
Academic output on rural to urban migration in China has been on the rise in recent decades, reflecting a phenomenon that has not only impacted the social, economic, and political life of the country, but has also changed considerably throughout the years and therefore needs to be reassessed regularly. Within this scholarship, one strand has focused on the specificity of the experiences of migrant women. Building on the idea that women may have different patterns of opportunities and constraints to men, this literature brings attention to the experiences of female migrants as a significant portion of the “floating population” in China.1 With the aim of contributing to this growing literature, and by building on the life stories of about thirty women who migrated for work from their villages to Beijing between 1993 and 2000, Gaetano explores how female migrants navigate structural opportunities and constraints, sometimes by conforming to gendered and traditional expectations while at other times by challenging them.

Yet, the women of this book are special, because they belong to an often-overlooked category. Employed in the informal service economy, Gaetano's informants lived and worked in the liminal spaces of urban households, were excluded from formal labour schemes, and negotiated the pros and cons of close relationships with their employers. Thus, Gaetano also contributes to the expanding literature on migrant domestic workers across Asian urban settings. Furthermore, this book’s methodological foundation of long-term contacts and exchanges with informants opens a perspective of migration as an enduring process in which the decision to move and the act of moving itself are only part of a series of events in migrants' lives. Finally, by using in-depth interviews with fifteen employers, the book offers a triangulation of the often opposing perspectives of migrants and their employers.

The book is organised into six main chapters, starting with a general overview of the macro-historical conditions that favoured the evolution of female migration in contemporary China, going on to the lived experiences of these migrants, characterised by real struggles, personal dreams, and contrasting emotions. Throughout the book, Gaetano locates her informants' narratives and experiences in a variety of spheres (their hometowns, Beijing, their family, work environment, society at large) and explores the motivations and expectations...

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behind the decision to migrate (Chapter Two), the channels used by young rural women to find work in distant urban places (Chapter Three), their incorporation into the informal urban service economy and the impact that this may have on their subjectivity and agency (Chapter Four), the dynamic and creative negotiation between migrants and oppressing structures (Chapter Five), and the reproductive decisions that migrant women may make as a consequence of their situation (Chapter Six).

The picture emerging from Gaetano's account is complex. On the one hand, rural women in contemporary China can afford a degree of mobility that was not available just a few decades ago. Yet, their migration still occurs within traditional gendered structures that frame them within the domestic sphere and as inferiors. Thus, the trade-offs and compromises these women may have to accept are multiple.

For instance, in order to diminish unwanted risks, the women often rely on family and personal networks, which may result in them being channelled into gender-specific job niches and in a limiting of their opportunities for occupational mobility. Above all, while migration may enable these women to acquire symbolic and economic capital, it often does not fully overcome the structural barriers to urban citizenship and full inclusion in urban society.

This ethnography of rural women in urban China constitutes a significant contribution to the literature on women’s migration in China. It could be regarded as valuable for researchers in the field of women studies and gendered migrations in contemporary China, yet, thanks to the informative background chapter, this book may also be appreciated by students and non-experts who want to know more about the lives of migrants in contemporary China from their subjective perspective.

That said, I believe that Gaetano's rich account could be better appreciated if the migration of rural Chinese women were assessed not solely as a unique and specific phenomenon, but also in the context of similar movements in the region, if not globally. Integrating this account within broader debates on women's migration and participation in the informal economy in the region could allow the identification of continuity of certain patterns across countries, and at the same time, differences produced by the specificity of the social, economic, and political context of China. Aside from this minor quibble, this book remains an excellent piece of work offering an in-depth analysis of women, migration, agency, and gender inequality in contemporary China.

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