

« CHINA IN A TIME OF PANDEMICS: POLITICS, CULTURE AND SOCIETY »

Webinar series

EURICS, IFRAE, INALCO and University of Liège

The occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic in Wuhan in January 2020 has been followed by a surge in critical comments addressed at the Chinese regime by observers of contemporary China. While in the initial stage of management of the pandemics by the Chinese authorities, much of the critique pointed at failures related to the nature and very functioning of the regime, it appears that in a second stage, the combination of highly constraining sanitary and social control measures, as well as social mobilization on the one hand, and a fine use of political communication on the other hand, have enabled the Party-state to take advantage of this crisis in terms of strengthening of its legitimacy at the domestic level. At the international level, this relative capacity of the regime to contain the pandemic was prolonged by a diplomatic campaign quickly labelled “mask diplomacy” by Western medias and by at times severe criticisms from Chinese diplomats aimed at the shortcomings of the management of the pandemics by some European governments. At the same time, one witnessed a multiplication of acts of sinophobia in several European Countries, in the USA, and in Australia.

Interestingly, these comments echoed scientific debates on the stability of the Chinese regime over the last decades. One thinks of analysis announcing the quasi unavoidable fall of the Chinese Communist Party after the Tian'anmen massacre on June 4th 1989. According to one line of argument, the capacity of the regime to manage this health crisis represented a serious challenge for the legitimacy of the regime, or even of its stability. Others were arguing that the capacity of the Party-state to control the pandemics rather fast was a testimony of its resilience.

Through this series of webinars, we set out to ask the following questions: *beyond the sole reforms of the system of sanitary crisis in China, in which respect can the management of the crisis by the Party-State be considered as revealing a number of major transformations of the modes of government under the rule of Xi Jinping? Would the crystallization of comments about the Chinese regime in this context of pandemics not require to take some reflexive distance as to the processes which shed light on the changes in governance, in the Party-state's relationship with society and in their economic and geopolitical implications? Just to mention the centralization of power, the strengthening of discipline and of loyalty within the Party, or the unprecedented toughening of social control and repression, as well as the massive detention of Uighurs at an unmatched scale in Xinjiang. Equally important have been the strengthening of the capacity of penetration of the Party-State within society or the increased weight of the public sector in the economy. Besides, one may wonder whether Covid-19 has also highlighted changes already at play in China's external relations, in particular with the European Union and at the level its projection of economic power or of its model of governance.*

Format of webinars: 1 to 2 speakers, 1 chair/discussant.

Used platform: Zoom

Logistics: EURICS

Organization : EURICS, INALCO, IFRAE, University of Liege (Faculty of Social Sciences ; Faculty of Philosophy and Letters and Institute of Social Sciences Research).

Scientific coordination: Sébastien Colin (INALCO, EURICS) and Eric Florence (University of Liege)

1. ***Epidemic Governance in China: A Historical Perspective***, 2 April, 13h-14h30. Prof Angela Leung (Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of Hong Kong); Discussant: Luca Gabbiani (EFEO, Paris), in collaboration with the French Center for Research on Contemporary China (Hong Kong).
2. ***Pandemics and the politics of legitimization/State formation in China***, 21 May 2021, 13h-14h30. Prof. Evan Pils (King's College and EURICS Fellow); Dr Zhang Chenchen (Queen's University Belfast); Discussant: Prof. Chloé Froissart (INALCO, Paris)
3. ***Covid-19 and Chinese Society : Coping Strategies***, 3 June, 13h-14h30. Speakers: Prof. HU Ming (Nanjing University), Prof. Scott Rozelle (Stanford University) and Prof. Mark Sidel (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Chair and discussant: Prof. Isabelle Thireau (EHESS/CNRS)
4. ***Social Traumas and Cultural Practices***
5. ***Pandemics and the Mutations of Global Capitalism***
6. ***The rise of Sinophobia : Ethnic discrimination against Chinese Communities in Europe*** , in collaboration with the Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies (University of Liège).
7. ***Covid-19 and the EU-China relationship***
8. ***Covid-19 and competing political regimes/competing ethics of government.***