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BOOK REVIEW

Making Mao's Steelworks: Industrial Manchuria and the Transnational Origins of Chinese Socialism

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In recent years, historians have become interested in China's three northeastern provinces Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning. Approaching the region's past from a variety of angles, they have discussed the region's experiences of war, colonialisation, resource extraction, as well as how it became known to contemporaries (Young 1998; Mitter 2000; Duara 2003; Seow 2021; Rogaski 2022). Koji Hirata's *Making Mao's Steelworks: Industrial Manchuria and the Transnational Origins of Chinese Socialism* is a new addition to this field of study. *Making Mao's Steelworks* shows that studying the history of Northeastern China can also shed light on the history of socialism in China. Focusing on the history of the Anshan Iron and Steel Works (鞍山鋼鐵公司), or Angang for short, Hirata highlights that, although China's northeast was a symbol of socialist industrial development during the Mao period, the region's industrial infrastructure was laid by Japanese colonisers and the Nationalist (KMT) government. Therefore, he argues that the relationship between capitalism and socialism was symbiotic.

Making Mao's Steelworks is organised chronologically. Part 1 discusses industrialisation in Manchuria before 1949. Hirata begins by analysing the Japanese Empire's efforts to industrialise the region before 1945 in Chapter 1. Japan's attempt began during the First World War, when the Japanese South Manchuria Railway Company established the predecessors to Angang, the Shinko Company (振興鐵礦有限公司) and the Anshan Ironworks (鞍山制鐵所). The Japanese-led industrialisation gained momentum after the establishment of the Japanese-controlled Manchukuo in 1931. With the puppet state pursuing state-led economic development, the Anshan Ironworks reorganised itself and expanded its size and production capacity. But this came with ethnic segregation and violence. The steelworks privileged its Japanese employees over its Chinese ones and used Chinese prisoners of war as forced labourers. Chapter 2 then examines the history of Northeastern China after the Japanese surrender at the end of the Second World War. Hirata discusses the consequences of both the Soviet occupation of the region in 1945 and industrial programmes of the KMT. The chapter points out that during the war with Japan, the KMT's economic policy learnt from Soviet, German and Japanese economic programmes, developing interventionist economic policies and setting up its own state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Thus, when the war ended, the KMT government reorganised factories that came under Chinese control into SOEs as well. For Hirata, the KMT's postwar economic policies were significant. Through collaborating with remaining Japanese managers and deploying Chinese engineers to Manchuria, the KMT nationalised Anshan's steelworks and reintegrated the region into China's national economy.

Part 2 covers the period between 1948 and 1957. Chapter 3 discussed how the new Communist (CCP) authority in Anshan cooperated with Japanese and KMT experts who remained at Angang. Diverging from previous chapters' focus on state activities, Hirata shifts his attention to the lived experiences of Japanese engineers in this chapter. Utilising both

Chinese and Japanese sources, he vividly illustrates how local authorities cooperated with Japanese residents, as well as how Japanese engineers lived and worked in the first years of the PRC. Although the Communist government established a working relationship with Japanese staff, the situation changed with the outbreak of the Korean War. Non-Communist employees became potential political liabilities, and the government repatriated most Japanese experts back to Japan in 1953. Coming to replace Japanese experts were Soviet advisors, who are the subject of Chapter 4. Hirata reminds readers that Soviet aid played an important role in China's First Five-Year Plan, and much of that went to Northeastern China. For example, in Anshan, investment diverted to Angang allowed it to upgrade and restore its facilities. Soviet aid also came in the form of technology transfer. During the 1950s, Angang received many Soviet advisors while also sending trainees to the Soviet Union to receive technical training. Based on these developments, Hirata argues that Soviet support made China's economy more independent—Angang managed to meet domestic demands in steel and became technologically self-reliant.

Beginning from Chapter 5, Hirata returns to examining Angang's relationship with the state and its experiences within political campaigns. Chapter 5 discusses the operation of Angang and its interaction with Anshan city's government and party committee. Hirata notes that SOEs were subjected to two lines of control, a vertical system that made them responsible to the central government and a horizontal system that connected them with local CCP organisations. Promotion of the one-chief system in SOEs, which would make enterprises responsible only to the central government, met with little success, especially after Gao Gang 高崗 (1905–1954), one of the system's chief advocates, fell from grace. Thus, operations at Angang involved negotiations with both the central authority and with local government. For example, when allocating goods produced, state planning, coordination with local governments, and the enterprise's own effort to find customers all played a role. In Chapter 6, Hirata assesses the effect of the political changes brought by the CCP on Angang's workforce through evaluating how they reinterpreted Maoist discourses to their advantage. Political campaigns outside and inside the steelworks educated employees about the CCP's political programme. But campaigns also created consequences not expected by the authority. During the Hundred Flowers Campaign, engineers at Angang who were affiliated with the KMT before 1949 raised grievances about preferential treatments given to their CCP colleagues and the enterprise's mistrust of them. To make their arguments, these engineers employed political vocabularies, such as class and left-wing patriotism, they learnt from political campaigns. For example, one engineer named Yuan claimed that engineers should not be considered accomplices of reactionaries by citing their own humble social backgrounds and their work toward strengthening China.

Part 3 of the book examines the period from 1957 to 2000. Chapter 7 follows the history of the Angang Constitution, a report by the CCP Anshan City Committee produced in 1960

about how Angang's output increased through mass mobilisation of workers. Tracing the Angang Constitution's trajectory through the Great Leap Forward, the Third Front Movement and the Cultural Revolution, Hirata believed that the Angang Constitution symbolised a new phase of Chinese socialism, categorised by 'an alternative model of socialist industrialisation' that decentralised enterprise management and relocated industrial enterprises away from regions with a high concentration of factories. However, with the beginning of Reform and Opening in 1978, the Angang Constitution gradually faded from public attention. Angang's experience during the period of market reform is examined in Chapter 8. On one hand, the enterprise tried hard to cooperate with Western and Japanese firms and learn about their new technologies. On the other hand, it continued to benefit from its status as an SOE, which gave it access to cheap raw materials and other kinds of benefits. While the enterprise retained its status as an SOE despite the wave of SOE privatisation, restructuring in the 1990s devastated Angang's workers. To resist the layoffs, workers developed many forms of protests, including redeploying political rhetoric they had learnt during the Maoist period.

Making Mao's Steelworks is a welcome addition to a number of recent studies that make Chinese industrial enterprises and lives in these worksites their focus (Hou 2018; Meyskens 2020). Hirata's ability to employ Japanese and Russian sources alongside Chinese and English ones allows the book to capture new themes and perspectives, as is the case in Chapter 3, where he uses Japanese sources to offer a detailed account of the lives of Japanese engineers who stayed in Angang after 1948. Another notable feature of *Making Mao's Steelworks* is Hirata's attempt to form dialogues with studies of industrial development outside China. The book's discussion of Angang history and the wider history of China's socialist industrialisation is informed by the concept 'late industrialisation', which is used in the book to describe how, from the late nineteenth century onwards, countries in the process of industrialisation, regardless of their ideological position, increasingly used state power to lead economic development (Hirata 2024, 8). As the PRC government also directed the country's industrialisation, Hirata believes that China's experience followed practices established, despite the fact that China during the Mao period regarded itself as a socialist state. This view parallels recent studies of industrial history and history of science that emphasise regional, or even global, convergences of developmental models (Links 2020; Seow 2022).

However, the argument that Hirata seeks to make with the history of Angang—the symbiosis between capitalism and socialism—requires more discussion. The view that socialism and capitalism interacted and shaped one another is not a new one. For example, the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1995, 275) argued that the construction of capitalism's 'golden age' after the Second World War owed to shifts in US trade policies made to prevent Communism from spreading to its allies. And recently, Oscar Sanchez-Sibony (2023, 8–9),

a historian of the Soviet Union, argued that the USSR actively participated in both the postwar Bretton Woods system and the development of the neoliberal global economic system after the 1970s. But the fact that real existing socialism interacted with capitalism did not mean that the two are necessarily 'both sides of the same coin' (Hirata 2024, 11). Studies examining the development of statistics and agricultural science in China during the Mao period have also argued convincingly that the Chinese approach to these matters was shaped by the particular historical context of the Mao period and Maoist politics (Schmalzer 2016, 4; Ghosh 2020, 16–7).

Making Mao's Steelworks could also benefit from the inclusion of more discussion of the long-term influences of Japanese and KMT industrialisation in Northeastern China on how Angang operated under the PRC. The book appears to be treating socialism and capitalism as characteristics of different governments, rather than two different social systems—Japan, the colonial state of Manchukuo, as well as KMT China were, in the most general sense, capitalist, while the PRC, particularly in the Mao period, was socialist. However, given that most of the book is dedicated to examining Angang's history under the PRC, the direct identification of socialism and capitalism with states may make how Angang's development showcased the interactions between the two systems difficult to discern. *Making Mao's Steelworks* notes interactions between socialism and capitalism on these occasions: imitation of Soviet Five-Year Plans by Japanese firms in Manchukuo in Chapter 1; the KMT plan to nationalise industrial assets in the Northeast in Chapter 2; the Communist authority's decision to retain Japanese and KMT engineers who remained at Angang after Communist forces took over Anshan in 1948 in Chapter 3; and Angang's outreach to Western and Japanese firms after market reforms during the 1980s in Chapter 8. However, the impact of state-led industrialisation under Manchukuo and the KMT, and of the continued presence of KMT and Japanese engineers after 1948, appeared to have disappeared from Angang after the early 1950s. As Hirata also notes in chapters 4, 5 and 6, Japanese engineers were expatriated back to Japan after the Korean War and replaced by Soviet advisors, while political campaigns made socialist ideas present in the daily lives of Angang's employees. The operation of Angang after 1949 also revolved around the planned economy and consisted of bargaining with central and local government authorities. Both phenomena could suggest that, contrary to the argument of *Making Mao's Steelworks*, the PRC made Angang distinctively socialist. Furthermore, interactions with capitalist firms in the 1980s ultimately did not save Angang from economic difficulties that led to the traumatic mass layoffs in the 1990s. Thus, although *Making Mao's Steelworks* convincingly shows that the CCP's industrialisation efforts built upon infrastructures set up by the Japanese and the KMT, it could have done more to examine Japanese and KMT influences on policies other than state-led industrialisation. For example, the monograph could benefit from also examining the ways that Angang's history before 1949 shaped the company's work culture, or how

engagement with capitalist firms after Reform and Opening affected the enterprise's management.

Nonetheless, by offering a comprehensive history of Angang, *Making Mao's Steelworks* is a valuable addition to the scholarship on PRC history. Employing Chinese, English, Japanese and Russian sources, Koji Hirata uses the history of the Angang to illustrate 'the messy history of Chinese socialism', and to remind researchers of the extent to which state-led industrial development shaped China's historical trajectory.

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