

The Chinese Economy, ECON 232A, Spring 2026
Monday and Wednesday, 2:15 – 3:30 pm
Axinn 219

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Warner 312 walk-in hours: Tuesday, 1:15 – 2:45 pm, and Thursday, 10:30 am – 12:00 pm, 1:15 – 2:45 pm
Appointments via [Calendly](https://calendly.com/wpyle/meeting): hours vary by week (<https://calendly.com/wpyle/meeting>)

Course description: This course explores China's economy under Communist Party rule, with particular attention to its organization, growth, and transformation over the past half century. While our disciplinary focus is economics, we will necessarily engage with key political and historical factors.

The first half of the course is organized chronologically. We begin with the rise to power of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and examine the nature and consequences of the economic system imposed under Mao. We then trace the post-Mao reforms, beginning with those launched by Deng Xiaoping, which set China on a path of unprecedented growth, poverty reduction, and structural change. The second half of the course is more thematic, focusing on the economic system and challenges of roughly the past 15 to 20 years. We will seek to understand the internal workings of the "China model" and how it interacts with the global economy. Throughout the course, we will also reflect on how periods of rapid growth and structural change are experienced in the lives of ordinary individuals.

Our subject is daunting in both size and complexity. By some measures, China is now the world's largest economy, and it remains very much a moving target. Its younger generation, much like the one before it, is coming of age in a country vastly different from the one in which its parents grew up. To make sense of these dynamics, we will draw on a wide range of sources, including work by journalists, documentarians, and scholars from multiple disciplines. Guest speakers will join us as well. Many of you have studied, traveled, or even grown up in China, and your perspectives will be valuable to our collective learning.

Required Reading and Viewing: Ours is a reading and viewing intensive class. There are four assigned books available at the College Bookstore, each of which can also be accessed electronically, for free, from the Davis Library.

- The second edition of Arthur Kroeber's *The Chinese Economy: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2020) is the closest thing we have to a textbook; its virtues include its relatively up-to-date and comprehensive coverage as well as its balanced tone.
- The journalist Peter Hessler's *Country Driving* (2011), a personal favorite, will serve as the basis for a book review that you will submit in March; as much as any writing about China, it addresses my aim that you gain an appreciation for how periods of rapid economic change play out in the lives of ordinary people.
- *The Highest Exam: How the Gaokao Shapes China* (2025), by Ruixue Jia, Hongbin Li, and Claire Cousineau was an *Economist* "Best Book of the Year" in 2025; it examines how China's college entrance exam shapes economic outcomes and broader social norms. Claire Cousineau is a Middlebury alum.
- *Breakneck: China's Quest to Engineer the Future* (2025) by Dan Wang was listed by both the *Financial Times* and *The New Yorker* as one of their "Best Books of the Year" in 2025; it serves up an accessible account of China's industrial policy and technological ambitions, blending economic analysis with personal reflections.

Additional books from which I assign multiple chapters include Orville Schell and John DeLury's *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-first Century* (2013), Andrew Walder's *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (2017), and Richard McGregor's *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers* (2010). Copies of these are available on short-term reserve at the Davis Library Circulation Desk.

Additional assigned readings can be accessed electronically on our class Canvas page under "Readings".

Assigned video material can be accessed under "Viewings" on our class Canvas page. A couple of short audio and video clips are only accessible via embedded links in the schedule below.

Grades: Your final grade will be a function of your performance on a book review (10%), a movie review (10%), an in-class mid-term (15%), two structured academic controversies (20%, collectively), class participation (20%), and a final exam (25%). Your class participation grade will be a function of attendance and your contributions to discussions in class.

Your class participation grade will reflect both attendance and the quality of your contributions to in-class discussions.

In determining final grades, and in line with a new department policy intended to address grade inflation, an A will be reserved for the top quartile of students. Beyond that, I anticipate the median course grade to fall in the B+ to A- range.

There is no extra credit.

Except in cases of illness or family emergency, assignments will be considered late if submitted after the specified time on the specified day. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 15% per school day.

In the schedule below, the dates for exams, assignment submissions, and in-class Structured Academic Controversy activities are firm. The dates for covering specific topics and completing the associated readings are more flexible and may shift slightly depending on the pace of the course. Any changes will be announced in class and/or posted on Canvas.

Laptop, electronic resources and AI policy: Because the class works best when everyone is fully engaged, and because internet-connected devices can be a source of distraction, I ask that you take notes by hand or on a device not connected to the internet. If there are extenuating circumstances that make typing notes significantly easier for you, please see me to discuss an exception to this policy. To support in-class note-taking, I distribute hard copies of my PowerPoint slides.

There is no prohibition on the use of AI tools for coursework, provided that you clearly explain how you used them. Be aware, however, that AI-generated output may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. You are fully responsible for the accuracy of your work: a wrong answer is a wrong answer. Of equal or greater importance, relying on AI as a shortcut for completing assignments may limit your ability to learn the material and develop critical reasoning skills.

COURSE CALENDAR		
Week	Theme	Assessments and assignments
Feb 9, Feb 11	Introduction and Imperial China	
Feb 16, Feb 18	Communist Party of China and Mao	
Feb 23, Feb 25	Mao's economy and legacy	
Mar 2, Mar 4	Deng's "Reform and Opening Up"	
Mar 9, Mar 11	Structural change and economic performance through 2008	In-class test, Wednesday
March 11-12, Scott Rozelle (Stanford) visits campus, public talk 4:30 pm, March 11 th		
Mar 16, Mar 18	Hessler's <i>Country Driving</i>	Book review, due March 19
Spring break		
Mar 30, Apr 1	Society post-2008: migration, education, inequality, demographics	
Apr 6, Apr 8	Structured academic controversy	Op-ed due Apr 6; Reflection due Apr 10
Apr 13, Apr 15	Structure of post-2008 economic system	
Apr 20, Apr 22	Performance of post-2008 economic system	Movie review, due April 27
Apr 27, Apr 29	China and globalization	
May 4, May 6	Structured academic controversy	Op-ed due May 4; Reflection due May 8
May 18, Comprehensive final exam, 2:00 – 5:00 pm		

READING AND VIEWING CALENDAR

Wednesday, February 11

Read for class

- Wang, D. and A. Kroeber. 2025. "The Real China Model." *Foreign Affairs* 104:5.
- Wang, Z. 2014. *Never Forget National Humiliation*, chapter 2.

Monday, February 16

Read for class

- Schell, O. and J. Delury, 2013. *Wealth and Power*, chapter 9.
- Mao, Z. 1927. "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan."

View for class

- Williams, S., 1989. *China: A Century of Revolution, Part One: China in Revolution 1911-1949*.

Wednesday, February 18

Read for class

- Schell, O. and J. Delury, 2013. *Wealth and Power*, chapter 10.
- Walder, A., 2015. *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed*, chapters 5 and 8.

View for class

- Williams, S., 1994. *China: A Century of Revolution, Part Two: The Mao Years 1949-1976*.
- Yang, J., 2013. [Interview](#) with author of *Tombstone*.

Monday, February 23

Read for class

- Schell, O., 1977. "China I: Peking and Shanghai," *The New Yorker*, March 7.
- Schell, O., 1977. "China II: The Factory and the Farm," *The New Yorker*, March 14.

View for class

- Antonioni, M., 1972. *Chung Kuo*, Part I ([4](#) and [5](#)) , Part II ([1](#), [2](#), and [3](#)), Part III ([1](#) and [2](#)).

Wednesday, February 25

Read for class

- Kroeber, A. 2020. *China's Economy*, 49 - 53
- Schell, O. and J. Delury, 2013. *Wealth and Power*, chapter 11
- Schell, O., 1984. "The Wind of Wanting to Go It Alone," *The New Yorker*, January 23.

View for class

- Coldstream, R., 2009. *China's Capitalist Revolution*, "Opening the Door: How Deng Xiaoping Transformed China's Economy."

Listen to for class

- Kestenbaum, D. and J. Goldstein, 2012. "[The Secret Document that Transformed China.](#)"

Monday, March 2

Read for class

- Schell, O. and J. Delury, 2013. *Wealth and Power*, chapter 12
- Kroeber, A. 2020. *China's Economy*, 66 - 71

View for class

- Coldstream, R., 2009. *China's Capitalist Revolution*, "Becoming a Superpower: Deng Xiaoping's Reforms and their Legacy."

Wednesday, March 4

Read for class

- Kroeber, A. 2020. *China's Economy*, 25 - 48, 72 - 76, 80 - 84, 103 - 107
- Schell, O. and J. Delury, 2013. *Wealth and Power*, chapter 13

View for class

- William, S., 2003. *China in the Red*.

Monday, March 9

Read for class

- Kroeber, A. 2020. *China's Economy*, 93 - 102

View for class

- Fan, L., 2009. *Last Train Home*.
- Rozelle, S. 2021 [interview](#) with Hongbin Li.
- William, S., 2003. *China in the Red*.

Monday and Wednesday, March 16 and 18

Read for class

- Hessler, P., 2011. *Country Driving: A Journey through China from Farm to Factory*.

Monday, March 30

Read for class

- Kroeber, A. 2020. *China's Economy*, 207 - 226, 249 - 256
- Wang, D. 2025. *Breakneck*, chapter 4

Wednesday, April 1

Read for class

- Jia, R., H. Li, and C. Cousineau. 2025. *The Highest Exam: How the Gaokao Shapes China*.

Monday, April 13

Read for class

- Kroeber, A. 2020. *China's Economy*, 76-84, 117-141.
- McGregor, R. 2010. *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers*, chapters 1-2, 6.

View for class

- Zhou, H. 2015. *Chinese Mayor*.

Wednesday, April 15

Read for class

- Wang, D. 2025. *Breakneck*, Introduction, chapters 1-2.

Listen to for class

- Wong, S. 2022. [The Prince](#), episodes 1-4.

Monday, April 20

Read for class

- Naughton, B., 2024. "Re-engineering the Innovation Chain." *Current History*.
- Wang, D. 2025. *Breakneck*, Introduction, chapters 3, 5, 6-7.

Wednesday, April 22

Read for class

- Gunter, J., A. Brown, F. Chimits, A. Hmaidi, A. Vasselier, and M. Zenglein, 2025. "Beyond Overcapacity: Chinese-Style Modernization and the Clash of Economic Models." *MERICS Report*.
- Kroeber, A. 2020. *China's Economy*, 267-295.
- McMahon, and A. Polk. 2025. *China's Economic Transition: Debt, Demography, Deglobalization and Scenarios for 2035*, 1-48.

Monday, April 27

Read for class

- Friedberg, A. 2018. "Globalization and Chinese Grand Strategy," *Survival* 60, 7-40
- McMahon, and A. Polk. 2025. *China's Economic Transition: Debt, Demography, Deglobalization and Scenarios for 2035*, 49-69.

Wednesday, April 29

- Kroeber, A. 2020. *China's Economy*, 296-331.

Write a 900-word review of Peter Hessler's *Country Driving*.

A review is not simply a summary. It is your interpretation of what the book reveals and why it matters. Your task is to explain what you found most significant about Hessler's portrayal of China's economic transformation and how the book enhanced (or complicated) your understanding of the Chinese economy.

Somewhere in your review, you should briefly describe the book's organization and structure (the road trip, the village, the factory town). But summary should serve analysis, not substitute for it.

You have considerable discretion in terms of structure and emphasis. You may focus broadly (e.g., structural transformation, migration, entrepreneurship, state capacity, institutional change) or more narrowly (e.g., informal governance in villages, the culture of small-scale manufacturing, the meaning of mobility). You may center your review around a few carefully chosen anecdotes or move more evenly across the book's three sections. What matters is that you make clear how Hessler illustrates important features of China's evolving economy.

Consider your audience to be a well-educated reader with a general interest in China and a particular interest in how economies develop.

Expectations

Your review should:

- Advance a clear central insight or interpretation.
- Use specific examples from the book to support your claims.
- Demonstrate knowledge commensurate with the material covered in class.
- Be clearly written, thoughtfully organized, and stylistically engaging.
- Avoid grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors.
- Write economically and precisely.

This is not a traditional essay in the sense of requiring a formal introduction and conclusion or formal references to secondary material. You are encouraged to draw on class readings and discussions, but unless you quote directly from another source (which I discourage), no bibliography is necessary. If you do quote from any source other than Hessler, provide attribution directly in the text.

You may include a brief block quote from *Country Driving* if absolutely necessary, but the review should primarily reflect your own voice and analysis.

Suggestions as you work

- As you read, mark passages that seem especially revealing about markets, migration, entrepreneurship, state institutions, or social change.

- After finishing the book, reflect on why Hessler structured it as he did. Why those places? Why those people? Why that sequence?
- Draft an outline before writing. Think carefully about how to engage your reader from the start.
- You may consult other reviews (so long as you attach an additional “sources used” page), but your interpretation must be your own. Passing off the work of others as your own constitutes plagiarism.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

If you use artificial intelligence tools (e.g., ChatGPT or similar platforms) at any stage of completing this assignment, you must submit an additional one-page statement describing how you used them.

This statement should specify whether AI was used for idea generation, outlining, drafting, editing, fact-checking, or any other purpose, and should briefly reflect on how the tool shaped (or did not shape) your thinking and writing.

Failure to disclose AI use will be treated as a violation of academic integrity policies. Appropriate and transparent use, however, is permitted provided that the review reflects your own understanding, analysis, and voice.

Late Policy

Lateness will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from B+ to B) per weekday, not including holidays. For example, a review submitted one weekday late will drop 1/3 of a grade; two weekdays late, 2/3 of a grade; and so on.

Assignment: Movie Review of *Caught by the Tides*

Length: 900 words

Due: Monday, April 27, at 11:59 p.m. (Canvas upload)

Write a movie review of Jia Zhangke's *Caught by the Tides*. Your review should:

1. Explain what you believe the director's intended message about change in China over the course of the twenty-first century. You may find it helpful to distinguish between *what changed* (observable shifts in people's lives and in their environments) and *why it changed* (underlying economic, social, or institutional forces).
2. Support your interpretation with specific plot elements and/or character behaviors. Use specific scenes, moments, or character choices (not just general plot summary) to support your interpretation.

Style & Structure

- You have wide discretion in how to organize your review.
- Aim for clarity, flow, and thoughtful organization. Consider your readers to be people who haven't seen the film but are interested in socio-economic change in China.
- In developing your interpretation, consider how the film reflects economic transformations discussed in the course (e.g., migration, inequality, marketization, state policy, or changing life opportunities).
- Your review should be engaging and easy to read. It is not a traditional academic essay in the sense of needing a formal introduction, conclusion, or citations. Be creative.
- You may draw on ideas from our readings and class discussions, but avoid jargon and direct references to specific authors. The piece should read like a review, not a scholarly paper.

Evaluation

I will grade your work based on:

- Writing quality: clarity, flow, grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- Organization: logical structure and coherence
- Interpretation: originality and creativity in your reading of the film
- Evidence: well-chosen references to plot and character that support your argument
- Style: does it read like a review and is it lively and accessible, not academic?

Sources & Academic Integrity

You may consult published reviews or other sources, but your writing and ideas must be your own.

Plagiarism, including uncredited use of AI output, is a violation of the Honor Code.

If you draw directly on others' work or use AI, you must include a separate "Sources Used" page that clearly explains:

- What sources or tools you used
- How you used them (e.g., to check grammar, get editing suggestions, or spark ideas)

Important: You should not use AI to generate substantive content. Doing so will undermine your own development as a creative and critical thinker. Think of this review as an exercise in working out your own ideas.

In our classes on Monday and Wednesday, April 6th and 8th, we will hold our first *Structured Academic Controversy* (SAC), a debate and focus group discussion designed to explore opposing perspectives on a timely issue related to our class's subject matter. The exercise is intended to help you apply economic reasoning, engage with diverse views, and practice clear and persuasive oral and written communication.

Overview and deliverables

- Complete assigned readings before class on Monday, April 6 (everybody)
- Participate in debate on Monday *or* focus group on Wednesday (as per sign-up sheet)
- Submit written work to Canvas by the following deadlines:
 - Op-Ed (roughly 400 words): before 2:00 p.m. on Monday, April 6 (for those not debating on Monday)
 - Reflection Essay (600 words): before 11:59 p.m. on Friday, April 10 (everybody)

Topic

China has emerged as the dominant global force in automotive green technology. It controls the supply chains for electric vehicle (EV) batteries and critical minerals, manufactures at unmatched scale and cost, and produces EVs that are cheaper, better-ranged, and more technologically sophisticated than most of what American automakers currently offer. The United States has responded primarily with walls: 100 percent tariffs on Chinese EVs, sweeping restrictions on Chinese investment through Foreign Entity of Concern (FEOC) rules, and bans on Chinese-linked firms accessing federal clean energy tax credits. The costs of this approach are becoming harder to ignore. EVs remain expensive for American consumers, domestic battery manufacturing is struggling to scale, and legacy U.S. automakers face mounting competitive pressure both at home and in global markets.

Other countries are making different bets. Canada recently struck a deal to import Chinese EVs at minimal tariffs. European automakers have pursued licensing and joint venture arrangements with Chinese battery firms. Ford's licensing agreement with CATL and Tesla's reliance on CATL cells for its Megapack batteries show that even within the U.S., commercial logic is pushing toward engagement. The question is whether Washington should get out of the way or whether the risks of deeper integration with Chinese firms in this strategically vital sector are simply too great.

Debate Prompt

We will debate whether the United States should lower barriers to Chinese participation in the American automotive green tech sector through some combination of reduced tariffs on EVs and components, and greater openness to licensing agreements, joint ventures, and direct investment by Chinese firms.

At stake are questions that cut across economics, industrial policy, and national security. Would easier access for Chinese goods and capital lower costs for American consumers and help close the EV competitiveness gap, or lock the U.S. into dangerous dependencies on a strategic rival? Can engagement be structured – through carefully designed deals, domestic content requirements, or technology transfer conditions – to deliver the benefits while managing the risks? Or is the automotive sector too strategically important to gamble on Chinese goodwill? And if tariffs and domestic subsidies alone cannot close the gap with China, what should the U.S. strategy be?

Readings to complete before class (Monday, April 6)

- Mary Gallagher, "[The U.S. Response to China's Dominance in Clean Energy](#)," in *Getting China Right at Home* (SAIS).

- Jonas Nahm, "[The United States Needs a Nuanced Response to China's Manufacturing Might](#)," in *Getting China Right at Home* (SAIS).
- Kate Logan and Li Shuo, "A U.S. Vibe Shift on Chinese Clean Tech?" *China Climate Hub Monthly Reflections*, February 2026. See Canvas "Readings" folder.
- [Michigan Battery Plant's End Exposes U.S.-China Tech Gap](#)," *Battery Tech Online*, October 2025.
- Robert Atkinson, "[Don't Let Chinese EV Makers Manufacture in the United States](#)," Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, September 2025.
- David Hart, "[A Smarter U.S. Response to China's Electric Vehicle Revolution](#)," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 2026.

Debaters and focus group participants are especially encouraged to research additional perspectives, including recent news coverage of BYD's legal challenges to U.S. tariffs and the Canada-China EV deal.

Debate — Monday, April 6

Two four-member teams will debate: one supporting outright confiscation and one opposing it. Each team should designate two Speakers and two Answerers.

- Speakers: prepare and rehearse opening statements.
- Answerers: anticipate questions and craft responses.

Part One: opening statements (12 minutes)

- "Pro lowering barriers" Speakers: up to 6 minutes
- "Anti lowering barriers" Speakers: up to 6 minutes

Part Two: questions and rebuttals (20 minutes)

- Groups huddle, with each team preparing and asking one question of other side (4 minutes)
- "Pro lowering" Answerers respond to "Anti" question (4 minutes)
- "Anti lowering" Answerers respond to "Pro" question (4 minutes)
- "Anti lowering" Speakers ask two follow-ups of "Pro" Answerers (4 minutes)
- "Pro lowering" Speakers ask two follow-ups of "Anti" Answerers (4 minutes)

Part Three: conclusion (8 minutes)

- Groups huddle, with each team identifying strongest argument on other side (4 minutes)
- "Anti lowering" Answerers state strongest "Pro" argument (2 min)
- "Pro lowering" Answerers state strongest "Anti" argument (2 min)

Focus Group — Wednesday, April 8

I will guide focus group participants in a discussion reflecting on Monday's debate. The goal is to assess persuasiveness, evidence, and how arguments affected your views.

Guiding questions:

- Did your opinion shift based on the arguments presented?
- What new perspective or appreciation did you gain?

Written Assignments

Op-Ed (approximately 400 words) — due by 2:00 pm on Monday, April 6th

All non-debaters must submit an op-ed before class on Monday, November 3. Write a concise opinion piece taking a clear stance on the issue. Use the tone and structure of a newspaper op-ed and embed links to relevant sources. Tips for strong op-eds are available [here](#).

Reflection Essay (approximately 600 words) — due by 11:59 pm on Friday, April 10th

Everyone must submit a reflection essay after the SAC. It should state your initial opinion before the debate, explain whether and how your view evolved based on readings and in-class debate and discussion, and reflect on your appreciation for opposing perspectives. Your essay should be engaging, organized, and polished. No bibliography is required, and you should not quote directly from outside sources. Grades will reflect organization, insight, and writing quality.

Evaluation Breakdown

Role	Component	Points
Debaters	Debate performance	70
Debaters	Reflection essay	70
Focus Group Participants	Pre-SAC op-ed	25
Focus Group Participants	Focus group participation	45
Focus Group Participants	Reflection essay	70
Other Students	Pre-SAC op-ed	25
Other Students	Reflection essay	35

Please upload all submissions to Canvas. Late work will incur a 15% penalty per weekday.

In our classes on Monday and Wednesday, May 4th and 6th, we will hold our second *Structured Academic Controversy* (SAC), a debate and focus group discussion designed to explore opposing perspectives on a timely issue related to our class's subject matter. The exercise is intended to help you apply economic reasoning, engage with diverse views, and practice clear and persuasive oral and written communication.

Overview and deliverables

- Complete assigned readings before class on Monday, May 4 (everybody)
- Participate in debate on Monday *or* focus group on Wednesday (as per sign-up sheet)
- Submit written work to Canvas by the following deadlines:
 - Op-Ed (roughly 400 words): before 2:00 p.m. on Monday, May 4 (for those not debating on Monday)
 - Reflection Essay (600 words): before 11:59 p.m. on Friday, May 8 (everybody)

Topic

The United States has pursued a strategy of export controls on advanced AI chips and semiconductor manufacturing equipment to constrain China's ability to train frontier AI models. This strategy rests on a bet that access to advanced processing power is the decisive input to AI leadership. Recent evidence complicates that bet. Chinese labs, working with limited access to advanced processing power, have developed efficient, open-source models that developers around the world now download and build on more than any American counterpart. China's open AI ecosystem, combined with its manufacturing base, logistics networks, and robotics sector, may be building an advantage that grows over time, as widespread deployment generates data that improves the models, which in turn enables further deployment, through a process that does not depend on frontier chips.

Defenders of the controls argue they are working as intended: China still trails the United States at the frontier of AI capability, controls have preserved critical U.S. chokepoints in the semiconductor supply chain, and they buy time for the U.S. to invest in its own open-model ecosystem, domestic chip development, and allied digital infrastructure. Critics counter that the controls carry their own costs: they have accelerated Chinese domestic chip development, pushed Chinese labs toward efficiency innovations now adopted as industry standards, and complicated U.S. relationships with allies. Critics add that the controls do not address the layer of competition where China is advancing most rapidly.

Debate Prompt

U.S. export controls on advanced AI chips are premised on the idea that access to advanced processing power is the decisive input to AI leadership. But if the most strategically consequential AI applications run not on frontier models requiring cutting-edge chips, but on small, specialized models deployed across factories, logistics networks, and robotics systems, does the current U.S. strategy address the right layer of the competition?

The **Pro** team will argue that export controls remain the essential foundation of U.S. AI strategy: frontier capability still determines which country sets technical standards and achieves transformative breakthroughs, controls preserve critical chokepoints in the semiconductor supply chain, and the U.S. can address China's gains in deployment by tightening controls, bringing allies on board, and investing in its own open-source AI models.

The **Anti** team will argue that export controls, however well-designed, are increasingly insufficient: China has demonstrated it can approach the frontier with limited access to advanced processing power, its open-model ecosystem is building an advantage through industrial deployment and data accumulation that controls cannot reach, and the U.S. needs to shift its focus from restricting China's access to chips toward actively promoting its own advantages, by developing competitive open-source AI models, accelerating AI deployment across the economy, and helping allies build digital infrastructure on American technology rather than Chinese.

Both teams should draw on the assigned readings and are encouraged to research additional perspectives.

Readings to complete before class (Monday, May 4)

- Greg Allen, [Choking off China's Access to the Future of AI](#), CSIS.
- Will Hunt, Saif M. Khan, and Dahlia Peterson, [China's Progress in Semiconductor Manufacturing Equipment](#), Center for Security and Emerging Technology.
- Ngor Luong, [Two Loops: How China's Open AI Strategy Reinforces Its Industrial Dominance](#), U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.
- Kyle Chan, [China is running multiple AI races](#), Brookings.
- Colin H. Kahl and Jim Mitre, [The Real AI Race: America Needs More Than Innovation to Compete With China](#), Foreign Affairs.

Debate — Monday, May 4

Two four-member teams will debate: one arguing that export controls should remain the centerpiece of U.S. AI strategy, and one arguing that the U.S. needs to move beyond a controls-first approach. Each team should designate two Speakers and two Answerers.

- Speakers: prepare and rehearse opening statements.
- Answerers: anticipate questions and craft responses.

Part One: opening statements (12 minutes)

- “Pro” Speakers: up to 6 minutes
- “Anti” Speakers: up to 6 minutes

Part Two: questions and rebuttals (20 minutes)

- Groups huddle, with each team preparing and asking one question of other side (4 minutes)
- “Pro” Answerers respond to “Anti” question (4 minutes)
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- “Anti” Speakers ask two follow-ups of “Pro” Answerers (4 minutes)
- “Pro” Speakers ask two follow-ups of “Anti” Answerers (4 minutes)

Part Three: conclusion (8 minutes)

- Groups huddle, with each team identifying strongest argument on other side (4 minutes)
- “Anti” Answerers state strongest “Pro” argument (2 minutes)
- “Pro” Answerers state strongest “Anti” argument (2 minutes)

Focus Group — Wednesday, May 6

I will guide focus group participants in a discussion reflecting on Monday’s debate. The goal is to assess persuasiveness, evidence, and how arguments affected your views.

Guiding questions:

- Did your opinion shift based on the arguments presented? Which arguments were most persuasive, and why?

- The readings suggest that export controls target one layer of the U.S.-China AI competition. Did the debate help clarify whether that is the right layer to target? What evidence or arguments moved you most on this question?
- What new perspective or appreciation did you gain for the opposing side's argument?

Written Assignments

Op-Ed (approximately 400 words) — due by 2:00 pm on Monday, May 4th

All non-debaters must submit an op-ed before class on Monday, May 4. Write a concise opinion piece taking a clear stance on the debate prompt: do export controls address the right layer of the U.S.-China AI competition, or does the U.S. need a fundamentally different strategy? Tips for strong op-eds are available [here](#).

Reflection Essay (approximately 600 words) — due by 11:59 pm on Friday, May 8th

Everyone must submit a reflection essay after the SAC. It should state your initial opinion before the debate, explain whether and how your view evolved based on readings and in-class debate and discussion, and reflect on your appreciation for opposing perspectives. Your essay should be engaging, organized, and polished. No bibliography is required, and you should not quote directly from outside sources. Grades will reflect organization, insight, and writing quality.

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