

Railways and the Russo-Japanese War

Transporting war

**Felix Patrikeeff and
Harold Shukman**

Railways and the Russo-Japanese War

The book explores the nexus between railways and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) – the first modern war and one in which the railways played a key part.

This volume examines some of the key dimensions of the Russo-Japanese war, and most notably how uncomfortably technological and human dimensions of Russia's war effort interleaved in the course of the conflict. The authors demonstrate how advantages that might have been built upon were squandered, blunt traditional forms and habits were applied in politically tortuous contexts, and technological edge was negated by the internal turmoil of a country unable to tame a process of modernisation.

Demonstrating the vital role railways played in the Russo-Japanese War, generally considered to be the first modern, technological conflict, and a precursor to the First World War, this book will appeal to students of the Russo-Japanese War, Russian history, military history and international history in general.

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Introduction

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905 brought political and social consequences that are well known and need not be covered in any great detail here. It confirmed the emergence of an Asian nation (Japan) as a world power, through the latter's defeat of arguably one of the most powerful (and certainly the largest of) European armies. This led to the profound destabilisation of the internal political system of imperial Russia, fuelling popular discontent that would soon erupt in revolution. It was also one of the most carefully observed and widely reported conflicts, laying bare the technology and strategies employed by both sides. And for good reason. The Russo-Japanese War was remarkable in the sense that here was a conflict which foreshadowed many of the characteristics of wars in the remainder of the twentieth century, bringing as it did the steeliness of technological innovation to aspect after aspect of combat and military strategy.

In the course of the war, we see the first deployment of contact mines, the introduction of fire-control and range-finding systems and the devastating firepower of dug-in, quick-firing field artillery, rifle fire and, above all, machine-gun bursts, used against waves of infantry formations. In addition to these, barbed wire, searchlights, telephone communications and trench warfare were also added to the rudiments of war, with the infantryman's spade now as useful to him as his rifle. If war, as Michael Howard suggests in an essay, 'starts in the minds of men', then the Russo-Japanese War provided their imagination with much stimulating matter as to its pursuit.¹ Casualties were very high, especially when the Japanese captured Port Arthur after an eight-month siege, while the Battle of Mukden would enter the annals of Russian folklore as a monumental national tragedy. The war was a signal lesson in the importance of morale.

General Alexei N. Kuropatkin, the Russian commander-in-chief in Manchuria, would later attempt to exonerate himself for Russia's defeats by blaming the lack of moral strength and commitment shown by the Russian soldiers, which compared so lamentably with the qualities of the Japanese. The contrast highlighted another powerful new tool of modern warfare: ideology. Russia's fighting men not only were uneducated and

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inadequately trained, but lacked patriotic motivation. Japanese soldiers, in sharp contrast, combined advanced military training with a culture of self-sacrifice, in effect the application of Zen Buddhism to warfare. The early application of this daunting combination of high religious philosophy and military strategy was to be found in the Russo-Japanese War. The relentless onslaught of single-minded Japanese infantry, unheeding of loss of life, was no less responsible than the social malaise at home for the demoralisation and defeat of Russian troops at Port Arthur and Mukden. European armies were to come to use similar, if somewhat less philosophically conditioned, techniques in the First World War and beyond.

The 1904–1905 war combined land and naval action in a form which was both intense and, to a degree, muddled, in the sense that both aspects brought with them untried forms of advanced technology. The many observers of the war noted the application of new weaponry and tactics, as they intertwined in a relatively compressed physical environment. Reports were sent home, based on the lessons drawn from the conflict. However, the novelty, and indeed the ferocity, of the war helped to disguise the profound shift that had occurred in the realm of geopolitics. Both Russia and Japan had fought the war beyond their own borders, with the belligerents fighting at the end of long and difficult supply lines.

Russia had reached this point through an intensive and extremely rapid period of railway construction, culminating in the building of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) in only six years (1897–1903). The CER had encouraged Russian settlements to grow along it, as well as one major centre, Harbin. This railway had come into existence as an extension of another major venture: the Trans-Siberian Railway. In combination, the railway system had allowed a potentially smooth and rapid opening up of a Russian hinterland, as well as creating out of Manchuria a territory throughout which Russian commerce was expected to spread and flourish. In practice, however, Russian economic and commercial coverage would remain thin and highly vulnerable. But perceptions are important factors in international relations, and the impression that Russia had designs not only on Manchuria but on China as a whole persisted, especially in the mind of the Japanese, who regarded Russia's railway-building projects in Manchuria as a threat in the extreme. The Russo-Japanese War allowed Japan to block this perceived threat, when the 'sharp' end of Russian imperialism in Manchuria – the South Manchurian Railway – was handed over to Japan in the peace treaty signed in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

A secret 1907 agreement between Russia and Japan, dividing Manchuria between them, not only halted the perceived Russian threat but also, thanks to Japan's control of Korea, made Japan a continental power in its own right. This created a profound sense of unease in Russia, which realised that Japan's freedom of manoeuvre throughout Manchuria could pose a threat to the hinterland of Vladivostok, which had hitherto remained beyond contention. In the absence of a Russian fleet, northern

Manchuria's role as the strategic key to the Russian Far East now seemed vulnerable.

Even with some of the issues resolved for the two countries, Manchuria remained an area of contention between Russia and Japan, and the advantage that Russia had gained from its railway-building projects in effect turned into a liability in geopolitical terms. The reason why this should have been the case is worth exploring.

In many respects, the railway-building involved with both the Trans-Siberian and the Chinese Eastern Railways was the acme of planning, execution and technology. The war itself came at a time when the construction of the railway was in its closing stages. Maximising the usefulness and efficiency of the CER in Russia's broader war effort, the railway played a significant part in this period. However, there are also negative facets to take into account. St Petersburg's policies in this conflict were to become the cause of cleavage with the Russian settlements in northern Manchuria. Although it was intimately tied to the Russian government, the CER had a fair degree of autonomy in the general conduct of Russian affairs in northern Manchuria, and its interests did not always harmonise with those of the Russian government. It received huge subsidies from St Petersburg and became a major employer, chiefly of Russian labour, in the region. Yet it proved a disappointment to the Russian government, both as a magnet for private Russian investment and in its failure to create an image of military and economic significance in the eyes of the world.

The railway system was, in other words, both an advantage and a disadvantage. Before the Trans-Siberian Railway had come into existence, the only way one could reach the Far East from European Russia was to cross Siberia on horseback – a journey made over many months, on uneven roads, and often resulting in the exhaustion of the traveller. The year 1883 saw the introduction of a sea route along the Arctic Russian coast, reducing travel to a few weeks, but as the ice-free season lasted only a few months, this option met with a desultory response from travellers and settlers alike. The opening of the Trans-Siberian Railway reduced the journey to just one month, allowing for the first time mass travel to the eastern periphery. Colonisation levels increased, and so did the optimism in contemplating a transformation of eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East.

There was, of course, a negative side to these changes. The building of the railways extended Russia's geostrategic heartland into North-East Asia, signalling the appearance of a 'geographical pivot' (Mackinder) of history. Russia quickly began to shift its attention from sea power to land power, with people and machinery coming to be more cheaply and efficiently moved by railway than by sea, thereby reshaping Russia's own outlook, as well as, in a broader context, the strategic 'heartland' of North-East Asia.

Russia's territorial and political expansion had been viewed quite differently in other quarters, notably by Japan, whose fears regarding Russia's

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motives helped to precipitate the Russo-Japanese War, and which was instrumental in eliciting an enduring tension in relations between the two states. On China's part, its method of retaining presence and control in Manchuria had been first and foremost to populate it with *Han* Chinese – a strategy which had earlier achieved considerable success. Nonetheless, the political cohabitation in Manchuria remained an unhappy one, with guises of extraterritoriality and colonisation being in evidence, but at the same time no formal annexation of the area having taken place, leaving it in a state of limbo.

Russia's eastward expansion had brought with it a great railway which the equally expansive Japan had seen as a threat to its own territorial ambitions. The result was the Russo-Japanese War, which *would* not have been fought on the scale that it was, had the railway not been built, and indeed *could* not have been fought at all in the railway's absence. The strategic role of railways on a continental scale would henceforth be seen as crucially important for the transport of war.

Our book examines some of the key dimensions of the war, and most notably how uncomfortably technological and human dimensions of Russia's war effort interleaved in the course of the conflict. Advantages that might have been built upon were squandered, blunt traditional forms and habits were applied in politically tortuous contexts, and technological edge was negated by the internal turmoil of a country unable to tame a process of modernisation. Tensions and contradictions beset the Russian war effort, in the same way as they confounded the Russian metropolitan state itself. Rather than the technological successes and the impressive gains that the Russians had experienced earlier on in the expansion of their horizons in the East, it was, ironically, the defeat that came to be embodied in the Russian outlook.

1 Russian context and Manchurian setting

The public mood in Russia on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War was deeply unsettled. The steady build-up of tension between Russia and Japan was a matter of growing, and widening, public concern. While there was little sympathy for Japan, condemnation of what were seen as the tsar's provocative policies in the Far East was widespread. The roots of this malaise, however, went far deeper than the immediate issue of what was to happen in Manchuria.

The nineteenth century had, arguably, seen more social change in Western Europe and the United States of America than the whole of previous recorded history within the same space of time, and, despite its backwardness in many respects, Russia was in its own way affected profoundly. The accelerated expansion of modern industry and the creation of new forms of production brought about rapid urbanisation in even so preponderantly an agrarian society as Russia.¹ Quantum leaps in physics and other fields of scientific endeavour, new methods of civil engineering, the arrival of automobiles and early flight, and the flowering of new directions in the arts all contributed to a sense that the modern age had arrived. But the educated classes in Russia were acutely aware that their antiquated political system was holding the country back, and that profound reform was long overdue. Although monarchy was still prevalent throughout most of Europe – modified by varying degrees of constitutionalism – republicanism was an accepted principle among large sections of the politically conscious population.

In Russia, however, the monarch still ruled as an absolute sovereign, a divinely appointed autocrat who believed it was his destiny and his duty to preserve the Romanov dynasty, uphold the values and spiritual authority of the Orthodox Church, and strengthen the unity of the Russian people: Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Nationality were the three pillars of the state. The inevitable result of this system of personal responsibility was that all of society's ills eventually came to rest on his shoulders, all administrative inefficiencies and bureaucratic injustices were blamed on him, and all solutions depended on his willing them.

The most important solutions implemented by the autocracy were the Great Reforms of the 1860s, undertaken by Alexander II, grandfather of

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Nicholas II, who was the tsar at the time of the Russo-Japanese War. In 1861, in the wake of Russia's ignominy in the Crimean War, Alexander II finally set out to put Russia on the path of European modernisation by emancipating the serfs, who as freed labour were expected to enter the expanding industrial sector. By turns obedient and rebellious, the peasants held to the firm belief that the soil was given by God to those who tilled it, and they remained motivated by this belief regardless of the changes in their way of life wrought by the state. Their greatest sense of betrayal came when, after a prolonged and controversial process of consultation, the terms of emancipation were seen to be more favourable to the landed gentry than to the peasants.

Fearful that genuinely free peasants would leave the village and run out of control, the government ensured that the local authority remained in the hands of the gentry and government agencies by tying the peasants by law to their village communes, run by themselves and collectively responsible for repaying to the state the cost of the land granted to them on a forty-nine-year mortgage, for the collection of all taxes, and for handling the annual call-up of recruits for Russia's large standing army.² Under locally negotiated terms, peasants in areas of rich soil received small portions of land and had to compensate their former owners for the loss of their obligatory labour with day-labour. In regions of poor soil they were compelled to seek work in towns and compensate their former owners in cash.

The landowning gentry, authorised by the government to organise the terms of the emancipation on a local level, had ensured that they favoured their own interests. The new arrangements nevertheless benefited some peasants – those whose strips of land were the most fertile, or who were lucky enough to marry into a family whose strips were contiguous with their own, thus leading to augmentation and greater pooled resources – and a small class of well-to-do peasant farmers emerged. Another sector of the peasant population managed to get by, barely able to run their farms as successful businesses but somehow hanging on. However, the largest group by far were also the poorest, condemned by an array of disadvantages to find work as hired agricultural labourers or to be absorbed into the lower orders of the urban population either as factory workers or as other forms of non-agrarian labour. Furthermore, restricted by continued, indeed lifelong, membership of the commune and still designated as 'peasants' in Russia's system of civil classification, the agrarian population as a whole were for the most part restricted in their opportunities to improve their condition.

This latter outcome was precisely what the government of Alexander II had hoped for; opponents of emancipation had argued that, beyond its economic consequences, the freeing of Russia's peasant population would cause such social instability that society's traditional virtues would be undermined. 'Stability' was the remit of the ministry of the interior, which was responsible for policing the empire, but this aim, especially after the

assassination of Alexander II, became suffused with a reactionary ideology by both his son Alexander III and his grandson Nicholas II, whose comparatively feeble character and intellect were heavily influenced by the most obscurantist elements of the Orthodox Church under the guidance of Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Procurator of the Holy Synod.

Another significant consequence of the emancipation was that large numbers of peasants followed the time-hallowed tradition of many Cossacks and went east to Siberia. In the popular mind, Siberia was symbolised by the prison successive tsars had made of it.³ But it was also a place where land was readily available and the hand of government much lighter on those at large. The relatively rapid colonisation of Siberia over the period from the 1860s to the end of the century is an integral part of our story. The string of settlements along the path of what would become the Trans-Siberian Railway was established and developed by peasants, workers, engineers, merchants and farmers who were overwhelmingly those who had taken advantage of the conditions of the post-Reform interior and decided that Siberia offered the most favourable prospects.⁴

Recognising the need to increase the size and efficiency of the civil service and to staff it with better-educated personnel, Alexander II greatly expanded existing educational institutions and created many new ones – grammar schools, polytechnics and universities – while opening them up to universal access.⁵ In the same spirit, he reformed the judicial system, giving autonomy to its professional bodies (including allowing them to appoint judges), and introducing juries. Successive generations of university and high school students, however, now imbibed the progressive ideologies of Populism in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, and Marxism in the 1890s, ideologies which were reinforced by the pendulum swings of government policies towards higher education in general, and student activism in particular. For example, after the assassination of Alexander II, the minister of education banned the teaching of the social sciences, especially sociology, regarding the very study of society as subversive, which of course it was.

Well before the emancipation of the serfs, and for the rest of the tsarist era, the demand for political reform had grown, together with the demand for the modernisation of the vast agrarian sector, a demand that encompassed both economic and social change. In partial recognition of this demand, Alexander II introduced a measure of democracy into the sphere of public administration by the creation of district and provincial councils, or the *zemstvo*, a form of local government which he hoped would satisfy the appetite for a share of government, and divert the demand for a constitution and a national assembly. Any attempt to effect collaboration between provincial *zemstvos* would be firmly suppressed as a potentially revolutionary step. Equally, Alexander III and Nicholas II would ensure that conservative deputies outweighed the liberal-minded specialists – economists, agronomists, engineers, teachers and other members of the

intelligentsia, who were employed by the *zemstvo* and whose civil needs the *zemstvo* had ostensibly been created to satisfy.

Undoubtedly Alexander II's reforms had a palpable impact on the direction of Russian modernisation, but, as was to be shown graphically by later events, these effects also brought about the opposite of the state's intentions. Energetic industrialisation, while greatly increasing the state's wealth, also led to social mobility and instability. Educational opportunities created a larger class of literate, qualified and enquiring young people, but also raised political awareness and the demand for further reform, and even revolution.⁶ The freer judiciary increased the demand for constitutional change and popular representation on the basis of some form of democratic principle. Instead of gaining in solidarity and stability, society became chronically unstable. Instead of liberal ascendancy, right-wing sentiments and growing obscurantist-monarchist attitudes deepened the chasm between the progressive and the reactionary sections of the population.

The swing from official, if qualified, liberalism to reaction, which took its sharpest form in the 1880s as a direct result of Alexander II's assassination by revolutionaries, began with the rise of terrorism in the 1860s. From 1866, when the first of six attempts was made on his life, the 'Tsar Liberator' became susceptible to warnings from conservatives, who argued that his reforms would lead to unrest.⁷ And when Alexander, who was about to introduce limited legislative reforms, was finally assassinated in March 1881, his son Alexander III reverted to the kind of repressive policies that were more in harmony with his own rigidly reactionary outlook. While he was careful not to dampen the entrepreneurial industrial spirit of the age, which was designed to strengthen the state, he quickly moved to restrict access to high schools and universities, identifying them as the seedbeds of anarchy and disorder they were. By means of infiltration and overwhelming force, the secret, political police, known as the *Okhranka*, crushed student groups that were engaged in any activity that could be dubbed seditious.⁸ Those affected included innocent study groups, and workers' circles where the iniquities of capitalism were preached. There was a clampdown on the illegal and clandestine distribution of agitational pamphlets, and the organisation of strikes. Young men and women (Russian women had been attending parallel university courses since the 1860s) were arrested in large numbers and many were sent to remote places of exile in Siberia or forced into the army, while many others who were excluded from Russian universities found their way to Western Europe, where they continued their education.⁹

Castling around for a cause of the disaffection among the young that had led to the assassination, the government found it in Russia's most visibly alienated group, the Jews. They were to feel the effect of the change of direction with particular sharpness. Defined in legal terms as 'aliens' (*inorodtsy*), the Jewish population of the Russian Empire numbered

around five million. The overwhelming majority lived in the so-called Pale of Jewish Settlement, a broad corridor running from north to south down the western border of the Russian Empire from the Baltic to the Black Sea and embracing the territories inhabited by Latvians, Estonians, Lithuanians, Poles, Belorussians, Romanians and Ukrainians. All of these peoples, including the Jews, were, like all other inhabitants, classified as subjects of the Russian Empire, and none of them enjoyed the least ethnic autonomy. (The small population of Finns were an exception, in that they enjoyed a degree of autonomy, partly because Finnish society was at that time dominated by a Swedish minority, which gave Finland a European veneer that tended to check the repressive impulses of the Russian administration. Political unrest at the end of the century effectively put an end to this restraint.)¹⁰ A vigorous search for individual national identity, expressed in its initial phase through anthropological and folkloric research, was, however, going on within most of the national groups throughout the empire, and the central government maintained strict surveillance and tough policing over anything more political in nature.

The Jews were doubly disadvantaged. Like the rest of the empire's population, they had no political or civil rights, and by the late nineteenth century they too were organising themselves to struggle for national expression, in various forms. But in addition to suffering the disadvantages of Russian subjecthood, the Jews were the object of targeted discrimination by the state, and often the violent hostility of the people among whom they lived. Anti-Semitism was endemic not only among the Slavs of the Pale of Jewish Settlement, and not only institutionalised in legislation and state practice but also virtually a visceral component of the Orthodox Christian outlook in its distorted form.

Alexander II's reforms had allowed Jews to enter Russian high schools and universities. As a result, Jewish youth, keen to escape the restricted cultural and religious atmosphere of traditional Jewish village life, clamoured for an education in Russian – abandoning their mother tongue of Yiddish – that would assist their admission into Russian culture, and thence for the first time in Russia into the professions. Alexander III, however, reacted to his father's assassination by clamping down on all possible sites of liberal-minded thought, above all the educational institutions. Over and above the new restraints placed on the syllabus and admission of Russians, Jewish students were subjected to a numerus clausus that restricted them to 5 per cent of a high school's student number, and only 2 per cent of a university's student body.¹¹

By these measures, at a stroke Alexander III politicised an entire young generation and left his successor a legacy of mounting alienation and hostility. To save themselves from the reactionary climate and the restrictions now imposed on Russian universities, young Russians, joined by Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Georgians, Armenians, escaped to the universities of Western Europe, mainly Germany, France and Switzerland, to find the

education denied them in Russia, and in more congenial circumstances. There they soon formed student colonies, mixing with revolutionaries in exile and gradually coming to constitute a large pool of potential activists who would play a crucial role in the further development of the Russian revolutionary movement and the organisation of labour.

Also from this time, the early 1880s, Jewish emigration from Russia began in earnest. Young Hebrew-speaking idealists (mostly politically rather than religiously oriented) left for Palestine to form small, agricultural communities, forerunners of the kibbutz movement of a later age. Most, however, headed for America and Western Europe and the blandishments of a freer, more prosperous life. The large Jewish communities of New York, London and Paris date their origins from this time, though it was not until the post-1905 wave of emigration that significantly larger numbers left Russia to escape the pogroms and economic destitution that were visited upon the Pale during this turbulent period.

Taken together, the politicisation and alienation of Jewish youth, emigration of tens of thousands of Jews, and the economic and social aggravation of Jewish life by intensified restrictions within the Pale were all the result of state policy and created a clearly defined scapegoat for the state to use in its efforts to restore unity.¹²

By the turn of the century, two main currents of political opposition and organised unrest were making themselves felt in Russia. One was devoted to the goal of constitutional reform to culminate in the creation of a national assembly, and was supported chiefly by members of the educated middle class. The term 'middle class' signifies in this context the result of the considerable social mobility fostered by industrialisation and the reforms of the 1860s, although the actual legal classifications still in being in Russia separated the population into gentry or nobility (*dvoryanstvo*), town-dwellers (*meshchanstvo*), peasants (*krestyanstvo*), clergy (*dukhovenstvo*) and merchants (*kupechestvo*). Active in local government, though increasingly marginalised by the reactionary policies of the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, and popular among lawyers, doctors, academics and schoolteachers, this trend embodied Russian liberalism, which by the time of the Russo-Japanese War was calling openly for political reform in the direction of civil society. During the war itself, the liberals dominated the political agitation in Russia, creating newspapers to promulgate their programme and their demands, and emerging as the most successful political party – the Constitutional Democrats (Kadets) – when the tsar allowed elections to a national assembly, the State Duma, in October 1905.

A more radical trend was that which can be broadly designated the revolutionary movement. Emerging in the 1880s from Populism, which had unsuccessfully advocated preparing the peasants for an uprising, and also plotting, successfully, to assassinate the tsar, Russian Marxists were by the turn of the century busy organising factory workers and artisans, not for

an uprising but for the long haul towards socialist revolution. Two political parties represented the revolutionary movement: the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), who focused their attention mainly on the countryside, where they hoped to raise political consciousness among the peasants, but were mostly supported by rural intellectuals and village schoolteachers; and the Social Democrats, who sought to engage the loyalties of the proletariat but only succeeded in splitting their own party into two camps, the Bolsheviks led by Vladimir Lenin, and the Mensheviks led by no single individual, (Trotsky, who would emerge as another charismatic Marxist, had yet to make his mark on the broader ranks of the Party). With the Russo-Japanese War providing the background of extreme governmental weakness and state insecurity, both these revolutionary trends engaged in active insurgency, the Bolsheviks smuggling (useless, rusty) rifles into Moscow and both groups robbing banks to fund their violence.¹³

At the same time, most of the nationalities, more properly defined as ethnic groups inhabiting the border territories, emerged from their earlier preoccupation with the largely anthropological expression of their identities, and organised themselves into parties, some of them in readiness for the new political process to come, others adopting the more violent course exemplified by the Russian revolutionaries. These manifestations, among Poles, Ukrainians, Baltics, Armenians, Georgians, Jews, were instrumental in antagonising the already strongly defensive attitudes of Russian reactionaries, who now took their own steps towards organisation with the formation of a range of groups and parties best described as proto-Fascist in orientation and ideology. The 1905 revolution was successful in prompting a powerful upsurge of Russian defensive nationalism which would have dire consequences for the regime at a later date.¹⁴

At this time, all the existing European empires were rife with nationalist ferment, and national liberation movements were well established in some. In Europe it was the Austro-Hungarian Empire that produced the most varied theories, reflecting the extraordinary variety and complexity of its national and ethnic mix. The post-1918 map of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans would reflect the comprehensive character of this urge.

In Russia, where the mix far outstripped Austro-Hungary in terms of the number of nations and groups, the geographical and demographic map was less complex. In broad terms, the Russian heartland was inhabited by the Great Russians, who were also the largest single group by far (43 per cent),¹⁵ while the national minorities in general were ranged along the borderlands, reflecting the historic character of Russian imperial expansion.¹⁶

The rapid industrial expansion of the last decades of the previous century had greatly affected the demographic picture in particular regions: the booming oil fields of Baku in the Caucasus became highly cosmopolitan, as workers and peasants and engineers flocked to jobs from European Russia and the ethnically mixed regions of the Caucasus and Muslim areas

to the East; and in southern Russia – known as Little Russia and in due course Ukraine – coal, iron and steel production had, like that of oil, increased to such an extent that Russia now figured among the world's leading producers, and the labour force in that large region was composed of Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, Romanians and Jews, to name a few. Ports, such as Odessa and Batum on the Black Sea, St Petersburg, Riga and Libau on the Baltic, and Murmansk and Archangel in the far North, expanded greatly to handle the huge rise in Russian exports in this period, and were similarly noted for the wide range of ethnic groups represented by their working class.

The conditions in which this new and burgeoning working class lived and worked were almost universally poor, if not appalling: urban squalor, overcrowded 'barracks' where men lived without their families, the working day which in 1897 was established, after considerable agitation, at twelve hours, but which commonly exceeded fourteen or more hours, and cut-throat wages.¹⁷ Such conditions could well have been found in other rapidly industrialising countries. Their significance in Russia, however, was that the workers quickly became the concern of organised Marxists who aimed to harness this potential source of proletarian muscle to the cause of socialist revolution. The area of Russia's most dynamic economic activity – industrial labour – was also an area of its greatest turbulence, both potential and actual. Of equal importance was the fact that Russian workers, who retained their legal status as peasants, were still inscribed as members of their original communes and still owed obligations to their villages in terms of tax owed or remittances to be paid, as well as being subject to obligatory military service. And in large numbers they would return to the village at harvest time to maximise the communal effort. (As late as 1910, no less than 10 per cent of the population of the capital, St Petersburg itself – the most populous and densely industrialised city in the empire – returned to the countryside for this purpose.)¹⁸ One result of this seasonal human pendulum was to inform, if not to 'infect', the rural population with the unrest and agitation of the urban working class.

Forty years earlier, conservatives had warned that radical reforms would bring with them further and more far-reaching demands from ambitious activists, and by the late nineteenth century many people of all classes were in agreement. The peasants had been stirred up, the workers were being organised into unions and political groups by militant and radical, ideologically inspired revolutionaries. But the harsh reactionary measures of the 1880s brought a new factor into play: inspired to a large extent by the intellectual ferment of Jews in Austro-Hungary, Russia's Jewish intellectuals were exhibiting all the signs of the 'deleterious' effects of education, as perceived by Russian right-wing and conservative observers. Marginalised until the Great Reforms, by the end of the century young, Russified Jews were making their presence felt at the heart of the

Russian Marxist social democratic labour movement, as propagandists, agitators and organisers.

To right-wing observers, this was the worst possible scenario, for it proved in their eyes that the mythical international Jewish conspiracy to take over the world had materialised in Russia: created by a German Jew, Marxism – as they saw it – was a worldwide Jewish doctrine designed to undermine Russia's traditional Christian values and so weaken the state that its takeover by forces controlled by the Jews would be possible. Rabidly anti-Semitic, proto-Fascist opinion was a political fact by the beginning of the twentieth century, and in 1900 its first organisation, to be known generically as 'the Black Hundreds', emerged under the name of the Russian Assembly. During the upheavals of 1905 a host of similar bodies arose with such names as the Union of Russian Men, the Russian Monarchist Union, the Union of the Russian People, the Union of the Archangel Michael, and the Society for Active Struggle against Revolution and Anarchy. Minimally ideological, these groups were motivated by primitive nationalistic emotion, defensive and paranoid. Led by titled nobles, often associated with the court – Nicholas himself was allegedly seen wearing the insignia of one of them – and senior Orthodox churchmen, they employed thugs to carry out pogroms against Jews and similar violence against liberals.

It is worth noting in this context that the term 'Russian', as rendered in English, has two quite distinct meanings in its original forms: *ruskii* signifies pertaining to Great Russian ethnicity, e.g. Russian language, the Russian nation; while *rossiiskii*, deriving from the word for the territory, *Rossiya* (Russia), means belonging to the place of that name, e.g. *rossiiskaya imperiya*. (Hence, Russia, a conglomeration of many different nations and groups, is today known in Russian as *Rossiiskaya Federatsiya*.)

Against the background of workers' strikes and student agitation, the first years of the twentieth century saw a sharp rise in peasant unrest. Forty years after the Great Reform, the mass of the peasantry, still engaged in agriculture, were bent under the yoke of debt to the state, and under-endowed with land. Between emancipation and 1900 the landed gentry had sold off at least half of the land they had held in 1861, predominantly to peasants, though only a small minority of the new landowners could be called successful farmers. The original mortgage, set up by the government for forty-nine years, was due to terminate in 1910, at which time a huge number of peasants would be at risk of losing their smallholdings through repossession. The peasants felt deeply aggrieved, and in many places resorted to direct action: looting, burning the houses of gentry and generally causing mayhem in the countryside.

In 1902, Peter Struve, a former Marxist and a leading intellectual force in the Russian liberal camp, founded the journal *Osvobozhdenie* (Liberation). Following a well-established tradition going back to the reign of Nicholas I, the journal was smuggled into Russia from Western Europe.

It was extremely popular among the *zemstvo* intelligentsia: that is, the professional employees, including doctors, teachers, experts and officials, as opposed – literally and figuratively – to the elected, gentry deputies, and was the flagship of the movement that in 1903 brought the Union of Liberation into being. This was a loose federation of like-minded organisations and groups advocating a constitutional monarchy, civil and political rights, and universal suffrage, among other things.¹⁹

This area of activity was politically of great importance, since it saw the emergence for the first time of a systematic effort by university professors, working with liberal intellectuals and future politicians, to develop a theory of civil society in Russia, which was in effect to serve as the leitmotif of the 1905 revolution. Their goal was to persuade the tsar and his government that a system which allowed autonomous activity by independent social groups was in Russia's best interest, and a better way to defend the country from the civil chaos that would result if the confrontation between state and society were allowed to continue. Their arguments made no headway with the tsar or his ministers until events compelled them to make concessions.

Around the turn of the century, the Marxist revolutionary organisations were having little success in forming themselves into a nationwide social democratic party. While differences of doctrine and method were usually the immediate cause of their failures, it was above all effective policing – surveillance, interception, border control, and penetration of cells by undercover agents and provocateurs – that brought this situation about. However, in one important respect Marxist activity made a major impact: young activists had throughout the 1890s succeeded in drip-feeding the idea of organised protest into the minds of a widening circle of workers. By absorbing the most basic principle of Marxist analysis, namely that capitalism can thrive only if wages are held down in order to maximise profit, workers throughout the industrial scene increasingly felt the inherent injustice of the system and well understood the notion of 'exploitation'. Simple 'bread-and-butter' issues, like the eight-hour day and safe working conditions, became the common currency of the working class, and workers willingly joined strikes and demonstrations to demand them.

However, if any authoritative control was being exercised over the organised workers, it was by the police. The idea that the government should take over the Social Democrats' labour policy was the brainchild of an ex-revolutionary, now chief of the Moscow secret police, Sergei Zubatov. He argued, and showed in practice, that if the employers could be compelled to meet the moderate, and moderately expressed, economic demands of the workers, and if the workers were allowed to make their collective claims without fear of attack by the government's forces, their political potential, and with it the influence of the Social Democrats, however exaggerated, would evaporate. Strikers arrested by Zubatov's agents were given the 'good cop, bad cop' treatment: the 'good cop' would

persuade them that their true enemies were not the state, but the student revolutionaries, who were using them for their own ends, and who could always escape abroad or take their summer holidays when the police cracked down. The 'bad cop' would then warn them that they would face the harshest conditions of exile if they persisted in cooperating with the revolutionaries. Supported by patrons as high up as an uncle of the tsar, Zubatov was given his head to set up trade unions, which were to act under undercover police supervision. His agents helped workers to formulate their demands and then saw to it that employers conceded them.²⁰ This practice, dubbed 'police socialism', proved ultimately disastrous for the government, for it was responsible for launching a wave of strikes throughout the south of Russia in 1903 that became uncontrollable. Zubatov was dismissed and the policy discontinued, at least for the time being.

If the Zubatov strategy achieved anything, it was to confirm both the government and the workers in their most firmly held beliefs: for the government, that organised labour was a threat to law and order, and for the workers, that the government was prepared to make an alliance with them only so long as it deprived the revolutionary movement of their support. The workers' living and working conditions were seen to count for nothing. Zubatovism also reinforced the belief among workers that they were themselves best fitted to look after their own interests, and thus gave a boost to the drive for independent trade unions, free from interference by revolutionaries. Between the fall of Zubatov and the revolution of 1905, Russia saw continuous workers' strikes so serious that early in 1904, in St Petersburg alone, the government decided to restore the discredited policy of Zubatovism. Interior minister Vyacheslav von Plehve approved the creation of the 'Assembly of Russian Workers' under the leadership of a priest, Father Georgi Gapon.²¹

Just as it had under Zubatov, this new initiative also quickly ran out of control, but with even more dramatic consequences. Father Gapon was a staunch supporter of the monarchy and held the widespread view that the tsar would act to heal Russia's wounds if only he were made fully aware of them. However, by the end of 1904, with some 9,000 members in his Assembly, Gapon was befriended by Socialist Revolutionaries, Social Democrats and members of the Union of Liberation, all of whom introduced their own ideas into his broad popular programme. The result of this explosive combination was that when a wave of large strikes broke out in December 1904, Gapon was urged to take it over and spread it to other firms. Within four days he brought out 90,000 workers from 150 different factories, and was persuaded to lead a 'peaceful' procession to the Winter Palace to present a petition to the tsar himself. In patriotic, pious, humble tones, the appeal called for the workers to be given 'human rights', for the 'people' to be allowed to rule together with the tsar, for all elements of the population to choose their own representatives, and for the

‘election of a constituent assembly on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage’.²²

Given such wording, the government needed no prompting as to the political source of these ideas. On Sunday 9/22 January 1905, Gapon took the head of his procession, and with icons held high, the huge crowd marched into the centre of St Petersburg. Keeping the tsar in total ignorance of what was happening, the new interior minister, Prince Nikolai Svyatopolk-Mirsky (Plehve having been assassinated in July) ordered the troops to disperse the procession and to fire on the crowd if the order was not obeyed, which it was not. As a result, at least 100 people were killed and several hundred injured, though estimates vary wildly. Nicholas was henceforth cursed and lampooned as ‘Nicholas the Bloody’, and ‘Bloody Sunday’ entered the annals of the revolution as a watershed, a huge step taken by the forces of progress towards general disorder.

It is worth repeating that in spite of their general failure to create a nationwide party before the summer of 1917, the Marxist Social Democrats are to be credited with raising political awareness in Russia. The goals of the Second Socialist International, to which the Russian Social Democrats were affiliated, had become the common currency of trade unionists throughout the industrialised world and had percolated into Russia and been accepted by a circle well beyond that of the factory workers. The eight-hour day and better working conditions, worker representation on factory committees, and other workers’ rights, were absorbed as demands into the programmes of more moderate political parties – when they came into being on the eve of 1905 – and became an integral voice in the chorus of protest that beset the government in the immediate prelude to the Russo-Japanese War.

For decades after the event, the Finns liked to say that something was ‘as stupid as the Russo-Japanese War’. Indeed, their view was shared by none other than the Russian ambassador in London at the time of the war, Count Alexander Benckendorff, who, although a Baltic German himself, could not be accused of a lack of patriotism, but he made no effort to hide from his staff his view that the war was the ‘greatest stupidity that Russia could have done’.²³ It defied common sense that Russia would embark on a military campaign – a full-scale war, no less – at the most distant end of its territory, more than 6,000 miles from the heartland, at a time when the state was beset by profound disarray, with whole sections of the population disaffected and agitating for far-reaching political change. Many came to believe the rumour, initiated by finance minister Sergei Witte, that the tsar’s interior minister, von Plehve, had advocated a short, victorious war in the Far East to deflect Russia’s internal turmoil and rally the people to a patriotic cause. Certainly, Witte and von Plehve personified the animosity between the expansive policies of the finance ministry, which sought to create wealth, and the innate conservatism of the interior ministry, which fought a rearguard action against perceived instability. But

Witte's allegation was unjustified, and may indeed have been intended to minimise his own sense of responsibility for the Manchurian tragedy.²⁴

A more realistic explanation for Nicholas II's Far Eastern adventure is to be found in the hard-headed national and economic self-interest that had motivated his late father. The inexorable westward expansion that took place in the United States throughout the nineteenth century is a better analogy for Russia than the overseas empires of the day. In the American case, nothing impeded the drive to the Pacific Ocean, other than geography and the uncoordinated resistance of native peoples whose lack of economic and technological resources made American domination a virtual inevitability. In Russia, beginning with Muscovy in the sixteenth century, the state had gradually extended its power and authority eastwards, opposed only by sheer distance, physical obstacles and a brutal climate.²⁵

With the final defeat of the Tatars in the sixteenth century, successive tsars had been drawn inexorably to fill what they perceived to be a geopolitical vacuum stretching from the Urals to the Pacific coast. For most of this time, no other power posed a plausible threat to Russia's advance. Alexander III continued this process of peaceful penetration, finding China amenable to mutually beneficial agreements which gave Russia access to its markets, and above all to a warm-water outlet on the Pacific. The last three decades of the nineteenth century saw Russia making huge strides in railway-building, with Moscow as the hub of a vast radiating network that was intended to provide the infrastructure of the burgeoning industry to come. The last, and most ambitious, arm of this system was to be the Trans-Siberian Railway, built, like the American coast-to-coast railways, from both ends at once, and linking the capitals of European Russia with the Pacific. Not only would this unite the entire land mass of the empire, but it would open up vast tracts of mineral-rich land beyond the Urals, facilitate the transport of convicts to Siberia, and cut down by many months the time taken to move troops to the Amur region, should any military threat to Russia's interests arise.

These goals were expressed by foreign minister Prince Aleksei Lobanov-Rostovsky when Nicholas II succeeded Alexander III in 1895:

Our goals may be seen as two-fold: securing an ice-free port on the Pacific Ocean and the annexation of a number of areas in Manchuria, which would be essential in making the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway easier.²⁶

Russia appeared to be gaining ground on the other powers – Great Britain, France, Germany and the United States – which were similarly seeking advantage in China. It was a rapidly modernising Japan, however, that emerged as the main opponent to the Russian advances.

Japan viewed Russia's role in China with suspicion from the outset. As long as Russia's centre of gravity remained well to the western, European

part of its territory, it posed no threat to Japan's territorial ambitions. But when Russia embarked on the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway and made an agreement with the Chinese to build a link, the Chinese Eastern Railway, across Manchuria to the warm-water port of Port Arthur, Japan was alarmed, and in 1895 succeeded in getting China's cession of Port Arthur and the Liaotung Peninsula. Now it was the Western powers and Russia which were troubled, and which managed to 'persuade' Japan to hand the concessions back. The contest between Russia and Japan was now open, as each country attributed aggressive, imperialist motives to the other.²⁷

Witte, responsible for one of the most dynamic economic periods in Russia's pre-Soviet history and the architect of the entire railway project, was the most persistent advocate of a policy of gradual economic exploitation of the Far East. His approach to the task was based on the idea that Russia's stability, and that of the monarchy, which he strongly supported, would be achieved by economic success. Although he did not share the reactionary views of his fellow statesmen, neither was he sympathetic to liberal demands for democracy or participation in the country's administration, which in his view was the proper business of professional state officials.²⁸ Nor did he favour an aggressive or militant policy in the Far East, which he was convinced would provoke war with Japan.²⁹ At a time when the European powers were modernising and strengthening their armies, and Russia's military leaders were demanding enhanced budgets for their own needs, Witte resisted their demands, incurring the tsar's displeasure and paving the way for his dismissal in 1903.³⁰

Weak-willed and despised by his mother, the dowager empress, and her court camarilla as inadequate to the task of maintaining the power of the monarchy, Nicholas II was a man of ordinary intelligence and little training for the job, happiest when ensconced with his loving family at the comparatively modest palace of Tsarskoe Selo outside St Petersburg, rather than dealing with ministers in the capital and having to face the growing demands of a society eager for change. Equally, he had a stubborn streak and could act impulsively in a usually vain attempt to show strength of character. He was, however, susceptible to the advice of others. On the eve of the war with Japan, those with the greatest influence on him were courtiers and their friends with business interests in the Far East, who were impatient for Russia to acquire a dominant presence there. He was also urged by his cousin, Wilhelm II, kaiser of Germany, who was at the time acquiring overseas colonial territories in East and South West Africa (as yet untouched by the British). With blatant cynicism and hypocrisy, Wilhelm encouraged 'Cousin Nicky' to claim Russia's inheritance in the East while he, 'Willy', would safeguard his Western frontiers.³¹

Nicholas needed little encouragement to pursue his own dream of himself as heir to the Muscovite tradition of eastward expansion and as Christian missionary to Asia. Witte's dismissal in August 1903 left the field

clear for the hotheads to build up the pressure on Japan to renounce its claims. How Japan responded will be seen in due course. For the moment, suffice it to say that it viewed Russia's programme of railway-building as deeply aggressive, a direct threat to Japan's own intention to gain an economic and political base in Manchuria, and with the ascendancy of Nicholas's cronies in St Petersburg, the Japanese felt it was time to act.

Depending on the observer's political perspective, Manchuria was either an artificially generated political entity or the organic heartland of China's last dynasty: the Manchu. This conceptual tension had major ramifications for the development of the region (now known simply as the Three North-eastern Provinces). Sparsely populated when it first came to figure on the international political map, Manchuria existed as a crossroads to the histories of a number of states in the region, notably Mongolia, China, Japan, Korea and Russia. Only in the closing years of the nineteenth century did it appear as a major focus for political control and economic expansion. The curiosity of why this should have occurred so late in regional history must first and foremost be attributed to the eagerness of the Manchus to maintain Manchuria as their spiritual territory, unpopulated by Han Chinese. This made the region much like the surrounding borderlands of Mongolia, Korea and Russia: with tribes moving easily and freely across notional political borders, practising nomadism and transhumance, as they had for many centuries.

The situation changed dramatically, triggered by the rise of the modernism of the age of railways. Investment in railway construction had encouraged Russia to move quickly to build a Trans-Siberian Railway to link European Russia with the thinly populated regions beyond the Urals – notably Siberia itself and the Russian Far East. Such construction, however, would not have been fully logical without adding an exit point to the Pacific. Russia had tamed the armies of Napoleon, and now this expansion would make the country a world power of enormous military portent. Such an image was not complete without the psychological effect of Russia being able to show itself to be a power that spanned West and East. Thus was born the strategy of extending the Trans-Siberian Railway by creating a fork at Lake Baikal, thereby allowing the railway to tap the virgin lands of Manchuria. At the end of this line were to be Dal'nyi and Port Arthur, the proposed locations of Russia's window on the warm waters of the Pacific.

The politics for such a facilitation of Russian Pacific presence and the initial stages of its physical manifestation both moved with remarkable speed, with the negotiations between China and Russia having taken place in St Petersburg with the Chinese plenipotentiary Li Hung-chang, resulting in a treaty signed in 1896.³² So swift was the evolution of Russian presence that it badly upset the regional balance of power, giving Japan deep suspicions of Russia as harbouring intentions to overturn this emerging Asian power's place in North-East Asia, and usurping its interests in the key state

of Korea – a not entirely unrealistic perspective, given Russia's contribution to the excoriation of Japan from the gains it had made in Manchuria as a result of its war with China.

The dynamism of the railway-building process and the compression of financial processes that in another age would have required much longer periods to unfold were two features of the emerging global system, in which economic development was no longer a process tracked in generations. Japan had in many respects already shown itself to be highly adept in such development, but here, on its very doorstep, appeared a rival of worrying proportions, backed by vast reserves of European capital.³³

The Russian government had not intended this to be such a threatening process to any of its regional neighbours. The new railway spur, to be known as the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), was intended to be not only a way for Russia to take an appropriate place in the political sphere of Asia, but, still more importantly, a vanguard for the economic development of an enormously rich, but relatively untapped, hinterland.³⁴ Those engaged in the conceptualisation and implementation of the plans for the CER were, it is clear, alive to the economic potential of Manchuria, but they were also aware of the political pitfalls that threatened to emerge from the bold Russian initiative. Most prominent in forwarding such a perspective had been the driving force of the Manchurian venture: Witte himself. His ministry was responsible for elaborating a policy of 'Railway and Trade' – a policy that was to encourage the flowering of diversified economic activity in Manchuria, allowing China to draw considerably from the process. To a lesser degree, other regional neighbours too could engage in the opening up of Manchuria. The policy was a sophisticated one, focusing as it did on trade as the driving force behind Russian presence, rather than on a more conventional form of a Western power's politico-military role as a spearhead for later economic benefits – the latter representing the now all too familiar pattern of cruder nineteenth-century imperialism. With trade at the core of Russian activity there, Witte argued, there would be less potential for friction with China and Japan.³⁵

Investment in Manchurian infrastructure was considerable. The railway line was complemented by the creation of conurbations, engineering facilities and smaller-scale branch enterprises. Such activity was fed by the rapid flow of settlers, both Russian and Chinese, to populate and drive regional development.³⁶ To a modest traditional Chinese settlement at Futiatien in the depths of the Manchurian plains, and on the banks of the major river the Sungari that flowed through them, was appended the Russian town of Harbin, which quickly developed into the major city in inland Manchuria, and the heart of the operations of the CER, as well as northern Manchuria's commerce and industry.³⁷ Within a span of six years (1897–1903) the trunk line of the CER was completed, and branch lines in the process of being constructed; major railway settlements had emerged at Hailar and Tsitsihar, while Harbin itself had become a sizeable regional

centre. Taken together with Dal'nyi and Port Arthur, the transformation of Manchuria into a Russian-controlled territory was nearly complete.

Russia's foray into Manchuria did much to alter the regional balance, however. Japan was an important competitor power in the area, having defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, thereby securing a firm presence in Manchuria – a presence that Russia very quickly displaced, much to the displeasure and concern of Japan itself. From Japan's perspective, this was an unwelcome completion of a process of Russian territorial expansion that had a long history.

Russia's interest in the region was, after all, evident from very early on. Indeed, the historian G. Vernadsky had written that 'if Peter [the Great] had lived longer, he would have tried to reach India. At the same time he secretly dreamed of opening a way to China as well.'³⁸ Neither Peter nor his early successors, Catherine I and II and Alexander I, achieved these ambitions. It was only during the reigns of Nicholas I and Alexander II, in fact, that Nikolai Nikolaevich Muraviev, the governor-general of eastern Siberia, was able to secure the Amur region for Russia: 'The Amur had virtually become [only a few months before the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1856] a Russian river, and it was only necessary to obtain the nominal sanction of the *fait accompli* from the Chinese.'³⁹ In early 1857, Alexander II gave imperial sanction for the establishment of military colonies, consisting of Cossacks and their families, on the left bank of the Amur. This was a compulsory form of resettlement, and did not encourage further immigration from European Russia.⁴⁰ Most of the Cossacks had been 'recruited' from the peasantry registered at Nerchinsk under a conversion programme proposed by Muraviev in 1851.⁴¹ This resettlement was sanctioned in May 1858, when the Treaty of Aigun was signed, with Russia being ceded the left bank of the Amur down to the Ussuri and both banks below the Ussuri.⁴² Five days later, Muraviev, at a church parade, addressed his troops: 'Comrades, I congratulate you! We have not laboured in vain; the Amur now belongs to Russia!'⁴³ He had achieved this relatively peacefully; as one Russian scholar later put it, 'without gunpowder or smoke'.⁴⁴ Through his efforts, Muraviev had defined the borders of the eastern portion of Russia's empire, but this had also laid the ground for further imperial outstretch. As Ravenstein wrote in 1861:

On the Amur and Ussuri ... the boundary line does not bear the stamp of permanency. Russia holding one bank only on these rivers, while China holds the other, may at any chosen time furnish its neighbour with fertile cause of dispute, and when the time comes the huge Chinese empire tumbles into pieces; the whole of Manchuria with Leaotong [Liaotung] must become the prey of Russia.⁴⁵

His words were to have resonance in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when the Chinese Empire did, in fact, show signs of strain and,

indeed, collapse under the combined weight of the imperialism of the major European powers and Japan. With spheres of influence being defined on Chinese territory, treaty ports established in order to create bases for trade and political influence, China's periphery also began to show the signs of considerable strain. Russia's contribution to this came during the reign of Alexander II, with the launching of the enormous Trans-Siberian Railway project in 1891. Troops, in the form of the Transbaikalian Army,⁴⁶ were ready at hand to enforce tsarist policy in Manchuria, while potential settlers, who were living a miserable existence on newly acquired territory,⁴⁷ were also near enough to be drawn from in future projects involving Manchurian territory.

Alexander III was not to live long enough to see Russian activity extend directly into Manchuria. Nonetheless, during his reign we can see a rapid change in Russia's imperial interests. Germany attempted to encourage Russia to shift its attention from the Balkans and the Near East, to the Middle East and Far East, thereby postponing any friction between Russia and Austria. Moreover, because of the worsening relations with Britain over Afghanistan in 1891–1892, it was natural enough that Russian sights should narrow further to only the Far East. An example of Alexander III's imperial ambitions in this respect become evident in 1893, when a Mongolian, Dr Badmaev, received two million roubles from the Treasury to allow him to establish private companies at Chita.⁴⁸ At about this time a growing closeness between Russia and China became evident.⁴⁹ It was clear that these strengthening ties were part of Witte's grander scheme, one incorporating the Trans-Siberian Railway – a scheme which rapidly unfolded in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895.⁵⁰ Alexander died before the Treaty of Shimonoseki ended the war between China and Japan, but in his report to the new tsar, the Russian foreign minister, Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky, underlined, in a passage already quoted, that Russia would continue to develop its role in the region:

Our goals may be seen as two-fold: securing an ice-free port on the Pacific Ocean and the annexation of a number of areas in Manchuria, which would be essential in making the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway easier.⁵¹

Witte was of a like mind with Lobanov-Rostovsky. However, a further major concern for Witte was how to maintain the integrity of a region in which Russia had a growing interest. This was displayed in his reflections on the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki and the earlier-mentioned cession of Port Arthur and Liaotung Peninsula to Japan. 'This agreement', Witte wrote, 'appeared to me as being unfavourable to the interests of Russia. From this, however, arose the question: what would be an appropriate response?'⁵² The answer came six days after the signing of the treaty, when the Triple Alliance, comprising Russia, France and Germany,

made a dramatic intervention in Sino-Japanese affairs. The Alliance 'advised' Japan to surrender the Liaotung Peninsula to China in return for a heavier indemnity. Furthermore, Port Arthur, if left under Japanese control, would pose a 'constant threat to China's capital and make the independence of Korea illusory, and it would be a permanent obstacle to the peace of the Far East'.⁵³ Thus, Japan, which at the time stood alone, had to relinquish both acquisitions. Importantly, both once again became potential areas for Russian involvement.

Some Chinese statesmen, interestingly, regarded Russia's part in the intervention as constituting a sign of 'her faith and righteousness'.⁵⁴ The Chinese plenipotentiary Li Hung-chang saw a different motive behind Russia's actions. His misgivings were well founded. During the talks in St Petersburg on the proposed railway, Witte outlined plans for the creation of a monopoly of Manchurian railways, to be placed under the jurisdiction of the Russo-Chinese Bank.⁵⁵ Li Hung-chang responded angrily to Witte's proposal, as a contemporary account of the meeting showed: '[Li] could not refrain from making scenes in the presence of his fellow-negotiator, or to angrily declare that this agreement "would leave Manchuria under the control of the bank"'.⁵⁶

The terms of the agreement arrived at in St Petersburg allowed for the creation of a 'private' company which would control the affairs of the CER. But as Witte was later to recall:

Li Hung-chang categorically refused to accept my proposal that the construction of the railway be undertaken by the Treasury, or that the railway belong to the Treasury and the Government. Consequently, it was necessary to form the Chinese Eastern Railway Company, which, of course, was, and in fact is to this day, under the full control of the [Russian] government.⁵⁷

In the railway contract drawn up in 1896, the same year as the St Petersburg agreement, one of the clauses stated that 'the Company will have the absolute and exclusive right of administration of its lands'.⁵⁸ Russia's position in Manchuria was further strengthened when, in Peking in 1899, it reached an agreement with Britain on the question of railway construction. 'The significance of this proviso', a contemporary Russian commentary concluded,

will instil both surprise and fear in local rulers; the suggestion being that our long-standing enmity towards England is at an end, and what remains for China is, henceforth, to comply unquestioningly with our demands, as well as those of England.⁵⁹

Furthermore, Russia had already secured the Liaotung Peninsula on leasehold and seized Port Arthur and Dairen in the year before.⁶⁰ Thus, by 1900, when the *I Ho Ch'uan*, or the Righteous and Harmonious Boxing

Order, began what was to be known as the Boxer Rebellion, Russia was able to mobilise its troops and enter Manchuria to ‘protect’ its nationals’ interests there, paying scant attention to the correctness of such an action. In fact, General Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin, the Russian chief-of-staff in the Far East, saw this as an unparalleled and fortuitous opportunity – an observation he quickly made known to Witte. ‘It is imperative’, Kuropatkin advised, ‘that, taking full advantage of the present opportunity, we seize the whole of Manchuria.’⁶¹ The same Kuropatkin, the Russian state secretary A.A. Polovtsev observed, was ‘still dreaming of taking the Bosphorus or invading India’.⁶² Such thoughts of military glory, Polovtsev added, delighted the tsar.⁶³ Witte, however, was far from convinced of the appropriateness of such an action. Of the situation that had emerged as a result of the troubles, he observed that ‘Our forces conducted themselves in a totally arbitrary way; that is, they behaved as an enemy would behave on captured territory, and moreover Asian territory.’⁶⁴ Witte’s conclusion concerning this episode was unequivocal: ‘It was in this way that the ground was laid for an eventual catastrophe.’⁶⁵ The proliferation of Russian troops simply added to Japan’s ill-will with regard to the South Manchurian Railway, a CER branch line that was rapidly reaching completion: ‘The South Manchurian Railway was conceived in sin... The Japanese regarded this Russian railway thrust into South Manchuria as a “dagger pointing at the heart of Japan”.’⁶⁶ By the opening of the twentieth century, Russia had achieved predominance in Manchuria, as Ravenstein had envisioned some forty years earlier, but it had also laid the groundwork for friction and conflict with neighbouring Japan.

In the course of establishing itself in Manchuria, Russia had done much to place its own stamp on the region. Despite the fact that, by the terms of declarations enacted in March 1900, Russia formally accepted the commercial policy of ‘open door’ in Manchuria, thereby technically allowing the United States, France, Germany, Britain, Italy and Japan the right to compete economically in Manchuria,⁶⁷ the situation on the ground was a very different one. Russian agencies and private interests in Manchuria ensured that the economy that emerged there was a quintessentially Russian one. Language, business practices and most of the goods themselves were predominantly Russian. In a 1903 report to Washington, American Consul Miller observed that

Russian commerce was so thoroughly spread over all Manchuria, and so well protected by the railways and railway guards, that any military evacuation would confer only illusory equality in commercial privileges... [T]he only remedy would be to demand the complete opening of Manchuria to foreign trade.⁶⁸

But such an outcome was unlikely, as Miller had already made clear to Washington in the course of his tour of Manchuria in the spring of 1902:

[R]egardless of the promises of their government, the Russians had little expectation of leaving the country or settling merely in open ports. They would rely . . . upon the military protection of the Russian railway guards, whose jurisdiction along the railways was claimed by Russia even in case of evacuation.⁶⁹

Such observations underlined Russia's plans for Manchuria as being of an imperial sort – a perspective that was shared by Japan in deliberating on the approach it was going to take in this context. Russia did not seek to hide its own attitudes to its rivalry with Japan: '[J]udging from the talk of Russian officials there is a gradual tendency on the part of Russia toward war with Japan, and they freely express their desire to fight Japan in Manchuria.'⁷⁰ The bravado of local Russian officials aside, the construction of the CER had not only encouraged the prospect of consolidating Russia's influence in Manchuria, but also brought into being the very real strategic threat that the railway would pose should it fall into the wrong hands. The curved line from Harbin to Tsitsihar, flowing as it did towards the Russian frontier, was of considerable military importance, since it constituted an excellent base for an armed force advancing against Blagoveshchensk and the Amur Railway east of the city. Russia had, in other words, committed itself to a position that was at one and the same time one of strength and one of vulnerability. This contradiction was to characterise the entire course of Russian involvement with Manchuria, and was at the heart of its relationship with Japan.

Russia's own relationship with its quasi-colony was not much easier. While the broader policy lines laid down by Witte and the Russian government were in harmony with the outlook of the Russian settlers in Manchuria, here too there was a contradiction. Although the settlers realised how vulnerable their position was, and saw too that Witte's 'trade first' approach was the appropriate one for them (and, more importantly, that war was not), they nonetheless set about creating a Russia-in-miniature in the heartland of Manchuria. This left them as communities which were out of step with the Russian government's broader strategies, and yet seemingly the unwitting implementers of the same. In all of this, they remained at the geopolitical fault line of a complex relationship between Russia, Japan and China.

This complex set of contradictions was best demonstrated in the evolution of Russian settlements in Manchuria. The municipal administration of Harbin was much like that of provincial towns in Russia itself, and therefore, wrote one local critic, suffered the same defects as those so painfully obvious in the former:

Chronic deficits, the lack of funds for even the most urgent of needs, the unsatisfactory nature of the municipal budget, absenteeism among officials and a general apathy in matters concerning city affairs.

Interest in the latter is only shown in the form of regular protests against taxation intended to buttress the city coffers.⁷¹

However, the municipal administration – the *zemstvo*, as it was known in Harbin – differed from those to be found in the treaty ports such as Shanghai in China proper in that it was not allowed to exact funds through either land taxes or customs duties.⁷² It was only after the Treaty of Portsmouth of 1905, which ended the Russo-Japanese War, that Harbin became a treaty port, and foreign nationals began to trickle into the city. The latter expressed their desire to see the introduction of a system of municipal administration similar to that in other treaty ports. But as a local Russian newspaper concluded: ‘to the wider circle of the Russian public, those principles upon which was built this form of self-government and budget appear as *terra incognita*’.⁷³ The same commentator even compared the state of Russian municipal administration with that of other treaty ports and mildly admonished the Chinese inhabitants of Harbin, concluding that ‘it is surprising that the Chinese of Harbin do not value the equality proffered to them in the area of municipal administration’.⁷⁴

By the terms of the original railway contract signed in 1896, the CER was to receive gratis, or in some areas upon payment of an annual rent, all lands ‘actually necessary for the construction, operation and protection of the line’.⁷⁵ The Russian ‘tenants’ subsequently interpreted this wording in the broadest possible sense. Besides the land 100 feet (thirty metres) on either side of the railway track,⁷⁶ the company acquired large tracts encompassing the various stations too. Such an interpretation of the agreement, in effect, provided the foundations for building of towns, of which Harbin was the most significant.

The settlement at Harbin, which was founded in 1897, boasted a population of nearly 40,000 people on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War.⁷⁷ Of this total, about 20,000 were Russian.⁷⁸ There was a predominance of railway workers, with the merchant class and military making up a large proportion of the remainder.⁷⁹ The town itself could be divided into three main areas, the first being Staryi Kharbin (Old Harbin). This had been the original Russian township, largely made up of the luxurious villas belonging to the engineers who had constructed the CER.⁸⁰ Old Harbin, which went into rapid decline upon the completion of the railway, was located some nine *versts* from the main station.⁸¹ Much nearer the centre of the settlement was the Pristan’ (or Quay) area, so called because of its proximity to the River Sungari. Here, over a third of the total population of Russian Harbin lived in conditions not dissimilar to those of a North American frontier town. The streets were unpaved, deeply pitted and covered in a layer of fine yellow dust which would swirl into suffocating clouds during the dry season but turned into a thick, immobilising mud after the torrential rains of the wet season.⁸² A unique intertwining of Chinese and Russian cultures was to be found in the Pristan’ area, in an

atmosphere filled with the vitality of a thriving, bustling community. Hawkers peddled their cooked food to Chinese workers – many of whom would crowd into Pristan' from nearby Chinese settlements during the day, and return to their homes after dark – while Russians frequented their local *stolovye* (restaurants). In this crowded district were to be found market stalls, baths, Chinese theatres, inns, food stores and 'one commercial company after another [mainly steam mills]'.⁸³ Accommodation was hard to find, and as a result, rents were high.⁸⁴ As with most communities of this type, Pristan' initially lacked adequate planning and sanitation. For some, these characteristics were almost too much to bear. Polner, for example, noted of this area that '[it] is abominable. Here are commingled the worst features of Russian and Chinese settlements; all the excesses of Russo-Chinese civilisation.'⁸⁵ Within a few years, the proximity of Pristan' to the river had helped to transform the district into Harbin's main business centre;⁸⁶ its less savoury reputation having passed on to other, newer suburbs of Harbin, notably the Modiagou area, which by the 1930s was a haven for criminal activities, and especially kidnappings.⁸⁷

The third Russian district in this early period was New Harbin, or, as it was later known, Novyi Gorod. This was the 'aristocratic' sector of Harbin, complete with paved roads and even '...the occasional wooden pavement'.⁸⁸ Here there was a proliferation of two- and three-storey stone houses as well as 'the wooden houses of the railway staff; extremely elegant homes, bordered with verandas and balconies, luxuriant greenery hiding them from the gaze of passers-by'.⁸⁹ It was in Novyi Gorod that the chief administrative complex of the city was located, including the CER management building, the post and telegraph offices, and the headquarters of the Border Patrol. These, along with the newly constructed central railway station and hotel, were structures that stood out in relation to the development of the settlement as a whole. As Polner observed, 'Striking in their splendour, ... [t]hese buildings captivate the beholder by their blatantly decadent contours, their grandiose character. The town grows before our eyes and woods still line many of the construction sites.'⁹⁰

If, setting aside the immense cost of the CER itself, we consider that these grand edifices were built at considerable expense to the company that had been formed a few years earlier, we begin to see a certain *raison d'être* to this extravagance, namely to impress upon the Chinese authorities the permanence of Russian involvement in Manchuria. As Weigh quite rightly concludes, 'it was the intention of the Russian authorities to make the expenditures as high as possible so that it would be impossible or unprofitable for China to recover [the CER]'.⁹¹ Among the first of the ornate structures in this area were men's and ladies' schools of commerce, with their respective halls of residence⁹² – an image telling of the long-term intentions of Russian policy and, ironically, ultimately revealing flaws in the same, as is discussed in later chapters.

By 1904 the other important Russian settlements in northern Manchuria

were parochial by comparison with Harbin itself. Hailar, which was a centre for one of the major CER auxiliary enterprises and the timber industry, and Tsitsihar were both small Chinese communities which grew in importance only with the advent of the railway. The principal functions of these towns, other than in small-scale import/export ventures, were largely limited to those connected with the railway's own activities. As a Harbin scholar observing the economic history of Tsitsihar noted, the Russian attempt to introduce a textile industry to the town showed some signs of expansion 'only recently'. The reason for the slow growth, he suggested, was that 'the Chinese are not yet sufficiently accustomed to it, hence the lack of demand for its products. . . . However, we can look forward to the industry expanding fairly rapidly if rational measures are adopted for such development.'⁹³ While the industries waited to 'take off', commercial activities, other than those directly related to CER business, consisted of small import/export trade, including imports of Russian sugar, soap and candles. The same writer noted that 'Russian styrene candles are very popular with the Chinese because they burn more cleanly.'⁹⁴ Exports from Tsitsihar were largely limited to raw agricultural products, and particularly cereals such as oats and native grains such as *mi-tsu* and *siao mi-tsu*.⁹⁵

Taken as a whole, Manchuria's remarkable surge in prosperity, despite the region's wealth of natural resources, was based on the development of a predominantly monoculture economy centring on the humble soya bean.⁹⁶ A very large proportion of the Chinese peasants who settled in Manchuria in the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century engaged in the production of soya beans, which were not only nutritious for human consumption, but also valuable as animal feed. The latter use especially was responsible for creating a great export market, with the railways serving as the major conduit for the transport of the beans overland to Europe, or to major ports such as Dal'nyi for export to the United States (another major buyer of soya beans). Given the late advent of Chinese settlers to Manchuria, caused by the prohibition of Chinese settlement by the Manchus and a tight control of migration by indigenous warlords such as Chang Tso-lin,⁹⁷ much of the Manchurian territory was either wild, populated by indigenous tribes or the dreaded bands of *Hunghutze* (Red Beards), who preyed on Chinese settler and foreigner alike. Emerging settlements were therefore very tightly tied to the railways themselves, as these provided not only a source of security, but also virtually ready-made links to sources of income and, for some, rapidly emerging prosperity.

The Manchurian economy, at least at this stage of its development,⁹⁸ and despite the enormous strides it took in those early years of growth, was therefore very delicately poised. Chinese and foreigner alike were most vulnerable to fluctuations in the fortunes of the railway system, and this showed itself in the course of the political crises that gripped the region in the first half of the twentieth century.

2 Railways and empire

The development of railways in China was shaped by competing world-views shown by the imperial powers, but also within China's own elite – and none more so in the case of the latter than the Self-Strengthening Movement. Lasting from 1861 to 1894, this movement was important in blending traditional Chinese outlook with modernism, with the Chinese authorities implementing significant programmes of economic and military modernisation. Railways, however, were not seen as an important dimension of bringing China technologically into the modern age. This was not due to any lack of awareness of the importance of railways on the part of the Self-Strengthening Movement itself. As early as 1867, Shen Pao-chen, a leading voice in this movement, had raised the matter, and with a characteristically Confucian sense of the long term:

What shall we do about telegraphs and railroads? The Qin (Ch'in) dynasty built the Great Wall, and at the time it was considered a calamity, but later generations relied on it. If telegraphs and railroads are built, China will likewise enjoy great benefits from them in the future.¹

Being a Self-Strengthenener, however, Shen rejected the notion that the Chinese government should succumb to the imperialist powers in allowing the latter to build and control them. He demonstrated this stance, when, as governor-general in Nanking, he at first bought and then ordered the demolition of China's first railway. Funded by the British merchants, this line, from Wu-sung to Shanghai, was only sixteen kilometres (ten miles) long, completed in 1876, cheaply, but without imperial sanction. The official whom Shen sent to destroy the illicit line was, ironically enough, Sheng Hsuan-huai, who was to become the Director of the Chinese Imperial Railways Administration. Sheng performed his duty efficiently and with a commercial aptitude which was later to bring him wealth and an impressive career as an administrator.² He must have approached his task with great regret, a symptom that was to be shown by many who embraced modernisation for China, but came into conflict with the attitudes shown

by the leaders of the Self-Strengthening Movement. The latter were quite willing to build advanced vessels and telegraph facilities, they adopted Western military technology, built modern arsenals modelled on European forms, and freely co-opted Western experts, but they looked upon railway construction with great suspicion, even when this was mooted for their own tightly controlled areas of political influence.

The answer to this apparent contradiction may lie in the insight with which the modernisers approached the new technology. As with Russia, railway lines in China might open up a Pandora's box that few other instruments of modernisation could. Weaponry, advanced forms of communication, even Western experts could be controlled. Railways, on the other hand, were part of a global phenomenon which opened up territories and brought different peoples into contact in an unrestrained, free-flowing way. The impact of this on Chinese cultural perceptions, and on the geo-mancy concerned with the centuries-old lie of the land, the form and place of villages in Chinese life, and the possible destruction of ancestral resting places, was potentially too great a form of destabilisation to contemplate. Unlike in Russia, where policies ran roughshod over such delicate considerations, in China such an assault on its rural heartland threatened the possible unravelling of the very fabric of Chinese civilisation.

There were, however, also practical issues that had to be considered. In Russia the railway provided a way of introducing modes of transport to areas which were scarcely – or at very best episodically – linked; the value of this to the development of a rural economy which in most areas of Siberia barely limped along was something to consider seriously. In China, however, population density, ancient transport systems and businesses connected with cart and canal barge suggested that the railway would pose a considerable threat to local economies.³ Moreover, the imperial elite of China had just emerged from a period of rural unrest and peasant rebellion, in the form of the Taiping Rebellion, which was tamed by the use of a traditional, conservative political outlook, and military tools acquired from the outside world. The potential for further unrest, based on the destabilisation and change that the advent of the railway threatened, was too great for these Chinese innovators to toy with.

Finally, there was also the issue of the foreigners themselves. In the capacity of advisers to the court and individual leaders' provinces, these men had their uses, and were controllable. The appearance of railway systems in China might well have resulted in the diffusion and unrestrained spread of their ideas and influence. Again, in a China so politically tender after a long and violent period of rebellion, such thoughts were frightening. So too was the prospect of new classes emerging in China, which had never been seen before, and whose impact would be unpredictable: railway workers, engine drivers and engineers – all of them maintaining the railway systems, and perforce being educated technologically and socially by Western systems of organisation and training. There was

the potentially unwelcome prospect too of station-masters and other forms of railway officials, financiers, and businessmen, emerging to form elites to rival the authority of the purveyors of controlled modernisation. All these were, of course, necessary if the railway systems were to run safely, efficiently and profitably.

And here was, arguably, the greatest sting in the tail of introducing such advanced technology as the railway to China. Construction costs were enormous for railway projects, involving far greater amounts of capital, indeed, than any existing Chinese financial organisation could harness.⁴ Such a prospect was not one that the leaders of the Self-Strengthening Movement would wish to entertain, having done so well in avoiding becoming dependent on foreign loans and capital until virtually the end of the nineteenth century.⁵ So, with internal mobilisation of capital being highly dependent on the introduction of universal Chinese financial legislation, in order, at least, to guarantee returns on investments, Chinese-led railway development was problematic in the extreme. This had not prevented Chinese investors from attempting to build lines before then, but the fruits of the ventures had withered on the vine. Chang Chih-tung, the viceroy at Wuchang, had, for example, set about using Chinese capital for the building of the Peking–Hankow Railway after 1889, but had failed emphatically.⁶

Despite these reservations, the Self-Strengtheners did take some early steps to create China's railway system, with Li Hung-chang being the one who took the first initiative, and in typically wily fashion. One of Li's many modern enterprises was the Kaiping Coal Mines at Tangshan, where, in 1880, he had its English engineer C.W. Kinder build a six-mile (ten-kilometre) mule-drawn tramline from the mine to navigable water. Kinder built the line to the European standard gauge of 4ft 8½in, and to very high engineering standards for such a modest purpose. The real goal of this limited project soon became plain: it was, in fact, the first stage of the Peking to Mukden line, and after a few months steam engines appeared on it.

The door to railway construction opened wider with the defeat of China by France in 1885, forcing the Chinese court to contemplate further and more radical forms of modernisation. Railway construction quickly found support from the newly formed Admiralty Board, a body linked, as many were in the China of the period, to Li (who was viceroy of the capital province of Chih-li, and the power behind the Chinese throne). During the next ten years the board was responsible for the building of the Port Arthur naval base, which was to be home to China's Beiyang fleet. By 1894 this line had reached south to Tientsin and north to Shanghaiwan (just above the Great Wall). In essence, the aim of this line was to help to defend Chinese interests in Manchuria. Like the Beiyang fleet and the fort of Port Arthur itself, the new railway was unable to protect China against Japan when hostilities broke out with the latter in 1894.

Li was not the only provincial governor who saw railways as an essential part of China's drive to modernisation and sovereign integrity. Liu Ming-ch'uan built a short line on the island of Taiwan, while in 1889, as mentioned earlier, Chang Chih-tung petitioned the Chinese court for an initiation of China's first great main line from Hankow to Peking, proposing the use of Chinese capital and materials.⁷ To facilitate Chinese contribution to the construction of the line, Chang established the huge Hanyang Ironworks in 1890.⁸ The ironworks and the mines that fed its production went on to become the foundations for modern industrialisation in central China.⁹

Peking was favourably inclined to the venture, and even indicated that it might provide financial support for it. However, Li's Shanghai-kwan line initially eclipsed Chang's venture, not only because of Li's influence at court but also because of his line's military significance. Chang was therefore unable to generate the necessary capital. While his ironworks continued to expand, Chang's railway plan had to be shelved until after China's defeat by Japan, when the court was spurred to authorise construction. Shortly after this, Chang sold both the industrial concerns and the railway project to Sheng Hsuan-huai, who was himself anxious to consolidate his own position upon the collapse of Li Hung-chang's military-industrial complex in north China.¹⁰ Sheng, the man who had earlier implemented the destruction of the Wu-sung railway, was at first determined to further Chang's ideas of using Chinese capital and material, even if this slowed down the building of the railway. Western observers were quick to criticise the project, doubtless wanting to secure their own involvement in it. Describing the Hanyang Ironworks, China's first major modern capital works project, as a 'white elephant', one English commentator went on to compare Western and Chinese ideas on railway-building in the following way:

Ten years would not seem to China a long time for the completion of the Peking-Hankow line, although foreign engineers and foreign capital might complete it in a year. She believes that she can wait and gradually do this work in small pieces. This is the foundation of her confidence in the sufficiency of native capital, and we must confess that it has some grounds. From our point of view, an immediate opening up of the whole country . . . would bring new prosperity and revive the dying embers of national life. But it must always be remembered in all these matters that China is still in control of her own country, and the only way we can safely surmise as to what she will do, is to regard events from her own viewpoint. She is in no hurry for railroads and is determined that they shall be built according to her own ideas.¹¹

Just two years after the publication of this article, China no longer controlled its railway policies, as the Western powers took advantage of its

weakened state to force it to grant railway as well as other economic concessions.

The railways originally planned by the leading elements of the Self-Strengthening Movement had at their core the goal of guaranteeing China's economic and military integration, although personal profit also entered the reasoning of individual leaders such as Li Hung-chang himself. With China's defeat by France and Japan, and the loss of key strategic points such as Port Arthur and Dairen, conditions in the late 1890s forced China to speed up construction of railways, and to do so using the more acceptable forms of foreign investment in this process.¹² Foreign capital and a broad spectrum of Western engineering and administrative controls had in the main taken over from purely Chinese interests. The construction of the Peking–Hankow and Kaifeng–Liaoyang lines were now funded by Franco-Belgian sources of capital.¹³ The Tientsin–Pukow project, on the other hand, was Anglo-German, while that of the Peking–Mukden line employed solely British capital. The latter lines were intended to feed German- and British-dominated treaty ports. The sole German line was in Shantung Province, running from the German-leased port of Tsingtao to Tsinan. Solely British lines appeared, with the Shanghai–Nanking, Ningpo–Suchow and Kowloon–Canton lines running into territories of interest to Britain. Although these lines no longer figured with regard to China's own military or political interests, they nonetheless held some economic value to China, and were built to the gauge and technical standards which the engineer Kinder had earlier established as the Chinese standard.¹⁴

But with these came other lines too, which were immediately to be seen as posing a threat to China's sovereignty and political integrity. These were the proposed railways that would enter China from neighbouring Western-controlled states, Britain and France obtaining the right to build railways of penetration into Yunnan Province from Burma and Vietnam respectively. These were to be built in accordance with the metre gauge of the colonial systems in the latter states. Neither of these lines was ever built, but the French railway from Haiphong to Kunming was the most spectacular of all the railways of penetration. Many in France who harboured imperialist pretensions for China looked to this railway as an excuse for annexing the whole of Yunnan Province. Indeed, Governor-General Paul Doumer told the French parliament late in 1898 that '[t]he railway is also a military instrument'.¹⁵ His activities in the province showed that he intended to use the railway in this way, although the French government itself forestalled such a venture.¹⁶

But all of these railway projects paled against Russia's, which were by far the most ambitious in terms of their physical scale and extent, and most audacious in their political scope. These railways were built to the Russian gauge of five feet (which in itself removed them from integration with neighbouring systems), and they also introduced a political dimension which none of the others had. While the other European railway

construction projects interlocked into the Chinese politico-military matrix unaggressively, showing themselves to be genuine attempts at opening up the country to trade and communication rather than a means to usurp political control, the Russian scheme took the role of the railway to a fresh political dimension. So great were the Russian projects that they brought with them unprecedented forms of military and political privileges that the Russian government felt were commensurate with its need to protect its concessions. In practice, however, this anticipated the creation of a Russian protectorate over the whole of Manchuria.¹⁷ At the core of the problem of understanding Russian involvement in Manchuria was the creation of a unique concept, the *polosa otchuzhdeniya*, meaning something like 'separation strip' or 'exclusion strip'. On the one hand, this was a logical political form, allowing the Russians to protect their valuable railway by granting absolute rights to land a few metres on either side of the line. On the other hand, even when this modest concession was multiplied by the length and extent of the railway line, the outcome would be a fair amount of territory that had been handed over to the Russians. Moreover, as with Harbin and the other centres of population along the line, the ceded land had a way of bulging and expanding Russian presence. After defeating Russia in 1905, Japan inherited these privileges on the South Manchurian Railway (SMR), which, moreover, the Japanese converted to the standard Japanese gauge used for Japan's own railways in Korea, thereby creating a fresh extended network, and coincidentally another territorial breach into China – indeed, of the sort that the early European railway pioneers had hoped to create in south-western China.

There was, however, an unfortunate dimension to the place of the railway system in the development of Manchuria. It was clear from the beginning that, Witte's moderate approach to Russian activities there aside, the railway inherently served an important security function. For the first time, technology had allowed Russia to span its vast territories, linking its eastern and western portions with a 'bridge of steel'. The implications of this were considerable. Before the advent of the Trans-Siberian Railway, crossing the extraordinarily difficult terrain that divided eastern and western Russia took many months,¹⁸ and was a hazardous and difficult journey for men on horseback. Winter made the transport of heavy armaments, machinery and supplies virtually impossible. Thus, to secure territory deep in the hinterland of Siberia and the Russian Far East, Russia relied on a policy of building up fortress settlements controlled by scrupulously loyal officers, who acted as local governors. Materials for the development of these settlements had to be sourced locally. Local garrisons became both the core constituents of these centres and their source of security. The Cossacks, the unruly, barely disciplined but fiercely loyal horseman-warriors of Russia's periphery, became an indispensable part of the security equation, forming as they did the delicate web connecting the fortress-settlements, and maintaining order in the otherwise sparsely popu-

lated territory. The Cossacks were highly suited to their role in consolidating the modern Russian Empire, but with the advent of the railway a variety of characteristics of empire came into question, including the place of the plainsmen in its further evolution. Where transport by horse required months, the Trans-Siberian reduced the length of the journey to days and weeks. The weather, although still a major factor in slowing the normal functions of commerce and the soldiery, no longer played an important part in dictating the pace and nature of activity in the East. Changed too were the social dimensions of the settlements. The railway quickly created a strongly multicultural flavour in settlements and territory associated with the lines and stations. Those who travelled on the new railway felt the strangeness of the ethnic mixes that appeared at the stations en route:

One detects a new type among the crowds at the stations, – flat faces, round eyes, square thickset bodies. Here on the borderland, the old race has fused with the Slav and has become metamorphised. The sons of Tatars . . . have become shopkeepers, train-hands, waiters, and butchers, who come to sell meat and milk to the chef of the wagon restoran. Sometimes, at the stops, figures, gnome-like in enveloping red capote and grotesquely padded furs, hold their ponies with jealous rein, staring curiously at the locomotive and passengers.¹⁹

This was an ethnic and cultural ‘melting-pot’ that was seemingly there to be used in the building up of empire. This characteristic was especially evident in the Russian Far East and Manchuria itself, when the railways finally linked and created a single conduit for the development of the Empire. This is perhaps best depicted by an American senator, Albert J. Beveridge, after his visit to Manchuria at the turn of the twentieth century:

And you are struck by the fact (nay, if you be Anglo-Saxon, you are startled by it) that all of this mingled motley of humanity get along in perfect harmony. The bronzed Korean, the queued Chinaman, and the blue-eyed, yellow-haired Russian soldier arrange themselves on an open flat-car in a human mosaic of mutual agreeableness. There is no race prejudice here! Superior to all the world, as the Russian believes himself, he shows no offensive manner towards the other races with which he so picturesquely mingles. It is a thing that you must have noticed up in Siberia, where the Russian peasant is also coming into contact with semi-oriental peoples. But, with the blood of racial bigotry coursing through your veins, here this social fusion startles you. It is a strange page suddenly opened before you. And it is a page you will read again and again every day as long as you are in Manchuria. And from a reading of it a lesson may be learned, and part of Russia’s secret of dominion revealed.²⁰

These were not especially welcome transformations to many, as they altered the essential Russianness of the Siberian outposts, creating a sense of cultural alienation and threat. The Trans-Siberian Railway, and beyond it the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), therefore not only linked the former fortress-settlements but also served to strain their very social fabric. In making Siberia more secure, ironically the railway also made it more vulnerable. Vulnerable too was the place in the new technologically conditioned era of the Cossacks themselves. The horsemen were for centuries in complete harmony with their environment, having inherited their mantle from the Mongol horsemen who had conquered Russia so effectively and comprehensively in the time of Genghis Khan and his Mongol hordes.²¹

Subtly, the horse was overtaken by the train, which could carry large numbers of men quickly, and complete with substantial supplies, depositing them in problem areas relatively fresh for combat with enemy troops or enforcing local internal order. And despite the fact that the broader *penetration* of territory beyond the immediate railway zone was still clearly dependent on mounted troops, the appearance of the situation suggested otherwise: a new age had dawned for military technology in the East. The speed with which the Trans-Siberian Railway came into operation emphasised the eclipse of the old in the region. With capital in place, technology, labour and planning had blended remarkably swiftly to create the line efficiently and effectively. Here, as in the course of the Russo-Japanese War itself, the Easterners had done much to facilitate the building of the railway. Families such as the Skidelskys made their early fortunes by assembling gangs of labour to lay the railway lines, and also extended their railway-linked activities by harnessing natural resources, providing timber for sleepers, stones for the beds and fuel for the locomotives.²² These early Eastern pioneers were initially based in Vladivostok and its environs, extending their activities to Manchuria in a seamless fashion when the CER was commissioned.²³ Capital, technology and entrepreneurial flair appeared to combine impressively – uncharacteristically so for a country, such as Russia, that had embarked on its modernisation relatively late, and had repeatedly performed erratically in the process. The Trans-Siberian therefore provided another important dimension to the formation of the ‘New Russia’: the self-confidence and optimism that it could match its earlier – and on the whole cruder – dimensions as an international power with technologically conditioned innovation and a hitherto unheard-of flexibility.

Manchuria and neighbouring Siberia were, in effect, sanctuaries of the ancient and the testing ground for the modern – territories that inhabited neither entirely comfortably. Russia’s new railway system firmly connected Manchuria to Siberia, heightening its destabilising impact on both. For Manchuria, however, the impact was an extended one. It had been a territory that was artificially separated from the rest of China by the latter’s Manchu rulers, who wanted to demonstrate their distinctiveness.²⁴ When it

became clear that this wealthy region was in danger of being usurped by neighbouring powers, China opened it up to Chinese colonisation, which took shape quickly. But the Chinese settlers arrived as colonisers in competition with the Russians and Japanese. This resulted in a constant state of political flux for the region, with all parties attempting to demonstrate their claims to sovereignty over the freshly opened lands, but with little historical legitimacy to back these up.²⁵ In this way, Manchuria remained a distinctive area of competition for the powers. In China proper the Chinese government, weak as it was, reluctantly provided concessions to the imperial powers, but with an underlying moral certainty that these had been imposed on the local Chinese population, as well as their long-established political and social order. In Manchuria this was not as an easy line to run with. As in the American West, authority was secured on the basis of competing claims, and the ability to show primacy through a complex political process. Chinese interests were represented by both the central Chinese government and local warlords, whose respective views and policies often diverged. Foreigners' local rights and privileges were negotiated with the warlords, as was the tapping of labour, whose flow into Manchuria they controlled. Broader questions relating to issues of sovereignty were in the hands of the central Chinese authorities. However, the warlords' powers were, finally, of a limited, highly localised nature, and therefore vulnerable to the testing. The outcome of such a complex set of power relations eventually emerged when Japan took control of Manchuria as a whole in 1931, but the early signs of the reasons why it should have done so were evident at this early stage.²⁶ The same sense of uncertainty was also evident in eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East in the course of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent Intervention, when Japan lingered far longer than its British, American, Canadian and French allies, seemingly unconvinced of the validity of claims on control of the region.²⁷

The unease over the issue of Manchuria was evident in other ways. The United States was especially sensitive to the developments in the area. It had argued strongly for an 'open door' arrangement in Manchuria, which essentially staked America's own claim on economic and political participation there, and yet it also espoused a strong line supporting the political integrity and independence of China. This left the United States in an impossible position. By pressing the issue of China's integrity, it felt compelled to reconcile this with dealing with the local power-brokers who were the warlords. Such a compromised position was a difficult one to square with the desired American role of honest broker, a position which greatly reduced the United States' influence in the region – a point underlined by President Theodore Roosevelt: following Japan's victory, he made an uncharacteristically hushed declaration to his son: 'between ourselves – for you must not breathe it to anybody – I was thoroughly well pleased with the Japanese victory, for Japan is playing our game'.²⁸

Nor was Britain able to exercise substantial political sway over the region. Having been so successful in extending its areas of influence in key areas of China proper, Britain encountered the very considerable hurdle of not knowing how to use this experience in furthering its interests in Manchuria. Again, the division of power between a central Chinese government and local political leaders made conventional diplomacy all but impossible. Thus, Russia's presence, employing the thinly veiled imperialistic tools of railway-building and the *de jure* instruments of political involvement, was a difficult one to eclipse or usurp. The only regional power of any importance, therefore, was Japan, which had, moreover, important cultural advantages. Japan had done much to emulate the history of Britain. A small island-country, it had grasped the nettle of modernisation and had shown itself as successful as its European counterpart in carving a place in regional, and indeed *global*, terms. Many in Whitehall considered Japan a 'Britain of the East', and therefore not only a known quantity but something of a kindred spirit – a status no country before (or, in fact, after) Japan was able to secure. The United States too had had an influential part to play in Japan's emergence on the international stage, having been instrumental in opening – initially through the historic Perry mission – the hitherto introverted Japan to the emerging disciplines of Western trade, political organisation and combat.²⁹ Both Britain and the United States therefore viewed Japan as a close ally – one that could, moreover, further their own interests on the difficult political terrain of north-eastern China.³⁰

There was a further dimension to this political equation. Russia's position in Manchuria was in itself something that was worth challenging, providing the other powers with the ability to compete with it, and to share in the prosperity that this 'frontier territory' promised. But Russia was also seen as being able to use its position in Manchuria as a political wedge driven into the body of China in order to split it asunder, leaving it vulnerable to more extensive Russian expansion. Indeed, there were people who influenced United States policy who, from the first of Russian initiatives in north-east China, had anticipated that Russia's advance would not stop in Manchuria. If not contained, they believed, Russia would ultimately absorb the Chinese Empire itself. Such thinking was seemingly reinforced by the efficacy of the autocratic Russian government and, perhaps even more worryingly, by the cultural affinity between Russia and Asian nations. Writing in 1900, Paul S. Reinsch, espousing a view that was commonly held in Europe, had characterised Russia as 'semi-Asiatic and becoming more Oriental'.³¹ As such, Russia was seen as the 'greatest menace to the continued vigor and supremacy of Western civilization'. Extrapolating from this, such a perspective held that, should Russia come to control China, bringing Russian organisation to the Chinese masses, the place of the Anglo-Saxon in the existing Chinese order would be endangered.³² The idea was not a new one. As early as July 1896 the British

diplomat Cecil Spring Rice had warned Theodore Roosevelt that, should this occur, the result would be 'such a power as the world has never seen'.³³ Thus, in the eyes of Britain and the United States, the stakes were considerable. This explains the energy which both devoted to consolidating the treaty Britain shaped with Japan – an agreement which encouraged the latter to shape a policy of increasingly assertive and complex rivalry with Russia, laying the foundations for conflict and the stemming of Russian influence in China.

And while Britain and the United States worked to shape this subtle 'united front' against Russia, pressure from Germany and France, as discussed above, helped to sharpen the potential lines of conflict between Russia and Japan by encouraging the former to turn more and more of its attention to its eastern ventures.³⁴

The complex relations that are described here were, in effect, a representation of an unstable balance of power becoming evident, predicated on each side either by opposition to, or acceptance of, the Russian advance. Such a situation replaced the stability that had previously been maintained in the Far East through a multiple balance, with an unaligned Britain holding the balance of power between the competing nations. By this time, however, British dominance was waning and the Russian influence increasing in East Asia, coinciding, of course, with the emergence of Japan and the United States as Pacific powers. As a result, the system showed increased complexity. The perception of a Russian advance at the turn of the century became the catalyst causing a split of the powers into two opposing camps, and thereby creating an inherently unstable simple balance of power.³⁵ Such situations are normally accompanied by heightened tensions, arms races and crises.³⁶

The situation in East Asia very much held to such a pattern after the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. After 1902 the United States, despite being in a situation of relative disadvantage earlier on, was, by remaining aloof from official foreign entanglements and alliances and 'retaining its freedom of action',³⁷ able to assume the role of holding the balance of power that had earlier been held by Britain.

The decline of British power was most clearly indicated by the division of China into virtual 'spheres of influence' by Russia, Japan, Germany and France.³⁸ President Theodore Roosevelt, aware that 'power struggles in . . . East Asia influenced the balance of power in Europe', grew concerned by the implications of global power shifts, and became increasingly alive to the United States' potential leadership role. At the core of Roosevelt's concerns were, of course, indications that Britain's power was in decline. Being aware of this, but, like his secretary of state, John Hay, believing in the solidarity of British and American interests, Roosevelt became convinced that 'the United States would have to hold the balance of power if England failed to hold it, no matter against what countries'.³⁹ The East Asian situation was, in some important respects, a precursor to the role the

United States would go on to play at a global level in the interwar period.⁴⁰ Whether intentionally or not, Britain was in the process of losing its position of political centrality to the United States.

Manchuria therefore came to be at the core of global transformation at the beginning of the new century, in the same way that, after the First World War, it served to precipitate the dramatic realignments and political forms that gave rise to the conflict that was to be the Second World War in East Asia.⁴¹ Inextricably intertwined were the fortunes of the major international powers, finding that a sparsely populated area of inner Asia was at the heart of their understanding of the political make-up of the global situation. The trigger to the transformation was the inexorable path to the Russo-Japanese War. And the prize? Despite its potential bounties, Manchuria was an area that would be enormously costly to develop, as both Russia and – particularly – Japan discovered.

For Russia, even at the early stages of north Manchurian development, the Chinese Eastern Railway stood out as something of a colossus in both economic and political terms in this regard. For the years up until 1914 it had absorbed an estimated 182 million gold roubles in subsidies from St Petersburg.⁴² By the same year the company employed over 20,000 people, the majority of these being Russian.⁴³ However, despite the proportions of investment and the size of the operation, the CER, contrary to expectations,⁴⁴ rarely seemed to be in a position to provide images of strategic advantage for Russia. This applied as much to the financial sphere as it did to the military: at a time when the Russian government had steeply increased its investment in its army, and might have welcomed greater allocation of private funds to its venture, the figures in the latter were disappointing.⁴⁵

The railway system was, in other words, both an advantage and a disadvantage. In 1883 the only way one could reach the Far East from European Russia was to cross Siberia on horseback, a trip requiring two to four years of riding, often resulting in complete exhaustion. That year saw the introduction of a sea route, known as the Northern Sea Route, a shipping lane along the north coast of Siberia which was ice-free and open only for two months each year, and which reduced the travel time to a few weeks. But this never became popular with settlers and colonists. The opening of the Trans-Siberian railway reduced the journey to thirty days, and first allowed mass travel to the eastern periphery.⁴⁶ Not only did this increase the levels of colonisation,⁴⁷ but it also altered the outlook dramatically by underlining Russia's role there as an *œuvre civilisatrice*.⁴⁸

The building of the railways extended Russia's own heartland into North-East Asia, highlighting the appearance of a 'geographical pivot' of history, to use Halford Mackinder's concept.⁴⁹ It caused Russia's attention to begin to shift from sea power to land power, with people and machinery coming to be more cheaply and efficiently moved by railway than by sea. Russia, in this sense, played a key role in reshaping both its own outlook and the strategic 'heartland' of North-East Asia.

Expanding into Siberia, especially by constructing an ambitious railway system, made more compelling the logic of extending Russia beyond its traditional borders.⁵⁰ Particularly audacious were the apparent underlying purposes of such expansion. As the plans of the Trans-Siberian and Manchurian Railways took shape, they revealed a tendency to branch out and indicate still further areas of Russian interest. Thus, the Manchurian line – itself a branch line of the Ussuri Railway – bifurcated at Harbin, with the southern railway system extending to the very edge of Japan's world, while its Eastern line was directed to the Russian settlements of Vladivostok, itself being the point of another line to Khabarovsk, but with the intention of creating another fork along the way, which would then connect the line with Korea, the 'Hermit Kingdom', which Japan coveted for itself. The purposes of such a system of branch lines and forks need not have been suspected of strategic intentions, as they were also a way of expanding the commercial usefulness of this exceedingly expensive railway system, opening up potential markets and sources of commercial transport.

However, such a proposition was only one edge of a two-edged sword. Commercial interests were inextricably tied to the proposition of political influence and territorial control. Witte had been able to sugar this particularly unpleasant pill by emphasising the purely commercial intent at the heart of the railway project. But the images that interested parties such as Japan and China perceived were on the whole at odds with this. Branch lines and forks presented the latter states with an increasingly undifferentiated image of a *general* spread of Russian influence, using the strategic forking of the line to take into its grasp section after section of Manchurian territory, and creating centres of control along the way, with Harbin increasingly appearing as a nerve centre for the entire unified operation for gaining hegemony in this strategically important region. But was this a genuinely thought-out policy of political hegemony, or one which came to pass as the Russians improvised and hurriedly fashioned their apparent footholds? The impression the Russian activities were giving was one of permanence, and yet the very foundation of this apparent empire was a ninety-nine-year leasehold, rather than territory or influence in perpetuity.

3 The railway and the war

The 1904–1905 war combined land and naval action in a form which was both intense and, to a degree, muddled. And for good reason: both of these facets of warfare brought with them untried forms of advanced technology.¹ Many observers of the war noted the application of new weaponry and tactics, as they intertwined in a relatively compressed physical environment and time frame. Reports were sent home, based on the lessons drawn from the conflict. The communications from correspondents give as complete a picture of a conflict as had ever been seen before. The journalists gave body to the bare bones of warfare that had before then been common fare for readers at home, Conrad's powerful prose informed by an imagination feeding on graphic descriptions, detailed information, photographs and vivid drawings being produced with remarkable efficiency, and quantity, at or near the front lines of the conflict. Such reporting in some key respects altered the very nature of documenting war. Journalists and commentators alike had the ability to triangulate their sources, dig deeper into factual content, and move beyond the highly dependent state that newspaper correspondents found themselves in while reporting from the headquarters of the friendly power involved. The importance of this became evident too in ways in which the war was scrutinised and *critically* assessed. This brought the conflict closer to the readers' own instincts and daily lives. An example of this comes from Rear-Admiral Ingles (a former naval adviser to the Japanese government), who wrote of the situation in Japan for the *Daily Telegraph* in London:

Suddenly the ordinary travelling public are instructed to wait a little, and the turnstiles are locked. The public turn back and chat, not in the least disconcerted. At last the great iron gates at the end of the platform are opened, and at the same time the head of the battalion is halted, turns towards the train; in a moment the train is packed as full as it can hold. The guard whistles, the train moves off. There are no friends on the platform – no women – no band playing 'The girl I left behind me.' 'All is quiet, all is great.' Everything betokens order and

quiet determination. Now the train has gone, the great gates are shut, the turnstiles are opened, the next ordinary passengers' train is ready to depart 'on time.'²

The war effort on both sides was intimate, intertwined with daily life of the civilian populations in ways which had hitherto been unheard of. Newspaper journalists swarmed around the battlefields, and the two sides' home bases. A journalist asked a Japanese officer if his forces were going to land troops in Port Arthur for reconnaissance purposes. 'Why should we?', the officer responded. 'We know all there is to be known about Port Arthur already.'³ What he was referring to was the Japanese network of spies, operating for some years behind enemy lines, but here represented in a candid and intimate fashion to the world's newspapers.

The exotic nature of the war's setting, the great stakes that Russia and Japan had openly identified as the goal of their struggle, and the implications of the war for the future of the wider world resulted in one other important feature of the conflict. Obscured in the process was the place of the railway on the broader canvas of the war. The novelty and the ferocity of the war helped to disguise the profound shift that had occurred in the realm of geopolitics, at the core of which stood the railway. Both Russia and Japan were fighting the war beyond their own formal borders, with the belligerents waging war at the end of long and difficult supply lines. Interestingly, the railway served as a focus and a reinforcement of the war effort for both sides. Russia had reached this point through the intensive and extremely rapid period of railway construction culminating in the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER): a mere six years, from 1897 to 1903, to complete the project in untamed country and a harsh climate.

The CER had, of course, also encouraged the building of infrastructure along the line, providing, at least in principle, the necessary sources of support for Russian security in the region, as well the creation of a central nerve centre, Harbin (which had over 40,000 residents by 1903, of whom half were Russian).⁴ The connection of this railway with the Trans-Siberian had provided an important facet to the region.

In many respects, the railway-building involved with both the Trans-Siberian and Chinese Eastern Railways was the acme of planning, execution and technology. The construction of the railways was carried out economically, with noteworthy achievements in planning and engineering. The construction of the CER, for example, was initiated in the absence of suitable Ordnance maps of the regions it was to traverse. The charting of the route was carried out using advance parties scouting out the territory, and a number of the reference points for this were triangulated through the use of astronomy.⁵ Construction of the lines, which was initiated just six months after agreement was reached with China, was divided into sections, work on which was initiated simultaneously. There were thirteen

sections of the main line, and the Southern line comprised eight. Each was between seventy-five and 160 kilometres in length (about forty-seven and 100 miles).⁶ The plan provided for ten pairs of trains a day, with speeds of twenty-two kilometres per hour on flat stretches and sixteen kilometres per hour in hilly sections (about 14 m.p.h. and 10 m.p.h. respectively). The frequency of trains was to increase to sixteen pairs some time after the lines were completed.⁷ Because of the large number of waterways in Manchuria, 912 steel bridges were built, together with 258 stone ones.⁸ There were also a number of temporary wooden bridges still in place when war broke out.⁹ The pressure that the construction effort itself entailed is reflected in the memoirs of General Dmitrii Khorvat, the CER's first manager:

[T]he construction of [the CER] had not yet been completed. In the short interval between the time when it was handed over for regular operation and the beginning of the war very little additional construction could be accomplished. Of the station tracks and sidings that had to be made according to the scheme of work 125 kilometers were not yet laid; of the seventy-four shunting loops only fifteen were ready by April 1st 1904. The necessary material had to be brought from Russia, to wit about 128 kilometers of rails, 103,000 [*poods*] of fastenings, about 1000 switches, as many pieces of rail cast especially for crossings etc. The water-supply, telegraph, dwelling houses and workshops were not completed in several places.¹⁰

Such views of the CER's origins in themselves provide indications of the great feat of engineering and construction that it represented, the builders efficiently completing large segments of tracks under conditions which were far from ideal. This harnessed and established a potentially significant military-industrial complex for the Russian Far East, with major contractors using their skills and local knowledge quickly and smoothly to build up economies of scale and banks of local knowledge, and to introduce new technologies and engineering techniques. The synchronisation of these efforts was enhanced by creating a centre of education and scholarship at Harbin. The polytechnic that was founded in the capital city of 'Russian Manchuria' quickly became the heart of this effort. The lecturers and researchers here built up a cadre of engineers who, in turn, provided the substance to the distinctive work that emerged in Manchuria. This took the form of a great, and most ambitious, spectrum of activities in the area of research and development (R&D) – so ambitious, in fact, that it would have been difficult to explain *unless* this were to be seen as an investment in the long-term rewards that would eventually flow from them.¹¹ But far more important in this context was the way in which the cities in the Russian Far East (such as Vladivostok) began to be integrated into the activities of the broader region. Prominent families such as the Skidelskys, Vorontsovs and Brynners expanded their business activities

into Manchuria, and tapped the available business from the railway-building going on. The Skidelskys, indeed, were instrumental in providing the all-important labour for the laying of the lines themselves, sourcing these efficiently and inventively from the Russian–Chinese region. In addition, the Skidelskys took a central part in supplying energy resources to the railway, expanding their operations to coal mines and timber exploitation in Manchuria, as did the Vorontsovs.¹²

Dating essentially from the 1860s, the Russian railway construction industry received a huge boost in the 1890s as a result of the Trans-Siberian Railway project. Its skills and range of metallurgical production greatly expanded. In Siberia, new mines were opened up and their product transported directly to new local ironworks to make rails. Against this background of Russian industrial expansion, it is important to note that much of the manufacture and engineering work was also carried out in the eastern United States and shipped across the continent to the Pacific coast and onward by ship to Hong and Vladivostok. American steel-rolling mills, machine-shops and forges for the manufacture of rails, locomotives and bridge components expanded and grew rich on the contracts that were negotiated with the Russian government for this mammoth enterprise. It has been estimated that 27,000 American workers were engaged on this part of the work alone, while Westinghouse and the New York Air Brake companies were employing a further 5,000 men on Russian contracts. The Trans-Siberian Railway, it was calculated, was supporting no fewer than 128,000 American family members. Beyond that, the railway gave such an impetus to the US metallurgical engineering industry that it became a formidable competitor in the market for railway construction to come in Asia, Africa, South America and Australia. In its way, the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway was an important milestone in the history of US industry. While the British participation in the venture was represented chiefly by capital raised in London, British engineering expertise also played a part. The crucially important Baikal ice-breaker-cum-ferry was manufactured in Newcastle upon Tyne and assembled on-site by British engineers, and there were even units of the Royal Engineers present to supervise some of the more complex bridge-building tasks.¹³

The Railway Guard was another aspect of the development of the railway network that gave rise to the view that what was emerging here was, in fact, something far greater than simply a commercial venture. Ostensibly in place to protect the railway itself, and the safety of passengers and staff, the Guard was a supplement to the Frontier Guards who were looking after the Trans-Siberian Railway. The numbers were considerable by the time of the Russo-Japanese conflict: forty-five squadrons of mounted men, fifty-five companies of infantry, six batteries of artillery. In all, by that time the Trans-Siberian line was guarded by some 25,000 men.¹⁴ In Manchuria the Railway Guard soon took on a far more straightforward military function, and this became especially clear in the course of

the Russo-Japanese War. To judge from accounts of the conflict, the Guard and railway workers took on the appearance of the Russian Army's support corps, playing a vital role in providing supplies to the forces, transporting personnel and reserves and, increasingly, hastily removing Russian soldiers in the course of their retreat from theatre after theatre of conflict. This would often occur with little notice, giving railway personnel and guards what seemed like impossible demands, which they evidently carried out with some efficiency.

An especially vivid account of such an occasion comes in Khorvat's memoirs, in his description of the CER's contributions to the war effort:

Up to the 18th of February [1905] the railway carried to the positions on the Fushun and Suchiatung branches ammunition, provisions and fodder and brought back the wounded. From that day the evacuation of the line began. The employees of the station Suchiatung had to work hard in order to send the wounded to the rear. The retreat took place under frightful circumstances: all around were battle and fire. The wounded and hospitals were being loaded hurriedly and at random. The employees of the station were the last to withdraw. At the station Davanganpu the station master Yakovlev left with the last train crowded with wounded, while the fusillade was going on within two kilometers of the station and the shells were falling on the station itself. The evacuation began so unexpectedly that there were not enough engines. Some trains were sent off which consisted of over sixty cars.¹⁵

The war itself had come at a time when, as indicated earlier, the construction of the railway was in its closing stages. Stations, workshops and other facilities were nearing completion, but in many cases not entirely ready when war began. It is telling that even early on, the military's focus was on the CER and its potential. Discussions were initiated about double-tracking the line between Harbin and Mukden for military purposes, but the final decision went against this proposal, as it was thought that double-tracking the Trans-Siberian line in Manchuria alone would not significantly enhance its efficiency or frequency of services.¹⁶ This exposed an important weakness in the military capabilities of the new railway lines, and one that had clearly not been detected at the beginning of the project. The introduction of the advanced technology itself was sufficient, it had seemed then, to achieve the state's broader strategic goals.

As Russia prepared for conflict, planning shifted from double-tracking of the CER to concentrating on the further development of other elements of the railway in order to make it a more efficient military carrier. One hundred and forty-six additional sidings were constructed, and the functions of numerous stations were upgraded for military purposes. This work resulted in a total of 525 kilometres (326 miles) of new track being laid in the course of the conflict.¹⁷ By 1 August 1905 the frequency of

running reached twenty-one pairs of trains per day. To put this into perspective, double-tracking would have had to be introduced to improve efficiency had the volume reached twenty-two pairs per day.¹⁸ The most intensely exploited junctions of the line, such as at Harbin itself, had as many as fifty-two or fifty-three pairs of trains moving in three directions. Such was the quality of the coordination of these services (and their mechanical efficiency) that in the course of two and a half years of war and the evacuation of Russian troops, not one train crash was recorded. This impressive performance by the CER served to underline not only its own qualities but also the shortsightedness of the original planning for the combined Trans-Siberian and CER. The bottlenecks revealed the weak rump of this fresh phase of Russian militarisation, one that could not be dealt with through increased efficiencies (the railway had already reached its ceiling in this), or through any form of improvisation.

Maximising the usefulness and efficiency of the CER in Russia's broader war effort was one aspect of the part played by the railway in this period. However, there are also negative facets to take into account. St Petersburg's policies in this conflict were to become the cause of cleavage with the Russian settlements in northern Manchuria, and notably in the nascent Harbin, where 'no sooner had Russian forces entered Manchuria than there arose a duality of power [with local authorities] in connection with the policy of the Russian government in China'.¹⁹ Although it was very much under Russian government control, the CER had a fair degree of autonomy with respect to the general conduct of Russian affairs in northern Manchuria. At the start of hostilities, in 1904, the interests of the CER were not wholly in harmony with those of the government in St Petersburg. In that year, Harbin was designated as a northern base for the Russian war effort against Japan.²⁰ Large numbers of wounded soldiers were sent there from the front. The town, however, was still relatively undeveloped and there was a general shortage of housing. When the army's medical needs arose, a crisis quickly emerged – a crisis the CER management was not in a hurry to resolve:

There developed a complex and stubborn struggle over the newly-completed administrative buildings: the railway management only begrudgingly assigned these to the needs of the sick and wounded, and to secure the use of even one building for use as a hospital required immense effort.²¹

There were further costs in combining the burgeoning growth of a new, dynamic city with the distinctive functions required of it by the imposition of a massive war effort. Many of the streets remained unpaved and without drainage. The Harbin authorities failed to organise a corps of scavengers to ensure that the streets did not fester as a consequence, and therefore the city was, as one account put it,

becoming a vast insanitary quagmire, and pestilence in the horrible forms of cholera and typhus seems inevitable. At times the state of the streets is such that the inhabitants are blockaded in their houses for two or three days, and the spring sun is now causing disease to germinate in a manner which occasions the gravest anxiety among the medical officials concerned.²²

The effects of this insanitary state were as terrible for the population of the city as their implications were for the Russian military's use of the settlement as its strategic centre in Manchuria.

Furthermore, as has already been argued, Harbin had been generated on the outer boundaries of an existing Chinese settlement, and had acted as a powerful magnet for Chinese migration and commercial activity in the Russian parts of the emerging city. While the Russian population concentrated on loftier pursuits in Harbin, the Chinese Harbinites were the ones who built up an infrastructure that provided much of the fresh produce that it depended on. With the outbreak of war, the Chinese began to capitalise on the increased demand for food (especially fresh vegetables), and the enormous additional requirements of the temporary population that was the Russian Army. The local Chinese soon started raising their prices to extortionate levels, ignoring the protests of their Western customers and even behaving with an unacceptable degree of insolence, instead of the kow-tow expected, especially by Russian officers used to the deference of Russian peasants.²³

The subtleties with regard to the motives behind Russia's apparent territorial and political expansion – whether the expansion was a thought-out policy of political hegemony or a hurried, improvised series of actions – were not of importance to its neighbours, especially Japan, whose fears and suspicions helped to precipitate the Russo-Japanese War. Japan's unambiguous fears shaped an enduring tension in relations between the two states, culminating in troop concentrations and Russia's move to convert less tangible gains into firm expansion of its empire. Russia was enabled by the railway to pour troops into Harbin at a rate to which, Russia believed, Japan's response could only be defensive and costly. Moreover, Japan had to hold Korea at any cost, especially as it seemed only a matter of months before Russia would have sufficient troops to commit a force of 200,000 to invade the 'Hermit Kingdom', while Japan would have only half that number for its defence.²⁴

On China's part, its method of retaining presence in, and indeed control of, Manchuria had been first and foremost to populate it with *Han* Chinese – a strategy which had earlier achieved considerable success. Nonetheless, the political cohabitation in Manchuria remained an unhappy one, with guises of extraterritoriality, including colonisation, but at the same time no formal annexation of the area having taken place, leaving it in a state of limbo. The problem of reading Japan's aspirations

complicated the picture further for China, given that there was little doubt Japan sought to extend its influence into its North-East, but countering this could hardly be done when Russia was building up its own presence with such apparent speed and, superficially at least, such success. China's only option was to maintain a position of neutrality against the background of rising tensions – ironic in itself, given that these tensions were forming on ostensibly Chinese territory. However, in order to add a certain amount of pressure on Russia, China ensured that its troops remained close to the Manchurian border. In the course of the subsequent war, indeed, the Chinese general Ma moved 16,000 regular Chinese troops within striking distance of Manchuria, posing for Russia the conundrum of what to do should China renounce its staunchly held neutrality, thereby opening up a fresh front on the back of any Japanese successes in the war.²⁵ For Russian strategists, Chinese entry into the war seemed to be foreshadowed by the presence of Japanese officers in the Chinese Army, ostensibly there for the training of Chinese officer corps and men.²⁶

The final unknown in this complex geopolitical equation was the place filled by Korea itself. The country had hitherto represented itself as a largely inert and hopelessly withdrawn nation, one which, despite its remarkable social and cultural homogeneity and longevity as a unified state, was ripe for imperial plucking. Japan had made the first substantive move to lay claim to influence in it, taking charge of what European commentators called a 'lazy nation', wallowing in centuries of 'sloth and corruption'.²⁷ Especially urgent for Japanese concerns was the fact that the 'Hermit Kingdom' was protected by an indigenous army of just 15,000 'badly armed and utterly inefficient soldiers, often a source of positive alarm to the peace-loving inhabitants'.²⁸

In acquiring a 'share' of Manchuria through its victory in the Russo-Japanese war, Japan changed the overall balance of power in the region considerably, and favourably for itself, but it left the issue of economic dominance unresolved, with neither the colonial powers (Japan and Russia) nor China itself able to take sufficient control of the economy.

For Russia, however, the dilemma stretched further: in fact, into its own hinterland. The Trans-Siberian Railway represented a narrow corridor of development. The integration, and further exploitation/colonisation, of the 8,000 kilometres (5,000 miles) of underdeveloped Siberian territory initially opened by the railway by 1918 required an additional 15,600 kilometres (9,750 miles) of new trunk line for fresh increases in freight and production.²⁹ The CER was, in its original conception, intended to tap further bountiful territory, but it too suffered from a similar 'corridor effect'.³⁰ Both railways required the development of a system of branch lines to exploit their respective hinterlands adequately. Instead of achieving this, the lines created bottlenecks in a strategic sense. As was discovered during the Russo-Japanese War, and beyond that in the 1917 revolutions, the difficulties of moving large volumes of people and supplies efficiently were considerable.³¹

4 War on ice

The approach to Manchuria was stark. A single track of rail, sixty-four kilometres (forty miles) from Irkutsk, the capital of eastern Siberia. Lying in front of this line was Lake Baikal, sixth largest lake in the world, almost 640 kilometres (400 miles) long and some 50–60 kilometres (30–40 miles) wide. The lake was at the end of the Trans-Siberian line, where a fresh line was to run in a semicircular fashion around its southern shore. The new line was in the process of being constructed when the war broke out, leaving the crossing of the lake to be undertaken by steamer in summer, and either by the same through a channel formed by an ice-breaker or by sledge in the winter. The route which was slowly taking shape became a source of chaos, confusion and congestion. In winter the lake is covered by a metre or so of ice, and raging snowstorms bring huge snowdrifts.

Across the expanse of ice and snow, three separate tracks were formed in order to service the Russian war effort. A sledge route, marked by poles, mostly carried officers. A foot track was formed, and whole battalions would disappear into swirling snow. Finally, a temporary rail line was laid on sleepers, directly on the ice, and extended across the lake with great speed, and at considerable human cost. Soldiers drowned when the ice gave way, taking railcars down into the freezing depths. When a heavy locomotive engine sank through a crack in the ice, the authorities ordered that henceforth trains would carry only supplies, while personnel would have to make the sixty-kilometre (forty-mile) crossing on foot, frostbite and lack of food only adding to their general misery. The ice on Baikal would be deeply ridged by crevasses and cracks, so that the officers too would have to get off their sleds and walk for part of the journey. The only respite was to be found in a wood and felt rest-house built on the lake each winter for intrepid civilian travellers, but now used to give Russian officers a chance to rest and warm themselves with hot soup, coffee and tea, for which they had to pay. Enlisted men had no money, being barely able to afford a loaf of bread with what they received from the state.¹ For them, rough temporary shelters were built, with a hurried meal and a modicum of medical attention being available to treat their frostbite.

But even this arrangement was not entirely efficient. A great build-up of supplies occurred at Baikal Station, before the ice-line was traversed. Stockpiles of stores, ammunition and other supplies, brought in steady quantities from Irkutsk, quickly piled up on the shore of Lake Baikal, representing, as one contemporary account puts it,

mountains of cases, pyramids of bales, containing articles and provisions of which the troops already in Manchuria are in sore need. Russian officialdom is not seen at its best in such circumstances as these, and the absence of all grip of the situation becomes daily more deplorable.²

Even when the ice thawed, the situation was not eased. Indeed, in many respects it became even more difficult. The frequency of freight trains was reduced to six per day,³ with the prospect that when the number increased, the vast quantity of stores awaiting onward shipment would make it extremely difficult to achieve the transport of the colossal numbers of troop reinforcements demanded by the military authorities. Moreover, it was not just in the frequency of freight trains that the problems lay. Recruiting workers for the railway had been a major obstacle at the early stages of the development of the Trans-Siberian, and the personnel problem persisted on the Siberian line. Indeed, such were the difficulties that they not only caused inefficiencies but also revealed the severe limitations of Russia's process of formal and informal colonisation and Russification. Such contemplations would further undermine the morale of combatants and colonisers alike.⁴

Complicating these already troubling images are those of the refugees, mainly women and children, crossing in a *westward* direction, surplus to the needs of the war, even though many of them were the families of soldiers fighting in the conflict. The first two trains after the start of hostilities were said to have carried some 2,000 people in indescribable conditions. The special correspondent of *The Standard* wrote of these trains that they contained

no lavatories, no food to be got along the line, hardly any water, no milk, and six hundred children of all ages huddled together for warmth, and crying with misery and hunger. It is one of the pitiful sights of warfare, and a mere forerunner to the woes behind.⁵

To add to their miseries, the refugees suffered from outbreaks of flu, and there were cases of freezing children being smothered by desperate mothers who, when they eventually arrived in Moscow, recounted the horrors of the war in the Far East and of their own terrifying trek across thousands of miles of dreary, snow-swept plain and ice-bound steppe.

Of the troops travelling by train, only the officers were given upholstered passenger cars and sleeping cars, and they even had the use of a lavishly decorated Orthodox Church car, while enlisted men were packed into freight vans, the sides of which were lined with felt; some, but not all, of these vans were supplied with a single stove, which also gave the men hot water and tea. Cossacks, a hardy group, tended to share their cramped wagons with their horses, which were housed at each end of the car, the saddles and other kit being piled in a pyramid in the middle. Temperatures outside very often fell to -45°C (-50°F), conditions which the soldiers and their uniforms were barely able to withstand.

Inside the cars, the troops had narrow wooden benches to sit on, but nowhere to sleep except the floor. These conditions were recognised by the authorities as so onerous, and ill-conceived for men who would soon have to start fighting, that after every three days of travel, one day's rest was ordered. Nor were these conditions quickly replaced by better ones at the end of the journey, which dragged out from days to weeks, with the average time necessary to reach Irkutsk alone being two weeks after leaving Moscow.

The soldiers themselves were of different kinds. There were the new conscripts, all young, some spirited and imbued with a sense of adventure, and others filled with dread at the unknown dangers that lay ahead. Then came the regulars, who knew their business and minded it in a spirit of self-discipline and indifference. And then there were the reservists, men in their middle age,

strong-bearded fathers of families, masters of small holdings, responsible citizens, torn from counter and counting-house, from field and byre, their wives and families left to starve, and their business, built up with care and caution, left to ruin – terrible fighters these, and most miserable of men.⁶

These very different groups were thrown together as they made their way painfully across Siberia: 'well-nigh every shade of character and calling is represented in the moving mass of soldierdom which is restlessly passing eastward to fight the Battles of the Great White Tsar'.⁷ Their various attitudes would be forced to blend together on board the trains, at base camps in Manchuria itself, as the new recruit's zeal would steadily wane, and the gloom and despondency of the reservist would deepen, as he contemplated his losses by being forced to join the war effort. In such a glum atmosphere even the steady mood of the regular soldier was gradually eroded. The mood was made no better when the soldiers saw that there was a tension between their commanders and the local railway authorities in Harbin concerning hospital facilities. In his depiction of this unfortunate situation, Polner writes that as soon as Harbin was designated the Russian Army's northern base for the war

[t]here developed a complex and stubborn struggle over the newly completed administrative buildings [at Harbin]: the railway management only begrudgingly assigned these to the needs of the sick and wounded, and to secure the use of even one building for use as a hospital required immense effort.⁸

The situation was complicated still further by the announcement, made while the war was under way by General Mikhail Alekseev, the viceroy of the Far East, that convicts in the Russian penal settlements in the Russian Far East were to be armed and taken into the army to help 'Holy Russia to crush the Japanese'.⁹ Thus, the already mixed bag was supplemented by political prisoners and 'murderers and criminals of the lowest type', as one observer put it in a tone of surprise and moral outrage.¹⁰ By comparison with these, the Japanese troops were homogeneous and highly motivated, with the army showing no signs of either dissent or fragmentation.¹¹

Another hazard faced by the Russian soldiers when they reached Manchuria was that of the *Hunghutze*, nomadic bandits, many of whom had migrated to Manchuria from China proper, but had done so as outlaws and criminals. Once in Manchuria, they had few options for making a lawful living and turned instead to a life of random criminality. Joining up with local riff-raff, they gained in strength and prominence, becoming a bane to Russian and Chinese interests alike. Their red flag, with its motto of 'Vengeance', brought terror to the whole countryside. Such was their pervasiveness and scope that they set up 'insurance offices' from which they sold flags that protected itinerant traders and their carts from attack. Initially, the 'gossamer thread' of the railway was amply protected by the Manchurian Railway Guard, who looked upon the *Hunghutze* as mere 'kittle-cattle' or awkward customers. Indeed, the bandits had been of considerable value in making the Russian case for maintaining troop levels in Manchuria after the Boxer Rebellion had been quelled there. 'As long as these terrible brigands threatened the very existence of a line', a contemporary commentator put it, 'so beneficent to the trade of the civilised world in general, the presence of Russian troops to keep them in check was surely necessary.'¹² But with the preparation for hostilities with Japan, the Guard itself was preoccupied with other duties, resulting in the rapid build-up of bandit activities, and in increasingly bold forms. The result was to draw greater numbers of troops into defending the railway line. Whether the Japanese actually trained and armed the bandits in order use them as an additional preoccupation for the Russian forces, or the bandits themselves viewed Russian preparations for war as a useful moment to step up their activities, it is impossible to say. But the effect of these was nonetheless considerable. For example, a band of 500 *Hunghutze* attacked a Russian post to the west of Haicheng, in the region between Mukden and Niuchwang where they were especially active, and, although they were eventually repulsed, they killed or wounded a score of Russians.¹³

But the main threat of the *Hunghutze* was to the railway itself – to the point, in fact, that the Russians were said to have held out the olive branch to these bandits in order to lessen their threat to the CER.¹⁴ Particularly vulnerable to raids was not so much the railway line itself (lengths of which could be destroyed and replaced without much disruption), but bridges, and especially the major bridge crossing the Sungari, the main river in inland Manchuria. As a British observer put it, ‘the wrecking of a bridge, even where there are British Royal Engineers to repair it, is a bad business, and especially so when there is only one route available and time presses’.¹⁵ This became a major area of weakness for the Russians, with Cossack divisions and large numbers of Russian infantrymen being assigned to protect the bridges. In their defence of these most vulnerable of targets, the Russian military employed summary justice for Chinese suspected of being saboteurs or wreckers, and, as rumour had it, the punishment extended to the suspects’ villages.¹⁶ Reports of sabotage were rife, including one from Reuters News Agency, which made mention of three Japanese disguised as nuns, arrested near Syzran Station by gendarmes and railway guards. They had been in the process of attempting to blow up a major railway bridge across the Volga. ‘It is easy to understand’, a report concluded, ‘that such a daring endeavour as this, even if unsuccessful, would have the serious moral effect of producing considerable nervousness among the public, and possibly to some extent among the soldiery also.’¹⁷

The railway created one other major dilemma for the Russian side. Originally, it was planned that the Trans-Siberian Railway should terminate at Vladivostok, which, with its natural protected harbour, was to be the major Russian city in the Far East.¹⁸ With the creation of the branch line in Manchuria, the importance of Vladivostok was for a time diluted by the increased prominence of Dal’nyi and Port Arthur, and the rise of Harbin, which within six years had become a major transport junction and settlement in North-East Asia. These developments shifted some of the focus away from the Russian Far East proper. The rivalry between the bona fide Russian port-city and the Chinese pretenders remained a major cause of friction and contention throughout Russia’s involvement in Manchuria.¹⁹ There was, however, another major strategic consideration to add to this: namely, *which* of the Russian cities should be developed for the further enhancement of Russia’s presence in the region?

Again, the lack of focus by the Russian authorities on their broader geostrategies was of significance to the Russian war effort itself. After all, how was Vladivostok related to Harbin in Russia’s ‘grand strategy’, if such, in fact, existed at all? And how was the relationship between the various centres of power in the region to evolve? This would not have been so big a problem had it arisen in the context of the centres themselves, or within Russia proper. But here we see a very different political environment, a multi-state one. With the elaboration of a relationship between the centres, it was important that the ultimate goal of such development be

crystal clear to other interested parties, in case neighbouring powers became nervous. And so this was with China, and still more so in Japan. Neither could read with any clarity Russia's ultimate motives for its Far Eastern venture. This was for the plain reason that Russia itself had either worked through badly, or not worked through at all, the ramifications of its actions. Without such logic being clear to neighbours and rivals alike, the implications would be grave, as, indeed, they were.

Ironically, the sense of unease felt in the Russian settlements in Manchuria was evident in Vladivostok too, for regardless of the undisputed hold which Russia had on the city-port, it remained vulnerable in the eyes of its Russian inhabitants. Rumours abounded regarding the city's Japanese community (which departed *en masse* shortly before the outbreak of war), the presence of Japanese spies in a variety of menial jobs (officers disguised as barbers, dockside workers and so forth²⁰), and Vladivostok's strategic value and vulnerability to Japanese attack.

In many respects it was this atmosphere of uncertainty, and the inability of the Russians to apply a sense of clarity to their presence, that gave rise to the notion that the early period of conflict had been shrouded in a 'fog of war'. The analysts of the war summed it up in the following way:

Presently the fog will lift, and all will be clear as on a summer noon. But no history will ever faithfully reproduce the early phases of the Russo-Japanese War if it does not take note of the obscurity in which the opening of the land campaign was for weeks successfully enveloped.²¹

The author develops this theme by adding that such a situation was astonishing, given the intense interest in the first moves of the war:

Never had the Press of the West made more strenuous endeavours, or displayed greater enterprise, with a view to the speedy and continuous record of every movement, more particularly of the opposing forces by land. Despatch-boats, and even wireless telegraphy, had been pressed into the service of special correspondents, and nothing that forethought could suggest or money procure was wanting to provide, at any rate, the English newspaper-reader with as early and accurate tidings of the war as he has of a railway accident in Scotland or a meeting of the London County Council.²²

In part, this 'fog' may be regarded as having been the result of the Japanese imposing a censorship on their preparations for war, and these were at an unprecedented level in themselves.²³ The same could not be said of the Russians, who, it has been argued earlier, were too generous in opening their preparations to the world's gaze. That in itself allowed for a degree of insight which should have given some scope to clarify the situation on the ground. And yet it didn't. The war was obscured by a plethora of

different angles, most of these novel and whose place in the overall picture was difficult to judge. While the Japanese used this complex environment to their own advantage, the Russians, having attained such achievements in one set of emerging technologies (those connected with the railway), literally lost themselves in the others, leaving themselves open to the pernicious impact of confusion and disarray.

Russian war-making had traditionally been centred on the notion of the long view: the ability to absorb blow after blow, advance upon advance of the enemy, forcing the latter to extend his lines of supply to breaking point, and leaving his position ultimately unsustainable. In part, this was a strategy that had little to do with tactics, and more in common with the art of converting a position of defeat into one of victory. But unlike the game of Go, the sublime Japanese game of strategy,²⁴ which builds up a position seemingly invisibly, drawing upon the opponent's cruder instincts and allowing the opponent to be mired or, as it were, checkmated through their own aggression, Russia's military strategies were based on superiority of numbers, developing preponderance on the battlefield and, if this failed, using endless hinterland to exhaust the opponent. At all times the Russian commanders saw time as on their side. Losses in the opening gambits could be compensated for in the longer run. However, Manchuria was perhaps the least appropriate environment for such a strategy to be played out. Like the board that Go is played on, the latter was finite. Opening strategies did matter, and the building up of a multifaceted position was of key importance. But the Russian commanding officers were from an old school. The Russian commander-in-chief, Aleksei Nikolaevich Kuropatkin, saw attack as being logical only when the right levels of preponderance had been attained – searching for the ideal position to deliver a *coup de grâce*, while being sapped of energy and balance through death by a thousand cuts. This was important, because the Japanese were viewing the situation tactically: attaining a position of political weight, rather than defending a territorial position. Had Manchuria been Russian territory in a proper sense, the Russian commanders' outlook, that any initial losses or setbacks could be compensated for in the long run, might have been a more logical one. There was no such possibility here, as the battlefield and the prize were one and the same.

The differences between the Russians and Japanese in strategic outlook were quickly visible, representing a gap that displayed itself over and over again during the course of the conflict. Russian officers showed that they were capable only of displaying hardened attitudes to the way in which war *should* have been fought, rather than the way a swift, highly mobile strategy could be implemented. On the Japanese side, risks and likely benefits were systematically assessed, with the integrated strands of strategy being shrouded in great secrecy.²⁵

As the separate stages of the war unfolded, it soon became clear that there was another major difference between Russian and Japanese perspec-

tives on the war. While the latter employed a pronounced integrated strategy, as mature in its formulation as it was in its execution, the Russians showed a laconic, other-worldly approach to the business at hand. It was as if each discrete action were seen by its Russian commander as a test of his individual nerve, rather than serving as a segment of an interlocking plan of action. When, for example, early in the war Russian ships of the Vladivostok Squadron, instead of taking on Japan's warships, sank transports and harassed foreign trade, their actions were lauded by the Russian press as glorious naval victories.²⁶ Such actions put the Russian Navy in an ambiguous position with regard to international law. After all, the Japanese had been scrupulous in providing safe passage to unarmed merchant vessels until the Russian Vladivostok Squadron began to indulge in such attacks, with the consequent loss of lives. On the one hand, Russia wanted to impress world opinion as the defender of civilised behaviour, but at the same time it was flaunting its inability to observe precisely those principles.

Such inconsistency, not to say hypocrisy, was compounded by reports of Russian land forces being unable to find their enemy, and with the Japanese forces in the end feeling compelled to seek the Russians out. This led one foreign commentator to declare: 'Russia is trying to blind itself and others to the realities of a situation brought about chiefly by a combination of blind arrogance and insane unpreparedness.'²⁷ There was more to this than simply arrogance and lack of preparation, however. The war, as no conflict had done before, revealed the Russian national psyche at its most complex and intriguing. The facets of this psyche were shown by the traditional muddle that might have been recognised in Russia's approach to preparation for a war, but they also adopted a more formal face, as major mouthpieces of sectoral interests in Russian society began to express their idiosyncratic perspectives on precisely what it was that Russia was seeking to achieve in the course of this conflict. These, while maintaining the unified theme of the need to defeat Japan, nonetheless showed remarkable variety in their make-up. On the religious side of the conflict, shades of difference occurred between various interest groups and their perspectives. The Russian ultra-nationalist journal *Strannik*, for example, saw the Russo-Japanese War as nothing less than the enforced spread of Russian Orthodoxy: 'Russia has a providential mission', it concluded, 'to extend and maintain the Orthodox faith over the whole world.'²⁸ In subtle contrast, others saw this mission as important, but also regarded the war as a clash of cultures. The peasant paper *Rossiia Palomnik* argued that the emperor of Japan was the Antichrist, and that it was the duty of 'Holy Russia' to wage war against him.²⁹ *Tserkovnyi Vestnik* provided a surprising perspective on the role of the Russians in the confrontation: '[T]he war now waged by Russia is in accordance with the will of God. He ordered the Jews to exterminate the Canaanites, and the Japanese are the Canaanites of the 20th century.'³⁰ The nuances of the purpose of the conflict aside, the overall tenor of the call to the 'greater victory' was stark

and uncompromising. As the *Moscow Gazette* put it, Russia's famous general Suvorov had ordered that 'no quarter' be given to the French forces during the Napoleonic Wars, and this rallying call was reinvoked against the Japanese, but with a barb:

To burden Russia with thousands of Japanese prisoners spreading dysentery, typhus, and even cholera among the Russian people would, perhaps, be in accordance with humanitarian principles, but would be very unwise. No quarter and no prisoners should be our motto.³¹

5 The dawn of modern conflict

With the First and Second World Wars obscuring its broader significance, modern readers might be excused for viewing the Russo-Japanese conflict as a highly publicised, but nonetheless a localised, and perhaps even parochial, war – the belated dying gasp of the old century, rather than the portent of the new. To a degree this has been the result of the war having become somewhat caricatured, and then eclipsed by conflicts and confrontations which now firmly define the twentieth century. Its significance has been emphasised as the momentous first victory of an Eastern country over a Western one (although how many would, even *now*, consider Russia to be a truly Western state?), and one thinks of the epic, and ultimately quixotic, journey of Russia's Baltic fleet to the Far East, where it was summarily despatched to its watery grave by its highly primed, methodical Japanese opponents. Above all, it opened up a hitherto obscure area of the world to the gaze of international society. Manchuria became a household word for a time, eliciting passions and even the eloquent prose of authors such as Joseph Conrad, who felt that this distant corner of the world had become intertwined with the lot of Europe itself, exposing the weaknesses and inflated pomp of regimes that had long lost the necessary vitality and connection with their societies – and this was especially true of the Russian autocracy, although, one should add, far from exclusively so. 'Never before', Conrad wrote in 1905, 'had the Western world the opportunity to look so deep into the black abyss which separates a soulless autocracy posing as, and even believing itself to be, the arbiter of Europe, from its benighted, starved souls of its people.'¹ Why would Conrad have wished to reprint his contemporaneous, and most powerful, article from 1905 at the end of the first global conflict, the First World War? The answer is that, for Conrad, it was the former that had signalled the new age, and the latter that had been its tumultuous, bloody echo. Russia, like many other European monarchies, he observed, was ripe for change, and it was the Russo-Japanese War that had so graphically demonstrated this:

The sin of the old European monarchies was not the absolutism inherent in every form of government; it was the inability to alter the forms

of their legality, grown narrow and oppressive with the march of time. Every form of legality is found to degenerate into oppression, and the legality in the forms of monarchical institutions sooner, perhaps, than others.²

The First World War had demonstrated this analysis in the grotesque way human life had shown itself to be worthless, with officers of the *anciens régimes* thinking nothing of sacrificing tens or hundreds of thousands of lives for the achievement of some minor gain on the tortured shapes of battlefields, and for the honour of monarchies that had long since lost touch with both their people and the emerging modernity. But the Great War was simply the expansion of a picture that had first been painted in Manchuria, and then thrown on to the far grander canvas of the European killing fields. Attitudes of the European regimes that had been sucked into the First World War were no different in 1914 from what they had been at the end of the Russo-Japanese War. Few lessons had been learned, despite the fact that the conflict between the Russians and Japanese was, at the time, the most publicised and scrutinised war in history.³ By the end of the first universal war, most of the *anciens régimes* had been toppled, leaving the European stage open to radically new ideologies and aspirations. No greater transition was to be seen than in Russia itself, where Bolshevism transformed the nature not only of Russia, but of international geopolitics for nearly seventy-four years. And yet the Russo-Japanese War had revealed the first serious rumblings of this radical alternative in 1905, suppressed by the Russian monarchy, and largely ignored by its European cousins.

The geopolitics of the First World War were in great measure presaged by the build-up to the Russo-Japanese War. Intricate alliances that left great powers teetering on the edge of a precipice were in place in the Far East in the same way as they were to be nine years later, threatening to draw the major European states into a conflict that was all-enveloping and, once the die had been cast, with no way of avoiding the conflagration. France had, after all, signed a treaty with Russia, obliging the former to enter a conflict in which the Russians were confronted by two opponents. Britain, on the other hand, was by the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance bound to come to the aid of its ally if it were forced to deal with more than one hostile power at a time. This anticipated the labyrinthine web of alliances that allowed such a broad multilateral conflict to emerge so quickly in Europe following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Bosnia in 1914. Arthur Diosy, writing of the significance of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, summed up this dynamic in the following way, pointing out the apparent impossibility of avoiding conflict:

The danger of Britain's being drawn into the whirlpool is almost as great in the contrary event. France, in spite of her recent entrance into closer and more friendly relations with Britain, would hardly be likely

to continue to stand idly by whilst the ‘friendly and allied nation,’ her much-petted comrade, Russia, was being humiliated by the victory of an adversary so very much smaller, and that foe an Asian nation. The Government of the French Republic, as at present constituted, would be loth to plunge France into war, especially as it would entail a conflict with Britain, to save Russia from downfall; but behind that Government stands the French people, still, to a great extent, enamoured with Russia.⁴

In more resonant, universal form, Conrad pointed to the implications of such a finely balanced international system, so obviously poised to succumb to the emerging logic of all-encompassing war: ‘Never before in history’, he pointed out in 1905

has the right of war been more fully admitted in the rounded periods of public speeches, in books, in public prints, in all the public works of peace, culminating in the establishment of the Hague Tribunal – that solemnly official recognition of the Earth as a House of Strife.⁵

The world, in short, was ready for war on a scale that had never been seen before, and the early signpost to this was so readily apparent in the course of the Russo-Japanese War.

As the heightened anxiety of Diosy and the clear-thinking pessimism of Conrad show so vividly, the world had changed by the time of the Russo-Japanese War. The extension of the great powers’ activities to the new worlds had created novel political networks which, contrary to the views of the critics of imperialism such as Lenin,⁶ readied the world for the advent of modern capitalism as we now know it: a globalised environment within which economics and politics intertwine in ways that are not immediately evident, and producing political outcomes that are not directly controllable. Thus, while China may well have been the victim of a semi-formal political and economic carve-up in the closing years of the nineteenth century, its potential leverage in the context of the Russo-Japanese War was far greater than its otherwise helpless political demeanour might have suggested. Should the Russians lose, Diosy observed, ‘there is but little doubt that China would turn and rend the Russians, at whose hands she has suffered much that was particularly galling to [China’s] stiff-necked pride’.⁷ But more than this, ‘[t]he whole question of the effect the Russo-Japanese conflict may produce on China is so vast, so fraught with tremendous possibilities affecting the whole world, that imagination boggles at it.’⁸ The consequences would be especially grave if the Japanese were to triumph, and

the four hundred million Chinese to allow their vitality, their undoubted intelligence, their unrivalled industry and thrift, to be

guided by their Japanese cousins into new channels; their sterling qualities applied, under that enlightened tuition, to the development . . . of the wonderful natural resources of the Celestial Empire.⁹

To contemporary observers, the balance of power was in a delicate state, with the future difficult to predict, and international relations were impossibly complex. Few would have guessed the implications of what was otherwise a confrontation built upon the classic foundations of old-world politics and strategies: personified states taking umbrage against one another, pointing out interests trampled and avenues closed. The nineteenth century had been one in which the personification of states had reached its acme, bringing to the observer stylised – and often caricatured – representations of national character and outlook:

[T]he Russian is, by nature, a fatalist, and he looks upon this unceasing onward march of his nation to the conquest of vast new dominions as inevitable. ‘It is the destiny of Holy Russia!’ So think nine out of ten of those Russians who think at all. . . . Strong as this national and religious impulse is with the Russians, a spirit still stronger, because more actively enthusiastic, burns in Japanese hearts. It is as fine an emotion as any race has ever felt, a spirit that makes heroes of a whole nation when the need arises: *Yamato Damash-i*, the Spirit of Old Japan.¹⁰

Such simplistic representations of nations and peoples are instructive, given that they capture historically founded national characteristics which do provide some insight into opponents in the realm of international relations, but they also allow observers to reach conclusions about the nature of confrontation and conflict which are less than instructive. And so it happened here. The Japanese, newly entered into the realms of international society, quickly adopted the language of international relations of the period, looking at Russia’s activities in China as being the preamble to the seizure of Korea, which one Japanese statesman described as ‘an arrow pointing at Japan’s heart’.¹¹ Such a colourful depiction of national interests was then linked to a traditional understanding of power politics, which emerging technologies were then factored into. Plainly, a hostile power established on the Korean peninsula would be within a few hours of the Japanese coast.

Japan had for centuries experienced a turbulent relationship with neighbouring Korea, which served as a pathway for the movement of invading forces both into and from Japan.¹² The difference here at this stage of their shared history, of course, was the addition of the factor of advanced technology, which made Japan seemingly more vulnerable, and therefore caused it to observe its situation with heightened nervousness and vigilance – a condition that had already become familiar to the ‘old world’ of the

West, but not so in the 'new', in which states such as China took a long view both of political situations and of their strategies to counter these. As advanced Western technology closed in on these societies, so their outlook would change.

Ironically, with the exception of Japan, where government and society had achieved a distinctive symbiosis, a common direction and a set of aspirations (driven by an irrepressible desire for modernisation), this was a time when, as argued by Conrad, governments and peoples could not be farther apart, but the gap between the latter and international affairs had become narrower than it had ever been. Until then, victories and losses on the grand chessboard of international relations had had only a nominal direct impact on the peoples of contending powers; armies fighting out disputes between states did so in a limited physical area, and usually distant from their centres of population.

The Russo-Japanese War was conducted on different precepts. It was a war that was fought by the peoples,¹³ being the first mass conflict, and one which touched the ordinary person in ways hitherto unknown.¹⁴ In Manchuria itself the war drew in the towns and cities, either through great sieges, such as that of Port Arthur, or through the effects of the mobilisation of resources for war. Unlike in previous wars, the Russian Army's unprecedentedly massive demand for manpower brought the war, despite its geographical remoteness, close to a broader range of families than ever. In Manchuria, civilians fussed, agonised, and in many cases cursed the Russian government for its aggressive intrusion into their lives. None was untouched. Russian communities that had become entrenched in the 'new lands' so swiftly and relatively surely in the years immediately preceding the conflict never really recovered their nerve, haunted as they were by the spectre of their country not being able to defend their interests successfully and, more than that, leaving them highly vulnerable to further encroachment by foreign powers.

The Japanese had already experienced this sense of vulnerability and the imposition of foreign interests on their own shores, but absorbed and learned from the experiences in both positive and negative ways. The Perry mission of 1854¹⁵ had been a rude jolt to the introverted Japan of the period, instructing the Japanese on the potential for the *projection* of power, and its efficient dispatch on board advanced steamships. Japan quickly absorbed the dangers implicit in resisting the advent of such technology and politics, and reorganised itself radically to accommodate such changes in global outlook.¹⁶ This was the age of naval supremacy, which by the turn of the century had experienced the emergence of another form of steam power: the railways. Between them, these technologies drew Japan closer to the mainland and international society, but also made the island-nation, which had for so many centuries relied on the waters separating it from the tumult of the mainland, that much more open to violent intrusion. Battle vessels could threaten Japan's shores in

ways unthinkable in the previous century, while the railway allowed opposing powers to supply their armies of conquest and occupation in ways that intensified the threat. Combined, the technologies of sea and land dramatically reduced the time needed for the unfettered transport of war.

Ironically, it was not Japan that displayed its newly acquired international military capacity first, but Russia, which boasted a large fleet that had both western and eastern facets, and advanced protection and weaponry with which to command its seas.¹⁷ Coupled with its ambitious railway venture, which cost £440 million of 'the French people's hard-earned savings',¹⁸ Russia, in effect, was perfectly poised technologically, with a major European ally tied seemingly inextricably to it. The European powers were adept at playing up such images, but none more so in this period than Russia itself. No wonder, then, that when the war broke out, commentators could measure Russia's role as in all respects insuperable, and to some awe-inspiring:

Russia's object, steadfastly, unswervingly pursued, with marvellous patience and boldness and skill, is of such a stupendous magnitude that even her most determined opponents admit its grandeur, and most respect those who have, for generations, striven towards its fulfilment. It is nothing less than supremacy in Asia, to be obtained by means of the establishment of such naval and military predominance, at first in the northern half of the continent, as would place the untold resources of the huge Chinese Empire, and its teeming population, at the disposal, in the course of time, of the Northern Conqueror (already Lord of the enormous tracts of Siberia, some day to rival Canada in productiveness), and thus make him Arbiter of the destinies of the peoples of Asia, and Ruler of the Pacific.¹⁹

Russia had, like Japan in the Far East, drawn together the most advanced features of the new era and fashioned from them a modern state, but, unlike Japan, Russia was also apparently straining to demonstrate its ability to use its new status to exercise a form of political hegemony that was to become the norm for the emerging international system. Japan's goal was different, and its political horizons far more modest. It saw the value of creating and consolidating a hinterland that it currently lacked – a territory (encompassing Korea and contiguous areas of north-eastern China) which would provide it with a granary and space in which its growing population could be resettled. To this end, it had already defeated China, tempered Korea and unfolded its own plan for evolution. Grand visions of hegemony and more utilitarian expressions of development of statehood do not make comfortable bedfellows in such areas as North-East Asia. Indeed, dysfunctions abound in such situations, leaving the powers scrambling for ways in which somehow to harmonise their incom-

patible interests, and at a historical juncture when the logic of war seems so easy to succumb to.

There is a further facet of the geopolitics here that adds to the pointedness of the situation. While Russia and Japan squared off over their conflicting interests in the region, conducting exhaustive – and exhausting – bilateral diplomacy to break the impasse, the other major powers created something of a *cordon sanitaire*, sensitive as they were to the risk of being drawn into the looming conflict, and exercised another modern form, namely strategic political manoeuvre. World powers had until then based their actions on clear-cut alliances and black-and-white decision-making. While the overhang of the old was still there, and has been discussed earlier, it was no longer something that necessarily had the earlier clarity. And it was here, in North-East Asia, that the great powers exercised this new flexibility: angling, positioning, observing, but being slow to engage in ways which might have allowed either Russia or Japan sufficient guidance in shaping their broader strategic policies.

Such nuances complicate a picture that might otherwise suggest a situation in which two powers were simply set on a course of carving up territory – a situation that better represented the situation in Africa and South-East Asia. Here it was a matter of two states defining their very character and shape, and, in the case of Russia, its claim to global preponderance – high stakes indeed for both, but stakes which were in many ways foreign to the nature of Western expansionism that had characterised the global system in the nineteenth century.

With such changes in geostrategy and state-building, it would be natural that the ultimate instrument for the advance of interests – that is, war – might also be reconsidered. Attitudes to the nature of war, as has been discussed above, were already in the process of changing. Expanded forms of transport and force-projection raised the horizons of what was possible, and military strategists began to factor the new outlook into their conceptions of the role of their armies, cavalries and navies. An equally important consideration, however, was the weight to be assigned to the various wings of their armed forces, and how these might be coordinated in advancing the conduct of attack or defence. From the first hint of conflict, therefore, it promised to be an important laboratory of equipment and strategy – a perspective which was taken up by all the major powers, with representatives of their militaries being assigned to study these in detail.²⁰ But as this was the first conflict to incorporate the roles of telegraph and photography in a thoroughgoing fashion, it also became a point of focus for the international press, intent on reporting a struggle that promised to be both exotic and of an unprecedented scale. In enumerating the novel features of this war, we are also pointing to the major characteristics of wars to come.

How did the broader public of Russia and Japan approach the impending conflict? Here too were differences that were telling in terms of our

understanding of modern warfare. Measuring the level of involvement in the preamble to war versus the distance at which the hostilities were to take place was a difficult aspect for Russians to come to terms with. Manchuria was *terra incognita* for most Russians, including, and perhaps especially, the soldiers who were to be sent in their hundreds of thousands to that distant theatre of war. The state did absolutely nothing to enlighten the Russian public as to the importance of the war. Wars that had been fought on the European doorstep of the country were self-obvious in their portent for the Russian population: the territory that was to be lost or gained was contiguous to Russian territory. Many Russians had travelled to countries of the new Europe, and therefore were familiar with what lay beyond Russia's western border. There were few, if any, impressions of the 'wild Far East'.²¹

War too had been very European for Russians, given that, for them, conflict had been almost entirely located in the western portion of the country. Nonetheless, war had been myth-laden, separated as it was from society as a whole. Even the advance, and later the painful retreat, of Napoleon's army in Russia had not entirely awakened the Russians, or the Europeans, to the nature of modern warfare. The Russians had arguably come closest to the collision of warfare and society. Kutuzov had brought to warfare civilian involvement in the form of the scorched earth policy, by which the civilian population of areas in the path of the war was co-opted to the war effort, with the Russian Army savagely removing the sources of supply of food, shelter and other essentials from the grasp of the enemy forces. The purpose of the strategy was to debilitate an army that had, in past wars, been largely detached from the land it fought on. From any other perspective, the armies had fought a campaign that was based on the precepts of classical warfare.

To a great degree, the battles of the Russo-Japanese War were a hybrid, an overlapping of old and new. These were 'private battles' in so far as they were physically removed from the populations of Russia and Japan, but there was nonetheless an unprecedented emotional dimension to the relationship between civilian and warrior; both were encouraged to view the situation as one of life and death. Attitudes to the enemy were absolute, and the stakes of the war, as they were seen by civilians, enormous.²² At the same time, the older conventions were still in place. It is difficult to imagine officers in modern armies being afforded the honourable practices of old, where the private was detached from the public, and the enemy officer was not a monster incarnate, but a gentleman to be respected as such. Therefore, we have the odd, and contradictory, images of Russian society women in Harbin being told that they should leave Manchuria without delay, as the consequences of staying on would be dire.²³ At the same time, when a woman attempted to enter the restaurant at Harbin Station, the Russian gendarmes at the door prevented her from doing so: Japanese officers were dining there.²⁴

Such conflicting images were gradually shed as warfare took a more direct, and violent, part in civilian life, replaced by those of universal carnage that we have come to identify with warfare in our own age. At this stage, however, we still see the uncomfortable cohabitation of old and new.

The scale of warfare, too, was something civilians had to adjust to. Never before had armies of such vast numbers as those of the Russo-Japanese War been pitched against one another: about 125,000 Russian troops and border guards had been stationed in the Far East before the war; by its end some 1.3 million had been transported to the region.²⁵ As for the Japanese, their numbers rose from 300,000 at the start to about 900,000 at the end of the war. In the massive Battle of Mukden the combined forces of both sides were close to 600,000, the largest number of troops yet engaged in any single battle. As a Harbin woman wrote in her diary at the time,

The trains carrying troops run without stop. And when one pauses for thought, steps away from the inertia that dictates existence from day-to-day, and asks oneself: what are these preparations for? The countless medical corps, the enormous, highly-organised human mass, transported across one and a half continents – one is appalled at the thought that all this is being done so that people can kill each other.²⁶

In other ages, wars had been highly formalistic, stylised affairs, controlled by strict disciplines and rules of conduct that were to be dropped for ever as warfare became more naturalistic, atavistic. Conflicts acquired more anarchic, barely controlled forms, governed neither by civilised outlook and controls, nor by any logic but war's own, dark one; neither understood nor managed, whether by soldier or officer.

The Japanese introduced one other innovation to the melting pot of modern warfare, ironically one that had been tempered by ancient beliefs and steeliness so alien to their Russian opponents. Von Clausewitz had seen war as a finite means of achieving finite objectives that could not be achieved by other means. There was a mechanistic, comprehensible, indeed *predictable* character to the actions of the armies that were sent into the field to achieve these limited goals. Here, however, was a Japanese Army, recognisable in terms of the way it was organised and outfitted, to all intents and purposes a modern force, guided by forms and practices in keeping with images from the Western inventory of combat. To these features, however, the Japanese added an alien element: an ideology so personal and powerful that it strained the very boundaries of Russian – and beyond it *Western* – imagination. Each Japanese soldier was imbued with the will to achieve the overriding goal, no matter how unrealistic it appeared on the ground. Indeed, this goal was transformed into a *sacred* duty. Victory and death became one, with the latter holding no dread for

the soldier. For an army which counted human costs as immaterial, and with enlisted men remorselessly acting out this principle, an important Western guideline to strategy was fundamentally undermined. Traditional Western military thought held that battles often turned on critical moments of hesitation. Officers who recognised such moments in their opponents' actions could shift the balance of advantage by launching determined counter-attacks. The Japanese soldier showed nothing of this characteristic. Retreat or hesitation was not for a moment contemplated, and therefore the attack became relentless, often totally implausibly to the Russian enlisted men who were its target.

No example could have been more graphic than in the account of Japanese troops attacking a Russian line at a fort just outside Port Arthur. The line was reinforced by the introduction of coils of barbed wire, itself an innovation first tested in this war. Japanese troops attacked the Russian line, with the result that the first wave of troops became hopelessly slowed and then entangled by the barbed wire. Russian machine-guns (another innovation first employed extensively in this war) were able to cut down the Japanese troops with murderous efficiency. Rather than shift the initiative of the battle, another wave of Japanese troops quickly appeared, with soldiers climbing on the backs of their fallen comrades, cutting through the barbed wires with metal cutters, or simply surging forward in whatever way possible. As a correspondent observed in prose that indicates how incredible the situation appeared:

[The Japanese troops] bounded forward; but the rifle and shell fire mowed them down on all sides, . . . one detachment, . . . with a kind of frenzy, passing over the bodies of their dead comrades, hurled themselves through the barbed wire right into the fort.²⁷

The Russian troops confronting this awesome sight were dumbstruck, demoralised. There was nothing in the Western vocabulary or comprehension that could explain the attitude of the Japanese soldier; nothing in the realms of military or human thought that could provide a response to it. Russian soldier Jacob Marateck described the sensation of knowing that the Japanese had 'squandered' 100,000 lives to capture Port Arthur, and that the determination of the remaining Japanese troops was undiminished: 'the Russian infantryman, for all his stubbornness and bravery, was obviously not insane enough to try to outdo his Asiatic enemy'.²⁸ It was, in short, for Russian men and officers alike both a surprise and a grotesque imponderable. As one Russian enlisted man put it, the blend of the modern and innately Japanese was not something that he or his fellow soldiers had been acquainted with during their preparations for battle:

[I]n our training we had learned nothing whatever about modern advances in infantry tactics, while the despised Japanese, in their

shameless eagerness to be westernised, were up on all the latest tricks. Our leaders were smugly ignorant about the Japanese mentality, their fanaticism, their patriotic fervor, their incredible endurance, their horribly unpredictable methods of attack, or even their weapons and in what way these might stack up against ours.²⁹

Massed warfare, another feature of the war, was a phenomenon that touched combatant and civilian alike. It provided, at the broadest level, the impression that the *states* themselves were engaged in a struggle for their very lives. This in itself was a departure, with civilian populations coming to feel that they had a direct stake in the war. In the course of previous conflicts, such the Napoleonic Wars, the British had felt an anxiety that an invasion of their country by the French armies would bring the chaos of the French Revolution, complete with the murderous retribution that had come during the Great Terror in France. This, however, was very different from the feelings that were in existence before and during the Russo-Japanese War, and that would be revisited during the First World War. The Russo-Japanese conflict brought on a popular outlook that was made up of less crystallised, indistinct images of impending peril, and perhaps even doom for the vanquished side.

I just cannot believe it about all those young men, celebrating life, and whom just the day before yesterday I had seen full of life and good spirits, having forgotten the war. There were so many of them. . . . Is it really possible that so many people could die all at once? This horror just doesn't gel in my consciousness.³⁰

The people at greatest risk, in a metaphorical sense, were the Russians of Manchuria, for the stakes were very high indeed for them³¹ – a detail that somehow eluded the Russian government throughout. This is, of course, a condition that one associates with many colonial communities, whose interests were rarely, if ever, placed above those of the metropolitan state. Colonies, however, were usually well established and resilient by nature, whereas Russia's colonial outposts in Manchuria were in their infancy. Their growth became inextricably intertwined with the war itself. Resources were limited for the settlements and the Russian Army alike. The result was a distinctive, perhaps even unique, symbiosis. The legacy of the war was understandably a lasting one, with colonial outposts observing local Russian authority with some suspicion and frustration from then on. The central Russian government, on the other hand, cast the Manchurian Russians as wilful, vaguely disloyal. Between them, such views ensured that the development of 'Russian Manchuria' was to remain a troubled one.³²

Here too was a departure for modern warfare. No longer was war conducted in an artificially defined environment. The Russo-Japanese War was

a multifaceted conflict, shaping, and in turn being shaped by, the complex environment it was being fought out in. For Japan, the equation was somewhat simpler, of course, given that it had embarked on a war to establish its rights in these territories. The Russian military commanders, on the other hand, had a more complicated situation to manage – a test which, despite the goodwill expressed for them locally, they failed, to a man. Generals such as Kuropatkin, the supreme commander of Russian forces in Manchuria, were oblivious to anything but their textbook rendition of how a war should be fought, thinking about little beyond the battlefield as they interpreted it.³³ This limitation of outlook quickly translated itself into a considerable loss of confidence among local Russians, who felt that they were being required to support ‘their’ armies in all respects, with no consideration for local conditions, and in the absence of any insight on the part of the senior military. Local knowledge should have figured prominently in the course of the war, and in defining Russian strategies against the enemy, and yet the commanders in their ignorance conducted the war as if it were being fought on European fields a century earlier. The sense of frustration, and separation, that Manchurian Russians felt is evident in the following diary entry:

Of course, it was a great mistake to leave Stoessel on the Amur. After all, we Manchurians (I too can call myself one) knew his worth. With the death of Kondratenko, the fate of the fort there was sealed. After all, Stoessel was not just a fool – he was also an upper-class idiot and a scoundrel.³⁴

Amazingly, the Russian commanders did not exploit the acumen of settlers who had acquired deep local knowledge of the region. The Manchurian Russians were not the only ones to be ignored, however. The commanders feared most the Manchurian Chinese, regarding them as spies for the Japanese, and were commonly unable in practice to differentiate between them, often with tragicomic consequences. In all, the Russian commanders were operating in a social and political vacuum, guided by nothing more than their outdated and limited understanding of how to conduct a war. To make matters worse, the Russian troops felt a great sense of alienation, making them jumpy and apt to mistake their targets. The Russian soldiers had little inkling as to whether the ‘Asians’ they came across were Japanese or Chinese. Often it did not matter in the least, as they would seek revenge for lost comrades in gruesome manner, and against whatever ‘foreign’ face was to hand.³⁵

Complicating matters further was the ubiquitous presence of the *Hunghutze*, whom we met in Chapter 4, Chinese bandits who recognised neither master nor allegiance, and who would be as happy to dispatch a Russian soldier as they would a Japanese. These bandits had grown powerful in a highly fluid political environment in which no power –

Russian, Japanese or, indeed, Chinese – was able to tame their activities, nor any advanced technology allow Russian or Japanese ‘masters’ to take control of the railways’ hinterland.³⁶ The war to be fought was intruding upon *their* territory, and the response was generally summary and brutal. A scene played out in front of a newly arrived Russian soldier was typical, revealing the gulf between Russian and Chinese, and the Russian’s ignorance about the alien new environment, which his superiors made no effort to correct. After a long and arduous train journey, in the course of which he and his comrades had ‘little but hard black bread, foul soup, and hot tea’ to subsist on,³⁷ spirits were high at the thought of cooking the five oxen that had been purchased in anticipation of their arrival in Manchuria. A detail was sent to fetch them, but within minutes of nearby woods it was set upon, with two killed. The soldiers’ NCO concluded that this was the work of ‘Japs’, and immediately set about rounding up a group of frightened Asiatic civilians, the officer deciding these were ‘Japs’, and two of them had to be killed in tit-for-tat fashion. ‘Some friends and I’, the soldier wrote, ‘disgustedly headed back toward the train. Behind us, we heard a couple of screams, then silence, then a burst of loud wailing.’ It turned out, he concluded, that this had been the work not of ‘Japs’, nor even of the Chinese villagers who had suffered such shocking summary ‘justice’, but of some *Hunghutze*.³⁸ Later, the divisional commander found himself lost in the heart of Manchuria, attempting in vain to read his maps in order to find the front. The officer approached Chinese peasants for help in finding the right direction.³⁹ One wonders whether the people he approached had experienced similar ‘punishment’ to that meted out in the incident just recounted. And if they had, what answers would they have provided to the commanding officer’s desperate questioning?

In reading accounts such as these, it is difficult not to wonder how the Russian forces might have fared had they taken greater advantage of the resources at hand, instead of blatantly ignoring and squandering them. It is perhaps a moot point, since the Russian forces arrived in Manchuria having been trained and conditioned by an old order which provided the troops with little if any of the flexibility they needed to operate in such a bewildering theatre of war. The Russian military learned their lessons here, and never again showed such dramatic ignorance. In subsequent major military actions, albeit under the Soviet banner, Russian troops were adroit in their environment, scoring impressive victories against the Chinese in the summer of 1929, and the Japanese in 1938 and 1939 and finally in 1945.⁴⁰

Japanese forces had, by contrast, been admirably modernised in preparation for the conflict, trained in orientation based on a good deal of intelligence, which had been systematically collected before the war. This became a hallmark of the way in which Japanese troops functioned in foreign environments, where they were geographically adept and relatively well informed about indigenous society and culture. This provided them

with an enormous advantage on the battlefield, while the Russians struggled to find their orientation on the alien terrain. With a sense of irony, Marateck describes in his diaries his general's 'aristocratic contempt for geography and terrain maps'. In the end, he observes, this was 'more than made up for by the accommodating Japanese. Whether out of Oriental courtesy or simple impatience, the enemy presently came looking for *us*.'⁴¹

But the Japanese Army's competence and skills on the field of battle were only outward features of root-and-branch changes that were going on at home. Japan had gone through a thoroughgoing process of modernisation, labelled the Meiji Restoration.⁴² In the course of this process, the new Japanese state excoriated old, inefficient forms of warfare and introduced with brutal speed new techniques of organisation and technologies.⁴³ The reorganisation of the military had been conducted in a fashion that allowed Japan to take advantage of external expertise and innovation in timely and judicious fashion. Japanese military leaders had learned their lessons well, and adapted them to their country's purposes in ways which were comprehensible to the ordinary soldier and sailor. Recognition of the gains made by the Japanese officer class, for example, was evident in the flattering comparisons made by European observers with outstanding military men of their own. Field Marshal Yamagata was depicted as Japan's Moltke, General Baron Kodama the 'Kitchener of Japan', and so on. Most of these senior officers had cut their military teeth in their country's recent war with China.⁴⁴ Their Russian counterparts were not granted such flattering sobriquets, having built their reputations in the Crimea and against the Turks in the Balkans. They possessed old-world credentials, and inspired few, if any, foreign observers. More importantly, they were hardly an inspiration to their own troops, given that they were men from an older generation, cut from a different cloth. It is difficult, in fact, to find any parallel with the effect of Admiral Heihachiro Togo's (the much-admired head of Japanese operations in Manchuria) using a paraphrase of Nelson's oft-quoted exhortation to his sailors at Trafalgar: 'England expects that every man will do his duty'. Togo made this as pertinent, natural and inspirational in the Japanese context as it had been in the historic engagement between British and French navies a century earlier. Japan had become a modernised, integrated state, and one that could expect that its demands on its forces would be met by wholehearted commitment.⁴⁵

By contrast, Russian officers used faded techniques to inspire their troops, showing that they had absorbed nothing of strategic value from the experience of the preceding hundred years. Officers' rallying calls encouraged troops to think of the autocracy, and the perpetuation and greater glory of the Russian Empire, providing the 'inspirational truth . . . about how our little Father the Czar was counting on each of us'.⁴⁶ Against the background of revolution and total turmoil back home in Russia, such slogans fell on mostly deaf ears. Neither autocracy nor empire was a credible reason to lay down one's life in battle. If anything, such outdated

exhortations seemed like a vain attempt to prevent the forces of modernisation from breaking out of the political straitjacket of the Russian Empire. Rather than inspiration, soldiers *en route* to Manchuria

started out by wondering how many of us would return alive, and soon somebody else ended up proposing that, at the next halt, we surround our officers and kill them all, then make the train go back to Petersburg and proclaim the revolution.⁴⁷

Such an outlook had its effect elsewhere. Whereas the new Japanese officer class was steely, willing to give life and all for the greater good of Japan, a Russian cavalry captain who was attached to the Chief Commissariat Department was charged with offering a secret plan of mobilisation to two Japanese officers in Vienna.⁴⁸ A different episode from the history of military espionage provides a contrasting example of subversion: Colonel Motojiro Akashi, the Japanese military attaché in St Petersburg at the outbreak of the war, far from seeking to assist his country's enemy, collaborated with Russian revolutionaries, funding their activity *against* the tsarist regime.⁴⁹ The mood of Russian society meant that soldiers felt that they were not only fighting for the nation's cause, but also enforcing a rotting social order at home:

Terrible stories are told of reigns of terror, of wholesale executions, of secret burials behind inviolable cordons of soldiers. Regiments which in the ordinary course would have gone to the front are being, it is said, retained at home to overawe the civil population, only the reservists being sent to fight the Japanese.⁵⁰

What was the nature of the Russian Army that was sent to fight the Japanese in Manchuria? Its twentieth-century form had first been conceived in the Great Reforms carried out by Alexander II in the 1860s and 1870s, and it is noteworthy that those reforms, which affected all aspects of Russian administration and society, had been prompted above all by Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, a humiliation accentuated by having taken place within Russia's own borders. Discovering the causes of that cataclysmic event within Russian society itself and seeking to correct them – by the industrialisation of the economy, the conversion of millions of peasants into factory workers, the overhaul of the administration, and the restructuring of education and the judiciary – Alexander II finally tasked his war minister, Dmitri Milyutin, with carrying out the modernisation of the army. Apart from wholesale deficiencies in the supply of food, clothing, equipment and weaponry, the Crimean War had exposed Russia's Army of nearly one million men as a body of badly trained serfs led by a militarily illiterate officer class of low organisational ability. As with all the other Great Reforms, the opposition of the traditionalists was robust and

would succeed in delaying and diluting many of Milyutin's initiatives. Over a period of seventeen years, however, the army was given a general overhaul that addressed some, at least, of its failings.

Milyutin began by introducing military districts under a semi-independent commander, with a staff, military council, engineering, artillery, medical and other technical departments. Tasked primarily with reinforcing the empire's borders, the district commander held the rank of governor-general, viceroy or military governor, depending on the location of his particular district. Designed to decentralise the military administration, to reduce its cost and, above all, to achieve flexibility in mobilisation and deployment, Milyutin's military districts, after a brief breakdown in 1917, were reinstated by the Bolsheviks in 1918 and remained as the structure of Russian Army administration throughout the Soviet period and up to the present day.

To raise the generally poor standard of general and military education of the officer class, which came overwhelmingly from the aristocracy and gentry, in 1863 Milyutin introduced military schools in the military districts with the aim of creating a supply of professional officers of mixed social origins. This reform, though sound in intention, depended on attracting newly educated young men of non-gentry background into an army career, when medicine, law, engineering, commerce and journalism, and in due course politics, represented a more compelling option to many of them. However, coupled with a policy of promoting promising NCOs, this reform succeeded in increasing the number of regular officers from about 30,000 in 1874 to about 40,000 by the end of the century, not enough to satisfy the needs of a large modern army, but an officer corps, nevertheless, drawn from the middle classes rather than exclusively the upper nobility, its traditional source. The senior ranks, however, still came predominantly from the nobility, the titled aristocracy and families either related or close to the royal family. The *social* modernisation of the army, therefore, had to await the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, when the government recognised the need to raise its technological level by engendering the growth of a professionally educated officer corps.

Despite this latter hangover from a previous age, under Milyutin the army underwent a noticeable degree of modernisation. Successive generations of young officers of the new type brought with them into the army the political and social concerns of their class, which included most of the intelligentsia, and while the army at the turn of the century cannot be said to have been either politicised or, still less, radicalised, it had become a pool of latent unrest. Even so, the upper class would remain dominant in the officer corps, and one important effect of the defeats the Russian Army was to suffer during the Russo-Japanese War would be a loss of the upper class's self-confidence, as it slowly became aware of its unfitness for modern warfare.

Finally, in 1874 Milyutin achieved his most cherished goal: a system of conscription that was based, at least nominally, on the principle that the Russian Army should henceforth be composed of men of all classes, the 'nation in arms'. Instead of the twenty-five years – virtually a life sentence, given the brutality of army discipline and the harsh conditions – served by serfs and peasants before 1874, now all men aged 20 would serve for six years, reduced by 1900 to three, though raised to four with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War.

Although eligibility for conscription was universal, recruitment itself was carried out by lottery, since the number of available men of military age always far exceeded the 800,000 required for the standing peacetime army, as well as the 500,000 kept on reserve. Moreover, since the Russian population was growing at an explosive rate as the nineteenth century approached its end, the proportion of recruits taken to those left out was shrinking all the time. Exemption and deferment on educational grounds were fairly freely allowed: in general, high school and university students could defer up to the age of 27 or 28 (perhaps a cause of the Russian phenomenon of the 'eternal student' to be found around Russian and many West European universities). Family circumstances – sick parents or an only son – were also taken into account when ballot results were examined, but, other than physical unfitness, it was the conditions of peasant life, the needs of the village for labour and income, that above all dictated the reasons for exemption.

Demonstrating perhaps an aspect of peasant culture, on mustering for his service the new recruit was encouraged to bring certain personal effects with him for which the army would compensate him in cash according to a scale laid out in the soldier's Discharge Book. These included a pair of high boots with not less than a year's good wear in them, for which he would get five roubles; two shirts, fifty kopeks each; long-johns thirty-five kopeks; a sheepskin coat was worth four roubles and a pair of gloves twenty-six kopeks; eleven kopeks for a pair of ear-muffs, and for two pairs of woollen socks or cotton foot bindings (*portyanki*), seventy-two kopeks. These allowances, adding up to just about a week's wages for an unskilled worker, provided a small 'nest-egg' with which new recruits were able to soften the blow of enlistment by the purchase of extra food and other comforts.

Food in the army was generally found to be acceptable in quality but meagre in quantity. The law stipulated that each soldier was to receive three pounds of bread daily. However, as the writer Joseph Brenner recalled of his own days as a recruit at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, in his company, at least, the distribution of the bread ration was a complex affair. Allocated to company commanders, the bread was passed to company sergeant majors, then to the bakery sergeant, on to the unit sergeant major, who passed it on to the platoon sergeant, who passed it on to the platoon distributor, who doled it out to the men. In his wisdom the

divisional commander had decreed that the men should receive only half their ration, while the cash value of the other half would be distributed with great ceremony to the soldiers twice a year in cash, usually amounting to seventeen or seventeen and a half kopeks (i.e. 17–17.5 per cent of a rouble, when a rouble was worth one-tenth of a pound sterling). The total allowance was itself depleted by incremental theft at every level, from commander himself down to junior sergeant. It appears that the entire regimental personnel – including streetwise soldiers themselves, of course – were engaged in petty trade with local shopkeepers, who paid eight kopeks for a loaf. The *kasha* (porridge) and meat allowances were treated in the same way, but Brenner does not disclose their market prices.⁵¹

As in any army, the soldiers were housed, fed, clothed and equipped at the state's expense, and pay was therefore minimal. (During the war in Manchuria, especially following Russia's big defeats, pay days were often long delayed and food less than minimal. Troops were expected to follow the traditional army practice of foraging – in this case, robbing helpless Chinese farmers.) After basic training, however, in summertime recruits were encouraged to find a job in the nearby town and earn a wage from which they would have to pay 'tax' into the unit kitty, which effectively meant the divisional commander's pocket.

As with all of Alexander II's other reforms, the guiding principle of the army reforms – to create a close bond between society and a fair-minded monarchy – frustrated by a combination of conservative resistance to the social reforms and the traditionalist reaction of the army hierarchy. The regime took every opportunity to bolster reaction and resist change, and in the army the gentry remained in command of the still predominantly peasant lower orders. Nor were soldiers made to feel equal members of society. Prohibited from restaurants and theatres, from the interior of trams and first- and second-class railway compartments, approaching a public park they were greeted by large signs stating: 'DOGS AND SOLDIERS FORBIDDEN TO ENTER'.⁵²

Military service was frequently inflicted on student revolutionaries as an alternative to prison or exile. Similarly, the peasants, who remained a majority both of the population and of the army rank and file, still saw military service as a penance. Removed from the land, or the factory job that paid the mortgage on their land, the peasants remained tied to the village commune by the obligation of military service and taxation. The army was still a harsh environment, though many were better fed, clothed and housed than they were used to, and it offered little reward for loyal service.⁵³ Unsurprisingly, drunken riots often occurred when recruiters arrived in the village to gather the year's cohort; in the days leading up to the physical fitness examination, trigger fingers were often amputated, or a pint of vinegar consumed 'to weaken the blood' and engender a sickly complexion, as new recruits sought desperate means to evade the army. One recruit would later note that when his turn arrived, an aunt

strongly recommended a man who would draw out all my teeth. Feibush the bath attendant held that the surest remedy would be to blind myself in the right eye, the one without which a man cannot aim a rifle. And my Uncle Yonah, never at a loss, knew a man skilled in the art of severing a tendon at the knee. Had I accepted even half the suggestions offered to me, I should not only have escaped military service, but would have ended up a cripple such as the world had never seen.⁵⁴

All men of military age were liable for military service, although exemption was easily acquired by university students and graduates. Equally exempt were the nomads of Siberia and the Muslims of Central Asia. The rest of Russia's great variety of ethnic and national groups – Poles, Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Balts, Caucasians and Jews – were all equally liable. As a result, the demographic composition of the army roughly mirrored that of the empire itself, which meant that slightly less than half the total number were ethnic Russians. In an army where the training and disciplining of the lower ranks were notoriously brutal, military service for Jews was especially harsh. Leaving behind Jewish communities which provided a familiar and often completely self-contained environment and, for those who wished, the opportunity to live their lives according to the laws and practices of Judaism, it was a painful experience to move into an alien world of military custom where open hostility echoed the free-floating anti-Semitism of the regime itself. The military authorities took the robust view 'Eat or starve!', reflecting official attitudes by making no allowance for Jewish dietary imperatives. Most young Jewish men in Russia in those years, even those who were otherwise non-practising and even atheist, found it hardest to cross the kosher Rubicon by eating 'unclean' food, especially pork, which was usually seen to be floating unappetisingly on what the army dished up as soup. But unless they were posted near a town with a synagogue, where any passing Jew could be sure of a hot – kosher – meal, they were likely to succumb eventually.

Jewish parents certainly worried about the physical dangers and hostile treatment their sons would have to face, even though similar hazards were to be found in Russian civilian life. But they were apparently more concerned by the knowledge that after a few years of military service, a son would come home 'coarsened, brutalised, Russianised, and, in short, with scarcely a spark of Jewish feeling still left in him'.⁵⁵ Against this background, it is not surprising that many Jewish men of military age escaped from Russia, commonly by illegal means, and sought refuge abroad. One consequence of this steady flow of evaders was that the authorities understandably assumed the Jews were not supplying their due number of annual recruits, and therefore compensated for what they thought was a shortfall by more stringent application of the regulations. In actual fact,

throughout the period from the 1880s to the eve of the First World War the Jews consistently provided a disproportionately *larger* number of recruits than any other national, ethnic or religious group. This situation arose certainly not from greater patriotism or willingness, but simply from the ineptitude of the system. In the period 1902–1907, when the Jews constituted between 4 and 5 per cent of the overall population, they consistently provided between 5.2 and 5.4 per cent of the annual recruitment of conscripts.⁵⁶

From the memoirs – and the demeanour – of Jewish ex-soldiers, however, it appears that army life was not an unrelieved litany of discrimination and brutality. It was often seen – in hindsight – as more interesting and easier to take than the drudgery of working for anything up to eighteen hours a day as an artisan in civilian life. The army fed and clothed its soldiers, improved their physical fitness, taught them more than a rudimentary usage of the Russian language, and sometimes basic literacy. And, no less important, military service, especially in time of war, conferred a certain confidence and a modicum of civic dignity on the ex-soldier when he was making his way in civilian life: the accusation of evasion could be readily rebutted by display of the Discharge Book.

A major obstacle to army reform, apart from the resistance of traditionalists, was financial. While rapid industrialisation was the government's chosen means to generate the wealth needed to stabilise and strengthen Russia's position in the world, finance minister Witte's policies did not favour military expenditure, and it was not until the mid-1890s that he committed major funding to the army, while also encouraging a large programme of naval construction. It was symptomatic of Russia's budgetary preferences that throughout the 1890s Russia tried to promote the cause of disarmament and arms reduction in Europe, culminating in the first Peace Conference in The Hague in 1899, which in the event achieved nothing in the cause of disarmament. The arms race went on unabated, foreshadowing international relations of the later decades of the century; the Russian government flinched under the pressure to match the technological superiority of its potential enemies, while striving to maintain its commitment to military, social and industrial development. Witte's reluctance to concede to the army's demands was a source of conflict in government and a contributing factor in his fall from grace in 1903.⁵⁷

Whatever the shortcomings of the modernised Russian Army, its soldiers were universally acknowledged for their uncomplaining endurance, hardiness and good nature – in other words, the quintessential qualities of the peasantry from which they still predominantly sprang. Their journey from European Russia to Manchuria would test these qualities to the limit. Yet having departed from their training camps in European Russia in a 'glow of patriotism' and good humour, and having endured all the hardships of the journey through a Siberian winter to Manchuria, the soldiers were still the same cheerful and light-hearted men; 'still the tsar's

“brother”; still his own officer’s “little pigeon (*golubchik*)”; and he is still . . . one of the brightest, most docile, and most enduring fighting-men in the world’.⁵⁸ These traits were not, however, shared by the *non*-Russian conscripts, the Poles, Ukrainians, Latvians, Estonians and Jews, whose love of the tsar was generally reckoned to be less warm than that of the chicken for the fox.

Apart from their ethnic variety, the troops could be defined according to three categories: first, there were the average serving soldiers of the regular army, trained to know their business and minding it in a spirit of seriousness and indifference; second came the newly conscripted men, all aged 20 or slightly more, and generally displaying an artificial air of careless jollity designed to stave off thoughts of what lay in store; and finally, the reservists, men of 40, the *borodatye* (bearded ones), fathers of families, masters of smallholdings of all types, taken from their businesses, their fields and factory machines, their wives and children left to fend for themselves, their affairs left to fall into decline – they were regarded as the most reluctant of fighters and the most depressed of the three types.

In his memoirs of the war, General Alexei Kuropatkin, the commander of the Russian Army, made plain his own view of Russian soldiers whose lives he so lavishly sacrificed through his manifest disability as a strategist. Contrasting the intensely patriotic Japanese, who had been trained in target practice in the years before their military service, Kuropatkin noted that the Russian government would never have dreamed of following this practice for fear of an armed uprising. Russian schools, he added, did not inspire patriotism, and military service was generally regarded as dishonourable. ‘The Russian infantryman’, he recalled, ‘undersized and overloaded, was usually untidy and often dirty, and generally outfitted in a badly fitting uniform. Slouching along the street, he aroused more pity than pride among the onlookers.’⁵⁹

Even before fresh troops arrived in Manchuria to counter the Japanese attack on Port Arthur in January 1904, railway stations in the war zone and the railway line itself were overrun by Russian refugees – seeking to escape westwards. The military command, uncharacteristically farsightedly, had envisaged the supply problems which a flood of fresh troops, combining with a panicked civilian population, would cause, and set about packing Russian families into empty troop trains going westwards. The trains consisted of goods vans that had been hastily lined with felt, but with no other concessions to the Siberian winter. Outside temperatures were capable of falling to -45°C (-50°F), and the fierce, icy wind soon found exposed cracks to howl through. With no lavatories, no food to be found along the line, except when the train stopped at the larger stations, barely any water or milk for the children – the evacuees suffered great hardship, including sickness and death, as we saw in Chapter 4.

The surprise Japanese attack on Port Arthur forced the Russians to rush

troops to supplement the standing army of 125,000 men stationed in the Far East while the Trans-Siberian Railway was still being completed. (Construction was started from both ends in 1891, but it was not until October 1905 that it was possible to circumnavigate the southern end of Lake Baikal by rail, while the final link to Khabarovsk was completed only in 1916.) The immensely long, slow troop trains were made up of almost 100 wagons each, but were consistently loaded with three times the number of men they were designed to carry. By this means, the authorities managed to transport as many as 30,000 fresh troops a month.

Having journeyed through 6,400 kilometres (4,000 miles) from Moscow, crossed no fewer than 1,429 newly constructed bridges and traversed an endless expanse of steppe, the troop trains came to an abrupt halt at Lake Baikal, still 2,400 kilometres (1,500 miles) from the battle zone in Manchuria. Journalists covering the war noted the enormous build-up of men and supplies at Baikal Station, as the ice railway was capable of carrying only a fraction of the freight coming from Irkutsk every day along the single track. They also noted the army's bewildered inefficiency in handling such unprecedented volumes.

In due course, three British engineers arrived from Newcastle to supervise the transport and assembly of a giant jigsaw of iron plates, engines, pipes and fittings, sent out down to the last nut and bolt from England. In an extraordinary feat of engineering, the machine eventually slid out of its chrysalis of wooden scaffolding as a train-ferry, carrying trains and men across the lake in summer, as it might cross the English Channel, and performing as an ice-breaker in winter.

The imperial Russian Army, whatever the 'universalising' instincts of its architect, Milyutin, was even more class-ridden than the British or any other army of the time. Among the rank and file there was a widespread belief that their senior officers were closely related to the tsar or his entourage, or at least that they – and lower-ranking officers – wished to convey this impression. In fact, the impression was startlingly close to the reality. Among the senior commanders involved directly in the Russo-Japanese War, no fewer than six were blood relatives of the tsar, all of them grand dukes: they were Kirill, a cousin of the tsar; Alexis, an uncle of the tsar and high admiral of the Russian Navy; Vladimir, another uncle and permanent commander-in-chief of the Army; Constantine, a grandson of Nicholas I; Boris, a cousin of the tsar; and George, another uncle, and governor of Moscow. Considering their elevated positions, a surprisingly large number of State Council members were on active service in Manchuria. Eight generals were members of the State Council, a body appointed by Nicholas II to advise him on all elements of state policy.

Before the political reforms following the 1905 revolution, the tsar managed his administration without the assistance of anything resembling a cabinet. Ministers were appointed by him personally and reported to him individually and in person. There was thus no body of ministerial expertise

or authority. 'Each ministry functioned on its own and was responsible only to the tsar', speaking only to him 'in the privacy of his closet'.⁶⁰ Instead, there was the State Council, which might be considered the *crème de la crème* of 'official Russia'. Consisting of 215 men, the State Council personified the oldest and most noble families of Russia, many of them able to trace their family origins back to Kievan Russia, or at least many generations further back than the tsar himself.⁶¹ They tended to bear aristocratic titles such as prince, count or baron, and most of them were big landowners. They achieved their State Council membership through the high positions to which their privileged birth had raised them, whether in the civil administration or the armed services. Both branches of the administration, civil and military, were also well populated at the highest levels by Baltic nobility of either German or Swedish origin (Witte was of Swiss origin), with names such as Beckmann, Fuchs, Kaufmann, Lambsdorff, Schwanebach, Uxkull von Guldenbandt.

The quality of command was an important factor in the performance of the Russian Army in Manchuria. Few general officers had seen combat since the Russo-Turkish War of the late 1870s; their average age was 70, while half of the corps commanders were already in their sixties.⁶² Thus, even had the army been equipped to the highest modern standards, its commanding officers were essentially stuck in the military outlook of an earlier age, at least twenty-five years out of date. Though not necessarily typical, General Oskar Gripenberg was certainly at home in the State Council. He was deaf and inexperienced, and his pessimism about the Russian Army's chances led to openly bad relations with Kuropatkin, which even found an echo in an article by Lenin of February 1905 entitled 'First Lessons'. Gripenberg was responsible for the failure of the important Battle of San-de-pu in January 1905, and he was duly recalled to St Petersburg. General Aleksei Kuropatkin, minister of war until he was appointed commander-in-chief Manchurian forces in 1904, was regarded by some in St Petersburg as 'an extremely clever and noble man but educated only as regards military topics'. Others have commented that he was, on the contrary, well versed in all manner of subjects except military ones.⁶³

The contrast between the Russian high command and that of the Japanese could hardly have been sharper. While the Russians, especially those with connections at court and the State Council, showed scant regard for the hierarchical order, or line of command, upon which an army's fighting efficiency depends absolutely, their Japanese counterparts were the very embodiment of a social order of which the hallmark was precisely strict obedience according to rank, an arrangement not wholly dissimilar to what the Chinese called 'kow-tow'. A Japanese general, appointed by the emperor and given a command posting by him, would not have had to argue with his fellow commanders, even if his decisions were the result of consultation and consensus. The Japanese Army operated on the basis of a

strictly centralised command structure, enabling it to conduct its movements according to well-coordinated plans. While this approach may conflict with the idea of the 'fog of war' and the recognition by such theorists as Soviet Marshal Tukhachevsky in the 1930s of the need for commanders to react on the spot to unforeseen factors and situations, the Russian Army against which the Japanese were fighting lacked anyone with the strategic acumen of a Tukhachevsky. The strategic advantage was unquestionably with the Japanese.

After the war was over, and the Treaty of Portsmouth was secured, the tsar felt the need to find scapegoats for the litany of disasters that had befallen his armed forces, both army and navy. It is remarkable that not one of the members of the State Council who had occupied senior posts during the war was made to face a court martial for his failures. Kuropatkin continued to hold high office, was appointed commander of the Northern Front in 1916, and was then put out to grass as governor-general of Turkestan. He took no part in the Civil War, but retired in May 1917 to his former estate near Pskov, where some sources say he worked as a clerk, while others say he taught in schools. He died near Tver in 1925.

Some of Kuropatkin's comrades-in-arms were less fortunate. Several senior officers were court-martialled in St Petersburg in the winter of 1906. Admiral Rozhdestvensky, although he had been exonerated on the grounds of having sustained a serious head wound at the start of the Battle of Tsushima, insisted on standing trial alongside his fellow officers. He was duly acquitted. His chief of staff, Captain Clapier de Colongue, was

a handsome, fair-haired, rather effeminate officer of aristocratic French birth who supported his Admiral at all times, taking the blame for errors of judgement and receiving the brunt of Rozhdestvenskii's evil temper. It was said that he often came from interviews with the Admiral with tears in his eyes.⁶⁴

Clapier was sentenced to death, along with Rear Admiral Nikolai Nebogatov, who claimed responsibility for the surrender of the remnant of the fleet at Tsushima. In fact, they both escaped the firing squad and were sentenced to long prison terms. General Stoessel was sentenced to be shot for turning a blind eye to the circulation of subversive propaganda, but was similarly sent to prison for many years instead.

If the army was 'the nation in arms', it was only to be expected that the living conditions for officers would be vastly superior to those their men endured, since that would reflect the normal arrangements throughout society. During the long journey to the war, officers were accommodated in proper passenger cars with upholstered seats, sleeping cars, civilised eating arrangements and even a car fitted out as a chapel, with icons and an Orthodox priest. The troops, on the other hand, were packed, thirty at

a time, into felt-lined wagons – a few with a stove which heated only a small area – where they subsisted in a version of the appalling conditions to which most of them had become accustomed growing up. Despite the warmth generated by such cramped conditions and the round-the-clock smoking of the low-grade tobacco favoured by Russian peasant and worker – ‘we came to hate the stink of one another’⁶⁵ – the freight vans gave only partial protection against the Siberian wind, and it was soon discovered that the soldiers’ clothing was inadequate for the Siberian winter. Frostbite was common.

The journey from railheads in European Russia to Lake Baikal took at least two weeks, and beyond the barrier of Baikal lay nearly 1,500 miles to Harbin in Manchuria, where the railway divided, the Chinese Eastern Railway going south to Port Arthur and the Trans-Siberian Railway continuing eastwards to Vladivostok. New coal mines were opened in Siberia in order to keep the locomotives fuelled for the heroic journey. Stations and new settlements were constructed at intervals calculated to match a locomotive’s full coal supply, which would be replenished at each halt. Unscheduled stops, to allow the horses to be aired and the soldiers to stretch their legs, and, in winter, to clear snowdrifts and fallen trees which commonly made further progress impossible, greatly extended the length of time it took to get the troops to the war zone. According to one veteran of the Mukden campaign, the journey from Odessa to the war zone could take as much as thirty-six days.

Beyond physical conditions and everyday human grievances against the regime, ideologies, as argued earlier, were an important addition to the political make-up of events. But they were fragile entities which fed on, and in turn provided sustenance to, the societies they grew from. Japan’s was an ideology that had successfully straddled old and new, creating a hybrid political creed in the process, one that appealed to the population at large – a population which mostly was part of the old Japanese world. Russian politicians and military officers alike made the mistake of pointing to their Japanese foes as being crude and outmoded. This was a fatal misreading of the capabilities of the Japanese military. And so too was it a misreading of the aspirations of Japanese society, which was entirely focused on precisely the goals its leaders were proposing for the country’s ‘new age’. Russian society, conversely, was made up of a population that had been deeply fractured by the rapid economic and cultural changes that forced industrialisation was bringing. But this was an organic, largely chaotic form of change, often resulting in anarchic political perspectives that pitted both primitive understandings of individualism and collectivism against a recalcitrant, and seemingly oblivious, anachronistic autocracy. Homogeneity versus heterogeneity constituted the social foundations for the war – a situation which left Russia in a position of considerable disadvantage in the conduct of the conflict.

The differences discussed above had other important ramifications.

Perhaps key among these was the degree to which the preparedness, and the pervading attitudes, of Russian and Japanese troops showed themselves in the use of modern military technology. An example of this is vividly demonstrated by a comparison of the machine-gun, first used with such widespread and deadly purpose in the Russo-Japanese War. The Russians had the Maxim gun, manufactured under licence from the British firm Vickers since 1902,⁶⁶ and reckoned to be as good as the Hotchkiss weapon used by the Japanese Army. The difference, a contemporary observer noticed, was that '*they* [the Japanese] knew how to employ it with some tactical effectiveness, while to us it was just another burden some poor donkey of a foot soldier had to haul over the frozen ground'.⁶⁷ The Russians' repeating rifle was superior to the equivalent Japanese weapon, but the invention of smokeless powder, 'about which I suppose no one had bothered to inform our general staff', had increased the range, accuracy and penetrating power of rifle bullets, thereby allowing Japanese troops 'to carry a lightweight rifle and twice as many bullets'.⁶⁸ At the core, therefore, were the attitudes displayed by the opposing forces, and the logistics that guided the introduction and inculcation of maximum effectiveness of the technology that had appeared at this time. Arguably, Japan's seamless ideology provided the all-important difference in the effectiveness of this.

There were other differences between the Russians and Japanese, which ran somewhat deeper into the core of their societies. Japan's social structure was galvanised by the process of modernisation, while its Russian counterpart showed all the decay of the old. 'Deep within the Russian official system', one observer commented early in the conflict, 'lies the canker of corruption, and at every point this, coupled with amazing unreadiness and an utterly indefinite plan of operations, is beginning to be evident.'⁶⁹

There was, however, a curious anomaly in all of this. While Russia was so ineffective in applying advanced technology in the military sphere, its railway-building was virtually a model of success in this, the most advanced and exacting of technologies. Why was this the case? Perhaps the chief explanation is that, unlike the military, where the heavy hand of the old order lay so heavy, the railways were the preserve of the new forces present in Russian society. Fortuitously, this technology, while of such great potential importance in the strategic area, was the preserve of the Ministry of Finance under Sergei Witte, who took care to keep it isolated and under his wing from the start. As a result, the construction process for the Trans-Siberian and Chinese Eastern railways showed enormous flexibility, and examples of efficient application of skills and ingenuity. Had the Russian military displayed the same qualities, the forces facing Japan on the Manchurian plains would have been far more effective. But this showed precisely the dislocation and disharmony that typified Russian modernisation, and represented the vulnerable underbelly of the Russian Empire.

The mixture of old and new in the case of Russia was an enduring one. Modern and traditional coexisting uncomfortably in the body politic of Russia was, and remains, perennial for that country. Descriptions of the old army travelling to Manchuria on the new railway provide graphic dramatisation of this incongruity. The sight of Russian soldiers, with their predominantly peasant backgrounds, packed into newly built, but desperately overcrowded, carriages, stripped of any comfort, or even the 'luxury' of heating on board, was one that was repeated day in, day out as thousands upon thousands of soldiers were dispatched to the battlefield by this efficient form of transport. Little time or attention was devoted to providing the troops with food because, as these were peasant-soldiers, they were used to foraging for it.⁷⁰ Keeping them alive for the duration of the journey was the task of mobile kitchens which would come into operation at railway halts, when the soldiers were disgorged from the carriages for their bowl of soup and stale bread.⁷¹

Such attitudes to the treatment of the 'new' Russian soldier remained in place, arguably, until the Civil War, when the Bolsheviks countered traditional methods by offering soldiers of the Red Army such 'luxuries' as decent boots and greatcoats.⁷² Officers of the old order, and indeed its society, continued to see them as being below such treatment, and maintenance of numbers and morale in the White armies suffered as a result.⁷³ There was a sharp difference in outlook between the ordinary enlisted man on the one hand and the employees and armed detachments of railway guards who maintained the security of the new railways on the other – not one, however, that was noticed by the commanders of the Russian forces. Accounts of the work of the railway personnel show that they devoted enormous energy and loyalty to the Russian war effort.⁷⁴ These stand in sharp contrast to accounts of the Russian *muzhik* soldiers, marked as they were by demoralisation and a high degree of uncertainty as to what soldiers could expect to do.

There was, moreover, little initiative shown by the soldiers (again, in marked contrast to the railway workers in Manchuria), a point that Marateck makes sardonically in describing how the Russian soldiers crammed into their railway carriages began to speak loudly of mutiny and revolutionary overturn of the existing order. 'No one bothered to remember', Marateck observes, 'that the officers had our ammunition under lock and key. Not that it made much difference. They were fine talkers and dreamers, our Russians, but hopelessly addicted to authority.'⁷⁵ Such gaps in consciousness were apparent all the way up the chain of command, extending even to the way in which the officers looked at the world they operated in. General Dmitrii Leonidovich Khorvat, the manager of the CER, but effectively the Russian governor of Manchuria, in his memoirs describes instance after instance of the failings of the Russian officer class that was sent to Manchuria to fight. And while one would expect Khorvat's perspective to be biased, enhancing his own role and that of his

subordinates, there is more than enough evidence to conclude that his overall view was far from overblown. Indeed, it is accounts of those such as Khorvat, who occupy a place on the periphery of the war itself, but are nonetheless privy to the thinking that underpinned major policies and the conduct of the conflict, that reveal some fascinating insights into just how far Russian military leadership lagged behind the rapidly unfolding nature of the new era of war.

It is instructive to linger on the nature of individuals such as Khorvat, as in important ways they represent the true strength of the Russian Empire. Enigmatic, perhaps even quixotic, Khorvat showed much that was itself open to criticism and guilty of belonging to a fast-disappearing Russian political world. And yet his origins and rise to prominence suggest strengths that indicate how powerful the instruments of empire could have been, had they been allowed to take their full form.

Khorvat was born in Kremenchug in the province of Poltava to a provincial landowner. His great-grandfather had emigrated to Russia from Austria-Hungary at the time of Empresses Elisabeth of Russia and Maria Theresa of Austria-Hungary, both of whom consented to the migration. Khorvat's great-grandfather took with him three hussar and seven infantry regiments, which were assigned to the Russo-Turkish frontier and occupied the territory formerly known as New Serbia (later Novorossia⁷⁶). Khorvat's father at first entered military service (a duty which was incumbent upon every nobleman), and was later in life appointed a district magistrate. On his mother's side, Dmitrii Leonidovich was a direct descendant of Prince Golenishchev-Kutuzov, commander-in-chief of the Russian armies during Napoleon's invasion, and the man directly responsible for the strategy which led to the disastrous French retreat from Moscow in 1812.

Khorvat spent most of his early life 'in the saddle' on his father's estate, completing his secondary schooling in 1875 and entering government service as a cadet in the Military Engineering School.⁷⁷ After three years of study he was commissioned as a sub-lieutenant and attached to the Battalion of Sappers of the Imperial Guards. He participated in the war against Turkey (1877–1878) for the liberation of the Balkan Slavs. After the war, he entered the Military Engineering Academy, completing his course there in 1885, and was subsequently assigned to the service of Trans-Caspian Military Railway, then under construction. Khorvat displayed great energy and resourcefulness in his new role, being entrusted with increasingly important tasks. Rather than subsequently taking the relatively easy position – indeed, a sinecure – of engineer for commissions and chief of section, offered to him by his officer in charge of construction, General Annenkov, Khorvat decided to work instead as a 'simple inspector and assistant engineer ... [as] he wanted to become thoroughly acquainted with railway work from the road bed up'.⁷⁸ After this period of work, Khorvat became, in succession, assistant chief of section, engineer for com-

missions and, finally, superintending engineer. In the course of his early engineering work, much of which was conducted in Central Asia, Khorvat was responsible *inter alia* for the building of the famous 2.5-kilometre wooden bridge over the River Amu-Daria (Oxus). With this distinguished service behind him, in 1895 he was appointed to build the first (or eastern) section of Great Siberian Road and Ussuri Railway, which he completed with great economy and success. Four years later, he was transferred to Central Asia again, and from there, in 1902, returned to the Russian Far East and his Manchurian brief.

Despite having had such a varied and distinguished early career, Khorvat remained on the periphery in terms of his political influence at the centre – an odd situation to have found himself in, given the enormous responsibilities and the highly political functions invested in him in his Manchurian posting. In the initial period of service as the head of the CER, Khorvat showed the same skills and competence that he had displayed in his earlier work. He also showed a strong political acumen, warning St Petersburg of the storm clouds gathering over the region, and using quite subtle signs to reach this conclusion:

As early as the end of 1903 some nervousness became apparent in the Japanese population of the railway territory. In my reports I asked for instructions, but my questions remained unanswered. Some Japanese began to delay the delivery of supplies to the railway. We were especially alarmed by the slackness in the delivery of coal.⁷⁹

Reports such as this show Khorvat's ability to deftly balance the complex issues that confronted both the railway, and its efficient running, and the broader geopolitical concerns. At the same time, on the ground in Manchuria itself, Khorvat gained great respect from the Russian population. Unlike the Russian military leaders who conducted the war against Japan, whose stature slumped very quickly after the outbreak of hostilities, Khorvat's reputation gained much in the course of the war. His responsibilities during the war were extremely varied and weighty, and he earned much respect in carrying them out, as shown in this excerpt from the Vera Cattel archives:

The heaviest yoke that rested on the shoulders of D.L. Khorvat was the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. In his capacity as the Manager of the Chinese Eastern Railway and the administrator of the territories of the Railway Zone, he was responsible for the transport of troops, military supplies and armaments, and their safe-keeping. Occasionally he himself would, in the capacity of a train driver, and under enemy fire, personally move the last trains out from the battlefields. D.L. displayed a similarly great civil responsibility and self-restraint during the time of the first Russian Revolution of 1905–1906.⁸⁰

Personalities such as Khorvat potentially, and in his case actually, provided a strong impetus for the building and consolidation of empire. His time in Manchuria, which spanned seventeen years in all, showed that he was a highly capable administrator, whose efficiency and political skills imparted an imposing stature to his name in the region. Politically, too, Khorvat achieved such prominence as to make him an all-powerful ruler of his young, energetic corner of the Russian Empire. Such were his successes and the area he presided over that local Russians playfully dubbed Manchuria 'Happy Khorvatia'.⁸¹

Khorvat and his kind were talented, determined professionals who absorbed modern techniques and attitudes effortlessly, and developed them in inventive ways in constructing the Manchurian railway system. Indeed, there would be little to fault them on in this regard. Politically, however, administrators such as Khorvat remained on the outer edge, deemed to be provincial leaders, enjoying entrée to little, if any, of St Petersburg's 'grace and favour'. This was not, it should be noted, a condition which was suffered by colonial administrators alone. Russian officers too complained frequently, and bitterly, of being marginalised in political terms, and prevented from experiencing forms of advancement that were enjoyed by those directly related to or favoured by the Russian court.

The imposition of ceilings on earned advancement, and the ossification evident in the ways power was exercised in the periphery of empire, was in stark contrast to the situation in Japan, where, despite the high degrees of discipline and hierarchy at the core of its social functioning, opportunities nonetheless beckoned for talented individuals, who could rise to heady heights in their careers and come to exercise considerable power at the heart of the Japanese political system.⁸² Even a cursory inspection of the make-up of the Russian and Japanese commands would show just how firmly the Russians were locked into the unforgiving exclusivity of the existing Russian hierarchy.⁸³ As was shown above, the senior ranks of the Russian Army were substantially composed of figures who either enjoyed a blood relationship with the tsar or were well connected at court or were members of the State Council, the august body of the country's highest dignitaries which advised the tsar, despite the obvious fact that many of them lacked the least talent or ability to do so: even more so than the British House of Lords, the State Council could be cited as the best evidence of 'life after death'.

Social mobility is an important dimension in making a society vibrant, and one that is able to accommodate – and, more importantly, *instigate* – change. Japan, ironically via a revolution from above, successfully unlocked the strictures of society, making it more permeable to fresh talent and worth. Russia, on the other hand, resisted change at its core. Even radical reform programmes such as that of 1861 (the emancipation of serfs) failed to unlock the centre of power to those outside the existing

order, thereby preventing talented individuals such as Khorvat from ever achieving true influence in Russia's body politic.⁸⁴

Power so dissipated had important implications for the nature of strategies pursued in warfare. After all, the CER was at the core of differences giving rise to confrontation and conflict in Manchuria, and yet its political role in the Far Eastern Problem was, surprisingly, a peripheral one. This gave rise to a set of tensions between St Petersburg and its Manchurian outpost which were never resolved, and were indeed the cause of inefficiencies and lost opportunities alike. Arguably the greatest of these was in the area of the logistics of the war. The Manchurian Russians had developed an enormous amount of local knowledge of the region's geography, climate and society. They had also achieved a high degree of skill in producing engineering solutions to problems unique to Manchurian topography.⁸⁵ And yet their input into the Russian war effort was minimal, almost non-existent. Considering the superhuman effort Russia was making to transport its troops from the European heartland to the war zone of Manchuria, it is a startling fact that Manchurian Russians were not conscripted into the army. Local Cossacks were of course mobilised: military action in defence of the fatherland was their *raison d'être*. But Manchurian Russian men of military age, although not explicitly exempted from military service, were not routinely taken into the army. They were used only as armed Railway Guards with the role of defending the permanent way from hostile attack from any quarter.⁸⁶ Was this exclusion due to the absence of military training facilities in the region? Surely there were enough trained Cossacks to serve as instructors? Was it not rather a consequence of the state's prevention of the build-up of military force far from the European capitals and with local loyalties? This point would be demonstrated during the Civil War, some thirteen years later, with the separatism of the Far Eastern Republic.

Thus, the CER's contributions were frequently formidable, and the roles of its personnel consistently selfless, and often heroic, but at all times they were based on the knee-jerk requirements of Russian officers who saw the CER as little more than a service, rather than as an integrated element of their strategy-making. Lines of communication between Russian officers and railway officials were at all times based on the assumed superiority of the former, allowing for little genuine interchange between the two groups. Here too valuable opportunities for genuine gains and initiatives were lost to Russia. Frustration was palpable in the descriptions of the war left to us by railway officials. Intemperate, vain perspectives were clear in the attitudes displayed by senior Russian officers. Between these poles was to be found little, if any, common ground, often resulting in tragic, unnecessary consequences. More important than this, beyond the immediate scope of the war itself these relations laid the dysfunctional foundations of relations between centre and periphery, a pervasive sense of tension which worked against the very purpose of the war, the reinforcement of Russia's claim on

the control of Manchuria and its region. St Petersburg's attitudes and disdainful manner, even arrogance, towards its Manchurian 'colony' shook the latter to the core, revealing to it its ephemeral, uncertain grip on existence in a distant foreign setting. To the Russian centre, the Manchurian Russians' outlook, on the other hand, smacked of autarky and hints of separatism. Requests and complaints emanating from the 'colony' were to be contemplated with caution and an eye to the possible underlying motives for their appearance.⁸⁷

Witte's instincts in laying the political groundwork for the Russian settlements in Manchuria had been sound, based as they were on the conclusion that Russian outposts founded on trade and commerce, rather than belligerent manifestations of imperialism, were likely to be a better guide in such a complicated political context. Manchurian Russians on the whole quickly picked up such insights and used them to forge an organic place for themselves in their adopted environment. They promoted them actively in the run-up to the war, arguing strongly against the current of bellicose thought that was gaining an increasingly prominent place in St Petersburg, eclipsing Witte's views in the process. The firmness of their attitudes did little to reassure Russian policymakers of the loyalty that might be expected from these outposts.⁸⁸

Such, then, were the foundations of the geopolitics of the war: a set of Russian 'colonies' at odds with the dominant Russian perspective on the region and its further development, and a new power, Japan, that had quietly developed all the prerequisites for taking control over the same. Between them were issues which were the difficult products of an emerging age and politics, resolvable by either great ingenuity or the simpler rudiments of war.

Were such choices evident at the core of Russian power? As argued earlier, a cruder, more unbending, political perspective was gaining currency in St Petersburg. Witte's authority in matters to do with Far Eastern – and railway – affairs was replaced by the influence of the so-called Bezobrazov Clique, a group of court politicians who displayed little patience for either subtlety or the 'long view' – both characteristics so readily identifiable with Witte's more sophisticated outlook and policies. In a sense, Bezobrazov not only lacked the differentiated perspectives of the person whose power he usurped, but had accepted the evident 'truth' of Russia's military predominance and, in fact, its apparent invulnerability. Such an approach shed any need for discussion or compromise, or for an integrated vision of Russia's place in the Far East. Little wonder, then, that the negotiations ostensibly proceeding between Russia and Japan were fraught with such difficulties that the obvious final conclusion had to be that a diplomatic outcome to the Manchurian situation was an impossibility.⁸⁹

But the process leading to such a conclusion was a relatively slow, agonising one, allowing parties outside the dispute to locate themselves strategically in anticipation of the inevitable conflict, and looking to the

possible benefits that they would be able to gain by doing so. From being at the heart of a parochial problem and dispute, Manchuria was becoming transformed into a political issue of broad, international dimensions and scope, with what had been a precocious scheme of economic development under Witte becoming a matter that was shaping the international order. Were Russian diplomats and policymakers capable of anticipating this outcome, let alone dealing with it competently? The accounts of the origins of the war suggest not, giving rise to additional considerations regarding Russia's ability to find a place in the emerging global order.

6 The railway and hostilities

It did not take long for the Russo-Japanese War to begin to stand in a class by itself as one of the most surprising, as well as one of the most instructive, wars yet waged. A contemporary scholar put the importance of the war in the following terms:

In its earlier stages it was easy to apply to it the ordinary canons of military and naval criticism, and to treat it as a by no means abnormal development of self-repeating history. But then the chance existed that at short notice the flame of war would suddenly dwindle in intensity, and, gradually diminishing, leave, at the end of a few months, nothing but smouldering embers, upon which onlooker nations would be throwing buckets of peaceful water.¹

Between early August 1904 and the beginning of February 1905 the war intensified, and showed that this was not to become a 'smouldering ember'. If anything, the shifting balance of the war suggested that Japan had achieved not only the capture of Port Arthur and Liaoyang, but also undisputed influence over Korea. Even Vladivostok had come under serious threat. Japan's success, moreover, suggested a perfect unfolding of modern war. 'Surely there never was', as one contemporary writer put it, 'a war in which the student was more naturally carried on from one point to another, and in which all the time the different movements and disturbances progressed more harmoniously on their appointed course'.² Perhaps most notable in this regard was the continuity of senior commanders in the war. Despite the dramatic Russian losses in the summer of 1904, with the exception of Generals Linevich and Grippenbergh on the land and Admiral Rozhdestvensky on the sea, the *dramatis personae* on the Russian side were the same by the end of the year. The major exception was, of course, Admiral Alexeev, the strategically inept 'arch-intriguer', who returned to St Petersburg, there to continue his machinations against his rival Kuropatkin.³

The Russian retreat, in what became known as the second phase of the war, was paralleled by Japanese advances in one other area. Until then, the

Russians had had, and to a considerable extent not taken full advantage of, the enormous asset of their railway network. Japan was quick to ensure that this area of its campaign was not neglected. Thus, the shifts and changes in the conventional war were matched by a more subtle transformation in the railway politics in the region. Japan exploited its advances on land and sea in order to neutralise what we earlier described as a 'dagger pointed at the heart of Japan', the Russian-controlled railway in Manchuria. It did so in a fashion that continues the parallel of Japan's military strategies with the venerable game of Go. Japan began to accelerate the construction of the railway lines from Seoul to Wi-ju, and from Yalu to its newly conquered prize of Liaoyang. By the end of December 1904, the Japanese had also completed the line from the southern Korean city of Fusan to Seoul, a project initiated by a construction company subsidised by the Japanese government. It was due to be opened only in 1906, but the demands of the war made earlier completion imperative, and as the result of tremendous efforts the task was finished a year earlier than scheduled. The importance of this line was not immediately evident in strategic terms, but the implications were nonetheless considerable. The Fusan-Seoul line was linked with the Seoul-Wi-ju railway. With this network completed, it was possible to travel from Fusan to St Petersburg, thereby matching the earlier achievement of a similar capacity from Port Arthur. The implications of this were clear. Should Japan win the war in Manchuria, it could contemplate taking it into the hinterland of Russia itself, thus introducing a modern concept to warfare – that of power projection. The railway system Russia had constructed provided it with the capacity to threaten Japan, but the capture and control of this system would have provided the latter with the capacity to launch a rapid, and potentially unstoppable, counter-offensive, with the railway line allowing the transport of supplies and men in the same way that Russia had achieved at the early stages of the war. By its redoubled effort in completing the Korean railways, Japan had in effect created a flanking strategy, whereby counter-attack into the heart of Russia was possible via the Manchurian or the Korean system. Coupled with this, Japan had provided the one dimension it had hitherto lacked: the ability to provide its Manchurian forces with the support of the railway.

In the process of achieving this position of tactical balance, and potential advantage, the Japanese had shown enormous skills and determination. David Davies, writing to *The Times*, described the construction process across the mountains of Korea as

a feat of engineering which reminds one of the railways of Switzerland. Two ridges have to be crossed, and in each case the line makes a wide curve gradually ascending the steep slopes, and half way up it enters a tunnel which pierces the mountain at a height of 2,000 feet [600 metres].⁴

As with its other approaches to tasks at hand, and, remarkably, mirroring Russian practice, Japan speeded up the process of making the railways functional by importing much of its material from the United States. From there came all its rolling stock. Locomotives were imported from Philadelphia and cars from Delamere, Ohio. Ninety-pound rails were purchased from the Carnegie Steel Works.⁵ Supplying both sides in the conflict, the American iron and steel industry grew in wealth and efficiency at an unprecedented rate.

And as the stratagems of Go would instruct, Japan had pushed ahead with this remarkable, and highly intensive, enterprise while at the same time pressing on the Russian fortifications at Port Arthur, thereby tying Kuropatkin down to the line of the Sha Ho, while lying in wait for Admiral Rozhdestvensky to arrive with the Baltic Fleet, which was embarked on its quixotic mission halfway round the world to the Far East and its watery grave. The Japanese strategies were best summed up in this example of the high praise owed to it:

The breadth and conception, the patience and thoroughness in execution, in circumstances in which it would not have been surprising if such enterprises had been temporarily abandoned, are truly extraordinary, and calculated to make the student of history wonder whether some previous campaigns, hitherto regarded as well-nigh perfect examples of the military art, would not have both assumed a different complexion and produced widely different results had the victors super-added to their military activity such energy in railway construction as was exhibited by the Japanese during the latter half of 1904.⁶

This passage perhaps underplays the overall import of the Japanese railway system, which virtually at a stroke transformed Korea into a 'vertebrate country', with a railway serving as the backbone to that hitherto sleepy peninsular state. But it also made nonsense of a preconception cherished by the architects of Russia's Far Eastern adventure, who for years had imagined that the railway extension southwards from Harbin to Port Arthur had given them a grip on Manchuria which they could tighten at will. A year of war more than exposed their delusion.

The Japanese had exposed Russian self-satisfaction by creating a mirror-image railway system in Korea, and used the politics of forking the system to achieve strategic advantage. But there was a crucial change in the broader political balance when Japanese work brought to life the tactical value of the Harbin–Liaoyang line, together with the two prongs of railway line between Liaoyang and Port Arthur and Yalu respectively. Instead of a primitive mountain road which was vulnerable to closure by at least one pass, a full-sized railway line was being built, while a narrow-gauge line for horse traction had greatly increased the Japanese ability to carry supplies to the Manchurian front.

The implications of this dimension of the railway equation go deeper still. In developing a broad, overarching strategy to their exertions, the Japanese also reinforced their position on the ground in Manchuria. In the second six months of the war, Japan upgraded its resources for feeding its troops in the field, providing them with reinforcements and new equipment, arms and ammunition. The occupation of Dal'nyi and Niuchwang and the incorporation of the advances provided by the railway forks produced an important change in Japanese capabilities in the battlefield, and left Japan in an advantageous position in relation to the Liaotung Peninsula and its advance to Mukden. This was at considerable variance with the first half of the year, when Japanese troops and supplies were landed by sea at Pitsuwo, Takushan, Chemulpo (later renamed Inchon) and Chinampo,⁷ using Port Adams to some extent as a supply base for General Oku's Second Army during its advance in the north of the Liaotung Peninsula.⁸

The Russians, on the other hand, found themselves not only with hitherto unquestioned 'truths' undermined, but also the problems associated with the coordination of the war effort. While the Japanese forces were systematically developing their stores, and employing a range of different methods for the purpose, Russian supplies were shrivelling, with no new sources coming on stream. This revealed how dependent the Russian forces remained on the earlier sources of Liaoyang and Niuchwang – the former providing resources to the overall war effort, while the latter was an important point of supply for Mukden. Despite losing these two important centres, the Russian forces nonetheless had to feed and clothe increasing numbers of men, the result of the steady build-up of Russian troops in Manchuria. Unlike Japan, for which the railway became a major new asset in its war effort, Russia was fully dependent on the Trans-Siberian Railway, which remained, in effect, the only means by which the absolute necessities for a great and growing army could be carried to the front. Kuropatkin's serious dissatisfaction with the supply situation was fully justified. The commissariat problem was a key one for Russia throughout the Russo-Japanese War, but it became especially acute in the winter of 1904. The problem was met by redoubling the effort to make the railway still more productive, and by depending on the legendary qualities of the Russian infantryman, who was expected to go on fighting on a near-empty stomach. This was hardly a recipe for a successful counter-offensive. Rather, it was the unimaginative means of holding ground, but doing so with rapidly diminishing logic and scope.

So here, in effect, was the key question of the Russo-Japanese War. It occupied the heart of the conflict, as this unfolded in the following year. The balance had by then already shifted in the direction of Japan, and it was only a matter of how the denouement was to take shape in the ensuing months. Perhaps it is a mark of the lack of imagination and insight on the part of the Russian commanders that they failed to comprehend

their situation throughout the war. Kuropatkin searched for his elusive rally and moment of strategic counterpoint, while his Japanese opponents systematically smothered the Russian war effort. The widespread view among Western military observers, namely that Russia's performance on the field taught them nothing beyond the obvious fact that the Russian infantryman fought bravely and with tenacity, failed to note that overall the Russian forces had operated within a matrix of failure, at the centre of which was the question of how a country like Russia could be so dependent on a single source of strength to carry it to victory and dominance, but without placing this in the broader geopolitical context of the region.

Could this be seen as complacency on the part of the Russians? To a degree that was the case, with military leaders assuming that their railway was a constant factor working in their favour. This was not, however, the case. The railway was a major source of advantage only in so far as it could be worked into a powerful general strategy for war. With such a positive plan in place, the railway would come into its own, providing the forces with rapid transport, the advantage of being able to deliver weaponry efficiently to its front lines, and supporting the forces with logistical guidance and medical aid. Creative use of the railway system during the Russian Civil War fifteen years later included the near-mythical armoured train used by Leon Trotsky as a mobile nerve centre, a potent weapon that was able to deliver attacks with a degree of surprise. In this last respect, it resembled the horse-borne attacks of Cossacks and White commanders such as Baron von Ungern-Sternberg.

The Russian forces approached their railways in a passive way, regarding them largely as a support facility, and purely as a means of transport for their human and material supplies. The Japanese saw their railways as an element to be integrated into their overall strategy, using the lines as a support facility, but also integrating them into their broader plan of attack. Neither side treated the lines as a dynamic element, one that might be seen as relative at a particular point of the conflict. The Chinese Communist Party, when it began its campaign in Manchuria in the late 1940s, obviously absorbed some of the lessons stemming from the Russo-Japanese War. Depending on the particular juncture of their conflict with the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) and local right-wing forces, the CCP forces, if they were on the defensive, wrecked railway lines to slow down their opponents, but when they had regained momentum they redoubled their efforts to restore lines, which they then used to facilitate their own rapid advance.⁹ Such tactics incorporated an innate understanding of both the strengths and the weaknesses that the railways represented, and placed at the fore the need to be flexible in the engagement with these. Little of this flexibility was evident in the approaches adopted by the belligerent states, but because of its dogged work and application, Japan was able not only to neutralise Russia's earlier advantages, but even to achieve a potentially advantageous position.

This left Russia in a vice-like grip, with its forces gradually eased into the heartland of Manchuria, abandoning centre after centre in the southern part of the region. At the same time, the flanking effect achieved by the completion of the Korean railway network applied still greater pressure on Russian forces. Having to divide their attention between confronting regular Japanese forces in the South and the spectre of a further front opening in the East, while supplies for the large Russian Army dwindled, the Russian military was faced with multifaceted threat and few options at its disposal. The import of this can be judged by the fact that, earlier in the war, Russia had itself contemplated opening up a Korean front in the war with Japan, with initial plans and strategies put into place for this purpose.¹⁰ But this represented little more than a component of a patchwork of strategy rather than one of a consolidated, far-thinking battle plan.

Perhaps the most remarkable shortcoming in Russian strategic thinking was its military leaders' inability to blend railways and cavalry successfully, notably the Cossack divisions at their disposal. The rapid transport of 'shock troops' of mounted soldiers was a potentially powerful formula to use against the Japanese. After all, the Japanese cavalry capacity was arguably the weakest element of its war effort, employing 'poor mounts': smaller, weaker horses which were ill-suited to the environment – more Japanese packhorses than Siberian battle steeds.¹¹ On the other hand, the Cossack *sotni* (squadrons) were some of the fiercest, and more feared, elements of the Russian military – a reputation that outlasted their otherwise quite lacklustre performance in the Russo-Japanese War. This has, in any event, been a broadly neglected aspect of the war;¹² and curiously so, given the place of the cavalry as the prime form of military technology for so many centuries preceding this conflict. More intriguing still was, of course, the fact that it was from this region that the Mongol horsemen had developed their great advantage over earlier military forms, and adapted these superbly to the nature of the landscape of Mongolia and Manchuria.

Russia was one of the early states to feel the impact of the 'Mongol hordes', which so effectively claimed territories sprawling across what was to become Russian Siberia. The Cossacks' pedigree was born as a response to this, providing Russia with border troops and defenders of Russian sovereignty in territories that could only be controlled on horseback. The Russo-Japanese War was something of a crossroads for the horse versus the 'iron horse', the railway, but with neither the Russians nor the Japanese fully understanding the nature of this apparent turning point. Neither side underplayed the importance of the cavalry. The Japanese, for example, were very much alive to its value, and, as a result of the conflict, planned to form no fewer than eight divisions of cavalry in the post-war reorganisation of the army.¹³ Kuropatkin had 149 cavalry squadrons at his disposal at Mukden. Of these, only three regiments (Guards and line Dragoons) were parts of the regular cavalry, and of these two arrived in the summer of 1904, accompanying the 17th Army Corps.¹⁴ The remainder

were Cossacks, who should have been employed imaginatively in the course of the war. Instead, the Russian commanders reported general dissatisfaction – indeed, disillusion – with their performance. Part of this was the nature of Cossack discipline. These horsemen were considered to be ‘irregulars’, whose place in a highly formalistic military organisation was difficult to locate and manage. The Russian War Office attempted to keep the Cossacks under tighter rein by transferring cavalry Guards officers to the Cossack units. The result was less than impressive, as one expert observer noted:

In personal intelligence, courage, and initiative, it is certain that these gentlemen were not lacking. But in service experience, and, above all, in appreciation of the peculiarities of the new subordinates, they left much to be desired. Their appearance at the front, therefore, had no appreciable influence on the usefulness of the Russian Cavalry.¹⁵

Thus, the Cossacks were left in limbo, able to exhibit neither the ferocious and blindly loyal characteristics that had been instrumental in forging their reputation as border guards and enforcers of tsarist order in the periphery of the empire, nor the disciplined work required by their masters in the high command. Kuropatkin, for example, in his general order shortly after the Battle of Liaoyang, accused the cavalry ‘of having left him in ignorance of the numbers and intentions of the enemy’.¹⁶ At the same time, the Hungarian master-horseman Honved-Hussar captain Spaits wrote, ‘Besides military training, above all, the Russian cavalry failed in the firm resolve to sacrifice themselves, and perhaps this was their greatest fault.’¹⁷ Here we see two very different requirements of the horsemen: one assuming that they would fulfil an intelligence role, the other that they should have demonstrated the self-sacrifice that had built their reputations as fierce and uncompromising warriors, whose main value would have come from inspiring fear in their enemies, and doing so at any cost. Such contradictory requirements of the horsemen understandably resulted in a form of stasis. Opportunities were lost in the process. Horsemen should, in a general sense, have come into their own in the months of September 1904 to July 1905 – a period in which the opposing sides had settled into patterns of an apparently long, and perhaps even open-ended, struggle. Instead, the Cavalry Corps were largely inactive during this period. Specifically, the loss of potential advantage was noted by specialist observers in contexts such as the aftermath of the costly Battle of Liaoyang:

Immediately after the days of Liaoyang, at which time it can be accepted that a certain disorder prevailed on the Japanese lines of communication, and that no attack on them was expected, this was, in our opinion, the time to carry out a great raid against the stretch of railway Liaoyang–Haitschöu.¹⁸

The application of such a strategy was eminently possible, with some of the best cavalry raiding corps in existence being present in Manchuria. The likely impact of their strategic employment was sketched by an experienced Austrian cavalry officer:

A cavalry raiding force should occasion as much loss as possible to the enemy by means of unpleasant surprises. The where and how is immaterial. . . . The principal thing . . . is to appear as unexpectedly as possible on the flanks and rear of the enemy, and to be a nuisance to him as long as it is feasible.¹⁹

Such raids were not launched promptly, when the Manchurian roads were still passable and the cavalry corps had a fairly free run over much of the territory.²⁰ When the raids were initiated, the element of surprise had largely been lost, and the planning of even these abortive efforts appeared to be marked by the dysfunctional traits that plagued much of the Russian military organisation at this time. General Mishchenko organised a raid that had, at its heart, the dicta mentioned above. The general's plan, implemented in the winter of 1904, was to attack the Japanese depot at Yingkow with the aim of damaging the Japanese stores. The plan was disastrously ill-conceived, as it failed to take into account that the harbour there had already frozen over, and the enemy's entire supplies were being forwarded via Dal'nyi. When this was realised, a secondary target was mooted: the destruction of the Port Arthur–Liaoyang railway line.

But other factors came into play: Mishchenko's force had to cope with slippery ice, and hard-frozen ploughed fields made the transport of supplies for his raiding force – carried by some 1,600 baggage animals – a nightmare to contemplate.²¹ Rather than a raiding team, the general's force became a slow-moving convoy, and one which ignored another major principle of successful cavalry raiding parties: 'During a raid the cavalry must live on the country, or, still better, from the rations which they are able to take from the enemy.'²² Mishchenko's 'raid' was a disaster. Other factors which exacerbated its failure included attacks by the *Hunghutze*, and even small Japanese infantry detachments. Indeed, half a Japanese company, occupying a small trench in the field, kept back Mishchenko's middle column – more than a division strong – for three hours at Kiliko.²³ Even when it moved without hindrances such as these, it proceeded very slowly, making on average just twenty-nine kilometres (eighteen miles) a day.²⁴ Even such slow progress, however, offered Mishchenko a potential strategic coup. Had he moved against Haitshöu, occupied by just 1,500 Japanese infantrymen and members of their artillery corps, outnumbered nearly eight to one by the Russian force, Mishchenko could have captured and destroyed the railway line and bridges, and thereby achieved a valuable success. Instead, he opted to keep to his original plan to attack Yingkow, where a railway station was successfully stormed by twelve *dis-*

mounted squadrons of Cossacks, all of them from different regiments. The strategically insignificant success of this action was supplemented by the razing of a few buildings and magazines.²⁵ The disappointing performances were not, however, attributed to commanders such as Mishchenko and their ill-judged strategies. Rather, it was the reputation of the Cossack himself that became greatly tarnished by late 1904:

[T]he much vaunted Cossack at the end of the first year of the war was of far smaller reputation than he had been at the outset, and had shown that . . . he was of very doubtful use for any mounted infantry purposes save the incidental and occasional one of providing, by more or less unscrupulous means, food for himself and forage for his horse.²⁶

Such conclusions helped to reinforce the already prevailing thinking in Europe, which had already begun to devalue the role of the cavalry, given the supremacy of the self-loading rifle and the special value of the trenching tool. Nonetheless, there are indications such as those described above that suggest that the cavalry had certainly not been eclipsed by more modern forms, but rather had been badly conceptualised as an element of overall strategy on the part of Russia.²⁷ Particularly evident in this was the failure of Russian strategists to combine the use of cavalry and railway effectively, either as a means of transporting shock divisions closer to the heart of the enemy, or incorporating the use of cavalry in the tactical strikes against enemy-held portions of the railway system.

It is indicative of poor Russian logistics in this regard that even in conventional areas of combat the Russian cavalry was so poorly deployed that its action emerged as a comedy of errors. At Wafangku the Russian commanders managed to locate their mixed division of cavalry at a wing opposite to the 1st Japanese cavalry brigade of Akijama. Furthermore, at Liaoyang itself, on the Russian-held west wing of the battle, two and a half cavalry divisions, headed by Generals Samsonov, Grekov and Mishchenko, were involved in fighting, but with Samsonov's being held far back at the rear to serve as a second line of defence – itself an ill-conceived use of cavalry. Had the forces of the three generals been allowed to work together, the combination would have been formidable. Instead, no similar opportunity ever appeared again at Liaoyang.²⁸ By the spring of 1905, when the Russians were fighting the Battle of Mukden, the Russian cavalry had reached its nadir, 'with scarcely 100 men per squadron remaining'.²⁹ Throughout its use on the battlefields of Manchuria, the cardinal principle of cavalry had been ignored: 'prevention is better than cure'.³⁰ This failure by the Russian commanders was especially costly, as the Japanese cavalry's tactics were relatively weak: they failed to take advantage by attacking Russian troops in retreat; missed opportunities at battles such as Shaho; and failed to make a forceful turning movement on the eastern flank at

Liaoyang, where Kuropatkin should have taken advantage of the absence of Japanese cavalry and inflicted a painful defeat on the enemy by using his own mounted troops aggressively.

Perhaps the final failure of the Russian cavalry was its inability to inspire the Russian infantry. The cavalry should have been a source of considerable strength from the perspective of the ordinary foot soldier, who would have looked upon the Cossack as a formidable asset, carving out paths for him to follow and capitalise on. Instead, the infantrymen regarded the Cossacks as 'hopelessly undisciplined',³¹ and unable either to provide credible intelligence or to terrorise the enemy. One infantryman described how he had observed a Cossack being ordered to launch a counter-offensive, a lance charge against a Japanese encampment. 'The only problem', he added, 'was [that] no one had told his officers where to find the Japanese.'³² There were other problems that plagued the Russian cavalry units, of course, and these largely reflected the other shortcomings of the Russian military. In all the Cossack districts, for many years the Cossacks suffered from a serious lack of horses.³³ The Russian government had used the Cossacks as its 'enforcers' in the periphery, and yet had done little to correct this situation. Increased demands for military efficiency had been placed on the Cossack units, but, again, little guidance or assistance had been given in achieving such changes. Two other factors may help to explain the situation. First, the Cossacks were badly paid, and this encouraged chronic problems of morale and discouraged voluntarism. Second, the Cossack officer corps suffered neglect, desertion was rife, and those remaining at their posts were often morally and intellectually inferior types. To try to correct this situation, the Russian command decided to transfer a large number of cavalry officers of the Guard to the Cossack units,³⁴ as mentioned earlier, but only succeeded in widening the culture gap between officers and men.

There were, of course, no simple answers to the failure of one side to gain advantage, and the inexorable successes of the other. The cavalry might have accomplished some crucial actions and given Kuropatkin's forces an advantage which he could have consolidated. Had his forces been more imaginative in combining horse and the 'iron horse' of the railway, they might, again, have achieved an element of surprise and built up their own badly flagging morale. But in the final analysis the Russians failed in the emerging 'new warfare' because they did not anticipate, nor did they provide for, the notion of protracted conflict. Observers of the war commented on this as an important dimension of the warfare of the future:

[E]ven to thoughtful and experienced critics the Battle of Mukden brought grave reflections as to the part which cultivated endurance might play in future armed struggles for existence. There had hitherto been a habit of assuming that an enemy's endurance could not

possibly exceed a standard which, although undefined, was certainly well within limits largely exceeded at Mukden by the Russians as well as the Japanese.³⁵

The terrible logic of these observations quickly impressed students of warfare, but its implications for the war which was to engulf the European continent a decade later, and then spread to a universal scale still later, led the high commands of the European states to draw the *wrong* lesson from this conflict:

It was not, perhaps, an altogether pleasant thought for some European nations that troops magnificently trained up to a certain pitch, and hitherto deemed capable of any strain likely to be put upon them, might crumble to nothing when called upon to face such an ordeal as a battle lasting without intermission a fortnight or three weeks.³⁶

Rather than viewing the negatives of modern attrition warfare, of which this was the first important model, the European nations understood that an army's sense of endurance had to be built up through efficient forms of supply, as well as the availability of vast pools of human reserves to replenish the flagging state of standing armies. The Russo-Japanese War revealed that endurance was not, of course, open-ended.

Confirming the importance of this singular lesson was the apparent fact that such determined, well-backed effort would result inevitably, and inexorably, in victory for the side which was better prepared and more single-minded. The argument seemed to be sustained by the gains the Japanese were achieving through these characteristics. Liaoyang had been a significant loss for Russia, as it removed at a stroke a major 'advanced post' and source of food and supplies for its army. But Mukden proved to be even more significant. It had, through the dogged action of the Japanese forces, become a military centre of major proportions. With the isolation of Port Arthur, Mukden became Russia's administrative centre in Manchuria, and then the main military headquarters following Kuropatkin's defeat at Liaoyang. Mukden had thus been invested with significant prestige, and its loss would deal a major blow to Russia.

Mukden was even more significant in practical terms. The Russians had already lost the coal mines at Fushun, and therefore an important source of fuel for the army. There was also the loss of Sinminting and its value as a source of supplies. The erosion of Russian control at one major point after another conferred even greater importance on Mukden, and its loss gave the Japanese the opportunity further to consolidate, and in fact *advance*, their war effort, thanks to the easier access Mukden gave them to their huge storage depots at Liaoyang and northern Korea. As the Russians were driven further and further northwards, the Japanese gained an opportunity to push their extreme right flank forward beyond Shin-king,

to the point of driving a wedge between the Russians at Kirin or Harbin and Vladivostok.³⁷ Such a breakthrough demonstrated the combination of Japanese determination, planning and the methodical unfolding of superior systems of supply, and it held great significance for European warfare, as is vividly outlined in this important observation:

There will occasionally arise Napoleons who can personally direct and personally influence the movements of 200,000 or 250,000 troops, and it is probable that in such cases the increased vigour and initiative displayed will render a force so led fully equal, if not superior, to one numerically half as large again – even assuming the latter to be reasonably well handled. But Napoleons are, of course, outside the question. They were not present, at any rate, at Mukden. Poor Kuropatkin at his best never really influenced the movements of more than one of his armies, and in the great battle . . . nothing was more remarkable than the independence of Liniévitch [Linevich] and want of co-ordination between Bilderling and Kaulbars. Even on the side of Japan we have nothing approaching Napoleonic or Wellingtonian genius in the actual conduct of the battle. Yet the machinery worked on the whole very smoothly, and not only were some 400,000 men set and kept in motion, and a very important, if not decisive, victory won, but unforeseen obstacles were encountered and surmounted, and important modifications were introduced in the original plan.³⁸

Significant here was the notion that it was no longer important to have outstanding military leaders, so long as the ‘machine’ was in place to support and further the fortunes of massed armies, and that the administrative wing of the military was able to absorb and provide for unforeseen changes and obstacles that would have to be overcome by the ‘original plan’. Such reasoning, as the First World War would show so vividly, was both misguided and dangerous, for it largely removed the element of the unexpected from the nature of war, replacing it with faith in the ability of enormous forces and an integral ‘system’ behind them ultimately to triumph. Such reasoning was backed up by quotations, such as the following, displaying that what was wrong with the Russian war effort was not the unwieldy size of the Russian Army, but the crucial issue of keeping it supplied:

Were there not plenty of experts at the beginning of the war to say confidently that in Manchuria it would be impossible for Russia to support an army of more than 250,000, even if the Siberian railway were taxed to the utmost limit of its capacity? Yet it is practically certain that Kuropatkin had at Mukden at least 360,000 men under his command, and these simply could not have fought as manfully as they did, had not the local food resources been at least reasonably sufficient.³⁹

The conflict did one other thing that revealed the changing nature of modern warfare. Even a brilliant commander and strategist such as Napoleon could not have coordinated the work of his armies, numbering less than those fielded in Manchuria, for very long before falling back exhausted by the effort.⁴⁰ With the advantages provided by rapidly evolving technology, and careful coordination of war effort, such a limitation no longer appeared to apply. Echoing in such thoughts is the rationale for mounting battles lasting not weeks, but months or even years, where leadership is subordinate to determined organisation and the driven sense of a will to win. As important as this was the belief that such sustained and disciplined approaches to warfare would eventually be matched by the crumbling of the enemy, and that such a result might occur suddenly and decisively. Until the Battle of Mukden exposed the shaky foundation of even Russia's military power, few would have assumed that Japan's successes in the Far East, however brilliant and far-reaching, would have an impact on the European balance of power. In fact, after Mukden the European powers began to rethink their positions. The Battle of Mukden thus acquired historical significance no less momentous than that of Waterloo itself. In the course of the First World War the powers searched in vain for one watershed event after another on the European battlefields, but instead experienced the frustration of the lessons provided by the Russo-Japanese War, in which both sides had learned all too well the importance of the unbroken flow of supplies. One further dictum emerged, and that was the need for the European powers to ensure that they did abide by the new 'laws' of combat, for the cost of not adapting to the fresh conditions demonstrated by the war was plainly perilous. Europe's armies might well be trained to the highest standards and thought capable of withstanding the worst a war could deliver, and yet they might fall apart when required to fight a battle lasting for two or three weeks without respite. No finely honed European army could expect to triumph without the ability to endure conditions and periods of combat hitherto unseen. The Russo-Japanese War signalled the norm for conflicts to come.

The Japanese state became a model to be emulated by its European counterparts, admired for its efficiency, resourcefulness and, most important, its ability to harness the public spirit and unity of purpose. As one commentator put it, Japan was 'victorious, multifariously active, financially secure, and happy, moreover, in the harmony of her political parties and the support of a united people'.⁴¹ Such admiration was largely derived from the island-state's capacity to coordinate its resources in such a way as to establish an unassailable position. It had five large armies in Manchuria and was preparing an expedition to the island of Sakhalin, while Admiral Togo's fleet was being refitted in readiness for his historic encounter with Admiral Rozhdestvensky. Russia's lamentable condition of widespread unrest and disunity, described elsewhere in this book, bears no comparison.

Japan demonstrated to the West, as it would do again in the form of its remarkable economic recovery after the Second World War, how it could act with maximum efficiency as a modern state, blending innovation with nationalism and national resolve, indeed self-sacrifice. It also demonstrated, seemingly conclusively, how much of a liability a state of the old order could be. But in international relations such lessons are invariably accompanied by the furtherance of *realpolitik* too, and so it was that the lessons of military organisation inflicted on Russia with such cruel consistency served as a lever with which Germany began to prise open the existing relations between the great powers. After the decisive defeat of Russia at Mukden, Germany became restive over the impact of that event on its own stake in the Far East, notably its interests in Shantung and other key points in northern China. With Russia's great power potency apparently nothing more than a military form of 'the emperor's new clothes', Germany had to consider seriously the issues surrounding its own presence in China. Moreover, Britain's apparent move to neutralise France as an important ally of Russia had resulted in those two traditional rival nations of Western Europe developing an *entente cordiale*, which gave the appearance of Germany being squeezed even further. The latter therefore began to test the emerging matrix of relations by becoming more forcefully active in Morocco, with an implied threat to France's interest in Algeria. These developments, of course, added to the complexities of the political topography that gave form to the First World War.

There was a further significant dimension to the war which gradually emerged from its fog. The scale of the conflict was, as has been described, enormous, far outstripping any comparable war in terms of the human and material costs. This revealed an important facet of modern statehood, and one that Japan, as discussed earlier, showed it could manage admirably, leaving the country in an enviable economic position. Russia, on the other hand, found that here too it was wanting. At first the Battle of Mukden elicited feelings of the need to find the people responsible for the last and most significant Russian defeat in the war, followed by such profound despondency that the search became a hunt for scapegoats. Kuropatkin in fact escaped punishment, his place as chief culprit being taken by lower-ranking officers on his staff.

But there were far more sobering elements of the battle to contemplate, and ones for which Kuropatkin could not be held entirely responsible. The chief of these was the likely financial condition that Russia would face in the future – one that was very much shaped by the war, but also by the very nature of its economy at that juncture. Russia had expended an enormous amount in terms of the human costs associated with the conflict. *Paris Matin* compared these before and after the Battle of Mukden. Some 162,100 Russian soldiers had been killed, wounded or taken prisoner in the fourteen months before Mukden. At the battle itself, 175,000 soldiers had been killed or placed *hors de combat*. To these shocking losses had to

be added 7,000 sick men *per month*, making an approximate general total of loss of 435,000.⁴²

Such losses were made all the grimmer by the financial slide that Russia experienced as a result of the war. Russia had borrowed on a grand scale in order to finance its forces for the war in the Far East. The losses that it suffered up until, and including, the Battle of Mukden compounded the precarious state of the money raised and 'invested' in the Russian military effort. A total of 1,480 guns had been lost, resulting in accounts for ten million roubles (£1,000,000 – say, £50 million at today's prices), and the same again for the merchant vessels that had been confiscated as a result of the loss of Port Arthur. On top of these was to be added the loss of Russia's fleet there, which amounted to 160 million roubles (£16 million). Including a recent internal loan, Russia had expended some two billion roubles on the war (£200 million). This in itself was a sobering set of figures, but within it lay a further, and perhaps even more troubling, element to contemplate. The cost to Russia of railway construction and line maintenance in Manchuria was huge, but it was increased by *Hunghutze* raids, the construction of the city-port of Dal'nyi, as well as the organisation of maritime services connected with the railway and Port Arthur. These too had to be included in war expenses and serviced by foreign loans. In all, these 'peripheral' items totalled 570 million roubles (£57 million).⁴³

Entirely understandably, the losses suffered by Russia gave pause for thought on the part of its creditor nations, the chief of these being France. French holders of Russian government bonds had been the most generous of lenders to Russia's railway development schemes, and had continued to be so at the start of Russia's war with Japan. However, and particularly so after the fall of Mukden, French loans dried up alarmingly, and to add to Nicholas II's already monumental loss of face, his applications for bale-out loans were refused until a peace treaty had been signed by the two belligerent nations. Despite widespread knowledge of Russia's immense and proven natural and other resources, the rest of Europe's money markets followed the French example, compelling the tsar to issue an internal loan of £20 million to stay afloat. Russia had reached a financial impasse through the war and its attempt to extend its empire. It was rumoured that Russia would soon begin to deplete its gold reserves, thereby making its position untenable in the international financial community. Russia's finance minister intervened in a novel way, inviting the editors of a number of respected European newspapers to view the Russian gold reserves. The editor of *The Times* declined the offer, but representatives of other newspapers accepted, 'duly dazzled with the sight of 65 millions in gold in the vaults of the imperial Bank of Russia'.⁴⁴ This may have had the effect of providing the holders of Russian state bonds with some sound sleep for a few nights, but did little to reassure international financiers, who would have been aware that Russia had borrowed several times this amount from France alone.

For Russia, the war had brought into sharp perspective how easily a state at war could find itself almost terminally debilitated financially if it were unable to triumph on the battlefield, or manage its economy sufficiently adeptly in order to compensate for its military losses. But in this case the stakes were matched by the dilemma of how to proceed with the issue of the Russian presence in Manchuria. The loss of Mukden may have been galling to the Russian government, but it was far from unsustainable in strategic terms. With the defeat at Mukden, the strategically located and mature Russian city of Harbin was well placed to become the main Russian centre, permitting the Russian Army to be fed and reinforced even more effectively than the Japanese Army which threatened it. Russia had overstretched its resources in maintaining the whole of Manchuria, and consolidation at Harbin would allow Russia to regroup its position there, providing more appropriate lines of communication and defence. General 'Papa' Linevich, who replaced the hapless Kuropatkin as commander of Russian forces after the disaster at Mukden, reflected more this positive outlook in his first communication with the tsar:

We occupy an admirably fortified position. The wet weather has hitherto prevented me from taking the offensive, but now that our losses at Mukden have not only been made good and that we have been reinforced by a fresh Army Corps from Europe, I feel myself able to do more than hold my own against the enemy.⁴⁵

However, such prospects were already out of date by this stage of the war. The situation was on a knife-edge for some time after the Battle of Mukden. Russia risked losing more than just the southern part of Manchuria at this point in the war. With the calamitous destruction of Admiral Rozhdestvensky's Baltic Fleet at Tsushima in May 1905, the Japanese high command expanded their horizons, thinking now of drawing the island of Sakhalin, and perhaps even the port of Vladivostok and the Amur region, into the net of war and conquest. Such a prospect was far more ominous than an optimistic reading of the Russian position might have suggested.

Sakhalin had been formerly claimed by Japan, but in 1875 it was ceded to Russia in return for the Kurile Islands. Russia had done little to consolidate Sakhalin beyond two insignificant settlements which it had first used to jockey Japan out its own claim. However, not only was the island strategically important for the occupation of the Amur district, but its fisheries were highly productive, and it was thought to hold immense mineral wealth. Once Mukden had fallen, Japanese forces defeated the small Russian garrison on Sakhalin with ease. The retreating Russian forces set fire to the settlements, leaving Japanese troops with an easy path to occupying the island. Control of Sakhalin gave Japan decisive control of the seaborne side of the equation. But it was the other side of the equation

that presented Russia with some stark considerations regarding the possible unfolding of the war, should this be continued from the relative shelter of northern Manchuria alone. The Japanese strategists had begun to implement a plan aimed at subjecting Vladivostok to combined pressure not only from the sea, but from land forces operating from the north, west and south simultaneously. The northern attack would probably have been preceded by the occupation of Nikolaevsk and Khabarovsk; that from the west would have been delivered by a force detached from the main army; while the pressure from the south would have been exerted by troops which had been moving up from Korea for some months.

As has been observed earlier, Russia had at one stage of the war contemplated opening up a Korean front, thereby forcing the Japanese to dilute their resources and broaden their focus. But by the spring of 1905, General Hasegawa, formerly a commander of the Japanese Imperial Guards Division and now the head of Japanese forces in Korea, had systematically built up an army capable of dealing with the 30,000 Russians distributed in the space between the Tyumen' River and Vladivostok. The purpose of this force was at first simply to hold the territory south of the Tyumen', thereby preventing a diversionary front from being opened up by Russians. In the process, the force dealt largely with the Cossacks who were actively raiding in the region. However, following the destruction of the Baltic Fleet, Japan undertook a steady advance. With the Korean portion of the plan in place, and the horizon lifting strategically in Manchuria itself, it seemed that a powerful collision of forces was inevitable. Russia had in some respects anticipated this possibility, and as soon as Port Arthur fell, a concerted effort was made to turn Vladivostok into an impenetrable stronghold. By the time the Japanese forces began to move more broadly, the Russian Far Eastern city-fort had a total 85,000 men based there, with 2,000 large guns fed by 1,000 rounds of ammunition. Furthermore, there were 400,000,000 rifle cartridges stored there, and food supplies enough to last the Russian force for two years.⁴⁶

But here another painful cost of the war was to hint at its existence. With Manchuria divided in two, and part of the railway line there alienated from Russian control, the economic catchment area for the remaining portions of the Manchurian railway system might be insufficient for Russian purposes. Furthermore, and as emerged after the war was concluded and the South Manchurian Railway handed over to Japan, the Russian-controlled railway system would have an automatic competitor in the form of its southern branch line – a situation which could well eat into whatever profits the Russian railway could extract from its operations.⁴⁷

Here was a final and most unpalatable lesson for Russia to learn on entering the world of modern warfare and new geopolitical thought. At the time of its entry into the conflict, Russia had an impressive command of a new technology, the railway, which had propelled it into the very core of North-East Asia, and promised to reap enormous rewards in terms of

its economic exploitation of the region, and its geopolitical influence there. The combination appeared to be a compelling reason to risk a war with Japan. Within fourteen months of the outbreak of the war, the situation had been totally reversed, with Russia cornered in every respect, and little to look to for possible ways out of the impasse. At the heart of this conundrum was the railway system, which now showed itself to have become a potential liability of enormous proportions. Moreover, this was not a Gordian knot which could be sliced in two to resolve it. New rules of trade, commerce and diplomacy had to be acquired by Russia in order to extricate itself from the unfavourable situation. As with so much of the war, however, Russia responded to the implications slowly, if at all, at the time: '[A]s a matter of fact, it was not until we saw Kuropatkin's badly broken army squeezed out of Mukden and driven past Tie-ling, that the end of the war came even dimly into sight.'⁴⁸

7 On the hills of Manchuria

The Russo-Japanese War has had a very great impact on the Russian popular consciousness. In many ways the symbolism associated with it rivals the Russian experience in the Second World War, and most certainly eclipses that of the First World War. A good deal of scholarly attention has focused on the more sensational aspects of the war, notably the spectacular defeats suffered by the Russian Navy, especially at Tsushima. This image of the war owed much to the attention the war drew from established and emerging writers, for whom, as with Joseph Conrad, the war symbolised an important turning point.¹ For Russians, however, the war had the effect of filling important writers with dread and introspection about what it meant to be Russian. Anna Akhmatova, for example, in her epic poem *Poema bez geroya* (Poem without a Hero), writes of the ‘hell of Tsushima’ – the first of a series of major watershed events that threatened Russian (and European) culture. But a great deal of this introspection was far removed from the conditions and facts of the battlefield itself. As David Wells, a student of the impact of the Russo-Japanese War on Russian literature, puts it in his important work on the subject

The war . . . functions as a catalyst for self-definition where the actual events of the military contest in Manchuria are of far less importance than the significance that can be written into them from the point of view of more urgent concerns on the home front. Symptomatically, the ostensible enemy in the conflict, the Japanese soldier, is, in the majority of texts, conspicuous by his absence. All literary responses to the war have ulterior motives; it is always a question of the war plus something else.²

This conclusion is reflected in the literary and political interpretations of the war that use the latter to criticise the tsarist bureaucracy, corruption and inefficiencies in the Russian Army of the period, as well as Russian social structure as a whole.³ Symbolists were especially prominent in this respect, with many pointed political and social observations appearing in poems that tore at the very fabric of tsarist society. As the poet Konstantin

Bal'mont put it in one of his works, 'Our tsar means Mukden / Our tsar means Tsushima / Our tsar means a bloody stain ('*Nash tsar*' – *Mukden*, / *Nash tsar*' – *Tsushima*, / *Nash tsar*' – *krovavoe pyatno*').⁴

Perhaps it was the confluence of impending social transformations and the dramatic folly of the war that gave rise to the sustained burst of apocalyptic creativity, or, on the other hand, it may have marked the rise of a new generation of writers, cutting their creative teeth on the complex social phenomena of the age. After all, Tolstoy, the doyen of realists in the Russian literary tradition, was already 76 years of age at the start of the war, and showed ambivalence as to its significance, at once presenting his absolutist, strong humanist-pacifist strains, but at the same time being troubled by the impulses of nationalism elicited by Port Arthur and Tsushima.⁵ In the end, these represented contradictory elements which simply could not live comfortably together in his writings on the war. On the one hand, he wrote acerbically of the senior officer corps:

Again those coarse and servile slaves of slaves – the various generals – decked out in a variety of motley garments, have (either to distinguish themselves, or to spite one another, or to earn the right to add another little star, decoration, or ribbon, to their ridiculous and ostentatious dress, or from sheer stupidity and carelessness) destroyed thousands of those honourable, kindly, laborious, working men who provide them with food – and destroyed them with terrible sufferings.⁶

And yet, on the other hand, Tolstoy closely followed the progress of the war, and when Port Arthur surrendered he wrote, 'I suffer from it. This is patriotism. I was brought up on it and am not free from it, just as I am not free from personal egoism, family egoism, even aristocratic egoism.'⁷ Accompanying his own tormented thoughts on the war were those of other Russian writers, who in the literary media of Symbolism, and in examinations of the psychology of war and documentary prose, explored the nature, impact and the spiritual significance of the war. As Wells argues,

The war's appropriation by such an extraordinary range of literary and ideological paradigms as patriotism, apocalyptic symbolism, psychological analysis and oppositional realism, by the 'high' literature of the symbolists as well as the 'democratic' prose of the Znanie group, is surely an indication of its centrality to the Russian historical and cultural consciousness.⁸

The left in general, whether Marxist social democrats, socialist revolutionaries or anarchists, all saw the Russo-Japanese War as the sort of self-inflicted wound that only a regime as blind, wilful and stupid as tsarism could commit. Lenin could have been expressing the feelings of most of the

Russian oppositionist movement when he wrote that the defeat of Russia's military gave the workers a reason to rejoice. 'The catastrophe of our vilest enemy signifies not only the approach of Russian freedom. It also portends a new revolutionary upsurge of the European proletariat. . . . Progressive, advanced Asia has struck a blow at retarded, reactionary Europe.'⁹

But the period was, it must be said, a highly confusing one in all respects, and this was strongly reflected in the perceived results of the war. As a military historian put it,

Historically, the result [of the war] is rather bewildering. On the one side, we have Zemstvos, or Elective Municipal Councils, meeting in Moscow and discussing with apparent freedom even proposals assured to have received . . . the Imperial approval. On the other, we see women and children brutally beaten in the course of street riots in Poland; domiciliary visits paid in fashionable quarters of the capital, and resulting in the discovery of apparatus for making bombs; and in the Caucasus a simple reign of terror. From such a queer mixture of constitutional effort and red revolution it is almost impossible to evolve any succinct and coherent story.¹⁰

Were the extraordinary literary forms that were emerging, ostensibly on the back of the terrible defeat of Russia in the Far East, the response to this social tumult, or were they the probing of the nature of modern warfare? It seems that the writings on the war owed more to the former than the latter, for what creative writers wrote on the war was episodic, steeped in symbolism, bereft of the actual horrors of the war on the ground. They were, in short, more a response to the remarkable vistas of change that suddenly appeared across Russian society than a considered view of what the war, and the defeat, actually meant.

Perhaps the most important dimension here was that of bringing European Russian thought into conflict with the significance of the East in modern Russian history. The war brought about a rethinking of what it meant for Russia to consider itself as a Eurasian power; indeed, it required a radical rethinking of what Eurasianism meant to the Russian state. At its core, this reconsideration questioned the value of contemporary European society, and its ability to endure in the face of its own inner corruption and weakness. Such a perspective drew on earlier thoughts of this sort, including those of Dmitrii Merezhkovsky, which pointed to the sterility of Europe, implicitly and explicitly questioning whether Russia's self-identification too closely with things European was the appropriate line of development. Merezhkovsky's ideas, like those of his wife, the distinguished poet Zinaida Hippus, were rooted in an idealistic notion that the goal of history was the synthesis of the Hellenic principle of purity of the flesh and the Judaeo-Christian principle of purity of the spirit. Forced into exile in France after his fierce attacks on the tsarist system in 1905, he

returned to Russia in 1912, but, given his ideas, it was obvious that the Russia of Lenin's Bolshevism after 1917 was not for him, and he re-emigrated to France for good.¹¹ The journal *Vesy* (Scales) achieved considerable significance and influence in the aftermath of the war, publishing some of the best work of poets and writers who were struggling to understand the effect on the Russian psyche of the debacle in the Far East and the cataclysmic events of the 1905 revolution. The Symbolist poet Andrei Belyi picked up on this trend of thought, drawing on the Russo-Japanese War to signal a radical rethinking of Russian poetry. In an article 'Apokalipsis v russkoi poezii' (Apocalypse in Russian Poetry), published in *Vesy* in the spring of 1905, Belyi suggested that the Japanese, in their inexorable advance in the war, were the agents of forces much greater than a simple adversary in a distant conflict: 'Japan is a mask, behind which are invisible people. The question of victory over the enemy is closely linked with a transformation (*pereval*) in consciousness directed at the solution of the deepest mystical questions by European humanity.'¹²

This was to remain a significant preoccupation in Russian thought, with Slavophiles and Eurasianists seeking to find a 'third way' for Russia, neither corrupted by an apparently spiritually and morally disintegrating Europe, nor swallowed by the emergent, but largely alien, power of the East. The Russo-Japanese War gave rise to many, at times phantasmagorical, renditions of such an outlook. Many of those who fought in the war found that being in the East was an alienating experience, with foreign visual images, architecture and cultural traits. Some, however, were prompted to reappraise what they had left behind in European Russia, and found their impressions of the East a revelation. These men commonly felt that the European idea had rotted to the very core, and that the Eastern discipline and political forms were potential sources of rebirth for Russia as a world power. Perhaps the most exotic of these was Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, the so-called 'Bloody Baron' of the Civil War, who brought fear and merciless retribution to the Bolsheviks in the course of his short-lived efforts to establish a Eurasian Empire founded on an abortive form of pan-Mongolianism that he shaped in the course of his conversion to a Eurasianist outlook.

Von Ungern-Sternberg was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to a landowning minor noble, but at the age of two moved to what is now Estonia, where he spent his formative years. He served in the Russian Navy as a naval cadet, going on to the Pavlovsky military school. He was to complete his cadetship there in 1908, having volunteered to fight in the Russo-Japanese War while still a cadet. This was the start of an enigmatic career marked by a fierce desire to wage war. After the war, he was convinced that Russia and Japan would collide militarily again, making him all the more eager to return to the East when his training was complete. His original posting was with the Argun Division of the Trans-Baikal Cossack force. After less than a year's service he was forced to leave the

division for unknown reasons, though the popular explanation was ‘drunkenness’, which he denied.¹³ Through his family’s influence, von Ungern-Sternberg was allowed to enlist in the Amur Division instead.¹⁴ If he suffered from a drink problem, this ceased completely after he settled into his new division, with which he spent some years travelling around the broader region, familiarising himself with the customs and cultures of Dauria (Transbaikalia), Xinjiang and the Buddhism of Mongolia and Tibet. So eager was he to learn about these that he fell foul of the military authorities again, on this occasion for not returning after a leave spent exploring Mongolia some time before the outbreak of the First World War.¹⁵ This too proved to be a surmountable obstacle to his seeing action again, which he did with the Second Army. In order to contribute to the Russian war effort, Baron Ungern undertook a remarkable journey, walking and riding on his own from Dauria to Blagoveshchensk, a distance of about 1,600 kilometres (1,000 miles). Following action in East Prussia, he received the St George medal, 4th class – a prestigious military medal which he wore constantly.¹⁶ The years of wandering and his experiences in these remote areas profoundly transformed him, not least in his adoption of Buddhism.¹⁷

In his biography of the ‘Bloody Baron’, Yuzefovich suggests that his transformation was akin to a revelation, comparing it with that of the hero of Vladimir Nabokov’s *The Gift*: ‘During sandstorms, like Marco Polo, I saw and heard “the whispers of souls, that drew me sideways”, and in the strange glistening light met whirlwinds, caravans and armies of phantoms – thousands of phantom faces.’¹⁸ He adds too the evocative images conjured by other travellers and their experiences in the broader region:

I heard frightening, wild voices, echoing through caves and gorges. I saw lights on the bogs and burning ponds, looked upon unclimbable hills, happened upon piles of slithering snakes, wintering in holes in the ground, climbed atop of cliffs that looked like petrified caravans of camels and their riders. And everywhere I encountered bare cliffs, the folds of which in the rays of the setting sun reminded me of Satan’s cape.¹⁹

Early studies of von Ungern-Sternberg miss this aspect, looking instead more narrowly at his military activities and his idiosyncrasies (especially his bloodlust) in accounting for the legendary status he achieved in his short life.²⁰ However, concentrating on these aspects leaves an important dimension unexplored. His exposure to the exotic nature of the areas traversed and cultures encountered resulted in an ideology shaped by an amalgam of Western and Eastern influences. On his Western side was his unshakeable support for the Russian monarchy. From the Eastern side of his development came a heightened understanding of the

ways of the East, its religions and even the language and manners of its politics.²¹

The combination of the earthiness of his Russianness and the mysticism he encountered in the East produced a Eurasian outlook which not only perplexed his opponents (and by all accounts some of his Eurocentric allies too), but gave him an aura which, despite his terrible record of cruelty, endures to this day.²² Dreams of the restoration of monarchies (he always spoke of these in the plural) were cloaked in the idiom of his Eurasian setting, producing an image which the Soviet authorities found hard either to understand or to counter. Through revelation and cultural mutation, together with his considerable military experience and flair, von Ungern created for himself the notion of a Central Empire, including Outer and Inner Mongolia, to the boundaries of Tibet, Manchuria and India (incorporating, of course, Russia itself). The reshaping of his world-view into this complex vision of Eurasianism had been initiated by his exposure to the East in the Russo-Japanese War.

Many others who had fought there were strongly influenced by their experiences in Asia, where they had – many for the first time – been forced to reconcile these with what they had left behind in Russia. And while these experiences had been diverse, the overall impact was uniform. The returning soldiers had observed Russia's shortcomings at first hand, and had to come to terms with them. Whether via more conventional reform, revolution or the more exotic ideologies that individuals such as von Ungern-Sternberg produced through observations of the clash and interplay between Eastern and Western cultures, Russian soldiers saw the prospect of change as inevitable. Of course, many of the enlisted men, and with them a certain proportion of junior officers, had travelled to Manchuria with that prospect already in mind. The severe hardships they had encountered *en route*, the inequity they found in the Russian Army, the very fact that there was such great enmity between the various nationalities and creeds that made up the enlisted sector of that force, made one thing clear to these men: that the Russian Empire no longer functioned effectively; indeed, that it was in terminal dysfunction.

For the Russian soldiers, the changes precipitated by the war would have been difficult to understand. How might the disaster that was Tsushima be reconciled with the tsar's concessions at Russian Easter when, in a demonstration of remarkable largesse, he introduced a greater measure of liberty for practically all religions in Russia, with the routine exception of the Jews? In effect, this meant the Old Believers, Roman Catholics, Muslims and other religious communities which had endured serious disabilities in public worship, education, marriage and the law. The optimism aroused by this change was genuine, as shown in the following observation, though in a very short time the reaction would come, and it would be fuelled precisely by the identification of 'true Russian' affinity with Orthodox Christianity at its most obscurantist:

At one stroke these disabilities were abolished, and there is no question that this step, taken within a few weeks of the Battle of Mukden, served to alleviate much of the bitterness caused in Russia by that tremendous reverse. Indeed, according to one well-informed observer, it was 'universally regarded as the greatest concession of individual liberty ever made in Russia since the liberation of the serfs', especial stress being laid upon the fact that the measure removed almost the last vestige of religious authority from the police.²³

The Russian world, as it already seemed to so many contemporary Russian writers, was fraying, if not on the verge of collapse. Not only were the internal changes taking place at breathtaking pace, but they were accompanied by the rapid spread of spontaneous eruptions of revolutionary outbreaks in European and Asiatic Russia. In Warsaw on May Day 1905, sixty demonstrators were killed and 200 injured in a clash with troops 'with which the town had been packed in anticipation of a disturbance', while a few days later there was a pogrom and massacre of Jews at Zhitomir. On 24 May the Russian governor of Baku was assassinated by a bomb, and the following month saw a Muslim outbreak in the Trans-Caucasus and further rioting in Poland; in July there were strikes in St Petersburg and on the neighbouring fortress island of Kronstadt, the murder of the prefect of Moscow and riots in Nizhnii Novgorod, with the killing or wounding of sixty-five people, and the ruin of its famous fair that year, followed by the Black Sea Mutiny, immortalised in Eisenstein's film *The Battleship Potemkin*.²⁴

The Russian Empire appeared to be splintering, and to this had to be added the painful, seemingly inexorable, series of defeats in a war which had been entered into by Russia with such vigour and supreme confidence, but now became more and more like a death by a thousand cuts: a sordid, painful struggle in which there was retreat after retreat across the southern part of Manchuria, culminating in the loss of Mukden.

The Battle of Mukden had been enormous, greater in the numbers of men involved than in any previous battle in the history of war. The Battles of Leipzig (1813), Königgrätz (1866) and Gravelotte (1870) each involved 400,000–430,000 men; Solferino (1859) had only 300,000, Wagram (1809) just 280,000 and Jena (1806) 200,000. Before the Battles of Liaoyang and Sha-ho (460,000 and 580,000 respectively), the largest battle Russia had been involved in was Borodino in 1812, when there were a total of 250,000 men present. At Mukden, 370,000 Russian troops faced 250,000 Japanese. Whereas Borodino lasted just twelve and a half hours, the Battle of Mukden lasted from 24 February to 10 March, with the related capture of Tie-ling taking a further five to six days.²⁵ The battle had taken Russia's forces into a realm of endurance they had not known. Indeed, it had taken the world's understanding of war into a new form of consciousness. Henceforth, battles were conceived in terms of a size and

duration never before contemplated. Instead of tens of thousands, strategists would think in terms of hundreds of thousands of men fighting, not for hours or weeks, but months. For a single battle to mark such a transition assigns it considerable historical significance.

Despite the scale – and the transformative nature – of the battle, its imagery was fashioned into something different. For the Russians it became a distillation of their suffering in war – a meaning that was to eclipse many of the other major foci that the battle brought into being. For instance, it overshadowed the public's appreciation of the fact that Russia had been able to transport more than 350,000 troops over thousands of miles and then maintain them in the field over many months, an achievement that would have given satisfaction to an administration with better credentials of efficiency than Russia's.

Here, the role of the railway was of fundamental importance in helping Kuropatkin to keep his forces active over such a long span, and so too was the ability of the Russian forces so ingeniously and successfully to gather the wherewithal necessary to sustain themselves. But the railway too faded away in the popular consciousness that was dominated by the memory of Mukden, leaving the battle in the setting of a desolate, foreign field; not Russian interests to be defended at all costs, but the heart-wrenching sadness of distance and loss. Rather than representing a Herculean battle so valiantly fought by Russian soldiers, Mukden came to represent the fragile and tragic nature of being Russian. For the battle was to be remembered in the most enduring and evocative of Russian songs, '*Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii*' (On the Hills of Manchuria). In important ways, this song, written as a haunting waltz by a little-known army bandmaster, I.A. Shatrov, became a paean to future wars, neither celebrating victory nor marking loss on the battlefield, rather commemorating the suffering of soldiers on the field, and the civilian population left behind. The lyrics to this song, by the writer Stepan Petrov, better known by the pseudonym Skitalets (The Wanderer), a friend of Gorky and a prominent figure among left-wing intellectuals, depict Manchuria as a place of deathly quiet, associated with Russians only through the fallen and the ghostly-white Orthodox crosses that mark their tortured demise. The lyrics reflect not only Russia's bitter experiences in Manchuria, but would be subtly altered in future years to conform to changing conditions and needs of war – a form of a 'musical constitution' that reflected Russians' waging of war,²⁶ and they merit consideration:

'Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii'

*Tikho vokrug,
Sopki pokryty mgloi,
Vot iz-za tuch blesnula luna,
Mogily khranyat pokoi.*

*Beleyut kresty,
Eto geroi spyat,
Proshlogo teni kruzhat'sya vnov',
O zhertvakh boyov tverdyat.*

*Tikho vokrug,
Veter tuman unyos,
Na sopkakh Man'chzhurskikh voiny spyat,
I russkikh ne slyshat slyoz.*

*Plachet, plachet mat' rodnaya,
Plachet molodaya zhena,
Plachut vse, kak odin chelovek,
Svoi rok i sud'bu klyanya.*

*Pust' gaolyan
Vam navevaet sny,
Spite geroi russkoi zemli,
Otchizny rodnoi syny.*

*Vy pali za Rus',
Pogibli za Otchiznu,
Pover'te, my za Vas otomstim
I spravim my slavnuyu triznu.*

I spravim my slavnuyu triznu.

'1906'

Around us, it is calm.
The hills are covered by darkness.
Suddenly, the moon shines through the clouds,
Graves hold their calm.

The white glow of the crosses,
these are heroes asleep,
the shadows of the past circle around,
Recall again and again the victims of battles.

Around us, it's calm,
the fog blown away by the wind,
warriors are asleep on the hills of Manchuria,
and Russian weeping cannot be heard.

Dear mother is weeping, weeping,
weeping is the young wife,
all like one are crying,
cursing fate and destiny!

Let *kaoliang*'s rustling
lull you to sleep,
rest in peace, heroes of the Russian land,
dear Fatherland's sons.

You fell for Rus',
perished for the Fatherland,
believe us, we shall avenge you,
and celebrate a glorious wake.

And celebrate a glorious wake.

Here, the numbers of soldiers fighting were so great, the fallen so many,²⁷ that it was simply impossible to comprehend the loss of the individual soldiers, and instead the song represents something of a first monument to the Unknown Soldier – a faceless, nameless scion of the tortured mother earth of Russia. But the supreme irony, and poignancy, of the song is that, while it whirls its ghostly way around the hills and plains of Manchuria, the latter remains abstract, distant, foreign. The crosses planted across the hills of Manchuria were on land as alien to non-combatants then as it was to subsequent generations. For each and every one of these generations, a word such as *kaoliang* (*gaoliang*) was something that was integral to the experience of the Russian soldiers as Manchuria and the Manchurian Russians, but without any meaning whatsoever to the Russians left behind: *kaoliang* was a tall grain unique to China, possessing immense significance for those around whom it grew, and those it fed, but meaning nothing to the ordinary Russian. In a sense, this dichotomy represented pointedly the abortive Russian experience in Manchuria: forever to be connected to, and yet disconnected from, this ultimately foreign ground.

The war in Manchuria gave rise to much symbolism in Russia, of which this simple, yet profoundly moving, waltz was one of many tributes to the fallen there. The war gave rise to many physical monuments too, most of them erected on funds raised by charitable bodies and private subscription. In the main, these were in austere, highly formalised granite shapes, which tended to remove the tragedy of Manchuria from the ordinary person and transform it into the realm of the tightly cosseted Russian 'society' (*obshchestvo*) of the time, in which officialdom and Church alike helped to shape an impossible existence for the majority of the people. Unlike other monuments to war, which in the course of generations often tend to symbolise

the experiences of conflict and loss, the Russo-Japanese War shed most of its physical commemorations, none of which found their way into the hearts of the Russian people. And yet this song did. Carried from generation to generation, and embraced by tsarist Russian, Soviet Russian and post-Soviet Russian alike, 'On the Hills of Manchuria' interweaves with the Russian experience in the twentieth century, cropping up in the most unlikely of places. In Nikita Mikhalkov's film *Urga* (1991), his hopelessly displaced Russian itinerant lorry driver, half drunk, takes the stage at a nightclub in Ulan Bator, where he leads the Chinese-trained band in playing 'On the Hills of Manchuria', to which he adds his own unsteady voice. It quickly envelops his entire sad existence, his financially enforced exile in this unfamiliar corner of the world. At the same time, it evokes and refreshes the memory of the now so distant war in a neighbouring territory. More recently, a British orchestra on its War Songs Tour of Russia observed the following when it played the song towards the end of their concert:

During 'The Hills of Manchuria', we felt that special stillness in the audience much treasured by performers, and that even-more-special silence after we finished the song. It was at least 20 seconds before the audience broke the spell and burst into applause, giving Dmitri [the singer] a standing ovation.²⁸

By this time, however, the lyrics carry a different weight and shape. The writer of the account of the orchestra's tour observes that: '[t]his particular song is known from the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, and has followed the Russian Soldier ever since', and yet the lyrics sung at the concert commemorate a far broader experience:

Night has approached,
 Dusk has settled on the ground,
 Deserted hills are drowned in the darkness,
 The East is covered by a cloud.
 Here in the ground
 Our heroes sleep,
 A song is sung by the wind above them,
 And the stars look down from the sky.
 All remains silent in the night
 Sleep, warriors, sleep in peace,
 May you see in your dreams your native lands,
 And your faraway home. . . .
 The people and the fatherland will not forget
 Their sons' courage.
 Sleep, heroes, the motherland will always
 Cherish your memory.²⁹

But in examining this unique living monument to the war, there is one dimension missing, and that is of the Manchurian Russians, whose experiences are absent from the song, and the war itself. Nothing in the song commemorates the Russian settlers in that distant land, or their toils and sacrifices there. The mournful refrain was crafted for the Russian visitors to Manchuria, who, because of their fate and misfortune, were to remain for ever. Their commemoration left out the ancillary forces attached to the railway, and their own heroic acts of sacrifice. Left out too were the ordinary Russian citizens of the Manchurian region – the pioneers who had erected the edifice of the Russian presence there, and who were strangely excluded from both the fighting and the sombre glories. And with them the very reason for their presence and the resulting war. The Chinese Eastern Railway is neither commemorated in Russia's popular culture nor memorialised by any but the *Man'chzhurtsy* (Manchurian Russians) themselves. The *Manchzhurtsy* devoted a huge amount of energy in carrying out this work, which has etched in great detail their contribution to this informal Russian *krai* (territory), but until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening up of the study of Manchuria in Russia itself, this had been the preserve of Russians in exile who conducted their work in various corners of the world, and, for the most part, in relative anonymity, even within their host societies.

It is appropriate here to note the place of Russian-Manchurian studies in general. Major centres of such study have been the United States, Australia and Israel, although the last-mentioned centre (ironically, given that this was technically the product of a minority in the Russian-Manchurian community) in many respects has given us the most active and enduring corpus of work and chronicling. Australia's contributions have been via two prominent Russian chronicles: *Politekhnik* (Polytechnic), the work of the Harbin community's university, a journal that focuses on the engineering and social-scientific sides of Russian life in Manchuria; and *Australiada* (Australiada), a journal which has devoted itself to the life and work of Russians in Australia, but which has inevitably concerned itself with the life, history and politics of Russians in Manchuria, many of whom have ended up in Australia. The United States has been the major repository of sources on Manchurian Russians, with materials gathered in a variety of centres, most notably the Hoover Institution of War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University, which has gradually acquired the valuable – and, regrettably, underused – archives of the Museum of Russian Culture, located in San Francisco and developed through the individual efforts of the keepers of the museum. Russia itself has been a conspicuously late entrant to the work on Manchuria, which during the Soviet period remained *terra incognita* for Russian scholars, having been politically most sensitive, not only as a sore point (given the troublesome presence of so many political 'Whites' or émigrés in Harbin) but also as a vulnerable point for Soviet foreign policy, given the bitter relations the Soviet Union

experienced with China for much of the twentieth century; but also because Manchuria was historically and politically so intertwined with the politically sensitive region of the Russian Far East, which at the height of the Cold War was the front line of the second major front in this period of confrontation between East and West. The result has been that scholars from Russia itself have approached their subject with a catch-up attitude, and perhaps even a certain amount of naivety, generating a fractured and, in many regards, an incomplete image of the Russian presence in Manchuria.

In documenting both their contribution to, and experiences in, Manchuria, the *Man'chzhurtsy* have devoted surprisingly little attention to the war that in such important ways forged their communities and their very existence. It is as if they saw this episode as one best forgotten, relegated to the obscure corners of their own history. And yet the war was directly responsible for creating the conditions in which they would henceforth have to trade. Harbin was at a stroke elevated to the premier Russian settlement in Manchuria, and, rather than nestling quietly in the heartland of Manchuria and acting simply as a junction for a number of major railways running into it, was transformed into the point at which Russian influence ended in the new political circumstances governing Manchuria. In this new role Harbin found itself in a difficult position, for under these conditions, in a profound sense the Manchurian Russians had also to abandon their spiritual home:

[D]espite [the] Muscovite monopoly [of Harbin], you never hear the word Russia. Just as, in the south, Japan veils her efforts under the name of the South Manchurian Railway, so in the north, above Chang-Chun, the Imperial Russian Government is the Chinese Eastern Railway.³⁰

This was, in part, the Manchurian Russians conforming to the spirit of the Treaty of Portsmouth, which, in officially ending hostilities, showed the intent to demilitarise and depoliticise Manchuria by removing the metropolitan states from direct involvement in the region, substituting for them the administrative bodies of the two railways. But for the Harbinites it went deeper still. While they followed with interest what was happening in Russia proper, they did so at metaphorical arm's length. Their writings about Russia were relatively sparse and rudimentary, and their contributions to its politics minimal. It was as if they took to heart the official post-war prescription for their continued existence, and this became part of their very nature. As their troubled history evolved, so grew their distance from their spiritual and cultural home. This is reflected in the fact that the evolution of their language fell behind, despite the relative ease of keeping in touch with Russia itself, so that the language spoken by the final generation³¹ of Harbin Russians is a linguistic snapshot of old Russia: beautifully spoken and somewhat old-fashioned.

It is worth dwelling on the broader point of this sense of separation. The Russo-Japanese War had been mingled with the birth pangs of this Russian city, but it also dictated the way in which Harbin was to develop as a major trading centre. Whereas before the war Harbin would undoubtedly have developed to such a status, because of it Russia felt compelled to make it a success in order to maintain its grip on its remaining interests in Manchuria. Moreover, Russia had been left quite alone in this exercise. Before the war, Russia had a number of Western allies and friends, most notably the French. With Russia's calamitous defeat, it found itself for a time quite isolated from the community of states, and certainly so as far as such relations were played out in China. On the other hand, Japan's spectacular victory had given it enhanced prestige in the same community, and especially so in terms of its economic relations:

Nor were Japan's relations with the outside non-belligerent world less happy. Her few well-placed loans were accorded a most gratifying response, and her credit, always high, reached during the period in question a pinnacle to which some older and richer nations have not often attained.³²

As we have seen, however, Russia was in a parlous financial state at the end of the war, hardly in a position to sink considerable sums into the running costs and further development of its railway network in Manchuria, or to help the Russian community to make gains in local trade. In any case, neither aim was entirely realistic. Building further lines in Manchuria was a *sine qua non* for the Chinese Eastern Railway to expand its productivity and financial returns, but this was an expensive business, and certainly not one readily entertained by Russia at the conclusion of such an expensive conflict. Instead, Russia sank as much money as possible into the consolidation of existing lines and CER activities. As two American observers, Wright and Digby, noted of the CER's involvement in the development of Harbin itself:

Not only will the railroad buy, but it will build, and is building, plenty of substantial hotels, blocks of offices and rows of residences. It has recently run up a Merchants' Exchange that would suit Philadelphia. It runs in Kharbin [Harbin] a Chinese daily newspaper and a Russian daily, both of them filled with reassuring fabrications on how well Russia is developing the country and protecting the interest of its natives.³³

And fortunately for Russia, it was assisted in this desperate strategy by the growth of a key resource in Manchuria: the humble soya bean. As Japan and Russia emerged from their conflict they found that this commodity had begun to enjoy increased interest in Europe and America, where it

served as a cheap and nutritious animal feed. Around Asia the soya bean represented far more, having long been a valuable and versatile source of protein and nutrition for humans.³⁴

The terms of the peace between Russia and Japan had encouraged a swift resumption of useful trade activities and the commercial development of Manchuria. Japan's initial demands had reflected the commanding position it held at the end of hostilities. When they arrived at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1905, the victorious Japanese had demanded something of a Carthaginian peace, which would leave Russia not only strategically but also financially bereft in the Far East. Japan wanted unequivocal control of Korea, all leases granted to Russia by China transferred to Japan, and the administration of Manchuria transferred to China (and thereby implicitly to fall under Japanese influence). In addition, Russia was to pay Japan for the costs of the war, give up all Russian naval ships that had sought asylum in neutral ports or surrendered to Japan, hand over the island of Sakhalin to Japan, severely restrict its naval activities in the Far East, and grant extensive fishing rights on the Siberian coast to Japan.³⁵ Japan's original twelve demands were in due course expanded to fourteen, but the tenor of these, at the behest of the United States, was considerably moderated. Added to the points was an especially important one that established an 'open door' policy for all countries in the further development of Manchuria. The Manchurian railway system was cleanly and definitively divided between Russia and Japan, although the lines were to be used purely for commercial and industrial purposes, with Japan acquiring mining rights associated with what was to become the South Manchurian Railway (SMR). Commercial activities were opened up for both states, providing an equitable foundation for business: 'Both parties to this treaty remain absolutely free to undertake what they may deem fit on the expropriated ground.'³⁶

The agreement lingered in greater detail on the railway system, indicating that the two parties were to create a junction for their railway lines at Kwangchengtsze and that '[i]t is agreed that the lines of the Manchurian Railway shall be worked with a view to ensuring commercial traffic between them without obstruction'.³⁷ But there were obstructions which were built into the post-war operation of the two lines. While there was, as the settlement demanded, a junction created, this was thenceforth between different gauges of line, the Russian being five feet and the Japanese 3½ feet, increasing to 4 feet 8½ inches. Such a break in the gauge was, as one contemporary intelligence source indicated, to 'have a very serious bearing on Harbin products going south'.³⁸ The SMR enhanced this advantage by introducing double track within a comparatively short time, fully equipped with American-made rolling stock.³⁹ Furthermore, the junction itself did not permit rolling stock to be conveniently shifted on to appropriately-sized wheels; instead, goods and passengers had to be moved by vehicle over seven miles of difficult, relatively unsafe terrain.⁴⁰ The overall signific-

ance of such arrangements was to ensure that neither passengers nor goods should be able to travel freely either in a northerly or southerly direction across the demarcation point between Russian and Japanese spheres of influence.

With the railway divided effectively into two quite separate entities, the spheres of influence also took on distinctive characteristics. In physical terms, the Russian- and Japanese-controlled sectors of Manchuria were unequal, Japan's area of influence being only one-third of the land mass. The combination of the railway zone it held with the leased Kwantung Province had a population of only 501,553. Russia, on the other hand, still controlled two-thirds of the territory, and its railway territory had a population of 551,220.⁴¹ As Wright and Digby concluded, 'The Russian region of Manchuria is less thickly populated and less commercially important than the Japanese, though considerable Russian immigration is increasing its value as a market.'⁴² The 'capitals' of these two zones grew apace, with the oddity that both had been founded and initially developed by Russia. Millions of roubles had been spent by Russia on converting a relatively sleepy Manchu backwater called Ta-lien-wan (a 'Manchu caprice', as it is described by Wright and Digby) into its warm-water port and Asian commercial capital, Dal'nyi.⁴³ But with the intervention of the war, and without the exchange of a single shot, the newly founded capital passed into Japanese hands.

Dal'nyi had, within three years of Russia's assuming control of it in 1898, 'been transformed . . . into one of the most modern, practical cities of North-East Asia.'⁴⁴ This had been achieved through the spending of some twenty million roubles (US\$10 million) on government infrastructure alone, while '[h]ow much private firms and individuals sunk in the venture is not known'.⁴⁵ After the war, Japan engaged in further massive spending, somewhat incongruously turning Russian architecture and sweeping tsarist boulevards into its 'colonial capital overseas'.⁴⁶ Between the new Japanese city of Dairen and the associated leased territory along the SMR, there were resident some 95,000 Japanese, one-third of whom were merchants.⁴⁷ Harbin had similarly risen from a wild region of rich, unpopulated country. With the creation of the junction of the Siberian and Manchurian Railways, in a matter of ten years the city had grown to become the commercial centre of mid-Manchuria, with substantial buildings and a population of some 120,000 people. But this city of 'mushroom growth' had by 1907 'obtained a reputation for murder, robbery, and thieving. It is questionable if a city could be found where life is more insecure, more especially if one ventures out by night'.⁴⁸

Ostensibly, Manchuria, governed by these imposing rival capitals, was left open to equitable international economic development, although both Japan and Russia were, of course, to have some natural advantage in the exploitation of the area. But the prospect of developing this relatively untouched corner of China was not likely to be easy or immediately

cost-effective, so the prospects of quick returns were slim, except in encouraging the development of a monoculture agrarian sector, on the back of which could come more extensive economic development. On the Russian side of the new economic division of the region, entrepreneurial activity was left to the local residents to pursue, armed with a few advantages, including the favourable position afforded by the use of Russian as the *lingua franca* in northern Manchuria.

Given that the final treaty forestalled the complete dismemberment of Russia's North-East Asian venture, with just the southern half of Sakhalin ceded to Japan, no restrictions placed on its naval activities in the north-eastern seas, and only limited fishing rights being given to Japan in Russian territorial waters in the Seas of Japan, Okhotsk and Bering, Russia could contemplate reinforcing its railway network between its Manchurian and east Siberian lines. The economic integration of these Russian interests flowered quickly, with business interests in eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East opening up activities in Manchuria. Families such as the Vorontsovs, Skidelskys, Brynners and others expanded their operations into Manchuria, thereby helping to establish a flourishing Russian business community there. The major, capital-rich families and operations were supplemented by many smaller businessmen, traders and prospectors who slipped across the border after the end of hostilities.

The division of Manchuria into two provided political stability and encouraged swift economic development to take root, if in markedly different spheres of political influence. Indeed, the Manchurian economy as a whole began to boom as the railways tapped the rapidly increasing output of soya beans from the burgeoning rural sector. Small farmers grew the beans effectively, and, mediated by Western and Japanese companies, channelled stocks of them to railway stations for transshipment to the docks of neighbouring ports such as Dairen and Vladivostok, and then on to their European and American destinations. With the 'open door' policy firmly in place, Western exporters began to look to Manchuria as a market for their primary industrial goods and consumer products, making full use of the emerging boom conditions.⁴⁹

But this situation, on the surface allowing Manchuria to undergo a remarkable transformation from the period 1904–1905 when war clouds hung over it, also contained the seeds of the decline of Russian influence in the region. A monopoly over the railway system in Manchuria as a whole would have allowed Russia an enormous advantage; one which could have capitalised strongly on the sharp growth in agricultural exports and permitted a considerable degree of reinvestment in order to spread the branch lines further, thereby opening up more and more Manchurian territory to profitable exploitation. Instead, Russia found itself in a position of commercial competition with Japan, attempting to undercut freight rates on the SMR and using economic incentives to attract exports to its ports and the Trans-Siberian Railway. While the soya bean-induced prosperity

lasted, the forms of competition that emerged were sustainable – indeed, appeared most attractive. But they did not allow vital funding to flow back as reinvestment into the railway system itself, leaving the latter to be exploited rather than itself to exploit. This endgame required some twenty-eight years to be played out, a period in which Manchuria, as a consolidated region, might have experienced spectacular forms of economic take-off instead.

The frustration of the Russian private sector in northern Manchuria was made plain to the tsarist government, which was told of the potential bounties that were to be secured in Manchuria should it support the Russian commercial initiatives there.⁵⁰ The pleas fell on deaf ears as the Russian government continued to plough its money almost entirely into its railway system, leaving Russian commerce to fend for itself. Blame, however, cannot be apportioned only to the government and its failure to take advantage of its subjects' commercial presence in Manchuria. The *kommersanty* (businessmen) themselves had shown remarkably blinkered attitudes, failing to capitalise on opportunity after opportunity;⁵¹ their ineptitude in the face of the mighty imperial project in Manchuria echoed that of the military commanders who had shown such lacklustre leadership in the course of the Russo-Japanese War. Opportunities were lost, natural advantages wasted, through arrogant complacency instead of entrepreneurial acumen. In all, as one of the present authors has described it, Russia's adventure in Manchuria could be best depicted as 'slovenly imperialism' (*bezalabernyi imperialism*).⁵²

The transformation of the political and economic topography in Manchuria had seemed an equitable way to resolve differences between the Russian and the Japanese presence. It was a formula guaranteed to avoid further friction and conflict, having cleanly divided both the railway system and its hinterland between the contending parties, and placed their relationship on an economic footing. However, this solution proved to be as misguided as the approach to the complex geopolitics that had given rise to the Russo-Japanese conflict, and the two states' inability to arrive at a workable, mutually acceptable framework for coexistence in the region. If anything, the dilemma that Japan faced before the war, of whether to act in a peremptory fashion or not, had now transferred to Russia:

Russia in Manchuria is in a dilemma; either she must stand her ground in Northern Manchuria and thus smooth the path of her rival in the south, for since the war Japan has been upholding Russia's position thereby perpetuating precedents that she may turn to her own advantage; or Russia can unite with China to check the growing power of Japan.⁵³

The overall impact of the resolution dictated by the Treaty of Portsmouth was to focus attention on the most useful and profitable ways

to exploit the resources of Manchuria. This was a greater sticking point between the signatories than might have appeared at first glance. After all, both Russia and Japan viewed Manchuria as an immensely bountiful region. It was, of course, a place of considerable value. But its exploitation raised a variety of problems.

This in itself might have given the competing parties pause for thought. However, in addition to the warring states themselves, the introduction of a genuine 'open door' basis for commercial activity in Manchuria encouraged other nations to add their eager participation in its economy. There had already been some inkling of the potential here. When Russia opened up a corridor of opportunity for its own traders, as well as those of China, on its own territory, a variety of resourceful European companies attempted to take a share of the lucrative trade by using Russian and Chinese trademarks to sell their goods legitimately.⁵⁴ As a result, Russia cancelled its generous provision there. But the end of the Russo-Japanese War had brought something much broader in terms of commercial competition, and this now had to be factored into the overall picture. The result was to underline just how vulnerable Russian trade and production practices were in Manchuria. An example of this was Russian flour production.

The Russian government had invested heavily in building mills in Manchuria, to take advantage of wheat cultivation in the region. However, this area of production made heavy weather of its advantage, and of the facilities provided by the Russian government. The Chinese market was a major focus for such production, given that the northern Chinese diet was wheat based rather than rice based. Despite the natural advantage that the Russian growers and milling operations enjoyed, they were outdone by US competitors on price, quality and by-products.⁵⁵ Most importantly, the Russian producers of flour offered for sale a grey-coloured product, and a badly refined one at that, in a market that saw white flour as essential to meet Chinese tastes. Not only that, but the American companies were able to ship their superior product from Puget Sound and Portland on the West Coast at an f.o.b. price just a fraction more expensive than these local Russian businesses could offer.⁵⁶

The Japanese were in some respects more adept in dealing with these new factors,⁵⁷ but they were starting from a position which was less established than that of Russia. After all, trade had been at the very core of the Russian presence in the Far East, and had largely been an engine for its further expansion into the region. Trade had also been at the heart of Russia's international relations, which under Finance Minister Witte had assumed quite subtle, sophisticated forms.

The failure of Russian imperialism in Manchuria is shown in brightest relief when comparing it with the work of a Britain or Japan in China. As an imperialist power, Britain had shown the skills of bureaucratic organisation and acculturation of elites, while the Japanese displayed their prodigious

gious capacity for planning and provision for the long-term.⁵⁸ Despite the massive investment that Russia had made into its railway system in Manchuria, and the development of the railway's own subsidiary activities, it had left this corner of its empire to take shape on its own. In part, this was a structural problem, it should be noted. Russia technically had only its railway zone on which to build its colonial edifice, and therefore its ability to expand its empire here was physically limited. Nevertheless, this did not prevent its own citizens from performing the work of developing an enduring Russian presence there – something that they pointed out over and over again in their petitions to the Russian Ministry of Finance, and the government as a whole. Imperialist creativity was demonstrated in another way by Japan when, needing to crystallise its imperial presence in Manchuria after 1931, it co-opted a politically disenfranchised Chinese leader, Emperor Pu-yi, to validate its presence and legitimate the completion of its thoroughgoing plans for its new imperial hinterland, the new quasi-state of Manchukuo.

Notes

Introduction

- 1 M. Howard, *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order*, Profile, London, 2001, p. 5.

1 Russian context and Manchurian setting

- 1 For an authoritative analysis of the policies designed to transform Russia from an agrarian to an industrial society, see 'Russia: Agrarian Policies and Industrialization, 1861–1914', in Alexander Gerschenkron, *Continuity in History and Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1968, pp. 140–248.
- 2 Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Imperial Russian Army*, 2 vols, vol. 1, *The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1980, p. 25.
- 3 Alan Wood, 'The Exile System', in H. Shukman (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, pp. 257–259.
- 4 J. Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581–1990*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 186.
- 5 Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation*, 2 vols, Macmillan, New York, 1961, vol. 2, pp. 1032–1033.
- 6 H. Shukman, 'Introduction', in Shukman (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 3–4.
- 7 David Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform, 1801–1881*, Longman, London, 1992, p. 322.
- 8 Nurit Schleifman 'The Okhrana' in Shukman (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 49–51.
- 9 Harold Shukman, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, Batsford, London, 1966, p. 36.
- 10 David Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform, 1801–1881*, Longman, London, 1992, pp. 61–62.
- 11 *Evreiskaya entsiklopediya*, Brokhaus i Efron, St Petersburg, 1908–1913, vol. 13, p. 50; Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and Interpretation*, vol. 2, Macmillan, New York, pp. 1113–1115.
- 12 Shukman, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, pp. 36–37.
- 13 Michael Futrell, *Northern Underground: Episodes of Russian Revolutionary Transport and Communications through Scandinavia and Finland, 1863–1917*, Faber & Faber, London, 1963, p. 79.
- 14 Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917*, HarperCollins, London, 1997, p. 425.

- 15 J.N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History, 1812–1992*, 4th edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 602.
- 16 F.H. Skrine, *The Expansion of Russia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1915, pp. 8–10.
- 17 James H. Bater, *St Petersburg: Industrialization and Change*, Edward Arnold, London, 1976, p. 110.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 314.
- 19 Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Left, 1870–1905*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1970, pp. 316–317.
- 20 Madhavan Palat, ‘Sergei Vasilievich Zubatov’, in Shukman (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, p. 399.
- 21 Shukman, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, Batsford, London, 1966, p. 71.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- 23 Dmitrii L. Abrikossov, *Revelations of a Russian Diplomat*, ed. George A. Lensen, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1964, p. 112.
- 24 Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution, 1899–1919*, Collins Harvill, 1999, p. 12; Abraham Ascher, *The evolution of 1905*, Stanford, CA, 1988, p. 44.
- 25 For an account, see B. Bobrick, *East of the Sun: The Conquest and Settlement of Siberia*, Heinemann, London, 1992.
- 26 Dated 25 March 1895, in *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, Moscow, 1932, no. 52, p. 40, cited in Felix Patrikeeff, ‘Walls and Frontiers’, in *Silk Road Studies*, VI, Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia, 2002, p. 91.
- 27 For the diplomatic backdrop to this phase, see A. Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881–1904*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1958, pp. 59–68.
- 28 Peter Struve (ed.), *Samoderzhavie i zemstvo: Konfidentsial’naya zapiska Ministra finansov Stats-sekretarya S. Yu. Witte (1899)*, Dietz, Stuttgart, 1903.
- 29 Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy*, pp. 167–168.
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 223–227.
- 31 Shukman, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, p. 65.
- 32 Li was invited to St Petersburg in 1896, and there signed a treaty of alliance with Russia; in return, Russia was to be allowed to build a railway line across northern Manchuria, linking the Trans-Siberian with Vladivostok. R.K.I. Quedsted, *Sino-Russian Relations: A Short History*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 82.
- 33 By the First World War, railway-building had absorbed £380,000,000 of Russia’s foreign indebtedness. Skrine, *The Expansion of Russia*, p. 313. It is interesting to note that the Russian state and big private banks in Moscow and St Petersburg were slow to generate capital for the vast railway projects, with these Russian financial institutions becoming engaged in railway expansion only in the late 1890s. See G.P.G. Sinzheimer ‘Reflections on Gerschenkron, Russian Backwardness and Economic Development: Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective’, *Soviet Studies* vol. 17, no. 2, Oct. 1965, p. 218.
- 34 The opening up of Russia’s hinterland had, until the advent of the railway, been episodic and slow. Traders who made their way into Siberia financed the Cossacks sent ahead to conquer what, in due course, was territory larger than the Roman Empire. But in doing so, these traders became lords and masters of land they secured. For a vivid depiction of this process, see Y. Semenov, *The Conquest of Siberia: An Epic of Human Passions*, George Routledge, London, 1944, pp. 273–274.
- 35 See discussion in F. Patrikeeff, ‘Russian and Soviet Economic Penetration of Northern China, 1895–1933’, in J.W. Strong (ed.), *Essays on Revolutionary Culture and Stalinism*, Slavica Publishers, Columbus, OH, 1990.

- 36 Ibid.
- 37 For an interesting depiction of Harbin's pre-history and early development, see D. Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria*, Stanford, CA, 1999, pp. 14–48.
- 38 G. Vernadsky, *Political and Diplomatic History of Russia*, Williams & Norgate, London, 1937, p. 240.
- 39 P.S.H. Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, 1911–1931*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1959, pp. 28–29. These advances came as a result of Muraviev's second expedition, which began in 1854.
- 40 D.J. Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia*, Hollis & Carter, London, 1950, p. 24.
- 41 Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy*, p. 24. The purpose of the programme was to convert peasants registered at Nerchinsk into Cossacks. From a total population of 29,000 males, Muraviev intended to form twelve battalions of 1,000 men each. This was approved by Nicholas I on 27 April 1851 (ibid.).
- 42 For details of this, and a discussion of the contentious phrasing, see R.K.I. Quested, *The Expansion of Russia in East Asia, 1857–1860*, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1968, p. 146ff.
- 43 Cited in Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy*, p. 32. Muraviev's own glory, however, was quite short-lived. In early 1861 he went into retirement after his project for the division of eastern Siberia into two governor-generalships was rejected by the central government. I.I. Lin'kov, V.A. Nikitin and O.A. Khodenkov, *Deyateli Rossii XIX – nachala XX v.: Biograficheskii spravochnik*, Izd. Moskovskogo universiteta, Moscow, 1995, p. 121.
- 44 I.A. Yakushev, *Amur ili reka chernogo drakona*, n.p., 1931[?], p. 3.
- 45 E.G. Ravenstein, *The Russians on the Amur*, London, Trübner, 1861, pp. 153–154.
- 46 Derived through the conversion programme for the Nerchinsk peasantry. See above, note 41.
- 47 In describing the lot of these settlers, Dallin cites the Russian explorer Nikolai Przhevalsky: 'These settlers look upon the new region with animosity and consider themselves deportees. One hears bitter complaints about the hardships, and sad reminiscences of former habitations.' Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia*, p. 24.
- 48 For a concise depiction of the context within which Badmaev was working, see D. Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860–1914*, Berg, Leamington Spa, UK, 1987, pp. 187–191.
- 49 These close relations were as much a tactical expedient as a representation of increasing warmth between China and Russia (a useful depiction of this can be found in P.H. Clyde and B.F. Beers, *The Far East: A History of Western Impacts and Eastern Responses, 1830–1975*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Hills, NJ, 1975, pp. 210–211).
- 50 Tang, for example, sees Witte as having realised 'the political and strategic significance of the Trans-Siberian Railway as an interrelated part of his larger policy in Asia'. Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy*, p. 36.
- 51 A note dated 25 March 1895, in *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, 1932, no. 52, p. 40.
- 52 S.Yu. Witte, *Vospominaniya*, vol. 2, Izd. Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, Moscow, 1960, pp. 44–45.
- 53 G. Stokes & S. Stokes, *The Extreme East: A Modern History*, Longman, Hong Kong, 1964, p. 215.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 The Russo-Chinese Bank was Russian-controlled, but with a high level of French investment. See R.K.I. Quested, *The Russo-Chinese Bank*, Birmingham Slavonic Monographs no. 2, Department of Russian Language and Literature, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, 1977 (especially pp. 3–31).

- 56 Cited in *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, 1932, no. 52, p. 45.
- 57 Witte, *Vospominaniya*, p. 55.
- 58 Cited in K.S. Weigh, *Russo-Chinese Diplomacy*, The Commercial Press, Shanghai, 1928, p. 252. By this clause, China had thereby ‘abandoned all rights of jurisdiction in her own territory, and, therefore, all people whether they be Chinese or Russian or foreign residents within the railway area, had to be under Russian laws’ (ibid.).
- 59 From a telegram dated 21 May 1899 sent by the Russian representative at the talks between Russia and Britain. *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, 1932, vol. 25, p. 128.
- 60 See Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy*, pp. 50–51.
- 61 Witte, *Vospominaniya*, p. 180.
- 62 Polovtsev was state secretary from 1901 to 1905. The quotation comes from his diary: *The Diary of A.A. Polovtsev*, trans. J.M. Schilling, Schilling Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, p. 59.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Witte, *Vospominaniya*, p. 180.
- 65 Ibid. Notwithstanding Polovtsev’s observations, the Witte account of Kuropatkin’s enthusiasm to seize the whole of Manchuria is, of course, coloured by his eagerness to depict himself as being the one with a deep sense of political wisdom. David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye provides a fascinating depiction of the misgivings that Kuropatkin felt about taking more of Manchuria. As a quote from a memorandum dated 14 March 1900 indicates, the general feared not only that such a step would jeopardise friendly relations with China, but also that the spill-over effect of having ‘Manchuria’s huge population within [Russian] borders’ would be too great a threat to Russia. See *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire on the Path to War with Japan*, DeKalb, IL, 2001, chap. 5. However, as developments in Manchuria after the Russo-Japanese War showed, the retention of the northern part of Manchuria as a sphere of Russian influence was a deeply flawed proposition, as the economic catchment area that Russia had as a result of the formal division was insufficient to sustain either a profitable railway operation or a viable sphere of activity for Russian commerce.
- 66 Shen, Mo, *Japan in Manchuria (An Analytical Study of Treaties)*, Manila, n.p., 1960, p. 87.
- 67 J.V.A. MacMurray, *Treaties and Agreements with and concerning China*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1921.
- 68 T. Dennett, *Roosevelt and the Russo-Japanese War*, Doubleday, Page, New York, 1925, p. 130.
- 69 Ibid., p. 129.
- 70 Ibid., pp. 129–130.
- 71 *Vestnik Azii*, Harbin, no. 3, 1910, pp. 22–23.
- 72 In Shanghai, for example, the following taxes were collected by the local municipal administration: 1 per cent of the annual income derived from property; one-twentieth of 1 per cent of the value of the property itself; and customs duties not more than one-tenth of 1 per cent of the value of goods. In Harbin, by contrast, all customs duties were collected by the CER, thereby giving it another area of considerable fiscal influence. *Vestnik Azii*, no. 3, 1910, p. 26.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Ibid., p. 43. Although there is no evidence to demonstrate it, one must wonder whether the Chinese recognised that equality in an administration without real power was really very similar to being without a voice in the administration of the treaty ports in China proper.
- 75 Cited in Weigh, *Russo-Chinese Diplomacy*, p. 251.
- 76 Amounting to approximately 300,000 acres (120,000 hectares).

- 77 *Far Eastern Review*, May 1909, p. 424.
- 78 T.I. Polner, *Obshchezemskaya Organizatsiya na Dal'nem Vostoke*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1908, p. 88.
- 79 Polner cites the combined percentage for non-railway employees as 35.5 per cent of the total working population (*ibid.*)
- 80 *Ibid.*
- 81 *Ibid.* (1 *verst* = 3,500 ft, or approximately 0.66 mile or 1 kilometre).
- 82 *Ibid.*
- 83 *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.
- 84 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- 85 *Ibid.*
- 86 The transformation had been helped by two factors: (1) the CER's Construction Division having applied itself to the planning of the Pristan' area, dividing it into districts and providing the guidance for the construction roads and utilities; (2) Harbin's municipal administration having finalised the zoning of areas under construction, thereby putting to an end the erection of improvised accommodation for business and residence alike. Heads of businesses also recognised the value of the river as an economic artery, and therefore moved their main offices to the district. M. Tairov, 'Pristan' i novyi gorod', *Politekhnik*, no. 6, 1974, pp. 37–38.
- 87 A. Vespa, *Secret Agent for Japan: A Handbook to Japanese Imperialism*, New Left Book Club, London, 1938, p. 190 *passim*.
- 88 Polner, *Obshchezemskaya Organizatsiya*, p. 88.
- 89 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 90 *Ibid.*
- 91 Weigh, *Russo-Chinese Diplomacy*, p. 217.
- 92 Polner, *Obshchezemskaya Organizatsiya*, p. 89.
- 93 *Vestnik Azii*, no. 1, July 1909, p. 102. The experience here, as elsewhere in northern Manchuria, was one where local enterprise required a long period of subsidy and support in order to establish itself – support which was rarely forthcoming from either the railway or the Russian government itself (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion).
- 94 *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- 95 Exports of the native grains by this period had, according to CER statistics, reached about 100,000 *poods* (1 *pood* = 36 pounds or 16.33 kilograms). *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- 96 For the centrality of the soya bean trade in the Manchurian economy, see F. Patrikeeff, 'Prosperity and Collapse: Banking and the Manchurian Economy in the 1920s and 1930s', in F.H.H. King (ed.), *Eastern Banking: Essays in the History of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation*, Athlone Press, London, 1983.
- 97 For an examination of Chang's formative years in Manchuria, see G. McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China, 1911–1928: China, Japan, and the Manchurian Idea*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1977.
- 98 Japan, upon taking control of the whole of Manchuria after the Manchurian Incident of 1931, began to invest very heavily there. This was, however, simply an intensification of a process already in train. By 1927, 85 per cent of Japan's total international investment was in China, and of that Manchuria made up 80 per cent. In 1932 the investment had deepened further still, with 68 per cent of the total resources ploughed into the Manchurian economy being Japanese (McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, pp. 7–8). By 1945, Japan had invested more in Manchukuo (the name of Manchuria under Japanese control) than in its formal colonies of Korea, Taiwan and the other portions of China occupied by it. F.C. Jones, *Manchuria since 1931*, RIIA, London, 1949, p. 139; L. Young,

Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism, University of California, Berkeley, 1998, pp. 183–184, 213–215. Also, for details of Japan's investment into Manchukuo's social infrastructure, see K.C. Sun, *The Economic Development of Manchuria in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (ed. R.W. Huenemann), East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 1969, pp. 101–102.

2 Railways and empire

- 1 Quoted in R.W. Huenemann, *The Dragon and the Iron Horse: The Economics of Railroads in China, 1876–1937*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1984, p. 1.
- 2 Albert Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization: Sheng Hsuan-huai and Mandarin Enterprise*, Atheneum, New York, 1970, p. 62.
- 3 For a sketch of the delicate balance that the local rural-based economy had to work with, see F. Patrikeeff, 'Prosperity and Collapse: Banking and the Manchurian Economy in the 1920s and 1930s', in F.H.H. King (ed.), *Eastern Banking: Essays in the History of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation*, Athlone Press, London, 1983, p. 268.
- 4 It was only after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 that China saw the introduction of commercial legislation that allowed Chinese merchants and gentry to draw together sources of money for this scale of capital projects.
- 5 For an analysis of the work of local capital and the ability of Chinese industrial-modernisers to tap this, see Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization*, p. 63.
- 6 For background to the construction of the railway, see W. Mesny, *Mesny's Chinese Miscellany*, Shanghai, 1895–1905, with breaks, vol. 2, Chap. 26.
- 7 Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization*, p. 14.
- 8 For a full account of this enterprise, see F.R. Tegengren, *The Iron Ores and Iron Industry of China*, 2 vols, Geological Survey of China, Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, Peking, 1923–1924. The Hanyang Ironworks was important in one key aspect of China's railway story: it was granted a monopoly for the manufacture of the rails for the key Peking–Hankow and Canton–Hankow lines (Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization*, p. 29).
- 9 Ironically, most of the production from the Hanyang works was sold to Japan at below market rates, while China continued to rely on traditional forms of iron production, or buying foreign imports. Tegengren, *The Iron Ores and Iron Industry of China*.
- 10 Li was also Sheng's patron (see Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization*, pp. 63–64).
- 11 *North China Herald*, 9 April 1897.
- 12 The problem of securing capital in large proportions from Chinese sources also affected a spectrum of other capital-intensive industrial projects. See Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization*, p. 68.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.
- 14 For the backdrop to this process, see P.H. Kent, *Railway Enterprise in China*, Edward Arnold, London, 1907.
- 15 Quoted in R. Lee, *France and the Exploitation of China, 1885–1901: A Study in Economic Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, Hong Kong and New York, 1989, p. 202.
- 16 For the outcome of the troubled history of the Yunnan–Burma Railway, see Dorothy Borg, 'Yunnan–Burma Road Enters Trial Stage', *Far Eastern Survey*, vol. 8, no. 13 (21 June 1939), pp. 155–156. In the case of the Haiphong–Kunming line, China began to view this as one of strategic advantage in its war

- with Japan, 1937–1945 (see Borg, ‘New Links in Unoccupied China’, *Far Eastern Survey*, vol. 9, no. 2 (17 January 1940), pp. 23–24.
- 17 Of course, when the Japanese took over the Manchurian railways in 1905 (and took over Manchuria completely in 1932), they also assumed the principle governing the control of extensive tracts of territory.
 - 18 A Cossack, Dmitry Peshkov, set a record when, in the winter of 1899, he set off on horseback from the Siberian village of Albazinsky (near Blagoveshchensk) to St Petersburg, a journey of 5,500 miles. He arrived in the capital 200 days later, having averaged twenty-eight miles a day. He was, however, riding a Cossack pacer, Serko. (See T. Stevens, *Through Russia on a Mustang*, Cassell, New York, 1891). Ordinary travel, let alone the transport of goods overland, required many months more. Stuart Legg in his *Heartland*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1970, depicted the journey in the following way: ‘Before the railway, to travel overland from European Russia to the Pacific meant a journey of up to a year along the *Trakt*, the old Siberian post-road. It was performed behind teams of shaggy ponies, in summer in a *tarantas* . . .; in winter in a sledge, when your body was additionally swathed in furs and several pairs of felt and leather boots’ (p. 4).
 - 19 L. Bates, *The Russian Road to China*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston and New York, 1910, p. 46.
 - 20 A.J. Beveridge, *The Russian Advance*, New York: 1903, pp. 9–10, 16–17ff.
 - 21 B. Bobrick, *East of the Sun: The Epic Conquest and Tragic History of Siberia*, Henry Holt, New York, 1993, pp. 33–34.
 - 22 For a sketch of the Skidelskys, see F. Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile: The Northeast Asian Balance of Power, 1924–1931*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2002, pp. 116–118, and especially p. 198, note 72.
 - 23 Ibid.
 - 24 O. Lattimore, *Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict*, Macmillan, New York, 1932, p. 38.
 - 25 The implications of the policy of exclusion imposed by the Manchus is discussed in Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile*, pp. 2–3.
 - 26 For a full discussion, see Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile*, pp. 62–63 and *passim*.
 - 27 Japanese troops left Vladivostok on 25 October 1922, thereby ending the Allied Intervention in the Russian Far East (American forces had evacuated Siberia in April 1920). Japan’s uncertainty regarding the control of the region was well founded. It required almost a full year for the new Soviet state to bring the Russian Far East under its political control. The theme of control was a perennial one in the course of Russia’s elaboration of empire in the East. As Sung-Hwan Chang argues in his ‘Russian Designs on the Far East’ (in T. Hunczak [ed.], *Russian Imperialism from Ivan the Great to the Revolution*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 2000), ‘Russian expansion in Asia was essentially tied to Siberia. What the Russians looked for in the 1850’s and what they settled for in the 1900’s equally reflected their basic concern, which was over their sprawling territory in the East’ (p. 320).
 - 28 Roosevelt to Theodore Roosevelt Jr, 10 February 1904, in E.H. Zabriskie, *American–Russian Rivalry in the Far East: A Study in Diplomacy and Power Politics, 1895–1914*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1973; R. Esthus, *Theodore Roosevelt and Japan*, Washington University Press, Seattle, 1967, p. 24.
 - 29 For an excellent summary, see P.H. Clyde and B.F. Beers, *The Far East: A History of Western Impacts and Eastern Responses, 1830–1975*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1975, pp. 121–131.
 - 30 As one commentator reminds us, the City of London, for example, regarded

- Japan as 'Great Britain's god-child in the Far East'. H.H. Tiltman, *The Far East Comes Nearer*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1937, p. 1.
- 31 Paul S. Reinsch, American lawyer and academic, was appointed minister to China in 1913 by President Woodrow Wilson. His first major book, *World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century as Influenced by the Oriental Situation*, was published in 1900. The highly acclaimed work was 'an analysis of the forces underlying contemporary international relations'. N.G. Pugach, *Paul S. Reinsch: Open Door Diplomat in Action*, KTO Press, New York, 1979, pp. 3, 11–12, 68.
- 32 A. Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897–1911*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1972, p. 70.
- 33 While Roosevelt saw no reason to oppose Russia at this stage, by 1902 his views had changed dramatically. H.K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1984, pp. 260–262.
- 34 As Chang puts it succinctly 'thwarted in the West, the Russians recognized that their economic progress hinged more than ever on extensive development of their Far Eastern possessions' (Hunczak, *Russian Imperialism*, p. 304)
- 35 M. Wight, *Power Politics*, 2nd edn, Penguin, Harmondsworth, UK, 1986, p. 170.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid., p. 172.
- 38 E. Trani, *The Treaty of Portsmouth: An Adventure in American Diplomacy*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1969, p. 6.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Wight argues that the United States assumed this role as a result of the First World War (*Power Politics*, p. 184).
- 41 See Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile*, especially chap. 8.
- 42 *The China Weekly Review* (formerly *Millard's Review*), Shanghai, 23 October 1920.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 See D. Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860–1914*, Berg, Leamington Spa, UK, 1987, p. 207.
- 45 Funding for the army had increased from 9,315 million roubles in 1902 to 22,441 million in 1903. By 1904, private Russian investment in Manchuria had been no more than 5 million roubles, while the government's investment in railway and supplies for Port Arthur and Dairen stood at almost 500 million roubles. M.I. Sladkovskii, *Istoriya torgovo-ekonomicheskikh otnoshenii narodov Rossii s Kitaem [do 1917 g.]*, Nauka, Moscow, 1974, pp. 333, 337–343.
- 46 W. Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, George Philip, London, 1954, p. 12.
- 47 Between 1897 and 1911 the number of immigrants in Siberia rose from 4,889,633 to 8,393,469, *Aziatskaya Rossiya*, vol. 1, St Petersburg, 1914.
- 48 See, for example, the discussion of the thought of Russia's foremost Sinologue, V.P. Vasil'ev, in A. Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881–1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958, pp. 42–43. Vasil'ev, who was active in the late nineteenth century, depicted Russia's role in the East as that of a 'cultural missionary' (*Kulturträger*), with Russians advancing as 'liberators' of peoples deep in 'internecine strife and impotency' (ibid.).
- 49 H.J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, edited and with an introduction by A.J. Pierce, Norton, NY, 1962, pp. 259–260.
- 50 For an exploration of this theme, see F. Patrikeeff, 'Russian and Soviet Economic Penetration of North-Eastern China, 1895–1933', in J.W. Strong (ed.), *Essays on Revolutionary Culture and Stalinism*, New York, 1990.

3 The railway and the war

- 1 See S.P. MacKenzie, 'Willpower or Firepower? The Unlearned Lessons of the Russo-Japanese War', in D. Wells and S. Wilson (eds), *The Russo-Japanese War in Cultural Perspective, 1904–1905*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 1999, p. 31.
- 2 Cassell's *History of the Russo-Japanese War*, 5 vols, vol. 1, Cassell, London, 1904–1905, p. 47.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- 4 R.K.I. Quested, *Simo-Russian Relations: A Short History*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 82.
- 5 For a full account of the construction of the CER, see S. Avenarius, '80 let KVzhd (1898–1978): istoricheskii ocherk', *Politekhnik*, Sydney, no. 10, 1979, pp. 58–64.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- 9 D. Khorvat, Deyatel'nost' KVzhd vo vremya Russko-Yaponskoi voiny', *Politekhnik*, Sydney, no. 10, 1979, p. 65.
- 10 D.L. Khorvat *Memoirs*, W. Klemm (trans. and ed.), n.p., n.d, p. 6.
- 11 Part and parcel of this was the rapid development of a water-borne element to the CER's activities, thereby allowing the company to control river traffic and transportation. In the course of the war, this was one of the targets for Japanese action, as the latter destroyed ten of the railway's seventeen new steamships. R. Connaughton, *Rising Sun and Tumbling Bear: Russia's War with Japan*, Cassell's Military Paperbacks, London, 2004, p. 54. For a detailed study of the ancillary enterprises set up by the CER, see P.S.H. Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, 1911–1931*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1959.
- 12 F. Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile: The Northeast Asian Balance of Power, 1924–1931*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2002, p. 151.
- 13 Skrine, F.H., *The Expansion of Russia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1915, p. 315.
- 14 Cassell's *History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. I, p. 286.
- 15 D.L. Khorvat *Memoirs*, W. Klemm (trans. and ed.), n.p., n.d., p. 11.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 19 S. Yu. Witte, *Vospominaniya*, 2 vols. vol. 1, Moscow, 1960, p. 180.
- 20 T.E. Polner, *Obshchezemskaya Organizatsiya na Dal'nem Vostoke*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1908, p. 86.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- 22 Cassell's *History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, p. 286.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 122–123.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 283.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 132–133.
- 29 A view expressed by A.A. Bublikov, a member of the Duma. Cited in F. Patrikeeff, 'Revolution in Siberia', in H. Shukman (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, p. 256).
- 30 For more detailed discussion of this, see Patrikeeff, 'Russian and Soviet Economic Penetration'.
- 31 Patrikeeff, 'Revolution in Siberia', p. 260.

4 War on ice

- 1 Joseph Brenner, *One Year and Other Stories*, translated from Hebrew by David Patterson and Ezra Spicehandler, forthcoming from The Toby Press, New Milford, CT.
- 2 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, 5 vols, vol. 1, Cassell, London, 1904–1905, p. 67.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- 4 S.G. Marks, *Road to Power*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1991, p. 179.
- 5 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, p. 68.
- 6 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 2, pp. 71–73.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 T.I. Polner, *Obshchezemskaya Organizatsiya na Dal'nem Vostoke*, vol. 2, Moscow, 1908, pp. 86 and 90.
- 9 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, p. 283.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 As early as the 1870s, foreign observers had noted how disciplined Japan's troops were. Upton, for example, writes of how that country's newly modernised state had what it needed to 'substitut[e] a national force in the place of the undisciplined hordes, voluntarily furnished by the clans under the old régime'. It had done so, the author concludes, by looking to French officers to conduct training, 'supporting them, without jealousy, in all measures for reform'. E. Upton, *Armies of Asia and Europe*, Appleton, New York, 1878 (reprinted by Greenwood Press, New York, 1968), p. 11.
- 12 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, p. 282.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 74 and 282.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.
- 16 *Cassell's* reports that, in one case, '[Russian] troops are said to have burned the village to the ground and to have massacred the inhabitants, including even women.' *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- 18 Marks describes how Russia looked upon the strategic significance of the city in the following way: 'Vladivostok was of vital importance to the communications of the region. . . . Officials in St. Petersburg and Siberia understood as early as 1875 that poor communications were at the root of Russia's strategic weakness in the Far East. As a corrective measure throughout the 1880s, they discussed construction of a railroad across Siberia.' S.G. Marks, *Road to Power*, pp. 26–27).
- 19 For further detail regarding the place of Vladivostok in the Russian Far East–Manchurian nexus, see F. Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile: The North-east Asian Balance of Power, 1924–1931*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, p. 20 and *passim*.
- 20 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, p. 92. One could, of course, ask why Japanese were barbers and dockside workers in the first place, given the availability of Chinese, or Russians. It is, perhaps, a reflection of the unsettled nature of the socio-ethnic make-up of the city that this should have been the case – but extraordinarily so, as this was, after all, the base for a major Russian fleet (the Vladivostok Squadron), and therefore should have been under a far more stringent security regime. Indeed, this was to come, when the tsarist regime greatly strengthened the city's fortifications, but most effectively under the Soviet Union, which interdicted any entry for foreigners, and therefore made the city-port fully secure.

- 21 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, p. 113.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 113–114.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- 24 For an engaging literary account of Go, but one which also captures its politico-philosophical core, see Y. Kawabata, *The Master of Go*, trans. E.G. Seidensticker, Penguin, Harmondsworth, UK, 1972.
- 25 To some extent the Russian approach to this war may reflect the conditions at home. The political environment there was not an ideal one. While in Japan the population stood resolutely behind its government and armed forces, in Russia the mood not only was anti-government, but also displayed a strong anti-war strain. For example, when the Japanese launched their surprise attack on Port Arthur, the Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries turned their attention to broadly disseminating the notion of 'war on war'. D. Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860–1914*, trans. B. Little, Berg, Leamington Spa, UK, 1987, p. 222. While not suggesting that the Russian military leaders were thereby shaken in their resolve, or their approach altered from its intrinsic characteristics, one could nonetheless see *why* the need to achieve large-scale successes became so significant, thereby in key respects reinforcing Kuropatkin's approach to warfare.
- 26 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 2, p. 564.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 562.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 560.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 560–562.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 562.

5 The dawn of modern conflict

- 1 Joseph Conrad, *Autocracy and War*, London, 1918, pp. 17–18. (This is a private reprint of a work that was first serialised in *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 84, 1 July 1905.)
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.
- 3 In his *Notes on Life and Letters* (Doubleday & Page, New York, 1923, p. 80), Conrad wrote, '[I]n the nature of things, the war in the Far East has been made known to us, so far, in a grey reflection of its terrible and monotonous phases of pain, death, and sickness; a reflection seen in the perspective of thousands of miles, in the dim atmosphere of official reticence, through the veil of inadequate words.' And that may have been the case, but the reports nonetheless provided him with much detail and substance that would provide 'adequate words' for what was happening in the battlefield. Another well-known writer, Jack London, travelled to Yokohama in January 1904, from there moving on to Korea, where he watched – in early May – the preparation of Japanese troops at Yalu for the thrust into Manchuria. There were reporters from the United States, France, Britain, Germany and Italy. The immediacy, and quality, of his own work were palpable. In his dispatches to the Hearst papers, London wrote of the sluggish nature of Russian troops, while 'The Japanese understand the utility of things. Reserves they consider should be used not only to strengthen the line . . . but in the moment of victory to clinch victory hard and fast. . . . Verily, nothing short of a miracle can wreck a plan they have once started and put into execution.' D.L. Walker, *Jack London's War*, <http://www.jacklondon.net/Journalism/jackLondonsWar.html>. With coverage at the front by the likes of London, and with Conrad analysing the war from afar, the quality of observation and analysis was notable. Press coverage of the war in Japan itself was most vociferous. See, for example, A. Goonasekera and

- Y. Itō (eds), *Mass Media and Cultural Identity: Ethnic Reporting in Asia*, Pluto Press, London, 1999.
- 4 Arthur Diosy, 'The Causes of the Conflict and the Dangers Ahead', Introduction to *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, 5 vols, vol. 1, Cassell, London, 1904–1905, pp. 6–7.
 - 5 Conrad, *Autocracy and War*, p. 53. Conrad saw too that the flowering of 'advanced thought' was very much caught up in the mood of conflict that pervaded, arguing that 'the best way to help its prospects is to provide in the fullest, frankest way for the conditions of the present day. War is one of its conditions; it is its principal condition' (pp. 54–55).
 - 6 For a novel interpretation of Lenin's error in judging capitalism to be in its last stage in the era of high imperialism, see B. Warren, *Imperialism, Pioneer of Capitalism*, ed. J. Sender, New Left Books, London, 1980.
 - 7 Diosy, 'The Causes of the Conflict', p. 8.
 - 8 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, p. 9. There were good reasons in evidence to support the view that a broader Chinese-patriot inspired Asian united front might emerge. Young men from the new Chinese Reform Party would, it was suspected, side with their former enemies the Japanese to counter Western imperialism, and so too the 'half wild horsemen' (the bandit *Hunghutze*, who regularly preyed on Russians in Manchuria), who Diosy proposed might well be co-opted to the Japanese cavalry against Russia (p. 8).
 - 9 *Ibid.*
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
 - 11 *Ibid.*, p. 1. Tellingly (and as noted in Chapter 1), the Japanese regarded the building of the South Manchurian branch line of the CER as 'a dagger pointing at the heart of Japan' – a nervous disposition indeed, revealing a degree of insecurity that any neighbouring nation, and most notably Russia, would have done well to heed.
 - 12 In the sixteenth century, for example, 200,000 Chinese troops repelled Japanese armies which were intent on conquering this important Chinese tributary state, and beyond that invading Ming China itself (for the context, see P.H. Clyde and B.F. Beers, *The Far East: A History of Western Impacts and Eastern Responses, 1830–1975*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1975, p. 195).
 - 13 In the literature of military art, the notion of modern mass war came to be centred on the notion of conscripts and reservists; certainly a situation that characterised the Russo-Japanese War. See V. Triandafillov, *Kharakter operatsii sovremennykh armii*, 1st edn, Gosizdat, Otdel Voennit, Moscow, 1929, pp. 1ff).
 - 14 In the course of his treks around Manchuria, 'Traveller' observes, 'In Port Arthur the curio-shops were selling to Japanese tourists fragments of shell-case, broken swords, the little metal crosses which every Russian soldier wore round his neck, and other oddments. Furthermore, they were making new relics! If you went round the back you found a group of painstaking artificers breaking up new stuff and making it look convincingly weatherbeaten.' 'Traveller', [a 'wandering Briton's'] 'Adventures in Manchuria', in *The Wide World*, n.p., March 1946.
 - 15 On 31 March 1854, Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, representing the United States, signed a treaty with Japanese officials that opened up Japan to international trade.
 - 16 See D.C. Evans and M. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics and Technology in the Japanese Imperial Navy 1887–1941* (esp. chap. 1), Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 1997.
 - 17 By the mid-1890s, Russia had shifted its cruiser technology to a higher plane, allowing vessels to adopt improved armour plating and to act both as raiders

- and as components of a battle fleet. For a broad discussion of this aspect of naval technology, see D.K. Brown, *Warrior to Dreadnought: Warship Development 1860–1905*, Chatham Publishing, London, 1997.
- 18 Diosy, 'The Causes of the Conflict', p. 7.
 - 19 Diosy, *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.
 - 20 One of the more impressive collections of these observations was compiled by the US military. The US War Department's General Staff produced *Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War*, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1906–1907, a formidable, immensely detailed study of the conflict.
 - 21 There was a certain parallel existence between Russia's 'Wild East' and America's 'Wild West'. Russian writers often made the link between these wild, unknown territories. See, for example, P.P. Semenov, 'Znachenie Rossii v kolonizatsionnom dvizhenii evropeiskikh narodov', *Izvestiya Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obschestva*, no. 28, 1892, pp. 349–369. Such links were seen in the United States too. As the Library of Congress's *Meeting of Frontiers* puts it: 'Cossacks came to be seen widely as a Russian type of cowboy thanks to the numerous Cossack acts in Wild West shows.' <http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfpercep/percepruscow.html>.
 - 22 The Russian government was intent in emphasising that the war it was waging was against nothing less than the 'Yellow Peril'. Even after the conflict had come to an end, the government was prone to describing Russia as holding 'the line against the onswEEPing hordes since Jenghis Khan'. While such pronouncements were intended to rally support for it in Siberia and the Russian Far East, they also helped to perpetuate the image of insecurity and threat there. Frank Furedi, 'The Rise of the Rising Sun', BBC History, September 2005, www.frankfuredi.com/pdf/RussiaJapan.pdf. The Manchurian Russians, of course, were in a more precarious situation still, as they had no claim on the territory where they lived, which remained 'foreign'. 'Globe Trotter' (cited in note 23) frequently reveals the innermost fears that the Manchurian Russians felt. Such an outlook was heightened by the prevalence of *lubki* (or popular prints), which fed Russian mass culture with images of this 'yellow peril' (see Y. Mikhailova, 'Images of Enemy and Self: Russian "Popular Prints" of the Russo-Japanese War', *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, no. 16, 1998, src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/publicatn/acta/16/Yulia/yulia-1.html).
 - 23 'Globe Trotter' [pseudonym of K.N. Rossolimo], *Dnevnik, 1899–1906 gg.*, New York, 1951, p. 66.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
 - 25 Ian Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War*, Longman, London, 1985, p. 2.
 - 26 'Globe Trotter', *Dnevnik*, p. 67.
 - 27 F. Craig and J.P. Boyd, *Russia and Japan: The Tragic Struggle by Land and Sea for Empire in the Far East*, Historical Company, London, Berlin and New York, 1906, pp. 166–167.
 - 28 S. Wincelberg and A. Wincelberg, *The Samurai of Vishogrod: The Notebooks of Jacob Marateck*, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1976, p. 148.
 - 29 *Ibid.*
 - 30 'Globe Trotter', *Dnevnik*, p. 73
 - 31 'Globe Trotter' observed of the situation in Harbin that 'people are running, fearing war and all manner of difficulty, while we are settling into life here' (*ibid.*, p. 78). When she visits a local shop to buy curtains for her new dining room, the shopkeeper observes that 'everyone was selling out, but you are buying'.

- 32 F. Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile: The Northeast Asian Balance of Power, 1924–1931*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2002, pp. 12–13.
- 33 While the Manchurian Russians observed in some detail the quality of the commanders conducting the war, pouring scorn on a number of these (the description of Stoessel below is an example of the venom that was reserved for them), their views of Kuropatkin were so respectful that they often verged on idolatry. See, for example, ‘Globe Trotter’, *Dnevnik*, p. 79).
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 35 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, p. 122.
- 36 For a brief discussion regarding the persistence of the bandit problem, see Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile*, p. 168, footnote 58.
- 37 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, p. 122.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*, pp. 150–151.
- 40 For the 1929 Sino-Soviet Conflict, see G.A. Lensen, *The Damned Inheritance: The Soviet Union and the Manchurian Crisis, 1924–1935*, The Diplomatic Press, Tallahassee, FL, 1974. For later Russian military successes, see S.I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945–1948*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987, and D.M. Glantz, *Soviet Operational and Tactical Combat in Manchuria, 1945: ‘August Storm’*, Frank Cass, London, 2003.
- 41 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, p. 150.
- 42 See T.C. Smith, ‘Japan’s Aristocratic Revolution’, *Yale Review*, vol. 50, no. 3, Spring 1961, and also his *Political Change and Industrial Development in Japan*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1955 (esp. pp. 25–41) for a succinct depiction of the dilemmas facing this revolution.
- 43 For an enduring study of the industrialisation process, see E.H. Norman, *Japan’s Emergence as a Modern State*, Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, 1940.
- 44 *Cassell’s History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, pp. 127, 128.
- 45 Before the Battle of Tsushima, Togo (who studied naval science in Britain from 1871 to 1878) exhorted his forces to higher achievement by proclaiming, ‘The fate of the Empire depends upon today’s battle: let every man do his utmost.’ See C. White, *The Nelson Encyclopaedia*, Chatham Publishing, London, 2002.
- 46 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, pp. 122–123.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- 48 *Cassell’s History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, p. 287.
- 49 Michael Futrell, *Northern Underground: Episodes of Russian Revolutionary Transport and Communications through Scandinavia and Finland, 1863–1917*, Faber & Faber, London, 1963, p. 224.
- 50 *Cassell’s History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, pp. 287–288.
- 51 Joseph Brenner, *One Year and Other Stories*, translated from Hebrew by David Patterson and Ezra Spicandler, forthcoming from The Toby Press, New Milford, CT.
- 52 Allan Wildman, *The End of the Imperial Russian Army*, 2 vols, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1980, vol. 1, p. 35.
- 53 Until the Milyutin reforms, recruits who had served out their twenty-five years were permitted to reside wherever they chose in the empire.
- 54 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, p. 80.
- 55 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, pp. 79–80.
- 56 *Evreiskaya entsiklopediya*, Brokhaus i Efron, St Petersburg, 1908–1913, vol. 5, p. 700.
- 57 Witte’s problems were at least twofold. He had a habit of squirrelling surpluses away, so as to avoid their being drained off. A.A. Polovtsev, *The Diary of A.A.*

- Poloutsev*, trans. J.M. Schilling, Schilling Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA, n.d., p. 65). Such an approach would in itself have made him unpopular with a Russian military who were keen to upgrade their equipment. In addition to this, however, Vladimir N. Kokovtsov, who replaced Witte as minister of finance, notes in his own memoirs that his predecessor was disliked by the tsar, but even more so by the tsarina, who referred to Witte as 'this harmful person'. From draft of *Out of My Past: The Memoirs of Count Kokovtsov*, trans. L. Matveev, ed. H.H. Fisher, Kokovtsov Collection, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, n.d., p. 890).
- 58 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, p. 70.
- 59 A.N. Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army: Being Historical and Critical Comments on the Military Policy and Power of Russia and the Campaign in the Far East*, trans. Capt. A.B. Lindsay, ed. Major E.D. Swinton, 2 vols, vol. 1, John Murray, London, 1909, pp. 122–123; see Wayne S. Vucinich (ed.), *The Peasant in Nineteenth Century Russia*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1968, p. 130.
- 60 George E. Sokolsky, *The Story of the Chinese Eastern Railroad*, with an introduction by Dr Hu Shih, North-China Daily News & Herald, Ltd, Shanghai, 1929, p. 19.
- 61 Dominic Lieven, *Russia's Rulers under the Old Regime*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1989, p. 1.
- 62 Hans Rogger, *Russia in the Age of Modernisation and Revolution, 1881–1917*, Longman, London, 1983, p. 179.
- 63 Lieven, *Russia's Rulers*, p. 150.
- 64 Denis Warner and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise: A History of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905*, Frank Cass, London, 1974, 2002, p. 409.
- 65 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, p. 121.
- 66 Rogger, *Russia in the Age of Modernisation*, p. 178.
- 67 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, p. 148.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- 69 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 1, pp. 284–285.
- 70 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, p. 124.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- 72 When half a million Red Army men were to be demobilised in 1921, however, Lenin realised that if they all went at once, the railways would not cope, while if they waited for gradual demobilisation they would still need feeding and clothing. He therefore gave the following order: 'Stop giving them anything at all. Neither bread, nor clothes, nor boots. Tell the Red Army man: either leave right now on foot with nothing. Or wait a year on one-eighth of a pound of bread and no clothing or boots. He'll leave on his own and on foot.' See D.V. Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire: Political Leaders from Lenin to Gorbachev*, trans. and ed. Harold Shukman, HarperCollins, London, 1998, p. 77.
- 73 See F. Patrikeeff, 'Revolution in Siberia', in Harold Shukman (ed.) *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, pp. 260–261.
- 74 For a depiction of this, see *D.L. Khorvat Memoirs*, W. Klemm (trans. and ed.), n.p., n.d.
- 75 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, p. 121.
- 76 Novorossiia (New Russia) included the provinces of Kherson, Ekaterinoslav, Taurida and Bessarabia. Taken as a whole, it represented the entire northern coastal region of the Black Sea.
- 77 *D.L. Khorvat Memoirs*, W. Klemm (trans. and ed.), foreword, pp. 1–2.
- 78 *Ibid.*

- 79 Ibid., chap. 5, p. 1.
- 80 Cattel Collection, Hoover Institution, Box 7 (2), p. 49.
- 81 'Konchina Gen. D.I. Khorvata', *Luch Azii*, nos. 33–35, 1938, p. 21.
- 82 Admiral Togo is a case in point: born to a samurai serving under the house of Shimazu, he emerged through the ranks of the military and, after it was formed in 1866, his native Satsuma Domain's navy, and moved to the new imperial Navy in 1871. D. Evans in T.N. Dupuy *et al.* (eds), *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military Biography*, HarperCollins, New York, 1992, p. 746.
- 83 Even a cursory glance through the list of commanders active in the war shows how close these were to the family of the Russian tsar.
- 84 For a time during the Civil War, Khorvat came to claim – on a whim of the deluded – the title of Supreme Ruler of Russia, with his seat of power being in Vladivostok. After the final victory of the Bolsheviks, Khorvat lost not only his real claim to power (control of the CER) but also any legitimacy to his presence in Manchuria itself. He therefore moved to China's capital, Peking, where he became the nominal, but undisputed, head of the Russian Emigration in China. For an account of this transition, see Patrikeeff, *Russian Politics in Exile*, pp. 59–60.
- 85 For an account of the innovations (which included the novel *Petlya* [Loop] on the CER's Western line, which compensated for a severe gradient and inhospitable hills by spiralling downwards around the perimeter of these) and skills of the Manchurian Russian engineers, see S. Avenarius, '80 let Kvzhd (1898–1978)', *Politekhnik*, no. 10, Sydney, 1979, pp. 58–64.
- 86 The authors are grateful to Professor Oleg Rzheshesky of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of General History, Moscow, for this information.
- 87 The imbalance in the relationship between the Russian political centre, together with its representatives in Manchuria and the Russian Far East, and its Manchurian outpost is vividly depicted in Khorvat's memoirs, where time and time again Khorvat exposes both the arrogance and the incompetence of the former. While undoubtedly being self-serving, the memoirs nonetheless reveal how out of touch the centre was with the conditions on the ground in Manchuria.
- 88 For an account of the economic tensions between Russia and the Manchurian Russians, see F. Patrikeeff, 'Russian and Soviet Economic Penetration of North-Eastern China, 1895–1933', in J.W. Strong (ed.), *Essays on Revolutionary Culture and Stalinism*, Slavica Publishers, New York, 1990, pp. 56–70.
- 89 Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation*, 2 vols, Macmillan, New York, 1961, vol. 2, p. 1270.

6 The railways and hostilities

- 1 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, 5 vols, vol. 4, Cassell, London, 1904–1905, pp. 540–541.
- 2 Ibid., p. 543.
- 3 Ibid., p. 544.
- 4 For a full account of David Davies (later the first Baron Davies, the British promoter of the League of Nations) as an observer of the Russo-Japanese War, see D. Steeds, 'Japan at War – The Diary of a British Observer, 1904', Suntory Centre, London School of Economics, Discussion Paper no. IS/05/491.
- 5 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 4, pp. 544–546.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 544–546.
- 7 During the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur, the Commander-in-Chief of United Nations forces in Korea, chose Inchon for a landing. It was not by

- chance. A young Douglas had been at his father's side when the latter, a major general himself, was a US observer during the Russo-Japanese War. They watched as the Japanese took advantage of twenty-foot (three-metre) drop in the tide to land four battalions of troops in the space of nine hours. Colonel W.E. Bridges, US Army [ret.], in correspondence, *Military History*, March 2006 (accessed at www.historynet.com/mh/letters_03_06/, 14 April 2006).
- 8 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 4, p. 547.
 - 9 Railways were not only used tactically in the conduct of the war, but also in the European portion of the Russian Empire, although in the latter it was used as a means of hindering the war effort for very personal reasons. The *Melbourne Age* published a report from London (dated 2 January 1905) that 'The traffic on the railways in Poland and other districts of Russia, where army reserve men are being dragged from their homes and forced to Manchuria, has for some weeks past been much interrupted. The official explanation of these interruptions is that they were due to snow storms; but unofficially it is stated that the cause is the destruction of railway bridges by the relatives of reserve men, who either show their resentment in this fashion, or who hope by blocking the railways to prevent the drafting off of reservists.'
 - 10 Russia had in April 1904 made an early advance into the northern part of Korea (near Pyongyang), but this had been defeated by the Japanese commander Kuroki.
 - 11 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 4, p. 552.
 - 12 P. Wrangel, *The Cavalry in the Russo-Japanese War: Lessons and Critical Considerations*, trans. J. Montgomery, London, 1907, pp. 1–2.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 - 16 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
 - 17 Francis McCullagh, *With the Cossacks: Being the Story of an Irishman Who Rode with the Cossacks throughout the Russo-Japanese war*, Eveleigh Nash, London, 1906.
 - 18 P. Wrangel, *The Cavalry*, pp. 18–19.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
 - 20 A Cossack quoted by Maurice Hindus in his *Cossacks*, (Collins, London, 1946, p. 31) puts forward a view regarding Cossack divisions' greatest advantage: '[W]e choose our own fighting terrain.' Such an instinctual approach was never allowed its full, indeed *any*, capacity on Manchurian battlefields.
 - 21 Wrangel, *The Cavalry*, p. 21.
 - 22 *Ibid.*
 - 23 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
 - 24 *Ibid.*
 - 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
 - 26 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 4, p. 552.
 - 27 This is evidenced by the fact that, some fourteen years later, Bolshevik troops had considerable trouble in dealing with Cossack White forces that launched attacks on Soviet territory from Manchuria. These used traditional methods, conducting sudden, and often terrifying, raids on Soviet troops, who found it hard either to deal with them, or, for that matter, to locate the troops themselves. For amplification of this point, see F. Patrikeeff, 'The Civil War in Siberia and the Russian Far East: A Reconsideration', in S. Gregory (ed.), *The Wall and After: Australian Perspectives on Europe*, Southern Highlands Press, Berrima, NSW, Australia, 2002, pp. 55–56.
 - 28 Wrangel, *The Cavalry*, p. 28.
 - 29 *Ibid.*

- 30 Ibid., p. 30.
- 31 Shimon Wincelberg and Anita Wincelberg, *The Samurai of Vishogrod: The Notebooks of Jacob Marateck*, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1976, p. 185. While doubtless accurate from the foot soldier's perspective, such an outlook also diminished the role of spontaneity and opportunism in the Cossacks' art of combat (see note 20 above). The real problem was, arguably, the failure of the Russian officer corps to bring the two outlooks closer together, and to make them work in a positive way.
- 32 Wincelberg and Wincelberg, *The Samurai*, p. 186.
- 33 Wrangel, *The Cavalry*, p. 11.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 10–11.
- 35 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 5, p. 115.
- 36 Ibid., p. 115.
- 37 Ibid., p. 116.
- 38 Ibid., pp. 113–114.
- 39 Ibid., p. 114.
- 40 One observer of the Russo-Japanese War compared what he saw here with the British forces at war in South Africa some decades earlier: '[O]ur own War Office found the strain altogether excessive, and confusion, if not something worse, occurred in regard to supplies and stores, the bare recollection of which is painful' (ibid., p. 120).
- 41 Ibid., p. 123.
- 42 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 5, p. 123. It is perhaps pertinent here to mention the fact that Harold Shukman's father was a private in the imperial Russian Army from 1902 to 1906, fought in the Battle of Mukden and was lucky to survive. His further adventures in Russia, this time in the Civil War, are described in Harold Shukman's *War or Revolution: Russian Jews and Conscript in Britain, 1917*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2006.
- 43 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 5, p. 123.
- 44 Ibid., pp. 125–126.
- 45 Ibid., p. 204.
- 46 Ibid., p. 193. The further strengthening of Vladivostok came after the war, when major fortifications were invested in Russian Island, standing a few miles to the south and offering superior surveillance of the Sea of Japan and defence of the Russian port.
- 47 For an amplification of this point, see F. Patrikeeff, 'Prosperity and Collapse: Banking and the Manchurian Economy in the 1920s and 1930s', in F.H.H. King (ed.), *Eastern Banking: Essays in the History of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation*, Athlone Press, London, 1983, pp. 265–266.
- 48 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 5, p. 126.

7 On the hills of Manchuria

- 1 Among those who were in one way or another connected with this war were Richard Harding Davis, Jack London and even Edgar Wallace, who tangentially came into contact with it (he was sent by the *Daily Mail* to Vigo, where he investigated the matter of the Russians opening fire on a British fishing fleet, thinking it was the Japanese Navy). Ernest Hemingway collected cartoons of the war. Furthermore, numerous works appeared in British and American Boys' Own adventure stories. In Japan, perhaps the most prominent writer to have seen direct action was Mori Ōgai (Rintarō), one of the most prominent authors of the Meiji period, who, as a field doctor in the war, kept a poetic diary. The pre-eminent Chinese writer Lu Xun (China's first Modernist) became motivated to become an author as a result of the war. He was studying

- medicine in Japan at the time, and in a microbiology lecture was shown a series of slides of an execution of a Chinese spy by the Japanese. The Chinese students present were jeered by Japanese students, encouraging Lu Xun to find focus for his feelings for China: 'After this film I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be, can only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles. . . . The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determined to promote a literary movement.' Lu Hsün, *Selected Short Stories of Lu Hsün*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, Cheng & Tsui, Boston, 1978, p. 3.
- 2 David Wells, 'The Russo-Japanese War in Russian Literature', in D. Wells and S. Wilson (eds), *The Russo-Japanese War in Cultural Perspective, 1904-05*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 1999, p. 109.
 - 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.
 - 4 'Nash tsar', in K.D. Bal'mont, *Stikhotvoreniya*, ed. V. Orlov, Leningrad, 1969, p. 339 (cited in Wells, 'The Russo-Japanese War', p. 111).
 - 5 Tolstoy's correspondence is telling in this regard. When Iso-Abé, editor of the Japanese socialist newspaper *Heimin Shimbun Sha*, wrote to him on 4 September 1904, enclosing an article called 'Tolstoy's Influence in Japan', Tolstoy responded in a measured way: 'Though I never doubted that there are in Japan a great many reasonable, moral and religious men, who are opposed to the horrible crime of war which is now perpetrated by both betrayed and stupefied nations, I was very glad to get proof of it.' Letter, 23 October 1904, in R.F. Christian (ed. and trans.), *Tolstoy's Letters*, vol. 2, 1880-1910, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1978, p. 645). However, the real passion appears in an exchange of letters with Chan Chin-tun, a lawyer and publicist who had studied in Russia, and was still living there in 1905. 'The deep respect I have always felt for the Chinese people', Tolstoy wrote, 'has been further increased in the highest degree by the events of the terrible Russo-Japanese war. In this war the Chinese people have performed a great heroic feat before which not only is the importance of the Japanese victories nullified, but all the madness and cruelty of both the Russian and the Japanese governments are revealed in their true, revolting light. . . . The Chinese people, in spite of all the cruelties perpetrated against it both in previous foul attacks on it by European, so-called Christian peoples, and in this latest war, has shown that it is far more imbued with the true spirit of Christianity . . . than the Christian peoples and the Russian government. (I recall your just remark about the difference between government and people.)' *Ibid.*, 4 December 1905, p. 653.
 - 6 L. Tolstoy, 'Bethink Yourselves!', in his *Recollections and Essays*, trans. A. Maude, Oxford University Press, London, 1937, pp. 258-259. Cited in Wells, 'The Russo-Japanese War', p. 123.
 - 7 L. Tolstoy, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 20, Moscow, 1965, p. 206. Cited in Wells, 'The Russo-Japanese War', p. 124.
 - 8 Wells, 'The Russo-Japanese War', p. 130. The Znanie (Knowledge) group was under the headship of Maksim Gorky, later to become the 'realist literary pen' of the Bolshevik regime. For a full discussion of this group's work at the time of the war, see *ibid.*, Wells, pp. 124-129.
 - 9 V.I. Lenin, *Sochineniya*, 4th edn, vol. 8, pp. 31-39, cited in Louis Fischer, *The Life of Lenin*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1964, p. 44.
 - 10 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, 5 vols, vol. 5, Cassell, London, 1904-1905, p. 208.
 - 11 See Michael T. Florinsky (ed.), *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Russia and the Soviet Union*, n.p., n.d., p. 349.

- 12 Andrey Belyi, *Kritika, estetika, teoriia simbolizma*, vol. 1, Moscow, 1994, p. 377. Translated by and cited in Wells, 'The Russo-Japanese War', p. 113.
- 13 L. Yuzefovich, *Samoderzhets pustyni: Fenomen sud'by barona R.F. Ungern-Shternberga*, Ellis Lak, Moscow, 1993, p. 207.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 16 Perhaps the most curious image of this medal is on the backdrop of a Chinese ceremonial robe which von Ungern-Sternberg was photographed wearing (*ibid.*, opposite p. 1). The medal remained on his chest even after his capture.
- 17 Such was his affinity that when news of his execution reached Urga, the Bogdo-Gegen (the spiritual ruler of Mongolia) commanded all temples and monasteries in Mongolia to conduct public prayers for him. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 29, quoting Ungern.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
- 20 Von Ungern-Sternberg was just 35 when he was executed.
- 21 Correspondence captured by the *Pekin and Tientsin Times*, and published by the Special Delegation of the Far Eastern Republic in Washington in 1921 under the title of *Letters Captured from Baron Ungern in Mongolia*, clearly shows his understanding of forms of tones and character of address as well as the deference that would be expected by the senior Mongolian and Chinese officials he was in communication with.
- 22 In the epilogue to his study of von Ungern-Sternberg, Yuzefovich mentions how he 'with his very own eyes saw, even held in his hands, a tea cup from which [the baron] *perhaps* drank.' (The cup was part of a set owned by a woman from Reval (Tallinn) whom the Baron had known and had visited on numerous occasions in the Manchurian city of Harbin.) Yuzefovich, *Samoderzhets pustyni*, p. 221 (our emphasis). Stephan in his work on the Russian Far East notes that whilst the Cossacks held a mass for Ataman Semenov in Chita after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and some Far Eastern entrepreneurs intend to raise a monument to the memory of Admiral Kolchak, '[f]or the time being ... Ungern-Sternberg remain[s] beyond the pale' J.J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1994, p. 293.
- 23 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 5, p. 208.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 211–213.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 26 The song was almost immediately taken up by the Russian people, but it enjoyed even greater success in the First World War, and has endured since then as the song synonymous with Russians engaged in war. There is even a 1969 version written by the Soviet poet-singer Alexander Galich.
- 27 The estimates are that over a third of the Russian soldiers (or well over 100,000 men) perished in the Battle of Mukden. See Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation*, 2 vols, Macmillan, New York, 1961, p. 1274.
- 28 www.delosmus.com/blog/archives/000154.html.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 R.L. Wright and B. Digby, 'Manchu and Russ in Kharbin', *Scribner's Magazine*, n.d., New York, p. 474.
- 31 By this is meant the generation of Russians who were forced to leave China in the decade following the start of Sino-Soviet acrimony after Stalin's death in 1953.
- 32 *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 5, p. 217.
- 33 Wright and Digby, 'Manchu and Russ in Kharbin', p. 474.
- 34 Japan's early economic interest in Manchuria was as a source of soya bean cake and soya bean oil (see C.N. Spinks, 'Origin of Japanese Interests

- in Manchuria', *Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 3, May 1943, esp. pp. 259–261).
- 35 See *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 5, pp. 222–223 for a full list. The original Japanese demands included a reference to the railway from Harbin to Vladivostok and, particularly, the question of railway guards associated with this, but the specific formulation of this was lost (*ibid.*).
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 230.
- 38 J.B. Suttor, *Report on Manchuria, 1907*, News South Wales Intelligence Department Bulletin no. 20, Sydney, 1907, p. 32.
- 39 R.L. Wright and B. Digby, 'The Making of a Capital', *Scribner's Magazine*, n.d., New York., p. 236.
- 40 Suttor, *Report on Manchuria*, p. 36.
- 41 Wright and Digby, 'Manchu and Russ in Kharbin', p. 479.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 479.
- 43 The choice of name is itself an interesting one, meaning 'farthest'.
- 44 Wright and Digby, 'The Making of a Capital', p. 233.
- 45 Wright and Digby, 'Manchu and Russ in Kharbin', p. 479.
- 46 Wright and Digby, 'The Making . . .', p. 231.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 233–234.
- 48 Suttor, *Report on Manchuria*, p. 16.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 F. Patrikeeff, 'Russian and Soviet Economic Penetration of North-Eastern China, 1895–1933', in J.W. Strong, *Essays on Revolutionary Culture and Stalinism*, Slavica, New York, 1990, p. 59.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 53 Wright and Digby, 'Manchu and Russ in Kharbin', p. 479.
- 54 In 1881, Russia declared a zone fifty *versts* (about thirty-three miles, fifty-three kilometres) wide, free to Russian and Chinese imports of necessities such as flour, sugar, beans and so forth. This zone included Blagoveshchensk and Khabarovsk, as well as the Chinese Amur city of Aigun, where a landmark treaty had been signed by Russia and China regarding their border and trade relations in 1858. This had already caused problems for the new city of Harbin, but this arrangement was stymied when it was discovered that French, German and British firms had begun to use Russian and Chinese trademarks to market their own goods in the zone. *Ibid.*, p. 479.
- 55 Suttor, *Report on Manchuria*, pp. 17–18.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 57 Wright and Digby, in their article on Harbin, inadvertently point out the role of economies of scale in Japanese business activities. While Russians owned 192 firms, employing 856 persons, in Harbin in 1912, there were just ten Japanese firms, employing over 1,776 people, at that time. ('Manchu and Russ in Kharbin', p. 478.) The Japanese had carefully identified key areas of activity, and then translated them into a far greater scale of business. In the same year there were but three American firms in Harbin, employing just fifteen people (*ibid.*).
- 58 Japanese planners in Manchuria even in the 1980s recalled with fondness and pride their work in Manchuria, which they described as the acme of their achievement, far surpassing even the 'economic miracle' of Japan's post-war reconstruction and spectacular economic resurgence. They did so for good reason: the development of Manchuria outstripped the other example of Japanese success, that of the development of the island of Taiwan. It could even be said that it was in Manchuria that Japan looked to systemic economic planning as a means to achieve fast, heavy industry-based economic growth.

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