

SPRING 2025

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ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE TRACKS

How Japan Mapped Modernism in Manchuria



"Tourist Map of Harbin," (1926). Published by the Japanese Tourist Board, this map marks various tourist attractions. During Harbin's earlier years (1900s), majority of the Chinese population resided in Fuchiatien, a satellite town beyond the railway line shown in the lower right corner of this map [1].

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IN AUGUST 13, 1933, page four of the Hartford Daily Courant advertised top-quality refrigerators, washers with electric pumps, and new styles of women's clothing perfect for late summer (and late winter, if we can judge anything from the lustrous caracul coat). Looking past the bolded cursive of Sage-Allen department store, the top headline on that page dwelled on the contents of a letter written by Hartford local Mrs. Rose Lewis, who had spoken to Japanese General Kuniaki Koiso. At the time, Koiso served as Chief of the Kwantung Army in Manchuria. Mrs. Rose Lewis' itinerary was carefully arranged by an attentive Japanese Travel Bureau, which housed her at the six-year-old Yamato Hotel at Mukden prior to her departure for the bustling new capital of Hsinking. Praising South Manchuria Railway's (SMR) "excellent sleepers, diners, and observation posts," Lewis' experience as a first-class passenger reveals the curated travel luxury marketed to English-speaking visitors within four years of the formal invasion of Manchuria. In this narrative of rapid transformation, "the village of Changchun—a collection of dour homes, a railroad station, and a Yamato Hotel" became a place that "bristles with activity...this miracle on the flatlands," indicating the efforts that the Japanese government and SMR took

to fashion desirability out of emptiness. Who was the audience for this austere modernity, borne suddenly of coal-rich borderlands? And for residents born before this bustling activity, how might they bear the permanence of the fleeting luxury glistening outside a train window?¹

In the early twentieth century following the 1912 collapse of the Qing Dynasty, Manchuria acted as a northern buffer zone for mainland China, definitively cartographed in royal maps as Chinese but in reality a tenuous zone of national and imperial disputes. In September 1931, following a false flag dynamite detonation along the SMR railways in Mukden, the capital of the Liaoning province, Japan launched an invasion on Mukden, capturing Manchuria and establishing the puppet state of Manchukuo in February 1932. This rapid and violent political shift created a contentious space of territorial belonging. Scholarship on territory in the era of the modern nation-state has conceived of the nation as "the great container of activities...fusing polity, economy, nation and society," a bounded region where "'identity space' is congruent with 'decision space.'" As the northernmost territory, bordering the Russian Empire, Manchuria's location insulated and protected the Chinese "geobody," a concept Thongchai Winichakul uses to understand the construction of modern Thai-ness through boundary

mapping. American Oriental scholar Owen Lattimore wrote of Manchuria in 1935 "as a front on which not only Russia and China are opposed, and Japan and China, but on which Japan and Russia have in the past been opposed and may yet be opposed again." Manchuria was a dynamic spatial frontier upon which empires confronted their desires for expansion. More specifically, Lattimore argues that this confrontation is one in which "the effort of race and region to assert themselves in the face of culture and nation, and the effort of nation and culture to impose themselves on race and region, are history itself." Therefore, Manchuria is a "cradle of conflict" both in terms of the military violence used to claim empire and in the ethnic confrontations of such seizure.²

Confrontation raises a number of questions: How might different imperial authorities organize these continuously shifting diasporas? How might race and region be defined in a space with various ethnic minorities undergoing centuries of migration, and what is the culture imposed by an occupying nation? This paper seeks to understand how the Japanese Empire negotiated this tenuous relationship between space and nation through the use of cartographic tools. Specifically, I examine how Japanese urban mapping of Manchuria imagined its potential as experimental grounds for the empire. I argue that though urban mapping was successful in creating an image of Japan as the architect of East Asian modernity, the cartographic depictions nevertheless emphasized Manchuria as a unique frontier disjoint with Honshu, Hokkaido, and the Ryūkyū islands. SMR-published urban maps of Hsinking in the 1930s reveal that Japan's imperial administrative state was interested in carving up the landscape without accounting for the ethnic pluralities living in this transformed frontier.

Manchuria as a Borderland

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND how urban mapping of Manchuria arrived at a vision of Japanese imperialism that dictated its residents' spheres of life and attempted to minimize multiethnic interaction, I first examine Manchuria's role as a spatio-temporal borderland prior to Japanese invasion and conduct a comparison of mappings of the region produced during the Qing Dynasty, Russian Empire, and Japanese Empire. These cartographic depictions reveal distinct imperial visions for Manchuria. While Qing Dynasty mappings in the early 19th century clearly incorporated the Northeast as geographically and linguistically indistinguishable from the central and southern provinces, Russian and Japanese mappings mark it as politically and ethnically distinct from existing Russian or Japanese territory. Even following the establishment of Manchukuo, it stands apart as an individual unit separated from Hokkaido, Honshu, and Okinawa.

Founded by people of Manchu descent (originating in the Northeast), the Qing Dynasty carried out a campaign that expanded its rule westward to become the largest territorial imperial dynasty. The map shown in Figure 1a, commissioned under Emperor Jiaqing and printed by Zhu Xiling in 1818, is based on work by the Huang family of cartographers in the Qing court. Mounted on a folding screen and dyed with Prussian blue ink, it was produced as part of a collection of maps from Suzhou and displays an abstracted Qing territory viewed from the south. This administrative map of the Qing Empire is littered with toponyms presenting the inner (dark blue) region with a textual key describing how the place names are encoded in shapes. Written entirely in Mandarin

¹ The Kwantung Army, also known as the Guandong Army, was created for the purpose of guarding the South Manchuria Railway Zone following the Russo-Japanese War "Letter Tells of Visit to Manchukuo," *The Hartford Daily Courant*, August 13, 1935, 4; "Manchuokuo Five Years Later: Bustling Activity Is Typical of Japanese Miracles," *The News Sentinel*, November 25, 1936, 13. I choose to refer to the Northeast region of China under Japanese occupation from 1932–1945 as Manchuria. In Chinese, this region is simply referred to as Northeast/Dongbei (東北), and more specifically the Three Eastern Provinces/Dongsan-sheng (東三省) (Refer to Figure 1 in the Appendix for a map of Manchuria). Manchuria derives its name from the Manchu people native to the region, romanized from the Chinese mǎnzú/滿族, so it functions in Chinese as an ethnic marker instead of a geographic term. The term Manchuria is commonly associated with the Japanese puppet state of Manchuokuo (Mǎnzhōugúo in Chinese, Manshūkoku in Japanese). Chinese scholars instead use the term Dōngsānshěng, and postwar Japanese scholarship recognizes the colonial implications of using the term Manshū. I chose to use the term Manchuria to explicitly associate the geographic region with the imperialist mappings this paper examines, although this association should not suggest a permanent toponymic correlation between Manchuokuo and the Northeast. For more on semantic differences in the historiography of this region, refer to Mark C. Elliott, "The Limits of Tartary: Manchuria in Imperial and National Geographies," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 3 (2000): 106; Li Narangoa, "The Power of Imagination: Whose Northeast and Whose Manchuria," *Inner Asia* 4, no. 1 (2002): 5.

The South Manchuria Railway Company, established in 1906, was a joint-stock company responsible for operating railway lines in Manchuria north of the port city of Dalian. The SMR received extensive government support to develop railway towns along major stations.

² "Manchuokuo Five Years Later: Bustling Activity Is Typical of Japanese Miracles," 13; "New City of Orient Follows Pattern of America," *The Portsmouth Herald*, September 29, 1939, 7; Peter J. Taylor, "The State as Container: Territoriality in the Modern World-System," *Progress in Human Geography* 18, no. 2 (1994): 156–57; Charles S. Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 816; Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (University of Hawaii Press, 1997); Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict* (The Macmillan Company, 1935), 295; Owen Lattimore, 301.

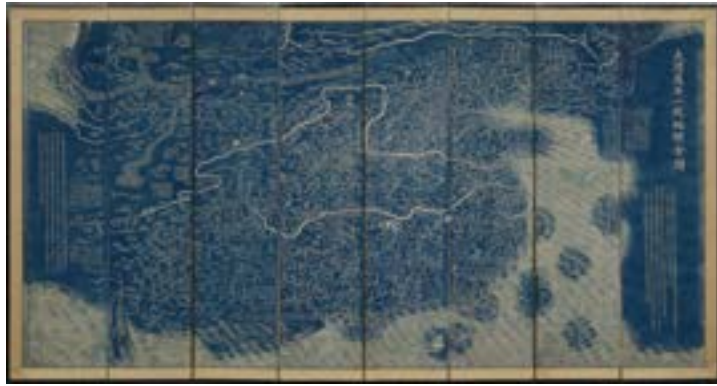


Figure 1: "Daqing wannian yitong dili quantu (Complete map of the geography of the everlasting, unified Great Qing)," (1818). China was at its largest during the Qing Dynasty and controlled the territory of what is now Mongolia [2].

Chinese, this map demands cultural unity under a centralized language. Figure 1b shows the location of the Willow Palisades, a barrier of willow trees constructed under the Qing Dynasty along the eastern end of the Great Wall to protect southern Manchuria. The map's unique pictorial illustration of the Palisades (an illustration of the fence and ditch, along with the curved

3 Suzhou is a prominent port city adjacent to Shanghai and located in China's most prosperous region from the mid-Ming to high-Qing era (under Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong). It was the most populous non-capital city in the world until the mid-19th century with dense population growth during the Qing Dynasty. At the time the map was made, Suzhou was embedded in a global trade system, with its satins and silks in demand across southeast Asia. For more on Suzhou's role in the East Asian economy, refer to Michael Marmé, "Survival through Transformation: How China's Suzhou-Centred World Economy Weathered the General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century," *Social History* 32, no. 2 (2007): 144–65; James Reardon-Anderson, "Land Use and Society in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia during the Qing Dynasty," *Environmental History* 5, no. 4 (2000): 507, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3985584>; Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904–1932*, 1st ed., vol. 196 (Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1tfjc1r>; The details of the map production are from descriptions for the "Heaven and Earth: The Blue Maps of China" exhibition displayed at the Boston Public Library. "New Exhibition 'Heaven & Earth' Opens at Leventhal Map & Education Center," April 16, 2024, <https://www.leventhalmap.org/about/press-releases/heaven-and-earth-press-release/>.

lines of the Changbaishan mountain range) reinforces Manchuria's role as a buffer zone protecting inner China. This compressed view of the Northeast, with its heavy blue shading in contrast to the lighter green of the Pacific Ocean, argues for Manchuria as part of a continuous Chinese territorial body. In reality, Qing authorities sought to preserve Manchuria as an ethnic homeland separate from the rest of the mainland by regulating Han Chinese immigration to the area, a policy which was not reversed until possibilities of foreign intrusion became apparent. The toponymic encoding of counties, provincial seats, prefectures, and subprefectures creates a crowded linguistic landscape emphasizing the populous nature of the unified Qing lands. The permeating blue of the Mandarin place names implies that neighboring foreign territories (e.g. Russia, India, Thailand, and Vietnam) are not beyond the cartographic reach of this map. Indeed, they can be reckoned as an extension of the Qing imperial realm or as spatially and socially inferior satellites to it. Although the map compresses the Northeast, drawing the southern provinces in greater detail, it nevertheless recognizes Manchuria as a naturally connected organ of the Qing geo-body through its extensions of shading and toponymic encodings.³

Compared to the Qing Dynasty map, the map in Figure 2 clearly distinguishes the Russian and Chinese sides of the border. Titled "Map of the Russian Empire," it was produced in St. Petersburg circa 1885 by a Russian cartography company around a decade prior to the Russian invasion of Manchuria. It maps Northeast China as an empty space in contrast to the shaded provinces of the Russian Empire. The text at the bottom reads "Chinese Empire," with the



Figure 2: "Daqing wannian yitong dili quantu (Complete map of the geography of the everlasting, unified Great Qing)," (1818). China was at its largest during the Qing Dynasty and controlled the territory of what is now Mongolia [3].

place names Mongolia, Manchuria, and Korea — in addition to the eastern terminus of the Great Wall — clearly marked. The red boundary lines delineating Russia's imperial borders create a strict cutoff point where Russia ends and other empires begin. Unlike other Russian maps, which visually center the city of Moscow, this projection centers the longitudinal midline of Russian territory, thus visually emphasizing the less populated Eastern territories directly north of Mongolia. This shift away from the empire's political-economic center and toward Russia's territory in Asia suggests an early attentiveness to possible lands for expansion. Temporarily restrained by a neat red

border, the visual void of Northeast China creates the impression of a land emptied of people (*terra nullius*). The existence of few major metropolitan areas, in addition to a lack of concentrated political power across provinces, created an environment vulnerable to encroachment and ideal for the construction of a transportation method capable of integrating this rural frontier zone. Perceived as an entry to Asia and crucial to dreams of the Russian Far East, this cartographic representation aligns with imaginations of Manchuria as a *terra incognita* prior to the establishment of the Chinese Eastern Railway.⁴

Japanese-made mappings following the

4 "Daqing wannian yitong dili quantu." Map. Suzhou, China, [ca. 1820]. Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center, <https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:wh24b054q> (accessed December 09, 2024). Wannian (万年), or ten-thousand years, is a common measurement metric used throughout Chinese history to indicate the longevity of the current ruler and translated as everlasting. For example, the current inscription at the Heavenly Gates at Tiananmen Square currently reads "The Everlasting (Ten-thousand-year-old) People's Republic of China." The photo in Figure 1b was taken when I visited the exhibition at the Boston

Russo-Japanese war and establishment of the Manchukuo puppet state directly define Manchuria as an economic resource. Published in 1932 as part of the Asahi Publishing company’s English supplement series, this map, titled “Map of Manchuria,” depicts the railroad lines running through the territory. Interestingly, the top line reads “Asahi Publishing, Present-day Japan, 1932,” acknowledging the temporal instability of this cartographic representation. In contrast to the Qing Dynasty map that projected its territorial possessions into an everlasting future, this company-produced map, made for English-speaking audiences, recognizes territory as a dynamic concept. It acknowledges that although Manchuria is included in a present-day map of Japan in 1932, this territorial claim might no longer hold true in a different year. The legend distinguishes between the Railway Lines of the Manchu State, Japanese Railway Under Treaty Rights, Siberian Railway, the Chinese Eastern, and Railways in China Proper. These five categories create two significant divides: one between Manchuria and China Proper, the other within Manchuria as a state divided between nations by the physical form of the railways. If Manchuria is not China Proper, what other quantifier might be added to clarify its position? Is it an inauthentic representation of China, or otherwise, an extension of Present-day Japan? Based on the semantics of Japanese railway agreements — allowed to operate throughout Manchuria only “under treaty rights” — it appears that the latter cannot be the case. With an independent “Capital of the Manchu State” and existing local provincial capitals, might Manchuria be too administratively independent to be considered as a reimagination of “China proper”? This map, like other contemporary Japanese mappings of the region, portrays Manchuria as an independent state physically chained by its railways. It occupies a unique position with respect to previous colonial projects in Okinawa or Hokkaido in that Manchuria appears to function with administrative freedom.⁵

Railway imperialism, primarily its focus on



Figure 3: “Map of Manchuria,” (1932) [4].

economic ventures, joint private and public ventures and large-scale transformation of the physical landscape, distinguished Manchuria from Japan’s previous colonial projects and thus made apparent the existing ethnic background of the region. This mapping aligns with government statements in the same year, which proclaimed that “Japan harbors no territorial designs in Manchuria and will uphold the principles of the Open Door and equal opportunity and all treaties relating thereto... Japan desires only to secure peace and order in Manchuria and to make the region safe for Chinese and foreigners and open to all for economic development.” Dubious in its reality, this statement implies that Manchuria currently exists in a state hostile to residents both native and foreign. As a benevolent authority imposing order upon the

region, Japan perceives Manchuria as an international economic frontier rather than an integrated Japanese territory. The distinction between these two forms of colonization is apparent in contrast to the Ryūkyū Disposition, during which the Meiji Dynasty annexed Okinawa and incorporated the islands into the Okinawa Prefecture. When referring to the annexation of Okinawa and Hokkaido, Japanese texts primarily use the term *kaitaku* as opposed to *shokumin*, with the former translated as “reclamation” and the latter translated as the “settlement of explicitly external lands.” These imperial projects, carried out in the latter half of the nineteenth century, therefore reaffirmed existing territorial claims instead of creating justifications for foreign subjugation.⁶

Japanese imperialism in Manchuria began with the railways. As a joint public and private enterprise, the SMR functioned with considerable corporate freedom, which it put to use in effecting colonial rule. Established in 1906 after the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese war by Imperial Ordinance, the company was designated by government order to also oversee marine transportation, the electric grid, Railway Zone management, and management of land and buildings, effectively making it (effectively) a comprehensive administrative body. From 1907 to 1933, freight traffic on the South Manchuria railway increased by a factor of fourteen times to almost 19 million tons of freight a year, and freight profits increased by a factor of fifteen times to almost 95 million yen. During this period, 85% of profits derived from freight and 15% derived from passenger service, indicating the importance of this railway to regional trade as an economic enterprise, especially in transporting agricultural and

products and coal exports from the Northeast to circulate on markets elsewhere in Asia. From 1907 to 1929, business with Japan constituted 40% of total imports and export volumes to and from Manchuria. Railways enabled formerly separate rural communities to be amalgamated into a national and global economic network, rapidly transforming the Manchurian landscape. Economic conquest required the mobilization of labor. How did physical changes to the landscape introduce new interactions between local original residents and foreign settlers? ⁷

To answer this question, I now turn to themes of urban mapping in the second half of the paper. Although the regional maps examined above mark Manchuria as a contested space, they lack the specificity necessary to understand how imperial planning accounted for ethnic interactions and displacement. I argue that it is necessary to turn to urban spaces as the sites of pre-existing and often overlapping efforts at state-building. Moreover, urban mapping in proposed city plans from the 1930s reveals how Japanese imperialism in Manchuria was a decidedly metropolitan vision. In order to prove itself as an architect of modernity, the Japanese government and South Manchuria Railway facilitated the rapid implementation of a blueprint for modernity in East Asia. This project sought to validate Japan’s current presence in Manchuria based on a mythologized past portraying Han Chinese people as external settlers and Japanese people as ethnically related to the native Mongols. Japan sought to project this presence into the future by turning to city-building. Urban maps sought to renegotiate Manchuria’s role as a borderland, but these spatial representations obscured segregated

Public Library this summer, so my apologies for the poor quality; S. Vostrotin, “A Russian View of Manchuria,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 11, no. 31 (1932): 20; Ruth Rogaski, *Knowing Manchuria*, Environments, the Senses, and Natural Knowledge on an Asian Borderland (University of Chicago Press, 2022), 10, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226818801>.

5 See Appendix for additional maps published by the SMR.

6 Kenkichi Yoshizawa, “Japan’s Aims in Manchuria,” *The Far Eastern Review* January 1932 (n.d.): 9; Hyman Kublin, “The Evolution of Japanese Colonialism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, no. 1 (1959): 73.

7 David D. Buck, “Railway City and National Capital: Two Faces of the Modern in Changchun,” in *Remaking the Chinese City* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 35; The South Manchuria Railway Company, *South Manchuria Railway* (Dairen, 1935), 7; J.N. Penlington, “Manchukuo and Engineering Developments,” *The Far Eastern Review* June 1933 (n.d.): 262; The South Manchuria Railway Company, *South Manchuria Railway*, 12–13. English language publications by the South Manchuria Railway (including every progress report throughout the 1930s) are accompanied by a greeting card “With the Compliments of The South Manchuria Railway Company – English section.” This interesting addendum to the publications reveals the extent to which the SMR desired to project their success in East Asia to a global English-speaking audience. I thought it was a neat method of appealing to international customers by appealing to the individual consumer; The South Manchuria Railway Company, *Second Report on Progress in Manchuria* (Dairen, 1931); Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict*, 268.

urban realities within these rapidly expanding railway towns. These maps argued for Japan’s crucial role in developing existing establishments, thus cementing its role as the leader of East Asian modernity. However, ideal imaginations of urban space masked and exacerbated ethnic divides, thus further emphasizing Manchuria’s place as an ephemeral borderland instead of a permanent site for Japanese imperial ambitions.⁸

Urban Mapping of Hsinking

IN MARCH OF 1932, Changchun was renamed as Hsinking (新京)/Shinkyō, or “new capital.” Compared to existing cities such as Harbin, the existing center of Russian state-building, or Shenyang, with its traditional palace and Manchu royal tombs, Changchun was relatively free of the physical imprints of imperial history. It struck a balance between urban and rural spheres of life, lying on a main railway terminal while remaining a riverside settlement with just about 130,000 inhabitants in 1931. On paper, Hsinking was known as the capital city of Manchukuo, yet it also served a crucial role in the imaginary landscape of Japanese imperial desires. The amount of capital poured into its initial five-year construction project created a new urban aesthetic that exchanged traditional facades for grand-scale buildings.⁹

The new capital construction project at Hsinking was centered around the railway station and created a hybrid architectural style combining the academic style of French Beaux-Arts and existing

East Asian styles of architecture. Le Corbusier, who produced urban plans in French Algiers (to be carried out on a scale similar to the Kwantung Army’s efforts in Manchuria), mentored the Japanese architects Maekawa Kunio and Sakakura Junzō, who worked on the South Lake plans in Hsinking in 1939. Additional architectural influences came from the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, whose work centered around the creation of a utopian garden city with resource distribution for individual residents. His student, Endō Arata, designed the Manchurian Central Bank Club in Hsinking, although the theory behind Hsinking was more similar to Corbusier’s visions of state-centered grandeur than to Wright’s decentralized utopia. Construction in Hsinking proceeded parallel to architectural ideas circulating in Tokyo, which sought to build Japanese cities (particularly after the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake) using a hybrid aesthetic that reconciled modernists interested in the functional purpose of architecture and historicists seeking beauty from the past. According to Tokyo Imperial University Professor Ino Dan, these aesthetics could be reconciled through the construction of a modern architectural feat from out of a void. In a January 1932 edition of the *Far Eastern Review*, an English-language journal edited by American publisher George Bronson Rea, Dan argues that Japan “is carrying on her work of reconstruction, anticipating that she may be able to contribute some new theory and style to the architecture of the world of today.” Hsinking theoretically provided a rural, ahistorical space for experimentation. Through imagining Hsinking, Japan reimaged itself in ways that could not be fully realized in Japan due to competing modes of architecture.¹⁰

City planner Sano Toshikata, hoping to

present Hsinking as technologically advanced, added European features such as wide boulevards and elm-lined streets, with fancy suburbs and various places of recreation in the south. At the center of the city lies the Datong Circle/Great Unity (大同廣場), with six major roads radiating outward. The circular plaza cuts through a diagonal grid built along the tracks, which loop around the city with northern branches headed toward Harbin and Talai (大賚) and the southern branch destined for the port city of Dalian (大連). The Western SMR railway tracks visually slice through a grid of red streets, partitioning the city into settlements east and west of the railway. As noted on the map, the upper third of the proposed construction area was reserved for railway tracks, industrial work, and air force grounds; residential areas are left blank, palaces are in light red, public spaces in light blue, parks outlined in dark green, and the areas in which construction was happening for the first time outlined in yellow. The newly constructed areas outlined in yellow displays the significant shift eastward to center the city between the eastern and western railway tracks. Moreover, a new settlement was established by the railway tracks east of the Songhua River by the heavy industry area (in grey). Emphasizing the contrast between past and present territorial expansion attests to the Construction Bureau’s ability to rapidly carve out new territorial stakes in Manchuria’s tabula rasa. By connecting the western settlement with the northern railway infrastructure and constructing administrative buildings around the Datong Circle, the existing Changchun settlement was spatially joined to the northern Hsinking station to create a new united capital city. This reordering of social life on a citywide scale and at the neighborhood level argues for the

Hsinking as a metropolitan area broken down into minute administrative blocks. The usage of red grid-ding isolates each urban neighborhood into its own sphere of governance, explicitly replacing the flexible borderlands cementing each city block into its proper position.¹¹

Although the map shown in Figure 4 displays the highly ordered nature of life in Hsinking, it provides only an architectural blueprint without signs of everyday activity. The photographs published along with the map lack human presence, with the title photo on the right consisting of rows and rows of uniform residential housing emptied of inhabitants. The grandness of the Beaux-Arts architecture made Hsinking unfriendly to residents, with its wide roads suitable for vehicle traffic but too broad for pedestrians. How might an individual interact with the landscape and experience the city as a pedestrian? How might these neighborhood blocks account not only for spatial but also for ethnic organization? In railway towns such as Dairen and Harbin, in which Russian municipal authorities had previously sought to implement ethnic segregation, the influx of labor migrants in the 1910s prevented effective housing policy segregation. There, ethnic divisions were primarily driven by socioeconomic factors. Lattimore referred to this phenomenon as “floating labor”: masses of laborers attracted to Manchuria during times of high economic opportunity who struggled to maintain skilled employment once that peak had passed. He argued that floating labor was politically dangerous, since these temporary workers lacked security and attachment to the land. Through urban mapping, Japanese architects presented an alternative to spatially bound masses of laborers.¹² The illustrated aerial map of Changchun in Figure 5,

8 Li Narangoa, “The Power of Imagination: Whose Northeast and Whose Manchuria,” 17.

9 Based on this information, I hypothesize that the Asahi Publishing Map was printed in January or February of 1932, since it maintains the place name of Changchun. However, Changchun is marked on the map as the “Capital of the Manchu State,” so it’s also possible that the cartographer chose to use the original place name, perhaps for familiarity; Qinghua Guo, “Changchun: Unfinished Capital Planning of Manzhouguo, 1932–42,” *Urban History* 31, no. 1 (2004): 103; Edward Denison, *Ultra-Modernism: Architecture and Modernity in Manchuria* (Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 69.

10 Qinghua Guo, “Changchun: Unfinished Capital Planning of Manzhouguo, 1932–42,” *Urban History* 31, no. 1 (2004): 103; Edward Denison, *Ultra-Modernism: Architecture and Modernity in Manchuria* (Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 69; Buck, 86; James Dougherty, “Broadacre City: Frank Lloyd Wright’s Utopia,” *The Centennial Review* 25, no. 3 (1981): 245; Buck, 86; Edward Denison, *Ultra-Modernism: Architecture and Modernity in Manchuria*, 54; Ino Dan, “The Reconstruction of Tokyo and

Aesthetic Problems of Architecture,” *The Far Eastern Review* January 1932 (n.d.): 42; George Bronson Rea, “Basic Problems: Japan’s Right to Exist,” *The Far Eastern Review* January 1932 (n.d.): 3. – The Far Eastern Review, founded in 1904, was headquartered at the Yokohama Specie Bank Building in Shanghai with offices in New York, Berlin, and Great Britain. In his editors’ note at the beginning of the same issue, George Bronson Rea states that “The World is not dealing with a gentle, polite, yielding and pacific Oriental people meekly accepting whatever is handed out to them. We are dealing with a people, like ourselves, proud, chivalrous, determined and valorous; in every sense our equals.” Rea advocated on behalf of the invasion of Manchuria, even becoming an adviser to the Manchukuo puppet state.

11 Buck, 80.

12 Guo, “Changchun: Unfinished Capital Planning of Manzhouguo, 1932–42,” 108; Mark Gamsa, “Harbin in Comparative Perspective,” *Urban History* 37, no. 1 (2010): 146; Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict*, 268;



Figure 4: “Text: Kokuto kensetsu hansei chikashi” (國都建設の全貌) / The Full Scale of Capital Construction, 1936. I enlarged the inset map and added translations for different areas of the urban plan [5].

titled “Kokuto kensetsu hansei chikashi (國都建設完成近し)/National Capital Construction is Nearing Completion,” imagines what segregated city life might look like. Despite the bright colors and densely populated residential areas, it nevertheless presents a pristine, unpeopled depiction of city life. Road traffic and pedestrians are barely visible, sparsely incorporated and easily confused with the city block fencing. Breaking away from the physical space of the former Changchun was also thus a national and cultural movement away from a “Chinese” way of life. Green belts cutting through the city separated Japanese residential areas from the native Chinese population, a division that implemented practices of ethnic segregation. Chinese labor was essential to economic functioning in Manchuria, with practically all factory, agricultural, mining, and fishery workers being Chinese. Even in the Japanese Railway Zone, Chinese workers made up over 93% of farming laborers and 96% of mining laborers in 1929. Following the outbreak of the second

Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Chinese migrant laborers, primarily from neighboring Shandong and Hebei provinces, continued to enter Manchuria. Which settlements in this map correspond to the laborers’ sleeping quarters, and which side of the green belt was allocated for Japanese residents? Washing the entire image with bright colors, the green belts brim with vitality yet in reality serve as enforcers of a dividing line. Hsinking on paper welcomed all, only so long as in the absence of internal conflict and ethnic intermingling.¹³

Paired with a contemporary photo of the construction site taken from an elevated location north of the city, the combination of photographic reality and pictorial imagination align on the crucial role of central administration in downtown Hsinking. As noted in a SMR progress report in 1938, the first five years of Manchukuo were focused on the “abolition or reform of all vestiges of the former regime and the perfection of a new centralized machinery of administration through the incorporation of new constitutional principles.” Hsinking radiates outward from the Datong Circle drawn in the lower right corner, with a monument on a pedestal ringed by an assembly of grand government buildings. These administrative buildings are drawn with a hybrid East Asian (both Chinese and Japanese) and Western architecture. The Police Department (shown in Figure 6b), one of the earliest buildings constructed around the Datong Circle, with a central tiled Chinese roof and tower resembling a pagoda set against the rectangular Beaux Arts style. A merging of Chinese and Western aesthetics are also apparent in use of Chinese tiled roofing (cuanjian/攢尖). Perhaps the most lasting distinct example of this architectural synthesis is the Manchukuo State council building, a five-story structure with Doric columns, paired pyramidal roofs at the front and back, and an entrance reminiscent of Han Chinese gate-towers. Three kilometers from the Datong Circle in downtown Hsinking, the state council, designed with a west-facing entrance, housed one of the four branches of government (State Council,



Figure 5: “Kokuto kensetsu hansei chikashi (國都建設完成近し)/ National Capital Construction is Nearing Completion,” 1936. The buildings in clockwise order from the left to the right in the bottom image are the Police Building, Telephone and Telegraph Building, Central Bank of Hsinking. Two years later, the Capital Construction Bureau and Department of Education would also be added along the Datong Circle. The Manchukuo State Council Building (on the extreme right) of the drawing, was completed in 1936 [6].

Legislative Council, Courts of Justice, and Supervisory Council). As seen in the bottom portion of Figure 5, the Datong Circle had yet to be completed with the full array of government buildings. Yet, the map’s title assures audiences that the voids in the photo will soon be transformed into the bright, ideal illustrated representation shown in the map.¹⁴

Read in combination with textual sources

authored by the South Manchuria Railway Company, the mappings reveal that imperial visions of Hsinking governed the social space of Manchuria by contrasting it with a primitive, racialized past. In order to establish a modern administrative space, Japanese publications (textual and visual) needed to distinguish their present creation from past empires, thus effectively removing Hsinking from a prior urban history.

13 Guo, “Changchun: Unfinished Capital Planning of Manzhouguo, 1932-42,” 108; The South Manchuria Railway Company, *Second Report on Progress in Manchuria*, 172; The South Manchuria Railway Company, *Sixth Progress Report on Manchuria* (Dairen, 1939), 137–38. – In the Sixth Progress Report, the SMR refers to these migrant laborers as part of the “Chinese coolie immigration,” a pejorative shift in terminology from 1932, in which they were simply referred to as Chinese workers.

14 The South Manchuria Railway Company, 2; Guo, 116; The Prime Minister (who at the time of the map’s publication was Zhang Jinghui), headed the State Council and eight other state departments (Civil Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense, Finance, Industry, Communications, Justice, Education). There was also an Imperial Household Department advised by a privy council. – The South Manchuria Railway Company, *Sixth Progress Report on Manchuria*, 2; Guo, 116; The Prime Minister (who at the time of the map’s publication was Zhang Jinghui), headed the State Council and eight other state departments (Civil Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense, Finance, Industry, Communications, Justice, Education). There was also an Imperial Household Department advised by a privy council. – The South Manchuria Railway Company, *Sixth Progress Report on Manchuria*, 2.

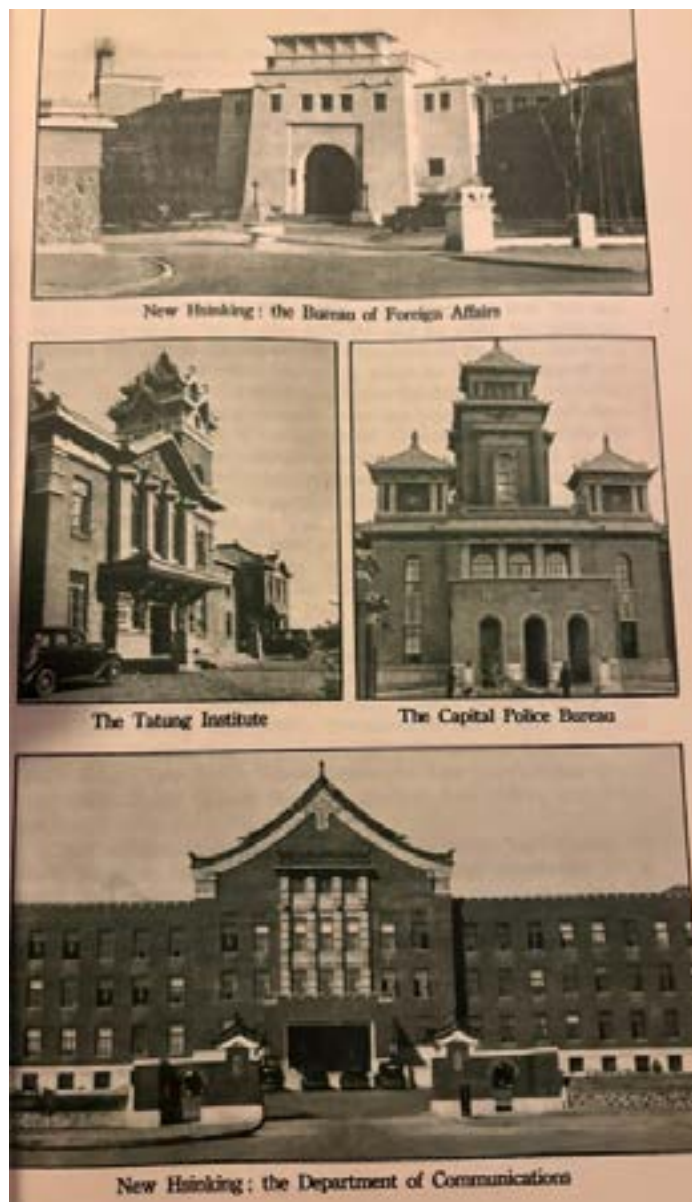


Figure 6: Administrative buildings in Hsinking. Each of these buildings, constructed as part of the Five-Year Plan to remake Hsinking, display hybrid East Asian and European architectural influences [7].

Whereas Changchun had existed in a continuous past, Hsinking replaced historic Changchun with the static beauty of the present, modernized imperial city. The introduction to the second volume of the SMR's bi-monthly magazine, *Contemporary Manchuria*, writes that the five-year commemoration ceremony of Hsinking's founding will "always be remembered as a shining symbol of the inception of the world's newest bi-monthly magazine, *Contemporary Manchuria*,



writes that the five-year commemoration ceremony of Hsinking's founding will "always be remembered as a shining symbol of the inception of the world's newest State." It exists in reaction against "Changchun, as Hsinking was called in the days when Manchuria was ruled by despotic warlords." In its place, "a majestic new metropolis, built along modern and dynamic lines, has risen—a city befitting the capital of a new and progressive state." Historically differentiated from the "despotic warlords" that controlled the region following the Xinhai Revolution, Japan's new "shining symbol" also represents political liberation. Economic progression and political progressiveness merge here in the form of a city with a railway terminus, even though Hsinking practiced a divisive urban design founded on segregation. However, political liberation belonged to residents who were "protected" by divisive urban design and not to those who were segregated from peeking over the green hedges.¹⁵

Compared to SMR and Japanese government mappings of other major Manchurian cities like Harbin, mappings of Hsinking display a lack of attention to the contested history of urban spaces in the Northeast. A 1933 map of Harbin, published in the same paired brochure style of Figures 4 and 5, introduces the city to Japanese tourists. The back side of the brochure introduces the city, outlines its local festivals and holidays, suggests sightseeing routes and hotels, and enumerates its main avenues. In the top right of the map, the names of various hotels are listed along with their corresponding number on the map. Most of the hotels are clustered in the northwestern third of the city along the railway tracks, with a few

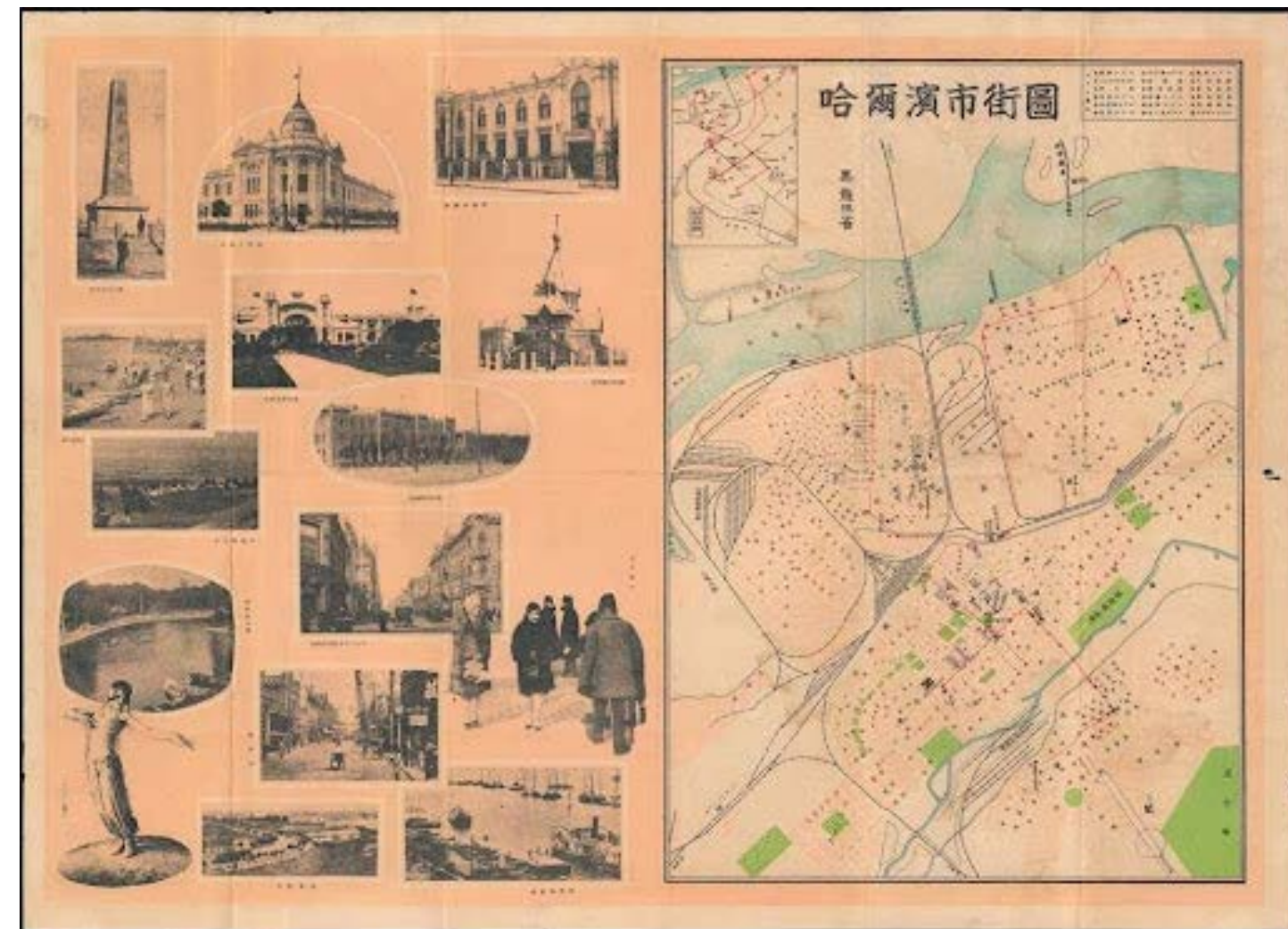


Figure 7: "哈爾濱市街圖/Harbin Street Map," (1933). Produced by the SMR, this map was made for tourists to learn about the major sights and hotel accommodations in Harbin [8].

scattered in the city center. An inset map in the top left corner, a miniature of the red routes in the central map, notes all the city inspection points. In 1926, the Japanese Tourist Board published an English-language map of Harbin with an inset city map surrounded by images taken throughout the city. Although the maps in Figures 7 and 8 are both street maps with gridding similar to that shown in Figure 4, the maps of Harbin point out singular locations instead of broadly classifying large swaths of the city by their function like in the map of Hsinking. Urban mapping in Harbin encouraged individual interaction with the landscape for both Japanese and English-speaking audiences. Moreover, the inclusion of individual street names in both maps of Harbin make them useful portable tools to use for planning visits to the city. In these instances, the cartographer pairs maps with images to elicit

curiosity in the city rather than proclaim a grand aerial plan. Russian-backed urban development in the 1900s and 1910s in Harbin influenced Japanese architects when constructing Hsinking, although this influence is not explicitly apparent in Figures 4 or 5. In contrast, the images included in the Harbin mappings include photos of the Russian diaspora in Harbin and Russian architecture, rooting the city in a separate imperial past. Why might Japanese urban mapping differ between these two cities, both metropolitan railway hubs? This contrast between the Harbin tourist maps and Hsinking planning maps supports the argument that rather than build around the foundations of another empire's existing metropolitan center, Hsinking was unique in being the first modernized space in Manchukuo entirely of Japanese origin. In mapping Hsinking, the Japanese empire could truly construct

space from out of a void.¹⁶

Thus, Japanese imperial visions as told through urban mapping arrived at a gridded, mathematical modernity that dealt with questions of ethnic conflict by removing visual representations of its residents. Manchukuo was constructed through antithesis, negating decades of power struggles between the Qing Dynasty, Manchu factions, and Japanese and Russian railway developers. This antithetical construction necessitated that Japanese imperialism must project a message in opposition to the historical borderlands. Following the People’s Liberation Army’s battle route through Manchuria, Datong Circle was renamed to the People’s Square (人民广场), with People’s Avenue as the main street running North to South. The former site of the Manchukuo State Department, now marked on Google Maps as a historical site, continues to boast its hybrid Beaux-Arts architecture, although its modernity has worn away. Situated along Liberation Avenue (解放街), the Chinese flag flutters above the Doric columns. This constant revision of space invites a new proclaimed liberation that classifies Hsinking, with its brief attempt at modernity, as a historical mishap. The districts west of the railways still bear remnants of this past (铁西/Railway West), settlements once bound to the railways that wound along the Eastern Highlands from Changchun to Tumen; from Harbin to Ussuriysk, and from Harbin to Iman to where the Ussuri met the Heilong/Black Dragon. They carried millions of tons of coal and oil, peeling back the landscape to reveal the sinuous dark wealth that lay beneath the black dragon’s often frozen exterior. Bullet trains continue to hurtle across her body.

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[2] Daqing wannian yitong dili quantu." Map. Suzhou, China, [ca. 1820]. Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center, <https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:wh24b054q> (accessed December 09, 2024). Wannian (万年), or ten-thousand years, is a common measurement metric used throughout Chinese history to indicate the longevity of the current ruler and translated as everlasting. For example, the current inscription at the Heavenly Gates at Tiananmen Square currently reads “The Everlasting (Ten-thousand-year-old) People’s Republic of China.”The photo in Figure 1b was taken when I visited the exhibition at the Boston Public Library this summer, so my apologies for the poor quality.

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[6] Manshūkoku Kokumuin Kokuto Kensetsukyoku, “Kokuto Kensetsu Hansei Chikashi.”

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[8] The South Manchuria Railway Company, 哈爾濱市街圖 (Harbin Street Map), 1933.