Introduction

Kazuhiko Togo and Dmitry Streltsov

Tribute to the late Professor Tsuneo Akaha

Tsuneo Akaha was born in Japan in 1949. He first went to America as a high-school exchange student, but after graduating from Waseda University he returned to America to pursue graduate studies at the University of Southern California (USC). After earning a PhD in international relations from USC in 1981, he taught at several universities in the US before settling in 1989 at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS).

There he published or edited 11 books and numerous journal articles. He taught courses focusing on human security, international migration, multiculturalism, East Asia, and Russia-East Asia relations. He also attended many international conferences and organized panels with scholars from America, Europe and Asia. Professor Akaha thus became not only a very popular professor at MIIS but also established a large network of scholars and practitioners in the US, Russia, Japan, and other countries in Asia and Europe. His friends were impressed not only by his intellect but also by his ability to embrace people with different views, his warmth and his sense of humor.

In June 2020 Professor Akaha retired from MIIS and together with his wife, Janet, moved to Hawaii to be closer to his two children, Mitzi and Yoshi. In December of that year he embarked on a new project: editing a book entitled “Handbook on Japan-Russia Relations” to be published in English in Tokyo by a new publishing company established by a long-time American resident of Japan.

Given Professor Akaha’s large network in Japan, Russia and the US, it did not take very long for him to select 22 scholars and create a formidable structure where each contribution would fit. In January 2021 each contributor signed a contract agreement and at the end of September each received “a friendly reminder” that his or her first draft was due in early December. However, when some of the contributors began sending in their first drafts, they were met with a totally unexpected and shocking message: Professor Tsuneo Akaha had passed away on Wednesday, 17 November 2021. It was a severe blow for the “Akaha Project.” On November 19 the MIIT put up a farewell message “Remembering Tsuneo Akaha” on the university home page. On December 29 the Akaha family organized an internet farewell gathering which was joined by some of the project participants who spoke with the family.

Rebirth of the New Akaha Project

In January 2022, serious efforts began to contact each of the contributors to discuss what could be/should be done with the project and the new editorial group began to confirm and
The Ukrainian War

On February 24, 2022, the Ukrainian War started. For the newly emerging editorial group, it was a real challenge if not a second devastating blow. The following were the issues which had to be discussed and decided:

- The Ukrainian War is a very serious issue which would affect the post-World War II order of peace and security. Naturally it would have serious repercussions for Japan-Russia relations.
- However, if the book as a whole or any particular chapter focused on the issue of the Ukrainian War itself, proportion and balance could not be maintained. More importantly, because this book would be written by representatives of both Japan and Russia, along with others, the contributors might have certain political lines which they could not cross. In order to avoid this we established the following two principles and circulated them to all contributors in June 2022:
  - Principle One: The scope of this book should be the period up to February 24, 2022 when open hostilities began;
  - Principle Two: If a contributor’s essay requires looking at the post-February 24th period (as it would, say, if the topic were the territorial dispute) then keep that portion measured and succinct to keep harmony with the principle One above.

Thus this book has come to be published first by overcoming a personal tragedy, the passing of Professor Akaha Tsuneo, the founder of this project, and then, second, by overcoming a tragedy of global scale, the Ukrainian war, by way of keeping an adequate distance from that war.

Overview of the book

This collective work is devoted to the relations of two major world powers—Japan and Russia. Russian-Japanese relations may not attract as much attention as the relations with other major world powers, for example, their relations with the United States and China. The history of official relations between Russia and Japan encompasses a period of a little more than one hundred and fifty years, which is very short in terms of the scale of global history and the history of East Asia, in particular. In addition, for both Russia and Japan, these relations have never been a key element of foreign policy, indispensable or intrinsically important for their diplomatic strategy. Actual interactions between Russians and Japanese in the postwar decades have been rather limited, mostly because the partner was invariably affiliated with an opposing camp, notwithstanding its status in world politics (as was the case of Japan’s view of Russia), or “the subordinate,” “satellite” or even “servant” of the main geopolitical adversary (in the case of Russia’s view of Japan).
It is also noteworthy that for most of this time Russia and Japan were enemies, rivals, competitors. Over the course of more than a hundred years, the countries have fought against each other three times. There were numerous conflicts and direct military confrontation, accompanied by mutual hostility and lack of trust—the Russo-Japanese War, the intervention of Japanese troops in the Russian Far East in the period 1918–1922, and the Second World War, for which there is still no peace treaty between the two countries. In the Cold War period Japan and the USSR were on different sides of the geopolitical barricades, treating each other as potential enemies. The contentious legacy of World War II, particularly the absence of full-scale settlement of the unresolved issues also played a role, manifesting itself in the postwar territorial conflict, a different interpretation of actions of the Soviet Union in its month-long war against Japan in August–September 1945 and other “historical grievances.”

In the post-bipolar period, after several attempts had been made to ameliorate the political atmosphere in mutual ties and to sign a peace treaty, Russo-Japanese relations have seemingly entered a new period of confrontation in 2022. According to the Japanese historian Kimura Hiroshi, these relations have always been so bad that there was a theory that the bad state of these relations is normal.

For both parties the significance of bilateral relations to a large extent was determined by their geographical proximity. This neighborhood has always been a pivotal factor for both Moscow and Tokyo when building their security strategy, and not necessarily on the level of regional politics. Since positioning each other in the scale of diplomatic priorities was mostly limited to the status of a political or a military adversary (for both countries the other party has always been the source of numerous “challenges” and even military threats), this geographically predetermined relationship can be characterized as “distant neighbors.”

At the same time, at certain historical stages, this neighborhood was not so “distant.” The countries managed to establish relations in the economic sphere, while tourism, cultural, scientific and educational ties were actively developing. One could also observe a mutual attraction to the culture of the partner: many Russians admire Japanese painting, theater, martial arts, and the high technological level of consumer products, while many Japanese are fond of Russian ballet, classical literature and music, and achievements in space exploration, to name a few. The national character of the peoples of the two countries share commonalities: emotionality and sensuality as opposed to cold prudence; collectivism and a sense of mutual assistance rather than rational individualism and cynical pragmatism; patriotism and love of the motherland instead of cosmopolitanism.

Economic aspects of these relations were also productive: Japan relied on Russia as a source of energy and raw materials indispensable for its economic needs, Russia was happy with Japan's supplies of equipment and industrial products necessary for the infrastructure development of Siberia and the Far East. Although these relations never reached the level of serious mutual interdependence, they brought enough fruits, not only in terms of their purely economic results, but in their effect on the political climate. In fact, the economic content of Russo-Japanese relations comprised their “healthy” foundation, though it was not in the fore in their general assessment as “bad” relations.

Relations between Japan under the Tokugawa Shogunate and Russia during the Tsarist Empire under Peter the Great started at the beginning of the 18th century, and developed in broad and deep spheres. This book analyzes these three centuries of Japan-Russia relations so as not to miss out any essential factors of the relationship. Broadly speaking it covers seven areas.

Introduction
In Chapter 1, Alexander N. Panov provides an overview of the history of the relations between Russia and Japan from the first contacts in the late 17th century to the present. The broad picture includes analysis of the reasons for the periods of bilateral wars and conflicts and the periods of comparative warming, characterized by the intentions of both sides to improve relations. A substantial part of the chapter is devoted to revealing the roots of the territorial problem and its influence on bilateral relations.

After the initial skirmishes and their appeasement that occurred between the Tokugawa Shogunate and Tsarist Russia, the first state-to-state war, the Russo-Japanese War, took place in 1904–1905 between the powerful status-quo power, the Russian Empire, and newly rising power, the Empire of Japan. Chapter 2 by Kazuhiko Togo covers Japan–Russia diplomatic relations from the Russo-Japanese War to the Treaty of San Francisco. After Japan’s decisive victory in the Russo-Japanese War, the strategic paradigm in North East Asia dramatically changed. Japan and Russia began cooperating to expand their respective spheres of influence, and the US became an unwelcome third country. That took shape in four Russo-Japanese agreements, but the 1917 Revolution changed that paradigm. The Soviet Union and Japan had difficult negotiations settling Japan’s Siberian intervention but finally succeeded in concluding the Basic Rules Convention in 1925. This eventually led the two countries to conclude the Neutrality Pact in April 1941, each to prepare for the coming war. But in the final days of World War II, the Soviet Union made a last-minute attack on Japan on August 9, 1945. The San Francisco peace treaty conference was held in September 1951 but the Soviet Union did not sign the resulting treaty. The postwar settlement had to wait until the 1956 Joint Declaration where all but the territorial issue, covered in Clause 9, was resolved. During the Cold War when Japan was firmly protected under the American nuclear umbrella, the Soviet Union ceased to be a direct military threat, until, in the post-Cold War period, Putin’s Russia loomed high as an adversary to the US, a time when Japan began to play a greater role in the US-Japan alliance.

Chapters 3 and 4 look at security issues and threat assessment in Japan–Russia relations. Anna Kireeva seeks to answer the questions of what is Russia’s position on these issues, how has it transformed after the end of the Cold War and what are the driving factors behind the transformation. It takes a combined approach in answering these questions by looking both into the evolution of Russia’s position and specific security issues using analysis in a correlation with political relations and with a focus on the 2010s–2020s and the sharp deterioration of relations in 2022. Koizumi Yu in his follow-up chapter posits that neither Japan nor Russia have regarded the other as a serious security threat. The Japanese side has pursued relations with Russia primarily with an eye toward resolving territorial disputes and deterring China, while the Russians have seen the benefits of engaging Japan in a geopolitical confrontation with the United States. He makes the point that Japan–Russia relations are largely defined by relations with major powers such as China and the United States.

Territory

In the pre-World War environment, two treaties related to territorial demarcation—the 1855 Tsukou Treaty (Treaty of Commerce and Navigation) and the 1875 Treaty of Exchange of Sakhalin for the Kurile Islands—were concluded with a realistic and pragmatic approach. But after World War II, with both the Treaty of San Francisco (not signed by the Soviet Union)
and the 1956 Joint Declaration, the territorial issue, i.e., the dispute over the ownership of four islands: Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and Habomai (in Russian: Itsurup, Kunashir, Shikotan and Ostrova Khabomai) became the central conflict between the two countries.

In his chapter reviewing the Russian perspective on this relationship-defining dispute, Dmitry Streltsov dwells upon the origins and the main landmarks in the postwar development of this dispute, focusing not only on the principled differences in the positions of the sides per se, but also on the international and domestic political context of their formation which can explain the motivations of both Russia and Japan. On the other hand, Shimotomai Nobuo points out that it is not always easy to be a neighbor to the Russians. What is called the “Northern Territorial Questions” remained the most serious issue between the two capitals when they began talks on the peace treaty from 1955. Historical agreement of the 1956 Declaration, Prime minister Tanaka’s 1973 visit and the perestroika movement of 1985–1991, eventually failed to solve the issue. Even after the demise of the Soviet Union, Japanese respective administrations—eventually culminating in Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s 27 meetings with President Putin—tried but failed to find resolution by 2020.

Not only in the chapters directly covering this issue but also in a majority of the chapters featured in this book, this territorial issue comes up. But after the start of the war in Ukraine, all of the efforts which the two countries made after perestroika were practically reset to zero.

The economy and energy

Editors’ note: During the preparation of this book, the sad news came about the passing of Pavel Minakir. A recognized Russian and international expert in the field of theoretical and applied problems of regional economics, theory and methodology of spatial economics, economics of the Russian Far East, and international economic cooperation of the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, Professor Minakir worked with great enthusiasm on the chapter of this book. This chapter prepared in collaboration with Marina Mazitova will become part of his rich creative legacy, which includes more than 470 scientific papers published in Russia, Australia, China, the Republic of Korea, the USA, Japan, India, Vietnam, France, and the UK.

In pre-World War II bilateral relations, the most important economic relations were in the area of fisheries, but in the postwar era the two countries began expanding their relations substantially, consisting mainly of Japan’s imports of Siberian energy resources and Soviet imports of Japanese machinery. Even during the Cold War mutually beneficial robust economic and energy relations developed substantially. That tendency continued more vigorously with the Russian Federation under Presidents Yeltsin and Putin and peaked with Abe-Putin cooperation in the 2010’s. Pavel A. Minakir and Marina G. Mazitova describe the Russian perspectives of this in Chapter 7 by inviting the reader to look at the dynamics and structure of foreign economic relations between Japan and Russia after 2000, not only through the prism of purely economic interests and export-import needs of each country, but on the assumption that economic relations are largely determined by the bilateral political agenda and “turns” of Russian domestic economic policy. Attention is also paid to the emergence in 2022 of a fundamentally new stage—the “sanctions economy”—and its impact on the current and future development of bilateral cooperation.

In Chapter 8 Tabata Shintaro reviews how, in the 2000s, Japan-Russia economic relations developed rapidly, promoted by rising oil prices, which increased Russia’s exports of oil and gas
to Japan and Russia’s imports of passenger cars from Japan. Trade between the two countries followed into the next decade as well. But with a decrease in the trade volume, economic growth stagnated from 2009, even before the beginning of the Ukraine crisis.

After establishing the importance of the energy sector in trade relations, the next two chapters focus more closely on this area of cooperation and development. In Chapter 9 Elena Shadrina questions the long-prevailing thesis about the two countries’ economic compatibility as not satisfying the modern-day notion of sustainability. Russia’s institutional context resulted in government-backed arrangements overriding bilateral cooperation and after 2022, Russia’s geopolitical ambitions have disrupted the setting for bilateral energy relations.

Horiuchi Kenji explores “resource diplomacy” in Chapter 10 and how it has occupied a vital position in Japanese foreign policy and the importation of natural resources from Russia. Japan has tried to pursue resource cooperation with Russia, even at times when tensions were rising between the US and Russia. Japan’s resource diplomacy has included multilateralism and market-oriented aspects, and its efforts such as “decarbonization” and increasing liquidity of energy market have had important implications for resource cooperation with Russia.

Disaster cooperation

In other areas reviewed in this work, there seems to be little room for optimism, given the events of 2022. Cooperation in the area of natural disaster relief, however, would be one area where the two countries could find common ground. The work of the Russian coast guard to return the body of a Japanese tourist which drifted into their area after the tragic accident of a tourist ship in Shiretoko is a moving example of cooperation after February 2022. Vladimir Nelidov’s Chapter 11 focuses on historic issues of Russia-Japan cooperation in the fields of natural disasters and environment protection. It provides an overview of the degree to which these issues are covered in bilateral agreements, followed by detailed discussion of the three most salient cases of such cooperation: the Chernobyl nuclear disaster; cooperation in dismantling Russian nuclear submarines and processing nuclear waste; and the provision of help in the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami. On the other hand, Chapter 12 by Omatsu Ryo focuses on the advantage of geographic proximity when offering disaster assistance. The Sakhalin region and its surrounding areas experience many natural disasters such as tsunami, storms, avalanches and landslides. Despite economic sanctions against Russia and diplomatic tensions around the war in Ukraine, cooperation by Japanese post-disaster restoration experts in disaster response in the Sakhalin region will help deepen human and economic exchanges between the regions concerned and also expand opportunities to export disaster response equipment.

Culture

Following the Meiji Restoration, Russian culture had a deep and lasting influence on Japanese intellectuals especially in the areas of music and literature. In Chapter 13 Vassili Molodiakov examines the history, main trends and particular features of relations between Japan and Russia in the intellectual and cultural sphere, from the initial contacts in the first half of the 18th century to the present, showing how the mutual perception of Russian and Japanese cultures changed, depending on the nature of the political regimes and the dynamics of
political relations between them. Chapter 14 by Yokota-Murakami Takayuki reviews how Japanese have been strongly attached to, and have received major inspiration from, Russian culture. This never declined even in times of political/military/diplomatic conflicts, coexisting ambivalently with the hostility toward Russia as a nation.

**Perceptions of the other**

From the past to the present, Russian society has had images of Japan and the Japanese, and Japanese society has had the same of Russia and the Russians. Cooperation and conflict have provided the backgrounds to the peaks and the valleys of these perceptions. In Chapter 15 Olga A. Ignatjeva describes Captain Vasily Golovnin's memories of Japan in the early 19th century and ends with the reception of Japanese Zen by today's youth. The conflicting history of relations over the past two centuries has nonetheless been expressed in a competitive but generally favorable and tolerant perception of Japan in Russia, concluding that the image of Japan in the minds and mentality of Russian citizens is formed according to the agonistic type, which implies the acceptance of the other, and not rejection.

On the other hand, in Chapter 16 Alexander Bukh recalls that geographically, Russia is Japan's closest neighbor. This geographical proximity, however, is not reflected in the political, economic, and other sets of relations between the two countries and the term “distant neighbors” coined more than two decades ago is still applicable to describing the state of bilateral relations. This chapter touches on the way the Japanese viewed Russia in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, though its main focus is on the postwar period.

**International relations and diplomacy: How Russia and Japan view the roles of the US and China**

This book began with the historic analysis showing that immediately after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War, the two countries shook hands to resist the growing American interest in Manchuria. Then in the 1920s and 1930s when the world was heading towards another global crisis, the two countries chose a path to neutralize any hostile relations, so that each would be able to fight its own war, but the abrogation of that agreement late in the war set the stage for future animosity. In Chapter 17 James Brown reviews the Russian perspective of the role the US has played in Russia-Japan relations. The US-Japan alliance was formed as a bulwark against the spread of communism, and, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the principal adversary against which the alliance was directed. However, in more recent times, the predominant focus of the US-Japan alliance has shifted from Russia to China and North Korea.

Kazuhiko Togo looks at the Japanese perspective of the US role in Chapter 18, starting with the Cold War when Japan and the US were basically united to deal with the Soviet Union rigorously. As the Soviet Union dissolved and present-day Russia emerged under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the US encouraged peace treaty negotiations on whatever terms Japan preferred to choose. However, as relations between the US and Russia soured under Putin from 2000 to the Maidan Revolution of 2014, it became difficult for Japan to advance peace treaty negotiations smoothly.
With China’s extraordinary rise in the last two decades of the 20th century there emerged a harmonious 15-year period (1985–2000) when the great powers in the region—Russia, the US, and Japan—were not at odds. That situation continued, and was even reinforced, during the first four years under Russia’s Putin (2000–2003). In Chapter 19 Natasha C. Kuhrt describes how, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, hopes were high that Japan would be Russia’s main political and economic partner in the Asia-Pacific. However, for a range of reasons it soon became clear that it was China that would be the main focus of Russian foreign policy in the region. Yamazoe Hiroshi, in Chapter 20, demonstrates how Prime Minister Abe Shinzō made efforts to maintain the existing international order and to counter challenges coming from China. Better relations with Russia was a priority to serve both of these purposes. But Russia’s violation of Ukraine’s sovereign rights in 2014 seriously damaged international norms. Amid the dilemma between upholding the international order and enhancing Japan’s strategic ties with Russia vis-à-vis China, the Abe Cabinet introduced an economic cooperation scheme with Russia. Even with this cooperative approach, however, Russia enhanced its strategic cooperation with China at the expense of Japan, and hardened its stance in peace treaty negotiations. These relations naturally became even more unsettled and uncertain after the start of the war in 2022.