

LETTERS

From the *Slavic Review* Editorial Board:

Slavic Review publishes signed letters to the editor by individuals with educational or research merit. Where the letter concerns a publication in *Slavic Review*, the author of the publication will be offered an opportunity to respond. Space limitations dictate that comment regarding a book review should be restricted to one paragraph of no more than 250 words; comment on an article or forum should not exceed 750 to 1,000 words. When we receive many letters on a topic, some letters will be published on the *Slavic Review* website with opportunities for further discussion. The editor reserves the right to refuse to print, or to publish with cuts, letters that contain personal abuse or otherwise fail to meet the standards of debate expected in a scholarly journal.

To the Editor:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I would like to comment on Olga V. Solovieva's review of Szezod Muminov's *Eleven Winters of Distcontent* (*Slavic Review*, 82, No. 1, 2023:253–254). She characterizes it as written from "the perspective of the (specifically, the Stalinist) state." I am a specialist in Russo-Japanese relations, familiar with the literature of the Japanese POWs in the Soviet Union. Contrary to Solovieva, I find Muminov's book a ground-breaking work, placing the issue in three broader contexts: (a) the legacy of Japanese imperialism; (b) Japanese POW camps in the system of Soviet forced labor camps, and (c) the ideological war in the Cold War. This work is based on rich array of sources, not only memoirs written by former Japanese POWs, but also by other foreign POWs, as well as hitherto unused Russian and American archival sources. The author approaches the POWs with sympathy and compassion, and yet treats the subject with detachment and objectivity. This book does not depict Japanese POWs in the Soviet Union merely as passive victims of sufferings, humiliation, and marginalization, but as participants in the worldwide storm of WWII and the Cold War, and it reclaims them as active agents of history. By movingly depicting the hitherto little known heroes such as Takasugi Ichiro and Saito Rokuro, who managed to maintain their humanity despite incredible suffering, Muminov lifts this book above a mere scholarly treatise. I would add that Muminov's book received the Murayama Tsuneo book award by the Japanese society of the Siberian Interns Studies Society.

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Olga V. Solovieva responds:

Professor Hasegawa accurately relays Muminov's intentions as stated in the Introduction. But how these intentions were implemented and which interpretive framework was applied were the focus of my review. Muminov echoes

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the camp newspaper *Nihon Shimbun*, which he says helped “the internees identify the real culprits behind the Siberian Internment-Japanese imperialism and war of aggression” (55). The Russian colonial history in Siberia is elided. For the nuances of the scholarly debate on the internment, meticulously collected data, and an impartial account of Cold War-era viewpoints, the English-language reader can consult historian Tomita Takeshi’s “The Reality of the Siberian Internment: Japanese Captives in the Soviet Union and their Movements after Repatriation,” a chapter in the 2019 Brill volume *A History of Russo-Japanese Relations*, edited by Dmitry V. Streltsov and Shimotomai Nobuo. The translator of Tomita’s chapter is Sherzod Muminov. Muminov’s book retraces Tomita’s steps in the discussion of the internment, starting with its causes, via its physical and ideological conditions, to its political reception and aftermath in Japan but disparages Tomita’s work as one of the “empirical histories that shun the polemical approach and base their findings on archival sources” (38). Muminov’s foregrounding of the postwar Soviet perspective on internment must therefore be a “polemical approach”: what I recognize as the application of an explicitly contemporary Russian ideological lens.

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