

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Patriots, and not parochial: a critical survey of *Lat Pau*'s and *Thien Nam Sin Pao*'s reportage of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905

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Abstract

Throughout the Russo-Japanese War, *Lat Pau* and *Thien Nam Sin Pao*, both based in Singapore, followed the war closely, fueling the nationalism of their readers. Far from portraying China as a passive non-belligerent, both newspapers drew attention to both China's precarious international position and her self-strengthening efforts. Chinese nationalism was born out of an international outlook among the overseas Chinese, who were concerned with the fighting in Manchuria, even though the battlefields were distant from both their hometowns in southern China and Southeast Asia. To them, the Russo-Japanese War was not simply a localized conflict on East Asia's periphery; China's fate hinged on its outcome, and it threatened to escalate into a worldwide conflagration anytime. The keen interest displayed by overseas Chinese in the war is indicative of their international outlook, and the nationalism that partly resulted from this attention to the war ultimately fueled their participation in the 1905 anti-American boycott as well as revolutionary activities.

Keywords: *Lat Pau*; nationalism; Russo-Japanese War; *Thien Nam Sin Pao*; 1905 anti-American boycott

Given the instrumental role of the overseas Chinese in supporting the 1911 Revolution, the origins of overseas Chinese nationalism have long been a subject of interest to historians. In her discussion of the overseas Chinese in Singapore at the turn of the nineteenth century, Tsai Pei-jung asserted that they lacked nationalism but rather displayed “archetypal parochialism,” and that “the average overseas Chinese merely possessed a narrow parochialism; as far as China was concerned, they only cared about their hometowns and were hardly concerned about the government and the state” (Tsai 2002, 86, 166). Similarly, Yen Ching-hwang has argued that “clan feuds” in China spilled over to the overseas Chinese in Singapore and Malaya during the late nineteenth century, which only served to further alienate different communities from each other (Yen 1986, 198). At which point did the overseas Chinese embrace “nationalism” in favor of “parochialism,” and what catalyzed this shift? The broad consensus is that this shift materialized during the early twentieth century under the combined stimuli of China's domestic political forces (including the Qing court, the loyalists, and the revolutionaries) as well as foreign aggression. As early as 1997, Zhuang Guotu noted that:

various measures adopted by the Qing court including the soliciting of funds, selling of official titles, dispatching of imperial envoys and naval fleets to Southeast Asia, encouragement of investment by overseas Chinese, and establishment of consulates to protect overseas Chinese

interests had the unintended effect of raising overseas Chinese consciousness and encouraging their involvement in domestic Chinese affairs beyond the realm of their hometowns and clans, thus ensuring that they became ever more concerned with the fate and future of the Chinese nation and race.

Ultimately, Zhuang concluded that “by the turn of the nineteenth century, the overseas Chinese were far more enthusiastic about national affairs than those pertaining to their hometowns” (Zhuang 1997, 88).¹

Expanding on Zhuang’s observation, Xu Bingsan went on to study the combined effects of the Qing court’s efforts at co-opting the overseas Chinese, propaganda by the loyalists and revolutionaries, as well as the 1911 Revolution on overseas Chinese nationalism (Xu 2011, 65). At the same time, historians who focus on stimuli from foreign sources have largely studied the impact of the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, the Boxer Rebellion and the ensuing Eight-Power Intervention (1899–1901), as well as the Chinese Exclusion Act in the US and the anti-American boycott of 1905, which quickly followed (Chang 1982; Wang 2000b, 39; Wong 2002, 110). In retrospect, the series of events listed above represented so-called national humiliations, with the victimization of China at their core. By contrast, the role of the Russo-Japanese War in fueling overseas Chinese nationalism has been largely neglected by historians. On the issue of overseas Chinese loyalties, Wang Gungwu has asserted that many overseas Chinese in Singapore at the turn of the twentieth century exhibited “dual loyalties” to both Britain and China (Wang 2000a, 173). Yet, I argue that this same group was also deeply concerned about the Russo-Japanese War, a conflict in which both Britain and China were non-belligerents. A systematic survey of *Lat Pau* 叻報 (hereafter LP) from January 1904 (on the eve of the outbreak of hostilities) to September 1905 (the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth) and *Thien Nam Sin Pao* 天南新報 (hereafter TNSP) from January 1904 to September 1904 (TNSP temporarily suspended operations from October to November 1904 pending reorganization) as well as from December 1904 to April 1905 (TNSP ceased circulation permanently from the end of April 1905 due to financial distress) reveals that both newspapers featured lengthy reports and commentaries on the Russo-Japanese War daily. In the following survey of LP, supplemented with several references to TNSP, I discuss how the Chinese-language press of Singapore during the early twentieth century reported on the Russo-Japanese War, the main battlefields of which were geographically distant from both southern China and Southeast Asia, and demonstrate how this served to fuel overseas Chinese nationalism.

The Chinese-language press in Singapore, 1904–1905

My choice of Chinese-language newspapers based in Singapore as appropriate and significant sources for studying overseas Chinese nationalism is justified by three factors. First, Singapore has the unique distinction within the entire Southeast Asian region of being the only predominantly Chinese territory in terms of demographic composition. As early as 1836, Singapore’s ethnic Chinese outnumbered the Malays and accounted for about three-quarters of the local population by the early twentieth century (Kwa and Lin 2015, 55, 459). Naturally, this was fertile ground for overseas Chinese nationalism to flourish, in contrast to other territories in which ethnic Chinese were somewhat more marginalized and were presumably more cautious of expressing their nationalist sentiment. Second, despite the relative numerical strength of the Hokkien community, no single dialect group achieved predominance within Singapore’s ethnic Chinese population. Of the councilors of Singapore’s Chinese Chamber of

¹In his study of LP between 1887 and 1893, Huang Chien-chun discovered that of sixty-seven appeals for disaster relief during this period, twenty-two were issued by the Qing consulate in Singapore, comprising nearly a third of the total. Huang concluded, based on this observation, that the Qing government’s attempts to win over the overseas Chinese did much to foster nationalism among them. See Huang Chien-chun, *Wanqing xinma huaqiao dui guojia rentong zhi yanjiu—yi zhenjuan, touzi, fengjue weili* [A study of national identity among overseas Chinese in Singapore and Malaya during the late Qing: from the perspective of disaster relief, investment, and the bestowing of official titles], (Huang 1993, 180).

Commerce, founded in 1905, four were to be Fujianese and six to be men of Guangdong (including the Cantonese, Teochews, Hakkas, and Hainanese). Further, out of the forty members of the committee, sixteen were Fujianese, while the remaining twenty-four were selected from the various dialect groups from Guangdong (Song 2020, 547). We can thus reasonably infer from this arrangement that Hokkiens made up roughly 40% of the Singapore Chinese population in 1905. Besides, according to the 1901 census, Hokkiens, Cantonese, and Teochews accounted for 56%, 18.7%, and 16.8% of the ethnic Chinese population, respectively (Kwa, 2015, 56–59). This was in stark contrast to other countries and territories like the Philippines and Siam, where the Hokkiens and Teochews achieved undisputed predominance, respectively, by the early twentieth century (Kung 2022, 4; Skinner 2010, 45–46). This relative heterogeneity of the Singapore Chinese population likely highlighted the relative importance of cross-dialect forums such as newspapers, which allowed for easy interaction among the various groups via written Chinese.

Third, and arguably most importantly, located at the crossroads of East and West, Singapore's Chinese-language press was born shortly after modern Chinese-language newspapers came into being in China itself. Founded on 10 December 1881, LP was the first Chinese-language newspaper owned and run by overseas Chinese, not only in Singapore but also in the whole of Southeast Asia, and maintained circulation until 1932 (Peng 2005, 44–98). Following LP's lead, several newspapers, including *Sing Po* 星報 (1890–1898), *Thien Nam Sin Pao* (1898–1905), *Jit Shin Pau* 日新報 (1899–1901), and *Thoe Lam Jit Poh* 圖南日報 (1904–1905), were founded in succession. However, they were generally short-lived, with the sole exception of LP, which sustained operations for fifty-one years. Thus, only three Chinese-language newspapers were in circulation in Singapore during the 1904–1905 period, namely LP, TNSP, and *Thoe Lam Jit Poh*. While no copies of *Thoe Lam Jit Poh* have survived, LP and TNSP, which researchers can still consult in their entirety, constitute an excellent perspective from which to study the origins and subsequent development of overseas Chinese nationalism in Southeast Asia and especially Singapore during the early twentieth century.² As Wang Gungwu has noted, overseas Chinese nationalism at the time, being of a relatively benign type, was tolerated by Southeast Asian colonial officials (Cushman and Wang 1988, 2). Thus, newspapers could serve as an outlet for such nationalism without being subjected to the relatively stricter censorship imposed by the colonial authorities in later decades. It is worth noting that although these newspapers had their own respective stands, they also sought to cater to their readers' preferences and inclinations, giving rise to an unofficial dynamism between journalist and reader. Indeed, TNSP's editorial board went so far as to acknowledge this relationship openly and unreservedly, stating that “the choices and judgments of our newspaper hinge on that of the masses” (本報取捨褒貶，悉以眾心為心) and that “whether we ought to criticize or praise someone or something is dependent on public opinion; we shall never go against public opinion in insistence of our individual views” (宜抑宜揚，準諸輿論，斷不肯憑私喜私怨以違公是公非).³ At this point, a brief discussion of LP's and TNSP's circulation figures, readership, and source of news reports is in order to allow for a more accurate assessment of their influence in this regard.

According to the Blue Paper of the Straits Settlements, the daily sales of *Sing Po* during 1891–1898 and LP during 1891–1900 are as follows:

Two observations from Table 1 are worthy of note. First, both *Sing Po*'s and LP's sales surged in 1894, likely because the First Sino-Japanese War broke out in that year. This suggests that significant events played a crucial role in propelling the development of the Chinese press as follows.

²Chen Mong Hock noted that “Outside Singapore, though the Lat Pau had a very small circulation, it was spread over a very large area.” She added that “the Lat Pau reached not only all the major towns in Malaya but also those throughout the rest of the Nanyang.” Chen Mong Hock, *The early Chinese newspapers of Singapore* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1967), p. 41. *Thien Nam Sin Pao* also enjoyed a wide geographical spread with regard to its circulation, including Southeast Asia, the coastal cities of China, Japan, North America, and Australia. Li Haitao, *Tiannan xinbao yanjiu* 天南新報研究 [A study of Thien Nam Sin Pao], PhD dissertation, Northeastern Normal University, 2017, p. 23.

³Benbao congxin zhengdun gaobai 本報從新整頓告白 [Proclamation on the reorganization of this newspaper], TNSP, 23 February 1904, p. 2.

Table 1. Daily sales of *Sing Po* during 1891–1898 and LP during 1891–1900 (copies)*

Year	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900
<i>Sing Po</i>	300	400	350	740	800	970	800	700	–	–
<i>Lat Pau</i>	235	450	340	450	465	500	500	517	500	550

*Chen Mong Hock, *The early Chinese newspapers of Singapore*, pp. 40, 63.

Second, the daily sales of both newspapers rose simultaneously instead of one rising at the expense of the other. This suggests that a large pool of potential readers existed in Singapore society at that time and that the market was far from saturated. In other words, different newspapers did not necessarily compete for a limited share of the market; some readers might even have subscribed to two or more newspapers at the same time. While I have been unable to locate the daily sales figures for LP and TNSP after 1900, it is conceivable that at least some readers of *Sing Po* and *Jit Shin Pau* switched to LP and/or TNSP after 1899 and 1901, when those newspapers ceased circulation, respectively, thus boosting the circulation figures of LP and TNSP. According to foreign observers in China at the time, a copy of any given newspaper typically changed hands four or five times before the day was over, and many readers further disseminated what they had read via conversations with family and friends (Weale 1905, 219–220). Assuming that this was also the case in Singapore at the time, individuals who gained access to LP’s and TNSP’s reportage, whether directly or indirectly, likely numbered in the thousands by the early twentieth century. Furthermore, *Shenbao* (申報), arguably the most influential newspaper in China at that time, featured LP’s reports on several occasions during 1904–1905 alone, reflecting LP’s considerable influence within Chinese journalistic circles in China itself, which was far greater than what her limited circulation figures might suggest.⁴

Upper-and middle-class overseas Chinese who possessed basic literacy and modest financial means likely constituted the bulk of LP’s and TNSP’s readership.⁵ According to Leung Yuen Sang, when Zuo Binglong first served as consul to Singapore during 1881–1891, he frequently organized competitions of poetry and prose on LP. These competitions produced about 300 winners (excluding winners who won the competitions more than once). As a result, as early as the late nineteenth century, “a sizable group of gentry-scholars” who “enjoyed close contacts with the official authorities (referring to the Qing consulate headed by Zuo Binglong) as well as the support of officials and encouragement of newspapers” already existed in the Singapore Chinese community (Kwa 2015, 232–238). After Zuo’s departure, his successor Huang Zunxian revived *Huixianshe* (會賢社), a club aimed at winning over men of letters within the Singapore community, and renamed it *Tunanshe* (圖南社), while tweaking the literary competitions to better reflect contemporary concerns (Tang 1970, 190). Thus, in terms of occupation, these scholars, together with merchants and shopkeepers, probably comprised the bulk of both newspapers’ readership. Notwithstanding the fact that the overseas Chinese community in Singapore at the time mainly consisted of impoverished laborers who were more or less illiterate, newspapers were prohibitively expensive to most of the working class. According to a study by Yen Ching-hwang, the average worker in Singapore and Malaya earned a monthly wage of eight to nine Malayan dollars, of which roughly four dollars could be saved after deducting the cost of daily necessities. After further

⁴Faren tuodi 法人拓地 [French territorial expansion], E Jing shui’e 俄京水厄 [Flooding of the Russian capital], *Shenbao*, 9 February 1904, p. 2; Taozu zhi yan 逃卒之言 [Words of a deserter], *Shenbao*, 7 September 1904, p. 2; Ji niangzijun 記娘子軍 [The women’s battalion], Qunxiong dingce 群雄定策 [Heroes devise a strategem], *Shenbao*, 25 January 1905, p. 2.

⁵The term “basic” is relative – while Chua Ai Lin has shown that many Straits Chinese learned Mandarin and studied Chinese literature and history by the 1930s, I doubt many of them read LP during 1904–05, if at all. At that time, LP’s articles and commentaries were written in classical Chinese. While easier to read than ancient Chinese classics, they were nonetheless more challenging to read than vernacular Chinese, which only gained popularity from the 1920s onwards, in the wake of the New Culture Movement. See Chua, p. 289.

deducting remittances sent to relatives back in China, he typically saved only a dollar or two per month (Yen 1976, 285). Considering that the monthly subscription fee of LP and TNSP was 1 dollar and 70 cents, respectively (Chen 1967, 33, 74; Choi 1993, 6), even if a few readers were to share the subscription fee among themselves, the expense would still have exceeded the means of most laborers. When the 1894 Sino-US treaty banning the entry of Chinese laborers into the US neared its expiry in December 1904, the LP editorial board appealed to Liang Cheng, the Chinese consul in the US, to at least “revise the existing treaty” in the event that he failed to abolish it altogether. Among the terms proposed for revision were “ban laborers but not merchants from entering the US” and “merchants ought to be defined by ownership of a given number of dollars’ worth of capital.”⁶ Apparently, LP’s editorial board saw itself as the spokesperson of business interests in general, adopting a pragmatic stance with respect to the Exclusion Act in the US as it sought to safeguard the interests of the overseas Chinese elite.

Several outstanding questions

In this section, I put forward a few questions that remain unanswered, with reference to the existing literature and newspaper sources:

- (1) The relationship between the Russo-Japanese War and overseas Chinese nationalism

When the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War coincided with the traditional Lunar New Year holidays, LP formally apologized to readers for taking a break during such a critical moment.⁷ A scholar has even noted that within a week of the outbreak of hostilities, the foreign ministry of the Qing court was overwhelmed by telegrams sent by overseas Chinese communities in the US, Australia, Asia, and Africa, calling on the Qing authorities to side with Japan and resist Russia to defend Manchuria (Rotem 2007, 171). With the further intensification of fighting following the commencement of the siege of Port Arthur, LP claimed that “while we in Singapore reside in the wilderness of the far South, we stand with tipped toes and extended necks, wishing fervently for accurate news of the war, to the point that we are hardly able to sleep at night.”⁸ The reason for this is that as contemporaries saw it, the Russo-Japanese War did not simply concern the belligerents only but was a conflict on which hinged the fate of the Chinese nation. Specifically speaking, overseas Chinese did not follow the news of the Russo-Japanese War in a vacuum but analyzed it in connection with their own international status and exclusion policies implemented by the US and Australian authorities. On 29 September 1904, LP reported that Australia relaxed entry restrictions on Japanese immigrants and commented, “While New Gold Mountain (Australia) had spared no effort to ban the entry of Asians, they have made a special exception for Japanese in view of the recent Japanese victory.” The lesson to be learned, according to LP, was that the Chinese nation had to strengthen itself.⁹ At that point, Port Arthur had not even fallen to the Japanese, and the final outcome of the war was still in question, yet it was already clear that initial Japanese victories were already serving to encourage Chinese nationalism. Moreover, such reports were hardly isolated in nature but appeared multiple times within a relatively short period. After only a month, LP reported on how the Labor Party in Australia demanded the Parliament limit the quota on Chinese immigrants under the caption “Humiliation of overseas Chinese” and lamented “insults from foreigners are growing by the day since Chinese prestige is low.”¹⁰ As the attacking Japanese tightened their lines around Port Arthur’s perimeter that December, an Australian Member of

⁶Xinyue jiang ding 新約將定 [Drafting of a new treaty], LP, 30 December 1904, p. 5.

⁷Cinian tingbao qi 辭年停報啟 [Notice regarding the temporary cease in publication as we bid farewell to the previous year], LP, 10 February 1904, p. 1.

⁸Lun E’ri Lushun zhiyi 論俄日旅順之役 [On the Battle of Port Arthur between the Russians and the Japanese], LP, 23 February 1904, p. 1.

⁹Aozhou dianyin 澳洲電音 [Telegram from Australia], LP, 29 September 1904, p. 2.

¹⁰Huaren shouwu 華人受侮 [The humiliation of Chinese], LP, 28 October 1904, p. 2.

Parliament proposed that “Japan has recently joined the ranks of civilized nations” and that this warranted “a change in immigration restrictions.” Again, LP concluded that this move was motivated by repeated Japanese victories, which did away with foreign discrimination of Asians once and for all.¹¹ If the Australian authorities’ discrimination between Chinese and Japanese triggered nationalism among overseas Chinese, the US authorities’ policy of excluding both Chinese and Japanese under the blanket term “yellow race” achieved a largely similar effect. Reporting on the US authorities’ discrimination of East Asian immigrants under captions like “The yellow race is unwelcome/discriminated against” (黃種招忌、歧視黃種), LP not only made clear its sympathy for the Japanese but actually expressed solidarity with them.¹² In an age of raging Chinese nationalism, LP made sure to portray overseas Chinese and more broadly Chinese in general as victims of discrimination and imperialism.

(2) Existing discussion on LP and TNSP

Two schools of thought have long existed regarding LP’s stance. The first, advanced by Chen Mong Hock, contends that LP was two-faced, being both pro-Qing and pro-British in its political inclination. The second, proposed by Kwa Bak Lim, argues that LP had always been strictly pro-Qing only. Kwa’s evidence for this is LP’s prolonged silence on the Wuchang Uprising in 1911 and its reference to the revolution as “chaos” and the revolutionaries as “renegades.”¹³ While I agree with Chen, I also argue that LP was not as firmly against the revolutionaries as has been argued in existing scholarship. TNSP, in contrast, has long been regarded as the official mouthpiece of Qing loyalists in Southeast Asia until very recently (Li 2017, 44). In March 1904, TNSP reported on the existence of a rumor in Qing official circles that Sun Yat-sen had returned to Huizhou clandestinely to plan an uprising. That report neither declared Sun a “bandit” or “outlaw” nor referred to “uprising” as “rebellion” or “treason” and reported the rumor in a matter-of-fact manner without any attempt at smearing the revolutionaries.¹⁴ Two days later, TNSP even advertised on behalf of *Thoe Lam Jit Poh*, the newly founded newspaper of the revolutionaries. In addition, TNSP lauded *Thoe Lam Jit Poh* for “championing reform and embracing nationalism of civilized nations.”¹⁵ In sum, both LP and TNSP were neutral and even slightly approving of the revolutionary cause. Not only were the Qing court, the loyalists, and the revolutionaries not as fiercely opposed to each other as existing scholarship has often portrayed, but the fault lines between them were frequently blurred, with individuals being able to switch camps with relative ease.¹⁶ All three political forces merged to a large degree on LP and TNSP, with their ambiguous stance facilitating the growth of Chinese nationalism overseas.

¹¹Aoshi dianyin 澳事電音 [Telegram on Australian matters], LP, 2 December 1904, p. 1.

¹²Huangzhong zhaoji 黃種招忌 [The yellow race is unwelcome], LP, 10 March 1905, p. 5; Qishi huangzhong 歧視黃種 [The yellow race is discriminated against], LP, 29 April 1905, p. 5.

¹³Kwa Bak Lim & Lin Xiaosheng, *Xinhua lishi yu renwu yanjiu* 新華歷史與人物研究, pp. 127, 129–132. In recent years, scholars in agreement with Chen Mong Hock have proposed that *Lat Pau* was an “inter-subject” who pledged dual allegiance to China and Britain in their attempt to explain why *Lat Pau* adopted a critical attitude toward certain Western countries while trying to forge an anti-Russia Sino-British alliance. See Lan Feng, Nanyang Lebao: Zaoqi liusan chuanmei de huayu tezheng ji huazu de shenfen goujian [Lat Pau of the South Seas: characteristics of the discourse of diasporic media during the early period as well as the construction of an overseas Chinese identity], in Xu Xinjian ed., *Wenxue renleixue yanjiu* 文學人類學研究 [Research in literature and anthropology] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2019), Vol. 2, p. 191.

¹⁴Sun Wen qianhui zhi fengshuo 孫文潛回之風說 [Rumors on Sun Yat-sen’s secret return], TNSP, 5 March 1904, p. 2.

¹⁵Wenxing zhao le 文星照叻 [The literary gem of Singapore], TNSP, 7 March 1904, p. 2.

¹⁶Focusing on the loyalists/reformists’ and revolutionaries’ mobilization of overseas Chinese in North America during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Chen Zhongping’s recently published *Transpacific Reform and Revolution* demonstrates, through meticulous study of key leaders of both camps, how the success of the loyalists/reformists greatly aided the revolutionary cause. See Chen Zhongping, *Transpacific Reform and Revolution: The Chinese in North America, 1898–1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023).

(3) China's role in the Russo-Japanese War and the international impact of the Russo-Japanese War

For a long time, the Qing court's neutrality was generally regarded as a passive response to Russian and Japanese competition over Manchuria. It was not until fairly recently that Yu Dahua, among other Chinese scholars, revealed that Qing forces clandestinely supported the Japanese under the pretense of neutrality and devoted attention to the Qing court's agency in the midst of Russo-Japanese competition (Yu 2005, 122–123). As for the international impact of the Russo-Japanese War, Akira Iriye, in his introduction to a volume of essays studying the war from a transnational perspective, pointed out that “[the] war not only provoked nationalistic responses in Korea and China against imperialism, it also encouraged anti-colonial movements in Egypt, India, Indochina, and elsewhere” (Steinberg 2007, 3). That volume also included Li Anshan's work on the role of *Dongfang zazhi* [Eastern Miscellany] in fomenting Chinese nationalism during the war (Steinberg 2007, 491–512). Yet the Qing court's agency in the war as well as the impact of the war on overseas Chinese nationalism remains under-researched. The most salient difference between Singapore and the regions cited by Akira Ariye – Egypt, India, and Indochina – is that, being an immigrant society, overseas Chinese nationalism in Singapore was more an extension of nationalism in China than a product of anti-colonial sentiment. Seen in this light, studying the reaction of upper-and middle-class overseas Chinese in Singapore towards the Russo-Japanese War through LP and TNSP is indeed a worthwhile endeavor that can tell us much about overseas Chinese nationalism during the early twentieth century.

LP's and TNSP's reportage of the Russo-Japanese War

Global tensions and the risk of a global conflagration

Since the roots of the Russo-Japanese War can be traced to the Sino-Japanese War and the Suppression of the Boxers by the Eight Power Expedition, and particularly given that Russo-Japanese tensions had been building up for some time, the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War was hardly surprising to most readers of LP and TNSP. As early as January 1904, LP predicted that “it is almost inevitable that Russia and Japan reach a showdown; the outbreak of hostilities is simply a matter of time.”¹⁷ Besides, the British Far East Squadron based in Hong Kong was also on high alert, which led LP to conclude that the European powers and the US were bound to be dragged into the upcoming conflict.¹⁸ Moreover, LP pointed out that the imminent Russo-Japanese War would decide the balance of power in Northeast Asia for the next century, because “following the annihilation of the Russian fleet, the Japanese can then rest on their laurels for the coming hundred years.”¹⁹ The problem was that the situation in Northeast Asia grew even more volatile following the outbreak of Russo-Japanese hostilities, with a real risk of escalation into world war.

When the Russo-Japanese War broke out, the European powers, which maintained nominal neutrality, in fact supported the belligerents clandestinely. As LP saw it, the British were firm allies of the Japanese, while Germany and France, particularly the latter, were in solidarity with Russia. On 23 June 1904, LP featured a report with the caption “The French aid Russia,” which claimed that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 外務部 (*Waiwubu*) received a secret report from Mukden (Shenyang) mentioning that civilians in Manchuria witnessed twenty-seven French officers performing various duties in the Russian barracks. Based on this observation, the report predicted that “once China forges an alliance with Japan, France would immediately aid Russia.”²⁰ While it is

¹⁷Shiju kanyu 時局堪虞 [Current affairs cause for worry], LP, 5 January 1904, p. 2.

¹⁸Zhangwu xiansheng 仗務先聲 [Prelude to war], LP, 6 January 1904, p. 2; Shishi jueyao chuji 時事決要初紀 [A preliminary record of the most important current affairs], LP, 14 January 1904, p. 1.

¹⁹E'ri jiaoshe dongshi dianyin 俄日交涉東事電音 [Telegram on Russo-Japanese negotiations on Asian affairs], LP, 1 February 1904, p. 2.

²⁰Faren zhu E 法人助俄 [The French aid Russia], LP, 23 June 1904, p. 13.

certainly doubtful whether the civilians in Manchuria were able to distinguish between the French and Russians, such reports certainly contributed to the already tense atmosphere. Subsequently, LP featured several reports on alleged French assistance to the Russians as well as the risk of direct French involvement in the conflict. In particular, a report carrying the provocative caption “The French harbor suspicion and jealousy” declared that after defeating the Russians, Japan would then “surely ally with Siam to hinder the French in Indochina.”²¹ In hindsight, such reports might seem to be wild exaggerations aimed at fearmongering. To their readers, however, a world war might indeed have seemed likely, with a possibility of China proper and even Southeast Asia becoming embroiled.

Besides manifesting in various schemes hatched by the European powers, notably France, the risk of world war was even more apparent in the arms race among the great powers. After the outbreak of hostilities, LP featured numerous reports on intensified militarization among the European powers and the US, which was exemplified by naval expansion. Such reports championed the Darwinist principle of “the survival of the fittest,” with a report on 8 December 1904 stating that US President Theodore Roosevelt was prompted by the Russo-Japanese War to build “ironclads” (more likely “dread-noughts”).²² Such great power intrigues were particularly intense in the “Great Game” between Britain and Russia. In the Dogger Bank Incident of 21 October 1904, the Russian Baltic Fleet attacked British fishing trawlers in the North Sea, having mistaken them for Japanese ships. The ensuing diplomatic dispute brought Anglo-Russian relations, which were already tense before the incident, to their nadir. On 25 October, LP featured reports from the *Straits Times*, which in turn reported two fishermen deaths from British sources; on the following day, LP then reported the rumored deaths of as many as eighteen British fishermen.²³ Considering that even the Chinese Minister in the UK, Zhang Deyi, wrote in his report to the Chinese Foreign Ministry that “Anglo-Russian hostilities seem inevitable,” it is hardly surprising that the media portrayed a gloomy image of imminent war.²⁴ On 16 January 1905, LP reported on a speech delivered by UK Prime Minister Balfour in Glasgow in which he stated that the Royal Navy was armed to its teeth in preparation for “a possible contingency in northwest India in the event of sudden hostilities with a certain great power on the European continent.”²⁵ In this instance, Balfour had just stopped short of naming Russia as the enemy and stated explicitly the possibility of Anglo-Russian conflict in Asia. Anglo-Russian tensions continued to simmer until 8 March 1905, when Russia paid Britain 65,000 pounds in compensation.²⁶ As contemporaries saw it, the Russo-Japanese War was hardly the localized war as we know it but threatened to escalate and engulf the world at any moment. An appreciation of this point is critical to our understanding of why LP and its readers devoted so much attention to the Russo-Japanese War and its potential impact.

²¹Fa huai yidu 法懷疑妬 [The French harbor suspicion and jealousy], LP, 29 September 1904, p. 2.

²²News reports on the arms race among European powers and the US include: Mei zeng haijun dianyin 美增海軍電音 [Telegram on US naval expansion], LP, 14 November 1904, p. 1; Zhijian fengyan 製艦風言 [Rumors on the building of warships], LP, 19 November 1904, p. 2; Mei zhen haijun dianyin 美振海軍電音 [Telegram on the building of the US navy], LP, 7 December 1904, p. 2; Meishi dianyin 美事電音 [Telegram on US affairs], LP, 8 December 1904, p. 1; Ying zhen haijun 英振海軍 [The building of the British navy], LP, 13 December 1904, p. 1; Zongtong yaoyan 總統要言 [Important speech by the president], LP, 14 January 1905, p. 2; Dazhi haijun 大治海軍 [Large-scale naval expansion], LP, 23 January 1905, p. 5; Fa zhen haijun 法振海軍 [The building of the French navy], LP, 27 February 1905, p. 2.

²³E jian niangshi dianyin 俄艦釀事電音 [Telegram on the incident caused by Russian ships], LP, 25 October 1904, p. 1; E jian niangshi dianyin 俄艦釀事電音 [Telegram on the incident caused by Russian ships], LP, 26 October 1904, p. 2. The actual death count was two British fishermen.

²⁴Telegram from the Chinese Minister in Britain Zhang Deyi to the Chinese Foreign Ministry 駐英大臣張德彝致外務部, 17 December 1904, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 02-13-051-01-018.

²⁵Yingshi dianyin 英事電音 [Telegram on British affairs], LP, 16 January 1905, p. 1.

²⁶Beihai yao'an dianyin 北海要案電音 [Telegram on important incident in the North Sea], LP, 8 March 1905, p. 2.

Russian barbarity and violation of international law

Shortly after the commencement of hostilities, TNSP featured a report by *Tongwen Hubao* 同文滬報, a Japanese-sponsored newspaper in Shanghai, which claimed that “Russians mistook Chinese living in some part of Manchuria for Japanese” and massacred over twenty thousand of them to preempt a possible uprising. Although the report added that this news “had yet to be verified,” this did not prevent it from making references to the Blagoveshchensk [海蘭泡] massacre of 1900 and invoking readers’ collective memories of national humiliation. The report concluded that “the Russians are an evil people who outmatch tigers and wolves in their brutality” and that in future Chinese “should no longer regard them as human beings.”²⁷ A general survey of news reports from that time reveals that regardless of whether the alleged Russian atrocities were real or imagined, and regardless of whether the victims were Japanese, Chinese civilians, or civilians of non-belligerent nations, such incidents invariably reminded readers of China’s weak and vulnerable state. The hypocrisy of European and US governments and the double standards they adopted also drew much flak from LP and TNSP’s editorial staff. For instance, on 11 May 1904, LP reported that European and US governments scarcely raised any protests when Russian warships “immediately fired on Japanese merchant ships without conducting any checks.” LP added that “if the Japanese were the protagonists, the various nations would certainly issue a joint protest and denounce such acts as a violation of international law.”²⁸ On 7 July of that same year, LP reported the killing of an American war correspondent by the Russians at Liaoyang, which was reminiscent of a similar event involving the manslaughter of an American journalist by Qing troops at Tianzhuangtai. In contrast to the Tianzhuangtai incident, which resulted in the incarceration of local officials and the paying of 25,000 taels of silver as compensation, US authorities did not make similar demands on the Russians. Accordingly, LP’s editorial staff drafted the caption “Only the weak gets bullied” and concluded that “individuals must strive to be independent while nations must strive to be strong; international laws have never been made with weak nations in mind.”²⁹ As the siege of Port Arthur entered its final stages, on 7 December 1904, LP featured a report based on French sources, which claimed that Russian soldiers donning Red Cross uniforms searched for wounded Japanese soldiers on the battlefields before “bayoneting or shooting them.” In light of LP’s repeated portrayal of France as a Russian ally, this seemingly counterintuitive negative reportage concerning Russian troops based on French news reports seems calculated to boost its reliability in the eyes of readers. Finally, LP’s editorial staff questioned the lack of protests from newspapers in Europe and surmised that “Europeans have a natural sympathy for their own kind and hence are inclined to side with the Russians.”³⁰ LP’s reportage is replete with such reports, which are too numerous to cite in full here. Undoubtedly, such reportage was intended to highlight the racial aspect of the Russo-Japanese conflict and garner sympathy for the Japanese cause, albeit indirectly. In view of these Russian atrocities, LP claimed on several occasions that “the barbarity of Russians far exceeds that of African savages” and that “the everyday barbarity and cruelty of Russians is of a wholly different order from that of the African natives.”³¹ While the denigration of Africans as barbaric savages was a construct by Europeans to justify their colonial endeavors, LP saw Russians and other European colonial powers in the same light and employed the same rhetoric to criticize them, which greatly boosted the impact of its reportage.

On 15 December 1904, Russian sailors entered into a dispute with a rickshaw coolie while on shore in Shanghai, and one of them mistakenly hacked a bystander named Zhou Shengyou to death in the heat of the moment. Pointing out that the Russian ships were anchored in Shanghai harbor to seek refuge from the Japanese, the circuit intendant 道台 (*daotai*) of Shanghai Yuan Shuxun insisted on the

²⁷Lun E ren zhi canbao 論俄人之殘暴 [On Russian brutality], TNSP, 16 March 1904, p. 2.

²⁸Zhanshi huiwen 戰事匯聞 [Compilation of war news], LP, 11 May 1904, p. 10.

²⁹Zhi zhi qiruo 只知欺弱 [Only the weak get bullied], LP, 7 July 1904, p. 2.

³⁰Lushun jinqing 旅順近情 [Recent events at Lushun], LP, 7 December 1904, p. 2.

³¹Shanghai zhuan dian 上海專電 [Special telegram from Shanghai], LP, 9 June 1904, p. 2; E ren shisha 俄人嗜殺 [Bloodthirsty Russians], LP, 12 September 1904, p. 2.

trial of the culprit according to Chinese law, whereas the Russian consul in Shanghai refused adamantly to release him into Chinese custody.³² On 4 January 1905, LP reported that the Chinese Foreign Ministry instructed Yuan to confront the Russian consul with the message that his continued refusal to surrender the culprit would be regarded as “nothing less than a violation of Chinese neutrality.”³³ Evidently, the Chinese Foreign Ministry as portrayed by LP stood firm in defending Chinese rights and dignity. On the same day, LP also carried a report on the Russian consul’s acquiescence to Chinese demands, attributing this to “firm retorts by the Chinese authorities and the inviolability of international law” as well as the fact that “Port Arthur had fallen, resulting in a decline in Russian prestige, hence the Russians no longer dare to act as haughtily as before.”³⁴ In this case, whether the Russians actually gave way as a direct consequence of Port Arthur’s fall is of secondary importance; the key is that LP linked this incident to changing Russian fortunes in the war. This also suggests that as LP’s editorial staff and readers saw it, the course of the Russo-Japanese War impacted directly on the rights of individual Chinese (including overseas Chinese). On 17 January 1905, LP featured a follow-up report that clarified that the Russian consul in Shanghai did not surrender the culprit after all and that the incident had already led to “universal rage among the Chinese.” Zhou Shengyou was a native of Ningbo, and the wealthy Ningbo merchant community in Shanghai pressured the Shanghai authorities to “bring the culprits to justice” while collecting funds to compensate Zhou’s bereaved family.³⁵ Conceivably, these actions of the Ningbo merchant community in Shanghai served as an example for the overseas Chinese in Singapore and prompted them to organize an anti-US boycott swiftly following the US authorities’ exclusion of the Chinese. Supported by widespread public sentiment, Sheng Xuanhuai, the official tasked with the resolution of this dispute by the Qing court, made it clear to the Russian consul that “should any incident involving Russians in Shanghai crop up in the future, Chinese officials can only react by trying them independently, instead of conducting a joint trial with Russian officials.”³⁶ Ostensibly, Sheng’s attitude was neither condescending nor overbearing; in reality, it was little more than a veiled threat. For months after the incident itself, LP continued to follow it closely, detailing how Chinese officials allied themselves with the general public to fight for Chinese rights and prestige under the backdrop of Russian defeats on the battlefield, which likely further encouraged nationalist sentiment among its readers. On 18 February, LP reported that the Chinese Foreign Ministry sent a telegram to Hu Weide, the Chinese Minister in Russia, which instructed him to “handle the case together with other nations, in accordance with international law, following the precedent of the Dogger Bank incident.”³⁷ In marked contrast to the tradition of “playing off barbarians against one another” (*yi yi zhi yi* 以夷制夷), this particular report demonstrated, in unambiguous terms, how the British handling of the Dogger Bank incident constituted a ready model for Chinese officials to emulate. Not only did such reports by LP serve to lift the spirits of its readers, but they also enlightened them by making them aware of the promising potential of “resisting foreigners by civilized means.” Even after the incident was seemingly resolved after the Russian authorities sentenced the culprit to eight years of jail and hard labor, it remained very much alive in the memories of LP’s editorial staff and its readers. On 29 March 1905, LP reported that the Russian military in Shanghai rented a sprawling mansion compound for their own use. While this incident had nothing to do with the Zhou Shengyou case whatsoever, LP’s editorial staff nonetheless commented that “we Chinese ought to handle this with care to avoid Zhou Shengyou’s fate,” which suggests that incidents involving foreigners could easily inflame passions following their widespread reportage.³⁸

³²Wang Guanhua has studied the entire incident in detail. See Wang Guanhua, *In Search of Justice: The 1905-1906 Chinese Anti-American Boycott* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), pp. 79–80.

³³Zhong’e jiaoshe tedian 中俄交涉特電 [Special telegram on Sino-Russian negotiations], LP, 4 January 1905, p. 1.

³⁴Shanghai zhuan dian 上海專電 [Special telegram from Shanghai], LP, 4 January 1905, p. 1.

³⁵Huaren gongfen 華人公憤 [Rage among all Chinese], LP, 17 January 1905, p. 5.

³⁶E bing zhao bi huaren an xiaoxi 俄兵斫斃華人案消息 [News of a Russian soldier hacking a Chinese to death], LP, 10 February 1905, p. 2.

³⁷Shuishou sharen 水手殺人 [A sailor commits murder], LP, 18 February 1905, p. 5.

³⁸E bing zuyuan 俄兵租園 [Russian soldiers lease a garden], LP, 29 March 1905, p. 5.

LP's reportage of the Russians' conduct of the war

On 9 June 1904, LP claimed in a tongue-in-cheek fashion:

When Russo-Japanese hostilities broke out, a certain French newspaper based in East Asia featured an anecdote on the Russo-Japanese War, which was really humorous. It was said that a Frenchman and a Russian officer had a meal together at a restaurant in a railway station. The Frenchman asked if the Japanese would have the guts to declare war on Russia. The Russian officer replied, "The Japanese?," following which he pointed at a plate of biscuits on the table and remarked, "Should the Japanese dare to attack us, they will meet with this fate." Having said that, the officer devoured all twelve biscuits in the plate calmly. We may infer that the Russians consider the total defeat of Japan to be as easy as eating biscuits. But I must say that while the Russian officer has a huge appetite, his judgement pales in comparison. It is a great pity that the Russian people share that officer's thinking and regard the Japanese with contempt. Such is the preposterousness of the Russians.³⁹

Here, LP featured a satire of the Russians by employing a caustic tone: clearly, the Russian officer's contempt for the Japanese was not only born of mere underestimation of the Japanese but was fueled by his desire to brag about his inherent superiority to the Frenchman, who also belonged to the white race. Seen in this light, LP's mockery of the Russian officer's huge appetite but poor judgement constituted a sarcastic rebuttal of the Russian cause, which targeted the racism at its core. The reliability and veracity of such reports is, of course, open to doubt, but such techniques employed by LP's editorial staff could and did leave lasting impressions on readers.

Especially worthy of note is the fact that although LP frequently featured reports that criticized and even mocked the Russians, the adoption of such a stance can neither be attributed to the preferences or attitudes of individual editorial staff, nor was it motivated by their gloating at Russian misfortunes. In fact, some of these commentaries aimed to boost the self-confidence of the Chinese race by exposing Russian shortcomings. In part, this was because the Chinese at that time feared for the very survival of their nation, and there was hence a real need for retrospection among the Chinese people. Even more pointedly, however, China, like Russia, had endured an agonizing episode of defeat at the hands of Japan, a foe for which the Chinese had little respect. When the Russians suffered successive defeats in the opening battles of the war, LP's editorial staff felt a need to justify this. Consequently, on 18 March 1904, LP commented that "while the Russians are tyrannical, their domestic politics are practically as corrupt as that of China." The following day, LP added that "it is hardly the case that Chinese troops cannot fight, and the armies of some European nations are of a similar level to the Chinese," and that "the Russians are even more ill-prepared for war than the Chinese, with endemic corruption in official circles and widespread complacency among both civilian and military officials; their conduct, which resembles that of puppets, is also on par with their Chinese counterparts."⁴⁰ On 6 April, LP featured commentaries by Japanese newspapers that claimed that "the Russian navy collapsed even more quickly than the Chinese navy of 1894-95" and that Russian troops were "even more prone to cowardice than the Chinese."⁴¹ I argue that LP's statements during the early stages of the war, which insisted repeatedly that Russia was at roughly the same level as China or even weaker in some areas, were neither a simple smear campaign nor an ingenious adaptation of "spiritual victory" [*jingshen shengli fa*, in the words of famous novelist Lu Xun]. During the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, LP had experienced a profound transformation – from blind optimism for the Chinese cause to cool-headed reflection of China's ills and weaknesses (Sheng 2014, 56-64; Wu 1997, 47). In the wake of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, there was much talk of the Great Powers' "scramble for China." The fiasco of

³⁹Xianggang nanqing xibao lun Ri'e zhanju 香港南清西報論日俄戰局 [Commentary on the Russo-Japanese war by Nanqing Xibao of Hongkong], LP, 2 June 1904, p. 1.

⁴⁰Panguan qingyi 旁觀清議 [Commentary by a bystander], LP, 19 March 1904, p. 5.

⁴¹Riren lunzhan 日人論戰 [The Japanese discuss the war], LP, 6 April 1904, p. 5.

the Hundred Days Reform and the capture of Beijing by the Eight Power Boxer Relief Expedition served to further undermine whatever little confidence the Chinese people had regarding the nation's future. In this context, LP's editorial staff seemed to have appreciated the need to restore confidence in China's future. The underlying logic of their commentaries was that since Russia, which turned out to be a paper tiger, was defeated in such an embarrassing fashion by newly emergent Japan, China's defeat in 1894–95 seemed easier to stomach. Since China and Russia shared many common problems and weaknesses, and since China lost the 1894–95 war, Russia's defeat by Japan was inevitable. On 16 June, TNSP listed many similarities between the wars of 1894–95 and 1904–05, which was in reality a comparison of China's and Russia's domestic problems and apparently motivated by similar concerns.⁴²

As the war dragged into late 1904, and with mounting Russian resistance, particularly the tenacious Russian defense of Port Arthur, which far exceeded the initial expectations of LP's editorial staff, LP began to shift its stance subtly and even assessed the Russians rather favorably. On 7 October, LP featured an account of a Japanese veteran who participated in the Japanese civil wars, the quelling of unrest in Korea, the Sino-Japanese War, the occupation of Taiwan, the Eight Power Expedition, and the Russo-Japanese War, in which he spoke highly of Russian gallantry in war and commented that “to compare the Russian army with that of the Chinese would be to pit an able-bodied man against a child.”⁴³ While the Japanese had captured Port Arthur within a day with little effort during the Sino-Japanese War, they only prevailed over Port Arthur's Russian defenders after a prolonged siege that entailed tens of thousands of casualties during the Russo-Japanese War, which contrasted sharply with their previous experience a decade earlier. By 14 November, LP's editorial staff was sufficiently impressed with the Russian defense of Port Arthur to remark that “the difficulty of capturing Port Arthur is now clear for all to see, and it is equally clear how incompetent our troops were in the Sino-Japanese War.”⁴⁴ As late as 31 December, on the eve of Port Arthur's fall, LP commented, in view of the stubborn defense mounted by Stoessel, the Russian commander of the garrison, that “if only the Chinese officers defending Port Arthur a decade ago could fight like Stoessel, Port Arthur would not have fallen so easily to the Japanese.”⁴⁵ At first glance, it might seem as if LP had shifted its stance, from disparaging the cowardice of the Russian forces to lauding their bravery. In fact, LP remained consistent in its patriotic championing of the Chinese cause. Precisely for this reason, LP successfully aroused nationalistic sentiment among its readers regardless of whichever stance it adopted.

The issue of Chinese agency during the war

Just how was “neutrality” to be defined? Not only was this an issue the Qing court had to grapple with, but the European powers were also forced to manage this conundrum. Shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, the Governor of the Straits Settlements sent a telegram to the Colonial Secretary Alfred Lyttelton to ask if the Russian Volunteer Fleet ought to be regarded as a belligerent force, which is

⁴²Lun zhong'e zhizhan jueji zhongri zhizhan 論日俄之戰絕似中日之戰 [The Russo-Japanese War closely resembles the Sino-Japanese War], TNSP, 16 June 1904, p. 2.

⁴³Ribian tan'e 日弁談俄 [A Japanese soldier discusses the Russians], LP, 7 October 1904, p. 5.

⁴⁴Lushun zhangwu zhuandian 旅順仗務專電 [Special telegram on the Battle of Port Arthur], LP, 14 November 1904, p. 1. On 14 December 1904, LP reported that the Russian defenders of Port Arthur “only filled half of their artillery shells with gunpowder, while filling the remaining half with miscellaneous items,” and thus inferred that the Russian defenders were forced to use the adulterated shells left behind by Chinese troops, being short on ammunition. LP thus lamented that “the greed and incompetence of Chinese officials is plain for all to see.” Here, LP similarly invoked the tenacity of the Russian defense to emphasize the incompetence of the Chinese officials and armed forces. See E bing kukuang 俄兵苦況 [The misery of Russian soldiers], LP, 14 December 1904, p. 2.

⁴⁵Lushun zhangwu tedian 旅順仗務特電 [Special telegram on the Battle of Port Arthur], LP, 31 December 1904, p. 1. On 29 December 1904, LP similarly lauded Stoessel for maintaining his calm under heavy fire and commented that “such a loyal soul has no equal.” See E shuai zhongyong 俄帥忠勇 [The loyalty and bravery of the Russian commander], LP, 29 December 1904, p. 2.

indicative of the ambiguity of purported neutrality.⁴⁶ In the popular imagination today, China was a passive bystander and victim of the Russo-Japanese War, as she maintained neutrality in a conflict fought on her soil. Indeed, newspapers during the war focused on how China was bullied and humiliated by the belligerents, especially Russia, including the killing of innocent Chinese civilians, the arbitrary expansion of the war zone, and paying the Russians for garrisoning Manchuria.⁴⁷ In fact, not only did the Qing court try its best to preserve its neutrality, but it also strove to defend its sovereignty, a point that was not lost on the editorial staff of LP and TNSP. Indeed, the Qing court's self-proclaimed neutrality was hardly a given, but a delicate equilibrium could be brokered with its embroilment in the Russo-Japanese War at any time. Under such circumstances, the Qing court's agency mainly manifested in its strengthening of border defenses along the war zone. According to LP, the Zhili viceroy Yuan Shikai warned the Russian governor of the Far Eastern Provinces that "should Russian troops cross the Liao River by force, they should expect resistance from Chinese forces."⁴⁸ Moreover, LP wrote favorably of the elite Qing forces (the New Armies), claiming that "the New Armies are well-trained and well-equipped, and are truly the *creme de la creme* of the Chinese army," "have an imposing appearance," and "are well-disciplined and strong;" the 40,000-strong New Army under Ma Yukun's command, in particular, "use modern weapons and practise Western drill."⁴⁹ The hidden message was, of course, that even if Russian troops were to clash with the New Armies in violation of Chinese neutrality, they would not necessarily gain the upper hand. Besides the Qing court and high-ranking local officials, even junior officials and civilians were bold enough to challenge the Russians. In May 1904, LP reported that the "upright and fearless" magistrate of Haicheng county expelled Russian troops from the walled city and issued strict orders forbidding the subsequent entry of Russian troops, which eventually forced the Russians to compromise and bivouac beyond the walls.⁵⁰ Besides, Ma Yukun's troops repeatedly requested their superiors for permission to engage the Russians on the east bank of the Liao River, and 2000 civilians in the suburbs of Liaoyang organized themselves into militia, "frequently engaging Russian troops in battle under the Japanese flag."⁵¹

Despite these incidents, the editorial staff of LP and TNSP apparently thought that the Qing court did not do enough to defend Chinese sovereignty and featured commentaries calling for an end to neutrality and an official alliance with Japan to fight Russia on several occasions.⁵² These appeals for direct participation in the war could easily fuel resentment against the Qing court. On 2 March 1904, TNSP featured a commentary that was highly critical of the Qing court, pointing out that "Chinese politics is now so corrupt as to render the Qing court wholly incompetent" and that

⁴⁶The Officer Administering the Government of the Straits Settlements to Mr. Lyttelton, 12 February 1904, CO 273/299.

⁴⁷E wu huaguan 俄侮華官 [The Russians humiliate a Chinese official], LP, 30 January 1904, p. 2; E ren zhi shewang 俄人之奢望 [The Russians' wishful thinking], TNSP, 23 February 1904, p. 2; E ren yaosuo 俄人要索 [The Russians' extortion], LP, 24 February 1904, p. 5; E ren shi dongsansheng wei jidi 俄人視東三省為己地 [The Russians regard the three northeastern provinces as their own territory], LP, 14 March 1904, p. 2; Lun E guan shiyu dongsansheng jumin shi 論俄官示諭東三省居民事 [On the proclamation issued by Russian officials to residents of the three northeastern provinces], TNSP, 15 March 1904, p. 2; Yu guang zhanyu 欲廣戰域 [Planned expansion of war zone], LP, 22 March 1904, p. 5; E ju Liaoxi 俄據遼西 [Russians occupy the west of the Liao River], LP, 24 March 1904, p. 6; E le zhongguo chebing 俄勒中國撤兵 [Russians order the Chinese to withdraw their troops], TNSP, 28 April 1904, p. 2; E fan zhongli yaowen 俄犯中立要聞 [Summary of Russian violation of Chinese neutrality], LP, 25 May 1904, p. 5; You ru huaguan 又辱華官 [Another humiliation of a Chinese official], LP, 5 August 1905, p. 5.

⁴⁸Zhao qing tuiying 昭請退兵 [Direct order to withdraw troops], LP, 6 April 1904, p. 2.

⁴⁹Guanwai junwei 關外軍威 [Military prowess beyond the Shanhaiguan Pass], LP, 13 April 1904, p. 5; Liaoshen bingrong 遼瀋兵容 [The image of our troops at Liaoyang and Shenyang], LP, 2 May 1904, p. 2; Nizeng bingli 擬增兵力 [Planned reinforcements], LP, 19 May 1905, p. 2.

⁵⁰Ri xia shuangyu 日下雙魚 [Killing two birds with one stone], LP, 28 May 1904, p. 2.

⁵¹Qingbing yu ebing tiao zhan 清兵與俄兵挑戰 [Qing troops challenge Russian troops to do battle], TNSP, 14 March 1904, p. 2; Majun yuzhan 馬軍欲戰 [The cavalry longs for battle], LP, 5 April 1904, p. 5; Liaoyang minqing 遼陽民情 [Social conditions in Liaoyang], LP, 22 July 1904, p. 5.

⁵²Lun E'ri kaizhan zhengfu shou juwai zhi yu 論俄日開戰政府守局外之愚 [On the foolishness of the government in maintaining neutrality in the Russo-Japanese War], TNSP, 29 February 1904, p. 2.

“even foreigners are aware that China has a rotten core beneath her bright appearance, and is beyond salvation.”⁵³ This also suggests that although the editorial staff of LP and TNSP did not necessarily support the revolutionary cause out of their own volition, such commentaries likely made their readers more receptive to the propaganda of the revolutionaries.

Subtle shifts in LP's and TNSP's attitudes towards Japan

At the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War, LP supported Japan unreservedly, believed that the Japanese would return Manchuria to China after expelling the Russian troops stationed there, and even went so far as to refer to the Japanese forces as “a benevolent and righteous army.”⁵⁴ In July 1904, LP reported Japan's conditions for returning Manchuria, namely the stationing of a substantial Chinese garrison according to Japanese standards and granting Japan most favored nation status in commercial matters.⁵⁵ At the same time, the magistrate of Jin county, Jinzhou prefecture, arrested and jailed five Japanese under duress from the Russian authorities. When the magistrate sent a telegram to ask the Chinese Foreign Ministry for instructions on how to handle this case, the latter took the highly unusual step of discussing this with the Japanese minister in China.⁵⁶ Since Jinzhou prefecture was located west of the Liao River and hence well within the neutral zone, even if the magistrate of Jin county arrested Japanese under pressure from the Russians, official Japanese intervention in this incident clearly violated Chinese sovereignty. Despite the blatant trampling of Chinese sovereignty by the Japanese in these incidents, however, LP's reportage was strangely dispassionate and did not contain any hint of criticism.

As the war progressed, LP's stance towards Japan became less consistent and was characterized by vacillation. In August 1904, LP, echoing commentaries on Shanghai's *Shenbao*, reminded the Chinese public and state officials “not to be secretly pleased by Japan's victories” and protested strongly when Japanese troops replaced the Chinese coat of arms at the Niuzhuang customs building with the Japanese flag upon entering the city.⁵⁷ Despite this, when Japanese forces purchased timber from Chinese merchants but refused to pay and even executed two of the merchants in public, LP, again echoing *Shenbao*'s commentaries, remarked that the merchants only had themselves to blame because they were too greedy.⁵⁸

TNSP and LP's stance towards the Japanese underwent a fundamental shift in April 1905. On 4 and 17 April, both newspapers featured reports with the captions “Japanese troops torture officials and civilians in Fengtian” and “the Japanese torture [Chinese] officials and civilians,” respectively. Both reports were virtually identical in their content and even choice of words, lambasting Japanese troops for “replacing violence with violence” [*yi bao yi bao* 以暴易暴] and pointing out that “the Japanese generals' claims of protecting the inhabitants of Fengtian have turned out to be no more than empty talk.”⁵⁹ From then onwards, both newspapers began to report extensively on Japanese atrocities, in

⁵³Lun Ri'e zhanzheng 論日俄戰爭 [On the Russo-Japanese War], TNSP, 2 March 1904, p. 2.

⁵⁴Qing shou gutu 請收故土 [Appeal to recover lost territory], LP, 7 June 1904, p. 2.

⁵⁵Yuchou dongfang 預籌東防 [Preemptive planning for defenses in the east], LP, 9 July 1904, p. 15; Chuzhi dongshi 處置東事 [Settling issues in the Far East], LP, 11 July 1904, p. 15.

⁵⁶E xie huaguan 俄脅華官 [Russians threaten Chinese official], LP, 14 July 1904, p. 15.

⁵⁷Lun riben zhansheng hou zhi qingxing 論日本戰勝後之情形 [The situation after the Japanese victory], LP, 20 August 1904, p. 1; Guan gebao ji riren er she Liaodong zongdu shi kai er lunzhi 觀各報記日人而設遼東總督事慨而論之 [Our commentary on other newspapers' reportage of the Japanese appointment of the governor of Liaodong], LP, 1 September 1904, p. 1.

⁵⁸Ri bi mushang 日斃木商 [Japanese execution of a timber dealer], LP, 4 October 1904, p. 5; Lun ri bi mushang shi 論日斃木商事 [On the Japanese execution of a timber dealer], LP, 6 October 1904, p. 1.

⁵⁹Rijun nuedai Fengtian guanmin 日軍虐待奉天官民 [Japanese torture of Chinese officials and civilians in Fengtian], TNSP, 4 April 1905, p. 8; Ri nue guanmin 日虐官民 [Japanese torture of Chinese officials and civilians], LP, 17 April 1905, p. 5.

particular their rampant massacres and pillage in the vicinity of Fengtian.⁶⁰ Just why did both newspapers suddenly turn anti-Japan? This is open to conjecture, but their understanding of Japanese policy in Korea was likely responsible for this shift. On 30 July 1904, LP reported on the arrogance of the Japanese in Korea, for they “regarded Koreans like dogs and horses” and “threatened Koreans with despicable means.” In view of this, LP called for “bringing the culprits to justice by upholding the law.” At first glance, it might seem that LP’s condemnation of the Japanese was motivated by sympathy for the Korean people, but close reading of the article reveals otherwise. LP’s call for “bringing the culprits to justice by upholding the law” was simply a means for “boosting Japanese prestige,” which was in fact “the first piece of advice offered by LP to Japan for governing Korea.”⁶¹ In other words, not only did LP not oppose Japanese colonial rule over Korea, but in fact saw the punishment of the Japanese culprits as merely a means for strengthening Japanese colonial rule over Korea. On 21 November, LP featured the full text of a notice issued by Japanese forces in Korea, which claimed that “the Japanese forces’ protection of Koreans is akin to a mother’s protection of her child” and that “Japanese forces shall do everything in their power to protect Koreans from abuse.”⁶² In these instances, the image of the Japanese forces is that of a benevolent guardian to the Koreans. By 1905, LP gradually began to sympathize with the Koreans under Japanese rule. Upon learning that the Korean government recalled Korean diplomats posted overseas, LP’s editorial staff immediately concluded that this was an omen that Korea was about to lose her sovereignty and become a Japanese vassal; upon learning that the Japanese were building fortifications on Jeju Island, they similarly remarked that “Japan’s policy in Korea is totally unrestrained and allows her to keep a tight leash on the Koreans.”⁶³ Considering that LP’s and TNSP’s editorial staff followed events in Korea closely, they were probably more sensitive to potential Japanese encroachment on Chinese rights in Manchuria.

It must be mentioned, however, that although LP and TNSP adjusted their respective stances toward Japan, both newspapers consistently emphasized the need for wholesale learning from Japan. In fact, another major newspaper in Malaya, *Penang Sin Pao* 檳城新報, explicitly linked the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 anti-American boycott.⁶⁴ As *Penang Sin Pao* observed perceptively, when Russia colluded with France and Germany to force Japan to give up her territorial demands on China’s Liaodong Peninsula, the Japanese people regarded it as a national humiliation; however, when the US passed the Exclusion Act, the Chinese people were initially “numb” to it and only boycotted US goods after the situation escalated. Thus, the editorial staff of *Penang Sin Pao* concluded that the Chinese were generally less patriotic than the Japanese. This comparison cannot stand up to close scrutiny: while the Three Power Intervention over Liaodong involved nation states, the Exclusion Act was a policy of the US government that targeted Chinese immigrants (who comprised only a tiny fraction of the entire Chinese population) and is thus hardly valid. However, this was a moot point during the Russo-Japanese War, when many Chinese were inspired to learn from Japan and were in fact indirectly encouraged by Japan’s victory to boycott US goods. According to LP, the Chinese government purchased a gunboat from Japan’s Kawasaki shipyard in December 1904. Despite the fact that the gunboat was only useful for river patrol duties, LP devoted much space (over two consecutive days) to describing its capabilities and equipment, as well as its commissioning ceremony.⁶⁵ In the final analysis,

⁶⁰Ri sha yizu 日殺驛卒 [Japanese killing of a soldier at a post station], LP, 21 April 1905, p. 5; Qing zhi huaguan 請治華官 [Japanese demand the punishment of Chinese official], LP, 25 April 1905, p. 10; Fengmin canzhuang 奉民慘狀 [The pitiable state of civilians in Fengtian], LP, 30 May 1905, p. 2.

⁶¹Yuan ri yuanyin 怨日原因 [Reasons for resenting the Japanese], LP, 30 July 1904, p. 5.

⁶²Rijun jieming 日軍戒命 [Proclamation by the Japanese forces], LP, 30 July 1904, p. 5.

⁶³Bu pai shichen 不派使臣 [Recalling of diplomats], LP, 14 January 1905, p. 5; Gaoli jinzhuang 高麗近狀 [Recent status of Korea], LP, 27 March 1905, p. 5.

⁶⁴Mei jin gongyue zhi ganqing 美禁工約之感情 [Our feelings on US exclusion], *Penang Sin Pao*, 24 July 1905, cited from Wong Sin Kiong, *Haiwai huaren de kangzheng: duimei dizhi yundong shishi yu shiliao* 海外華人的抗爭：對美抵制運動史實與史料 (Singapore: Singapore Society of Asian Studies, 2001), p. 93.

⁶⁵Paojian luocheng 炮艦落成 [Commissioning of gunboat], LP, 15 December 1904, p. 5; Huajian luocheng 華艦落成 [Commissioning of Chinese boat], LP, 23 December 1904, p. 2.

this phenomenon can be explained by Japan's victory over Russia; as a result of this, the purchase of a single Japanese-built gunboat could greatly lift the spirits of many ordinary Chinese. While Chinese learning from Japan was concentrated in the military sphere, this learning was not limited to adopting the most advanced weaponry but extended to drill, organization, and even dress.⁶⁶ Even more remarkable was LP's reporting of Europeans' learning from Japan in 1905, in particular citing British general Ian Hamilton's (who observed the Russo-Japanese War) view that "our army is now in dire straits, and we must emulate the Japanese in all our military affairs."⁶⁷ While Western learning had laid the foundation for Japan's rise, Japan now appeared to beat the West at their own game, so much so that the British began to adopt Japanese practices in a case of reverse learning. On 17 April, LP reported that some Chinese had beaten Westerners in a wrestling match in San Francisco and added that "martial arts had always been an integral component of traditional Chinese culture" but had nearly become a lost art following the advent of firearms. Even so, "this art (martial arts) is indispensable to our people, and in times of war," since Japanese troops "mostly relied on martial arts" to defeat the Russians. Precisely for this reason, "even in an advanced civilization like the US, both the navy and the army have specially hired Japanese martial arts instructors to teach this art, to great effect."⁶⁸ Besides spreading the message that "the West is now learning from the East," the report was clearly inspired by social Darwinism and elevated wrestling to the level of preserving traditional Chinese culture as well as national salvation. This report was also evidently intended to remind readers that in an age when traditional culture was lost within China and had to be reintroduced from overseas, Japan seemed to embody success in combining the best of East and West, and that China ought to follow the example of the West in learning from Japan.

The impact of the Russo-Japanese War on the Qiaoxiang and Singapore

Considering that Guangdong and Fujian, which were the hometowns of most overseas Chinese (*qiaoxiang* 僑鄉), were in close proximity to Japanese-occupied Taiwan, and that the British who ruled Singapore were allied to the Japanese, the Russo-Japanese War had a palpable impact on the *qiaoxiang* as well as Singapore. Even before hostilities broke out, LP featured a Japanese proposal involving the blockade of the Taiwan Straits and Viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi Cen Chunxuan's proposal to form New Armies in Guangdong in preparation for the defense of Manchuria in case of emergency.⁶⁹ After the war broke out, TNSP proposed that "South China ought to use the navy to preserve neutrality" and that the reconstituted South Seas fleet could "project our military prowess overseas." Even if the fleet did not directly engage Russian ships, the author added, it can serve to deter potential aggressors from harboring designs on Fujian and Zhejiang. At a minimum, the fleet could strengthen coastal defense and assist the army west of the Liao River in fulfilling the obligations of a neutral nation.⁷⁰ The war only exerted a direct impact on the *qiaoxiang* and Singapore, however, after Russia's Baltic fleet sailed eastward. Between October 1904 and May 1905, LP and TNSP followed the voyage of the Baltic fleet closely for over six months. LP, in particular, commented that "both Taiwan and Fujian belong to Japan's sphere of influence; should the Russians harass Taiwan, Fujian would surely suffer collateral damage."⁷¹

⁶⁶Gailiang caofa 改良操法 [Improvement in drill], LP, 4 November 1904, p. 19; Fangxing bingzhi 仿行兵制 [Emulation of army organization], LP, 18 January 1905, p. 5; Bingzhuang gailiang 兵裝改良 [Improvement in army dress], LP, 23 January 1905, p. 2.

⁶⁷Ying yi fangri 英宜仿日 [British ought to emulate the Japanese], LP, 7 January 1905, p. 1; Ying fang rizheng zhuandian 英仿日政專電 [Special telegram on the British adoption of Japanese administrative procedures], LP, 27 June 1905, p. 1.

⁶⁸Zhuangzai jiji 壯哉技擊 [Heroism of wrestling], LP, 17 April 1905, p. 5.

⁶⁹Shishi jueyao shier xuji 時事摘要十二續紀 [The twelfth instalment in a series of brief reports on current affairs], LP, 2 February 1904, p. 1; Shishi jueyao shiwu xuji 時事摘要十五續紀 [The fifteenth instalment in a series of brief reports on current affairs], LP, 9 February 1904, p. 1.

⁷⁰Lun zhongguo nanfang yiyong shuishi bao zhongli 論中國南方宜用水師保守中立 [Southern China ought to use the navy to preserve its neutrality], TNSP, 11 August 1904, p. 2.

⁷¹Xianggang zhuandian 香港專電 [Special telegram from Hongkong], LP, 9 December 1904, p. 1.

The editorial staff and readers of both newspapers had four main concerns: first, the Russian and Japanese fleets could possibly engage each other off the coast of Guangdong and Fujian, which could affect trade and commerce in the *qiaoxiang*; second, the Baltic fleet could enter ports in Guangdong (including Hainan) or Fujian and demand provisions, thus violating Chinese neutrality; third, warships of belligerents could intercept merchant ships of neutral nations in the South China Sea or launch a surprise raid on Singapore; fourth, the Russians were rumored to be selling poisoned wheat flour to Japanese, and that the poisoned wheat flour had entered the Xiamen and Singapore markets, causing the deaths of two innocent women and children who consumed buns made using that flour.⁷² Concerned about the vulnerable state of China's coastal defenses, a band of *juren* 舉人 (a successful candidate in the imperial examinations at the provincial level) in Yazhou, Hainan, organized a protest at the local *yamen* 衙門, and imported wheat flour found no buyers in Chaoyang, Guangdong, owing to rumors about poisoned flour.⁷³ These anecdotes demonstrate the panic and paranoia in the *qiaoxiang* vividly. The arrival of the Baltic fleet in East Asia meant that the war was no longer distant and abstract but had a direct and tangible impact on the overseas Chinese and their hometowns (Guangdong and Fujian), as well as their place of domicile (Singapore). In Europe, rumors that the Baltic fleet would stop over in the Philippines were rife, leading the US colonial authorities there to be "on high alert," with warships on standby in Filipino waters.⁷⁴ Such neutrality backed by military force, when contrasted against the weak coastal defenses of Guangdong and Fujian (whether real or imagined), served as yet another stimulus to the nationalist sentiment of LP's readers. Even during June 1905, when the Baltic fleet had been annihilated in the Battle of Tsushima, the overseas Chinese in Singapore remained nervous. During the night of 9 June, "residents of Singapore were suddenly startled by the rumble of artillery fire" and immediately feared a naval raid by enemy ships.⁷⁵ Although this was quickly proven to be a false alarm set off by a naval exercise, it was nonetheless clear that Singapore residents at that time felt that the war was extremely close to Singapore's shores. Besides, considering that American wheat flour was one of the key items targeted by the anti-US boycott of 1905, the month-long paranoia involving wheat flour, rumored to be poisoned, also served as a sort of dress rehearsal for the boycott that quickly followed.

Finally, although the *qiaoxiang* and Singapore were impacted by the war right from its start (albeit to a limited degree), to claim that "the overseas Chinese in Singapore grew concerned about the Russo-Japanese War only because the war impacted Singapore and the *qiaoxiang*" would be to mistake the effect for the cause. It must be remembered that this impact only became apparent from late 1904, during the final stages of the war, but the Chinese-language newspapers in Singapore had been following Russo-Japanese tensions closely from January 1904, even before the opening shots had been fired. In other words, the impact of the Russo-Japanese War on the *qiaoxiang* and Singapore merely intensified their concern for the war but did not actually spark it in the first instance. This suggests that the upper-and middle-class overseas Chinese in Singapore during the early twentieth century already possessed an international outlook and were not as parochial as much of the existing scholarship has suggested.

⁷²Gan she fangdu 趕設防堵 [Scramble to build fortifications and intercept the Baltic fleet], TNSP, 2 March 1905, p. 5; Mian yi fangdu 麵宜防毒 [Prudent to take precautions against poisoned wheat flour], TNSP, 10 April 1905, p. 5; Zhengdun haifang 整頓海防 [Revamp coastal defenses], LP, 27 March 1905, p. 2; E jian guo le 俄艦過叻 [Russian fleet crosses Singapore], LP, 10 April 1905, p. 2; E jian guo le xushu 俄艦過叻續述 [Follow-up to the Russian fleet's crossing of Singapore], LP, 11 April 1905, p. 2; You yu zhanlun 又遇戰輪 [Another encounter with warships], LP, 17 April 1905, p. 2; Gongying yichuan 弓影傳疑 [A false alarm], LP, 29 April 1905, p. 5.

⁷³Zhuangzai ci shen 壯哉此紳 [A heroic band of scholar-gentlemen], LP, 8 March 1905, p. 2; Mianshang jinkuang 麵商近況 [Recent situation faced by wheat flour dealers], LP, 12 May 1905, p. 9.

⁷⁴Hechu neng rong 何處能容 [No where to dock], LP, 3 January 1905, p. 2; Mei shou zhongli tedian 美守中立特電 [Special telegram on US neutrality], LP, 19 April 1905, p. 1.

⁷⁵An zhen wuyou 安枕毋憂 [Stay calm and don't worry], LP, 9 June 1905, p. 5. Shortly after, on 4 July, LP featured a report on the alleged infiltration of Russian spies into Singapore and their drawing of maps of British forts, with the caption "Stop the covetous glance of the Russians," which made LP readers even more concerned about the Russian threat. See Jueqi kuisi 絕其窺伺 [Stop the covetous glance of the Russians], LP, 4 July 1905, p. 2.

Conclusion

As Wang Qisheng has pointed out, China experienced three mass protests between 1915 and 1925 in response to Japanese provocations, namely the 1915 protest against Japan's "Twenty One Demands," the 1919 protest against the transfer of Shandong's rights to Japan at the Paris Peace Conference, and the 1925 protest against the shooting of a Chinese worker by a Japanese foreman. Referring to these three crises as "the subjugation of the nation," "the loss of a province," and "the death of an individual," he noted that the magnitude of each crisis paled in comparison to the one preceding it, yet the scale of mobilization in response to each crisis rose dramatically (Wang 2010, 4). Besides the Chinese Communist Party's participation in the last of these crises, that is, the May Thirtieth Movement, the rapid surge in Chinese nationalism was chiefly responsible for this paradoxical phenomenon. Although China did not directly participate in the Russo-Japanese War, slightly different versions of all three crises, namely the Zhou Shengyou case ("the death of an individual"), the potential loss of Chinese rights and sovereignty in Manchuria ("the loss of a province"), and the impending "scramble for China" ("the subjugation of the nation"), formed the backdrop to the Exclusion Act and the anti-US boycott, all of which fueled Chinese nationalism, of which overseas Chinese nationalism was an offshoot. While "the subjugation of the nation," "the loss of a province," and "the death of an individual" during the Russo-Japanese War did not (and in fact could not) give rise to the mass protests that materialized a decade or two later, they nonetheless served as a sort of "dress rehearsal" for these monumental events in modern Chinese history.

Similarly, overseas Chinese concern for the Russo-Japanese War being fought in Manchuria did not arise from the blue. As Michael R. Godley has noted, throughout Huang Zunxian's tenure as Qing consul in Singapore during the early 1890s, "he managed repeated appeals for overseas Chinese relief for disasters" in several Chinese provinces, including Shandong and Zhili (present-day Hebei) in the north, which certainly broadened the horizons of the overseas Chinese community in Singapore beyond their home provinces (Godley 1981, 75). The key differences between these disasters and the Russo-Japanese War, then, were that China was not a belligerent in the Russo-Japanese War and that the war lasted longer than any of those individual disasters. This suggests convincingly that a perceptible shift in overseas Chinese nationalism indeed occurred during the turn of the twentieth century, which is consistent with earlier arguments made by Wang Gungwu and Michael Godley, although I would like to add that this was a new kind of nationalism born out of an international outlook. In her study of the *Malaya Tribune*, founded in Singapore in 1914 as the first English-language newspaper for an Asian readership, Chua Ai Lin has shown that widely publicized debates on this "cross-ethnic forum" during the 1930s helped the English-educated overseas Chinese in Singapore to define their "Chineseness" (Chua 2012, 285). While the English-educated overseas Chinese did not embrace Chinese nationalism blindly but "added a new depth" to it, their Chinese-educated brethren likewise expanded their horizons beyond "China proper" in defining overseas Chinese nationalism three decades earlier (Chua 2012, 301).

Chang Tsun-wu has argued that the anti-US boycott lost steam partly because "Japan's aggressive invasion of China distracted the Chinese people" (Chang 1982, 233). I disagree with Chang's argument. My study of LP reveals that the overseas Chinese nationalism that resulted from both the Russo-Japanese War and the anti-US boycott coalesced to become a potent force, which in turn influenced the subsequent course of Chinese history. In fact, Chang himself noted that the proposed treaty to be signed between Japan and the Qing court was very much on the agenda of members of the public who rallied against US exclusion. At the gathering, the crowds scrutinized the draft treaty to determine which articles to reject and which articles to accept, which was indicative of the fact that the resolution of issues stemming from the Russo-Japanese War and the anti-US boycott were intimately linked to each other (Chang 1982, 233).

The success of the anti-US boycott was contingent on two preconditions: first, participants of the boycott had to consume the goods in question to begin with because it was precisely the shift from consumption to boycott that could make the offending nation feel the pinch; second, participants of the boycott had to be fully aware of the need for a boycott and be willing to tolerate inconveniences stemming from the boycott. On 26 July 1905, *Penang Sin Pao* featured a list of US imports compiled by

students of the Lingdong Tongwen school, as follows: twill, kerosene, wheat flour, sewing machines, gramophones, cigarettes, rubber slippers, dentures, and American ginseng.⁷⁶ Of all the items in the list, the vast majority are arguably luxury goods consumed by the rich, with the sole exception of wheat flour. This seems to suggest that a significant portion of participants in the boycott were upper- and middle-class overseas Chinese who were financially well-off. How, then, did they appreciate the necessity of boycotting US goods, so much so that they participated in a mass movement that was unprecedented up to that point in time? Why were many overseas Chinese suddenly motivated to support the revolutionary cause financially from 1905 onwards? (Wong 2001, 110) Based on case studies of LP and TNSP, this article suggests that overseas Chinese nationalism in early twentieth-century Singapore was to a large extent a product of both newspapers' reportage of the Russo-Japanese War, which can at least partially answer these questions.⁷⁷

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⁷⁶Zhi ge huiguan gonghan 致各會館公函 [An open letter to the various clan associations], Penang Sin Pao, 26 July 1905, cited in Wong (2001, p. 110).

⁷⁷Prasenjit Duara has questioned the generalization, promoted first by the revolutionaries and later supported by Yen Ching-hwang, that “the lower class overseas Chinese support the revolutionaries, while the upper class overseas Chinese support the loyalists/reformists.” Through close study of newspapers which mostly circulated among upper class overseas Chinese at that time, I have corroborated Duara's counter-argument with empirical evidence. See Prasenjit Duara, Nationalists among transnationals: Overseas Chinese and the idea of China, 1900-1911 in Aihwa Ong & Donald Nonini, *Ungrounded empires: The cultural politics of modern Chinese transnationalism* (Duara 1997, 51).

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