

Oberlin College  
Department of Politics

**POLITICS 212: POLITICAL ECONOMY  
OF DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA, 3.0**

Spring 2024  
Professor Marc Blecher

Office hours [by appointment](#) (I'm very flexible)

E-mail: [marc.blecher@oberlin.edu](mailto:marc.blecher@oberlin.edu)

[My website](#)

[Course Blackboard site](#)

Mondays, 8:35-9:50 AM  
AJLC 201



Politics 212 surveys and compares the relationships of politics and the economy in China, India, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Among the various analytical themes we will weave together are:

- § the role of historical, pre-capitalist structures of political economy and class relations in shaping subsequent development;
- § state socialism vs. capitalism;
- § the effect of country size;
- § import-substitution strategies (emphasizing national self-reliance and active roles for the state in the economy) vs. neoliberalism and export-led development (emphasizing markets and integration with the world economy);
- § the plight of labor;
- § the plight of women;

- § the nature of the state and politics (state capacity and autonomy, the representative vs. the authoritarian state, interest representation [corporatism vs. pluralism], popular political movements, and “democratization”); and
- § the “Washington consensus” (emphasizing market-based globalization, Western-style “democratization”, and US global hegemony) vs. the “Beijing consensus” (emphasizing active state regulation of marketization, diversity of national political forms, and opposition to any global hegemony).

Politics 212 is not an in-depth course in the politics of the five cases we take up, so please do not expect that. We must move over each one far too lightly. The focus is on the theoretical, analytical theme of the relationship of the state and politics on the one hand and industrialization on the other, which produces fascinating and important insights.

The course does not require previous study of economics. I will introduce in a non-technical way the economic concepts and theories needed to get at the issues that concern us. One goal of the course is to help you understand that matters of economics and political economy, which may appear dry and can take highly technical forms, are comprehensible to ordinary mortals; and, moreover, that they are flesh-and-blood issues of the profoundest significance to real people.

Before each class I expect you to complete readings that will cover the subject for the day. In class the material cannot be covered in anything approaching the fullness of what you need to know about it; *ipso facto*, classes cannot substitute for the reading. If you have not done the reading before class, you will not be able to get much out of that class session, and you will, unavoidably, feel lost.

Blogging is essential to Politics 212.

- § To encourage reflective reading, help you retain what you have read, and help me calibrate what we do in class, once each week I expect you to write on Blackboard a short response to questions I will have posed in advance about the works we are confronting. You’re also welcome 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.
- § 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 very important for your learning, I do factor heavily into your final grade simply whether you have done them seriously and regularly. If you do 13 of them (which is an average of one per week), you’ve got an “A” for 40% of the course. (See page 3.)
- § Specifically, those of you with surnames beginning A-M should do so by the Sunday before class at 8:00 PM, and those with surnames M-Z by 8:00 PM Tuesday. Please observe the 8:00 PM deadlines, since that’s when I start preparing for class, and they are crucial to my doing so.

- § If you must miss or inadvertently have missed your appointed day, as will inevitably happen, just post a blog for another day that week; if you miss a week, just do two in a subsequent week. The spirit here is to do them regularly, but we can be flexible in doing so. You may, of course, respond more than once each week if you like; the more often you do, the more you will learn.
- § Each evening before class, prepare by taking a few moments to log in to the blog to read what everyone has written. That too will help you grasp the material.
- § While I always try my best to be flexible and accommodate students' needs, I cannot accept missed blogs at the end of the term. I have a pedagogical reason here: the blogs are a process, not a product; the whole point is to help you learn by doing them week-in, week-out, not at the end of the term in order to meet a requirement. So, to reiterate, if you fall a bit behind, just double up in subsequent weeks to catch up.

You will also write two open-book, take-home essays of approximately 1,250 words ( $\approx$  5 pages) each. The schedule can be found in the course outline below. These papers do require you to demonstrate command of the material, but they are oriented mainly toward developing your engagement with and analysis and interpretation of it. To give you an idea of what to expect and to help you orient your reading and thinking, starting on page 8 below you will find the essay questions from the most recent offering of the course. You can expect many of the same issues to be treated this time around, probably with some of the same or similar questions.

I will evaluate your work according to the following weightings:

Blog postings	40%
Papers	30% each
Active listening and participation in class	A "fudge factor"

Please take careful note of these proportions. They reflect my conviction that the daily process of the course is even more important to your learning as the two papers you will write. In the past students who assumed that the papers were their only major responsibilities for the course have been unpleasantly surprised at the end of the semester. 😞

Americans spend five times as much on dog food as on college books. Politics 212 is doing its part to right our priorities. Please purchase:

Marc Blecher, *China Against the Tides* (third edition only)  
 Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India*  
 Thomas Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle*  
 Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*  
 T. J. Pempel, *Régime Shift*  
 Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*  
 William Strunk and E. B. White, *Elements of Style*  
 Jung-en Woo, *Race to the Swift*

In addition, if you can afford them, I recommend purchasing these books, from which we will be reading several chapters:

Pranab Bardhan, *Awakening Giants, Feet of Clay*

Barbara Entwisle and Gail E. Henderson, eds., *Re-Drawing Boundaries: Work, Households and Gender in China*

Elizabeth Perry, ed., *Putting Class in Its Place* (out of print, but may be available from used book sellers)

The same “reform” movement that is ruining primary and secondary education is now taking aim at us, requiring faculty to list “learning goals” for all courses. These are being used to measure what we're doing, all the better to encourage still further the growing hegemony of market forces in education. Thus, I am obliged to tell you that the goal of *Political Economy of Development in Asia* is for you to learn about the political economy of development in Asia, and to get some practice reading, writing and thinking systematically.

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## Schedule of Classes, Topics and Assignments

February 5: Historical Roots of Indian Capitalism and Representative Politics

Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, chapter 6.

February 7: Institutionalization and Import Substitution in Nehruvian India

Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India*, chapters 1-3.

Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*, chapter 1.

February 12: Deinstitutionalization (Indira Gandhi & Sons) and Political Economy in India, 1966-91

Corbridge and Harriss, chapters 4-5.

Rudolphs, chapter 4 & 6-8.

February 14: Economic “Reform” in India, 1991 to the present

Corbridge and Harriss, chapters 6-7.

February 19: Labor and Agrarian Politics in India (**I have to travel out of the country, so we will meet on Zoom**)

Screen *Occupation: Millworker* (via Blackboard).

Rudolphs, chapter 10, 12 & 13.

Leela Fernandes, *Producing Workers: The Politics of Gender, Class and Culture in the Calcutta Jute Mills*, chapters 2 and 3 (on Blackboard).

February 21: Gender in India; Social and Political Movements in India (I have to travel out of the country, so we will meet on Zoom)

Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity*, chapter 7 (on Blackboard).

Corbridge and Harriss, chapters 8-9 and conclusion.

February 26: Class postponed, as I have to be in New York for a medical appointment.

February 28 - March 1: Historical Roots of Chinese Socialism

Moore, chapters 4 and 9.

Marc Blecher, *China Against the Tides*, chapter 1.

March 4: Maoist Political Economy (N.b. This is an extraordinary day for us, to make up for the missed February 26 class. We will meet at the usual 8:35 time and classroom.)

Blecher, chapter 2 and pp. 129-145.

March 6: Structural Reform in China

Blecher, chapter 3 and pp. 145-165.

Screen *All Under Heaven* (from Blackboard).

**First essay topics distributed.**

March 11: Industrial and Agrarian Politics in China

William Hurst, "Urban China: Change and Contention," in William Joseph, ed., *Politics in China*, chapter 9 (on Blackboard).

Ching-kwan Lee, "From the Specter of Mao to the Spirit of the Law: Labor Insurgency in China" (on Blackboard).

Marc Blecher, "Hegemony and Workers' Politics in China" (on Blackboard).

John James Kennedy, "Rural China: Reform and Resistance", in William Joseph, ed., *Politics in China*, chapter 8 (on Blackboard).

March 13: Gender in China; India and China Compared

Screen *Small Happiness* (from Blackboard).

Blecher, pages 119-125.

Entwisle and Henderson, eds., *Re-drawing Boundaries*, chapters 5-9 (on Blackboard).

Gail Hershatter, "Chinese Sex Workers in the Reform Period", in Perry, ed., chapter 7 (on Blackboard).

Pranab Bardhan, *Awakening Giants*, chapters 1, 2 and 10 and Afterword to the Paperback Edition (on Blackboard).

**March 16, 8 AM: First paper due**

March 18: Historical Roots of Japanese Political Economy  
Moore, chapters 5 & 8.

March 20: The Japanese Postwar Conservative Régime

T. J. Pempel, *Régime Shift: Comparative Dynamics of Japanese Political Economy*, pages 1-16 and chapter 2-3.

Screen [The Pacific Century](#). You can stop when the film starts to mention Japanese influence in Thailand and the rest of SE Asia, though if you continue a bit further there is some interesting material about the electoral system. All in all it'll take about an hour to watch — and a most worthwhile hour.

April 1: Japanese Crisis and Change in the 1990s (I have to travel out of the country, so we will meet on Zoom)

Pempel, chapters 5-6.

April 3: Labor Politics in Japan (I have to travel out of the country, so we will meet on Zoom)

Andrew Gordon, "Conditions for the Disappearance of the Japanese Working-Class Movement", in Perry, ed., chapter 1 (on Blackboard).

John Price, "The 1960 Miike Coal Mine Dispute: Turning Point for Adversarial Unionism in Japan?" (on Blackboard).

Also, review 25'00" to 31'00" of [The Pacific Century](#).

Satoshi Kamata, *Japan in the Passing Lane: An Insider's Account of Life in a Japanese Auto Factory*, chapter 8 (on Blackboard).

Knuth Dohse, Ulrich Jürgens and Thomas Malsch, "From 'Fordism' to 'Toyotism'? The Social Organization of the Labor Process in the Japanese Automobile Industry" (on Blackboard).

April 8: Political Economy in Taiwan from the Sixteenth Century through 1949

Thomas B. Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle*, chapters 2-4.

April 10: Political Economy in Modern Taiwan

Gold, chapters 5-8.

April 15: State and Society in Taiwan: Labor and Environmental Politics

Nai-teh Wu, "Class Identity without Class Consciousness? Working-Class Orientations in Taiwan", in Perry, ed., chapter 3 (on Blackboard).

Hsin-Huang Michæl Hsiao, "Changing Literary Images of Taiwan's Working Class", in Perry, ed., chapter 4 (on Blackboard).

James Reardon-Anderson, *Pollution, Politics and Foreign Investment in Taiwan: The Lukang Rebellion* (on Blackboard).

April 17: Democratization in Taiwan

Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic*

*Transitions*, pp. 5-7, 267-282, 291-299 (on Blackboard).

April 22: South Korean Political Economy, I

Jung-en Woo, *Race to the Swift*, chapters 1-3

April 24: South Korean Political Economy, II

Jung-en Woo, *Race to the Swift*, chapters 4-5

April 29: South Korean Political Economy, III

Jung-en Woo, *Race to the Swift*, chapters 6-7

**Second essay topics distributed**

May 1: State and Society in South Korea

Hagen Koo, "Work, Culture, and Consciousness of the Korean Working Class," in Perry, ed., chapter 2 (on Blackboard).

May 6: Democratization in South Korea

Charles K. Armstrong, "The Politics of Transition in North and South Korea", *n.b. read only pages 5-16* (on Blackboard).

Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions*, pages 83-97, 232-239 (on Blackboard).

Dorothy J. Solinger, "Ending One-Party Dominance: Korea, Taiwan, Mexico" (on Blackboard).

Charles Armstrong, "Contesting the Peninsula" (on Blackboard).

May 8: Course conclusion

**May 18, 4:00 PM: Second paper due**



## ESSAY QUESTIONS FROM THE MOST RECENT OFFERING OF THE COURSE

### First Essay Topics

1. India experienced a negotiated transition to capitalism and parliamentary democracy, while China underwent a revolutionary transition to a state socialist economy. In what ways do the differences between the agrarian structures (*i.e.*, village-level economic, social and political structures) and structures of the state and of state-society relations of pre-1947 India and pre-1949 China help explain the differences in their pathways of transformation since the middle of the twentieth century? In what ways is such a mode of explanation limited by political or conjunctural (*i.e.*, accidental or exogenous) factors?
2. In the Nehru period there was some interest in adopting Chinese measures of economic organization and development (Rudolphs, pp. 315-318). Going beyond this small issue and the limited discussion of it on those pages, account for this interest (however limited), discuss the historical, political and political-sociological reasons why the state never got serious about it, and speculate on how feasible and effective such a set of policies would have been in India had the state tried to pursue them more seriously. Then compare with China, analyzing what it had that India lacked that enabled it to undertake collectivization successfully. Conclude with some comments on what's at stake here.
3. The Rudolphs argue that successful economic development can be consistent with a representative ("democratic") state. Yet in China the decidedly illiberal state has been absolutely essential in mobilizing resources for and directing economic development. Discuss, paying equal attention to both cases, and drawing out the implications.
4. Compare the processes, outcomes, and political aspects (including prerequisites and/or effects) of import-substitution industrialization in India and China, and comment on what the comparison illuminates.
5. The Rudolphs speak of political deinstitutionalization and the rise of demand politics in India. This also happened in China, both in the Maoist period and, in very different ways, under structural reform, during both of which popular political movements have captured the world's attention. In each country, what do these political processes have to do with economics? Conclude with a comparison of India and China in these terms, and comment on why all this matters.
6. "A high capacity state requires a high level of autonomy from society. Moreover, both are necessary for economic development." (Kurt Remarque [🤔]) Comment, comparing India and China, and drawing out the implications.
7. In both India and China, industrial labor is politically weak. Compare the reasons why this is so, relating the issue to relevant wider aspects of each country's political and economic system and policies. What does the comparison teach us?



8. Corbridge and Harriss speak of “passive revolution” as both a description and a prescription for political change in India. What is it, and how did it play out in India? Does it help explain something important about the structural reforms in China? Whether it does or doesn't, what, if anything, does the comparison illuminate?
  9. Why has India's economic reform been so much more limited than China's? What, if anything, might this have to do with the way each country undertook import substitution industrialization? With their political systems (including, perhaps, régime types, mixes of demand and command politics, state capacity, state autonomy)? What's at stake here?
  10. Women have benefited and but also suffered more than men as a result of economic development in both India and China. Compare the two cases, showing in each how the outcomes result from aspects of the wider political economy. What are the lessons here?
- II. Write out your own question, discuss it with me, and then respond to it in writing.

## Second Essay Topics

1. In what ways do the similarities and differences between the pre-capitalist agrarian and political structures of Japan and either pre-1947 India or pre-1949 China help explain some of the salient similarities or differences in their subsequent pathways of transformation? In what ways is such a mode of explanation limited? What's at stake here?
2. Discuss the effects of imperialism on economic development in China and/or India on the one hand and Taiwan and/or South Korea on the other. What's at stake here?
3. Japan, Taiwan and South Korea have all possessed states with high capacity to mobilize resources for economic development. They have differed somewhat with respect to the autonomy of the state from social forces, though all have sought to exclude workers politically (albeit in different ways and with different levels of success), and their relations with their bourgeoisies and farmers have differed. Choose one or at most two cases, and compare the state-society relationship with that in India or China. Then analyze the effects of all this on some important aspects of economic development.
4. The Rudolphs argue that successful economic development can be consistent with representative politics. Yet in Taiwan and South Korea decidedly illiberal states have been absolutely essential in mobilizing resources for and directing economic development. Compare Taiwan and/or Korea on the one hand and India on the other, drawing out the significance of the question.
5. Compare the conditions of possibility, political rationales, and specific means of implementation of import substitution industrialization in India or China on the one hand and Taiwan and/or South Korea on the other. Why does any of this matter?

6. Evaluate the effects of country size and, if you like, heterogeneity on the processes, problems and political implications of ISI, export led-development, or both, drawing on India and/or China on the one hand and Japan and/or Taiwan and/or South Korea on the other. What's the significance of this comparison?
7. Discuss the implications of "democratization" (*i.e.*, the transition from authoritarian politics to a representative, multi-party system) in Taiwan and/or Korea for the prospects of a similar change in China.
8. Discuss the mechanisms that have subordinated labor in India or China on the one hand and Japan and/or Taiwan and/or South Korea on the other. Then address one or more of the following questions: Do different strategies of labor subordination have different historical origins? Different political or economic effects on workers? On economic development? Do they have different implications for political change? Whatever question(s) you choose, explain why any of this matters.
9. All the countries we studied this semester received foreign aid and investment at certain key stages in their development. Evaluate its effect on shaping the political economy of India and/or China on the one hand and Japan and/or Taiwan and/or Korea on the other. Pay attention to what was affected (institutions, policies or both), how significant the effect was, and, if it fits with your approach, how it interacted with political nationalism (at the elite or mass levels or both). Place your response in the context of the other important factors shaping development that we have studied. What's the wider significance here?
10. The political economy of post-war development in Japan, Taiwan and Korea was affected by their position as American protectorates during the Cold War. The US also affected economic development India and China, but very differently. Choosing one or more from the first group and then either India or China, compare the effects of US influence, and show why it matters.
11. Write out your own question, discuss it with me, and then respond to it in writing. It should involve a comparison of at least one case from the first half of the course with at least one from the second.