

OUT TO WORK

*Migration, Gender, and the
Changing Lives of Rural Women
in Contemporary China*

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Introduction

A New Beginning

I left home. When the car began to move, I didn't shed a tear, because I wanted to go . . . a new beginning. Filled only with a strong yearning for the city, I gave no serious thought to the matter of my employment. My aunt had prepared for me a battered old suitcase. Inside I had packed only some clothes, books, a pen, and two notebooks. I wore a watch, and carried two hundred *yuan* given to me by my mother upon departure. My father didn't quite agree with the work I was setting out to do, yet he didn't oppose me when I insisted that I would go anyway, and said only: "Come back if things don't work out." My mom was pleased with where I was headed, only sad that I wouldn't be able to return home often. No one else knew I was leaving; my brother was at school, so I didn't see him to say goodbye. In the car, speeding along the highway, I turned my head to look out the window at the trees passing by and saw the budding shoots that heralded spring, and then I cried. So quickly did the scenery flash by that I sometimes couldn't clearly make anything out. Still, the car continued rushing toward the endless horizon of that highway. Beyond was the city where I was headed—a strange and unfamiliar place. Perhaps there the sky would not be as deep a blue as in my hometown, and there would not be a quiet path like the one in my village. I did not even know why I wanted to go there.

In this recollection, recorded in her diary, a young woman I will call Qiaolian describes her initial migration in 1997 from her village to Beijing to take up a job as a *baomu*¹ caring for a toddler and doing housework for a three-generation family in exchange for a small salary, room, and board. Qiaolian is a member of China's large "floating population" (*liudong renkou*).² Rural women like her are collectively known as the "working sisters" (*dagongmei*), young and unmarried daughters from predominantly agrarian households who make up as much as 33 to 50 percent of China's rural migrant labor force (*nongmingong*), which has steadily grown from between 20 and 30 million in the mid-1980s to over 160 million people in 2012 (Chan 2012).³ Qiaolian's diary selection neatly conveys the tension in the moment

between departure and arrival that is pregnant with possibilities, in which Qiaolian's emotions range from excitement and optimism to homesickness and anxiety, as she anticipates a journey of great significance in her life.

The text provides some clues as to Qiaolian's specific motivations, expectations, and concerns in regard to the imminent journey, which in turn reflect her individual characteristics, family background, as well as the broader social and cultural context of contemporary China. For example, her battered suitcase and meager possessions indicate the family's relative poverty by urban standards at the time, and suggest a motive for going out to work. Her dizziness at the passing scenery attests to the novelty of riding in a car, and further highlights the contrast between the village and the city as well as between herself and her employers—actual and symbolic differences between people and places that are brought to attention as migration creates spaces of traversal and contact. The notebook and writing utensils represent Qiaolian's wish to continue her formal education, which was prematurely cut short due to a combination of poverty and gender discrimination, and hints at a more personal motive for migration. Her father's reluctance stems from his shame at having an unmarried daughter working for strangers and doing menial labor, in violation of norms of gender and social respectability that reflect poorly on the family. Her mother's practical gift of cash bestowed like a dowry, as insurance against uncertainty, belies her worry about her daughter's safety, although her satisfaction at Qiaolian's departure resonates with her daughter's optimistic expectation for a better life. As the car speedily propels her away from the village and the past, toward the city and the future, Qiaolian gives voice to doubt, foreboding the hardships ahead. Indeed, by dint of her origin, gender, age, and marital status, as well as education and occupation, Qiaolian would occupy an inferior and marginal position in the urban labor market and urban society, and thus be quite vulnerable. She would therefore suffer disappointments and setbacks along with rewards in her new life as a migrant woman worker.

In her narrative, Qiaolian is the protagonist who parts with "tradition," symbolized by an idyllic rural setting, and seizes the opportunity to become a subject of history and modernization by embarking on a path toward the distant beckoning city. Her writing thus calls to mind Berman's (1982) description of the *ambivalent experience of modernity*, wherein a new temporality "objectifies the past and presents horizons of possibilities located far beyond one's present, such that the future becomes something to be desired" (Hirsch 2001: 143). "One can now dream of a different life—more decent, bearable or enjoyable" (Bauman 2001: 122). Predicated on an individuated and self-conscious subjectivity, modernity offers opportunities for self-making and transformation of identity (Felski 1995; Giddens 1991), yet simultaneously "threatens to destroy everything we have, every-

thing we know, everything we are” (Berman 1982: 15). Such a dramatic rupture with the past that enables a hopeful yet uncertain future of one’s own making is reflected in Qiaolian’s desire for a “new beginning” expressed in the opening passage.

This book is an ethnographic study that focuses on rural Chinese women, including Qiaolian, for whom migration entails not only moving across space but also venturing in new directions in life and reinventing themselves in time. In contemporary China, the association of the city, urban life, and urbanites with dynamic, forward-looking, “modern” culture in contradistinction to the countryside, rural life, and rural inhabitants, considered mired in “traditional” culture and behind the times or “backward,” is a powerful ideological construct of place and identity (see, e.g., Chu 2010; Liu 2000; Sun 2009). These symbolic connotations also mark a shift away from the more positive view of peasants as a revolutionary force and the backbone of socialist development under the leadership of Mao Zedong (e.g., Meisner 1999). Among rural Chinese youth in the postreform period, leaving the village to work in the city is widely perceived as an integral part of becoming modern, as well as becoming more mature and increasing your moral worth, and thus migration becomes a search for self-identity and self-transformation. Mobility and modernity have become inextricably linked in the contemporary era of globalization (e.g., Urry 2007). My purpose is to explore how mobility and modernity intersect in the lives of Qiaolian and her peers.

This project is motivated by curiosity about rural migrant women’s lives in contemporary China, and the feminist concern of whether or not labor migration benefits them and promotes gender equality. How do they experience migration, and what are the cultural, social, and even political ramifications of their migration experience? This study builds upon a robust literature focused on gender and migration that has emerged over the past few decades.⁴ In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist scholars began to illuminate women’s roles in migration. Privileging their perspectives has since served as an important corrective to the field of migration studies that had long overlooked women. By the 1990s, with the understanding of gender as a socially constructed, fluid, and relational category, feminist scholars began to explore the gendering of migration. On the whole, the scholarship indicates that migration affects women and men differently and that therefore it “looks different” from the perspective of the individual and female migrant. Moreover, due to the dynamic nature of gender, gendered ideologies and practices may change as individuals encounter shifting economic, political, and social structures through migration (Donato et al. 2006: 6).

Drawing upon these insights, a central goal of this study is to investigate how migration impacts rural Chinese women’s identity and their agency or capacity for self-determination. In turn, it aims to illuminate whether or not, and how,

migration empowers rural women and fosters positive social change, by transforming gender norms, roles, and relations in ways that promote gender equality. My research contributes to this literature a longitudinal focus on change over the life course of individual women, and across numerous sociocultural and spatial contexts, including the family and intimate relations as well as at work and in the city. Such an approach reflects a reconceptualization of migration within interdisciplinary scholarship, as a sociocultural process (Halfacre and Boyle 1993), which unfolds across space (Silvey 2006) and in time (McHugh 2000), rather than as a one-off event or unidirectional move. It also responds to recent calls by migration scholars to integrate anthropological approaches to personhood and family with migration theory (e.g., Halfacre and Boyle 1993; McHugh 2000).

It is particularly significant that rural Chinese women are participating in this quest, and hence important to better understand their experiences. First, migration to distant cities for work was not an option for most rural women of previous generations. Migration opens up new paths to rural women, including those previously forged only by men; enterprising young women who walk along these roads can have very different futures from previous generations of women. Second, for unmarried women, migration corresponds to a critical juncture of their life course between youth and impending adulthood, signified by marriage and motherhood, and thus has great potential to influence that trajectory. Third, migration enables them to become wage earners, consumers, city-dwellers (albeit temporary), and even migration brokers, new roles that both augment and challenge their primary social identity and roles in the family and household as well as their marginalization in the labor market and urban society. Fourth, migration creates a “state of in-between-ness,” which is disorienting yet potentially empowering (Lawson 2000: 174). No longer identifying with the village but also not fully integrated into the urban milieu, migrant women have the task to manage identity “in relation to negotiated meanings of gendered concepts in both their communities of origin and their urban surroundings” (Silvey 2000: 511). Rural women’s changing visions of themselves and their futures, gleaned through labor migration, reflect their awareness of other possibilities for being-in-the-world that could be a basis for social change, starting with their own lives. Migration thus engenders profound transformations that have broader social significance as individuals adopt ways of thinking and being that call into question normative discourses and practices and unsettle the status quo of power relations in the domestic and public spheres. Finally, a focus on rural migrant women’s experiences and agency is theoretically useful for critiquing the discourses of Chinese modernity that portray rural women as passive embodiments of timeless or backward “tradition” but not as subjects and agents of (their own) history.⁵

My research focuses closely on the life stories of a cohort of young women born between 1976 and 1984 who first migrated from their villages in central and western provinces to Beijing between 1993 and 2000, in their mid-to-late teens, to work in the informal service economy as domestic workers and hotel housekeepers, and documents their lives over an extended period of fieldwork. Multisited research, in key informants' hometowns (sending villages) and in Beijing (destination), along with regular and continuous contact with key informants over several years, allows me to situate migration across social and spatial contexts. I am also able to consider migration's impact on the individual's life trajectory, as time and experience engender shifts in migration goals and meaning, as well as shifts in the options and resources available for individuals to express agency and effect cultural change.

This project originated in eighteen months of dissertation fieldwork conducted from 1998 to 2000, primarily in Beijing, which included interviews with and participant-observation among thirty migrant women domestic workers or hotel housekeepers, two-thirds of whom were under age twenty-five. During a subsequent research period in 2002, I followed up with several of the younger women who were still in Beijing: Qiaolian, Changying, Ruolan, Yaling, Shuqin, Shuchun, Meilan, Peiqi, Rongli, Xiulan, and Lina, and cultivated two additional informants (Xiaofang and Yarui). Since then, with the aid of airmail letters, e-mails and instant messages, cell-phone texts, and annual trips to China from 2006 to 2010, and again in 2012, I have maintained regular and close contact with Changying, Ruolan, Shuqin, Shuchun, and Yarui. I have visited each woman's natal village at least once, and have spent time with their spouses, offspring, siblings, parents, and in-laws. The stories and experiences of these "key informants," with whom I have had extended contact, comprise the heart of this book. In addition, I draw upon interviews or conversations with other migrant women I have met over these many years, including the original group of thirty informants, as well as the friends, covillagers (*tongxiang*),⁶ and coworkers of my key informants.

Of the thirty migrant women interviewed between 1998 and 2000, ten were older domestic workers employed by my Beijing friends or neighbors, and were either introduced to me by their employers or met randomly around my residential complex. During that time, I also interviewed fifteen employers, all from the professional class, about their relationships with their domestic workers. Other informants were contacted through the Migrant Women's Club (Dagongmei Zhi Jia) of Beijing, an organization established in 1996 by a small group of urban women activists committed to the alleviation of social inequalities between residents of the countryside and the city and between men and women (Milwertz 2000). I attended numerous Club functions, including the First National Conference on

Migrant Women Workers' Rights and Interests, held in April 1999 (see Jacka 2000). From January to June 2000 I regularly participated in the Club's activities, met frequently with the organizers, staff, and members, and voluntarily offered English-language lessons to interested members. Over this period of time I established rapport with a core group of fifteen members of the Club, all unmarried and under the age of twenty-five, who had experience in domestic service. I interviewed each woman at least once for a few hours outside of scheduled Club meetings.

I met Qiaolian, whom I have already introduced, and Changying, her middle-school classmate, in 1998 when they were working as teachers in informal, illicit schools for migrant children in Beijing.⁷ Qiaolian had previously worked in domestic service. During the 1999 Spring Festival, I accompanied these young women to their coastal home villages, about 250 miles from Beijing, to meet their families. Around this time I also became friendly with two sisters from a poor and remote village in north China about five hundred miles from Beijing, which I toured in 2002. Shuqin had worked for a time in 1997 as a chambermaid at a Beijing hotel where my American friend, who introduced us, held a long-term room lease. Her elder sister Shuchun had been a domestic worker for a Beijing family. When I first met them in 1998, the sisters were working together in a small-scale, private apparel factory in Beijing. In late 1999 they joined a custodial services company contracted to a four-star hotel. I spent much time at the hotel, observing them on the job, and at the worker dormitories, hanging out with them and their coworkers. I also interviewed the janitorial company boss and the hotel housekeeping manager. Another American friend in Beijing introduced me to Ruolan, a chambermaid at the hotel where she stayed from 1996 to 1997. From a village just 150 miles from Beijing, Ruolan too had worked previously in domestic service in Beijing. I got to know Ruolan better in 2002 and during several visits to her natal and postmarital homes since 2006. Also in 2002 I met Xiaofang and Yarui, Shuchun's coworkers at the four-star hotel. Xiaofang had previously worked with Shuqin as a chambermaid in 1997. I forged a lasting bond with Yarui; since 2006 I have twice visited her natal village, less than 150 miles from Beijing. I have maintained relationships with all of these key informants for at least a decade, with the exception of Qiaolian and Xiaofang, both of whom I last saw in 2002.

Methodology

The combination of detailed interviews with participant-observation and long-term fieldwork among key informants enables me to provide a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of migration from the perspective of the migrant, a viewpoint often overlooked in migration studies (Brettell 2000; Kearney 1995). Indeed, acknowl-

edging migrants as social actors is a key contribution of anthropology and ethnographic research methods to migration scholarship (Brettell 2000; Mahler and Pessar 2006; McHugh 2000). Much migration scholarship focuses on macroeconomic structures and systems, or on the individual as a rational (male) economic actor, and considers migrants to be like “iron filings . . . impelled by forces beyond their conscious control . . . denied the creative capacity to innovate and shape the worlds from which and into which they moved” (J. Abu-Lughod 1975: 201). In contrast, I pay attention to agency, by which I refer to each individual’s “independent modes of ideation and practice” and “capacity for purposeful action” (O’Hanlon 1988: 196–197).⁸ Migration is not simply something that happens to migrants; they are conscious participants. Taking into account their motivations and desires, embodied experiences, and situated meanings of migration dispels facile assumptions and illuminates complexities. For example, similar to Qiaolian, most migrants from rural China are not fleeing desperate poverty but seeking an improved quality of life, the very definition of which evokes nonmonetary symbols, values, and statuses. Ethnographic methods are best suited to documenting subtleties and ascertaining their significance to migration.

A theoretical approach that engages both anthropology and feminist studies highlights the intersection of individual subjectivity and agency with discourses and institutional structures in the lives of rural migrant women in China (e.g., Kabeer 2000; Parker 2005; Wright 1995). Foucault established that agency could not be based on “an unmediated and transparent notion of the subject or identity as the centered author of social practice” (quoted in Hall 1996: 5). Rather, domination is exercised through symbolic production, and social identities are negotiated in dialogue with discursive power, not external to it. In turn, Bourdieu’s theory of practice (1977) as taken up by anthropologists like Ortner (1984, 1995, 1996, and 2006), proposes how individuals may unconsciously reproduce cultural discourses according to social position; agency is thus “embedded” in structures (Ortner 1996: 12–13). Accordingly, shifts in social roles incurred through migration, such as when rural daughters become migrant workers, also involve discursive moves that open up new possibilities for identity and agency, and may engender cultural transformations. By highlighting migrant women’s own understandings and experiences of migration and modernity, my ethnographic research sheds light on how state projects of modernization and development become individual ones that creatively play out over a woman’s lifetime.

Further, feminist scholarship emphasizes that gendered ideologies, institutions, and practices mediate migration (Mahler and Pessar 2006: 33). Thus, migrants can be conceptualized as positioned within multiple and overlapping discourses and structures: at the micro level of the individual; at the meso level as members of

households and families as well as social networks, and the gender relations and roles determined therein; and at the macro level of the political economy, including state policies and nationalist ideologies, which are themselves gendered (Brettell 2000; Silvey 2004). To explore the various sites, social positions, and identities that migrants simultaneously occupy, and to understand how they intersect with gender and impact rural migrant women's agency (Brettell and Sargeant 2006; Lawson 2000), I analyze interview transcripts, conversation notes, participant-observation field notes, and migrants' written works (e.g., letters, diaries), and also consult secondary sources.

At the macro level, a dual economy and labor market system, supported by an institutional mechanism of household register (*hukou*) and ideologies that maintain sociospatial class and gender inequalities, together construct young rural women as a cheap and flexible migrant labor force, who must sacrifice their youth for national development. Despite unjust conditions, young women are empowered by the chance to leave home, gain independence, see the world, and change fate. Urban consumer culture, shaped in global capitalism, likewise exploits their rural origins, youthfulness, and femininity and engenders new desires to be satiated by continuous labor (Pun 2003). Yet by capitalizing on these traits, and risking the "migration trap" of perpetual debt (Oishi 2005), young rural women can accrue significant symbolic and social capital.

At the meso level, a division of labor by sex, a patrilineal-patrilocal marriage and family system, and a tradition of son preference conspire to render daughters as temporary members of their natal households. On the one hand, they are susceptible to discrimination; on the other, they are expendable and available to migrate. Gendered social networks channel them into job niches that mimic divisions of labor in the household and reinforce gender stereotypes and inequality. But within these limitations, migrant women gain meaningful experiences, useful knowledge, and important capabilities that generate shifts in identity and social roles, expand their agency, and individually advance gender equality.

At the micro level, biography and personality shape each woman's migration motivations and experiences in myriad and unpredictable ways. I focus on a handful of key informants in an effort to convey each woman's unique history and character and to shed light on processes of change. Each is special in her way; as a group too they are rather exceptional. Their tenacious perseverance, through struggles and hardship, and their sheer ingenuity in recognizing and seizing upon opportunities afforded by migration, ultimately enabled them to achieve a degree of improved social status and social mobility. Yet their relative successes occurred within the context of wider gender and sociospatial inequalities that made their journeys so difficult. My approach is truly an "ethnography of the particular"

(L. Abu-Lughod 1991), which aims to illuminate culture as it is embodied and experienced by individuals, and reproduced or transformed in the context of social relations and interactions. The longitudinal ethnographic focus on a handful of individuals is appropriate to this task, but their stories are not intended to represent those of all migrant women from rural China.

Young rural women exercise agency when they reflect on their lives and reformulate their goals in light of old and new (to them) social rules, values, morals, and identities—including those encountered through migration, and thereby increase their capacity for purposeful action. Social positions and cultural discourses then become resources to be strategically manipulated. The choices these women make among available options variously enable and constrain their autonomy in different contexts, reaffirming the observation that “if systems of power are multiple, then resisting at one level may catch people up at other levels” (L. Abu-Lughod 1990: 53). For example, by playing the role of obedient and diligent “model workers,” informants created gender-appropriate workspaces where they could preserve their maidenly reputations. Such an arrangement reproduced patriarchal relations in a new setting even as it allowed them to earn an independent wage. As another example, informants’ refusal to marry in the traditional manner shows resistance to patriarchal authority vested in the kinship system. Yet the chance to exercise greater agency in marriage paradoxically entailed their continued subjection, as “migrant women workers,” to the authority of employers and to capitalist discipline. These examples highlight the complex interplay of identity, agency, and the individual’s life trajectory.

A focus on agency thus avoids a “zero-sum” approach to power as something gained or lost, as well as the polarizing debate in the literature on Chinese women and factory work over migrant women worker’s identities as either “filial daughters” (under the authority of patriarchal households) or “rebellious daughters” (Woon 2000). Rather, I heed the call for a nuanced approach to how rural migrant women balance tensions they face simultaneously as “individual actors and in the context of the family and workplace patriarchal structure[s]” (Woon 2000: 162; see also A. Lee 2004), at particular moments of their lives. From this perspective, empowerment is situational, contextual, and also temporal, as it intersects with specific events in the life course. It is individual, though it has the potential to incrementally effect broader cultural and social transformations.

Organization of This Volume

This book is arranged chronologically as well as thematically, so that key informants’ lives unfold over successive chapters. Chapter 1 provides the macrohistorical

context for the migration of women in China over the past two decades. I briefly sketch China's "reform and opening" and explain how it set the stage for the labor migration of women by rearranging the relationships between rural and urban, women and men, and rural women and the state. I emphasize that the new economic policies of "market socialism" drew upon and intensified institutional and ideological forms of sociospatial (i.e., rural-urban, peasant-worker) class as well as gender difference. This seemed to naturally result in the creation of a cheap workforce of migrant women, disadvantaged in the labor force relative to urban workers and to men, and which has greatly enabled China's rapid accumulation of capital and economic growth. In summary, policy change has steered China in new directions, presenting rural women with new possibilities for their futures and hence to forge new beginnings, albeit under severe constraints and conditions of inequality. Successive chapters explore rural women's migration decisions and journeys and how they faced daunting circumstances by drawing upon an expanding repertoire of material, symbolic, and experiential resources to (re)negotiate identity and challenge patriarchal power in different social contexts and at different moments in their lives.

Chapter 2 presents and analyzes migration from the micro level of the individual and the meso level of the household. I explore rural women's motivations and expectations of migration, explaining how migration subjectively emerged from young women's desires for the new and modern, as well as a sense of filial responsibility to their families and households. Such cultural orientations reflected not only nationalist discourses of development and modernization, but also the patriarchal values of the traditional kinship and family system. Gender division of labor in the household and gender roles in the family shed light on why and how migration is gendered in a particular pattern. One migration story is explored in detail to further illustrate that migration motives are complex, and may vary according to an individual's particular biography and character (Pessar and Mahler 2003). The chapter thus highlights the importance to migration studies of a gender analytic as well as a migrant-centered ethnographic approach, which together present a more clear picture of why and how people migrate than do macro-level economic, demographic, or institutional explanations.

Chapter 3 describes the function and significance of social networks of kin, and covillagers guided by the principle of reciprocity, that facilitate migration by providing material and social support to new migrants, as well as guarding the moral reputations of unmarried women. Young migrant women are both pawns and players in social networks. On the one hand, the social network extends the reach of rural patriarchal power to the city and curtails women's autonomy. On the other hand, migrant women gain interpersonal skills, social status, and so-

cial capital, which can parlay into more and better work opportunities and social mobility. Importantly, participation in reciprocity-based social networks through migration marks rural women's foray into a sphere of activity generally associated with men.

Chapter 4 describes migrant women at work, highlighting work conditions, relations with employers and customers/clients, opinions and attitudes about their work, and their efforts to improve their position in the workforce. I also draw upon interviews I conducted in 1999–2000 and 2002 with employers of migrant domestic workers and hotel chambermaids, supplemented by casual conversations with key informants' employers and coworkers during 2006–2010, to explore labor relations and how they have changed over this time. Migrant women faced numerous obstacles and risks in the labor market and workplaces on account of their doubly disadvantaged status as migrants and women, as well as their youthful inexperience. Their efforts to overcome such barriers and dangers demonstrate the fluidity and multiplicity of identity. Importantly, in negotiating new roles and identities through interactions with employers and coworkers, migrant women develop useful skills and accrue resources that empower them in a restrictive labor market, and even more so in their families and rural communities, and in regard to their futures, as I explore in subsequent chapters.

Migrant women's exposure to urban lifestyles and consumer culture through working and living in cosmopolitan Beijing and its impact on their embodied subjectivity and gender identity, as well as on their social status, is the topic of Chapter 5. Migrant women's seemingly frivolous concerns with consumer taste and trends are in fact emblematic of a deeper anxiety about belonging, identity, and social status. Applying knowledge and techniques of consumption to their own bodies and lifestyles allows relatively powerless rural women a degree of control and freedom to make themselves over from "country bumpkins" to "urban sophisticates." Ostensibly superficial makeovers can also have significant social effects, as migrant women parlay their symbolic capital and expertise into social and economic capital. For example, experienced migrant women gain respect of kin and peers back home by providing information and advice. They can also benefit financially by exploiting their youthful bodies and femininity. Yet, their self-transformations are insufficient to fully overcome their marginalization in urban society. Meanwhile, the stresses of migrant life negatively impact on their physical and mental well-being. Also, their sexier images are a source of tension as they conflict with conservative ethics and social mores, and may interfere with filial obligations to family and kin. No longer identifying with the village but not fully integrated into the urban milieu, migrant women symbolically occupy an in-between space, a position of ambivalence, but also one of potential strength and power.

Chapter 6 reflects on the ways that the experience of labor migration impacts the life course, as rural women spend their youth living away from home, and in turn how this transforms traditional courtship, marriage, and family. Different from their parents' generation, young migrant women anticipate romance, engage in extended courtships, and are more selective in choosing a spouse than are their nonmigrant peers. Ultimately, the experience of labor migration empowers rural women to assert themselves in romance and make independent decisions about their own future. Their postmarital lives further depart from tradition as they aspire to provide an even better future not only for themselves but also for their families and, especially, their children, by maintaining jobs and residences in the city. As migrant working wives and mothers, my informants embody both the self-sacrificing "traditional Chinese woman" and the "modern" individualized woman who asserts her own desires and interests. Balancing identities and roles to achieve their goals entails the strategic negotiation of their households, finances, and conjugal and extended kin relations across rural and urban contexts. Their competent performances in turn evidence migrant women's empowerment and capacity to mitigate patriarchal power in both domestic and public spheres.

The Conclusion reflects on the significance of this book to understanding migration, gender, and social change in contemporary China. By offering an agent-centered and gender-aware perspective on migration and modernity as understood "from the ground up" as well as over the long-term, and taking into account how migrants are embedded in social relationships, discourses, and power on multiple levels, this study reveals a complexity that is not captured in official rhetoric and political-economic explanations. Throughout the book, I describe and analyze rural migrant women's experiences in light of the meanings, affects, and understandings they ascribe to migration, on the one hand, and the context in which these take shape, on the other. Their experiences thus articulate with broader sociocultural transformations in China: increasing gender and class inequality; the growth of consumer culture and new forms of social distinction; changing norms of gender and sexuality; and a revolution in marriage and family. I argue that the potency of rural migrant women's agency is evident in how they negotiate social inequality in the home and workplace and how they leverage their migration experiences over their life course. These experiences include enhancing their bargaining power in their families and households, expanding their social networks and public role, fulfilling aspirations for romance and marriage, and improving their own and their families' economic and social status. In these ways they forge new beginnings toward new futures for themselves, potentially for other rural women, and new possibilities for gender equality.

Numerous scholars stress the importance of paying attention to “what differently placed [i.e., in power] people really do say” about modernity (Taylor 2001: 9; see also Felski 1995: 14–15; Mills 1999: 12–15; Rofel 1999: 17–18). Feng Xu (2000: 19) argues that a “bottom-up” study of the lived experience of rural Chinese migrant women can “expose the silences” of a unified nationalist discourse of modernity, not only revealing the inequalities that underlie China’s economic miracle but pointing the path toward a more equitable future. By listening to the voices of rural migrant women, who have heretofore been largely ignored or silenced, I endeavor to show how their experiences reflect and contribute to a changing China, as well as how migration becomes a means to change individual lives.

Conclusion

The Changing Lives of Rural Women

During a Chinese New Year visit to Qiaolian's natal village back in 1999, Qiaolian's mother gave me a precious gift of handwoven and dyed batik cloth, which she had kept stored in a trunk. Qiaolian and I admired the intricate handiwork of the faded material as we listened to her mother's moving account of how, as a young woman, she labored into the night weaving and dying this material. On her wedding day, she used the material to bundle together her meager dowry, just a spare outfit and a few jewels, which she carried over her shoulder as she walked to her husband's village, where she would live with his parents as their new daughter-in-law. Hearing of my interest in handwoven cloth, Qiaolian's aunts gave me samples of their textiles. Produced in an era of relative scarcity and thrift, when hand-sewn clothes were the norm, such textiles were no longer valued in the market economy, with its convenient ready-made fashion. They were meaningful only as nostalgic representations of women's youth and former skills.

The story evoked by the gift of cloth emphasized to me the different trajectories of two generations of rural Chinese women, whose lives were conditioned by the distinct historical contexts, and related gender configurations, in which each came of age. Raised under revolutionary socialism, Qiaolian's mother left her natal village only at marriage, and did not venture very far. Her wedding ceremony reflected the socialist ethic of frugality during leaner times. Her modest dowry showcased her handicraft skills and industriousness, qualities certain to recommend her as both a housewife and worker in her husband's agricultural collective. Her daughter, raised under market socialism, left the village initially to work in distant Beijing, in the service sector, and to continue with her studies toward a college degree. She explored different jobs and even helped start a business; she adopted a more feminine and up-to-date appearance and she continued to learn. In her mid-twenties, through her social network, she was introduced to an educated man, a schoolteacher from a town near her home. After marriage, she collaborated with her husband to establish an elementary school that could serve the villages outside the town.

Revolutionary socialism incited rural women to become productive workers and loyal citizens of the party-state. The new society improved women's lives in myriad ways, including promoting literacy and combating forced marriages, opening occupations and political roles to them that were formerly reserved for men, and extolling gender equality even in matters of appearance and dress. Despite such achievements, gender equality remained a distant ideal. In particular, women were still held responsible for the domestic sphere as "virtuous wives and good mothers" and thus not treated as equals to men in the workplace (whether farm or factory). A patrilineal-patrilocal marriage and family system continued to disadvantage women in regard to resource distribution in the family and household as well as in the male-dominated public institutions of work units and collectives.

China's shift to a market economy and opening to global capitalism presented rural women with alternative and plentiful possibilities for their futures. Their generation could imagine and, to varying degrees, also experience, living independently away from home and family, working for a wage and for a boss, and building a social network and accruing social capital and status. They could also develop their talents through technical training or higher education, experiment with cultures of consumption and dating, choose a spouse independently of go-betweens, marry far from the village, and advance toward a middle-class lifestyle. Once again, many of these options were previously available only to men. For example, Shuqin once shared with me her happy childhood memory of running down the mountainside from her village to greet her father and uncles returning from weeks of toiling in the coal mines of north central China, and reaching inside their pockets for gifts of sweets. Then she proudly intoned, "Now, I'm the returning villager whom the kids run to for presents!" Indeed, each year since 2004 she and her sister have returned to their natal home together—by airplane! However, the shift to market socialism also presents new obstacles to improving rural women's lives. As a consequence of so many choices, as well as challenges, what it means to be a rural woman and how a rural woman should behave, and the progress of gender equality, are in rapid flux.

In this book I have described the experiences of young women like Qialian who migrated to Beijing from rural villages during the 1990s and early 2000s to help spearhead China's economic development and growth in the era of reform and opening. Gender is integral to their experiences of migration and modernity, which in turn have profoundly impacted gender roles, identities, and relations. These young women forged new paths out of the village and made their own way in the city. At every step, they encountered discrimination as migrants who traversed the rigid ideological and administrative rural-urban boundary, as menial

laborers in an emergent capitalist system of class inequality, and also as women subjected to patriarchal gender ideologies and structural gender inequality. In particular, the restrictive policies and regulations tied to the household registration system and the rural-urban class divide it helps maintain served as a barrier. The constraints of the patrilineal-patrilocal marriage and family system and a gender-biased labor market also limited their livelihood options, their settlement possibilities, their marital prospects, and hence their futures. These first-generation migrants also bore the burden of relative educational and economic deprivation. Thus they contributed most of their hard-earned wages to their natal households, where they were applied to siblings' school fees, to medical expenses, or to pay down farm debts. In time, each also faced the inevitability of marriage that results from social pressure to form a family as well as pragmatic concerns for their future economic security. As wives and mothers they encountered the additional difficulty of balancing wage work with domestic obligations, and balancing family unity with the flexible household configurations required to achieve socioeconomic mobility through continuing to migrate for work.

The uniquely migrant-centered and longitudinal approach of this multisited study highlights the intersection of structure and agency as revealed in the minutiae of everyday social relations and interactions, in multiple social contexts, including the workplace and the domestic sphere, and at various times in an individual's life. My research indicates these women were not powerless victims but participants who determinedly seized upon new economic and social opportunities presented by market socialism and made them personally meaningful and beneficial. As agents, they creatively drew upon available resources to understand and navigate the complex situations and environments they encountered through migration. They used their individual backgrounds and personalities; their various and shifting social relationships, roles, and identities; as well as ideologies of difference (i.e., gender, rural-urban, and cultural quality) to negotiate authority vested in rural elders, employers, urbanites, and state representatives. In this way they gained personal advantages and furthered their own evolving aims. Particular strategies they deployed included augmenting their natal families' wealth and status, by which they garnered security and prestige, and cultivating social networks that connected them to more desirable jobs and marriage prospects. They also carefully selected future spouses who shared their vision of social mobility and made smart economic and emotional investments in their spouses, children, and affine kin, in return for practical support and respect for autonomy.

Overall, I conclude that migration promotes agency and advances gender equality by creating more opportunities for young rural women to make money, learn new skills or further their education, earn recognition and respect for their con-

tributions to their rural households and communities, and exercise greater control in matters of marriage and family. However, I also find that individual migrant women's empowerment is not necessarily or always aligned with the goals of gender or sociospatial equality, nor sufficient to dismantle durable structures and enduring discourses of inequality. Further, I observe that the capacity for these women to develop agency by grasping and utilizing novel possibilities offered through migration increased with experience over time. Yet as the opportunities available at particular moments of the life course vary, so too agency does not simply increase or decrease with age. Rather, individuals draw upon their experience to capably respond to the given circumstances. For example, in their teens and early twenties, my informants were naïve and vulnerable, and subordinate to authority figures such as parents and employers. Yet their youthful energy and beauty were assets in the labor market and consumer culture, and they deployed them for personal gain and empowerment. Into their thirties, they had the advantages of knowledge, skills, and resources accumulated through extensive experience of migration and work to help them to discern among options and make informed decisions, as well as generational authority over their children and others. But their youthful advantages declined, and their responsibilities as working wives and mothers were complicated, requiring more complex negotiations and compromises to meet expectations, fulfill desires, and maintain some autonomy.

I explored in Chapters 1 and 2 how rural women are rendered structurally and symbolically marginal in development and modernization discourse and policy, in the labor market and urban society, as well as in their households and families, as a result of social constructions of gender and occupational hierarchies, patrilineal-patrilocal kinship practices, and the sociospatial class divide maintained by the *hukou* system. Paradoxically, these disadvantages produce new desires and the impetus for change, as young rural women aspire to become more modern and improve their cultural quality by leaving the village for the city, and by rejecting agriculture to take up the menial jobs offered to them. Through migration they join social networks and become migration brokers, service workers and wage earners, savvy consumers and cosmopolitans, or even college students and service managers, as described in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively. These new roles and identities instill young rural women with self-confidence and assert their significance to economic development and modernization while challenging their exclusion from urban society. Further, their remittances of wages and consumer goods as well as information enhance their social standing in the family and household and among their rural community.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 also demonstrated the micro-strategies by which migrant women manipulate the patriarchal power of parents and rural elders, employers,

and representatives of urban society and the state in order to ensure desired outcomes of their migration decisions: a safe journey and successful search for work, decent wages and a tolerable work environment, and eventual integration into the middle class. Their efforts are often contradictory; in their struggle to advance their own interests, young migrant women sometimes subvert and at other times reinforce normative constructions of gender and rural-urban difference that rationalize and perpetuate structural gender and sociospatial inequality. For example, young migrant women's involvement in social networks and *guanxi* relationship building subjected them to indirect patriarchal control over their behavior while away from home through enforcement of standards of female respectability, even as such activities increased their public visibility and value to their households and the rural community. Similarly, young migrant women took pleasure and power in emulating modern fashions and urban lifestyles, as it enabled them to better blend into urban society and even move out of menial jobs, yet such practices promoted stereotypes of femininity and rusticity that reinforced gender and rural-urban hierarchies. Further, their tactics and successes were individual and inadequate to dismantle durable structures of inequality, such as the *hukou* system and gender-discriminatory labor market. Thus their impact could only be ephemeral; ultimately young migrant women sought out marriage in order to secure their future.

Nonetheless, rural women's changing visions of themselves and their futures, gleaned through labor migration, reflected awareness of other possibilities for being-in-the-world that formed a basis for social change, starting with their own lives. Migration is a process that unfolds across the individual life course, and indeed all of my informants documented personal growth and self-transformation over time. As Chapter 6 especially makes clear, migration significantly impacted rural migrant women's perspectives and behaviors in regard to courtship, marriage, and family formation, as well as postmarital gender identities, roles, and relations. My findings show that, over the long-term, migration especially empowers some rural women and advances gender equality by enabling greater autonomy in courtship and marriage. Migration also supports more egalitarian, companionate marriages, strengthens the position of the daughter-in-law in the patrilineal family, and encourages nonnormative gender divisions of labor in the household, such as the wife as breadwinner. However, migration also introduces rural women to middle-class expectations of scientific mothering that reinscribe women in the domestic sphere as managers of their children's development. Further, the instability of the migrant labor market and the high cost of housing, medical care, and children's education for "outsiders" in the city forced migrant women to endure long separations from their husbands, which increased

their domestic burden and no doubt put stress on their marital relationship, or forced them to sacrifice conjugal independence to reside with in-laws in a more traditional household arrangement.

Situating women's experiences of labor migration and its impact on identity and agency within the wider social relations of family and kinship as well as the individual's life course is a unique contribution of this book to a growing literature on migrant women workers in contemporary China. Significant works have focused on industrial relations and labor politics through investigations of women factory workers in China's export manufacturing industries (e.g., C. K. Lee 1998; Pun 2005; Feng Xu 2000), or of migrant women workers in domestic service (e.g., Sun 2009; H. Yan 2008), hotel hospitality (Otis 2011), and home-based enterprises (L. Zhang 2000). Others look outside the workplace to encompass migrant women's use of urban space and technology (e.g., Wallis 2013) and to compare the experiences and identities of two cohorts (i.e., single and married) of migrant women in the city (Jacka 2006). Broadening the scope to encompass household and family, kinship and social networks, and urban space and consumer culture in addition to informal-sector service work, and by adopting a longitudinal perspective, this study illuminates migration as a process that impacts rural women's identity and agency in multiple contexts and over time. Such an approach furthers our understanding of migrant women's complex and context-dependent agency and empowerment.

Migration creates a position of ambivalence that can lead to critical insight as rural women compare and contrast their community of origin with their destination society. They also may evaluate their past experiences and selves against their lives in the present as well as the different gender configurations of the places and times in which they have lived. For example, in a conversation with Yarui in 2002, she spoke of hurt feelings after being bullied by her Beijing coworkers, who called her an "outsider" behind her back. She surmised: "In an ideal society, everyone would be equal, like they were under socialism." Yet in the next breath, she reconsidered: "Society must be socially stratified, like feudal society [was], and not stay as under communism, or life would be boring and pointless." She elaborated that society required internal friction to stimulate "differences of opinion" that would create a more interesting society. Then she gave the example of her family as a "typically feudal" one that, I presumed, met the requirements of so-called internal friction: "At home, no one can be seated at the dinner table until my grandfather has sat down, and no one dares to pick up their chopsticks until he has raised his rice bowl to his lips."

It could be that Yarui was reflecting on the social changes wrought by market socialism and their impact on the lives of rural women in particular. Market

socialism offered Yarui a new direction in life and a different fate than previously available. By choosing to migrate, then pursuing romances in the workplace, and finally marrying and settling down in Beijing, Yarui challenged the gender and generational inequality characteristic of her rural household and family, which she envisioned as a holdover from the (mythic) feudal past. But as a rural migrant and menial worker in the city, she was disadvantaged relative to urban coworkers and employers, who treated her as an outsider and an inferior. No wonder she voiced ambivalence about her plight and that of contemporary society generally.

For much of China's history, patriarchal kinship and family determined women's identity and destiny. Socialist revolution provided possibilities for rural women beyond the domestic sphere as determined by a patriarchal state. In contemporary China, neoliberal capitalism opens up seemingly endless opportunities for self-making and greater space for autonomy and individualism (Y. Yan 2010), yet it creates new vulnerabilities due to market competition. This system also creates new inequalities rooted in development policies and institutional practices, including the household registration system and the discriminatory labor market, and ideological constructions of gender and sociospatial difference. The ethnographic evidence presented in this book, particularly the stories of my key informants, provides hope for China's future. Through small accomplishments in their own lives, rural migrant women are gaining traction and moving ahead.

Notes

Introduction

1. The Chinese term literally means “protector mother” or “swaddling mother,” and is perhaps best translated as “dry-nurse,” one of two forms of “menial mothers” of the late imperial-republican periods that also included the “wet-nurse” (*ruma*, *naima*) (Lieberman 1998: 158–159). In the late Qing, dry nurses were usually mature women who had borne children and who were hired to care for the children of elites and might also perform routine domestic work. In southern China, they were called *amah* (Mandarin *ayi*), a term still in use today. In contemporary parlance, *baomu* generally refers to the young rural women employed in urban households as full-time, live-in maids or nannies. I translate *baomu* as “domestic worker” rather than the more pejorative “maid,” unless the text is meant to convey such a connotation. Feminists use the term “domestic worker” to promote recognition of maids and nannies as rightful workers, not servants or slaves.

2. As I explain below, institutional barriers to permanent settlement, especially in the largest cities, force millions of people in China to “float” between rural and urban spaces, hence the term “floating population.” Note that the term incorrectly suggests that people migrate “blindly,” as aimless drifters or vagrants. Dutton (1998: 63–65) traces the etymology of the term to negative associations with social disorder or chaos, as in “hooligan” (*liumang*). The rural women who are the subjects of this book are considered temporary residents no matter their length of stay in the city because their household registration remains in the place of origin. By contrast, those whose migration entails a change of official registration are indicated by the term *qianyi renkou*, more akin to the English term “immigrant.” Approximately 262 million people living and working in urban China in 2012 lacked the local household registration (“Migrant Workers” 2013). Legal and illegal statuses further distinguish among “migrants” as I use the term. The latter include those lacking documentation, stable shelter, and stable employment (i.e., the “three-withouts” [*sanwu*]).

3. Overall migration patterns since the 1980s have followed economic indicators, as labor flows from poorer, inland regions (primarily in China’s central and western regions) to the wealthier, eastern and southern seaboard, and, within the eastern region, concentrating in urban areas and Special Economic Zones (Chan 2012; Fan 2007; Mallee 1996). Long-distance, interprovincial migration, responsible for about one-third of all migration, has continuously increased since the 1990s, and is mostly from village to city (Chan 2012). Age and marital status are important determinants of women’s migration in China as elsewhere (Riley and Gardner 1993). The migrant worker population has consistently been youthful (Rozelle et al. 1999): about 40 percent of migrant workers from 2008 to 2012 were under age thirty, reflecting a preference for youthful workers in manufacturing especially (Chan 2012; “Migrant Workers”

2013). Within the migrant population, women tend to be younger, and therefore a greater percent are unmarried, when compared to men (Goldstein et al. 2000; Zai and Chan 2004). This is not to say that married women and mothers do not migrate (Roberts et al. 2004). Indeed, demand for more mature workers, which includes married women and mothers, has increased over the past decade, due to factors such as a declining birthrate and an expanding service sector (Chan 2012; Connelly et al. 2012; “Migrant Workers” 2013).

4. For overviews of this interdisciplinary field of scholarship, see Hondagneu-Sotelo (2005); Mahler and Pessar (2001, 2006); Pedraza (1991); Pessar and Mahler (2003); Silvey (2004); Willis and Yeoh (2000).

5. For much of modern Chinese history, debates about modernity and national identity have taken place on the symbolic terrain of gender difference and constructions of womanhood (Barlow 1994). See my discussion of “the woman question” in Chapter 1.

6. The terms *tongxiang* or *laoxiang* refer to people from the same place, be it a village, county, or province, and imply a reciprocal social relationship as among kinswomen and close friends.

7. Such illicit schools sprung up in Beijing in the 1990s to meet the needs of the children of rural migrant workers, whose access to free public schooling is restricted without the local *hukou*. See Chapter 4 (note 1).

8. Thus, agency has ideational, experiential, and material components. Anthropologists influenced by existentialism and phenomenology describe agency as the capacity to make sense of our lives and social worlds, and in our natural or cultural need to live meaningfully, to construct a worthwhile life (Jackson 2005, 2008; Scheper-Hughes 2008). Feminist scholars have emphasized that agency may be “action taken in specific contexts, but not entirely autonomously or without constraint” (Joan Scott, quoted in Wolf 1992: 23). Further, “agency can involve passivity, accommodation, and withdrawal as much as defiance and resistance” (Wolf 1992: 24).

Chapter 1. Rural Women and Migration under Market Socialism

1. The national women’s organization, the All-China Women’s Federation, was created in 1949 as a “mass organization” under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to represent and safeguard the rights and interests of Chinese women and tasked with promulgating laws and policies. In 1995 it was reinvented as one of the largest nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), also known as a GONGO: government-organized NGO. See Wesoky (2001) and Judd (2002) for contemporary studies of the Women’s Federation, and Wang (1999) for a historical view.

2. The few men who have passed through companies like the March 8th were newsworthy. An article in the *Beijing Evening News* (22 May 1998) announced the arrival of the “first male maid” at Beijing’s Chongwen District Trade Union Household Service Reemployment Center, a forty-six-year-old laid-off steelworker who received free retraining in household service at a reemployment center. He is quoted as saying to the reporter: “What, don’t you believe this? Should I feel ashamed? Once you are no longer ashamed, you can do this.” Such reports helped construct domestic work as properly women’s work that is demeaning or ludicrous when undertaken by men.

3. In the 1990s, however, numerous for-profit domestic service placement agencies emerged in Beijing.

4. A widely accepted view in China of gender relations is that women, especially rural women, have a lower status than men. As Peng Peiyun, former chairwoman of the All-China Women’s Federation, stated: “Due to the obstacles of traditional customs and the level of social develop-

ment in China, women's status is still lower than men's, rural women's status is lower than that of urban women, [and] in order to realize real equality between men and women and bring the initiative of women into full play, it goes without question that we still have a long way to go" (1995: 6).

5. According to revolutionary socialism, women's liberation and gender equality were narrowly conceived to be the movement of women into socially productive labor—work located outside the home and oriented beyond the household, which was to be facilitated by the socialization of domestic responsibilities (Honig 1985: 330). In retrospect, revolutionary socialism fell short of its lofty goals for women's liberation and gender equality. Deeply rooted notions of gender difference and male superiority, inattention to gender inequality in the family and household, resistance from the male peasantry, and pursuing expediency over ideals together impeded women's ability to fully participate in production and the public sphere as men's equals (see n. 10 below). In rural China, for example, the continuance of the patrilineal-patrilocal marriage and family system perpetuated gender inequality. Upon marriage, women might depart one agricultural work team and enter another, causing the former work team or brigade to lose their labor power. This reinforced the perception of women as temporary workers, and negatively impacted their overall opportunities for training and promotion (Lai 1995).

6. Hanchao Lu (2002) and others note that Shanghai became synonymous with a modernity equated with Westernization that was at first alien to the nation; Faure and Liu (2002) stress that Beijing, Nanjing, and Guangzhou were more attractive to intellectuals and socially mobile elites not because they were, like Shanghai, Western treaty ports, but for their prior cultural importance as centers of learning. On the discourse of (Western) modernity in China, see also Shih (2001).

7. In early twentieth-century literature, the peasantry was portrayed as a culturally distinct and alien "other," passive, helpless, and unenlightened, in the grip of ugly and fundamentally useless customs, desperately in need of education and cultural reform, and for such improvement in their circumstances totally dependent on the leadership and efforts of rational and informed outsiders (Cohen 1993: 154–155).

8. In speeches, Mao often invoked the metaphor of women in binds or shackles due to "feudal patriarchy" (a gender and class system of oppression) and the fetters of traditional, "superstitious" (*mixin*) beliefs and practices. See, for example, his "Report on the Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (Mao 1965 [1927]).

9. Dorothy Ko explains: "To claim credit for the 'liberation' of women, the CCP and its sympathizers perpetuated the stark view of China's past as the perennial dark age for women" (1994: 2). From the work of social historians like Ko and others (e.g., Bray 1997; Hershatter 1997; Mann 1997), a more nuanced image of women in "traditional," or imperial and republican-era China has emerged that emphasizes the regional, ethnic, and class differences among women and is attentive to historical change.

10. Feminist studies of the CCP and "the woman question" have criticized the failures of political praxis and policy to address the roots of gender inequality, namely entrenched gender ideologies and the patrilineal-patrilocal marriage and family system. However, many also acknowledge improvements to women's lives under revolutionary socialism, such as gains in literacy and education, life expectancy and maternal health, and work opportunities, as well as the abolition of forced marriage, child-brides, and other practices harmful to women. For an overview, see Honig (1985). On the CCP's gender politics, see Gilmartin (1995), Johnson (1983),

Stacey (1984), and Wang Zheng (1999). Women's lives under revolutionary socialism are chronicled in Croll (1978), Davin (1976), Hershatter (2000), Honig (2000), and Wolf (1985).

11. Ironically, the implementation of the *hukou* system undermined Mao's promise that the socialist revolution would abolish the antagonistic, exploitative relationship between the city and the countryside (Kipnis 1997: 165–168).

12. For more details on the *hukou* system's development during the 1950s, its temporary suspension during the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961), and its reimplementa-tion in the wake of mass famines and upheaval that resulted from that failed experiment in rapid industrializa-tion, see Cheng and Selden (1994). On its use in political control, see Fei-Ling Wang (2004 and 2011). On *hukou* and managed urbanization, see Chan (1994).

13. For several years after the policy change, migrant children born to Beijing fathers and rural mothers (including those of my informants, see Chapter 6) were still being denied local *hukou* in practice, making it virtually impossible for their offspring to gain equal access to urban education and medical services.

14. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the persistence of bias against rural-urban inter-marriage.

15. Economic reforms were introduced in two stages (Naughton 2006). The early phase of reforms concentrated on agricultural productivity and the transition to a market economy. Between 1978 and 1984, rural reforms were introduced that involved redistribution of collective land to households, who in effect contracted land from the state in perpetuity. Households were permitted to make their own decisions about farming and to sell their produce on the market after contributing a grain quota or tax to the government. This “household responsibility system” reversed the “scissors effect” of agriculture subsidizing industry via state extraction of rural profits that characterized prior decades. In the industrial sector, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were likewise given leeway to sell above-quota products for profit. Urban reforms, with gradual privatization of industry and land at their core, were the focus of economic policies after 1985. The years 1996–1997 saw a major push toward privatization of the SOEs; privatiza-tion of real estate was stepped up after 2000.

16. In 1981, China began to manage population growth through restrictions on numbers and timing of births, using a quota system. For a thorough study of the background and history of population planning, see Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005).

17. China is linguistically diverse, having numerous regional and local dialects, including Cantonese and Mandarin (Putonghua), which is also the official language of the nation. Inability to speak proper Putonghua may be indicative of a lack of formal education and perceived by urbanites as a sign of low *suzhi*. See Pun (1999) for a description of how dialect is used as a tool by native supervisors and bosses to discipline and control rural outsiders and migrant women workers in the export-processing industries of southern China.

18. In the late 1990s, some of the lowest-paid female migrants were domestic workers like Qiaolian, who earned about 400CNY per month. Hotel housekeepers earned similarly low wages. By contrast, the average monthly wage of a (male) migrant construction worker was about 900CNY (Xin 2000). Gender rather than education or age appeared to account for such a discrepancy in wages, at least among rural-to-urban migrants. For example, Wang and Zuo (1997) found that when other factors (education, experience, age) were controlled, a female migrant still earned 22 percent less than male migrants. Magnani and Zhu (2012) calculated that male migrants earned an average of 30 percent more than women migrants, and that relative gender wage discrimination was greatest at the lowest income levels. An experiment conducted by Guang

and Kong (2010) similarly found that when all other factors were controlled, being a rural and female migrant sharply diminished the likelihood of a job applicant being hired by companies in Beijing.

19. In elite households of late imperial China, women and men were accorded separate living quarters, with women secluded in the interior behind walls. Work performed in the inner quarters was equated with feminine virtue and elite status, while activities that took women outside this realm were comparatively less virtuous or “womanly” and indicated lower social status. For more details, see Bray (1997), Ko (1994), and Mann (1997). Chapters 2 and 3 also discuss migration and service work in regard to gender transgression.

20. The (re)migration decisions of married women are closely tied to the age and sex of their children; the availability of childcare provided by in-laws, parents, or other close kin; and their educational needs (Connelly et al. 2012; Fan, Sun, and Zheng 2011).

21. Thus, the Goals for the State Council’s Program for the Development of Chinese Women (1995–2000) were “to increase the employment of women and expand their areas of employment in the course of establishing a socialist market economy, readjusting the urban and rural industrial structure, and developing the tertiary industry.”

Chapter 2. Dutiful Daughters and Migration Desires

1. I discuss *guanxi* in more detail in Chapter 3.

2. The conviction that investment in education will enhance social mobility is pervasive despite the reality that institutional and social barriers thwart the advancement of rural youth. See Hannum and Park (2007) and the collection of essays in Postiglione (2006a) for further information.

3. Socialist model workers in agriculture and industry, such as the Iron Girls, exemplified the gender-neutral or androgynous look. In 1950s and 1960s propaganda posters, they were posed with heavy equipment and tools, wearing overalls, and sporting short hair. But close readings of such visual images indicate subtle gender differences, according to Evans and Donald (1999). Indeed, socialism did not entirely erase gender difference or inequality.

4. Urban working mothers at least had some social support as recipients of state benefits distributed through the work units; rural women, working in self-sufficient agricultural collectives, did not, despite their more onerous double burden (see Sidel 1972: 84–85; M. Wolf 1985: 121–122).

5. The state has taken steps toward a goal of universal coverage (by 2020) by improving the availability and quality of rural health care, such as by building more hospitals and training more medical personnel and establishing a cooperative insurance system in rural areas equal to that provided to urban citizens since 1998 (Yip 2010).

6. Land reform and collectivization interfered with the traditional patrilineal inheritance process and weakened the father-son bond. In the postreform era, the greater cash-earning power of adult sons has increased their bargaining power over their elders. Indeed, “inheritance” is often passed to sons at marriage, before the parents’ death (Y. Yan 2003).

7. A daughter’s temporary membership in her natal household should not, however, be exaggerated. Anthropologists and social historians have shown the ongoing links of married women with their natal households (e.g., Judd 1989) and the importance of affinal ties that are forged through marriage to rural social life and economy (Croll 1984).

8. In very poor households having few laborers, young women’s help in family farming is certainly critical to the household economy, but those who can migrate are already somewhat

peripheral to that economy. Hence their remittances tend to supplement the household budget, allowing for enhanced consumption power (see Fan 2004 and C. K. Lee 1998).

9. I interviewed Shanshan, who I met through Qiaolian and Changying, in 2000, when they were neighbors in a migrant enclave in Beijing. Shanshan was unemployed at the time and busy caring for her husband, also a migrant, and raising their newborn.

10. Fortunately, this gender gap in compulsory education appears to be narrowing since the implementation of new government initiatives in 2005 (Ibid.).

11. Interestingly, as I will explain in Chapter 5, one positive, unintended consequence of migration and work is that it allows young women to reflect upon and question the fairness of gender-selective practices with regard to schooling decisions made in their own households. Equally encouraging, some scholars have found that demand for young women's labor in south China's export industries, together with the smaller families created by the family planning policy, are favorably influencing parental attitudes toward investing in daughters' educations (H. Zhang 2007).

12. Not only is there pressure for young couples to procreate, but there is also pressure on rural women to bear sons. Pressure on rural households for male farm labor under the household responsibility system contributed to undermining the initial "one-child" family planning policy (Greenhalgh and Li 1995). The overall sex ratio has become imbalanced; technology enabling fetus sex identification and sex-selective abortion accounts for the "missing girls" (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). On the other hand, recent scholarship points to lessening of son preference in areas where women's employment opportunities, including via migration, are established and in concert with the promotion of smaller families through family planning (Short 2003). See also Chapter 6.

13. Poverty itself was shameful but so too was the grandmother's transgression of traditional gender prescriptions of virtue by migrating from the inner quarters to the public streets (see Mann 1997: 30–44).

Chapter 3. Gendered Social Networks and Migration Pathways

1. For example, while gender identity may have become less relevant after 1949 for women who positively embraced the class label of "worker" (Rofel 1999: 80), this may not have been possible for the rural female *domestic* "worker" of the post-1949 period. In her analysis of women who had migrated out of China's villages and found work in urban domestic service in the 1970s, Hairong Yan (2003a: 582) points not only to their violation of the norms of rural patriarchy, but also to their failure to become the liberated subjects of state socialism:

In both the city and the countryside, these rural migrant women were transgressors: In the countryside they had transgressed the sphere of local patriarchy and thus raised anxiety about their gendered personhood; in the city they were transgressors of the proper subject position of rural woman as defined by ideologically espoused heroic agricultural labor, and they reinvoked the specter of the past through domestic service. This notion of transgression and contamination thus constitutes a vague source of shame for these women—vague because it is caught uneasily between the state ideology of women's liberation and the continued presence of patriarchal power that defines what a proper woman is through the spatial circumscription of her labor.

2. Trafficking in women is an officially acknowledged and widely reported crime that has been on the increase, or simply made more visible (Whyte 2000), in the postreform period. The rise of trafficking may be connected to the demographic sex imbalance.

3. Security deposits served as collateral to discourage migrant workers from spontaneously quitting employers.
4. See Hu (1944) and Yang (1965: 167–172) for anthropological discussions of this Chinese concept.

Chapter 4. Menial Women and Model Workers

1. Children of migrant workers have long been denied access to public schooling in large cities (Kwong 2004). Until educational policy reforms adopted in the late 2000s, enrollment in public schools was limited to local *hukou* holders (Hannum, Wang, and Adams 2010). Many public schools charge illicit arbitrary fees to enroll migrant children. Most migrant workers therefore send their children back to the village when they reach school age, to be looked after by kin, or enroll them in cheaper, makeshift schools operated mainly by migrant entrepreneurs. Such schools tend to be of substandard quality and insecure, as they might be demolished or closed down on short notice by authorities (see Jacobs 2011). Students who receive early education in Beijing must return to their place of *hukou* registration to sit for post-secondary school entry exams, which may be based on an altogether different curriculum. This link between education and *hukou* is a main impediment to the permanent settlement of migrant families in Beijing (“Migrant Workers” 2013).

2. In 1994, domestic service was officially recognized as a technical occupation, and deemed the science of “home economics” (*jiazheng*) (Wang Zheng 2000). Through its affiliated domestic service employment agencies, the Women’s Federation instituted training centers and awarded certificates in the new science. The changes were aimed at the reemployment of urban women workers laid off from restructured state-owned enterprises, who were reluctant to enter an occupation they found shameful due to its association with servitude as well as rural migrant women.

3. Maids, nannies, and even wet nurses were available for hire after 1949, but they grew increasingly rare (Tang and Feng 1996). Without local *hukou*, it was extremely difficult for rural women to procure basic necessities of food and housing in the city. Moreover, it was a violation of regulations to reside away from one’s place of *hukou* registration.

4. A Beijing cadre who was retired from the Foreign Service explained to me that the state provided subsidies to households like his during the 1950s and 1960s, in variable amounts and forms depending on the cadre’s rank in the government agency, expressly for securing domestic help, usually middle-aged women from the countryside. His household received a stipend for their domestic workers’ salaries and extra ration coupons for rice and other staples. His work unit also arranged for the transfer of their domestic workers’ household registration to Beijing, where it was entered into his family’s register. However, many more rural women who became nannies in the 1960s and 1970s did not secure urban *hukou* (H. Yan 2003a: 582).

5. Given that the socialist revolution had purportedly eradicated class inequality and exploitation by eliminating capitalist labor relations as well as feudal servitude, their reappearance in the form of a market in private caregivers in the 1980s was jarring (Chen and Sun 1984–1985). Much effort was made to reassure the emerging urban middle class that hiring caregivers was in keeping with socialist aims of development, and would be tolerated and even encouraged (“Baomu” 1986; Croll 1986).

6. In this chapter I rely on an extensive literature on the unique work conditions of domestic service, including Anderson (2000), Rollins (1985), and Romero (1992), to name but a few.

7. Some nurse's assistants (*hugong; huli*) are paid by the hospital as temporary staff; others are domestic workers hired by the patients or their families.

8. Wenling, from a poor area of north China, had worked nearly ten years in domestic service (in Xi'an and Beijing), and at the time of our meeting was already thirty-two years old, yet still unmarried. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of migrant women workers and the problem of later marriage.

9. Again, the existing literature on domestic service in other contexts, such as among immigrant and minority women in the United States, suggests similar hierarchies of "professionalism" by work arrangements and content. For example, live-in domestic workers rank below part-timers, and those working directly for a household rank lower than those working for a contractor (Salzinger 1991).

10. As explained in Chapter 1, most fees were eliminated with legislation introduced in 2003.

11. After switching from the four-star hotel to a (three-star) state-run guesthouse in 2001, Shuqin still kept details of her menial work to herself. However, when visiting her natal home, she boasted of meeting high-profile government officials (who had stayed at the guesthouse) and distributed gifts of souvenir pens inscribed with the titles of ministries that she received as perquisites of her job!

Chapter 5. From Country Bumpkins to Urban Sophisticates

1. China has over one hundred spoken languages, about 85 percent of which belong to any of seven dialect families.

2. Like many migrant workers, Shuchun rented a room in a house located on the far outskirts of Beijing, in a so-called migrant enclave. Her landlords were former farmers who received Beijing *hukous* after their village was incorporated into the city administrative zone in the 1980s. Many migrants renting in such "urban villages" worked the fields belonging to their landlords, who in turn derived income from the rental property (see Jacka 2006).

3. The dismantling of rural collectives and restructuring of the state-run economic sector in the postreform period has undermined China's health-care system, which today is characterized by differential access and quality of care as well as skyrocketing prices. Key steps toward a goal of universal coverage (by 2020) have been improving the availability and quality of rural health care and establishing a cooperative insurance system equal to that provided to urban citizens since 1998 (Yip 2010). Rural migrant workers have been virtually excluded from the urban welfare regime; however, in 2003, municipalities began offering special social insurance schemes to migrant workers. Yet, by 2009, only a small percentage of migrant workers were covered by the major types of social insurance: pension, health care, unemployment, injury, and maternity. Further, as eligibility for each level of coverage is determined by household registration, migrant workers on the whole receive lower benefits. Moreover, insurance schemes are not portable, and thus most migrant workers who pay into the fund do not benefit over the lifetime (Selden and Wu 2011). For these reasons, migrants usually seek medical care back in the countryside.

4. The trial period evokes the apprentice system of the presocialist era, but in the postreform period serves to build employer's trust in the authenticity of the employee's résumé, in a context where phony college degrees are easily available for purchase.

5. The landlord and his family occupied the renovated rooms, which had linoleum floors and new furniture. They charged Yarui 150CNY plus utilities to rent the dilapidated room in

the rear of the house. She also paid a migrant management fee and public hygiene fee to the local village committee.

Chapter 6. Migrant Working Wives and Mothers

1. Several ethnographers of rural China have noted an increase in uxori-local marriages, whereby the wife resides in or near her parents after marriage (H. Zhang 2004). Historically, such “minor” forms of marriage were undesirable but not uncommon, particularly in families without sons to inherit and tend to the property (Baker 1979). The implementation of family planning in the postreform period has led to smaller family size. Households with only one daughter may seek a uxori-local marriage and be attractive, especially to poorer, landless bachelors (H. Zhang 2007).

2. The general rule of thumb for rural marriages historically was that a girl should remain within ten *li*, about three kilometers, of her natal village. Under collectivization, intravillage, intrabrigade marriages became a common phenomenon (Selden 1993).

3. In 2000, for example, Yaling’s five-year-old son still did not have the Beijing *hukou*.

4. The sex-ratio imbalance is attributed to the restrictions on family size under the planned birth policies implemented since 1980, son preference, and the introduction of ultrasound technology that facilitates fetal sex detection (Poston, Conde, and DeSalvo 2011). In 2003 the state banned the use of such technology for elective sex-selective abortion procedures.

5. China has a long tradition of equal division of family property among sons, different from European primogeniture. Inheritance helped perpetuate the intergenerational contract: filial sons provided care and support to aging parents, and inherited the family property upon their death (see Baker 1979). In the postreform period, parents turn over property (and/or sums of cash) to their sons at marriage, and thus have less leverage to ensure their gifts are reciprocated with children’s filial obligations (see Ikels 2004; Y. Yan 2003).

6. Under a practice called *dingti* in the socialist work-unit system, a high-school-educated daughter or son would be hired to take over his or her parent’s job upon the latter’s retirement.

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