Between Tokyo and Moscow: The History of an Uneasy Relationship, 1972 to the 1990s. by Joachim Glaubitz
Review by: Stephen Kotkin
Published by: Association for Asian Studies
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2943646
Accessed: 10/12/2011 17:19
subject to interesting influences caused by its eventual return to China in less than two years.

Looking at Thailand and Taiwan would have proved useful also, particularly in view of their regional importance. Some short remarks about China and India, too, would have been an extra asset to the book, whose main importance is the comprehensive regional analysis it offers.

ZOHAR BEN-ASHER
ABC Business Consultants
Tel-Aviv Institute of Chinese and Southeast Asian Economies and Societies


Joachim Glaubitz's 1992 German-language study of recent Russo-Japanese relations has now been translated into English. It comes with a new epilogue carrying the story to 1994 (although without acknowledgment that the book appeared in German and without the original title, "Strange Neighbors" [Fremde Nachbarn]). Employing both Japanese and Russian sources, the author has written what he characterizes as an unprejudiced chronicle of current events for specialists (p. ix).

Glaubitz begins his narrative with Richard Nixon's normalization of Sino-American relations, reminding us that this step forced the Japanese to take a more independent role in foreign affairs. He argues that when Japan's efforts to strengthen relations with the USSR yielded little, it turned to the other major communist power, China, with which it enjoyed "historical and cultural ties" (pp. 29–30). The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan supposedly reinforced the predilection for China, which courted the Japanese and in any case provided a more attractive market than the USSR for Japanese products. The subject of potential war guilt is not addressed.

After this brief background discussion, Glaubitz turns to what he calls "Japan's relations with the Soviet Union," rather than the two countries' mutual relations. He maintains that the Japanese government pursued two aims: economic cooperation and the return of four islands off the northern coast of Hokkaido, with the former goal subordinated to the latter. Neither objective was achieved.

Noting that the history of the territorial dispute "has been described in detail elsewhere" (p. 32), Glaubitz nonetheless devotes almost one-quarter of his book to it. He presents no concrete cases when one state has willingly relinquished territory to another in peacetime, no comparative analysis of irredentism (or its absence) in international relations, and most important, no explanation for why the Japanese government has steadfastly made the return of the territories a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Why has Germany, also defeated in World War II, not sought to "recover" lands that played a far greater role in its history than the Kuriles played in Japan's? What significance do the barely inhabitable islands hold for postwar Japan, especially when fishing rights can and have been negotiated?

Glaubitz reveals the motivation for his study when he writes that "it is one of the quirks of history that two such major powers as Japan and the Soviet Union/Russia have spent decades blocking the progress of mutual détente because of what amounts to a trivial question of territory" (pp. 30–31). Despite presenting considerable evidence that neither country deems the issue trivial, he presses for a solution, exhorting that Russia "must reassess its own position and show more flexibility
towards Japanese demands, which it could demonstrate, for example, by returning two of the four occupied islands” (p. 30). Evenhandedly, Japan is told to “revise its policy towards the newly created state of Russia” (p. 30), although no specific instructions are issued.

A blow-by-blow account of Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka’s 1973 visit to the USSR follows. After presenting a wealth of detail culled from a close reading of the press and other published sources, the author concludes that “overall, Tanaka’s visit achieved little” (p. 59). Since the Japanese insisted, with no right to expect an outcome favorable to them, that the territorial issue lead the agenda, the time-consuming preparations for the trip and its execution seem virtually pointless, if relentless.

Next comes an illuminating discussion of the troubled history of attempted economic cooperation. Limited successes receive mention, but they are overshadowed by failures. Summarizing the results of efforts to develop Sakhalin oil and gas, for example, the author notes authoritatively that “more than twenty years after the first negotiations took place, and almost twenty years after the signing of a[n exploration] treaty, . . . Japan has invested around $200 million but has as yet received not one ton of oil or gas” (p. 123). Glaubitz blames both sides, but especially the USSR, and deservedly so. Imploring the Japanese to achieve the impossible and build massive infrastructure in resource-rich yet exceptionally inaccessible regions, the hydra-headed Soviet bureaucracy either failed to facilitate or obstructed the implementation of projects that were in the USSR’s interests. So far little seems to have changed since 1991, the boosterism notwithstanding.

Readers may wonder about certain postulates that accompany the author’s narration. He alleges that Japan’s “relations with the Soviet Union have always been founded on sentiments of cultural superiority colored by an enduring mistrust rooted in historical events” (p. 11). Cannot the same be said, perhaps even more strongly, of long periods in German relations with Russia, now rather friendly? Elsewhere, Glaubitz maintains that Japan and Russia “are culturally alien to each other, and their contact has no deep historic roots” (p. 134). Are the United States and Japan culturally similar? Do not Russo-Japanese contacts go back farther in time than American-Japanese contacts? Distracting, these assertions do not much affect the presentation, which remains empirically driven.

Initially concluding the book after Mikhail Gorbachev’s 1991 visit to Japan (also recounted scrupulously), Glaubitz appeared optimistic, largely because the USSR unexpectedly permitted reference to the disputed islands by name in a noncommittal joint communique. In the new epilogue written after Boris Yeltsin abruptly canceled a proposed trip to Tokyo in September 1992, the author has become deeply pessimistic, since emergent Russian “nationalists” apparently will not permit a Russian president to give back part or all of the territories. Towards the end, though, Glaubitz suddenly wonders whether relations would dramatically improve even if the islands were returned (pp. 241–42). He hints that despite the periodic hullabaloo about the potential for economic cooperation, the two countries might lack sufficient mutual interest to sustain vigorous relations. Future developments in China may, or may not, provoke a reconsideration.

STEPHEN KOTKIN
Princeton University

Energy Demand in Five Major Asian Developing Countries: Structure and Prospects.
By MASAYASU ISHIGURO and TAKAMASA AKIYAMA. World Bank