

STALIN, JAPAN, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY OVER CHINA, 1894–1945

ROUTLEDGE OPEN HISTORY

HIROAKI KUROMIYA



Stalin, Japan, and the Struggle for Supremacy over China, 1894–1945

Stalin was a master of deception, disinformation, and camouflage, by means of which he gained supremacy over China and defeated imperialism on Chinese soil. This book examines Stalin's covert operations in his hunt for supremacy.

By the late 1920s Britain had ceded place to Japan as Stalin's main enemy in Asia. By seducing Japan deeply into China, Stalin successfully turned Japan's aggression into a weapon of its own destruction. The book examines Stalin's covert operations from the murder of the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin in 1928 and the publication of the forged "Tanaka Memorial" in 1929, to Stalin's hidden role in Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the outbreak of all-out war between China and Japan in 1937, and Japan's defeat in 1945. In the shadow of these and other events we find Stalin and his secret operatives, including many Chinese and Japanese collaborators, most notably Zhang Xueliang and Kōmoto Daisaku, the self-professed assassin of Zhang Zuolin. The book challenges accounts of the turbulent history of inter-war East Asia that have ignored or minimized Stalin's presence and instead exposes and analyzes Stalin's secret *modus operandi*, modernized as "hybrid war" in today's Russia.

The book is essential for students and specialists of Stalin, China, the Soviet Union, Japan, and East Asia.

Hiroaki Kuromiya is a professor of history emeritus, Indiana University, USA. He has authored, among others, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s–1990s* (1998), *Stalin* (Profiles in Power) (2005), *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin's Great Terror in the 1930s* (2007), *Conscience on Trial: The Fate of Fourteen Pacifists in Stalin's Ukraine, 1952–1953* (2012), and *Zrozumieć Donbas* (2015), and coauthored *Między Warszawą a Tokio: Polsko-japońska współpraca wywiadowcza 1904–1944* (2009, with Andrzej Pełtoński) and *The Eurasian Triangle: Russia, The Caucasus, and Japan, 1904–1945* (2016, with Georges Mamoulia).

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Abbreviations, Transliterations, and Bibliographic References



1. Abbreviations

AAN, AVP, RGASPI, and other abbreviations for specific archives are listed, and their full names are spelled out in the Bibliography.

CCP: Chinese Communist Party (Communist Party of China)

CER: Chinese Eastern Railway (KVZhD in Russian)

Comintern: Communist International

FDR: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945)

FER: Far Eastern Republic (1920–22)

GRU: Soviet military intelligence (*Glavnoe razvedyvatel'noe upravlenie*)

IMTFE: International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo War Crimes Trial, 1946–48)

JCP: Japanese Communist Party

KMT: *Kuomintang/Guomindang* or Chinese Nationalist Party

MPR: Mongolian People's Republic

OKDVA: Soviet Special Far Eastern Army

SCAP: Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers

2. Transliterations

Russian and other languages that use one of the Cyrillic alphabets are romanized according to the Library of Congress systems. Chinese is romanized using the pinyin method, except for some familiar cases, such as Chiang Kai-shek (instead of Jiang Jieshi) and Taipei (instead of Taibei). Japanese is generally romanized according to the modified Hepburn system, except with a hyphen (-) instead of an apostrophe (') after *n* before a vowel or *y* (e.g., *Kan-ichi*).

3. Bibliographic references

The Bibliography provides full bibliographic information for every source cited in the footnotes. In each chapter, the first footnote citing a specific source provides the full citation, except for the name of the publisher. Subsequent footnotes citing that source use shortened citations.



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Introduction



AFTER the successful Russian Revolution of 1917 and the failed revolutionary attempts in Germany, Hungary, and elsewhere in Europe over the next few years, the Soviet dictator Iosif V. Stalin (Joseph Stalin, 1878–1953) was determined to take the revolution to China. Almost all the world’s imperialist powers had a large stake in China. There Stalin faced the largest imperialist power, Great Britain, and the most ambitious one, Japan, a neighbor of both China and the Soviet Union. The United States, meanwhile, carefully monitored its stake in China so as not to lose out to other powers. Stalin’s greatest weapon in this struggle for control was to use China’s nationalism against these two imperialist powers. In the end, Britain came to accept Chinese nationalism, but Japan did not. Thus, by the 1930s, the competing interests of Soviet Communism and Japanese imperialism led to a momentous rivalry whose nature and geopolitical ramifications are still not fully understood to this day. To investigate this period properly requires a fresh understanding not only of the Soviet Union and Japan during this time but also of the United States—which under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945) came down decisively on the Soviet side. In essence, this power struggle caused Stalin to turn to the United States as a proxy—and with a deft sleight of hand, to guide Japan toward self-destruction in China and thereby create an immediate backdrop for the victory of Communism in China in 1949. Meanwhile, at the end of World War II, Japan found itself at war with an unexpected foe in the Soviet Union, with whom it had deceived itself into believing it could have a political romance. This book examines the battle for supremacy in China, particularly between the Soviet Union and Japan,¹ and investigates the secret histories of this period that those in the West and Asia alike have been content to leave hidden.

The genius of Stalin’s political strategy in China evolved during the long years of the Bolsheviks’ underground conspiratorial work before 1917, during which they developed a highly sophisticated art of disinformation, camouflage, and deception. During the revolution, they emerged as the sole ruling party and opened their ranks widely to mass membership. Nevertheless, the party’s political operations remained highly conspiratorial. Decision-making was confined to a narrow circle of individuals (the Politburo) and often to just the dictator—first Vladimir I. Lenin (1870–1924) and then Stalin. Although policy implementation

¹On the long struggle for hegemony in China, see Bruce A. Elleman, *International Competition in China, 1899–1991: The Rise, Fall, and Restoration of the Open Door Policy* (London, 2015) and S.C.M. Paine, *Wars for Asia, 1911–1949* (New York, 2014).

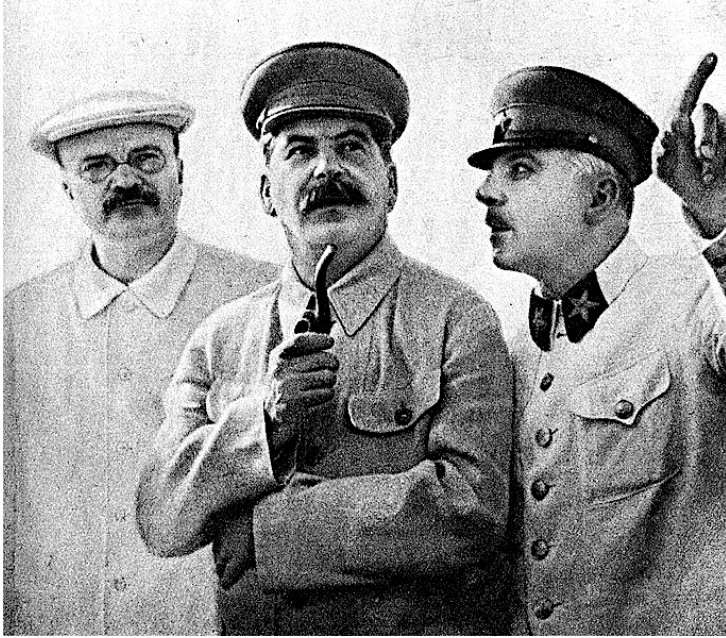


Figure 1. Soviet dictator Stalin with his lieutenants, Viacheslav Molotov (left) and Voroshilov Kliment (right), 1937

was accompanied by mass campaigns, its actual mechanism was often opaque, with hidden forces (the secret police) working behind the scenes. When it came to international politics and diplomacy, the Bolsheviks were necessarily constrained by foreign forces they could not control. The sense that the Soviet Union was surrounded by hostile capitalist countries, far mightier in economic power than the first socialist state, reinforced the Bolshevik conviction that any and all means were justified to fight against the enemy camp. From the earliest days of the Soviet government, its guiding principle was deception unhindered by any pretense of fair play—and deception that fully utilized all the might of espionage and counterespionage.² At the same time, the Bolsheviks disdained democracy as institutionalized deception of the masses based on hypocritical principles.

Stalin had a stated affinity for Asia. He is known to have declared himself to be “Asiatic,” a “Russified Georgian-Asiatic,” and the like. As an avid reader, he was familiar with Asia, and although there is little evidence that his knowledge was substantial, he turned out to be a master of both *ninjutsu* (忍術)—the Japanese art of ninja (stealth, camouflage, and sabotage)—and *jūjutsu* (柔術), a quintessentially Japanese martial art that attempts to use an opponent’s own

²For a good exploration of this subject, see Bruce A. Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception: The Secret History of Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917–1927* (Armonk, NY, 1997).

force against him or her. It was precisely these stealth tactics that Stalin would use against Japan to defeat it resoundingly and gain hegemony in East Asia.

As a military tactician, Stalin's understanding of *ninjutsu* may well have been influenced by the famous dictum of Sun Tzu (Sun Zi, 孫子, ca. 544–496 BCE): “War is deception” (兵者，詭道也). In a March 1937 speech that he delivered shortly before Marshal Mikhail N. Tukhachevskii (1893–1937) and numerous other Red Army commanders were executed, Stalin declared:

To win a battle in war, several corps of Red Army soldiers may be needed, but to ruin the victory at the front a few spies will suffice somewhere in army headquarters or even in the division headquarters who can steal an operation plan and pass it to the enemy.³

For Stalin, deception was not simply a tool of war but also a guiding principle. Nor were these mere words. A strategy of deception was almost certainly a key element of his approach to Japan. Take for example the “small war” at Khalkhin Gol (also known as the Nomonhan Incident) in 1939, in which the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) defeated Japan and Manzhouguo (Manshūkoku in Japanese, a puppet state created in 1932 in Manchuria in northeastern China). Komatsubara Michitarō (小松原道太郎, 1886–1940),⁴ the commander of Japan's main fighting unit, the Twenty-Third Division, was likely a Soviet agent.⁵

Likewise, in 1924 Stalin expressed his belief in *jūjutsu* quite clearly to China's leader-to-be Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石, Chiang Chung-cheng, Jiang Jieshi, 1887–1975). According to Suzuki Teiichi (鈴木貞一, 1888–1989), a China specialist in the Japanese Army who knew Chiang well, when Chiang asked Stalin for help in creating an army of fourteen divisions, Stalin apparently rebuffed him: “You don't need excessive forces. The armed forces are the last resort. You must exhaust all other means to lead the enemy to collapse before using arms.”⁶ The commander of the Red Army, Lev D. Trotskii (1879–1940), and his deputy, E.M. Sklianskii (1892–1925), gave similar advice to Chiang: What mattered was not so much the size of a military force as the deployment of subversion behind enemy

³I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniia* (Stanford, CA, 1967), 1:219.

⁴Here and elsewhere, the name order is family name–given name for East Asians unless they refer to themselves in the Western order (given name followed by family name).

⁵See Hiroaki Kuromiya, “The Mystery of Nomonhan, 1939,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 4 (December 2011): 659–77. On the “honey trap” against him, see also A.G. Zorikhin, “Iapono-sovetskaia voina . . . dolzhna byt' provedena kak mozhno skoree,” *Voенно-istoricheskiei zbornal*, no. 1 (2000): 54.

⁶Quoted in Suzuki Teiichi, “Hokubatsu to Shō-Tanaka mitsuyaku,” *Bessatsu chisei 5: bimerareta Shōwashi*, December 1956, 21–22. Although no record of Chiang's meeting with Stalin has been found, it is possible that he did meet Stalin but deleted any mention of him later. See Yuan Nansheng, *Sidalin Mao Zedong yu Jiang Jieshi* (Changsha, 2003), 44; *VKP(b), Komintern i natsional'no-revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Kitae. Dokumenty. T. 1. 1920–1925* (Moscow, 1994), 312–13.



Figure 2. Chiang Kai-shek, China's political leader, 1943

lines—a strategy that would weaken the enemy, which then could be crushed.⁷ Undoubtedly, their advice reflected the view of the Soviet leadership as a whole. Here, too, Stalin, Trotskii, and Sklianskii may well have been influenced by one of Sun Tzu's other famous dictums: "To break the enemy without fighting is the best of the best" (不戰而屈人之兵，善之善者也). In the same vein, Stalin gave Bulgarian Communists the following advice in 1948:

You should not be afraid of any "categorical imperative" regarding moral responsibility. We are not bound by any "categorical imperatives." The key issue is the balance of forces. If you are strong, then strike a blow. If not, do not enter the fray. We agree to fight not when the adversary wants us to, but when it is in our interests to do so.⁸

In the 1930s, Stalin lured Japan ever deeper into China, used Chinese and U.S. forces to exhaust the Japanese military, and then in 1945 struck a coup de grâce against Japan. It turned out to be a masterful stroke.

* * * * *

This book makes bold claims about the history of the interwar struggle for supremacy over China: It was Stalin who had the Manchurian warlord Zhang

⁷ *VKP (b), Komintern i natsional'no-revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Kitae*, 280, 306–8. Chiang's account is in *Jiang Zhongzheng xiansheng nianpu changbian*, ed. Lü Fangshang (Taipei, 2014), 1:226–27.

⁸ Georgi Dimitrov, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1949*, ed. Ivo Banac (New Haven, CT, 2003), 442–43.

Zuolin (張作霖, 1875–1928) murdered in 1928 and blamed Japan for his assassination. With the ultimate aim of destroying Japan's aggression on Chinese soil, Stalin induced Japan to invade Manchuria in 1931. To the same end, Stalin engineered the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 1937, which led to an all-out war between Japan and China. Simultaneously, Stalin engaged in provocative and diversionary activity to exhaust Japanese forces in China. For example, he was responsible for the major border clashes between Japan and the Soviet Union, beginning with the Kanchazu Incident (which took place just before the Marco Polo Bridge Incident) and ending with the Battles of Lake Khasan in 1938 and Khalkhin Gol in 1939. Perhaps above all, Stalin dictated how the world and history would understand the events, in large part because he took extraordinary measures to hide his hand. Even though it was the Soviet Union that in August 1945 broke the 1941 Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact and started a war against Japan, Moscow managed to secure a seat on the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), also known as the Tokyo War Crimes Trial, which held Tokyo responsible for conflicts that Moscow had actually caused. This deflection of blame was Stalin's tour de force.

Although this book radically reinterprets the history of interwar East Asia, it does not in any way absolve Tokyo for its crimes of aggression. Rather, it attempts to chart systematically Stalin's hidden hand in the history of Japan's aggression in Asia. Stalin engaged Japan with such skill and foresight that even now it is difficult to discern his presence.⁹ Virtually no credible account of Stalin's covert actions has been written in Japan, China, or the West. The unfortunate result is that the world essentially repeats the Stalinist accounts of international history.¹⁰ Moreover, although Japanese nationalist circles peddle conspiracy theories about the Soviet Union, China, and the United States on the flimsiest of evidence, what these circles fail to imagine is that their heroes, imperial Japanese radical nationalists, in fact worked with (and in some cases actually worked for) the Soviet Union in undermining the Anglo-American liberal world order that they insisted stood in the way of Japanese imperialism.

Although it is possible that some of the Japanese nationalists unwittingly carried out Stalin's bidding, others consciously did so. Within this latter category, some Japanese nationalists were Soviet agents, while others were not; yet, they knowingly worked with the Soviet Union in the hopes of advancing the agenda of Japanese imperialism. The prominent journalist Ozaki Hotsumi (尾崎秀実, 1901–1944), the right-hand man of the German journalist and now-infamous Soviet spy Richard Sorge (1895–1944), is well known to have been a Soviet agent and was executed for treason in 1941. Under the guise of being a patriotic nationalist, he penetrated the highest echelons of the Japanese government and

⁹ Even the latest Russian account of Stalin and the Far East has nothing new to say on the subject. See Oleg Mozokhin, *Stalin i Dal'nii Vostok* (Moscow, 2020).

¹⁰ Even the most recent accounts of Stalin's strategic moves in Eurasia make no substantive break with them. See for example Alfred J. Rieber, *Stalin and the Struggle for Supremacy in Eurasia* (Cambridge, 2015).



Figure 3. Ozaki Hotsumi, a Japanese journalist, political adviser, and Soviet agent, before 1940

made incalculable contributions to keeping Japan mired in China after 1937. In contrast, Komatsubara was almost certainly an unwilling collaborator. Having fallen into a “honey trap” while he was a military attaché in Moscow in the late 1920s, he appears to have been blackmailed into working for Moscow.¹¹ Kōmoto Daisaku (河本大作, 1883–1955), an ultra nationalist, is widely believed to have been responsible for the assassination of Zhang Zuolin in 1928. He is also one of the men who engineered the Mukden Incident, Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Although Kōmoto confessed to Zhang’s murder and even published his confessions, there is substantial doubt about his part in the assassination. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Moscow admitted that its secret services were, in fact, responsible for Zhang’s murder and that it had shifted the blame onto Japan. Although we cannot know for sure whether Kōmoto was a Soviet agent, we can at least say that he consciously collaborated with Soviet operatives. Chapter 2 discusses this case in detail. There are other similar collaborators, many of whom are discussed in the book. These men worked with Communist foes of Japanese imperialism because they had a common interest in fighting against a world order dominated by the West. Other figures are more difficult to understand, such as Tanaka Ryūichi (田中隆吉, 1896–1972), an enigmatic Japanese intelligence officer involved in Japan’s numerous conspiratorial operations in China (most notably the spread of Japan’s military operations to Shanghai in early 1932). Russian historians have now acknowledged that Tanaka was a Soviet agent.¹² At the IMTFE after the war, Tanaka proved to be an invaluable asset for the prosecutors (including those from the Soviet Union). He incriminated his former army colleagues and later died after suffering a nervous collapse. The Russian acknowledgment does not necessarily prove that Tanaka was actually a Soviet agent—but if he was, many of the unaccountable Japanese operations in

¹¹See Kuromiya, “Mystery of Nomonhan.”

¹²A. Kolpakidi and D. Prokhorov, *KGB. Prikazano likvidirovat’. Spetsoperatsii sovetskikh spetssluzhbb 1918–1941* (Moscow, 2004), 199. Their account includes inaccuracies that are discussed in Chapter 3.

Figure 4. Richard Sorge, a German journalist and Soviet agent in Japan, 1940



interwar China begin to make perfect sense. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 explore these cases in detail.

The fact that the Communist Bolsheviks sought out right-wing nationalists for subversive operations is not in the least surprising. They repeatedly made it clear that they were willing to work with the right under certain conditions. Here the Soviet-German collaborations in the 1920s and 1930s are particularly instructive. In 1923, a German nationalist and member of the paramilitary *Freikorps* (“Free Regiments”), Albert Leo Schlageter (1894–1923), was executed by the French military for sabotage in the French-occupied Ruhr. Karl B. Radek (1885–1939), a Polish-German-Soviet Bolshevik who would play a prominent role in the failed German revolutionary uprising in the autumn of 1923, came out in praise of Schlageter as “a courageous soldier of the counter-revolution” who “deserves to be sincerely honoured by us, the soldiers of the revolution.” In June 1923, Radek delivered a speech at a plenum of the Communist International (Comintern) Executive Committee:

But we believe that the great majority of the nationalist-minded masses belong not to the camp of the capitalists but to the camp of the workers. We want to find, and we shall find, the path to these masses. We shall do all in our power to make men like Schlageter, who are prepared to go to their deaths for a common cause, not wanderers into the void, but wanderers into a better future for the whole of mankind; that they should not spill their hot, unselfish blood for the profit of the coal and iron barons, but in the cause of the great toiling German people, which is a member of the family of peoples fighting for their emancipation.

This truth the Communist Party will declare to the great masses of the German people, for it is not a party fighting for a crust of bread on behalf of the industrial workers, but a party of the struggling proletariat fighting for its emancipation, an emancipation that is identical



Figure 5. Tanaka Ryūkichi, a Japanese intelligence operative and suspected Soviet agent

with the emancipation of the whole people, of all who toil and suffer in Germany. Schlageter himself cannot now hear this declaration, but we are convinced that there are hundreds of Schlageters who will hear it and understand it.¹³

Radek suggested that in opposing foreign capitalist forces, the Communists and nationalist patriots like Schlageter could find common political ground. Thus, for a brief period in 1923, joint nationalist-Communist actions did take place, and “posters with the Soviet star and swastika appeared together” in Germany.¹⁴ Radek was keenly interested in German-Soviet cooperation. Already in 1919–1920, while sitting in a German jail after taking part in the failed revolutionary attempt, Radek was courted by Germans, including Heinrich Laufenberg

¹³Karl Radek, “Leo Schlageter—The Wanderer into the Void,” *Labour Monthly* 5, no. 3 (September 1923): 157. Radek’s speech was published with a preface by the journal’s editor, who said that it was “likely to become one of the historical documents of the European revolution” at the “very moment when fascism and Communism were on the point of coming to grips [*sic*] for the soul of the tortured German masses.” *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁴Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2015), 196. This kind of Nazi-Communist hybridization was not uncommon in interwar Germany. For example, in 1931, Richard Scheringer (1904–86) famously defected from the Nazi Party and joined the German Communist Party; see Louis Dupeux, *National bolshevisme. Stratégie communiste et dynamique conservatrice* (Paris, 1979), 415, 565–68. Scheringer’s conversion led to a Communist campaign to recruit leftist Nazi members and the creation of “so-called ‘Scheringer Staffeln’ from units of the banned Rotfrontkämpferbund, whose members sported Soviet armbands with their SA uniforms.” See Timothy Scott Brown, *Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists Between Authenticity and Performance* (New York, 2009), 117, 182. The campaign was not too successful, with more people defecting from the Communist Party to the Nazi Party than the other way around. See Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, *Nationalbolschewismus in Deutschland 1918-1933* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973), 285. Nevertheless, the Communist interest in right-wing radicalism never ceased. Scheringer studied Russian in the Reichswehr and believed that from a military point of view, the Soviet Union was Germany’s ally. See his memoir, *Das Große Los. Unter Soldaten, Bauern und Rebellen* (Hamburg, 1959), 187–88, 226–27. Scheringer remained devoted to Communism for the rest of his life.

Figure 6. Karl Radek, a Polish-German-Soviet Bolshevik and Sinologist, 1925



(1872–1932) and Fritz Wolffheim (1888–1942), who sought to collaborate with Soviet Russia against the post–World War I order that the Treaty of Versailles had created in 1919. Radek was impressed by these German “National Bolsheviks,” and he and other Bolsheviks saw the potential for an alliance.¹⁵ This sentiment certainly helped sustain the alliance established by the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo, in which Weimar Germany and the Soviet Union stood together against the Versailles world order for a decade until 1932. Famously, the two countries secretly collaborated on military matters.

Even after Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) came to power in 1933, Radek courted Germany, certainly with Stalin’s approval. In 1934, he and Nikolai I. Bukharin (1888–1938), an old Bolshevik, met “Professor Oberländer,” a young National Socialist professor from the University of Königsberg who was visiting Moscow and was a “trusted friend” of Erich Koch (1896–1986), the East Prussian *gauleiter* (Nazi regional leader). Radek and Bukharin expressed their fulsome admiration for the “wonderful German people,” with Radek going so far as to say: “There are magnificent lads in the SA [*Strumabteilung*, storm troopers] and SS [*Schutzstaffel*, protection squadrons]. You’ll see, the day will come when they’ll be throwing hand grenades for us.” Radek and Bukharin also “expressed

¹⁵See Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, “Karl Radek in Berlin: Ein Kapitel deutsch-russischer Beziehungen im Jahre 1919,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 2 (1962): 101.

their firm conviction that the Nazi regime would collapse in economic and social crisis.”¹⁶ Within a few years, after they had rendered excellent service to Stalin, the Soviet dictator had both men killed for supposedly being German (as well as Polish and Japanese) “spies.”

In retrospect, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 can be traced to Moscow’s peculiar infatuation with fascism.¹⁷ In fact, Radek, who in the first half of the 1930s served as Stalin’s personal diplomat, repeatedly suggested that Moscow would be willing to work even with Nazi Germany in opposing the imperialist powers that dominated the world. Before Hitler came to power, Radek had predicted Hitler’s victory and did not rule out the possibility of Nazi-Soviet cooperation, although he regarded Hitler and the Nazis as “too politically stupid” (“*politisch viel zu dumm*”) to comprehend such a possibility.¹⁸ In August 1934, Radek openly expressed his admiration for German students wearing the Nazi SA uniform and their willingness to sacrifice. He compared them to the young Communists in the Red Army and the Prussian volunteer forces who had fought against Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) in 1813. Radek insisted that Nazism was an “unwitting pacesetter of Communism” (“*unfreiwilliger Schrittmacher des Kommunismus*”).¹⁹ That same year, Radek told the German ambassador that Moscow would not do anything that would jeopardize the possibility of returning to a political rapprochement with Germany.²⁰ These remarks reflected Stalin’s political thinking at the time. Radek was extremely useful to Stalin, who allowed him to put out political feelers that Stalin himself could not or would not utter publicly. Culturally refined, pleasantly eccentric, and sharply cerebral, Radek possessed the rare verbal ability to express provocative and even taboo ideas with disarming charm and wit. For that reason, Radek’s remarks are an important guide to Stalin’s thinking.²¹ Yet, Stalin viewed Radek as a loose

¹⁶Gustav Hilger and Alfred G. Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies: A Memoir-History of German-Soviet Relations, 1918–1941* (New York, 1953), 268.

¹⁷Certain philosophical and institutional affinities between fascism and Communism sustained relatively friendly relations between Italy and the Soviet Union in the 1920s and their political “rapprochement” in 1933–1934. See J. Calvitte Clarke III, *Russia and Italy against Hitler: The Bolshevik-Fascist Rapprochement of the 1930s* (New York, 1991).

¹⁸Ernst Niekisch, *Erinnerungen eines deutschen Revolutionärs* (Köln, 1974), 217. On Niekisch and “national Bolshevism,” see David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, chap. 7.

¹⁹Quoted in *Deutschland und Sowjetunion 1933–1941. Dokumente aus russischen und deutschen Archiven. Bd. 1: 30 Januar 1933–31 Dezember 1934* (Oldenbourg, 2014), 1319. Some Nazis became covert but witting “pacesetters” of Soviet Communism. Walther Stennes (1895–1983), an SA officer who in 1930–1931 rebelled against Hitler’s “legalism,” was expelled from the Nazi Party, became Chiang Kai-shek’s bodyguard and personal intelligence man, and worked for the Soviet secret police under the code name *Drug* (Friend). See V.L. Peshcherskii, “Vrag moego vruga . . .,” *Voenna-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1998, no. 3, 59–71; Jerrold Schecter and Leona Schecter, *Sacred Secrets: How Soviet Intelligence Operations Changed American History* (Washington, DC, 2003), 15–16. For other cases of Nazis becoming Soviet agents, see Kurt Possanner von Ehrenthal (1898–1933) and Karl-Günther Heimsoth (1899–1934), see *Ocherki istorii rossiiskoi razvedki* (Moscow, 1996), 2:181–195.

²⁰See Jean-François Fayet, *Karl Radek (1885–1939). Biographie politique* (Bern, 2004), 685.

²¹However, Stalin almost certainly did not share the following ideas Radek expressed (but

cannon who knew too much and spoke too much; once his political utility had been exhausted, Stalin had him killed in jail in 1939.²²

* * * * *

In tracing Radek's work, we can see how the Bolsheviks carefully cultivated nationalists as political allies as a strategy to advance their Communist aims. It is no surprise, then, that their willingness to collaborate with nationalists became even more manifest in Asia. From the mid-1920s, when Sino-Soviet relations were normalized after the chaos caused by the Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war (1918–20), Moscow subordinated the Chinese Communists to the hegemony of the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang/Guomindang*, or KMT 國民黨). This strategy was based on careful studies of Asia in general, and China in particular, where industry was embryonic and the proletariat small. Radek was an influential and knowledgeable figure among the Bolsheviks in Asian as well as European affairs. In 1909–1911, while living in Leipzig, he had studied the history of China (and international politics) and collected a vast number of maps,²³ suggesting an interest in geopolitics. Later, Radek became the founding president of the Sun Yat-sen Communist University of the Toilers of China, established in Moscow in 1925. His studious, diligent reading²⁴ and prolific writing show that he was also intimately familiar with Japan and its history.²⁵ Radek was an admirer of Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), a noted Japanologist and geographer who is considered the father of the Nazi doctrine of *Lebensraum* (living space, the belief that Germany needed “living space” to survive) and who taught both Adolf Hitler and Rudolf Hess (1894–1987). Radek kept a copy of Haushofer's book *The Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean* (*Geopolitik des Pazifischen*

that Radek himself may not have believed in): “We actually do not work at all according to a ‘theory,’ do not have any ‘ideology,’ rather we have only an aim.” Quoted in Schüddekopf, *Nationalbolschewismus in Deutschland*, 13.

²²The ever jocose Radek was one of those whom Stalin characterized as “slaves of their tongue—their tongues manage them.” With Radek, one could never know when and what his tongue was “liable to blurt out.” See Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin, Profiles in Power* (Harlow, 2005), 63.

²³Faye, *Karl Radek*, 68.

²⁴Radek “read every conceivable serious journal.” Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, trans. Peter Sedgwick with George Paizis (New York, 2012), 161.

²⁵See for example Karl Radek, *Portraits and Pamphlets* (London, 1935); his preface to O. Tanin and E. Yohan, *Militarism and Fascism in Japan* (New York, 1934), a translation of O. Tanin and E. Iogan, *Voenna-fashistkoe dvizhenie v Iaponii* (Moscow: Partizdat, 1933). This book was translated into Japanese and published in 1936 as 近代日本政治史: 日本に於けるミリタリズム及びファシズムの發展を通して見た (Tokyo: Sōbunkaku, 1936). In October 1933, Stalin had instructed Radek to write the preface with “some corrections” to the earlier version of the Tanin and Yohan text (published for limited circulation in Khabarovsk in 1933) which, its title notwithstanding, did not clearly brand Japan as “fascist.” With Radek's corrections that Japan was fascist, Stalin intended to use this book to raise public opinion in the Soviet Union and “all other countries” against Japan's militarist fascists. *Stalin i Kaganovich. Perepiska. 1931–1936 gg.* (Moscow, 2001), 396. Tanin (O.S. Tarakhanov [1901–1938]) and Iogan/Yohan (E.S. Iolk [1900–1937]) were both Soviet military intelligence officers.

Oceans, 1924) on his desk and regularly sent Haushofer the Soviet journal *The New East* (*Novyi Vostok*).²⁶

Yet, for Moscow, Japan represented a more complex problem than China. Because Japan was a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy, political intervention and manipulation from without had to be more subtle and covert than in China—a country divided by warlords, with whom Moscow was able to forge both open and clandestine relationships. Thus, to understand how Moscow laid the groundwork for its intervention in Japan requires an in-depth look at Japan's internal political circles—specifically, why both left- and right-wing groups shared a common interest in the Soviet Union. In fact, Japan—including its right-wing nationalist circles—covertly tried to cultivate the Soviet Union as an ally. As Chapter 1 discusses, in the wake of the Washington Naval Conference (1921–22), which ended the Anglo-Japanese Alliance that had been in effect since 1903, Japan became isolated and alienated from the imperialist world order with which it had faithfully engaged for almost twenty years. In this new international environment, Japan sought new partners in the Soviet Union and Germany, two countries that were also isolated from the post-World War I world order.

Although both the left and the right courted the Soviet Union, Moscow found it nearly impossible to work with Japanese Communists because the Communist Party was outlawed and persecuted. In contrast, Moscow had no trouble working with Japan's right-wing nationalists, who were eager to oust Britain and the United States from Asia (under the slogan "Asia for the Asians") and considered Moscow a convenient (though at times problematic) ally. Consider Suzuki Teiichi, who was vehemently hostile to the Anglo-American world order. In 1919, while studying economics as an army officer, he was deeply affected by *The Tale of Poverty* (*Binbō monogatari*, 貧乏物語, 1917) by the Marxist economist and journalist Kawakami Hajime (川上肇, 1879–1946).²⁷ When Suzuki served in China from 1926 to 1927, his army superior encouraged him to associate with the Soviets. He went to the Soviet embassy "almost every other day," holding numerous conversations with Ambassador Lev M. Karakhan (1889–1937); Aleksandr I. Egorov (1883–1939), a Soviet military adviser in Beijing; and others who welcomed him. Egorov proposed that "Russia," Japan, and Germany work together to kick out the Anglo-Saxons from China.²⁸ Later, Suzuki was sent to London to study at the London School of Economics and took courses with Harold Laski (1893–1950), a Marxist political scientist and member of the British

²⁶Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Karl Haushofer: Leben und Werk. Band 1. Lebensweg 1889–1946 und ausgewählte Texte zur Geopolitik* (Boppard am Rhein, 1979), 222.

²⁷Suzuki Teiichi, "Waga kaisō (2)," *Fumi* 49 (July 1982), 24–25.

²⁸*Suzuki Teiichi shi danwa sokkiroku (jō)* (Tokyo, 1971), 63; *Suzuki Teiichi shi danwa sokkiroku (ge)* (Tokyo, 1974), 137, 278. Suzuki insisted that he meant to "work with Russia" and not be manipulated by "English cunning" until Japan gained some "assurance" from the United States. *Suzuki Teiichi shi danwa sokkiroku (ge)*, 237. See also Suzuki Teiichi, "Yo to Konoe Fumimaro kō," *Fumi* 44 (December 1980), 3–4.

Figure 7. Tanaka Giichi, Japan's Premier (1927–1929), before 1929



Labour Party. Suzuki's main interest was in the Soviet Union.²⁹ After World War II, the IMTFE indicted and sentenced him to life imprisonment for his role in, among others, instigating hostilities against the United States and Britain in 1941. A Japanese historian who interviewed Suzuki after World War II was surprised to learn just how anti-American and pro-Soviet he turned out to be.³⁰

Suzuki's sentiments were not uncommon among right-wing Japanese military men and politicians, including prominent figures such as General Tanaka Giichi (田中義一, 1864–1929), who was prime minister from 1927 to 1929 and famous for reputedly being responsible for the forged document known as the Tanaka Memorial, and General Araki Sadao (荒木貞夫, 1877–1966), who was war minister from 1931 to 1934 and the top-listed defendant at the Tokyo Trial. Both Tanaka and Araki had served as military attachés in imperial Russia, spoke Russian, and remained sympathetic to the Soviet Union as an international political partner while remaining adamantly anti-Communist (though not necessarily anti-Russian or anti-Soviet). Taking advantage of Moscow's insistence that the Soviet government had nothing to do with the Comintern, these men found it convenient to denounce Communism on the one hand while courting Moscow on the other. Even the emperor's younger brother Chichibunomiya (秩父宮, 1902–1953), who was reprimanded by the emperor for supporting the radical rightist programs of suspending the constitution to “renew” or “renovate” (革新) the Japanese body politic, was interested in the Soviet experiment. In 1929, he began studying Russian at the Army Staff College.³¹

²⁹Suzuki Teiichi, “Waga kaisō (5),” *Fumi* 52 (April 1983), 42.

³⁰Hosaka Masayasu and Hirose Yoshihiro, *Shōwaki no ikkyū shiryō o yomu* (Tokyo, 2008), 121.

³¹Chichibunomiya denka Rogo gokenkyū, “*Jiji shinpō*, 7 April 1929, 7. On Chichibunomiya's

The simultaneous occurrence of world capitalism's woes in the form of the Great Depression beginning in 1929 and the Soviet planned economy's stupendous development (at least in numbers) during the First Five-Year Plan (1928–32) caught the attention of Japan's right and left alike. The right began to see Soviet-type economic planning (which they called a "controlled economy") as a way to overcome the failure of capitalism. In 1934, with the participation of Suzuki Teiichi and other officers, the army published a pamphlet titled *The True Meaning of National Defense and a Proposal for Strengthening It* (国防の本義と其強化の提唱). The pamphlet caused a sensation both inside and outside Japan because it urged Japan to "adopt state socialism." According to the *New York Herald Tribune*: "The first chapter, dealing with national defense and domestic problems, says that 'society must be reformed and the economic system readjusted to bring about a more even distribution of wealth.'"³² The pamphlet also called for a unified, rational control of the strategy, ideology, armed forces, and economy under the state. Many commentators characterized the pamphlet as advocating "national socialism" and an American-style "New Deal." Some even called the authors "Communists." However, the Soviet Communist Party newspaper, *Pravda*, disagreed, calling it a manifesto of "militaristic fascist elements."³³ *Pravda* was correct in not calling it "Communist," because the pamphlet dismissed internationalism as incompatible with Japan. It also explicitly rebuked Communism for squeezing the population for the sake of rapid economic development and thereby failing to cultivate the national livelihood that was essential to national defense.

It was often difficult to distinguish between Japan's political left and right, which were both radically opposed to capitalism. This was one of the driving forces behind both sides' sympathetic attitude toward the Soviet Union, even if it was not reciprocated. One of the most important pre-World War II Japanese ideologues of nationalist "state socialism," Takabatake Motoyuki (高畠素之, 1886–1928), was initially a Marxist who in the 1920s published the first complete Japanese translation of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. The Japanese ideologues of state socialism were supporters of Stalin's "socialism in one country,"³⁴ a doctrine arguing that, in their view, socialism could co-exist with nationalism in one country. It suited the Japanese nationalists, who rejected the rival theory of internationalism ("permanent revolution") advocated by Stalin's foe, Trotsky. Many radical Japanese political groups in the immediate post-World War I years (such as the Rōsōkai 老社会) initially included both left and right members. Many adherents of "pan-Asianism," such as Mitsukawa Kametarō (満川亀太郎, 1888–1933) and Ōkawa Shūmei (大川周明, 1886–1957), were supportive of the

closeness to the radical right, see Hata Ikuhiko, *Shōwashi no nazo o ou. Jō.* (Tokyo, 1999), 96–97.

³²Wilfrid Fleischer, "Army Demands Japan Adopt State Socialism," *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 October 1934, 36.

³³Vystuplenie iaponskoi voennshchiny," *Pravda*, 5 October 1934, 5.

³⁴See Tatiana Linkhoeva, *Revolution Goes East: Imperial Japan and Soviet Communism* (Ithaca, NY, 2020), 208–9.

Figure 8. Ōkawa Shūmei, one of Japan's most famous nationalist ideologues, 1936



Russian Revolution as anti-imperialist and anti-Western. While they were against Communism and imperialism, they had a weakness for the Soviet Union: Its imperialism, as long as it was not anti-Asian, was “moral and justified,” whereas Western imperialism was “predatory.”³⁵ Essentially, Ōkawa’s ideology “differed from communism only in its adherence to [Japan’s] imperial nationalism. In its pursuit of the violent abolition of the current system, Ōkawa’s idea was similar to Lenin’s war communism.”³⁶ In fact, Ōkawa once expressed admiration for Karl Marx as his “teacher.”³⁷ Ōkawa, Mitsukawa, and other like-minded pan-Asianists supported Japanese-Soviet cooperation.

The 1934 army pamphlet reflected ideas expressed by firebrand nationalist ideologues such as Ōkawa Shūmei and Kita Ikki (北一輝, 1883–1937). Kita knew Marxist literature well and was influenced by it; so were some (possibly

³⁵Ibid., 76. On these and other Japanese pan-Asianists, see Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York, 2007); Christopher W.A. Szpilman, *Kindai Nihon no kakushinron to Ajiasbugi* (Tokyo, 2015). On Ōkawa, see Vasilii Molodiakov, *Rossia i Iaponia: mekh na vesakh. Neizvestnye i zabytые stranitsy rossiisko-iaponskikh otnoshenii (1919–1948)* (Moscow, 2005), 32–33.

³⁶Shinji Yokote, “The Ideological Impact of World War I on East Asia: The West, Communism, and Asianism,” in *Russia’s Great War and Revolution in the Far East: Re-imagining the Northeast Asian Theater, 1914–1922*, eds. David Wolff, Shinji Yokote, and Willard Sunderland (Bloomington, IN, 2018), 195. “War communism,” a term coined by the Bolsheviks, refers to Russia’s economy during the civil war period, when the state eliminated the market and controlled the national economy almost totally from above.

³⁷See his 1930 acknowledgment: Ōkawa Shūmei, *Ōkawa Shūmei zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1961), 109–110. Many other right-wing ideologues such as Ōgishi Yoriyoshi (大岸頼好, 1902–1952) and Endō Yūshirō (遠藤友四郎, 1881–1962) were former Communists.

many) prominent army officers. Kita was on friendly terms with the famous Marxist-turned-anarchist Ōsugi Sakae (大杉栄, 1885–1923), who was murdered by the military police in 1923.³⁸ Many described Kita's ideas as "Communist."³⁹ The consequences of his ideological intermixing provide a highly instructive and illuminating example of how Japan was susceptible to Soviet manipulation, even when Moscow's involvement was hidden or ambiguous. On 26 February 1936, after a failed coup attempt by young army officers (see Chapter 4, p. 296), Kita was held ideologically responsible and executed in 1937. Without question, those close to the situation saw Soviet influence. Ozaki, a crypto-Communist who spied for the Soviet Union, called Kita a "revolutionary," even if his understanding might not be "Communist."⁴⁰ Having familiarized himself with the ideology of Kita and the coup leaders, Sorge wondered whether it might not, in fact, be a Communist uprising. He told his friend Prince Albrecht von Urach (1903–1969), a German nobleman working as a journalist in Tokyo, that "the Japanese Communists may have had some connection with the uprising, and that he [Sorge] did not dismiss the possibility of a Communist Japan still ruled by the emperor."⁴¹

It is possible, however, that Moscow was more directly involved in what became known as the February 26 Incident (or the 2.26 Incident of 1936). A prosecutor in charge of investigating the failed coup privately stated that the Comintern (a euphemism for Moscow) was actually behind it.⁴² If so, this involvement would not have been anomalous: Japanese investigators were aware of Moscow's instructions to its operatives in Japan; by adding rightist content to leftist thought, they could turn the army "Red." Therefore, they should continue to work with the nationalists toward eventual Communist insurrections under the guise of nationalist movements.⁴³ Rumors were flying in the 1930s about Moscow's financing of Japan's right-wing movements.⁴⁴

³⁸Harada Seiji, interview by Itō Takashi: "Sugao no Kita Ikki to 2.26," *Rekishi to jinbutsu*, December 1975, 116. Harada Seiji (原田政治, 1899–1983) worked as a fundraiser for Kita and knew his political operations well.

³⁹George M. Wilson called Kita a "right-wing left extremist." See his *Radical Nationalist in Japan: Kita Ikki, 1883–1937* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 93.

⁴⁰*Gendaishi shiryō* (2): *Zoruge jiken* (2) (Tokyo, 1962), 137, 158–159.

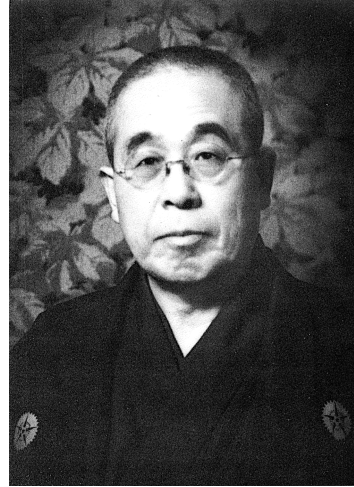
⁴¹F.W. Deakin and G.R. Storry, *The Case of Richard Sorge* (New York, 1966), 174. The account is based on the authors' interview with von Urach. Some Japanese Communists believed that the mutiny would grow into a revolution. See Makise Kikue, *Kutsumi Fusako no koyomi: Meiji shakaisbugi kara Zoruge jiken e* (Tokyo, 1975), 108. Kutsumi Fusako (九津見房子, 1890–1980) was a member of the Sorge spy ring in Japan.

⁴²Hara Hideo, Sawachi Hisae, Sakisaka Tetsurō, comps., *Sakisaka shiryō 7: Kensatsu hiroku 2.26 jiken* (Tokyo, 1990), 3:24. In 1940, a leading Japanese commentator on international affairs also suspected that Moscow had been behind the February 26 Incident and the similar coup attempt that took place earlier on 15 May 1932. Hanzawa Gyokujō, "Kominterun no Tōa katsudō to sono waga kokujō ni oyoboseru eikyō" (no pagination), Masaki Jinzaburō bunsho, no. 2423, Kokkai Toshokan Kensei shiryō shitsu, Tokyo.

⁴³*Naimushō shūbō* 5 (25 May 1936), article 4; 10 (29 June 1936), article 2.

⁴⁴See for example *Kido Kōichi kankei bunsho* (Tokyo, 1966), 247–250.

Figure 9. Kuhara Fusanosuke, 1939, a pro-Soviet Japanese industrialist who had a secret meeting with Stalin in 1927



In other words, Moscow saw the ambiguity of Japan's political left and right as an opportunity to exert influence. Indeed, some Japanese rightists did not disavow Marxism-Leninism entirely: They simply wanted to put the Japanese nation at the center of their ideology.⁴⁵ According to Tokugawa Yoshichika (徳川義親, 1886–1976), a nobleman who associated with both the right and the left, they pursued the same goal, and when it came to reorganizing the state, there was no real difference between them.⁴⁶ Moscow skillfully exploited this “no difference.” In fact, the Japanese police noticed that in the wake of the February 26 Incident, the Japanese left made a “right turn,” becoming often indistinguishable from the right.⁴⁷ In writing to Lev Karakhan in March 1932 from Tokyo, Aleksandr A. Troianovskii (1882–1955), the Soviet ambassador, emphasized that not all militarist-fascist movements were hostile toward the Soviet Union, that Soviet economic development impressed Japan, and that Japan understood the importance of the Soviet Union in its geopolitical calculations.⁴⁸ Although we cannot know for sure whether Moscow actually stood behind the February coup in Japan, it is evident that there was ample ground for collaboration between Moscow and Japan's political right. Moscow did not miss this golden opportunity. While some leftists like Ozaki worked for Moscow under cover, some rightists were also willing to work with (if not always *for*) Moscow.

Kuhara Fusanosuke (久原房之助, 1869–1965) was one such example. An affluent and powerful industrialist who founded what later became the huge Hitachi multinational conglomerate, Kuhara (like the nobleman Tokugawa)

⁴⁵See for example the case of Ōkawa Shūmei, discussed in Nakano Masao, *Kakumei wa geijutsu nari* (Tokyo, 1977), 100.

⁴⁶Ibid., 87.

⁴⁷Keihokyoku Chōsashitsu, *Sayoku undō no Nihonka* (Tokyo, 1937).

⁴⁸See AVP, f. 08, op. 15, p. 151, d. 217, ll. 20, 24, and 37.

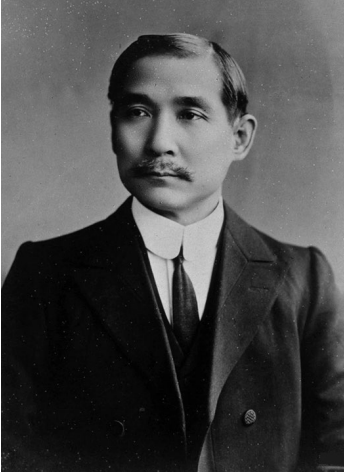


Figure 10. Sun Yat-sen, co-founder of the KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party), 1911

associated with both the left and the right. In fact, he admired both Hitler and Stalin. Kuhara entered politics in the 1920s and in 1927 became one of the only foreign private citizens until then to meet with Stalin in Moscow. Directed by Tanaka Giichi, Japan's prime minister at the time, Kuhara seems to have struck a secret verbal deal with Stalin regarding the political control of the Asian continent and played an important yet little understood role in Japan's slide into World War II (see Chapter 2). Yet, Kuhara escaped persecution for war crimes because in 1916, he lent a vast sum of money to Chinese revolutionaries, one of whom was Sun Yat-sen (孫中山, 孫逸仙, 1866–1925), who had co-founded the KMT in 1912. After World War II, Kuhara worked to achieve friendly relations between Japan and both the Soviet Union and Communist China.⁴⁹

Such exceedingly mysterious and politically suspect figures were not exclusive to Japan's political right. Kamei Kan-ichirō (亀井貫一郎, 1892–1987), a nobleman and former diplomat who called himself a “*ninja*” (忍者), spoke English, French, and German comfortably and in the 1920s joined Japan's Social-Democratic Party (社会民衆党), which he stated to an American journalist in 1928 was “conducting the most strenuous fight against the [*sic*] Japanese Imperialism in China and the [*sic*] capitalism.”⁵⁰ He knew both Ozaki (a Communist) and Kita (a radical nationalist). While playing an active role in the socialist movement, Kamei simultaneously carried out secret work for the Second Department (Intelligence) of the Army General Staff. In the mid-1930s, Kamei joined a group of Soviet experts to study Japan's political system known as the emperor system (tennōsei 天皇制) and helped the Soviet Union formulate its policy toward Japan. While

⁴⁹See Kuhara's biography: Yonemoto Jirō, *Denki Kuhara Fusanosuke ō o kataru* (Tokyo, 2006).

⁵⁰Kamei Kan-ichirō to George E. Sokolsky, 17 August 1928, George Sokolsky Papers, box 67, folder 4, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University. Sokolsky (1893–1962) was an American journalist who reported from China for fourteen years from 1918 to 1932.

promoting political cooperation with the Soviet Union against the imperialist world order, Kamei also expressed great interest in Nazism and, in 1937–1938, engaged in political intrigue involving Finnish Communist and Comintern leader Otto Kuusinen (1881–1964), Hitler, Rudolf Hess, and other Nazi figures. After World War II, Kamei appears to have worked for American intelligence in Japan. His life and work were so dramatic and mysterious that his biographer called him a “monster” (*kaibutsu* 怪物).⁵¹ Kamei’s case is discussed throughout this book.

* * * * *

Likewise, it is important to note that some radical Chinese nationalists were also hand in glove with the Soviets. Like their Japanese counterparts, radical nationalists in China were against liberalism and capitalism, promoted the idea of “China’s Stalin” (as well as “China’s Hitler” and “China’s Mussolini”), and entertained “goals and policies” that were “similar to those that [had] appeared in Chinese Communism.”⁵² Of the dozen or so graduates of the KMT’s Whampoa Military Academy⁵³ who went on to study in the Soviet Union, *all* later joined the so-called Blue-Shirt Society, an ultranationalist secret society within the KMT. This could not have been accidental. Even more graduates went on to study in Japan, and many of them also joined the society. In both the Soviet Union and Japan, these Chinese nationalists studied shoulder to shoulder with their Communist classmates and maintained close relationships with them after returning to China.⁵⁴ It would have been surprising if Moscow had *not* recruited agents from among these Whampoa graduates. In fact, there were numerous Communist spies in the ranks of the KMT, including three famous master spies who deeply infiltrated the KMT (even its special operations departments): Li Kenong (李克農, 1899–1962), Qian Zhuangfei (錢壯飛, 1895/96–1935), and Hu Di (胡底, 1905–35).⁵⁵

Yuan Shu (袁殊, 1911–1987) was another master spy who infiltrated the KMT. Having studied in Japan, where he was exposed to Marxism, he be-

⁵¹Takahashi Masanori, *Kaisō no Kamei Kan-ichirō. Gekidō no Shōwasbi o kage de sasaeta eiketsu* (Tokyo, 2000).

⁵²Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927–1937* (Cambridge, MA, 1974), 43, 81, 145. See also Maria Hsia Chang, *The Chinese Blue Shirt Society: Fascism and Developmental Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA, 1985), 17–18.

⁵³The academy was established in 1924 with the CCP’s participation and with the financial support of the Soviet Union.

⁵⁴See Deng Yuanzhong, *Guomindang hexin zuzhi zhenxiang: Lixingshe, Fuxingshe, ji suowei “Lanyishe” de yanbian yu chengzhang* (Taipei, 2000), 54–55. See also Maggie Clinton, *Revolutionary Nativism: Fascism and Culture in China, 1925–1937* (Durham, NC, 2017), 38.

⁵⁵See Hao Zaijin, *Zhongguo mimizhan* (Beijing, 2010), 11–12, 34–35. Three KMT intelligence organizations in Shanghai, Nanjing, and Tianjin, created in 1930 under the guise of news agencies, were “from top to bottom completely in their hands.” See Fang Ke and Dan Mu, *Zhonggong qingbao shounao Li Kenong* (Beijing, 1996), 43; Kai Cheng, *Zhonggong yinbi zhanxian de zhuoyue lingdaoren Li Kenong* (Beijing, 2018), 14–15.

came a Communist. In 1931, he started working for the Chinese Communist Party's intelligence service. As instructed, Yuan infiltrated the KMT's intelligence units and ultraright circles (such as the Blue-Shirt Society), as well as Japan's diplomatic and intelligence corps in Shanghai. Chinese historians later called him "white skinned but red hearted" (白皮红心), referring to the labels attached to the anti-Communist nationalists (the "Whites") and the Communists (the "Reds").⁵⁶ In 1941, Yuan provided Moscow with critical intelligence on Japan's military moves (see Chapter 5, p. 406). Wang Dazheng (王大楨, aka Wang Pengsheng [王芄生], 1893–1946) was yet another. While studying in Japan, Wang became acquainted with key Japanese political, military, and ideological figures, including Yasuoka Masahiro (安岡正篤, 1898–1983), who was a scholar of the Chinese neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming (王陽明, 1472–1529) and was widely regarded as an ideologue of Japanese radical nationalism. In his work as a diplomat and an expert on international affairs, Wang Dazheng employed many Chinese nationalists who had studied in Japan and become Communists.⁵⁷

As Chapter 2 discusses, there are strong hints that Zhang Zuolin's eldest son, Zhang Xueliang (張學良, 1901–2001), was an accomplice of Soviet and Japanese conspirators in his father's assassination. Zhang Xueliang then turned against the Soviets and fought them in a brief war in 1929 over the control of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER or KVZhD in Russian), after which he abruptly changed his allegiance and quietly colluded again with Moscow, this time against Japan in an alliance that led to Japan's occupation of Manchuria in 1931. Next, Zhang Xueliang, a self-acknowledged "fanatic patriot" (爱国狂),⁵⁸ flirted with fascism. In 1933, he traveled to Europe and met Benito Mussolini (1883–1945), "whom he came to admire."⁵⁹ Zhang believed that China's future lay in "totalitarianism," either by fascism or by Communism.⁶⁰ In the end, Zhang chose Communism. Although he did not make his choice public during the 1930s, toward the end of his life, Zhang confessed that his heart lay with Communism (see Chapter 4, p. 315).

In his senescence, Zhang still asserted his respect for Stalin as a political leader, whereas he dismissed both Hitler and Mussolini as having failed and

⁵⁶See Zeng Long, *Wo de fuqin Yuan Shu: huanyuan wumian jianjie de zhenshi yangmao* (Taipei, 2016), 10, 100; Hu Zhaofeng, Feng Yuehua, and Wu Min, *Jiandan qinxin: hongse qingbaoyuan Yuan Shu chuanqi* (Chengdu, 1999), 35–43, 63–67.

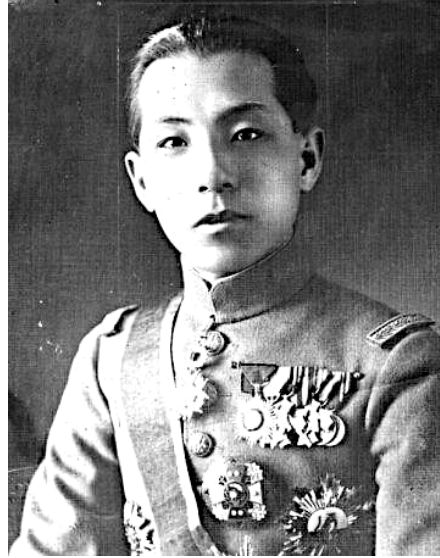
⁵⁷See Pan Changlong, "'9.18,' 'Tianzhong zouzhe' yu Wang Pengsheng," *Waiguo wenti yanjiu*, no. 3 (1997): 42–45.

⁵⁸During their first visit in 1991, Zhang's first sentence to the interviewers was "I'm a fanatic patriot." See *Zhang Xueliang koushu lishi (fangtan shilu)* (Beijing, 2014), 1:61, 1:104, 4:1017. See also *Zhang Xueliang wenji* (Beijing, 1992), 2:1181.

⁵⁹Zhang's standard English biography, Aron Shai, *Zhang Xueliang: The General Who Never Fought* (New York, 2012), 37. Unfortunately, Shai's book fails to incorporate much relevant literature. In addition, while Shai and some other Zhang biographers state that Zhang met Hitler in Germany, other sources do not confirm this meeting. Zhang asserted that he did not meet Hitler, who was in Munich when he visited Berlin. See *Zhang Xueliang koushu lishi*, 1:166.

⁶⁰Wang Shujun, *Zhang Xueliang shiji chuanqi* (Jinan, 2002), 1:515.

Figure 11. Zhang Xueliang, a key player in Stalin's China strategy, 1928



“gone down.” In Zhang’s opinion, Chiang Kai-shek had also failed as a leader because his love for himself was greater than his love for his country. In contrast, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders, Mao Zedong (毛澤東, 1893–1976) and Zhou Enlai (周恩來, 1898–1976), were “awesome” (厉害), according to Zhang. About the terror committed by the Communists, he was more philosophical, citing a famous line from a Tang-era poem: “一將功成萬骨枯” (“the achievement of a general costs ten thousand lives”).⁶¹ Although Zhang in no way deferred to foreigners, he turned out to be an invaluable political asset for Moscow. As this book discusses, he played a pivotal role in all major events in Stalin’s struggle for supremacy over China before World War II: Zhang Zuolin’s assassination in 1928, the release of the Tanaka Memorial in 1929, Japan’s occupation of Manchuria in 1931, and the formation of the Second United Front between the CCP and the KMT in 1937. Although Zhang is well known for his role in the Xi’an Incident (the forceful detention of Chiang Kai-shek) in 1936 (see Chapter 4, p. 310), historians have inexplicably ignored his major role as China’s supreme conspirator. Significantly, a member of Zhang’s entourage, Yan Baohang (閻寶航, 1895–1968), subsequently known as China’s Richard Sorge, was an invaluable spy planted deep inside China’s political and military establishment (see Chapter 3, p. 176 and Chapter 5, p. 404). Unlike Sorge, however, Yan was not caught by the enemy. Wrongly accused of being a “counterrevolutionary,” he was arrested by his leader, Mao, and died in prison in 1968 during the Cultural Revolution.⁶²

The stories of these Japanese and Chinese men highlight a critical factor

⁶¹Zhang Xueliang *koushu lisbi*, 6:1714, 1717–1718. Zhang quoted the poem slightly differently: “一將成名萬骨枯” (“the fame of a general costs ten thousand lives”).

⁶²Jin He, *Yan Baohang zhuan* (Shenyang, 2008), 518, 521; memoirs by his son Yan Mingfu

in Japanese-Soviet-Chinese relations in the interwar period—i.e., that Moscow secretly, consistently, and masterfully cultivated agents and influencers in Japan and China. In general, the Chinese were far more hard-nosed and aware of Moscow's hidden political agenda than were the Japanese. Both political wings of the Japanese government and of the military establishment in particular entertained the naive hope that they could develop and promote a productive and allied political relationship with the Soviet Union, in contrast to the direction of their Anglo-American relations. The Soviet Union, however, did not entertain any such hopes and in fact used this very aspect of Japan's political aspiration to manipulate the Japanese expertly. Some of these Japanese men may have thought that by working with the Soviets they could influence and control Moscow. If so, they were delusional; it was the other way around. Moscow used these leftists and rightists to do its own bidding. The manipulation was not always successful—but even when it was successful, Stalin rarely showed his hand. What these men failed to appreciate was the strength of the strategy that the Soviet Union developed as political and military *maskirovka* (camouflage, deception). Moscow secretly used enemy forces to implement its policies, while at the same time deploying its full political, diplomatic, economic, and military power behind the scenes.

We can trace this strategy back to the Higher School of Military Camouflage (Высшая школа военной маскировки), founded in Moscow in 1918, the year after the Bolshevik Revolution. The school's 1927 manual notes: "The enemy cannot be duped by concealment alone." Therefore, it is necessary to "create the wrong impression about our actions and intentions in the enemy. . . . The main methods of creating the wrong impression in the enemy . . . are: (1) spreading disinformation, (2) carrying out deceptive actions, and (3) creating disguised objects."⁶³ In 1923, the Politburo approved the creation of a bureau of disinformation within the secret police.⁶⁴ In 1925, a disinformation division was created within the Soviet military intelligence agency (GRU), which spread disinformation (for example, inflating the actual strengths of the Red Army) to disorient capitalist countries.⁶⁵ In general, the GRU's military disinformation operations were more active than those of the Soviet secret police.⁶⁶

(阎明复), *Yan Mingfu huiyi lu* (Beijing, 2015), 56–86. Yan Baohang's Russian code name was "Pavel" (巴维尔) (74). Mingfu became a Russian specialist who interpreted for Mao and other CCP leaders in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁶³V.N. Lobov, *Voennaia khitrost' v istorii voin* (Moscow, 1988), 18–19. This school is discussed in "Vysshhaia shkola voennoi maskirovki," *Krasnyi ofitser*, no. 1 (1918): 11.

⁶⁴Vladimir Voronov, "Ot sovetskogo dezinformbiuro," 23 February 2019, accessed 1 July 2019, <https://www.sovsekretno.ru/articles/ot-sovetskogo-dezinformbyuro-/>. Voronov questions whether this bureau was actually created. If it did exist, exactly what kind of work it carried out is unknown. Rumor in Moscow has it that not a single document has been declassified from its archive.

⁶⁵See a 1925 report in *Glazami razvedki, SSSR i Evropa, 1918–1938 gody. Sbornik dokumentov iz rossiiskikh arkhivov* (Moscow, 2015), 164–69.

⁶⁶Evgenii Gorbunov, *Stalin i GRU* (Moscow, 2010), 57.

Maskirovka constitutes the core of what, in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014, has come to be known as "hybrid war."⁶⁷ In its essence, however, hybrid war is nothing particularly new; Moscow used it in Asia during the 1920s, 1930s, and beyond when the world's attention was fixated not on the Soviet Union but on Japanese imperialism. Subsequently, this subversive strategy came to be known as reflexive control (рефлексивное управление) in the Soviet Union (and after its collapse, in the Russian Federation). The "objective of reflexive control is to force an enemy into making objective decisions that lead to his defeat by influencing or controlling his decision-making process."⁶⁸ Reflexive control techniques include intimidation, enticement, disinformation, deception, manipulation, concealment (camouflage), diversion, paralysis, exhaustion, and provocation.

To be effective, reflexive control demands a deep understanding of the enemy and its vulnerabilities. Imperial Japan's weaknesses included its sense of superiority over Russia and the Soviet Union (a by-product of Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5), its sense of injustice at the hands of the Western powers (in the post-World War I settlement), its anti-Americanism (partly a response to the anti-Japanese Immigration Act of 1924), its violently nationalistic ambitions regarding Manchuria (as Japan's economic "lifeline"), and its fragile economic foundations. All these weaknesses manifested themselves in the form of Japan's self-righteousness about its imperialist expansion. Moreover, Japan held its military forces in such high esteem that they became almost unaccountable for their actions. The Soviet Union studied Japan carefully, understood both its strengths and its weaknesses, and exploited those vulnerabilities accordingly. The Japanese government and the armed forces proved incapable of withstanding the covert provocations of its neighbor, with whom Japan had long dreamed of forming a political romance. The result presaged the doom of the Japanese Empire long before the Pacific War broke out in 1941. In fact, the notion that the United States caused Japan's collapse is for the most part historically inaccurate. However successful Japan may have been in the 1941 Pearl Harbor attack against the United States, the home of *ninjutsu* and *jūjutsu* had by then already been soundly defeated at its own game by Stalin. Japan had simply failed or refused to understand that defeat. Tellingly, Japan's final defeat at the hands of Stalin would come one week after his declaration of war against Japan in 1945.

⁶⁷Today's Russian military forces have a two-volume textbook on *maskirovka*, which is "three times longer than Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*." Lucy Ash, "How Russia Outfoxes its Enemies," 28 January 2015, BBC News website, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31020283>.

⁶⁸Timothy L. Thomas, "Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17, no. 2 (2004): 243. See also Michał Wojnowski, "Zarządzanie refleksyjne jako paradygmat rosyjskich operacji informacyjno-psychologicznych w XXI w.," *Przegląd bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego*, no. 12 (2015), 11–36. For an analysis of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine as an example of reflexive control, see Alya Shandra and Robert Seely, "The Surkov Leaks: The Inner Workings of Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies Occasional Paper, London, July 2019.

By its very nature, Stalin's game of deception is difficult to prove, for concealment was its essence. Even after nearly a century, Moscow still carefully guards its archives. Numerous files and even parts of files in the former Soviet Communist Party Archive (RGASPI) remain classified. The Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AVP RF) in Moscow does not make its lists of documents available to researchers, in effect allowing access only to those documents that the Russian government and its agencies deem politically acceptable.⁶⁹ Although the archive of the secret police (FSB) is not closed, many of the files ostensibly available to researchers are sealed and cannot be read.⁷⁰ The Russian Ministry of Defense archive (TsAMO), which presumably contains Soviet military intelligence documents, is virtually closed, as is the Russian Presidential Archive (AP RF). It is highly revealing that, as far as we know, none of the Japanese archival documents that the Soviets captured in Manchuria in 1945 have been made accessible. (By contrast, much of the Polish, German, and French archives that the Soviets captured during World War II were either returned to their countries of origin or made available to researchers.) In brief, Moscow—first the Soviet Union and then the Russian Federation—has de-classified those archival documents that suit its interpretation of history and has held back those that do not. East Asia in general, and China and Japan in particular, occupies a special place in Moscow's concealment of historical truth.

Moreover, in history as in politics, Moscow still engages in disinformation. The case of Ataman Grigorii M. Semenov (1890–1946) is a good example. The head of the anti-Bolshevik Russian émigré community in the Far East, Semenov secretly collaborated with Moscow—although in attempting to hide his clandestine life, he did not always follow Moscow's instructions. We now know that Semenov had contact with Richard Sorge. In 1931, for example, Semenov reported to Sorge that Japan was preparing for war with the Soviet Union.⁷¹ Of course, this report was Moscow's disinformation (see Chapter 3, p. 229)—a complicated case of one secret Soviet agent providing disinformation to another. Still attempting to conceal Semenov's role as a Soviet collaborator, Moscow continues

⁶⁹Documents relating to Soviet-Japanese relations are an exception. With the participation of the AVP, a Japanese scholar cataloged many relevant documents during the 1990s. See Chiharu Inaba, comp., *Sovetsko-iaponskie diplomaticheskie otnosheniia (1917–1962 gg.), katalog dokumentov (po materialam Arkhiva vnesheii politiki RF)* (Tokyo: Nauka, 1996). Yet, the AVP now disowns the catalog (which does not list classified material, in any case).

⁷⁰By contrast, the Ukrainian secret police archive of the Soviet period is now wide open. Many new works based on its documents are expected to be published in the future. See the latest studies dealing with post-Stalin Soviet foreign operations based on them: Sanshiro Hosaka. "Repeating History: Soviet Offensive Counterintelligence Active Measures." *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, no. 0 (2000): 1–30 (online publication accessible at <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2020.1822100>); Sergei Zhuk, *KGB Operations Against the USA and Canada in Soviet Ukraine, 1953–1991* (London, 2022).

⁷¹M. Alekseev, "Vash Ramzai." *Rikhard Zorge i sovetskaia voennaia razvedka v Kitae 1930–1933 gg.* (Moscow, 2010), 412; Yang Guoguang, *Gongxun yu beiju: bongse diewang Zuoerge* (Beijing, 2012), 40. We don't know whether either Semenov or Sorge knew that the other man was actually a Soviet agent.

Figure 12. Ataman Grigorii M. Semenov, leader of the anti-Soviet Russian émigré community in China and a Soviet agent, 1920s



to spread disinformation that Semenov was a Japanese agent.⁷² Historians should not be fooled by Moscow's strict and elaborate control of information.

Yet, no one—not even Moscow—can hide everything. Fragmentary information can sometimes provide a valuable clue to historical mysteries. When read carefully and critically, both published and unpublished materials, as well as declassified archival documents, are illuminating. The *absence* of documents in archives is also quite significant. I have made every effort over many years to gain access to as many documents as possible in Moscow and elsewhere. Although in matters of intelligence and camouflage, a smoking gun is rarely found, a clear, logical line of events does emerge through close analysis of the available documents, as I lay out in the following chapters.

This book's focus on Asia also addresses some peculiar lacunae in historiography. Moscow's covert operations in Europe are better known than those in Asia. In the 1920s in particular, Moscow's spectacular covert operations against Western intelligence services and émigré groups through the creation of fake anti-Soviet organizations inside the Soviet Union have become widely known.⁷³ In Soviet Ukraine from 1920 to 1924, there was a special organ charged with exporting revolution to the West (Poland).⁷⁴ Yet, Moscow found its covert operations in the West increasingly difficult because the West quickly learned the

⁷²See Hiroaki Kuromiya, "Ataman Semenov's Secret Life," *Przegląd Wschodni* 13, no. 2 (2014): 535–56.

⁷³On the case of the famous "Trust" operation and other similar ones, see Costello John and Oleg Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions: The KGB Orlov Dossier Reveals Stalin's Master Spy* (New York, 1993).

⁷⁴See O.O. Hisen, *Derzhavnyi terorizm. Diial'nist' zakordonnobo viddilu TsK KP(b)U "ZAKORDOTU". 1920–1924* (Kam'ianets'-Podil's'kyi, 2016); V.S. Sidak, ed., "Zakordot" v systemi spetssluzhbb radians'koi Ukrainy. *Sbornyk dokumentiv* (Kyiv, 2000); V.S. Sidak and V.A. Kozeniuk, eds., *Revoliutsiiu naznachit'. Eksport revoliutsii v operatsiiah sovetskikh spetssluzhbb* (Kyiv, 2004).

lesson of these operations. Poland, a country bordering the Soviet Union and fiercely jealous of its newly gained independence in 1918, probably carried out the most effective intelligence and counterintelligence operations with regards to the Soviet Union, even though their effectiveness was severely limited by Moscow's own intelligence and counterintelligence.⁷⁵

By contrast, Moscow found Asia to be an ideal playground for *maskirovka*. China, deeply divided by warlords, was an excellent target for covert operations, with the CCP willing to act as Moscow's agent. Japan proved to be an equally easy place for Soviet operations, because it was politically divided and unstable (in the twenty years between World War I and World War II, some twenty Japanese cabinets came and went) and also because it clung to the possibility of a political romance with the Soviet Union. The more unlikely such a romance appeared, the more hope Japan entertained, and the more desperate it became. As a result, contemporary Russia, China, and Japan all have reason to avoid speaking honestly about the complicated history of the 1920s and 1930s. Moscow's withholding of relevant documents does not seem inconvenient or unwelcome to either Beijing or Tokyo.⁷⁶

Consequently, there is a glaring hole in the historiography of interwar Asia. The Soviet Union—the country that, along with Japan, played the most significant role in China between the two World Wars—still remains a shadowy figure in the background.⁷⁷ This book aims to bring that figure into the light.

This book's focus on China and Japan illustrates just how consistent and persistent Moscow's covert operations were throughout this period.⁷⁸ Information

⁷⁵ Andrzej Peptoński, *Wywiad Polski na ZSSR 1921–1939* (Warsaw, 1996); *Kontrwywiad II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 2002); Andrzej Krzak, *Kontrwywiad wojskowy II Rzeczypospolitej przeciwko radzieckim służbom specjalnym 1921–1939* (Toruń, Poland, 2007).

⁷⁶ Some works have been published on these matters. On China, see M. Alekseev, *Sovetskaia voennaia razvedka v Kitae i khronika 'kitaiskoi smuty' (1922–1929)* (Moscow, 2010); V.N. Usov, *Sovetskaia razvedka v Kitae: 20-e gody XX veka* (Moscow, 2002); V.N. Usov, *Sovetskaia razvedka v Kitae: 30-e gody XX veka* (Moscow, 2007). On Japan, see Aleksei Kirichenko, *Shirarezaru NichiRo no nihyakunen*, tr. Kawamura Suguru and Nagochi Yōko (Tokyo, 2013); Kirichenko, *Iaponskaia razvedka protiv SSSR* (Moscow, 2016); Aleksandr Kulanov, *Shpionskii Tokio* (Moscow, 2014). By contrast, much scholarship has examined Moscow's anti-American espionage operations in both Russia and the United States, even if far from everything has been revealed. See for example John E. Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven, CT, 2000); V.V. Pozniakov, *Sovetskaia razvedka v Amerike 1919–1941*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 2015); M. Stanton Evans and Herbert Romerstein, *Stalin's Secret Agents: The Subversion of Roosevelt's Government* (New York, 2012); Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America—The Stalin Era* (New York, 1999); Schecter and Schecter, *Sacred Secrets*.

⁷⁷ A few exceptions include: Dan N. Jacobs, *Stalin's Man in China* (Cambridge, MA, 1981); Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception*; John W. Garver, *Chinese-Soviet Relations 1937–1945: The Diplomacy of Chinese Nationalism* (New York, 1988). Even in China, not much work takes full advantage of available Soviet and Russian sources. See, however, Xue Xiantian, *Minguo shiqi Zhong-Su guanxi shi: 1917–1949*, 3 vols. (Beijing, 2009).

⁷⁸ For a rare book that takes Asia seriously, see Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin. Waiting for Hitler, 1929–1941* (New York, 2017). Yet, even this work largely omits Stalin's invisible operations.

about Soviet espionage activities in Asia has emerged more slowly than information about those activities in the United States and Europe.⁷⁹ Newly revealed information has compelled historians to reevaluate Stalin's global ambitions—and naturally, it has forced me to review my own earlier accounts of Stalin and his era.⁸⁰

For the sake of historical truth, historians must pose difficult questions. Some so-called heroes are likely to have been villains—and vice versa. The people of Russia, China, and Japan deserve the truth. Yet, Moscow and Beijing continue to hide relevant documents and spin untruths precisely because no one has posed the difficult questions that these governments would prefer to ignore. Although Tokyo may not hide documents the way Moscow and Beijing do, it is distinctly reluctant to rehash an embarrassing and dishonorable past. Likewise, Washington displays no willingness to examine seriously its odd political romance with Moscow during the 1930s and World War II.

Historians must also critically examine the Soviet Union's internal affairs. As with its external relations, Moscow engaged in extensive covert provocations that it camouflaged as anti-Soviet activities. As a result, untold numbers of innocent Soviet people perished.⁸¹ They also deserve the truth, if only posthumously.

This book seeks to uncover these truths, as well as the many other truths buried under the tailored versions of history that Moscow, Beijing, and Tokyo would prefer to perpetuate.

⁷⁹On Stalin and Europe, see for example Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA, 2019). Stalin found it almost impossible to engage in elaborate covert actions in Europe the way he did in Asia. However, for an important work on Stalin's covert operations in post-World War II Europe, see N.V. Petrov, *Po stsenariiu Stalina: rol' organov NKVD-MGB SSSR v sovetizatsii stran Tsentral'noi i Vostochnoi Evropy* (Moscow, 2011). For a work on Soviet intelligence that covers mainly Europe, see Jonathan Haslam, *Near and Distant Neighbors: A New History of Soviet Intelligence* (Oxford, 2015); see also Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–56* (London, 2012).

⁸⁰See Kuromiya, *Stalin*; Kuromiya, "Stalin's Great Terror and The Asian Nexus," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 5 (July 2014), 775–93; Kuromiya and Andrzej Peplowski, *Między Warszawą a Tokio: Polsko-japońska współpraca wywiadowcza 1904–1944* (Toruń, Poland, 2009); Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle: Russia, The Caucasus, and Japan, 1904–1945* (Warsaw, 2016).

⁸¹The use of covert provocateurs is one of the least studied and least understood aspects of Stalin's terror. I have provided fragmentary information in my previous books: *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s–1990s* (Cambridge, 1998); *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin's Great Terror in the 1930s* (New Haven, CT, 2007); *Conscience on Trial: The Fate of Fourteen Pacifists in Stalin's Ukraine, 1952–1953* (Toronto, 2012). For a striking case of Soviet provocation under the guise of a peasant rebellion, see A.V. Venkov, "Delo Senina" ili operatsiia "Trest" na Verkhnem Donu (Moscow, 2016).

War and Romance (1894–1922)



IN THE IMPERIALIST POWER GAMES of the nineteenth century, Japan was a relatively weak yet assertive non-Western upstart. By the middle of the century, this country that had virtually isolated itself from the outside world for more than two hundred years was forced to accede to Western pressure to open itself to foreigners—and specifically, foreign trade. Even though these and other changes nearly tore Japan apart, they eventually led to the defeat of the shogunate and the restoration of imperial rule in a new guise: the Meiji Restoration (1868). A survival strategy in the face of Western powers with superior military might, the restoration meant rapid Westernization and modernization. Japan's change of course roughly coincided with the Great Reforms that took place in Russia after its defeat in the Crimean War, 1853–56.¹ Sometimes, Japan's modernization (in practical terms, Westernization) took on a comical dimension, such as forcing Western manners and customs onto its population, in a way not dissimilar to the Westernization of Russia under Peter I (1672–1725).

Its humiliating defeat in Crimea put Russia on a collision course with Japan as Tsar Alexander II (1818–1881) turned his attention away from the West to the much weaker East. In 1860, soon after that defeat, Russia seized a Chinese settlement called Haishenwai on the coast of the Sea of Japan and renamed it Vladivostok, meaning “Conquer the East,” a name with ominous overtones for Japan. (Vladivostok is only 700 km or so from Japan's northern coast, whereas it is some 6,500 km from St. Petersburg and 6,400 km from Moscow.) Japan had long been aware of a potential Russian threat because as early as the first half of the nineteenth century, Russians—like other Westerners—had frequently pressed the recalcitrant Japan to open. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Russia had come to see the Asian continent in general—Korea and China in particular—as ripe for imperial expansion—an attitude that brought Russia into competition with Japan. This rivalry culminated in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 over the control of the Far East, with Japan emerging as the victor. Ironically, this war proved to be the beginning of Japan's political romance with Russia, a furtive romance that continued for several decades and exposed Japan's vulnerability to Russian secret intelligence.

¹See the classic work Cyril E. Black, et al., *The Modernization of Japan and Russia: A Comparative Study* (New York, 1975).

Timeline: 1894–95: (First) Sino-Japanese War || 1895: Triple Intervention (Russia, France, Germany) || 1896: Li-Lobanov Treaty (China and Russia) || 1899: America’s Open Door Policy || 1899–1901: Boxer Rebellion (China) || 1902: Anglo-Japanese Alliance || 1903: Completion of Chinese Eastern Railway || 1904–5: Russo-Japanese War || 1910: Japan’s annexation of Korea || 1911: Xinhai Revolution (China) || 1913: War scare (United States and Japan) || 1914–18: World War I || 1915: Japan’s Twenty-One Demands to China || 1916: Russo-Japanese Alliance || 1917: February and October Revolutions (Russia) || 1918–21: Foreign intervention in Russia’s civil war || 1919–20: Versailles Conference || 1921–22: Washington Conference || 1922: End of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

1.1 Russia, Japan, and the United States to 1917

The modernization of Japan and Russia took two different political forms. Japan faithfully emulated the European states to various degrees in various fields and adopted a constitutional monarchy modeled on those of Britain and Prussia; in contrast, Russia remained an autocracy until 1917 in the belief that a strong autocracy was inherent in its nature. Japan’s victory over Russia in 1905, the first incident in modern history in which a European power was defeated on the battleground by a non-European power, sent shock waves around the world. This war led Russia to adopt a quasi-constitutional political body. Even so, the Russian monarchy obstinately clung to centuries-old autocratic rule. Russia’s poor performance in World War I was critical to the collapse of the Russian autocracy in February 1917 and to the Bolshevik Revolution in October of that year. The emergence of an anti-capitalist and openly atheist regime fundamentally changed the international order.

For the West, Japan’s emulation of Europe made it a model state. For Britain and the United States, both of which had a stake in the Far East and entertained further ambitions there, Japan provided a convenient and valuable counterweight to Russia’s growing expansion into the Asian continent. Japan, in turn, eventually found Britain to be a potential ally against Russia’s advances into Asia. Initially, what prompted Japan to assert its own interests in Korea and China (particularly Manchuria) was Russia’s construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, beginning in 1891. When the Japanese, the “first yellow people to go methodically to the white men’s school,”² defeated China in a war over the control of China’s tributary state Korea in 1894–95, the West was shocked:

Japan’s easy victory over huge China astounded the whole world. That these “highly intelligent children,” as one of the early British ministers to Japan had characterized them, should have so rapidly acquired the technique of Western methods was almost unbelievable.

²Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (New York, 1920), 21. In 1921, this book was published in Japanese translation as 有色人の勃興 in Tokyo.

Indeed, the full significance of the lesson was not immediately grasped, and the power of New Japan was still underestimated.³

Russia, France, and Germany quickly grasped the political significance of Japan's victory, however, and immediately intervened against Tokyo's seizure of the Liaodong Peninsula (including the city of Port Arthur) in northeast China—a diplomatic incident that became known as the Triple Intervention.⁴ Given its limited military might in comparison with these three Western powers, Japan had no choice but to retreat. This humiliation became the impetus for Japan's decision to seek an alliance with Britain (which did not take part in the intervention). Although some Japanese politicians entertained the idea of forming an alliance with Russia against the other Western powers, those favoring Britain prevailed—on the premise that sooner or later, war with Russia would be unavoidable. Abandoning its traditional diplomatic stance of “splendid isolation,” Britain accepted an alliance with Japan in 1902. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was the first alliance on equal terms between a Western and a non-Western state.⁵

Japan's rise did pose a potential threat to American maritime access to China. Now Japan dominated the vast tract of the western Pacific Rim from Taiwan to the northern tip of the Kuril Islands, leaving only a narrow channel between Taiwan and the Philippines as an unoccluded access path. Yet, Washington was not too worried at the time.

Undeniably, Japan and the United States were concerned about Russia's advance to the east, which did not stop in 1895. Russia's construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway led to an understanding among the imperial powers that the division of China was inevitable. In fact, it began in 1896, a year after the Triple Intervention against Japan. China and Russia signed a secret treaty (the Li-Lobanov Treaty) that allowed Russia to control northeast China (part of Inner Mongolia and Manchuria) almost unilaterally and build the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) linking the Russian cities of Chita and Vladivostok via the Chinese city of Harbin. By crossing through Chinese territory rather than remaining on Russian soil, this new route cut almost 1,000 km from the previous route between the two cities. (The railway was completed in 1903.) Almost three decades later, in 1924, a Soviet historian acknowledged that the Li-Lobanov Treaty was in effect a Sino-Russian military alliance, with the CER designed for the express purpose of preventing Japan from advancing across the Asian continent.⁶ The Russian move accelerated the division of China: In 1898, Germany “leased” (that is, took) a large area of the Jiaozhou (Kiautschou) Bay,

³Ibid., 21.

⁴German Kaiser Wilhelm II urged Russian Tsar Nicholas II to intervene “with all Europe against Japan” to “protect Europe from the incursion of the yellow race.” See his 26 April 1895 letter in *Perpiska Vil'gel'ma II s Nikolaem II* (Moscow-Petrograd, 1923), 7–8.

⁵See the classic work: Ian H. Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires, 1894-1907* (London, 1966).

⁶B.A. Romanov, “‘Likhunchangskii fond’ (Iz istorii russkoi imperialisticheskoi politiki na Dal'nem Vostoke),” *Bor'ba klassov*, nos. 1-2 (1924): 77–127. Soon after seizing power, the Bolshevik



Figure 1.1. The Trans-Siberian Railway at the time of the Russo-Japanese War. The northern route (St. Petersburg–Vologda–Ekaterinburg) was not fully completed until 1906.

including Qingdao (Tsingtao); then Russia “leased” the Liaodong Peninsula, including Port Arthur (part of Lüshun, formerly Dal’nyi/Dalian/Dairen), an ice-free port that Russia had long coveted. These leases posed an undisguised challenge to Japan. Moreover, Russia’s lease of Liaodong allowed it to build an extension of the CER that connected Harbin to Port Arthur in 1903. After Germany and Russia acquired their leases, Britain gained the lease of Port Edward (Weihaiwei), across the Bohai Strait from Port Arthur, in that same year.

The Russo-Japanese War

Russia’s action in China was, according to Sergei Iu. Witte (1849–1915), then finance minister of Russia, a “fatal step” that “marked the beginning of the process of carving up China.” Russia’s seizure of Port Arthur in particular was “the first step in a process that led us into war with Japan, a war that led in turn to revolutionary disorders in Russia” and that shook “the foundations of the Russian Empire.”⁷ The foreign division of China led to the anti-foreign

government published a large number of secret treaties that the tsarist government had signed with foreign powers. Yet, it did not publish this treaty until after China had acknowledged its existence in 1922. Russia had bribed the Chinese diplomat Li Hongzhang (李鴻章, 1823–1901) with 3 million rubles into signing this treaty, although Sergei Iu. Witte, the finance minister of Russia, denied the bribe. Part of the treaty became known in 1921 when Witte’s memoir was first published abroad: See Sergei Iu. Witte, *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, trans. and ed. Sidney Harcave (Armonk, NY, 1990), 229–38.

⁷ *Memoirs of Count Witte*, 282–83, 373.

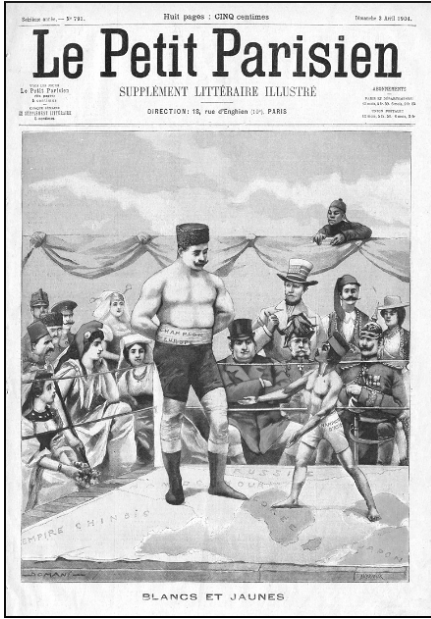


Figure 1.2. A French image of the Russo-Japanese War: “Whites and Yellows”

Boxer Rebellion in China (1899–1901), which in turn invited large-scale foreign intervention in China.

By all accounts, Russia had underestimated Japan. It did seek to placate Japan in 1898 by recognizing Korea as belonging to Japan’s sphere of influence. Yet, in the end, the tsar ignored Japan, against the counsel of Foreign Minister Vladimir Lamzdorf (Lamsdorf) (1845–1907) and others, believing that Japan would not fight back and that Korea would become part of the Russian Empire.⁸ Tsar Nicholas accepted the reckless policies pursued by his viceroy in the Far East, and “in his heart,” according to Witte, “thirsted for the glory that would come from a victorious war.”⁹ Nicholas believed that victory would be easy, calling the Japanese “macaques” (макаки), or monkeys, even in official documents.¹⁰

In contrast, Japan had carefully prepared for war against Russia. It had spread an intelligence network far and wide, from Europe to Asia, and employed subversion within and outside Russia, targeting political opposition groups and national minorities. Russia was aware of Japan’s intelligence work (which Britain assisted), but when hostilities broke out, Russia was taken aback and overwhelmed by Japan, having failed to match its war preparations. It was at this point that Russia began to emulate and develop Japan’s intelligence practices

⁸Romanov, “Likhunchangskii fond,” 90–91.

⁹*Memoirs of Count Witte*, 278, 366.

¹⁰Sergei Iu. Witte, *Vospominaniia. Tsarstvovanie Nikolaia II*, 2nd ed. (Leningrad, 1924), 1:239, 242.

(“total espionage”) to the extreme.¹¹ As a Russian historian has noted, “In a broad sense, the experience of Russian MI [military intelligence] during the Manchurian campaign [of 1904–5] laid the corner stone of the establishment of one of the most powerful secret services in the history of the twentieth century.”¹² Thus, at this time, Russia was already laying the groundwork for its later intervention in Japan.

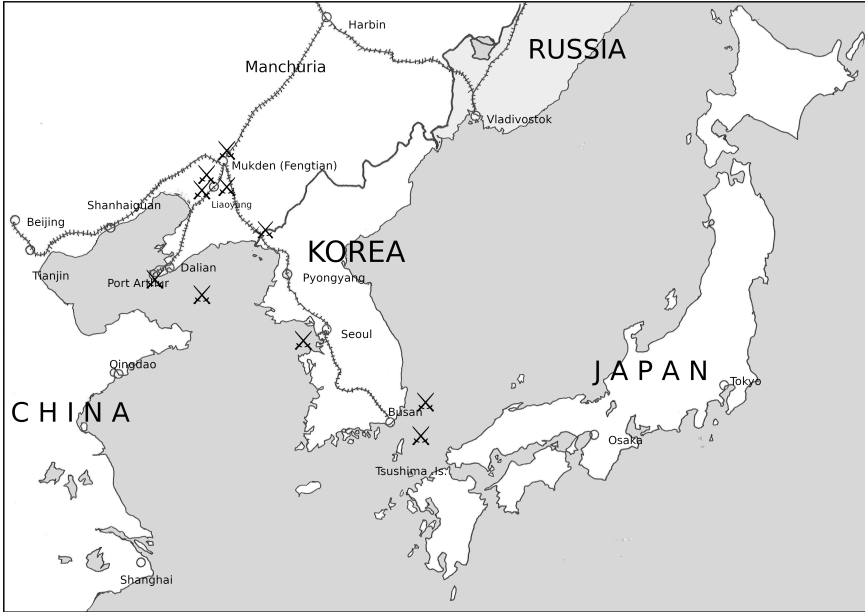


Figure 1.3. Major battles in the Russo-Japanese War. The Seoul–Busan Railway opened for operation during the war.

With Russia’s Baltic Fleet almost completely destroyed at the Battle of Tsushima in May 1905, the Russo-Japanese War ended with what appeared to be Japan’s spectacular victory. In fact, the victory was more fortunate than decisive, in the sense that by the time the two countries reached a ceasefire shortly after Tsushima, Japan’s resources were almost exhausted. Although Japan was elated by the victory and the Japanese army came to believe in its invincibility, some Japanese military experts remained deeply concerned about the relative weakness of Japan’s military manpower and national economy in comparison with those

¹¹Hiroaki Kuromiya and Georges Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle: Russia, The Caucasus, and Japan, 1904–1945* (Warsaw, 2016), chap. 2; Hiroaki Kuromiya and Andrzej Peplowski, “Stalin, Espionage, and Counterespionage,” in *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953*, eds. Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon (New York, 2014), 73–91.

¹²Evgeny Sergeev, *Russian Military Intelligence in the War with Japan, 1904–05: Secret Operations on Land and at Sea* (London, 2007), 185.

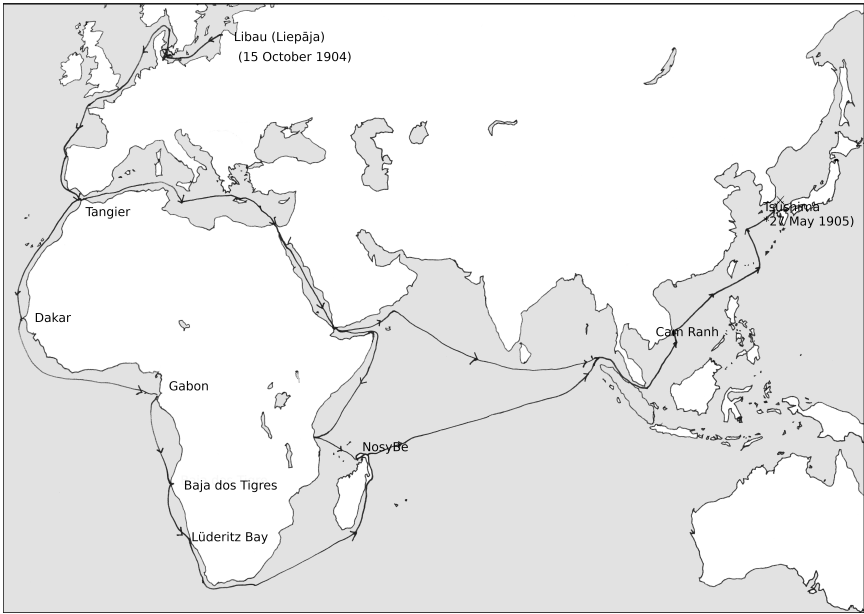


Figure 1.4. The Baltic Fleet was reorganized as the Second Pacific Squadron and dispatched to the Far East in three formations on different dates and along three routes, the longest of which was more than 30,000 km. Their parlous journeys were facilitated by France and Germany at their respective colonial bases. The three groups joined forces in Cam Ranh (in today's Vietnam) and proceeded to Tsushima, where they were destroyed in battle.

of other Western powers—Russia included. This concern came to haunt Japan after World War I.

The impact of the war

All the same, Japan's victory was epoch making. The defeat of a European autocracy by an Asian constitutional monarchy prompted many countries (Persia and Ottoman Turkey, for example) to explore a constitutional path in their own countries. It convinced the Ottomans, against whom Russia had waged successful wars since the nineteenth century, that Western powers were not unbeatable. Likewise, it gave many colonized peoples in the world (in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere) hope of liberation from Western colonial powers. It had a similar impact on oppressed national minorities (especially Muslims) within the Russian Empire.¹³ As a German naval officer remarked at the time, "The role of the white race as Lords in Asia has ended. This is the beginning of a new era

¹³Klaus Kreiser, "Der Japanische Sieg über Russland (1905) und sein Echo unter den Muslimen," *Die Welt des Islams* 21, nos. 1–4 (1981): 224–26.

in world history.”¹⁴ A Belgian newspaper noted: “Port Arthur has surrendered. This event is one of the greatest events in modern history. . . . The significance of the disaster cannot be underrated now. For the first time the old world has been humiliated by an irreparable defeat dealt it by the new world, a world mysterious, and, to all appearances, adolescent, which was only yesterday won to civilization.”¹⁵ Quoting this article, Vladimir Lenin welcomed Japan’s crushing victory over his own country:

Advancing, progressive Asia has dealt backward and reactionary Europe an irreparable blow. Ten years ago this reactionary Europe, with Russia in the lead, was perturbed by the defeat of China at the hands of young Japan, and it united to rob Japan of the best fruits of her victory. Europe was protecting the established relations and privileges of the old world, its prerogative to exploit the Asian peoples—a prerogative held from time immemorial and sanctified by the usage of centuries. The recovery of Port Arthur by Japan is a blow struck at the whole of reactionary Europe. . . . This disaster implies a tremendous acceleration of worldwide capitalist development, a quickening of history’s pace. . . . The Russian people has gained from the defeat of the autocracy.¹⁶

In contrast, we know little about how Stalin reacted to Russia’s defeat. While he saw it as a sign of bankrupted tsarism, he also saw the surrender of Port Arthur as “disgraceful” (позорно).¹⁷ Later, in the 1930s, he was determined to recover the southern half of Sakhalin, which had been lost to Japan.¹⁸ Stalin listened fondly to the song “On the Hills of Manchuria,” proclaiming revenge on Japan.¹⁹ In light of highly emotional remarks he delivered in 1945 (see Chapter 5, p. 425), Stalin clearly did not share Lenin’s assessment and instead entertained a deeply felt sense of resentment. His response to Russia’s defeat is probably one of the few times when Stalin’s political self—steely cold and devoid of human sentiment—failed him.²⁰

Japan’s presence on the world stage as the so-called liberator of the non-Western world reached its zenith in the years following its victory in the Russo-Japanese War.

¹⁴Quoted in Rotem Kowner, ed., *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War* (London, 2007), 304.

¹⁵Quoted in V.I. Lenin, “Padenie Port-Artura,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1967), 9:151.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 152, 158. An English version, *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1962), was freely consulted here and elsewhere in the present book.

¹⁷I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniia* (Moscow, 1953), 1:74.

¹⁸K.M. Simonov, *Glazami cheloveka moego pokoleniia. Razmysleniia o Staline* (Moscow, 1988), 427–28.

¹⁹Artem Sergeev and Ekaterina Glushik, *Besedy o Staline* (Moscow, 2006), 22–23, 78.

²⁰Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin, Profiles in Power* (Harlow, UK, 2005).

The U.S. reaction to Japan's victory

Within two decades, however, Japan's prestige had plummeted. As is often the case, victory turned out to be defeat in disguise. Just like in 1895, the Western imperial powers were again alarmed by Japan's victory. Sharing Britain's fear of Russian expansion, Washington had sympathized with Japan during the war, and American financiers had willingly supported Japan. (In 1899, the United States had already declared an "Open Door Policy" in China, a policy designed to secure for the United States equal footing with other imperial powers. The United States, along with Japan, had protested Russia's refusal to withdraw from Manchuria after China's anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion.) President Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. (1858–1919) hoped the war would weaken both Russia and Japan: At the beginning of the war, he told the German ambassador to the United States that it "is to our interest that the war between Russia and Japan should drag on."²¹ A close investigation reveals Roosevelt's shifting and often studied response toward Japan. During the war, he was concerned about those in Japan who had favored a Russo-Japanese alliance over an Anglo-Japanese alliance. Yet, even in July 1905, when Japan's victory was certain, Roosevelt suggested to a Japanese envoy that Japan adopt an "Asian Monroe Doctrine," a doctrine for the exclusion of the West from Asia, although the president felt that it was not expedient for Japan to announce this doctrine at the time because he intended to announce it himself after he stepped down from office. Roosevelt even attempted to flatter the Japanese by saying that he had much more in common with the yellow-skinned Japanese than with the white-skinned Russians.²² Roosevelt disliked Russian despotism and preferred Japan because it had adopted Western constitutional rule. Earlier, in July 1904, he had written to Secretary of State John Hay (1838–1905) that "the Japs played our game because they have played the game of civilized mankind."²³

Roosevelt was conflicted, however. In a letter dated 13 June 1904 to Cecil Arthur Spring Rice (1859–1918), an Englishman and close friend, he began with a note: "Personal. Be very careful that no one gets a chance to see this" and then expressed his feelings about the Russian people and Russian despotism:

I never anticipated in the least such a rise as this of Japan's, but I have never been able to make myself afraid of Russia in the present. I like the Russian people and believe in them. I earnestly hope that after the fiery ordeal through which they are now passing they will come forth faced in the right way for doing well in the future. But I see nothing of permanent good that can come to Russia, either for herself

²¹Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Edward H. Zabriskie, *American-Russian Rivalry in the Far East: A Study in Diplomacy in Power Politics: 1895–1914* (Philadelphia, 1946), 108.

²²*Nihon gaikō bunsho. Dai 37kan dai 38kan bessatsu. NichiRo sensō V* (Tokyo, 1960), 712, 742, 772–73.

²³Eugene P. Trani, *The Treaty of Portsmouth: An Adventure in American Diplomacy* (Lexington, KY, 1969), 31–32.

or for the rest of the world, until her people begin to tread the path of orderly freedom, of civil liberty, and of a measure of self-government. Whatever may be the theoretical advantages of a despotism, they are incompatible with the growth of intelligence and individuality in a civilized people.²⁴

Roosevelt then recounted the view that he had recently expressed to two Japanese diplomats during a lunch in Washington:

I told them that I thought their chief danger was lest Japan might get the “big head” and enter into a general career of insolence and aggression; that such a career would undoubtedly be temporarily very unpleasant to the rest of the world, but that it would in the end be still more unpleasant for Japan.²⁵

Undeniably, the American president was growing increasingly concerned about where Japan’s power could lead. Roosevelt proved prophetic in this regard. Although the war was fought on Chinese and Korean soil, both Japan and Russia completely ignored the interests of China and Korea—and it was China and Korea that suffered as a result. Japan behaved just like every Western imperial power, and often worse, deeply alienating even its ally, Britain. Describing Japan’s behavior in Korea in 1908, the British journalist F.A. McKenzie (1869–1931) lamented Britain’s disregard for Japan’s brutality to Koreans:

We owe it to ourselves and to our ally, Japan, to let it be clearly known that a policy of Imperial expansion based upon breaches of solemn treaty obligations to a weaker nation, and built up by odious cruelty, by needless slaughter, and by a wholesale theft of the private property rights of a dependent and defenceless peasantry, is repugnant to our instincts and cannot fail to rob the nation that is doing it of much of the respect and goodwill with which we all so recently regarded her.²⁶

As if echoing the British ambivalence toward Japan, Roosevelt’s conflicted feelings grew, even as he maintained an unconcerned air. He wrote to Rice in June 1904:

Don’t understand from the above that I was laying the ground for any kind of interference by this government in the Far East. . . . Of course, in many ways the civilization of the Japs is very alien to ours. . . . The Japs interest me and I like them. I am perfectly well aware that if they win out it may possibly mean a struggle between them and us in the future, but I hope not and believe not. At any rate, Russia’s course

²⁴ *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Elting E. Morison (Cambridge, MA, 1951), 4:829.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 830.

²⁶ F.A. McKenzie, *The Tragedy of Korea* (New York, ca. 1908), vi.

during the last three years has made it evident that if she wins she will organize northern China against us and rule us absolutely out of all the ground she can control. . . . There was nothing whatever to warrant us going to war on behalf of either side, or doing otherwise than observe a strict neutrality, which we have done. The good will of our people has been with the Japanese, but the government has been scrupulous in its impartiality between the combatants. . . . I do not anticipate that Tokyo will show a superior morality to that which obtains in Berlin, Vienna and Paris, not to speak of London and Washington, or of St. Petersburg. But I see nothing ruinous to civilization in the advent of the Japanese to power among the great nations.²⁷

When the war turned favorable for Japan, Roosevelt began to fear Japan's dramatic rise more deeply, viewing it as a possible threat to the United States (particularly with regard to China and the Philippines, the latter of which the United States had seized from Spain merely a few years earlier). While simultaneously endorsing an Asian Monroe Doctrine, in July 1905, Roosevelt told the Russian ambassador to the United States that "in the beginning of the conflict," his sympathies had been with Japan, but that "with the development of the war," he had begun to favor Russia. According to the ambassador, Roosevelt understood that America's chief rival in trade and industry was not Russia but Japan. Therefore, "a considerable strengthening of Japan cannot coincide with American interests," and "the complete exclusion of Russia from the Pacific Ocean" was unwelcome to the United States.²⁸

Now seeing an end to the conflict as beneficial to U.S. interests, Roosevelt offered to mediate peace between Russia and Japan. Meeting in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, they signed a treaty in September 1905; Roosevelt was awarded a 1906 Nobel Peace Prize for his mediation. He wanted to save the balance of power between the two countries in the Far East. The treaty allowed Japan to secure a big foothold in the Asian continent, especially the control of the Harbin-Port Arthur Railway (which Japan renamed the South Manchurian Railway), the lease of Kwantung Territory, and the creation of a military force (the Kwantung Garrison or the Kwantung Army from 1919 onward) to protect Japan's acquisitions in China. But Witte, Russia's plenipotentiary at Portsmouth, was jubilant about the outcome. When an American journalist asked him about the treaty, Witte proclaimed triumphantly: "Not only do we not pay so much as a kopek but we obtain half of Sakhalin now in their [Japanese] possession. . . . It was a complete victory for us."²⁹

²⁷ *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 4:831–33.

²⁸ See Zabriskie, *American-Russian Rivalry*, 120.

²⁹ Tyler Dennett, *Roosevelt and the Russo-Japanese War: A Critical Study of American Policy in Eastern Asia in 1902–5, Based Primarily upon the Private Papers of Theodore Roosevelt* (Garden City, NY, 1925), 263.

Meanwhile, the growing U.S. involvement in Asian affairs led to the typical configuration of imperial contention: secret schemes amid fierce competition. It is widely believed that Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, for example, was based on a secret agreement between Japan and the United States that allowed Japan to colonize Korea in exchange for Japan's recognition of U.S. possession of the Philippines (the so-called Taft-Katsura Memorandum of 1905, which Koreans consider to be America's betrayal of Korea).³⁰

At the same time, the U.S. Navy began to draft secret war plans against Japan (known as War Plan Orange). For the first time in American history, the United States "prepared war plans in peacetime directed at a specific adversary."³¹ Moreover, the goal of the war plans was the " 'complete' defeat of Japan, couched in terms such as 'enforcing submission' and 'imposing our will.'"³² War Plan Orange marked the emergence of the United States as an imperial power. In fact, one could argue that these war plans were the beginning of the Pacific War that would officially break out in 1941.

While anti-Asian sentiment in general was not new, specifically anti-Japanese feeling had been smoldering in the United States since before the Russo-Japanese War. Roosevelt noted in March 1904 that the United States "as a whole tends to sympathize with Russia."³³ In February 1905, when it became clear that Japan would win the war against Russia, the San Francisco *Chronicle* ran a "banner, page one headline proclaiming 'JAPANESE INVASION THE PROBLEM OF THE HOUR.'"³⁴ In October 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education adopted a policy of requiring all public school students of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese descent to attend a segregated "Oriental School."³⁵ This new policy violated the 1894 treaty between the United States and Japan on the rights of ethnic Japanese living in the United States. Tokyo and Washington avoided open conflict by making mutual concessions (through a series of informal understandings known as the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907–8), in which the United States promised to rescind San Francisco's school segregation policy, and Japan voluntarily limited immigration.³⁶

At the same time, anti-American feelings were growing in Japan. There

³⁰Tyler Dennett, "President Roosevelt's Secret Pact with Japan," *Current History Magazine*, October 1924, 15–21. In fact, this memorandum merely confirmed the informal agreement that had been reached between Japan and the United States. See Raymond S. Esthus, "The Taft-Katsura Agreement—Reality or Myth?," *Journal of Modern History* 31, no. 1 (1959): 46–51.

³¹Tal Tovoy and Sharon Halevi, "America's First Cold War: The Emergence of a New Rivalry," in Kowner, *Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, 150.

³²Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945* (Annapolis, MD, 1991), 363. See also 27–28.

³³*Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 4:760.

³⁴Quoted in Charles M. Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855–1975* (Berkeley, CA, 1976), 50.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 54. Children of Chinese descent had been segregated since 1884.

³⁶See Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* (Berkeley, CA, 1977), pp. 31–45.

was widespread sentiment among the Japanese that the Portsmouth Treaty did not do justice to Japan's victory in the war and was too charitable to the loser—and that the United States was responsible for the treaty. These ill-feelings toward the United States were not quite justified. After all, Tokyo had willingly renounced war reparations and some territorial gains in order to reach a ceasefire. But Russia's tactical diplomacy had certainly charmed the American public. Witte was overtly histrionic, adopting informal American manners with finesse while ignoring the traditional protocols of diplomacy. In contrast, Japanese diplomats had failed to appeal to the American public, observing punctiliously the formalities of Western diplomacy. The Japanese felt unwittingly tricked into accepting a raw deal.³⁷ In various parts of Japan, popular anger led to riots that targeted foreigners—Russians and Americans in particular.

In 1907, the crisis in American-Japanese relations even led to persistent rumors of possible war between the two countries. In 1908, however, the Root-Takahira Agreement smoothed out the conflict through mutual concessions: curbs on Japanese immigration in exchange for an American recognition of Japanese hegemony in Southern Manchuria and Korea.³⁸ But the United States did not easily cede Manchuria to Japan's hegemony. Secretary of State Philander C. Knox (1853–1921), railway tycoon Edward H. Harriman (1848–1909), and others made various attempts to “smoke out Japan.”³⁹ For example, Knox proposed internationalizing the railways in Manchuria under Russian and Japanese control. These attempts failed because Russia and Japan worked in concert to thwart them. According to the Japanese scholar Chiba Isao, the Knox proposal was as shocking to the Japanese as the Triple Intervention had been. It served as yet another example of anti-Japanese sentiment and prompted the Japanese ambassador in Washington to note in his diary in 1910 that it would be “impossible to avoid war between Japan and the United States.”⁴⁰

Russo-Japanese rapprochement

In contrast, Russia and Japan began cooperating almost immediately after the end of the Russo-Japanese War. American concern about Japan's rise in the Far East gave Russia new opportunities for its own imperialist ventures. During the peace negotiations in Portsmouth, Witte had already broached the subject with his Japanese counterpart Komura Jutarō (小村壽太郎, 1855–1911), proposing an alliance between Russia and Japan:

³⁷ See Susanne Schattenberg, “Die Sprache der Diplomatie oder das Wunder von Portsmouth: Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der Außenpolitik,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 56, no. 1 (2008): 3–26.

³⁸ For U.S.-Japanese relations of this period, see Raymond A. Esthus, *Theodore Roosevelt and Japan* (Seattle, WA, 1967); Charles E. Neu, *An Unknown Friendship: Theodore Roosevelt and Japan, 1906–1909* (Cambridge, MA, 1967); Chiba Isao, *Kyū gaikō no keisei. Nihon gaikō: 1900–1919* (Tokyo, 2008).

³⁹ Philander Knox, quoted in David J. Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia* (London, 1950), 100.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Chiba, *Kyū gaikō no keisei*, 214.



Figure 1.5. In general, the regions north of the Great Wall (marked by the undulating lines) were considered Manchuria and Mongolia. The definition of “Inner Mongolia” has changed over time, however. The map shows today’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The white line through Inner Mongolia delimits the extent of westward expansion by Manzhouguo in the 1930s.

I attempted to have included in the treaty we were to sign at Portsmouth a provision for a postwar alliance between the two countries, whereby one would defend the other if the interests of either, as defined in the treaty, were menaced. When I discussed my idea with Komura, the chief Japanese plenipotentiary, he was evasive, but implied that the treaty might include something less binding than an alliance. So I sent a telegraph to Count Lamsdorf, our foreign minister, asking for instructions.⁴¹

Despite Japan’s fear that a Russo-Japanese rapprochement might alarm Washington, Japan and Russia began forging a closer relationship against the United States soon after the end of hostilities, concluding four agreements between 1907 and 1916. These agreements contained secret protocols that demarcated each country’s spheres of influence in Asia, with Korea falling to Japan, Outer Mongolia to Russia, and Inner Mongolia divided between them. The 1916 agreement, signed during World War I, led to a formal alliance between the two countries.⁴² The secret protocol within this last (1916) agreement, which concerned China,

⁴¹ *Memoirs of Count Witte*, 697.

⁴² Michio Yoshimura, *Zōho: Nihon to Rosia* (Tokyo, 1991).

was directed against their common enemy at the time, Germany—at least according to Russian and Japanese negotiators.⁴³ Some Russian, American, and Japanese scholars argue, however, that the agreement was also or even primarily directed against the United States.⁴⁴ They may well be right, given the fact that Germany no longer posed a realistic threat to either side's sphere of influence in China. Moreover, the agreement was signed on July 3, the day before American Independence Day, as if to snub Washington.⁴⁵ If this interpretation is correct, Russia and Japan elaborately camouflaged their real target. Regardless of which country the agreement was directed against, Britain supported the rapprochement of Russia and Japan, both of which were fighting on Britain's side during World War I.

The Russo-Japanese alliance was a remarkable realignment of imperial powers on the Asian continent. In fact, it was part of a larger, global reconfiguration of forces: the Triple Entente based on the Franco-Russian Alliance (1894), the Entente Cordiale between Britain and France (1904), the Anglo-Russian Entente (1907) (which ended the so-called Great Game, the famous rivalry between Britain and Russia for hegemony over Asia), and the Franco-Japanese Treaty of 1907.

The alliance between Russia and Japan did not do away with mutual distrust, which died particularly hard among military leaders on both sides. But some Japanese, most notably Tanaka Giichi, came to the conclusion that Russo-Japanese agreements were preferable to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (which was renewed and expanded twice, in 1905 and 1911). Tanaka knew Russia well. In 1898, Captain Tanaka was sent to Russia's capital as an assistant military attaché and studied Russia diligently. Tanaka loved Russia but regarded it as a rival and enemy of the Japanese Empire in Asia. Returning from Russia in 1902, he took part in the Russo-Japanese War as a staff officer. After the war, he attained the rank of General, was knighted, and eventually became prime minister in 1927. Recalling his years in Russia, Tanaka used to tell Russians that “he had drunk so much vodka with Russian officers during his service in Russia that nothing could destroy the ties” between them.⁴⁶ As Chapter 2 discusses, Tanaka repeatedly confessed his “love” for Russia during the 1920s.

⁴³Peter Berton, *Russo-Japanese Relations, 1905–1917: From Enemies to Allies* (New York, 2012); Berton, “A New Russo-Japanese Alliance?: Diplomacy in the Far East during World War I,” *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, no. 11 (1993): 72. See also Konstantin Sarkisov, *Rossia i Iaponiia. Sto let otnoshenii (1817–1917)* (Moscow, 2015), 659.

⁴⁴E.A. Baryshev contends for example that when signing the agreement, Japan had both Germany and the United States in mind. See E.A. Baryshev, “Russko-iaponskaia konventsiia 1916 g. i ee mezhdunarodnoe politicheskoe znachenie,” *Iaponiia. Ezhegodnik*, 35 (2006): 243–56; Bruce A. Elleman, “The 1907–1916 Russo-Japanese Secret Treaties: A Reconsideration,” *Ajia bunka kenkyū* no. 25 (1999): 32–33; Hata Ikuhiko, “NichiRo sensō go ni okeru NichiBei oyobi NichiRo kiki (2),” *Ajia kenkyū* 15, no. 3 (1986): 65.

⁴⁵I owe this point to an informal communication from Bruce A. Elleman.

⁴⁶George Alexander Lensen, ed., *Revelations of a Russian Diplomat: The Memoirs of Dmitrii I. Abrikosov* (Seattle, 1964), 268.



Figure 1.6. Russia and Japan divided Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. As of 1916, the darker shaded areas of Manchuria and Outer and Inner Mongolia belonged to Russia’s sphere, and the lighter shaded areas of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia belonged to Japan’s. Arrows indicate two small areas whose spheres remained unclear.[†]

[†] See Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, “Imagining Manmō: Mapping the Russo-Japanese Boundary Agreements in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia, 1907–1915,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, no. 2 (March 2012): 1–30.

In 1906, soon after the Russo-Japanese War, Tanaka had begun to doubt the utility of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which he suggested was more beneficial to Britain than to Japan. Even though Russia (or a Russian-French-German bloc) still remained Japan’s major obstacle in Asia, Tanaka proposed that Japan might consider advancing to the south (against European and American powers) rather than to the north (against Russia). He went even further, stating that at some point, Japan might do well to renounce the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and form a Russo-Japanese alliance, which would allow Japan to seize British interests in the Far East and divert Russia away from the Far East and toward India.⁴⁷ In subsequent years, Japan proceeded along those lines Tanaka had delineated.

Tanaka Giichi’s secret affair with Russia

Tanaka’s love affair with Russia involved far more than a mere endorsement of Russo-Japanese rapprochement: Tanaka secretly provided confidential military material to the Russian side. Along with church relics from Port Arthur, Tanaka

⁴⁷ Tanaka’s memorandum quoted in Tsunoda Jun, *Manshū mondai to kokubō hōshin: Meiji kōki ni okeru kokubō kankyō no hendō* (Tokyo, 1977), 661–96. See also Kurosawa Fumitaka, “Meiji matsu, Taishō shoki no NichiRo kankei,” *Gaikō shiryō kanpō*, no. 30 (March 2017), 57–74; Kobayashi Michihiko, *Nihon no tairiku seisaku 1895–1914* (Tokyo, 1996), 152–53.

“from time to time” handed information unavailable to the public (such as war lectures that had been read to Japanese officers) to the Russian military attaché V.K. Samoilov (1866–1916) and kept him informed about the work of various committees in the Japanese Army. He also helped to quash a scandal involving a Russian officer in Japan. Tanaka did all this even before the 1907 Russo-Japanese Agreement. Almost certainly to reward Tanaka for his secret service to Russia, Samoilov recommended to the Russian government that it decorate Tanaka with the Order of Saint Stanislav as an incentive for him to continue to provide confidential information to Russia.⁴⁸ One can only wonder about the extent of Tanaka’s secret dealings with the Russians. Consider, for example, the draft of the document that Tanaka wrote detailing Japan’s fundamental military strategy: the top secret Imperial Defense Policy of 1907. Did Tanaka leak it to Russia? Oddly enough, no historian has ever questioned what else Tanaka may have secretly shared with the Russians in addition to that mentioned by Samoilov. Understanding these dealings, to the extent that they did exist, is critical to making sense of the Soviet Union’s eventual political strategy toward Japan and China.

Outwardly, Tanaka continued to promote a Russo-Japanese alliance, which materialized in 1916—and despite Tanaka’s expectations, coexisted with the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 helped clinch the Russo-Japanese Alliance of 1916. Japan sold weapons and ammunition to Russia, and at London’s request, the Japanese Navy carried shipments of gold for Russia three times—the last of which was in 1917—so that Russia could purchase Canadian weapons and armaments.⁴⁹ This was and probably remains the apex of Russo-Japanese relations.

“War scare” in the Pacific

Meanwhile, Japan’s relations with the United States soured further.⁵⁰ Sensing this deterioration, in 1909, Homer Lea (1876–1912), an American political adventurer in China, published *The Valor of Ignorance*, which he had written soon after the Russo-Japanese War. In his book, Lea insisted that war between Japan and the United States was inevitable (“In the national fabric of Japan and the United States, in their international and human relationship, conditions potential of peace are not to be found”) and sounded the alarm that the United States was not ready for this war.⁵¹ In his introduction to the book, retired Major-General J.P. Story echoed Lea’s warning:

⁴⁸See Samoilov’s top secret reports to the Russian General Headquarters: Hoover Institution Archives, Russia. Voennyi agent (Japan), box 1, folder 1:1, 432–33, folder 1:2, 82–83 (21/8 December 1906). Tanaka’s secret activity was first revealed by P.E. Podalko in his *Iaponiia v sud’bakh rossiiian: Ocherki istorii tsarskoi diplomatii i rossiiskoi diaspori v Iaponii* (Moscow, 2004), 96–98.

⁴⁹Saitō Seiji, “Nihon kaigun ni yoru Roshia kinkai no yusō 1916–1917 nen,” *Kokusai seiji*, no. 97 (May 1991), 154–77.

⁵⁰For a concise analysis of the estrangement between the two countries, see Akira Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897–1911* (Cambridge, MA, 1972).

⁵¹Homer Lea, *The Valor of Ignorance* (New York, 1909), 169.