

War Correspondents: A Western Look into the Russo-Japanese War

The Russo-Japanese War took place from 1904-1905 and was the first modern war of its century. The war was fought over influence in Manchuria and Korea. Both Russia and Japan were backed by foreign powers and showcased new technological advancements in weaponry. The war left Japan as a power in the East and shocked the world since Russia, a great European empire, was defeated. War correspondents from over the world came to relay the events of the Russo-Japanese War, which gives a unique insight into how the Western world viewed their ally Japan as well as their rival Russia. By using newspapers from 1904-1905 I will track how the attitudes of the United States reporters changed throughout the war, as well as a Japanese newspaper to track how the United States viewed their allies. I will be examining how the American war correspondents wrote about the Russo-Japanese War throughout the it using major events to track the changes. By examining the changes in diction and how the correspondents report throughout the year I will show how Japan was first viewed as lesser power but after the war they were viewed as a power in the East.

This war is notable because it was a modern encounter between two prominent Asian powers, one of which, Japan, a little more than 50 years before was closed off to the world in terms of trade and diplomacy. The advancement of Japan and their own expansion against Russia, a powerful European empire, was hugely significant in building Japanese confidence to start colonizing some of Asia. Western foreign powers sent war correspondents and military observers to the countries that they backed in the war to witness how the war would play out as

well as provide support and gain more modern military experience. Japan's defeat of Russia changed the diplomatic sphere of the east and helped bring Japan onto a more equal stage with the rest of the world powers. This war shaped the viewpoint of the western countries on Japan and Russia going into World War I which helped shape the Treaty of Versailles and the 20th century view of Japan and Russia. This war also changed how countries would wage war as there were great casualties from the war and the populations of Japan and Russia were unhappy with the amount of losses sustained compared to the results of the war. Yet this was the new cost of a modern war and left the Japanese with an almost pyrrhic victory. This conflict however is shadowed by World War I, which impacted the world and left much deeper scars on the populations in Europe.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 stressed 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*

¹ Frank Jacob, *The Russo-Japanese War and its Shaping of the Twentieth Century*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 1-2. Denis Warner, and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise: A History of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905*, (London: Cass), 2004, ix-xi.

² In 2004 alone there were many works that focused on different aspects of the war from both Russia and Japan. Kaigun Gunreibu. Meiji sanjūshichi-hachinen Kaisen shi. (Tōkyō: Fuyō Shobō Shuppan), 2004. Handō, Kazutoshi, and Kazushige Todaka. Nihonkai Kaisen kaku kateri. (Tōkyō: PHP Kenkyūjo), 2004. Mun-hyōng Ch'oe, and Ch'ang-hūi Pak. Nichi-Ro Sensō no sekaishi. (Tōkyō: Fujiwara Shoten), 2004. Yasuo Nagayama. Nichi-Ro Sensō: mō hitotsu no "monogatari". (Tōkyō: Shinchōsha), 2004. Toshiaki Koga. Kyōkasho kara mita Nichi-Ro Sensō: kore de ii no ka, Nihon no kyōkasho. (Tōkyō: Tendensha), 2004. V. K. Shatsillo, and Larisa Shat's'illo. Russko-i'ā'ponskai'ā' voīna: 1904-1905. (Moskva: Molodai'ā' gvardii'ā'), 2004. B. W. Norregaard. Velikai'ā' osada: Port-Artur i ego padenie. (Sankt-Peterburg: M.A. Leonov), 2004. O. R. Aīrapetov. Russko-i'ā'ponskai'ā' voīna: 1904-1905 : vzgli'ā'd cherez stoletie : mezhdunarodnyī istoricheskii sbornik. (Moskva: Tri Kvadrata), 2004. A. V. Shishov. Neizvestnye stranit's'y Russko-i'ā'ponskoī voīny: 1904-1905. (Moskva: Veche), 2004.

War and Its Shaping of The Twentieth Century focus on how important the war was in the 20th century.

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 in the field have had no real shifts in the past decades as the degree 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.⁴ The field is quite small and seems to not have any leading works and is only pushed on by new primary sources that are found, Frank Jacob cites newspaper articles in his introduction as a reason for his book.

The scholarship was in decline until the centennial of the Russo-Japanese War which brought 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 decrease in scholarship according to John Westwood is because of the position that the Russo-Japanese War is placed in history. Scholars see the war merely as a precursor to the greater conflict that is World War I.⁵ 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

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.

⁴ Frank Jacob, *The Russo-Japanese War and Its Shaping of The Twentieth Century*,(New York, NY: Routledge), 2018, 2-3.

⁵ John Westwood, *Russia against Japan, 1904-05 : A New Look at the Russo- Japanese War* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1986, 1.

found to be the lone subject of many works looking at the early 20th century. The field is very repetitive and this is the problem with the field as the field cannot be progress and is trapped within a loop. This takes from the effectiveness of the literature and their arguments. The driving force within this field is the finding of new primary sources to draw new arguments and conclusions from. Both Westwood and David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye cite their reason for adding to the historiography of the Russo-Japanese War to the addition of new sources and archives.⁶ 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.

At the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War the Japanese attacked Port Arthur after negotiations had failed. The Japanese sent their fleet to the Russian held Port Arthur on February 9 1904 and attacked the resting Russian Pacific Fleet. The news did not reach the newspapers in the United States until February 10.⁷ The Russians had believed that the Japanese would attack as the Japanese ambassador to Russia left on February 5, so this attack was a surprise, but the surprise had a lessened effect on the Russian troops.⁸ The information from the attack was sent to the *Washington Post* by a correspondent from London. It gave no real biases as the information conveyed was very literal and did not contain much opinion. The article was mainly a report of the activities of the two navies that surrounded Port Arthur.⁹ *The New York Times* account presented no opinion either, it focused on a hourly account of the battle of the Japanese attack on

⁶ 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.

⁷ "Crushing Blow to Russia." *The Washington Post* (1877-1922), Feb 10, 1904.

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/144485864?accountid=12299>, 1.

⁸ Westwood, 23.

⁹ "Crushing Blow to Russia", 1.

Port Arthur and focused specifically on the British steamship *Columbia*.¹⁰ The *Chicago Tribune* article is sent by cable and describes a high Japanese officer who went to Port Arthur on the 7th of February to check on Russian positions a couple days before the surprise attack on the port.¹¹ It is a relay from information gained from Japanese officials and does not contain any racial biases on the ability of the Japanese military.¹² The Japanese newspaper, the *Kobe Chronicle*, depicted the navy of Japan as having great successes against the Russian port and navy.¹³ The *Kobe Chronicle* reports on the military strength and how its own people are fighting without mention of the Russian people and soldiers.¹⁴ There are no racial biases or dehumanization in the writing of the correspondents reports. This comes bilittlement of the enemy comes later in the century during World War II in the Pacific arena.

Leading up to the Battle of the Yalu River, the Japanese invaded Korea and moved very slowly pushing the Russian troops who came to help Port Arthur out of the peninsula. The pace of the Japanese annoyed the military advisors stationed with the Japanese and was helping the Russian tactic of holding or containing the Japanese troops until extra army support arrived from the trans-Siberian railway in Manchuria.¹⁵ The two armies fought over the Yalu River which is in between the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria in a large scale land battle. The fighting led to a

¹⁰ "Japanese Struck by Night." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Feb 10, 1904.

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/96477737?accountid=12299>.

¹¹ The officer was sent with a delegation to Port Arthur without military bearing and was treated as a diplomat and saluted peace while he committed to memory very accurately the placement of the ships in Port Arthur and the defences. He returned directly to Admiral Togo's ship as the delegation left and reported on the status of Port Arthur.

¹² "Daring Deed by Jap." *Chicago Tribune (1872-1922)*, Feb 11, 1904.

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/173195696?accountid=12299>.

¹³ The *Kobe Chronicle* is a translated compilation of a Japanese newspaper from during the war.

¹⁴ A Diary of the Russo-Japanese War, *Kobe Chronicle*, The Kobe Chronicle Office, Kobe, Japan, 1904-1905, 8.

¹⁵ The Manchuria region is above Korea and it was where the Russian troops were stationed before the war broke around Port Arthur. This region has been highly contested throughout history and holding it was very important as it led straight to Korea as well as guarded the Russian Empire eastern territory.

Japanese victory which helped secure Japan as being a force to be reckoned with and led to lines of credit opening with Japan, so the war could continue and was a great psychological victory over the Russians.¹⁶

The *New York Times* reported from St. Petersburg where the news was discrediting the Japanese advances and told a narrative of Japanese inexperience as they were not able to compete with the Russian artillery on the 26th of April.¹⁷ *The Washington Post* had observers in both London and St. Petersburg and confirmed the Russians were trying to discredit the Japanese in their victory yet the Japanese made the battle out to be a great victory with Russian reports of only skirmishes and not the battle.¹⁸ The *Chicago Tribune* hailed the Japanese effort as a complete victory and reports of the Russians falling back into Manchuria and trying to oppose the Japanese advancement in the early stages of the offensive.¹⁹ All of these point to a Japanese victory and a Russian media trying to make the victory less substantial as the Russian forces are being pushed back by a new island nation. As the war went on with the Japanese victories piling up there was a change in the reporting. The articles that were submitted by the war correspondents shifted from factual reports to more of a supporting language across the articles. This is slight and it is when the articles show regular military competence as something of a great victory such as the bombardment of Russian positions. The Japanese army was very

¹⁶ Denis Warner, and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise: A History of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905*, (London: Cass), 2004, 247, 268-269.

¹⁷ 100,000 Japanese Crossing the Yalu." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, May 01, 1904.
<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/96407961?accountid=12299>, 1.

¹⁸ "First Land Battle." *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, May 01, 1904.
<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/144481619?accountid=12299>, 1.

¹⁹ "16,000 Japs Defeat 30,000 Russians." *Chicago Tribune (1872-1922)*, May 01, 1904.
<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/173105631?accountid=12299>, 1.

talented and as the Japanese army was outnumbered they were still able to push back to Russian force.²⁰ This led to a deepened respect of the Japanese as a professional fighting force.

The fighting went on and in mid February of 1905, the Japanese army was running out of energy and with the pressure of the Russian Baltic Fleet coming to Japan, the Japanese general Oyama Iwao was compelled to make sure the Russian army was defeated and did not retreat further into Manchuria.²¹ This led to one of the largest land battles of the time: the Battle of Mukden.²² The Russians were fortified in Mukden and the Russian commander Aleksey Kuropatkin was well worn from the campaign because there was much interference from St. Petersburg and with repeated defeats the morale of the army was very low. The Japanese defeated the Russians and routed them. This was the last great battle on land between Russia and Japan.²³

After the battle, both the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* had confirmations that the Russians had indeed started to retreat and that the battle was a large back and forth that led to a Japanese victory with heavy losses. They say nothing that would presume demonizing of the Russians and instead allude to an armistice.²⁴ The *Chicago Tribune* confirmed the retreat as well as the considerable victory that the Japanese were able to achieve because they have surrounded the Russian forces numbering around 200,000 men. The article praises the Japanese effort as the Japanese armies cutting the railways and taking many towns in Manchuria that had

²⁰ "16,000 Japs Defeat 30,000 Russians.", 1-2.

²¹ Denis Warner, and Peggy Warner, 466-468.

²² This battle had the largest amount of casualties and was a true taste of what was to come in modern warfare with massive armies. Kuropatkin lost a third of his army and Oyama lost a quarter of his forces in the course of the battle.

²³ Denis Warner, and Peggy Warner, 480.

²⁴ "Bloodiest Battle of War." *The Washington Post* (1877-1922), Mar 10, 1905.

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/144551948?accountid=12299>, 1.

"'North Front' Attacked." *New York Times* (1857-1922), Mar 10, 1905.

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/96543440?accountid=12299>, 1.

been fought over.²⁵ In the *Kobe Chronicle*, the Japanese praise their troops and report a smashing success that were hard fought over, yet there are not many troop numbers for either side. This could mean that the information about casualties is being kept by the government as they are afraid of public outcry because of the large losses from the campaign.²⁶ There is no resentment against the Russians in this Japanese newspaper which seems unlikely, but if the numbers were withheld or modified there wouldn't be a large outcry against the Russian army and people. This battle secured the war on land for Japan, but there was still the rest of the Russian fleet that still needed to be defeated.

The Russian Second Pacific Squadron led by Rozhdestvensky headed to Vladivostok as Port Arthur fell to the Japanese while the fleet was resting in Madagascar.²⁷ Under the decision of Rozhdestvensky, they sailed to the Straits of Tsushima which was the most direct route.²⁸ The Japanese Admiral Togo decided to fortify the Straits of Tsushima and left the rest of Japan open to attack trying to force an encounter with the Russian Admiral.²⁹ After the battle, the Japanese government shut out reporters to conceal the information of the battle. St. Petersburg believed their fleet had won even with the lack of information reported by *The Washington Post* sources in St. Petersburg, but mostly the reports were unconfirmed about any of the countries victories. In *The Washington Post*, there was a lot of speculation and hesitation to call the battle in favour

²⁵ "Ring of Guns Around Army." *Chicago Tribune (1872-1922)*, Mar 10, 1905.

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/173247946?accountid=12299>, 1.

²⁶ A Diary of the Russo-Japanese War, *Kobe Chronicle*, The Kobe Chronicle Office, Kobe, Japan, 1904-1905, 170-174.

²⁷ The fleet had to go all the way around Africa because the Russian fleet mistook British fishing boats for Japanese naval ships. This almost started war between Britain and Russia. So Russia was not able to use the Suez Canal to get to the fighting in the East quicker. This was known as the Dogger Bank incident.

²⁸ This route however took the Russian fleet in between Korea and Japan, both under Japanese naval control.

²⁹ Denis Warner, and Peggy Warner, 444-496.

of Russia because Japan had proven themselves in the past land campaign as a capable military.³⁰ The *New York Times* also was not able to get information from Japanese officials as a way to tell the outcome. Yet the war correspondent alludes to a historic battle, but cannot give a definite winner.³¹ The assumption would be that the Japanese won the engagement. The Japanese refused all communication to the foreign newspapers following the battle. There is only speculation and theories of naval experts shown in the *Chicago Tribune* with a reinforcement of a lack of Japanese press on the outcome or any details regarding the war.³² There is no certainty in the following days after the battle from any of the newspapers. A couple days after the battle, the newspapers were allowed to know of the complete Japanese victory as it was a stunning victory and the war correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* wrote the victory as if it was expected. This shows the changing of the war correspondents viewpoint on Japan as it emerges from this war as a powerful contender on the world stage.³³

The Japanese showed the world that they would be a force in the East because their new army repelled one of the oldest empires of Europe out of Korea and through Manchuria. This changed the viewpoint of the United States because the reports that they received showcased Japanese victory and this helped shape the viewpoint of the Japanese as a strong ally in the East going into World War I. The Japanese power throughout the war only showed how inadequate the Russian military was as a fighting force, which was a reflection of the power of the Czar. The

³⁰ "Fleets May Have Met in Battle." *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*, May 28, 1905.
<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/144598887?accountid=12299>, 1-2.

³¹ "Czar's Ships Near; Tokio Refuse News." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, May 28, 1905.
<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/96536038?accountid=12299>, 1.

³² John Callan, "Await News of Big Fight." *Chicago Tribune (1872-1922)*, May 28, 1905.
<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/173252201?accountid=12299>, 1.

³³ John Callan, "Jap Victory is Complete." *Chicago Tribune (1872-1922)*, May 30, 1905.
<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.umw.edu/docview/173207830?accountid=12299>, 1.

field should move from the beaten horse of the importance of the war to a study in journalism by comparing press releases from the governments of Russian and Japan to more global newspapers who sent war correspondents. The Russo-Japanese War was a showcase of the horror that was to come, but it helped shape the Japanese view on the world stage as well as set up the Russian Revolution as the Russian populace was angered after the war.

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