

Business History of Modern China

Dartmouth College | HIST XXXX

Fall 2025

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About the Course

Basic Information

Time	TBD
Classroom	TBD
Instructor	Yi Lu
Office	Carson 205
Office Hour	TBD
Phone	603-646-0156
Email	yi.lu@dartmouth.edu

Course Description

By 2030, China is expected to become the largest economy in the world. Chinese companies have significantly altered the business environment domestically and are now aiming for a global presence. What insights can we gain about China — its people, government, and culture — from its evolving enterprises? This course examines modern China and its global influence through the lens of business. Through discussion of historical sources, case studies, and class visits, we delve into the factors driving

China's expansion, including: China's place in the world economy; traditional family businesses; early efforts at state-led industrialization; legal and social frameworks for business; foreign investments, companies, and competition; the emergence of a Chinese business class; state-owned enterprises alongside private-sector competitors; and the influential roles of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and foreign companies in shaping modern China. We will also investigate the impact of the Communist Party and government (both local and national) on business and society. Will China lead? Has it peaked? By the end of this course, you will be equipped to make informed assessments.

Learning Goals

By the end of the class, you will be able to:

- discuss key issues and broad trends shaping Chinese business history since 1800 and their present-day relevance;
- evaluate scholarly arguments, policy decisions, and public debates concerning China and its relations with the world;
- develop independent research skills using a diverse set of primary sources – texts, statistics, images, material objects, films, etc.;
- communicate your arguments in a variety of media and formats, ranging from critical essay to op-ed to oral presentation.

Assessments

Participation

Your participation in class is essential for learning – not just for you, but also for your peers. The class promotes active learning and often includes work in pairs or small groups.

Issue Paper

In this assignment, you will write a short brief on an economic issue related to modern China. Topics may include:

- industrial policies
- rural economy
- public health and human development

- international trade
- and more.

Whatever topic you choose, your paper should examine the history, trends, and their implications. More specifically, it should:

- state the issue for consideration;
- examine the historical context and its contemporary relevance;
- indicate a recommendation for action;
- provide supporting information relevant to the issue and recommendation;
- list references for the supporting information and other resources.

Case Study Paper

For the final project, you will develop a teaching case that presents a critical business issue facing an entity – a person, an organization, or a location – related to China. They do not need to be based in China; foreign individuals, companies, or agencies dealing with China are also acceptable. Whatever your case study, you paper should:

- go beyond the immediate example to identify underlying topics and to contextualize them in the Chinese / global history;
- serve as a teaching resource that generates lively classroom debate in which participants present and defend their analysis and prescriptions.

You should base your paper on careful library research and oral interviews with relevant stakeholders (if needed). In addition to text, you may use video, audio, graphics, animation, and other media. The assignment includes two parts:

Task	Requirement	Due date
Proposal	2-3 pages, plus bibliography	TBD
Presentation	5-10 mins	TBD
Final draft	15 to 20 pages long	TBD

Mid-term and Final Exams

In the mid-term and final exams, you will apply historical knowledge and reasoning skills that you have developed in the class to a new set of documents. The exams will be available on Canvas during the following periods:

Assessment	Optional review session	Start date	End date
Mid-term	TBD	TBD	TBD
Final exam	TBD	TBD	TBD

Once you begin the written exam, you will have **90 minutes** to write an essay based on ONE extract from the following selection of materials:

- Primary sources: texts that were written in the time period you are asked about;
- Secondary sources: texts written by later historians that explain the time period;
- Multimedia sources: typically artworks – cartoons, posters, paintings, videos – from the time period.

While the documents will be new, their genre and context should be familiar to you through our class readings, lectures, and discussions. During the exam, you may consult your notes, our course readings, and the Internet (including AI tools), but you should cite them properly if you do so.

Final Grades

Your final grade will be calculated based on the following weighting:

Task	Percentage
Participation	10
Issue paper	20
Case study proposal	5
Case study presentation	5
Case study paper	20
Mid-term exam	25
Total	100

Deadlines and Extensions

Due dates exist in the real world, and they exist in this course. But like real world deadlines, they are not ironclad. Use the listed dates to plan your work and stay motivated. If you need more time, you may submit **one** assignment without penalty up to 72 hours past the original deadline. You do not need to ask me for permission; you do not need to explain anything, either.

If you need more extensions in the future, please email me and ask. If your requests become a pattern, I will work with you to explore any underlying issues and discuss ways to maintain your progress.

Note that this flexible deadline policy does not apply to the pop reading quizzes: they are not announced beforehand and must be completed in class. If you must miss a class due to compelling reason, please notify me in advance to discuss any make-up opportunities.

Textbooks

You do not need to purchase any books for this class. All readings are available, for free, on our Canvas website. Physical copies are on reserve at Baker-Berry Library.

Schedule

S01: Introduction: The Business of China

- Interpreting enterprise, state, and society¹
- Myths and Lessons of Modern Chinese History²

¹ Bian, "Interpreting Enterprise, State, and Society."

² Kirby and Zendell, "From Beijing Jeep to ASC Fine Wines."

S02: Shoots of Capitalism

Case study: Silver trade

- Chapter 6, Weighing Silver³
- Cycles of Silver⁴

³ Brook, *Vermeer's Hat*, 152–85.

⁴ Flynn and Giraldez, "Cycles of Silver."

S03: Great Divergence

Case study: Lower Yangtze Delta

- The Shanxi Banks⁵
- Chapter⁶

⁵ Morck and Yang, “The Shanxi Banks.”

⁶ Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988*.

S04: Canton Trade

Case study: Macartney Embassy in China

- Qianlong’s Edict to King George III of England (1793)⁷
- Introduction: Comparisons, Connections, and Narratives of European Economic Development⁸

⁷ Atwill and Atwill, *Sources in Chinese History*, 18–21.

⁸ Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*, chap. 1.

S05: Self-strengthening

Case study: Augustine Heard & Co and Wu Bingjian

- Augustine Heard & Co.: Building a Family Business in the China Trade⁹
- Chapter 5, To Reorganize or to Be Recognized? Reconstituting Business in the Reconfigured World of Global Business¹⁰

⁹ Kirby, Eby, and Ji, “Augustine Heard & Co.”

¹⁰ Wong, *Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, 135–77.

S06: Economic Patriots

Case study: Sheng Shihuai

- The Kuan-tu Shang-pan System: “Official Supervision and Merchant Management”¹¹
- Economic transition in the nineteenth century¹²

¹¹ Feuerwerker, *China’s Early Industrialization*, chap. 1.

¹² Rowe, “Economic Transition in the Nineteenth Century.”

S07: Chinese Capitalism

Case study: Zigong, Sichuan

- China Unincorporated: Company Law and Business Enterprise in Twentieth-Century China¹³
- Chapter 3, Fragmentation as a Business Strategy¹⁴

¹³ Kirby, “China Unincorporated.”

¹⁴ Zelin, *The Merchants of Zigong*, 50–73.

S08: Homegrown Industrialists

Case study: Dasheng Cotton Mills

- Enterprise Culture in Chinese History: Zhang Jian and the Dasheng Cotton Mills¹⁵
- Sun Yatsen, The international development of China, Program 1 and Conclusion¹⁶

¹⁵ Köll, “Enterprise Culture in Chinese History.”

¹⁶ Sun, *The International Development of China*.

S09: Urban Consumerism

Case study: Nanjing Road, Shanghai

- *The Goddess*¹⁷
- Chapter 2, The State in Commerce, and Chapter 3, Visual Politics and Shanghai Glamour¹⁸

¹⁷ 吳, “清華大學所藏檔案的分析.”

¹⁸ Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*, 30–78.

S10: Developmental State

Case study: Mantetsu in Manchukuo

- The South Manchurian Railway Company and the Mining Industry: The Case of the Fushun Coal Mine¹⁹
- Blood, Iron, and the Japanese Empire²⁰

¹⁹ Chen, *Daughter of Good Fortune*.

²⁰ Hirata, *Making Mao's Steelworks*, 29–63.

S11: China's Destiny

Case study: Chiang Kai-shek

- China's Destiny and Chinese Economic Theory²¹
- The collapse of Nationalist China: Introduction²²

²¹ Chiang and Jaffe, *China's Destiny and Chinese Economic Theory*.

²² Coble, *The Collapse of Nationalist China*.

S12: Leaning to One Side

Case study: Stalin

- Mao Zedong: Leaning to One Side²³
- Chapter 3, Chinese Economic Aid and Kim's Juche Idea, 1953–1956²⁴

²³ @ de Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 452–53.

²⁴ Shen, “Building a Digital Silk Road?” 77–107.

S13: Land Reform

Case study: Long Bow Village

- Mao Zedong: The Question of Land Redistribution²⁵
- Fanshen, Preface, Chapter 27-31²⁶

²⁵ @ de Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 411–12.

²⁶ Hinton, *Fanshen*, 259–96.

S13: Planned Economy

Case study: Rong Yiren and his family

- The Rong Family: A Chinese Business History²⁷
- Chapter 4, The Socialist Era, 1949–1978: Big Push Industrialization and Policy Instability²⁸

²⁷ Köll, “The Rong Family.”

²⁸ Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, chap. 4.

S14: Third Front

Case study: Panzhihua, Sichuan

- Crisis and the Development of China’s Southwestern Periphery²⁹
- Chapter 5, Industrial Development amid Cold War Insecurity³⁰

²⁹ Kinzley, “Xinjiang at the Center.”

³⁰ Meyskens, *Mao’s Third Front*, 201–26.

S15: Market Maoists

Case study: Wanxiang Group

- Wanxiang Group: A Chinese Company’s Global Strategy³¹
- Chapter 5, A “Great Leap” in Trade³²

³¹ Abrami, “Wanxiang Group.”

³² Kelly, *Market Maoists*, 186–204.

S16: Special Economic Zones

Case study: Huaqiangbei, Shenzhen

- Huaqiangbei: The Epitome of Industry Development and Transformation in Shenzhen³³
- Chapter 1, The Myth of Shenzhen³⁴

³³ Zhang and Qian, “Huaqiangbei.”

³⁴ Du, *The Shenzhen Experiment*.

S17: Capitalism without Democracy

Case study: Deng Xiaoping

- Chen Yun: Speech given at the Chinese Communist National Representative Conference, September 23, 1985³⁵
- Part II, The Economy³⁶

³⁵ @ de Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 510–12.

³⁶ Gewirtz, *Never Turn Back*, 65–106.

S18: Trading with the Enemy

Case study: Coca Cola

- More than Just a Soft Drink: Coca-Cola and China's Early Reform and Opening³⁷
- Chapter 8, Normalization the Trade Deal³⁸

³⁷ Kraus, "More Than Just a Soft Drink."

³⁸ Ingleson, *Made in China*, 228–62.

S19: Rival Partner

Case study: Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited

- Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited: A Global Company's China Strategy³⁹
- A Strait of Uncertainty: Taiwan's Development in the Shadow of China⁴⁰
- Introduction⁴¹

³⁹ Kirby, "The Business of China."

⁴⁰ Kirby, Chan, and Mchugh, "Huawei."

⁴¹ Wu, *Rival Partners*, chap. 1.

S20: Start-up Nation

Case study: Dorm99.com

- The Challenges of Launching a Start-Up in China: Dorm99.Com⁴²
- The Power of Informal Institutions⁴³

⁴² Kirby, "The Challenges of Launching a Start-Up in China."

⁴³ Tsai, *Back-Alley Banking*, 1–23.

S21: Capitalism Without Democracy

Case study: Google

- Chapter 1, "The Myth of China's Democratic Capitalists"⁴⁴
- Google's Dragonfly: The Ethics of Providing a Censored Search Engine in China⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Tsai, *Accountability Without Democracy*.

⁴⁵ Bó and Xu, *Google's Dragonfly*.

S22: Agents of Growth

Case study: Datong, Shanxi

- The Chinese Mayor⁴⁶
- Who Wants to Be a Communist? Career Incentives and Mobilized Loyalty in China⁴⁷
- Juking the Stats? Authoritarian Information Problems in China⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Zhou, “Datong.”

⁴⁷ Dickson, “Who Wants to Be a Communist?”

⁴⁸ Wallace, “Juking the Stats?”

S23: Infrastructure State

Case study: China Railway Construction Corporation

- China Railway Construction Corporation: Attaining Globalization via High-Speed Rail⁴⁹
- Introduction⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Cao, Lin, and Wei, “China Railway Construction Corporation.”

⁵⁰ Ma, *Localized Bargaining*.

S24: Communist Spirit

Case study: Maotai

- Maotai: How China’s ‘Firewater’ Became the World’s Most Valuable Liquor Brand⁵¹
- Chapter 2, Red Roulette⁵²
- Introduction, China’s Gilded Age: The Paradox of Economic Boom and Vast Corruption⁵³

⁵¹ The Wall Street Journal, “How China’s ‘Firewater’ Became the World’s Most Valuable Liquor Brand | WSJ The Economics Of.”

⁵² Shum, *Red Roulette*.

⁵³ Ang, *China’s Gilded Age*.

S25: Belt and Road

Case study: Sri Lanka

- Chinese Infrastructure Investments in Sri Lanka: A Pearl or a Teardrop on the Belt and Road?
- Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road⁵⁴
- Fragmented Motives and Policies: The Belt and Road Initiative in China⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Xi, *The Governance of China*.

⁵⁵ Ye, “FRAGMENTED MOTIVES AND POLICIES.”

S26: New Productive Forces

Case study: Huawei

- Huawei: A Global Tech Giant in the Crossfire of a Digital Cold War⁵⁶
- Notice of the State Council on the Publication of “Made in China 2025”⁵⁷
- The Rise of China’s Industrial Policy⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Kirby, Chan, and Lau, “Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited.”

⁵⁷ PRC State Council, “Notice of the State Council on the Publication of Made in China 2025.”

⁵⁸ Naughton, *The Rise of China’s Industrial Policy, 1978 to 2020*.

S27: “Low-Quality Population”

Case study: Meituan

- Delivery Workers, Trapped in the System⁵⁹
- China’s Low Human Rights Advantage⁶⁰
- Invisible China, “Introduction”⁶¹

⁵⁹ 赖, “Delivery Workers, Trapped in the System.”

⁶⁰ Qin, “China’s Low Human Rights Advantage.”

⁶¹ Rozelle and Hell, *Invisible China*.

S28: Conclusion: Unfinished Business

Case study: US-China trade war

- China’s Economy Has Peaked. Can Beijing Redefine its Goals?⁶²
- Who Wins and Who Loses in the US-China Trade War?⁶³

⁶² Wright, “China’s Economy Has Peaked. Can Beijing Redefine Its Goals?”

⁶³ Huang, “Who Wins and Who Loses in the US-China Trade War?”

Course Policies

Communicating with Me

Email

The best way to reach me. I will answer within a working day, but expect slower turnarounds in the evening or on weekends.

Canvas

All readings and assignments will be posted there. For the most up-to-date information about the class, please enable email notification and subscribe to our course calendar.

Secure Communication

This class is committed to academic freedom and welcomes diverse views. Unfortunately, it does not operate in a legal void. Chinese laws, such as the 2021 [National Security Law in Hong Kong](#), assert extrajudicial jurisdiction: they can criminalize non-citizens of mainland China and Hong Kong, even if they reside outside their borders.

Due to the political sensitivity of some class materials, some of you may not feel safe to participate in class. I discourage self-censorship, but I need to protect your privacy and safety.

To create an open and safe intellectual space, you may submit oral remarks or written assignments by emailing me directly; I will read them and/or repost them on our Canvas site without identifying your name. For added anonymity, you may also:

- Print out your remarks and drop them under my office door (Carson 205) or in my department mailbox, located on the third floor of Carson Hall;
- Submit them via our [Secure Comments Form](#) on Google.

These anonymous submissions may be featured in class, but your participation will not be credited.

Technology Use

Device Use

You can use all gadgets for note-taking and reading, but please mute all sound notifications and refrain from non-academic uses.

Generative AI

This course welcomes ethical use of artificial intelligence. You may use generative AI models for a variety of tasks, including:

- Generating ideas
- Summarizing, rephrasing, and synthesizing information
- Proofreading, editing, and revision

Large language models do not make any warranties about the completeness, reliability and accuracy of information that they generate. You are responsible for your AI usage, including any inaccurate, biased, offensive, or unethical content.

The college's [Academic Honor Principle](#) still applies: You may not submit work, in any form, that is not your own, without acknowledgment of the source. This includes AI tools.

For every assignment you submit with machine input, you must clearly indicate which part of the work is machine-generated. Additionally, you should complete an AI Usage Form and answer the following questions:

- What prompt(s) did you use?
- How did you use AI?
- Which model(s) did you use?
- What output(s) did you receive? Did you ask follow-up questions?
- How did you revise the original response(s)?
- What did you learn?

For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, please refer to the section below on academic honesty.

Recording and Data Storage

To protect everyone in the class, do not make a recording in any medium without written consent of all those participating. Additionally, you may not share any course materials – from readings to written assignments – with any individual or entity beyond the class without prior permission.

Students with accommodations approved by the [Student Accessibility Services](#) may be authorized to record class lectures, discussions, lab sessions, and review sessions and take pictures of essential information, and/or be provided class notes for personal study use only.

Supporting You

There are additional resources on campus to help you succeed in the class, including:

Libraries and Museums

We have reference librarians to support your learning and research:

- [Wendel Cox](#), subject librarian for history, who updates a [research guide on history](#)

Our librarians are available in person, by email, and via [appointments](#) for research consultation, reference questions, or purchase requests.

Academic Resources

Throughout the term, you will find the following offices on campus useful for your academic development:

- [Writing Center](#): Peer-to-peer tutoring to help you become a better writer
- [Academic Skills Center](#): One-on-one support and peer tutoring sessions to boost your study skills, from reading to note-taking
- [Undergraduate Deans Office](#): Your dean helps you make the most of your own strengths and connects you to Dartmouth resources for student support of all types.

Student Accessibility and Accommodations

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are required to register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS; [Apply for Services webpage](#); student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu; 1-603-646-9900) and to request that an accommodation email be sent to me in advance of the need for an accommodation. Then, students should schedule a follow-up meeting with me to determine relevant details such as what role SAS or its [Testing Center](#) may play in accommodation implementation. This process works best for everyone when completed as early in the quarter as possible. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations or have concerns about the implementation of their accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

Religious Observances

If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me as soon as possible—before the end of the second week of the term at the latest—to discuss appropriate course adjustments.

Title IX Information

Sex and gender-based discrimination, sex and gender-based harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, etc., are not tolerated in our community.

For more information regarding Title IX and to access helpful resources, visit Title IX's website (sexual-respect.dartmouth.edu).

Please be aware that as a faculty member, I am required to share disclosures of sexual or gender-based misconduct with the Title IX office.

Mental Health and Well-being

Dartmouth's academic environment is challenging, our terms are intensive, and classes are not the only demanding part of your life. Please reach out to me if you are experiencing challenges that are impacting your participation in this course; we can work together to develop a plan to support your success.

There are a number of resources available to you on campus to support your wellness, including: the [Counseling Center](#) which allows you to book triage appointments online, the [Student Wellness Center](#) which offers wellness check-ins, and your [undergraduate dean](#). The student-led [Dartmouth Student Mental Health Union](#) and their peer support program may be helpful if you would like to speak to a trained fellow student support listener. If you need immediate assistance, please contact the counselor on-call at (603) 646-9442 at any time.