

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 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 submit 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.)

Weekly Schedule and Readings

Part A Historical Legacy

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

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.

Fitzgerald, J. (1990). The Misconceived Revolution: State and Society in China's Nationalist Revolution, 1923–26. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 49(2), 323-343.

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

Lieberthal, Kenneth. (2003). *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform*. New York: W. W. Norton. (Chapter 7)

Manion, M. (1985). The cadre management system, post-Mao: The appointment, promotion, transfer and removal of party and state leaders. *The China Quarterly*, 102, 203-233.

Meyer, D., Shih, V. C., & Lee, J. (2016). Factions of different stripes: gauging the recruitment logics of factions in the reform period. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 16(1), 43-60.

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.

Potter, P. B. (1999). The Chinese legal system: Continuing commitment to the primacy of state power. *The China Quarterly*, 159, 673-683.

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: Authoritarian Control: Repression, Co-option and Legitimation

- 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.
- Wang, Y., & Minzner, C. (2015). The rise of the Chinese security state. *The China Quarterly*, 222, 339-359.
- 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.
- Zhu, Y., & Fu, K. W. (2024). How propaganda works in the digital era: Soft news as a gateway. *Digital Journalism*, 12(6), 753-772.

**Research prospectus due*

Week 8: State-Society Relations I: Political Participation and Political Responsiveness

- 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.
- Qiaoan, R., & Teets, J. C. (2020). Responsive authoritarianism in China - a review of responsiveness in xi and Hu administrations. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 25(1), 139-153.
- Su, Z., & Meng, T. (2016). Selective responsiveness: Online public demands and government responsiveness in authoritarian China. *Social Science Research*, 59, 52-67.

Week 9: 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.

Week 10: State-Society Relations III: Major Social Cleavages

- Liu, C. (2019). Local public goods expenditure and ethnic conflict: Evidence from China. *Security Studies*, 28(4), 739-772.
- White, Tyrene. 2010. "Domination, Resistance and Accommodation in China's One-Child Campaign." In *Chinese Society*, 3rd ed. Routledge.
- Wu, A. X., & Dong, Y. (2019). What is made-in-China feminism (s)? Gender discontent and class friction in post-socialist China. *Critical Asian Studies*, 51(4), 471-492.
- Steinhardt, H. C., & Wu, F. (2016). In the name of the public: Environmental protest and the changing landscape of popular contention in China. *The China Journal*, 75(1), 61-82.

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