

WOODSWORTH COLLEGE
University of Toronto
2026 Summer Program in Beijing, China
SOC393Y0 – Contemporary Chinese Societies
May 16 to June 12, 2026

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

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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 market-oriented reforms on the lived experiences of Chinese people in China and elsewhere. Combining lectures, discussions, visits, and other learning activities, students will have the opportunity to explore various aspects of social, economic, and political changes in contemporary China — including issues such as population, ethnicity, internal migration, stratification and inequality in education, health, employment and gender, family organization, social networks, poverty, welfare, sexuality, intimacy, and China's evolving role in the 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

Develop deeper understanding of the characteristics of Chinese politics, economy, culture, and society, and how they interconnect.

- Understand key theories and concepts of social change and development, especially the roles of institutions and individual actions.
- Apply theoretical knowledge and methodological skills in critically analyzing empirical issues related to Chinese societies.

Course Requirements & Evaluation

Journal (30%)

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

- **First Journal due:** Monday, May 25, 2026 , before 9:00am– 10%
 - **Second Journal due:** Monday, June 1, 2026, before 9:00am – 10%
 - **Third Journal due:** Monday, June 8, 2026, before 9:00am – 10%
- (All times refer to China time, GMT+8)

Student-Led Seminar (25%)

Small groups will lead 15-minute seminars on selected topics, followed by Q&A or discussion.

Participation (15%)

Attendance, preparation, and engagement in classroom and field discussions. Innovative ideas and sharing relevant experiences are encouraged.

Research Essay (30%)

A 10-page essay (typed, double-spaced) analyzing a selected topic based on class insights, informant discussions, fieldwork, or other data sources. Detailed instructions will be provided during the course.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Date	Activities	Instructor
May 16 (Sat)	Student check-in at residence	
May 17 (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>)	
May 18 (Mon)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Introduction	Weiguo & Tat
May 19 (Tue)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Economic History and Development	Weiguo

Date	Activities	Instructor
May 20 (Wed)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Market Reforms, Inequality and Politics	Weiguo
May 21 (Thu)	9:00 am–12:00 pm China and the Global Context	Tat
May 23 (Fri)	Field Trip: Visit Great Wall	
May 25 (Mon)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Population Policy and Demographic Change; <i>First Journal due</i>	Weiguo
May 26 (Tue)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Kin, Family, and Marriage Dynamics	Weiguo
May 27 (Wed)	1:00 pm–4:00 pm Women’s Participation in Labor and Politics	Weiguo
May 28 (Thu)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Chinese Culture Revisited	Tat
May 29 (Fri)	Field Trip: Visit Beijing Xiaomi	Weiguo
Jun 1 (Mon)	1:00 pm–4:00 pm Village Transformation and Changing Private Lives; <i>Second Journal due</i> ; Last day to drop course without academic penalty	Weiguo
Jun 2 (Tue)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Social Problems and Social Service in China	Tat
Jun 3 (Wed)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Sexuality in China	Tat
Jun 4 (Thu)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Navigating Youth: Education, Employment, and Relationships (Discussion with CUEB professors and students)	Weiguo
Jun 5 (Fri)	Field Trip: Visit Taikang Community in Beijing	Weiguo
Jun 6 (Sat)	Coffee Chat with Dr. Linyu You (Counselling Psychologist, China Foreign Affairs University)	Tat
Jun 8 (Mon)	9:00 am–12:00 pm The Personal and the Political – Relating to China from Diverse Perspectives; <i>Third Journal due</i>	Tat
Jun 9 (Tue)	9:00 am–12:00 pm China’s Presence in Canada and the Negotiation of Chinese Identities Among Immigrants and International Students	Tat
June 10 (Wednesday)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Group Presentation; Farewell Lunch	Weiguo & Tat
Jun 11 (Thu)	9:00 am–12:00 pm Final Briefing and Debriefing	Weiguo & Tat
Jun 12 (Fri)	Last day to request CR/NCR; Check out residence	

Course Materials

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

Available electronically from the University of Toronto Libraries:

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