HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Images of Enemy and Self : Russian "Popular Prints" of the Russo-Japanese War
Author(s)	Mikhailova, Yulia
Citation	Acta Slavica Iaponica, 16, 30-53
Issue Date	1998
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/40148
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	16_30-53.pdf

Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP

Images of Enemy and Self: Russian "Popular Prints" of the Russo-Japanese War*

Yulia Mikhailova

Introduction

It is broadly recognized that wars and conflicts produce negative images of adversaries and that perceptions distorted by hostile feelings, in their turn, are not favorable for further friendly relations between nations. It is exactly this dangerous spiral that dominated the Russian attitudes towards Japan for a long time in history.

In analyzing the process of *enmification*[1] scholars have introduced a variety of constructs: the view of the enemy as "devil," the perception of the "incorrigibly malevolent" adversary, misrepresentation through "mirror imaging," and "diabolical images of the enemy." Various psychological mechanisms involved in this process — perceptual distortions, good-bad stereotypes, projections, exaggerated fear, anxiety-based overreactions, frustration-aggression, scapegoating — have also been studied.[2] Though enmification usually occurs according to the above-mentioned general pattern, cultural variations exist and historical consequences in specific cases are different.[3] In view of the prospect for the future *rapprochement* between Japan and Russia, it would be instructive to know what images of Japan in Russia underpinned the complicated history of relations between the two countries in the hope that this understanding could help to sweep away old hatreds and fears.

Though some articles briefly mention Russian or Soviet perceptions of Japan,[4] with the exception of a recently published book by a young Russian scholar Vasilii Molodiakov,[5] no substantial research in the field has been undertaken. Molodiakov

* I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the staff of the Section of Prints of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, especially to Nataliia Rudakova, who generously shared with me their knowledge about Russian caricatures and prints. I am also greatly indebted to Hiroshima City University which provided me with a grant to do this research.

1 The term "enmification" has been borrowed by me from Robert W. Rieber, Robert J. Kelly, "Substance and Shadow," in: R.W. Rieber (ed.), *The Psychology of War and Peace: The Image of the Enemy*, New York, Plenum Press, 1991, pp. 5-20.

2 Lorand B. Szalay, Elahe Mir-Djalali, "Image of the Enemy," in: R.W. Rieber (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215.

3 For example, enmification of Japan during the Second World War took place both in the US and the USSR, but with the end of the war relations between the US and Japan took the form of a teacher-student alliance, which did not happen in the case of the Soviet Union and Japan though the Soviet Union seemed attractive to some Japanese left wing intellectuals.

examines the attitudes towards Japan of Vladimir Solov'ev, Valerii Briusov and Andrei Belyi, each of whom was a prominent philosopher or writer at the end of the 19th through beginning of the 20th century. Having chosen a geopolitical approach in his analysis, the author traces how the "myth" about Japan as the "yellow peril" came into being in Russia and emphasizes that in contrast to Europe or the US where it circulated mainly on the level of "yellow press," in Russia this myth became an inspiration for the most outstanding intellectuals of the time and their prophetic vision of the future.[6]

However, was this the only image of Japan in the Russian society at that time? This paper will attempt to shed some light on this subject and contribute to the study of Japan's image in Russia on the level of mass consciousness during the Russo-Japanese War and thereafter. The object of analysis are mainly the so called "popular prints" (*lubki*) produced during the war.[7]

It is assumed that the popular mind is quickly shaped by "symbolic" items, hence, graphic forms of representation play an especially important role in reflecting the existing images of Self and Other and in creating them. Graphic images appeal not only to consciousness, but to emotions as well, and in case of multiple recurrence easily turn into identifying icons. "Popular prints" of the Russo-Japanese War were a part of an officially sponsored propaganda effort. At the same time they expressed the perception of war and reaction to it not of the intellectual elite, but of the ordinary people, and thus reveal the attitudes towards the enemy and Self on the mass level. The paper argues that because *lubki* prints were closely connected to folklore and images which had existed in the mass consciousness for a long time, they were instrumental in creating and supporting stereotypes of Japanese in the mind of ordinary Russian people.

The article begins with a historical overview of "popular prints" in the Russian culture. It then examines images of Japanese and Russians through the "popular prints"

---

4 See Yu. Mikhailova, "The Image of Japan in Russo-Soviet Japanese Studies," *Japanese Studies Bulletin,* Australian Association of Japanese Studies, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1993, pp. 59-74; S.I. Verbitskii, "Russian Perceptions of Japan," in: J.E. Goodby, V. Ivanov, N. Shimotomai (eds.), *"Northern Territories" and Beyond*, Westport and London, Praeger, 1995, pp. 63-69.

5 V. Molodiakov, *"Obraz Iaponii" v Everope i Rossii vtoroi poloviny XIX — nachala XX veka,* Moscow-Tokyo, Institut Vostokovedeniia RAN, 1996.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

7 The word *lubok* (sing.), *lubki* (pl.) comes from the word *lub* (bast) which was at first used for their production. The term *narodnye kartiny* (popular prints) is also used as a synonym for *lubki.*
The analysis of the "popular prints" (*lubki*) in this article is based on the collection of the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg. Another approximately identical collection exists in the State Public Historical Library, Moscow. The catalogue of the latter collection compiled by I.V. Levedeva (*Russkii voennyi lubok [Katalog]*, part 2, Moscow, GPIB of Russia, 1995 [in Russian]) gives only a formal description of the prints, such as the name and the address of the workshop, the size of the print, the name of the text's author (when it exists), and the first and the last words of the text. My goal was not to make a descriptive inventory of the prints, but rather to concentrate on analysis of their contents.

depicting the war and classifies them into three categories: allegoric, realistic and satirical. A brief comparison with Japanese war-time woodblock prints follows. Finally, in way of conclusion, the impact of these "popular prints" on Japan's image in Russia and the Soviet Union is highlighted.

"Popular Prints" in Russia

From the second half of the 17th century till 1918[8] *lubki* prints and literature played an important role in the life of the Russian people as the main means of mass culture. The first *lubki* prints were mainly religious in contents. In the 18th century several monasteries near Moscow specialized in their production. Then secular subjects came to be represented as well. Thus, heroes of knightly romances, genre scenes, real and imaginary birds and beasts were the subject of secular *lubki*. Especially popular were the characters of the "world of laughter." Jokes, irony and satire, caricature and ridicule poked fun at serious aspects of life, exposed unfairness and showed up human feelings and weaknesses.

"Popular prints" were not really created by the people themselves, as songs, fairy tales or anecdotes were. They were rather meant to be produced *for* people. Anonymous authors of *lubki*, who aimed at mass consumption, knew well expectations of the lower levels of society. For centuries *lubki* prints or books reproduced the same topics again and again — love triangles, a valorous knight or a merry Punch — giving them numerous variations. *Lubki* were popular exactly because they reflected the popular taste, everybody's "likes" and "dislikes." However, since the 19th century the expression *lubochnyi* (*lub*-like) acquired the meaning of anything primitive, vulgar or crudely made.

In the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century the production of *lubki* concentrated at a few large scale workshops in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and a small number of workshop masters and publishers decided what the repertoire and the style of prints should be.[9] As time passed, wood was replaced by copper, then by lithographs and chromolithographs. All "popular prints" became subject to censorship and at least one sheet of each picture was directed to and kept in main national libraries of St. Petersburg and Moscow. "Popular prints" usually contained explanatory texts, often written in verse. Names of artists and printers were not written, however, those of the texts' authors usually were.[10] The name of the workshop and its address were also indicated.

"Popular prints" were sold in large numbers at fairs and by peddlers and occupied

8 The production of *lubki* prints and books was forbidden by a decree of the Soviet government.

9 N. Rudakova, " The Russian Lubok: Two Hundred Years of Popular Prints," in: *Tradition and Revolution in Russian Art: Leningrad in Manchester*, Manchester, Exhibition Catalogue, 1990, p. 66.

10 Among the authors of texts for the "popular prints" of the Russo-Japanese War was, for example, a well-known writer of the time V. Giliarovskii who used the pen-name "Diadia (lit.: 'uncle') Giliash," a war writer and poet S. Sulin, pen-name - "Pika" (lit.: 'a lance'), a poet R. Mendelevich, pen-name "Mech" (lit.: 'a sword').

the most honorable places in houses of peasants, craftsmen and merchants — the so-called "red corner," a place reserved for icons. They could also be fixed to the inside of a coffer cover where they easily caught the eye. Pictures remained there for years until they went into dust. Thus, *lubok* images came to be well ingrained into the people's memory.

War often figured among the subjects of prints. The importance of the war theme is well justified. War was perceived by people as an event of a global, cosmic scale, as an act of the Almighty God, the same as heavenly signs: earthquakes, plague, starvation or miracles. This association gave birth, for example, to some religious motives in allegoric prints of the Russo-Japanese War. Prints were also an important source of information about the course of war. Peasants, mostly illiterate, could hardly grasp information from newspapers or books, remember figures and facts. Even more educated city dwellers had them in at one ear and out at the other. On the other hand, cock-and-bull stories and rumors enjoyed popularity in the countryside and in city taverns for ordinary folks. *Lubok* prints quickly absorbed fresh rumors and stories, represented them in traditional graphic forms which were then brought back to villages and towns. At the same time prints often made fun of enemies Russia waged wars with. For example, some of the 18th century "popular prints" represented Russian Cossacks defeating Prussians who were depicted with long mustaches and called *Prusaki*, a synonym for cockroaches in the Russian language. "Popular prints" of the war against Napoleon usually mocked the sufferings of the French during the cold Russian winter or glorified the heroism of Russian peasants. Prints which appeared during the 1877-1878 wars against the Turks made jokes about their sluggishness and inability to fight well. No wonder that the war with Japan gave birth to a series of *lubki* prints relevant to the events.

Images of War with Japan

Hardly had the first Japanese bullets struck the Russian ships at Port Arthur and Chemulpo when they immediately echoed back in "popular prints." Hundreds and thousands of colorful prints soon appeared in all the remote corners of Russia, leaving newspapers and official information far behind. Before people had time to understand well who was fighting with whom and what the mobilization was for, peasants and towns-people grew excited over pictures of thousands of Japanese in bright blue uniforms or as tiny weaklings smashed by huge fists of smart Russian Cossacks and sailors.

Images of Japanese soldiers pushed images of graceful geishas and cherry blossoms into the background. This new image of Japan absorbed all the biting irony and humor, all the ardor of popular indignation, all the creativeness of *lubok* traditions and contributed to the popularity of the war among the masses, at least during its first months while the atrocities and hardships were not yet great and the ineptitude of the Russian command was not yet obvious. The overall number of "popular prints" of the Russo-Japanese War was more than three hundred, and many pictures were re-printed thousands of times. However, *lubok* prints appeared only during the first half a year of the war. As soon as the Japanese won one victory after another (the destruction by a mine

of the flagship *Petropavlovsk* was followed by the defeats at Tyurenchen and Nanshan and the siege of Port Arthur began), "popular prints" first became more serious, but then lapsed into silence. The topics were soon exhausted. The last print *The Battle at Shakhe and the Seizure of Liaoyan* was censored on 18 October 1904 and contains no commentaries at all.

"Popular prints" of the Russo-Japanese War may be tentatively classified into three categories: allegoric, realistic and satirical.

1. Allegoric prints.

We may call allegoric prints those which convey images of war in symbolic terms, using mainly symbols derived from Russian history and Orthodox Christianity to build up the spirit of nationalism and to evoke anti-Japanese feelings. From the time of Peter I, Russia's self-image was one of a great military power. This image was enhanced throughout the 18th and 19th centuries due to successful wars against the Turks and Napoleon. In particular, the Patriotic War of 1812 was an important step in the development of the Russian national consciousness, as Russia demonstrated that it was the only European state able to defeat the mighty Napoleon. The Balkan War of 1877-78 was fought under the slogan of Pan-Slavism, i.e. unification of all the Slavs under Russian leadership, and was regarded in Russia as the liberation of "brother-Slavs" from the "unfaithful" Turks. These ideas stimulated the development of the Slavic orientation in the Russian national consciousness. It is this self-image of Russia that helps explain the contents and the character of the 1904 "popular prints."

The print *On the War of Russia with Japan* (picture No. 1) belongs to the category of allegoric prints and contains the official Russian interpretation of the war. On the front-right side of the picture, we see a woman standing on what may be assumed to be the shores of Port Arthur's harbor. She is dressed in some mixture of clothing of the mediaeval Russian czars and knights. Her mantle and skirt are heavily decorated with the double eagle, the coat of arms of the Russian Empire. An icon, an attribute of the Orthodox faith, is fixed to her breast. Another double eagle is sitting on the woman's shoulder. She holds an olive branch, a symbol of peace. A white angel is floating over her head. Her sword is sheathed and her posture is full of dignity and pride.

On the left back side of the picture we see a dragon-like monster. He bares big sharp teeth. His awful jaw disgorges lightning. He has huge stretched forward paws with claws and protruding wings of enormous size. Flames are raging behind him. However, in spite of his terrifying attributes, quite appropriate to the "diabolic image of the enemy," he does not look terribly frightening and resembles a stupid eight-headed monster-serpent (*zmei-gorynych*) from Russian fairy tales who is supposed to be defeated by a valorous hero.

The woman symbolizes Russia as the herald of peace. This allegoric representation resembles much the so called "Apotheosis," a large figure of Russia surrounded by its minorities which used to be an essential final part of many buffooneries or farces performed for the entertainment of the common people. The dragon-like monster represents here the aggressive intentions of Japan. However, the main message, also expressed in the text, is not only to stress the menace coming from Japan. It is rather to

emphasize the peaceful intentions of Russia, the idea that the Christian faith and Russia's glorious martial past would ensure her victory. The text blames Japan for its treacherous behavior — a surprise attack on Port Arthur — and predicts that it will be punished by God. Although prior to the Second Hague Peace Conference of 1907 there existed no rule of international law requiring a declaration of war before the opening of hostilities,[11] the Japanese attack on Port Arthur was regarded by the Russians as inappropriate behavior for an "honest warrior."[12] Since then the idea that Japan is an evil and treacherous country has been repeated over and over again in various prints, cartoons and articles.

In picture No. 2 *The Russian Hero at the East: The Hero and Yellow Pygmies* we see a Russian epic knight riding a huge white horse, a typical *lubok* image of a hero — Iliia Muromets or Eruslan Lazarevich. He occupies the central part of the picture and is very large in comparison with the Japanese soldiers surrounding him. While the Russian knight is dressed in medieval clothes and is armed with a lance, the Japanese have modern uniforms and weapons. The message is evident: the Russian national spirit is stronger than modern technology.

This print claims that the spiritual differences between the Russians and the Japanese are based on their racial differences. The Japanese are identified here with the Mongols, people of the yellow race known in Russia for their brutality. The Mongols conquered Russia in the 13th century, and their cruel yoke lasted for two and a half centuries. It is usually assumed that since that time the Russian people (= the Slavs) have hated all the people of the yellow race and had a feeling of disgust towards all those with slant eyes and yellow skin. In reality, however, Mongol blood, probably, runs in the veins of most Russians, and the above mentioned attitude should be classified rather as an invention of the 19th century intellectuals of pro-Slavic orientation. It is interesting that another influential group of Russian philosophers of the time, the Eurasianists, on the contrary, was proud to view Russia as "the legacy of Genghis Khan."[13]

It is the moral superiority of Russia over Japan that is accentuated in allegoric "popular prints." This is not just the opposition between a good Self and a wicked Other typical to all enmification cases. The Russian spiritual tradition, based on Orthodox Christianity, was obsessed with the "search for the right morality," and always acknowledged the priority of moral values at the expense of practical issues. Moral victory, i.e. the display of heroism, courage or dignity, could even be regarded as more important than the real outcome of a battle. Thus, a popular Russia song glorifying the heroic and tragic death of the *Variag* (see the explanation to picture No. 4 below) said: "No quarter for the proud *Variag* - No one asks for mercy!"

---

11 R.A. Esthus, *Double Eagle and Rising Sun: The Russians and the Japanese at Portsmouth in 1905*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1988, pp. 198-199.

12 In a very similar way the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor became an "indelible symbol of the Japanese treachery in the US and inspired an immediate commitment to a vengeful war without mercy." See: J. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, London, Faber and Faber, 1986, p. 181.

13 N.S. Trubetskoi, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan and Other Essays on Russian Identity*, Ann Arbor, Michigan Slavic Publications, 1991.

2. Realistic prints

Realistic prints were meant to convey information from the war theater as closely as possible to reality. Indeed, many correspondents were dispatched to the Far East. Among them were famous photographers V. Bulla and V. Taburin. However, their photos could not be delivered quickly to the Western part of Russia. It usually took about a month and a half for a train to cross Siberia, while some sort of graphic information was required more urgently. The way out was found in drawing pictures which were stylistically close to photos. They were both published in magazines and reproduced as separate sheets of prints. The influence of historical and battle painters such as Vasilii Surikov and Vasilii Vereshchagin, himself a participant in the war, is evident here.[14] Some realistic prints depict events close to the facts of the war; however, many convey rather the spirit of war, the impressive and terrifying battle scenes, the sufferings of people. However, *lubki* prints did not have to convey the truth. While portraying fighting with the Japanese, the author of the print might well have in mind not the real event, but another "popular print," for example *A Panorama of the Chesmenskaia Battle.* One and the same event, even one of minor importance, when the Russians managed to achieve some success or displayed heroism, was repeated in several prints. The heroic deed of the cruiser *Variag*, the repulse of the first Japanese attacks on Port Arthur, some episodes of confrontation on the Yalu river, the sinking of a Japanese cruiser — all this was quickly grasped by the printing press and spread in colorful sheets around Russia, inspiring people to the war effort.

The absence of precise information about the events at the remote Far Eastern battlefield, exaggerated reports about the heroic deeds of the Russians and, of course, expectations of the inevitable victory over the Japanese can well be seen in the print *The Defeat of a Japanese Cruiser* (picture No. 3). It represents the first night attack of the Japanese on Port Arthur and had already been approved by the censorship committee on the fifth day after the attack. As is well known, the Japanese activities were very successful. Two Russian battleships and one cruiser were badly damaged, 14 people were killed and 71 wounded. Though the Japanese also had some losses, the Russians had hardly any precise information. Rumors and imagination created a picture of a Japanese cruiser going to the bottom.[15] Sources of information the authors of the print refer to are a telegram from Paris to the newspaper *Novoe Vremia* "confirmed by a re-

14 Later the artist N. Samokish, who worked as a war correspondent, even gained some fame after issuing an album. See N.S. Samokish, *Voina. 1904-1905. Iz dnevnika khdozhnika*, A Colored Autotype, St. Petersburg [1908].

15 It is interesting that one of the Soviet histories of the Russo-Japanese War presents information about the defeat of a Japanese destroyer not as an objective historical fact, but citing the words of the commander of a Japanese destroyer *Akatsuki* who allegedly wrote: "[Another destroyer] began sinking quickly. I clearly saw its upper deck, a destroyed bridge, the opening in the chimney and clouds of smoke pouring out of it: the boilers seemed to have cracked. *Shirakumo* was sinking and no one could help her." See: I.I. Rostunov, Iu.I. Chernov, "Nachalo voiny i strategicheskoe razvertyvanie" in: I.I. Rostunov (ed.), *Istoriia russko-iaponskoi voiny 1904-1905 gg.*, Moskow, Nauka, 1977, p. 120.

port of a merchantship which came to Tientsin from Japan." On the left side of the picture, a Russian battleship with the Andreevskii flag is steadily standing on the water in spite of bombs, mines and waves. On the contrary, a Japanese cruiser is all in flames and about to sink. No one in Russia could have thought at that moment that by June 1904 the Russian Pacific Fleet would be blocked in the Port Arthur harbor, that on the eve of the year 1905 Port Arthur would capitulate, or that the Baltic Fleet would be completely destroyed on 27 May 1905.

Every Russian schoolboy or schoolgirl knows the story of the Variag, which became the first victim of the war in the unequal battle with the Japanese. The Russians did not surrender, but opened the Kingston valves and sank their ship so as not to let the enemy get the booty. Sailors and officers took refuge on foreign ships stationed in the same harbor Chemulpo. It is this particular moment that we see in the print *Vanquished, Destroyed but not Surrendered* (picture No. 4). The *Variag* is going down to the bottom while the Russian crew is boarding the French cruiser *Pascal*. This picture strongly bares traces of a photo, but it was probably the only one which depicted events so realistic.

Two messages stand out here: glorification of the Russian heroism and morale, and the international solidarity of the European countries against the Japanese. The text at the bottom of the print says:

> In a hot and unequal battle our sailors demonstrated unprecedented energy. Three times fires in riggings were put out. Wounded crew members were quickly replaced by others. Slot-holes were repaired on the spot. Both sides of the cruiser were completely damaged, guns destroyed... The foreigners were deeply touched by the heroism of the Russians. Many of them cried seeing the Russian ships going to a certain death. When the Russians passed the foreign ships targeting the port exit, their crews lined up along the decks. Russians were shouting "hurrah!" and singing the national anthem.

Thus, Russian heroism, bravery and courage are extolled to emphasize that the Japanese are no peers to the Russians in an honest battle. The Japanese may win only by resort to conniving or due to their numerical superiority in manpower. There is no place for "barbarian Asians" in the international club of the civilized nations, claims this print.

The initiative in the war belonged to the Japanese nearly throughout the whole campaign while the Russians were passive. Realistic prints indirectly betrayed the ineptitude and passivity of the Russians. In the texts the Japanese are constantly "on the move": they are "landing," "building fortifications," "pushing by force" and "attacking, " while the Russian are "observing," "settling down," "keeping calm," "repulsing attacks." However, the portrayal of war required battle-scenes where the Russians would not have been only on the defensive. So, stories had to be invented. For example, the text to the picture No. 5 *The Repulse of a Japanese Landing by the Russians* (censored on 17 (30)[16] April 1904) said:

> The newspaper *Standard* telegraphed: "The Japanese fleet under the command of general Togo escorted a significant number of the Japanese merchant transport to the coast west of the Yalu and the Japanese landed." However, the Japanese did not notice a Russian detachment in the nearby ambush. When 12,000 of the Japanese landed, the Russians went out of the ambush, attacked the Japanese unawares, inflicted serious casualties and pushed them out.

It is likely that the landing of the First Japanese Army headed by general Kuroki 125 km west of the Yalu is referred to here. The sparseness and the insufficient number of the Russian army allowed the Japanese to realize their plans successfully: by 10 (23) April Kuroki's army of 45,000 completed their concentration on the left bank of the Yalu. Sporadic Russian attacks occurred though, and it is probably one of them which is represented here.

This print is very colorful. Yellow fur coats of the Russian soldiers in red *papakhas* contrast well with the bright blue Japanese uniforms. We see faces of the Russians distorted by fear and anger. Not so much are they attacking, but rather carrying away the wounded and dead, who are potrayed as young people. The Japanese in the back-side of the print move like a huge crowd, their strength doubled by the presence of battleships. This print, in spite of the artist's intention to show the success of the Russian army, conveys the horror and the inhumanity of war, emphasizing again the aggressiveness and the cruelty of the Japanese.

3. Satirical prints

It is the satirical "popular prints" though, where the popular humor is most revealed, that provide us with the most information about the Russian images of the Japanese enemy and Self. Here, indeed, one can see grotesque scenes of the Japanese in defeat and in panic, bold attacks of Cossacks and sailors, or the vicissitudes of relations with the US and England. At the beginning of the war when expectations about victory were strong, satirical "popular prints" were bold and insolent, even arrogant. They made fun of the cowardliness and weakness of the Russian adversary, attributing to him stupidity and greed, ridiculing his physical height, skin color and facial features. It seemed that "popular prints" knew no restraint. Their mockery may seem to us crude and primitive, their humor flat and gaudy. But it was for these very features that "popular prints" were appreciated by the ordinary Russian folk.

Most typical are the prints *The Enemy is Terrible but God is Benevolent* (picture No. 6) *and Cossack Petrukha* (picture No. 7). In picture No. 6 we see a huge figure of a Russian fellow in boots, mittens and a fur-cap striding across the Sea of Japan, one boot in Korea, another already close to Japan, with Manchuria left far behind. Small Japanese ships turn over as soon as he steps into the sea. The Japanese are hastily running away. America, England and China are stunned by the victorious march of the Russian.

---

16 The first figure gives the date according to the old Russian Julian calendar, the figure in brackets according to the Gregorian calendar.

The most striking feature of the picture is the contrast between the huge size of the Russian giant and the miniature size of the Japanese. Like Gulliver among the Lilliputians, he is holding one bunch of Japanese in his fist, another bunch is stuck behind his sash, and still other behind the top of his boot. The text written in verse is abundant in derogatory attributes regarding the Japanese. They are "yellow-skinned," "slant-eyed," "foul," "snub-nosed," etc. One may only wonder how these tiny people could become a fearful enemy and why they cannot be defeated without God's benevolence.

In the print *Cossack Petrukha* (picture No. 7) a huge Russian Cossack is easily screwing off the legs of Japanese soldiers booted in well buttoned white boots with straw soles, an invention of the Japanese army of the time. For some reason, probably because the Russian army always suffered from the lack of ammunition and clothing, these neat buttoned boots especially fascinated the prints' painters. We see another Japanese soldier pierced by a lance. The caption maintains that it is not even necessary to kick the Japanese; they may just as easily be thrown right and left. One of the "popular prints," *The Martial Song of the Russian Sailors*, directly maintained "We'll twist your cheeks off without any lead or gun — just by a fist blow." The same conventional Russian military icon, the courageous Cossack, is repeated in nearly the same manner throughout many prints. He is whipping with a lash, pulling by the ear (which becomes as large as a donkey's), or killing the Japanese by a flick of his little finger. These images symbolized the physical weakness, ineptitude or the stupidity of the Russian adversary.

It was generally assumed that Russian's enemies were very much afraid of Cossacks since the time of the war with Prussia (1759-1762). Thus, "popular prints" and cartoons of 1812 portrayed the French falling down in a dead faint on hearing the word *koza* (goat) which sounded to them similar to *Cossack*.[17] However, there was a great discrepancy between the reality and this image of a Cossack. The Russian Cossack troops were armed in an outdated fashion with sabers and lances. The Cossacks were not to live up to their reputation, being of an inferior standard in comparison with European cavalry. The special terms of employment of Cossacks, whereby they were responsible for the provision of their horse, uniform and equipment, meant that these soldiers were not going to expose these items to unnecessary risk, particularly when compensation was paltry. In Russia itself, Cossack troops, known for their loyalty, were often used by police to suppress demonstrations of dissidence and did not enjoy much love of the population. Cossacks were hardy, brave and obedient soldiers, but they lacked education and sophistication, flair and intuition. While the Russians laughed at the Japanese cavalry and artillery, this fueled a major under-appraisal of Japanese martial qualities.

In reality the Japanese army was superior to the Russian army in many respects. It was equipped with the most modern technology; battleships and cruisers were mainly Britain built. Officers were educated and civilized and enjoyed the confidence of their soldiers. The logistic support was also superb.

---

17 D. Rovinskii, *Russkie narodnye kartinki*, in 5 vols, Vol. IV, St. Petersburg, 1881, p. 425.

Gradually and reluctantly, as the war proceeded, Japan's military achievements had to be appreciated. In a book *Talks about a Japanese* published in June 1904 and written in a form of a conversation between an old soldier and a young recruit, thus imitating the common people's style, the Japanese army was described in the following way:

> [The Japanese] are good seamen, they understand this business... It is astonishing that this army has been built in 20-30 years. During the Chinese campaign a Japanese did not lag behind us. He strains himself to the utmost, but pushes forward, doesn't want to show he is worse than others... [Though] they lack bravery, the infantry fights well. Artillery and cavalry are worse than Russian.[18]

However, Russians tended to emphasize the "unnatural," inhuman qualities of the Japanese, rather than their mastery or craft in warfare. One book of the time designed for popular consumption said:

> Mother-Russia had many adversaries in her life, but it is for the first time she meets one like the Japanese... Turks in comparison with the Japanese are children. One has to wake a Turk up, make him take the rifle — he is a careless and indifferent enemy. A Chinese is even more simple... A Japanese, in a word, is an Asian; he is much more cunning than a Chinese and very able in night deeds: he is like an owl in the night, sees everything and is able to fight.[19]

Another Russian conventional military icon was the valiant and smart sailor. We see him, for example, at the print *How a Russian Sailor Cut off the Japanese Nose* (picture No. 8). This humorous story was based on a true fact. On 1 (14) March the Czar nominated Vice-Admiral Makarov as the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Pacific fleet. He was a good scholar, an experienced warrior, an active and courageous commander, respected even by the Japanese. During the period until his tragic death on 31 March (12 April) the Russian fleet completely changed its passive tactics, undertook a number of skillful maneuvers and attacked the enemy several times. For example, the Japanese wanted to block the Port Arthur harbor by sinking their old steamers at the entrance. The flotilla was accompanied by a cruiser and several destroyers. The Russians guessed the enemy's intentions, successfully attacked and destroyed the ships. The prow of one steamer was blown up by a mine. The Japanese were really taken aback by the insistence of the Russians in taking up the fight, and the message passed to general Togo was that for once the enemy had shown resilience and was prepared to do battle.[20] The spirits of people in Port Arthur became high and it is this mood which one can feel through the print.

---

18 K.K. Abaza, *Beseda pro Iapontsa*, St. Pertersburg, V. Berezovskii, 1904, pp. 33-34.

19 N.I. Suvirov, *Proshloe i nastoiashchee Iaponii*, St. Pertersburg, V. Berezovskii, 1904, p. 13.

20 R.M. Connaughton, *The War of the Rising Sun and Tumbling Bear*, New York and London, Routledge, 1988, p. 38.

The humor lies here in a pun: the Russian word *nos* means both the nose of a person and a ship's prow. We see pictures of stunned Japanese soldiers, fountains of blood flowing out of the holes in their faces while the noses themselves are lying separately "in Manchuria." An important element of fun is hidden in the word "nose" itself. "Sharpening of noses" was an usual comic interlude during the breaks in drama performances. It included singing, dancing, fighting and laughing and was very popular among the commoners.[21] Vladimir Nabokov, noting the meaning of the image of "nose" in Gogol's literary works, wrote that for Gogol as for every Russian the "nose" seems to be comic, something living quite separately from the person who owns it. It is an element of the Russian rude carnival humor in general and of the Russian jokes about the nose in particular. Noses amuse and sadden the Russians. There are many proverbs and sayings concerning the nose. This word in Russian is a part of many idiomatic expressions, such as *povesit' nos v unynie* meaning "to be discouraged"; *ostat'sia s nosom*, "to be duped"; *vodit' za nos*, "make a fool of someone"; *sovat' nos vo chto-libo*, "pry into something"; and *uteret' komu-libo nos*, "get the better of somebody."[22] Thus, the print actually meant to say that the Russians made fools of and got the better of the Japanese who poked their noses into something not their own business, i.e. tried to fight against the Russian army, but failed.

The print *Raeshnik* (formerly, a box with moving pictures the display of which was accompanied with jokes; usually used at fairs) also pokes fun by playing with the image of "nose" (picture No. 9). A Russian sailor, Ivan-Lupinos (lit.: "Nose-beater"), is bullying a Japanese by beating his nose with maps of Europe. In the Russian language the word *karty* means both "maps" and "cards." Though the scene literally depicts the punishment of a card game loser, it expresses the Russian belief that the Japanese would lose the war, even in spite of the help of their European "friends." The picture also jeers at the Western allies of Japan who are now "assisting" Ivan-Lupinos by "holding tough the ears" of a Japanese soldier.

A common feature of enmification is representation of the enemy as an animal or as some ugly creature. In picture No. 10 a handsome *Vasia-the-Sailor* has the appealing charm of the so called "open Russian face." He is so smart that he uses the Japanese shells falling on Port Arthur as a lighter for his pipe. What a contrast he is to the frail, puny and crooked figure of Admiral Togo who is begging his Western friends for help. It was also Nabokov who noticed that for a Russian everyone "frail and puny is a crook."[23] Russians, probably, thought a bit higher of the Englishmen, represented here as a stout and fat John Bull, than of the Americans: tall but thin Uncle Sam was also portrayed as sort of a crook.

Russian "popular prints" attempted to convey the idea that the Japanese would be unable to wage the war without the financial help of their Western "friends." In-

---

21 D. Rovinskii, *op. cit.*, p.315.

22 Vladimir Nabokov, *Sobranie sochinenii amerikanskogo perioda v piati tomakh*, St. Petersburg, Simpozium, 1997, p. 406.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 407.

deed, war expenditures were a heavy burden for the Japanese economy and Japan had to resort to foreign loans. In picture No. 11 *In Pursuit of Money* we see tiny Japanese soldiers, like a swarm of spiders or cockroaches, desperately trying to climb up the tall figure of Uncle Sam. The expression of Uncle Sam's face is angry, a hint that he expected a quicker and a less costly victory from his little friends. The poem at the bottom of the picture claims that the Japanese are real swindlers; they always resort to tricks and conniving which is again contrasted to the "simple honesty" of Russian fellows. However, unfortunately for Russians, honesty was not the only quality necessary to win the war.

Russian "popular prints" were so bold and impudent that they dared to poke fun even at the emperor of Japan as we see in the print *A Clever Wife* (picture No. 12). It is composed of several scenes. In the middle the "Japanese empress" is scolding her husband for his engagement in war with Russia and banishes him from her presence (in the right bottom scene). This may be viewed as a projected image of the Russian imperial family. It was broadly known that the Czarina Alexandra had the upper hand over her husband Nicholas II. It is likely that the title is borrowed from one of the numerous contemporary comedies which made fun of silly husbands who disobeyed their wives and got into trouble as a result. Both the "emperor" and the "empress" have Mephistophelian features, the often "devilish" representation of an enemy. In some other scenes of the print the Russians compare themselves to a huge bear and an elephant. The Japanese are running away from the bear in fear and even lose their white buttoned boots. The stately elephant pays no attention to the small, noisy pug barking in vain at him, a metaphor for the Russian attitude towards Japan, which, unfortunately, came to symbolize the Soviet attitudes towards Japan for many years. The latter image was borrowed from a famous fable by Ivan Krylov, *An Elephant and a Pug*, which obviously added to the print's popularity. It is also of interest that the word *mikado*, as the Japanese emperor is called here, became, in its plural form the *mikados*, one of the Russian colloquial pejorative terms for the Japanese.

Another of Krylov's fables was the source of inspiration for the print *A Foolish Frog at Port Arthur* (picture No. 13). The fable tells us about one ambitious frog who wished to be as large as an ox. By puffing and panting she bellied out and boasted in front of her friends. The result of her efforts was miserable. She exhausted herself and burst like a soap-bubble. Here we see the Russians making fun of the Japanese efforts to catch up with the Western states and to enlarge the territory of the Japanese empire by invasion. The frog with a huge belly and funny thin legs is, of course, Japan, while the ox here means Russia. Friends — to be understood in this context — are other Asian countries.

Japanese Wartime Woodblock Prints: a Comparison

During the war with Russia woodblock prints depicting scenes of war and images of the enemy and Self also appeared in Japan. It is interesting to compare what features Russian and Japanese prints had in common and what made them different.[24]

The immediate social and ideological purposes of the prints in each country were

mainly the same: to mobilize people for the war effort and to create a psychological buffer against war's hardships. However, Japan also had a broader and a more complicated task. It had to convince the domestic and international audience that Japan was an important nation fighting a righteous war, and an equal to "civilized" Western powers. The war was a mile-stone in building-up the ideology of modern Japan based on the concepts of the divinity of its imperial dynasty, the family-state and loyalty of subjects to both. It was almost the first time in Japanese history (the Sino-Japanese War was only the first attempt) when woodblock prints were used for the indoctrination of this ideology into the mass consciousness. The prints assisted in creating and supporting the general enthusiasm about the war that existed in the Japanese society.

Because for several centuries Japan had not been engaged in large-scale military campaigns with foreign countries, Japanese artists had little experience in representing their adversaries at war. So, images had to be invented anew. These factors contributed to their novelty and freshness. Japanese prints displayed creativity and artistism. Moreover, they were individual works of art and the names of artists and designers — Getsuzo, Ryua, Kobayashi Kiyochika — were known to the public.

In contrast to Japan, this war was not a matter of vital interest to the whole population of Russia. For the Russians, this war pursued the interests of a narrow group of bourgeoisie and court aristocracy. Until the capitulation of Port Arthur, which was perceived as a national humiliation, ordinary people remained more or less indifferent to the events at the remote Far Eastern theatre of war.

Russian "popular prints" had a long tradition of depicting Russia's adversaries at wars. Russia also possessed a self-image of a great military empire respected and even feared by the world. So, prints produced during the war with Japan could easily borrow the existing images and adapt them to the new situation. Only satirical prints such as *How a Russian Sailor Cut off the Japanese Nose* or *A Foolish Frog at Port Arthur* show features of novelty and imagination. This resort to tradition, though guaranteeing the popularity of images on the mass level, at the same time made them stiff and dull. The anonymity of Russian prints only enhanced these features.

Both Russian and Japanese prints contrasted positive images of Self to negative images of Other, but contrasts were often drawn on different assumptions. The Japanese accentuated primarily "the Japanese spirit," their chivalry and discipline, and opposed them to the enemy's arrogance, cruelty and lack of discipline. However, they rarely depicted the foe in a grotesque manner, and did not rely on caricature to convince the viewer in the valour of their fighting man. Moreover, they never resorted to blunt racism for denigrating the enemy. Only in cartoons of that time, an even "lower" genre, may one see Russians represented as "demons," "water-fleas," "worms" or scornfully called *Rosuke*. Sometimes woodblock painters attributed to Russians even noble fea-

---

24 This comparison is based on E. de Sabato Swinton, *In Battle's Light: Woodblock Prints of Japan's Early Modern Wars*, Worcester Art Museum, 1991; Idem, "Russo-Japanese War Triptychs: Chastising a Powerful Enemy," in: J.T. Rimer (ed.), *A Hidden Fire: Russian and Japanese Cultural Encounters, 1868-1926*, Stanford, Stanford University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995, pp. 114-132.

tures or showed them as a formidable enemy, though primarily to emphasize that the Japanese were strong enough to overcome them. Admiration and respect was felt for those enemy leaders whose strength and bravery were close to the Japanese ideals, this being seen in depicting the tragic death of Admiral Makarov or General Kuropatkin fighting in the battle of Liaoyang.

In general, Russian print designers tended to emphasize the peaceful intentions of their mother-land, its heroic military past, courage and boldness of Russians. However, satirical prints were based on exaggeration of physical, racial differences between the two peoples: the huge height and size of Russian Cossacks, the yellow skin and slant eyes of the Japanese. These caricatures made Russian representations crude and vulgar, though quite appealing to ordinary folks. The intelligent public in St. Petersburg and Moscow was aware of the fact that the Japanese were clever, powerful and dangerous enemies able to fight well. But who would have thought so when looking at the crippled figure of Admiral Togo or at the crying ragged fellow representing Marquis Ito!

On the whole, Japanese woodblock prints seem to be more serious than Russian popular prints, which corresponds to the goals of the war each country had. For Japan this was a national war which was to define the country's future. For Russia this was simply a military campaign in a remote Far Eastern theater. Japanese woodblock prints assisted in mobilizing the population of Japan into one nation pursuing one major goal. Conventional Russian military icons, Cossacks and sailors, were no longer able to promote the spirit of national unity in a country torn apart by the revolutionary movement. However, graphic images of the Japanese created by the war-time "popular prints" appeared able to form attitudes towards the Japanese on what may be called the level of banality, in the sense that they became a part of Russian "banal nationalism" directed against Japan.[25]

"Popular prints" analysed in the present article and in the works of E. de Swanton demonstrate our hypothesis about the heterogeneity of attitudes to the adversary on different social levels in each country. Japanese woodblock prints supplement a more familiar and widespread image of Japanese intellectuals of the beginning of the 20th century who were enchanted by great Russian literature. As for Russia, though it has recently become popular to write about the hostile attitudes to Japan of the Soviet leaders, usually these attitudes are attributed to ideological confrontation. It seems that another explanation related to deeper layers of mass consciousness, to folkloristic traditions should also be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

The image of Japan and the Japanese in Russia during the war with Japan was different for the intellectual elite and for the popular masses. Russian intellectuals were able to realize the potential might of a rapidly modernizing Japanese state and foresaw inevitable rivalry. They perceived Japan as "the yellow peril," as a menace possibly able

25 On "banal nationalism" see: M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, London, Sage, 1995.

to shake the foundations of the Russian civilization.[26] On the contrary, the ordinary people relied rather on traditional imagery than on reality. They did not view Russian adversary in this war as a threatening menace. Even when popular magazines used the words "the yellow peril," this aimed rather to stress Europe's need to be protected by Russia, and China, not Japan, seemed to be more dangerous. For example, at the beginning of 1905 when the outcome of the war was more or less clear, an article in *Niva* stated:

> Finally, having made a good effort, the Russian people would anyhow put an end to the Japanese invasion. However, it is China with its population of millions who is rising up against us ensuing Japan and due to her help... It is quite likely that the national awakening of the yellow race would have consequences for England, Germany and France. At present we are the only country supping up the broth made by Japan.[27]

In other words, in spite of her military victory in the war, Japan failed to become an adversary deserving serious attention by the common Russian people. The people actually never understood completely why the war was lost to Japan.

Russians were definitely stunned by the achievements of the "little country," whose "treacherous light... has brightly illuminated Mars [Russia - Y.M.] and overcast even the disorders of the 'moon' [the Muslim world - Y.M.]."[28] At the same time Japan remained a "'yellow *parvenu*' [italics - Y.M.] which due to her dodges and guile managed to get a place in the 'first' class salon." The magazine *Budil'nik* ran a cartoon representing a small and clumsy Japanese woman making her first steps into the company of the European ladies.[29] What an irony this attitude was for Japan who had fought the war with the purpose "to see [the] country cease to be regarded as a land inhabited by dear little doll-like people...," to get rid of the "misconception that [the Japanese] are only pretty weaklings."[30] The Russian people did not seem to be much convinced by her efforts. The image of the "little yellow country," though now not so much "pretty" but "cunning and treacherous," constructed by "popular prints" and duplicated by cartoons of popular magazines, lived long in Russia. By appealing to the folklore and popular humor, accentuating the most primitive, racist instincts of the people, and using a traditional art form, "popular prints" helped to promote this image even into the future.

In political cartoons which appeared in 1938 and 1939 on the occasion of the Soviet victory over Japan at Lake Khasan (the Chokoho incident) the Russians were again depicted as giants with boots and guns of enormous size, though now the Cossack was replaced by the brave Soviet soldier.[31] The Japanese again bore the same stereotypical features. One may only suggest that the Soviet leaders of the 1930s, who came from

---

26 V. Molodiakov, *op. cit.*

27 "V ozhidanii zheltoi opasnosti," *Niva*, 1905, No. 20, p. 400.

28 *Budil'nik*, 1905, No. 47, Front-cover.

29 *Budil'nik*, 1905, No. 31, Front-cover.

30 K.K. Kawakami, *Japan and the Japanese as Seen by Foreigners*, Tokyo, Keiseisha, 1904, p. X.

the "bottom" of society, in their younger years absorbed well the images of the Japanese spread by "popular prints." These racist images enhanced now by the ideological ethos appeared to be a convenient tool for the Soviet propaganda machine to build up the image of a "weak enemy" and to instill in the consciousness of the Soviet people that they lived in the "most powerful state in the world."

It is obvious that Russian "popular prints" were too boastful and vainglorious, and their laughter was vulgar and even racist. They conveyed what was thought to be people's thoughts and feelings at that time, reflecting the blind and strong faith in victory, regarding failure as inconceivable. "Popular prints" were far from the reality of the war and were fed by rumors or images which were pre-set in the Russian mind. They glorified the Russian national spirit and the moral and physical superiority of the Russians while belittling the Japanese. While denigration of the enemy, attributing to him malevolent characteristics, as well as racism and stereotyping are quite visible in the Russian "popular prints," exaggerated fear and anxiety are expressed to a lesser degree than, for example, in American and British cartoons of the Pacific War.[32] There was no Russian analogue for the Japanese superman which later appeared in the American and British war graphics.

However, this form of enmification of Japan was highly ironic for Russia. The "giant" Russia was defeated in 1905 by the same small Japan it made fun of. The denigration of the country which has proved its abilities to enter the world community as a peer turned into humiliation and national shame for Russia itself.

Both in the short and in the long run the Russians became the victims of their own ambitions, exaggerated self-image and misinterpretation of reality and of the Other. The same pattern of enmification when the adversary was "not taken seriously" is clearly visible in the Soviet policy towards Japan from 1945 till the second half of the 1980s. In no small part due to "popular prints" the idea of Japanese treachery and deceit, contrasted with Russian moral justness, became deeply imbedded in the mind of the Russian common folk and provided an effective instrument for the ideological mobilization of anti-Japanese feelings. Only in the 1970s did new images begin to ouster old stereotypes. The latter is, however, a topic for a separate examination.

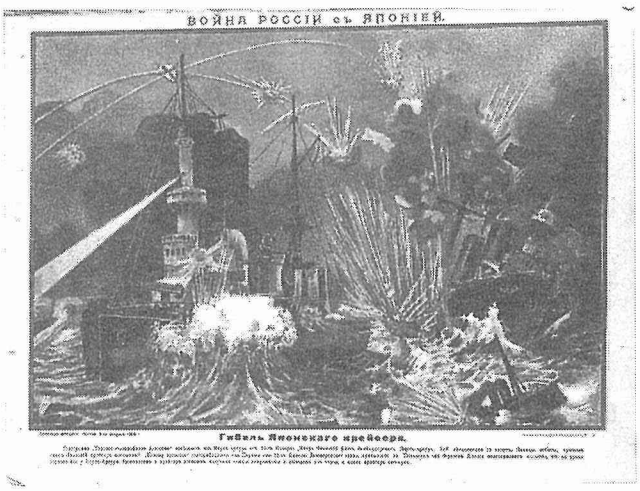
31 G. Smol'nyi, "Skaz o 'khrabrom' samurae," *Krasnoarmeets*, 1939, No. 1, pp. 26-27; *Krokodil*, 1938, No. 20, Front-cover.

32 Compare J. Dower, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-189.

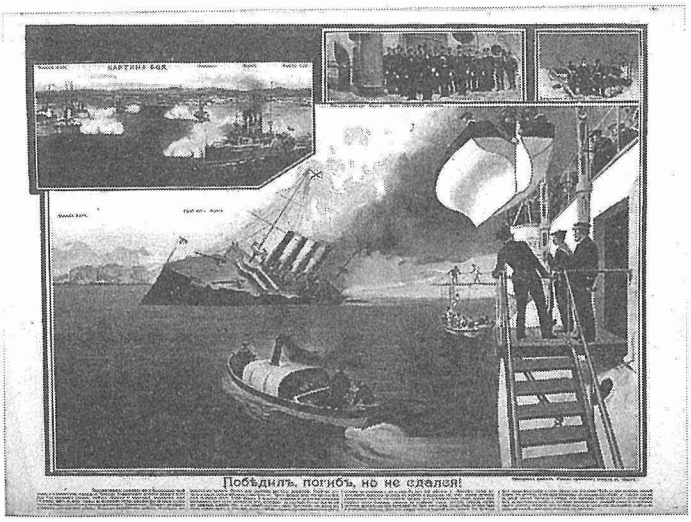
Appendix: Pictures

Pict. No. 1 *On the War of Russia with Japan*

Pict. No. 2 *The Russian Hero at the East: The Hero and Yellow Pygmies*



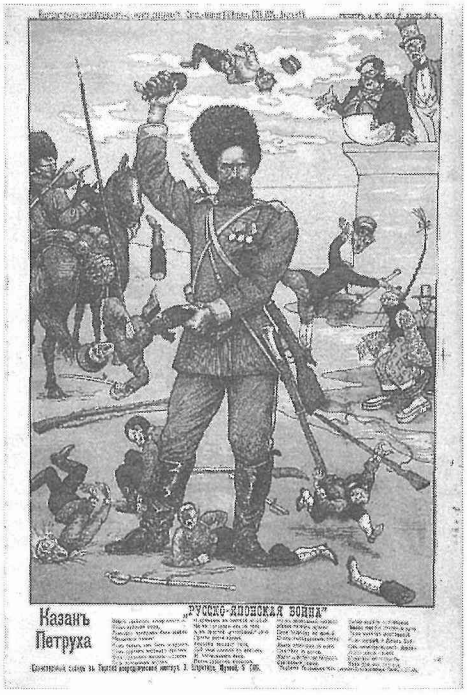
Pict. No. 3 *The Defeat of a Japanese Cruiser*



Pict. No. 4 *Vanquished, Destroyed but not Surrendered*

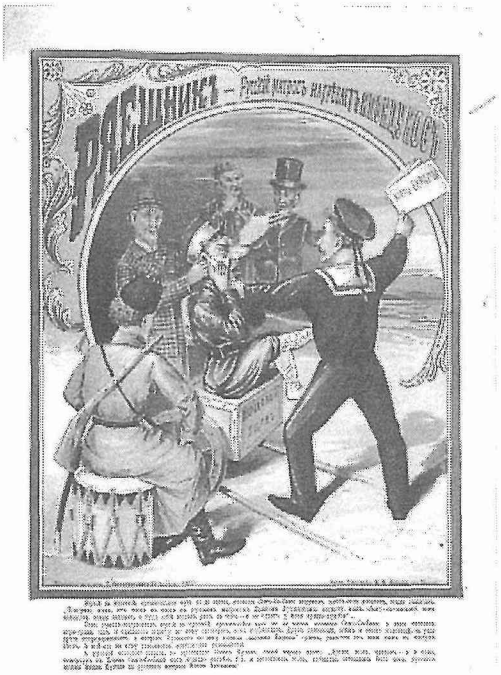
Pict. No. 5 *The Repulse of a Japanese Landing by the Russians*

Pict. No. 6 *The Enemy is Terrible but God is Benevolent*



Pict. No. 7 *Cossack Petrukha*

Pict. No. 8 *How a Russian Sailor Cut off the Japanese Nose*



Pict. No. 9 *Raeshnik*

Pict. No. 10 *Vasia-the-Sailor*

Pict. No.11 *In Pursuit of Money*

Pict. No. 12 *A Clever Wife*

Pict. No. 13 *A Foolish Frog at Port Arthur*