

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
Department of History  
Semester I, 1989-90

History 725

Meisner

Reform and Reaction in Post-Mao China

The aim of this enterprise is to stimulate new understandings and interpretations of the post-Maoist era in the history of the People's Republic of China (i.e., the period since 1978), not by once again reviewing the events of the period, but rather by pursuing broad theoretical and comparative historical approaches which hopefully will provide insights into the nature of the Soviet-type societies produced by 20th-century socialist revolutions in general, and, by implication, of the post-1949 Chinese socio-political order in particular. As indicated on the following pages, the line of inquiry will proceed from aspects of original Marxism to contemporary Marxist interpretations of "actually existing socialism," with particular attention paid to several theorists identified with what is sometimes called "the Budapest School." The perspectives gained through these readings and discussions will then be brought to bear on the history of post-Mao China--through papers and further discussions over the last five weeks of the seminar.

A general knowledge of the history of the People's Republic of China, both in the Mao and post-Mao eras, is presupposed--more or less equivalent to a reasonably good command of Carl Riskin, China's Political Economy (NY: Oxford, 1987) and Maurice Meisner, Mao's China and After (NY: The Free Press, 1986). Beyond the readings and the discussion topics outlined below, participants will be expected to prepare two or three brief critiques of several of the writings listed for the period Sept. 14--Nov. 2, one of which should deal with the Feher, Heller and Markus volume Dictatorship Over Needs. These should be informal presentations (written or oral) designed to provoke discussion and debate. Also required is a 15-20 page paper dealing with a problem in the history of the post-Mao period to be presented during the last month of the semester. This can take the form of either a research-type paper or an interpretive essay, but in either case it should have some theoretical content and a comparative historical dimension--hopefully reflecting what might have been gained from the preceding weeks' readings and discussions.

Tentative Schedule of Discussions and Readings:

Sept. 7: Introductory Meeting

Sept. 14: Post-Revolutionary Society: Socialism, Capitalism or Neither?

Paul M. Sweezy, Post-Revolutionary Society (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1980), ch. 10 (pp. 139-151).

Arif Dirlik, "Post-Socialism," in Arif Dirlik and Maurice Meisner (eds.), Marxism and the Chinese Experience (M.E. Sharpe, 1989), pp.

Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller, and György Markus, Dictatorship over Needs (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1983), chapter 1 on "Eastern European Societies and the Western Left," pp. 1-44.

Sept. 21: The Marxist Critique of Capitalism

Robert C. Tucker, The Marxian Revolutionary Idea (NY: Norton, 1969), chs. 1-3 (pp. 3-91).

Maurice Meisner, "Marx, Mao and Deng on the Division of Labor in History," in Dirlik and Meisner, Marxism and the Chinese Experience, pp.

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Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I, passim.

Sept. 28: The Problem of Capitalism and the Search for A Non-Capitalist Road to Socialism

Teodor Shanin, Late Marx and the Russian Road (NY, 1983), pp. 3-74.

A. Walicki, The Controversy Over Capitalism (Oxford, 1969), pp. 133-194.

Oct. 5: Capitalism and Socialism in the Chinese and Russian Revolutions

Isaac Deutscher, The Unfinished Revolution: Russia 1917-67 (Oxford University Press, 1967), chs. 1 & 2 (pp. 3-39).

Maurice Meisner, "Bourgeois and Socialist Aspects of the Chinese Communist Revolution," Ch. 2 of book manuscript entitled "The Deradicalization of Chinese Communism"

Oct. 12: The Social Outcome of Socialist Revolutions: The Case of the Soviet Union

Leon Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed

Paul Sweezy, "The Nature of Soviet Society," in Sweezy, Post-Revolutionary Society, chs. 4 & 5 (pp. 55-84).

Oct. 19: Eastern European Marxist Perspectives on the Nature of Soviet-type Societies (I)

Feher, Heller and Markus, Dictatorship Over Needs, Part I on "Economics and Social Structure," (pp. 1-133).

Oct. 26: Eastern European Marxist Perspectives (II)

Feher, Heller and Markus, Dictatorship Over Needs, Part II on "Political Domination and Its Consequences," (pp. 137-217).

Nov. 2: Eastern European Marxist Perspectives (III)

Feher, Heller and Markus, Dictatorship Over Needs, Part III on "The Functioning of the System," (pp. 221-299).

Also, time permitting: Rudolph Bahro, The Alternative in Eastern Europe

Nov. 9 through Dec. 14: Post-Mao China: The Reforms and their Social and Political Consequences

(precise topics and problems to be determined)

Readings will include: selections from Dirlik and Meisner (eds.), Marxism and the Chinese Experience

M. Meisner, chapters 4-12 of book mss. on "The Deradicalization of Chinese Communism"

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"The Deradicalization of Chinese Commun-  
ism"

William Hinton, "A Trip to Fengyang County:  
Investigating China's New Family Contract  
System" (Monthly Review, Nov. 1983);  
"Dazhai Revisited" (Monthly Review, March  
1988); "A Response to Hugh Deane"  
(Monthly Review, March 1989).

One session will be led by Su Shaozhi at a time to be announced.

Also, reading and discussion of seminar papers will be scheduled over the  
last four weeks of the semester.