

## Introduction

### *Migration, Family, and Masculinity in Postsocialist China*

The traditional Chinese economy and society were no more or less dependent upon the successful operation of the Confucian family system than vice versa. The family, the economy, and the society were, as we have seen, one system. That system was patriarchy.

—Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*

We met Xie, a twenty-year-old male waiter at a newly built three-star hotel in Dongguang, an industrialized economic zone in South China, in December 2013. A tall, fair, and timid young man, native of Chong Qing, Xie told us that he had left his rural home at the age of fourteen because he was kicked out of school as a result of leading a gang fight. Xie used to be one of the millions of “left-behind children” in rural China. His parents left him in the care of his paternal grandmother when he was just three years old to *dagong* (work for others)—a term peasant workers used to describe their predicament as migrant workers in cities. They did not return for six years. When he missed his parents and asked why they did not return, his grandmother would point at a newly built house and tell him that this was concrete evidence of their love for him. The house was built for his future marriage using remittances from his parents. Xie’s parents had high hopes for him. They hoped he would use the money they earned from *dagong* to attend university or at least to learn a skilled trade. Instead, Xie has changed jobs more than ten times in the six years since he began his *dagong* life. His next-to-last job was as a male sex worker in a glamorous five-star hotel in Yunnan province; this ended fairly uneventfully when he was infected

with sexually transmitted diseases and forced to return to his parents, who were working in Dongguang at the time. When we spoke to him Xie was living with his parents in a rented apartment in one of the “villages in cities” (*chengzhongcun*)<sup>1</sup> not far from where he works. His grandmother still lived in the rural village, but he and his parents were saving to buy a flat in a town near to their rural village. He told us that he knew nothing about farming and could not imagine living the life of a peasant. He was not even planning to return to the village for the Spring Festival. Instead, he and his parents would celebrate it in Dongguang. Xie used to live with his girlfriend, whom his parents had approved to be his marital partner, but they split up when she found out about his sex work. Xie was fond of this girl because she washed all his clothes, cooked for him, and was frugal with money, which made her “virtuous wife” material, like his mother. Unlike his parents, Xie vowed that he would never leave his children behind and go out to *dagong*. Instead, he wanted to get married, raise children, and live happily with his family. Xie thought that he needed a successful career to make this dream come true. When we met him, this seemed only a distant possibility; as a waiter he earned a meager eighteen hundred yuan per month and spent it freely, most of it on visits to massage parlors, gambling, drinking with friends, and occasional consumption of soft drugs in the nearby karaoke bars. He did not seem to worry about his future; his parents had already built a house for him, they were saving for a down payment on a flat in the town, and they planned to send him to learn a skill after the Spring Festival.

Yao is a forty-five-year-old security guard from Hunan. He left his rural home for *dagong* in the cities of South China in 1989. When Yao left, his only child was nine years old. During the first five years of *dagong* life, his wife stayed behind to look after their son. She joined him in 2004 because he became sick and was not able to earn enough money for the family. When we met Yao in 2013, the first thing he told us was that he felt terribly guilty towards his parents, because he had not been home for the Spring Festival for eleven years. The second thing was that he felt sorry that his child had grown into adulthood without

1. Villages in cities are sometimes referred to as urban villages. These are enclaves and housing located both on the outskirts and in downtown areas of major migrant-receiving cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen in China. Rural-to-urban migrants are the major residents of villages in cities. Although living conditions in these villages are typically overcrowded and unsatisfactory, they provide some form of affordable housing for the millions of rural-to-urban migrants.

parental support. Yao's only consolation was that he counted himself a caring husband—while rural men seldom do domestic chores, Yao washed his wife's clothes, cooked for her, cleaned the small rented apartment that they shared, shopped for food, made the bed, and changed the linens. Yao did all these chores despite teasing from his fellow Hunanese. Yao's wife was the one who made all the important decisions for the family, a pattern departing remarkably from the tradition of male dominance and female subordination prescribed by Confucian teachings about conjugal power in China. Yao and his wife are also unconventional in that she had earned nearly twice as much as him as a factory worker at the time of our interview.

In the 1930s Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong saw “leaving the land but not the village” (*litu bu lixiang*), allowing China's rural peasants to combine small-scale industrial and agricultural production, as a viable strategy for addressing the agrarian crisis which, according to Stacey (1983), threatened the survival and legitimacy of the peasant patriarchy. Six decades later events in rural China had developed in exactly the direction that Fei wanted to prevent: since the 1980s rural China has experienced arguably the largest exodus in its history. According to the 2010 census, a staggering 220 million peasants have left their rural homes in search of better economic opportunities in the country's glittering new urban centers. What started as a trickle of individual migrants—mostly married rural men traveling to do temporary or seasonal work to supplement their income from agricultural production—has become a way of life for most peasants and their children: men and women, single and married, understand going out to *dagong* in cities as “the way things are,” not something they have a choice about. This mass exodus has prompted concerned sociologists, journalists, and policy makers to develop terms such as “left-behind children” (*liushou ertong*), “hollow village,” (*kongxincun*) and “lone-person village” (*yigeren de cunzhuang*) to describe villages inhabited only by young children and their elderly grandparents, and increasingly only the grandparents.

The image of the lone elderly peasant sitting in front of a newly built two-story brick house could not be further from the cultural ideal of the large, extended Chinese family, consisting of at least three generations—the patriarch and his wife, his married sons and their wives, and their grandchildren (Hsu, 1971). Although previous studies have suggested that the large joint family was an ideal rather than the norm throughout most of China's history, families consisting of three generations used to be common, accounting for around half of both urban and rural

households (Unger, 1993; Harrell, 1993). Even after a family division (*fenjia*), linked households sometimes developed into “networked families” (*wangluo jiating*) (Unger, 1993) or “aggregate families” (Croll, 1994) to fulfill the traditional functions of caring for the elderly and the young. The massive migration of the young and able-bodied from rural China to urban areas represents an unprecedented crisis for families in rural China, because now nobody—including the senior leaders of the postsocialist state—can be certain that the elderly population in the countryside will have anything to fall back on, or that the young will be adequately nurtured.

Rural migration to urban areas not only makes fulfillment of the family’s time-honored role as caretaker for the young and old an unprecedented challenge for the peasant family, it also shatters the foundation of the peasant patriarchy—the advantage and control men have over women, derived from the exclusion of women as full members of their natal families before marriage and their confinement to the domestic realm after marriage. Parents traditionally favored sons over daughters, because sons were the successors to the family name, lineage, and bloodline and were expected to support their parents in old age. Parents invested more in sons than daughters in the terms of education, housing, and land, because sons were a form of old-age security, while daughters were viewed as only temporary members of the household on whom the parents could not count. When a daughter married she had to move to live with or near her husband’s family and transfer her allegiance to them, a practice variously termed “patrilocal residence,” “patrilocality,” or “virilocal marriage.” The saying that describes a married daughter as “water splashing out,” the labeling of daughters as “a loss” (*peibenhuo*), and the custom of having the mother’s face look toward the outward door when giving birth to daughters all symbolized the outsider status of a Chinese daughter in her natal family. It is also no coincidence that the Chinese character for “marry” (*jia* 嫁) represents a female figure outside the family. The one-child policy has begun to change daughters’ second-class status in the family. By making it legitimate for only-child daughters to live with or close to their parents after marriage, this policy makes them available to provide old-age care and changes the cultural dynamics and expectations that devalue women (Unger, 1993). Although statistical evidence suggests that patrilocal residence is still the norm in rural areas (Judd, 1994; Harrell, 1993), there are also signs that rural-to-urban migration may be one mechanism behind the gradual change in the practice of patrilocality. Rural-to-urban migration dramatically

weakens parental control and strengthens the conjugal bond when a couple migrate together; it may thus increase the bargaining power of female migrant workers negotiating to live near their own rather than their husband's family after marriage.

Men's dominance over women in Chinese society was traditionally based on a rigid system of sex segregation that reserved the public realm for men, secluding and confining women to the domestic sphere (Mann, 2011). The Chinese character for "wife" graphically depicts her as a domestic figure (*neiren*): it represents a female figure with a broom (婦). Although the Communist revolution encouraged women's participation in production, thus dramatically reducing the "outside/inside" segregation of the sexes, to date none of the reforms have fundamentally altered the fact that the domestic sphere is women's responsibility (Croll, 1983; Judd, 1994; Yan, 2003). Rural-to-urban migration may yet change this dynamic. While rural men consider the idea that they would do domestic chores laughable (Judd, 1994), peasant men in urban centers, such as Yao, have no choice but to negotiate responsibility for domestic chores. This is particularly true for peasant men in migrant couples (men who migrate to the city with their spouse) and migrant families (peasant men who migrate to the city with their wife and children). Away from the village these families often do not have access to extended family support for child care, and as they are typically in the city's lowest social stratum they are unable to afford paid child care. The financial pressures on migrant families with children are particularly testing: migrants are denied full citizenship in the city they live in, and their children are denied access to public education (Goodburn, 2009). This makes paid employment for the wife an economic necessity, which in turn necessitates conjugal renegotiation of responsibility for domestic chores and child care, so that husband and wife can combine work and family responsibilities. The impact of this renegotiation of the centuries-old "outside/inside" division of roles between peasant men and women, and the ways in which it may transform Chinese patriarchy, are extremely interesting issues.

Despite the potentially massive impact of rural-to-urban migration on the Chinese family, there has been little systematic research in this area. Previous studies of rural-to-urban migration focused on its economic, political, and health impacts. When effects on the family were explored, the focus was on quantifiable outcomes, such as family wealth, child health, and the well-being of the elderly; internal family negotiation processes were left largely unexamined. The few studies to look at the interpersonal dynamics and emotionality of family negotiations

resulting from rural-to-urban migration mostly did so from the standpoint of women, either as migrant workers or left-behind wives (Gaetano and Jacka, 2004; Jacka, 2006, 2012). The voices and subjective experiences of peasant men are curiously absent from the academic record. This absence coincides with a similar gap in literature on Western migration, and constitutes an important lacuna in our understanding of how the colossal migration from rural to urban China may have transformed that pillar of Chinese society, the patriarchal family system. The neglect of Chinese peasant men's voices may perhaps stem from the view that peasant men are the de facto beneficiaries of patriarchy, and hence their experiences are unproblematic and do not warrant extensive investigation. However, gender is not a fixed, individual attribute; gender is relational. Inequalities between the sexes originated in interactions between men and women, and the intersection between interactional and institutional contexts. We would be hard pressed to develop a full understanding of exactly how the Chinese patriarchal family is produced, reproduced, challenged, and transformed by migration without considering the subjective experience and agency of men. Furthermore, men are not a homogenous group. Inequalities between men, and how these have shaped patriarchy, has become a burgeoning area of study in the West under the banner of masculinity research (Connell, 1987), but this theoretical perspective has seldom been employed to understand the experiences of male peasant workers in urban China.

Most studies of the Chinese family have focused on the "structural principles" of the "corporate family," thus leaving issues of intimacy, emotionality, and individual agency largely unaccounted for (Yan, 2003). Judd (1994) has also suggested that previous studies had prioritized inter-household and external dynamics over intrahousehold processes. It is the Chinese family's public manifestation, including economic, political, and juridical aspects, that has attracted the attention of scholars. In reviewing Stacey's acclaimed book *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*, Watson (1985: 62) laments that "for a book about the family, there is not much here about the internal dynamics of domestic life." The marginalization in academic literature of the internal, domestic life of the Chinese family has gone hand-in-hand with an almost total absence of interest in conjugality. When scholars have considered the domestic dynamics of Chinese family life, the spotlight has been fixed firmly on intergenerational relationships, for instance the father-son bond (Hsu, 1971), the mother-child bond (Wolf, 1972; Evans, 2008), or the antagonism between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law (Wolf, 1968; Gallin, 1994). The

absence of the conjugal dimension may be related to the fact that in the Confucian discourse of the Chinese patriarchal family, “the husband-wife relationship is strictly held to be supplementary and subordinate to the parents-son relationship” (Hsu, 1971: 57), although scholars have suggested that variations in custom and class practice may have resulted in much stronger bonds between husband and wife than the official model permitted (Hsu, 1971; Stacey, 1983). The omission of conjugality from the literature on the Chinese family is even less justifiable today, given that the Communist state has dramatically redefined the family as a “form of joint life of two sexes united in marriage” (Stacey, 1983: 4). Yan (2003: 86) has argued that “the triumph of conjugal power” was one of the key changes to the Chinese family and could not be overlooked. Whether Yan (2003) overstated the case is debatable; nevertheless he pointed out the increasingly central role of conjugal dynamics in Chinese family life, even in rural families.

In summary, previous studies of migration, family, and gender in China have overlooked three issues: they have prioritized outcome over process and structural principles over emotionality; men’s voices and subjective experience are missing from the academic literature; and conjugality has been marginalized. This book departs from previous research in three important respects in order to address these gaps. First, it examines the impact of rural-to-urban migration on family dynamics and intrafamily negotiation processes rather than looking at quantifiable outcomes, as previous studies have done. Second, it specifically considers the emotional dimension of intergenerational dynamics and devotes considerable space to discussing individual agency in conjugal negotiations. Third, it looks at the voices and subjective experiences of male migrant workers, and uses peasant men’s experiences and narratives to analyze how migration has transformed the family.

#### MIGRATION RESEARCH IN CHINA: THE FAMILY AND GENDER GAPS

Since the Communist Party came to power in 1949 it has relied predominantly on the household registration system (*hukou*) as a means of restricting the geographical mobility of its population. Under the *hukou* system, which assigned every Chinese citizen a particular place of residence, rural residents were not allowed to migrate to cities, and urban residents were prohibited from moving between cities. In the late 1970s and 1980s, following the gradual removal of barriers to rural-to-urban

migration, post-Mao China probably witnessed the largest human migration in history (Peng, 2011). The 2010 census in China estimated that around 260 million Chinese people were living away from the place where their *hukou* (household registration) was recorded. This colossal population of migrants included about 220 million people migrating from rural to urban areas (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011a), the so-called floating population. Migration from rural to urban areas has not only had a tremendous impact on China's economic development, urbanization, and rural development, it has also shaped millions of rural families. Some scholars have estimated that around half of China's rural population of more than six hundred million live in households with at least one migrant worker (Démurger and Xu, 2011). Because of the overlapping constraints of the *hukou* system and rural land tenure arrangements, the vast majority of rural-to-urban migrants are "circular migrants," who maintain close ties with their family in the source community throughout the process of migration (Fan, 2008). However, there are increasing numbers of permanent migrants (Hu, Xu, and Chen, 2011) and returned migrants (Gao and Jia, 2007). Regardless of type, rural-to-urban migration entails migrants physically leaving their family; it creates split households and forces family affairs to be transacted across multiple geographical locations. This generates new opportunities and tensions, allowing family members to renegotiate their familial roles and obligations, as well as potentially affecting the distribution of power and resources and posing a new challenge to the maintenance of emotional bonds, intimacy, and loyalty between family members.

A search for publications including the words "migration" and "China" via Google Scholar suggests that the vast majority of existing research has focused on the impact of migration on economic development, work conditions and labor resistance, urbanization, access to health care, and HIV/AIDS. Studies examining the impact of migration on family life are in a minority. The lack of research in this area stands in sharp contrast to the central role the family plays in Chinese society and the importance of the family system as a mechanism for maintaining the Chinese patriarchy. There are three possible explanations for the relative lack of research on migration and the family. First, the image of the typical rural-to-urban migrant is of a young, single worker, epitomized in the phrases *dagongmei* (factory girl) (Chang, 2008) and *dagongzai* (factory boy). Although this image may have represented the earliest cohort of female migrant workers who left the countryside to work in the export-driven processing zones in South China (see for



example Lee, 1998), it was not valid for the earliest cohort of male migrant workers, let alone the majority of the floating population thirty years after the unleashing of this prodigious migration. Several studies have shown that more male migrant workers were married than single (Choi and Du, 2011). According to the 2000 census, around 73 percent of those classified as the floating population were married (Wong, Li, and Song, 2007). The misconception that migrants tend to be single may result in the view that migration is a temporary stage in an individual's life cycle, that physical separation from family in the source community is a short-term experience, and that migration has only a brief, limited impact on family life. Recent statistics have showed that for many rural-to-urban migrants, migration is not a transitional experience; it begins in early adulthood and extends well into their late fifties (Loyalka, 2012; National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 2013). In addition, although the majority of rural-to-urban migrants may be circulators, the duration of their physical separation from their family is anything but short. Because China is such a geographically vast country, traveling between the source community and the destination community may take days and cost migrants a hefty proportion of their often meager income. Coupled with the difficulty of obtaining leave from work in some sectors, these factors mean that migrants' temporary separation from the family left behind may be measured in years rather than months. Given the number of lifelong circulators, who are often forced into separation from their family for extended periods of time, the challenges that China's internal migration poses to family life are far from negligible.

Second, while the majority of the earliest cohort of rural migrants was men, the percentage of female migrants has increased rapidly over the last thirty years. The 2000 census showed that women accounted for 49.6 percent of the floating population (Cai, 2003). More importantly, the nature of female migration has changed over the years. The 1990 census showed that the majority of male migrants migrated for work reasons (60 percent), whereas most women migrated for family reasons (56 percent). Women migrants were also more likely to return to their community of origin because of family and caring responsibilities (Zhu, 2005). In summary, the majority of the earliest cohorts of female migrants in China were either dependents of migrants or their migration trajectory was truncated by family responsibilities. This is consistent with the traditional Chinese gender norm that anchors femininity in wifedom and motherhood (Mann, 2011). However, there is evidence that an increasing number of

female migrant workers prioritize work over family life, enjoying the newfound independence and power their city income has brought them and contemplating settling permanently in the city (Yan, 2008; Zhu and Chen, 2010; Chang, 2008). The question of how this transformation of the female experience of migration, and women's attitudes toward migration, will affect the Chinese patriarchy and shape conjugal relationships remains to be answered.

Third, while it is true that early cohorts of rural-to-urban migrants tended to be circulators and were therefore able to maintain close relationships with their family in their community of origin, this may no longer be true; an increasing number of temporary migrants are seeking permanent settlement opportunities in the city. The effect this has on how left-behind elderly parents are cared for may shake the foundations of the Chinese family system and undermine the ethos of filial piety.

Finally, the stereotype of rural-to-urban migrants as individuals rather than as part of a larger household has distracted scholars from the investigation of postmigration intrahousehold dynamics. New evidence has suggested that the pattern of rural-to-urban migration has gradually shifted; whereas male married migrants used to leave their children, wife, and elderly parents behind, nowadays migration tends to involve couples or even the whole nuclear family. Fan (2008) showed that couple and family migration has increased. The rapid expansion of "villages in cities" in urban China provides further evidence of the changing pattern of rural-to-urban migration; single workers living in dormitories are giving way to migrant families settling on the margins of affluent urban communities.

These changes raise questions about how the internal dynamics of family life have been affected by migration, yet most of the limited number of studies of migration and family in China have focused on the economic consequences (Qin, 2010). In particular, researchers have explored how migrants' remittances to their families may ameliorate rural poverty (Taylor, Rozelle, and de Brauw, 2003; Du, Park, and Wang, 2005; Huang and Zhan, 2008; De Brauw and Rozelle, 2008). More recently, other studies have begun to investigate the impact of rural-to-urban migration on the well-being of the so-called "left-behind children" (Zhou et al., 2005; Liang, Guo, and Duan, 2008; Liu, Li, and Ge, 2009; Chen et al., 2009; Gao et al., 2010; Fan et al., 2010; Jia and Tian, 2010; Qin and Albin, 2010; Ye and Pan, 2011; Lee, 2011; Lu, 2012; Wen and Lin, 2012; Zhou, Murphy, and Tao, 2014; Murphy, 2014; Wu, 2014;

Wu, Tsang, and Ming, 2014). A smaller body of research has examined the impact of migration on elderly care (Pang, de Brauw, and Rozelle, 2004; Guo, Aranda, and Silverstein, 2009; Giles, Wang, and Zhao, 2010; Chang, Dong, and MacPhail, 2011; He and Ye, 2014). Research on how migration shapes conjugal dynamics is conspicuously lacking (Jacka, 2012), although a few articles have addressed issues related to left-behind wives (Xiang, 2007; Jacka, 2012).

Gender is also a lacuna in research into migration and the family. A review of literature showed that migration studies in China touching on the issue of gender can be divided into two categories. Research in the first category compares the differences between male and female migrants and explains them in terms of macrostructural factors such as gender norm socialization (see Choi and Du, 2011, for a review); the second category focuses on the particular experiences of female migrants (Lee, 1998; Pun, 2005b; Yan, 2008; Gaetano and Jacka, 2004; Zhang, 2014; Chiang, Hannum, and Kao, 2015). Although these studies have enriched our understanding of the dynamic interaction between gender and migration, they have left the particular experiences of male migrant workers unexplored. This omission is especially unfortunate, because while female migrant workers may be doubly marginalized in cities, male migrant workers often have to cope with the discrepancy between their dominance in rural China and their marginalization in cities. The household-based agrarian economy, patrilineal inheritance, and patrilocal postmarriage residence backed by Confucian ideology are the foundations of Chinese patriarchy (Zuo, 2009). Although there have been changes in China as a result of economic reform and modernization, scholars argue that the overall structure of the Chinese patriarchy, specifically the dual backbone of patrilineal inheritance combined with patrilocal residence, remained largely intact until the mid-1990s (Stacey, 1983; Judd 1994; Hershatter, 2004). Rural men, especially married rural men, largely hold the authority, control the distribution of resources, and dominate the economic activities of the patrilineal family; they are held responsible for the performance and success of their family. Rural men are expected to build a house, take a wife, and become head of a household. Migration to cities is often a way of meeting these expectations. Economic achievement therefore has dual significance for male rural migrants: it is a means of improving the material conditions of their family and the ultimate barometer of their manhood. The reality, however, stands in sharp contrast to their expectations. Contemporary China is characterized by inequalities embodied

in the structure of work units (*danwei*) (Lin and Bian, 1991) and household registration (the *hukou* system); these systems exclude migrant workers from the social security program (Solinger, 1999), better-paid jobs (Cai and Wang, 2008), urban housing market (Song, Zenou, and Ding, 2008), and public services such as education and health care (Goodburn, 2014), relegating them to the status of second-class citizens in cities (Wu and Treiman, 2007). Excluded and marginalized, rural-to-urban male migrants are nonetheless judged according to the ideal of dominant manhood that prevails in popular discourse in the cities. This hegemonic discourse of masculinity stresses male virility, wealth, and entrepreneurship (Lu, 2000; Zhang, 2007; Uretsky, 2008). In addition to these discrepancies, rural-to-urban migration may fundamentally alter the gender and power dynamics of the Chinese family system, rendering the continued dominance of men problematic.

#### MIGRATION AND GENDER IN THE WEST: THE ABSENCE OF MALE VOICES AND SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Over the past three decades many scholars, particularly feminist ethnographers, have worked to “bring gender from the periphery to the core of migration studies” (Mahler and Pessar, 2006: 27). This body of research has drawn attention to the central role gender plays in decisions about migration, the process and outcome of settlement in the host society, and decisions about return (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Phizacklea, 2003; Hagan, 1998; Boyd, 1989; Ong, 1987; Constable, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Choi and Du, 2011; Lan, 2006; Flippen and Parrado, 2015). However, despite the insistence on the importance of gender in migration research, male migrants’ voices and accounts of men’s subjective experience has remained largely abstract, shadowy, or confined in domains traditionally considered as masculine. This is especially true of studies in developing countries, where the disadvantages of women are still considered the major challenge to gender research. In 1984, *International Migration Review* published a special issue entitled “Women in Migration” to counter the “male bias” in early migration research that portrayed the typical migrant as a young male and neglected the particular experiences of women migrants, or represented them in terms of the stereotype of “passive dependents” in migration research and policy (Morokvasic, 1984). This special issue presented a wide array of evidence for the centrality of women in patterns of internal and international migration, and the variable impact of migration on

gender relationships in both the sending and receiving communities. Ten years later, *International Migration Review* published a follow-up special issue entitled “A Glass Half Full? Gender in Migration Studies.” While praising the 1984 publication for “bringing female migration out of the shadows” (Donato et al., 2006: 4), this new special issue highlighted the importance of a relational understanding of gender in migration research. By viewing migration as a gendered process, editors of this special issue drew distinctions between male-centered, female-centered and gender-blind gender analysis. A gender analysis of migration recognizes men and women as subjects of inquiry and also conceptualizes gender as more than a simple dichotomous variable. In a gender analysis of migration, gender, according to the editors of this special issue, is relational, contextualized, and multiscalar.

A detailed look at the burgeoning literature on gender and migration covered in this special issue and related works shows that, despite the emphasis on gender as a relational construct, most research still relies predominantly on the views of female respondents. Men are nearly always included in large-sample quantitative research, such as studies of ethnic enclaves, segmented assimilation, and postmigration incorporation. However, the focus of quantitative studies very rarely extends beyond a simple comparison of male and female differences, and the explanation for any gender differences is usually speculative. Most qualitative research on gender and migration relies mainly on data provided by female respondents. With the notable exceptions of work by Lin (2013), Hoang and Yeoh (2011, 2012), Hoang, Yeoh, and Wattie (2012), Cheng, Yeoh, and Zhang (2015), Dreby (2010), Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014), and Schmalzbauer (2015), men in migrant families usually appear in the narratives of their wives, mothers, and sisters. Their voices are seldom heard firsthand, and their subjective experience is represented by their female family members. When the subjective experience of men is placed center stage in migration research, the focus is usually on their work life (Lin, 2013; Baey and Yeoh, 2015) or on deviant behaviors such as men’s alcohol consumption, drug and gambling addiction, violence perpetration, role in HIV/AIDS transmission, and criminal engagement (Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz, 2004; Bourgois, 1996a; Cohen, 2006; Lewis, 2014).

Ordinary, heterosexual migrant men’s voices and subjective experience are largely absent from the gender and migration literature, with some recent exceptions. For example, Parreñas’s study of Filipino transnational fathering (2008) suggested that migrant fathers were more willing to

participate in housework than husbands in wife-away transnational families; migrant fathers' economic contribution gave them a secure sense of masculinity, while the inability of husbands in wife-away families to fulfill the role of breadwinner prompted them to refuse housework because it might reinforce their homemaker identity. Charsley's (2005) study of Pakistani men who immigrated to Britain through marriage argued that although most men faced precarious economic conditions and domestic pressure, there were two distinct strategies for coping with the crisis of masculinity that this implied: some men unleashed their frustration through "violence, desertion, or taking a second wife" (p. 85), while other men accepted the situation and dealt with their crisis of masculinity by fulfilling "the role of a good son" (p. 100). Lin (2014) analyzed how rural-to-urban migrants in China reworked their role as filial sons after migration. Other studies have argued that migrant men's higher earning power may allow them to maintain a high status in their community of origin and consolidate their domestic authority (Osella and Osella, 2000; Walter, Bourgois, and Loinaz, 2004; Broughton, 2008). These and other studies (see for example Castañeda and Buck, 2011; Smith, 2006; Menjívar, 2000; Boehm, 2012) suggest that family life is central to the understanding and expression of migrant masculinity.

#### MASCULINITY: CONSTRUCTED, NEGOTIATED, AND CONTEXTUALIZED

A folk interpretation of masculinity views it as the "psychological essence" of manhood, whereas sex role theory conceives masculinity as an aspect of identity that is acquired during early childhood socialization. Conceiving masculinity as an intrinsic aspect of being a man rules out questions about the social processes by which it is constructed, and which are in turn legitimized by it. On the other hand, viewing masculinity as a product of early childhood socialization neglects questions related to change, power, and structure (Goffman, 1977; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Connell (1993) used both reasons to advocate placing masculinity research in the framework of "the political sociology of men in gender relations" (p. 601). In a series of thought-provoking studies, Connell (1987, 1993, 1998, 2003) argued that there exists in most societies a culturally normative ideal of manhood. Borrowing from Gramsci's notion of "ideological hegemony," Connell asserted that this hegemonic masculinity reflects, makes "natural" and legitimizes social arrangements that privilege the dominant group in society (e.g. white, middle-class, heterosexual men in Western capitalist

societies) (see also Kimmel, 2005). Although hegemonic masculinity is the dominant gender ideology and has a correspondingly strong influence on the practice of manhood, men who are subordinated and marginalized because of their class, ethnicity, migration status, or sexual orientation are forced to confront the discrepancy between cultural ideals and their structural locations. Their lower social status also forces them to mobilize other resources and construct alternative discourses of manhood (Bourgois, 1996b; Cruz, 2000; Nardi, 2000; Mutchler, 2000; Cohn and Enloe, 2003).

In this framework masculinity is understood both as a normative ideal of manhood at the ideological and discursive level, and in terms of personal practice that is closely linked with the institutions of the state, the workplace and labor market, and the family. Masculinity thus must be located in the social stratification mechanisms that produce inequality between men and women and between groups of men (Donaldson, 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). It is a construction that is historically and culturally specific (Baron, 2006; Heron, 2006; McCoy, 2006). Conceiving masculinity in these terms means that a particular concept of masculinity and its expression can be analyzed within a specific historical and cultural context, and in terms of four dimensions: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural (Lusher and Robins, 2009). Personal factors may include an individual's gender-role beliefs; interpersonal factors may include the pattern of interactions in close relationships, for example between migrant men and their aging parents or their spouse and left-behind children; institutional factors may include structural inequalities related to rural or urban residency, and workplace practices that make it challenging to combine paid employment and parenthood in an urban setting without extended family support or the financial resources to access paid child care; cultural factors include the different dominant discourses of ideal manhood and family obligations in rural communities and urban society, and how the disjunction between the two affects men.

Connell (1992) put it very well: "The study of men is as vital for gender analysis as the study of ruling classes and elites is for class analysis" (p. 736). It has been argued that women are not born, but become women (de Beauvoir, 1952), and that male identity has been problematized and is no longer taken for granted (Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell, 2005). In our case, making masculinity visible helps us question the origins, structures, and dynamics of inequalities between men and women within the family, and inequalities between groups of men in society (Connell,

1987; Kimmel and Messner, 2010). It also sheds light on the strategies men use to “do gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and construct a positive sense of self when confronted by challenges and crises generated by migration.

#### THE CITIES AND THE RURAL MALE MIGRANTS

Three research sites were used in this study: Dongguan, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, all in South China. Dongguan is host to more than fifteen thousand foreign companies specializing in electronics and the IT industry, textiles and clothing, furniture, toys, and chemical products. The second author of this book conducted ethnographic fieldwork at factories in Dongguan between 2007 and 2009 and is very familiar with the dynamics of its migrant population and the local settings. It was therefore the ideal place for us to recruit male migrants working in the manufacturing sector. Shenzhen was chosen as our second field site in order to recruit male migrants working in service industries. The service industry has become the second-largest industrial sector, absorbing 35 percent of migrant workers in Shenzhen in 2010.<sup>2</sup> Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, is one of the largest cities in South China and had a population of 12.92 million in 2013. Rapid modernization means that when we conducted our field research there were numerous infrastructure and construction projects in operation, most of which rely on migrant workers. It was therefore an appropriate site for the recruitment of male migrants working in the construction sector. In view of the fact that age and marital status may affect the meaning and expression of masculinity (Du, 2011), we limited our sample to men between eighteen and sixty years of age.

Between 2012 and 2015, our research team visited six “villages in cities” in Shenzhen, Dongguan, and Guangzhou in the course of fifteen field trips. During each field trip, we observed the daily lives of migrant workers, had conversations with hotel and restaurant owners, street peddlers, truck drivers, taxi drivers, motor-taxi drivers, beauticians, cleaners, waiters, and migrant parents picking up children after school. We also conducted in-depth interviews with 192 migrant men and 74 migrant women. These interviews included eleven couple interviews. In

2. “The report of living status of the new generation of migrant workers in Shenzhen.” Shenzhen Trade Union, 2010, <http://acftu.people.com.cn/GB/67583/12155296.html>



this book, we drew mainly on the interviews with the 192 men, although we also cross-checked the validity of their accounts with the interviews with women. In particular, the eleven couple interviews were analyzed to help us understand conjugal dynamics as discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

The mean age of our 191 male respondents (one male respondent finished the in-depth interview but did not complete the questionnaire) was thirty-six years. The mean age at which they began *dagong* life in the cities was twenty-three years. One hundred thirty-seven of our respondents were married (71 percent), two cohabited with a partner, two were widowed, four were divorced, and forty-six were single. One hundred thirty-four of our respondents had children. Slightly more than half of our respondents (111) were individual migrants, fifty-one had migrated as part of a couple, and another thirty had been part of a family migration. In terms of occupational distributions, we made sure that our sample covered the major occupations of male rural-to-urban migrants. Our respondents included thirteen migrant workers who had succeeded in finding a white-collar role, nineteen men working in the hotel and catering sector, most as cooks or waiters, forty-four construction workers, forty-seven taxi drivers, nineteen factory workers, thirty-six security guards, and fourteen men in various economic roles such as grocery shop/restaurant/vegetable stall owners, unpaid family workers, hairdressers, sales clerks, cleaners, electricians, etc.

When we started our fieldwork we were concerned about the gender dynamic of women interviewing men. To minimize any interviewer gender effects we included five men in our team of ten trained interviewers. We also matched interviewers and respondents according to age: for example, we avoided having young female interviewers interviewing young male migrant workers. Young male migrant workers were either interviewed by male interviewers or by the two senior female interviewers in the research team, who approached them as an older aunt- or sister-figure to avoid embarrassment in discussion of intimate issues. Comparison of the interview data obtained by male and female interviewers did not reveal any systematic interviewer-related biases. Previous studies have suggested two conflicting gendered dynamics of interviews. On the one hand, same-gender identification is argued to be a precondition for successful interviews; on the other hand, some studies suggest that cross-gender discussion is easier for some topics. For example, men often find it easier to discuss pregnancy with a woman interviewer than with another man (Lee, 1997). In our interviews we observed

both patterns; young male respondents seemed to be more forthcoming about entertainment, friendship, and male subculture with young male interviewers, while many male migrant workers were surprisingly willing to discuss conjugal dynamics and intergenerational emotional dynamics with our female interviewers. Quite a few male respondents told our female interviewers that they could never have discussed such issues with their friends, and that they greatly appreciated having the opportunity to talk about these more intimate and emotional issues. There is a cultural expectation that Chinese men will not express their emotions, yet five male respondents cried during the interviews as they were sharing stories about a sick wife, separation from girlfriends, and arguments with their spouse. It may be that rather than being a hindrance, having women interview men presents an opportunity; men often value aspects of the female world (e.g. its emotionality) that they are not supposed to share, and are generally excluded from.

#### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is composed of eight chapters. Following this introduction, chapter 2 provides a sketch of the *dagong* life of our respondents. It contextualizes their experiences within the broader contours of rural and urban inequalities, the state engineering of economic modernization, and the regulation of migration flows in postsocialist China. Chapter 3 tells the stories of how migrant men negotiate love and intimacy in cities and balance individual choices with parental influence. Chapter 4 looks at the issues of conjugal power negotiation resulting from and related to migration, the continuities in, as well as changes to, the traditional pattern of male dominance within a marriage. Chapter 5 examines how the novel context provided by rural-to-urban migration makes negotiation of housework an important issue for couples, and how migrant men developed a counterdiscourse of manhood to justify their increased participation in the domestic sphere. Chapter 6 explores the paradox of absentee fatherhood: while migration has allowed these fathers to fulfill their instrumental role of providing for their children, it has resulted in multifaceted emotional gaps. Chapter 7 examines how, as faraway sons, migrant men reconcile with their failure to serve their parents physically and financially, as expected by the teaching of filial piety in Chinese culture, and their efforts to reinterpret the obligation to care for elderly parents in emotional terms. Based on the findings of the

preceding chapters, chapter 8 develops the concept of masculine compromise to account for changing gender practices and identity related to migration. It provides a feminist framework to analyze the ways in which migration transforms the family, and how migrant men interpret and respond to these transformations.