POL 16: Politics of Global China

Part IIB HSPS Tripos 2023/2024

Course Organiser:
Dr. Christian Sorace
Room 228, Alison Richard Building, cs2205@cam.ac.uk

Michaelmas Term:
Lectures on Tuesdays, Weeks 1-8, 11am in Room 11, Sidgwick Lecture Block
Seminar on Thursday, Week 6, Alison Richard Building, Room SG2

Supervisors:
Dr. Christian Sorace cs2205@cam.ac.uk
Dr. Linda Qian lq236@cam.ac.uk
Additional PhD supervisions TBA

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.
Lectures Michaelmas Term:

Lecture 1. *Historical Foundations*

**Core Reading:**


110-192.

*Suggested Supervision Question:* What can China’s history tell us about its present?

**Further Reading:**


Evan Osnos, “Does Xi Jinping’s Seizure of History Threaten his Future?” *The New Yorker,*
Lecture 2. Legitimation, resilience or collapse? Three approaches

Core Reading:

*Legitimation*


*Resilience*


Collapse


*Suggested Supervision Question*: Does one's choice of analytic paradigm and approach to China frame one's interpretation of Chinese politics?

**Further Reading:**


Lecture 3. Political Institutions

Core Reading:

Susan V. Lawrence, Susan and Michael F. Martin, “Understanding China’s Political System.”


*Suggested Supervision Question:* What are the strengths and weaknesses of China’s political institutions?

Further Reading:

*On Cadres:*


On Bureaucracy:


On Security:


Marie-Eve Reny, Authoritarian Containment: Public Security Bureaus and Protestant Church Houses in Urban
Lecture 4. *Power and Space*

**Core Reading:**


https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/escape-from-the-closed-loop/
**Suggested Supervision Question:** What can China's distinctive spatial regime explain about China's politics and economy?

**Further Reading:**

*Urban China*


Rural China


Lecture 5. Political Economy

Core Reading:


*Suggested Supervision Question*: Which concept best describes China’s political economic model?
Further Reading:

Macroeconomic Trajectories


Debates


Labour


Rural Development


Lecture 6. *Ecological Politics*

Core Reading:


*Suggested Supervision Question:* To what extent is China capable of leading a green energy transition at home and globally?

*Further Reading:*


**Week 6: Borderlands**

**Core Reading:**


Carole McGranahan, “Chinese Settler Colonialism: Empire and Life in the Tibetan
Borderlands,” in Frontier Tibet: Patterns of Change in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands, Amsterdam

Suggested Supervision Question: Can China be characterized as a settler colonial state?

Further Reading:

Ethnic Policy

Thomas Mullaney, Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China, University of
Enze Han, Contestation and Adaptation: The Politics of National Identity in China, Oxford University
Nation' and China’s Quest to Become a 'Normal Country,’” The China Journal Volume
86 (2021).
Ma Rong, “The Historical Evolution of China’s System of Autonomous Ethnic Regions,”
translated by David Ownby, Reading the China Dream:
https://www.readingthechinadream.com/ma-rong-ethnic-regional-autonomy.html
Sinica Podcast: Tashi Rabgey and Jim Milward on China’s ethnic policy in Xinjiang
Tibet, February 15, 2019: https://thechinaproject.com/2019/02/15/sinica-podcast

tashi-rabgey-and-jim-millward-on-chinas-ethnic-policy-in-xinjiang-and-tibet/

Tibet:


Xinjiang:


Online Resources:

Xinjiang Papers ‘Absolutely No Mercy’:

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-
Inner Mongolia

Enze Han, “The dog that hasn’t barked: assimilation and resistance in Inner Mongolia, China.”


Week 8: Hong Kong

Core Reading:


“Protest Tech: Hong Kong,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (website):

*Suggested Supervision Question*: Were the Hong Kong protests (2019-2020) inevitable/avoidable?

**Further Reading:**


Lecture 1. *Global China*

**Core Reading:**


Ivan Franceschini and Nicholas Loubere, *Global China as Method*, Cambridge University Press

2022.

Suggested Supervision Question: Is “Global China” a coherent concept?

**Further Reading:**


(2017).

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

https://www.nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/chinese-virus-world-market/

Lecture 2. *Chinese Capitals*

**Core Reading:**


*Suggested Supervision Question:* Does Chinese capital(s) differ from other forms of foreign investment?

**Further Reading:**

TBD

**Lecture 3. China’s Global Infrastructure**

**Core Reading:**


1461-1485.


https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/04/opinion/sunday/china-colonial-power-jinping.html

Deborah Brautigam and Meg Rithmire, “There is No Chinese ‘Debt Trap’,” *The Atlantic*, February 6, 2021:

https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/02/china-debt-trap-diplomacy/617953/

*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 4. China and the Seas**

**Core Reading:**


https://amti.csis.org/island-tracker/
Suggested Supervision Question: Are China’s actions in the South China Sea legal?

According to whose definition?

Further Reading:


Week 5. China and Soft Power

Core Reading:


*Suggested Supervision Question:* Is China’s “soft power” strategy working? Why or why not?

**Further Reading:**


**Lecture 6: Sino-America Cold War(s)**


Yao Yang, “Is a New Cold War Coming?” interview with Beijing Cultural Review, April 28,
2020, translated by David Ownby, *Reading the China Dream*:  
https://www.readingthechinadream.com/yao-yang-the-new-cold-war.html


*Suggested Supervision Question*: Have the U.S. and China entered a “new Cold War” or is this a misleading analogy?

**Further Reading:**


**Lecture 7: China and the US: Current Topics**

**Core Reading:**

*Overview*

Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, “An Overview of the U.S.-China Relationship,” in


**Debate**


**Special Focus on Taiwan**


Historical Documents


Suggested Supervision Question: Whose century is it?

Further Reading

TBD

Week 8: China and the Future

Core Reading:


Suggested Supervision Question: How do leaders in Beijing envision the global political order and China's role within it?

Further Reading:


