

# Japanese Colonial Exploitation in Liaoning Anshan during World War II

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## Abstract

Anshan, a heavy industrial city in central Liaoning province, is rich in iron ore. The natural wealth that not only established Anshan's unique position in the development of heavy industry in China, but also brought misfortune to this small city. After the Russo-Japanese War, the three provinces in northeastern China gradually became Japanese colonies and energy grabbing grounds, so Anshan, as one of the cities with the richest mineral resources in this area, naturally could not escape the ravages of the invaders. During World War II, Japanese penetrated their invasion and exploitation into various fields including economy, culture, and social life, and attempted to control Anshan, a heavy industrial base, in an all-round way in order to provide a continuous supply of materials for Japanese army during the war. This paper mainly explores the destruction that the Japanese colonization and exploitation left to Anshan during the Second World War.

## Keywords

Anshan; World War II; Colonization activities; Japan.

## 1. Background of Japanese Colonial Exploitation in Anshan during World War II

The Japanese colonization in Anshan was not a coincidence, but the result of the political strategies and economic condition of Japan, and the natural resources condition in Northeast China.

### 1.1. Aggression Strategy of the Leader of the Japanese Government

Japanese government holding massive exploitation in China did not aim at showing their grandeur, but showing a reflection of the political idea that had been occurring in the minds of the majority of Japanese officials since the Meiji Restoration.

Ever since the Meiji Emperor ascended the throne in 1868, some of the top politicians in Japan had been hoping to conquer neighboring countries, such as Korea and China, to occupy more resources for achieving their national target of enhancing their power and international status. By the 1880s, this idea gradually formed and finally became the "continental policy", which became the mainstream of the Japanese government in a short time and led to the Russo-Japanese War. After that, Russia was forced to sign the Portsmouth Peace Treaty, which transferred all land controlled by Russia over the three northeastern provinces to Japan. The Japanese colonialists then adopted some immigration policies like "pioneer groups" and "national company" to gradually encroach in the Northeast China and enslave the local inhabitants, to achieve their expected "continental strategy".

### 1.2. The Production Plan

Japan's resource exploitation and another colonization activities started with its rigorous plans about northeastern China. As early as before the outbreak of World War II, the Showa steel-smelting institute had formulated and implemented the so-called Five-Year Industrial Plan.

After the outbreak of World War II, domestic mineral resources of Japan were unable to cope with the huge needs of the war in both the Chinese and Pacific, so the plundering of the rich iron ore resources in Anshan became necessary to continue Japan's ambition of foreign expansion.

### **1.3. Military Force**

From military perspective, the poor defense in these northeastern provinces had a close relationship with the fact that Japanese plundered resources in Anshan and even the whole northeastern China wantonly. On the eve of World War II, the number of Japanese troops and military police stationed in northeastern China was as high as eight divisions, more than 600,000 people, while the main force in this area resisting Japanese army was the Northeast Anti-Japanese League with only 30,000 people and much worse weapons than the Japanese counterparts [1]. Therefore, during World War II, there was actually much weaker military resistance in the northeastern provinces than in another areas in China, which also allowed the Japanese to take advantage of the situation.

### **1.4. Favorable Natural Conditions**

The Japanese chose Anshan as their colonization because of her superior natural resources. The whole Anshan mining area also includes more than 10 mines of various sizes, such as East Anshan, West Anshan, Cherry Garden, Da Gu Shan, Xiaolingzi, Guan Men Shan, etc. According to the record No. 76 in the Japanese archives, in 1936, the total amount of mineable iron ore at Gongchangling (including confirmed amount and estimated amount) was 22,336,900 tons. According to the industry standard, the grade of iron ore which is over 40% can be called rich ore, while the grade of these iron ore is about 68%, which is a veritable steal treasure trove. [2]

## **2. Japan's Colonial Aggression in Anshan**

During World War II, the Japanese colonization of Anshan consisted of both economic and cultural activities. They economically plundered for their war and financial needs of the time, while cultural colonization attempted to keep Anshan under Japanese control for generations.

### **2.1. Economic Exploitation**

From the very beginning, the purpose of the Japanese was to plunder the mineral resources of Anshan. As a result, they took various management measures and policies, including industrial development plans, South Manchuria Heavy Industries, the Showa steel-smelting institute, and railway construction.

#### **2.1.1. Industrial Development Plans**

Japan was a well-planned country, and this characteristic was reflected in the plundering of resources from its colonies during the war. Their economic aggressions was guided by plenty of industrial plans made by the Japanese military. To supply Japanese demand of armaments against China and the Soviet Union and the needs of Japanese domestic production, they made production plans that changed almost every year with the changes of the international situation. Long before the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese Ministry of the Army and General Staff put forward several requirements for the development of Anshan, including the production of military supplies. Since then the Japan government had successively issued a series of industrial plans to arrange the production of steel at Anshan. The war demand for resources was never-ending, while it became increasingly difficult for Japan to import iron ore due to the severe international situation. Therefore, in 1938, the Showa steel-smelting institute made the "Japan-Manchuria iron and steel five-year plan trial" and the 1-4 phase of the plan to increase production, which required the production of iron and steel to improve to 10 million tons by 1941 and that of pig iron to increase to 1.7 million tons; iron and steel smelters with blast

furnaces should continuously operate. It also attempted to abolish the obstacles to steel trade between Japan and the Manchuria, and urged Japan-Manchuria sales. After the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese government twice modified this plan in 1939 and 1940, targeting to increase the Showa steel-smelting institute's production capacity of iron from the original 3.3 million tons in 1941 to 4.4 million tons, and finally to 5.5 million tons in 1943. Steel production was to be increased from 2.83 million tons in 1941 to 3.58 million tons in 1943. In 1939, the Showa steel-smelting institute Company launched the fifth and sixth phases of the Five-Year Plan to increase the production of pig iron and pellet iron by 2.6 million tons over the given period. The major steel products such as ingots, steel products, billets, and special steels were to be increased respectively by 2.08 million tons, 0.83 million tons, 1.84 million tons, and 0.05 million tons. Anshan Iron & Steel's production equipment had also been expanded.

From the perspective of actuality, such production and expansion arrangements were somewhat excessive for the level of production at that time. At the beginning of the Second World War, the Showa steel-smelting institute was still in the process of the fourth phase construction, instead of initiating the fifth one as they wish; What's more, only one of the four coke ovens was in operation, and no other projects, except the sheet-steel mill, was progressing on schedule. By 1941, the rolling mills, steel plants, and steel-making plants had completed only the most basic construction, and the most efficient one among which had completed only 40% of its plan. The projected works of the Five-Year Industrial Plan scheduled for 1941 was largely delayed until 1942, and the 6th phase of the production increase plan was never implemented. By the time of the second Five-Year Industrial Plan, Japanese productivity and supply capacity were already strained. Confronting a more tense situation in the war, Japanese government announced the implementation of a wartime economic system in the northeast China and started the Second Five-Year Plan, which covered basic material production, the military-industrial industry, transportation and communication products, and another important subsidiary industries. This new targets were similar to those of the First Five-Year Industrial Plan, but there was no progress in the expansion of facilities. This plunderous wartime production and management methods soon led to a decline in the production capacity of all major plants, including the the Showa steel-smelting institute works, and by 1944, the iron and steel industry in northeastern China had collapsed at every line. [2]

### **2.1.2. South Manchuria Heavy Industry Co.**

Such a massive plundering scheme required an excellent manager, and in Anshan, South Manchuria Heavy Industry Co. (hereinafter called Manye), which was established in 1937, played this role in order to reduce the tax and to centralizedly control the steel production of northeastern China. Even though its business scope just limited to iron and steel, light metals, machinery, and coal, it still contributed a lot to the "Japan-Manchuria Union" and to the Japanese monopoly of steel production in Manchuria. By 1943, it had already become a large Concheen with 37 companies, which had net investment of 500 million yuan and total capital of 2.1 billion yuan. [4] The establishment of Manye linked the steel production of Anshan with the Japanese consortium, promoted the development of Japan-Manchuria integration, and confirmed the monopoly of Japan in the steel industry of Anshan.

### **2.1.3. The Showa Steel-smelting Institute**

The factory that turned these plans into the real robbery was the Showa steel-smelting institute, a steel company established in Anshan in 1933 by the Japanese government for the times and the sake of Chinese steel resources.

The company expanded on the basic of the former Anshan steel-smelting institute held by both the South Manchurian Railway Co. and South Manchuria Heavy Industry Co. During the Second World War, the Showa steel-smelting institute continued to supply steel products to Japan and was responsible for most of the above-mentioned five-year plan for steel production, including

68% of the pig iron targets, 83% of the ingot targets, and 76% of the steel targets. According to statistics, between 1937 and 1945, the Showa steel-smelting institute produced 7.815 million tons of iron and 3.325 million tons of steel, including pig iron, pellets, billets, ingots, steel, special steel, etc. Just in 1943, the Showa steel-smelting institute produced 89.4% of the total domestic iron and steel products, and almost all of these products were exported to Japan apart from a fraction of them used for another purposes in 1940-1941. At the same time, the Showa steel-smelting institute also upgraded many facilities. During World War II, the blast furnaces built during phases 3 and 4 of the Five-Year Development Plan were put into operation, and another blast furnace was built. Up to the end of World War II, Japanese constructed nine blast furnaces, three of which were built during the war. Besides, the Showa steel-smelting institute constructed the second steel mill (both large-scale factory and small one) with a capacity of 500,000 tons per year, a preliminary rolling mill with rails and other rolling equipment, the No.1 and No.2 coal washing plants, and coking plants No. 2 to 4. On the mining industry, the output of rich mines such as GongChangling increased from 700,000 tons in 1938 to a million tons in 1944, while the new factories including No. 2 and No. 3 concentrating mills and another 23 calcinators and 10 sintering machines (they brought the annual sinter output to 1.06 million tons). As for coke production, by 1945, the Showa steel-smelting institute had 12 large coke ovens and 12 medium-sized coke ovens, with the highest output of 2.089 million tons of coke in 1943. [2]

It was the sadness of Chinese miners that made the Japanese achievement in their plan. To motivate their employees, the Showa steel-smelting institute established a series of schools to train skilled workers. Meanwhile, the pioneer organizations set by the institute such as the "Laborers' Association" (most of whose members were Japanese) to encourage, but actually, supervise the employees. At that time, laborers there suffered a particularly worrying treatment in both their work and their rest, and there was a popular saying in the Anshan's mines: "The concentrating plant is a big pigsty, the iron smelting plant is the gate of hell; the pipe factory is even worse. We trade our lives for a meal." [5] Laborers at that time were usually driven to do something difficult and dangerous such as rock stripping and perforating for 16 hours a day, and even children were hired. To prevent the riot, they were supervised by Japanese soldiers with guns. According to the memory of Zhang Tongde, an old worker, to exploit the Chinese labor force and save the cost of production, the institute took some of the Chinese employees as "learner", who wore jute clothes and lived in frozen silos with no fire but only weeds. The place they lived was surrounded by electric fence to prevent them from escaping. More than half of these so-called "learner" died in "counseling centers" [3]. Despite the heavy tasks, Chinese workers were not well paid. Actually, regular Chinese workers typically earn about a quarter of their Japanese counterparts' salary, and Chinese temporary workers just got half of what regular ones earn [5]. But those who were able to get paid may be much more lucky than those more than 30,000 workers who died during the war. Some of them died of overwork, some of them died of disease, some of them died from the mistreatment of the Japanese overseers, and after being drained of their last shred of value, the Japanese threw them into the mass graves at Gongchangling. Those who survived were not fortunate, for many of them were diagnosed with silicosis, a disease that could choke them to death at any time and would torment them in the rest of their lives.

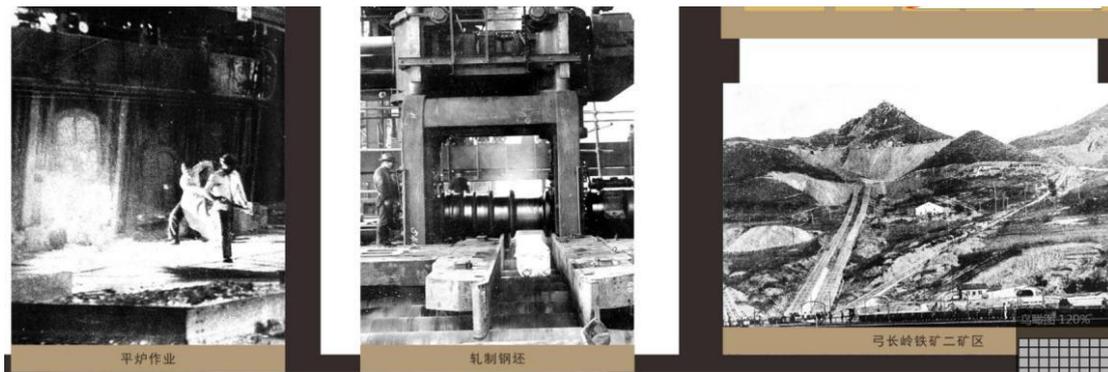


Figure 1. The Showa steel-smelting institute's flat furnace operation, rolling of billets, and the second mine at Gongchangling (from left to right).

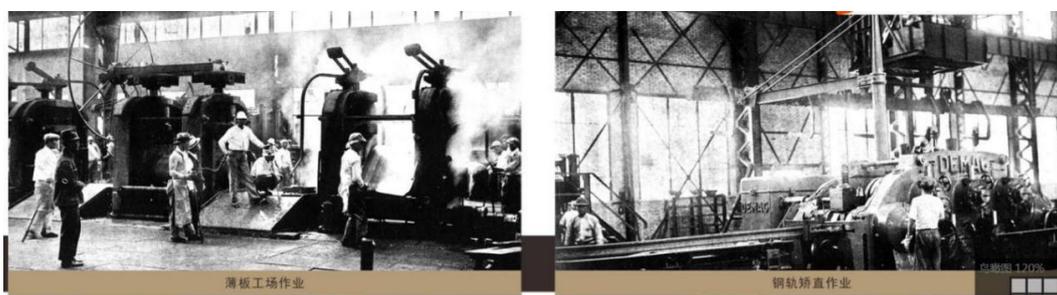


Figure 2. Sheet plant operations and rail processing (from left to right)



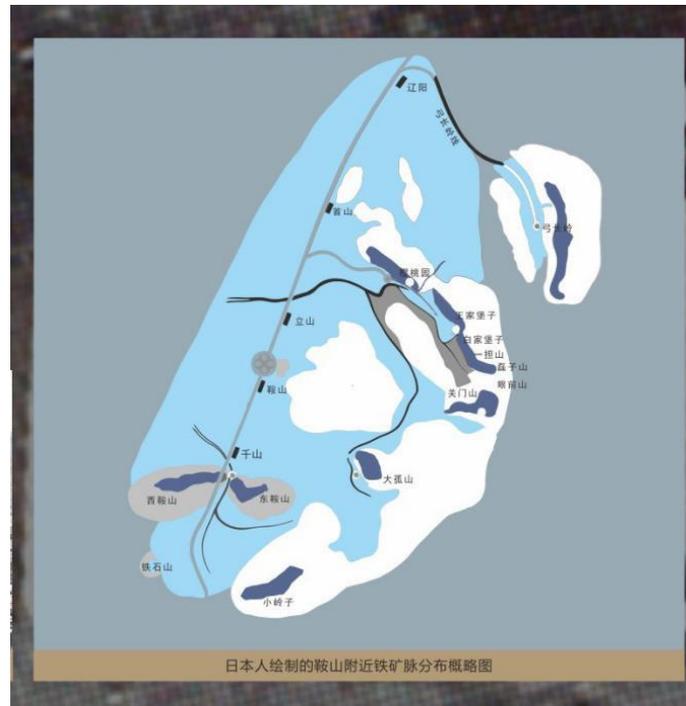
Figure 3. Comparison of Chinese and Japanese Labour Wages



Figure 4. The Showa steel-smelting institute's "counseling center," miners' folk songs, child laborers in the mines, skeletal remains in the mass grave at Gongchangling, and Japanese overseers (from left to right).

### 2.1.4. Railway Construction

To transport steel to Japan more efficiently, Japan constructed a railway from Shoushan to Nantai in Anshan, relying on the South Manchuria Railway Co., and transported Anshan's steel resources to Japan constantly. [5]



**Figure 5.** Japanese topographical map of the mines around Anshan, which shows the Japanese planning of the railway at that time

## 2.2. Cultural Colonization

The Japanese Government was clearly aware that economic plunder could just bring temporary benefits, and the truly colonial rule could only be consolidated by thoroughly enslaving Chinese in ideology. As a result, the Japanese established some basic schools in Anshan and "revised" the textbooks to cultivate "qualified Manchurian citizens". The Japanese had a great ambivalence in the cultural education, which was perhaps similar to all another invader. On the one hand, they decided to promote obscurantism in the colonies, to prevent any colonized people from receiving education, and to keep them in a state of confusion and obedience all the time. On the other hand, they understood that there would not be slaves without cultivation and brainwashing. So, the Japanese came up with a "compromised" and "smart" solution. Even if Chinese students were enrolled in school, they had to be educated in a Japanese style, so that they could learn Japanese culture and accept the ideas of "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity". To further enslave the Chinese workers, the Showa steel-smelting institute also established a school for youth, which focused on the development of morality and professional skills, and especially emphasized loyalty and love and dedication for the country and public good. The students here were expected to work hard without complaint for the benefit of Japanese fascism. [3]

To beautify and to cover up the viciousness of Japanese imperialists and to consolidate their colonial position, Yoshi Hirakawa, a member of the South Manchurian Education Association's Textbook Editorial Board and a head of the General Affairs Division of the Education Department of Pseudo-Fengtian Province, presided the issuance of the "Temporary Measures for Subjects and Textbooks in Provincial Schools, Prefectural Departments of Education, and the Inspection and Straightening of Primary Schools", which requested to compulsively delete

and change the content of textbooks as they wished, and to enforce the "loyalty" education among students. What's more, they also issued a series of corresponding regulations, including prohibition of using the teaching materials advocating anti-Japanese and the Three Principles of the People. At the same time, the Ministry of Education published its own textbooks to fill this "gap" created by prohibition. This atmosphere lasted throughout World War II, and even up to 1945, these so-called "national textbooks" was still in using, which means all the students in Anshan, even in the entire Northeast China, had to study the culture of invaders in this limited cultural atmosphere. Education and textbooks, which were supposed to be the key to the wisdom, became the accomplices of the invaders in this case. [6]

### 3. Characteristics of Japanese Colonial Activities

Japanese government's colonization activities during World War II were similar with that of another fascist countries, but at the same time, they also had some of their own characteristics.

#### 3.1. Extremism

When Japanese colonialists plundered the iron and steel resources of China, they often took an extreme measures, for instance, each exploitation plan was designed in terms of the maximum operational capability at the time, just as Yamamoto Jotaro said, "As long as the resources of Manchuria are fully utilized, there is no need to employ Chinese people and pay for them." [4] This extreme colonial practice completely hurt the feelings between the two countries, and more importantly, caused irreparable harm to the natural resources, environment and people of the Anshan.

#### 3.2. The Wartime System

If we browse the history of Japanese colonization in Anshan, we will find that every second that Japanese spent in Anshan was in a war state. They put high value on the heavy industries and took militarized management to organise all the factories and mines they controlled in order to produced military supplies. Steel production in Anshan was monopolized and managed by Japanese companies and Japanese factories. Naoto Kochiyama, the chairman of the board of directors of the Showa steel-smelting institute, once made a "patriotic" speech: "The Showa steel-smelting institute is a national company, and even if we produce just one more ton of iron, we will make contribution to the fulfillment of the national target." [4] However, this highly strained wartime system soon collapsed due to the excessive tension in production methods, which also showed that the wartime economic system is only available in the sake of rational development, instead of invasion and plunder.

#### 3.3. Hypocrisy

People living in the Northeast China are familiar with the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere", because it is the slogan that the Japanese colonialists put forward during their colonization. The invaders always make some high-sounding excuses when they start a war, so, invaders regarded their plundering activities as the contribution to the common prosperity of Asia; They enslaved foreign laborers and took it in guarantee; They killed millions of unarmed people while they taught the students it was "loyalty". Comparing what they said and what they did, I find there was such an ambiguity between right and wrong in their mind, and they tried their best to find excuses for those vicious activities, which made all their behaviours very hypocritical.

#### 3.4. Precision

Japanese showed their meticulousity in the detail of the production plans they made. Each figure in the plan has been carefully extrapolated even to one decimal place and the targets always changed according to the political and international situation on yearly basic. It is true that such

feature could create higher economic incomes, while during the war, this thoroughness led to the tragedy of the people living in colony.

### 3.5. Comprehensiveness

Japanese colonization activities at Anshan composed a comprehensive network, centering on steel production and also involved another related industries, such as railways, schools, and the expansion of equipment. All these industries greatly and directly influenced people's daily life, which could help the Japanese colonists totally control the Northeast China in every aspects.

## 4. Impact of Japanese Colonial Activities

### 4.1. Negative Impact

The colonial activities of the Japanese invaders in Anshan caused irreparable damage to the natural resources and ecological environment of Anshan, and millions of tons of iron and steel resources in this city and transported the products to Japan in order to make the weapons used in the war, and the whole city of Anshan became a iron and steel warehouse for Japan, which objectively promote their invasion of China. At the same time, colonization and invasion also caused great harm to the people of Anshan, the entire city's labor force were enslaved by the invaders, tens of thousands of workers lost their lives in World War II, and some citizens' health was permanently damaged in the heavy and dangerous work. During the six years of World War II, students in Northeast China did not receive proper education, and some youth were even forced to distort their outlook on life. Perhaps the mental damage was a more serious shadow than the material loss.

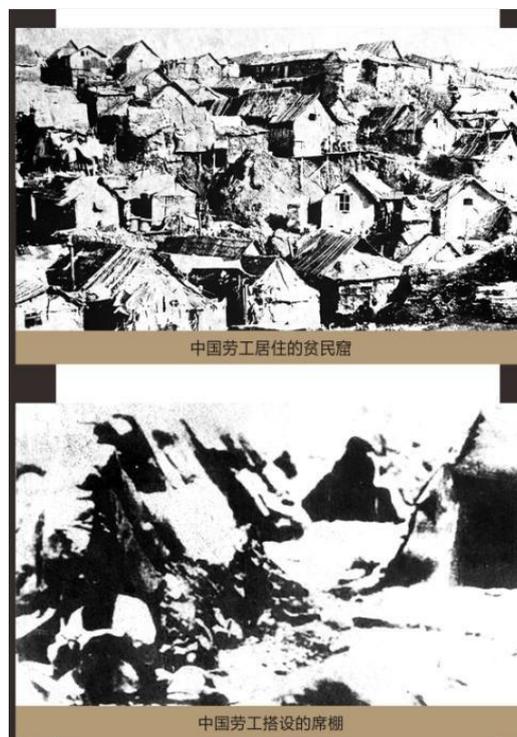


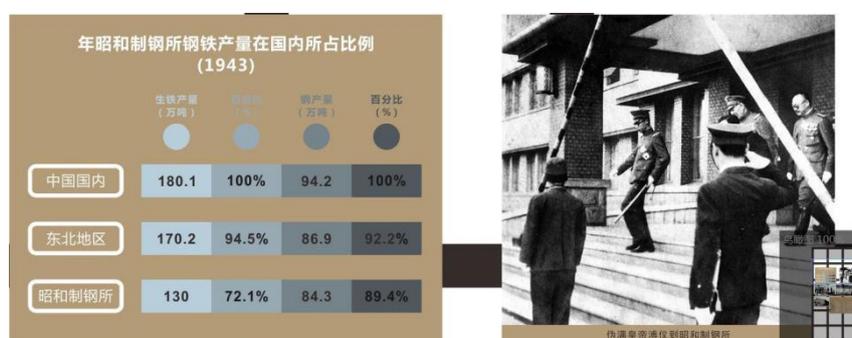
Figure 6. Chinese miners' "residence"

### 4.2. Another Effects

Each coin has two sides. The Japanese activities at Anshan made some contribution to the economic and social development in this city. After the liberation of the country, the original Showa steel-smelting institute had already been out of production, but the knowledge and production experience about steel and iron had great reference value in the following works. At the same time, some Japanese experts still living in China after the war guided the

reconstruction of Anshan's steel industry, who also played a significant role in promoting and guiding the development of Anshan's modern industrialization. Meanwhile, Showa steel-smelting institute cultivated several experienced and professional workers, who played an irreplaceable role in the construction of heavy industry in the new China.

At present, we can also find some remains of the colonial period in this city. The most famous one among them is the Big White House, a historical building of Ansteel Group. Originally, it was an office building of Showa steel-smelting institute in the war, in August 2010, Anshan City officials declared the the Showa steel-smelting institute industrial complex, including the Big White House, as one of the 7th National Cultural Relics Protection list. There is also the Taicho Complex in the center of Anshan. Taicho, meaning "village on a hillside" in Japanese, is a beautiful and poetic name, but also sounds ironic for a complex that was born in the war and plunder. Some of them along the street have been converted into restaurants and bars, but most of them are still private. Also, people here learnt some Japanese habits such as saun and remain these in their life until now.



**Figure 7.** The Showa steel-smelting institute's market share of steel production and Puyi's presence in the Great White House in 1943 (from left to right).

## 5. Conclusion

As a native of Anshan, steel and endless mines leave a very deep impression to me. In my memory, those aging mills and factories have been supporting the economy of the city from the moment it was born, and bring us countless happiness to our lives since childhood. I know the scarred history of both the factories and this city. I know how those invaders occupied it and plundered its treasures, and how this city embraces the new life after that dreadful period. The purpose of this essay is not to arouse hatred or any other negative feelings in the reader, but to recount the disaster its suffered and to remember the reason that why it suffered it, and eventually to prevent similar tragedies from happening again.

During the writing process, I also found that there is a problem with Anshan's World War II historical materials, that is, the data of the same project is too complicated and fuzzy, and sometimes there are discrepancies in the data of the same project.

I would like to thank the staff of the Anshan Iron and Steel Publicity Department for providing me with these historical photos as a reference, but for technical reasons, most of the images can only be presented in a group format.

A quote from Chairman Mao's meeting with the leaders of the Communist Parties of various countries could not be a better way to conclude this thesis: "War is something that really makes people suffer. War also brings famine, pestilence, looting ..... why we fight? We should prevent but should not be afraid of it. We are supposed to be against with it, but not be afraid of it." [7]

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