



“Faster than a speeding bullet train” might describe the growth of the concept of camps in China. A country of 1.3 billion with the second largest economy in the world, China is undergoing a drastic transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-oriented economy, which will drive a shift across many sectors of the country, including the education system. For more than half a century, camps have been popular in many other Asian countries, particularly Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Malaysia; but *camp*, as Westerners know it, has only in the past five years become recognized in mainland China. The word, *Yingdi*, 营地, is a newly coined word representing camp programs for children, and many Chinese are seeking to make *Yingdi* an essential part of the education of children.

The Changing Landscape of Chinese Education

During the early years of China’s Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966, many Chinese schools were closed to allow young people to join the Red Guard. Although schools were later reopened, an entire generation was largely educated in heavily regulated ideological curriculum.

Since the resumption of public admission to colleges and universities in the late 1970s, there has been a strong emphasis on academics, which was also heavily regulated by the government. Recently, however, the government has taken steps to liberate students from rigid requirements, particularly in the younger grades. Children in grades one through three have no homework, and there are no admissions exams to enter junior high school. Still, a test-oriented education culture is prevalent in the upper grades. Although the total number of enrolled students has dropped, the education system is expanding as demand grows for a wider variety of services. The education industry shows signs of transitioning to a quality-oriented growth sector.

While still government regulated, more room for creativity in curriculum development is being encouraged, and private schools have proliferated. In 2011, there were 276 private, international schools serving 144,436 students, and by 2015, the private education sector is projected to reach a market size of \$102 billion (Deloitte Research, 2012). Parents have demonstrated their willingness to pay for private education, including

test-preparation schools, in order for their children to be admitted to prestigious universities in China and abroad. During the 2012–2013 school year, there was a 21 percent increase in the number of Chinese students studying in the United States, estimated at about 235,000 (Associated Press, 2013).

In the past five years, there has been considerable growth in the industry of summer study tours for the children of affluent families, which include visits to North American universities. Many of these tours refer to themselves as “camps.” It was reported by *China Daily* that one organization in Beijing sent 10,000 students on study tours in 2012. Typical tours last two to four weeks and include university visits, travel, language lessons, and study of local culture, with some including home visits at a cost of \$5,000 or more. Chinese parents with financial resources are now showing increased interest in providing overseas travel experiences for younger children, a trend that is impacting summer camps in the U.S. and Canada. The primary appeal to parents of North American summer camps seems to be opportunities for their children to learn and practice the English language, but they also recognize the value of



Yingdi

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recreational activities, cultural awareness, and the need for their children to develop greater independence. Youth programs in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand are also drawing interest from Chinese parents.

The tragic Asiana 214 aircraft crash in the summer of 2013, in which two children died, may have brought increased scrutiny from the Chinese government. Although the accident was not directly connected with camp operations, because many of the children aboard the flight were headed to a summer program in California, the domestic media portrayed it as a failure of overseas educational programs, which prompted government actions. One province immediately announced a moratorium of travel programs, and a likely response will be stronger licensing requirements (USA Today, 2013).

Development of Camps in China

Travel to foreign countries for tours or camp experiences is not financially feasible for many middle-class Chinese families, and domestic day camps, resident camps, and new youth programs are being established to meet the demand. The first

summer camps in China were academic programs, usually held at schools or universities. An organization called New Oriental pioneered this over ten years ago. After the benefits of outdoor programs were recognized, companies began to run small military-style camps, some with an English instruction component. The interest in developing camps is high, but there are factors that may discourage all but the most determined. Real estate in China is among the most expensive in the world, and government approval is limited to those Chinese with special connections. On the other hand, there is also a growth in the concept of philanthropy, and thriving corporations may become the source of funding for the fledgling industry.

Camp Partnership Agencies

A number of China-based organizations have been established to recruit and place Chinese campers in North American camps. These organizations also perform a public awareness function as they educate parents about this new concept of *Yingdi* (camp), particularly when adding an affix of “education” to the phrase *Yingdi*, to help parents understand the educational value of the camp experience. Marco Reyes, an

American with a strong camp background, has lived in China since 2008 and believes that camp will be an important institution in the future. He is one of the founders of Stateside Adventures in Beijing, which represents a variety of traditional camps, sports camps, and weight loss camps, primarily in the northeastern states. He has said that providing assurance of safety practices to parents is of great importance, and he relies on his experience with the standards of the American Camp Association (ACA) as well as recent ACA research. His organization has experienced a 200 percent growth in camp placements in the past year as more families learn of the availability of camps.

Ivy Feng, founder of LeShine Cultural Communication Company in Shenzhen, has been on a fast track to acquire as much knowledge as possible about the camp industry in order to develop an independent camp in China. After developing relationships with several camp professionals during the 2013 ACA National Conference, she traveled to several camps to establish partnerships. In the summer of 2013, she accompanied a group of twenty Chinese children for a one-week session at Camp Friendship in Virginia

followed by a tour of Washington, Boston, and New York. In the summer of 2014, she plans to bring groups to at least four camps in the U.S. and Canada, with additional programs scheduled in Hong Kong and Australia. At home in Shenzhen, just over the border from Hong Kong, LeShine has begun weekly programs for high school students. Motivated by her experiences, she completed the International Camp Directors Course, attended the Asia-Oceania Camping Congress in Australia, and is quickly establishing plans to purchase property for her own camp in China.

A School without Walls, an Education without Boundaries

The Initiate Development for Education and Service (IDEAS) Foundation, a nongovernmental organization committed to the overall development of young people, is one of the first organizations to pioneer an actual camp in China. Its predecessor was the Little Angels Action Fund, which was founded in 2008. The mission of IDEAS is to empower youth to better explore themselves and to reflect upon social issues. Through educational innovation, the IDEAS Center, the camp program of the IDEAS Foundation, aims to cultivate youth into global citizens equipped with international perspective, team spirit, leadership qualities, and awareness of civic engagement. The IDEAS Gehua Camp, a multimillion-dollar, ultramodern facility, opened in 2012 in the seashore resort city of Qinhuangdao, about 280 kilometers (approximately 174 miles) from Beijing, and has already served 8,000 campers.

During the summer of 2013, 200 youth from mainland China, U.S., Canada, Russia, Australia, Japan, Germany, Malaysia, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong participated in a full-scholarship, international camp program developed by IDEAS and instructed by talented program teams recruited from Duke University, MIT, Cornell University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Oberlin College. Inspired by the latest, evidence-based research on experiential learning, the IDEAS center has four educational pillars: character development, nature exploration, humanities and arts, and science and technology. The IDEAS summer camp also featured popular activities with Chinese cultural themes such as archery, calligraphy, dance, ink making, music, stone carving, and traditional paper making.

In addition to the international summer programs and traditional Chinese cultural programs, there was also a Whole Person Camp that focused on perception of the world through six senses in a cross-disciplinary program that included arts, drama, robotics, and music. Campers related these activities to society through ethnographic projects in which they explored various social issues first-hand and brainstormed creative solutions. A fourth program, LEAD Camp, was designed for high school students and teachers. Through various activities, such as experiential learning and creative arts, students had opportunities to see themselves differently as they explored a new world. The teachers, under the guidance of professional educators, gained an understanding of the concept and practice of youth leadership development through experiential learning and observation of student activities.

Because *Yingdi* is a new concept in China with new programs developing each year, IDEAS hopes to position itself as an education and research center for the fledgling camp industry. With the guidance and leadership of the IDEAS staff, it is hoped that eventually camp professionals will come together as an association of educators.

Implications for North American Camps

There is evidence that camp exists in at least a quarter of the world's countries, although the label of "camp" may not be consistent. The emergence of a camp industry in China will perhaps have a more profound effect on American camps than developments in most other countries.

- Camper recruitment — With the recent announcement that Chinese regulations regarding family size were being relaxed, the number of camp-aged children may reverse the trend of a declining population of children, which still has a staggering number of about 150 million being camp eligible (ages eight to sixteen). Cultural exchange opportunities are plentiful as Chinese parents seek opportunities for their children to experience American life and to learn English. Agencies, youth organizations, Chinese camps, and families are already contacting North American camps for placement of children. Interested camps should update their profiles on ACA's Find a Camp database to indicate

their interest in accepting international campers.

- Staff — Just as in the U.S., there are large numbers of Chinese college graduates who are not yet employed and seeking ways of enhancing their resumes. A growing number of college students and graduates in China are seeing the value of a season at an American camp to practice English language skills and gain experience in a western culture. Accompanying a group of Chinese children to a summer camp as a chaperone is an attractive opportunity, and U.S. staff placement agencies with the ability to arrange J-1 visas are receiving inquiries from China.
- Sharing of resources — ACA CEO Peg Smith has reaffirmed her commitment for ACA to be a global resource partner for developing and emerging camps. The ACA Professional Development Center is experiencing interest from the global community, with 230 international users of digital learning resour-

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es, webinars, and conferences in the past year from twenty-six countries, including China. Chinese who are seeking to build and promote camps are anxious to avail themselves of current knowledge in the industry, and ACA's online resources will continue to be an attractive and economical alternative to traveling to another country for courses and conferences. The number of international attendees at the ACA national conference has also grown each year, and there have been Chinese professionals in attendance for the past five years.

International Camping Congress, 2014

While there is often discord and distrust between governments, camps, for many years, have been venues for greater global understanding. The intrinsic benefits of staff and camper exchanges in North American camps are understood, at least anecdotally, and have served to bring children and staff together for the outcome of cultural understanding. Global and

cultural networking through the camp profession can extend to adults by participation in conferences and events around the world. The 10th International Camping Congress will be held October 23–27, 2014, in Antalya, Turkey. Turkey sits astride two continents, a position that has given rise to a culture that reflects both East and West. Under the banner of “Let’s Camp for Peace,” delegates from more than twenty countries will convene at the Maritim Pine Beach Resort on the Mediterranean Sea. Program tracks will focus on research, business management, operations, and human resources, with keynote speakers of international renown, including ACA CEO Peg Smith. The schedule is balanced by small group educational sessions, a panel discussion, and social events for networking and relaxation. A first-time addition of an agents’ workshop on October 23, preceding the congress opening, will provide an opportunity for directors to meet with representatives from international schools and placement agencies to discuss camper recruitment in a “speed dating” format. Pre- and post-congress tours of Turkey will also be offered. Full information is found at: <http://icc2014turkey.org>

Photos on pages 48–49 courtesy of LeShine Cultural Communication Company; Camp Friendship, Palmyra, Virginia; Gehua Camp, Qinhuangdao, China; Stateside Adventures, China; Camp Echo, Burlingham, New York; and Camp Wekeela, Buckfield, Maine.

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