The Anshan Iron and Steel Works (AISW), formerly the Manchuria Iron and Steel Works (MISW), was the second largest iron and steel company in the Japanese-occupied Yen block until 1945. It was also the largest iron and steel company in the People’s Republic of China until the 1960s. As for the iron-smelting sector of the industry, the pig-iron output reached 1.3 million tons in 1943, which was about 20% of the total production in the Yen block. It was the second largest pig-iron production plant in the Yen block, second only to the Japan Iron and Steel Co. in Yahata (which produced 30% of the total), and it was the largest producer of pig-iron in Socialist China until the 1970s.

By focusing on the AISW, the book examine the following three topics: the output of the iron and steel industry during the Manchukuo era, the complicated changes in military dominance in the final stage of the Chinese Civil War in northeast China, especially the volatile and complex process in and around Anshan, and the restart of production at the AISW despite war damage.

In regard to the first topic, the AISW was equipped with the latest machinery and production technology obtained from Germany, the US and Japan, which was instrumental in the success of the company. The most important product of the AISW was pig iron. 40-50% of produced pig iron was exported as steelmaking raw material to Japan, which used it in the war against the US and the UK. The book proves this by analyzing newly discovered original documents and materials on the AISW and other organizations, and by interviewing people who worked at the AISW or lived in the region at the time.

The second topic covers the fact that the iron and steel industry was very important for the production of ammunition. This is why the Soviet army, the Nationalists, and the Communists, tried to take over Anshan city immediately after the surrender of Japan. This led to eight changes in the Anshan rulers in the years immediately after August of 1945. This book clarifies
these changes and the complicated relations between the Soviet army, the Nationalists, and the Communists.

The most important contribution of the book is the analysis and discussion of the third topic: the restarting of production at the AISW despite war damage. (See Figure 1, which shows my conclusion as simplified image.) The AISW suffered heavy war damage and both the iron-smelting and the steel-smelting sectors had to stop their operations in autumn of 1945. However, the AISW was reconstructed during the Three Year Reconstruction Period (1949-1952), to the extent that its production equaled the highest prewar period production level. This is attributed to a combination of many factors, including young Chinese leaders summoned from all over China, the enthusiasm of newly recruited young Chinese workers for the reconstruction of their own country, the flexible manpower policy of the Chinese Communist Party, experienced Chinese workers, Japanese and ex-Nationalist engineers, remaining technical documents from MISW, and remaining functional equipment at MISW.

The iron-smelting and the steel-smelting sectors suffered war damage of different kinds. In the iron-smelting sector, many machines were confiscated or destroyed, but large pieces of equipment such as the blast furnaces and other giant structures were left untouched. In the steel-smelting sector, the newly-built No.2 steelworks factory was completely destroyed. However, the older No.1 steelworks factory remained intact, and the No.1 factory compensated for the loss of production at the No.2 factory, helped by the introduction of new technology brought in by the ex-Nationalist engineers and experienced Chinese workers. Thus, both the iron-smelting and the steel-smelting sectors reached their prewar maximum production levels within a few years. Other factors such as remaining technical documents, the operational know-how of the Japanese engineers and ex-Nationalists engineers, and experienced Chinese workers were also indispensable to the successful reconstruction process.

The book also explains the outstanding efforts of Chinese engineers and workers in the reconstruction effort in the early 1950s. The upsurge of patriotic sentiment among the Chinese immediately after the victory in WWII and the Chinese Civil War was central to their efforts to rebuild the AISW. Such patriotism and great devotion of the people reflected the new domestic and international political situation in northeast China at the time.
Another important contribution that the book makes is to point out the flexible and rational manpower policy, such as the detention policy of the Communists. They tempered their wartime hostility toward ex-enemies, i.e. detained Japanese engineers, ex-Nationalists engineers and experienced workers, and used their skill and knowledge to rebuild the steel industry. This was the key factor that led to an enabled many other factors to take place, as detailed above.

To summarize, a considerable part of the material resources, i.e., the remaining equipment and documents ensured that operations could be restarted at the AISW. Another helpful factor was the detained Japanese engineers, the ex-Nationalists engineers and trained Chinese workers who remained in the country after the Chinese Civil War. They were few in number but great importance and their contributions were invaluable. Aside from these factors, what contributed the most to the continuity of AISW was the devotion of young Chinese communists, newly joined young Chinese engineers, and newly recruited young Chinese workers who worked hard to build a new country of their own. The manpower policy of the Communist also served the movement well. All of these factors contributed to the remarkable reconstruction of the iron and steel industry in Anshan, despite the serious and repeated war damages it suffered.
Fig. 1  Historical Conditions for Miraculous Reconstruction of the AISW

Historical Enthusiasm Caused by Liberation & Revolution

Training System and Chance of Promotion

Rapid Reconstruction of AISW: Repairing & Improvements

Human Resources

Flexible Manpower Policy, Challenging Technical Policy of CCP

Young Chinese Communists, Engineers Sent from All China

Newly Sent and Trained Young Chinese Workers

Experience and Skills of Remaining Chinese Workers

Japanese Engineers & Ex-Nationalist Chinese Engineers

Materials

Remaining Documents of MISC

Remaining Equipment of MISC

Note 1: MISW means the Manchuria Iron & Steel Works, and AISW means the Anshan Iron & Steel Works.

Note 2: CCP means the Chinese Communist Party.