POL 16: Politics of Global China

Part IIB HSPS Tripos 2024/2025

Course Organiser:
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Lecturers:
Dr. Christian Sorace
Dr. Linda Qian

Michaelmas Term:
Lectures on Tuesdays, Weeks 1-8, 11am in Room SG2, Alison Richard Building

Lent Term:
TBD

Supervisors:
Dr Christian Sorace cs2205@cam.ac.uk
Dr Linda Qian lq236@cam.ac.uk
TBD
Outline:

China’s increasingly prominent role in the world has attracted all kinds of attention, ranging from adulation to anxiety and war-mongering. Despite the spotlight given to Global China, much of it uncovers only glimpses and shadows. The reason for this is that it focuses on only part of the picture. It is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle China’s global aspirations from its domestic politics. This paper will begin with an overview of twentieth-century history in China, with special attention given to pivotal moments in the history of the People’s Republic of China. During the Michaelmas Term, the paper will delve into the core issues of domestic politics, including: legitimation, ideology, and discourse; organisation and institutions; political economic models and their internal tensions; energy and environmental politics; as well as, China’s borderlands and minority nationalities. In the Lent Term, the paper will expand its scope to track several of the multiple trajectories and disputed impacts of China’s presence across the globe. Throughout the paper, it will be necessary to reflexively grapple with how concepts and narratives come with their own sedimented histories and normative inscriptions. Any engagement with Global China requires an attentiveness to multiple voices and perspectives, which are too often submerged in the framing of US-China rivalry.
Supervisions:

Each term will consist of three supervisions. All essays should be typed and no longer than 1,500 words, including a full bibliography. Please put your name, college and email address at the top of each essay.

Lent Supervisions will be announced in early January.

Assessment:

There will be a one five-hour written examination. Candidates must answer three questions with a limit of 4,500 words. Revision will be organised in the Easter Term.

Online Resources

Sinocism: https://sinocism.com/

ChinaFile: https://www.chinafile.com/

The China Project: https://thechinaproject.com/


Made in China Journal: https://madechinajournal.com/

Global China Pulse: https://thepeoplesmap.net/globalchinapulse/

People’s Map of Global China: https://thepeoplesmap.net/

Reading the China Dream: https://www.readingthechinadream.com/
Lausan: https://lausancollective.com/

Chuang: https://chuangen.org/about/

Podcasts:

Sinica: https://www.chinafile.com/library/sinica-podcast

Pekingology: https://www.csis.org/podcasts/pekingology

The China in Africa Podcast: https://thechinaproject.com/series/the-china-in-africa-podcast/
Lectures Michaelmas Term:

Lecture 1. Historical Foundations

Core Reading:


110-192.


*Suggested Supervision Question:* What is the status of revolution in contemporary China?

Further Reading:


Lecture 2. Legitimation, resilience or collapse? Three approaches

Core Reading:

Legitimation


Resilience


*Collapse*


*Suggested Supervision Question:* How does China’s structure of legitimation shape state-society relations?

**Further Reading:**


**Lecture 3. Political Institutions**
Core Reading:


Suggested Supervision Question: To what degree is Chinese politics institutionalised?

Further Reading:

General


On Cadres:


*On Bureaucracy:*


*On Security:*

Lecture 4. Spatial Regimes

Core Reading:


Wei Zhu, “Grid Managers, the Moral Logic of Guan, and State-Society Dynamics in China,”

Suggested Supervision Question: Is China’s political system better at responding to crises than Western democracies?

Further Reading:

Urban China


**Rural China**


**Pandemic Response**


Lecture 5. Capitalism in China

Core Reading:


Suggested Supervision Question:

What are the power dynamics between state, capital, and labor in contemporary China?

Further Reading:

Macroeconomic Trajectories


Debates


Labor


Rural Development


Lecture 6. Ecological Politics

Core Reading:

Anna-Lora Wainwright, “Removing Mountains and Draining Seas,” in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, edited by Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini,


*Suggested Supervision Question:* Is “ecological civilization” a coherent concept?

Further Reading:


**Lecture 7: Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Family-Planning**

**Lecturer: Linda Qian**

**Core Reading:**


Suggested Supervision Question: TBD

**Further Reading:**

*Cadres, Revolution, and Statecraft*


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**Bio-politics and Family Planning**


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**Gender in Urban and Rural China**


Introduction, pp. 1-15. Chapter 1, pp. 16-54. [http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350323674](http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350323674).


*Sexual Minorities, Sexuality, and ‘Ambiguity’*


Activism and the Public Sphere


Lecture 8. (Im)mobilities and Everyday Politics

Core Reading:


Mary Gallagher. ‘China’s Struggle for Common Prosperity,’ *China Leadership Monitor.* (2023).

https://www.prcleader.org/post/china-s-struggle-for-common-prosperity

*Suggested Supervision Question:* To what extent has capitalism entered the Chinese countryside?

**Further Reading**


**Lectures Lent Term**

**Lecture 1: Borderlands**

**Core Reading:**

James A. Milward, “The Qing Conception of Strategic Space,” *Strategic Space* (2023):

https://strategicspace.nbr.org/the-qing-conception-of-strategic-space/

Uradyn E. Bulag, “Nationality” in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*,

edited by Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, Nicholas Loubere, Verso/ANU Press
Suggested Supervision Question: Is China’s nation-building a completed project?

Further Reading:

Nationality/Ethnic Policy

Thomas Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*, University of California Press (2011).


https://www.readingthechinadream.com/ma-rong-ethnic-regional-autonomy.html

Sinica Podcast: Tashi Rabgey and Jim Milward on China’s ethnic policy in Xinjiang and

Tibet:


Xinjiang:


Online Resources:

Xinjiang Papers ‘Absolutely No Mercy’:

Xinjiang Documentation Project (UBC): https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca

Inner Mongolia


Lecture 2: Hong Kong

Core Reading:
1-22; 45-71; 122-150; 172-217.

Suggested Supervision Question: What changed between the Handover in 1997 and 2020 when the Hong Kong National Security Law?

Further Reading:

Lecture 3: Geopolitics of Taiwan

Core Reading:


Alex W. Palmer, “‘An Act of War’: Inside America’s Silicon Blockade Against China,” *New York Times*, July 12, 2023:


**Historical Documents**


**Suggested Supervision Question:** Is “strategic ambiguity” a useful framework of explanation for the relationship between the US, China, and Taiwan?

**Further Reading**

Lecture 4: *Global China*

**Core Reading:**


Chris Bing and Joel Schectman, “Pentagon ran secret anti-vax campaign to undermine China during pandemic,” *Reuters*, June 14, 2024.

*Suggested Supervision Question:* Can comparison avoid the trap of whataboutism?

**Further Reading:**


Andy Liu, “‘Chinese Virus,’ World Market,” *n + 1 magazine*, March 20, 2020

Lecture 5:

*China in IR*

**Core Reading:**


*Suggested Supervision Question:* To what extent is China seeking to change the world order?

**Recommended Reading:**


**Lecture 6: Chinese Capitals**

**Core Reading:**


Meg Rithmire, “Going Out or Opting Out? Capital, Political Vulnerability, and the State in
China’s Outward Investment,” *Comparative Politics* 54, no. 3 (April 2022): 477–499.


*Suggested Supervision Question:* Is there anything distinctive about Chinese capital?

**Lecture 7: China’s Global Infrastructure**

**Core Reading:**


*Suggested Supervision Question:* Do China’s infrastructural projects abroad represent a new model of global development or reproduce existing patterns of debt, dependence, and inequality?

**Further Reading:**

Alessandro Rippa, *Borderland Infrastructures: Trade, Development, and Control in Western China,* Amsterdam University Press (2020).


**Lecture 8: China and the Seas**
Core Reading:


https://amti.csis.org/island-tracker/

Suggested Supervision Question: Why has the South China Sea become an area of fraught geopolitical concern?

Further Reading:


Robert Kaplan, “The South China Sea is the Future of Conflict,” *Foreign Policy*, Washington