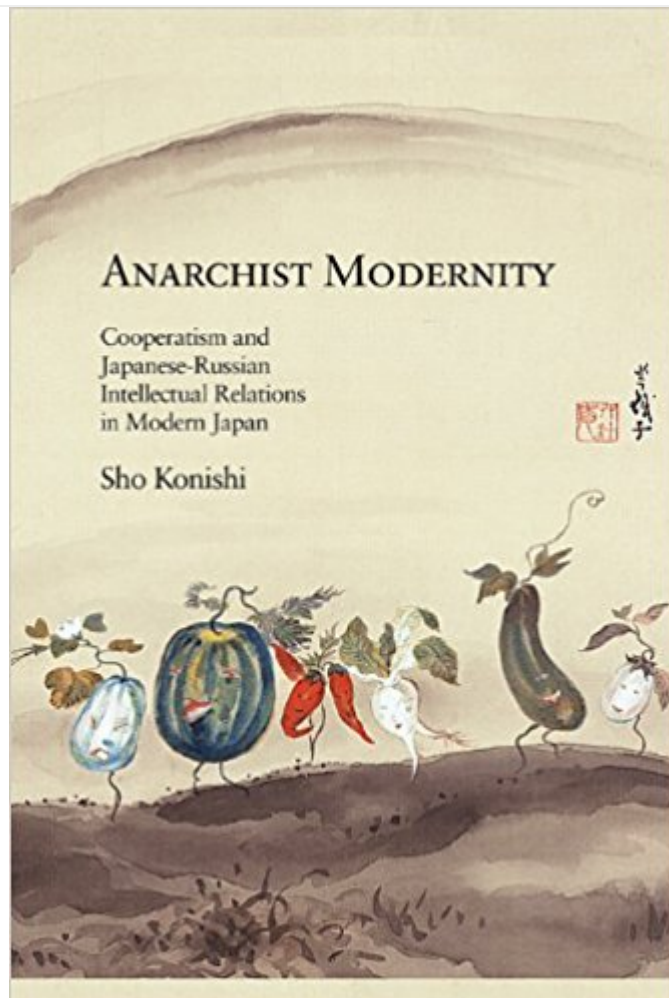


# {essays in history}

The Annual Journal produced by the Corcoran Department of History at the University of Virginia

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



Volume 47 (2014)

### Reviewed Work(s)

*Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan.* By Sho Konishi (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013). Pp. 426. Hardcover, \$42.58.

In *Anarchist Modernity*, Sho Konishi reexamines a critical period of sociopolitical and economic transformation in Japan known as the Meiji restoration (1868-1912). By tracing the development of an underground, non-state, cross-border, Japanese-Russian intellectual network, the author audaciously challenges historians' conventional interpretations of Japan's opening to the world (*kaikoku*) and the Meiji restoration (Meiji Ishin) as a manifestation of Western modernity and an inevitable product of modernization theory. Konishi suggests that this frequently overlooked aspect of transnational intellectual dynamics renders an insufficient, if not flawed, protocol to make sense of Meiji Japan's and the contemporary trajectory of intellectual configuration.

Through riveting accounts of the fateful meeting between Russian revolutionaries and the Japanese Ishin and its resulting translational practices, the emergence of Tolstoyanism as a populist's anarchist religion, the watershed non-war movement occurring at the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war, the rise of Esperantism as the birth of a translingual order, and Japan's post-war scientific turn, the author expounds the powerful concepts of "anarchist cooperatism" and "mutual aid" to emphasize a new mode of lived modernity and knowledge that "long evaded [the] historian's conceptual grasp (3)." Utilizing a diversity of primary sources collected from over twenty-five archives and special collections, including "doodles and sketches in class notebooks, newspaper cartoons, photos, tattered slips of paper, rough notes scribbled on the back of name cards, postcards, diaries, records and songbooks compiled and written by farmers for farmers, and unpublished and self-published manuscripts," Konishi tactfully uncovers an invisible network of anarchist's exchanges to attack the long-held assumption of anarchism as anti-modern and retrogressive. Konishi also proposes a new mode of understanding Japanese modernity in multiple

temporalities that transcend the West's confined imagination of civilization and progress (17).[1]

The first chapter contests a long-standing view of the Meiji Restoration as a reactive answer to Western civilization and its imagined modernity by tracking spheres of knowledge existing beyond the plane of the state's awareness. It details a vivid account of the most prominent Russian Japanologist, Mechnikov, whose revolutionary pursuits in Japan left a widely influential Russian translation culture as his most important legacy. This translational exchange allowed a brand-new vision of progress to emerge: a lived modernity separating itself from the confined territoriality and singular temporality of the West, defined by the practices of what Konishi termed "anarchist cooperatism" or "mutual aid." Anarchist cooperatism embraces a utopian vision of progress that displaces sociopolitical hierarchy and promotes collaboration as the climactic stage of human civilization. Mutual aid is therefore an ethical response to the West's radical theory of social Darwinism that emphasizes competitions of races and survivals of the fittest. This differentiating anarchist vision of modernity, made widespread through Mechnikov's ideological engagement with Japanese intellectuals via a flourished translation culture, challenges existing historiography on modern Japan that ascribed the primacy of its progress to modernity defined by the West.

Inextricably linked to the West's competing vision of multiple Japanese modernities is the emergence of a new anarchist religion Konishi concisely termed "Toylstoyanism". Chapter two thus focused on Tolstoy as the most important figure in the configuration of intellectual exchanges between him and a leading religious thinker in Japan, Konishi Masutaro, whose foundational translational work based on the principle of Taoism infuses with that of Tolstoyan Christianity to create an unprecedented anarchist theology. Konishi and Tolstoy transformed orthodox Christianity by "removing the essential church doctrines and the authority of the church itself" (139). In other words, this theology offered an alternative to the civilizational narrative established by the West that proclaimed Christianization of the far-eastern Japan, in its orientaling construct, as a sole mode of modernity and its only opportunity to partake in the community of civilized nation-states.

Chapter three and four both recapture a compelling account of the non-war movement concomitant with the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905). Konishi successfully argues that despite the ongoing war, underground Japanese-Russian intellectual networks did not cease to thrive. Anarchist cooperatists maintained a vision of peace completely detached from that of the civilized western nation-states. Overcoming western modernity, Japan's non-war movement signifies a broader vision of peace predicating upon an international sphere unconstrained by the spatial construct of the nation-states. With "heimin" (people) as a distinctive Japanese construct, Japanese anarchist cooperatists imagine world peace to be a naturalizing process premised on the well-being of the people entirely independent of the reordering tasks of international political authorities. In chapter four, Konishi skillfully illustrates the incongruity of Western cosmopolitanism to the historical narrative of Meiji Japan through the case of Arishima Takeo, a historian and activist who embraced anarchist cooperatism and Tolstoyanism in his effort to posit himself squarely in the very historicity of the moment when Western ideas of progress deployed to explicate Japan's cultural phenomena hit a dead end.

If the non-war movement critiques the realization of world peace through the restructuring of world hierarchy, the Esperanto movement radically breaks away from the confines of the nation-state by establishing a new, translingual order. Chapter five discusses how transnational intellectual circles succeeded in claiming the universality of this new linguistic order and subsequently by using it as a modality to challenge the ontological discourse of nature vis-à-vis culture, and the teleological meaning of civilization long dominated by the West. Paralleled with the rise of Esperantism and the aforementioned discourses, the scientific turn in Japan was embraced with new meanings of progress propelled by the overturn of Darwinist language and a vision of anarchist modernity that espouses cooperatism and mutual aid. Konishi contends in the last chapter that it is impossible to make sense of Japan's intellectual phenomena without deconstructing the synthesis of Esperanto and the scientific logic of anarchist Darwinism. It is only through the conceptual framework of non-state, cross-border, intellectual networks can the knots be completely disentangled.

In more than 400 pages, Sho Konishi provides readers with a rich and innovative study of the Japanese-Russian anarchist intellectual network in Meiji Japan. His study undoubtedly makes a valuable contribution to the already-established field of Modern Japanese history, as it successfully exposes an underground mode of intellectual exchanges that challenges the conventional paradigm of Japanese modernity vis-à-vis the West. Even though this is an academic work that will not perhaps appeal to a general audience, students and scholars interested in Japanese and transnational history, historiography, and modernity studies will find it immensely useful both in terms of theoretical framework and methodology.

**Anh Sy Huy Le**

*University at Buffalo, State University of New York*

[1] For a recent influential work on anarchist history, see James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed, An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. In Scott's work, anarchism is viewed as an anti-state and anti-progress mode of existence characterized by people's self-peripheralizing tendency to escape from state's surveillance and its modernizing projects.



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