

13. Chang, *Factory Girls*.

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## A Media-Enhanced Middle School Study of Modern Chinese Migration

By Karen Gaul

Multimedia lessons are an effective way to reach middle school learners, and this is especially so when teaching the complexities of China's rapid urbanization. Key to understanding the effects of migration on the fabric of Chinese society is viewing this phenomena from the perspective of the migrant worker. A variety of resources exist with which a teacher can provide students both the voice of the migrant and vivid images that bring his or her experiences to life. At the heart of many of these visual media pieces lie questions essential to the understanding of Chinese urbanization: Why is this mass migration occurring? What are its social implications? How might China's future be impacted?

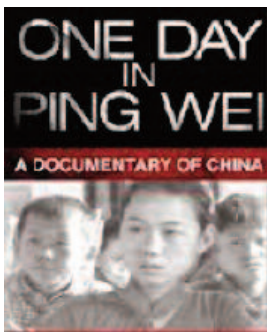
Some initial understandings of human migration in general are necessary before launching a study on Chinese urbanization. It's likely that students possess prior knowledge about migration. Most will recognize America's Nineteenth Century Industrial Revolution as an event that spurred Europeans to seek opportunity in the United States, and many may have knowledge of war refugees from places such as Việt Nam, Kosovo, or the Sudan seeking a new home. Establish a baseline with your class that includes examples of factors that push migrants away from home, challenges faced when in a new environment, and factors that draw migrants back home.

Suggested resources for this study include films, videos, slideshows, and background readings, all of which are brief in length and accessible to the middle school learner. Students who complete this study should be able to articulate the forces driving internal migration in China, and the current and future implications of this phenomena. Each should also be able to draw on the narratives to present an understanding of Chinese urbanization from the perspective of the migrant.

### Film Resources for Classroom Discussion on Chinese Migration

#### The Ping Wei Film Series and Discussion Questions

Set in the village of Ping Wei in Anhui Province, this series of half-hour films follows the life of Liu Yen Twin from the ages of ten to seventeen. These films provide a glimpse into rural Chinese family life. Confucian values are evident, as are the changes that modernization brings to the village. Students will be grounded in their understanding of village life as seen through the eyes of a child of similar age. All films in the series are narrated in both English and Mandarin with subtitles.



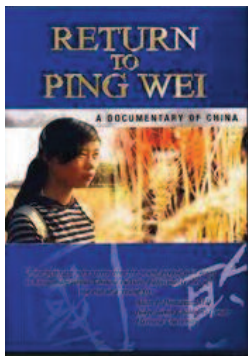
#### *One Day in Ping Wei*

Produced and filmed by Andrew Fone

30 minutes

DVD, Pearl River Productions, 2004

In *One Day in Ping Wei*, we are introduced to ten-year-old Liu Yen Twin and experience an average day in the village. Students will immediately realize that village life lacks many amenities. Roads are unpaved, and few motorized vehicles can be found. The Lius' home is without running water and most modern conveniences. They are not wealthy by American standards, yet the Lius are a seemingly happy, healthy, and content family.



*Return to Ping Wei*  
Produced and filmed by Andrew Fone  
30 minutes  
DVD, Pearl River Productions, 2007

*Return to Ping Wei* is the second documentary featuring the Liu family. Filmed two years after *One Day in Ping Wei*, the changes the village has undergone are obvious. The dirt road leading into the village is now paved, and the influx of cars and other motorized vehicles is noteworthy. The family now has a freezer and a new counter in the kitchen. Students will agree that life seems a bit easier for the villagers. Liu Yen Twin is now a teenager and expected to perform well academically.



*Away From Ping Wei*  
Produced and Filmed by Andrew Fone  
30 Minutes  
DVD, Pearl River Productions, 2011

In *Away from Ping Wei*, Liu Yen Twin is seventeen and a migrant worker in a Beijing restaurant. Beijing, where she shares a small room with her cousin, is far from home, and she misses her family in Ping Wei. When separation from family becomes too much to bear, Liu Yen Twin seeks a job closer to home. Much of this film also focuses on the importance of the New Year's celebration, and students will recognize further evidence of changes to village life brought on by modernization.

#### Discussion Questions for Students on Ping Wei Film Series

1. What family values are evident in the film?
2. Would you describe the family as wealthy?
3. How does life change for the Liu family and other villagers over time?

#### Last Train Home: Web Resources and Discussion Questions



*Last Train Home*  
Directed by Lixin Fan  
85 minutes  
DVD, EyeSteelFilm, 2009 (distributed by Zeitgeist Films)

*Last Train Home*, a feature-length film by Lixin Fan, highlights the hardship of migrant life, particularly its effect on the family, as epitomized by one migrant couple's struggle to catch a train home to be with family for the Chinese New Year. Video clips from the film's web page coupled with a PBS teaching guide will extend a topic introduced in *Away from Ping Wei*: the high human cost of migrant work.

"Documentaries With A Point of View (POV): Last Train Home," *PBS.com*, accessed November 24, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/7dectcf>.

The PBS website provides links to related short videos that are accessible to middle school students. A few of these videos are noted below, each of which provides a unique perspective on the migrant experience.

#### *Interviewers at Guangzhou Train Station* (6 minutes)

As thousands stand in lines at the train station, migrants discuss the financial barriers preventing more frequent travel home and the effects these long separations have on family relationships.

*How Can There Be Any Feelings?* (0:47 minutes)

The daughter of migrant workers expresses her frustration about having been raised by her grandparents.

*A Mother Leaves Her Child for Work in the City* (1:28 minutes)

The mother of the girl featured in *How Can There Be Any Feelings?* shares her reasons for leaving her child in the care of grandparents.

“POV: Community Engagement & Education Discussion Guide: Last Train Home,” *PBS.com*, accessed November 24, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/ob4wegy>.

This PBS study guide for *Last Train Home* provides short background readings on the magnitude of China’s current migration phenomena, the life of a migrant worker, Confucian values, the Chinese economy, and biographies of selected people featured in *How Can There Be Any Feelings?* and *A Mother Leaves Her Child for Work in the City*.

Discussion Questions for Students on *Last Train Home*

1. What forces are pushing rural Chinese to migrate to urban areas?
2. What forces are pulling rural Chinese to return home?
3. What are the effects of migrant work on family life?

### Further Classroom Resources for Chinese Migration Discussion: *Factory Girls* and *Leaving the Land*

#### ***Factory Girls***

Leslie Chang’s *Factory Girls* offers readers a look at factory life in China from the perspective of the young female worker; Chang also offers her perspective on migrant factory workers in her 2012 TED talk, *The Voices of Chinese Workers*. Chang’s book follows two young women over the course of three years as they leave their rural homes to find work in the factories of Guangdong Province. Students can learn about the motivations of young Chinese migrants from the first chapter of *Factory Girls* and from Chang’s TED talk.

Leslie Chang, “Going Out,” *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2008), 3-16.

“Going Out,” chapter 1 of *Factory Girls*, introduces the reader to Lu Qingmin. Qingmin is a teenage migrant who leaves her rural home and finds factory work in Guangdong Province. Students will connect with Qingmin as they read about her somewhat-rebellious yet fun-loving youth in her rural village, and they will understand that, even with poor working conditions and low pay, Qingmin finds her newfound independence liberating.

Leslie Chang, “The Voices of Chinese Workers,” *TED.com*, last modified June 2012, <http://tinyurl.com/mnaja9l>.

In this TED talk, Chang proposes that it is not global consumerism that drives Chinese migrants into factories. Particularly for the teenage girls who leave their rural homes, it is a sense of adventure and a desire for independence that draws workers to factory cities. Chang brings to life the narratives of young female factory workers, one of whom is Lu Qingmin, the focus of the first chapter of *Factory Girls*, and reminds us that life lessons learned and money earned while on the job are at the heart of the young female migrant experience.

Discussion Questions for Students on *Factory Girls*

1. What forces are pulling young women to migrate to urban areas?
2. Why does Leslie Chang feel that very few factory workers would like to go back to the way things were before urbanization?
3. How is globalization impacting the Chinese worker?

***Leaving the Land***

*Leaving the Land* is a *New York Times* multimedia series on China's monumental plan to resettle rural families in urban environments by Ian Johnson. Articles in this series contain written narratives, accompanied by short videos, slideshows, and graphics that bring to life the human experience of mass migration. The videos, slideshows, and graphics in the first two segments of this series will be well-received by middle school students, and excerpts from the written narratives can be used to strengthen *Leaving the Land's* message. The following are two parts of the series by Ian Johnson with sample multimedia resources from both.

Ian Johnson, "China's Great Uprooting: Moving 250 Million Into Cities," *The New York Times*, last modified June 15, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/khwmdp>.

Sample multimedia resources from "China's Great Uprooting":

***In China, A Staggering Migration* (Video)**

By Alicia DeSantis, Graham Roberts, and Derek Watkins

2:24 minutes

The magnitude of China's plan to move 250 million rural Chinese to urban locations is overwhelming.

***A Chinese Push for Urbanization* (Captioned Image Slideshow)**

By Justin Jin

A captioned slideshow displaying former village dwellers at work and at home in their new urban environments.

Ian Johnson, "Pitfalls Abound in China's Push From Farm to City," *The New York Times*, July 13, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/nqrjyfn>

Sample multimedia resources from "Pitfalls Abound in China's Push from Farm to City":

***China's Consuming Billions* (Video)**

By Jonah M. Kessel

5:20 minutes

Consumerism is at the heart of China's goal to move millions of people from rural to urban settings.

***Rocky Transition from Farm to Town in China* (Captioned Image Slideshow)**

By Sim Chi Yin

A captioned slideshow featuring former village dwellers struggle to make ends meet in in urban environments.

**Discussion Questions for Students on *Leaving the Land***

1. How is China's goal of moving 250 million people to urban areas viewed by migrants?
2. Will the impact of this forced migration be easier on the younger migrants?
3. How is migration affecting life in China?

**Cross-Curricular Applications**

Many of the themes commonly taught in social studies classes, including cultural identity, change over time, and governance, are captured in this study. When used as a part of a social studies unit, students should be able to articulate the forces driving China's internal migration and how migration is changing China. Students should also be able to predict possible outcomes if China's government is successful in moving 250 million people to urban locations. In addition, the use of multimedia to deliver personal narratives allows for broad use of this study within a middle school curriculum. Below is an analysis of themes found within the study and



cross-curricular suggestions for each.

Personal narratives are an integral part of this study. The *Ping Wei* series and *Last Train Home* resources provide strong video narratives, and *Last Train Home* also contains written biographies that give insight into the film's characters. Leslie Chang gives us a narrative from Lu Qinming's point of view in the first chapter of *Factory Girls*, and Lu Qinming's narrative is further explored in Chang's TED talk. Each can be evaluated and used as models for writing or speaking. Students can (1) write or tell their own narratives with the understanding that personal experiences shape identity; (2) assume the identities of migrant parents, migrant children, and government officials, and debate the economic benefits in relation to the social cost of mass migration; and (3) compare the narratives of Chinese migrants with migrants from around the world.

Still images enhance written and spoken narratives. Chang's book cover and cover art for *Last Train Home* and the *Ping Wei* films convey a sense of what the reader or viewer will experience. Slideshows in the *Leaving the Land* series support the related narratives and highlight points that the author wishes to emphasize. Each can be evaluated and used as teaching tools in art classes. Students can (1) evaluate still images from this study and create their own images to support a variety of narratives, (2) create their own cover images for the *Leaving the Land* pieces, and (3) produce slideshows to demonstrate an understanding of the Chinese migrant experience.

Music is used to heighten meaning in video. Traditional Chinese music is often used in the *Ping Wei* films, and the *Leaving the Land* series uses Western music in its video. *The Last Train Home* video clips contain a musical introduction but no music in the narratives. Music, or the absence of music, can affect the way a video is interpreted, and the use of music to convey meaning connects these resources to music class content. Students can (1) analyze the effectiveness of the use of music in the video resources, (2) compose their own music for the *Last Train Home* clips, and (3) discuss possible reasons for the filmmakers' choices in music (i.e., traditional Chinese vs. Western).

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## Encountering Migration: Factory Girls and BaFa BaFa

By Matthew Sudnik

In his recent book, *The Power of Place*, Harm de Blij, the John A. Hannah Distinguished University Professor of Geography at Michigan State University, writes, "Of the seven billion current passengers on Cruiseship Earth, the overwhelming majority ... will die very near the cabin in which they were born."<sup>1</sup> De Blij underscores the situational differences humans experience throughout the world. Place remains one of the most salient factors in our individual and collective destinies. While movement is an important theme in world history and human geography classes (it is one of five geography themes!), it is important to remember that migrations of great distance, spanning cultural boundaries, are not experienced by most people. De Blij names this special group "mobals." He writes, "Mobals are the risk-takers, migrants willing to leave the familiar, to take a chance on new and different surroundings, their actions ranging from legal migration to undocumented border crossing, their motivations from employment to asylum."<sup>2</sup> We may assume that the majority of our students have limited experience with the phenomenon of migration. Yet careful research reveals that each of us has our own migration story. Furthermore, the study of migrants is an important part of our study of human history. Migrants are unique and are often agents of cultural diffusion. In this essay, I will suggest three tools for engaging our students in a thoughtful, experiential exploration of migration: a book, a research project, and a game. Each of these tools has been tested in my classes at Central Catholic High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

There are many books written about migration. Even if one is not teaching an Asian studies course, it is valuable to include a text about East Asian migrants. Many educators may use texts about migrants entering the United States from our southern border. In my opinion, one difficulty of beginning our study of migration with this