

Urban History, 38, 3 (2011) © Cambridge University Press 2011
doi:10.1017/S0963926811000575

From colonial port to socialist metropolis: imperialist legacies and the making of ‘New Dalian’

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the transformation of the city of Dalian from a colonial export port to an industrialized core city of the Japanese wartime empire and finally a model production city of the People’s Republic of China. These shifts in the economic and political function of the city also resulted in complex identity issues for Dalian’s urban residents. Dalian’s rise reminds that there were trajectories of urban development and modernity in China which were different from that of Shanghai. Dalian provides an important, local view of the transition from empire to nation in this strategically important part of Manchuria.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Northeast China, an area known as Manchuria, was in the midst of an urban boom. Owen Lattimore, a leading scholar and contemporary observer of the region, remarked that ‘Manchuria was already more “megalopolitan” than any other part of China of equivalent area, and far more metropolitan in ration of great cities to total population.’ The port city of Dalian, strategically located at the tip of the Liaodong peninsula, was one such great city, and Lattimore considered it to be ‘far ahead of Peking and Nanking’ in terms of modern urban development.¹ Dalian was one of the first ‘instant cities’ in this region, growing from a trading outpost in the late 1890s to a city of nearly 1 million people by 1945. By the early 1920s, the port of Dalian was second only to Hong Kong and Shanghai in total trade volume, a spectacular rise to prominence.²

Dalian’s history is closely entwined with the rise and fall of the Japanese empire, and the shifting map of political power in Manchuria. The city sits at the tip of the Liaodong peninsula, a sliver of land jutting into the Bohai Sea. During the late 1890s, the peninsula became the focal point of Russian and Japanese imperial designs for the military and economic control of Manchuria. Out of this competition, Dalian was born. The city developed along a historical trajectory shared with other urban colonial spaces in China, including Hong Kong, Harbin and Changchun.³ It was planned

¹ Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict* (New York, 1935), 260.

² Y. Konishio, *Port of Dairen* (Dairen, 1923), 35.

³ For Harbin see James H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City 1916–1932* (Ithaca, 2002). For Changchun, see David Buck, ‘Railway city and national

and built by Russia (1898–1904) and Japan (1905–45). From 1945 to 1950, the Soviet Union (1945–50) occupied the city until control was formally handed to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). During their rule over Manchuria, Japan built Dalian into a model city of its empire, and it was hailed in the mid-1920s as ‘the monument and the measure of Japan’s ability as a builder of modern cities’.⁴ By the early 1940s, the Japanese population reached 225,000, making Dalian the most ‘Japanese’ city in mainland China in terms of both population and political and economic control.

With such a colonial past it is surprising that in 1949, just one month after the founding of the People’s Republic and only four years since Japan’s defeat, the Chinese press was hailing ‘New Dalian’ as ‘New China’s model city’.⁵ The new Chinese communist state may have just as easily used the city’s colonial past to cast Dalian in a much more negative light, as a city tainted by decades of Japanese imperialism. Instead, readers are presented with the fantastic tale of the rebirth of what is claimed to be an undeniably Chinese city. Moreover, its status as a production model placed it on the cutting edge of a new urban modernity. The *People’s Daily* newspaper wrote of how Dalian had been ‘transformed from an oppressed Japanese imperialist colony, to an industrial base of New Democracy and New China’.⁶ One commentator even proclaimed the city to be ‘a worker’s paradise’.⁷

The image of cities instantly transformed from colonial hell to socialist heaven was a common one used by the CCP as they moved from their rural bases into a highly diverse urban landscape.⁸ After their takeover of Shanghai in 1949, for example, the CCP described ‘New Shanghai’ in much the same way. Shanghai was, however, far from a model city for the new regime. The CCP viewed that city’s capitalist, consumption-oriented economy as a remnant of the imperialist past that would have to be remade through revolution. Thus, behind the positive image of ‘new’ Shanghai, was a far more negative picture. There were even calls for the city to be radically depopulated and returned to a status of ‘ordinary regional centre’.⁹ The challenge for urban managers was to reorient places like Shanghai from consumption cities to production cities, a process that

capital: two faces of the modern in Changchun’, in Joseph W. Esherick (ed.), *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900–1950* (Honolulu, 2000), 65–89.

⁴ Adachi Kinnoyuke, *Manchuria: A Survey* (New York, 1925), 127.

⁵ Chen Qiyang, ‘Dalian – xin Zhongguo de mofan dushi’ (Dalian – new China’s model metropolis), *Luxing zazhi* (Travel Magazine), 23 (Nov. 1949), 2–8.

⁶ Dalian gongye zhanlanhui (ed.), *Gongye Zhongguo de chuxing* (The Embryonic State of Industrial China) (Guangzhou, 1950), 7–10.

⁷ Li Zongying, Liu Shiwei and Liao Bingxion (eds.), *Dongbei xing* (Travels through the North-East) (Hong Kong, 1950), 50.

⁸ See for example Jeffrey Wasserstrom’s analysis of the images of ‘New Shanghai’ in idem, *Global Shanghai, 1850–2010: A History in Fragments* (London, 2009), 77–88.

⁹ Marie-Claire Bergere, *Shanghai: China’s Gateway to Modernity* (Stanford, 2009), 342.

would carry on well into the 1950s.¹⁰ Yet, in Dalian, this transformation appears to have been completed in 1949.

In their proclamations about 'New Dalian', the CCP was staking their claim to a city that had been a Japanese colony for 40 years and controlled by the Soviet military for another five. This article argues that to understand how the CCP was able to make such a claim about Dalian one must look at the underexplored theme of the developmental legacies of Japanese imperialism in the making of a new Chinese urban modernity. The confident heralding of the city as a model hid a more complex reality in which the new Chinese authorities rebuilt an urban, industrial order which had many similarities with that of the previous regime.

Recent studies have begun to explore the continuities in state-building efforts between those of the Nationalist government in the 1940s and the CCP in the early 1950s. The war experience in the making of modern China remains a central focus of this new work.¹¹ However, the impact and legacies of the Japanese wartime regime on the CCP's post-war state-building project remains underexplored. This article argues that while the CCP's politics spoke of liberation and social revolution, it was ultimately the developmental foundations set by the Japanese wartime state which came to empower the socialist definition of Dalian as a model production city.

This article examines two interrelated features of the process of urban redefinition in Dalian. First, it traces the fundamental shift in the city's economic function from that of an export and consumption economy to a tightly controlled system of production. This transformation began in the early 1930s and continued through the 1950s. It spanned multiple political regimes which are usually treated as clean breaks in the narrative of modern Chinese history, the defeat of Japan in 1945, the Soviet occupation of the north-east and the founding of the PRC in 1949. War was central to this transformation, and total war mobilization was a feature spanning several decades of Dalian's history. Secondly, it examines how, at key points in Dalian's short but dynamic history, serious questions arose about the city's identity and its place within larger frameworks of empire and nation, and on these occasions, war brought some degree of clarity to these concerns. It examines a key segment of the population, the industrial labour force, to shed light on the common promises and assumptions made by Dalian's wartime leaders. It concludes that Dalian's residents had experienced a key form of urban modernity that would be labelled 'socialist' – the city as a production system – and which would become more commonplace throughout China in the 1950s.

¹⁰ Liu Shaoqi (ed.), *Xinminzhu zhuyi chengshi zhengce* (New Democratic Urban Policy) (Hong Kong, 1949), 22–8.

¹¹ See Joshua H. Howard, *Workers at War: Labor in China's Arsenals, 1937–1953* (Stanford, 2004), and Rana Mitter and Aaron William Moore, 'China in World War II, 1937–1945: experience, memory, and legacy', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45 (2011), 225–40.

From colonial port to imperial production city

Throughout the late 1890s, Russia and Japan competed for a strategic foothold in Manchuria. As a result of this sudden interest from imperial powers, the tip of the Liaodong peninsula became a highly sought-after spot on the map of Northeast Asia. It was in this highly charged geopolitical context that the city of Dalian was born. After defeating Russia in the Russo-Japanese war, Japan inherited Russia's colonial territory on the Liaodong peninsula, which included the naval port town of Lüshun and the blueprints for the magnificent but only partially constructed port city of Dal'nii. Lüshun provided an important base for the projection of naval power in the region, while Dal'nii was envisioned as a trading hub. Japan renamed the city Dairen (Chinese: Dalian) in 1905, and set about finishing Russia's dreams for an international trading port, linked by rail to the agricultural wealth of Manchuria, and by steamship to world markets. As it was a new community, the colonial powers in control of the Guandong Leased Territory had all of the barren shores of Dalian bay on which to project their dream city.

Much like the instant boom cities in China today, Dalian's growth was fuelled by dreams of opportunity. Chinese and Japanese industrialists, merchants, traders and labourers flocked to the new city. The population grew from 19,000 in 1906 to over 200,000 in 1926.¹² The port quickly surpassed its regional rival at Yingkou to become the major export and processing centre of Manchuria's lucrative soybean trade.¹³ Steamships run by Japanese firms carried soy products to Japan and as far away as Europe, while Chinese merchants built a considerable coastal trading network with Dalian at the centre. With an abundant source of cheap Chinese labour from nearby Shandong, and long-distance railroad connections from the deepwater port facilities to a fertile agricultural hinterland, the sky seemed the limit for the economic future of the city.

Dalian was the terminus and headquarters of the South Manchurian Railway Company (SMR), a massive, quasi-governmental entity that oversaw the development of the railway and port facilities which brought great wealth to the city. The company also systematically set out building Dalian into a model of Japanese colonial development in Asia. By the 1920s, visitors marvelled at the city's wide, tree-lined boulevards, grand central plazas, parks, vibrant markets and modern shopping districts. Dalian's 'Great Plaza' (Ō-hiroba) served as a symbol of its booming economic clout. This central space was ringed with monumental commercial buildings, including two major banks, and the grandiose Yamato Hotel, the finest in the city. The SMR built schools, hospitals, libraries, port facilities and established industrial enterprises in Dalian and the Leased Territory and

¹² Inoue Kenzaburo (ed.), *Dairen-shi shi* (The History of the City of Dalian) (Dalian, 1936), 15–16.

¹³ Zhou Yonggang (ed.), *Dalian gangshi* (A History of the Port of Dalian) (Dalian, 1995), 170.

the Railway Zone (*fuzokuchi*), a narrow strip of land controlled by the company on both sides of the tracks stretching to Changchun.¹⁴ The SMR hospital in Dalian was one of the largest modern facilities in China, with room for 450 patients, and an outpatient clinic serving over 800 people per day.¹⁵

With its modern transport infrastructure, commercial establishments and cutting edge medical facilities, Dalian became the concrete manifestation of Japan's imperialist aims in Northeast Asia. As the formal symbol of Japan's informal empire in Manchuria, Dalian's Japanese population was always very high, and hovered between one third and one fourth of the total population of the city, reaching 225,000 by 1945. Japanese dominated the most lucrative businesses and industries, earned higher wages than Chinese and had access to the best schools and hospitals. However, Chinese elites in this colonial city were far from powerless. Chinese residents were the majority population throughout the city's brief history, and Dalian was home to a sizable Chinese merchant community, with strong associational identities. By 1924, there were over 4,000 Chinese businesses of various sizes throughout the city.¹⁶ The largest and most profitable were bean mills, which processed soybeans into soybean oil for export to meet the increase in demand from Europe and the United States.¹⁷ Many of the mill owners were members of the Shandong Native Place Association, which served as a political and economic network for its elite members, while providing charitable functions for migrant labourers.¹⁸ This even included nighttime Japanese language courses and technical training. Dalian's vibrant colonial economy had grown so quickly that by the late 1920s there existed significant competition between Chinese and Japanese merchants, and it was not uncommon for smaller Japanese firms to lose business and even close due to Chinese competition.¹⁹

Yet, political events in the region soon took a drastic turn which would radically alter Dalian's role in the empire. On 18 September 1931, the Japanese military garrisoned in Dalian and Lüshun invaded Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchukuo. Over the next few years Dalian would lose its centrality as the political and economic capital of the

¹⁴ Manshikai (ed.), *Manshū kaihatsu yonjūnenishi* (Forty Year History of the Development of Manchuria) (Tokyo, 1964–65), 224–6.

¹⁵ Kinnoyuke, *Manchuria: A Survey*, 134–5.

¹⁶ Gu Mingyi, Fang Jun, Ma Lifeng, Wang Shengli, Zhang Qingshan and Lu Linxiu (eds.), *Diguo zhuyi qinlue Dalian shi congshu: Dalian jin bainian shi* (Collected History of the Imperialist Invasion of Dalian: The Recent Hundred-Year History of Dalian) (Shenyang, 1999), 999.

¹⁷ Xu Jingzhi, 'Jiefang qian Dalian minzu gongshangye jianwen' (Information on pre-liberation Chinese industry and commerce in Dalian), *Dalian wenshi ziliao* (Dalian Historical Materials), 6 (1989), 87.

¹⁸ Dairen shōgakkai kenkyū bu, *Dairen chihō ni okeru shinajin no shakai jigyō* (Social Enterprises of Dalian's Chinese Residents) (Dalian, 1930), 8–11.

¹⁹ Yanagisawa Asobu, *Nihonjin no shokuminchi keiken: Dairen Nihonjin shōkōgyōsha norekishu* (The Japanese Colonial Experience: The History of Japanese Entrepreneurs in Dalian) (Tokyo, 1999), 168–72.

Japanese empire in Manchuria. The shift of human and material resources to Manchukuo, and the outbreak of total war in China (1937) and the Pacific (1941) resulted in a fundamental reshaping of the city from a colonial export port to a militarized production city. This transformation would have lasting consequences for Dalian's post-war fate.

Japan's invasion of China in the mid-1930s, and the start of the Pacific War in 1941, led civilian and military planners alike to prioritize key parts of the empire as production bases in support of the expanding war effort. Dalian became one such place. During this period, the city's commercial economy was increasingly controlled by the state, and reoriented toward war production. This shift was evident in terms of urban space. Just as the articles in this issue focusing on the Shanghai racecourse, Tianjin waterworks and Suzhou's red light district reveal how physical space in the city is shaped by social and political networks, the case of Dalian shows a transition away from commercial toward industrial spaces in the context of total war. In the 1920s, the bustling docks and the banks, hotels and business around the 'Great Plaza' were Dalian's centre of gravity, symbolizing the commercial power of the city. By the 1930s, the symbolic centre shifted toward new suburban industrial zones and imperial spaces like the new train station and the Guandong Leased Territory administration complex.

In Manchukuo, Japan implemented a blueprint for building a modern industrial base, designed to be a production centre serving the expanding empire. This developmental scheme represents a significant break with the patterns common to European imperialism, where the colony simply provided food and raw materials to the metropole.²⁰ Rather, Manchukuo was a radical experiment, designed to be a self-sufficient part of the empire, able to consume its own resources for industrial development and feed the population with its agricultural goods.²¹ Larger companies from Japan, including Nissan, moved to Manchukuo to form the Manchuria Industrial Development Company (Mangyō). Mitsubishi and Mitsui also invested heavily in chemicals and machine factories.²² This wave of state-led industrialization continued through the war years, influencing Dalian's urban development well into the 1950s.

Before this, Dalian had never been a significant industrial or production centre. The largest established industries were in SMR hands, namely the SMR locomotive manufacturing and repair facilities. However, with the prioritization of large-scale industrial development after 1932, the SMR and other companies were encouraged to invest in new factories. As a result, the number of factories employing five or more employees in Dalian and the Guandong Leased Territory rose from 487 in 1932 to over 1,000

²⁰ W.G. Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism, 1894–1945* (Oxford, 1987), 213–17.

²¹ Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, 1998), 241–306.

²² Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism, 1894–1945*, 213–17.

by 1937.²³ Moreover, the city's industrial labour force increased 250 per cent.²⁴ Japan's invasion of China in 1937, followed by the Pacific War in 1941, pushed Dalian's industrialization drive even further, and by 1943 there were over 1,800 factories employing over 80,000 industrial workers.²⁵

The process of industrializing the colonial port city was not an easy one. There were serious constraints to the development of large-scale industrial enterprises in Dalian. The city lacked large expanses of flat land, ready access to water demanded by industry and needed more electrical power. In terms of the physical space for large industry, Dalian was at a significant disadvantage compared to other cities developed by Japan in Manchuria.²⁶ The only available land suitable for industrial development was to the north-west of the city. This area, called the Ganjingzi district, became the focal point of industrialization. By 1935, Ganjingzi was home to several major chemical plants, an oil refinery and steel processing and machine tool factories. In the chemical sector, the Manchuria Chemical Industry Company (Manshū kagaku kōgyō kabushiki kaisha), established in 1933, was one of the largest in the region.²⁷ The company built its main factory in Ganjingzi, and produced ammonium nitrate for export as chemical fertilizers to Japan, Taiwan and Korea. By the wartime period, explosives were also manufactured here, in addition to sulphuric acid, and ammonium-based chemicals and chemical products. Much of the company's equipment was purchased from German firms, and was the most advanced equipment available. By the early 1940s, the company employed 2,500 workers, with an additional 13,000 part-time labourers. Chemical manufacturing was the most valuable of all of Dalian's modern industries, accounting for 40 per cent of the city's production by value.²⁸

The need for efficiency and productivity as demanded by the wartime state led to the creation, in 1938, of an integrated development plan for the whole of the Leased Territory. Dalian was at the centre of these plans, which were designed to maximize the area's productive capacity, noting, 'every foot of land should be utilized and developed according to its adaptability so as to materialize its mission fully'.²⁹ It was an unprecedented effort to co-ordinate industrial development in Dalian and its surroundings.

After 1941, with raw materials and power stretched thin across the empire, maintaining high levels of production proved to be extremely difficult. In order to keep production flowing, the military began to control

²³ Dairen shōkō kaigi (ed.), *Kantōshū no kogyō jijō* (The Guandong Leased Territory's Industrial Circumstances) (Dairen, 1939), 10–11.

²⁴ Ramon Myers, *The Japanese Economic Development of Manchuria, 1932–1945* (New York, 1982), 127.

²⁵ Lüda gaishu bianji weiyuan hui (ed.), *Lüda gaishu* (A Brief Account of Lüda) (Lüda, 1949), 64–6.

²⁶ Dairen shōkō kaigi (ed.), *Kantōshū no kogyō jijō*, 50–1.

²⁷ *Diguo zhuyi qinlue Dalian shi congshu: Dalian jin bainian shi*, 1089–90.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ 'A review of the thirty-year Japanese administration of the Kwantung leased territory and the S.M.R. Zone', *Contemporary Manchuria*, 3 (Jan. 1939), 78–9.

completely all resources in Dalian, prioritizing the flow of necessary raw materials, water, electricity and even food to critical industries. As early as 1938, regulations had been in effect to ration electricity use in shops and homes. Small industries and handicraft manufacturers, defined as those with less than 50,000 yen in capital or under 20 employees, were organized by industry and collectivized into groups of six.³⁰ This was part of the 'rationalization' (*gōrika*) of production and trade. Energy and resources were conserved by merging small-scale industries. As these smaller industries were often privately owned, their reorganization set in motion a lasting trend toward large-scale, state owned enterprises which would become the central feature of the socialist production city in the People's Republic.

The expansion of the war in Asia and the Pacific had important consequences for Dalian, as the military began to exert control over almost all economic activities throughout the city. Beginning in April 1940, the Japanese wartime state implemented trade restrictions on the import and export of many commodities. A year later, the prices of commodities and daily use goods were likewise strictly regulated.³¹ With these moves, the traders and businesses which had helped to build Dalian into a model of Japan's colonial development through the 1920s were effectively sealed off from their established trade networks as all available resources were to be put toward the war effort. By 1942, most of the city's independent economic activity had been halted, and Dalian was fully integrated into the centrally planned economies of Manchukuo and Japan through the creation of the Manchukuo-Guandong Trading Association (*ManKan bōeki rengōkai*), which was a centralized entity regulating the trade in daily use commodities.³² Most importantly, it oversaw the organization of Dalian's remaining commercial enterprises and shops into collectivized receiving and distribution fronts for the military's rationing scheme. By 1943, most shops and businesses that traded in clothing, shoes, medicine, all foodstuffs, tea and paper had been collectivized in this manner.³³

The war experience in Dalian was thus different from other Chinese cities. There was no brutal military occupation, massive migration, civilian massacre or bombing here. Instead, the people of Dalian, Chinese and Japanese alike, experienced total war mobilization creep into most features of daily life. In the process, the Japanese wartime state had achieved in Dalian what would become a key goal of CCP urban planning after 1949; it had transformed the city from a site of consumption into a tightly controlled site of production in which the majority of its residents were drawn into the process of producing for war. This experience also had

³⁰ Lüda gaishu bianji weiyuan hui (ed.), *Lüda gaishu*, 12.

³¹ *Diguo zhuyi qinlue Dalian shi congshu: Dalian jin bainian shi*, 960–1.

³² Kantōshū keizaikai (ed.), *Kantōshū keizai nenpō* (Guandong Leased Territory Economic Yearbook) (Dairen, 1944), 35–6.

³³ *Ibid.*

a profound impact on Dalian's identity, both in terms of the position it occupied in the wartime empire, and subsequently, on how city residents, Chinese in particular, were viewed by the state.

Through 1932, Dalian served as the capital of the Guandong Leased Territory, Japan's formal colonial leasehold over the Liaodong peninsula. The policies of Japan's colonial administration here were somewhat different from those in the formally annexed colonies like Taiwan or Korea, particularly in terms of residency and the Chinese population's position within the larger empire. With the founding of Manchukuo, the situation became even less clear, as it was not immediately apparent whether or not Dalian was a part of this new nation. Considerable tensions existed among the colonial powers over this issue. A notable Japanese author and resident of Dalian, Saitō Mitshuhiro, wrote a provocative article in the *Dalian Shibao* newspaper, asking 'who are the people residing abroad in Guandong'? He continued, 'now that Guandong is considered an extension of Japanese territory, for those Han people living here, whether consciously or not, we already consider them citizens of Manchukuo (*Manzhouguoren*)'.³⁴ Saitō Mitshuhiro's fears hinged on the administrative uncertainty of the Guandong Leased Territory. He continued, 'We should set up a principle of putting Japanese first, otherwise, it will be like it has been in the past, where Han people are the original inhabitants and we Japanese are the people residing abroad. In the Guandong Leased Territory we must establish a system where we Japanese are the principal residents, and Han are the visitors.'³⁵

The outbreak of war brought clarity to these issues. Wartime industrialization created new social hierarchies in the city. The biggest change was a redefinition of categories of residency in the Guandong Leased Territory which gave Chinese with permanent jobs, particularly those with industrial jobs, higher status in the eyes of the wartime state. Until the wartime period, there had been considerable confusion among colonial bureaucrats in Dalian and the Leased Territory about how best to classify the Chinese population. Much of this can be attributed to the unique political status of the Guandong Leased Territory, particularly prior to the founding of Manchukuo. While many bureaucrats saw the extension of Japanese laws in Guandong as beneficial, others wondered what it would mean for the Chinese population. Were they to become subjects of the Japanese empire like Taiwanese and Koreans? If not, were they to be treated like 'foreigners' (*gaikokujin*)?³⁶ Through the 1920s and 1930s, the status of most of Dalian's Chinese population was somewhere in between, and often depended on one's economic status. However, by the early 1940s,

³⁴ *Diguo zhuyi qinlue Dalian shi congshu: Dalian jin baimian shi*, 423. The quote is taken from a 1 May 1933 article in the journal *Dairen Jipō*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Yamada Takeyoshi, *Kantōshū no shisei mondai* (The Problem of City Administration in the Guandong Leased Territory) (*Dairen*, 1928), 2–4.

Japanese authorities established a more definitive registration policy for the Guandong Leased Territory, which reflected the needs of the wartime state to control and monitor effectively the working population.

The new registration laws of 1942 divided the Chinese population into two categories. Those whose family registry was now in Guandong were granted 'registered' (*minseki*) status. Everyone else, including those who wanted to work in the city for more than 90 days with the hopes of someday becoming a permanent resident, was considered a temporary resident (*kiryū seki*).³⁷ To establish permanent residency, one had to have a permanent home in the Leased Territory, usually by owning property or a house. A stable job was also a factor. An individual hoping for this status would present these qualifications to the neighbourhood or village leaders to forward to the higher up authorities for approval. Once approved, an entire family could gain status as registered residents of the Leased Territory, with permission to work and move about far more freely than others.³⁸ They would then be issued a permanent resident card.³⁹

Being a registered resident of the Leased Territory, a 'Kantōshū jin', allowed one's children to attend better schools, and afforded opportunities to try and attend Japanese-run schools, training institutes and colleges. College for most Chinese in Dalian was not a possibility, only 6.5 per cent of Chinese students attended colleges.⁴⁰ Enterprising families from Shandong who had yet to attain permanent status might be able to send their children to school, but their path to success was much harder. Zhang Lianmin was born in a shantytown area outside of Dalian. His family was from Shandong, and lived in a community with others from their home village. Zhang was lucky enough to attend a school nearby, and recalls learning the harsh lessons of the colonial hierarchy, where Shandong people were generally mistrusted by the authorities. Shandong children who first started attending school had to learn not to refer to themselves as Chinese.⁴¹

The most skilled Chinese workers, and those in prioritized industries, were often locally born or with 'registered' status.⁴² Workers in the

³⁷ 'Kantōshū minseki kisoku' (Regulations for Guandong Leased Territory residence), 11 Feb. 1942, reprinted in Nakamura Wataru (ed.), *Kantōshū soshakuchi to Minami Manshū Tetsudō fuzokuchi* (The Guandong Leased Territory and the South Manchuria Railway Zone (Tokyo, 1966), 245–6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ 'Aiguo de minzu gongshangyezhe – Xu Jingzhi' (A patriotic industrialist – Xu Jingzhi) in *Dalian wenshiziliao* (Dalian Cultural and Historical Material), 6 (Dec. 1989), 18.

⁴⁰ Qi Hongshen (ed.), *Dongbei difang jiaoyu shi* (The History of Education in the North-East) (Shenyang, 1991), 259.

⁴¹ Takenaka Kenichi, *Dairen akashia no gakusō: shōgen shokuminchi kyōiku ni kōshite* (Dalian's Schools of Acacia: True Records of Resistance to Colonial Education) (Tokyo, 2003), 80–7.

⁴² Kantōshū rōmu kyōkai, 'Kantōshū ManShijin keiei kōjō rōdō chōsasho' (An investigation of Chinese-managed factories in the Guandong Leased Territory) (Aug. 1940), in Shen Jie and Nagaoka Masami (eds.) *Shokuminchi shakai jigyo kankei shiryōshū* (*Manshū, Manshūkoku*) *hen* (Collected Materials on Colonial Social Enterprises in Manchuria and Manchukuo) (Tokyo, 2005), vol. XI, 89–168.

shipbuilding and machine tool manufacturing sector had comparatively higher literacy rates. Industrial surveys from the wartime period praise this highly skilled workforce, noting that the educated, permanent labour force found in Dalian was a key feature of its continued industrial growth, and that locals were well suited for factory work due to a 'higher cultural level and an educational system in place for Chinese'.⁴³ Thus, it was only under increasingly severe wartime conditions the Japanese imperialist system granted large numbers of Chinese a more privileged imperial status.

The new registration system was part of a significant attempt on the part of wartime authorities to maintain Dalian's labour force by restricting the movement of people in and out of the city and between jobs, restrict consumption and ensure that the best supply of food went to the most critical war industries. This stands in contrast to occupied cities like wartime Shanghai. Toby Lincoln's article reveals, for example, how the Shanghai authorities encouraged people to move out of the city. In Dalian, the task of labour control was handled by the massive Guandong Labour Association *Kantōshū rōmu kyōkai*, the state sanctioned union which oversaw everything from residence permits, housing distribution, job appointments, policing the workplace and running production campaigns on the factory floor. This entity became one of the most important state agency's impacting the lives of Dalian's industrial workforce, which by the early 1940s was approaching 100,000 people.

The Labour Association played a very large role in enforcing restrictions on the movement of people, and in co-ordinating immigration of labourers into Dalian and the Leased Territory. A major goal was to reduce drastically and block completely the exodus of labour from Dalian, particularly skilled labour. It co-ordinated police efforts to investigate all outgoing passengers at the entry points to the Leased Territory. Those individuals found fleeing jobs or with technical skills were forbidden to exit, and were sent back to Dalian.⁴⁴

Within factories, the Labour Association oversaw the running of competitions between work units, particularly in terms of increasing production, and reducing absenteeism.⁴⁵ It launched a major campaign, the 'perfect attendance movement' (*Rōmuka kaikin jikkō undō*), which was part of a series of 'factory prescriptions' which the Labour Association hoped to implement in order to achieve the goal of increasing production. This included vague instructions to 'rationalize' the production process, focusing on better utilization of raw materials and distribution of resources. Discipline on the factory floor was also brought up, with

⁴³ Dairen shōkō kaigi (ed.), *Dairen keizai benran* (An Economic Handbook of Dalian) (Dairen, 1943), 51.

⁴⁴ Han Yuexing, 'Dalian de Guandongzhou loawu xiehui' (Dalian's Guandong Labour Association), *Dalian Chun Qiu* (Annals of Dalian), 3 (1997), 24–5.

⁴⁵ Kantōshū keizaikai (ed.), *Kantōshū keizai nenpō*, 61–5.

high rates of worker absences, and serious time wasting noted as key problems.⁴⁶

As the Pacific War raged on through 1943, the need to safeguard the production process in critical war industries in Dalian intensified. Strict food rationing became a part of daily life for all city dwellers, and an individual's position in the wartime production system became vital. It determined how much and what kind of food one could bring home. In the late 1930s, Dalian's major industries were divided into three ranks which prioritized the flow of raw materials, energy and labour. By the early 1940s, this system was also used for distributing food. There were 20 factories that received the top classification, a list which included such heavy industries and manufacturing enterprises as shipbuilding factories, chemical plants, machine tool factories, the locomotive factory and the port authority. Those industries classified in the second rank included soybean oil presses, transport and communications and public utilities. Third rank industries included food processing and smaller chemical plants.⁴⁷ In an effort to ensure the labour supply in these critical industries, particularly the top ranks, workers actually saw their food rations increased in 1943.⁴⁸ Workers at the prioritized industrial units, Chinese and Japanese alike, enjoyed larger rations than those in other sectors of the economy. At top tier industries, Japanese workers received close to 29 *jin* (14.5 kilograms) and Chinese 23 *jin* (11.5 kilogrammes), a figure equal to the amount given to Japanese civilians in the city.⁴⁹

The pressing demand for productivity in a state of total war led the Japanese wartime state in Dalian to privilege a key segment of the colonial population. The new residency system rewarded the skilled sector of the Chinese working population with better access to education, housing and food. At the same time that it extended these privileges, the state also enforced restrictions on people's movement, consumption patterns and work life which deepened people's dependency on their work units and the state. The echoes of this experience would be clear to those living through the system of urban socialism idealized and implemented in the 1950s and centred on the Soviet model, with its cellular work units, production campaigns and the prioritization of resources towards strategic heavy industries.

The powers that took over the city after 1945 gained control of an industrialized port city with the majority of its key industries in state hands. The largest of the former Japanese industries were immediately

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 56–61.

⁴⁷ 'Jūyō sanyō ni jūjisuru Manjin rōdōsha shokuryō haikyū yōkō' (An outline of food distribution to Chinese labourers in major industries), in *Manshūkoku kimitsu keizai shiryō* (Secret Economic Materials of Manchukuo) (Tokyo, 2000–01), vol. XV, 30–41.

⁴⁸ Dalian shizhi bangongshi (ed.), *Dalian shizhi laodong zhi* (Dalian Labour Gazetteer) (Dalian, 1999), 21.

⁴⁹ Liu Gongcheng, *Dalian gongren yundong shi* (A History of the Labour Movement in Dalian) (Shenyang, 1989), 271.

seized by Soviet troops who arrived in Dalian in late August 1945 after sweeping through Manchuria. In terms of the CCP's image of what 'new' cities would look like in China after 1949, it is clear that Dalian was indeed a model, and its economy had the numbers to back up its image as a model production city, particularly when compared to Shanghai. As late as 1952, the private sector in Shanghai was still responsible for 87 per cent of that city's industrial production.⁵⁰ That same year modern industrial production accounted for 96 per cent of the total industrial output of Dalian, and, in stark contrast to Shanghai, 86 per cent of its industries were state owned.⁵¹ Thus, by 1949, when the Chinese press hailed Dalian as a model production city for the new nation, it was by far the most 'state owned' of any other major city in China.

From Japan's imperial city to New China's model metropolis

Japan's defeat in 1945 brought both joy and uncertainty for Dalian's Chinese residents. The city was free from decades of Japanese control, but celebrations quickly turned to uncertainty as there were serious questions about how Dalian would continue to function, and who would be in control of the city. Within the first year of its post-Japanese existence, the port all but shut down, and the city's lifeline of raw materials and food ceased to flow. At the peak of war production in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the port handled over 10 million tons of goods annually, yet by 1946 and 1947, that figure had decreased dramatically to a few hundred thousand tons.⁵² The city's vital war industries ground to a halt, and the population decreased dramatically. Skilled workers who remained in the city joined the swelling numbers of street hawkers and peddlers, where they competed with destitute Japanese families selling off their belongings for food.⁵³ Dalian's large Japanese civilian population was repatriated in 1947, and many Chinese fled to rural areas or returned 'home' to nearby Shandong province.

Both the Nationalists and the CCP hoped and planned to seize the opportunity to liberate the city and gain control of its vital industrial base and port facilities. However, both Chinese powers were denied the chance to accept Japan's surrender. Rather, on 22 August, Soviet tanks and paratroopers arrived on Dalian's streets. Unknown to most people in the city at the time, the Soviets were there to stay. The Yalta Agreement, and the subsequent Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, signed in February 1945 with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, granted the Soviets control of the former Guandong Leased Territory for use as a naval base.

⁵⁰ Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, 354.

⁵¹ Lüda zhilüe bianxie xiaozu (ed.), *Lüda zhilüe* (A Brief Record of Lüda) (Shenyang 1960), 89.

⁵² Liu Liangang, Du Yunxiao, Shi Jiewen, and Gao Chongtai (eds.), *Dalian gangkou jishi* (A Chronological History of the Port of Dalian) (Dalian, 1988).

⁵³ Zhang Pei, *Dalian fangwen jiyao* (Summary of a Visit to Dalian) (Shenyang, 1949), 6–7.

Dalian would remain a part of the Soviet-controlled Port Arthur (Lüshun) Naval Base Area until 1950, at which time it was formally handed over to the People's Republic of China. Soviet military forces retained control of the nearby Lüshun naval port until 1955.⁵⁴

Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, which had signed the treaty with the Soviet Union, expected that their personnel would be allowed into the city. After repeated denials to land troops and station officials in the city, the Nationalist government effectively mobilized a brief but symbolically powerful anti-Soviet student movement in Dalian to protest Soviet occupation. While these activities were quickly contained in Dalian itself, their message was carried throughout the nation via press reports and books published in Shanghai and Nanjing which put the city on the Nationalists' map as a pivotal battle ground against communism and 'red imperialism'.⁵⁵ Recovery of Dalian thus became essential for the health of China as a whole. One Nationalist government-sanctioned book on the situation in the city, published in 1947, urged its readers 'to pay great attention to Dalian, it is an issue of our nations survival, if we cave easily to Soviet demands, we are committing suicide'.⁵⁶

During these years, Dalian was in geopolitical limbo; a Soviet-controlled base that occupied a position on the post-war map of Northeast Asia somewhere between the collapsed Japanese empire and the new Chinese nation. Although the Soviets eventually allowed Chinese communists into the city in large numbers, they too experienced significant frustration as they attempted to stake deep, nationalistic claims to Dalian. As a 'new' city with just over 50 years of history in 1949, all of it dominated by foreign powers, it was difficult for the CCP to assume that Dalian would fit neatly into the geo-body of the new People's Republic of China. Soviet behaviour in the initial months after the takeover certainly did not help matters, as the city's liberators acted more like hostile occupiers. Rape and looting on the part of Soviet troops was widespread, and both Chinese and Japanese communities suffered. As they did throughout Manchuria, the Soviets removed key industrial equipment and power generators from Dalian. Armed conflicts between CCP and Soviet troops, either in response to assaults on civilians or the looting of industries, were not uncommon occurrences.⁵⁷

These were serious issues. Since Japan's defeat, the Liaodong peninsula had become a heavily militarized area, with over 100,000 Soviet troops stationed there. This, along with the CCP and the Nationalist militaries clamouring to land their troops in the city, made Dalian a potential

⁵⁴ Dieter Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China 1945–1950: The Arduous Road to the Alliance* (Armonk, 2004), 51–125, 348, 415.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 49, 54.

⁵⁶ Li Chongsheng (ed.), *Lüda de Jinxi* (Lüda's Present and Past) (Nanjing, 1947), 83.

⁵⁷ Christian A. Hess, 'Big Brother is watching: local Sino-Soviet relations and the building of New Dalian, 1945–1955', in Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (eds.), *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China* (Harvard, 2007), 160–83.

'hot' zone in the emerging Cold War, and the Soviets were fearful of US intervention should fighting over the city escalate. In this highly charged environment, the Soviets believed that any kind of unrest, including the revolutionary activities orchestrated by the CCP, was too dangerous. Soviet troops routinely stopped CCP cadres from carrying out struggle sessions against Japanese collaborators and forced any grassroots campaigns and activities to take place through Soviet-sanctioned 'Sino-Soviet Friendship Associations'.⁵⁸

Just as they tried to mobilize political support by appealing to Chinese nationalism, the CCP were forced to accept a complex arrangement which left them second in command to another foreign occupying power. For the rural CCP cadres who arrived in Dalian fresh from a prolonged guerilla war against Japan, this was a bitter reality. Their most potent tool for mobilizing the population was to rebuild 'new' society through struggle against the old. Dalian, in their eyes, was full of people who had collaborated with the Japanese, and also full of people who had suffered under Japanese rule. The plan was to try and empower the latter group to struggle against the former. The Soviet's refusal to allow the CCP to build support in this way was more than an operational headache; it blocked their deeper, nationalistic claims to legitimacy in the eyes of Dalian's Chinese residents.

Open conflict between the CCP and Soviets over the control of the city, its key industries and its labour force reached a boiling point in 1947. That year, leading CCP cadres in Dalian began openly to resist Soviet military policies. The most serious conflicts were economic in nature. Shortly after they arrived in the city, the Soviets took control of the major Japanese industries throughout the city. The CCP, under Soviet oversight, formed a city-wide labour union, and its members soon angrily complained to labour leaders that the wage structure in those factories was different from that in Chinese-held industries. Wages in Chinese industries were far higher than in the Soviet managed facilities. Tang Yunchao, the leader of the labour union, was outraged and in union meetings openly referred to the Soviet Union as 'an imperialist country'.⁵⁹

Just as the fragile political order was sliding toward chaos, war once again brought clarity to Dalian in terms of its political status, economic function and its identity. The Chinese civil war between the Nationalists and CCP, which lasted from late 1945 through 1950, led the city to be cast in an important and familiar light. Politically, as the civil war intensified, the Soviets began to throw their support behind the CCP. The CCP likewise began pursuing a policy of following Soviet guidance, referred to locally as 'putting the Soviets first', and backed away from their stronger claims

⁵⁸ Wang Qiren, 'Chuli yu Su jun dangju guanxi de ji ge yuanze' (Some principles on dealing with the Soviet military authorities), in Dalian shi shizhi bangongshi (ed.), *Sulian hongjun zai Lüda* (The Soviet Red Army in Lüda) (Dalian, 1995), 105.

⁵⁹ 'Ba Shen yu Du Ping tanhua jiyao, 17 Sep. 1947' (A summary of the talks between 'Ba Shen' and Du Ping on 17 Sept. 1947), in *Sulian hongjun zai Lüda*, 279–80.

to Dalian, reluctantly accepting Soviet authority. Dalian was now heralded as the cutting edge of 'the Soviet model' – the embrace of Soviet guidance, expertise and culture which would spread to all of China through the 1950s. As a result, local tensions between the two eased, and both sides turned their attention to reindustrializing the city. Although many of its industries were non-operational, and there were few resources and raw materials in the Soviet-controlled base area, the city nevertheless had the potential to be a crucial production base for CCP's war effort. The former Japanese industrial base, and most importantly, its workers, would prove vital to this plan, as Dalian's war industries were once again privileged by the new regime to jumpstart the economy.

The 'Soviet model' became the vehicle for this renewal, and it placed great emphasis on heavy industries as the leading sector of economic development. The Soviets had seized and controlled the largest of the former Japanese war industries, including the locomotive plant and shipbuilding facilities and these became model Sino-Soviet managed industries, and employed one third of Dalian's labour force.⁶⁰ The CCP inherited smaller factories, including chemical production facilities which had the potential to be vital in terms of manufacturing armaments for their war effort against the Nationalists. The Soviet model offered ways to reorganize the workplace based on production teams, labour competitions and a tiered wage structure which privileged those with advanced skills or managerial experience.

Under this system, political elites also began to view the population in much the same way as during the Japanese war regime. The CCP's anti-Japanese nationalism, which had earlier led them to question people's past positions within the Japanese system, was downplayed in favour of the pressing needs to reindustrialize. People in Dalian were thus evaluated by the new authorities in terms of their position within the production system. The CCP began paying significant attention, both in terms of propaganda and policy, to dealing with 'non-productive' people throughout Dalian. In 1946, the Soviet-CCP authorities estimated that over 80,000 people were peddling goods of all kinds on the streets and in large open markets throughout the city. This activity was considered non-productive, and beginning in 1947, market crackdowns and re-employment campaigns funnelled people of key working age off the street and into industries.⁶¹ This was combined with the issuance of a new currency at a rate which decimated the savings of any family that had managed to build up a savings, thereby both reducing consumption and forcing people to work.⁶²

Moreover, the CCP's own labour union began to act less as a voice for worker welfare, which had led to conflicts with the Soviets, and more as an agent of the new production regime. This state institution

⁶⁰ Dalian shizhi bangongshi (ed.), *Dalian shizhi laodong zhi*, 77.

⁶¹ Zhang, *Dalian fangwen jiyao*, 6–8.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 8–9.

began to enforce residency requirements, issued identification cards based on employment and employability and oversaw the running of labour competitions and other disciplinary actions designed to maximize output during the working day. Just as in the Japanese era, the new police force in Dalian used labour registration cards to restrict movement of skilled labour out of the city.⁶³ Many workers would have been familiar with Japan's Labour Association and with the very similar activities it sponsored only a few years before. The Japanese system lingered in other ways as well. During exhausting labour competitions, the main target to achieve was to surpass the levels of production of 1943, the year that Dalian's productive capacity reached its peak.⁶⁴

The Soviet model as implemented in Dalian resonated with the past in other ways. This was a state once again at war, and workers were asked to work more for less. By 1947, the lower wage scale that had been implemented in Soviet-controlled industries became standard. At 16 *jin* of grain per month, this was lower than during the Japanese era.⁶⁵ Moreover, the Soviet model involved a tiered wage structure in which the most skilled workers earned the highest wage. Often the most skilled were precisely those workers educated under the Japanese. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Japanese publications praised Dalian's Chinese workforce, noting that the educated, permanent labour found in the city was a key feature of its continued industrial growth, and that locals were well suited for factory work due to a 'higher cultural level and an educational system in place for Chinese'.⁶⁶ This group was politically suspect by the CCP, but ultimately rewarded for their expertise given the pressing needs of the time. This would be a very significant tension in the labour force for years to come.

Speaking to his workers in 1947 at the outset of the embrace of the Soviet model and the renewed push for wartime industrialization, the union leader, Tang Yunchao, played on this tension in his speech. He told the assembled workers, 'The people of Dalian did not have to go through the fight that Chinese in liberated areas continued to go through in order to achieve the fruits of victory, which were dropped on them by the Soviet military.' He importantly stopped short of discussing people's life under the Japanese – that would come later in the mass campaigns of the 1950s. In the meantime, the way to redemption, both in terms of one's immediate economic situation and in terms of uniting through struggle with the rest of CCP-held China, was through production. Tang continued his speech by carefully contextualizing labour during the Japanese period: 'We workers from Dalian have been forged in a mould of modern industry

⁶³ Lüda gaishu bianji weiyuan hui (ed.), *Lüda gaishu*, 347–8.

⁶⁴ Lüda xingzheng gongshu, 'Guanyu 1949 nian jingjianjihua de jiben zongjie yu 1950 nian jingjian renwu' (An outline of economic construction plans from 1949 and our tasks for economic construction in 1950), *Jingji* (Economy), 2 (1950), 5–12.

⁶⁵ 'Ba Shen yu Du Ping tanhua jiyao, 17 Sep. 1947', 279–80.

⁶⁶ Dairen shōkō kaigi (ed.), *Dairen keizai benran*, 51.

for 40 years, and we have much firsthand experience with production and endless stamina. Given the present difficulties, we must use all of our experience and effort to increase production and for it is through this effort that we carve a path for ourselves.⁶⁷ What made these people and their city valuable to new China, what made them Chinese at this moment, was their position in a system of war production that spanned Japanese, Soviet and Chinese regimes.

Conclusion

What can Dalian tell us about urban development and urban modernity in China? Its history may be unique among major Chinese cities, but the forces which built it, colonialism, imperialism and total war, were not. To return to the images of 'New Dalian' presented in 1949, the city was in fact a model of a new kind of urban form, the production city. It was certainly much closer to that ideal than China's other major cities, including Shanghai. In the field of Chinese urban history, Shanghai has proven to be a very important site through which to explore themes of cosmopolitanism and the development of the private sector, and many fine studies now exist which illuminate the kinds of hybridity that a city of that size, with its mix of foreign and Chinese, came to represent in terms of a distinctive Chinese modernity. Dalian was no less modern during the period examined in this article, but it was on a very different trajectory from Shanghai. It was not pummeled by war and imperialism but was built in this context. Moreover, this article has argued that the legacies of the Japanese wartime regime proved vital in the reformulation of Dalian after 1949. Thus, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the CCP not only built upon developmental legacies from the Nationalist government and Soviet Union in formulating their plans for a new China, but from Japanese foundations as well. With unusual openness, a journalist who wrote for a major daily newspaper made this point clear to readers in an article on Dalian's rebirth. He described how Dalian's model status came to be, concluding, 'For this we need to thank the system of Japanese imperialist monopoly, for it gave Dalian the conditions necessary for building socialism.'⁶⁸ There was little use hiding the fact that China's new model city owed a great deal to its Japanese past.

⁶⁷ 'Tang Yunchao zai Lüda zhigong di yi ci daibiao dahuishang de gongzuo baogao' (Tang Yunchao's work report at the inaugural congress of the Lüda Federated Trade Union), in Shan Wenjun (ed.), *Chengshi de jieguan yu shehui gaizao* (City Control and Societal Transformation) (Dalian, 1998), 540.

⁶⁸ Dalian gongye zhanlanhui (ed.), *Gongye Zhongguo de chuxing*, 28.