China’s Encounter with Modernity

This course explores the processes and paradoxes of China’s engagement with the modern world from the late Qing dynasty to the early years of Communist rule, with a particular focus on the Republican era, which lasted from 1912 to 1949. This period witnessed epochal changes in Chinese society and culture, ranging from the adoption of republican government and rapid expansion of print culture to the promotion of women’s rights and explosion of nationalism. Taken together, these and other changes can be said to signify the emergence of Chinese modernity.

Yet what exactly do we mean by the term “modernity”? And what makes China modern? This class will seek to answer these questions by exploring the specific changes occurring in China over the first half of the twentieth century and how scholars have utilized the concept of modernity to understand and analyze them.