

History 439 — Communist China

CRN: 10352

Spring 2026 • 3 Credit Hours

Meeting Times: M/W/F, 1:30–2:20 PM

Location: BRNG 1242 (with occasional virtual option if needed)

Prerequisites: None

If you are interested in an **honors contract**, contact the instructor during Week 1.

Instructor Information

Professor: Dr. M.M. Tillman

Email: mmtillman@purdue.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays after class (in person or virtual), or by appointment

Important: Do **not** come to office hours if you are ill—request a virtual session instead.

Course Description

China remains the only state that still **formally identifies as Communist**, long after the collapse of the Soviet Union and even as North Korea removed the term from its constitution. This course traces:

- The evolution of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)
- The ideological shifts that shaped modern China
- The CCP's struggles with modernization, socioeconomic diversity, and global pressures
- The difference between **post-socialist practice** and **socialist rhetoric**

Originally designed in the 1970s through a Cold War lens, the course now incorporates contemporary issues such as:

- Internet governance
- Territorial sovereignty
- Economic transformation
- Social policy
- China's political future

We will combine **lecture, discussion, workshops, panel formats, group work, primary source labs, and multimedia analysis.**

No prior knowledge of Chinese history is required.

Course Goals

1. Learning Environment Goals

Trust

- Build a class community where everyone can contribute
- Use group activities, clear expectations, and structured feedback
- Emphasize respectful dialogue

Enthusiasm

- Engage through diverse activities
- Connect class learning to everyday research skills

Energy

- Avoid fatigue with varied pacing
 - Offer reading-length options
 - Prioritize student wellbeing
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2. Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify key terms in Marxism and Chinese Communism
2. Construct historical timelines to understand change
3. Cite information correctly using footnotes or endnotes
4. Select salient quotations and evidence from sources
5. Compare scholarly arguments across books and articles
6. Critique arguments and analyze sources through workshops and blogposts

7. Build a multi-stage research paper, developing from discussion to review to written analysis
8. Connect course questions to contemporary events
9. Collaborate effectively in group settings

Course Components and Grading

Below is an accessible breakdown of all assignments, their weight, and their pedagogical purpose.

Graded Components

Component	Weight	Purpose and Notes
Worksheets (3 dropped)	10%	Reading scaffolding; alternative to verbal participation; structured group discussion; extensions possible
Panel Discussions	5%	Encourages all students to speak; mimics real public engagement formats
Group Presentation (Week 15)	2%	Cooperative learning; formats include policy brief, white paper, or op-ed
Surveys (x7)	5%	Pass/Fail; supports metacognition and growth mindset; flexible submission
Homework (x9; one dropped)	8%	Prepares for labs and discussions; no late work accepted
Online Reading Quizzes (x9; one dropped)	40%	Ensures reading completion; close-reading, interpretation, key concepts
Midterm Exam	20%	Covers early CCP history to ~2008; logic and lecture-based questions
Final Exam	8%	Covers post-2008 content; similar format to midterm
Final Skills Survey	2%	Reflection on learning
Extra Credit	Up to 10%	Academic events, strong citizenship, excellent attendance

AI Use Policy

1. **You remain the human in charge.**
Use AI as a *tool* (e.g., grammar help), not the creator. You must understand and direct the work.

2. **You must disclose all AI use.**
Your disclosure must include:
 - Platform used
 - All prompts
 - How you revised or used responsesMinimal disclosure = **zero** on assignment.
 3. **You are responsible for the final product.**
Empty or invalid citations = **zero**.
 4. **Undisclosed AI use detected by software = zero.**
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Course Schedule (Accessible Overview)

Full detailed schedule preserved below, structurally organized for readability.
All worksheets and homework are due **before class unless otherwise stated**.

Week 1

Mon 1/12 — Introductions

- Collective goal setting
- What issues/questions should shape the syllabus?
- **Output:** Class-generated goals

Wed 1/14 — Introduction to Communism

Read: Engels selections

Discussion: Marxism as analysis vs. critique vs. statecraft

Fri 1/16 — Was China “feudal”?

- Documentary clip: *China: War and Revolution*
 - Read Watersrom, Ch. 1 (“to 1949”) + Ba Jin *Family*
 - **Survey 1 due**
 - **Course quiz due**
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Week 2

Mon 1/19 — MLK Day (No class)

Wed 1/21 — Imperialism and Modernity

Clip: *China: War and Revolution*

Reading: Wasserstrom Ch. 2

Fri 1/23 — Marxism and China

Clip: Aminda Smith

Read:

- Lenin, *Imperialism*
 - Chen Duxiu & Mao Zedong, "Chinese Government"
 - Wasserstrom Ch. 1
- Panel 1:** What did/does Marxism offer China/the world?
- Panel 2:** Was China "ready" for revolution?
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Week 3

Mon 1/26 — Chinese Soviet Republic

- **Reading Quiz 1**
- Workshop: "They Say / I Say"

Wed 1/28 — Writing Workshop

Worksheet due at end of class

Fri 1/30 — Lab 1: Visual Materials

Survey 2 due by midnight

Week 4

Mon 2/2 — China's Long Wars

Reading: Wasserstrom (from "First United Front" → "Communists beat the Nationalists")

Wed 2/4 — Political Change and the Common Man

- **Reading Quiz 2**
Workshop on narrative structure

Fri 2/6 — Panel

Homework 1 due before class

Homework 1 Options (Accessible Summary):

- Option 1: British Foreign Office archival file
 - Option 2: Historical newspaper search
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Week 5

Mon 2/9 — Maoist Economics

Finish Wasserstrom Ch. 3

Wed 2/11 — Politics and Entrapment

- **Reading Quiz 3**
Workshop: Sourcing historical materials

Fri 2/13 — Great Leap Forward

Homework 2 due: Zhou Xun, *Forgotten Voices* artifact analysis
Survey 3 due

Week 6

Mon 2/16 — Cultural Revolution (Lecture + film)

Wed 2/18 — Cultural Revolution (continued)

Fri 2/20 — Personal Experiences

- **Reading Quiz 4**
Workshop: Using anecdotes
Survey 4 due
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Week 7

Mon 2/23 — *Morning Sun* (Panel)

Homework 3 due

Wed 2/25 — Deng's Reforms

Lecture + Wasserstrom Ch. 4

Fri 2/27 — One Child Policy

- **Reading Quiz 5**
Workshop on graphs
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Week 8

Mon 3/2 — Protest & Prosperity

Film: *Gate of Heavenly Peace*

Wed 3/4 — C-Span Lab

Homework 4 due

Fri 3/6 — Meritocracy

Survey 6 due

Week 9

Mon 3/9 — Optional Review

Wed 3/11 — Optional Review

Fri 3/13 — No class (conference)

Online midterm due

Week 10 — Spring Break

Week 11

Mon 3/23 — Middle Class China

- **Reading Quiz 6**
Lecture + Wasserstrom Ch. 4

Wed 3/25 — Panel + Homework 5-1

Fri 3/27 — Panel + Homework 5-2

Week 12

Mon 3/30 — Religious Policy

- **Reading Quiz 7**
Lecture + Wasserstrom Ch. 5

Wed 4/1 — Religion Panel

Homework 6 due

Fri 4/3 — Writing Workshop

Complete Wasserstrom Ch. 1 + *Making China Confucian Again*

Week 13

Mon 4/6 — AI and the State

- **Reading Quiz 8**
Worksheet due

Wed 4/8 — Love and the State

Fri 4/10 — China's CDC and COVID Timeline

Read Wasserstrom Ch. 6
Indicate availability for Weeks 14–15

Week 14

Mon 4/13 — COVID and Information Systems

Homework 7 due
Modern posters lab
Survey 7 due

Wed 4/15 — International Rules

- **Reading Quiz 9**
Homework 8 due

Fri 4/17 — Optional Review

Online final due at midnight

Week 15 — Contemporary Issues

Mon 4/20 — Chinese Social Media in the U.S.

Wed 4/22 — China's Environmental Policy Role

Fri 4/24 — U.S. Chips in China

Week 16

Mon 4/27 — Student-Chosen Topic

Wed 4/29 — Student-Chosen Topic

Fri 5/1 — Student-Chosen Topic

Final Survey Due