

ULTRA-MODERNISM

Architecture and Modernity in Manchuria

Edward Denison
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Authors' Note

This book could have taken many forms. Japan’s encounter with architectural modernity is distinguished for its distinction and China’s is matchless in its multiplicity. Consequently, few sites offer the historian a richer and more fertile ground than the territory in which these two converged in the first half of the twentieth century. The production of architecture in Manchuria during this period was as prolific and profound as occurred anywhere else in the world at the time, yet it features in no standard textbooks on architectural modernity or modernism. The term Manchuria is used throughout this book only as a convenient and easily legible way of making reference to the region of northeast China as it was commonly known and referred to at that time.

The story of Manchuria mirrors that of most of the world outside the West during the twentieth century: a faint whisper drowned out by the deafening master narrative of Western-centric modernism. Change is afoot. In the twenty-first century, the century of modernism is being re-examined in a different light as the global majority challenges the minority’s version of history. In so doing, it paints a much richer and

more complete picture of the actual experiences of this extraordinary era in which the global encounter with modernity heralded the end of Holocene and the dawn of the Anthropocene.

Manchuria has a close association with this epochal transition, in which the nuclear bombs over Japan played their part. Amid the comparatively barren landscape of architectural enquiry into Manchuria and its neighbours, this book's principal aim is to encourage much-needed further work on this fascinating subject in this overlooked region during this seminal period. It makes no claim to intellectual profundity and pleads leniency both from those who are familiar with its content and expected something weightier, and from those who are unfamiliar with it and hoped for something lighter.

Prologue

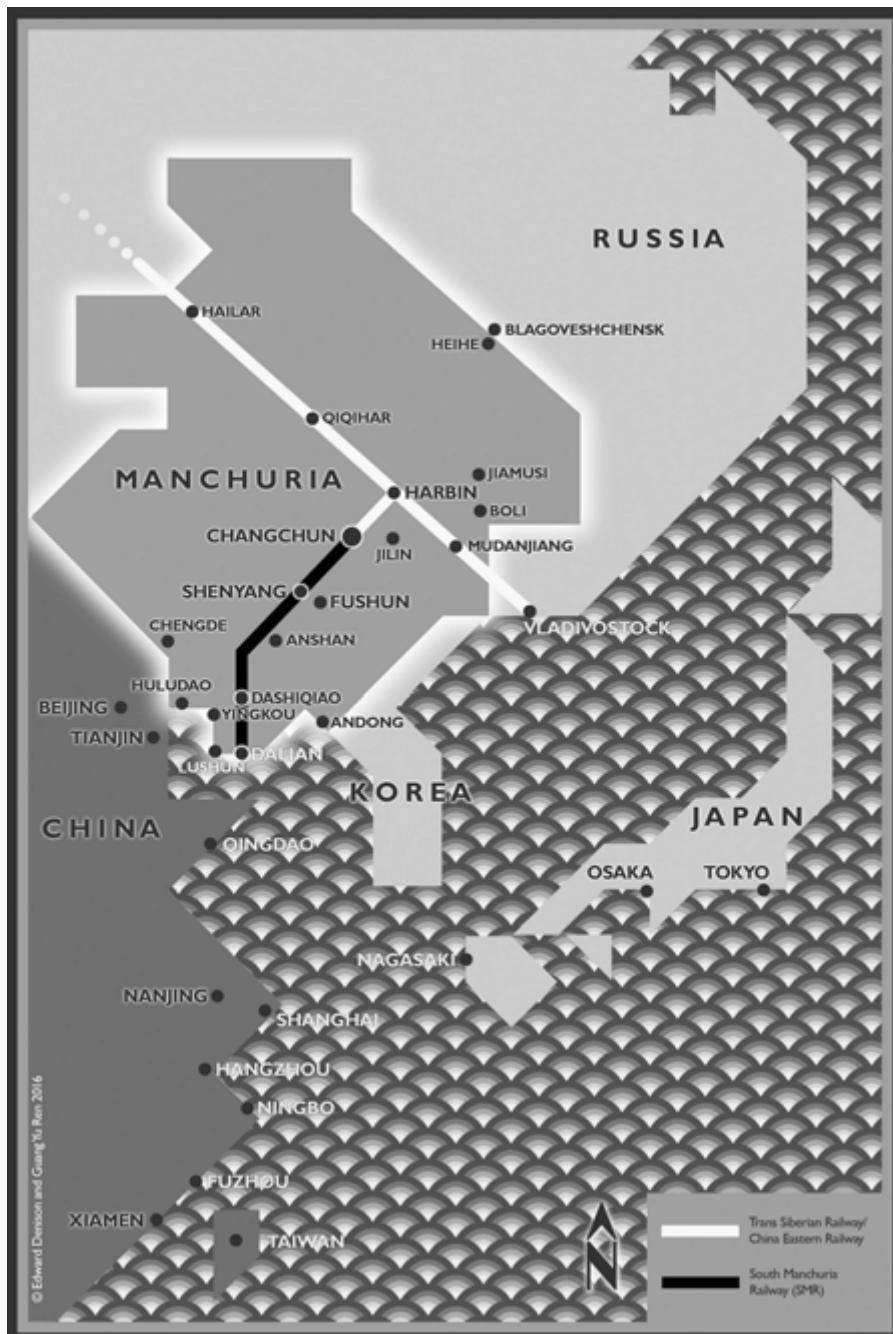
The date 9 August 1945 is seared into the history books by Fat Man, the atomic bomb that erased Nagasaki in a flash. Fat Man and his companion Little Boy, dispatched by Enola Gay over Hiroshima three days earlier, brought a mercifully swift end to the Second World War, but the blinding horror of these new weapons cast much into the historical shadows, including one of the largest military campaigns of the entire war. At one minute past midnight on 9 August, just hours before Fat Man's dispatch, a million Soviet troops crossed the border into Manchuria, opening a theatre of war the size of Western Europe. The Soviet invasion of Manchuria and the American bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima shared the same objective: the unconditional surrender of Japan, the first nation outside the West to have achieved a state of full modernisation and the first to gain entry into the exclusive club of imperial nations.

Manchuria, the long-contested northeastern portion of China that rises into Russia's underbelly was for most Westerners, as one Japanese writer explained in 1925, 'a name pasted on that jumping-off edge of the world somewhere in the outer darkness of their school geography—a mere label, some 10,000 miles below their mental horizon'.¹ Flanked by Mongolia to the west and Korea to the east, Manchuria, however, had been the jewel in Japan's imperial crown—a prized possession prised not merely from China, but from a brutish group of imperial powers rasping over the territory since the mid-nineteenth century. Following Japan's outright occupation of Manchuria in 1931, the region was rebranded Manchukuo and recast as a new state. However, this youngster was by no means independent. It had been conceived by Japan and was controlled by Japanese interests. Chief among these was the South Manchuria Railway (SMR)—an extraordinary product of modernity born out of the tumultuous union of industrialisation, state-sponsored capitalism and imperialism.

Throughout the 1930s, Japan set out not only to create an imperial realm in Manchuria, but also to manufacture a modernist utopia distinct from Western precedents. The vast plains of Manchuria became the site of some of the most ambitious architectural designs and urban plans anywhere on the globe before the Second

1. Kinnosuke, 1925: v.

World War. The subsequent conflict that brought the curtain down on Japan's exceptional experiment also concealed this unique architectural encounter with modernity from the world's attention and effectively struck it from the historical record. Forged by Japan in China, modernity in Manchuria challenges the West's exclusive claim to the programme of modernity, casting it in an Eastern mould and part of China's unique experience of multiple modernities. This book explores this overlooked territory and examines how architecture and planning were exploited to simultaneously create the reality and myth of modernity in Manchuria. It was an illusion that was painstakingly constructed throughout the early twentieth century until it finally shattered at one minute past midnight on 9 August 1945.



Map of Manchuria showing the principal settlements and railway routes.

1

Between East and West

Since the Great Wall of China the world has seen no material undertaking of equal magnitude.¹

Introduction

Manchuria is classic frontier territory—the contested no man’s land between established strongholds on the global chessboard. Raided by the Mongols, seized by Russia, conjoined with Korea, acquired by Japan and today claimed by China, the realm of the Manchus has been pounded for centuries by the historical tide and battered by successive waves of migration and military campaigns. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the Chinese solution to incessant incursion was the construction of a wall designed to separate them from their barbarous neighbours. This eastern section of the Great Wall proved impenetrable until 1644, when the gates at Shanhaiguan were opened by the beleaguered Ming general Wu Sangui and a surge of Manchus poured through to claim the throne and establish the Qing dynasty (1644–1911)—China’s last imperial dynasty.

The Manchus were outsiders and their reign in China was weakened and ultimately terminated by other outsiders from farther afield. Unruly hordes, like the Manchus, had long tested China’s borders, but by the nineteenth century the arrival of an altogether new form of barbarian, invulnerable to any wall no matter how great, precipitated China’s fundamental transformation from an inward-looking and ancient civilisation to a modern nation-state.

Various European powers had nibbled at the edges of China since the sixteenth century. Trade forged the first contact, with the Portuguese arriving in the 1510s and settling in ports along China’s southern coast from Ningbo to Canton (Guangzhou). The foreigners’ licentious behaviour caused their banishment to a deserted island that became Macao and a staging post for religious missionaries hell-bent on converting the Chinese to Christianity over subsequent centuries. The Jesuits were the most

1. Norman, 1902.

successful in this endeavour and from the seventeenth century established strong ties with China in spiritual as well as more corporeal matters.

These soft relations that had opened the door to China were eclipsed in the early nineteenth century by the British, the most barbarous of barbarians. Their Herculean trade in narcotics blew the open door off its hinges and hastened the demise of the Manchu rulers. In 1839, after years of exchanging Indian opium for Chinese tea, the seizure and destruction of more than 1,000 tons of opium by Chinese officials provided the pretext for the First Opium War (1839–1842). China's fleet of outmoded junks proved no match for the technologically superior British gunboats. Modernity's arrival in China was propelled through the twin barrels of Royal Navy cannon and the opium pipe.

China's ignominious defeat concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing on 29 August 1842, which, among other indignities, opened five ports to foreign trade—Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), Foochow (Fuzhou), Ningpo (Ningbo), and Shanghai—and the ceding of Hong Kong to Britain. It also launched an era of unequal treaties that eroded China's political standing and established growing numbers of treaty ports throughout the country in which foreigners were permitted to live and trade, immune from Chinese jurisdiction under the system of extraterritoriality. Through a systematic process of international drug dealing backed by Queen Victoria's navy and ill-disciplined marines, Britain was instrumental in launching China's 'Hundred Years of Humiliation' (*Bai Nian Guo Chi*), during which the once glorious Celestial Empire degenerated into the Sick Man of Asia and instilled in China a profound distrust for many foreign nations, not least Britain and, by the end of the century, Japan.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw China's frail carcass picked apart by predatory Western powers, its dominion sliced up and parcelled into manageable portions—colonies, leased territories, treaty ports, and foreign concessions. An unexpected and belated guest at this dishonourable banquet was Japan, China's subaltern neighbour and cultural underling. The Japanese, as the English poet and Orientalist Laurence Binyon (1869–1943) once noted, 'look to China as we look to Italy and Greece, for them it is the classic land'.² By the late nineteenth century, China's superior relationship with Japan was upended.

The historic reversal was effected by the countries' respective responses to the intrusion of Western powers. Both had sought to contain this interference by confining trade to specific ports (Canton in China³ and Nagasaki in Japan), but British gunboats turned foreign interest in China from an external concern to an unavoidable and corrosive internal problem. When Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Edo (Tokyo) Bay in 1853 onboard the USS *Mississippi*, the Japanese were not going to

2. Binyon, 1908: 6.

3. Macau, Xiamen, and Taiwan were at different times exceptions to the general rule.

cede to foreigners the favourable terms that China had been forced to make a decade earlier. For Japan, interaction with the West stopped at trade, which became its salvation. For China, it permitted settlement, which became its downfall.

The arrival of foreign forces on Japan's doorstep prompted sweeping reforms aimed at the wholesale modernisation of the nation. With a revolutionary zeal, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 not only laid the foundations of Japan's swift and fundamental modernisation, but also endowed the country with membership to the elite club of Western nations. All that remained for Japan to become a fully signed-up member was an empire, the appetite for which China and Korea would pay dearly. In 1885, Japan's metaphorical passage to the West was encapsulated in an anonymous essay, 'Datsuaron' ('Departing Asia', *Tuo Ya Lun*), attributed to the reformist intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), conjuring an image of Japan, drawn by the irresistible 'winds' from the West, setting sail and leaving Asia and its uncivilised and unmodern neighbours behind.⁴

The pretext for the commencement of Japan's empire building was a dispute at the end of the nineteenth century over the former vassal state of Chosen (Korea). When war broke out on 3 August 1894, China—the region's perennial super-power—assumed it would easily defeat its upstart neighbour. The outcome was unthinkable. The eminent Chinese reformer Liang Qichao (1873–1929) described it as a 'thunderbolt in a dream'⁵ but for the population of northeastern China (which became Manchuria) it was a total nightmare. As the Japanese pursued the retreating Chinese forces, they rounded on the natural and strategic port of Lüshun, the protruding promontory that guards the maritime approach to Beijing—'China's Gibraltar'. There the Japanese massacred thousands of civilians in a chilling foretaste of future atrocities that would soak the ground on which their empire would later be constructed with the blood of many. The Lüshun Massacre opened wounds between the two countries that would fester into the third millennium.

Japan's victory in the first Sino-Japanese War secured China's fate—a vertiginous fall from grace that reached its nadir with the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki on 17 April 1895. This treaty contained not only the terms of peace, but also the first drafts of the gathering storm that would batter the region for half a century. It would also permanently alter the course of China's modernisation by preparing the conditions for unprecedented construction and destruction—modernity's loyal bedfellows.

In a supplementary treaty signed by China, Japan, and Britain in 1896, Japanese subjects were granted the right to 'carry on trade, industry and manufactures' in the territory granted to Japan.⁶ With the 'most-favoured-nation' clause extending this

4. Fukuzawa Yukichi, 'Datsuaron', *Jiji Shimpō*, 16 March 1885. Fukuzawa was referring to Korea and China.

5. Liang Qichao, 'Wu Shi Nian Zhongguo Jin Hua Lun', *Shen Bao*, 50th Anniversary Special Edition, February 1923.

6. The supplementary treaty was signed in Beijing on 21 July 1896.

right to citizens of other nations, for the first time in history foreigners residing in China were permitted to engage in industry. Having been allowed to settle on Chinese territory, they were now allowed to extract resources and manufacture goods. For China, the doors to modern industrial production—a hallmark of modernity—were unlocked not from the West but from the East.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki forced China to recognise Korea's independence and pay Japan a hefty war indemnity. However, it was the surrender of sovereign territory that would have the most debilitating and lasting effect on China. Japan had taken from China parts of the northern coastline on the Liaodong Peninsula, as well as several islands in the China Sea, including Formosa (Taiwan). The generous terms not only disgraced China's ailing Qing government, but also rattled the Western powers. France, Germany, and Russia performed the 'Triple Intervention' demanding Japan withdraw its claim on the Liaodong Peninsula and the port of Lushun. On 5 May 1895, Japan bowed to the pressure in exchange for a larger indemnity, but the damage had been done. Japan had lost face and this grave dishonour would have to be avenged. Russia, whose central role in prising back the Liaodong Peninsula for China, had not acted altruistically and would pay a heavy price for this Pyrrhic victory.

Enter the Russian Bear

Of the many foreign powers prowling around China's perimeter in the nineteenth century, the first to stake a claim in Manchuria's vast untapped resources were Britain and Russia. Britain's desire to open up north-east China to international trade was realised in the Treaty of Tientsin (June 1858), which established the port of Newchwang (Yingkou) as a treaty port and Manchuria's pre-eminent commercial port until the twentieth century.

One month earlier, when the Chinese were distracted by the dual tragedies of the Second Opium War (1856–1860) and the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864),⁷ the Russians pressed the embattled Qing government to revise China's northern border southwards. The resulting Treaty of Aigun (May 1858) and Convention of Peking (November 1860) re-established the Sino-Russian border at the Amur River and granted to Russia all the territory east of the Ussuri River up to the Pacific coast.

Without firing a single shot in combat, Russia acquired 900,000 square kilometres of land and an extended Pacific coastline on which they established the naval port of Vladivostok. This distant settlement would later become the terminus of the longest railway in the world, the Trans-Siberian, linking Europe with East Asia. Still clinging hopefully to its antiquated ways, the Middle Kingdom 'darkened under the shadow

7. Over 20 million Chinese are said to have died in the Taiping Rebellion.

of a beast of prey with a thirst for blood and territory which was thoroughly modern, European.⁸

Railways were an essential component in the machinery of modernity. Their iron filaments extended deep into uncharted territories and extracted the resources demanded and devoured by modern industry. Fossil fuels, metal ores, and agricultural produce depended on continuous columns of railway wagons shunting their cargoes to the nearest seaport and delivering them into new trade routes that spanned the globe. Foreign powers, in particular the British, were eager to build a railway network in China, but the Chinese were resistant. They viewed this technological innovation as a veil for further exploitation rather than mutual progress.

In the 1860s, goods in China were transported great distances using ancient methods. Canals and rivers were preferable to land transport, which required super-human levels of endurance. ‘The roads in China [were] proverbially the worst in the world,’ wrote the British traveller Archibald Colquhoun (1848–1914). ‘The typical western China road is a thing to be experienced, it cannot be described.’⁹ With the sedan chair and wheelbarrow reigning supreme for centuries, the benefits of the railway were obvious and the competition non-existent. ‘Steam or anarchy’ proclaimed the missionary Reverend Alexander Williamson (1829–1890) prophetically in 1870, unwittingly foreseeing the transformation railways would bring well beyond his lifetime:

Immense numbers would find employment and good wages on the construction of the works. The traffic would gradually, as the rails were laid down, assimilate itself to the habits of the people; mines and new sources of industry would be brought into operation. The agricultural resources would be greatly developed, and commerce in all its branches would receive a powerful impulse . . . Railways would bring the whole Empire under the control of the central Government, put an end to rebellions, would place commerce on a secure basis, equalize the administration of justice, modify those famines . . . moreover, they would provide means for the diffusion of knowledge and, in short, would, in a thousand ways, promote the advancement and happiness of the people.¹⁰

In 1894, the British introduced railways to Manchuria, breaching the Great Wall at Shanhaiguan while pressing for advantage in the region. While laying the Beijing-to-Mukden (Shenyang) railway in a bid to connect the strategic ports of Tientsin (Tianjin) and Newchwang, some Chinese officials witnessed the benefits of this new iron horse and became convinced of its potential. Few were as impressed as the eminent government official and military general, Li Hongzhang (1823–1901),

8. Kinnosuke, 1925: 48.

9. Colquhoun, 1898: 82.

10. Williamson, 1870: 82.

who masterminded various modernisation programmes in China. Manchuria's fate would be decided by his diplomacy and defined by the railways he championed.

One year after signing the Treaty of Shimonoseki on behalf of the Qing government in 1895 (during which he survived an assassination attempt by a Japanese right-wing extremist), Li was in St Petersburg attending the celebrations marking the Coronation of Emperor Nicholas II, Russia's last monarch. During this trip, Li negotiated the secret Li-Lobanov Treaty (June 1896), establishing a Russo-Chinese alliance motivated principally by a mutual antipathy towards Japan. The bonds of friendship between China and Russia were formed around a common enemy and strengthened by Russia's role in Japan's retrocession of the Liaodong Peninsula after the Sino-Japanese War.

Li travelled to Russia armed also with the draft of an unpublished accord dubbed the Cassini Convention, named after Russia's exceptional plenipotentiary to Beijing, Count Arthur Cassini (1836–1913). Cassini believed Manchuria was the key to Russian dominance in Asia and masterfully wrong-footed Britain, distracted by problems in southern Africa, in the race to seize control of the region in the dying years of the nineteenth century.

In 1890, Russia had started building the Trans-Siberian Railway connecting St Petersburg in the west with Vladivostok in the east. 'Since the Great Wall of China,' marvelled the writer Henry Norman, 'the world has seen no material undertaking of equal magnitude.'¹¹ The railway was forced to follow a wide arc to circumvent Manchuria. It was a costly detour that Cassini was determined to eliminate and ultimately exploit. The Cassini Convention was a blueprint for a Trans-Siberian shortcut that, rather than navigating around Manchuria, carved a straight line across it. The shortcut took 500 miles off the journey from Vladivostok to St Petersburg.

A new financial institution, the Russo-Chinese Bank, was established to sponsor the project, 'the financial lamb's skin in which the Russian Ministry of Finance was masquerading'¹² and a new company, the China Eastern Railway Company, was created to build it. This new company, whose shareholders could be either Chinese or Russian, 'was destined to play the rôle of giver of life or death to economic North Manchuria'.¹³ In an atmosphere of scheming, subterfuge, and secrecy, the China Eastern Railway (CER) or *Kitaiskaya Vostochnaya Jeleznaya Doroga* (Chinese Eastern Iron-road)¹⁴ was born, and its iron tracks began to cut across Manchuria's vast territory. With the help of Italian experts, Russian engineers constructed bridges and tunnels (the longest of which was over 3 kilometres) and nearly 100 stations in their bid to thread this vast line of communication across northern Asia.

11. Norman, 1902.

12. Kinnosuke, 1925: 58.

13. Kinnosuke, 1925: 52.

14. Clarence Cary, 'Dalny—A Fiat City', *Scribner's Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1903): 485.

Having greased the diplomatic machinery with his covert convention, Cassini set to work in Beijing securing the ratification of the Li-Lobanov Treaty. On 8 September, China consented to Russia building their railway and ratified the treaty 20 days later. Cassini departed Beijing on 30 September with the paperwork, the terms of which not merely granted Russia the right to build the desired railway, but also allowed the Russians to exploit the mining potential in the region and also to reserve the right to concentrate Russian forces in Lüshun and the neighbouring settlement of Talienshan (Dalian Wan, Dalian Bay) in case she ‘should find herself suddenly involved in a war’.¹⁵ Russia now had complete jurisdiction over the railway zone in Manchuria, within which its workers and military personnel enjoyed extraterritorial privileges. Cassini had played a masterful game and won for Russia the prize she desired. Construction of the Russian gauge (five foot) CER began on 28 August 1897, marking the height of Russia’s fleeting but fundamental involvement in Manchuria and the first episode in half a century of foreign meddling that culminated in Manchuria’s severance from China and Japan’s attempt to fashion it into a uniquely modern independent state.

15. ‘The Cassini Convention’, *North China Herald*, 30 October 1896.

2

Russian Manchuria

Kwantung Leased Territory

Never, perhaps, in the whole history of colonization has so much money been so recklessly squandered as in Manchuria.¹

The success of the Li-Lobanov Treaty whetted Russia's appetite for control of the region. The Russian Empire was handicapped by the paralysis of its Far Eastern Fleet in the frozen Pacific port of Vladivostok during the winter and needed a warm water alternative. The obvious candidate was Lüshun, a natural deep water port at the tip of the Liaodong Peninsula, which the Japanese wrested from China after their victory in the Sino-Japanese War only for it to be humiliatingly returned following the Triple Intervention.

Two and half years after pressuring Japan to surrender its claim on the Liaodong Peninsula, Russia's Pacific Fleet arrived off the coast of Lüshun in the prologue to a performance of two acts combining manipulative military coercion and deft diplomatic courting. The imposing presence of the Russian navy moored at Lüshun provided sufficient coercion, while Russia's diplomats courted Li Hongzhang and his aides. On 27 March 1898, Russia's nimble performance resulted in the Russo-China Convention that leased to Russia the ice-free ports of Lüshun and neighbouring Talienshan, and the surrounding sea and hinterland 'for such a distance as is necessary to secure proper defence of this area' for a period of 25 years with the option of further extensions.²

Russia promptly renamed Lüshun, Port Arthur, which became a naval port for exclusive use by Russian and Chinese vessels. The surrounding area was renamed the Kwantung Leased Territory. Talienshan became Dalny (Dalian), Russian for 'Far Place', a moniker that even the earliest visitors to this auspicious settlement noted would 'lose [its] former significance in our easy, come-and-go modern methods of communication'.³ Dalian would become a commercial port open to foreign trade. The masterstroke that sealed Russia's grip on much of Manchuria was the clause permitting Russia to connect the China Eastern Railway (CER) with Dalian, thereby creating the

1. Whigham, 1904: 8.

2. Article II, Russo-Chinese Convention, 27 March 1898.

3. Clarence Cary, 'Dalny—A Fiat City', *Scribner's Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1903): 485.

basic structure of the railway network that would ‘stagger the imagination in reach and potentiality’ as it transformed the region over the next half a century.⁴

The original network was shaped like the letter ‘T’, with the CER crossing Manchuria in an East–West direction as part of the railway line connecting Europe and Asia and, from a point approximately midway along this line, a 943-mile track extending southwards to Dalian. The new line turned the Trans-Siberian Railway from an internal enterprise serving Russia’s modernising programme, into what contemporary commentators described as:

[o]ne of the greatest arteries of traffic the world has ever seen [and] one of the chief factors in shifting the centre of gravity of the world’s trade. . . . The eventual effect will be colossal, for the railway will open up enormous underdeveloped regions, and will facilitate the conveyance of passengers, correspondence, and the lighter class of goods; a most important matter when it is a question of connecting within a fortnight’s time the capital of Europe with those of China, Japan and Corea [sic]. A great portion of the eastern section of the line will pass through a splendid country, – Manchuria, – a white man’s country, and full of valuable resources.⁵

The person responsible for deciding the precise location of this railway junction was the engineer Shidrovski, who arrived at the site with a group of 20 men on 11 April 1898. At the junction of this triple spur, there was said to be a Chinese distillery encircled by a high wall on the banks of the Sungari (Songhua River) and approximately 20 huts centred around a wine shop, called the ‘Hsiangfang’ (frying pan), with other houses dotted along the river.⁶ Shidrovski is said to have bought the wine shop and surrounding dwellings and established the headquarters of the CER’s construction group. The arrival of the railway would turn the barren landscape into an entirely new settlement called Harbin, a name said to be from the Mongolian, Ha-la-bin. Within months of its official foundation on 28 May 1898, Harbin became a bustling garrison town populated by several thousand Russians associated with the construction and protection of the railway under the leadership of Duke Hilkov and chief engineer Ignace. It would soon become one of the largest cities in Manchuria and among the first in China to be subject to modern urban planning.

At the other end of the line, on the Manchurian coast, Russian railway engineers disembarked not at Dalian, which was surrounded by hills that would take months for the new railway line to traverse, but at a site on the Liao River upstream from the treaty port of Yingkou and almost half way between the ancient capital of Shenyang and Dalian. From this point, it was easier and quicker to import all the necessary materials for the construction of the railway in both directions while at the same time

4. Clarence Cary, ‘Dalian—A Fiat City’, *Scribner’s Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1903): 482.

5. Colquhoun, 1898: 327–28.

6. Kaname Tahara, ‘Harbin and Environs’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 350.

the terrain around Dalian could be sufficiently blasted and bridged for the railway line to be cut through.

By 1899, the Russians had built a 14-mile branch line linking the river port to the main line at Dashiqiao (near Yingkou). And so it was this innocuous village became the principal portal through which the material elements of modernity arrived in south Manchuria. A ‘huge quantity of rails, sleepers and other materials for the construction of the main line was rushed’⁷ through Dashiqiao as Russia spared no expense in laying their line southwards to Dalian and northwards to Harbin. The cost of the railway was estimated at £30,000 per mile (three times the average price of railway construction), which some observers who witnessed Russian officials’ penchant for ‘squeezes’ put down to ‘embezzlement and maladministration’.⁸ ‘Never, perhaps, in the whole history of colonization,’ claimed one visitor unfavourably, ‘has so much money been so recklessly squandered as in Manchuria.’⁹ The iron rails of this new trunk line were not those used on the Trans-Siberian route weighing 48 pounds per yard, but much heavier, sturdier, and costlier 65 pounders that would support the anticipated speed and weight of the massive American locomotives that were expected to race from Harbin to Dalian in just 15 hours. The first trains were eight-wheeled compound Baldwin locomotives built in Philadelphia and weighing a comparatively heavy 90 tonnes.

Construction of the railway attracted successive waves of Chinese labourers from neighbouring Shandong and Zhili¹⁰ Provinces. Over 100,000 found employment on the CER around the turn of the century. It was a propitious passage for many of these luckless peasants, though many met their end in the process. The Russian railway was unreliable, rickety, and risky. Derailments were frequent, and ‘Chinese labourers were killed in considerable numbers by the overturning of waggons [sic].’¹¹ One journalist travelling between Yingkou and Dalian in 1903 reported on the state of the railway that had an average speed of around 30 mph on account of the frequent stops at refreshment-rooms in partially constructed stations:

[Each] refreshment-room was in every case a deplorable hovel, where the engineers and other employees of the line were accustomed to wash down the most unappetising food with liberal drafts of vodka. Our engine-driver and stoker visited each one of these “buffets,” their consumption of vodka increasing with the distance and with the heat of the sun. The result was that the engine was driven with such vigour about the middle of the day as to run over a Chinese coolie.¹²

7. Kinnosuke, 1925: 57.

8. Whigham, 1904: 58.

9. Whigham, 1904: 8.

10. Present-day Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei Province, as well as small parts of Henan and Shandong Provinces.

11. Whigham, 1904: 48.

12. Whigham, 1904: 15.

The sheer number of Chinese labourers rendered them expendable, but still they kept arriving, desperate to flee the famine and pestilence in their homeland and to chance their luck in Manchuria despite the grinding poverty and pneumonic plague. Armed with the naïve hope of the uninitiated, the countless coolies that formed this great northern migration were in search of riches. A small number would get to enjoy ‘the golden shower of Russian roubles’ emanating from the ‘vast stream of gold that poured into North Manchuria from Europe’.¹³

The Boxers

By the time Russia had started extending its iron tentacles across Manchuria, the rest of China was overrun by foreign settlements. As harbingers of modernity, treaty ports had sprung up not only along the coast, but along its rivers too. These privileged and autonomous miniature foreign worlds were invariably subdivided into separate concessions owned and governed by merchant diplomats from competing foreign nations. Some, such as Russia (Kwantung) and Germany (Shandong), had successfully leased from China entire territories, while others, like Britain (Hong Kong) and Japan (Taiwan) had prised portions of the periphery which they claimed as their own.

The powerlessness of the ailing Qing government to prevent foreign nations claiming its territory and undermining its sovereignty caused a group of discontented Chinese from Shandong province to take the law into their own hands in 1899. The Empress Dowager, Ci Xi (1835–1908), turned a blind eye to their harassing and killing foreign missionaries, then later lent her tacit support. As the movement grew, the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists, or Boxers, as they became known by the foreign community, marched on Beijing. In June 1900, the Boxers besieged the Foreign Legation Quarter for two months. Foreigners in China endured a nervous impasse as disenfranchised Chinese rode a wave of nationalist fervour stoked by the Boxers’ murderous campaign to rid China of foreigners and destroy their assets and institutions.

Russia’s new railway line was one of the Boxers’ principal targets. The Russians claimed that two-thirds of the 1,400 kilometres of track that had been laid by 1900 was destroyed or damaged, and railway buildings, especially those in Harbin (which was besieged for a week), were burned and razed. The damage was undoubtedly extensive and costly, but the incident was also a convenient excuse for unscrupulous Russian contractors and engineers to ‘claim bridges that had been paid for but not built were “destroyed” by Boxers’.¹⁴

What first appeared like a serious setback not only for Russian interests and investments in Manchuria, but also for the foreign community in China more broadly,

13. Kinnosuke, 1925: 59.

14. Whigham, 1904: 58.

turned out to be an opportunity to strengthen their claims on China that would scar Russo-Chinese relations for generations. In early July 1900, Russian troops expelled Chinese residents from settlements on the Russian side of the border along the Amur River, resulting in the Massacre of Blagoveshchensk. Cossack soldiers rounded up Chinese citizens and forced them to swim across the treacherous river. Most of those that swam were swept away by the strong currents. Those that refused were bayoneted. Up to 5,000 Chinese civilians died in the slaughter. Similar incidents occurred all along the Russian border. The chaos coincided with the arrival in Beijing of the 20,000-strong multinational army that had marched, raped, and pillaged the 75 miles from the port of Tianjin to relieve Beijing's foreign legations on 14 August. Vengeance filled the foreign legations, forcing the Qing government to pay heavily for supporting the Boxers.

Foreign powers reconvened around the diplomatic table, their hungry eyes on China. The terms of peace were laid out in the Boxer Protocol on 7 September 1901, which demanded a huge indemnity from China and the occupation by foreigners of numerous Chinese settlements, as well as consenting to a stronger military presence in foreign areas. In the wings, Russia quietly asked for control of all Manchuria. China declined. Having to make do with an increased military presence, Russia strengthened her grip on the region by fortifying Harbin, Dalian, and Port Arthur and accelerating the pace of railway construction. At the end of the nineteenth century, Russia had over 20,000 troops stationed at Harbin and Dalian. By 1901 this had risen to over a million. China was powerless to resist, but Japan, who controlled neighbouring Korea, grew increasingly agitated at Russia's duplicity. With the Russians embedded in Manchuria and the Japanese entrenched in Korea, their overlapping spheres of influence strained under the pressure. Something had to give.

New Towns

Russia's consolidated position in Manchuria precipitated a building boom in Harbin and Dalian that saw, for the first time in China, the implementation of modern urban planning and, increasingly, architectural solutions to problems of a uniquely modern kind—factories, railway stations, telephone and telegraph facilities, radio stations, hotels, and international ports. Unlike the unplanned, cosmopolitan, and commercial treaty ports throughout China, Dalian and Harbin were the first cities in China's modern history to be the subject of comprehensive urban plans.

By the end of 1902, Russian engineers had completed their prized CER, and the first trains started running along the shortened Trans-Siberian Railway on 1 July 1903. The objective had been to connect St Petersburg with the China Sea within a matter of days. In 1901, it had taken 17 days to travel from Yingkou to St Petersburg on an unreliable and uncomfortable railway. By 1903, the same journey took 13 days

on ‘one of the most luxurious trains in the world’.¹⁵ This new land route to Europe provided for the first time a competitive alternative to the sea. Passengers could travel from London to Shanghai via the CER in 18 days compared with the sea route, which took 31 days and was double the price.

The new route to Europe accelerated the development of Harbin, which had until then been marooned midway along the Manchurian section of this intercontinental line. The same military engineers assigned to conduct surveys for the railway were called upon to make plans for the city. Harbin had been a launch pad for the construction of the three spurs of the CER and the shop window for Russian engineering in the cause of imperial expansion. Money was no object for the Russian government, who lavished millions of gold roubles on the initial planning of Harbin. It was no object for the contractors either. Their exceptional pay was the Tsar’s gold-plated carrot to ensure that the job was done. The soundtrack to the city’s early development combined the latest tunes emanating from phonographs imported en masse from America and the crackle of money being burned. In Manchuria, ‘a Russian’s idea of good-fellowship is to squander, to pour champagne on the floor, to light his cigarette with a three ruble [*sic*] note, and to generally splash money around’.¹⁶ ‘The Harbin idea of having a good time,’¹⁷ wrote the same visitor who observed a Russian engineer arrive at a bar with pockets bulging with roubles, was to make ‘all the girls sit in a row while pouring champagne on hundred ruble [*sic*] notes, and then stick these notes on the forehead of each of the eight girls’.¹⁸

Indeed, such insouciance was an indication to some of ‘the true Russian spirit’ in Harbin, which in turn had direct consequences for the city’s planning. ‘An Englishman or American,’ wrote one visitor in 1904, ‘would immediately have his commercial imagination stimulated by the position of the town. “Here,” he would say, “is the very place for a big city; let us make haste and build it.” The Russian says: “We have plenty of space to fill up before we get to Kharbin. If Kharbin is to be a great place, it will become so all in good time.”’¹⁹ And so it was that despite the considerable fortune spent on Harbin’s early planning, the town grew somewhat haphazardly into a city over subsequent decades.

The initial plan of Harbin was determined by a combination of natural and manmade features—the navigable Songhua River created the northern boundary, to the south of which the two railway lines converged in the form of a three pointed star that stretched to the farthest corners of Manchuria in the direction of Europe, the Pacific, and the China Sea. A shrine in the waiting room of the town’s railway

15. Whigham, 1904: 50.

16. Kinnosuke, 1925: 69.

17. Kinnosuke, 1925: 69.

18. Kinnosuke, 1925: 69.

19. Whigham, 1904: 77.

station containing an icon of St Nicholas, patron saint of travellers, symbolised the town's strategic position at this new crossroads between Asia, Europe, and America. Despite the settlement's 'triple aspect' being 'about as ugly and uninteresting as any new prairie town can expect to be', it was clear to those that witnessed the establishment of this settlement that its 'situation, if intended for a future metropolis, [was] unexampled'.²⁰

Comparisons between Manchuria and America's Midwest were common, especially among Western observers, and it was easy to see why. The shared experience of vast exploitable, rich and fertile territories facilitated by the expansion of railways and shipping on navigable waterways was unambiguous. But despite these similarities, Manchuria was not the Midwest. As one observer in 1903, 'One remembers Kharbin [sic] is not in America. . . . These three lines of railway are Russian lines, which would never have been built save for strategic purposes. This wide navigable river leads, not to a Chicago nor to a St Louis, but to Khabarovsk, to the Amur, a Russian river and finally not to the sea, but to the Sea of Okhotsk'.²¹

The original town of Harbin, which soon became known as the Old (Starrie) Town, was planned by the engineer Obromievski and laid out on 4,000 hectares of raised ground to the south of the later settlement in 1898. On the swampy south bank of the Songhua River, workshops, warehouses, and a sawmill were erected to store and supply the building trades. Demand consistently outstripped supply, and the local Chinese were quick to seize a business opportunity. In 1899, one entrepreneur established the town's first Chinese general store, and the area became the preferred home of the city's merchants. Harbin would 'never witness such active building and street planning works as while it was giving shelter to the first contingent of builders in its numerous mud houses' and all manner of tents of straw mats and canvas.²² However, within weeks of their arrival, these pioneers witnessed devastating summer floods that inundated vast swathes of land earmarked for their future city. The deluge was a terrible yet timely occurrence that determined the early layout of Harbin.

By 1901, a New Town (*Novui Gorod*) was planned on 3,000 hectares of raised ground to the west of the Old Town adhering to modern urban planning principles emanating from Europe and North America. Mr Miller, a US consul, later described these plans in a report to Washington as a 'record of the wonderful enterprise worth special mentioning in the history of modern town-building in the nineteenth century'.²³

Streets were laid out in a regular and orderly pattern, with a combination of rectilinear, diagonal, and curved routes converging at, or radiating from, key sites, such

20. Whigham, 1904: 76.

21. Whigham, 1904: 76–77.

22. T. Itoda, 'Harbin and Its Forty Years History', *Manchuria* (1 June 1940): 231.

23. 'Official Report to DC by US Consul Miller in Manchuria in 20 Years', *Far Eastern Review* 22 (1926): 341.

as parks or civic buildings, to create a grand and dignified appearance. A smattering of public gardens provided a ‘few cherished trees and plots of grass [to] relieve the eye, and a military band sometimes played without positive offence to the ear’.²⁴ The result was a city with a variegated urban layout formed by a series of differently scaled open spaces and roads, from monumental boulevards to quiet backstreets. One of the pivotal features was St Nicholas Church (1900) in the heart of the Old Town. The original church, built of straw matting in 1898, was the first Russian Orthodox church to be built in Manchuria. By 1900, CER employees had amassed sufficient funds to build an imposing new church out of wood in the architectural style of North Russia. The exterior walls were covered in murals painted by the artist and adjudicator of the Imperial Russian Art Academy Exhibitions, Mr Gurschensko.²⁵

By 1903, the town’s evenly mixed civilian population of Russians and Chinese had reached 20,000. Despite opposition from city planners, an additional 5,000 hectares of low-lying land was given over to development between the New Town and the river. Here emerged the commercial district, Pristan (quayside), populated by Harbin’s growing army of merchants and industrialists, who shared this cheap and inauspicious floodplain with the thriving Chinese settlement of Fuchiatien, which derived its name from a woman named Fu who established a hostel for the Chinese who were prohibited from residing in the CER zone. These suburbs, connected flimsily to the New Town by a single road bridge over the railway line, were intended only to be temporary, but the early builders had other ideas and constructed their shops and homes with permanence in mind, creating Harbin’s primary business district and Manchuria’s liveliest commercial centre.

Harbin’s rapid development coincided with the global proliferation of the biomorphic style of Art Nouveau, furnishing the town with the most concentrated ensemble of this contemporaneous global style anywhere in China and perhaps even the world. Less than a decade after the Belgian architect Victor Horta (1861–1947) had unveiled the flamboyant organic ‘whiplash’ style in his design for the Hôtel Tassel (1893) in Brussels (the first time Art Nouveau had enjoyed an architectural outing), the seeds of Art Nouveau travelled the length of the Trans-Siberian Railway and blossomed in the unlikely setting of Manchuria.

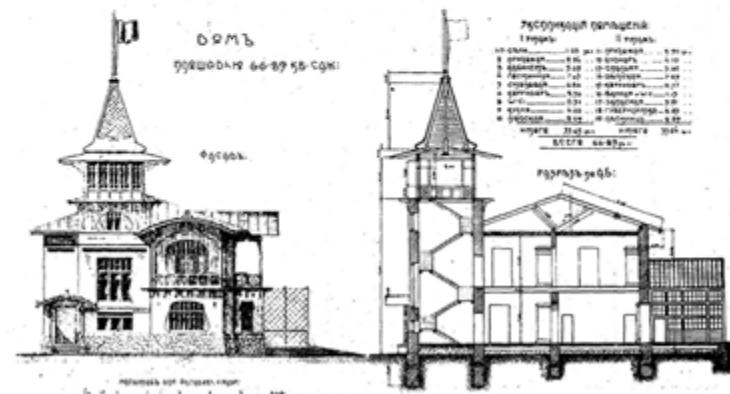
Hotels, shops, department stores, offices, and residences built by the Russians in Harbin at the turn of the century adopted this ostentatious aesthetic. Art Nouveau became the signature style of the CER in its early years and some of the city’s most expressive and original examples include the railway station, the administrative buildings on Bolshoi Avenue designed by Mr D. A. Kryzhanovsky from St Petersburg, and, earliest of all, the residences built for the railway’s supervisors.

24. Whigham, 1904: 79.

25. Kaname Tahara, ‘Harbin and Environs’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 350.



The plan of Harbin showing the three settlements created by the railway. Clockwise from top left: Pristan, Fuchiatien, and the New Town (*Novui Gorod*).



Constructed in wood and plastered stone, the organic, irregular, and playful character of some of these dwellings contrasts sharply with the pompous posturing of neo-classicism that proliferated in China's other foreign settlements from the same period.

At the other end of the railway line was Port Arthur, a military base that neither needed nor possessed civic planning. When the traveller Alexander Hosie (1853–1925) visited in 1900, he noted the government offices ‘scattered about the town, which consists of a collection of heterogeneous buildings, setting all sanitary laws at defiance, with streets and alleyways in the worst possible conditions’.²⁶ The small settlement comprised only a few small offices, shops, and residences, a branch of the Russo-Chinese Bank and at the western end the red-brick railway station and terminus of the CER. The scene could not have contrasted more sharply with neighbouring Dalian, where the Russians planned to ‘build a modern city and port on gigantic scale [sic]’.²⁷

Dalian was the only Chinese harbour north of Shanghai at which ocean-going liners could discharge their cargos, giving it a distinct advantage over the nearby port of Yingkou, at the mouth of the Liao River. Before the Russians developed Dalian, goods imported from Europe and America into Manchuria had to be discharged at Shanghai, from where they were sent up the China coast on smaller freighters. Planned as a free port, Dalian dispensed with this inefficient arrangement and for the first time in history plugged Manchuria directly into the international network of maritime trade. The speed of Russia’s progress not only ‘startled the world’, but, as one American writer explained, especially ‘waked-up our British friends, as well as sorely depressed their spirits’.²⁸ Yingkou’s standing, like that of the foreign powers with vested interests in the treaty port, was gravely undermined and never recovered.

The site on which the Russians had chosen to build Dalian was, as one journalist remarked, an area of land that ‘nature had done little to mark out as a future metropolis’.²⁹ Mr Kerbech, an engineer from the CER, designed this new city with the assistance of the future governor and chief of engineering construction, Mr Saharoff, who had supervised the construction of the Egelsheld Wharf in Vladivostok.³⁰ Together, they were responsible for introducing China to modern town planning. With a massive budget of 20 million roubles, their ambitious scheme covered an area of 100 square kilometres, reinforcing the views of the wider community that the relatively small group of engineers and contractors charged with building Dalian

26. Hosie, 1901.

27. *Far Eastern Review* 24 (February 1928): 78.

28. Clarence Cary, ‘Dalny—A Fiat City’, *Scribner’s Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1903): 484.

29. Whigham, 1904: 7.

30. *Dairen*, South Manchuria Railway Company, 1935: 3.

and the connecting railway were ‘extravagant and reckless’.³¹ At Dalian, the Russian government was ‘determined to build itself a metropolis complete in every detail,’ wrote one observer, ‘another power would have been content to build its railway and begin the harbour tentatively, and let trade do the rest. Not so Russia. Dalny is to spring into the world full grown.’³²

‘The manifold requirements of modern city construction,’ observed the American writer Clarence Cary when visiting Dalian in 1903, were ‘created at demand in double-quick order, by the exercise of an alert and intelligent foresight, backed with a generous purse’.³³ Attempting to make sense of the senseless, many commentators drew comparisons with the cosy familiarity of Western precedents. One American later described the scheme as ‘a European city admitting a population of 40,000’.³⁴ Another claimed it was modelled after Paris with ‘the main streets radiating from several circles like the spokes of a wheel, and intersected by narrower streets’.³⁵ For ‘those who love analogies,’ wrote another, ‘see in Dalny the future New York of the East’.³⁶ But Dalian, clinging as it does to China’s coast and dangling off the end of Russia’s fanciful railway line, cannot be seen as a Western incarnation. To regard it as such is to misunderstand it. ‘There is,’ as the journalist H. J. Whigham described, ‘something splendid and Oriental and almost barbaric in [its] wholesale creation. . . . Even in its present embryo state Dalny is one of the marvels of the present age. For surely nowhere else in the world has a Government built a city and port of such dimensions on absolutely barren soil, hundreds of miles from its own borders, without a penny’s worth of trade already in existence to justify the expense.’³⁷

Despite the dubious site and the unsustainable budget, the Russian plan was to create a complete and modern city serving global trade on Chinese soil. Witnessing the nascent settlement in 1903, Whigham foresaw ‘a large seaport town with ample docks and wharves, with a splendid sea frontage and convenient railway dépôt, with wide streets and boulevards and shady gardens, with a commercial quarter that will eclipse every foreign settlement in the East and a residential quarter which might grace Manchester or Philadelphia’.³⁸ However, unlike the great planned cities of Europe that had to contend with medieval foundations or the early urban plans of the United States of America that were devised in an era before railways, power stations, factories and unfurnished with electricity, gas, and water supplies, Dalian, like Harbin, was a twentieth-century city and, as such, not only combined contemporary

31. Whigham, 1904: 77.

32. Whigham, 1904: 8.

33. Clarence Cary, ‘Dalny—A Fiat City’, *Scribner’s Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1903): 489.

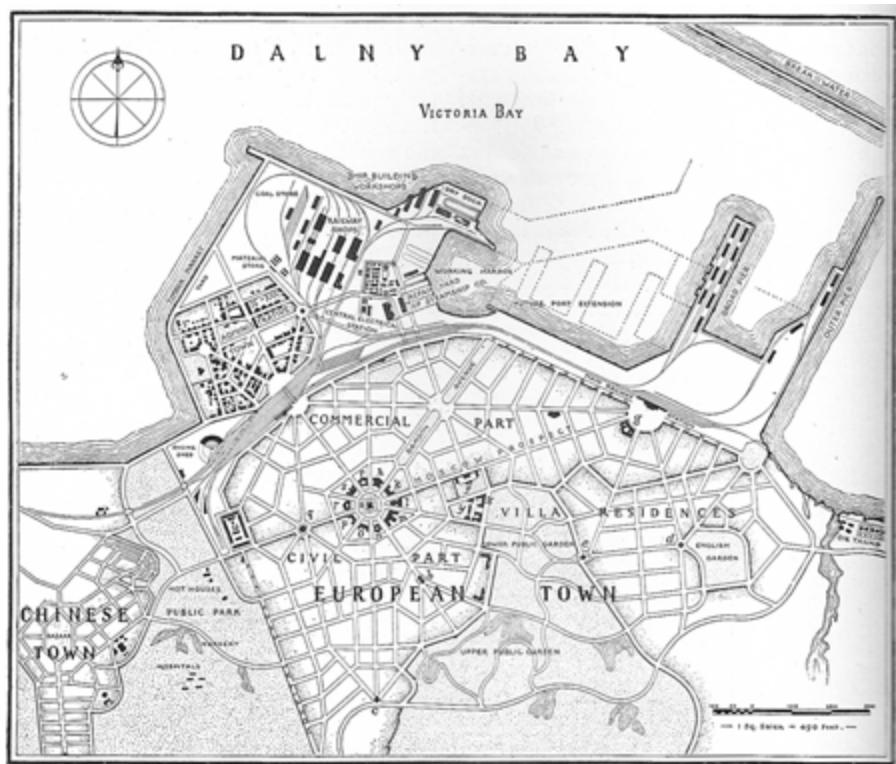
34. ‘Official Report to DC by US Consul Miller in Manchuria in 20 Years’, *Far Eastern Review* 22 (1926): 344.

35. *Dairen*, South Manchuria Railway Company, 1935: 6.

36. Whigham, 1904: 8–11.

37. Whigham, 1904: 8.

38. Whigham, 1904: 8–11.



Plan of Dalian (1903) showing (clockwise from top left) the first Russian 'administrative' settlement, the railways workshops, docks, proposed new 'European' town with main circus, and the separate Chinese town.

urban planning theory with the accoutrements of urban modernity, but was itself a product of modernity—the terminus 'of the greatest railway in the world'.³⁹

Modernity's assimilation into contemporary urban planning was exemplified at Dalian by the railway and the vital link it had with the port. As the primary conduit for goods into and out of Manchuria through the city's wharfs, the railway was not a clumsy incision compromising an established urban plan but an essential part of an entirely new one. The terminus of the CER, which was completed in 1904, made Dalian the gateway to Manchuria. The city's railway station therefore assumed a vital role in both the urban and cultural landscape. Dalian's first railway station was built to the north-west of the city centre, forming a barrier with the port. Freight lines continued to the end of the small promontory, creating an arc across the city's northern perimeter as it fed the wharfs, warehouses, and a dry dock of the future international port. Deep excavations had to be made to cut this line through the city, leaving a

39. Whigham, 1904: 10.



Photo of the early Russian 'administrative' settlement in Dalian in 1903.

deep scar across its northern boundary. 'This difficulty, by dint of much patience, perseverance and expenditure of countless roubles' was overcome by the construction of a large bridge that carried the road over the freights lines and sidings.⁴⁰ In the years ahead and under a different administration, this bridge would become one of the city's major landmarks.

Dalian's earliest significant buildings, including the town's first residential quarter, were constructed to the north of the railway line in a small area of land that jutted out into the bay and formed the first phase of the Russian city plan. Later phases comprised far more ambitious plans that filled the area between the railway line and the mountains, which formed a dramatic backdrop to the south.

The Russians spared no expense installing the necessary components of a modern city. The city they had planned and started to build possessed Manchuria's first electrical power plant, the first water works, and modern brick foundries that furnished the town with the building blocks of its first 'European style' structures. In 1902, they began transforming the ramshackle seafront with warehouses that were invariably flooded even at low tide into a new harbour with modern facilities using thousands of

40. Cook's *Tourist's Handbook*, 1910: 81.

tonnes of rocks brought to the foreshore from the mountains on the backs of 40,000 to 50,000 Chinese coolies.⁴¹

The heart of Dalian's urban plan was an arterial circus in the city centre from which major roads radiated. It was to be a modern and rational civic landscape that created a sense of formality and grandeur through the arrangement of broad boulevards connected at key nodes and junctions often landscaped as public parks, forming a more dense urban grain with minor streets serving residential or smaller commercial functions. Streets were sealed, guttered, paved on either side, and electrically lit. Tramways, telegraph lines, and a clean water system were laid, and public parks were ample in size and number to accommodate the city's future growth.

Kerbeck and Saharoff's plan was the subject of considerable professional approbation internationally. The British architect Inigo Triggs included their scheme in his seminal book, *Town Planning: Past, Present and Possible* (1909), where it features alongside Sir Christopher Wren's plan for London after the Great Fire in 1666. To Triggs, Dalian was:

[a]n interesting example of this type of the combined radial and chessboard system. . . . There are many diagonal arterial thoroughfares. The crossing points of the different systems of radials create a number of local centres, the most important of which has been planned in front of the railway station. In the heart of the town a circular public space has been laid out, with ten long straight streets converging upon it. Built round this, with excellent effect, as may be imagined, there are ten structures, each in its separate block. The city is divided into various quarters, the Administration Town on the north, with three broad thoroughfares leading to the railway station; the commercial quarters in the centre of the city, radiating from one large round-point round which are gathered the important public buildings; the private residences and parks, grouped together on the south-east, and the Chinese quarters in a separate city on the south-west.⁴²

Kerbeck and Saharoff's plan might have been attractive on paper, but only a tiny fraction (around 8 square kilometres) was ever realised. One visitor described a scene in August 1902, in which 'long empty roads, scaffolded buildings, and up-turned surfaces had rather an air of inchoate desolation' and projected the 'somewhat melancholy expression which is a concomitant of dishevelled habitation-places wherever an appropriate sum of human life and endeavour is lacking, whether because this is yet to come, or has had its little day'.⁴³ Despite the harbour improvements, the area between the central circle and the main wharfs remained 'rough ground, with hills and ponds'.⁴⁴ In the adjacent area, between the central circus and the railway, the Russians only managed to level the ground without constructing any buildings. Only

41. Manchuria in 20 years, *Far Eastern Review* 22 (1926): 343.

42. Triggs, 1911: 101–2.

43. Clarence Cary, 'Dalny—A Fiat City', *Scribner's Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1903): 493.

44. *Dairen*, South Manchuria Railway Company, 1935: 3.

one street was laid out along what would become the Central Park, and only a few houses in this district were ever built. These residential quarters that were to host the first generations of adventurers or entrepreneurial Russians remained largely empty, with too few Russian officials, contractors, or wealthy Chinese to fill what had been constructed.

Dalian was a “boom” town without any reason for a “boom”.⁴⁵ There was something not only novel and audacious about Russia’s ambitions but also chimerical. ‘It is not a common thing in the line of human endeavour,’ wrote Cary, ‘to evolve a sea-port, railway terminal city, with all the essential modern appliances, including ample provision for future residence, trading, and manufacturing facilities, before the advent of an expected population.’⁴⁶ Behind ambitious plans and exorbitant budgets there was an omnipresent sense of ephemeral opportunism lingering over Russian Dalian. The harbour had been built, but there were no ships. Not yet at least. Macadamised roads criss-crossed the empty plain on which the city had been laid out on paper but had yet to be built in brick or stone. One road had even been carved through mountains at considerable expense so as to reach the sandy coastal beaches where ‘future millionaires of Dalny will have their summer bungalows’.⁴⁷ But the millionaires were nowhere to be seen. Even the city’s main hotel suffered from what one journalist described as ‘the defects of Russian management’. The construction and equipment were first rate, but the hotel manager was ‘a man of the lowest type, who confined his attention to drinking vodka [and] ran the hotel into a state of disreputable dirt and almost deserted by the public’.⁴⁸ It was a common story in Russian Manchuria, where the architects of this new world seemed happy to ‘erect a building at great expense and then to hand it over to a confirmed inebriate’.⁴⁹

Although the Russians were not as arrogant as other foreign nationals towards the Chinese, there was ample evidence of their general ambivalence. ‘Racial prejudice was a factor’ in Russia’s early urban planning as it was in colonial settlements across the globe, where new towns were established away from existing settlements so the foreigner did not have to ‘mingle too closely with the natives’.⁵⁰ Dalian’s Chinese settlement was undoubtedly less formal than the Russian area and set ‘aloof’ from it by a large public park. Foreigners explained the separation was to ensure ‘the multitudinous poorer classes of the indigenous folk [were] not to swarm among foreign residents as they have elsewhere been imprudently suffered to do’ in their ‘unpleasant and detrimental’ manner in places like Hong Kong and Shanghai.⁵¹ Some claimed the

45. Whigham, 1904: 8.

46. Clarence Cary, ‘Dalny—A Fiat City’, *Scribner’s Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1903): 482.

47. Whigham, 1904: 9.

48. Whigham, 1904: 13.

49. Whigham, 1904: 13.

50. *The Kwantung Government*, 1934: 137.

51. Clarence Cary, ‘Dalny—A Fiat City’, *Scribner’s Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1903): 486.

Russians 'never cared a fig for the Chinese. . . . The economic and commercial benefits for the hundreds of thousands of coolies who worked on the Chinese Eastern Railway were about the last thing the architects of the Far-Eastern Empire of the Tsar would bother about'.⁵² Dalian's Chinese town possessed a theatre where the Chinese coolie could 'spend some of his wages for the good of the place instead of hoarding them and sending them at length to his family in Shan-tung [Shandong]',⁵³ but between Dalian and Harbin, argued an American Consul some years later, the Russians 'gave no thought to the construction of modern towns' and in the Chinese settlements 'not the slightest indication of modern town planning could be seen anywhere'.⁵⁴ Modernity had arrived in Manchuria but it was embryonic and unevenly distributed. A much larger and more immediate impact would be made by modernity's omnipresent companion: war.

As Russia sought to strengthen its position in Manchuria after the Boxer Rebellion, confidence gave way to complacency. Russia's desirousness of neighbouring Korea created unease among the Japanese, who proposed the establishment of a buffer zone between Manchuria and Korea. Russia's Admiral Alexieff 'and other Russian architects of her Far Eastern Empire' baulked at the idea and pressed harder for timber concessions along the Korean border.⁵⁵ Japan lost patience. As had occurred ten years earlier against China and would happen again four decades later at Pearl Harbor, Japan seized the initiative and launched a surprise attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur in the opening salvo of the first Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Minutes before midnight on 8 February 1904, as a circus entertained soldiers and civilians in town, in a scene of 'mingled confusion and deliberate devastation', a group of small Japanese torpedo boats stole into the heavily fortified harbour and crippled Russia's invincible fleet while moored at anchor.⁵⁶ Japan's modernised navy under the command of the British Royal Navy-trained Vice-Admiral Togo, the 'Nelson of Japan', boasted a new era of battleships, some of which were built on the Clyde, and carried 60,000 soldiers. With extraordinary pluck, the Japanese assault on the Russians at sea and on land set the tone not only for a war that would last over a year and a half, but also for subsequent events in Asia for half a century.

Conflict between these two neighbours in China's backyard had been anticipated by many for years. The long and costly war mobilised a million soldiers from each side on the Manchurian battlefield, but few had imagined the result. Japan paid a high price for the gamble. The heavy casualties its army suffered etched Manchuria into the romance of selfless sacrifice of the Japanese soldier; an imperial baptism that forged

52. Kinnosuke, 1925: 67.

53. Whigham, 1904: 9.

54. 'Official Report to DC by US Consul Miller in Manchuria in 20 Years', *Far Eastern Review* 22 (1926): 343.

55. Kinnosuke, 1925: 65.

56. *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, Vol. 1, 1904: 18.

a modern national psyche. The 81,455 dead and 381,313 wounded Japanese soldiers⁵⁷ prepared the ground for future myth-making that would excuse far larger conflicts and much greater losses. Japan's victory over Russia also avenged their duplicity over the Liaodong Peninsula a decade earlier. Japan had seized back that very same asset from the Russians—it was, as one Japanese resident in Manchuria would later put it, 'territory *regained*'⁵⁸—only in the meantime it had been richly furnished with the embryonic accoutrements of modernity—industry, manufacturing, mining, construction, ports, architecture, urban planning, and, most importantly, railways.

The Russo-Japanese War marked the first time in the modern era that a Western nation was defeated by an Eastern counterpart. It signalled also the completion of Japan's second vital step in its quest for empire. The balance of power in the region had shifted dramatically and laid the grounds for events over the next four decades.

57. Young, 1998: 89–90.

58. Itō Takeo in Fogel, 1988: 5.

3

Rising Sun over Manchuria

*The Golden Age of the South Manchuria Railway,
1906–1931*

For the first time in history, a non-white race has undertaken to carry the white man's burden, and the white man, long accustomed to think the burden exclusively his own, is reluctant to commit it to the young shoulders of Japan, yellow and an upstart at that.¹

Modernity, the hallmark of the twentieth century, had its origins in the West in the previous century and was the motive and apologia for Europe's numerous colonial campaigns. No territory outside this expanding Western world was immune from being beaten in the name of modernity. The sustained campaign was so successful that the West even began believing its own mantra: to be modern was to be Western. The Russo-Japanese War upended this notion and became a milestone in a very different reading of history in which the East could claim not merely to be modern, but to be so on their terms. In the unlikely setting of the Chinese battlefield of Manchuria emerged a new species in the broader genus of modernity.

Despite the West's considerable effort to lay claim to modernity throughout much of the twentieth century—which was as strong in architecture as in any other field—Japan's experience, especially in the context of Manchuria, reveals modernity's many forms. The Russo-Japanese War fractured modernity's Western edifice and marked the point at which it became a truly global phenomenon. As Kawakami put it in 1933: 'For the first time in history, a non-white race has undertaken to carry the white man's burden, and the white man, long accustomed to think the burden exclusively his own, is reluctant to commit it to the young shoulders of Japan, yellow and an upstart at that.'² In Manchuria, Japan's efforts to build an empire presents the earliest and one of the foremost examples of multiple modernities, where the experience and condition of modernity in the non-Western host, China, arrived from the East and materialised largely in the absence of the West.

1. Kawakami, 1933: vi.

2. Kawakami, 1933: vi.

The Birth of the SMR

On 5 September 1905, Russia and Japan signed the Treaty of Portsmouth, which outlined the terms of peace and defined Japan's spoils of war. In principle, both powers were to leave Manchuria and the territory was to be returned to China, with two important exceptions. One was regarding the Liaodong Peninsula, or Kwantung Leased Territory, the lease of which was to be transferred to Japan along with all public works and properties. The other was the railway. Russia had to 'transfer and assign to the Imperial Government of Japan, without compensation and with the consent of the Chinese Government, the 520 mile stretch of railway between Chang-chun [Changchun] and Port Arthur and all its branches, together with all rights, privileges and properties appertaining hitherto in that region, as well as all coal mines in the said region belonging to or worked for the benefit of the railway'.³ Japan not only gained what it had lost a decade earlier following the Sino-Japanese War, but also successfully stripped Russia of its assets south of Changchun.

Russia was permitted to retain the CER with its three-way junction at Harbin and the southbound track as far as Changchun. Russia and Japan were allowed to 'exploit their respective railways in Manchuria exclusively for commercial and industrial purposes' and with the exception of the railway inside the Kwantung Leased Territory, 'in no wise for strategic purposes'.⁴ This optimistic and unrealistic future would be thrashed out in a separate treaty. With both sides weary of war, it was hoped that Manchuria would become a field in which the seeds of commerce and industry rather than conflict could thrive.

With Japan now in control of the spine of Manchuria's railway network and its key branch lines that plugged it into the region's natural resources, the next step was to establish the means of administering and exploiting their prize. This task fell to one of Japan's most senior officials in Manchuria, Kodama Gentarō (1852–1906), the Imperial Army's chief of general staff and former governor general of Taiwan.

In September 1905, Kodama hosted his friend and former head of Civilian Affairs in Taiwan, Gotō Shimpei (1857–1929) in the city of Shenyang. Over the previous decade, the pair had been instrumental in introducing modern agricultural production, industry, and railways into the fledgling Japanese colony of Taiwan. During their fleeting liaison in Shenyang, Kodama and Gotō hatched a plan that would similarly transform Manchuria from 'a tranquil and backward Oriental land without modern

3. Article VI, *The Treaty of Portsmouth*, 1905.

4. Article VII, *The Treaty of Portsmouth*, 1905.

transportation facilities,⁵ but on a larger scale and concentrated entirely on Japan's newly acquired railway network.⁶

The Japanese had to tread lightly. China was as anxious to rid Manchuria of foreign forces as other foreign powers were to prevent Japan from having a monopoly in the region, while Japan needed to assert control without aggravating an already tense situation. The matter came to a head in Tokyo the following May, after the Japanese prime minister, Saionji Kinmochi (1849–1940), had visited Manchuria. Kodama presented the plan that he and Gotō had conceived the previous September. It was greeted with warm approval, and within weeks the government established a special committee to decide how to administer Japanese interests in Manchuria.

Kodama was appointed chair of the seventy-seven-member panel, but died only days later. Despite the loss of this central and supportive figure, the committee continued its mission with Gotō at the helm. On 11 August 1906, the government officially announced the birth of Mantetsu—the South Manchuria Railway (SMR)—the physical and figurative backbone of Japanese-occupied Manchuria. By the end of the year, Gotō had been appointed the company's first president.⁷

A Quasi-Colonial Cog

The SMR was a product of the early twentieth century and of modernity itself. The 'colonial policy' it embodied was, as Gotō emphasised, 'inescapable in our time'.⁸ Western powers had long jostled for positions of power in distant lands, but China was unique in the range and extent of its territorial partitioning. Various methods were employed in gaining an advantage in this competitive quest globally. Commercial and colonial enterprises, which had their roots in the sixteenth century and had fully flourished by the twentieth century, were invariably entwined and the fruits of their success could be read in the ill-conceived borders and often arbitrary boundaries of semi-official states and territories across the globe. This ill-fitting jigsaw puzzle contained latent tensions that ruptured in localised fractures and on two occasions precipitated world wars that substantially reordered the entire scheme.

The SMR was both a cause and effect of this conundrum. It not only was a consequence of shifting power in the region and unique encounters with modernity in the early twentieth century, but also would affect much more profound encounters in subsequent decades. The SMR continued the colonial tradition of utilising a

5. *South Manchuria Railway: The Pioneer on the Continent*, 1939.

6. See Harada Katsumasa, *Mantetsu (South Manchuria Railway)*, 1981: 38, and Ramon H. Myers, 'Japanese Imperialism in Manchuria: The South Manchuria Railway Company, 1906–1933', in Duus, Myers and Peattie, 1989: 101.

7. Gotō was appointed president on 8 November 1906. Nakamura Zekō was vice president.

8. Fogel, 1988: 14.

combination of political and commercial interests to infiltrate and exploit a foreign territory. In this respect it bore similarities to Britain's East India Company, but it was also vitally different, not merely for being based on land rather than sea. While the SMR followed similar Western precedents, it was the first time that such an enterprise had originated outside the West. Furthermore, Japan's relationship with China was neither colonial nor distant. China was Japan's cultural progenitor and until the Sino-Japanese War had been revered by its neighbour. The SMR responded to this relationship in a way that Western colonial ventures did not have to in their acquired and invariably remote territories. It was subtle, sophisticated, and scientific—learned even—and thus could be presented as a mutually beneficial enterprise that supported China's struggle against pernicious Western influence and, eventually, the entire liberation of Asia.

When the SMR was established, the foreign morsels of China's apportioned territory—treaty ports, foreign concessions, leased territories, and diplomatic quarters—were not colonial entities and neither was Manchuria. These sites were quasi-colonial—servile to a much wider system of foreign exploitation but not directly administered from and accountable to isolated centres of power. Gotō understood this. He knew what it was to administer a colony, having done so in Taiwan, and he knew Manchuria was different. He also knew that the SMR, if managed properly, could perform many of the functions of a colonial enterprise and guarantee Japanese control of the region by more subtle means: *bunsō teki bubi*—‘military preparedness in civilian clothing’. The SMR was one of the essential cogs in the much larger geopolitical machine that was neither colonial nor imperial, not yet at least.

A Head of Steam

Japan's quasi-colonial campaign in Manchuria depended on the SMR. From humble origins, it grew into an enterprise of such immense power and influence that it became the very object through which Japan was able to realise its subsequent imperial ambitions. It controlled the trunk line between Changchun and Dalian, and numerous branch lines linking other towns and cities. It also owned the mining rights in the mineral-rich regions of Fushun and Yentai, outside Shenyang, and the ports along the coast.

The SMR was responsible for the planning, construction, and public administration of the settlements along the railways, which were vigorously promoted as sites cultivating new forms of metropolitan modernity. It also became a vital route for social and cultural engagements within Manchuria and throughout Asia more broadly. White Russians fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution, European émigrés, Chinese overseas students, warlords and legions of soldiers, merchants, and adventurers relied on the SMR to gain entry to or exit from China through the early decades of the

twentieth century. It laid the very fabric of modernity in Manchuria and very quickly became the region's primary asset.

The SMR was founded on a capital investment of 200 million yen in the form of one million shares divided equally between the Japanese government and private shareholders. With a guaranteed dividend of 6 per cent a year for fifteen years combined with a growing mythology domestically surrounding Japan's glorious sacrifices in Manchuria, SMR shares were purchased enthusiastically by the Japanese public and furnished the company with the funds it needed to consolidate its newly acquired assets.⁹

From the outset, the SMR engaged in architectural production. Ports, mines, and railway facilities all had to be developed swiftly for the company to be able to begin repaying its shareholders. Propelled by Japan's obsession with modernisation, Manchuria's built environment was swiftly transformed by the erection of entirely novel structures: wharfs, offices, stores, silos, factories, stations, warehouses, mines, workshops, hospitals, public libraries, town halls, fire stations, and modern hotels.

In addition to physical infrastructure, the SMR went shopping for the products that would furnish these new facilities. In April 1907 the company bought 180 state-of-the-art locomotives and 2,060 carriages from the United States.¹⁰ Japanese officials travelled to the City of London to raise more credit before sailing across the Atlantic to spend it, leaving many disappointed British railway manufacturers in their wake.¹¹ It was a tradition that continued for decades. 'In its physical aspect,' wrote Kawakami in 1928, 'the South Manchuria Railway is an American railway, as its rolling stock and other materials are mostly of American origin.'¹² This would change in the 1930s. Since its inception, the total value of American machinery and materials purchased by the SMR up to 1928 exceeded US\$100 million—over US\$30 million more than all the other Japanese companies in Manchuria combined.

International rolling stock demanded an international track gauge. In 1907, the strategic thirty-seven-mile link from Port Arthur to Dalian was upgraded to a double track and standardised 56.5 inches. On 30 May 1908, the entire line to Changchun and branch lines to Fushun and Yentai, were completed.¹³

At Changchun, the Japanese purchased a plot of land one mile outside the old city's north gate in 1907 and established the SMR zone linked to the CER zone to

9. Ramon H. Myers, 'Japanese Imperialism in Manchuria: The South Manchuria Railway Company, 1906–1933', in Duus, Myers, and Peattie, 1989: 104.
10. Ramon H. Myers, 'Japanese Imperialism in Manchuria: The South Manchuria Railway Company, 1906–1933', in Duus, Myers, and Peattie, 1989: 107.
11. Ramon H. Myers, 'Japanese Imperialism in Manchuria: The South Manchuria Railway Company, 1906–1933', in Duus, Myers, and Peattie, 1989: 107–8 and Fogel, 1988: 7.
12. Kawakami, 'American Capital for Manchurian Railways', *The Far Eastern Review* (March 1928): 110.
13. The Andong–Shenyang line was started in August 1909 and completed in November 1911.

the north, which had fallen into evident decline since 1905.¹⁴ The urban plan was prepared by the civil engineer, Katō Yonokichi (1867–1933), who implemented similar plans for Shenyang and oversaw the expansion of Dalian.¹⁵ These plans were based on modern planning principles from Europe and North America, but were also informed by Gotō's insistence that they should address the specific needs and incorporate the characteristics of Manchuria. Transplanted onto the once barren plains by a quasi-colonial enterprise, these modern schemes were reinterpreted, adapted, and improved by the Japanese. They were not Western. Japanese urban planning in Manchuria, incorporating modern theories of zoning and replete with modern utilities, preceded by more than a decade Japan's first urban planning laws in 1919. By the Second World War, no other foreign power had embarked on such an ambitious programme of urban planning overseas before and, outside of wartime, none has tried since.



Aerial view of the SMR Zone at Changchun, designed by Katō Yonokichi in the early 1910s, showing the railway station in the foreground and combination of radiating streets and grid pattern.

14. The land was purchased on 1 May 1907.

15. Katō Yonokichi worked in the Civil Engineering Section of the Niigata Prefecture when he was appointed manager of the SMR's Civil Engineering Department by Gotō Shimpei.

Katō's plan for Changchun was an organised and generous grid dissected by diagonal roads that radiated from two circuses and converged in front of the railway station (1914). Katō's urban plans were earnestly modern and, with the exceptions of Harbin and Dalian, were unlike anything seen before in China. Streets were wide, sealed, tree-lined, and flanked by pavements. They formed regularly spaced city blocks served by modern utilities: water, drainage, and electricity.

The buildings that populated these early Japanese settlements were predominantly designed in a Western 'neo-Renaissance' style that had been exported to Japan in the late nineteenth century by foreign architects and teachers. The first and most notable of these architectural envoys was a British architect, Josiah Conder (1852–1920), who was chiefly responsible for introducing architecture as a profession to Japan through his teaching post at Tokyo's Imperial College of Engineering (ICE). The neo-Renaissance style was enthusiastically espoused by Japan's young architects and most famously by the ICE and University College London (UCL) graduate, Kingo Tatsuno (1854–1919). This generation of architects were responsible for exporting this style to Manchuria in the early twentieth century. Practitioners such as Tatsuno's former student Matsumuro Shigemitsu (1873–1937) designed many of Changchun's early public buildings. Matsumuro worked for the Kyoto Prefecture and designed their offices in 1904, but resigned amid a scandal that cast him into professional obscurity until 1908 when his mentor, Tatsuno, suggested he make a new start in Manchuria. Matsumuro was among the first of many Japanese architects to seize the opportunity of an embryonic empire. He became head of the construction department in the Civil Affairs Bureau of the Kwantung Leased Territory and was the Bureau's only architect until 1916. Other organisations like the SMR had their own architects, such as University of Tokyo graduate Ichida Kichijirō, who designed the three buildings around Changchun's new public square: the new railway station, the SMR offices (1910), and the Yamato Hotel (1909), the progressive Art Nouveau exterior of which boldly broke from the antiquated conventions of neo-Renaissance and neo-gothic on which his generation had been raised.

Between Changchun and Dalian, the Japanese-controlled railway opened up the ancient city and regional capital of Shenyang, an unpolished 'bit of real "Old China"; dilapidated, time-soiled and worn down'.¹⁶ From 1906, Japanese residents began settling in Shenyang, but not in the old city. The conventional approach of separating native and foreign populations prompted the planning and construction of a new settlement outside the old walled city, where a sea of tiled roofs covering low-rise court-yard housing, broken only by a three-storey pagoda, harboured the hustle and bustle of daily rituals. The scene was interrupted only by the continuous piercing sound of steam whistles from brass kettles advertising the sale of hot water—a welcome fillip in Shenyang's bitter cold. All this was very different from the new world outside

16. Cook's *Tourist's Handbook*, 1910: 75.

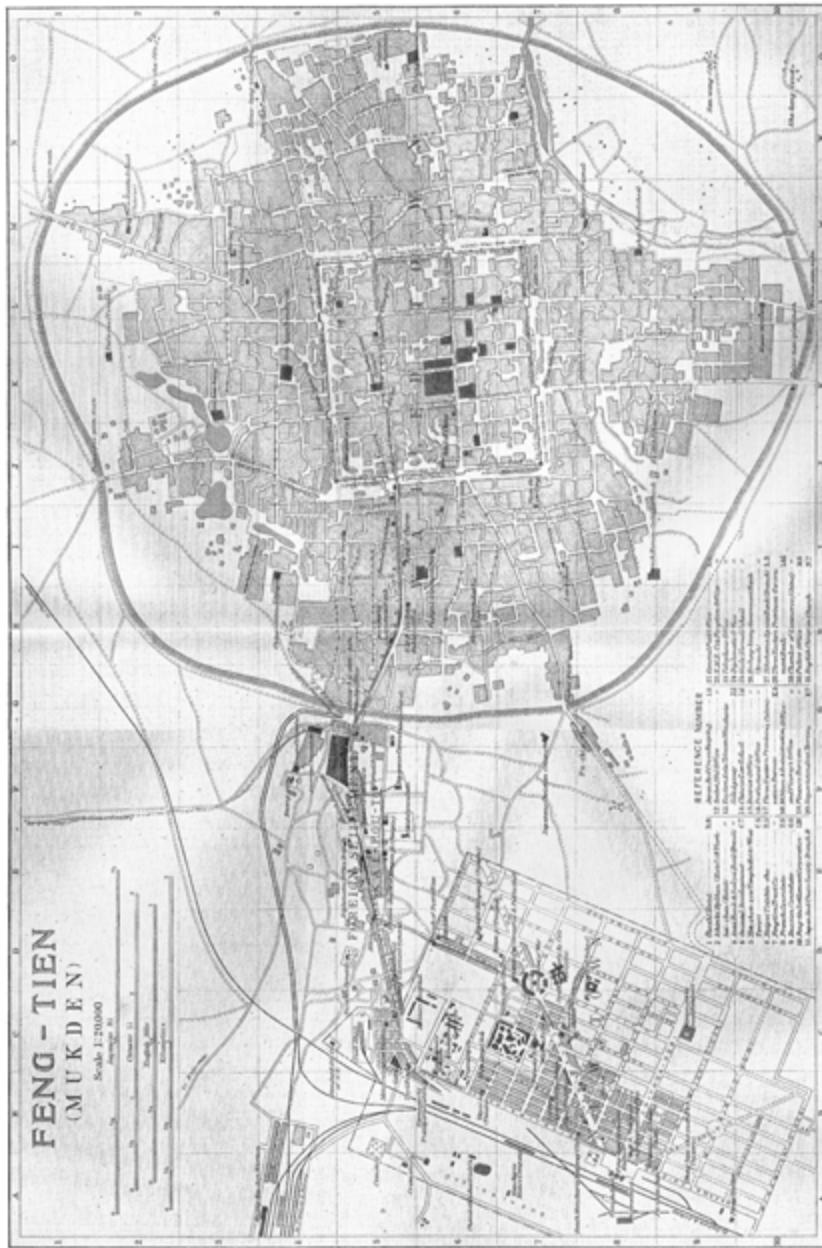


The Yamato Hotel (1909), Changchun, designed by Ichida Kichijirō, who also designed the neighbouring new railway station (1914) and the SMR offices (1910).

the old, where the unfamiliar elements of modernity began being laid out according to the rectilinear pattern designed by Katō Yonokichi. A new railway station, workshops, industrial plants, and a modern hotel, the Astor House, were accompanied in 1910 by an imposing branch of the SMR's Yamato Hotel chain. The arrival of these modern establishments were consequent on 'the rapid development of railway travel in this part of the world [which] opened the eyes of the tourist to the possibilities of finding something different, something new—yet ancient, a unique change from the "modern civilization series" of Europe and the Far West'.¹⁷ However, as one writer lamented from the vantage point of the 1930s, 'the whistle of [SMR] trains on their way from Siberia to the Yellow Sea sounded the death knell of the old Manchuria . . . [the SMR's] gleaming rails turned a land that three or four decades ago was almost a wilderness into the most easily accessible region in the Far East'.¹⁸ Such achievements could not have been dreamt of let alone foreseen by the SMR in 1906 when the seeds of success were sown. By the end of its first year, the SMR, having spent with abandon in the United States, attracted additional funds from London and embarked on a major works programme. The company duly paid a 6 per cent dividend to its shareholders and registered a healthy profit of two million yen.

17. *Cook's Tourist's Handbook*, 1910: 7.

18. Scherer, 1933: 44.



Courtesy of I.J.R.R.

Map of the City of Mukden

Plan of the SMR Zone designed by Katō Yonokichi outside the ancient walled capital of Shenyang (then Mukden).

Jealous Eyes

The SMR's success did not go unnoticed. One of the most notable onlookers was the American railway magnate Edward Henry Harriman (1848–1909), director of the Union Pacific and the Southern Pacific railroads. Harriman was desirous of the Russian-built lines because they represented important links in his ambitious plan to construct a transglobal railway. He had been in Tokyo after the Russo-Japanese War and sought an agreement with Count Katsura to include the SMR into his scheme, but the Japanese rejected the proposals. Japan had only recently been affronted by the United States over the islands of Hawai'i, which Washington had annexed in 1898. Over 60,000 Japanese had emigrated there with an assumption that their country would in due course take control of the islands. Japan was not going to relinquish its hard won spoils in Manchuria to an American railway tycoon.

Harriman, however, persisted. In 1908 he lobbied the dashing young American consul in Shenyang, Willard Straight (1880–1918). Straight was an orphan from New York and had spent four formative years of his childhood in Japan. Having later studied architecture at Cornell University (the Cornell student union building bears his name), he had become well connected in the city's financial circles and returned to Asia in 1902, where he worked in the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service. The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 drew Straight to Korea as a war correspondent, then into the diplomatic service. After stints in Seoul and Havana, he returned to Asia as American consul general in Shenyang in 1906, where he lived a charmed life as an eligible bachelor cavorting with international high society. His alleged liaisons filled copious column inches and extended to the highest echelons of American society, including the Roosevelts and even Harriman's daughter, Mary.

With Straight in Shenyang and Harriman hell-bent on global domination by railway, they formed a consortium of New York financiers and concocted a plan to raise US\$20 million to establish the Manchurian Bank, which would help administer an American version of the SMR. Straight signed an agreement for the loan in 1908, but China's deteriorating political landscape forestalled the plan. Changing tack, the financiers backed a revised proposal to build a separate railway linking the strategic city of Jinzhou near the south Manchuria coast with Heihe in the north, teaming up with a British interest and major railway contractor, Pauling & Co. The ambitious line would run parallel to Japan's SMR, but, rather than stopping on its northward route at Russia's CER, would continue to Heihe on the Amur River at the Russian border. An agreement was signed in Shenyang on 2 October 1909. However, Harriman's death less than a month earlier robbed the project of its pioneering spirit. The scheme ran out of steam and eventually fell off the rails, marking the end of Western attempts to wrest control of Manchuria from Japan, who flourished amidst the disunity of Western powers.

Full Steam Ahead

In 1907, the SMR faced its own internal political reorganisation. Against Gotō's wishes, the company was severed from direct political authority and began to function independently from the Kwantung Leased Territory, who reported directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo, under the governor-general Ōshima Yoshimasa. The keystone in the reorganised new company was the Research Department, renamed the Research Section in 1908.¹⁹ Gotō had studied medicine in Germany and his clinical training and scientific approach underpinned his reverence for research. 'I cannot exaggerate,' explained Gotō, 'the essentiality to the management of Manchuria of research into the economic conditions of Manchuria as well as the study of popular and commercial customs.'²⁰ The activities of the Research Section were importantly linked to architectural production. Its work demanded the construction of libraries, workshops, and laboratories, and staff studied and tested new building materials and technologies. It was through a vast and highly organised research apparatus that the SMR was able to furnish the Japanese authorities with the required information to administer and exploit their possessions in Manchuria and plan cities of the future. The Research Section helped define the SMR, and there was nothing like it in the world.

From its origins as a small office in Dalian in April 1907, the Research Section had 42 members of staff by 1909. At its peak in 1940 it had a multinational staff of 2,354.²¹ Early research initiatives focused on various aspects of Sinology and produced some of the most respected studies in this field. However, Gotō believed it was not the business of the SMR to fund a small band of privileged Japanese scholars to undertake pure academic research. Research had to serve a broader political purpose: Japan's cultural annexation of Manchuria. 'We have to implement a cultural invasion with a Central Laboratory, popular education for the resident populace, and forge other academic and economic links,' the SMR researcher Itō Takeo recalls Gotō saying. 'Invasion may not be an agreeable expression,' he explained, 'but [language] aside we can generally call our policy invasion in civilian garb.'²² This imperialistic attitude conflicted with the political sensibilities of many of those working in the Research Section, whose personal interests were not in aiding colonial service or imperial ambitions, but primarily in scholarship.²³ Over the subsequent years, their output

19. Gotō appointed as head Okamatsu Santarō (1871–1921), a law professor from Kyoto University who he had previously hired in Taiwan. Okamatsu was replaced in 1908 by Kawamura Chūjirō, who remained head of research for a decade and later rose to become the head of the SMR. Fogel, 1988: 18.

20. Fogel, 1988: 16.

21. Employees were primarily from Japan (140,000 at their peak), China, Korea, Russia, and Mongolia. Staff numbers were 51 by 1918, 167 by 1926, and from 1931 onwards rose dramatically.

22. Fogel, 1988: 14.

23. Joshua Fogel cites Itō Takeo, an employee in the Research Section for 25 years from 1920, as saying his SMR colleagues fell into three different ideological categories. The largest comprised the imperialists, who saw

and political leanings were often at odds with their superiors and especially with their perennial rivals in Manchuria, the Kwantung Army. This tension was evident everywhere, not least in urban planning, with the Kwantung government being responsible for towns and cities in the leased territory and the SMR responsible for those along the railways.

While the work of the Research Section had obvious architectural implications, other SMR departments were more directly concerned with architectural production. Architecture and engineering offices were situated within the General Affairs (1914–1919), the Technical Department (1919–1922),²⁴ and the Regional Department (1923–1930). In 1930, as construction became more demanding and widespread, the Construction Department was established to administer architecture, engineering, port construction, and regional developments, responsible for the design and construction of modern urban landscapes across Manchuria. It was the ‘function of calling cities into existence out of brown patches of acreage along its railway lines . . . that eats up a major portion of [the SMR’s] earnings’.²⁵

The Japanese and their supporters insisted this aspect of the SMR’s mission was humanitarian. As the journalist Henry Kinney described, the SMR was ‘a civilising force’,²⁶ rather than ‘a mere commercial enterprise for profit’.²⁷ By devoting ‘huge portions of its earnings to cultural and eleemosynary work, by building and maintaining numerous modern schools, hospitals, and the like’ the SMR saw its purpose as ‘instructing the Chinese in the arts and means of modern civilization’²⁸—of ‘showing them the way’.²⁹ ‘Not Conquest, But Development’.³⁰

The new settlements that the SMR planned and built were the pre-eminent examples of this approach and designed to accommodate a migrant population. Gotō envisioned Manchuria as a place of settlement for Japanese civilians, especially the unskilled and unemployed from the northern regions of Japan. Migrants were expected to exceed 500,000 within the first decade and official organisations, such as the Oriental Development Company (*Toyo Takushoku Kabushiki Kaisha*), were to facilitate this flood of workers.³¹ The actual figures fell significantly short of this on

Manchuria as Japan’s lifeline. Second were the harmonisers, who believed in the possibility of ethnic concord between China and Japan in Manchuria. The third were the anti-colonialists, who congregated in the greatest numbers within the Research Section, in Fogel, 1988: 11–12.

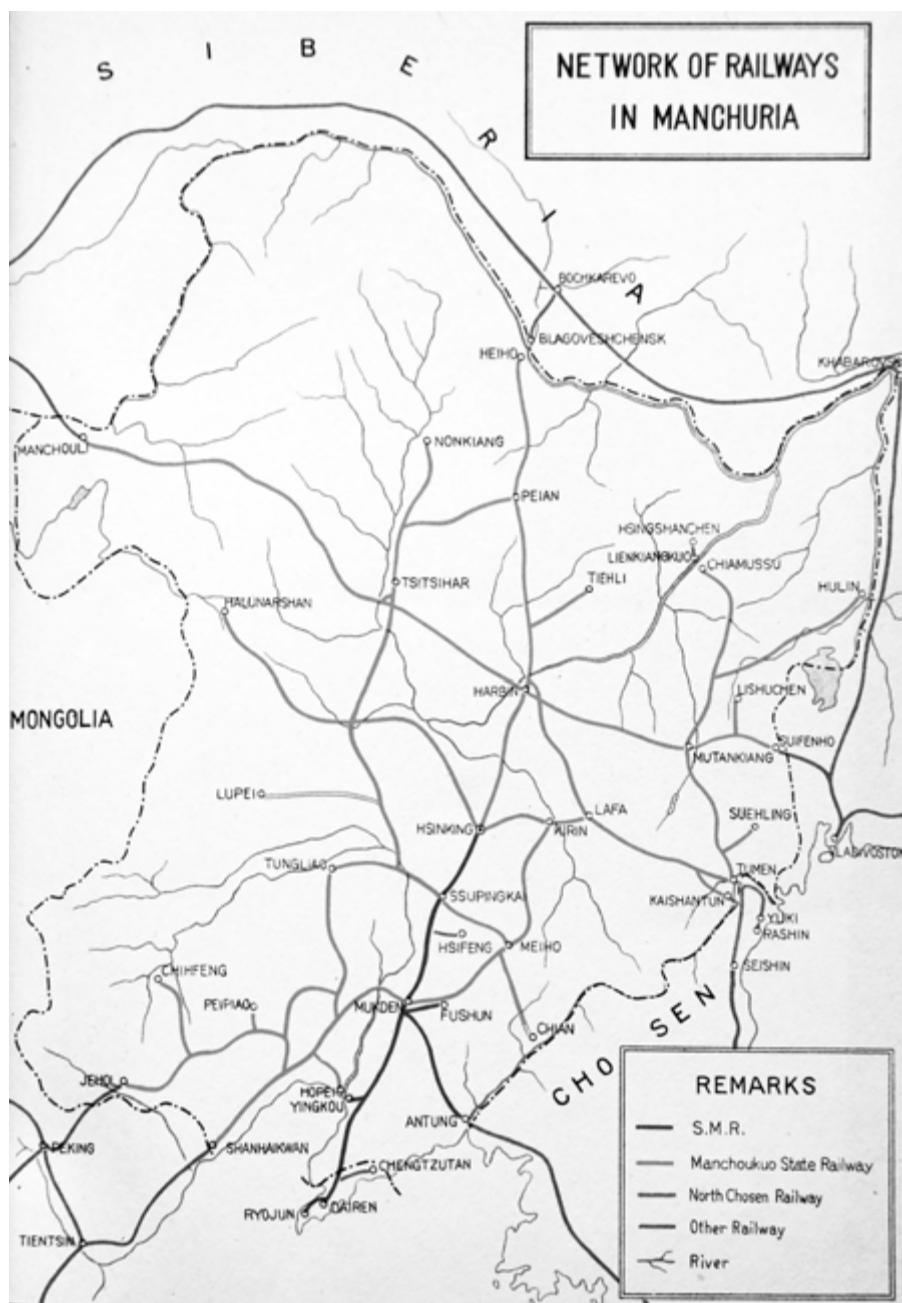
24. Architecture and engineering offices were placed under the direct supervision of the President’s Office for a brief period in 1922.
25. Kinosuke, 1925: 131.
26. Kinney, 1928: 27 and ‘Recent S.M.R. Development Work’, *Far Eastern Review* (September 1928): 401.
27. ‘The South Manchuria Railway’, *Far Eastern Review* (May 1927): 210.
28. Kinney, 1928: 28 and ‘The South Manchuria Railway’, *Far Eastern Review* (May 1927): 210.
29. Kinney, 1928: 27.
30. Kinney, 1928: 26.
31. The Oriental Development Company was established in 1908 to support colonial works in Korea, but its activities were extended to Manchuria in July 1917. In 1936, new offices designed by Kingo Munakato were opened in Dalian.

account of the unexpected deluge of cheaper Chinese labour from nearby provinces, particularly Shandong, which supplied an average of 400,000 immigrants a year.³² Japanese migrants were predominantly skilled professionals, military personnel, and businessmen, whose ranks swelled the population of the Kwantung Leased Territory from 25,699 to 56,060 between 1907 and 1911. By 1936, this had risen to half a million.³³ The imperial elite that formed the cream of this crowd were the SMR staff, whose numbers rose from over 13,500 employees in 1908 to 37,685 by 1924.³⁴ By any standards, the staff that tended the precious railway were treated royally for their loyalty. They were proud, highly motivated, and well paid, receiving twice the salary of temporary Japanese workers and six to seven times the salary of Chinese workers.³⁵ In return, they worked hard for the SMR. Annual profits rose continuously until the outbreak of the Second World War, during which the company enjoyed periods of unprecedented prosperity.

The 1910s was the ‘Golden Age of the SMR’³⁶ Profits trebled in the years up to 1914, doubling again by 1918 and almost doubling again by 1921. By 1923, the SMR’s revenue of 185 million yen was almost equivalent to the combined operational budget for Taiwan (100 million) and Korea (101 million),³⁷ though this was anything but evenly sourced from across the SMR’s network. The Shenyang–Andong line, for example, operated at a loss until 1910 and generated net revenues 15 times smaller than the trunk line from Dalian to Changchun, which became the most profitable railway in China, carrying three times the amount of traffic as the Beijing–Shenyang or the Nanjing–Shanghai lines. The SMR’s profitability was due in part to its policy of investing heavily in modern technology, which improved efficiency and increased profits that in turn paid for modern technology. By 1927, this amounted to 425 locomotives, 430 passenger cars, 6,642 freight cars and cabooses, and 128 stations.³⁸ From 1908 to 1930, the SMR’s assets rose from 163 million yen to over one billion yen.

Another key to the SMR’s financial success was its strategy of combining passenger and freight services on the same line. Unlike most railways in the region or throughout China more broadly, the SMR’s passenger services were efficient, well designed, and comfortable. By combining and efficiently operating two forms of traffic, the region’s mining interests were dependent on and exploitable through the SMR’s lines, guaranteeing the company a consistent profitability and offsetting any losses incurred

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- 32. The Japanese civilian population in Manchuria rose from 16,612 in 1906 to 233,749 in 1930, one-third of which were related in some way to the SMR.
 - 33. The exact figure, according to *Eigyō hōkokusho* (Vol. 1, Report No. 4, p. 61) was 13,621; see Myers, 1989: 115.
 - 34. Different sources cite different precise figures, though most are similar to these figures cited by Myers (1989: 115) from *Eigyō hōkokusho*, Vol. 1, Report No. 4, p. 61.
 - 35. Hikōtarō, 1965: 114.
 - 36. Kadono, 1936: 8.
 - 37. George B. Rea, ‘The Greatest Civilizing Force in Eastern Asia: The Real Mission of the South Manchuria Railway’, *Far Eastern Review* (November 1924): 4.
 - 38. ‘The South Manchuria Railway’, *Far Eastern Review* (May 1927): 209.



Railway map of Manchuria from the 1930s showing the SMR from Dalian to Changchun (Hsingking), the former CER cutting through Manchuria east–west, the Trans-Siberian Railway circumventing north Manchuria, and many branch lines.

by the huge cost of administration, iron and steel production, and the hotel and hospitality sector.

With a monopoly on transportation, the SMR expanded its operations beyond the railways. Company subsidiaries benefitted from a reciprocal cycle of mutual exchange and profitability. From ceramics to oil and from glass to soybeans, the SMR used its research capabilities to transform and exploit the local resources and in turn boost its own profits by encouraging the use of the railway. No product illustrated this reciprocal relationship better than the humble soybean. Not native to Manchuria, the soybean was one of the fruits of the Research Section that transformed it into the SMR's cash crop, revolutionising Manchuria's agricultural economy in the process and spawning a multitude of derivative products including fuel, vitamin B, plastics, lecithin, raw sugar, and lubricants. It was even refined for use in the production of camera film for Manchukuo's prolific film industry.³⁹ By 1927, half the world's soy beans came from Manchuria through the commercial and transport monopoly of the SMR.

Other innovations were directly concerned with modern architectural production. The local manufacture of construction materials that were transforming the built environment, such as steel, concrete, and glass, as well as the construction of modern industrial facilities, inspired a generation of young architects to seize the revolutionary potential of these new materials and construction techniques. With Manchukuo's annual consumption of cement throughout the 1930s averaging nearly a million tonnes,⁴⁰ self-sufficiency was a priority, but there was another problem; freezing winters confined construction to half the year. It was in the Research Section's laboratories that a new type of cement was developed that hardened in Manchuria's freezing temperatures, allowing construction throughout the year. All across Manchuria, the products of this revolution were taking shape and the region's ancient towns and cities would never look the same again.

The SMR's research also pioneered the production of shale oil from the liquefaction of coal. Indeed, 'nowhere in the world [could] one find the shale oil industry being studied and conducted on such a large scale as by the SMR at Fushun', a mining town 35 km east of Shenyang.⁴¹ In the late 1930s, as Japan's need for fuel self-sufficiency grew in parallel with its imperial ambitions, the SMR's Central Laboratory went into partnership with the Japanese Imperial Navy to build a shale oil plant in Fushun. 'With this most modern and exceedingly important enterprise scheduled to open shortly,' wrote one journalist optimistically, 'Fushun is destined to become the chief supplier of fuel for the Japanese Empire'.⁴² On the eve of the Second World War,

39. Soya bean processing was introduced by the British in Newchuang in 1896, but not properly exploited in the modern sense until the Japanese arrived.

40. In the 1930s Manchukuo consumed 700,000–800,000 tons of cement annually.

41. Horace M. Masuda, 'Fushun: Mining Metropolis', *Far Eastern Review* (October 1940): 364.

42. 'Fushun . . . Manchurian City of Industry', *Manchuria* (1 October 1936): 235.

Japan pinned its hopes on the production of oil from Manchukuo's vast coal reserves to solve an impending fuel crisis.

Chinese Resistance

As the SMR set about transforming Manchuria, a revolution of a different kind was unfolding in China, where the ailing Qing dynasty was clinging to the reins of power. China's continued erosion by foreign nations, the Sino-Japanese War, and the Boxer Rebellion had done much to undermine the credibility of China's rulers. The death of the Empress Dowager, Cixi (1835–1908), who had wielded immense power in China for nearly half a century and resisted many reforms, brought a Manchu infant to the imperial throne and the possibility of change. Pu Yi (1906–1967), aged just two years and ten months, was the twelfth and last of the Qing rulers and the last emperor of China. Following the birth of the Republic of China on 1 January 1912, Pu Yi was forced to abdicate.⁴³ His departure would not, however, signal the end of his imperial career. After a brief restoration in 1917 lasting just ten days, the Japanese would later reinstate Pu Yi as emperor of his ancestral territory of Manchuria under Japan's control.

In the meantime, China was entering a turbulent and troubled transition from an era of dysfunctional imperialism to an age of barely functioning republicanism. On 18 January 1915, Japan issued the infamous Twenty-One Demands that sought to extend Japanese control of Chinese territory and assets. Despite enraging the Chinese and undermining trust among foreign allies, particularly Britain and the United States, Japan firmly believed it had a pre-eminent position in Manchuria. Seven of the twenty-one demands dealt exclusively with these interests, ranging from a 99-year extension to the lease of the SMR zones⁴⁴ to greater rights for Japanese citizens in Manchuria (including property, commerce, and travel). The Twenty-One Demands became a lightning rod that channelled the latent energies simmering amongst China's masses and concentrated them squarely on a nationalist agenda opposed to the appropriation and exploitation of Chinese territory by foreign powers and, in particular, Japan. Manchuria, for so long the wilderness on the Middle Kingdom's northern periphery, was now concentrating China's woes. Throughout much of this period, Manchuria was virtually an independent state under the control of the warlord and later governor general of the Three Northern Provinces, Zhang Zuolin (Chang Tso-lin, 1875–1928).

China organised mass boycotts of Japanese goods and invested heavily in alternative railway lines throughout Manchuria to challenge the SMR's monopoly. In 1928 China purchased 244 steel bridges and 21,000 tonnes of rails from the American Steel

43. The official abdication was signed on 12 February 1912.

44. This included the Shenyang to Andong line and the Kwantung Leased Territory/Liaodong Peninsula.

Products Company, all of which were shipped from Baltimore to Dalian to build the Jilin–Heilong line with the purpose of bypassing the SMR. The objective was to concentrate Chinese railways through Shenyang to feed a future commercial port at Huludao that, with heavy investment from the Netherlands Harbour Works Company, would knock Dalian off its pre-eminent perch. The US\$6 million harbour construction works commenced on 2 July 1930 and were scheduled to finish in October 1935. Thousands of kilometres of proposed lines spread out from Huludao to Fuyuan in the north-eastern corner of Manchuria, Heihe on the northern border with Russia, westwards to Doulun in Inner Mongolia, and eastwards to Jilin and beyond. Japan protested vigorously, knowing that the realisation of these plans ‘would not only have destroyed the value of the SMR and Dairen harbor but would have wiped out Japan’s special interest in Manchuria from the very foundation’.⁴⁵ Japan’s reaction in defence of what it regarded as rightful assets was to have global consequences. Concerned by China’s growing unity and frustrated by Grand Marshall Zhang Zuolin’s failure to challenge Chiang Kai-shek’s Northern Expedition, Japan took decisive action.

Zhang was a monarchist and opposed China’s fledgling republican movement spearheaded by the Guomindang (Kuomintang). In 1928, having been in Beijing and pronounced himself Grand Marshall, Zhang’s Fengtian Army was defeated by Chiang Kai-shek’s (1887–1975) Nationalist forces and forced to retreat behind the Great Wall. The Guomindang eventually succeeded in bringing peace to much of China and formally installed a Nationalist government in the newly assigned capital of Nanjing in 1928. On 4 June, the ousted Grand Marshall returned to Shenyang from Beijing by train and was assassinated by a Kwantung Army officer Kōmoto Daisaku, who had planted a bomb on a viaduct outside Shenyang where the SMR joined the Chinese state railways. The nature of Zhang’s premature death was symbolic of the much wider significance of the railways in Manchuria.

Zhang’s assassination was proof, if any more were needed, of Japan’s entrenched position in Manchuria. Japan’s intransigence contrasted starkly with the increasingly conciliatory tone of other foreign nations towards the fledgling Nationalist government in Nanjing. Japan found itself a victim of the SMR’s success, being embedded too deeply by the company in regional affairs. Politically or commercially, withdrawal was neither desirable nor practical. A strategy was needed to deal with the new political situation.

Diplomatic cooperation soon gave way to military coercion as a growing clique within the Japanese administration and a new generation of Kwantung Army officers grew restless with China’s demands and their own government’s inaction. The head of the SMR’s Research Section, Sada Kōjirō, embodied this mounting frustration. He had sown the seed of an idea in the Kwantung Army for a manufactured incident

45. Kadono, 1936: 10.

to strengthen Japan's control that led to Zhang's assassination.⁴⁶ A year before, the reluctance of staff in the SMR's Research Section to work on projects with a military application had caused the formation of a separate department, the Information Section, which actively collected military intelligence.⁴⁷ Three months after Zhang's death, the Japanese established the Manchurian Youth League (*Manshū Seinen Renmei*), which aggressively encouraged Japanese expansionism through the industrialisation of Manchuria and its formation as an independent state.

With the Nationalist government officially established in Nanjing and the assassination of Zhang in Shenyang, 1928 proved a pivotal year for Manchuria, but before the year's end, there was still one more episode that would impact significantly on the region's fate. In the final weeks of 1928, Ishiwara Kanji (1889–1949) was appointed a staff officer in the Kwantung Army, sharing the ideals of the Manchurian Youth League and publically supporting a more aggressive role for Japan in Manchuria. It took less than three years of political manoeuvring and the economic conditions of the Great Depression for him to achieve his objectives.

An Alternative Modernity: Chinese Architecture in Manchuria

The rising tide of militarism in Manchuria by the late 1920s made it an unlikely place for the cultivation of one of the many strands of architectural modernity in China, but Shenyang's North-Eastern University was briefly one of the most important sites of architectural education in China before the Second World War. From the early twentieth century, Japan's universities schooled growing numbers of Chinese students who were attracted not only by the relatively inexpensive education compared with the United States or Europe, but also by its cultural and geographic proximity. The total number of Chinese students in Japan had risen from 280 in 1901 to 15,000 by 1906—more overseas students than at any other time or in any other country. It was from Japan, not the West, that most of China's first trained architects emerged.⁴⁸ From the late 1910s, a second generation travelled to Europe and America, in particular to the University of Pennsylvania.

One of the earliest Chinese students to enrol in architecture at the University of Pennsylvania,⁴⁹ Yang Tingbao, was later invited to Shenyang's North-Eastern University to help establish China's second architecture department.⁵⁰ In 1928, the dean of the Engineering College, Gao Xibin, contacted Yang to offer him the role, but he 'turned it down, because [he] was already tied up with the architectural office of

46. Fogel, 1988: xii.

47. Fogel, 1988: 115. The Information Section later changed its name to Research Materials Section and then to East Asia Section.

48. Wang, 1966: 59.

49. The first was Zhu Bin (1918), followed by Fan Wenzhao (1919).

50. The first was Suzhou Technical College in Jiangsu Province.

S. S. Kwan and Pin Chu to which [he] became later a partner.⁵¹ Yang instead recommended his friend and fellow University of Pennsylvania graduate, Liang Sicheng (1901–1972), son of the Chinese reformer Liang Qichao (1873–1929).

Liang Qichao was ‘very glad to hear of this opportunity’,⁵² but instability in Manchuria made him uneasy about sending his son to Shenyang. Nevertheless, he accepted the position on his son’s behalf, and in 1928 Liang Sicheng returned home from a tour of Europe to China along the Trans-Siberian Railway with his wife and fellow architect Lin Huiyin. They took the CER and SMR to Dalian, from where they took a Japanese boat to Tianjin, then an uncomfortable train to Beijing: ‘the city of their dreams’—where the opposing odours of ‘tuberose and shit . . . mingled with cries of rickshaw men and beggars’.⁵³ By the end of 1928 Liang was installed in Shenyang as ‘Assistant Professor in Charge, Department of Architecture’. The course that he and Lin established was modelled on the training they had received at the University of Pennsylvania under the supervision of Paul Philippe Cret (1876–1945) and the dean, Warren Powers Laird (1861–1948). As the sole lecturers in the Architecture Department for the first year, Liang and Lin did their best to instruct some of China’s first homegrown architects.

In the summer of 1929, Liang and Lin brought two more University of Pennsylvania graduates to Shenyang, Tong Jun and Chen Zhi, and another teacher, Cai Fangyin. Upon arriving in Shenyang, the expanded group formed their own private practice—Liang, Chen, Tong & Cai Architects and Engineers. Lin’s name was not in the firm’s title, despite being a ‘full partner in the designing’.⁵⁴ She contributed to the planning of a park outside Shenyang, as well as ‘designing private residences for wealthy [Shenyang] warlord families’.⁵⁵ The firm received several commissions, among which the only one to be realised was the new university campus (administration building, classrooms, and dormitories) for Kirin University,⁵⁶ completed in 1931.

Shenyang’s fleeting association with the development of architecture in China drew to a close with the threat of war with Japan.⁵⁷ The following February, Chen left for Shanghai, where he established a private practice with friend and former classmate, Zhao Shen. Liang remained in Shenyang until the end of the academic year, when he handed over to Tong, a native of Shenyang. Within weeks, the North-Eastern University was closed and Tong Jun made his way to Shanghai, where he teamed

51. Letter from Yang Tingbao to Wilma Fairbank, 6 December 1979, FFA.

52. Letter from Yang Tingbao to Wilma Fairbank, 6 December 1979, FFA.

53. Fairbank, 1994: 35.

54. Fairbank, 1994: 42–43. In a letter to Chen Zhi dated 9 January 1980, she states that she got this information from Liang Sicheng ‘in a long interview we did together in 1947’, FFA.

55. Fairbank, 1994: 42–43. In a letter to Chen Zhi dated 9 January 1980, she states that she got this information from Liang Sicheng ‘in a long interview we did together in 1947’, FFA.

56. Letter from Chen Zhi to Wilma Fairbank, 28 November 1979, FFA.

57. Lin had also been diagnosed with tuberculosis and returned to Beijing for treatment in late 1930.

up with Chen and Zhao to form Allied Architects in 1933. The brief but important chapter in architectural education in China was firmly closed, ended by Japan's broader designs.

The SMR and 'The Mukden Incident'

By 1931 the SMR operated one of the most modern railways in the world and owned a total of 1,129 km of track.⁵⁸ Flanking these lines were the valuable and controversial railway zones (*fuzokuchi*) covering a total area of 233 square kilometres. Unlike the foreign treaty ports and concessions throughout China, the precise boundary of this occupied land on which Japanese businesses were established and thousands of residents lived was never ratified by any treaty and consequently was the source of festering resentment and constant tension.

Such tensions contributed to the most significant confrontation between China and Japan before the Second World War, the consequences of which continue to reverberate today. On 18 September 1931, Ishiwar Kanji and the chief of intelligence of the Kwantung Army, Seishirō Itagaki (1885–1948), masterminded an 'incident' on the railway line outside Shenyang. The orchestrated explosion was framed as Chinese insurgent activity and provided the pretext for Japan's total occupation of Manchuria. As the Japanese foreign minister, Count Yasuya Uchida, later reasoned, 'We had no alternative other than to resort to measures of self-defense.'⁵⁹ The militarists' strategy sealed their victory and their prize was a greatly expanded empire in the guise of Manchukuo (Manchuland), a new state concocted and, for all intents and purposes, administered by the Japanese.

On 23 February 1932, Itagaki invited the former and last Chinese emperor, Pu Yi, to become the head of state of the new nation that comprised five races (*gozoku kyōwa*): Japanese, Manchus, Hans, Mongols, and Koreans. Collectively, Manchukuo manifested Japan's emerging paternalistic pan-Asianist ideology. According to the partisan press, Japan claimed 'the high moral principles embodied in the founding of the Empire [had] no parallel in the history of the world'.⁶⁰

The Mukden Incident was a turning point for the SMR, for Manchuria, and for the relationship between Japan and its new imperial realm. The SMR was stripped of its many commercial enterprises and reorganised as a railway company in service to a much larger militaristic machine. The president, Uchida Kōsai, personified this shift. Having been opposed to the military, he became a keen supporter of Manchurian independence. In so doing, he lost the respect of colleagues and, most notably, the vice-president, Eguchi Teijō, who resigned, pointedly remarking: 'This is Napoleon's

58. Prior to the Mukden Incident, the total length of railways in what would become Manchukuo was 6,219 km.

59. 'Manchukuo and Japan', *Far Eastern Review* (August 1932): 346.

60. 'Progress in Manchukuo—A Remarkable Record', *Far Eastern Review* (November 1935): 420.

Moscow. It will end in dismal failure.⁶¹ It would take over a decade and another world war for his cautionary words to be vindicated.

Before 1931 Manchuria had been a site of Japan's quasi-colonial exploitation from the motherland. After 1931, with the effects of the Great Depression undermining economic confidence, Manchuria was recast as Japan's future and its lifeline, protected in self-defence and preserved at all costs. In this new guise, Manchukuo became the site of some of the most concentrated architectural encounters with modernity during the twentieth century—an encounter that was promoted by and in pursuit of a distinctly Japanese modernist agenda.

61. Fogel, 1988: xii, 123.

4

Manchukuo

Modern Mirage, 1932–1945

Those engaged in public works and building construction are the pioneers in the establishment of a new order in East Asia and this branch of industry forms the basis for the construction of Manchoukuo [*sic*].¹

From 1932, the balance of power shifted dramatically in Manchuria. The reverberations from the Mukden Incident affected Japan and would soon be felt across Asia before rocking the entire globe. Since 1905, Manchuria had been an expedient quasi-colonial adventure for Japan offering substantial economic and political dividends. Manchukuo, however, was an idea born out of imperialistic ambitions within the military in collusion with right-wing sympathisers in Tokyo.

Established on 1 March 1932, Manchukuo embodied not only the crystallisation of Japan's ambitions in Asia but also a transformation within Japanese politics that would lead inexorably to domestic turmoil and global conflict. To justify their claims, Japan's position shifted from treating Manchuria as a convenient accessory to becoming the country's lifeline—the motherland and progeny connected by the fragile chord of the SMR. The inviolability of this vital connection caused Japan to sever its relationship with the League of Nations and to stand alone on the world stage.

The assertion that Japan would perish without Manchukuo upended the conventional relationship between imperialism and modernity. The promise of modernity was a central facet of twentieth century imperialism, and much energy was expended and lives extinguished marching to modernity's tune. After the creation of Manchukuo, however, modernity's magic began to work not only in the conventional direction of metropolitan centre to imperial periphery, but also in the other direction. Manchukuo's claims to modernity were so compelling that, directly and indirectly, they effected the modernisation of the motherland and of Japanese society.²

Manchuria was seen by the Japanese as a component in the larger structure of empire, but Manchukuo was empire defined. For architects and city planners motivated by the possibility of designing the future and the irresistible thrill of having

1. ‘New Building Law Announced’, *Manchuria* (1 June 1940): 262.

2. For a thorough account of this particular aspect of Manchukuo's encounter with modernity, see Young, 1998.

these designs built, Manchukuo bristled with opportunity. The new state was framed as ‘a new country with no cultural legacy needing to be preserved and a mixed race country requiring a new architectural style’.³ It was painted as a blank canvas onto which they could realise their vision of a brighter future, though the task proved very much more complex and confused than the state or the media would ever admit. Nevertheless, the vision was sufficiently alluring as to reflect an alternative image of modernity back to Japan, whose architects, planners, and engineers flocked to Manchukuo to thrive in the warm glow of imperial opportunity.

Changing of the Guard

The Mukden Incident marked the transition from the quasi-colonial SMR era of soft and subtle commercialism, to an imperial age characterised by an independent one-party state under military rule masked by the neologism: the ‘kingly way’ (Wang Tao). Wang Tao represented ‘the high moral principles embodied in the founding of the Empire’. According to the Japanese-sponsored press, it had ‘no parallel in the history of the world’.⁴ The new state ideology signalled Japan’s departure from internationalism by drawing on local religions and customs, such as Buddhism, Daoism (Taoism), and Confucianism to promote virtue and morality over materialism. It was an attempt at a cultural revolution. All school books published by the Guomindang (Kuomintang) were pulped and replaced with *The Four Books* and *The Book of Filial Piety* by Confucius. Wang Tao also opposed Communism.⁵

The establishment of a military state was expertly orchestrated by the Kwantung Army, whose long-held thirst for power was satiated and whose assertion that Japan should control the region was vindicated. Victory also signalled the defeat of the Japanese left-wing and the ultimate demise of the independence of political parties within the executive body of the Japanese government. The subjugation of state and society under the Japanese military became a hallmark of Manchukuo’s encounter with modernity.

Japan’s adept and swift orchestration of events (which continued through to 1933 with the annexation of neighbouring Jehol (Rehe) Province)⁶ outwitted other foreign nations and skilfully enlisted their members’ opinions to justify and strengthen its case. In 1932, George Bronson Rea, the respected owner of the *Far Eastern Review*

3. Masami Makino, ‘Architecture of the Ten Years of Manchukuo’, *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (October 1942): 19.

4. ‘Progress in Manchukuo: A Remarkable Record’, *Far Eastern Review* (November 1935): 420.

5. Communism was subject to a thinly veiled attack by Chih Piao, the second secretary of the Manchukuo Legation to Tokyo, who highlighted the need for a, ‘new system free from radical theories or fallacies liable to undermine completely the social structure’. See Chih Piao, ‘Manchoukuo’s Construction Program’, *Far Eastern Review* (March 1934): 108.

6. Rehe Province was absorbed into Liaoning Province and Hebei Province in 1955.

and an ‘outstanding authority on Far Eastern affairs’ was among the first foreign recruits.⁷ I offer no apologies for defending a cause that in my humble opinion represents all those ideals and principles upon which human liberty and progress are founded.⁸ Other foreign apologists included Henry William Kinney, who wrote the popular book, *Modern Manchuria* (1928), and Ellis Whitman, who in 1934 eulogised: ‘The resurrection of the Mongol nation, only a few years ago facing utter destruction and extinction at the hands of Chinese officials, soldiers, and bandits, is one of the brightest pages in the history of the years which have seen the establishment of the state of Manchoukuo [sic].’⁹

The discipline and swiftness of Japan’s strategy contrasted sharply with the international community’s indifference. The Lytton Report, commissioned by the League of Nations to establish the cause of the Mukden Incident, was not published until over a year after the event and several months after Manchukuo’s official inauguration. Manchuria was the first major incident to expose the League’s impotence and set a dangerous precedent for others to follow. Branded ‘superficial, ill-informed and, probably unintentionally, dishonest’ by the Japanese-sponsored press, the Lytton Report was too little too late.¹⁰ It infuriated Japan and legitimised their ambassador’s theatrical exit from the League of Nations on 24 February 1933, setting a precedent for global conflict.¹¹ Within two years, fascist Italy, the first country to officially acknowledge Manchukuo,¹² would be invoking Japan’s treatment of Manchuria to legitimise its invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) from neighbouring Eritrea, where it too was busy designing an empire on modernist lines.¹³ Two years later, Japan would in turn cite Italy’s assault on Ethiopia to justify the wholesale invasion of China.

The ‘crusade for the peace of the world’ that put Manchukuo on ‘a pathway towards peaceful empire’¹⁴ represented the changing of the guard at home and abroad. Isolated from the international community, Japan set about building Manchukuo with extraordinary gusto. Japanese architects later described this developmental phase as ‘fast-ism’, during which much was built with little time for regret or reflection.¹⁵ The construction programmes planned over the 1930s were fantastically ambitious and relied on a fragile triumvirate: the political will of the Japanese state, the military authority of the Kwantung Army, and the financial capital of the private sector.

7. ‘A Straw in the Wind’, *Far Eastern Review* (July 1932): 304.

8. Rea, 1934: 1.

9. Whitman, 1934: 247.

10. ‘That Lytton Report’, *Far Eastern Review* (October 1932): 444.

11. The Japanese Ambassador was Yosuke Matsuoka.

12. Italy formally recognised Manchukuo in November 1937. The only other countries to recognise Manchukuo’s legitimacy were Japan, Nationalist Spain (1 December 1937), Germany (20 February 1938), and El Salvador.

13. For more information, see Denison, Ren, and Gebremedhin, 2003.

14. ‘Progress in Manchukuo: A Remarkable Record’, *Far Eastern Review* (November 1935): 420.

15. Masami Makino, ‘Architecture of the Ten Years of Manchukuo’, *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (October 1942): 19.

Behind the hyperbole, economic relations between the Japanese business community and the Kwantung Army were critically strained—especially during the depressed conditions from 1931. Both parties depended on one another for prosperity and survival, but distrust and suspicion prevailed. The Japanese state needed private capital to invest in and realise their ambitions as much as the private sector needed the state for the provision of vital infrastructure, resources, and security. As state control increased, a form of nationalisation was imposed on all major utilities under the maxim ‘one firm for one industry’.

On 15 June 1932, the Central Bank of Manchu was founded and immediately absorbed the four note-issuing institutions and implemented a single currency, the Kokuhei, ending the chaos of Manchuria’s financial system in which different regions and even different cities had possessed separate currencies. On 3 March 1933, the Bureau of State Highways was formed to build and unify Manchukuo’s roads.¹⁶ Three weeks later,¹⁷ the Manchuria Telegraph and Telephone Company was established, charged with managing, improving, and unifying over 100 different private telephone companies.¹⁸ Electrical generation and supply was brought under the Manchuria Electric Industry Company in November 1934, combining all private and state suppliers. The supply of construction materials such as iron, steel, cement, and timber were brought under state control.¹⁹ On 21 August 1937, the Manchuria Motion Picture Producing and Distributing Corporation (*Manshu Eiga Kyokai*) was established, later taking control of the production, distribution, import, and export of all films in Manchukuo.²⁰ The simultaneous nationalisation of state utilities and reliance on private capital created a tension and an economic paradox that ultimately proved unsustainable.

The SMR was a prime example of this contradiction. Stripped of much of its profit-making enterprises, on 1 March 1933, the SMR assumed administrative control of Manchukuo’s 5,800 km railway network made up of the SMR (1,129 km), the Chinese State Railways (2,936 km), and the North Manchuria Railway (formerly the CER, 1,733 km) under a new administration, the General Directorate of State Railways. Based in Shenyang, this new office had ambitions of building a 15,000 km state railway network for Manchukuo, adding an extra 4,000 km of track in ten years.

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16. The Bureau of State Highways planned to build 60,000 km of roads in ten years with Hsinking as the hub of the network and Shenyang and Harbin the other major centres.
 17. Established on 26 March 1933, the Manchuria Telegraph and Telephone Company was supervised by both governments and both armies and exempt from paying tax.
 18. By 1937 the Manchuria Telegraph and Telephone Company employed 8,400 staff.
 19. In 1937, the cost of iron plate increased from 22 to 30 yuan per tonne. Demand for timber rose by 30–40 per cent from 1933 to 1934. To combat inflation and manage demand, iron, steel, and cement production were nationalised.
 20. The corporation was launched following the Motion Picture Law of October 1937 and on 1 November 1937 took control of the distribution of pictures to all cinemas in Manchukuo.

On 23 March 1935, distracted by domestic issues, Stalin transferred ownership of the CER to the Japanese, signalling the end of Russia's 40-year venture that had helped define modern Manchuria.²¹ Having been 'a pebble in the shoe' of the railway administration, the CER's transfer marked the complete unification of the state's network.²² The following year, the General Directorate of State Railways was subsumed into an even larger organisation, Tetsudo Sokyoku, which took control of the supervision of all railway lines in Manchukuo and Korea.²³

The SMR's subsidiary ventures suffered badly. The once formidable Research Section staffed by a committed band of progressive and predominantly left-wing intellectuals was soon challenged by the Economic Research Association (ERA), a new research group established in January 1932 by the Kwantung Army.²⁴ The ERA exposed the often contradictory political allegiances among members of the Research Section and symbolised the division between the right-wing military and the progressive or left-wing professionals, among whose ranks were many architects, city planners, and engineers.

The incorporation of progressive left-wing professionals into the right-wing and military-oriented imperial apparatus was a unique facet of Manchukuo, challenging stereotypical notions of empire. Left-wing intellectuals whose academic careers had become untenable at home found an unlikely sponsor in the right-wing research units of the Kwantung Army. Manchuria offered a professional, personal, and intellectual lifeline to participants in the construction of the new state. These agents of empire excused their complicity by convincing themselves they were transforming Manchukuo for the better. Throughout the 1930s, the progressives maintained the illusion that their presence tempered their right-wing paymasters. Whether idealism blinded their judgement or they were resigned to the inevitable, political allegiances eventually caught up. In the 1940s, in the midst of global conflict, many were rounded up and imprisoned, and by 1943 the SMR's formerly prodigious Research Section was abolished. The SMR was by then far from the 'big happy family, embracing within its fold no less than 120,000 Japanese, Manchoukuoans and Chosenese' that Japanese journalists had so recently and so tirelessly tried to purport.²⁵

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21. The CER was relatively costly. It had to administer over 750,000 square metres of civil constructions, which was far more per mile than Russian state railways.
 22. 'The Manchoukuo State Railways', *Far Eastern Review* (October 1936): 438.
 23. Tetsudo Sokyoku, established on 1 October 1936, was an amalgamation of the General Direction of State Railways (7,410 km), the Railway Construction Bureau of the SMR (1,099 km), and the Direction of the North Chosen Railways (329 km).
 24. After the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the ERA was renamed the Industrial Department and then back to the Research Department.
 25. 'The Port of Dairen', *Far Eastern Review* (May 1940): 179.

Construction Boom

When the Great Depression reached Asia, unemployment in Japan rose as sharply as industrial output fell. In 1932, a slight increase in international trade was portrayed by the vice-consul in London, Isoshi Asahi, as ‘a ray of sunshine to what might be described as a picture of unrelieved gloom.’²⁶ Under slowly improving conditions, Japan set about wooing its business community, encouraging them to establish regional and head offices in Manchukuo and investing heavily in the new state.²⁷

For the majority of Japanese businessmen, many of whom had little or no experience of China, Manchukuo was a place that occupied imagination rather than experience. China had for too long been a wild frontier worthy of contempt, not investment. Businessmen already in China knew of the opportunities, but were also aware of the risks. Boycotts of Japanese goods and attacks on Japanese-owned facilities undermined the export market, particularly in primary industries such as cotton and textiles. By the mid-1930s, a combination of profit and patriotism had stimulated an economic recovery that was propelled further by a growing political will. Despite underlying problems, fortunes could still be made in the heart of Japan’s empire, and they were. Among the foremost profiteers from Manchukuo were Japan’s architects and planners. Tired of the bureaucratic and economic obstacles that impeded progress at home, architects in Manchukuo could realise their dreams. Ambitious plans became reality through the combined abundance of willing clients, copious land, and available funding.

The ensuing construction boom not only attracted men of vision (and they were almost entirely men), but also huge numbers of skilled and semi-skilled workers to construct these visions. An army of construction workers—engineers, transport experts, concrete form workers, scaffolders, carpenters, plumbers, plasterers, painters, and stonemasons—that doubled throughout the 1930s and included in its ranks over half a million Chinese migrants, was vital to Manchukuo’s physical transformation.

The funding of Manchukuo’s construction boom fell squarely on the state and the Japanese taxpayer. Large institutions such as the Bureau of Public Works, Central Bank of Manchu, General Directorate of State Railways, the Kwantung Office’s Public Works Department, and municipal offices collectively spent over 100 million yen annually on construction. The Bureau of Public Works, which spent over 10 million yen a year, was the office responsible for the construction industry and ‘looked after

26. Isoshi Asahi, ‘Manchoukuo, One Year of Achievement’, *Far Eastern Review* (September 1933): 391. Manchukuo’s exports increased by 45 per cent and imports by 150 per cent.

27. In August 1933, a major business conference was held in Dalian designed to stimulate economic growth at home and in the new imperial realm. One of the conference outcomes was the founding of the Japan-Manchuria Business Council.

the drafting of plans, unification of construction, and the supply of materials for governmental construction'.²⁸

New Architecture for a New State

The question of what form architectural modernity in Manchukuo should take posed a dilemma for the Japanese. It was complicated enough in the motherland, where the subject of architectural modernity was not only contested by different factions of varying political hue vying for dominance throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but also courted by a number of Western admirers that included Frank Lloyd Wright, Bruno Taut, and Antonin Raymond. The crown-topped style popularised by Kikutaro Shimoda had found its home among nationalists and imperialists. The gothic style popularised by Yoshikazu Uchida was attributed to an emergent form of Japanese expressionism. And the rationalist concrete frames produced by Japan's growing band of young European-trained architects were international at best, but viewed domestically as suspiciously Western, inviting censure from the right wing. Japanese architects that either migrated to empire or engaged in it from a distance, exported these domestic experiences and squabbles to Manchukuo, where the colourful language of Japanese architectural modernity acquired a distinctly local inflection.

The evolution of a distinct architectural response to Manchurian conditions combining local, regional, and international elements took several decades and paralleled similar debates about architectural authenticity in both Japan and China. 'There is a movement afoot,' noted one journalist in 1926, 'among a small group of men to retain the beauty of old forms but to use modern methods. And in China, too, here and there, attempts have been made to build modern structures, which are not square and squat for the sake of cheapness or ornate in the way of the west.'²⁹ The new Kabukiza theatre (1924) in Tokyo's Ginza district became the architectural embodiment of this movement to resist the Westernisation of Asia's architectural landscape. The Japanese-style concrete construction was seen by many as 'a thing of beauty in the style of old Japan . . . a great Japanese jewel in the midst of hybrid, boxy western industrialism'.³⁰ The architect had become the latest recruit in a cultural force reclaiming Japan's national identity in the face of Western modernity. Shortly after the opening of the Kabukiza, one journalist wrote of this artistic struggle:

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28. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 46–47.
 29. 'Concrete and Ideas Retain Old Beauty of Orient and Add Strength of West', *Far Eastern Review* (May 1926): 238–39.
 30. 'Concrete and Ideas Retain Old Beauty of Orient and Add Strength of West', *Far Eastern Review* (May 1926): 238.

Of these new artists, none is more interesting than the architect in the Orient who is beginning to rebel against the ugly, square, western boxes, that are making unsightly the ancient Oriental cities. He will no longer admit that only in such ugliness can one secure proper heat, light, ventilation and sanitation. Instead, he is trying to bring these desirable comforts into buildings that are not ugly and squat and square but which have some of the beauty of the East.³¹

Such observations were responding to a new phenomenon in Asia, where the first generation of trained professionals in the novel art of architecture and with all the methods of modernity at their disposal were returning from overseas education and either designing buildings in the foreign styles they had been taught or sought to use their knowledge to create new forms of domestic architecture. Ino Dan, assistant professor at Tokyo Imperial University, identified the two extremes: modernists, who, paraphrasing Le Corbusier, 'regard architecture as a machine made at the least possible expense and in the safest and most convenient manner possible for living', and historicists, who sought beauty from the past, whether Occidental or Oriental.³²

It was the latter that drew Dan's attention and concentrated public and professional opinion following the devastating earthquake that flattened Tokyo on 1 September 1923. The pursuit of Western styles of architecture which had appeared in Japan since the late nineteenth century, was, he argued, 'meaningless' and created an opportunity for the exploration of a national architecture 'based on the culture of the Japanese race'.³³ What followed was years of extensive research into the theory and practice of local building traditions, a discipline that was later taken to Manchukuo and carried out under the auspices of architectural departments in state institutions and professional bodies such as the Manchurian Architectural Association (*Manshu Kenchiku Kyoukai*). Local building materials, climate, ecology, customs, and conditions, were all analysed in relation to Japan's characteristic style of building with its large roof and projecting eaves imported from China during the Tang dynasty, over one millennium earlier.

Japan, like China, struggled to reconcile their distinctive roofs with modern materials and modes of living. The complexity and utility of these crafted timber structures did not translate into concrete. 'It is not difficult to imagine how unpleasant this would be,' asserted Dan, 'when one realizes that such a projection of roof would be made of ponderous concrete'.³⁴ There had to be another way. The irreconcilability of modern

31. 'Concrete and Ideas Retain Old Beauty of Orient and Add Strength of West', *Far Eastern Review* (May 1926): 238.

32. Ino Dan, 'The Reconstruction of Tokyo and Aesthetic Problems of Architecture', *Far Eastern Review* (January 1932): 42.

33. Ino Dan, 'The Reconstruction of Tokyo and Aesthetic Problems of Architecture', *Far Eastern Review* (January 1932): 42.

34. Ino Dan, 'The Reconstruction of Tokyo and Aesthetic Problems of Architecture', *Far Eastern Review* (January 1932): 42.

materials with Japan's building traditions did 'not mean that a revival of the Japanese style of architecture in the modern city [was] hopeless,' argued Dan.³⁵ The solution lay not in the simplistic substitution of timber and paper screens with concrete and glass, but a more elemental understanding of Japanese architecture and built form—the study not of the building, but of space: the void not the solid. From this perspective traditional Japanese building 'reveals that there is something quite modern in its spirit', and this was understood by some of the greatest modernists of the twentieth century, including Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier.³⁶ Functionality, standardisation, the structural frame, and geometric simplicity were elemental features that traditional Japanese (and Chinese) building shared with Western modernism and which some modernists—Taut, Wright, Raymond, and Neutra—appropriated before offering them back to Japan as essential attributes of modernism as they saw it.

From 1932, Japanese architects were presented with an entirely different challenge when their profession found itself in the frontline of Japanese efforts to create and assert a new identity for Manchukuo—a politically motivated process that intensified up to the end of the Second World War. It was a new territory, physically and figuratively, for Japan's architects to explore and realise their dreams of architectural modernity—a utopian setting that, it was hoped, would allow them to 'contribute some new theory and style to the architecture of the world of to-day'.³⁷ By the 1940s and in the midst of global conflict, the Japanese architect in Manchukuo was cast as a national hero: on 22 May 1940, a new law was passed declaring 'those engaged in public works and building construction are the pioneers in the establishment of a new order in East Asia [which] forms the basis for the construction of Manchoukuo [sic].'³⁸

Huge resources were committed to architectural theory and practice in Manchukuo. Researchers examined every detail of traditional building and its response to local conditions. The lack of earthquakes, a drier climate and extreme temperature variations throughout the year were features of Manchuria that determined its built form and distinguished it from Japanese norms. These dissimilarities presented architects embracing imperial opportunity with a major challenge that was not always successfully met, but had the potential to advance architecture at home.³⁹

Timber—the elemental material for Japanese architects—was substituted by locally manufactured bricks (*peitzu*) comprising dried blocks of rammed earth

35. Ino Dan, 'The Reconstruction of Tokyo and Aesthetic Problems of Architecture', *Far Eastern Review* (January 1932): 42.

36. Ino Dan, 'The Reconstruction of Tokyo and Aesthetic Problems of Architecture', *Far Eastern Review* (January 1932): 42.

37. Ino Dan, 'The Reconstruction of Tokyo and Aesthetic Problems of Architecture', *Far Eastern Review* (January 1932): 43.

38. 'New Building Law Announced', *Manchuria* (1 June 1940): 262.

39. Masami Makino, 'Architecture of the Tens Years of Manchukuo', *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (October 1942): 17.

that for millennia had risen out of the Manchurian plains in the form of city walls, forts, ramparts, temples, and the humble dwelling of the peasant farmer. Solid walls of *peitzu*, topped with straw covered timber roofs, created an impermeable barrier to the elements, quite unlike Japan's raised timber-framed homes with flexible and permeable screen walls. In towns and cities, *peitzu* were substituted by a more permanent fired brick, which became a characteristic feature of Japanese architecture in Manchukuo. Over 150 million bricks were used each year, 120 million of which were manufactured locally.

To combat the extreme winters and temperatures below -40°C, Japanese architects experimented with 'the tatami-less house' and adopted domestic interiors that used tables and chairs.⁴⁰ Such foreign devices had become the norm in offices, schools, and shops in Japan throughout the Meiji era, but less so in the domestic environment, where the tatami reigned. Homes were kept warm by an integral form of central heating known as a *kang* (Russia's called them *pechka*)—a raised platform projecting from the wall about 70 cm high with a fire inside that warmed the walls and floor of the house.⁴¹ The extreme summer heat was dry and therefore less of a concern for architects accustomed to resolving ways of cooling interiors. Other local conditions besides the continental climate included wartime preparedness, such as bomb-proofing and anti-air raid design. 'All of these things,' noted one commentator, 'contributed to the rise of a new, and different type of construction and architecture that had never existed before'.⁴²

While practical considerations concentrated on construction techniques, materials, customs, and local conditions, theoretical concerns focussed on the question of architectural modernity in Manchukuo and what form this should take. The result was not the adoption of architectural modernity from the West, but a multifaceted modernity from the East forged by Manchuria's climatic, geographic, political, and socio-economic conditions. Initially, as one observer put it, 'a new type of construction was introduced by the Japanese, which was neither purely Japanese nor purely foreign. . . . The buildings put up by the Japanese were a compromise between western and Japanese types of construction'.⁴³ Later, with the advent of Manchukuo, architects were conscious that 'Manchurian architecture needed to be unique'.⁴⁴ Inspiration for the 'concrete massive walls and phantastic [sic] roofs' of new buildings came from

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- 40. Masami Makino, 'Architecture of the Tens Years of Manchukuo', *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (October 1942): 17.
 - 41. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 46.
 - 42. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 46.
 - 43. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 42–43.
 - 44. Masami Makino, 'Architecture of the Tens Years of Manchukuo', *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (October 1942): 19.

'the style of the "potala's" and the "p'ai-lou's" of Mongol monasteries'.⁴⁵ In the domestic realm, the combination of 'native Manchus [taking] in the modern facilities' and the Japanese adopting certain characteristics of Manchurian dwellings produced 'a new type of residential building'.⁴⁶ The process of translation resulted in 'Manchurian construction coming to possess qualities and characteristics peculiar to the country'.⁴⁷ It had taken a few years, but at last in the new state created by Japan a mode of building 'that represented Manchuria finally emerged'.⁴⁸

Architecture in Manchukuo was a predominantly metropolitan undertaking engaged in two main spheres of activity: architecture of the state (e.g., government offices, schools, hospitals, fire stations, railway buildings, industrial facilities, and public housing) and private practice (e.g., department stores, shops, cinemas, hotels, factories, and private housing). The architectural departments of state organisations were largely responsible for public schemes funded by private capital and commissioned by state organs such as the Kwantung Army, the SMR, and municipal departments, while some public commissions were open to competition or subcontracted to independent architects whose work was otherwise principally engaged with private clients.

The distinction between these two spheres assumed an aesthetic connotation with the imposition by the state of stylistic censorship, especially after the foundation of Manchukuo. The charged political atmosphere and the desire for buildings to represent a fledgling nation under the patronage of an expanding empire imposed a loose set of stylistic conditions on design. With the benefit of hindsight, many architects were critical of this initial phase, where the explicit incorporation of Asian style roofs and decoration on modern buildings driven by political expedience were seen as lazy, uninventive, and even embarrassing.⁴⁹ Amidst a political landscape rife with rivalries, the Japanese found themselves supervising the creation of a new style that was neither Chinese nor Japanese, but attempted to embody the solidarity between Japan and Manchukuo and reflect the utopian idea of the new state: a modern 'Manchu' style.

The keenest advocates of empire believed the path of progress led from the imperial centre to the periphery. 'New construction features were introduced by the Japanese hereto unseen in Manchuria,' boasted Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'and Manchu

45. T. V. Gilchrist, 'Hsinking', *Manchuria* (15 September 1939): 1442.

46. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 45.

47. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 43–45.

48. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 43–45.

49. See Masami Makino, 'Architecture of the Tens Years of Manchukuo': 15–24 and Hideo Fuegi, 'The Building Industry and Architectural Profession Past and Present', *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (November 1942): 35–44.

people assimilated the gift of their better trained and better informed Japanese “instructors”⁵⁰ Japan saw it as a civilising duty to export to Manchuria all the facets of modernity—international standards of lighting, materials, ventilation, sound absorption, heating and cooling, and sanitation. However, Manchukuo also pointed Japanese architects towards a future for their own society in which everything from the domestic environment to urban planning was reorganised along modern lines. This was not merely an example of the dualistic relationship between colonised and coloniser but the upending of the conventional centre-periphery model of empire entirely. Manchuria was a vast laboratory in which a new generation of Japanese architects and planners gained unprecedented experience and opportunity, the fruits of which would materialise much later. It would take nearly two decades and one world war before such futures were realised, but Manchukuo’s role in Japan’s post-war developments, whether acknowledged or not, are indisputable.

A Modern Utopia

Whether engaged in the design of the Manchukuo state, its cities, or its buildings, there was no stronger guiding principle for the Japanese than the pursuit of the modern. Modernity was omnipresent in its quest of industrial expansion, military strength, technological development, and various forms of cultural and artistic expression. Manchukuo’s programme of modernity was rooted firmly in the metropolitan realm, though unlike encounters with modernity elsewhere it did not place rural settlement in opposition to it. Japan’s colonial policy promised progress and opportunity in rural and metropolitan contexts in equal measure, though it was in the cities that it flourished most fully. Modernity defined the means by which Manchukuo was presented to the Japanese and international public and sold to prospective migrants.

Architects and planners had to respond swiftly to the immigration boom that accompanied the founding of the new state. Migration programmes that promised millions would make the journey from Japan to Manchuria before 1930 never exceeded 10,000. After the establishment of Manchukuo, average annual migration peaked at nearly 100,000 a year.⁵¹ In 1937, over 80 per cent of the 1,349,920 Japanese had arrived since 1931.⁵² This was still some way short of expectations, as successive schemes aimed at boosting migration failed to meet targets. In July 1936, a plan was announced to send one million mostly low-income or unemployed households

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50. Shinsaku Tsutsui, ‘Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo’, *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 45.
51. Young quotes that ‘before 1930 the Japanese population rose at an average of 9,350 per year, by the 1930s it was 83,132 per year’ (1998: 257).
52. The total population was then 36,949,972. Up until Japan’s surrender in 1945, a total of 321,882 Japanese emigrants had arrived in Manchuria.

(5 million people) to Manchukuo for permanent settlement over 20 years.⁵³ Migration became a national obsession both domestically and in its creation of the new state. As one journalist put it, ‘The final culmination of complete Manchu-Japanese solidarity will be achieved when the current mass immigration program from Nippon has been realized.’⁵⁴ Manchukuo became a concept—an ideal—that state-sponsored programmes aggressively promoted at home. Agrarian families from areas with traditionally high unemployment, such as the prefectures of Nagano and Yamagata, were targeted for rural programmes, enticed by the promise of new homes and land.

However, the vast majority of migrants that made the journey across the sea were skilled and semi-skilled workers destined for the cities.⁵⁵ Manchukuo’s metropolitan leaning contrasted sharply with Japan’s imperial programmes in neighbouring Korea, where almost all the loans issued to settlers by the government-backed Oriental Development Company targeted agricultural schemes. In Manchuria half the loans were for urban projects and the rest were for manufacturing and transportation programmes.⁵⁶ Despite the government’s best efforts at promoting rural policies and presenting a shared experience of modernity, immigration in Manchukuo turned out to be a predominately elitist, skilled, and metropolitan phenomenon. The ultra-modern transportation and communication networks served the rapidly expanding cities and connected them to burgeoning industrial facilities. Some cities enjoyed electrical supply as high as 95 per cent compared with an average of 5.4 per cent across Manchuria.⁵⁷ Even radio broadcasting, that ‘aerial bond of unity for the toiling millions’, remained an extravagance, beyond the means of most rural workers.⁵⁸ Film and drama too were played out only in the new and invariably glitzy cinemas and theatres in new cities.⁵⁹ Despite utopian ideas to the contrary, modernity in Manchukuo was an inescapably metropolitan affair.

53. 400,000 of these households were to engage in agriculture.

54. Murotsu, ‘Japan-Manchoukuo Solidarity Strengthened’, *Manchuria* (1 January 1939): 898.

55. The composition of Japanese immigrants remained consistent throughout the 1930s with the four main enterprises comprising commerce (25 per cent), the colonial administration (22 per cent), manufacturing (21 per cent), and shipping and railways (18 per cent).

56. These figures were for 1926, but they reflect the general trend since Manchuria became a field of operations for the Oriental Development Company in 1917. See Herbert Bratter, ‘Japan’s Colonizing Agency’, *Far Eastern Review* (May 1930), 213. Similar comparisons can be seen in the overall investment in industry, manufacturing, and agriculture in Manchukuo in the 1930s. From 1935 to 1937, total investment in industry and manufacturing rose from 707 million to 2.2 billion yen and 363 million to 653 million yen respectively. Agriculture, in contrast, rose from 120 million to 300 million over the same period.

57. Household electrical supply was 97 per cent of Anshan, 95 per cent in Dalian, 67 per cent in Hsinking, 70 per cent in Fushun, 42 per cent in Harbin, and 40 per cent in Shenyang. ‘Electricity in Manchuria’, *Far Eastern Review* (July 1937): 275.

58. Murotsu, ‘Japan-Manchoukuo Solidarity Strengthened’, *Manchuria* (1 January 1939): 898.

59. Shenyang had 16 Japanese cinemas and 16 Manchu. Hsinking had 6 and 5 respectively and Harbin 3 and 8 (and 6 foreign). In total, Manchukuo had 62 and 64 and 8 respectively.

The struggle to cultivate modernity in the countryside was compounded by the persistent and associated problem of local opposition (branded banditry by the Japanese), and mass migration from China. Fear of the natives—that perennial colonial dilemma—was no less of an issue for the Japanese resettling among their Asian cousins than it was for the thousands of Italian farmers Mussolini sent to Libya, Somalia, and Eritrea at the same time and for the same reasons. The 14 million native ‘Manchu’ farmers that resisted the appropriation of their land was a constant concern, sapping Japanese resources and undermining confidence. For the 300,000 rural Japanese migrants marooned in small settlements in an alien and hostile landscape, their numbers would always remain a mere drop in an ocean of Chinese labourers.



Cartoon showing ‘five modern Manchurian girls’, including the ‘ultra-modern miss’ clad in fur and flaunting a camera.

Japan tried strenuously to appease the rural communities and counter the urban exclusivity of cultural production and engagement. The Comfort Train, which travelled along the myriad arteries of Manchukuo’s many branch lines, delivered state-sponsored culture to the far-flung corners of empire. Performing troupes and an on-board cinema entertained the rural masses with film shows, phonograph, and dramatic performances. A basic medical service was also provided free of charge. As tension with China escalated, the Japanese recognised that arts and culture were

effective antidotes to military machinations, and they went to great lengths to emphasise the ‘even more vital task [of] collaboration in modern drama, music, filmplay, journalism and radio broadcasting between the two nations’.⁶⁰

Cultural appeasement and propaganda worked in both directions. The information sections of the Manchukuo government and the film industry in Japan had helped spawn a thriving tourist sector that targeted the country’s growing middle classes. The publication of brochures, maps, pamphlets, posters, and books and the production of features films and documentaries were framed as helping ‘foreign people gain a correct understanding of ever-developing Manchuria’, but it was much more than that.⁶¹

Manchukuo became a film set on which the drama of Japan’s imperial project was played out in glorious detail and projected back to a thirsty public at home and overseas. Films were made to convey every aspect of Manchukuo’s path to modernity and played heavily on modern themes and imagery, including architecture and planning. *Honeymoon Express* was set on board the ultra-modern locomotive, the Asia Express. *Sora No Tabi (Aeroplane Trip)* was a story about a honeymooning couple on a journey around Manchuria by aeroplane. *Nobiyuku Kokuto (Growing Capital of Manchukuo)*, commissioned by the Capital Construction Bureau, contrasted Manchukuo’s new capital of Hsinking with its former incarnation, Changchun,⁶² and *Kokuto Sai (Capital Construction Festival)*, commissioned by the State Council’s Bureau of Information, celebrated the completion of the first Five-Year Capital Construction Plan in 1937. In a quadrangular romance titled *Chi Chiao Tu* the lead protagonist was cast as an architect.

Manchukuo was portrayed as a place to experience the future—a land of modernity fashioned by Japan’s benevolent and guiding hand—and became the ultimate destination for the discerning Japanese tourist. The route was well established, comfortable, imbued with cultural and imperial significance and, most importantly, increasingly affordable to the rising middle class. The first generation of Yamato Hotels in the larger cities were expanded, modernised, and augmented by local branches in more remote areas, such as Chengde, Jilin, Jingyuetan, and Qiqihar.⁶³ The hotel chain was not merely expected to ‘mark an epoch in the tourist industry of Manchuria’, but ‘also a potential incentive to the promotion of trade relations between the new Empire and foreign nations interested in the Orient’.⁶⁴ The number of guests visiting SMR hotels rose from 21,865 in 1932 to 58,207 by 1939.⁶⁵

60. Murotsu, ‘Japan-Manchoukuo Solidarity Strengthened’, *Manchuria* (1 January 1939): 898.

61. ‘Railways in Manchuria’, *Manchuria* (1 July 1936): 52.

62. *Nobiyuku Kokuto* was filmed in two reels and subtitled in Japanese, Manchukukuo, German, and Italian.

63. The Qiqihar branch was opened on 15 August 1936.

64. ‘Railways in Manchuria’, *Manchuria* (1 July 1936): 52.

65. Young, 1998: 263.



Advertisement for the Japanese state-sponsored Yamato Hotel chain, showing the network of hotels around Manchuria.

Tourism was founded on the cult of the modern. It relied on modern technology, new buildings, novel facilities, and mass communication with all their comforts and gizmos: pneumatic suspension, air-conditioning, elevators, refrigerators, telegraphy, telephones,⁶⁶ and radios. Manchukuo possessed luxury hotels; glamorous passenger

66. From 1906 to 1932, the number of telegraph and telephone offices in Manchukuo rose from 44 to 214 and from 21 to 254 respectively and the number of long distance calls rose from 17,000 to 1.25 million. From 1906 to 1937, the number of telephone subscribers in Manchukuo went from 785 to 69,246, 42,446 of which were Japanese. This paled in comparison to Japan, where for every hundred people, telegraph use was

steamers with the latest interior designs; a network of highways plied by inter-city buses, chauffeur-driven motor cars and ‘motor omnibuses’; a state of the art railway boasting ‘ultra-modern’ high-speed trains and new airports that plugged it into an expanding web of international air travel. The elements were indivisible, each one a vital cog in the imperial machinery that forged the new state of Manchukuo.

No single object epitomised Manchukuo’s encounter with modernity more vividly and embodied its modernist urge more succinctly than the Asia Express, ‘the last word in modern steam railway transportation’⁶⁷ This ultra-modern high-speed train was the pride of the SMR’s empire and the prototype to Japan’s later bullet trains.⁶⁸ Manufactured in the SMR’s workshops in Dalian, each train cost half a billion yen. Launched on the trunk line between Dalian and Changchun on 1 November 1934, the Asia Express was capable of travelling at 140 km per hour—comparable to the fastest trains in America and 15 km per hour faster than the fastest train in Japan.



The Asia Express, the SMR’s ‘ultra-modern’ high-speed train.

The streamlined Asia embodied modern luxury travel. The locomotive’s sleek elegance was more at home on a science fiction set than on Manchuria’s vast plains. Built of aluminium and sheet steel, it was lightweight and furnished with the finest materials and equipped with the latest technologies. The modern travelling experience was

450 compared with 32 in Manchukuo and the number of telephone subscribers was 9.8 compared with 0.15 in Manchuria. ‘Manchuria’s Electrical Communications’, *Far Eastern Review* (September 1938): 339.

67. *Manchuria* (25 May 1938).

68. The cost was boasted as being cheaper than the \$200,000 three-car express trains operated by the Union Pacific in the United States.

enabled and transformed by air-conditioning, rare hardwoods, linoleum surfaces, and silk velvet fabric covering wire-sprung seat cushions. Each locomotive was painted deep indigo and pulled six coaches painted rich olive with a white streak down their sides. One entire carriage was devoted to baggage and another to dining with a kitchen, refrigerator, and space to seat 30 passengers at a time. The remaining four carriages comprised two third-class compartments each seating 88 passengers; one second-class compartments accommodating 68 passengers, half of who could enjoy revolving seats that could change direction; and a first-class carriage accommodating 60 passengers who not only had revolving seats but also enjoyed the privilege of an observation car at the rear of the train that offered panoramic views of the passing landscape.

In 1935 the Asia started travelling the entire line from Dalian to Harbin following Stalin's transfer of the former CER to the SMR. In just 2 hours and 50 minutes, 2,000 workers narrowed the 240 km line from Changchun to Harbin to the standardised 56.5 inches, cutting 5 hours off the 18.5-hour journey.⁶⁹ The consolidation of both lines made it possible to depart Dalian at 9 a.m. on a Saturday morning and arrive in Berlin at 6.42 a.m. on the Wednesday 11 days later—a favourable alternative to the fastest sea route, which took 35 days. This extraordinary train upended the modernist mantra that modernity travelled from centre to periphery: new to old, progressive to backward, urban to rural, West to East. The Asia linked Manchuria's cities and countryside and switched modernity's direction from East to West—Empire to Motherland. In the late 1930s, the *Tabusa*, with its distinctive streamlined white hood joined the Asia, and in the skies the *Super Air Express* offered daily flights between Manchukuo's capital with Tokyo.⁷⁰

The Asia became the symbol of what the Japanese regarded as the SMR's civilising mission: part of the wider imperial aim of 'indicating to the Chinese a path toward modernity'.⁷¹ Many SMR employees not only shared such views but were also convinced they were relieving Manchukuo of the heavy burden of Chinese misrule by delivering the new state into the global family of nations and setting it on the path to a more civilised and prosperous future. The feeling was summed up by one journalist in 1936:

The traveller in these old Manchu provinces of China, that used to be regarded as the Forbidden Land infested with bandits, finds express streamlined trains, with solid Pullman cars rivalling the luxury of the 'Twentieth Century Limited', towns with palatial hotels and continental [sic] service, travel bureaux [sic] and clubs

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69. The track was changed in the early morning of 31 August 1935 by groups of 15 workers each given short stretches.
70. Launched on 1 June 1937, this new service took 9 hours and 48 minutes, leaving Tokyo at 7.27 a.m. and arriving in Changchun (Hsinking) at 5.15 p.m. The aeroplanes used on this 233 km service were Nakajima A. T. models. 'Air Services', *Manchuria* (15 June 1937): 355.
71. 'The Development of Manchuria', *Far Eastern Review* (October 1927): 430.



SMR advertisement from the mid-1930s proudly declaring its imperial mission: 'Carrying the Light of Civilization into Manchuria'.

where he is made welcome—Occidental civilisation transplanted to an Oriental setting . . . So modern cultural and educational equipment is nearly complete and there remains very little to be added in these towns in respect of modern conveniences.⁷²

According to Japanese state media, Manchuria had been 'kept from modern civilisation for many centuries' before Japan arrived to unlock its potential.⁷³ Its modern cityscapes were frequently contrasted with old Chinese towns: 'Manchuria to-day is a fascinating contrast of old and new, for side by side with plodding aboriginal tactics is a new and modern rush of science, with stream-lined cities bulging into the age-old obstacles.'⁷⁴ Its modernisation became Japan's justification for interfering in China.

72. 'Survey of Kwantung Government', *Manchuria* (1 October 1936): 224.

73. 'Railway Construction in Manchuria', *Far Eastern Review* (June 1937): 244.

74. Dave Taylor, 'Springtime in Manchuria', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 376.

'The colossal Japanese experiment of Manchoukuo is succeeding in every respect,' exclaimed Baron Kimmochi Ohkura in 1940, describing Japan's actions as 'a labour of love' for which, he carefully added, 'Japan has never for one moment harboured any imperialistic designs . . . In the not too distant future, when the great experiment is completed and recognized as successful by the world, the new order will be vindicated.'⁷⁵

Industrial Manchukuo

Japan's interests in Manchuria stemmed from the region's natural resources, but acquiring, extracting, and exploiting these resources took decades. Fushun's coal deposits had been known for centuries, but it took Japan's modern industrial-scale mining to unlock ten billion tonnes of reserves.⁷⁶ Fushun was one of the largest open-cut coalmines in the world,⁷⁷ with the coal seam extending 10 miles from east to west and over 2 miles south to north with a depth of up to 140 metres. The SMR had invested 123 million yen developing the mines at Fushun and nearby Anshan, a fraction of the annual budget of 800 million yen by 1937.⁷⁸ The landscape around Shenyang was transformed by Japan's hunger for natural resources, including 'coal and iron, the food for all modern industries'.⁷⁹ The vast crater of Fushun's open-cut mine teemed with over 30,000 Chinese labourers. The hole became so large that by the mid-1920s it consumed the old town, requiring a new one to be built on safer ground nearby.⁸⁰ Completed in 1933, this new 'mining metropolis'⁸¹ became home to 100,000 workers and their families, including 23,000 Japanese.⁸²

Towering over Fushun was one of the more potent symbols of Japan's investment and consequent political alliances—the 52-metre high winding plant of the Fushun Ryuho Colliery. Built by the German companies Demag and Siemens Schuckert,⁸³ these mammoth machines were as alien to Manchuria's once barren landscape as

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- 75. Annual harvests rose from 3.4 million tonnes in 1934 to 4.6 million tonnes by the end of the decade. Baron Kimmochi Ohkura, 'Japan and Manchoukuo's Industrial Development', *Far Eastern Review* (August 1940): 277.
 - 76. When Japan started mining in 1907, 400 tonnes a day was being extracted.
 - 77. A survey by the Geological Institute in 1929 estimated Manchuria's total deposits were approximately 4.8 billion tonnes but subsequent estimates raised that to 10 billion.
 - 78. Annual investment in mining in 1935 was 398 million yen.
 - 79. 'Railway Construction in Manchuria', *Far Eastern Review* (June 1937): 244.
 - 80. From 1929 to 1930, nearly 8 million tonnes of coal were sold, nearly half of which was exported to Japan (1.85 million), China (1.1 million), and Korea (0.4 million). The remainder was used locally, including 1.4 million tonnes by the SMR. In 1934, exports to Japan had risen to 2.7 million tonnes.
 - 81. Horace M. Masuda, 'Fushun: Mining Metropolis', *Far Eastern Review* (October 1940): 363.
 - 82. Approximately 2,000 of these were mechanics and skilled professionals engaged in the management of the mines.
 - 83. The vast hoists housed atop the winding plant's tower could lift 12.2 tonnes of coal or 120 men in each lift and delivered 560 tonnes of coal per hour from a depth of 770 m, rapidly accelerating Fushun's coal production throughout the 1930s.



Fushun, showing the modern town planning in the foreground and in the background the Fushun Ryuho Colliery built by the German companies Demag and Siemens Schuckert.

the immense grain silos had been to America's Midwest. Like their agricultural antecedents, these mighty machines were just as important in invoking an image of modernity, with Japanese characteristics. 'One does not expect to run into a cherry tree while leaving a foundry and crossing a railway which runs into a sort of blast-furnace atmosphere,' noted one foreign correspondent having witnessed the dystopian image of furnaces and smoke stacks at the Showa Steel Works at Anshan.⁸⁴ When asked if the development of Manchuria was consonant with the spirit of the American pioneers, the Chief of the Manchukuo Foreign Office's Publicity Section, Shigeru Obama, replied: 'Yes, but one different point is that Manchoukuo [sic] is making strides as a new State based upon the morals peculiar to the Orientals.'⁸⁵

The potency of Manchukuo's industrial landscape as an image of modernity made it a site of education and propaganda. Schoolchildren and their families were sent on excursions to witness first-hand the marvels of modern industry. 'Should a traveller who knew the Manchuria of ten years ago happen to visit Mukden, Fushun, Anshan and Dairen to-day,' wrote a journalist in 1940, 'he would be astonished to see row after row of huge plants standing on what was once vacant ground'.⁸⁶ The Fushun Cement

84. J. N. Penlington, 'Manchoukuo and Engineering Developments', *Far Eastern Review* (June 1933): 263.

85. 'Dialogue on the Culture of Manchoukuo', *Manchuria* (25 December 1939): 1612.

86. Baron Kimmochi Ohkura, 'Japan and Manchoukuo's Industrial Development', *Far Eastern Review* (August 1940): 277.

Manufacturing Corporation produced a fifth of the half million tonnes of cement produced in Manchuria each year. Its collieries yielded ten million tonnes of the total fourteen million tons of coal mined annually, becoming the 'driving power' not only of the SMR but 'of many modern industries' across Manchukuo.⁸⁷

The Japanese were keen to assert that before 1932, Manchuria was industrially and 'economically the most modernly and intensively developed region of China' outside Shanghai.⁸⁸ After 1932, it produced more coal, iron, and steel than China. It had more railway lines than China. It had faster trains than China. It had more good roads than China. It had a more efficient long distance telephone network and proportionally more telephone subscribers than China. Per capita it had more subscribers to radio,⁸⁹ more electrical bulbs,⁹⁰ and a higher use of electricity⁹¹ than China.

City Planning

The constellation of towns and cities scattered across Manchukuo relied on and owed their existence to the railways. For most metropolitan centres, this sprawling network of iron filaments determined not only their encounter with modernity but also their physical form. In the plan of Dalian the Japanese retained the Russian 'spider-web' system, whereas the 'square system' predominated in the earlier railway zones planned by SMR, and in the larger cities 'both systems [were] blended'.⁹² Modern city planning arrived on the back of Russia's railways and thrived in Japanese-controlled Manchukuo, reaching its apogee in the state's new capital, Hsinking (formerly Changchun).

Selecting a capital was not straightforward. The string of major cities along the SMR all had their merits and shortcomings. The port of Dalian was the natural gateway to Manchukuo. It had the largest Japanese population⁹³ and was closest to Japan, but its coastal position isolated it from much of the country. Further north, the ancient regional capital of Shenyang was the largest city and well connected by road and rail, but its imperial associations and large Chinese population made it unattractive to those with grand visions of a modern metropolis befitting a new state. Next was Changchun, which, despite marking the union of the SMR and CER, was comparatively underdeveloped. Harbin, the most northerly city, was in the centre

87. These figures are for 1936. 'Fushun . . . Manchurian City of Industry', *Manchuria* (1 October 1936): 234.

88. 'The Development of Manchuria', *Far Eastern Review* (October 1927): 430.

89. By 1936, there were over 100,000 radio users in Manchukuo.

90. Manchukuo had 6.7 electrical lamps per 100 people, compared with 59.4 in Japan. More lamps were installed in Osaka (2,753 million) in 1934 than the whole of Manchukuo. 'Electricity in Manchuria', *Far Eastern Review* (July 1937): 275.

91. In 1934, 0.7 per cent of China's population had an electrical supply compared with 5.4 per cent in Manchukuo and 92 per cent in Japan. 'Electricity in Manchuria': 275.

92. *The Kwantung Government, Its Functions & Works* (1934): 138.

93. In 1931, the Japanese population of Dalian was 102,768. By 1941, it had nearly doubled to 192,059.

of Manchukuo, but its Russian origins and character were not the image empire builders wanted to project. Within four days of announcing Manchukuo's establishment, Japan declared Changchun the new capital, citing its geographic, strategic, and historic advantages and giving it a new title: Hsinking (New Capital).⁹⁴ Free from cultural precedent and unencumbered by large pre-existing urban areas and land-ownership issues, Changchun, more than any of the other cities, was the tabula rasa that the Japanese sought on which to fashion the ideal city.

In 1932, Hsinking's Five-Year Capital Construction Plan represented one of the most ambitious and consciously modern city plans ever undertaken at that time, not merely in Manchukuo, but in the world. However, Hsinking was not alone in its ambitions. Manchukuo was billed a 'land of wonders' in which other marvels occurred 'no less amazing' than those in Hsinking.⁹⁵ The modernisation of Japan's cities and the rebuilding of Tokyo after the 1923 earthquake had nurtured a generation of young architects, planners, and engineers primed to respond to Manchukuo's metropolitan boom, just as Manchurian cities would be the training ground for a new generation of Japanese after the war. Railway expansion driven by the Kwantung Army encouraged new urban plans for 104 towns and cities, 44 of which were implemented by 1940 and 60 remained at the planning stage.⁹⁶

In October 1933 the Town Planning Section was established in the Public Works Bureau of the Department of People's Welfare 'to direct and supervise town planning... on modern lines. The Town Planning Section subsequently was transferred to the Department of Communications and expanded as the Town Planning Bureau',⁹⁷ which was instrumental in drafting the Town Planning Act of 1937.⁹⁸ Town planning in Manchukuo was carried out in conjunction with land improvement so that the municipal authority was able to make a profit from the sale of the land improved by the accoutrements of modernity: water and electrical supplies, waste systems, telephone and telegraph lines, recreational parks, wide and sealed roads, and abundant public amenities.⁹⁹

Harbin, Dalian, and Hsinking are the subject of more detailed explorations in the subsequent chapters, but other cities deserve attention. Under the new regime, Shenyang became the industrial and commercial centre—'the Osaka of Manchukuo'¹⁰⁰ or the 'Manchester of Manchukuo',¹⁰¹ depending on one's cultural predispositions.

94. 'The Birth of a New World Capital', *Far Eastern Review* (July 1936): 269.

95. 'Mutankiang Expands Rapidly', *Manchuria* (1 August 1936): 104.

96. 'Communications in Manchoukuo', *Far Eastern Review* (September 1940): 339.

97. 'Communications in Manchoukuo', *Far Eastern Review* (September 1940): 339.

98. In May 1940, the Manchukuo Public Works and Building Association was established and geared towards military requirements such as national defence.

99. By 1940, 26 towns had a modern water supply and 30 others were under construction. 'Communications in Manchoukuo', *Far Eastern Review* (September 1940): 339.

100. Geo White, 'Construction Work in Mukden', *Far Eastern Review* (June 1938): 238.

101. Geo White, 'Rapid Development in City of Mukden', *Manchuria* (1 January 1937): 15.

The ancient Manchu capital with its dilapidated 10-metre-high crenellated wall was surrounded not only by the region's mineral wealth sprouting chimneys, mine shafts, and electricity pylons, but also various foreign settlements with all their modern accoutrements.¹⁰² The contrast between old and new did not escape the Japanese-sponsored press: 'Side by side with the neat, modern railway settlement with its regular macadamized roads, squares and parks, water and gas supply, excellent schools, hygienic institutions and other public enterprises, stood stretching to the east the vast neglected area of the Chinese Municipality lacking even elementary public facilities like good water, primitive sanitation and so on'.¹⁰³ All this began to change after 1931. New architectural forms started to emerge from the morass. The General Directorate of State Railways spent 6 million yen on its brand new headquarters.¹⁰⁴ In the city centre, 'the scaffolded iron-concrete mass of the new Mitsui office' rubbed shoulders with 'big department stores and apartment houses, busy streets and over-crowded shopping districts glittering with innumerable neon-light signs'.¹⁰⁵ 'Instead of dirty, impassable, loamy streets', the new city plan proposed 'excellent avenues, macadamized and asphalt roads'¹⁰⁶ in four separate classes: first (50–60 metres), second (30–40 metres), third (22–27 metres), and auxiliary streets (4–8 metres).

Beyond the Old Town, Shenyang was dominated by the Japanese, whose numbers rose from 47,567 to 163,591 in five years from 1933. Their world revolved around the Yamato Hotel, which boasted being the 'centre of the settlement's social and business life and a place of comfort and excellent service'.¹⁰⁷ Across the street stood 'the vast estate and imposing buildings of the Manchuria Medical College', established in 1911.¹⁰⁸ The foreign settlement was home to a small European and American community, whose lives revolved around whichever social hub suited their particular taste. For the colonials there was the Mukden Club. For the missionaries there were the Irish, Scottish, and French Missions. If you were a Nazi there was the Deutscher Klub, possessing beautiful gardens and home to the Charter of the Nazi Party. For the thousand White Russians stranded in Shenyang there was the Russian Orthodox Church, 'representing one of the best specimens of Russian architecture',¹⁰⁹ or the

102. In early 1935, the government launched a plan for city construction in six cities in Mukden Province: Taoan, Shanhaiguan, Jinzhou, Pechihlu, Andong, and Yingkou.

103. Geo White, 'The Flourishing City of Mukden', *Manchuria* (15 December 1936): 391.

104. It also constructed dormitories and 1,430 houses along the railways, including 140 family houses in Shenyang.

105. Geo White, 'The Flourishing City of Mukden', *Manchuria* (15 December 1936): 391. Shenyang was electrified in 1910, among the first cities in China to have a municipal supply. In 1929, a new plant was erected by Andersen, Meyer and Co. and was one of the most modern in China.

106. Geo White, 'The Flourishing City of Mukden', *Manchuria* (15 December 1936): 390.

107. Geo White, 'The Flourishing City of Mukden', *Manchuria* (15 December 1936): 391.

108. Geo White, 'The Flourishing City of Mukden', *Manchuria* (15 December 1936): 391.

109. Geo White, 'The Flourishing City of Mukden', *Manchuria* (15 December 1936): 391.



Experiencing modernity in Shenyang—the roof gardens of modern department stores allowed customers to view the city in entirely new ways. The character in the cartoon, 'Rooftop', by Shinkyo Comics is saying: 'I see, once you stand here you will realise that there is a valley floor in the town too.'

middle school, library, and various sports clubs. The city even boasted Asia's largest 18-hole golf course.

Shenyang's urban plan divided the city into five zones: residential (40 per cent), manufacturing (20 per cent), commercial (10 per cent), green zones (14 per cent), and

reserved district (6 per cent). A small proportion (10 per cent) was retained for future expansion on the periphery. An industrial zone, the Mukden Industrial District, was developed to the west of the city, adding hundreds of hectares of urban land to the metropolitan area¹¹⁰ and contributing substantially to a boom in population and construction. As Shenyang's population rose from 472,450 in 1933 to 721,549 by 1938, so too did the annual expenditure on construction; from 0.9 million yen in 1931 to 47.7 million yen in 1937. With so much construction, the municipal government struggled to keep apace, failing to provide sufficient numbers of schools, hospitals, and homes for the city's burgeoning population.

In March 1937, further plans for Shenyang's long-term development were drafted by the Municipal Office and sent to Hsinking for approval. The ambitious proposal was a 15-year plan to build a city capable of accommodating 1.5 million people. State media boasted that within 14 years Shenyang 'will be a modern metropolis of a million and a half and equipped with all the latest facilities that can derive from civilization and science, according to the city's construction plan . . . transformed from a backward provincial town into a modern metropolis comparing favourably with any of the great world cities'.¹¹¹ Like so many modern plans hatched in the first half of the twentieth century, their full realisation was curtailed by conflict, the very force that had given them life.

All across Manchukuo, urban planners followed in the wake of railway engineers. Mudanjiang, once a small settlement around a railway station on the eastern section of the former CER near the Korean border, had become a large town of 46,000 with a Japanese population of 7,000. Around 80 per cent of the new buildings were said to 'have a strong Korean flavour', though they 'apparently lacked solidity, being ill-adapted to keep off the severe wintry cold'.¹¹² Nevertheless, urban planners were confident they could transform the city into one that accommodated 300,000 residents. Over 100,000 were expected to arrive within a year, 'attracted by the glamour of bustling boom that they fancied enveloping the rising town'.¹¹³

In nearby Jiamusi, exposed by the completion of the Tumen–Jiamusi line in 1937, urban planners eagerly anticipated a city of 300,000 in 30 years replete with all modern services, facilities, and infrastructure. Despite a 'painful shortage of timber . . . a lively building boom [was] expected to set in as soon as the weather permitted'.¹¹⁴ The same railway line opened up the rural settlement of Boli, where urban planners drafted ambitious plans to convert 'wild tracts stretching beyond the existing small town in

110. From March 1935 to 1938, 144 factories were constructed on over 1,500 hectares of vacant land. Geo White, 'Construction Work in Mukden', *Far Eastern Review* (June 1938): 238.

111. 'Ambitious Town Planning for Mukden', *Manchuria* (15 June 1937): 365–66.

112. 'Mutankiang Expands Rapidly', *Manchuria* (1 August 1936): 104.

113. 'Mutankiang Expands Rapidly', *Manchuria* (1 August 1936): 104.

114. 'Tumen-Chiamussu Railway Completed', *Manchuria* (15 February 1937): 108.

front of the railway station into a modern city of decent size.¹¹⁵ Despite ‘all its crudity’, observed one journalist, Boli was ‘lit with electricity since the beginning of the year as if to herald the influx of modernity’.¹¹⁶

On the other side of Manchukuo, Qiqihar encountered a similar experience.¹¹⁷ Urban planners immediately began making provision for a city of 600,000 within 10 to 20 years. By 1935 there were 6,623 Japanese residents (2,236 households) and a modern system of water supply was under construction. A network of sealed roads was laid out along with the spacious Lungsha Park, which contained a library, tower, and small zoo.¹¹⁸ In the centre of the town stood the 70-metre-high reinforced concrete memorial to the Japanese soldiers killed in 1931, constructed in 1935. ‘In several years,’ the press boasted, ‘the city [had] modernized with all facilities inseparable from modern life.’¹¹⁹ A familiar story unfolded in Hailar, near Manchukuo’s western border with Russia. Despite the formidable construction effort since 1931, ‘the increase of buildings in number [was] still disproportionate to the rapid growth of the population’.¹²⁰ The formerly sleepy town was transformed by macadamised streets, parks, a sports stadium, ‘houses of modern type, schools, hospitals, bridges, and roads; sawmills worked by electric power; telegraph and telephone lines’ and regauged and repaired railways.¹²¹ With the help of the railways, some of the remotest parts of Manchukuo encountered modernity and experienced its novel offerings, albeit fleetingly before debts had to be paid and scores settled.

War

Construction defined Manchukuo in the 1930s. Destruction followed in its wake. Manchukuo epitomised the consequences of this doomed alliance. In 1937, the military’s role in orchestrating its encounter with modernity reached a natural, inevitable, and horrifying conclusion. Having planned and constructed so much, Japan invaded China in July 1937, precipitating total war in Asia and a prelude to the Second World War. The scale of destruction that ensued was unprecedented in human history.

‘At last Nippon is in for the final, for a knock-out decision; a once-and-for-all house cleaning of all tortuous tangles in the Sino-Nippon relations which have been plaguing the East for ages,’ boasted the president of the SMR shortly after the invasion.

115. ‘Tumen-Chiamusu Railway Completed’, *Manchuria* (15 February 1937): 109.

116. ‘Tumen-Chiamusu Railway Completed’, *Manchuria* (15 February 1937): 109.

117. Japanese troops occupied Qiqihar on 19 November 1931 when the resident Japanese population was just 123 and the town had no water supply.

118. The Japanese population of Qiqihar in 1932 was: 1,225 Japanese (522 households); 1933: 2,669 (1,176 households); 1934: 4,406 (1,749 households); and 1935: 6,623 (2,236 households).

119. ‘Metropolis of Northwest Manchuria’, *Manchuria* (1 September 1936): 171–76.

120. I. A. Kuklin, ‘Japanese Development of Hailar’, *Manchuria* (15 November 1936): 322.

121. I. A. Kuklin, ‘Japanese Development of Hailar’, *Manchuria* (15 November 1936): 322.

We are free to admit that Nippon has been exceedingly annoying to her neighbour, China. Nippon is expanding. And what country in its expansion era has ever failed to be trying to its neighbour? Ask the American Indian or the Mexican how excruciatingly trying the young United States used to be once upon a time. But Nippon's expansion, like that of the United States, is as natural as the growth of a child. Only one thing stops a child growing: death . . . [Nippon] is fighting to keep Asia from becoming another Africa.¹²²

With a war on all fronts, Manchukuo's strategic importance increased. A Five-Year Industrialisation Plan was launched by the Kwantung Army in conjunction with the SMR's Research Department. An ambitious migration programme was launched to deliver one million families (five million people) to Manchuria before 1957. Iron and coal production were accelerated. So too was electricity generation, with 15 new power plants planned and nine under construction. Manchukuo's aspiration had become suicidal ambition. Legitimacy for Japan's warmongering was explained through its ancient and inalienable bond with the Chinese and other Asian countries. Under its leadership, Japan asserted Asia could fight the pernicious triumvirate of Soviet communism, Western capitalism, and Chinese nationalism. In 1939, this myth was titled the 'New East Asia':

A new revitalized East Asia rising from the devastation . . . A golden age of racial harmony and collaboration among the three great nations of the Far East, Japan, Manchoukuo and a resurgent China has been ushered in. . . . Nothing will sidetrack Japan from this mission of creating the new order for the permanent stability of east Asia.¹²³

Joining Japan in this alliance for global peace and prosperity were its two European allies, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Having been the first European power to acknowledge Manchukuo, Italy opened an embassy in March 1938, and shortly afterwards hosted a Fascist Goodwill Mission from Italy. On 1 August 1939, Hsinking hosted an Italian Fascist Exhibition. According to Sir Reginald Johnston, Professor of Chinese at University of London and former English tutor to Emperor Pu Yi, Mussolini was one of Pu Yi's heroes.¹²⁴ Manchukuo sent its own goodwill mission to Europe in August 1938, visiting Italy, Germany, and Nationalist Spain. The mission returned to Dalian in late January 1939 to 'a welcome worthy of national heroes'.¹²⁵ In early 1938, Nazi Germany officially recognised Manchukuo and within a few months signed the Treaty of Amity with Japan, becoming the biggest export partner outside Japan and enjoying benefits of strong trade relations.¹²⁶ In 1934, Berlin had been among

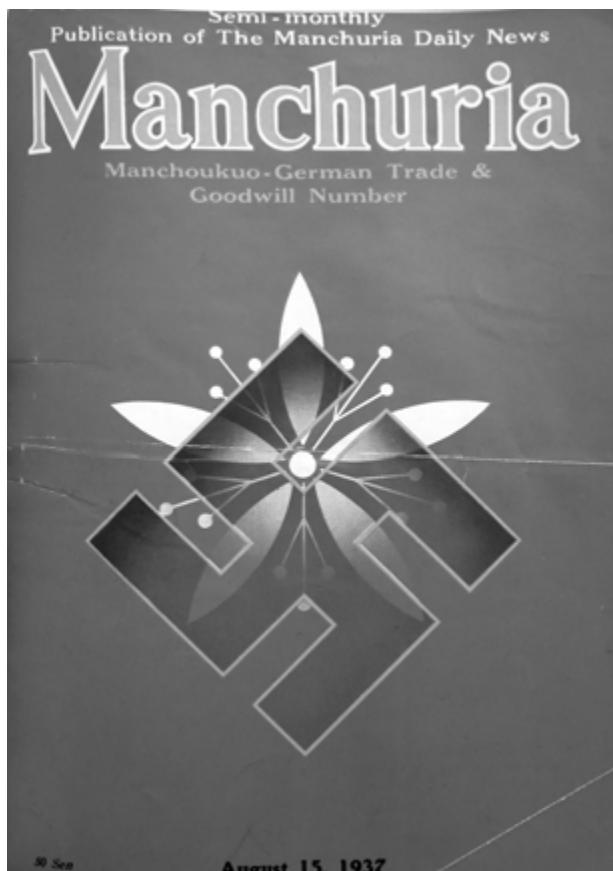
122. Yosuke Matsuoka, 'Speaking for Nippon', *Manchuria* (1 November 1937): 701.

123. 'Revitalised East Asia', *Manchuria* (15 January 1939): 934–35.

124. George Gorman, 'A Plea for Manchukuo', *Far Eastern Review* (September 1932): 401.

125. 'Manchoukuo Mission Returns to Dairen', *Manchuria* (1 February 1939): 960.

126. The Germans had had a major interest in the huge arsenal in Shenyang built by Marshal Zhang and supplying it with modern equipment. In 1935, a German economic mission to Manchukuo resulted in the signing



Front cover of a special edition 'Manchoukuo-German Trade & Goodwill Number' of the Japanese-sponsored journal *Manchuria*.

the first two cities to have direct two-way communications with Manchukuo.¹²⁷ The tripartite relationship that would become the Axis Powers symbolised the political isolation that these nations shared. The result was an inexorable march to war, but en route there were prodigious efforts at construction. Nowhere in the world at that time were these efforts more concentrated than in Manchukuo.

of the Manchukuo–German trade agreement in 1936. In 1937, exports to Germany were valued at 57 million yen compared with 277 million yen to Japan. In the late 1930s, Germany invested nearly half the capital for a joint venture with the Japanese and Manchukuo governments to establish an airplane factory based in Hsinking called the Oriental Aviation Industry Company.

127. The other city was San Francisco.

5

The Badlands of Harbin

Lodged in the very heart of Manchukuo, [Harbin] posits the Manchurian problem, which comprises three factors: the West, the East and Russia.¹



*A couple arrives in cosmopolitan Harbin for
the first time:
“Oh, this isn’t a Hollywood set. It’s real!”*

Cartoon of ‘cosmopolitan Harbin’.

1. Scherer, 1933: 78.

At the junction of Russia's CER and the trunk line to Dalian via the SMR, Harbin was as much a product of Manchukuo's short history as it was a victim of its fortunes. Few cities were as severely buffeted by the political storms that swept from Europe to Asia and back again. The settlement had grown from a garrison town, blending rampant mercantilism and paranoid militarism in the late nineteenth century into one of Asia's liveliest and most cosmopolitan cities in just three decades. By 1931, Harbin was the embodiment of China's unique and complex condition caused by its many and varied encounters with modernity. As the reporter James Scherer suggested, the city was 'a symbol' of a global dilemma: 'Lodged in the very heart of Manchukuo, it posits the Manchurian problem, which comprises three factors: the West, the East and Russia.'²

For Russians and romantics, Harbin was the 'the new Moscow of the Far East'.³ 'The elaborateness and thoroughness with which the city was built,' wrote one journalist on the 40th anniversary of the city's foundation, 'bespoke the intentions that lay deep within the heart of Czarist Russia, that of making Harbin the focal point in the domination of the Far East'.⁴ But such pronouncements relied on a questionable blend of optimism, nostalgia, and propaganda. From the outset, the general building of Harbin was neither elaborate nor thorough, less still its later developments. It was a true frontier town—a hustling and bustling settlement in Manchuria's badlands, born from the railways and sustained by others' misfortunes.

A Troubled Upbringing

The city's development was always capricious, heavily dependent on international events unfolding far beyond its boundaries. Harbin had a troubled upbringing and throughout the early years remained something of an outcast. The settlement emerged from 'a desert wilderness'⁵ in 1898, plagued by disease and deprivation, to become a thriving town dominated by Russians and Chinese by the time of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. This conflict precipitated a 'torrential downpour of gold from Russia' and legions of industrialists and merchants keen to exploit the war's commercial opportunities.⁶ A cessation of hostilities brought a slump, which was reversed by the Great War and stimulated further by the Bolshevik Revolution, sending waves of White Russian migrants into China via the Trans-Siberian railway and CER. In Harbin, these itinerant aristocrats were forced to rub shoulders with hundreds of displaced Europeans and tens of thousands of Chinese labourers that had flocked there over the

2. Scherer, 1933: 78.

3. Kinnouke, 1925: 66.

4. 'City of Harbin', *Manchurian Economic Review*, no. 4 (1 November 1938): 8.

5. North Manchuria and Chinese Eastern Railway, 1924: 270.

6. T. Itoda, 'Harbin and Its Forty Years History', *Manchuria* (1 July 1940): 283.

years. Of all the cities in China, only Shanghai had a greater ethnic diversity.⁷ Despite their contrasting political, economic, and cultural backgrounds, residents shared a common quest for a brighter future than was possible at home.

Harbin's increasing exposure to international trade and transport routes⁸ meant the city always retained its status as the pre-eminent Russian settlement in Manchuria. Even Russia's defeat to Japan in 1905 did little to dent its fortunes. It remained the centre of the CER (renamed the North Manchuria Railway and sold by Stalin in 1935) and the junction of this Russian-controlled railway linking Europe with Vladivostok and its southbound branch line to Changchun.

In 1913, Harbin's population was 68,549, of which 34,313 were Russian, the vast majority having arrived in the previous five years. The city acquired a sense of identity forged by the vicissitudes of the CER's construction and the Boxer campaign. Just as had occurred in many of China's other treaty ports, a mythology was swiftly constructed around the hardship and sacrifice of veterans that laid the foundation of the city's identity and vindicated Russia's claims to it. By the 1910s, these pioneers had slowly helped to recast Harbin as a place of permanent abode rather than transient opportunity, as well as a place of emergent modernity.

A Russian-Jewish merchant Iosif Kaspe commissioned the architect Sergei Vensan (1873–1937) to design the city's most luxurious hotel, Moderne. Located in the heart of Pristan, the Moderne became one of the most famous landmarks. When opened in 1914, it copied many of its predecessors like the Grand Hotel and the Orient by including a cinema—the essential venue for a quintessentially modern experience. Harbin had become, as one Russian writer put it, a type of colony: 'If a colony implies a land remote from the metropolis, a land that represents a particle of fatherland transplanted to a foreign country, then, Harbin, with the Chinese Eastern Railway, is now the first and unique Russian colony.'⁹

This quasi-colony shared with many true colonies the common experience of having its fate decided not by events taking place around it, but by matters closer to the heart of empire. Few events had a bigger impact on Harbin than the Russian Revolution. The exodus of hundreds of thousands of White Russians transformed the city, particularly its cultural life, which was stimulated greatly by the wealth and expertise of these new arrivals. As the Chinese government ceased to recognise Czarist Russia and rescinded all extraterritorial rights, this wave of Russian migrants

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7. A census taken in Harbin in February 1913 revealed that the city's 68,459 residents comprised 53 nationalities and spoke 45 different languages, the most dominant being Russian, Chinese, Polish, and Yiddish. Groups of nationals with over one hundred residents were: Russians (34,313), Chinese (23,537), Jews (5,032), Poles (2,556), Japanese (696), Germans (564), Tatars (234), Latvians (218), Georgians (183), Estonians (172), Lithuanians (142), and Armenians (124). In Olga Bakich, 'Emigré Identity: The Case of Harbin', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (2000): 53.
 8. Harbin became a 'treaty port' in 1907.
 9. A. Rykachev, 'Russkoe delo v Man'chzhurii', *Russkaia mysl* 8 (1910): 122, in Olga Bakich, 'Emigré Identity: The Case of Harbin', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (2000): 56.



The Hotel Moderne (1914), designed by Sergei Vensan, one of Harbin's most renowned establishments.

created a vast reservoir of stateless people. The huge White Russian population dispersed overseas to other treaty ports, notably the thriving multinational metropolis of Shanghai where they collectively transformed the French Concession, imbuing it with the verve for which it became world-famous and for which the French residents were not slow to claim credit through an Orientalist sleight of hand by branding their territory 'Paris of the Far East'. The dissipation coincided with increasing Chinese control of Harbin and its various institutions, including the CER, effecting a marked change in the city's character throughout the 1920s. The Whites came under pressure not only from the Chinese, but also from their Red counterparts.

Soviet agreements with China signed in 1924 to co-administer the CER forced Russian workers to adopt Soviet identities. Patriots willingly obliged. Pragmatists chose between becoming Harbin radishes (red on the outside and white within) or Chinese citizens, their passports stamped with Russian émigré (*rossiiskii emigrant*). Diehard Whites sacrificed their jobs and remained stateless.¹⁰ For the Russian

10. See Olga Bakich, 'Emigré Identity: The Case of Harbin', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (2000): 58.

population, Harbin throughout the 1920s was becoming politically polarised: a tale of two cities—red and white, communist and monarchist, Soviet and Russian. Members of both camps vigorously promoted their world view, though also shared the common nostalgia of the immigrant. Yearning for a home that was geographically or temporally remote generated customs, rituals, institutions, and architecture that was often more potent than the authenticity of the original.

Maturity and Manchukuo

The creation of Manchukuo saw the 50,000-strong Russian community subsumed into a uniquely diverse new state, creating a problem for Japan as it sought to construct the image of Pan-Asian ethnic harmony symbolised in the new flag.¹¹ The Russian community was too large to be overlooked and the institutions it had built were too well entrenched in the life of the largest city in northern Manchuria. Although Russians could be found in most cities in Manchukuo, their concentration and numbers in Harbin distinguished the city from all others.¹²

In 1932 Harbin was a vivacious, anarchic, and nocturnal city ‘jammed with cabarets, taxi dance hall cafés and Russian restaurants’,¹³ somewhat at odds with Japan’s morally charged imperialist ambitions. It had a thriving sex trade and notorious criminal underworld that flourished in the narrow alleys of downtown Pristan with its assortment of gaily lit Russian bars and night clubs. Electric light was a feature of Harbin and arrived shortly after the Russo-Japanese War through a bath house on Uchastkovaya Street in Pristan owned by V. N. Michkov.¹⁴ The city never looked back. Harbin had more electric lamps per capita than Japan (and 16 times the average for Manchukuo).¹⁵ Petty crime was rife, and kidnappings were a regular inconvenience that law breakers and lawmakers both entertained. Had it not been for the romance of Harbin’s character, created largely by ‘the renaissance style or “art nouveau”’ architecture, a complete reorganisation might have been implemented by the new Manchukuo administration.¹⁶

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11. Four stripes in the right-hand corner of the Manchukuo flag symbolised the different ethnic groups: red (Japanese), blue (Han Chinese), white (Mongolian), and black (Korean). The yellow background represented the Manchu. Official Manchukuo publications of later years stated that ‘the five coloured stripes [sic: five colours] of the Manchoukuo flag signify the cooperative unity of five dominant racial groups in Manchuria, namely, the Manchus, the Hans [Chinese], the Mongols, the Japanese, and the Chosenese [Koreans].’ Olga Bakich, ‘Emigré Identity: The Case of Harbin’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (2000): 64.
 12. By the mid-1930s the Japanese established the Bureau for the Affairs of Russian Émigrés, which registered 44,086 Russians in Manchukuo, 25,942 in Harbin, and 16,192 in the rest of Manchukuo. Olga Bakich, ‘Emigré Identity: The Case of Harbin’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (2000): 62.
 13. Kaname Tahara, ‘Harbin and Environs’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 403.
 14. T. Itoda, ‘Harbin and Its Forty Years History’, *Manchuria* (1 July 1940): 283.
 15. Harbin had 109 electrical lamps per 100 people. Manchukuo had 6.7 and Japan had 59.4. ‘Electricity in Manchuria’, *Far Eastern Review* (July 1937): 276.
 16. Kaname Tahara, ‘Harbin and Environs’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 352.

One of the foremost examples of the city's Art Nouveau style was the former North Manchuria Railway Administration Bureau, which became the Harbin Railway Directorate after 1932. Built in dark green stone 'on the basis of a design submitted in a contest in the Russian Capital', one commentator claimed that 'nowhere else in the Far East [was] this particular style of architecture to be seen. The supreme effort put into the architecture and the furnishing of this building together with that of the Harbin Railway Club directly opposite still lingers in the imposing aspect and appointments of the two edifices'.¹⁷

However, the city's older buildings, especially the family residences long since vacated or subsequently appropriated, were in a state of decay or abandonment. In a similar manner to that which the Japanese had adopted in Dalian nearly three decades earlier, their predilection for the picturesque preserved the city centre, while new city plans developed the periphery. The aim was to clean up the city's rugged reputation and bring order to its patchwork character. Harbin, claimed a Russian journalist in 1936, 'must be reconstructed according to modern town planning with its streets following a definite diagram instead of being scattered around to the four winds' before it could legitimately claim 'its place as the finest city in the north in all respects'.¹⁸

Following the establishment of Manchukuo there was a massive influx of Japanese residents, mostly engaged in the new administration and the railway. The first Japanese resident of Harbin had been Ms Chiyo Miyamoto, a native of Nagasaki who arrived via Vladivostok and Jilin in 1898 to join the household of Dr Prechekov. As a true pioneer, she acquired the status of queen among the Japanese community, which grew from just three in 1898 (an engineer and a cook on board a Russian steamer joined Ms Miyamoto later that year), to over 150 the following year.¹⁹ By 1932 there were 4,151 Japanese living in Harbin, which grew to 53,295 throughout the course of the decade. Over 50 new Japanese businesses engaged in building trades and public works contractors found immediate business in the large scale construction programmes aimed at accommodating the new arrivals.²⁰

The rise of the Japanese population mirrored the concentration of their Russian counterparts, whose members moved south to China's treaty ports or overseas. The sale of the former CER forced Russian workers to return to the Soviet Union, where they faced persecution and even death simply for being 'Harbin Russians' (*kharbinsy*). Among those that had emigrated from the Soviet Union to work on the CER, some found themselves branded returning émigrés and with the equivalent status of a foreign national.²¹ Those Russian architects and engineers that remained in Harbin

17. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 402.

18. A. V. Upshinsky, 'Harbin Sees Many Improvements', *Manchuria* (1 July 1936): 19.

19. The engineer and cook were Mr Umematsu Kato and Magojiro Tokitsu. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 403.

20. 'Harbin Conditions of Today', *Manchuria* (15 August 1936): 141.

21. Olga Bakich, 'Emigré Identity: The Case of Harbin', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (2000): 62.

formed their own society in Manchukuo, among whose ranks included Mikhail Matveevich Oskolkov and Petr Sergeevich Svirido. However, life was hard and the glory days were never to return.²² Destitute White Russians survived in the slums of Hsinyang District west of Pristan, home to the former CER workshops (a vestige of former empire, having been designed in St Petersburg in 1903 and erected in Harbin in 1907). Schoolchildren at the eleven Russian schools absorbed into the municipal education system were exempted from paying fees on account of their poverty.

The demographic and cultural shift that arrived with Manchukuo's creation had a major impact on the character of the city and the lives of its residents—or at least that is what the Japanese press liked to claim. Tram conductors no longer carried out their 'not infrequent' beating of passengers and instead started showing 'absolute courtesy' to the public.²³ Mr Upshinsky, a Russian journalist, boasted that in the first half of 1936 'only two major crimes have been committed whereas last year the daily papers were full of brutal murders, kidnapping, robberies, assaults on the street and hooliganism in general'.²⁴ The problem was not so much eradicated as moved on. Chief of the Criminal Bureau, Mr Arai, lauded the energy and efficiency of the new detectives which had caused 'professional criminals to leave for Shanghai'.²⁵

Harbin's new municipality, inaugurated on 1 July 1933, initiated a new city plan that laid the foundations of a 'Greater Harbin'. This was further developed in a five-year plan launched two years later that proposed the future development of the city around the nucleus of Pristan and the New Town (formerly Novui Gorod), rebranded Nankang (Nan Gang) by the Japanese. Harbin, under its new administration, became a more orderly, if less carefree, city with ten districts stretching in all directions from its bustling core.²⁶

In the heart of Pristan was Kitaiskaya Street, running from the Sungari River to the newly named Tatung Square. This thriving commercial thoroughfare lined with small Russian and Japanese shops and larger department stores was dubbed Harbin's Ginza, after Tokyo's pre-eminent shopping street, though the throngs of people 'sauntering down Kitaiskaya Street on a summer's evening [were] not exceeded by those in Ginza or in Shinjuku in Tokyo'.²⁷ Japanese ladies dressed in kimonos mingled with 'pretty Russian girls, smartly and gaily dressed threading their way with arms linked in groups of two's and three's affording a profound stimulus to the visitor. Among them are the questionable women who eventually turn into ill lighted alleyways,

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22. Note 31 in Victor Zatsepine, 'Russia, Railways, and Urban Development in Manchuria 1896–1930', Victor and Zatsepine, 2013: 35.
23. 'A. V. Upshinsky, 'Harbin Sees Many Improvements', *Manchuria* (1 July 1936): 21.
24. 'A. V. Upshinsky, 'Harbin Sees Many Improvements', *Manchuria* (1 July 1936): 32.
25. 'A. V. Upshinsky, 'Harbin Sees Many Improvements', *Manchuria* (1 July 1936): 33.
26. Pristan, Hsinyang, Nankang, New Town, Machia, Tungfuchia, Hsinfuchia, Kuching, Hsingfang, Taping, and Sungpu.
27. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 403.

followed some steps behind by cautious males.²⁸ In the centre of Pristan, the large Japanese department store, the Matsuura Yoko with its roof garden offering panoramic views of the city competed for the skyline with the imposing bulbous dome of St Sophia Church.²⁹ Capable of seating 2,000 people, St. Sophia, or Sofisky, was originally attached to the Eastern Siberia Sharpshooters Division who bestowed it on the people of Harbin.³⁰

North of Pristan, along the banks of the Sungari River, was the district of Sungpu, forming Harbin's famous riverfront characterised by frosty scenes of ice-skating on the river in the winter and the languid atmosphere of cafés, bars, and boating during the summer. Here the Yamato Hotel chain had a Yacht Club, an important social hub and summer annex. Harbin's Yamato Hotel opened on 1 October 1936 in the former CER's Board of Directors Hall. The conversion of this Art Nouveau landmark designed by the Russians before the Russo-Japanese War³¹ was proof of a general trend throughout the 1930s that saw Harbin's older streets becoming 'Japanified'.³² The building's imposing style was said to 'leave a deep impression with domestic travellers as international tourists [passed] through from Europe to Asia'. The SMR's chain of hotels converted the famous landmark into a luxuriously appointed 'ultra-modern hotel'³³ accommodating 240 guests. Inside the lobby was a large grandfather clock presented to the Qing emperor by Queen Victoria, and the hotel took 'particular pride in its Grill Room [designed] by a youthful SMR architect, Machida. Built in the imitation of a Russian bar room, the Grill has become, together with the Japan-Manchoukuo club, the social centre of the upper class Japanese in Harbin'.³⁴

The Yamato Hotel was located in the tree-lined district of Nankang (Nan Gang), home to government offices and residences of wealthy merchants and officials. Principal buildings included the SMR's regional headquarters and the Japanese Consulate General, 'the most colourful of consulate buildings in the whole of Manchoukuo [sic] . . . in a Renaissance style according to plans designed by the famous Russian architect Jidanov'.³⁵ By the mid-1930s, Nankang was connected to the rapidly expanding residential district of Machia, the prospect between the two districts 'impressing all travellers in an indescribable manner'.³⁶ Machia, with its pretty houses, botanical gardens, and schools, was home to many of Harbin's wealthier White Russian refugees, who referred to it as Tsarskoye Selo after the area outside

28. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 403.

29. St Sophia was funded by the merchant prince Chisteyakov. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 404.

30. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 404.

31. The building was not completed and after the war it became a hospital, army headquarters, and a consulate.

32. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940).

33. 'The Yamato Hotel & the Yacht Club in Harbin', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 342.

34. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 353.

35. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 353.

36. Kaname Tahara, 'Harbin and Environs', *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 401.

St Petersburg that was home to the Imperial Russian family. The bucolic scene of ‘private homes fenced in by wooden rails . . . colourfully nestled in greenery’, was noted as ‘offering a delightful pastoral atmosphere which belies the fact that this is a part of a great metropolis’.³⁷

A very different scene emerged in the former Chinese district of Fuchiatien (Fu Jia Dian) to the east of the city, which, having formerly been situated outside the railway zone in which Chinese were forbidden to live, was incorporated by the Japanese into the new Municipal area. ‘One step into this district,’ alerted one journalist, Kaname Tahara, ‘brings one into a totally different world from the rest of the Harbin’.³⁸ Under the new city plan, the rapidly expanding Fuchiatien, which had a population of nearly 200,000, was divided into Dong Fuchia (East Fuchia) and Xi Fuchia (West Fuchia) and acquired a new industrial zone of 1.5 square kilometres. In 1936 it was keenly anticipated that Fuchiatien would ‘soon be bristling with smokestacks and buildings for industrial purposes’.³⁹ Occupying nearly a third of this land was a new cement factory, opened in 1935, to rival the Fushun Cement Manufacturing Corporation with ‘oil mills, flour mills, distilleries, tannery, electric light plants, refineries and locomotive sheds’ occupying the remaining land.⁴⁰ Harbin had 53 modern oil mills compared to 23 flour mills and thousands of traditional mills—‘huge modern brick structures, with modern occidental equipments [sic] which, according to one Japanese observer, ‘make one’s fancies travel back to Minneapolis’.⁴¹

As a Chinese enclave in a city dominated politically by Japanese and culturally by Russians, Fuchiatien’s experience of modernity was unique. The thriving commerce within its teeming streets and alleys was described by Tahara as an ‘economic mart that dominated the whole agricultural market of North Manchuria . . . a tremendous market both of goods and the human body, in gaiety and color a close second only to Shanghai’.⁴² The ability of the Chinese to create a district in which all manner of trades merged, from upmarket department stores and lowly brothels, made Fuchiatien ‘the centre of the greatest development of modern Chinese culture in the whole of Manchoukuo [sic]’. In this quaint corner of Harbin a particular form of modernity emerged that made the Chinese ‘of Dairen and Mukden [look] no more than country yokels’ and, according to Tahara, linked it with China’s pre-eminent site of modernity: ‘The Chinese culture of Shanghai has passed intact through South Manchuria directly into Harbin’.⁴³

37. Kaname Tahara, ‘Harbin and Environs’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 401.

38. Kaname Tahara, ‘Harbin and Environs’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 402.

39. A. V. Upshinsky, ‘Harbin Sees Many Improvements’, *Manchuria* (1 July 1936): 19.

40. A. V. Upshinsky, ‘Harbin Sees Many Improvements’, *Manchuria* (1 July 1936): 19.

41. Kinnosuke, 1925: 71.

42. Kaname Tahara, ‘Harbin and Environs’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 402–3.

43. Kaname Tahara, ‘Harbin and Environs’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1940): 403.

Coming of Age

After a protracted and troubled upbringing, 1935 marked Harbin's coming of age. With the population approaching half a million, a five-year plan was launched, aimed at bringing order to the city.⁴⁴ Stalin's sale of the former CER paved the way for the first direct train service from Dalian, which arrived in Harbin's central station on 1 September, 1935. The Badar swamp, between Pristan, Fuchatien, and New Town, which had for decades been an incubator for disease and contagion, and had long broken the heart of the city, was drained and filled in with the intention to turn it into a park with 'shadowy walks, summer houses, fountains and grounds for sports' as well as tennis, football, and baseball pitches.⁴⁵ A new refrigerated wholesale warehouse was built to store the city's fresh produce, greatly improving hygiene standards. The city's water was transformed, with the antiquated system of putrid and often poisonous wells⁴⁶ being replaced by a new municipal water supply. The Waterworks Department laid 100 km of iron pipes along all the main roads in the central districts and connected them to individual properties proving a fresh water supply pumped from 3 km away.⁴⁷ Construction of a new dam on the Sungari River was designed to stop the devastating floods that frequently ravaged the city. A few years later, the Japanese built one of the world's largest hydro-electric projects in which 'huge ultra modern turbines [converted] the sluggish energy that had wasted seawards for centuries into the life-blood of industry'.⁴⁸

According to the Japanese, Harbin was 'fast approaching the level of a modern Japanese city, in name as well as in reality',⁴⁹ but the city would forever remain a victim of history and its origins. Its social, commercial, and physical character had been defined by its position at the strategic junction not merely of the two of the most important railway lines in Asia, but of two continents. Consequently, the Japanese invested less here than in other cities nearer to the commercial and political centres of Manchukuo. Harbin's strong international character made it a miniature Shanghai and shaped its multifarious encounter with modernity. Ultimately, its history and relative proximity to Russia encumbered Harbin's development, particularly in comparison to the other key cities along the SMR, notably Dalian and Hsinking, which enjoyed their status as Manchukuo's modernist gateway and its ultra-modern capital.

44. The 1936 census put the population at 466,472.

45. A. V. Upshinsky, 'Harbin Sees Many Improvements', 20.

46. Harbin had 411 wells, 93 of which were not fit for drinking, 150 were only good for drinking after boiling, and 51 were drinkable after filtering. A. V. Upshinsky, 'Harbin Sees Many Improvements', 20.

47. A. V. Upshinsky, 'Harbin Sees Many Improvements', 20.

48. Dave Taylor, 'Springtime in Manchuria', 376.

49. 'Harbin Conditions of Today', *Manchuria* (15 August 1936): 141.

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Dalian

Gateway to Manchukuo

I wish I could show you the Darien of today. It is a city of telephones, electric lights and street cars, automobiles, broad, paved streets, and hard-surfaced roads leading out into the country.¹



Front cover of a special edition of the *Manchurian Architectural Association Journal* (July 1933) showing the different designs of pavilions at the Manchuria Expo in Dalian.

1. Scherer, 1933: 41.

By the 1930s, Dalian, formerly Russia's prized terminus at the end of the branch-line extending from the Chinese section of the Trans-Siberian Railway, had become Manchukuo's gateway to the world. The ice-free port conceived by Russia and seized by Japan was a product of modernity, the abrupt encounter still clearly marked in its urban form and its architecture, which was retained and augmented by Japan throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Under Japanese jurisdiction, Dalian became Manchukuo's first modernist city.

Dalian's change in ownership from Russian to Japanese in 1905 signalled the moment that the West surrendered its monopoly on modernity. With the opportunity to make a strong first impression, the Tokyo government deliberated over Dalian's development. Should they follow Russia's original and ambitious plan or should they erase the embryonic city and start again along more modest lines sympathetic to Japan's exhausted post-war condition and limited resources? The pragmatic consensus supported the latter, but Count Kodama, 'the very brains that had engineered the Russo-Japanese War, stoutly opposed the negative policy from an international standpoint'. Winning over 'one Minister after another of the Cabinet to his side, the Government at last decided to make the Civil Governor of Kwantung construct the City of Dairen according to the old Russian plan'.² Some years later, American consul at Yingkou Henry Miller echoed somewhat romantically an interpretation of events, claiming the Japanese, accustomed as they were 'to dainty landscape gardening', were swayed by their admiration for the 'fine specimens of western architecture' exhibited by 'the clusters of the Russian buildings [and] the extensive scale of the Russian plan'.³ Kodama's decree resulted in the creation of what one writer later claimed was 'one of the leading modern cities [with a] city plan modelled after Paris [that] combines the best features of the radiating, square and circular system of modern city construction. . . . The streets radiating from the Central Circle in cobweb fashion,' in particular, 'symbolize the progressive freshness that is consistent with the colonial policy of present-day Japan'.⁴

Dalian became among the world's first examples of modern urban planning pursued by a non-Western nation. A unique product of its time and place, the fledgling port, not yet a decade old, revealed modernity's increasingly complex condition at the beginning of the twentieth century. By the 1920s, one visitor, Dr Uyeda, claimed it could 'be shown to the world as a modern city of which its author and builder well might be proud . . . the most striking achievement the Japanese have ever accomplished abroad. . . . [Many a] western specialist [gave] a cry of wonder at its phenomenal growth, saying that such a city would require nearly one whole century

2. Dr K. Uyeda, 'Manchuria in Twenty Years', *Far Eastern Review* (August 1926): 345.

3. 'Official Report to DC by US Consul Miller in Manchuria in 20 Years', *Far Eastern Review* 22 (1926): 346.

4. 'The Port of Dairen', *Far Eastern Review* (May 1940): 178.

to bring up and embellish.⁵ On China's coast, a resurgent non-Western nation had seized from an ailing Western empire a city designed according to the latest planning theories and set about altering and enhancing this design according to its own particular interpretation. 'The desire to emulate and excel the west in the creations of the west is the strongest motive force in modern Japan,' concluded one observer in 1933, adding presciently: 'one wonders what will happen when the Chinese are seized with the same sort of ambition.'⁶ Echoing this sentiment, the writer and Japanese apologist, Henry Kinney, claimed Dalian demonstrated 'the seemingly anomalous condition where, Japan, herself an Oriental country, brought a thoroughly western civilization to Manchuria on a scale far more comprehensive than anything that has been accomplished in any other part of China'.⁷ Dalian marked the first moment that the physical traits of Western modernity were seized by the East. Japan never looked back.

Desperate to join the club of modern developed nations, Japan understood Dalian's importance and its potential. As the gateway to Japanese Manchuria it rivalled its equivalent among China's treaty ports, as the author James Scherer attested in 1933 when claiming Dalian was 'one of the most flourishing and progressive cities in the Far East, second as a port to Shanghai'.⁸

A City Emerges

By defeating Russia, Japan won the right, as all victors do, to pen Manchuria's official history. It was a privilege they exploited thoroughly up to their own capitulation in 1945. The Russian origins were erased in an airbrushing of history that, like Manchuria's vast plains, was treated as a blank canvas on which a new history could be painted. Writing from the safe distance of 1933, one contributor to the *Far Eastern Review* confidently claimed: 'Everything in Dairen begins in the year 1907'.⁹ Two years later another writer depicted a sorry scene born of Russian incompetence that confronted the Japanese planners. Occupying the site of the future Wharf Office was a miserable pond, and 'the Central Circle and the streets radiating therefrom existed only on blue prints'.¹⁰ Only when Japan decided to follow these plans were 'the construction and reconstruction works begun on an enormous scale. Thus was started the first phase in the development of the city and port of Dairen'.¹¹

Within a year of the SMR's formation, the prodigious company adopted a 'one-port' policy and assumed responsibility for Dalian's subsequent development. Dalian's

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- 5. Dr K. Uyeda, 'Manchuria in Twenty Years', *Far Eastern Review* (August 1926): 345.
 - 6. J. N. Penlington, 'Manchoukuo and Engineering Developments', *Far Eastern Review* (June 1933): 263.
 - 7. Kinney, 1928: 44, and 1930: 48.
 - 8. Scherer, 1933: 40.
 - 9. J. N. Penlington, 'Manchoukuo and Engineering Developments', *Far Eastern Review* (June 1933): 262.
 - 10. *Dairen*, South Manchuria Railway Company, 1935: 3.
 - 11. *Dairen*, South Manchuria Railway Company, 1935: 4.



Plan of Dalian from the early 1920s showing the consolidation of the initial Russian plan and the beginning of westward expansion.

pre-eminence sucked the lifeblood from neighbouring Yingkou, which had enjoyed a primary position in Manchuria since Britain made it a treaty port in 1860. The Russians had proposed Dalian's skeletal structure, but it was the SMR throughout the 1910s that gave the modern city life. Gotō Shimpei, the SMR's first president, appointed Katō Yonokichi¹² to plan Dalian's expansion. Katō was responsible for the extensive grid system 'expanded on something like the American plan'¹³ that stretched westwards from the Russian-planned core, anticipating the city's growth from an initial 200-acre site to 1,700 acres by 1919, and 5,270 by 1929.¹⁴ The SMR bestowed on Dalian sewage works, waterworks, trams, hospitals, parks, schools, bridges, more railways, and bigger harbours. By the early 1930s, nearly a quarter of a million Japanese lived in Dalian, most of whom were affiliated in some way to the SMR, either through research, agriculture, mining, or the huge company's administration. The SMR was also responsible for introducing into China (and even Japan) the comparatively new theory of urban zoning, defining industrial, residential, mixed, and commercial zones designed to aid the efficient functioning of the modern city.

Japan's endeavours were duly noted in early publications that witnessed the start of Dalian's transformation. The 1910 edition of *Cook's Tourist's Handbook* described the burgeoning city more favourably than had been possible just a few years earlier: 'The residential area, in convenient proximity to the railway, is laid out on a strictly modern plan, with many fine roadways radiating from centres where spacious circles provide public gardens surrounded by handsome buildings.'¹⁵ Encircling the central circus like the decorative figures on a carousel were the Dalian City Hall,¹⁶ Police Headquarters, Department of Communication, the Oriental Development Company, the British Consulate, the Yamato Hotel, the Yokohama Specie Bank, and the Bank of Chosen. Separating these architectural ornaments were ten roads radiating outwards to every corner of the city. The largest, the Yamagata-dori, pointed northeast and led directly to the wharfs. On the opposite side of the circus it became the Higashikoen-cho, which linked the city centre with new western suburbs. The Oyama-dori connected the city centre to the old Russian quarter and was the only road to cross the deep cut of the railway tracks. The rickety wooden bridge erected by the Russians for this purpose was replaced by 'a magnificent structure of three noble arches' and renamed the 'Bridge of Japan' or 'Nippon Bridge' (*Nihon Bashi*).¹⁷ Like all great

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- 12. Buck (2000: 68) cites Katō as being a public works specialist that designed the SMR settlements at Changchun and Shenyang and carried out the official survey of Changchun in 1907. He was also chief of SMR's Public Works Office from 1914 to 1923, after which he retired.
 - 13. J. N. Penlington, 'Manchoukuo and Engineering Developments', *Far Eastern Review* (June 1933): 262.
 - 14. *The Kwantung Government*, 1934: 138.
 - 15. *Cook's Tourist's Handbook*, 1910: 81.
 - 16. Dalian City Hall (1917–1919) was designed by Matsumuro Shigemitsu, head of the Construction Department in the Civil Affairs Bureau of the Kwantung Leased Territory.
 - 17. *Cook's Handbook*, 1910: 82.

bridges, Dalian's 'Nippon Bridge' was more than a mere crossing and more than an important nexus within the web of circuses and their radiating streets. In Dalian the bridge became a potent symbol of Japan's power and presence.

On the other side of the bridge, the old Russian quarter retained much of its original character well into the 1930s. The solid homes of former CER employees were appropriated by wealthy Japanese. The cultural detachment of the suburb's original architectural character assumed a romance and exoticism that appealed to Japanese high society, attracting SMR officials, businessmen, and diplomats. Rich Chinese joined this privileged enclave in the uncertain era of the 1930s, believing it to be 'a safer haven than Shanghai' where 'kidnapping was common'.¹⁸

'Good streets, bridges, water works, drains, parks, electricity, gas, telephones, street-cars and water-front improvements' were vital ingredients of Manchuria's modern urban landscapes, which possessed 'many roads [that] were far better than roads in Japan'.¹⁹ Dalian's promise of modern living, its convenient location, and its salubrious climate attracted Japanese settlers. Its proximity to Japan and, before 1931, its safety from attacks by Chinese on the Kwantung Leased Territory helped Dalian become the political and commercial heart of Japanese-controlled Manchuria. The city received the majority share of Japan's capital investment in Manchuria of over 600 million yen, and the property market boomed, as Dalian became home to the largest concentration of Japanese outside Japan. New suburbs were planned and furnished with rows of houses built from modern non-combustible materials such as reinforced concrete and brick. Development quickly consumed the remaining land within the urban plan that Russia had so generously laid out. Even after the creation of Manchukuo, when Japanese businesses had spread out across the region and the political centre had shifted to Hsinking, Dalian's population continued to rise sharply. In July 1938, 162,123 of Dalian's 515,743 residents were Japanese.²⁰

In the Chinese Quarter conditions also improved as successive generations of coolies clambered up the social ladder, making way for countless others to fill their space below. What was once described as a 'place detested by every White man for its unsanitary, vermin-ridden and foul-smelling persons', the Chinese quarter 'blossomed into a respectable and flourishing town' in which Chinese coolies who had previously served under the Russian regime and the early Japanese Administration could now be found 'waddling in luxury as millionaires'.²¹

The Japanese were careful to ensure Dalian's development did not compromise its pleasant natural setting or damage its physical character. 'Avenues [were] lined with elms, poplars, acacias or other shady trees, and public squares with flower-beds,

18. J. N. Penlington, 'Manchoukuo and Engineering Developments', *Far Eastern Review* (June 1933): 261.

19. 'Engineering Feats in Kwantung', *Far Eastern Review* (February 1927): 75.

20. 1939 Manchuria Yearbook, cited in 'The Port of Dairen', *Far Eastern Review* (May 1940): 178.

21. Dr K. Uyeda, 'Manchuria in Twenty Years', *Far Eastern Review* (August 1926): 346.

evergreens and grass plots' helped to beautify the built up areas.²² Further afield were larger parks, such as the former 'Tiger Park'—named for the abundance of wild cats that once roamed the area. The park was situated at the base of the hills behind Dalian and had been renamed West Park because it formed the western boundary of the Russian settlement. However, the city's continued westward expansion under the Japanese caused it to be subsumed into the larger metropolitan area. West Park became Central Park, forming a wedge from south to north through the growing city. The park was popular not only for its flora and fauna, but also for its sporting facilities, which included a baseball pitch, archery, riding clubs, and swimming pool. On a hill next to Central Park was Komura Park, owned and managed by the SMR, with views of the city and various attractions such as a merry-go-round, greenhouse, and library.²³

At the foot of Central Park, where the hills that skirted Dalian's southern boundary met the city, was Tokiwabashi, an area defined by the intersection of tram lines heading out to the western suburbs and the railway yards serving the main station nearby. In the late 1920s, Tokiwabashi was transformed into a self-consciously modern commercial district. 'The important civic centre of Modernistic Tokiwabashi'²⁴ was designed by the Munakata Architectural Office and constructed between 1928 and 1931. Expressive architectural elements and sculpted concrete detailing that evoked Frank Lloyd Wright's recently completed Imperial Hotel (1923) in Tokyo adorned the scheme. The centre comprised shops (including the Rensagai Shopping Centre, the Municipal Market, and the Mitsukoshi Department Store) and offices (the Gas Company, the Manchurian Electric Company, and the Dairen Transportation Company). In the middle was the famous Tokiwa Cinema, a little gem from the golden age of cinema owned by Dalian's king of cinema, Romoo Koizumi.

Occupying a corner site in the heart of Tokiwabashi, the Tokiwa Cinema looked like it had landed from outer space. The cylindrical body was set back from its curved wings, which folded outwards and extended down both streets. The main entrance was placed behind a curved portico supported by two plain round columns. Rising above the portico, the cinema's frontage was dominated by a glass screen window divided into four vertical sections and separated by three slender chamfered mullions, the tops of which pierced the roofline and thrust skyward. Inside, the distinctive organic appearance and the combination of circles, curves, and arcs triumphed over the straight line. The result, inside and out, was a modernist drama that was as progressive as the films it screened—the Tokiwa was among the first cinemas in Asia, let alone Manchuria, to air 'talkies'.

22. 'Engineering Feats in Kwantung', *Far Eastern Review* (February 1927): 75.

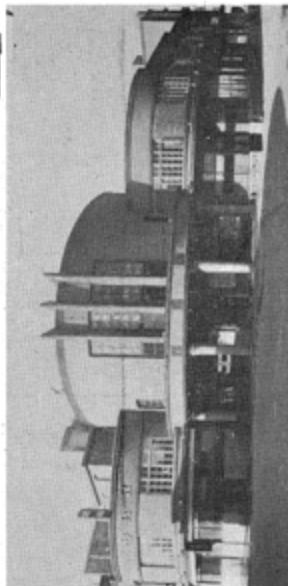
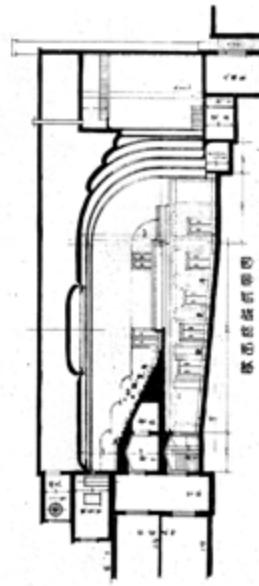
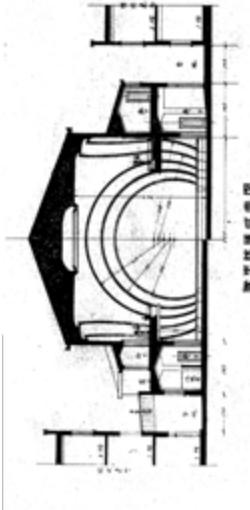
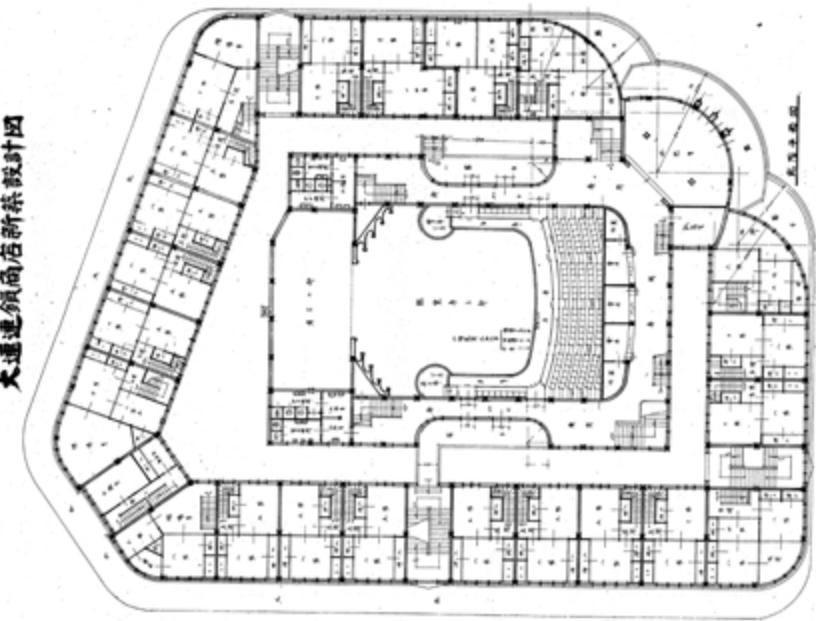
23. 'The Port of Dairen', *Far Eastern Review* (May 1940): 180.

24. 'The Port of Dairen', *Far Eastern Review* (May 1940): 179.



Plan (bottom) of the Rensagai Shopping Centre (1928–1931), designed by the Munakata Architectural Office, showing the shop fronts designed in a variety of modern styles, bringing the modern experience of window shopping to Dalian.

大連銀座商店新築設計圖



The Tokiwa Cinema (1928–1931), designed by the Munakata Architectural Office. Clockwise from top left: sections; first-floor plan showing the cinema surrounded by shops; the main entrance.

Manchukuo's Modernist City

By 1920, Dalian had become China's fourth biggest port,²⁵ but as Manchuria became Manchukuo, Dalian assumed an even greater importance as the gateway to a modern state and Japan's hard-won empire. Since Russia had relinquished the city, its development had been 'phenomenal', with a fourteen-fold increase in population, a tenfold increase in trade, and a nearly threefold increase in size.²⁶ In 1930, new building regulations were established to anticipate a population of one million. By the mid-1930s, Dalian was second only to Shanghai, with whom it shared many similarities in its dependence on and projection of a sophisticated and progressive urban modernity. But, unlike Shanghai, a consistent and essential facet of modernity in Manchukuo was the railway, whose network of tracks extended like veins across the hinterland from the main artery of the SMR. Dalian was at the heart of this pulsing imperial project.

'I wish I could show you the Darien of today,' wrote an American visitor in 1933. 'It is a city of telephones, electric lights and street cars, automobiles, broad, paved streets, and hard-surfaced roads leading out into the country'²⁷ By 1940, journalists acclaimed its cosmopolitanism and claimed it ranked 'as one of the leading modern cities'²⁸ matching and often exceeding modern urban experiences in Japan. The Japanese went to considerable lengths to emphasise the egalitarianism of modernity forged by their imperial machine compared with Western equivalents. Comparing the 93,000 radio listeners among the 37 million Chinese in Manchuria with just 40,000 among 350 million Indians in British India, the Japanese claimed such figures 'go to show that Manchoukuo is making tremendous progress as a modern civilized state in the Far East . . . an unparalleled advancement in the history of modern civilization'.²⁹

Modern communications demanded modern infrastructure, which in turn embraced modern architecture. Japan's architects had to consider the form and appearance of entirely novel building typologies: cinemas, railway termini, factories, workshops, and radio stations. One of the most striking structures was the futuristic premises of the JQAK radio station on Shotokugai Park, built in the western suburbs of Dalian to avoid interference from the concentration of wireless communications in the port. Construction of the idiosyncratic building began in March 1936 and was completed by October. The new facility cost 400,000 yen and contained two studios, with a spare for emergencies. Like a spaceship beaming its message to the stars, the 'modernistic studio standing on a low mound in the outskirts of Dairen,

25. Only Shanghai, Hankou, and Tianjin were bigger, with the once formidable Guangzhou in fifth place.

26. *The Kwantung Government*, 1934: 139.

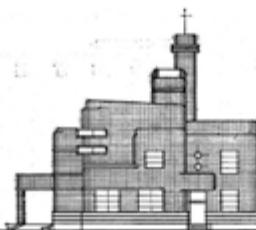
27. Scherer, 1933: 41.

28. 'The Port of Dairen', *Far Eastern Review* (May 1940): 178.

29. 'Manchuria's Electrical Communications', *Far Eastern Review* (September 1938): 342.



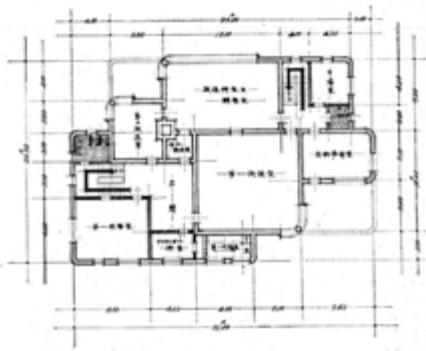
正 面 圖



反 面 圖



平 面



大 連 放 送 局

底 面

The 'ultra-modern' JQAK radio station (1936), Dalian, showing elevations (middle) and plans (bottom).

[called] forth nightly to its countless number of international radio fans throughout the world.³⁰

Dalian also bore early witness to the future potential of film. In February 1906, the first film ever aired in Manchuria was shown at a fundraiser for Dalian's Okayama Orphan Asylum. By 1910 the city boasted Manchuria's first motion picture theatre, 'Denki Yuen' (which became the Denki Kan), courtesy of the SMR, who were responsible for its construction in a city park. From 1907, the Dalian branch of the YMCA hosted public screenings of short reels and in 1914 imported the first full feature-length film into Manchuria: *Quo Vadis?* screened in Dalian's Kabukiza theatre. This was followed in 1915 by *Les Misérables*, screened at the bastion of Japan's upper classes, the Yamato Hotel—the resident orchestra making this popular art form more palatable to the privileged guests.

In 1928, Manchuria's movie scene was revolutionised by the screening of the first ever 'talkie'. Fox Movietone Party brought the film and equipment to Manchuria and played it at Dalian's portable Kyowakaikan, owned by Romoo Koizumi, proprietor of the Tokiwaza theatre. In 1930, Koizumi purchased modern equipment for talkies and screened Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* at the Kyowakaikan before it had been aired in Japan.³¹ Manchuria fell in love with cinema. 'All the leading cinemas in Dairen installed modern sound equipment,' exclaimed a journalist in 1939, asserting that 'Manchuria was not a whit behind Japan'.³²

Important though Dalian was in fostering cultural change in Manchuria, it could never compare in scale or scope with the port. Modernised industrial and agricultural production throughout Manchuria underpinned the port's economic success and fuelled its constant expansion. Coal, iron, and steel arrived by train from the industrial heartlands of Fushun and poured out of Manchuria through Dalian, where ships could be berthed four abreast for added efficiency. Three million tonnes of coal was exported through Dalian every year. The SMR invested heavily in the latest equipment and technologies, including modern mechanical loading equipment modelled on the latest examples from Durban, South Africa. At the Kanseishi coaling station, the latest machinery from the United States and Germany processed up to 12,500 tonnes of coal a day. Agricultural achievements were just as impressive. By the mid-1930s, Dalian was the world's leading port for soya beans and soya related products. The port handled nearly two million tonnes of soya beans annually, most of which were shipped to Europe. Dalian's meteoric rise throughout the 1930s placed it

30. 'Manchuria's Electrical Communications', *Far Eastern Review* (September 1938): 342.

31. Liu Wenhua, 'Brief History of the Development of Motion Pictures in Manchuria', *Manchuria Special Number* (20 July 1939).

32. Liu Wenhua, 'Brief History of the Development of Motion Pictures in Manchuria', *Manchuria Special Number* (20 July 1939).

consistently ahead of the great Japanese ports of Kobe, Yokohama, or Osaka in terms of foreign trade.³³

The port was the reason Dalian hosted ‘the largest and best equipped railway workshop in the Far East’—the SMR’s own manufacturing and repair workshops at Shakako.³⁴ Established in 1911, Shakako was capable of manufacturing 40 locomotives, 55 passenger cars, and 650 goods wagons annually.³⁵ Comprising a total area of 490 acres, the steel-framed locomotive shops purchased from Morgan Engineering Company, Ohio, covered 225 acres. Inside, the latest machinery purchased from Britain manufactured everything except the axles and driving wheels, which were shipped from Sumitomo Steel Works in Osaka.³⁶ They even manufactured the fine steel doors of the new Dalian Hospital, constructed in 1923.³⁷

In 1936 the municipality drafted plans for Dalian to accommodate one million people, extending the city over 16 km to the west. By mid-1938, the city’s population exceeded half a million.³⁸ The comprehensive plan sought to relieve pressure on the old centre by creating new suburbs that were linked by new wide roads and a modern tram network. Main roads leading from the city were widened to 60 metres, and modern trams wove their way to new residential districts. They also brought the ‘scenic trio’ of coastal resorts, Fukasho, Hoshigaura, and Rokotan within half an hour of the city. From the centre of town, trams passed through Tokiwabashi to Fushimi Heights—a quiet district with a number of schools, including the Dalian Middle School (1935), notable for its emphatic form and spirited brickwork recalling the Dutch Expressionists of the Amsterdam School. Beyond Fushimi Heights, trams travelled through Tankatun and the industrial zone of Taizantun before reaching Hoshigaura (Star Beach, Xing Pu)—Dalian’s premier summer resort with its golf course, tennis courts, and beautiful sandy beach overlooked by a bronze statue of Gotō Shimpei. The final stop was the terminus at the resort of Rokotan (‘Fierce Old Tiger’), named after the rocky promontory that appeared to be roaring at the sea.³⁹

In the city centre, old markets were replaced by sanitary indoor facilities and fashionable department stores that matched those in Tokyo’s Ginza district. Two million yen were spent constructing a ‘Japanese version of a modern shopping quarter’⁴⁰ at Rensagai, opposite the railway station. Throughout the 1930s Dalian also boasted a new hospital and museum, and the largest public library in East Asia. Even the fire

33. Proportion of trade at Dalian (100 per cent) in 1935 compared with Yokohama, Osaka, and Kobe was 57.3 per cent, 53.1 per cent, and 50.9 per cent respectively.

34. ‘S. M. R. Shakako Workshops’, *Far Eastern Review* (March 1929): 128.

35. ‘S. M. R. Shakako Workshops’, *Far Eastern Review* (March 1929): 128.

36. ‘S. M. R. Shakako Workshops’, *Far Eastern Review* (March 1929): 128.

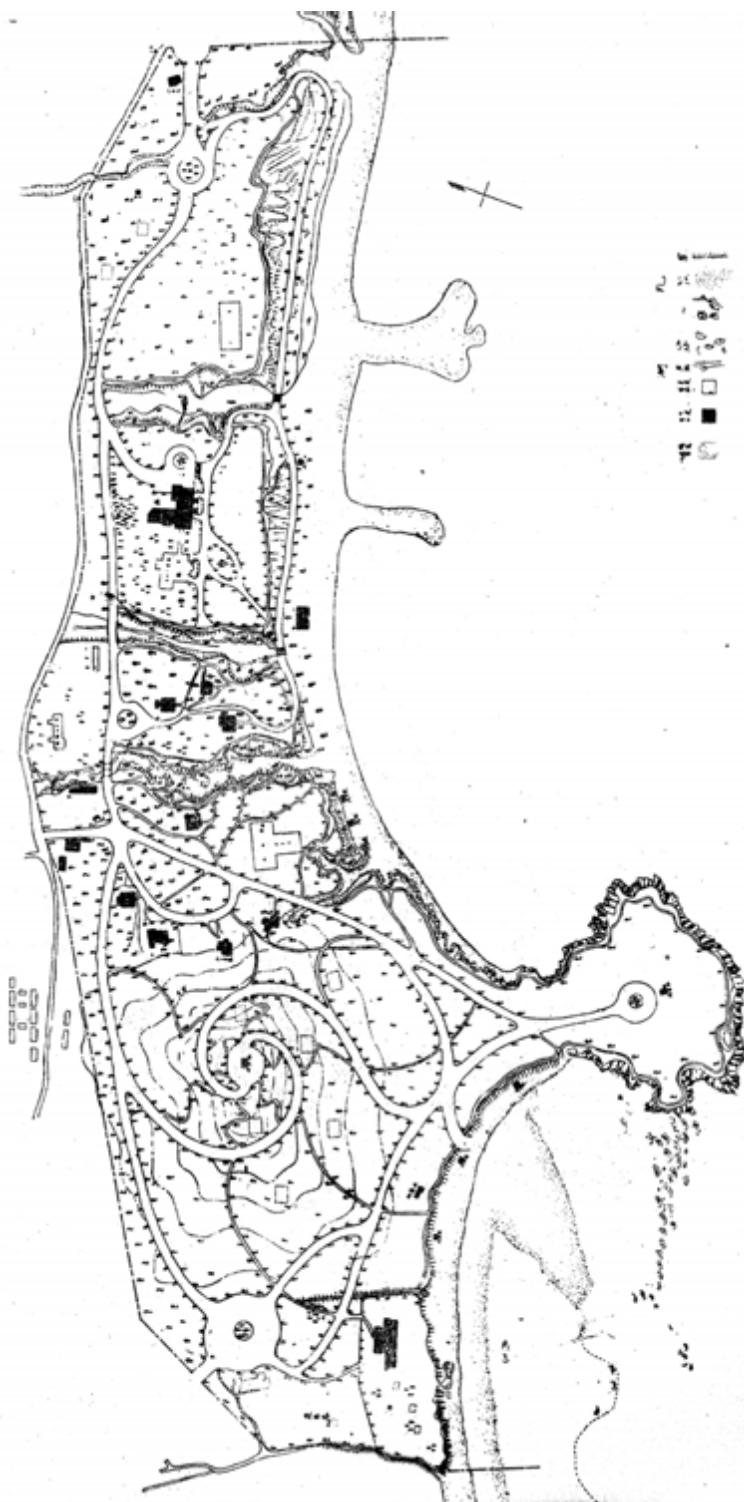
37. By 1929, Shakako employed over 2,200 skilled mechanics (1,174 Chinese and 1,102 Japanese), 1,400 workmen (719 Japanese and 700 Chinese), and 500 office staff, of which 450 were Japanese.

38. The actual figure for July 1938 was 515,743.

39. ‘The Port of Dairen’, *Far Eastern Review* (May 1940): 178.

40. ‘The Port of Dairen’, *Far Eastern Review* (May 1940): 178.

星ヶ浦初期計畫平面圖



Picturesque plan of Hoshigaura (Star Beach, Xing Pu), Dalian's premier summer resort with long sandy beach and promontory with bronze statue of Gotō Shimpei.

brigade underwent wholesale modernisation, with new stations designed and built throughout the 1930s in a style and manner that reflected the speed and efficiency of the modern service.⁴¹ By 1938, one journalist boasted that ‘the brigade is now run with military precision. Everywhere is orderliness, efficiency and speed’.⁴² Nowhere were these particular hallmarks of modernity more explicitly conveyed than through the SMR, and no building embodied the company’s progressive vision more than the ultra-modern railway station in Dalian, ‘the finest in the whole of the Far East’.⁴³

Dalian’s railway station was literally and figuratively the gateway to Manchukuo. Architecturally, it bore enormous weight and symbolism, and the SMR invested heavily in ensuring it met expectations. The origins of the design go back to 1924, when the SMR hatched an ambitious plan to simultaneously redevelop the harbour and the railway station. An architectural competition was launched, which Inoue Sontarou won, but only the harbour was ever completed. The design was said to be similar to Tokyo’s Ueno Station but with additional features—luxurious reception rooms, barber shops, public bathrooms, and a lunch room.

Construction of the railway station eventually began in August 1935, under the supervision of Takaoka Building Contractors, who were also responsible for erecting Dalian’s central Post Office.⁴⁴ Being in the centre of the city, numerous houses had to be destroyed to make way for the station and the colossal piazza in front. Both were completed by March 1937 and officially opened on 1 June.⁴⁵ An army of 450 Chinese construction workers built the station, supervised by 20 Japanese technicians and foremen. The building’s superstructure comprised a ‘lofty and far-reaching steel framework’⁴⁶ 100 metres wide, 50 metres deep and 25 metres high—equivalent to five storeys. The station stood in an elevated position overlooking the square with approach roads giving access to the station’s entrance on the first floor level via ramps supported on plain concrete pillars. The imposing symmetrical façade was dominated by a row of tall slender windows lighting the cavernous departure hall and arranged in pairs, separated by slim pilasters. The basement housed a variety of services including a dining room, restaurant, public telephone booth, barber’s shop, and bathroom, as well as waiting rooms, luggage stores and rooms for employees. On the first floor were the telephone office and exchange, boardroom, and dining car office.

Despite an original budget of 800,000 yen, which increased to 1.5 million yen, the final price—including all the landscaping and urban clearance required in the enabling works—was three million yen, making it the costliest building in Dalian’s

41. In 1937, 224 fires caused over one million yen of damage in city.

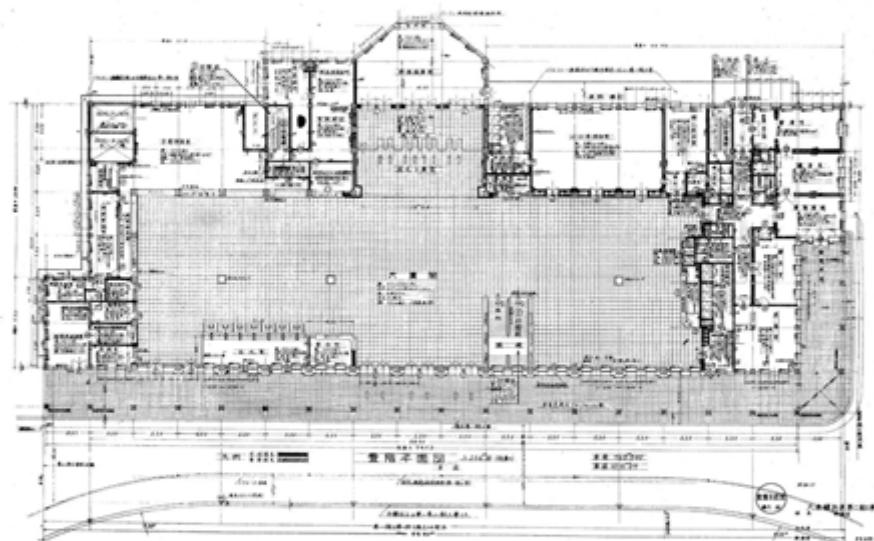
42. ‘Fire Fighting in Dairen’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1938): 523.

43. ‘Developments in Dairen’, *Manchuria* (June 1937): 371.

44. The cornerstone was laid on 22 August 1935.

45. The old station was closed on 31 May 1937.

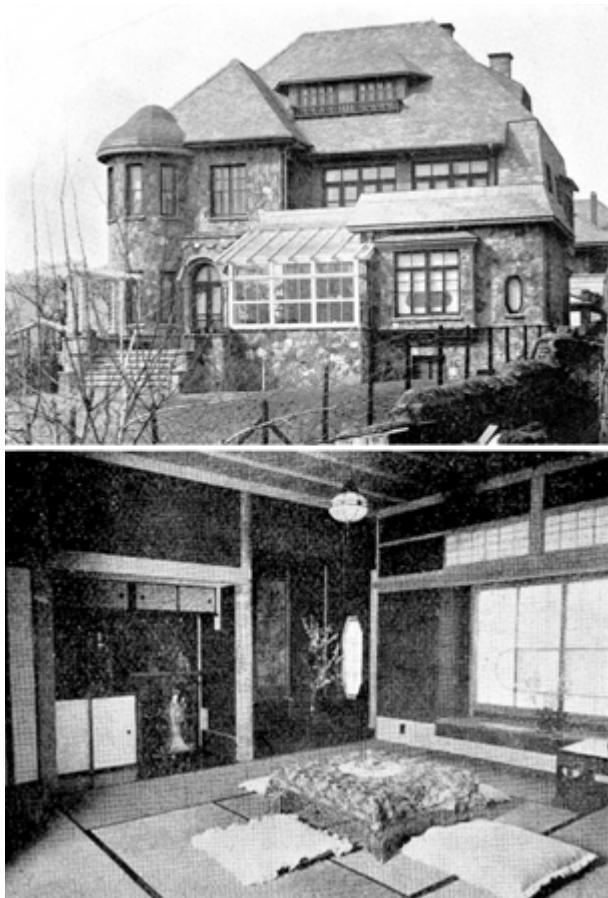
46. ‘New Railway Station for Port of Dairen Is Being Completed’, *Far Eastern Review* (July 1936): 317.



Dalian's 'ultra-modern' railway station (1935–1937), supervised by Takaoka Building Contractors.

history.⁴⁷ All granite, bricks, timber, and cement⁴⁸ were sourced entirely from Manchukuo, while some of the steel came from Japan. The lower walls were lined in Manchurian granite with tiling above. The steam heating was installed by the Osaka Electric Company. Upon its inauguration a spokesman for the Takaoka Building Contractor claimed fittingly: 'The SMR has designed the building to be the largest and most stately station along its entire line, a building worthy of Dairen, the gateway to Manchuria.'⁴⁹

Mirror to the World



A modern villa in Dalian's western suburbs showing the distinction in architectural form and appearance between the exterior and interior.

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- 47. Nevertheless, it was still a relative bargain compared with what an equivalent building in Tokyo would have cost, owing to lower local wages, the absence of the need for earthquake-proofing, and the extensive use of local materials. 'New Railway Station for Port of Dairen Is Being Completed', *Manchuria* (July 1936): 317.
 - 48. The Japanese company Onodo Cement opened the first cement plant in Dalian, which was followed by the smaller Manchu Cement Kabushiki Kaisha.
 - 49. 'New Railway Station for Port of Dairen Is Being Completed', *Far Eastern Review* (July 1936): 317.

History and circumstance made Dalian a peculiar city. Because of its early urban form, Dalian was frequently likened to Western precedents such as Paris, Boston, Washington, or St Petersburg—even the ‘rows of strongly built houses’ in the city’s sprawling western suburbs ‘reminded one of Lancashire’.⁵⁰ However, beneath the thin veneer of architectural form and style was something more profound. ‘These houses of solid brick and double windows [had] no likeness to an English or Russian house inside, for the interior [was] Japanese.⁵¹ Whatever might have seemed familiar to the outsider from the outside looking in was countered by the unfamiliarity of the inside. Japanese interiors and domestic habits were exported wholesale to Dalian, where homes invariably had floors of tatami matting and screen walls. ‘The Japanese worker returning home at the end of the day will discard his foreign clothes and don the comfortable kimono, after the daily hot bath.’⁵² The Chairman of the American delegation to the Fifth America-Japan Student Conference in Tokyo, Lewis Schmidt recognised Dalian’s distinction. Although to his eyes it was ‘very much a European city’, he could also see that it was ‘different from Japan and the United States and the civilizations of Europe as well as some of the Far East and, represented something unusual’.⁵³ Dalian was indeed unusual—a model of Manchukuoan modernism—but it was not the site of Manchukuo’s ultimate encounter with modernity. This experience occurred further north in the fledgling nation’s newly prescribed heartland: Hsinking (Changchun), where the potency of modernity was so strong, the Japanese called it *ultra-modernity*.

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50. J. N. Penlington, ‘Manchoukuo and Engineering Developments’, *Far Eastern Review* (June 1933): 261.
 51. J. N. Penlington, ‘Manchoukuo and Engineering Developments’, *Far Eastern Review* (June 1933): 261.
 52. J. N. Penlington, ‘Manchoukuo and Engineering Developments’, *Far Eastern Review* (June 1933): 261.
 53. Lewis Schmidt, ‘American Student Delegation’, *Manchuria* (1 September 1938): 583.

Hsinking

Manchukuo's Ultra-Modernist City

Hsinking is a true city of the 20th century, and not a casual product of “Colonial” style of the 19th century as so many other cities in the Far East. It is strange to find that ultra-modernism here.¹

Hsinking, Manchukuo’s newly designated capital and ‘ultra-modern’ city, was unprecedented. In the decades leading up to the city’s construction, urban planning had emerged as a distinct profession, detached from the zealous visions of ambitious architects, engineers, and cartographers. By the time the new capital was being conceived, the irresistibly rational logic of modernism was revolutionising the progressive professions of urban planning and architecture globally. Planners and architects of future cities around the world celebrated the potential of science and technology to enhance the human condition, heralding the utopian ideal that society could be advanced and improved by design. At Hsinking, Japanese planners and architects had the chance to design and build their ideal city, almost from scratch. Such an opportunity and undertaking on this scale and at this speed had never occurred before—neither in Japan nor elsewhere.

Modern city planners promised a better standard of living enabled by technology and defined by space, light, and efficiency. Completely new and consciously modern cities had been envisioned on paper by some of the most resolute modernists, such as Le Corbusier, but none had ever been built. Hsinking was the first on this scale, but conventional history tells us that such utopian projects were only accomplished after the Second World War, in the post-colonial era. Modernist history equates modernisation and Westernisation and purports that a universal modernism found fertile ground in newly independent states, reaching its apogee in Brasilia and Chandigarh. Hsinking does not fit into this account of history and has been written out entirely—an anomalous victim of historical circumstance defined by three consequent conditions: the West’s claim over modernism, Japan’s dishonour, and China’s humiliation.

Nevertheless, in the fleeting period between Manchukuo’s establishment in 1932 and Japan’s wholesale invasion of China in 1937, conditions were right for the world’s

1. T. V. Gilchrist, ‘Hsinking’, *Manchuria* (15 September 1939): 1442.

first non-Western modernist capital: ‘A splendid new capital for a new empire.’² For some, it was ‘a “neo-Japanese” city, in which the ideas of Nippon and those of Europe have been ingeniously blended’.³ Others observed ‘the houses one sees are cubes with flat roofs, a few columns, strangely shaped turrets. . . . This seems indeed to be the town of which Le Corbusier, the famous French architect, was dreaming’.⁴ But modernism in Hsinking was not that of Le Corbusier or other self-acclaimed modernists in the West. It was inevitably different. After successive translations, modernism in Manchukuo was conceived and constructed in exceptional circumstances by the first non-Western nation to have sought and achieved a state of modernity. Hsinking was planned entirely by Japanese planners and all of its buildings were designed by Japanese architects, except the Foreign Affairs Bureau, the design of which did little to inspire confidence in the West’s presumed pre-eminence. Designed by the French architect Brossard Mopin, it was described in *Architectural Forum* as ‘Bumbling neo-Egyptian’ with the suggestion that Manchukuo had replaced the Soviet Union as having the world’s worst architecture.⁵

Hsinking, more than any other city in Manchukuo, defined the aspiration to be ultra-modern—more modern than the motherland. Even the name—Hsinking (New Capital)—emphasised modernity. Its built environment embodied Manchukuo’s distinct and eclectic encounter with modernity. As one American visitor and war veteran General J. Leslie Kincaid wrote following his visit in 1938: ‘Manchoukuo has dramatized modern empire-making more effectively than any other country in this world, and any intelligent observer who has travelled through the new empire and has seen the wonderful new capital of Hsinking must be convinced that Manchoukuo [*sic*] has been solidly built in the few short years, and built for all time’.⁶

The Birth of a Modern Capital

Hsinking was designated the capital of Manchukuo in March 1932, stealing the region’s political heart from the ancient capital of Shenyang. Within days, the new government established the Capital Construction Bureau (CCB) and launched an ambitious Five-Year Capital Construction Plan. The CCB was headed by Yūki Kiyotarō with an Architecture Department directed by Kensuke Aiga, who joined the CCB from the SMR. Aiga designed the CCB offices in Hsinking in 1934, a white ‘cathedral-like’

2. ‘Manchoukuo News’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1938): 539.

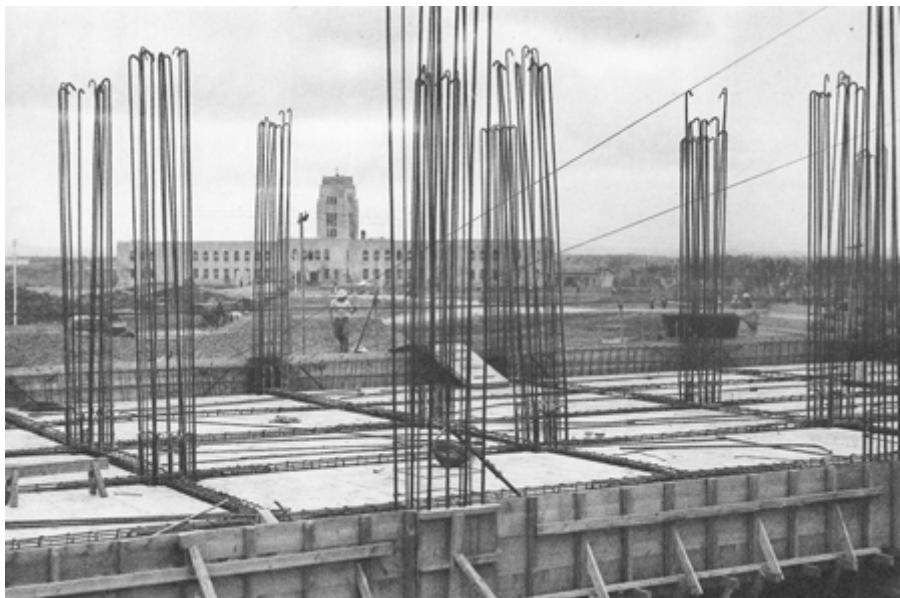
3. *Contemporary Manchuria* 2, no. 3 (May 1938): 124.

4. T. V. Gilchrist, ‘Hsinking’, *Manchuria* (15 September 1939): 1442.

5. ‘Japanese Architecture in Manchukuo’, *Architectural Forum* (October 1937): 96. For more information on the work of Brossard Mopin, see David Tucker, ‘France, Brossard Mopin, and Manchukuo’, in Victoir and Zatsepine, 2013.

6. ‘Manchoukuo Built for All Time, Gen. Kincaid Declares’, *Manchuria* (1 December 1938): 796.

building with a ‘central skyscraper tower’, said to be ‘one of the most beautiful structures in Manchuria’, which the CCB shared with the Ministry of Education.⁷ Starting small, the Bureau grew rapidly to a large office with over 400 staff within two years.



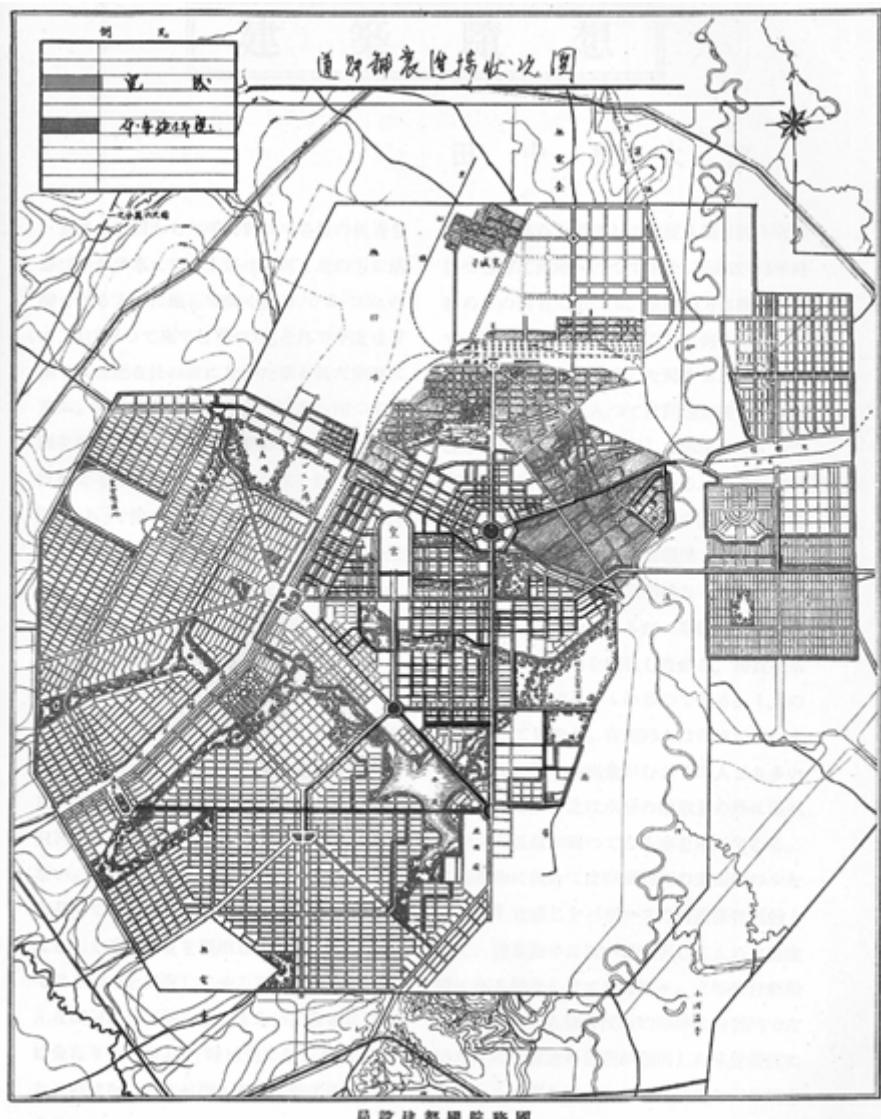
Behind a forest of reinforcement bars appears the offices of the Ministry of Education and the Capital Construction Bureau (1934), designed by Aiga Kensuke.

The plan was to develop a vast area of agricultural land outside the old Chinese city of Changchun and south of the neighbouring Russian and Japanese settlements. Changchun had served as the terminus of the SMR since Japan’s victory over Russia in 1905, and it was here that passengers travelling between Asia and Europe before 1935 had to change trains from the narrow gauge SMR to the wider gauge CER. The city was transformed by its swift metamorphosis into Hsinking, causing the SMR Zone to become a relic of history and subsumed by the wider plans to equip the new capital ‘with the primary essentials of a modern city’ capable of accommodating 1.5 million people.⁸ With a budget of 30 million Manchukuo yen for the first five years, construction began in spring 1933 at a pace that—if you believed the Japanese press—‘astonished the world’⁹

7. ‘Souvenir Enthronement Supplement’, 1934: 50, 59.

8. This was later scaled back to one million. ‘The Birth of a New World Capital’, *Far Eastern Review* (July 1936): 296. In 1931, Changchun’s population was 128,040, of which 11,483 were Japanese.

9. ‘Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo’, *Far Eastern Review* (April 1940): 139.



Plan of Hsingking, showing complete and planned road surfacing. The plan is dominated by the Tatung Circle in the centre, with the old SMR Zone to the north and the old Chinese city to the east, the new imperial compound to the west and much of the new capital spreading out to the south and south-west.

The Kwantung Army, the principal authority in commissioning Hsinking's urban plan, appointed Sano Toshikata (1880–1956) as chief advisor. Toshikata was an expert in seismic design and particularly concerned with public hygiene, declaring that all new buildings should be fitted with modern water closets. Toshikata was a student of Gotō Shimpei and had succeeded Kingo Tatsuno (1854–1919) as head of architecture at Tokyo Imperial University. In Manchukuo, he helped the Kwantung authorities devise an urban planning policy and invited the Capital Construction Bureau (CCB)¹⁰ and the SMR to submit suitable designs. Although broadly similar in principle and configuration, the two proposed plans differed principally over the site and location of the emperor's palace, a highly emotive political issue. Pu Yi, the puppet emperor, insisted in vain that the palace should be located along the city's central axis, according to Chinese tradition. Although the appeals of a symbolic local figurehead could not be allowed to determine Japan's designs for their colonial capital, they could not be entirely ignored either. The issue was never fully resolved and as Hsinking rose all around him, the emperor was housed in temporary accommodation, while the palace compound was carved out of the city grid conspicuously off-centre.

Despite uncertainty over the palace, the proposed master plan of 1932 was applauded by a partisan press as an example of 'modern city-planning, designed to transform Hsinking into a great metropolis [and] present a gorgeous modern European city'.¹¹ By any measure, the plan was ambitious, but it was not European, or even Western. Hsinking's form and layout was characterised by axial roads linking circular nodes that permitted a modern 'rotary system' of traffic management and provided expansive open areas and monumental vistas that dissected a rectilinear grid-system of smaller roads. Such urban planning features had precedents in the West, but the conditions under which Hsinking was being realised were wholly different from the likes of L'Enfant's Washington, DC, Haussmann's Paris, Prost's Casablanca, Burley Griffin's Canberra, or Lutyens's New Delhi. Whether the desired state of 'ultra-modernity' was ever achieved or not in Hsinking is immaterial. Modernity was the driving force behind the city's total planning and design in a way that surpassed these antecedents and was not matched until after the Second World War with modernist urban reconstruction programmes elsewhere in the world and the advent of the post-colonial city.

'Guided by the dual consideration of the traditional Oriental idea and traffic facilities, Hsinking's plan adopted in principle the checker-board system, blended, where permissible, with the wheel-spokes and the cobweb or loop systems.'¹² The cost of the construction programme was to be covered by the sale of individual

10. The CCB was established in March 1932 and headed by Yūki Kiyotarō. The Architecture Department was headed by Aiga Kensuke, who joined the CCB from the SMR.

11. Kwata, 1939–40: 7.

12. 'Rapid Expansion of Hsinking', *Manchuria* (1 September 1936): 165.

plots to private investors within a rectangular area covering 200 square kilometres, containing the old town and former CER and SMR zones.

Development was planned in two phases, each encompassing 100 square kilometres and accommodating half a million people. The first phase, which was later reduced to a more manageable area of 79 square kilometres,¹³ concentrated on the city centre, extending southwards from the railway station. In the first fiscal year 20 square kilometres was prioritised for the urgent delivery of private residences (6.5 square kilometres), government offices (2 square kilometres), commercial areas (2 square kilometres), highways (4.5 square kilometres), public utilities, schools and museums (1.5 square kilometres), industrial area (1 square kilometre), parks and recreation (2 square kilometres), and agriculture (0.5 square kilometre).

Some of these functions were subdivided into different groups. Commercial areas contained retail, wholesale, and foreign trade, and while 'Hsinking was not intended for an industrial city'¹⁴ the industrial zone was divided into two areas for semi-heavy and light industry. Both zones were located in the northeast to ensure 'civic, commercial and residential districts [were] free from smoke and noise'.¹⁵ In this modern city there would be 'no need to imagine irritation arising from soot and noise disturbances as [was] the case with cities like Tokyo, Osaka and London'.¹⁶ Residential areas were arranged into four grades determined by population density; from 4,000 people per square kilometres (875 square metres for each lot) to 12,000.¹⁷

Densities were kept low by a generous allocation of public parks and open spaces. The undulating landscape helped planners define parks, lakes, and spaces between the different zones—residential, commercial, civic, and industrial—as well as serving as 'excellent centres of refuge in times of emergency'.¹⁸ Categories of parks and open spaces were also arranged according to scale. Large- and medium-sized parks contained recreational facilities such as golf courses, sports fields, and racetracks and were connected by main streets. Small parks were designed for residential areas with primary schools. Parks also played an important role in hosting cultural institutions such as museums, libraries, public halls, zoos, and botanical gardens.

A modern city required modern roads. In Hsinking, all major roads were surfaced in either asphalt, stone, or hard brick and lined with trees, and stratified in three main

13. This included 6.5 square kilometres for government offices, 21 square kilometres for highways, 3.5 square kilometres for public utilities, 7 square kilometres for parks, 9 square kilometres for military purposes, and 53 square kilometres for private purposes (including 27 square kilometres residential, 8 square kilometres commercial, 6 square kilometres industrial, 10 square kilometres undesignated, and 2 square kilometres for special purposes such as dairy farming).

14. 'Five Years of Capital Construction', *Contemporary Manchuria* 2, no. 1 (January 1938): 6.

15. 'The Birth of a New World Capital', *Far Eastern Review* (July 1936): 296.

16. 'Five Years of Capital Construction', 6.

17. Every residential area was to be provided with three types of market—livestock, vegetable, and retail—for every 3,000 inhabitants.

18. 'The Birth of a New World Capital', 296.

categories: trunk lines (26–60 metres wide), branch lines (10–18 metres) and feeder roads (less than 10 metres). The 60-metre wide highways exemplified Hsinking's progressive planning. The central section comprised a 16-metre-wide central promenade, flanked by 12-metre-wide carriageways for motor vehicles, then 10-metre-wide pavements on either side. These pavements not only served pedestrians, but were also easily accessible conduits for modern utilities: drainage, sewage pipes, power supply, telephone cables, and telegraph lines. Secondary roads (45 metres wide) were configured slightly differently. Fast moving vehicles occupied the central asphalted section (16 metres wide), which was flanked by a green strip (2.5 metres wide) planted with trees. Two 6-metre-wide macadamised roads on either side were for slower-moving vehicles such as rickshaws, carriages, wagons, and the Russian equestrian import, the drosky, and flanked by 6-metre-wide pavements.

Hsinking's construction plan also included a new airport, a meteorological observatory, a wireless station, an athletics stadium, an international racecourse and proposals for an underground railway—second only in Asia to Tokyo's, which had opened in 1927.¹⁹ As with telephone and telegraph cables, subterranean railways were deemed preferable for maintaining the serenity of the urban environment—the same reason why in Hsinking noisy, disruptive, and unsightly electric trams were banned in favour of motor buses and building heights could not exceed 20 metres, so as ‘to eliminate the discomfort that may result from the construction of skyscrapers’²⁰

Here, the Japanese planned, designed, and constructed a modern capital to their own agenda, where modernity's promise possessed almost curative powers. As one visitor wrote in 1939: ‘One seems to breathe freer in such an atmosphere of complete “modernism” . . . Here in the heart of the Asiatic continent a “dream city” of modernism is growing . . . surely more adapted for the requirements of the future times than many other towns . . . Modernism in Asia!’²¹

From Plans to Reality

The Japanese moved swiftly to turn the Capital Construction Plan into reality, despite the freezing winters forcing ‘no building work [to] be attempted from late autumn to late spring’.²² Details of the ambitious construction schedule were laid out in a Five-Year Plan and over 130 million yen was spent in the first three years.²³ The Japanese media trumpeted the achievements: ‘Modern city planning designed to transform Hsinking into a great metropolis befitting the capital of the rapidly growing

19. ‘The Birth of a New World Capital’, 296.

20. ‘The Birth of a New World Capital’, 296.

21. T. V. Gilchrist, ‘Hsinking’, 1442.

22. Chokiuro Kadono, ‘Railway Construction Pushed by Manchukuo’, *Far Eastern Review* (May 1933): 203.

23. Shinsaku Tsutsui, ‘Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo’, *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 47.



Stonemasons working on a construction site in front of the Department of Justice and Foreign Affairs.

State is now being carried out on an extensive scale by the Capital Construction Bureau, upon the completion of which Hsinking will present a gorgeous modern foreign-style city.²⁴ Foreign journalists such as the French correspondent for *Gringoire*, Jean Douyau, were conscripted by the Japanese and parroted the message, using foreign precedents to underline Hsinking's superiority:

The Japanese wish, "trowel in hand," to break world records for rapidity in building. America years ago had great performances to her credit along this line. Australia built her new capital, Canberra, in a minimum of time. Ankara, the Turkish capital, arose with equal speediness. In Hsinking it is being done in five year plans . . . Was it in ten minutes?²⁵

In the first fiscal year (1932–1933) 5.2 million Manchukuo yen was spent on building seven government buildings, 547 special residences and 160 other structures.²⁶ This more than doubled the following year to 12.6 million Manchukuo yen on the construction of 11 government buildings, 971 special residences, 795 shops, stores, and dwellings, 185 offices and apartments, and 130 Manchu houses. In the third year, expenditure rose by 500 per cent. Over 24 million Manchukuo yen was spent on 12 government buildings and 1,225 special residences, 1,325 shops, stores, and dwellings, and 538 offices and apartments. A new category of 'Manchu homes' was also

24. 'New City-Planning', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 50.

25. Jean Douyau, 'Impressions on Manchoukuo', *Contemporary Manchuria* 2, no. 3 (May 1938): 125.

26. 'Capital Construction in Manchoukuo', *Manchuria* (1 February 1937): 72.

included in official figures, 403 of which were built over the year. Construction of government offices continued to rise rapidly throughout 1936, with 42 built in the year, while 'shops, stores, and dwellings' remained stable at 1,384 units and 'special residences' and 'offices and apartments' decreased to just 258 and 344 respectively. Manchu houses more than doubled to 973. The total number of buildings in 'the new building area in the new capital' was 8,243 costing 57.3 million Manchukuo yen.²⁷ In spring 1936, a number of buildings were awarded for their 'excellence in design, elegance, and solidity' and to avoid the nuisance of smoke, heating systems became compulsory in all new buildings.²⁸

Between 1932 and the end of 1936, Hsinking had grown, as one Japanese commentator put it, 'from a humble town of about 120,000 to a modern metropolis of 300,000 constantly expanding and building itself up under well designed and well directed city planning'.²⁹ The Japanese population had not only increased significantly, but also as a proportion of the total population. By the end of 1935, Hsinking's total population had risen to 267,951, of which 51,708 were Japanese. Nearly 10,000 of these were officials and their families, instructed to relocate to Hsinking as pioneers of the new state and the intended occupants of the 3,000 special residences constructed in the first five years. However, despite the prodigious figures, the actual population growth was less than planned and by 1937 was still far short of the 500,000 people that the Japanese had hoped would be living in Hsinking. Even by April 1939, the total population had risen only to 381,135, of which 94,666 were Japanese.³⁰

By the end of the first Five-Year Plan building plots sold to private investors were largely confined to the prime sites along the major thoroughfares and represented only 5 per cent of the available land. Only 21 per cent of the road network was completed,³¹ which the Japanese media referred to optimistically as being 'wonders in themselves'.³² Above ground, roads were lined with trees and adorned with street lighting and signage, and below ground 225 km of water mains and 50 km of sewage pipes were laid.

Pre-eminent among Hsinking's new streets was the Chuo-dori (Central Thoroughfare), 'the most representative modern thoroughfare in the city'.³³ It formed the central section of the city's spine that extended in a straight line from the railway station in the north to the city's southern perimeter. The northern section comprised what was once the main section of the Japanese railway zone and started at the

27. 'Capital Construction in Manchoukuo', 72–74.

28. 'Capital Construction in Manchoukuo', 74.

29. Tohmasu Dan, 'Reminiscences of Hsinking', *Manchuria* (15 December 1936): 408.

30. 'Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo', *Far Eastern Review* (April 1940): 139.

31. 'Rapid Expansion of Hsinking', *Manchuria* (1 September 1936): 165.

32. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 47–48.

33. 'Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo', *Far Eastern Review* (April 1940): 140.

station, which had been so instrumental in the city's initial encounter with modernity. Assembled around the 'plaza' in front of the station were the Yamato Hotel, the police station, library, custom house, and a large stone *torii* that marked the entrance to the shrine of the city's guardian deity: the sun goddess Amaterasu Okuninushinomikoto and the spirit of the Emperor Meiji.³⁴



The Tatung Boulevard showing the crenellated Kotoku Kaikan and the 'ultra-modern' Nikkei Gallery with its illuminated needle tower.

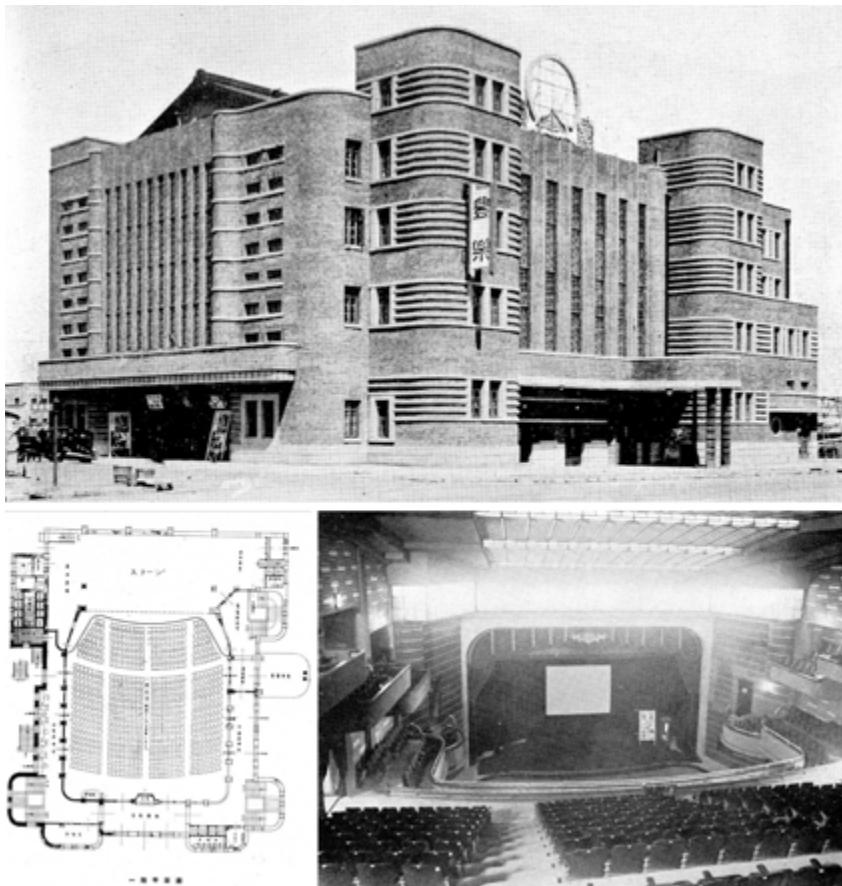
From 1932, the central and southern section of the Chuo-dori was laid out across open fields and named the Tatung Boulevard. This main axis became a stage set on which the drama of this new city was dutifully choreographed. Architecture assumed the leading role in this performance, with a host of characters in the form of major public departments, offices, and commercial venues. The 'severely modern'³⁵ Kwantung Army Headquarters (1934), which contained the seat of the Japanese Legation, was housed in a 'magnificent castle-like structure bearing the Imperial crest of the chrysanthemum'.³⁶ The eight-storey Hozan Department Store offered its guests a rooftop garden from which they could admire the attributes of the modern city: 'gaiety of colours . . . great cinemas, magasins, the glitter of plate-glass and of stainless steel'. Nearby were the Minakai Department Store and the Kotoku Kaikan, a large four-storey crenellated block with rounded corners and turret rising above

34. 'Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo', 140.

35. 'Souvenir Enthronement Supplement', 1934: 59.

36. 'Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo', 140.

the main entrance, recalling the battlements of an old city wall and accommodating the offices of Mitsubishi and other large corporations. In contrast, next door, was the 'ultra-modern' Nikke Gallery, an affiliated concern of the Nippon Woollen Textile Company and the self-styled 'Oasis of the Capital City'. With its roof terrace, *piloti*, gleaming white walls, and sleek *fenêtre en longueur* wrapping around the façade, the Nikke Gallery was as aesthetically close to any international vision of modernism as any building in China before the Second World War. An illuminated needle tower crowned the structure in a series of glass panels stepping up in three vertical stages to a flagpole at the summit. Inside, on the ground floor, behind the rows of pillars, was a showroom, above which was the 'Nikke Parlour' that was, some claimed, 'certain to impress one as reminding one somehow of Tokyo in its atmosphere'.³⁷



The Feng Le Cinema (1936), Hsinking. Clockwise from top left: Exterior after completion, interior from upper gallery, first-floor plan.

37. Kwata, 1939–40: 15.

Branches of Business

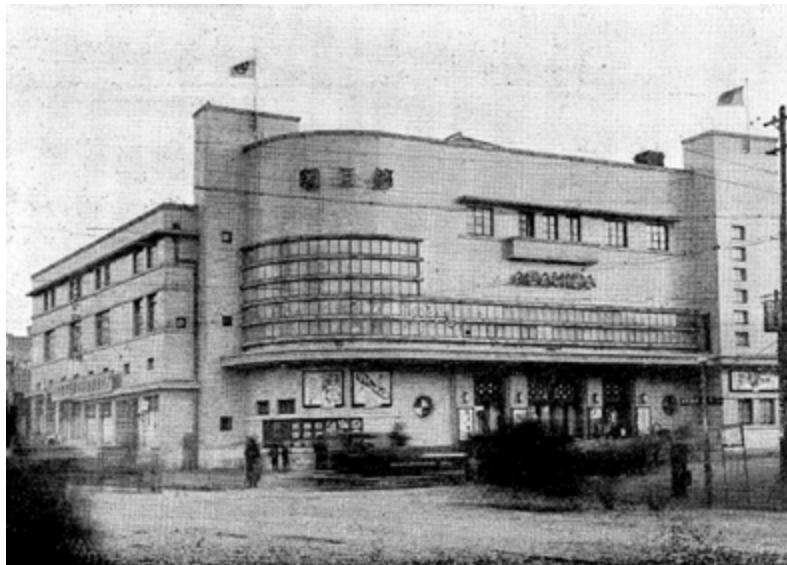
Dramatic, cultural, publicity,
news and cartoon films; 16
millimetre films produced also
on contract.

Sectional filming, recording,
developing, editing, copying
of films on reduced scale
Contracts for such also
undertaken

Sale of film material and
equipment on commission.
Sale of various films
Importing, exporting and
distribution of films.
Studios rented
(Tourists will be afforded
every convenience)



Advertisement for the Manchuria Motion Picture Producing and Distributing Corporation (*Manshu Eiga Kyokai*).



The Asahiza Cinema (*Morning Star*, 1936), Hsinking (now destroyed).

In the smaller streets behind the Nikke Gallery and Kotoku Kaikan were some of Manchukuo's most modern cinemas: the Asahiza (Morning Sun) and Feng Le, a striking brick structure evoking the expressive brickwork of Northern Europe popular in Japan in the 1930s. Hollywood was the staple supplier of films to Manchukuo until the Manchuria Motion Picture Producing and Distributing Corporation (*Manshu Eiga Kyokai*) banned American imports in 1939.³⁸ In the absence of Hollywood, the Corporation was tasked with creating Manchukuo's own silver screen. Furnished with studios in Hsinking that were 'the largest and best equipped in the Orient', it produced 'annually at least 60 "feature" plays and many more short news and educational pieces'.³⁹ Adding to thriving domestic film production were German and, to a lesser extent, Italian imports. An agreement had been signed in early 1939 to distribute up to 40 American films in Manchukuo, including 'Adventures of Robin Hood' with Errol Flynn and 'Stage Door' with Katherine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers, but the signing of the Amity Agreement with Germany heralded a U-turn and the large-scale importation of German films, including those directed by the Nazi propagandist Karl Ritter.

Back on the Tatung Boulevard, the annular form of the Tatung Circle punctuated its straight line about a third of the way down its length. Like an over-blown version of Dalian's central circus, the Tatung Circle was an urban spectacle that formed the heart of the city plan. Six roads radiated from the Tatung Circle, between which were some of Hsinking's most important buildings: the headquarters of the Telephone and Telegraph Company (designed by the CCB's Aiga, who also designed the Ministry of Education and CCB offices [1934]), the Police Headquarters, Hsinking Special City Hall, the Capital Construction Bureau, and the headquarters of the Central Bank of Manchu, designed by Kensuke Yokoi, situated on the northwest corner of the Tatung Boulevard.⁴⁰ Four storeys high⁴¹ above two basements and occupying a 30,000 square kilometres site, the mammoth steel frame and reinforced concrete structure was concealed behind a neo-classical exterior dominated by a portico of ten Doric columns fashioned in Manchurian granite designed to give 'the impression of solidity and strength'.⁴² Little expense was spared on interior finishings. Floors were lined with linoleum tile. Fascist Italy provided the marble for the bank counters and columns. Nazi Germany supplied the glass for the huge dome above the banking hall.⁴³ Replete

38. Construction of the Manchuria Motion Picture Producing and Distributing Corporation studios began in 1937 and was completed in 1939.

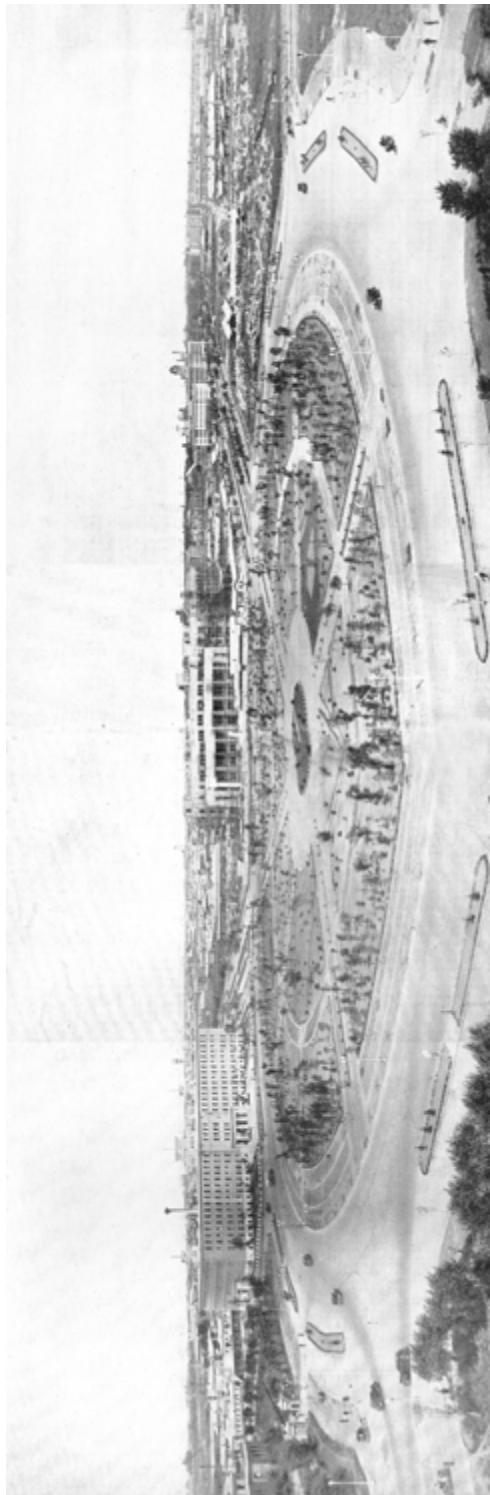
39. Murotsu, 'Japan-Manchoukuo Solidarity Strengthened', *Manchuria* (1 January 1939): 898.

40. The Central Bank of Manchu was established on 15 June 1932 and had 150 branches in Manchukuo and one in Tokyo.

41. The building was 21.5 metres high, with the elevator tower adding an extra 6 metres.

42. 'Manchoukuo's New Bank', *Far Eastern Review* (September 1938): 344.

43. The guest rooms and president's and vice president's offices had mantelpieces of Italian marble and finished in hardwood. Guestroom walls were lined with Japanese marble and satin damask and the president's and vice president's offices were lined in teak veneer.



The massive Tatung Circle forming the heart of Hsinking's new plan, showing the new buildings (Telephone and Telegraph Company, left, and Central Bank of Manchu, right) under construction and the Tatung Boulevard with its new department stores extending in the distance to the right.

with modern conveniences, such as ventilation, lighting, air-conditioning, sanitation, and heating, the building was opened on 15 August 1938. Billed as being more than just ‘one of the most beautiful and impressive structures that has been built in the city so far’,⁴⁴ the press wilfully ignored its Grecian overtones and directly associated the building with Hsinking’s brand of modernity:

The new building stands as a monument to the energy of the Japanese and Manchoukuo [sic] leaders, whose far-sighted policies have been instrumental in transforming the once characterless gloomy town of Changchun into a majestic new metropolis built along modern and dynamic lines—a city befitting the capital of a new and progressive state.⁴⁵

In the late 1930s, the bank commissioned a senior draftsman from Frank Lloyd Wright’s Tokyo studio, Arata Endo (1889–1951), to design staff residences and a club. Arata moved to Hsinking for the project, where his designs for the homes of the bank’s head and high officials evoke Wright’s prairie style with their horizontal arrangement of low broad roofs, deep overhanging eaves, and thick set windows.

Foreign correspondents commissioned by the Japanese dutifully filed favourable reports of the Tatung Circle:

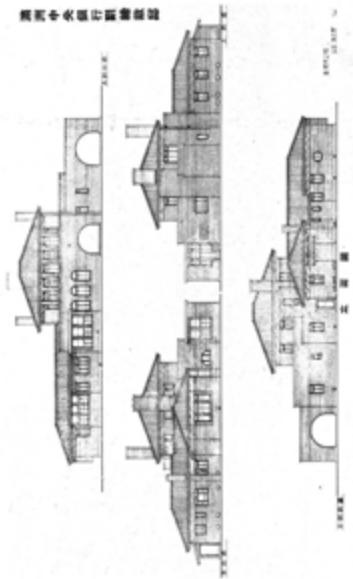
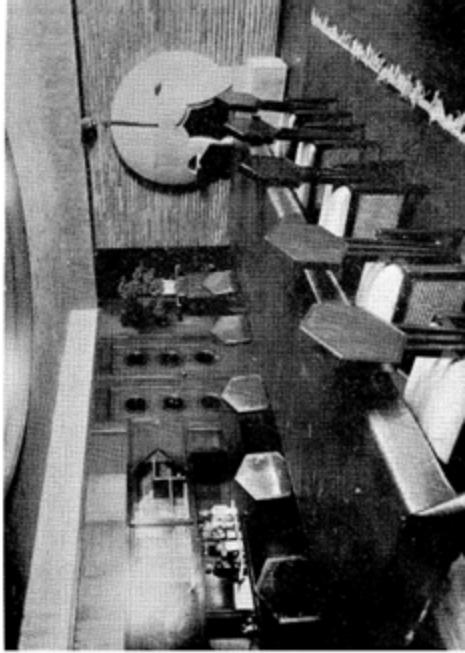
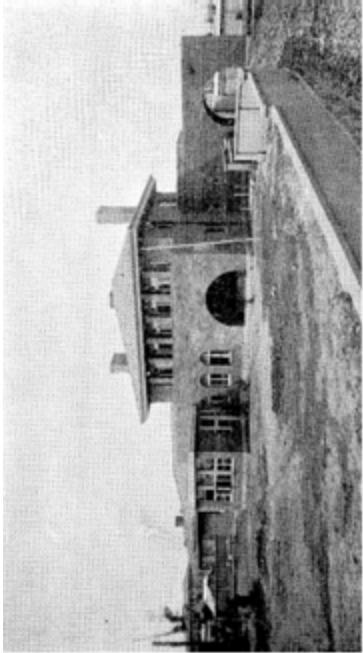
I have another look at Hsinking. In the centre is what would correspond to the Étoile in Paris, all duly and properly proportioned. When certain glorious centuries have passed, I suppose that an “arc de triomphe” will be erected in the middle of the town and the avenues running to the four points of the compass will bear the names of its greatest men. At the moment it is a vast garden in the form of a circle, “un grand round,” a great ring as one sees at Toulouse on which are being built the administrative buildings. The majority of these have been completed and they are of adequate size with great simplicity of line. The architects and engineers have looked well ahead and made plenty of opportunity for the future though the whole is well equilibrated. The Étoile of Hsinking will be most attractive.⁴⁶

Directly west of Tatung Circle were the grounds of the Imperial Palace, not laid out until the late 1930s. Arranged longitudinally in a north-south orientation, the site (0.5 square kilometres) fronted by a large plaza, was semicircular at its northern end to symbolise heaven and horizontal at the southern end to symbolise earth. The emperor, in accordance with Chinese tradition, occupied the space between the two, though in Changchun he never got that chance. The Japanese were in no hurry to expend valuable resources on architecture designed to placate local sensibilities. A building committee was established in 1935 and dispatched to Beijing and India to

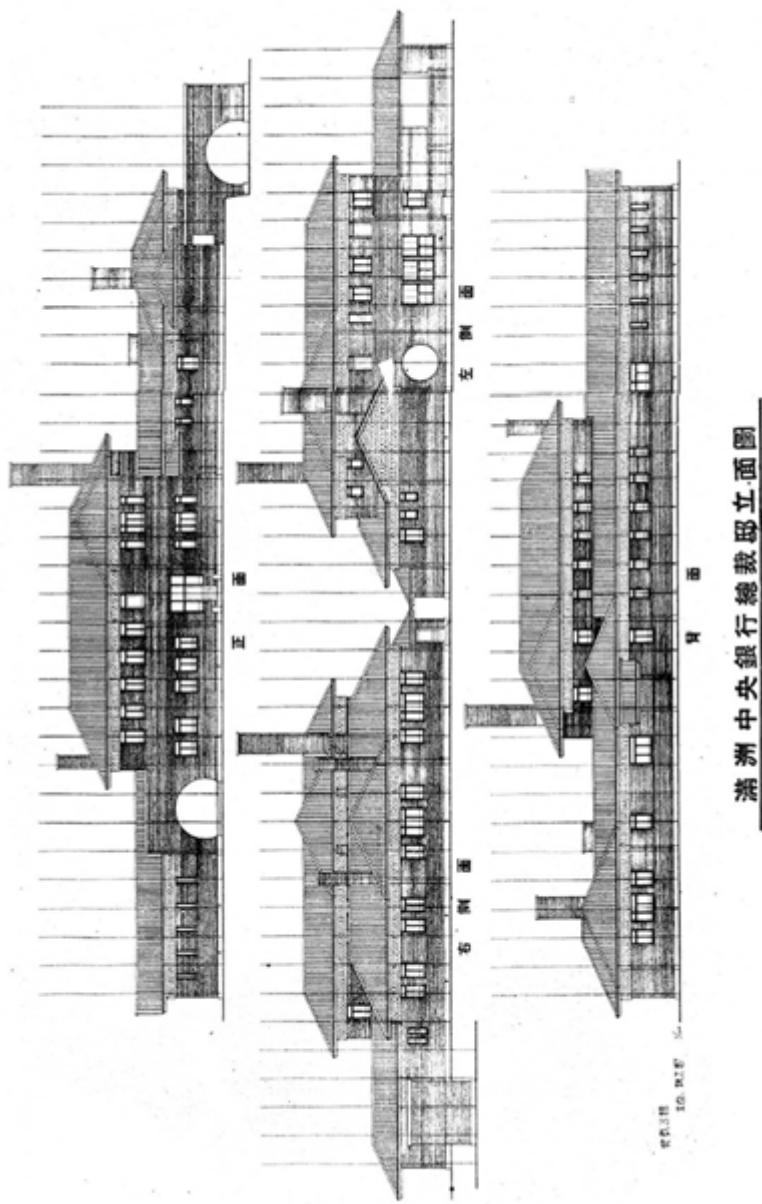
44. ‘Manchoukuo’s New Bank’, *Far Eastern Review* (September 1938): 344.

45. ‘Manchoukuo’s New Bank’, 344.

46. Jean Douyau, ‘Impressions on Manchoukuo’, *Contemporary Manchuria* 2, no. 3 (May 1938): 124–25.



Residence of senior official of the Central Bank of Manchukuo designed by Arata Endo, senior draftsman in Frank Lloyd Wright's Tokyo studio. Clockwise from top left: principal elevations, exterior, main dining room, and ground and first-floor plans.



Residence of the president of the Central Bank of Manchu designed by Arata Endo, senior draftsman in Frank Lloyd Wright's Tokyo studio.

research palace architecture.⁴⁷ Construction started on 10 September 1938, but was never completed. It was much easier for the media to promote the building than for the authorities to construct it. The new palace, it was boasted, would 'represent the beauty and progress of Manchurian construction, in which is centred the best that builders and designers can produce'⁴⁸ while another journalist claimed 'in outward appearance, the new Palace buildings will be elegant structures of the old Oriental style, but will be equipped with fire-proof and all other modern equipment'.⁴⁹ Neither was right. The war interrupted the construction schedule and the puppet emperor of Manchukuo remained in temporary accommodation throughout his tenure.



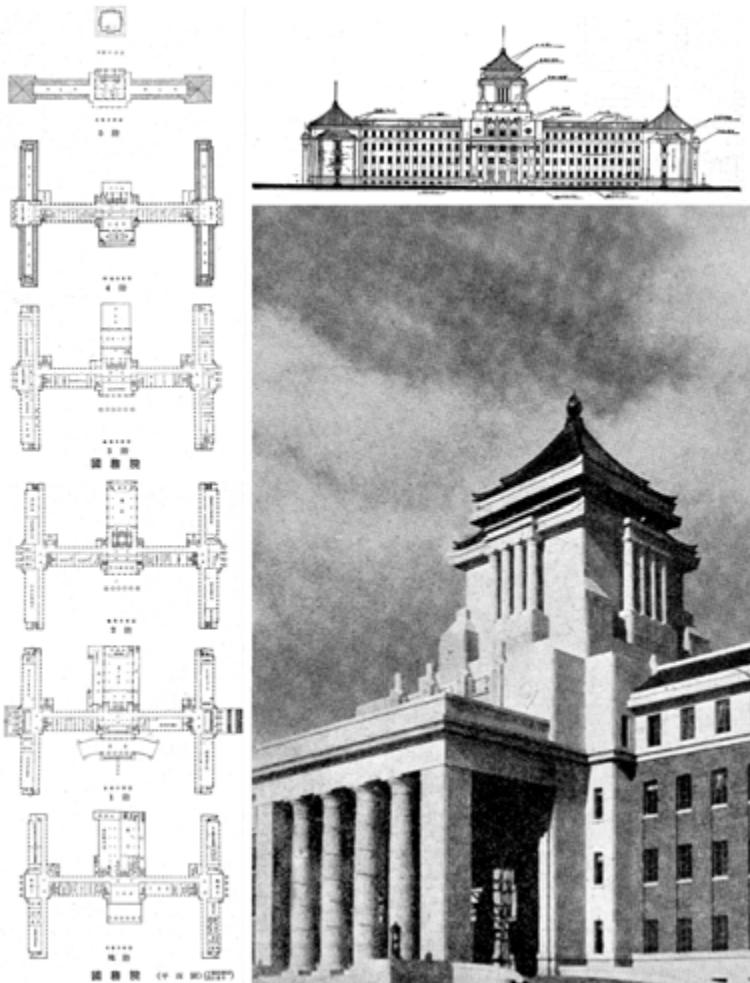
Different government buildings in Hsinking showing the variety of different 'oriental'-style roofs that became the dominant language of public buildings in the new capital. From top: The Department of Justice and Foreign Affairs (1933), Department of Justice (1936), Mixed Court (1939), Department of Transport (1938), Headquarters of the Kwantung Army (1934).

47. 'Construction of Hsinking Palace Starts Sept. 10', *Manchuria* (15 September 1938): 637.

48. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchoukuo', 47.

49. 'Construction of Hsinking Palace Starts Sept. 10', *Manchuria* (15 September 1938): 637.

The Shuntian Highway connected the Imperial Palace to the city's largest park, the South Lake Complex. Parallel to the southern stretch of the Tatung Boulevard, the Shuntian Highway hosted the highest concentration of Manchukuo's government offices, the 'oriental' roofs and decorative treatment on which contrasted with the pragmatic commercialism of the Tatung Boulevard. The 'curly roofs'⁵⁰ and Asian style of the Department of Justice's central tower was said to have 'surprised people' for its inventiveness,⁵¹ but the massive State Council attracted most attention.



The State Council (1936), designed by Ishi Tatzuro. Clockwise from top right: principal elevation, detail of main entrance portico and central tower, and floor plans from basement to tower.

50. 'Souvenir Enthronement Supplement', 1934: 59.

51. Masami Makino, 'Architecture of the Ten Years of Manchukuo', *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (October 1942): 19.

Located at the northern end of the Shuntian Highway, adjacent to the Imperial Palace compound, the State Council was the most important civic building in Manchukuo. Completed in 1936, Ishi Tatzuro's design was based on the controversial National Diet Building (1918–36) in Tokyo, the origins of which gave rise to the *teikan-yōshiki* or 'crown topped' style. Parallels between these two politically important buildings are obvious: the symmetrical plan and elevations, the central monumental stepped tower set on a three-storey Doric portico supporting a smaller colonnade above, and the extensive use of masonry. The New State Council was both more classical, in the Western sense, and borrowed more explicitly from Asian iconography in its roof design and stone detailing than the National Diet Building. The latter was simpler in line and detail and the crown of the tower was an abstracted stepped pyramid, whereas that at Hsinking was a more literal interpretation of a traditional Japanese roof. Unsurprisingly, the media responded uncritically, claiming it represented 'the refreshing beauty, symbolic of the rising metropolis in this modern setting'.⁵²

At the southern end of the Shuntian Highway, on the northern perimeter of the South Lake Complex, was the Manchoukuo [sic] Mixed Court (1939), a monumental steel framed structure clad in brick and topped with an 'oriental' roof. The geometric massing in the main body of the building behind a huge porte cochère echoed the gate towers that punctuated old forts or city walls. The tiered structure and plastic forms appeared more inventive when compared with the many attempts by Japanese and Chinese architects in their respective countries to 'orientalise' modern steel or reinforced concrete frame structures.

The adjacent South Lake Complex was the largest of Hsinking's many parks that furnished the city with one hectare of green space per 450 residents—comparable to North American cities, or three to four times European cities, and ten times more than Kyoto.⁵³ The first park completed by the CCB was Tatung Park (290,000 square metres), which had 45,700 planted trees and, in the middle, the Blue Wave Pond containing 160,000 fish.⁵⁴ Other parks included Kodama Park (350,000 square kilometres), which contained a zoo, playground, sports facilities, including one of China's first baseball fields,⁵⁵ and a boating pond that became an ice rink in winter.

The South Lake Complex was the site of a new suburban district for wealthy Japanese residents and businesses commissioned by the Japanese government in

52. 'Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo', *Far Eastern Review* (April 1940): 140.

53. Bill Sewell, 'Reconsidering the Modern in Japanese History: Modernity in the Service of the Prewar Japanese Empire', *Japan Review* 16 (2004): 234.

54. Other parks included Paishan Park (146,000 square metres and 36,000 trees), Mutan Park (135,000 square metres) with heated greenhouse, Shuntian Park (construction started in 1934 and was 80 per cent finished by 1937), and Hoshun Park (131,000 square metres).

55. The Nanling Stadium, completed in 1936, contained a baseball diamond, as well as other sports facilities, such as rugby, volleyball, basketball, football, and tennis.



Plan for the South Lake Complex (1939), designed by Junzo Sakakura, an assistant of Le Corbusier.

1939. Junzo Sakakura (1901–69), who was working in Le Corbusier's office at the time, was invited to design the large mixed-use scheme of offices, apartments, and villas. Sakakura's design, clearly inspired by his mentor's approach to planning and architecture, linked the natural and urban environments in a layered hierarchy from the water's edge to the urban grid. A network of meandering footpaths followed the lakeside, behind which a long circuitous road lined by detached villas wound its way from the main road to a club building on the banks of the lake. Behind this picturesque landscape the planning changed completely into a rectilinear grid comprising twelve large squares formed by roads. The two squares near the southern end of the lake were further subdivided and contained smaller low-rise apartment blocks. A chain of much larger apartment buildings arranged in a perpendicular pattern linked the other squares together in an uninterrupted sequence across the entire site. These higher-rise structures, raised on piloti to allow the free circulation of pedestrians and vehicles at ground level, have been likened to Le Corbusier's famous Unité d'Habitation apartments in Marseilles, but preceded this modernist exemplar by nearly a decade. However, such architectural aspiration proved too grandiose for wartime Japan. Sakakura's South Lake Complex was never built.

Nevertheless, the project's scale and ambition, like a microcosm of Manchukuo more broadly, made a significant impact on a generation of young Japanese architects.

Kenzo Tange (1913–2005), an employee of Le Corbusier’s other Japanese apprentices, Kunio Maekawa (1905–86), travelled around Manchukuo and worked with Sakakura on the South Lake Complex. Tange would become one of Japan’s most celebrated post-war architects and in 1960 drew on his experience in Hsinking to design the celebrated and influential plan for Tokyo Bay. Maekawa, like many Japanese architects in the 1930s, exploited Japan’s invasion of China in 1937 by opening an office in Shanghai in 1939. There he designed a dormitory for employees of the Kakō Commercial Bank (1939–43) and sent ‘some of the office staff to Manchuria to work for the Manchurian Aircraft Company—designing factory buildings in Shenyang’.⁵⁶

Architecture in Hsinking

Japan’s lust for modernity in Hsinking was projected through monumental and efficient urban planning and state-of-the-art infrastructure, but was hard to define architecturally. Kensuke Aiga, the prolific CCB architect, explained his goal had been to create the official buildings in the capital of an ideal country. Evidently burdened by the weight of responsibility, a satisfactory architectural solution eluded him. Having explored various alternatives, a tolerable compromise was one that added a ‘modern style’ to a ‘Chinese style exterior . . . to create a new and modern overall form interwoven with a Japanese style interior’.⁵⁷ Essential to this architectural equation was the combination of three key elements: Chinese, Japanese, and the modern.

Manchukuo’s political condition, continental climate, and the vernacular buildings of northern China (Manchuria and Mongolia)—temples, fortifications, city walls, and palaces—all played their part in constructing Manchukuo modernism, a vision of modernity too far removed from Western precedents to be measured by the same standards. The experience and expression of modernity in Manchukuo was, by definition, exceptional, creating an entirely new architectural landscape that was one among multiple modernities globally.

Another condition of Manchukuo’s architectural modernity was not simply its potential to inform architecture in Japan, but that Japanese architects in Manchukuo were conscious of this potential. Colonies throughout the world were abundant sources of inspiration for modernism in all its forms, but the Western artists that commandeered such cultural cues seldom acknowledged their debt. Instead, they incorporated these ingredients into modernist recipes and exported them back to the colonies as innovation. In Manchukuo, Japanese architects were candid about the potential for the imperial realm to inform the motherland—reversing the conventional notion of centre-periphery and the one-directional exchange between

56. Reynolds, 2001: 97.

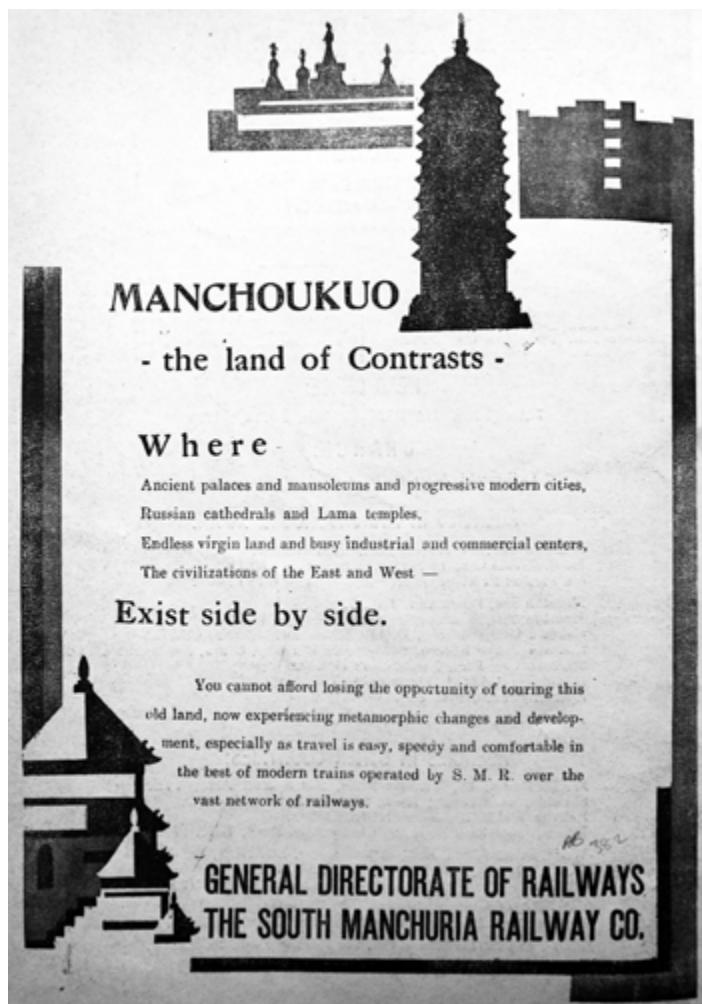
57. Kensuke Aiga, ‘Thoughts before and after the Establishment of Manchukuo’, *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (October 1942): 8.

coloniser and colonised. Manchuria's architecture was not only relevant to Japan, it was, like urban planning before it, deemed by many to be an essential factor in the advancement of the nation and the wider expansion of colonial territories. After 1937, Japanese officials increasingly saw Manchukuo as a model precedent for subsequent imperial acquisitions under the umbrella of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and capable of stimulating domestic reforms.

Characteristics of modernism in Hsinking that were distinct from the universal form, type, and style promoted by European modernists were variety and servitude to a higher purpose. Along the Tatung Boulevard, for example, was an 'array of modern structures [that] represent the height of recent Manchurian construction and typical Manchurian style, and add solemnness [*sic*] and grandeur'.⁵⁸ Architectural variety (and wholesale city planning) was a feature of Tokyo's reconstruction after the 1923 earthquake; an event that reverberated strongly in the planning and design of Hsinking a decade later. As Ino Dan from Tokyo University pointed out on the eve of Hsinking's establishment: 'The City of Tokyo has no restriction on the style of architecture except for sundry regulations concerning the height, light, area, gradient of staircases, dynamic calculations and the like. As a result, the Tokyo of to-day has become a sort of architectural exhibition with a confusion of all sorts and varieties of buildings . . . We do not consider it necessary for a city to have its buildings conform to one kind of architectural style.'⁵⁹ Manchukuo's Japanese architects were generally critical of this eclecticism, blaming it on the speed with which it was realised, but it did not prevent the state and media pedalling the idea of modernity.

Another trait that distinguished the metropolitan modernism of Hsinking from many other global exemplars—Paris, Berlin, London, New York, or Shanghai—was the complicated relationship with tradition. Japanese architects in Manchukuo recognised the enduring tension between old and new forms.⁶⁰ They acknowledged local traditions and were even critical of their own often-poor efforts to incorporate such traditions into a modern architectural language for Manchukuo, though were grateful for the experience.⁶¹ Throughout the world modernists of all varieties emphasised this binary relationship, even if it was seldom more than a charade, because it served their purpose and justified the progressiveness of their ideas. Architecture and planning were two effective and conspicuous means of reinforcing this dichotomy, which assumed many forms: rural–urban, old–new, past–future, tradition–modernity,

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58. Shinsaku Tsutsui, 'Construction and Architecture of Manchukuo', *Manchuria—Special Manchoukuo Economic Number* (25 May 1938): 47.
59. Ino Dan, 'The Reconstruction of Tokyo and Aesthetic Problems of Architecture', *Far Eastern Review* (January 1932): 39.
60. Kensuke Aiga, 'Thoughts before and after the Establishment of Manchukuo', *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (October 1942): 8.
61. Masami Makino, 'Architecture of the Ten Years of Manchukuo', *Journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association* 22, no. 10 (October 1942): 17.



'Manchoukuo—The Land of Contrasts': SMR advertisement celebrating the contrasts that characterised Manchuria's encounter with modernity.

rich–poor, dark–light, quiet–loud, dirty–clean, small–big, backwards–forwards, and fast–slow.

Duality was emphasised at a metropolitan and a global level and was as evident in Hsinking as anywhere. For example, in the older quarter of the city one visitor claimed 'colourful Oriental charm abounds'⁶² defining it in terms of 'curious shaped shop signs hanging from the eaves of dark, gloomy looking "Mud Huts" and clustered red, yellow and green lanterns festooning the narrow streets'.⁶³ In stark contrast

62. 'Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo', 139.

63. 'Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo', 139.

was ‘the remarkable modernization’ of Hsinking’s ‘city planning, with magnificent buildings and residential quarters, and the well mapped-out plan for further improvements . . . a beautiful picture of a gorgeous modern capital with rows of ultra modern “edifices” adorning the tree-lined thoroughfares, from which the ugliness of telephone wires and sewers is completely hidden’.⁶⁴ However, within this projection of ultra-modernity was a perennial and conscious attempt to accommodate tradition—something that Europe’s early modernists went to great pains to deny. For Hsinking, an oppositional relationship with the old was used primarily as a device to distinguish it from Western and Chinese precedents. Hsinking’s modernity was presented as distancing itself from and accentuating the primitive and chaotic state of Chinese settlements, while at the same time making European cities, especially London, appear ‘old-fashioned’, ‘dreary’, ‘dirty’, and ‘overcrowded’.⁶⁵

Hsinking’s encounter with modernity was also explained in mystical or even supernatural terms, as one Japanese journalist wrote in 1936: ‘The advent of the capital city of Hsinking must be little short of magic to a western traveller who may remember old Changchun. Well might he doubt his own eyes. On an unknown tract of farm fields and straggling huts now stand rows of palatial government edifice’s [sic] etc., lining broad well-kept streets, stately residences, big stores and shops, all in the brief span of only four years or so.’⁶⁶ Another marvelled, ‘The government waves its wand and another departmental building arises.’⁶⁷ The transformation from old to new was both literal and figurative, as another Japanese visitor reminisced a few months later:

Looking backward, with the muffled roar of this newest metropolis in my ears, I see once more the deserted streets of old Changchun and the people groping in darkness and uncertainty. And then, as by magic, there comes a light revealing as it grows brighter, a new vista of life, a city beautiful, with its many buildings and spacious gardens, with its throngs of happy men and women, labouring in peace and moving in harmony, under the five-coloured banner of Manchoukuo.⁶⁸

Hsinking’s ‘ultra-modernity’ was founded also on speed—both in the pace of life and the swiftness of the city’s emergence. Speed even acquired an architectural designation. Masami Makino, writing in the journal of the Manchurian Architectural Association, referred unfavourably to the first five years of Hsinking’s development as ‘fast-ism’,⁶⁹ which resulted in questionable architecture and mistakes being made. Others, especially foreigners, were more impressed. A Canadian basketball player touring Manchukuo in 1939 ‘couldn’t believe that the majority of buildings

64. ‘Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo’, 139.

65. T. V. Gilchrist, ‘Hsinking’, 1442.

66. ‘Mutankiang Expands Rapidly’, *Manchuria* (1 August 1936): 104.

67. ‘Souvenir Enthronement Supplement’, 1934: 62.

68. Tohmasu Dan, ‘Reminiscences of Hsinking’, *Manchuria* (15 December 1936): 410.

69. Masami Makino, ‘Architecture of the Ten Years of Manchukuo’, 19.



Fast-ism is characterised in this cartoon titled 'Speed Crisis' by Shinkyo Comics. The first person is saying 'Whoa! That was close again. I will be run down and killed any time soon,' to which the second replies, 'Speed crisis.'

of Hsinking have been built within five years.⁷⁰ Having been a Chinese town dubbed the 'City of Beans' surrounded by fields in 1932, by 1940 Hsinking had become an 'ultra-modern metropolis' and the 'pride of Asia'.⁷¹

Hsinking's unique brand of ultra-modernity was fashioned by the Japanese and enthusiastically promoted to a largely ambivalent global audience. However, foreign visitors that did witness Manchukuo before the outbreak of the Second World War, including those paid by the Japanese to do so, were often overawed by the experience. Writing in the journal *Manchuria* in 1939, T. V. Gilchrist eulogised about Hsinking's design: 'How magnificently planned are these streets with their side-alleys, their crossings, the huge squares from which radially new streets are streaming, rising and sinking with the undulating steppe'. No other capital in the world compared, 'with the exception perhaps for Ankara that has been built mainly by the German architect Holzmeister and therefore lacks the "genuine" touch of Hsinking'.⁷²

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70. Shinobu Higashi, 'Manchoukuo Progress, Racial Harmony Impress Visiting Canadian Team', *Manchuria* (1 August 1939): 1347.
71. The team's Asian tour included Japan, Korea, Manchuria, and the Philippines. 'Hsinking, Capital of Manchoukuo', 139.
72. T. V. Gilchrist, 'Hsinking', 1442.

Hsinking's frequent comparison to other modern foreign cities had the effect of affirming its modernist credentials and reinforcing its distinction. It appeared just as 'modern and prosperous'⁷³ to American visitors as it did to a Polish journalist, the only difference being that the former might be reminded of Washington, DC, or Midwest cities that sprang up along railroads and the latter might be 'reminded very much of the Baltic port of Gdynia, which is virtually a brand new city built in the modern style'.⁷⁴ For one American scholar visiting Hsinking in 1938, the city's 'magnificent city planning and construction work literally took my breath away. Without coming here I never could have conceived the possibility of such a city rising out of the older civilization to which it is attached. The buildings along bold and impressive lines, compare most favourably with our finer Government structures in the United States and the planning closely resembles that of our more modern American cities'.⁷⁵ For a Canadian, Hsinking was 'a tremendous model city' and could be 'compared with Vancouver with a history of fifty years of building behind it'⁷⁶ and to a Frenchman it recalled 'Casablanca on the Mediterranean', which 'showed the power of our construction work just as Hsinking indicates the same in the Orient'.⁷⁷ All accounts were acts of cultural and intellectual appropriation in their shared attempt to contextualise the experience of modernity they had encountered by recalling precedents elsewhere, but none was truly comparable. Hsinking was unique, and destined not to last.

Unfinished Utopia

Hsinking's ultra-modernity, like so many modernist visions of utopia, was encountered more fully on paper than in concrete reality. Despite the considerable efforts of the state-sponsored media and hired foreign hacks, the pan-Asian co-prosperity dream that the Japanese claimed Manchukuo represented quickly turned into a nightmare of global proportions. 'In Europe modernism expresses itself in slaughter and destruction,' asserted one visitor in 1939, with his head firmly stuck in the sand; 'Here it finds its expression in planned construction'.⁷⁸ On 7 July 1937, skirmishes between Japanese and Chinese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge (*Lugouqiao*) sparked Japan's all out invasion of China and the preface to the Second World War.

73. 'Manchoukuo Built for all Time, Gen. Kincaid Declares', *Manchuria* (1 December 1938): 796.

74. Roman Fajans was a Polish journalist working for two Warsaw dailies, *Kurjer Warszawski* and *Polska Zbrojna*, and spent seven months touring Asia. He visited the Polish community in Harbin before travelling to Hsinking. 'Manchoukuo News', *Manchuria* (1 August 1938): 539.

75. Mr Lewis Schmidt, chairman of the American delegation to the Fifth America-Japan Student Conference in Tokyo, *Manchuria* (15 August 1938): 571.

76. Shinobu Higashi, 'Manchoukuo Progress, Racial Harmony Impress Visiting Canadian Team', *Manchuria* (1 August 1939): 1347.

77. *Contemporary Manchuria* 2, no. 3 (May 1938): 124.

78. T. V. Gilchrist, 'Hsinking', 1442.

For Manchukuo, Japan's formerly concentrated interests and resources were dispersed across a much wider area. Construction peaked in 1937 and would never again return to the same feverish levels experienced in the preceding five years. In 1936, a visitor would have noted 'new houses going up and old ones being remodelled to take care of the ever rising tide of newcomers'⁷⁹ but it was never enough. Between 1937 and 1939 house building was sufficient for just 10,000 families (approximately 50,000 people), almost half of the actual demand generated by 95,000 arrivals in the same period. In 1938, only 727 residential houses (for 2,414 families) and 400 commercial properties accommodating residential units on the first floor were constructed. By 1940, Japanese policies had raised Hsinking's population to nearly half a million,⁸⁰ and the construction of 9,000 homes was planned, but even the media acknowledged that a shortage of materials would likely reduce this by 40 per cent. Actual construction remained a fraction of the target. In 1942, a revised urban plan for Hsinking was published that was much less ambitious than its antecedent from 1932 and reduced the housing quota. Housing shortages meant exorbitant rents, which compounded the already difficult living conditions created by a relative paucity of established social, cultural, and commercial activities and the fact that the nation's capital resembled a building site with an abundance of incomplete and temporary structures.



Modern housing in Hsinking in the 1930s, in contrast with the rudimentary transportation.

79. Tohmasu Dan, 'Reminiscences of Hsinking', *Manchuria* (15 December 1936): 408.

80. Hsinking's population in early 1940 was 430,092.

For Japanese, the deteriorating economic situation experienced in Manchukuo was amplified at home. For architects in Japan, work had been drying up throughout the late 1930s. By 1944 construction in Japan had fallen by 75 per cent since 1937.⁸¹ Attracted to empire by the worsening conditions at home, this drought motivated some of Japan's most important modernist architects—Sakakura, Maekawa, Arata, and Tange—to be associated with Manchukuo. However, the militarisation of the state was suffocating architecture and planning and undermining the once rich variety of research activities conducted by Japanese scholars and professionals. Collectively, these formerly worthy endeavours were victim to the 'fascist assault and repression by the military'.⁸²

Despite the deteriorating situation, many professionals engaged in realising Manchukuo's modernist city remained in their posts at the SMR, the CCB or numerous municipal authorities throughout Manchukuo during the war. As the tide turned, they were left stranded and exposed—the incidental flotsam marking the high-water mark of empire. These individuals and their families, friends, and colleagues would pay a terrible price for their involvement—for many, it cost them their lives.

81. Reynolds, 2001: 97.

82. Itō Takeo, SMR researcher, cited in Fogel, 1988: 203.

The End

Western writers visiting Manchuria have claimed that here is found a picture of what Japan will be in the future.¹

Japan framed the outright invasion of China in 1937 as emancipation, not colonisation. ‘Under the leadership of progressive Japan’, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere presented ‘a golden opportunity for a re-birth of the Asiatic races that will establish peace in Asia on a basis of Sino-Japanese co-operation . . . Japan’s advance to China is not a case of conquest by force of arms’² At best, this was a farce, but in reality it was deadly serious. The full horror of Japan’s actions between 1937 and 1945 are debated to this day. The rape of entire cities is still officially denied by many and Japan’s continued honouring of known war criminals keeps old wounds festering.

Throughout the Second World War, tens of thousands of Manchukuo’s non-Japanese residents died at the hands of the Kwantung Army. Most notorious were Unit 731 in Harbin and Unit 100 in Hsinking,³ which operated a covert programme of human experimentation ranging from vivisection without anaesthesia to research in biological warfare that killed thousands of prisoners and oblivious civilians over the course of a decade. Such dreadful experiences returned to haunt Japan’s agents of empire when the military momentum stalled. By 1944, the once mighty and proud Kwantung Army was a skeletal force based in southern Manchuria and the last line of defence for the few metropolitan settlements strung out along the beleaguered SMR. Rural migrants and countless small settlements had long since been abandoned by the very forces that had encouraged them to Manchuria in the first place. Retribution was inevitable, brutal, and swift. Tens of thousands of stranded Japanese, enticed overseas by the promise of empire yet let down by its frailty, were swept up in the retreat and many were marooned.

As the imperial edifice crumbled, the oppressed turned on the oppressor. Manchukuo became a site of slaughter, as Chinese and Russian residents of Manchuria

1. Kinney, 1929: 44; 1930: 48.

2. ‘Rebirth of the Asiatic Races?’ (translated from the ‘Kaizo’ by ‘Contemporary Opinion’, in *Far Eastern Review* (April 1938): 126.

3. Other units were established throughout China, including Unit 1644 in Nanjing and Unit 8604 in Guangzhou.

visited revenge on their former imperial masters. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Stalin promised that the Soviet Union would join the Pacific War within three months of Germany's surrender. News of Hitler's eventual downfall reached Moscow on 9 May. Exactly three months later, almost to the hour, a vast Soviet army of one million soldiers, exhausted by Hitler's stubborn stand at Berlin and having traipsed across the continent, arrived on Manchukuo's doorstep for the final showdown in Asia. In the early hours of 9 August, two vast Soviet armies embarked on the biggest pincer movement in history to sever Manchukuo from its beleaguered imperial host by cutting the lifeline of the SMR.

Japan had invested heavily in Manchukuo and gambled just as heavily on a favourable outcome. By the time America joined the war in 1941, five cities in Manchukuo—Dalian, Shenyang, Hsinking, Harbin, and Mudanjiang⁴—had over 50,000 Japanese residents and a second tier, including Anshan, Fushun, Andong, and Jilin, had more than 20,000 each. Although the actual numbers of Japanese citizens tempted to empire fell far short of original expectations, Japan had made an extraordinary contribution to Manchuria's modernisation, though the nature of this encounter with modernity was hotly contested. For some, Manchukuo was the illegitimate offspring of the non-consensual liaison between China and Japan—the bastard child of imperialism delivered into a dysfunctional and violent domestic environment doomed to fail; to others, it was a window on the future. Manchuria harboured the 'future captains of Japanese industries . . . the biggest Japanese company ever organised' and its premier port, Dalian, was said to be 'more modern, more sanitary, with better-built houses and better-paved streets than anything at home'.⁵ It was a vision depicted by many, including the writer and Japanese apologist, Henry Kinney:

[T]he Japanese establishments in Manchuria are far more modern, in a western material sense, than are any parts of Japan itself, due largely to the fact that here was a clean slate on which to write, and also to the fact that the development was in the hands of a strongly centralized administrative machine, unhampered by traditions or politics, and this machine called into its service some of the best brains of Japan. Western writers visiting Manchuria, and more especially Dairen [Dalian], have claimed that here is found a picture of what Japan will be in future. Some regret the fact that the artistic and aesthetic factor is being subordinated to the material and concretely useful considerations, but the point remains that in Manchuria Japan has established a contribution to modern civilization.⁶

Manchukuo, notwithstanding the odious conditions under which it was realised, represented an encounter with architectural modernity that was unique in scale, time, and context. Despite its significance, it has escaped historical attention.

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- 4. Mudanjiang (Botankou) in eastern Manchukuo was located on the former CER and experienced rapid growth in the mid-1930s owing to its strategic importance near the borders of Russia and Korea.
 - 5. Kinosuke, 1925: vii.
 - 6. Kinney, 1928: 44; 1930: 48.

Meanwhile, Japan has continued to confound those who have sought to conflate modernisation and Westernisation. Only recently has a reappraisal of modernity generated a wider acceptance of its complex character and genuine multiplicity. As the author of *Manchoukuo: Jewel of Asia* observed, ‘Not only are actual conditions [in the East] quite different from western conditions, but events seem to take place in an entirely different way.’⁷

After the war, Manchukuo’s modernism lived on in Japan through the work of some of the most accomplished protagonists, such as Maekawa, Arata, and Tange. But that was in the future. Hours after the Soviet army entered Manchukuo on 9 August 1945, Fat Man fell on Nagasaki. The combined effect of the Soviet invasion and two atomic bombs in three days brought an end to the global war and an end to Japan’s empire and its ultra-modernist dream. The desolate landscapes of post-war Hiroshima and Nagasaki echoed the barren plains on which Manchuria’s modern cities had been built; both brutal reminders of the overwhelming and often contradictory forces of modernity. Manchukuo was returned to China. Within five years, its neighbour, Korea, returned to war and China turned to Communism. Manchukuo’s fleeting tryst with modernity was swiftly overtaken by history and plunged into obscurity—too humiliating for China, too shameful for Japan, too dishonourable for Russia and too remote for the West, which, as victor in 1945, earned the right to pen modernism’s official history.

7. Collier, 1936: 248.

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