

UNDERSTANDING CHINESE POLITICS AND CHINA'S IMPACT ON THE WORLD

MUZHOU ZHANG

Autumn 2025

Contact: mz[at]ps.au.dk

Time: Thursday, 15:00–18:00

Room: 1330-018

Examination: Oral exam with synopsis

Synopsis due: Jan 15, 2026

Oral exam: Jan 22–23, 2026

Introduction

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution and the start of the reform in the late 1970s, China has made an extraordinary economic achievement while consolidating its authoritarian regime. This seemingly unique path of development, which contradicts the modernization theory and the Nobel Prize-winning institutional explanations of economic growth, puzzles a great many policymakers and researchers. So, first of all, we will try to make sense of some of the most important formal and informal institutions that undergird China's political economy.

Despite the economic success, there has also been increasing inequality and mounting socio-economic problems in China. Can Chinese people have authorities respond to their concerns? In a rapidly changing society, how does the Chinese public think of democracy and their government? Now China has become a global power from the "century of humiliation": what are the public opinion-foundations of China's engagement with the West?

After studying the last question, we will delve into various specific cases—from the relationship between Chinese import competition and Brexit to the export of the "China model"—to understand China's multifaceted impact on the world.

Preparation and Participation

Per the study regulation, students must have taken 80% of the course to have the eligibility for taking the exam. Students should notify the lecturer of any absence in advance. In addition to regular seminar sessions, there will be mock exam sessions toward the end of the term to help students better achieve the learning outcomes and to prepare students for the exam.

This course requires students to read all the assigned readings before each seminar session, and it expects students to actively contribute to and engage in the group and plenary discussions as well as other in-class activities. Students should behave kindly and cooperatively toward their classmates and make their comments on one another's contributions constructive. At master's level, this course also requires independent learning, meaning that students should not expect reading guides, notes, etc. from the lecturer, but—needless to say—questions are always welcome. Some of the points students can always ask themselves while working on the readings are as follows.

- What is the research question (RQ)? What is the motivation for asking this RQ, why is this RQ a puzzle, or what gap in the literature is this RQ aimed to fill?
- What are the argument(s) and the potential mechanism(s)? Are there any scope conditions?
- What is the research design: data source(s), identification strategy (observational study) or experiment design (experimental study), and modeling strategy? Is there any threat to the validity of the research design?
- What are the main empirical findings? Is there any heterogeneity?
- Is there any alternative/competing explanation that might challenge the conclusion?
- What follow-up study would you like to do?
- How does the reading relates to the other readings of the same week (and perhaps to some readings of other weeks or even to the broader literature or other subfields of political science)?

Examination

A week before the oral exam, students will submit a synopsis (maximum 8,400 characters) in which they motivate and identify a research question related to this course, make argument(s), and propose a quantitative research design appropriate to test the argument(s) empirically. During the 30-minute oral exam, students (a) will first briefly present and defend their synopsis and (b) will then answer a few questions about the readings. These two parts carry equal weight toward the final grade on a 7-point scale. Students can only bring the synopsis to the oral exam.

Learning Outcomes After Active Participation Throughout

- Have decent knowledge of Chinese politics and China's impact on the world
- Have familiarity with the recent, relevant literature in political science
- Can critically follow and engage with news and academic research on the relevant topics independently
- Can identify meaningful yet doable research questions about the relevant topics
- Can propose sound quantitative research designs to answer research questions about the relevant topics empirically
- Can communicate knowledge and research on the relevant topics effectively and professionally

Contents and Schedule

Master's Degree Program in Political Science at Aarhus University expects students to read around 1,200 pages during a 10-ECTS elective. The required readings of this course have 825 formally published pages, which count as about 1,100 pages, as students will have to look through the online appendices for details excluded from the main texts and additional references for background knowledge wherever necessary. The remaining 100 pages go for the synopsis which may need some references beyond this syllabus.

1 Introduction**Aug 28 (W35)**

- Dickson, Bruce J. 2021a. "1 What keeps the party in power?" In *The party and the people: Chinese politics in the 21st century*, 11–36. Available at <https://doi-org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk/10.1515/9780691216966> (institutional access via Aarhus University Library/Statsbiblioteket). Princeton University Press
- Dickson, Bruce J. 2021b. "2 How are leaders chosen?" In *The party and the people: Chinese politics in the 21st century*, 37–64. Available at <https://doi-org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk/10.1515/9780691216966> (institutional access via Aarhus University Library/Statsbiblioteket). Princeton University Press

2 Selection of Office Holders in China**Sep 4 (W36)**

- Li, Hongbin, and Li-An Zhou. 2005. "Political turnover and economic performance: the incentive role of personnel control in China." *Journal of Public Economics* 89 (9-10): 1743–1762
- Landry, Pierre F., Xiaobo Lü, and Haiyan Duan. 2018. "Does performance matter? Evaluating political selection along the Chinese administrative ladder." *Comparative Political Studies* 51 (8): 1074–1105
- Fisman, Raymond, et al. 2020. "Social ties and the selection of China's political elite." *American Economic Review* 110 (6): 1752–1781
- Liu, Hanzhang. 2024. "Meritocracy as authoritarian co-optation: political selection and upward mobility in China." *American Political Science Review* 118 (4): 1856–1872

3 Political Connections in China**Sep 11 (W37)**

- Jiang, Junyan. 2018. "Making bureaucracy work: patronage networks, performance incentives, and economic development in China." *American Journal of Political Science* 62 (4): 982–999
- Chen, Ting, and James Kai-sing Kung. 2019. "Busting the 'Princelings': the campaign against corruption in China's primary land market." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 134 (1): 185–226
- Li, Zeren. 2024. "Subsidies for sale: postgovernment career concerns, revolving-door channels, and public resource misallocation in China." *The Journal of Politics* 86 (2): 704–719
- Truex, Rory. 2014. "The returns to office in a 'rubber stamp' parliament." *American Political Science Review* 108 (2): 235–251

4 Representation and Lawmaking in China**Sep 18 (W38)**

- Truex, Rory. 2016a. "1 Introduction." In *Making autocracy work: representation and responsiveness in modern China*, 1–14. Available at <https://doi-org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk/10.1017/CBO9781316771785> (institutional access via Aarhus University Library/Statsbiblioteket). Cambridge University Press
- Truex, Rory. 2016b. "3 Does NPC matter?" In *Making autocracy work: representation and responsiveness in modern China*, 46–74. Available at <https://doi-org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk/10.1017/CBO9781316771785> (institutional access via Aarhus University Library/Statsbiblioteket). Cambridge University Press

- Truex, Rory. 2016c. "4 Testing representation." In *Making autocracy work: representation and responsiveness in modern China*, 75–102. Available at <https://doi-org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk/10.1017/CBO9781316771785> (institutional access via Aarhus University Library/Statsbiblioteket). Cambridge University Press
- Truex, Rory. 2020. "Authoritarian gridlock? Understanding delay in the Chinese legislative system." *Comparative Political Studies* 53 (9): 1455–1492

5 Government Responsiveness in China

Sep 25 (W39)

- Chen, Jidong, Jennifer Pan, and Yiqing Xu. 2016. "Sources of authoritarian responsiveness: a field experiment in China." *American Journal of Political Science* 60 (2): 383–400
- Distelhorst, Greg, and Yue Hou. 2017. "Constituency service under nondemocratic rule: evidence from China." *The Journal of Politics* 79 (3): 1024–1040
- Meng, Tianguang, Jennifer Pan, and Ping Yang. 2017. "Conditional receptivity to citizen participation: evidence from a survey experiment in China." *Comparative Political Studies* 50 (4): 399–433
- Jiang, Junyan, and Yu Zeng. 2020. "Countering capture: elite networks and government responsiveness in China's land market reform." *The Journal of Politics* 82 (1): 13–28
- Fu, Jiawei, Zeren Li, and Haibing Yan. n.d. "Does affluence influence authoritarian responsiveness? Evidence from urban China." Forthcoming in *Comparative Political Studies*, online first at <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140251342921>

6 Chinese Public Opinion

Oct 2 (W40)

- Chen, Jie. 2013. "Why does or does not the middle class support democracy?" In *A middle class without democracy: economic growth and the prospects for democratization in China*, 92–118. Available at <https://doi-org.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199841639.001.0001> (institutional access via Aarhus University Library/Statsbiblioteket). Oxford University Press
- Pan, Jennifer, and Yiqing Xu. 2018. "China's ideological spectrum." *The Journal of Politics* 80 (1): 254–273
- Truex, Rory. 2022. "Political discontent in China is associated with isolating personality traits." *The Journal of Politics* 84 (4): 2172–2187
- Nicholson, Stephen P., and Haifeng Huang. 2023. "Making the list: reevaluating political trust and social desirability in China." *American Political Science Review* 117 (3): 1158–1165
- Alkon, Meir, and Erik H. Wang. 2018. "Pollution lowers support for China's regime: quasi-experimental evidence from Beijing." *The Journal of Politics* 80 (1): 327–331

7 Chinese Outward Public Opinion

Oct 9 (W41)

- Liu, Adam Y., Xiaojun Li, and Songying Fang. 2023. "Unpacking 'the West': divergence and asymmetry in Chinese public attitudes towards Europe and the United States." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 52 (1): 119–133
- Kim, D.G. 2024. "Anti-Asian racism and the rise of hawkish mass opinion in China." *Political Science Quarterly* 139 (2): 177–199

- Bell, Mark S, and Kai Quek. 2018. "Authoritarian public opinion and the democratic peace." *International Organization* 72 (1): 227–242
- Mildenerberger, Matto, and Dustin Tingley. 2019. "Beliefs about climate beliefs: the importance of second-order opinions for climate politics." *British Journal of Political Science* 49 (4): 1279–1307

Autumn Break (W42)

8 Individual Feedback on Synopsis Oct 23 (W43)

- Further information on Brightspace

9 "China Shock," Trade War, and Domestic Politics Oct 30 (W44)

- Feigenbaum, James J., and Andrew B. Hall. 2015. "How legislators respond to localized economic shocks: evidence from Chinese import competition." *The Journal of Politics* 77 (4): 1012–1030
- Colantone, Italo, and Piero Stanig. 2018. "Global competition and Brexit." *American Political Science Review* 112 (2): 201–218
- Ballard-Rosa, Cameron, et al. 2021. "The economic origins of authoritarian values: evidence from local trade shocks in the United Kingdom." *Comparative Political Studies* 54 (13): 2321–2353
- Chyzh, Olga V., and Robert Urbatsch. 2021. "Bean counters: the effect of soy tariffs on change in Republican vote share between the 2016 and 2018 elections." *The Journal of Politics* 83 (1): 415–419
- Kim, Sung Eun, and Yotam Margalit. 2021. "Tariffs as electoral weapons: the political geography of the US-China trade war." *International Organization* 75 (1): 1–38

10 China's Growing Influence Worldwide Nov 06 (W45)

- Qian, Jing, James Raymond Vreeland, and Jianzhi Zhao. 2023. "The impact of China's AIIB on the World Bank." *International Organization* 77 (1): 217–237
- Chen, Alicia R. 2025. "Strategies of a rising power: Chinese economic influence in regional international organizations." *British Journal of Political Science* 55 (e52): 1–23
- Strange, Austin. 2024. "Symbols of state: explaining prestige projects in the Global South." *International Studies Quarterly* 68 (2): sqae049
- Mattingly, Daniel, et al. 2025. "Chinese state media persuades a global audience that the 'China model' is superior: evidence from a 19-country experiment." *American Journal of Political Science* 69 (3): 1029–1046

11 Recap Nov 13 (W46)

- No readings

12–14 Mock Oral Exam Nov 20, 27, & Dec 4 (W47–49)

- Further information on Brightspace