This course is a seminar in Chinese grand strategy and foreign policy. We will explore major continuities and discontinuities in China’s approach to the modern world from the height of the Qing Empire through today (a period roughly equivalent to the existence of the United States). And we will examine how current Chinese strategy seeks to shape its future.

As the People’s Republic of China rises to preeminence in world affairs, it is critical that U.S. strategists have a deeper understanding of how China’s strategy and statecraft has developed over its history. What makes Chinese strategy unique is the fact that China is both a civilization and a nation-state—or “a civilization pretending to be a nation-state” as sinologist Lucian Pye has described it. It has a strong sense of how the world should be ordered. It is also the only country in the world that still rules most of its imperial territories.

Throughout China’s strategic history, it has faced critical turning points. Given our time constraints, we will begin with an overview of China today under Xi Jinping’s leadership. We will then turn to the late Qing China, when the Middle Kingdom was at the height of its power and had organized its foreign relations into what is now commonly referred to as the “Chinese world order.” We will then look at the attempts of the new Chinese nation-state to “reunify” the Qing borders and to contend with a succession of tectonic shifts in world affairs (1911 to 1949). Next, we will study the period of “Maoism,” during which China pursued a revolutionary, Communist foreign policy (1949 to Mao’s death). Finally, we will consider the period of “reform and opening,” from 1978 to the present, and discuss whether China’s grand strategy faces a new turning point as the post-WWII global order is undergoing severe strain.

The main objective of this course is to develop an analytical framework to assess the merits of the current debates about China’s strategy. We will answer some of the following questions:

1) What does China see as its place in world affairs, particularly in Asia? What is China’s vision of an alternative Chinese-led world order? How is such an order similar/different from Imperial China at the height of its power?
2) What strategies is China implementing to advance its ends?
3) What are some of the constraints China faces given its embrace of significant parts of the global order and the current balance of power?
4) How should the U.S. respond?

**Discussants:** Discussants are assigned to specific questions below and should be ready to offer a reflective response to their assigned question during the seminar. Discussants do not need to prepare a formal written response, but they are encouraged to work from personal notes.

**Sessions:** Our course will take place on Zoom. All times are Eastern Standard; please adjust for your own time zone.
Monday, July 13, 2020

10 a.m. to Noon ET  Xi Jinping & the China Dream

Readings:
- Dan Blumenthal, “Introduction” and “Big Ambitions,” The China Nightmare (forthcoming)
- Excerpt from “Xi Jinping’s Report at the 19th CPC National Congress,” Xinhua, November 3, 2017

Discussion Questions:
1. The “China dream”: What does it mean? What is the CCP’s grand strategic objective?  [Discussant: James Beckwith]
2. Does the “China dream” represent a break with past Chinese grand strategy or a continuation of it?  [Discussant: Zane Zovak]
3. How does Xi Jinping envision China achieving its strategic objectives?
4. How has Xi’s strengthening of the CCP impacted his strategy?

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

10 a.m. to Noon ET  Why Global Centrality?: The Historical Legacy

Readings:
- Dan Blumenthal, “China: The Imperial Legacy,” Rise of the Revisionists: Russia, China, and Iran, ed. Gary Schmitt
- Chen Jian, “Introduction,” Mao’s China and the Cold War, p. 1–16

Discussion Questions:
1. How did China under the Qing understand itself in relation to its various neighbors—the Mongols, East Eurasians, Vietnam, and Korea? What policies did it pursue toward those neighbors? What was “Sinification”?
2. What would it mean to “reunify” the Qing Dynasty empire? How successful has China been in reconstituting its historical holdings?
3. Is China’s imperial mindset compatible with the Westphalian system of international relations based on “sovereign equals”?

4. How did Mao understand China’s strategic situation post-WWII? How did he respond to that situation? What were his strategic objectives? How did he use alliances to achieve his objectives?

5. In what ways has China become a modern nation-state? In what ways is it still a premodern civilization/empire?

**Friday, July 17, 2020**

**10 a.m. to Noon ET**  
Mao, Cont’d | Deng’s National Rejuvenation

**Readings:**
- Excerpts from Henry Kissinger, *On China*
  - “Chapter 17: A Roller Coaster Ride Toward Another Reconciliation: The Jiang Zemin Era,” p. 447–86
- Yasheng Huang, “How Did China Take Off?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26, no. 4 (Fall 2012)

**Discussion Questions:**
1. How did Deng Xiaoping understand China’s strategic situation? How did he respond to that situation? What were his strategic objectives?
2. What was “reform and opening”? What did Deng hope to achieve with this policy?
3. In what ways has China become a “post-modern,” globalized nation? In what was does it remain a modern nation-state? An empire?
4. Are Deng’s changes reversible? Is it possible to de-globalize China?

**Tuesday, July 21, 2020**

**10 a.m. to Noon ET**  
Deng, Cont’d | The Recentralization of Dictatorship

**Readings:**
- Joseph Fewsmith, Chs.1 & 2, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge University, 2018)
Discussion Questions:
1. Why did the CCP end its policy of reform and opening?
2. Is there a unique Leninist Party approach to the world? Is the CCP capable of reform which could enable it to tackle the challenges of the 21st century?
3. How do Chinese leaders today understand China’s strategic situation? What internal threats do they see? What is their perception of the U.S.?

Thursday, July 23, 2020

10 a.m. to Noon ET Implications for America

Readings:

Discussion Questions:
1. How have Xi and the CCP responded to their strategic environment? What actions have they taken toward internal threats, their neighbors, and the U.S.?
2. What continuities and discontinuities do you see with China’s strategy, past and present? In what ways is it still acting as an empire? A nation-state? A globalized economy?
3. What are the strategic implications of China’s grand strategy for the U.S. and its allies?
Suggested Background Reading
(Available electronically and in hard copy upon request)

General

1) Christopher Ford, “Chapter 3: Confucian Conceptions of Order,” Mind of an Empire: China’s History and Modern Foreign Relations, p. 29–38

2) Bruce A. Elleman, Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders: Twenty Neighbors in Asia


Qing Dynasty

1) Peter Perdue, “Chapter 16: Frontier Expansion in the Rise and Fall of the Qing,” China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia, p. 547–58

2) Odd Arne Westad, “Chapter 4: Republic,” Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750, p. 123–70


4) Alain Peyrefitte, “Chapter 86: In Exchange for Tea: Opium,” and “Chapter 87: Military Action,” The Immobile Empire

Mao

1) Chen Jian, “Chapter 4: China’s Strategies to End the Korean War, 1950–1954,” Mao’s China and the Cold War, p. 85–117


Deng

**China Today**


5) Ian Johnson, “Chapter 2: Ritual: The Lost Middle,” *Souls of China*