

Konishi, Sho. (2013). *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperation and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan*. Harvard University Press. pp. 426. ISBN: 9780674073319. Hardback.

Reviewed by Corey Ponder

The practice of collecting, analyzing, and writing history is not straightforward. Historians can look at the same events through different lenses and draw different conclusions. For example, colonialist historians may assume that inherent racial inferiority, geographical disadvantage, and technological backwardness on the part of the colonized necessitate unilateral assistance by the colonizer. On the other hand, Marxist historians tell history from the proletariat's point of view: capitalism determines culture, society, and history. While Marxist histories can be informative and critical, they sometimes ignore the everyday practices of groups, communities, and individuals whom exist outside of some arbitrarily delimited working-class. When reading any history, it is useful to ask: whose stories are told?, whose stories are marginalized and invisibilized?

In *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperation and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan*, Sho Konishi employs a largely underused method, telling the histories of some of the individuals, groups, and communities whom have been rendered invisible by more institutionally-accepted historical methods. Konishi names his method “anarchist history.” It “expresses a view of modern global history as simultaneously existing, multiple imagined and lived ideas of progress or ‘modernities’ [which lack] teleological and hierarchical ordering” (6). Anarchist or otherwise, histories that call well-deserved attention to forgotten stories are part of the blossoming ‘new history’ paradigm. New histories provide a counterpoint to narratives of wealth and power by highlighting the omnipresent and everyday struggles occurring alongside, outside, and against the state and the bourgeois. The paradigm has elsewhere been discussed through the lenses of nomadology (Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari), people’s history (Howard Zinn), subaltern history (Dipesh Chakrabarty), and history from below (Raymond Thompson).

Konishi's delivery and execution of anarchist history generates some anxiety and questions. Relentlessly empirical, *Anarchist Modernity* delivers a modern (1860-1930) intellectual history of cooperative anarchist relations between Japan and Russia, re-imagining modernity away from the singularizing totality of constructed experience. The alternative modernity that Konishi traces illuminates forgotten stories of knowledge exchange, idea currency, and cultural interchanges that flow East and West, North and South. Geographical imaginations lodged by imperial wars, colonialism, globalization, and neoliberalization of the Far East, Global South, and Middle East are rescinded, questioning the taken-for-granted teleology of capitalism and the 'high-science' epistemology of Western knowledge. *Anarchist Modernity* offers one possible non-statist conception of writing history and modernity: culture in a specific time and place produced language, religion, arts, poetry, and literature in intellectual and everyday practices. Through eight chapters (including the introduction and epilogue), Konishi constructs this alternate modernity, addressing many of the key themes in contemporary studies of culture, community, epistemology, and anarchism. The book is unapologetic for its inviting prose and digestibility. There is much merit to be drawn, especially for those interested in cultural production, anti-imperialism, and the development of anarchism, such as the relationship between the work of Charles Darwin, Ilya Mechnikov, and Peter Kropotkin.

Konishi considers the creation and exchange of language, knowledge, and ideas in Japanese-Russian relations that meet the demands of 'the people'. Anarchist understandings of evolution and the body are infused with the otherwise dissimilar writings of Charles Darwin, Jean-Henri Fabre, Ilya Mechnikov, and Peter Kropotkin, together formulating cohesion between culture and nature. This adhesion interpreted Darwin without Malthus. Cooperation between species would result not in a ruthless struggle for finite resources, but in the improvement of existence for all. Particular European readings of Darwin that justify and promote colonialism are re-examined and refuted. Konishi suggests that this type of knowledge production fueled a cooperative 'Cultural Revolution' based on mutual aid. This 'Cultural Revolution' "shift[ed epistemology] from high culture to popular, state to non-state, institution to non-institution, sociolinguistic Darwinism to

multiplicity and diversity of cultural development, and the formal to the informal realms of everyday life as the sites, times, and sources of cultural expression” (329). Based on this, the anarchist ‘Cultural Revolution’ was constitutive of its expressive, equal and non-hierarchical parts: formal and informal, everyday and intellectual. Yet, with the exception of a conversation about the international auxiliary language Esperanto – which served both everyday and intellectual purposes – readers are given only an intellectual history, and not the complementary social history. The locus of Konishi’s ‘Cultural Revolution’ is exemplified and constructed through exchanges between renowned writers and thinkers. Why are the everyday histories of ‘the people’ not told? An anarchist history should rule out and eliminate assertive hierarchies. Does a predominately intellectual anarchist history re-create an epistemological hierarchy in different terms?

Asking these questions does not preclude the relevance of Konishi’s description of cultural and knowledge production existing outside of, against, and simultaneous with, the nation-state. At moments, Konishi does articulate an anarchist culture free of hierarchically imposed epistemological, governmental, and colonial powers. He posits the emergence of an alternative translation culture. Encounters between Ilya Mechnikov and Futabatei Shimei helped give birth to a new Japanese dialect derived from nineteenth-century Russian populist literature. The users of this dialect criticized the ongoing political, economic, cultural and social adoption of Western thought and ideology. Konishi also discusses Tolstoy’s translated writings on religion and Christianity, removing religion from the church. Tolstoy envisioned a ubiquitous conversation on the Non-War Movement, Konishi removes ‘the people’ from nation-state borders to activate an anarchist consciousness detached from failed capitalist histories and international relations.

Common themes resurface throughout the book: anarchist epistemologies, resistance, mutual aid, and cooperation. At over four hundred pages, Konishi’s unrelenting empiricism is at times exhausting, particularly because he continually revisits the same intellectual relationships throughout the book. Moreover, he draws attention to anarchist traditions from which contemporary studies are indebted. Relevant theorists are included and discussed, even if only in passing: Derrida, Althusser, Freud, Hegel, Hobbes, Ibsen,

Kant, and Marx. This intellectual anarchist history of an alternative modernity in modern Japan successfully illustrates what anarchism was in a particular time and place. However, the 'Cultural Revolution' contention is less convincing. As readers, we are supplied with only an intellectual history, rendering the quotidian of this anarchist modernity invisible.