

The Trans-Siberian Railroad and Japan

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The Trans-Siberian Railroad has drawn the attention of the Japanese from when it was still at the planning stage. This is because of the proximity of its eastern terminus of Vladivostok to Japan.

The *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* newspaper reported on

May 6, 1885 that the Russian government was to start construction of the railroad between Tyumen and Vladivostok and that when its construction was successfully completed, not only would it yield benefits for Europe in general, but "it will, many believe, exercise an

immense influence on the whole of Asia".

Citing a Vladivostok newspaper as the source of its information, the December 26th, 1889 issue of *Kampo*, the official journal of the Japanese government, reported that the first phase of construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad aimed to link three large rivers - the Amur, the Ob, and the Yenisei rivers - by means of a total of 2,982 versts of track. Furthermore, the April 25, 1891 edition of *Kampo* quoted an article from *The Times* (London) in its report that the Russian government would spend 7 million rubles on constructing the railroad in 1891, including the 2.9 million rubles needed for construction of the Ussury railroad starting from Vladivostok.

These reports show that the Russian government had begun to put great efforts into the construction of the railroad in the Far East and that it attracted much attention from the Japanese government.

It is widely known that the Crown Prince of Russia, Nikolai Aleksandrovich, who had just returned from Japan at the end of his trip to Asia, attended the ground-breaking ceremony for the Ussury railroad, because the Nikolai Gate was built in Vladivostok in order to welcome the Crown Prince.

In March 1891, the Japanese government was engaged in rapid preparations to receive the Russian Crown Prince. However, no articles are found in the "Kampo" in which the ground-breaking ceremony for the Trans-Siberian Railroad and the visit of the Crown Prince were discussed together. For example, the March 15, 1891 edition of the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* reported that, "Although rumor has it that the purpose of the Crown Prince's visit is to investigate Japanese armaments and forts, we do not suspect him of any hidden motives. As the Crown Prince is to become the Grand Emperor of Russia, we should endeavor to give him a good impression of Japan".

On the other hand, the April 7 edition of the *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* struck something of a wrong note, insisting that, just as the major aim of the visit was to inspect reclamation work in Siberia, the aim of his trip to Japan focused on inspecting Hokkaido.

It seems that various lies about the intention behind the visit gained currency among the people at that time, but the Japanese government ordered that he was to be given the warmest possible welcome in every place he visited, from Kyushu to Tokyo.

Nevertheless, the historical relationship of Japan with the Trans-Siberian Railroad began rather dramatically. The Crown Prince's party arrived in Nagasaki on April 27, 1891, on the final leg of his trip to Asia, and arrived in Kyoto via Kobe Port on May 9.

On May 11, 1891, he went on a sightseeing trip to Lake Biwa from Kyoto. During this trip, the policeman guarding him attacked him with a sword, wounding him. The Japanese government was astounded by the incident. Emperor Meiji came from Tokyo to visit the Crown Prince, who was receiving medical treatment in Kyoto. The Parliament, the Prefectural Assembly, the Municipal Assembly, schools, and other organizations apologized for the incident, expressing their hopes that the Crown Prince would continue his tour of Japan. Although the Crown Prince returned from Kobe Port to Vladivostok on May 19,

this incident sparked an interest in Russia and the Crown Prince among the Japanese.

The ground-breaking ceremony in Vladivostok for the Trans-Siberian Railroad was able to be held with the Crown Prince as the guest of honor. The *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* also reported that the Crown Prince attended the ground-breaking ceremony for the Trans-Siberian Railroad which took place at 10 a.m. on June 1 and that he departed for the capital by train on June 3.

This incident is well known in Japan as a case in which the judiciary preserved its independence, sentencing the policeman to life imprisonment in line with the criminal code, even though the Japanese government demanded the death penalty for him.

When the construction of the Ussury railroad began, many migrant workers crossed the sea from Japan. According to records dated August 1895, there were 13,100 railroad construction workers, consisting of 5900 Russians, 6200 Chinese and Koreans, and 1000 Japanese. However, it is said that few Japanese were successful as construction workers. The Russian contractor farmed out work to a Japanese sub-contractor and the Japanese migrant workers were paid piecemeal rates. Accordingly, few if any Japanese workers were assigned to construction sites where the labor conditions were favorable. In contrast, the wages of skilled guest workers, such as carpenters, masons and blacksmiths, were high, and there were also Japanese who settled permanently in Vladivostok. Most of the workers were from Kyushu, partly because Nagasaki was linked to Vladivostok by a regular boat service.

According to a January 1895 report by the Japanese Commercial Agency in Vladivostok, 956 Japanese were living in Vladivostok at that time. The problem was that, other than the 162 Japanese who were categorized as "official workers, students or businessmen", there were 452 men and 342 women who fell into the category "others". According to Mr. Matsuura, who surveyed the Japanese in Vladivostok, most of these 342 women were prostitutes. If a Japanese man living in Vladivostok submitted certification stating that a woman was his wife, a passport could easily be obtained and its holder could enter Russia. Mr. Matsuura condemned this situation as "a blot on the nation".

After the Sino-Japanese War, the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad became an issue in Japanese policy towards Russia. In a telegram sent to Foreign Minister Saionji in March 1896, Mr. Aoki, the Japanese envoy to Germany, wrote that it was certain that China would conclude a treaty of alliance with Russia, and that Japan would need countermeasures to deal with this.

Japan and Russia were in opposition over the sphere of influence in the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria. An agent at the Japanese Commercial Agency in Vladivostok sent a secret report to the government in October 1895, stating that a survey party from Russia was going to be dispatched to Manchuria. The Japanese government secretly kept an eye on negotiations between Russia and China. Eventually, in May 1896, Russia and China agreed on the construction of the Chinese-Eastern Railroad, which ran from the Zabaikal line to Vladivostok via North

Manchuria.

Russia leased Lushun and Dalian in the Liaodong Peninsula from China in 1898. Furthermore, it was granted the right to lay a railroad track from these cities to the Chinese-Eastern Railway. As Japan had abandoned the Liaodong Peninsula under pressure from Russia, France and Germany three years previously, the country grew more cautious and hostile toward Russia.

When the Boxer Rebellion broke out in 1900, Russia dispatched its army on the Chinese-Eastern Railway, which was still under construction, in order to quell it. However, it did not withdraw its forces completely. On January 30, 1902, Japan concluded an alliance with Britain. Russia made a joint declaration with France in March. The relationship between Japan and Russia became tense.

However, even amid this political situation, the convenience of using the Trans-Siberian Railroad came to be recognized as construction of the railroad progressed. The May 5, 1900 edition of the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* stated that,

"The number of those going to Europe to see the Paris Exposition or to inspect commerce and industry has increased greatly of late, and as tickets for 1st and 2nd class cabins on ships bound for Europe are sold-out, many people are forced to wait for the next ship. However, there is a new route that enables one to avoid such a long sea journey to Europe. It is the Trans-Siberian Railroad."

The article further stated that, when the Zabaikal line from Irkutsk to Suretensk was completed on 28 April, it would become possible to travel from Vladivostok to any European city, if one took a steamboat between Khabarovsk and Suretensk on the Amur, becoming much more convenient. The article also detailed the various routes and fares. The harbors in Japan connected with Vladivostok included Kobe, Nagasaki, Hakodate and Niigata. Each of these routes called at a number of harbors in Japan or Korea en route for Vladivostok.

The Chinese-Eastern Railway was completed in November 1901, opening up a direct route from Tsuruga over the Japan Sea to Vladivostok. By means of the Chinese-Eastern Railway and the Trans-Siberian Railroad, it became possible to travel from Japan to London or Paris in 15 to 17 days. The sea route via the Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean that had been used until then required 40 days. The new route became a major transportation corridor connecting Europe and Asia.

A special express sleeper ran to the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Moscow five times a week from April 1903, and it was planned to add a limited express for Vladivostok via the Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Chinese-Eastern Railway from Moscow to this from April 1904.

Services on the Tsuruga to Vladivostok route were temporarily suspended because of the Russo-Japanese War between 1904 and 1905. However, the Japanese government attached importance to it as the shortest route to Europe. In 1907, in order to develop international trade, the government nationalized four ports: Yokohama, Kobe, Kanmon (Shimonoseki and Moji), and Tsuruga, the last being the only first-class port on the Japan Sea.

In order to develop Tsuruga Port as an international harbor, the first phase of port reconstruction was carried out between 1909 and 1913. As a result, it became possible to anchor two 3000t class steamships at the port, and the landing stages and warehouses were developed.

On the other hand, the Russian government also decided to run a sleeper train on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. An article in the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* about the future of the Tsuruga Port stated that, "if one travels on the Trans-Siberian Railroad the cost is lower than sea travel; as Vladivostok is to become a taxed port, general cargo will mostly gather there from now on. Recently, this port has become a hub for exports of bean cake from Manchuria, fishing boats going to Primorskiy Territory from the Hokuriku region of Japan and fish exported from Primorskiy Territory; in the future, this port will prosper, having become a global center for passenger and cargo traffic".

Moreover, the South Manchuria Railway, which Russia yielded to Japan under the terms of the Portsmouth Treaty, began operating in 1909. This railway was completely connected to the China-Eastern Railway in Changchun as a result of a Russo-Japanese agreement. Furthermore, after long negotiations between Japan and Russia, connecting transportation on the railroads of both countries began in March 1911, and connecting tickets were put on sale.

The route was as follows:

1. A crossing to Vladivostok by steamer via Tsuruga Port from Shimbashi Station in Tokyo, followed by a journey to Moscow or Europe on the China-Eastern Railway and the Trans-Siberia Railroad.
2. A crossing to Dalian by steamship from Tokyo or Moji Port in Kyushu, followed by a journey to Moscow or Europe on the China-Eastern Railway and the Trans-Siberia Railroad via Harbin.

Furthermore, the Russo-Japanese Freight Direct Connection Agreement was concluded, and the conditions of direct transportation by railroad and steamship were fixed in August of the same year.

The movement of people and goods flourished as interconnection between the means of transportation owned by different countries and organizations was established.

According to the tourist guidebook for the Trans-Siberian Railroad "The Great Trans-Siberian Route" published in Japan in 1910, there were eight main routes from Asia to Europe. The main ones were as follows:

1. Tsuruga to Vladivostok service: There were three sailings each week between Tsuruga and Vladivostok, and there was a connection with the Europe-bound express in Vladivostok. From 1912, direct international trains with sleeper carriages ran to Tsuruga from Tokyo. This route was the fastest route from Japan to Europe and became the main route connecting Europe with Japan. According to an advertisement pamphlet for the Trans-Siberian Railroad, the travel times from Tsuruga were 15-16 days to Paris, 14-15 days to Berlin, and 12-13 days to Moscow.
2. Shimonoseki or Moji to Dalian service: There were three sailings each week between Japan and Dalian, and a connection with the Vladivostok train in Harbin was

reached by means of the South Manchuria Railway from Dalian.

3. Shimonoseki to Pusan service: this route linked Pusan with Harbin from Mukden (Shenyang) via Seoul and Pyongyang.

Of course, these are routes that had Japan as a starting point, and it goes without saying that if starting points differ, their relative importance also differs. However, it is clear that these were among the main routes connecting Europe with East Asia by means of the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Services on the Trans-Siberian Railroad were resumed in 1927 after a temporary suspension during the Russian Revolution and the formation of the Soviet Union. In addition, after the revolution there were no changes in the routes connecting Europe with Northeast Asia, including those from Japan via the Trans-Siberia Railroad.

The first route, from Japan to European Russia via Vladivostok Port and Khabarovsk, was entirely within the territory of the Soviet Union, and therefore had the advantage that there were no border procedures.

The second route ran from Vladivostok Port via Harbin and Manzhouli by means of the Chinese-Eastern Railway and the third ran northwards up the Korean Peninsula from Pusan Port to Shenyang, Harbin and Manzhouli, and the fourth extended northwards from Dalian Port, via Harbin and Manzhouli, just as they had before the establishment of the Soviet Union.

From the foregoing, it may seem as if the main benefit seen at that time was the decrease in travel time. In fact, the decreased cost of travel was also very much at issue. The cost of traveling via the Trans-Siberia Railroad was half that of traveling via the U.S., and about 60% cheaper than traveling via the Suez Canal.

Furthermore, the beautiful scenery along the way was also widely advertised. For example, the sleepers were described as "well-equipped and finely built; ten days on the train will not tire the traveler as the railroad runs through the plains of Manchuria, past unique views of Siberia, the unparalleled sights of Baikal, and the plateaus of the Urals, regions where a variety of peoples with different customs live."

The tone of these advertisements remained the same in Soviet times. In short, the Trans-Siberia Railroad was introduced to the world in terms of its tourism aspects. In the 1920s at least, detailed descriptions of many cities en route from the Far East to European Russia, such as Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk, and Harbin, were included in pamphlets for the Trans-Siberian Railway.

This Northeast Asian railroad network broke down in various places after the Second World War due to various political circumstances. Furthermore, due to the

development of air routes, these rail routes have ceased to be the main means of international transportation anymore. However, as a result of the redevelopment of many ports, the role played in freight traffic and tourism by railroads connected with ports is being recognized anew.

I have described the history of Northeast Asia's railroads with Japan as the focus. Comparing this with the current condition of Northeast Asian lines, the following points can be made:

- 1) The main east-west railroad route in Northeast Asia is still the Trans-Siberian Railroad, running west via Khabarovsk from Vladivostok, which provides an exit onto the Sea of Japan.
- 2) The East Chinese Railway, which ran via Harbin and was connected to the Trans-Siberian Railroad at Suifenhe in the east and Manzhouli in the west, was the main east-west route. However, this route is hardly utilized as a main international east-west traffic route. Agricultural products from northeastern China were once transported mainly via this route to the Sea of Japan side. It is hoped that further studies and development of this route will take place in order to facilitate its use in the future.
- 3) The Dalian to Harbin line is the main north-south trunkline. However, the north-south route is interrupted by the Amur River between Heihe in China and Blagoveshchensk in Russia.
- 4) The route that connected Shenyang with Pusan Port via Seoul and Pyongyang was severed by the division of the Korean Peninsula. The reconstruction of this route is an unavoidable problem in developing the rail transport network in Northeast Asia. An international agreement was concluded in 1996 about the construction of a route which will travel northwards up the Korean Peninsula from Pusan Port and connect with the Chinese railroad, and fresh developments with regard to this have been seen recently.
- 5) There have been many proposals by the Russian side regarding the east-west route from Changchun to Rajin and Vladivostok via Tumen, so I am not going to touch upon this here.

Historically, discussions about the Trans-Siberian Railroad have always linked it with the political situation in Northeast Asia. On the other hand, the railroad has been used by many people regardless of political confrontations, and this also has led to the stability of Northeast Asia. In this context, we must conclude that we have much to learn from the railroad's history, and that it is important to think comprehensively about the various problems besetting the realization of an overland transportation network in Northeast Asia.