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Title:

The Rationality of the Ideology: The Third Front Danwei and the Militarized Logic of Chinese Modernity in the Cold War

Keywords:

Danwei, The Third Front, Modernity, Militarization, the Cold War

Introduction:

This research examines how China's Third Front during the Cold War catalyzed its modernization within the broader context of globalization. Moving beyond traditional accounts centered on military and economic history, it adopts a micro-level perspective, using a combination of archival research and ethnographic interviews. This approach elucidates how the Danwei charted a viable path to modernization, balancing the legitimacy of domestic revolutionary efforts with the exigencies of the international Cold War environment. The research seeks to deconstruct conventional Cold War narratives of political and ideological dichotomy and to investigate the integration of communist practices into the evolving landscape of modern nation-states during this period.

Research Question:

How did the Third Front facilitate China's Modernization in the Context of Cold War-era Rivalries Among Modern Nation-States?

Literature Review:

The Third Front Scholarship Review: Covell Meyskens [Representative of Strategically Successful stance], Barry Naughton, Luthi Lorenz [Representatives of Economically Failed stance]

The Danwei (Cold War Industrialization) Scholarship Review: Andrew Walder, Chris Bramall, Chen Chao, Li Hua-Yu, Sigrid Schmalzer, Deborah Kaple

Research Significance (Gaps):

This research acknowledges that previous academic research on the Third Front often (partially) lacked a micro-perspective and a bottom-up analytical framework. Merely emphasizing the ideological narratives of the state's upper echelons or examining how political power shapes collective identity does not sufficiently explain how the Third Front contributed to China's modernization efforts during the Cold War. Consequently, this research adopts a New Cold War historiographical approach, establishing a cyclical analysis that connects the state to the individual and vice versa, thereby elucidating how individual actors influence the broader Cold War narrative.

This research concurs with prior discussions regarding the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) promotion of socialist industrialization and ideological cultivation. However, within the Cold War context—where domestic social reforms were influenced by international strategic considerations—the DPP must be understood in light of global geopolitical competition. This research endeavors to deconstruct the isolationist tendencies of socialism and explore how socialism can incorporate specific elements of capitalism to advance China's modernization agenda.

Methodologies:

Archival Analysis

)For the Third Front: Archives from Sichuan Provincial Archives, Guizhou Provincial Archives, Yunnan Provincial Archives, Shanghai Municipal Archives

)For the micro individuals' policy influence: Memoirs from The Maoist Legacy Database --University of Freiburg, The Chinese Foreign Policy Database --Wilson Center Digital Archive, The Database of Chinese Political Campaigns

Ethnographic interviews: Interview additional firsthand accounts from individuals who experienced or are descendants of the Third Front in the western provinces of mainland China to supplement or corroborate archive evidence.

Argument:

Danwei's "autonomous and inefficient" operation and its privileged status on the "Third Front" exemplify a strategic compromise China adopted to balance domestic legitimacy with Cold War strategic imperatives. This compromise enables China to actively engage in its development as a

modern nation-state under Cold War Rivalry.

Contribution to the Conference Theme:

An innovative perspective: The research emphasizes the dwindling reliance on grand geopolitical narratives and shifts towards an understanding of how this global conflict highlighted its influence on individuals' daily lives, social relations, and local identities from a microcosmic viewpoint. This paradigm shift redefines the impact of the Cold War. The research investigates the "danwei," a microsocial unit within the third front, analyzing how communist strategies were employed to shape mass identity during the Cold War. Furthermore, it addresses the existing gap concerning the micro-perspective's role in augmenting the national narrative within the framework of new Cold War history. By examining social interactions and the role of privileged classes within the danwei, the research demonstrates that micro-level analysis can contribute to the development of international Cold War discourse, thereby laying the groundwork for future comparative investigations.

An Innovative Idea: This research eschews a simplistic view of the Cold War as merely a manifestation of global isolationism stemming from the binary opposition of two ideologies. Instead, it reconceptualizes the Cold War as a global competition among contemporary nation-states. The research elucidates how China, operating the Third Front, employed capitalist strategies to pursue modernization while preserving its communist foundations. This approach challenges the conventional scholarly narrative that socialism was impeded by capitalism and signifies a distinctive endeavor by the Chinese Communist Party to integrate into the global ideological framework.

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