

To the Class of 1995,

Thanks to the generous support of the Class of 1995, I was able to spend nine weeks at an education NGO that works to narrow the achievement gap between rural and urban students in China's southwestern Yunnan province. Like Teach for America, this organization recruits top graduates from Chinese and American universities to work for two years as teachers in rural schools. The villages in which these 'Fellows'—as the young teachers are called—work are part of a China that is often ignored by Western reporters who are more interested in the country's booming urban centers. These villages, and the school-age children who live in them, are being left behind as millions of Chinese travel east in search of work in the big cities. Due to generations of pro-urban policies and cultural prejudices against farmers, students in urban areas consistently outperform their rural counterparts. Consequently, the income gap between rural and urban areas is wide. For many children, the location of their birth determines so much about their future. As such, the work of the Fellows is key to providing an opportunity for rural children to escape a life of poverty.

My time with this education NGO was evenly divided between assisting with carrying out the organization's mission and conducting my own senior thesis research. As part of my work for the organization, I was assigned to research possible tools that the fellows could use in order to help convince their co-teachers to adopt a student-centered approach to teaching. Student-centered learning is a pedagogical approach that encourages active student learning. All too often, Chinese schools—which must teach to a test that heavily favors rote memorization—encourage teachers to lecture to a silent class. Though this approach is somewhat successful in boosting student scores on national tests, most education experts recognize that student-centered learning is a better way of ensuring that students are, in fact, developing a deep understanding of the material. As such, Fellows were encouraged to help convince the fellow teachers at their school to adopt a student-centered approach. The ultimate aim was to revolutionize the way that Fellows' schools approached teaching. I hope to remain in contact with the Fellows that I worked with in order to see how they are using some of the ideas I helped generate in order to change the teaching culture at their schools.

In my senior thesis for the Anthropology Department, I will be exploring issues of nationality and ethnic identity in rural communities that are heavily populated with ethnic minority peoples. My internship was an ideal vantage point from which to explore this issue as it brought me in constant contact with educators who were working with ethnic minority students. As such, I was able to analyze the ways that education policy makers, principals and teachers talked about notions of identity in an ethnic-minority context. I looked at how textbooks and teachers were explaining to these minority students their own history as well as how they explained how this history fit it into the greater picture of China's history.

My initial findings suggest that educators are presenting students with a mixed message regarding ethnic minorities: that they are both part of the Chinese nation and separate from it. History textbooks often emphasize the similar pasts of ethnic minorities

and Han Chinese; they are portrayed as very much part of the Chinese nation. Textbooks on contemporary society often emphasize the differences between ethnic minorities and Han Chinese, and argue that Han Chinese must work to preserve these differences as they are valuable part of diversity. I hope to spend the coming semester reviewing my field notes and reading other scholars so as to better understand how this mixed message is helping to shape Chinese people's understanding of their own nation.

I am most grateful for the opportunity to work and conduct research in China. Thanks to the funding of the Class of 1995, I was able to pursue my professional interest in education work as well as my academic interest in education in China. In so doing, I was also able to improve my Chinese to the point where I could conduct and transcribe Chinese-language interviews, a skill that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. None of this would have been possible without your generous support. I cannot say enough how much I appreciate the gift of your financial assistance and vote of confidence in my summer plans.

Sincerely,

Adam Bradlow, Class of 2011
AB Anthropology



