim not only at children, but also at teenagers and even adults.

If we look at the Russian comics industry of the 1990s, we see that female authors were almost excluded from the comics production. In this period, the realm of comics was a rather minor artistic niche, which appeared more male-centric than other branches of the publishing industry.<sup>2</sup> There are very few examples of women participating in content

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<sup>2</sup> Women worked as illustrators, animators, or writers. For example, graphic artist Tatiana Vyshenskaya (1901–1990), who drew covers and characters

creation. Usually they carried out functions of assistants, such as colorists or illustrators. Their labor was frequently uncredited. There are almost no examples of women being mentioned as co-authors.

One of the representative comics production groups, studio “KOM”, was established in 1988 as a branch of the newspaper *Vechernyaya Moskva* (“Evening Moscow”). This studio consisted of male artists and caricaturists, who called themselves “komovtsy” and who published original comics and comic strips for the newspaper. Comics by “KOM” were aimed at an adult audience and examined such genres as comedy, action, and horror. Today “KOM” is seen as an important part of the Russian comics history and most of the artists who worked there in the early 1990s maintain their interest in comics.

Andrey Snegirev, a “KOM” affiliated artist, is frequently singled out as the creator of the most renowned Russian original comics of that period, although the work he is most famous for was aimed at children. *Keshka* (1991–1998) is a series of short strips, published in the early 1990s in the newspaper *Sem'ya* (“Family”) and later compiled into comic books. *Keshka* is the name of the cat-protagonist. When in 1993 *Keshka* strips were compiled into a book and colorized, Andrey Snegirev's wife, Natalia Snegireva, was mentioned as a co-author and colorist. Subsequently, all new stories about *Keshka* were in color. Andrey created the stories and layouts, while his wife added color. However, despite the fact that the official website of *Keshka* comics refers to Snegireva as “*Keshka*'s mother”, most of the secondary sources have omitted her as a co-author.

Natalia Snegireva did not work for “KOM” studio, but she was one of the first women to help create Russian comics. She also exemplifies the omission of female comics artists from the Russian book market in the 1990s. All the famous Russian comics magazines were edited by men and published works for men. Comics made by independent female authors hardly existed during that period. The few existing examples of female authors usually refer to male artists' wives. Furthermore, while Natalia

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for children's humor magazine *Veselye kartinki*, and famous artist Tatiana Mavrina (1900–1996), who created filmstrips.

Snegireva was credited on the covers, the names of other female colorists and assistants have become public only recently.

Another example of a married couple who worked on comics, Evgeniy Sorokin and Svetlana Sorokina, are not associated with original material. Instead, they worked on adapting translated comics and related artwork for Russian publications. This time too, Sorokina assisted her husband as a colorist. During the early 1990s, Evgeniy Sorokin worked for the Soviet-Danish publishing house Egmond FIS (joint company with publisher *Fizkultura i Sport* ("Physical Culture and Sport")). Egmond FIS was the first publisher in the USSR to issue comics magazines about Mickey Mouse and Scrooge McDuck from 1988.

Each comic book was about 20-30 pages long and was accompanied by different puzzles for kids, additional artwork, and coloring pages with characters from comics. These coloring pages and additional images did not belong to the original creators, but were drawn by Evgeniy Sorokin. His copies were created with the permission of the copyright owners and could hardly be distinguished from the original. As a result, Russian readers frequently were not aware that the coloring pages were made by a local artist. Dmitriy Sorokin, the son of this married couple, revealed that many color pictures that Evgeniy Sorokin produced were in fact colorized by his wife, Svetlana Sorokina [Sorokin 2019]. Dmitriy refers to his parents as an ideal creative tandem. Working for Egmond FIS, Evgeniy Sorokin did the sketches, and Svetlana Sorokina colored them. However, Egmond FIS did not employ Svetlana officially. In other words, her labor was unpaid and uncredited.

When Evgeniy Sorokin left Egmond FIS at the end of 1993, he started to work with Machaon publishing house in 1994. Soon his wife Svetlana was hired together with him as a colorist. Machaon focused on translations of the American comic *ElfQuest* by Wendy and Richard Pini. Svetlana was responsible for the covers of the Russian editions of *ElfQuest* (*Saga o lesnykh vsadnikakh*, 1994) comic series: she colored black and white images created by Wendy Pini. Her work was approved by Machaon and then by the Pinis themselves. As a result, Svetlana was in charge of the Russian edition of *ElfQuest*, and she was also asked by

Wendy Pini to draw a cover for the first volume of *ElfQuest* (collection of the first five issues). This cover is the only one to have Sorokina's signature on it.<sup>3</sup> Despite her contribution, Svetlana Sorokina was not officially recognized until 2019, showcasing the peculiar gender bias that plagued the industry in the 1990s.

Generally, the women who worked together with their husbands were the only ones to receive recognition, even if delayed, in the Russian comics history. There were, however, some exceptions. Lena Uzhinova (a.k.a. Alyona Kamyshevskaya, b. 1967) can be named as the first independent female comics artist in Russia at the end of the 1990s, although, at first, she did not consider herself a comics artist [Kunin 2018]. Uzhinova created her first comics at the age of twenty but is most known for her animated works and the short comics she made for several non-comics magazines and newspapers in the 1990s. Her first comics, *Zhizn' vo mgle* ("The Life in Darkness", 1987),<sup>4</sup> told the story of a hippie girl who goes to work where everything and everybody is standard.

In 1995, Uzhinova was in Paris and chanced upon the comic *Leon La Came* (1993–1998) by Nikolas de Crecy. Heavily under the influence of this work, Uzhinova realized that she did not just want to read comics but also devote herself to making comics [Kunin 2018]. Only after 2004 did Uzhinova begin to take comics more seriously, when she was invited by Andrey Snegirev to take part in the third Russian comics festival KomMissia (short from "Comics Mission"). Finally, she began to produce comics fulltime in 2008, after taking part in the Saint Petersburg comics festival Boomfest as a special guest.

Not only was Lena Uzhinova the first female comics creator in Russia, but she also addressed gender inequality already in one of her earlier

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<sup>3</sup> One more interesting fact is that the covers of the Russian edition had the subtitle "picture novel" (roman v kartinkakh), but not "comics".

<sup>4</sup> This comics could be only seen in her personal interview. For more information see: Kunin A. Lena Uzhinova: Raznost sluchaya [Lena Uzhinova: The Difference Being], July 2009, accessible at <http://chedrik.ru/2009/lena-uzhinova-raznost-sluchaya/>

works. From 1998 to 2012, she created a comic series which includes thematic cycles about women's life: childhood, adulthood, first love, casual and non-casual sexual relationships, joys, disappointments. In one of her biographical essay comics *Byt' mal'chikom* ("To Be a Boy", 1998), she described her attempts to become a boy. Lena depicted herself as a little girl who hates wearing dresses and prefers different attributes of masculine culture such as black toy pistols, Chapaev toy soldiers, slingshots, boys' jeans and sneakers. But the only thing she cannot emulate is the ability to pee standing up. As a result, she pees over herself. But at the end of this story she finds her own way of peeing in order to extinguish a campfire. At first glance, it seems that penis envy is represented here, but the criterion of masculinity, defined only by physiological characteristics, appears to ridicule physiological gender determinism.

*Byt' mal'chikom* is one example of how a female comics artist portrays a female character, addressing problems of femininity during the 1990s. At the same time, their male counterparts were also depicting female characters in comic art.

During the 1990s, Russian comics were appearing in different cities of the former USSR, but, in many cases, they were oriented towards Western models. As mentioned by culturologist Daria Dmitrieva: "In fact, the comics of the early 1990s, aimed as entertaining adventure reading at teenagers and adults, were created from scratch, often by directly moving the Western tradition to the Soviet ground" [Dmitrieva 2015, p. 301]. The most famous magazines of that time were *Muha* ("The Fly") in Ufa city, and *PIF* or *Priklyucheniya i fantastika* ("Adventures and Sci-fi"), and *Veles* in Ekaterinburg. All three magazines had exclusively male staff. Main genres of their stories were comedy, adventures, and action. These magazines presented works made by men and for men and usually included sexualized images of women.

One of the first periodical post-Soviet comic magazines *Veles*, which was published from 1991 to 1995, shows how male comics artists were looking for inspiration in American superheroes and Slavic mythology (*Veles* is a name of a pagan god of the ancient Slavs). The comic story



Attractive Baba Yaga in *Veles* comic magazine № 2, 1993.

© Igor Kozhevnikov

with the same name, *Veles* (1993), tells about an animal being, sheltering a human baby. The animal figure takes the baby to Baba Yaga and asks her to breastfeed the baby. The famous Slavic folklore character Baba Yaga is usually portrayed as a scary, old woman, but here she looks very sexy, and all the evil male forest spirits come to see her. After feeding the baby, Baba Yaga has a sexual affair with the animal being who brought the child. Another comics, called *Kosmicheskaya nimfomanka* ("Space Nymphomaniac", 1991), was supposed to be the first Ural erotic comics with female protagonist, but it was never published [Pavlovskiy 2017]. However, such stories demonstrate attempts to depict women only as an object of male sexual desire.

The next periodical comic magazine, *Muha*, was published from 1992 to 1995 (nineteen issues), every issue including five comics stories by different Russian authors. This magazine had a characteristically sexist

way of portraying female characters. The women wear skimpy outfits, and the panels tend to focus on their large breasts. Female characters are portrayed prevalently as seductive antagonists or damsels in distress. Finally, they are represented as objects of the male protagonist's desire and as his "prize" at the end of the story.

A later comic magazine *Velikolepnye priklyucheniya* ("The Amazing Adventures", 1999–2003) focused on children audience and promoted healthy life and creativity. It consisted of stories about the adventures of a group of teenagers. There were five male characters in the group and only one girl, Leska, who played a supportive role. Leska was portrayed as "sporty", "pretty", and "brilliant". Such description is a reference to a famous Soviet movie *Kavkazskaya plennitsa* ("The Caucasian Prisoner"), a romantic comedy about a university student falling in love with a girl, Nina, who against her will is sold by a relative to a local man as a bride. In the movie, Nina is described as "a sporty girl, a Komsomol girl, and just a very pretty girl", a phrase which still endures as a running joke, referring to the female ideal of the Soviet period. Leska from *Velikolepnye priklyucheniya* is also "sporty" (has an ideal figure), "pretty", and "brilliant". The word "brilliant", (in Russian, the word *umnitsa*, "умница" is used), refers not only to being smart or clever, but also connotes obedience. Specifically, *umnitsa* in this context refers to an obedient little girl.

Although, as mentioned above, *Velikolepnye priklyucheniya* was a magazine aimed at children, women were usually portrayed here in the same subordinate position as in comic magazines for adults. For example, a nurse from the first issue of *Velikolepnye priklyucheniya*, who arrives to help the characters, is not wearing a proper nurse uniform, wearing a short dress instead. The main male character gets pushed accidentally into her large breasts, while other characters make jokes about how they want to be "healed by the nurse", implying sexual interaction.

There were no Russian comics magazines aimed at women or girls during the 1990s. Comics, as well as videogames, were considered entertainment for the male audience, something largely enjoyed only by boys and men. There was no place for accurate female representations

or representation of women's issues and interests. The only positive or educational female images aimed at the female consumer are very patriarchal, such as good wives and mothers, or those obedient to their parents or husbands. During the 1990s, this point of view was popularized throughout Russian media such as TV shows, women's magazines, etc., which did not feature any female protagonists. But soon, when the year 2000 was around the corner, the situation began to change slowly with the appearance of anime, populated by independent female protagonists.

### **Manga as a New Form for Women's Self-Expression**

As previously discussed, the first female comics artists appeared in Russia during the 1990s, but, with the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they have gained new possibilities to express themselves, borrowing the format of Japanese comics – manga. Among the many reasons why manga appealed to the Russian readers, one may highlight the more positive image of Japan compared to other countries. As mentioned by professor Yulia Mikhailova: «...even during the cold war the Soviet mass media looked at Japan more sympathetically than at other “capitalist” countries: Japan, in a way, was regarded as the “victim of American imperialism”» [Mikhailova 2006, p. 182]. In 1970, Soviet journalist Vsevolod Ovchinnikov wrote the book “Sakura (The Story of What Kind of People the Japanese Are)”, which became very popular among Soviet citizens, who started to associate Japan with a high level of culture and refined manners.

The positive image of Japan was adopted by the younger generation. The new Japanese media, such as anime and manga, also offered representations of more fluid gender identities and relationships between sexes. Combined with innovative story-telling and striking visuals, these imported media attracted young Russians searching for a new form of self-expression after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The influence of Japanese pop culture was very strong at the beginning of the 1990s not only due to the distribution of anime and manga, but



also due to the development of computer games and such companies as Nintendo or Sega. In this case, the first information about Japanese anime and manga could be found in post-Soviet magazines dedicated to video games, such as *Video Ace Dendy*, *Velikiy drakon* ("Great Dragon"), *Strana igr* ("Game Land"), etc. By the end of the 1990s, however, information about manga and anime began to appear in periodicals for Russian children and teenagers. In the post-Soviet era, some of the major children's publications were *Klassnyi zhurnal* ("Cool Magazine", a pun on "classroom journal", which sounds the same in Russian, 1999–present), *Gen-13* (2001–2008), *Popurri anime* ("Potpourri Anime", 2003–2005), *Yula* ("Whirligig", 2004–2009), etc. Their content became less ideological and more entertaining, although they preserved the familiar format of miscellaneous content, borrowed from the Soviet times. However, the comics began to play a more significant role. For example, American comic strips about Garfield, Bugs Bunny, Calvin and Hobbes, and Snoopy filled the pages of *Klassnyi zhurnal*.

These post-Soviet children's magazines were sold by the thousands of copies (usually 20,000 copies) at Soyuzpechat' kiosks, which distributed periodicals since the 1930s and, after 1994, as a result of the corporatization of the monopoly Soviet agency, were renamed Rospechat'. Now, according to the information on its website, the Rospechat' Agency is one of the largest players in the Russian market of distribution of periodicals and the owner of more than 2,000 kiosks in 17 regions of the country. The system of periodical distribution inherited from the Soviet era helped to popularize the novel media such as comics before the wide spread of the Internet.

The development of video-recording technology increased the popularity of Japanese anime, which was shown on Russian television or sold on VHS cassettes and gathered a big group of fans, especially after the anime series *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon* was broadcast in Russia in 1996–1997. The story about a middle-school girl Usagi Tsukino, who received magical powers and became the Sailor Soldier, was aimed mostly at a female audience and displayed visual tropes of anime style (big eyes, colored hair, exaggerated emotions). One may theorize that the

popularity of Sailor Moon became the reason why the original Russian comics in manga style mostly targeted an adolescent female reader.

Young Russian artists began to create their own works, which combined the elements of American comics (they used color, uniform panel layout, right-to-left direction of reading) with visually distinct Japanese character design. One early example is *Nika* – the first Russian comics in manga style, which were drawn by a Moscow artist Bogdan based on the script by Slava Makarov and serialized in *Klassnyi zhurnal*, starting with the first issue (1999) through the 119<sup>th</sup> issue (2001). It tells the story of a 17-year-old schoolgirl Nika Novikova. She is an orphan with big eyes, fluffy hairstyle and white headband, reminiscent of Japanese *hachimaki*. Nika studies martial arts, can handle weapons and fights against villains. Despite her brave personality, she is frequently not strong enough and ends up needing the help of two young men: Vyacheslav Radnov and Brys' (short for Bolshaya rys' – "Big lynx", a pun on a similar sounding onomatopoeia that is used to chase animals away). Despite her shortcomings, Nika is generally depicted as cool and sexy, referencing a heroine of the "girls with guns" genre. Nika also uses a magic power, which connects the heroine with the popular girl's anime of that time in the *mahō shōjo* genre. Both plot-wise and in respect to its visual design, *Nika* makes a striking contrast in comparison to pretty and funny characters of other comics in the *Klassnyi zhurnal* magazine, for the most part cute animals and kids.

*Nika* inspired many Russian authors, among them was Sideburn004 (Tatiana Lepikhina, b. 1984), who became a very famous manga artist, working today in the *seinen* and boys' love genres. She states about her interest in comics: "Who among us didn't like to read comics – stories in pictures – as a child? I also loved it and tried to illustrate my stories. Once I got the magazine *Klassnyi zhurnal* in my hands, at that time it was printing manga *Nika* by Bogdan. I was captivated by the pictures, characters, humor. This time I had no idea about manga and its difference from comics, but I already had been watching anime and tried to draw some girl-characters in the style with big eyes" [Al'manakh russkoi mangi 2013, p. 250].

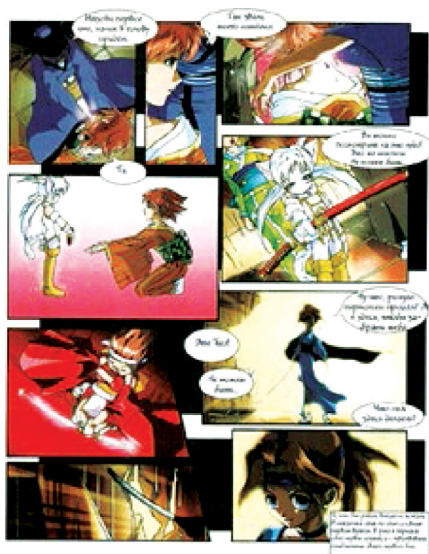
Active, independent, and strong heroines became a distinguishing feature of Russian comics in manga style of the early period. The comics reflect the struggle for survival and the cruel reality of Russian society of the 1990s. This struggle is put on the shoulders of a young female protagonist.



Brave and sexy schoolgirl Nika Novikova  
in the first Russian comics in manga style,  
*Klassnyi zhurnal* № 3, 1999 © Bogdan Kulikovskikh

The next Russian comics in manga style, *Lina*, shows how many elements from famous anime, such as *Sailor Moon*, *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Chobits*, *Curious Play*, move to after 'anime'. *Lina* was drawn by Enji (Anastasia Kameneva, b. 1985) and serialized in the magazine *Klassnyi zhurnal*, starting with the issue № 2 ([122], 2002) through issue № 46 ([214], 2003). The main character Lina is a schoolgirl with big eyes and yellow hair. The school director gives Lina and her friends a task to find the Queen of Spirits. During the journey it becomes clear that Lina is much alike the Queen of Spirits, and evil forces try to kill her.

Her friends protect Lina, turning into Fire warrior (red-haired girl Aola) or Water warrior called Ocean Wind (pink-haired girl Yuniko), with similar functions to Sailor soldiers in the *Sailor Moon*. Also, the author herself appears in this story as a guardian Angel under her own pseudonym Enji (Anastasia took her pseudonym from the song name of her favorite music band). At the end of the story, Lina is represented as the other half of the Queen of Spirits, because many years ago her body and soul were separated. The story ends with the episode where Lina wakes up in the morning and realizes that the whole adventure was just a dream. The manga “Lina” is reminiscent of a short Russian version of “Sailor Moon”, repeating the idea of reincarnation of the main heroine from the modern world into an ancient Goddess (like schoolgirl Usagi Tsukino and Princess Serenity), and provides Russian readers with comics made in the conventions of the magical girls genre.



On the left: Lina on the cover of *Klassnyi zhurnal* #8 (128), 2002 © Enji

On the right: Katy Lero and the appearance of her magic cat  
in manga “The Kitten” (*Kotyonok*) – *Klassnyi zhurnal*,  
#15 (231), 2004 © Enji

The next work by Enji – *The Kitten (Kotyonok)* – was published in *Klassnyi zhurnal* in issue № 9 ([225], 2004) and demonstrated how Japanese themes are reinterpreted by the author. The main heroine Katy Lero returns to Russia after living in Japan for 16 years. She is very happy to see Europeans in her class: “Finally, I saw heads not with the same hair color and the same faces. It was probably one of the happiest days of my life”.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, her classmate Maya Ido, a Japanese girl born in Russia, states that she does not really want to live in Japan, “on a tiny island, among wayward, narrow-eyed wunderkinds, where you need to be able to read strange signs and know the art of chomping, dressing kimonos and tea ceremony”.<sup>6</sup> These statements indicate stereotypes and make some distance for understanding Japanese culture, which is still exotic.

In spite of such negative reflection on the Japanese culture, the manga *The Kitten* continues to borrow some elements of anime, especially from *Pokemon*. Katy Lero gets magic powers due to a “kitten” – an anthropomorphous animal, who represents her inner world. This creature appeared from her body during the entrance ceremony to the Japanese weapons section, where all the participants create a Japanese atmosphere: they are dressed in kimonos and carry katana. Her friends also have such “pets”, who represents different types of anthropomorphous cats.

In 2001, *Voiny snov* (“The Soldiers of Dreams”) was published in Ekaterinburg. It became the first Russian magazine devoted only to anime and manga. Unlike other magazines which were in color, this magazine was black and white and associated not with comics, but with manga, using this new word on the cover. But some kiosks incorrectly identified the direction of this magazine, positioning it as a coloring book. This magazine published a manga of the same name, in which a girl named Sonya uses magic powers of transformation to fight evil in the mysterious world of dreams. The girl has friends who become soldiers of dreams and

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<sup>5</sup> Klassnyi zhurnal № 9 (225), 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Klassnyi zhurnal № 10 (226), 2004.



The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> issues of the *Voiny snov* magazine  
(The Soldiers of Dreams), 2001

command animals that look like Pokemons. The main male character, like Tuxedo Mask from *Sailor Moon*, protects Sonya and becomes her romantic partner.

The authors of this story did not hide the source of inspiration: sometimes the characters of *Voiny snov* discussed popular anime, comparing their own costumes with Sailor suits. However, after the second issue, the magazine ceased publication. Some years later, in 2004, a Moscow publishing house Advance-Press started the release of a monthly anime stylized magazine called *Yula* ("Whirligig"), which was targeted at girls of primary and secondary school age. It became very successful and was published until the 50<sup>th</sup> issue in 2008. *Yula* was the first children's magazine containing only original Russian comics and comic strips without any translations of Western comics. The slogan was "the magazine for energy girls".



The magazine was made by a group of young female artists and scriptwriters: Anna Kirsanova (a.k.a Gaallo), Aleksandra Kramarenko (a.k.a. Dilandu), Oksana Guseva (Oka), Yulia Kukushina (Yul'cha), Natalia Sudareva (a.k.a. Aeri), Evgenia Romanova.

The central role in *Yula* magazine was played by *The Knights of the Rainbow* (*Rytsari Radugi*) comic series, which, according to the interview, was supposed to be a Russian version of *mahō shōjō*. The story was about three Russian schoolgirls, who represent certain types of women: Juli is a clever girl, Zyun'ka is a handmade mistress and Yul'cha is a beauty and lover of animals. The girls find a magic pet which looks like a rabbit and together they start an amazing adventure. During this adventure they receive magic powers, travel to the Rainbow planet and awaken the legendary Talisman.



On the left: Mania and Kira on the cover of the 1<sup>st</sup> issue  
of the *Yula* magazine, April 2004

On the right: Juli, Zyun'ka and Yul'cha from the comics "The Knights  
of the Rainbow" (*Rytsari Radugi*) – *Yula* magazine № 3 (12), 2005

The authors recognize that they were greatly influenced by anime *Sailor Moon* and Italian-American series *Winx Club*, so *The Knights of the Rainbow* is a cross between manga and European comic books. The authors used common anime clichés because of which many readers can see parallels with anime and manga *Magic Knight Rayerth* by CLAMP. The magazine's mascots characters – blonde Mania and red-haired Kira – are also suggested types of gender behavior in ongoing comic strips. Mania represents the traditional activities of a woman, such as cooking, ironing, house cleaning, wearing pretty dresses, or dancing ballet. Her sister Kira looks like a tomboy who enjoys skateboarding, repairing things, wearing jeans, listening to loud music, and so on. Therefore, the comics *Rytsari Radugi* show a greater variety of women's roles compared to previous works, and readers can choose between traditional (feminine) or more masculine behavior.

*Anime guide* was a new Russian magazine aimed at anime fans from an older age range (for teenagers and college students), which started to be published in 2004. It contained many different materials as well as original Russian manga. One of the first manga was *Ne govori mne, kto tvoi drug* ("Don't Tell Me Who Your Friend Is"), created by Mila & Delfina (Lyudmila Melnikovich), later reorganized in "Studia Kauri" – a group of female artists and scriptwriters. In the story, a young man Ron, to save his life, was forced to make a contract with a mysterious girl Remi. *Ne govori mne, kto tvoi drug*, like the previous manga-style comics from the magazines *Yula* or *Klassnyi zhurnal*, is made in color and read from left to right. But, because of the adult oriented audience, it contains elements that cater to the older fan-base: naked bodies, panty shots, sexy costumes, cat ears *nekomimi*, etc. The female characters become more sexualized, reflecting anime patterns for male audience.

Russian children's publications of the post-Soviet period began to popularize comics as a new genre, but, in most cases, it was strongly influenced by Japanese anime and manga, which was a fashionable hobby of the time, following the slogan "Anime is trendy". Bright, cute, and big-eyed characters conveyed, first of all, feminine elements. For that reason, Russian manga-style comics of the early period describe adventures



of female characters and contain women's names in the titles (Nika, Lina). Also, it borrowed famous anime clichés about a group of fighting girls, which can be seen in such comics as *Rytsari Radugi* ("The Knights of the Rainbow") and *Voiny snov* ("The Soldiers of Dreams"). This makes it clear that manga in Russia has become associated exclusively with the female genre.



“Don’t Tell Me Who Your Friend Is” (*Ne govori mne, kto tvoji drug*) –  
 Anime Guide № 2, 2004 © Studia Kauri

## Between Manga and Comics: Female Comics Artists in Russia

The popularity of manga in Russia revived interest in comics. During 2011–2016, several new comics publishing companies were founded, some of them working together with Russian authors. The new generation of Russian artists, who grew up reading Japanese manga, as well as original Russian manga, began experimenting with style.

Their works usually present a mix of manga, European, and American comics features. Many amateur artists began to participate in “The Alley of Authors” – an activity included in different comics festivals, where authors can get a table in a special area to sell their own fanzines and self-published comic books. More and more women started to work in the Russian comics industry, developing new themes and style features, and raising new questions in comics.

Manga has proven to be a great impetus to the development of women's comics in Russia. For example, as comics artist Anna Rud' remembers: “Technically, I took a lot from manga: the frame setting, dynamics. I liked the way how emotions were conveyed in manga, not the same as in comics, where everyone walked around with stony faces and stood in frozen lifeless non-human poses”.<sup>7</sup> Anna Rud' (b. 1990), who in her childhood was a fan of *Sailor Moon* and Russian edition of *ElfQuest*, created *The Club* – a lesbian comics, made in black and white and read from right to left like original Japanese manga. *The Club* was officially published in Russia in 2016, but, for the first time, it was posted on a website *Mint-manga* in 2013. Posted on this website are original works by Russian artists and scanlated Japanese manga. *The Club* was tagged as “erotic”, “josei”, “yuri”, and “drama”. Both *josei* and *yuri* genres belong to the terminology of Japanese manga industry. *Josei* is a manga genre, aimed at the young adult women, and *yuri* is a genre dedicated to lesbian romantic and sexual relationships. *The Club* tells about two women who meet at a night club and engage in a sexual affair, and they fall in love with each other. There is no doubt that Anna focused on audience interested in manga because, in 2013, it was the only type of comics in Russia describing same sex relationships.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Comic Con Russia 2016: Intervyu s Annoi Rud [Interview with Anna Rud'], October 2016, accessible at <http://spidermedia.ru/comics/comic-con-russia-2016-intervyu-s-annoj-rud>

<sup>8</sup> The first Japanese manga of yuri genre appeared on Russian book market in 2011. The publishing house “Comics Factory” supposed to release three volumes of Chirality. But they could publish only one book, because same sex

Later Anna Rud' was hired by the Moscow comic book publisher Bubble Comics. This company specializes in Russian superheroes comics. Their *Bubble Visions* label focused on original works with non-superhero themes, and this is where *The Club* was published.

The main heroine of *The Club*, Malena, is an "ideal" woman – a blonde with long hair, perfect body and makeup, wearing a short dress, the same image of woman circulated widely by male artists from the pages of the *Muha*, *Veles*, *Velikolepnie priklucheniya* magazines. At the beginning of the story, we see Malena with a boyfriend in a night club. Malena's boyfriend does not pay attention to her feelings and flirts with other girls. At first Malena plays the role of obedient partner, pretending she is okay with her boyfriend's behavior and just watching him silently. In the club's toilet Malena meets a mysterious woman – self-confident, physically strong and sensible – all the traits "ideal" women do not have. They begin a relationship, causing Malena to have doubts. There is a dialogue between the heroines, when Malena is asked by her girlfriend to stay with her a little longer. Malena replies furiously: "And what will be later? A wedding, kids and all the things?", defining the only things an "ideal" woman should care about. In the end, Malena returns to her man, though Malena and her girlfriend still have feelings for each other and Malena understands that her life with a man will be unhappy. Malena's girlfriend tells that "It could be different", which means that only Malena (not her boyfriend or society) is free to choose what kind of life she wants to live. A woman does not have to endure unwanted things because life is happy if you have a caring partner.

During her work at the Bubble Comics company, Anna Rud' continued to develop her own style, and, as a result, her comics now are drawn more in the "Marvel" style than the manga style. Such changes can be seen for many female artists who started their way into Russian comics industry

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scenes in this manga caused controversy in the censorship committee and the manga was removed from the production cycle. The next year, "Comics Factory" compiled Chirality in one book and put it in additional cellophane cover.



“The Club” by Anna Rud’, 2016

from manga in the early 2000s: at first, they copied manga-style and manga page layouts, and then they developed their own style, carefully adapting favorite elements from manga to comics.

One more example is Alina Erofeeva (also known as Meissdes, b.1989). Her drawing style was heavily influenced by manga by such authors as Oda Eiichiro and Hayashida Q. Her work *For the Blessed Ones and Holy Fools* (*Dlya blazhennykh i yurodivykh*, 2011), which she created together with scriptwriter Natalia Devova, won the 1<sup>st</sup> prize of comics festival “KomMissia” in 2011 as the best manga. After joining

Bubble Comics in 2013, Erofeeva changed her style in order to draw comics about Russian superheroes (Besoboy, Exlibrium, etc.). It shows that superhero themes mostly aimed at male audience<sup>9</sup> need authors to abandon the feminine manga style.

But some of those who work at *Bubble Comics* continue to draw in the manga style (black & white, right to left direction of reading, system of emotions and characters’ types), combining elements of male and female comics genres. The most popular series in Bubble, reprinted several times during the last three years, is *Tagar* (2017–2019) – a mystery and action manga series by Marina Privalova (artist, b. 1989) and Anna Sergeeva (scriptwriter, b. 1989). The volume’s first circulation of 2,000 copies quickly sold out, which is absolutely unique for Russian comics. The commercial success of *Tagar* stimulated Bubble Comics to open a special division for manga series, and,

<sup>9</sup> Male protagonist in comics *Major Grom*, *The Monk*, *Besoboy*.

consequently, Russian manga began to be strongly associated with female authors. During the exhibition “Romanga-do: Russian Manga Way”, which was held at the Saint Petersburg Comics Library in 2018, works by twenty-eight authors were presented, twenty of whom were female manga artists [Magera (ed.) 2018].



Popular Russian manga series “Tagar” (Vol. 1–2)  
by Marina Privalova (artist) and Anna Sergeeva (scriptwriter)

The comics form began to be used by some Russian feminists. In 2016, young feminist activities began to spread through Russia. The most famous Russian feminist Nika Vodvud (also known as Nixelpixel) made a YouTube channel with videos on feminism, which was new content for Russian media. Nika also published her comics *Pyosya* (“Doggy”) about three anthropomorphic characters (a dog named Pyosya, a cat, and a hedgehog), who explain ideas of feminism and tell readers about themes like abuse and transsexuality. After Vodvud’s success many artists began to make short comics about feminism and publish it on the Internet. The popularity of feminist fanzines has also grown substantially. In 2016, the

FemInfoteka library opened in Saint Petersburg a big collection of books, comic books, and comic fanzines about feminism. Now there are nearly 300 fanzines with articles and comics, which examine themes of rape, abortion, domestic violence, abuse, etc.

We can say that comics in modern Russia become not only a new way for women's self-expression, but also the way to talk about inner experiences in a form of autobiographical comics. Many popular autobiographical stories in Russia are also created by female comics artists. In 2014, Lena Uzhinova published *Moi seks* ("My sex") as her first comic book, telling about the lack of sexual education in the USSR. It describes Lena's struggle through life trying to find her place in the Soviet reality and, later, in the post-Soviet space. In an ironic and playful way, she tells about her sexual experiences with different men, search of love and her pregnancy.

Yuliya Nikitina (b. 1988) is a comics artist, who in the beginning of her career drew fan art of favorite manga such as *Bleach* and *Naruto*. Later, she began to experiment with her drawing style. Nowadays she is best known as the author of autobiographical comics *Polunochnaya zemlya* ("Midnight Earth"), *Kniga tela* ("The Book of a Body", 2015) and *Razdelenie* ("Separation", 2015). *Kniga tela* is a silent comic, which addresses issues of the female body. This theme was continued in her comic book *Separation* about the experience of pain and illness inside the body, summarized by the author.

One more example of autobiographical comics is *Survilo* (2019) by Olga Lavrentieva (b. 1986). It is the story of the author's grandmother Valentina Vikentievna Survilo and her life during the siege of Leningrad in 1941–1944. *Survilo* won the 1<sup>st</sup> prize of the Comics Boom website as the best comic book in 2019. In 2020, it was translated into French and published by the French publishing house Actes Sud. It shows all the suffering a young woman went through. The tragic story of a woman from Leningrad becomes the prism through which one can see the history of the whole country.

Modern Russian comics market is no longer dominated by men as it was in the 1990s: women not only draw comics, but also open

publishing companies (like Anna Korostyleva), edit comics and organize comics exhibitions. Some comics artists agree that it is not necessary to divide works into “female comics” or “male comics”:<sup>10</sup> the story plays the main role and it does not matter who the author is (man or woman).

Russian comics are still in the process of development and growth, but there are already unique works in different genres, such as autobiography, mystery, comedy, or drama. The form of manga and its visual effects were necessary for Russian female artists to begin drawing comics freely with the characters and stories they have been longing for. Their works became a seed for the next generation of female artists, who now provide beautiful cultivated flowers – modern Russian comics. And sometimes we can still feel a great influence of manga in it.



French edition of the comics  
“Survilo” by Olga Lavrentieva,  
2020

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<sup>10</sup> Komiksy Peterburga: O chem risuyut zhenshchiny [Comics of Saint-Petersburg. What do women draw?], March 2018, accessible at <http://spbformat.ru/articles/komiksyi-peterburga-o-chem-risuyut-zhenshhinyi/>

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