

# Introduction

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The importance of the Russo-Japanese War seems by now so obvious, certainly for those who research it, that statements about its being more than a mere colonial war or even of its being the greatest conflict of the early twentieth century no longer ignite contention, let alone generate doubting responses. Commemorated across the globe, from St. Petersburg to Tokyo, via London, Portsmouth (New Hampshire), Seoul, and even Jerusalem, the centenary of the Russo-Japanese War in 2004–05 underscored the growing recognition that the war has gained lately. These widespread activities, in the form of scholarly conferences and symposiums, public meetings, films and artistic exhibitions, as well as countless academic and popular publications, were a rite of passage, attesting to the fact that this episode has ceased to be a peripheral issue and deserves much greater attention.

More than seeking to affirm the greater significance that the Russo-Japanese War has been accorded lately, the present volume aims (as does the companion volume) at a broad and comprehensive reexamination of the origins of the conflict, the various dimensions of the nineteen-month conflagration, and the legacy of the war and its place in the history of the twentieth century. Such an enterprise is timely because of the longer perspective and because at present we have not only greater access to materials and sources but also a growing number of scholars expert at multilingual, multidisciplinary, and comparative research. This volume has benefited from the collaboration of thirty-two scholars with precisely such qualities. Moreover, as natives of twelve different nations and representatives of a broad disciplinary background, this unique team of scholars seemed especially suited for the undertaking we initially aimed at. Without exception all have sought to provide a novel and critical view of the war, facilitated by a century-long perspective, and based on an impressive assortment of primary and secondary sources, many of them unexplored, and in a number of cases unavailable, earlier. Whereas a few of the contributors chose to reexamine well-known issues, the majority focused on topics never researched before. The result of these collaborative efforts is a rich and comprehensive opus, the first of a two-volume project, aiming at broadening our knowledge and understanding of this key event.

Despite the growing number of publications on the Russo-Japanese War, an abundance of questions and issues related to this topic remain

unknown, or call for, if not necessitate, a reexamination. Was the precursor to the war, for instance, mainly a long and inevitable collision course, or was the war sparked by proximate causes in the last few years before its outbreak? Was Japan's strategy for the war justified, and to what extent did its intelligence-gathering activities render it victorious? How did the Japanese forces take over Sakhalin, and can this final operation of the war shed new light on exemplary Japanese behavior during the war? What was the place of economic factors in keeping the fighting going and in the final decision by both sides for a diplomatic denouement, and what was the place of personal motives in the financial assistance Japan received during the war? How was the war represented in the two belligerent cultures, and what was the legacy of these representations? What were the immediate and far-reaching repercussions of the war for each of the belligerents, and what was its impact on British and German policies in the crucial decade before World War I? What were the echoes of the war in the colonial world, and did they lead to any substantial transformation?

To deal with these and many other complex questions, the present volume offers thirty chapters divided into three parts: the causes of the war, its course, and its consequences. The first part, on the origins of the war, comprises three insightful essays. While many studies on the Russo-Japanese War have devoted considerable attention to Japan's progress toward war after 1900, Urs Matthias Zachmann traces a shift in the Japanese public's attitude to Russia during the Far Eastern Crisis of 1897–98. The growing anti-Russian sentiment in those years, he argues, set a precedent for all further anti-Russian agitation, allowing the manipulation of public opinion as the war with Russian approached. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye engages in the controversial question regarding the role and responsibility of Russia's prominent finance minister, Sergei Witte, in the events that led to the war. Witte indeed was dismissed from his influential post six months before the war and preached a peaceful solution to the conflict, but his ardor for the Trans-Siberian Railway, a partnership with the Qing dynasty, and his dream of Russia involvement in northeast Asia, Schimmelpenninck van der Oye concludes, played a major role in enhancing the tsar's dreams of an empire on the Pacific. Eva-Maria Stolberg examines the place of the Siberian frontier in the lengthy Russo-Japanese contention. Her historical survey of the region begins in the 1890s, focuses on its role as the hinterland of the Russo-Japanese War, and ends with the Japanese intervention in Siberia almost two decades later. Throughout this period, she suggests, the Siberian and Manchurian frontiers were intertwined in a complex relationship. Siberia, Stolberg concludes, played an important role in Russian plans before and after the war, it also affected the Japanese strategic and economic view of northeast Asia.

The second part is concerned with the course of the war and consists of eleven essays divided into three sections: the military, economic, and cultural dimensions. The military section opens with Ian Nish's overview of

the land war. Nish argues that the Russo-Japanese War, despite a number of illustrious naval battles, was in fact a clash between two continental empires, which treated it merely as a war of expansion. Inaba Chiharu and Rotem Kowner overviews the Japanese network of intelligence gathering on Russia during the war and analyze its qualities. Although the Japanese intelligence was much inferior in capability to the organization it evolved three decades later, its activities before and during the war, they argue, provided much of the information necessary for Japan, helping its two military services to conduct their warfare and its leaders to make the necessary decisions. Marie Sevela considers the virtually unknown takeover of Sakhalin toward the end of the war. Sevela reveals a degree of chaos among the Russian defenders, which came as no surprise, and a few cases of cruelty by the Japanese, which were not expected. She explains the motives for the occupation of the island, whose southern part remained in Japanese hands for the next forty years.

The economic section in the second part begins with Nathan Sussman and Yishay Yafeh's chapter on the perception of Japan by British investors during the war. Using data on prices and yields of Japanese sovereign bonds traded in London between 1870 and 1914, Sussman and Yafeh demonstrate that Japan's victory over Russia did more to establish Japan's reputation as a trustworthy borrower than most of the preceding events of the Meiji Period. The interests of the financier Jacob Schiff in Russia at the time he decided to underwrite crucial war bonds for Japan is the topic of Daniel Gutwein's chapter. In a thought-provoking essay he contends that Schiff's decision did not stem from a desire to take revenge on Russia for the prewar pogroms against Jews, but to assist his business associates in Britain who faced political and financial difficulties in floating the Japanese war loans. Schiff's financial-political circle, Gutwein suggests, aimed for a Russian defeat in order to strengthen Witte and his economic policy of rapid industrialization, with its implications for Russia's home and foreign policies. In the final chapter in this section, Ono Keishi analyzes the effects of the war on Japan's postwar fiscal and monetary policies. While the financial constraints Japan experienced during the war are well known, Ono reveals that Japan experienced serious shortage of specie after the war, and it was only the outbreak of World War I that brought about a large amount of trade surplus and specie inflow, thereby averting the danger of a specie crisis.

The cultural section begins with Shalmit Bejarano's novel reading of Japanese wartime illustrations depicting women in various war-related roles and bereaved families. These images, Bejarano argues, not only narrate the untold stories of those who were excluded from the official histories but also indicate the changing narrative of the modernizing Japanese state at one of its most defining moments. Ury Epstein reexamines the evolution of Japanese nationalism through the unusual prism of the increasingly militant songs taught in Japanese elementary schools. Seen from this angle, Epstein asserts, the virtual starting point of Japan's attack on Russia occurred slightly before the Sino-Japanese War

and did not cease throughout the next decade. Russia too had its own female heroines, as Yulia Mikhailova and Ikuta Michiko finely demonstrate. While they find women taking part in many aspects of the Russian war efforts, they were glorified for virtues related to caring for men and were downgraded as independent human beings. Aaron Cohen explores the experience of the war and revolution during 1904–05 in the Russian art world. He finds it to substantially differ from that a decade later. The detachment that Russian art culture felt from the conflict with Japan, Cohen concludes, demonstrates that it was not a “dress rehearsal” for World War I as many have believed. In the chapter closing this section, Anna Frajlich reconsiders the effect of the war on Russian poetry. The poetic testimonies Frajlich brings to light manifest the traumatic experience of the war and revolution in Russia, the vibrant creativity of its poets, and their avid identification with Europe.

The third and largest part of the book deals with the reactions to the war and its legacy. It comprises fifteen essays divided into three sections, on the belligerents, on Europe, and on the colonial world. The first section, on the two belligerents, begins with Nikolai Ovsyannikov's analysis of the impact of the war on internal Japanese politics. The war looms, Ovsyannikov argues, as a landmark in Japanese political history at home. It not only brought about the formation of a new cabinet headed by a non-oligarchic figure and a president of the largest party in the Lower House, it also stimulated the progress of constitutionalism by moving the public opinion up to a new level that made large-scale liberalization possible. Selçuk Esenbel explores the seeds of Japanese Pan-Asian discourse in the 1930s as reflected in the early Japanese contacts with Muslim political activists during and soon after the war. These early interactions, Esenbel maintains, served as guidelines for training Japanese agents to be sent to Muslim countries under Muslim identity decades later when Japan turned against the West. Jan Kusber's chapter probes the relations between Russia's defeat at the front and the revolution in the rear. Kusber focuses on soldiers' unrest during the demobilization process soon after the war and shows that it initiated revolutionary learning and political involvement among the peasant rank and file, which were kept on a back burner until 1917. In the final chapter in this section Alex Marshall assesses the way the war altered both the scope and intent of Russian war planning in Eurasia. Marshall focuses on the policies of Fedor F. Palitsyn, the Army's Chief of the General Staff between 1905 and 1908, and subsequent reorganization of the army until the outbreak of the Great War.

The second section, on the repercussions of the war in Europe, opens with Keith Neilson's reexamination of British policy in the wake of the war. Neilson finds that British strategic foreign policy until 1907 was strongly influenced by the war, and suggests that British policy in Europe cannot be divorced from extra-European (particularly East Asian) matters. All in all, Neilson regards the war as the most important international event, certainly from the British viewpoint, in the twenty years before World War I. Many of the vivid impressions the British public absorbed

during the war were due to dozens of war correspondents dispatched to Manchuria by the British press. The numerous books and articles they wrote on the war, Philip Towle concludes, reflected the prejudices, troubles and anxieties of the age. These correspondents were not able, however, to predict or warn against the nature of future massive armed conflicts and their repercussions for Europe, Russia in particular. Bernd Martin reconsiders the impact of the war on Germany. This rising power did not take an active part in the conflict but was evidently affected by the changing balance of power as, at the beginning of 1906, it found itself internationally isolated. Thereafter, he maintains, the Entente was virtually set against the Central Powers, leading irrevocably to a titanic clash eight years later. Based on original reports, Martin overviews German perceptions of the conflict and the effects of its sinuous relations with Russia during the war on its subsequent geopolitical position. In another chapter on Germany, Oliver Griffin analyzes military attitudes to Russia during the war and their subsequent impact. Based on a careful examination of the perception of German military observers of the nature of Russian military leaders, Griffin uncovers much derision as to the capabilities of the Russian army but also conspicuously little attention to the revolution of 1905.

The conflict in northeast Asia was echoed in other parts of Europe as well. It was a major issue, for example, in Austro-Hungarian politics, and consequently was prominent in the Austro-Hungarian media. Through a creative analysis of satirical texts and political cartoons, Monika Lehrer finds that in Austria-Hungary great importance was attached to the war. The interest in the war, Lehrer concludes, stemmed from a need to gain information and clues about the activities of both allies and opponents – information that was used with much skill to adjust relations with the “Other.” While the Ottoman government was thought to be emotionally inclined toward the Japanese, Ottoman policy during the war showed no clear sign of it. Reexamining Ottoman neutrality during the war, Halit Akarca contends that the Sublime Porte tried not to invite enmity from the Great Powers, most importantly from Russia. This policy, Akarca concludes, led to the performance of some acts that might be interpreted as beneficial for Russia, rather than maintaining balanced relations with both sides, let alone showing any official liking for the Japanese. In the final chapter in this section, Ben-Ami Shillony argues that the outbreak of the war caused mixed feeling among the world Jewry, half of which dwelt in the Russian empire at the time. Although thousands fought and died on the Russian side, Jews all over the world were elated by Japan’s victories. Shillony overviews the reactions and illuminates the motives for Jewish support for Japan.

The last section of the third part is devoted to reactions and consequences of the war in Asia and the colonial world. Huajeong Seok examines the three crucial years from the Russo-Japanese Convention of 1907 to the Japanese annexation of Korea. Although the annexation of Korea, Seok argues, was a by-product rather than the main purpose of the

convention with Russia, it was not until the convention was signed and the adjustment of interests among the imperial powers was attained that Japan had a free hand in controlling Korea. Gesa Westermann explores the reaction to the war in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Burma. While the news of the Japanese victories certainly caused excitement among the local populations, Westermann reveals that the war did not have the expected effect on the national and independence movements, and she calls into question the assertion that the Japanese victory became a worldwide stimulus for anti-colonial resistance movements, at least with regard to Southeast Asia. The British invasion of Tibet during the early stages of the war is the topic of Gordon Stewart's chapter. He reexamines the grounds for the allegations that many contemporaries made that there was a direct connection between these two events. Stewart concludes, however, that far from taking advantage of that war to invade Tibet, the British were reluctant to exploit the timing and did all that they could to mollify the Russians and assure them of the limited nature of Britain's intentions in Tibet. In the last but not least chapter of the book, Rina Bieganiec explores the echoes of the war in the Middle East, and the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Manar* in particular. Bieganiec reveals much enthusiasm for Japan's victories among the Ottoman, Persian and Egyptian public, as well as a new, albeit short-lived, regard for Japan as a model for modernization rather than Westernization.

Read as a complete whole, this book brings to light further evidence of the importance of the Russo-Japanese War and its place in the history of the twentieth century. While admittedly some of its consequences were short-lived and occasionally even marginal, the participants in this project share a consensus regarding the scope and significance of the conflict. The Russo-Japanese War, they believe, was truly a turning point in modern history, extending far beyond the sphere of Manchuria and East Asia. As the initiator of this project, I join them in the ardent hope that this volume, together with the second volume, will serve as an important contribution to the expanding scholarly works on the war, its causes and its consequences. I am aware that even such a large undertaking cannot cover all aspects, as many of the questions raised here deserve further elaboration, while others — pertaining to ignored or overlooked themes — still require reexamination. Nonetheless, it is my wish that the volume will facilitate the emergence of a new view regarding this event, and serve as a source for further discussion free of the early historiographical constraints and misconceptions so common in past years.

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