

CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

TERM: Spring 2025
WEBSITE: [POLS 1350](#)
TIME: M/W/F 9-9:50am
CLASSROOM: Smith-Buonanno Hall 201
TEACHING ASST: Danny Xu

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OFFICE HOURS: WEDNESDAYS 4-6:00PM

COURSE SUMMARY

The People's Republic of China is one of the most important actors in international politics today. This undergraduate lecture examines China's role in global affairs. It applies broad theoretical perspectives on international relations to understand China's choices across a wide range of foreign policy topics. What explains why China has increased its defense spending? When is it more likely to resort to military force? What explains patterns in China's trade and investment abroad? What accounts for China's changing approach to climate change? To what extent does China seek to reshape the international order and what would this mean for the prospects for global peace and stability?

SHOULD I TAKE THIS COURSE? AND WHY?

There are two broad reasons to take this course. First, China's foreign relations are an increasingly critical component of global affairs. Various academics, policymakers, and pundits posit that the rise of China presents *the* defining challenge of international politics in the twenty-first century. This course will help you draw your own conclusions about the validity of these claims. While I do not everyone will arrive at the same answer, I do expect that everyone will develop historical and theoretical building blocks that will make their answers better informed.

The second reason is that studying international relations (IR) theory and country-specific foreign policies are often mutually reinforcing endeavors. Theoretical frameworks help us structure (nearly infinite) quantities of data and develop more stable expectations about politics. Thinking like a social scientist, we can leverage what scholars have learned in economics, sociology, psychology, or political science in order to better explain what happens in the international arena. However, studying the foreign policy decisions of a particular country, such as China, affords an opportunity to test the limits of these theoretical models. Thinking like a historian or regionalist, we can critically evaluate broad theoretical claims about why states do what they do based upon how well theories match empirical patterns. In short, I hope that students interested in *either* international politics generally or China specifically will gain something meaningful.

The course is divided into two sections. In the first half, we'll (speedily) trace the history of Chinese foreign policy from 1949 to 2007. We'll ask why China allied with the Soviet Union

and entered the Korean War, why it charted an independent course in the mid-1950s and eventually normalized relations with the United States. We'll then ask whether and how Chinese foreign policy changed during the 1980s and 1990s. In the second half, we'll examine Chinese foreign policy in the era after Deng Xiaoping, switching from a chronological to a thematic lens. Specifically, we'll examine five important facets of contemporary Chinese foreign policy: (1) state society relations; (2) elite decision-making; (3) security and military affairs; (4) economic trade and development; and (5) international institutions and the global order.

Each week pairs one or two general readings on international relations theory with several applications to the case of China. The goal is to critically evaluate how well theoretical frameworks illuminate historical and contemporary events. Rather than covering all theoretical material at the onset, the course introduces some each week. The upside is that each discussion focuses on a few theoretical concepts in the context of a China-specific topic. *Please note that there are readings for the first week of class.*

This course is structured to be a *survey class*. There are no prerequisite requirements. Students without background in Chinese politics or international relations theory should not be discouraged from enrollment. In the past, however, students have recommended that those with limited prior exposure to China might consult a general history prior to beginning the course. To that end, students may find it helpful to consult: (1) *The Search for Modern China*, especially Chapters 19 through 25; (2) *Making Modern China: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping*, especially Chapters 7 through 12; (3) *Modern China: A Very Short Introduction*; or (4) *China: A Century of Revolution*, a PBS documentary available on YouTube. Similarly, students that have not taken a course in international relations theory may find it helpful to consult an introductory text, such as *World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions* (4th edition).

COURSE GOALS

The overall goal of this course is to help you develop informed opinions regarding the foreign policies China has and is pursuing. You should come away from this class with a better understanding of Chinese political history, theories of international politics, and the general value of social science in explaining world events.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There is one required text for the course: *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (\$34), which is available for purchase at the Brown bookstore. All other readings are provided on Canvas.

Note that there are a few optional readings in Chinese for those who have the language skills to engage with them. **These readings are not required and will not be tested.** Please direct any questions about these readings to me, rather than the teaching assistants.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This course will be taught using a traditional lecture format. Nevertheless, there are three things critical to your success in the course. First, you should invest time in engaging with the material

prior to class. Second, you should engage with the material with a critical eye. On the one hand, assigned readings in this course represent the culmination of years of careful academic research by some of the leading scholars in the field. Try to remain open-minded and take what the author is saying seriously. On the other hand, the study of Chinese foreign policy is filled with contestation. Lectures will aim to bring out multiple sides of the debate and encourage you to start developing ideas about where you stand. Third, in-class discussion and debate requires that we be respectful of each other's opinions. That includes the instructor. If you ever feel that the classroom environment is problematic in any way, please contact me.

TIME ALLOTMENT

You should expect to spend approximately: about 6 hours per week (on average) reading during the first half of the course, about 3 hours per week (on average) during the second half of the course, and about 10 to 15 hours preparing for the mid-term and final exams.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND COLLABORATION

Plagiarism violates the academic policies of Brown University and the norms of the scholarly community. Consequences for plagiarism are often severe, and can include suspension or expulsion. Brown's [Academic Code](#) provides specific details regarding how to properly cite material. A general rule of thumb is, if you are in doubt, ask for clarification. If you are still in doubt, *include the citation*. Students may find additional support for the writing requirements in this course at the [Brown Writing Center](#). You are encouraged to discuss course material and assignments with classmates. This is critical to academic work. In the end, however, all assignments must be your own work. You should acknowledge assistance given by other students. For example, if a classmate provided comments on an earlier draft, simply include a footnote acknowledging the assistance (you will see this convention in nearly every assigned reading).

ACCESSIBILITY

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me if you have a disability or other condition that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information contact [Student and Employee Accessibility Services](#) (401-863-9588; SEAS@brown.edu).

Brown University welcomes students from around the country and the world, and the unique perspectives international and multilingual students bring enrich the campus community. To empower multilingual learners, an array of support is available including language and culture workshops and individual appointments. For more information about [English Language Learning](#) support at Brown, contact the ELL Specialists (ellwriting@brown.edu).

COURSE STRUCTURE

10% Section Participation
30% Reflection Essay
30% Mid-Term Exam
30% Final Exam

Participation. Students are strongly encouraged to attend class section led by the teaching assistant. Participation will be evaluated based both on the frequency and thoughtfulness of your contributions. Exemplary participation consistently meets the following criteria: (1) complete comprehension of the week's readings; (2) ability to draw connections across readings; (3) engagement with your classmates' ideas; and (4) novel insight. Above average participation consistently meets some of these criteria. Acceptable participation consistently makes a good faith effort but is inconsistent in execution or engagement. Unacceptable participation is consistently not involved or otherwise disrespectful. I will contact you if your participation is unacceptable.

Reflection Essay. The reflection essay is intended to encourage students draw connections between Part I and Part II of the course. Students should pick one of the thematic topics discussed in the second part of the course (e.g., state and society, elite decision-making, military modernization) and discuss the way(s) in which salient dimensions of that topic have changed since 1949. The reflection essay should be comparatively short (no more than 1,000 words) and focus on big picture ideas from the course. The reflection essay is due on April 30, 2025.

Mid-Term Exam. The mid-term exam will cover content from block 1 to block 6. The exam will be 30% multiple choice and identification, 30% short answer, and 40% essay. The first two sections will focus on people and events. The third will focus on making connections between theory and empirics across the first half of the course. A set of potential essay questions will be circulated the week before the exam. The exam is open book and open note, but students must have produced referenced notes themselves. Use of Chat GPT or other artificial intelligence tools is not permitted, including as a resource to produce notes for the exam. While group study is encouraged, you want to ensure that your short answers and essays are original. **No group study or collaboration is permitted once the exam has been posted.** The exam will be posted to Canvas on Monday March 3 and is due on Tuesday March 4. Once you open the exam, you will have 3 hours to complete it. Unless there are extraordinary circumstances, exams uploaded after the deadline will not be accepted.

Final Exam. The final exam will cover content from block 7 to block 14. It does *not* include content from the first half of the course, although students are free to draw on it in their responses. The exam will be 30% multiple choice and identification, 30% short answer, and 40% essay. A set of potential essay questions will be circulated the week before the exam. The exam is open book and open note. Rules and guidance for the final exam are the same as the mid-term exam. The exam will be posted to Canvas on Monday May 5 and is due on Wednesday May 7. Once you open the exam, you will have 6 hours to complete it. Unless there are extraordinary circumstances, exams uploaded after the deadline will not be accepted.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Part I: Historical Foundations

1. CLASS OVERVIEW: JANUARY 22
2. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE: JANUARY 24 AND 27

Theoretical concepts: actors, preferences, bargaining, domestic institutions

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- Svolik, Milan W. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. pp. 1–18.
 - Joseph, William A., ed. *Politics in China: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. pp. 3–44.
 - Jost, Tyler, and Daniel Mattingly, “Networks of Coercion: Military Ties and Civilian Leadership Challenges in China.” *American Journal of Political Science*, forthcoming.
 - (Optional) Geddes, Barbara, et al. *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. pp. 1–24.
 - (Optional) Qin Yaqing. “Why Is There No Chinese International Relations Theory?” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7.3 (2007): pp. 313–340.

Note: no class on January 29 (reading drop)

3. THE COLD WAR: JANUARY 31 AND FEBRUARY 3

Theoretical concepts: alignment, use of military force

- Garver, John W. *China’s Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. pp. 29–91.
- Christensen, Thomas. “Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing’s Use of Force” in *New Directions in the Study of China’s Foreign Policy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, pp. 50–85.
- Jost, Tyler. “The Institutional Origins of Miscalculation in China’s International Crises.” *International Security*. 48.1 (2023): 47–90.
- (Optional) Niu Jun. *From Yan’an to the World: The Origin and Development of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy*. Norwalk: Eastbridge Books, 2004. pp. 316–343.
- (Optional) Wu Lengxi, “Inside Story of the Decision Making during the Shelling of Jinmen.” English translation from *Wilson Center Digital Archive*. For original, see: 吴冷西. 《十年论战：1956-1966中苏关系回忆录》北京：中央文献出版社，1999.

4. REVOLUTION AT HOME AND ABROAD: FEBRUARY 5, 7, AND 10

Theoretical concepts: ideology, ideological competition

- Chen Jian. *Mao’s China and the Cold War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. pp. 163–204, 259–285.
- Garver, John W. *China’s Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. pp. 196–231.
- Lüthi, Lorenz M. *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. pp. 46–156.
- (Optional) 李丹慧. “中苏关系与中国的援越抗美.” 《当代中国史研究》3 (1998): 114-129.

5. THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF OPENING AND REFORM: FEBRUARY 12 AND 14

Theoretical concepts: economic performance, leaders

- Shirk, Susan L. *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. pp. 3–22.
- Vogel, Ezra F. *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. pp. 1–14.
- Garver, John W. *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. pp. 286–382, 401–427.
- (Optional) 张清敏. “领导人人格特点与中国外交研究.” 《世界经济与政治》6 (2014).

Note: no class on February 17 (President's Day)

6. TIANANMEN AND THE UNIPOLAR ERA: FEBRUARY 19, 21, AND 26

Theoretical concepts: international order, socialization, political survival

- Johnston, Alastair Iain. *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. pp. 1-40.
- Garver, John W. *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. pp. 428–461, 607–673.
- Sarotte, Mary Elise. “China's Fear of Contagion: Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example.” *International Security* 37.2 (2012): 156-182.
- (Optional) Johnston, Alastair Iain. “Is China a Status Quo Power?” *International Security* 27.4 (2003): 5-56.

Note: no class on February 24 (reading drop)

February 28: Part I Review

Mid-term exam (take home): March 3–4

Part II: Contemporary Issues

7. GRAND STRATEGY: MARCH 7 AND 10

Theoretical concepts: grand strategy

- Doshi, Rush. *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*. Oxford University Press, 2021. Chapters 3, 7, and 11.
- Shirk, Susan. *Overreach: How China Derailed Its Peaceful Rise*. Oxford University Press, 2023. Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.

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- Weiss, Jessica Chen. "A World Safe for Autocracy: China's Rise and the Future of Global Politics." *Foreign Affairs*. July/August 2019.
 - Mearsheimer, John J. "The Inevitable Rivalry: America, China, and the Tragedy of Great-Power Politics." *Foreign Affairs*. November/December 2021.
 - (Optional) Goldstein, Avery. "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance." *International Security* 45.1 (2020): 164–201.
 - (Optional) Lissner, Rebecca Friedman. "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield (November 2018)." *Texas National Security Review* (2018).
 - (Optional) Yuan Peng, "The Coronavirus Pandemic and a Once-in-a-Century Change." (RCC translation)

Note: no class on March 5 (reading drop)

8. FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING: MARCH 12 AND 14

Theoretical concepts: operational codes, domestic audiences, nationalism

- Rudd, Kevin. "The World According to Xi Jinping." *Foreign Affairs*. November/December 2022.
- Weiss, Jessica Chen, and Allan Dafoe. "Authoritarian Audiences, Rhetoric, and Propaganda in International Crises: Evidence from China." *International Studies Quarterly* 63.4 (2019): pp. 963–973.
- Jost, Tyler. "Have China's Wolf Warriors Gone Extinct?" *Foreign Affairs*. June 27, 2024.
- (Optional) 宫力, 门洪华, 孙东方. "中国外交决策机制变迁研究(1949-2009年)." 《世界经济与政治》11 (2009): pp. 44–54.

9. SECURITY AND COERCION: MARCH 17 AND 19

Theoretical concepts: arming, coercion

- Mastro, Oriana Skylar. *Upstart: How China Became a Great Power*. Oxford University Press, 2024. Chapters 4 and 5.
- Wong, Audrye. "How Not to Win Allies and Influence Geopolitics: China's Self-Defeating Economic Statecraft." *Foreign Affairs*. May/June 2021.
- Cunningham, Fiona S. "Strategic Substitution: China's Search for Coercive Leverage in the Information Age." *International Security* 47.1 (2022): 46–92.
- (Optional) Department of Defense. *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*. 2024.
- (Optional) Powell, Robert. *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. pp. 3–22.

Note: no class on March 21 (reading drop)

10. TECHNOLOGY: MARCH 31 AND APRIL 2

Theoretical concepts: innovation, technological revolutions

- Miller, Chris. *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology*. Simon & Schuster, 2022. Chapters TBD.
- Toner, Helen, Jenny Xiao, and Jeffrey Ding. "The Illusion of China's AI Prowess." *Foreign Affairs*. June 2, 2023.
- Liu, Zongyuan Zoe. "China's Real Economic Crisis." *Foreign Affairs*. September/October 2024.
- (Optional) Ding, Jeffrey. *Technology and the Rise of Great Powers*. Princeton University Press, 2024. Chapter 7.
- (Optional) Farrell, Henry, and Abraham L. Newman. "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion." *International Security* 44.1 (2019): 42–79.

11. THE ECONOMY: APRIL 4 AND 7

Theoretical concepts: comparative advantage, globalization, interdependence

- Pearson, Margaret M., Meg Rithmire, and Kellee S. Tsai. "China's Party-State Capitalism and International Backlash: From Interdependence to Insecurity." *International Security* 47.2 (2022): 135–176.
- Dreher, Axel, et al., *Banking on Beijing: The Aims and Impacts of China's Overseas Development Program*. Cambridge University Press, 2022. Chapter 1.
- Tan, Yeling. "How the WTO Changed China," *Foreign Affairs*. March/April 2021.
- (Optional) Tan, Yeling. *Disaggregating China, Inc.: State Strategies in the Liberal Economic Order*. Cornell University Press, 2021. Introduction and Chapter 1.
- (Optional) Gewirtz, Julian. "The Chinese Reassessment of Interdependence." *China Leadership Monitor* 64 (2020).

12. INFLUENCE AND SOFT POWER: APRIL 9 AND 14

Theoretical concepts: influence, soft power

- Fung, Courtney, Enze Han, Kai Quek, and Austin Strange. "Conditioning China's Influence: Intentionality, Intermediaries, and Institutions." 2023. *Journal of Contemporary China* 32.139 (2023): pp. 1–16.
- Repnikova, Maria. "The Balance of Soft Power." *Foreign Affairs* July/August 2022.
- Mattingly, Daniel. "China's Soft Sell of Autocracy is Working: And America's Efforts to Promote Democracy Are Failing." *Foreign Affairs*, September 25, 2024.
- (Optional) Mattingly, Daniel, et al. "Chinese State Media Persuades a Global Audience that the 'China Model' is Superior: Evidence from a 19-Country Experiment." *American Journal of Political Science*, forthcoming.

Note: no class on April 11 (reading drop)

13. INTERNATIONAL ORDER: APRIL 16 AND 18

Theoretical concepts: international institutions, institutional reform

- Johnston, Alastair Iain. "China in a World of Orders: Rethinking Compliance and Challenge in Beijing's International Relations." *International Security* 44.2 (2019): 9–60.
- Greitens, Sheena Chestnut. "Surveillance, Security, and Liberal Democracy in the Post-COVID World." *International Organization* 74.S1 (2020): E169–E190.
- Economy, Elizabeth. "China's Alternative Order" *Foreign Affairs*. May/June 2024.
- (Optional) Guo Ji. "The Profound Institutional Crisis of the West." *Qiushi* 3(4), 2011.
- (Optional) Weiss, Jessica Chen, and Jeremy L. Wallace. "Domestic Politics, China's Rise, and the Future of the Liberal International Order." *International Organization* 75.2 (2021): 635-664.

14. PROSPECTS FOR CONFLICT: APRIL 21 AND 23

Theoretical concepts: commitment problems, peaking powers

- Fravel, M. Taylor. "Power Shifts and Escalation: Explaining China's Use of Force in Territorial Disputes." *International Security* 32.3 (2007): 44-83.
- Beckley, Michael. "The Peril of Peaking Powers: Economic Slowdowns and Implications for China's Next Decade." *International Security* 48.1 (2023): 7-46.
- Medeiros, Evan S. "The Delusion of Peak China." *Foreign Affairs*. May/June 2024.
- Mastro, Oriana Sylar. "The Taiwan Temptation." *Foreign Affairs*. July/August 2021.

15. CLASS SUMMARY: APRIL 25

Final exam (take home)