

Handout 2: Role Cards

Directions: Read the description of your assigned character. Then, fill out the chart below with your group members.

Hopes and Dreams: What are the most important dreams or aspirations of this person?	Obstacles: What obstacles has this person faced?
Geography: What place(s) is this person connected to? How is he or she connected to these places?	Impact of the hukou system: How has the hukou system impacted this person's life?

Vocabulary

Hukou: A system used in China through which Chinese citizens and residents have been assigned either rural or urban hukou (household registration). An individual's hukou determines where he or she can go to public school, access health services, obtain a marriage certificate, and receive retirement benefits.

Shanghai: Shanghai is China's most populous city and a center of business and trade. The entire city is considered to be the equivalent of a province. Because of both internal and international migration, many people living in Shanghai do not have Shanghai hukou and therefore cannot utilize many of its public services.

Shandong: Located in northern coastal China, Shandong province has rapidly developed and urbanized over the past decades. Slightly over half of the province's residents now live in cities. The province's government has also implemented reforms to allow individuals with rural hukou to access services in urban areas.¹

Role Cards

Zhao Shiling

You are a middle-aged woman from a rural village in the province of Shandong. Your husband was very poor and often took out his frustrations on you. When you had your second child, your family was fined a month's wages for violating the one-child policy. You decided to move 700 miles away to the city of Shanghai at the age of 29, leaving behind your husband and two young sons. At the time, a train ride back to the village took over 15 hours and you rarely visited your children. Still, you made more money as a factory worker than your husband did back in the coal mines. Two years later, you were fired from the factory for being too old.

Rather than giving up on city life, you learned a new trade. Today, you run a successful flower shop in a bustling area of Shanghai. Your oldest son came to live with you when he was eleven years old and now both of your sons have left the village. Although your oldest son was a very good student, he was prohibited from attending high school in Shanghai because your household registration (hukou) was in your rural hometown. While you once hoped that he would attend college, he never finished high school and has struggled to make ends meet as a hairdresser. You also worry about your only grandchild, who lives in Shanghai but has a rural hukou like you and his parents. Because of his household registration, he too will not be able to attend high school in Shanghai and will have few opportunities if he remains in the city.

Although you have lived in Shanghai for decades and own your own business there, you still have to travel back to your home county if you want medical care covered by insurance or other services. Luckily, the journey is now only three hours via bullet train and you have purchased two comfortable apartments next to the high speed train stop in the city of Zaozhuang, where your hukou registration is based.

¹ "Shandong: 'Localized Urbanization' Demands in-Depth Reforms." *The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China*, www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/NPCChina/2013-12/17/content_1817369.htm.

Little Sun

At the age of eight, you lived with your coal miner father and older brother in a rural area of Shandong province. Your mother had already left the family to work in far away Shanghai. When your brother also left for Shanghai, you grew very sad and despondent, as one of China's millions of "left behind children." You would hang up on your mother when she called and wouldn't play with other children. Your teacher mistakenly interpreted this behavior as signs of autism and you were institutionalized for years in a special school.

Your mother and brother left you for opportunities in the big city, but in reality had few opportunities of their own there because of their rural hukou. Your older brother moved back to Shandong to attend high school after his Shanghai school told him he was no longer eligible. He soon dropped out and you followed him back to Shanghai to move in with your mother.

Your mother's successful business and wealth helped her find a wife for you from an area near your hometown. Now, you have a young son and work as a cook in a Greek restaurant. You want to make sure your son has a chance to finish high school and go on to college. You know that your rural hukou, which you have passed on to your son, has limited his education options. While you and your wife both prefer life in Shanghai, you are wondering whether one of you will need to return to Shandong to allow your son to attend public school.

Big Sun

When you were young, your mother left you with your father and younger brother to work in the big city of Shanghai, over 700 miles away. At the age of eleven, you left the village where you were born to join your mother, who had started her own flower shop in the city. You soon became a star student and athlete in your Shanghai middle school. You and your mother dreamed that you would go to college and continue your family's upward economic progress.

Unfortunately, when it came time for you to enroll in high school, an official phoned, asking your mother about your family's household registration, or hukou. When your mother replied that they had a rural hukou, she was told that you could only attend high school in the county of your hukou. After returning to your hometown, you found that your childhood classmates were way ahead of you in school. Because the university entrance exams given to students from rural areas were much harder than those given to city dwellers, the rural students studied longer hours and covered more material each year. You ended up dropping out of school. Rather than joining your father in the coal mines, you returned to Shanghai to find work.

As a high school dropout with a rural hukou, you had limited options. For a while, you played a lot of video games and relied on money from your mother to survive. Eventually, though, you got a job at a golf course and later moved to a nearby city to learn to be a hairdresser. Recently, you've been reading about stock market investing. You hope to save enough money to pay for a bride from Shandong, but the price keeps going up and you are picky. Women from Shandong also don't seem to like you much. They also know that leaving Shandong to live with you in Shanghai means that they too will become rural migrants with few rights in the big city.

Zhao Min

You grew up in the rural province of Shandong as the daughter of farmers. Hoping to give you a different future, your parents decided you should married Little Sun, a shy young man whose mother owns a business in Shanghai and multiple apartments in Shandong. You have moved to Shanghai to be with your husband and now work as the manager of a French restaurant.

Confident and outgoing, you often joke with your mother-in-law about your husband's incompetence as you help her with her flower shop. You also worry that your young son will soon be teased by his playmates, whose fathers have respectable jobs in engineering or business. You know your husband can never get such a job because he could not attend high school in Shanghai due to his rural hukou. He ended up dropping out of school altogether and now you make more money than he does.

You may soon move back to your province with Shuo Shuo so that he can attend kindergarten in a place where he can continue his studies through high school and beyond. He does not have an urban hukou and you don't want him to end up a dropout like his father and uncle. While his grandmother and father will miss him, they will be able to visit often from Shanghai via a three hour high speed train ride. This is much different than the fifteen-hour journey your mother-in-law had to make fifteen years ago.

“Hello Kitty”

You live in the smoggy city of Zaozhuang, in the province of Shandong. Your nickname “Hello Kitty” comes from the mask you wear over your face in your WeChat profile. You earn about a thousand yuan (\$150) a month managing a grocery store and enjoy the independence this give you. In your spare time, you sometimes go online to text on WeChat. A few weeks ago you started texting a man named Big Sun. Originally from a nearby village, Big Sun now lives further south near the city of Shanghai. His mother is well known in the local community for her wealth as she owns several apartments in Zaozhuang as well as a business in Shanghai.

Although you liked texting with Big Sun, you have rejected him in person. You worried that he might want you to leave your hometown for Shanghai, which you didn’t want to do. Big Sun still has a rural hukou, so you would be migrants in Shanghai. You wouldn’t have access to healthcare, pensions, or even public education for your child.

Your relatives also looked down on his job as a hairdresser. Most men in you know work in physical jobs like coal mining or construction. Although Zaozhuang is a growing city, it still has northern rural customs and ways. Big Sun doesn’t seem to understand how things work here. He embarrassed you by showing up at your workplace and appeared too pushy with your family when he met you for lunch. When you yelled at him for his mistakes, he just stammered and quivered like a wimp. You know you can find a better match.

Little Cousin

You were born and raised in a rural village in Shandong province. When your cousins and their mother left the village for Shanghai, you stayed in the village through high school. You studied very hard and ended up earning the placement test scores to get into a good college. From there, you continued on to graduate school in a nearby city where you met your wife. Now, you have a good job as an engineer in a pharmaceutical company in the city of Zaozhuang not far from the village where you grew up. This is also where your hukou is based, so you have full access to government services.

Recently, your cousin Big Sun and his mother came to visit from Shanghai for a family wedding. While you once looked up to Big Sun, you now feel sorry for him. As a migrant living in Shanghai with a rural hukou, Big Sun had to dropout of high school. He also can't get a real job with a secure pension. Everyone in his extended family has been gossiping about the fact that he can't find a wife at the age of thirty. He never even finished high school and now cuts hair for a living.