

WOODSWORTH COLLEGE
University of Toronto
2026 Summer Program in Beijing, China
SOC393Y0 – Contemporary Chinese Societies
May 2 to May 29, 2026

Instructors: Professor **Weiguo ZHANG**, Sociology
Professor **Ka Tat TSANG**, Social Work

Email: weiguo.zhang@utoronto.ca
k.tsang@utoronto.ca

Course Description

百闻不如一见

Seeing it once is better than being told a hundred times

This course aims to enhance students' understanding of Chinese politics, economy, and culture, and of the impacts of the market-oriented reforms on the lived experiences of Chinese people in China and elsewhere. With a combination of lectures, discussions, visits, and other learning activities, students will have the opportunity to learn various aspects of social, economic, and political changes in contemporary China, regarding such important issues as population, ethnicity, internal migration, stratification and inequality in education, health, employment and gender, family organization and formation, social networks, poverty, social welfare, sexuality and intimacy, and China's future role in the new global context.

The focus of this course is to understand social change and development in contemporary Chinese society and global Chinese communities, particularly the roles of societal institutions and individual actions in social change, and how social change affects the nature of people's lives. It will cover theoretical and methodological issues regarding state–society relations (state in society, state as society), structure and agency, context and behavior, and macro–micro linkages. We will examine how macro state policies (including market reforms, population policy, and democratic elections), mediated by societal institutions, influence individual behavior, and, on the other hand, how individual actions shape the characteristics of the society in which people live.

In addition to the formal lectures and classroom discussions co-taught by two University of Toronto professors, namely Weiguo Zhang (Sociology) and Ka Tat Tsang (Social Work), we will invite Chinese scholars, students, villagers, migrant workers, women, elderly, policy makers, and other professionals for guest lectures and informant discussions.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should:

- Develop a deeper understanding of the characteristics of Chinese politics, economy, culture, and society, and how they intertwine.
- Understand theories and concepts of social change and development, and the roles of societal institutions and individual actions in these processes.
- Apply theoretical knowledge and methodological skills to critically analyze empirical issues in Chinese society and communities.

Course Requirements & Evaluation

Journal (30%)

Based on class participation and readings, students will keep a written journal reflecting on issues discussed. Submit three entries (3 pages each, typed and double-spaced, excluding references).

- **First Journal due:** Monday, May 12, 2026, before 9:00 a.m. (10%)
- **Second Journal due:** Monday, May 18, 2026, before 9:00 a.m. (10%)
- **Third Journal due:** Monday, May 25, 2026, before 9:00 a.m. (10%)
(All times refer to China time, GMT +8)

Student-Led Seminar (25%)

Students will work in small groups to lead a 15-minute seminar on a course-related topic, present their findings, and facilitate discussion.

Participation (15%)

Active attendance, preparation, and participation in class discussions and informant sessions. Innovative ideas, thoughtful questions, and relevant sharing will be particularly valued.

Research Essay (30%)

Each student will write a 10-page individual essay (typed, double-spaced, excluding references) based on course materials, guest lectures, or fieldwork observations. Details on submission and evaluation will be discussed in class.

Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

Date	Topic / Activity	Instructor
May 2 (Sat)	Student check-in	
May 3 (Sun)	4:30 p.m. Orientation; 5:30 p.m. Welcome Dinner (<i>Dayali Roasted Duck, Dawanglu location, 3rd Floor, Wanhui Shopping Mall, Jintai Road, Chaoyang, Beijing</i>)	

Date	Topic / Activity	Instructor
May 4 (Mon)	Introduction	Weiguo & Tat
May 5 (Tue)	Economic History and Development	Weiguo
May 6 (Wed)	Market Reforms, Inequality, and Politics	Weiguo
May 7 (Thu)	China and the Global Context	Tat
May 8 (Fri)	—	—
May 9 (Sat)	—	—
May 11 (Mon)	Population Policy and Demographic Change	Weiguo
May 12 (Tue)	Kin, Family, and Marriage Dynamics (<i>First Journal Due</i>)	Weiguo
May 13 (Wed)	Women's Participation in Labor and Politics; Field Trip: Visit Beijing Xiaomi	Weiguo
May 14 (Thu)	Chinese Culture Revisited (<i>Tat</i>); Navigating Youth: Education, Employment, and Relationships (<i>Discussion with CUEB professors and students</i>)	Tat & Weiguo
May 15 (Fri)	Coffee Chat with Dr. Linyu You (<i>China Foreign Affairs University</i>)	
May 18 (Mon)	Village Transformation and Changing Private Lives (<i>Second Journal Due; last day to drop course without penalty</i>)	Weiguo
May 19 (Tue)	Social Problems and Social Service in China	Tat
May 20 (Wed)	Sexuality in China	Tat
May 21 (Thu)	Field Trip: Visit Taikang Community in Beijing	
May 23 (Sat)	Field Trip: Visit Great Wall	
May 25 (Mon)	The Personal and the Political – Relating to China from Diverse Perspectives (<i>Third Journal Due</i>)	Tat
May 26 (Tue)	China's Presence in Canada and the Negotiation of Chinese Identities Among Immigrants and International Students	Tat
May 27 (Wed)	Group Presentation; Farewell Dinner	Weiguo & Tat
May 28 (Thu)	Final Debriefing (<i>Class and Project</i>)	
May 29 (Fri)	Check-out and CR/NCR deadline	Weiguo
May 30 (Sat)		

Course Materials

Zang, X. (Ed.). (2012). *Understanding Chinese Society*. Routledge.

Available electronically through the University of Toronto Libraries:

<http://search.library.utoronto.ca/details?8940692&uuid=2922e106-88b9-4a58-bb98-64ea1ef8f8a3>