

## CHAPER 3: THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

### 3. RUSSIA'S SOUTHWARD ADVANCE; ANGLO-JAPANESE ALLIANCE

#### Japan and the Boxer Rebellion

Just as the Donghak Peasant Revolution set the scene for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sino-Japanese War, the Boxer Rebellion did likewise for the Russo-Japanese War.

The Boxers were a secret religious society descended from the White Lotus Sect, founded during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). They were practitioners of *yihuequan*, a style of boxing whose mastery, according to superstitions of the times, enabled them to fend off sword thrusts and even bullets.

In 1899 the Boxers, united behind the slogan “Help the Qing, annihilate foreigners,” launched a xenophobic campaign in Shandong province. In 1900 they expanded their operations to Zhili (today Hebei) and Shanxi provinces, and even to Manchuria. They killed Christians, and destroyed churches, railroads, electric cables – anything and everything of foreign provenance. However, it was their destruction of the railroads that sent shock waves through China and the rest of the world as well. Toward the end of April, the Boxers entered Beijing. Unfortunately, Empress Dowager Cixi sympathized with them and schemed to once again grasp state power through their efforts. The Boxers began to run even more rampant. When June came, they murdered both Sugiyama Akira, a clerk at the Japanese Legation, and Clemens von Ketteler, a German diplomat. Sugiyama's body was dismembered and his heart gouged out, yet another instance of Chinese atrocities.

Also in June, the Boxers surrounded the Legation Quarter of Beijing and Emperor Guangxu issued an edict (essentially a declaration of war) to the foreign powers. In July Boxers and Chinese troops, whose numbers had reached several tens of thousands, were still besieging the Legation Quarters. The situation had become desperate. To rescue the more than 4,000 diplomats, foreign residents, bodyguards, and Christians, all at their wits' end, the foreign powers' hopes turned to the mobilization of Japanese troops, due to Japan's proximity to China. Ishii Kikujirō, second secretary at the Japanese legation, and also a victim of the siege of Beijing, kept a record of his experiences. He wrote that at that time Russia, hoping that all persons under siege would be annihilated, therefore providing it with an excuse to occupy Manchuria, vetoed every request for Japanese help.<sup>1</sup>

The Japanese assumed a cautious stance, as they were loath to invite the suspicion of other nations. But after the UK had asked them, four times, to send troops, they acquiesced and dispatched the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. That division formed the mainstay of the Eight-Nation Alliance, which removed the stranglehold on the Beijing Legation Quarter on August 14. The Alliance's troops numbered approximately 20,000; half of their number was accounted for by Japanese soldiers. On August 15 the empress dowager and Guangxu fled from Beijing and sought refuge in Xian.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ishii Kikujirō, *Nihon gaikō hiroku* (Confidential Japanese diplomatic records) (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1934).

The Boxer Protocol was concluded in September 1901. The pact was signed by 11 nations and China, thus settling the rebellion. According to the protocol, China was required to pay 450 million taels. Additionally, each of the foreign signatories was permitted to station troops in 12 locations, including Langfang, Tianjin, Tanggu, Lutai, and Shanhaiguan, a right that would later prove to be very meaningful. In 1937 Chinese troops illegally fired upon a Japanese unit, stationed at Liugou Bridge in accordance with permission granted in the protocol.

### **Japanese military discipline wins praise**

The Boxer Rebellion provided the first opportunity for the Japanese military to fight alongside the soldiers of foreign nations. Their bravery and strict discipline on that occasion earned them praise from all over the world. Japanese losses during the assault on Tianjin in early July were especially numerous. Of approximately 600 Alliance casualties, more than 250 were Japanese; 50 of the 51 soldiers killed in action were Japanese. After Tianjin fell, Alliance soldiers from other nations went on a rampage, looting, setting fires, and raping wherever they went, but very few Japanese soldiers engaged in such violent acts. Chinese residents of Tianjin showed their gratitude by displaying Japanese rising-sun flags with slogans like “We submit to the authority of the Japanese empire” written on them.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the news that the Japanese had served as the mainstay of the effort to rescue the Legation Quarter, then under siege, soon traveled throughout the world, garnering accolades for the Japanese. According to *Beijing Ablaze*, British newspapers unanimously sang the praises of the Japanese. An editorial in the 28 August 1900 edition of the London Times read “The entire world is grateful to the Japanese for their rescue of the Legation Quarter. The nations of the world have Japan to thank for saving them from the humiliation of having their diplomatic corps massacred or their flags desecrated. Japan is an entirely worthy partner of the Western nations.” The Standard, a British newspaper, carried an editorial on August 18 stating, “Everyone will tell you that any honor arising from the quelling of the Boxer Rebellion belongs to the Japanese military. The unrivaled perseverance, discipline, and bravery of the Japanese soldiers deserve our highest praise.” Japanese efforts to relieve the siege may very well have set the scene for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

After the rescue of the Legation Quarter, the Alliance forces divided the city of Beijing into quarters, each administered by a different nation. In the Japanese quarter, there was excellent public order. According to Irish journalist George Lynch, “The English and American were better than the French or Russian quarters, but a long way behind the Japanese.”<sup>3</sup>

Worst of all was the Russian quarter; since there was no military discipline, the Russian soldiers became thugs, killing, setting fires, and raping, wreaking havoc wherever they went. Their acts of violence were so terrible they were considered fates worse than death. Rather than become victims,

---

<sup>2</sup> Eiko Woodhouse, *Pekin moyu: Giwadan Jihen to Morison* (Beijing ablaze: the Boxer Rebellion and Morrison) (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> George Lynch, *The War of the Civilisations: Being the Record of a “Foreign Devil’s” Experiences with the Allies in China* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1901), 138.

some Chinese residents committed suicide by jumping from buildings; others drowned or hanged themselves. The Russians often kill the unfortunate women whom they raped when they were finished with them.

At a point where the Russian territory touched the Japanese ... a perfect stream of poor people carrying bundles and staggering under tables, chairs and beds were moving into the Japanese quarter.

(...)

The population of the Japanese quarter was being rapidly increased by migration from the Russian. The latter thereupon prohibited those leaving from carrying their goods away with them; yet still the Chinese went, leaving all their belongings behind them rather than endure the horrors of life in the Russian quarter.<sup>4</sup>

In despair, Lian Fang, mayor of Beijing, appealed to British diplomat Claude MacDonald, describing atrocities committed by Russian troops: "The Russians are killing Chinese men, and raping our women. To escape the humiliation of being raped, many women and girls are killing themselves. I beg you to arrange for the Japanese to take over administration of the Russian quarter."<sup>5</sup>

Although the Japanese had made the greatest contribution to the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion and the liberation of the Legation Quarter, they were not vociferous in demanding material benefits, i.e., reparations. It was the Russians who made the most excessive demands, despite the fact that they had not only obstructed the attempt to rescue those under siege, but also had provided only 40% of the troops that Japan did in the effort to save Beijing. They demanded 29% of the reparations. Next came Germany (20%), which did not even participate in the liberation of Beijing. Third was France (16%), which had deployed only half the men that Japan had, fourth was the UK (11%), and fifth, Japan (7.7%).

Unlike the Russians and Germans, who engaged in ugly bickering for the lion's share, Japan's restraint during the jockeying for reparations earned it the gratitude and trust of Chinese hearts and minds. Soon there was a marked increase in the number of Chinese studying in Japan.

### **The Heilongjiang tragedy**

When the Boxer Rebellion spread to Manchuria, the Russians mobilized a great many soldiers from Siberia and Port Arthur, maintaining that they were needed to protect the Chinese Eastern Railway, then under construction. The invasion commenced in July 1900; by October they had occupied all of Manchuria. Russian troops committed unspeakable atrocities in Manchuria. They attacked and occupied towns and villages that had absolutely no connection with the railroad, and slaughtered thousands of innocent Manchurians. It was during this period that the Russians

---

<sup>4</sup> Lynch, *op. cit.*, 137.

<sup>5</sup> Woodhouse, *op. cit.*

massacred inhabitants of 64 villages east of the Amur River in one of the bloodiest incidents in the history of the Far East.

Historian Wada Sei described that incident in a treatise entitled “The Plight of 64 Villages East of the River.” The 64 villages were a group of villages along the bank of the Amur River (Heilongjiang) opposite the Aihui district in Northern Manchuria. From north to south they stretched out over 90 kilometers south of Blagoveshchensk, covering 50 kilometers east to west. They were situated on the banks of the Amur River where it meets the Zeya, in an area blessed with fertile soil. Han Chinese residents of Manchuria inhabited those villages, and since they were on the east bank of the Amur River, the area that comprised them was called “the 64 villages east of the river.” Viewed from Manchuria, they were located on land “outside the Amur River.” But according to the Treaty of Aigun, concluded in 1868, designating territory north of the Amur River as belonging to Russia, this was Chinese territory, and Manchurians enjoyed the right to live there in perpetuity; Russian infiltration was prohibited.

In July 1900, after the Boxer Rebellion arose, and even before they invaded Manchuria, Russian troops drove more than 10,000 residents out of the 64 villages at bayonet point in one of the greatest tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

At that time Ishimitsu Makiyo was in Blagoveshchensk under orders from Headquarters of the General Staff. Ishimitsu was an eyewitness to the massacre; he described what he had seen and heard in his journal, later published as *Flowers of the Wasteland*. “It was the worst massacre in the history of East Asia. On that day it seemed as though a monstrous mechanism had raised the curtain on a bloody struggle.”<sup>7</sup> Without a doubt, the massacre was the prelude to brutal conflicts in East Asia, beginning with Russian incursions into Manchuria and Korea, and continuing with the Russo-Japanese War.

The nation of Japan was horrified by the massacre, which inspired several works of poetry. For instance, Doi Bansui expressed his outrage and despair in a long poem entitled *Tragedy on the Amur River*, an excerpt from which follows.

Immense river  
Rolling along for 4,000 Russian miles  
And ending in the Strait of Tartary  
Eternal waves,  
Bear witness!

In the year 1900 your waters became graves.  
In those waters five thousand blameless lives  
Were lost,  
Transformed into ghostly spirits.

---

<sup>6</sup> Wada Sei, *Kōtō rokujūshi ton no mondai ni tsuite* (The plight of 64 villages east of the Amur River) (Tokyo: Seikatsusha, 1942).

<sup>7</sup> Ishimitsu Makiyo, *Kōya no hana* (Flowers of the wasteland) (Tokyo: Chūkō Bunko, 2017).

Aggrieved by those loathsome deeds  
Flowers will never bloom on your banks again.

From that day on  
Your green waters and the map of East Asia  
Will forever be stained blood-red.<sup>8</sup>

### **The aftermath of the massacre**

In 1902 the Russians and Chinese signed the Agreement Between Russia and China with Regard to Manchuria, which I will discuss in more detail later. Though the Russians had agreed to return all Manchurian territory south of the Amur River, they failed to return the 64 villages east of the river to China. The five or six thousand homesick villagers who had hoped to return to their native land assembled at Aihui, but all they could do was gaze at the landscape, filled with disappointment. When Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, the Chinese asked again and again for the return of the 64 villages. But the Russians not only ignored those requests, but also resettled waves of Russians, both military personnel and civilians, in those areas. Their adamant justification: “Since the Chinese residents left the area, it has become the home of Russian settlers; we cannot return it.” Even though it was they who had driven them out, the Russians had the gall to suggest that the original residents had abandoned their villages.

This was the same shamelessness that prompted the Russians, by then the Soviets, after the Greater East Asian War, to expel Japanese residents from the Northern Territories (Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands), and populate their land with Soviets.

Recorded history tells us that the transition from imperialism to socialism did not alter the Russian mentality one iota.

After the demise of the Qing dynasty in 1912, Zhang Zuolin’s Manchurian government once again requested the return of the 64 villages. After the Russian Revolution, the Soviet government twice (in 1919 and 1920) issued a Karakhan Manifesto, which stated that the Russians would return territory usurped from China during the imperial era. Consequently, believing that Soviet intentions were good, the Chinese Nationalist government negotiated for the restoration of the 64 villages, but the USSR dismissed their requests. The villages were swallowed up by the USSR and have remained Russian territory to this very day.

### **Russia defaults on treaty with China**

When the Russians occupied Manchuria, they had the audacity to Russify the names of towns, revealing for all to see that they intended their occupation to be permanent. Even after the Boxer Rebellion had been suppressed, the Russians did not withdraw their troops, thus violating the Boxer Protocol. They attempted three times to conclude a secret treaty with China that would have

---

<sup>8</sup> Doi Bansui, “Kokuryūkō jō no higeki” (Tragedy on the Amur River) in *Doi Bansui shishū* (Collected poems of Doi Bansui) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1952).

made Manchuria a Russian protectorate. However, those efforts ended in failure in the face of staunch opposition from Japan, the UK, and the US. The signing of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which I shall discuss later, in January 1902 boosted Chinese morale, and at the same time, put pressure on Russia. Consequently, the Agreement Between Russia and China with Regard to Manchuria was signed and sealed in April 1902.

According to that agreement, the Russians were to withdraw their troops from Manchurian territory they had occupied, in three stages. The first withdrawal, over six months, was to be from southwestern Shenyang (later Fengtian, today Liaoning) province. Over the next six months they were to withdraw from the remainder of Shengjing province and from Jilin province. Over the third six-month period, they were to withdraw from Heilongjiang province.

If the Russians had honored their agreement with China, there would have been no Russo-Japanese War. The Japanese would not have expanded into Manchuria, nor would they have annexed Korea. Adhering to a single treaty would certainly have changed the history of the Far East — there might have been peace instead of chaos and upheaval. But to the dismay of all those who yearn for justice and peace, once the Russians had occupied an area, they refused to relinquish their hold on it. Not once did they peacefully return occupied territory to its owners, not during the days of imperialism, and not during the life span of the Soviet Union. The Agreement Between Russia and China with Regard to Manchuria was no exception. Russian promises and Russian intentions were diametric opposites.

The Russians did complete the first stage of the withdrawal. But as far as the second stage was concerned, not only did they not withdraw their troops, they also increased troop strength in the area between Fengtian and the Manchuria-Korea border, thus declaring their ambition to subsume Greater Mongolia and Zhili (Hebei) province, along with Manchuria, into their sphere of influence.

### **Russian encroachment on Korea**

It was at about this time that the Russians openly expressed their intention to invade Korea. First they occupied Yongampo, located at the mouth of the Yalu River, saying that they wanted to protect the forests there. Then, in July 1903 they sent troops into Korea and forced the Koreans to sign an agreement giving Russia a concession in Yongampo. After receiving strong objections from Japan, the Korean government announced that it had abrogated the agreement. But the Russians ignored the notice of annulment and began constructing a fortress in Yongampo, which they christened Port Nicolai, implying that their appropriation of Yohgampo was a fait accompli. The Koreans were helpless to stave off Russian encroachment.

Some Russian leaders were apprehensive about and critical of Russia's adventurist policies. One of them was Sergei Witte, Russia's finance minister, who wrote the following in his memoirs.

The Japanese, of course, have gotten wind of this dangerous mission [Russia's plan to take control of Korea]. They are aware that Russia is creating the outward impression that it has withdrawn from Korea, but in reality, continues to harbor ambitions to occupy that nation. I must concede that it is with good reason that the Japanese have become exceedingly hostile toward us. Our occupation of the Liaodong peninsula and subsequent use of the Boxer Rebellion as an excuse to send

troops to Manchuria, and our failure to withdraw those troops have caused China to completely lose faith in Russia. The same is true of Japan. If only we had adhered faithfully to the agreement with Japan, and had not conspired to take over Korea, the Japanese would have been reassured and would not have turned against us. However, we expelled the Japanese from the Liaodong peninsula, and occupied it ourselves. Furthermore, in return we concluded an agreement [concerning Korea] with the Japanese, but then violated it using treacherous means. It is more than understandable that the Japanese distrust Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Since this is testimony from a prominent Russian politician who stated that Russian designs on Korea caused the Russo-Japanese War, we must consider it a historical resource of great consequence.

### **The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and its significance**

Following Japan's reluctant accession to the Triple Intervention, there were arguments in favor of two courses of action within the Japanese government with respect to countering Russian encroachment on the Far East. The first was to mitigate Russian aggression via a compromise, i.e., a treaty with Russia. The second was to enter into an agreement with the UK, with which Japan shared a goal, namely, to put a stop to Russia's southward aggression. A group led by Itō Hirobumi and Inoue Kaoru favored the first; Prime Minister Katsura Tarō and Foreign Minister Komura Jutarō favored the second, believing that Russia would not be satisfied with occupying Manchuria, and was sure to invade Korea, and that any understanding reached between Japan and Russia would have only a temporary effect. After some twists and turns, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed in London on January 30, 1902. The gist of the treaty follows.

- (1) Both nations recognize the independence of China and Korea. The UK has political and economic interests in China, while Japan has the same interests in Korea. If those interests are threatened by domestic disturbances in China or Korea, or by the aggressive action of a third-party nation, either party to the treaty has the right to take the necessary measures to safeguard those interests (Article 1).
- (2) If either the UK or Japan goes to war with a third-party nation in order to protect its interests, the other party to the treaty shall maintain neutrality and prevent other nations from opening hostilities against its ally (Article 2).
- (3) If a third-party nation enters into a conflict with the UK or Japan, the other party to the treaty shall come to the aid of its ally (Article 3).

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance lifted the spirits of the Japanese people. It also proved to be a hidden source of support during Japan's confrontations with Russia, and its role in dissuading the French from entering the war on Russia's side cannot be overestimated.

According to diplomat Ishii Kikujirō, "the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was a near-perfect treaty. Both the Japanese and British believe that strict adherence to promises made is of great importance.

---

<sup>9</sup> Sergei Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, ed. Sidney Samuel Harcave (London: Routledge, 1990).

That particular trait was tested and proven during the life of the treaty. Because the treaty clearly conveys how crucial it is to both signatories, neither party has failed to fulfill its responsibilities. I suspect that no other treaty of this caliber exists.”<sup>10</sup>

I do not believe that anyone would question my conclusion that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was the greatest possible pillar of support for Japanese diplomacy for the next 20 years. It certainly served as a silent source of strength for Japan during the Russo-Japanese War. The fact that the hostilities did not spread beyond those two nations was due to the fact that the UK adhered to the promises it made in the treaty and strictly kept a close watch on France, an ally of Russia, and prevented it from joining in the hostilities.

In the international struggle for supremacy in Manchuria subsequent to the Russo-Japanese War, Japan was careful to be in close communication with the UK at all times, and the UK, in return, became a strong advocate for Japan. This relationship prevented the struggle from worsening. Japan’s subsequent sudden expansion in the Far East and the Pacific between the conclusion of the treaty and the close of World War I, would not have been possible without the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The US soon began to view this treaty with displeasure, and it eventually was terminated, under circumstances that I shall discuss later. When looking back at history, we must remember that together with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Japan prospered, having become one of the world’s first-rank nations. But we must also recollect with regret that after that treaty was terminated, a now isolated Japan found itself in distress, bound for a destiny replete with vicissitudes.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ishii Kikujirō, *Diplomatic Commentaries*, Willam Langdon, ed. and trans. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1936).