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6. Out to the City and Back to the Village: The Experiences and Contributions of Rural Women Migrating from Sichuan and Anhui

➤➤ A great deal of attention, scholarly and otherwise, has focused on the massive rural-to-urban migration in China since the beginning of economic reforms, but researchers have only recently begun to examine the role of gender in migration.¹ Most of their works highlight structural relations, such as the impact of political, sociocultural, and economic determinants on men's and women's positions in the labor market and on their roles in the village household. Relatively little attention has been given to the agency of migrants and the contributions they make. This is due in part to a lack of empirical field-based information, and also to researchers' general emphasis on broad trends rather than migrants' direct experiences. In this chapter, I use data from a survey of village households in Sichuan and Anhui to examine rural women migrants' experiences. The data consist of first-person and detailed accounts by migrants of their migration and job search processes and of their views about a variety of issues. The survey is a rare and valuable source of qualitative data that is uniquely suitable for studying migrants' experiences and contributions. I compare male and female migrants in broad terms, but I highlight the experiences of rural women.

Most Chinese rural women who migrate to work in urban areas maintain close ties with their home village. The vast majority are young and single, and they return to the countryside upon marriage. The experiences

that they have gained during migrant work and the contributions they make to their village enable them to be potential sources and agents of social and economic change in China's countryside.

In this chapter, I emphasize four aspects of migrant women's experiences. First, I examine the economic motivations and contributions of women migrants and stress that rural women, when given the opportunity to pursue off-farm work, are as economically active as their male counterparts, and that their remittances² are important means for improving their families' well-being. Second, I illustrate the central role female migrants play in forging networks of rural-to-urban migrants. These networks are highly gendered. They facilitate the migration of inexperienced women migrants but also channel them into segregated jobs and homogenize their urban experiences. Third, I show that urban work experiences can empower women migrants and enable them to become potential agents of social change in rural areas. Fourth, I argue that the sociocultural constraints facing rural women remain powerful limitations on their economic contributions and their agency in fostering social change. Central to these constraints are expectations of marriage and the traditional gender roles within marriage.

THE SICHUAN AND ANHUI SURVEY

The Sichuan and Anhui Survey was conducted by the Research Center for the Rural Economy in the Ministry of Agriculture in 1995.³ Sichuan in western China and Anhui in central China are two major origins of rural-to-urban migrants, especially those headed for destinations in eastern and southern China. Though Anhui is geographically closer to China's developed eastern seaboard, it shares with Sichuan relatively low levels of economic development and a large surplus of rural labor. The survey consisted of two parts. The first part involved three villages each from two counties in Sichuan and two counties in Anhui. In each village, 15 migrant households (where one or more household members had migrant work experience) and 10 nonmigrant households were randomly selected. A total of 300 households from the 12 anonymous villages were interviewed. The interviews were conducted during the Spring Festival (late January and early February 1995), a time of year when many migrants returned to the home village. The result is a valuable volume of transcribed material (the Interview Records),⁴ consisting of first-person accounts of migration, labor market processes, and farming and evaluations of migrant life and other household and family issues. The second part of the survey consists of systematic data on 2,820 households in Sichuan and Anhui (the Household

Survey) and provides supplementary information about labor migrants from the two provinces.

In this chapter, I focus on the transcribed material from the first part of the Sichuan and Anhui Survey—the Interview Records. Specifically, I examine the records of interviewees⁵ who migrated to urban areas or their outskirts to work and are therefore considered rural-to-urban labor migrants. Based on the migrants' narratives, I conduct two types of analysis. First, I reconstruct aggregate patterns of migration processes and consequences for the purpose of comparing male and female migrants. Second, I use women migrants' narratives to interpret their experiences, contributions, and constraints.

In the Interview Records, male migrants are more highly represented, older, and more likely to be married than their female counterparts. Of the 191 migrant interviewees⁶ included, 160 or 83.8 percent are men and only 31 (16.2 percent) are women. The average age is 24.7 for female migrants and 31.7 for male migrants, and the age group 15–24 accounts for 75.9 percent of female migrants and only 25.0 percent of male migrants. The majority of male migrants (78.1 percent), but only a small proportion of female migrants (22.6 percent), is married. The high proportion of male migrants may in part be due to a smaller number of migrant women returning to the home village during the Spring Festival, but there is no compelling evidence that this is the case. Rather, the sex ratio is consistent with the conventional wisdom that more men than women participate in rural-to-urban migration. Women's lower representation in migration is also related to migrant women's age concentration, which reflects the sociocultural traditions that govern the life cycle of rural females.⁷ In rural China, it is common for young women not to pursue education beyond junior secondary school. Many, in fact, quit after primary school; and a significant proportion is illiterate. They are too young to get married, and their labor may not be central to the family's farm work. During the several years between school and marriage, therefore, they constitute surplus labor. If they do pursue migrant work during these years, however, they are under pressure to return to get married when they reach their mid-twenties.⁸ Marriage almost always signals a termination of migrant work.⁹ As a result, the vast majority of female labor migrants is single. For men, on the contrary, marriage may not be a deterrent to migration but can actually facilitate continued migrant work. I shall elaborate these processes in greater detail in the "Constraints" section.

Table 6.1 describes the demographic characteristics, destinations, and migrant work of the 31 women migrants included in the Interview Records.

Table 6.1 Characteristics of Women Migrants

Number	Village	Age	Marital			Destination	Migrant Work
			Status	Education	Education		
1	Sichuan, Village 1	32	married	primary	Wuliang, Jiangsu	machinery factory worker	
2	Sichuan, Village 1	23	single	NA	Huizhou, Guangdong	electronics factory worker	
3	Sichuan, Village 2	18	single	junior secondary	Shenzhen, Guangdong	eyeglasses factory worker	
4	Sichuan, Village 2	30	married	primary	Dongguan, Guangdong	accessory factory worker	
5	Sichuan, Village 2	29	married	primary	Dongguan, Guangdong	toy factory worker	
6	Sichuan, Village 3	26	single	primary	Guangzhou, Guangdong	metal factory worker	
7	Sichuan, Village 3	41	married	junior secondary	Bohu, Guangdong	vegetable farm worker	
8	Sichuan, Village 3	18	single	primary	Guangdong	art products factory worker	
9	Sichuan, Village 4	21	single	junior secondary	Xiamen, Fujian	electronics factory worker	
10	Sichuan, Village 4	22	single	junior secondary	Guangdong	shoe factory clerk	
11	Sichuan, Village 6	19	single	junior secondary	Erneishan, Sichuan	hotel service worker	
12	Anhui, Village 1	23	single	junior secondary	Tianjin	food processing factory worker	
13	Anhui, Village 1	16	single	illiterate	Wuxi, Jiangsu	restaurant worker	
14	Anhui, Village 1	21	single	junior secondary	Chongming, Shanghai	garments factory worker	
15	Anhui, Village 1	20	single	primary	Luyang, Henan	shoe factory worker	
16	Anhui, Village 2	22	single	junior secondary	Beijing	nanny	
17	Anhui, Village 2	23	single	junior secondary	Suzhou, Jiangsu	tour guide	
18	Anhui, Village 2	47	married	illiterate	Beijing	nanny	
19	Anhui, Village 2	46	married	illiterate	Beijing	nanny	
20	Anhui, Village 3	22	single	primary	Changzhou, Jiangsu	shoe factory worker	

Table 6.1 (continued)

Number	Village	Age	Marital			Destination	Migrant Work
			Status	Education	Education		
21	Anhui, Village 4	NA	single	NA	Changzhou, Jiangsu	garments factory worker	
22	Anhui, Village 5	18	single	junior secondary	Shanghai	painter	
23	Anhui, Village 5	20	single	illiterate	Changchun, Jilin	garments factory worker	
24	Anhui, Village 5	20	single	junior secondary	Changshu, Jiangsu	seamstress	
25	Anhui, Village 6	24	single	primary	Changzhou, Jiangsu	tailoring business owner	
26	Anhui, Village 6	24	single	NA	Shanghai	grocery store salesperson	
27	Anhui, Village 6	23	single	illiterate	Shanghai	restaurant worker	
28	Anhui, Village 6	23	single	illiterate	Shanghai	nanny	
29	Anhui, Village 6	NA	single	NA	Danyang, Jiangsu	fishery worker	
30	Anhui, Village 6	22	single	primary	Wuxi, Jiangsu	garments factory worker	
31	Anhui, Village 6	23	single	illiterate	Changzhou, Jiangsu	construction worker	

NA = not available

Among them, only six were married. Their ages ranged from 29 to 47. The 25 single women range in age from 16 to 26. Regardless of age and marital status, the women migrants' educational attainment was low, with seven illiterate, nine primary, 11 junior secondary, and four unknown. This is a profile similar to that reported in macro-level studies.¹⁰ In the next section, I shall examine the spatial patterns of migration for both men and women and highlight the economic motivations and contributions of women migrants.

ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The Sichuan and Anhui data record patterns of migration specific to gender. Contrary to conventional wisdom that women migrate shorter distances than men, women migrants in the Interview Records migrated long distances to work. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 document the destination

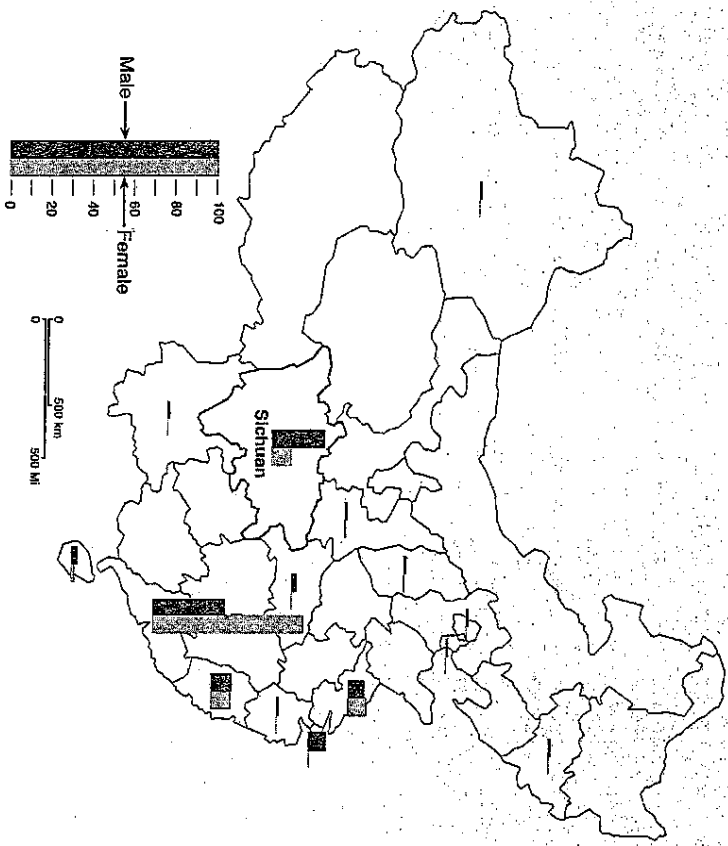


Figure 6.1 Destinations of Sichuan Migrants (percent)

provinces of male and female migrants. Clearly, except for the home province, eastern coastal provinces are more popular than inland provinces. Sichuan migrants favored Guangdong, Fujian, Shanghai, and Jiangsu. Anhui migrants were especially attracted to the adjacent provinces of Jiangsu, Shanghai, and Zhejiang. Male and female migration patterns differed in two ways. First, the home provinces were important destinations for men, accounting for respectively 25.3 percent and 24.7 percent of male migrants from Sichuan and Anhui. By contrast, only one Sichuan woman migrated to work within her home province, and none of the Anhui women migrants worked in their home province. This difference suggests that women migrants are at least as likely as, and perhaps more likely than, male migrants to pursue work in distant destinations. Second, female migrants are more concentrated in their migration desti-

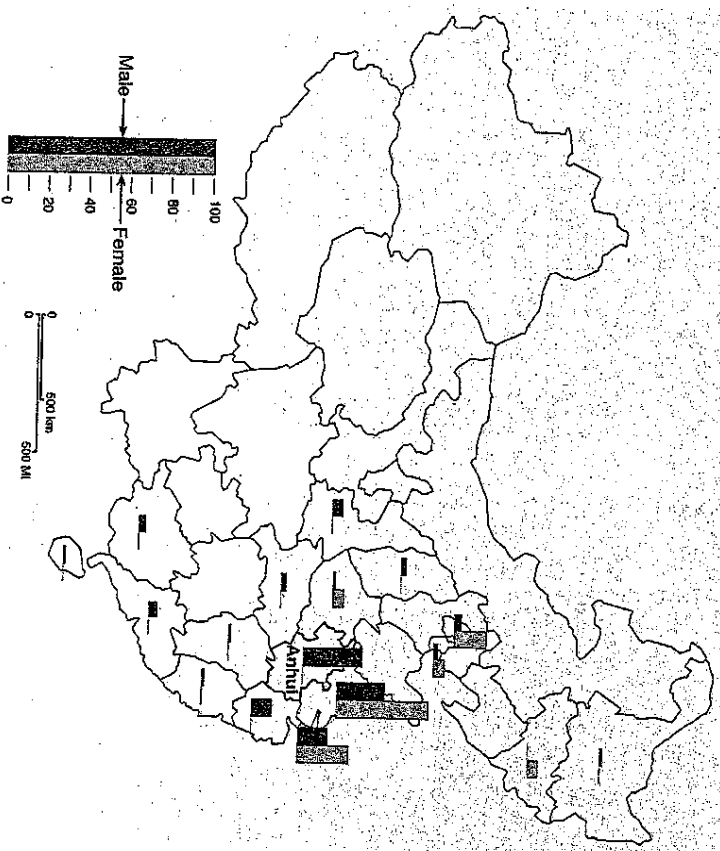


Figure 6.2 Destinations of Anhui Migrants (percent)

nations. Guangdong (72.7 percent) was especially popular among Sichuan women, and Jiangsu (45.0 percent) and Shanghai (25.0 percent) were favored by Anhui women. It is possible that a smaller sample of women compared with men resulted in the former's more concentrated distribution. But table 6.1 shows that women migrants' destinations were mostly large cities, such as Shanghai, Beijing, Changzhou, and Guangzhou, or special economic zones/regions, such as Dongguan and Xiamen, suggesting that they were attracted to places known for economic and employment opportunities. Though male migrants were also attracted to these places, their destinations were more dispersed. The concentration of women migrants' destinations highlights the role of gendered social networks, which are further examined in the next section, in channeling migration streams to specific destinations.

In their narratives, migrants mentioned three types of reason for migration. These are detailed in table 6.2. "Push" refers to the lack of resources, especially farmland, in the village and migrants' or migrant households' inability to make ends meet based on village resources; "pull" refers to the desire to increase income for improving family well-being; and "noneconomic reasons" refers to motives not directly related to income. These three types of reason are not mutually exclusive, but push reasons emphasize the village's lack of resources, pull reasons focus on economic betterment expected from migrant work, and noneconomic reasons highlight factors other than economic benefits. Interviewees often mentioned more than one reason, and therefore all responses are included in the percentage calculation. More women's responses (47.7 percent) than men's responses (34.2 percent) referred to push reasons, and more men's responses (50.9 percent) than women's responses (34.1 percent) fell under pull reasons. Similar proportions of men's and women's responses involved noneconomic reasons. These results suggest that economic motives were prominent among both male and female migrants, and that women's migration was more likely a result of economic difficulties and the lack of village resources. "Surplus labor," for example, indicates that some women's labor in farming is rendered unnecessary because there is little farmland to begin with. These women are, in essence, surplus agricultural labor. This Sichuan woman's comment (#6 in table 6.1)¹¹ is similar to many young women migrants' remarks: "In our family there is plenty of labor but very little land. I had nothing to do at home, and so I decided to find migrant work."

More than one quarter of migrants indicated that economic reasons like "job opportunities" and "better income" explained their selection of migration destination (table 6.2). However, the social network consisting of "fellow villagers, relatives or friends" was the leading reason for the majority of male and female migrants to select their migration destination. By contrast, "proximity to home village" was not an important factor for either group.

The average duration of migrant work was 9.3 months for male migrants and 10.7 months for female migrants. The difference suggests, first, that men are more likely than women to return to the home village during the busy farming season. Indeed, a higher proportion of men (33.6 percent) than women (12.9 percent) returned to help with farming during 1994. Second, it suggests that women are as economically active during their period of migrant work as men.

Women migrants, however, earn considerably less than their male counterparts. The average income of female migrants was 355 yuan, a mere 55.3

Table 6.2 Reason for Migration and Choosing Migration Destination

	Men	Women
Reason for Migration (Multiple)		
Push		
insufficient farmland or food	34.2	47.7
education fees for family members	17.9	18.2
to pay off debts	4.3	9.1
surplus labor	6.0	2.3
	6.0	18.2
Pull		
increase income	50.9	34.1
build new house	41.9	31.8
marriage expenses	6.0	0.0
	3.0	2.3
Noneconomic reasons		
broaden horizon and learn skills	13.2	13.6
dislike farm work	9.8	11.4
	3.4	2.3
Other	1.7	4.5
N	234	44
Reason for Choosing Migration Destination		
fellow villagers, relatives, or friends	58.4	60.7
better income	14.6	10.7
job opportunities	10.9	17.9
proximity to home village	3.6	3.6
other	12.4	7.1
N	137	28
Duration of Migration in 1994 (Mean Months)		
	9.3	10.7
N	154	31

percent of the average income of male migrants (table 6.3). This discrepancy is likely related to a persistent gender gap in educational attainment in rural China, to women migrants' young age, and to labor market segmentation in urban areas. In the Interview Records, 64.8 percent of male migrants, compared with only 40.7 percent of female migrants, had junior secondary education. Women migrants' young age is likely correlated with lack of seniority and experience, and hence, lower income. Moreover, the urban labor market is segmented in such a manner that women migrants are highly represented in gender-segregated and low-paying jobs.¹²

Despite the discrepancy in income, male migrants and female migrants alike saved an average of about 61 percent of their income (table 6.3), indicating that women spend less during their period of migrant work. The ability of female migrants to save at a rate similar to men's suggests that

Table 6.3 Income and Saving

	Men	Women
Monthly Income (mean <i>yuan</i>)	642	355
N	129	23
Monthly Saving (mean <i>yuan</i>)	378	255
% of income	61.4	61.3
N	100	16
Annual Saving or Remittance (mean <i>yuan</i>)	3,783	2,178
N	127	24
Use of Saving or Remittance (multiple, %)		
building or renovating house	31.9	21.2
agricultural input	19.2	15.2
living expenses	11.8	18.2
education fees for family members	11.4	12.1
to pay off debts	10.0	6.1
marriage expenses	2.2	9.1
future use	6.6	3.0
other	7.0	15.2
N	229	33

women are as economically driven as men to use their migrant income to support the village household. The average annual remittance of female migrants—taken or sent home, mostly during the Spring Festival—was 2,178 *yuan*, which was 57.6 percent of that of male migrants. That percentage is higher than the income percentage (55.3 percent), which is probably due to female migrants' longer duration of migrant work during the year.

Household and living expenses consume the bulk of the remittances from both male and female migrants. Some migrants have multiple uses for the remittances, and all these uses are included in the computation for table 6.3. "Building or renovating a house" was mentioned most often, followed by "agricultural input," "living expenses," "education fees for family members," and "to pay off debts." Their order of importance was similar between male and female migrants. Except for "building or renovating a house," the differences in percentage points between men and women were less than 10, again suggesting that male and female migrants have relatively similar priorities in the use of their savings. Expenses in the future, including "marriage expenses," "future use," and "other," accounted for relatively small proportions of the responses. A higher proportion of female responses (9.1 percent) than male responses (2.2 percent) for "mar-

riage expenses" suggests that dowry, in addition to bride-price, is a common concern. "Future use" and "other" refer, for example, to savings for opening a business.

The above statistics suggest that, when given an opportunity to pursue migrant work, women do make important contributions to improving household well-being. The story of a forty-seven-year-old Anhui woman (#18) illustrates the economic contribution one migrant can make:

The big flood in 1991 destroyed our harvest. There wasn't enough food for the family. My husband is not a tactful person and he would get into trouble if he worked in the city. Instead, I decided to look for migrant work. My departure would also save the family food. After the 1992 Spring Festival, I followed a fellow villager who had worked as a nanny in Beijing, and worked there until harvest that year. After helping my older son to build his house, we were again in debt. So in 1993 my daughter and I went to Beijing again. . . . I returned for the harvest in 1994, and after that my younger son also followed me to Beijing and worked as a kitchen hand in a restaurant. . . . My husband and my mother-in-law take care of the farming and housework. In addition to the money we sent home, at the end of the year we brought home 1,900 *yuan*. We paid back some debts, built three rooms, and bought a cow. . . . After the Spring Festival the three of us will go out again, because the family still needs money. We still have some debts; we should get prepared for my son to get married; my daughter will be marrying soon and we need to prepare for her dowry.

In this household, the wife was not only the main provider of funds for renovating the house, paying debts, and investing in agricultural input but also the pioneer migrant who paved the way for other family members to pursue migrant work. This type of "reversed" division of labor, in which the wife does migrant work and the husband stays in the home village, is rare but was shared by all six married women in the Interview Records. I shall elaborate the context and dynamics of such an arrangement in the "Constraints" section.

More common among female migrants are young, single women. Traditionally, rural women's labor in housework and farming is not remunerated, their lives revolve around the village, and they have few opportunities for social or economic mobility. Migrant work, on the other hand, is rewarded financially, increases rural women's exposure to new ideas and

opportunities, and enables them to make a significant economic contribution to the family. This Anhui woman's (#15) determination to migrate, when she was only 15, helped her family tremendously:

After my father passed away, we had accumulated a debt of 6,000 *yuan*. After finishing primary school I stayed home to work on the farm. But farm work barely feeds my family and does not produce income. In 1990, I secretly borrowed 40 *yuan* from a neighbor and planned to go to Luoyang to find work. My mother found out and tried to stop me. I finally left with tears in my eyes. I just wanted to make some money. . . . This year I brought home 800 *yuan*, which was all used to pay back our debt.

Migrant work is an important opportunity for wage earning that is not available to most rural women, as illustrated by this eighteen-year-old Sichuan woman (#3) who worked in an eyeglasses factory in Shenzhen:

We have very little farmland, and so I wasn't of much use staying in the village. All the young people in our village were working outside [the village]. I too became restless and did not want to stay home. By working as a migrant I can at least support myself rather than depending on my parents. . . . How much did I bring home? I am embarrassed to say. I brought home very little money. . . . let's say 300 *yuan*. Some of my friends cannot even support themselves and need their parents to send them money.

This woman was not under pressure to support the family, which was probably a reason for her small remittance. She seems to have been driven more by the desire to make productive use of her labor and to earn her own living. When young women cannot be economically productive and have no access to wage work in the village, migrant work becomes an important, perhaps the only, means for them to generate earnings for themselves.

While most rural migrants are employed in wage work, the more adventurous are able to find opportunities to be creative and enterprising. This twenty-four-year-old woman (#25) from Anhui only had primary-level education. But after seven years of work as a migrant, she managed to start a tailoring business in a large city:

I started to do migrant work in 1988. In 1994 a *laoxiang*¹³ introduced my sister and me to work in a clothing factory in

Changzhou. But the boss delayed paying us for eight months. In the end, my sister and I decided to leave the factory, rent a place, and start our own tailoring business. We wrote to our home village and recruited six young women to help us. Even though my sister and I did not make any money in the first eight months of last year, in the last four months we each made 3,000 *yuan*, and together we were able to bring home 4,000 *yuan*.

This young woman's experience suggests that migrant work is fraught with exploitative practices as well as opportunities. Her enterprising ability is perhaps an exception to the popular image of women migrant workers as docile, obedient, and tolerant. Nevertheless, sending home remittances from migrant work is something shared by and expected of almost all migrant women.

The evidence described here suggests that rural women migrants do travel long distances to destinations that promise economic opportunities, that they are as economically active as men during periods of migrant work, and that they actively send home remittances to improve the village household's well-being. In other words, migrant work has become an important means for rural women to make efficient use of their labor, to engage in wage work, and to perform as economic agents for the family.

MIGRANT NETWORKS

Research on China has highlighted social networks as an important source of information for migrants.¹⁴ Evidence from the Interview Records shows that women migrants play an important role in forging gendered networks, facilitating the migration of other rural women, and directing other women to specific gender-segregated urban work.

In rural China, fellow villagers and relatives play a very important role in providing information about possible migration destinations and job opportunities. Table 6.4 shows that respectively 92.3 percent and 68.9 percent of female and male migrants in the Interview Records undertook their migration together with fellow villagers, family members, or relatives. The very small proportion—7.7 percent—of women who migrated on their own suggests that company was crucial to them, and that the journey away from home can be a factor in impeding migration. Many rural Chinese, especially women, have never traveled to places far from their home village and must rely on people they know who are familiar with the route. Furthermore, there is a widespread and valid perception that the journey

Table 6.4 Migration Company and Job Information

	Men	Women
Migration Company		
fellow villagers	26.7	57.7
family or relatives	42.2	34.6
no company	30.2	7.7
other	0.9	0.0
N	116	26
Information About Work		
fellow villagers	23.6	25.0
family or relatives	27.9	28.6
self	33.6	17.9
recruitment	3.6	10.7
other	9.3	0.0
N	140	28

to and from the destination is dangerous. Migrants are especially wary of robbers. Traveling with someone they trust is a risk-reducing strategy. To this thirty-two-year-old Sichuan woman (#1), the trip from her home village to Wujiang, Jiangsu, where she worked as a machinery factory worker was almost overwhelming:

I left the village right after the Spring Festival of 1994. I went with my cousin and five other fellow villagers. We took the train to Zhengzhou, changed to Xuzhou, Nanjing, and then Suzhou. From Suzhou we took the bus to this town in Wujiang. That was my first time journeying a long way from home. We made so many connections that I felt dizzy. The entire trip I followed my cousin closely and didn't dare to move around lest I got lost. The trains and buses were very crowded and disorderly. We had some problems with the connections, but luckily we didn't come across any robbers during the trip.

This Anhui woman's (#21) encounter with robbers likely added to her concern over the migration journey:

The journeys to work and back home are unsafe. My fellow villager and I [traveled from Changzhou to Nanjing and] took the bus to return from Nanjing to the village. At three in the morning, four robbers got onto the bus and searched our belongings. Fortunately, my bag was with the driver and wasn't taken away.

But my fellow villager's valuables were robbed. Not only that, the robbers beat her up because she argued with them.

Not only do fellow villagers, family members, and relatives provide company during the migration journey, they are also the main source of job information for the majority of migrants (table 6.4). Rural migrants have weak affiliations with the state and little access to institutional support.¹⁵ Other than the more experienced migrants, rural Chinese have few means to obtain and evaluate information about the urban labor market. Even if state or urban agencies are available, migrants may still prefer to use social networks as a more reliable source of information. The prominence of specific destinations, such as Shanghai and Changzhou among those from Village 6 in Anhui (table 6.1), for example, suggests that social networks give rise to migration streams from the home village to the destinations familiar to experienced migrants.

Social networks play an important role in directing migrants not only to specific destinations but also to specific types of jobs. After the Spring Festival, in particular, inexperienced migrants follow fellow villagers to find work. Often, these informal groups are determined by gender. For example, this twenty-two-year-old Anhui woman (#16) was first recruited by an employment agency to work as a nanny in Beijing. As a pioneer migrant, she became a magnet and guide to other potential female migrants in the village:

In the past several years, I have brought more than twenty young women from my home village to Beijing to work as nannies. . . . After I returned to the village this time [during the Spring Festival], another ten or so women asked me to take them to Beijing.

Sometimes, employers use migrants as a conduit to recruit more migrant workers from the home village. This twenty-two-year-old Anhui woman (#20) who worked in a shoe factory in Changzhou played such a role:

My boss asked me to introduce several fellow villagers to him. All the workers in that factory are women. Several young women from the neighboring village also want to join me.

Many migrants who have benefited from urban work are willing to be purveyors of information for fellow villagers. In fact, they have a sense of obligation to their neighbors, further reinforcing the role of networks in directing migrants to specific types of work. A forty-six-year-old Anhui

woman (#19) working as a nanny in Beijing remarked, "I have always wanted to connect fellow villagers to good jobs. When I fail I feel very bad."

Relatively few female migrants found their job on their own (17.9 percent), compared with their male counterparts (33.6 percent) (table 6.4). This discrepancy suggests that women migrants are more reliant on information provided by others, via social networks or recruiters. Fellow villagers, family, or relatives were the main sources of information for 53.6 percent of female migrants and 51.5 percent of male migrants. Recruitment—referring to formal recruitment by employers and employment agencies of labor in rural areas—accounted for the employment of 10.7 percent of female migrants but only 3.6 percent of male migrants, reflecting the efforts by some employers to target rural women workers. Social networks play a role even in migrants' access to recruitment information. This twenty-two-year-old Sichuan woman (#10), for example, learned about a recruitment opportunity by a Taiwan-invested shoe factory through her relative:

One of my relatives is the manager of an employment agency. In 1992, through him I learned that a well-established factory in Guangdong was recruiting workers. So I applied and was selected.

Furthermore, social networks connect migrant women to employment agencies at the destination. For example, all four nannies in the Interview Records traveled to their destinations with other fellow villagers and contacted specific employment agencies as a group. Their job search experiences, including details such as how much they were charged by the agency and how long it took to find an employer, were very similar. This Anhui woman's (#28) account was largely echoed by other nannies:

In 1990, I followed four young women from the home village to go to Shanghai. Of the 50 *yuan* that my family gave me, only 20 *yuan* was left when I reached Shanghai. We paid one *yuan* per day to stay in a nanny employment agency. After three days I was matched with a family who needed a nanny for their child. The family and I each contributed one half of the 14-*yuan* fee charged by the employment agency.

Both the marginal institutional positions of migrants and the prominent role of social networks have fostered the channeling of such workers into specific types of jobs.¹⁶ To rural migrants, the urban labor market consists of segments specifically targeting their labor rather than a range of oppor-

Table 6.5 Top Three Occupations of Migrants

Rank	Men	% of All		
		Nonagricultural Occupations	Women	Nonagricultural Occupations
1	construction worker	35.6	manufacturing worker	51.6
2	manufacturing worker	20.6	nanny	12.9
3	construction contractor	7.5	service worker	12.9
Sum		63.8		77.4
N		160		31

tunities. Their value to this market is tied to their membership in a labor force that is reputedly hardworking, tolerant, cheap, and disposable.¹⁷ Without local household registration (*hukou*), they are the "outsiders" who are brought in only to satisfy urban demand for workers for low-paying and less prestigious jobs.¹⁸ Much of the existing research on migration in China has emphasized how urban labor practices and regulations limit migrants' job access, and little attention has been paid to the role of social networks in fostering labor market segmentation. Through such networks, new migrants replicate the work of earlier migrants. Furthermore, social networks are often gendered, and they reinforce the sorting process that matches employers with workers and deepens segmentation and gender segregation of work. This is a process that homogenizes rather than diversifies migrants' experiences. Thus, migrants in the Interview Records were highly concentrated in a few occupations, namely, construction worker, manufacturing worker, and construction contractor for men and manufacturing worker, nanny, and service worker for women (table 6.5). This type of gendered sorting is widely known among migrants. For example, a twenty-three-year-old Sichuan woman (#2) who worked in an electronics factory in Huizhou, Guangdong commented: "Most men [migrants] from our village work in construction in Jiangsu, and most women [migrants] work in Guangdong factories."

Most of the manufacturing jobs available to female migrants involve labor-intensive work in factories producing such goods as electronics and garments.¹⁹ Domestic work is another popular occupation, especially for older women. Two of the four migrant women above forty years of age were nannies. Service work in hotels or restaurants was also quite popular. In addition, two women were hired as agricultural workers in the rural outskirts of urban areas (#7 and #29). Agriculture is the least preferred work and is usually picked up by migrants who have failed to find other work in urban areas. Many employers in urban areas target young, single migrant

women, because they are perceived to be more dexterous, efficient, capable of handling delicate work, and easier to manage than men or older women.²⁰ The forty-one-year-old woman who worked as a vegetable farm worker (#7), for example, was deemed too old for preferable factory work:

Vegetable farming is hard, poorly paid work. Most people prefer not to do such work. But I have no choice. I am too old for factory work. Factories won't hire me. The minute they see my identity card they turn me away.

Administrative positions are rarely open to rural migrants. Only one woman (#10) in the Interview Records had an administrative position, as a clerk in a Taiwan-invested shoe factory in Zhongshan. Most rural migrants have little job mobility, and in this regard her experience is rather exceptional:

The factory provides training to new employees. After that, they assign employees to different types of work. Opportunity certainly plays an important role. I was initially assigned to manage the shop floor. After three months, the factory head noticed that I did very well and asked me to do some administrative work. . . . I am happy that I am a clerk rather than an ordinary worker.

The networks that facilitate migration and the search for a job remain strong in the destination. For example, the pioneer migrant from Anhui (#16) who brought more than twenty women to Beijing maintained close contact with most of her fellow villagers:

Every Sunday I go out with 15 or 16 *laoxiangs*, all of whom have worked as nannies in Beijing. We go to the park, go shopping, or go to the movies. It's a lot of fun. . . . Presently, some of my *laoxiangs* continue to work as nannies, some are washing dishes in restaurants, and some have become food vendors. Three women married *getihu* [private entrepreneurs] or farmers from the Beijing suburbs. One woman died from a gas leakage while working in a restaurant. Her family received only 3,000 *yuan* in compensation. I have lost contact with three other women.

Among some women migrants a sense of sisterhood and mutual responsibility has developed, further reinforcing gendered networks. Such networks can also evolve into something resembling a collective front for negotiating options in the labor market. Rather than functioning as an individual job seeker, the migrant may become part of a group that works its way through the complex urban labor market as a single unit. After work-

ing in Shanghai as a nanny for four years, this Anhui woman (#28) contemplated changing jobs:

Since 1990, I have gone to Shanghai every year to work as a nanny, and I've been with seven different families. Last year, after the Spring Festival, three other women from my home village and I decided we wanted to try out factory work. So we traveled to Nanjing together, and then took the train to Changzhou and entered a private enterprise. After nine days, we all felt that factory work was too exhausting, and so the four of us returned to Shanghai and continued working as nannies.

Furthermore, social networks bind migrant women together so that many are part of a native place-based community that serves social functions not provided by urban natives. This Anhui woman (#12) who worked in a food-processing factory in Tianjin said:

Workers in that factory came from eight different provinces, including many *tongxiang* from Anhui. We take care of one another and do things together—like taking photographs and going to karaoke bars. Every week all the *tongxiang* have a party, and sometimes we invite friends from other provinces as well. In the four years I have been at the factory, no one has ever harassed me. Even though I could have made more money working in another factory, I do not want to give up my job. It's fine that I make less money than I could have. Fellow workers in that factory are mostly in their late teens and early twenties, and are friendly and full of life. As a result, factory life is a bit like campus life. We seldom interact with the Tianjin natives.

There is no question that networks—especially those involving *laoxiang* and fellow villagers—are crucial for migrant workers to endure the dreaded migration journey, to find work, and to enjoy social and community life. Moreover, gender influences the formation and composition of such networks, with the ironic effect of both homogenizing migrants' experiences and occupations and providing a basis for companionship and support.

SOCIAL CHANGE

To rural women in China, migrant work presents more than just an important opportunity for wage work. By removing themselves from rural areas, at least temporarily, migrant women not only earn money for themselves

but also are exposed to new ideas, which may infuse village life with economic and social changes.

Exposure to new ideas leads some women to contemplate ways of investing long-term. Those who are enterprising may use their earnings to broaden their future options. This twenty-two-year-old Sichuan woman (#10) wanted to start a business in the future:

Young people should try to go somewhere and increase their exposure. Life is more meaningful if you are making money rather than relying on your parents. . . . I send home 500-550 *yuan* every month. Over the past two years I have sent home a total of 7,200 *yuan*. . . . I still want to work for another two or three years, to save up some money in order to start a business in the future.

Similarly, this twenty-three-year-old Anhui woman (#12) planned to invest her savings:

In 1994 I made about 3,500 *yuan*. I saved every cent and plan to use it to buy a store in town (20,000 *yuan*). My boyfriend is from this county. After we get married we can rent out the store. . . . Migrant work really helps increase our exposure.

To many rural women, migration may offer the only opportunity to engage in nonagricultural labor, and is therefore especially attractive to those who dislike farm work. This nineteen-year-old Sichuan woman (#11) was happy to work in a hotel in Emeishan:

I want to have a new life. I don't want to live the rest of my life as a farmer, trapped in this poor village like my parents. . . . After many attempts to persuade my father to permit me to do migrant work, he finally agreed. He talked to a relative who found the connection for me to work in this hotel.

Women migrants who engage in wage work rather than staying in the village as surplus agricultural labor feel an increased sense of independence from the family. This twenty-one-year-old Sichuan woman (#9) commented:

The past two years I was in Guangzhou I didn't save up much money. Still, I found the experience rewarding. I earned my own living. I was naïve when I was staying in the village. When I was away from home I had to be independent and make my own decisions.

Many migrant women commented on their changes in lifestyle and outlook as a result of migrant work experience. A twenty-three-year-old Anhui woman (#12) summarized these changes:

Many changes have occurred to migrants. They turn huts into large houses, dress better, and are more open. Those who stay behind look less smart. As far as meeting and seeing people of the opposite sex, migrants are more open and nonmigrant women tend to remain feudalistic (*Jengzian*). Many migrants have learned some skills and figured out a way to make money, and they build houses and buy electrical appliances. They eat better now, and kill a pig during the Spring Festival. Villagers used to be simple-minded, but are now more cunning. . . . Older cadres in the village are too slow and conservative. They should retire and let younger people do their job.

Her remarks suggest that migrants have not only improved their material well-being but also incorporated new views and lifestyles into village life. Her critique of cadres is an example of migrants reflecting on and evaluating rural life in relation to their increased exposure. Furthermore, migrant women may perceive nonmigrants as unsophisticated. This twenty-three-year-old Anhui woman (#27), for example, felt distant from nonmigrants:

When I return home to the village I usually hang out with other young women migrants. I have little to talk about with nonmigrant women. We have different lifestyles, and we don't see eye to eye. To us [migrants], nonmigrant women wear reds and greens²¹ and look unrefined. To them, our permed hair makes us look strange and alien.

Migrants bring back elements of the urban lifestyle, especially from places where they work.²² This woman who worked in Beijing (#16) commented:

Beijing is wonderful. It is big, sophisticated, and it has so many things not found in the village. . . . Through migrant work we learn skills and knowledge and make money. . . . Our quality of life has improved as well. In particular, we dress much better now. Migrant work increases our exposure, so that we talk more politely and we become wiser. Villagers imitate migrants. They buy western-style furniture and decorate their homes following the styles in Beijing. . . . Villagers are now more concerned with sanitation. Their taste for food has also changed. I don't respect

those who prefer staying home doing nothing to migrant work. More than 90 percent of the young women in our village do not go to school. When they go to Beijing, they look especially dumb and are likely to get into trouble.

Critical evaluations such as the above may prompt migrants to make changes to the family and to the village. This twenty-two-year-old Sichuan woman's (#10) comment further reinforces the notion that returned migrants become agents of social change in the village:

After migrants have been to more developed areas, their attitudes change. They become dissatisfied with their situation and want to improve their family's well-being by working harder.

Among married women, the most significant changes brought about by migration relate to the division of labor within the household, whereby one spouse does migrant work and the other takes care of the farmland and housework. Such an arrangement is necessary if the married couple wishes to improve the well-being of its household via migrant work, without giving up farm work. Giving up contract land is not common, especially since most rural migrants do not have access to permanent residence in urban areas and so must eventually return to the village. The most widely adopted division of labor is one where the husband does migrant work and the wife stays in the village. Of the 126 married migrant households in the Interview Records, 69.1 percent were split households where the husband was the migrant worker and the wife stayed in the village, 26.2 percent were households where both the husband and the wife were migrant workers, and less than 5 percent (six) were split households where the wife migrated and the husband stayed in the village (see also migrant #18's narrative in the "Economic Motivations and Contributions" section). The last type of arrangement—the "reversed" division of labor—is the exception rather than the rule, but does suggest that migrant work opens up alternative forms of household division of labor that deviate from traditional norms of village life. Women engaging in this "reversed" division of labor are not only wage earners but also empowered by their economic contributions to the family. After seven years of migrant work, this Anhui woman (#19) decided to return to the home that she helped build:

My husband is a contented farmer. In 1987, my three daughters were still small. We were very poor then, and so I decided to find migrant work in Beijing. . . . Later I also brought my daughter along to Beijing to work in a factory. . . . I am return-

ing to the village now, because I want to help my husband in farm work. During the past several years my daughter and I brought home 8,000 *yuan*, which we used to build four big rooms. I am very happy about that.

In short, the Interview Records indicate that women migrants have gained a sense of independence and exposure to new ideas as well as income, and are thus better equipped to plan their future, to critically evaluate rural life and traditions, and to engage in alternative gender divisions of labor. All of this suggests that women migrants are potential agents of social change in rural China.

CONSTRAINTS

Despite the many contributions women migrants make to their families, their fellow villagers, and their villages, they continue to be constrained by deep-rooted sociocultural traditions as well as an inferior institutional status. These constraints limit their opportunities to engage in nonvillage, nonagricultural, and wage work, and undermine their agency and ability to contribute to the village and to foster social change. In this section I focus on the constraints posed by the patrilocal marriage system and expectations of marital roles in the household.

First of all, the pressure for rural women to get married escalates once they have reached their early twenties. Parents are eager for their daughters to return to the village before they are past "marriageable age." A twenty-three-year-old Sichuan woman (#2) who worked in Huizhou described the pressure from her parents:

My parents think that I have reached the age for getting married and are anxious that I find a husband. They don't want me to do migrant work anymore. But I still want to work some more and make some money. I like my work and I like Huizhou, but I won't find a husband there. I'll find someone in my native place to marry. It's more convenient and it's safer.

Women migrants in the Interview Records almost unanimously agreed that they should return to the countryside to find a husband. Though young rural women may desire to marry urbanites in order to "leave the farm for good" (*tiaochu nongmen*), their inferior backgrounds and lack of urban residence render them among the least desirable in the urban marriage market.²³ In addition, most rural women consider finding a husband in

their native place less risky. Both considerations reflect the marginal and outsider status of migrants in urban areas. To most rural women, therefore, marriage denotes the termination of migrant work and the return to the village. A twenty-three-year-old Anhui woman (#28) who worked in Shanghai summarized succinctly women migrants' marriage considerations:

I have never considered finding a husband in Shanghai. Among Shanghai natives, only men who are twice our age, widowed, or disabled would marry women with our background. Marrying migrant workers is risky, since it is hard to tell what kind of people they are. It is much safer to find a husband from one's native place.

Villagers' concern over undesirable urban influences may prompt fiancés and parents to pressure women migrants to discontinue urban work even before they get married. This twenty-four-year-old Anhui woman (#26) who worked in Shanghai suffered from such pressure:

In our village, most women my age are already married. After they get married, most will not pursue migrant work anymore. . . . Three years ago my sister introduced me to a young man. We have been seeing each other since that time. It went really well at first, but he works as a cook in Changzhou and we don't see each other that often. As a result, we have had some misunderstandings lately. He wanted me to write to him, but I didn't go to secondary school and cannot write well. Plus, his family is not supportive of his seeing me, and he has become somewhat suspicious of me. In our village, there is a common view that migrant women are loose. So after you are engaged, your fiancé and his family discourage you from migrant work.

The notion that migrant women are immoral²⁴ is related to the age-old belief that women's proper place is within the domestic sphere. Confucian prescriptions relating to social positions popularize the notion that women's place is "inside" the family, whereas men are responsible for the "outside," including making a living to support the family. Though the state's intervention, under Mao, mitigated the constraints on women's labor force participation, sociocultural traditions are deeply ingrained in the social fabric of China and are reproduced in various ways as the state turns its attention to economic development. Tamara Jacka²⁵ has shown that the boundary between the inside/private and outside/public domains has shifted as women have become the primary labor force in agriculture.

Specifically, in rural China today, "inside" refers not only to the home but also to the more stable and sedentary village life, including agriculture. To those who hold strongly to traditional views about gendered boundaries, cities may be perceived to be disorderly, corrupt, and fraught with bad influences.²⁶ For women migrants, pressure from their prospective husbands and future in-laws, the deep-rooted tradition of getting married before the mid-twenties, the limited marriage market in urban areas, and the advantages of returning to the native place for marriage combine to keep opportunities for pursuing economic mobility through migrant work short and temporary. Therefore, urban work represents only an episode, primarily in the late teens and early twenties, of most rural women's lives.²⁷

For rural men, in contrast, marriage does not necessarily disrupt migrant work but in fact facilitates labor migration. The patrilineal tradition ensures the transfer of a woman's labor to the husband's household upon marriage. A wife not only represents an augmentation of labor resources but also becomes the designated person to take care of farming, household work, and child rearing, making it possible for the husband to pursue migrant work. The high proportion of married men among migrants and the less concentrated age distribution of male migrants observed earlier further underscore that marriage is less disruptive of rural men's migrant work. As discussed earlier, a division of labor by gender, with the wife tending to the "inside" and the husband working "outside," is a popular strategy among rural families for augmenting household income while holding onto farmland. In China, as in the West, women are stereotyped as the nurturing family members and are expected to be the primary caregivers in the household.²⁸ Accordingly, married women in rural China have little choice but to stay in the village to care for children and elderly in-laws. This division of labor also ties women to agricultural work and reinforces the feminization of agriculture that has been well documented in recent research.²⁹ In this regard, to women migrants, marriage is disempowering because it requires leaving their wage work and thereby decreases their own economic mobility, forcing them to rely on their husbands' wages for improving the household's well-being.

The experiences of the six married women migrants who engaged in a "reversed" division of labor with their spouses further illustrate the endurance of sociocultural traditions about gender roles, even as they are the exception to the rule. A "reversed" division of labor denotes a deviation from traditional gender role arrangements, and in all six cases that strategy was the household's last resort rather than its preference. Economic hardship and the desire to build a house motivated these couples to pursue

wages through migrant work. Most important, all six women considered their husbands' poor or potentially poor performance in migrant work a reason for a "reversed" division of labor. In other words, married women migrants are but replacements: men remain the preferred candidates for migrant work, and it is only under circumstances where their work has failed or is likely to fail that the wife has the opportunity to pursue off-farm employment. Although all six married women managed to improve their households' financial well-being through migrant work, the three younger migrants (#1, #4, and #5, ages ranging from twenty-nine to thirty-two) were under pressure from their husbands to return to the village. This thirty-two-year-old Sichuan woman (#1) described her dilemma:

Many fellow villagers have started to build new houses. We decided to do the same. But after building a house four years ago we have been in serious debt. Migrant work is the only means to pay back the debt. During the past several years my husband had done migrant work in mining, construction, a brick factory, etc. He is unskilled and can only do manual work, work that is dirty, tiring, and dangerous. . . . He is impatient and has a bad temper, and he cannot tolerate the tough life of migrants. . . . The past several years the money he made from migrant work wasn't enough to pay for his food, cigarettes, and drinks. Even he himself admits that he is useless [*meiyong*]. For several years he didn't bring back a cent. In the village you could at least produce some income from farming and raising pigs. Fellow villagers all tease him. He feels embarrassed and doesn't want to go out anymore. . . . I suggested that he take care of the home so that I could try my luck outside. He said, "Don't you look down on me. Migrant work is harder than you think. Try it if you don't believe me." So I went out, and he stayed home to farm and watch the kids. . . . In one year I brought home 3,000 *yuan*. This money helped us to pay back our debt, purchase fertilizers and pesticides, pay the children's school fees, and buy a TV set for them. . . . I still want to return to work after the Spring Festival, but my husband doesn't want me to go. . . . He wants me to stay home and help him raise some pigs. . . . We have been fighting about this matter.

This is a vivid example of how the "reversed" division of labor is considered deviant and is hotly contested. Even though this woman was happy about her economic achievements, her comments on the husband's failure in mi-

grant work show that she was heavily invested in constructions of gender and the institution of marriage, even as she simultaneously contested and felt constrained by them. Men who stay in the village while their wives do migrant work risk being perceived as "useless" and tend to put pressure on their wives to return.³⁰ Similarly, in cases #4 and #5 the wife's economic power was being pitted against her expected village and household roles. By contrast, the older women migrants (#7, #18, and #19, ages ranging from 41 to 47) and their husbands were more relaxed about arrangements. All three couples had grown children, so it is likely that the husband viewed the woman's caregiving labor as less necessary. The differences in household dynamics between the younger and older migrant couples further demonstrate that the woman's role as caregiver, especially when the children are young, is a predominant factor in the household division of labor.

In summary, evidence from the Interview Records suggests that the sociocultural constraints that rural women face considerably limit their opportunities for migrant work and off-farm work, in turn decreasing their economic contributions to the family and to the village. For both single and married women, marriage and their expected role within it take precedence over their autonomy, economic betterment, and other benefits of migrant work.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Based on the Interview Records of the Sichuan and Anhui Survey, in this chapter, I have argued that rural women migrants make important contributions to their households, forge lasting networks with other women migrants, and have the potential to foster social and cultural change in the countryside. Their agency, however, is tightly constrained by sociocultural traditions of marriage and gender roles within marriage.

Rural women migrants are mainly young and single and have low levels of education. Many are surplus labor in rural areas where farmland is limited, and migrant work puts their labor to productive use. They travel long distances to specific destinations, in part drawn to economic opportunities and in part guided by social networks formed by fellow villagers and relatives. Even though women migrants have lower incomes, they are as economically active as male migrants, and their remittances are an important means of alleviating village households' economic difficulties and improving their well-being.

Gendered social networks play important roles in rural-to-urban migration, providing information to new migrants, facilitating their migration and

job search processes, and reducing the risks of migrant work. At the same time, however, they reinforce the segregation of urban work, by resident status and by gender, and homogenize migrant women's work experiences.

Migrant work is an important, and sometimes the only, means for rural women to engage in wage work, through which they gain independence and greater exposure to new ideas and opportunities to earn their own living. Women migrants are critical of rural life and strive to incorporate elements of the urban lifestyle into their own lives and those of fellow villagers. Migrant work even leads some to experiment with new gender divisions of labor in the household. Through wage earning and making economic contributions to the family, women are empowered and become potential agents of social change in rural China. However, women migrants' agency is constrained by sociocultural traditions. Blocked from the urban marriage market by their inferior socioeconomic and institutional status and driven by the preference for a husband in their native place, most young women return to the countryside to get married before they reach their mid-twenties. Once married, rural women are expected to stay in the village, while their husband's migrant work is permitted to continue. Even though a "reversed" division of labor exists, whereby a woman rather than her husband leaves the village for migrant work, it is considered deviant and is hotly contested. Marriage, in essence, usually terminates rural women's migrant work, cuts off their opportunities to engage in off-farm wage work, and undermines their agency.

Although this is a case study focusing on only twelve villages in two provinces and on a small sample of 31 rural women migrants, the qualitative data examined in this chapter provide depth, richness, and texture that can not only complement other case studies but also enhance our understanding and interpretation of large-scale studies and representative surveys. More than analyses that use only quantitative data, migrant women's own narratives foreground their agency in the household and in the village and also emphasize the structural constraints that limit their contributions.

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NOTES

1. For example, Cai 1997:7–21; Chiang 1999; Davin 1997, 1998; Fan 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Fan and Huang 1998; Huang 2001; Yang and Guo 1999; Wang Feng 2000.
2. In this chapter, I use the terms "savings" and "remittances" interchangeably, because in the data migrants do not distinguish between them. Both terms are used to refer to the portion of income that migrants send or bring back to the village, either for their own use or for the use of the household.
3. See Du 2000.
4. Nongyebu nongcun jingji yanjiu zhongxin (NNJYZ) 1995.
5. The material also includes selective accounts by the interviewees of their household members, but these are too sketchy for detailed examination and are not included in this chapter's analyses.
6. In the vast majority of migrant households, only one migrant was interviewed. Among households where more than one migrant was interviewed, only two had detailed accounts of all those interviewed. In both cases, two migrants were interviewed. In other words, the 191 migrants analyzed in this chapter represent a total of 189 households.
7. See Fan 2000, 2003a.
8. For example, Tan 1996.
9. Wang Feng 2000; Yang and Guo 1999.
10. For example, Fan 2000.
11. In this chapter, the interviewees are kept anonymous and are identified only with numbers listed in table 6.1. Hereafter, "#" refers to the number in that table.
12. Fan 2000, 2003a; Huang 2001; Yang and Guo 1996.
13. *Laoziang* and *tongxiang* both refer to people from the same village, and are sometimes used more broadly to refer to people from the same county or province.
14. See, for example, Fan 2002; Lou et al., this volume; and Solinger 1999:176.
15. Solinger 1999:242.
16. Fan 2001.
17. Zhou Xiaohong 1998:3–23.
18. Fan 2002, 2003a.
19. See also table 6.1.
20. Chiang 1999; Lee 1995; and Tam 2000.

21. This expression is commonly used to describe rural people whose wearing of colorful clothes is interpreted as due to lack of sophistication and taste.
22. See also Lou et al., this volume.
23. Until recently, a child born in an urban area had to inherit the mother's household registration. This discouraged urban men from marrying rural women, since their children's survival and education in the city would be extremely difficult. Starting in 1998 and in selected parts of China, new regulations have been approved that allow children to inherit their father's household registration (see Chen 1999; Davin 1998). But it is unclear whether this regulation has been fully implemented across the whole of China, and whether it can offset the inertia in the urban marriage market that disadvantages rural women. See also Beynon, this volume; Chen 1999; Chiang 1999; Fan and Huang 1998; Fan and Li 2002; and Tan and Short, this volume.
24. See Pang Hui's story, this volume. When she returned home from migrant work, her husband thought of her money as dirty and refused to let her stay back home.
25. Jacka 1997:193.
26. For further discussion on this point see Gaetano, this volume.
27. See Fan 2003b; Lee 1995.
28. McDowell 1999:126; Yu and Chau 1997.
29. For example, Davin 1998; Jacka 1997:128–39; and Zhang 1999b.
30. See also Lou et al., this volume.

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7. The Migration Experiences of Young Women from Four Counties in Sichuan and Anhui

It is not easy to make money by peddling; there's more bitterness than sweetness. But there is sweetness if you bring money back.
—a married woman from Anhui

I changed greatly. I lacked self-confidence before. My marriage was not very successful. My parents-in-law did not accept me. Now I am confident. I can work independently, and I want to run my own company in the future, since I am very familiar with the market right now.—a twenty-six-year-old secondary school graduate from Anhui, with one daughter

➤➤ This chapter draws upon research conducted with rural women from Anhui and Sichuan who migrated to a town or city outside of their home county and then returned to rural life. It seeks to explore these women's understandings of and feelings about their past experiences of migration and life in the city, and the impact that migration had upon their present circumstances and their perceptions of the future.

Our analysis is based on fieldwork carried out during August and September 2000 in four counties of Anhui and Sichuan provinces, as part of a larger study of the effect of migration on women's reproductive health and on women's status in their rural families. Anhui and Sichuan are both high-migration provinces, ensuring an adequate proportion of returned migrants in the study. Both are poor, with similar levels of per capita income and economic structure, but they have very different migration histories. Thus our selection of these two provinces allows areas of both comparison and contrast. The investigation included a survey of individual women, focus group discussions, and household and individual interviews. Information used in this chapter mainly comes from the focus group discussions and individual interviews.