

The Rise of China 中国的崛起

Politics 161 | 10360 | Fall 2025
University of California, Santa Cruz
Prof. Benjamin L. Read

Professor's email:	bread@ucsc.edu. Email is the best way to reach me, much better than Canvas.
Course web site:	https://canvas.ucsc.edu/
Professor's web site:	https://benread.net
Course meetings:	Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30pm–3:05pm; attendance required
Classroom:	Physical Sciences Building 140
Office hours:	On Zoom: Mondays, 2:00–3:00pm, Thursdays, 11:00–12:00pm Please sign up at https://tinyurl.com/benreadofficehours You may also email me to make an appointment outside this time slot.
Date of this syllabus:	September 25, 2025, version 1. The syllabus may be updated during the academic term.

Overview

This course provides a broad introduction to the foreign relations of China. The rise of China—its growing economic clout, political influence, and military muscle—is often called the single most momentous process in the international relations of our time. We aim to understand this process from many perspectives, including by learning about Xi Jinping and what China is striving to accomplish under his leadership. As many (including the U.S. Secretary of State in 2012) have observed, in the context of a post-Cold War order centered on the United States, this ascendance raises the crucial question of “what happens when an established power and a rising power meet.” Thus, this course gives considerable attention to the U.S.–China relationship in its various manifestations, from differences over core values to technological competition. We examine how China interacts with other states in the Asia/Pacific, and how places such as the two Koreas, Japan, Taiwan, and Australia are reacting to their neighbor’s emerging prominence. The course also examines issues such as China’s influence on the developing world and global governance. In exploring each of these topics, we assess the value of major theoretical approaches to the study of international relations, particularly the realist tradition. We endeavor to understand the perspectives of China’s Communist Party leadership and ordinary people as well as external and critical points of view. There are no prerequisites for this course, nor is any Chinese language required, though there is an optional add-on module for students who are learning to read Chinese.

Course Goals and Core Questions

The goals of this course are:

- Students will build greater competence and confidence in interpreting international affairs.
- Students will gain a deeper understanding of China’s rise in power and prominence, and a host of related questions and issues, including China’s relationships with several other countries as well as the United States, and aspects of U.S. foreign policy.
- Students will sharpen skills of reading, research, speaking, and writing.

The course accomplishes the above goals in large part through sustained consideration of the following core questions:

- How should we understand China’s rising regional and global prominence, and what are its implications?
- What drives or what explains China’s foreign policy decisions?
 - What does the CCP leadership want?
 - How is it pursuing those goals in bilateral relationships, multilateral forums, and particular issue areas?

- Is China's foreign policy different under Xi than under previous leaders?
- In what ways are other countries responding to China's rise?
 - Are they "balancing" against China or "bandwagoning" with China? Something else?
- How have the United States and China dealt with one another across a range of issues and problems?
 - To the extent that there are frictions or tensions, what factors are responsible for them and how feasible is it to mitigate them? Is conflict inevitable between a rising power and an established "hegemon"?
- What are the advantages and limitations of the realist theory of international relations in illuminating the above questions?

Readings

We will read parts of a 2022 book by Bates Gill called *Daring to Struggle: China's Global Ambitions under Xi Jinping* (Oxford University Press). If you like having hard copies of books, you might order it on Amazon or elsewhere. I'll make sure that PDF copies of the individual chapters are available if you prefer that.

All readings will be available on Canvas (canvas.ucsc.edu), unless otherwise indicated on the syllabus. In Canvas, see Files / Readings.

Assignments and Ground Rules

- **Self-introduction:** please send me an email in the first week of class introducing yourself. You may wish to lay out such basic facts as your year in school; college; major; prior courses (if any) in Asian languages, history, or politics, and in international relations; international travel experience (if any); future career interests; what you're most excited about in school and in your life; any challenges you're facing; and anything else you would like me to know about you. It can be useful for me to know such things, but really I would just like to read whatever you would like to tell me about yourself. Optionally, attach an ordinary, up-to-date photo of yourself with your face plainly visible so that I can more quickly learn everyone's name and face.
- **Attendance:** Attending class is firmly required. I'm not indifferent to whether you're there or not. Quite the contrary: it matters a lot to me, and more importantly, to you. Your being there helps you learn and makes the class work. Good attendance is rewarded with a modest bonus. Unexcused absences will lower your quarter grade. Two percentage points will be deducted from your course grade for every unexcused absence. To put that in perspective, the difference between a B+ and a C+ is ten percentage points. It is entirely possible to fail the course through non-attendance; this has happened before.
- **Optional 2-credit Chinese language add-on module:** For those who are learning Chinese or already speak or read it, I offer an entirely optional extra discussion session with materials tailored to your learning level. I will circulate information about this.
- **Discussion:** Contribute actively to class discussion. Participation in class counts for 10% of your class grade.
- **Reading:** This course involves a fair amount of reading, and the readings are required; complete them before the class meeting for which they are assigned. I will circulate discussion questions at least 24 hours before class to help guide you and to set the stage for in-class discussion.
- **In-class writing assignments:** Students will write a paragraph or two in response to one or more of the pre-assigned discussion questions in class. (25% of class grade)
- **Short briefing paper and briefing simulation:** For this assignment, you will first choose a topic involving a specific aspect or episode of China's relationship with another country. Then you will choose a role: you will be a young diplomat either in China's Foreign Ministry, or in the US State Department, or in the diplomatic service of another country. You will research and write a short, focused briefing paper (~2 pages) on the issue of your choosing. Importantly, you will also submit the five or so scholarly sources you used to write the paper, as PDFs. In the briefing phase, I will play the role of a busy and skeptical senior diplomat (your boss's boss, at the level of, in China's MFA, a Deputy Director General of the Department of North American and Oceanic Affairs, or the equivalent) In a short Zoom appointment, I will ask you tough questions about how your sources support the conclusions you have reached. I will circulate detailed instructions early in the quarter. Deadlines for components of this paper are as follows.
 - A one-paragraph proposal is due on Thursday, October 23, 2025 (2% of class grade).
 - A bibliography with 5 high-quality and substantive sources is due Monday, November 3, 2025 (3% of

- class grade)
 - The 2-page briefing paper is due Saturday, November 22, 2025 (10% of class grade).
 - The last day for the briefing is Friday, December 5, 2025 (10% of class grade.)
- **Final exam:** The final exam will be noon to 3pm on Monday, December 8, 2025 (40% of class grade). The final exam covers all the lectures, discussions, readings and themes of the course.
- **Midterm:** There will be no midterm.
- **Grading:** All assignments are scored on a 0-100 scale, where 90-100 is an A, 80-89 is a B, etc. Grades of A minus or higher are reserved for work of exceptionally high quality. The grade of B is for work that is truly good although not great. The grade of C is for minimally acceptable work.
- **Time commitment:** The UCSC Academic Senate reminds us: “Systemwide Senate Regulation 760 specifies that one academic credit corresponds to three hours of work per week for students during a 10-week quarter. This means that the average workload for a 5-credit course is 150 hours or 15 hours per week.” With this in mind, expect to spend each week, on average:
 - Lectures and discussion: 3 hours and 15 minutes
 - Reading, note-taking, and review for the exams: 6 hours and 45 minutes
 - Research and writing for the paper: 5 hours
- **Accommodations:** UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me privately during my office hours or by appointment, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. We would also like to discuss ways we can ensure your full participation in the course. We encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.
- **Course materials:**
 - **Slides and audio recording:** Within a few days after each lecture I will post the slides and an audio recording. The recording is mainly in case you had to miss class for some good reason. Please bear in mind that these are for your personal use only and shouldn't be distributed or posted on the public internet. The Academic Senate has asked faculty to include a note to this effect, as follows:
 - **Warning from the university about distribution of lecture notes and materials:** Please note that students may be disciplined for selling, preparing, or distributing course lecture notes, including notes created independently by students. The unauthorized sale of lecture notes, handouts, readers or other course materials is a violation of campus policies as well as state law. Violation by distribution to the public may also constitute copyright infringement subject to legal action.

Schedule of class meetings

#1, Thursday, September 25, 2025 Introduction

- (There are no required readings for today)
- **Optional reading:**
 - Sophie Wushuang Yi, “[China’s Victory Day Parade: A Tale of Two Audiences](#),” *The Interpreter* (published by The Lowy Institute in Australia), September 22, 2025
 - Chris Buckley, “[China’s Combative Nationalists See a World Turning Their Way](#),” *New York Times* (December 14, 2020), <https://nyti.ms/3acJMPN>

#2, Tuesday, September 30, 2025 Realism as a general theory of international relations

- John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (Norton, 2001), chapters 1 and 2
- Zheng Yongnian, “Constructing China’s Independent Knowledge System of International Relations” (a dialogue in the official Communist Party newspaper, the People’s Daily), September 22, 2025

#3, Thursday, October 2, 2025

Influences from history and geography

- Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, “What Drives Chinese Foreign Policy?” in *China’s Search for Security* (Columbia, 2012), pp. 3–36
- Suisheng Zhao, “Rethinking the Chinese World Order: The Imperial Cycle and the Rise of China,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 24 (2015), 961–982

Optional further reading:

- Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750* (New York: Basic Books, 2012)

#4, Tuesday, October 7, 2025

The Party, leaders, and institutions 1

- Bates Gill, *Daring to Struggle* (2022), introduction and Chapter 1, “Opportunities,” pp. 1–31
- Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, “Who Runs Chinese Foreign Policy?” in *China’s Search for Security* (Columbia, 2012), pp. 37–62

#5, Thursday, October 9, 2025

The Party, leaders, and institutions 2

- Bates Gill, *Daring to Struggle* (2022), Chapter 2, “Legitimacy,” and Chapter 3, “Sovereignty,” pp. 32–77
- Suisheng Zhao, “President Xi’s Big Power Diplomacy: Advancing an Assertive Foreign Policy Agenda,” in Axel Berkofsky and Giulia Sciorati, eds., *Mapping China’s Global Future: Playing Ball or Rocking the Boat?*, ISPI (Milan, Italy, 2020), 24–36

Optional further reading:

- Andrew Small and Dhruva Jaishankar, “[“For Our Enemies, We Have Shotguns”: Explaining China’s New Assertiveness](#),” *War on the Rocks* commentary (July 20, 2020)
- Xi Jinping, “[Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era](#),” speech delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (October 18, 2017)
- Jianying Zha, “[China’s Heart of Darkness — Prince Han Fei & Chairman Xi Jinping](#),” *China Heritage* (2020)
- Avery Goldstein, “China’s Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping,” *International Security* 45:1 (2020)
- Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

#6, Tuesday, October 14, 2025

China and the United States: Key events and themes

- John Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present* (New York: Henry Holt, 2016), chapters 33–35
- James Mann, *About Face: A History of America’s Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (Knopf, 1998), chapters 15 and 16 on the Clinton administration and Most Favored Nation status, pp. 274–317

Optional further reading:

- Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015)
- Robert G. Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present*, 3rd edition (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017)
- David Shambaugh, *Tangled Titans: The United States and China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013)

#7, Thursday, October 16, 2025

China and the United States today: Focus on tech and trade

- Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, “The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2018
- Council on Foreign Relations, “The Contentious U.S.-China Trade Relationship,” April 14, 2025
- Gregory C. Allen, “Choking off China’s Access to the Future of AI: New U.S. Export Controls on AI and Semiconductors Mark a Transformation of U.S. Technology Competition with China,” CSIS (October 2022)
- Michael Riley and Ben Elgin, “China’s Cyberspies Outwit Model for Bond’s Q,” *Bloomberg*, May 2, 2013

Optional further reading:

- The Congressional Research Service often updates a very short report summarizing the U.S.-China trade relationship: “U.S.-China Trade Relations,” most recently updated September 9, 2025
- Information Office of the State Council, People’s Republic of China, “[The Facts and China’s Position on China-US Trade Friction](#),” white paper, September 2018
- Kai-Fu Lee. *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018.

#8, Tuesday, October 21, 2025

Values, culture, and human rights

- Zhou Qi and Andrew J. Nathan, “Political Systems, Rights, and Values,” ch. 3 in Nina Hachigian, ed., *Debating China* (2014)
- Susan B. Glasser, “Head of State: Hillary Clinton, the blind dissident, and the art of diplomacy in the Twitter era,” *Foreign Policy* (July/August 2012)
- MERICS, “China’s Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law: A Warning to the World” (June 24, 2021), short report

Optional further reading:

- Gary J. Bass, “Human Rights Last,” *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2011)

#9, Thursday, October 23, 2025

Submit proposal for briefing memo [NO IN-CLASSROOM SESSION]

- No readings are assigned for today. See Canvas for the assignment.

#10, Tuesday, October 28, 2025

China’s goals, continued: Leadership and ideas

- Bates Gill, *Daring to Struggle* (2022), Chapter 6, “Leadership,” and Chapter 7, “Ideas,” pp. 135–185

Optional further reading:

- Nadège Rolland, “China’s Vision for a New World Order,” National Bureau of Asian Research special report #83 (2020)
- Melanie Hart and Blaine Johnson, “Mapping China’s Global Governance Ambitions,” (Center for American Progress, 2019)
- Ted Piccone, “China’s Long Game on Human Rights at the United Nations,” (Brookings, 2018)
- Allen Carlson, “Is There Something Beyond No? China and Intervention in a New Era,” in DeLisle and Goldstein, eds., *China’s Global Engagement* (Brookings, 2017), 183–205
- Rosemary Foot, “U.S.-China Interactions in Global Governance and International Organizations,” in David Shambaugh, *Tangled Titans: The United States and China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013)
- Michael Fullilove, “China and the United Nations: The Stakeholder Spectrum,” *The Washington Quarterly* 34:3, 2011, pp. 63-85

#11, Thursday, October 30, 2025 The China-Taiwan-U.S. triangle 1

- Shelley Rigger, “Taiwan in U.S.-China Relations,” in David Shambaugh, *Tangled Titans: The United States and China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013)
- Jia Qingguo and Alan D. Romberg, “Taiwan and Tibet,” ch. 9 in Nina Hachigian, ed., *Debating China* (2014)

Optional further reading:

- People’s Republic of China, “The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era,” white paper (August 2022)

#12, Tuesday, November 4, 2025 The China-Taiwan-U.S. triangle 2

- Dexter Filkins, “A Dangerous Game over Taiwan,” *New Yorker* (November 14, 2022)
- Tony Tai-Ting Liu, “Xi Jinping’s Taiwan Policy: Soft Gets Softer, Hard Gets Harder,” in *The Xi Jinping Effect*, edited by Ashley Esarey and Rongbin Han (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2024), 207–225
- Oriana Skylar Mastro, “The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2021)
- Jessica Chen Weiss, “Don’t Panic About Taiwan,” *Foreign Affairs* (March 2023)

Optional further reading:

- Henley, Lonnie D., “Beyond the First Battle: Overcoming a Protracted Blockade of Taiwan,” CMSI China Maritime Reports #26 (2023)

#13, Thursday, November 6, 2025 China, Russia, and Ukraine

- Yu-Shan Wu, “Russia and Chinese Security,” *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Security* edited by Lowell Dittmer and Maochun Yu (2015)
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “[2025 Carnegie Global Dialogue: China and Ukraine](#),” Carnegie Global Dialogue Series (February 25, 2025) — prior to class, watch this discussion among Pavlo Klimkin, Zhao Long, Ellen Nakashima, and Eric Ciaramella
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis,” February 24, 2023

Optional further reading:

- Naazneen Barma, Ely Ratner and Steven Weber, “A World Without the West,” *The National Interest* July/August 2007, pp. 23-30

Tuesday, November 11, 2025: **Veterans Day, no class**

#14, Thursday, November 13, 2025 China’s “soft power” and “sharp power”

- Michael Forsythe, Jay Root, Bianca Pallaro, and David A. Fahrenthold, “How China Influences Elections in America’s Biggest City,” *New York Times*, August 25, 2025
- Alliance Canada Hong Kong, “[In Plain Sight](#): Beijing’s Unrestricted Network of Foreign Influence in Canada” (May 2021)

Optional further reading:

- The Hoover Institution, “Chinese Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance” (2018)

- Anne-Marie Brady, “Magic Weapons: China’s Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping” (2017)
- Marshall Sahlins, “China U,” *The Nation*, November 18, 2013
- Edward A. McCord, “Confucius Institutes in the U.S.: Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom; Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend” [a rebuttal to Sahlins; their exchange continued after this.]
- Joshua Kurlantzick, “How Beijing is Controlling Chinese Media in Canada and Around the World,” Council on Foreign Relations (2023)
- Yenna Wu, “Recognizing and Resisting China’s Evolving Sharp Power,” *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 26:2 (2019)
- Bonnie S. Glaser and Deep Pal, “Is China’s Charm Offensive Dead?” *China Brief*, 14/15, July 31, 2014
- Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China’s Soft Power is Transforming the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007)

#15, Tuesday, November 18, 2025 China and Australia

- Xuefei Zhang and Zihan Wang, “Re-orienting China-Australia Relations in the Theoretical Perspective of Security Dilemma,” SHS Web of Conferences 169 (2023)
- Xue, Ye, “Balancing against China with Confidence: Australia’s Foreign Policy toward China in 2020–22,” *Asia Policy* 18:1 January 2023, 115–141
- Katherine Lee and Elad Bruhl, “The Deterioration of Australia-China Relations: What Went Wrong?” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 78:3, 2024, 326–347

Optional further reading:

- Rory Medcalf, “Australia and China: Understanding the Reality Check,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 73:2 (2019), 109–118
- John Fitzgerald, “Overstepping Down Under,” *Journal of Democracy* 29:2 (April 2018), 59–67
- James Reilly, “Counting on China? Australia’s Strategic Response to Economic Interdependence,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol 5, 2012, 369–394
- Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia* (Hardie Grant, 2018)
- Critical review of *Silent Invasion* by David Brophy

#16, Thursday, November 20, 2025 China and the Korean Peninsula

- International Crisis Group, “Fire on the City Gate: Why China Keeps North Korea Close,” Asia Report #254, December 9, 2013
- Ellen Kim and Victor Cha, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: South Korea’s Strategic Dilemmas with China and the United States,” *Asia Policy* #21 (January 2016), pp. 101-121
- Patricia M. Kim, “Lost Illusions: How Beijing Failed to Woo Seoul,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 30, 2016
- Koh Ewe, “The K-Drama Line that Infuriated the Chinese Internet,” BBC, September 23, 2025

Optional further reading:

- Chen Jian, “[North Korea’s Relations with China](#),” Woodrow Wilson Center paper

#17, Tuesday, November 25, 2025 China and Brazil [NO IN-CLASSROOM SESSION]

- We will not meet in class. Prof. Read will pre-record a short lecture.
- The final exam will include a required question on China and Brazil
- Ryan C. Berg and Carlos Baena, “The Great Balancing Act: Lula in China and the Future of U.S.-Brazil Relations,” CSIS 2023
- André Luiz Reis da Silva, Juli Arusiewicz Berta, and Maiara de Almeida Cardozo Nunes, “Brazil-China Relations since 2003: Convergences and Divergences,” *Janus* 15:2 (December 2024)
- Natalia Ceppi and Gisela Pereyra Doval, “Brazil-China Bilateral Link During the 21st Century: Business as Usual,” *Janus* 15:2 (December 2024)

Thursday, November 27, 2025: **Thanksgiving Day, no class**

#18, Tuesday, December 2, 2025 China and the Developing World: The Belt and Road Initiative

- Prior to class, watch the movie “When China Met Africa” (2010). I will explain how to view it.
- *The Economist* magazine, set of articles from a special report on China’s Belt and Road Initiative (February 2020)
- Maria Abi-Habib, “[How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough up a Port](https://nyti.ms/2lwfnHU),” *New York Times* (June 25, 2018), <https://nyti.ms/2lwfnHU>
- Brook Larmer, “Is China the World’s New Colonial Power?” *New York Times Magazine*, May 2, 2017

Optional further reading:

- Cynthia A. Watson, “Concentrated Interests: China’s Involvement with Latin American Economies,” in DeLisle and Goldstein, eds., *China’s Global Engagement* (Brookings, 2017), 123–154
- Nicholas Casey and Clifford Krauss, “It Doesn’t Matter if Ecuador Can Afford This Dam. China Still Gets Paid.” *New York Times*, December 24, 2018
- Ching Kwan Lee, *The Specter of Global China: Politics, Labor, and Foreign Investment in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018)
- Ben Lampert and Giles Mohan, “Sino-African Encounters in Ghana and Nigeria: From Conflict to Conviviality and Mutual Benefit,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 43/1 (2014), pp. 9-39
- Check out this photo essay: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/08/a-new-silk-road>

#19, Thursday, December 4, 2025 China and Southeast Asia

- David M. Lampton, Selina Ho, and Cheng-Chwee Kuik, *Rivers of Iron: Railroads and Chinese Power in Southeast Asia* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020), 1–9, 84–150

Optional further reading:

- Brantly Womack, “Xi Jinping’s Diplomatic New Normal: The Reception in Southeast Asia,” in *The Xi Jinping Effect*, edited by Ashley Esarey and Rongbin Han (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2024), 226–248
- Howard W. French, “China’s Dangerous Game,” *The Atlantic*, October 13, 2014