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Covell F. Meyskens. *Mao's Third Front: The Militarization of Cold War China.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9781108489553 (hardback, \$39.99).

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In this groundbreaking work, Covell Meyskens makes two crucial interventions into the study of the People's Republic of China. First, he provides an in-depth history of the Third Front, a massive and secretive campaign that was initiated in 1964. Second, he invites readers to reconsider Maoist-era economic policies, which are typically viewed through the lens of domestic politics, through a Cold War perspective, thus complicating and enhancing our understanding of these years. This book is essential reading for scholars of modern China as well as anyone who is concerned with international politics during the Cold War era.

Driven by fears of invasion by the United States and the Soviet Union, Mao Zedong and other leaders of the Chinese Communist Party demanded the development of industry in China's vast interior: the Third Front. From its inception in 1964 to its quiet death in the mid-1970s, the Third Front was the centerpiece of China's economic planning. The Communist Party mobilized hundreds of thousands of workers to create the Third Front, but because of security concerns this campaign was little known even as it transformed China's economy. The secretive nature of the Third Front has profoundly affected the historical record. As Meyskens notes, scholars have known about the Third Front for over thirty years thanks to the pioneering work of Barry Naughton.¹ But Naughton's scholarship, while important, did not bring the Third Front into the broader narrative on Maoist China: the campaigns go entirely unmentioned in the popular textbooks assigned in college campuses.² After the publication of *Mao's Third Front*, scholars can fully engage the Third Front as well as the international dimensions of Maoist economic development.

If the secrecy surrounding the Third Front led to its initial absence from the historical record, the difficulty of studying this secretive campaign ensured it remained little-known for decades. Meyskens is refreshingly upfront about the problems he encountered in accessing archives, as well as the strategies he used to placate suspicious archivists. As a result, the book is impeccably sourced with documents from the Hubei and Sichuan provincial archives, as well as the Beijing and Shanghai municipal archives. These archival sources are complemented by published collections, memoirs, factory gazetteers, and oral histories collected by the author. Meyskens uses these diverse sources to bring the Third Front to life for readers, always sure

¹ Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: Defense Industrialization in the Chinese Interior," *China Quarterly* 115 (1988).

² As Meyskens notes (2), textbooks that do not mention the Third Front are among the most influential English language surveys of modern China: Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1999); Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012); and Andrew G. Walder, *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015). This is not to say, however, that the Third Front is entirely unknown. See, for example, Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 308-309, and Lorenz M. Luthi, "The Vietnam War and China's Third-Line Defense Planning before the Cultural Revolution, 1964-1966," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10:1 (2008): 26-51.

to emphasize how international and diplomatic concerns drove the creation and path of Third Front projects deep in the interior of the People's Republic. This book is thus far more than the addition of an important chapter to the narrative of Maoist China, but is rather a consideration of how Chinese history reads differently when accounting for this attempt to ease Cold War fears. In the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward famine, the People's Republic was weak and isolated. Fears of invasion, stoked by the Gulf of Tonkin incident, convinced Mao that the concentration of industry along the coast left the country far too vulnerable. Viewing the entire domestic map as a potential battlefield, Mao pushed for the buildup of military and industrial enterprises in secure locations. Mao envisioned the Third Front as a vast transformation that would fundamentally alter the economy of the People's Republic. Even those who took part in the Third Front were to be re-engineered into perfect Maoist workers, undergoing great hardships so that the Helmsman could sleep soundly, knowing the country was secure. But things did not go quite as Mao planned.

The book's first chapter details the origins of the Third Front, emphasizing the connections between domestic and international concerns. On the home front, the Great Leap Forward had left party leaders wary of grand campaigns, especially those that pulled farmers away from their fields. Preparing for the Third Five Year Plan, party leaders planned to focus on agriculture, not military production. But with border clashes with the USSR and India, continued raids from Taiwan, and the buildup of American firepower in Vietnam, Mao was able to push his comrades into launching the Third Front. "Mao's lieutenants," Meyskens notes, "fell in line with his new industrial policy for China," even as some feared "that the Third Front might cause the problems of the Great Leap to return" (43). Using collections of party documents, Meyskens deftly brings readers into the debates over economic planning. During these meetings, Communist leaders gingerly avoided mention of the Great Leap famine while simultaneously attempting to ward off another Party-induced disaster. With Mao still accepted as a military genius, his views carried the day. Significantly, the Third Front embraced a militaristic model of production, calling for "wars of annihilation" (69) to quickly develop industry from nearly nothing.

In the book's second chapter, Meyskens shifts from high ranking party leaders to the rank and file, the so-called "good people" (80) who were to be mobilized to build Mao's Third Front. Starting in the late summer of 1964, recruiters first insisted that Third Front workers meet high physical and ideological standards, before lowering those expectations when confronted with a lack of skilled workers. Drawing on documents from the Shanghai and Chongqing city archives, Meyskens demonstrates that recruiters attempted to impress on urban residents their responsibility to help build the underdeveloped interior before the arrival of the imperialists. But these archival sources also reveal that urban leaders pushed back against moving resources out of their cities. Meyskens's interviewees, meanwhile, had a wide variety of responses to Third Front recruitment. Some feared leaving for parts unknown, while others took great pride in traveling many miles to do their part to defend China from imperialist aggression.

These recruits joined a program of economic development that drew heavily on Maoist military strategy. As Meyskens explains in the book's third chapter, both Mao's military thinking and China's Cold War concerns affected the course of the Third Front. Echoing the party's initial rise to power during the Red Army days, recruits were expected to be fully self-reliant. And they would need to work quickly, building the Third Front before the United States or the Soviet Union could invade. The wartime pace of production was deadly, producing no shortage of martyrs. This was especially true on the Chengdu-Kunming Railroad, where two workers died for every kilometer of track laid; things turned particularly grim during the Cultural Revolution, when factions of railway workers battled each other with real weapons. The military thinking underlining the Third Front also fast-tracked ambitious water control projects. While he includes a fascinating account of the governor of Hubei, Zhang Tixue, attempting to convince Mao to build the Three Gorges Dam, Meyskens is mostly focused on the also controversial Gezhouba Dam. As he argues, while Premier Zhou Enlai is usually seen as a rare voice of reason in the dam's hurried construction, he is personally to blame for many of the dam's problems. Zhang Tixue, after all, "did not have the authority to start the Gezhouba Dam project. He had to gain Zhou's approval" (158).

Chapter Four, a deep dive into daily life in the Panzhihua industrial complex, brings the actual experiences of Third Front workers into sharp relief. Combining documentary evidence and interviews with Panzhihua veterans, Meyskens details diets, work patterns, family life, and cultural activities. The workers of Panzhihua, a massive mining and steel production center, lived in canvas tents and slept on hard beds. Once again he stresses the diversity of experiences. Some were thrilled to sacrifice for the good of the People's Republic; others hated every minute of it and longed to return to city life. There was,

however, a limit to the diversity of opinions: everyone was fantastically bored. And even as Meyskens brings the grassroots experiences of Third Front workers to life, he is careful to note how these experiences were fundamentally informed by Cold War concerns. Despite the hardships and martyrs created in Panzhihua, the national media never mentioned these workers, let alone their sacrifices.

The book's final chapter documents the end of the Third Front and evaluates its impact on the course of Chinese history. Meyskens connects domestic developments with broader international concerns, arguing that many of the problems inherent in Third Front production were the direct results of Cold War fears. Working in secret to quickly construct factories from scratch in remote and inaccessible locations, Chinese planners faced an impossible task. It is little wonder that over half of the Third Front enterprises ended in failure. While not ignoring the Third Front's many problems, Meyskens notes that if not for Mao's Cold War paranoia, the current economic imbalance between coastal and interior China would have been even more problematic. The only other proposed alternative to the Third Front, the Third Five Year Plan, largely focused on coastal development: "If the Party had maintained this initial policy platform, China's seaboard would have likely become more developed, but the Chinese interior would have probably fallen economically further behind" (201).

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With President Richard Nixon's arrival in Beijing in 1972, the international insecurity that had fueled the Third Front's growth quickly dissipated. "Paramount leader" Deng Xiaoping shifted the Chinese economy towards consumer goods, shutting down many Third Front projects. In the intervening years, the secret project has largely faded from the historical record. This meticulously sourced and lucidly written study powerfully restores the Third Front back into the record of Maoist China. But it also challenges those studying these years to consider how international relations informed China's domestic politics.

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