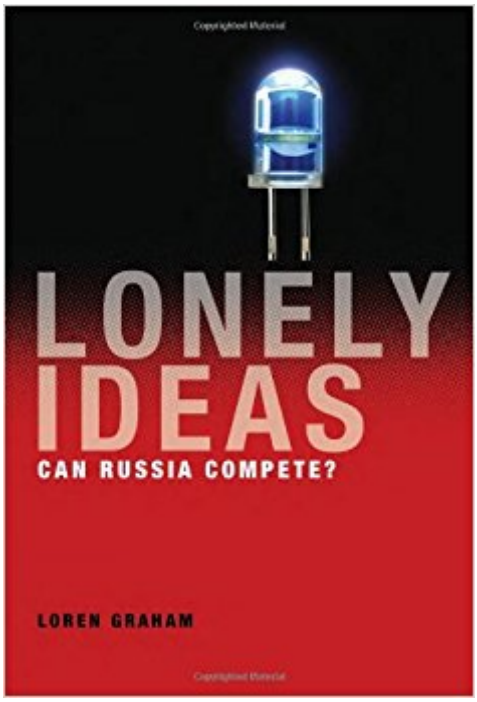
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Lonely Ideas: Can Russia Compete? (MIT Press)



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Synopsis

When have you gone into an electronics store, picked up a desirable gadget, and found that it was labeled "Made in Russia"? Probably never. Russia, despite its epic intellectual achievements in music, literature, art, and pure science, is a negligible presence in world technology. Despite its current leaders' ambitions to create a knowledge economy, Russia is economically dependent on gas and oil. In Lonely Ideas, Loren Graham investigates Russia's long history of technological invention followed by failure to commercialize and implement.For three centuries, Graham shows, Russia has been adept at developing technical ideas but abysmal at benefiting from them. From the seventeenth-century arms industry through twentieth-century Nobel-awarded work in lasers, Russia has failed to sustain its technological inventiveness. Graham identifies a range of conditions that nurture technological innovation: a society that values inventiveness and practicality; an economic system that provides investment opportunities; a legal system that protects intellectual property; a political system that encourages innovation and success. Graham finds Russia lacking on all counts. He explains that Russia's failure to sustain technology, and its recurrent attempts to force modernization, reflect its political and social evolution and even its resistance to democratic principles.But Graham points to new connections between Western companies and Russian researchers, new research institutions, a national focus on nanotechnology, and the establishment of Skolkovo, "a new technology city." Today, he argues, Russia has the best chance in its history to break its pattern of technological failure.

Book Information

Series: MIT Press

Hardcover: 216 pages

Publisher: The MIT Press (September 13, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0262019795

ISBN-13: 978-0262019798

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #270,207 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #82 inÃ Â Books > Business & Money > Human Resources > Knowledge Capital #353 inÃ Â Books > Business & Money > Economics > Development & Growth #718 inÃ Â Books > History > Asia > Russia

Customer Reviews

An outstanding contribution to the economics of technical progress and to the understanding of Russian history from Peter the Great to Putin. It explains why Russian modernization efforts have repeatedly failed, whereas Silicon Valley has flourished, and what would need to be done to make the modernization of the Russian economy a reality. (Michael Ellman, Emeritus Professor Amsterdam University) Lonely Ideas seeks to explain why Russia and the Soviet Union failed to capitalize on a rich talent pool to become a leading scientific and technical power. Graham's scholarship is excellent -- others have written about the subjects covered in this book but no one has provided the sweeping synthetic vision shown by this author. No other English-language writer has the breadth and depth of knowledge, experience, and insight demonstrated in this book. (Rochelle G. Ruthchild, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University) Lonely Ideas provides a social and institutional explanation for Russia's long history of failed technologies. It asks whether it is ultimately possible for Russia to reform itself sufficiently to become an international player in technological innovation. It is pithy, provocative, and packed with fascinating material on Russia's technological history. It will appeal to both a general and an academic readership. (Christopher Otter, Department of History, Ohio State University)succinct and devastating... It should be required reading in the Kremlin. (Joshua Lustig Current History)This short, engaging book will please not only historians of science and technology, who know Graham's work well, but anyone interested in the social and economic conditions favorable to cultivating new, globally competitive industries. (Chronicle of Higher Education) Lonely Ideas is an excellent, brief overview of the qualified successes and costly failures involved in Russian modernization. It should become the standard volume for introducing lay readers to the growing field fo Russian science and technology studies. (The Russian Review)

Loren Graham, often described as the leading scholar on Russian science and technology outside that country, is the author of The Ghost of the Executed Engineer and other books. He is Professor Emeritus of the History of Science at MIT and Research Scholar at the Davis Center for Russia and Eurasian Studies at Harvard.

I found it an absolute pleasure to read Loren Graham's new book, Lonely Ideas. As described in the product description, Graham asks a seemingly simple, but fundamental question that has been in the back of the minds of many of us who have been traveling to the former USSR for decades: Why is it that a country, historically so rich in intellectual, scientific and artistic talent can't seem to bring

much to market? "How does one explain the pattern of impressive technological invention in Russia followed, again and again, by failure to develop and sustain that invention as a true innovation?""No other country in the world," Graham writes, "displays this pattern of intellectual and artistic excellence and technological weakness to the same degree as Russia."In a simple, straightforward and conversational style, Graham examines a range of factors -- attitudinal, economic, legal, organizational, political and general societal issues, including corruption and crime -- that both impede innovation in Russia, and raise hopes for the future. As both a chemical engineer and Russian historian by training -- who has been traveling to, and working in Russia since the early 1960s -- he draws on his own and others' extensive academic research, including a wealth of innovative surveys and other sociological research carried out in both Russia and the US. But even more interesting are his own incisive personal observations from over 5 decades of discussions w/ friends, scientific colleagues and officials of all stripes, and from his own participation in US and Soviet/ Russian joint projects.Graham correctly notes that ultimately, the problem is not a scientific or technological one, but a societal one. His book, then, ultimately becomes a fascinating journey not only through the world of science, technology and innovation, but through the heart of Russian society as a whole. It provides an important framework for understanding a wide array of issues that go well beyond questions of science and technology alone. And it raises new questions for further investigation and discussion. I highly recommend this clearheaded, easily readable, and ultimately profound book to specialists and non-specialists alike.

It has very interesting information for those who are interested in history of Russian science. To my shame I knew very little about Igor Sikorski and never new about Pavel Yablochkov. This was the first time I read about significant contribution of Russian scientists to development of genetics and computers - the areas, which are not the strongest parts of our science nowadays.I agree with the most of the problems, hindering implementation of scientific breakthroughs, with some small comments:- The social factors are mostly obsolete now. The registration system (propiska) is no more than inconvenience, which is quite easy to avoid. The low mobility of people is a bigger problem and it is caused mostly by attitudinal reasons. The mobility which exists is afflicted by the great centralization and development imbalance as most of the migration flows are directed to Moscow/St. Petersburg and to few other successful regions.- The legal problems of innovation business are much wider than patent rights or crime situation. The quality of law enforcement and judiciary system is traditionally low in Russia and property rights are hardly protected. These problems haunts all kinds of businesses, not only innovative ones.The last chapter of the book is

the least clear one, but the problem it describes is the difficult indeed. The Skolkovo and ROSNANO failed, because they tried to solve wrong problems. The rise of middle class was short and bore no fruits. Now Russian economy is starting to decline, the internet business is under state attack and the government doesn't have even mid-term economic strategy. How do we get off this hook? That question deserves another dedicated book :)

I am russian and I am the first one to review this very good book on some tragic history of Russian Innovation. Yes, all what is Graham wrote on our history of technology review is correct and very important to the history of science and technology in my country. To foreign reader the book has very good overview of everything russians did for whole humanity.However, discussion into why russia is always fail to reap all benefits of our innovations is somehow not finished. Graham lists all barriers which are very universal but falls short of explaining why stalinskaya sharashka (RnD center in Gulag) is far more effective in creating significant innovation than anything now in Russia or abroad. US had Bell Labs, Russia had sharashka. What was more effective in discussion, in my opinion.The deduction on key factor for innovation is protest movement in Russia 2012-2013 is totally incorrect, as majority of intelligentsia here as well as creative class is far from confrontatin from state and power and prefer to collaborate but not oppose. The fact that this movement is significantly less now without any change to innovation activity - just proves that protest movement has nothing to do with russian chances to improve innovation ecosystem. Again, my personal view that solid education in STEM and technology enterprenership culture - key things to overtake this centure long curse

THIS BOOK IS VERY WELL FOCUSED AND THE AUTHOR KNOWS THE SUBJECT VERY WELL-PRESENTS TECHNICAL ISSUES IN A CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD WAY -BUT IT IS TOO ANECDOTALAND UNNECESSARILY PERSONALIZED -GOOD PROFESSIONAL EDITING WOULD HELP --NONETHELESS ITS UNUSUALLY INTERESTING

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