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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON JAPAN

No. 4



Table of Contents

Editor's Note

Erdal Küçükyağın..... 7

Abstracts 11

State, Political Parties, and the Nation: Triangular Political History without a Center of Gravity

Shimizu Yuichirō..... 15

An Ottoman Staff Officer in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905): General Pertev Bey's Impressions and Evaluations

Doruk Akyüz 36

Railroads of the Glorious Empires in the late 19th Century: From the Great Game to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5

Semiha Karaoğlu..... 63

Tracing the Royal, Romantic and Demonic Roots of the *Nio* Warrior Guardian

Jennifer Norris 90

***Yōkai* as the Edge of The World**

Kōda Retsu 甲田烈..... 120

BOOK REVIEW

Selçuk Esenbel 141

BOOK REVIEW

Can Öçalan..... 147

- . *Generalfeldmarschall Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz: das Lebensbild eines grossen Soldaten Aus meinen persönlichen Erinnerungen*. Göttingen: Göttinger Verlagsanstalt, 1960.
- . *Hayatımın Hatıraları: Rus-Japon Harbi 1904-1905*. Istanbul: Matbaa-i Ebüzziya, 1943.
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Railroads of the Glorious Empires in the late 19th Century: From the Great Game to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5

Semiha Karaoğlu

Introduction

The course of the nineteenth century until the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 reveals invaluable information as to countries’ railroad development. Railroads built by the British Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Empire of Japan –the most prominent empires of the nineteenth century– have changed the currents of world history. Moreover, worth mentioning is the Great Game theory, based on the rivalry between the British and the Russian Empires. The Great Game enabled the framework for a design of more extensive railroads constructed in Afghanistan, such as the Trans-Caspian railway built in 1880. Moreover, it is plausible to draw a more general outline by elucidating the retaliation by the British Empire that resulted in the structuring of the “Harrai Road Improvement Project.” The reprisal by the British created pressure on the Russian part, leading the Russians to construct a line developed as the Sind Peshin State Railway.¹

Railroads gained momentum and became pivotal for countries’ development, intelligence sharing, and expansion, with numerous conflicts to ensue. Consequently, railroad construction enabled the Russian Empire, the British Empire, and the Empire of Japan to confer prestige on their territorial borders –or colonies– as the world’s most notable ones. However, it is of ultimate

¹ Farnworth, Roger. “Railways in Iran – Part 6 – Foreign Articles – Collection A.” Roger Farnworths, 2012.

significance to provide an introduction to the railroads in world history, for the history of railroads evolved in multiple stages in line with the historical developments throughout the nineteenth century. Therefore, the present research aims at exposing the fact that, on the one hand, railroads play a pivotal role in revealing the intelligence behind empires' motives by analyzing the historical development of the railroads. On the other hand, it suggests that railroads give clues as to geopolitics, strategic locations, and buffer zones, which are of tremendous weight for empires to strategically advance their territorial borders, ultimately serving their imperial and expansionist ambitions. The significance of strategy, intelligence sharing, and geopolitics are pivotal points to comprehend in the analyses of the railroads as well as how railroads have allowed countries to manifest their imperialist attempts.

The rivalries among the most glorious empires of the nineteenth century (the British Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Empire of Japan) unveil a more extensive judgment. Through the analysis of railroads located in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and today's Northeastern China, it is plausible to discover a sequence, which exhibits a correlation linking the principal railroads of world history –including the trans rail lines– to the prevailing Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), which allows a read into the permanence and ever-lasting imperial objectives that nations have sought throughout history. Nevertheless, the introductory history of world railroads is imperative to lay out to further analyze railroads in the nineteenth century.

A Brief History of Railroads

It is plausible to state that the first railroads were developed in Great Britain. While previously, canal building was widespread in Europe (to carry goods, produce, and food within continental Europe), with the introduction of the Industrial Revolution and the beginning of a new era, railroad constructions gained momentum to ease the transportation of goods. The chief determinant for the development of railroads was the fact that “where natural interconnection among navigable rivers was lacking, gaps in trade were likely to develop, most notably at watersheds.”² Moreover, as canal

transport became crucial at the height of increased use of coal for raising steam and for iron smelting; hilly areas of Great Britain such as Birmingham were problematic and in the “Black Country of England, or areas of massive coal production where droughty uplands were prevalent, the transporting of coal through water canals became more and more impracticable.”³ Therefore, with the introduction of iron and steel production, along with the steaming of engines, a new era began. Railroads started to be constructed.

Great Britain and Continental Europe

Primarily within Europe, railroads became widespread, and became the chief means of transportation. As the technology and know-how of railroad development expanded throughout continents, the United States and Canada also eased their transportation by diverting their technology from water-based to railroad-based ones. Among the early European railways were the Stockton and Darlington Railway and the Liverpool and Manchester Railway –both the projects of George Stephenson.⁴ Completed on September 27, 1825, the Stockton and Darlington Railway had the characteristic of an experimental line, the volume of whose passengers grew tenfold only in two years. Stephenson's second project, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, completed in 1829, took the innovative nature of railroads and became the first fully evolved railway to be built. The British Empire used this railroad to carry goods and provide extensive passenger services.

As stated, geopolitics has played a crucial role in the construction of railroads throughout history, one example of which lies in the case of continental Europe. It is plausible to state that the developmental stages of the railroad constructions differed immensely, comparing Great Britain and France –for instance. The motive behind establishing railroads of both France and other countries of the continental Europe was similar to that of Great Britain: creating ease in the transportation of coal. Therefore, France

Inc., 2019.

3 “Railroad History.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. (2019)

4 George Stephenson was a British civil engineer and mechanical engineer. Renowned as the “Father of Railways”, Stephenson was considered by the Victorians a great example of diligent application and thirst for improvement.

5 “Railroad History.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. (2019)

2 Shedd, Thomas Clark & Allen, Geoffrey Freeman. “Railroad History.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*,

and Belgium also built railroads in locations where transportation through water-resources did not suffice. The difference between Great Britain and continental Europe, however, laid in the organizational aspect of the railroad constructions. Great Britain constructed its lines based on the funding of its private enterprises, whereas continental Europe's railroad constructions received their financing from state-led authorities. Coal mining areas had a more sweeping priority in the design of the lines since the ultimate goal behind Europe's rail construction was to render coal transportation more effective and sustainable. Therefore, France designed its first line around the Stéphanoise coalfield southwest of Lyon. In the aftermath of the construction of this railroad, Belgium constructed the world's first international rail line –which ran between Liège and Cologne.

Geopolitics, again, proved to be a crucial determinant in the construction of railroads since Belgium's newly constructed rail line invoked tension in the other countries of Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, "by building an extensive system of rail lines, Prussia ultimately forced unification of the German states under its leadership. Similarly, the Kingdom of Piedmont, through its rail lines, brought pressure on the Italian states to join in a united country about 1860."⁶ Therefore, it is incontrovertible that during the mid-nineteenth century, rail lines constructed all around Europe became a source of tension, competition, and rivalry based on geopolitics and continental European dynamics. Prussia's fear of harm propelling its unification reveals how rail lines used to operate as a threat to many nations throughout history. Hence, the tension Prussia experienced can be a starting point in elucidating how geopolitics shaped rail line designs in world history, claiming a threat to the landscapes and territories of several nations, as shall be elucidated.

The United States and Canada

With the introduction of British technology and know-how, American railroads became prevalent, again, towards the nineteenth century. The first

railroad in Canada was constructed by British military engineers in the 1820s. Among the first railroads were the 1825 Granite Railroad, the Stourbridge Lion, and the Delaware and Hudson Railroad. St. Lawrence Railroad was the first in Canada. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, Boston railroads, and The South Carolina Railroad were also railroads constructed to grant the United States a means of commodity and mobility during the nineteenth century.

As an undertaking of geopolitics, the United States did not aim at expansionism in the design of its tracks. On the contrary, those were exertions to establish a unified network within the United States. Hence, it is plausible to observe the United States as a more domestic-oriented entity, when comparing it to other colonial powers –as shall be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Colonial Power and The Introduction of Railways in India

The political condition and the economic trends of nineteenth century India induced the British to construct railways all over the Indian sub-continent as a fundamental part of the imperialist ambitions of the British Empire and a great challenge against the Russian Empire's seeking trade control in the sub-continent. Railways, it was believed, would assist the economic development of India and provide both a market for British goods and a source of raw materials. It is plausible to establish a division in terms of the motives behind the British imperial railways throughout the Indian sub-continent focusing on the late nineteenth century. Railroads constructed between 1832 and 1852 were industrial railways, whereas railroads built between 1853 and 1924 were passenger railways. Railroads constructed during the second period ultimately served the British Empire's goal of expanding its influence and dominance within the Indian sub-continent.

The following excerpt elucidates how the constructions of the railroads commenced in British India. As is evident in the following paragraphs, it is possible to see the nexus between colonization, expansion, network building and railroad construction, imposed chiefly by the empires of the nineteenth century –the most prominent of which is the British Empire in the case of India. (Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4)

⁶ "The Complete History of Railroads: Trade, Transport, and Expansion." *Britannica Educational Publishing*, 2011: p. 8.

A British plan for railway development in India was first initiated in 1832, but the core of the pressure for building railways came from London in the 1840s. In the year 1844, private entrepreneurs were permitted to launch a railway system by Lord Hardinge, who was the Governor-General of India. The railway age dawned in India on 16 April 1853, when the first train ran from Bombay's Bori Bunder to Thane, a distance of 21 miles, marked by a 21-gun salute. The mileage of India's rail network grew from 838 miles in 1880 to 15,842 miles in 1880, mostly radiating inland from the three major port cities of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. Most of the rail construction was made by Indian companies under the supervision of British engineers. They built a railway system of strong bridges and a mixture of broad-meter and narrow-gauge tracks. By 1901 India had a rail network covering 25,373 miles.⁷

1832-1852: Industrial Railways

Madras was the center of India's first railway proposals in 1832.⁸ The initial train route constructed within the sub-continent was the Red Hill Railway. The country's first train, the Red Hill Railway, ran from Red Hills to Chintadripet bridge in Madras in 1837. Therefore, it is plausible to observe that the completion of the rail route took roughly five years. The main use of this railroad was to transport laterite stone for road-building work in Madras.⁹ Eight years following the completion of India's first railway, engineers started to envision the Godavari Dam Construction Railway in 1845. Built at Dowleswaram in Rajahmundry, it supplied stone for the construction of a dam over the Godavari River.¹⁰ Both railways were the engineering products of General Sir Arthur Thomas Cotton KCSI.¹¹

On May 8, 1845, the British Empire incorporated the Madras Railway, succeeded the same year by the East India Railway. Moreover, as the British

⁷ "Infrastructure and Railroads." *Environment & Society Portal*, Accessed on 3 July 2020.

⁸ Darvill, Simon. "India's First Railways." *The Indian Railways Fan Club*, 2011.

⁹ Darvill 2011.

¹⁰ Darvill 2011.

¹¹ General Sir Arthur Thomas Cotton KCSI (15 May 1803-24 July 1899) was a British general and irrigation engineer. Cotton devoted his life to the construction of irrigation and navigation canals throughout British India.

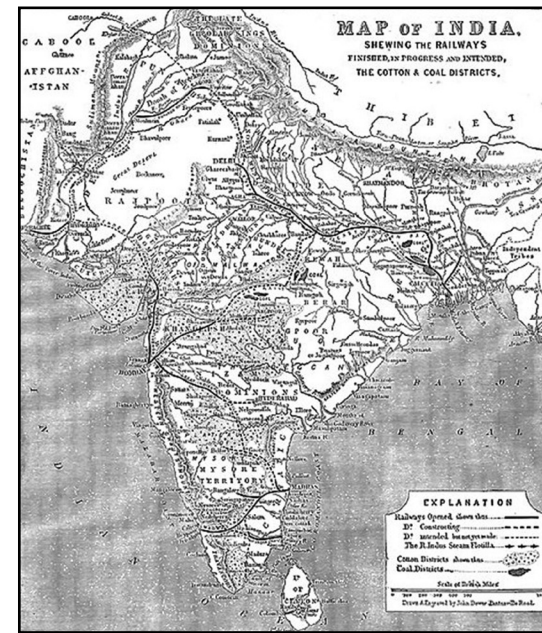


Figure 1: Map of India Railways, 1865 by John Dower. (Source: Illustrated London News April 29, 1865.)

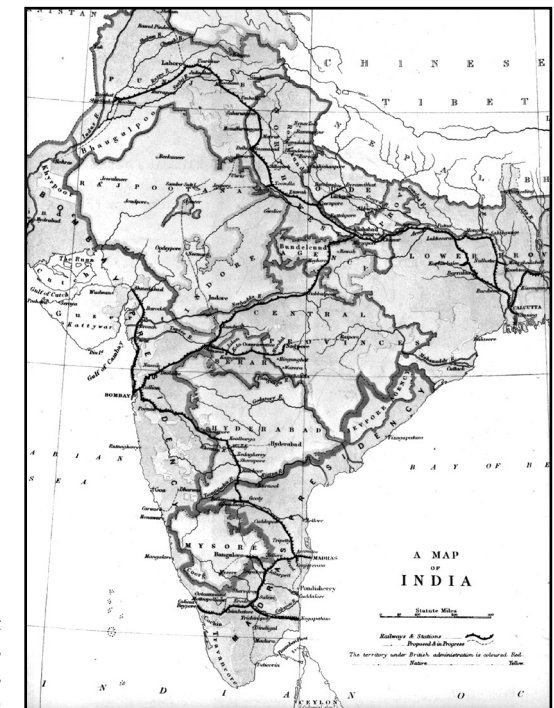


Figure 2: Map of Indian Railways in 1871 prepared by the British Government India Office for the House of Commons Committee. (Source: Saunders Geographers.)

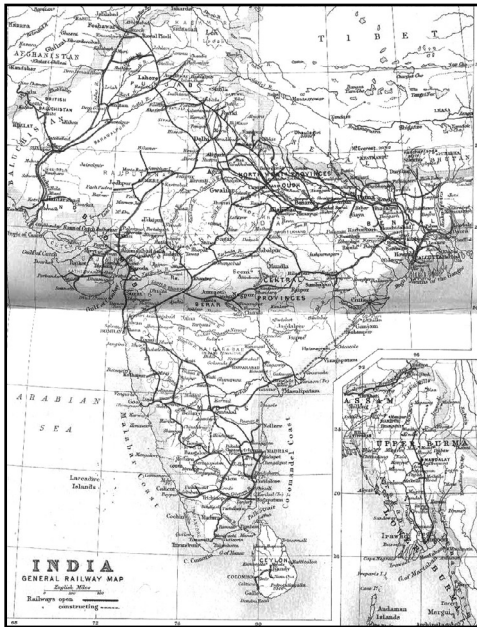


Figure 3: Map of the Railway network in India in 1893, from Constable's Hand Atlas of India by John George Bartholomew. (Source: Historical Maps of India)

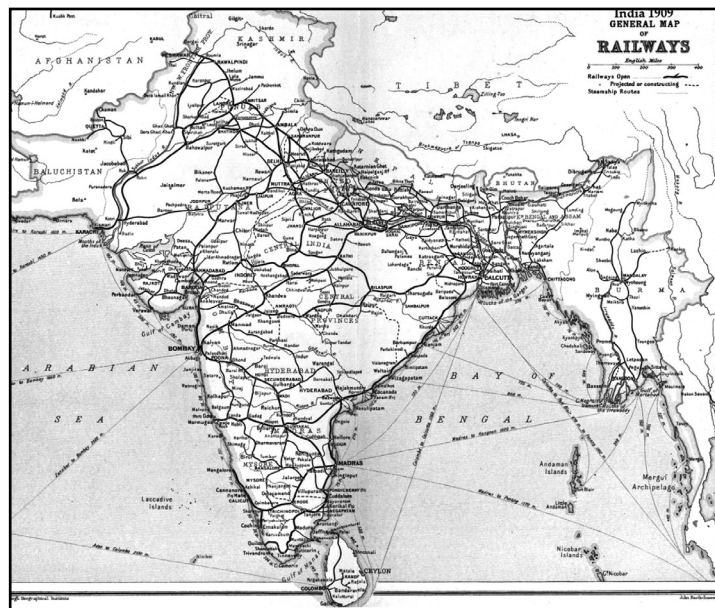


Figure 4: A general map of Indian railways, 1909. Scanned and reduced from personal copy of Imperial Gazetteer of India, volume 25 (Atlas), Oxford University Press, 1909, by John Bartholomew and Company/Edinburgh Geographical Institute. (Source: Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1909)

Empire aimed at accelerating its commercial activities within the Indian sub-continent, an act of the British Parliament promulgated novel constructions, and on August 1, 1849, the British Empire incorporated the Great Indian Peninsular Railway. Following these developments, the British Empire authorized the construction of the Solani Aqueduct Railway in Roorkee in 1851. As the trade-related activities and flux of goods became more widespread within the sub-continent, the newly built railway originally transported building materials for an aqueduct over the Solani River.¹² The subsequent year, 1852, the British Empire incorporated the Madras Guaranteed Railway Company.

1853-1924: Passenger Railways and Expansion

Dedicated by James Broun-Ramsay,¹³ 1st Marquess of Dalhousie, the country's premier passenger train commenced operations connecting Bombay's Bori Bunder station and Thane on April 16, 1853. The Great Indian Peninsula Railway (GIPR) built and conducted the passenger line.¹⁴ The British Empire promulgated the extension of the Bombay-Thane line to Kalyan with the Thane viaducts over the Thane creek¹⁵ (India's earliest railway bridges) in May, 1854. The first passenger train in eastern India ran from Howrah (near Calcutta) to Hoogly, a distance of 24 miles (39 km), on August 15, 1854. The East Indian Railway Company (EIR) built and operated the line.¹⁶ That year, the GIPR opened its first workshops in Byculla. In 1855, the British Empire incorporated the BB & CI Railway, and in August of the same year, it introduced the EIR Express and Fairy Queen steam locomotives.¹⁷ Built and operated by the Madras Railway, South India's first passenger train ran from Royapuram-Veyasarapady (Madras) to Wallajah Road in Arcot on July

¹² Darvill 2011.

¹³ James Andrew Broun-Ramsay, 1st Marquess of Dalhousie KT PC (22 April 1812-19 December 1860), also known as Lord Dalhousie, styled Lord Ramsay until 1838 and known as The Earl of Dalhousie between 1838 and 1849, was a Scottish statesman and colonial administrator in British India. He served as Governor-General of India from 1848 to 1856.

¹⁴ "India's 1st train: When Sahib, Sindh & Sultan blew steam." *The Times of India*, 2013.

¹⁵ "IR History: Early Days - I." *The Indian Railways Fan Club (IRFCA)*, 2010.

¹⁶ "IR History: Early Days - I." *The Indian Railways Fan Club (IRFCA)*, 2010.

¹⁷ IRCTC Tourism, "The Fairy Queen." *IRCTC Tourism Official Website*, 2018. Archived from the original on 21 April 2018. Retrieved on 3 July 2020.

1, 1856.¹⁸ The Madras Railway's first workshop opened in Perambur (near Madras) that year, and the British Empire extended the Bombay-Thane line to Khopoli; then in 1858, the empire incorporated the Eastern Bengal Railway.¹⁹ The following year, the Great South Indian and Carnatic Railways merged to form the South Indian Railway Company. The British Empire, then, incorporated the Calcutta Tramways Company in 1880,²⁰ followed a decade later by the East Coast State Railway.

The Great Game: How a Rivalry Resulted in Railroads

It is of utmost significance to analyze the Great Game and how it escalated the construction of more railroads in Central Asia and Afghanistan to recognize a pattern in the railroad designs throughout history. The Great Game is also crucial since it provides undeniable evidence regarding then-upcoming rivalries, such as the rivalry between the Empire of Japan and the Russian Empire, which resulted in the escalation to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. With deep historical roots, the Great Game is a compound of the rivalry between the British and Russian Empires, the fundamental factor being the British fear that Russians might advance to today's India –then the British Raj– to enhance their economic activities and trade relations by reaching for the resources lying on the Indian sub-continent. Deprived of trade routes which would permit them to practice additional commercial ventures and purchase products such as silk, spice, cotton, and tea –principal goods manufactured in the British Raj– the Russian Empire aimed at advancing towards Afghanistan, with a view to arriving in the Indian sub-continent. Fearing such an advancement by the Russian Empire towards India via Afghanistan, the British Empire carved the idea of using Afghanistan as a “buffer zone” among its policies at the height of its colonizing process.

In this view, the rail lines throughout Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as the financing and construction process of them, became one of the strategic necessities of the British Empire. It is, therefore, plausible to see a British Empire hard at work in constructing railroads and establishing

networks to supply goods and provide intelligence sharing within the region. Although a full-scale Russian invasion was unlikely, the British still insisted on establishing rail lines along India's northwestern frontier –now part of Pakistan. The reason why the British Empire gave such prominence to the region was the fact that the defense of India's northwest frontier was essential to the ‘Great Game’ of politics played across Central Asia by the two rivals. The following describes the initial decision-making mechanism behind the rail line building in the region:

In 1857 William Andrew, Chairman of the Scinde, Punjab & Delhi Railway, suggested that railways to the Bolan and Khyber passes would have a strategic role in responding to any Russian threat.1 No action was taken until 1876, when Britain decided to keep at least one route into Afghanistan open all year round to permit the rapid deployment of troops from Karachi to counter any threat to India. Orders were given that a railway should be built to Quetta, near the Afghan border, and this developed into a scheme to reach Kandahar.²¹

The strategic importance of Afghanistan and Central Asia, therefore, resulted in various railroads initiated and constructed by the British Empire. Nevertheless, the escalation of the Second Afghan War (1878-80) delayed the construction operations for the railways. With the start of the war, novel necessities with utmost urgency emerged, leading to the decision of the British Viceroy's council on September 18, 1879 to make do with a line through the Bolan pass usable only in fair weather. The details of the construction are as follows:

Work began just three days later, and after four months the first 215 km of the line was complete, opening from Ruk to Sibi in January 1880. On 27 March 1880 the Morning Post commented “after three and twenty years of apathy the necessity has been realised and now these railways are being constructed.” The railway was built to the 1676 mm Indian broad gauge.²²

18 “Legacy of First Railway Station of South India.” RailNews, 2013.

19 “Eastern Bengal Railway.” *Grace's Guide to British Industrial History*, 2019.

20 “History - The Calcutta Tramways Company [1978] Ltd.” *Calcutta Tramways*, 2014.

21 Grantham, Andrew. “Railways of Afghanistan: Afghan Railroads, Past, Present and Future.” *Railways and the Great Game*, Accessed on 17 June 2020.

22 Grantham, “Railways of Afghanistan...”

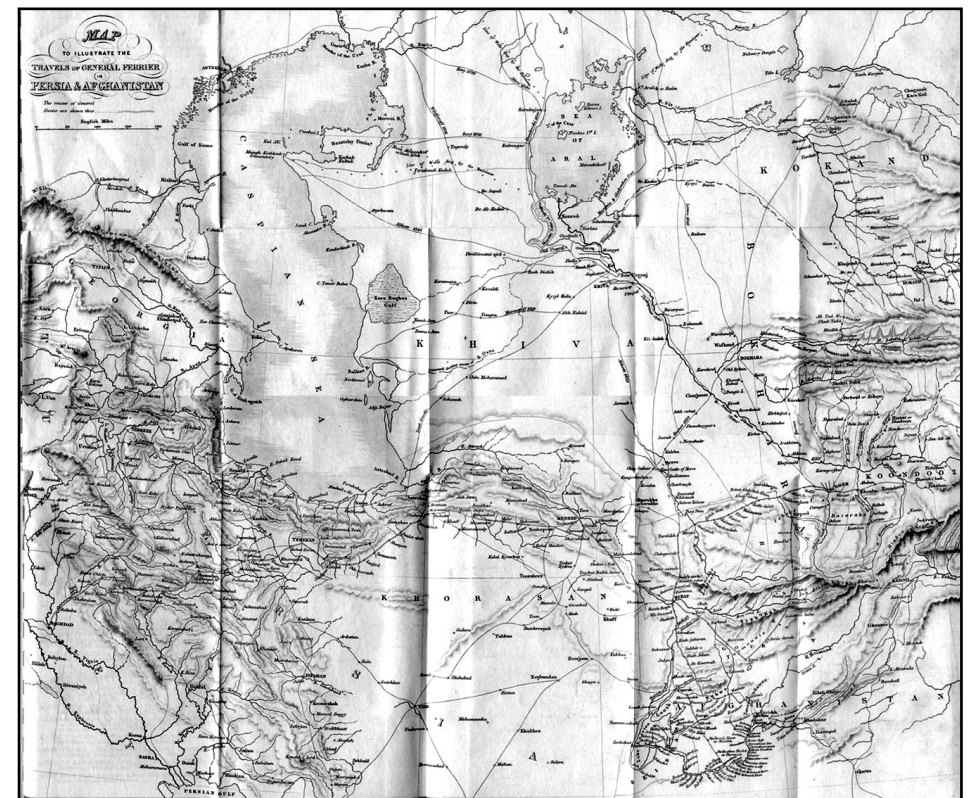
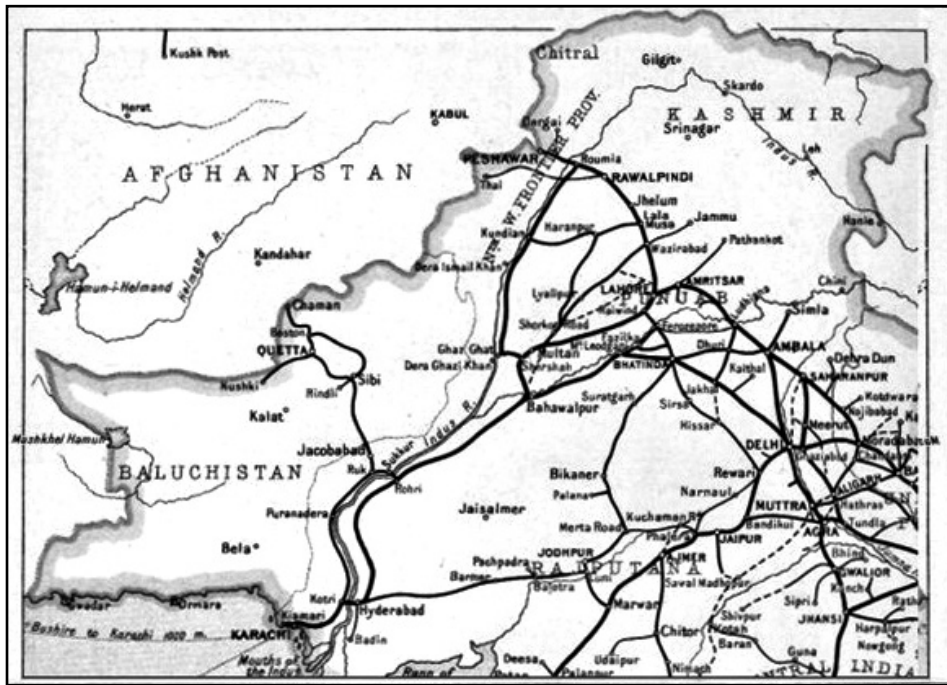


Figure 5: Northwestern Railway map scanned and cropped, from personal copy of the Imperial Gazetteer of India, Oxford University Press, 1908 by J. Bartholomew. Retrieved on 11 November 2016. (Source: Imperial Gazetteer of India, Oxford University Press)

The ultimate goal, as is evident in the quotation (*vide supra*), was to create a network via railway line or telegraph, which reveals, once again, how vital intelligence sharing was for the British Empire. Therefore, geopolitics was an inevitable component of the railroad designs in terms of the British Empire’s open-ended rivalry with the Russian Empire and its conflict with Afghanistan due to the empire’s increasing dominance in the region. (Fig. 5, 6)

Trans-Caspian Railway

The Russian Empire, along with Britain, was also active in playing the Great Game. Turning Afghanistan into a chessboard where both empires would position their pawns with certain motives behind their moves –Britain’s legitimately claiming supremacy and dominance over the British Raj and the

Figure 6: Map to Illustrate the Travels of General Ferrier in Persia and Afghanistan” from Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkistan, and Baluchistan; with Historical Notices of the Countries Lying Between Russia and India by Joseph Pierre Ferrier. Second Edition 1857 by Joseph Pierre Ferrier [Source: The University of Texas at Austin - Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection: Afghanistan Maps (Historical Maps)]

Russian Empire’s striving to acquire access to Indian commercial activities. The expansionist policy of the Russian Empire towards Central Asia became the empire’s priority, for it deemed such enlargement as a means of participating in Silk Road commerce. Consequently, the Russian Empire started establishing the Trans-Caspian Railway (also called the Central Asian Railway) in 1879. Although the railway “originally served a military purpose of facilitating the Imperial Russian Army in actions against the local resistance to their rule, when Lord Curzon visited the railway, he remarked that he considered its significance went beyond local military control and

threatened British interests in Asia."²³

From a strategic point of view, it is beyond doubt that the Russians required a means of communication, for they, besides international competition, were dealing with the Russian revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century. Therefore, at the height of growing internal conflicts with dire consequences, the Russian Empire utilized the Trans-Caspian Railway additionally for the transfer of knowledge and information sharing. As is evident in the map below (Fig. 7, 8), the rail line included Tashkent, which was an important bastion for the Red Army.²⁴ Therefore, the strategic significance of the rail line also manifested itself when troops of the British Indian Army participated in some of the battles along the railway line during the Russian Revolution. The original documents published by the US Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Statistics exhibit the detail line route and what implications it would, consequently, have on the Russian Empire in terms of geopolitics, economy, and trade-related activities of the empire:

The eastern extension of the trans-Caspian system, begun in 1895, extends that line, which is already a thousand miles in length, 350 miles farther eastward to a point near the western border of the Chinese Empire. One of the western dependencies of China is the vast section known as East Turkestan, while West Turkestan, which adjoins it, is a part of Southeastern Russia. The trans-Caspian railway, stretching eastwardly from the great Caspian Sea a thousand miles, formerly terminated at Samarkand in central West Turkestan. By the project of 1895 work was begun for an addition of 350 miles eastward from Samarkand, carrying the line to Andijan, in the province of Fergana, upon the eastern border of West Turkestan and bordering upon the Chinese possession of East Turkestan. While East Turkestan is a sparsely settled territory, the possible importance of this extension of the Russian system to the borders of China at this point is very considerable in its strategic and future commercial possibilities. Stretching eastwardly from Andijan, West Turkestan, the terminals of the line now being

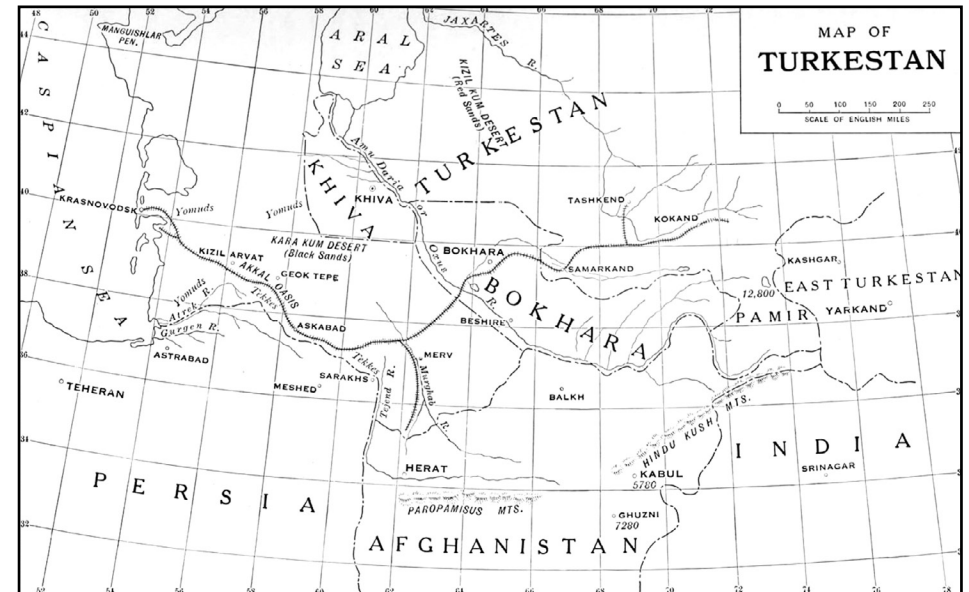


Figure 7: A map of the Central Asian Railway in 1922. The railway ran from Krasnovodsk to Kokand and Tashkent via Askabad, Bokhara and Samarkand by Hawley, W. A. (Walter Augustus), 1863-1920. (Source: Oriental Rugs, Antique and Modern)

*completed, lies a comparatively level section, through which caravan routes have for centuries extended, connecting China with Europe across this arid district.*²⁵

Trans-Siberian Railway

In the aftermath of the construction of the Trans-Caspian Railway, the Russian Empire had grown more ambitious since the Russian mindset dictated that 'political power came from economic power'. The Russian idea of reaching out to the British Raj did not vanish. On the contrary, it grew even more persistent once the Great Game surged in the relation to both countries. Deprived of natural resources and colonies like those of the British Empire, the Russian Empire carved another idea in mind: constructing another railroad.

²³ Gerace, Michael P. *Military Power, Conflict and Trade: Military Spending, International Commerce and Great Power Rivalry*. Routledge, 2004: p. 182.

²⁴ Joshi, Nirmala. "Reconnecting India and Central Asia: Emerging Security and Economic Dimensions." *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program*, 2010: p. 27.

²⁵ Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Statistics. "The Russian Empire and the Trans-Siberian Railway." *U.S. Government Printing Office*, 1899: p. 2505.



Figure 8: Route of Trans-Caspian railway in Turkmenistan. Retrieved on June 18, 2020. (Source: The UN Cartographic Section.)

Yet, this time more comprehensive, more connective, and more resilient. An influential minister in the Russian Government, Sergei Witte, established the Trans-Siberian Railroad as its pet project. Firmly believing that Siberia was an underexploited region of the Russian Empire, Witte thought that such a convoluted railroad would result in (1) the exploitation of the Siberian region along with the harvest of its natural resources and (2) expand the empire's commerce with East Asia. The ultimate motive behind the Russian Empire, as stated, was to eliminate the barriers to the trade routes and to not lose competitiveness with the British Empire in the world scene in terms of trade and commerce of Indian-based goods and produce. (Fig. 9)

Seeking expansionist policies, the Russian Empire's long-term goals by establishing such an impeccable railroad did not, as has been the case throughout history—remain hidden. The Russian Empire's salient enterprises of expanding its borders drew criticism from the other two most prominent

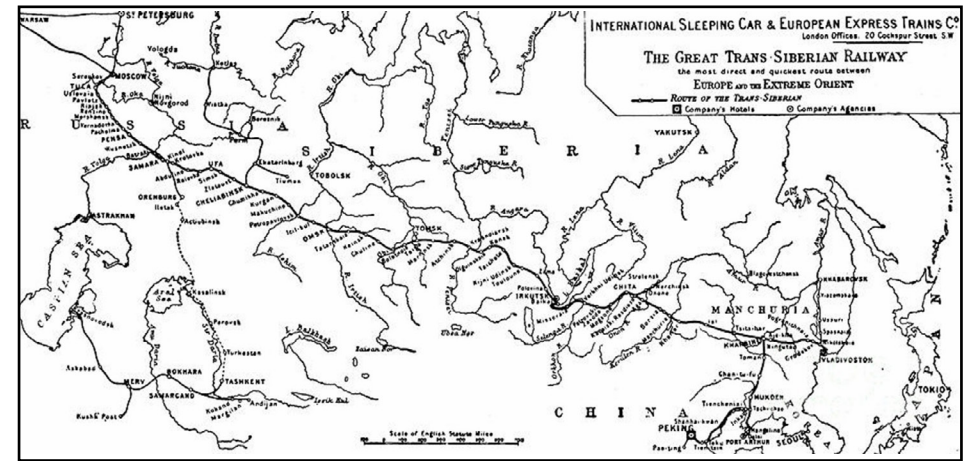


Figure 9: Route of Trans-Siberian railway in Turkmenistan. (Source: The English School)

empires of the globe during the late nineteenth century, namely the British Empire and the Empire of Japan. So much so that the Empire of Japan regarded the expansionist endeavors of the Russian Empire as a grand threat to the imperialist concepts created and promulgated by the Empire of Japan. Although not as widely mentioned as the strategic issues regarding the Liaodong Peninsula –or specifically the Port Arthur– the Trans-Siberian Railway is also among the reasons as to why the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 escalated. Attracting the attention of the Empire of Japan, the Russian Empire created an atmosphere in Eurasia where tension among the three glorious empires mounted, if not putrefied.

Witte's ideas dovetailed with those of Czar Alexander III, who saw the growth of a Russian population in Siberia as a way to secure the country's eastern border. So, in 1891, Russia broke ground on a railroad that would connect one side of its immense bulk to the other. This, from the Japanese point of view, was quite alarming. Prior to the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Russia seemed like it was mostly focused on European affairs. The more the country turned its eyes east, the more worried Japanese policymakers became about Russian intentions.²⁶

²⁶ Beauchamp, Zack. "The Trans-Siberian Railway reshaped world history." *Vox*, 2016.

Beauchamp's words (*vide supra*) reveal how the Russian Empire created a new loop where the Empire of Japan would fill it with territorial and commercial rivalry, further escalating the tensions between the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan –both seeking ways to expand in East Asia via railroads. The rivalry and competition between the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan in the late 19th century were at its most severe, given this fact. Coinciding with the aftermath of the First Sino-Japanese War, China's ceding Taiwan, Penghu, and the Liaodong Peninsula to the Empire of Japan triggered the Russian Empire to a greater extent, resulting in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, as shall be discussed in the following section. (Fig. 10)

In an academic debate as to the strategic value of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, scholars Felix Patrikeeff and Harry Shukman bring up a novel perspective by implying that the territorial ambitions of the Russian Empire in terms of its commercial activities had always been Western-oriented. As the empire long sought to be in closer relations with the European markets –particularly after the development of the railroads in continental Europe, the Empire of Japan, previously, did not deem the Russian Empire as a strategic threat. "As long as Russia's center of gravity remained well to the western, European part of its territory, it posed no threat to Japan's territorial ambitions," scholars Felix Patrikeeff and Harry Shukman argue. "But when Russia embarked on the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, Japan was alarmed."²⁷ The nexus between the railroads and the Russo-Japanese War, therefore, once again, outlay the significance of strategic locations and geopolitics in world history as the determinant factor behind empires' motives of connecting regions to one another.

The Escalation of the Russo-Japanese War

It is reasonable to commence with the background of the Russo-Japanese War and what led the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan to wage war one another. Both the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan, as has been mentioned throughout the paper, were two of the greatest empires in the

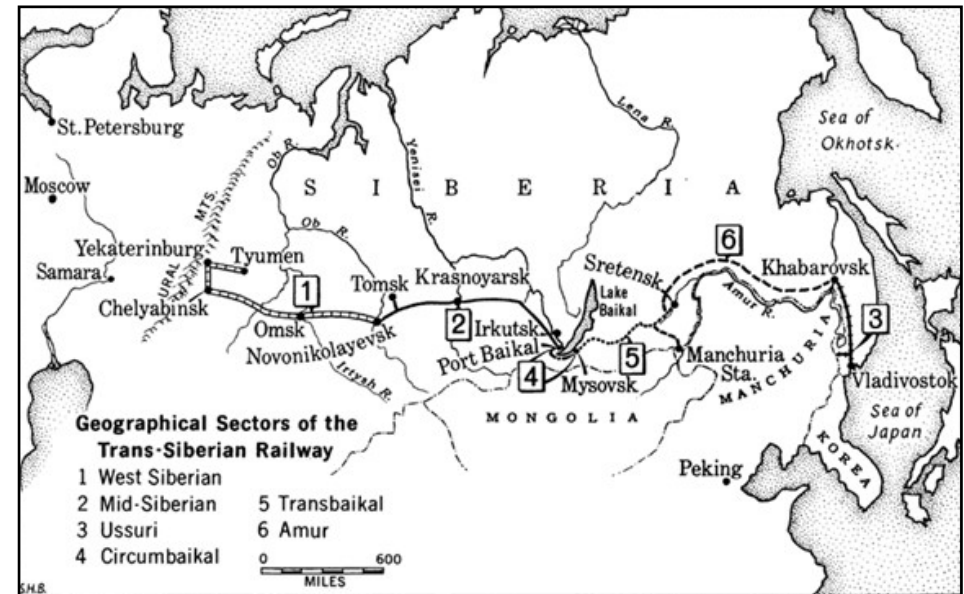


Figure 10: Historical map of the Trans-Siberian Railway. (Source: Trans-Siberian Russia)

early twentieth century, both having carried out imperialist and expansionist policies in the Asian continent and having a territorial claim to Asia. In the case of the Empire of Japan, it is commonly understood that the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, fought over Korea's independence, allowed the Empire of Japan to acquire Taiwan, granting the empire extraterritoriality privileges. Followed by the Treaty of Shimonoseki, Li Hung-chang and Ito Hirobumi negotiated, and the Empire of Japan was given plenty of territories, further allowing her to expand its territorial borders. The terms of the treaty obliged China to recognize the independence of Korea, over which it had traditionally held suzerainty; to cede Taiwan, the Pescadores Islands, and the Liaodong (south Manchurian) Peninsula to Japan; and to open the ports of Shashi, Chongqing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou to Japanese trade²⁸ as Paine states.²⁹ However, The Triple Intervention of 1895, secured by Russia, France, and Germany, subsequently required Japan to retrocede the Liaodong

²⁸ This treaty of commerce and navigation was agreed upon July 21, 1896.

²⁹ Paine, S. C. M. *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

²⁷ Patrikeeff, Felix & Shukman, Harold. *Railways and the Russo-Japanese War: Transporting War*. Routledge, 2007.

Peninsula to China in return for an additional indemnity of 30,000,000 taels.³⁰ Therefore, with the Triple Intervention of Germany, Russia, France in 1895, the Empire of Japan was forced to return the Liaotung Peninsula and Port Arthur to China, which would, later on, signify one of the *casus belli*³¹ for the Empire of Japan.

Port Arthur

Having given the background knowledge as to Japanese Imperialism, it is of utmost significance to state the geopolitical and geographical importance of the Lüshunkou District –which is a district of Dalian, in Liaoning province, China. Also previously pronounced Lüshun City or Lüshun Port, the Russian Empire formerly named it both Port Arthur and *Ryojun*. The present research mentions Lüshunkou District as Port Arthur, for it was the name of the district during the Russo-Japanese War. The location of the Port Arthur is at the extreme southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula. In geopolitical and military terms, Port Arthur was of surpassing significance both for the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan in the early twentieth century. (Fig. 11, 12)

A crucial access spot for both empires, the port harbored pre-eminent geopolitical value, especially for the Russian Empire, for various purposes. Explicitly put, it was manifest that the Russian Empire was looking forward to a warm port for the transportation of its products for a considerable period. The Suez Canal was an opportunity; however, as the British Empire had the dominance over the Suez Canal and she also refused access to the Suez Canal for the Russian Empire –the Russians desired a port that would ease its way to the Indian sub-continent to conduct trade in India. Without any other options to access to the Indian sub-continent, the Russian Empire had to sail along the Indian ocean. Since the Suez Canal opened, the Russian Empire had been using the Cape Route when the British Empire refused passage through the Suez Canal. In the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese War, the Dogger Bank incident (Jackson) forced the Russian fleet to sail around Africa as well, which was not

30 Treaty of Shimonoseki. Shunpanrou Hall, Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture, Honshu, Japan, where the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed in 1895. See, The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Treaty of Shimonoseki." *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*, 2020.

31 An event or action that justifies or allegedly justifies a war or conflict.



Figure 11: Images from the Leonard A. Lauder Collection of Japanese Postcards at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Unless otherwise indicated, all are by unidentified artists and date from the 1904-1905 war years. (Source: Massachusetts Institute of Technology © 2010 Visualizing Cultures)

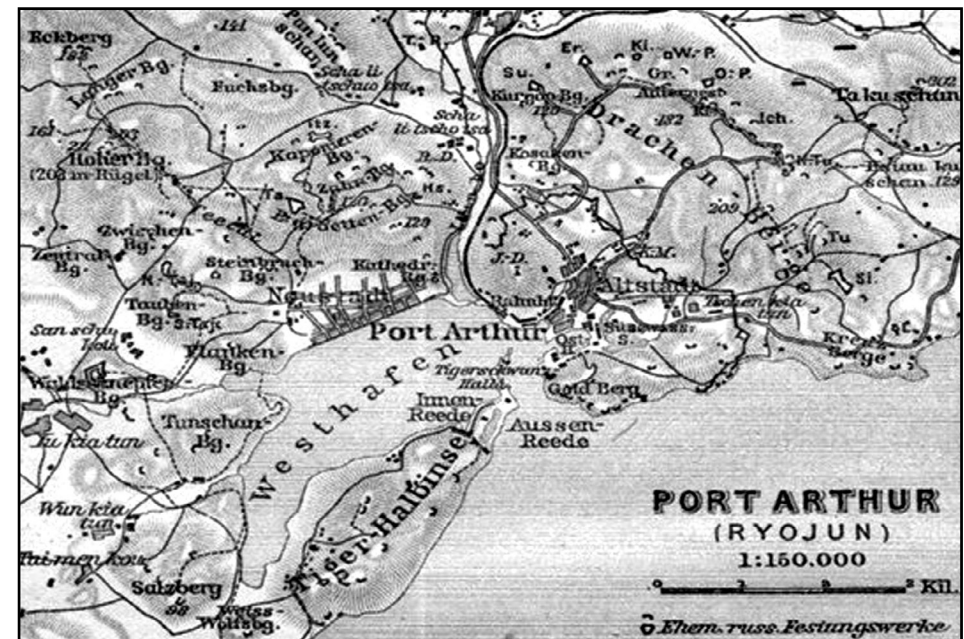


Figure 12: Port Arthur city plan Lüshunkou/Lvshunkou District (Ryojun), China. (Source: Alamy)

a convenient route for the Russian Empire. Another remarkable fact is that in the early twentieth century, all the ports of the Russian Empire at the time were in cold spots, which hindered the mobility of the boats and ships to a substantial degree. Geographically fit, Port Arthur became a prominent spot to start and reshape the Russian Empire's projects. As the construction of the railway tracks set out –dealt with in more detail in the following section– the Russian Empire employed too many soldiers at the Port (Arthur). The deployment of soldiers served a beneficial purpose of intimidating the Japanese regime –as the Japanese at the time were attempting to establish their domination in the Korean Peninsula. What is striking is that when the Empire of Japan tried to oppose the deployment of the Russian soldiers, the Russian Empire merely shrugged them off and did not pay much heed to the opposition, which would be another triggering event that would lead up to the Russo-Japanese War. Therefore, as its location signifies, Port Arthur is an excellent natural harbor, the possession, and control of which became a *casus bello* of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). (Fig. 13)

The South Manchuria Railway

Officially South Manchuria Railway Company, or *Mantetsu*³², was a comprehensive National Policy Company of the Empire of Japan, the principal function of which was the operation of railways on the Dalian–Fengtian (Mukden)–Changchun (called Xinjing from 1931 to 1945) corridor in northeastern China, as well as on several branch lines. Strategically of tremendous significance, the South-Manchurian Railway was geopolitically pivotal in Asia. The railway granted access to East Asian resources, Chinese and Japanese goods –silk, cotton, and porcelain, and a more prominent claim to Asia in general. The Russian Empire built the mainline from Changchun to Port Arthur, called Lüshun under Russian rule, between 1898 and 1903 as the southern branch of their Chinese Eastern Railway according to the 1896 secret treaty and the 1898 lease convention between Qing China and Imperial Russia in the aftermath of the First Sino-Japanese War. Once one of China's most strategically vital and economically prosperous transportation nodes,

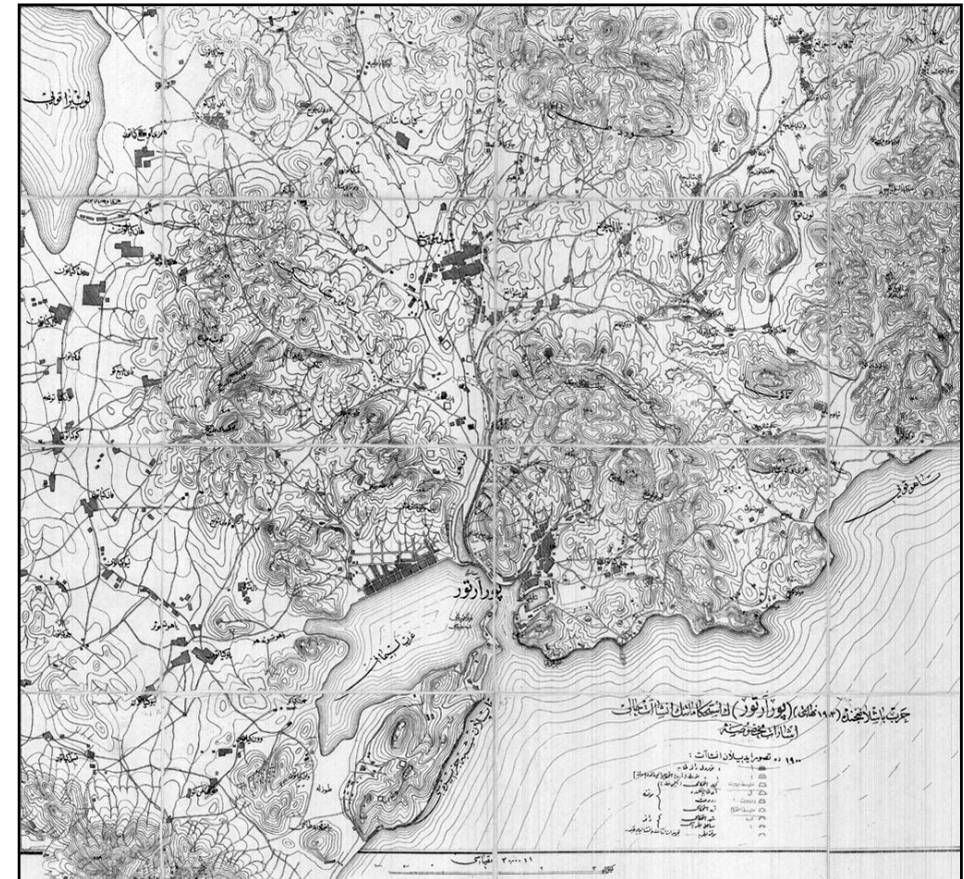


Figure 13: China-Dalian / Ottoman Map/Siege of Port Arthur (1904-5): [Map of the Russian-Japanese War]. Place and Year: Constantinople: Matbaa-i Askeriye, 1905. [Source: Ottoman Military Press (Matbaa-i Askeriye)]

the South Manchuria Railway, the Chinese Eastern Railway, and the cities along it fell on hard times.

Built at the turn of the 20th century on land forcibly leased from the increasingly frail Qing dynasty, Russia saw the line as a way to shorten travel times between Moscow and the Russian Far East, including the strategic ports of Vladivostok and Port Arthur –now known as Lüshun– by cutting through China's vast northeastern hinterlands. Though largely forgotten today, the railway had an immense impact on the history of modern Northeast Asia and

³² Japanese: 滿鐵

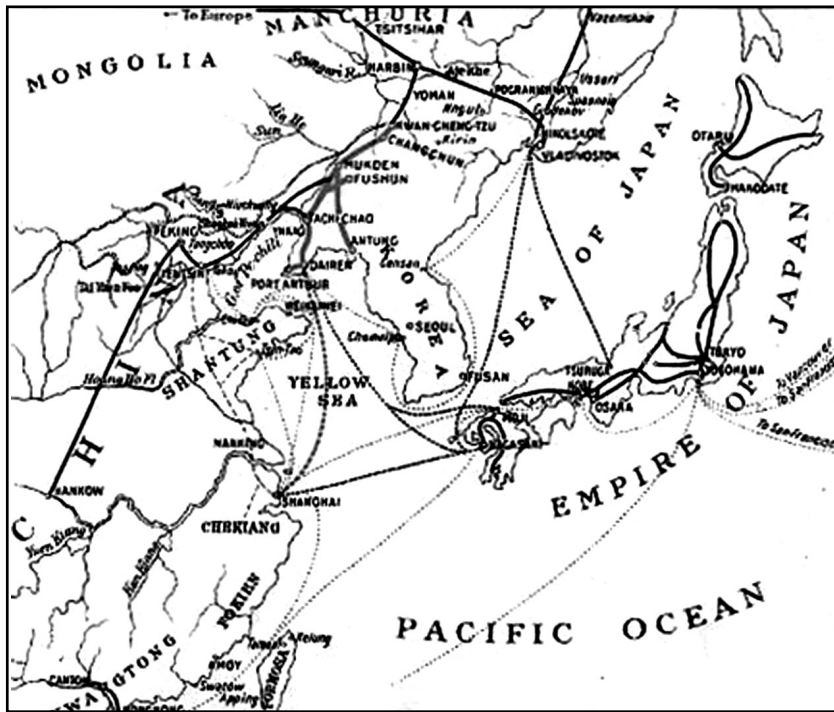


Figure 14: Promotional postcard issued by the South Manchuria Railway Co., which provides the “Shortest and quickest route between the Far East and Europe via Dairen”. The South Manchuria Railway network is shown in orange. Published by John Barnes & Co. Ltd, London, in the 1920s. (Source: South Manchuria Railway Co.)

played a key role in inciting the Russo-Japanese War.³³ (Fig. 14)

Therefore, it is reasonable to observe a trend wherefrom the final consequences of the First Sino-Japanese War until the escalation of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, railroads have shaped world history. As was the case in the railroads constructed throughout Afghanistan stemming from the famous historical theory, the Great Game, the leading rivalry between the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan resulted in (1) construction of a plethora of railways and (2) strategic battles in the Asian context. Although the regions, empires, and railroads themselves vary and evolve throughout

history –specifically in the late nineteenth century– the fundamental factor lying behind empires’ constructing railroads was identical: strategic empowerment.

Conclusion

The evolutionary stage of railroad designs for both the Great Game—resulting in the railroads of Afghanistan and the Russo-Japanese War have one idea in common: geopolitical strategy. Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Northern China –then known as Manchuria– had been home to various railroads for strategic purposes. India, as another example, also consisted of several railroads ranging from one corner of the country to another. There are differing aims behind each empires’ motives for constructing railroads. However, the ultimate goal remained the same, reaching out to the strategically or resource-wise significant regions of the globe. The British Empire, for instance, constructed railways and promulgated the extension of them throughout the history of the British Raj. The British Empire conducted such an extensive building of railways, for it envisioned the enhancement of commercial activities throughout the Indian sub-continent. Furthermore, it also utilized Afghanistan as a ‘buffer zone’ and turned the region into a plethora of railroads to ensure intelligence and information sharing, as well as to conduct trade and shield the zone from a potential Russian intervention.

The second theoretical part of the present research demonstrates that the rivalry between the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan, similarly, resulted in the development of plenty of railways. The Russian Empire, to have a stronger claim to Central Asia and threaten the hegemony and dominance of the Empire of Japan, designed the Trans-Caspian and Trans-Siberian Railways. The Empire of Japan, on the other hand, seized the operation of the South Manchuria Railway in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. In 1905, after Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, this area was taken over by Japan as the South Manchuria Railway Zone. *Mantetsu* was established in 1906 to operate the railways taken over from the Russians. Therefore, as is indisputably demonstrated throughout the paper, the strategic advantage of certain regions has been tremendously instrumental in railroad designs. Moreover, the strategically significant locations such as Port

³³ Te, Ma. “The Railway Relics of the Russo-Japanese War.” *Sixth Tone: Fresh Voices from Today’s China*, 2019.

Arthur, for geopolitical and military purposes, marked among the reasons why such a drastic war as the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 escalated.

In conclusion, railroads –especially the trans-railroads and the ones constructed in strategically significant regions– are excellent sources that shed light on the events that characterized the turning points in world history. In this view, Trans-Caspian Railway, Trans-Siberian Railway, South Manchurian Railway, along with the railroads of Afghanistan and India, constructed by the British Empire, are not merely means of transportation of people or goods. They also functioned and operated as strategic moves that the glorious empires of the nineteenth century which sought to implement their imperialist and expansionist policies. Especially within the context of the imperialism of the Empire of Japan, colonialism of the British Empire and the Russian Empire's trials of reaching out to (1) Indian and Chinese commerce and (2) warm water ports, railroads gained even more momentum, for they acted as mediators of empires' reaching their goals.

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