

# Russia and the Great Powers in the Far East, 1855-1914

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## INTRODUCTION

International politics in the Far East in the 1890s and the early 1900s was an example of "imperialism" in modern history. The Great Powers (including Russia, France, Britain, Germany, and the United States) and Japan were involved in a rivalry for political and economic domination in the Far East, which intensified and ultimately led to two major wars within a decade: Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95 and Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05. Korea, which had suffered from relatively low levels of economic and technological developments, served as the epicenter of the rivalry due to its geopolitical significance. Surrounded by China, Russia, and Japan, the Korean peninsula has been the strategic focus in the Far East, which in a large part explains why the two wars broke out concerning Korea. Of the Great Powers, Russia pursued the most aggressive policy in the Far East with the decision to build the Trans-Siberian Railway. A Russian strategic objective in the Far East appeared to be the political and economic domination of China and furthermore the expansion of its power into the Asian-Pacific region. Pressured by the Russian expansionism in the Far East, Japan attempted to dominate Korea at all cost for both defensive

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and offensive purposes, which became the source of conflicts between Japan and China as well as Russia.

By and large, at the time, there were three sets of distinct yet related rivalries which dominated strategic realities in the Far East: China versus Japan, Russia versus Japan, and Russia versus China. These rivalries became further complicated as Britain, Germany, France, and the United States exerted their influence to seek their own political and economic interests in the region. An analysis of the rivalries provides the methodological framework for this study. Major questions to be dealt with in this study include: What was the role and responsibility of Russia in the Far East in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries? What was the nature of the rivalry among the Great Powers and Japan? And to what extent, did Korea play an important role in the Far Eastern politics during the time span?

The examination of Russian strategic rivalries with China and Japan in the Far East at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provides important lessons and sheds light upon the future of Northeast Asia.

## I. Russian Expansion in the Far East

The impact of the West upon the Far East began to materialize in the mid-19th century. Britain first began its penetration in China in the 1840s and the United States followed, opening up Japan a decade later. These two events marked a defeat for both China and Japan, and soon communication and commercial relations began to develop between the Far East and the western world. With the outbreak of rivalry among the western powers for the markets of the Far East, Russia could no longer ignore the potential significance of both the Pacific and Asian continent.<sup>1)</sup>

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1) Gregory Bienstock, *The Struggle for the Pacific* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1937) p.125. In particular, the defeat in the Crimean War deepened the Russian

Russia's penetration into the Far East began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Following the Chinese defeat in the Opium War, concluded by a humiliating Anglo-Chinese Treaty of Nanking in 1842, the Russians took advantage of China's dilemma to extort the formal concession of the territories over which they exercised de facto control. In May, 1858, yielding to Governor-General of Eastern Siberia Nicholas Muraviev's persuasions and threats, China signed the Treaty of Aigun. The treaty recognized Russian sovereignty over the left bank of the Amur from the Aigun River to the sea, put the Ussuri region (from the junction of the Ussuri river to the shore) under a joint Russo-Chinese administration, and granted Russian and Chinese national the exclusive right of navigation on the Amur, the Ussuri, and Sungari.<sup>2)</sup> Almost simultaneously, the Treaty of Tientsin signed in June 1858 guaranteed the Russian subjects the right to trade with China by sea and land. The Treaty of Peking in November 1860, tracing the new Russo-Chinese frontier, recognized Russian sovereignty not only over the territories ceded by the Aigun treaty but also over the vast region between the Usury and the gulf of Tartary, and granted Russia trading privileges in Mongolia and in Chinese Turkestan.<sup>3)</sup> During the negotiations with the Chinese in 1858 and 1860, the Russian arguments were all along the same line: "protection of China" against England.<sup>4)</sup> In the same year, the building of Vladivostok went ahead and Russia's position in the northern Pacific was established.

As Russia approached the Sea of Japan, new international relationships began to develop in the region. The island of Sakhalin lies only a few miles

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interests in Asia due to the inability to expand on the Western sector for a time.

2) *Ibid.* Peking, however, would not ratify the Aigun Treaty and did not conclude Russian territorial claims until driven to extremes by the so-called Taiping Rebellion, the occupation of the Chinese capital by the Anglo-French troops, and the looting of the Forbidden City (1860).

3) *Ibid.*

4) David J. Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949) p. 20

from the Amur estuary. Farther to the east there is the long belt of Kurile Islands. Japan was the nearest neighbor of Sakhalin and Korea was contiguous to the new Russian Far East. Therefore, Russia's expansion in the north Pacific created a rivalry between Russia and Japan. Unable to restrain Russian encroachments, Japan was forced to conclude the treaty of 1855 with Russia, by which the two governments declared their intentions to maintain peaceful relations and to protect each other's subjects. The Kurile islands were recognized as Japanese from Etorofu southwards, and Russian from Uroppu northwards. Sakhalin was declared to be a common possession. The ports of Shimoda, Hakodate, and Nagasaki were to be open to Russian ships. And the further treaties in 1857 and 1858 finally provided for an exchange of permanent resident diplomatic missions between the two countries.<sup>5)</sup>

The problem of Sakhalin which was unsettled with Japan was solved by the Treaty of St. Petersburg in May 1875. The treaty recognized all of Sakhalin as Russian, while recognizing the Japanese rule over the whole chain of Kurile Islands. This was essentially a strategic compromise: each power retained possessions from which it could threaten the other if it wished.<sup>6)</sup> In addition, the Japanese were free to trade in the ports of the Sea of Okhotsk and in two ports in Kamchatka. The treaty essentially consolidated the good relations between Russia and Japan, which had developed in the preceding decade and a half.

Expanding into the North Pacific, Russia abandoned one piece of territory, Alaska, in the Far East in 1867. At that time, Alaska appeared to possess small importance, because it did not bring in any significant revenues. However, the United States wished to acquire Alaska, for strategic rather than economic reasons. Prince A.B. Lobanov-Rovstovsky believes that Russia's decision to sell Alaska was influenced by its defeat in the Crimean War.<sup>7)</sup>

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5) *Ibid.* : See also Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801-1917* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) pp. 438-440.

6) *Ibid.* p. 440

The Crimean war had revealed the acute dangers resulting from enormous expansion and Russia's dominions in the Far East. This handicap was obviated by the sale of Alaska to the U.S. and by the concentration of Russia's colonizing in the Ussuri Amur region, to the detriment of Kamchatka.

## II. Korea's "Open-Door Policy" in 1876

Meanwhile, the potential source of conflict among the Asian powers was Korea. For centuries up until the last quarter of the 19th century, China's influence had been strong in Korea. Independent in its internal affairs, Korea was loosely tied to China in its international affairs. The Chinese were pursuing merely a dog-in-the manager policy.<sup>8)</sup> They did not want Korea to come under the shadow of any other power, nor did they relish the idea of Korean independence.

The Korean peninsula, however, was crucial for the security of Japan. Korea had long been a source of danger to Japan, as all past invasions had come either from or through the peninsula. A Japanese historian Hidemichi Akagi states that Korea was regarded as a dagger pointed at Japan's heart, a source of constant irritation and menace to Japan's security.<sup>9)</sup> He argues that Japanese policy was to maintain Korea's independence, because it would secure Japan. Once Korea was controlled by another power, it would become a menace to Japan's very existence.<sup>10)</sup>

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7) A. Lobanov-Rostovsky, *Russia and Asia* (Michigan: The George Wahr Publishing Co., 1951) pp. 216. Lobanov-Rostovsky was Foreign Minister in 1895-96.

8) Tyler Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1941) p. 451.

9) Akagi, *Japans Foreign Relations*, p. 113

10) Unlikely, Bennett believes that Japan had not the shadow of a claim to possession of Korea: Japans claim was purely economic—in a measure Japan was dependent upon Korea for foodstuffs. In retrospect, this argument is quite doubtful. See Dennett, *Americans*, p. 451

Korea was also important for Russia's sea lane communication to the south. The port of Vladivostok, which had rapidly developed since 1860, was always frozen for part of the winter. An ice-free port in Korea was attractive to the Russians. As a result, a rivalry among Russia, Japan, and China for domination in Korea gradually intensified beginning in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Korea abandoned a policy of self-imposed isolation.

After several futile attempts to penetrate into Korea in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan finally concluded its first treaty with Korea in 1876. The treaty opened Korea's ports to Japanese merchant vessels and established diplomatic relations between Japan and Korea, treating Korea formally as an independent state.<sup>11)</sup>

The Treaty of 1876 carried important political and strategic implications in the Far East. First, it laid a groundwork for Japanese expansion into the mainland of Asia. Second, it opened Korea up to international intercourse for the first time. After this treaty, other European powers followed in Japan's foot-steps. The United States concluded a treaty with Korea in 1882, England and Germany in 1883, Italy and Russia in 1884, and France in 1885. All these Powers received the right to trade in Korean ports, and established regular diplomatic missions in Seoul.

In December, 1884, a group of pro-Japanese reformers in Korea attacked the palace and proposed to introduce a program of internal reforms and of close cooperation with Japan.<sup>12)</sup> However, the commander of the Chinese forces in Seoul, Yuan Shih-Kai, recaptured the palace. After this, riots followed, directed against Japanese and Europeans. Both China and Japan sent troops into Korea. This time hostilities between Japan and China were averted through negotiations - the Treaty of Tientsin in April 1885. The treaty stipulated three important principles: both Japan and China

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11) For details, see the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Korea and Japan, February 26, 1876. In Annexes of Chois *The Fall of the Hermit Kingdom*, pp. 124-126

12) Choi, *The Fall of the Hermit Kingdom*, pp. 15-37

should withdraw troops from Korea within four months from the date of the signing of the treaty; whenever either party felt the necessity of dispatching troops to Korea, it must inform the other party in writing; and both Japanese and Chinese officers should not take part in the training of the Korean army.<sup>13)</sup>

### III. Trans-Siberian Railway and Sino-Japanese War (1894-95)

The 1890s and the early 1900s were marked by a second Russian drive into the Far East. It began with the decision to build a railroad across Siberia in 1891.<sup>14)</sup> Russia's statesmen believed that the Trans-Siberian railway would open new vistas of Russian domination in China. In his report to Alexander III on November 6, 1892, the promoter of the project, Finance Minister Count Sergei Witte maintained that the Trans-Siberian line would eventually supersede the Suez Canal as the principal trade route to China and would flood Chinese markets with Russian goods.<sup>15)</sup> He advocated a Sino-Russian alliance as the means of undermining the colonial supremacy of Britain, and pictured Russia in the part of arbiter between Asia and the western world. At the same time, in Witte's opinion, rapid and dependable communications linking Vladivostok and Moscow allow the strengthening of the Russian fleet in the Pacific.<sup>16)</sup>

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13) Akagi, *Japans Foreign Relations*, p. 131

14) *Cyclopedia of Russian and the Commonwealth of Independence* (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1992) pp. 434-435.

15) Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia : A History and An Interpretation* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953) Vol. II. pp. 1262-1263.

16) Sergei Witte, *Memoirs of Count Witte* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1921) trans. Abraham Yarmolinsky, pp. 86-87. In his Memoirs, however, Witte claims that this project had no political or military designs: it was an enterprise of a purely economic nature. Russian and western historians interpret the construction of the railroad in economic, political, and strategic terms. For instance, a Russian traditional historian Romanov emphasizes that it would be instrumental in bringing to fruition

The political repercussions of the Russian railroad venture were first felt most immediately in Japan and Korea. To Japan, the Russian outpost at Vladivostok and the inevitable drive into adjacent Korea represented a considerable danger. As the Trans-Siberian railway was under construction, and within several years a direct railroad, capable of carrying not only goods but also regiments of troops and heavy artillery, could connect St. Petersburg and Moscow with Vladivostok.<sup>17)</sup> In order to secure at least a buffer between itself and Russia and, if possible, bring Korea under her control, Japan was prepared to wage war on China.

In June 1894, a rebellion in Korea gave Japan an opportunity to take action. The Tong-Hak (Eastern Learning) society, proclaiming to drive all foreign influence from Korea and reform the Korean government by Koreans, created riots.<sup>18)</sup> They quickly swept the southern half of the country and threatened the capital. The Korean government made a formal request for Chinese intervention. China notified Japan under the convention of 1885 that she would send troops to Korea to restore the peace in Korea. The Japanese in their turn sent in troops, and presented an Ultimatum to Korea, demanding that it should declare itself completely independent of China and should carry out a series of specified administrative reforms.<sup>19)</sup>

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an alliance with China, thereby undermining the colonial policy of England and giving Russia the opportunity to become mediator between Europe and Asia. At the same time, it would draw Russia and the U.S. closer, unveiling the solidarity of political interests of the two Powers. Agreeing with this, the Western historians including White argue that the railroad was created to extract the natural resources of Siberia; to assist colonization of Siberia by peasants from overpopulated provinces; to penetrate the Chinese market; to have a substantial share of trade between the Far East and Europe by the railway and thus to bring profits to Russia. See Boris A. Romanov, *Rossia v Manchzhurii*, 1892-1906 (Leningrad: Izdanie Leningradskoro Vostochnogo Istitutata Imeni A. S. E nukidze, 1928) pp. 57-60. John A. White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964) p. 48.

17) Dallin, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

18) For details, see Bongwan Cho Oh, *The Russian Policy in Korea and the Russo-Japanese War*, M. A. Thesis, Georgetown University, 1964, pp. 21-23

19) Japans first step was to loan Korea supposedly in the interest of various reforms,

The Japanese in effect occupied Korea, and hostilities developed with the Chinese, which led to the Sino-Japanese War in July 1894.

The war ended with Japan's victory in 1895 and both powers began negotiating at Shimonoseki. The Japanese chief demands were: China's recognition of Korea's complete independence; the cession to Japan of Formosa, the Pescadores, and the Liatung peninsula, including Port Arthur; the payment of an indemnity of three hundred million taels; and the conclusion of a treaty of commerce and navigation between China and Japan, with the extension of the most favored nation treatment to Japan.<sup>20)</sup>

Under such circumstances, Russia was faced with a choice of two courses of action: cooperation with Japan at the expense of China, or defense of China against Japanese claims. Foreign Minister Prince A. B. Lobanov-Rostovsky wished to avoid a conflict with Japan. Through negotiations with Tokyo, he wanted to arrange for the Russian acquisition, by way of compensation for Japanese gains, of an ice-free port in Korea and northern Manchuria, which would shorten the Chita-Vladivostok span of the Trans-Siberian railway by some six hundred miles.<sup>21)</sup> Witte, on the other hand, argued that if Japan were to establish itself on the mainland, it would quickly accumulate power, and ultimately Russia would have difficulty in dislodging Japan in the future. He believed that Russia's main task was to stall and drag on negotiations until the Trans-Siberian railway was completed, which would allow Russia to demonstrate its strength in the Far East: until that time, all annexations of Chinese territory by other Powers was prevented, and Russia meanwhile posed as a friend of China.<sup>22)</sup>

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but actually putting a strain on Korea's budget and bribing her closer to Japan: see K. Akasawa, *The Russo-Japanese Conflict* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co, 1904) p. 52.

20) Edward H. Zabriskie, *American-Russian Rivalry in the Far East, 1895-1914* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946) p. 27.

21) Florinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 1264.

22) Seton-Watson, *op. cit.* pp. 582-583; Treadgold further argues that at the same time Russian strategy was to block Japanese domination of newly independent Korea

The policy advocated by Witte finally prevailed and early in April 1895, Russia, backed diplomatically by France and Germany, pressed Tokyo to refrain from the annexation of the Chinese mainland. Japan was forced to yield to their pressure, and abandoned the Litung peninsula. But, it was forced to satisfy itself with the annexation of Formosa and the Pescadores islands, and a large indemnity.

For Russia, the main result of the Sino-Japanese War was the ability to make use of China's weakened position. In June 1896, Russia signed a treaty of alliance with China, which provided for mutual military assistance against Japan: Russia was to aid in the defense of China against Japan, and in the event of a Japanese attack on Russia's Far Eastern territory, all Chinese ports were to be opened to Russian warships.<sup>23)</sup> The final paragraph of the accord provided for the construction of a Russian railroad across Chinese territories in Manchuria (between China and Vladivostok) in order to allow the Russian forces easier access to endangered places. This was to be called the Chinese Eastern Railway, financed by a new Russo-Chinese Bank, funded largely with French capital.

After its defeat in 1895, China was compelled to relinquish all claims to Korea, and Japan remained in actual control of the ostensibly independent kingdom: Japan pressed the Korean government to proclaim modernization and reforms. The Queen of Korea, opposed to Japanese rule and reform, was assassinated, and the king, fearing for his life, took refuge in the Russian legation in Seoul.<sup>24)</sup> Thus, Russia and Japan began to negotiate Korean concerns. For the first time in history, the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was suggested by the Japanese as a borderline dividing Korea into two foreign

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before it should become firm, see Donald W. Treadgold, *Russia and the Far East in Russian Foreign Policy*, edited by Ivo J. Lederer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964) p. 543.

23) Zabriski, *op. cit.* p. 30

24) For details, see Margaret Fraser, *Russian involvement in Korea, 1895-1910*. M. A. Thesis, 1956, Georgetown University, pp. 8-9

protectorates. Russia rejected it. However, both powers finally agreed in May 1896, to limit number of their troops in Korea. In June, they agreed to advise the Korean government to economize, balance its budget and leave the Korean government the maintenance of national armed forces and police.<sup>25)</sup>

#### IV. Kiaocho Incident

In November 1897, an new international crisis in China occurred, when the German government occupied Kiaocho, on the Shantung Peninsula, as reprisal for the murder of two German missionaries by the Chinese. The incident provided an excuse for the seizure of Chinese territory by other European powers. Russia protested the occupation and threatened to send its fleet to Kiachow Bay. The conflict, however, was settled at China's expense. In March 1898, a few weeks after Kiachow had been ceded to Germany, China signed a treaty with Russia. By this treaty, the Chinese government ceded the Liaotung Peninsula including Port Arthur and Talienswan to Russia for twenty-five years, and granted a concession for a South Manchurian Railway to be built from Kharbin to Port Arthur. Now, Russia was taking from China without war what it had prevented Japan from taking as the fruits of victory in the Sino-Japanese war (1894-96), and was asserting its supremacy over southern as well as northern Manchuria.

Japan at this stage had two possible options: to compromise with Russia to restrain Russia's aggressive Far Eastern policy, or to combat the Russian program by forming an alliance with one of the European powers. Japan at first proposed a division of spheres with Russia. It was suggested to Baron Rosen, the Russian Minister in Tokyo, that Japan recognize the Russian supremacy in Manchuria in return for Russian recognition of

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25) For details, see Choi, *The Fall of the Hermit Kingdom*.

Japanese supremacy in Korea. St. Petersburg could not bring itself to accept their terms. Instead, Russia accepted an agreement with Japan in April 1898, where both nations recognized the independence of Korea, and promised to refrain from interference in its internal affairs. Neither would send military or financial instructors to Korea without consulting the other. However, in light of the development of Japanese commercial and industrial enterprises in Korea, Russia agreed to recognize the predominant economic right of Japan on the Korean peninsula.<sup>26)</sup>

Russian penetration of Manchuria alarmed Britain. It not only excluded British economic interests from Manchuria, but also created a serious threat in that Russia would eventually influence China to pursue policies hostile to British interests in other parts of China.<sup>27)</sup> Faced with this strategic dilemma, the British sought for an agreement with Russia by proposing a partition of spheres of influence in China. Britain sought for a peaceful solution with Russia because the British military forces could not deter Russian advances on the Asian continent.<sup>28)</sup> The Russians was prepared to make a formal concession. In April 1899, both powers made an agreement on spheres of interest, which provided that Russia would not seek railway concessions in the Yangtze valley on condition that Britain would not seek anything north of the Great Wall.

The British zone was described as "the provinces adjoining the river Yangtze and Honan and Checkiang." The sphere obtained by Russia was defined as the territories lying "to the north of the Great Wall." The Russian concession to Britain consisted of the abandonment of its claims to the Province of Chili. As far as Manchuria was concerned, the open doors remained. However, the other powers were effectively barred as a result of this agreement.

Russia's advance continued, and Britain was unable to check it so long

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26) *Ibid.*

27) Seton-Watson, *op. cit.* pp. 585-586

28) Dallin, *op. cit.* p. 58

as it had no ally in the Far East. Britain, thus, expected support from Germany. The German government at that time wanted to see Britain and Russia in conflict with each other. Germany hoped that preoccupations in the Far East would make Russia less concerned with the Balkans, and therefore less likely to be involved in hostile activities against German's ally Austria Hungary. At the same time, if the British were tied up in the Far East, the Russians might be less able to oppose German plans for naval strength in the North Sea. Given these considerations, Germany made an agreement with Britain in April 1900, which stated the desire of both Powers to maintain the open door in China and the integrity of the Chinese empire. But the Germans made it clear to the British that they would take no action against Russia.

The reaction of the U. S. to the changing situation in North China differed from that of Britain: while the British tried to arrive at a compromise with Russia in order to safeguard its extensive political and economic interests in China, the U. S. was free to continually oppose the process of partitioning China. Washington now espoused the earlier British principle of an "open door" for foreign trade in China and other parts of the British sphere, and Secretary of State John Hay began to labor on the creation of a treaty system guaranteeing the "open door" in China as protection for American political and economic interests.<sup>29)</sup> This policy was an economic counterbalance against Russia's political advance in the Far East.

## V. The Boxer Rebellion

A next major upset in the precarious power balance in the Far East was

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29) See Zabriskie, *op. cit.* p. 65; see also U-Gené Lee, *America and Korea: Theodore Roosevelt's Attitudes Toward the Far East*. M. A. Thesis, Georgetown University, 1968 pp. 3-12

precipitated by the Chinese. The despicable treatment of China by the great Christian powers created rise to a strong nationalist movement. The culminating point of anti-foreign agitation was the Boxer Rebellion in May 1900 and the siege of the diplomatic missions in Peking, which led to the dispatch of a joint expeditionary force of the European Powers and the Japanese. The Rebellion was finally suppressed by an international armed force under the command of the German field Marshal Count Waldersee.<sup>30)</sup>

Each of the Great Powers tried to make use of this event to promote a given scheme of policy. Japan, for example, considered the movement propitious for a new military advance on the continent, from which it had been driven away by Russia a few years earlier. Germany wanted to make use of the intense rivalry between the British-Japanese and the French Russian coalitions, and ultimately accomplished its goal: The German General Waldersee was appointed Commander in Chief of all the Allied Armies. The German government hoped that this success would only be the beginning of the growth of Germany's importance in Far Eastern affairs, and vehemently protested when the other nations hastened to bring the Boxer affair to a close: she preferred to protract it.<sup>31)</sup>

The Russians used this opportunity to strengthen their forces in Manchuria, and then to demand new far-reaching concessions from the Chinese government in return for their withdrawal. Disclosure showed that the arrangement contemplated called for the establishment of a de facto Russian protectorate over Manchuria and also the exclusion of foreigners. This caused vigorous protests from the United States, Japan, and Great Britain. The trend of Russian policy in China intensified the anxieties and apprehensions of Tokyo. In November 1901, Marquis Ito, an elder Japanese statesman and a proponent of an understanding with Russia, visited St. Petersburg to reach an agreement with Russia. When his overtures failed to produce a rapprochement, the

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30) Michael. T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History of Interpretation. Vol. II.* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953) pp.1267-68.

31) *Ibid.* pp. 1267-1268

Japanese decided instead in favor of an alliance with England. After protracted negotiations, Tokyo and London signed a treaty in January 1902.<sup>32)</sup> The treaty provided that if either Power were to be attacked by two other Powers, its ally would come to its assistance. It also recognized the special interest of Japan in Korea.

The Russo-Chinese agreement of April 8, 1902 concerning Manchuria was the result of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the united opposition to Russian policy in China after the Boxer Rebellion. Russia signed an agreement recognizing Chinese sovereignty over Manchuria and promised to evacuate her troops by October 8, 1903 in three stages.

## VI. Russo-Japanese War (1904-05)

The next two years witnessed the further aggravation of the relationship between Russia and Japan. One of the important factors, which contributed to the conflict was the diversity of ideas and aims within the Russian government, which prevented the adoption of any definite policy. The Foreign Minister, Count V. N. Lamsdorff, advocated a compromise with Japan calling for the withdrawal of all Russian claims to Korea and Manchuria. Witte also favored peaceful penetration, which amounted to Russian domination of the trade and economic resources of northern China. The Minister of War, General A. N. Kuropatkin, also wished to avoid war in the Far East, and keep Russia militarily strong for any dangers which might face it in the West.

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32) William, L. Langer, *Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902, 2.Vol.* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1935) pp. 782-783. Langer argues that England allied with Japan not because of using the Japanese army to force Russia out of Manchuria, but because Russian advances not only in China but also in the Near East that distressed Britain and made her willing, in order to prevent an alliance between Russia and Japan, to take the risk that the Japanese might take advantage or the 1902 agreement to force the issue over Korea with Russia: However, Dallin argues that in order to prevent the Russian advanced in Manchuria, Britain allied with Japan.

Their opponents led by two well-connected retired guards officers, A. M. Bezobrazov and V. M. Vonliarliarsky, urged a reckless aggressive policy both in Manchuria and Korea. They were the promoters of the so-called Yalu concession, the mysterious enterprise relating to a vast timber concession on the Yalu and Tumen rivers on the northern border of Korea. Bezobrazov, leader of the group, persuaded Emperor Nicholas to finance the Yalu venture by representing it as an outpost of Russian political, cultural, and military influence in the Far East. In his opinion, it would offer a wide field for industrial exploitation and at the same time serve as protection against Japanese attack.<sup>33)</sup> Witte, unsparingly critical of the Bezobrazov's scheme, nevertheless provided the necessary funds when ordered to do so by the tsar.<sup>34)</sup> These personal squabbles explain much in the devious course of Russian policy.

The first stage of the evacuation of Russian troops from Manchuria was carried out in October 1902, in accordance with the agreement of April 1902. But when the time came for the next stage, in February 1903, the Russians did not act in an effort to extract further concessions from the Chinese, and above all to exclude all other powers from concessions in Manchuria. The Chinese resisted these demands with diplomatic support from Japan, the United States, and Britain. The central issue now was the conflict of interests between Russia and Japan. In late 1903, Japan made a final attempt at reconciliation with Russia. Subject to the promise by both Powers to respect the territorial integrity of China and Korea and the principle of the Open Door, it was proposed that Russia should recognize Japan's "preponderant interests" in Korea, and that Japan should recognize Russia's "special interests in railway enterprises in Manchuria." Between August and January 1904, proposals and counterproposals were

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33) Vladimit Aravin, *Imperialism v Manchurii* (Moscow: 1934) pp. 69-70.

34) In May 1904, Bezobrazov was appointed Secretary of State and was actually in charge of all matters pertaining to the Far East; in August Witte was dismissed from the office of Minister of Finance.

exchanged. But no agreement could be reached.<sup>35)</sup> With Bezobrazov in full control of Far Eastern policies, the Japanese proposal had little chance of success. The Japanese were strengthened by the diplomatic support not only of their British ally but also of the United States. That the U. S. policy pursued in protection of its trade interests and ambitions in Manchuria revealed its attitude toward Russia. More direct, however, in its bearing upon the initiative taken by the Japanese at Port Arthur was the "assurance given by the U. S. to Japan on January 12, 1904 that in the event of war the American policy would be benevolent toward Japan."<sup>36)</sup> The United States therefore had played an important role in the precipitation of hostilities. A Russian historian Kantorovich further explains that the Russo-Japanese War was not only an English but also an American war against Russia and its policies of territorial conquest.

German policy at that time was a series of complicated moves and intrigues. Before the war started, Germany had encouraged Russia to oppose Japan. Actually, the German idea behind these moves was to divert Russia's attention from Europe and to isolate France.<sup>37)</sup> A protraction of the war was therefore advantageous to Berlin. A weakening of Russia and a loss of Russian prestige strengthened Germany's position in relation to France. Russia's ally, France, made efforts to avert war, but the French proposals for mediation were declined. On February 5, 1904, Japan broke off diplomatic relations with Russia, and on the night of 8-9 February Japanese warships made a surprise attack on Port Arthur.

The Russo-Japanese war was a product of imperialism. All the Powers involved, except China and Korea, were imperialists.<sup>38)</sup> As to the origin of the Russo-Japanese War, scholars provide various interpretations. The

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35) For details, see Akagi, *Japans Foreign Relations*, PP. 191-217; see also Zabriski, *American-Russian*, pp. 65-100

36) Zabrisk, *op. cit.* pp. 101-102

37) Dallin, *op. cit.* p. 590

38) Seton-Waston, *op. cit.* p. 590

explanations presented by the Russian and the Japanese writers differ greatly. According to the traditional Russian interpretations, which were expounded in many Russian publications including the A. N. General Kuropatkin, the major cause of war was Bezobrazov's pushing forward in his foolhardy scheme for "secret infiltration of Korea" through the obscure Yalu concessions on the Korean border.<sup>39)</sup> However, Japanese historians, including Asakawa and Akagi argue that the real basis of the conflict was: An unbridled Russian imperialism which, not content with the illegal seizure of Manchuria, planned to extend itself in to Korea in the guise of private enterprise built around the Yalu concession.<sup>40)</sup>

Generally agreeing with these arguments, the western historians suggest that in the last months of peace it was the Japanese who were pushing towards war, and the Russians who were retreating. Russian policy at that time was marked by incompetence and confusion rather than by aggressive intentions. Furthermore, the Russian seizure of the Liatung peninsula in 1898 was not only an act of aggression but an unforgivable insult to Japan, from which war could come.

The war against Japan was for the first time a series of unprecedented defeats for the Russian Army and Navy. The military debacle brought catastrophe to the whole political system as well. Russia was ill prepared for a war. The logistical capacity of the single-track Siberian railway was inadequate to meet the requirements of a huge, modern Japanese army. The Russian government put its hopes in its European navy, which did not reach the Far East until May 1905. The Black Sea fleet could not move owing to the provisions of the Straits Convention in force, which closed the Bosphorus to Russian warships. While Russia was at war, the Baltic fleet would have to sail right round Europe, Africa and Asia. The navy was ultimately annihilated at the battle of Tsushima.

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39) A. N. Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army and the Japanese War* (translated by A. B. Lindsay, 2 vols) (New York: Dutton, 1909).

40) See Asakawa, *The Russo-Japanese Conflict*. See also Akagi, *Japans Foreign Relations*.

By that time, Japan also exhausted. President Roosevelt and Kaiser Wilhelm succeeded in convincing both countries to agree to a peace conference and, eventually, to sign the peace treaty in Portsmouth on September 5, 1905. Russia accepted the loss of the Liatung peninsula (Containing the two ports of Talienwan and Port Arthur) and Southern Manchurian Railway. These went to Japan. Russia also recognized Japan's paramount political, military, and economic interests in Korea. For their part the Japanese were perfectly willing to leave the Chinese Eastern Railway, and the dominant position in northern Manchuria, to the Russians. Japan obtained fishing rights in the sea adjacent to Russia, but her demand for an indemnity war was refused by Russia. In addition, by the Treaty of Portsmouth, Sakhalin was divided in two and Russia ceded to Japan its southern portion.<sup>41)</sup> Defeat in the Russo-Japanese War not only damaged the prestige and international standing of Russia, but also put an end to the designs of Russian expansionism, for the time being, in the Far East. Nevertheless, with the Maritime Provinces and the Chinese Eastern Railway still in its possession, the Russian empire remained a Great Power in the Asian-Pacific region.

## VII. Aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War

The Russo-Japanese War had a significant impact upon the future of political realities in the Far East. In particular, the strategic inter-relationships among the Great Powers and Japan in the Far East took an unexpected course, which appeared to be one of the most outstanding features after the end of the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>42)</sup> Russia accomplished a rapprochement

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41) Seton-Watson, *op. cit.* pp. 596-597

42) For the cause of Russo-Japanese rapprochement, Zabriski argues that it was based in the main on Russian fear of Japanese dominance in Manchuria. Dallin, however, believes that it was to oppose to the trading Powers.

with its former enemy Japan: Russian and British conflicts were removed; and the U. S. took an antagonistic position against Russian and Japanese policy in the Far East.

The first step toward Russo-Japanese solidarity was taken on June 13, 1907, when a convention designed particularly to facilitate traffic on the conflicting railway lines of the two Powers was signed. And on July 30, 1907, an open convention was signed by Russia and Japan in which each agreed to respect the territorial integrity of the other and to uphold the principle of the open door in Manchuria.<sup>43)</sup> In addition, a secret agreement was drawn up between the two countries, which gave Japan a free hand in Korea, and recognized the spheres of interests of Russia in northern Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, and of Japan in South Manchuria and Inner Mongolia.<sup>44)</sup>

The Russo-Japanese collaboration was cemented not so much because of the resistance of China, but because of the opposition of the four big powers to Russian and Japanese policy in China.<sup>45)</sup> Among the four Powers, the United States occupied the extreme position in the antagonism to Japan and Russia. The United States possessed no ports or spheres in China and was opposed to territorial acquisitions in China by the other five Powers. The American policy strove to solve the problems by economic means—to achieve the “open door” and territorial integrity of China by vast investment and by industrialization of China.

The German attitude toward Russia and Japan was analogous to that of

43) See Morse and McNair, *Far Eastern International*, pp. 519-522

44) Dallin, *op. cit.* p. 90.

45) Russia and Japan were not rich enough to grant large loans to China, build railway out of purely economic interest, and develop an important trade. The open door to the rest of China was not as much important as territorial and political interests to Russia and Japan. Fundamentally, thus, the four trading Powers opposed to Russian and Japanese expansion on the continent. They presented anything but a united front and Russia and Japan were successful in keeping them from forming a coalition.

the U. S. It was prompted partly by economic motives as the German trade with China grew rapidly. However, the German policy in the Far East was heavily influenced by the state of affairs in Europe, where the antagonism against Germany-Austria was becoming acute.<sup>46)</sup> Germany failed to draw Russia towards Germany either in cooperation with France or at the cost of breaking the Franco-Russian alliance by exploiting Russia's isolation and existing bitter feelings toward Britain in 1904-05. These considerations led Germany to support the American policy, far from entertaining anti-imperialistic ideas and adhering to any principles concerning the integrity of China. The collaboration between the U. S. and Germany in the Far East continued until the very break of World War I.

The conspicuous move of Russian diplomacy after the end of the Russo-Japanese War was to seek a cooperative relationship with Britain. The traditional Anglo-Russian conflict in the Far East was mollified by Japan's victory, and a degree of readjustment in their rival interests became possible. A month after the signing of the Russo-Japanese agreement, Russia and Britain signed a convention on August 31, 1907. In this treaty, the two countries delimited the spheres of influence in Persia: agreed upon a policy in Afghanistan, by which Britain was to control that country's foreign relation; and recognized the territorial integrity of Tibet and China's suzerainty over the country.<sup>47)</sup> At the same time, as a trading Power in China, Britain tried to maintain a mediating position between the offensive of the Russian government and the opposition presented by the U. S. and Germany.

France's position was uncertain and inconsistent.<sup>48)</sup> Although the Russo-Japanese War did not subject the Franco-Russian alliance to severe strain, France also belonged to the "trading powers" and was essentially opposed to the creation of a large Russian sphere in China. However, she was

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46) Dallin, *op. cit.* p. 95

47) Morse and McNair, *Far Eastern International*, p. 520

48) Dallin, *op. cit.* pp. 91-97

forced by circumstances to yield in a great degree to the Russian demands in northern China.<sup>49)</sup>

The next step in the formation of an alliance between Japan and Russia was taken on July 4, 1910. The policy begun three years earlier was continued, but at this time it was aimed almost directly at the United States, whence a suggestion was raised that the Manchurian railway should be neutralized.<sup>50)</sup> The convention in 1910 recognized the right of each Power "within its sphere freely to take all measures necessary for the safeguarding and defense" of its interests, and laid down that the two governments should consult each other on "any matters affecting their special interests in Manchuria." Secured by this agreement, Japan announced the formal annexation of Korea on August 22, 1910.

In 1911, the Chinese Revolution provided the Russian government with an opportunity to act in Mongolia. The Russo-Mongolian treaty of November 1912 confirmed various Russian financial and commercial privileges, including preference for imports from Siberia, permission for Russian subjects to acquire land in Mongolia, and the foundation of a Russo-Mongolian Bank in Urga, the new capital. Russia promised armed resistance in the event of Chinese attempts at reconquest, and the Mongolian government undertook to conclude no treaty with a foreign Power without prior Russian approval.<sup>51)</sup> In November 1913, the Chinese government of Yuan Shin-kai concluded an agreement with Russia, which upheld the principle of Chinese sovereignty in Mongolia, but recognized its autonomy. However, this was simply a face-saving device, which did not affect the substance of Russian domination.

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49) All Far Eastern problems appeared unimportant to France when compared to the German danger. The need of Russian assistance in the event of a European war was a decisive factor in French policy. Russia realized this and exploited the situation.

50) Secretary of State Knox proposed in December, 1909, that the existing railroads in Manchuria be taken over by an international syndicate backed by the Great Powers. For details, see Dallin, *op. cit.* pp. 99-100

51) Seton-Watson, *op. cit.* pp. 682-684.

## CONCLUSION

Russian policy in the Far East in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was characterized by extreme expansionism and intransigency. Such a policy aggravated Russia's strategic rivalry not only with Japan and China, but also with the Great Powers including Britain, Germany and the United States. Russia's rivalry with other powers was primarily caused by its goal of seeking excessive political and economic interests in Korea and Manchuria. Its outcome was a military confrontation between Russia and Japan in 1904-05. Defeat in the war put an end to Russia's policy of aggrandizement, but with the Maritime Provinces and the Chinese Eastern Railway still in its possession, Russia could remain a Great Power by solidifying its footing in the Far East.

Both the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 occurred as a result of the rivalry for domination on the Korean peninsula. The principal actors involved in each war were the two dominant Asian Powers during each of the decades: China and Japan in the 1890s, as well as Japan and Russia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This implies that the role of Korea is critical to maintain the balance of power in the region. Fully aware of the geopolitical significance of Korea, Japan persistently made efforts to dominate the Peninsula.

The lessons of Russian strategic rivalries with the major Asian powers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century provide important implications for the future of Korea and Northeast Asia. If the United States were to withdraw its political and security commitment from Asia following the unification of the two Koreas, the balance of power in Northeast Asia would be precarious and similar to that of the Far East in the early 1900s.

### 주제어(Key Word)

러시아외교(Russian Diplomacy), 러-일전쟁(Russo-Japanese War), 시베리아 철도(Siberian Railroad)

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**초록****극동에서의 러시아와 열강: 1855-1918**

김 승 환

지금으로부터 약 1세기전 세계 열강들의 對 극동 정책 및 전략적 경쟁관계는 앞으로 한반도 통일 이후 동북아의 안보 및 국제질서에 관한 연구에 중요한 시사점을 제시해준다. 세계 유일한 초강대국인 미국의 적극적인 개입, 전략무기 개발, 국력의 차이 등 오늘날 역내 전략적 상황은 과거에 비해 많은 새로운 변수들이 개입되어 있으나, 보다 넓은 의미에서 동북아 국제질서는 러시아, 일본, 중국이라는 지역내 강대국 전략관계의 기본틀 속에서 이루어지고 있기 때문이다. 19세기 말부터 20세기 초에 이르기까지, 극동지역은 제국주의 열강과 일본이 주도권을 잡기 위해 패권경쟁을 벌이던 각축장이었다. 시베리아 철도 건설과 함께 정치, 경제적인 관심을 극동지역에 집중시키며, 적극적인 팽창주의 정책을 펴나가던 러시아는 영국 및 미국을 포함한 유럽 열강들로부터 고립되고, 청·일 전쟁 (1894-95)에서의 승리로 극동지역에서 전략적 입지를 굳힌 일본과의 충돌로 결국 러·일 전쟁 (1904-05)을 일으켰다. 이 전쟁에서 패배한 러시아는 더 이상의 팽창정책을 포기한 반면, 승리한 일본은 한국 및 중국에서 전략적 입지를 강화하고 아시아대륙으로 진출하는 기반을 확고히 다지게 되었다.

19세기 말-20세기 초 아시아에서 일어났던 두 차례의 전쟁, 즉 청·일 전쟁과 러·일 전쟁은 모두 한반도의 지배권을 차지하기 위한 전쟁이었으며, 이 두 전쟁 모두 당시 역내 최강대국간의 무력충돌이었다. 1890년대 중반 중국과 일본의 충돌 그리고 1900년대 초 러시아와 일본의 충돌이 이를 입증한다. 다시 말해, 국력 면에서 당시 미약했지만, 지정학적으로 극동의 핵심적 위치에 있었던 한국은 강대국간의 힘의 균형을 이루는데 결정적인 역할을 해왔다. 역사적으로 일본이 끈질기게 한반도를 지배하려는 의도를 여기서 찾아볼 수 있다.