

Introduction

On 1 March 1913, a slim, studious-looking Japanese man in his mid-thirties boarded a French ship in Yokohama. He had been unable to obtain documents allowing him to leave from the authorities. So in lieu of papers he had a note signed and stamped by Fernand Gobert, the sympathetic Belgian Vice-Consul in the city, falsely certifying that the man was travelling as his personal translator and language instructor.¹ A Chinese revolutionary living in Tokyo had helped with the costs of the trip. A close friend had given him a watch, another his suit. The whole affair had the air of a tense and desperate gamble.

The traveller's name was Ishikawa Sanshirō (1876-1956). As a journalist and self-proclaimed socialist he invited constant monitoring by the Japanese police. He had been a vocal opponent of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. Censors had just forbidden the distribution of his *Seiyō shakai undōshi* (History of Western social movements). After harsh repression a couple of years earlier in the context of the High Treason Incident, in which several of his close friends had been sentenced to death and executed, he was in fear for his life. Fleeing into exile was the only solution, and so he waved goodbye to the Japanese coast. After a stopover in Shanghai where he visited other Chinese revolutionaries, Ishikawa made the slow journey to France, finally arriving in Marseilles after 38 days at sea. He had little money, did not speak French or know anyone in the country, and genuinely wondered how he was going to stay alive.²

Thus started a seven-and-a-half-year spell of self-imposed exile, probably making Ishikawa the only Japanese citizen with that status in Europe at the time. While overseas, he mingled with various activists of an anarchist disposition in England, Belgium and France. He met English social philosopher Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) and lived mostly with the family of Paul Reclus (1858-1941), the nephew of famed French anarchist and geographer Elisée Reclus (1830-1905). He penned a diary, *Hōrō hachinenki* (Adrift for

eight years), during those years and about three decades later produced a memoir relating to that period of his life which he called *Rō* (Adrift).³ On a few occasions, the “drifter”, as he referred to himself, came close to an early demise. But he managed to survive against the odds, which included a close encounter in Brussels with the outbreak of the First World War.

On his return to Japan in November 1920, Ishikawa resumed his involvement with the Japanese anarchist movement while remaining in contact with a loose transnational network of intellectuals and activists. He immediately laid down the theoretical foundations of his own socio-political model, a non-violent, cooperative mode of living inspired by his European experience, which he called *domin seikatsu* (土民生活), literally “life of the people of the earth”. To this he added practical experiments in individual self-sufficient living and socio-political organisation through the establishment of a network of Farmers’ Self-Governing Councils (*Nōmin Jichikai* 農民自治会). From that time onwards, Ishikawa worked on the translation from the French and diffusion of Elisée Reclus’s geographical writings. He also pursued historical research, increasingly focusing on the Asian continent. He spent the war years living off his meagre earnings and until his death in 1956 remained an ardent advocate of the anarchist mode of socio-political organisation, which he saw as the antithesis of top-down social control.

Scattered mentions of Ishikawa in English-language historiography qualify him as a “socialist” who later became an “anarchist”. The conventional grasp we have of these terms, however, hardly gives credit to the breadth of his knowledge and intellectual curiosity. Familiar with a wide range of Western works, from English progressive political tracts to the output of the French artistic avant-garde and ancient Greek philosophers, he was also well versed in the Chinese classics in addition to Japan’s own literary tradition. He authored thousands of pages of books, essays, translations, articles, correspondence and diaries, in which he challenged his country’s ideological and geo-political trajectory.

At first glance, it is easy to characterise Ishikawa as a radical intellectual inspired by Western thought and intent on applying it to a local context. From that standpoint his anarchism would appear solely as a set of imported European ideas deployed to critique Japanese modernity. This book – hereafter *Geographical Imagination* – paints a different picture. By tracing transnational links in the early twentieth century, it shows that Ishikawa and Western intellectuals engaged together in the actualisation of a specific mind-set. It was defined by a shared imagination about the goals and means

of revolutionary transformation, viewed as a process constantly in the making in contrast to adherence to a fixed ideological corpus. This process, which is best embodied by Ishikawa's concept and practice of *domin seikatsu*, took two forms. First, it prioritised human agency in the everyday as a lever of social change. Second, it concerned itself with man's place in the natural world, stressing symbiosis and interconnectedness over hierarchy and competition.

These two themes – the transformative potential of everyday practices and the ethics of cooperation – formed the core of a dialogue that unfolded over several decades between Eastern and Western radical thinkers. Ishikawa was instrumental in the pursuit of this dialogue. He was determined to identify intellectual themes common to European and his own East Asian traditions, and in so doing validate the strand of anarchism he advocated.

Reconfiguring geographical thought

Modern geography played a key role in the development of the common imagination that characterised transnational anarchist connections in the early twentieth century. *Geographical Imagination* highlights the role of geographical knowledge as a conduit for the sharing of revolutionary ideas and a framework for conceptions of liberation from state authority. Both in the West and in Japan, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the emergence of conflicting conceptions of geography. On the one hand, a dominant strand prospered in tandem with capitalist development and imperialist expansion. Geographical knowledge was to a large extent used as an instrument of power for the control of resources. It aimed at securing territorial boundaries and ensuring national and colonial management. It had a concomitant role in shaping national identity. In the West, the views of British geographer Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) are often associated with this strand, which primarily tended to sanction the established order.⁴ On the other end of the spectrum, some practitioners of the discipline conceived of geography as a dissenting tool, while putting forward an understanding of the world that, as formulated in broad terms, emphasised cooperation over competition as a motor of change. Russian scientist and anarchist Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) is representative of this latter trend.

In Japan a similar spectrum of geographical ideas developed after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. One objective of this book is to highlight the split that gradually emerged between a corpus of geographical knowledge

essentially devoted to the successful implementation of the Meiji modernisation programme and what I have called “grassroots” geography. This type of geography prevailed in non-academic settings, crystallising some time before the establishment of the discipline as a separate subject in universities in the early 1900s. In many cases influenced by Western knowledge, but at the same time deeply aware of local traditions and specificities, grassroots geographers provided a terrain for reflection on the role of geography in modernising societies. The handful of these intellectuals who explored the potential of geographical thought as a tool of social critique and transformation developed their ideas partly in response to an array of perceived crises faced by Japan. But by such exploration, they also sowed the seeds of alternative geographies and offered a corrective to an overly instrumental and mechanical understanding of scientific knowledge.

Ishikawa Sanshirō's intellectual contribution should be evaluated in this context. He too engaged with geographical thought as a means of critiquing Japan's modernisation drive, finding sources of inspiration both in Japan and in the West. He was particularly critical of what he considered the excessive importance assigned to deterministic models of development, which in his view devalued human agency. His rejection of determinism targeted both the social Darwinist vision that dominated Japan's capitalist development from the early Meiji period (1868-1912) onwards and Marx's historical materialism, which especially appealed to leftist Japanese after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

Ishikawa's encounter with the geographical thought of Elisée Reclus during his stay in Europe between 1913 and 1920 played a pivotal role in his intellectual development, further validating his belief in an anarchist model of socio-political organisation. Although neglected for decades, the impact of Elisée Reclus on the discipline of geography has been revisited in recent years. Scholars now recognise the French anarchist's pioneering work in the field of human geography and emphasise the influence that his thought continues to have on the field.⁵ Reclus's distinctive ideas appeared in the context of scientific advances achieved from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. In geography, the new thinking focused on the way in which physical environments determined human activity and development. But together with such contemporaries as the American George Perkins Marsh (1801-82), Reclus became equally concerned with the reverse impact of human activity on the earth. He believed in the importance of studying this dynamic two-way interaction from a historical perspective.⁶ His investigation

of the historical process of human development emphasised man's constant modification of his natural surroundings, which in turns exert an influence on him, and so on in a recurring pattern.⁷ Through this approach to the physical environment in terms of relations and interactions, Reclus largely avoided the reductive environmental determinism that characterised his era.

Ishikawa familiarised himself with Reclusian geography during his exile years in Europe. Elisée Reclus's six-volume work, *L'homme et la terre* (Man and the Earth), published posthumously between 1905 and 1908, became a key source of inspiration. Seen as Reclus's summative oeuvre, the volumes provided a detailed exposition of what he called "social geography", that is, geography mindful of the social dimensions of the man-nature interaction. Reclus's work is attracting renewed interest because it clearly resonates with a range of environmental concerns as they are experienced today. The French geographer insisted on mankind's interdependence with, and indebtedness to, the natural world, warning of the arrogance of humans who too easily saw themselves as positioned at its apex.⁸ For him man was not above nature. He was an intrinsic part of it, and humanity and the Earth had a common and indivisible history.

As a corollary, and in what could be seen as his anarchist trade mark, Reclus also proposed that the discipline of geography play a moral role, as a science that must not just study the Earth but also offer suggestions on how to spread the Earth's resources in an equitable manner.⁹ This view of geography as a means to improve and liberate the human condition in its global aspirations – its "revolutionary" capacity to modify power relations – was at odds with conventional geography and the prevailing ideologies of nature-subjugation and racial hierarchy of the era. It also constituted a form of politically engaged science deployed in the name of equality.

Crucially, Reclusian thought encouraged a rehabilitation of the human dimension in its relationship to the Earth in an era when it had been downgraded in the geographical mainstream. In that sense, Reclus's geography met the concerns of Japanese non-academic geographers who, a few decades later, struggled to comprehend their country's dizzying modernisation. Indeed Reclus's social outlook contrasted with the bias to physical geography adopted by the Meiji administration after the Restoration of 1868, and its emphasis on producing a measurable and standardised space for the development of a modern nation.¹⁰ Described in broad sketches, *Geographical Imagination* explores how Ishikawa, through his engagement with human geography, challenged the modern reordering of the world into a chartable

and manageable space, proposing instead to remap it as a locus of social transformation.

In Japan, interest in human geography also constituted a response to the man-made environmental damage that emerged together with industrialisation. The pollution caused by the Ashio Copper Mine in the late 1800s and early 1900s had a devastating effect on farming communities located to the north of Tokyo.¹¹ But the event also impacted on the collective consciousness. Ashio soon came to symbolise the harmful side of modernisation, raising questions about the limits of human agency in managing nature. As human geography became one means of addressing the pollution issue, a strand of thought developed that linked geographical knowledge with environmental conservation. Ishikawa played a role in cementing this link through writing and activism.

In other words, the environmental damage and disruptions that accompanied modernisation provided him and like-minded thinkers with an incentive to reflect on human geography by acting as a constant reminder of the changing relationship between mankind and its natural surroundings.

The transformative potential of everyday life

Radical thinkers such as Ishikawa were thus concerned with the process of what could be called the “re-humanising” of science, a trend that reflected the intellectual undercurrents of late Meiji Japan. It is a central theme of this book. But these radicals’ vision was also distinctive for its emphasis on the inseparability of revolutionary thought and lived experience. They saw the concept of social transformation as being necessarily embedded in living practices – that is, in the creation of bonds of solidarity in all spheres of human experience – and thus without validity on its own.

In *Communal Luxury*, Kristin Ross subtly explores the connection between the insurrectionary thought and practices of the 1871 Paris Commune in which Elisée Reclus participated. As she observes, the Commune represented “equality in action”,¹² where revolution as lived experience generated its own conceptual framework, which in turn helped the process of insurrection to move forward. But, importantly, only the conviction on the part of the communards that everyday action had transformative potential made this kind of revolutionary dynamics possible. As *Geographical Imagination* illustrates, Ishikawa’s anarchism was also rooted in such a conviction.

Ross refers to the work of Henri Lefebvre, whose seminal theory of space articulates what is at stake from a conceptual viewpoint. Against the notion that space is a given framework for the unfolding of human action – a kind of geographical landscape against which histories develop – the French sociologist and philosopher envisaged space as a social construction. The tension between what he called the conceived and the lived – the *conçu* and the *vécu* – meant in his view that space is always the product of appropriation and contestation. While for Lefebvre this tension mostly resulted in the persistence of capitalist relations of domination, he suggested that it also cleared the path to revolutionary politics. Thus, Japanese radicals such as Ishikawa were interested in geographical thought – particularly human geography – because it addressed this spatial dimension in the form of concrete activities of everyday life and their potential to effect social change. Anarchism tends to promote individual agency rather than organisational structures, favouring fluid associations over institutions and their entrenched control over human relations. Ishikawa's individual response as an anarchist activist was to embark on experiments in self-sufficient living and the establishment of a loose network of self-governing farmers' councils.

In the minds of their practitioners such revolutionary practices implied above all the creation of networks of solidarity. The building of transnational connections between East Asian and Western activists contributed to the task of social transformation while fuelling the common imagination to which they adhered. The tracing of Ishikawa's travels and encounters highlights the extension of this imagination to East Asia in the early twentieth century. The connections thus forged eschewed formal organisational attachment and institutional allegiances in favour of informal, sometimes clandestine, links. As Benedict Anderson has argued, the existence of such links encouraged the global spread of anarchism in the late nineteenth century.¹³ Following in Anderson's steps, *Geographical Imagination* stresses the persistence of non-institutional connections in the propagation of anarchist thought and practice during the first decades of the twentieth century.

The investigation of radicals' informal means of communication and reflection also forces us to reconsider the ambitions of anarchism during the period. Private correspondence and diaries, self-published periodicals and pamphlets, translations and other "travelling books", poetry, journal illustrations and literary criticism: these are genres of text that often existed outside conventional or institutional channels of publication and distribution, but were nonetheless capable of expressing a particular world view. Assembled

together like a mosaic, they sketch the picture of a non-hierarchical mode of social interaction constantly in the making. Although the history of anarchism has tended to favour a narrative of events and personalities, often linked to violence and terrorism, these sources also make clear that the aspirations of early twentieth-century anarchism exceeded the narrowly political goals usually associated with the movement. As geographical thought provided radical activists with a framework of understanding, so did an array of scientific and religious ideas drawn from both Eastern and Western sources, making anarchism a polymorphic cultural phenomenon which should be studied from multiple perspectives.

Geographical Imagination is first and foremost an exploration, through the figure of Ishikawa Sanshirō, of a specific set of ideas and their relation to the capitalist development and industrialisation of the first decades of the twentieth century. Thus, the tensions of modernisation are at the core of the present analysis, which is why as a biographical study it does not extend much into the years of the Pacific War and beyond. Particular attention is paid to the reality of human encounters and travels as a means of interpreting the intellectual landscape of the time. If Ishikawa is the focus of investigation, the various contacts, friends and acquaintances with whom he mingled and corresponded over the years are essential complements to the narrative. The premise is that no corpus of ideas exists in a vacuum and that, without taking into account the “embodiment” and actualisation of these ideas by various individuals, historical understanding may be lacking. In that sense, *Geographical Imagination* is also a work that emphasises the role of networks in intellectual exchanges. This is why it is sometimes necessary to elaborate on the thought and lived experience of those with whom Ishikawa had a particular affinity.

At this stage it is also important to highlight what the book is not – which aspects or perspectives it does not address and why. Although concerned with geography, there is here very little engagement with the development of cartography, arguably one of the main strands of the discipline and certainly one that is relevant for the study of human geography. For one thing, Ishikawa himself did not make much use of cartography in his arguments and never gave it prominence in the course of his intellectual enquiries.¹⁴ As a second reason, I can only point to the abundance of existing scholarship on the subject, which covers the history of Japanese cartography with a degree of sophistication and expertise that *Geographical Imagination* would not be able to match.¹⁵ These studies of cartography should complement the main thread

of this book, as it is concerned with the role of geographical knowledge in either sanctioning or criticising Japan's modernisation drive.

The development of geographical thought during Japan's modern period offers a lens of investigation into clashing conceptions of progress. The Meiji regime's sense of urgency with regard to the transformation of the country into a fully-fledged capitalist nation-state resulted in a bias in favour of the adoption of Western geographical methods and an emphasis on physical over human geography. The first chapter of *Geographical Imagination* examines the response of grassroots geographers – amateur scholars working outside the ambit of institutional frameworks – to this trend. By reflecting on the fundamentals of the man-nature relationship and the role of geographical thought in social transformation, these grassroots scholars provided the background against which anarchist activism developed in the late Meiji period and beyond. As suggested, they attempted to re-humanise science, in other words reposition men and women in all their individual potentialities and aspirations at the centre of their concerns. The development of grassroots geography facilitated the reception of Elisée Reclus's work in Japan.

Like many others, Ishikawa Sanshirō owes his career path to a number of contingencies. They occurred in the form of family circumstances, fresh encounters and the turn of international events. The build-up to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 marked the start of his participation in the public sphere, when he openly opposed the conflict together with other self-proclaimed socialists. The second chapter explores Ishikawa's socialist years until his departure from Japan less than a decade later for fear of becoming a victim of repression by the government.

From the viewpoint of the historian, the late-Meiji socialist period is revealing of the deepening gulf between the city and the countryside. At the time, about two thirds of Japan's active population were still engaged in primary industries. The perception that farmers, especially small tenant farmers, were the first casualties of modernisation encouraged a number of activists to gear their efforts towards improving the plight of poor rural dwellers. Ishikawa was one of them. With other radicals he shared a vocabulary of social transformation that identified the countryside as a site of potential liberation. At the same time, this focus on the condition of rural areas put at the forefront cases of environmental damage, specifically the pollution incident related to the over-exploitation of the Ashio Copper Mine. The figure of Tanaka Shōzō (1841-1913), who campaigned for the rights of the villagers affected by the pollution, occupies an important place in the environmental

and intellectual history of the Meiji era. This chapter illustrates that its impact on Ishikawa's intellectual trajectory was equally significant.

When Ishikawa left Japan in March 1913 he had no concrete plan about where and how to live. He could rely only on his wits and hope that a transnational network of anarchist sympathisers would help to support him. The outbreak of the First World War during his stay in Brussels further jeopardised his chances of survival. The third chapter looks at Ishikawa's exile years. It traces his travels and the events that marked this pivotal period of his life. What becomes apparent is the existence of intellectual zones of convergence between Ishikawa and the various thinkers and activists he met in Europe. These zones related to religious, political and philosophical thought amongst others, highlighting how much a shared world view drew on both Eastern and Western traditions and depended on the blurring of knowledge categories.

This chapter also considers Ishikawa's active support for an allied victory in 1916. Such a stance raises questions about his anarchist commitment, conventionally understood as advocating non-interventionism in armed conflicts between states. But Ishikawa's time spent abroad sheds particular light on the role of personal contacts in the shaping of dissenting ideas during the first decades of the twentieth century, and the doctrinal fluidity of such ideas. The loose network of like-minded activists to which the Japanese anarchist belonged remained of vital importance after his return home in 1920. So did the social thought of anarchist and geographer Elisée Reclus with which Ishikawa familiarised himself in depth while in Europe.

Once back in Japan, however, Ishikawa faced the challenge of disseminating *domin seikatsu*, the model of socio-political organisation he had articulated while in exile. This strategy for non-violent social transformation owed its inspiration in part to Reclusian geography while it also participated in the cultural trend of "return to the land" that characterised the period. The notion of "standing on the Earth", in both its symbolic and literal meanings, was at the core of Ishikawa's thinking. But in the process of developing his scheme, he found himself confronted by an array of competing ideological strands – Marxist and nationalist – that exposed precisely how difficult it was to "stand on the Earth" in 1920s Japan.

Chapter four thus investigates the conception of *domin seikatsu* in relation to Reclusian geography and assesses its viability in the context of the complex ideological landscape of the time. *Domin seikatsu* as a concept demanded individual and direct engagement with the forces of production in order to bring about social change. It also supposed the privileging of relations of

solidarity or, to borrow Kropotkin's vocabulary, mutual aid. In retrospect, the key belief in revolutionary practices of everyday life as a lever of transformation, which would ensure a kind of rhizomatic – that is, not institutionally driven – dispersal into society, appeared idealistic. As a concrete experiment, the scheme ultimately disappointed. But it deserves attention for what it says about a specific anarchist stance in interwar Japan, in spite of its utopian side or exclusively emblematic role.

The unfolding of utopia in the form of the Nōmin Jichikai in the mid-1920s and Ishikawa's repeated attempts to distance his scheme from popular agrarianism constitute the topic of the fifth chapter. The Nōmin Jichikai was meant to give *domin seikatsu* a collective embodiment and encourage farmers to practise self-reliance. But it quickly had to face the impatience of those it was supposed to help while the appeal of extreme – populist – visions of farmers' empowerment won over the milder version proposed by Ishikawa. As the decade drew to a close, ideological radicalism started seeping into every corner of Japan's political terrain. *Geographical Imagination* describes in detail how the failure of Ishikawa's scheme of farmers' empowerment was ultimately due to a clash of ideologies as much as a clash of personalities.

The fifth chapter also puts this scheme into perspective via a comparison with the figure of Miyazawa Kenji. That the celebrated poet, savant and author of children's tales endeavoured to launch a similar project to support farming communities at about the same time as Ishikawa lends credibility to the Nōmin Jichikai project. It also suggests that the two men, each a visionary in his own way, shared more than a historical moment. They were also united by a view of the Universe as a vast expanse of interconnected organisms in time and space, in which man's destiny is predicated on relations of solidarity. Indeed, both referred to the Buddhist spiritual tradition to support their views.

Seen in context, it is clear that Ishikawa's philosophical vision and related praxis – his insistence on “standing on the Earth” – sought primarily to reclaim individual agency from what he considered to be overly mechanistic interpretations of historical change. That is what motivated his harsh criticism of Darwinism and adoption of alternative explanations for evolution. He was intensely preoccupied by the need to restore a form of temporality to human society that was devoid of the accelerating sense of time embedded in capitalist development. For Ishikawa, everyday direct engagement with the forces of production – mainly the land – represented this alternative temporality.

Chapter six explores the meaning of such temporality. First it assesses Ishikawa's discussion of Darwinism, both scientific and social, and the counter-arguments he offered as criticism of the dominant conception of linear temporality. The publication of his first book-length essay in 1925, *Non-evolutionary theory and human life*, clarified his strong stance in favour of alternative modes of lived experience. Ishikawa's belief in the interconnect-edness of all things in the natural environment as opposed to the existence of a central and controlling axis had to serve as a template for the organisation of human affairs. As the chapter suggests, this philosophy found resonance in Buddhist thought, while fostering amongst like-minded intellectuals and activists a close interest in entomology.

The second part of this last chapter looks at an experiment in self-sufficient living and the activities of farmer-poets in Hokkaido, and considers to what extent these represented a reflection on Reclisian ideas. It makes clear that Ishikawa was instrumental in propagating the French geographer and anarchist's works in Japan and that these indeed contributed to shaping a common "geographical imagination" in response to the country's unwavering path to modernisation and competition on the world stage. As the political climate veered towards thought control and preparation for total war, Ishikawa pursued his quest for the "true *domin*", eventually spending the war years in quiet withdrawal from the public eye.

Ishikawa's resolute stance in favour of human agency and against coercive ideologies during the pre-war decades and beyond sets him apart from the majority of his contemporaries in the intellectual sphere. He has been called "the conscience of Japan" (*Nihon no ryōshin* 日本の良心) precisely for this steadfastness in the midst of a disastrous era.¹⁶ His intellectual and practical endeavours, which went against the grain in a period of mounting authoritarianism and jingoism, had their fair share of failures, lack of realism and ideological inconsistencies. Yet in spite of these weaknesses, Ishikawa's voice counted. The aim of *Geographical Imagination* is to explain why.