



Class Work: Vocational Schools and China's Urban Youth

Terry Woronov

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Images of Chinese teens with their heads buried in books for hours on end, preparing for high-stakes exams, dominate understandings of Chinese youth in both China and the West. But what about young people who are not on the path to academic success? What happens to youth who fail the state's high-stakes exams? What many—even in China—don't realize is that up to half of the nation's youth are flunked out of the academic education system after 9th grade.

Class Work explores the consequences for youth who have failed these exams, through an examination of two urban vocational schools in Nanjing, China. Through a close look at the students' backgrounds, experiences, the schools they attend, and their trajectories into the workforce, T.E. Woronov explores the value systems in contemporary China that stigmatize youth in urban vocational schools as "failures," and the political and economic structures that funnel them into working-class futures. She argues that these marginalized students and schools provide a privileged window into the ongoing, complex intersections between the socialist and capitalist modes of production in China today and the rapid transformation of China's cities into post-industrial, service-based economies. This book advances the notion that urban vocational schools are not merely "holding tanks" for academic failures; instead they are incipient sites for the formation of a new working class.



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