Features

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Cover Photo: Pasu Au Yeung / CC BY 2.0
Pictured: An Umbrella Movement protest overlooking downtown Hong Kong
Education Refugees?
Chinese Students in the United States

By Andy Lee

When 15-year-old Shaowen Zhang* first set foot on the idyllic campus of her New England boarding school last fall, it was akin to hitting the reset button on her life. A victim of China’s rigid education system that places an unwavering emphasis on rote learning, discipline and conformity, Zhang consistently failed to keep up with her teachers’ exacting standards and high expectations. With her parents’ blessing, she crossed 12 time zones in her long journey from the east coast of China to the east coast of the United States to get a second chance at school.

With its sprawling rustic campus, her new school is worlds apart from her previous alma mater situated in a flourishing Chinese metropolis. Despite stark differences in setting and curriculum, Zhang quickly discovered that she had a lot in common with many of her new classmates who were also refugees that fled China’s overly competitive and stifling education system. According to the New York Times, statistics released by the Department of Homeland Security reveal that 638 Chinese students were granted visas to attend high schools in New York City alone in 2012, a large increase from five years ago.

Many Chinese believe that an early immersion in the American education system will not only enhance their children’s intellectual and social development, but will also bolster their chances of securing coveted seats at renowned American universities. Due to rapidly increasing incomes and a traditional emphasis on education, an unprecedented number of families from the affluent coastal region of China are sending their children to private schools in the United States to pursue secondary education. Many parents believe that an early immersion in the American education system will not only enhance their children’s intellectual and social development, but will also bolster their chances of securing coveted seats at renowned American universities. A degree from one of these prestigious institutions is believed to help pave the way to lucrative employment opportunities back home in China.

The 2014 Open Doors report compiled by the Institute of International Education, an established nonprofit organization that seeks to foster international education exchange, does little to quell the anxiety that these savvy Chinese parents have over college admissions. According to this newly released report, undergraduate international students at American universities increased by 9 percent in 2014, with China sending 31 percent of these students, significantly more than any other foreign nation. In 2013, 274,439 Chinese students went to the United States to study, representing a 16.5 percent increase from the previous year.

An Imperfect Relationship

In a climate of economic uncertainty and stagnating domestic enrollment, many American high schools and universities, particularly those that are not very well-known, are welcoming Chinese students with open arms. The admissions departments of these high schools and colleges dispatch representatives to China to recruit wealthy students who often pay full tuition, which in turn subsidizes many of their American counterparts.

With Chinese students aspiring for American degrees and U.S. schools seeking tuition dollars, the current
relationship between these two parties may appear like a match made in heaven. However, the reality proves to be much more complicated.

With a few exceptions, students tend to socialize with those from their own ethnic background. While there isn’t a lot of outright tension, conflicts due to cultural differences do occasionally flare up.

During the beginning of the first semester at her new school, Zhang performed poorly on her English assessment examination and was assigned to an ESL class where the majority of her classmates were also from China. Due to their common background, many of these students forged solid bonds with each other, but struggled to integrate with the rest of the student body. To the dismay of many of their English instructors, many of them switched back to speaking Mandarin with each other after class.

In a lilting admixture of English and Mandarin, Zhang describes the social environment of her boarding school. “With a few exceptions, students tend to socialize with those from their own ethnic background. While there isn’t a lot of outright tension, conflicts due to cultural differences do occasionally flare up.”

Zhang’s parents were not particularly pleased to find out that a substantial proportion of her classmates hail from China. After all, they paid exorbitant boarding school tuition and other fees so that their daughter could learn to act and speak like an American. They are so concerned about the composition of the student body of their daughter’s school that they are currently in the process of helping her transfer to a different school with a lower Chinese student enrollment.

Cohesion & Cultural Divides

Jinhui Wang,* a current sophomore at an elite urban university on the East Coast, may provide some clues on how Zhang will fare a few years from now. Erudite and personable, Wang also spent his formative high school years in the United States. After living here for over five years, Wang is now a fluent English speaker with a barely detectable Chinese accent. He is well versed in American sports and popular culture and is an active participant in myriad student organizations across campus. While he has a number of American friends, his closest friends are Chinese.

Based on Wang’s experiences, many of the American students he has encountered rarely express an interest in his Chinese background. Their relations are often grounded on Wang’s deep understanding of the intricacies of American culture, rather than on his American counterparts’ curiosity of the country he comes from.

Wang’s observations were corroborated by a 2013 report released by the Institute of International Education. The report conducted an assessment of the latest trends regarding American students studying abroad in China. The report discloses that while there has been a growing interest in American students studying in China, only 26,686 American students were in China for education related activities in 2013. The number of Chinese students in the United States therefore dwarfs the amount of American students in China.

Promoting Equal Exchange

In an era that is disproportionally shaped by the United States and China, this asymmetry in study abroad patterns is troubling. The governments and educational institutions from these two countries should consider committing additional resources to fund programs to ensure that the next generation of Americans and Chinese are capable of interacting and collaborating with one another.

When asked if his high school and university have been doing their part to help Chinese students integrate into the wider community, Wang provided a very perceptive response:

“Students from both countries should make more of a concerted effort to learn about each other. While schools should continue to organize events and workshops to promote exchange, the onus is on students to build authentic relationships beyond these formal settings.”

*The names of students featured in this article have been altered to preserve their anonymity
When I asked Ying Lao, a young women’s rights activist from Shan State in Burma, whom she thinks should become the nation’s president, she didn’t miss a beat in answering. “Me,” she says, her face still for a moment before breaking into a charming smile.

Ying Lao’s interest in politics is one shared by many of her fellow Burmese activists who received their educations abroad. After finishing high school, she desperately wanted to attend university with her friends, but it was neither affordable nor practical. Only after a period of intense hard work and a series of chance events did Ying Lao get the chance to go to college — in Indiana.

Setting aside the fees, the tertiary education system in Burma doesn’t confer degrees many see as useful. The system’s inadequacy combined with the country’s limits on political activism, which make campaigns to improve said system all the more difficult, is a primary reason for the traditional emigration of Burmese students.

For most of the late twentieth century, students who left Burma rarely returned, living in self-imposed exile. But now students who receive scholarships and other opportunities to go abroad are starting to go back. Equipped with training and experience unavailable in Burma, these young people are making remarkable contributions to the creation of democracy and civil society in Burma.

A History of Student Activism

Students — and youth more generally — have played leading roles in Burma’s political sphere since the colonial period that lasted between 1885 and 1948. It was in one of the National Schools where Aung San, a Burmese national hero and father of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi (Daw Suu), developed his vision for an independent nation.

Students — and youth more generally — have played leading roles in Burma's political sphere since the colonial period that lasted between 1885 and 1948.

“These schools,” writes Daw Suu in her book Freedom from Fear, “were the crucibles in which a political awareness of their colonial status and a desire to free themselves from it were fired in the hearts of young Burmese.”

In the 1930s, Rangoon University became the focal point of anti-colonial stirrings. During the 1935-36 academic year, a group of young nationalists including Aung San, as well as Nu, Hla Pe and Thein Pe captured all the executive offices of Rangoon University’s Student Union (RUSU).

These same four men would go on to negotiate independence from the British and, with the exception of Aung San — who was assassinated in 1947 — become important politicians during the young nation’s (brief) era of civilian rule.

In 1962, the RUSU building was the site of protests against legislation introduced by the newly installed Union Revolutionary Council government. The protests began on July 7, four months after General Ne Win took control of the country in a coup, and on July 8, the student union building was destroyed.

To many, the disintegration of RUSU marked the first crack in relations between students and the state. Between 1962 and 1988, the country’s socialist period, students commemorated anniversaries of the student union’s demise by distributing pamphlets with anti-government slogans.

Violent Encounters Spur Change

Between the early-1960s and late-1980s, student groups were active, but clandestine. The 1964 National Security Act banned all politically motivated groups except those affiliated with the incumbent party, driving almost
Villarosa describes the government of Burma's sponsorship of its own youth activist organization, called the 88 Generation Students and Youth Union of Myanmar (EGSY).

The group, she argues, is specifically designed to “confuse the Burmese public” and undermine support for pro-democracy youth organizations. Villarosa writes, “The pro-regime group released a statement… calling for opposition groups to support the government’s seven-step ‘roadmap for democracy,’ and held a press conference… during which they called for lifting economic sanctions against Burma” — policies that contravene those advocated by the opposition. Despite the regime’s rather elaborate attempt, Villarosa remarks, “No one is fooled. End comment.”

Since the days Rangoon Student Union served as a hotbed of anti-colonial activism, to the 1988 revolution, through to today, young people have enjoyed the privileged status as champions in the campaign against injustice and oppression.

This is where students who study abroad can contribute most to civil society development, but their newfound expertise can also be a detriment. On several occasions Ying Lao has noted that some young people who have studied abroad often come across as “arrogant.”

“They’ve learned so many things and see so many flaws, and when they go back they’re so eager to share their opinion and thoughts,” she says, but their communication style is undiplomatic. This has some older activists, those who remember well the events of 1988, contending that the influx of new ideas creates conflict within the democracy movement.

This is particularly dangerous accusation, as dividing the opposition’s front has been a favored tactic of the regime. In a 2008 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Yangon (formerly Rangoon), Chargé d’Affaires Shari Education’s Role in Activism

The Next Leaders of Burma

Since the days the Rangoon Student Union served as a hotbed of anti-colonial activism, to the 1988 revolution, through to today, young people have enjoyed the privileged status as champions in the campaign against injustice and oppression. It is widely acknowledged that because they will be the next leaders of Burma, investments in young people can only yield a positive return.

The youths themselves acknowledge this but are motivated by what they see as a pressing call to action. Whether or not the old and new generations can reconcile differences, Burma is at a critical juncture in its history. “Our hope is to target the elections [next year],” writes Koe Khant, a youth activist based in Yangon. “As part of this process, youth and students of Burma may have an opportunity to bring a genuine transition to the country’s people.”
Sunflowers in Taiwan: A New Chapter in Cross-Strait Relations

By Andrew Previc* & Adam Kong

Photos: Gabriel Hung

Between March 18 and April 10, 2014, more than 100,000 Taiwanese citizens, students and civic leaders flocked to the Legislative and Executive Yuan in Taipei under the banner of the “Sunflower Movement” to protest a major treaty between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan). The Sunflower Movement, though an unprecedented event in Taiwanese history, received little press coverage outside of East Asian news outlets. Despite the movement’s relative obscurity, closer examination reveals important shifts in the balance of power between China and Taiwan that, in turn, offers a glimpse into the island’s future.

The Cross-Strait Agreement on Trade in Services still under consideration in the Taiwanese parliament is at face value one of a series of bills associated with the broader Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement, which aims to open the Taiwanese economy to further investment from mainland China by reducing bilateral tariffs. Many Taiwanese worry that the bill’s passage will intensify competition for an already limited number of jobs domestically while opening Taiwan to excessive influence from the mainland.

There is also the concern that increased Chinese investment will lead to higher costs at home, as many link immigration and foreign buying from mainland China with the recent rise in Hong Kong’s food and housing prices. Those that are successful often face stagnant or declining wages and fewer vacation days than in the past, even in highly skilled professions such as engineering and medicine. Economic conditions have deteriorated to such an extent that many students take what are known as “working holidays,” leaving Taiwan for up to two years to work in Singapore, New Zealand or

“There is no such thing as a good people’s party, only good people!”
Australia, where wages are often three to five times higher.

Given the struggle many college graduates face, it is no surprise that that the majority of Sunflowers, including two of the movement's initial organizers, Chen Wei-Ting and Lin Fei-Fan, were students. The predominance of students involved in the movement led a number of observers both within and outside Taiwan to denounce the Sunflowers as spoiled disruptors complaining about life's difficulties while enjoying the privilege of college on their parents' and others' dimes.

These sentiments, however, belittle the struggle and actual experiences of a number of students involved in the Sunflower Movement. Many Sunflowers, for example, brought textbooks with them to the protests and would keep up with assigned readings in the evenings. A number of them also returned to their respective universities in the middle of the protests to take midterm examinations. This is in addition to the experience of being a protester in and of itself, which involves sleeping on the ground, going days without showers or steady access to food and facing continual harassment by riot police.

Taiwanese Politics of Identity

While the protestors were largely motivated by economic concerns, there was also a shared belief that the protests were necessary to ensure the future of Taiwan as a democracy and nation, particularly given the potential effects of increased cross-strait interaction on the integrity of Taiwanese identity.

The concept of a unique Taiwanese identity has its roots in the island's pre-World War II history, its colonial relationship with Japan and its multi-ethnic and linguistic heritage. These have all played an important role in defining and, on occasion, disrupting the relationship between mainland China and Taiwan over the past 60 years.

In the 1990s, for example, then-Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui emphasized the uniqueness of Taiwanese identity as a cornerstone of Taiwanese political independence. This identity issue contributed to the third Taiwan straits crisis in 1996, which saw two U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups sail past the Chinese coastline.

Recently, support for Taiwanese identity and independence has placed former President Lee’s Taiwan Solidarity Union along with the Democratic Progressive Party at odds with the ruling Kuomintang (Chinese National People’s Party), which retains historical affiliation with the mainland leaders who fled China over 60 years ago.

Many involved with the Sunflower Movement argue that the trade
agreement has the potential to open Taiwan to increased numbers of foreign workers and travelers from the mainland seeking residence in Taiwan. They note, for example, that the agreement allows Chinese “specialists” working for Chinese firms with offices in Taiwan to stay in the country for a period of three years per application with no restriction on the number of times they are eligible for visa renewal.

Additionally, the Policy on Chinese Immigration to Taiwan states that any company investing more than $200,000 in the founding of a new company or branch office based in Taiwan can send up to two staff members to run the office. For each additional $500,000, the Taiwanese government will allow the Chinese firm to send one additional staff member to live in Taiwan — up to a total of seven people per branch office. As each staff member is allowed two family members, this means that Taiwan can host as many as 21 mainland Chinese residents affiliated with a single company.

Several of our colleagues in Taiwan have commented that as a result of the increased flow of people between the two countries, the distinction between the Taiwanese and mainland Chinese identities will become blurred. They believe this will happen as mainland Chinese nationals travel to and subsequently raise families in Taiwan and vice versa — something that is already taking place with increasing frequency in both countries.

Though greater overlap in self-identification may help defuse tension between the two countries and offer a road to resolution of the “Taiwan issue” in the future, the prospects of enhanced economic and cultural ties are not completely embraced by the Taiwanese people. Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou, who currently enjoys a 9 percent approval rating, has endured searing critiques for what many believe is his excessive “coziness” with the mainland government.

Adding to this controversy are the accusations of diplomatic pressure by the Chinese government that attempt to undermine Taiwan’s economic relations with other nations in recent years, forcing the hands of many legislators in recent bilateral negotiations.

To the extent that the Sunflower Movement has brought the concerns of Taiwanese students to a wider audience and highlighted the potential blurring of cross-strait identities in the future, it has succeeded. Even though the agreement will most likely be passed in its original form in the coming months, the protests have prompted discussion by prominent officials, including Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng concerning the implementation of a review mechanism for future cross-strait treaties. Should such a mechanism be created, it would be a boon for Taiwanese democracy and another win for the Sunflowers.

*Andrew Previc is a partner at Prester John Ltd., a market entry advisory firm*
Ties between China and Africa have expanded dramatically in the last decade. Waving the red and yellow flag, Africans have flocked to the streets to celebrate the arrival of Chinese delegations making their way to presidential mansions where they are expected to sign lucrative trade deals. These trade deals have helped boost Africa's overall economic growth and provide China with much needed raw materials. They have, at the same time, fueled the resilience of African heads of state to cling to power, seemingly for eternity.

**Bad Influence on Governance**

Unlike the West, China has turned a blind eye to the unsavory human rights record of some African states, signing trade agreements and granting foreign aid without attaching conditions that call for free elections and greater transparency in government activities.

This trend has encouraged many African heads of state to eschew good governance practices, rendering the majority of African states democracies in name only. For instance, four African heads of state — President Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea, President Dos Santos of Angola, President Mugabe of Zimbabwe and President Biya of Cameroon — have held power for more than three decades.

China is Africa's biggest trading partner today, and the southern African country of Zimbabwe has benefitted enormously from this relationship. Since 2002, in response to reports of human rights violations and a controversial land reform program — a policy that seized white-owned lands and allocated them to black Zimbabweans — the United States and European Union have imposed sanctions and travel restrictions on President Mugabe, members of his cabinet and some of their affiliated businesses.

Although the EU recently lifted these sanctions, the United States maintains targeted sanctions on select Zimbabweans and businesses because they “[undermine] democratic institutions and processes in Zimbabwe,” according to the United States Embassy in Harare.

**Today, Chinese firms hold substantial influence in Zimbabwe’s economy, with heavy presence in the mining, construction, agriculture and retail industries.**

Recently, the Zimbabwean government signed a $1.3 billion power generation deal with the Chinese company Sinohydro. Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Zimbabwe has increased by about $590 million since 2009, making the country the biggest African recipient of Chinese investments last year, according to the Chinese Embassy in Harare. China is also the third largest buyer of Zimbabwean tobacco, Chinese goods are said to flood the local Zimbabwean markets and the yuan was once speculated for adoption as Zimbabwe's official currency.

But with blue Chinese roof tiles lining Mugabe's presidential mansion, Beijing’s footprint in Zimbabwe transcends economic frontiers. Culturally, too, China’s presence in Zimbabwe has been increasing. Zimbabwe University now houses a Confucius Institute. The country has hosted a China-Zimbabwe quiz show and a “Night of Beijing” performance to promote mutual cultural understanding. In 2010, Chinese actress Wendy Yang joined the cast of Studio 263, Zimbabwe's longest-running soap opera, becoming the first Chinese person to take a leading role on Zimbabwean TV.

China has continued to gain unprecedented access to Zimbabwe's abundant mineral resources. These...
forays have been accompanied by subtle positive economic returns for the ailing southern African nation. However, most of the benefits of Chinese investments are captured only by elite groups and have so far failed to trickle down to ordinary citizens. The country is grappling with hyperinflation and only one in 15 are said to be employed.

**China’s Self-Serving Policy**

Growing bilateral relations with China have had no effect on Zimbabwe’s human rights record, which remains abysmal. China has long rejected in its foreign relations any need to tie financial support to the adoption of democratic principles. For example, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said during a 2011 visit to Harare that “China believes that Africans have the right to choose their own way of development, as they are masters of the African continent. All others are just guests.”

Earlier in 2008, however, China’s support for Mugabe’s regime was without question. The Zimbabwean presidential election of that year was colored by controversy with Mugabe, whose party was accused of fraud and voter suppression, ultimately forcing the opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, to withdraw his candidacy. China led a veto to block a UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on Mugabe and his party leaders following the contested elections.

Political and economic analysts have argued that China’s influence in the region is self-serving, focused solely on extracting raw materials for domestic growth while undermining opportunities to improve good governance in Africa. But China’s Africa policy is not directly intended to undercut efforts to improve democracy and government in these countries; it is, rather, an unfortunate byproduct of national self-interest.

Considering China’s internal political structure — and despite progress on some fronts — it is hard to imagine that a country that does not prioritize its own people’s human rights would advance a foreign policy that encourages the promotion of human rights abroad.

Growing bilateral relations with China have had no effect on Zimbabwe’s human rights record... China has long rejected in its foreign relations any need to tie financial support to the adoption of democratic principles.

The authoritarian Chinese government maintains a one-party system that exerts aggressive control over the country’s judiciary and media, and continues to restrict fundamental rights of assembly, religion and expression. By this analysis, seizing any chance for a democratic Zimbabwe will require repairing its relations with the West, severance of ties with China and the pursuit of a new path toward self-determination.

The ideological standoff between the United States and Zimbabwe has resulted in crippling sanctions that have discouraged private investments, except for Chinese financiers who have the backing of the Chinese government, and, some would argue, access to loans from the IMF and World Bank.

China’s rise as an economic and political powerhouse has directly challenged the Western notion that democracy precedes economic prosperity. A triumph of this model in Africa will further validate China’s ideological bent and make it an attractive trading partner for unsavory regimes around the world.

If China is to continue as Zimbabwe’s most influential ally, there is little expectation for change and thus little chance for democracy for the country that is home to more than 12 million Africans. What is worse, Zimbabwe’s economy is still crumbling despite its relationship with China, and that deterioration has international implications as well. Reports indicate that hundreds of displaced Zimbabweans continue to flee their repressive regime into neighboring countries, threatening to destabilize regional economies.

Not even the adoption of the new Zimbabwean Constitution, despite its Declaration of Rights and increased measures for checks and balances, offers any real promise of hope for the beleaguered nation, for there is apparently no incentive from its closest friend, China, to improve its government and politics.

Neither the United States nor the European Union has any real chance at present of influencing Zimbabwe in the direction of democracy, good governance and human rights. As long as the China-Zimbabwe relationship continues, with China’s current approach catering to Mugabe and his cronies, the current government will remain in power, offering little hope for the vast majority of Zimbabweans who will remain powerless, hopeless and impoverished for the foreseeable future.
The Dandelion School: 
Innovation & Migrant Education

By Aliza Goldberg

The Dandelion School motto reads in Chinese characters “confidence, happiness, looking for truth and creativity” painted over rainbow streaks. Its Daxing campus in Beijing glints with glass and ceramic mosaics in dancing flower shapes, an art project created by the students in collaboration with the artist Lily Yeh. The colors, as well as the four goals, attempt to hide the pain that pervades the school, which provides middle school education for the children of migrant workers.

According to statistics provided by the school, China has 236 million migrant workers, most of whom are peasants. Some 3.7 million of those migrants live in Beijing, accounting for 490,000 school-aged children in need of education. Most of these students lack the fundamentals of education because of the poverty of their native villages. Though Chinese middle schools focus on preparing students for the highly competitive high school entrance exam, Dandelion School aims to give students a broader academic foundation by fostering critical thinking, interdisciplinary studies, literary and artistic pursuits and a healthy lifestyle. This nurturing approach seems a hefty task to accomplish in just three years.

I entered a middle school classroom packed with five rows of six students each. All the children folded their hands together, elbows resting on their metal student desks. A few kicked their legs in anticipation. “Hello,” they sang in unison. My Global Scholars classmates and I lined up at the front of the room, pointing to the countries we were from: the United States, India, Benin, South Korea, Taiwan and Nicaragua. The students only knew where the United States and Taiwan were located.

For a challenge as ambitious as educating a whole migrant worker community, the Dandelion School has succeeded in many areas. Though the class sizes are large, teachers give attention to the children by dividing them into levels based on math scores. Testing serves only as a method for assessing the school’s success — the seventh grade teacher assured us that the curriculum focuses on student progress and a passion for learning rather than statistics.

The school structure uses collaboration and small group learning, veering away from the standard Chinese system in favor of catering to the students’ unique backgrounds. The extracurricular activities also stimulate curiosity through a variety of alternative approaches, including maintenance of a waterfall that powers the school’s electricity, a social enterprise program that combines the cultural tradition of handicraft with business experience, as well as performing and visual arts clubs that foster confidence.

I sat with four students, trying to convey with as few and simple words as possible the task we had given the class. The project involved creating a “new world” using categories such as food, technology and clothing. Give 11-year-olds the freedom to develop their own ideal world and what do they draw? Chopsticks with a fork and knife set at the ends, cows that milk orange juice, white and brown rice that tastes like white and dark chocolate and apple pizza burgers. Though eager to imagine a place outside the Dandelion School, they hesitated to share their imagination with the class.

Most of the resources for their extracurricular activities, as well as renovations, supplies and food, have been donated by foreign companies. The Dandelion School does not solicit aid — companies traveling in Beijing often seek out a token underprivileged school. But despite all of the unsolicited contributions of basketball hoops, library books and solar panels for hot showers, the students’ future seemed grim. Without hukou, the government social security and identification system for Beijing citizens, the students will never receive the same career and healthcare opportunities as the true Chinese urbanites.

China repeats the word “innovation” as the key for future development, but creating innovation is a nebulous process. That afternoon’s exercise on utopian thinking sparked a pathway to development, the topic of last year’s Columbia Global Scholars Program. Sadly, these students may never have the opportunity to develop their imagination beyond the classroom.
Due to its proximity to China, Hong Kong houses the regional headquarters of many international media outlets. Despite this, the city itself seldom garners international headlines outside its role as a global financial hub. The Occupy Central protests, which officially commenced in the early morning of September 28, 2014, reversed this trend. Social unrest has rarely been so visible in the ex-colony, and the incident demonstrates with striking clarity the attitude of China’s central government toward one of its two Special Administrative Regions.

The protest was soon coined the Umbrella Revolution, which might be considered a misnomer since protestors never intended to revolutionize the Chinese regime. Instead, they articulated clear demands for reforming the election of the city’s chief executive, the highest ranking administrator reporting directly to the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) State Council. Compared to the past large-scale demonstrations in Hong Kong that usually involved a wide range of public grievances, including demands on Beijing leaders to redress the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the initial requests from the 2014 protestors were modest by comparison, which is a distinctive feature of the whole Umbrella Movement.

Students Find Their Voice
It is worth noting that Occupy Central, the civil disobedience campaign which was intended to put pressure on Beijing to allow universal suffrage in Hong Kong that met international standards, was originally initiated by two university professors and a church minister in order to encourage political participation by citizens over 40 years old. The three gentlemen planned to launch the protest on the National Day of the PRC, a public holiday in Hong Kong. However, the movement received unexpected support from a throng of students participating in a class boycott, which aroused public attention and stimulated intense discussion on their proposed democratic agenda. The movement reached such a critical mass that the original Occupy Central initiators had to abruptly declare the commencement of the movement during the students’ demonstration, three days prior to the original plan.

The class boycott was organized by the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) and the student activist
group Scholarism. Consisting of the student unions of eight universities in Hong Kong, HKFS is a longstanding democratic activist organization that has been a vocal commentator on various social issues in recent years. Scholarism, by contrast, is a new and rising star in the local political scene, established by two high school students in 2011 when the Hong Kong government proposed revising the curriculum to include moral and national education in primary and secondary schools.

Pointing out the biased content in the proposed teaching manual — especially portions concerning the purported achievements of the Chinese Communist Party — Scholarism successfully mobilized students against the new curriculum, which led to the government decision to table the proposal. The incident not only promoted Scholarism as a mainstream pro-democracy group in Hong Kong, but also refocused public attention to the voices of students in a way that would prove essential to the subsequent success of the Umbrella Movement.

Joshua Wong, one of the founders of Scholarism, was on the cover of Time magazine’s international edition in October of last year. Leveraging the political prestige built up in 2011, the 18-year-old freshman has been one of the key figures of the Umbrella Movement. His appearance on Time magazine represented much more than individual achievement. It revealed the pivotal role that the younger generation has assumed throughout the entire process.

The depth and frequency of youth involvement in public discussions and official consultations on electoral reform have been unprecedented, and their courage has helped induce people from all social and economic strata — in particular those from the city’s financial hub — to be less politically apathetic and to think critically about Hong Kong’s democratic future.

Observing the involvement of younger generations and their broader impact on society, however, government media and local pro-Beijing political figures have accused foreign powers of instigating and financially supporting the movement. To many, this accusation is made against external forces only to divert public discussion away from the movement’s core agenda, but some in Hong Kong share the government’s point of view.

Hong Kong’s business community, for instance, failed to muster much support for the students. Many business owners and captains of industry in the city are baby boomers who built their economic success from scratch in the 1960s and 1970s, contributing over decades toward the burgeoning economy of one of the four “Asian Tigers.” By purportedly disrupting commercial activity and sowing social discord, they deemed the movement a threat to the long-term stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

Political polarization is the biggest domestic challenge facing Hong Kong today. The stark difference in political views among family members, friends, colleagues and neighbors is altering the social and professional fabric of Hong Kong society. Some are ‘un-friending’ their friends on Facebook and have had their social lives and jobs impacted by their association with the Umbrella Movement. It is worth noting, however, that much of this polarization is deliberately engineered by the government. When the concept of Occupy Central was launched, the pro-Beijing camp quickly initiated a counter campaign called the Anti-Occupy Central Alliance. Having diverse opinion is absolutely normal in civil society, but instead of trying to bridge differences and facilitate a compromise, Hong Kong’s Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying announced that he was a signatory of the Anti-Occupy Central campaign in his own personal capacity. This was followed by the signing of other top officials from his cabinet. The government, by preempting any possibility of open discussion, is as much responsible for political polarization in Hong Kong as the Umbrella Movement itself.

HK’s Youth Cannot Be Ignored

If the government continues to ignore the voices of its youth, social unrest is likely to continue. The youth protestors in Hong Kong are only one subset of broader society, but while they have little or no experience living under British colonial rule, they are not lacking experience or insight. They grew up during a transformative period in Hong Kong’s history and thus treasure different values, perhaps resulting in less concern about economic prosperity compared to previous generations and more emphasis on democratic progress. These considerations, among others, should be respected as the PRC continually re-evaluates the “one country, two system” framework in Hong Kong.

Unfortunately, government leaders and pro-Beijing supporters will never tire of raising conspiracy theories regarding the voices of China’s and Hong Kong’s newest generations. Failure to afford proper representation to Hong Kong’s citizens in the city’s electoral reform will result only in further instability and discord, perhaps realizing the worry from the last British governor of colonial Hong Kong Chris Patten, who said: “My anxiety is not that this community’s autonomy would be usurped by Peking, but that it could be given away bit by bit by some people in Hong Kong.”
It is commonly known that China is a multi-national country with a population divided between 56 distinct ethnic groups classified by China’s central government. As this population is overwhelmingly Han Chinese, the country’s other 55 national subgroups are referred to as ethnic minorities. Educating these minorities in a way consistent with China’s Constitution — which is written to protect their cultural heritage — is a significant challenge. This policy memo will focus on the problem of promoting Mongolian bilingual education and cultural heritage while confronting a host of demographic, economic and political challenges that characterize the modern Chinese state.

Mongolians span east-central and northern Asia and are concentrated largely between the country of Mongolia and the region of Inner Mongolia to its south that lies just inside China. There are approximately 5.8 million ethnic Mongolians in China, which accounts for just 0.45 percent of the total population. Of those, roughly 67 percent of ethnic Mongolians live in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) and continue to maintain their own written and spoken language, which belongs to the Altaic language family.

**Constitutional Protections**

Equality among ethnic groups as a basic principle has been clearly defined in the Chinese Constitution and other relevant laws. The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) stipulates that “all ethnic groups in the PRC are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the ethnic minorities and upholds and develops a relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China’s ethnic groups. Discrimination against and oppression of any ethnic group are prohibited.”

The Constitution and the Act of Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities further state that every minority has the freedom to use and develop their own language, and to maintain their customs and religions. For a multicultural country like China, language education has an essential role in defining cultural autonomy, assimilation and reproduction. In the Chinese Education Law of 1995 from the China National People’s Congress, it stipulates that “schools and other educational institutions primarily for ‘minority’ nationalities may use the spoken or written language in common use among the ethnic group or in the locality as the language of instruction.”

However, educating minority youth in their native tongue often conflicts with the broader demands of Chinese national cohesion. The question then arises of how to effectively promote bilingual education without the rights of ethnic minorities being curtailed in favor of political and economic expediency.

**Bilingual Education in IMAR**

There are basically two kinds of schools in IMAR: the majority are Chinese schools where all courses are taught in Mandarin; the second kind are Mongolian schools, or what some refer to as trilingual schools that include instruction in the native language, Mandarin and English. The existence of such schools owes to the original provisions in the Chinese Constitution protecting minorities, but their quality and number fail to live up to the original constitutional aspiration.

Trilingual schools only account for a small portion of schools in IMAR, as we can see from Table 1. According to the sixth national census, there are almost 20 million Han Chinese permanent residents, which accounts for nearly 80 percent of the total population in IMAR.
of ethnic Mongolians is only around 4 million, which makes up 17 percent of the total inhabitants. Therefore, it seems ethnic Mongolians lack any choice but to attend predominantly Chinese schools.

Indeed, only 1.8 percent ethnic minority students are registered in trilingual primary schools according to Table 1, which shows that the majority of ethnic Mongolian pupils went to Chinese schools in 2013. IMAR Education Publishing House, which caters to minority education, printed over 68,000 textbooks for first graders at elementary schools in 1992. However, in 2005, only 22,000 textbooks were printed.

Over the course of 15 years, there have been 45,000 fewer students studying Mongolian, which is not proportional to the birth rate of ethnic Mongolians in the same region. The importance of ethnic language education cannot be overstated since the diminishment of any language is a broader loss for human culture. Furthermore, the stark contrast between China’s stated policy toward ethnic minorities and its actual implementation is an obstruction of the rights enshrined by the Constitution and laws of the PRC.

There are multiple reasons for this deteriorating situation. The Mongolian ethnic group’s density and homogeneity have been diluted by large-scale, Han Chinese immigration to ethnic minority regions over the years. Parents also send their children to Chinese schools in hopes of securing a brighter future for them in a broader Chinese and global context. Meanwhile, trilingual high school teachers struggle to find supplementary materials and exercises in Mongolian to prepare students for the national college entrance exam. They have to translate all the materials from Mandarin to Mongolian since these students must take most of the exam in their native language.

Table 1: Mongolian Nationality Schools in IMAR in 2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMAR Schools</th>
<th># of trilingual schools</th>
<th># of students enrolled in trilingual schools</th>
<th># of ethnic minority students in schools (including non-trilingual schools)</th>
<th># of schools in total</th>
<th># of registered students in total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>64,755</td>
<td>356,044</td>
<td>3,057</td>
<td>1,310,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>59,554</td>
<td>178,876</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>688,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General High School</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>46,679</td>
<td>133,153</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>494,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>13 (w/ Mongolian system)</td>
<td>31,817</td>
<td>107,290</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>399,201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from the Inner Mongolia Department of Education’s educational statistics

In terms of bilingual education, the situations in Xinjiang and Tibet may be much worse than in Inner Mongolia, necessitating a reform of bilingual education in minority regions all across China. Challenges of ethnic education in China include but are not limited to: a shortage of qualified minority teachers, low quality of textbooks, a lack of local knowledge in designing the curriculum, the preponderance of Chinese schools compared to minority ones and the lack of minority language teaching facilities.

Multiethnic education and preferential policy have always been a sensitive issue in China. For a multicultural nation, cultural diversity is barely discussed. Curriculum design and ethnic bilingual education systems are overwhelmingly based on the Han Chinese experience, and shortage of traditional ethnic cultures and histories impoverishes Chinese education as a whole.

Ethnic cultural diversity is under unprecedented pressure, which cannot be solved by the current policy of the national government. As society evolves, China’s minority education system and laws should be adjusted to truly respect the ethnic minority’s right to education that is enshrined in the Chinese Constitution.
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