**Course Description**

The history of communism dates predominantly from the modern period and has been crucially shaped by the monumental theoretical works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as well as by the theoretical contributions and political work of V. I. Lenin and Mao Zedong. The goal of these philosophers and political leaders was to assert communism as the dominant political doctrine as well as political movement.

The idea of communism is much older, with kindred conceptions found in ancient mythological, religious, and philosophical texts, such as Plato’s *Republic* and Confucius’ description of datong (‘Grand Course’) as two prominent examples of enduring influence. While this course will concentrate on the modern period, it will begin by reaching back to these earliest precursor concepts of communism, described by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek as one of the “concrete universals” that have always percolated in the human imagination, but have rarely if ever fulfilled the expectations connected to them.

While some claim the history of communism to have reached an effective endpoint with the collapse of the USSR in 1991, there are competing claims that communism remains alive in places like China and in the hearts and minds of those who are convinced that communist ideals present a viable alternative to global capitalism and the pervasive marketization and commercialization that comes with it.

This course will trace the idea of communism from its antecedents to its current status in the arena of political ideologies, placing special emphasis on Chinese theoretical contributions as well as today’s lived communism. Given their intertwined evolution, this course will also touch on the history and theory of socialism.

**Learning Objectives**

By completing this course, students will:

- Develop a critical understanding of the main concepts of Marxist philosophy and how they have shaped the idea of communism
- Appraise the scholarly work of philosophy by tracing concepts from their origins to their use in the present era
- Relate political practice to its theoretical underpinnings by taking current politics in China as a case in point
- Formulate – in writing and in conversation – their own position within a complex theoretical debate and defend their stance against the critiques of others
- Produce a short article to publication standards

**Course Prerequisites**

None

**Methods of Instruction**

The course will be taught using a combination of classroom lecture and discussion, as well as field trips to local museums. Classroom activities will involve critical discussion and debate in various formats, ranging from structured group work to panel discussions to plenum debates guided by the instructor.

**Assessment and Final Grade**

1. Initial Essay 20%
2. The Manifesto 20%
3. Final Essay 25%
4. Museum Reports 15%
5. Participation 20%
TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

Initial Essay

Students are required to write a short essay of 1500 words on a topic – subject to the instructor’s approval – that examines an aspect of communism and speaks to an explicit personal interest of the student. At least four scholarly sources and formal citations are required. The essay should be written in the first person when appropriate and illustrate why it is an expression of personal interest, but without compromising scholarly quality. The purpose here is to produce a compact, informative essay that demonstrates the student’s understanding of the material and is an expression of the student’s active participation in the course. This first essay can provide a possible baseline for the middle and final essays. It will be graded on the quality of topic, discussion and writing, as well as on how far it meets the requirements outlined here.

The Manifesto

Lenin famously asked: “What is to be done?” Students are required to employ the format of a political manifesto to answer that question. A manifesto formulates 1) a key controversial problem in communism and then 2) suggests the preferable solutions and the ideological arguments that support them. The purpose here is to produce a well-referenced (at least five formal references to prominent communist thinkers or scholarly publications) argumentative political statement in which the student introduces the problem, explains her position, and argues why that position is warranted. This 1500-word essay will be graded on the quality of topic, argument and writing, as well as on how far it meets the requirements outlined here.

Final Essay

Students are required to write a short article (2000-3000 words) on a topic (can overlap with topics treated in the first and middle essays) – subject to the instructor’s approval – that examines an aspect of communism in a contemporary context. The purpose here is to produce a short article that can be submitted for publication to a, print or online, non-vanity publication (“non-vanity” generally means a publication that does not require a fee for publication, but has a formal submission and review process, i.e., is not simply a blog or personal publication effort). The student must identify a potential publication, review its submission guidelines for authors, name the proposed publication at the top of the first page of the essay and attach the publication’s submission requirements as Appendix A. This article will be graded on the quality of topic, discussion and writing, as well as on whether it meets the requirements for submission for publication.

Museum Reports

Students are required to write a short report (375-500 words) after visiting two museums and two parks in host environment. Students are encouraged to include pictures of themselves in the descriptions of their experiences. This report will be graded strictly on evidence of proven site visits and short descriptions of the same.

Participation

Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Attendance

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for Open Campus and Short Term programs, absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course will result in a written warning.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the
For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent.

Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to any required field placement. Students may not miss placement/work hours at an internship or service learning site unless approved in advance by the Academic Director and placement supervisor. All students must complete all of the requisite 100 minimum work hours on site at the internship or service learning placement to be eligible for academic credit.

Students who miss class for personal travel, including unforeseen delays that arise as a result of personal travel, will be marked as absent. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.

Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Absences for classes will lead to the following penalties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Total Course Hours Missed</th>
<th>Minimum Penalty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 20%</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements; 3% grade penalty &amp; <strong>written warning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>Automatic <strong>course failure</strong>, and possible expulsion</td>
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*N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, and local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.*

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

**Class: 1.1 Introduction to Class**

Presentation of course requirements: Students will be instructed on course requirements, with special attention given to the specifics of the three essays.

Introductory lecture: Communism has long been and for many remains one of the most polarizing political ideologies, both in terms of theory and political practice. In this initial lecture and discussion, we will begin by discussing students’ and the instructor’s impressions of communism along with well-established sympathetic and critical narratives of the same. The aim is to establish a baseline for student engagement.

Required


**Week 2**

**Class: 2.1 Specters of Communism: A Historical Overview of Communism**
Two leading contemporary political philosophers, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, have made arguments for embracing communism as the only sensible path for human progress. In this lecture we will examine these arguments in their broader historical context, including their explicit repudiations, especially in the United States, from the Red Scares of the early 20th century to the claims of victory over communism with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. We will also discuss the concepts of humanism, universalism and historicism, which variously underpin communist thinking, and which serve as focal points of some of the most debated ideas about whether communism is essential or contrary to human nature.

Required

Class: 2.2 Pre-Modern Western Socialist/Communist Utopias

What we call communism in modern political philosophical contexts shares many conceptual similarities with ideas from ancient times, particularly in the form of early narratives of political or religious utopias. A survey of these will be provided in the lecture, but readings and discussion will focus on Plato’s Republic and the monastic rules of St. Benedict and St. Francis.

Required

Class: 2.3 Datong and Other Ancient Chinese Concepts of the ‘Grand Course’

The Chinese concept of *datong* has perhaps its earliest exposition in the Confucian classic, *The Book of Rites*. There Confucius describes the ‘Grand Course,’ its collapse in the Warring States Period, and his method for fostering its return. This concept, along with its associated concept of a *xiaokang* society and the broader idea of harmony, has been among the most influential in Chinese thought, with clear linkages to Maoism and even, the post-Mao reforms that continue today.

Required

**Due date for Initial Essay**

**Week 3**

Class: 3.1 Utopian Socialism: From More to Owen

The immediate forerunners of modern communist movements find their initial expressions in critical assessments of the political and economic transitions from feudalism to what would emerge later as capitalism. First among these is Thomas More’s classic, *Utopia* (1516), followed by major contributions from many others, including most notably Charles-Henri de Saint-Simon and Robert Owen.

Required

Class: 3.2 The Scientific Socialism of Marx and Engels vs. Anarchism

The role of the state as an agent and guarantor of communism or something like it has been discussed since Plato and Confucius. In 19th-century Europe, the debate centered primarily on whether a state is an intermediate necessity or one of the primary obstacles to socialist equality.
These discussions were central to the rise of Marxist thought, as Marx distinguished his notion of communism from the anarchisms of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin.

Required


Class:  3.3  Marx’s Key Concepts and Methods

Marx’s early and middle works emphasize humanist idealisms and the existential necessity of revolution. His later and most mature works center primarily on his studies of the political economy of capitalism, culminating in the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867), though subsequent volumes would appear as edited by Friedrich Engels. This lecture will focus on Marx’s critical methods, dialectical and historical materialism, core concepts from *Capital*, Vol. 1, which should be understood in the contexts developed from Marx’s earlier works and political motivations.

Required


Due date for Middle Essay.

**Week 4**

Class:  4.1  The Revolutions of 1848 and Their Consequences

The Communist Manifesto was published on the eve of a wave of revolutions that shook Europe in 1848. All of these failed to achieve their immediate goals, although by some accounts the Paris Commune in France got the closest while Nordic socialism can claim its starting point from the same period of time. This lecture and discussion will focus on Marx’s assessments of those failures and how they in turn influenced his further developments of communist theory.

Required


Class:  4.2  Bolshevism and the October Revolution in Russia

While the rise of Bolshevism under V. I. Lenin’s leadership draws its clearest theoretical and practical lines from Friedrich Engels (despite claiming Marx as its truest father), it also offered its own substantial contributions if not deviations to/from Classical Marxism. These developments were arguably of vital necessity to the establishment of the first avowedly communist-oriented state, the USSR, and they likewise proved useful for developing communist revolutions elsewhere. This lecture will focus on these developments, including the Leninist vanguard party system, as well as, more broadly, Leninism and Stalinism, and their impacts on political history.

Required
Class: 4.3 Socialism and Social Democracy in Europe

Social Democracy, Labour parties, Nordic Socialism—these movements had their impetus in the revolutions of 1848, and for different reasons over time, moderated their revolutionary programs in favor of working within liberal democratic systems to build robust social welfare systems. By some accounts these movements were second cousins to communism and achieved in some countries socialist developments rarely achieved elsewhere, even in communist countries. By other accounts, they undercut socialist militancy and destroyed the Internationale, ultimately devolving into the New Democrats and New Labour in the post-Soviet world order. Nevertheless, the Nordic model has become influential in contemporary China, which aims to develop a socialist society using a market economy led by a Communist Party. These historical tensions and developments will be the focus of this lecture and discussion.

Required


Week 5

Class: 5.1 The Soviet Bloc

The rise of the Soviet Bloc, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War II, established the frontlines of the ensuing Cold War. This lecture and discussion will focus on the Warsaw Pact and the failed national movements aimed at pushing back against Soviet hegemony, particularly in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Later movements to be discussed, like Solidarity in Poland, would mature near the end of the Soviet period and by some accounts hasten the Bloc’s collapse. We will also review the relationship between the USSR and Vietnam from the late-1960s onward and how this impacted the communist world, especially Sino-Soviet relations and Southeast Asia more broadly.

Required


Recommended


Class: 5.2 Marxism and the Communist Party of China

Why did the Chinese “choose” Marxism as a solution to the crises of modernity faced in the early 20th century? How did Chinese communism synthesize traditional ways of thinking with a political movement that was at once both German and Russian, but above all, claiming to be internationalist? What developments to Communist theory did the Chinese Marxists make, and how did these impact their revolution, victory and subsequent rule? A key focus here: the development of Mao Zedong Thought and what non-Chinese call Maoism.
Latin American Socialist Movements Past and Present

Latin American socialist and communist movements in the 20th century have drawn influence primarily from communism, with revolutionary movements in the Caribbean, most especially Cuba, as well as attempts that achieved various degrees of success but mostly failure throughout Central and South America. Alongside these developments, liberation theology emerged as a synthesis of Marxist and Catholic values, and all found themselves on the frontlines of the Cold War. This lecture will provide an overview of these developments and discuss their contentious and in some cases, ongoing outcomes, including what some mark as the return of liberation theology with a sympathetic Argentine pontiff.

Required


Recommended


Week 6

Class: 6.1 The Soviet Collapse and the End of History?

Francis Fukuyama’s thesis that the collapse of the USSR signaled the “end of history” has been one of the more influential concepts in Western and particularly American thought for more than two decades. This lecture and discussion will examine what led to the Soviet collapse, its impact on communism globally, its influence on rising American unilaterism, the ongoing debates whether these developments were more tragic than liberating, and the increasing suspicion that neither history nor communism have reached their ends.

Required


Daniels, Robert V., Ed. 1993. A Documentary History of Communism in Russia: From Lenin to
Post-Communism in Europe, Africa and Asia

This lecture begins by firstly examining the different meanings of the word “post” in the term “Post-Communism,” which largely describes the conditions in countries that abandoned communist-led systems following the Soviet collapse, but which others have extended to countries that are still led by communist parties, like China and Vietnam, but under market reforms. We also review briefly the history of communist and socialist movements in Africa and South Asia, and how these have been impacted, both positively and negatively, by the Soviet collapse and the increasing global marketization. Theoretically, these developments have been embraced by new contributions to socialist and communist theory.

Required


China after Mao

Post-Mao reforms in China, including developing the so-called “socialist market economy,” have claimed remarkable achievements of national development including lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty, all under a one-party “communist” rule that has evolved economically while retaining Leninist if not Stalinist political systems. The CPC still expresses a communist teleology and has framed development as a critical first step in socialist development. This lecture and discussion will review these efforts and the controversies they have produced, including the extent to which they have abandoned their communist past and instead embraced a capitalist present and future.

Required


Recommended


Final Essay due

Course Materials

Readings


Marx, Karl, 1844, Estranged Labour,” in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,