Social Inequality in China: Education, Migrant Communities, and Volunteerism

Instructor: Rachel Leng
Faculty Supervisor: Ralph Litzinger, Cultural Anthropology
Meeting Time and Place: Wednesdays, 7 - 9pm, Keohane 4D 201

Course Description:

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to the culture and politics of migrant life – particularly migrant education – through a wide spectrum of readings, documentaries, and films. Since the late 1950s, China has made tremendous efforts to improve education, with the aim of promoting economic and social development. Nevertheless, despite the tremendous strides China has made in the global sphere, the current rural-urban divide is startling and there is still much effort needed to improve the education system. While the rising middle-class enjoys its new money and lifestyle, their rural counterparts often struggle with poverty reminiscent of China twenty years ago.

In spite of the series of education reforms before, during, and after the Cultural Revolution, striking deficiencies nevertheless remain in the Chinese educational system, and enormous difficulties still lie ahead for ongoing educational reform. As China’s markets underwent reform post-1977 (the end of the period of Maoist command socialism), opportunities for development and employment began to open up in urban areas. The privatization of public goods increased the demand for higher-salaried employment as goods and services once provided by the government were cut, and local and foreign business enterprises and investment were allowed to flourish. When foreign investment came in, these areas grew spectacularly in wealth and population, attracting migrant workers from all of the country in pursuit of a better life. However, because migrants have limited access to public goods due to the continued existence of the 1950’s household registration (hukou), the children of these rural-to-urban migrants have been denied access to public education in China’s cities and factory towns.

Over the course of this semester, we will look at various aspects of the migrant condition. We will examine the historical and current barriers to migrant education, and specifically at a non-profit school dedicated to improving education for migrant children. This class is geared towards preparing students for their participation in the DukeEngage Beijing program at the Dandelion Middle School. There will be reflections and discussions interspersed throughout the course on teaching at the school and on the lived experiences of the migrant community at the school. In light of the growing non-profit response to various issues of social inequality in China, we will also take the Dandelion Middle School as a case study in order to discuss the potential benefits and repercussions of volunteerism, including the problem of poverty tourism. The course will culminate in a final project or essay where students will reflect upon and propose projects to address the complex issues of social injustice, volunteerism, inequitable education and the marginalization of migrant communities in China today. The overall aim is to better prepare the next class of Duke Engage students to make informed decisions and take principled action through social engagement at the Dandelion school and beyond.
Course Materials:
All of our reading materials, with the exception of the required books (see below), will be available for access via Sakai. Most will be posted as PDFs. There will be a few readings with a link to an external website. The readings are listed on the date they are due. Please download them well in advance and come to class each week prepared to discuss what you have read.

The two books required for the class, “Factory Girls” and “Awakening Creativity: Dandelion School Blossoms,” are lengthy but easy readings. These are available on Amazon or can be ordered through the Regulator Bookstore on Ninth Street. Please note the due dates for longer readings and manage your time accordingly.

Assignments:
1. Seven one-page reflections on readings/movies (due at beginning of class)
2. Weekly current events articles (each student should find a recent article pertaining to the class topic for discussion and debate)
3. Student Presentations – in groups of two or individually, students will be given an opportunity to explore a relevant topic/issue of interest to them as it relates to migrant education. More information regarding structure and content will be provided on the first day of class.
4. Final ten-page paper analyzing the effectiveness of civic engagement in education reform, drawing upon the Dandelion Middle School as a case study. This paper must concisely describe the problem, outline proposed solutions, and include supporting materials to demonstrate and substantiate an argument.

Attendance:
Mandatory for every class period. Missing class for extra-curricular meetings is not acceptable. Attending fewer than 11 sessions will result in an automatic failure. (or, you could say: if you miss more than five classes you will automatically fail).

Grading:
A grade of satisfactory in this course requires more than satisfactory completion of all assignments, including written and oral assignments, attendance, and class participation.

Book list:
Factory Girls by Leslie Chang
Awakening Creativity: Dandelion School Blossoms by Lily Yeh
English Language Teaching in China: New Approaches, Perspectives and Standards by Jun Liu

Films (These first two films will be put on reserve in Lilly):

1. Turning Point 1977 / 高考 (2009), film directed by Jiang Haiyan
   a. Set at the close of the Cultural Revolution, Turning Point 1977 tells the story of a group of young idealists battling for the right to return home and restart their lives after years of toil on a state run re-education farm in China. (Summary: IMDb.com)
2. Last Train Home (2009), documentary directed by Lixin Fan
   a. A couple embarks on a journey home for Chinese new year along with 130 million other migrant workers, to reunite with their children and struggle for a future. Their unseen story plays out as China soars towards being a world superpower. (Summary: IMDb.com)

   a. A news documentary by local Chinese CCTV reporters that looks at the social environment and development of the Dandelion Middle School. Includes interviews of teachers and staff and how their work contributes to the school.

Schedule:

Week 1:

Lesson 1: Civic Engagement, Education and Volunteerism in China
Facility sponsor in attendance.

Readings (111 pages):

Week 2:

Lesson 2: The Hukou System and Chinese Migrant Condition
Readings (113 pages):
- Zhang, L. “Strangers in the city : reconfigurations of space, power, and social networks within China's floating


Assignment 1 due: One-page summary/reflection on Hukou system readings.

Week 3:

Lesson 3: The Educational System and Achievement Gap in China
Readings (222 pages):

- **Film** - 高考

Assignment 2 due: One-page summary/reflection on education system (migrants) readings.

Week 4:

Lesson 4: The Status of Migrant Education in China
Faculty sponsor in attendance.
Readings (129 pages):


Optional Readings:


Assignment 3 due: One-page summary/reflection on achievement gap readings.

Week 5:

Lesson 5: Middle School in China (Teaching)
Faculty sponsor in attendance
Readings (141 pages):


Assignment 4 due: One-page summary/reflection on the middle school experience for Chinese students.

Week 6:

Lesson 6: Film – Last Train Home (Migrants in Urban Cities)
Readings (407 pages):

  
  **Assignment 5 due: One-page summary/reflection on Factory Girls and Last Train Home film.**

**Week 7:**

**Lesson 7: Dandelion Case Study / Student Profiles**

Readings (90 pages + websites):
- Dandelion School website.  
  <http://www.dandelionschool.org/>
- Dandelion 2012 Blog:  
  http://dandelionschool.tumblr.com/Yeh, L.  

**Week 8:**

**DE Beijing 2012 & Social History at Dandelion Middle School**

Readings (120 pages):
- Film – Social History Documentary (sub-titled translation of local Chinese news report)
- Case report of previous DukeEngage Beijing Projects
- Project Reports from 2012 program
- DE 2012 Beijing Student Panel discussing projects and experiences

**Week 9:**

**Spring Break**

**Week 10:**

**Video-chat with Dandelion Teachers/Volunteers**

Readings (135 pages):
- Yeh, L. “Awakening Creativity: Dandelion School Blossoms,” pp. 91-205.

**Week 11:**

**Student Presentations**

Readings:
- TBD, will be determined by students who are presenting (must be sent out at least 3 days in advance, minimum 1 paper per group)

**Week 12:**

**Lesson 8: Why does education matter? Teaching English in China**

Readings (141 pages):
- Book: *English Language Teaching in China*
  - Chapters 1 and 14

**Assignment 6 due:** One-page summary/reflection on educational achievement readings and struggles of teaching English readings.

**Week 13:**

**Lesson 9: Volunteerism and a Global China**

Readings (87 pages + website):

**Assignment 7 due:** One-page summary/reflection on volunteerism and global China readings.

**Week 14:**

**Student Presentations**
Readings:
- TBD, will be determined by students who are presenting (must be sent out at least 3 days in advance)

Week 15:
**Conclusion Proposed Initiative for Social Projects**

Review and Reflect:
  - These chapters will provide useful practical tips for teaching English in Chinese schools.
  - Chapter 2: Redefining grammar in contextualizing communicative competence (Diane Larsen-Freeman) (p. 42)
  - Chapter 14: Teaching pronunciation in twenty-first century China: models and methods (Jette G. Hansen Edwards) (p. 270)

Week 16: May 3
**Final Papers/Project Proposals due**