

Politics and Development of Contemporary China

Course Overview

The experience of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has attracted scholarly attention because of its stable one-party rule alongside rapid economic growth, which began more than three decades ago. To what extent is the China experience unique? To what extent can the China experience be explained and analyzed by existing theories in political science? In what ways can the China experience contribute to the scholarship of comparative politics? This advanced-level course focuses on the comparative implications of the China case. While its substantive focus is China, the course situates the case within the broader literature of comparative politics and international relations, including but not limited to state-building, the politics of development, contentious politics, and authoritarian politics. It is organized along the following four sections:

1. *A Political History of Modern China*

Why did China become a communist state in the 20th century? How can we understand political changes in contemporary China (1949-present)? This section reviews China's political history, including late imperial China, the nationalist revolution, and the communist revolution, focusing on issues like state-building, nation-building, and the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

2. *Political Institutions and Development*

How can we explain China's state structure and the development of its domestic political institutions? What are the political-economic explanations for China's economic miracle? This section introduces China's domestic political institutions, including formal state institutions, central-local relations, state-business interactions, and external trade.

3. *Public Opinion and Political Participation*

How active and influential are societal actors in China's political landscape? What are Chinese citizens' views on politics? What are the main social cleavages in China? This section explores key topics in China's political sociology, including state-society relations, the rise and decline of NGOs, and major social cleavages such as gender, labor, environmental protection, and minority concerns.

4. *China and the World*

As a historical global power and (re)emerging global power in the contemporary era, China has developed complex relations with its neighbors and other countries. This section examines China's foreign policy, regional security dynamics, its role in global governance, and its relationships with neighboring states, the Global South, and the Global North.

Course Objective

1. Understand and explain political outcomes in China using social science theory
2. Situate China within the broader context of comparative politics literature and debates.

Assessments

- 10% - Attendance and participation

- Active participation is required
 - Each student is required to lead the discussion for one seminar
- 20% x2 – Response papers
 - Write a 1000-word response paper to the readings of one research cluster (Part A, B, C, and D)
 - Can be submitted at any time during the term
- 50% – Research Proposal (5% research prospectus; 15% presentation; 30% final report)
 - A research proposal with a research question, a literature review, hypotheses, and methods

Suggested Data Sources for China Studies

- [China Gazetteer](#) (This database aggregates over 3000 county gazetteers compiled since the founding of the People's Republic of China).
- [CCP Elites - China Data Lab - UC San Diego](#) (This data contains information on the highest members of China's government, including all full and alternate Central Committee members, provincial standing committee members, and vice governors from 1997 through July of 2021.)
- [National Population Census of China Database](#) (This database provides access to digitized reports and Excel files of the population census published by China Statistics Press.)
- [Enterprise Survey for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in China](#) (Targeting private and foreign-owned enterprises registered in China from 2010 to 2017, this survey includes a total of 58,500 corporations and individual household businesses in 117 counties and districts).
- [Asian Barometer Survey](#) (The ABS is a cross-national comparative survey focused on socioeconomic modernization, regime transition and democratization, and changes in political values across the East Asia region.)
- [China General Society Survey \(CGSS\) 2023](#) (Launched in 2003, the CGSS is the country's earliest nationwide, comprehensive, and ongoing academic survey project. It systematically and comprehensively collects data at multiple levels, including social, community, household, and individual levels.)

Course Structure

In each session, I will lead the graduate students to discuss the readings on their key concepts, arguments, methodology, and implications from a comparative perspective, alongside two students assigned as the discussion leaders. The two students must write a 2-page response paper to the readings, based on the discussion areas above, from their own perspectives.

Weekly Schedule and Readings

Part A: Historical Legacy

Week 1: The birth of Modern China: Late Qing to the Early Communist Era

Huang, Haifeng, and Xinsheng Liu. (2018) Historical Knowledge and National Identity: Evidence from China. *Research and Politics*, 5(3), 1–8.

- Hui, V. T. B. (2025). What Rose and Fell in Imperial China? State Strength, the Civil Service Examination and Inventiveness. *Political Science Quarterly*, qqaf013.
- Fiskesjö, M. (2006). Rescuing the empire: Chinese nation-building in the twentieth century. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 5(1), 15–44.
- Strauss, J. (2006). Morality, coercion and state building by campaign in the early PRC: Regime consolidation and after, 1949–1956. *The China Quarterly*, 188, 891–912.

**Watch documentary: China: Century of Revolution (Part 1)*

Week 2: The Communist Party and Chinese Leadership

- Jiang, Junyan, and Zhaotian Luo. (2021). Leadership Styles and Political Survival of Chinese Communist Party Elites. *Journal of Politics*, 83(2), 125–139.
- Landry, P. F., Lü, X., & Duan, H. (2018). Does Performance Matter? Evaluating Political Selection Along the Chinese Administrative Ladder. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(8), 1074–1105.
- Li, Zeren, and Melanie Manion. (2023). The Decline of Factions: The Impact of a Broad Purge on Political Decision Making in China. *British Journal of Political Science*, 53(3), 815–834.
- Thornton, P. M. (2021). Party all the time: The CCP in comparative and historical perspective. *The China Quarterly*, 248(S1), 1–15.

Part B: Political Institutions and Development

Week 3: Chinese State Institutions

- Landry, P. F. (2008). *Decentralized Authoritarianism in China: The Communist Party's control of local elites in the post-Mao era*. Cambridge University Press. (Chapter 2)
- O'Brien, K. J., & Han, R. (2009). Path to democracy? Assessing village elections in China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 18(60), 359–378.
- Snape, Holly. (2024). The Rise of Party Law: Rewiring the Party, Recalibrating the Party–State Relationship. *China Journal*, 92, 1–26.
- Truex, R. (2014). The returns to office in a “rubber stamp” parliament. *American Political Science Review*, 108(2), 235–251.

Week 4: Chinese Political Economy I: Explaining Growth

- Bosworth, B., & Collins, S. M. (2008). Accounting for growth: comparing China and India. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 22(1), 45–66.
- Heilmann, S. (2008). Policy experimentation in China's economic rise. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 43(1), 1–26.
- Shevchenko, A. (2004). Bringing the party back in: the CCP and the trajectory of market transition in China. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 37(2), 161–185.
- Xu, C. (2011). The fundamental institutions of China's reforms and development. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 49(4), 1076–1151.

Week 5: Chinese Political Economy II: State-Business Relations

- Jiang, J. (2018). Making bureaucracy work: Patronage networks, performance incentives, and economic development in China. *American Journal of Political Science*, 62(4), 982–999.

- Lin, S. (2025). Addressing Risk by Doing Good: Business Response to Government Policy Initiative. *The Journal of Politics*, 87(4), 1414 – 1430.
- Lorentzen, P., Landry, P., & Yasuda, J. (2014). Undermining authoritarian innovation: the power of China's industrial giants. *The Journal of Politics*, 76(1), 182–194.
- Ong, L. H. (2012). Between developmental and clientelist states: Local state-business relationships in China. *Comparative Politics*, 44(2), 191–209.

Week 6: Chinese Political Economy III: Politics of International Trade

- Erten, B., & Leight, J. (2021). Exporting out of agriculture: The impact of WTO accession on structural transformation in China. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 103(2), 364–380.
- Fuchs, A. (2018). China's economic diplomacy and the politics-trade nexus. In *Research Handbook on Economic Diplomacy* (pp. 297–314). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Gu, J., Zhang, C., Vaz, A., & Mukwereza, L. (2016). Chinese state capitalism? Rethinking the role of the state and business in Chinese development cooperation in Africa. *World Development*, 81, 24–34.
- McNally, C. A. (2012). Sino-capitalism: China's reemergence and the international political economy. *World Politics*, 64(4), 741–776.

Part C Public Opinion and Political Participation

Week 7: Public Opinion and Political Culture

- Li, Lianjiang. 2008. Political Trust and Petitioning in the Chinese Countryside. *Comparative Politics*, 40(2), 209–226.
- Pan, Jennifer, and Yiqing Xu. 2017. China's Ideological Spectrum. *Journal of Politics*, 80(1), 254–273.
- Stockmann, D., & Gallagher, M. E. (2011). Remote control: How the media sustain authoritarian rule in China. *Comparative Political Studies*, 44(4), 436–467.
- Truex, Rory. (2022). Political Discontent in China Is Associated with Isolating Personality Traits. *Journal of Politics*, 84(4), 2172–2186.

Week 8: Authoritarian Control

- King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2013). How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression. *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 326–343.
- Ong, Lynette H. (2018). 'Thugs for Hire': Subcontracting of State Coercion and State Capacity in China." *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(3), 680–695.
- Qin, Bei, David Stromberg, and Yanhui Wu. (2017). Why Does China Allow Freer Social Media? Protests versus Surveillance and Propaganda. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(1), 117–140
- Xu, X. (2021). To repress or to co-opt? Authoritarian control in the age of digital surveillance. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(2), 309–325.

**Research prospectus due*

Week 9: State-Society Relations I: Political Participation and Political Responsiveness

- Chen, Jidong, Jennifer Pan, and Yiqing Xu. (2016). Sources of Authoritarian Responsiveness: A Field Experiment in China. *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(2), 383–400.

- Fu, D., & Distelhorst, G. (2018). Grassroots participation and repression under Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. *The China Journal*, 79(1), 100–122.
- O'Brien, K. J. (1996). Rightful resistance. *World Politics*, 49(1), 31–55.
- Manion, Melanie. (2017). Good Types' in Authoritarian Elections: The Selector Connection in Chinese Local Congresses. *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(3), 362–394.

Week 10: State-Society Relations II: NGOs and Civil Society

- Dai, J., & Spires, A. J. (2018). Advocacy in an authoritarian state: How grassroots environmental NGOs influence local governments in China. *The China Journal*, 79(1), 62–83.
- Fu, D. (2017). Disguised collective action in China. *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(4), 499–527.
- Hsu, J. Y., & Hasmath, R. (2014). The local corporatist state and NGO relations in China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23(87), 516–534.
- Saich, T. (2000). Negotiating the state: The development of social organizations in China. *The China Quarterly*, 161, 124–141.

Part D China and the World

Week 11: China and the World: Overview

- Callahan, W. A. (2008). Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony? *International Studies Review*, 10(4), 749–761.
- Haug, S., Foot, R., & Baumann, M. O. (2024). Power shifts in international organizations: China at the United Nations. *Global Policy*, 15, 5–17.
- Mattingly, D., Incerti, T., Ju, C., Moreshead, C., Tanaka, S., & Yamagishi, H. (2025). Chinese state media persuades a global audience that the “China model” is superior: Evidence from a 19-country experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 69(3), 1029–1046.
- Shambaugh, D. (2015). China's soft-power push: The search for respect. *Foreign Affairs*, 94(4), 99–107.

Week 12: China and the Global North

- Christie, Ø. S., Jakobsen, J., & Jakobsen, T. G. (2024). The US way or Huawei? An analysis of the positioning of secondary States in the US-China rivalry. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 29(1), 77–108.
- Liao, S., & McDowell, D. (2016). No reservations: International order and demand for the renminbi as a reserve currency. *International Studies Quarterly*, 60(2), 272–293.
- Medeiros, E. S. (2019). The changing fundamentals of US-China relations. *The Washington Quarterly*, 42(3), 93–119.
- Reilly, J. (2017). China's economic statecraft in Europe. *Asia Europe Journal*, 15(2), 173–185.

Week 13: China and the Global South

- Callahan, W. A. (2016). China's “Asia Dream”: the Belt and Road Initiative and the new regional order. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 1(3), 226–243.
- Dreher, A., Fuchs, A., Parks, B., Strange, A. M., & Tierney, M. J. (2018). Apples and dragon fruits: The determinants of aid and other forms of state financing from China to Africa. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(1), 182–194.

- Eichenauer, V. Z., Fuchs, A., & Brückner, L. (2021). The effects of trade, aid, and investment on China's image in Latin America. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 49(2), 483–498.
- Hooijmaaijers, B. (2021). China, the BRICS, and the limitations of reshaping global economic governance. *The Pacific Review*, 34(1), 29–55.

Week 14 Presentation