Course Content and Format

This course will examine China’s efforts to reconstitute its political institutions following the collapse of the imperial system in 1911. Particular attention will be paid to the clash between competing conceptions of political development and the rival political movements and forces that espoused them. The search for an effective and stable political order in the face of external pressures and internal fragmentation will receive extended discussion. The failed effort to create legitimate and popularly grounded political institutions will be a major focus of the course. A secondary focus will explore the impact of rapid economic, social and cultural change on the political system. The course will be organized in a lecture format, though class discussion will be encouraged.

Grades will be based on three term tests, weighted equally at 33 1/3%

All readings will be posted on Quercus in Modules by date and topic.

Topics and Readings:

May 3  The Rise of China: Historical Perspectives and Course Overview

1. Martin Jacques, When China Rules the World, Chapter 3 (“China’s Ignominy

May 4  China’s Traditional Order and the Problem of Change

1. Lieberthal, Governing China, Chapter 1, pp.3-19.
2. Henrietta Harrison, Inventing China, Chapter 1

May 5  Revolution and Reform

2. Maurice Meisner, Mao’s China and After, 3-51.
2. Lieberthal, Governing China, pp.19-26
May 6  Alternative Visions: The Republic and the May 4th Movement

3. Chen Duxiu, “Call to Youth.”*
4. Video (“China in Revolution”)

May 10  The CCP and the KMT (GMD): 1921-1937

2. Kenneth Lieberthal, Governing China, 31-39

May 11  The CCP: From Yanan to ‘Liberation’: A Peasant Revolution?

2. Video (“China in Revolution: II”)

May 12  The CCP in Power: The Early Years

2. Maurice Meisner, Mao’s China and After, Chapter 5-6.
4. Video (“The Mao Years: I”)

May 13  Term Test # 1 (No class Scheduled)

May 17  The First Five Year Plan and the ‘Great Leap’


May 18  The Cultural Revolution and the End of the Mao Era

1. Maurice Meisner, Mao’s China and After, Chapters 17, 19.
2. Phillip Pan, “The Cemetery”

May 19  The Deng Era Takes Shape: Economic Reform and Market Socialism

1. Maurice Meisner, Mao’s China, Chapter 24
3. Video (‘Born Under the Red Flag’-I)
May 20  Political Reform and Democratization in the Deng Era
2. Video “Born Under the Red Flag: Part II)

May 24  Victoria Day: No Class Meeting

May 25  Party and State Institutions in Flux

May 26  Political Leadership in Flux
2. Evan Osnos, “Born Red” *New Yorker*, (Xi Jinping bio)
3. Daniel Bell and Eric Li “Meritocracy”

May 27  Test # 2 (No Lecture Scheduled)

May 31  Ideology and Value Change in Contemporary China

June 1  State and Society in Flux
2. Gilboy and Read, “Political and Social Reform in China,” 2008
3. Andrew Nathan, “The Puzzle of the Chinese Middle Class.”
4. Video (China from the Inside)

June 2  Towards a ‘Rule of Law?’
2. Hualing Fu, “The July 9th Crackdown on China’s Rights Defender Lawyers”.
3. Video (“The Story of Qiu Ju”)
June 3  Intellectuals, Artists and Dissent in China

1. Evan Osnos, “The Han Dynasty”
2. Evan Osnos, “Ai Weiwei in Profile”
4. Video ("Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry")

June 7  Ethnicity and Identity

1. James Leibold, “Xinjiang,” China Leadership Monitor, 2019,
2. Dru Gladney, Dislocating China, Chapter 2

June 8  China Challenges the World

1. Ian Johnson, “Will China Become Supreme?”
2. Frank Pиеke, Knowing China, Chapter 6
5. Video (China from the Outside)

June 9  Chinese Nationalism and the Problem of the Periphery

4. Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell, China’s Search for Security, Chapter 8.

June 10  Whither China?

1. Minxin Pei, “CCP Rule: Fragile or Resilient?”

June 14  Term Test #3 Review and Guide (Test to be completed in Final Assessment Period, TBA)