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## **Historical Sciences**

# **TASKS OF RUSSIAN NAVAL INTELLIGENCE IN CHINA IN THE EARLY XX CENTURY**

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## **Abstract**

The article examines the activities of Russian naval intelligence in China in the early twentieth century. After the defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, the Chinese government began in the early twentieth century to implement a program of reviving the navy. The Japanese provide effective support to the Chinese Naval Department in the construction of warships. However, attempts to create a combat-ready Chinese fleet were prevented by the nationwide crisis that unfolded in the country. I must say that China has not been able to claim the role of not only a world, but also a regional naval power. Despite the well-founded fears of the Russian Maritime Ministry, there were no military clashes with China in the early twentieth century on the seas and rivers. At the same time, Russian naval intelligence constantly collected information about the creation of the Chinese fleet and the internal situation in the neighboring state. It should be noted that the Russian Naval Ministry in the early twentieth century followed the attempts to create a Chinese fleet, but did not perceive China as the main threat at sea to the foreign policy interests of the Russian Empire.

**Keywords:** Russian Empire, Russian Maritime Ministry, naval agent, Japan, Chinese Navy, naval intelligence, China, naval affairs, national crisis, shipbuilding program, Amur River, Far East.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Russian naval intelligence in China faced a number of important tasks. [3, p. 168] First of all, even during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905 [30, p. 179] the Russian Maritime Ministry expressed legitimate concerns that China might act on the side of Japan as an ally. [10, p. 82]

During the fighting with Japan, the Russian Far Eastern press, citing articles in the French newspaper Figaro, argued for such a possibility. [2, p. 2] Especially since the Japanese side conducted an active propaganda campaign to unite all the peoples of Asia [4, p. 178] under the rule of the Japanese emperor against the colonizers from Western Europe. [1, p. 112] By the way, the Chinese authorities did not take measures to eliminate the Hunghuz gangs operating in the rear of the Russian army in Manchuria, [6, p. 121] explaining their inaction by the difficult internal political situation in the country. [8, p. 307].

It should be noted that Chinese neutrality throughout the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905 [11, p. 2] caused the Russian government reasonable concerns. [3, p. 2].

Naturally, the Russian side began to take measures against the likely Chinese expansion. [7, p. 718] First of all, in the Russian Far East, they began to strengthen the defenses of the Amur River [12, p.217] and create a military river flotilla on it. [31, p. 2] Then followed the preferential distribution of land plots in the Far Eastern region to former participants of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905 [5, p.210] And the land was given to both officers and lower ranks of the Russian armed forces. Preference was given to persons who had the Order of St. George or the insignia of the Order of St. George. [13, p. 2].

However, subsequent events have shown the groundlessness of fears of a military threat from China. [9, p. 119] Therefore, during the First World War, some of the ships of the Amur Flotilla were sent to the theater of operations.

## II. METHODOLOGY

To work on the scientific article, materials from the funds of the Russian State Archive of the Navy (RGA of the Navy) were used in the city of St. Petersburg. At the same time, the scientific article contains little-known publications of domestic authors.

The basis for the scientific article is the unshakable principle of historicism. This approach allows us to fully reveal the unexplored aspects of the activities of Russian naval intelligence in China at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The article uses a comprehensive approach that defines the logic of scientific research. The problem-chronological method helped to consistently present historical events. The method of historical reconstruction contributed to the restoration of the professional work of the Russian naval agent in China in the early twentieth century on the collection and systematization of intelligence information.

## III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Despite this, the presence of a small number of combat vessels in Vladivostok after the defeat in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904 – 1905 and the desire of the Chinese to create after the defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 indicated several promising areas for the Russian navy for further work.

For example, an employee of the Embassy in Beijing, state Councilor D. D. Pokatilov provided in the Russian Navy data on educational practices Chinese midshipmen on warships of the British Navy and the program of the courses of scuba diving in a special school in the city of Chefoo. [15, L. 1 – 2].

However, the diplomatic staff were not professional intelligence officers. Lieutenant A. N. Voskresensky was confirmed as a naval agent in China in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I must say that before being appointed to this responsible post, A. N. Voskresensky was for a number of years attached to the naval agent in Japan, Captain of the 2nd rank A. I. Rusin. He then took up the post of naval agent to Japan himself. After the mentioned appointment, his position began to sound like a naval agent in Japan and China.

It can be concluded that naval intelligence in China at the beginning of the twentieth century was carried out by a navy officer who had received serious professional training in providing secret operations and was familiar with the working conditions in the Far East. [18, l. 7 – 7ob].

As a result, in the documents of the Russian Maritime Ministry, a special English reference book issued on the personnel of the Chinese Fleet first appears. [15, l. 4].

At the same time, important information is transmitted: on the construction of the Chinese gunboat "Kiang-Yuan" at Japanese shipyards [17, l. 1], general plans for orders of Chinese ships at Japanese shipyards [17, l. 28 – 28].] with their subsequent refutation [17, l. 35], materials on the negotiations of the Japanese on the lease of railways on the terms of assistance in the program for the revival of the Chinese fleet [16, l. 1] and the navigability of the Chinese military river flotilla on the Amur River and its tributaries.

The main task of A. N. Voskresensky was to monitor the attempts to modernize the Chinese fleet. According to information obtained by the Russian side, the Chinese planned to spend about 22 million rubles on the national shipbuilding program in terms of Russian rubles. According to the testimony of the Russian naval agent in Japan and China, 20 provinces were taxed for the reform of the national fleet. [19, l. 2-3].

In November 1907, A. N. Voskresensky received intelligence about the formation of a special department in the structure of the Chinese Military Ministry, which was later to become an independent department. [20, l. 5-6].

The naval intelligence officer also drew attention to the training of Chinese midshipmen in the fleets of Germany, Great Britain and France. [20, l. 8] At the same time, the Russian Maritime Ministry was regularly provided with information about the organization of arsenals for storing weapons and Chinese naval schools and craft schools. [20, l. 10-11].

It should be noted that according to A. N. Voskresensky, the Chinese government only in 1910 adopted a program for the modernization of the national fleet [21, l. 1], which was recognized by many foreign experts as a very ambitious and poorly feasible project.

In the following year, 1911, a separate Chinese maritime ministry was created, headed by Prince Tsai-Xun. [21, l. 4] A. N. Voskresensky provided for the specialists of the Russian naval department its complete internal structure, which included the secret part, the minister's office and the economic department. [22, l. 5].

According to the report of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chinese government has also allocated substantial funds for the development of the Manchuria region. It was, first of all, about the cattle breeding of the region, support for forestry and agriculture, and the implementation of monetary reform [22, l. 6ob.]. The fact is that the Russian authorities were interested in the socio-economic situation in the area of the Chinese-Eastern Railway.

Soon, a list consisting of 19 coal mines and iron mines used for the needs of the Chinese navy was received from the naval agent in Japan and China [23, l. 5ob.]. A. N. Voskresensky also gave a list of 10 commercial Chinese steamship campaigns in his reports [23, l. 14-17], which allowed us to judge the possibility of attracting military transports and auxiliary cruisers during the fighting in the sea theater.

The grandiose plans for the transformation of the Chinese fleet were hindered by the revolution that had come in the country. The greatest place in his reports during the Chinese revolution, A. N. Voskresensky, who received the rank of senior lieutenant at that time, paid attention to the position of the command of the Chinese naval forces in relation to the unfolding events.

At the beginning of its activity on November 2, 1911, the naval intelligence officer reported that the crews of 16 ships of the Chinese navy located on the Yangtze River did not want to take an active part in the revolutionary movement. Subsequently, Senior Lieutenant A. N. Voskresensky wrote a detailed chronicle of the revolution in China for the Russian Naval Department.

The commander of the gunboat "Manchu", captain of the 2nd rank N. N. Sergeev, described the revolutionary unrest in the port of Hankou in sufficient detail in his report. In addition, he compiled a complete list of warships of Great Britain, Germany, the North American United States and Japan, standing with the gunboat "Manchu" on the same roadstead. The report was accompanied by a decree on the new Government of the Republic of China.

In connection with the revolutionary events in China, the Russian Maritime Ministry, fearing anarchy and anarchy in the state, by 1913 prepared a plan to repel the forces of the Siberian Flotilla and the ships of the Vladivostok port of attack from the sea from the eastern neighbor [14, d. 93, l.37].

Counterintelligence activities in the port of Vladivostok in the event of the outbreak of hostilities were to be carried out by the gendarmerie captain Fioshin seconded from the city of Khabarovsk [26, d. 31, l.13-14].

However, according to the authoritative opinion of Senior Lieutenant A. N. Voskresensky, during the revolutionary events in the Chinese navy, there was a final drop in discipline and combat training. In addition, the material part of the Chinese warships is either technically obsolete or has become completely unusable. Hence, the Chinese squadrons could not deliver even local problems to the Russian Empire in the Far East, not to mention the deployment of large-scale military operations at sea [14, l. 68].

Despite the above, the naval agent in Japan and China continued to send messages to the Russian Maritime Ministry on the following issues: instructions for combating spies in the Chinese navy, tactical and technical characteristics of the Chinese naval forces, information about the construction of coastal batteries, information about shipyards and factories [24, l. 2].

In the summer of 1913, Senior lieutenant of the fleet A. A. Nishchenkov, specially seconded to the Far East, gave several useful recommendations related to the deployment of an extensive intelligence network on Chinese territory. He highlighted the strategic and technical directions of the Russian naval intelligence in China [16, l. 1-2].

The expert of the Maritime Ministry called the objective difficulties for the organization of the intelligence network: the complexity of the Chinese language for teaching, the hostile perception of all representatives of European civilization by Chinese residents, and the difference in the appearance of Russians and Chinese.

In turn, according to a specialist in naval intelligence, the positive aspects were: the lack of a common national identity among the Chinese, anarchy in the Chinese state, the decisive role of foreigners in the ownership of Chinese capital, the abundance of foreign specialists in the Chinese navy and shipyards, the pro-Western sentiments of the large Chinese bourgeoisie and the poverty of the overwhelming number of residents in China [25, l. 4-5].

At the end of his report, fleet officer A. A. Nishchenkov emphasized the prospects for the formation of an intelligence network in China for the work of technical and strategic directions [25, l. 6].

During the First World War, the Chinese navy did not take hostile actions against Russia, but naval intelligence and the diplomatic service still observed the unsuccessful attempts of the Chinese government to implement the national program of shipbuilding of the navy [25, l. 4].

As a result, after the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905 [32, p. 415], the main task of Russian naval intelligence in China was to monitor the development of the Chinese shipbuilding program of the national fleet [29, p.210]. This program was a real comprehensive reform of the naval forces of the eastern neighbor [27, p. 102]. It covered naval education, fleet modernization, ministry organization, and the construction of coastal batteries. In addition, the Chinese planned to significantly upgrade the shipbuilding and other factories used for the needs of the fleet.

Naturally, given the insignificant capabilities of the Siberian Flotilla in the Far East, the Russian Maritime Ministry experienced serious concerns about the Chinese threat from the sea [28, p. 227].

The Chinese revolution caused the Russian government additional anxiety. The Russian Maritime Ministry assumed that in a situation of anarchy, Chinese squadrons could attack the Russian Far East. Hence, the naval agent in Japan and China still had to monitor and report to his department on the progress of the revolutionary events. The mission of Senior Lieutenant A. A. Nishchenkov proved the priority of organizing an extensive intelligence network for the Russian department on Chinese territory.

On behalf of the Russian Maritime Ministry, this fleet officer formulated strategic and technical directions for the development of naval intelligence in China.

However, all the forecasts of the leaders of the Russian naval department about the war at sea between Russia and China showed their complete failure. The modernization program of the Chinese navy has experienced constant difficulties due to a lack of funding and the difficult situation inside the country. At the same time, the revolutionary events in the Chinese state led to the complete collapse of the naval forces and their loss of combat capability.

## IV. CONCLUSION

As a result, the Chinese navy in the early twentieth century He was never able to recover from the unsuccessful Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 and play the role of a foreign policy tool in the Far East. Despite this, during the study period, the development program of the Chinese naval forces and the revolutionary events in China became the object of close attention of the Russian naval intelligence.

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## ЗАДАЧИ РОССИЙСКОЙ ВОЕННО-МОРСКОЙ РАЗВЕДКИ В КИТАЕ В НАЧАЛЕ XX ВЕКА

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### Аннотация

В статье рассматривается деятельность российской военно-морской разведки в Китае в начале XX в. После поражения в японо-китайской войне 1894 – 1895 гг. китайское правительство начинает в начале XX в. осуществлять программу возрождения военно-морского флота. Китайскому военно-морскому ведомству японцы оказывают эффективную поддержку в деле строительства боевых кораблей. Однако попыткам создания боеспособного китайского флота помешал общенациональный кризис, развернувшийся в стране. Надо сказать, что Китай так и не смог претендовать на роль не только мировой, но и региональной военно-морской державы. Несмотря на обоснованные опасения Морского министерства России, не было боевых столкновений с Китаем в начале XX в. на морях и реках. При этом российская военно-морская разведка постоянно собирала информацию о создании китайского флота и внутреннем положении в сопредельном государстве. Нельзя не отметить, что российское военно-морское министерство в начале XX в. следило за попытками создания китайского флота, но не воспринимало Китай как основную угрозу на море внешнеполитическим интересам Российской Империи.

**Ключевые слова:** Российская Империя, Морское министерство России, военно-морской агент, Япония, китайский флот, военно-морская разведка, Китай, военно-морское дело, общенациональный кризис, судостроительная программа, река Амур, Дальний Восток.

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