

China, India and the New Class

Written by Dylan Kissane

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A New Class

POL 210 is a year round course at CEFAM. If it is not being taught as a full, 13 week course in either the Fall or the Spring, it is being taught online via our e-learning platform or, as at the present, in a tight, five week Summer program. The summer semester kicked off on Monday with 25 fresh faces looking forward to (or perhaps dreading) 2 hours of lectures per day at least four days a week for the next month or so.

Any professor will tell you that each class has a slightly different feel. Not the material – realism only evolves so much between semesters, I find – but the students and their dynamic changes and this can be enough to make an interesting class either fantastically fun or depressingly bad. In the first couple of hours it can be hard to say exactly which way the course is going to go. It's still a period of feeling out and testing the minds in the room. Will they do the reading? Will they be able to catch the contradictions between X and Y that I want them to catch? Will there be the fantastic back and forth between professor and student that makes this job worth doing?

The early read, though, is pretty positive and an example from this morning reinforces this. One thing I like to do at the start of class is to pull something out of the previous day's or even that morning's news and throw it up for discussion. Today I chose the *Times of India* report that has 40 Chinese PLA soldiers inside Indian territory proclaiming, via a banner, that this was now Chinese land. The response of the Indian government seemed somewhat light and local residents of the region thought that the leaders in Delhi were being soft on the Chinese. I was ready for the class to start and had thrown up a map of the region onto a slide to discuss a little history of the Sino-Indian border and the disputed areas, when a voice in the second row piped up.

'Is this going to be about the Chinese soldiers?'

I was happily surprised. I do encourage my students to read the news and keep an eye on things with an international politics bent while they take my course. Often, though, this amounts to the finance majors keeping a closer eye on the Hang Seng and the Australian All Ords instead of only the Dow and the NASDAQ. While the marketing majors tend to be a little more open to international cultures, rarely do they pick up on strategic issues, particularly so when it comes to troop movements in south and central Asia.

I hope this is a sign of things to come. Students who are interested enough to be reading deeper into the newspaper than page 6 and who click a little more widely that the front page of Google News are also likely, in my opinion, to dig a little deeper into international politics than just the required reading. They'll likely broaden their knowledge more than the course strictly demands, and have more complete and well informed research papers, driven not by my demand for 4000 words of argument, but truly by their own desire to figure out the answer to a difficult question.

It's early days still but here's hoping this summer session of POL 210 keeps progressing in the same fashion it seems to have started.

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