

# Vladivostok: Storm Center of Asia

*Symbol of Russian Expansion, It Is a Threat to Japan's Dreams of Empire; and It Holds a Vast Importance to Other Nations as Well*

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The Harbor at Vladivostok. Shown Above, Is the Gateway to Siberia

**V**LAdivostok is not particularly notable as a city. It sprawls, in Asiatic fashion, across the hills that skirt the Bay of Amur. Down at the waterfront, where eastern Siberia runs into the Pacific, there are signs of progress. There is a modern breakwater and dry docks—the handwork of the Soviets. During the summer months one can find there a nondescript fleet of freighters unloading nondescript cargoes of oil and tea and loading up with soya beans, timber and fish. For most of the year, however, most of the city's 100,000 inhabitants go their way as indifferently as the population of a thousand other cities of the imperturbable East.

Yet many observers believe that Vladivostok is just around the corner from a place in the sun. And this fame, if and when it comes, will be a result of the fact that this city stands as a mark of the fulfillment of the ambition of one world power and as an obstacle to the fulfillment of the ambition of another.

Vladivostok, to Russia, is the symbol of three centuries of successful expansion and stands today as the port for the vast Soviet hinterland of eastern Siberia. To Japan, it is a symbol of the fact that there is a point beyond which Japanese expansion on the Asiatic mainland cannot go. Russia does not propose to give up her territory. Japan shows no sign of giving up her dream. But until one or the other surrenders, the horizon of the Far East is likely to continue to be shadowed by clouds of war.

Those clouds for a year have appeared to be of substantial stuff. The puppet kingdom of Manchoukuo has been abristle with Japanese troops. They have guarded the railroads, marched and countermarched through the towns, undertaken frequent forays against the pestering bandits and are kept in readiness for an emergency. The Japanese, with an eye for strategy as well as trade, have turned to, with pick and shovel, to improve old roads and build new ones. One new railroad is just being completed and another is on the way. The first runs from the Manchoukuo town of Tsitsihar toward the Siberian frontier and the Trans-Siberian railway. The second runs from

the coast of Korea to the Manchoukuo capital of Hsinking (Changchun). No one denies—least of all the Japanese—that this latter road will greatly increase the ease with which Japan can move troops into Manchoukuo, just as the former will greatly increase the speed with which they can be concentrated against Siberia.

Across the frontier there is just as much stirring. Two years ago, the Soviets suddenly developed an interest in the colonization of eastern Siberia. Ever since, a steady stream of settlers has poured from western Russia into this undeveloped empire. They have been carefully chosen settlers, recent graduates, most of them, of the Red Army. At strategic points along the Trans-Siberian, huge warehouses have gone up and huge supplies of war materials and foodstuffs have gone into them. There has been a slow but substantial increase in the Siberian air force of the Soviets, an increase that can be multiplied over night. Moscow boasts one airplane factory that can turn out 10 fighting ships a week. For 18 months that factory has run full blast. The ships it has turned out are at the disposal of the forces in the East.

It is this busy preparation on both sides of it that makes the Manchoukuo-Siberian frontier one of the world's most dangerous boundaries. Russia has defied Japan to cross it. Japan is uncertain whether—or when—to risk a

crossing. Each appears to be sure that it will be crossed. Back of all the feints and passes between these powers lies a long history of rivalry and suspicion.

On the Japanese side the story begins with the Sino-Japanese war. That was in 1894. The Japanese won, to the surprise of everybody including themselves. As a reward for winning they followed the best western precedent and took over a few bits of Chinese territory, including the Liaotung Peninsula, the choicest quarter of Manchuria. To the west, and particularly to Russia, this sudden ingathering on the part of the Japanese had an unpleasant look. Consequently the powers, with Russia taking the lead, "strongly advised" Japan to hand back the territory. Japan, enraged but prudent, handed it back. Whereupon, having allowed a scant 36 months to elapse, the Russians moved into the same territory and appropriated it for themselves. The Russo-Japanese war in 1904-1905 settled that account.

That war ousted Russia from the Liaotung Peninsula. But it did more than that. It put an end to Russia's Asiatic expansion and gave a start to the Asiatic expansion of Japan.

The Russians began their eastward trek across Siberia in the sixteenth century. By the time the first American colonists were establishing themselves in Massachusetts, they were already settling up trading posts on the banks of the Yenesei River. This eastward push continued until it reached the Pacific—with Russian pioneers sending furs back

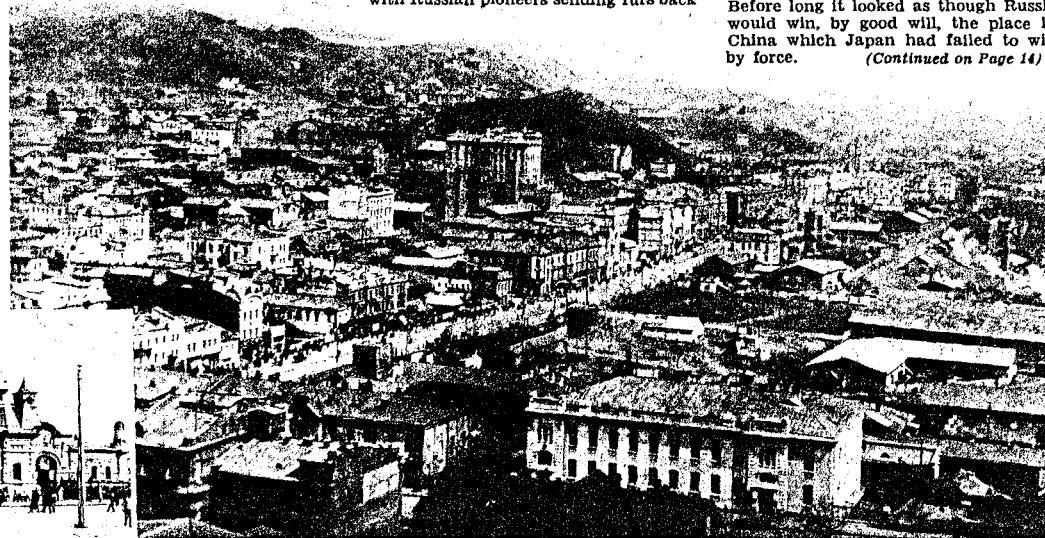
from their frozen wilderness along the 6000-mile road to Moscow.

In the end, Russia worked herself into the good graces of China and, by devious methods, secured a wide variety of special privileges in Manchuria. There she built two railroads: the South Manchurian, which connected Port Arthur at the tip of the Liaotung Peninsula with the Trans-Siberian and the Chinese Eastern, which provided the Trans-Siberian with a short-cut across northern Manchuria to Vladivostok. By means of the South Manchurian, Port Arthur and Dalren were to be the year-round ice-free ports for Siberian commerce; by means of the Chinese Eastern, Vladivostok was to be made more accessible as a military and naval base.

Japan, as has been stated, brought that dream to an end with the war of 1905. But the issues involved in the relations between the two powers were not settled. In fact, those relations have somewhat worsened since the Soviets came to power. For one thing, Communism and the Communists have given the Japanese a good many uneasy moments during the last 10 years. Public opinion in Japan has been convinced, to its own satisfaction, that a good many of its "red" troubles have been fomented with the direct aid of Moscow.

Moreover, the Japanese have not relished the Soviet policy toward China. Once the revolution was over in Russia the Soviets turned up, forthwith, in China as intercessors for an oppressed people. Japan, by the propagandists, was given the rôle of chief oppressor. Before long it looked as though Russia would win, by good will, the place in China which Japan had failed to win by force.

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J. Jay Hix. (Left) Underwood & Underwood

The City of Vladivostok Sprawls Over the Hills Where They Dip Toward the Pacific. Inset at the Left Is the Railway Station, Which is the Terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway. From Here Those Thin Steel Rails Stretch Westward, Linking Moscow to the Great Pacific Ocean and Establishing a Tangible Contact Between the East and the West.