

MAPS 31804 Politics and Legacies of Mao's China
Spring Quarter 2025
Meeting Location: TBD

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Course Objectives and Description

The 27-year rule of Chairman Mao Zedong (1949-1976) left a complicated and long-lasting legacy for modern China. First, the Mao era was a period of intense *statebuilding*. Under Mao, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established a complex network of political institutions aiming to perpetuate its rule, penetrate and control society, and advance its ideological objectives. Second, Mao's China underwent systematic *socioeconomic transformations*. The CCP implemented a series of ambitious, overarching policies — land reform, agricultural collectivization, nationalization of urban industry, and mass migration of Han residents to the frontiers — that fundamentally changed China's economic, social and demographic landscape. Lastly, Mao's China featured *mass-scale atrocities and repression*. Numerous citizens were tortured, prosecuted, and killed during Mao's mass campaigns between the 1950s and 1970s. The traumatic memories of Mao-era violence continued to impact the political narratives, attitudes, and behaviors of contemporary Chinese.

How did Mao's political agenda and policies shape the modern Chinese state in the long run? Moreover, how did Mao's complex political legacies impact the political norms and institutions of *contemporary* China? This course aims to take a deeper look at major political campaigns and transformative policies in the Mao era, understand their objectives and consequences, and evaluate their long-term impacts on contemporary Chinese politics, economy, and society. By reading recent cutting-edge scholarly works by historians, political scientists, and economists, this course will guide students to contemplate whether Chinese politics in the reform era (1978 – present) marks a *breakup* from the pre-reform era, or a *continuation* of the latter.

Course Credit Information

This is a one-semester, 3-credit course. This class meets for two, 80-minute lectures each week over the semester with the expectation that students will work on learning activities (reading, writing, problem sets, studying, etc.) for about 2 hours out of the classroom for every class period. The syllabus includes additional information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

Course Level

This course is a seminar designed for advanced undergraduates or master's students who have taken some prior coursework in Chinese politics or history. Knowledge of Chinese is not required but could be a strong advantage.

Reading Materials

Recent journal articles and book chapters will be used as primary reading materials for this course. A list of proposed readings to be assigned are shown in the *Course Schedule* section.

Grading Criteria

There are four major components of the course grade, namely:

- **Term Paper (25%).** Students are required to complete an original term paper that analyzes *a major political institution/norm* developed in Mao era that has contemporary political implications. The paper should (1) describe the institution and how it evolved under Mao's reign, (2) summarize existing scholarly literature on this institution, (3) discuss whether and how this institution survived in the reform era; (4) evaluate its roles and impacts in contemporary Chinese politics. The length of the term paper should be no longer than 20 double-spaced pages. Each student is required to schedule an appointment with the instructor in advance to discuss their topic proposal.
- **Response Papers (5% × 12 = 60%).** Students are required to write a 200-word response paper every week commenting on the merits and weaknesses of an article they are assigned to read in the week.
- **Participation (10%).** Attendance to the class is mandatory. Each unexcused absence will result in the loss of 0.5% of a student's total grade.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Disability

- The University of Chicago believes that a culture of rigorous inquiry demands an environment where diverse perspectives, experiences, individuals, and ideas inform intellectual exchange and engagement. In line with this perspective, this course will explore challenging ideas, unfamiliar arguments, and ways of viewing the world that may differ markedly from our own. Our conversations, both in and out of the classroom, present an opportunity to interrogate our assumptions about the social sciences and each another. This will require an open mind, patience, and mutual respect.
- If at any point you are not treated with respect, or you have concerns about a conversation you have had or witnessed, please reach out to me directly. I also welcome your suggestions for how I might improve efforts to foster an inclusive learning environment in which everyone feels welcome and treated equitably.
- This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a documented need for accommodation should contact Student Disability Services (773-702-6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu) and Juan as soon as possible.

Proposed Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1: The Historical Origins of Mao's Ideology and Practices

What is Maoism? How did Mao develop his political ideals and policy agenda in the revolution's early years? How did those ideas influence the PRC's institutional design after 1949?

1. Gao, Hua. 2019. *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origin and Development of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, 1930–1945*. Stacey Mosher and Guo Jian (trans.) The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.
2. Perry, Elizabeth, and Sebastian Heilmann. 2011. "Embracing Uncertainty: Guerrilla Policy Style and Adaptive Governance in China." In *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*, eds. Elizabeth J. Perry and Sebastian Heilmann. Harvard University Press.
3. Koss, Daniel. 2018. *Where the Party Rules: The Rank and File of China's Communist State*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.
4. Cheek, Timothy, Mühlhahn Klaus, and Hans Van de Ven. 2021. *The Chinese Communist Party: A Century in Ten Lives*. Cambridge University. Chapter 3.

Week 2: Maoist Statebuilding: Bureaucratic Selection and Political Control

How did the Chinese regime under Mao select, manage, and control subordinate bureaucrats at different levels of government? What was the relationship between the Party and the state under Mao? What were the long-term effects of Mao's bureaucratic management norms?

1. Shih, Victor. 2022. *Coalitions of the Weak: Elite Politics in China from Mao's Stratagem to the Rise of Xi*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-5.
2. Strauss, Julia. 2020. *State Formation in China and Taiwan: Bureaucracy Campaign and Performance*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1-3.
3. Lee, Hong Yung. 1991. *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China*. Chapters 1-3.
4. Zhou, Xueguang. 2001. "Political Dynamics and Bureaucratic Career Patterns in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1994." *Comparative Political Studies* 34(9): 1036–1062.
5. Zhang, Qi and Mingxing Liu. 2019. *Revolutionary Legacy, Power Structure, and Grassroots Capitalism Under the Red Flag in China*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 2.
6. Mattingly, Daniel. "How the Party Commands the Gun: The Foreign-Domestic Threat Dilemma in China." Forthcoming, *American Journal of Political Science*.

Week 3: Mao's Agricultural Policies: Consequences and Contestations

How did Mao transform China's rural structure and agricultural production? Why did Mao's Great Leap Forward fail, and why did the Great Famine in 1959-61 occur? How did local officials tacitly resist and challenge the Center's agricultural policies? How did Mao's agricultural policies impact the rural landscape in contemporary China?

1. Yang, Jisheng. 2013. *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine 1958-1962*. Jian Guo and Stacy Mosher (eds.) Farrar Straus and Giroux. Chapter 1-4.
2. Kung, James Kai-Sing, and Shuo Chen. 2011. "The Tragedy of the Nomenklatura: Career Incentives and Political Radicalism during China's Great Leap Famine." *American Political Science Review* 105(1): 27-45.
3. Lin, Justin Yifu. 1990. "Collectivization and China's Agricultural Crisis in 1959-1961." *Journal of Political Economy* 98(6): 1228-52.
4. Chen, Shuo, and Xiaohuan Lan. 2017. "There Will Be Killing: Collectivization and Death of Draft Animals." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 9 (4): 58-77.
5. Zhang, Qi, Mingxing Liu, and Victor Shih. 2013. "Guerrilla Capitalism: Revolutionary Legacy, Political Cleavage, and the Preservation of the Private Economy in Zhejiang." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13(3): 379-407.

Week 4: Industrial and Trade Policies in Mao's China: From Stagnation to Reform

What was Mao's approach to industrialization in China? How did China transition from a planned economy to a market economy in the 1980s? How did Mao's China trade with the West? Was China completely isolated from the outside world? How did the experience of foreign trade during the Mao era influence China's economic and trade policymaking in the reform era?

1. Perry, Elizabeth, and Christine Wong. 1989. *The Political Economy of Reform in Post-Mao China*. Harvard University Press. Ch. 8-10.
2. Kirby, William C. 1990. "Continuity and Change in Modern China: Economic Planning on the Mainland and on Taiwan, 1943-1958." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 24: 121-141.
3. Lau, Lawrence, Yingyi Qian, and Gerard Roland. 2000. "Reform without losers: An Interpretation of China's Dual-Track Approach to transition." *Journal of Political Economy* 108(1): 120-143.
4. Kelly, Jason M. 2021. *Market Maoists: The Communist Origins of China's Capitalist Ascent*. Harvard University Press. Ch. 1 & 4-6.
5. Fan, Jingting, and Ben Zou. 2021. "Industrialization from Scratch: the 'Construction of Third Front' and Local Economic Development in China's hinterland." *Journal of Development Economics* 152: 1-22.

Week 5: The Maoist Legacies of China's Social, Education, and Health System

How did the education system under Mao impact China's subsequent trajectory? Why were many Chinese leaders in the reform era technocrats or engineers? How did Mao's China control and manage pandemics under severe budgetary constraints? How did Mao's mobilization-style approach to disease control influence public health practices in contemporary China (e.g. lockdown of cities; the "zero-Covid" policy)?

1. Andreas, Joel. 2009. *Rise of the Red Engineers: the Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class*. Stanford University Press. Ch. 1-5.
2. Glaeser, Edward and Ming Lu. 2018. *Human-Capital Externalities in China*. NBER Working Papers. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w24925>
3. Fang, Xiaoping. 2021. *China and the Cholera Pandemic: Restructuring Society under Mao*. University of Pittsburgh Press, Ch. 3-6.
4. Zhou, Xun. 2020. *The People's Health: Health Intervention and Delivery in Mao's China, 1949-1983*. McGill-Queen's Press. Ch. 1-4.
5. Liu, Ying. 2022. "The Long-Term Impact of Community Health Workers on Health and Economic Outcomes: Evidence from China's Barefoot Doctors." In *Proceedings of 2021 APPAM Fall Research Conference*.

Week 6: Maoist Political Violence and its Long-Term Consequences

How did the mass-scale political violence occur in Mao's China? Who were the perpetrators of violence, and what were their motivations? How did the memories of political violence under Mao influence the contemporary political behaviors and attitudes of Chinese citizens?

1. Dikotter, Frank. 2015. *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945-1957*. Bloomsbury, 2015. Ch. 3-7.
2. Yang, Kuisong. 2008. "Reconsidering the Campaign to Suppress Counter-Revolutionaries." *The China Quarterly* 193: 102–121.
3. Su, Yang. 2011. *Collective Killings in Rural China during the Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge University Press. Ch. 1-5.
4. Tan, Hecheng. *The Killing Wind: A Chinese County's Descent into Madness during the Cultural Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 2016. Ch. 4-7.
5. Walder, Andrew G. *Agents of Disorder: Inside China's Cultural Revolution*. Harvard University Press. Ch. 3-6.
6. Wang, Yuhua. 2021. "The Political Legacy of Violence during China's Cultural Revolution." *British Journal of Political Science* 51(2): 463-487.

Week 7: The Maoist Legacy of Mass Mobilization and Political Participation

Why did Mao engage the masses in his political campaigns? Was Mao's mass mobilization a form of (non-democratic) political participation? How did the mass mobilization in the Mao era shape political participation and citizenship in China during the reform-era?

1. Tsai, Wen-hui. 1999. "Mass Mobilization Campaigns in Mao's China." *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 6(1): 21–48.
2. Perry, Elizabeth. 2002. "Moving the masses: Emotion work in the Chinese Revolution." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 7(2): 111-128.
3. Lee, Ching Kwan. 2002. "From the Specter of Mao to the Spirit of the Law: Labor Insurgency in China." *Theory and Society* 31(2): 189-228.
4. Andreas, Joel. 2019. *Disenfranchised: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China*. Oxford University Press, 2019. Ch. 2-7.
5. Javed, Jeffrey. 2019. "Speaking Bitterness." In *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, and Nicholas Loubere (eds.). Australia National University Press: 257–62.
6. Xu, Jing, Junyan Jiang, and Tianguang Meng. "New Socialist Men (and Women)? Communist-era Legacies and Political Engagement in China." *Unpublished Manuscript*.

Week 8: Maostalgia: Collective Memories and Contemporary Grievance

Why did many Chinese miss Mao and hold a fond memory of his reign? Was the "Maostalgia" a true nostalgia of the past, or a reflection of contemporary discontent? Under Xi Jinping, how did the regime appropriate the "red memory" of the Mao era to justify its legitimacy?

1. O'Brien, Kevin J., and Lianjiang Li. 1999. "Campaign Nostalgia in the Chinese Countryside." *Asian Survey* 39(3): 375–93.
2. Xu, Bin. 2015. "Memory and Reconciliation in Post-Mao China, 1976–1982." In *Routledge Handbook of Memory and Reconciliation in East Asia*. Routledge, 47-60.
3. Hurst, William. 2009. "The Power of the Past: Nostalgia and Popular Discontent in Contemporary China." In *Laid-Off Workers in a Workers' State*, Palgrave Macmillan, 115-132.
4. Williams, Emily. 2022. "From grassroots nostalgia to official memory: Red relics in contemporary China." *Made in China Journal* 7(1): 52-57.
5. Javed, Jeffrey, and Iza Ding. "Red Memory: Communist Nostalgia and Political Attitudes in Contemporary China." *Unpublished Manuscript*.

Week 9: Conclusion: Mao's Long Shadow over Contemporary China

President Xi Jinping's unprecedented consolidation of power has defied many conventional wisdoms about Chinese politics in the reform era. Is Xi's revival of many Maoist narratives and symbolisms a genuine effort to reclaim Mao's political legacy, or a strategy to strengthen his legitimacy? What lessons from the Mao era should Xi keep in mind to prevent missteps and disasters during his rule?

1. Zhao, Suisheng. 2016. "Xi Jinping's Maoist Revival." *Journal of Democracy* 27(3): 83-97.
2. Shirk, Susan. 2018. "China in Xi's 'New Era': The Return to Personalistic Rule". *Journal of Democracy* 29(2): 22-36.
3. Fewsmith, Joseph, and Andrew J. Nathan. 2019. "Authoritarian Resilience Revisited: Joseph Fewsmith with Response from Andrew J. Nathan." *Journal of Contemporary China* 28(116). pp. 167-179.
4. Fewsmith, Joseph. 2021. *Rethinking Chinese Politics*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 4-6. pp. 109-184.