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Report on a Russian-Japanese Workshop “Internment of Japanese in Mongolia and Siberia in Postwar Period”

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Abstract. This paper discusses the fruitful results of Russian-Japanese workshop, which was held on September 29, 2018 at Irkutsk State University (ISU). Researchers from several major Japanese universities and historians of ISU met up to exchange opinions on the problem of common historical past – internment of Japanese in Mongolia and Siberia in postwar period. During the workshop two lectures were held: “Shikoku Goro’s Detention in Siberian Labor Camps: Tracing the history of his Artistic Representation and Cultural Movement” by Professor Takayuki Kawaguchi and “Japanese internments in Mongolia (1945–1947)” by Professor Sergey Kuznetsov. They both touched upon various aspects of Japanese internees’ lives in Labor Camps, including harsh conditions of life, Soviet propaganda, relations between locals and prisoners and artistic works of former internees. While answering the questions from the audience they discussed artistic representation of Japanese anti-war movement and the lack of imaginative literature on the topic in Russia. Professor Kuznetsov pointed out that Russian research segment on Japanese internees has more than 600 scientific works and there are more than 2000 memoirs of former internees in Japan, with combined efforts from both sides it will be possible to shed light on yet unknown details of the discussed topic.

Keywords: Russian-Japanese relation, Japanese prisoners of war, Japanese internees in Mongolia, anti-war movement, Japanese in Siberian Labor Camps.

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The workshop was held on September 29, 2018 at the main conference hall of Irkutsk State University, where researchers from Japanese universities and members of ISU historical faculty met to discuss an important problem of common historical past – internment of Japanese in Mongolia and Siberia in postwar period.

The group of Japanese researchers came to Irkutsk to see the burial places of Japanese soldiers near Lake Baikal and to exchange opinions on the problem with Russian specialists who could give a new insight to the group’s joint project. This group consisted of twelve researchers from several Japanese universities and Re-

search Institutes, just to name few – Osaka University, Rikkyo University, Hiroshima University and etc. Scientific background of the group also ranged from art and gender studies to history and modern international relations.

A welcome speech was delivered by the Head of World History and International Relations Department (ISU historical faculty) Professor Sergey Kuznetsov who paid great attention to strengthening bonds between Siberian and Japanese researchers. The welcome speech was followed by opening remarks from Professor Hideto Tsuboi (International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Japan) who explained the reasons behind their visit to Irkutsk – the joint group of researches has worked on the internment problem for several years and now is in the last preparations before publishing a book that will cover not only historical aspects of the question, but artistic and moral components as well.

After his inspiring speech he introduced the first speaker of the workshop – Professor Takayuki Kawaguchi from Graduate School of Education, Hiroshima University.

Professor Kawaguchi gave a lecture entitled “Shikoku Goro’s Detention in Siberian Labor Camps: Tracing the history of his Artistic Representation and Cultural Movement”. This presentation was inspired by artistic works of former Japanese prisoner of war Shikoku Goro (1924–2014), who spent three years in Siberian Labor Camps. Professor Kawaguchi started his presentation with a short story of Shikoku Goro’s childhood and years that he spent in Japanese army before he was detained, slowly tracing three years in the fifth Camp in Khabarovsk, Labor Camp in Khurmuli district, hardships he faced in Gorlin hospital and barracks of Khurmuli and last year in Nakhodka.

Life in Camps left an essential mark on Shikoku Goro’s future self-expression, his artistic works and political views, as he tried to show it in his paintings. Professor Kawaguchi included three Shikoku Goro’s oil-paintings in his presentation: “Felling work” (1997), “The First One” (1997) and “The Last One” (1997), each represented different periods of his life in Camps, portraying hard labor and small details such as his first agitation poster and everyday life of Japanese prisoners.

During his imprisonment Shikoku Goro kept a diary that became his personal book of life that described Camps, other Japanese prisoners and Soviet soldiers, often with his sketches inside. Unfortunately he could not take all his notes with him when he returned back to Japan, but in order to keep the memory of the past, between 1949 and 1950 Shikoku Goro wrote a book “Memory of my Youth” [2] that became his own answer to the war and to Hiroshima atomic bombing.

The “Memory of my Youth” was not only a story of words and letters, it was also a story written in sketches that portrayed both bad and good memories of his past – cold and hunger, compassion and self-expression. For Shikoku, these Labor Camps were also the place where he could learn a lot and mingle with the local and foreign culture.

Professor Kawaguchi emphasized that Shikoku Goro’s experience in Labor Camps greatly affected his life in Japan and his political views, as he became a member of the Japanese Communist party and an ardent anti-war activist. As well

as his artistic side was affected by Soviet agitation with its wall papers, poetry reading, concerts and newspaper *Nihon Shimbun* that was specially published for Japanese prisoners.

Professor Kawaguchi also touched upon Shikoku Goro's work in the "Society of Our Poems" (1949–1953), one of poetry movement in postwar Hiroshima. The "Society" spoke against Korean War, creating one of the most interesting artistic anti-war movements in the city. Shikoku Goro was one of the creators of so-called Street Poem Posters, where through his painting he could express his anti-war and anti-violence statement. Additionally, Professor Kawaguchi pointed out that this Street Poem Posters originated from Shikoku's experience in the Labor Camps. And even though Shikoku Goro was not a professional painter, his works, his passion to art and his thoughts were the characteristics of a true artist. In conclusion Professor Kawaguchi expressed his sincere desire to continue working with the topic and granted a newly published edition of "Memory of my Youth" to Irkutsk State University.

The second lecture entitled "Japanese internments in Mongolia (1945–1947)" was delivered by Professor Sergey Kuznetsov. In his presentation he analyzed the causes and consequences of internment of the Japanese in Mongolia in 1945–1947. Professor Kuznetsov started his speech with a short historical review on Soviet–Mongolian and Japanese–Mongolian relations before and during Second World War. His brief review of the sources, domestic and Japanese research and memoir literature shows the geography of the placement of prisoners of war Camps in Mongolia and the use of their labor in the national economy of the country. All Mongolian Labor Camps were situated close to the Soviet border to make transfer of prisoners easier.

The first big problems started after construction of the Camps when prisoners of war faced a lack of food, medical care and warm housing. These factors led to a high mortality rate of internees in Mongolia and showed that the country was not ready to accept such significant contingent of internees. However, Professor Kuznetsov noticed, these extreme conditions were not made intently for Japanese prisoners, after war Mongolian economy was in ruins and often ordinary citizens lived in the same conditions as Japanese prisoners. Moreover several groups of Japanese got opportunities to fish and to hunt, so all prisoners could eat nutritious food.

In the second part of his presentation Professor Kuznetsov showed numerous photos of modern Mongolia where the traces of Japanese internees still could be seen. Almost all central buildings of Ulaanbaatar – Government, Theatre, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hotel, Cinema and even the foundation of Sukhe Bator monument – were built with the help of Japanese internees. The other part of the photos showed burial places of Japanese prisoners. As it was mentioned before mortality rate of Japanese prisoners in Mongolia was very high, 1615 people (around 13,1 % of whole contingent) died of hunger, cold and other diseases. However until the end of XX century the circumstances and conditions for the repatriation of internees to their homeland were still unclear. But at the beginning of a new century Japan finally could come back to historical memory of its internees in Mongolia. In October 2001 the Memory Complex in the memory of

Japanese prisoners in Dambadarjah on the northern outskirts of Ulaanbaatar was opened. This project was financed by Japanese government and construction was started at the site of the former cemetery of Japanese prisoners of war.

In conclusion Professor Kuznetsov expressed his sincere gratitude to Japanese delegation for their visit to Irkutsk. After the big round of applause to both lecturers, Professor Kuznetsov opened the floor to questions.

The first two questions were addressed to Professor Kawaguchi, asking why Shikoku joined the Japanese Communist Party. And the other question touched upon non-violent artistic nature of anti-war movements in Japan, whether it was post-war period or modern time. In both answers Professor Kawaguchi referred to Shikoku Goro's personal experience as a prisoner of war and anti-war activist. Shikoku Goro graduated only from middle school and since he was so young to think critically of Japanese propaganda and the Emperor's policy, his real political education had started only in the Soviet Camps. Obviously some of his thoughts were a result of Soviet propaganda, but these three years divided his life onto two parts, what was before and what was after. And this "after" seemed a better reality for him. Beside he realized that the system that previously existed in Japan could not work anymore and construction of a new political system was just a matter of time and left-winged policy met his requirements. As for the other question, art became the way of Shikoku Goro's self-expression and he realized that poetry, painting and art in general could change people minds and feelings without aggression and coercion.

Professor Kuznetsov received several questions on relations between Japanese prisoners and ordinary Mongolian citizens; similarity between Soviet and Mongolian politics toward Japanese internees; propaganda and political schools in Mongolia. As for the relations between Mongolians and Japanese internees, Japanese described Mongolians in their memoirs as friendly neighbors. Hospitality is a historical part of Mongolian traditions, so Mongolians often shared their scarce food with Japanese and that is how they could build friendly relations despite of extreme conditions of life.

Surely the close connection between Soviet policy and Mongolian policy existed. In general Mongolian system was not independent and took patterns of Soviet history; the first questions on independent Mongolian politics toward Japanese prisoners were raised only after collapse of the Soviet Union. As for the political schools, there are many documents on political schools in Buryatia, but none of them give hints if there were any schools in Mongolia. An honest answer would be probably *no*, considering catastrophic state of Mongolian economy after war. Often people didn't have money to buy food not speaking of propaganda newspapers.

In closing remarks Professor Kuznetsov pointed out the lack of imaginative literature on discussed topic in Russia. He emphasized that in Russia more than 600 scientific works about Japanese prisoners of war were published and none of them could be considered imaginative literature. Whereas Japanese literature accounts more than 2000 memoirs of Japanese prisoners of war. Probably this problem may be solved through bilateral scientific and artistic cooperation.

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Интернирование японцев в Монголии и Сибири в послевоенный период: итоги российско-японского семинара

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Аннотация. Анализируются результаты совместного российско-японского семинара, который состоялся 29 сентября 2018 г. в Иркутском государственном университете (ИГУ). Исследователи нескольких крупнейших университетов Японии и историки ИГУ встретились для обсуждения и обмена мнениями по проблеме общего исторического прошлого – интернирования японцев в Монголии и Сибири в послевоенный период. В ходе семинара были представлены две лекции: «Жизнь Сикоку Горо в сибирских трудовых лагерях: отражение истории в его художественных работах» профессора Такаюки Кавагути и «Японские интернированные в Монголии (1945–1947)» профессора Сергея Кузнецова. Оба ученых затронули различные аспекты жизни интернированных японцев в трудовых лагерях, проанализировав тяжелые условия жизни, механизмы советской пропаганды в лагерях, отношения между интернированными и местным населением, а также их отражение в многочисленных художественных работах бывших заключенных. Отвечая на вопросы аудитории, докладчики дискутировали на тему художественной составляющей японского антивоенного движения, отметив при этом практически полное отсутствие художественной литературы по этой теме в России. В то время как российский сегмент по теме интернированных содержит более 600 научных работ, в Японии было опубликовано более 2000 мемуаров бывших японских интернированных. Подводя итоги семинара, обе стороны сошлись во мнении, что, только приложив совместные усилия, будет возможным пролить свет на неизвестные до сих пор детали исследуемой проблемы.

Ключевые слова: Советско-японская война 1945 г., интернирование, военнопленные Главное управление по делам военнопленных и интернированных, использование труда военнопленных, репатриация, Сибирь, Монголия, сибирские лагеря, Горо Сикоку, советско-японские отношения.

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