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BOOK REVIEW

China's Cold War Science Diplomacy

Gordon Barrett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 300 pp. £75.00 (hbk). ISBN 9781108844574

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One of the key fissures in the escalating decoupling between China and the outside world is science. US President Joe Biden's administration has imposed an ever-escalating series of restrictions on the transfer of US technology and know-how to the country, while the previous Trump administration launched a "China Initiative" intended to root out alleged spies in US industry and academia suspected of leaking scientific knowledge to China. US allies from Japan to the Netherlands to the European Union have curtailed earlier sharing of technology and knowledge.

This is a stark change: as Gordon Barrett's book reveals, since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the country has placed science at the heart of many of its diplomatic initiatives – with much success. Barrett's book provides an important intervention in our understanding of the history of the relationship between Chinese science and the outside world, showing that PRC scientists were actively engaged in scientific cooperation and diplomacy beyond the country's borders long before 1971, when the country began a rapprochement with the US. Moreover, this engagement was not only with the socialist world, but also with capitalist societies and the Third World. The book utilizes the concept of "science diplomacy" to show that this engagement not only served to maintain flows of knowledge between China and the outside, but also served the Chinese state's broader foreign policy objectives: recognition, influence, and resistance of international orders dominated by Beijing's enemies – first, the US and, then, too, the Soviet Union.

Barrett's narrative begins in the years immediately prior to the establishment of the PRC (chapter one) and stretches until the 1970s. The coverage of the late 1940s is illuminating and shows that the Chinese Communist Party's science diplomacy ambitions began even before they had won the Chinese Civil War and thus that Chinese actors were active participants in the formation of a post-war structure of international science. The author pays close attention to "the strategies and structures that supported China's scientific outreach" (p. 3), and effectively mines Chinese archival sources to intricately lay out the role that science and scientists played in PRC diplomacy; in doing so, his book offers grounded insights into the practice of PRC diplomacy more broadly.

The book's early chapters reveal the prominent role that PRC scientists played in several international and transnational scientific networks. Barrett documents Chinese influence in the World Federation of Scientific Workers (chapter one), a broadly leftist organization with both political and scientific aspirations previously studied largely from a European perspective, and in the Pugwash conferences (chapter two), a group primarily known for engagement between capitalist states and the Soviet Union but that also, Barrett shows, acted as a venue for continued Chinese transnational engagement with American scientists.

The author then turns to the PRC's attempts to place Beijing figuratively and literally at the centre of scientific networks with the Third World via, among other initiatives, the establishment of a "Peking Centre" that would act as an Asian regional hub for the World Federation of Scientific

Workers (chapter three) and two scientific colloquiums held in Beijing in 1964 and 1966 that sought primarily to attract scientists from Asia, Oceania, Africa and Latin America (chapter four). In a fifth and final chapter that bridges the radical period in Chinese (science) diplomacy and the rapprochement era of the 1970s, Barrett analyses PRC engagement with five British socialist scientists via visits to China that took place between the 1950s and 1970s, with thoughtful reflections on how scientists' professional identities made them particularly useful to the PRC state as "foreign friends" that spoke with authority about what they witnessed while in China, connecting these scientists with broader studies of China's people's diplomacy during this period by Anne-Marie Brady and Julia Lovell, among others.

Barrett successfully demonstrates that science really mattered in Chinese diplomacy. Numerous, well-documented examples are provided of the state taking a close interest in even seemingly minor developments, such as the *People's Daily*'s coverage of the barring of a pro-Beijing, British socialist scientist from the council of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in the very months when the Communists were marching to victory in the Chinese Civil War (pp. 176–178). The book also makes an important contribution to connecting the history of Chinese science with the global history of science, as called for by, among others Fa-ti Fan. Barrett looks closely at Chinese involvement in institutions that had a global scope but have typically been studied from a European or Cold War-superpower perspective. The book reveals how the World Federation of Scientific Workers featured Chinese membership at its highest level (p. 33) and was initially reliant on Chinese funding (p. 41), to give just one example.

The book is explicitly part of the rapidly growing field of science diplomacy. That field has usefully shown how international and transnational scientific interactions are often an important form of diplomacy. Barrett's work is a valuable and subtle contribution to the field. He rejects a binary between politics and scientific exchange. Time and again, Barrett shows that Chinese and non-Chinese scientists were drawn towards one another in part because of an interest in academic cooperation, but also simultaneously due to political motivations, whether these were the socialist political convictions of British scientists (chapter five) or the practical need of Chinese scientists to play their role of serving the PRC party-state. Barrett argues that the scientists he examines held "multiple roles [and] identities" (p. 4), and he effectively shows how the PRC's leading scientists were often as adroit as political actors as they were influential as scientists. In Barrett's narrative, scientists like Zhu Kezhen, Li Siguang and Zhou Peiyuan are primarily depicted as political actors – emissaries of the PRC state – rather than as active, practising scientists (and indeed at that late stage of their career, perhaps they were). Nonetheless, Barrett is also convincing when he states that, even if some of the international conferences meetings he discusses "were simply about propaganda and elite-level networking," they nonetheless provided genuine opportunities for scientific interactions such as academic lectures on the science diplomats' research specialisms (p. 53). That is to say, the science of science diplomacy mattered.

China's Cold War Science Diplomacy will be of interest both to scholars of China's foreign relations and to historians of science. Barrett's focus on science diplomacy offers a novel perspective on PRC foreign relations but also insights into Beijing's strategy and tactics for engagement with the outside in this period. Science diplomacy as a field has attracted the attention of historians, scholars of international relations and practitioners of diplomacy, but *China's Cold War Science Diplomacy* is one of the first book-length historical studies to be explicitly framed around the concept, and the introduction directly grapples with the term and its applicability to this case. In a field in which much time has been spent suggesting and critiquing definitions, Barrett's book is a welcome example of the value of a detailed, archival case study that helps to show the value of the category of science diplomacy for historians.