

Course Form for PKU Summer School International 2026

Course Title	Title in English: Thinking Like a Political Scientist
	Title in Chinese: 像政治学家一样思考
Teacher	Professor Yanjun LIU
First day of classes	July 6, 2026
Last day of classes	July 17, 2026
Course Credit	3 credits
Course Description	
<p>Objective: This course aims to: (1) familiarize students with core theories in modern political science; (2) deepen students' understanding of central political issues—such as state capacity, economic development, and governance—from Chinese, comparative, and global perspectives; and (3) cultivate the capacity to think like political scientists by rigorously analyzing political propositions through scientific research design.</p>	
Pre-requisites /Target audience	
There are no prerequisites. The course is open to undergraduate and entry-level graduate students interested in politics and political science.	
Proceeding of the Course	
<p>The two-week course combines ten morning lectures (9:00–12:00) with five afternoon learning sessions (LS, 13:00–17:00). The afternoon sessions include two end-of-week student panel presentations and discussions based on assigned readings, two on-site movie or documentary screenings with short written commentaries, and one field trip.</p> <p>Week 1 July 6 (Mon): Lecture 1 July 7 (Tue): Lecture 2 July 8 (Wed): Lecture 3; LS1 – Field trip July 9 (Thu): Lecture 4; LS2 – Movie screening and commentary July 10 (Fri): Lecture 5; LS3 – Week-1 student panel presentations and discussion</p> <p>Week 2 July 13 (Mon): Lecture 6 July 14 (Tue): Lecture 7 July 15 (Wed): Lecture 8; LS4 – Movie screening and commentary July 16 (Thu): Lecture 9; LS5 – Week-2 student panel presentations and discussion July 17 (Fri): Lecture 10</p>	
Assignments (essay or other forms)	

Readings will be assigned in advance of each lecture. Students are expected to attend all morning lectures, participate in afternoon learning sessions, and complete a final paper or research design on a political topic of their choice.

Evaluation Details

Morning lecture attendance: 20%
Afternoon learning activities: 40%
Final term paper: 40%

Attendance policy

Timely attendance at all lectures is required. Absences are permitted without penalty only for illness, in which case a signed written explanation must be submitted afterward. If a lecture must be missed for other reasons, a written request is required in advance. Unexcused absences (other than illness) will reduce the attendance score by 10% per occurrence, up to the total of ten lectures.

Final term paper

The paper should be 3,000–5,000 words. Evaluation will be based on the relevance and originality of the topic (20%), the quality of theoretical and/or empirical evidence (25%), the rigor of reasoning and analysis (25%), writing and presentation (15%), and organization and format, including references and bibliography (15%).

Text Books and Reading Materials

There is no required textbook. Readings are assigned for each lecture: those marked with an asterisk (*) must be completed in advance, while the remaining readings are recommended as time permits and will be used for end-of-week student panel presentations and discussions.

Academic Integrity (If necessary)

Plagiarism is strictly prohibited. Plagiarism is defined as presenting others' work as one's own. All non-common-knowledge ideas or materials must be properly acknowledged. Any evidence of plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment and will be reported to the university authorities.

CLASS SCHEDULE

(Subject to adjustment)

Session 1: Introduction; What is Science? ; What is Politics?

Date: July 6, Mon.

【Description of the Session】

This session introduces political science as a scientific approach to studying power, institutions, and collective outcomes. It clarifies how political science differs from normative theory and policy advocacy, and outlines what it means to “think like a political scientist.”

<p>【Questions】</p> <p>What distinguishes scientific explanation from opinion or normative argument? What kinds of questions are central to political science? How do theory, evidence, and causality relate to one another?</p>	
<p>【Readings】</p> <p>*Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder. <i>Principles of Comparative Politics</i>. CQ Press, 2017, ch.1-3.</p>	
Session 2: The Modern State and Varieties of Regime	Date: July 7, Tue.
<p>【Description of the Session】</p> <p>This session examines the origins of the modern state and the diversity of political regimes. It introduces core theories of state formation and compares political institutional logics across historical and global contexts.</p>	
<p>【Questions】</p> <p>What defines a modern state? How do regime types differ? What explains different political regimes?</p>	
<p>【Readings】</p> <p>*Clark, William Roberts, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder. <i>Principles of Comparative Politics</i>. CQ Press, 2017, ch.4, 6-7.</p> <p>Tilly Charles, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans, et al. eds., <i>Bringing the State Back In</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169-186.</p> <p>Dincecco, Mark, and Yuhua Wang. "Violent conflict and political development over the long run: China versus Europe." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 21, no. 1 (2018): 341-358.</p> <p>Stasavage, David. <i>The Decline and Rise of Democracy: A Global History from Antiquity to Today</i>. Princeton University Press, 2020, chs.1, 5-6.</p> <p>Przeworski, Adam, and Fernando Limongi. "Modernization: Theories and facts." <i>World Politics</i> 49, no. 2 (1997): 155-183.</p>	
Session 3: State Capacity and the Chinese State in Comparative Perspectives	Date: July 8, Wed.
<p>【Description of the Session】</p> <p>This session introduces state capacity as a central concept in comparative politics and applies it to China. It examines different dimensions of capacity and situates the Chinese state in historical and cross-national perspective.</p>	
<p>【Questions】</p> <p>What is state capacity and how can it be measured? In what ways is the Chinese state strong or constrained? How does China challenge conventional state-building theories?</p>	
<p>【Readings】</p> <p>*Migdal, Joel S. Strong societies and weak states: state-society relations and state capabilities in the Third World. Princeton University Press, 1988.</p> <p>*Besley, Timothy, and Torsten Persson. Pillars of prosperity: The political economics of</p>	

<p>development clusters. Princeton University Press, 2011. Chapter 1.</p> <p>Hanson, Jonathan K., and Rachel Sigman. "Leviathan's latent dimensions: Measuring state capacity for comparative political research." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 83, no. 4 (2021): 1495-1510.</p> <p>Lee, Melissa M., and Nan Zhang. 2017. "Legibility and the Informational Foundations of State Capacity." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 79(1): 118–132.</p> <p>Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. "The durability of revolutionary regimes." <i>Journal of Democracy</i> 24, no. 3 (2013): 5-17.</p> <p>Ang, Yuen Yuen. "Do Weberian Bureaucracies Lead to Markets or Vice Versa? A Coevolutionary Approach to Development," in <i>States in the Developing World</i> edited by Miguel Centeno, Atul Kohli, Deborah J. Yashar, and Dinsha Mistree. Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 280-305.</p>	
<p>【Afternoon Learning Sessions】</p> <p>Field trip to a site about Chinese history & culture</p>	
Session 4: The Politics of Economic Development; China and Beyond	Date: July 9, Thu.
<p>【Description of the Session】</p> <p>This session surveys major political theories of economic development and applies them to China and other regions. It highlights the role of institutions, incentives, and state strategies in shaping development outcomes.</p>	
<p>【Questions】</p> <p>What are the main political explanations for economic development? How does China's experience compare with other regions and LDCs?</p>	
<p>【Readings】</p> <p>*Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. "The colonial origins of comparative development: An empirical investigation." <i>American economic review</i> 91, no. 5 (2001): 1369-1401.</p> <p>*Xu, Chenggang. "The fundamental institutions of China's reforms and development." <i>Journal of Economic Literature</i> 49, no. 4 (2011): 1076-1151.</p> <p>Hon S. Chan, "Cadre Personnel Management in China: The Nomenklatura System, 1990-1998," <i>The China Quarterly</i>, No. 179 (Sep., 2004)</p> <p>Li, Hongbin, and Li-An Zhou. "Political turnover and economic performance: the incentive role of personnel control in China." <i>Journal of public economics</i> 89, no. 9-10 (2005): 1743-1762.</p> <p>Robert Wade. 1992. "East Asia's Economic Success," <i>World Politics</i>, 44 (2, January): 270-320</p> <p>Valenzuela, J. Samuel, and Arturo Valenzuela. "Modernization and dependency: Alternative perspectives in the study of Latin American underdevelopment." <i>Comparative Politics</i> 10, no. 4 (1978): 535-557.</p> <p>Scott Kennedy, "The Myth of the Beijing Consensus," <i>Journal of Contemporary China</i> Vol. 19, No. 65 (June 2010).</p>	
<p>【Afternoon Learning Sessions】</p> <p>Movie screening and commentary on Chinese Political Economy</p>	

Session 5: Representation, Responsiveness, and the Policy Process in China	Date: July 10, Fri.
【Description of the Session】 This session explores how representation and policy responsiveness operate in Chinese political systems.	
【Questions】 How do Chinese regimes respond to citizen demands? What channels of representation exist in China? How does policy experimentation affect governance?	
【Readings】 *Manion, Melanie. "Authoritarian parochialism: Local congressional representation in China." <i>The China Quarterly</i> 218 (2014): 311-338. *Grossman, Guy, and Tara Slough. "Government responsiveness in developing countries." <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> 25, no. 1 (2022): 131-153. He, Baogang, and Mark E. Warren. "Authoritarian deliberation: The deliberative turn in Chinese political development." <i>Perspectives on politics</i> 9, no. 2 (2011): 269-289. Distelhorst, Greg, and Yue Hou. "Constituency Service under Nondemocratic Rule: Evidence from China." <i>Journal of Politics</i> 79, no. 3 (2017): 1024-1040. *Heilmann, Sebastian. "Policy experimentation in China's economic rise." <i>Studies in comparative international development</i> 43, no. 1 (2008): 1-26. Heilmann, Sebastian, and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds. <i>Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China</i> . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011, Chapter 1.	
【Afternoon Learning Sessions】 Week-1 student panel presentations and discussion	
Session 6: Civic Participation and Social Governance in China	Date: July 13, Mon.
【Description of the Session】 This session examines civic participation, contention, and grassroots governance in contemporary China. It analyzes how the state manages participation while maintaining social order.	
【Questions】 What forms of participation are tolerated or encouraged in China? How do citizens engage the state without direct confrontation? How does participation affect regime stability?	
【Readings】 *Stromseth, Jonathan R., Edmund J. Malesky, and Dimitar D. Gueorguiev. <i>China's Governance Puzzle: Enabling Transparency and Participation in a Single-Party State</i> . Cambridge University Press, 2017, Chapter 1 and 5-8. *O'Brien, Kevin J. "Rightful resistance." <i>World Politics</i> 49, no. 1 (1996): 31-55. Cai, Yongshun. "Power structure and regime resilience: contentious politics in China." <i>British Journal of Political Science</i> 38, no. 3 (2008): 411-432. Spires, Anthony J. "Contingent symbiosis and civil society in an authoritarian state: Understanding the survival of China's grassroots NGOs." <i>American Journal of</i>	

<p>Sociology 117, no. 1 (2011): 1-45. Tang, Beibei. "Grid Governance in China's Urban Middle-Class Neighborhoods." <i>The China Quarterly</i> 241 (2020): 43-61.</p>	
Session 7: Experimental Methods	Date: July 14, Tue.
<p>【Description of the Session】 This session introduces experimental methods as tools for causal inference in political science. It covers survey, field, and laboratory experiments, with examples from various issues and settings.</p>	
<p>【Questions】 Why are experiments useful for identifying causal effects? What are their key limitations? How can experiments be conducted in various political contexts?</p>	
<p>【Readings】 *Angrist, Joshua D., and Jörn-Steffen Pischke. <i>Mastering 'Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect</i>. Princeton University Press, 2014, Introduction and ch.1. *Druckman, J.N., Green, D.P., Kuklinski, J.H., and Lupia, A. eds. 2011. <i>Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science</i>. Cambridge University Press, chs. 2-3, 6 and 9. *Mutz, Diana. 2011. <i>Population-Based Survey Experiments</i>. Princeton University Press, chs. 1 and 4. Anderson, Sarah E., Mark T. Buntaine, Mengdi Liu, and Bing Zhang. "Non-governmental monitoring of local governments increases compliance with central mandates: a national-scale field experiment in China." <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> 63, no. 3 (2019): 626-643. Meng, Tianguang, Jennifer Pan, and Ping Yang. "Conditional receptivity to citizen participation: Evidence from a survey experiment in China." <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 50, no. 4 (2017): 399-433. Carlson, Elizabeth. "Ethnic voting and accountability in Africa: A choice experiment in Uganda." <i>World Politics</i> 67, no. 2 (2015): 353-385. Bansak, Kirk, Jens Hainmueller, and Dominik Hangartner. "How economic, humanitarian, and religious concerns shape European attitudes toward asylum seekers." <i>Science</i> 354, no. 6309 (2016): 217-222. Cantoni, Davide, et al. "Curriculum and ideology." <i>Journal of Political Economy</i> 125, no. 2 (2017): 338-392. Talhelm, Thomas, and Xiawei Dong. "People quasi-randomly assigned to farm rice are more collectivistic than people assigned to farm wheat." <i>Nature Communications</i> 15, no. 1 (2024)</p>	
Session 8: Case-Oriented Qualitative Methods	Date: July 15, Wed.
<p>【Description of the Session】 This session focuses on qualitative and case-based research methods. It highlights how case studies contribute to theory building and causal explanation.</p>	

<p>【Questions】</p> <p>What advantages do case studies offer? How are cases selected and compared? How can qualitative evidence support causal claims?</p>	
<p>【Readings】</p> <p>*Gerring, John, 2007. Case Study Research: Principles and Practices. Cambridge Univ. Press, skim chs. 2-3 and read chs. 5-6 in depth.</p> <p>Berman, Sheri. "Civil society and the collapse of the Weimar Republic." <i>World Politics</i> 49, no. 3 (1997): 401-429.</p> <p>Tsai, Lily L. "Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 101, no. 2 (2007): 355-372.</p> <p>Posner, Daniel N. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi," <i>American Political Science Review</i> 98, no. 4 (2004): 529-545.</p> <p>Ziblatt, Daniel. "Rethinking the origins of federalism: puzzle, theory, and evidence from nineteenth-century Europe." <i>World Politics</i> 57, no. 1 (2004): 70-98.</p> <p>Laitin, David D., and Rajesh Ramachandran. "The historical sources of language policy." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 87, no. 3 (2025): 967-981.</p> <p>Eisenman, Joshua. "China's Vietnam War revisited: A domestic politics perspective." <i>Journal of Contemporary China</i> 28, no. 119 (2019): 729-745.</p>	
<p>【Afternoon Learning Sessions】</p> <p>Movie screening and commentary on Chinese Citizen Participation</p>	
Session 9: Writing Like a Political Scientist: From Question to Conclusion	Date: July 16, Thu.
<p>【Description of the Session】</p> <p>This session addresses academic writing as a core research skill. It guides students through formulating research questions, structuring arguments, and presenting contributions clearly.</p>	
<p>【Questions】</p> <p>What makes a strong research question? How should arguments and evidence be organized? What distinguishes effective academic writing?</p>	
<p>【Readings】</p> <p>*Przeworski, Adam, and Frank Salomon. "Some Candid Suggestions on the Art of Writing Proposals." <i>Social Science Research Council</i>, 2012.</p> <p>Howard, Christopher. <i>Thinking like a political scientist: A practical guide to research methods</i>. University of Chicago Press, 2017.</p> <p>Booth, W. C., et al. <i>The Craft of Research</i> (4th ed.). University of Chicago Press, 2016.</p>	
<p>【Afternoon Learning Sessions】</p> <p>Week-2 student panel presentations and discussion</p>	
Session 10: Course Conclusion & Final Paper Proposal Presentation	Date: July 17, Fri.
<p>【Description of the Session】</p> <p>The final session synthesizes key course themes and features student presentations of final paper proposals, with collective feedback and discussion.</p>	

A CV of 250-300 words and a high-resolution personal photo should also be provided.