

PSCI 2216 Chinese Political System

Meeting Time and Location:

M/W/F 1:25-2:15, 121 Wilson Hall

Instructor:

Linan Yao, linan.yao@Vanderbilt.Edu

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

Office hours: W 4:00-6:00 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 and Methodological Skills:** Students should enhance their abilities to critically assess China's political system and the theoretical frameworks surrounding it. "Methodological" in this context refers to students' capacity to incorporate quantitative and qualitative evidence in their arguments.

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 it. We will also be using additional readings from books and academic journals on a weekly basis, all of which are listed in the syllabus. All required reading materials will be made available as PDF files for easy access.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

1. **Class Participation:** 15%

You are expected to attend classes regularly and punctually and participate in class discussion.

2. **Assignment:** 25%

- "In the News" Presentation: 5%

Throughout the semester, each student will make a short presentation on a recent news story related to China. In 5 minutes, describe the relevant background information, provide a succinct summary of event(s), and briefly discuss the significance of the news.

Presentations begin on September 1. The first student to present will receive a letter-grade bonus

on their presentation; the second and third students to present will receive a half letter-grade bonus. You can sign up [here](#):

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18BCbPEA8BVF8dT0657NQLTsTb4MPS4tIIclHcqHXn0I/edit?usp=sharing>.

- **Timeline Project: 5%**

A collaborative timeline on the evolution of the Chinese political system. Each student selects an event, explains its significance, and adds it to our collective timeline. Avoid duplicates. We will review it together in class on Oct 16. Deadline: Oct 15.

- **Institutional Map Project 5%:**

Collaboratively map the Chinese political institutions. Each student selects a political institution and explains its functions, and adds it to our collective chart. Avoid duplicates. For inspirations, please refer to organizations from the following sources: [Organization of the CCP](#), [State Council](#), and [Mass Organizations](#). We will review it together in class on Dec 27. Deadline: Dec 26.

- **China Expositions: 10%**

At the beginning of the semester, you will write a 300- to 500-word exposition essay, describing your understanding of and attitude towards China. At the end of the semester, having learned about Chinese politics, you will repeat this exercise, reflecting on whether your earlier understanding/attitude has been changed, challenged, or reinforced.

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

The midterm exam comprises 40 multiple-choice and true-or-false questions, specifically designed to assess your understanding of key facts and concepts covered in the first half of the course. The emphasis will be on knowledge essential to understanding the Chinese political system rather than your retention of detailed facts such as dates. Therefore, the best way to prepare for the exam is through regular engagement with the course materials, attending and participating in lectures, and developing a holistic understanding of the topics rather than rote memorization. Some sample test questions will be made available two weeks before the exam.

4. **Group Research Project: 40%**

To foster exchange of ideas and collaboration, you will join your classmates in groups of approximately four to conduct independent research on a topic of your choice. The project consists of group as well as individual components:

- group annotated outline (5%): an outline of your research, including main arguments and supporting evidence, annotated with a bibliography.
- group presentation (15%): a 10-minute presentation on your research and findings at the end of the semester. After the presentation, each student will be asked to submit an “author contribution statement” for the group research project.
- individual reflection paper (20%): each student will write a 5-page paper that reflects on the research finding and ties it to one of the central themes or theories of this course. While the group presentation may primarily focus on facts, I encourage you to go beyond listing facts in your individual reflection paper. Practice analytical and persuasive writing. Adopt a perspective you are passionate about, and use facts to substantiate your arguments.

Please submit your preferred topic choices by November 1; I may pair students based on indicated preference if needed. Topics Include (but are not limited to):

- China’s demographic changes
- Feminist and LGBTQ+ movement

- Hi-tech development and industrial policy (e.g., AI, bio-tech, etc.)
- Environmental issues and policy response
- One Belt One Road

If your selected topic pertains to either “China and Its Peripheries” or “China and the World,” you may be asked to present during the corresponding week, depending on our schedules.

7. Extra Credit: Book Review: 3 – 5%

You have the option of writing a book review to earn extra credit. The review should be around 800-1,000 words. No additional research is required.

Here are some tips for writing a good book review. (1) Read the book thoroughly and take notes. (2) Outline the major themes of the book and author’s main argument. (3) Consider the evidence supplied by the author to support the argument. (4) Determine whether you agree/disagree with the author’s argument and why. (5) Provide evidence to support your own opinion (e.g., cross-reference other materials from the class).

Note: Submit your book choices to the instructor for approval. If you need help finding a book, inform the instructor about your topics of interest.

Important Dates & Deadlines

| <i>When</i> | <i>What</i> |
|---------------|---|
| Sept 1 | China exposition I due |
| Sept 1 | “In the News” presentations begin |
| Oct 15 | Timeline Project due |
| Oct 18 | In-class midterm exam |
| Oct 26 | Institutional Map Project |
| Nov 1 | Research project: submit topic choices |
| Nov 15 | Research project: group annotated outline due |
| Nov 26 | China exposition II due |
| Dec 4 & Dec 6 | Research project: group presentations in class |
| Dec 11 | Research project: individual reflection paper due |
| Dec 13 | Optional book review due |

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/. 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.

Syllabus Guideline:

Listed activities such as “film screening” and “class discussion” are scheduled for individual lecture sessions, with each activity taking place on a separate day. Please note that the provided schedule and reading may be subject to change.

Part One. Introduction

8/23 & 8/25 - Course Overview and How to Approach Chinese Politics

Part Two. Historical Overview

8/28 & 8/30 & 9/1 - Imperial China, Reform and Revolution

Film Screening: *A Century of Revolution*, Part I

Class Discussion: What is communism, and what factors contributed to its rise in China?

- Kenneth Lieberthal, The Legacies of Imperial China. from *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform*. University of Hawai'i Press
- *Politics in China*. Chapter 2.
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Chapter 1

9/4 & 9/6 & 9/8 - The Mao Era I (1949-1966)

Film Screening: *A Century of Revolution*, Part II (second half)

Class Discussion: What influenced Maoist Communism? How should we understand totalitarianism?

- *Politics in China*. Chapter 3.
- Joseph Esherick. 1996. Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution, *Modern China*.
- Yang Jisheng. 2022. *Tombstone* Chapter 0 (“An Everlasting Tombstone”) and Chapter 14 (“The Systemic Causes of the Great Famine”).

9/11 & 9/13 & 9/15 - The Mao era II (1966-1978)

Film Screening: *Morning Sun*

Class Discussion: How do we understand Maoist Communism?

- Micheal Schoenhals and Roderick MacFarquhar. 2006. *Mao's last revolution*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Introduction, Chapters 5, 6, and 7.
- Andrew G. Walder and Yang Su. 2003. The Cultural Revolution in the Countryside: Scope, Timing and Human Impact. *The China Quarterly*.

9/18 & 9/20 & 9/22 - The Deng Era I (1978-1989)

Gaming: *Mao's Legacy*

Class Discussion: What tensions have emerged between the Communist ideologies and the economic reforms implemented?

- *Politics in China*. Chapter 4, p. 119-132.

- Shirk, Susan L. 1993. *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China*. Univ of California Press., Introduction.
- John McMillan and Barry Naughton, 1992. How to reform a planned economy: lessons from China. *Oxford review of economic policy*.

9/25 & 9/27 & 9/29 - The Deng Era II (1989)

Film Screening: *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*

Class Discussion: What is the relationship between economic reform and democratic reform?

- Andrew J. Nathan 2001. The Tiananmen Papers. *Foreign Affairs*, page 2-48.
- Dingxin Zhao. 1998. Ecologies of Social Movements: Student Mobilization during the 1989 Prodemocracy Movement in Beijing. *American Journal of Sociology*.
- Lowell Dittmer. 1990. China in 1989: The Crisis of Incomplete Reform. *Asian Survey*.

10/2 & 10/4 & 10/6 - The Jiang and Hu Eras (1989-2012)

Film Screening: *The Chinese Mayor*

Class Discussion: How did China transition from a state of poverty to one of the world's fastest-growing economies?

- *Politics in China*. Chapter 4, p. 132-144.
- Joseph Fewsmith. 2021. *Rethinking Chinese Politics*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 2 and 3.
- Jidong Chen, Pan, Jennifer, and Xu, Yiqing. 2016. Sources of authoritarian responsiveness: A field experiment in China. *American journal of political science*.

10/9 & 10/11 & 10/13 - The Xi Era

Class Discussion: How Do We Understand Key Policies from the Last Few Years? Does the Xi era signify fundamental changes in the Chinese political system?

- Susan Shirk. 2018. China in Xi's New Era: The Return to Personalist Rule, *Journal of Democracy*.
- Samson Yuen. 2014 Disciplining the Party: Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign and its limits, *China Perspectives*.
- Barry Naughton. 2017. Is China Socialist? *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.

10/16 Midterm Review

10/18 In-class Mid-term

(10/20 Fall break)

Part Three. Special Topics

10/23 & 10/27 - Elite Politics and Institutions

Class Discussion: Which institution or individuals hold the ultimate power in China's political system?

- Susan Lawrence and Martin, Micheal F. 2009. Understanding China's Political System, Congressional Research Service. R41007, December, 31.
- Victor Shih. 2022. *Coalitions of the Weak: Elite Politics in China From Mao's Stratagem to the Rise of Xi*. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 1 and Chapter 7
- Andrew Mertha. 2009. Fragmented authoritarianism 2.0: Political pluralization in the Chinese policy process. *The China Quarterly*.

10/30 & 11/1 & 11/3 - Cadre System

Class Discussion: What are the incentives shaping the Chinese cadre system?

- 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.

11/6 & 11/8 & 11/10 - Responsiveness, Propaganda, and Censorship

Class Discussion: What is the source of popular support in China?

- Ding, Iza. 2020. Performative governance. *World politics*.
- Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E Roberts, 2014. Reverse-engineering censorship in China: Randomized experimentation and participant observation. *Science*.
- Margaret E Roberts. 2018. *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, page 1-104.
- Daniela Stockmann. *Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China*, Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1. page1-18.

11/13 & 11/15 & 11/17 - Protest and Repression

Class Discussion: Could there potentially be a democratic future for China?

- Yanhua Deng and Kevin J O'Brien. 2013. Relational repression in China: using social ties to demobilize protesters. *The China Quarterly*.
- O'Brien, Kevin J. 1996. Rightful resistance. *World Politics*.
- Yuhua Wang and Carl Minzner. 2015. The Rise of the Chinese Security State. *The China Quarterly*.
- Minxin Pei. 2013. Five Ways China Could Become a Democracy. *The Diplomat*.

(Thanksgiving break)

11/27 & 11/29 - China and Its Peripheries: Xinjiang and Taiwan

- *Politics in China*. Chapter 16.
- *Politics in China*. Chapter 18.
- Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Myunghee Lee, and Emir Yazici. 2020. Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression: China's Changing Strategy in Xinjiang. *International Security*.
- Phillip Saunders. 2022. Three Logics of Chinese Policy Towards Taiwan: An Analytic Framework, from *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan*. National Defense University Press.
- Oriana Skylar Mastro. 2021. The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force, *Foreign Affairs*.

12/1. Class Discussion: China and the World

- Graham Allison. 2015. The Thucydides Trap: Are the US and China Headed for War? *The Atlantic*.
- Rush Doshi. 2021. *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*. Oxford University Press, Introduction, Chapters 1, 3, 7, 11, 12, and Conclusion.

12/4 & 12/6. Group Presentations