

Waves of Rural Brides: Female Marriage Migration in China

C. Cindy Fan and Youqin Huang

Department of Geography, University of California, Los Angeles

Conventional views on marriage migration consider it primarily family-related, and portray female marriage migrants as mostly passive, tied movers. Marriage as an economic strategy is seldom studied. We argue that a structural framework enables analysis of the complexities underlying female marriage migration, stressing institutional, economic, and sociocultural factors that impose constraints on and provide opportunities for women's mobility. A review of the historical and social roles of marriage in China shows that its transactional nature undermines women's status but offers disadvantaged women an opportunity to achieve social and economic mobility. Based on statistical analyses of a one-percent sample of China's 1990 Census, we show that peasant women in poor areas are constrained by their institutional positions, rural origins, and low education and status, shutting them out from cities and the urban labor market. Yet in the face of these constraints, many women, in exchange for economic opportunities and agricultural work, pursue migration by marrying into rural areas in more developed regions and by moving over long distances. These rural brides in well-defined migration streams are testimony to the roles of social and kinship networks and of brokers in the marriage market. Men who are socially and/or economically disadvantaged but locationally privileged are able to draw brides from afar. Despite the neoclassical overtone of the notion that marriage migration is an economic strategy, we argue that a structural approach is necessary for understanding the complexities underlying female migration and for explaining the recent phenomenon of long-distance female marriage migration in China. *Key Words: China, marriage, migration, women.*

Research on women's mobility has proliferated recently, as more attention is given to the role of gender in the migration process (Chant and Radcliffe 1992; Pedraza 1991; Ellis et al. 1996). The neoclassical perspective emphasizes the economic rationality of migrants, and argues that women as well as men move in response to regional differentials in economic opportunities (e.g., Thadani and Todaro 1979). While economic opportunities are indeed a primary factor in the migration of men and women, studies using the neoclassical perspective tend to overlook the institutional, historical, and sociocultural complexities of human movements (Chant and Radcliffe 1992). Often neglecting the role of gender, they consider female migrants a homogeneous group and ignore the complex realities and constraints faced by women as a whole and female migrants in particular. The structural approach, on the other hand, explains female migration in relation to historical transformations of regional and national economies, the gendered segmentation of the labor market, and sociocultural constraints (e.g., Bennholdt-Thompson 1984; Bourque and Key 1981; Caplan 1985;

Moser 1981; Roberts 1978; Sassen-Koob 1983). This approach emphasizes the role of gender in the spatial organization of production, and the relations between production and gender-differentiated migrations (Radcliffe 1991). Focusing on migration decisionmaking, the household-strategies approach emphasizes migration as a means of human-resource allocation and risk diversification, mediated by the gendered division of labor and power relations within the household (e.g., Wood 1981).

These theoretical approaches are testimony to the complex and multilayered nature of the processes that govern female migration. Despite the dominance of the neoclassical economic framework in migration research, recent studies of female migration and the role of gender in migration have emphasized the structural approach. The latter, scholars argue, facilitates the incorporation of historical and sociocultural perspectives into understanding the interlinkages between migration and gender in two ways: by examining the constraints and opportunities that influence the choices of prospective migrants, and by evaluating the role of individual agency in

explaining migration (Ellis et al. 1996; Lim 1993; Ortiz 1996; Riley and Gardner 1993). But relatively few empirical studies articulate how constraints, opportunities, and individual agency interact to produce and shape female migration. Most existing studies of migration assume voluntary migration and relatively free movements within national political boundaries. The theoretical underpinnings that ensue downplay institutional and structural constraints on mobility and are less relevant for socialist or transitional economies such as China. And empirically, we know very little about the process of migration in these economies, especially since socialist transition has unleashed new forces and opportunities for migration.

Studies on migration in China mostly lump men and women together, or treat gender as just one of many independent variables that explain migration differentials (e.g., Shen and Tong 1992; Zhang 1990). Yet structural forces differently affect men and women and their migration experiences. This paper focuses on the mobility of Chinese women in general and female marriage migration in particular. Its basic premise is that female migration has to be understood in relation to the historical and structural contexts that impose constraints on but yet open up opportunities for women's mobility.

The main objective of the paper is to explain the prevalence of female marriage migration and the relatively new phenomenon of long-distance marriage migration. We do so by examining the relationship between marriage and migration, and by drawing upon salient structural factors. We argue that marriage is a strategy by which peasant women in disadvantaged positions move to more desirable locations where they may achieve social and economic mobility. This argument challenges the conventional wisdom of a unidirectional relationship between marriage and migration (i.e., that women move to join their spouses, and migration is only a by-product and consequence of marriage).

Studies of female migration in transitional economies have been more concerned with economic restructuring, labor market, and household demands, than the historical, institutional, and sociocultural bases of female migration, or the role of agency, including that of female migrants themselves. Early feminist studies portray women as victims rather than individuals actively negotiating available options and resources for improving their life chances (Gilmartin et al. 1994).

More recent feminist migration research studies the history, structural forces, and political-economic contexts that shape female migration, and the response of women to these macrolevel forces (see reviews in Friedman-Kasaba [1996] and Lawson [1997]). For example, Radcliffe's (1991) study of Peruvian peasants found that the mobility of women was unduly shaped by broad political-economic forces, sociocultural relations in the community, and intrahousehold gendered relations and struggles. An edited volume by Buijs (1993) examines how women, forced to leave their original homes by forces beyond their control, attempt to construct a meaningful identity and take control of their lives in alien and often oppressive circumstances. Nevertheless, these studies emphasize macrolevel structural and microlevel household forces more than the active role of agency in the migration process. In this study, we argue that the role of agency is as important as structural factors, especially when various actors organize their resources in different ways in order to overcome constraints and make use of opportunities for social and physical mobility.

Since the state relaxed migration control in the mid-1980s, many Chinese women and men have found their way to new employment opportunities in urban industrial areas (Fan 1996). The bulk of peasant women from poorer areas remain disadvantaged in their mobility because of the household registration system [*hukou*] (Chan 1994; Cheng and Selden 1994). Furthermore, the underdeveloped labor market affords fewer opportunities for non-*hukou* migrants (Knight and Song 1995), and the historically and generally low social status of women undermines their access to education and their chances for waged work. On the other hand, economic reforms have widened the regional gap in development, intensified the push-pull forces of migration, motivated women to move long distances to desirable locations, and enabled informal and formal brokers to play an important role in the formation of chain migration and a marriage market.

In the following sections, we first review the relation between marriage and female migration in general, and more specifically, in China. Then we discuss the institutional and sociocultural constraints and opportunities that influence women's mobility in China. Finally, by analyzing a sample of a recent national census, we document the demographic characteristics and spatial patterns of females who marry in order to migrate,

and statistically estimate the role of several determinants in explaining such migration in China. Aggregate statistical analyses are necessary for ascertaining the importance of macrolevel structural forces, and for specifying the differential (push-pull) impacts of these forces in different parts of China. Using the national census, these analyses enable a comprehensive documentation and evaluation of female marriage migration, which not only can be used to infer the motivation and process of migration, but also can provide a necessary baseline reference for future in-depth surveys and case studies.

Marriage and Female Migration

Marriage, one of the most important events in the life cycle, is also an institution that imposes economic and sociocultural constraints on both women and men. In most societies, women are subject to a more demanding set of gendered expectations and responsibilities associated with marriage, and with their roles as wives and mothers. One of these expectations is that women will move at marriage to live with their husbands. Another related expectation is that women will follow their spouses when they migrate, mostly to support the latter's career development. Studies based on developing countries often consider women as passive, tied movers within marriage, viewing migration as a result of, but not the motive for, marriage (Bonney and Love 1991; Fincher 1993; Houstoun et al. 1984; Oberai and Singh 1983; Rosenzweig and Stark 1989; Thadani and Todaro 1984; Watts 1983). Wives in developed countries, likewise, are under considerable pressure to orient their roles around their husbands' career concerns (Bonney and Love 1991). As tied movers, women's careers are often given a lower priority in household decision-making, and marriage may provide "the mechanisms through which women become domestic laborers" (Fincher 1983). The notion of tied movers has dominated most studies on marriage migration, including studies of the relationship between marital status and propensity to migrate (e.g., Ellis et al. 1996; Ortiz 1996). Studies that look at marriage as a household strategy for diversifying income sources and risks, and as opportunity for international migration, are the exceptions. Rosenzweig and Stark (1989), for example, observe that rural households in India

send their daughters to marry in distant households in different natural environments, in order to mitigate their income risks. Marriage is also pursued as a means of immigration, especially for those who do not have access to other means of obtaining legal residence status, and for those in oppressed situations who wish to migrate to escape political and/or economic pressures (e.g., Humbeck 1996).

Marriage as a strategy for women seeking to migrate is rarely studied. One reason is the assumption that marriage is a social contract based on affection and mutual commitment, which downplays the pragmatic (e.g., economic) aspect of such an institution. In reality, the social-romantic and pragmatic facets of marriage are often intricately intertwined and difficult to observe independently. The decisions for marriage and migration are also intertwined, so that it is very difficult to determine if marriage motivates migration, or if the desire for migration induces marriage. It is not the goal of this paper to separate out the two directions of the marriage-migration relationship. Instead, the objective is to highlight marriage as a strategy by which women can achieve migration, in relation to structural factors that constrain, yet provide opportunities for women's mobility. In China, where women continue to be subject to various constraints (some of which apply to men as well) limiting their social, economic, and physical mobility, marriage is not an uncommon strategy for disadvantaged women seeking to move to places where they may improve their well-being.

Women, Marriage, and Migration in China

In China, marriage is a social institution that directly connotes pragmatic and economic values, such as continuation of the family line (Wolf 1972), increase in family labor resources (Croll 1984), formation of networks (Ebrey 1991), provision of old-age security (Potter and Potter 1990), and transfer of economic resources (Croll 1984). Historically, the labor, fertility, and person of Chinese women have been considered a property exchangeable in transactions, most notably through marriages (Croll 1984). Under the patrilocal tradition, daughters would eventually move out and join the husband's family, adding to its labor resources. Parents of sons, especially those in rural areas, were eager to recruit the labor

of daughters-in-law, and this partly accounts for the prevalence of early marriages (Croll 1987). On the other hand, there is little incentive for the natal family to invest in daughters (Li 1994), since they will eventually leave the household, and since sons, rather than daughters, are expected to take care of the parents during their old age. The belief that “daughters married out are like water spilled out” has led to persistently lower levels of education among Chinese women.

Marriage has been a unique opportunity for the natal family to be compensated for raising a daughter. The most direct compensation is in the form of the brideprice, which is often negotiated between older generations. Although “arranged marriages” have been outlawed by the Chinese Communist Party (1950 Marriage Law), proposals initiated by a third party (e.g., parents, go-betweens), with the consent of the prospective bride and groom, remain the most popular form of marriage in rural China (Croll 1984; Shen 1996). Underlying the persistence of the older generation’s intervention is the deep-rooted notion and practice that marriage is a contract negotiated between two families, involving monetary and material transfers, and above all, the transfer of rights over women and their labor.

A number of scholars have observed that the economic reforms since the late 1970s, especially the Household Responsibility System,¹ have deepened the concept of marriage as a transaction, undermined women’s status, and left practices of patrilocal and patriarchy unchanged (Croll 1984; Gao 1994; Park 1992). Instead of the collective, the peasant household is now the basic production and consumption unit. In the household, women’s subordinate status is reinforced, while men assume the position of heads of the social and production unit (Park 1992). Household-based agriculture means that labor resources within the affinal reach of the household are critical for economic production. While men have a better chance of obtaining nonagricultural work, women play an increasingly key role in agricultural production (Bossen 1994). Young girls in rural areas are under pressure to leave school early to help with farming (Min and Eades 1995; Wolf 1985: 126–33). In exchange for losing the daughter’s labor, the natal family expects, and demands, a handsome return from the prospective groom’s family. Combined with rising income in the countryside, this has led to a revival of hefty brideprices and extravagant wedding celebra-

tions (Honig and Hershatler 1988; Min and Eades 1995).

In light of these conditions, evidence shows that gender inequality in contemporary China has not declined, despite Maoist policies which aimed at “liberating” women by increasing their labor-force participation² (Maurer-Fazio et al. 1997; Park 1992). The Chinese Communist Party’s articulation of inequalities primarily through class, while viewing gender as peripheral to the proletarian struggle, has been suggested as one of the reasons why a large gender gap persists (Gilmartin et al. 1994; Park 1992). In the rural areas, particularly in peasant households, the gap in access to education between women and men remains large (Bauer et al. 1992; Li 1994). While peasant men may improve their social and economic mobility by joining the military, going to school, and becoming cadres, many Chinese women in the countryside remain poor and uneducated, and must resort to marriage as a compensation for their lack of other opportunities for achieving upward social mobility (Bossen 1984; Honig and Hershatler 1988; Wang and Hu 1996: 287). Although Chinese tradition prescribes that in-laws should have similar socioeconomic positions [*mengdang hudui*], it is widely accepted and expected that husbands should be “superior” to wives in age, height, education, occupation, and socioeconomic status (Ji et al. 1985; Lively 1991; Shen 1996; Yang 1994: 220). In a word, the notion that “a woman’s *xingfu* [happiness or well being] depends on her marriage” continues to dominate in China, especially in the countryside.

Traditionally, Chinese brides moved a short distance to join their husbands’ families (Wang and Hu 1996: 283; Yang 1991; Zhuang and Zhang 1996). Typical marriages in rural areas involve a go-between or matchmaker who, either when notified or upon observing that a woman or man is reaching “marriage-age,” approaches the family about suitable candidates for a prospective spouse in the same village or in a village not too far away. A survey in the late 1980s found that most rural marriages did not exceed a 25-km radius (“Most Rural People’s . . .” 1989), underscoring the prominence of same-locality (same town or village) marriages. Poor transportation infrastructure, patriarchal lineage, and the strong desire for kinship networks are among the reasons for short-distance marriages. Some scholars have argued that short-distance marriages have increased since the rural reforms, as affinal labor is sought during peak periods of the agricultural season in

order to boost household production (Min and Eades 1995).

Given the impetus to stay close to the natal family, and observations that rural households are motivated to find marriage partners locally, the large number of interprovincial female marriage migrants since the 1980s may seem an anomaly. According to the 1990 Census, marriage accounted for, respectively, 28.2 percent and 28.9 percent of intraprovincial and interprovincial female migrations between 1985 and 1990 (Table 1). While the magnitude of interprovincial female migration (1.4 million) was smaller than that of intraprovincial moves (3.1 million), as in the case of all types of migration,³ marriage was indeed the leading reason for interprovincial female migration, suggesting that distance is not as constraining in marriage migration as one might expect. For example, studies have shown that in some parts of China, female marriage migrants, many from provinces thousands of miles away, accounted for the bulk of immigrants, and their numbers have increased over time (Xu and Ye 1992; Wang 1992). As will be shown in the empirical analysis, the pattern of origins and destinations of interprovincial female marriage migrants, and the distance between them, further underscore the prevalence of long-distance marriage migration to selected regions in China. This type of long-distance migration is a relatively new phenomenon (Shen 1996; Wang 1992; Yang 1991), and cannot be fully explained by the patrilocal tradition. We argue that it reflects macrolevel structural forces that define unique sets of constraints and opportunities for migrants

and their spouses, and that at the same time various agents actively interact with these forces to produce large waves of interprovincial female marriage migration.

Constraints, Opportunities, and Agency

While economic reasons are often cited as explanations for the patterns and directions of migration in many countries, including China, they cannot be considered in isolation from structural factors. Macrolevel forces that underlie economic reasons for migration are often gender-biased and are only meaningful if they are interpreted in relation to historical, institutional, sociocultural contexts and their dynamics. The structural factors that affect female migration are often the same as those that determine women's status and the integration of women into development (Lim 1993). With special reference to female marriage migration, the following subsections describe the structural factors in China and their changes since the reforms. Together, these impose constraints on, while also opening up new opportunities for, women's mobility and the role of agency in the migration process.

Household Registration System [*Hukou*]

The household registration or *hukou* system is a key institution for defining an individual's op-

Table 1. Comparison of Reasons for Migration by Females in China by Categories (%)

	Intraprovincial Migrants		Interprovincial Migrants	
	All	Aged 15–29	All	Aged 15–29
Job transfer	8.0	4.8	8.4	4.1
Job assignment	5.0	7.2	2.6	4.0
Industry/business	15.1	17.8	16.6	21.2
Study/training	11.6	16.9	6.5	10.2
Seek help from friends/relatives	11.7	6.2	14.7	8.9
Retirement	0.5	0.0	0.9	0.0
Joining family	14.5	6.8	16.3	8.4
Marriage	28.2	36.8	28.9	40.0
Other	5.4	3.5	5.1	3.2
Total number (in 000s)	11,153	7,570	4,893	3,066
%		67.9		62.7

Source: SSB (1994).

portunities and socioeconomic position in China (Christiansen 1990; Cheng and Selden 1994). Every Chinese citizen is given a *hukou* that records his or her registration classification and location. In terms of registration classification, the system bifurcates the population into the “nonagricultural” (mostly urban) population heavily subsidized by the state (e.g., grain rationing, housing, medical care, pension, etc.), and the “agricultural” (mostly rural) population that has the right to farm but receives little state welfare or benefits. The “nonagricultural” and “agricultural” classifications were first designated to urban and rural populations respectively. But since the classifications are passed from one generation to the next, and since the system makes it extremely difficult for an “agricultural” person to obtain “nonagricultural” *hukou*,⁴ not only do the overwhelming majority of the population in rural areas have “agricultural” *hukou*, but individuals who are no longer living in rural areas or are no longer engaged in agriculture may continue to have this type of registration classification. The registration classifications are not only a classificatory device, they also connote one’s identity and socioeconomic status.

In terms of registration location, a person’s *hukou* records where he or she “belongs to,” usually the place of birth. It resembles an “internal passport” (Chan 1996), analogous to the green card for immigrants to the U.S. This system has, until the mid-1980s (see below), tied Chinese peasants to their birthplace—without a registration location in the destination place, a migrant is excluded from many desirable jobs (especially in the formal sector) and subsidized welfare benefits (e.g., housing, education) that are necessary for their survival.

It is extremely difficult to change one’s *hukou* classification or location, especially from agricultural to nonagricultural *hukou* (classification), or from a rural *hukou* to one in an urban area (location). Behind the government’s strict control on *hukou* are the practical purposes of monitoring migration (and limiting rural-urban migration) and of protecting the state from bankruptcy (if state subsidies were extended to all citizens). In the minds of most Chinese, therefore, *hukou* classification and *hukou* location not only define their general well-being but also their status—nonagricultural *hukou* is superior to agricultural *hukou*; a *hukou* in the city (*shi*) is superior to that in a town (*zheng*), which in turn is superior to a village (*xiang*)⁵ *hukou*.

Responding to the burgeoning agricultural labor surplus since the rural reforms of the late 1970s, the state has relaxed its control over temporary migration, allowing peasants to obtain “temporary residence permits” (*zhanzhuzheng*) in towns and cities provided that they are responsible for their own grain and housing (*zili kouliang hu*) (“State Council Regulations . . .” 1984). Under this directive, the number of temporary migrants (also loosely referred to as the floating population) has sharply increased, but permanent migration that entails the transfer of *hukou* classification and/or *hukou* location continues to be strictly controlled. Marriage migration is usually considered permanent migration, as the 1950 Marriage Law stipulates that a woman’s *hukou* location, as well as her land, food, and housing quota, can be transferred to the husband’s household and locality after marriage.⁶ On the other hand, recent waves of marriage migration have also included some women who did not transfer their *hukou* locations to the destinations, mostly for the purpose of evading fertility control (Ma et al. 1995).

Though peasants in China desire nonagricultural *hukou* classification, it is extremely difficult to obtain. On the other hand, changing one’s *hukou* location, especially from one rural area to another, is possible with marriage. This is particularly attractive to peasant women, who are motivated to migrate to coastal provinces and large cities, where new economic opportunities have burgeoned since the economic reforms that began in the late 1970s. By introducing incentives into family farming, the Household Responsibility System has generated significant improvement in agricultural productivity. By expanding nonstate sectors, international trade, and zones “opened” for foreign investment, the state has engendered rapid industrialization in coastal urban areas and their rural surroundings. The demand for migrant labor in more developed regions, both in agriculture (to tender contract farms) and in rural industries (due to rapid growth of township-village enterprises⁷), also exerts a strong pull for peasant women. Governments and employers in richer rural areas are more capable of providing new residents with permanent status (by transferring their *hukou* location to the destination), enabling them to partake of benefits such as medical, housing, and pension provisions. Through marriage, not only can migrant women benefit from the resources in the husbands’ families, they can also achieve permanent migration and be in a better

position to gain access to resources in the destination, including employment opportunities and social benefits provided by employers and local governments (Huang 1997). Permanent migration to urban areas, however, continues to be strictly controlled. The larger the city, the tighter is the control on residence (Shen 1996), which explains why most female marriage migrants choose rural areas as their destinations, as will be illustrated in the empirical analysis.

Status of Women and the Labor Market

The Chinese labor market is underdeveloped and highly segmented (Knight and Song 1995). The segmentation reflects the *hukou* system, as the urban labor market, especially the formal sector, is largely closed to individuals with agricultural *hukou*. Only low-salaried and low-status occupations shunned by urban residents are available to (temporary) migrants. On the other hand, a rural labor market is emerging, as many township-village and joint-venture enterprises⁸ have attracted surplus agricultural labor from poorer rural areas. But being an “outsider,” without local *hukou*, still limits one’s access to employment and other benefits. In addition, women are generally at a disadvantage in the labor market because of their traditional roles in the family and in the society. Enterprises often assume that women are less productive because of maternity and child care and are reluctant to hire them (Park 1992). In the labor market, gender inequality and wage gaps persist despite the government’s attempt to remove gender discrimination in both jobs and wages. A recent study by Maurer-Fazio et al. (1997) concludes that the ratio of women’s to men’s earnings has declined further since the economic reforms. The continued gender wage gap suggests significant gender discrimination (e.g., men receiving preference in promotion to better-paying jobs) in the labor market (Knight and Song 1995). Furthermore, women are “crowded” into certain segments of the labor force, such as textiles and service jobs in urban areas, or less prestigious, low-paying jobs and agricultural work in rural areas, and they are less likely to hold positions of leadership and responsibility (Riley 1996).

Despite Mao’s attempt to raise the status of Chinese women, they continue to be constrained by traditional views of women’s role in the family.

The Chinese woman is defined in relation to others: first to her father, then to her husband, and, in old age, to her children. As mentioned earlier, many parents deem it unwise to invest in their daughters’ education or skills. Although this traditional view has receded considerably in the city, women in rural areas continue to be subject to sociocultural constraints that limit their access to resources that might improve their competitiveness in the labor market. Peasant women who have agricultural *hukou*, have low education, and are unskilled are at a particular disadvantage in nonagricultural work and in the urban labor market. For them, there are very few means to achieve social and economic mobility outside of marriage, which may be the only chance for them to exert some control over their future. Since the daughter “married out” is not expected to have full responsibility for her natal family, she may be motivated to seek marriage even if it entails long-distance migration, and especially if it promises to bring about significant improvement in economic well-being.

The story of Wang Xiaoli is not uncommon among peasant women (“Working Girls . . .” 1997:16). She lives in a poor rural area in Sichuan and was forced to leave school at grade four so that her younger brother could go to school. For five years, her father had been searching for a spouse for Xiaoli, who finally decided to go to Beijing on her own: “I do not want to live like my mother; I must go out and adventure.” A woman without local *hukou*, however, is in double jeopardy in the labor market (Leeds 1976). Marriage, which offers an opportunity to obtain local *hukou*, provides a means for overcoming some of the disadvantages that a peasant woman faces during her search for economic opportunities. Moreover, she will have the local kinship support of the husband’s family. Yet, to many peasant women, marrying “into” large cities is not a viable option, since they are considered the least desirable women in the urban marriage market. Wang Xiaoli, after reaching Beijing, discovered that the only persons willing to marry her were either physically handicapped or twenty years older than she. She concludes,

Only those who cannot find a wife locally (Beijing) would consider “outsiders” like us, and we also have to be very pretty before someone would pay us any attention. Maybe my father is right: peasant people should remain in rural areas (“Working Girls . . .” 1997:16).

“Marrying into” rural areas in more developed regions, on the other hand, has become an attractive option for many peasant women in China. Meanwhile, many men in rural areas near cities and in coastal provinces have temporarily left farms for work in township-village enterprises in nearby small towns, while continuing to keep an agricultural *hukou* classification. This is the “leaving the land but not the village” (*litu bu lixiang*) model, which has been publicized since the reforms as a means to alleviate an agricultural labor surplus. Peasant women who are married to men who return only during peak periods of the agricultural season or who seldom participate in farm work, have become the key laborers in the farm. By “marrying to the farmland,” female marriage migrants anticipate that their farm labor will legitimize their use of and right to the land while their husbands’ labor is utilized somewhere else (Bossen 1994). The gendered division of labor within the peasant household is therefore also an occupational division of labor—women are the farm laborers and men work in urban industrial sectors. This is a model conducive to raising household income, but is more common in rural areas near towns, cities, and rapidly growing regions.

Economic and Spatial Restructuring

Despite the socialist ideology of promoting equality, including spatial equality, in development, policies during the Maoist regime were not successful in reducing uneven regional development (Cole 1987; Paine 1981). Regional policy since the economic reform has further widened the gap between inland and coastal areas (e.g., Fan 1997; Wei and Ma 1996). Post-Mao state policy has unequivocally favored coastal provinces, areas that received disproportionate state investment, where the first open zones for attracting foreign investment were established (Fan 1995). Market reforms in rural and urban areas have opened up new economic and employment opportunities everywhere in China. But it is in coastal provinces that these reforms have been most rapid and have had most profound impacts on economic growth. Figure 1 shows that in 1988, ten years after the beginning of the economic reforms, the eastern coastal provinces, especially the growth corridor from Beijing, Tianjin in the north to Guangdong in the south, had the highest rural output per capita (total output in rural areas,

including industrial output). The substantial regional gap in rural output per capita between eastern and western China reflects superior agricultural productivity and effective rural industrialization (especially through township-village enterprises) in coastal provinces, exerting strong pull forces to peasants in poorer inland provinces. The relaxation of migration control, as mentioned earlier, has significantly increased migration propensity (Liang and White 1997) and has made it possible for millions of Chinese to migrate. Not surprisingly, the dominant direction of migration is from inland areas toward the coast, and from the west toward the east.

Uneven regional development is also the basis for “spatial hypergamy” in mate selection (Lavelly 1991). If marriage is a precious opportunity for a woman to achieve social and economic mobility, and if she follows the patrilocal tradition to join the husband where he lives, then the prospective husband’s location becomes an important factor in marriage decisionmaking (Li and Lavelly 1995). Place-based characteristics, especially the local economy, create both opportunities and constraints in men’s success in the marriage market. In the case of China, rural men in coastal provinces experiencing rapid economic growth are considered more desirable than men in inland, remote, or mountainous locales.

Marriage Agency and Brokering

The *hukou* system, the labor market, the status of women, and contemporary economic and spatial restructuring constitute a set of structural forces that impose constraints or define opportunities for the mobility of Chinese women. For women in poorer rural areas who are not competitive in the urban labor market, marrying men in another rural but more desirable location is a unique opportunity for improving their social and economic mobility. The economic reforms and the ensuing uneven regional development have further underscored the importance of location, motivating women to move up the spatial hierarchy through marriage. The reforms have also opened up opportunities through women who seek out and respond to marriage offers, men who want to marry nonlocal women, kinship and social networks, marriage brokers, and marriage media that bring the prospective bride and groom together.

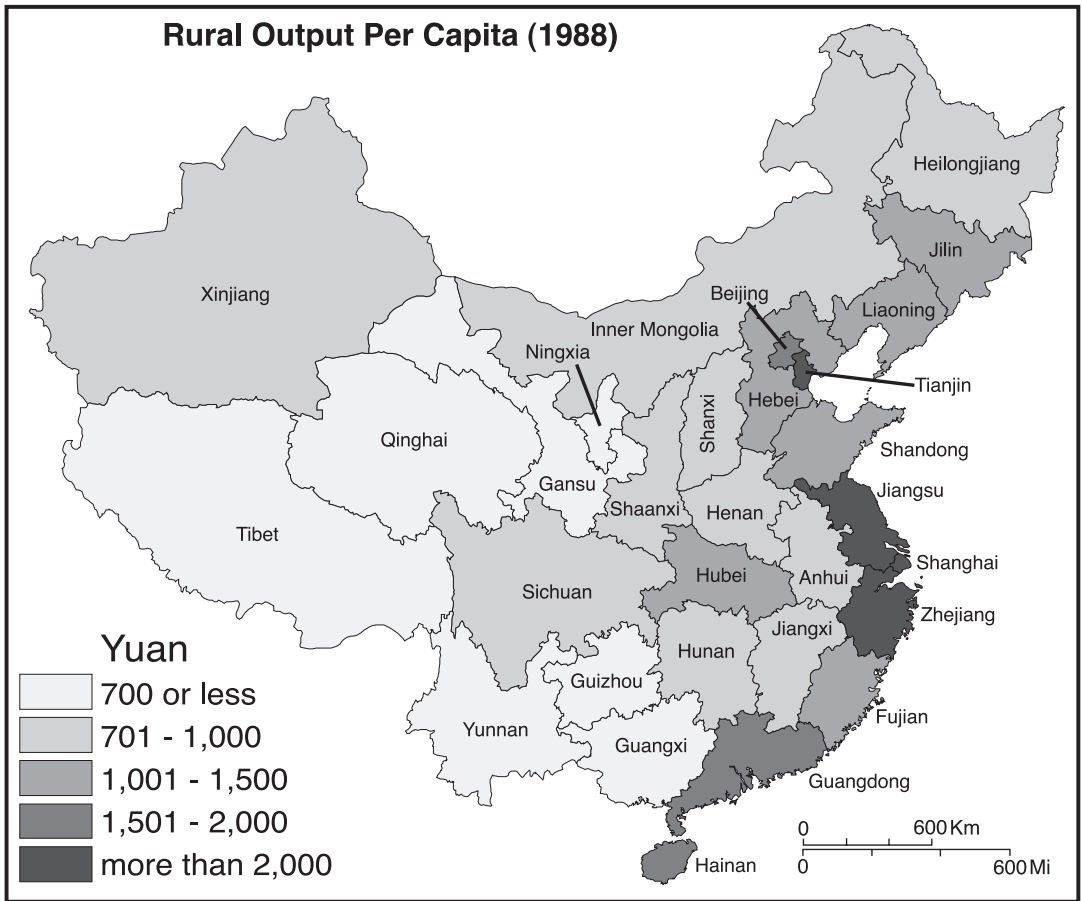


Figure 1. Rural output per capita by province (1988). Source: SSB (1989).

A number of surveys in China reveal that personal attributes and economics underlie men's decisions to marry female migrants from other provinces (*wailainu*). Men who marry *wailainu* are typically older and poorer, and some are mentally or physically handicapped, which imposes constraints on their ability to find marriage partners (Ma et al. 1995; Xu and Ye 1992). The existence of larger numbers of single and older men⁹ relative to their female cohort may be attributable to better chances of survival for male infants in difficult times (Min and Eades 1995), such as during the famine in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This not only reflects the low social status of women in general, but, more specifically, female infanticide and the strong preference for sons (Bullough and Ruan 1994). In addition, in the midst of rising brideprices and marriage expenses, marrying *wailainu* appears as a good bargain since such migrants usually request less brideprice, do not expect extravagant ceremo-

nies, and are widely considered to be diligent (Liu 1990; Xu and Ye 1992). To the *wailainu*, the favorable location of these men and the promise of a "better life" compensate for what may be perceived as unfavorable personal attributes (Ma et al. 1995). A popular saying in rural Zhejiang, one of the major destinations of female marriage migrants, describes the current prevalence of long-distance marriage migrants: "In the 1960s, wives were from Subei [the northern and poorer part of Jiangsu, a province adjacent to Zhejiang]; in the 1970s, they were from rustication¹⁰; and in the 1990s, they come from afar" (Xu and Ye 1992). This suggests that marriage migrations from another nearby province are not a new phenomenon in China, but those that take place across provinces and over thousands of miles are in fact a product of the reform period.

Among the main channels for the prospective husband and wife to meet are kinship and social networks, marriage brokers, and media. Some of

these channels have existed historically, but recent market reforms, improvement in information flows, and increased population mobility have provided increased opportunities for various agencies in the marriage market. Pioneer female marriage migrants inform their sisters, relatives, friends, and people from the same village (*tongxiang*) about marriage opportunities (that is, prospective husbands), and may in fact bring them along to the destination when returning from a visit to home villages (Wang and Hu 1996; Xu and Ye 1992; Yang 1991; Yang 1994). These “chain” or “snowballing” migrations are well documented (Min and Eades 1995; Wang 1992), and are not unlike the effect of kinship and social networks on other types of migrations, which explain streams of population movement from specific origins to specific destinations and are reflected by migrant enclaves and communities such as the “Zhejiang Village” in Beijing¹¹ (Xiang 1993). The rise in entrepreneurship and materialist values, permitted and directly or indirectly encouraged by the economic reforms, are conducive to the work of marriage brokers, who collect a fee or commission by arranging for prospective husbands to meet potential marriage partners (Shen 1996; Yang 1991). Some men who have difficulties finding a wife locally welcome the broker’s service, although incidents of divorce, abduction, and fraud have led to a perception that such a channel is “cheap but risky” (Min and Eades 1995).¹² Media such as advertisements and “introduction centers” are also used (Shen 1996), again reflecting better information flows and the rise in entrepreneurship in China during the reform period.

A popular magazine, *Zhongguo Funu* [Chinese Women], for example, regularly advertises a registered marriage introduction center. Besides the standard information such as age, height, education level, and economic status, these advertisements also specify urban/rural and location criteria. The following example describes an “above marriage age” man (see note 9) from a less developed part of Jiangsu (Subei), hoping to marry a peasant woman from another province:

Miss, do you want to come to the relatively well-off Jiangsu province? Male, aged 30, height 1.65 meters, single, senior-high education, loves calligraphy, painting job, healthy, law-abiding, kind and cheerful, annual income 20,000 yuan plus, savings, six-room flat. Looking for a woman from rural, poorer, and mountainous areas as companion. No requirements on location, education level, or marital his-

tory. Send letter to Jiangsu province, Xiangshui county . . . (“The Magpie Bridge” 1997a).

While many men’s advertisements specify whether peasant or city women are desired, women’s advertisements typically require that the potential spouses be located in more desirable locations than theirs. For example, a woman from Anhui, a poor province, looks for men in “more developed regions” (“The Magpie Bridge” 1997b). Another woman from Guizhou, also a poor province, wants to marry someone who can help her migrate (“The Magpie Bridge” 1997b).

The following empirical analysis illustrates some evidence supporting the argument that rural women subject to macrolevel structural constraints seek marriage as a means of migration to more favorable, wealthier locations. Through detailed analyses of the patterns of female migration, demographic characteristics of the women and their husbands, and spatial patterns of their migration, we seek to infer the motivation and processes of female marriage migration. Through a multivariate analysis, we also seek to ascertain the relative strengths of determinants that reflect structural, economic, and sociocultural forces influencing this type of migration.

Empirical Analysis

Recent census and population surveys in China have inquired as to the primary “reason of migration.” Both the 1987 one-percent Sample Survey and the 1990 Census offered nine options for reasons of migration: “job transfer,” “job assignment,” “industry/business,” “seek help from friends/relatives,” “retirement,” “joining family,” “marriage,” “study/training,” and “other.”¹³ The empirical analysis in this paper mainly employs a one-percent village-level sample of the 1990 Census¹⁴ (SSB 1994). It contains information about every individual in all households of the sampled village-level units (villages, towns, or urban neighborhoods in cities). The 1990 Census defines a migrant as an individual five years or older whose usual place of residence on July 1, 1985 was in a different city, town, or county than that on July 1, 1990. Although this definition underestimates the actual volume of migration by excluding multiple moves, return migrants, migrants younger than five years old, and moves within the same city, town, or county, the census remains by far the most comprehensive source of

migration data in China. We will first describe the pattern of female migration, then analyze the characteristics of these migrants and their husbands, and, third, investigate the spatial features of this migration. We conclude the empirical analysis with a logistic regression analysis that examines the relative contributions of structural, sociocultural, and economic factors to explaining the patterns of interprovincial female marriage migration.

Female Migration

Census data show that in China, men’s propensity to move continues to be higher than that of women. Between 1985 and 1990, a total of 20.4 million men (13.4 million intraprovincial and 7.0 million interprovincial) and 16.1 million women (11.2 million intraprovincial and 4.9 million interprovincial) migrated, reflecting mobility rates (ratio of migrants to the total population in 1990) of 3.3 percent and 2.8 percent respectively.

Figure 2 shows the proportions of female and male migrants attributable to the nine migration

reasons mentioned earlier. This figure combines interprovincial and intraprovincial female migrants, who are further differentiated in Table 1. For all female migrants (Figure 2), the leading reason of migration was marriage (28.4 percent), followed by industry/business (15.6 percent), joining family (15.0 percent), seek help from friends/relatives (12.6 percent), study/training (10.1 percent), job transfer (8.1 percent), other (5.3 percent), job assignment (4.2 percent), and retirement (0.6 percent). Although industry/business, primarily economic in nature, was the second most important reason for women, family-related motives (including marriage, joining family, friends/relatives) are shown to dominate female migration. In contrast, employment-related reasons (particularly industry/business and job transfer) accounted for the majority of reasons among male migrants. These statistics suggest that women are primarily dependents in the process of migration, that is, they migrate after marriage to join spouses and their families, follow their spouses as tied movers, or move to seek the support of friends and family members. But closer scrutiny of the data will

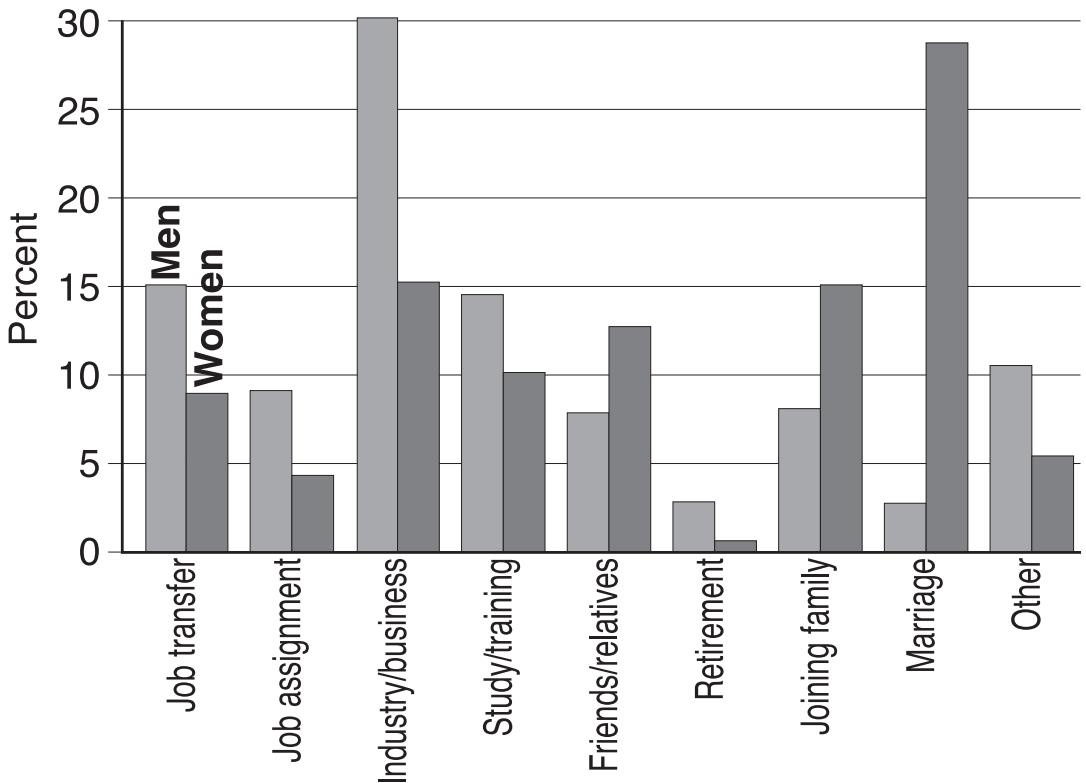


Figure 2. Reasons for migration of females, compared to males, in percentages. Source: SSB (1994).

reveal more complex mechanisms underlying female marriage migration in China.

Female Marriage Migration

As Table 1 shows, marriage was an equally important reason for intraprovincial (28.2 percent, 3.1 million) and interprovincial (28.9 percent, 1.4 million) female migration between 1985 and 1990. The relative importance of marriage was even more marked for the 15–29 age group,¹⁵ accounting for 36.8 percent and 40.0 percent, respectively, of intraprovincial and interprovincial female migrants. Given the traditional prevalence of short-distance marriages, the magnitude and relative importance of interprovincial marriage migration are quite exceptional. Interprovincial marriage migration is more revealing of the complexity of migration because it generally involves longer distance, greater institutional hindrance, and more permanent moves.

Demographic and Locational Characteristics of Female Migrants

A comparison of female marriage migrants with female industry/business migrants, all female migrants, and female nonmigrants helps shed some light on the characteristics of females in the marriage group and their migration decisions (Table 2). Both intra- and interprovincial migrants as a whole were younger than nonmigrants, and both marriage migrants and industry/business migrants were younger than migrants as a whole. The mean ages of female marriage migrants were 25.7 (intraprovincial), and 25.4 (interprovincial), and were very similar to that of industry/business migrants. They were also similar in the proportion of migrants with agricultural *hukou* classification (>90 percent), significantly higher than the nonmigrants' proportion (81.3 percent), and the proportion of migrants as a whole (57.4 percent for intraprovincial and 60.6 percent for interprovincial migrants). The proportions of female marriage migrants and indus-

Table 2. Demographic and Locational Characteristics of Female Migrants and Nonmigrants

	Intraprovincial Migrants			Interprovincial Migrants			Nonmigrants
	Industry/ Business	Marriage	All	Industry/ Business	Marriage	All	
Age (mean)	25.3	25.7	26.5	25.0	25.4	27.2	32.2
Agricultural <i>hukou</i> (%)	90.8	91.0	57.4	91.9	92.6	60.6	81.3
Origin (1985) (%)							
City (<i>shi</i>)	3.5	2.8	12.5	5.3	3.5	21.4	
Town (<i>zhen</i>)	12.1	11.8	20.6	8.6	8.3	13.8	
Village (<i>xiang</i>)	84.4	85.4	66.9	86.2	88.2	64.9	
Destination (1990) (%)							
City (<i>shi</i>)	69.6	36.6	59.2	47.1	18.0	45.0	24.6
County (<i>xian</i>)	30.4	63.4	40.8	52.9	82.0	55.0	75.4
Education (15–29) (%)							
Illiterate	3.0	9.1	4.8	4.4	13.4	7.6	9.7
Primary	25.4	38.3	21.9	32.6	44.1	28.9	37.6
Junior high or above	71.6	52.6	73.3	63.0	42.5	63.5	52.7
Labor force participation (15+) (%)	98.3	80.5	64.0	97.8	81.8	68.1	72.8
Occupation (15+) (%)							
Agriculture	10.1	83.1	38.2	8.0	89.2	42.1	75.6
Industry	53.4	8.6	30.0	56.5	6.5	28.4	11.9
Service	36.5	8.3	31.8	35.5	4.2	29.5	12.6
Total number (in 000s)	1,687	3,141	11,153	812	1,415	4,893	500,311
(%)	15.1	28.2		16.6	28.9		

Source: SSB (1994).

try/business migrants from villages (>84 percent) were also substantially higher than that of female migrants as a whole (66.9 percent for intraprovincial and 64.9 percent for interprovincial migrants), suggesting that both types of migrants had predominantly rural origins.

In terms of destinations, however, female marriage migrants and female industry/business migrants differed. The bulk (69.6 percent) of intraprovincial and almost half (47.1 percent) of interprovincial female industry/business migrants chose to go to cities, compared with 36.6 percent (intraprovincial) and 18.0 percent (interprovincial) of female marriage migrants. The proportions of marriage migrants choosing to go to county destinations (63.4 percent for intraprovincial and 82.0 percent for interprovincial) were significantly higher than that of all migrants (40.8 percent and 55.0 percent respectively). Thus, not only were female marriage migrants largely from rural areas, the majority of them also chose to migrate to rural areas. This is particularly the case for interprovincial female marriage migrants, 88.2 percent of whom originated in villages and 82.0 percent of whom migrated to counties.

Not surprisingly given their rural origins, female marriage migrants are distinguished by having the lowest levels of education, compared with female industry/business migrants, female migrants as a whole, and female nonmigrants. Among the 15–29-year-olds,¹⁶ only 52.6 percent of intraprovincial and 42.5 percent of interprovincial marriage migrants had education at the junior high or above level, significantly lower than other groups shown in the table. The vast majority of female industry/business migrants, on the other hand, had at least high school-level education. Marriage migrants also had the highest illiteracy¹⁷ rates (9.1 percent and 13.4 percent, respectively, among intraprovincial and interprovincial migrants). Despite female marriage migrants' low education, their labor-force participation rates after migration (at the destination) were high. Although their rates were not as high as that of female industry/business migrants, at 80.5 percent (intraprovincial) and 81.8 percent (interprovincial), their labor-force participation rates were substantially higher than that of either female migrants as a whole or female nonmigrants. These statistics suggest that female marriage migrants were active participants in the economy, contradicting the view that marriage migrations are primarily social or family-related

moves and involve passive or tied movers. The occupational structure of female marriage migrants also stands out. The bulk of them engaged in agriculture (83.1 percent intraprovincial, 89.2 percent interprovincial), and the proportions were significantly higher than that of female industry/business migrants (who were primarily in industry and services), female migrants as a whole, and even female nonmigrants.

It is clear from the above comparisons that female marriage migrants were a distinct group of women. They were young and relatively uneducated, came from rural areas, settled in rural areas, were economically active in the labor force, and were mostly engaged in agriculture. They did not fit the typical profile of family-oriented, passive, and tied movers. These peasant women sought to migrate to the destination *and* join the agricultural labor force there. Interprovincial female marriage migrants intensified these attributes: they were younger and had lower educational levels, and a higher proportion of them had agricultural *hukou* classification and rural origin. The difference is particularly sharp in the case of education, with more than half (57.5 percent) of female interprovincial marriage migrants between the ages 15–29 receiving less than a junior-high level of education. Yet their labor-force participation rate (81.8 percent) was higher than that of intraprovincial female marriage migrants. What these statistics suggest is that peasant women with the most severe personal, social, and locational constraints were most prone to opt for migration to another province through marriage. They are likely to have very limited opportunities for social and economic mobility other than marriage, and their willingness to move long distances and be away from affinal and familiar environments can be interpreted as a price they must pay in order to overcome these constraints.

Nonetheless, the statistics on destination and occupation are quite puzzling, because it seems that female marriage migrants did not accomplish significant improvements in social or economic status, as they moved from one rural area to another and from agricultural work to agricultural work. This likely reflects a combination of personal, social, institutional, and locational factors. First, their low skills, as reflected by their low education, render them less competitive in urban industrial sectors in cities. Second, urban areas, especially large cities, have stricter controls on permanent migrations, including marriage migra-

tions. The rural origin and *hukou* constraints on female migrants may have confined their options to choosing marriage partners in rural areas. Third, not all rural areas are the same. Those near big cities or in more developed provinces are more desirable, particularly because the Household Responsibility System has brought about commercialization of agriculture, giving farmers near markets and, in high-productivity locations more profit opportunities. Therefore, moving to another rural area, one that affords better opportunities, may enhance a peasant woman's economic status. Finally, as mentioned earlier, some peasant women may elect to stay on the farm while their husbands work in nonagricultural sectors.

Who Did Female Marriage Migrants Marry?

A comparison of the husbands of marriage migrants, other migrants, and nonmigrants could shed some light on the mate-selection opportunities and their relationship with migration. The 1990 Census data do not, however, allow perfect matching of household members into husbands and wives, except when one or the other is also the household head. Since the bulk of household heads in China are men, we have selected male household heads married to marriage migrants, other migrants, and nonmigrants in 1990. Since comparison of education necessitates controlling of age, we have further focused our analysis on husbands in the 25–39 age group (Table 3). The resulting 1.5 million (intraprovincial) and 0.6 million (interprovincial) husbands of marriage

migrants accounted for, respectively, 47.8 percent and 45.0 percent of all such mates.

While the majority of marriage migrants' husbands had junior-high or above education, they were, as a whole, less educated than husbands of nonmarriage migrants. In particular, husbands of interprovincial marriage migrants had the lowest level of education, with only 57.5 percent having junior-high or above education, the lowest level among all groups. They also had the highest illiteracy rate (5.9 percent). As expected, large percentages of husbands of marriage migrants were engaged in agriculture, since the bulk of female marriage migrants chose rural destinations. This contrasts with husbands of nonmarriage migrants, who were highly represented in industrial and service sectors. Husbands of interprovincial marriage migrants again stand out as the group most engaged in agriculture (75.7 percent). These statistics support a prevailing argument in the literature, primarily based on case-study surveys, that husbands of *wailaimu* have relatively lower social and economic status, which lowers their competitiveness in the marriage market and motivates them to seek brides from other provinces.

A number of case studies suggest that the large number of single "above marriage-age" men motivates the immigration of rural brides. To assess whether this effect operates at the macroscale, we computed, at the county level, the correlation coefficient between sex ratio of single men to women above 30 years old and the proportion of interprovincial female marriage migrants to all interprovincial female migrants. The correlation

Table 3. Education and Occupation of Husbands^a of Migrants and Nonmigrants by Categories (%)

	Intraprovincial Migrants		Interprovincial Migrants		Nonmigrants
	Marriage	Nonmarriage	Marriage	Nonmarriage	
Education (%)					
Illiterate	2.6	2.8	5.9	3.7	4.3
Primary	27.9	15.8	36.6	19.7	29.7
Junior high or above	69.5	81.4	57.5	76.6	66.1
Occupation (%)					
Agriculture	67.2	15.0	75.7	17.2	67.6
Industry	22.2	41.8	17.5	43.3	18.6
Services	10.6	43.2	6.7	39.5	13.8
Total (in 000s)	1,500	1,159	637	521	92,993

^aHusbands who were household heads between 25 and 39 years old in 1990.
Source: SSB (1994).

coefficient of 0.35 ($p < .05$) suggests a positive but weak effect of sex ratio on marriage migration.

Spatial Pattern of Interprovincial Female Marriage Migration

Given the evidence thus far presented, we would expect that interprovincial female marriage migration would exhibit distinct spatial patterns. Indeed, marriage was the most important reason for female outmigration in twelve provinces,¹⁸ with the highest proportions in the southwestern and poorer provinces of Yunnan (72.7 percent), Guizhou (71.2 percent), Sichuan (48.6 percent) and Guangxi (42.0 percent). Although the volume of outmigration varied among these four provinces, together they accounted for more than half (50.5 percent) of the total interprovincial female marriage migrants, forming a spatial core of sending provinces. For fourteen provinces,¹⁹ marriage was the most important reason for female immigration. The eastern coastal provinces of Hebei (63.0 percent), Jiangsu (54.5 percent), Fujian (50.6 percent) and Zhejiang (47.2 percent), as well as Anhui (59.1 percent) in central China, had the highest proportions of female marriage immigrants. Most of these receiving provinces are economically more developed (see Figure 1), which is a major factor of marriage-migration destination. The three centrally administered municipalities of Beijing (11.3 percent), Tianjin (10.5 percent) and Shanghai (5.1 percent), on the other hand, had the lowest proportions of female marriage immigrants outside of Tibet. Despite large numbers of temporary immigrants (primarily for industry/business) in these large cities, Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai exert stricter control over permanent migration and provide few opportunities for peasant women to migrate there through marriage.

Census data indicate that 84.8 percent of all interprovincial female marriage migrants were from the central and western regions, and 60.0 percent migrated to the eastern region.²⁰ Figure 3, which illustrates the fifteen largest net flows²¹ between pairs of provinces, confirms the observation that interprovincial female marriage migration was primarily an eastward phenomenon. The data also reveal that, except for the net migration from Hebei to Beijing and Tianjin, the largest net flows originated exclusively from the southwestern provinces of Guangxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, while the net migration to the six

eastern coastal provinces of Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong accounted for more than 50 percent of the total net flows. Although marriage migrants did not account for a large proportion of female immigrants in Guangdong, Figure 3 shows that the net flow from Guangxi to Guangdong was the largest in the nation. As in the case of Beijing and Tianjin, large numbers of female industry/business migrants also migrated to Guangdong, and as a result, the relative proportion of marriage immigrants was smaller even though its volume was large. Except for the flows from Guangxi to Guangdong, and from Hebei to Beijing and Tianjin, all other flows were between nonadjacent provinces. In fact, the majority of interprovincial female marriage migrations took place across several provinces and involved long distances, contradicting the conventional view that marriage migrations are primarily short-distance moves.

Within the major receiving provinces, proportions of female marriage immigrants exhibit distinct spatial patterns. Figure 4 shows the county-level proportions of female marriage immigrants (interprovincial and intraprovincial) in Jiangsu and Guangdong, two of the more developed provinces and major destinations of female marriage migrants. The county-level data, drawn from the 1990 Census 100-percent volumes,²² do not allow differentiation of migrants into interprovincial and intraprovincial sources. Nevertheless, the maps depict clearly that female marriage migration is more highly represented in the provinces' poorer peripheries than in their economic cores, and is more prominent in counties than in cities. In the case of Guangdong, marriage accounted for more than 80 percent of all female immigrants in six counties²³ (counties surrounding and north of Maoming city), which are primarily rural and poorer counties in the western periphery of the province, away from the Pearl River Delta economic core and adjacent to neighboring poorer sending provinces. A recent paper (Fan 1998) reports high correlations between marriage migration and interprovincial migration in these counties, further supporting the notion that women from adjacent poorer provinces (e.g., Guangxi) were attracted to marry in the periphery of Guangdong. In Jiangsu, although the contrast between the core (Southern Jiangsu or Sunan) and the periphery (Subei) is not as striking as that in Guangdong, Sunan as a whole is indeed less highly represented in female marriage

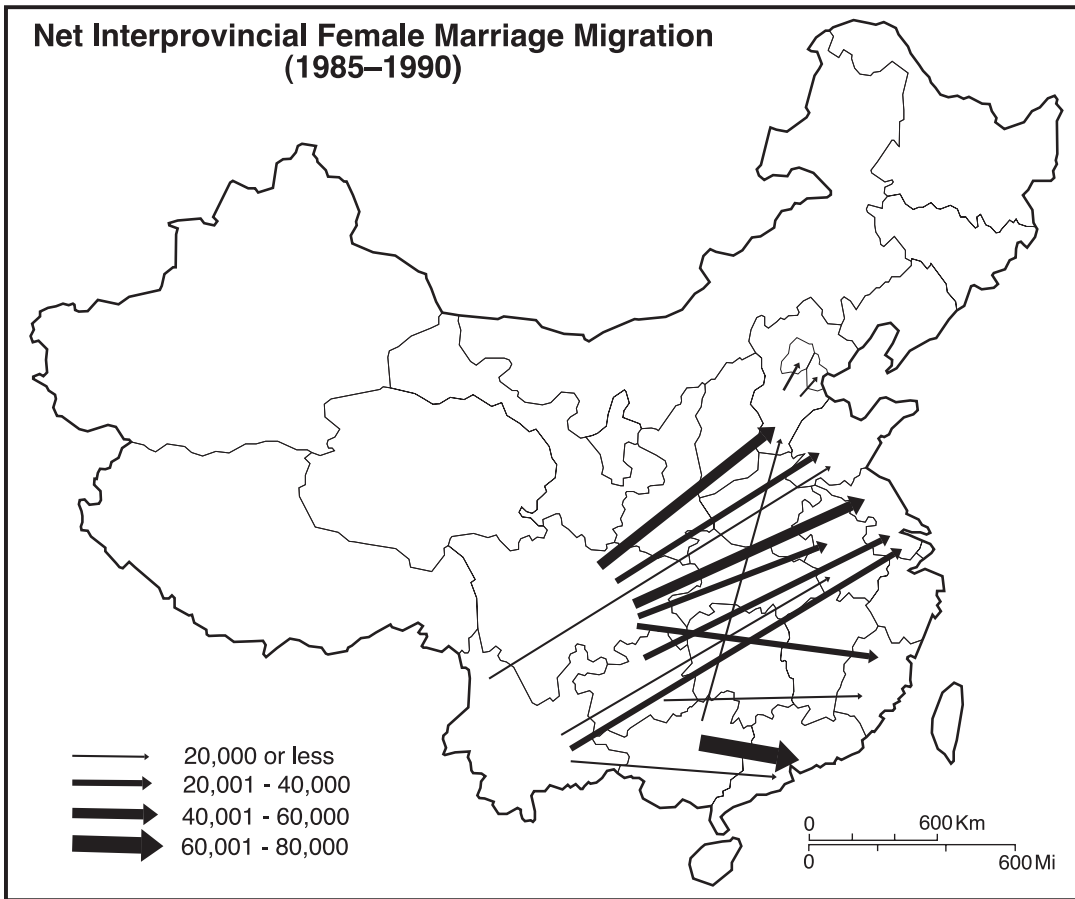


Figure 3. The fifteen largest net flows of interprovincial female marriage migration (1985–1990). Source: Huang (1997); SSB (1994).

immigration. Seven²⁴ of the ten counties whose proportions of female marriage migration exceeded 75 percent, and the only two counties whose proportions exceeded 80 percent (Suining and Feng), were in northern Jiangsu (Subei), where per capita income is only a fraction of the provincial average. These counties also had significantly higher rates of interprovincial migrants and higher rates of female migrants than the rest of the province, suggesting that like western Guangdong, the poorer periphery of Jiangsu is a distinct destination of interprovincial female marriage migration.

The data in these two provinces suggest that even if female marriage migrants chose to go to more developed provinces, they were mostly confined to relatively poorer locations, although these counties may be economically more developed than those of the migrants' origins. In addition, in both provinces, prefecture-level cities,

open coastal cities, and special economic zones received significantly lower proportions of female marriage immigrants than counties, again supporting the notion that female marriage migrants target specifically rural destinations. The western parts of both provinces, compared with the eastern parts, are geographically nearer to sources of interprovincial migrants, and have better access to railroad transportation, which further facilitate immigration of women from other provinces.

The spatial patterns of female marriage migration presented above support a number of arguments made earlier. First, female marriage migrants seek to move up the spatial hierarchy, from inland to coastal provinces and from poorer to more developed regions. Such movements further substantiate the notion that marriage is an economic strategy. Second, within the provinces, rural and relatively poorer locations had higher proportions of female marriage immigrants, while

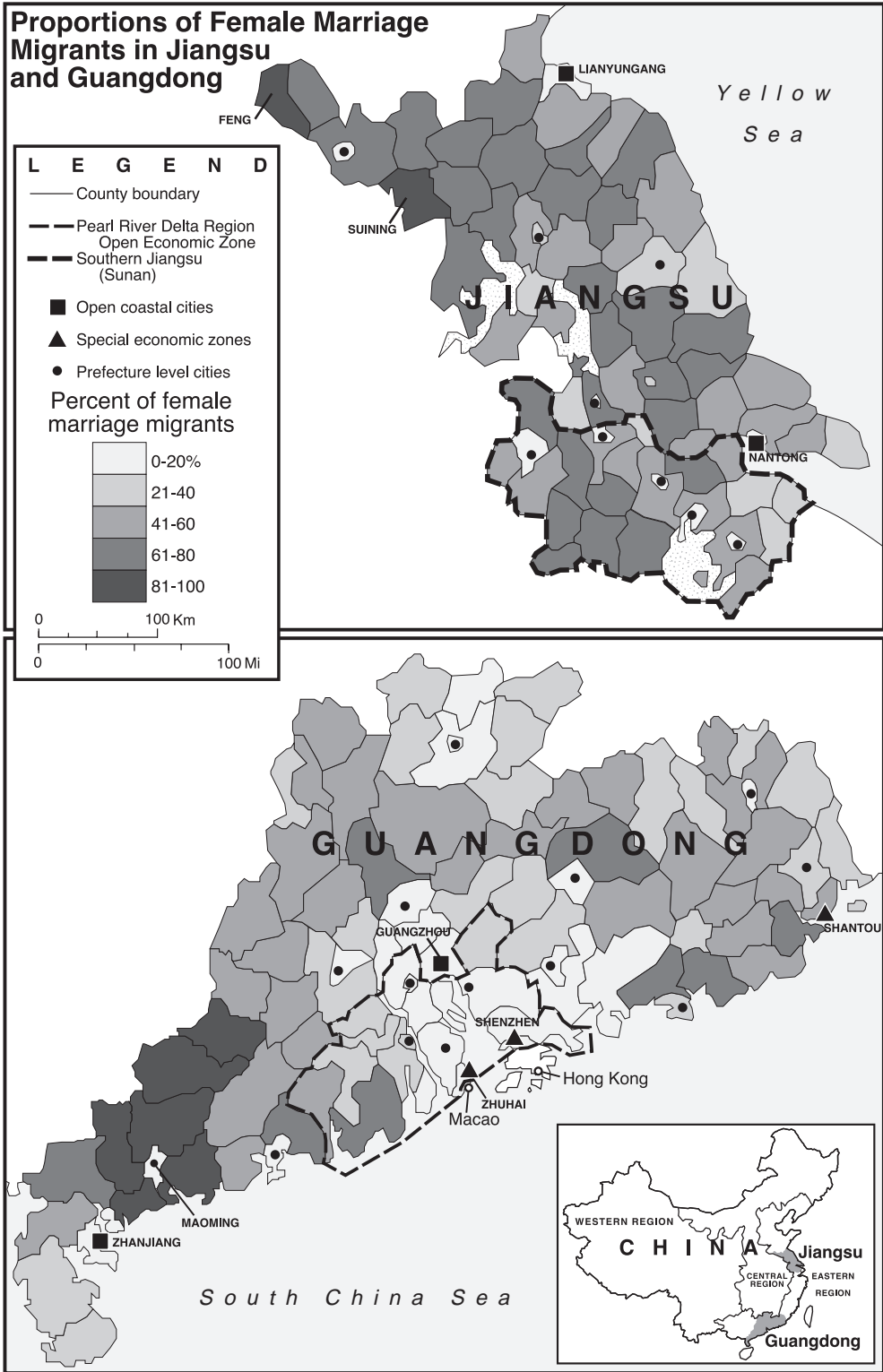


Figure 4. Proportions of female marriage migrants by percentage in Jiangsu and Guangdong provinces. Inset map shows location of provinces. Source: GDPPCO (1992); JSPPCO (1992).

large cities and more developed areas had smaller proportions, which again point to the difficulties peasant women face when attempting to migrate to urban areas through marriage. Third, the concentration of origins and destinations at the provincial level and of destinations at the subprovincial level suggest that streams of marriage migration have been formed, supporting the argument that social and kinship networks and other agencies such as brokers have played an important role in facilitating and sustaining waves of marriage migration, including long-distance marriage migration.

Assessing the Determinants of Marriage Migration

The above analyses provide general support for the importance of institutional, economic, and sociocultural factors in shaping female marriage

migration. They also give weight to the argument that women in disadvantaged positions are more likely to pursue marriage as a strategy to achieve migration and to improve their social and economic mobility. In what follows, we further examine the effects of the above factors on interprovincial female marriage migration, using a logistic regression analysis in an effort to assess the relative significance of the factors thus far investigated.

The dependent variable in our analysis takes the value of 1 for marriage migration and 0 for other types of migration. There are four sets of independent variables variously referencing individual- and provincial-level data (Table 4). The first set addresses the effect of the *hukou* system and the segmented labor market and includes (1) *hukou* classification of the female migrant, (2) *hukou* location of the female migrant, (3) destination 1 (urban or rural), and (4) destination 2 (municipal cities or other provinces). We expect

Table 4. Logistic Regression of Interprovincial Female Marriage Migration*

Independent Variable		Parameter Estimate	Odds Ratio ^a
Institutional and structural factors			
(1) <i>Hukou</i> classification	(1: agricultural; 0: nonagricultural)	1.6162**	5.034
(2) <i>Hukou</i> location	(1: rural; 0: urban)	0.5089**	1.663
(3) Destination 1	(1: rural; 0: urban)	1.0993**	3.002
(4) Destination 2	(1: nonmunicipal provinces; 0: municipal cities)	0.1854**	1.204
Status of women			
(5) Education 1	(1: primary and junior high; 0: otherwise)	0.3625**	1.437
(6) Education 2	(1: senior high; 0: otherwise)	0.4501**	1.568
(7) Education 3	(1: college or above; 0: otherwise)	-1.4824**	0.227
Economic factors			
(8) Income of origin	(1: 500 yuan or above; 0: otherwise)	-0.8843**	0.413
(9) Destination 3	(1: coastal provinces; 0: otherwise)	0.2155**	1.240
Demographic structure			
(10) Sex ratio	(single men to women 30 years or older)	0.0003**	1.000
Intercept		-6.5631**	
Number of cases ^b	48927		
Degree of freedom	10		
Model chi-square	16375**		
-2 log likelihood with intercept only	58859		
-2 log likelihood with intercept and covariates	42484		
Goodness of fit ^c (ρ^2)	0.28		

* dependent variable is interprovincial female migration (1: marriage; 0: other reasons)

** significant at 0.0001 level

^a odds ratio = e^{b_i} , where b_i = parameter estimate.

^b The number of cases refers to actual cases from the 1% sample of the 1990 Census used in the logistic regression and has not been multiplied by 100.

^c $\rho^2 = 1 - (\log \text{likelihood with intercept and covariates} / \log \text{likelihood with intercept only})$

Source: SSB (1994).

more women with agricultural *hukou* classification and rural *hukou* location, and those who chose rural and nonmunicipal cities destinations, to be marriage migrants (versus other types of migrants). The second set of independent variables examines the status of female migrants. Among demographic variables reported in the census, education is the most appropriate indicator of women's status. We use three education variables to examine possible nonlinear effects of education on migration (Ortiz 1996): (5) education 1 (primary and junior high); (6) education 2 (senior high); and (7) college or above. We expect more women with lower education to be marriage migrants. The third set of independent variables represents economic factors: (8) income of origin is measured by agricultural household income per capita²⁵ of migrants' province (before migration), and is evaluated for the year 1988, near the midpoint of the period 1985–1990; and (9) destination 3 (coastal provinces versus inland provinces). We expect income of the originating provinces to be negatively related, and income of the coastal destinations to be positively related, to the likelihood of marriage migration. Finally, the sex-ratio variable (10) compares, at the provincial level, the number of single men over 30 years old with their female counterparts and aims at testing the effect of demographic structure on marriage migration. We expect high sex ratios to be positively related to high propensities of female marriage immigration.

Estimates of the model are reported in Table 4. The goodness of fit measure ρ^2 is 0.28, suggesting that the model is a relatively good fit for the data (Hensher and Johnson 1981: 51). The results are generally consistent with our expectations. Female migrants with agricultural *hukou* classification were 5.0 (odds ratio) times more likely to be marriage migrants than those with nonagricultural *hukou*. Female migrants with rural *hukou* location were 1.7 times more likely to be marriage migrants than those with urban *hukou* location. In terms of destination, female marriage migrants to rural destinations were 3.0 times more likely than those to urban destinations, and female marriage migrants to nonmunicipality provinces were 1.2 times more likely than those to the three centrally administered municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai). The parameter estimates and odds ratios confirm the importance of institutional and structural factors. Peasant women are constrained by their *hukou* status and location and are likely to migrate

through marriage into other rural areas, but they continue to be shut out from urban areas and large cities that have stricter controls over permanent migration.

Odds ratios for the education variables suggest that women with higher education are less likely than those with lower education to engage in marriage migration. Specifically, female migrants with college or above level of education were 77.3 percent ($1 - \text{odds ratio} = 1 - 0.227$) less likely to be marriage migrants than those without. But the effect of education seems to be curvilinear. Female migrants with primary and junior-high education were 1.6 times, and those with senior-high education 1.4 times, more likely to be marriage migrants than those with either lower or higher education. What these estimates suggest is that some degree of education facilitates the gathering of resources and information (Ortiz 1996) and motivates women to pursue marriage migration. Interprovincial marriage migration is not traditional, and the long distance and many intervening obstacles involved demand a certain spirit of adventure and creativity that women with very little or no education may not possess. On the other hand, those with the highest education were more likely to pursue other types of migration, including to urban areas where they may be more competitive in the labor market.

As expected, estimates of the economic variables suggest that female migrants from wealthier provinces were less likely (58.7 percent, or $1 - 0.413$), and female migrants to coastal provinces more likely (1.2 times), to be marriage migrants. Once again, this supports the argument that female marriage migrants were motivated to leave their poorer surroundings and pursue marriage as a means to achieving migration to more developed regions. A positive parameter estimate for the sex-ratio variable suggests that a large relative proportion of older single men was conducive to marriage migration, yet an odds ratio of 1.0 also indicates that its effect was weak. In comparison, institutional, structural, and socioeconomic factors exert stronger influences than demographic structure on the propensity of interprovincial female marriage migration.

Conclusion

The main objective of this paper has been to explain the prevalence of female marriage migration and the relatively new phenomenon of long-

distance marriage migration in China. We have argued that interpretation of these population movements must be made in relation to underlying structural forces, including institutional, economic, and sociocultural factors. As a whole, they define the constraints on and possible opportunities for the mobility of women. Our analyses support the argument that peasant women in disadvantaged institutional, economic, and social positions are severely constrained in their mobility and in their choices of possible destinations. They are shut out from cities because of their agricultural *hukou* classification and rural *hukou* location, and from the urban labor market because of their low education and skills. Their positions reflect not only centuries-old traditions that limit women's access to knowledge, resources and power, but also the unique institutions of China that deny its rural residents access to benefits and opportunities in urban areas.

Results of our analyses suggest that peasant women in disadvantaged positions are motivated to interpret marriage as not simply a life event, but as an alternative to their limited social and economic mobility. Without the skills necessary to compete in the urban labor market, they aim at moving to rural areas in well-developed regions and provinces. The economic growth of coastal provinces, accelerated by rural reforms, and the general rise in population mobility since China's economic reforms, provide further impetus for women to head for coastal provinces that may be thousands of miles away from home. Rather than moving on their own, marriage provides a means for them to overcome disadvantages of being an "outsider" in the destination, and allows them to attain local *hukou* and to have access to local resources, including land. This challenges the conventional wisdom of a unidirectional relationship between marriage and migration, and the notion that migration is simply a by-product and consequence of marriage. Instead, we argue that marriage is a means for achieving mobility, especially for women who lack access to other means of doing so.

We have found that interprovincial female marriage migrants had some degree of education, probably at a level conducive to gathering information and resources regarding long-distance marriage migration, but not sufficient for competing in urban industrial sectors. In conjunction with the notion that marriage is an economic strategy, this finding and the one about focused

destinations of interprovincial female migrants in China suggest that these women are active agents, negotiating their options and engineering population movements. They challenge the conventional view that female marriage migrants are passive actors whose mobility is simply a response to marriage.

Not only were the destinations focused, but their origins were also spatially concentrated, as the majority of them were from four provinces (Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangxi) in south-western China. These spatially defined streams of female marriage migrants support the observation made in previous case studies, namely, that social and kinship networks play important brokering and go-between roles in facilitating the waves of rural brides finding mates in desirable locations. They also suggest that formal marriage brokers, whose role is facilitated by a rise in entrepreneurship and improvements in information flows, have contributed to such movements. As for the men who married female migrants, our analyses suggest that they were also socially and economically disadvantaged. But their favorable position in the spatial hierarchy seem to have compensated for what may be considered less desirable personal attributes, and allowed them to draw peasant women from poorer regions, perhaps with the aid of social and kinship networks or more formal brokers.

Though the female marriage migrant may be distant from the natal family and married to a man whose personal attributes may be "less attractive," in exchange, she obtains a more desirable location and likely improves her economic well-being. Though her husband has brought in a *wailaimu*, who may be considered socially less preferable to local women, he has achieved marriage and augmented his household's labor supply, and usually at a cheap price. Between both are brokers who benefit socially and/or economically by pairing up prospective husbands and wives. Although parental intervention has gradually receded, the traditional Chinese notion that marriage is a pragmatic transaction between two parties (husband and wife), arranged with the aid of a third party, seems to have revived in the reform period, in a form that is accompanied by substantial population movements. Although there is a neoclassical economic flavor to this phenomenon, this study has shown that an adequate explanation of women's mobility must include the structural approach, which entails more attention to institutional, historical, and

sociocultural complexities underlying migration, and which enables analysis of the constraints, opportunities, agency, and brokers involved in women's migration.

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Notes

1. The Household Responsibility System implemented in the late 1970s represented a return from communal agriculture to family farming. In return for the use of "contracted" land (from the state), the farming household must fulfill an agreed price or quota of crops. The remainder of the output is at the disposal of the household, including being sold in the private market for profit.
2. Chinese women's level of labor-force participation is among the highest in the world (Bauer et al. 1992).
3. The total numbers of interprovincial and intraprovincial female migrants were, respectively, 4.9 million and 11.2 million (Table 1).
4. Joining the army, entering the university, and long-time employment in state-owned enterprises are some possible channels for those who hold agricultural *hukou* to obtain a nonagricultural *hukou*.
5. Both cities and towns are urban entities, and villages are rural. Another set of administrative units, cities (*shi*) and counties (*xian*) are often employed, such as in the 1990 Census destination types for migrants. Counties may consist of towns and villages, but for all practical purposes are considered primarily rural areas.
6. Yet a woman cannot change her agricultural *hukou* into a nonagricultural *hukou* even if she marries a man who has nonagricultural *hukou*.
7. Township-village enterprises are collectively owned enterprises run by townships, villages, and households in rural areas that have burgeoned since the economic reforms, replacing the handicraft, agricultural sideline, and industrial enterprises previously run by communes.
8. A joint-venture enterprise refers to an enterprise jointly shared and run by Chinese and foreign investors and is the most common form of foreign investment in China.
9. Single men over 30–35 years old are considered *dailing weihun*, or "above marriage age," in China.
10. Rustication refers to a Maoist policy that sent youths and intellectuals from cities to the countryside in order to "learn from the peasants."
11. Zhejiang Village in Beijing is a migrant enclave formed and expanded by migrants from Zhejiang, especially the Wenzhou area within the province, since the late 1970s. Zhejiang Villages also exist in other large cities in China.
12. Sun's (1991: 39–42) book describes several anecdotal examples of female migrants marrying in rural areas of more developed provinces, who eventually resort to divorce. An older man married an Inner Mongolian woman 18 years younger than he, but later divorced her because of difficulties dealing with the age difference. Another man was introduced by a marriage broker to a woman from a poor province, married her, but upon finding out that she had cheated about her age and past marriage, divorced her. One woman from Anhui, a poor province, introduced herself to an older man who was eager to find a marriage partner, but a few days after the wedding took the money promised to her and left.
13. Definitions of reasons of migration are (SSB 1993: 513–14, 558): job transfer (migration due to job change, including demobilization from the military); job assignment (migration due to assignment of jobs by the government after graduation and recruitment of graduates from different schools); industry/business (migration to seek work as laborers or in commercial or trade sectors); study/training (migration to attend schools or to enter training or apprentice programs organized by local work units); seek help from friends/relatives (migration to seek the support of relatives or friends); retirement (cadres or workers leaving work due to retirement or resignation, including retired peasants in rural areas with retirement benefits); joining family (family members following the job transfer of cadres and workers); marriage (migration to live with spouse after marriage); and other (all other reasons). These reasons have been interpreted and categorized in different ways, most commonly as one or more of the following types: plan (institutional), economic, life cycle, family, and social (Chan 1994: 115; Li and Siu 1994; Rowland 1994; Shen and Tong 1992: 202; Tang 1993; Zhai and Ma 1994). Marriage is typically considered a life cycle or

- family reason for migration but is also linked to economic considerations (Ding 1994).
14. The one-percent sample dataset takes villages/towns/neighborhoods as the sampling unit, and includes all households within the sampled units. It contains a total of 11.8 million records (individuals) from 8,438 villages/towns/neighborhoods. All population figures extracted from the sample and reported in this paper have been multiplied by 100, except the number of cases in the logistic regression analysis (Table 4).
 15. Although the 1980 Marriage Law stipulates that the minimum age of marriage for women is 20, the practice of younger marriages continues in China, especially in rural areas (Yang 1991). The age group 15–29 represented 88.1 percent of all female marriage migrants recorded in the 1990 Census.
 16. Comparison of education levels is valid if it is made for a well-defined age group, such as 15–29, since the age range for certain migrants (e.g., retirement) differs significantly from marriage migrants, and since the age range of nonmigrants is large. An older average age is likely related to lower levels of education, a younger to higher levels, since many currently older Chinese women were not encouraged to pursue education or gain access to schooling when they were young. The 15–29 age group accounted for, respectively, 67.9 percent and 62.7 percent of intraprovincial and interprovincial female marriage migrants (Table 1).
 17. The formal definition in the census is “illiterate and semiliterate,” referring to individuals who recognize less than 1,500 Chinese characters and cannot read popular literature nor write a simple letter (SSB 1993: 514).
 18. Gansu, Shaanxi, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangxi, Hebei, Jiangxi, Jilin, Liaoning, Inner Mongolia, and Tianjin.
 19. Hebei, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan, Guangxi, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Ningxia.
 20. These regional delineations are according to the scheme developed in the Seventh Five-Year Plan (1986–1990). Also see Figure 4.
 21. The spatial pattern of gross flows is similar to that of net flows, except that the former also denotes large flows between adjacent provinces of Anhui and Jiangsu, and among Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou.
 22. The one-percent sample data of the 1990 Census are not designed for estimating the volume of migration for subprovincial units. Instead, we use the 100-percent volumes (GDPPCO 1992; JSPPCO 1992), which provide county-level data for female marriage immigrants, but do not differentiate between intraprovincial and interprovincial sources.

23. Wuchuan, Gaozhou, Xinyi, Dianbai, Huazhou, and Luoding.
24. Suining, Feng, Pi, Suqian shi, Siyang, Tongshan, and Shuyang.
25. Agricultural household income per capita is deemed a more appropriate indicator of regional development than wage or employment measures, because the latter were not designed to reflect well-being in rural areas, and because the bulk of female marriage migrants were rural-to-rural migrants. The value 500 yuan is the median of agricultural household income per capita and an appropriate divider of poorer provinces from more developed provinces, and was selected as the cut point of the dummy variable (1: 500 yuan or above; 0: otherwise).

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Correspondence: Department of Geography, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095, email fan@geog.ucla.edu; yqhuang@ucla.edu.