

The War Correspondents of the Russo-Japanese War: A Literature Review

The Russo-Japanese War is mostly forgotten to the world as it lies in the shadow of World War I which has dominated history. It was one of the first modern wars and it was observed by many countries through their war correspondents. The scholarship surrounding this war is very limited from western scholars and so its level of importance in history has been relegated. This paper will examine the views of the historians who study the war and how the field is viewed and written about as well as my viewpoint on the field of study. The scholarship produced on the Russo-Japanese War has mainly been produced by either Russia or Japan with the inclusion of western scholars who study those countries. The historiography of the Russo-Japanese War is focused less on how the war was fought, but rather the literature is focused on how the war affected world politics in the early 20th Century and its importance within the scopes history.

Animosity brewed between Russia and Japan prior to the war because of disagreements regarding Korea. Russia wanted control over Korea for a warm water port and Japan was seeking colonial territories to expand into because it was a newly modern nation. This disagreement led to discussions that fizzled out and later to a surprise attack on Port Arthur by the Japanese which started the war. Much of the war was fought with the two navies of Russia and Japan with new technology and new strategies introduced with modern warfare. The Russo-Japanese War ended with territory gained by Japan and this left both countries with a taste of modern warfare which would be present in Europe a decade later. The war left Russia with a loss

against a young nation making the monarchy look weak and Japan with an angry population because of losses sustained on a war that gained so little. This war provides a good study on eastern politics that is lost to the world politics of World War I.¹

The field of works written on the Russo-Japanese War is small within the western published historiography on the subject. In Russia and Japan works are much more numerous produced regarding the war.² Most of these works focus on how important the field is in a study of early 20th century politics as well as military history. The need for importance in world history is expressed because of the proximity of the Russo-Japanese War to World War I which dominates early 20th century historiography. Works such as Frank Jacob's *The Russo-Japanese War and Its Shaping of The Twentieth Century* focus on how important the war was in how the 20th century played out. John Steinberg wrote an article for *The Russian Review* titled "Was the Russo-Japanese War World War Zero?" which argues that the Russo-Japanese War was a testing of the tactics and the weapons that would be used in the Great War.³ Yet with much of these works calling for an extended look into the Russo-Japanese War the scholarship remains thin in western historiographies. The works have had no real shifts in the past decades as the magnitude of relevance is the main argument of these scholars. As these works are mainly focused on the importance of the war there is a decline in the amount of works focused purely on military history within the field. The

¹ Denis Warner, and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise: A History of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905*, (London: Cass), 2004, 535-538.

² Frank Jacob, *The Russo-Japanese War and Its shaping of The Twentieth Century*, (New York, NY: Routledge), 2018, 2-3.

³ John Steinberg, "Was the Russo-Japanese War World War Zero?" (*The Russian Review* 67, no. 1 (2008)): 1-7. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20620667>, 1-7

field is quite small and seems to not have any leading works and is only pushed on by new primary sources that are found.

The scholarship was in decline until the centennial of the Russo-Japanese War which brought in more renewed interest in the war but the subject still does not have a distinct direction with the scholarship that is produced regarding the Russo-Japanese War. This lessened scholarship is according to John Westwood because of the position that the Russo-Japanese War is placed in history as scholars see the war merely as a precursor to the greater conflict that is World War I.⁴ The argument is that because of where the Russo-Japanese War is placed within history it is studied as a precursor and so scholars may mention the war but it is not usually found to be the lone subject of many works looking at the early 20th century. It is because of this lack of apparent importance in history that the Russo-Japanese War makes that the scholarship regarding the late 19th and early 20th centuries has been dominated by other conflicts and events. The driving force within this field is the finding of new primary sources to draw new arguments and conclusions from. This is said by both Westwood and David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye who both cite their reason for adding to the historiography of the Russo-Japanese War to the addition of new sources and archives.

⁵ This lack of broader focuses causes the scholarship to be narrow within the field which limits the field to being solely focused which diminishes its importance.

⁴ John Westwood, *Russia against Japan, 1904-05 : A New Look at the Russo- Japanese War*, (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1986, 1.

⁵ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Rewriting the Russo-Japanese War: A Centenary Retrospective." (*The Russian Review* 67, no. 1 (2008)): 78-87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20620672>, 86-87.

The new sources and archives found throughout the years drive the field forward but this limits the field as the scholars focus is only on the new sources and how the Russo-Japanese War fits into the world politics of the time rather than how the war was fought. The field is limited due to being in the shadow of World War I which makes the field only focus on its relevance rather than creating works that highlight how the war was fought with the modern weapons and tactics. This is a huge weakness of the field and it makes many of the works seem redundant as they argue that the Russo-Japanese War is relevant but never focus their works on how the types of history found in the war. This creates a weak field which makes the scholars focus on the importance of the war almost exclusively which creates a self fulfilling prophecy which leads the field into further disarray.

The scholarship surrounding this field is very small compared to the surrounding events and this diminishes the impact of the Russo-Japanese War in history. The historiography surrounding the Russo-Japanese War is weakened because of the necessity of the need for validation within history through focusing on the impact of the Russo-Japanese War. This validation has not been received and so there was a decline in scholarship as the interest in the Russo-Japanese War declined. The field should focus on expanding and focusing on the war with a mention on importance as a way to become more robust and more important as a field.

Bibliography

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