CEE 175G/275G China’s Environmental and Climate Governance

Spring 2023

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:00-4:20 pm
Location: Turing Auditorium, Room 111

Professor: Shiran Victoria Shen
Email: svshen@stanford.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Overview

Over three decades of extraordinary economic development in China came at the tremendous expense of the environment. Despite having one of the world’s most comprehensive environmental laws and regulations, China was among the most polluted globally until recent years. The Eighteenth Party Congress in November 2012 was a watershed event in China’s environmental and ecological landscape. However, strong central directives to clean the environment and curb carbon emissions have yielded mixed results. From the angle of environmental governance, this course examines how domestic actors and institutions affect policy-making and implementation in China from the late twentieth century until today. It draws upon analytical frameworks from the disciplines of the social sciences to explain policy outputs and outcomes.

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites, but some background or willingness to learn basic social science research methodology is desirable. This class will interest graduate and advanced undergraduate students curious about environmental politics and governance in China.

Learning Goals

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Describe the central and local actors critical to environmental policymaking and implementation in China.
- Understand the organizational and institutional roots of China’s environmental challenges.
- Think critically about environmental issues in China within different analytical frameworks.
- Relate and connect course materials with current events and knowledge from other courses in politics and environmental sciences.

Course Requirements

Preparation, Attendance, and Participation – 20%
• Attendance is mandatory. Each student is allowed up to two unexcused absences. Excused absences can be granted for emergencies (e.g., illness or death in the family), in which case, you should seek permission from the professor before class time.
• All students are expected to have read the required readings before class and be ready to engage in discussions.
• At the beginning of each class, I will ask students to report one piece of news related to environmental and climate issues involving China. Please be prepared to apply learning from the lecture to explain or discuss the news.

Analytical Papers x 2 – 50% (25% each)
• An analytical paper should achieve the following goals:
  ○ New knowledge and insights: what things discussed in this class strike you the most? What new knowledge have you acquired that challenge your previous thinking?
  ○ Appraisal: Synthesize a select number (the exact number is up to you but should be three or more) of readings. Do they complement or contradict each other? What might explain their convergence or divergence?
  ○ Connection: how do current events connect with what has been discussed and taught in class so far? How do the materials in this class connect with what you have learned in other courses at Stanford and beyond?
Avoid a Q&A-style paper. A good paper will weave all three pieces together seamlessly and organically.
• Label your documents as “LastName_AnalyticalPaperNumber.” For instance, “Shen_2” if it is Shen’s second analytical paper.
• Email your papers to the professor by the following due dates:
  ○ The first analytical paper is due 11:59 pm on Sunday, April 30.
  ○ The second analytical paper is due 11:59 pm on Sunday, May 28.
• Obviously, you may submit your work before Sunday if that suits your schedule better.
• It is the student’s responsibility to submit correct and uncorrupted files. Submitting wrong or corrupted files will result in automatic zeros in grades.

Final Exam – 30%
• The final exam will cover an entire semester’s materials. As announced in the university schedule, the final exam will be held on Tuesday, June 13, from 12:15 – 3:15 pm. Other than documented emergencies (e.g., death in the family), no exceptions will be made.

Meeting with the Professor
• All students are expected to meet with the professor during office hours at least once during the semester.

Course Materials

NO PURCHASE IS REQUIRED! All readings can be downloaded from Canvas or accessed via the Stanford Library.
Copyright Policy

The syllabus, exams, essay materials, and presentation slides are the intellectual property of the instructor. By U.S. copyright law, the instructor is the exclusive owner of the copyright in those materials she creates. Other course materials, like the readings, are subject to fair use. Please do not post any course materials online (e.g., Course Hero). Of course, you may take notes and make copies of class materials for your own use. You may also share those materials with another student enrolled in this course in the same semester.

Late Submissions Policy

Papers submitted late will be penalized by one entire letter grade (e.g., B+ → C+) for every 24 hours they are late unless prior permission is sought from the instructor.

Regrade Policy

If you have good reasons to believe a grade is unjustified, please email the professor a one-page memo explaining why. You must wait at least 72 hours upon receiving your graded assignment before doing so. Remember that regrading a paper or exam can result in a lower grade if further issues are identified during the reevaluation process.

Honor Code

The university takes the Honor Code seriously (consult here: https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/policies-guidance/honor-code). Violations of the honor code will be reported to the Office of Community Standards.

Academic Accommodations

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability should initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://oae.stanford.edu).

Note on the Readings

The amount of reading in this class varies from week to week. Some weeks you will only have to read a handful of newspaper articles; in others, we will ask you to read multiple articles from academic journals. With that in mind, you are encouraged to check the reading list further ahead of the night before class to ensure sufficient time to complete the material. Generally, journal articles will take the longest to read thoroughly, while newspaper articles can usually be read fairly quickly.
When it comes to quantitative journal articles, you are encouraged to read them in their entirety. However, it is understood that you will sometimes need to familiarize yourself with the empirical techniques the authors use. If that happens, do not worry—you are not expected to be experts in every statistical technique you encounter. Do not spend too much time spinning your wheels over complicated statistics. Instead, focus on answering the following questions: (1) what question are the authors trying to answer? (2) What do the authors hypothesize the answer to be? (3) What reasons do the authors have for proposing this hypothesis? (4) Do the analyses the authors perform support their hypotheses? (5) What are the implications of the outcome for our understanding of environmental politics and governance and how the Chinese political system works?

Since this is a social sciences-oriented course taught in an engineering department, I have included guiding questions to aid your reading.
# Course Structure and Important Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 4/4</td>
<td>Introduction, Course Overview, and Brief Background on Chinese Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 4/6</td>
<td>Actors, Interests, and Political Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 4/11</td>
<td>Bargaining and Lobbying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 4/13</td>
<td>Experimentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 4/18</td>
<td>Pluralization in Policy Making and Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 4/20</td>
<td>The Principal-Agent Framework and Central-Local Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 4/25</td>
<td>Incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 4/27</td>
<td>Constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 4/30</td>
<td>First Analytical Paper DUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 5/2</td>
<td>Ambiguities and Distortions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 5/4</td>
<td>First Reflection and Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 5/9</td>
<td>Bureaucratic and Administrative Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 5/11</td>
<td>Culture, Historical Legacy, and Style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 5/16</td>
<td>Agent Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 5/18</td>
<td>New Environmental Priorities and the Pivot to Climate Mitigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 5/23</td>
<td>New Challenges in Climate Mitigation and the Rise of Climate Adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 5/25</td>
<td>Information Disclosure: Logic, Opportunities, and Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 5/28</td>
<td>Second Analytical Paper DUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 5/30</td>
<td>Tradeoffs and Social Costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 6/1</td>
<td>Second Reflection and Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 6/6</td>
<td>Final Review and Preparation for Final Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 6/13</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
</tr>
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Lecture 1 (4/4) Introduction, Course Overview, and Brief Background on Chinese Politics

No required readings.

Suggested readings:


Lecture 2 (4/6) Actors, Interests, and Political Organization

Questions to think about while reading:

- Which factors were responsible for the environmental crisis in China? How does the country’s political organization play a role in causing that crisis?
- Who are the main central and local actors? What are their respective interests? What does “one agent, two/multiple principals” refer to?
- What is fragmented authoritarianism? What are its characteristics and policy consequences?
- [Optional] What is authoritarian environmentalism? What are its shortcomings in explaining environmental policies in China?

Required readings:


Optional reading:


Lecture 3 (4/11) Bargaining and Lobbying

Questions to think about while reading:

- What is bargaining? What is lobbying? How do they happen in China’s political system?
- Identify instances of bargaining or lobbying from the Lampton and Li & Zhan readings.
  - Who were the actors?
- What were their respective interests?
- What did they bargain or lobby over?
- What was the consensus or outcome?
- Who gained and who lost (if anyone lost)?

Required readings:

**Lecture 4 (4/13) Experimentation**

Questions to think about while reading:
- What is decentralized experimentation? What assumptions does it make?
- What are the challenges of using experimentation to achieve policy goals and learning effectively?

Required readings:

**Lecture 5 (4/18) Pluralization in Policy Making and Implementation**

Questions to think about while reading:
- What is the “political pluralization” that Mertha refers to? Is it equivalent to democratization? Why or why not?
- What is the role of the public in policy-making and implementation? How has that evolved over time?

Required readings:

Suggested reading:

Lecture 6 (4/20) The Principal-Agent Framework and Central-Local Relations
Questions to think about while reading:

- What is the principal-agent problem (i.e., agency dilemma)? What are its assumptions? What are the two major solutions to the agency dilemma?
- How is environmental policy implementation in China a classic principal-agent problem? Do you think that is the case elsewhere, too?

Required readings:


Lecture 7 (4/25) Incentives
Questions to think about while reading:

- How do political incentives shape political behavior in the environmental realm in China?
- What is the difference between a developmental state and an image-building state?
- Why are certain policies prioritized over others? Think in terms of how their timeability, attributability, measurability, and policy importance align with the incentive structure of the local leaders.

Required readings:


Lecture 8 (4/27) Constraints
Questions to think about while reading:

- What are the different types of constraints in policy implementation?

Required readings:


**Lecture 9 (5/2) Ambiguities and Distortions**

*Questions to think about while reading:*

- What is the difference between the ambiguity of goal and the ambiguity of means? Give examples of environmental policy in China that fall under the two categories.
- What is the relationship between ambiguity and information distortion?

*Required readings:*


**Lecture 10 (5/4) First Reflection and Discussion**

**Lecture 11 (5/9) Bureaucratic and Administrative Behavior**

*Questions to think about while reading:*

- What are the attributes of the bureaucratic behavior “muddling through”?
- Is incentive design alone enough when other bureaucratic logics (e.g., meeting targets, maintaining coalitions) compete for attention?
- Relating to previous readings, how do politics shape bureaucratic and administrative behaviors?

*Required readings:*


**Lecture 12 (5/11) Culture, Historical Legacy, and Style**

*Required readings:*


Lecture 13 (5/16) Agent Control
Questions to think about while reading:
- What are the two major theoretical ways to solve the agency dilemma?
- Has police patrol in the form of top-down campaigns worked well in improving environmental outcomes in China?

Required readings:

Lecture 14 (5/18) New Environmental Priorities and the Pivot to Climate Mitigation
Questions to think about while reading:
- How do the guidelines for the construction of ecological civilization map to essential themes in political science and economics?
- Why did China start caring about combating climate change when that seemed to be pitted against its strong interest in economic development?
- How are climate policies made and implemented in China?
- Why did (some) localities in China become interested in taking action on climate mitigation?

Required readings:

Optional reading:

Lecture 15 (5/23) New Challenges in Climate Mitigation and the Rise of Climate Adaptation
Questions to think about while reading:
- What are the opportunities and challenges for China to further decarbonize its economy? What are the political and institutional constraints?
• What has been done in China to adapt to the consequences of climate change?
• Why did (some) localities in China become interested in taking action on climate adaptation?
• What are the political and institutional constraints for climate adaptation?

Required readings:

Recommended reading:
• The rest of the report.

Lecture 16 (5/25) Information Disclosure: Logic, Opportunities, and Challenges
Questions to think about while reading:
• Why disclose environmental information? What is strategic disclosure?
• What are some challenges to environmental information disclosure?

Required readings:

Lecture 17 (5/30) Tradeoffs and Social Costs
Questions to think about while reading:
• Why is the consideration of social costs important for public policy? Along what dimensions can we conceptualize social costs?
• Can well-intended public policies have unintended negative consequences?
• Economist and social theorist Thomas Sowell once said, “There are no solutions. There are only trade-offs.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
Required readings:


Lecture 18 (6/1) Second Reflection and Discussion

Lecture 19 (6/6) Final Review and Preparation for Final Exam