Politics of China Reflective Paper

When I registered for Politics of China at the beginning of the spring semester, I didn’t have any particular plan in mind for the class. I needed the cultures credit, and the class fit my schedule neatly, so I made a last minute decision to add the course. At that point so early in the semester, of course, I had no idea how much the class would fit into more than just scheduling, but also providing a valuable base that connected to both of my other International Studies courses this semester. The insights provided by this course directly affected my viewpoint and ideas in both my Comparative Politics (IS 230) and National Security (IS 320) classes. The broad connectivity between the three classes shaped my learning in the strongest way.

Although the class is named Politics of China, I feel that the course delved into more culture than I initially anticipated. In a way, this is because even a shallow understanding of the Chinese political structure requires some cultural background as an explanation of why factors of the state are the way the are and why some state policies do – or don’t – work. The two classes that I connected my studies in this course each tie to different sectors of Chinese culture. The in-depth discussion of the structure of the political system in this class fed almost directly into the study of regime types done in my Comparative Politics class, whereas the history and discussion of China’s culture and ambitions helped with an understanding of Chinese aims and its role in the changing world order in National Security.

In Comparative Politics, China ranged on the authoritative end of the regime type spectrum. What we learned in Politics of China provided rich elaboration on not only the points at which China is distinct from the other focus countries, but also the reasons why it has become so. I pulled from the knowledge I gained in this class for most of the essays, but two in particular. The first focuses on regime type, and there the understanding of China’s political system, its closed political system, and lack of political party competition was crucial. In the second essay, I drew on our the discussion of protests to help explain the difficulty in developing large-scale, effective protest movements in China, as well as touching on the level of internet restriction and censorship present in Chinese society. That in particular ties in with my creative project on the Department of Propaganda’s censorship directives earlier in the semester.

National Security was a little trickier. Throughout the semester, I have found several new sites from which to find sources, such as the online news site, the China Digital Times. This has aided in analyzing China’s current foreign policy objectives, as well as providing key insights into Chinese culture and current events. Our study of China’s economic system and ambitions connects most strongly with the National Security paper, as the objective was to apply Stephen Brook’s theory of economic globalization of production to the US relationship with China.

Looking back, my learning in this class became most relevant when I began to see the connections between my other courses, and how I could use the material read or analyzed for more than just one class. I have cited from articles we read exclusively in Politics of China on works in other classes, and that universal applicability caught my attention. The class as a whole was more than I expected it to be, and became much more of an asset than I anticipated when simply registering all the way back in January.