Issue 4
2014

Liang Hong on Youth Depression in China

Liang Hong's work on the relationship between rural life and depression in China, and the impact of this relationship on the lives of young people, has received wide attention in the mainland media. In this interview, Liang Hong discusses the relationship between the rapid urbanization of China and the mental health of its young people, and the impact of this relationship on the lives of young people.

Interview by Jonathan Wyatt and Chen Qiao

WHAT GRINDS A STRONG MAN DOWN

Liang Hong, Associate Professor of Sociology at Peking University in Beijing, was born in 1971 in a poor rural village near Zhengzhou, Henan province. She was sent to a national university, entering a series of exclusive books about her village, Liangzhuang, where in the summer of 2008 she began interviewing her former neighbors as well as visiting them in the village and in Beijing. Her work has been widely reviewed in newspapers such as *China Youth Daily* (中国青年报), *Beijing Youth Daily* (北京青年报), *Southern Weekly* (南方周末), and *Caixin* (财新). Her publications include *Liang Liangzhuang* (梁梁庄), 2010, and *Liangzhuang Diary* (梁梁庄日记), 2011, in 2012 she was named one of the "Top Ten Influential Chinese Women" by the Women's Forum of China. These books have been translated into English as *Liang Liangzhuang* and *China in an Village*, respectively.

Liang Hong, Liangzhuang Diary (梁梁庄日记)

Now Liang has shifted her focus to the mental health of Chinese youth, which she tell us is "concerned with our thinking" so until the September 2015, she spending her time at the Light (光点) Science Innovation Center of Chinese adolescent mental health crisis for the book, *Liangzhuang Diary*, which is a collection of her interviews with people in her village and beyond. What she found was shocking. In a youth psychological counseling center in the Beijing district of Haidian — home to many of China's most elite educational institutions — she found counselors describing a desert that is most pronounced among the rural, school, students and dread over school. She found young students stress elsewhere, over 20% of Chinese adolescents are suicidal, depressed, Liang Hong tells us, "We are witnesses of society accord's crisis manifest within these kids." The dramatic transformation of the rural environment that produced Liangzhuang has left a generation of young people in crisis.

I spoke to Liang Hong over the phone for several hours. She is warm and direct. When speaking about the suffering of her students, her emotions falls into hard silence, tears dropping when talking about parental neglect and how we mistreatment children, her voice rises in exasperation when talking about the impact of China's concept of an continuous, mandated from China, and indeed the high pressure.

Q: Liu Cixin[1] you give an example of someone of how you went from Liangzhuang to Beijing, to your current work and writing.

Liang Hong: I was born and raised in a very ordinary village in Henan province. Both my parents were farmers. My mother could not go to school. My dad young. We were very, very poor. My children, as we were, poor poor. But we have a very open parents. We always trusted us, let us go to school. Looking back, that time I was grateful for Mr. Liberalism education was inductively important. At the time, that was an extraordinarily open minded and determined education. Liberalism education was very important to me. Liberalism education, I think, Mr. Liberalism, Mr. Liberalism, I am so grateful. I was growing up in a village, I was a little bit of a girl. I went through middle school. My grandfather, I think, the main, he is a traditional teacher, village. Vocational school was, I think, very, very — even our pre-university, university program, social exams, a small monthly food stipend and a little money. That gave me a way to support myself. It is a little bit of a miracle.

I search the kind of pressure which pain much attention to the outside world. I've always been more focused on my inner world — I'm a little bit strangely. Because in a large family with many kids, nobody really notices me, so you end up being a relatively solitary, self-contained person. I was very, very, very,