

Steel Metropolis: Industrial Manchuria and the Making of Chinese Socialism

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In October 1954, five years after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC, 1949–present) in the hands of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India made a visit to China. During his visit, on October 24, the CCP brought Nehru to the city of Anshan (鞍山) in Northeast China, which was also called Manchuria historically. During the leadership of Mao Zedong (1949–1976), Anshan earned its reputation as China's "Steel Metropolis" (鋼都) for housing the PRC's largest steelmaking enterprise: the Anshan Iron and Steel Works (鞍山鋼鐵公司), or Angang (鞍鋼). Angang was also one of China's largest state-owned enterprises (SOEs). According to a major Indian daily, Nehru was "very impressed" by this "giant metallurgical complex of some 40 plants which are the pride of the people of China."¹

In the heyday of the Sino-Soviet Alliance in the 1950s, the development of Chinese SOEs in Manchuria relied heavily on machines, designs, and know-how imported from the Soviet Union. Such a narrative, however, deliberately concealed the other half of history. Many SOEs in Northeast China—including Angang—were originally established as Japanese colonial enterprises before or during Japan's military occupation of the region between 1931 and 1945. Between 1946 and 1948, Angang and other Japanese enterprises in the region were controlled by the Chinese Nationalist Party, which represented China from

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1. G. K. Reddy, "Mr. Nehru Visits Steel Works," *Times of India*, October 25, 1954, 7.

1927 until its defeat by the CCP in 1949.² The Nationalists reorganized the former Japanese enterprises in Manchuria as Chinese SOEs.³ The Japanese and the Nationalists thus unintentionally laid foundations for the subsequent socialist industrialization in the hands of the CCP.

Drawing on archives and interviews in Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and English, *Steel Metropolis* examines the development of Angang in the twentieth century. By doing so, I contend that Chinese state socialism was a hybrid system that evolved through transnational and local-level negotiations. China's SOE system built on the physical assets, human resources, and policy ideas imported from Nationalist China, imperial Japan, the Soviet Union, and other regimes. The day-to-day operations of SOEs involved bottom-up participation by lower-level officials and local residents, who pursued their own interests by reinterpreting the ideological and institutional rules of the state.

The significance of this work lies in my argument that the evolution of socialism and capitalism in the twentieth century involved a symbiotic process of mutual learning. Ideas, technology, and practical knowledge traveled across political boundaries, and many socialist and capitalist countries pursued similar strategies of state-directed industrialization. By showing interconnectedness between the two systems, my work situates China within the global history of late industrialization.

SOEs in Maoist China, like their counterparts in other socialist regimes, were embedded into the state bureaucracy as the core parts of the socialist planned economy. Their operation was mainly financed by the state budget, and they purchased and sold goods largely through the state-sanctioned economic plans rather than the market. Their managers were appointed by the state, and they were often transferred to and from other SOEs or relevant government offices. Workers were guaranteed life employment and enjoyed various social welfare services provided by their workplaces.⁴

Following the Soviet example, Maoist China also prioritized developing heavy industries. In his 1952 Russian-language report, Premier Zhou Enlai of the PRC averred that “the central link” in the PRC First Five-Year Plan (1953–1957) was heavy industry, which would “transform the shape of the country's economy” and “strengthen national

2. In this article, “Nationalists” and “Communists” (with capitalization) refer to adherents of the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Communist Party, respectively.

3. For the development of Anshan up to the immediate aftermath of the CCP revolution, see Matsumoto, *Shinryaku to kaihatsu*; Matsumoto, “*Manshūkoku*” kara *shin Chūgoku e*; Tanoue, *Oya to ko ga kataritsugu Manshū no “8-gatsu 15-nichi*.

4. For an overview of the history of SOEs in modern China, see Bian, “Explaining the Dynamics of Change.”

defense.”⁵ To the Chinese Communists, the amount of steel production represented the best measure by which to compare the wealth and power of nations.⁶

Despite their central role in the making of the Chinese socialist political economy, SOEs in Maoist China have not received much scholarly attention in the historiography. Key business histories of modern China focused on private enterprises in China proper, especially in the Lower-Yangzi region during the pre-Communist period.⁷ Other scholars have published important books on the history of Chinese SOEs, but they tend to focus mainly on the Nationalist period, although they also touch upon the Nationalist legacies in the early PRC.⁸ While social scientists once produced important works on SOEs in the Mao period,⁹ their focus has long moved to the SOE reform under Deng Xiaoping and his successors.¹⁰ Recently, Hou Li and Covell Meyskens have each published important historical works on Chinese SOEs in the late Mao period.¹¹ While building on this body of literature, my dissertation fills in a historiographical gap by focusing mainly, though not exclusively, on the early Mao period, when the basic structure of the PRC’s SOE system was debated and formatted.¹² By examining one of the most important SOEs in China, I discuss several interrelated questions about the Chinese SOE system before, during, and after Mao Zedong’s leadership.

Main Themes

First, the history of Angang and other SOEs in Manchuria allows one to rethink the issues related to change and continuity in modern China by adding a regional layer to the debate. Recent scholars have highlighted hitherto-overlooked continuities and similarities between the time periods that had been studied separately. In particular, many recent

5. Zhou, “Doklad Chzhou En’laia ‘Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie v Kitae i zadachi piatiletnegostroitel’stva’” (August 29, 1952).

6. For an overview of China’s industrialization during the twentieth century, see Brandt, Ma, and Rawski, “Industrialization in Chin.”

7. For instance, see Cochran, *Encountering Chinese Networks*; Coble, *Chinese Capitalists in Japan’s New Order*; Köll, *From Cotton Mill to Business Empire*; Sheehan, *Industrial Eden*.

8. Bian, *The Making of the State Enterprise System in Modern China*; Köll, *Railroads and the Transformation of China*.

9. For instance, see Rawski, *China’s Transition to Industrialism*; Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism*.

10. Leutert, “State-Owned Enterprises in Contemporary China”; Steinfeld, *Forging Reform in China*; Walder, “China’s Bureaucratic Capitalism.”

11. Hou, *Building for Oil*; Meyskens, *Mao’s Third Front*.

12. See Bian, “Redefining the Chinese Revolution.”

historical works on the early PRC questioned the conventional understanding of the 1949 Revolution as a watershed.¹³ Scholars have revealed various similarities and inheritances between the early PRC planned economy and Nationalist China's economic policy.¹⁴ Building on these bodies of scholarship, I show that to study change and continuity in a country of China's size, it is also necessary to consider varying regional historical paths in different parts of the country.

Before 1945 Manchuria was a site of foreign, especially Japanese, imperialism. The Japanese set up major industrial enterprises in the region, including the Anshan Ironworks (鞍山製鐵所). During the Japanese occupation from 1931 to 1945, the Japanese-sponsored regime of Manchukuo developed the Shōwa Steelworks (昭和製鋼所) in Anshan and other heavy industry enterprises, thus making the northeast by far the largest heavy industry region on Chinese soil. Despite the serious damage during the Soviet occupation (1945–1946) following Japan's surrender, Manchurian industry's significance did not disappear. Between 1946 and 1948, the Nationalist government introduced its SOE system to the enterprises in the region. During the Chinese Civil War, the CCP defeated the Nationalists in Manchuria in 1948 and took over Angang and other SOEs. It was in Manchuria that the CCP made its first industrial planning through SOEs. Northeastern SOEs like Angang thus served as the models for the entire nation during the formative years of China's SOE system.

In the first decade of the PRC, Manchuria had the highest concentration of SOEs, accounting for about 30 percent of industrial output by all the Chinese SOEs. Even after it was surpassed by the Shanghai-based eastern region in 1958, Manchuria continued to have the second-largest cluster of SOEs during the rest of the Mao period. Furthermore, SOEs in Manchuria focused more on heavy industries. In 1952, Manchuria produced 41 percent of China's power, 33 percent of coal, 39 percent of cement, and 70 percent of steel.¹⁵ Despite its Japanese and Nationalist origins, industrial Manchuria was Chinese socialism.

Second, I contend that the late industrializers of the twentieth century such as the Soviet Union, Japan, and China had indeed much in

13. Brown and Pickowicz, *Dilemmas of Victory*; Esherick, "War and Revolution"; Kubo, *1949-nen zengo no Chūgoku*.

14. Among others, Bian, *State Enterprise System in Modern China*; Kinzley, *Natural Resources and the New Frontier*; Kirby, "Continuity and Change in Modern China"; Köll, *Railroads and the Transformation of China*; Kubo, *Gendai Chūgoku no genkei no shutsugen*; Thai, *China's War on Smuggling*; Yan, *Zhanzheng yu gongye*.

15. Guojia tongjiju, *Xin Zhongguo liushinian tongji ziliao huibian*; Guojia tongjiju, *Quanguo gesheng, zizhiqu, zhixiashi lishi tongji ziliao huibian, 1949-1989*; Guojia tongji ju gongye jiaotong wuzi tongji si, *Zhongguo gongye jingji tongji ziliao 1948-1984*.

common in their state-directed industrialization and reliance on imported technology. Soviet socialism and various types of capitalism of other countries influenced each other in tackling common geopolitical challenges of the twentieth century.

The early Soviet Union tried to catch up with the advanced industrial powers such as Germany and the United States by selectively importing policy models and industrial technology from these powers.¹⁶ The Soviet Union's rapid catch-up industrialization, in turn, inspired many in the nonsocialist parts of the world, including imperial Japan and Nationalist China. The PRC's import of Soviet technology and learning of Soviet policy ideas in the 1950s can be conceived as a part of the larger history of state-directed industrialization, with borrowed technology in twentieth-century China. Certainly, China's international isolation in the 1960s led the PRC to seek economic autonomy in an extreme manner. Nevertheless, even in this period, China was slowly beginning to strengthen its economic ties with capitalist countries, especially Japan.¹⁷ SOEs in Manchuria served as agents of the continuous and transnational process of state-direct industrialization and technology transfer.

Third, I examine how the PRC state, SOEs, and their employees interacted with each other. Recently, in search of grassroots voices under CCP rule, a group of historians have been making use of newly found sources in China, such as local archives and oral history interviews. Most notably, they have been practicing what they call "Sino-logical garbology"—the use of so-called "garbage sources 垃圾資料" such as discarded government documents and other rare materials purchased through old book markets in China.¹⁸ Some historians have used such sources to study business enterprises in the PRC.¹⁹

Building upon their work, I show how SOEs actually worked at the grassroots level in two ways. On one hand, I examine the relationship between the state and SOEs. As social scientists have long noticed, the actual working of SOEs under state socialism was characterized by *vertical* bargaining within bureaucracy.²⁰ The case of Angang shows that the vertical line of control from Beijing was often resisted by local authorities, who tried to assert influence over SOEs through a horizontal line of control from provincial and municipal CCP committees. On the other hand, I explore how workers and engineers negotiated with

16. Link, *Forging Global Fordism*.

17. King, *China-Japan Relations after World War II*.

18. Among others, see Brown, "Finding and Using Grassroots Historical Sources from the Mao Era"; Brown and Johnson, *Maoism at the Grassroots*.

19. Bian, "Redefining the Chinese Revolution"; Cliver, *Red Silk*; Hou, *Building for Oil*; Meyskens, *Mao's Third Front*.

20. Kornai, *Socialist System*, 121–124.

the SOE management, making use of state-sponsored political language. SOEs served as sites of the CCP's propaganda as well as social engineering that aimed at creating new socialist men and women devoted to the mission of industrializing the motherland.²¹ Angang's efforts to educate and mobilize workers and engineers, however, also led to unexpected consequences. For instance, during the Hundred Flowers campaign of 1957, Angang engineers appropriated the political discourse of socialism to criticize local CCP cadres. Through the case of Angang, I show that various organizations, groups, and individuals both within and outside the CCP party-state articulated their own interests and demands by appropriating the official ideological and organizational rules set by the very CCP party-state.

Primary Sources

This transnational history was made possible by primary sources in Chinese, Japanese, English, and Russian. The CCP state archives in Northeast China remain notoriously closed. To get around this problem, I deployed methods of "Sinological garbology" developed by recent PRC historians, which is purchasing historical records from local used book dealers. These dealers also provided dozens of valuable unpublished company and city histories. I also conducted oral history interviews with retired Chinese workers, officials, and engineers.

I make extensive use of *Neibu cankao* (内部参考), a confidential PRC periodical that the Xinhua News Agency produced only for very high-ranking CCP officials. A research library outside China holds the issues of *Neibu cankao* from the 1950s and 1960s.²² My other sources from China include published company and city histories, memoirs, and local newspapers, as well as a limited number of documents from city and provincial archives. I complement my text-based historical narrative with quantitative data. I extracted these data both from published sources and confidential volumes of statistics compiled by Angang and the Anshan city government, which I discovered during my fieldwork. Outside China, I also found valuable sources on the Nationalist regime in archives in Taiwan and the United States.

The archival materials and interviews from Japan and Russia are what really made possible this transnational history. Included among these sources are hundreds of records of interviews that Japanese intelligence officers conducted in the mid- and late 1950s with Japanese

21. Hou, *Building for Oil*, Chapter 5; Meyskens, *Mao's Third Front*, Chapter 4; Perry, *Patrolling the Revolution*; Perry, *Anyuan*.

22. The name of this library has not been named for purposes of anonymity.

who had worked for the CCP in Angang. Following their conquest of Manchuria in 1948, the CCP forced about ten thousand Japanese still remaining in the region to continue to work. After the CCP allowed them to return to Japan in 1953, a Japanese intelligence agency, financially backed by the CIA, conducted interviews with them about their experiences under the CCP. Records of these Japanese intelligence interviews were recently declassified in the Archives of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外務省外交史料館) in Tokyo.²³ I also interviewed engineers' children who spent their childhoods in Anshan under the CCP. Some of them also shared unpublished memoirs written by their fathers.

I used documents written by Soviet diplomats, military officers, and technological experts who played important roles in Angang's partial destruction in 1945 as well as its expansion in the 1950s. I found these documents in various Russian archives, especially the Russian State Archive of Economy (*Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki*) and the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (*Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii*), both in Moscow. To be sure, all of these Chinese and non-Chinese sources have their own particular biases. Through combining these primary sources created from differing perspectives, I try to provide a more balanced account of economic life before, under, and after Maoism.

Chapter Organization

This dissertation is organized chronologically in three parts. Part I, "Remaking Capitalism," explores the origins of state-directed industrialization in Manchuria before the CCP takeover. Chapter 1 focuses on the development of the Anshan Ironworks and the Shōwa Steelworks, as well as the city of Anshan, under the Japanese control until 1945. Chapter 2 discusses how the legacies of the Japanese-period industrialization and urbanization in Anshan were destroyed or preserved, and reorganized under the Soviet occupation and Nationalist rule between 1945 and 1948.

Part II, "Building Socialism," consists of four chapters on the crucial years of 1948 to 1957, including the period of the First Five-Year Plan. In reconstructing and expanding Japanese-built factories in Manchuria, the CCP made use of Japanese and Nationalist human resources, in addition to economic aid from the Soviet Union (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 discusses how Angang and other large-scale SOEs in Manchuria served

23. For this collection of records, see Iitsuka, "Sengo Chūgoku tōhoku chiku niokeru Nihonjin ryūyō gijutsusha no shosō."

as the experimental site of the SOE management system of the PRC. Far from being a monolithic organization, Angang's management was colored by tensions between two different types of cadres, who respectively represented two different lines of control: from the national industrial ministry and from the local CCP organization.

Chapter 5 discusses the planning and construction of the city of Anshan, and shows that the city officials' efforts to remake Anshan into a new socialist industrial city were faced with localized challenges from people, practices, and spaces. Chapter 6 explores the socialist politics of everyday life among workers and engineers of Anshan. The Chinese citizens' variegated participation in the CCP's socialist project took form not only in obedience toward CCP authority but also in appropriation of the official political discourse of the state for the purpose of protecting their own interests.

Part III, "Remaking Socialism," discusses the PRC's self-conscious search for their own version of socialism distinguished from the Soviet model, and its complicated relations with the Stalinist system that they had explicitly learned during the previous period. After the First Five-Year Plan, Mao launched the devastating Great Leap Forward (1958–61). In it he promoted a local campaign of mass-based management in Angang, which he called the "Angang Constitution," as a model of China's own version of socialism. Nevertheless, those institutions and discourses that constituted Chinese socialism had its roots in the period prior to the Great Leap Forward.

Conclusion

This is a study of the origins and development of Maoism at Eurasia's crossroads. For this purpose, I chronicle the history of a single SOE that Chairman Mao himself never set foot in but that nevertheless epitomized the industrial dreams of Mao, his comrades, and his rivals. How exactly this emergence unfolded in time is perhaps best represented in the everyday experiences of Chinese, as well as Japanese and Soviet, people in the factories and mines of Angang.

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