At the beginning of the 21st century, China is moving ever closer to the center of international affairs. This course traces the country’s complex foreign relations over the past 250 years, identifying the forces that will determine its path in the decades to come. Since the height of the Qing Empire in the 18th century, China’s confrontation with foreign powers have caused its world view to fluctuate between feelings of dominance and subjugation, emulation and defiance. From the invasion of Burma in the 1760s to the Boxer Rebellion in the early 20th century and the rivalry with
the United States in eastern Asia today, many of these encounters have left the Chinese with a sense of humiliation and resentment, and have inflamed their notions of justice, hierarchy, and China’s regional centrality. This course is essential for anyone wishing to understand the recent past and probable future of this dynamic and complex country.

Course overview

1. Introduction: Why is China important?

The power of the past

2. The origins of the Chinese state
3. China and its region
4. The Chinese Communist Party
5. China’s age of reform

Chinese power today

6. The sources of economic growth
7. China’s military power
8. China’s foreign policy
9. The domestic variables

The future of Chinese power

10. Three scenarios for China’s future
11. China’s future economies
12. China in Asia
13. The United States and China
Course readings

The readings for the course can be accessed through Canvas. The following books are useful as general overviews, and it is recommended that students read them in full:


Assignments and grading

There are two assignments for this class.

The first is a group exercise. Depending on the number of students in the class, we will form small groups who will work on policy problems connected with China’s rise. The output will generally have two forms. There will be a 10-minute briefing for the whole class, followed by discussion. In your briefing, you may use no more than four slides. The group will also prepare, for the instructor, a two-page memo (1.5 line-spaced) that summarizes and highlights the points made in the briefing. The memo is due on the day of the presentation.

**Presentation dates:**

- **Group 1 (October 8):** What are China’s main economic challenges today?
- **Group 2 (October 15):** If war between China and the United States broke out tomorrow, what could China hope to achieve militarily?
- **Group 3 (October 22):** Who make the decisions in Chinese foreign policy?
- **Group 4 (October 29):** What is most important for Sichuan’s future?
- **Group 5 (November 5):** Which of the three scenarios for China's future do you think is most probable?
The second assignment is an **individually written six-page policy brief** that outlines, analyzes, and makes a policy recommendation for a particular problem related to China’s current foreign policy. This may be written for the Chinese government or for a foreign government (including that of the United States). This paper is due **December 1**.

The group exercise will count for one-third of the grade and the individual memo two-thirds but class participation will be taken into account when assessing the final grade for the course.

All written work for this course must be appropriately referenced. Students seeking guidance regarding proper citation and academic honesty should refer to the Harvard Kennedy School Academic Code. If you still have questions as to whether or not you have used citation properly, please speak with the instructors before turning in your written assignment.

The course may be audited, but only with written permission from the instructor. Harvard students from outside HKS may register for this course, with written permission, if space and time-tabling allows for it.

**Overview of individual sessions and mandatory reading**

**Week 1** (September 3)

**Lecture: Why is China important?**
Within less than a generation, China has moved from the periphery of the international system to its center. It is likely that the country will be a dominant power in the 21st century and beyond. But China is not only important because of its geo-political weight. It is also essential because of its cultural and political significance for the larger eastern Asian region.

**Reading:**

**The power of the past**

**Week 2** (September 8 and 10)

**Lecture: The origins of the Chinese state**

Chinese culture originates in three great epochs: Han, Tang, and Song. Knowing a bit about them is important for understanding China today.

**Seminar: The classics of Chinese strategy**

**Reading:**

3. *Confucius: Analects* (excerpt)

**Week 3** (September 15 and 17)

**Lecture: China and its region**

China is at the core of a vast region, stretching from the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea to the Pacific and Indian oceans. China’s place within its region was defined during the Qing Empire, which ruled China from the early 17th to the early 20th century.

**Seminar: Chinese world orders**

**Reading:**


**Week 4 (September 18 at 11.45am – L332 and 2.45pm – L382)**

**Lecture: The Chinese Communist Party**
The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was formed in the early 20th century and took power in 1949. Mao Zedong led the CCP for forty years, and his thinking created some of the fundamentals for Chinese world views today.

**Seminar: The CCP in power**

**Reading:**

**Week 5 (September 29 and October 1)**

**Lecture: China’s age of reform**
Mao Zedong’s rule united the country, but failed in terms of economic development. After Mao’s death in 1976, the new leader Deng Xiaoping opened up for the transformation of the Chinese economy from a state-led to a market-led form of production and enterprise. It was the greatest economic transformation the world has ever seen.

**Seminar: How did China break through?**

**Reading:**

Chinese power today

Week 6 (October 6 and 8)
Lecture: The sources of economic growth
For thirty years (from 1980 to 2010) the Chinese economy continued to grow very rapidly, in what amounts to the biggest economic and social revolution of modern times. What were the main causes of this growth? What role did the Chinese state play in it? And what kind of economy does China have today?

Seminar: Does China have a capitalist economy?

Reading:

Week 7 (October 13 and 15)

Lecture: China’s military power
In 1979 fought an inconclusive war against its former ally Vietnam. The results of the war convinced the Chinese leadership that its military was backward and broken. Since then, China has expanded its military power in a revolutionary manner, spending
more percentage-wise on building its capabilities than any other major power. Still, most experts argue that China's military reach is far inferior to that of the United States, even in Asia.

Seminar: Can China challenge US power in eastern Asia?

Reading:

Week 8 (October 20 and 22)

Lecture: China’s foreign policy today
As its power has grown, China's involvement in international affairs has also expanded. The country today defines its interests as being global, even though its active policies are mainly reserved for its own region. Meanwhile, many experts claim that Chinese national security decisionmaking is under-developed for the purposes it is supposed to serve.

Seminar: Who decides China’s foreign policy?

Reading:
Week 9 (October 27 and 29)

Lecture: The domestic variables
Over the past generation China has moved from a tightly controlled Leninist dictatorship to a much more open society, which the Communist Party struggles to keep control over. A number of key commentators argue that China's main problems are domestic, and that many of them are connected with poor governance. In addition, the CCP’s policies for controlling ethnic minorities seem to have failed.

Seminar: The key challenges of one Chinese province

Reading:

The future of Chinese power

Week 10 (November 3 and 5)

Lecture: Three scenarios for China’s future
While China’s power has grown significantly over the past generation, it is not given that its growth will continue. But it is also possible that we under-estimate China’s potential for growth and, especially, its proclivity for change. What are conceivable scenarios for China’s future over the next twenty years?

Seminar: The coming collapse of China?

Reading:


**Week 11** (November 10 and 12)

**Lecture: China’s future economies**
China today is first and foremost an economic power. How is its economy likely to develop? Is China today facing a middle-income trap? How will demographic change influence China’s growth? And what about regional variations within China itself?

**Seminar: China 2030**

**Reading:**

**Week 12** (November 17 and 19)

**Lecture: China in Asia**
Over the next decade, China’s main orientation in terms of foreign policy objectives will be towards its own region. This means mainly east and southeast Asia, but also Russia and India. What is the potential for conflict or integration in China’s relationship with its neighbors?

**Seminar: When North Korea Collapses**

**Reading:**

**Week 13** (November 24 and December 1)

**Lecture: The United States and China**
The United States, in Chinese, is MeiGuo, or ‘the beautiful country’. And Americans admire Chinese industriousness and skill over those of all other nations. The economies of the two countries are today closely linked. But Chinese and US policies towards each other have fluctuated wildly in the past and are likely to do so in the future. What is the most likely scenario for US China policy ten years from now?

**Seminar: US policy towards China – a briefing for the new president**

**Reading:**