

experiences and political activities. For instance, apart from re-creating Li's image as a vanguard in China's enlightenment during the May Fourth era, Shan reminds readers that in his capacity as the chief librarian, Li was, in fact, also a pioneer in promoting modern Western library management at Beijing University, which later set the model followed by many universities in republican China. In highlighting the process of Li's conversion to Marxism, Shan also rightly points out that Li's acceptance of communism as a revolutionary ideology was influenced by his adaptability and modification of many ideas, ranging from certain aspects of China's traditional cultures, the Western concept of parliamentary democracy, liberalism to anarchism. Nevertheless, he concludes that the nationalist impulse was deeply rooted in Li's concept of communism.

In analysing Li's political career from the May Fourth period, the author traces in detail Li's role in the formation of the Chinese Communist Party (1921) and later the adoption of a united front policy with the Nationalist Party. In his detailed narrative of Li's entire political career as a communist, Shan also perceptively suggests that the year 1924 was the turning point whereafter Li devoted himself more to revolutionary strategies and tactics than to scholarly discussion of revolutionary theories. From this point, Li became more committed to taking action. Shan's detailed narrative of Li's leadership in North China during the first United Front period (1924–1927), a topic that has long been ignored by scholars outside China, also justifiably retrieves the important contribution that Li made during the last years of his political life. However, the claim that the civil war in the post-Second World War years could be won by the communists firstly in North China, not South China, "was in part an attestation of Li's long-standing influence" (p. 218), perhaps requires further critical analysis.

Shan's detailed and insightful narrative of Li's life-long political activities is impressive. Given that the author suggests that Li was not a sophisticated Marxist ideologist and that from 1924 he devoted himself more to political action than theoretical inquiries, his discussion of Li's Marxism as a revolutionary ideology tends to be brief. Apart from challenging some recent interpretations from mainland China which in general exaggeratedly praise Li's understanding of Marxism, or summarizing the major Western interpretations on this issue, the author has been wary of presenting his own view of Li's perceptions of Marxism, other than claiming that "Li was not bound up by an orthodoxy, and his version of communism remained in a state of fluidity..." (p. 142).

Despite the relatively brief discussion of Li's Marxist ideology, Shan's book sheds much new light on his entire political journey and reappraises Li's position in the context of China's search for modernity. It is a major contribution to the expanding historiography on early Chinese communist movement.

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Mao's Third Front: The Militarization of Cold War China

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Julia C. Strauss

SOAS University of London, London, UK
Email: js11@soas.ac.uk

Mao's Third Front is a ground-breaking monograph that focusses on an oft-referred-to, but little-studied subject in PRC history: the "Third Front." Launched in 1964, a period normally considered to be one of retrenchment and economic recovery through relatively greater reliance on markets,



private garden plots and specialized technical knowledge, the Third Front stands in counterpoint to what we consider to be the norm for the period immediately preceding the Cultural Revolution. This monograph not only puts the Maoist, mobilizational alternative on the map, it problematizes the standard periodization of PRC history in the way it demonstrates key continuities from the Great Leap Forward through to the early 1960s and the Cultural Revolution.

Until it was quietly shelved in the late 1970s, the Third Front was a collection of projects implemented in tried-and-true Maoist campaign style to achieve quick breakthroughs in building a heavy industrial base in the underdeveloped interior of China. The sprawling scale of the Third Front as a “militarized industrial campaign” (p. 66) in different industries across remote regions of the south-west with little to no pre-existing infrastructure, its obvious ties to national defence, its mobilization of millions and the sensitivity of the topic could have easily resulted in a monograph that either focused too narrowly on one project, or was so overwhelmed by the multitude of details that it only resulted in generalities. Meyskens adroitly avoids all these pitfalls, blending political, social, economic and Cold War history. The introduction consists of an overview of the topic and a discussion of sources. The first chapter lays out the origin of the Third Front in Mao’s preoccupation with continuing the revolution amid China’s increasingly precarious international standing in the early- to mid-1960s. Meyskens explains the ways in which the Third Front emerged from the principles that animated the Great Leap Forward: self-reliance, autarky and the mobilization of the naturally revolutionary nature of the masses through extraordinary campaigns to achieve the goals of the revolution in heavy industry, particularly steel. In many cases, Third Front projects were revivals of drives first attempted during the Leap: Panzhihua Steel (Sichuan), Shuicheng Steel at Liupanshui (Guizhou), and Second Heavy Industry Works (Sichuan). The Third Front also encompassed massive railroad building campaigns: the Chengdu–Kunming line as well as the Guiyang–Chongqing and Guiyang–Kunming links. These ideational and institutional links to the Leap notwithstanding, the Third Front was launched in a very different international environment: China’s profound and deepening international isolation rendered the Third Front nothing less than a massive pre-emptive defence strategy, with its emphasis on dispersed projects often hidden from view. The Third Front also departed from the Leap’s denigration of specialized knowledge. Construction of Third Front factories and railroad lines amid very challenging conditions required rather than suppressed technical expertise: engineers and technicians were sent down to remote areas to build from nearly nothing and were not expected to learn from peasants. Rather they were enjoined to use their skills to build heroic projects from the ground up with nearly nothing.

Chapter one reviews the high-level policy debates and decisions around the Third Front; chapter two covers the ways in which people – mostly men – were recruited from their regular work units to embark on an unknown adventure remote areas where conditions were extremely primitive; chapter three discusses the heavily militarized campaign atmosphere of the Third Front’s actual work, particularly in the building of the Kunming–Chengdu railroad. Chapter four turns to social history in the new steel town of Panzhihua, detailing the physical, social and psychological hardships that workers building the Third Front had to endure. Real *jianku* (hardship) in physical comfort, impossibly long working hours, separation from family and an extraordinarily skewed gender ratio were baked-in costs to the tens of thousands of people sent to build the Third Front, but at the same time, the workers of Panzhihua were privileged with higher salaries and levels of subsidy than the norm, were lauded for building socialism and often felt that despite the hardship they were making positive contributions to building socialism. Chapter five evaluates the Third Front as a whole, finding that while regional output of coal, oil and electricity all grew, astonishing inefficiencies remained (establishing factories and power plants in caves was bound to be logistically difficult and expensive), and that while the Third Front was successful in building an industrial base in the interior, when economic policy shifted in the Deng era “roughly half of Third Front projects were found to be economically unviable and were consigned to the dustbin of history” (p. 235).

In short, *Mao's Third Front* is a *tour de force*, agenda-setting monograph that successfully draws out its documentary and oral sources in ways that prompt us to rethink Mao-era regional and industrial history in a wider context of Cold War history. One can only hope that in the future, scholars will be permitted access to sources that can build on this fine piece of scholarship.

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China's Cold War Science Diplomacy

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Pete Millwood

University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia
Email: pete.millwood@unimelb.edu.au

One of the key fissures in the escalating decoupling between China and the outside world is science. US President Joe Biden's administration has imposed an ever-escalating series of restrictions on the transfer of US technology and know-how to the country, while the previous Trump administration launched a "China Initiative" intended to root out alleged spies in US industry and academia suspected of leaking scientific knowledge to China. US allies from Japan to the Netherlands to the European Union have curtailed earlier sharing of technology and knowledge.

This is a stark change: as Gordon Barrett's book reveals, since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the country has placed science at the heart of many of its diplomatic initiatives – with much success. Barrett's book provides an important intervention in our understanding of the history of the relationship between Chinese science and the outside world, showing that PRC scientists were actively engaged in scientific cooperation and diplomacy beyond the country's borders long before 1971, when the country began a rapprochement with the US. Moreover, this engagement was not only with the socialist world, but also with capitalist societies and the Third World. The book utilizes the concept of "science diplomacy" to show that this engagement not only served to maintain flows of knowledge between China and the outside, but also served the Chinese state's broader foreign policy objectives: recognition, influence, and resistance of international orders dominated by Beijing's enemies – first, the US and, then, too, the Soviet Union.

Barrett's narrative begins in the years immediately prior to the establishment of the PRC (chapter one) and stretches until the 1970s. The coverage of the late 1940s is illuminating and shows that the Chinese Communist Party's science diplomacy ambitions began even before they had won the Chinese Civil War and thus that Chinese actors were active participants in the formation of a post-war structure of international science. The author pays close attention to "the strategies and structures that supported China's scientific outreach" (p. 3), and effectively mines Chinese archival sources to intricately lay out the role that science and scientists played in PRC diplomacy; in doing so, his book offers grounded insights into the practice of PRC diplomacy more broadly.

The book's early chapters reveal the prominent role that PRC scientists played in several international and transnational scientific networks. Barrett documents Chinese influence in the World Federation of Scientific Workers (chapter one), a broadly leftist organization with both political and scientific aspirations previously studied largely from a European perspective, and in the Pugwash conferences (chapter two), a group primarily known for engagement between capitalist states and