Nixon instead of Chiang after the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué, Mao shows how Goldwater continued to support an independent Taiwan after Nixon’s presidency and into the 1990s.

Mao supports her argument using government documents, archival materials, and a reasonable number of secondary texts. Her archival research in the papers of Knowland, Taft, Goldwater, and Kohlberg is prominently displayed throughout the book as she recounts the behind-the-scenes proceedings of the Asia First cohort. In the case of the John Birch Society, Mao artfully connects Welch’s writings, Kohlberg’s papers, and the society’s official documents and publicity materials into one coherent telling of the self-styled “foreign policy watchdog organization” (p. 133). In addition, although Mao’s narrative suggests that the John Birch Society did not represent the entire conservative Asia First movement, the organization did highlight and clarify the rationale behind Asia First logic and managed to integrate it into a conservative internationalist platform.

In sum, Mao’s book offers a unique look at the perspectives and power of a conservative faction of politicians and citizen activists determined to halt the wave of Communism that was certain to swell after the PRC victory in mainland China. Asia First concerned more than a swiveling of the U.S. Cold War spotlight from Europe to the Far East; it was a driving force behind the development of conservative foreign policy in the post-World War II era. Indeed, its influence on contemporary global politics can still be seen in myriad instances of Pacific-oriented U.S. diplomacy. Moreover, Mao’s account of Asia First politics demonstrates how a traditionally isolationist faction of politicians came to view the order of the world and the U.S. position in that order. For the present-day reader trying to make sense of developments in the South China Sea, the relationship between the United States and Taiwan, and U.S. foreign policy in the Pacific generally, Mao’s Asia First is an informative primer.


Reviewed by Stephen V. Bittner, Sonoma State University

In recent scholarship, Soviet society during the long reign (1964–1982) of Leonid Brezhnev has been transformed into something that previous generations of Sovietologists could scarcely have imagined—a happening place. Decidedly postrevolutionary in outlook, acquisitive at its core, riven with corruption and unofficial economies that provided everything from narcotics to rock-and-roll records, yet suffused with the familiar iconography, exhortations, and eschatology of Marxism-Leninism, Soviet society under Brezhnev defies easy categorization. That “stagnation” is a mostly inadequate description of its complexity is the central premise that Dina Fainberg and
Artemy M. Kalinovsky put forth in their introduction to the anthology *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: Ideology and Exchange.*

Even though Fainberg and Kalinovsky claim that the idea of a Brezhnev-era stagnation is "by now well-established" (p. vii), few historians are likely to bicker with their revisionism. They show that despite a few references to "stagnation"—particularly on the economic front—in private circles during the Brezhnev years, the label did not come into wide use until after Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1985. Gorbachev's aides put forth this derisive label mainly to underscore the need for reform. As Fainberg and Kalinovsky note, the Soviet Union was never as conservative, cynical, corrupt, and devoid of faith as the stagnation paradigm suggests. Nor was it entirely progressive, idealistic, law-abiding, and full of confidence in the Communist future. Instead, it was all these things and more. In short, contrary to the editors' stated intention, stagnation is less a hypothesis to be proven or disproven by historical research, than a discourse that informed the ways contemporaries understood their surroundings. In this respect, it bears some resemblance to Yanni Kotsonis's treatment of "backwardness" in the late Tsarist countryside.

Containing ten essays that range in focus from Soviet journalism (Simon Huxtable) and biomedical research (Anna Geltzer) to film (Andrey Scherbenok) and international music exchanges (Simo Mikkonen), *Reconsidering Stagnation* succeeds above all in showing how wide the current scholarly gaze is on the Brezhnev period. Although many of the essays would have benefited from further polish, the anthology contains a few gems. One is Juliane Fürst's oral-historical study of the Soviet hippie *sistema*, which first developed among hippies in central Moscow and then grew into a network of contacts, crash pads, and occasional summer camps that linked hippies across the Soviet Union. Fürst complicates the question of whether the hippie *sistema* proves or disproves stagnation by arguing that it does both. Hippies reacted to the "perception of *zastoi* [stagnation]... of 'being stuck in the status quo' and a certain ennui" (p. 139), yet their very existence suggests that this stagnation was far from all-encompassing. Hippies were themselves proof that Soviet society contained a "considerable amount of energy and creative force, which produced fashion, art, music, and literature... creating an increasingly parallel world" (p. 138).

Also significant is Lewis Siegelbaum's study of a rural exodus in the 1960s and beyond that was disproportionately female. Whereas women were in the clear majority in the Soviet countryside in the years following the Second World War, a "great reversal" (p. 47) had occurred by the late 1980s, when the countryside contained only 886 women for every 1,000 men. Like Fürst, Siegelbaum both affirms and challenges perceptions that the Brezhnev period was characterized above all by stagnation. On the one hand, such high mobility belies the view that Brezhnev's developed socialism was static in comparison with the great migrations of the final Tsarist and Stalinist decades. Women were drawn to the city by the trappings of the consumer economy, by educational opportunities, and by the perception that it offered gender emancipation. On the other hand, women were pushed out of the village by fears that it had...
become a dead end of deprivation and alcoholism. Paradoxically, the latter fear likely became more pronounced as the village became more male in composition. To young, ambitious women, few places seemed more stagnant during the Brezhnev years than the Soviet countryside.

Finally, Natalya Chernyshova contributes a fascinating study of Soviet shopping. Ranging from the culture of the queue, to letters of complaint, to elaborate, semi-official networks for bringing foreign goods across the Soviet frontier, Chernyshova depicts a Soviet retail economy that is far more flexible and participatory than previous accounts acknowledge. By the early 1980s, according to Chernyshova, the ability to buy what one wanted correlated strongly with personal satisfaction and fulfillment. Although Chernyshova’s emphasis on the dynamism of the retail economy belies the idea of stagnation, her conflation of shopping and happiness suggests no small degree of ideological decay, a central component of stagnation. Thus, like Fürst and Siegelbaum, Chernyshova both challenges and affirms the editors’ central interpretive line in Reconsidering Stagnation.


Reviewed by Thomas W. Simons, Jr., Harvard University

Louis Sell is a retired U.S. Foreign Service Officer whose 27-year career included an extraordinary series of assignments that allowed him to witness the final decades of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. From the prelude of a student visit to Moscow in 1967, to State Department work on the U.S.-Soviet summit of May 1972, to the “dissident beat” at the U.S. embassy in Moscow in the late 1970s, to strategic arms negotiations in Geneva in the early 1980s, to chief of the bilateral relations section of the State Department’s Soviet desk in mid-decade, to chief political reporting officer first in Belgrade and then in Moscow during the final years, up to the collapse of 1991: Sell was present at a dozen key junctures of the waning Cold War. His Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia, also published by Duke (in 2002), harvests his years in the Balkans. Here he draws on his rich Soviet experiences to fashion a judicious and accessible one-volume account of the USSR’s last decades and where U.S.-Soviet relations fit in, both at the time and in history’s rearview mirror.

Yet it is more than a memoir, even if Sell’s own recollections provide one of its threads. They make the story vivid and often poignant. Anyone who has raised American children behind the Iron Curtain will instantly recognize Sell’s three-year-son, in Louisville on a visit, trying to eat a banana without removing the peel, because he had never seen one before (p. 376). But the recollections are only one thread in a multilayered book. The backbone is an engaging, detailed narrative of Soviet developments and U.S.-Soviet relations that draws principally on a highly impressive range of