Zavoretti’s account of the daily lives of rural-born workers in urban Nanjing in 2007 sheds light on how identities take shape in relation to urban residents. Zavoretti argues that these identities are unstable and change in dynamic ways according to how rural-born workers navigate barriers and opportunities in a rapidly stratifying Nanjing society. Through their stories, Zavoretti challenges the dominant state, media and popular discourse of a monolithic rural migrant labour group that is transient and presents a social problem. She argues that rural migrant workers are part of an emerging class within urban China and are neither transient nor marginal. Zavoretti’s informants come to life in this book and reveal some of the fascinating ways in which non-elites and the uneducated masses in China survive and thrive, despite the odds. Their individual pursuit of various jobs and lifestyles, overlaps with their families’ expectations, giving shape to varied and complex identities.

The book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter describes how rural migrants identify themselves in opposition to the “hegemonic ideal” of a middle-class Chinese who is well-educated, urbane, works in a white-collar job and enjoys considerable spending power. Zavoretti shows that the rural migrant, labelled *nongmin gong* 農民工 by Nanjing’s urban-born residents known as Nanjingren, alternate between two approaches. They either extricate themselves from the category or re-create themselves, developing characteristics to enable them to pass as a polished, middle-class Nanjingren, depending on the context and the need for such labels.

In Chapter Two, Zavoretti examines how these *nongmin gong* self-identify as workers (*gongren* 工人) who hold meaningful or appropriate jobs for themselves as individuals as well as their families. Rural migrants react to their position as outsiders by identifying themselves as workers with shared values which they contrast with locals who often display callous and superior attitudes towards them. Zavoretti’s informants acquire agency and cope with the bias by contrasting their hardworking, frugality and perseverance to the wastefulness, extravagance and laziness of Nanjing natives. These migrant workers from Anhui and Sichuan also draw on their regional cultural traits which they describe as positive values connected to work and family which they consider Nanjingren lack.
Rural-born workers in Nanjing function in specific places and spaces, which Zavoretti examines in Chapter Three. Refuting the dominant theories that envisage rural-born migrant workers occupying an interstitial space, Zavoretti shows that rural-born workers thrive in and utilize visible, public and often affluent spaces for their own purposes. Zavoretti’s informants challenge the perceived physical and social marginality attached to the state discourse and instead integrate themselves into the mainstream of urban Nanjing. Now a part of urban public spaces, these migrant workers are no longer temporary or short-term but rather are essential for the smooth operation of the city. Zavoretti’s choice of Nanjing was criticized by Nanjing residents who thought that migrant workers only converged on frontier cities like Guangzhou where the rural migrant workers were essential cogs of capitalism and industrialization. Zavoretti’s ethnographic accounts challenge such misconceptions.

Chapter Four examines how migrant workers view issues of money in the context of earning, spending and consumption. Zavoretti describes how urban-born Nanjingren equate personal success with spending power and consumption practices and, therefore, consider migrant workers “failed consumers” (p. 110). Ironically when migrant workers acquire spending power, they are described by urbanites to be of low-\textit{suzhi}, characterized by inappropriate earning and spending habits and are portrayed as being excessive or irrational. Urbanites also disparage migrant workers’ lack of “modernity” which is usually associated with urbanites’ access to Western cultural practices. Zavoretti paints an ironic scene of migrant workers of a European-style bakery eating their savory lunches of vegetables and meat besides pots of chocolate, sweets and pastries which hold no allure for the rural-born who have their own notions of appropriate consumption. Their frugality is linked to the desire to save money. Many want to purchase real estate in order to establish residency (\textit{hukou}) in Nanjing, which would provide them and their families with access to public education and healthcare. Zavoretti’s urban-born informants cannot purchase real estate but instead splurge on European-bakeries.

Chapter Five narrates the fascinating stories of how migrant men and women define their own notions of success in the urban space. These are linked to traditional patriarchal gender roles, which are usually reflected in speech. The actions of women defy those norms. Zavoretti’s women informants are strong-willed, entrepreneurial, and devoted to their families, and they let men claim the fruits of their labour. Take the example of Ma Ying, wife of an informant, Mr. Zhang, who left her village to work in Guangzhou and returned to her native Sichuan to negotiate her marriage by
contacting the family of her husband prior to even meeting him. Ma Ying epitomizes the enigma of many Chinese women, who work to maintain the household by working on both the family business that secures the family’s livelihood and taking care of daily housework. Ma Ying and Zavoretti’s other informants redefine their notions of success in dynamic ways, always undergirded by their roles within their families.

Zavoretti has produced a compelling work that gives voice to those who choose to move from rural to urban areas for work or to be with their families. Their stories are not singular or unidirectional. These stories are compelling and different from those Chinese who have the birthright of urban identity that brings with it a coveted access to education, public services and institutional support.

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