

May 27, 2011

Dear students,

On Monday, September 5, as part of your orientation to Brown, you will participate in a seminar about a book that you and all new Brown students will read this summer. The book we have chosen is *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*, by journalist Leslie Chang. It has been purchased for you by the Office of the Dean of the College and the Brown Alumni Association. Think of it as a welcome gift from Brown and your first official college reading assignment.

Factory Girls examines issues of migration and industrialization in contemporary China by focusing on the stories of two young women from the provinces who come to the city of Dongguan to work in the factories, learn new skills, and achieve “success.” As Brown celebrates the “Year of China” in 2011-12, *Factory Girls* should cause you to reflect on the question of a country’s relationship to both its past and its future and how that attitude can affect the lives of ordinary people trying to get ahead.

We would like you to read this book and to tell us your reactions. What aspects of Chang’s account — or of Min and Chunming’s lives — did you find most compelling? Why do you think Chang interweaves her own family’s tale into a story of contemporary factory workers? How did *Factory Girls* make you think differently about contemporary China? About education and what it means to succeed in life? About how we view history and the past? Were there parts of the book that you did not like? Write up your reactions in the form of a letter to your academic advisor. Think of the letter as a way of introducing yourself to your advisor, giving him or her a sense of who you are and how you think. While you are introducing yourself, you should also talk a bit about your goals and aspirations for Brown. How do you imagine yourself changing during your four years here? Please submit your letter online at <https://apps.college.brown.edu/ask> by August 1. We will make sure it gets into your advisor’s hands before your first advising appointment on September 6.

I should mention that your letter will be read by a few other people, as well. First, the specialists in Brown’s Writing Center will read your letter to get a sense of your strengths or weaknesses as a writer. We will also share a copy with the person who will be leading your seminar discussion on *Factory Girls*, and who may want to use your ideas as a starting point for the discussion. For both of these reasons, we ask that you give this first college reading assignment some careful attention and thought.

When you arrive on campus, you will receive a move-in packet containing information about the time and location of your seminar on *Factory Girls*, and the name of your discussion leader. We hope this opportunity to meet new friends and discuss ideas will make your orientation to Brown even more meaningful. So enjoy your reading, and don’t forget to bring your book when you come to Brown in September!

All my best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katherine Bergeron". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Katherine Bergeron
Dean of the College
Professor of Music