

Dalian Friendship Memorial Building

The Dalian Friendship Memorial Building stands out even among the eye-catching twentieth-century architecture that surrounds it. A near replica of an administrative office building from over a century ago (and built on the opposite side of the Sea of Japan), this historic building attests to the complexities of Japan's international relations.

A Complicated History

This brick, stone, and wood replica was built in 1994 to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the friendship agreement between Kitakyushu and Dalian, China. The agreement marked a positive turn in the complex relationship between the two cities.

In the early twentieth century, Moji was a key port that connected Japan to Dalian (then known in the English-speaking world as "Port Arthur"). Japan briefly controlled Dalian after the signing of the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ended the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). But the port was soon claimed by Russia to prevent Japan from expanding too far into China.

Dalian was a major hub of trade for Russia in Asia until the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), after which Japan regained control of the city. Dalian then became the main port for Japan's outposts in the region. Moji, in turn, became a key stop for ships headed to the Asian mainland. This relationship lasted until Japan's defeat in World War II (1939–1945), after which the Soviet Union held Dalian until 1950, when it was finally returned to China.

Like the city it represents, the memorial has a complex and multinational history. The building is modeled on the administrative office of the Trans-Manchurian Railroad (Japanese: *tōshin tetsudō*), which operated in Dalian and the surrounding region. That office was designed in 1902 by German architects hired by the Russian administrators of the city. After Japan took control of Dalian, the office became the Dalian Club. In 1926, it was then converted into the Nihonbashi Library.

A Near-Perfect Replica

When the project began, six buildings in Dalian with ties to Japan were considered as candidates. The former Nihonbashi Library was ultimately chosen for its unique design,

rarity, and historic value, as well as its overall aesthetic appeal.

However, the lack of original blueprints or detailed records presented an immediate obstacle to the construction. To overcome this, the design team traveled to Dalian to measure and document the original building to ensure an authentic reproduction. Some 45,000 bricks and 5,000 pieces of cut granite were imported from Dalian for both the base construction and the intricate inlays in the entryway floor and elsewhere. Supposedly, even the toolmarks on the stone were carefully recreated. This required close cooperation between the two cities and nations.

The building's architecture reflects its multinational roots. There are clear Russian and German touches in the high-steepled tower roofs and half-timbered walls, and the Chinese-style roof has rows of interlocking curved tiles rather than Japanese-style overlapping plates. Although the roof tiles were initially imported from Dalian, they were unsuitable for the local climate, and replacement tiles were made in Shimane Prefecture.

From 1995 to 2018, the building functioned as the Dalian Friendship Memorial Library, which housed Chinese and other East Asian materials. The first floor now houses a Chinese restaurant called Dalian Acacia, while the second floor has a public space furnished with tables and comfortable armchairs. There are also displays of artworks and materials related to Dalian, including an introductory video in Mandarin and Japanese. The third floor is used as a meeting space for local urban development groups.