

**University of Toronto
Department of Political Science**

POL431H1S
Politics and Society in Contemporary China

Winter, 2026
Mr. Falkenheim

Office Hours: Tuesday 2-4 and by appointment (SS3029)
email: victor.falkenheim@utoronto.ca

Course Outline

This course will explore the dynamics of political change in post-Mao China through an examination of selected systemic challenges and regime responses. The primary focus will be on processes of institutional development and decay as the Party-State regime alternates between hard and soft authoritarianism. A secondary theme will deal with evolving state-society relations, exploring the regime's efforts to manage an increasingly diverse and restive society. An important goal of the course will be to introduce students to the major scholarly debates within the contemporary China studies field, as well as to the primary and secondary materials available for empirical research on these questions.

Course Format and Requirements

The course will be organized as a colloquium/seminar centered on class readings. Responsibility for summarizing and commenting on the readings will be rotated among seminar participants. Grades will be based on the following:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------|------|
| (1) Participation: | 20%; |
| (2) 2 reading summary/critiques (5-7 pages) | 50% |
| (3) Research Exercise 5-7 pages, | 30% |

Readings: Posted on Quercus by topic and date.

Topics and Readings:

January 5

**I: Course Introduction; Problematics, Empirics, and Hunches:
Pekingology Revisited**

1. Randall Peerenboom, China Modernizes: Threat to the West or Model for the Rest?, Oxford, 2007, Chapter 1.
2. Kaiser Kuo, "Why do Chinese People like their government," SupChina, 2019.
3. "Western intellectuals now have weak minds to grasp China"

4. Kaiser Kuo, "The Great Reckoning." (2025)
5. Joseph Fewsmith, "The Changing Methodology of Beijingology."
6. Alice Miller, 'Valedictory', China Leadership Monitor, # 57
7. Kevin O'Brien, "Studying Chinese Politics in an Age of Specialization," Journal of Contemporary China, September, 2011.
8. Scott Kennedy, "Overcoming our Middle Kingdom Complex: Finding China's Place in Comparative Politics," in Scott Kennedy, Ed. Beyond the Middle Kingdom, Stanford, 2011.
9. Kevin O'Brien, "Speaking to Theory and Speaking to the China Field," Issues and Studies, December, 2018.
10. Andrew Mertha, "Fifty Years of Engagement: The China Scholar Community and the Study of China," Engaging China, 2021

January 12

China: 'Resilient Authoritarianism' or "Trapped Transition"?

1. Bruce Gilley, "Should We Try to Predict Transitions to Democracy? Lessons for China," (2005)
2. Minxin Pei, "Is China's Transition Trapped and What should the West do about it?" Centre for Social and Legal Studies, University of Oxford, 2007/
3. Elizabeth Perry, "Studying Chinese Politics: Farewell to Revolution," The China Journal, January, 2007
4. Andrew Nathan, "Authoritarian Impermanence," Journal of Democracy, 2009.
5. Vivienne Shue and Patricia Thornton, To Govern China, Introduction.
6. Minxin Pei, "China: Totalitarianism's Long Shadow," Journal of Democracy, April, 2021.
7. William Overholt, China's Crisis of Success, Chapter 1.

January 19

Chinese Perspectives and China 'Models'

1. David Shambaugh, "Learning from Abroad to Reinvent Itself: External Influences on Internal CCP Reforms," in Cheng Li, Editor, China's Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy, pp.283-301.
2. Bruce Gilley and Heike Holbig, "The Debate on Party Legitimacy in China: A mixed quantitative/qualitative analysis," Journal of Contemporary China, March, 2009.
3. Bell, "Chinese Democracy Isn't Inevitable," The Atlantic, May 29, 2015.

4. Lance Gore, "The Communist Party-Dominated Gove Model of China: Legitimacy, Accountability and Meritocracy, Polity, 2018.
5. Rory Truex, "Consultative Authoritarianism and It's Limits, Comparative Political Studies, 2017.

January 26

Change as Process I: Three Models

1. Yu Keping, "Ideological Change in and Incremental Democracy in Reform Era China," in Cheng Li, Ed. China's Changing Political Landscape, pp. 44-57.
2. Kellee S. Tsai, Capitalism Without Democracy, Chapters 2&7, (pp. 17-43; 200-221)
3. George Gilboy and Benjamin Read, "Political and Social Reform in China: Alive and Walking," Washington Quarterly, 2008.
4. Andrew Mertha, "Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0," China Quarterly, 2007.
5. Yun Yun Ang How China Escaped Poverty, Selected sections.

Change as Process II: Case Studiues

6. Daniel Kelliher, "The Chinese Debate over Village Self-Government," The China Journal, January, 1997.
7. Tianjian Shi, "Insitutionalist Tactics for Democracy," World Politics, 1999.
8. Lianjiang Li, "The Empowering Effect of Village Elections in China," Asian Survey, 2003.
9. Kornreich. Vertinsky and Potter, "Consultation and Deliberation in the making of China's Health Care Reform"

February 2

Can the Party Reinvent itself?

1. Dickson, "Integrating Wealth and Power in China: The Communist Party's Embrace of the Private Sector," China Quarterly, no. 192 (December, 2007).
2. Stig Thorgersen, "Parasites or Civilisers: The Legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party in Rural Areas," China: An International Journal, September, 2003, pp.200-223
3. Andrew G. Walder, "The Party Elite and China's Trajectory of Change," China: An International Journal, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2004)
4. Patricia Thornton, "The New Life of the Party," The China Journal, 2012.

5. Baogang Guo, 'A Partocracy with Chinese Characteristics: Governance Reform under Xi Jinping,' Journal of Contemporary China, 2020.
6. Minxin Pei, "Rewriting the Rules of the Chinese Party-State: Xi's Progress in Reinventing the CCP," China Leadership Monitor, #60 (2019)
7. Kjeld Erik Brodsgard, 'Turning the CCP into an Elite Party,' in Zheng and Gore, The CCP in Action, 2020.

February 9

Ideology and Legitimacy: Restoring Orthodoxy?

1. Feng Chen, "Rebuilding the Party's Normative Authority: China's Socialist Spiritual Civilization Campaign," Problem of Post-Communism, Nov.-Dec., 1998.
2. Anne-Marie Brady and Wang Juntao, "China's Strengthened New Order," Journal of Contemporary China, 2009,
3. Daniel Bell, "From Marx to Confucius: Changing Discourse on China's Political Future," Dissent, 2009.
4. "Internet Commentator"
5. Central Document # 9 (2013)
6. Minxin Pei, "Ideological Indoctrination under Xi Jinping," China Leadership Monitor, #59 (2019)
7. Maria Repnikova and Kecheng Fang, "Authoritarian Participatory Persuasion 2.0: Netizens as Thought Work Collaborators in China," Journal of Contemporary China, 2018.
8. Timothy Cheek, "Ideological Reformation"

February 16

Reading Week: No Class

February 23

Elite Conflict, Leadership Selection and Meritocracy

1. Susan Shirk, (The Political Logic of Economic Reform (1993), Chapter 4 ("Leadership Incentives."))
2. David Shambaugh, "The Dynamics of Elite Politics During the Jiang Era," China Journal, January, 2001.
3. Richard Daniel Ewing, "Hu Jintao: The Making of a Chinese General Secretary," China Quarterly, March 2002
4. Evan Osnos, "Born Red," The New Yorker, April 6, 2015
5. Cheng Li, "Leadership Politics in the Xi Jinping Era"
6. Susan Shirk, "Return to Personalistic Leadership," Journal of Democracy, 2016.

7. Nimrod Baranovitch, "A Strong Leader for a Time of Crisis: Strongman Politics as a Collective Response to Regime Weakness," Journal of Contemporary China, (2021)
8. Roger Garside Coup: Great Leap to Freedom, University of California Press, 2021
9. Richard McGregor, "Interview re: "Xi Jinping: The Backlash" (Lowy, 2020)
10. Melanie Manion, "Meritocracy Revisited"

March 2

Managing Protest

1. Murray Scot Tanner, "Cracks in the Wall: China's Eroding Coercive State," Current History, September, 2001.(PDF)
 2. Jianying Zha, "Enemy of the State," The New Yorker, April 23, 2007.
 3. Teresa Wright, "The Chinese Democratic Party and the Politics of Protest in the 1980s-1990s," China Quarterly, No. 172 (December, 2002).
 4. James Tong, "Anatomy of Regime Repression in China," Asian Survey, November-December, 2002.
 5. Zhen Jianghua, "The Perilous Life of a Young Activist in China."
 6. Xu Zhiyong, "Dear Chairman Xi, It's Time for You to Go," (2021)
 7. Peter Lorentzen, "Designing Contentious Politics in Post-1989 China,," Modern China, 2017
 8. Chen Xi, Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism, Introduction
 9. Sheena Greitens, "Domestic Security under Xi Jinping," China Leadership Monitor, (2019)
 10. Suzanne Scoggins, "Rethinking Authoritarian Resilience and the Coercive Apparatus," Comparative Politics, January, 2021.
5. Baogang He and Mark Warren, "Authoritarian Deliberation,"

March 9

The 'Puzzle' of Popular Support

1. Andy Nathan, "Culture, Complicity and Idenetity: Why Public Support for the CCP Remains High After 2020," Center for Advanced China Research, January, 2021.
2. Cunningham, Saich and Turiel, "Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time," Harvard Ash Centre Working Paper, (July, 2020)

3. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “The State and Digital Society in China: Big Brother Xi is Watching You,” Issues and Studies, (March, 2020)
4. Wenfang Tang, “The ‘Surprise’ of Authoritarian Resilience in China,” American Affairs Journal, 2017.

March 16

Civil Society

March 23

Ethnic Nationalism and the Chinese State

1. James Leibold, Xinjiang, CLM #59
2. Robbie Barnett, “Thunder from Tibet”
3. Dru Gladney, “Dislocating China.” Ch 2
4. Gardner Bovingdon, “The not so silent majority”
5. “Conversation with Ilham Tohti”
6. Bill Hayton, Inventing China” Conclusion

March 30

China and the World