

# PSCI 2216 Chinese Political System

Fall 2024

## Meeting Time and Location:

M/W/F 1:25-2:15, Commons Center 335

## Instructor:

Linan Yao, [linan.yao@Vanderbilt.Edu](mailto:linan.yao@Vanderbilt.Edu) (Please use my Vanderbilt email for all course-related inquiries.)

Office location: Commons 314 (Take the central stairs to the third floor, then turn right twice.)

Office hours: W 4:00-5:00 and by appointment

## Course Description:

This course provides an overview of China's political system. We start with a historical survey, beginning with its imperial past to the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), then the era of Mao, and finally moving through the period of economic reform. In the second part of the course, we delve into the central themes of China's political landscape, covering topics ranging from political institutions to state-society interactions. The aim of this course is to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in the Chinese political system.

## Course Objectives:

1. **Factual Knowledge:** Students will gain an intricate understanding of the Chinese political system, including its historical roots, key components, and its handling of internal and external pressures.
2. **Theoretical Understanding:** Students will grasp theoretical frameworks to understand and interpret China's complex political dynamics.
3. **Analytical Skills:** Students should enhance their abilities to critically assess China's political system and the theoretical frameworks surrounding it.

## Texts and Materials:

This class makes use of the following textbook:

- Joseph, William A. 2014. *Politics in China*. Oxford University Press.

You do not need to purchase the textbook for this course. Each week's readings will be uploaded to Brightspace, along with reading instructions. I suggest starting with a quick read to grasp the main ideas, then review the material more closely following the provided instructions. Please make sure to complete the readings before the related lecture.

The sample quiz questions included in these instructions will give you an idea of the type of content that may appear on the midterm and final exams.

## Course Requirements:

For detailed expectations and rubrics, refer to the end of the syllabus.

1. **Class Participation:** 10%
2. **Assignment:** 20%
  - **"In the News" Presentation:** 5%

Throughout the semester, each student will deliver a 5-minute presentation on a recent news story related to China.

- **Timeline Project: 5%**

This is a collaborative project aimed at creating a timeline that details the evolution of the Chinese political system. Each student is required to select an event from a provided list. The task involves writing a concise summary of approximately 200 words that not only explains the selected event but also highlights its significance.

- **Institutional Map Project: 5%**

This is a collaborative project to map the Chinese political institutions. Each student is required to select an organization from a provided list. The task involves writing a concise summary of approximately 200 words that not only explains what the selected organization does but also highlights in what way it matters.

- **Short Essay: Debunking a Myth About China: 5%**

Write a short essay (300-500 words) that critically examines a common myth or misconception about China in American political narrative.

**3. In-class Midterm: 20%**

The midterm exam will feature 40 questions, a mix of multiple-choice and true-or-false, designed to evaluate your grasp of the essential facts and concepts introduced in the course's first half.

**4. Take-home Final Exam: 20%**

The final exam will be online and will consist of four short-response questions and two essay questions.

**5. A Final Paper: 30%**

Submit one short paper (about 5 pages long, doubled-spaced) that grapples with a topic of your interest related to this course, due on the last day of class. Students are strongly encouraged to schedule office hours to discuss their topics of interest and paper outlines, preferably early in the semester.

**6. Extra Credit - A Review Paper: 3 %**

You have the opportunity to earn extra credit by writing a review of one, or a couple of the papers assigned in the same week, for this course. The review should be approximately 800 words in length. Book chapters from the textbook are not eligible for the review paper.

**Note on File Submission:**

When submitting any documents for this class, please avoid sharing Google Docs or Google Slides directly with me. My Vanderbilt email is a Microsoft account and is not linked to Google services, so I will not receive anything shared directly through Google.

**Important Dates & Deadlines:**

<i><b>When</b></i>	<i><b>What</b></i>
Sept 2	"In the News" presentations begins
Sept 23	"Timeline Project" assignment due
Oct 4	In-class midterm
Oct 14	"Institutional Map Project" assignment due
Nov 4	"Debunking a Myth" assignment due

Nov 22	Optional review paper due
Dec 4	Final paper due
Dec 9 at 9 a.m. to Dec 11 at 5 p.m.	Take-home Final Exam

### **Grading Policies:**

I will assign grades using the following scale : A (93.33), A- (90), B+ (86.67), B (83.33), B- (80), C+ (76.67), C (73.33), C- (70), D+ (66.67), D(63.33) D- (60), and F (Below 60). Here are several important details regarding my policy on course grades.

Grade complaints will not be entertained until 24 hours after the exam/assignment is returned to you or more than two weeks after the exam/assignment has been returned. If you have a question concerning the grade you have received, wait 24 hours and submit a written explanation, including specific reasons why you think your grade should be changed.

The only acceptable (not penalized) excuses for not completing an assignment on time are personal/family emergencies or illnesses. Otherwise, late assignments will be lowered by half a letter grade for each 24-hour period it is late.

### **Class participation rules:**

There are some important guidelines to ensure a conducive learning environment:

- **Active Participation:** Your unique perspective is valuable to our collective learning. Share your thoughts actively.
- **Respect:** Maintain an atmosphere of respect and courtesy. Avoid derogatory comments and personal attacks.
- **Inclusivity:** Respect cultural, racial, gender, and personal differences. Use inclusive language and refrain from making assumptions about others. Be mindful not to dominate the conversation.
- **Attentive Listening:** Pay full attention when others are speaking. Do not interrupt or talk over others.
- **Open-mindedness:** Be open to new perspectives and prepared to learn and grow.
- **Confidentiality:** Respect the privacy of your classmates. Keep personal experiences and opinions shared in class within the class.

### **Academic Integrity Policy:**

It is your responsibility to understand and abide by the Vanderbilt Honor Code. You can learn more about it [here](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/): [https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student\\_handbook/the-honor-system/](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/). Academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism, or any attempt to gain an unfair academic advantage, will be reported to the Honor Council. Breaches of academic integrity can lead to severe consequences including failure of the assignment, failure of the course, or disciplinary actions by the university.

### **Classroom Accommodations:**

If you require accommodations due to a disability, please contact Student Access Services at 615-343-9727. I will strive to provide all necessary accommodations for students with disabilities, as approved by this office.

If you experience significant personal and/or academic stress, Vanderbilt's Student Care Network offers a range of services to assist and support you. You can reach out to the Office of Student Care Coordination (OSCC) [here: https://www.vanderbilt.edu/carecoordination/](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/carecoordination/) or call them at 615-343-WELL.

### **Schedule:**

Please note that the provided schedule and reading may be subject to change.

## **Part One. Introduction**

### Week 1

*Q: How do we understand authoritarian politics?*

Aug 21 & Aug 23 – Course Overview and How to Approach Chinese Politics

## **Part Two. Historical Overview**

### Week 2

*Q: How do we understand the historical legacy of the PRC?*

Aug 26 & Aug 28 – Imperial China & The Republican Era

Aug 30 – Introduce Yourself & Class Discussion

- Kenneth Lieberthal, The Legacies of Imperial China. from *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform*. University of Hawai'i Press, page 1 – 14.
- *Politics in China*. Chapter 2. (starting from “Decline of the Imperial State”; Focus on the key concepts highlighted in the reading instruction)

### Week 3

*Q: What are communism, Maoism, and totalitarianism?*

Sept 2 & 4 – The Mao Era I (1949–1966)

(Sept 6 – Class Cancelled)

- *Politics in China*. Chapter 3. Part I.
- Yang Jisheng. 2022. *Tombstone*. Chapter 14 (“The Systemic Causes of the Great Famine”).

### Week 4

*Q: Why did tragedies like the Great Leap Forward Famine and the Cultural Revolution happen?*

Sept 9 & Sept 11 – The Mao Era II (1966-1978)

Sept 13 – Class Discussion

- *Politics in China*. Chapter 3. Part II

### Week 5

*Q: What is the relationship between economic reform and political reform?*

Sept 16 & 18 – The Deng Era

Sept 20 – Class Discussion

- *Politics in China*. Chapter 4, p. 119-132.
- John McMillan and Barry Naughton, 1992. How to reform a planned economy: lessons from China. *Oxford review of economic policy*.

### Week 6

*Q: Is the Chinese regime institutionalized?*

Sept 23 & Sept 25 – The Jiang, Hu, and Xi Eras

Sept 27 – Class Meeting Canceled (midterm review materials distributed for study)

- *Politics in China*. Chapter 4, p. 132-144.
- Nathan, Andrew J. “China’s changing of the guard: Authoritarian resilience.” In *Critical Readings on the Communist Party of China* (4 Vols. Set).
- Fewsmith, Joseph, and Andrew J. Nathan. “Authoritarian resilience revisited: Joseph Fewsmith with response from Andrew J. Nathan.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 28.

### Week 7

Sept 30 – Midterm Review

Oct 2 – TBD

Oct 4 – In-Class Midterm

### Week 8

*Q: Does the policy outcome in China reflect the will of one single individual?*

Oct 7 & Oct 9 – Institutions

(Oct 11 – Fall break)

- Lieberthal, Kenneth G. “Introduction: the ‘fragmented authoritarianism’ model and its limitations.” *Bureaucracy, politics, and decision making in post-Mao China* 1 (1992): 6-12.

## **Part Three. Special Topics**

### Week 9

*Q: How does PRC select and control cadres?*

Oct 14 & 16 – Cadre System

Oct 18 – Class Discussion: Review of the Institutional Map

- Victor Shih, Christopher Adolph, and Liu, Mingxing. 2012. Getting ahead in the communist party: explaining the advancement of central committee members in China. *American political science review*.

- Pierre F Landry, Lü, Xiaobo, and Duan, Haiyan. 2018. Does performance matter? Evaluating political selection along the Chinese administrative ladder. *Comparative Political Studies*.
- Minxin Pei. 2016. *China's crony capitalism: The dynamics of regime decay*. Harvard University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1.

### Week 10

*Q: Does the Chinese regime uphold an ideology?*

Oct 21 & 23 – Ideology and Propaganda

Oct 25 – Class Discussion

- *Politics in China*. Chapter 5.
- Daniela Stockmann. *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China*, Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1. page1-18.

### Week 11

*Q: What is the source of popular support in China?*

Oct 28 & 30 – Responsiveness and Censorship

Nov 1 – Class discussion

- Jidong Chen, Pan, Jennifer, and Xu, Yiqing. 2016. Sources of authoritarian responsiveness: A field experiment in China. *American journal of political science*.
- Ding, Iza. 2020. Performative governance. *World politics*.
- Margaret E Roberts. 2018. *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, page 1-104.

### Week 12

*Q: Is there a democratic future in China?*

Nov 4 – Protest and Repression (to be continued next week)

Nov 6 – China and the US election

Nov 8 – Review of Debunking the China myth assignment

- Yanhua Deng and Kevin J O'Brien. 2013. Relational repression in China: using social ties to demobilize protesters. *The China Quarterly*.

### Week 13

Nov 11 – Protest and Repression (continued)

Nov 13 – China and Its Peripheries I: Xinjiang and Taiwan

Nov 15 – Class Discussion

- O'Brien, Kevin J. 1996. Rightful resistance. *World Politics*.

### Week 14

*Q: Is China offering another political model to challenge the current world order?*

Nov 18 & 20 – China and Its Peripheries II: Taiwan; China and the World

Nov 22 – China and the World: Discussion

(Nov 23 – Dec 1, Thanksgiving break)

- Rush Doshi. 2021. *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*. Oxford University Press, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 11.

Week 15

Dec 2 – China's Pressing Issues

Dec 4 – Final Review

## **Expectations for Each Class Activity and Evaluation Rubrics:**

### ***Class Participation***

Active participation is a key component of this class. It can take many forms, such as asking questions during lectures or submitting responses through online platforms.

Because participation can be challenging to track accurately, I use the following rule to determine your participation score:

1. Base Participation Score: This is calculated based on your average performance in the other 90% of the course.
2. Bonus: A bonus of up to 3 point can be added for consistent and active engagement, such as asking questions and contributing to discussions.
3. Penalty: a penalty may be applied if you are consistently and notably absent from class.

### ***“In the News” Presentation***

Throughout the semester, each student will deliver a 5-minute presentation on a recent news story related to China. To qualify as recent news, the source article should ideally be no more than one month old. Start by introducing the news story as clearly as possible. Then, conclude with a short analytical segment (about 1-2 minutes), offering brief commentary and insights on the news, referencing theories, concepts, or facts from the course.

Please note that if a presentation focuses on a topic unrelated to current events in China, it will be awarded a score of 1 point, regardless of its overall quality. A list of resources for finding relevant news about China is available in a separate file.

#### **Grading Criteria:**

- 3 points for effectively covering the news.
- 1 point for providing your insights. This could include discussing the significance of the news, exploring why something happened, or making comparisons. You should reference theories, concepts, or facts covered in class. If you believe another political science theory better fits your analysis, it is acceptable to replace the course materials with that theory.
- 1 point for adhering to the 5-minute time limit. A well-timed presentation requires practice. Be selective with your content; for example, if discussing causes or consequences (or any list), focus on the three most important points rather than attempting to cover all factors.

Presentations will begin on September 2. The first student to present will receive a 1-point bonus on their presentation, while the second and third students will receive a 0.5-point bonus each. You can sign up using the following link: [Presentation Sign-Up Sheet](#). Don't forget to sign up for a slot on the spreadsheet to facilitate course collaboration.

### ***Timeline Project***

This is a collaborative project aimed at creating a timeline that details the evolution of the Chinese political system. Each student is required to select an event from a provided list. The

task involves writing a concise summary of approximately 200 words that not only explains the selected event but also highlights its significance.

**Grading Criteria:**

- Completion of the project with insufficient information (3 points): Typically indicated by a summary that is either too brief or lacks informative content.
- Completion of the project with sufficient information that adequately explains the event and its significance (4 points).
- Completion of the project with comprehensive information that not only explains the event and its significance but also excels in synthesizing and presenting information concisely (5 points).

Please sign up for your chosen event here: [Timeline Project Sign-Up Sheet](#). Ensure not to sign up for an event that has already been chosen by another student. The assignment is due on Sept 23. We will review the results in class.

***Institutional Map Project***

This is a collaborative project to map the Chinese political institutions. Each student is required to select an organization from a provided list. The task involves writing a concise summary of approximately 200 words that not only explains what the selected organization does but also highlights in what way it matters.

**Grading Criteria:**

- Completion of the project with insufficient information (3 points): Typically indicated by a summary that is either too brief or lacks informative content.
- Completion of the project with sufficient information that adequately explains the organization and its significance (4 points).
- Completion of the project with comprehensive information that not only explains the organization and its significance but also excels in synthesizing and presenting information concisely (5 points).

Please sign up for your chosen organization here: [Institutional Map Sign-Up Sheet](#). Ensure not to sign up for an organization that has already been chosen by another student. The assignment is due on Oct 14. We will review the results in class.

***Debunking a Myth about China***

How has an American politician's statement about China during the election been misleading? What ongoing myth about China, perpetuated by American politicians in the past, would you like to correct? Which simplified views of China do you wish to challenge or complicate? This assignment, a short essay (300-500 words), is an opportunity to showcase how you can critically examine common narratives related to China as you observe real-world politics. The writing should take the most basic form of persuasive writing: identify a statement you disagree with, then present your most impactful and concise argument against it.

The assignment is due on Nov 4. While the assignment is submitted to me, the points you discuss might be selected for review and discussion in class. To engage in this conversation safely, you may choose to indicate that you prefer these points to be shared anonymously.

**Grading Criteria:**

- 3 Points: The essay insufficiently critiques a common narrative or misconception related to China. This is typically indicated by a discussion that is too shallow, too brief, or lacks accurate information.
- 4 Points: The essay sufficiently critiques a common narrative or misconception related to China, providing a solid discussion with adequate depth and accuracy.
- 5 Points: The essay effectively critiques a common narrative or misconception related to China and demonstrates a deep understanding, offering original or nuanced perspectives.

***In-class Midterm***

The midterm exam will feature 40 questions, a mix of multiple-choice and true-or-false, designed to evaluate your grasp of the essential facts and concepts introduced in the course's first half. These questions will draw on materials from both the assigned readings, as highlighted in my weekly reading instructions, and the lectures.

Our focus for this exam is on fundamental knowledge crucial to understanding the major events, figures, and aspects of the Chinese political system, rather than on memorizing minute details like specific dates.

To effectively prepare for this exam, it is important to thoroughly engage with the readings following the provided instructions and to attentively participate in and understand the lectures.

Aim to build a comprehensive view of the Chinese political system's evolution, ensuring familiarity with all major events and concepts discussed. For practice and a better idea of what to expect, refer to the sample questions included in the reading instructions.

In addition, I welcome student-generated test questions. Details on how this can be done are to be determined.

***Take-home Final Exam***

The final exam will consist of four short-response questions and two essay questions. These questions will test (1) your grasp of the theories and key facts covered throughout the course (2) your synthesis of the material and (3) your analytical writing abilities.

The short-response questions are meant to consolidate your understanding of the theories, concepts, and facts learned throughout the semester. Each question should be answered in one to three sentences. Each short-response question is one point and providing the correct answer will earn you that one point.

For each essay question, you will need to articulate a clear and considered answer, logically support and elaborate on your argument, and integrate at least two theories and two key facts in an accurate way discussed in the class. Expected answers are within 500 words per question.

The exam will be available online. You can refer to course materials and use the internet. You can complete the exam anytime between Dec 9 at 9 a.m. to Dec 11 at 5 p.m.. However, if you are well-prepared and have a thorough understanding of the course content, completing the exam should not take more than 3 hours.

Grading Criteria for Each Essay Question:

- 3 points for clearly stating your answer to the question posed, logically supporting and elaborating on your argument.
- 2 points for referencing two facts covered in the class in a relevant and accurate way (1 point for each fact).
- 2 points for referencing two theories covered in the class in a relevant and accurate way (1 point for each theory).
- 1 point for keeping within the 500-word limit.

For preparation, sample questions are provided under the weekly schedules and within the “Questions to Think About” section accompanying my weekly reading instructions.

### ***A Final Paper***

Submit one short paper (about 5 pages long, doubled-spaced) that grapples with a topic of your interest related to this course, due on the last day of class, Dec 4.

This short paper, though only about 5 pages in length, represents the most challenging assignment of this course. Its brevity should not be mistaken for simplicity. This task demands a robust synthesis of facts and theories, alongside strong persuasive and analytical writing skills. You are expected to:

1. Identify a clear, focused question related to the course.
2. State a well-articulated argument.
3. Develop this argument logically and coherently.
4. Support your argument with relevant facts and materials drawn from course content.
5. Consider the opposition in a thoughtful way.
6. Write well.

Five points will be allotted for each of these criteria. Detailed instructions will be provided later in the course.

Crafting a high-quality short paper requires more than the time it takes to write five pages. It involves deep thought, careful planning, and often multiple revisions to hone your argument and refine your analysis. I advise you to get started early. To assist you in this process, you are strongly advised to discuss your topic or your outline with me in my office hours. A face-to-face conversation during my office hours is crucial to ensure that you have the correct understanding of the feedback I provide.

### ***Extra Credit - A Review Paper***

You have the opportunity to earn extra credit by writing a review of one, or a couple of the papers assigned in the same week, for this course. The review should be approximately 800 words in length. Book chapters from the textbook are not eligible for the review paper.

The quality of your paper review will be assessed as follows:

- Satisfactory (1 point): The review demonstrates a basic understanding of the paper but lacks depth or critical engagement.
- Good (2 points): The review accurately comprehends the paper and includes some critical engagement, but this may not be fully developed.
- Excellent (3 points): The review not only understands the paper correctly but also provides a thorough and insightful critical engagement with its content.

To critically engage with a paper effectively, follow these steps:

- Read and Analyze: Read the paper thoroughly and take detailed notes. Identify and outline the major themes and the author's main argument. Consider the underlying assumptions of the argument and analyze the evidence the author provides to support it.
- Formulate Your Stance: Decide whether you agree or disagree with the author's argument, and clearly articulate your reasons for this stance.
- Organize Your Review: Structure your review around your stance (as established in step 2), rather than just summarizing the paper (as in step 1). When developing your argument, integrate notes from your initial reading and reference other course materials to support your points.

The optional review paper is due on Nov 22. No late submissions will be accepted.