INTRODUCTION

World war as a form of conflict spanning the continents, engaging their millions in an all-embracing do-or-die effort, and unleashing the enhanced lethality of industrialized combat, is arguably the twentieth century’s most baleful legacy. Although historians commonly refer to Europe’s Great War of 1914–18 as the First World War, this volume contends that in many ways the modern era of global conflict began a decade earlier with armed confrontation between Russia and Japan. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 was fought between an established European power and an emerging Asian power, but most of the combat occurred either in China and Korea or in adjacent waters, while the war itself was largely financed in third-party money markets. Other nations also produced many of the capital ships and heavy armaments that figured prominently in the conflict, while outside observers viewed the war as a testing ground for military theories and applications born elsewhere. Indeed, while the rest of the world proclaimed “neutrality,” larger alliance systems governed the conduct of states in other parts of the world, disciplining expectations and participation. Meanwhile, the non-aligned states of the world tended to identify their interests with one side or another, thereby contributing to a realization that the world was rapidly dividing itself into armed camps. When peace was restored in September 1905, it came neither at Shimonoseki nor in St. Petersburg, but in the American city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, thus heralding the notion in global history that key decisions affecting Europe and Asia might be made or be substantially influenced elsewhere. Finally, the Russo-Japanese War aroused nationalist passions among peoples of the Euro-American colonial world, lending impetus to fledgling anti-colonial sentiments and movements that would continue to blossom during the twentieth century’s two better-known world wars.

In narrower military perspective, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 presaged the Great War of 1914–18 in ways that were either unknown, undiscovered, or undeveloped in its more recent European and American antecedents. By the turn of the twentieth century, the second generation of the industrial revolution had made
available for widespread military application improved technologies, techniques, and methods, the sum of which exposed greater masses of manpower to increasingly lethal means in ever more remote locales. During late November and early December 1904, the Japanese General Nogi Maresuke spent 10,000 casualties to capture 203 Meter Hill, a prominence that enabled him to bring accurate siege artillery fire to bear on the First Russian Pacific Squadron at Port Arthur. Not until Verdun in 1916 would isolated strong points claim so many losses amidst the same infernal context of barbed wire, hand grenades, incessant artillery barrages, and deadly flat-trajectory fire from rifles and machine guns. Similarly, at Tsushima in May 1905, Vice Admiral Zinovii Rozhestvenskii’s reinforced Second Russian Pacific Squadron would lose 5,000 sailors (and another 6,000 prisoners) and eleven capital ships during one hellish 36-hour span. Not until Jutland in 1916 would surface forces of similar size engage in combat on a similar scale, but without the same catastrophic losses and Armageddon-like outcome.

The sheer drama of these “last man standing” confrontations eclipsed the impact of various scientific and managerial advances that both made them possible and that were busily revolutionizing the nature of modern warfare. Both Russia and Japan mobilized mass cadre and conscript armies respectively of 1,300,000 and 1,200,000 troops. Railroads and steamships conveyed them to the theater of operations and, where possible, supplied them, at least with munitions, arms, and military equipment. The deployment and employment of field armies that eventually numbered more than a quarter million troops required a high order of planning and management skills, many of which were borrowed with varying degrees of effectiveness from the same industrial revolution that was so busily transforming the nature of combat. Meanwhile, masses of men and smokeless powder weaponry meant extended flanks and extensive networks of trenches.

As large numbers of troops increasingly went to ground, the same weaponry created the expanded and paradoxically well-populated, but empty battlefield. Battlefield positions might stretch more than 100 kilometers from flank to flank, while depths extended to more than 50 kilometers. And, battles, which had previously and mercifully required only several hours or several days, now might drag on for weeks to become identifiable military operations in the modern sense of the term. Meanwhile, each of the combatants with vary-
ing degrees of success mobilized the press and other forms of media to enlist the home front. Thanks to electrically-based means of communication, both the home front, and, indeed, the entire world might learn about maritime and battlefield outcomes within a matter of hours. In many ways the Russo-Japanese War more closely resembled the First World War than either the American Civil War of 1861–65 or the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71.

These and other features of the prototypical world war argue for a historical treatment of the Russo-Japanese conflict in its broadest possible context. Indeed, a major premise underlying the present volume—the first of two—holds that a proper understanding of the war should draw on a wide range of perspectives, sources, and languages. Otherwise, major aspects of the confrontation, including its vast geographic scope, its subtle and not-so-subtle social, political, cultural, and financial implications, and its profound impact both on the battlefield and beyond, would surely prove elusive. The multi-faceted nature of the war requires a study not only of Russian and Japanese materials, but also of sources in Chinese, English, French, German, and Korean, not to mention the tongues of those people who felt the war’s impact, including Indians, Vietnamese and Indonesians. This volume breaks new ground by highlighting, inter alia, newly-accessible documents from the tsarist-era military, diplomatic, and intelligence archives. Almost a third of this volume’s articles make use of these fresh materials. In unfortunate contrast, the Japanese military archives were, in large part, lost at the end of the Second World War, leaving behind only fragmentary collections. Still, reexamining such semi-primary classics as Tani Toshio’s The Secret Japano-Russian War in light of new considerations and fresh insights can yield important discoveries, as shown by three of this volume’s contributors.

Recent decades have witnessed new approaches to understanding the past, many of which add depth and insight to the concerns of traditional military history. Accordingly, this volume accepts only as its figurative focus a conventional examination of the war’s campaigns on land and on sea. However, due emphasis also falls on the conflict’s origins, impact, conclusions, and aftermath, all of which fall initially under the purview of traditional diplomatic history, then reach out to embrace other sub-disciplines. For example, the application over the course of the war of new technologies and scientific developments requires perspectives from the history of science and technology. By the same token, the vital role played by international
finance necessitates the involvement of economic history. Other considerations, including the much-discussed link between the Russo-Japanese War and the Revolution of 1905 in Russia, benefit from the perspective of social history. Meanwhile, wartime efforts to unleash the martial passions of millions, both under arms and on the home front, suggest approaches associated with both social and cultural history. Mention of the latter sub-discipline implies that literary scholars and historians of art have ample opportunity to contribute important insights into significant aspects of the conflict’s enduring legacy.

To be sure, culturally-oriented treatments, including those that focus on the popular press, graphic arts, poetry, and music, promise additional understanding of the war experience, and their substance forms an essential complement to the historian’s traditional diet of dispatches, memoranda, diaries, official histories, and related materials.

Although military history lies at the core of this volume, coverage begins with the origins of the confrontation, both long-term and immediate. The first section, “In the Shadow of War,” comprises five essays by historians who examine the remote and proximate causes of war from various vantages, including diplomatic history. Several authors weigh a whole century’s worth of causes, while others analyze only immediate casus belli, whether geo-strategic (Korea/Manchuria), technological (completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad), or political (the Bezobrazovtsy).

Volume one goes on to deal with the war itself and its various ramifications. The second section constitutes a topical treatment of the war’s course on sea and land, followed by coverage of discrete aspects, ranging from strategy and generalship to tactics and military intelligence. The third section examines the various ways in which the war found reflection in the media on the home front. The illustrations that accompany this volume are best viewed in conjunction with these essays. The final section, “Impact,” skips ahead to the postwar years when all the real and figurative war debts either exacted heavy tribute or paid bonus dividends. The legacies were multi-faceted, affecting military and financial establishments, anti-colonial causes, and the shape of memory itself. The Portsmouth Treaty, an undeniable signal that the United States might now pursue its destiny more energetically across the Pacific, it turns out, was initialed in Kittery, Maine.

This is the first of two volumes. Although the second emphasizes Asian sources and perspectives, particularly Japan, China, and Korea,
the current volume makes important contributions to our knowledge of East Asia. Each section has one or more papers based primarily on Japanese sources. Woodblock prints, a pre-photography vestige in the advertisement market, gained a new lease on life to cover the war, revealing dramatic moments, both real and imagined. Modern Japan’s much-remarked myth-making penchant once again comes under scrutiny, this time on the continent at the Chinese, then Russian, then Japanese (and now again Chinese) naval base of Port Arthur. These assertions notwithstanding, there is an imbalance in this volume that favors Russian perspectives, and this imbalance awaits redress by East Asian scholars in the second volume.

Although breadth and diversity of perspective remain important objectives for the two projected volumes on the history of the Russo-Japanese War, the editors are painfully aware that gaps in coverage will likely persist. Consequently, the editors are optimistic that whatever lacunae exist among the fifty-odd articles slated for publication will afford inspiration for other investigators to fill the gaps. The intent is that this collection will provide fodder for many sub-fields of history, while stimulating debate over the collection’s central premise—that the Russo-Japanese war was worldwide in its causes, course, and consequences.
ILLUSTRATIONS
Fig. 1. Kokyo, “Engagement at Port Arthur, 14 February 1904,” Japanese woodblock print. Caption: “A picture of our destroyer advancing quickly like a bird in morning fog, venturing in the turbulent snowstorm, shooting and wrecking the enemy’s ship at Lushun (Port Arthur).” (Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Gregory and Patrica Kruglak.)
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**Rodina.**
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Fig. 13. “Kuropatkin’s Means of Escape.” Japanese cartoon. The caption explains that Admiral Alekseev invented the train, but General Kuropatkin developed the balloon and submarine, all the better to escape from danger by air or in the depths of the sea. (Herbert Wrigley Wilson, Japan’s Fight for Freedom, 3 vols. [London, 1904-1906], III, 904.)
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Map 1. Far eastern theater of war, with initial Japanese lines of operation.
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Assault on Port Arthur


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