

Oberlin College
Department of Politics

Politics 313: Seminar: The Transition to Capitalism in China

Spring 2011

Professor Marc Blecher

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Office hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 3:30-4:30;

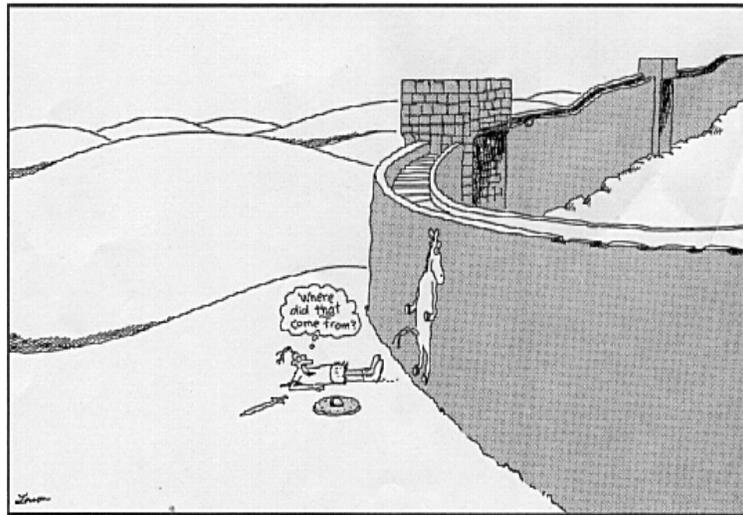
Tuesdays 3:00-4:00. Sign up at

<http://tiny.cc/BlecherOfficeHours>

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Class meets Tuesday,
1:00-2:50, King 339



Circa 300 B.C.: The first barbarian invader reaches the Great Wall of China

We can forgive Larson's hapless equestrian. China has surprised many people — both its own leaders and people as well as foreign observers, including your humble professor — more often than most of them care to remember, and its recent history poses a profound set of puzzles. The Chinese Communist Party and its government, the People's Republic of China, comprise the largest Communist Party-run surviving state in the world, one of only a handful of any size. It is a rather unlikely survivor. Between 1949 and 1976, it presided over perhaps the most tempestuous of the world's state socialisms. Nowhere — not in Eastern Europe, the USSR, Cuba, Vietnam or North Korea — did anything occur like the Great Leap Forward, when the country tried to jump headlong

into communism, or the Cultural Revolution, when some leaders of the socialist state called on the masses of people to rise up against the socialist state's own bureaucracy. Indeed, the Cultural Revolution brought China to the brink of civil war. The radical policies of the Maoist period were extremely innovative and iconoclastic, and they accomplished a great deal; but they also severely undermined the foundations of Chinese state socialism. Yet somehow it survived.

Then in 1979 the Chinese state switched course, pioneering broad-gauged structural reform way ahead of any other state socialist country. Economic forms that were quite inconsistent historically and theoretically with rule by a communist party and its government proliferated, taking mixed "market socialist" forms in the 1980s, the social reaction to which almost overcame the socialist state in the famous 1989 protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square and across the country. Indeed, the comparison with Russia and Eastern Europe was stunning: in China a huge phalanx of furious citizens engaged in massive demonstrations all over the country lasting almost two months. Nothing like this occurred in Russia and Eastern Europe, where gradual political openings were being contemplated and embarked upon. Yet state socialism there would be brought down amidst popular movements that were minuscule in scope and duration compared with the Chinese. But again the People's Republic of China managed to survive, this time by moving more sternly, decisively and successfully against popular demands for reform than any other socialist state did at the time.

Starting in the 1990s, China began the transition to full-fledged capitalism – interestingly and paradoxically, without the massive outburst of protest seen in 1989 after a decade of much more tentative change. What can be called market Leninism – China's combination of repressive politics and free-market economics – has not just lasted a good deal longer than most observers expected, but it seems unexpectedly resilient at least for the foreseeable future. This has defied the confident theories held by western liberals, modernization theorists, and most major western politicians – known as the "Washington Consensus" – that capitalism and markets go hand in hand with democracy (even as the individualism and the rise of a middle class, which are meant to stimulate democracy, have indeed occurred). Moreover, China's market Leninism has not just survived, but has chalked up significant successes. It has produced repeated spurts of economic growth that have often surprised even its own promoters. Market Leninism has also made China a more influential force on the world stage than ever before in its history. Many scholars, policy makers and politicians are even beginning to speak of a "Beijing Consensus" replacing the "Washington Consensus".

Yet, today Chinese market Leninism is also shot through with contradictions. The country's overall quiescence does not necessarily indicate political stability or social peace; on the contrary, protests, strikes, riots and small insurrections have become a daily fact of life. Nor do China's palpable industriousness and economic dynamism necessarily reflect the happy equilibrium of an upward spiral of development. What powers the Chinese economy today? Will the country consolidate market Leninism or break with it? If it makes a break, will the process be smooth and gradual, or rough and sudden? And what would emerge from such a break? Does China hold out the prospect

of a "third way" — a hybrid combining in a new way features of state socialism and capitalism? China is too complex, its present situation too unprecedented, and social science too indeterminate to permit easy or sure answers. But to make educated guesses, we need to analyze the many contradictory economic, social and political forces at play. Some of them are the subject of Politics 313.

During the first half of the seminar, we will read, contemplate, and discuss some of the best, most interesting new scholarship on various specialized topics related to Chinese political economy and political sociology. In the second half we will work together on research papers on a topic of interest to you, which should connect with the question of China's transition to capitalism but need not be related to the particular issues we will have studied. In our final weeks, you will present to the seminar early drafts of your research papers, to be circulated in advance. You will also read classmates' drafts and contribute to discussions that will help all of us learn about the subject matter of the various papers, while also providing suggestions to each author about ways to develop the research paper in progress. Finished seminar papers revised on the basis of class discussion and my comments will be submitted at the end of the semester. I will present some of my own work in progress as well.

We will be making intensive and regular use of Blackboard.

§ To encourage reflective reading, help you retain what you have read, and help me calibrate what we do in class, each week I expect you to write on Blackboard a short response to questions about the works we are confronting that I will have posed in advance. (*N.b.* Read the questions carefully before you start the reading; that will help you read thoughtfully and efficiently, and avoid becoming a slave to the author.) You are also invited to comment there at any time on what others in the class have written. Start a debate! You may also use the blog to raise questions on which you would like help from me or from fellow students.

§ I use the blogs to promote your learning, not to evaluate it. I want you to think and write your blogs freely and creatively, and to take risks. Therefore I do not grade them. But because I view them as crucial to your learning, I do factor heavily into your final grade whether you have simply done them seriously and regularly.

§ Nuts and bolts: During the first part of the semester, when we are reading and discussing books, your blogs are due each Tuesday at 9 AM. This deadline is firm because that's when I start using your blogs to prepare for class. In fact, the blog closes at 9:00 AM, both to enforce this deadline and also because I do not want students making up missed blogs later in the semester; the whole point of the blogs is to do them week-in, week-out, not subsequently in order to meet a requirement. (The blogs are about a continuous process, not end-products.)

§ Between 9:00 AM and class time on class days, prepare by taking a few moments to read what everyone has written. That too will help you grasp the material for the day.

All this preparatory work will help make our discussions more productive. I also expect you to participate regularly in class discussions, which are the lifeblood of a seminar.

I will evaluate your work in Politics 313 according to the following weightings:

Weekly blog comments	25%
Quality (not quantity) of participation in class	25%
Paper	50%

PLEASE TAKE CAREFUL NOTE OF THESE PROPORTIONS. They reflect my conviction that the week-to-week process of participating in the course through reading, thinking and contributing to everyone else's learning in discussion is as important to your learning as the paper you will write. In the past students who assumed that the paper was their only responsibility for the course were surprised at the end of the semester. ☹

Please consult the schematic chronology (below) and, if you are not a student of Chinese, the guide to the rudiments of Chinese pronunciation (below). The latter will help you to discharge your responsibility as advanced students of China to pronounce Chinese words and names properly - a responsibility that major media regularly shirk.

You should keep up with the news from China. There are several possibilities:

§ The best China journalism in major US papers can be found *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*, all available in Mudd or on line. Chingching Ni, a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, is a veteran of Politics 313, which, I like to think, helps account for her penchant for stories about the human costs of China's very rapid development.

§ Official news from China can be found in the *Beijing Review* (a weekly magazine, in Mudd) and *China Daily*. They are not as boring and slanted as they used to be. The *China Daily* is available on line: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/home/>

§ Yahoo provides a reasonably comprehensive source of Western wire-service reports at: <http://asia.news.yahoo.com/china.html>

§ So does the *Financial Times*: <feed://www.ft.com/rss/world/asiapacific/china>

§ The Chinese Embassy to the US web site contains official government news releases and other basic information): <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/>

Newspapers and cyberspace can provide timely information; but information is not knowledge. For that, we still need analyses contained in books. Each year Americans spend five times as much on dog food as on college books. Politics 313 is doing its part to help us get priorities right. The following books are available for purchase at the Oberlin Bookstore:

Marc Blecher, *China Against the Tides*, third edition

Deborah Davis and Wang Feng, eds., *Creating Wealth and Poverty in Postsocialist China*

Elizabeth Economy, *The River Runs Black*

Ching-kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*

Elizabeth J Perry and Mark Selden, eds., *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance* (3rd edition [Nb. Do not get an earlier edition.])

William Strunk and E.B. White, *Elements of Style* (any edition)

Teresa Wright, *Accepting Authoritarianism*

Schedule of Classes, Topics and Assignments

February 8: Introduction

February 15: Overview

Marc Blecher, *China Against the Tides* (third edition **ONLY**), chapters 2-7.

February 22: Inequality

Deborah Davis and Wang Feng, eds., *Creating Wealth and Poverty in Postsocialist China*.

March 1: The Environment

Elizabeth Economy, *The River Runs Black*.

March 8: Labor

Ching-kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*.

March 15: Politics Between State and Society I: Popular Consent

Teresa Wright, *Accepting Authoritarianism*.

March 22: Politics Between State and Society II: Protest

Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden, eds., *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance* (3rd edition [*Nb. Do not read an earlier edition*]).

April 4: Research proposals due

April 5: Individual meetings to discuss research proposals

April 11: Annotated bibliographies due

April 12; Individual meetings to discuss bibliographies and research progress

April 18: Detailed outlines due

April 19; individual meetings to discuss outlines

April 26, May 3: Class presentations of research paper drafts

May 11: Conclusion

Marc Blecher, *China Against the Tides*, chapter 9.

May 17: Papers due. (This deadline is firm, due to strict College rules.)

Schematic Chronology Of Chinese Politics Since 1978

1978	Deng in charge at Third Plenum; “democracy wall”; Carter-Hua Communique (US-PRC relations)
1979	“Rightists” exonerated: rural reforms extend; Vietnam invasion
1980	“Gang of Four” tried: some communes become townships; Zhao Ziyang Premier
1981	Rural incomes up, amid urban shortages: Hu Yaobang replaces Hua as Party Chair
1982	US defense weapons to Taiwan, but US-China agreement on fewer future sales
1983	Spiritual Pollution Campaign stirs doubts in Communist Party, but campaign ends soon
1984	Industrial reforms announced; Hong Kong accord
1985	Old cadres retired at autumn congress; Gorbachev heads USSR
1986	Students protest delay of political reforms, but Communist Party is slow to accommodate them.
1987	Dismissal of Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang; movement against bourgeois liberalization
1988	Abortive price reform; inflation; beginning of economic austerity
1989	Broad popular protests followed by repression and martial law; rise of hard-line leadership
1990	Hard-liners in power
1991	Consolidation of post-1989 leadership; economic austerity
1992	Economic austerity ends; debate on appropriate pace of growth
1993	Some releases from prison of 1989 protesters; economic overheating; rural discontent erupts
1994	High inflation; continuing expressions of discontent
1995	Corruption a major issue; death of Chen Yun; economic soft landing; Taiwan Straits heat up
1996	Economy stabilizes; Taiwan Straits hot; US-China relations difficult
1997	Death of Deng Xiaoping; return of Hong Kong; Jiang Zemin consolidates the country’s leadership at the 15 th Party Congress, and then visits US
1998	At the National People’s Congress, Premier Li Peng is the first top Chinese leader in history to vacate his position in accordance with the Constitution; President Clinton visits China; hard-liners rise at end of the year
1999	China tense in face of political demonstrations by workers and <i>Falungong</i> spiritual practitioners; US bombs Chinese embassy in Belgrade, provoking popular patriotic outrage and state-approved popular demonstrations; Politics 313 tries once again to grasp Chinese politics and political economy
2000	Hard-liners remain in control, keeping political atmosphere repressive

2001	US-China relations tense due to collision of military aircraft; China joins WTO
2002	In smooth transition, Hu Jintao succeeds Jiang Zemin as Party General Secretary; massive labor protest in northeast; China joins WTO
2003	Hu consolidates power, appoints Wen Jiabao as Prime Minister
2004	Jiang Zemin resigns Military Commission chair, marking full transition to new generation of leadership; rapid economic growth continues
2005	Anti-Japanese protests; major chemical spill exposes political and policy weakness; Bush visits; economy continues to grow
2006-7	Continuing economic growth and political authoritarianism; new labor laws passed
2008	China hosts the Olympics
2009	Broad political stability amid slowed economic growth and key anniversaries; massive ethnic riot in Xinjiang
2010	Resurgent economic growth; Politics 313 struggles yet again to understand all this.

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Guide To Chinese Romanization

As a student of Chinese politics, it's your responsibility to pronounce Chinese words correctly. There are three major systems of romanization used in the general literature. The first can be called the "post office system", though it is totally unsystematic. It is mainly used for place names, such as Peking, Canton, and Amoy.

The other two are Wade-Giles, which was commonly used through the 1970s, and pinyin, which is the official system of the People's Republic, and has now almost completely replaced Wade-Giles. You will have to discern which one your source is using by inspection. (Our readings use pinyin.) The pinyin system is distinguishable by any of the following: x, q, z, zh, r, g, d, b, ong. By contrast, the Wade-Giles system contains apostrophes and hyphens.

Once you have deduced which system a text uses, you apply a few rules. The main general rule is that practically all words you see, except family names, contain two syllables. Sound them as containing two syllables, even if the letters suggest three or more to you. A few system-specific rules are noted below. The left side of each equation is the romanization, as you might see it on a page; the right is a usual and approximate English equivalent sound.

PINYIN

x = sy z = dz zh = j c = ts ong = ung ian = ien ui = way

i is variable: "-ee" after most initials; "-r" after ch, r, sh, zh; or a deep "-uh" or no sound after c, s, & z.

WADE-GILES

When not followed by apostrophes: k = g p = b t = d ts = dz ch = j. When followed by apostrophes, these all have English sounds.

Also: j = r ih = r ui = way yu = yo yü = yü hs = sy