Everybody educated?
*Education migrants and rural-urban relations in Hubei Province, China*
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Everybody Educated?
Education Migrants and Rural-Urban Relations in Hubei Province, China

This dissertation tells the stories of China’s ‘education migrants’, the growing number of Chinese rural youth who migrate to the city via the country’s higher education system. These youths’ increased enrolment in Chinese universities has driven the rapid expansion of the Chinese higher education system since 1998. Despite being the first in their families to go to university, education migrants struggle in the city as a result of their substandard degrees and the stigmatisation of rural people in urban China. Yet, driven by their family members’ need of support and a lack of alternative options, these youths continue to strive for success in China’s urban society.
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Willy Sier
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Glossary
Ant tribe / Yizu
A term popular in academic literature in reference to educated, rural youth in cities.

Eating bitterness / Chiku
Bearing hardship.

Gaokao
The university entrance exam.

Guangjie
Go out window shopping, roaming the streets or a mall.

Hukou system
Chinese system of residence registration.

Key point university
Universities belonging to the top segment of the education system, funded by the 985- and 211-projects.

Left-over woman / Shengnű
A derogatory term to refer to a highly-educated, unmarried woman.

Marriage Agent / Meipo
A female matchmaker in the village who matches young men to potential brides for a fee.

Marriage House / Hunjia
The house a groom is expected to buy before marriage.

Outside / Waidi
‘Going outside’ generally means ‘to migrate’ or ‘do migrant labour’. ‘Coming from outside’ or ‘being an outsider’ means ‘to be a migrant’ or ‘not a local’.

Phoenix boy / Fenghuangnan
A derogatory term to refer to a boy who grew up in China’s countryside, and is now successful in the city.

Shuangxiu
Getting two days off per week on a job.

Taobao
An online marketplace.

Taobao
Job-hopping.

WeChat / Weixin
China’s most popular social media application. It combines functions of social media applications Facebook and Whatsapp.

Zhai
Popular internet-term, meaning: not often wanting to go outside, being shy, keeping to oneself.
Time Line

1949: The China Communist Party (CCP) comes to power, and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is founded.
1976: Death of Mao Zedong.
1978: Start of the reform period under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping.
1986: Implementation of nine years of compulsory education.
1990: Stagnation of the rural economy, which develops into ‘rural crisis’.
1998: Start of the radical expansion of the Chinese higher education system.
2004: Launch of the rural primary school merger programme.
2017: Rural graduates can now apply for urban hukou-registrations in second-tier cities.

Maps

Figure 1: Map indicating the location of Hubei province in China
Made by: Willy Sier

Figure 2: Map indicating relevant research locations within Hubei province
Made by: Willy Sier
Overview of Main Characters

MORNING SUNSHINE

1994
University dropout
Major: accountancy
Zhuanke university
Two sisters, one brother
Parents practice labour migration
Married in 2018

ANNA

1993
Foxconn office employee
Major: editing
Class 2 university
One brother
Parents practice labour migration
Plays piano
LI TANG
1988
Car salesman
Major: car sales
Zhuanke university
Only child
Mother is a farmer
Raised by single mother

JULIA
1993
Works in education sales
Major: Fashion design
Class 2 university
One brother
Mother practices labour migration
Very ambitious
Misty
1993
Works in sales
Major: accountancy
Zhuanke university
One brother
Parents are farmers
Married and pregnant in 2019

Xi
1993
University dropout
Works in e-commerce
Major: machine engineering
Class 1 university
Single child
Parents are farmers