



History 439: Communist China (10352)

- MWF 1:30-2:20 PM
- BRNG 1242 or [virtually](#) on occasion if you cannot make it to campus
- 3 credit hours
- No prerequisites
- Contact me within the first week if you would like to do an honors contract

Professor Tillman

- mmtillman@purdue.edu
- OH: Wednesdays in office or [virtually](#) after class; by appointment

Please do not come to my office if you are ill.

Course Description

China is the only state that still claims to be Communist; even North Korea has removed the word from its constitution. While the Soviet Union collapsed, China's ruling elite has remained in power, but has turned to unusual sources of inspiration, given its history of iconoclasm and revolution. This course was originated in the 1970s from a Cold War framework, and we are seeking to bring it up to speed with consideration of contemporary issues: How is the Chinese government dealing with problems of socioeconomic diversity, the internet age, threats to its claims of territorial sovereignty, etc.? To what degree is a post-socialist state still socialist?

This course has two sets of goals: one is to familiarize you with the contemporary China and how it came to be the way that it is, especially how revolutionaries have understood their own history and applied foreign theoretical concepts and ideas; to some degree, we may also think about paths not taken. We will make sure we hit upon some important issues and themes in the CCP's history, and will have a midterm based on some facts, especially from the textbook. However, we will also modify the emphasis/duration and inclusion of particular topics on the basis of student interest and concern, to be surveyed and defined the first week of class.

400-level seminars require active participation. The second goal of this class is to develop communication skills in authentic forms of the current professional world: roundtables, panels, blogposts, policy briefs. No method, even a "skills-focused" pedagogy, is completely free from ideology. The selected textbook, written in English, focuses particularly on the structural and cultural reasons Chinese and Americans often misunderstand each other. By frequently drawing upon interviews and articles, I encourage you to think about sources and how they inform debates and shape narratives about China. In particular, to what degree can the discipline of history contribute to an understanding of the present (or to supplement the work of political scientists, sociologists, and economists who study contemporary China)? In order to help you understand how historians have come to their conclusions, we will also engage in a series of workshops about primary sources and critiquing arguments.

No matter who you are or what your background is, you should have a fair shot to do well in this class if you put in the work. Because this class does not have any pre-requisites, I do not assume any background in China or in history. In order to help get us all to the same speed, we have some interspersed lectures on Mondays, especially at the beginning of the semester. We will also watch clips from documentaries, but with the goal of analyzing as well as learning from them.

Goals

Environmental goals for the classroom

1. My goals: To create an environment of trust → in which all can participate → by assigning group activities; by maintaining standards of courtesy; by creating structures of challenge; by creating venues for feedback for the instructor
My viewpoint: Morally, you are my peers. Intellectually, you are my friends. I strive to be honest with you and to listen to you. Your opinions and interpretations are valid even if certain facts may be incorrect.
2. My goals: To create an environment of enthusiasm → so that all can engage → by alternating types of activities
My viewpoint: School is not just preparation; it is life. You already engage in amateur research in your everyday life, and I seek to help structure academically informed research on China.
3. My goals: To create an environment of energy → to prevent fatigue → by alternating “flow” work with “slow” work; providing options for longer or shorter readings so that you can adjust to meet the needs of your schedule
My viewpoint: Your wellbeing matters, and there are many different ways to learn.

You can think about the classes that you’ve experienced before. Which have had high levels of trust, in which you feel free to express your own views? Which classes have helped you learn the most? What do those classes have in common?

Learning outcomes help you outside the classroom:

Please note that in letters of recommendation, letter writers are often asked, “How does this person work in groups? Do they show leadership potential?” And the like. In this class, you can do your own work but also work cooperatively with others.

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Identify major terms in Marxism and Chinese Communism.
2. Outline historical change in timeline projects/workshops. Understand chronological structures of change.
3. *Correctly source* information in footnotes or endnotes, modeled in a citation exercise and practiced in writing throughout the semester.
4. *Find and select* salient quotations and information, through workshops and practiced in writing assignments.
5. *Connect, compare, and contrast* scholarly arguments in articles and books
6. *Evaluate and critique* scholarly argumentation, selection of sources and analysis of sources through primary source workshops and collective blogposts and your own individual one.
7. *Develop and articulate* an understanding of the major questions of a subfield by building a paper, from class discussions and the discussant review paper to the first paper. In the class discussions, we will analyze single arguments; in the discussant review paper, students will compare scholarly questions and perspectives in an article and a book; for the first paper, they will select a second book to read and to put into conversation with the first two. Students may thus present different stages of a “rough draft” on this larger paper throughout the semester.
8. *Articulate* relevance to current-day events in panels and other in-class activities.
9. *Cultivate community teamwork* through group work.

Class components: *how they are calculated;* what they assess; how they function pedagogically

Assessments	Weight
Worksheets <i>Three dropped (roughly a week of free absence from class)</i> <i>If you cannot come to class, please let the instructor know, you are encouraged to Zoom in</i> <i>& finish before midnight or ask for an extension</i> <i>Three check minuses will result in one negative point</i> <i>Three check pluses will result in a positive point</i> <i>Checks maintain your grade</i>	10%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -provides an alternative for students who cannot come to class -provides an alternative form of participation for students who are shy or have trouble talking in seminar -provides structure for small group and large group discussions -helps students to focus on their reading 	
<p>Panel discussions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -encourages each student to speak in class; can therefore help minimize barriers to public participation -helps students to access a greater variety of information without having to do all of the work of reading the information -mimics real-life genres of public engagement rather than an artificial classroom exercise 	5%
<p>Group presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -delivered in Week 15 of class -provides an opportunity for cooperative learning -base genre (policy brief, white paper, or op-ed) mimics real-life genres of public engagement rather than an artificial classroom exercise 	2%
<p>Surveys x 7 <i>P/F</i></p> <p><i>If you cannot come to class, please let the instructor know; you are encouraged to Zoom in & finish before midnight or ask for an extension</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -helps students develop metacognition & the ability to assess their thinking -helps students to reframe labwork in terms of progress in skill development rather than a finished project 	5%
<p>Homework x 9 <i>One dropped</i> <i>No late work accepted!</i> <i>Three check minuses will result in one negative point</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -helps students to prepare for labs and other group activities and discussions -encourages students to draw in information from outside of class -helps students to think about information assessment outside of the confines of a classroom 	8%
<p>Online reading quizzes x 9 <i>Lowest/ one dropped</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -incentivize reading the articles -helps students to focus on information that may help in their discussions (such that a few students are not disproportionately responsible for the work) -sometimes requires some inductions, close reading of text 	40%
<p>Midterm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -tests basic information from the early party to roughly 2008 -sometimes requires some logic or deductive reasoning -points reinforced by clips -incentivizes going to lecture and reading the textbook 	20%
<p>Final</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -tests basic information basic information offered in lecture post-2008 -sometimes requires some logic or deductive reasoning -points reinforced by clips -incentivizes going to lecture and reading the textbook 	8%
<p>Final skills survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -encourages students to reflect on what they've learned over the semester 	2%
<p>Extra credit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -allows students opportunities to experience academic life and thinking outside of the classroom -outstanding citizenship and attendance may be recognized 	As much as 10%

1. You remain the human in your relationship with the machine. That means that *you* are the one thinking and directing the machine to work *for you*, not the other way around. So, for example, use AI to help you with grammar or organization, but make sure that you understand how you are coming to those conclusions. An analogy: When you use a calculator, you should have an idea of why you are adding or subtracting, and also a general estimate of whether a number should increase or decrease. Likewise, you need to have a sense of the parameters of an intellectual exercise. You need to be the creator and to exercise creativity, not a passive recipient of the machine's output.
2. You disclose to me when and how you use AI. That will include a list of whatever software you use and the prompts that you've given to AI. So, examples might include this: "I used X platform and typed in this prompt: 'xxxxxx.' I read the result and revised the prompt to say this: 'xxxxxx.' Then I revised the writing to include A, B, and C, and I added these paragraphs." If you simply write, "I used AI in this paper," without further clarification, you will get a zero on the assignment.
3. You are ultimately responsible for any work that you do. Revise your assignments to make sure that the final product is one that you own and approve of. If you submit an empty or invalid citation, you will get a zero on an assignment.
4. If you do not disclose your use of AI, and software indicates that AI was used, you will get a zero on the assignment.

Course Schedule

Week 1

1/12 Monday: Collective goal setting and introductions. The syllabus will be determined one week from this date.

Discussion: Why did you take this class? What do you think the most important opportunities, questions, and concerns Americans and Chinese should have?

Products: What are our goals for this semester in terms of skills and content?

1/14 Wednesday: Introduction to "Communism"

Read [Engles's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts](#) ("wages"; "profit"; "estranged labor"; "Landed Property and Capital")

Discussion: How is Marxism different as historical analysis, capitalist critique, and statecraft theory?

1/16 Friday: *Was the Chinese past "feudal"?*

In-class clip of "[China: War and Revolution](#)"

Read Wasserstrom, Chapter 1 through "1949"; Read Ba Jin, [Family](#)

Survey 1 due

Course quiz due

Week 2

1/19 Monday: MLK Day, No class

1/21 Wednesday: *Did Westerners bring "modernity" to China? What was the impact of imperialism?*

In-class clip of "[China: War and Revolution](#)"

Read Wasserstrom, Chapter 2

1/23 Friday: *Marxism & China*

In-class clip of Aminda Smith

Read Lenin's "[Imperialism](#)"; Chen Duxiu & Mao Zedong's "[Chinese Government](#)", Chapter 1 of Wasserstrom

Panel 1: Based on your readings, answer the question: *What did/does Marxism have to offer China and/or the world?*

Panel 2: Based on your readings, answer the question: *From a Marxist perspective, was China "ready" for revolution?*

Week 3

1/26 Monday. Was the Chinese Soviet Republic revolutionary?

Reading quiz 1 due before class ([Song Shaopeng, "Gender and Class"](#))

Workshop: "They say/I say" (group worksheet due at the end of class)

1/28 Wednesday. Writing workshop: Scouting in the Jiangxi Soviet (**group worksheet due at the end of class**)

1/30 Friday. **Lab 1: Visual materials from the Jiangxi Soviet**

Survey 2 due at midnight

Week 4

2/2 Monday. China's long wars (Lecture)

Read Wasserstrom, "First United Front" to "Communists beat the Nationalists"

2/4 Wednesday. How does political change reach the common man?

Reading quiz 2 due before class (DeMare, "Merchant Zha")

Workshop: Historical imagination and the structure of narrative (group worksheet due at the end of class)

2/6 Friday. Panel

Homework 1 due before class:

Option 1: Search for a file in the British Foreign Office materials, using one of the following keywords:

- INDUSCO
- Chinese Civil War
- Mao Tse-Tung
- Zhou En-lai

Create a powerpoint slide or infographic with some basic information about the file: who created this file? Where did they get their information? How did they have access to it? What bureau was it connected to? How would you evaluate the credibility of this information? *Be able to explain your reasoning in class.*

Option 2: Go to one of the historical newspapers at Purdue University. Search for one of the following events that has been discussed in class:

- INDUSCO
- Chinese Civil War
- Mao Tse-Tung
- Zhou En-lai

How many hits to you get? (Did you get any hits?) What time period do they come in? *Zero in on one article.* Create a powerpoint slide with the information above as well as a summary of the article: who wrote it? What information did they include and how did they get that information? Who do you think their readership was? How would you evaluate the credibility of this information? *Be able to explain your reasoning in class.*

Those who cannot come to class are encouraged to Zoom in:

Skills survey 3 due at midnight.

Week 5

2/9 Monday. Maoist economics and society (Lecture; finish Wasserstrom, Chapter 3)

2/11 Wednesday. When are politics entrapment?

Reading quiz 3 due before class (Cao Shuji, "An Overt Conspiracy")

Workshop: Sourcing historical materials (group worksheet due at the end of class)

2/13 Friday. Great Leap Forward.

Homework 2 due: Select an entry from Zhou Xun's *Forgotten Voices*. Create a powerpoint slide about the person interviewed with some basic information: Who was this person? Where was he or she from? What categories of

identity would he or she place himself in? What surprised you about these personal experiences? Has it changed the way that you think about the Great Leap Forward? *Be able to explain your reasoning in class.*

Lab 2: Oral history vs. photographs, statistics, spatial mapping

Skills survey 4 due at midnight.

Those who wish to delve into the methodology of oral history more fully can read Gail Hershatter's *The Gender of Memory*.

Week 6

2/16 Monday. The Cultural Revolution and aftermath (lecture and film clips from "Morning Sun")

2/18: Wednesday. The Cultural Revolution and aftermath (lecture and film clips from "Morning Sun")

2/20 Friday. Personal experiences of the Cultural Revolution

Reading quiz 4 due before class (Honig, "Socialist Sex")

Workshop: Using anecdotes in historical writing (group worksheet due at the end of class)

Week 7

2/23 Monday. **Morning Sun (Media and Material Culture panel presentation)**

Homework 3 due before class: Select a memoir from the Cultural Revolution from one of the following options. Prepare a powerpoint slide with information about the memoir: who is this person? What background did he or she have? What categories of identity most marked him or her? What were their experiences? *Be able to explain your reasoning in class.*

[Ah Cheng, "King of Trees"](#) (fiction but reads like a first-hand account)

[Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters*](#)

Ji-Li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl* (HSSE)

[Gao Yuan, *Born Red*](#)

Da Chen, *Sounds of a River*

Zhu Xiao Di, *Thirty Years in a Red House*

Cao Guanglong, *The Attic: Memoir of a Chinese Landlord's Son*

Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (HSSE)

Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (HSSE, this is a long book)

Lab: Propaganda Posters

Survey 5 due at midnight.

Those who cannot come to class are encouraged to Zoom in.

Those who wish to explore the methodology of film more can read Li Jie's *Cinematic Guerrillas: Propaganda, Projectionists, and Audiences in Socialist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

2/25 Wednesday. Deng's Reforms (Lecture, Wasserstrom, Chapter 4 through "1989")

2/27 Friday. One Child Policy.

Reading quiz 5 due before class (Milwertz, "Accepting Population Control")

Workshop: Understanding and Providing Graphs (group workshop due at the end of class)

Week 8

3/2 Monday: Protest and Prosperity (Lecture and film clips from "Gate of Heavenly Peace")

3/4 Wednesday: **C-Span Archives lab**

Homework 4 due before class:

Option one: Read a chapter in [*Tiananmen exiles : voices of the struggle for democracy in China*](#) or . Create a powerpoint slide or infographic with information about the protestor. Who was this person, what was their background, and what was their experience before and after 1989? How did their memoir help to shape your understanding of the events?

Option two: Read one of the documents from “[The Tiananmen Papers](#)”—first the synopsis and then the original document. Do you agree with the synopsis provided by the website? How did they come to those conclusions? Is there anything else that you find interesting or different in the original material? What else do you think that they might have overlooked?

Lab: C-Span Archives

Survey 6 due at midnight.

Those who wish to explore this methodology more can read Ying Qian’s *Revolutionary Becomings: Documentary Media in Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024).

3/6 Friday. Meritocracy with hierarchy (Lecture)

Week 9

3/9 Monday. Optional midterm review session

*Sign up for a panel preference on **either** Wednesday or Friday. Homework will be due on **one** of those days.*

3/11 Wednesday. **Optional review session.**

3/13 Friday. No class; instructor is at a conference. **Online midterm due**

Week 10: Spring Break, no class

Week 11

3/23 Monday. China’s Growing middle class (lecture, finish Wasserstrom Chapter 4)

Reading quiz 6 due before class (“Time as Money,” *China Candid*)

3/25 Wednesday. All read “A Hero for the Times” *China Candid*

Homework 5-1 due: Select one biography from *Biographical Dictionary of New Chinese Entrepreneurs*. Create a powerpoint slide with information about the person: who are they? What is their background? What were their experiences and obstacles in their life?

Panel discussion: What venues of upward mobility were there in China? How have they changed over time? How does the biography you read compare with “the millionaire hero” in *China Candid*?

3/27 Friday. All read “Looking Ahead,” *China Candid*

Homework 5-2 due: Select one biography from *Silent voices*. Create a powerpoint slide or infographic based on what you learned from this interview. Who was interviewed? What was their background and experience?

Panel discussion: What do these case studies indicate about welfare in China? Or do you think they might not be representative?

Week 12

3/30 Monday. Current Religious Policy (lecture); read about [religions](#) and Wasserstrom, Chapter 5

Reading quiz 7 due before class (Ian Johnson, intro, *Souls of China*)

4/1 Wednesday. Panel: Religion.

Homework 6 due: Select one of the following options to read. Create a powerpoint slide with information.

- A chapter from *Red China*.
- [Uighurs](#)
- [Hui](#)

Panel discussion:

4/3 Friday. Writing workshop: Confucianism and the State.

Finish reading Wasserstrom, Chapter 1 & the introduction to *Making China Confucian Again*.

Week 13

4/6 Monday. Discussion: AI and the Chinese State

Reading quiz 8 due before class ([Silvia Lindtner](#), “Feeling like a State”)

Group discussion worksheet due at the end of class.

4/8 Wednesday. Lecture & discussion: Love and the Chinese State

Read a popular media post by [Shanni Zhao](#)

Discussion worksheet due at the end of class.

4/10 Friday. “China’s CDC and Covid Across a Timeline” (lecture)

Read Wasserstrom, Chapter 6

Be prepared in class indicate availability in weeks 14 & 15.

Week 14

4/13 Monday. Covid and systems of information.

Homework 7 due before class: Read one of the options below, and create a powerpoint slide or infographic with the information there. Do you think that this information is credible? Where is it sourced?

- A newspaper article of your choice

Lab: Modern posters ([Covid diary](#))

Survey 7 due by midnight.

4/15 Wednesday. [“Playing by the Rules”](#)

Reading quiz 9 due ([“China’s Influence at the UN”](#))

Homework 8 due: Find and reference three articles based on your assigned topic.

4/17 Friday. **Optional Review Session. Online final due at midnight.**

Week 15

4/20 Monday. China’s social media in the United States

4/22 Wednesday. China as a driver of global environmental policy

4/24 Friday. US chips in China

Week 16

Homework 9 due on Monday: Write a question for Jamelle Bouie, from the *New York Times*

4/27 Monday. Topic of students' choosing

4/29 Wednesday. Topic of students' choosing

5/1 Friday. Topic of students' choosing

Final survey due.

Revised 1/14