

WOODSWORTH COLLEGE

University of Toronto

2025 Summer Program in Beijing, China

SOC393Y0 – Contemporary Chinese Societies

May 3 to May 30, 2025

Instructors: Professor Weiguo ZHANG, Sociology
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Course Description

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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 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 like its population, ethnicity, internal migration, stratification and inequality in education, health, employment and gender, family organization and family formulation, social network, poverty, social welfare, sexuality and intimacy, China's future role in the new global context, etc.

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 such 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, particularly, how macro state policies (including market reforms, population policy, and democratic election), mediated by societal institutions, influence individual behavior, and on the other hand, how individual actions shape the characteristics of the society in which they 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 and students, villagers, migrant workers, women, elderly, policy makers and other professionals for guest lectures and informants discussions.

By the end of the course, students should:

- have deeper understanding of the characteristics of Chinese politics, economy, culture, and society, and how they intertwine and work together in Chinese communities;
- have better understanding of the relevant theories and concepts of social change and development, and particularly the roles of societal institutions and individual action in social change, and how social change affects the nature of people's lives;
- be able to apply theoretical knowledge and methodological skills in the critical analysis of empirical issues pertinent to Chinese society and Chinese communities.

Course Requirements & Evaluation

Students will be evaluated based on the following activities:

Journal (Value: 30%): Based on class participation and readings, keep a written journal of your own reflections on the issues discussed. The journal is to be submitted to the instructor three times over the course. 3 pages for each journal entry (typed, double spaced, excluding references).

The journal exercise is intended to facilitate your own learning and integration of scholarly exploration and personal experience. Journal writing, therefore, does not have to conform rigidly to academic writing conventions. The key idea is for you to demonstrate how you have processed the materials covered in this course and made them relevant to your own personal learning and development.

First Journal due: May 12 (Monday), 2025 before 9:00 am (Value: 10%)

Second Journal due: May 19 (Monday), 2025 before 9:00 am (Value: 10%)

Third Journal due: May 26 (Monday), 2025 before 9:00 am (Value: 10%)

All times refer to China time (GMT +8)

Student-Led Seminar (Value: 25%): Students will work in small groups. Each group will lead a seminar of 15 minutes on a topic related to this course. The group will be responsible for making a presentation on the chosen topic and facilitating a Q&A and/or discussion on the topic.

Participation (Value: 15%): Attendance, participation in classroom discussion and preparation of questions for discussion with informants will be counted towards participation of the course. Innovative ideas, inquisitive questions, and sharing of information and experience helpful to the learning of other students will be particularly valued.

Research Essay (Value: 30%): Each student is required to write an individual essay drawing on the insights gained from discussions with informants or guest lecturers in class, fieldwork visits, or data collected independently or acquired through other channels such as statistics, survey, or personal stories available on the internet). A final essay of 10 pages (typed, double-spaced,

excluding references) must be submitted at the conclusion of the course. Students are encouraged to engage in conversations with instructors regarding research topics, theories and methods, arguments, and other relevant aspects. Detailed instructions concerning submission dates, essay format, and the grading rubric will be addressed during class discussions.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

May 3 (Saturday)	Students' arrival in Beijing
May 4 (Sunday)	Welcome dinner
May 5 (Monday) (Weiguo & Tat)	Introduction
May 6 (Tuesday) (Weiguo)	Economic History and Development
May 7 (Wednesday) (Weiguo)	Market Reforms, Inequality and Politics
May 8 (Thursday) (Weiguo)	Population Policy and Demographic Change
May 9 (Friday)	Visit Great Wall
May 12 (Monday) (Weiguo)	Kin, Family, and Marriage Dynamics
May 13 (Tuesday) (Weiguo)	Women's Participation in Labor and Politics
May 14 (Wednesday) (Weiguo)	Navigating Youth: Education, Employment, and Relationships (Discussion with CUEB professors and students)
May 15 (Thursday) (Weiguo)	Village Transformation and Changing Private Lives
May 16 (Friday)	Visit Hyundai
May 19 (Monday) (Tat)	China and the Global Context
May 20 (Tuesday) (Tat)	Chinese Culture Revisited
May 21 (Wednesday) (Tat)	Social Problems and Social Service in China
May 22 (Thursday) (Tat)	Sexuality in China
May 23 (Friday)	Visit nursing home in Beijing
May 26 (Monday) (Tat)	The Personal and the Political - Relating to China from Diverse Perspectives
May 27 (Tuesday) (Tat)	China's Presence in Canada and The Negotiation of Chinese Identities Among Immigrants and International Students
May 28 (Wednesday) (Weiguo & Tat)	Group Presentation
May 29 (Thursday) (Weiguo & Tat)	Final Debriefing
May 30 (Friday)	Students' departure

Course Materials

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

It is available electronically from the University of Toronto Libraries:

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