

Chapter 9

Rise of Japan

—Japanese Patriotism Amazed the Entire World—

Race against Time

The gap between the military strengths of Russia and Japan on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War was certainly great enough to say that it was indeed foolhardy for Japan to start a war with Russia. While the population of Japan was about one-third of that of Russia, its steel and pig iron production was only tens of thousands of tons compared to 1.5 million tons and 2.2 million tons, respectively, for Russia.

Some forty years later, on the eve of World War II, Winston Churchill asked Japanese foreign minister Matsuoka Yosuke how Japan could dare to plot a war with the United States and Britain, which produced 75 million tons and 12.5 million tons of steel, respectively, when Japan itself produced only 7 million tons annually. The great gap between Russia and Japan at the beginning of the 20th century was much larger than that.

According to Australian war writers Denis and Peggy Warner, in January 1904 the Russian Army had a wartime mobilization capability of 3.5 million personnel, including 1,135,000 troops on active duty plus army reserves and second reserves. In contrast, the Japanese Imperial Army in those days had 180,000 troops on active duty, 200,000 army reserves, and another 200,000 in the second reserves.

It could be misleading to compare the war capability of armies on the basis of number of divisions. During the Cold War, for instance, a division of the Soviet army was considered to be the equivalent of two to three divisions of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force. This is because numbers of soldiers, tanks, and cannons in a division are different from one army to the next.

Instead, the number of infantry battalions that can immediately participate in battle is the measure used to compare the war capability of armies. The size of a battalion does not differ much from country to country. Using this yardstick, Russia had 1,740 battalions, or more than ten times the 156 battalions that Japan had on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War.

In terms of total tonnage of naval vessels, the Russian navy had 800,000

tons, of which 190,000 tons had been stationed in the Far East. This compared with 260,000 tons for the Japanese Imperial Navy.

Comparison of Japanese and Russian Military Strength before the
Russo-Japanese War

Army	Infantry	Cavalry	Cannons	Total Force Strength
Japan	156 battalions	55 companies	636	Approx. 158,000
Russia	1,740 battalions (90 battalions)	1,085 companies (—)	1,200 (172)	approx. 2,070,000

Navy	Battleships	Armored Cruisers	Cruisers	Total tonnage
Japan	6	6	12	approx. 260,000 tons
Russia's Baltic Fleet	11 (7)	12 (4)	12 (—)	approx. 800,000 tons (approx. 190,000 tons)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are Russian force in the Far East

The above table clearly shows that Japan appeared to have no chance of winning the war with Russia. The only advantage for Japan was the great distance between the European center of Russia and the Far East. Such great distance meant that it took a long time to transport reinforcements and military supplies, making logistics and replenishment highly challenging.

In this sense, the Russo-Japanese War was a race against time.

The Battle of Mukden on March 10, 1905, was one of the largest showdowns in the history of ground warfare. Some 250,000 Japanese troops—all that Japan had at the time—fought against 320,000 Russian troops.

By that time, Russian troops were fully benefitting from the Eastern Siberian Railway, which enabled the arrival of monthly reinforcements of 50,000 troops. Toward the end of the war, reinforcements of 60,000 troops became possible in a month via this railway.

Had the Battle of Mukden been delayed by half a year, therefore, the strength of the Russian troops would have been nearly doubled, leaving Japan no chance of winning. Had the battle been fought half a year earlier, instead, the Russian side would have had to fight with a strength of only 220,000 troops. Since this was approximately the same strength that the Russians had mustered for the Battle of Liaoyang (遼陽会戦) in September of the previous year, annihilation of the main Russian force might have been possible.

In this sense, Komura's effort to prompt the eruption of the war as early as possible was, strategically speaking, highly appropriate.

Miscalculation in Delay Tactics

The race against time was an important factor in the Russo-Japanese War, not only in the grand strategy but also in every aspect of the war. In a way, it is even possible to interpret every strategy and tactic employed throughout the war as having used this variable. The most urgent issue for Japan at the beginning of the war was how to wipe out Russian troops and cripple Russian ambition on the Korean peninsula. Subsequently, it was imperative to sever the line of communication between the Russian troops based in Liaoyang in southern Manchuria and those in the Lüshun fortress. After that, the imperative was to annihilate the Russian army assembled in Liaoyang before it grew into a massive force.

The key to accomplishing these missions was how to send as many soldiers as possible to northern Korea and southern Manchuria.

The fastest way to dispatch troops to northern Korea was to transport them to Incheon on boats. That would be about one month faster than landing the troops either on Busan or Wonsan on the east coast and marching them through treacherous roads. This method of transport, however, required Japan to secure command of the sea in the Yellow Sea. This was why the first military operation of the Japanese side was the bombardment of the Russian squadron in Lüshun.

The Russian military plan in 1901 called for concentrating the bulk of troops in Mukden and Liaoyang, then from there withdrawing all the way to Harbin—while defending Lüshun and Vladivostok with a limited number of

troops. The plan was to delay Japanese advances in the course of withdrawing, and then turn to offensive tactics as repeated reinforcements tipped the military balance in Russia's favor. The revised plan of 1903 was basically the same: to first withstand the Japanese offensives and then go on the offensive after massive reinforcements arrived to wipe out the Japanese troops from Manchuria and Korea. The plan, which had received imperial endorsement from the Czar before the start of the war, also envisaged the initial withdrawal to Harbin.

It was this military strategy that was behind the mysterious withdrawals of the Russian troops during the Battles of Liaoyang and Mukden—when one more push would have destroyed the Japanese troops. The Russians felt that they could surely win sooner or later if they continued to amass reinforcements as they withdrew. While Russia might have had a fifty-fifty chance of winning a face-to-face showdown, it was not at all necessary to gamble against a Japanese army known for its intrepidity. All Russian troops had to do was to fight the Japanese enough to delay their operations and then, once that mission was accomplished, to withdraw their main force to preserve its strength. Some may criticize this strategy, but commanders would not be denounced too harshly as having only followed the basic grand policy decided in the Czar's presence. Seen from this angle, it could be said that ground battles during the Russo-Japanese War proceeded almost exactly how Russia had planned.

In retrospect, however, this delay tactic was the greatest cause of Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War.

To begin with, troops fighting at the forefront were put in a difficult position in deciding whether to fight a battle all the way, which meant risking their lives, or wind up the battle at an appropriate timing, and this allowed death-defying Japanese soldiers to take advantage of the situation.

But the far graver impact was on Russia's domestic politics. Reporting on one withdrawal after another damaged the prestige of Russia, which in turn encouraged the activities of anti-government subversives and separatist movements by minorities. As the revolt of American intellectuals and students during the Vietnam War (1965–75) and the slowdown of the Soviet economy as the result of the war in Afghanistan (1979–89) damaged the capabilities of the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively, to

continue those wars, the outcome of the delay tactics became the critical obstacle for Russia in continuing the Russo-Japanese War.

Bold Personnel Change That Affected the Fate of a Nation

It seems appropriate to spend a few pages here to portray the leaders of the Japanese military at the time of the Russo-Japanese War.

Kodama Gentarō (児玉源太郎) guided the strategy of the whole campaign during the Russo-Japanese War. An elite of the elites of the *Chōshū-han*, Kodama had been a prime minister hopeful from early in his life. He was an attractive man of sharp wits, dauntless actions, decisiveness, and abundant sense of humor.

Kodama first participated in military actions at the age of sixteen during the Boshin War (戊辰戦争) in 1868–69. He was already Deputy Chief of Staff at Kumamoto Garrison when he was 25 years old; he successfully defended Kumamoto Castle from fierce charges of Satsuma rebels. During the First Sino-Japanese War, Kodama supported Kawakami Sōroku (川上操六), then de facto Chief of General Staffs of the Imperial Army, attending to military administration as Vice-minister of War. Kodama was appointed as Minister of War of the fourth Itō cabinet at the age of 48. In the subsequent Katsura cabinet, he was appointed as Minister of Home Affairs cum Governor-General of Taiwan; he was also in charge of supervising the planning of strategies against Russia as de facto deputy prime minister.

The Chief of the General Staff at that time was Ōyama Iwao (大山巖, to be succeeded by Yamagata Aritomo when Ōyama was appointed to commander-in-chief of the Japanese army in Manchuria after the eruption of the Russo-Japanese War), one of the Meiji elder statesmen and a man of unfathomably great presence. While it was actually the deputy-chief that managed General Staff affairs, Kawakami Sōroku met a premature death as a result of exhaustion from the First Sino-Japanese War. He was followed by a brilliant successor Tamura Iyozō (田村 怡与造), who also passed away in October 1903, half a year before the Russo-Japanese War, exhausted by the operational preparation for the war. After these two deaths, no one had any brilliant ideas about who the next deputy-chief of the General Staff should be.

After careful consultation among the bewildered Prime Minister

Katsura, Kodama, and Komura decided that there was nobody else but Kodama to assume the post. For Kodama it would mean a demotion of two levels from a cabinet minister and de facto deputy-prime minister to deputy-chief of the General Staff, but Kodama paid no heed to that. Among those who appointed Kodama or for Kodama himself, the only consideration in their minds was the fate of the nation.

Tōgō Heihachirō was appointed to Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy, which surprised some. With such brilliant talents in the imperial navy as Hidaka Sōnojō and Shibayama Yahachi—who, some thought, might be more qualified to be commander-in-chief—voices questioning the wisdom of appointing Tōgō reached even the Imperial Court. When asked by Emperor Meiji about this appointment, Navy Minister Yamamoto Gonbei replied, “Because Tōgō is a man of good fortune, Your Majesty.” To be sure, Tōgō had played a vital role at various key points during the First Sino-Japanese War as commander of the superannuated *Naniwa*. It appears that Tōgō’s promotion was attributable to his reticence, calm composure, and ability to stay focused.

Blockading Russia’s Lüshun Squadron

Emperor Meiji always hesitated to decide on whether to wage war until the very last minute. At the time of the First Sino-Japanese War, the Emperor said, “It is a war of Our cabinet members. It is not Our war,” and he remained in a bad mood for a few days.

On the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, when even the most cautious Itō Hirobumi decided that war would be inevitable, Emperor Meiji repeatedly said, “We do not know how to apologize to our people if the war turns out to be a disaster.” Because the emperor of Japan is ultimately responsible to the state, its people, and the spirits of the ancestors, it must have been the graveness of his responsibility that made him make those comments.

But on February 3 the Japanese government received a telegram reporting that all the vessels of the Lüshun squadron had steamed out of port, which could only mean that Russia was in a state of war readiness. While there was no knowing where the squadron was heading, the worst possible scenario for Japan would be the Russian squadron to capture Jinhai Bay facing the Korea Strait. Located in the southeast of the Korean

peninsula, Jinhae is a good harbor where, later, at the time of the Battle of Tsushima, the Japanese Combined Fleet would anchor to wait for the arrival of Russia's Baltic Fleet. If Jinhae Bay was captured even temporarily, traffic through the Korea Strait would be cut off, disabling the transport of Japanese ground troops to the Asian continent. Even if the Japanese side could recapture the bay shortly, the delay in the transportation of troops caused by the initial Russian capture may have proven to be fatal.

The urgency of the situation notwithstanding, Emperor Meiji still did not endorse the war even at the cabinet meeting held in his presence on February 4. It was on February 5 that imperial sanction was at last given to dispatch naval vessels. Departing Sasebo port in Nagasaki on February 6, the Combined Fleet immediately headed for Jinhae Bay and attacked the Russian squadron off Lüshun port on February 8.

Anchored in Incheon port were two Russian vessels, the gunship *Korietz* and the cruiser *Variag*. These two vessels sailed out of port on February 8 but soon returned to port, having encountered the main force of the Japanese fleet. They ventured out once again on February 9 only to be devastated by the superior enemy forces. Both ships scuttled backed to Incheon Port.

Deep in the night of February 8, the fleet of Japanese destroyers spotted and assaulted the Russian fleet anchored off Lüshun Port, seriously damaging battleships *Tsessarevtch* and *Retvisan* and cruiser *Pollada*. Although the Japanese Combined Fleet challenged its Russian opponents to a duel on February 9, the entire Russian squadron, intimidated by the surprise attack on the night before, retreated deep into Lüshun Port and never came out.

For about one year since, Russia's Lüshun squadron concentrated solely on preserving its force until reinforcements arrived from Europe. Other than one vain attempt to escape to Vladivostok, the fleet's activities were confined to the region around Lüshunkou. Thus, the Japanese Combined Fleet was able to accomplish its original goal of gaining command of the Yellow Sea and protect the safety of its naval transports.

Sea battles between the two sides during this period hardly affected the big picture of the war. It would be justified if I decided to forgo a detailed description. However, the operation of blockading Lüshun Port merits some explanation because it was a very visible operation to the Japanese people,

generating a lot of heroic stories—in fact, for quite a few elders, this blockade would be the first thing in the entire Russo-Japanese War that would come up to mind.

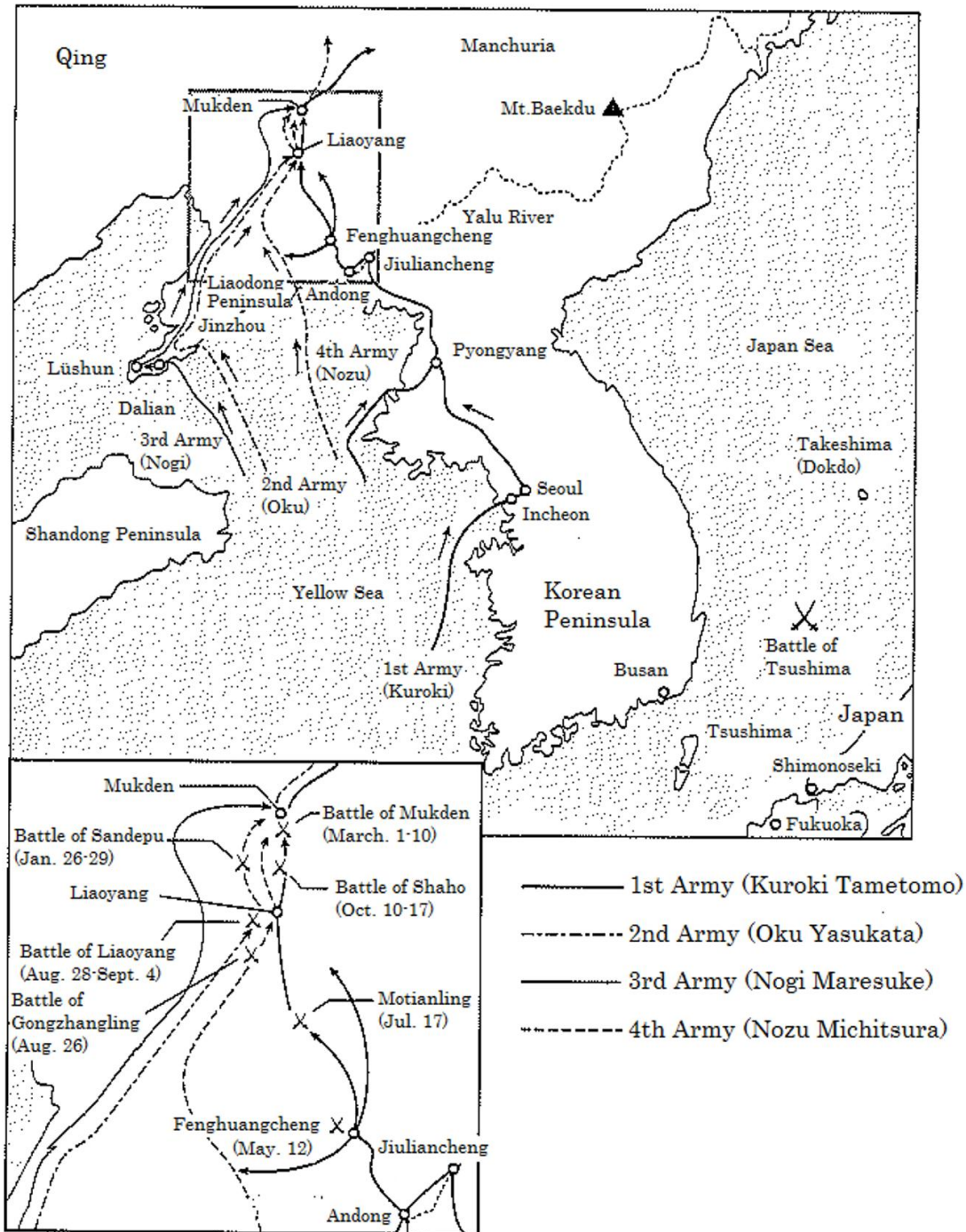
Noblesse Oblige

The blockade had already been tried by the U.S. Navy during the Spanish-American War (1898), and the tactic had been incorporated in the operational plans of the Imperial Navy before the start of the Russo-Japanese War. The blockade was aimed to obstruct the passage of Russian vessels by sinking old transport ships in the narrow channel near the mouth of Lüshun Port. This tactic would not be effective unless vessels are sunk accurately at the intended spot. But it would be challenging to spot the right point during the night, while the attacking vessel would be easy prey to the garrison's salvos during daytime. In the end, Commander-in-Chief Tōgō decided to carry out the mission at night out of concern for the safety of his men, but it would still be a highly risky, death-defying operation, sailing through shells from hundreds of enemy guns.

When 67 volunteer sailors and noncommissioned officers were called for on February 18 for the first attempt, as many as 2,000 volunteered. Some even sealed their applications with blood.

Blockade attempts were made three times in vain on February 24, March 27, and May 2, each time piling up casualties. Nevertheless, as many as 6,800 still volunteered for the next attempt, testifying to the high morale among officers and sailors. As abortive attempts were repeated, many involved naturally started arguing that those who had experienced the operation before should be given preference in the recruitment. Tōgō, however, singlehandedly rejected this argument, saying, “While it might be applicable to officers, no same sailor should go twice.” This was a manifestation of Tōgō's spirit of noblesse oblige, urging the elite to volunteer for dangerous tasks ahead of others.

Courses of Japanese Troops' Advances



First Victory at the Battle of Yalu River

During the blockade of Russia's Lüshun squadron, the Japanese First Army

under the command of General Kuroki Tamemoto (黒木 為楨) successfully landed on Incheon in mid-March. The Second Army under General Oku Yasukata (奥 保鞏) subsequently landed on Liaodong Peninsula.

Meanwhile, the Russian squadron in Lüshun Port would not take the offensive, except for small-scale operations around Liaodong Peninsula. Basically, the Russian squadron in Lüshun took the option of preserving its strength until the arrival of the Baltic Fleet from Europe, a very passive decision that inadvertently made it easier for the Japanese side to concentrate its forces.

The Japanese victory at the Battle of Yalu River (鴨緑江の戦い), which determined the outcome of the early stage of the Russo-Japanese War, was primarily the result of the speed at which the Japanese side was able to concentrate its forces. While the Russian side had estimated that about 20,000 Japanese troops would arrive in Yalu River in mid-May, it was actually in late April that Kuroki's First Army reached the southern bank of the Yalu River—and 20,000 Russian troops found themselves up against 40,000 Japanese troops.

Kuroki's Army started crossing the Yalu River on May 1. In anticipation of the Japanese crossing in the vicinity of Andong (present-day Dandong) at the estuary of the river, the Russian troops had built defense lines there. But the 12th Division of Kuroki's army took a northern detour and completed the crossing.

As a matter of fact, Imperial Headquarters had proposed postponing the river-crossing operation for three days so as to synchronize it with the Second Army's landing on Liaodong Peninsula. General Kuroki turned down that proposal on the grounds that preparations were already too far advanced to put off the river-crossing. Heavy rains began falling after Kuroki's army crossed the river on May 1; these rains would have made the crossing impossible for another week. Thus, it turned out that General Kuroki's decision was a priceless one in this war that was a race against time. Had the river-crossing been delayed for another week, the Russian troops would have had that much more time to gather reinforcements and to strengthen their defense.

The Japanese Army was superior to its Russian opponent on several points. The size of troops was one, as we have seen. Particularly, the power of the Japanese 12cm-howitzer, which had been a well-kept secret, simply

overwhelmed the Russian troops.

But the topography of the region benefitted the Russians in defending their stronghold and led to expectations that the Japanese side would claim heavy casualties upon attacking. In fact, army surgeons attached to Kuroki's army had been instructed to prepare themselves to attend to some 6,000 wounded. As it turned out, however, Kuroki's army succeeded in capturing the Russian stronghold within a day with little more than 900 casualties.

In order to escape being besieged and annihilated by the Japanese troops, the Russian troops started to retreat. En route, they were confronted by First Lieutenant Makisawa's company, which was defending a gorge. Even though the company suffered nearly devastating damage, losing half of its soldiers in the battle, it succeeded in defending its stronghold from the Russian attacks until reinforcements from the Japanese main force arrived. The result was the destruction and surrender of two Russian regiments. This battle was reported to various Western powers by their military observers, who unanimously praised the heroic conduct of the Makisawa company.

Although this Battle of Yalu River was not as large-scale as the subsequent Battles of Liaoyang and Mukden, its psychological impact on both the Japanese and Russian sides was tremendous.

In regard to this victory, Major General Nagaoka Gaishi (長岡外史), who later succeeded Kodama Gentarō to become deputy-chief of the General Staff, wrote to Kuroki that, "Although I have known the expression, 'so joyful as to start dancing in spite of oneself,' this was exactly what happened when the news of your victory reached the Imperial General Headquarters." Minister of War Terauchi Masatake sent a congratulatory telegraph, saying, "The entire nation is enjoying limitless jubilation."

At that time, Toyokawa Ryōhei of Mitsubishi Bank was engaged in the floatation of the Japanese government bond issue in Britain and the United States under the special command of Prime Minister Katsura. Toyokawa reminisced:

While we had been suffering from a dearth of purchasers of the our bond no matter how favorable the conditions were before the Battle of Yalu River, we have come to suffer from so many purchasers since the victory on May 1 that we have had to turn down some of them.

The amount of the bond issued also shot up: from ¥2 million before the May 1 victory to ¥50 million overnight.

Kuroki Tametomo, Overnight World Hero

The Battle of Yalu River was the first combat in which a nation of colored race, using modern weapons, overwhelmed the white race. *The Times* of London praised Japan's victory, stating:

There is no word that can sufficiently praise the morale, courage, and perfect organization of the Japanese Army. This battle has proven that Japanese staff officers are endowed with supreme military capabilities. Its soldiers are also excellent, moving precisely like a machine.

In her book *The Chinese Hsinhai Revolution: G. E. Morrison and Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1897–1920*, Woodhouse Eiko introduced the following overseas episodes that can only be described as “Kuroki Fever”:

Kuroki became an overnight hero. In Mexico they renamed their most productive mine General Kuroki Mine for good fortune. Kuroki fever was also witnessed in Canada where the Northern Land Railway named a newly opened station in Saskatchewan province after Kuroki, . . . while the Department of Communication of the provincial government of Ottawa also named a newly opened post office after him . . . To some in the United States it might have been unbearable for this hero Kuroki to be a mere Japanese, and a rumor was going around that Kuroki was actually a descendant of a Pole by the name of Kroski.

In Russia, rumor has it that Kuroki was actually part Russian because his grandfather was born in a Siberian village. The Kuroki Army's great victory at the Battle of Yalu River, the rumor says, owes it to the Russian blood of its commander . . .

Those were the days when it was not believed that a yellow race could defeat a white race.

In the subsequent Battle of Nanshan (南山の戦い), too, the quick concentration of troops by the Japanese was the decisive factor. Nanshan is a 3-kilometer-wide mountainous region in the narrowest part of Liaodong Peninsula. Because the landing of the Japanese Second Army on Liaodong Peninsula had been carried out much more smoothly than expected, the Russian side had no time to request reinforcements from Liaoyang or Lüshun, forcing it to defend Nanshan with a solitary regiment.

Still, the Japanese troops found Russian defenders, protected by trenches and armed with machine guns, tough opponents. They showed a caliber of fighting of a modern state military—which was a far cry from Qing soldiers during the First Sino-Japanese War who had fled without putting up any respectable resistance. In retrospect, the hardship that the Japanese troops experienced in the Battle of Nanshan was a precursor to the fierceness of the battle at Lüshun. While Russian gunships dispatched from Lüshun bombarded the advancing Japanese troops, causing heavy casualties, the Japanese Combined Fleet also bombarded the Russian strongholds, contributing to their eventual fall.

The Times of London reported on the Battle of Nanshan and lavished praise on the “marvelous courage and patience” of the Japanese troops.

Subsequently, the Japanese force captured the region around Dalian Bay. Dalian became Japan’s logistics base throughout the war.

All of Kuroki’s Bold Initiatives Hit the Mark

Having succeeded in isolating Lüshun, the next requirement for the Japanese military was to dispatch as many troops as promptly as possible to Liaoyang in order to engage in a decisive battle with the Russian Army before its main force was joined by reinforcements.

In the west of Liaoyang lies the great plain of Manchuria until it meets the sea in Bohai Bay. Now that the Japanese Army had conquered Dalian, it could use the branch line of the Chinese Eastern Railway to transport troops northward. In contrast, east of Liaoyang—that is, the region between Yalu River and Liaoyang—is mountainous. A dividing ridge connects eastern Manchuria and Liaodong Peninsula, a configuration that was easy for the Russians to defend but difficult for the Japanese troops to attack. In light of

this natural handicap, therefore, it was commendable that Kuroki's army broke through the Russian defense much faster than expected and advanced further to threaten the east side of Russia's main force.

Kuroki's army was always a step ahead of the Russians from one occasion to the next. Moreover, Kuroki was even a step ahead of operations of the Imperial General Headquarters. After the successful crossing of Yalu River, the General Headquarters instructed Kuroki to stay put for a while, holding off on a further advance deep into Manchuria. General Kuroki, however, asked for General Headquarters' permission to attack Fenghuangcheng (鳳凰城) on the grounds that his current station was too narrow for 40,000 troops and too difficult to defend. Headquarters replied that he had to proceed at his own risk. While his staff officers were furious at this reply, Kuroki remained calm, telling his men, "No need to be so upset. Naturally, I will take full responsibility." Kuroki's troops attacked Fenghuangcheng on May 12. Because the Russian side was caught in the middle of constructing defense facilities, Fenghuangcheng, a point of strategic importance on the Korea-Manchuria border, fell easily into the hands of Kuroki's army.

Now that Fenghuangcheng was conquered, the only thing Kuroki's army had to do to reach Liaoyang was to take the rough mountainous road that goes through the natural stronghold of Motianling (摩天嶺). When Kuroki realized that the Russians, quite unaware of the strategic importance of Motianling, had not yet fortified it, he had his army capture it, again going beyond the operational boundary instructed by the General Headquarters. Belatedly realizing Motianling's importance, an elite division of the Russian Army challenged Kuroki's army in a hand-to-hand fight to retake it. The Japanese troops successfully repulsed this challenge. Thus the preparation for Japan's First Army to proceed to Liaoyang was completed.

The above episode shows that, each time a new situation emerged, the Japanese troops always made the first move—before the Russian side had even made an action plan. The Russians had to convene a war council to decide on how to cope with each new situation. From the beginning, there had been a difference in views between Quartermaster General of the 3rd Manchurian Army Mikhail Alekseyev, who insisted on defending, on Russia's honor, the territories that Russia had captured on the Korean and Liaodong peninsulas, and Aleksey Kuropatkin, commander-in-chief of the Russian

land forces in Manchuria, who was mindful of strategic sustainability. The differences between these two resulted in unnecessarily long war councils and halfhearted compromise plans.

Immortal Accomplishment in World Military History

Kuroki achieved many distinguished military accomplishments during the Russo-Japanese War, but the night raid of Gongzhangling (弓張嶺) was, according to military historian Itō Masanori, the immortal accomplishment in world military history.

While the Japanese Army had secured the dividing ridge of the road that connects the Korea-Manchuria border and Liaoyang by conquering Motianling, it still had to break the defensive line on the mountain range put up by the robust Russian 10th Army. At the heart of this defensive line was Gongzhangling. Unless this defensive line was broken, Kuroki's army would remain locked up in the mountains, unable to contribute to the general attack on Liaoyang.

Faced with this task, Kuroki received a telegram from the General Headquarters informing him that no additional rounds of cannon fire would be supplied for the time being and, therefore, that his army had to make do with what ammunition it already had to win this battle. Except for engaging in a close combat with swords and bayonets after sneaking into the enemy stronghold under the cover of darkness, it was simply impossible to seize an enemy fortress without shell protection.

But a night raid was a tactic adopted by smaller troops, a battalion at the largest, and a night raid by a full army division was unheard of in world military history—nor was it guaranteed to succeed. Accomplishing tactical goals in the darkness would be extremely challenging, and there was always a risk of friendly casualties. Opinions on the wisdom of this operation differed among his staff officers, but Kuroki brilliantly put a period to the dispute, saying:

What's most important is the opinion of the field commanders who will be actually engaged in the battle. Unless they are wholeheartedly supportive of the plan, this operation can never succeed. If field commanders agree with the plan, let us carry it out, but when they

appear doubtful, let us revise the plan. Summon the division commander and the brigade commander at once.

The Second Division from Sendai was in charge of the Gongzhangling front. The commander, accompanied by two brigade commanders under him, came to see Kuroki and his staff officers. Upon hearing the plan, he immediately said, "Let us give it a try."

A night raid called for special preparations. First, all of the officers had to be made fully familiar with the topography of the region. Thus, officers sneaked into the mountains in their areas of responsibility to thoroughly study the terrain and returned to their respective bases, all before dawn. One foreseeable problem on the night of the raid, which would have a full moon until 3:00 a.m., was the reflection of moonlight on the bayonets, but the solution was found when a soldier suggested wrapping the bayonets in sorghum leaves. The password was agreed on, and it was decided that all the raiders would wear white armbands as a mark. Kuroki's army was under a severe time constraint to reach Liaoyang in time for the showdown, but somehow the troops managed to complete their preparations soon enough.

Thus, on the night of August 26, 12,000 troops of the Second Division started marching silently toward the mountain peak that was protected by 17,000 Russian troops. Soldiers were even prohibited from batting at mosquitoes that were swarming around them.

It was an operation in the pitch dark with no verbal commands. Nobody knew how their fellow soldiers were fighting. If some fell behind, they would go unnoticed. Under these circumstances, one could only trust the patriotism and sense of duty of each and every soldier. In retrospect, all the officers and soldiers of the Second Division gallantly lived up to Kuroki's expectations. Some participated in the raid in spite of high fever. One officer was recuperating from the loss of his right arm in the previous battle, but he also took part in the raid, claiming he wished to die honorably with his still-serviceable left arm and two legs.

The valor of Captain Miura, one of the sword masters among the rank and file, became a legend during this night raid. While cutting down one enemy soldier after another in a dogfight, Miura spotted enemy trenches that were effectively shooting down Japanese soldiers. Dashing toward the gunfire, he immediately cut down several enemy soldiers. All of a sudden, he

felt that his body became astonishingly heavier. With no way of knowing in the darkness what had happened, Miura continued to cut down enemies around him, as he felt that the extra weight had been lifted. He continued to swing his sword in the darkness to save his division. Finally, he collapsed.

One of Miura's men rushed to rescue him and found the point of a bayonet sticking out from his back. Picking up a stone, this soldier struck the point of the bayonet and pulled it out from Miura's chest. In retrospect, it is believed that as Miura charged at Russian soldiers, one of them, having no time to shoot, threw his bayoneted rifle at Miura which penetrated his chest: the moment when he felt an extra load in his body. As he continued to cut down enemies, the hilt of the bayonet must have been broken, making him feel a sudden lift of weight from his body. It was after the battle was won that Miura fainted from loss of blood.

Miura miraculously recovered from this injury. For his distinguished service, he was later promoted to major general, the highest rank that a non-graduate of the Army War College could reach.

The night raid began at 3:30 a.m. after the moon had set. By 11:30 a.m., having suppressed the fierce firepower of the Russian defenders, the Japanese flag stood at the summit. From the summit of the mountain, massive numbers of Russian troops were seen to retreat like an outgoing tide. Itō Masanori pointed out that a successful night raid involving a full army division was unprecedented in military history. Probably, it will not be repeated in the future.

War Is the Foundation of All the High Virtues and Faculties of Men

According to *Nichiro Sensō* (Russo-Japanese War) by the Japanese author Kojima Noboru, Lieutenant General Ian Hamilton, a British military observer with Kuroki's forces, left the following impression of this battle in his memoir:¹

I wish to stress at least ten times that Japanese soldiers are endowed with splendid qualities. They are innocent like young children and intrepid like lions and think only of fulfilling their duties to their

¹ Ian Hamilton, *A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book During the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Edward Arnold, 1906) pp.14–5.

ancestors and the emperor.

Believing that the Japanese is “a born soldier” bred with the “milk of patriotism,” Hamilton continued to quote John Ruskin, his compatriot art critic and social theorist, who said, “All the pure and noble arts of peace are founded on war; no great art ever rose on earth but among a nation of soldiers. . . . War . . . is the foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of men.” Hamilton expressed his great admiration for Japan’s refined samurai ethic and culture, with its balanced emphasis on liberal and military arts, contrasting this tradition with that of embattled China, which “discouraged their best from adopting the military career, and thought their worst were good enough for the army.”

Moreover, Hamilton expressed concern about the future of his own country, noting, “English women do not teach their children even one-tenth of traditional spirit that Japanese mothers do.”

It was not only the British who worried about their own country’s future in light of the patriotism manifested by the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War. In his *Shufu Shu-u Hito wo Shosatsu Su*, Japanese author Takeda Taijun quoted *Waga Dōhō ni Tsugu* (Message to My Fellow Compatriots), written by Qiu Jin, a Chinese revolutionary, who said she felt like “dying of envy” at the sight of young, sweet children waving small national flags as they saw young soldiers off to the battlefield when she visited a friend in Yokohama in the fall of 1904.

She continued to comment:

Ah my fellow people, it is because the Japanese unites so solidly in giving unqualified esteem to fighting men that soldiers can give up their lives so selflessly in battle. . . . Families of soldiers in the battlefield are provided with subsidies, and it is a great honor for family members to have husbands, sons, and brothers in the battlefield. Shops carry a signboard saying “special half-price service to military personnel.”

Alas, have pity on our own soldiers. They are forced to support themselves and their families with scanty rations that are already skimmed every month, and they are cursed and sworn by their

superiors when they make even the slightest error. Those in power look down on soldiers as if they were lowly slaves, refusing even to sit with them. Soldiers are despised as the most inferior of the inferior. Even when a war is won, it is only high-living officers who monopolize all the credit.

Qiu Jin also touched on women's education, observing "women's schools are increasingly flourishing in Japan," and proposed that Chinese women should consider studying in Japan because, "a state like Japan, where women support their parents, assist their husbands, educate their children, and try to eradicate idlers, must become a mighty nation." Thus, it was not only soldiers but also women in Japan that both Hamilton and Qiu Jin praised in admiration.

What is This Thing Called War?

What is this thing called war? As the saying goes, "Thousands die to raise one hero to fame." Soldiers in the field are not the only victims of war. From ancient times, there is nothing that makes people suffer more than a war.

Yet from the viewpoint of a history of civilization, it is undeniable that many of arts that are so moving have been founded on war, as Ruskin said. Particularly during the period when a nation is rising, war becomes a source of people's energy; war could even nurture a great civilization. It is needless to recall that Athenian "Golden Age" under Pericles flourished after the Greco-Persian Wars and that Elizabethan England prospered as a result of the annihilation of the Spanish Armada. Incidentally, Pericles was twenty years old at the time of the Battle of Salamis, and William Shakespeare was twenty-five years old when the Spanish Armada was destroyed in the Anglo-Spanish War. This is testimony to the fact that it was the youths during the heroic age of a war who became the driving forces of the subsequent rise of culture.

In Japan, many aspects of so-called prewar culture that present-day Japanese admire and feel nostalgic about have been cultivated by people who had spent their youth in the days of the Russo-Japanese War, a rising period of a new Japanese Empire. In fact, the high standard of present-day Japan,

not only in science and technology but in literature, fine arts, and many others, owes a lot to the people of that age.

The times have changed and the people are different. Contemporary Japan is not what it was during the Russo-Japanese War. Nor is today's United Kingdom the same as England in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Still less is contemporary Greece Pericles' Greece. However, for a nation, having gone through this kind of heritage is a part of its history and tradition, and it should never be forgotten.

