

Francia – Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte

Bd. 40

2013

DOI: 10.11588/fr.2013.0.40979

Copyright

Das Digitalisat wird Ihnen von perspectivia.net, der Online-Publikationsplattform der Max Weber Stiftung - Deutsche Geisteswissenschaftliche Institute im Ausland, zur Verfügung gestellt. Bitte beachten Sie, dass das Digitalisat urheberrechtlich geschützt ist. Erlaubt ist aber das Lesen, das Ausdrucken des Textes, das Herunterladen, das Speichern der Daten auf einem eigenen Datenträger soweit die vorgenannten Handlungen ausschließlich zu privaten und nicht-kommerziellen Zwecken erfolgen. Eine darüber hinausgehende unerlaubte Verwendung, Reproduktion oder Weitergabe einzelner Inhalte oder Bilder können sowohl zivil- als auch strafrechtlich verfolgt werden.

NAOKO SHIMAZU

THE MENTALITY OF THE JAPANESE CONSCRIPT
AND MANCHURIA AS »LIEU DE MÉMOIRE«¹

The Russo-Japanese War, as the first major international war of the twentieth century, is important to our understanding of the First World War. Significantly we see prescient indications of new social mores, expectations, and new realities of warfare as revealed in the individual experiences of Japanese conscripts. At the time, the total Japanese population was about 46,1 million, out of which 1,09 million men were mobilised. In the end, 73 685 soldiers or 1,6 % of those mobilised died in battle². The war had cost the Japanese state 1,7 billion yen compared to 200 million yen for the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Until now, historical connections made between the experiences of the Russo-Japanese War and the First World War have not been fully explored or developed³. This is mainly due to the categorical separation of the two wars, as being distinct and discreet from each other; thus, creating a conceptual gap in the way the two wars are situated historiographically. In Japanese historiography, too, there has been hitherto very little attempt to link the Russo-Japanese War with the First World War. Japan as one of the two belligerent powers of 1904/1905 is considered to have played a marginal role in the First World War, to the extent that the Japanese Foreign Ministry defined it as a »European War«. Whilst on the other hand, the Bolshevik Revolution occurred in the midst of the Great War, weakening the legitimacy of the new Soviet Union as a legatee of the 1904–1905 war. In all, the size, the scale, and the sheer devastation of the First World War and in particular its impact upon the »mentalities« of the principal belligerents were so insurmountably great that it can only truly be compared to the Second World War.

Nonetheless, Japanese society at war in 1904–1905 can be usefully considered as a precursor for how modern societies came to cope with large-scale mobilisations, and their accompanying social after-effects. Japan was a modern nation-state, with armed forces which had been expanded substantially in size and in power in the decade after the humiliation experienced at the hands of Russia, Germany and France in the Triple Intervention of April 1895. Japan works as an insightful, comparative, case for industrialized Western states like Germany, France and Britain, as contemporary Japanese leaders certainly had intended their country to be cast in the manner of a Western-style modern state. Indeed, as evidenced by the large number of international military observers attached to Japan's First Army, the Russo-Japanese War was seen by contemporaries as the most modern war of its time, show-casing the most up-to-date military hardware purchased from Western states which vied for lucrative defence contracts.

How did Japanese conscripts experience the war, and what were their attitudes towards war and death? Without a doubt, the richest and the most rewarding primary sources for exploring

1 A fuller version of the discussions in this article can be found in: Naoko SHIMAZU, *Japanese Society at War: Death, Memory and the Russo-Japanese War*, Cambridge 2009, esp. chapters 2, 3, 7.

2 Rikugunshō (ed.), *Nichiro sensō tōkeishū*, vol. 8, Tokyo 1995, p. 10.

3 A notable exception is the edited volume produced by John W. STEINBERG, Bruce W. MENNING, David SCHIMMELPENNINCK VAN DER OYE et al. (ed.), *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, Leiden 2005, where the editors attempt to categorize the Russo-Japanese War as the first of the series of world wars fought in the twentieth century.

the war experiences of the ordinary Japanese people are the personal war diaries of conscripts who were mobilised to fight on the Manchurian front. For one, keeping a diary was still a private activity for conscripts during the Russo-Japanese War, unlike in the post-1905 period when diary-writing became part of the character-building training of the army⁴. In 1904–1905, only information of a strategic nature such as the location of the unit, details of movements and so on, was censored, leaving remarkable freedom for conscripts to write what they wanted. As one conscript wrote regarding the pros and cons of diary-writing:

»Although Sakai insists on the uselessness of a diary, I absolutely insist that it is useful. Why is it useless when we can look over what we wrote later, and use it for educational materials, to know the thinking of the period, and to enjoy the memory of the past. Although it may also cause sadness, I think it must be useful in many ways. But, I think one must note everything of what one thinks in the diary⁵.«

Personal war diaries in the Russo-Japanese War, therefore, provide the most direct access to re-creating the mentality of Japanese conscripts, revealing their rich, inner world, full of complex, and often conflicting, emotions.

This study offers a glimpse into the mentality of the Japanese conscript who fought in »Manchuria« (northeast China) during the Russo-Japanese War. In the process, it explores how the notion of Manchuria came to symbolise the collective memories of the war veterans in post-1905 Japanese society, something which was particularly utilised by the Army after the Manchurian Incident of September 1931. Indeed, on the thirtieth anniversary of the Russo-Japanese War in 1935, one way in which the invasion of Manchuria in September 1931 was justified, amongst others, was that it was a means of protecting the dead Japanese souls from the 1904–1905 war⁶. I argue that Manchuria in post-1905 Japanese society came to assume meaning as a significant *lieu de mémoire* for the generation of Japanese soldiers who fought in the war, as their memories were principally coloured by their tragic experiences centring on memories of the death of their comrades-in-arms and that this had a profound legacy for later Japanese society. The first part of this article will analyse how battlefield death was portrayed during the war, while the second part will explore how Manchuria was commemorated in collective memory as a *lieu de mémoire*.

Manchuria as the Site of Death

During the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese state created a new slogan of »honourable war death« (*meiyo no senshi*) in order to convince the conscripts to sacrifice their lives to fight for the state. One of the principal reasons why it was necessary to invent such a slogan was that conscripts generally felt that their primary loyalty was to their families (particularly parents) and the local community, and not to the state. As many of them came from lower socio-economic backgrounds in rural areas, where familial and communal relations were tightly knit, it was critical that they returned home able-bodied in order to continue to act as principal breadwinners in multi-generational households. Therefore, it is not too difficult to imagine the perceptual gap that existed between the state and the people, as the former wanted the latter to fight and die for the state, whereas the latter wanted to survive the war without wanting to be disloyal to the state. Unsurprisingly, conscripts' diaries are full of mentions of such ambivalent sentiments, and awareness of the hollowness of the official rhetoric of »honourable war death«. Not only that, their diaries reveal that the contemporary understanding of political terms such

4 Toshiya ICHINOSE, *Kindai nihon no chōheisei to shakai*, Tokyo 2004, p. 6, 10–12, 47.

5 Yūsaku MOZAWA, *Aru hohei no nichiro sensō jūgun nikki*, Tokyo 2005, p. 220.

6 Yomiuri shinbun, 10 March 1935.

as »nation« and »nation-state« was not as rigidly defined as it subsequently became, leaving some fluidity in their interpretations⁷. All in all, we can safely assume that Japanese conscripts in 1904–1905, like most of their European counterparts in the First World War, did not want to die in battle because they wanted to survive, in order to return home to continue to fend for their families.

So how did soldiers write about battlefield deaths in their personal diaries? Somewhat surprisingly, they often considered battlefield death to be unnatural and, therefore, something »unlucky«, betraying very strongly their desire to not die. One private wrote about feeling »really eerie« when at night one of his comrades was shot dead on scouting duty⁸. The sense of eeriness derived from the Japanese popular belief that the body and the soul (*tamashii*) separate at death, and the soul of the dead person continues to linger in the space of »this world«, that is, the world of the living, before it goes to the »other world«, the world of the dead. It also derived from the Japanese notion that the newly dead soul bears some »grudge« against the living, and this needs to be calmed through ancestor worship in order for peace to prevail in the world of the living. For the Japanese, the dividing wall between life and death is relatively thin, and life and death are perceived to be continuous⁹. Accordingly, during the Russo-Japanese War, it was believed that a battlefield death, given that it was horrific and took place outside of the context of one's ordinary life, would doubly invoke the anger of the dead soul. This explains why battlefield death was considered unnatural and, indeed, fearful by many soldiers across the ranks. For example, one officer remained highly superstitious about death. Often he would calculate the probability of dying depending on the particular position he had to defend or the duty he had. As he admitted in his diary, he often felt frightened about death after being wounded in the Battle of Liaoyang. However, he felt that his status as an officer did not allow him to show signs of weakness, particularly to his subordinates¹⁰.

On rare occasions, soldiers would commit suicide on the battlefield. This phenomenon was considered to be particularly unnerving psychologically by all, regardless of rank. This may fly in the face of the well-known reputation of the Japanese attitude towards suicide as advocated in the samurai ethical code¹¹. One of the most famous treatises on the samurai's attitude towards death can be found in a short book written by Tsunetomo Yamamoto in 1716, entitled »Hagakure« (Hidden Leaves):

»The Way of the Samurai is found in death. When it comes to either/or, there is only the quick choice of death. [...] If by setting one's heart right every morning and evening, one is able to live as though his body were already dead, he gains freedom in the way. His whole life will be without blame, and he will succeed¹².«

In the idealised code of samurai ethics, suicide was considered to be the prerogative of the samurai because he was to have ultimate control over his life, even in the choice of death¹³.

7 Shinobu ŌE, *Heishitachi no nichiro sensō: gohyakutsū no gunji yūbin kara*, Tokyo 1988, p. 210–211, 263–267.

8 MOZAWA, *Aru hohei* (as in n. 5), p. 65.

9 Hayao KAWAI, *Nihonjin no shiseikan*, in: Tomio TADA, Hayao KAWAI (ed.), *Sei to shi no yōshiki: nōshi jidai o mukaeru nihonjin no seishikan*, Tokyo 1991, p. 249, 255–256.

10 Jirō TAMON, *Nichiro sensō nikki*, Tokyo 1980, p. 41, 97, 129, 131–132, 141, 181.

11 For the best exposition on Japanese attitudes towards suicide, confer to Maurice PINGUET, *Voluntary Death in Japan*, transl. by Rosemary MORRIS, Cambridge 1993.

12 Tsunetomo YAMAMOTO, *Hagakure. The Book of the Samurai*, transl. by William Scott WILSON, Tokyo 1983, p. 17–18.

13 For a more detailed treatment of the cult of death and its effects on the Japanese soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War, consult Naoko SHIMAZU, *The Myth of the Patriotic Soldier: Japanese*

In the light of the above, let us take a look at how a private wrote about battlefield suicide in 1904–1905:

»Death in war is not about dying because one wants to die. One gets killed without really knowing what's going on. What's more, there is no guarantee of being killed. I personally don't believe that one can die that easily. But, with suicide, one dies facing death squarely as that knife which went through the neck of Captain Usukine. It's as though one was lured by the spirit of death, as though it was something super human which fixed its gaze on us. Isn't it why it's [suicide] frightening¹⁴?«

In fact, this private together with his senior officer were so unnerved by the suicide of the old officer that they slept together in the same room, experiencing a few sleepless nights, allegedly hounded by the »god of cowardice«.

What did Japanese conscripts think of the enemy as they faced Russian soldiers on Manchurian battlefields? Japanese attitudes towards their enemy counterparts were affected by their relative perceptions of the martial bravery of the Russians in battle. A Japanese private wrote about the »decisive strike of the enemy which was very brave and praiseworthy«¹⁵. Grudgingly admitting respect for the Russians' fearless attitude, yet another praised them, writing »the Russian soldiers are nothing like the Chinese soldiers of yesterday. Amply brave and elite is their army«¹⁶. A Japanese conscript praised the conduct of a Russian private: »Last night, there was one Russian private, carrying and throwing a grenade, who came barging into our line, he was naked save his trousers and boots, not carrying any weapon. Of course, he was speared and killed, but when you see this, it is not because the Russian soldiers are weak, but because Japanese soldiers are strong, that we always win¹⁷.« Interestingly, he used the bravery of the Russian soldier in order to underline indirectly the martial bravery of Japanese soldiers, including presumably his own. Seen in this light, praising the martial bravery of the enemy seemed to have involved an element of self-praise, that the Japanese were braver than the brave enemy, which in turn had the effect of strengthening one's sense of worth.

Japanese conscripts were often just as appalled by the sight of Russian dead bodies as by those of the Japanese. When a Japanese private came across bodies of the enemy dead, he described how »that scene of horror was difficult to express in words«¹⁸. There was the sense that both Russian and Japanese soldiers shared the same fate as foot soldiers of imperial armies, as one conscript sympathised with the Russians: »when one sees them as prisoners of war, it is pitiful and one feels sorry for them¹⁹.« Now and then, however, soldiers emphasised the barbaric nature of the Russian soldiers:

»until four, five days ago, this was where the Russian soldiers stayed. They are even filthier than the Chinks. They either destroy or burn down the houses on departure, with furniture strewn all over the place, making it an unbearable sight. Also, the dead

Attitudes towards Death in the Russo-Japanese War, in: *War and Society* 19,2 (October 2001), p. 69–89; Eiko IKEGAMI's *Taming of the Samurai. Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan*, Cambridge, MA 1995, is one of the best works on the samurai ethics available in English.

14 Makiyo ISHIMITSU, *Ishimitsu Makiyo no shuki*, Tokyo 1988, p. 668.

15 Sōkichi ŌSAWA, *Ensei nisshi*, in: *Zamashiritsu toshokan shiryō hensan gakari* (ed.), *Nichiro sensō jūgunki 1*, *Zamashi shiryō gyōsho 4*, Zama 1990, p. 89.

16 Michita DOIHARA, *Nichiro sen'eki nikki*, Tokyo 1979, p. 48, 163.

17 MOZAWA, *Aru hohei* (as in n. 5), p. 85.

18 ŌSAWA, *Ensei* (as in n. 15), p. 35–36.

19 MOZAWA, *Aru hohei* (as in n. 5), p. 50.

bodies of horses, pigs and Chinks that the Russians had left here and there is not a pleasant sight to see²⁰.«

Moreover, the hatred for the enemy occasionally surfaced as revenge for the deaths of comrades-in-arms: »when I saw the enemy dead [...] I felt sorry for them, but yesterday after seeing our force fight a terribly difficult battle which resulted in so many deaths and injuries, our hatred for the enemy penetrated into our spine. And, now, it feels good to see enemy dead bodies²¹.«

Of particular note, Japanese and Russian officers declared a temporary truce for thirty minutes to celebrate New Year's Eve in December 1904, as they gathered in mid-battlefield. They spoke French to each other, took photographs, and the friendly meeting went on longer than planned, for one hour. These friendly gatherings became more noticeable after the fall of Port Arthur on 1st of January 1905, as is indicated by the records that we have of gift exchanges between the two sides: the Japanese lower ranks offered postcards, whilst their Russian counterparts reciprocated with gifts of cups²². During these gatherings, the defeated Russian soldiers behaved in a very jolly manner, getting drunk, saluting the Japanese, approaching them to ask for a hand shake, and some Japanese would go and treat the Russians with food and drinks from the military canteen as »only the feeling of camaraderie was left after such a fierce struggle to survive²³. After the signing of the peace in September 1905, Japanese and Russian soldiers would commune with each other fairly frequently out at the front: »the Russian enemies that we had been glaring at have now become friends. Yesterday, too, Russian officers and soldiers came to visit our regiment. From now on there will be more visits from the Russians making it more interesting²⁴.« So much has been made of the Christmas day truce during the First World War in Europe but such displays of camaraderie across the front in the battlefield, expressing congeniality and conviviality, had precedents in the Russo-Japanese War a decade earlier.

Japanese soldiers' diaries and letters are full of depictions of battlefield death as something »tragic«, »cruel« and »heart-wrenching«²⁵. Not surprisingly, this attitude towards death was universally shared across all ranks and, in a sense, worked as a binding agent to form a common experience. A first-class private, aged twenty-two, wrote in his diary about the »horrifying tragedy« of the sight of badly mutilated soldiers who were screaming for help:

»Oh, even though it is the duty of soldiers to separate from fathers, mothers, wives, and children, far away from home, as defender of the state, and that we take for granted that we get hit by enemy bullets and are buried in a foreign land [...] what would their families feel if they only knew how tragic reality was²⁶?«

The above quotation emphasises not only the inseparable link that soldiers felt with their families but, also, the well of loneliness emanating from being »buried in a foreign land«, away from the family. In fact, this sense of the loneliness of death is a universal theme in the treatment of war

20 JINGORŌ NAGAMITSU, *Sakubun chōmen: Chūgoku*, 29 May 1905, in: *Ebino-shi shiryōshū IV: Nishin nichiro sensō, Ebino-shi, Miyazaki-ken* 1996, p. 215.

21 DOIHARA, *Nichiro sen'eki nikki* (as in n. 16), p. 49.

22 KAIZŌ TADA, *Nichiro sen'eki junchū nisshi: Ichi kangohei no roppyaku nanajūgo nichi*, Toyama 1979, p. 152; A British journalist who was attached to a Russian regiment also provided testimony to this effect. Confer, FRANCIS MACCULLAGH, *With the Cossacks: Being the Story of an Irishman Who Rode With the Cossacks During the Russo-Japanese War*, London 1906.

23 TADA, *Nichiro sen'eki junchū nisshi* (as in n. 22), p. 183.

24 NAGAMITSU, *Sakubunchō 2* (as in n. 20), p. 241.

25 For instance, ŌE, *Heishi* (as in n. 7), p. 117.

26 KIICHI TAKADA, *Nichiro sen'eki jūgunki*, Tokyo 1963, p. 30, 40.

death in their diaries. Conscripts tended to consider war death as »tragic« and »heart-wrenching« because it was a lonely death, away from their home and family. Interestingly, this perception of death as being lonely can be interpreted as an extension of the loneliness of their life at the front in Manchuria – a continuum of loneliness for the soldiers. In war death, one became a victim of the ultimate state of loneliness by dying in a foreign land away from one's home. Moreover, as mentioned previously, physical death did not mean a complete break from the world of the living, as the soul of the dead person continued to live on, and only after a while did it leave »this world« to go to the »other world«. Around the time of the Russo-Japanese War, it is safe to assume that most conscripts subscribed to the notional cosmic framework of »this world« and the »other world«, deriving from a mixture of beliefs drawn from ancestor worship (with shamanistic practices) and Buddhism, which as a latecomer to Japan had had to accommodate the existing indigenous belief system²⁷.

As a reflection of their tendency to equate death with loneliness, the perceived lonesome solitude of the tombstones of the war dead on the battlefield came to symbolise the tragedy of battlefield deaths. When he came across the tombstones of Japanese soldiers near the battle of Jōngju in April 1904, a senior private wrote that »having seen this, for the first time, I felt that I was in war«²⁸. Another could not fail to be moved to tears when he walked past the many gravestones which looked as though soldiers were standing in a row by the roadside²⁹. As a medical doctor sat under a tree by the tombstones of the lower ranks of the Fourteenth Regiment, marked by four separate pillars, each inscribed with names, ranks and dates of death, he was overcome with the feeling of grief, and felt »the mercilessness of war«. To commemorate the spot, he made a pencil drawing of the area³⁰. Soldiers would often go and grieve for dead comrades by returning to the battlefields upon which they had recently fought, noting that »it's an unthinkable tragedy«, as if to confirm the tragic nature of war³¹. Underneath, their sadness was compounded with empathy that this fate could befall any one of them. These moments of intense grief are often associated with the sense of being far away from their homeland. Hence, Manchuria came to acquire that connotation – a symbolic far-away place where soldiers died. The distance from home played a significant role in the psyche of the conscripts as the »far-ness« of Manchuria is often repeated in their diaries. Though a non-combatant, the captain of a Japanese Red Cross hospital ship, »Kōsaimaru«, also described a similar sentiment:

»The fresh gravestones looked very lonely and sad in the sunset, and as I walked along the countless gravestones, four or five injured soldiers were burning incense and bowing to the graves [...]. I wonder what it feels like to be these injured soldiers who lost their comrade friends then. We also stopped and bowed in front of the graves, trying not to cry³².«

The worst moment was often marked by the death of a friend. One NCO experienced this when he found out that his friend had died of stomach wounds, only a few hours after having seen him. According to the NCO: »I was so distressed that I thought I was going to faint. [...] Every strength had been sapped out of my body and all I could do was to lie down.« To make

27 Confer, for instance, to: Ichiro HORI, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change*, Chicago 1968; Hisao TANAKA, *Sosen saishi no rekishi to minzoku*, Tokyo 1986, p. 210.

28 Tsuneyuki UCHISEKI, *Meiji sanjūshichihachinen nichiro sen'eki jūgun nissshi*, in: *Ebino-shi shiryōshū IV: Nisshin nichiro sensō*, Ebino-shi, Miyazaki-ken 1996, p. 159.

29 Hatsuichi MUKAIDA, *Ichi kashikan no nichiro jūgun nikki*, Tokyo 1979, p. 165.

30 Kuniyoshi MIZOGAMI, *Nichiro sensō jūgunki: Gun'i no jinchū nikki*, Kyoto 2004, p. 61–62.

31 MOZAWA, *Aru hohei* (as in n. 5), p. 105–106, 150.

32 Gentarō HOSOKAWA, *Byōinsen Kōsaimaru Kenkenroku: Nichiro sensō hitchō*, Tokyo 1993, p. 133–134.

matters worse, the day after the death of his friend, the NCO received a letter from the wife of the dead friend asking him to admonish his dead comrade to write to his wife more regularly:

»Oh, to think that the person to whom this message is addressed has died only yesterday and his soul is now wandering in the outer space of his homeland. My tears do not stop, to think that his wife, children, and siblings do not even dream of what has happened [to him]³³.«

Similarly, a private wrote in his diary, »although we know that fighting is tragic, the beloved friend with whom I was having a conversation and laughing together until just now, unexpectedly, was never to return. This tragic scene can never be appropriately explained in words³⁴.« A sub-lieutenant told his tale of the Battle of Jiuliancheng to the general manager of the hospital ship, Kōsaimaru, as follows:

»Seeing our comrade-in-arms (*sen'yū*) dying in front of one's eyes, there is the heightened feeling of anger. I said, »I will take revenge on your behalf«, to which the dying friend said, »Do try your best.« Those wounded who would eventually die were suffering terribly. [...] Those well enough could cry with tears but those dying could only faintly smile sadly. Oh, there is nothing as tragic as this³⁵.«

The intense grief experienced by the soldiers on the death of their friend from home might be partly attributed to the perceived disjunction in the psychological link between home (representing permanence), and the front (representing impermanence), as symbolised by the physical presence at the front of the friend from their hometown. With his death, yet another tangible link with home was being cut off for the soldier.

Another characteristic of soldiers' writings on war death is the gruesome detailing of battle-field deaths, most often described in terms of carnage after battles. Soldiers were often shocked at the ways in which the bodies of their comrades were disposed of. An infantry company commander, having witnessed a fierce battle around Jiuliancheng on 23 May 1904, said,

»Nobody cleared up the dead bodies of the Russian soldiers which were left alone, and even the holes quickly dug up to bury them had been dug up and scavenged by stray dogs, and the sight is too horrible to look at. The bodies of the dead Japanese soldiers which had been buried in the valleys were also not so deep, which meant that hands and feet were sticking out³⁶.«

In general, bodies of Russian soldiers were buried whereas those of the Japanese were cremated. However, Japanese bodies often had to be buried first before they were dug up to be cremated. In particular, one transport unit private's diary is full of such scenes because he was often entrusted with the job of clearing bodies³⁷. Even a medical surgeon was appalled by the carnage he saw after the attack on the 203 Metre Hill in early December 1904: »As one climbs

33 MUKAIDA, Ichi kashikan (as in n. 29), p. 142–144.

34 ŌSAWA, Nichiro, p. 89.

35 HOSOKAWA, Byōinsen (as in n. 32), p. 162; see also Tadayoshi SAKURAI, *Human Bullets. A Soldier's Story of Port Arthur*, London 1907, p. 87. There is a paperback reprint published by the University of Nebraska Press in 1999.

36 HOSOKAWA, Byōinsen, p. 138–139; see also, Tōkichi NEGORO, *Yūyō no bohyō*, Tokyo 1976, p. 207–208.

37 Yasuji KUSUNOKI (ed.), *Nichiro sen'eki jūgun ryakuki: Nakazawa Ichitarō*, Tokyo 1996, p. 119–122.

up the hill towards the summit [...] the barbarity is such that it is not possible to describe it. It is not possible to imagine this if one had not seen it. Although I have experienced quite a few battles and have seen quite a few dead bodies, this is truly the first time [to come across such a carnage]. [...] It is so awful that tears don't even come out³⁸.«

Scenes of moral repugnance occurred on a daily basis in wartime situations, and soldiers would soon become accustomed, to seeing multiple horrifically violent deaths. As an illustration, one private matter-of-factly described the work of reburying the dead:

»We had to go and bury the remains of the enemy war dead which were already buried once but had been dug out by dogs and birds. They were buried like potatoes with heads lined up but it was so smelly that my nose was about to fall off. In any case, eyes had all fallen out, and there were just holes. It was a real problem trying to cover them with soil as it smelt so bad. We buried about eight or nine persons in one hole. We came back, washed hands with a bit of water, and then had dinner and went to bed³⁹.«

Getting accustomed to battlefield violence and death allowed the individual to cope with the horror of daily reality such as that depicted in the description above. Nevertheless, this did not stop him or many of his comrades from continuing to write about such experiences in their diaries almost as a cathartic process.

There is a particularly poignant story told in the diary of a transport unit private about his involvement in the construction of a memorial monument for dead soldiers⁴⁰. On 7th of April 1905, he and his fellow privates were ordered to find the burial sites of soldiers following a map of burial sites of the war dead, so that they could cremate these bodies and store the ashes in boxes provided by the headquarters. They started digging two days later, their progress being hampered by the terrible smell of dead bodies. Over the next few days, some of them worked on laying a road for the memorial monument, whilst others worked on carving the monument, and the rest continued to dig out the dead bodies. Finally on 14th of May, the whole undertaking was completed, and the memorial monument was erected at the end of the gravel path with a *torii* gate (a Shinto gate). On the 15th, there was an opening ceremony attended by a commander, where the memorial address was read out:

»Today, we are having an opening ceremony for the memorial, built with the assistance of soldiers from the Imperial Guards Eighth Reserve Transport Unit, constructed on top of a hill of elm tree forest, in order to quieten the patriotic spirit of our dead soldiers. This place was where the enemy's artillery base stood, and Mt Xinshan towards which our brave soldiers advanced stands to the back of us across a narrow river, with the Hongshaling, Chaopoyan, Bapanling forming a mountain range in the distance. To the front of us as well as to our sides, the green grass which grows from the blood our soldiers bled is particularly bright and beautiful in colour, and makes us wonder whether it is the doing of our long dead patriotic souls⁴¹.«

The poetic quality of the above memorial address accentuated the sadness of the occasion. It may be worth pointing out that the Japanese army considered some tangible »relic« from the war dead to be of supreme importance. Hence, for every dead soldier, the army returned a small

38 DOIHARA, Nichiro (as in n. 16), p. 167.

39 Matashige SAWADA, Nichiro sen'eki jūgun nisshi, in: Zamashiritsu toshokan shiryō hensan gakarī (ed.), Nichiro sensō jūgunki 2, Zamashi shiryō gyōsho vol. 5, Zama 1990, p. 74; also see NEGORO, Yūyō (as in n. 36), p. 208.

40 KUSUNOKI, Nichiro (as in n. 37), p. 119–127.

41 Ibid., p. 127.

box of relics of the dead to the bereaved family, often just containing only a few strands of hair known as the »hair of the deceased«. The hair was collected from the dead Japanese soldiers before they were cremated. It did not matter if the hair returned to the family did not actually come from the specific individual deceased man. But the »hair of the deceased« became the symbolic link between the lonely battlefield death and the family back home.

What we see from all the above is that, overall, soldierly sentiment emphasised pain, sadness, grief and tragedy at the loss of their comrades-in-arms in Manchuria, rather than matching the mood of the triumphalist celebrations that had been arranged within Japan for the home front. This soldierly sentiment was most poignantly expressed in war songs about the Russo-Japanese War, and acted as an emotive bond amongst the war veterans in post-1905 Japanese society as we shall see below.

Manchuria as »lieu de mémoire«

Manchuria, known in Japanese as *Manshū*, hence, became the most important collective *lieu de mémoire* for Japanese conscripts in post-1905 Japanese society. In spite of the fact that all battlefield deaths took place in Manchuria, war veterans and families of the bereaved had to commemorate the war dead within the national space of Japan. I argue that this inability to mourn for the war dead at the site of death in Manchuria led to the heightened sense of psychological separation from Manchuria, as well as contributing to the reification of »Manchuria« in the mentality of veterans and bereaved. Importantly, Manchuria came to assume a special place for two generations of Japanese soldiers, as it symbolically connected the 1904–1905 war experiences with newer experiences created as a result of the 1931 invasion of Manchuria.

The most famous popular song about the Russo-Japanese War was released in September 1905, precisely the month when the Treaty of Portsmouth was concluded to end the conflict⁴². Not by coincidence it was called »Comrade-in-arms« (*Sen'yū*) with lyrics by Hisen Mashita and composed by Kazuoki Miyoshi, both of whom were school teachers in Kyoto:

»Here, many hundreds of leagues from home,
The red setting sun of distant Manchuria
Shines down on a stone at the edge of a field,
Beneath which my friend lies.

It grieves me to think of the brave hero
Who only yesterday headed the charge –
Ruthlessly setting upon the enemy.
I wonder, will he sleep well here?

At the height of the battle,
I raced blindly to the friend
Who had been at my side
As he fell suddenly,
The flag with him⁴³.«

There are two definitions of the term »*sen'yū*«: one definition refers to the smallest unit in the army which usually consisted of one second-year private, who was coupled with one or two

42 <http://kindai.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/855493/101>.

43 This is the translation given by Louise YOUNG, *Japan's Total Empire. Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*, Berkeley 1998, p. 91.

first-year privates, moving as one unit, including sleeping next to each other; the other definition is the more general one referring to those soldiers who shared fighting experiences⁴⁴. In the song above, the first definition of »*sen'yū*« is invoked, though it does not require much stretch of the imagination to recognise that the song also invoked the general definition equally as powerfully as the more personal one. It is not difficult to understand why the song became such an instant success amongst the veterans, as the verses reflect those very raw emotions that we witnessed in the pages of the diaries of the conscripts. It became symbolic and emblematic of the experiences on the Manchurian front, of the harrowing sadness and pain of losing a comrade-in-arms at the front, far away from home, in the lonely expanse of Manchuria. Another noteworthy point is the allusion to the landscape of Manchuria in the song, in the phrase, »the red setting sun«, as evocative images of the Manchurian front as represented by the landscape became a potent trigger for memories of the front for Japanese society as we shall see below.

In 1906, the »Asahi« newspaper, one of the leading broadsheets, spearheaded an innovative travel venture when they came up with the idea of an organised cruise called the »Manchuria Korea Touring Cruise«. This was an attempt to diversify the newspaper's business base as the main income from the circulation of newspapers decreased due to the economic slump experienced in the immediate aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War. Within the first three days of announcing the cruise in the paper, it was fully subscribed with 374 applicants. What was striking, however, was not only that there was a popular interest in the cruise, but that the Army, the Navy and the Railway companies (especially the South Manchurian Railway) immediately offered special assistance to the cruise passengers by offering access to a wide range of facilities (including access to the battlefields of the Russo-Japanese War). It was hoped that tours such as these would enable members of the younger Japanese generation to visit Manchuria as part of their school trips, in order to instil in them the sense of the nation as well as of the empire by physically visiting the war sites, and to remind them of the sacrifices made in the »land dyed in the blood of our men«⁴⁵. The central plank of the cruise programme was to visit the new Japanese battlefield sites from the Russo-Japanese war and listen to first-hand accounts given in situ by military men⁴⁶. Hence, Manchuria, which contained the principal *lieu de mémoire* of both, the Sino-Japanese (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese War, immediately took on an emotive significance for the Japanese people. Typically, as in many other such ventures in Japan, it was the shared interest of the commercial and public sectors that enabled successful collaboration. It is worth remembering that from 1905 to 1931, the Japanese government only possessed the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula on a lease, with rights to concessions along the South Manchurian Railway. It was only after the invasion of September 1931 and the establishment of Manchukuo in March 1932 that the three north-eastern provinces of China came totally under Japanese control.

The South Manchurian Railway (SMR) was quick to recognise the potential of mobilising Japanese cultural elites to visit »Manchuria« and to write about it for audiences back home in Japan as a way of advertising the Japanese presence in the Kwantung Leased Territory. To this end, one of the earliest known faces to visit Manchuria was Soseki Natsume (1867–1916), one of the most famous modern Japanese writers, in the autumn of 1909, as the guest of the president of the SMR. Soseki's travelogue – »Here and There in Manchuria and Korea« (»Mankan tokoro dokoro«) – was serialised immediately after his return to Tokyo in the above mentioned »Asahi« newspaper where he published most of his writings, both fiction and non-fiction, in

44 Saburō TAKAHASHI, *Senkimono wo yomu: Sensō taiken to sengo nihon shakai*, Kyoto 1988, p. 154–155.

45 Teruo ARIYAMA, *Kaigai kankō ryokō no tanjō*, Tokyo 2002, p. 30.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 23–88.

serialisations⁴⁷. Soseki was shown around the major battlefield sites, but also writes much about the landscape of Manchuria – particularly the »brilliant reds and sorghum yellows of the landscape«. Although some may debate the literary merit of this particular piece of writing, it nonetheless achieved the objective of the SMR, as it had a major impact on the Japanese reading public, as it became the writing on Manchuria most likely to be read by Japanese visitors, even in the 1930s.

Battlefield tourism requires visible monuments as focal points. As early as November 1909, a large mausoleum, towering over sixty-five metres high, was built on the hill surrounding Port Arthur, next to the Hakugyokusan Shrine. But there needed to be more. Hence, war monument construction began in Manchuria with the establishment of the Manchuria War Site Preservation Association in 1913, through the combined interests of the Army, Navy, and the South Manchurian Railway. From 1914 to August 1919, it launched a major initiative to select forty-five war sites to commemorate the 1904–1905 war. When the construction of monuments at these sites was completed, the association commissioned a photo album to commemorate the occasion⁴⁸. This interest in war monument construction in Manchuria was the direct result of an upsurge in war monument construction in Japan. In the period 1910–1912, there was a second surge in the construction of war monuments dedicated to the war dead from the Russo-Japanese War in Japanese towns and villages. The monuments from this period tended to be official ones erected by local chapters of the Imperial Reservist Association established in 1910, with the aim of linking the Army to grassroots reservist associations throughout Japan. In an article featured in the veterans' magazine, »Sen'yū« (»Comrades-in-arms«), the intentions of the Manchuria War Site Preservation Association included, above all, moral education: passing down the patriotic spirit of the »brave soldiers« of the Russo-Japanese War to Japanese youth through their interaction with war monuments⁴⁹. It was considered highly important that a demonstrable link be made to the battlefields of Manchuria for future generations of soldiers, through the physicality of war monuments in exact locations where the battles took place. Figure 1 is a typical war monument built by this association on Mount Shōju near Port Arthur in Manchuria, but all the monuments had more or less similar appearances. The completion of the entire series of monuments to the war now meant that they provided the visual *raison d'être* for the Japanese presence in Manchuria, not to mention giving due respect to tens of thousands of Japanese war dead.

In 1928, Akiko Yosano (1871–1941) the famous Japanese poetess, who dedicated a highly controversial »anti-war« poem – »You must not die« (»Kimi shinitamaukoto nakare«) – to her younger brother on the Manchurian front during the Russo-Japanese War, was taken to the war monument on Mount Nanshan, to the north of Dairen (Dalian). Of her visit to the battlefield sites, she wrote:

»There amid some young pine trees a white granite commemorative tablet had been erected. While paying our condolences on the battlefield, it was refreshing to look at the wide-open green field where the sorghum had just come into bloom in the clear May sky⁵⁰.«

47 Soseki NATSUME, *Rediscovering Natsume Soseki: with the First English Translation of Travels in Manchuria and Korea: Celebrating the Centenary of Soseki's Arrival in England, 1900–1902*, introduction and translation by Inger Sigrun BRODEY and Sammy I. TSUNEMATSU, London 2000.

48 *Manshū senseki honzonkai* (ed.), *Senseki kinen*, Ryojun 1920.

49 Katsusaburō SHIBA, *Manshū no senseki hozon*, in: *Sen'yū* no. 39, (1 January 1914), p. 16–17.

50 Akiko YOSANO, *Travels in Manchuria and Mongolia. A Feminist Poet from Japan Encounters Prewar China*, transl. by Joshua A. FOGEL, New York 2001.



Fig 1: War monument on Mt Shōju built by the Manchuria War Site Preservation Association (1919)

Like Soseki in 1909, Yosano, who was invited to visit Manchuria and Mongolia by the SMR, published a travelogue of the journey. As we see again in Yosano's writing, Manchuria represented an unknown landscape to the Japanese who were not used to seeing the endless horizon of a plain. Evidently, the landscape clearly made both, the Japanese conscripts and later Japanese visitors, feel the »foreignness« of Manchuria⁵¹. The popular perception of Manchuria as a »lonely« and »barren« place remained strong in the 1930s⁵². In this way, many Japanese writings on Manchuria tended to recite familiar themes, focusing on the huge, empty expanse of the Manchurian plain, the red sun, and the wide blue sky, etc. This practice tended to reinforce the original imagery used by the conscripts in 1904–1905.

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Russo-Japanese War in 1930, the above mentioned famous song released in 1905 – »Comrade-in-arms« was turned into a feature-length film with the same title, produced by Fukui Puro (Fukui Production)⁵³. In the 1930s, Japanese cinema audiences became increasingly demanding, seeking out technologically spectacular productions. Not surprisingly, one critic panned the film on the basis that »outright militarism was disparaging of the audience [...] in other words, this is the most old-fashioned kind of film made only to take advantage of topicality«⁵⁴. Instead, if audiences want-

51 *Manshū no tabi o kataru*, in: *Tabi*, vol. 16, no. 8 (August 1939), p. 66; *Manshū no tabi o kataru*, in: *Tabi* vol. 13, no. 6 (1936), p. 91–92.

52 *Manshū no tabi o kataru*, in: *Tabi* vol. 12, no. 5 (May 1935), p. 100.

53 <http://www.japanese-cinema-db.jp/details/24873>, accessed 13 January 2013.

54 *Kinema junpō* no. 363 (21 April 1930), p. 91.

ed to hark back to the old-fashioned camaraderie of the bygone era, they would be better advised to wallow in the sentimental tear-jerking world of the ever popular »Nogi stories«, films which were morality tales centred on the war icon from the Russo-Japanese War, General Nogi, the most unlikely of war heroes⁵⁵. General Nogi was the general responsible for the »human bullets« (see below) as his old fashioned tactic of blindly charging against the enemy had cost an enormous number of Japanese casualties in the battle to capture Port Arthur. His saving grace was that he had lost both of his sons in the Russo-Japanese War, and his subsequent measured self-conduct, both modest and sorrowful, earned him popular respect and sympathy. He came to nationally symbolise the sorrow and pain of war (symbolism made particularly potent and poignant by his ritual suicide upon the death of Emperor Meiji in 1912), and was particularly loved by the working class for his frailty as a human being. Hence, the »Nogi stories« became the most popular sub-genre of »war films« in pre-1937 Japan.

On the 1930s revival of the famous song, »Comrade-in-arms«, Young makes a powerful argument:

»Representing Manchuria as the site of loss, the place where fathers, brothers, and comrades in arms died in heroic sacrifice, the »Sen'yu« revival strengthened the sense of connection that the lifeline was coming to represent. Manchuria must be defended, for it was all that the Japanese had left of the loved ones they mourned⁵⁶.«

Yet in another war song the »Manchurian March« released in 1932, an even more direct correlation is made between those who had fallen in the war and Manchuria, »turning Manchuria into a national monument to the Russo-Japanese War dead«⁵⁷:

»Look over at the war memorial!
There the bones of our heroes,
Dead in the war between Japan and Russia,
Are long buried.

Stained with a red river of blood,
The evening sun shines upon it,
Soaring high over the endless plain⁵⁸.«

There is still the sense of »rawness« of witnessing battlefield deaths in the above song, written as late as 1932, attempting to reconnect the personal experiences of the conscripts from 1904–1905 to the new Manchuria which was now a puppet state of Japan's. In the early 1930s, therefore, the real issue that faced those (like the Army, the relevant government ministries, and private-sector film production companies), who had to create pro-war messages in popular culture and drum up popular interest in Manchuria, was how to make Manchuria and war generally alluring to the younger generation who seemingly remained oblivious to the traditional messages of »pain«, »loss« and »loneliness« that had bound the earlier war generation together emotionally.

The Russo-Japanese War was fast becoming obsolete in the 1930s as the dynamic aerial warfare in contemporary films excited the younger generation more. Yet the Russo-Japanese War was wheeled out on occasions when the Japanese Imperial Army wanted to spell out messages

55 Yoshihiro KURATA, *Meiji taishō no minshū goraku*, Tokyo 1980, p. 141.

56 YOUNG, *Japan's Total Empire* (as in n. 43), p. 91.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

58 *Ibid.*, again, I use Louise Young's excellent translation of the verse available in her book.

for moral education in the 1930s. Lieutenant Tadayoshi Sakurai whose phenomenally successful fictionalised first-hand account of the war, »Human Bullets« (1907), popularised the cult of death among Japanese soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War, became the Army's chief writer-in-residence for propagandising martial stories from the war in post-1905 Japanese society⁵⁹. His »Human Bullets« became a publishing phenomenon in post-1905 Japan with over one thousand reprints, and was translated into eleven languages from 1906 onwards, becoming a favourite of both Theodore Roosevelt and Kaiser Wilhelm II.⁶⁰ Arguably, »Human Bullets« together with Inazō Nitobe's »Bushido: The Soul of Japan« (1900)⁶¹ became the two most influential Japanese writings that helped to construct images of »Japan« and »the Japanese« in the global discourse in the early twentieth century. Sakurai's account is peppered with quotes such as: »But in this particular battle to be ready for death was not enough; what was required of us was a determination not to fail to die⁶².« Our brief examination above of personal diaries kept by lower ranking soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War reveals that Sakurai's rendition was uncommonly macabre, showing, seemingly for effect, an abnormally high level of desire for death. His book is full of examples of his preparation for death: for example, he reputedly told his brother: »I am ready not to tread on the soil of Japan again with this pair of legs. Be happy with me, when you hear that I died in battle⁶³.« In Sakurai, the army found their ideal propONENT for the cult of death which was to underline the spiritual strength of the Japanese Imperial Army. However, it was a fine balance to achieve between making war attractive to the younger generation through technological gimmickry, and inculcating spiritual strength based on loyalty through death without putting them off entirely.

Conclusions

We have seen that the battlefield experiences of Japanese conscripts in the Russo-Japanese War led to these men portraying their Manchurian impressions in certain ways. These emphasised the sense of loneliness and particularly focused on the notion of battlefield death as representing the ultimate state of loneliness for the Japanese conscript. War death was particularly lonely because it occurred far away in Manchuria, which was »thousands of leagues« away from the familiar surroundings of their home, as the famous song, »Comrade-in-arms« reminds us. Hence, the mentality of the Japanese conscript on the Manchurian front was inevitably affected by the intensity of the emotions he felt in this foreign environment as soldiers faced death squarely on battlefields. To this end, Manchuria played an important role as the *lieu de mémoire* for the war generation from the 1904–1905 war. For them, »Manchuria« would immediately evoke certain images based on their personal experiences which were reinforced in the post-1905 years by other means, such as commemorative war monuments, built both in Japan and in Manchuria, and writings about Manchuria by famous contemporary cultural figures. As part of this process, a specific set of leitmotifs developed to describe Manchuria which worked to evoke certain feelings of foreignness, sadness and loss.

Nevertheless, with the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932, these traditional evocations of Manchuria by the Russo-Japanese war generation no longer remained as relevant because Manchuria now also represented a brave new future for the Japanese empire. Hence, the war generation effectively had to overcome their personal experiences and wake up to face the new real-

59 SAKURAI, Human Bullets (as in n. 35).

60 Kuninori KIMURA Teikoku gunjin no hansen: Mizuno Hironori to Sakurai Tadayoshi, Tokyo 1993, p. 54.

61 Inazō NITOBE, Bushido: The Soul of Japan, in Malvern, PA 1900. Incidentally, »bushidō« meant »the way of the warrior« in Japanese.

62 Ibid., p. 239.

63 Ibid., p. 7, p. 180 for instance.

ity of the ever-expanding military ventures of the Japanese empire. During this period, Japanese officialdom attempted to salvage the last of the »patriotic memories« of the Russo-Japanese War by turning them into sources of moral education. In this way, the mentality of the Japanese conscript at the Manchurian front discussed earlier, which had been characterised by a complex mix of emotions and loyalties, was remoulded to create a one-dimensional image of the patriotic Japanese soldier who fought valiantly against an impossibly large enemy, Russia, as a result of his sheer spiritual strength⁶⁴. As we know, this newly reconstructed 1930s »memory« of the Japanese conscripts on the Manchurian front was very different from the reality of their experiences as we witnessed in their war diaries of 1904–1905.

64 For discussions of how the memories of the Russo-Japanese War were »reconstituted« in the 1930s, see: SHIMAZU, *Japanese Society at War* (as in n. 1), p. 230–263.

