

Images of Competing Imperialisms:  
Russia and Japan in China at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The turn of the 20th century saw expansion of Russia's political and economic interests in China. At that time there appeared very active groups of politicians and businessmen interested in increasing of the Russian infiltration into Northeast China. In Russian press of that period we can see a tendency to form an image of the messianic role of Russia played in this part of Asia. At the same time, much was written about friendly relations between the peoples of Russia and China, and such passages were intended to show big difference between the policy of Russia in China and those of the Western countries there.

In the period of the Boxer uprising (1898-1901), the official media constructed an image of Russia as a defender of justice and Christian values from barbarian “Boxers” (Yihetuan). These perceptions were provided not only by newspaper articles, but also by various kinds of brochures designed for a mass and less educated reader.

As for visual images (illustrations, caricatures, photographs), their role was extremely important. They had to carry even a heavier load, as they always have an exceptional impact on the forming of any nation's perceptions about other peoples. This is particularly typical of the countries where literacy rate and levels of education are not high enough. Politicians and editors were very well aware of the role of visual images and their significance for political propaganda.

A special place was given to the dissemination of the idea that the Russian troops in China were protecting not only the interests of Russia, but also of the entire civilized world. It was argued that the Boxer Uprising had been caused by the erroneous policies of the Western powers in China and their excessive cruelty. At the same time ambivalence of the images formed by some Russian newspapers was evident.

During the 1904-1905 Russian-Japanese war, the role of visual images in Russian imperialist propaganda increased further. A large number of postcards, posters and popular prints portrayed not only the Japanese, but also the Chinese in a caricature format. At the same time, created visual images of the Russian soldiers and sailors were invariably positive.

At that period of time, visual images created by Japanese official propaganda and Japanese press were a kind of mirror reflection of what the Russian media did.

In conclusion, we can say that all the images described can serve as evidence of how at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Imperialist powers tried to brainwash their population and manipulate the public opinion of other countries to impose on them the views and stereotypes required.