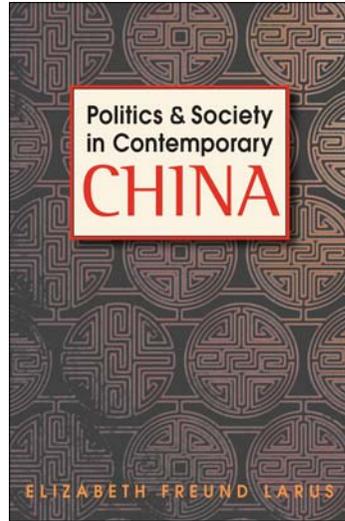


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Politics and Society in Contemporary China

Elizabeth Freund Larus



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ISBNs: 978-1-58826-800-6 hc

978-1-58826-825-9 pb



LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

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1

Studying Chinese Politics

5:00 P.M., June 12, 1986, Beijing, China

I'm riding my black Flying Pigeon bicycle from northwest Beijing to Tiananmen Square. The air is hot and gritty, but not unpleasant. A man riding on a bike ahead of me sings robustly; he has a nice voice. I begin to pass a slower-moving cyclist. "No! Never pass on the right!" a Chinese friend admonishes me. I'm a bit startled by his vehemence. I'm one of a large flow of cyclists on bike lanes flanking wide boulevards. The cyclists far outnumber buses, taxis, and government sedans. It takes about an hour to pedal from the Central Institute of Nationalities to Tiananmen Square. There, a crowd slowly gathers around me and a classmate taking night exposures of the Monument to the People's Heroes. They ask a lot of questions about my life in the United States, such as do I have a TV? A refrigerator?

5:00 P.M., June 12, 2004, Beijing, China

I'm riding in a taxi going out for a Saturday night in Beijing. The taxi is stuck in traffic. It's not totally unpleasant. The driver is playing a music CD from Taiwan. I strike up a conversation with the driver. I observe that Beijing is a modern city now. I ask where he's from. I'm surprised when he tells me that he's "an old Beijinger." I'm mildly surprised by this news. He's the first Beijing taxi driver I've met this summer; all the others have come from elsewhere in China. I joke that all of the "r's" left New York and ended up in Beijing.¹ I don't think he gets the joke. We arrive at my destination, a five-star hotel. Inside, I'm awestruck by the massive chandeliers lining the lobby. There's a black lacquer baby grand piano, and a Chinese singer crooning Western songs. I order a gin and tonic, amazed at the changes I've witnessed since my first visit to China in the 1980s.

5:00 P.M., June 12, 2010, Fredericksburg, Virginia

I'm giving a tour of my parents' new home to friends visiting from China. They are both members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Who would have

thought, during the summer twenty-four years ago, that I'd one day host CCP members in my parents' home in the United States! We take a look at the beautiful furnishings in the master bedroom. The Chinese couple remark that they have similar furniture in China. No wonder they do, because the furniture was made in China! I marvel at how China got to this point so fast. I wonder about how I can explain to my students the dramatic political, social, and economic changes that China has undergone in the last thirty years. In 1986, most Chinese rode bicycles as daily transport; cars were the privilege of Communist Party members and government officials. In 2011, General Motors sold more cars in China than in the United States. In 1986, most Chinese lived in humble apartments. "Living rooms" were pressed into service as dining rooms at mealtimes and bedrooms at night. Furniture was shoddy. Today, about 50 percent of the furniture sold in the United States is made in China. Municipal governments throughout China have razed centuries-old neighborhoods and replaced them with forests of high-rises. Investment in second homes has skyrocketed to the point that the Chinese government is fearful of a housing bubble. Today, China is the world's fastest-growing economy. China has more Internet users than the United States has people. The Chinese Communist Party has jettisoned socialist economics for the market. Fewer and fewer Chinese employees work for state businesses while more and more work in private and foreign firms. An increasing number of private entrepreneurs are joining China's Communist Party, creating perhaps the ultimate oxymoron: the capitalist communist, or the communist capitalist!

What accounts for these dramatic changes? What policies led to these changes, when were they implemented, and who made the key decisions? This book examines the dynamics of China's remarkable political, economic, and social changes. Never have so many people come so far, so fast. Between 1949 and the late 1970s, more than 100 million Chinese people rose out of poverty. Between 1980 and the early twenty-first century, more than 500 million people have risen out of poverty. Once occupied by foreign powers, China has joined those nations on the world stage of international affairs, trade, and finance. China holds the world's largest reserves of foreign currency and contributes mightily to the global economy. China is poised to overtake the United States as the world's largest economy around the year 2020.

Despite these advances, China is still a developing country, and struggles with the problems typical of developing countries. Although China has more millionaires (and billionaires!) than at any time in its history, it is still a poor country. The average per capita income is only \$4,382, and the average rural per capita income is even less.² Income distribution has become less equal in recent decades as China has moved from a socialist economy to a market-oriented one. There is tremendous income disparity between rural and urban areas and between interior and coastal areas, and life is still hard in rural areas. Rural health care, once rudimentary but widely available, has become scarce. The

overwhelming majority of rural residents have no health insurance, and fees are beyond the reach of most rural residents. Poor living conditions and the lack of services in rural areas and in China's interior have resulted in a huge wave of rural-to-urban and interior-to-coastal migration. While these migrants provide cheap labor to construction projects and assembly factories in the cities and coastal areas, their relocation often results in fractured families, the spread of disease, and increased crime. Education is a brighter spot. China has largely eliminated the gender gap in both urban and rural education, although facilities at rural schools often cannot match those in urban areas. Shanghai produces some of the best students in math and science in the world.

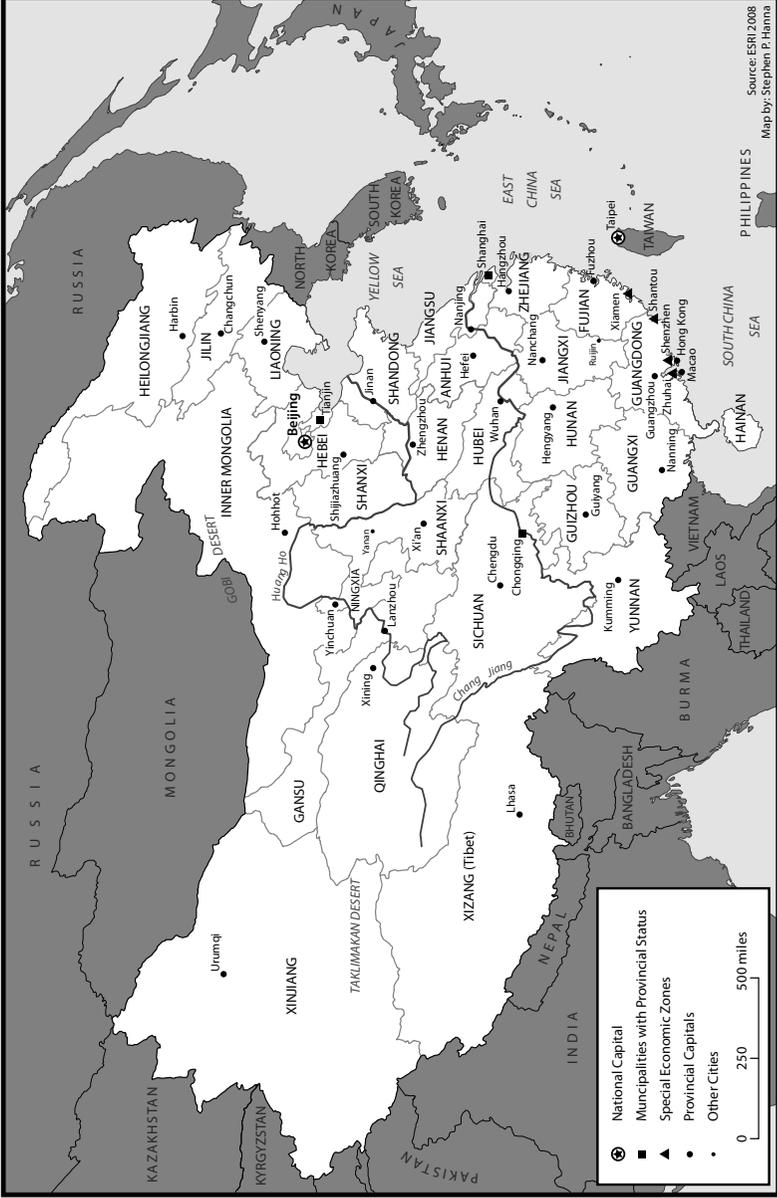
China's contemporary history makes a fascinating story. Ruled by emperors for thousands of years, China has an imperial history rich with warring kingdoms, court intrigue, overseas exploration, and foreign trade. In the nineteenth century, both domestic forces and foreign encroachment took their toll on China's imperial order. China's imperial system collapsed in the early 1900s and was replaced by a republican form of government. The new nationalist government lacked cohesion, however, and soon China descended into years of chaos in which the strong ruled and the weak submitted. Out of that chaos rose one man ultimately stronger than the others, General Chiang Kai-shek, who reunited China and restored some semblance of order. This order was short-lived, as imperial Japan entered China in the early 1930s and occupied it during World War II. Forced by Japan to retreat into China's interior, Chiang's Nationalist government could only nominally govern the country during World War II. In China's vast rural countryside, another force—the communists—was gathering strength. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the Chinese communists organized the peasantry in revolution. In 1949, they succeeded in overthrowing the Nationalist government and established a new government in which a small, elite group of Chinese communists wielded tremendous power over the vast population. The Chinese communists promised the destruction of the capitalist economy and class-based social system, a new order in which the workers were the masters of society, with lifelong job tenure and state-provided benefits, education and literacy for rich and poor alike, improved hygiene and public health, equality between the sexes, and peaceful foreign relations. The promise of the revolution was betrayed, however, by earth-shattering political campaigns that destroyed lives and tore China's social fabric. By the time of Mao's death in 1976, the Chinese people were exhausted. Under a new leader, Deng Xiaoping, China jettisoned socialist economics and political campaigns and engaged in bold economic reform. By the end of Deng's life, in 1997, China was the world's fastest-growing economy and was becoming a major player on the world stage.

Since 1949, all of China's economic reforms and political campaigns were instigated by the core leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. China is still run by a handful of powerful men. The CCP's 78 million members answer to a

handful of men who sit near the apex of party power. The tightly organized and highly disciplined CCP continues to exercise significant control over China's politics, economics, and society. The interlocking membership of party and government personnel means that governments at every level—national and local—carry out party wishes. There is still little transparency in government decisionmaking at any level. In recent years, China has implemented electoral reform by allowing villages to elect committees to make decisions on their behalf. Electoral reform has not advanced beyond the township level, and most elections in China remain indirect. The lack of pluralism and opportunity for people to participate in government and decisionmaking means that people have limited means of voicing their opinion other than in the form of protest. Since the beginning of the reform era in the late 1970s, there has been a sharp increase in both the number and scale of public protest. The protesters air a variety of grievances. In the 1980s many people protested inflation, government and party corruption, and party control of civic organizations. The transition from socialism to a market-oriented economy has created winners and losers. The privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in particular has resulted in unpaid back wages, loss of pensions and benefits, and layoffs. Frustrated by their treatment and their inability to reverse the trend toward privatization, former state workers have taken their grievances to the street in demonstrations. The Chinese government regularly violates the human rights of the Chinese people. Although the state constitution explicitly states the rights and liberties granted the Chinese people, it also limits those rights when the state feels threatened. The most egregious violations occur against ethnic minority groups and religious organizations.

The goal of this text is to introduce students to the contemporary politics and society of the People's Republic of China.³ (See Figure 1.1.) The main theme of the book is China's dramatic political, economic, and social transformations under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In the ninety years since its creation, the CCP has become the world's largest communist party. Once hunted down and then exiled to the Chinese countryside, the CCP in 1949 succeeded in overthrowing the existing regime and establishing the world's largest communist country. Under Mao Zedong, the CCP reformed and then revolutionized Chinese politics and society. Mao's political campaigns were often brutal, isolating or crushing opposition to the party and causing massive suffering for the Chinese people. By the time of Mao's death in 1976, the CCP's legitimacy was in question. Despite challenges to its legitimacy, membership in the party continues to grow. New recruits to the CCP are pragmatic. Unlike previous generations who joined the CCP for ideological reasons, young recruits now join the party to advance their careers. It is virtually impossible to join the ruling and upper managerial class without being a party member. The CCP is changing, too. The party is becoming increasingly capitalist in view and membership. Deng Xiaoping inaugurated the reform era in 1978, gradually jettisoning socialism for some odd variation of state-led capitalism. Out went most of

Figure 1.1 Map of the People's Republic of China



the lumbering and slumbering state business and in came foreign investment in private or joint ventures. Foreign-funded businesses exploded in southern China, which provided a seemingly inexhaustible supply of cheap labor from the countryside. Increasingly, many Chinese left state employment for private firms or started their own businesses. Party members even jumped into the sea of private business. The party's embrace of capitalism made it necessary to extend membership to private entrepreneurs. In the past decade, China's capitalists have found it pragmatic to have the seat at the economic and political table by joining the party or running for elective office. Once seated at the table, China's capitalists have had a hand in shaping policy to support their interests, thereby changing both the nature of the CCP and the dynamics of Chinese government.

This book wakens students to the importance of China in world affairs and in their lives. China is important at many levels. First, at the most basic level, the world's most populous country simply cannot be ignored. China's 1.3 billion people are both producers and consumers. Under Deng Xiaoping, China became the world's factory. Its assembly factories and rural businesses stimulated China's economy, resulting in double-digit growth for thirty years. As China's economy grew, so did its appetite for resources, particularly energy and natural resources. China is now the world's largest user of energy, importing much of it to feed its economic growth. In recent years, China has increasingly sought natural resources from abroad. Innumerable Chinese corporations have set up shop in Africa to take advantage of that continent's rich and vast resources. China's desire for resources has driven up the prices of commodities in recent years, affecting prices worldwide. China's consumer demand seems nearly as insatiable. While Americans remain the world's greatest individual consumers, the sheer number of Chinese means that there is simply more demand for goods. China's growing middle class is creating a huge demand for foodstuffs, commodities, and even luxury goods, pushing up prices worldwide.

Second, China's export-led economic development strategy affects the United States. China, in 1978, adopted an economic development strategy based on cheap labor-intensive industry and its undervalued national currency (called the yuan). Unable to compete on their own turf, US businesses moved manufacturing jobs abroad—to China—arguing that they could not compete with other Western and Japanese firms that had moved their operations to China as well. In particular, US businesses and politicians blamed an undervalued yuan for the inability to compete. An artificially low currency makes exports cheaper, and many businesses complained that they could not compete with Chinese exports. However, a stronger yuan and higher wages are unlikely to bring jobs back to the United States. It is more likely that the jobs will merely move on to the next low-wage country. It is increasingly likely that Americans will be working for foreign firms in China or elsewhere as a result of China's three-decades-long strategy of export-driven development. It is also increasingly likely that

Americans will work for Chinese firms in the United States. China's overseas investments have blossomed in recent years, and Chinese firms have opened dozens of plants in the United States since 1995. With trillions of dollars in foreign reserves (composed mostly of US dollars), China is increasingly investing in the United States. Its investment clout is also likely to translate into political clout. China is the largest foreign holder of US debt and uses that position periodically to admonish US politicians for fiscal foolishness. It is no longer impossible to imagine a United States accommodating its largest creditor on some domestic or foreign policy issue.

Third, its geographic location in Asia makes China a key player in the region. China's leaders seek to reestablish the country's preeminence as the Middle Kingdom. Beijing's increasingly aggressive investment in its military is raising eyebrows in the West. There has been much talk in the West about China's military rise. For now, China is sticking to its territorial claims (over Taiwan, the South China Sea, and various islands) and is not seeking to conquer new lands. In recent years, however, Western analysts have noticed a much more aggressive stance on these claims. Chinese ships have harassed ships of its Asian neighbors in disputed territories, compelling some of them to respond with live-fire war exercises, further heightening tensions in the region. China's neighbors are particularly concerned with China's naval expansion in the Asia Pacific and are strengthening military relations with the United States to counter China's rise.

Fourth, China is more engaged in the world than ever. In foreign affairs, China projects itself as a responsible member of the global community. Its membership in international organizations (IOs) has blossomed in recent decades. China's economic rise is helping Beijing wield increasing influence in global issues. Its economic and military weight makes it impossible for Western powers to ignore China. China is increasingly using its voice in foreign affairs, from nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula to international intervention in Sudan and Libya to debt forgiveness for heavily indebted poor countries. The West finds China's engagement with nondemocratic governments, particularly in the developing world, to be particularly irksome. In recent years, China has cut deals with several nondemocratic governments, offering foreign aid in exchange for access to raw materials for its economic expansion. China offers this aid without conditions for political and economic reform, thereby propping up nondemocratic governments in the developing world. Western governments blame China for undoing or undermining much of its work to advance democratic government in the developing world.

China's engagement with the world also is likely to challenge the US position in the world. China's increasing stature in international organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO) is likely to change US dynamics in those organizations. China's naval expansion is calculated to test US military dominance in the Asia

Pacific. Although it is unlikely that China's military would directly confront the United States in Asia, its military modernization and naval expansion may make the United States more hesitant to intervene in the region or could make any confrontation in the region more costly for the United States.

This textbook does not assume that the reader has previous knowledge or experience of China. I have packed this book with detailed information on topics ranging from the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and contemporary political institutions to the political economy of the Mao and post-Mao years and the rural-urban gap, and from human rights issues and civil liberties to national defense and foreign affairs. This amount of detail is intended to clarify and elucidate the material, rather than confuse the reader. Individual readers will likely find some details more engaging than others, but I believed it was my academic responsibility to offer as much information as possible to allow all readers a firm understanding of contemporary China's politics and society. The progression of the book is as follows. Chapter 2 sets the stage for the rest of the book. It provides context for understanding contemporary Chinese politics and society. It offers the reader a background on China's geography, demographics, and historical milestones, and traces the progression from imperial order to republican and then communist government. It introduces the reader to the major Chinese schools of thought and examines their impact on China's government and politics. It also traces the rise of the Communist Party and explains Mao Zedong Thought.

China's socialist era is commonly known as the Mao years. From the creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 until the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, China was embroiled in dramatic political, economic, and social revolution. Chapter 3 chronicles and explains this dramatic era. The chapter begins with a discussion of the organization of the early communist government and explains China's socialist transition. It then focuses on several life-changing political campaigns and their impact on China's government and society. The chapter concludes with the end of the Mao era and the beginning of a new chapter in China's history—the reform era—which receives further attention in Chapters 5 and 7. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth look at the organization of the CCP and the state governing apparatus at the national and local levels. It also examines local elections, rural politics, and prospects for China's democratization.

Local elections and prospects for democracy would have been impossible without the reforms of the Deng Xiaoping era. Chapter 5 outlines the dynamics of the post-Mao reform era. The chapter presents and analyzes changes to China's political system in the post-Mao years, with special emphasis on resistance to reforms on the part of China's communist hardliners. It explains the rise of key reformer Deng Xiaoping, and offers the reader an introduction to Deng's early economic reforms, which are examined in greater depth in Chapter 7. The chapter also introduces the reader to China's post-Deng leadership.

Much of the chapter is dedicated to political, constitutional, and legal reforms, with special emphasis on human rights concerns.

While living conditions for most Chinese improved during the reform era, China still confronts significant social issues. Chapter 6 begins with issues that directly affect individuals and the Chinese family. It examines the impact of health-care system reform with special emphasis on the dire consequences for China's rural population, the intended and unintended consequences of population control policies, and the complexities of education reform. Following these sections is one dedicated to civil society and social change. This section chronicles and analyzes the rise of China's middle class and their behavior. It also examines the current state of the arts, media, and Internet in China, with special attention to government attempts to control each of these. The chapter also discusses ethnic minorities in China, emphasizing attempts by the central government to develop minority areas. This section is followed by one dedicated to human rights issues in China, with special reference to violation of the human rights of minorities in China.

Chapter 7 chronicles the amazing economic reforms since 1978. It begins with dramatic reform to agriculture and industry, and analyzes the impact of these reforms on China's rural and urban populations. China's quest for energy for its continued economic development is examined, as well as the negative impact of development on China's environment and China's growing environmental movement. Much of the chapter is dedicated to China's growing presence in the global economy. China not only attracts significant foreign investment but is increasingly investing in other countries. The story of China's remarkable transformation from xenophobic regime during the later Mao years to its propulsion onto the world stage is examined through a discussion of the initiation of a Chinese stock market, the creation of special zones dedicated to foreign trade and investment, and China's quest to attract foreign science and technology. The chapter makes special reference to growing problems in foreign trade and investment, such as violation of intellectual property rights and disputes over the value of Chinese currency and its foreign trade practices.

One of the major problems that evolved out of the reform era is the yawning rural-urban gap. In the early reform years, the Chinese government encouraged foreign investment in eastern China, but failed to channel adequate state investment to rural China. As a result, millions of Chinese fled the countryside for jobs in eastern cities. Those left behind are increasingly discontented as corrupt local officials confiscate land for development. Chapter 8 analyzes the origins and problems associated with this rural-urban disparity and discusses the problems of the hollowing out of rural China. The chapter looks at the rural-urban education and health-care gap and discusses the government response to a looming health-care crisis in rural China. It also examines expression of rural discontent and government responses to address rural poverty as part of a strategy of domestic security.

Chapter 9 addresses issues of national security and introduces the reader to China's military and national defense. It chronicles the creation and modernization of China's military and offers the reader an explanation of the structure of the military and of national defense policy. It discusses recent developments in force projection, cyber warfare, China's space program, and expansion of China's naval power. The author hopes that students interested in this topic pursue their interest by referring to the notes that appear at the end of the chapter and the many resources cited in the bibliography.

Chapter 10 looks at China's foreign policy and its foreign policy making process in historical context and introduces the reader to the philosophy and theory behind China's approach to the broader international community. The chapter then examines China's relations with various regions of the world and with the world's major powers. There is literally nowhere in the world that China has not increased its presence in the last thirty years, and the goal of the chapter is to illuminate the rise of China as a major world player.

That China's leaders aspire to create a rich and powerful nation is undisputed. China's trajectory to reach that goal is less certain. The concluding chapter raises questions about China's future. Chapter 11 assesses major outstanding challenges to China's politics and society, such as government corruption and rising social discontent that challenge domestic security. The chapter offers scenarios for the future direction of domestic politics and discusses prospects for democracy. Finally, the chapter offers perspective on China's future in world affairs.

This book is an introductory text, and I strongly encourage students to explore the wealth of excellent scholarship that is available beyond this book. I have included an exhaustive bibliography not only as a reference for the material in this book, but as a guide to further readings on China's politics and society.

Readers of this book should not be surprised to have some encounter with China in the future. That encounter may be traveling to China, doing business with or working for a Chinese firm in the United States, investing in Chinese firms, or conducting research on China for US businesses or the US government. More and more Americans are living in China and working for US or Chinese firms. My intent in writing this book is to prepare readers for those experiences by helping them to understand China, or at least helping them to understand a world in which China is becoming an increasingly important player.

Notes

1. New Yorkers are notorious for leaving the "r" off the ends of their words; the Beijing accent is heavy in the "r" sound.

2. Income is according to the International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, September 2011, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/02/weodataindex.aspx>.

3. The term “China” used in this book refers to the nation-state of the People’s Republic of China, which consists of twenty-two provinces, including Tibet, the northwest territory called Xinjiang, and Hainan Island. It does not include the island of Taiwan and its associated territories. Throughout this book, the term “Taiwan” is used interchangeably with the “Republic of China” (ROC), which consists of the islands of Taiwan, Penghu, Jinmen, Mazu, and several islets.

China's environmental problems are numerous and complex. Like many developing nations in the early stages of economic growth, it seems to have followed an initial policy of having enforced few environmental protection policies and of pursuing a causal "develop first and clean up later" attitude. These approaches are no longer tenable, and concerted attention to the environment is now widely recognized to be a social and political necessity for China, both domestically and on the global world stage. The Chinese government welcomes public participation in addressing environmental problems which have captured popular attention, a move which some observers see as a possible catalyst for more enduring political reforms, the fostering of a vibrant civil society, and perhaps even democracy. Power and Politics in Contemporary China. Listed in: Asian Languages and Civilizations, as ASLC-208 | Political Science, as POSC-208. Moodle site: Course (Login required). Faculty. Kerry E. Ratigan (Section 01). Description. Next, we will interrogate the relations between various social groups and the state, through an analysis of contentious politics in China including the ways in which the party-state seeks to maintain social and political stability. Finally, we will examine the major policy challenges in contemporary China including growing inequality, environmental degradation, waning economic growth, and foreign policy conflicts. Limited to 25 students. Fall semester.