Since Lucian Pye (1992: 235) first described China as a “civilization-state, pretending to be a [nation-] state,” no one has yet developed this theme more than superficially. To be true, Huntington’s seminal work on “clash of civilizations” (1996) calls our attention to civilizations as a factor in world politics. In doing so, he set off a decade-long debate on civilizations as primordial entities fraught with conflict potentials in post-Cold War international relations. His thesis, however, was emphatically countered by Katzenstein and his colleagues (2009), who saw civilizations as malleable cultural identities that orient the ideas and practices of states and peoples. While this means that we need not view civilizations necessarily as animating sources of conflict, what is still lacking is a more focused mode of analysis that addresses civilization as a crucial factor - - if not determinant-- in shaping or guiding domestic politics as well as international behavior of nations, especially in the case of China, given its uniquely rich and long civilization.

In this course, we will ascertain the real and hidden meanings of China as a civilization-state -- and more. We will endeavor to understand China by comparison with the West in both civilizational and historical perspectives. We will attempt to bring things up to date, by examining China’s second rise-- after a century and a half in eclipse-- and its implications, including what has made the “China Model” tick (i.e., its mode of rapid and sustained development in the absence of a Western-type liberal democracy), and its challenge to theory (both comparative-politics and IR theory). China is the only one of the ancient civilizations that has survived the test and scourge of time, and continued till this day, only in reinvigorated form. Many tantalizing puzzles remain to be explored, beginning with the “why” of its immense longevity (over 5,000, and possibly up to 7,000 years, uninterrupted). Since the Chinese imperial state as a governance structure first took shape in 206 B.C., the land mass that makes up the
The heartland of the East Asian subcontinent has remained under the roof of one unitary polity(!). The Qin-Han imperial structure developed as a form of governance in China has perpetuated through the ages ever since--- even beyond the end of dynastic cycles in 1911. The answer to this egregious puzzle only begins to surface when contrasted with the vicissitudes of the comparable Roman Empire in the West. The latter, better known in retrospect as the Western Roman Empire, arose about the same time (3rd cen., B. C.) but lasted only until 476 A.D.

The study of China as a civilization-state, we will find, belies the myth surrounding the (European) notion of a “singular civilization” emerging only since the 18th century, to the effect that in the modern world only the Christian Europe was civilized. Likewise, it falsifies the Western monogenetic theory of civilizations—that all civilizations originated in river valleys (by contrast, ancient Chinese civilization originated in loess highland). Further, it verifies that China cannot be understood in the same paradigm of the usual (European-derived) sense of nationalism or that of the ordinary nation-state as a “unit” of the Westphalian system.

For over a millennium (713 A.D.-1820 A.D.), during its first rise, China’s GDP topped the world, surpassing that of the entire Europe combined (Maddison 2003; 2007). Yet, why it went down (though not out) under the impact of Western (& Japanese) inroads --punctuated to boost by domestic decay and unrest -- after the mid-19th century, is another giant puzzle. Interest in the latter was revived in 2011, the centennial of the Xinhai Revolution (1911) that ended 23 centuries of dynastic cycle and signaled the rise of the atypical modern Chinese nationalism, in contrast to its own previous “culturalism,” and distinct from the European and Japanese variants of nationalism.

Other super puzzles tweaking one’s curiosity include (a) the enduring influence of the Confucian culture on Chinese society and politics, plus its contemporary resurgence; (b) the non-development of capitalism following the end of China’s feudal system (qua system, 1122- 235 B.C.), as it did in comparable times in Western history; and (c) the rise of Communism to power by the mid-20th century in a deeply Confucianized China that valued social harmony in contradistinction to class struggle. The most recent puzzle, besides, is its amazing record of sustained, spirited, rapid economic growth, following three decades of sluggish performance during the Maoist period, in what has become
known as the “China Model” of development. After the 2008 Wall Street meltdown and the ensuing global financial tsunami, this Chinese model of rapid economic growth became the envy of many in much of both the developed and the developing worlds. It simply defies *laissez faire* economics, as China’s average growth of up to 9% annually, over a stretch of three decades, combines two opposites (socialism with partial marketization), in which the visible hand of the state guides the invisible hand of the market. How these two diametric opposites can work together in synergy—so that $1 + 1$ is larger than $2$---, to reiterate, is a particular puzzle deserving our in-depth exploration.

Besides its extraordinarily long, unbroken history, the Chinese civilization-state is also distinct for its huge geographic and demographic scale and diversity. Just as national unity is its first priority, plurality is the condition of its existence. China is not only made up of 56 ethnic groups, but subsumes Hong Kong and Macao in a “one country, two systems” formula, something alien to a typical nation-state. Diversity requires a necessary centrality of purpose if the country is to remain viable and to thrive. This imperative, the Communist regime has proven adept at enforcing, against dissent, revolts, and severe external criticisms.

The difficulty in the task of deciphering China is the lack of a frame of reference by which we can compare it with nation-states in our Westphalian system. Comparison is the social-scientist’s equivalent of laboratory work for the natural scientist. Comparative politics, as a field, has advanced from its initial preoccupation with institutions to a post-behavioralist stage of comparing functions and structures (as inspired by Parsonsian sociology ¹), even comparing “whole political systems” (a la Easton 1965, and Almond and Powell 2010). It has even shown versatility in applying social-science theories to the comparative study of the (former) Soviet-bloc systems (e.g. Fleron 1969), an enterprise that has been morphed into a nascent sub-filed of “post-Communist” studies after 1990.

But, none of this offers us much help in deciphering China, which is both a Communist state (in form, structure, and spirit) and a “post-Communist” state *sui generis* (due to its abandonment of the centrally planned economy, in favor of partial marketization). Yet, as the Chinese civilization-state is gaining in strength in its second

---

¹ Named after Talcott Parsons. See all full citations in the References section below.
ascent, it is fast “socializing” into the Westphalian system of nation-states (as Brzezinski and Mearsheimer (2005) cogently observed). Yet, its “Eastphalian” tradition from a totally different era vaguely identified as a “tribute system of states,” which existed prior to and outside the Westphalian system, is said to be still relevant to an adequate understanding of China’s approach to external relations today (Kang 2010).

Building upon the Weberian scheme of public and private authorities, Charles Lindblom (1977) advanced a taxonomy that groups political-economic systems into three generic structures: authority, exchange, and persuasion. Like Adam Smith and Karl Marx before him, Lindblom understands (what we too often forget) that the biggest difference between one regime and another is the degree to which market replaces government or government replaces market. In this scheme, it was possible to see Maoist China as showing a “preceptoral” structure, in which Mao relied on ideological persuasion aided by organization, whereas by contrast Stalin relied mainly on organization, only peripherally aided by ideology. They both replaced market by government.

In this course, to sum up, we will ascertain if contemporary China, during its current second ascent, can be more properly understood, and appreciated, in light of its enduring civilization, in contrast with the West. What complicates our tasks of comprehension, however, is the wide divide separating Maoist China and the post-Mao stage of development. In the latter, Dengist reforms not only reoriented the CCP’s revolution away from the Maoist brand of Communism, toward building what was billed as “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” But, the reforms were executed by way of a “revolution from above” (Hsiung 2009: 34f), another departure from Mao’s revolution from below by the masses. The state (i.e., the government) in the Dengist legacy, recalling Lindblom’s language, still dominates the market; the distinct feature is that state and market are coalescing into an integral entity (known as marketized socialism) that is unprecedented and defies easy explication. Such is the challenge (and joy!) inherent in a course like this one.

Recommended Textbooks: Purchase or Rental

^Daniel A. Bell, The China Model: Political Meritocracy & the Limits of Democracy (Princeton University Press, 2015);

2 Eastphlia” is a term used in Kim (2009), Fidler (2010), and Ginsburg (2010), for a tradition, a system of institutions, or way of thinking in contrast to what is usually represented by Westphalia in the literature.
Books on Reserve

*Gregory Chow, *China as a Leader of the World Economy* (World Scientific, 2012);
*James C. Hsiung, *China into Its 2nd Rise: Myths, Puzzles, & Challenge to Theory* (World Scientific, 2012);
*Deng, Zhenglai & Sujian Guo, eds., *China’s Search for Good Governance* (Palgrave, 2011).
*Zheng, Yongnian, *De Facto Federalism in China* (World Scientific, 2007)

N.B.: For full citations, please see the References section below.

**Class Calendar (Topics and Readings)**

1. Intro: Meaning of the “Civilization-State” and Chinese Political Culture: Relevance to the Present
   Lecture
   +Pye (1988); +Gernet (1982), ch. 1
   +Jacques (2009),194-232
   +Guang Xi (2014)

2. Chinese Civilization: Origins and Longevity; Confucian Culture; & Legacy of the Imperial System
   ^*Hsiung (2012), chs. 1 & 2
   ^Bell, 63-109 (Asian values; and the value of virtue)
   ^Lieberthal, pp. 5-19
   *Chien, 3-48
   +Fu (the autocratic tradition)
   +Blair & McCormack (2008) (Western civ with Chinese comparisons)

3. Response to the West; Rise of Chinese Nationalism, and the Chinese Revolution (in comparison with other revolutions)
   ^*Hsiung (2012), 71-92
   ^Lieberthal, 19-26
   *Chien, 49-93
   +Brinton
4. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Ideology, and CCP’s Rise to Power

**Hsiung (2012), 93-113**

**Lieberthal, 39-56**

**Saich, 21-33; 108-141**

*Wang, 38-40; 70-82*

*McGregor, *passim*

+Hsiung (1970), 110-125

5. Political Structure & Process

**Lieberthal, 173-242**

**Saich, 142-170; 179-209**

*Wang, 69-195*

*Zheng Yongnian, *passim*

6. Politics under Mao, 1949-1976

**Hsiung (2012), 114-126;**

**Lieberthal, 60-83; 84-122; 290-294 (state over society)**

**Saich, 34-66; 241-249 (state-dominated society)**

7. The Military in Chinese Politics

**Saich, 170-178**

*Wang, 238-268*

*Chien, 177-190*

*McGregor, 104-134*


8. The Politics of Post-Mao Transition

**Hsiung (2012), 127-130**

*Wang, 48-68 (“de-Maoization”)*

+Li & White (1993).

+Ezra Vogel (2011)—on Deng’s role in transforming China; preferably read with Bernhard (2011, on Bismarck’s “revolution from above”), as reviewed by Bernhard (2011)

9. The Great Leap Outward: The Dengist Reform & Legacy

**Hsiung (2012), ch. 6**

**Lieberthal, 125-168**

*Wang, 139-160 (Legal Reform); 301-335 (Economic Reform); 338-370 (Pols of modernization)*

+Shirk (the political logic of China’s economic reform)
10. The China Model, & the Dengist Legacy
^*Hsiung (2012), ch. 7
^Lieberthal, 316-336
*Chow, esp. Part I and Part II
^Bell, 63-178 (esp. 157-175)
+Walter and Howe (on China’s fragile financial foundation)
+Hsiung (2009) (“revolution from above)

11. China’s First Rise (713-1820), & the Tribute System of International Relations, in Retrospect
^*Hsiung, (2012) ch. 3
+Frank, 108-117; 218-25
+Kang (2010), 54-138

12. China’s Second Rise: Challenge to World Order or to IR Theory? Telescoping Pax Sinica
^*Hsiung (2012), chs. 8 & 9
+Hsiung (2015), 132-137

13. Toward Good Governance in China; an outlook for the future
^Saich, 250-261 (state & Society under reform); 210-240 (participation & protest); 297-335 (social policy: success & frailties)
^Bell, 179-198
*Chow, Part III
*Wang, 338-370

Legend:   ^ = Book required for purchase
* = on reserve
+ = Recommended, but not required, nor on reserve

OTHER REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE
Class attendance is absolutely essential, as we attempt to develop a fitting analytical device for deciphering the Chinese civilization-state, such that will (i) unravel all the noted puzzles, (ii) dismantle the myths, and (iii) have the potential of enriching the “craft” of comparative analysis by the insights we gain from our study. In this enterprise, student participation will be welcome. The extent and form of such participation will depend on the size of the enrollment.

Unless we decide to do otherwise (this largely depends on the size of the enrollment), a term paper is required, due at the end of the semester. The topic of the paper should be chosen in consultation with me no later than the third week of class. A one-page précis on research design, including the major hypothesis, a brief bibliographic note (please consult the References below first), and your expected findings, is due during the fifth week. My office hours are Wednesdays 3:30-6:00 p.m.; and other times
by appointment. My office is located at 19 West 4 Street (Rm. 222). My direct phone line is: (212) 998-8523; and e-mail address: <jch2@nyu.edu>.

REFERENCES


Prologue
What Accounted for the Longevity of The Chinese Imperial Structure
■ Answers Revealed from Contrasts with The Roman Empire –

Seven Reasons Why Roman Empire Was Outlasted & Outshone by China

(I) Economic Troubles & Over-Reliance on Slave Labor, Hence, weak state-society integration, in Roman Empire..
   Cp. China: Since Qin-Han (秦、漢) times (3rd Cen B.C. - 3rd Cen. A.D.), government intervened to sustain economic growth. Hence, strong, & lasting state-society integration, despite dynastic cycles. During 713-1820, China’s GDP = world’s largest, bigger than entire Europe combined (a-la British records kept by Angus Maddison).
   No serfdom (except in Tibet) -- > population’s sense of belonging together w/ the imperial government.

(II) Rise, and Rivalry, of Eastern Empire (Byzantine, later, Constantinople). Western Roman Empire ended in 476, & Eastern, 1453.
   Cp. China: National divisions invariably ended in re-unification, bec/ of (a) the overwhelming Chinese Ideal of ding-yu-yi (天下定於一, “unification 【of all under heaven】 as an integral whole”); and (b) a commonly shared Confucian culture (since 136 B.C.), and a common non-phonetic written script. No duplication of similar cultural unification in Europe. (Religious wars +State-church rivalry.)

(III) Over-Expansion & Military Overspending
   Roman Empire’s expansion by military conquest, and its rule based on military control, ruined its economy and infrastructure.
   Cp. China: Qin-Han imperial state’s extension from China’s Northwest to the East coast = by attraction and suasion, w/o conquest (only exception: Xinjiang). Hence, no similar economic strangulation. The imperial state’s
geographic extension = more acceptable to an ever-increasing population, who became assimilated into the Chinese cultural sphere.

(IV) Government Corruption & Political Instability.

In Roman Empire, sheer size w/o a systemic bureaucracy made it hard to govern. In-fights at the top: 20 men took the throne in 75 years. The Praetorian Guard (the Emperor’s bodyguards) assassinated old emperors and installed new ones at will. Roman citizens lost their trust in their leadership.

Cp. China. A “monocratic” bureaucracy (hailing from the keju 科舉 system) was in effective charge of a well-regulated governance structure. Keju = mankind’s first civil-service installation, which was parroted by Ottoman Empire, whence it was introduced to Britain and, eventually to the US. No similar imperial in-fights. Chinese yulinjun (御林軍) was very different from Rome’s Praetorian Guard: and their members would shield the Emperor with their lives.. A censorial system (御史) maintained watch on both the monarch and officials. Anticipating today’s Discipline Inspection system of the CCP.

(V) Invasions by Barbarian Tribes: Arrival of the Huns & Migration of the Barbarian Tribes

Barbarian attacks on Rome < -- massive migration caused by the invasion of Europe by the Huns （匈奴 driven from Central Asia） in late 4th century. They rampaged northern Europe, driving many Germanic tribes (the Goths, like the Visgoth) – known then as “barbarians”-- to Rome’s borders. Brutalized by the Romans, the Goths rose up in revolt, and eventually sacked Rome, weakening the Roman Empire.

Cp. China: No Barbarian invasion was strong enough to sway the Chinese imperial state, except for those by the Mongolians (--> Yusn Dynasty, 元朝, 1260-1368) and the Manchurians (--> Qing Dynasty, 清朝, 1644-1911). But both became Sinified and assimilated into the Confucian culture.

Cp. China: A distant equivalent = the invasion of the barbarian tribes from China’s northwest, known as Wu Hu (五胡), that drove some of the northern Chinese to southern provinces. But, the southerners did NOT brutalize these new arrivals, who settled in self-defining zones and became accepted neighbors known as haka (客家人). All this was possible and natural under the all-inclusivist Chinese culture.
(VI) Christianity and the Loss of Rome’s Traditional Values

The Edict of Milan legalized Christianity in 313, which became the state religion in 380. As Edward Gibbon argued, Christianity displaced Rome’s polytheistic religion and ethos, which saw the emperor as having a divine status. Christian faith also shifted the glory of the state onto a sole deity. Thus, weakening the Empire’s internal cohesion.

Cp. China: The Chinese secular religion of Tian (天) saw the emperor as the “Son of Heaven” (天子), a-la Mozi (墨子), with a (revocable) mandate to rule. The concept (and its unquestioned embracing by the people) underscored the unquestioned legitimacy of Imperial rule, until the “Mandate from Heaven” was considered withdrawn. (W/D of the Mandate, as interpreted by the monocratic elites would justify an armed uprising to overthrow the dynasty, in favor of a new dynasty.)

A distinct result: An inherited tradition under which Chinese nationals, unlike their Western counterpart, did not consider themselves as on the opposite end of the government, so long as it was considered to have the “Mandate from Heaven” to rule) (a-la Martin Jacques).

(VII) Weakening of the Roman Legions.

Despite Roman military’s reputation in ancient times, during the Empire’s decline, emperors had difficulty recruiting enough soldiers from the Roman citizenry. They had to rely on mercenaries (i.e., German soldiers of fortune), who were good fighters but had little loyalty to their employers. Ambitious German officers often turned against their Roman employers. Eventually, they joined the “barbarians” who sacked the city of Rome and brought down the (Western) Roman Empire (476 A.D.).

Cp. China: No Chinese dynasty (or emperor) ever employed foreign legions, much less mercenaries. Even garrisons defending China’s borders against the Barbarians along the Western and Northern borders were dispatched from the Central gov’t, often from the crack troops loyal to the emperor.

Chinese military tradition: Loyalty only to one ultimate leader (the emperor) as long as his dynastic rule lasted.

(In today’s China, the military is loyal only to the CCP).