

“Trade, Merchant Capital and Welfare: Port Cities and Public Health, 16th–20th Centuries”

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**“Creating a Safe and Prosperous Haven: The Development of Colonial Public Health in the
Manchurian Port of Dalian, 1905-1927”**

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Paper Abstract

The border region of Manchuria in northeastern China was one of the most contested places in Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the Qing dynasty collapsed, imperialist dreamers in both St. Petersburg and Tokyo cast their eyes on Manchuria and its storehouse of natural resources. The Russians were the first to begin the ‘development’ of the region, securing from the weak Manchu court in 1898 both the right to construct a railway through the territory and a twenty-five year lease of the strategic Liaodong Peninsula. Although they lost both the leased territory and railway only seven years later, as a consequence of their defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, the Tsar’s planners had drafted detailed plans for their new colony and completed (to varying degrees) the construction of a number of cities, harbours and fortifications. The engineering corps of the Russian-controlled Chinese Eastern Railway drafted the plans for the construction of a ‘modern’ commercial port city called Dalny (‘Far Away’, referring to its distance from the Tsar’s capital) at the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula, and began to develop the region’s agricultural and resource potential. An important element in these efforts to develop their new Far Eastern colony was the creation of new health regulations and agencies for their enforcement. The Russian governors and military commanders established new quarantine and sanitation regulations in southern Manchuria in an effort to improve the living environment for their soldiers, engineers and growing civilian population. As part of this effort to create a sanitary colony, the Russians constructed a dozen hospitals in the region—facilities to treat both the colonizers and some members of the indigenous Chinese community (mainly prostitutes in the new Women’s Hospital in Port Arthur).

With the transfer of the Guandong leasehold (*Kantō-shu*) and the regional railway to Japanese control in 1905, efforts to develop ‘modern’ medical infrastructures were intensified. The new governors built on earlier Russian plans and by the 1910s had supervised the growth of the port city of Dairen¹ to such an extent that it was emerging as one of the largest commercial harbours on the China coast after Hong Kong and Shanghai. The worldwide soya bean trade boom of the late 1910s combined with the diversification of Dalian’s commercial and industrial base to solidify the port’s position as a leading transportation hub in Asia. During the first two decades of Japanese rule the city’s population grew tremendously from 38,896 in 1906 to 255,651 by 1925. By the mid 1920s travel guides published by the Japanese-controlled South Manchuria Railway Company (SMR) proudly proclaimed Dalian to be the most modern city in all of Manchuria. In many ways this claim was true, for in only two decades the Japanese officials of

¹ Dairen, or Dalian as the city was called in Chinese, was the new name of the former Russian port of Dalny. The new name (Dairen / Dalian) can be translated from both Japanese and Chinese as ‘Great Connections’, an appellation that refers to its important role in the regional transportation network, and its symbolic representation as a meeting place between Asian and Western civilizations.

both the SMR and the various administrations in the Guandong leasehold who administered the city had accomplished a great deal. Dalian had the most modern port facilities not only in China but in East Asia; electric tramcars ran through its streets; spectacular colonial buildings dominated its landscape; a modern water and sewage system had been completed; several schools and training colleges had been established; and the city boasted the largest ‘public’ hospital in northern China.² The city was now seen by many as a model of modernity within Japan’s colonial empire. In 1930 an expatriate American employed by the SMR, Henry Walsworth Kinney, wrote: “To the serious student who is interested in observing the development of modern civilization in the Far East Dairen [Dalian] offers an excellent demonstration of progress.”³ This paper accepts Kinney’s challenge and explores one aspect of Japan’s ‘civilizing mission’ in Manchuria—the development of ‘modern’ medical facilities and public health policies in the port city of Dalian.

During these first two decades of Japanese rule, Dalian and the surrounding Manchurian colony faced several major health crises, including outbreaks of plague, cholera, influenza, and seasonal cycles of dysentery and typhoid. The Japanese authorities, as had the Russians before them, often attributed the presence of these diseases to the presence of their ‘natural carriers’—the migratory Chinese population of labourers and settlers. In order to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, various authorities in the Guandong leasehold cooperated to enforce new and scientific public health regulations. Police, harbour inspectors, sanitation workers and ‘civic-minded’ members of local chambers of commerce worked together to identify illness and public health violations throughout Dalian. As the city grew and was confronted with serious threats to the health of its residents, it became obvious that public health required the close attention of the central colonial administration. Japanese merchants and their chambers of commerce, concerned with both their own health and that of the regional economy, called for improvements to Dalian’s sanitation and waterworks, as well as for the construction of a major hospital in the city. The new South Manchuria Railway Hospital in Dalian took four years to build (1923-1927), at a cost of more than three million yen. When its construction was completed, this hospital was the largest and best-equipped medical facility in continental East Asia and it was hailed by the colonial authorities as a symbol of the ‘modernity’ brought by Japanese rule.

Using materials gathered in Chinese, Japanese and American archives and library collections, this paper examines the history of the port city of Dalian focussing on its roles as both an economic and transportation hub, and as a ‘living laboratory’ in the development of public health policies in the early Japanese empire.

² Dalian’s hospital was the largest medical facility in Manchuria, having ten departments including: surgery, gynaecology, ophthalmology, dermatology, a kinder-clinic, rhino-laryngology, otology, physical treatment, dentistry, and a laboratory. Subsidized by the SMR, by the mid 1920s the new Dalian Hospital treated tens of thousands of patients annually. Although the constituted only 30 percent of the region’s population, Dalian’s Japanese residents accounted for more than 95 percent of the patients treated at this facility.

³ Henry Walsworth Kinney, *Manchuria Today* (Osaka: Hamada Printing, 1930), 49.