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Chinese Economic Policy Focus of UNH Professor's New Book

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DURHAM, N.H. -- China has become the third-largest and one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, and for that reason it is important to understand the country's policies now and as a communist state, argues Lawrence C. Reardon, associate professor of political science at the University of New Hampshire, in his new book, "The Reluctant Dragon: Crisis Cycles in Chinese Foreign Economic Policy."

Before 1978, Chinese foreign economic policy was considered by many to be isolationist and centered on Maoist self-reliance. Reardon argues that China was not out of touch with the global marketplace during the 1949-78 period, and that Deng Xiaoping's heralded liberalizations were in fact revisions and expansions of policies from the Maoist period.

"Now that China has been admitted to the World Trade Organization and will begin to adhere to international norms, we need to understand why leaders make the decisions they do," Reardon says. "I was able to reconstruct economic decisions made over three decades, and that's important because there's a view out there that after 1978 China changed, that there was a great transformation to a slightly more liberalized state. I argue that's not necessarily true."

The idea for the book grew out of the introductory chapter of Reardon's dissertation, but was only possible because of the Chinese Communist Party's publication of internal histories and other restricted-circulation materials. The book is part of a series published by Columbia University's East Asian Institute. Reardon spent last academic year at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the Elliott School of International Affairs of The George Washington

University in Washington, DC, working on his second book that explores post-1978 Chinese foreign economic policy, looking at the initial steps taken to open its economy to the outside world.

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