

# Born Soldiers Who March Under the Rising Sun: The Russo-Japanese War, Britain's Military Observers, and British Impressions Regarding Japanese Martial Capabilities Prior to the First World War



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## Abstract

This thesis explores how Japan's military triumphs during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-'05 influenced British opinions regarding the ability of the Japanese military as well as the decision to strengthen the military dimensions of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in the spring and summer of 1905. Utilizing reports and assessment from British Army and Royal Navy observers to the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy it is shown how these men, and by extension their superiors in London and New Delhi, were given a new appreciation for the potential role played by Japanese soldiers and sailors should a subsequent conflict have erupted between the Russian Empire and the Anglo-Japanese coalition in the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War.

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The Russo-Japanese War (8 February 1904 – 5 September 1905) was "the first great war of the 20th century." It grew out of rival imperial ambitions of the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan over Manchuria and Korea. The major theatres of operations were Southern Manchuria, specifically the area around the Liaodong Peninsula and Mukden; and the seas around Korea, Japan, and the Yellow Sea. The Russo-Japanese War was a military conflict fought between the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan from 1904 to 1905. Much of the fighting took place in what is now northeastern China. The Russo-Japanese War was also a naval conflict, with ships exchanging fire in the waters surrounding the Korean peninsula. Russia provided military support to the Qing Empire in China during that conflict, which pitted the two Asian powers against each other. With the Russians' history of military aggression, the Japanese initially sought a deal, offering to cede control of Manchuria (northeastern China). Under the terms of the proposal, Japan would have maintained influence over Korea. Japan mobilizing for war with Russia! This electrifying message flashed to the major world capitals from foreign observers in St. Petersburg and Tokyo during the first days of 1904. For several years, czarist Russia had been penetrating southward into Manchuria with the steel bands of the Trans-Siberian Railroad—putting itself on a collision course with the newly expanding empire of Japan. The ultimate Russian objective was the occupation of Korea. The Japanese response to the rebuff was swift and aggressive. Army units moved to staging areas for deployment to Korea, while the Imperial Japanese Navy prepared to steam out to sea and engage the Russian Pacific Fleet.