

# Business History of Modern China

Dartmouth College | HIST XX.XX/ASCL XX.XX

Fall 2025

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## About the Course

### Basic Information

Course number	TBD
Campus Distributives	INT + SOC + NW
Time	TBD
Classroom	TBD
Instructor	Yi Lu
Office	Carson 205
Office Hour	TBD
Phone	603-646-0156
Email	<a href="mailto:yi.lu@dartmouth.edu">yi.lu@dartmouth.edu</a>

## **Course Description**

### **ORC version**

This course explores China's modern transformation through its business history, examining how enterprises have navigated the nation's blend of capitalism and single-party rule. It delves into cycles of prosperity and decline, from the Qing Dynasty to its current status as a global economic power. Using case studies, the course analyzes diverse actors — from family firms to foreign traders, ordinary workers to tech giants — to understand China's model of capitalism and socialism and its global impact.

### **Full version**

China today presents a major paradox: a capitalist economy led by a single-party state. The Chinese Communist Party has oscillated between welcoming private entrepreneurs and foreign companies and slamming the door shut with equal force. Businesses have flourished despite — or perhaps because of — rampant official corruption, regulatory uncertainties, and relentless geopolitical friction. And while fears of an economic “hard landing” persist, China is also home to some of the world's most innovative and influential companies, achieving growth without significant political liberalization — at least so far.

How have Chinese businesses navigated, adapted, and thrived in such a fluid environment? Conversely, what can these enterprises reveal about China — its people, governance, and culture? This course explores modern China and its global impact through the prism of its business history over the past two centuries. It was a period marked by cycles of prosperity and decline: In 1800, the Qing Dynasty stood as the world's wealthiest and largest empire. Yet, a century of internal strife and foreign imperialism plunged it into ruin. By 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established, much of the country lay in shambles, its population largely illiterate, and its economy still reliant on traditional farming. Determined to forge a modern, powerful nation, the Chinese Communist Party embarked on building a socialist economy, nationalizing land, abolishing private property, and pursuing self-sufficiency. The result was a tumultuous mix of disasters and revolutions, but also the seeds of a distinct model of party-state capitalism. Since the 1970s, China's reforms — which produced the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history — have come to define the contours of our world order today.

This course delves into this complex history using a wealth of historical sources, interactive discussions, and virtual site visits. Progressing chronologically, we will examine a diverse array of actors: from traditional family firms to foreign traders, tech giants to everyday entrepreneurs and workers. Each session will employ a case-study approach, focusing on a specific problem tied to a time, place, organization, commodity, or idea. Collectively, these studies will illuminate how modern China crafted institutions and practices that uniquely fused capitalism and socialism, localism and globalism — a hybrid model that has proven remarkably effective in generating wealth and power, even as it spawns new cycles of social and political conflicts.

Today, China is the world's largest economy by purchasing power parity, its top manufacturer, its leading merchandise trader, and the holder of the largest foreign exchange reserves. Yet its future is fraught with uncertainty amid domestic crackdowns, trade wars, demographic shifts, and the looming effects of climate change. Will China lead? Has it already peaked? Only a deep historical perspective can shed light on its trajectory. By the

end of this course, you will be equipped to make informed judgments — not only about China but also about the broader history of capital, labor, technology, and power across the globe.

### **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 case report.

### **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.

#### **Comparative Essay**

Historical comparisons are useful for illuminating, critiquing, or challenging the stability our understanding: Just as looking through a pair of glasses changes the way we see an object, using one case as a framework for understanding another changes the way we see both. This paper gives you an opportunity to think comparatively, over time and across temporal, geographical, or cultural contexts. You should select **one** case study from our class and analyze it in relation to:

- A different time period – either earlier or later – in Chinese history.
- Another place. You may also zoom in (to a smaller locale) or out (to a larger province, region, or another country).
- Another case study. It could be another individual or organization, either from our syllabus or one of your choice.
- An issue or problem (e.g., raising capital, impact of war, industrial policy, etc.)
- Theories (e.g. capitalism and communism, social inequality, state-society relationship, etc.)

Whatever comparisons you make, you should take the similarities and differences you've observed and make them cohere into a meaningful argument. More specifically, your essay should specify:

- **A frame of reference:** This is the context within which you place the two things you plan to compare and contrast. As discussed above, the frame of reference may consist of another case study, time period, location, theme, or theory.
- **Grounds for comparison:** You need to indicate the reasoning behind your choice. Why compare these two things? What makes them comparable (or not)?
- **Your thesis:** How the two things you've chosen to compare actually relate to one another. Do they extend, corroborate, complicate, contradict, correct, or debate one another? This relationship should drive your argument.

The final paper should be between 800 and 1200 words in length.

### Mid-term Exam

In the mid-term exam, 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:

Optional review session	Start date	End date
TBD	TBD	TBD

Once you begin the written exam, you will have **120 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.

### 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. It does not need to be based in China; foreign individuals, companies, or agencies dealing with China are also acceptable. Whatever you choose, your project should:

- Analyze the history of your case study over a period of ten years or more.
- Use both primary and secondary sources.
- Connect your case to broader trends, themes, or theories of Chinese and/or global history.

There are two required submissions for this assignment:

Task	Deadline	Word limit
Proposal with bibliography	TBD	400-800 words, excluding bibliography
Final draft	TBD	2500 to 4000 words, excluding footnotes, tables, and figures.

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.

### Final Grades

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

Task	Due date	Percentage
Participation	NA	10
Comparative paper	TBD	25
Case proposal	TBD	10
Case study final draft	TBD	30
Mid-term exam	TBD	25
<b>Total</b>	NA	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**

- Qianlong's Edict to King George III of England (1793) (Atwill & Atwill, 2021, pp. 18–21)
- Myths and Lessons of Modern Chinese History (Kirby & Zendell, 2014)

### **S02: Canton Trade**

- Chapter 5, To Reorganize or to Be Recognized? Reconstituting Business in the Reconfigured World of Global Business (Wong, 2016, pp. 135–177)
- MIT Visualizing Culture: [Rise & Fall of the Canton Trade System](#)

### **S03: Pacific Trade**

- Augustine Heard & Co.: Building a Family Business in the China Trade (Kirby et al., 2016)
- America's China and Pacific Trade (Fichter, 2010, Chapter 8)

### **S04: Self-strengthening**

- The Kuan-tu Shang-pan System: “Official Supervision and Merchant Management” (Feuerwerker, 1958, Chapter 1)
- Economic transition in the nineteenth century (Rowe, 2022)

### **S05: Chinese Capitalism**

- Fragmentation as a Business Strategy (Zelin, 2005, pp. 50–73)
- China Unincorporated: Company Law and Business Enterprise in Twentieth-Century China (Kirby, 1995)

### **S06: Homegrown Industrialists**

- Enterprise Culture in Chinese History: Zhang Jian and the Dasheng Cotton Mills (Köll, 2010a)
- Sun Yatsen: The international development of China, Program 1 and Conclusion (Sun, 1920)

### **S07: Urban Consumerism**

- *The Goddess* (Y. Wu, 1934)
- Chapter 2, The State in Commerce, and Chapter 3, Visual Politics and Shanghai Glamour (Yeh, 2007, pp. 30–78)

**S08: Developmental State**

- The South Manchurian Railway Company and the Mining Industry: The Case of the Fushun Coal Mine (Chen, 2015)
- Blood, Iron, and the Japanese Empire (Hirata, 2024, pp. 29–63)

**S09: China's Destiny**

- China's Destiny and Chinese Economic Theory (Chiang & Jaffe, 2013)
- The collapse of Nationalist China: Introduction (Coble, 2023)

**S10: Leaning to One Side**

- Mao Zedong: Leaning to One Side de Bary & Lufrano (2001)
- Chapter 3, Chinese Economic Aid and Kim's Juche Idea, 1953–1956 (Shen, 2018, pp. 77–107)

**S11: Land Reform**

- Mao Zedong: The Question of Land Redistribution de Bary & Lufrano (2001)
- Fanshen, Preface, Chapter 27-31 (Hinton, 1967, pp. 259–296)
- Introduction: China's Land Reform (Noellert, 2020, pp. 1–33)

**S12: Planned Economy**

- The Rong Family: A Chinese Business History (Köll, 2010b)
- Chapter 4, The Socialist Era, 1949–1978: Big Push Industrialization and Policy Instability (Naughton, 2018, Chapter 4)

**S13: Third Front**

- Crisis and the Development of China's Southwestern Periphery (Kinzley, 2012)
- Industrial Development amid Cold War Insecurity (Meyskens, 2020, pp. 201–226)

**S14: Market Maoists**

- Wanxiang Group: A Chinese Company's Global Strategy (Abrami, 2008)
- A "Great Leap" in Trade (Kelly, 2021, pp. 186–204)



**S15: Special Economic Zones**

- Huaqiangbei: The Epitome of Industry Development and Transformation in Shenzhen (Zhang & Qian, 2019)
- The Myth of Shenzhen (Du, 2020, Chapter 1)

**S16: Capitalism without Democracy**

- Chen Yun: Speech given at the Chinese Communist National Representative Conference, September 23, 1985 de Bary & Lufrano (2001)
- The Economy (Gewirtz, 2022, pp. 65–106)

**S17: Trading with the Enemy**

- More than Just a Soft Drink: Coca-Cola and China's Early Reform and Opening (Kraus, 2019)
- Chapter 8, Normalization the Trade Deal (Ingleson, 2024, pp. 228–262)

**S18: Rival Partner**

- Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company Limited: A Global Company's China Strategy (Kirby, 2020)
- A Strait of Uncertainty: Taiwan's Development in the Shadow of China (Kirby, Chan, & Mchugh, 2020)
- Introduction (J. Wu, 2022, Chapter 1)

**S19: Start-up Nation**

- The Challenges of Launching a Start-Up in China: Dorm99.Com (W. Kirby, 2008)
- The Power of Informal Institutions (K. S. Tsai, 2002, pp. 1–23)

**S20: Nailing Jelly**

- Google's Dragonfly: The Ethics of Providing a Censored Search Engine in China (Bó & Xu, 2020)
- "The Myth of China's Democratic Capitalists" (L. L. Tsai, 2007)

**S21: Urban Modernity**

- The Chinese Mayor (Zhou, 2015)
- Who Wants to Be a Communist? Career Incentives and Mobilized Loyalty in China (Dickson, 2014)
- Juking the Stats? Authoritarian Information Problems in China (Wallace, 2016)

**S22: Infrastructure State**

- China Railway Construction Corporation: Attaining Globalization via High-Speed Rail (Cao et al., 2018)
- Introduction: Localized Bargaining (Ma, 2022)

**S23: Golden Smoke**

- Maotai: How China's 'Firewater' Became the World's Most Valuable Liquor Brand (The Wall Street Journal, 2024)
- How China became addicted to its tobacco monopoly (McLure et al., 2023)
- Introduction, China's Gilded Age: The Paradox of Economic Boom and Vast Corruption (Ang, 2020)

**S24: Profit Injection**

- Dying to Survive (Wen, 2018)
- China's Healthcare Industry: A System Perspective (Burns & Liu, 2017)

**S25: Belt and Road**

- Chinese Infrastructure Investments in Sri Lanka: A Pearl or a Teardrop on the Belt and Road? (Rithmire, 2019)
- Fragmented Motives and Policies: The Belt and Road Initiative in China (Ye, 2021)

**S26: New Productive Forces**

- Huawei: A Global Tech Giant in the Crossfire of a Digital Cold War (Kirby, Chan, & Lau, 2020)
- Notice of the State Council on the Publication of "Made in China 2025" (PRC State Council, 2015)
- The Rise of China's Industrial Policy (Naughton, 2021)

**S27: "Low-Quality Population"**

- Apple, Foxconn, and Chinese workers' struggles from a global labor perspective (Pun et al., 2016)
- China's Low Human Rights Advantage (Qin, 2009)

**S28: Conclusion: Unfinished Business**

- Who Wins and Who Loses in the US-China Trade War? (Huang, 2022)
- China's Economy Has Peaked. Can Beijing Redefine its Goals? (Wright, 2024)

## **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.

## Socioeconomic Differences and Financial Difficulty

Our community is composed of students from a variety of financial backgrounds. Socioeconomic diversity can be invisible, and you may be experiencing financial difficulties related to the cost of textbooks, materials, or other necessities for our class of which I am not aware.

If you encounter financial challenges related to this class, there may be sources of support for you. If you feel comfortable sharing your experience with me, you may. You may also consider meeting with a financial aid officer to discuss options, reaching out to the First-Generation Office if you are a first-generation student, browsing the Funding Resources page, or, applying for the Dartmouth 4E Fund which provides supplemental funds for essentials, enrichment, experiences, and emergencies.

## 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](mailto: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

Dartmouth has a deep commitment to support students' religious observances and diverse faith practices. Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. 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

At Dartmouth, we value integrity, responsibility, and respect for the rights and interests of others, all central to our Principles of Community. We are dedicated to establishing and maintaining a safe and inclusive campus where all community members have equal access to Dartmouth's educational and employment opportunities. We strive to promote an environment of sexual respect, safety, and well-being. Through the Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct Policy (SMP), Dartmouth demonstrates that 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](https://sexual-respect.dartmouth.edu)). As a faculty member, I am required to share disclosures of sexual or gender-based misconduct with the Title IX office.

If you have any questions or want to explore support and assistance, please contact the Title IX office at 603-646-0922 or [TitleIX@dartmouth.edu](mailto:TitleIX@dartmouth.edu). Speaking to Title IX does not automatically initiate a college resolution. Instead, much of their work is around providing supportive measures to ensure you can continue to engage in Dartmouth's programs and activities.

## Mental Health and Well-being

The academic environment is challenging, our terms are intensive, and classes are not the only demanding part of your life. 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. Please make me aware of anything that will hinder your success in this course.

## Bibliography

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