

Sophia University –Summer Session 2026

July 1 – July 22, 2026 *July 1: Orientation. *July 3: No class day

Date: December 2025

Course Title	Contemporary Chinese Society
Course Code	SOZ440
Instructor	Yuxin Pei
Class Period	3rd Period (13:30–15:10)
Course Format	In-Person
Language of Instruction	English
Maximum class size	20
Course Description	<p>This course provides an accessible and academically rigorous introduction to contemporary Chinese society through political, social, and cultural changes since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. No prior knowledge of Chinese history, politics, or language is required, making the course suitable for students from diverse academic backgrounds.</p> <p>Approaching China as a lived social reality rather than an abstract geopolitical concept, the course examines how state policies, market reforms, and social transformations shape everyday life. Key topics include urbanization, migration, housing, family and gender relations, marriage and fertility, digital media, inequality, and social mobility.</p> <p>A central focus of the course is the connection between macro-level structures—such as political institutions and social systems—and micro-level experiences, including personal narratives and life stories. Students will explore how ordinary people navigate and respond to large-scale political and economic changes in their daily lives.</p>
Course Objectives	<p>This course aims to help students gain a meaningful and accessible understanding of contemporary China through everyday life experiences and sociological analysis. The course is designed to be intellectually engaging without being overwhelming, allowing students to learn efficiently while developing strong analytical skills.</p> <p>By the end of the course, students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Understand contemporary Chinese society by connecting political, economic, and social changes to ordinary people's daily lives.● Learn to view China from both an “inside” perspective, grounded in lived experiences and personal stories, and a sociological perspective that highlights social structures and inequalities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop core academic skills, including critical thinking and the ability to link individual experiences with broader social patterns. ● Gain a nuanced and empathetic understanding of China that goes beyond stereotypes, fostering a deeper intellectual and personal engagement with Chinese society.
Expected work outside of class	<p>Students are encouraged to work collaboratively in preparing group presentations. Time spent outside the classroom—such as reading, discussing ideas, and coordinating tasks—is intended to support not only the quality of the presentations, but also the development of a supportive and collegial learning community. Through shared preparation and mutual assistance, students can learn from one another, build connections, and create a comfortable and collaborative learning environment that enhances both academic understanding and group engagement.</p>
Course Materials	<p>Course materials combine scholarly readings with films, documentaries, popular media, and social media content. Through sociological analysis and open discussion, students will gain a nuanced understanding of contemporary China while also reflecting on broader global issues such as modernity, state power, and individual agency.</p>
	<p>Purchase of textbook: not necessary</p>
	<p>e-book: not acceptable</p>
Moodle	<p>-Moodle will not be used for this course.</p>
Contact Instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • via Email <p>*The email address will be available at CGED office or informed by the instructor in the first class if needed.</p>
Evaluation (Attendance, Class participation, in-class assignments, final exam, quizzes, etc.)	<p>Students' performance in this course will be evaluated through a combination of individual and collaborative activities designed to reflect their understanding, engagement, and progress over time. The evaluation emphasizes learning, participation, and thoughtful engagement, rather than memorization or high-pressure testing.</p> <p>Assessment components include attendance, class participation, in-class activities, group discussions, presentations, short reflective essays, and examinations. These components together allow students to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways, recognizing different strengths and learning styles.</p> <p>Mid-term Group Presentation (30%)</p> <p>The group presentation provides students with an opportunity to collaboratively explore course themes, share perspectives, and learn from one another in a supportive group setting.</p>

	<p>Final Exam (70%)</p> <p>The final exam assesses students' overall understanding of key concepts, theories, and social phenomena discussed throughout the course, with an emphasis on comprehension and interpretation rather than rote recall.</p> <p>Short written assignments and class discussions will be used to support learning and to provide ongoing feedback, helping students track their progress and deepen their understanding of contemporary Chinese society.</p>
Other comments	-
Class schedule	<p>*July 1: Orientation</p> <p>*July 3: No-Class Day</p>
	<p>[DAY 1]</p> <p>Introduction</p> <p>In the first class, selected scenes from Zhang Yimou's <i>To Live</i> (Huozhe) will be shown as an introduction to the course. The film portrays the life of an ordinary Chinese family across major political and social transformations of the twentieth century, offering a powerful artistic lens through which to reflect on why China has become what it is today. Widely recognized internationally—including winning the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival—the film provides a compelling entry point for international students.</p> <p>By beginning with this film, the course invites students to approach contemporary China through human experience and everyday life, rather than abstract narratives or stereotypes. The scenes serve as a shared reference point for later discussions, helping students connect historical change with the lived realities that continue to shape Chinese society today.</p>
	<p>[DAY 2]</p> <p>Hukou System and migration</p> <p>China's rural-to-urban migration is one of the largest in modern history and has fundamentally shaped its cities, labor markets, and social life. The Hukou (household registration) system plays a central role by influencing access to education, healthcare, housing, and social welfare, creating different lived experiences within the same city.</p>

	<p>Understanding this system helps explain everyday realities in China—from who builds and services cities to why social inequality and mobility persist. For international students, this knowledge provides a practical lens for studying, traveling, and collaborating in China, offering a deeper and more realistic understanding of how Chinese society functions beyond headlines and stereotypes.</p>
	<p>[DAY 3]</p> <p>Urbanization and the House Market</p> <p>Urbanization has reshaped Chinese cities at an unprecedented scale, turning housing into a key factor in social mobility, family expectations, and access to opportunity. Rapid development and rising demand made homeownership central to urban life, while also deepening affordability pressures and inequality.</p> <p>The recent real estate downturn reveals how growth driven by property and speculation affects not only investors and developers, but also young people, families, and local governments. Understanding housing helps students see how economic change, risk, and everyday life are deeply connected in contemporary China—insight that is essential for studying, traveling, or working in the country.</p> <p>.</p>
	<p>[DAY 4]</p> <p>China's Media Censorship</p> <p>Media censorship shapes how information, news, and political ideas circulate in China, influencing what people see, say, and share online. Understanding these controls helps explain everyday communication practices, including self-censorship, humor, and coded expression.</p> <p>At the same time, social media, live streaming, and platforms like TikTok (Douyin) are central to Chinese digital life, driving entertainment, consumer culture, and online creativity. Together, these dynamics reveal the tension between state regulation and popular culture—offering international students a crucial lens for understanding contemporary Chinese society and digital life.</p>
	<p>[DAY 5]</p> <p>Digital Economy and Live-Streaming E-commerce</p> <p>Live-streaming e-commerce has transformed China's digital economy by</p>

blending shopping, entertainment, and social interaction. Platforms that combine influencers, real-time engagement, and instant purchasing have reshaped consumer behavior and marketing strategies, offering insight into the future of global online retail.

At the same time, women entrepreneurs have emerged as influential leaders within this digital landscape. From live-streaming hosts to tech founders, they drive innovation while navigating gendered expectations, platform pressures, and new economic opportunities. Together, these developments show how technology, entrepreneurship, and social change intersect in contemporary China—making this topic highly relevant for international students interested in business, media, and digital culture.

[DAY 6]

Filial Piety and Intergenerational Relationships

Filial piety has long shaped family life in China, influencing how parents and children relate to each other and how elderly family members are cared for. It affects everyday expectations around respect, responsibility, and support across generations.

As China modernizes—with urban migration, smaller families, and longer life expectancy—these traditions are being reinterpreted. Understanding how filial piety adapts today helps international students see how cultural values respond to social change and offers a meaningful comparison with family and aging practices in other societies.

[DAY 7]

Childbirth Control Policy

China's family planning policies have deeply shaped family life and population trends. From the One - Child Policy to today's birth - encouraging measures, the state has played an unusually strong role in decisions about childbirth.

While these policies successfully slowed population growth, they also created long-term challenges, including aging, gender imbalance, and heavy social pressure around marriage and childbearing. Today, many young people are reluctant to have children despite policy relaxation.

For university students, this topic shows how government policy can influence personal choices and social values. It helps explain

	<p>contemporary debates about family, gender, and demographic change in China, while offering useful comparisons with population issues worldwide.</p>
	<p>[DAY 8]</p> <p>Group Presentation</p> <p>Building on the topics discussed in class, the group presentation invites students to explore contemporary China in creative and interactive ways. Students are encouraged to compare China with their own countries or cultural backgrounds, highlighting similarities, differences, and shared challenges.</p> <p>This assignment is designed not only to deepen understanding of China, but also to foster mutual learning and cross-cultural exchange among classmates. In previous years, students who have taken this course consistently found this activity engaging and meaningful, as it helped them better understand both China and each other.</p>
	<p>[DAY 9]</p> <p>Love and Marriage in China</p> <p>Romantic relationships in China today are shaped by both digital technology and traditional matchmaking practices. Dating apps coexist with parent-led “marriage markets,” where factors such as education, income, housing, and household registration still play a major role. These overlapping systems reveal social pressures around age, gender, and “marriageability,” especially for highly educated women and men.</p> <p>At the same time, new rituals of romance have emerged. Public, event-style proposals and lavish weddings — once absent from Chinese tradition—are now common, influenced by social media, reality TV, and consumer culture. Marriage has become not only a personal commitment, but also a public performance of emotion, status, and family expectations.</p> <p>In this section, students will explore how love, choice, and social structure intersect in modern China. You will also take part in a fun matchmaking simulation game, allowing you to experience how contemporary Chinese courtship works—and to compare it with dating and marriage practices in your own culture.</p>
	<p>[DAY 10]</p> <p>Domestic Violence and Divorce</p>

Domestic violence has increasingly become a public and legal issue in China rather than a private family matter. Changes in law, media coverage, and activism have raised awareness of gender-based violence, while also revealing persistent challenges related to power, gender norms, and access to protection. Examining these issues helps students understand how social change reshapes ideas of safety, justice, and family responsibility.

At the same time, divorce rates in China have risen sharply in recent decades. Economic independence, changing expectations of marriage, and greater legal recognition of individual rights have made divorce more socially visible—and more contested. These trends highlight shifting attitudes toward love, commitment, and personal fulfillment, as well as the tensions between traditional family ideals and modern relationship realities.

[DAY 11]

Virginity, Gendered Sexual Rights, and Commercial Sex Work

In Chinese society, virginity discourses and gendered sexual rights are deeply intertwined with cultural norms and expectations. These attitudes shape how individuals, particularly women, experience their autonomy and sexuality. The emphasis on virginity often imposes restrictive standards that can hinder gender equality and influence broader discussions about sexual identity and behavior. Understanding these discourses is vital for recognizing the ongoing challenges faced by individuals striving for personal rights and freedoms in a traditionally patriarchal context.

Conversely, commercial sex work presents complex social issues shaped by legal ambiguities and public health concerns. As sex work remains largely stigmatized and criminalized, workers often face significant social prejudice and health risks, complicating their fight for labor and human rights. This dynamic raises essential questions about gender, power, and societal attitudes toward professionalism in intimate services.

[DAY 12]

State, Market, and Feminism

In a rapidly evolving landscape, the interplay between the state, market forces, and feminist movements in China presents a complex picture of progress and challenge. While the Chinese government has shown

ambivalence towards feminist activism—sometimes supporting gender equality initiatives and at other times stifling dissent—market dynamics often shape the experience of gender equality. The rise of consumer culture has influenced feminist discourse, commodifying empowerment while simultaneously concealing lingering inequalities.

At the same time, LGBTQ issues are increasingly visible but fraught with tension. While urban, middle-class LGBTQ individuals may enjoy a degree of visibility and acceptance, many face discrimination and legal challenges. Activism exists within a legal framework that is often restrictive, complicating efforts for broader acceptance. This juxtaposition highlights the need for a critical examination of how state policies and market realities influence both feminist and LGBTQ advocacy in shaping identities and rights within contemporary China.

[DAY 13]

The popularity of Japanese and Korean soap operas has become a cultural phenomenon in China, significantly shaping the landscape of Chinese popular culture. These dramas, known for their engaging storylines and production quality, have captivated audiences and influenced entertainment preferences across the country. With themes that resonate deeply with Chinese viewers, they facilitate a unique form of cultural exchange between East Asian nations, blurring the lines of traditional cultural boundaries.

Central to this popularity is the emergence of dedicated fan culture surrounding these dramas. Passionate fan communities have sprung up, actively participating in discussions, fan art, and social media trends that amplify the visibility and impact of their favorite shows. This fervor influences consumer behavior, driving merchandise sales and promotional events, while also shaping social media dynamics. The interactions and collaborations among fans across borders enhance the understanding of differing cultural narratives, contributing to richer cross-cultural interactions and media consumption patterns.

[DAY 14]

Final Class Reflection

In our concluding session, we will conduct a reflective assessment that allows you to critically engage with the themes and discussions we've covered throughout the course. This assessment will not follow a traditional exam format; instead, it will present an open-ended opportunity for you to articulate your insights and understanding of key

	<p>topics.</p> <p>Students will select from several questions that reflect the course content, and you are encouraged to utilize any relevant materials to support your responses. This exercise is designed not merely as an evaluation but as a platform for you to contemplate and connect with the material on a deeper level.</p> <p>The intention is to cultivate an atmosphere conducive to thoughtful dialogue, where you can engage meaningfully with your peers. I look forward to your reflections and to a productive discussion that encapsulates the journey we have undertaken together throughout this course.</p>
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*Course format, evaluation methods and class schedule may be subject to change.

[Important Note Regarding Class Capacity]

Course enrollment in each course is on a first-come, first-served basis. Please be aware that once the maximum capacity is reached, you will no longer be able to select that course.

If you plan to transfer the credits to your home university, please consider alternative courses as well when making your study plan, in case the courses you want to take are full.