

International Baccalaureate

Internal Assessment: History HL

**How significant was the Russo-  
Japanese War in the outbreak of the  
1905 Russian Revolution?**

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## **Section A: The Plan**

This historical investigation will attempt to answer the research question “How significant was the Russo-Japanese war in the outbreak of the 1905 Russian Revolution?”. In order to answer this question, this investigation will address the problems which the Russo-Japanese war caused and further worsened in Russia from February 1904 to January 1905. These problems shall include...

- \* Russia’s economic situation
- \* The Russian population’s perception of the Russian autocracy
- \* Political opposers of the Tsar who existed in Russia during this historical period.

Primary statistics will need to be collected to show the magnitude of the war’s expenses. Eye-witness accounts describing the mood of the Russian population during this historical period will also be necessary to answer the research question. Finally, the analysis of the opinions and research of renowned historians is another integral part of the this investigation’s method.

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## **Section B: Summary Of Evidence**

There are several similarities between the consequences of Russia’s involvement in the Russo-Japanese War and the causes of Russia’s 1905 revolution. These connections include the economic instability which the war caused, the strengthening effect of the war on the Tsar’s political opposition and the negative impact of the war upon the general public’s attitude towards the autocracy. Historian Ascher (1994), claims that the war did not make revolution inevitable in Russia, however, war did “establish the pre-conditions for such an upheaval” (p. 43).

### Consequences for nationalistic pride:

As propaganda published in 1904 illustrates, Russia entered the war confident of an early victory over Japan, an Asian nation perceived as weak and inferior by Europeans at this point in history (Byrant, 2006). Unlike the scenario which these propaganda images depicted, Russian troops were repeatedly defeated by the Japanese throughout the war. This resulted in the autocracy being portrayed as “irresponsible, incompetent and reckless” (Ascher, 1994, p. 43) and feelings of “burning shame, resentment, and indignation” (Ascher, 1994, p. 43) escalating with each new defeat (Krasnov, 1991). Prince Felix Yusupov described that in response to Russia’s loss to the Japanese, strikes “broke out almost everywhere” and members of the Imperial family and high government officials became targets of assassination attempts (Yusupov, 2003).

### Economic Consequences:

The Russo-Japanese War's debilitation of Russia's economy intensified Russian criticism towards the Tsar (Ascher, 1994, p. 52). According to Soviet publications, approximately 2,347,000,000 roubles were spent on the war (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 1989). To fund this, taxes were increased, consumer prices inflated and wages decreased. As Ascher (1994) quoted, the Russo-Japanese war also "adversely effected some important sectors of the national economy" (p. 53). For example, the war crippled agricultural and industrial production and also resulted in the Trans-Siberian railway (a major transportation system) becoming inaccessible for economical purposes.

### Political Consequences:

Russian prince, Felix Yusupov, (2003) claimed that opposers of the Tsar took advantage of the negative image the war cast upon Russia's government. An example of this exploitation (according to Orlando Figes (1996)) is when the future leader of the Octoberist party, blamed Russia's bureaucratic government for the lack of weapons accessible to the Russian army during the war (p. 170). It has been described that opposers of the Tsar were eventually viewed by the general public as "champions of freedom". The most infamous example of this mindset autocracy was the public's response to the assassination of Russian minister, Pheve, whose death was celebrated by crowds in the Russian streets of Warsaw (Figes, 1996, p. 170).

### Alternate explanations:

Whilst all of these consequences of the war contributed towards Russia's 1905 revolution, historians such as Sidney Harcave have linked other factors to the outbreak of this revolt. These factors include the nation's agrarian problems, nationality problems and the increasing educated class (Harcave, 1970). Policies such as Russification were said to "turn most of the people against the Russian government" (Harcave, 1970). The accessibility of education also posed threats to the autocratic Tsar. Historian, Lynch argues that the protests which led to revolution were caused by industrial recession, bad harvests and the regime's ill-judged policies. For example, under Sergei Witte's economic policy, harvests were poor in 1900 and 1902, prompting famine and economic problems for Russians (Lynch, 2005). These conditions and problems were present in Russia even before the Russo-Japanese war had begun.

Word Count: 526

## **Section C: Evaluation of Sources**

“The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray” is a historical recount written by Abraham Ascher, an American university professor of history. The recount was published in 1988 by Stanford University Press and printed in the United States of America. The purpose of this source is to educate the target audience (university students and adults) on the events which impacted the Russian Revolution of 1905. The source does not describe the revolution, but analyses it, in attempt to persuade the reader to agree with the author’s interpretation of this historical event. This source is valuable because it was written by a renowned historical professor who is an expert in this field. The audience which this recount is targeted towards is another advantage of this source. This is because when such an educated audience is targeted, there is not as much risk of important historical details being omitted or simplified. The source was also published in the United States of America, which is valuable as censorship playing a significant role in the content of the novel is not a profound issue. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the historical archives in Russia were accessible for the first time for study and analysis. Since this novel was published in 1988, Abraham Ascher would not have had access to this supply of Russian historical documents. Therefore, some of Ascher’s claims may be outdated in accordance to new, available evidence, limiting the reliability of this source. Another limitation is that in this source, the historian only presents his point of view on an event which is open to different interpretations.

“Lost Splendor: The Amazing Memoirs of the Man who Killed Rasputin” is an autobiography written by Prince Felix Yusupov, a member of the Russian Royal Family. This primary historical source was published in France in 1953 with the purpose of providing future generations with something to remember this historical figure and his experiences by. This source is of value to historians because the author was quite a significant figure in Russian history and an active member of the Russian Royal family. Such a title would have enabled the author to observe the Royal Family at close-range. Hence, this valuable source provides historians with a potentially sincere, eye-witness account of the events and conversations involving the Russian Royal family. This source was published in France rather than the USSR, which is of value because this means that the author did not feel compelled to subdue certain opinions of his. However, since this is an opinionated autobiography, bias is an extremely large limitation of this historical source. Also, since the purpose of this source is to provide a memoir for future generations, the author may have wanted to portray himself, history and others in a very specific way, resulted in information being omitted or exaggerated.

*Word Count: 474*

## **Section D: Analysis**

An understanding of the historical context of the Russo-Japanese War is crucial in analyzing how significantly the Russo-Japanese War contributed towards Russia's 1905 revolution. Authors, Felix Patrikeeff and Harry Shukman, (2007) describe Russia before the Russo-Japanese War as being "deeply unsettled" (p. 5). At the turn of the century, Russia was modernizing both its agriculture and industry. However, the combination of the nation's backward farming techniques, rising population, and poor political policies resulted in famine and the feelings of unrest emerging. Before the war, the government also faced political challengers, such as terrorists and liberals who desired change. (Patrikeeff, Shukman, 2007)

Some historians, such as Sidney Harcave argued that the Russo-Japanese war was not a significant cause of Russia's 1905 revolution. As the context revealed, Russia was not independent of "revolutionary ideas or threats" prior to the the wars outbreak in February, 1904. The famine, economic problems, population growth and gradually strengthening political opposition to the Tsar made the Russian population more susceptible to liberalist and revolutionary ideas, increasing the likelihood of rebellion from the Russian people to surface. Sidney Harcave has connected four problems in Russia to the 1905 revolution: agriculture, the labor force, the educated class and the several minority groups throughout Russia. (Harcave, 1970)

Even though Russia's problems (before war) contributed towards the "brewing revolution"; the Russo Japanese war worsened multiple conditions which have been connected to Russia's revolution. Therefore, the analysis of historians such as Lynch are much more accurate than Harcave's. Whilst Lynch does argue that multiple factors mentioned by Harcave acted as a key cause of revolution, this historian also labels the Russo-Japanese war as a "catalyst" of revolution. (Lynch, 2005) This is because, as this historian highlights, the war worsened conditions throughout Russia. This is exhibited via the vast evidence which reveals that the war impacted the Russian economy, taxes, and the strength and appeal of political opposers. These differences of historical analysis may be present due to the publication time difference between these two historians. Lynch, unlike Harcave, would have had a much wider hindsight, due to the later publication (2005) of this historian's critical analysis of this historical event. Harcaves analysis was only published in 1970. This historian's denied access to particular sources (available only after 1991) are a limitation of his perspective's value.

The Russo-Japanese war showed for the first time in modern history, an Asian power triumphing over a European nation. The negative psychological impact this unexpected Japanese victory had upon the Russian population in this context should be taken into consideration when discussing impact of the Russo-Japanese war. Several primary sources

have reported the embarrassment and feelings of shame which resulted from Russia's loss to an inferior Asian, presumably weaker nation. The war appeared to have vindicated the "incompetence" of the autocracy, in a way in which multiple of the problems Russia faced before the war did not achieve. In the words of Abraham Ascher "the war seemed to justify every criticism towards the autocratic regime". (Ascher, 1994, p. 43)

Whilst sources such as Prince Felix Yusupov's auto-biography describe "strikes breaking out" in response to Russia's losses in the war, the limitations of this source need to be taken into account before jumping to hasty conclusions that there is a direct correlation between war and revolution. As analysis of this source mentioned, this author may have observed that these two events were interconnected, however, other independent factors may have also contributed towards the outbreak of these protests (as Lynch and Harcave discuss).

However, it is also important to consider that the weight of the material which supports a correlation between Russia's loss in the Russo-Japanese war and the outbreak of the 1905 revolution is vast. Several historians have observed the link between these two separate events. This includes historians such as Orlando Figes and Abraham Ascher whose opinions and research are extremely valuable and well recognized. Whilst each of these historians assert that the Russo-Japanese war certainly worsened Russia's economic status, political satisfaction, and the population's patriotism; the war alone could not have solely caused revolution. The Russo-Japanese war acted as a catalyst of the conditions which forced revolution to break out in Russia in 1905.

*Word Count: 694*

## **Section E: Conclusion**

The Russo-Japanese War played a significant role in the onset of Russia's 1905 revolution. This is because even though the war was not the singular cause of revolution, it did worsen several problems which Russia was facing during the early 1900's. Thus, as Michael Lynch described, the war assumed the significant role of a "catalyst" in the precipitation of the 1905 revolution. This historian's perspective can be justified with evidence of the war's significant impact upon the strength of the autocracy's political opposers, the Russian economy, and the general public's attitude towards the Tsar. Had Russia not been involved in the Russo-Japanese War, perhaps these "preconditions for upheaval" (in the words of Historian, Ascher) would not have reached the same level of intensity which they did, thus, potentially avoiding (or postponing) Russia's 1905 revolution.

*Word Count: 137*

**Total Word Count: 1981**

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