

POLS 420: Introduction to Asian Politics

CLASS LOCATION: Admin 317

CLASS TIME: Tuesday & Thursday 11:00 am – 12:15 pm

INSTRUCTOR: Chen Wang

OFFICE: Admin 319

OFFICE HOURS: T/Th 12:15 pm – 2:15 pm or by appointment

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DEPARTMENT PHONE: (208)885-6032

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to provide students with a basic understanding of both domestic and international politics of *major* regions and countries in Asia. It is challenging to study Asian Politics in one single course, even at the introductory level. The European countries share common cultural heritage and, nowadays, democratic political systems. The same might be said about Latin America, while the countries of Sub-Saharan African share common patterns of political history. But there is surprisingly little in common among the countries in Asia. They are characterized by diverse religious/cultural traditions (Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity), colonial legacies (or lack thereof), political systems (ranging from democracy to one-party autocracy to personalist dictatorship), and levels of development. They are not entirely integrated economically (in contrast to Europe) and have complex relations characterized by union (e.g., ASEAN), hostility (e.g., North and South Korea), enduring rivalry (India and Pakistan), or contesting-alliance (both South Korea and Japan are key US allies in the region but are periodically at odds with each other). Each subregion, or even country, merits its own semester-length treatment.

Due to this regional diversity, this course will inevitably be taught in a selective manner. The majority of our time will be spent on the Northeast Asia theater, which includes China, Japan, and two Koreas (South Korea and North Korea). This subregion warrants the most pressing attention for a simple and straightforward reason: it has the potential to trigger another world war (either over a nuclearized North Korea or the Taiwan Strait). We will also briefly cover India (another major power in South Asia measured by economy, size, and military), and only take a bird's-eye view of the ASEAN countries (Southeast Asia). We will regrettably not cover Central (e.g., Kazakhstan) and West Asia (e.g., Saudi Arabia).

Hopefully, with this calibrated balance of depth and breadth, the course can prepare students for their future study/research in Asian Politics and/or their career development in international affairs of this region.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students are expected to:

- Gain basic knowledge and understanding of both domestic and international politics of certain countries and regions in Asia.
 - Enhance your ability to apply basic political science concepts to understanding these countries' behaviors and policies
 - Be able to form independent evaluation of events and issues related to these countries.
 - Learn to think critically, write convincingly, and communicate clearly.
 - Work effectively as a team member.
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COURSE MATERIALS

The complexity of Asian politics makes it difficult to achieve a coherent and comprehensive learning experience using a single textbook. We will thus draw on a range of book chapters and academic journal articles to support our study. **All required readings will be provided by the instructor and made available on Canvas.** Recommended readings are accessible through the UI library.

In addition, students are also encouraged to watch a free YouTube channel: [Asian Boss](#), where you can find interesting street interviews on a variety of topics with ordinary people all over Asia. Sometimes these interviews can provide you with perspectives that are very different from those you can read from major news outlets such NYT, Washington Post, or WSJ.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade in this course will be derived from your performance on the following components:

- **Attendance and Participation: 10%**

Attendance and active participation are essential to this course. Each student is allowed **3 unexcused absences**. Additional unexcused absences will result in a **5-point deduction per occurrence** unless a valid excuse (e.g., medical, academic, or family reasons) is provided with appropriate documentation. There will be about **15 random attendance checks** throughout the semester. The success of the course depends on students completing all required readings and coming to class prepared to engage, share insights, and ask questions about the subject matter.

- **Reading Quizzes: 20%**

There will be **21 reading quizzes** across the semester (mostly multiple choice and true-or-false questions). The quizzes are **due by the beginning of each class**. Days without quizzes are marked in the class schedule below. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped from

final calculation. **No make-up quizzes** will be offered unless a valid excuse (e.g., medical, academic, or family reasons) is provided with appropriate documentation.

- **Group Project: 25%** The class will be divided into four small groups, each consisting of no more than six members. Each group will present their research of a given topic on the specified date, which is summarized in the table at the end of this section.

Students should select a group based on their interest in the topic. Group sign-up will **open after the first class (Thursday, January 15)** and will operate on a first-come, first-served basis.

The evaluation of this assignment has two components. First, the presentation (55%) will be evaluated as a single teamwork through peer assessment (by other groups). In other words, all group members receive the same presentation score. A detailed rubric outlining the evaluation criteria will be provided in class. Second, there will also be a peer-evaluation of individual contributions to the presentation (45%) by group members conducted through a post-presentation survey.

Table 1: Group Assignment Topics and Presentation Date

	Topic	Presentation Date
Group A	Will China seek to unify Taiwan using force by 2035?	February 10 (Tuesday)
Group B	Should Japan amend Article 9 of its constitution?	March 3 (Tuesday)
Group C	Why was South Korea able to democratize?	April 7 (Tuesday)
Group D	Why has the “Kim Dynasty” endured in North Korea?	April 14 (Tuesday)

- **Take-home Midterm Exam: 20%**

There will be a take-home midterm exam scheduled on **Thursday, March 12**. It will be a timed, open-book exam (75-mins) that contains multiple choice, true-or-false, short answer, and one essay question. The exam will be conducted **on Canvas during the class time on the exam day**.

- **Final Exam: 25%**

The final exam will be given during the period scheduled by the University. This will be a timed, open-book exam. The exam will be **cumulative but with a slightly heavier focus on topics after midterm**, which will consist of multiple choice questions, true-or-false questions, short answer questions, and one essay question.

- **Grade Scale**

There will be no curving in this class. Final letter grades will be calculated as follows:

[90, 100]	A
[80, 90)	B
[70, 80)	C
[60, 70)	D
[0, 60)	F

COURSE POLICIES

- **Academic Integrity**

A core value at UI is the ideal of academic honesty and integrity. UI students live and work in a community which emphasizes their responsibility for helping to determine and enforce high standards of academic conduct. The University of Idaho expects all students to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty, and to refrain from any action which infringes upon academic freedom of other members of the community. Please review the [UI Student Code of Conduct and Resolution Process - Academic Dishonesty](#).

Note that forming a group to study for homework assignments or offering feedback on a draft of another student's paper are not considered violations of academic integrity. On the other hand, writing portions of a classmate's paper or copying a paragraph from a book or website without attribution are very serious violations. If you are unsure whether you are committing plagiarism, do not hesitate to ask me for guidance (before you submit your work).

- **Learning Environment Civility**

In any environment in which people gather to learn, it is essential that all members feel as free and safe as possible in their participation. To this end, it is expected that everyone in this course will be treated with mutual respect and civility, with an understanding that all of us (students, instructors, professors, guests, teaching assistants, etc.) will be respectful and civil to one another in discussion, in action, in teaching, and in learning.

Should you feel any classroom interactions do not reflect an environment of civility and respect, you are encouraged to reach out to me or an appropriate campus resource to discuss your concern. Some appropriate campus resources to express a concern or request support include the **Dean of Students Office** (208-885-6757 or [VandalCARE referral](#)), the **Counseling and Mental Health Center** (208-885-6716), or the **Office of Civil Rights and Investigations** (208-885-4285).

- **Center for Disability Access & Resources (CDAR)**

University of Idaho is committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment where course or instructional content are usable by all students and faculty. If you believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments for this class (including pregnancy-related disabilities), please contact Center for Disability Access and Resources (CDAR) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from CDAR is required before any modifications,

above and beyond what is otherwise available for all other students in this class will be provided. Please be advised that disability-related academic adjustments are **not retroactive**. CDAR is located at the Bruce Pitman Building, Suite 127. Phone is 208-885-6307 and e-mail is cdar@uidaho.edu. For a complete listing of services and current business hours visit <https://www.uidaho.edu/cdar>.

- **Grade Appeals**

Hopefully there will be no reason to contest a grade. However, a student who believes strongly that a homework assignment or the paper has been graded incorrectly may appeal by writing a one-page, typed memo explaining why the grade was inappropriate. No sooner than 72 hours and no later than 10 days after the original grade was issued, the memo must be submitted along with the original graded assignment to me for re-grading.

- **AI Use Prohibited for Exam-taking**

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools—including but not limited to ChatGPT, Copilot, Perplexity, Grammarly, image generators, and automated coding/writing assistants—is not permitted for **exam-taking** in this course.

COURSE SCHEDULE

— The subsequent weekly schedule in this course are tentative and subject to change

— Recommended readings are provided for your personal interest and enrichment. They are not required and will not be included in quizzes or exams

Week 1—Course Introduction

- Jan 15: Read this syllabus [No Quiz]

Week 2—China I: The Basics & The Party-State

- Jan 20: Joseph, William A., ed. 2014. *Politics in China: An Introduction*. **Chapter 1: pp. 3–18**
- Jan 22: Joseph, William A., ed. 2014. *Politics in China: An Introduction*. **Chapter 6: pp. 192–206**

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Horsley, Jamie. 2023. “What is the State of the Chinese State.” *The Diplomat*: [available online](#)
- ★ Truex, Rory. 2020. “Authoritarian gridlock? Understanding delay in the Chinese legislative system.” *Comparative Political Studies*.

Week 3–China II: From the “Red Star” to the “Pragmatist”

- Jan 27: Watch the documentary, *Morning Sun*, on Youtube: [available here](#) [No Quiz]
- Jan 29: Xu, Chenggang. 2011. “The fundamental institutions of China’s reforms and development.” *Journal of Economic Literature*: pp. 1076–1111

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Montinola, Gabriella, Yingyi Qian, and Barry R. Weingast. 1995 “Federalism, Chinese style: the political basis for economic success in China.” *World Politics*.
- ★ Shaoda Wang and David Y. Yang. 2022. “Policy Experimentation in China: The Political Economy of Policy Learning” *NBER Working Paper*: [available online](#).

Week 4–China III: Elite Politics

- Feb 3: Li, Cheng. 2012. “The powerful factions among China’s rulers.” *Brookings*: [available online](#)
- Feb 5: Jia, Ruixue, Masayuki Kudamatsu, and David Seim. 2015. “Political selection in China: The complementary roles of connections and performance.” *Journal of the European Economic Association*. [skip the formal model in section 3]

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Zhu, Jiangnan, and Dong Zhang. 2016. “Weapons of the powerful: authoritarian elite competition and politicized anticorruption in China.” *Comparative Political Studies*.

Week 5–China IV: Security and Foreign Policies

- Feb 10: **Group A Presentation** [No Quiz]
- Feb 12: Nathan, Andrew J. and Andrew Scobell. 2012. “How China Sees America: the sum of Beijing’s Fears.” *Foreign Affairs*.

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Drinhausen, Katja and Helena Legarda. 2022. “Confident Paranoia: Xi’s ‘comprehensive national security’ framework shapes China’s behavior at home and abroad.” *Metrics China Monitor*
- ★ Fravel, M. Taylor. 2007. “Power shifts and escalation: explaining China’s use of force in territorial disputes.” *International Security*.

Week 6–Japan I: The Basics & The Long-term LDP Dominance

- Feb17: Huffman, James. 2021. “The Meiji Restoration Era, 1868-1889.” *Japan Society: available online*
- Feb 19: Scheiner, Ethan. 2005. “Pipelines of pork: Japanese politics and a model of local opposition party failure.” *Comparative Political Studies*.

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Scheiner, Ethan. 2006. *Democracy Without Competition in Japan: Opposition Failure in a One-Party Dominant State*. **Chapter 3**.
- ★ Cox, Gary W., Frances McCall Rosenbluth, and Michael F. Thies. 1999. “Electoral reform and the fate of factions: The case of Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party.” *British Journal of Political Science*.

Week 7–Japan II: The Economic Miracle and Long Stagnation

- Feb 24: Öniş, Ziya. 1991. “The Logic of Development State.” *Comparative Politics*.
- Feb 26: Hoshi, Takeo, and Anil Kashyap. 2011. “Why did Japan stop growing?.” *NIRA Report*.

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Krugman, Paul. 2023. “What happened to Japan?” *New York Times*

Week 8–Japan III: Security and Foreign Policies

- Mar 3: **Group B Presentation [No Quiz]**
- Mar 5: Koga, Kei. 2018. “The concept of ‘hedging’ revisited: the case of Japan’s foreign policy strategy in East Asia’s power shift.” *International Studies Review*

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Richard J. Samuels. 2006. “Japan’s Goldilocks Strategy.” *The Washington Quarterly*.
- ★ Jerdén, Björn, and Linus Hagström. 2012. “Rethinking Japan’s China policy: Japan as an accommodator in the rise of China, 1978–2011.” *Journal of East Asian Studies*.
- ★ Tamaki, Taku. 2019. “It takes two to Tango: the difficult Japan–South Korea relations as clash of realities.” *Japanese Journal of Political Science*.

Week 9–Review & Midterm Exam

- Mar 10: Review Day [No Quiz]
- Mar 12: **Midterm Exam [no class]**

Week 10: Spring Break!

Week 11–Two Korea I: The Division of the Korean Peninsular

- Mar 24: **No Class (instructor is away for conference)**
- Mar 26: Stueck, William. 1995. “The United States, the Soviet Union, and the division of Korea: a comparative approach.” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*.

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Sartori, Anne E. 2002. “The Might of the Pen: A Reputational Theory of Communication in International Disputes” *International Organization*.
- ★ Mercer, Jonathan. 2013. “Emotion and Strategy in the Korean War.” *International Organization*.

Week 12–Two Korea II: Nuclear Weapons

- Mar 31: Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: North Korea: [available online](#).
- April 2: Bowers, Ian, and Henrik Stålhane Hiim. 2020. “Conventional counterforce dilemmas: South Korea’s deterrence strategy and stability on the Korean Peninsula.” *International Security*.

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Roehrig, Terrence. 2016. “North Korea, nuclear weapons, and the stability-instability paradox.” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*.
- ★ Way, Christopher and Jessica L. P. Weeks. 2013. “Making It Personal: Regime Type and Nuclear Proliferation” *American Journal of Political Science*.

Week 13–Two Korea III: Democratization of the South

- April 7: **Group C Presentation [No Quiz]**
- April 9: Shin, Doh Chull. 2018. “The Deconsolidation of Liberal Democracy in Korea: Exploring its Cultural Roots.” *Korea Observer*.

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Fowler, James. 1999. “The United States and South Korean Democratization.” *Political Science Quarterly*.
- ★ Suh, Jae-Jung, Sunwon Park, and Hahn Y. Kim. 2012. “Democratic consolidation and its limits in Korea: Dilemmas of cooptation.” *Asian Survey*.

Week 14—Two Korea IV: Authoritarian Resilience in the North

- Apr 14: **Group D Presentation [No Quiz]**
- Apr 16: Choi, Changyong. 2013. “Everyday politics” in North Korea.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Greitens, Sheena Chestnut, and Benjamin Katzeff Silberstein. 2022. “Toward Market Leninism in North Korea: Assessing Kim Jong Un’s First Decade.” *Asian Survey*.
- ★ Kim, Taekbin, and John Ishiyama. 2023. “Kim Jong Un and Consolidating Power: Explaining Elite Appointment in the Workers’ Party of Korea Central Committee, 2012–2019.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*

Week 15—India I: The Puzzling Case of Democracy

- Apr 21: Gupta, Dipankar. 2005. “Caste and Politics: Identity over system.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*
- Apr 23: Sun, Yan, and Michael Johnston. 2009. “Does democracy check corruption? Insights from China and India.” *Comparative Politics*.

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Treisman, Daniel. 2007. “What have we learned about the causes of corruption from ten years of cross-national empirical research?.” *Annual Review of Political Science*.
- ★ Bertrand, Marianne, Simeon Djankov, Rema Hanna, and Sendhil Mullainathan. 2007. “Obtaining a driver’s license in India: an experimental approach to studying corruption.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Week 16—India II: The Duel in South Asia

- Apr 28: “History of Conflict in India and Pakistan.” *Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation*: [available online](#)
- Apr 30: Paul, Thazha V. 2006. “Why has the India-Pakistan rivalry been so enduring? Power asymmetry and an intractable conflict.” *Security Studies*.

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Mansoob Murshed, Syed, and Dawood Mamoon. “Not loving thy neighbour as thyself: Trade, democracy and military expenditure explanations underlying India—Pakistan rivalry.” *Journal of Peace Research*
- ★ Suedfeld, Peter, and Rajiv Jhangiani. 2009. “Cognitive management in an enduring international rivalry: The case of India and Pakistan.” *Political Psychology*.

Week 17–The Gravity of ASEAN in US-China Competition

- May 5: Parameswaran, Prashanth. 2023. “Southeast Asia and US-China Competition: Contours, Realities, and Implications for the Indo-Pacific.” *Wilson Center*. [available online](#)
- May 7: **Catch-up Day & Course Conclusion**

Other recommended readings:

- ★ Ing, Lili Yan. 2025. “ASEAN Between China and the US: Navigating a ‘No Single Power’ Global Order.” *The Diplomat*: [available online](#)
- ★ Severino, Rodolfo C. 2007. “ASEAN beyond forty: Towards political and economic integration.” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*.