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Communities of practice, impression management, and great power status: Military observers in the Russo-Japanese War

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Abstract
Military attachés and wartime observers have received surprisingly little attention in international relations. Why do states exchange attachés, permitting uniformed foreigners to gather intelligence on their territory and during their wars? To explain, we adopt a broadly practice-theoretic approach, focusing on the individuals who developed the role by living it, showing how they both innovated a distinct military practice and established institutional legitimacy for attachés. We address an early historical case in which the practice proliferated: the Russo-Japanese War, throughout which observers represented multiple European states, on both sides of the conflict. Sometimes termed the first modern war, the conflict saw Japan's entry into the Eurocentric great power system. In this context, embedded attachés had a dual effect. On the one hand, a professional attaché community established itself: we show how local innovation by embedded officers, in the context of this structurally destabilising event, permitted the creation of a new institutional role that might otherwise have been impossible. On the other, the Japanese made use of the attachés as witnesses for Western governments, observing their performance of great power-hood, as they defeated Russia. The argument has implications for understanding both the military attaché system and communities of practice as such.

Keywords: Military Attachés; Military Observers; Communities of Practice; Great Powers; Status

Introduction

Why have states, historically, exchanged military attachés and what significance does this practice hold for our understandings of international relations?[1] Attachés are military officers stationed as uniformed diplomats in foreign states or on the battlefields of wars to which they are third parties.

[1]Work on attachés is surprisingly limited. In military history, a lone monograph deals with them systematically. Alfred Vagts, *Military Attaché* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). Anderson terms it 'a somewhat disappointing and opinionated book but the only effort at a comprehensive study of a significant subject'. The latter is still true. An informal survey of military history reference works found only one with an entry, less than a page long. André Corvisier and John Childs (eds), *A Dictionary of Military History and the Art of War*, trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 51–2. Four others include none. Richard Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History from 3500 B.C. to the Present*, 2nd rev. edn (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986); Richard Holmes (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Military History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Edward Luttwak and Stuart L. Koehl, *The Dictionary of Modern War* (New York, NY: Harpercollins, 1991); Franklin D. Margiotta (ed.), *Brassey's Encyclopedia of Military History and Biography* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 1994). John Keegan's *Intelligence in War* includes no general account. *Intelligence In War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al Qaeda* (London: Hutchinson, 2003). In IR, Barkawi and Porter appear to be alone in taking them seriously unto themselves. Tarak Barkawi, '"Defence diplomacy" in North-South relations', International Journal, 66:3 (2011), pp. 597–612; Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009).

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They are thus gatherers of potentially sensitive technical and strategic information. In so doing, they fill an ambiguous or ambivalent role between warrior, diplomat, and spy, engaging in both diplomacy and potentially surreptitious information gathering. The practice has at times been characterised as 'sanctioned spying'.[2] How did states come to regard exchanging attachés – in wartime and peacetime alike – as a legitimate and desirable practice?

Drawing on work on communities of practice,[3] this article offers an exploratory account of military attaché use during the period in which it became a widespread and commonly accepted international practice. We aim to explain the phenomenon by looking at the localised interactions of attachés as a community. We do so in a moment of wartime use that saw military observers deployed in record numbers and for the first time to belligerent states explicitly beyond the 'Western core' of the Eurocentric state system. We focus on two mechanisms – one at the level of attachés themselves, as they came to instantiate and consolidate a professional community, and the other at the level of receiving states, showing powerful states have complex reasons for permitting foreigners to observe their military activities.

First, we show that in this context attachés themselves were implicated in driving their relatively rapid emergence, by thinking of and positioning themselves in the field as communities of practice dedicated to producing and disseminating military knowledge. Early attachés and wartime observers were often self-starters, who sought permission from their home states to observe, as much or more than being deployed on orders from above. Associating as communities of practice in host countries or theatres of war, they made themselves useful by both gathering and exchanging information about their host, thereby increasing the pool of intelligence available to their governments. Sharing information and bringing together expertise, they developed consensus assessments of difficult subjects. In periods of geopolitical and technological transition, such information was likely invaluable for third-party observer states. Military attachés as a community thereby directly participated in the process of defining themselves as a nascent profession.

Second, we argue that receiving states have had reasons of their own to encourage the practice. Host states receive military observers as a matter of diplomatic reciprocity – states received attachés so they could later send them. However, they have often also done so simply to be observed. By accepting attachés, host states could be seen engaging in respectable and effective military conduct – in effect, to be performing the role of a state, or even that of a great power. As witnesses to military activity, attachés could be expected to report back to their home states that their hosts had conducted themselves both properly and effectively. Put differently, attachés were received as audiences for status performances.[4] Performance allows states with marginal or parvenu international status to consolidate their perceived statehood. Historically, this may have been particularly important for non-Western states aiming to establish status in the otherwise Eurocentric international system.

We focus specifically on wartime military observers as a crucial subset of the phenomenon. As Maureen O'Conner Witter notes, 'wartime observation efforts … most directly stimulated the growth of the permanent attaché'.[5] The close quarters of wartime combat observation made

[2]Maureen O'Conner Witter, 'Sanctioned spying: The development of the military attaché in the nineteenth century', in Peter Jackson and Jennifer Siegel (eds), *Intelligence and Statecraft: The Use and Limits of Intelligence in International Society* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), p. 90.

[3]Emanuel Adler, 'The spread of security communities: Communities of practice, self-restraint, and NATO's post-Cold War transformation', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14:2 (2008), pp. 195–230; Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds), *International Practices* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[4]Recent work has shown that status is essentially relational – an actor has it to the extent its peers confer it by witnessing its enactment. Marina G. Duque, 'Recognizing international status: A relational approach', *International Studies Quarterly* (2018); Jonathan Renshon, 'Status deficits and war', *International Organization*, 70:3 (2016), pp. 513–50. On status and/as performance, see Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[5]Witter, 'Sanctioned spying', p. 91.

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transnational professional community building across diverse nationalities more likely and more intellectually productive. The emergence and consolidation of the attaché system – and use of military observers in particular – formed part of what Tarak Barkawi had called the 'globalization of Western forms of military discipline'.[6] In this way, the historically situated community of practice we focus on in this study provides an important case of the often-neglected 'cosmopolitan' or 'transnational' inflection of military organisation.

To probe the plausibility of these claims, we turn to a relatively early case of widespread and institutionalised observer use: the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05). The conflict pitted a large land empire from Europe's margins against a rising Asian naval power.[7] Japan won handily – soundly defeating its more 'Western' opponent, shocking European capitals, and signalling its rising great power status. The conflict was witnessed and documented by the largest and most nationally diverse deployment of military observers to that time by a significant margin, with over 80 officers from 16 countries observing by the war's end. We trace both the role these observers played and how they were received by both sides. To do so, we draw on a primary source base of official reports, memoirs, and personal reflections by the observers, alongside secondary historical research.[8]

We proceed in three stages. First, we set out the puzzle of the military attaché or observer. Second, we show theoretically how a communities of practice account helps to make sense of attachés. Third, we turn to the case, documenting the attaché community in the field, on the Japanese and Russian sides. We conclude by considering postwar consequences and assessing the importance of attachés for our understanding of world politics.

Military attachés and observers in historical perspective

We begin with the role of military attaché itself, which remains under-developed in IR. A military attaché or observer is an officer seconded to an overseas diplomatic mission or embedded with another state's armed forces.[9] Attaché usually refers to the embassy posting; observer to the wartime position. They gather information about military capacity and conduct for their home government. Attachés are, 'the quiet, unobtrusive, soldier-diplomats who collect and circulate information, intelligence, and opinion for the edification of their peers and superiors'.[10] They are neither strictly diplomats nor intelligence agents. They formally represent the interests of their government, but do not negotiate on its behalf. Nor are they strictly spies – their presence and purpose are accepted by their host. This has led to their characterisation by scholars as institutionalising a number of tensions: attachés must be both friends across borders and agents of their own government.[11]

[6]Tarak Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire: Indian and British Armies in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 279.

[7]The war has been the subject mostly of passing interest in IR, for example, Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 165, 173. The most important study dealing with observers, Porter focuses chiefly on the British, and on a critique of 'military culture' as a variable. Porter, *Military Orientalism*, pp. 85–110.

[8]See American, British, German, and other reports and memoirs cited below. Several of these national reports were published in multivolume editions after the war; General Staff (ed.), *The Russo-Japanese War: Reports from British Officers Attached to the Japanese and Russian Forces in the Field* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1907); Historical Section of the German General Staff, *The Russo-Japanese War*, trans. Karl von Donat (London: Hugh Rees, 1910).

[9]The role is thus distinct from trade, cultural, and other attachés, with whom they have in common only having been seconded to a foreign embassy by a particular national bureaucracy. Charles Wheeler Thayer, *Diplomat* (New York, NY: Harper, 1959), p. 123.

[10]Charles B. Burdick, 'The American military attachés in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen; Freiburg*, 0:2 (1989), p. 61.

[11]Vagts thus speaks of a 'double authority under which the service attaché seems to act'. Vagts, *Military Attaché*, p. ix. Another account refers to the practice as 'open military intelligence gathering'. Witter, 'Sanctioned spying', p. 90. Wark

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In basic form, the attaché observes and reports on military affairs, in peace and war. The role predates the label: while 'the nomenclature dates from the nineteenth century, the functions … are much older'.[12] It was practiced between a few major powers during the Napoleonic wars, but went by varied names and in apparently limited number.[13] From the late nineteenth century, it was rapidly institutionalised in Europe. The number of attachés globally rose tenfold, from 30 or so in 1870 to 305 in 1914, rising past 450 by 1936.[14] At the national level, the increase could be even more rapid: as late as 1888, the US had no attachés abroad; by 1914 it had 31.[15] Attachés had gone from an idiosyncrasy to a globally widespread practice.[16] Official preparation was limited as well: as late as the Second World War, US military attachés received only minimal or idiosyncratic training.[17]

Early observers often had wide latitude. In 1897, for example, the British officer-intellectual C. E. Callwell traveled to observe the Greco-Turkish War, largely on his own initiative. He secured permission from the War Office, 'subject to acting with a faultless discretion', but no specific instructions.[18] In 1947, while attached to the Kuomintang National Army, the French observer David Galula drove alone in a borrowed Jeep, through the no man's land of the Chinese civil war. He was detained by the communists twice – the second time for a week – gathering volumes of intelligence.[19] Early attachés and observers were often a self-motivated and entrepreneurial lot, creating the role for themselves to fill.

Attachés or military observers are sometimes subsumed under the categories of diplomat, consul, intelligence agent, and others besides. In historical practice, the role emerged autonomously, apart from intelligence agencies or civilian diplomatic services. Thus, Harold Nicolson's classic study *Diplomacy* raises military attachés only to differentiate them from diplomats as such.[20] While often found in diplomatic settings, their professional cultures and trajectories followed their uniforms. Referring to late nineteenth-century attachés, Matthew Anderson observes that 'These men were not diplomats … Military and naval attaches usually regarded their appointments merely as interludes in their service careers and often had little sympathy with the outlook and preoccupations of professional diplomats.'[21] Charles Wheeler Thayer notes attachés (military or otherwise) are 'seldom … career diplomats' who are 'almost invariably' seconded from their

summarises the interwar British variant as having 'to behave and think both as a soldier and as a diplomat (and on occasion as a spy); … to serve, simultaneously, two immediate superiors –the Director of Military Intelligence at the War Office, and the Ambassador'. Wesley K. Wark, 'Three military attachés at Berlin in the 1930s: Soldier-statesmen and the limits of ambiguity', *The International History Review*, 9:4 (1987), p. 587.

[12]Vagts, *Military Attaché*, pp. ix., 3.

[13]David Jones, 'Military observers, Eurocentrism and World War Zero', in David Wolff et al. (eds), *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 142–3.

[14]Vagts, *Military Attaché*, pp. 34, 68. See similarly estimates in Corvisier and Childs (eds), *A Dictionary of Military History and the Art of War*, p. 51. Ad hoc observation of wars by third-party military representatives appears to be somewhat older: 'Hardly a war between 1815 and 1914, in Europe or beyond the seas, escaped this neutral observation'. Vagts, *Military Attaché*, p. 261.

[15]Vagts, *Military Attaché*, pp. 33–4.

[16]See summary in Witter, 'Sanctioned spying', p. 90.

[17]Scott A. Koch, 'The role of US Army attachés between the world wars: Selection and training', *Studies in Intelligence*, 38:5 (1995), pp. 111–15.

[18]C. E. Callwell, *Stray Recollections* (London: Arnold, 1923), p. 46.

[19]A. A. Cohen, *Galula: The Life and Writings of the French Officer who Defined the Art of Counterinsurgency* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2012), pp. 68–70; David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1964), p. 35.

[20]Sir Harold George Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 236. Similarly, Platt's history of the British consular services and Sharp and Wiseman's volume on American diplomacy do not mention them. Desmond Christopher Martin Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British Consuls since 1825* (London: Longman, 1971); Paul Sharp and Geoffrey Wiseman (eds), *American Diplomacy* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2012). Kissinger mentions attachés strictly in passing. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 239, 366.

[21]Matthew Smith Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 130. In Germany, circa 1900, 'it was made clear that military attaches were subordinate not to the head of the mission of which they were

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respective departments or areas of government.[22] International law is largely silent on the practice.[23] Military observers in the field are further removed again from conventional diplomacy.

Nor however are they simply spies. As uniformed officers stationed abroad, they are received by host nations directly, presenting themselves without false pretenses, and exchange information with one another across boundaries of nationality. They collect information on the technical military capacity of their host states, but do so openly. 'For example, when military attachés attend another country's military exercises they are engaged in overt intelligence collection. The host government expects that the attachés will report the event and any relevant information from it to their own governments.'[24] They may coordinate with their national intelligence agencies, but are not on their staffs.[25]

The existence of attachés confronts us with a puzzle: why have states exchanged gatherers of sensitive military information, permitting them to operate on their soil? It is not especially puzzling that states *send* attachés to gather military intelligence. However, this does not explain why states institutionalised the *acceptance* of attachés and observers. Reciprocity offers a possible explanation, but does not tell us how states overcome incentives to defect – incentives that are considerable, in the face of core concerns about secrecy surrounding national defence and security. Attachés occupy their roles at the pleasure of their host states, requiring governments to trust one another to the extent of taking in sanctioned military intelligence gatherers. Yet states readily accept foreign attachés from non-allies. Indeed, before the Russo-Japanese war, Japan and Russia had exchanged them. Both hosted observers from their enemy's alliance partners throughout the conflict.[26] Inversely, even friendly or formally allied states collect intelligence on one another. Wartime observers were initially more common and collect even more sensitive information.[27] For these reasons, we focus on wartime observers specifically.

The timing of attachés' historical appearance is also striking. As L. W. Hilbert notes, the mechanisation of war, circa the end of the nineteenth century, made expert, technical intelligence collection newly useful and important.[28] The attendant bureaucratisation of war likely also increased both the volume of intelligence to collect and bureaucratic capacity to gather it.[29] Yet late the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century bureaucratisation and formalisation of military practice did not extend to attachés themselves: 'In a twentieth century world featuring increasing specialization, the military attaché remained a jack-of-all-trades.'[30] Indeed, the institutionalisation of

formally members but only to the kaiser himself' (p. 131). Anderson nonetheless emphasises the importance of the Russo-Japanese war to their institutionalisation (p. 130).

[22]Thayer, *Diplomat*, p. 123.

[23]They are mentioned only to specify receiving nations' right to approve them in Article 7 of the 'Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations' (1961). They go unmentioned in the 'Vienna Convention on Consular Relations' (1963).

[24]Nicholas Eftimiades, 'China', in Robert Dover (ed.), *Routledge Companion to Intelligence Studies* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 193; see similarly Len Scott, 'Human intelligence', in Dover (ed.), *Routledge Companion to Intelligence Studies*, p. 98.

[25]Inversely, an intelligence-gathering role differentiated military attachés from consuls. *John Dickie, The British Consul: Heir to a Great Tradition* (London: Hurst, 2008), pp. 88–9.

[26]Chiharu Inaba and Rotem Kowner, 'The secret factor: Japanese network of intelligence-gathering on Russia duing the war', in Rotem Kowner (ed.), *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–5: Volume I, Centennial Perspectives* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2007), p. 89; Bruce W. Menning, 'Miscalculating one's enemies: Russian military intelligence before the Russo-Japanese War', *War in History*, 13:2 (2006), p. 143; Haruki Wada, 'Study your enemy: Russian military and naval attachés in Japan', in David Wolff et al. (eds), T*he Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 13–44. On the hosting of enemy's alliance partners during the war – see below.

[27]Witter, 'Sanctioned spying', p. 91.

[28]L. W. Hilbert, 'The origins of the military attaché service in Great Britain', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 13 (1960), p. 330.

[29]The rise of the attaché further correlates with the late nineteenth-century emergence of national intelligence organisations in Europe – bureaucracies that had not previously existed. British military intelligence, for example, expanded rapidly circa the Boer War. Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York, NY: Random, 1979), pp. 572–3.

[30]Wark, 'Three military attachés at Berlin in the 1930s', p. 586.

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attachés reduced specialisation, as the ad hoc roles of wartime and peacetime observers were rolled into one.[31]

To explain, we draw theoretically from the literature on communities of practice. Empirically, we focus on a turning point in the role's expansion: the 1904–05 Russo-Japanese war, during which Western states deployed military observers in unprecedented numbers, to both sides of the conflict. We show Western observers formed distinctive professional communities and participated in innovating novel forms of international security practice. Their reports and observations appear to have shaped and conditioned the revised western assessments of both belligerents in the context of the conflict.

Attachés as epistemic communities of practice

We turn theoretically to the literature on communities of practice.[32] Communities of practice are 'like-minded groups of practitioners who are informally as well as contextually bound by a shared interest in learning and applying a common practice'.[33] Membership entails participation in its shared activities, assumptions, and tacit knowledge. Such professional communities may be enacted transnationally, even globally, as in Knorr Cetina and Bruegger's account of financial markets, and may have global stakes, as in Jasanoff's study of scientists as policymakers.[34] They may traverse state/non-state boundaries.[35] Communities of practice can be transformative, insofar as they 'contribute to the learning of new identities via the negotiation and reification of meaning'.[36] Our concern is with their capacity to instantiate themselves as producers of expert knowledge – what Emanuel Adler terms 'epistemic practical authority' – and the relationship they thereby construct with the wider social world.[37] By establishing transnational communities of practice, military observers justified themselves to their superiors as purveyors of practical military knowledge. For host states, attachés were prospective audiences for a performance of statehood, at a symbolically laden nexus of security, diplomatic, and intelligence-gathering activities.

The attaché professional community emerged at the end of the long nineteenth century, with a shared informational agenda, professional identity, and set of practices. To participate in it was to participate in a distinct form of military-diplomatic relations, one that contributed to enacting

[31]Witter, 'Sanctioned spying', p. 90. Some concessions were made to professionalisation. Where pre-Napoleonic military representatives were often aristocrats, by the late nineteenth century most attachés were non-aristocratic professional officers, trained in staff colleges and linked to military chains of command, not political dynasties. Jones, 'Military observers, Eurocentrism and World War Zero', pp. 145–7. Their duties remained loosely defined and largely discretionary.

[32]Adler, 'The spread of security communities'; Adler and Pouliot (eds), *International Practices*; Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The IR literature on communities of practice has grown rapidly – see, for example, Federica Bicchi, 'The EU as a community of practice: Foreign policy communications in the COREU network', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 18:8 (2011), pp. 1115–32; Patricia M. Goff, 'Public diplomacy at the global level: The Alliance of Civilizations as a community of practice', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50:3 (2015), pp. 402–17; Nina Græger, 'European security as practice: EU–NATO communities of practice in the making?', *European Security*, 25:4 (2016), pp. 478–501. On related epistemic communities, see Peter M. Haas, 'Introduction: Epistemic communities and international policy coordination', *International Organization*, 46:1 (1992), pp. 1–35; Mai'a K. Davis Cross, 'Rethinking epistemic communities twenty years later', *Review of International Studies*, 39:1 (2013), pp. 137–60.

[33]Adler, 'The spread of security communities', p. 196.

[34]Sheila Jasanoff, *The Fifth Branch: Science Advisers as Policymakers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger, 'Global microstructures: The virtual societies of financial markets', *American Journal of Sociology*, 107:4 (2002), pp. 905–50. While neither uses the language of community, both capture pools of experts, with global reach.

[35]Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams, 'Privatization in practice: Power and capital in the field of global security', in Adler and Pouliot (eds), *International Practices*, pp. 310–31.

[36]Adler, 'The spread of security communities', p. 201.

[37]Emanuel Adler, *World Ordering: A Social Theory of Cognitive Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 27.

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modern international political practice. Attachés were military professionals, loyal to both their states and professional identities. If, as Barkawi stipulates, soldiers in the modern world are subject to 'a cosmopolitan form of discipline' – a shared professional culture transcending national identities – attachés should be well suited to community building.[38] Deployed together for long periods, they found they had much in common, and much to learn from one another. The Russo-Japanese war was a (though not the only) landmark event in this process, in which this network was systematically instantiated at a single conflict.

If observers made themselves useful to their home states, their hosts found they had a use for them, too. Attaché acceptance was a way to enact participation in the elite international conduct of war and peace. To participate in the attaché system allowed states to publicly engage in 'performing' the modern international system.[39] Foreign military observers could bear witness to their competent combat performance as states, and often as great powers. We show that in the Russo-Japanese war, Japanese military elites adroitly engaged with the emerging attaché system as an opportunity to perform Japanese status as a fully-fledged, great power member of international society.

We focus on practice and communities of practice instead of Bourdieusian fields or other approaches, for two reasons.[40] First, we are more concerned with cooperation and community building than with the competition, contention, and conflict that field theory is commonly deployed to explain. While these phenomena could in principle be engaged with in field-theoretic terms, we argue an emphasis on community better foregrounds the aspects of the case we are most concerned with: community building and knowledge production among attachés or observers, and their apparent relationship with international change.[41] Second, our emphasis is on micro-level knowledge production, rather than the often-larger scales in which fields operate. We begin with a view from the ground, located at the micro level, and scale up. While fields may in principle be micro-scale as well, a focus on communities of practice locates analysis squarely at the interpersonal level.[42]

Our argument intersects in three ways with work on status and hierarchies. First, because sending and receiving attachés was initially a practice of great powers, to participate in the attaché system allowed states to signal elite status, through inclusion in the symbolic economy of great power relations. In the same way states accrue status by receiving embassies, to receive

[38]Tarak Barkawi, 'States, armies and wars in global context', in Julian Go and George Lawson (eds), *Global Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 64.

[39]Erik Ringmar, 'Performing international systems: Two East-Asian alternatives to the Westphalian order', *International Organization*, 66:1 (2012), pp. 1–25. Recognition-driven motives likely also shaped states' decision to send attachés. Doing so was a way to perform sovereignty, or – as in the ambivalent case of British Dominions Canada and Australia – autonomy. We limit ourselves here to the performances observers witnessed, rather than enacted.

[40]See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993). For an example of field analysis in world politics, see Julian Go, 'Global fields and imperial forms: Field theory and the British and American empires', *Sociological Theory*, 26:3 (2008), pp. 201–29.

[41]Thus one recent account in social theory mobilises fields as a general theory of social life. Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, *A Theory of Fields* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Because field and practice both belong to the Bourdieusian toolkit, the two are broadly consistent with one another. Ours is a choice of emphasis, not of theoretical exclusion.

[42]Similarly, we focus on practices rather than norms because we are concerned foremost with continually adjusted and often preconscious social activity, as against more formal, rigid, or systematic rules. This is consistent with recent developments in scholarship critical of norms talk. Pratt argues scholars should jettison norms as bounded entities, in favour of the '*normative configuration*, defined as an arrangement of ongoing, interacting practices establishing action-specific regulation, value orientation, and avenues of contestation'. Simon Frankel Pratt, 'From norms to normative configurations: A pragmatist and relational approach to theorizing normativity in IR', *International Theory*, 12:1 (2020), pp. 59–82. See similarly Antje Wiener, 'Enacting meaning-in-use: Qualitative research on norms and international relations', *Review of International Studies*, 35:1 (2009), pp. 175–93. More obliquely, a shift away from norms talk may help address concerns about Eurocentrism and the 'spread' of Western ideas. See the critique of norms talk in chapters in Charlotte Epstein (ed.), *Against International Relations Norms: Postcolonial Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2017).

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military attachés and observers serves to signal hierarchical standing.[43] As the system widened and became more formally institutionalised, states could signal status by sending and receiving more of them. In the Russo-Japanese war, two great power states with ambiguous status received especially large numbers of observers and Britain, the hegemon of the moment, sent the most. Second, because of their intelligence gathering function, attachés could be expected to report to their governments specifically on their hosts' good conduct. Receiving states acquitted themselves both *as* hosts, in the sense of respecting emerging diplomatic practices, and as great powers, in the sense of their conduct of war and peace befitting that status, understood in terms of rule observance and military effectiveness. In 1904, Japan was already powerful, having rapidly modernised and avoided the formal or informal colonialism imposed on its neighbours, but was also foreign to the European great power system. Japanese handlers ensured members of the attaché community were both well treated and witnessed a resounding Japanese victory.[44] The result was a recalibration of the perceived status hierarchy. Third, the community of practice itself was internally hierarchical, recognising authority derived from the status of one's nationality and from seniority. Much practice-theoretic work shows how the impact of individuals scales up within formal institutions, such as intergovernmental organisations.[45] We find similar effects in a relatively informal setting. Our account thus suggests linkages between micro-level social settings and macro-level international status hierarchies.[46]

Attachés in the Russo-Japanese War

We explore this theoretical account through a single focused case: that of military observer use by Western states during the Russo-Japanese War.[47] We focus on this case not because it was typical, but because it was an exceptionally strong case of wartime observer deployment in practice. This is an exploratory, theory-building exercise, not a test of generalisability.[48] We thus focus on a case that is neither the first instance of attaché exchange, nor a perfectly typical one. Instead, the Russo-Japanese war was a linchpin moment in the history of the practice: 'the most extensively observed war of the pre-1914 era'.[49] It presents an ideal juncture to cut in analytically and assess the scope of both the phenomenon itself and its potentially transformative effect. The case provides a strong basis in the historical record for considering the extent of attachés' potential impact

[43]Duque, 'Recognizing international status'.

[44]Research on status in IR understands status hierarchies in terms of relative 'positionality', taking status stratification as a point of analytical departure. Janice Bially Mattern and Ayşe Zarakol, 'Hierarchies in world politics', *International Organization*, 70:3 (2016), pp. 637–40. See, particularly, chapters in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014). We follow this literature in understanding status as social and relational: it does not reduce to relative military capacity, and is constituted through relations between states. Duque, 'Recognizing international status'; Renshon, 'Status deficits and war'. On perception and great power status, see William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Benjamin Zala, 'Great power management and ambiguous order in nineteenth-century international society', *Review of International Studies*, 43:2 (2017), pp. 367–88.

[45]Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Vincent Pouliot, 'Power in practice: Negotiating the international intervention in Libya', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:4 (2014), pp. 889–911; Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders*. As Pouliot shows, hierarchies can be durable at the individual level. While the status changes we document are somewhat incremental, they nonetheless represent considerable achievements. Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders*; Vincent Pouliot, 'Against authority: The heavy weight of international hierarchy', in Ayşe Zarakol (ed.), *Hierarchies in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 113–33.

[46]The case may thus help indicate how practices contribute to international change. Ted Hopf, 'Change in international practices', *European Journal of International Relations* (2017).

[47]We draw on a combination of communities of practice and Bourdieusian practice theory. See methodological guidelines in Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, *International Practice Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 35–44, 51–9.

[48]On theory-building 'plausibility probes', see discussion in Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

[49]Rotem Kowner, *Historical Dictionary of the Russo-Japanese War* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), p. 236.

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on the international system. Here, we aim only to provide a configurational and thus case-specific account of the wartime community and related systemic effects. Attachés other involvements in other contexts are grist for future research.[50]

A practice-oriented account calls for a broadly abductive approach, with the balance of focus on induction rather than deduction. Put differently, it calls us to start chiefly with the data. We draw on a mix of primary and secondary sources that provide access to the empirical base of textual evidence necessary in such a historical context to 'offer a window onto enacted practices'.[51] The historical distance of our case presents methodological constraints in terms of data, which is confined to material available through existing primary sources and existing analysis of them.[52] At the same time, the observers produced a trove of texts documenting their experiences and impressions, texts that shed considerable light on the self-understandings underlying their roles and activities. We proceed by surveying the published memoirs and official reports of Western observers of the war. In taking up memoirs, we follow Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger in treating these texts as 'ego-documents' with a particular import for understanding and interpreting the activities undertaken by individuals.[53] Official reports focus more directly on technical aspects of military life. They also contain records of activities that can be used to unearth and foreground micro-practices of community building, highlighting informal rules and practices of sociality. These reports are publicly available and offer remarkable insights into the intentions, expectations, and interpretations of the military observers themselves. We emphasise British and American observers, as two complementary vantage points. The British sent the largest delegation, and thus offer extensive access to practice. The Americans were newcomers to the attaché game, and were forced to think consciously and write about what their European peers took for granted. They thus provide a *parvenu* perspective on pre-established practice. We supplement with other reports – chiefly German – as well as existing historical scholarship.

The attachés were uniformly white and male, and defaulted to a strongly Eurocentric worldview – it was this view that Japanese elites laboured to overcome. While the community itself was deeply Western, we focus beyond it, attending to the involvement of non-Europeans and their role in producing and transforming world order. In this sense, ours is not a story about the spread of a presumptively European international system or society.[54] It is the story of complex interactions between that system and other parts of the world, by way of attending to the micro-level activities and mediation of knowledges involved with those interactions and their outcomes. Put differently, this is not a macro-level account of expansion – it is a contextual reconstruction of transformation or integration, and the localised negotiations and revisions implicated in it.

The case below proceeds as follows. We begin by framing the war itself. We then identify and delineate the observer community. From there, we turn to their relations with, first Japan, and

[50]For configurational or analyticist research methods, and an explanation of their case-specific use, see Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 123–70.

[51]Vincent Pouliot, 'Methodology: Putting practice theory into practice', in Rebecca Adler-Nissen (ed.), *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 49.

[52]These constraints are not insurmountable. See discussion of ethnographically oriented historical research in Joseph MacKay and Jamie Levin, 'Hanging out in international politics: Two kinds of explanatory political ethnography for IR', *International Studies Review*, 17 (2015), pp. 171–7.

[53]See discussion of 'ego-documents' in Bueger and Gadinger, *International Practice Theory*, p. 151.

[54]Such Eurocentric readings are often associated with the English School. For their standard articulation of the expansion of international society, see, for example, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). See an English School critical reconstruction in Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (London: Routledge, 2009). For recent revised English School accounts, see Timothy Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit (eds), *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also Andrew Phillips, *War, Religion and Empire: The Transformation of International Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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second, Russia. Finally, we consider the postwar impact of the experience for the profession, Japan, Russia, and the broader Eurocentric international system. We aim to show, both that a community of practice existed, and that the community was treated differently on the two sides of the war. Japanese authorities were motivated to demonstrate their status as a European-style great power, and consequently both treated the observers lavishly and ensured they witnessed a resounding Japanese victory. Russia enjoyed greater status as a result of prior historical participation in the dynamics of the Eurocentric state system. However, the observations of attachés – and the broader outcome of the war itself – led to a considerable revision of this assessment. The attaché community provided on-the-ground data that was available to orient and give shape to contemporary understandings of the unanticipated Russian defeat and Japanese victory in the conflict.

The Russo-Japanese War, 1904–05

The Russo-Japanese war has been termed 'World War Zero': a globally significant conflict, between powers from different regions, and involving unprecedented technology and mechanisation by a non-European belligerent.[55] It was the only great power war of the long nineteenth century fought wholly outside Europe, and the only one won by a non-European people against Europeans.[56] It signalled Japanese entrée into the Western great power system, yielding the only major empire built by non-Europeans during the period. Yet as a testament to the ambivalent status of this moment in international politics, Japanese success in the conflict was also celebrated by anticolonial and nationalist intellectuals throughout the non-West.[57] It was a multiply transformative event.

Japan's military engagement was its largest before the Second World War. A million Japanese served in the army alone; almost 90,000 from the army and navy died. Beyond the significant human cost, the country went significantly into debt to pay for the war effort. Victory became a major source of prestige and national pride.[58] Linked to significant colonial industrialisation, Japanese-occupied Manchuria became 'the most lucrative railroad colony in history and a center of gravity for the whole economy of northeastern China'.[59] But perhaps more crucially for our purposes, Japanese victory helped to reshape European attitudes towards Japan.[60] The French attaché in Tokyo, in 1898, saw the Russians as 'greatly superior' to the Japanese. In 1902, the British military representative thought much the same. The war reshaped these attitudes. It concomitantly destabilised Russia's European standing. Western powers, to varying degrees, viewed Russia as imperfectly European, but certainly as more so than Japan.[61] Russian defeat shocked

[55]John W. Steinberg, 'The operational overview', in John W. Steinberg, Bruce W. Menning, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David Wolff, and Shinji Yokote (eds), *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 106.

[56]Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 124.

[57]Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 71.

[58]Sandra Wilson, 'The Russo-Japanese War and Japan: Politics, nationalism and historical memory', in David Wells and Sandra Wilson (eds), *The Russo-Japanese War in Cultural Perspective, 1904–05* (New York, NY: St. Martin's, 1999), pp. 160–1. The Japanese also revolutionised wartime medicine, reducing 'their losses through disease to a quarter of the number killed in battle' – in an era when soldiers were more likely to die of illness than violence. Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, p. 194.

[59]Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, p. 445.

[60]On the observers' conclusions, see sources in Porter, *Military Orientalism*, pp. 229–30, fns 4–7; John Ferris, 'Turning Japanese: British observation of the Russo-Japanese War', in John W. M. Chapman and Chiharu Inaba (eds), *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–05: Volume II, The Nichinan Papers* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2007), pp. 122, 128–9.

[61]Iver B. Neumann and Vincent Pouliot, 'Untimely Russia: Hysteresis in Russian-Western relations over the past millennium', *Security Studies*, 20:1 (2011), pp. 105–37. In the racialised hierarchy of the nineteenth-century international system,

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Europe and cast doubt on Russia's imperial standing. The war was among a series of reversals that 'wrecked the regime's legitimacy and resulted in domestic turmoil', which subsequently gave rise to the failed revolution of 1905.[62] Russian expansion into East Asia was a gamble that went badly. Its aims in the region were thwarted for decades.

The war began in February 1904, instigated by Japan, and lasted 19 months. The primary action consisted of a Japanese siege of Port Arthur (a Russian-controlled city in Manchuria, leased from China), an early battle at the Yalu River, on the Korean border, a major battle at Mukden (lasting 13 months, and implicating 600,000 combatants – the largest globally before the world wars), and a concluding naval battle in the Tsushima strait, separating Korea and Japan.[63]

The attaché community

By the turn of the twentieth century, Japan had already extensively adopted the practice of sending military attachés abroad, having stationed them in Sweden, Russia, China, Germany, Britain, Austria-Hungary, Korea, and the United States.[64] Russia also participated in the European attaché system. Observer deployments to the 1904–05 war were historically large, with two distinct attaché communities emerging, on either side of the conflict.[65] Russia received a total of 27 officers as observers.[66] Britain and its dominions sent 15 officers to the Japanese side alone – as many observers as were sent by the other major powers combined.[67] Japan and Britain were allied at the time, which no doubt shaped these numbers – however, most major powers deployed observers to both sides. More strikingly, France, a military ally of Russia, was also permitted to deploy observers to Japan; British observers were equally accepted by Russia, despite the Anglo-Japanese alliance.[68] On the Russian side, they were joined by the other European great powers, as well as 'delegates from such smaller European states as Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, and neutral Switzerland, as well as the trans-Atlantic United States and Argentina'.[69]

The two communities of military observers on each side of the war were, by all appearances, quite similar to one another. Both became close-knit. Many observers were already well acquainted, having been posted to other countries together in peacetime. In many respects, they belonged to a global military elite.[70] Bound by professional skill and duty, they recognised shared social hierarchies and unofficial rules of good conduct. On the Russian side of the war, once stationed with Russian troops,

proximity to Europe and to whiteness signalled presumptive superiority. Alexander D. Barder, 'Scientific racism, race war and the global racial imaginary', *Third World Quarterly*, 40:2 (2019), pp. 207–23; Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 118–25.

[62]Dominic Lieven, *The End of Tsarist Russia: The March to World War I and Revolution* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2015), p. 65.

[63]For a synoptic overview of operations, see Steinberg, 'The operational overview'.

[64]Inaba and Kowner, 'The secret factor', p. 89.

[65]Accepted standards of conduct required they be separate: moving observers between sides would produce the appearance of passing information. Vagts, *Military Attaché*, p. 261.

[66]Lieutenant-General A. A. Ignatyev, *A Subaltern in Old Russia*, trans. Ivor Montagu (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1944), p. 171.

[67]Ferris, 'Turning Japanese', pp. 119–20.

[68]General Staff (ed.), *The Russo-Japanese War*, vol. 3; John J. Pershing, *My Life before the World War, 1860–1917: A Memoir*, ed. John T. Greenwood (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), p. 229. Russia's welcome of British military observes is all the more striking given that the UK had actively contemplated taking a more direct role in the conflict. Indeed, both the cases of the Anglo-Japanese and Franco-Russian alliance included provisions for military support in the event of a wider conflict.

[69]Jones, 'Military observers, Eurocentrism and World War Zero', pp. 155–6.

[70]That elite status likely reflected upper class backgrounds. The Canadian observer was credentialed with little more than an elite boarding school education, a commission, and a letter from the Prime Minister. Directorate of History, 'Canada's First Military Attaché' (Ottawa: Canadian Forces Headquarters, 1967), pp. 5–6.

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> they immediately created their own autonomous, corporate diplomatic community which, despite their individual nationalist rivalries, fully reflected the transnational society of the day. In so doing, the attachés imposed their own sense of the appropriate protocol in a manner that was perhaps unique in the history of such attaché-observers.[71]

The British representative, Lieutenant General Sir Montagu Gerard, most senior by rank, became a recognised community leader.[72] On the Japanese side, attachés were similarly sociable with one another: 'Given their diverse national mix, the degree of corporate comradeship that the attachés developed is remarkable. The German Eberhard von Tettau recalled that his mission had "especially friendly relations" even with their traditional opponents, "their French comrades"'.[73] This informal sociability helped shape the attaché community. While the community was hierarchical, and often formal, the frequently acknowledged social interactions of observers formed the constitutive context to their associative behaviour and sense of group solidarity.[74]

The American observer (and later General of the Armies) John Pershing remarked in his subsequent memoirs that

> We were a friendly lot and often exchanged information and observations. We also had good times together, taking rides within our restricted sphere and entertaining each other. Each group of officers whose country's national day happened to come when we were together gave a banquet in honor of the occasion, and we all drank to the health of his sovereign or chief of state.[75]

Two Americans on the Russian side, Walter Schuyler and Carl Reichmann, did not fit in as well. They arrived speaking no language other than English and were full of unsolicited advice for their more senior peers. Whatever their flaws, however, the Americans were concerned to learn the informal practices of the profession, and to report them to their superiors back home. Reichmann's report recorded and commented at length on the rules of propriety and informal protocols of the attaché community. He noted 'the man who could talk constantly about no matter what and take part in all conversation, whether or important or not, was always persona grata'.[76] He devoted an entire subheading of his report to ceremonies, for which dress uniforms – up to and including swords – were an unspoken requirement.[77] In contrast, British reports make only passing references to other attachés, and almost none to the community as such.[78] They had little need to explicitly document its customs and expectations, being already near the top of its social hierarchy.[79]

[71]Jones, 'Military observers, Eurocentrism and World War Zero', pp. 154–5.

[72]Vagts, *Military Attaché*, p. 262.

[73]Jones, 'Military observers, Eurocentrism and World War Zero', p. 156.

[74]On informal sociability in diplomatic settings, see Deepak Nair, 'Sociability in international politics: Golf and ASEAN's Cold War diplomacy', *International Political Sociology* (2019).

[75]Pershing, *My Life before the World War, 1860–1917*, p. 229.

[76]Carl Reichmann, 'Report of Capt. Carl Reichmann, Seventeenth Infantry, Observer with the Russian Forces', in War Department (ed.), *Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), vol. 1, p. 102.

[77]Much the same is true of Schuyler. Walter S. Schuyler, 'Report of Lieut. Col. Walter S. Schuyler, General Staff, Observer with the Russian Army', in War Department (ed.), *Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War*, pp. 101–02. Reichmann also reported all arriving observers were to call on those of other nationalities already present: 'This prompt call is semi-official and semi-social, is *de rigeur,* and should not be shirked.' Reichmann, 'Report of Capt. Carl Reichmann', p. 175.

[78]General Staff (ed.), *The Russo-Japanese War*.

[79]Some states sent attachés to signal their membership in the international system. Canada sent its first ever military observer, H. C. Thacker, with the British, to Japanese forces. Directorate of History, 'Canada's First Military Attaché'. Canadian officials debated how his deployment signalled ambiguous status as a dominion of the British Empire. See J. MacKay

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The observers shared information.[80] They discussed the specifics of battlefield and other wartime conduct and sometimes produced consensus views of ambiguous or informationally difficult matters.[81] They did not appear to habitually conceal information from one another.[82] As a result, the concentration of nationalities yielded information not just about the war and the armies fighting it, but also about the armies delegating observers. One of the Americans noted that 'The attaches of the several countries differed very much in their equipment, giving a good opportunity for comparison of the different systems.'[83] The extent of information sharing was such that William Judson, an American attaché deployed among the Russian attaché contingent, flagged it in his official report as a potential problem for operational security going forward.[84] These concerns were expressed only after the war and likely little shaped it, but indicate the extent to which information circulated freely among the observers.

Communal life extended to discipline. When the two Swiss observers on the Russian side casually predicted Russian surrender within earshot of their hosts, representatives from neutral countries engineered their recall by their home government.[85] The point was not that they were wrong – by this time, the others shared a dim view of Russian efforts and prospects – but that observers could not be seen to conduct themselves in this way (nor the community be seen to tolerate it). Similarly, Gerard, the senior British officer, had his own subordinate, Major J. M. Home, sent back to London, apparently on the basis that his garrulous conduct offended their hosts. Per the Russian officer who hosted them, he 'was a jolly, sprightly fellow and immediately put himself on back-slapping terms with the junior representatives of the other countries, treating me as well without ceremony'.[86] While their Russian host appeared have taken no offense, Gerard seems to have viewed his junior's behaviour as inappropriate to professional and communal standards.[87]

In short, the community functioned not unlike any social circle of diplomats. There was formality, friendliness, and social hierarchy reflecting both domestic-organisational and international hierarchy, and norms of good social conduct – norms cast in relief by the odd fit the Americans made of themselves. The community nonetheless differed in several important respects. Their work was focused on substantive military matters that were by their nature sensitive. They pooled technical information predicated in part on their own military expertise. They

Hitsman and Desmond Morton, 'Canada's first military attaché: Capt. H. C. Thacker in the Russo-Japanese War', *Military Affairs*, 34:3 (1970), pp. 82–4. The Australian observer, John Charles Hoad, seems also to have been sent for largely political reasons. Ferris, 'Turning Japanese', p. 120; Kowner (ed.), *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–5*, p. 148.

[80]E. Agar, 'Russian and Japanese field defences', in General Staff (ed.), *The Russo-Japanese War*, p. 633; for example, Joseph E. Kuhn, 'Report on Russo-Japanese War', in War Department (ed.), *Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War*, pp. 124, 143, 217, 221.

[81]Agar, 'Russian and Japanese field defences', p. 635; for example, Valery Havard, 'Report of Col. Valery Havard, Assistant Surgeon-General, U.S.A., Observer with the Russian Forces in Manchuria', in War Department (ed.), *Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 32; William V. Judson, 'Report of Capt. William V. Judson, Corps of Engineers, Observer with the Russian Forces in Manchuria', in War Department (ed.), *Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 173.

[82]The extent of information sharing was such that William Judson claimed that 'Military attaches are less dangerous only than war correspondents. Many of them will be ill disposed for one reason or another. Some will try to "make records" in getting out information, and some may even try covertly to furnish information to the press.' Judson, 'Report of Capt. William V. Judson', p. 162. See discussion of squabbles in Ferris, 'Turning Japanese', p. 120.

[83]Schuyler, 'Report of Lieut. Col. Walter S. Schuyler', p. 105. He went on to describe the other attachés' kit in detail: notebooks, map cases, dispatch boxes, measurement tools, and so on (pp. 105–06).

[84]Judson, 'Report of Capt. William V. Judson'.

[85]Vagts, *Military Attaché*, p. 262.

[86]Ignatyev, *A Subaltern in Old Russia*, p. 173.

[87]Jones, 'Military observers, Eurocentrism and World War Zero', p. 156. Though, see Waters, Home's successor, who claimed he merely took ill and returned home. Waters would later succeed Gerard, who died of pneumonia in 1905, before the war's end. W. H. H. Waters, *'Secret and Confidential': The Experiences of a Military Attaché* (London: John Murray, 1926), pp. 287, 298.

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also did *not* serve ambassadorial or consular functions, for there were none to be undertaken here. In short, theirs was a distinctive role, and they formed a distinctive community – one that did not easily reduce to existing social categories.[88]

Attachés and the Japanese military

European observers attached to the Japanese armed forces typically arrived with orientalist views, and saw their hosts as especially other. The Japanese subjected them to varying strategies of control, emolument, and constraint, managing their activities and perceptions much more extensively than the Russians did. This in turn seemed to reflect a deliberate Japanese concern with appearances, as outsiders to a European dominated international system.

The Japanese treated their Western guests with extravagance and a good deal of formal (though evidently merely symbolic) deference. Visiting observers reported multiple official functions, lavishly catered. Ian Hamilton, a British observer, noted that 'The banquets are frequent to properly accredited foreigners; too frequent, indeed, for the taste of quiet folk.'[89] He later described at length an evening of food, drink, and comic theatre, put on in the presence of a visiting Japanese prince.[90] Pershing's experience was similar: 'The first night we were there we were given a feast consisting of sardines, pâté-de-foie-gras, chicken and mushrooms, eggs, bacon, and coffee, after which all hands slept soundly.'[91] On King Edward VII's birthday, in November 1904, during fighting at Port Arthur, a Japanese field marshal sent the British observers a case of champagne and a congratulatory note.[92]

The purpose of all this was not only to impress their guests, but also to pacify them, often while curtailing their access to the front. Japanese officials prevented the British delegation from reaching the front until the summer of 1904 –'when the war was half over', or so the British thought – producing considerable frustration.[93] Denied first-hand access to the battlefield, the Westerners fell back on orientalist clichés.[94] A British journalist wrote home that 'The Japanese were silent as sphinxes, patient as the pyramids, impenetrable as the Sahara.'[95] A Canadian observer deployed with the British complained that 'until a thing is accomplished, nothing is heard about it & and not necessarily even then'.[96] Only when Japanese armies landed on the Manchurian mainland in May did the situation begin to change. Even these restrictions impressed some observers, in terms of both strategic reasoning and rigor of execution:

> One of the most striking things in connection with this war has been the way in which Japan has handled the question of the censorship. There can be no doubt that the standard set in this war has furnished an object lesson which will be represented to all the great powers by

[88]They also differed from civilian diplomatic communities in being entirely male. In European diplomacy, the role of spouses, traditionally wives, was central. On gender and diplomacy, see chapters in Jennifer A. Cassidy (ed.), *Gender and Diplomacy* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[89]Ian Hamilton, *A Staff Officer's Scrap-Book* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), p. 28.

[90]Ibid., pp. 153–9.

[91]Pershing, *My Life before the World War, 1860–1917*, p. 226.

[92]C. M. Crawford, 'Diary of the Officers attached to the Third Japanese Army from 29 July 1904 to the Fall of the Fortress', in General Staff (ed.), *The Russo-Japanese War*, p. 395.

[93]Ferris, 'Turning Japanese', p. 121.

[94]See extended discussion in Porter, *Military Orientalism*.

[95]Quoted in Jones, 'Military observers, Eurocentrism and World War Zero', p. 152.

[96]Quoted in Hitsman and Morton, 'Canada's first military attaché', p. 83. Not bound by the rule to observe one side only, some journalists decamped to the Russians. Reporters were not much liked by the observers. The American observer Judson noted that 'In my opinion the only safe way to deal with this question is to give out information through some official channel, at the capital of the country, on a sufficiently liberal scale to satiate public curiosity … [A]ny determination to prevent correspondents from accompanying the field army would be so unpopular as to be impracticable.' Judson, 'Report of Capt. William V. Judson', p. 162.

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> their attaches in the field in such a way as to make some similar method a necessity in all future wars.[97]

The Japanese had not merely succeeded at wartime management of military observers, they had set the standard for so doing.

The Japanese impressed their guests systematically with the efficiency and good order of their operations. The British were keen on Japanese organisation and achievement in general.[98] An American attaché reported that 'All the foreign observers were of one accord in their estimate of the Japanese artillery' as 'excellent'.[99] Moreover, the polite refusal to provide information seems to have fallen away, once attachés were put to field with Japanese troops in Manchuria. Observing alongside Pershing, Edward McClernand reported that

> On taking our leave next morning, Lieutenant-General Nishijima said he was sorry we had been exposed to such inclement weather, and trusted we had derived some satisfaction from the march in spite of the rain, adding that he hoped to see us again and that he would take pleasure in giving us all the information in his power. I wish to emphasize this conversation in view of the reported experiences had by attaches on other occasions, and to call attention to the fact that on the march mentioned we were allowed to mix with the troops about as freely as were their own officers.[100]

McClernand thus acknowledged prior Japanese efforts to courteously sequester the observers, but also the effectiveness of subsequent Japanese handling of the observer experience at the front – which was actually quite curated – in an atmosphere of putative access and openness. They thereby countered any prior negative perceptions. The Japanese were, in short, effective managers of Western impressions.

European and American respect for the Japanese was by no means a given. Even setting orientalism aside, the British naval attaché in Tokyo, in 1902, reported

> It is an unpleasant fact that among Europeans out here it is the practically unanimous opinion that the value of the Japanese army as a fighting force is much overrated, in short that they have won their reputation very cheap, and that at the first shock with European troops they would 'crumple up'. I cannot speak of that of my own knowledge, but it is the opinion of our military attaché, and according to him, of all the foreign attachés.[101]

This belief was not universal: another British official thought 'the Japanese infantry in time of war are second to none in the world'.[102] Still, prewar European opinions of Japanese military capacity were uneven at best. This perception was no accident. Porter notes that 'Japan had deliberately concealed the strength of its forces, shielding information from foreign military attaches, thus enabling Russia to underestimate them.'[103] The war itself corrected the record, in a way consistent with Japan's strategic interests as a rising power.

[97]Peyton C. March, 'Reports of Capt. Peyton C. March, General Staff, Observer with the Japanese Army', in War Department (ed.), *Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 55.

[98]For example, Agar, 'Russian and Japanese field defences', p. 633.

[99]Kuhn, 'Report on Russo-Japanese War', p. 35. See similarly Edward J. McClernand, 'Report of Lieut. Col. Edward J. M'Clernand, First Cavalry, Observer with the Japanese Forces in Manchuria', in War Department (ed.), *Reports of Military Observers Attached to the Armies in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War*, p. 82.

[100]McClernand, 'Report of Lieut. Col. Edward J. M'Clernand', p. 94.

[101]Troubridge, quoted in Ferris, 'Turning Japanese', p. 129. On 'military orientalism', see Porter, *Military Orientalism*.

[102]MacDonald, quoted in Ferris, 'Turning Japanese', p. 129.

[103]Porter, *Military Orientalism*, p. 93.

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In sum, the Japanese appear to have worked hard to establish a strong national reputation, and to have succeeded in so doing. Broadly, the observers were impressed with the Japanese when they denied them information, were doubly so when they furnished it, and appreciated Japanese battlefield conduct once they had access to it. That impression no doubt resulted from Japanese battlefield effectiveness itself – they defeated the Russians soundly – but also from extensive and at times elaborate efforts to impress and satisfy their observer guests, likely relying on them to report as much to their capitals.[104]

Attachés and the Russian military

Matters were different on the Russian side. The Russians knew that Europeans saw them as somewhat foreign, but thought of themselves as considerably more European than the Japanese.[105] Count A. A. Ignatyev, who was assigned to host Western observers at the Manchurian front, spoke some European languages, but had no prior experience of the attaché system. He was unexpectedly assigned to manage the foreigners, on his arrival, with instructions to 'take care of everything … but be economical'.[106] The Russian officers were friendly with their guests, regarding them as colleagues. Attaché communal life extended to a good deal of informality, and often included Russian officers: 'This group's real center of social activity was the smoky bar at the buffet at the Liaoyang railroad station. There the observers mixed more freely with each other, as well as with Russian officers and civilians, and kept track of news and rumors.'[107] The Russians were friendly and professionally at ease with their guests in a way the Japanese could not easily be.

Nonetheless, the Russians came to be seen with disdain: their military operations were less efficient and effective than the Japanese. They lost the war, the observers retrospectively concluded, in part on account of these weaknesses. American observers were sceptical from early on of both Russian war efforts and Russian management of Western observers. Peyton March, an American observer with the Japanese, reported that captured Russian wounded

> were always questioned by the attaches with this column who speak Russian. These captives were in nearly every instance surprised by the Japanese point, and their accounts gave a very unfavorable impression of the manner in which the Russians were conducting their service of security and information, while that of the Japanese was characterized by alertness and snap.[108]

On first observing live fire on the front lines he noted the Russians were more poorly equipped and less well trained.[109] The Russian censorship regime struck the British as unremarkable and poorly implemented.[110] A German observer noted that 'The carelessness in the handling of things which it is absolutely necessary to keep secret is a fault to be frequently noticed with the Russians.'[111] German observers also took a dim view of General Aleksei Kuropatkin, who led the Russian war effort, whom they viewed as a dogmatic and ineffectual

[104]Before the war, foreign attachés were 'carefully "shepherded"' in Tokyo. *Colonel Charles Ross, An Outline of the Russo-Japanese War 1904, 1905* (London: Macmillan, 1912), p. 83.

[105]Thus, Dostoyevsky could write, in 1881, that 'In Europe we were only poor recipients of charity and slaves, but we come to Asia as masters. In Europe we were Tatars, but in Asia we are also Europeans. Our mission, our civilizing mission in Asia will entice our spirit and draw us thither once the movement has gained momentum.' Quoted in Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Harlow: Longman, 2001), pp. 207–08.

[106]Ignatyev, *A Subaltern in Old Russia*, pp. 171–2.

[107]Jones, 'Military observers, Eurocentrism and World War Zero', p. 156.

[108]March, 'Reports of Capt. Peyton C. March', p. 7.

[109]Ibid., p. 14.

[110]W. H. H. Waters, 'General Report on the experiences of the Russo-Japanese War', in General Staff (ed.), *The Russo-Japanese War*, pp. 133–4.

[111]Historical Section of the German General Staff, *The Russo-Japanese War*, p. 370, fn. 1.

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micromanager.[112] They saw the Russian military leadership generally as parochial, poorly educated, and incompetent.[113] In contrast, they saw the Japanese as an effective military force.[114] Multiple German observers noted that 'the Japanese act while the Russians react'.[115] The food service experienced on the Russian side was also considerably more haphazard than with the Japanese. Some attachés commonly ate, drank, and recreated with their hosts; others were left more or less entirely to their own devices.[116]

The Russians appear to have made comparatively little effort to emolliate their guests, whether with food, drink, access to troops, or otherwise. These were small matters, but likely shaped how the Western observers saw their hosts. Russian treatment of attachés also reflected Russian efforts – or, rather, the lack thereof – to manage observers' impressions and expectations. As hosts to the attaché community constituted by Western military officers, the Russians saw themselves as presumptive peers, and thus made no overt effort to be seen succeeding.

Postwar consequences

The war ended officially with the Treaty of Portsmouth, mediated by US President Roosevelt. Victory marked Japan's arrival as both a great power and an empire. Defeating Russia allowed it to formally annex Korea, take over the lease on Port Arthur, and establish itself as the pre-eminent power in East Asia, at least as assessed by Europeans. For Russia, defeat was a shock and a humiliation, and precipitated revolt, contributing to the Russian revolution of 1905. For China and Korea, over whose territory Russia and Japan had fought, the war was a disaster. Like the Opium Wars, Sino-Japanese War, and Boxer Rebellion before, the Russo-Japanese War signalled the Qing Empire's decline. For Korea, already in Japan's sphere of influence, it precipitated formal Japanese annexation, in 1910.

Throughout the conflict, the observers constituted themselves as communities on the ground. For those securely inside the community, it became an important source of intelligence, professional observation, identity, and comradery. Those who did not fit were socially disciplined, excluded, or sent home. As a result, their status *as* observers was constituted not just through designation by their home governments, but also their relationships with one another. To be an attaché was to be a member of the community, and vice versa. The observer community in this war, and likely others, may well have shaped the profession thereafter.

The presence of military observers afforded Japan a chance to be seen playing the part of an imperial power, operating a robustly modernised, Western-style military and defeating a fellow great power in war. Observers' reports cannot have been the only signal to European capitals that Japan's status needed to be revised upward. At a minimum, European statesmen also had access to reams of journalism from the war testifying to both Japanese effectiveness and relative Russian ineptitude. Still, the observer reports were expert and official documents of the outcome and its causes, and likely shaped metropolitan views and those of government elites in national capitals. At the outset of the war, the British had viewed their Japanese allies through a deeply

[112]Kuropotkin appears to have taken no interest in the observers, mentioning neither them nor Ignatyev in his memoir of the war – despite having been an observer himself in his youth, with the French, in Algeria. A. N. Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army and the Japanese War*, ed. E. D. Swinton, trans. A. B. Lindsay (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1909), pp. 102–03.

[113]Oliver Griffin, 'Perceptions of Russia in German military leadership during the war', in Kowner (ed.), *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–5*, pp. 352–5.

[114]The Japanese Army was based on the German model, and the Germans saw the war as a test of it against Russia – a view that assumed a good deal of relative Japanese competence and effectiveness. Jones, 'Military observers, Eurocentrism and World War Zero', p. 169.

[115]Griffin, 'Perceptions of Russia in German military leadership during the war', p. 358.

[116]Reichmann, 'Report of Capt. Carl Reichmann', p. 174. Havard, also American, nonetheless offers a detailed and largely appreciative account of Russian military food and mess practices. Havard, 'Report of Col. Valery Havard', pp. 23–8.

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orientalist lens.[117] Afterward, Hamilton reported that 'the Japanese infantry are simply superb. There is none better in the world.'[118] In contrast, he had little good to say about their opponents: "The Russians are disappointing as soldiers. They seem to have absolutely no go or initiative and the men are not well trained as individuals & probably could not be really well trained as they have not the intelligence.'[119] His reports, and others like them for the governments of Britain, America, Germany, and beyond, explore the strategies, tactics, and mechanisation of the Japanese army at length. Kuhn, one of the Americans, summarised the consensus view among the observers that the Japanese armed forces were 'excellent'.[120] The formal cataloging of the experiences of military observers from third-party states underscores not only the increased bureaucratisation of national military establishments, but also the apparent importance ascribed to observer efforts in the field.

Though Western orientalist perceptions did not entirely clear, Japanese standing in Europe increased significantly.[121] Postwar British conceptions of Japan emphasised strength, grounded in a striking fusion of divergent ideals: Japan was imagined as both ancient and modern, as a martial culture capable of supporting commercial industry, as both deeply Eastern and increasingly Western.[122]

While it is more difficult to be sure from a single case, the observers' effectiveness likely also helped cement the attaché and observer system as an accepted international practice. As Adler observes, 'the diffusion of a practice entails not only the numerical or geographical enlargement of the group of agents who engage in it, but also the new agents' participation in a community of practice where learning takes place and meanings and identities are negotiated and transformed'.[123] The military observers were there to learn, both from one another and from their hosts. The Japanese could only be seen to perform the role of great power, and thereby to secure it in Western eyes, by ensuring Western observers had a well-managed and curated view of their resounding victory. The war thus involved an odd but remarkable convergence of interests between the Western observers, who consolidated a professional identity by their presence, and Imperial Japan, which had an interest in being seen to win the war.

Some Japanese elites seem to have wondered if all of this was worth the practical and moral price their country paid. After the war, one account noted that

> In the days when Japan was engaging in peaceful arts, the Westerners used to think of it as an uncivilized country. Since Japan started massacring thousands of people in the battlefields of Manchuria, the Westerners have called it a civilized country… if we have to rely on the odious glories of war to become a civilized country, we should happily remain barbarians.[124]

These reflections indicate the at times ambivalent reception within Japanese society of the high human and financial costs of the war. Entrée into European international society also proved provisional. In 1919, Japan lost its bid to include a clause against racism in the Covenant of the League of Nations.[125] Defeat in the Second World War meant Japan accommodating itself to

[117]Ferris, 'Turning Japanese', p. 122.

[118]Hamilton quoted in ibid., p. 131.

[119]Hamilton nonetheless allowed that 'They have however one very fine military quality. They are not easily discouraged or demoralized.' Ibid.

[120]Kuhn, 'Report on Russo-Japanese War', p. 35.

[121]Thus Porter finds British perceptions were orientalist, 'but not in the sense that they depicted the Japanese in a derogatory way … Their receptiveness to Japanese examples enabled them to rise above dismissive and racist attitudes.' Porter, *Military Orientalism*, p. 109.

[122]See discussion in Porter in ibid., pp. 229–30, fns 4–7.

[123]Adler, 'The spread of security communities', p. 196.

[124]Okakura Tenshin, quoted in Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire*, p. 175. The war was also a prominent focus of attention for Japanese pacifists. Wilson, 'The Russo-Japanese War and Japan', p. 161.

[125]Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001), pp. 316–21.

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the West in new ways.[126] Nonetheless, postwar Japan became a member in good standing of the (still Eurocentric) international system – the result of a long, tortuous process in which the events of 1904–05 played a considerable role.

Conclusion

This article has provided an exploratory account of military attachés in world politics. Focusing specifically on wartime military observers, we treat them as a transnational community of practice. The community emerged out of professional military circles in nineteenth-century Europe, developing a shared repertoire of ideas and practices. The observer communities of the Russo-Japanese war marked a milestone for the profession, in both scale and significance for international politics. The observers made themselves useful not just to their governments, by documenting an unexpected conflict outcome, but also to their Japanese hosts, by recording their victory and how they attained it.

For their part, the belligerents treated the attachés differently, and were differently motivated in so doing. Japanese authorities went to great lengths to make a good impression. Beyond winning, they laboured to ensure observers sent home positive accounts of them – allowing access where it made the best impression, and curtailing it elsewhere. In contrast, Russia handled observers unremarkably. Already included in the Eurocentric international system (albeit with reservations), the Russian military made limited efforts to impress observers. The results, in the attachés' reports, were clear. The Japanese not only won, they were reported as displaying greater battlefield effectiveness and as superior hosts, and thus better participants in the institution of attaché exchange.

This account contributes to understanding the micro-level dynamics of ordering and change. The attachés instantiated – temporarily and in micro – a defined community. That community generated longer-term order as well, helping to proliferate and consolidate the practice of attaché exchange. Put differently, the change scaled up. The use of attachés during the war was also indirectly implicated in transformation at a much larger scale: that of great power politics. Japanese victory produced entrée into the international system. The military observers reported to the European metropoles that controlled informal access to the great power system. While it is difficult to be sure of their full impact, these reports seem likely to have been implicated in the transformation of European attitudes towards Imperial Japan. Japan's elaborate treatment of its European guests looks to have been directed towards producing those changes. By extension, the attachés' community-building and information gathering activities and Japan's impression management work, appear implicated in world ordering – involving stability and change alike – on a large scale.[127]

This account also helps calibrate the scope and potential for community of practice building even under pressure of wartime exigencies. Communities of practice appear to extend to intelligence collection in times of war. Indeed, such communities may flourish under difficult conditions to which they are specifically adapted. Finally, it suggests that communities of practice may sometimes flourish because they are useful to those outside the community and their respective states, as vessels for disseminating preferred impressions of the events over which the community has epistemic authority. Here, the observer community, a product of the European great power system, had proven useful to outsiders trying to make their way in.

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[126]Zarakol, *After Defeat*.

[127]The case thus tracks with much recent work in practice scholarship, in refusing a strict disjunction between stability and change. This is not about order, but about order*ing*: about treating the production of stability and change as deeply related rather than divergent processes. See Adler, *World Ordering*; Bueger and Gadinger, *International Practice Theory*, pp. 100–06.

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