

POLS 454

Politics in China and Japan

Culture, Power, and Competition

Semester	Fall 2026
Credits	3 credit hours
Format	Face-to-face
Classroom	FSP 126 (current assignment; changes announced in Canvas)
Meetings	Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:45–11:00 a.m.
Instructor	Ziwen (Gary) Zu
Email	zzu@utk.edu
Website	ziwenzu.com
Office	McClung Tower 1114
Office hours	Tuesdays 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.; Thursdays 2:00–4:00 p.m.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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Course Information

- **Instructor:** Ziwen (Gary) Zu
- **Email:** zzu@utk.edu
- **Website:** ziwenzu.com
- **Course format:** Face-to-face
- **Classroom:** FSP 126 (current assignment; any official change will be announced in Canvas)
- **Class meetings:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:45–11:00 a.m.
- **Official semester begins:** Monday, August 17, 2026
- **First class:** Tuesday, August 18, 2026
- **Last class:** Tuesday, December 1, 2026
- **Final examination:** During the Registrar's December 3–9 examination period; the exact appointment will be announced in Canvas after the Fall 2026 final-exam grid is posted
- **Office:** McClung Tower 1114
- **Office hours:** Tuesdays, 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.; Thursdays, 2:00–4:00 p.m.; advance appointment required via [Book an office-hour appointment](#)
- **Canvas:** Course announcements, materials, assignments, grades, and exam question banks will be posted on the course Canvas site.

Any official changes to this syllabus will be announced in Canvas.

Course Purpose and Scope

This is a China-centered comparative politics course in which Japan serves as a substantive case, a historical interlocutor, and a comparative benchmark. Approximately 70 percent of the course centers on China and 30 percent on Japan and China–Japan comparison.

The China-centered portion traces the rise of the Chinese Communist Party, the Maoist political order, reform and opening, the institutions of the party-state, authoritarian resilience and personalistic rule, central–local relations, political economy, law and corruption, propaganda and censorship, protest, migration and inequality, ethnic governance, nationalism, and foreign policy. The Japan portion provides focused study of the postwar Constitution, parliamentary and electoral institutions, Liberal Democratic Party dominance, the developmental state, demographic and gender change, and security policy.

Japan is not included merely as background to China. It supplies an independent political case and a disciplined comparative test. The comparison helps us ask why neighboring states with connected histories developed different regimes, how both used state power to promote economic development, and how domestic institutions and historical memory shape current regional competition.

The 27 non-examination meetings comprise 17 China-centered meetings, 6 Japan-centered meetings, and 4 explicitly comparative or bilateral meetings. Dividing comparative meetings equally produces 19 China-equivalent and 8 Japan-equivalent meetings, or approximately 70.4 percent China and 29.6 percent Japan. Required reading volume and exam points follow approximately the same balance.

Organizing Questions

1. How did revolution, party organization, war, and historical legacies shape China's contemporary political order?
2. How does the Chinese party-state organize leadership, policymaking, central–local relations, law, and political control?
3. Why has CCP rule endured, and has Xi-era personalistic rule strengthened or weakened its institutional foundations?
4. How did reform, local experimentation, state–business relations, and global integration transform China's political economy?
5. How do propaganda, censorship, law, protest, citizenship, and ethnic governance structure political participation in China?
6. How do Japan's postwar democracy, one-party predominance, and developmental state clarify what is distinctive—and what is not—about China?
7. How do nationalism, historical memory, China's rise, and Japan's security choices shape regional competition?

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Explain the historical formation and present organization of China's party-state.
2. Compare major explanations for authoritarian resilience, political centralization, policy experimentation, and state-led development.
3. Analyze how political institutions shape law, markets, local government, information control, participation, inequality, and foreign policy in China.
4. Describe the principal institutions and postwar development of Japanese politics, including LDP dominance and the developmental state.
5. Use Japan as a comparative case without treating either country as a fixed cultural type.
6. Distinguish scholarly arguments, official claims, descriptive journalism, advocacy reports, data, and audiovisual evidence.
7. Construct a clear, evidence-based comparative argument in both short analytical writing and timed examination conditions.

Course Language, Format, and Learning Environment

English is the language of instruction. Lectures, discussions, assignments, examinations, Canvas directions, and all required materials are in English. No knowledge of Chinese or Japanese is expected. When a source was originally produced in Chinese or Japanese, the assigned version is an official, published, or clearly identified English translation. Required audiovisual materials have English narration, subtitles, captions, or a transcript.

Class meetings combine short lectures, document analysis, structured discussion, data and evidence exercises, writing practice, and a crisis decision exercise. The instructor's role is to supply analytical frameworks, explain difficult material, model source evaluation, and give timely feedback. Students' role is to complete the assigned preparation before class, bring the relevant materials, test claims against evidence, and participate in civil academic discussion.

This course depends on open inquiry. Students are strongly encouraged to speak in class, ask genuine questions, offer interpretations, and challenge the instructor or one another with reasons and evidence. A thoughtful question, a careful disagreement, or an effort to clarify another student's argument can all make a valuable contribution. Participation is evaluated by preparation and constructive engagement, not by political viewpoint or agreement with the instructor.

Respect does not require agreement, and civility will not be used to shut down discussion of difficult or unpopular ideas. We will address arguments directly while treating the people who make them with dignity. Discriminatory harassment, personal attacks, intimidation, retaliation, and conduct that prevents others from participating are incompatible with this course. The instructor will work to maintain a learning environment in which every student can speak, question, disagree, and learn without discrimination or exclusion.

Materials and Access

All required and optional course materials are available through hyperlinks in this syllabus and in the corresponding Canvas module. There is no required commercial textbook, and students are not expected to purchase access to any assigned item. Whenever an ungated version is available, the syllabus links directly to that version. A small number of publisher-hosted readings may require students to sign in with a UT account through UT Libraries. The links lead to peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, official primary sources, reports, datasets, news, podcasts, and captioned or subtitled videos.

Canvas is the main access point for course materials. Each class meeting will include direct links to the required preparation and any optional materials for further study. A link may open an article, a PDF, an official webpage, an audio or video player, or a downloadable file. Students should open the links early enough to complete the assigned preparation before class.

If a link is broken, blocked, or inaccessible, please notify the instructor promptly. An updated link or an accessible alternative will be provided. Students need regular access to Canvas, a web browser, a PDF reader, and a device capable of playing captioned media.

Expected Workload and How to Succeed

For a three-credit course, students should plan for approximately six hours of preparation and assignment work outside class each week. A normal class requires two assigned pieces of social-science research totaling about 30–45 pages, plus a shorter primary source, report, news item, data exercise, or video.

Successful students typically:

- use the day's preparation questions to guide the reading;
- annotate the argument, mechanism, evidence, and limitations rather than highlighting everything;
- distinguish what a source claims from whether its evidence supports that claim;
- bring one question or contested passage to class;
- begin memos early enough to revise the argument;
- use the exam question bank throughout the unit rather than only immediately before the exam; and
- seek clarification in class, by email, or during office hours.

Communication and Office Hours

Course-wide information will be announced through Canvas. Students are responsible for checking Canvas and their UT email regularly. Email should be sent from a UT account and include POLS 454 in the subject line. The instructor normally responds within two business days; messages sent on evenings, weekends, or university holidays may receive a response on the next business day.

Office hours are in McClung Tower 1114 on Tuesdays from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and Thursdays from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Appointments normally last 25 minutes and should be booked at least 12 hours in advance through the [office-hours booking page](#). If no listed time is workable or the matter is urgent, email the instructor. Regular office hours are not held on university no-class days or holidays.

Assessment and Grading

Preparation and Participation – 15%

Participation is assessed through three equally weighted dimensions: preparation, constructive use of evidence in discussion, and completion of in-class analytical work. Quality matters more than speaking frequency. Listening carefully, asking a focused question, responding to another student's evidence, and improving a group analysis are all valuable forms of participation.

Routine participation records from two class meetings are automatically dropped. This provides flexibility for brief illness, unavoidable conflict, or an unusually difficult week without requiring personal disclosure. Students facing a longer disruption should contact the instructor or the appropriate university support office so that a reasonable plan can be developed. Attendance alone does not earn full participation credit, but students cannot complete most in-class work when absent.

Analytical Reading Memos – 20%

Students submit four memos of 700–900 words through Canvas before class at 9:45 a.m. on the dates below. Each memo must make a defensible claim, use specific assigned evidence, address a plausible alternative, and end with a clear implication. A bibliography is not required when only assigned materials are used, but brief parenthetical citations with author and page or source title are required. Every memo must also include the AI Use Statement specified under Course Policies; the statement does not count toward the word limit.

1. **September 10:** Is Xi-era personalistic rule an extension of authoritarian resilience or a threat to its institutional foundations?
2. **October 1:** Does market expansion imply state retreat? Evaluate China's changing political economy, using Japan as a limited comparative benchmark.
3. **October 27:** Which mechanism—law, censorship, propaganda, or selective responsiveness—best explains how the Chinese party-state governs social contention?
4. **November 17:** Is the evolution of Japanese security policy best understood as abrupt militarization, normalization, or gradual adaptation to China's rise?

Each memo is graded as follows:

- argument and analytical focus: 40%;
- use and interpretation of evidence: 35%;
- organization and engagement with an alternative explanation: 15%;
- clarity, citation accuracy, and compliance with instructions: 10%.

Midterm Examination – 30%

The in-class midterm is Tuesday, October 13 and lasts 75 minutes. It covers all required preparation, lectures, discussions, and in-class work through Thursday, October 8. Students should be prepared to explain and compare the course's major arguments about historical legacies, regime institutions, authoritarian resilience, Japanese party politics, state-led development, and political economy. Approximately 70 percent of the available points assess China-centered material and 30 percent assess Japan or explicit China–Japan comparison.

The midterm is worth 100 points and has four parts:

1. **Multiple-choice questions — 15 points.** Twelve questions test recognition, interpretation, and application of course arguments and evidence. Suggested time: 10 minutes.
2. **Concept explanations — 20 points.** Answer four of five terms. For each term, define it accurately, place it in the relevant country or institutional context, and explain why it matters for an argument made in the course. A strong response normally uses a concrete example or identifies the relevant scholar or reading. Suggested time: 15 minutes.
3. **Two short essays — 25 points.** Answer both questions. Each answer should make a direct claim and support it with specific course evidence in one or two developed paragraphs. These questions ask students to explain a mechanism, interpret evidence, or make a focused comparison. Suggested time: 20 minutes total.
4. **One longer essay — 40 points.** Choose one of two prompts. The essay should state a clear thesis, organize a sustained argument, use several specific examples from the course, and address a plausible alternative explanation. Suggested time: 30 minutes.

Final Examination – 35%

The final examination will take place during the Registrar's December 3–9 examination period. The exact date and time will be announced in Canvas after the Fall 2026 final-exam grid is posted. It is cumulative, with roughly two-thirds of the points focused on material taught after the midterm. Post-midterm topics include legitimacy and public opinion, law, censorship, propaganda, protest, civil society, nationalism, foreign policy, Japanese security policy, China–Japan competition, crisis bargaining, and comparative synthesis. Approximately 70 percent of the available points assess China-centered material and 30 percent assess Japan or explicit China–Japan comparison.

The final is worth 100 points and has four parts:

1. **Multiple-choice questions — 20 points.** Twenty questions test recognition, interpretation, and application across the semester. Suggested time: 20 minutes.
2. **Concept explanations — 20 points.** Answer five of six terms. Each answer must define the term, locate it in the relevant political context, and explain its analytical significance with a course example, scholar, or reading. Suggested time: 20 minutes.
3. **Two short essays — 25 points.** Answer both questions in one or two developed paragraphs each. At least one question will require explicit comparison or application of a course mechanism to evidence. Suggested time: 30 minutes total.
4. **One longer essay — 35 points.** Choose one of two prompts. The essay must present a clear comparative or causal thesis, organize the reasoning, draw on several specific pieces of course evidence, and consider an alternative explanation. Suggested time: 50 minutes.

Rules for Both Examinations

- Both exams are closed book and closed notes. The only authorized aid is one physical A4-size cheat sheet (210 x 297 mm). It may be handwritten or typed and may use both sides.
- The cheat sheet must be submitted with the examination. Attachments, foldouts, sticky notes, and additional sheets are not permitted.
- Generative AI, internet access, electronic devices, and any additional materials are prohibited during both examinations.
- At least seven calendar days before each exam, the instructor will post a bank of possible concepts, multiple-choice questions, short-essay prompts, and longer-essay prompts.
- Every concept and question appearing on the examination will be selected from the posted bank.
- Question-bank wording may be corrected for an obvious typographical error, but no new substantive question will be added after the seven-day deadline.

China-Japan Crisis Decision Exercise

The November 24 class is a multi-round diplomatic simulation built around a fictional crisis involving China and Japan. Students will be assigned to the Chinese or Japanese side and will take roles such as senior political leaders, foreign-ministry officials, defense and security advisers, economic officials, and public-information staff. Each side will receive a common account of the incident as well as private information about its own priorities, constraints, and uncertainties.

Teams will first meet internally to decide what happened, what they want, what they are willing to risk, and what message they intend the other side to hear. They will then exchange diplomatic statements, make proposals, respond to new developments, and negotiate over practical steps such as crisis communication, de-escalation, fact-finding, and the wording of a possible joint statement. New information will be introduced in stages, so students must make decisions before they know everything and must consider how domestic politics, alliance commitments, economic ties, legal claims, signaling, and misperception shape the room for agreement.

The exercise does not receive a separate grade, and students are not rewarded for “winning” the crisis. Normal expectations for preparation and constructive participation apply. The debrief will connect the choices made in the simulation to course arguments about coercive diplomacy, audience costs, nationalism, bureaucratic politics, and escalation. Concepts and public facts used in the exercise, as well as questions asking students to analyze its decisions, may appear in the final-exam question bank. Students will not be tested on private role instructions available only to another team.

Grading Scale

Final percentages are converted to letter grades using the following scale. Grades are not curved, and the instructor does not round a score across a letter-grade boundary.

Grade	Percentage	Grade	Percentage
A	93-100	C	73-76.99
A-	90-92.99	C-	70-72.99
B+	87-89.99	D+	67-69.99
B	83-86.99	D	63-66.99
B-	80-82.99	D-	60-62.99
C+	77-79.99	F	Below 60

Course Policies

Attendance, Tardiness, and Absence

Students are expected to attend, arrive on time, and remain for the full class. If an absence is foreseeable, notify the instructor before class when practical. For a health-related absence, students may use UT's [Caring for All Vols absence process](#). Do not email private medical records to the instructor.

The two dropped participation records cover routine short absences. When university activities, religious observance, military obligation, disability, serious illness, bereavement, or another documented circumstance produces a longer interruption, contact the instructor promptly so that missed work can be addressed consistently with university policy.

Late Memos

A memo submitted after 9:45 a.m. is late. Without an approved extension, the score is reduced by five percentage points of the memo grade for each 24-hour period or part thereof. A memo more than five days late is not accepted because class discussion and feedback will have revealed major parts of the analysis. Extensions should be requested before the deadline when circumstances permit. A student need not disclose unnecessary personal details, but the instructor may request appropriate university documentation.

Missed and Makeup Exams

Students who cannot take an exam at the scheduled time must notify the instructor as soon as possible, normally before the exam or within 48 hours of an emergency. A makeup exam requires an approved university-related conflict or a serious, documented circumstance. The makeup may use different questions from the same posted bank and may be written or oral. Travel plans, work shifts, and purchasing a ticket before confirming the university calendar do not ordinarily justify a makeup.

Under university final-exam policy, students are not required to take more than two final exams in one day. A student with a qualifying conflict must contact the instructor at least two weeks before the end of classes.

Regrading and Grade Questions

Students should first read the written feedback and rubric. A formal regrade request must be submitted by email within seven calendar days of the grade's release and must identify the rubric criterion and evidence supporting reconsideration. The entire assignment or exam, not only the disputed portion, may be reviewed, so the grade may increase, remain unchanged, or decrease. Clerical errors should be reported promptly and do not require a formal regrade argument.

Extra Credit, Incompletes, and Withdrawal

No individual extra-credit work is offered. If an extra-credit opportunity is made available, it will be announced to and available to the entire class. Incomplete grades and withdrawals follow current university and catalog policy. An Incomplete is not a substitute for a poor grade and is considered only when a student who has completed a substantial portion of the course faces circumstances that prevent timely completion.

Generative AI: Permitted for Homework with Disclosure

This course uses an open-use-with-attribution policy for homework. Students may use generative AI tools when preparing take-home work, including the analytical reading memos. Permitted uses include brainstorming, developing search terms, outlining, testing a counterargument, translating, revising prose, and drafting. Students remain the authors of the work they submit and are responsible for every claim, citation, interpretation, and sentence. AI output is not evidence: factual and analytical claims must be checked against the assigned materials or another reliable source and cited to that source. Do not upload confidential information, another person's work, or course materials that you do not have permission to share.

Every analytical memo must end with an **AI Use Statement**, even if no AI was used. The statement does not count toward the memo's word limit. If AI was used, the statement must include:

- the tool, provider, and model or version, if shown;
- what the tool was used to do and where its output affected the memo;
- every prompt submitted for the memo, copied verbatim, including meaningful follow-up prompts; and
- how the student checked the output and what the student changed, rejected, or rewrote.

If no generative AI was used, write: “**AI Use Statement: I did not use generative AI in preparing this memo.**” A missing, incomplete, or misleading statement violates the assignment instructions. Fabricated evidence or citations, failure to disclose AI assistance, or presenting unverified output as fact may also constitute academic dishonesty.

Students may use AI to study before an examination. The midterm and final themselves are closed book and closed notes, except for the single physical A4-size cheat sheet described above. No generative AI, internet access, or electronic device may be used during either examination.

Academic Integrity and Source Accuracy

Students are responsible for their personal integrity and for complying with UT's Honor Statement and Student Code of Conduct. Plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, fabricated evidence or citations, unauthorized exam materials, and inappropriate AI assistance are prohibited. Suspected academic dishonesty will be handled through university procedures and may result in an assignment penalty, course penalty, and referral to Student Conduct and Community Standards.

Civil Academic Discourse

The course examines authoritarian rule, war, nationalism, ethnicity, inequality, protest, surveillance, gender, territorial conflict, and other subjects on which informed people may disagree. Students should expect to encounter ideas that challenge their views and should be able to explain an argument accurately even when they reject it. Criticism should address claims, concepts, and evidence—not the dignity or presumed motives of classmates. No student is required to disclose a personal political belief or identity in order to participate.

Technology and Recording

Laptops and tablets may be used for assigned readings, notes, data exercises, and other course work. Unrelated messaging, shopping, video, social media, or work for another course is not appropriate during class. Phones should be silenced and put away unless an activity requires them.

Students may not make or distribute audio, video, photographs, screenshots, or transcripts of class meetings without prior written permission, except as authorized through an approved accommodation. Course slides, question banks, handouts, and recordings are for enrolled students' educational use and may not be publicly posted or sold.

Accessibility of Course Materials

Course links are selected to open without a paywall or login whenever an ungated version is available. If a publisher page requests institutional authentication, students may use their UT account through UT Libraries to reach the assigned reading. Students are not expected to pay for any course material. The instructor will provide meaningful link text, readable documents, and captions or transcripts for required media. Students who encounter a broken link, inaccessible document, missing or inaccurate caption, or other barrier should notify the instructor so an accessible alternative can be provided promptly.

Major Dates at a Glance

- **August 17:** Full-session classes begin
- **August 18:** First class meeting
- **August 24:** Add/drop deadline for full-session courses
- **September 7:** Labor Day; no classes (does not cancel a POLS 454 meeting)
- **September 10:** Memo 1 due
- **October 1:** Memo 2 due
- **October 5–6:** Fall Break; no classes
- **October 13:** Midterm examination
- **October 27:** Memo 3 due
- **November 3:** Election Day; no classes
- **November 17:** Memo 4 due
- **November 24:** Crisis decision exercise
- **November 25–27:** Thanksgiving Recess; no classes
- **December 1:** Last class meeting
- **December 2:** Study Day
- **December 3–9:** University final-exam period

Detailed Course Schedule and Required Preparation

All required items below are in English. Links are ungated whenever possible; any item that requires institutional authentication can be accessed with a UT account through UT Libraries. Assigned pages are inclusive. A normal class asks students to prepare two pieces of social-science research and one shorter source such as a speech, legal text, dataset, policy report, or video. The assigned portions usually total 30–45 pages. Optional academic readings, documentaries, podcasts, news, and data resources are listed in the separate Canvas reading guide. China, Japan, and Comparative identify the primary analytical focus rather than the nationality of every source.

Week 1 – Comparison and Evidence

Tuesday, August 18 – Comparative

Topic: Course launch: Why did China and Japan diverge?

Preparation questions:

1. What explanation do Haym and Motin give for the different reform paths taken by Qing China and Meiji Japan?
2. How far do the Reform Edict and Charter Oath support that explanation, and what do the primary sources leave unresolved?

Required preparation:

- Haym, A., & Motin, D. (2025). [Best practices and elite belief: International competition and state modernization in Qing China and Meiji Japan](#). *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 25(1), 21–44.
- Qing Imperial Government. (1901). [Reform edict of the Qing Imperial Government](#), 4 pages.
- Government of Japan. (1868). [Charter Oath of the Meiji Restoration](#), 2 pages.

Thursday, August 20 – China

Topic: How to study Chinese politics: comparison, culture, institutions, and evidence

Preparation questions:

1. What is the relevant “case” in each reading, and what evidence actually varies within it?
2. Under what conditions can evidence from one Chinese locality support a broader claim about China or a comparison with another country?

Required preparation:

- Snyder, R. (2001). [Scaling down: The subnational comparative method](#). *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 36(1), 93–110.
- Pepinsky, T. B. (2019). [The return of the single-country study](#). *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22, 187–203. Read pp. 187–198.

- Asia for Educators. [Introduction to China's modern history](#), approximately 15 minutes.

Week 2 – Late Qing, Republic, War, and Revolution

Tuesday, August 25 – China

Topic: Late Qing crisis, the Republic, and the rise of the CCP

Preparation questions:

1. Which political alternatives competed before the CCP's victory, and what constituencies or institutions sustained them?
2. How would a teleological account distort the evidence in these readings?

Required preparation:

- Yan, Q., & Leung, E. M.-T. (2020). [A forgotten experiment: Constitutional democratisation in early twentieth-century China \(1909–14\)](#). *British Journal of Chinese Studies*, 10, 15–39.
- Zhang, J. (2023). [The making of “public opinion”: Media and open diplomacy in China's strategy at Versailles and the May Fourth Movement](#). *Modern Asian Studies*, 57(4), 1355–1386. Read pp. 1355–1372.
- Mao, Z. (1927). [Report on the investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan](#), English excerpt, 4 pages.

Thursday, August 27 – China

Topic: War, revolution, historical memory, and legitimacy

Preparation questions:

1. Through what mechanisms did the war change the CCP's opportunities to recruit, organize, and govern?
2. How does the 2015 official commemoration select and frame wartime history to support contemporary legitimacy?

Required preparation:

- Chen, T., & Kung, J. K.-S. (2026). [The rise of the Chinese Communist Party](#). *Journal of the European Economic Association*. Read pp. 1–20 and the conclusion.
- Gustafsson, K. (2020). [Understanding the persistence of history-related issues in Sino-Japanese relations: From memory to forgetting](#). *International Politics*, 57, 1047–1062.
- State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2015). [Beijing parade sends message of stronger China to safeguard peace](#), official video, approximately 3 minutes.

Week 3 – Maoist China and Postwar Japan

Tuesday, September 1 – China

Topic: The Maoist political order: planning, famine, mobilization, and upheaval

Preparation questions:

1. How did procurement rules, reporting incentives, and information failures turn political targets into famine?
2. What institutional features connect the Great Leap Forward to Cultural Revolution mobilization, and where does that comparison break down?

Required preparation:

- Meng, X., Qian, N., & Yared, P. (2015). [The institutional causes of China's Great Famine, 1959–1961](#). *Review of Economic Studies*, 82(4), 1568–1611. Read journal pp. 1568–1590.
- Walder, A. G. (2016). [Bending the arc of Chinese history: The Cultural Revolution's paradoxical legacy](#). *China Quarterly*, 227, 613–631. Read pp. 613–625.
- Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. (1966). [The sixteen points](#), English excerpt, 3 pages.

Thursday, September 3 – Japan

Topic: Occupation reforms, the 1947 Constitution, and the postwar settlement

Preparation questions:

1. Which constitutional provisions most clearly redistributed political authority in postwar Japan?
2. What evidence supports the claim that the Constitution was imposed, negotiated, or subsequently appropriated by Japanese political actors?

Required preparation:

- McElwain, K. M., & Winkler, C. G. (2015). [What's unique about the Japanese Constitution? A comparative and historical analysis](#). *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 41(2), 249–280. Read pp. 249–267.
- House of Representatives, Japan. [The Constitution of Japan](#). Read the Preamble and Articles 1–9, 14, 24, 41–75, and 96.
- National Diet Library. [Birth of the Constitution of Japan](#). Read Parts 3–4 and inspect the [GHQ draft](#).

Week 4 – Party Organization and Authoritarian Resilience

Tuesday, September 8 – China

Topic: China's party-state: Party, government, military, legislature, and courts

Preparation questions:

1. How do formal Party rules link the CCP leadership to the government, legislature, military, and territorial hierarchy?
2. Which personnel and disciplinary powers make Party leadership effective in practice?

Required preparation:

- Cabestan, J.-P. (2022). [Organisation and \(lack of\) democracy in the Chinese Communist Party](#). *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 51(3), 364–385.
- Communist Party of China. (2022). [Constitution of the Communist Party of China](#). Read the General Program and Chapters I–II and X.
- Asia Society Policy Institute. [Decoding Chinese politics](#). Review the Party Center, State Council, and People's Congress sections.

Thursday, September 10 – China

Topic: Authoritarian resilience and Xi-era personalistic rule

Preparation questions:

1. What mechanisms did Nathan identify as the institutional foundations of authoritarian resilience?
2. Which Xi-era developments support or challenge that argument, and why does the distinction between a norm and an institution matter?

Required preparation:

- Nathan, A. J. (2003). [China's changing of the guard: Authoritarian resilience](#). *Journal of Democracy*, 14(1), 6–17.
- Fewsmith, J. (2021). [Balances, norms and institutions: Why elite politics in the CCP have not institutionalized](#). *China Quarterly*, 248(S1), 265–282.
- Shirk, S. L. (2018). [China in Xi's "New Era": The return to personalistic rule](#). *Journal of Democracy*, 29(2), 22–36.

Milestone: Memo 1 due before class.

Week 5 – Japanese Electoral Democracy and LDP Dominance

Tuesday, September 15 – Japan

Topic: Parliamentary government, the Diet, and electoral institutions

Preparation questions:

1. How did the post-1994 electoral system change the incentives facing candidates, parties, and party leaders?
2. Which political outcomes can plausibly be attributed to electoral reform, and which require another explanation?

Required preparation:

- Machidori, S. (2023). [An overview of political reform](#). In *Political reform reconsidered*, pp. 21–46.
- McElwain, K. M. (2008). [Manipulating electoral rules to manufacture single-party dominance](#). *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(1), 32–47. Read pp. 32–43.
- House of Representatives, Japan. [Structure of the National Diet](#) and [Powers of the National Diet](#).

Thursday, September 17 – Japan

Topic: LDP predominance, factions, bureaucracy, and opposition weakness

Preparation questions:

1. Through what mechanisms do patronage, factions, and access to policymaking help sustain LDP predominance?
2. Does the 2026 election result fit those explanations, or does it reveal their limits?

Required preparation:

- Reed, S. R. (2022). [Patronage and predominance: How the LDP maintains its hold on power](#). *Social Science Japan Journal*, 25(1), 83–100.
- Carlson, M., & Nakabayashi, M. (2024). [Factions and the redistributive effects of reform in Japan](#). *Political Studies Review*, 22(4), 948–966. Read pp. 948–959.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2026). [Japan House of Representatives February 2026 election results](#).

Week 6 – Cadres, Decentralization, and Experimentation

Tuesday, September 22 – China

Topic: Leadership selection, cadre incentives, and central–local relations

Preparation questions:

1. What observable evidence do the authors use to distinguish political loyalty from administrative competence?
2. How has personnel management under Xi changed the tradeoff between those two qualities?

Required preparation:

- Jia, L. (2022). [Loyalty and competence: The political selection of local cadres in China](#). *China Quarterly*, 251, 726–750.
- Doyon, J. (2018). [Clientelism by design: Personnel politics under Xi Jinping](#). *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 47(3), 87–110. Read pp. 87–102.
- UC San Diego China Data Lab. [CCP Elites Database](#). Read the project description and inspect one provincial leadership profile.

Thursday, September 24 – China

Topic: Reform, decentralization, and policy experimentation

Preparation questions:

1. How can hierarchy enable policy experimentation rather than simply constrain it?
2. How have Xi-era political pressures changed local officials' incentives to initiate, report, and scale experiments?

Required preparation:

- Heilmann, S. (2008). [Experimentation under hierarchy: Policy experiments in the reorganization of China's state sector, 1978–2008](#). CID Working Paper 172. Read pp. 1–13.
- Heffer, A. S., & Schubert, G. (2023). [Policy experimentation under pressure in contemporary China](#). *China Quarterly*, 253, 35–56.
- Becker Friedman Institute. (2026). [Laboratories of autocracy: What happens when China shuts down its policy experiments?](#), podcast; listen to the first 18 minutes.

Week 7 – Developmental States and Party-State Capitalism

Tuesday, September 29 – Japan

Topic: The developmental state, industrial policy, and the economic miracle

Preparation questions:

1. Through which institutions did the Japanese state coordinate firms, finance, trade, and technological upgrading?
2. What evidence makes the simple claim that “MITI directed the market” misleading, and how has industrial policy changed since the high-growth era?

Required preparation:

- Okazaki, T. (2019). [Development state evolving: Japan’s graduation from a middle-income country](#). In *Developmental state building*, pp. 19–46.
- World Bank. (1993). [The East Asian miracle: Economic growth and public policy](#). Read “The Growth Debate: Neoclassical, Revisionist, and Market-Friendly Views,” pp. 77–103.
- Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japan. (2024). [White Paper on International Economy and Trade 2024](#). Read the summary section on Japan’s “new direction of industrial policy.”

Thursday, October 1 – China

Topic: SOEs, state–business relations, and party-state capitalism

Preparation questions:

1. What distinguishes party-state capitalism from state ownership alone?
2. Do appointments, Party committees, finance, and local government relations show a departure from earlier governance or a deepening of it?

Required preparation:

- Leutert, W., & Eaton, S. (2021). [Deepening not departure: Xi Jinping’s governance of China’s state-owned economy](#). *China Quarterly*, 248(S1), 200–221.
- Oi, J. C. (1995). [The role of the local state in China’s transitional economy](#). *China Quarterly*, 144, 1132–1149.
- Pearson, M., Rithmire, M., & Tsai, K. S. (2021). [Party-state capitalism in China](#). Harvard Business School Working Paper 21-065. Read pp. 1–15.

Milestone: Memo 2 due before class.

Week 8 – Slowdown, Demography, and Midterm Synthesis

Tuesday, October 6 – No class

Fall Break.

Thursday, October 8 – China

Topic: Economic slowdown, demographic pressure, and midterm synthesis

Preparation questions:

1. Which constraints in the readings are demographic or structural, and which remain open to policy intervention?
2. How do migration rules, local debt, and the growth model amplify the effects of population aging, and which policies might ease them?

Required preparation:

- Wang, Y., & Conesa, J. C. (2022). [The role of demographics and migration for the future of economic growth in China](#). *European Economic Review*, 144, Article 104076.
- World Bank. (2026). [Rebalancing growth: China economic update](#). Read the press release and figures.
- International Monetary Fund. (2026). [People's Republic of China: 2025 Article IV consultation](#). Read the Executive Summary and pp. 6–14 of the staff report.

Week 9 – Midterm and Political Legitimacy

Tuesday, October 13 – Examination

Midterm examination. Closed book and closed notes; one double-sided A4-size physical cheat sheet permitted. Generative AI and electronic devices are prohibited.

Thursday, October 15 – China

Topic: Political culture, public opinion, legitimacy, and measurement

Preparation questions:

1. How do the studies distinguish genuine regime support from preference falsification or fear of answering honestly?
2. What does the official white paper claim democracy should mean, and how could the empirical research evaluate that claim?

Required preparation:

- Carter, E. B., Carter, B. L., & Schick, S. (2024). [Do Chinese citizens conceal opposition to the CCP in surveys?](#). *China Quarterly*, 259, 804–813.

- Jiang, J., & Yang, D. L. (2016). [Lying or believing? Measuring preference falsification from a political purge in China](#). *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(5), 600–634. Read pp. 600–619.
- State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. (2021). [China: Democracy that works](#). Read the Introduction and Sections I, II, and V.

Week 10 – Information Control, Law, and Corruption

Tuesday, October 20 – China

Topic: Ideology, propaganda, media control, censorship, and surveillance

Preparation questions:

1. What evidence distinguishes censorship of criticism from censorship aimed at collective action?
2. How might propaganda as signaling and digital surveillance work together with, or substitute for, content removal?

Required preparation:

- King, G., Pan, J., & Roberts, M. E. (2013). [How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression](#). *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 326–343.
- Huang, H. (2015). [Propaganda as signaling](#). *Comparative Politics*, 47(4), 419–444. Read pp. 419–433.
- Human Rights Watch. (2019). [China's algorithms of repression](#). Read the Summary and “How the IJOP App Works.”

Thursday, October 22 – China

Topic: Law, corruption, formal representation, and authoritarian institutions

Preparation questions:

1. What evidence would distinguish organizational repair from political power consolidation in an anti-corruption campaign?
2. How do state law, Party discipline, and personnel control interact in the institutions described by the readings?

Required preparation:

- Kautz, C. (2020). [Power struggle or strengthening the Party: Perspectives on Xi Jinping's anticorruption campaign](#). *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 25, 501–511.
- Lorentzen, P. L., & Lu, X. (2018). [Personal ties, meritocracy, and China's anti-corruption campaign](#). Working paper. Read pp. 1–20 and the conclusion.
- National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China. (2018). [Constitution of the People's Republic of China](#). Read the Preamble and Articles 1–5, 33–41, 57–67, 79–84, and 123–127.

Week 11 – Protest, Representation, and Demographic Change

Tuesday, October 27 – China

Topic: Protest, labor, civil society, and selective state responsiveness

Preparation questions:

1. How do rights-based claims, collective-action risk, and pressure from higher officials generate different predictions about state responsiveness?
2. Which mechanism is best supported by the field experiment, and what important forms of contention does that evidence not capture?

Required preparation:

- Chen, J., Pan, J., & Xu, Y. (2016). [Sources of authoritarian responsiveness: A field experiment in China](#). *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(2), 383–400.
- O'Brien, K. J. (1996). [Rightful resistance](#). *World Politics*, 49(1), 31–55. Read pp. 31–46.
- PBS NewsHour. (2022). [Thousands protest China's zero-COVID policy](#), video, 8:25.

Milestone: Memo 3 due before class.

Thursday, October 29 – Japan

Topic: Elections and campaigning; civil society, gender, and demographic change

Preparation questions:

1. Do the readings locate women's underrepresentation primarily in voter demand, candidate supply, party recruitment, or institutional constraints?
2. How do employment, care responsibilities, and demographic change shape the pool of people who enter Japanese politics?

Required preparation:

- Estévez-Abe, M. (2023). [Changing faces of political women in Tokyo](#). *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 24(1), 1–16.
- Kage, R., Rosenbluth, F. M., & Tanaka, S. (2019). [What explains low female political representation? Evidence from survey experiments in Japan](#). *Politics & Gender*, 15(2), 285–309. Read pp. 285–301.
- National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. (2023). [Population projections for Japan: 2021 to 2070](#). Read Key Messages and Overview, pp. 4–10.

Week 12 – Classification, Citizenship, and Center-Periphery Governance**Tuesday, November 3 – No class**

Election Day.

Thursday, November 5 – China

Topic: Migration, hukou, inequality, ethnicity, and center–periphery governance

Preparation questions:

1. How does hukou status convert an administrative classification into unequal access to residence, schooling, welfare, and citizenship?
2. What similarities and differences do the readings suggest between governing migration and governing ethnic difference?

Required preparation:

- Chan, K. W. (2010). [The household registration system and migrant labor in China](#). *Population and Development Review*, 36(2), 357–364.
- Vortherms, S. A. (2019). [China's missing children: Political barriers to citizenship through the household registration system](#). *China Quarterly*, 238, 309–330. Read pp. 309–323.
- Associated Press. (2026). [China adopts an ethnic unity law that critics say will cement assimilation](#).

Week 13 – Nationalism, China's Rise, and International Order**Tuesday, November 10 – China**

Topic: Nationalism, historical memory, and foreign-policy signaling

Preparation questions:

1. When can nationalist protest strengthen a government's international bargaining position, and when does it threaten domestic control?
2. How do the experiments qualify the assumption that nationalist public pressure is spontaneous or politically fixed?

Required preparation:

- Weiss, J. C. (2013). [Authoritarian signaling, mass audiences, and nationalist protest in China](#). *International Organization*, 67(1), 1–35. Read pp. 1–19 and 30–35.
- Quek, K., & Chan, S. S. H. (2025). [Managing nationalism: Experiments in China](#). *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 69(2–3), 381–405. Read pp. 381–395.
- Xi, J. (2021). [Speech at a ceremony marking the centenary of the Communist Party of China](#), official English translation.

Thursday, November 12 – China

Topic: China's rise, the global economy, and international security

Preparation questions:

1. Through what mechanisms do domestic insecurity, nationalism, and economic governance shape China's external behavior?
2. What evidence would distinguish a broadly revisionist China from a government that is selectively assertive or defending narrower interests?

Required preparation:

- Weiss, J. C., & Wallace, J. L. (2021). [Domestic politics, China's rise, and the future of the liberal international order](#). *International Organization*, 75(2), 635–664. Read pp. 635–650 and 657–664.
- Johnston, A. I. (2013). [How new and assertive is China's new assertiveness?](#). *International Security*, 37(4), 7–48. Read pp. 7–20 and 33–38.
- Associated Press. (2026). [China Shock 2.0: Surging Chinese exports threaten Europe's economy](#).

Week 14 – Japanese Security and East China Sea Competition

Tuesday, November 17 – Japan

Topic: Security normalization, constitutional debate, and the U.S.–Japan alliance

Preparation questions:

1. What different predictions do pacifism, buck-passing, and gradual normalization make about Japanese security policy?
2. How do Article 9, alliance asymmetry, and domestic political constraints shape Japan's choices within the U.S.–Japan alliance?

Required preparation:

- Lind, J. M. (2004). [Pacifism or passing the buck? Testing theories of Japanese security policy](#). *International Security*, 29(1), 92–121. Read pp. 92–106.
- Hughes, C. W., & Krauss, E. S. (2007). [Japan's new security agenda](#). *Survival*, 49(2), 157–176. Read pp. 157–168.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (1960). [Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States](#). Read the Preamble and Articles III–VI.

Milestone: Memo 4 due before class.

Thursday, November 19 – Comparative

Topic: Taiwan, the East China Sea, and China–Japan regional competition

Preparation questions:

1. Where do the Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese positions rely on legal claims, historical narratives, or strategic interests?
2. Through what sequence could a minor maritime incident escalate, and how might alliance commitments or operational ambiguity change that sequence?
3. Which assumptions in the official positions are shared, and which are mutually incompatible?

Required preparation:

- Midford, P., & Østhagen, A. (2024). [The East China Sea: A case of ocean geopolitics and maritime conflict](#). *East Asia*, 41, 223–254. Read pp. 223–244.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. [Senkaku Islands Q&A](#), Q1–Q6.
- State Council Information Office of the PRC. [Diaoyu Dao, an inherent territory of China](#), Foreword, Sections I and III–IV, and Conclusion.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan). [Diaoyutai Islands: Government position and strategy](#).

Week 15 – Crisis Decision Exercise

Tuesday, November 24 – Comparative

Topic: China–Japan crisis decision exercise

Preparation questions:

1. Which actions could defend a sovereignty claim without eliminating diplomatic off-ramps?
2. How might the same military or diplomatic signal be interpreted differently by China, Japan, and the United States?
3. What practical role can hotlines, international law, and prior alliance statements play when information is incomplete and decisions are time-sensitive?

Required preparation:

- Revisit the three official territorial positions assigned for November 19.
- International Crisis Group. (2013). [Dangerous waters: China–Japan relations on the rocks](#). *Asia Report* 245. Read the Executive Summary and pp. 1–9.
- Ministry of Defense, Japan. (2023). [Establishment of the hotline between Japan–China defense authorities](#).

- Governments of the United States and Japan. (2014). [U.S.–Japan Joint Statement](#), East China Sea and Article V paragraphs.
- United Nations. [Charter of the United Nations](#), Articles 2(4), 33, and 51.

Thursday, November 26 – No class

Thanksgiving Recess.

Week 16 – Comparative Synthesis

Tuesday, December 1 – Comparative

Topic: China, Japan, and comparative institutional analysis

Preparation questions:

1. In each constitution, through what institutional chain does popular sovereignty become effective political authority, and where does that chain break down?
2. Which China–Japan comparison from the semester produces the strongest causal insight, and which comparison risks treating unlike institutions as equivalent?

Required preparation:

- House of Representatives, Japan. [The Constitution of Japan](#): Preamble and Articles 1–9, 14, 41–75, and 96.
- National People’s Congress of the PRC. [Constitution of the People’s Republic of China](#): Preamble and Articles 1–5, 33–41, 57–68, and 79–94.
- International IDEA. (2026). [Global State of Democracy Indices](#): compare China and Japan on Representation, Effective Parliament, Civil Society, Gender Equality, and Predictable Enforcement.

Final Examination

Registrar-scheduled appointment during December 3–9

Closed book and closed notes; one double-sided A4-size physical cheat sheet permitted. Generative AI and electronic devices are prohibited. All concepts and questions are selected from the posted question bank. The exact date and time will be announced in Canvas after the Fall 2026 final-exam grid is posted.