

Visiting Speaker Series 2015-16 Term 1

Education and Training in the Risk Society: Experiences of Vocational School Students in China

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23 Nov 2015 (Monday)

12:30 – 1:45pm

Room 1118, 11/F,

Yasumoto International Academic Park*

(*Relocated from Room 307, 3/F, Esther Lee Building)



Dr. Anita Koo is Associate Professor in the Department of Applied Social Sciences at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Her research interests revolve around the relations between social inequalities and educational opportunities. Her current research focuses on the educational experiences and life chances of vocational school students in China. Her recent papers on vocational education have been published in *Journal of Education Policy* and *positions: asia critique*.

After a series of expansions of vocational education in post-reform China, the enrolment of vocational high school reached 21.13 million in 2012. When academic credentials are valued higher than vocational ones, as they are commonly regarded as more promising for high status jobs and economic success, children from resourceful families chase academic qualifications in the expanded education market, and vocational degrees are left for poorly performing students and those from poor families. This talk describes the “educational choice” and “career plan” among the vocational school students, and their sense of insecurities and uncertainties about their future in the fast growing economy. It also investigates how the expansion of education and the ever-changing labour market oblige the students to be individualistic, self-aware and reflexive.

Based on the fieldwork data collected in vocational schools in Chengdu, I find the students frame their choice of vocational schooling as a way of managing risks and hurdles on the educational path. Their plans concerning further education and training also based on their awareness of risks in a globalizing economy that characterized by increasing job insecurity and shifting employment patterns. Students learn hard to plan their own life trajectories to deal with uncertainties and risks in contemporary China. However, given the fact that these disadvantaged youths have limited resources to employ different strategies to manage risk and facilitate life chances, their choice and plan are not unbounded (without limits). When the “do-it-yourself biography” in risk society (Beck, 1992) emphasizes individual choice and personal responsibility, this talk argues that persistent systemic inequalities are still of great value for understanding the situations of young people in modern China.

Free Admission

The seminar is conducted in English

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