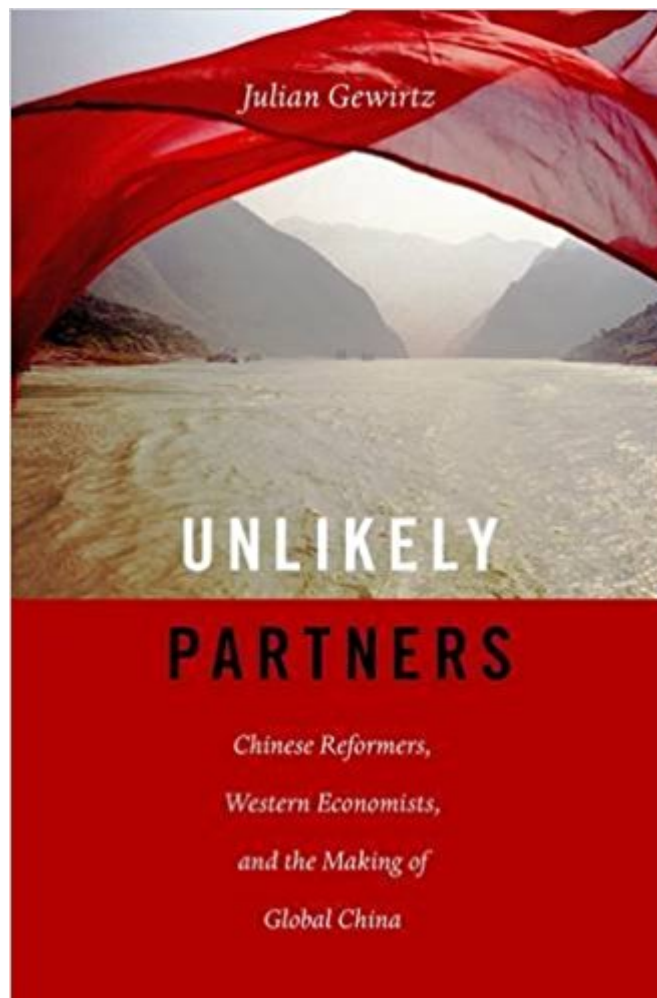




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# Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, And The Making Of Global China



## Synopsis

Unlikely Partners recounts the story of how Chinese politicians and intellectuals looked beyond their country's borders for economic guidance at a key crossroads in the nation's tumultuous twentieth century. Julian Gewirtz offers a dramatic tale of competition for influence between reformers and hardline conservatives during the Deng Xiaoping era, bringing to light China's productive exchanges with the West. When Mao Zedong died in 1976, his successors seized the opportunity to reassess the wisdom of China's rigid commitment to Marxist doctrine. With Deng Xiaoping's blessing, China's economic gurus scoured the globe for fresh ideas that would put China on the path to domestic prosperity and ultimately global economic power. Leading foreign economists accepted invitations to visit China to share their expertise, while Chinese delegations traveled to the United States, Hungary, Great Britain, West Germany, Brazil, and other countries to examine new ideas. Chinese economists partnered with an array of brilliant thinkers, including Nobel Prize winners, World Bank officials, battle-scarred veterans of Eastern Europe's economic struggles, and blunt-speaking free-market fundamentalists. Nevertheless, the push from China's senior leadership to implement economic reforms did not go unchallenged, nor has the Chinese government been eager to publicize its engagement with Western-style innovations. Even today, Chinese Communists decry dangerous Western influences and officially maintain that China's economic reinvention was the Party's achievement alone. Unlikely Partners sets forth the truer story, which has continuing relevance for China's complex and far-reaching relationship with the West.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A great book and a delight to read. It roars along at an exuberant, enthusiastic pace; each time I put it down I was eager to pick it up again. Gewirtz tells an important and bold story, making a substantial contribution to understanding China's economic transformation. (Barry Naughton, author of *The Chinese Economy*) Gewirtz has added a brilliant new chapter to the story of China's economic revival. This intelligent, thoroughly well-informed study reveals the essential role played by Western advisors who sought not to change China, but, rather, to be partners in its success. A powerful case for openness. (Evan Osnos, author of *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China*) China's reforms have been written about from many different angles, but no one until now has delved into the intellectual interchanges that transformed the thinking of a generation of economists who are still influencing China today. It is a great story, and Gewirtz tells it with great verve. (Joseph Fewsmith, author of *China since Tiananmen*) Gewirtz takes us on a grand tour of the historic efforts made by Chinese leaders to concoct a new economic model, reminding us also of the critical role played by foreign ideas and advisors. If you are confused by the complicated evolution of China's economy, this wonderfully meaty book will serve as a fascinating road map. (Orville Schell, Director, Center on U.S.-China Relations, Asia Society) Gewirtz has written an insightful and well-documented review of China during the very important period of change from 1976 to 1993. This work provides an excellent basis for understanding past developments and for assessing the impact of any policy changes that may be coming in the years ahead. I enjoyed the book greatly. (James D. Wolfensohn, President, World Bank Group, 1995-2005) I loved this book. It is a tour de force on China, the theory of policy advising, and the history of economic thought, all rolled into one. (Tyler Cowen *Marginal Revolution* 2016-10-23) Gewirtz's account of China's transition from Marxist central planning to socialist market economics is masterful: detailed, balanced, and illuminating. This is a revelatory account of China's economic evolution, its debt to Western economic thought, and its love-hate relationship with capitalism. (Publishers Weekly (starred review) 2016-11-25) It vividly brings to life China's economic debates from Mao's death in 1976 until 1993, by which time the country's direction was clearer. The claim is not that Westerners were responsible for China's development. A large constellation of Chinese reformers deserves the credit for that. Indeed, one of the book's virtues is that it puts the spotlight on Zhao Ziyang, the Communist Party chief who wound up under house arrest after the 1989 Tiananmen protests. Zhao has been written out of official histories, but his consistent support for bold thinking was critical to China's

success. Gewirtz's book does not attempt to provide a definitive account of China's economic rise. But it is still a gripping read, highlighting what was little short of a revolution in China's economic thought. (The Economist 2017-01-05) Provides a gracefully written narrative of the unusual experiments with mixing economic forms that facilitated China's economic boom. Nicely crafted and carefully argued. (Jeffrey Wasserstrom Los Angeles Review of Books blog 2017-01-04) Shedding light on how China achieved radical economic change in less than two decades, [Gewirtz's] book is instructive for anyone who wants to know how other countries can emerge from poverty and place themselves on the path to development. At a time when the Chinese model again seems to be creaking, President Xi Jinping would be wise to heed the message of Gewirtz's book: that China does best when it is open to foreign ideas. (Howard French Wall Street Journal 2017-01-20) A fluent account of the partnership between Chinese and foreign experts in the "golden age" of the 1980s that helped set the stage for the country's ascent as a global power. What this book lays out is a fascinating example of the power of international collaboration. (Jonathan Fenby Financial Times 2017-01-06) Gewirtz provides a dramatic and freshly detailed account of the terrifying years from 1976 to 1993, when China's central leaders held their breath and pushed their country into the unknown by beginning to liberalize its economy. He focuses especially on the boldness of Zhao Ziyang, who served as premier from 1980 to 1987. Zhao sought advice from foreign economists, putting their ideas into practice despite opposition from a conservative faction that was understandably suspicious of Western admonitions to abandon state planning and compromise the country's economic autonomy. This is a story not of Western influence seeping irresistibly into Chinese minds but of Chinese leaders actively reaching out for ideas. It is also a story of fierce political struggles conducted in the form of theoretical debates. Although built around personalities, it delivers a great deal of insight into how China's mix of socialism and capitalism works. (Andrew J. Nathan Foreign Affairs 2017-03-01) A remarkable book, written with poise and confidence, that shows how closely Chinese reform was tied to ideas from the capitalist and socialist blocs during the Cold War, and illuminates the beginnings of an economic idea that would transform China and change the world. (Rana Mitter Project Syndicate 2017-04-07)

Julian Gewirtz, a 2013 graduate of Harvard College, is a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Oxford and a Rhodes Scholar.

Julian Gewirtz has written a powerful yet nuanced account of the complex relationship between

Chinese and foreign economists as China in the Deng era sought to escape from Mao's dysfunctional, moribund economy. In this fascinating history, Gewirtz explains the evolution of China's paradoxical "socialist market economy" by focusing on the dialectic among the a breathtaking array of intellectuals and officials on the tensions between "government" and "market" and between "Chinese" and "foreign." With remarkable clarity, he explicates the subtle and unlikely "partnership" through which Western ideas were adapted, not adopted wholesale, in the breathtaking transformation of China. And he describes not just what actually happened but how the demands of China's complex political culture dictated changing perceptions and accounts of the vital interactions, leading today to submersion of this narrative by a Xi regime ostensibly bent on defending China against "Western influence." A remarkable work of Chinese economic history on the cross-currents of openness and parochialism with signal importance for understanding not just the China of yesterday, but also of today and tomorrow. Ben W. Heineman, Jr., Senior Fellow at Harvard's Schools of Law and Government.

China is now the world's largest economy by purchasing power parity and is expected to overtake the U.S. as the largest GDP economy by 2025. Mao's communist ideology regarding the economy has been replaced by a 'socialist market economy.' Gewirtz' book is how that transformation occurred between 1976 and 1993. When Mao died, China was mired in poverty and isolated from the outside world. It had been ravaged by the Great Leap Forward (1958 - 1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976), with a per capita GDP of only \$175 in 1978. Within two years, Deng replaced Mao's designated successor, Hua Guofeng, declaring his intention to find a form of socialism that did not 'boil down to shared poverty.' The method - 'crossing the river by feeling for the stones,' or 'pragmatic experimentation,' guided by learning from abroad. Intellectual exchanges had all be ceased under Mao. Thinkers and writers during the Cultural Revolution were often viewed as threats who needed to be 'reeducated.' (Tens of thousands of intellectuals and officials were purged as 'rightists' and died.) In 1978, Deng told a vice premier before a trip to Western Europe 'We ought to study the successful experiences of capitalist countries and bring them back to China.' This brought tremendous receptivity, though never unconditional, to incorporating market elements ('useful capitalist methods') into China's socialist system - despite a recent history of thought-policing and maintenance of the Party line that could be a matter of life and death. Western

economists were crucial, unlikely partners in that reform process. The U.S. was not the sole source of new ideas. Vice Premier Gu Mu's stay in Western Europe, sponsored by Hua Guofeng, brought awareness of special export-processing zones that became the special economic zones in Shenzhen and elsewhere. Within several weeks of Mao's funeral, Hua and his CCP elder allies (including Marshal Ye - a distinguished former military leader who had participated in the Long March of 1934-35) decided that the 'Gang of Four' (Mao's wife, plus three others who had gathered power during the Cultural Revolution) was endangering their leadership. The Gang was arrested, along with thirty of their closest allies in Beijing. Hua saw a need to raise living standards and supported national conferences on economic issues. Meanwhile, a sense grew that Deng should be brought back from his banishment to a tractor factory. In 1962, Deng praised policies creating economic incentives for peasant households to produce more crops - anathema to Mao, and had first promulgated the 'It doesn't matter if the cat is black or yellow, as long as it can catch mice, it is a good cat.' These views, along with his decades-long association with Zhou and deep ties to the military help explain his 1976 rehabilitation. 'If we ourselves don't know about advanced methods of management, we should learn from those who do, either at home or abroad' - Deng. The Chinese were most receptive to economists who came from planned economies and understood their flaws, but also knew that sudden changes were impractical. Ota Sik, from Czechoslovakia, inspired a phased-in pricing strategy in the early 1980s, whereby China gave enterprises ever more control over setting prices. The biggest star was Janos Kornai, a Hungarian who identified shortages as the chronic problem of socialism. The World Bank became China's largest source of foreign capital and provided reams of useful policy advice. Milton Friedman received a mixed reception in China. In his first visit (1980), Friedman strongly emphasized the importance of free markets, pointing to Hong Kong as a model to be followed - this was seen as becoming capitalist. That was not received enthusiastically. They sought his advice again in 1988, when worried by double-digit inflation which they knew undercut the Nationalists before 1949. Friedman showed that inflation is a problem of 'too much money chasing too few goods,' and that application of price controls and rationing would only worsen the situation. This time his advice was taken. In 1985 a cruise down the Yangtze River brought Chinese economists together to learn from the rest of the world - American, German, Hungarian, Polish, and Scottish economists. Jeffrey Tobin and Janos Kornai were among the foreign stars present.

Incredibly approachable and informative. Highly recommend.

Julian Gewirtz' *Unlikely Partners* may have been published by an academic press, but it reads as an entertaining and almost cinematic rendering of the complicated landscape of China's economy over time. This is a topic that had urgently needed exploration, and Gewirtz handles what is arguably a "dry" topic for lay-readers with graceful prose and scrupulous portraiture of the people he describes in this bizarre but important history. Before reading *Unlikely Partners*, I thought (ignorantly) about China's infinitely-growing role in the contemporary global marketplace in a monolithic and simplistic way. Or I looked back on the history of the Cultural Revolution with broad strokes, and saw a nation stuck in the past. Gewirtz explores these complicated dynamics between socialism and capitalism, past and present, unlikely and likely, with an expert's analytical acuity and a human being's empathy. This book was a joy to read. I can't believe Gewirtz is only 28, yet it makes me look forward for what's to come.

An excellent and nuanced history of China's economic policymaking in the first fifteen or so years of the reform era (1978-1993), focusing on the intellectual exchanges between a group of Chinese intellectuals and various foreign economists. Though "Western economists" are in the title, the stars of the story are in fact mostly lesser-known scholars from what used to be called the Eastern Bloc. As China started moving away from socialism and the planned economy, it looked for inspiration first to other socialist countries that had made similar attempts at reform. This important intellectual history, in which the great Hungarian economist Janos Kornai played a big role, has not been widely told before.

China did not just leap from Mao to now. This thoughtful, accessible, and original book tells of how China's leaders enlisted Western economists to help shape the seemingly oxymoronic, and staggeringly successful, "socialist market economy" that America and the world must now learn to live with successfully or pay a huge price. This is history that it is critical to know and, as told by Julian Gewirtz, a delight to imbibe.

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