CONTEMPORARY CHINESE POLITICS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

POLI 646 (3 credits)
Winter 2020
(Last Updated on Nov 28, 2019)

Time:

Location:

Course Description:
The China experience has invited scholarly attention because of its stable one-party rule accompanied by rapid economic growth that began more than three decades ago. To what extent is the China experience unique? To what extent can the China experience be explained and analyzed by existing theories in political science? In what ways can the China experience contribute to the scholarship of comparative politics? This is a graduate seminar that focuses on the comparative implications of the China case. While its substantive focus is on China, the course situates the case of China into broad literature of comparative politics, including state building, political economy of growth, contentious politics, and authoritarian rule.

There are five to seven article-length readings assigned each week. Required readings should be completed by the date corresponding with the topic as indicated on this syllabus. For each topic, the readings are chosen to encompass (to the extent possible) 1) background literature on specific topics of comparative politics; 2) analytic surveys or literature reviews on the topic; 3) studies presenting different views concerning the topic; and 4) recent studies that reflect the current state of the field on the topics.

Grading:

1) **Class Participation** (10%)
   You are expected to have completed all readings and actively and regularly participate in seminar discussions. You may miss one session without penalty.

2) **Weekly Notes** (25%)
   Each week, you need to hand in review notes before the class starts, reviewing all readings for that week. The notes need to concisely answer 3 to 5 questions listed below. The answer to each question should be limited to one paragraph.

   **For each reading:**
   a) What is the author's explanatory objective (or dependent variable)? Pay special attention to how this is defined and operationalized.
   b) What is the author's argument (or independent variables)?
   c) What is the logic connecting a) and b)? How convincing do you find this logic?
   d) What are the intellectual roots of the argument?
   f) Is the research design and methodology appropriate for the questions being asked?
   g) What type of evidence, if any, is provided for the argument? Does the evidence actually support the intended argument? What type of evidence would strengthen or weaken the argument?

   **To think about the readings collectively each week,**
   h) Are all the authors trying to explain the same phenomenon?
   i) Are they having a direct dialogue with one another? If not, how do you imagine that they might react to one another's arguments (e.g., in a conference or symposium)?
j) What is the intellectual contribution of the week’s literature to our understanding of comparative politics?

3) **In-Class Presentations (20%)**
   Each student will have two presentations throughout the semester (10% each). The presenter will provide thoughts and comments (20 min) on readings of a particular week, and lead discussions. You need to email all seminar participants a 3-page (double-spaced, 1/3 summary, 2/3 critique) review indicating the main points of the presentation **at noon** on the day before the seminar to facilitate discussion in class.

4) **Writing Assignment (45%)**
   You have two options: Brief Critiques (three essays, 8-10 double-spaced typed pages, worth 15% each) or Research Prospectus (35-45 double-spaced typed pages)
   - Brief critiques need to evaluate and discuss the assigned readings. They are expected to compare, contrast, and integrate the readings for a given week, and reflect original analysis. Critique on a particular week’s readings will only be accepted by the time class starts (electronic version only), because it other purpose is to enhance the quality of class discussions. **No extension or incompletes will be given. If you have not submitted three critiques by week 12, I will assume that you have chosen to write a research prospectus instead. None critiques (one or two) that have been written by then will count in your final grade.**
   - Research prospectus can focus on any topic broadly related to contemporary Chinese politics. This assignment is intended to prepare students for the dissertation prospectus and grant proposals. The prospectus will outline the phenomenon to be researched, posit a causal explanation and alternatives, and relate the topic to the existing literature. Students will present the outline of their work at week 13. Final paper is due two weeks from the last class. If you miss the deadline, the replacement will be an 8-hr take-home exam (10am-6pm) that resembles the format of your comprehensive exam. The exam needs to be scheduled no later than four weeks from the last class. It is the student’s responsibility to contact me to schedule this exam.

**Miscellaneous Reminders:**
A. McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).
B. In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
C. If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful if you contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 514-398-6009 before you do this.
D. McGill has policies on sustainability, paper use and other initiatives to promote a culture of sustainability at McGill.

Background readings that give a general and basic knowledge about Post-Mao China

**Schedule of Classes and Assigned Readings:**
1. **Introduction**
   - Introduction of course outlines;
   - Presentation assignment
   - an overview of important political and economic actors, institutions, and issues in contemporary China
Topic I: (Post-Revolutionary) State Building and State Collapse

2. State Building
- Franz Schurmann, Ideology and Organization in Communist China (Berkeley: UC Press, 1966)

Recommend:
- Hannah Arendt, “The Origins of Totalitarianism”
- James Scott, Seeing like a State (Yale University Press 1999). Part I & Part II.

3. State Collapse

Topic II: The Political Economy of Growth

4. Explaining Growth: Credible Commitment, Principal-Agent Problem, Property Rights

5. Explaining Growth: The State, The Sequence, and the Market

Background readings on developmental state:
- Theda Skocpol, Bring the State Back In.
- Meredith Woo-Cumings ed. 1999 The Developmental State (Cornell University Press, 1999)
Topic III: The Authoritarian Rule

6. Various Challenges and Solutions

7. Information and Communication

8. Civil Society or State Corporatism

9. Political Participation
   - Melanie Manion, “‘Good Types’ in Authoritarian Elections: The Selectoral Connection in Chinese Local Congress,” Comparative Political Studies (first published online June 2014).
   - Rory Truex, “Consultative Authoritarianism and Its Limits,” Comparative Political Studies (first published online in June 2014).

10. Discursive and Substantive Accountability

11. Mobilization and Demobilization


12. The Checks (?): Media & Legal Institutions


13. Presentation