

# ***FACTORY GIRLS AFTER THE FACTORY:***

## ***Female Return Migrations in Rural China***

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*Many scholars of gender and migration assume that migration increases women's household bargaining power, but this article argues that migration recreates and relies on patriarchal expectations that women return to household domestic labor. It draws on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork with migrant factory women in China's export processing zones as well as one migrant-sending community in China. Based on this fieldwork, I argue that despite young women's desires to continue migrating for factory jobs, older generations perpetuate gendered views of female migration as licentious and risky, in opposition to a dominant paradigm of proper femininity that relegates young women to household labor. They do this because migration creates an intergenerational dependence in migrant origin sites. Older women, unemployable in factories and deprived of state welfare support at home, rely on wage remittances from high-earning migrant sons and sons-in-law for subsistence. To ensure they receive remittances, they encourage daughters to marry higher-earning migrant men, then pressure these daughters to cease migrating in order to perform household domestic labor in support of migrant husbands. This finding reflects constraints on the opportunities that migration delivers to women: Not all women can migrate, and those who cannot must vie for control over migrant remittances.*

**Keywords:** *gender; migration; labor; development; Asia*

Since the 1990s, women in the global south increasingly have been hired to staff the global export processing zones created to serve the outsourcing needs of transnational firms. These export processing zones attract women workers with no other local job opportunities, who are will-

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ing to migrate from afar for factory work. Their employment has generated a large body of scholarly research, which examines first how the needs of globalized production came to be met by women (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Lee 1998; Ong 1987; Parrenas 2003; Pun 2005; Salzinger 2003) and then how women's entrance into a globalized workplace changed gender dynamics in their left-behind communities and households (Andrews 2014; Kung 1994; Lee 1998; Ong 1987; Parrenas 2003; Wolf 1994). However, researchers have recently begun to document the workforce exits and return migrations of many of these "global women" (Jacka 2006; Judd 1994). For example, in China's Special Economic Zones, 36 percent of migrant women have returned home after working in factories (Bai and He 2002; Murphy 2002; Murphy 1999; Wang and Fan 2006; Sun and Fan 2011; Zhao 2002).

Why have women exited the increasingly female migrant labor force that fuels globalized production? For the most part, scholars understand women's return migrations as a result of dynamics in migrants' destinations, such as unemployment stemming from fluctuations in export production (McKay 2006; Pun 2005; Salzinger 2003), or the inability of factory work to lead to inroads for permanent settlement and assimilation (McKay 2006; Ong 1987; Pun 2005; Wolf 1992; Yan 2008). However, this article analyzes female return migration from the site of origin to provide an alternative explanation for women's exit from employment. Based on 16 months of ethnographic data collected from 2002 to 2011 in one migrant site of origin and two migrant destinations in China, I argue that even as outsourcing firms recruit female labor, households in origin communities also require women's domestic labor in order to recreate the conditions allowing migrants to withstand the very conditions—exceptionally low wages, informal employment arrangements, no social benefits—that make migrant labor profitable for employers. Young women are caught between employers' needs for globalized production and households' needs to reproduce the conditions that allow families to send higher-earning men, not women, into migration. This tension is magnified by the dire state of migrant-sending communities, where aging generations receive no state support and must rely on daughters to negotiate with their migrant husbands to send a portion of the male wage to them as remittance. This tension thus creates divisions among women, particularly when older women, former migrants themselves, come to understand the importance of their daughters' domestic household labor in ensuring that migrant son-in-laws can continue to provide remittance support.

## GENDER IN MIGRANT-SENDING SITES

State policies frequently allow employers to hire migrant labor, yet prevent migrants from settling out of native workers' fear that migrants are taking away their jobs. Migrant labor, free to work but not to settle, is especially profitable to employers. Migrant workers leave their families behind in origin communities. They do not demand unemployment benefits, pensions, or subsidies for child care.<sup>1</sup> Many employers preferentially seek young women with no families to support (Lee 1998; McKay 2006), or men who leave their wives behind to perform unpaid reproductive labor and child care in origin communities (Burawoy 1976; Salzinger 2003). In fact, as Michael Burawoy (1976) has argued, migrant labor systems persist precisely because they create uneven but symbiotic relationships between origin and destination. Employers in destinations continue hiring migrants because they withstand lower wage levels by maintaining households in low-cost sites (Arrighi, Aschoff, and Scully 2010; Burawoy 1976). Meanwhile, households continue sending migrants because they need the remittance income.

Feminist scholars have taken this argument further. They observe that this arrangement, and the employers inside it, assume a laborer who is, by default, a male who leaves kin behind to maintain the household to which he returns during periods of unemployment (Salzinger 2001, 2003). A woman migrant worker, by contrast, must be excused from household duties—her domestic labor deemed, for the time being, dispensable—in order to migrate (Wolf 1992). When a woman migrates despite perceived household responsibilities, she is seen as withdrawing valuable domestic support from migrant husbands. This is why in the Philippines, as Rhacel Parrenas (2003) observes, female migration is often viewed as a “Philippine divorce,” an abandonment of women’s responsibility to support migrant husbands. Indeed, much research on women migrants reveals a paradoxical view of women migrants: they themselves are laborers responding to market demands, yet their own migrations alter the conditions that make migrant men attractive to employers (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Parrenas 2005).

If women who migrate abdicate their domestic role in labor-reproducing households, then women who do not do so strike a patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti 1988): they consent to domesticity, yet they have few means of recourse in the cases where husbands neglect to send wage remittances in exchange. To incentivize remittance sending, women back in origin communities engage in communal practices—informal lending schemes, rotating harvest teams, marriage matchmaking—to support wage-remitting migrants

and exclude nonremitting men. Few studies of migration have considered why and how women in sending communities might organize themselves to impose their expectations on absent migrants, women and men alike. Even fewer have considered why and how sending communities might discourage women's migrations in order to reproduce a practice of male breadwinning. In fact, the overwhelming assumption in migration studies has been that gender practices change after migrants arrive in destinations (Goldring 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Kibria 1994; Kim 2006; Levitt 2001; Murphy 2002; Pessar 1999), *not* that they are imposed by nonmigrants in sending communities (see Andrews 2014 for an important exception).

Meanwhile, labor demands in destinations continue to alter the bargain struck between migrant men and left-behind women. As younger women are increasingly recruited by employers in export processing zones for their "nimble fingers" and "productive femininity" (Salzinger 2003),<sup>2</sup> older women face a changing balance of power. Fewer women maintain their households of origin, and because of this, young men remit wages less frequently. This poses problems particularly for the elderly, deprived of state welfare support, who rely on remittances from sons and sons-in-law for subsistence (Utrata 2011).<sup>3</sup> Thus, older women perpetuate gendered views of female migration as licentious and risky, in opposition to a dominant paradigm of proper femininity that relegates young women to household labor.<sup>4</sup> These gender norms reflect the livelihood struggles of older women whose labor is not in demand in destinations. They also reflect constraints on the opportunities that migration delivers to women: Not all women can migrate, and those who cannot must vie for control over migrant remittances.

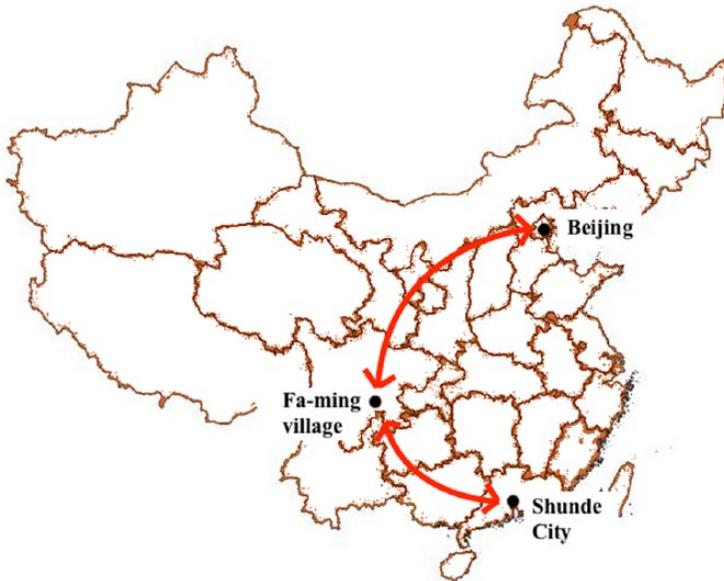
## METHODS

China's rural villages have been dispatching migrant laborers to work in cities since post-socialist market reforms in 1978. After a 1990s uptick in Chinese export production, women came to make up 36 percent of China's entire migrant labor population (Shen 2007). Most of these migrant workers have been drawn toward coastal Special Economic Zones, business-friendly production sites where transnational firms have increasingly established their manufacturing and assembly operations. Throughout the 1990s, state policies have loosened preexisting restrictions on rural-to-urban migration.<sup>5</sup> In 1990, China's rural-urban migration numbered between 60 and 80 million; by 2010, the migrant population had grown to 260 million. Yet while state policies have been reformed to authorize internal migration, they still uphold restrictions that discourage the permanent

settlement of rural migrants in cities. A nationwide household registration (*hukou*) system requires all residents to access public services—education, welfare, health care—in their place of birth or marriage, regardless of how long they have lived elsewhere (Solinger 1999). It also allocates to each rural-born person, man and woman alike, small plots of village land in her place of birth. Exclusion from urban public services, combined with land rights in villages, compels most rural migrants to maintain their households in villages, as a safety net for times of need. Even more resourceful and entrepreneurial migrants, who have the financial resources to acquire a rural–urban *hukou* transfer,<sup>6</sup> often choose to relocate without changing their *hukou* status in order to retain their village land as a fallback option (Fan and Wang 2008).

Chinese villages provide security, but they do not supply jobs: agriculture remains subsistence-oriented and rural industries are moribund. As a result, many rural households dispatch some members to work in cities, while leaving other members to raise migrants' children and to farm for subsistence in order to defray food costs. This “split household” migration strategy (Fan 2011; Fan, Sun, and Zheng 2011) is not intended to lead to permanent resettlement and has held steady even as growing numbers of young women were drawn into migration (Fan 2011; Fan, Sun, and Zheng 2011). Even as women came to comprise a dominant portion of the migrant workforce in many SEZs (Lee 1998; Pun 2005), they tend to leave the workforce at marriage and return to villages (Bai and He 2002; Otis 2003; Wang and Fan 2006; Zhao 2002).<sup>7</sup> In a study of migrants from Sichuan and Anhui, two primary migrant-producing regions, 28 percent of migrants returned to their origins after working an average of 2.9 years (Bai and Song 2002).<sup>8</sup>

This article investigates return-migrations among women by drawing on 16 months of relational, multi-sited ethnography, aimed at illuminating the social processes linking disparate places (Burawoy 2000; Desmond 2014). Fieldwork conducted in three sites—Shunde City in Guangdong province, Beijing, and “Fa-ming” village in Sichuan province—during discrete periods in 2002, 2007, and 2010. Fieldwork from Shunde City focuses on women working in the manufacturing sector, which employs 35.7 percent of China's migrant laborers (Statistica Dossier 2013). For three months in 2002, I conducted ethnographic and interview-based fieldwork with 24 women working in a garment factory in Shunde City, a Special Economic Zone in Guangdong province. Nineteen of these women were single, though many expressed their desire to continue factory work after they married. Only five women at the factory were married: they married other migrant men they met in cities, and left children



**FIGURE 1: Map of field sites**

in the care of parents-in-law. Fieldwork from Beijing focuses on men working in construction, which employs 18.4 percent of China's migrant laborers (Statistica Dossier 2013). For three months in 2007, I conducted ethnographic and interview-based fieldwork with 15 migrant men working at a Beijing construction site. Of these men, 11 maintained close relationships to rural households, sending frequent remittances and returning home to help with harvest.

To explore men and women's different relationships to a common origin, in 2010, I conducted ten months of ethnography in a migrant-sending community in Sichuan province, which I call "Fa-ming village."<sup>9</sup> This village was home to nine of the 15 Beijing migrant men I studied in 2007. Seventy-six percent of Fa-ming's households dispatched migrant men into construction work. The village was also representative of the home villages of the women from my 2002 Shunde study for several reasons. First, eight of the 24 women from my Shunde study came from Sichuan province. Second, Fa-ming sent the majority of its young women into factory work. Third, the demographics of Fa-ming's year-round inhabitants fit with what I had seen in the Shunde factory. Nearly all Fa-ming households had sent at least one member into migration, and yet of the round-the-year inhabitants of the village, nearly 80 percent were married women who had

given up migration after marriage. Because Fa-ming village sends men into construction and women into manufacturing, I incorporate findings from all three periods of research to form a full origin-side picture of gender norms of migration. Informants interacted in Sichuan dialect; the author responded in Mandarin Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

### WOMEN'S ROLES AT HOME

In Fa-ming village, young women frequently work in factories in coastal cities, or as shop girls in hotels, stores, and salons in the nearby county township before marriage. Factory and service jobs are not difficult to secure, so long as women are willing to work one-year contracts for low pay. In migrant sending sites like Fa-ming, most young women set out for coastal factories after middle school. They travel in small groups of three or four, armed with pocket cash and a cell phone. Meanwhile, in destination sites like Shunde, factory jobs are usually advertised by word of mouth. Once women arrive in Special Economic Zones, they can simply line up outside factory gates on testing dates or contact a friend already in a factory for an introduction. In 2010, the average wage of a factory worker from Fa-ming was 1,000 RMB per month.<sup>11</sup> After fines for tardiness and various meal costs were deducted from the wage, a factory worker typically took home 8,000 RMB for the year. In a Shunde factory, managers understand migrant women to be ideal workers, well suited to the flexible arrangements of manufacturing production. One manager explained that low wages were a condition of his industry—he could not raise wages without losing buyers—and that women could tolerate this because they worked in factories mainly for the exposure to urban life it afforded them. As he understood it, factory work is for them a lifestyle choice, not a livelihood. Even older women workers, he continued, only needed to earn “pin-money” wages. Such wages were considered sufficient to cover the daily support of a woman living away from her family, but not enough to contribute meaningfully to a household (Douglas 1920) since they had breadwinning husbands at home. These are arguments that explain the workplace decisions of migrant women based on assumptions about their household arrangements back in origin communities. They have been documented in the existing literature as well (McKay 2006; Salzinger 2003).

In these destinations, women are seen as temporary workers whose significant life events take place in faraway origin communities. Because of this, their decisions in the workplace are not understood to be rationally

or economically driven. In Shunde, another factory manager pointed out that turnover rates among young women were especially high: “They jump between jobs often, because they have no long-term goals.” Yet women in the Shunde factory explain their high turnover rates differently. Liu-ting, a 22-year-old woman, stated that she had switched jobs three times in one year because middle school classmates reported higher wages at different factories. She was aware that her parents in her home village saw her footloose behavior as a liability, since she incurred fines and often lost several months’ wages each time she quit one job and started another. She too was self-conscious about her behavior—“Do I seem like too much of an aimless wanderer? I am always running from place to place, it’s like I can’t find anywhere to rest.” But she also hoped to find a position where she could eventually be promoted to a higher paying secretarial position. Many women were particularly attached to this possibility, yet in only one situation did I encounter a migrant woman who had been promoted to a secretarial post, and this was because she had been engaged in a romantic affair with a male manager.

In Fa-ming village, a migrant sending community, residents hold expectations of women that mirror the assumptions of managers in Shunde. Most residents understand women to be temporary labor migrants who should eventually marry and then return to the village. When most women return home, they are confined to backstage, reproductive roles within the household. They are expected to care for children and engage in farm work while their husbands continue to migrate. Only a select few can find local jobs they can do without interrupting their household responsibilities. For example, Fa-ming has an appointed woman leader in Fa-ming village who draws a small salary for overseeing implementation of the one-child policy among residents. Another woman runs a local shop and was widely respected for contributing to her husband’s income as a migrant construction worker. For the most part, however, these jobs are difficult to secure. In addition, very few women are able to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities at home after migration. In Fa-ming, only three households of approximately 80 have actually reinvested migrant remittances into small businesses.<sup>12</sup>

Existing studies assume that these expectations of female domesticity are the result of older traditions of patriarchal gender relations in households (Kim 2006; Wolf 1992). However, in Fa-ming village, expectations that women return home are instead directly linked to migration itself. For example, Fa-ming village sends women into factory work, while 80 percent of men work in urban construction, a precarious occupation with a

high incidence of wage arrears. While women face low wages in destinations, men receive higher wages at higher risks. In Fa-ming, the modal male wage in construction was 3,000 RMB monthly in 2010, while the modal female wage in manufacturing was 1,000 RMB monthly.<sup>13</sup> In construction, migrant men often face wage nonpayment. This happens for two reasons: first, they are paid wages only at the end of each fiscal year; and second, they are paid by informal subcontractors who are not held accountable if they abscond from construction sites without paying workers' wages. For these reasons, most Fa-ming households send migrant men into construction work, but they also keep other household members behind to farm household land to produce a subsistence crop for fallback livelihood, just in case migrants return home without wages. Older villagers, those too old to be considered employable, often performed farm work. But in most households, women were expected to contribute their labor as well, to relieve the strain on less able-bodied elderly.

For example, in 2010 one construction worker at a Beijing construction site, Little Deng, was fired from multiple jobs and cheated by an unscrupulous subcontractor, and returned home with a loss of 1,100 RMB. Little Deng's marital household was in Fa-ming village, and when I visited his household in Fa-ming I met his wife, a 33-year-old woman named Yue-na who had once worked in coastal factories but now stayed in Fa-ming village full-time. In 2010, Little Deng did not earn any wages, but Yue-na cultivated enough grain and vegetables for the household to subsist, and when Little Deng returned home early, Yue-na declared, with stiff upper lip: "We have a rice crop and three pigs this year. . . . Worse comes to worst, we can sell two, and butcher one, and that way our son can still eat meat next Lunar New Year holiday."

In households like this, female domesticity is one side of a gendered bargain; women who choose to remain in the village receive remittances from migrant husbands. For example, when Yue-na worked in a furniture factory, she received only 940 RMB monthly, a pittance compared to her husband Little Deng's monthly earnings of sometimes more than 3,400 RMB per month in construction, which he remitted at the end of every year. Because women's wages are lower than men's, households frequently adopt the common strategy of male breadwinning. This forms a self-perpetuating cycle, driving women out of the migrant workforce at the age of marriage. Employers pay migrant women low wages because they assume women rely on male breadwinners in origin communities. Meanwhile, households expect women to quit migration because their earning potential is lower than men's. Put simply, employers underpay women assuming

they are homebound; and households keep women homebound because employers pay low wages.

Besides gendered wage differentials in destinations, another factor keeping women in households is state disinvestment in welfare provisions in origin communities. Since the mid-2000s, state reforms have rolled back low-income welfare programs meant to support the rural elderly (Kennedy 2007; Solinger 2011). Much of the time, households support their elderly by engaging in subsistence farming to defray food costs, and this farming is commonly undertaken by women (Jacka 2006; Judd 1994). In Fa-ming, one woman, Auntie Luo, had four “mouths” at home to feed: her son, her husband’s parents, and a bachelor uncle who lived with them. “If I worked in a factory, say I earned 1,200 RMB a month in a factory, I would spend a portion of that on food in the city. I would come home with hardly anything to contribute to the household. And who would farm the land and feed those mouths?”

Child care is another reason that women returned. Policies of hukou-based admission to urban schools, for example, mean that most migrants leave their school-aged children at home rather than bring them to cities. Many researchers have documented the deleterious effects of migration on the educational outcomes of rural children (Jacka 2012; Lu 2012; Wen and Lin 2012; Zhou, Murphy, and Tao 2014), and in Fa-ming women are well aware of these effects. One Fa-ming woman, Chen Yun, explained to me that a woman, once married, had a moral obligation to raise her child at home, rather than migrate and leave her child in the care of grandparents. Migration was tragic, Chen Yun explained, because “so many young children today are being raised by grandparents . . . who can’t read and can’t teach them right for wrong.”

## WOMEN ENFORCING FEMALE DOMESTICITY

Women typically engage in migration before marriage, and at marriage, the process of female domesticity begins. Even in the most gender-egalitarian households, most women eventually decide to drop out of the workforce either at or soon after marriage. For example, Little Deng never overtly instructed Yue-na to stop factory work. But once Yue-na became pregnant, she returned to her natal home for child birth, and then decided to remain at home until her son reached his teens and could enter the migrant labor force himself. Women who serve this dual role in the household—supporting a migrant husband while raising a future migrant

son—contribute directly to reproducing Fa-ming’s present and future migrant labor supply. Women are needed at home to fulfill the present needs of labor reproduction—women’s farm labor subsidizes migrant labor’s low wages by defraying household food costs and providing subsistence to families awaiting wage remittances. Women also are needed at home to maintain the social networks through which older migrants recruit new and potential migrants.

Wives of powerful and successful migrant men play a large role in maintaining these social networks. For example, one village broker in Fa-ming, a veteran migrant named Boss Gao, assembles and delivers teams of village men to work construction for subcontractors he knows in cities. He negotiates villagers’ wage rates with subcontractors, buys their train tickets to cities, and provides them with living allowances during the term of employment.<sup>14</sup> While he is away, Boss Gao relies on his wife, Madam Gao, to organize the wives of her husband’s recruits to collectively handle harvest work among each household and coordinate an informal loan-share system among migrant households, which is the sole means of credit and capital-raising among Fa-ming residents. When one migrant household decides to renovate their one-storied, mud-brick farm house into a three-story, concrete-and-tile-walled structure, other households devote small loans to the project, and Madam Gao keeps a written ledger of the amount each household contributed.<sup>15</sup>

Madam Gao also helps her husband locate and discipline unruly migrants from within the village. For example, when one of Boss Gao’s younger migrant recruits, a 28-year-old man named Little Fatty, absconded from a construction site in 2010, Madam Gao tried to help her husband locate him. Little Fatty had a penchant for online gaming in internet cafes, and Madam Gao asked Little Fatty’s wife, a young and recently returned factory woman named Sister He, to call him via cell phone. When Sister He admitted she did not know her husband’s whereabouts because she did not have a cell phone, Madam Gao bought her one. Several weeks later, when she checked back in, she learned that Sister He had still not reached Little Fatty—his phone had been turned off.

In addition, Madam Gao identifies potential “problem” migrants and maintained close relations with their wives. For example, she invited Sister He to join an informal farming cooperative system where women teamed up and rotated help among households during the rice harvest. She offered Sister He advice on how to keep her house and raise pigs for sale. In 2010 when Little Fatty did not bring home wages, she gave Sister He a loan of 1,500 RMB: “a small gift so you can buy meat for your son during the

Lunar New Year.” But she also leveraged this closeness to attempt to influence Little Fatty via his wife. When Little Fatty disappeared, Madam directly suggested that Sister He establish an ultimatum that her husband return to work or face divorce. Madam Gao said to the young wife:

You may not know this, but in this village, a man can build a one-story house with about 40,000 RMB, maybe even 30,000 RMB in saved wages. You tell your husband that he must build you a house next year or you will leave him. You can do that, right?

When young women such as Sister He stay back in Fa-ming, older women like Madam Gao can use them as conduits for recruiting and disciplining male labor.

Other interests also keep young women at home. For example, older women, who can no longer work in factories, often rely on migrant sons and sons-in-law for a portion of remittance income. Meanwhile, their daughters can help ensure that migrant men send support to their parents. For example, Yue-na’s mother had three daughters and no sons, and while Yue-na was still working she often complained that Yue-na’s factory wages were too low to help the household. But when Yue-na married Little Deng, her parents’ situation improved. Yue-na pressured Little Deng to relocate into her natal household, a practice counter to the traditional norm of a wife relocating to the household of her husbands’ parents.<sup>16</sup> He agreed after a period, in part because Yue-na suggested she would stop migrating and do farm work in Fa-ming full time. After this negotiation, Little Deng also agreed to renovate the family house, build a separate attachment for her aging parents, and send a small portion of his yearly wages to his parents-in-law. Because Yue-na consented to domesticity, her aging parents were provided for.

However, when other aging residents have no such access to remittance income, villagers blame them for their penury. For example, when one elderly couple requested that they be added to the list of Fa-ming’s low-income welfare recipients, a local village leader berated them for raising negligent adult children:

Where are [your migrant children]? What do they earn? You say your son is not a filial son? We cannot help you there. You still must report his circumstances and his income. You say you have not seen your son for five years? Your son has not returned home for ten years?<sup>17</sup>

Village leaders not only withdraw welfare support from needy aging residents, they also justify this lack of support by accusing elderly villagers,

former migrants themselves, of faulty child raising. This is an ironic twist. Many of these needy elders had in fact been unable to care for their children themselves because they spent their wage-earning years in migrant labor. Now many are supporting the next generation of migrant laborers by providing child care for grandchildren. They gave their adult years to export production, only to be left without community support in their twilight years. This makes the struggle to gain and keep hold of access to migrant income all the more dire.

### THE MODERN PRICE OF FEMALE AUTONOMY

Some older women in Fa-ming expect young migrant women to adhere to traditional values and practices even as they are exposed to modern, urban values in destinations. They commonly understand migration to be a corrupting influence on young women. Auntie Luo, for example, is a 38-year-old woman who worked in factories for nearly ten years before marriage and now kept a hawk-eyed watch on the comings and goings of young village girls. She reserved strong opinions on Golden Flower, a 28-year-old migrant woman who was particularly attached to factory work. In early 2010, when Golden Flower returned from coastal Guangzhou City with permed hair, full makeup and vogueish dress, Auntie Luo offered a back-handed remark: “She looks like a city girl!” It was not meant to be a compliment. She said, “This is how young people are nowadays. Even if you teach them right from wrong in childhood, they go to the city and they take on city airs.” This view is common among older Fa-ming women, despite the positive memories many of them still have of their own migrations. For example, Madam Gao admitted to me that she herself occasionally missed her factory years, which were “the first time I bought new clothes with my own money . . . the first time I met so many other girls like me.” Yet most older women publicly make offhand comments which convey negative judgments of young women who internalize tastes and aspirations from their migration experiences.

Significantly, older women see migration as licentious not merely because of their preexisting traditional gender ideology. They also believe migration introduces women to new marriage practices that place them in difficult circumstances. Increasingly, many migrant women marry romantic partners they meet in destinations: rates of long-distance, inter-provincial marriages among rural migrants have increased as a result of rural–urban labor migration (Fan and Huang 1998). However, for example, Auntie Luo

counsels young women to marry local men—members of Fa-ming or other nearby villages:

This is the thing about meeting a man in the city: you marry him and one day you will regret it. . . . Your husband is working in the city and none of your natal kin are around to help you. Think about all of the things in life that are difficult and important for a woman: having a baby, building a house. You will do all of that alone if you marry away from the village.

These difficulties are conventionally associated with China's rural kinship tradition, where married women relocate to the three-generational households of their husbands, where they perform domestic labor while living as "double outsiders," separated from their own kin and denied full membership status in households run by elder matriarchs (Freedman 1958; Tan and Short 2004).<sup>18</sup> Today, the rise of migrant labor has resurrected the plight of the "double outsider" woman. A woman confined to domestic labor in a nonnative village is isolated, and left alone while her husband continues to work away from home.

This belief in local marriages has only been resurrected because women are stuck in a double bind; they are expected to serve the needs of their migrant husbands, while also supporting their own parents. When young women marry, their marriages are often orchestrated to serve both needs. For example, Yue-na had negotiated the terms of her marriage so that she could support her parents with her husbands' remittances. Another young woman, Golden Flower, was stuck in a more difficult double bind. She was an eldest daughter in a household with no sons, her father had long ago suffered an accidental injury that ended his wage-earning capacity, and her aging parents needed remittances from a migrant son-in-law in order to subsist. Therefore, it was vital that she marry in a way advantageous to her aging parents. Golden Flower was eventually introduced, through a local matchmaker, to a construction worker named Honest Lin, who was non-local but nevertheless willing to relocate to her household. In his own natal village, he had lost his family land to government land seizures, and he agreed to provide support for Golden Flower's parents in exchange for access to all of their land. Honest Lin sent nearly 58,000 RMB—the entirety of his life savings, accumulated over a decade of construction work—to begin construction of a modern two-story house, complete with accommodations for her parents.

But such marriages, orchestrated around parental needs, place a great deal of expectation on young women. For example, many people's livelihoods rested on the success of Golden Flower's marriage. Golden Flower's mother

expected Golden Flower to stop working in factories to support Honest Lin, who was contributing so significantly to the household. Honest Lin's mother, back in her own village, also expected this. But Golden Flower chafed at the uneven bargain that marriage represented. She saw domestic work as a form of bondage, intolerable specifically in comparison to the life she had known during migration. She envisioned her near future: "In the end I'll be alone raising pigs in the village while he is out in the city working. At least he can go out and work, have some space for a real life out in the city." Finally, Golden Flower made Honest Lin a proposition: perhaps she could continue working in the city after they married, and they could both stop migrating in later middle age—perhaps by then they could afford an apartment in the nearby township. Golden Flower described her plan:

I will go out and work in a factory again. I'll make my own money, and I'll tell Honest Lin, "This is our marriage: you live your life in the city and I'll live my own. If you want to give me some spending money to use, then fine. If you don't, then fine."

After Golden Flower's proposition, the couple broke off their engagement, and she returned to work in a Guangzhou factory. However, the price of Golden Flower's autonomy was high: all of those around her suffered. Honest Lin lost his life savings, and her parents went back to farming and began to think of ways to marry their second daughter off.

Fa-ming residents expect women to play household roles that abandon their own desires in order to support their husbands and aging parents. Women, for their part, experience these expectations as backward, traditional, and confining. For example, Golden Flower complained frequently about her mother, whom she described as "from that old generation, where as soon as a girl gets married she has to stop working in the city, she is locked in her house like a prisoner. Doing farm work, feeding the pigs, cleaning the house and cooking all day, that's what married women did in the old days." As a result, some women attempted to deviate from the normative household arrangement, and in ways that served their household needs in new ways.

For example, one 33-year-old former factory worker named Clever Jade eloped with a migrant man she met on the assembly line of a factory in Shenzhen city. After marriage, she negotiated a more egalitarian household arrangement with her husband: both would continue working in the factory, rather than establishing a household immediately in his natal village. In Fa-ming village, many women observed this decision with disapproval. They also noticed that Clever Jade did not send wage remittances to her aging parents, who still subsisted by cultivating a small rice and vegetable

plot and lived in a mud-and-mortar house. But Clever Jade had made the decision not to channel her resources toward the previous generation—her aging parents; instead, she channeled it toward the next generation—her younger brother and her own son.

When Clever Jade's son was born, she and her husband left their son in the care of her parents-in-law in their village in Northeast China. But neither she nor her husband stopped working. After their child was born, the couple left the Shenzhen factory behind to find work in Beijing in order to be closer to his parents' home in the village. In Beijing, he works construction and she works a variety of jobs, such as a maid in a Beijing hotel, and a domestic caregiver in the home of a Beijing urban family. All of the couple's wages are sent instead to her parents-in-law in Northeast China, to defray costs of caring for their child. The couple is primarily focused on ensuring that their son will not one day join them in migrant labor. They hope that he can attend college and find formal employment. Clever Jade also sends wages home every year to pay for tuition for her younger brother, who attends trade school in a small city near Fa-ming village. She is determined to make sure both her son and her younger brother can one day leave migrant labor behind.

Clever Jade's farming parents support this arrangement. They insist that they are still able-bodied and can do farm work until their younger son enters the workforce and can offer financial support. Nevertheless, many other residents in Fa-ming disapprove of Clever Jade's strategy. Auntie Luo, for example, felt that Jade's aspirations of upward mobility—by helping her younger kin leave migrant labor behind—were delusionally unrealistic: "In the end, they should be asking themselves, who am I? Am I not a villager in the end? They are fooling themselves with all of that."

Auntie Luo understands Clever Jade's decision, to support her younger kin rather than her aging parents, to be negligent rather than forward-thinking. Better to accept the old bargain, she believes, than to aspire for a new arrangement that prioritized the upward mobility of younger rural residents over the subsistence concerns of older rural residents. This view is even held by younger women in Fa-ming. For example, Yue-na is Clever Jade's old middle school classmate, and she thinks Jade's choices are motivated more by her personal desire to live in Beijing than her wish to help her family: "She thinks she can be like a city person," Yue-na commented. "She spends all her money on clothes . . . but her husband is still a farmer's son and her poor parents are still sweating and toiling in the rice fields." Yue-na, like Auntie Luo, sees female migration as a decision motivated by personal desire, rather than family support. This is a view that

many women absorbed directly from their own migration experiences, where they had been paid low wages and treated as temporary employees interested only in funding their urban lifestyles.

Yue-na believes Clever Jade's continued engagement in migrant labor was motivated by lifestyle reasons, but I observed no evidence of this in Beijing. In 2011, I visited Clever Jade and her husband in an unheated, ramshackle hut in a migrant shantytown on the outer edges of Beijing. They had hooked up a stray wire to supply a faltering electricity source, which they used to power the single electric hot plate on which they cooked their meals. Only one public bathroom served the shantytown, which housed over 100 migrants. Clever Jade and her husband deliberately kept their expenses in Beijing low for two reasons. First, they kept most of their earnings as savings, because Clever Jade's parents-in-law were not able to cultivate a full harvest back in the village, and they had no safety net to fall back on if they suffered wage arrears. Second, they tried to maximize remittance income both to support their child and to pay tuition for Jade's brother. It is not personal desire for city living that keeps Clever Jade in Beijing rather than at home on the farm. Even in choosing migrant labor over domesticity, she continues to choose the interests of her child over her own. This is her attempt to resolve the double bind she faces: both that she must ensure the present care of her child, and that she must invest in a future she hopes will not include migrant labor.

## DISCUSSION

Since the rise of outsourcing, growing numbers of women in the Global South have joined the migrant workforce that serves global production needs. Yet in many sites women's workforce participation has proved temporary. In China, for example, nearly a third of the women who lend their labor to export processing zones have since returned to their village homes (Wang and Fan 2006). Existing studies have generally attributed this phenomenon to destination-side factors like employer preferences for young "maiden" workers over older, married women (McKay 2006; Salzinger 2003), or structural barriers to assimilation which eventually drive women back to their origin communities (Andrews 2014).

This article documents dynamics in migrant-sending communities which pressure migrant women to exit the workforce to perform domestic and agricultural labor at home. It contributes two findings. First, while existing studies assume that preexisting patriarchal traditions shape migration (Kim

2006; Ong 1987; Wolf 1992), I argue that migration itself recreates and relies on patriarchal gender relations in households within sending communities. In China, for example, migrant labor is profitable for employers because laborers can withstand low wages, and because they can repair back to home communities during periods of unemployment. When workers are women, employers underpay them under the assumption that they only work for temporary periods. When workers are men, however, employers hire men under the expectation that they can rely on support from households in sending communities. These expectations produce traditionally patriarchal household divisions of labor in sending communities. This is seen in Fa-ming village, where women work only temporarily before marriage, then return to domestic and agricultural work in order to provide household support for migrant husbands. In the sending community, women face a double bind: they are expected to support husbands who engage in precarious and high-risk migrations; and they are expected to negotiate with these husbands to channel a portion of remittance income to their aging parents, who lack access to welfare or social support.

Further, this article shows that these patriarchal expectations create divisions between older women who encourage female domesticity, and younger women reluctant to accept domestic life. These divisions stem primarily from a perception of women's work as an abdication of responsibilities to elder support. In many cases, this perception is rooted in structural relations: in some households, women's consent to domesticity is a condition for men to agree to channel support to women's aging parents. As a result, even when women attempt to create more egalitarian household arrangements, they are accused of abdicating family responsibility.

These findings contribute to the literature on gender and migration, which has traditionally examined migrant women's experiences in destinations rather than in origin communities (Pessar 1999). My research shows that migration reshapes gender relations in sending communities, just as sending communities determine which members—men or women—are sent into migration. It also contributes to understandings of how migrant labor systems are maintained over time. As Burawoy (1976) has theorized, migrant households not only dispatch individual members into migration; they must also hedge against risks of migration failure, and prepare current members for future and potential migrations. However, this analysis does not address the question of *whose* labor is allocated to perform this reproductive function, and how. My account fills this gap by showing, first, that women are expected to support current migrants and prepare future migrants, even as they themselves are increasingly recruited

for employment. It fills the gap, second, by showing that previous generations of migrants, themselves unable to work, recruit women to this reproductive role by mobilizing expectations of filial affection and ideas of “proper” femininity. Future research might extend the frame I provide for understanding the gendered aspects of migration by examining how the division of this social reproductive labor in migrant households shifts as circulatory migrants move toward permanent settlement in destinations.

## NOTES

1. This situation holds where migrant laborers lack substantive rights in places of destination.

2. Employers also increasingly recruit women directly from sending communities to formally train them in accordance with specific production needs (McKay 2006; Rodriguez 2010).

3. In particular, younger women’s departures introduce insecurity into the lives of their mothers, who earlier opted out of migration in favor of child care, and now who will not receive reciprocal elder care from the children they reared (Utrata 2011).

4. Perceptions of female migration as licentious are communal documented. For example, transnational labor recruiters hiring female domestics and caregivers from the Philippines deliberately describe this work as familistic, a natural extension of a woman’s proper feminine role, in order to dispel negative perceptions of overseas female migration (Guevarra 2009; Parrenas 2011; Rodriguez 2013).

5. In the mid-1990s, large municipalities established new household registration categories—intermediary “blue stamp” hukou status—which authorized rural migrants to secure state-issued work permits, allowing temporary residence in cities. Throughout the 2000s, however, these household registration categories have become unnecessary as work permits are no longer required.

6. In many second-tier cities, urban hukou papers have been made available for purchase. First-tier municipalities have remained exclusionary, with urban hukou status attainable only through application through military units or formal employers (see Wu 2010).

7. Most researchers have observed this phenomenon only from the destination side, noting that employers tend to favor young “maiden” workers who are easily disciplined and make few workplace demands (Lee 1998; Pun 2005; Salzinger 2003).

8. These return-migrations coincide with a rise in intraprovincial migration, because of the movement of capital investment into inland, predominantly rural provinces. However, the women I studied returned to home villages for domestic work, not for more local employment. Furthermore, some researchers have linked these return-migrations to a labor shortage afflicting China’s coastal economies (Chunyu, Liang, and Wu 2013).

9. I initially wished to visit the home village of one of the women from my 2002 Shunde factory study, but lost contact with those women. Instead I gained research access through the construction men in Beijing.

10. For the most part, these dialects are similar.

11. In 2010, US\$1 was 6.76 RMB.

12. This is a direct contrast from what migrant women often expect from their future. In Shunde, I surveyed 56 women, 50 of whom mentioned long-term personal goals of returning home to open a village store or noodle shop.

13. In Beijing, construction subcontractors typically only hire women for secondary roles, such as cooking or cleaning in workers' dormitories.

14. In 2010, a broker recruiting a team of 15 villagers netted annual earnings of 40,000 RMB, about 24,000 RMB more than the average migrant earning about 16,000 RMB each year.

15. Formal bank credit, for housing and other "non-vital" needs, is available to rural residents at only usuriously high interest rates. On the other hand, informal village loans can be gradually repaid, usually interest-free, as migrants send home additional remittances.

16. This was a practice counter to the norm in Fa-ming, which dictated that married women typically relocate from their fathers' to their husbands' three-generational households (Freedman 1958), making it difficult for a daughter to promise a portion of remittance income to her natal parents.

17. Indeed, under the most recent stipulations of China's nationwide low-income welfare program (dibao), supplicants with at least one wage-earning family member are denied welfare entitlements (Solinger 2011).

18. This "double outsider" phenomenon was linked, during pre-1949 feudal Chinese society, with male inheritance: Women were exchanged between households at marriage, while men inherited landed property through the paternal line (Freedman 1958). Today, property inheritance is abolished. However, young couples still settle near their parental households in order to retain access to assigned household land. This land is not an inheritance as it is immovable: a woman or man who relocates to another household at marriage relinquishes this right.

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