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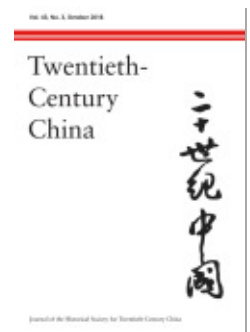
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*Building for Oil: Daqing and the Formation of the Chinese  
Socialist State* by Hou Li (review)

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(Review)

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HOU LI. *Building for Oil: Daqing and the Formation of the Chinese Socialist State*. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018. 272 pp. \$39.95 (cloth).

Set in China's Northeast, Hou Li's *Building for Oil* traces the history of the Daqing (大庆) Oilfield in Heilongjiang Province. The book follows Daqing from its origins as an oil campaign in 1960, to its elevation as a national model in 1963–1964, to its contributions to China's reform and opening up. Daqing Oilfield, Hou argues, “substantially changed the development path of modern China,” producing over 50% of China's crude oil and providing its largest single source of revenue (26–27). Daqing demonstrates how China's industrial drive persisted at the height of the Mao-era political campaigns, eventually paving the way for the agricultural revolution in the 1980s. Though we know of the Daqing model from the *People's Daily* in 1964—“In industry, learn from Daqing; in agriculture, learn from Dazhai”—Hou Li reveals the Daqing model with an urban planner's sensitivity to design and resources and an historian's eye for detail and analysis. The Daqing model, she suggests, adapted urban construction for a rural context, it balanced industry and agriculture, and it relied both on individual self-sacrifice and a flexible labor force that blurred the boundaries between workers and peasants.

*Building for Oil* is a history in three keys. On one level it is a history of the institutions and professions that were devoted to the work of construction and resource extraction. Sections of each chapter outline bureaucratic organization from the center to the locality. At this same level the book details the lives and careers of engineers, geologists, architects, and planners; Hou points out that most such professionals chose to stay behind on the mainland after 1949, a story of legacy and continuity that places Daqing within the twentieth century. On another level *Building for Oil* contributes to the literature on China's search for modernity; it is an economic history of industrialization, of Five Year Plans, and of China's eventual independence in oil production. Finally, the book is a personal history centered on the life of Zha Binhua (查滨华 1941–), a young woman who arrived at Daqing Oilfield in 1962 as a fresh graduate in urban planning from Shanghai's Tongji University.

Hou Li interweaves these three levels across six chapters and an epilogue. Chapter 1 locates the history of oil from the late nineteenth-century Self-strengthening movement up to the beginning of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In chapter 2, Hou Li introduces Zha Binhua, combining her journey to the oilfields with the national-level drive to mobilize human, material, and financial resources to the same end, extending the metaphor of the “battlefield” to the campaign for oil. Chapter 3 examines construction as an industry in the wider context of the planned economy, framing the building of an oil base city as a delicate negotiation between production and consumption, national and local, and industry and agriculture. If chapter 3 is about the economics of construction, chapter 4 is about the politics of construction, describing how Daqing became a national model—especially for Third Front cities—and how Zha Binhua found herself in a political role, representing the “Daqing spirit” at the 1966 Fourth Annual Conference of the Architectural Society of China in Yan'an. Chapter 5 is a social history of how life was experienced in Daqing, organized around types: Iron Men, Iron Girls, dependents, and intellectuals. It also details how the Cultural Revolution disrupted oil production, a

problem quickly rectified when Daqing became one of the first places where the military restored order. In chapter 6 and the epilogue, Zha Binhua and her husband are liberated from the May Seventh cadre school and are transferred to Langfang in Hebei Province, later continuing their careers as an architect and a planner in the Nanjing City Planning Bureau. The final two decades of their working lives coincide with Daqing's reform-era transformation from an oil district to a municipality, bringing to an end China's experiment of industrialization without urbanization.

*Building for Oil's* richly textured narrative makes numerous contributions. Its oral history of Zha Binhua preserves the memories of an individual who was at once ordinary (59% of Daqing's workers were young intellectuals, and female staff were better represented in the oil industry than in others) and extraordinary (a voice for Daqing on the national level). Hou Li uses Zha's story to illustrate the lives of many others, and Zha's experience of politics, from political study to the Four Cleanups to the Cultural Revolution illuminates what Gail Hershatter called "campaign time."<sup>1</sup> In addition, Hou Li uses the example of construction and planning in Daqing as a case study in building an ideal communist society, its model villages and settlements the built environment of socialist utopia.

The book further contributes to our understanding of the militarization of society in the PRC, with former People's Liberation Army men filling the roles of leadership—Yu Qiuli (余秋里 1914–1999) as the head of the Ministry of Petroleum and then as vice-director of the State Planning Commission—as well as the positions of ordinary workers. Throughout the book, the language of the drive for oil is framed as a battlefield campaign. *Building for Oil* also offers an alternative way of thinking about China's modernization, with the Daqing model providing a template for buildings and settlement patterns, other cities, and whole enterprises. In Daqing, Hou Li suggests, is the origin of China's contemporary urban policy.

Daqing and its history, as Hou Li herself writes, is a "microcosm of PRC history" (4). As such, the narrative in *Building for Oil* would benefit from greater integration with history and China studies: its analysis of expertise intersects with sociological work on the professions in general and engineering in particular, its treatment of women like Zha—as well as the female dependents who provided both agricultural and caring work—speaks to the literature on gender as well as on labor, and its nuanced oral history builds on recent framings of "Maoism at the grassroots."<sup>2</sup> As history, the text could better foreground sources like written memoirs and present-day interviews. The reader will be curious about the central role of memories in the study and also about Zha's positionality as a representative, which is underscored by the prominent photographic evidence, some produced by Daqing's Revolutionary Committee. These suggestions notwithstanding, *Building for Oil* is a provocative and important book, essential reading for students and historians of twentieth-century China, of economic and industrial development, and of models and their politics in the socialist era and beyond.

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## NOTES

1 Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

2 Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

ISABELLA JACKSON. *Shaping Modern Shanghai: Colonialism in China's Global City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 274 pp. \$99.99 (cloth).

*Shaping Modern Shanghai: Colonialism in China's Global City* offers a detailed study of the major colonial institution in one of the most important cities in Republican China: the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC), which governed the International Settlement in Shanghai from the mid-1840s until the relinquishment of the settlement in May 1943. As a treaty port open to foreign residents and companies, Shanghai became not only a major industrial and financial hub in China but also a center for political and cultural life, playing a significant role in the birth of Chinese nationalism. At a time of economic development and political and social unrest (the May Thirtieth movement of 1925, recurrent strikes and boycotts, the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945), the SMC's primary mission was to maintain a stable environment that was conducive to business. As the population of the International Settlement grew from 100,000 in 1880 to 1,000,000 in 1930, the SMC expanded its areas of intervention and increasingly shaped everyday life in the International Settlement.

Jackson's main argument is that the SMC exemplified the specifically transnational nature of colonialism in China. It was transnational in the sense that it involved nonstate actors who cooperated on the ground beyond national interests. The SMC was a transnational institution both politically and socially. Politically, it remained distant from imperial oversight. In contrast to the French Municipal Council that ruled the French Concession, the SMC was not subject to consular authority. The SMC, financially self-sufficient and able to maintain its own defense force, was proud of its political autonomy. In sum, the SMC acted much like the government of an independent city-state through its policy of territorial expansion and its governmental powers of taxing and policing the International Settlement. Socially, the SMC was a transnational body of people, including 25 different nationalities. Transnationalism, however, did not mean equality, as the SMC maintained a strict racial hierarchy between foreigners and Chinese, and even among foreigners (Russians, Sikhs). Transnational colonialism, Jackson argues, does not bear the positive assumption of cosmopolitanism. Although Chinese representation on the SMC increased after 1927, the British continued to dominate.

Observing the peculiar neglect of the SMC in the history of colonialism in China, Jackson helps to fill this historiographical void by drawing on "the vast holdings of the Shanghai municipal archives" (and secondarily, those of the Foreign Office in Britain) and putting forward "the concept of transnational colonialism to explain the nature of colonialism in China" (2). This concept, Jackson argues, is not only more appropriate to the Shanghai case but is further applicable to other colonial contexts. Contributing to the