

GVPT 289J: Uncertain Partners: The United States and China in a changing world  
Spring 2017  
M/W 9-9:50AM  
JMZ 0220  
(Discussion sections on Fridays)

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**Introduction**

The rapid ascent of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a major political and economic power has meant that its relationship with the United States has become central in contemporary international politics. To an increasing extent, some of the biggest global challenges—ranging from nuclear proliferation, to climate change, to economic growth—require U.S.-China cooperation if they are to be managed effectively.

Yet the U.S.-China relationship is at times turbulent, and its future remains highly uncertain. A persistent bilateral trade imbalance, for instance, has led to vocal demands by many U.S. politicians for a tougher U.S. trade policy toward China, while U.S. arms sales to Taiwan often provoke a strong reaction from the PRC. Meanwhile, some in Washington view China's rapid economic and military modernization with alarm—fearing that a stronger China will threaten U.S. allies and interests in the region.

Will the U.S. and China be able to forge a closer partnership that will enable them to cooperate in dealing with some of the vexing challenges facing the international community? Or are they

more likely to drift toward a more adversarial relationship, as China's growing power—and the US reaction—generate a vicious cycle of mutual mistrust?

In this class, students will learn about the history of U.S.-China relations, and will be exposed to many of the current issues facing the relationship. Key topics and questions to be addressed include:

- The U.S.-China relationship has changed from highly adversarial during the early Cold War, to a close partnership in the latter Cold War, to an ambiguous post-Cold War relationship that is sometimes characterized by tension and sometimes by cooperation. How can we account for these shifts?
- The issue of Taiwan remains central to the U.S.-China relationship. Beijing claims the island as a part of China, but the United States has provided substantial support to Taiwan's defense capabilities—something China views as interference in the PRC's internal affairs. Why is Taiwan such a major issue in U.S.-China relations? Why is Taiwan so important for China, and why has the U.S. provided support for Taiwan? What are the prospects for conflict and peace in the Taiwan Strait?
- Over the past three decades, China has seen tremendous economic growth. Though still a developing nation with living standards that lag far behind the U.S., China is now the world's second largest economy and largest exporting nation. Should we expect this growth to continue? What are the challenges facing China as it continues to develop economically?
- What are the prospects for political change in China, and how might political change affect future U.S.-China relations?
- Why have economic relations between the two countries become so extensive, and what are the implications for political relations between Washington and Beijing?
- As China has developed economically, it has also begun a program of military modernization. What are the implications for regional stability and U.S.-China relations?

### **Learning outcomes**

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify major issues and questions pertaining to US-China relations.
- Identify key events in US-China relations and explain their significance.
- Understand and critically evaluate some of the arguments advanced by experts on US-China relations.
- Communicate effectively on US-China relations. Students should be able to make reasoned oral and written arguments relating to important issues in US-China relations.

### **Course requirements**

The class will consist of 2 lectures each week taught by Prof. Kastner and a discussion section led each week by one of the assistants, Xiaonan Wang and Kainan Gao. Both the lecture and

the discussion section are required. Students are expected to come to discussion sections having done the readings for the week.

Grades will be assigned using the plus/minus system, based on the following:

- A midterm exam on Wednesday, March 15 (20% of the final grade)
- A final exam on Wednesday, May 17 (25% of the final grade)
- A paper (approximately 6 pages long), due Friday, April 28 (25% of the final grade)
- A preliminary bibliography and topic statement for the paper, due Friday, March 10 (5% of final grade)
- A draft of the paper, due Friday, April 7 (5% of the final grade)
- Workshop comments and participation (to take place in discussion sections on April 21; 5% of the final grade)
- Active participation in discussion sections (15% of the final grade).

The paper assignment: Details regarding the paper assignment will be distributed early in the semester. Students will be expected to use outside readings, and to hand in a brief topic statement and bibliography on March 10. A draft of the paper will be due on April 7, and students will be expected to read the draft papers of several other students in their discussion section and provide feedback. On April 21, students will participate in a workshop (in discussion sections), where they will break into small groups to discuss and provide constructive feedback on each other's papers. The final paper will then be due in section on April 28.

### **Class policies and other important information**

#### Cheating:

I take cheating very seriously, and will not hesitate to forward a case to the Office of Student Conduct if I suspect academic misconduct.

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit: <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html>.

### Laptops, cellphones, and other distractions:

Using electronic devices in class not only undercuts your ability to learn, but also distracts others (including me), thus affecting the ability of other students to learn.

Students wishing to use laptops in class must first sign a statement indicating that they will only use their laptops for legitimate course-related reasons such as taking notes, and that they will sit near the front of the class while using their laptop. Failure to comply (such as by surfing the web, checking email, etc.) will result in loss of laptop-using privileges.

Cellphone use will not be tolerated. Please silence your cellphone and refrain from using it during class—which is distracting to me and to other students. If I can hear you talking, it means you are too loud and are disturbing the class.

Violation of these policies will negatively affect your course participation grade.

### Absences, etc.

Though I will not take attendance in lecture, it is required and the material presented in lectures will be covered in course exams. If you have a legitimate reason for missing a major grading event (such as a medical issue, etc.), please contact me as soon as possible, preferably by email. If you miss a discussion section for a legitimate reason, please contact the TA as soon as possible and, if necessary, provide documentation.

For information on University policies regarding excused absences for medical or other reasons, and information on other course related policies, please refer to the Office of Undergraduate Studies webpage on course related policies:

<http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>.

### Course readings

I have assigned 4 books for the course, which will be available from the University bookstore.

- James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (USA: Vintage). 0679768610
- Shelley Rigger, *Why Taiwan Matters: Small Island, Global Powerhouse* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield). 1442204812
- Susan L. Shirk, *China, Fragile Superpower: How China's Internal Politics Could Derail its Peaceful Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press). 0195373197

- Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: Norton). 978-0-393-35299-3

Additionally, numerous articles are assigned. Students are responsible for downloading these articles themselves via the library webpage.

## **Topics and reading assignments**

Week 1 (Jan. 25): Introduction

**NO READINGS FOR WEEK 1, AND NO SECTIONS ON JAN. 27**

### **Part I: History**

In this first part of the course, we will explore the history of US-China relations since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. In particular, we will consider why relations between the two countries have changed dramatically over time.

Week 2 (Jan. 30, Feb. 1): US-China relations during the early Cold War.

Though the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the US did not establish formal diplomatic relations with the PRC government until the late 1970s. Why didn't the US recognize the PRC in 1949? By late 1950, the United States and China found themselves fighting each other in a very costly war on the Korean Peninsula. Why did the two countries fight each other in Korea? Why did relations remain tense even after the conclusion of the war in 1953?

Week 2 Readings:

- Thomas J. Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace: The Lessons of Mao's Korean War Telegrams." *International Security* Vol 17, no. 1 (Summer 1992), 122-154.
- Mann, Prologue and chapter 1.

**NO CLASS ON MONDAY, FEB. 6**

Week 3 (Feb. 8): Rapprochement and normalization: Why did Nixon go to China?

After two decades of adversarial relations, relations between the US and China began to warm in the early 1970s, culminating in a 1972 visit to China by US President Richard Nixon. In late 1978, the US and the PRC established full diplomatic relations. What caused this turnabout? Why did Nixon go to China?

Week 3 Readings:

- Mann, chapters 2-5

Week 4 (Feb. 13, 15): US-China relations during the later Cold War; Tiananmen and its effect on US-China relations.

US-China relations were quite stable during the 1980s, but after 1989, relations between the two countries entered a more ambiguous phase. The end of the Cold War meant that a key reason for cooperation between the two countries was no longer salient. Meanwhile, the PRC crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in 1989 shocked the US public and led many in the US to hold a much more negative view of China. Why did the Tiananmen Square crackdown have such a lasting impact on the relationship?

Week 4 Readings:

- Mann, Chapters 7-11

Week 5 (Feb. 20, 22): A complicated relationship: US-China relations after the Cold War.

Relations between the US and China during the 1990s and 2000s fluctuated quite dramatically, at times becoming quite tense, such as following the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999, and at other times exhibiting considerable cooperation. What were the key factors influencing US-China relations in two decades after the end of the Cold War?

Week 5 Readings:

- Mann, Chapters 12, 15, 16
- Shirk, Chapter 8

## **Part II: China's Transformation and its Implications**

Since 1978, China has undergone a dramatic economic transformation. The economy has grown rapidly, and the country has become deeply integrated into global markets. But political institutions remain authoritarian. In this part of the course, we will consider China's economy and political system, the challenges to continued reform, and implications for US-China relations.

Week 6 (Feb. 27, March 1): Reform and Opening: China's Economic Miracle.

Beginning in 1978, China embarked on an economic reform program that resulted in a gradual transformation into a market economy. The economy has averaged nearly 10 percent annual growth, and average living standards—though still lagging far behind those seen in developed countries—have improved dramatically. This week we will explore China's dramatic economic transformation.

Week 6 Readings:

- Shirk, Chapters 1-2

Week 7 (March 6, 8): China's Political System; Economic and Political Challenges.

China's economic transformation has not been accompanied by a political transformation. How does the political system work? What are the political and economic challenges facing China? What are the prospects for continued rapid economic development? What are the implications for US-China relations?

Week 7 Readings:

- Shirk, Chapters 3-4

**PAPER TOPIC STATEMENT AND PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE IN SECTION MARCH 10**

Week 8 (March 13, 15)

Monday will be a review session, and the midterm will be held on Wednesday.

**MIDTERM EXAM: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15**

**NO READINGS FOR WEEK 8, AND NO SECTIONS ON MARCH 17**

**[Spring Break, March 19-26]**

**Part III: The Question of Taiwan**

Taiwan has been a persistent issue in US-China relations. When the Chinese Communists established the PRC in 1949, the US continued to recognize instead the Nationalist government which by then had been forced to retreat to Taiwan. Since switching recognition in 1979, the

US has continued to provide support for Taiwan, including arms sales; the PRC, meanwhile, views Taiwan as a province that must ultimately be reunified with the rest of China. Why has this been such an intractable issue, and what are the prospects for resolution?

Week 9 (March 27, 29): Origins of the Taiwan issue and its evolution over time.

After considering the origins of the Taiwan issue, we will examine political developments in Taiwan since 1949. In the 1980s, Taiwan underwent a process of democratization which culminated in direct presidential elections in 1996. What are the implications of Taiwan's democratization for the US relationship with Taiwan? How has democratization affected relations between Taiwan and the PRC?

Week 9 Readings:

- Rigger, Chapters 1, 2, 4

Week 10 (April 3, 5): Looking forward: Prospects for conflict and peace in the Taiwan Strait.

After 8 years of détente that began in 2008, relations in the Taiwan Strait have again become tense. How stable is the Taiwan Strait likely to be in the years ahead? Is military conflict a real possibility? Is US support for Taiwan likely to persist into the future?

Week 10 Readings:

- Rigger, Chapters 6 and 8
- Shirk, Chapter 7

**FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER DUE APRIL 7**

**Part IV: Other Key Issues in Contemporary US-China Relations**

In this final section of the class, we will consider several other key issues facing the contemporary US-China relationship.

Week 11 (April 10, 12): Economic relations: Partnership or strife?

China-US trade flows have burgeoned in recent years. While closer economic ties have brought benefits to both countries, they have also given rise to new frictions. This week we will explore some of the sources of these frictions. We will also consider the implications of China's vast holdings of US treasury bonds.

Week 11 Readings:

- Daniel W. Drezner, “Bad Debts: Assessing China’s Financial Influence in Great Power Politics.” *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Fall 2009): 7-45.
- Christensen, Introduction and Chapters 1-2.

Week 12 (April 17, 19): Global governance: the environment and nuclear nonproliferation

The US and China are the world’s two largest economies and the two largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions. To what extent is cooperation between Washington and Beijing likely on climate change issues? To what degree have the US and China been able to cooperate on the issue of nuclear proliferation? On the nuclear issue, we will pay particular attention to the case of North Korea.

Week 12 Readings:

- Christensen, Chapters 3-5.

**IN SECTION ON APRIL 21, STUDENTS WILL UNDERTAKE SMALL-GROUP WORKSHOP/DISCUSSION OF DRAFT PAPERS**

Week 13 (April 24, 26): Finish non-proliferation; start discussion on China’s military modernization.

We will continue the discussion this week on US-China cooperation (or not) on the nuclear proliferation issue. We will then shift to a discussion of China’s military modernization. As China’s economy has developed, the country has also embarked on an ambitious military modernization program. What are the implications for US-China relations? Will a stronger Chinese military pose a threat to the US, and how might we expect the US to respond? What challenges does China face as it continues to pursue military power?

Week 13 Readings:

- M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Search for Military Power,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 31, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 125-141.
- Christensen, Chapters 6-7.

**FINAL PAPER DUE IN SECTION, APRIL 28**

Week 14 (May 1, 3): The US Pivot to Asia and the prospects for a US-China Security Dilemma; the disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea.

A number of regional issues pose challenges to future stability in East Asia. For instance, Countries surrounding the South China Sea (including China) are involved in numerous maritime

and territorial disputes, and at times these disputes can generate significant tensions. How have China and the US tried to manage these challenges, and what are the prospects for future conflict and cooperation on these issues?

Week 14 Readings:

- Christensen, Chapter 8 and epilogue.
- Shirk Chapter 6.
- Robert S. Ross, "The Problem with the Pivot," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 91, no. 6 (Nov/Dec 2012): 70-82.

Week 15 (May 8, 10): Prospects for the future under a Trump administration; review for final.

**NO READINGS OR SECTIONS THIS WEEK**

**SCHEDULED DATE OF THE FINAL EXAM: WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 8-10AM.**