

Democracy and Democratization in China

LACU 3046 (Attributes: POCP, POPT, POSC, INST, ISAS, IPE, CNST)

Spring 2025, Fordham University Lincoln Center

Tue & Fri, 2:30-3:45pm. Location: LL-522

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In-person office hours: Tuesdays and Fridays 11:30am-12:30pm (a prior appointment via email is required). Zoom meetings possible on other days.

*This syllabus may be revised as needed to ensure the educational quality and fairness of the course. If changes are made, a revised syllabus will be provided.

Course Description

While China is often classified as an authoritarian state by standard political science definitions, the Communist Party and Chinese government frequently assert that China is on its path to becoming the world's most democratic nation, arguing that the Chinese model of democracy surpasses Western forms, such as representative, liberal, and electoral democracy. This course examines the ideals and practices of political reform in post-Mao China (1978 to present) through the lenses of democracy and democratization. Key questions include: How do Chinese intellectuals and leaders conceptualize democracy? What democratic reforms have been pursued in China? What is the likelihood of China evolving into a democratic state, however democracy is defined—and should it? Or, would a stronger meritocratic system serve China's future better?

Course Goals

- To help students understand the basics of Chinese politics, including the fundamental ideals of the PRC, key historical events, political institutions, and political contestations.
- To enhance students' understanding of democracy, a contested idea in the modern world.
- To equip students with basic analytical skills in social sciences.

Expectations for Students

- Knowledge: Students are not expected to have background in political theory, Chinese politics, or Chinese history, though having taken a course in one of these fields would be helpful. No knowledge of Chinese is required.
- Reading and Writing: This course is reading intensive as you should expect to read up to 100 pages each week, although most of the readings are highly readable and informative. Finishing the required readings is of utmost importance for you to succeed in this class.

Course Materials

All readings are available via Blackboard and organized in the “Files” section. No textbooks are needed.

Course Assignments

- Attendance/Participation: 15%
 - Actively participating in class discussion is a core part of this class.
- Discussion posts on Blackboard: 35%
 - Students are required to submit a total of 8 discussion posts on Blackboard throughout the semester: 4 between January 20 (Monday) and March 7 (Friday), and another 4 between March 10 (Monday) and April 25 (Friday). You may choose the specific units for which you want to write. Each post should be 200–300 words and must describe an argument from one of that week’s readings that you find interesting, followed by 1–2 questions inspired by the argument. Posts must be submitted to Blackboard by 11:59 PM on Monday if you are writing about a Tuesday reading, or by 11:59 PM on Thursday if you are writing about a Friday reading. I will use the submitted questions to guide class discussions. Grading is on a completion basis: an A is automatically granted if all 8 posts are submitted on time. However, it is critical that your posts are your own work—posts generated by AI, plagiarized, or irrelevant to the assigned readings will not be counted.
- Midterm paper: 20%
 - 1500 words, due March 16 (Sun), 11:59pm. Students will write a paper based on one of the prompts provided by the instructor.
- Final Paper: 30%
 - 1800 words, due May 4 (Sun), 11:59pm. Students will write a paper based on one of the prompts provided by the instructor.
- Extra Credits:
 - Earn extra credit by submitting additional discussion posts on Blackboard! Submitting 4 extra posts will boost your overall course grade by one level—for example, from A- to A or from B+ to A-. These extra posts can focus on a different reading from the same week.

Course Policies

Attendance: It is expected that undergraduate students attend all synchronous or in-person class meetings. If this will be a burden for you (due to time zone or wifi issues), please talk with your instructor at the beginning of the semester about options that will allow you to participate in the course and continue your learning. Documentation supporting excused absence(s) for emergencies or long-term illness (defined as missing more than a week’s worth of classes) should be sent to their class dean. During this time, it is also recognized that unforeseen circumstances may well lead to an occasional absence or a class cancellation. Instructors and students are encouraged to engage in a dialogue at the start of the semester about the importance of *cura personalis* and how to inform each other in the event of situations like this.

Incompletes: When course requirements, other than just the final exam, have not been met, the instructor may report a temporary grade of INC (incomplete). This process should be initiated with the student's class dean or advising dean as early as possible. FCRH, FCLC, and PCS students must fill out an Undergraduate Petition for Grade of Incomplete (available from their advising dean). The grade of INC will not be allowed unless the petition is on file. On completion of the course requirements, the INC will, with the approval of the class dean, be removed and replaced by a permanent grade. If the requirements are not completed by the date specified on the academic calendar, the INC will be changed automatically to an F.

Late work: If you need more time to complete an assignment, please ask for an extension in advance. If an assignment is more than 48 hours late without an extension, it will lose one letter grade per additional day (A+ becomes a B+, etc.). Very late work may not receive credit.

Final grades are calculated using the 100-point system. 93-100% = A, 90-92% = A-, 87-89% = B+, 83-86% = B, and so on. Grades below a D- (below 60%) receive a NP (not passed).

Chosen Name and Pronoun: Some members of the Fordham community are known by a name that is different from their legal name. Students who wish to be identified by a chosen name can contact their professor via email and request their chosen name and pronoun be used by the professor during class and other interactions.

Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with the Undergraduate Policy on Academic Integrity at Fordham. The policy notes that: "Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an honest, truthful, and responsible manner. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating on exams, falsification, unapproved collaboration, and destruction of library materials."

You may discuss homework problems with other students, but the work that you submit should be your own, in your own words. Collaboration with others (including online resources) during quizzes and exams is prohibited. If you violate the policy, you will receive a grade of 0% on the assignment, quiz, or exam.

General Class Etiquette

The Department of Languages and Cultures is committed to providing an environment conducive to learning, respectful of diversity and individual differences, and appreciative of different worldviews and experiences, which we recognize to be a source of strength for us all. We work together to build this community and ask all members –faculty, students and administrators – to share their unique experiences, values and beliefs, be open to the views of others, value each other's opinions, and communicate in a respectful manner. Active, thoughtful, and respectful participation in all aspects of the course will make our time together as productive and engaging as possible. This means:

- Our classroom is meant to be a safe place. You are encouraged to express your ideas candidly while also keeping in mind that you are expected to show respect for one another and for the diversity of people and ideas in the world around you. Thoughtful critiques and feedback are welcome and encouraged, but negative criticism is not. If there are concerns that any student is not conducting themselves appropriately, this will be discussed with the student on an individual basis. Similarly, if any student feels unsafe as a result of viewpoints expressed by the instructor or fellow students, they are encouraged to speak with the instructor in private.
- Discrimination, harassment, or global generalizations against others on the basis of race, creed, national or ethnic origin, age, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression will not be tolerated.

Academic Accommodation

If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, please register with the [Office of Disability Services](#) for Students (ODS) in order to request academic accommodations for your courses. Please contact the main ODS number at 718-817-0655 to arrange services. Accommodations are not retroactive, so you need to register with ODS prior to receiving your accommodations. Please see me after class or during office hours if you have questions or would like to submit your academic accommodation letter to me if you have previously registered for accommodations.

Other Resources

- Information about the Chinese Studies major and Mandarin minor, as well as the Department of Languages and Cultures (LACU), can be found [here](#).
- [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) provides a range of services to help students address and cope more effectively with their stress and psychological concerns. You are encouraged to stop by or call the office to make an appointment.
- Writing Resources for Students: [Fordham University Writing Center](#)

Course Calendar

Part I: Introduction

01/14 (Tue) Course Introduction

01/17 (Fri) What Is Democracy? What Is Liberal Democracy?

- Fareed Zakaria. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* 76(6): 22-43. [Read pp. 22-34; 42-43.]
- WANG Shaoguang. 2014. "Representative and Representational Democracy," translated by Mark McConaghy and Shi Anshu. *Reading the China Dream*, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/wang-shaoguang-representative-and-representational-democracy.html>. [Read sections 1-4.]

01/21 (Tue) What Is Authoritarianism?

- Christian Davenport. 2007. "State Repression and the Tyrannical Peace." *Journal of Peace Research* 44(4): 485-504. [Read pp. 485-492; 500-502 (Conclusion).]
- Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. 2013. "The Durability of Revolutionary Regimes." *Journal of Democracy* 24(3): 5-17.

Part II: Ideas and Practices of Democracy in Chinese History

01/24 (Fri) Historical Resources for a Democratic China

- HU Shi. 2012 [1941]. "Historical Foundations for a Democratic China," in *English Writings of Hu Shih: Chinese Philosophy and Intellectual History (Vol 2)*, edited by Chih-P'ing Chou. Heidelberg: Springer. 169-179.
- Yasheng Huang. 2023. "The Exam that Broke Society." *Aeon*, <https://aeon.co/essays/why-chinese-minds-still-bear-the-long-shadow-of-keju>.

01/28 (Tue) The Striving for Democracy in Modern China

- Andrew J. Nathan. 1985. *Chinese Democracy*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 3, pp. 45-66.
- Dongxian Jiang. 2024. "Parties Are the Supreme Mentors of the Nation: Appreciations for Parties and Partisanship in China, 1895-1920." *Political Theory* 52(5): 726-753.

01/31 (Fri) Maoist Democracy

- Kenneth Lieberthal. 2004. *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform (2nd ed.)*. New York: W.W. Norton. Chapter 3, pp. 59-77.
- MAO Zedong. 1949. "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship." https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_65.htm.
- CCP Central Committee. 1970 [1966]. "Decision of the CCP Central Committee Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (The Sixteen Points)." *Studies in Comparative Communism* 3(3-4): 178-184.

02/04 (Tue) The 1980s: Reform and Opening

- DENG Xiaoping. 1980. "On the Reform of the System of Party and State Leadership." <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1980/220.htm>, Parts I-III.
- ZHAO Ziyang. 2009. *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Zhao Ziyang*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Part 6, pp. 247-273.

02/07 (Fri) The 1989 Tiananmen Protest

- Dingxin Zhao. 2001. *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Introduction, pp. 1-31. [Skip pp. 12-18.]

Part III: Power Dynamics in Contemporary China

02/11 (Tue) The Dominance of the Party

- Cheng Li. 2019. “6. China’s Communist Party-State: The Structure and Dynamics of Power,” in *Politics in China: An Introduction (3r. ed.)*, edited by William A. Joseph. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 201-236.

02/14 (Fri) Political Repression

- Perry Link. 2002. “China: The Anaconda in the Chandelier,” *The New York Review of Books*, accessed from *ChinaFile*, www.chinafile.com/library/nyrb-china-archive/china-anaconda-chandelier.
- Martin K. Dimitrov. 2023. *Dictatorship and Information: Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Communist Europe and China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 8, pp. 303-333.

02/18 (Tue) No Class! Classes follow a Monday Schedule

02/21 (Fri) Accountability and Political Trust

- Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li. 2006. *Rightful Resistance in Rural China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1, pp. 1-15.
- Tony Saich. 2016. “How China’s Citizens View the Quality of Governance under Xi Jinping.” *Journal of Chinese Governance* 1(1): 1-20. [skip pp. 11-14.]

02/25 (Tue) Women in Politics

- Jiang Jue. 2019. “13. Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in China: The Development and Struggle in Chains of State Feminism,” in *Handbook on Human Rights in China*, edited by Sarah Biddulph and Joshua Rosenzweig. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, pp. 253-267.
- Leta Hong Fincher. 2018. “Xi Jinping’s Authoritarian Rise in China Has Been Powered by Sexism.” *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/03/01/xi-jinpings-authoritarian-rise-in-china-has-been-powered-by-sexism/>.
- Yige Dong. 2019. “Does China Have a Feminist Movement from the Left?” *Made In China Journal* 1(2019), 58-63.

02/28 (Fri) Minority Ethnicities in Politics

- Baogang He. 2005. “Minority Rights with Chinese Characteristics,” in *Multiculturalism in Asia*, edited by Will Kymlicka and Baogang He. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 56-79.
- Gardner Bovington. 2019. “17. Xinjiang,” in *Politics in China: An Introduction (3r. ed.)*, edited by William A. Joseph. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 487-516.

03/04 (Tue) Religion in Politics

- Richard Madsen. 2010. “The Upsurge of Religion in China.” *Journal of Democracy* 21(4): 58-71.
- Xi Lian. 2013. “Cultural Christians and the Search for Civil Society in Contemporary China.” *The Chinese Historical Review* 20(1): 70-87.

Part IV: Experiments in Democratic Reform

03/07 (Fri) Reform of the People's Congress System

- Kevin J. O'Brien. 1988. "China's National People's Congress: Reform and Its Limits." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 13(3): 343-374.
- Rory Truex. 2016. *Making Autocracy Work: Representation and Responsiveness in Modern China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Introduction, pp. 1-8.

03/11 (Tue) Intra-Party Democracy

- *Constitution of the Communist Party of China* (2017). Chapter II, pp. 14-17.
- Cheng Li. 2009. "Intra-Party Democracy in China: Should We Take It Seriously?" *China Leadership Monitor* 30.
- Joseph Fewsmith. 2010. "Inner-party Democracy: Development and Limitations." *China Leadership Monitor* 31.

03/14 (Fri) Village Democracy

- Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li. 2000. "Accommodating 'Democracy' in a One-Party State: Introducing Village Elections in China." *The China Quarterly* (June 2000): 465-489.
- Ben Hillman. 2023. "The End of Village Democracy in China." *Journal of Democracy* 34(3): 62-76.

Midterm Paper Due: Mar 16 (Sun), 11:59pm

03/17-23: Spring Break

03/25 (Tue) Deliberation and Consultation

- Baogang He and Mark E. Warren. 2011. "Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development." *Perspectives on Politics* 9(2): 269-89.

03/28 (Fri) Rule of Law and Democracy

- Hualing Fu. 2019. "Duality and China's Struggle for Legal Autonomy." *China Perspectives* 1(116): 3-10.
- Taisu Zhang. 2018. "Maybe the Law Does Actually Matter to Xi Jinping." *Chinafile*, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/maybe-law-does-actually-matter-xi-jinping>.

Part V: East Asian Comparisons

04/01 (Tue) Taiwan's Democratization

- Chien-min Chao and Yeau-tarn Lee. 2006. "11. Transition in a Party-State System: Taiwan as a Model for China's Future Democratization," in *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform*, edited by Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard and Zheng Yongnian. London: Routledge, pp. 210-230.
- Bruce J. Dickson 1998. "China's Democratization and the Taiwan Experience." *Asian Survey* 38(4): 349-364.

04/04 (Fri) No Class (I need to attend an event at Columbia)

04/08 (Tue) The Hybrid Regimes of Hong Kong and Singapore

- Ambrose Yeo-chi King. 1975. "Administrative Absorption of Politics in Hong Kong: Emphasis on the Grass Roots Level." *Asian Survey* 15(5): 422-439.
- Mark R. Thompson and Stephan Ortmann. 2018. "Mis-Modelling Singapore: China's Challenges in Learning from the City-State." *The China Quarterly* 236: 1014-32.

04/11 (Fri) The Curious Case of Vietnam

- Regina Abrami, Edmund Malesky, and Yu Zheng. 2013. "9. Vietnam through Chinese Eyes: Divergent Accountability in Single-Party Regimes," in *Why Communism Did Not Collapse? Understanding Authoritarian Regime Resilience in Asia and Europe*, edited by Martin K. Dimitrov. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 237-275. 253-291

Part VI: Future Possibilities of Democratization in China

04/15 (Tue) Preconditions of Democratization

- Tianjian Shi and Jie Lu. 2010. "Meanings of Democracy: The Shadow of Confucianism." *Journal of Democracy* 21(4): 123-130.
- Andrew J. Nathan. 2016. "The Puzzle of the Chinese Middle Class." *Journal of Democracy* 27(2): 5-19.
- Elizabeth J. Perry. 2012. "The Illiberal Challenge of Authoritarian China." *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 8(2): 3-15.

04/18 (Fri): No Class! Easter

04/22 (Tue) Will the CCP Democratize China?

- Jiwei Ci. 2019. *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Introduction, pp. 7-29.
- Dan Slater and Joseph Wong. 2022. *From Development to Democracy: The Transformation of Modern Asia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction, pp. 1-6; Chapter 9, pp. 260-277.

04/25 (Fri) Mixing Democracy with Meritocracy?

- Daniel A. Bell. 2015. *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 4, pp. 151-178.
- Stephen J. Macedo. 2018. "The Self-Sustaining Virtue of the Powerful? A Critique of the China Model." *Politics and Religion* 11(4): 884-888.

04/29 (Tue) Post-Covid China

- Lynette H. Ong. 2023. "The CCP after the Zero-Covid Fail." *Journal of Democracy* 34(2): 32-46.

Final Paper Due: May 4 (Sun), 11:59pm