GGS 317-517 Geography of China
Spring 2025, Thursdays 1:30 – 4:10 pm
2310 Exploratory
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Canvas: https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/
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Canvas: https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/

Course Description:

Catalog Description: Survey the physical, resources, environmental and population characteristics of China, and its urban, economic, and transportation systems development from a geographical perspective.

Besides studying the above themes/topics systematically in detail, the course will divide China into three regions and each region will be studied in depth. The roles of China's culture, history, and its relationships with countries globally (geopolitical geography) will transpire across the study of all the themes/topics and regions.

Today's China is of global significance in all aspects: economically, environmentally, politically and social-culturally. What this country does affects us (U.S. and the world) today and will affect us more in the future. Therefore, developing a comprehensive understanding about different aspects of this country and its relations to the global society are important. The primary **objective** of this course is to provide students background knowledge of China in order to better understand the current and future affairs related to China. A specific contribution of this course to such an understanding is to emphasize the roles of geography/space in affecting China.

This course satisfies the **Mason Core Global Understanding/Contexts** requirement and the **Non-Western** requirement. Besides the Global Understanding/Contexts learning outcomes, the course also has another set of course-specific learning outcomes.

Student Engagement:

The course has no subject-specific prerequisite. It is lecture-centered with discussions and different writing assignments to support various learning objectives. China is a country that is much less homogeneous than most people perceived, and has a highly complex "character." The country, its people and geography need to be understood from multiple positions. While lectures and readings offer a partial view of China based on the instruction's positionality, a more comprehensive understanding would require perspectives based on different positionalities, including those of the students and other global citizens. Thus, your active participation by bringing the perspectives from different positionalities is critical to the successful learning of this course.

We will have class discussions occasionally and many issues can be assessed from multiple positions. I would like to see you engaged in these discussions by taking your own position and/or assuming the position of a citizen or government official of a country. When you express your view(s) in the discussion, please state your position(s) first so that others can interpret your comments appropriately given the positional context(s). An important lesson to

learn here is that different positionalities can both facilitate and constrain how one approaches and understands an issue.

Another engagement channel will raise the efficiency of the course delivery. Lecture slides will be available before class meets. By reviewing these slides in advance, students should help identify areas that need elaborations or clarifications and share these areas with the instructor and other students (via Discussion Board). Class lectures will then be adjusted to address these issues.

Learning Outcomes:

Global Contexts Learning Outcomes (GCLOs):

1) Identify and explain how patterns of global connections across nations and/or cultures have shaped societies to create interdependence and inequality
2) Use a disciplinary lens to demonstrate knowledge of how at least one nation and/or culture participates in or is affected by global contexts
3) Apply an understanding of one's own positionality within a globally interdependent and unequal world to analyze solutions to global problems

Course-specific general outcome: After finishing the course, students will not be an expert of China, but are expected to have a general knowledge of China to serve as the basis to a better understanding of the current issues and development of China today. Therefore, students will be evaluated by how much they know about the basics of China and how well they can understand and interpret current issues of China.

Course-specific Learning Outcomes (CSLOs):

1) Acquire the basic background knowledge about China, including history, culture, physical layout, environmental characteristics, population and political settings.
2) Expose to the recent developments of China in major themes from a geographical perspective.
3) Critically analyze and interpret current phenomena and events in China, and identify the roles of geography/space in the processes.

How should students learn?

The major learning activities include: 1) review lecture slides; 2) identify and report issues that require elaborations or clarifications; 3) attend weekly lectures; 4) take lecture notes; 5) participate in-class discussions; and 6) completing written assignments. Additional readings from the textbook and other materials may be required occasionally.

Written assignments serve two purposes: they offer students the opportunities to learn and apply class materials. Thus, submissions reflect how much students have learned and can comprehend. Therefore, they can also be used for assessing students' performance.

Texts:

Required Text:

Wong, D. W., K. K. Wong, H. Chung, and J. W. Wang (2018). *China: A Geographical Perspective*. Guilford.

References:
Dunford, M and W. Liu. 2014. *The Geographical Transformation of China*. Routledge.
Gamer, R. E. 2008. *Understanding Contemporary China* (3rd Edition). Lynne Rienner
    Publishers.
Hsieh, C-M. and M. Lu (et al.) 2004. *Changing China: A Geographic Appraisal*
    Westview Press.
Leeming, F. 1993. *The Changing Geography of China*. Blackwell.
Naughton, B. J. 2006. *The Chinese Economy*. MIT Press.
Veeck, G., C. W. Pannell, X. Shen and Y. Huang. 2021. *China's Geography:
    Globalization and the Dynamics of Political, Economic, and Social Change.* (4th
    Ed). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

Assessment Methods: Points

[for all students]

	Points
Mid-term (online – 2/27, 4:30 – 6 pm)	15 (CSLO 1)
Take-home Final (5/1-3; open book and notes)	25 (CSLO 2 & 3, GCLO 1-3)
Applications (3, 10 points each): (detail below)	30 (CSLO 2 & 3, GCLO 1-3)
Positional essay (due: 2/3)	10 (CSLO 1-3; GCLO 3)
Structured short research paper (due: 3/30)	20 (CSLO 1-3; GCLO 1-2)

[for 517 students only]

	Points
Short research paper	20 (CSLO 2-3)

- Total points will be scaled back to 100

Distribution of the total final scores (for GGS 317) will be used to determine the final grades using a "sliding scale" (curved): highest scores will receive A, and average scores will receive B- or C+. Percentages of students receiving the corresponding grades will be approximately: 20-30% (A), 35-50% (B), 20-30% (C). D and F grades will be assigned only if necessary. For GGS 517, an average score will receive A- or B+.

    !! All materials submitted to meet the evaluation criteria should be completed in accordance with the Mason's Academic Standards Code (https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/academic-standards-code/).

Incomplete will be handled strictly according to the University policy. Make-up exams are not given unless under unusual circumstances such as serious illness. Proof (documentation) is necessary to be eligible for make-up exams. No early exams will be given.

Schedule & Outline:

A brief schedule of the course is provided below. A detailed schedule including assignments is posted on Canvas.

Date	Chapters/Topics	Content
	Pre-course actions	
Week 1 1/21 – 26	*Background* 1: Introduction: The Aspiring Dragon	1) provides background information of China to support other chapters
Week 2 1/27 – 2/2	*Background* 2: Environment & Resources: Diverse & Abundant	2) discusses the physical layout and characteristics of the country and provide a brief assessment of its resource base and the geographical distributions of resources
Week 3 2/3- 2/9	*Background* 3: Population: Dynamic and Diverse	3) describes the demographic & racial-ethnic characteristics, geographical distribution, population dynamics, and cultural and political issues
Week 4 2/10-16	*Topics* 4: Agriculture, Food & Culture	4) provides an overview of the agricultural development in China (in related to Chapters 2 and 3), and help readers understand and appreciate the geographical variation of Chinese food culture
Week 5 2/17 – 23	*Topics* 5: Economic	5) dissects the economic systems from an economic reform-growth perspective, focusing on non-agricultural activities, the roles played by the Government and space. The distributions of economic activities at the provincial level will be reviewed.
Week 6 2/24 – 3/2		<u>**2/15 Mid-term: 1:30 – 3 pm**</u> (cover up to Ch. 4: background + agr.)
Week 7 3/3-9	*Topics* 6: Chinese Cities: Growing in Size and Number	6) provides a brief account of the evolving Chinese urban system, Chinese urbanization process in related to the economic development process (Chapter 5), the structure of the Chinese city systems and internal city structure, and the dynamics of cities in related to migration (Chapter 3)
Week 8 3/10 – 16		Spring Break
Week 9 3/17 – 23	*Topics* 7: Beyond the Cities: The Chinese Countryside	7) treating areas beyond urban/cities as part of the integrated and interdependent urban-rural system or continuum; meaning of rural and the changing rural culture
Week 10 3/24 – 30	*Topics* 8: Transportation Geography and E-Commerce Logistics	8) an overview of the recent developments of major transportation systems in China, intra-urban transportation, and the recent logistical service related to the boom of e-commerce

Week 11 3/31 – 4/6	*Topics* 9: Environmental Crisis with Chinese Characteristics	9) provides an assessment of major environmental issues of China, including the causes, impacts, and the future prospects of China's environment; particularly highlight issues with Chinese "characteristics"
Week 12 4/7 – 13	*Regions* 10: Coastal China	10) provides a geographical overview of the coastal region, variation in the level of economic development. Selected areas will be studied in detail.
Week 13 4/14 – 20	*Regions* 11: The Periphery of China	11) peripheral area of China is divided into three sub-regions (southwest, west and north-northeast). Physical, population, and economic characteristics of each sub-regions are discussed.
Week 14 4/21 – 27	*Regions* 12: Beyond the Mainland: Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan	12) provides the brief historical contexts for the three special territories, particularly about their geographical characteristics, their development trajectories over the past century, and their changing relationships with the Mainland
Week 15 4/28 – 5/4	*China in your "crystal ball"* 13: Crossroads	13) Based on what we know about the past and present, where will China be heading toward? **Final Take-Home Exam (5/1-3)**

Applications (30 points)

You are asked to complete **three applications** throughout the entire semester and each application carries 10 points. These applications facilitate the **GCLO** 1-3 below adapted for this course:

   a) Identify and explain how patterns of connections between China and other nations and/or cultures have shaped societies to create interdependence and inequality
   b) Use a geographical lens to demonstrate knowledge of how China participates in or is affected by global contexts
   c) Apply an understanding of one's own positionality within a globally interdependent and unequal world to analyze solutions to problems related to China

These applications also meet **CSLO**s 2 & 3:
- Expose to the recent developments of China in major themes from a geographical perspective.
- Critically analyze and interpret current phenomena and events in China, and identify the roles of geography/space in the processes.

Focusing on these two **CSLOs**, applications facilitate students to learn and aware, and critically analyze recent developments related to China from a geographical perspective. Each Application covers two or three chapters, and each session has **two parts.** I label them loosely as *Recent Development* and *Analysis-Interpretation*.

The textbook was published in 2018, not new enough to provide a snapshot of current China given the fast pace of developments in China and the global economy. Many new developments and phenomena were not captured in the text. Therefore, for each Application, you are asked to:

1. Identify *one development* or *phenomenon* in China that were not covered by the respective chapters in the text. *If the development or phenomenon was described in the text, you **can** still discuss it if your discussion is **significantly beyond the text**.* The development or phenomenon needs to be in ***post-Qing era*** (modern China). ***Describe*** and ***explain*** concisely the development or phenomenon, and demonstrate its relevancy to topics in respective chapters.

2. *Apply* what you learn in the class about China, critically *analyze* the development-phenomenon, and *interpret* the intentions and implications. If the development or phenomenon is not triggered by human actions, you can ignore the intention.

3. In either or both parts (Development & Analysis-Interpretation), you need to demonstrate at least one of the **GCLO**s (**a**, **b**, or **c** listed above). Please specific which GCLO(s) your application addresses.

4. *Additional research* may be needed to complete your applications write-up. An ***example (template)*** is provided in Canvas for your references.

5. Students need to *respond* to your classmate's posts. More detail is provided below.

6. ***Rubrics***, which are posted on Canvas, are provided to guide your work. Pay attention to the criteria based on which your write-up will be graded.

You need to use ***authoritative*** ***sources*** or materials to identify the new development or phenomenon. Specifically, your sources need to be in one of the following forms:
   a) a news article from a reputable source – a blog is not;
   b) a scholarly article published in an academic journal;
   c) a book or a monograph (or a book chapter or book section); or
   d) a documentary video of educational value.
The notes and references at the end of each chapter provide some sources; you may go beyond the list. If you find a source not on this list, please check with me before your selection.

Your write up of the ***development-phenomenon*** should be around **300 to 400 words** the most (the **Development** and **Analysis & Interpretation** sections only). Submit your write-up (paste) directly onto the **Discussion Board**. These Applications should not be merely expressions of opinions, but require formal and precise languages. Therefore, the *quality of writing* is counted and you need to polish your language.

Your reports and analyses will be shared with other students on the **Discussion Board** (peer-learning). Students will review each other and respond. However, responses should be insightful discussions rather than just general-superficial responses such as "a good/interesting topic" or "it is a good discussion." Apply what you learned about China so far to assess the topics critically, providing additional views, perspectives, or considerations.

Each student is required to ***review and respond*** to the posted applications of at least ***two other students***. *Your responses to your classmate's postings should not be simply agree/disagree. First, you do not need to agree or disagree – you can provide additional views or insights, or make new connections. If you want to agree/disagree, you need to provide support with logical arguments or evidence.* Student responses should be relatively short and concise (quality is more important than quantity; < 100 words). Student responses will account toward 25% of the score.

Research Paper (GGS 517 only):

Submit a library research paper of 8-10 pages of text (12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced), plus tables, figures and references. Students should conduct research on a specific geographical topic about China using refereed journals, books, and/or government documents. Below are some potential topics, but you are encouraged to develop your own. Feel free to discuss with the instructor on potential topics. The paper should include one or more research questions, results and findings.

• Impacts of flooding and urban development • Agriculture and desertification • Food security and urban expansion/urbanization • Housing market and government policies • Transportation infrastructure and economic development	• Industrial development and air pollution • China's foreign investment policies and globalization • The new geopolitics due to the Chinese policy in South China Sea • Tourism in China: domestic and international

Instructions and details of *Positional Essay* and *Structured Short Research Paper* are provided separately on Canvas (under Assignments)

Other Policies:

Academic Integrity: please refer to Mason's Academic Standards Code (https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/academic-standards-code/)

The Use of AI-generative material: Although this course does not have explicit policies addressing the use of AI to complete course assessments, policies of using AI partly fall under the **Academic Integrity** policies. No work submitted for this course is expected to use AI, except in searching materials. When AI must be involved (e.g., when using some search engines) in preparing submitted work, students should explicitly acknowledge the extent of using AI. Failing to do so will be a violation of academic integrity.

Mason Diversity Policy:

Please refer to the university non-discrimination policy and diversity statement. https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/non-discrimination-policy/ https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/general-teaching-resources/mason-diversity-statement/

GMU Email Accounts: Students must use their GMU email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See http://masonlive.gmu.edu for more information.

Office of Disability Services: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474, http://ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

GMU Resources:

The Writing Center: http://writingcenter.gmu.edu

University Libraries, Ask a Librarian: http://library.gmu.edu/ask

Counseling and Psychological Services: http://caps.gmu.edu

University Catalog: http://catalog.gmu.edu

University Policies: http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu
Academic Calendar (drop/withdrawal deadlines): https://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/

Course Materials and Student Privacy:

- All course materials posted to Canvas or other course site are private; by federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must not be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class.
- Video-recordings of class meetings that include audio or visual information from other students are private and must not be shared.

The University has compiled a list of common policies affecting all courses as the **Common Policies Addendum**. They are part of this syllabus and they can be accessed via the addendum hyperlink.

*The instructor reserves the right to modify this syllabus, but will notify students about the change.