New Book: Eleven Winters of Discontent: The Siberian Internment and the Making of a New Japan

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Dear colleagues,

Apologies for crossposting across networks. My book, *Eleven Winters of Discontent: The Siberian Internment and the Making of a New Japan*, is published by Harvard University Press on January 4. The book can currently be ordered with a 30% discount from the Harvard University Press website using the code HOLIDAY21 (the discount will be applied at checkout and is valid through December 31).

Sherzod Muminov

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**Eleven Winters of Discontent**
The Siberian Internment and the Making of a New Japan

The odyssey of 600,000 imperial Japanese soldiers incarcerated in Soviet labor camps after World War II and their fraught repatriation to postwar Japan.

In August 1945 the Soviet Union seized the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo and the colony of Southern Sakhalin, capturing more than 600,000 Japanese soldiers, who were transported to labor camps across the Soviet Union but primarily concentrated in Siberia and the Far East. Imprisonment came as a surprise to the soldiers, who thought they were being shipped home.

The Japanese prisoners became a workforce for the rebuilding Soviets, as well as pawns in the Cold War. Alongside other Axis POWs, they did backbreaking jobs, from mining and logging to agriculture and construction. They were routinely subjected to “reeducation” glorifying the Soviet system and urging them to support the newly legalized Japanese Communist Party and to resist American influence in Japan upon repatriation. About 60,000 Japanese didn’t survive Siberia. The rest were sent home in waves, the last lingering in the camps until 1956. Already laid low by war and years of hard labor, returnees faced the final shock and alienation of an unrecognizable homeland, transformed after the demise of the imperial state.

Sherzod Muminov draws on extensive Japanese, Russian, and English archives—including memoirs and survivor interviews—to piece together a portrait of life in Siberia and in Japan afterward. *Eleven Winters of Discontent* reveals the real people underneath facile tropes of the prisoner of war and expands our understanding of the Cold War front. Superpower confrontation played out in the Siberian camps as surely as it did in Berlin or the Bay of Pigs.

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and winner of the inaugural Murayama Tsuneo Memorial Prize.

Reviews

“The Siberian Internment is one of the forgotten episodes of the Second World War. In this fascinating account, Muminov exploits Japanese memoirs and Russian archives to tell a complex history, attentive both to individual lived experiences and to structural change, including the waning of the Japanese empire and the emergence of the Cold War. A stimulating challenge to the traditional boundaries of Japanese history!”—Sebastian Conrad, author of What Is Global History?

“This magnificent work is the first transnational and comprehensive treatment of more than 600,000 Japanese POWs captured in Northeast Asia who were transported to forced labor camps in the Soviet Union, where they languished for many years before a fraught repatriation to Japan. Muminov depicts the POWs with sympathy and compassion, yet examines the history with detachment and objectivity. Eleven Winters of Discontent offers impeccable scholarship, forceful argument, and a gripping narrative.”—Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, author of Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan

“A fresh, new history of the Siberian Internment that goes beyond hackneyed narratives of victimhood. Using a contextually broader and chronologically longer framework, Muminov moves the internment history beyond a national Japanese experience to a larger transnational story shared by various foreign POWs. At the same time, he reminds us how postwar Japan carefully erased the imperial past by remembering a particular set of hardship narratives while averting its eyes from anything that recalled the empire. An outstanding contribution to our reconsideration of the early postwar and Cold War world.”—Masuda Hajimu, author of Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World

“Muminov renders much-needed complexity and diversity to existing nation-centric narratives of the Siberian internment of over 600,000 Japanese. Giving agency to both Russians and Japanese on the ground, he offers transnational perspectives long called for but rarely achieved. This is a nuanced yet comprehensive treatment of the internment and its sociopolitical life in postwar Japan as well as a riveting read for anyone interested in the global history of war and the making of a postwar nation state.”—Sho Konishi, author of Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese–Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan

“An extraordinary achievement that connects the communist world with that of wartime East Asia as well as the Cold War, making contributions to the history of World War II, the Soviet gulags, and the postwar politics of life-writing. Muminov deprovincializes both Japanese and Russian modern history, showing they are incomprehensible without knowing the wartime connections that bound them together. In fields that continue to be
dominated by narrow national histories, this kind of multilingual, multi-archival approach is extremely rare, and at the cutting edge of historical research.”—Aaron William Moore, author of Writing War: Soldiers Record the Japanese Empire