Japan's 'Fifteen Minutes of Glory':
Managing World Opinion during
the War with Russia, 1904–5

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the major conflicts in which Japan participated in modern times, the Russo-Japanese War marks the apex of its international image. Only against tsarist Russia did Japan appeal to both its Asian neighbours and a majority of the Western nations. During this nineteen-month conflict, Japan's image as a backward Asian nation evaporated, supplanted by the vision of a determined and advanced martial nation. Japanese soldiers were depicted abroad as valiant and physically attractive, and their monarch lofty and benevolent. Alas, these images would never recur. While regarded as David fighting the ursine Russian Goliath in the early stages of the war, in its aftermath Japan was recognized as a regional power on an equal and occasionally superior footing to that of Western powers in the arena. In retrospect, it was perhaps an inevitable juncture in the rapid transformation of the image of the Japanese from benign, somewhat feminine children to yellow brutes – an image that receded only in the wake of the Pacific War.

The war was indeed a unique moment in Japan's struggle to enhance its international image. A decade earlier, during the war against China (1894–5), Japan was considered a dwarf fighting a giant, but its rival, in fact, was a collapsing Asian nation unfit for a modern military clash. Chinese weakness harmed Japanese efforts at image improvement as much as the combat behaviour of the Japanese themselves. The atrocities Japanese troops committed on the local population and the garrison of the Manchurian town of Lushun (Port Arthur) in November 1894 sullied the military credit the nation had gained. Finally, Japan's capitulation to
the Russo-Franco-German collaboration (known as the Three Power Intervention) sealed the common assessment by Western military experts that China's weakness rather than Japan's strength determined the outcome. Four decades later, the rise of ultranationalism in Tokyo, coupled with fears of further Japanese expansion, demolished what remained of a positive image associated with Japan. During the so-called Fifteen Year War (1931–45), Japan was thoroughly demonized in East Asia, by China in particular, and by most of its former Western allies.

The positive images Japan won in its war against tsarist Russia were fairly true to reality. Japanese forces were victorious in every single campaign of the war, and their conduct was by and large proper (adhering strictly to the Geneva Convention of 1864 and the Hague Convention of 1899) and humane (as far as the fighting allowed). Yet this behaviour alone does not account for the positive images. Reality contains many facets, but the desired concentration on positive facets, especially in wartime, requires favourable circumstances, skillful public relations and a willing audience. This chapter explores foreign images of the Japanese military during the Russo-Japanese War, examines the circumstances surrounding those images and the way Japan manipulated them, and seeks to explain the Japanese success in creating positive images of its military and of nation as a whole in the world opinion.

THE CIVILIZED SUPERMAN: THE EMERGENCE OF FAVOURABLE IMAGES OF JAPAN

In the early months of 1904, the Japanese soldier became, at least momentarily, the emblem of an imaginary Oriental knight. It was, in fact, the only time in modern history that portrayals of masculine and aggressive Japanese were accepted, even with a certain enthusiasm, by an applauding Western audience. In the years before the war, Western media and popular culture depicted the Japanese military with contempt mixed with sarcasm (Pl. 13). Frequently, the very sight of Japanese soldiers evoked laughter among Western observers. They were dressed, many thought, in ill-fitting uniforms, and behaved in a way that some interpreted as feminine and childish. The British writer and poet of imperialism, Rudyard Kipling, who visited Japan in 1889 and 1892, might be representative of Western criticism of the Japanese Army during the late nineteenth century. Attentively observing Japanese military personnel on several occasions, Kipling felt that the delicate fans and tea-sets he noticed in an army barracks in Osaka 'do not go with one's notion of a barrack'. While admitting that the Japanese soldier 'makes a trim little blue-jacket', he concluded that 'he does not understand soldiering'.

Impressions aside, in reality the Japanese military advanced dramatically towards the end of the nineteenth century. As Japanese victories in the war with China were known, Sir Henry Norman, a British military expert who had visited Tokyo in the early 1890s, wrote that Japan had not been taken seriously prior to the war. National images change
slowly, however, and many military observers stationed in Tokyo at the turn of the century, such as Georges de Man of the Belgian Embassy and the Russian military attaché Colonel G. M. Vannovskii, remained unconvincing. As late as November 1902, de Man sent his government a lengthy report on the Japanese army, criticizing the level of studies at the Japanese military academy and emphasized the soldiers' docility and indiscipline.

The poor image of the short and undernourished soldiers changed rapidly following some initial reports of Japanese successes against the Russians. Nothing could be more effective in changing Western images of Japan than victory in war. In attempting to account for the Japanese success, Westerners emphasized initially the strong character of the ordinary soldier. The British military attaché, Captain James Bruce Jardine, for example, argued that 'the main quality that makes the Japanese infantryman what he is is the quality that enabled the cavalryman to prove himself superior to the Cossack. We call it "bravery", which is but a feeble translation or equivalent for Yamato damashii.'

The British army officer Lieutenant-General Ian Hamilton, who served as senior military observer on the Japanese side, did not differ in his assessment. 'When war was declared,' he wrote in May 1904, 'the Japanese were formidable enough in all conscience. They were brave, disciplined, enthusiastic, efficiently officered, honestly administered.'

Within five months of the outbreak of the war, the willingness of Japanese to sacrifice their lives, and their courage in the face of death, appeared on American screens. Entitled Capture and Execution of Spies by the Russians, the film was produced by the Edison Company and the Klein Optical Company. It depicted two Japanese spies who were sent to blow up Russian railway tracks under the disguise of coolies. Captured and sentenced to death, they give three cheers for the emperor before the shooting squad.

In addition to their combat skills, Japanese soldiers were singled out for other, more spiritual traits. Hamilton focused on their modesty, 'a trait which above all others has won my profound and unstinted respect. Never has there been so much as a tinge of exultation . . . about the officers.' Frederick Arthur McKenzie, the 'special correspondent' of the British Daily Mail, stressed education: 'The Japanese soldier is, as a rule, it must be remembered, an educated man. He reads diligently, and follows the movement of the world after the same fashion as does the smartest bombardier in Dover Castle.'

With the incessant victories the Japanese soldier started to appear larger than life. 'When one considers the burrows, warrens, trenches, redoubts and forts the Japanese had to subdue,' war correspondent Frederick McCormick wrote, 'their efforts seem the achievements of demi-gods, or like the achievements of the gods they revere.' For McCormick, even the mere sight of a Japanese prisoner brought down the road by Russian soldiers was thrilling: the prisoner was 'like a man resting – a model for a sculptor – erect, elastic, a king beside the slaves around him'.
It is remarkable how success and new status, together with shared political ends, could ameliorate even the low image of the Japanese physical features, at least in the eyes of observers from friendly nations. The enthusiastic reports of Western correspondents who covered the war on the Japanese side rarely dealt directly with the Japanese body. Yet the accumulated stereotypes they referred to left no doubt, marking a shift in this problematic domain. In retrospect, an intermediate image was produced: not yet the savage, violent body that it slowly evolved into by the heyday of Japanese imperialism, but no longer the feminine and childlike body as it had been regarded before the war.\textsuperscript{17}

Many Western observers of the Russo-Japanese War referred to the physique of the fighting men. In a few months of fighting the Japanese seemed to have become taller, stronger and better nourished. Hamilton acknowledged this phenomenon soon after the Japanese takeover of the Russian position on Round Top Hill. ‘The whole of the First Army Headquarters,’ he averred, ‘look taller and bigger men, as if a great weight had suddenly been rolled off their shoulders.’\textsuperscript{18} Even characteristics that had been considered inferior were now seen in a different light. ‘They are wonderful little men,’ enthused veteran correspondent Frederick Villiers, who reported for the Illustrated London News, ‘these Japs with their moon faces, snub noses, beautiful, strong, white teeth, and the pluck of the very devil.’\textsuperscript{19} His impression of the Japanese serving in the navy was similar: ‘I have been on British warships while in action, or on the verge of meeting the foe, but I never saw any decks more trim, and the men and officers neater and smarter, than the crowd on the [Japanese flagship] Mikasa.’\textsuperscript{20}

The observers tended to overstate Japanese physical capabilities. They mentioned mainly physical endurance, a feature that Westerners had referred to since their discovery of Japan.\textsuperscript{21} ‘Both sides were brave to a very high degree,’ McKenzie reported from this ‘athletic meeting’. ‘Both showed their ability to endure great exertion and severe physical discomfort over a sustained period. Here, the Japanese came out ahead. The Japanese soldier can stand prolonged exertion as can no other soldier I know.’\textsuperscript{22} Similarly, the French physician Jean-Jacques Matignon, who joined the Japanese army in Manchuria, was dazzled by the Japanese reaction to pain: ‘The men stand the pain. They never complain, not because they do not feel it but because they were trained to withstand it silently.’\textsuperscript{23}

At this historical juncture a diet of rice appeared advantageous. ‘The Japanese soldier can live for days on rice,’ contended the British Army Captain Francis Roger Sedgwick, ‘... No European troops, however, could march and fight on such a diet.’\textsuperscript{24} Lloyd Griscom, the American minister in Tokyo, also thought that rice was at the base of Japanese behaviour and endurance. ‘Physically,’ the reports stressed, the soldiers ‘were like athletes unused to luxuries. Men who had spent their lives toiling in the fields on a diet of rice found it no hardship to plod along all day with heavy packs on their backs. The Japanese were probably the greatest marchers in the world.’\textsuperscript{25}
Observing the individual combat performance caused Ashmead-Bartlett to contemplate the link between civilization and the body. ‘Few will deny,’ he argued, ‘that the improvements, or the so-called improvements, of civilization have a disastrous effect on the physique and stamina of a nation; and as a race declines physically, so also does it decline in courage, determination and warlike prowess.’ Yet this process did not affect the Japanese. They were ‘undoubtedly the finest race physically that exists’.  

During the war Western journalists depicted the formerly almost anonymous Japanese political and military leadership in complimentary, and more importantly in human colours. Wright, who was uniquely situated to observe the Japanese naval operations first hand for seven months, is a good example of this new tone. At the Tokyo Club, he wrote soon after the war, ‘one meets most of the Japanese politicians and officials, who are as fine-looking and well tailored a lot of gentlemen as it is possible to see everywhere.’ ‘Everywhere’, for Wright, was definitely situated in the West, and the brave and well dressed Japanese were at last made honorary white men.

Wright never noticed feminine, childish, or ridiculously dressed men, nor did he ever depict the Japanese he encountered as yellow-skinned or possessing typical ‘Asiatic’ features. On the contrary, the naval officers he met were as impressive as any European aristocrat: ‘Vice-Admiral Saitō [Saitō Makoto], the Vice Minister, is a good specimen of a Japanese sailor, big and burly and with a kindly face. He might easily have been mistaken for a sun-tanned British Admiral. . . . Vice Admiral Ijuin [Gorō], . . . looked not unlike the great Prussian general Von Moltke.’ He depicted those officers without any of the amusement so typical of Western observers just few years earlier.

Of all Japanese personalities, General Nogi Maresuke, commander of the Third Army and the hero of the bloody siege of Port Arthur, seems to have won the greatest adulation (Pl. 14). ‘It was easy to see,’ Ashmead-Bartlett noted, ‘what a superior type of man he was.’ The British journalist was fascinated by Nogi’s appearance but felt a comparison to a well-known figure in the West was indispensable for his depiction: ‘The shape of his head, the keen eyes, and the square-cut beard, give him very much the appearance of General Ulysses Grant.’ The American correspondent of the San Francisco Chronicle, Richard Barry, expressed a similar view after meeting the Spartan-like bearded Nogi: ‘How handsome he was – and how simple and friendly, how easily pleased, how innately courteous!’

Wright’s depiction of Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō, commander-in-chief of the Combined Fleet and hero of the naval battle of Tsushima, whom Wright met three times, demonstrates how a common-looking Japanese could be portrayed in a human and warm manner lacking any racial nuance. Admiral Tōgō, he wrote, ‘is a short, well built man with rather a slight stoop. The eyes are brilliant and black, like those of all Japanese . . . He has a large head, which is a good shape and shows strongly defined bumps . . .’  

(Pl. 15).
In this historic moment of grace and supportive atmosphere, even Emperor Meiji was brought into the limelight. Before the war ended the war correspondent James Miller quickly assembled a collection of news and data on the warring parties into a thick book he entitled *Thrilling Stories of the Russo-Japanese War*. He dedicated the first chapter to the 'Mikado' who was portrayed as having a 'pleasant appearance,' and tall stature ('almost six feet'), much above previous estimations. Reading the ensuing delineation of the fifty-two-year-old emperor one may think of a movie star, totally different from any previous portrait of a Japanese. 'He is muscular and well-proportioned,' wrote Miller, 'he has a broad, high forehead, and judged by the most exacting standard of manly beauty, he is a handsome sovereign.'

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN IMAGE**

The positive images of Japan during the war with Russia were indeed different from its image in the West before the war, as well as three decades later, and particularly during the Pacific War. It was the outcome of unique circumstances, which materialized only once in the modern history of Japan. The factors that shaped the Japanese image at this period were the explicit support of the British and American press, the negative image of Japan's enemy, and the initial perception of Japan as the underdog or as an innocuous entity. No less important were concentrated Japanese efforts to appeal to Western public opinion by dealing humanely with the defeated enemy and by publicizing this attitude overseas. Finally, military success itself is usually a better predictor of positive images than failure. The following section explores these factors and assesses their importance.

Military success seems to be an important factor in changing national images. Banal as it may sound, Japan's military victory over an awesome European power was probably the most important factor in changing its image. Neither chivalrous behaviour nor a sophisticated public relations campaign could counterbalance loss on the battlefield. Keen observers of Japan and its place in the international arena before 1904 were not oblivious to the need for one crucial victory over a Western power. Three years before the war, Frank Brinkley, an English Yokohama-based newspaper owner, reflected on the gradual image shift of the Japanese. He felt that Japanese were not considered as children as in the past, and that 'a pleasant alternation has gradually been affected in the foreigner's methods'. As for the motives of the change, Brinkley had a definite answer:

... they know that the world never took any respectful notice of them until they showed themselves capable of winning battles. At first they imagined that they might efface the Oriental stigma by living up to civilized standards. But the success they had attained was scarcely perceptible when suddenly their victorious war with China seemed to win for them more esteem in half a year then their peaceful industry has won for them in half a century.
The extent to which Japanese motives for initiating hostilities against China in July 1894 were associated with an image change may remain obscure. Brinkley, nonetheless, hit the essence of Western stereotypes rather than Japanese sentiments. Certainly, the Japanese were also concerned by conflicting images. Still, Brinkley was writing after a war with an Asian neighbour. After the Sino-Japanese War Japan was told again and again, and in 1901 it was still 'perpetually told', that its victory over China 'proved nothing about her competence to stand in the lists of the West'. Brinkley went on to predict that Japan 'will complete the proof, or try to complete it. Nothing is more certain, nothing more apparent to all that have watched her closely.'\(^\text{35}\) Three years later, as the war with Russia broke out, Mori Ōgai, the influential novelist who during the war commanded the medical corps of the Second Army, touched on the same dilemma more acidly. 'Win the war,' he protested, 'and Japan will be denounced as a yellow peril; lose it, and she will be branded a barbaric state.'\(^\text{36}\)

As a characteristic outcome of cognitive dissonance, even the mere resolution to go to war made the Japanese feel stronger. Their steadfast spirit was evident to foreign observers as well. On the eve of the war McKenzie professed that early ideas regarding Japan had to disappear fast: 'This was no child nation, wandering heedlessly through sunny paths, but a great, grim, determined people, on the eve of what all knew would be a long, hard, life-and-death struggle.'\(^\text{37}\)

International circumstances also play an important role in shaping images. The setting of a war does not always allow the belligerents to succeed in appeals for approval by international public opinion, either because they are diplomatically isolated in the first place or because their cause is perceived as extremely unjust. During the Pacific War, Japan fought most of the major Western states and its thrust was perceived as an imperialistic enterprise treacherously initiated and brutally fought. In the Russo-Japanese War, however, public opinion in the West, and certainly in Asia, was largely on Japan's side, or at least not against it. As a whole, in 1904 Japan viewed the West as its audience and reference group, whereas four decades later it regarded fellow Asians, whom it somewhat despised, as the audience in its struggle against the West. Furthermore, during the Russo-Japanese War, Japan still sought admission to the 'club' of the developed and civilized nations, and therefore behaved in accordance with its most stringent perceived requirements. Three decades later, however, it was a disappointed and embittered 'honorary member' of that 'club', convinced of its inability to join it as an equal member.

International circumstances were reflected not only in Japan's willingness to adhere to international codes of conduct in battle but also in a desire to exploit them for purposes of image change. Prior to the Russo-Japanese War, Japan adopted the obligations determined in the first Geneva Convention (1864), the Brussels Declaration (1874), and the Hague Convention (1899) dealing with land warfare and human rights of POWs. Japan followed these rules closely and looked for witnesses to
testify to its adherence. Unlike the Pacific War, few civilians were involved on either side in the Russo-Japanese War. Moreover, although each army numbered about one million soldiers, the Russo-Japanese War cannot be defined as total war, and it was unquestionably far from the scale—in duration, manpower involved, or human suffering—witnessed during the Pacific War. These circumstance enabled Japan to treat its enemy soldiers, in physical and spiritual terms alike, better than during the total wars it waged in later years. In turn, this humane treatment was instrumental in appealing to world opinion, as much as it facilitated rapid reconciliation with Russia after the war.

Fighting an unpopular enemy is another important factor in ameliorating national images. The Japanese media and public considered Russia a European power, and the Russian people members of the ‘white’ race. In American and (Western) European eyes, however, Russia was considered more a foster fragment of the civilized Western sphere. It was frequently regarded as a semi-Asian nation; some held Russia, not Japan, to be the real ‘yellow peril’, a future barbaric menace to harmony and peace in the West. Some Anglo-Saxon support for Japan stemmed from sheer antagonism to Russia, as unsurprisingly the war marked the nadir of Anglo-Russian relations in the two decades prior to the First World War. At the turn of the century the rivalry between these two empires (known as ‘the Great Game’) stretched over several geographical sites in Asia, culminating in strife in China and British fears of Russian intervention in India. Russia, in turn, was upset by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902, and in the months preceding the war repeatedly rejected British offers of a general bilateral agreement between the two countries.

Although London attempted to maintain, at least officially, an even-handed policy regarding the two warring parties, the general public was overtly pro-Japanese. At the beginning of 1904, Anglo-Russian relations deteriorated because of Russian resentment for Britain’s actions in Tibet and its support for Japan. Eight months into the war the most severe crisis between the two nations occurred, when the Russian Baltic Fleet sank a British trawler on its passage through the Dogger Bank en route to East Asia, mistaking it for a Japanese torpedo boat.

The United States was less involved in the diplomatic discord in northeast Asia. The Americans, nonetheless, had nurtured a negative view of Russia, a position that had become increasingly evident since 1880 because of its aggressive expansion in the Far East, the reported cruelties of Russian despotism, and the persecution of Jews. In the year before the war American public opinion against Russia further deteriorated because of the Kishinev Pogrom of April 1903. American approval for Japan continued through the first year of the war and anyone with animosity for Russia gave support to its rival. George Kennan, a leading expert on Russia and a confidant of Theodore Roosevelt, was a notable figure in shaping the American public image of the tsarist regime as dark and despotic. In his writings prior to and during the war he depicted Russia as a ‘police state’ and Japan as a civilized nation equal in many aspects to the United States.
The stream of reports from correspondents who reached the war arena via the more convenient route over the Pacific to Japan – and thus were exposed mostly to the Japanese side – enhanced the initial prejudice against Russia. Although American officials were considered by both Russians and Japanese as the most trusted non-partisans, many private individuals and institutions in the United States did not hesitate to express their sympathy for one of the two parties, with a clear inclination to Japan. Jews were among the most ardent supporters of Japan, either in writing for its cause or financially, especially following a wave of pogroms across Russia during the war.43

No wonder, then, that while the Japanese soldier was glorified, harsh criticism was hurled at the Russians who were ascribed the very characteristics attributed to their enemy before the war. The American naval attaché in Russia, Newton McCully, for instance, concluded that the root of all the disasters Russia had suffered was to be found in the character of its people. Against a backdrop of Japanese stoic behaviour in wartime, Russian so-called manly behaviour was characterized, McCully felt, by ‘the occasional hysterical excesses of women or seventeen-year-old boys’.44

The hostile mood against Russia, mixed with admiration and support for Japan and its cause, can be discerned more easily in the conduct of individuals. Two personalities may serve as brief case studies for this thesis: American President Theodore Roosevelt and Jewish-American financier Jacob H. Schiff. Long before the war Roosevelt had been intrigued by the issue of race and manifested a peculiar mixture of ‘racial progressiveness’ and a belief in white superiority. Although he determined Caucasians as having the best civilization, he admitted the Japanese to the circle of ‘civilized nations’. Japanese representatives, such as a fellow Harvard alumnus, Kaneko Kentarō, cultivated the president’s interest in Japan, emphasizing the mutual interests of the two nations in Asia and providing him with reading materials about Japanese culture.45

Schiff, the president of the New York banking firm of Kuhn, Loeb & Co., helped Japan by joining an international syndicate and thus enabled the Japanese government to raise more than half of its foreign loans at the time of the war. Schiff’s support for Japan did not stem from interest or adoration of its culture. Unlike Roosevelt, he explained his actions as arising from antagonism to tsarist Russia, which persecuted the Jews. Specifically, he wished the Japanese to defeat the Russians and cause the demise of the tsarist regime.46 Schiff’s proclaimed motives have been questioned recently, and it is possible that he had, indeed, additional economic and political motives. Nevertheless, it is evident that had Schiff been pro-Russian he would not have assisted Japan.47

Japan’s organized courting of Western public opinion contributed much to its war efforts. Although Russia’s international image in 1904 was ebbing, it faced a non-European and non-Christian rival. Japan, despite its modernization and celebrated aesthetic sensibilities, was Asian and in contemporary Western eyes associated with the other, the less developed and the racially inferior world.48 It was axiomatic that Western
public opinion would support the colonial powers in their struggle with non-European (‘non-white’) opponents. Dividing the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’, Westerners displayed little concern over the fate, for example, of the Muslim peoples that Russian forces subjugated in central Asia during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In the six years before the Russo-Japanese War, and particularly during the war, Japan laboured more than ever before to recreate its image. Whereas domestically efforts to shape national images began with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, full-scale efforts internationally began only after the Sino-Japanese War. During that war Japanese oligarchs realized that their nation was failing to make full use of its military success to improve its image overseas. Not only was the heroic victory over China dismissed, but the massacre at Port Arthur endangered existing images of Japan as a civilized nation. Moreover, the association of Japan with the ‘yellow peril’ discourse jeopardized all efforts at modernization; it marked Japan as an unworthy member of the civilized world as well as a threat to the West. Consequently, Japan took an active role in the shaping of its image regarding its national status in general and its war activities in particular. First, it aimed to reshape conventional views of Japan as weak, feminine and semi-civilized, and to rid itself of the unequal treaties, thereby facilitating acceptance into the circle of ‘civilized’ nations. Second, Japanese leaders aimed to mitigate criticism of military misconduct during the Sino-Japanese War, as well as the broader concern in the West about its territorial aspirations in northeast Asia.

The campaign of ‘selling’ Japan, as Robert Valliant termed it, began in 1898 when a small group of officials of the Foreign Ministry conducted a systematic survey of public opinion on Japan in the foreign press. The unexpected leakage of news regarding the massacre in Port Arthur was significant testimony to the role of the Western press in fixing Japan’s image, but also an example of how uncontrolled media might prevent a nation from turning its military superiority on the battlefield into diplomatic triumph. A further incentive was launched two years later, during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900–1, when the Japanese government was perplexed by the suspicious press coverage its military expedition to Beijing had received. As a result, it established a network in Europe to gather any utterance by the press on Japan and to promulgate an official line. As conflict with Russia worsened, the cabinet met on 30 December 1903 to discuss ways to prevent the clamour of the ‘yellow peril’ rising again in the West.49

Accordingly, the government decided to keep China out of the conflict, and two months later appointed two special envoys to coordinate public relations activities in the West. It was a productive decision. The envoys, Suematsu Kenchō in Europe and Kaneko Kentarō in the United States, had respectively studied at Cambridge and Harvard, had a network of connections and spoke English well. Practically, they were to put a positive face on Japanese actions, meeting with correspondents and politicians and writing promotional articles. Suematsu, the son-in-law of
Japan's leading statesman Itō Hirobumi and previously a home minister, may serve as a case study for the Japanese efforts to sway foreign public opinion during the war. One of the objectives of his specific mission was to 'manipulate the British Press', with an emphasis on the right of Japan to act in self-defence. Unsurprisingly, his instructions were to prevent an anti-Japanese union in Europe based on racial fears:

The so-called doctrine of the 'yellow peril' readily moves the hearts of Western peoples and is nowadays popular on the continent. If we do not combat this doctrine with all our power, there is a danger that European countries will actually join together against us. By attacking the 'yellow peril' doctrine in all quarters, we shall prevent the combined interference of various European powers.\(^5\)

Japanese efforts in Western capitals soon leaned heavily on an information-gathering network established by the Foreign Ministry. Part of the daily assignments of diplomats stationed in legations overseas was to scan the main newspapers in their respective spheres, occasionally with the help of translators, and assess their importance. They attended parties sponsored by the government or legations of the great powers, and exchanged information with foreign diplomats and leading figures of the host country's government. When the war broke out this intimate knowledge of Western media and the circles of decision-makers proved instrumental in influencing their views, presenting Japan's cause and keeping them supplied with materials working for Japan's benefit.\(^6\)

During the war, the dilemma Mori Ōgai pointed out was resolved without further ado. Winning the war appeared much more important than any other goal, but it was also instrumental in bettering Japan's international image. In the meantime, the oligarchs found that catering to world opinion was not an easy task, especially not at home. Japan entertained members of the foreign press in Tokyo, and worse, assured their safety at the front. A month after the outbreak of the war, a total of fifty-three British, American, French and German correspondents had assembled in the Japanese capital looking forward to joining Japanese forces at the front (Pl. 16). In the following months the number of foreign correspondents increased dramatically. Reporting from the Russian side necessitated a long and exhausting trip across Siberia, whereas the Japanese side was more accessible from either Europe or the United States and it was not under siege.\(^7\) The correspondents, many of them celebrated military reporters, were welcomed warmly with parties and banquets. Behind the scenes, however, Japanese authorities were concerned that foreigners might disclose military secrets and were determined to keep them far as possible from the combat zone, with a control perhaps tighter than in any conflict before.\(^8\)

After prolonged pressure and protest from the correspondents, their newspapers and Japanese representatives overseas, anxious about the deteriorating image of their nation, Japanese authorities yielded.
Gradually, small numbers of correspondents were allowed to approach the front. The treatment of correspondents was undoubtedly the weak point in Japan's handling of its image, and some of its impatient visitors became anti-Japanese in due course. Although the Japanese apologized for inconveniences caused, they constantly censored the dispatches, insisted on vetting subjects and phrasing and prevented them from getting too close to the front by land or sea.54

The ambivalence and reluctance of the Japanese government regarding the presence of military correspondents at the front were to be repeated, even more markedly, with Western military observers. As soon as the war broke out, many Western and a few non-Western governments inundated the Japanese Foreign Office with requests to allow a few of their military officers to observe the war from the Japanese side. These requests were forwarded to the Japanese War Office or offices within the Japanese Army and Navy, and after some hesitation on 19 February 1904, permission was granted to dispatch military observers. Nonetheless, during the early stages of the war, Japanese military authorities did their utmost to reject the observers' requests to go to the front and kept them busy in various social engagements in Tokyo.

The Japanese, like the Russians, were not keen to show observers what they considered 'their' war, even if for political reasons they had to put up with them.55 Japanese authorities were particularly loath to host foreign representatives who came for the sole purpose of improving their own military establishments through an experience which Japanese troops were to acquire by blood. Indeed, abundant military reports published after the Russo-Japanese War indicate that Western military establishments viewed the conflict as an exceptional opportunity to examine the clash of two advanced, large-scale, and, most importantly, equal armies and fleets. For this reason, the Japanese were reluctant to tell the observers anything about the progress of events, and faced difficulties even with their British allies, since the latter expected better treatment from the Japanese than the other Western observers. The Japanese government, however, was reluctant to provide such preferential treatment, at least publicly, for fear of creating the impression that their war effort was being directed by the British. By April 1904, some thirty-four frustrated foreign officers, anxious to leave Tokyo for the front, were nonetheless put off with various assurances.56 The heavy curtain of secrecy and censorship regarding all military affairs baffled most military observers. The exception was the British, who seemed to enjoy a somewhat less suspicious welcome.57 As resentment grew, the Japanese sent an initial group of observers along with a number of correspondents to the First Army of Kuroki soon after its landing.58

The military observers did not fare much better than their civilian compatriots who served the written media; they too had to wear foreign clothes and were strictly limited in their movements, unable to move without an escort.59 The restrictions, censorship, latent hostility and physical separation, presumably due to different nutrition, did much to
alienate some of the observers and led a few even to protest officially. The Japanese clearly felt a certain dissonance regarding the observers, who on the one hand gathered classified information about the Japanese military strength and weakness, but on the other hand could contribute to Japan's image by dispatching their impressions back in their respective countries. Often, a hostile attitude to the foreign 'shadows' dominated, which was reflected in antagonism and even a threatening demeanour by the Japanese rank and file. With the Japanese, the observers often sensed a certain measure of mutual racial antagonism, which was liable to be exposed during the war.

In one rare incident the Japanese exposed some of their true feelings about the presence of the foreign observers. During his stay with the First Army staff, a German captain, Max Hoffman, became infuriated about the travel restrictions imposed on him. When he was forbidden to move to a better observation place, he shouted at his hosts: 'You are yellow; you are not civilized if you do not let me go to that hill.' The most senior Japanese officer present, General Fuji, replied: 'We, Japanese, are paying for this military information with our blood and we don't propose to share it with others.' Still, many of the upper echelons of the military were aware of the importance of the observers and did much to maintain cordial ties with them. General Nogi, for instance, was more aware of this need than other senior commanders. During the siege of Port Arthur he was in close contact with a selected number of military observers and war correspondents, and after the fall of the fort he invited the observers attached to the First and Second Armies to an inspection tour and banquet served with European wines. He also arranged a number of lectures on the siege and allowed his guests to examine the fortifications by themselves.

When presenting Japan's cause to foreign visitors, Japanese representatives constantly stressed cultural differences. They were conscious of the importance of the observers as messengers of Japan overseas, but were unaware of their domestic importance. In a period when Japanese still wished to emulate Western military conventions, their presence at the front had a positive effect. That is, the mere sight of non-partisan foreigners prevented local atrocities and encouraged civilized behaviour. For the sake of public relations, the Japanese also granted approval to a number of American women missionaries and nurses to assist in the war effort by making 'comfort bags', bringing flowers to the wounded and visiting hospitals. Their help, suggests historian Joseph Henning, struck a chord at home, as many Americans were interested in the missionaries' reports and impressions. Being aware of the role missionaries in general played in American society, Japanese officials and clergymen encouraged them to promote the view that the war was not a religious or a racial conflict. These pro-Japanese missionaries were in fact instrumental in attenuating Russia's religious affinity with the Americans. They stressed the differences between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Christianity of the 'progressive nations in the West', as well as the lack of freedom of
thought and religious practice in Russia. Japan, by contrast, although a non-Christian state once depicted as 'heathen', was now presented as 'Christianity's proxy in Northeast Asia.'

The approval granted to Christian activists to aid Japan's war efforts was not immediate due to prevalent suspicions of foreign and Christian organizations as serving as agents of hostile powers. The Japanese chapter of the YMCA had attempted for more than a decade prior to the war to convince the authorities that it was a sufficiently Japanese organization. Finally, in August 1904, the YMCA chapter received permission to approach the front, partly due to expectations of positive press coverage in the United States. Its members pitched comfort tents for soldiers in Manchuria, and in the autumn it also landed in Korea. Eventually, the need to prove their allegiance to the nationalistic cause of Japan made foreign and local YMCA activists more fervent than others in their support for the war, but temporarily, at least, they helped modify the Japanese image as an alien, non-Christian entity.

Another means of shaping foreign public opinion was the Japanese Red Cross, established eighteen years before the war. Although the act of establishing the Red Cross movement in Japan was seen partly as a form of gaining cultural legitimization, it gradually became a symbol of Japanese humanitarian efforts. The Japanese Red Cross was highly organized and in 1903 its membership was the largest in the world, employing thousands of young women dressed in Western-style nurses' uniforms. The Japanese organization hosted groups of volunteer nurses from the United States, Great Britain, France and Germany, thereby helping to shape the image of Japan as a civilized, Christian-like nation. In sum, the activities of the Japanese Red Cross Society during the Russo-Japanese War were instrumental in making Japan less alien in foreign eyes, and confirmed its sincere desire for modernization and emulation of the supposedly humane qualities of the West. Ultimately, the reports on the society abroad helped to shatter some inherent Western notions about humane behaviour being exclusive to Christian nations alone. Many military observers praised the Japanese for their care of injured Russian soldiers and prisoners. Furthermore, admiring reports by visiting American medical personnel, notably Dr Anita McGee, prompted Roosevelt in 1905 to sign into law a bill that empowered the government to reorganize and revitalize the American Red Cross Society.

Japanese conscious stress on bravery and humanness was another element in its image transformation. The Japanese government's active management of its national image had two, ostensibly contradictory, goals. On the one hand it sought to stress the heroic combat behaviour of the Japanese troops at the front and on the other hand the humane treatment of wounded enemy soldiers and prisoners of war in the rear. Bravery, organization and humanness were traits associated at that time with modern advanced nations and masculine societies, whereas combat cowardice, disorganization and inhumanity were associated with backward societies and a primitive form of life. Those in charge of the campaign
found it easy to locate instances of heroic and humane behaviour. Indeed, victory in battle, and Japan had many such victories during 1904–5, yielded countless instances of bravery and created a large number of prisoners, to whom humane treatment was provided.

This is easily said, but as is well known, victorious nations do not necessarily insist upon humane behaviour. Neither triumphant Germany in 1939–42 nor Japan in 1941–42 cared much about the wellbeing of vanquished enemy soldiers. Evidently, Japanese behaviour in 1904–5 was based on a thoughtful decision-making process and logistic preparations before the war. With the outbreak of the war, the Japanese government issued explicit regulations regarding the humane treatment of enemy prisoners, and established a POW Information Bureau in the Ministry of the Army. During the war Japan held 79,454 Russian prisoners, of whom the vast majority where kept in prison camps in the Japanese archipelago. Military authorities followed rules strictly, and both Russian POWs and foreign reporters testified during and after the war to the considerate and humane manner in which the Japanese treated their captured enemy.

Foreign correspondents were impressed by this attitude and noted it did not change even when a squadron of three Russian warships of the Vladivostok Independent Cruiser Squadron was causing havoc to Japanese shipping in the vicinity of its archipelago. In one of their attacks the Russian warships sank the transport Hitachi Maru carrying troops to the battlefield. A funeral for the 631 soldiers who perished was held in Tokyo, attended by an immense crowd. Almost on the same day 601 prisoners captured from one of the attacking cruisers sunk in battle arrived in Japan without any harm or public resentment. The Japanese exploited well their good treatment of the enemy prisoners and were more than willing to open some of their twenty-nine prison camps for inspection by foreign representatives, notably the camp in the remote town of Matsuyama where 4,043 prisoners were kept (as of 30 April 1904). Foreign visitors to the camp attributed the fine spirit of the prisoners to humane Japanese treatment and described the Russian prisoners as cheerful and happy. Testimonies of Russian prisoners indicate that the conditions in Matsuyama were not just a show for visitors. The prisoners had expected cruelty, but ‘were astonished to find themselves surrounded by what they were pleased to call paradise’. Many of them attested that ‘they had never fared better in their lives’, though not necessarily their spirit was high (Pl. 17).

The images of the heroic and manly behaviour of the Japanese soldiers were reinforced by reports from the front; victories were soon attributed to the long legacy of military sacrifice. Following the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese army began to modernize and the samurai tradition was abandoned. Towards the end of the century, however, Japan began to look for its spiritual origins under the slogan of wakon yōsai (Japanese spirit, Western technique). The Japanese military also sought out its own traditional concepts of bravery. Officers were armed with factory-made
and somewhat symbolic swords, and the rank and file, mostly of peasant origin, were lectured on samurai traditions and values. In the 1880s, the military began to use bushidō (lit., ‘the way of the warrior’) as an embodiment of patriotism and devotion to the emperor. The term received some recognition in the West following the publication of Nitobe Inazō’s book Bushido: The Soul of Japan in 1899. Nitobe saw it as a means of halting the materialistic trend engulfing Japan. But five years later, when the war broke out, the term was suddenly perceived as a key to understanding Japanese success in the battlefield. The book became a bestseller in the West, and was read by many influential figures, including the American president, Theodore Roosevelt.75

More than for external consumption, in the last three decades of the Meiji era military circles in Japan sought to reshape traditional standards of combat heroism for internal reasons. Despite its militant tradition, mobilizing the masses for war was a new aspect of modernization that Japan had to emulate from the West. Soon after the restoration, many objected to the conscription of men not belonging to the samurai class. While government leaders decided on general conscription, in 1873 the question of how to turn the peasants into soldiers remained open. For the immediate necessity of creating a modern army and navy, the oligarchs relied on the guidance of foreign military experts, but for long-term spiritual transformation it counted on native resources. Using the education system as a primary vehicle for indoctrination, the government educated the younger generation in nationalism and patriotic behaviour through the promotion of idealized images of agile soldiers willing to sacrifice their lives for the emperor and the nation.76

During the war, the government exploited the myth of ‘the patriotic soldier’, as historian Naoko Shimazu has described, emphasizing ‘an honourable war death’. Curiously, few people in Japan opposed this and similar myths publicly, despite the heavy casualties and the feeling that they distorted reality.77 Indeed, over-eagerness was not the wish of the government.78 More than anything, the public supported the war stoically and with much conformism. For the first time in the modern era, ordinary Japanese felt that the war was fully their war, rather than the possession of the government or the samurai class; in this sense, the process of spiritual indoctrination was almost complete.

During the war indoctrination of the ideals of bravery and sacrifice were intensified. Military authorities urgently required role models for soldiers to worship and thereby sharpen earlier messages of heroism. In 1904, they devised the title gunshin (lit.: war god), which was to be granted to extremely heroic figures who perished in combat. The title was mentioned for the first time in a newspaper article on 30 March 1904, following an announcement by the Imperial General Headquarters. It referred to Lieutenant Commander Hirose Takeo of the Imperial Japanese Navy, who had sacrificed his life in an attempt to rescue a subordinate during the second attempt at the naval blockade of Port Arthur four days earlier. The choice of Hirose was far from fortuitous. He was selected for this act of
sacrifice, rather than for an act of killing the enemy, but also for his physical and spiritual state, as well as for his pre-war cosmopolitan experience.79

All in all, Hirose provided tangible and sophisticated content for the role model wartime Japan needed. Accordingly, his 'public funeral' (kōsō) thirteen days later turned into one of the major events Tokyo witnessed during the war (Pl. 18). A procession passed through the centre of Tokyo and was attended by leading navy and army officers, members of the imperial family, thousands of schoolchildren, and no less important, by hundreds of foreign dignitaries and correspondents headed by the British Minister Sir Claude Macdonald. The title gunshin was made to stand in the top of a hierarchy of exemplary heroic figures, and was awarded only once more during the war. This time it went to a member of the Imperial Japanese Army, Major Tachibana Shuta, who died in the battle of Liaoyang. These two extreme models of heroism, one from each branch of the Japanese military, remained symbols of self-sacrifice until Japan's defeat in 1945.

The funeral of Hirose and his consequent hagiography is only one of countless examples of image management, consciously undertaken by the Japanese authorities during the war. Local newspapers, and of course foreign correspondents and observers, were fed incessantly with sensational stories of heroism, humaneness and human determination. By contrast, reports of insubordination and cowardice were suppressed, usually by the authorities, but occasionally also by the same correspondents, who wished to maintain the coherence of the stereotypes they had created earlier.80 The emphasis on bravery and humaneness also spread to the thriving industry of war pictures (sensō-ga), as several scholars have previously pointed out.81 While motivated by profit, the millions of nishiki-e prints sold during the war depicted faithfully the government line and served as an important tool for propaganda, both at home and abroad. Although presented as live reports from the front, most of the prints were made by artists who never left their studios. Invariably, they all concentrated on depicting scenes of Japanese heroism and sacrifice. Their message was not unique, as any war propaganda shows, but in comparison with prints a decade earlier during the war with China, they portrayed the Russians as a strong and worthy enemy.

Another medium for promulgating the messages of bravery and humaneness was the cinema. It was a novel medium and highly effective. For the first time, Japanese spectators were able to watch local films depicting the heroic behaviour of their troops at the front. Similar to later war films, Japanese directors did not emphasize extreme heroism, but 'ordinary' behaviour intertwined with ultimate sacrifice. One of those seminal films portrayed the war chronicle of Second Lieutenant Wakamiya until his death in the battle of Liaoyang, a film shown commercially throughout the country.82 American films followed suit with a visible inclination to the Japanese angle. The most notable example is Biograph's The Hero of Liao-Yang (1904), which depicted the story of a young Japanese officer before and during the war. The film's climax is
the mission the protagonist is given to carry a crucial message to the commander of the Second Army. Wounded and captured by the Cossacks, he nonetheless manages to devour the paper upon which the dispatch is written. Ultimately, he escapes, and in the midst of terrific cannonading and shells bursting about in every direction, he hands his despatch to the officer commanding.83

CODA: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL OPINION

Image management by the Japanese authorities during the war with Russia was highly successful. Within a period of nineteen months Japan turned, in the eyes of the powers, its neighbours and in its own eyes in particular, from a peripheral and exotic country to a modern nation fighting for a just cause. This favourable image facilitated military, diplomatic and financial support. Post-1905, Japan was regarded as a strong nation, certainly the strongest land power in East Asia, and one of the five strongest naval powers in the world. Domestically this image, as much as the victory itself, caused many Japanese intellectuals to believe that the Meiji dream had been realized. In the next several years Japan definitely benefited from this image; in a series of bilateral agreements it gained significant economic and territorial advantages on the Asian continent.84 Arguing against any attempt to assist Korean independence, American minister Horace Allen, for example, wrote to Washington soon after the war:

I am no pro-Japanese enthusiast, as you know, but neither am I opposed to any civilized race taking over the management of these kindly Asiatics for the good of the people and the suppression of oppressive officials, the establishment of order and the development of commerce.85

The fruits of victory did not last long; military images soon generated new fears of an expansionist Japan. Over the next four decades heroism and sacrifice were championed while the more humane aspects of Japan's military tradition were neglected. During the war with Russia, however, Japan won not only its 'fifteen minutes of glory', (paraphrasing Andy Warhol's notion of a sudden but temporary state of celebrity),86 but also a singular opportunity to enhance its standing among the nations of the world. Japan was probably entitled to it, but international circumstances, as well as a well-honed propaganda machine, were instrumental in creating new positive images of Japan.

NOTES


4 Theoretically, the aggregate of individual attitudes or beliefs held by the global adult population, ‘world opinion’ (or ‘world public opinion’) is certainly a rather abstract and fluid concept. It probably applies more aptly to a limited number of influential media sources and politicians in a selected number of countries and occasionally it materializes to political and other sorts of pressures and influence.


14 Frederick Arthur McKenzie, *From Tokyo to Tiflis* (Hurst-Blackett, 1905), p. 146.


Ibid., p. 68.


McKenzie, *From Tokyo to Tiflis*, p. 223.


Lloyd C. Griscom, *Diplomatically Speaking* (Little, Brown, 1940), p. 249.

Ashmead-Bartlett attributed the ‘superior physique’ of the Japanese to the most frugal manner and simplicity of their life, which ‘has made them a hardy people, able to meet the greatest trials and privations with indifference’. Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, *Port Arthur: The Siege and Capitulation* (William Blackwood & Sons, 1906), p. 485.


Ibid.


Wright, *With Togo*, p. 57.


McKenzie, *From Tokyo to Tiflis*, 2.


See, for example, Jack London, 'Japanese Officers Consider Everything a Military Secret', San Francisco Examiner (26 June 1904), p. 41.


The British officers were the largest delegation with ten members; Germany with five; France the United States with four; Spain, Austria-Hungary, and Switzerland with two; Italy, Turkey, Sweden, Chile, and Argentina with one each. In John Thomas Greenwood, 'The American Observers of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905)', Ph.D. Dissertation (Kansas State University, 1971), p. 247.

See Griscom, *Diplomatically Speaking*, p. 196.


Griscom, *Diplomatically Speaking*, p. 249.


On the masculanization of the Japanese society during Meiji era, see Jason G. Karlin, 'The Gender of Nationalism: Competing Masculinities in Meiji Japan', pp. 41–77.

Hata I., *From Consideration to Contempt*. 

Lensen, The d'Anethan Dispatches.


Seaman, From Tokio: pp. 62–3, 60.


For an illuminating study on the militarization of school songs since the early 1890s, see Ury Epstein, 'School Songs, the War and Nationalist Indoctrination in Japan', in Kowner (ed.), Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, vol. I (Global Oriental, 2007), pp. 185–201.


For cases of low morale and insubordination in the Japanese forces during the war, see Ō Shinobu (ed.) Nichi-Ro sensō no gunjishiteki kenkyū (Chuō Kōronsha, 1988), pp. 168–170.

See Lone, *Remapping Japanese Militarism*.

Cited in Gregory A. Waller, ‘Narrating the New Japan: Biograph’s *the Hero of Liao-yang* (1904),’ *Screen* 47, 2006, p. 52.


In 1968, Andy Warhol stated that ‘In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes.’ The statement resulted in the coining of the expression ‘fifteen minutes of fame’, that is, a fleeting condition of celebrity that attaches to an object of media attention. See Andy Warhol’s Exposure Catalogue of his photographs exhibited in Stockholm, Sweden, 1968. See also *American Heritage Dictionary of American Quotations*, Selected and annotated by Margaret Miner and Hugh Rawson (Penguin Reference, 1999), p. 479.