Fall 2021
DUKE UNIVERSITY
Department of Economics

Economics 407/627: SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET ECONOMIC HISTORY

Professor:	**CHARLES BECKER**	Office: 312 Social Sciences
Teaching Assistants:	**SULTAN MURATOV**	
	KAICHAO CHANG	
Class:	MW 08:30 – 09:45 August 23 – December 03	
Location:	Perkins Link 087 (classroom 3) (A/V equipped for remote students)	

1. **Course description**. This course traces economic factors leading to the downfall of the Russian Empire and the rise of the USSR, followed by an assessment of the decline and aftermath of the USSR. Particular attention is devoted to the NEP period, earlier Soviet economic models, the famine of the 1930s, the impact of the Great Patriotic War (WWII), industrialization and urbanization, Soviet planning, and declining productivity growth and life expectancy in the in the 1970s and 1980s. The course then explores the economic consequences of the USSR's collapse as well as the nature of recovery in various countries that followed. The course concludes with an overview of formal political economy models. Students will be encouraged to explore Census data, household surveys, and other data sources.

2. **Night Lights**! As in 2020, in 2021 I will be encouraging students to become familiar with and use satellite night light data, which are available from 1982 to the present at a resolution of 1 km² or less per pixel (the picture of Kazakhstan at night from 2006 below has over 13 million pixels, and each one is has an associated index of roughly 0-65. In the absence of reliable economic data for the late Soviet and early transition periods, comparing night light evolution can shed light (figuratively) on economic changes from 1992 onward. Note that oil flares distort the map. The TAs will be your guides in this new venture!

3. **History meets Machine Learning! Great Terror registry of those repressed** A new feature for 2021 is that I will be encouraging students with good web-scraping and data handling skills (and fluency in Russian or Google Translate) to access the vast volumes (for, example, there are 11 volumes for Leningrad alone) that are now online and in principle have notes on over 3,000,000 people who were arrested or executed during the 1930s: your entry source will lead you to specific regions. Moscow data are already accessible in spreadsheet form.

4. **Partnership with the Kyiv School of Economics**. This course will include roughly 3 participants from the Kyiv School of Economics' https://kse.ua/ MA program. They will be linked via Zoom, and are expected to follow the same program as Duke students. Depending on areas of interest, I may allow teams to work on research projects. In any case, I will expect KSE and Duke students to interact, including by making comments on each other's term papers.

5. **Duke Reader Project**. The course has a significant writing and presentation requirement, as noted below. Students will have the option to participate in the Duke Reader Project, through which students get feedback on drafts of their written work from Duke alumni who have professional experience relevant to their projects. For our course, volunteer readers will have backgrounds in some area of economics, history, or business related to the cold war or USSR. Students are also encouraged to make use of the Duke Writing Studio for help with writing assignments.

6. **Honor code and course policies.**
   - Failure to acknowledge assistance on an assignment, or to cite a source of information used in an assignment, or to represent the work of others as your own, violates the University's honor code. Any violations may result in failure of the assignment or the course, or expulsion from the University.
   - Any exam missed for a non-legitimate reason will be accorded the grade of 0. Any exam missed for a legitimate reason will be made up with an oral exam as soon as EcoTeach can schedule it.
   - Late work will be penalized by 1/3 grade point per day late (excluding Sundays).
   - Assignments must be submitted via Sakai.
   - Standard formatting for regular text material shall be as follows: 1-inch margins top/bottom/left/right; 1.5 line spacing; extra space between paragraphs; Garamond 12 font; right hand justification for main text. References and footnotes should be single space (with space between individual citations) and Garamond 11 font.
   - Assignments and term papers that have not gone through a basic spell and grammar check will not be accepted. Files attached with viruses will be deleted and not regarded as submitted; if for some reason the virus gets through and infects one of my computers, you will receive a grade of 0 for the assignment.

7. **Presentations and class organization.**

   Regular classes will be conducted live but recorded and made available remotely via Zoom. They will be recorded, but I expect students who are not ill to attend and participate "synchronously" (live). I believe that it will be possible for nearly everyone to be awake during the regular class sessions (starting at 08:30 in Durham, UTC-4), and hence 15:30 in Ukraine and Turkey (UTC+3), 17:30 in Uzbekistan (UTC +5), 18:30 in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (UTC +6), and 20:30 in China (UTC+8).

   Students are also requested to attend with their cameras turned on, using either a live or virtual background.

   Initial classes will consist of lectures by me on history topics. Readings will be assigned in advance. Sultan Muratov and Kaichao Chang also will have presentations of technical topics, especially related to the use of night lights, and we both will have some sessions on data and econometric topics.

   During the first two weeks we will expect you to learn basic political history and geography on your own (or to do so prior to the start of class). As an incentive, there will be a quiz around September 6.

   Thereafter, the class will be divided into teams of 3 people, and asked to prepare three papers (or short lectures based on multiple papers) to present to the class (2 live; 1 posted slides/notes). You will be paired by topic interest and also to ensure team diversity (e.g., one person with knowledge of econometrics, one with native English, one with a knowledge of one of the USSR languages, one who is familiar with socialist institutions…). Classes thereafter will be divided between team presentations and Becker/TA presentations.

   To enhance the efficiency of class presentations, each team should prepare a handout for distribution to the entire class. The handout should contain pertinent aspects of the formal presentation to avoid having to write out lots of equations on the screen in class. Even if you are not a presenter, you are expected to have read the assigned article in detail before class. The presenters will provide (a) derivations of technical work and (b) make critical analytical comments

as well as simply presenting the paper; other students should be prepared to discuss the article. At times, the professors will provide brief background lectures on related literature. The intention is to provoke discussion, and for the presenter to discuss new techniques, modeling approaches, data sets, and findings, as well as to discuss shortcomings.

The exact design of the course will depend on final enrolment. I anticipate a class of roughly 7 groups. If there are more than 7 groups, we will need to use some of the discussion section for presentations, in which case we expect you to attend at least 75% of peer presentations.

8. **Grading and assignments**. The grades will be determined as weighted averages of exam and homework performances: ALL DATES ARE APPROXIMATE

- USSR overview quiz · 5% September 6
- In-class presentations and supporting notes (3 per team) · · · 27%
- Original research paper: outline, empirical plan · · · · · · · · · · 10% October 20
- Research paper (including slides for oral presentation) · · · · · 30% November 17
- Written comments on two other students' research papers · · · 8% November 24
- Final examination[1] or revised version of research project · · · 20% December 8, 2:00 pm

- The **in class presentations** include three technical presentations of recent papers in economics journals, with dissemination via Sakai to the class, and two "live" classroom presentations via Zoom. These should be short but detailed presentations of a formal (*i.e.*, mathematical) economic model or econometric application pertinent to the USSR. Topics must receive the instructor's approval.
- The **research paper** is expected to be a journal article-type research paper that could be developed into or submitted as an honors thesis. It should be 15-25 pages in length plus tables, on a topic of the student's choice, but subject to instructor approval. The paper is expected to involve original empirical or theoretical research.
- The **final examination**, if it takes place, will be comprehensive.

9. **Course outline.** [2]As we come to each topic, I will note required and optional readings. The class itself will be conducted as a guided discussion, except when it is necessary to present formal models, or when students are making presentations. Thus, it is essential that everyone have done a substantial amount of reading on each subject prior to the class. **As a general policy, I expect each student to read the Alexeev-Weber book and Gregory-Stuart as useful background material, and really encourage you to go through both Aslund and Gaidar's books on more recent history. Students also should read at least one paper (or chapter from a book) for each class, and to contribute to the discussion based on that reading. Readings may be chosen from the syllabus below, or from the journals and websites listed above, or found elsewhere.**

August 23	**lecture: The Big Picture I**
August 25	**lecture: The Big Picture II**
August 30	**lecture: Anthropometrics**
September 1	**lecture: The Pre-revolutionary era**
September 6	**Quiz; technical presentation on night lights; USSR overview quiz**
September 8	**Data presentation from librarians; technical presentation on ArcGIS (date approx.)**

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[1] I reserve the right to cancel the final, in which case the presentation and survey will count for 30% (combined) and the term paper 45% of the total grade.

[2] Not yet confirmed, but I will try to arrange visiting lectures from Prov Alisher Aldashev (Satbayev University), Prof Michael Alexeev (Indiana University), Dr. Anders Aslund (Atlantic Council), Dr. Jack Matlock (Duke University), and Prof. Eugenia Nazrullaeva (Warwick University).

September 13	lecture: Serfdom & agriculture; student presentations start (TBA)
September 15	lecture: Serfdom & Agriculture
September 20	lecture: The Distant Regions; econometrics presentation
September 22	lecture: War & Revolution
September 27	lecture: The NEP Era
September 29	lecture: Industrialization I
October 4	**fall break**
October 6	lecture: Industrialization II
October 11	lecture: Famine: Kazakhstan
October 13	lecture: The Long Shadow of Kazakhstan's Famine (Zhaomin Li)
October 18	lecture: The Great Terror, Collectivization, and Excess Mortality (David Henderson)
October 20	lecture: War & Terror I; **research paper first draft due**
October 25	lecture: War & Terror II (Jia Rong Chua/Katja Gilman: who gets repressed and why>)
October 27	lecture: War & Terror III; econometrics presentation
November 1	lecture: Chernobyl
November 3	lecture: Semipalatinsk Nuclear Polygon (Sultan Muratov/Jeff Hill)
November 8	lecture: Militarization & Decline I
November 10	lecture: Militarization & Decline II
November 15	lecture: Demographic Change (Lin Zhao: who gets kidnapped and why?)
November 17	lecture: Urbanization (Kaichao Chang); **research paper due**
November 22	lecture: Collapse, Crisis, & Catastrophe (Stephanie Dodd)
November 24	**Thanksgiving break; comments on classmates' research papers due**
November 29 Science	lecture: Maternity Capital (Stella McMullen Miles) and Saving Soviet
December 1	lecture: Corruption in the Modern Era
December 8	**Final exam or revised research paper due**