

**Special Issue:
Science and Soviet Political Authorities:
Conflict, Cooperation, and Incongruence***

Introduction

Hiroshi ICHIKAWA**

Presently, we are seeing major changes in the historiography of Soviet science. Ever since the publication of Zhores Medvedev's shocking book, *The Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko* (Columbia University Press, 1969), Soviet science and scientific community have been depicted as passive victims of the party-state control. Such views, however, are currently being reexamined. The relationship between scientists and the political authorities was not dichotomous in its nature but it involved a complicated interaction of various factors.

One general characteristic of recent studies on the history of the former Soviet Union is the tendency to give increasing support to the understanding of its society based on the concept of 'centralized pluralism,' which Alec Nove, an economist, brought forward in a pioneering way. Already, in 1977, he recognized that, "Centralized decision making in a large modern industrially developed economy sets up an unmanageably large number of micro-economic interrelationships" especially due to "the ministers' insufficient resources and authorities owing to bureaucratic overlapping of organizations"¹ in the Soviet Union. Nove pointed out that "ministerial empires, and upward pressures originating with them (the inescapable delegation, devolution or decentralization – *Ichikawa*), are facts of economic and political life"² of the Soviet Union.

Also in the history of science, the traditional totalitarian model is being replaced by a more pluralistic viewpoint. Thanks to the study of the formerly classified documents in various archives, the totalitarian model which has been applied to the understanding of the Soviet society for a long time is expected to rapidly lose its popularity and to be replaced by more pluralistic view.

Seen from the outside, the path which Soviet scientists followed was full of "bizarre events." Nikolai Krementsov, however, mentions that, "these events grew naturally out of

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** Professor at the Graduate School of the Integrated Arts and Sciences, Hiroshima University, 1–7–1, Kagami-yama, Higashi-Hiroshima, 739–8521, Japan. E-mail Address: ichikawa@hiroshima-u.ac.jp

¹ A. Nove, *The Soviet Economic System*, George Allen & Unwin, 1977. p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

the Stalinist system of science, a system whose contours we have understood in terms of the very same processes and modes of analysis – institutional structures, interactions among competing groups and individuals, and professional cultures – that Western historians have used to understand their own science.”³ He, therefore, focuses on institutional structures, interactions among competing groups and individuals, and professional cultures as the background for those “bizarre events.”

Friedrich Engels says that the greatest achievement of Karl Marx is that he discovered the simple fact that “hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter, and clothing before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.”⁴ Likewise, what has overshadowed the historical study of Soviet science is also the overestimation of ideology. Beneath it is more mundane conflicts of interests, -personal, social or economic.

This special issue, the theme of which is dedicated to new trends in the historiography of the Soviet science, consists of five articles. Three of them are based on the speeches made at a panel session of the conference of the Japanese Society for the Study of Russian History held at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto on 6th October 2012. Alexei Kojevnikov, the author of *Stalin's Great Science: The Times and Adventures of Soviet Physicists* (Imperial College Press, 2004), here provides us with an outline of the evolution of the mutual relationship between the scientists and engineers and the Soviet political authorities.

Slava Gerovitch, the author of *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics* (The MIT Press, 2002), provides a fresh approach to the history of Soviet science; he considers the rise of Cybernetics in the Soviet Union in 1960's as the social reform movement by the scientists. His example of scientific innovation mechanism in the Soviet Union in the case of a mathematician Izrail' Moiseevich Gel'fand (1913–2009) and his school provides a useful insight.

In spite of rapid growth of research interest upon the spontaneity of scientists rooted in their concrete life conditions, the role the Soviet socialist philosophy and the various concepts of Marxism played must be also examined with much concern. Kanayama, Koji, a young and able historian of science sheds a new light on the philosophical disputes concerning contemporary physics in 1930's. He points out the effect of those disputes on 'sovietizing' physicists on the basis of his new approach to the details of the disputes.

The other two articles are written for this special issue. Ichikawa, Hiroshi, the author of a comprehensive work on the scientific efforts for the military purpose in the Soviet Union in the early stage of the Cold War⁵, clarifies some historical factors affecting the institutional framework in which scientific research was done in the Soviet Union.

It is needless to say that the most peculiar “bizarre event” in the history of the Soviet science is the Lysenko Affair. Saitô, Hirofumi, a young and able historian of biology, sheds a new light on the process by which Lysenkoites acquired hegemony in the field of biology and tells about the instability of their power.

³ N. Kremontsov, *Stalinist Science*, Princeton University Press, 1997. p. 287.

⁴ Friedrich Engels, “Karl Max's Funeral.” (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/death/burial.htm>)

⁵ Ichikawa, Hiroshi, *Science, Technology and the Cold War: in the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1955*. Kyoto, Minerva Shobô, 2007. (in Japanese)