

**“Making It” In China:  
Why Young Rural Women Climb the Ladder by Moving into China’s Cities**

By

Lai Sze Tso

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Mary E. Corcoran, Co-Chair  
Professor Fatima Muge Gocek, Co-Chair  
Professor Pamela J. Smock  
Associate Professor Zheng Wang

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to Mom, Danny, Jeannie, and Dad. I could not have accomplished this without your unwavering love and support. During the toughest times, I drew strength from your understanding and resilience.

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**Note about language:**

I use Pinyin to Romanize names and phrases for emphasis and clarity. Important phrases, interview excerpts, and school names are given in simplified Chinese.

**Abbreviations:**

**SEZs** Special Economic Zones

**RMB** renminbi (exchange rate from 2008-2009)

**SES** socio-economic status

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **I. Migrant Women as “Emissaries of Modernity”**

One remarkable phenomenon of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the increase in opportunities for social and economic mobility in rapidly developing countries. In these locations, the impact of globalization on national policies and economies has allowed many people to enjoy new options in their education, employment, saving and spending patterns, marriage, and other life events. For people living in rural areas, migration is essential for accessing urban opportunities. Rural families are affected even more deeply as millions of young women migrate to work and live in urban areas.

As the fastest growing economy and the world's most populous nation, China is a hotbed of social change and upward social mobility. Although the Special Economic Zones (SEZs), incubators for much of these activities, were first established in 1980, rural people could not sustain themselves in urban areas until after 1983, when Central authorities allowed rural households to transport goods freely once their mandatory quotas were fulfilled. In October of 1984, the Chinese government granted its rural people the right to move into market towns temporarily or permanently as long as they did not need government rations of grain. Researchers identify this event as the watershed moment, because within two months of this announcement, 590,000 people participated in the first wave of rural-to-urban migration (Liu 1991). In 1985, estimates of migrants rose to 6 million people (Ma 1987). By 1989, domestic newspapers floated figures from 50 to 80 million individuals (Liu 1991), but tabulations of retrospective questions on the 1990 Census suggest a more conservative estimate of 34 million (Davin 1999, p.27), with women comprising 43 percent of migrants (Messkoub and Davin 1998). As of 1997, estimates of migrants reached 120 million people (Croll and Ping 1997). Analysis of the

2000 China Census indicates a growth of another 25 million migrants; of these, 79 million and 66 million people respectively participated in inter-provincial and intra-provincial movements (Liang and Ma 2004). Early estimates from the 2010 census show the migrant population increasing to 155 million, an increase of an additional 10 million in just 10 years (Cai, Du, and Wang 2011, p.18). While larger migration patterns and dynamics are complicated and require greater attention to regional nuances and interpretation (Chan 2013), it is clear that young women comprise a substantial proportion of internal migrants.

Young migrant women have contributed to the burgeoning Chinese economy since 1980 and have changed the economic and social terrain in myriad ways. They first entered the factories established in SEZs when China initiated foreign investors and technology exchange in 1980 (Solinger 1999). Then, in the 1990s through the 2000s, they moved into in shanty-towns rural community enclaves in Chinese cities (Zhang 2001). There, they continued in factory work, looking for bridges into the urban economy and infrastructure outside of these enclaves. Many single migrant women began making inroads by taking jobs in low level, segregated manual-labor industries as maids, office cleaners, waitresses, shop assistants, escort services, and sales, while married women migrants participated in small commercial ventures such as selling vegetables (Jacka 2006) and flowers to locals, and engaging in urban “curb-market” low-skills services such as preparing baked goods and bicycle repair (Jacka 2006). Women worked in urban areas alongside rural men as they built the modern skyscrapers, high-rise apartments and gated residential neighborhoods for the burgeoning urban middle class (Zhang 2001). Discontented with the low paying work, some women chose to enter higher paying but stigmatized sex work (Zheng 2004, 2008), while others entered urban areas directly by marrying men with urban residency (Fan and Huang 1998).

Murphy (2002, p44) argues that as migrants, rural women become role models and “emissaries of modernity” because Chinese policy and popular imagination construct migration “as improving cultural quality, ideological quality, eugenics and physical quality (Murphy 2002, p. 44).” In practice, migrant women contributed to their natal and marital households by remitting earnings that help their families back in rural communities. These remittances finance the construction of new homes, the education of younger siblings and the women’s own children; by becoming entrepreneurs themselves (Murphy 2006); and by

funding commercial projects of other villagers by contributing to informal banking institutions (Tsai 2002). While government, industry, and researchers recognize the value of the economic contributions made by migrant women to society, we know relatively little about why women chose to migrate. This dissertation is devoted to uncovering women's motivations.

## II. PAST RESEARCH

A number of researchers have examined the experiences of Chinese women who migrated from rural to urban areas in the 1980s and 1990s. This research has relied heavily on censuses and surveys and has focused on describing the size, scope, determinants, and motivations of migrants at individual, household, community and national levels. These studies can be categorized as: analyses of growth in migration over time (Chan 1994; Liang 2001; Rozelle, Guo, Hughart, and Giles 1999), surveys on determinants of migration (He and Gober 2003; Roberts 2001; Rozelle, Taylor, and DeBrauw 1999; Zhao 2003; Zhao 1999; Zhu 2002), evaluations of migrant origin and destination community characteristics (Taylor, Rozelle, and DeBrauw 2003; Zhang, DeBrauw, and Rozelle 2004), assessments of how government policies are related to migration trends (Chan and Zhang 1999; Liang, Chen, and Gu 2002; Liang and White 1997; Zhao 2005), and studies of how household needs and capacity to generate off-farm income affect migration decisions (Zhao 1999). Gender oriented researchers have used census and survey data to examine the occupational attainment of men and women in segmented migrant-labor industries (Fan 2003; Huang 2001; Liang and Chen 2004; Roberts 2001; Yang and Guo 1996; Yang and Guo 1999).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the two main migration pathways available to women were work and marriage (Davin 1999; Fan 2008, pp143-161), with migrants concentrated in the fifteen to twenty-nine age range and marriage migrants attaining lower educational levels than “industry/business” migrants (Fan 2008, p147). Tabulations of the 1990 Census indicate that marriage migrants comprised twenty-eight percent of all intra-provincial migration and thirty percent of inter-provincial migration by women (Davin 1999,

Table 8.1 p 138). In extremely poor rural areas, marriage prevailed as a migration strategy. According to Fan, an expert on marriage migration patterns in China, considering patriarchal dynamics and women's "marginalization in the labor market, women may find marriage, and specifically hypergamy (marrying up) an attractive and perhaps even the only vehicle toward economic betterment (Fan 2008, p.137)." Fan theorizes that women who participate in marriage migration

“seek to migrate to the destination and join the agricultural labor force there. The characteristics of female inter-county and interprovincial marriage migrants, as reported by the 1990 census, are strikingly similar. These characteristics are largely repeated among female interprovincial marriage migrants, as are their differences from female interprovincial 'industry/business' migrants, in the 2000 census. What the above suggests is that peasant women with the most severe human capital and locational constraints are most prone to resort to marriage migration. They have very limited opportunities for social and economic mobility other than marriage, and their willingness to move long distances and be away from familiar environments can be interpreted as a price they are willing to pay in order to overcome these constraints (Fan 2008, pp. 148-9).”

Fan (2008) is not alone in portraying rural women as limited in the scope of their decision-making. Other researchers postulate that household heads made the decision for daughters to migrate, often basing the decision on household economics motivated by the desire for building connections into prosperous urban and rural areas. Through marriage migration, these women became the initial link for their natal households to access in-laws' resources and localities for entry into more prosperous economies and labor markets (Fan and Huang 1998). Presumably, once women become anchors for their natal communities into new areas, their family, friends, and neighbors can collectively build on these connections to initiate migration-streams for work and commercial opportunities.

In her comparison of the 1990 and 2000 Censuses, Fan (2008) finds that women's reported reasons for interprovincial migration changed. The percentages of women

migrants who reported migrating for job transfers, job assignment, studying/training, joining family, and (quite significantly for) marriage dropped, while the percentage who migrated for industry/business increased from under twenty percent in 1990 to over sixty percent in 2000 (Fan 2008, p. 83). In 1990 and in 2000, education migration did not register as a major reason for women. This is consistent with researchers' assumptions that patriarchs allocate household resources in gender biased ways to support son's education, housing construction and furnishings, to facilitate marriage. Fan states:

“In rural China, most young women do not pursue education beyond junior secondary and many withdraw from school after completing the primary level. The decision to discontinue at or before junior secondary may be made by themselves or by their parents, but either way it reflects the age-old view that education for the daughter is wasteful because she will eventually marry out and become a member of another household. At the same time, a large agricultural labor surplus and lack of farmland mean that many peasant women have never or seldom engaged in farming. Those in their late teens, after leaving school, may have little to do other than house chores. Having 'nothing to do at home' is, indeed, a common explanation by peasant women of their pursuit of migrant work....

Young peasant women's pursuit of migrant work not only saves the family money by their 'not eating at home' but is also a means of increasing household income and creating opportunities for others, especially male siblings. Sons are more likely than daughters to be encouraged by their parents to stay in school beyond junior secondary. In fact, it is not uncommon for young women to quit school in order to support their brothers' education (Fan 2008, p 85).”

Researchers describe the typical work migration pattern as cyclical, back and forth migration between rural and urban employment (Davin 1999). Women mostly worked at short-term menial jobs in segregated factories or as nannies, and mostly lived and worked in migrant enclaves (Jacka 2006; Ma 2001; Murphy 2002; Pun 2005). These jobs often

provided no skills development, on-the-job training, or opportunity for advancement. Work migrants were not fully integrated into urban life, work places, or social networks.

Much of this past research is motivated by macro-level perspectives about migration motives. The earliest findings were framed by painting the picture of rural people's movements as caused by regional inequalities in wealth, resources, and government investment (Liu 1991; Davin 1999, pp. 50-65), urban-rural inequalities in living standards and social services (Liu 1991; Davin 1999, pp. 66-68), rural surplus labor and unemployment (Liu 1991; Davin 1999 pp. 68-71), reaction to reforms on farming policies (Davin 1999, pp 74-77) and crisis response to drought and crop failure (Liu 1991).

Studies of the earlier women migrants largely depict the decision to migrate as determined by the household patriarch on the basis of household needs and gendered preferences (Murphy 2006). By contributing to household goals, young women are acting as filial daughters (Salaff 1981). Women implement the directives of the household head by remitting earnings home to support household goals such as building a new house, financing a brother's marriage, paying for brothers' education, and supporting daily needs of parents (Lee 1995, pp. 75-89; Murphy 2006). Patriarchal family goals and socio-economic constraints dominate the decision to have young women migrate (Du, Park, and Wang 2006). These studies did not ask women directly about their motivations and actions; instead they assumed women migrated for the benefit of the natal household.

Ching-Kwan Lee is one of the first researchers to use a feminist framework to motivate her ethnographic study of women workers in China. Wanting to understand how migration impacted women's lives on the factory floor in the Shenzhen (one of the first SEZs, established in 1980), she engages in feminist discourse to uncover gendered labor management practices of "maiden workers." Lee states:

"The transdisciplinary feminist literature on women workers in global factories focuses more squarely on the situation of female labor. Many of these studies subscribe to a heuristic framework of analysis, arguing that women workers worldwide are subject to collusion by the state, multinational corporations, and the patriarchal family. Minority women suffer from additional domination based on ethnicity. Yet, such frameworks do not

provide causal linkages among analytical signposts, and we are still at a loss to explain the diverse shop-floor politics and cultures....By assuming that Chinese women are victims of Chinese social structures, the literature has for a long time suppressed women's voices and denied their subjectivities. Hearing what they have to say and observing what they do is an indispensable point of departure for recasting Chinese women as subjects" (Lee 1998, pp10-11).

Lee (1995) conducted her fieldwork southern China from 1992-1993 in a factory of 800 workers, 80 percent women, from 14 different provinces. According to Lee (1998) over half of the workers in her study are from "not developed or "undeveloped" provinces," i.e. from poor regions of China. Women in Lee's study "almost universally and 'automatically' cited poverty at home as the main reason they came to Shenzhen (Lee 1998, p. 73)." As Lee gained the trust of her participants by visiting and interviewing workers in their dormitories and meeting with them at gatherings, she discovered that a women's choice to enter factory work is a personal decision amidst the execution of household strategy. Lee elaborates:

"A factory wage was keenly sought after, even though the amount was less than that earned by a hairdresser, a waitress, or a saleswoman, because factory jobs, not service jobs, symbolized a disciplined and confining work life compatible with definitions of appropriate femininity for maidens (Lee 1998, p 74)."

Other self-interested acts performed by Lee's participants include leaving home to postpone and eventually dissolve undesirable arranged marriages made by parents (Lee 1998, pp. 77-78) and escaping back-breaking agricultural work and avoiding unwanted familial obligations by fleeing the village with peers who were leaving for work (Lee 1998, pp. 78-79). Lee states that performing waged work is a step towards pursuing personal career and marriage plans because women are saving money to support their own education and dowries (Lee 1998, p. 80).

Lee argues that as early as 1990s, when she conducted her fieldwork, women were already motivated to migrate for reasons “beyond familial economic survival (Lee 1998, p.71).” Lee states,

“The stereotype that young rural migrants came to work in order to support the peasant household economy foundered not because it was false, but because it over-simplified their complex calculations and motivations. Negotiations between workers' individual interests, both economic and social, and the needs and expectations of their families were often involved. Becoming long-distance migrant workers allowed these women to maintain physical distance from their families while sending cash income home as a substitute or compensation for undesirable familial obligations. (Lee 1998, pp.73-74).”

Similarly, Pun (2005) conducted participant observation in Southern China from November 1995 to June 1996 in an electronics factory that hired between 526-576 workers. Pun provides a typical narrative from a participant named Dong to illustrate what migrant women expect when they become “dagongmei.” Dong is the eldest daughter of a poor family from rural Hunan. Unable to support the education of both children, her father asked her to quit school at the age of sixteen so her younger brother could enter junior secondary school.

“I thought I could earn more money in the special economic zone. I felt it was a waste of time to stay in the village because my parents could do all the farming work alone. My cousins and my friends who worked in Shenzhen often told me a lot of interesting stories. I knew quite well what the working conditions might be, and how much I could earn before I went out for work. I knew it was not easy to work in a big city, which was a totally strange place to me. But I thought it was still worth it to try, and it was a chance for me to look at the outside world. We often thought we were jing di

zhi wa [frogs living in a well, knowing nothing of the outside world], and we knew little about life outside the village....

“I know there is a big difference. People in the city earn a lot and enjoy a different kind of life. I feel tired. The working hours are too long. It's too hard. What's worse, I could never have hoped to stay in the city. My hukou is in the village....Last New Year, I went back home and I slept, slept all the day. (Pun 2005, pp. 66-67).”

It is clear from this excerpt that Pun's participant was well aware of the exploitative and often hazardous conditions before she started working because she has a network of friends and family who already work in Shenzhen. Their stories had instilled a desire in her to see urban areas and learn about life outside rural areas. What is also clear from this narrative is that this woman knows her time in the city is temporary because of her hukou, her inability to make a sustainable, livable income, and the social differences in urban lifestyles and her perception of her life trajectory.

Just as Lee (1998) argues that the household strategy model over-simplifies women's motivations, Pun's suggests that despite their knowledge of exploitative and often hazardous work conditions, rural women still desired being in urban areas to see what urban life is like. As migrants, they were plagued by low pay, prohibitively expensive housing markets, and the looming prospect of returning to rural areas to fulfill marriage commitments (Pun 2005, 65-68).

Findings from large scale regional household surveys from the mid to late 1990s seem to support Lee's assertion that migration is allowing women to become more agentic within household constraints but that structural factors, like the ones highlighted by Pun's interview, still matter. Fan (2008) reports on a set of household interviews conducted by the Research Center for Rural Economy of the Ministry of Agriculture during Spring Festival in 1995. Men and women in 300 households in Sichuan and Anhui, two of the poorest provinces in China, were asked about their reasons for migration. The top reasons reported for women for migration were insufficient farmland (31.8 percent), education fees for family members (18.2 percent), to increase income (18.2 percent),

paying off debts (11.4 percent), and marriage expenses (9.1 percent). For men, the top reasons were insufficient farmland (41.9 percent), education fees for family members (17.9 percent), and paying off debts (9.8 percent) (Fan 2008, p. 72). Both men and women were driven to migrate because of poverty and to earn educational funds for family members. One pattern that is consistent with early findings is that women are more concerned than men with earning money to cover their anticipated marriage expenses. Neither men nor women from these two poverty-stricken provinces report pursuing education as a reason for migration.

More recently, Roberts et al. (2004) interviewed 3000 women from Anhui and Sichuan in 2000 about their patterns of temporary labor migration. Roberts et al. (2004) report a decided shift in women's reported migration behavior. Only 30 percent of women aged 20-24 were married and married women were not returning to rural areas after marriage. Instead, they clearly negotiated extant patriarchal social norms in rural areas and have found ways to sustain their livelihood in urban areas. Roberts et al (2004) state:

“Many of these married women, with and without their families, are creating niches for themselves in sales and service occupations in urban destinations, renting accommodations from local residents, and even enrolling their children in school (Roberts et al. 2004).”

As of 2000, women from the poorest regions of China found affordable urban housing, brought their children with them into urban settings, and located social services such as schooling. Although the survey did not directly ask migrant women about their aspirations, it is reasonable to infer that women's actions signal desires to migrate and stay in urban areas, or to even have semi-professional or entrepreneurial employment.

Echoing Lee (1998) and Pun's (2005) arguments, Murphy (2006) describes many previous studies as “implicit in reference to 'household' migration strategies and community poverty alleviation (2006, p. 15),” leaving little room for studying whether personal benefits motivated women's migration choices. In alignment with Lee and Pun's feminist perspectives, Beynon (2004) and Jacka (2006) directly interviewed migrants about their decision-making processes and what they see as the benefits of migration.

Unlike the beginning of migration activities when women left home to enter factory work in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and when women's migration activities could be predicted by household SES (Du, Park, and Wang 2006), Beynon (2004) and Jacka (2006) further confirm that women's migration decisions are no longer due solely to natal household economics.

Analysts supply evidence suggesting women exhibit autonomy through actions such as deciding to migrate for self-development (Jacka 2006), sending home remittances to fulfill their internalized images of being filial daughters, contributing to household improvement, learning to navigate complex urban environments, and going on sight-seeing expeditions to explore urban landscapes on their days off (Gaetano 2004). But this autonomy is quite limited. Beynon (2004) concludes from her interviews with unmarried rural women working as nannies, domestic helpers, shop assistants, sweatshop workers, and staff in restaurants and teahouses in Chengdu between 1996-1998 (Beynon 2004, p132), that women migrated without “expectation of gaining a real economic and social value through a good job. Rather, the decision is related more to the symbolic value of the work (Beynon 2004, p. 137).”

Delving more deeply into how social and economic opportunities are changing women's goals, Jacka (2006) reached out to the Migrant Women's Club, an organization established to assist rural women living and working in Beijing. In 2000, Jacka (2006) used a questionnaire to ask 100 members of the Migrant Women's Club, women aged sixteen to thirty eight, to list their reasons for leaving home. The top reasons reported (Jacka 2006, p. 135) were developing one-self (forty-nine percent), broadening horizons (thirty-eight percent), exercising independence (thirty-three percent), for education (thirty percent), coming from a poor family (twenty percent), having nothing to do at home (twenty-three percent), learning a skill (seventeen percent), starting a business (seventeen percent), having a good time (ten percent), saving for a dowry (eight percent), and changing occupations (seven percent). Jacka followed up by asking respondents to list all parties involved in the decision to leave home for work. Eighty-nine percent reported self, nineteen percent replied parents, eight percent stated other relatives, two percent reported spouse, one percent stated work unit, and four percent reported other influences (Jacka 2006, p. 167). Jacka (2006) argues that these results show migration research should no

longer assume that women are constrained by the filial daughter model and migrate primarily to improve natal household economics at their parents' behest. And Jacka and Gaetano (2004) argue that recent work on migration in China has been too narrowly focused on “macro-level demographic, economic, and political effects of migration, and with how the influx of migrants into urban areas should be managed (Jacka and Gaetano 2004, p. 2).”

I agree. Rural-to-urban migration is changing the roles of women in the family. Thusly, research must account for young women's personal desires and aspirations as a driving force for their migration activities and strategies. In this vein, migration research has broadened; researchers have examined migrant women's letters (Chan 2002), interviewed migrant women working in service, retail and trade sectors (Feng 1997), delved into the relationships between government, enterprises, and women's work (Lee 1995; Solinger 1999; Tan 2000; Zhang 1999a; Zhang 2001) and investigated discrimination against rural women in the urban workplace (Tang 1998). Researchers have addressed how women first define, then re-interpret, their identities through confronting perceptions about their sexual behavior (Zheng 2004), filial obligations as daughters (Gaetano 2004), and media representations (Sun 2004). Researchers have assessed women's marriage options and prospects (Beynon 2004; Tan and Short 2004) and the difficulties of reintegrating into rural life after working as migrants (Fan 2004; Lou, Zheng, Connelly, and Roberts 2004; Murphy 2004).

### **III. LIMITS OF PAST STUDIES**

Past studies focus on women who migrated in the 1980s and 1990s. A lot has changed since then. Lee's and Pun's ethnographies tell us about early desires of young women, but are limited in that the women entering into factory work from the mid 1980s to mid 1990s are from the poorest regions of China. Since 2000, a number of changes have facilitated the upward mobility of rural women living and working in urban areas. The expansion both of employment opportunities and demand for educated labor from 2000 to 2008 means that rural women have access to better jobs beyond previous factory,

domestic work, cleaning, and menial sales. The rapid expansion of higher educational institutions from 1,022 to 2,263 with student enrollment going from 1 million in 1997 to 5 million in a decade (The Economist, March 17 2011) means that rural women have better chances of entering college and tertiary vocational training (Morgan and Wu 2011). And, changes in city residential and employment policies have made it easier for young women to find affordable urban housing, live in cities, and work in better-integrated urban jobs. There is a significant increase in opportunities for rural women to work, attend college or vocational schools, and support themselves in newly acquired urban lifestyles since the late 1990s.

A second limitation is that because past studies interview migrants in the city, they cannot capture the origin village context. We do not know what conditions migrant women faced back home while making the decision to drop out of school for work. Nor do we know how parents reacted when daughters decided to leave school for work, what resources were available to help daughters remain in school, and how previous waves of migration changed the economic and social conditions of home communities. We also do not know how household resources pre-conditioned women's motivations and aspirations for what could be achievable in migration.

Third, while past studies note the importance of family expectations in shaping young women's perceptions of themselves, their resources, abilities, obligations, and roles in the family before migration, past analysts do not directly ask women how parental involvement and social networks of teachers, friends, work colleagues, and extended family influence women's migration decisions and women's long-run strategies. Nor have past studies focused on uncovering how young women negotiate with their families or how women plan for and assess costs and benefits of migration at the time they make the decision to migrate.

Fourth, theories of agency share the premise that shifts in motivations and locations of agency are associated with different roles that correspond to progressive stages in the life cycle (Clausen 1991; Heinz, Kelle, Andreas, and Jens 1998; Shanahan 2000). Wolf (1972) argues that agency is causally related to women's primary roles in different life stages and tied to women's access to social networks. For migrant women, such roles may include: young daughter in her natal family, unmarried worker living away

from home, working wife in one's marital family, or matriarch of one's own family. Each role encompasses differential levels of space for women to negotiate between personal goals and familial expectations. Past studies cannot capture negotiation in the decision-making process, because data from retrospective interviews and data collected at migration destinations may skew the original terms of power and negotiated conditions. Further, because women may minimize unfulfilled expectations and obligations in their migration narratives. In order to track the degree to which young women exercise autonomy prior, during, and after migration, we need to interview women at each point.

Fifth, the earlier waves of rural-to-urban migration have changed rural areas. Remittances improved resources in rural families and amongst rural communities. Because myriad individuals participated in cyclic migration to and from cities since the 1980s, rural residents have more contacts and denser networks in urban areas. As a result of these last two changes, more social, human, and financial capital is available to young women in both their rural communities and migration destinations after 2000 than was available in the 1980s and 1990s. Rural women migrants in the 2000s likely have far more resources and support when planning for migration than their predecessors.

#### **IV. DESIGN STRATEGIES AND FINDINGS OF PRIOR STUDIES: WHAT WEAKNESSES DOES THE NORTH RIVER STUDY IMPROVE ON?**

We know a great deal about the lives of migrant women in the 1980s and 1990s. Prior studies show that the defining characteristics and dominant patterns depict young women, ages fifteen to twenty-nine, migrating for marriage and work and that migrant work options were hazardous and limited. Many of these studies assume that women's migration choices were in response to parental needs, as opposed to personal desires. In contrast, research designs informed by feminist methodologies and goals found that women's self-interest was also a cause of migration because researchers asked women to describe their decisions, their motivations, and what they hoped to gain for themselves through migration. Roberts et al. (2004) work reveals that as of 2000, even married

women migrants from the poorest regions of China were beginning to display behavior indicative of desires for permanence and familial integration in urban settings.

Social conditions and government policy in China have changed a great deal since the 1980s and 1990s. The rise of educational opportunities, the expansion of capitalism, the impact of globalization on local Chinese economies, and the boom in rural commerce and living standards brought about by prior migration collectively impact the conditions and expectations of rural communities. The vast majority of prior studies surveyed or observed migrants at destination cities after migration decisions were made. The few surveys of migrants in origin locations, such the one used by 1995 Anhui and Sichuan Interview Record by the Research Center for the Rural Economy of the Ministry of Agriculture (Fan 2008) and the Anhui and Sichuan migrant study conducted by the Chinese Population and Information Research Center (Roberts et al 2004) only capture return migrants at home for a short amount of time, missing migrants who chose to remain in urban areas, and largely ignoring the context of village conditions because data collection was conducted en masse by teams who remained on site for a limited amount of time. Equally important, these data were collected from women originating from the poorest regions of China, where we would expect patriarchal practices to persist because income inequality makes it difficult to change gendered biases in household economic strategies.

The studies above do not directly focus on social class. They typically assume interviewees are poor because they came from a poor region. But past cohorts of migrants have improved the resources and infrastructure of villages. Any investigation of women who migrated after 2000 needs to consider class issues.

My study design of conducting an ethnography on one village, with a focus on the migration activities from 2000-2008 of women in migrant ages, from fifteen to twenty-nine, at all stages of the migration trajectory offers several advantages over past studies. I collect contemporaneous information on decision contexts-on family, friends, connections, and processes. For example, I talk to women in their late teens when they are deciding whether to continue schooling or to drop out, and when they are just starting college or work; I talk to women in their early twenties when women have had several years of experience as workers or as college students; and I talk to women in their late twenties

when they have settled into longer run job and family patterns. This allows me to track how women's aspirations and strategies evolve and what factors, such as social networks and work experience, shape this evolution.

My study design allows me to follow-up on intriguing findings yielded in prior research. For example, in her study of the Migrant Women's Club in 2000, Jacka (2006) found that thirty percent of work migrants reported their reason for leaving home was education. We do not know if these women initially migrated for education or the conditions under which they chose this pathway and became classified as work migrants in Beijing. My study design builds on this finding and I directly ask migrants making decisions about migration pathways about their assessments of their chances of success as education migrants, whether they canvass their social networks for information and support, and how they balance the risks and rewards of pursuing education. My findings allows us to better understand how rural women make the decision between education and work migration, and what they perceive each pathway to offer them. Women in my study describe how they pursue new educational and employment opportunities, eschew pre-existing marriage migration patterns, postpone marriages, and divert parental pressures for arranged marriages.

My results, based on data collected on migration activities in a prosperous village in Hebei province from 2000-2008, are markedly different from previous findings about migrants from poor regions. First, and most importantly, parents of women in my study support the education of their daughters, encouraging young women to pursue college and vocation training. Although parents with limited economic resources will still ask daughters to sacrifice their education to support a brother's education, the prosperity brought about since the start of rural-to-urban migration in the 1980s means that parents have more resources available for their daughters' schooling.

The inclusion of educational migration as a pathway out of rural areas is new in studies of rural-to-urban migration for China. When education is included, I find that nearly everyone migrates. In my study village, forty percent of migrants leave via education. Parents and daughters both view education as the optimal path for urban success. Women report strong disappointment from their parents when they opt out of education.

A third new result is that when opting out of education, daughters make decisions independently of parents. They make rational decisions, weighing the costs and benefits of pursuing education over entering the labor market. Interviews with migrant women reveal that aspirations begin as a vague notion to “get out” of rural areas and become more specific through migration processes and engagement with social networks.

A fourth contribution is that women emphasize a desire for greater personal independence and postpone marriage for this reason. The narratives of education migrants reveal how the process of undergoing educational migration helps women develop their aspirations, specify their strategies, and widen their networks for attaining migration goals.

Rural women now have an ambitious set of aspirations for migration that center on achieving permanence, integration and autonomy. Both rural young women and their parents view education as the optimal way to realize these aspirations. Despite this, in North River, sixty percent of rural women between the ages of seventeen to twenty-nine drop out of the education pathway.

## **V. DISSERTATION OVERVIEW**

Rural women are contributing to the expansion and development of China, and their narratives are critical to understanding how globalization continues to create social change and opportunities for women’s achievement in developing societies. The new opportunities brought about by thirty years of migration and urban-rural development inspire rural women and their families to expect more from migration. I ask women to describe the goals that they have for migration. Why are women increasingly using education and work pathways, eschewing marriage migration, and postponing marriage as they try to improve their lives? How do natal household conditions constrain or improve women's chances for making it in China? Chapters II through VI describe the study design and address each of these questions about how young rural women conceptualize their aspirations. In this section, I briefly summarize chapters II to VI.

## **Chapter Two - Motivation and Methodology**

I do intensive one-village analysis. I first examine all women of migration age registered as being from North River. Using village household register records (*hukou*) and interviews with local informants, I document migration patterns by pathway and by household socio-economic status (SES). I find that the vast majority of young women migrate, that forty percent of women migrants do so via higher education, and that high and middle SES women are more likely to go on to higher education than are low SES women.

I then conducted 42 intensive interviews with migrants; 12 women from high SES households, 17 women from middle SES households, and 13 women from low SES households. Interviewees were aged seventeen to twenty-nine years. The youngest were planning to migrate or had migrated within the past year. Those in their early to mid-twenties had lived in urban areas for several years. Women in their late twenties were making decisions about or had settled into long-term work and marriage situations. I asked migrants about the factors and people shaping their migration decisions, their goals for migration, plans for achieving those goals, and about their experiences.

## **Chapter Three - Why Migrate?**

### **Thinking about Why Women Aspire for Permanence, Integration, and Autonomy**

While women differ in their migration pathways, the underlying motivations they offer in explanation of why they migrate are similar. Women aspire to achieve permanence, integration, and autonomy in their lives and state that they can only access the opportunities for achieving these aspirations through migration into the cities and urban areas of China.

In this chapter, I first present how young women define the concepts of permanence, integration, and autonomy and the social, economic, and personal indicators women use to mark attainment of these aspirations. Permanence refers to the time frame for migration. Interviewees aspire to a long-run, continuous urban experience. Earlier waves of migrants were typically intermittent short-term workers who cycled between rural and urban settings. Integration refers to developing an urban identity –to forming work networks and social networks that include city residents. Women migrants in earlier

decades usually worked and resided in segregated migrant enclaves. Autonomy refers to attaining independence: financial independence from parents, autonomy on the job, and full partnership in decision-making within marriage. Women's definitions of permanence, integration, and autonomy become more specific as they spend more time in urban settings.

I next explore potential explanations of why the goals women who migrated from North River between 2000 and 2008 differ from those of women who migrated in the 1980s and 1990s. I build on our existing knowledge of women's migration motivations in the preceding 20 years by discussing socio-economic and political changes to rural communities and rural culture. The changes brought about by previous waves of migration have made it possible for the present group of young women to imagine, desire, and strategize towards these new, more ambitious aspirations. I argue that past migration has fostered an environment where it is possible for young women to imagine urban possibilities because there are more resources and networks in their home community. Previous migration streams changed their communities and families through remittances (Murphy 2006), bringing in new social and fiscal practices, and acquiring commercial contacts (Tsai 2002). There are now more small businesses, more work opportunities and on-the-job-training in rural and suburban areas, more role models for young women from their home community, more familial and community contacts and ties to urban areas, and more connections to urban migration destinations. These social changes work together to provide young women with the support and tools for self-interested decisions about upward social mobility in their rural-to-urban migration.

#### **Chapter Four - Hegemony of Education and How Young Women Succeed as Students**

Education is seen as the best pathway for achieving permanence, integration, and autonomy by all migrants. Women who pursue education articulate that they get different kinds of advice, support, and help from multiple networks, and that they are selective about which networks they solicit for help at different stages of the migration and decision-making processes. Women's goals become more clearly defined as they move through

the migration process; their agency increases as they gain more experience in migration; and their networks widen as they progress along the educational path.

## **Chapter Five - Benefits and Costs of Opting Out of Education**

### **Why Doesn't Everyone Choose the Education Pathway?**

Despite the benefits of the education pathway, sixty percent of women migrants from North River chose to leave school. Women who leave school regularly refer to the high uncertainty for success on the education pathway. They calculate that they would lose time and money by attending school instead of directly entering the secondary labor market in urban China. The biggest benefit to exiting the education trajectory for work is that women become financially independent and leave the countryside at a younger age.

This chapter is organized into four sections. I first describe the three typical points when women exit education. I then describe the benefits, limits, and the trade-offs non-education migrants encounter as they leave the education pathway. Next, I provide a framework for understanding the risks and opportunity costs associated with education migration that young women hope to avoid by opting out of education, and provide young women's descriptions of the factors pulling and pushing them off the education pathway -- household finances, poor school performance, competition, and alternate visions for achieving upward mobility. I conclude by arguing that women exhibit agency in their choice to drop out. Women are rational decision-makers. They decide based on their own assessments of what would work for them. They do not consult family or teachers in making decisions. They do not back off from their decisions in the face of parental disappointment and resistance.

## **Chapter Six - Conclusion, Theoretical Considerations, and Implications for Future Research**

In chapter six, I first summarize what is new about my findings on women's migration aspirations and activities. I then discuss how the findings match up with those from research studies of earlier cohorts of migrants and how my findings extend the research literature on migrant rural women in China. I conclude by discussing future

research directions, application of my work to survey research, and implications for developing government policies and interventions that benefit women's in their pursuits of upward social mobility in rural-to-urban migration.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MOTIVATION AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I first describe my motivations for conducting research on migrant women. I discuss my own background, and how I came to realize the necessity of capturing women's experiences and stories early in the narrative-meaning-making process. I then describe the process by which I established rapport in my research site. Establishing such rapport is a necessary first step to gain the trust of the villagers. This trust is essential to gathering data that accurately captures the experiences of migrant women. In the study design, I describe the obstacles I encountered in the field and how dealing with these challenges altered my research strategies and improved the quality of my interview data. Dealing with challenges in the field forced me to be more holistic in my approach to data collection, which ultimately allowed me to better capture the complex and complicated nature of women's migration decisions and experiences. I then describe the steps involved in gaining access to a rural community and locating key informants to create a village census based on village *hukou* records. Once we compiled the village census, I worked with these key informants to establish SES categories to stratify women of eligible ages to target for interviews. In the last two sections, I first describe the how I determined the pool of women eligible for the study and selected the sample, and I then provide details about the interview format, the logic underlying my interview approach and questions. Lastly, I describe how I analyzed interviews for the central themes discussed in my chapters on migrant women's aspirations, the hegemony of education, and the costs and benefits that women balance when they decide to opt out of education for early employment.

## I. STUDY MOTIVATION

### RECLAIMING ROOTS

#### **Personal Motivations for Studying Migrant Women**

When I was four years old, my parents took my younger brother and I onto a plane bound for New York City. This journey would reunite my father with his own biological father, his own younger brother, and their families. For my mother, this trip signified a cleavage in her life; she was leaving her friends, family, work, and her whole social world behind in Hong Kong and southern China. At the age of 23, my mother followed her husband to a foreign place to build a new life for herself and her children. From then on, my mother only had minimal access to social and emotional support from her own natal family back home. I am a heritage student and scholar because I seek to understand the historic and modern forces that shape and affect Chinese women in their home and in the wider Chinese Diaspora.

As a first generation Chinese American growing up in New York City and Philadelphia in the 1980s through the 1990s, I was intrigued with the ethnic enclaves available to my mother and to other women in the Chinatowns of American east coast cities. I imagined these spaces as the social and physical embodiment of the world my mother had left behind. In these places, my mother could live as if she was still in her home community.

The important difference is that by virtue of becoming US immigrants, my mother and her new Chinese immigrant friends had materially improved their lives and their social mobility. An even more important difference is that this move enabled the next generation to access even greater opportunities in American society. Within two generations, new immigrants could make momentous leaps in upward mobility. Although my mother and her new friends were lucky to have finished primary education in their home country, their children could speak fluent English, obtain college degrees, and enter professional occupations.

For my dissertation, I wanted to find out how woman like my mother and her mother before her, chose to become migrants, leaving behind everything familiar to chase a

dream of better life in an unknown place; how women made migration decisions that change and uplift their lives and subsequently the lives of their children and future generations. Only two generations ago my grandparents grew up in small farming communities in Southern China. Villages where residents shared two or three surnames, where men left for work to support the family while women stayed behind were common. My grandparents left the village to pursue an urban lifestyle in Hong Kong. When my own mother was old enough, she left school to work in the booming textile industry in colonial Hong Kong. She eventually married, had children, and moved to the United States with my father. Neither of them knew much English nor had received more than a middle school education. Knowing that life in America was going to be tough, the prospect of opportunities available to the next generation, *my generation*, would be enough compensation for leaving the familiar behind.

One would suspect that if I wanted to know how and why women like my mother and grandmother made decisions about migration, and how these decisions transformed their lives, that the best approach would be to ask them directly. Yet, retrospective interviews have many problems. Oftentimes, women become migrants because they want to escape hardship and difficulty in their home communities and families. Memories of the past can be painful. People tend to be selective about which memories to share. Over time, past experiences have been processed and interwoven into an integral narrative reflective of current lives. A great deal of the confusion, debate, discussion, and emotions involved in the original deliberation over migration decisions becomes lost in the retelling of the master narrative.

Reminiscing about the conditions women like my mother faced before, during, and after they decided to leave home takes a great deal of courage and reflection. Attempts to reconstruct the migration history my own family were regularly thwarted by well-practiced responses to questions about life in the old country and the early years of our move to the United States. My mother often responded by saying that events happened “too long ago,” or sometimes “who wants to talk about it, who wants to remember?” While I initially was concerned that rural migrant women in China would be similarly evasive, my early forays into field-testing revealed that young women migrants became nostalgic when we broached the topic of home, and often cried as they started talking about their home life

and first migration experiences. During our in-depth interviews, many women chose to tell me painful personal stories that they kept secret from everyone meaningful in their lives. They confided that it did not make sense to tell family and friends because their loved ones could do nothing about the hardships and prejudices they faced as migrants. Women expected that their families would either tell them to stay strong and cope because everything is hard at first, or would tell them to return home and maybe go back to finish school. The veterans who toughed it out and stayed seemingly learned to cope by developing narratives to suppress the pain and glorify their migration experiences to those at home.

Upon reflecting on my own family dynamics, I realized that if I wanted to understand how and why women make the life-changing decision to migrate, I needed to interview women as close as possible to the time of actual migration events. In doing so, I would interview women just when the cacophony of decisions and pressures and influences were still fresh in their mind. Hopefully women would still be willing to articulate their feelings to an uninvolved listener as they grappled and made peace with the multitude of negotiations made when deciding to leave home.

In contemporary China, millions of young women leave their homes in the countryside in hopes of improving their economic and social mobility by moving into urban spaces. It was an opportunity for me to capture women's experiences as they are undergoing them.

## **II. STUDY DESIGN**

### **CHOICE OF PLACE**

Although my family is from southern China, globalization, urbanization, and economic development since the late 1980 transformed the rural landscape and all but obliterated the rural household in my ancestral land, more commonly referred in Putonghua as "laojia."<sup>i</sup> Due to the rapid urbanization that occurred during this era, understanding how young women native to this region made decisions about outmigration

from rural households would require retrospective interviewing of middle aged and older women. Tracking the size of the original migrant groups would be difficult since many women have likely migrated to other cities or even overseas. As I discuss in chapter one, because South China is now a major destination for migrants from other parts of China, with millions of men, women, and young families flocking to live and work in the booming cities, many studies have been conducted in this region to understand the lives of this new group of in-migrants.

South China is no longer an ideal site for trying to uncover how rural women's home and household conditions impact their migration trajectories and decisions. This requires focusing on regions that are just beginning to experience urbanization. I needed to conduct fieldwork in villages where women have only recently started preparing for migration. My gaze turned to North and Northeast China.

### **HONING ETHNOGRAPHIC SKILLS**

Preparation for field work entailed working on my local dialects, developing an awareness of how my American mannerisms distanced me from rural society, and learning how to build rapport with the matrons and daughters of rural families. I had to develop my participant persona and take on the roles of a member of the female community. Margery Wolf emphasized the importance of female community and the uterine family in conducting ethnographic work with women. Being raised as a daughter in a Chinese family, I had already been socialized to help out with "women's work" of sweeping up the kitchen and dining space, cleaning the dishes, preparing food for meals, setting the table, and cleaning the table, all without being asked to do so. As my adviser told me afterward, the women of the household said that I made them feel comfortable because they felt like I behaved like a married daughter returning home to help with household chores during holidays. My actions, behavior, and demeanor made me a member of the family.

## **GAINING ACCESS: SETBACKS IN THE FIELD**

### **Plenty of Data and Contacts, Not Enough Luck and Finesse**

Besides honing my ethnographic skills, I needed to narrow down where I would conduct my own fieldwork for my dissertation and how I would make the first contact with rural families. I was to learn that the accessibility and feasibility of field locations as research sites depends heavily upon the pathways and contacts used to establish first contact with community leaders in rural villages. This process is time consuming. I first tried and failed to make connections through a number of organizations in Liaoning Province. There were many reasons to work in Liaoning. I had been to these villages before, had contacts with government officials, had access to internal statistics that I could use to contextualize and verify potential findings, and had already started field testing my survey instruments and in-depth questions. However, circumstances eventually led me to consolidate and focus my dissertation on the village of North River in Hebei, a different province. Below I describe the process of gaining access.

As a research assistant for James Lee's historic-contemporary project, I had developed contacts with the Historic Branch of the Liaoning Provincial Office. In consultations with fellow research team members of the Lee-Campbell Research Group and the China Population Development Research Center in Beijing, I developed a questionnaire targeted at gathering data on both individual and household characteristics of current and potential women migrants. I initially planned to work with the history office of the Liaoning Provincial Office to conduct a cluster sampling of villages and households, anticipating interviews with a sample of families that had a daughter aged eighteen to twenty-eight, peak migration ages. In Liaoning, I field tested my interview with young women who recently migrated from the rural villages into Shenyang for work and study. The Liaoning history office assisted in multi-site data collection ventures over the course of several years. The office also provided limited access to their extensive library of raw and secondary statistics for internal government purposes. My contacts let me flip through their stacks of reference materials, but ultimately refused to let me use or cite the data for my dissertation.

Even without the library data, I still planned to conduct my study in Liaoning. But as I began finalizing plans, corruption scandals and political instability broke out at the provincial level. Although there were many pros to working in Liaoning, about a year into my thesis preparations, the government scandals made it unfeasible to continue to gather data in Liaoning. Although I had never received an official rejection, the contacts told me that because of the sensitive nature of the political unrest, I now needed approval from three different departments in the Governor's Office and an official escort to accompany me while in the Liaoning. It took me almost a year to realize this was a polite bureaucratic way of saying "no." Despite having spent a great deal of time developing contacts and making preparations through the history office, it was no longer feasible to enter the field through their support.

Undaunted by the government's hesitancy to support my project, I planned to interview women from rural Liaoning through personal contacts. I solicited the assistance of a Chinese graduate student who was also interested in doing a project in Liaoning. We gained access to her mother's natal village located two hours from the provincial capital of Shenyang. Over the course of a week, we spoke with local officials about the migration patterns of local young women, visited families, spoke with some young women who returned home for a break, toured greenhouse facilities that sustained the village economy, and field tested interview questions with students. We held a focus group consisting of 15-20 female students, and interviewed several students. We met with the principal and several teachers who told us about how wonderful their new school is and how they do not have any official dropouts.

But as I entered villages through local non-government informants, I realized that some of the villages in the Shenyang area were affected financially by local economic scandals, and that family decision-making and motivations for daughters' migration patterns may be severely biased due to family economic crises. Local informants also were concerned about my personal safety, residing in villages and working in Shenyang where economic unrest had led to an increase in violence.

In addition to conducting focus groups in the countryside through the contacts of my research assistant, I also started interviewing women I was put in touch with through a local school teacher in Shenyang. While I had managed to interview 10 women who had

recently migrated and were living and working in the city, I was soon informed by my government contacts in Liaoning that I needed to cease interviewing immediately if I did not want to get in trouble with local authorities. Since I did not want to jeopardize my dissertation by drawing negative attention to myself, I moved my research site to another province.

## **Changing Locations**

After alerting my dissertation co-chairs of the local situation, we decided to shift my research location to Hebei. Some migration research has been done in this province previously, so it would be possible to compare my work with that of earlier researchers. Furthermore, the proximity of this province to Beijing, a major migrant destination, makes my research findings more comparable to work done in the vicinity of other major migrant destinations like Shanghai and Guangdong.

This decision simplified the design of my study. I went from six small villages to one large village; because villages in Liaoning are small, I had planned to use six villages to vary SES, 6 small villages to ensure variation in SES; one large village in Hebei could provide similar variation in SES. Shifting locations simplified the study design. First, I only had to establish myself and collect data in one community. Second, communities not only differ in affluence but also in village administration, local resources, and schools. This meant it would be difficult to separate out effects of SES from effects of other village differentials. This change in design improved my ability to (1) focus on household SES by controlling for village characteristics, (2) account for migration history and prevalent migration patterns in the origin village, (3) evaluate intra-provincial and inter-provincial migration patterns, and (4) qualitatively compare education, employment, and marriage as out migration pathways for women from the same village. I expand on each improvement below.

### **(1) Focus on household SES by controlling for village characteristics.**

Villages in Liaoning are small and economically homogenous. I originally planned to interview eight women in six villages in order to get variations on women migrants'

socioeconomic status. This required 48 total interviews in six different sites and collecting data on each of those six sites. Hebei Province, my new research location, has larger rural villages with socio-economic diversity. I could compare how women from rich, middle, and poor households from one location differ in their decision-making and migration processes. My research site in Hebei comprises over 3700 people in 800 high, mid, and low SES households. I stratified the population by SES within the village and collected my target number of interviews at this location. The one village design eliminates potential problems from underlying differences in SES across villages; I could evaluate the effect of household SES on migrant women's decisions, no longer needing to control for differences in village characteristics such as prevalent out-migration patterns, administrative leadership, local resources, and schools across multiple sites. I could examine how women of different SES utilize resources, information, and networks in forming and making migration decisions in their efforts to leave the same village. This design decision expedited the study by reducing the workload and time needed for site preparation and data collection.

**(2) Accounting for migration history and prevalent migration patterns.** This one-village design allows for in-depth consideration of migration history and streams prevalent as structural-institutional patterns within the village. I collected information about existing migration patterns and the full set of real options for women considering migration in North River. This allows me to compare how young women and their households who make decisions based in patterns of migration already established within the village to women and households who embark on new migration strategies.

**(3) Evaluating intra-provincial and inter-provincial migration patterns.** Shifting the research site to Hebei province allowed me to better account for how migrants conceptualize geographic proximity and participate in prevailing intra-provincial and inter-provincial internal migration patterns. The 1990 Chinese Census indicates that at the national level, two-thirds of migrants travel within their province, while one-third travel across provinces. The proximity of the new research site to Beijing, a national transportation hub for trains and buses, meant my study now had the added advantage of examining inter-provincial migration. With such ready access to the national railway system, women from my village planned on traveling further than Beijing to more distant

locations. Hence, I could study how women and their families contrasted intra-provincial migration to towns and cities within Hebei to inter-provincial migration for major metropolitan areas.

#### **(4) Qualitative study of education, employment, and marriage out-migration.**

Moving to a one-village study enabled me to shift from conducting quantitative surveys to qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews. Women can take their time to tell their stories. When women paused in their stories, I would ask questions to probe for further details so women could elaborate upon on their experiences. This form of data collection is more appropriate for soliciting women's reasons and causal links for their decisions and subsequent migration behavior, allowing for more emphasis on gathering data about the choice process and on the various stages of the process. A new contribution of my work to existing research is my examination of all three major forms of out-migration -- education, employment, and marriage --simultaneously from one destination, and assessing how migrant women evaluate the choices among these options. I began by trying to capture marriage migration because it was the most prominent means of upward mobility during the 1980s. I also looked at work migration as the newly emerging pathways. What I discovered while living in North River is that young women and their parents no longer chose marriage migration. Another major finding is that rural parents are supporting schooling and vocational pursuits, allowing their daughters to postpone marriage.

Although labor migration constitutes the largest group of migrants, official statistics are murky about alternative pathways and origin village conditions. Researchers argue that remittances from migrant workers drive the bulk of economic and family transformation in rural areas. Migrant workers also have been targeted by the media and public policy action for their impact on urban destinations and urban society. Yet, since work migration is regarded in the literature as a "temporary" option for unmarried women or seasonal option for married women with children, I expanded the study to include women who migrated for education or for marriage because these migration pathways are regarded as more permanent. I also include interviews of women who participated in out-migration for work, but later returned to the village because of marriage, pregnancy, and child-rearing. The expansion of the target interviews to include women who participate in migration for these reasons allows me to better capture the various reasons, mechanisms,

and pathways for how and why women leave this village or urban areas so as to create a fuller migration narrative.

One lesson I learned from my experiences in Liaoning is that because of the recent history of government intervention and involvement in people's lives through multiple policies targeted at controlling population behaviors, villagers were suspicious of surveys conducted by "outsiders." People had learned to hide information and stonewall government representatives, researchers, and surveyors because they did not want outsiders to know the specifics about family wealth and affairs. Because of the importance of having the right contact person to introduce me into a rural community, I appealed to professional contacts at Beijing University to scout for feasible research locations. One colleague, Zhang Hao, had recently conducted research in North River, an affluent burgeoning village in nearby Hebei Province. His dissertation focuses on tracing the lineage of political leadership since the start of the Communist regime, and he had spent significant time and effort building relationships and living in the village. As an honorary member of the community, Zhang Hao vouched for my project and my moral character.

## **ADAPTING ROOTS IN NORTH RIVER**

### **Securing Clearance and Village Initiation**

Fieldwork in any foreign country usually involves maneuvering through a series of cultural-laden administrative steps. In China, entrance into village society and data collection was achieved in the following order; before entering village society in North River, I first needed to obtain the support and clearance from a faculty member at Peking University in Beijing. Once faculty support is secured, my faculty sponsor calls his village contact to establish my credibility as a member of the academic community. This is necessary because rural villages are generally not opened to the public for research. Chinese and foreign nationals alike are restricted from entering for journalistic, academic, or tourism reasons.<sup>ii</sup> If spotted by locals and reported to authorities, uninvited visitors may be asked to present their identification papers, residency designation, and visa, and then are escorted from the village. Faculty endorsement secured one the informal invitation to

visit the village for a meeting to present gifts and speak with local leadership about the study.

Zhang Hao first needed to secure clearance for me to visit the village from his own research advisor, Yang Shanghua at Peking University in Beijing. Their team had spent years building rapport and conducting social research in the vicinity. Once we obtained clearance, Zhang Hao and I met with Professor Yang to plan out the logistics for the multiple research trips I would make for data collection. Professor Yang suggested that Zhang Hao and I stay in the local town and commute to the village in the mornings, eat our meals at the local restaurants in the village, and return to town before sunset. Professor Yang argued that it would be unsafe for us to reside in the village or travel on the road at night. The strategy for our first trip was to meet with local officials, take a tour of the village, and decide if the village would meet the criteria for my study.

Counter to Professor Yang's argument, Zhang Hao argued that we needed stay in the village to show our sincerity to the villagers. He lived in the village during the duration of his data collection, and argued that the villagers would take offense to us living in town instead of staying with a local household. Furthermore, he explained that most of the interesting business happens in the evening, when villagers "chuan menr," or visit friends, family, and neighbors after dinner, and that most of my connections would be made in this way, as villagers tended their businesses or fields during the day. Furthermore, families and friends of potential participants needed to see me walk about the village and become familiar with me so that they could approach me. Otherwise, households would never welcome me into their homes, and daughters and granddaughters would not tell me about their migration aspirations and experiences. I took Zhang Hao's advice to reside in North River for the duration of fieldwork.

Entering a Chinese village for fieldwork requires obtaining permission and support from the local leadership. Zhang Hao was already considered an honorary member of the North River because he gained the support of the leaders and conducted his dissertation in the community. His introduction as my sponsor, and his endorsement of my character and my study carried weight. I was welcomed and granted permission to stay and work in North River. The acknowledgment and endorsement of the village leadership was critical. Unlike my previous failed attempts to enter villages by working first through higher

branches of the government and garnering permission from top-down, our direct visits to village leadership on their turf, and our asking for permission demonstrated respect for the leadership's authority and influence. Their support gave me access to information and resources not otherwise available or shared with researchers, even those with clearance from higher branches of the government.

As part of the initiation process to becoming an adopted member of the community, Zhang Hao took me to meet key members of the village leadership: the Mayor, Party Secretary, Party Accountant, and Family Planning Representative. A quirk for North River is that there are two party secretaries because there were two political factions in the village; one secretary for each faction. Since Zhang Hao's research is about the history of power dynamics in North River, he knew exactly which members of the local community would be important for endorsing my study and offering me help. In our first meetings, the leadership conveyed their expectation that we would represent their village and its residents in a good light. This implied that we should minimize saying anything that would defame or hurt them. They were a proud village because they were more prosperous than surrounding villages, had larger population than surrounding villages, had developed their local businesses into a thriving commercial hub, and had more students test into the top schools across China. As a historic village, many archeologists have come to their village to dig for relics. Although North River was used to public and academic attention, the leadership was honored that their village continues to be selected as participants in research from Chinese and foreign universities.

## **GRANTING OF RESOURCES**

In our initial meeting, village leadership provided their understanding of village migration patterns and popular destinations and granted me permission to reside and work in North River. Subsequent meetings resulted in access to Residency Registers, Village Accounting and Subsidies Recipient Lists, and Family Planning Records. With the support of leadership, I worked with designated community members to reconstruct a census of the village, narrow down eligible households, establish local social structure and meaningful economic status distinctions, create a village map detailing economic and

residential units, get an overall feel of the village to begin canvassing households for interviews. Below, I describe these meetings in greater detail.

I began by meeting with Elder Party Secretary who told me what he knew of young village women's migration patterns and destinations, and the history of migration in the village. Elder Party Secretary enlisted the Village Head Accountant to help me construct a list of eligible households and young women for my study by going through the hukou (household residency registers). He asked the Family Planning Representative to join us, provide input, and introduce me to households with young women eligible for the study. The Elder Party Secretary extended me an open invitation to attend important village leadership dinners where community issues and official business are conducted, and where I could be formally introduced to the rest of village leadership and influential community members. Finally, he made arrangements for me to live in the village and facilitated my adoption by local families as an honorary household member.

These resources and local privileges facilitated the building of a database of households, creating meaningful SES Categories, and physically mapping of North River, its commercial businesses, and residential boundaries. The most instrumental set of resources granted by the leadership was access to interviews and administrative records of the village accountant, the Family Planning Representative, and her husband, a local electrician. Their help enabled me to collect the bulk of the data used in this study. Below I discuss each informant.

### **Head Village Accountant**

At the start of my study, the head village accountant had been at his position for 15 years. His responsibilities included maintaining the official village copy of the hukou (household residency registry)<sup>iii</sup>, record-keeping and payment disbursement to households that received government subsidies due to poverty or disability, payment to households for farmland allotted to eligible members of the community<sup>iv</sup>, and general administration of subsidies and reimbursements from the government. The head village accountant also is the official liaison to help villagers interface with administrative procedures such as

applying for a national identification card<sup>v</sup>, issuing letters of economic duress for students admitted into college<sup>vi</sup>, documenting and forwarding application to change place of official residency from village to location of school to the township police stations. The head village accountant also submits applications on behalf of women who have reached age fifty for subsidies from the central government. These women adhered to the one-child policy during their child-bearing years, and now have only one or two children for financial support. The central government provides subsidies to compensate them for the support these women would have received if they had more children. Particularly relevant to my study, for the five years previous to my visit, the head accountant maintained a separate set of records documenting all official out-migration events each year. He kept a record of all the education migrants who left North River for schools that required a change in the location of hukou registration, of women who married outside the village, and of men, women, and children who left the community because of reunions with family members with residency registered areas outside North River. Being a native of the village, he served as the liaison for North River and the county's administrative functions and apparatus. Having fifteen years of experience, he is familiar with the financial situation for North River households.

The village accountant helped me create a village census using hukou information. The hukou data provided detailed demographic information about name, sex, year of birth, household number, head of household, relationship to household head, ethnicity, place of birth, current address, and production unit designation. Sometimes, additional information about highest education, or official migration reasons were listed. These data enabled me to ascertain the number of households, the number of women between the peak migration ages of seventeen to twenty-eight, and the household structures for all the families in the village. Records for disability and government subsidies over the past two years helped identify low SES households, refining the pool of potential study participants. Since the village accountant kept records for young men and women who requested official hukou relocation based on marriage, or school appointments, or reunions of children with parents, I could factor in the degree to which young people were leaving the village with official documentation over the last five years. On the initial trip, Zhang Hao and I spent three days with the Head Village Accountant, went through the registers of over 800

households and 3700 people, wrote down the names of young women between the ages of seventeen to twenty-eight<sup>vii</sup>, and documented the data in the residency registry by photographing the hukou records of North River.

### **Family Planning Representative**

After collecting hukou data from the village accountant, I turned the raw data files over to my Chinese coder. The coder inputted the handwritten notes listing women who were part of the target age group. After completing this task, the coder looked at the digital photos of each hukou record for the rest of the village. Reading the hand-written information recorded on the residency registry, she reconstructed a detailed census in an excel spreadsheet. With the list of potential eligible study participants in hand, I returned to North River to see the Family Planning Representative and have her verify its accuracy. She is a reliable source of information about households in the village because her job is to ensure that villagers follow government policies for fertility control and monitor contraceptive behavior as closely as possible. As part of her responsibilities, the Family Planning Representative counsels married women about contraceptive use, records the contraceptive method used by couples, and visits households every month to update information on births, deaths, pregnancies. During these visits, she checks in with married women about getting their ob/gyn exams at the local clinic for health and preventive monitoring for pregnancy. Her target population consists of married women who have not yet reached menopause. Furthermore, she helps local households apply for subsidies and applications for permission to have children. In carrying out her monthly visits to households with married women, she regularly comes into contact with the women of North River households. She knows the children, is informed when daughters are about to marry, and is informed about major life-course events of pregnancy, birth, marriage, and death.

Unlike women who marry into a village, the Family Planning Representative and her family are originally from North River. She grew up in the local community and married into another local family. Her family is well-esteemed in the village, and the family planning

representative is respected as an upstanding native person and trusted by the North River community.

Since she grew up in the community, and because her work gives her intimate access and credibility with local household matriarchs, the Family Planning representative was an ideal informant, village guide, and sponsor for my entry into women's lives. On my second trip to the village she looked at the list of potential participants and made a few suggestions for which households to approach first. By this time, I was staying with her family, so when we canvassed the village, we could tell people where to find me. She took me to neighboring households where she knew the families more closely and could tell me if daughters or granddaughters were back in town, or working in nearby towns. She started by vouching for me with local women in the same way that Zhang Hao had done for me when I first met with the village leadership. She would explain my study to household matriarchs and that I wanted to speak with the daughter (and sometime granddaughters). Because almost every woman in North River recognized her and met with her regularly for Family Planning purposes, my transition into visiting households went smoothly. Although she had a great deal of work, Family Planning Representative helped me canvass households in addition to her own workload. Soon, by word of mouth women throughout the village knew who I was and expected a visit from me if there were young women, ages seventeen to twenty-nine in the household. Once I interacted with the household matriarch, I could earn the support of the parents to contact their daughters and conduct my interviews.

The family planning representative and I would go to a household, usually meet with the household head (often a man) or the matriarch (usually his wife), and inquire as to the whereabouts of daughters or granddaughters who fit my study. If they were out of town, but not necessarily in school, household members were generally willing to tell us when and whether the potential participant was home. If not, we often recorded contact information for the potential participant. We would then ask if they would mind calling and talking to these young women using my cell phone. This method of contact allowed households to talk to their daughters and granddaughters without paying, and provided me an introduction and a show of support from the household for my study. I would ask permission to take down the cell number of these young women to make follow-up phone

calls. Since the original call was made using my phone, the young women would recognize the number when I called again to schedule interviews.

As we expanded to more households further from my host's home, I began having difficulty remembering where households were located. At this point, the Family Planning Representative suggested that I work with her husband, one of the local electricians, to construct a map of the village so that I could navigate the village to make return trips to households. Also, with a map, I could begin to ask around and locate households on my own, reducing the burden on the Family Planning Representative.

### **A Village Electrician**

Fortunately for me, the family planning representative is married to one of the village electricians, another key informant with extensive knowledge about village society. Electricians inspect and check wiring for new construction, go to designated households in the village to check usage, help repair black-outs, and collect payments every month. They are also responsible for maintaining the electrical grids and power lines in the village. In checking and reporting usage, each electrician maintains an account book with the name of the household head, household production number, and the monthly energy usage for each individual household in his district. He visits each residential or commercial property in his district at least once a month. He is also on-call to respond to emergencies anytime during the day. The responsibilities of his job means that he enters people's homes and can observe how people of different SES furnish their homes and utilize their appliances.

My village electrician monitors the Commerce Street district area and so has a good knowledge of people who own businesses. He knows which households qualify for poverty subsidies, and what their homes look like since many subsidized households are located right off the commercial district. Since he held this position for a number of years, his knowledge encompassed a great deal of what households and furnishing are like. In terms of electricity usage, energy consumption patterns and the presence and use of household appliances, the electrician explained that it is likely that some major household

appliances were brought into households as wedding gifts from parents and close relatives for newly constructed homes; for couples living in older homes, people may have refurnished the property when moving in to their parents' home upon marriage. Poorer households would basically use these pieces of furniture as spare storage instead of for their intended purpose. The electrician said that you can tell the affluence of a household by the electric bill because larger, more expensive appliances require more energy, resulting in more energy usage and higher bills.

The Family Planning Representative and her husband the electrician collectively know almost every household in the village because their job responsibilities require they visit people in their homes and businesses on a monthly basis. As part of his work, he had several sectional maps showing how each home is connected to the grid. So using these maps, he helped me draw a functional local map of the village.

All three key informants are originally from North River, so they understand the history and development of the village before and after out-migration and the commercial boom took place, as well as the relative economic prestige of this village in the surrounding area. They each helped me create the list of target household of eligible women for my study, reconstruct the village census, and locate these households on a map for canvassing and interviewing purposes. They knew the village well enough to verify the completeness of my list of potential participants and they provided information on the socio-economic structure of the households in North River. By creating meaningful categories for what it means to be low SES, middle SES, and high SES in North River, my key informants helped me to group women by their backgrounds so that I could categorize the 409 women eligible by natal SES for my study.

## **CREATING MEANINGFUL CATEGORIES TO STRATIFY TARGET POPULATION**

There are theoretic, logistical, and practical reasons to create meaningful categories of SES to stratify the target population.

A major premise in the literature is that household access to economic and political resources differentially influences how women are raised as children and how they

strategize and make decisions about their lives as they transition to adulthood. I stratify the target population based on their household conditions at the time of the study. Married women are located as members of their natal households.<sup>viii</sup> I stratify the study's target population by categorizing households based on their economic resources, and whether they were village teachers, leaders, and cadres. Stratifying the target population captures the widest range of experiences without interviewing all 409 eligible women. By stratifying the women's households into three categories of high, middle and low SES, I can conduct interviews following the grounded theory concept of saturation of information in each target group, thereby limiting the overall number of women I needed contact for interviews.

### **Defining High SES Households**

From conversations with local informants in North River, high SES households are defined as having good economic conditions, or having educated, powerful, or wealthy household members, having a steady income source, or having well-respected and influential household members.<sup>ix</sup> North River informants apply these criteria to identify high SES households. First, local shops owners and business ventures are included for their wealth and property. Second, past and present political leaders are included for their power and influence in the community.<sup>x</sup> Third, professionals with high-skilled or knowledge-based occupations such as electricians, teachers, doctors, and pharmacists are included; their occupations provide steady sources of income. In all of the groups except business owners, these occupations were designated as high SES because they provide retirement pensions.

### **Defining Middle SES Households**

In contrast to high SES households, middle SES households are characterized by the absence of businesses, professional occupations, political office, and the lack of disabled, handicapped, or sickly household members. Informants defined these households as average in economics,<sup>xi</sup> and suggest that these households had more members of working ages and hence able to bring in more remittances to support

expenses. The sources of income for these households come from grain harvests, livestock prices, farm-land subsidies, and remittances from members who have left home for work as migrants.

### **Defining Low SES Households**

On the other end of the spectrum, local informants define low SES households as not having money, being poverty-stricken, suffering from poor economic conditions, and having high dependency ratios at the household level. For informants, the presence of household members who have disabilities, are handicapped, suffer from an illness, or have recently died automatically qualified the household as low SES because of the costs involved in taking care of people who are ill or covering the cost of funeral arrangements.<sup>xii</sup> Informants emphasized that none of these households are in dire conditions in which people are homeless, starving, or uncared-for. Low SES households can afford basic necessities but little else. Like middle SES households, low SES households depend on grain harvests, livestock prices, farm-land subsidies, and remittances from household migrants as sources of income. However, the higher dependency ratio from young children and the elderly, as well as the presence of sickness and disability amongst members in the household, means that more people are dependent on the income and wages earned from remittances and farm work. In an effort to help destitute households, village leadership used discretionary funds from the central government to subsidize households with handicapped or disabled members in 2007 and elderly living by themselves in 2006. This list was used to identify the poorest households in the North River community.

### **BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY**

Once I stratified the target population into household SES categories, my next step was becoming a member of the local community. This step would enable me to learn what village life is like, to learn what home and leaving home mean to young migrant women, and to facilitate the process of interviewing and conceptualizing the migration experience.

Becoming part of the community entailed becoming a member of the households I stayed with, learning local village customs, listening to village gossip, visiting local schools, participating in farming, observing and participating in farming routines, observing subsidiary payments for farmland, riding buses on major travel days with local women leaving home to go back to work, visiting families, asking for phone numbers, sitting by parents who were calling daughters on my behalf. I ate with local families, used local stores, attended market day, went on trips and visited locations where locals vacation, and was treated by local doctors. Additionally, I participated in carrying out household chores, helped with farming, attended local events, assisted families on market day, hung out with young women when they went out to have fun, went to local worship and recreational events. I bought gifts when visiting households as well as village leaders and elders, and helped students study for school. When I got sick, I demonstrated that I trusted the locals to take care of me, to drive me to the hospital, and to take me to see the same doctors that they would call upon when they got sick.

Another major reason for becoming part of the community is to assuage people's perceptions of my being a city dweller entering their rural community to conduct interviews. Prejudice in China works in two major ways. In the city, urbanites think less of people from rural areas, regarding them as "tu" or of the earth, meaning dirty and uneducated. In the countryside, farmers think of outsiders as spoiled, to be "too good" to live or even stay with a rural family. When I first approached professors and professional office staff in Beijing University offices, many of them were shocked that I was thinking of staying overnight in the countryside. The understanding was that I would commute to the village in the morning, visit local leadership, canvas homes, and conduct interviews. Concerned about cleanliness and safety for me as a young woman, they hoped that the local hostels and restaurants would be sufficient for short stays during fieldwork.

I needed to take on a dual-identity as part of the process for entering people's households to conduct interviews with young women and their families. On one hand, I needed to be a member of the community; on the other hand, young women needed to see me as an urban sister to whom they could confide their thoughts and feelings about their migration experiences and life aspirations.

Acquisition of urban knowledge and identity included my fieldwork in Shenyang and its surrounding villages, in Beijing, and in the county seat of North River. I spent time in these typical major migration destinations, visiting places where migrant women typically worked, and had conducting surveys with students at school and workers at their jobs, doing focus groups with students and migrant workers in suburban village settings, and doing in-depth interviews of women at their work locations. I observed work and living conditions at these migrant destinations, all of which helped me develop a sense of what migrant women's lives were like as students and workers. The knowledge I gained from these observations and interviews helped me relate to women's experiences as migrants, and enabled me to understand which topics would be sensitive or difficult for young women to discuss in my study. Having developed this intimate knowledge of what urban lifestyle is like for young women I developed an interview strategy which allowed women to unpack and discuss their decisions to become migrants, on their own terms, during an interview where they set the both pace and content of the conversation.

Having developed familiarity with the urban identity women strove for, I needed to understand the rural origins. I needed to first understand what their lives are like at "home" and "leaving home," to understand the rhythms of rural life, cycles and seasons, neighborhood gossip, the slow pace of village living, the excitement associated with urban centers. In order to become a part of the village community, I became part of two households in the North River, and participated in major farming and local celebration for the better part of a year before I started collecting interviews with young migrant women. My status as an insider/outsider gave women confidence about my sisterhood and my ability to understand the draw of urban lifestyles.

### **FICTIVE KINSHIP, ADOPTED FAMILIES, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF REPUTABLE HOUSEHOLDS**

I was adopted by two families during my stay in North River, each with particular circumstances and benefits. In this section, I describe the practical and sociological reasons for becoming part of these households, and the conditions of each household and their extended family businesses and residential complexes. Through these families, I

participated in important social activities in the North River community. By staying with these families and having them introduce me to their friends, neighbors, and acquaintances, they served as my de-facto voucher to people in the village.

Villagers knew that I would be accountable to someone in the village and that they could use their knowledge of the moral character of my adopted families as a gauge for me. By living in the village, community members knew where to find me should they have questions. My adopted families also facilitated my introduction and entry into village life through activities that increased my visibility to the community. This familiarity enabled other villagers to approach me and become comfortable with me. Over the course of my stay, my adopted families became familiar with me and my research, and become liaisons by answering questions on my behalf and recruiting young women to participate in my study.

There is a long history of the role of fictive kinship in Chinese ancient and contemporary society, and being aware of these dynamics allowed me to conduct more reliable participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork. The local leadership helped me secure housing and de-facto adoption into two households. The first family is Zhang Hao's adopted family, the household and extended family he stayed with while he collected data for his dissertation. The second household is that of the family planning representative and her extended family. While Zhang Hao showed me the ropes during our first two stays in North River, we arranged for me to first stay with his adopted family. As I prepared for my extended stay, I moved into a guest bedroom at the home of the family planning representative, my second fictive family. Both households and their extended families were well established and respected in the village.

The importance of a reputable household to vouch for you is crucial in rural ethnographic fieldwork. Soon after I began walking around in the village, visiting households, and conducting interviews, my adopted family would help me through their capacity as my public relations team, guide, and informant to village society and residential life. Many villagers are still tentative about talking to outsiders, and even in a village of 3700 registered inhabitants, people can spot a fresh face. My adopted family often fielded questions on my behalf, helped explain the purpose of my study to their fellow villagers in terms that made sense to them, and helped me recruit participants or

other informants. Oftentimes, my adopted family served as informants, helping me understand local customs, village gossip, and strategize about the best times and ways to approach people in North River.

Zhang Hao's adopted family is located on the east side of the North River. They had two properties, one within the village and one on Commerce Street. Their residential unit was older, and is the family complex, with the household head, his wife and the grandchildren residing there. Down the block and across the street, their son and daughter-in-law managed and resided in the shower and bath business the family had started. During my first trip, I stayed in the family complex. While we were there, the family helped me to interview one young woman for my study. There were many people in the room, and they all seemed to know about her situation and the reasons for why she is home. I soon realized that I would need to make other arrangements for locating and interviewing women for my study. By my second trip, I moved in with the family planning representative and her husband. The two of them have a son who attends boarding school, so I used his bedroom during my time in the village. I often met with and conducted my interviews with young women in this room.

Being an adopted member of a well-respected family meant people related to me as a member of that family. When people in the village asked me whether I was staying in the closest town, I responded no, I am staying with my older sister, the Family Planning Representative. In this way, I was conveying to locals that I felt safe in the village, and that a respectable and trusted family in town trusted me enough to have me stay with them. In the beginning, people would ask me if it were difficult for me, being a city girl<sup>xiii</sup>. I told them that the conditions were fine, and I enjoyed being in the village. Between my two families, I participated in market days, shopping for groceries for the households, joining the leadership for business meetings, attending "subsidies" payments to villagers, going to the local town for festivities, visiting my fictive sister and brother's child at high school, being in town for celebration of holidays, taking an over-filled bus back to Beijing after holidays, going to visit families during meals, participate in planting and harvesting the peanut crop, celebrating holiday at the temple, going for a hike up the local religious mountain, cleaning peanuts for next year's crop and preparing peanuts to be pressed into peanut oil.

Besides helping me build rapport with local families and increase my exposure to the people of North River, my participation in these activities with local families allowed me to get a better sense of what home means to young rural women. By this point, I was prepared to conduct my interviews in earnest.

### **III. DATA COLLECTION**

In the spring of 2008, I was introduced to the residents of North River by my collaborator Zhang Hao. He conducted his dissertation fieldwork in North River, and helped me gain access to this rural community. Based on their definitions of high, middle, and low SES, we assigned categories to the women on the target list. There were a total of 409 women on the list: 53 women of high SES households, 248 women from middle SES households, and 108 women from low SES households.

I made many trips to the village of North River from 2008-2009. Most were before and after major holidays, as migrants tend to return to the village during the time off granted for holidays. Spending holidays in the village enabled me to observe the impact of national holidays on the behavior of the local population. Besides the national calendar of holidays, the people in the village were keenly aware of when crops needed to be planted and harvested, and would return home to help with farm work. I took advantage of these important cyclic migration patterns and returned to North River to interview women and to participate in harvesting and planting crops.

While a handful of interviews were conducted in the evening or nighttime in the homes of participants, the majority of my interviews occurred at the desk during the day in my bedroom/study while I stayed with the Family Planning Representative. Sometimes, I went to the home of the participant and conducted the interview in an unoccupied bedroom while the rest of the household carried about their day in the other rooms. Before these interviews, I would contact young women's households, find out from the mother or father when their daughter would be home, and make an appointment either to return to their home for an interview or for the young women to visit me. In this manner, I spent the

mornings canvassing the village visiting the homes of potential study participants, and reserved afternoons and evenings for interviewing young women. On days with no interview appointments, my afternoons consisted of visiting other informants and key community members to get a better sense of commerce and life in North River. I would visit with local businesses to get a better sense of how locals made purchases and spent money. On several occasions, I observed how local business owners talked to customers and asked about their children. In this way, people catch up on the news going on in the village and know who would be coming home from school, work, or visiting from their marital homes to return for the holidays or to help with the crops.

### **SAMPLE SELECTION**

With the approval of the village elders, I began canvassing North River with the Family Planning Representative in March 2008. The Family Planning Representative would tell me when young women were returning home to visit their families. Some young women are students boarding at their local high schools or colleges, some are migrant workers returning home for the holidays, and some women are pregnant or nursing mothers staying with their natal families for a short while. As local families and participants became familiar with me, they would tell me when young women became available for interviews.

### **Defining the Potential of Migration within the Village**

There were several steps in selecting the sample. Table 2.1 reports the number of women by SES for the first four steps.

[Insert Table 2.1 here.]

There are 3725 individuals of whom 1996 were females, listed in the village population register (hukou), in March 2008. In step 1, I listed all 409 women in the village between the ages of 17 to 28 years. I had SES information on all these women; 53 (13%) were high

SES households, 248 (61%) of middle SES households, and 108 (26%) were low SES households. In step 2, I omitted women for whom I could not obtain migration information. This reduced the population from 409 to 350 women. I have migration status for 86 percent (350) of this population.

In step 3, I restricted the sample to women who had migrated. This reduced the sample from 350 to 320. It is noteworthy that 91 percent of the women migrated. Migration amongst the target population is almost universal. Migration rates were high for women from each SES group –ranging for 87 percent for low SES women to 93 percent for middle SES women to 98 percent for high SES women. I likely found higher percentages of migration activity – 91 percent migrants (320/350) than do most Census and survey studies because their sample construction overlooks most education migrants and under-represents work migrants.

In step 4, I dropped sixteen women migrants for whom hukou records provided no migration pathway information. The records provided information on whether the 304 remaining women migrants were educational migrants, were currently working, and were currently married, or designated women who had already left the village as college students or were still in school studying for college as education migrants. I then divided the remaining non-education migrants into unmarried workers and married women non-education migrants. The hukou records did not provide information on whether these married women had initially migrated for work, for marriage, or even whether they were currently working.

Table 2.2 reports on migration pathway by SES. Education is a common pathway: forty percent of women migrants leave to pursue higher education.

[Insert Table 2.2]

Table 2.2 shows how women's migration paths differ by their household status for the sample of 304 migrants. Women are roughly split between the three groups; forty percent are education migrants, twenty-eight percent are currently working and thirty-two percent are married. Education is the most common pathway for migrants from high and middle SES households and work is the least common pathway. Fifty percent of women from

high SES households are education migrants, twenty-three percent are currently working, and twenty-five percent are married. The pattern is similar for women from middle SES households: forty-six percent are education migrants, twenty-three percent are currently working, and thirty-one percent are married. But the pattern for women from low SES households is quite different: nineteen percent are education migrants, forty-three percent are working, and thirty-six percent are married.

Since women's representation in these three groups differs by SES, my goal in constructing the final interview sample was adequate coverage in each SES by pathway combination. I did so by first selecting 84 women from the full sample of 304 migrants based on family SES and migration group. I then obtained contact information for women migrants from seventy-four percent (62) of these families. Seventy-nine percent (49) of the women whom I contacted agreed to be interviewed. I stopped at 42 interviews because of saturation.

Table 2.3 reports the migration groups by SES for my study participants.

[Insert Table 2.3]

I conducted interviews with 42 women. I wanted to ensure that I interviewed at least 2 participants in each of the SES by migration pathway cells. All nine cells of the SES by migration pathway matrix are non-zero. I interviewed 15 education migrants; 6 women from high SES households, 7 from middle SES households, and 2 from low SES household. I interviewed 18 workers; 4 from high SES, 7 middle SES, and 7 from low SES households. I interviewed 9 married women; 2 from high SES, 3 from middle SES, and 4 from low SES. There are 2 to 7 individuals in each SES by migration pathway cell.

[Insert Table 2.4]

The proportion of education migrants within each SES category is roughly equal to that within the population by SES groups. Work migrants are over-represented, and marriage migrants are under-represented within SES groups.

In selecting the initial list of families to contact, I first went through the list and chose families with the help of informants. The family planning representative recommended starting with families whom she knew well, so that access would be easier. Her work put her in contacts with families and she knew which ones had daughters returning to the village in the near future. The women I interviewed in the initial interviews provided an additional set of referrals to fellow migrants whom they knew planned to visit the village soon. In initiating contacts for participants, I began by working with informants to contact target families. At first, I went with the Family Planning Representative to call on families she was familiar with. Later on, I had young women whom I had already contacted serve as liaisons for meeting additional families. After I was established in the village, I personally approached households without being referred by other village members.

A second consideration in choosing respondents was adequate numbers of respondents in each SES group in each migration pathway. I eventually attempted to contact 84 migrants who had migrated. When I contacted a household, I would first talk with the parents and discuss the study. I then would ask if their daughters would be available to talk on the phone or would be returning home soon. A positive response meant parents used my cell phone to place a call to their daughters during my visit. Parents would speak directly to their daughters about my study. They would ask their daughters when they were coming home so we could coordinate an interview appointment. Once parents used my phone to call their daughters, I would ask for permission to record the cell phone numbers and send follow-up text messages to confirm interviews. Sixty-four (62) of the 84 families I contacted met with me and gave me contact information for their daughters.

My strategy of using family planning referrals – friends – and being based in the community gave me a leg up on getting migrants with ties to the community such as education and non-married workers. These migrants are still considered community members while marriage migrants typically have fewer ties to the community. Thus, the convenience sampling and referral contacts made it hard to access married women. Living in the village did not expose me to women who already migrated out for marriage. Women who married belong to the husbands' community so I could only get them just prior to

marriage, visiting, and pregnant or post-birth. Hence, my sample of married migrants includes those with the most ties to the village. Parents and siblings were not as willing to provide information because these women lived far away and visited less often. Married migrants who participated in my study moved relatively close by, were recently pregnant, and/or needed childcare support from their natal households.

Eighty-seven percent of high SES households, seventy-one percent of middle SES households, and sixty-seven percent of low SES households agreed to provide information. This pattern runs counter to most survey studies, where high SES households tend to refuse such participation. I attribute my rate of response amongst high SES households to endorsement by community and business leaders. I suspect that the high response rate among high SES participants is linked to the education pathway in another respect. Knowing that I am a student working on my doctorate, parents of high SES household encouraged their daughters to socialize with me as a way of improving their social network and gathering more information about education at prestigious institutions. I found that women from high SES and middle SES households asked questions about my educational trajectory. They regarded the interview session as an opportunity to gather additional information about the options they considered. My interviews with education migrants from high and middle SES household often concluded with these young women interviewing me about my academic strategies and pursuits, and their request for us to continue communications in the future. These women were effective at expanding their social network.

Agreement varied by SES: Eighty percent (16/20) of women from high SES households ninety-five percent of women from middle SES household, and sixty-four percent of women from low SES households agreed to participate. Overall, seventy-nine percent of the 62 women whom I contacted agreed to be interviewed.

The majority of interviews were completed in the village when women returned home to visit their families and had some down time to participate in a two hour interview. Oftentimes, women would only be in the village for 2 to 3 days. I conducted interviews in my village residences, the village homes of participants, or the homes of participants' friends. I conducted three interviews in the county seat for North River and around the city and suburbs of Beijing. These interviews were difficult for the participants because they

were either working or had to take time off of work for us to complete the interviews. I concluded interviewing once I had reached the saturation point after speaking with 42 women. I compensated each woman with a token gift of a journal or a make-up set.

## **INTERVIEW FORMAT**

In this section, I describe the physical location, setting, and tone of interviews and discuss my role as the interviewer probing and guiding the conversation as participants as provided their narratives.

Young women could be candid with me in their interviews because I was familiar with their physical surroundings and economic backgrounds. I scheduled interviews often having first visited the young women and their families at home. The young women could then decide if they wanted to stay in their homes for their interviews, go to a friend's home, or have the interview at my home. I also let them decide if they wanted to do one-on-one interviews with me, or have their friends and family sit in and participate as observers offering commentary. On several occasions, I visited the young women at their place of employment and conducted the interview during their breaks.

Undoubtedly, the way these women were recruited into the study and actually sat through the interview impacted their comfort level and responses. Some interviews were conducted with other people in the room. Under these conditions, some women would clam up and not talk, some would defer to their friends to answer a question on their behalf, or would squirm uncomfortably. Under each of these conditions, I needed to adapt the questions and would always remind participants that they were free to not answer questions, or to respond by saying "I don't know" if they have never thought about the topic before.<sup>xiv</sup> There were several occasions that this happened. These questions often dealt with issues about dating, boyfriends, and premarital sex.

I tried to make my interviews as comfortable for the women as possible. I asked them what they knew about the study from what their parents, family, or friends had told them. I offered tea and hot water, and had them sit in a comfortable chair. I kept my notebook and tape recorder to the side. I presented a gift at the end, I conversed about topics that interested them, and I provided contact information and my cell phone number

in case they had additional questions. I then inquired whether they wanted to do the interview by themselves, or whether they didn't mind having their friends or family members there during the interview. I also asked if they had other family, friends, neighbors or other acquaintances who qualify and would be willing to participate in the study.

In interviewing the women, I allowed for a more organic progression of storytelling and narrative creation. I refrained from using a hard copy set of questions. Instead of using the same prompts with each interview, I had women tell me about their lives. Interviews proceeded in several ways. Having been introduced to the study by family members or friends, some women were familiar with my research topic and would start talking about the subject matter right away. I would take notes and ask questions to elicit more information. Sometimes women were more timid, and were unsure about where to start talking about their stories. When I encountered this situation, I began by introducing the study, and eased into the interview by asking women their age, and if they are attending school, working, or if they are married and visiting their parents. I would explore topics, letting women talk as much as they wanted and try not to cut them off. While the interview participants spoke of their experiences, I would take notes and write questions down. If there were still unanswered questions, I would then ask for clarification.

### **LOGIC OF THE INTERVIEW**

I approached my interviews with young women with the perspective that women's lives are complicated and that they are still working through their narratives about the decisions and experiences they encounter in rural to urban migration. I decided to unfold the complexities of women's experiences by starting with simple questions with straightforward answers and then asking more abstract questions about decisions and meaning making in their narratives. These more abstract questions required the women to describe how and why they made important decisions in their lives, and to express the impact their decisions had on their migration and trajectories for upward social mobility.

Some women initially hesitated to participate in interviews stating that no one would want to know about their lives. They asked me what I am looking for when I prepare to

interview them. I told participants that I want to learn about their lives. I start then with straightforward questions because women have usually thought about the content in these questions. As we progress to more abstract questions, women may not have thought about the questions that I pose, or may be working out their feelings. The responses become more nuanced, with replies entailing more explanation, with women bringing more actors into the weave of their decision making. The responses women provided to these abstract questions revealed how women are contextualizing their lives with details and decision-making processes, thereby revealing their internal processes of weighing options, resources, and obligations. Their responses also indicate how they conceptualize current and future opportunities.

A typical interview progresses through the following set of probes and questions:

### **Of All Participants (at the beginning of the interview)**

How old are you?

Did you go to school in our village?

Where did you attend middle school?

Are you attending or have you attended high school?

Why did you attend this middle and/or high school?

Can you tell me about yourself as a student? Why do you feel this way?

What do you like about school? What don't you like about school? Why?

Do you have friends in school? What are they like?

### **To Education Participants**

Have you had classmates who dropped out of school?

Have you ever thought about dropping out of school?

What do you think about people who drop out of school?

Do you keep in touch with classmates who dropped out of school? Why-why not?

How much does it cost to attend your school?

Who pays for your tuition, books, and living expenses?

What was it like for you when you first started living at school?  
How often do you come home?  
How often do you talk to your parents? Do you call them or do they call you?  
Do you plan on participating in the college entrance exam?  
How do you feel about the college entrance exam? Why do you feel this way?  
Have you thought about college? Where would you like to go to college? Why?  
Who have you talked to about college plans? Why?  
What would you like to do after college? Why?  
If you have problems at school or in your life, who do you turn to for help? Why?  
Could you compare what you think is different between your life and the life of women who become migrant workers?

### **To Single Employment Participants**

Why did you stop going to school?  
How did you decide to not continue with schooling?  
How did you drop out of school? How did your parents' react to your decision?  
How did you find your first job? Did you get help to locate this job?  
How many jobs have you worked?  
Where were these jobs located?  
How old were you when you worked your first job?  
Why did you choose this job?  
What did you learn in this job?  
How much did you make, how long did you work there?  
What was your work like on a daily or weekly basis?  
What were your other jobs like?  
How did you locate these other jobs?  
How long did you work at these other jobs?  
If you have problems at work, or in your life, who do you turn to for help? Why?  
Did you have co-workers? What were they like?  
What was good about your work, what was bad about your work?

What kind of work would you like? Why?

What kind of work would you like in the future? Why?

How would you accomplish these plans for work?

### **Of Education and Single Employment Participants (towards the end of the interview)**

Have you visited any big cities? Where would you like to live? Why?

When do you think young women should get married? Why this age?

What do you think women should look for in a marriage candidate?

Where do you want to live in the future? Why?

Do you want to have children? How many children? Why?

Do you plan to on taking care of your parents? Why or why not?

### **Of Married Employed Participants**

Marriage participants are asked the Employment participants questions, then:

When did you get married?

How did you meet your husband?

Did you work after you got married?

Where do you live now? How did you decide to live there?

Do you have children?

What does your husband do?

Would you like to work again? What would you like to do?

Women typically took between 1.5 hours to 2 hours to address these questions. In their answers, women describe how friends, teachers, families each influenced their personal decisions. Taken as a whole, women's web of friends, teachers, and families form the structure in which women make and execute decisions about using school, work, and marriage to improve their lives. In their descriptions to the questions I posed in the interview, I discerned the social factors that structure the scope of women's perceived

options, and their agency in making decisions about how they interact with these structures. I describe how women conceptualized the impacts of education, employment, and marriage on their expectations and trajectories in chapters four through six of this dissertation.

One key decision in conducting ethnographic field work and collecting data through in-depth qualitative interviews is deciding when saturation of information has been reached. In the interview with my 40<sup>th</sup> participant, I realized that my interviews were not yielding any new findings or patterns that were not already addressed in my previous interviews. I conducted two more interviews to see if there were any differences in the themes brought up by participants. I found that these participants provided answers that resonated with previous interviews, so I concluded data collection.

#### **IV. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS**

In this last section, I describe the steps of working through qualitative data to address women's rural to urban migration in China. I focus my discussion on (1) creation of transcripts, (2) writing memos for key events and influences, (3) descriptions of key advice and advisers, (4) motivation and plans for geographic and social mobility (5) Establishing model of decision-making (6) development of themes for coding (7) case studies for quotes and descriptions.

**(1) Creating Transcripts.** After I completed the interviews, I had my interviews transcribed in China.<sup>xv</sup> It is necessary to hire native speakers of Putonghua, the main Chinese dialect. People from different regions of China should speak Chinese, but intonations and slang used by participants in North River would make it difficult for people who live outside of the North China to understand the content of the interview. Zhang Hao helped me locate several former students and associates living in Beijing to transcribe the interviews. I then listened to the interviews and cleaned the interview data, correcting for

interpretation of slang and where sound quality interfered with the abilities of transcriptionists to accurately record a transcript part of the interview.

**(2) Memos of Key Themes and Events.** Since I conducted all the interviews myself, I already had certain key themes in mind when I approached the data for analysis. I listened to audio recordings of interviews while making comment notations on the digital transcripts viewed and edited in Microsoft word. After this step, I wrote separate memos to document key points of interest in women's school to work transition, their rural-to-urban migration, and the decision-making process for considering or planning for marriage. These memos became the basis for the themes I explored more systematically when I was ready to construct codes using Word and NVIVO.

**(3) Description of Advice and Key Advisers.** Along with memos of key themes and events, I noted key people to whom the women turned for advice. I recorded the type of decisions which women sought advice for, whom they asked for advice, and why they asked these individuals for advice. These descriptions form the basis for the influences that structure women's decisions and decision-making processes for major transitions from school, work, and in migrating from rural areas.

**(4) Motivation and plans for geographic and social mobility.** In assessing the impact of SES on women's lives and selection of migration pathway and plans for geographic and upward social mobility, I include women's descriptions of how their childhood circumstances motivated their desires for economic stability, a more refined existence, a life away from the hardship of physical labor, or a life away from rural areas.

**(5) Establishing Model of Migration Motivation and Decision-making.** As a result of the work described in (1) to (4) above, I realized that women consistently ranked migration pathways with education being first then work then marriage. Their decisions were based on which pathway to follow was their perception that they succeed in that pathway. This led to my model of migration motivation and decision-making for rural-urban migration decision making for women in contemporary China.

**(6) Developing Coding Themes.** Having worked through the memos, and devised a conceptual model to contextualize and interpret women's narratives about their migration motivations and choices, I went through interview transcripts and code for incidents and quotes from the interviews relevant to these themes. The counts and

specific quotes are recorded in word transcripts, collated in NVIVO, and tabulated in charts and tables. Individual tables are provided in relevant chapters describing education, employment, and marriage decisions by migrants.

**(7) Case studies for quotes and descriptions.** In addition to memos about decision-making processes, model development, and themes for coding, I also wrote memos for how individual participants conceptualize their migration experiences. These memos incorporate the progression of events, and describe how women saw the various social actors as influencing, expanding, or limiting their range of opportunities and responsibilities. I describe each individual woman's story as a case study and provide excerpts from interviews to contextualize how decisions about education, employment, and marriage shape strategies for climbing the social ladder in rural to urban migration.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **WHY MIGRATE? YOUNG WOMEN'S ASPIRATIONS FOR PERMANENCE, INTEGRATION, AND AUTONOMY**

A fundamental issue to uncovering the dynamics of women's migration and agency in developing economies is understanding the conditions that drive women's shifting motivations from earning remittances for their household to migrating for personal non-monetary benefits. Just as young women in the United States and other western countries left their rural communities in droves to pursue economic and personal independence at the turn of the twentieth century (Hareven and Langenbach 1978; Tentler 1979, pp. 110-3; Dublin 1979, 1981, 1994; Peiss 1986, 2004, pp. 14-16), young rural women in twenty-first century China are now eschewing family obligations and renegotiating the social mores and norms of their village communities. Chinese women have actively participated in rural-to-urban migration since 1984, and the present wave of migrants have much more ambitious aspirations for their personal trajectories. Here, I address the questions of what do young women want for their lives and how they see migration providing it by describing the aspirations of migrants from North River, Hebei. These women made their decisions about and entered urban areas from 2000 to 2009. First, I show how rural women define their aspirations for permanence, integration, and autonomy. I explain why autonomy means a conflation of both urban China and western influences as attainable markers for rural women's measures of successful achievement of goals. I then describe how women's meanings of permanence, integration, and autonomy evolve across age. I do this separately for education and work-marriage migrants since evolution of these meanings differs between education and work-marriage migrants. I conclude this chapter by comparing my participants' aspirations to those aspirations documented in previous studies, and by discussing the shifts in social, economic, and policy environments that resulted in

shifts in aspirations from previous migration waves.

Studies of Chinese rural women who migrated in the 1980s and 1990s have documented growth in women's agency in activities (Fan and Huang 1998; Fan and Li 2002; Jacka and Gaetano 2004; Jacka 2006; Murphy 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008; Sargeson 2008; Yan 2008). Because researchers have meticulously documented the motivations that spurred women's migration in earlier periods of the phenomenon during the 1980s and 1990s, it is possible to compare the motivations of previous migrants to those reported by my study participants. Women from North River who participate in rural-to-urban migration between 2000 and 2009 plan their migration trajectories and make decisions differently than did earlier women migrants. Women in rural China no longer migrate for solely economic reasons; that is, as a member of the household carrying out the directive of the household head to earn money and send remittances home in support of household goals of building a new house, financing a brother's marriage, or sending male siblings to school. These themes were common a decade ago for women from the most poverty-stricken regions, but the women I interviewed report very different objectives. As was the case for western women during the Industrial Revolution, young women's motivations for leaving the countryside center on the promise of cities for a better life. In their interviews, women related that the goal of migration is to improve their own lives, with the method of migration mediating the degree to which they can attain personal aspirations for permanence, integration, and autonomy (PIA) in urban settings.

In this chapter, I address the questions of what do young women want for their lives and how do they see migration providing it. I do this by describing the aspirations of the young rural women participating in migration from North River in Hebei province to urban locations throughout China between the years of 2000-2008. First, I show how rural women define permanence, integration, and autonomy. Next, I explain why autonomy means a conflation of both urban China and western influences as attainable markers for rural women's measures of successful achievement of goals. I do this by highlighting women's experiences and explanations from their in-depth interviews. I then describe how women's meanings of permanence, integration, and autonomy evolve across age. I do this separately for education and work-marriage migrants since

evolution of these meanings differs between education and work-marriage migrants. I conclude by comparing my participants' aspirations to those aspirations documented in previous studies, and by discussing the shifts in social, economic, and policy environments that resulted in shifts in aspirations from previous migration waves.

## **I. DEFINING PERMANENCE, INTEGRATION, AND AUTONOMY**

Deriving themes of migrant aspirations involved a multi-step process using close analysis of audio renditions of interviews and Chinese-language transcriptions. First, while I was still in the field, I noted which participants provided particularly poignant interviews, with responses that touched upon multiple points of their migration narrative of what they want, how they plan to achieve, and steps actually taken. I drafted memos about how we broached these topics, their emotional responses, and why these themes were salient for participants as they discussed migration events. When collection concluded, I reviewed these audio recordings while reading over the corresponding transcripts. These earmarked interviews were replete with deep descriptions of desires, strategies, and hardships of their lives as migrants. I also reviewed initial individual memos. Using these interviews, transcripts, and memos, I compiled a concept map to serve as a guideline in reviewing all the interviews. With this guideline, I approached transcripts for education and work, highlighting passages where participants described desires, strategies, and hardships. I then focused on subthemes identified when participants spoke about desires for migration aspirations and hardships, and strategies for how women use social networks to either pursue education or transition into early employment.

The women in my study describe three common themes when they talk about their futures; they want achieve permanence, integration, and autonomy as part of their newly acquired identities as migrants. These aspirations inform their decisions at each migration stage and become better defined as women progress in their migration trajectories.

## PERMANENCE

The underlying message is a desire for permanent relocation into urban areas in contrast to cyclic, back and forth movement, the primary migration pattern followed by rural women migrants in China during the 1980s and 1990s. My study participants consistently state that their goals for permanence include being able to live and work in cities, going sightseeing in their city, visiting other urban locations, finding steady work, eventually being able to afford getting married, establishing an urban household, and experiencing major life events such as having and raising children, and having careers with trajectories that allow them to stay in cities. Study participants further report that when the time comes for their own parents to stop farming, they want to have their parents either leave the farm completely or have their parents stay in participants' urban households on a regular basis.

Aspirations for permanence in urban areas are a stark contrast to the household arrangements many young women experienced in childhood. Beginning with market and government reforms in the 1980s, many families in North River, as in the rest of rural China, had at least one parent who regularly participated in cyclical migration as seasonal laborers in construction, food services, or factory work. In contrast to this established pattern, young women's conception of what is possible and desirable in their lives is not circular migration. Instead, they want to permanently leave behind rural communities and establish urban lifestyles and start households with development possibilities in urban areas.

Xiaodong, a twenty-one year old woman from a high SES household, describes what it takes to move permanently into a city and to thrive in an urban setting. Xiaodong first explains how before she can migrate, she must learn a trade. Xiaodong is focused on becoming a beautician and aspires to become a salon owner. Xiaodong's response illustrates how access to a social network influences a woman's decisions about migration destinations and facilitates permanent migration into an urban area. Here, Xiaodong begins by responding to my question about whether or not she has considered moving to Beijing.

Xiaodong, age 21, high SES

“I've thought about it. I have to learn a trade first before I can move. I certainly want to move to Beijing to develop. I feel that the opportunities for expansion are broader (there), and the salaries are relatively higher. But oh, then I think about how when you earn more, then you spend more. The cost of living in Beijing is too high. So then I think about perhaps I should go to Shijiazhuang. I could go there because my brother (and his friends) are there. So we could look after each other. My brother has already graduated, and he is working there. He has a place where he's living in...It's not his own, a rental. He's been with his partner all along. His partner is also from our county. They're college friends.”

After further discussion of optimal locations for long-term migration, Xiaodong deliberates on conditions that are necessary for her future salon business to do well. In the excerpt below, Xiaodong highlights the role her boyfriend and his social networks play in her plans for starting a salon.

“I used to want to be in our county seat. In the end, he (Xiaodong's boyfriend) said that he had wanted to go to Baigou all along. It is because he has people there, and that make everything easier. There are people from our county in the county seat. (But) I feel like there are too few people, and there are too many hair salons. With such a low population, it would be difficult to make any money. If we were to go to Baigou, since Baigou is a big city, there would be a lot of people. There would certainly be a lot of people getting haircuts every day. If we go, we'd certainly need to first pick a (good) location.”

## **INTEGRATION**

Integration refers to the kinds of work networks and social networks that women aim to participate in. Women aspire to long-term careers, instead of hard temporary manual work with no future. Education migrants describe majoring in specializations such as medicine, tourism, accounting, and technology. They aspire to join the primary workforce in occupations with professional trajectories as accountants, editors, doctors, nurses, economists, and government or corporate employees. Young women who left the education track for work after chuzhong and gaozhong articulate looking for work that offers professional training in computing, hospitality, food services and restaurant management, beautician skills, distributors in fashion industry, pharmaceuticals, pharmacies, clothing sellers and distributors, sales in beauty products, and technology. Women see such jobs as offering skills training, capital accumulation, contacts and networks for them to start their own businesses as small scale entrepreneurs or as professionals running their own small businesses.

Study participants want work that offers integration into urban society and that provides freedom to dictate their own activities during non-work hours. In their discussions about employment options and work environments, women state that they highly value the ability to socialize with people not related to work, and to explore urban society. Previous ethnographies, censuses, and surveys show women working in and being confined to segregated factories, located away from urban centers, difficult to get to or leave, or working as nannies, living with employers and unable to exercise control over their own time. In contrast with earlier migrants who worked in secondary labor markets, women consider the long run possibilities for integrating into the economic infrastructure and social networks in urban areas. For instance, participants aspire to restaurant work where they can learn how to run a restaurant, manage customers and employees, balance books, and calculate bonuses and payments; as opposed to just wiping tables and cleaning restaurant space.

“Those of us who have made it out, we cannot go back again.”

-Yanchao, age 22, middle SES, education migrant

The above quote is provided by Yanchao, a twenty-two year old education migrant from a middle SES household. While her statement is typical of young women who have made it out of the village by testing into college, it is also an apt descriptor for young women who have left home for work and have enjoyed the lifestyle available in urban settings. This group of migrant young women is not content with returning to the countryside to live out rural lifestyles after enjoying economic and social independence and personal freedom in urban areas.

So how do young women go from knowing that they “cannot go back again” to executing plans for permanently moving to urban settings? Participant interviews reveal an emerging pattern of education migrants planning professional careers and work migrants aspiring to become small business entrepreneurs.

As Xiaodong's interview above shows, she aspires to move permanently into a prosperous urban area and become a beauty salon owner. Before she can do so, she knows she needs to develop her knowledge of the beauty industry. Presently, Xiaodong earns a good living as a singer for her aunt's touring band, making eighty renminbi (RMB) per performance. She has saved up 15,000 RMB from two years of performances, has obtained her mother's support, and her aunt has helped her line up a second apprenticeship at a salon in the county seat. Xiaodong still needs to secure her father's support for this next segment of her migration trajectory. In the excerpt below, Xiaodong explains how she plans to present her idea to her father. In subsequent follow-up conversations with Xiaodong, I found out that Xiaodong's father, who has owned and operated the largest grocery store in North River for the last 23 years, was eventually swayed by the following argument. Xiaodong states,

“I will say that earning money is one factor. In the future, if I've learned a trade and have skills, then I can open my own shop. I primarily want to sing right now. But when I compare this to learning a trade for later, I've considered which option would give me the best opportunities for expansion

in the long run. With singing, you can only work hard to earn a bit of money. If I were to make an investment, I could have others come make money for me. I could then save money. You could get a portion of the (money from their) work. Then you could take the money you make from the beauty salon and use it to open another shop, so there would be another venue for making money.”

Irrespective of whether women leave home through education or work, their experiences of living and being in cities and urban areas reinforces their desires to develop urban lifestyles. Throughout their interviews, women emphasize how much they enjoy the novelty, thrills, and comforts of urban settings. They do not talk about going to school or work, and then returning to the village upon the conclusion of school or work. Instead, women talk extensively about friends, classmates, and family members who have migrated out. Just like Yanchao, who is at school, and Xiaodong, who has worked for several years, young women's interviews are full of descriptions of conversations and retellings of planning sessions with members of their social networks. Young women work out career trajectories; make decisions about where to migrate; figure out which majors to study and which kinds of careers to pursue with their friends, classmates, and family members. Young women decide what “financially stable” means to them, and where they want to be economically before they are even willing to start thinking about marriage. Women's decision-making and agency extends to gauging the best time to establish a home and when to have children. In their interviews, many participants emphasize their resistance to getting married “too early.” They view marriage, a husband, and children in particular, as an emotional hindrance to the execution of strategies for achieving PIA goals. Women on the education pathway are focused on getting degrees, entering the urban work force, making money, and starting careers, while women on the work pathway are focused on getting jobs that give them the most exposure to urban areas, good vocational training, developing skills to transition into their small businesses, saving up enough capital to do so, and evaluating different cities and business models that best fit their entrepreneurial trajectories.

Migrant women's information seeking, their decision-making processes, and their network deployment demonstrate how women from this recent wave of migration weave their personal and professional trajectories into the fabric of the urban economy. This is vastly different from the previous waves of women migrants, women who were merely getting manual migrant jobs in factories as young women (Roberts 2001), perhaps participating in small time vending to support their husbands' migration activities (Jacka 2006), or living and working in migrant enclaves in urban areas once they married (Zhang 2001).

Previous waves of migrant women were limited in economic and vocational opportunities after marriage because they did not receive specialized training or technical education in their manual jobs. This lack of options and training does not apply to the women in my study. Young women from North River are able to take advantage of the social and economic changes that have occurred since the start of the rural-to-urban migration phenomenon in the 1980s. The most recent wave of women migrants know that the economy in general has opened up and that there has been an expansion of educational opportunities. They can choose to enter the more liberal urban labor market, which now offers more prestigious, better paying jobs, and to participate in jobs with career trajectories; or women can take advantage of their parents' emotional and financial support to continue learning a vocation or progressing in their academic studies. Many of the young women in North River state that their parents have progressive attitudes about the educational and vocational possibilities open to them as migrants, and that their parents help them actively strategize for achieving a professional life before marriage so that they can be financially independent as married women. Young women, with the support of their friends and families, aspire to and expect better integration into today's urban economy.

Young migrant women are training for and getting positions that allow them greater access to cities, urban people, and social and economic environments. Their families, friends, teachers, and employers are networks that help women to obtain jobs with career trajectories. In their narratives, these women disclose plans for viable professional businesses. They articulate intricate plans for prerequisite training and necessary certifications. Women are agentic about collecting information and using

available resources. During my interviews, many education migrants took our interview session as an opportunity to ask me about fellowships for additional training, expenses and experiences involved in going abroad, and compared the pros and cons of graduate school for possible career trajectories. The message of these interviews is that rural women articulate intricate plans for desired professional development, strategies for financing education, projected costs and necessary capital for entrepreneurial ventures and certification, and the professional contacts they need to make to gather information to pursue their professional goals.

## **AUTONOMY**

This component of PIA aspirations is the least tangible but is the most emphasized by rural women. Leaving the countryside means being able to disassociate from “ruralness”; women migrants equate rural-ness with being backward, making no progress, and being poor. Moving into urban areas and acquiring an urban identity means shedding traditional ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting with other rural residents and norms of rural society. Their acquisition of urban jobs, urban lifestyles, and urban residency means becoming “modern” and being part of the change fueling China's ascendancy and interaction with western societies and their influences.

In their interviews, many women compare their experiences of growing up and living in the countryside with their understanding and conception of how “Western” societies influence development in urban China. Women describe being modern as envisioning a future where they are not forced to return to the countryside, are no longer tied to the land, are not farming and toiling to scratch out a living, and are not dependent on nature for survival. Being modern means visiting places they see on television, becoming professionals or entrepreneurs, having career trajectories. They learn about wearing make-up, shopping for nice, chic clothes, watching movies, wanting to learn foreign languages, saving up money to purchase electronics, going online to connect with friends and strangers to discuss issues important to them.

For migrant women, autonomy means shedding the tell-tale signs of their rural identity --the way they speak, the way they interact with urban people, the habits they have but want to change-- and acquiring the accoutrements of urban lifestyles. For education migrants, this process happens during the years they spend in boarding school for gaozhong and as they enter and acclimate to new lifestyles during their college years. Work migrants transition earlier and faster, as they engage with urban (and westernized) social customs sooner and more directly when they take urban jobs. They are immersed in urban mannerisms and lifestyles, are given on-the-job training, and earn money. They can readily save up and pay for new clothes, make-up, food available in urban areas, and cell phones. They go to internet bars, travel to work and sight-see in far off places. Work migrants learn how to deal with banking, saving, and savvy networking while education migrants are still in school. Many education migrants express envy at the early taste of economic and social independence experienced by work migrants.

In studies of prior waves of migrants, researchers focused on understanding how migrants' residency status hindered their mobility, access to social and economic resources, and political rights in urban areas. Successful migration was measured by whether or not migrants gained urban status under the restrictive household registration system (hukou). This marker no longer applies to the current group of migrants; their aspirations go beyond obtaining official urban status. For them, the issue is lifestyle accessibility. They want to earn money to purchase cell phones and partake in technologies that enable them the freedom to call family and friends on their own schedule, as opposed to being constrained by company rules and pay phone charges. For instance, Leslie Chang's (2008) popular book Factory Girls illustrates how vital cell phones are to young migrant women for maintaining contact with friends working far away from each other. Wallis's (2013) academic study found similar results, illustrating how young women use cell phones to build romantic relationships and how cell phones allow women to feel more modern as savvy technology users. Unsurprisingly, cell phones are a marker of personal achievement for the young women in my study. Education migrants often receive a cell phone as a gift from their parents when heading into the final years of gaozhong or before leaving home for college, while work migrants in my study often save up between the first three to six

months of their wages to purchase new cell phones.

Autonomy extends beyond the acquisition of urban accoutrements; women desire both to access an urban lifestyle and to eschew obligations to their families and communities still living in rural areas. As I describe in Xiaodong's excerpt, at the start of my study, her parents have owned and operated a prosperous business in North River for the past 23 years. Her brother has already migrated and established himself in Shijiazhuang<sup>5</sup> and her parents hope that Xiaodong will stay near North River to inherit the family business. But Xiaodong does not want to take on this responsibility and instead is mapping out and executing her goal of becoming a beauty salon owner.

Lai Sze: Do you feel that your parents have any expectations for you?

Xiaodong: "They certainly do! My folks want me to stay at home, to move somewhere nearby. They want to find someone (for me). My family actually wants to spread out here, and we have the space for it. In the future, if I'm not here, and my older brother isn't here, then the space won't get used."

Lai Sze: Oh, so in the future, this place will go to you? Did they say this to you, or is this how you've been thinking about it?

Xiaodong: "They spoke to me about it before."

Lai Sze: Do you like this, or not like this?

Xiaodong: "I don't like this."

Lai Sze: Why not?

Xiaodong: "I am not willing to watch over this place. Maybe because it's been too long, and then there are so many interactions with people from

the village. Doing business (here means) asking and negotiating prices, trying to profit off of small gains. I especially hate this way of doing things. So in my heart, I don't have any interest for it.”

As Xiaodong's excerpt shows, young migrant women's pursuit of their autonomy goals often puts them at odds with parental wishes and expectations. Many women find it difficult to simultaneously be filial, obedient, supportive daughters while planning ways to achieve their desires of shedding rural identities and leaving the countryside. For young rural women, shedding their rural-ness means learning urban culture, taking on urban accoutrements in their lives, and interacting with people in urban areas. This requires that young women earn money in urban areas to consume urban goods to lead modern lifestyles.

## **II. WHY AUTONOMY MEANS URBAN AND WESTERN FOR RURAL WOMEN**

While some researchers regard the desires and spending habits of young migrant women living in urban areas as a demonstration of learned urban consumerism (Zheng 2004), more recent research has started to see these attitudes and behaviors as a mark of autonomy. Participation in these activities serves as a performance of modern social roles. The most important transition for young women in my study is the acquisition of their first cell phones. Leslie Chang's (2008) popular work about how factory girls utilize their cell phones to stay in touch with friends is an excellent journalistic approach to this key emotional marker of autonomy. More recently, Wallis's academic study shows that young women regard their cell phone purchases as momentous events because a cell phone allows them to better maintain ties to their wider social networks (Wallis 2013). No one would dispute that young women save up between three to six months of wages to purchase a cell phone, or that they go window-shopping during their off-hours. Yes, young women visit web bars and use their cell phones to go online to stay in touch with friends, meet new dating partners, and

look for new work opportunities. Or they complain about the hardships of adapting to urban life in anonymous chat rooms and forums as an inexpensive form of therapy. They learn how to use cosmetics and make-up for work and to express their own burgeoning sense of personal style. Many even spend upward of a month's worth of their hard-earned wages on expensive seasonal outfits so they can look chic and trendy. Like Chang and Wallis, I find that young women claim that their lives are drastically changed after acquiring their cell phones. Yet, these cell phone purchases are not the only marker of autonomy for young rural women. As I interviewed young women, and listened to their narratives and explanations for their spending patterns and their newly acquired tastes and behaviors, I heard young women illustrating how this helped them delineate the critical break from their rural identities.

Young rural women's consumerism and acquisition of urban characteristics allow them to develop and become comfortable performing a more "modern" reflection of themselves and to shed their rural past for a modern persona. Becoming urban means seeing themselves as engaging in practices, schemas, and beliefs necessary for survival, and then upward mobility, in urban society. Once they become comfortable with their new "urban" selves, women begin expanding their urban social networks, using their networks contacts to locate better opportunities. This is how rural women attain upward social mobility as new urban residents. Because many of these urban autonomy markers originated from western societies, women understand that the process of becoming urban is an engagement and reinterpretation of Western influences on their urban lives.

This set of markers could suggest that rural women equate consumerism of western images and western goods with autonomy. It is more likely that young women's desire and ability to consume these products and participate in Chinese urban life-style activities highlight both their desire and acquired ability to be independent from rural China. This new independence manifests in young women's economic capacity to make these purchases. Their individual-minded purchases indicate they are carving out space for personal exploration away from the social obligations of families and communities back home in the rural countryside. While living in urban areas, young rural women are able to take time and spend money in pursuit of hobbies and their

desire to travel. Young women can pursue work options and try out career trajectories. Many observe the marriage partner choices and marriage timing of their friends and decide they would prefer to use their time to execute the long-run strategies for learning a trade, accumulating personal wealth, starting small businesses, and safeguarding their financial and social futures aside from those of any potential spouse.

Besides creating the social space to explore their financial options, young women strategically evaluate the characteristics they want in potential marriage partners. Women use the social spaces afforded to them in urban areas to test courtship and dating. Postponing marriage while living in cities, they collect valuable information about transitions into major life course events such as entry barriers into different segments of the labor market, marriage, pros and cons of early and multiple childbearing, and transitions into entrepreneurship and home ownership in various urban localities. These activities are integral to rural women's aspirations for autonomy.

Young women explain that they start debating these issues amongst their friends and classmates when they are in school, and work with each other to make decisions that are best for them. While peers are the social network of choice for debating these issues, women will occasionally converse with their parents and family members. Young women hesitate to tell their families of their plans because parents express desires for young women to stay close to home and not travel too far. Young women explain that their parents worry that they may move somewhere far away for school, then work, and eventually marry too far away to return home regularly. Women are agentic about whom they debate issues with and what information they share about their migration strategies. Young women who opt out of the education pathway think about these issues, but have fewer people whom they can turn to for support and planning of strategies. Both work and educational migrants link autonomy to independence on multiple dimensions –financial freedom, reprieve from family obligations, delayed timing of courtship and marriage, and seeing themselves as becoming “urban” and westernized, and therefore modern.

Autonomy is conceptualized and defined as the opposite of being from the countryside, which women unanimously characterize as where “nothing is going on.” Women want to be part of development, of expansion and emphatically state that the

opportunities for development are in the cities and urban areas. For young women, financial independence is a prominent marker of autonomy.

Many women choose to leave education for work because they have made the cost- benefit calculation and decided that working sooner would allow them to achieve their migration aspirations sooner. Once women migrate into cities and urban areas, they gain financial freedom, are freed from many familial obligations while they are away, or at least can mediate which obligations they chose to fulfill and what information they share with their families and home community. They can exert greater control over the timing and balance of work, courtship, and transition into other major life events like establishing residency, marriage, and childbearing. For instance, they postpone marriage and evaluate potential spouses using the criteria of men's willingness and ability to assist in achieving migration aspirations. Lastly, as women become more comfortable with their new urban surroundings, their personal identities shift from being rural girls to being urban working women knowledgeable of and actively contributing to China's modernizing economy.

Xiaodong expresses the modern (and very progressive) concept that economic and occupational independence is achieved by being one's own boss, as opposed to laboring for others while working for wages.

“When you go out to work, you can certainly get the wages given. You get one month's basic wages. It's not convenient because that's all you have to spend. Then, you have to look at how people treat you as you work for them. If one were to become a boss, then the finances would certainly be more convenient. Then you would be supervising others, and nobody would be watching you.”

Unlike Xiaodong, Xue completed her second year of gaozhong, or secondary school, before becoming disillusioned by the competition to get into a good school. She left the education pathway after doing enough schoolwork to graduate from gaozhong. At the time of our interview, Xue had worked in two high-end food service industry venues, and was thinking about what it would take to transition into owning a franchise

clothing store in a neighboring city. The following excerpt from Xue's interview illustrates her thoughts about what migration can do for her. We can see that she and her parents are conscious of her young age. Xue and her parents are aware that since she has chosen the work pathway, she still has plenty of time to make money, explore her options, and decide where and when she wants to get married. The most important motivation, for Xue, as it is for Xiaodong, is making money and securing a stable and independent future.

Xue has worked in Beijing for almost two years. In her second position as wait staff in an elite restaurant, her monthly income is close to 2000 RMB from salary and commission. In this excerpt, Xue talks about her savings, and about her future plans. Xue's disclosure about how much money she has saved up, and her discussion of entrepreneurial options with her father are revealing. This discussion shows how much money top earning migrant women are capable of making in urban areas and how drastically women's plans can evolve when they go from being financially dependent on their parents to earning and saving money for their PIA goals.

Xue, age 20, middle SES

“It's been less than two years, and I have (saved) almost 10,000 RMB! I need to earn a bit more money. I want to go out and open my own shop. To have my own shop. I've decided to sell clothing from a franchise. But what I have (in savings) is not enough. My father said he would be able to help me by investing several tens of thousands.”

Lai Sze: Where do you want to open your shop?

Xue: “My father has decided that he wants me to be in the county seat, but I haven't decided yet. I might go to Baoding. Baoding...the commercial flow in Baoding is certainly greater than in the county seat. It's true that one could sell things in the county seat, but the volume would certainly be low. It's better to go to a bigger location to sell things, so you could sell

them quicker. So I want to take on a clothing franchise.”

Lai Sze: So if that's what you're thinking, then why go to Baoding instead of Beijing?

Xue: “Speaking of Beijing, I do want to go. But there aren't that many franchises here, and the local taxes are too high. The tax per square footage is too high. I wouldn't choose Beijing. Furthermore, in Baoding, after 2008, the commercial flow has ramped up, so the commercial flow should increase. So that's why I'd choose Baoding, but I still haven't decided for certain.”

Lai Sze: How long have you thought about this?

Xue: “For several months now. My father knows, and so does my mother. My mother isn't one to say, 'do what you want to do.' It's normally my father. My father also wishes for me to take on a franchise. But I am also thinking about another option. I am thinking about it, but I haven't decided yet. Whether to go into franchising a clothing shop, or an accessories shop. Because the investment would be much lower. It's talked about a lot on television. I haven't had a chance to research this yet. So I still haven't made up my mind. I don't know if it's better to go with franchise clothing, or with an accessories shop.”

Intrigued by Xue's deliberation between the two franchise models, I asked her how she would research her options. Xue replies,

“I would take time off. Yes, I get eight days off every month at the restaurant (where Xue currently works.) I could ask for two to three days off, then I could go check out every accessories shop in Beijing, and every franchise clothing shop, and do an on-the-spot investigation.”

Lai Sze: Would you have been able to take time off at your first job?

Xue: “While I was working in the first restaurant, the new labor laws were not in place yet. I only had two days off per month. We had to take four half-days to rest. So it was very hard to ask for time off. At the end, we could only take time off during the Spring Festival. When I moved to the new restaurant, the new labor laws were enacted, and I could get eight days off. So, I can ask for time off.”

Although Xue opted out of education for work, she is aware of the factors that led her to her present situation. Xue describes her transition from saving money to pay for vocational education to accumulating her savings to buy a small shop. Xue pays attention to commercial flows and taxation norms in different cities in her deliberations about where to start a potential business. She is aware of how the changing economy and labor laws afford her the opportunity to take time off to research different business models within Beijing. In this next excerpt, Xue discusses how she has managed to save money.

“Yes, when I go out to buy clothing, I go out for fun. Sometimes I don't want to buy anything, but I buy things anyway. It's because if I bring money, I will spend it. So I usually bring a few yuan's worth of bus fare, and I take enough money for beverages. If I have enough clothes (for the season), then I will not go out at all. Then my money will go straight into the bank account. Every month, I use only about two to three hundred yuan worth of money. Then the rest of the money goes right (into the account) at home. Every month, on the 28th, it goes into the account at home. If it's a Saturday or a Sunday, then it waits, because the bank isn't open. In this way, I am forcing myself not to spend money. Otherwise, I would spend all the money I'd have in my hands.”

Xue's goal to become economically independent illustrates one component of young women's aspirations for autonomy. By opting out of education for work, Xue became financially independent of her parents by earning her own money. While working in two extremely well paid jobs in the thriving food services industry, Xue gains first-hand experience about how successful businesses operate in cities. As we see in her interview, Xue is preparing to research her own entrepreneurial ventures, and has enlisted the support of both parents. Although Xue initially planned to work and save money to pay for vocational training to apprentice in a trade, her work in the food services industry has given her ample on-the-job training. In chapter five, I return to Xue's narrative to explore her work responsibilities and what she learned during her two years of work in Beijing.

### **III. PERMANENCE, INTEGRATION, AND AUTONOMY IN MIGRANT PATHWAYS ACROSS AGE**

Women's concepts of permanence, integration, and autonomy evolve with age. The meanings of permanence, integration, and autonomy evolve differently for work migrants than for education migrants because work migrants interact with urban society, urban residents, and the urban social structures much earlier than do education migrants. In this section, I describe the evolution of PIA goals for work migrants and then describe the evolution of PIA goals for education migrants.

#### **THE EVOLUTION OF PIA GOALS FOR WORK MIGRANTS**

The youngest work migrants, those in their teens, have four main PIA goals: they focus on “getting out,” gaining financial independence from parents, buying symbols of autonomy, and living urban lifestyles.

By their early twenties, work migrants' conceptions and achievable goals for

permanence, integration, and autonomy become more specific. The time range for permanence has expanded: As Yanchao's quote illustrates, migrant women claim they cannot return home. Integration at this stage means expanding their urban social circles and working at higher status jobs in urban settings. Autonomy now means not only financial freedom from parents, but having autonomy on the job, interesting work, and bargaining power in marriages.

For the oldest work migrants, permanence means maintaining urban residency. They have gotten out; now they want to stay out. Integration means having occupational status and careers which are not associated with their former rural identities. Autonomy means having financial independence and having a say in family decisions.

### **THE EVOLUTION OF PIA GOALS FOR EDUCATION MIGRANTS**

The evolution of educational migrants' PIA aspirations and goals follow a different time line. There are several reasons for this difference. First, education migrants will not be financially independent until their schooling is complete, typically at the conclusion of college. Second, they have two learning phases; while in college, then later while working their first jobs in the urban labor market. Third, their education provides entry into stable long term professional jobs and ready access to more successful tiers of urban society. Fourth, they face no pressure from parents to marry until they complete school.

As teenagers, education migrants anticipate that higher education will provide permanence, integration, and autonomy. They state "education is the way out," but talk only in general terms. In college, women start making linkages about how choices in careers, long-term jobs, companionate marriages, and getting into preferred urban areas can be planned out and achieved in sequential order. Integration goals during this migration stage have evolved into aspiring to occupations and industries that offer long term fulfilling work, autonomy at work, and transferability of skills when they graduate from college and transition into urban labor markets. Autonomy goals for college

students include obtaining professional identities separate from present and future familial roles. Delaying marriage is a prominent theme among college students. Many state they do not plan to get married before the age of thirty. In this migration stage, they start thinking about how future partners need to be supportive of their work and family goals and provide detailed descriptions of future spouses' desirable characteristics. For instance, they want equality in companionate marriages where they are on equal footing with their husbands in careers and within the family.

Only after completing college do education migrants have their first taste of financial and social independence. In this migration stage they finally work and socialize in cities, gain valuable work experiences and expand their social networks. Integration goals entail establishing urban work networks and social networks beyond their college networks. Women deploy these networks to pursue personal expansion and greater social independence via contacts and information about fulfilling careers and opportunities to relocate to other cities. Their autonomy goals are focused on choosing professions and picking cities that will allow them to maintain occupational and financial independence in the future. They aspire to have marriage partners who will support their future occupational, residential, and familial arrangements.

## **COMMONALITIES**

Despite the differences in the manifested markers of achievable success between education and work migrants, there are two clear commonalities for young rural women in PIA goals and strategies. First, women's articulation of permanence, integration, and autonomy goals and their plans for achieving these goals become more nuanced, and more specific with age. While early goals focus on leaving the countryside, young women only develop the more detailed renderings of the PIA aspirations after they move into urban areas. Only through interactions with urban networks and participating in urban work activities and enjoying an urban lifestyle do they have a more defined sense of what "urban" accoutrements, attitudes, and activities are meaningful and desirable in later life.

Second, marriage is not talked about by either group in the early ages and is postponed to much later ages than in previous generations and migration waves. Women in their teens and early twenties do not think about marriage yet. They state that it is not relevant at this point in their lives. Older women in later stages of migration, such as in college and when preparing to enter the labor market, state that they discuss what they might want from marriage with their friends and peers who are still in school. Being away from their parents and living in dormitories allow college students the social space to have these important life-course deliberations. Women on the work pathway delay marriage by pursuing work and entrepreneurial ventures, and are astute at postponing their inevitable marriage and family-building responsibilities by co-opting their parents into their entrepreneurial ventures. Whether through starting their own businesses or by focusing on establishing and building professional careers, women regard delaying marriage as critical to securing financial and social independence in later life.

#### **IV. CHANGING RURAL CULTURE: WHY ASPIRATIONS ARE DIFFERENT THAN THOSE OF PREVIOUS MIGRANTS**

Young women's migration narratives and descriptions of their experiences help us to discern several characteristics that differentiate this current wave of young women migrants from prior migrants; the ambitious nature of their goals and aspirations; their agency in negotiation with parents; their ability to identify, establish, and expand multiple networks for information and opportunities; and their determination and ability to exert greater control in how migration forces impact their life-course events. Why do the present aspirations, migration trajectories, and migration processes of my interviewees differ from those of prior waves of migrants?

Why are women so ambitious and so agentic? There are several macro-level reasons why women in my study express more ambition and more agency about their aspirations and outlooks on possibilities for their futures than earlier waves of migrants. First, rural areas have experienced economic and social changes which allow young

women greater freedom to imagine urban possibilities. Second, access to education at the national level has increased, resulting in more educational opportunities for girls. Third, the opening up of educational opportunities for girls and the concomitant expansion of the urban labor market for women has spurred parents to encourage young women to attend higher education to access jobs previously unavailable in the segmented urban labor market.

Before these macro-level changes occurred, previous waves of women could only define migration success in terms of the amount of money earned through their participation in cyclical migration as manual labor in factories and heavy manufacturing. Work conditions were characterized as having minimal autonomy and creativity, no career trajectory, strict control over work, and confining social life conditions and surroundings (see the ethnographic field work of Ching-Kwan Lee (1998), Dorothy Solinger (1999) and Pun Ngai (2005) in Chinese factories). Many of the women from these studies of earlier migration periods described that the most they could aspire to would be living as second class citizens in unsanitary black market regional squatter enclaves in urban locations in metropolises, as Li Zhang (2001) highlights in her ethnographic book, Strangers in the City. In contrast to descriptions of earlier migrants, women in my study aspire to more than just getting married into urban areas as rural brides (Fan and Huang 1998) or becoming mere small time vendors, selling vegetables and goods off of cloth sheets on city streets (Jacka 1997).

In my interviews with young women from North River who are in their late teens to late twenties, few recognize how urban and rural social structures and infrastructure have changed because of the work and contributions of previous migrants. Understanding the influences of these predecessors is key to understanding how the current environment fosters young women's development and attainment of PIA goals and aspirations.

Rural areas now include local small businesses in a multitude of industries, access to education for girls is now available and is encouraged by parents, and greater upward mobility options are available to young women in urban labor markets. Rural areas have developed their economic infrastructure and commercial practices over the last 20 years. The current group of young women migrants grew up immersed

in a culture of consumerism and had ready access to an abundance of affordable commercial goods. During the childhood and young adulthood of these young women, rural areas, including their home community of North River, have experienced an explosion of more small businesses (Tsai 2002), dramatic increases in household and community wealth, and an overall increase in their living standards.

Earlier migration has added to small businesses, commercial activities, entrepreneurial spirit, and urban amenities to rural areas on a limited scale. Past migration has fostered an environment where it is possible for young women to imagine urban possibilities because there are more resources and networks in their home community. Previous migration streams changed their communities and families through remittances (Murphy 2002) and by bringing in new social and fiscal practices and commercial contacts (Tsai 2002). There are now more small businesses, more work opportunities and more on-the-job training in rural and suburban areas; more role models for young women from their home communities; more familial and community contacts and ties to urban areas; and more connections to urban migration destinations. These social changes work together to provide young women more support and tools for agentic decisions about upward social mobility through participation in rural-to-urban migration.

As a result of these changes, young rural women begin learning skills (i.e. acquiring human capital) earlier, as teenagers still living in their home village communities. Participants state that they first observed then interacted with businesses of family members and neighbors in the community while they were youngsters at home. Women describe that as they got older, owners of local business hired them to work part-time or help out in these businesses on a part-time basis. Through these types of interactions, women were able to watch, listen, and learn how businesses operate by observing conversations amongst family and neighbors.

Changes in the rural infrastructure lead to increases in social capital in the form of having families, friends, and neighbors who can serve as role models and business connections. Young women can tap into their extensive network of contacts for help locating good educational and work opportunities in urban areas, thereby facilitating the attainment of the migration objective of better integration into urban settings. In

watching older rural women become business owners in the countryside while maintaining connections to urban family members, young rural women realized that these role models were making money even after marriage and secondly gaining more power to negotiate in their rural households. Hence, young rural women aspire to do the same, but in urban settings.

There is more fiscal capital now available from the remittances and saving efforts of previous migrants. Young women benefit from family members earning more money and developing local business ventures and from the expansion of local rural economies. There are now better schools to attend, and parents can pay for tutoring when young women struggle with academic material. Parents are able to cover expensive transfer fees into better schools when young women do not test well enough for initial admission into the top-ranked chuzhong and gaozhong schools. More importantly, parents and extended family members can now collectively finance college expenses and vocational training for young women. Women on the education pathway state that their parents and extended family network finance the extensive costs of college tuition, books, living expenses, a new cell phone, and perhaps even graduate school training, or even study abroad programs when women migrate for education. Women on the work pathway can receive financial support from their parents in the form of start-up money to cover initial transportation fees and the first three months of living expenses until women collect the earnings from their first paychecks. Later on, parents are willing to help invest upwards of several tens of thousands of RMB to help their daughters establish entrepreneurial ventures. As part of the older generation of migrants, parents of high and middle SES households now have the capability to remodel rural homes, purchase land and second homes in the county seat, and financially support their daughters' small business dreams of securing their financial futures. This parental safety net is vastly different from the traditional model of the younger generations providing financial and social support for their elderly parents. The knowledge that their parents can provide them with a free, newly constructed rural home and can help them by investing in their long run business ventures frees women from many of the social obligations in rural area and motivates them to imagine and strive for more ambitious goals of upward social mobility in urban areas.

The remainder of the dissertation explores how women use education and work to pursue their migration dreams, and the varied results they attain through these two different pathways. In their interviews, many young women state that education is the preferred pathway because it enables better attainment of permanence, integration, and autonomy. The work pathway offers women the opportunity to start achieving social and financial independence earlier than does the education pathway. However, all women recognize that this early taste of independence is shorter lived because education allows women to earn the credentials necessary to fully integrate into both the segmented labor market through acquisition of professional occupations and the urban residency and lifestyle as “educated” and “cultured” members of society.

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<sup>i</sup> ancestral land

<sup>ii</sup> Many parts of China are not “open” for interviews and data collection for journalists and academic researchers. It is necessary to secure the cooperation of local administrators before any interviewing can proceed. Otherwise, the local police will escort interviewers back to the train or bus station.

<sup>iii</sup> The hukou system started in the 1950s and its impact on limiting the opportunities of rural residents has been studied extensively. In North River, the head village accountant had older versions of the hukou which listed the whole household unit, a single individual is listed now by him or herself with information linked to household head. The information is generally updated when a household splits fenjia, in which a new household identification number is generated. The hukou information is also updated when a household head dies. The household identification number remains the same, but someone in the household inherits the title of household head.

<sup>iv</sup> In North River, each person designated as part of the official register and is an authorized birth is designated 1.1 mu of land for farming purposes. It is the responsibility of the village accountant and his assistants to payout land subsidies to each household based on the total amount of plots allotted to each household. Many households in North River did not abide by the one-child policy, which stated that they were allowed to have one child that the government would allow access to public good and subsidies. If the child was a girl, then the family could apply for permission to try for a second child after the first child had reached six years of age.

<sup>v</sup> Sometimes villagers would leave their identity cards with the head accountant for safekeeping. They would visit the accountant to retrieve their cards when they needed to buy train tickets or ride the long-distance to leave the village for work.

<sup>vi</sup> According to the accountant, this was a common practice for students preparing leave North River for college, irrespective of actual household SES.

<sup>vii</sup> Many parts of rural China use the lunar calendar system to describe their age. Most participants would specify their age in both sui and years.

<sup>viii</sup> There were a number of women who did not leave their natal household to become a member of their husband's households upon marriage. Instead, these women brought in husbands to help take care of their own parents and households. This uxoriocal practice is more common amongst women from households that my informants categorized as poor.

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<sup>ix</sup> The specific descriptions include: Tiaojian bijiao hao (条件比较好的); jiali you qian (家里有钱); jiali you quanli (家里有权); you wenhua de (有文化的) shouru bijiao wending (收入比较稳定); or shoudao dajia de zunjing (收到大家的尊敬).

<sup>x</sup> Party cadre members in North River come from the ranks of village political leadership. At the time of the study, there were about 80 party members, all of whom were selected into Communist Party based on their tenure and contribution in political office.

<sup>xi</sup> Jiating qingkuang yiban de (家庭情况一般的).

<sup>xii</sup> Jiali meiyou qian (家里没钱的); pinkun jiating (贫困家庭); jiali tiaojian buhao (家庭条件不好); jiali haizi, laoren duo (家里孩子, 老人多); jiali you shangcande, you yabade (家里有伤残的, 有哑巴的); or youbingde (有病人).

<sup>xiii</sup> Villagers were very polite in expressing concern that city folks staying with them would be uncomfortable. They would often check-in with me about whether I could get used to the local conditions by asking “buxiguan ba?”

<sup>xiv</sup> Buzhidao, or bu xiang huida.

<sup>xv</sup> I hired transcriptionists in China with funds provided by the National Science Foundation’s Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HEGEMONY OF EDUCATION AND WHY YOUNG RURAL WOMEN ARE SUCCEEDING AS STUDENTS

The classical model of migration of rural women posits that family goals, family constraints, and socio-economic status affect women's choices for migration. Analysts typically examine two migration paths – migration for employment and migration for marriage. They do not consider education as a path of migration. The classical model portrays women's migration choices as largely determined by family and socio-economic constraints. Women express agency only by choosing from a limited set of options. In contrast, the women interviewees in this study describe education as a major migration option, and describe themselves as playing a more active role in choosing whether and how to migrate. The women who migrate for education typically describe themselves as becoming empowered as a result of more schooling.

[ Insert Figure 4.1 ]

In developing countries, education has long been regarded as the prestigious pathway for men who permanently leave the countryside for urban areas. My interviews reveal that this education pathway is now also accepted by rural households in China as a way for young women to elevate their personal status and future prospects for securing work, a good husband, and other later life processes.

Several policy and economic changes in China set the stage for emerging education opportunities for women. Since the 1990's the Chinese economy has been shifting from socialism to capitalism, resulting in more responsiveness to market forces and increased work opportunities in many labor market segments. There is a

corresponding large expansion of opportunities for higher education to prepare and train people to move into expanding industries and occupations. Changes in residential policy requirements have reduced barriers to urban residency for both rural men and women. These changes mean that young women with the right educational training are able to move into new urban areas to work in growing segments of the labor market.

Women are increasingly able to take advantage of these policy and economic changes because household heads see the value of allowing daughters to pursue the pre-requisite education to capitalize on emerging opportunities. While economic, political, and policy changes have been transforming Chinese society since the 1990's, women would not be able to take advantage of the wider set of choices available to them unless traditional patriarchal values and practices had also started to change. In past generations, rural households in China favored having sons. Preferential treatment, such as educating sons over daughters, existed partly because rural households relied heavily on male heirs to maintain the family lineage. Male heirs were further expected to finance the care of elderly relatives. Since daughters married out, their earning and working abilities would not contribute to the finances of their natal households. Educating daughters was regarded as a sunk cost by their natal families. These beliefs and practices have begun changing in rural China. The opening of educational and market opportunities, government efforts to change people's perceptions about the value of women's work in the economy, and policies to change old age support for the rural elderly have led households to see value in educating daughters. With so many new opportunities available for educated young women, rural households now encourage daughters to attend school and continue on to higher education.

I extend the classical model of migration to adequately reflect and address these historical changes and the subsequent expansion of opportunities and incentives motivating young women. My model of migration is based on the stories and experiences of young migrant women. Historical changes widened the set of options for rural women and expanded the incentives for women to migrate. The number of actors involved in influencing how women make migration decisions increased as

options widened. While the classical model portrays women's migration decisions as a function of household dynamics, I find that peers in school, and teachers now shape the migration planning of young women. I further find more options and more actors make for more spaces in which women can exercise agency and that SES provides insurance and allows women's families to create back-up opportunities for women to pursue the education pathway.

The education migrants in my study are at different stages in the migration process. Some are still attending secondary high schools near-by and living in the village, some are about to leave the village for higher education, some are in college, and one has completed college and is working in Beijing. When women leave home for school, the circle of actors who shape their future choices further widens. Their notions of the futures they want change, and they become more agentic.

For women who are further along in the education pathway, several temporal and social changes occur. Women claim that their goals become better articulated, they acquire relationships that help them process the skills, trajectory, and activities necessary to achieve next steps of permanence, integration, and autonomy. By becoming part of new social circles, women find new spaces, new peers, and new mentors who encourage and expect young women to perform new roles in these new settings.

Risk is an important theme in the narrative of young women at earlier stages in the education process of deciding whether to complete secondary education. Young women who continue in school but fail to secure a score high enough to get into college incur the opportunity costs of (1) forfeiting several years in the work force earning money, (2) developing skills and contacts in urban society, and (3) delaying their independence before marriage. Their families absorb the costs of tuition for up to three years of schooling. Despite the allure of leaving home for education, not all women are able or willing to take these risks. Instead, women choose to leave home through either employment or marriage in order to improve their lives.

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section briefly describes the education system in rural China. The second section asks "Why is education the

most desired migration pathway?” I begin the second section by discussing how women articulate connections between education and desired migration goals. I then discuss how the women’s social networks – family, teachers, peers – structure women’s preferences. This section is based on all 42 women interviewees in my study. The third section asks “Who takes the education route?” Here I examine resources (SES) and constraints associated with taking the education pathway. Section four adds complexity to the migration narrative by asking “How does education migration change the migrant?” Here, I discuss how women who have successfully left North River talk about the concrete ways that education migration enabled them to achieve the goals of permanence, integration, and autonomy. Sections three and four are based on the 14 women on the education pathway.

## I. THE STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION IN RURAL CHINA

Education begins with elementary school<sup>1</sup> in North River. Children enter the elementary school, or xiaoxue (小学), located in the village at age six and complete six years of schooling. After xiaoxue, children attend lower middle school, or chuzhong (初中), for an additional three years. The closest chuzhong is located in the Township seat, about a 45-minute walk from North River. Although the first nine years of education are compulsory, rural parents state that they pay tuition and related school fees, especially if household heads did not comply with the stipulations of the one-child policy; parents have to pay for the full cost of social services for every child born who violates compliance. At the conclusion of chuzhong, students take a test, called the zhongkao (中考) to determine whether they continue in secondary academic high school at a gaozhong (高中), or start training at in vocational secondary school, known as gaozhuān (高专). Both of these two options are costly for parents – it takes three years tuition, boarding, and living expenses to support their children.

[Insert Figure 4.2]

Chuzhong students who test well on the zhongkao continue academic training in gaozhong for academic high school, typically a three year commitment with students specializing in academic majors. After three years of coursework, students can participate in the national college entrance exam, or gaokao (高考), to determine whether they can continue on to higher education. Students who receive a low score may opt for an additional year of review coursework, or fuxi (复习), in an academic high school and retake the exam in June the following year.

Chuzhong students who did not test well enough on the zhongkao to enter gaozhong can decide to enroll into gaozhuan, or vocational secondary school, which ranges from two to four years of training for medium-level employment as workers, farmers, managerial, and technical personnel. At the conclusion of gaozhuan, vocational students can also participate in the gaokao to determine whether they too can continue to higher education.

Higher education includes junior vocational colleges, known as dazhuan (大专), with two-to-three year programs, and colleges and universities, or daxue (大学), that offer bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. Daxue are categorized as universities, colleges, and institutes for academic purposes. They are divided into first, second, and third tiered schools, based on standards established by the Ministry of Education. The score one receives on the gaokao, or the national college entrance exam, determines the level of education one may apply to for higher education.

Having reached the age of sixteen, with a chuzhong degree in hand, young women can leave home, get a job, and begin leading an independent life in urban areas. Many of the employment and marriage migrants in my study graduated from chuzhong and chose to migrate into cities and towns to start working and living independent lifestyles. Some young women continued on the education pathway to attend gaozhong for an additional year or two, hoping that these few more years of education could help them develop more knowledge and skills to obtain more

interesting work than the low-skill jobs obtained by chuzhong graduates. A few young women manage to graduate gaozhong and gaozhuan, but choose not to participate in the gaokao because they do not want to continue on the education pathway.

Compared to the migrants who dropped out of the education pathway at the conclusion of chuzhong, women who continued to attend gaozhong but did not participate in the gaokao to enroll into higher education absorbed much higher opportunity costs. Their parents had to pay up to three years of tuition, board, and living expenses. Interview participants stated that expenses for 2008 for gaozhong and gaozhuan tuition ranged from 1100 RMB per school semester to 2500-5000 RMB for the academic year depending on schools; another 400-600 RMB in books per school year; and about 200 RMB for meals and living expenses per month.<sup>2</sup> Young women personally lost up to three years of earnings, up to three years of time in which they could have been building up work experience and skills, and up to three years of independence and expanding social networks for future work and marriage prospects.

## **II. EDUCATION AS A MIGRATION PATHWAY**

When asked directly, all women reported that there were three pathways for migration – education, employment, and marriage, and the majority of women reported that the education pathway offered the best chance of achieving the three goals of migration – permanence, integration, and autonomy (see chapter 3). Education is desirable, but it is risky. Although education is viewed as the optimal pathway for migration by all the women in my study, only thirty-eight percent of the 320 North River migrants continued to enroll in school beyond chuzhong to try education as a pathway.

The rest of this section explores why education is considered the most desirable pathway. Here, I begin to address how women who choose the risky option of education develop, conceptualize, and articulate the connections between education and their desired life outcomes— permanence, integration, and autonomy.

Seven positive themes about education emerged from the narratives. The most

prominent theme is “Education is the way out.” You can escape rural life, poverty, and being tied to the land by attaining education. Respondents also note that education provide six other advantages; stability, better social circles and marriage prospects, freedom, interesting work, family prestige, and a long term professional career. Below, I discuss each positive theme and provide excerpts from interviewees’ stories describing each theme. These themes are compiled from women at different stages of decision making for both education and employment migration. Education migrants include young women who have left home for gaozhong and gaozhuan, women preparing to attend college, college students, and college graduates.

### **THEME 1: “EDUCATION IS THE WAY OUT”**

The expression “Bijing shangxue caiyou chulu, (毕竟上学才有出路),” translated as “Education leads to the way out,” came up in virtually all interviews. “Education leads to the way out” reflects the belief that education provides not only credentials, but knowledge which will allow one to transcend the harsh life conditions of being tied to the land, farming to earn a living, dependency and exposure to weather conditions, and living in the countryside. Education, work, and marriage migrants use this exact phrase.

How young women articulate the effects of education in helping them attain migration goals is reflected in their age and educational attainment. Yanchao, age 22, is a college student from a middle SES household. Her response shows how education is allowing her to realize all three objectives of permanence, integration into urban society, and achievement of her personal image of autonomy. Haihai, age 20, is a young woman from a high SES household in her last year of gaozhong. Her response shows how education allows women to pursue a modern life by breaking into non-traditional occupations and career trajectories. Haihai’s response also reveals the extensive influence of her social networks, foreshadowing the discussion of how social networks structure women’s tastes and preferences. Feng, age 17, is the second

daughter of another prominent high SES family. She is just starting gaozhong, but her response shows how she is using education as a strategy to help her become integrated into her favorite city.

### **Permanence, Integration, Autonomy**

Yanchao, age 22, middle SES

Yanchao is a seasoned college student at Yanshan University, or YSU (燕山大学), a school located in Hebei province a few hours from Beijing. Yanchao has one year left of coursework before she can graduate and begin working. I interviewed Yanchao in August 2008 when she returned to visit her parents in North River for a few days. When I asked her about her feelings about education, she responded that she had already spent some time thinking about her future. Yanchao's response shows how the three objectives of permanence, integration into urban society, and personal image of autonomy are inter-related. Her narrative further reveals how achieving one objective sets her up for achieving the next objective. Leaving home to attend college changed Yanchao's ideas about the purpose of marriage.

“I study marketing, but I don't really like this major. There isn't a lot of room for development. I want to go into accounting. I don't want to return here. I feel that, one has to leave. After testing into college and you get out, you want your life to be a bit more interesting.

Before getting into college, I only wanted to get a stable job. I'm in the third year of college now, going into my fourth year. Now I think, after having spent several years outside living and studying, my thinking has undergone a great change. As a woman, life is not as simple as getting married and having children....

Before, I thought you'd get a job, get married, have children...that is to say, a traditional way of thinking. What it means to be a rural woman.

People who test into college won't have to stay on the land, don't have to follow this simple and rooted way of life. As a modern woman, you can stand independently. Be an independent woman and face the world...and look further ahead.

Presently, I am not planning to test for graduate school. I think, first I should work for two or three years to establish myself. To strengthen my financial capability, to have some experience, then I can go another step further towards developing myself. This means I can broaden my space for expansion. I haven't thought about simply finding a boyfriend or partner. I'm not particularly young, but when it comes to courtship, two people are like two cities, or two mountains, they should complement each other."

According to Yanchao, she originally took the education pathway because she wanted to be able to secure a stable job. This positive expectation about education reflects a desire for permanence in migration. Education and age have also allowed Yanchao to change her ideas about several other major lifestyle markers. We can interpret Yanchao's statement that before her third year of college, she assumed that marriage and childbearing were integral to a woman's identity. Women are meant to become wives and mothers. By her third year in college, Yanchao's ideas have changed. Yanchao expects courtship and compatibility both before and as components of a marriage. Women are independent, both financially and in thinking for themselves when planning a future. Yanchao states that accomplishment of these tasks allows women to shed the "traditional way of thinking" encumbering rural women, forcing them to get a job, get married, and have children.

In strengthening her ability to develop herself through school, shoring up her work and social experiences, Yanchao wants to broaden her "space for expansion." She seeks space to exercise her roles. This entails integration into urban society, where she has social spaces, and space in social circles to perform her new roles. She also will have actors, new friends, coworkers, bosses who will expect her to exercise

her agency in their interactions. She will also develop new goals from which to form and achieve new ideas. These desires harken to the goal of integration in urban society; to have social circles as stages, roles to perform, other actors to interact with, a forum to develop ideas and strategize on how to achieve upward mobility.

### **Image of Autonomy**

Haihai, age 20, high SES

For Haihai, a young woman from a high SES household, education means leaving the countryside to attend college to pursue a meaningful modern career in a non-traditional occupation for women. Haihai's pursuit of such lofty educational and occupational goals would fulfill her father's expectations and make him proud. Her mother runs the family hardware store and her father works as a village electrician. They live in the back of their hardware store, which is located on Commerce Street. Haihai is the elder child, she has a younger brother who is attending chuzhong. Haihai's mother and I had afternoon-long conversations about how they called extended family members living in North River and in different cities to help figure out where Haihai should apply for college and for employment opportunities.

“After graduation (from gaozhong), I'm thinking of going to college....Even though my grades are average, I would say that attending college is the way out. Anyway, right now I feel that all my efforts lately have been for preparing to test into college. Then I want to become a doctor. My father said to me that he'd like me to study medicine. I feel that I can see myself liking medicine. No matter what, I'll give it all I have to become a doctor.”

## **Integration into urban society**

Feng, age 17, high SES

Feng is a student in her first year of high school. Her father is a doctor in the village, and she is the younger of two daughters. Feng's response shows how she plans to use education as the stepping stone for moving into her favorite city, Tianjin. Although she had not visited Nankai University, Feng had visited Tianjin twice during her childhood and has an uncle living in Tianjin. When I asked her how she was doing in school, and what she thought about school Feng had the following response.

“I'm doing alright in school! I've always thought about testing into college...since I was in elementary school, I wanted to leave. I don't want to stay here. Study well and then leave. Test into college. One of my teachers told us to pick a higher ranked school, have a rather big target. I first thought of Peking University. Then I thought, I rather like Nankai University. Nankai University in Tianjin...Why? First, it has to be a big name school. Also, it's located in Tianjin. I really like Tianjin. Tianjin has a lot of potential for development in the future. That's why I want to go there. For now, I don't put too much thought into it...it's just that I'd like to test in. I haven't taken the college entrance exam nor applied to the school yet. So it's only a thought. In the future, I will be able to more fully understand (explore) this school. ”

## **THEME 2: EDUCATION MEANS STABILITY**

Education allows for long term stable changes in the lives of women and their families on multiple dimensions. Having an education means you can lead a stable life and avoid the hardships of being tied to the land, getting sick, or unforeseen circumstances.

Wen, age 20, tells her story about how she became motivated to pursue

education to help her family. While she was a student in chuzhong, her family experienced a series of financial and medical hardships. These difficulties meant that her family transitioned from being well-off to being poor very quickly.

I had been told by several young women and one of the local teachers that Wen is now an excellent student. Everyone recommended I interview Wen because she had the enviable position of being the academic star of North River's 2008 graduating class. Wen had just graduated from Yi County Gaozhong, the best school in the region. She took the college entrance exam and scored 576 points, a score high enough to earn her admission into Hebei University of Technology, or HEBUT (河北工业大学) in Tianjin. Generally regarded as a prestigious institution for receiving a tertiary education, HEBUT was founded in 1903. This school is highly competitive and is geared towards engineering and sciences.

Through Haihai's introduction, I met Wen as she was taking the last few days of her summer break to relax and prepare for her move to college. Wen is a pensive and studious young woman. Like Haihai, Wen is friendly and was willing to share her history and experience in an interview. Haihai and Wen share several similarities. Both women are twenty years old, their parents live on Commerce Street just a few buildings apart from each other, and both have younger siblings. Wen has a sister who is three years younger and preparing to attend gaozhong. Haihai and Wen have known each other since their childhood days as classmates, both in their xiaoxue in North River and as boarding students studying at Eastern County Chuzhong. While the two of them did not attend the same gaozhong, they maintained contact, following each other's progress in school. Being students, living as close neighbors in North River, and having been childhood classmates, they would speak to each other whenever they were both back home on their monthly breaks, vacations, and summer breaks.

Like Haihai's parents, Wen's mother and father had a hardware business when she was a child. However, the business was not particularly successful. When her mother's pre-existing ailments became aggravated with stress and injury from the family business, Wen's parents decided that they had to give up their already failing

business. Her mother's injuries and illness, along with the failed business, meant that Wen's household would have been considered a poor, low SES household since Wen's second year of chuzhong. Wen admits that at the time, she was not really very good at studying, and was not attending the best chuzhong. However, she realized then what a financial burden her education was on her parents. Unable to help out her family in any other way, Wen decided that the best thing she could do for her parents would be to study hard and test into a good college.

Wen, age 20, middle SES

"My studies went all right when I was in elementary school. When I first started out in middle school, I didn't do as well. Later on, because my fees and expenses were so costly, I knew that I needed to study hard. After that, I became serious about work, and I was able to catch up. I felt that my family's lives were hard. My father did not migrate out, he stayed home and farmed. Later on, something unfortunate happened to our family, at the time we had a business, but we weren't making much money. My father became very nervous, and became ill, and so did my mother. Her back gave out. It was already ailing her [from previous injuries], and my father had low blood pressure. It was a bad series of events."

Lai Sze: So these events happened to your family while you were in middle school? Was your family doing all right before then?

Wen: "Yes. We were doing alright. I was still very young before and didn't think too much about these things. When I got a bit older, I understood what happened."

Lai Sze: So your mother was injured, your father returned to farming, and you felt you needed to take care of them somehow. Is this when you decided that you needed to study hard?

Wen: “Yes. There was no other way besides studying hard.”

Lai Sze: So there’s no way out besides studying?

Wen: “I had to study well and test into a good college.”

While they were not officially considered low SES by village leadership standards for disability subsidies, Wen’s household faced a great deal of economic and medical hardships. Her mother’s injuries, the failed family business, her father’s decision to stay home to care for the family and farm instead of migrating for work outside the village, combined with the presence of two children attending school meant that there were many expenses and not much money to spare. Yet, these hardships during her childhood served as a point of motivation and inspired Wen to excel as a student and candidate for education migration in hopes of greater stability in life.

### **THEME 3: EDUCATION LEADS TO BETTER SOCIAL CIRCLES, MARRIAGE PROSPECTS, AND LATER LIFE OPTIONS**

Themes 1 and 2, that education is the way out and that education leads to stability are discussed by young women early on in migration decision-making as major motivators. Education for better social circles and marriage prospects mostly deals with integration after women enter college and begin thinking about employment and later life events such as getting married, establishing a household, and starting a family. As I spoke to women who are older and further along on the education pathway, they discussed how their thoughts about what they want had shifted since leaving home for higher education. The young women discussed how they have matured by the opportunities and examples taken from school and work peers. Pursuing education by leaving home allows women to develop social circles, marriage prospects, and the

social spaces and skills to exercise an increased sense of agency that women gain from education. Social circles of peers and coworkers also provide young women with feedback and offer concrete examples for re-evaluating and refining migration aspirations.

Education allows women to change the physical circumstances of their lives by accessing actual opportunities, such as mentorship into better social circles and training to develop the social skills to remain in these social circles. These opportunities allow women to develop social circles for work, for marriage, for a wider range of friends, and for implementing long terms plans to fulfill their goals of integration and permanence. Jun's narrative of experiences and interactions with her peers illustrates how education enables young rural women to transition into urban society.

Her account of how her family, friends, and employers helped her develop and pursue her goals reveals the extent that social networks structure choice and allow women to exercise personal agency.

Jun, age 26, high SES

Jun is from a high SES household. She left North River to attend Beijing University of Applied Technology, or BUAT (北京应用技术大学), a vocational college located in Beijing. She was originally enrolled at a school in Jiangxi, a province in Southern China. After attending the first day of orientation, Jun no longer wanted to be in the South. She was able to switch to BUAT because her cousin had applied to the school as a back-up option on her behalf without her knowledge. After three years at BUAT, Jun graduated and decided to stay in Beijing for work despite her initial reservations about moving to Beijing for school. Upon graduation, Jun worked for one year as a marketer at a small company selling educational documentaries about corporate and government corruption in China. The owner of the company is a woman who formerly worked for China Central Television (CCTV). Jun now works as an editor for a book publishing company. She has worked as an editor for over 2 years, but has started taking classes for certification as an accountant.

Her hope is to expand her skills to increase her work options by becoming more geographically mobile. As an editor, her options for where she lives are limited because the book publishing industry is concentrated in major metropolitan areas like Beijing. In such areas it is not feasible for most twenty-year-olds to purchase a home. An accounting degree would allow her to move elsewhere, buy a home, get married and raise a family. At the age of 26, Jun is amongst the oldest women in my study and the eldest of the education migrants. Jun is not yet married and doesn't plan to do so until she has reached 30. She wants to focus on building a life and career trajectory first. Jun has a steady boyfriend who has helped her mature and encourages her efforts to obtain the accounting certification.

### **Better social circles**

Jun landed her first job, working in marketing and distribution at a small company, through the help of a classmate who was already working at the company. The company was started by a friend of the classmate's teacher. Their boss, a woman, had worked at the CCTV but left to make documentaries about corruption in China. Jun and her classmate were the only employees and were responsible for researching, contacting, and marketing these documentaries as anti-corruption educational materials to department heads of government bureaus. Jun would personally contact the department heads of companies and government bureaus to persuade them to purchase the documentaries as training material for subordinates "so they don't knowingly break the law, or zhifa fanfa (知法犯法)." After the sale, Jun personally delivered the documentaries to clients in Beijing, or shipped materials to clients located outside the city.

Jun reports that she learned how to contact powerful people, manage relationships, and develop manners and social etiquette. This position exposed Jun to different social settings where she observed how her boss carried herself and worked with clients to grow a business. She also learned how to manage and develop relationships, important skills for networking and for making business contacts.

Jun and her classmate would be taken to dinners where her boss discussed business. She let them listen in and dine with clients. Her boss would pave the way with her clients by saying that it's not easy for these two young women. Jun and her classmate shared in meals and sat in on meetings. Their boss always generously let them take left over food home.

Jun reported that her monthly salary of 700 RMB was good. She paid 150 RMB for rent initially. When the winter came, her boss had Jun and her friend board at the company. The company was located in a residential complex, or xiaoqu (小区), so there was a heater to keep them warm. They could also watch television, and cook in the kitchen. Later on, when their boss opened a teahouse, she gave them a room at the dormitory which she set up for her teahouse employees. Their boss only asked that they supervise the trainees as they were still rather young. Jun and her classmate kept their belongings in the room, but continued to stay at the office because it was difficult to commute during the winter. Her boss could have charged the two of them rent, but generously allowed Jun and her classmate to reside at the office for free. Although she chose to stay in Beijing for her first job and later transitioned to a career as a book editor, Jun plans to build her life outside of Beijing. She explained that it is too expensive to set-up a household and raise a family in Beijing. The cost of living is more manageable in a smaller city, or even in the suburbs of Beijing. She is taking courses towards certification as an accountant. Her boyfriend supports this venture. She's been with him for three years, having met him through her classmates. They plan to move to another city together and start a family.

Jun's story illustrates how high SES structured her pathway. Jun didn't choose Beijing, but ended up attending college and working there for three years because of decisions and actions taken by her family and peers to keep her on the education path. Jun's story also illustrates how Jun's agency interacts with her social network through her initial decision not to go to Beijing, and her preparation to leave Beijing for better life course opportunities elsewhere. Her agency is revealed in her original decision to not go to Beijing because of costs and density of schools. Her family ensured that she had a wide range of options, even if she didn't have the foresight to apply to a wide range of

schools. Jun had the opportunity to reconsider her original decision. In that reconsideration, Jun's agency is exhibited through her interactions with peers in Beijing. She used her peers to get feedback, and to confirm that her ideas were feasible. She then turned to her family for help in implementing decisions.

When Jun completed her education, she developed relationships with peers to secure employment immediately after graduation. Jun secured a position which paid a reasonable salary, and that provided the benefits of reimbursed transportation expenses, a monthly expense account of an addition 50 RMB, and free housing, utilities, and meals. Her work requirements enabled her to interact with important business and government leaders. Jun's boss taught Jun the business and social etiquette necessary for moving into and doing business in important social circles, and gave her ample opportunity to practice those skills for upward social mobility. Jun then decided to transition into the book publishing industry as an editor and is taking coursework to become certified as an accountant. Certification will allow Jun to increase her geographic and social mobility as well as professional network, helping her secure greater integration in urban areas.

### **Marriage prospects and later life options**

I asked Jun whether she wanted to remain in Beijing or to move elsewhere. Jun said, "I have to see, it depends on where I marry." Jun's response shows that marriage, where a spouse is from, or where he wants to relocate to, are major factors for young women when making important life choices. As Jun explains,

"Beijing is not suitable for living, only for working. Beijing is bustling. Like my classmate from Baoding, she decided to come to Beijing to work. She hadn't been there long [in Beijing] when she felt that there are too many cars, too crowded, that people are all bustling about. It is anxious being in Beijing. [This is] because Beijing is for making money. Opportunities are plentiful. One cannot grow old in Beijing."

Prodded about her thoughts regarding this matter, Jun further explained why Beijing is not suitable place to settle down.

“In fact, I cannot live in Beijing. Average people are unable to afford buying a home in Beijing. Twenty-some year olds cannot afford to buy a home. This is not the case in smaller cities, [it is possible] to buy a home, to work. Actually, I initially didn’t realize this. I suppose I matured. To know, and to have observed more things, led me to another perspective.”

The situation is worse for marriage. Jun explains the barriers to marrying into a Beijing household by telling the story of how her classmate’s relationship deteriorated because of the prejudices Beijing people have against outsiders. This story highlights the real and perceived discrimination felt by some rural young women in their efforts to integrate into a city like Beijing.

“People from Beijing think less of people from outside, I know this. My classmate had a steady boyfriend. Because she is from outside of Beijing, his family did not agree [to their relationship]. In fact, this man doesn’t have a good job. He works for the subway. His family is from Shunyi District, a Beijing suburb, so you can say they are from Beijing. But they don’t have much to offer, and their home is extremely broken down. Beijing natives typically prefer people from Beijing. Moreover, [they] hope for someone with permanent work. Look at us [Jun and her classmate], we don’t have permanent work. Today, we drift here for work, tomorrow, we drift elsewhere.”

When I asked Jun about her matured perspective, she attributed her shift in thinking to her boyfriend. Jun’s boyfriend is from Yi County, where North River is located, and is employed as a police officer. Jun’s comparison of her relationship to

those of her peers further reveals what qualities are important in evaluating a marriage candidate.

“[I developed my maturity] through my boyfriend. He is rational and thinks about things a great deal. Even if you haven’t thought about something, he will have considered it. We’re from the same dormitory. He returned home after graduation. His father found him a job, in a government department. However, this job is temporary. A lot of people return home after graduation. Take the classmate I worked with in my first job; her family wants her to return home, and she is two years older than me, twenty-nine. I have another classmate from my dormitory. She studied fashion and her previous boyfriend said he wanted to move to Qingdao. She said no, that she wanted to stay in Beijing, so they broke up. My classmate has an uncle who has a doctorate. He works at the television station and wants to help her find a government employee from Beijing. He wants to help her find someone who owns a car and a house. But given her conditions, would someone working as a government employee, who owns a car and a house, think anything of her? To have a car and a house, he must be older. How would twenty-some year olds own a car and a house? Her uncle said he’d find someone between thirty and thirty-five, ‘Someone who is caring.’ Everybody makes their own way.

My boyfriend thinks long-term. It’s true that working as an editor, if were I to move to a smaller locale, I couldn’t do anything. I wouldn’t be able to work....We’ve dated for a few years, almost three years, starting about the time I left my first job. I’m to focus on what is before me, to first study accounting, then to learn how to drive, then to get certification. First I’ll learn a bit on my own, no need to take driving lessons. I can get my younger brother to teach me. Then I can take the test. I haven’t decided when just yet. [My boyfriend] hasn’t asked me to come back, only that I consider the employment aspect. In fact, accounting is useful anywhere,

doesn't matter if it's a big city or a small city."

Finding the right partner is not enough. Jun doesn't plan to marry until she is at least thirty years old, perhaps even older. She explains that it is necessary to first make headway in her career, secure personal finances, and be independently established when entering into a marriage. As Jun elaborates,

"I want to make improvements in my career, because I don't have anything right now. To find a marriage candidate, you first need to have a stable job. I don't know about other people, but my classmates are all like this. My classmate from Shandong, she has a temporary job. As soon as people find out that it's not a formal position, they're not willing [to proceed with a relationship]. Later on, she met another man, but his family lives too far away from her family. She told her boyfriend and his family that if they could locate a steady job for her, then she would go, if not, then she and he would separate. People are very realistic now. Take my [college] classmates as examples, some of them are married. The men are employed outside while the women stay at home as housewives. Those of us who grew up outside don't like this kind of lifestyle.

Having attended school and grown up outside [of the village], we want to be able to support ourselves; earn some money of our own, go to work every day. But it depends on each person's thinking. Each person thinks differently. I don't like staying at home, to spend the whole day in the house, caring for children, to not know how to dress yourself, while men are outside seeing the world. They see plenty of women. When men return home and see how sloppy you are, your status will certainly drop. Take the people from my dormitory. They have certainly considered this. First get your career in order, and then discuss marriage. Last year, on the May 1st Holiday, I went to our village marketplace to buy my granny a new jacket. As I was trying to figure out what my granny could wear, I ran into a

classmate of mine. She had just gotten married. The vendor asked me how big a size does my granny wear, and then said of my classmate that this mature married woman [funu, 妇女] could wear this [jacket]. I actually felt extremely uncomfortable when I heard this. I don't know how my classmate felt when she heard this. The vendor pointed at my classmate and called her a mature woman. I felt that she is still a young person, how could she be called a mature woman? Maybe things are different after you get married. Perhaps you become numb.

Maybe I felt uncomfortable for her. We are the same age, but to be referred to so differently by people. She also changed. After she got married, she looks much older. I think she looks sad. Another one of my friends got married last year. I said 'you must not be like her! You must have your own life.' She told me not to worry, that she won't be like that. Since she got married, she quickly had a baby. She initially said that she would look for work after she got married. But after she got married, she didn't think that way. She just stayed at home, didn't think about working anymore. My classmate from Shaanxi, before she got married, when she was a young woman, would pay attention to her attire and her appearance. As soon as she got married, she became sloppy. All she knew was taking care of the children. She didn't pay attention to appearance. I don't know if this is a common failing for women. After marriage, you change. Your fighting spirit disappears. My other classmate has a younger sister. Before she got married, she was very strong. She changed as soon as she got married. I hope that I will not be like this."

Jun's discussion of marriage hopes and aspirations reflects migrant women's goals of achieving permanence, independence, and autonomy. In her story, Jun juxtaposes the various experiences of her classmates to illustrate her values for women's ability to maintain their careers and independence after marriage. Jun clearly expresses her feelings about why women should not merely stay at home and perform

the role of being wives. As Jun explains, every day, men go out and work in the wider world. Husbands meet other women daily, and wouldn't want to return home to a wife who doesn't know about the world, or has a sloppy appearance. Having attended college and "grown up outside" away from the village, Jun wants to establish a career and be able to do more with her life. Her boyfriend, who is supportive of her ideas, encourages Jun to continue acquiring skills and helps her strategize for further migration and upward mobility.

The themes discussed above, that (1) education is the way out, (2) education means stability and (3) education leads to better social circles, marriage prospects, and later life options, are prominent in the narratives of education migrants. The remaining positive themes of education migration, that is, that (4) education means freedom, (5) interesting work, (6) family prestige, and (7) a professional life, are articulated by education migrants. However, employment and marriage migrants also emphasize these themes as the benefits of leaving home through education. These positive themes epitomize the benefits which are unavailable to them because they have opted out of the education pathway.

#### **THEME FOUR: EDUCATION MEANS FREEDOM**

Women can use education to achieve their personal image of autonomy, to become modern women. They can participate in the transformation of China by joining the new economy and global society. This means being able to experience society on your own terms, to acquire knowledge and become educated for yourself, thereby being able to take hold of and control ones destiny.

#### **Freedom to make decisions**

Ying, age 19, low SES

Ying is a 19 year old woman from a low SES household. Her parents can not

support her because of their physical ailments. Her family qualifies for disability subsidies from the village, but they still had to send her to live with her maternal aunt in a village located 15 minutes' bike ride outside the county seat. Ying has always been close with her aunt. When her xiaoxue grades were not good enough for her to enter into her desired chuzhong, Ying discussed the matter with her aunt. Her aunt promptly had Ying attend a chuzhong closer to her home. A few years later, when Ying took the zhongkao exam but did not test well enough to enter academic schools, she again turned to her aunt for help. Her aunt's friend had two daughters who were attending a nearby vocational school. They felt the school was decent, so Ying enrolled and is majoring in Finance and Accounting. I met Ying in the summer of 2008, as she was working her summer sales job at a shop in the county seat. She lives with her aunt during the summer; getting work experience to complement her vocational training.

Ying: "I'd always wanted to go to school, but for a time I changed my thinking. At the beginning of my second year at chuzhong, the day before classes started, my older brother got into a motorcycle accident. I stayed home for a week. I was extremely upset because my brother didn't take anything seriously and had caused the accident. He seriously injured the other party, who had brain trauma and was in a coma. My father was notified about the accident. I didn't want to go to school. I thought that I should start working, to earn some money for the family. When I told people about the idea, my friends, my teachers, my relatives all begged me not to, saying that this situation will pass. They said that I should go back to school, that education leads to the way out.....

My teacher, Teacher Li, made the deepest impression. I remember I kept a diary at the time, and [I recall] he said 'Only by going to school can you change your family circumstances. When you go to school, you become educated. Only then can you find good employment.' He said that my family will experience this difficulty for only a short while. He told me that I needed to set my sights further ahead, to consider the future. That I

should be sure of the path I want to take.

I felt that what he said made a lot of sense. Later, I thought, if I didn't go to school, what kind of work could I do? The most you could do is go out and work for someone. That's how you would pass your life. You'd have to work for someone. If you become educated, then you acquire knowledge for yourself. Even if you have things that other people can take away, no one can take it [your education] from you. It belongs to you. I felt this was quite meaningful. So I'm going to school. After I become educated, I can find work that is better than any work I would find now.

What do education and knowledge include? There's a traditional saying, how does it go...nowadays, everyone says 'work together to build a harmonious society.' Civilized culture means being educated. Regarding knowledge, it refers to knowledge of present society, and to book knowledge, it's all the same."

Lai Sze: What kind of knowledge is learned by being in society and what is learned by going to school?

Ying: "You can get knowledge from both. Look at those of us who go to school. I'm studying Finance and Accounting, and the various aspects of specialized knowledge, the basics, I learned from books. In present society, in practice, you come into contact with all types of people. In school, its only teachers and classmates. Teachers can only give you an oral account. They do not have personal experience. Look at how things are now, I meet all sorts of people, from difficult to easy-going people. It's a union of real life [experiences] and book [learning], so it's pretty good."

Lai Sze: So you work and go to school. How do you think your situation compares to others who only attend school, or just work?

Ying: "I think there are two ways to describe it. Let's look at those who go to school. They are completely devoted to studying. Through testing, through earning diplomas and the like, they are paving a future for themselves. Those like me, who work and go to school, can increase their experience in society. When it comes time to look for work, like at the end of the year, when we have our practicum and exams, if you have work experience, then it is a strength. It's really different for those who don't have any work experience. To work and to study [at the same time], first, you increase your experience in society. Second, you can earn some money for living expenses. That's what I would say. The other perspective is to look at it as a combination of labor and service work....You can work and study.

Before, my classmates would say [we should] work during vacation. Working [on the side] so you can get some experience in society. Speaking of studying, look at me now, just working here [in this store]. I have books, but when I go home, I am exhausted. I can't even read [my books]. So there are pros and there are cons. Right now, I'm just working. I haven't had time to review my studies. But some people, even if they are even more tired, they love to study. No matter how tired they get, they still [study and] read their books. No matter how busy it gets, you'd still find time to study."

Lai Sze: There are young women who decide to stop going to school, and leave home for work. What do you think of this situation?

Ying: "Oh. I guess there are two ways of looking at it, too. I have some classmates that went to school but dropped out after half a year. They went to Beijing for work. When you don't go to school anymore, and leave home for work, it may seem like things are fresh in the immediate moment. Later on, working those types of jobs, doing the same thing all

day, you'll start to loath it. That's one aspect of it. [They are] willing to accept these conditions in the long term, perhaps focusing on the income [you can earn]. Or you can describe it this way, at that point, [they may be] focusing on making sales. Later on, having come into contact with a lot of people, [they] become familiar with people who introduce them to even better work. In that way, they can make their way up [in society].”

Ying's description of the life she expects to be able to lead is in stark comparison to the destiny she anticipates for her friends who dropped out of school for work. On the one hand, Ying expresses how she had always wanted to study and become an educated individual. On the other hand, her household SES, combined with the financial difficulties that her brother's motorcycle crash imposed on her family, made Ying re-evaluate her desire for education. Ying attributes her resolution to remain in school to her teacher, who helped her see that becoming educated allows her to control her future and improve her family circumstances. More importantly, Ying's resolve to continue in school makes her reflect critically about the future available to women who drop out of school. As Ying states, her friends earn money and may meet people who will introduce them to better work opportunities, but they will be working for someone else. By becoming an educated woman, Ying is paving a future for herself. Since she is working during the summer to gain experience, she anticipates being even more qualified than people who focused exclusively on studying. Ying's story reflects how education allows women to make decisions about their future.

### **THEMES 5, 6, and 7: EDUCATION LEADS TO FAMILY PRESTIGE, INTERESTING WORK, AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

Women who are unable to pursue education also have positive opinions about why education is important. Young women who opted out of the education pathway

often value the concrete gains that education migrants make towards improving their lives. They state that educated women have a wider range of options when making decisions about their futures. In addition to believing that educated migrants have the freedom to dictate their futures, women see education as the precursor to family prestige, interesting work, and a professional life. Many employment and marriage migrants view their decision to leave school as one that lowered family prestige. They describe their work and their lives as consisting of menial, low pay work under difficult conditions with no chances of upward mobility. Hong, age 21, is from a low SES household. Her story serves as a counter-example to the lives of education migrants. She opted out of the education pathway after graduating from chuzhong. In the past four years since leaving school, Hong has tried at least four different types of jobs, earning 1100 for one month in her highest paying job, but typically no more than 650 RMB per month for most of her work history. This reflects the experiences of young women who leave home for work having received only a chuzhong education and illustrates how structural factors such as household SES, quality of social network access, and women's educational attainment interact to narrow young women's opportunities for social and economic mobility.

### **Leaving education means foregoing family prestige, interesting work, or professional life**

Hong, age 21, low SES

Hong is from a low SES household. She left home for employment, but states that she wishes she had been able to continue with her schooling. Her older brother was accepted into college but their parents and extended family could not afford to pay the tuition. Hong's brother worked in construction during summers to pay for his college tuition and after his graduation, borrowed money from family to start a restaurant business. Since dropping out of school after graduating from chuzhong, Hong has worked several low-skilled jobs. In her interview, Hong stated that she really misses

being in school. She states that school would allow her family to hold their heads up in the community. Coming from a poor family, a number of factors shaped her choice to leave home. Hong begins her story when household finances first started affecting her education. Unlike other young women from North River who attended chuzhong in the township seat, Hong attended a cheaper chuzhong in a neighboring village.

“Oh, how do I explain this? In fact, [I] felt I wasn’t the best at studying. Good schools want too much money [for tuition]. So I had wanted to attend, but our family didn’t have the [economic] conditions for it. My older brother was headed for college, he was in high school, and we didn’t have the economic circumstances [to support him]. Also, the school [in the next village] is close to my aunt’s home. My aunt lives in that village. So it was convenient. I would commute, going back and forth four times a day.

I didn’t attend high school. I graduated [middle school] in 2005. I didn’t take the [high school entrance] exam. How do I explain this? Actually, I had thought about going on to high school. But that year, the third [and last] of middle school, my father was working on a construction site. He was injured. He is still that way now. At the time, my family couldn’t bear the costs. My brother had started his first year of college. I had thought about dropping out, but I wanted to go [to high school]. But our family just didn’t have the capacity for it. So I decide to drop out. I would come out and work. My family would have fewer financial burdens.

I had thought about [dropping out], and my parents and I had discussed it. They said, ‘it is not easy for our family to have a college student. We must have him finish college.’ My parents had wanted to send us both to college. To bring pride to the family, to earn prestige. At that time, I had given up on going to school, and insisted that my brother finish college. So from that time on, I left home and worked outside.

[My parents and I,] we talked about it. How do I describe it...In fact, not going to school was a blow to me. It was [a blow] to them too. But we

didn't have the conditions for it in the family. My parents said to me, they really didn't do right by me, to not have me continue schooling. I told them it wouldn't be any use anyway. I knew what our circumstances are. I was willing to not go to school to help ease the financial burden on them. My brother also told me to go to school, but I said to him, no matter how bitter and exhausting my life is [working] outside, I am going to have you finish school. But I couldn't go to school anymore. I disappointed their painstaking efforts [to send me to school].

[When my brother] found out about my father's injuries, he returned home. He said that he would quit school. He would have me go to school. I said I wasn't going to go. I told him to go, to finish it [college]. I told him, 'you are already in school, and completed your first year. The second year is the most important. Your third year is practicum training.' I told him to finish, it's only another year or two, and you'll bring prestige to our whole family!"

Hong decided to drop out of school so that her brother could finish college. His college degree would bring pride and prestige to the family. After her brother graduated from college, he borrowed money from the family to start a restaurant business with two other classmates. Because of this sacrifice, Hong has worked in several low paying jobs since completing middle school. These jobs have been physically demanding, repetitive, and exhausting. In her first attempt to locate a job, she went to the County seat to interview for a job working in an electronics plant in Tianjin. She paid 500 RMB for the interview fee. When she didn't pass the interview, they returned the fee to her. When she returned home, her brother saw that she had not landed the job and called their cousin in Baoding to arrange a job for her. Their cousin had been working in Baoding for over three years, and brought her in where he was working. In her first job, Hong worked in a warehouse stocking and shipping pharmaceutical drugs. She worked in the warehouse for two and a half years, making 450 RMB a month. She and her co-workers would have their pay docked if shipments went missing. She lifted thousands of boxes

for eight hours a day, and had only two days off every month.

“No one is willing to work [in the warehouse]! It’s because it is exhausting work. Many people are unwilling to work in the warehouse. They would leave, or do deliveries, to write up orders, enter and stock inventory, or work in accounting. No one is willing to work in the warehouse because it’s exhausting....When I had worked there for two years, they increased my salary to 650 RMB [per month]. I had worked there for a while, and felt that it wasn’t suitable for me. [I] mean it was too exhausting. It was only eight hours a day, but you returned to move boxes. If you had a day with a lot of inventory, there might be several thousand [boxes]. It was mostly women [in the warehouse], because there were a lot of women workers. There were only two to three men, not many. So I would say that women did all the work. Most of the men left. It was grueling [work].”

Hong worked in the warehouse for two and a half years, and her monthly salary increased from 450 RMB to 650 RMB at the start of her second year. At the urging of her parents, she left the warehouse and joined her neighbors who worked in a book printing factory in the Tongzhou suburb of Beijing. Her parents pushed her to take this job because Hong's neighbors boasted that their daughters were earning a lot of money at the book printing factory. Hong describes a different set of circumstances when she started working at the factory.

“You have to match up the press, according to the page, and prepare to make books...In the first two months, you don’t get paid. I didn’t get paid in the first month or the second month. I had to spend my own money. They did not cover food, only boarding at the company. There were six to eight people per room. In my last job, there were only three of us [to a room]. Most of the time, the other two weren’t there, so I had a room to myself for two years....The surroundings [of the printing press company]

were all right, but in terms of the transportation, or shopping, every aspect was inconvenient! We had two shifts [at work]. A shift wasn't designated a certain set of hours, but my days were at least fourteen to fifteen hours, or even fifteen to sixteen hours. It was according to your work load. I mean that you were assigned a certain amount of work, and you had to finish it. If you didn't finish it, then your whole day counted for nothing. They give you a certain amount, and you have to complete it. It didn't matter if you worked all night, or if you worked all day and all night. It didn't matter how much time [you work], if you completed the work for the day, then you got paid. If you didn't complete the work, or if you were unwilling to do the work, or if you went back [to the dormitory] to rest, then all the work you did that day equated to not having worked at all. So even if you worked, it was the same as if you hadn't worked. [It's] just like you didn't work at all. It's as if you worked for nothing."

Hong worked at the printing factory for six months, and received only two paychecks of about 300 RMB each. Disappointed at the wages, Hong decided to try working in a restaurant. She brought a friend, a young woman who lived next door to her parents in North River, to start on the job with her. Within a few days of working, her friend received a call. Her friend's mother asked her to return home to go to school. Hong had already decided the restaurant industry wasn't for her and her friend's leaving spurred Hong to look for another job. As Hong explains,

"I only spent a few days there. That is to say, I have never worked in a restaurant. I couldn't tolerate the atmosphere. Every day, I would have to clean, to wash dishes. I felt it was not suitable for me. I couldn't work there either. Within a few days, I took the young woman who came to the restaurant with me to the Dongzhimen station [to send her home]. On my way back to the restaurant, my older cousin called me. She asked me where I was, and I told her I was at Dongzhimen seeing a friend to her

way home. She said that I should have told her, stating that she was also at Dongzhimen. Her [cousin's] family is from Changping and she works in Changping. I said I didn't know [that she was in Dongzhimen], and asked her if we could talk when I had time. She agreed. She asked me about how things were [at the restaurant]. I told her things weren't good. I told her I wasn't willing to work there, that I wanted to look for another job. She agreed, told me to stay there [at the restaurant] for a few more days, and that she would help me find another job. She then called me, and I left."

Thanks to her cousin, Hong transitioned into television sales in a store in Beijing. Her cousin was able to arrange for Hong to work there because she was a former employee. At this position, Hong earned 1100 RMB in her first month. Hong had a base salary of 800 RMB per month, could get commissions and bonuses, made new friends, received on-the-job training, had set working hours, and enjoyed perks such as one day off every week, and lunch and board provided by the company. However, Hong decided to leave this job after only one month because she disagreed with the style and supervision of a new manager. Hong discussed how she transitioned into this position, and the circumstances causing her to quit the best job she'd had since leaving home.

"I had called the manager. The first time I called her, I felt, well, the manager is a woman, and I felt that when she spoke, she was polite and brief, the affable type. But, even though it was the first time, my first time for an interview, I wasn't too nervous at the time. Only when I first entered the building, and saw the manager, I became a bit nervous. After we chatted for a short time, I felt all right....So when I was just starting, before they began advertising the television brand, I would go to the office every day and look around. If things were all right, things were relaxed in the morning and the evening. I wouldn't head out for work until eight, or nine o'clock in the morning. The company covered food and housing. [We] ate right at the company, had lunch at twelve o'clock. We'd be off of work by

four o'clock in the afternoon with nothing else to do. We could return to the dormitory.

But after a period of time, another group of employees transferred over with another manager. So it was necessary to invest with this other manager. [He] brought two instructors, and [we] underwent training. After we trained for a while we were presentable and could formally start....[All this] took about a week...How do I describe it? I was very happy working there. I had several [older and younger coworkers who were like] sisters and brothers, and I was very happy. But after working for a month, only a month, we no longer had our manager. We had [to report to] the manager who transferred in. His requests were too strict. There was really no way for us to accept it. So we discussed the matter, then decided to leave....Every aspect, his work requests, that is, his rules and regulations, we could understand that. But his management method was completely different from that of our manager. He was too strict, requested too much, so we couldn't accept it. It was only then that we decided to leave.”

Having worked at a variety of physically exhausting, repetitive, low-skill jobs, Hong stated that she enjoyed working in television sales. When she quit her sales job, Hong returned home. Her brother had moved to Xi'an and started a restaurant with two friends after his college graduation. He asked Hong to move to Xi'an and help manage his business. This offer was a turning point in Hong's life. Her brother would be able to take care of her, and Hong no longer had to be exploited or exhaust herself working at unfulfilling jobs.

“So last year, after I stopped working in Beijing, I returned home [to North River]. After I returned, my brother gave me a call. He said ‘I opened up a restaurant over here, started this restaurant with two friends. I received money from home to do this, so what I'm saying is you could come over here and help me handle things. I hadn't turned in my resignation, so he said ‘in any case, the job you have back there isn't

earning you any money. Moreover, it's so exhausting. Come over, and help me handle things. After all, we are brother and sister. It will be convenient for you manage finances. It makes keeping accounts and financing a bit more convenient. Come over and help out. I finally decided to go. I went over to Xi'an. [Before leaving for Xi'an,] I came back [home] from Beijing and talked with my mother. I said my brother asked me to go and help him handle [his business].

At that time, when I was working in the printing factory, I absolutely was not willing to work there, but I listened to my father and mother's insistence that I work there. Afterward, I told them of my resentment. Because they did not know that I switched jobs several times. I only told them that I was [still] working at the printing factory. I told them that all they know is [for me] to earn lots of money, that it's possible to earn several thousand RMB a month. But they do not know how hard I worked there, I told them that I worked fifteen, sixteen hour every day, and that I didn't even have time to rest properly. [To eat every day, I had to spend four to five RMB for each meal. I said 'you don't understand any aspect [of working outside]. All you say is that [I] can earn lots of money.' I told them, 'I'm not working there, no matter how much money I can earn.' I made a pledge to myself that from then on, I would not enter another factory. If it is a factory, I will not work there. I will not go. It was only afterwards that my mother really began to understand a little [of work conditions outside]. She said, go ahead and join your brother. Go to your brother, good or bad, you will [have someone] to take care of you."

Hong's story illustrates how low educational attainment, low household SES, and restricted social networks interact to narrow the opportunities available for young women trying to improve their economic and social conditions. Hong's work experience, the types of jobs she obtained, and the conditions under which she worked all show how low educational attainment reduces a young woman's capacity to obtaining fulfilling,

interesting work. Furthermore, Hong was not able to bring pride to her family.

Several aspects of Hong's experience resonate with common themes in the stories told by other migrant women. These themes are explored below. I first describe how women come to view education as the way out and how families, teachers, and peers shape rural women's migration preferences and strategies. I then describe how women develop and implement educational migration strategies and the role family SES plays in this process. I next delineate how migration for education changes young women's social networks and family aspirations.

### **How do women come to view education as the way out?**

The classical model of migration assumes that women's migration motivations are secondary to those of men and male household heads; that is, female children leave rural areas to join family members already situated in urban areas; young women migrate into urban areas to earn remittances to support their rural household; and older women migrate to join husbands and families working in urban areas.

The experiences and motivations of the young women in my study do not follow this model of migration. Women do not merely carry out the decisions of male household heads. Instead, women's tastes and preferences for migration are shaped by their interactions with family, teachers, and peers.

The prominence of each group in shaping tastes and preferences depends on where young women are in the migration process. Although older family members and teachers are important networks for helping women develop tastes and preferences early in life, young women who have either left home or are ready to leave home for college turn to siblings and cousins for advice more tailored to the needs and talents of individual young women. Women making the transition to college or entering the workforce stress the growing importance of peers in their lives. As Ying, the nineteen year old student from a low SES household, states, "I feel that at home, you count on

your parents. In the outside world, you count on your friends. To have an additional friend is to have an additional way out.”<sup>4</sup> Young women claim that peers help them better define their migration aspirations and think about upcoming life-course processes like marriage, partnership, establishing a household, and starting a family.

Young women select information from family members, teachers, and peers because they have different access to information and resources. Education policy in China has fluctuated greatly from 1950 to 2010. Many young women living in rural areas are born into families where parents received elementary educations at best. My interviewees, their parents, and elementary school instructors from North River explain that because of the low levels of parental education, students are usually unable to ask their parents or other elder family members for help. Recently, the education system in China underwent rapid expansion. There has been a growth of teaching institutions. Not all of the schools admitting students are accredited as degree granting institutions. Teachers, parents, and students have difficulty discerning the academic credentials of newer schools and of schools located in other provinces. Furthermore, it can be difficult trying to figure out what jobs are attainable for young women with degrees from these educational institutions. Because of this lack of credible information about schools and jobs, as well as minimal legal protections, women make decisions based on trusting a gradient of information from their social networks.

### **Social Networks: Family, Teachers, Peers**

Social networks include family, teachers, and peers. Family encompasses nuclear household members and extended family in the village and beyond. Teachers include the teachers, counselors, and principals whom young women interact with in *xiaoxue*, *chuzhong*, and *gaozhong* or *gaozhuan*. Peers include friends, classmates, schoolmates, and other young people women meet in school, at home, in their workplace and other social settings. Families, teachers, and peers have varied skills

and knowledge useful for helping young women prepare for education migration. Table 4.1 summarizes the contribution of each group in shaping women's tastes and preferences for education migration. I then discuss the content of information for each group, the resources they provide to young women, the specific actions they take to socialize young women onto the educational migration pathway, and any limitations in the usefulness of their advice.

[Insert Table 4.1]

## **Family**

Young women from rural areas of China are influenced by their nuclear family (parents and siblings) and by extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins).

Young women are bombarded by messages from their older family members, emphasizing the value of diligence and of studying hard. Education is emphasized as both important and as offering a permanent way out of rural life through work and residency in urban areas. Although parents often encourage their children to work hard in school, older relatives seldom possess requisite knowledge or skills necessary to help children with schoolwork beyond elementary education in *xiaoxue*. Since they are unfamiliar with the structure and content of secondary and tertiary education, they cannot provide assistance for *gaozhong* and *gaokao* exams. They do not know how to navigate the education structure nor do they have the specific skill-sets necessary to help young women negotiate and compare educational opportunities.

Parents compensate for these shortcomings by employing other resources. They encourage their children to develop working relationships with their teachers. They provide financial and emotional support, and they tap into the extended family for additional information and support. Recall that Ying, who is from a poor household, explained that her parents arranged for her to live with her aunt in Yi County's municipal seat so she could attend better schools. Ling is another young woman in college. Her

parents took out a loan from Ling's grandparents to pay for tutoring in preparation for college exams. Other women also said that their parents were willing to pay for an additional year of fuxi (or review) courses at gaozhong if they needed to retake the college entrance exams. Haihai's parents had called extended family members in other cities to scout out educational opportunities on her behalf. When exam scores seem too low for college admission, parents try to ensure a good future for their daughters by employing the back-up option of calling extended family members in other cities to secure jobs with better conditions and prospects for advancement. Below, I discuss the acts of socialization by family members in greater detail.

### **Acts of socialization by parents and older family members**

- 1) **Emphasizing importance of education:** Parents and other older family members directly tell young women that they value education. Family members emphasize the importance of education early on when young women are still living at home for xiaoxue, and then later through visits and phone calls, encouraging them to study hard while at chuzhong, gaozhong, and gaozhuan.
- 2) **Homework and Awards:** Parents encourage young women to do well on homework and display excitement about academic awards. Reinforcements for the importance of education come in the form of praise and rewards from extended family and community members for getting academic awards. My interviewees recount how their parents would excitedly discuss the academic performance or test scores with other relatives, or show joy when young women personally received school awards for attendance or academic improvement.
- 3) **Relating news of others' academic accomplishment:** Parents also tell young women of their relatives' accomplishments so they too can take pride in being affiliated with educational success. Family members boast and congratulate each other on young women's academic achievements. They also tell other people in the community of the successes of young women to demonstrate pride of young women's accomplishments.

- 4) Disapproval of drop-outs: Young women also sense the disapproval and concern of their parents when talking to their families about classmates or friends dropping out of school.
- 5) Emotional support from rigors of study: Since chuzhong students are allowed to return home twice a month, and gaozhong and gaozhuan students return home once a month, parents will visit the schools with food and treats, or medication when the student is ill. Parents also regularly call children while they are at school to check in on their academic progress. Besides directly telling their daughters that education is the way out, parents put great care in telling young women to focus on their studies and do well both as they are growing up and while living at school. They will also give children words of encouragement to “not become too stressed” from studying too hard.

### **Siblings and Cousins**

Besides older family members, young women also turn to siblings and cousins as important sources of information and resources for educational migration. Young women directly ask their siblings and cousins about their experiences and for advice about how to do well in school. Siblings and cousins share personal experiences and provide advice on several important set of decisions:

- 1) strategies for doing well in school
- 2) which gaozhongs and colleges young women should consider attending
- 3) which jobs and career tracks are available
- 4) how to best prepare oneself for different career tracks
- 5) which cities offer the best chances for migration success

Recall that Jun attended BUAT. However, Jun had initially applied to a college in southern China, and then decided she did not want to continue her education there.

Luckily for Jun, her cousin applied to schools in Beijing on her behalf, without telling her, to ensure that Jun had the back-up option of attending a northern school near her family and friends. Clearly, her cousin was looking out for Jun's best interests even when she herself may not have been practical in adequately exploring available migration options.

Jun's experience further shows how siblings and cousins are considered reliable information sources and are trustworthy. They are trusted over non-family members because they care about the success of young women and are invested in their futures. Siblings and cousins are also preferred over other family members because they have access to more relevant information regarding migration and opportunities for upward social mobility. Siblings and cousins have information about how to navigate the education system and tell young women about education-associated opportunities. Siblings and cousins know each other well, so they can tailor advice to fit the personality, talents, and tastes of their sister or cousin. Siblings and cousins have first-hand experience about the type of decisions young women are about to make and have often confronted similar situations or can reference experiences of their family and friends. They can better inform young women in making their decisions. Siblings and cousins will also help young women locate jobs with better work conditions appropriate for their talents and personalities if the education pathway does not work out and young women find it necessary to leave home to find employment. Siblings and cousins provide accurate descriptions of the hardships of transition, difficulties in the job market, real-life transitions, and real employment opportunities. Most young women only see their siblings and cousins at home over academic breaks and holidays. In my interviews, young women stated that their conversations with siblings and cousins happen mostly over the phone and through text messages.

Recall that Feng, the seventeen year old gaozhong student, wanted to attend college in Tianjin, and decided on Nankai University as her target school. I delved more deeply into how she came to this set of decisions. I asked Feng whether or not she knew that her parents wanted her to study well. Her response illustrates how parents directly tell children to study, believing that studying is good, and that studying well leads to a good future. Feng astutely notes that her parents do not discuss the specific steps for

securing the pathway for education migration, mainly, by preparing for the college entrance exam, and doing well enough to test into college. When prodded further about whether she spoke with anyone about her desire to move to Tianjin and attend Nankai University, Feng's response shows how she selectively chose relevant information from different social networks. Feng explained that there were too many students in her class, so the teachers were not able to tailor their response to her needs. Instead, she turned to her elder sister for advice. Although Feng considered her sister a mediocre student, she still valued her sister's advice and followed her strategy for how to do well. Feng's answer to how she developed her strategy for educational migration reveals the different types of interactions young women have at different phases of their lives with parents, siblings, teachers, and friends.

Feng, age 17, high SES

“Actually, most parents talk like this. They say ‘study well, and the future will turn out this way. Study well now, only then can the future be good.’ They don’t talk about the college entrance exam.

I told my sister I wanted to apply to Nankai University. My sister, who isn’t great at studying, told me that from the start, I had to find a target for myself and not slack off. So I decided on Nankai. I also talked about it with my best classmates and friends. I didn’t talk to my parents. Oh! I didn’t have the opportunity. How do I describe it? Anyhow, I haven’t spoken about it to them. They have always been concerned that I study well. They haven’t thought about what would happen after [I take] the college entrance exam.”

## **Teachers**

Teachers play a huge role in the life of students growing up in rural China. In

North River, many students begin living in the dormitories for chuzhong because their nearest school is the county seat, a 45-minute walk from North River. Given the daily class and study schedule of chuzhong, gaozhong, and gaozhuan students, many students cannot continue to live in their village because the daily commute would be too grueling, especially during the winter. Students return to North River for family visits one weekend every two weeks during the academic semesters while in chuzhong, and one weekend per month during gaozhong and gaozhuan. Teachers interact with students in classrooms and in school-related activities from early morning until late evening.

Teachers play a big role in the development of young women while they are still living in the village because xiaoxue teachers in North River live in the local community. If students have difficulty with homework, or want to talk to their teachers, they go directly to their teachers' homes for meetings. Since most of the young women in my study have received more education than their parents, these teachers are important in helping young women develop their interest in school. Once students leave home to live at dormitories during chuzhong, gaozhong, and gaozhuan, classroom teachers, counselors, and school principals take on even greater significance in influencing their tastes and preferences because they effectively serve as surrogate parents.

Teachers are esteemed by young women and families for their advice and assistance about both how to succeed in school, and the education pathway, because they have earned their academic and educational credentials and are familiar with how to successfully navigate the educational system. Teachers know the series of coursework and exams necessary to test into college because they themselves had to get through school and the exam systems to become instructors. They have mentored other students into higher education. Hence, teachers can train students in the specific skills and knowledge areas to do well in school and on exams.

However, teachers are not without their shortcomings. As Feng reveals her reluctance to bother her teacher we understand that teachers' information and capabilities for offering advice are limited. Young women may not want to ask teachers because their advice or strategies are not tailored to tastes or needs of an individual student. Haihai's experiences also suggest that teachers may not always be able to

provide advice that students can use. Haihai recognized early on that she was an average student, but her teachers did not adequately counsel her to plan out majors or target colleges in line with her demonstrated test-taking abilities and classroom performance. Her teachers socialized Haihai to study for the college entrance exam and to set her sights on top colleges, resulting in Haihai having to scramble to search for schools and majors she could gain admission to. Her teachers did not consider helping Haihai develop a back-up plan in case she did not do well on the college entrance exam. Their socialization led Haihai to not prepare realistic options for educational migration.

### **Acts of socialization by teachers**

- 1) Women are socialized by being directly informed of the advantages of the education migration pathway. This happened when women attended classroom and school speeches given by teachers, school counselors, and principals.
- 2) Teachers socialize young women by rating students' classroom performance, and by helping students understand the types of options available through continued education.
- 3) Teachers, counselors, and principals at school further reinforce the value of education in classroom interactions, assignments, and school-wide announcements.
- 4) Teachers provide students with the training and skills for doing well in coursework and on standardized exams by teaching the actual skills and mechanics necessary to do well in the classroom and on academic exams.
- 5) Teachers tell students to begin identifying target schools and possible occupations to strive for, discussing their school's rankings in comparison with other local schools.
- 6) Teachers then encourage young women to discuss college and career plans with their parents and families to garner their support.
- 7) By asking young women to bring their families into the discussion and planning process, teachers create feedback interactions between young women, their

families, and themselves which reinforce education as the preferred pathway.

- 8) Teachers do not talk about the risks of failing the tests or of alternative strategies beyond education migration.

Recall that Ying, age nineteen, attributes her decision to remain in school to the efforts of her chuzhong teacher, Teacher Li. Ying did not show up for classes at the start of her second year. She stayed home for a week, contemplating whether she would drop out of school altogether to work and earn money to help her father pay for her brother's motorcycle fiasco. In section II, I describe how Teacher Li reasoned with Ying to convince her to return to school; Ying remembers that Teacher Li told her that the ordeal would pass and that she should set her sights on the future, continue her schooling and become educated in order to get a good job and improve her family's circumstances. Later in the interview, Ying describes the other efforts Teacher Li undertook to keep her in school.

Ying, age 19, low SES

“Teacher Li left the greatest impression on me. I talked about him earlier. When I was in chuzhong, he was very nice to me. In my daily life, and in my studies, he took good care of me. People say that this is what the teaching profession is like, that teachers are supposed to be attentive to students' lives and their studies. But I don't think that's the case. There are some teachers who are only there to earn a living; they focus on what they have to do, like students' studies. They are concerned about what they are responsible for. Some teachers who don't care don't even have the heart for it. But Teacher Li is different. [I think] he feels that as a teacher, if it is your responsibility, then you have to accomplish it. Teacher Li, I feel that if I have something happening, he can see it. [If] I have a problem in my life, like that time when my brother got into the motorcycle accident, and I didn't go to school for a week. He kept calling me, telling me that the problem my family

faces is only for a short time. If I needed living expenses, he could give me money. He told me that I should first go to school, especially since I already paid tuition and received my books. He urged me to return to school.”

## **Peers**

Peers consist of classmates and friends at every level of schooling. After young women attend gaozhong, gaozhuan, and college, and then transition into the workplace, their peer network expands to include roommates, classmates, dorm mates from school as well as colleagues from work.

### **Acts of Socialization from Peers**

While still in school for xiaoxue, chuzhong, gaozhong or gaozhuan, young women spend a great deal of time talking to their friends and classmates. Young women engage with peers through informal discussions and peer-study groups with their friends in student-oriented facilities such as dormitories, study hall, and cafeterias. Young women seek help from peers in the following areas to improve their chances of doing well in school and to help them stay motivated to migrate for education by exploring the following:

1. How to develop better study habits.
2. How to ask teachers for help and improve performance on assignments and tests.
3. The kinds of jobs other classmates and friends are able to obtain after graduation.
4. The pros and cons of living in different cities.
5. Deciding which friends should accompany them on migration to different urban areas.

6. Serving as examples for gauging access to jobs, careers, dating, relationships, marriage, and urban residency.

Older education migrants stress the increasing importance of peers as sources of information and resources after enrolling in college and entering the work force. Friends and classmates are considered an emotional resource because they offer feedback and serve as a sounding board for expressing feelings and thoughts. Some friends decide to partner up and migrate together for schools and/or employment and give each other encouragement for migration decisions. As a show of support, young women choose to attend schools or migrate to cities together. Peers serve as social and economic resources because they help young women discuss possible career tracks in different cities and help each other locate work opportunities after gaozhong and college. Friends and classmates introduce each other to more friends to grow their social network. As women leave home for college, they develop relationships with peers who have access to employment and who help women identify necessary skills and knowledge to improve occupational mobility. The lives and experiences of peers serve as an aid for young women to determine how they want to further define goals and aspirations for jobs, careers, relationships, dating, courtship, marriage, and residency.

Since rural students leave home for boarding schools at a very early age, these relationships strongly influence young women. The young women in my study have even selected schools based on whether or not friends plan on attending the same school. Information about educational and employment opportunities is considered trustworthy when based on the personal experience of peer group members. It is regarded with skepticism if it originates from contacts with whom young women are unfamiliar.

Recall the interactions that Jun had with her classmates from gaozhong and dazhuan. When she had reservations about staying at the school in Jiangxi, Jun called her classmates from gaozhong who advised her to enroll at BUAT. Once enrolled at BUAT for dazhuan, Jun lived in a dormitory and shared a room with four other women for three years. Her roommates became a major

source of information for planning life decisions.

The interactions between family members, teachers, and peers collectively structure and shape young women's tastes, preferences, and preparation for education. Young women are exposed to the belief that education is valuable from an early age. Family members first emphasize the value of education early on when young women are growing up at home. This emphasis on education is reinforced by the information and acts of socialization by teachers when young women attend and board at school. Schools offer young women the social space to observe and learn from their peers. At school, women turn to their friends and classmates to get feedback and advice for how to deal with day-to-day difficulties of schoolwork and anxiety before exams. These acts of socialization are important precursors for education migration.

### **III. WHO GOES THE EDUCATION ROUTE?**

Women rely heavily upon family members, teachers, and more advanced peers for instruction, assistance in test preparation, and in navigating the burgeoning educational options available in contemporary China. Once women develop tastes and preferences for education, how do they then decide to go into education migration? In this section, I move from the development of women's positive views about education to explore the conditions that allow young women to pursue education. I focus on Haihai's and Wen's stories to highlight the impact of SES in shaping education migration. Haihai and Wen come from high and middle SES household respectively. Their individual stories about leaving home through education illustrate the kinds of decisions women face in the migration process. Below, I provide their stories and discuss how Haihai and Wen exercise agency in assessing their own talents, shortcomings, and what skills and resources they had to develop to successfully leave home through education migration.

I introduced Haihai and Wen in section II, explaining that they both planned to leave home to attend college; Haihai wants to study medicine to become a doctor and Wen wants a career and a stable life. I return to the stories of Haihai and Wen to

illustrate the links between household SES and the available choice sets for women to exercise agency.

Haihai, age 20, high SES

Haihai attended East County Gaozhong, a respectable boarding school with strict teachers and a reasonable track record of sending students onwards for post-secondary education. Although she did well enough at the school, the school itself was not the best one in the region, and had been her second choice. Unfortunately, her scores on the zhongkao exam were not high enough to enroll at Yi County Gaozhong, the top local school for academic studies. Haihai remarked that whenever the school rankings came out, her teachers would compare her alma mater with lesser schools in the region, but never with Yi County Gaozhong. This biased comparison bothered her, particularly because Yi County Gaozhong is considered the best school because of its record for sending students to good universities in Hebei and throughout China. This school produced a student who tested into Tsinghua University (Tsinghua Daxue, 清华大学), one of the elite schools in China. The legendary student is a boy from Haihai's village. Although she had not been able to test into Yi County Gaozhong, she explained that if the quality of education in her village was able to produce people who were routinely getting accepted into good schools, and were good enough to be admitted into Tsinghua University, then surely, she too should be able test into college.

At the time of our initial interview in May 2008, Haihai's sights were set higher than merely entering college. In April of 2008, two months before the gaokao, or national college entrance exam, in June, her teachers encouraged her and her fellow students to speak with parents about their possible college plans. This was meant to help students secure their parents support for future endeavors in higher education. Having always been closer to her father, and valuing his opinions about such matters, Haihai discussed her college plans and career aspirations with him when she returned home for her monthly weekend off from school. He suggested that she consider a career as a doctor, reasoning that it was a practical occupation since everyone gets

sick and it would be useful to have one in the family. She thought that her father's idea made sense, and decided that she would pursue a career in medicine.

In addition to her parents and family, Haihai's teachers shaped her belief that it is possible to achieve this goal. By living at school for chuzhong and gaozhong, she had developed friendships with classmates who excelled as students. Although she tried her best in school during xiaoxue, she was not able to ask her parents for help with homework assignments because the subject content was too difficult for them. Through asking her friends for help and by observing the way they studied, she improved her own study habits and grades. She learned to ask teachers for more clarification during class time, and outside of class, if she were uncertain about the materials covered. She learned, to review notes before the start of class, to listen to the oratory skills of her teachers and principal at school announcements and was inspired by their speeches about current events. She was thusly inspired by her teachers, and her friends at school.

Haihai is very close with her classmates and her teacher because she had boarded at school since chuzhong. In China, teachers are assigned a group of incoming students. A teacher follows the progress of the cohort until the students graduate. So students become very close to their teachers and often look to their teachers for advice. For college preparation and career consideration, young women often value their teachers' opinions and follow their advice. Haihai looked up to her own teacher and her school principal, stating "I think that our principal is passionate and articulate about current events happening around the country. I want to be like that." Similarly, the opinions and conversations with her friends and closest classmates provide fodder and forum for discussing migration goals for education and career. While teachers offer role models and advice for possible options, real considerations and plans are worked out amongst friends for how to tackle the logistics of migration.

In separate interviews, both she and her mother admitted that Haihai has never been the smartest student in her class. Nor was her class the best in her grade. Her high school was not the top ranked gaozhong in the area. Of the seventy students that enrolled with her in the first year of gaozhong, thirty of them had left by the middle of

the second year. There were only forty students remaining in her cohort. Haihai ranks her own academic performance as being somewhere in the middle of this group. However, Haihai had a steady work ethic in school, made friends with classmates who performed better on class assignments and exams, observed her friends' study habits, asked them for pointers on how to improve her habits and was diligent in her work by always putting her studies first. It was a combination of hard work, diligence, and inspiration that enabled her to earn the award for ranking first in grades for her class for one semester. This surprise achievement made her mother proud. Haihai comes from an extended family where cousins attend good colleges and well-connected urbanite aunts and uncles hold prosperous jobs in Beijing. Despite not attending the best gaozhong or being the top student in her cohort, the combination of her academic accomplishment, her high SES background, and her personal tastes made it seem reasonable for Haihai to expect to perform well on the gaokao and attend college for a career as a doctor.

As she was preparing for the gaokao, thoughts about college, career, and life plans weighed heavily on Haihai's mind. During our first interview, Haihai told me that she was not particularly nervous about taking the exam. Haihai became anxious when her results were late. She started going to the village internet bar every day for two weeks straight to check for her scores. Her family was getting nervous too, and her mother tried to calm Haihai by telling her that their relatives in Beijing would be able to get Haihai a very good job in the city if she did not test into college. When her scores were finally posted, Haihai realized the overall score was too low to gain her admission into any of the top schools. Her aspirations to major in medicine and become a doctor were no longer possible. In China's tiered education system, her score was only high enough to gain admittance to schools for tertiary vocational training.

Haihai's low overall score on the gaokao dashed her hopes for a top school, a career as a doctor or even a job in the medical profession. The results of this exam determine which doors become open and which ones become unavailable. A high score means that a student could leave the countryside to be educated at the most prestigious schools in China and be on track to an affluent urban life. A low score

results in students settling for a less prestigious academic or vocational training school in a smaller city or provincial town. Although it would have been possible to seek out vocational schools aimed at training in the medical field, teachers normally gear their students to target the best schools available based on scores from mock exams. Teachers and students generally do not strategize for professions or subfields when preparing for the exam. With so much of the future at stake, parents and teachers usually encourage students to return to school for an additional year of reviewing exam subjects. Students can then retake the gaokao again the following year. For Haihai, who is typical of students from households with high aspirations of attending a good school, the option to review (fuxi), for another year was something she had planned to do if she did not test well the first time.

The reality is that Haihai had taken the college entrance exam and had not done well. On a scale of 150-750, her score of 370 was much lower than the cut-off for good schools both on the national level and in her home province of Hebei.<sup>5</sup> The range of scores accepted by academic and vocation schools for students from Hebei are detailed by tiers and academic categories. Depending on fields of specialization, for students from Hebei in 2008, a minimal score of at least 537-552 points was necessary for consideration at top tier schools, 503-514 points at second tier schools, 422-430 points for third tier school, and 292-327 points for vocational training.<sup>6</sup> Of the remaining 40 students in her cohort, only two students, a boy and a girl, were able to score well enough to test into second tier schools. Another ten students tested into third tier schools, with the rest of the cohort scoring well enough for admittance into vocational schools. Many of her classmates who placed into third tier daxue decided instead to enter vocational school because tuition for vocational schooling tends to be less expensive than third tier academic institutions. Many of the classmates who placed into vocational schools decided to fuxi at Yi County Gaozhong, the best gaozhong in the region. Haihai originally expressed in our first interview that she too would fuxi and take the gaokao again in hopes of trying for a good school.

However, a subsequent sickness in her close-knit family put her parents in a difficult financial position. When it finally came time to decide between attending a

vocational school specializing in a-less-than-ideal major, or having her parents pay for another year of gaozhong tuition, boarding, meals, and living expenses, Haihai decided she would rather take the best offer she could get for higher education and begin working as soon as possible. Haihai's mother revealed that Haihai understood the family's situation and decided against retaking the gaokao because she wanted her family to save the money. In addition to her parents contributing to her aunt's medical treatments, her parents had to consider her brother's educational expenses. Her younger brother, presently in his first year of gaozhong, would stand a better chance for a good education if they set aside additional resources for when he may need to pay for an additional year in fuxi classes to retake the gaokao exam. More importantly, although her overall score was low, Haihai still scored high enough to gain admission into several schools. Haihai could leave home as an education migrant without retaking the gaokao.

Reassured by having received acceptance letters from several vocational schools, Haihai now faced the next major decision in her life; to decide where she should go to school. It is to Haihai's credit that she continued pursuing education. She exercised agency by changing majors, targeting new urban locations for migration, and evaluating the schools from which she could choose to study. While her scores were low, they were still high enough to gain her admission into other schools. Haihai still needed to put in due diligence and research these schools for their academics and accreditation. Haihai addressed this task by doing internet searches on the schools that sent her admission invitations. She also consulted with her parents, aunts and uncles in other cities, spoke with her cousin who was attending a college in Baoding, and further discussed the matter with her school friends. Several of her close classmates were in the same situation of having to choose amongst lower-tier schools in different cities. One friend considered attending a school in Xi'an with Haihai. Early one morning in late August, she and her friend headed out to Baoding to buy the train tickets for Xi'an. Haihai had already bought her ticket when her mother called to tell her the good news. An acceptance letter from Baoding University (保定学院) had arrived in the mail for her. Haihai rushed home to discuss the matter with her family.

In trying to understand the factors that went into Haihai's decision-making, I recall from our first interview that Haihai emphasized how lucky she was to have a brother. Having a brother meant that Haihai could leave home for a city far away and not worry about who would take care of her parents in their old age. The task of caretaker fell to her brother as the male heir of the household. It was important to the family that her brother also do well in school. Even if Haihai's brother were to leave home later on, as a son, the responsibility of parental care would still be his to bear. Haihai would not have to bring a husband home (nandaonujia, 男到女家), as was the local custom in North River for households with no male descendants. Unlike other young women who had no brothers and must consider the question of how to take care of their parents as they became elderly, Haihai was looking forward to pursuing an exciting life away from home.

Having a brother meant that she could attend school further away. Destinations as far away as Xi'an, traversing across two provinces, an ordeal requiring travelling twenty-four hours riding on overnight trains and connecting on multiple buses were possibilities for Haihai. But her aunt's recent sickness, and her observation of how her family bonded together during the family crisis, made her realize that going so far away would mean she would be all alone in Xi'an and that her family would worry about her. Going to college usually meant developing a career in a new location. Attending college in such a distant city meant building a life far away from home. The trip back from Xi'an would be grueling. In fact, some friends attending college in Xi'an decided to forgo returning home during holidays the previous year. They were even willing to forgo celebrating Spring Festival with their families, the most important Chinese holiday, because the trip was so costly and time consuming. Haihai realized that moving to Xi'an would mean she too would likely start a career there. She would be on her own, far away from the support and resources of her parents and her extended family. Although her family had always expressed their desire for her to stay close to home, Haihai had secretly wanted to move to an exciting city far away. Now, her family's circumstances, and the emotional and financial toll of her aunt's sickness, forced her to re-evaluate her initial desires.

Haihai's real options came down to two schools. The school in Xi'an was a decent vocational school, with tuition, board, books, and dorm fees costing almost 6000 RMB per year. Although not her ideal career choice, she would major in tourism in Xi'an, a city known global for its UNESCO archeological site. The only drawback was that the program she received her admission from was outside the quota of official students, so her tuition is much higher and her certification would count less than the degrees of the students who were admitted under the official quota. Her other option was to attend Baoding University and receive a vocational certification in the field of News and Journalism (新闻采编与制作). Cancelling her ticket for Xi'an, Haihai decided to remain in Hebei for college. Haihai's decision to remain close to home made sense for several reasons. First, Baoding University is the better of the schools to which she gained admission. Second, the school is located in Baoding, a decent city where she could develop a career, afford the cost of living, and build a life. Third, Baoding is only a three hour commute back to North River, so she could go back home regularly to see her family.

Haihai had aspired to be a doctor before taking the gaokao. The reality of her test results meant Haihai had to re-adjust her aspirations and settle for the achievable goal of getting the best education her score would allow. Attending the school in Xi'an, with a major in tourism, would have offered her the possibility of a future in a world renowned city, but at the cost of being separated from her family. However, attending a school in Baoding, majoring in journalism, meant that she could have a reasonable career, live in a familiar setting, and most importantly, be near family and friends for support and emergencies.

Neither of the schools that Haihai gained admission to ranks well in China's tiered education system. Nor were either of the academic specializations ideal for what Haihai wanted to do with her life. The success in Haihai's story is that she had tested well enough to be accepted into higher education. By the standards of most rural communities, Haihai had done well because she will be able to continue with her schooling and leave home as an education migrant. In fact, when her extended family found out that Haihai got accepted into Baoding University, they gave her gifts of

money and praised her. When Haihai discussed household's finances with her parents, her mother had told her that if necessary, they would borrow money for her to attend college. Despite not being able to achieve her aspiration of becoming a doctor, Haihai still succeeded as an education migrant.

Haihai's story of high aspirations tempered by the reality of low test scores is common for most education migrants from rural areas. However, the achievement of her fellow xiaoxue classmate, Wen, highlights what is achievable for a combination of talent, hard work, and strategic planning about school selection.

Wen, age 20, middle SES

Despite their differences in economic backgrounds, as hardworking students, Haihai and Wen share similar high aspirations for migration. I asked Wen which school she targeted before the gaokao. Wen sheepishly said that she felt getting into Peking University or Tsinghua University was out of the question. She did not consider herself one of the top students in her class at Yi County Gaozhong. She would have been content just getting into any decent college. So she set her sights on Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University (西北农林科技大学) in Shaanxi Province because she wanted to go out to the Northwest region of China and see what life is like out there.

In addition to sharing high aspirations and a desire to see places far away from home, Haihai and Wen both share close relationships with their fathers, which ultimately caused Wen to stay close to home when it came time to select her colleges on her enrollment application. When her father found out about her plans to leave home for such a distant location, he told her that he would worry about her attending a college so far away. Wen explained that she weighed her options in the following manner: Sichuan was not a good location because of the recent earthquakes, so she began looking for schools in Beijing and Tianjin. Wen focused on schools in these two locations. She also considered Shandong, and of course schools in Hebei Province. So she kept her selections to these four locations.

The closeness of the father-daughter relationship and the importance of her father's opinion in Wen's life were evident beyond her choice of school locations. Wen's father happened to walk in during our interview. I had just asked Wen how her mother and father reacted when she got into the best gaozhong in the region. So, she giggled and asked her father "Pop, how did you feel when I got into Yizhong?" He, in turn, smiled and chuckled "At that time? Not much really." The importance of her father's opinion is further evident when we turned to the topic of Wen's choice of majors. I asked Wen whether she had picked a major already. Like Haihai, who initially wanted to become a doctor because her father thought it was a good profession, Wen told me that her father had helped her choose her college major. Prefacing the discussion by saying that the decision was hers, he had suggested that if she were interested, she could consider majoring in economics. Her father reasoned that the development of society went hand in hand with the study of economics. She thought it was a good idea.

Despite their similarities, Haihai and Wen do not share the same choice sets for migration. One real difference of consequence between Haihai and Wen has real implications for how these two young women thought about migration and their families. Unlike Haihai, Wen does not have a brother. Wen is the eldest of two daughters, and has responsibility for the care of her parents. After seeing the reaction of her father to Wen's desired school locations, Wen no longer disclosed her desire to see far-off places to her father. Instead, Wen decided to discuss the matter further with her closest friends at school. Despite her closeness with her father, she did not disclose her desire to go to the Northwest after college even though she agreed to attend a local school close to home. She had mulled over the possibility of returning home to the village once she graduated, but quietly continued to express her desire to go see what the Northwest is like, to understand the lives of people in the region, and observe how difficult life is out there. She thinks it would be a good experience. She secretly nursed this dream without further discussion with her father.

When it came time to select schools and to submit applications, Wen did not waste her selection choices on trying for Peking University or Tsinghua University. Instead, she listed People's University of China (中国人民大学), which is also

considered one of the elite schools of China and Hebei University of Technology. Wen received an admission invitation from the latter of the two schools, and is on her way out to attend one of the best science and technology schools in China. Wen's story reveals the motivations, goals, and personal desires of a woman from a middle SES household who successfully made it as an education migrant.

Recall Wen's household circumstances from Section II; that Wen's family business began to fail, and both her parents became ill. These events lead to a rapid transition from high SES to low SES when Wen was a chuzhong student. The change in household SES, and her parents' economic and medical difficulties, Wen saw the concrete benefits of education and exercises her agency in a number of ways. (1) Wen first exercised her agency by deciding to pursue education because it would offer her family a stable life. Instead of dropping out of school for employment and the chance to send remittances home, Wen chose to focus on education. (2) In deciding that she would leave home through education, Wen further chose to work harder in school and shore up her abilities before taking the gaokao.

Wen's household circumstances further narrowed her choice set for migration locations and schools. Haihai and Wen both aspired to explore places far away from home, a reflection of their desires for an independent and modern lifestyle. However, when Wen discussed her original target school in Shaanxi province with her father, he expressed his reservations about her attending a school so far away from home. (3) At this junction, Wen exercised agency in deciding to stop discussing her migration aspirations with her father. Instead, she continued developing her aspirations through discussions with friends. (4) More concretely, Wen consciously chose to limit her selections to Beijing and Hebei areas, targeting schools near home. (5) Lastly, since she only has a younger sister, Wen is preparing to take on the role of caretaker when her parents become elderly.

A comparison of the choice sets of Haihai and Wen illuminates the differences in agentic actions for women of different SES backgrounds and household compositions. Although Haihai is not an outstanding student, she exhibited agency in shifting majors, target schools, and migration location in order to become an education migrant. The

SES of her parental household and extended family, as well as the presence of a younger brother, meant that Haihai had a wider set of options available in her choice set. These resources allowed her to attend college even though her teachers did not adequately prepare Haihai for education alternatives.

A review of Wen's circumstance suggests that given the events that happened when Wen was in chuzhong, continuing to pursue the education pathway verses leaving home for employment was the tougher of the two options. Other women from poor and middle SES household would have decided to drop out of school for work. However, Wen decided to follow through with the education pathway, and then worked harder in school to ensure success as an educational migrant. Despite her personal desire to study and see life in northwestern China, Wen decided to respect her father's reservations. She applied to colleges near home and prepared to establish a life locally. Because she does not have a brother and is the eldest of two sisters, Wen prepares to take on the responsibilities caretaker for her parents. However, Wen continues to discuss her desires to see the northwest with her friends.

The stories of Haihai and Wen show us why young women feel the need to become education migrants, highlighting the practices and actors that help them succeed. It also explains how different factors such as household composition, resources within the household, and in the extended family limit women's choice sets. I revealed how these two young women exercised agency by interacting with social networks to gather information and selectively choosing actors to help them widen their set of available opportunities. Young women like Haihai and Wen must balance personal self-interest with the responsibilities of filial children to their parents and extended families. Both Haihai and Wen state that they want to make their parents proud, be cognizant of household and familial economics, and manage role expectations and performances. In exercising agency, young women balance their self-interests, the needs and resources of the household and the overall welfare of the family.

Haihai and Wen have just gotten accepted into college and are preparing to leave home. In the next section, I return to the Jun's story and describe her migration

experiences to illustrate how higher education furthers the agency of young women.

#### **IV. WHAT DOES EDUCATION DO FOR EDUCATION MIGRANTS?**

How does education change the education migrant? I return to Jun's story to highlight what young women accomplish by of leaving home for education. Jun is the eldest of the education migrants and has reflected on her experiences since attending college. Jun describes the circumstances of her initial attempts to migrate for school, how she bonded with new peers in college and how education helps her access career and residency opportunities in Beijing. She also has matured because of the influence of her friends, and she describes her next steps to increase her migration options. Jun's story reveals how rural women seek spaces and skills to augment their agency and abilities for upward mobility after leaving home on the education pathway.

Jun, age 26, high SES Choosing Beijing for Education

Jun attended Beijing University of Applied Technology, BUAT (北京应用技术大学). She had tested well enough on the gaokao to enter college on her first try, but BUAT was not Jun's first choice. Jun did not want to live in Beijing, and did not apply to any schools in Hebei or the Beijing area. Jun didn't want to go to school in Beijing because there were a lot of schools in Beijing and the cost of living was high. She had thought about going to smaller cities in Hebei like Baoding or Shijiazhuang for school, but decided to enroll at a school in Jiangxi, located 4 provinces south of Beijing. Jun's father accompanied her on the trip from North River to Jiangxi for orientation. From the first day of orientation, she felt uneasy about being in the South. She called her gaozhong classmates to express her reservations and to ask them for advice. They told her that she should come back. After consulting her friends, Jun called her father to tell him that she decided to withdraw from the school. He told her to return home. Her

father had additional news for her. Jun's father discovered that her cousin had applied to several schools in Beijing on her behalf without telling the family. Jun could withdraw from the school in the South and return north to attend college in Beijing. Jun immediately returned north, where her father met her at the train station in Beijing and took her straight to BUAT. Jun describes the sequence of events leading up to her enrollment.

“I should say this, I started going to a school in Jiangxi. Later, I when arrived, it felt unfamiliar. The scenery was beautiful, it's located in the south, but I was really unfamiliar there. Beautiful scenery, but in my heart I felt uneasy. After returning to Beijing, I found this school...At that time, my cousin had applied to schools for me. I initially didn't think about going school in Beijing because expenses are too high. But, I had to go to college, so I had attend that school [BUAT]. So I told my cousin to enroll me. I did not apply. I didn't even consider Beijing. There are so many schools. I was thinking, maybe Baoding, or perhaps Shijiazhuang. I hadn't been to Beijing, and thought that the cost of living was too high, so I didn't consider Beijing. It was my cousin who applied for me, so I went.”

At school she lived in the dormitories and shared a room with four other women. She discovered that they too had scouted several schools before finally settling on BUAT. The ties she developed with roommates, dorm mates, and classmates from college were instrumental in Jun's adaptation into urban society, her development of independence, and the transition from school to work.

Jun's story shows how the structure of decision making and women's agency in the decision-making process have expanded, such as; (1) the set of choices available for women's mobility, (2) the number of actors that impact women's lives (3) the areas where women express agency has also expanded. Through the education and work opportunities in urban areas, Jun has developed and is currently following a strategic approach for improving her status. Jun demonstrates upward social mobility and

exhibits agency in the following manner:

Jun decided to try migrating to Jiangxi province for college.

- 1) When she was unsure about staying in Jiangxi after her initial move, Jun consulted peers from gaozhong for feedback before deciding to withdraw from college.
- 2) When the college in Jiangxi did not work out for her, Jun utilized back-up options by switching colleges. Being from a high SES background, these options were available because her cousin applied to colleges in Beijing and Hebei on her behalf.
- 3) While attending college in Beijing, Jun brought roommates, dorm mates, and classmates into her peer group. These contacts introduce Jun to her current boyfriend.
- 4) Jun networked with her peers to land a good job in Beijing before graduation.
- 5) At her first job, Jun learned valuable skills from her boss and took advantage of the opportunities her boss provided for practicing and observing interactions with people from different social circles.
- 6) Jun added to her social networks by increasing her number of peers and adding the additional categories of mentors and professional contacts.
- 7) Jun used members of her peer group as comparisons and sources of information when planning her upward mobility strategies. She discussed her goals with friends and continually revised and refined her migration goals.
- 8) Through discussions with her peers and reflection on their shortcomings and successes, Jun was able to articulate what her migration goals mean, and describe concrete plans for how she could achieve these goals.
- 9) Through peer group interactions, Jun changed her aspirations for the life she envisioned as achievable. She continued acquiring skills and widening professional social circles [reflecting permanence, independence, and autonomy] for her immediate and long-term plans.

- 10) Through education, Jun developed a new view and expectations of marriage and of a husband. She took on the modern perspective of marriage as a partnership; husbands as being as complementary and supportive of wives' financial and occupational independence.
- 11) From reflection on peers' experiences, Jun articulated her partnering criteria, including developing a set of precise standards for marriage. Marriage candidates must be economically successful, have permanent jobs or careers with possibility for advancement. Husbands must be supportive of women's work and career goals, and allow wives to be modern women.
- 12) By reflecting on her peers' experiences and with her boyfriend's encouragement, Jun learned to assess suitability in marriage candidates.
- 13) Jun located a suitable partner who encourages her personal and professional development. He helps her strategize for long term expansion of opportunities in employment and geographic mobility.
- 14) Jun developed skills and contacts which she used to create a career trajectory. She is very savvy in using both professional and social circles for upward mobility.

Jun's modern view of marriage and family focuses on promoting and enabling women's work outside of the home. Jun used her boyfriend's behavior as an example for defining a complementary partner that is supportive, helps her evaluate possible employment trajectories, and encourages her to develop skills to pursue greater social and geographic mobility. Through her interactions with her peers, mentors, and her boyfriend, Jun used her social circles to make headway in her career and personal goals. Jun's story highlights how education enables women to build and utilize social circles; and illustrates how peers facilitate the strategy and execution of career trajectories. Jun's achievements in taking advantage of these opportunities enabled her to further expand her vision of possible careers and life decision options.

Jun's story also shows how education changes the time horizon for planning and for careers. As a function of broadening migration desires, through skill development

and the widening of opportunities through social networks, educated women aspire to establish careers and economic and social independence. Women are willing to postpone marriage to accomplish these goals. In Jun's case, she developed criteria for partner selection, and critically evaluated marriage candidates to safeguard control of her career and independence after marriage. Hence, marriage is pushed back so women like Jun can achieve careers that last through the starting a family and having children. The education pathway enables women to stay in cities and achieve permanence in migration.

In reflecting on the time horizon and life trajectories of women who leave home for employment and marriage, the educated women in my study describe their peers as being pressured to return to rural areas to marry and start families by their mid-twenties. This means women who do not go the education pathway have a limited amount of time to live in a city, work, build-up a social network, and find a suitable spouse, before being pressured to return to a rural lifestyle. As I will discuss for employment migrants and for marriage migrants in chapters five and six, women who do not go the education route say much the same. In section five, I describe the process by which employment and marriage migrants drop out of the education pathway.

## **CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I explored women's narratives about their preferences and migration experiences. My analysis of young migrant women's narratives reveals three major sets of findings about the impact of education on the lives of young women. First, education is now universally and strongly described as the best migration pathway for permanently escaping rural life and becoming modern women. This is new! Previously, education was not even a pathway. Education offers women many opportunities to exercise agency. Second, a large social network consisting of family, teachers, and peers shape women's preferences. Each group has distinct roles and each is trusted for

different kinds of information and advice. Furthermore, the composition of the social network changes and widens as women go further along the education pathway. Women's access and use of their social networks becomes less familial and more dependent on peers. The network widens the social circles and spaces that women engage in, and provides more chances for women to practice and develop agency. Third, I find that education changes women in several ways; (1) it widens women's goals and aspirations (2) it widens social networks, shifting the information and resources from rural and familial to being more urban and peer-based, and (3) increases the scope of women's agency within their social network.

Women's narratives reveal several important details that need to be considered in modeling rural-to-urban migration choice sets and decisions. First, the SES of parents and of the extended family can narrow or widen choice sets for women. Second, the presence or lack of a brother impact women's expected roles in the household. When households encounter economic hardships and money is tight, brothers often get preference in household calculations. This finding is consistent with previous research about how rural Chinese households allocate resources under various economic conditions. However, the presence of brothers in a household results in women feeling a relaxed sense of obligation to stay close to home in their migration plans. My new finding is that women state that they feel less pressure to support their natal family when parents are elderly. Because these women do not feel the need to live near home, they can pursue education opportunities in locations beyond near-by cities and surrounding provinces.

The positive themes drawn from the interviews reflect women's perceptions about how education contributes to the achievement of migration goals of permanence, integration, and autonomy. Even young women who dropped out of education pathway for employment and marriage were influenced by social networks to believe that education is the preferred pathway.

They stated that education offers them freedom, careers, interesting lifestyles, and makes their parents proud. Young women gain greater agency over their decision making and life trajectory choices when they are away from home. They recognize that

education is key to increasing their agency. Women who leave home through education have the skills and space to achieve migration goals. They detail strategies for attaining stable urban residence, career trajectories, marriage partnering and family formation. They also create financial independence to continue permanence, integration, and autonomy after marriage.

In the next chapter, I ask “Why doesn’t everyone choose the education route?” exploring women’s discussions about how despite education being the best path, educational success is not attainable for all women because of intense competition, personal interests, talent, limits on household resources, and risks of failure. This chapter is based on the twenty young women who did not take the education pathway.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **BENEFITS AND COSTS OF OPTING OUT OF EDUCATION** **WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE CHOOSE THE EDUCATION PATHWAY?**

The previous chapter focuses on the stories and perspectives of women who migrate for education and describes how education changes these migrants. Women who choose the education pathway and succeed as migrants have very good outcomes. Education allows young women to enter social circles that enable them to meet people who are living modern independent lifestyles. These new peers and mentors become part of migrant women's social networks and may encourage young women to postpone marriage in lieu of professional and personal development. These new actors transmit skills and encourage education migrants to acquire and perform new social roles. Women who leave home through education expect professional careers with long-term trajectories. They aspire to build lives integrated in urban relationships and social spaces. Young educated women expect to marry in their late 20s and early 30s. They intend to marry men who want to be their companions and support their aspirations for migration.

Despite the benefits of the education pathway, sixty percent of the 304 women migrants from North River opted out of the education pathway. Women who decide against education usually exit the pathway at three time points: after chuzhong, during high school in gaozhong or gaozhuan, and after graduating from gaozhong. Four themes emerge when women interviewees describe what led them to opt out; (1) the risk of failing the national college entrance exam, (2) dislike of school, (3) parental costs, and (4) benefits of leaving home early, and employment in a city. Women calculate the benefits of staying in school for more education versus these four costs.

This chapter is organized into four sections. I first discuss the three typical

points when women exit education. I then describe the benefits, limits, and the trade-offs non-education migrants encounter as they leave the education pathway. Next, I provide a framework for understanding the risks and opportunity costs associated with education migration that young women hope to avoid by opting out, and provide young women's descriptions of the factors that pull and push them off the education pathway -- household finances, poor school performance, competition, and alternate visions for achieving upward mobility. I conclude by describing women's agency as revealed in their act of leaving school.

## I. COMMON POINTS OF EXIT

The first choice point of opting out of the education pathway at the completion of chuzhong is linked to the demand of market forces. At age sixteen, with a middle school degree, young women can leave home, get a job, and begin leading independent lives in urban areas. Young women can choose to stop school and begin work. Although it is possible to find work, the kind of work available for young women fresh out of chuzhong with no previous work experience is menial, repetitive, and low-paying with no future prospects. Women regard the benefits of such work as allowing them to leave home and become financially and socially independent. They begin living urban lifestyles earlier and are no longer a financial burden to their families. Young women can also begin building relationships with new peers and reconnect with friends and classmates who have already migrated to urban areas.

At the conclusion of chuzhong, students take the zhongkao, the first standardized test meant to sort students into schools in a ranked gradient from academics to vocational training. The results of this test help women estimate risk and their likelihood for success. Students who perform well can continue on to academic secondary schools, while students with low scores can begin vocational training. Students decide which schools to apply to from within these two tracks.

The second choice point to drop out of the education pathway occurs after the zhongkao, when women have enrolled into secondary high schools but have not yet

graduated. In their interviews, some stated that they want to attain more education than just chuzhong, and were still too young to leave home at the end of chuzhong. Young women explain that good employers want better educated workers. Young women have heard from their friends and family that it is hard to find decent work if you have only a chuzhong education, so they decided to stay in school longer.

The third point for opting out of the education pathway is after graduation from secondary high school. Women choose to obtain their secondary high school degree because they and their social networks consider it an acceptable point to leave education. Although parents and teachers buy into the narrative of education as the preferred way out, there is recognition that not everyone is talented enough to test into higher education or has the financial means to attend college.

At the conclusion of gaozhong, women can decide to take gaokao for college enrollment to leave home through education; they can also decide to not participate in the gaokao and prepare to leave home through employment. Some women take the gaokao after secondary school, but do not score well enough to leave as education migrants. These women leave the education pathway because they cannot or do not want to retake the gaokao. Others do not take the gaokao because they have no intention of pursuing higher education. They explain that they planned to finish high school and begin looking for work. These women reason, if they enter the job market at the conclusion of high school, then they can have three to four years of work experience more than a college student upon graduation. For them, the more savvy financial decision and strategy is to work now, save on college tuition, earn money, and start their independent lives earlier than college bound women.

## **II. BENEFITS AND LIMITS OF LEAVING EDUCATION EARLY**

Education offers many positive long term benefits to successful migrants. That said, many women cannot take advantage of the education pathway. In this chapter, I examine the experiences of those 28 interviewees who left home through employment or employment followed by marriage or cohabitation. Many decide to

leave the education pathway because they fear academic and test-taking failure. For one participant, it did not matter that she was from a high SES household and had done well in school; the fear of failing tests caused her enough anxiety that she ran away from school instead of sitting for exams.

Lai Sze: So when you ran away, did you make the decision to leave school in advance, or did you decide this on the spur of the moment?

Participant: "I decided on the spur of the moment, because I was really terrified of taking tests."

Lai Sze: Why were you so terrified of the exams?

Participant: "If you don't study well on a regular basis, then of course you're going to be scared during test time. You're scared you're not going to test well."

This decision highlights the anxieties that rural women experience when assessing whether they are good enough to continue on the education pathway. A daughter from a high SES household with a track record of good academic performance, this young woman could have tested into a good school. Her family could easily afford college tuition. However, her fear was so debilitating that she decided to leave school without notifying her parents, instead of sitting for her exams, because she felt she had not prepared enough for them.

### **BENEFITS OF LEAVING EDUCATION EARLY**

Women state that leaving the education pathway early benefits them in three ways. They enjoy benefits of (1) leaving home early, (2) avoiding education failure and the high costs associated with such failure, as well as (3) exercising

independence earlier.

**Leaving Home Early.** Women state that opting out of education enables them to leave home early. By leaving the education pathway earlier, women get to migrate into exciting metropolitan and urban destinations sooner.

**Avoiding Education Failure.** The perceived risks and costs of trying the education pathway, performing poorly on the college entrance exam, and not gaining acceptance into an institute of higher education are high. Leaving home for employment is less risky and has lower costs. Compared to the fierce competition for admission into higher education, almost all women can secure work in urban areas.

**Early Independence.** By leaving home early, women begin enjoying independence earlier than their counterparts who continue on the education pathway. They become acclimated to urban living and develop their social networks for opportunities. Women describe markers of their newly acquired independence as earning their own money, making their own decisions about how much to save and spend, and choosing what they want to spend their money on. Independence also includes performing other activities associated with being modern, including making decisions about whether and how they want to start courtship and dating, travelling or sight-seeing, making decisions to switch jobs or pursuing occupational training.

## **LIMITS OF LEAVING EARLY**

While employment migrants enjoy the benefits of leaving home earlier, these decisions have long-term consequences. These consequences include trades-offs on the duration and scope of independence and the exercising of agency, as well as fewer spaces where women can negotiate to maintain their migration goals of permanence, integration, and autonomy. Leaving home early limits upward mobility by limiting choice sets for employment and marriage partners.

Women who leave home early perceive an implicit limit on the amount of time they have before marriage. Women who left home and became work migrants state their parents began pressuring them to get married and become mothers beginning in their mid-twenties. Women view their single years as the only time to enjoy

independence. They do not want to squander this limited time in school, especially if they assess their chances of succeeding as education migrants to be low.

### **III. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITY COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH EDUCATION MIGRATION**

Given these benefits and limits, women still have to decide if betting on education is worthwhile. The pursuit of education is risky because testing well for higher education is not equally possible for all young women. Women must calculate the potential gains of educational success against the tangible risks and costs of educational failure. They describe four factors that influence their assessments for continuing or leaving education: (1) the risk of not succeeding; (2) dislike of school; (3) personal benefits of leaving school; and (4) household burden of educational expenses.

#### **FACTOR 1: RISK OF NOT SUCCEEDING**

Some women enjoyed attending school, but left school because the competition was too fierce. Despite enjoying school, these young women cannot compete with the best students in their local school, and stand little chance of competing on the provincial and national level for college placement. Using their academic performance to gauge their likelihood of success as education migrants, women who predicted a low likelihood of passing the national college exam chose to preemptively drop out.

Xue, a smart and talented twenty year old young woman from a middle SES household, confronted this reality and chose to opt out of the education pathway. Xue decided to forego education because she did not want to compete with the best students to test into college. Xue's story is a typical example of how women who feel themselves inferior students self-select out of education and opt into the work pathway. Here, Xue talks about the pressure she felt to do well in school, how it was

more pressure than she could handle, and how she thought that her classmates also felt that it was pointless to continue paying tuition to attend school if they were not going to test well enough for college admission.

Xue, age 20, middle SES

Lai Sze: What was it like at school?

Xue: "When I first started, I was fine. Then later on, I didn't want to study anymore."

Lai Sze: Why? When did you start to lose interest?

Xue: "Oh, during my second year of gaozhong! Because it was too much pressure! So, a lot of us just left (for work). One left and then another left."

Lai Sze: One left and then another left?

Xue: "One after the other. What I mean is that a lot of us shared the sentiment that we don't want to study anymore. On top of that, we were under so much pressure at school, and we felt like we couldn't test into college, so we just stopped going to school."

Lai Sze: What kind of pressure did you experience?

Xue: "To study! There are many people who study better than you do. Just amongst my cohort, there were many students who were studying better. Then, in our county, there are two (other) gaozhongs, and they both have so many students. In reality, you are already part of the lower tier (of schools). So, we said, if we are wasting our money, why

not just go out (to work).”

Lai Sze: How many friends were considering dropping out of school in this way?

Xue: “We all thought the same thing without needing to talk to each other. Everyone was thinking in this way...we all left together.”

Lai Sze: When you say all of you, how many of you left school?

Xue: “I left by myself. We are all from different places, but we dropped out of school at the same time. And after I spent about one month at home, my cousin took me out (of the village) for work.”

Xue further discusses why she did not want to deal with the pressure of trying to do well in school or to try to test into college.

Xue: “At the time, I thought to myself that I wanted to first earn some money first, then I could study a trade. My father and mother already put me through gaozhong. I couldn't ask them to continue putting out money for me to study a trade. So, I would earn some money. I left by myself.”

Lai Sze: Why could you not ask your parents to pay for you to learn a trade?

Xue: “Vocational training is much more expensive than gaozhong, at least twice as much. At the time, my younger brother was preparing to enter gaozhong. He was in chuzhong then, and was about to test for gaozhong. He would require a lot more money. So I thought, if I don't

go to school, I could leave early to earn some money, and then I could continue learning by studying a trade.

So for myself, I would first go outside and see the world. Second, I could come back and get vocational training. That way, I wouldn't need my parents to pay more money. That month I spent at home (after leaving school), I was so embarrassed. I didn't do anything, all I did was eat. You can't allow your parents to take care of you your whole life! So I decided to go out on my own.”

Lai Sze: Did you speak to your parents, or did you think about this by yourself?

Xue: “I thought about this by myself. I would not speak to my parents about it.”

Lai Sze: Why not?

Xue: “No matter where you are, no parents would want their children to (drop out of school and) go out to work because they didn't have money. I am sure my parents figured out a portion of it, but then I told them that it wasn't the reason. I won't let them know (that it was because of money.)”

Lai Sze: What is the main reason for why you don't want them to know?

Xue: “I am afraid they will worry. I am their daughter. You could say, 'I am thinking about them, that I do not want them to have to pay for me to go to school.' But in reality, my parents would not be that way. They would say, 'If you want to go to school, then continue going to school, I will pay for you to go.’ The pressure on my parents would be too much. I am thinking about them, I want them to be able to relax a bit. So I

would not tell them.”

While Xue cites the financial burden to her parents as a contributing factor in her decision to drop out of school, the critical factor is that Xue recognized that she was only an average student, attending one of the lower ranked county schools. She was discouraged when she realized that she would be competing both with the better students at her school and with students who attended better schools. Anxious about the pressure to do well in school and on the college entrance exams, Xue opted out of the education pathway.

## **FACTOR 2: DISLIKE OF SCHOOL**

Not all young women enjoy being students or attending school. Some young women describe several personal costs they bear in their efforts to stay in school: being teased by classmates, encountering school curricula they cannot follow, losing interest in school, and losing friends who already dropped out. Their poor academic performance combined with their growing disinterest in the academic material motivated them to leave school and the education pathway.

**Teased at School.** Some young women describe being teased at school by their classmates for having poor academic performance and for their physical characteristics. Since students attend classes and live in dormitories for chuzhong and gaozhong, there is little reprieve from intimidation. Young women who are teased at school indicate that they dislike school and want to drop out.

Xing is a twenty year old woman from a middle SES household. She decided to drop out of school during her last year in chuzhong because she could no longer endure her classmates' relentless taunting. I ask Xing how she felt about her academic performance. She replied by discussing what she felt like as a student.

Xing, age 20, middle SES

Xing: “Actually, I didn't have the heart to study, I just kept thinking about

how I wanted to go play. In class, I was clearly staring at the blackboard, but my heart was already focusing on other things. I had no way to control myself. So each day, one day after another, I was going from bad to worse, and things were going from bad to worse. I felt like there was no spirit left in my heart. I would think, counting in class, I was the tallest one, I was the oldest one, and then I would think, I was the one with the worst grades. It was so discouraging. If I stop going to school, then I would be saved the humiliation of making a fool of myself.”

Lai Sze: When did you decide to stop going to school?

Xing: “It was in the third year of chuzhong. The third year of chuzhong is the most important period. At the time, my grades really were not what they used to be. And then I was getting teased by my classmates every day. So it was...”

Lai Sze: Could you give me some examples? How would they tease you?

Xing: “Every day, it was 'Hey, stupidest student in class!' In our class, there was a gang of male students who loved to cause trouble. Every single day, they would be there, saying this (to me). Oh, it was so humiliating! I was the eldest, the tallest, and the worse student in our class. I thought about all this, and I just didn't have any more spirit.”

Lai Sze: Did you ever speak to your parents about this?

Xing: “We talked about it. I told them when it started, and told them I didn't want to go to school anymore. My dad and my mom were absolutely against it. They said that I must endure and complete my third year of chuzhong. I called them for a whole week. I called to pester them

every day....every single day! They sensed that I must truly not be able to take it anymore, that I did not want to be at school any more. So they stopped pushing me so hard. My father came to get me.”

Lai Sze: Who decided that you would work?

Xing: “I made the decision myself. Because I have several buddies outside. I am the kind of person that has difficulty not paying attention to what others are up to. They (my buddies) had gone out, and were earning money, and dressing up, buying clothes and such, and doing whatever they wanted. I was in school, but I felt restrained. (I) compared it to what it was like outside, and oh, it was so much better outside. Outside, there is freedom. In school, sitting there every single day, no way to walk out of the front door, it felt as if I were in prison.”

Lai Sze: Could you explain what you mean by outside? Do you mean outside of school, or outside as in being in the city?

Xing: “Outside? I mean outside near the school. In the beginning, during summer break, I had gone out to work for a period. I was outside for seven days. At the time, my mother took me up to the reservoir every day to play, and we'd go into the city to play too. While I was outside, I played to my heart's content. Afterwards, when I went back to school, I felt like I was again living a constrained life. I still felt that it was better outside. Just kept thinking about how much freedom I had outside. I could go wherever I wanted, I could do whatever I wanted. It had been so happy and carefree. And on top of that, I didn't do well in school, so I was in such low spirits every single day. It was very bad.”

Lai Sze: Before you went out to work, how long had you been in the city?

Xing: "I spent a month near where my mother works. I felt there was freedom outside, that it is good outside. At school, there is always someone watching over you, being locked in every single day. And you weren't even permitted out the front door (of the school). I felt really depressed and upset. Felt just like sitting in prison."

Lai Sze: If you had to compare, do you think there are differences in the big cities? Such as Beijing or Shanghai?

Xing: "To me, they are different. The fact of the matter is they are outside. It is better to work than to be in school. Being in school, it is boring listening to teachers lecture. I actually feel very comfortable outside. I do what I want to do, and no one is watching over me."

Lai Sze: Could you give me an example?

Xing: "One word, 'playing.'"

Lai Sze: Oh, playing.

Xing: "Oh, right now...right now, I'm not really in the mood to play anymore. If I'm going to work, I am going to focus on work. I'm now twenty years old, so I should think about how I want things to work out for myself. Focus on working properly. Save some money (because) I don't know how things will work out in the future."

Lai Sze: If you could pick any place, where would you work?

Xing: "I would like to return to where I was originally working, to the restaurant. That is where I'd like to go."

Lai Sze: To the restaurant in Beijing?

Xing: “Yes. Because the boss and his wife were very good to me. They took extremely good care of me. And it was very safe there.”

As Xing describes, for students who have poor academic performance, school is constraining and intimidating. Xing's classmates taunted her because of her size and her poor grades. Hence, Xing disliked school enough to drop out before completing chuzhong. She wanted the early freedom, social space, and economic and social independence of the work pathway. Having worked as a waitress in a restaurant near her parents' work for one month during the summer, Xing experienced the freedom of being outside and was treated well by her bosses and co-workers. Xing thoroughly enjoyed these early benefits. When her classmates resumed their taunting; Xing immediately told her parents that she was no longer willing to endure the ill-treatment. Xing demonstrates agency in deciding that opting out of education for work offers her a better life sooner.

**School Became Too Hard.** Many young women describe their difficulties in following the materials being taught in chuzhong and in gaozhong. They state that they cannot complete the homework assignments, understand the lectures, or communicate to their teachers their inability to comprehend the concepts. Many state that they realize that school has become too hard for them, and conclude it is not feasible to continue attending school.

Shuai is an eighteen year old woman from a low SES household. At the time of her interview, Shuai had spent a few years working in Beijing with her older sister. Shuai sat with her sister and her friend for the interview. Unlike her sister Shuang who completed chuzhong before opting out of education, Shuai dropped out at the start of chuzhong. Shuai begins describing her experiences by comparing herself to her sister.

Shuai, age 18, low SES

Lai Sze: Would you say your experiences were different?

Shuai: "The two of us work together, so it's more or less the same. Actually, I don't have much to say. We are together. We went everywhere together, and encounter the same people. We work at the same place."

Lai Sze: Let me see, (your sister,) she is twenty-two. How old are you now?

Shuai: "I'm eighteen."

Lai Sze: Then it couldn't be exactly the same, you've just turned 18!

Shuai: "Actually, I began by leaving school much sooner. When I stopped going to school, I stayed at home for two years. I played around for two years, just goofed off for two years. I was so young. As soon as I went out (for work) I started missing home. I went out, worked for two days, and came right back. Just worked two days and came home."

Lai Sze: Did you say you came home after two years, or after two days?

Shuai: "After a few days, I came home. There really was no other way. I joined my sister where she worked. I could only work while we were together. I was too young to be outside by myself. I had worked for two days, and came right back. Just two days and I had to return home."

Lai Sze: Tell me about your schooling. Did you attend elementary school here?

Shuai: "My elementary school is here in our village."

Lai Sze: Which middle school did you attend?

Shuai: "How do I talk about what happened in middle school...Well, it was our local school."

Lai Sze: How far along did you get (in school)?

Shuai: "I made it to my first year. My education level is lower than theirs [referring to her sister and her friend]."

Lai Sze: Did you complete your first year of middle school?

Shuai: "I didn't study well. If I could've studied, I would've continued studying."

Lai Sze: Were you in school for almost the whole year, or did you...

Shuai: "No. I just went for a short while."

Lai Sze: How old were you then?

Shuai: "Me? I was fifteen."

Lai Sze: You were fifteen then. How did you decide to leave school?

Shuai: "Oh, it was a problem set we were doing (in class). That teacher

wasn't very good either. It was because of a problem set, he called on me and forced me to try solving the problem set. He should have explained the problem set, but he forced me to solve the problem, told me to solve it on my own. I couldn't do it. I went for a half-day in the morning, and I didn't return that afternoon. There wasn't anything else. It was just that problem set. He wouldn't explain it, he just wouldn't explain it. And I couldn't figure out the solution on my own. Later on, it was settled, I stopped going (to school). It was because of this event, that I stopped going. There was nothing else. I couldn't study well, and I couldn't continue on, so I just stopped.”

Lai Sze: How did you do in school when you were younger?

Shuai: “Average. I did poorly in mathematics. Everything else was okay.”

Lai Sze: When you stopped going to school, did you returned home by yourself?

Shuai: “Yes. I went for half of the morning. When we were to return for afternoon classes, I just didn't go. They kept yelling at me. Later on, when classes let out for the day, a lot of people begged me to go back, and I didn't go. I just wouldn't go. There wasn't any other reason. It was all because of that problem set, and I stopped going.”

Lai Sze: Did your parents and family members have opinions about this?

Shuai: “They all told me ‘go (to school)’. That was it. They told me to go. They said, 'if you don't go, then it is because you've chosen this by yourself. So in the future, when you regret this, don't blame it on

us.' I said, 'I won't blame (anyone), I am deciding to drop out on my own.' I haven't gone (to school) since.”

During her interview, Shuai states that her teacher called on her in class, but, unable to answer the question, she grew so frustrated that she walked home from school that afternoon.

**Lost Interest in School.** Young women describe feeling disinterested in school. In their self-assessments, interviewees state that they had average or poor academic performance. Many state that they do not have the energy or enthusiasm to sit in class or listen to their teachers. They opt out of education, deciding that anything else would be a better alternative.

Chun is a twenty-two year old woman from a middle SES household. She had completed chuzhong and had dropped out of gaozhong after her first semester. In her interview, Chun brings up a series of events that caused her to lose interest in school. I begin the interview by asking Chun to describe her education history.

Chun, age 22, middle SES

Lai Sze: How much schooling have you had?

Chun: “Let's say chuzhong, because I only attended half a year of gaozhong before dropping out.”

Lai Sze: Why did you stop going to school?

Chun: “It's because I didn't have the spirit for it. It's because, oh, so many, a lot of our classmates, about four or five of them all together, they left, one after another after another, until there was only me, they went off to work, and I thought that wasn't (a) bad (option).”

Lai Sze: Do you mean you only had fifteen students in class?

Chun: "No. Before all this, there were four or five of us classmates who were especially close (friends). And then they all left together, one went here and one went there and then there I was all by myself. So then I felt like I didn't have the spirit to stay at school. The school is located over 40 kilometers from my home. I could go home maybe once a week, or just once a month, and I would have to transfer buses, it was especially troublesome. So it would be better to just go outside and get a job. I thought it would be good to go out and work."

Lai Sze: So you were not one of the first to leave for work?

Chun: "I was the last one."

Lai Sze: The last one?

Chun: "Yes, the last one. Since the very beginning my mother did not support my leaving. She only attended chuzhong herself, and couldn't get more education. I didn't want to keep going myself, but she has always told me to keep studying."

Lai Sze: When did your first friend leave?

Chun: "When my first friend left, we were in the third year of chuzhong. I had just gotten into the third year when she went out (for work)."

Lai Sze: What kind of work did she do?

Chun: "When she first started, she entered a factory. I forget specifically what kind of factory it was, but it was certainly a factory."

Lai Sze: And your next friend?

Chun: "The next friend left together with the first friend."

Lai Sze: They left together?

Chun: "Yes. Because they both studied until they were in chuzhong, and then decided not to study anymore. And then from then on, I was going to school by myself. Because at the beginning, a good number of them left together. I had already submitted my tuition, and they had turned in their tuition too, and then they all..."

Lai Sze: Your parents were not supportive of your leaving school?

Chun: "That's right. I was in school until I was eighteen. They thought I was too young. They said that even if I went out, I wouldn't be able to work on anything. Furthermore, I was not educated. Since the two of them aren't educated either, they suffered a great deal. So they wanted me to continue going to school. Then I said, if I'm going to go to school, then I have to go through college, because that is a way out. So they wanted to have me go to school, but I didn't want to go anymore. My studying was considered acceptable then. I felt so especially tired. So then, later on, I just stopped going."

Lai Sze: You said studying is very tiring?

Chun: "Yes."

Lai Sze: Was that during chuzhong or gaozhong?

Chun: "In the second year of chuzhong, during the second half of that

year. I felt that it was particularly exhausting...Because when we first started going to chuzhong, there was only a limited amount of time for me to spend with my really good classmates. Later on, as we went higher up in schooling, there were a lot of subjects. And on top of that, I would think about how I wanted to go play every day. Later on, my grades started to fall and just kept falling.”

Lai Sze: What do you mean by wanting to go play?

Chun: “When we go play, it isn’t as if we go out and run about. It would be when we’re in class, and we’re not paying full attention to the lecture. We felt like ‘Oh, it’s the same whether or not we listened!’ We wouldn’t pay attention to the simple details, because we knew it. When we were in class, we’d just goof around, and chat, things like that.”

Lai Sze: You mentioned having several friends who all left for work at the same time. Did they leave school for work before graduating chuzhong?

Chun: “After chuzhong graduation one of the girls continued on and went to school. We were there, and she went for a month and then just dropped out. So then there was only me, by myself, and two (of the girls) went to work together. Later on, I went for half a year, and I stopped going to school too.”

Chun's description shows how she did not have the heart to keep going to school; the rigorous school work was exhausting; her school was far from home; the monthly visit was cumbersome; she lost all her friends but saw them do well on the work path. Although she later regrets having opted out of the education pathway, this combination of conditions at a critical point in Chun's schooling time resulted in her loss of interest.

**Overcoming Loss of Social Circle.** Having a supportive circle of friends is very important in a young woman's calculations of whether or not to continue schooling. Even for women from high SES households, the loss of friends is enough to override parental encouragement and household access to resources.

Hongyue is a twenty-nine year old married woman. Since her father is a village leader, Hongyue had ready access to resources and connections growing up in North River. Despite these advantages, Hongyue could not bear to stay in school when her best friends opted out of the education pathway. Hongyue describes the circumstances under which she left school. Hongyue begins by explaining what work was like before marriage.

Hongyue, age 29, High SES, married

Hongyue: "I worked outside for only a short time. Before I got married, people worked only one year at a time. So when we went out, it would be for one year. So before marriage, I'd work on a yearly basis."

Lai Sze: So when did you start going out to work? How old were you the first time you left?

Hongyue: "I remember being eighteen the first time I went out to work. Wow, I was eighteen!"

Lai Sze: Why did you leave at the time?

Hongyue: "Actually, there were many factors. It was because...I felt, well, for example, my classmates would say to each other, that they don't want to keep studying. I felt that they were saying they didn't want to come to school anymore. We had great relationships. If she [referring to her best friend] stopped coming, then there is no more enthusiasm (for me to be) in school. It felt like I didn't have any more spirit. Oh, it

felt like there was something missing. To have one of my classmates leave, and we were great buddies, felt like there was no enthusiasm there anymore, so I just left.”

Lai Sze: Did you decide to leave because one of your friends left?

Hongyue: “She was my best friend at the time! And several (friends) left.”

Lai Sze: Were there several friends who left beforehand?

Hongyue: “Oh, it was four of them! All four of them were girls. The youngest was sixteen, she dropped out and she was only sixteen!”

One of the older interviewees in my study, Hongyue became a migrant over a decade ago. Yet, irrespective of the timing of migration or the resources available to women from high SES households, Hongyue's narrative shows that the loss of one's social circle (i.e. a best friend and close classmates) can prove an unacceptable cost of staying on the education path.

The excerpts from Xing, Shuai, Chun, and Hongyue illustrate how despite education being the preferred path for social and geographic mobility, it is not the best path for everyone. Not everyone can perform well academically or deal with the social difficulties of boarding and attending school without supportive understanding friends.

### **FACTOR 3: PERSONAL BENEFITS TO LEAVING SCHOOL AND HOME EARLY**

Many recognize the concrete personal benefits to leaving school and leaving home early; these benefits tempt them to opt out of education. The personal benefits of leaving school and home early include (1) pursuing other visions of success, (2) maximizing societal experience and (3) gaining early independence in urban areas.

**Other Visions of Success.** Some students with decent academic performance, talent, and household resources drop out because they had alternative work paths they wanted to pursue, and felt these options suited them better than the education pathway. Others reported that they did not like school, and that the tedium of school is a big cost; instead they want to pursue alternative options which are more interesting and offer less conventional ways for migration and upward mobility. These women take three years of gaozhong or gaozhuan and spend this time working towards their migration goals. If they do not go further in school, they can leave at the age of sixteen, and have three years of additional income and independence. The personal cost of taking an additional three years in school is unattractive. Young women drop out of education because they see how other women earn money and live independently, spending time and money as they wish. They want to join their peers who have already left school, to start living independent lives, and to try something else besides school. Both sets of conditions originate from women's expressed desires to start working toward their migration goals.

Xiaodong is a twenty-one year old women from a prominent high SES household; her family is a major contributor to the local business leadership and is well connected in the community. Xiaodong has an older brother who left home as an education migrant, is working in Baoding, and is preparing to marry his college sweetheart. Despite observing the advantages of education migration for her brother, and coming from a family which could support her through the expenses of being a student, Xiaodong does not want to leave home through school. Instead, Xiaodong eschews the education pathway to pursue other interests. Xiaodong dropped out of school after completing her first year of gaozhong. She was eighteen when she decided to leave the education pathway.

Xiaodong, age 21, high SES

"I finished the first year of gaozhong, and I lost interest. I couldn't say why, but I had gotten weary of it. I didn't have a shred of interest in studying any longer. There certainly were many contributing factors. For

example, you could see other people who already left school outside earning money; it was so convenient for them to spend their own money, so I wanted to go out by myself. I didn't want to go to school. I wanted to go out to do something. So that was a factor.”

**Maximizing societal experience.** When it becomes apparent to young women that they are unlikely to succeed as education migrants, many have to face another set of choices. Women then balance their desires for more education for personal fulfillment and work credentials against the projected limited time to explore urban society before they must marry.

Yang is a nineteen year old women from a middle SES household. She has a relaxed attitude about school and is not upset about not performing well on the college entrance exam. Although it would have been nice to attend college, Yang's mother wants Yang to enjoy her freedom before marriage. With such low exam scores, Yang has decided that she will not pursue higher education. Instead, she is taking her mother's advice to go out and maximize her time to experience society.

Yang, 19, middle SES

Lai Sze: What was it like to study at your school?

Yang: “At my school? Things were relaxed enough.”

Lai Sze: Did you participate in the college entrance exam?

Yang: “Yes.”

Lai Sze: How did you do on the exam?

Yang: “Ayah, very badly. I had been goofing off.”

Lai Sze: So what was your score?

Yang: "298, just under three-hundred points."

Lai Sze: Did you want to test into college?

Yang: "Of course I did! Who doesn't want to test into college?"

Lai Sze: What do you think of your classmates and teacher at school?

Yang: "They were okay. My classmates were all very nice."

Lai Sze: Oh, so one of your classmates told me you didn't score well (on the gaokao). What were your parents' reactions?

Yang: "Reaction? Their reaction was, if I personally wanted to continue going to school, then I could go. If I don't want to go, then they don't need to pay for school anymore."

Lai Sze: In this case, do you personally want to keep going?

Yang: "Me? I don't want to go anymore."

Lai Sze: Why not?

Yang: "I am not a good student. The money saved (from not paying tuition) can go towards my brother's marriage."

Lai Sze: What do you think of saving the money for your brother's marriage?

Yang: "It's very appropriate! It will save my parents from fatigue and nervousness."

Lai Sze: What plans do you have for yourself?

Yang: "Oh, I've decided to go and check things out! It's not as if education is the only way to go out and see the world!"

Lai Sze: Can you tell me more?

Yang: "Ayah, going to school is not exactly going and checking things out. This 'going to school' business, that is, attending school, it doesn't give you societal experience. Go out to work for a few years, then you'll get that societal experience!"

Lai Sze: So what kind of places do you want go?

Yang: "What kind of places? Some place not too far from home. As long as it's not too far, then it'll be fine. First, I want to go to a big city to run around a bit. If I don't want to continue working there after the Spring Festival, then I'll go to a smaller county-level city and hang out there for a bit."

Lai Sze: So you want to go to a large city first. Why go there first?

Yang: "My mother said, 'take this opportunity before marriage to go outside and wander about a bit. You won't have the chance after you marry.'"

Lai Sze: Have you thought about which cities?

Yang: “Uh-huh. Going to check out Beijing. Wherever it's pretty, that's where I'll go. Oh, like Beijing, Qinhuangdao, Qingdao, Dalian, these types of places!”

Lai Sze: So why do you pick these places? They are all in the northeast.

Yang: “Why do I want to go to these places? I've always heard that these are great places!”

Lai Sze: Have you thought about the south?

Yang: “Heading south? A good place in the south is Yunnan. Haven't thought about any other places.”

Lai Sze: So, what kind of work will you take in these cities?

Yang: “What kind of work? I haven't ever thought about what kind of work! I haven't even gone out to work. I don't know what kind of work I'll do.”

Yang and her mother are well aware that Yang's exam scores are not high enough to gain admission into college. Both mother and daughter are realistic that Yang will need to leave home on the work path if she wants to enter urban society. With her mother's encouragement, Yang is opting out of education to maximize the time she has to experience urban society as a single woman before becoming bogged down with the responsibilities of marriage and later adult life.

**Gaining Early Independence.** Many of the above narratives allude to how women begin desiring access to social and financial independence when they see how friends who opted out of school earn money, travel, do what they please, and spend money freely. These benefits are a huge draw to women who feel like they are wasting time or having difficulty in school.

Shuang, Shuai's older sister, opted out of school under these conditions. She studied hard and received decent grades in literature and mathematics, but her difficulty learning English made her lose hope in schooling and caused her to lose interest in her classes. Shuang refused to take the high school entrance exam, dropped out of school, and went to work. Sharing her experiences about how hard it is for average students like her to stay focused in school and to remain on the education route, Shuang states,

Shuang, age 22, low SES

“I figure that the vast majority of us attend school through chuzhong. There are only a few who went on for gaozhong. If they went on, then it was only for another year or half a year. I don't know how it is now. In fact, at that time, we didn't like going to school. If we were at school, we were hanging out, playing together. We didn't like to study. All day long, we would just skip class. We were aimless in class. Where are the students when you go to school? They are all aimless. It is better to just go out to work. It's so much more convenient to spend money (when you earn (it)).”

Despite teachers and families members touting education as the best pathway to migration success, many young women astutely calculate that attending school and testing out are not optimal strategies for achieving their individual aspirations. The personal benefits of leaving education early are equally attractive to women from high, middle, and low SES households. Xiaodong, Yang, and Shuang chose not to pursue education. Instead, they opted to pursue other visions, maximize societal experience, and gain early independence because these benefits were more accessible and rewarding based on their individual interests and abilities.

#### **FACTOR 4: OPPORTUNITY COSTS TO THE HOUSEHOLD**

Going the education pathway inflicts opportunity costs on the household. Parents pay tuition, boarding, and living expenses for up to three years for secondary high school, and then another three to four years of tuition, board, living expenses, and transportation fees for higher education. For young women who enjoy school, dire household circumstances may lead them to opt out of education to reduce the financial burden on the rest of the household. Similarly, young women who dislike school will opt out of education when they perceive economic distress in their parental household. Many women opting out of education early mention one of three opportunity costs: (1) educational expenses being too costly for parents of multi-children household (2) sudden illness or death in household or extended family and (3) loss of household income.

##### **Educational expenses too costly for parents of multi-children household.**

Some women state that they decided to opt out of the education pathway because they saw how hard it was for their parents to support tuition and education expenses for multiple children. These costs are heavy for parents of low SES households, for households with many children, and households that experience unexpected illnesses or a sudden death in the family.

Shan is a twenty-three year old married woman, the second of three daughters of a low SES household. Shan graduated chuzhong, testing into gaozhong. Several factors weighed heavily on Shan in deciding whether or not continue her schooling: her family had always been poor; her father had been ill and unable to work; and her older sister left school for work to support the family. Realizing that her schooling would be a burden, Shan tentatively decided to stop going to school. Shan then talked her mother into asking her older sister to let her try a job in the city. Everyone understood that Shan would return to school if she could not manage the job. Shan begins by describing what happened after she graduated from chuzhong.

Shan, age 23, low SES, married

Lai Sze: How about we start from the beginning. You had just graduated from chuzhong. Why did you decide to leave for work after graduation?

Shan: "At that time, I myself hadn't firmly decided yet. Because I did test into a school, it's just that it wasn't a very good school. I wasn't a very good student. I was the kind (of student) that was average or below.

In fact, I finally understand how things work now. I didn't understand it while I was in school. I didn't pay attention when we were listening in class. I just didn't focus my attention. Now, I can say that I understand, that I get it now, and I don't feel any regret. I've actually gone out and worked, and I've transitioned into a new way of living.

When I graduated from chuzhong, I tested into school. They even sent me my admissions letter. My sister was outside, and oh, it was so hard on her. And I knew this. At that time, our family (economic) circumstances were not good. My father's health was poor. He had gastric disease then, and couldn't work. He still has it now. My dad can't go out to work during the winter time, because the food in winter time is not good, and it aggravates his stomach illness. It's a lot better now.

My sister was a much better student than I am. Even though she was better student than I was, she just stopped going to school. My sister made the choice herself, deciding on her own to go out for work. She just went out.

Later on, when I graduated chuzhong, my mother and father didn't give me their opinions. They didn't force me to stay in school or to go out for work. I was thinking about it to myself, that my sister is having a particularly hard time, all for our family. Now, conditions are really much better. Before, our house was very old. Because there was three of us, sisters, and we were all in school, so (our household) circumstances weren't very good.

So then I thought about going out to work. My mother then said,

'this is your decision, I can't tell you what to do.' I said that I had decided. At that time, because of SARS, I stayed at home for a long time. After the SARS outbreak concluded, I went out, leaving in August. Then my sister picked me up in Beijing. I spent about a week in Beijing, and then I started working.”

Lai Sze: Did your father say anything to you at the time?

Shan: “My father is an extremely introverted person, he doesn't like to talk. He doesn't interfere, and it's not that he doesn't discipline me. As to his thinking, my mother knew already. My mother said to me 'So you're not going to school?', and I said I wasn't going. She said, 'You've thought this through for yourself? It could be that the rest of your life will not be the same. If you go to school, then you could have a whole other kind of life. If you don't go to school, then you may have another kind of life.' She wouldn't say anything else, it was very simple. But I understand. I decided to not go, and left (school) on my own.”

Lai Sze: Did you talk to your sister when you were making your decision?

Shan: “No, no, I didn't call her. It wasn't until after I decided that my mother called my sister. My sister was silent. My mother called her, and she didn't say anything. I was standing on the side, listening. My sister hesitated for a long time. Then she just asked my mother, she said 'Mom, what do you think about this?' My mother replied, 'She made her own decision. I didn't say anything to her.' Then my sister said, 'Then let's allow her to come out, let's see whether or not she can handle it.' At that time, school hadn't started yet. We said if I can handle it, then I would just (stay) outside and go to work. If it didn't work out, then I would just go back and go to school. My sister thought about it for me in this way. We only talked about it during the phone call. (I) had already decided to go. It

was too many days after the phone call, I was at home tidying thing up, and then I went.”

Shan's narrative of how her household SES forced her and her sister to opt out of education illustrates how difficult is it for women from low SES household to continue going to school even when they are good students who have tested into schools. While Shan demonstrates agency in making the decision to opt out of school in hopes of easing the burden on her sister, the reactions of her parents and sister reveal how strongly rural households believe in the promise of the education pathway to offer young women a better life.

Shan's vignette illustrates how low SES households have difficulty supporting the educational expenses of multiple children when the primary income earner is chronically ill. The high opportunity cost of overcoming sudden illness or injury means women must sacrifice their educational goals.

**Loss of household income.** Women from high SES and middle SES households are not immune to the opportunity costs of education. High SES households are defined as having a family business or having a member of the household in a village leadership position. Middle SES households are defined as having healthy household heads who bring home steady incomes. These characteristics mean high SES and middle SES households can access additional resources in their extended families and in other parts of the village infrastructure to cover the educational expenses of their children. Young women in multi-sibling households face questions of whether they want to forgo additional tutoring before testing or settle for a lesser quality education. Under serious financial crisis, such as when a member of the extended family undergoes expensive medical treatment or when the family business fails, those interviewees who are younger siblings often considered opting out of education.

Li and Ru are sisters from a middle SES household. During their childhood, their family owned and operated the peanut press facility in North River. Since they were a high SES household then, their parents easily supported the musical talents of

both daughters. Li and Ru were training to play instruments in preparation for college and musical careers. Unfortunately, the business failed while Li was in gaozhong and Ru was in chuzhong. Although the sisters are only a year apart in age, their parity impacted Ru's calculation for her bid for college. While Li and Ru both sat for interviews, Li was the only one willing to talk about the factors pulling her to stay in school pushing her sister to leave school. Li begins by stating that she wants to study because she feels badly that Ru stopped going to school for her.

Li, age 20, speaking about her sister Ru, age 19, middle SES

Li: "Right now, I just want to study. It's because when I was in gaozhong, my sister stopped going to school. My sister stopped attending school. Can you imagine how I felt about that? In my family, I am the only one who (gets to) go to school. And even then, we were borrowing money. My mother borrowed to give me money for school. It's really not easy to borrow money. (She) had to borrow money from my maternal grandfather, it is not easy to open one's mouth to ask for a loan from my grandfather! And my grandfather lent us over six thousand RMB. It was a lot. Then we borrowed a bit of money from my uncle. So, you know that people in the village were certainly talking about us. 'Look, they are borrowing money to send their children to school.' If I don't test into college, I feel that it'd be an embarrassment to my parents. In my heart, I always thought that I must test in (to college). Prepare hard for the exam, study hard. I must test into a college. To earn credit for my father and mother. That is how I felt."

Lai Sze: Was that when you were in chuzhong or in gaozhong?

Li: "Gaozhong"

Lai Sze: (When) your mother borrowed money?

Li: "That was when I was in the third year of chuzhong. I studied (at a school located) outside. Spent a lot of money, about several thousand (RMB) at that time. A total of about eight thousand give or take. And that was not considered that much money. Eight thousand was not that much. I would call home, and say 'Ayah, I have no more money, what should I do?' I was so embarrassed that I would have to tell my mother that I needed money from her."

Lai Sze: The family circumstances were not good at that point, that you had to borrow from relatives?

Li: "Yes. We had to borrow from our relatives. But later on, when you are borrowing from your relatives, and you are borrowing so much money, and you're not paying them back, you are embarrassed to even open your mouth. So really, it's not easy for them."

Lai Sze: Are you in college now?

Li: "I am looking for (summer) work. There is no work in college."

Lai Sze: What I mean is, what happened when you were in chuzhong?

Li: "(Paying) the college tuition, that tuition, my family used to have a factory. It's not around anymore, and we sold everything, sold (and received) several thousand RMB worth or so."

Lai Sze: What was sold?

Li: "Sold the machinery, there wasn't much else. Sometimes my father would go out to work. Add that to the money my sister earns, it's about

enough. A year's earnings, added to what my mother gets from raising pigs and such, and it's just about enough. It's enough to send me to school. My mother said, so you just go to school! If you (need to) spend 100 RMB, even if we are failing and have to sell our pots for scrap metal, we will certainly put you through school. That is the thinking right now, so I'm going to school!"

Lai Sze: So for you to attend college, they sold the equipment, your mother is raising pigs, and your sister is working? So your sister is working and lending you the money for school?

Li: "Yes, every month, my sister gives money to my mother. Sometimes it's 500 RMB, sometimes it's 700 RMB."

Lai Sze: How about when you were in gaozhong?

Li: "When I was in gaozhong, my sister would work. She didn't know how to save money then, just didn't know at the time. My sister's the kind of person who spends money in heaps. Can't save any money. It's mainly the money my parents earn, that's what is putting me through (college)."

Lai Sze: So did your (parents) stop borrowing money when you were in gaozhong?

Li: "In gaozhong, it was in the third year that was when I studied music outside. That was when we spent a lot of money, when we had to that borrow money, and I knew it."

Lai Sze: So the eight thousand RMB you spoke of earlier, was that for the third year of chuzhong or of gaozhong?

Li: "Gaozhong. Didn't really spend money in chuzhong."

Lai Sze: Has the money been repaid?

Li: "The money should be repaid by now!"

Lai Sze: How long has your sister worked outside, sending money home to your parents?

Li: "She stopped going to school in the third year of chuzhong. She didn't finish her third year. She was close to finishing, but she didn't take the test. How long has it been? Two years."

Lai Sze: So your sister sent 500 to 700 RMB every month for the last two years?

Li: "Um, the money she gave, in the beginning, it wasn't much. She didn't really give her money to my parents. Initially, she gave only a little bit. Later on, she gave a lot more. Now, she is definitely sending home 600-700 RMB per month."

Lai Sze: Has it been like this for half a year?

Li: "Half a year."

Lai Sze: Or has it been longer?

Li: "She's earned, in the last two years, of what she earned last year, she's given 5000 RMB, or maybe even 6000 RMB! 6000 RMB! Really, she's given quite a lot. She made a bit of money this year, and she spent some of it, so that would factor into it, so she's been saving her money for

me.”

Lai Sze: How much does your sister make a month?

Li: “Her basic salary should be 700 RMB a month. Food and lodgings are included. Actually, the more she works, the more she makes.”

Lai Sze: What are your thoughts about your sister working?

Li: “I feel that in the future, when I make money, I am certainly going to give it to her. That is what I'm thinking. Otherwise, she could have gone to school too. Really, she could have gone to school, but she thought about our family situation. She chose to go out for work, paying for me to continue. Because, at that time, I would say I was studying slightly better than she. When she was in chuzhong, her music teacher came to see her, asking her to study music, and speaking to my mother about it. My mother said, 'That's it. Your older sister spends so much money studying music.' I'm sure she was worried that if she were to study (music), that the family would not be able to bear it. My mother said she didn't want my sister to pursue the musical route, so she (my sister) left school. In actuality, I feel that if she had taken the exam, she could have tested in. That's what I think.”

Lai Sze: You still have three years left, is that right? Then you can go out for work and earn money. Why do you think your sister worked these last few years?

Li: “She certainly cannot...She can't take on a trade right now. I think that later on, if I complete college, we can earn money together. Then I want her to study a trade of some sort. If you don't have a professional skill of some sort, there is no way to make it. When you are working for others,

they really want you to have some education, to have a trade or professional skill. So I'll have her study a trade. Later on, it will be easier to earn money.”

Lai Sze: Have you spoken with her about it?

Li: “She spoke to me about it. She said she wants to learn a trade. But right now, you see that I'm spending so much money for school! She has just sacrificed everything because of me. How do I talk about my feelings...Actually, my heart aches over her. Sometimes when we're outside, I would call her, I would tell her to be sure to eat more. If nothing's going on, don't think too much about the situation at home, then maybe go strolling by herself. She is a year younger than me, we are almost the same (age).”

Lai Sze: So she is a year younger?

Li: “Yes, she is just a year younger.”

Lai Sze: When she stopped going to school, and went out to work, did your parents react?

Li: “In the beginning, my father said she should go to (school), to have us both go (to school) together. They were both said this, telling (her) to go. If you don't go to school, what can you do when you go out? You are still so young right now. Being so young, it's certainly not okay for you to go out for work!

My mom, my folks, were also worried something may happen to her outside. They couldn't allow her to go by herself. So my sister persisted, stating she did not want to continue school. She wouldn't go no matter what we said. Then later...in fact, it's not that mother said that she

didn't want her to go. (My mother,) she told her to go (to school), it would allow her to be like others who have (good) jobs, that you'll have a way out later on, and you'll have a good education. Oh, who knows where her heart was or what she was thinking! But I think she was really thinking a lot about me, that is how I feel in my heart.”

Although Li and Ru both sat for interviews, Li was the one who told me about the circumstances leading to Ru's decision to opt out. Li is a year older than Ru and was further along in her education when the family business failed. While their parents tried desperately to salvage Li and Ru's education, they had exhausted their funds and their ability to borrow money from extended family members to pay for Li's tuition and musical training. Recognizing how expensive it would be to finance Li's education, Ru left school. Li sees how she has benefited from Ru's decisions; Ru opted out and generously remits over 6000 RMB a year to cover Li's tuition.

Women reassess the opportunity costs of staying in education differently depending on their household SES. Many from low SES households consider opting out if there is chronic illness or multiple siblings attending school; most decide to opt out when there is a sudden illness or injury to the primary income earner; a few may complete their current schooling and even push on when a sibling volunteers to opt out, reducing the familial burden. Interviewees from middle SES and high SES households describe how their parents draw on resources from extended family when the primary income earner suffers a sudden illness or injury, or when the family business fails. While this coping strategy allows the household to finance an older sibling's education, interviewees who are younger daughters will often chose to opt out.

Observing their household's decline in socio-economic status, young women decide to leave education of their own volition, often fighting the protests of their parents and siblings. The vignettes about Shan, Hong, and Ru demonstrate how young women calculate the costs to their household economics and decide to leave the education pathway to ease familial financial burdens. Despite their enjoyment of school and their desire to continue, their household circumstances meant their

parents and siblings would face great difficulty in continuing to support women's educational goals. Women exercise agency by making the difficult decision to drop out of school. While they knowingly abandon the long-term benefits of the education pathway and their long-run personal interests, women regard their decision as a means to assist their parents and their working siblings and to reduce the overall stress and financial burdens.

#### **IV. Process of Opting Out: Balancing Risks and Costs of Education Versus Rewards of Early Work**

Xue is a twenty year old woman from a middle SES household. She has a younger brother who will be leaving home for school. She dropped out school not because she was a poor student, but because she realized that the competition for college admission is too fierce, and she does not believe she is good enough to succeed. Exercising decision-making skills and personal agency, Xue chose to leave school gaozhong after completing enough work to graduate with a degree. Wanting her to test for college to become an education migrant, Xue's parents had fought her decision. But Xue won the argument by explaining to them that staying in school or dropping out of school was her decision. Overcoming their protests, Xue told her parents that they cannot force her back to school. Soon after leaving school, Xue contacted her cousin to solicit his assistance in locating work. After expressing his extreme disappointment in Xue's decision to leave school, he reluctantly agreed. He helped Xue transition from school to work through a waitressing job in a restaurant in the Red Cross Headquarters complex in Beijing.

I ask Xue about the process of leaving school for work; specifically if she had spoken with anyone in her class who also opted out of the education pathway, to which Xue replies,

Xue: "I didn't go over my decision with them, but our thoughts about it were more or less the same. It's just that we didn't all get together

to discuss it. No, we didn't. My mom asked me to continue going to school, but I didn't want to. I just didn't want to. So I went and told (people at) school, and then I just stopped attending.”

Lai Sze: So you spoke with someone at school. Whom did you speak with?

Xue: “The form master.”

Lai Sze: The form master. What did your form master say to you then?

Xue: “Of course he wished that I would continue going to school. But my heart was no longer in it. So there was no way to make me stay, so I just stopped going (to school). I called my mother, telling her to come get me. We came back (home) together.”

Lai Sze: So when you spoke to your form master, he wanted you to stay in school?

Xue: “Yes. No teacher wants to see students dropping out of school to go work outside. He also tried to reason with us, telling us to think about the big picture. But our hearts were no longer on studying, and we didn't want to study anymore. So I returned home directly.”

Lai Sze: So, how many other female classmates were like you?

Xue: “It wasn't just female students, there were male students too.”

Lai Sze: How many students were in your grade?

Xue: “I'm not too sure, I left rather early. Because there were several of

them that also spoke of this, but their parents hadn't picked them up yet. I'm not too sure, but there were three (students) who left before me!"<sup>14</sup>

It is noteworthy that even though Xue stated that she felt everyone felt as she did, that only three students had left before Xue actually dropped out of her school. As Xue herself states, she did not speak to other students about her decision. However, Xue makes it clear that once she had decided to drop out and was finally ready to speak to her form master, then her mother, that there was no convincing her to stay in school. As she states in her excerpt, her heart was no longer into her studies. Xue had become disillusioned at her chances of becoming a successful education migrant. After taking a month to relax at home in North River, Xue and her mother contacted her cousins in Beijing to help her implement the next step the rural-to-urban migration, namely, to obtain a job in the segmented urban labor market. This transition would result in Xue's working in two high-end food services industry positions. At the time of her interview, Xue had worked for about two years and had acquired industry knowledge, urban skills, and a hard won urban lifestyle through arduous on-the-job training.

Education is risky because rural women are uncertain of educational migration outcomes despite investing their time, energy, and parents' money for school. The pursuit of education was a risk. Many women do not anticipate as pursuit as paying off in the long term. Women balance between the benefits and limits of continuing to pursue education with leaving education early to begin pursuing their goals for migration.

There are many costs to attaining education, which women and their families must bear, before the education pathway pays off. As Xue states, during her time attending gaozhong and boarding at the school, the costs of tuition, educational and living expenses, as well as miscellaneous costs easily added up to upwards of 2500 RMB per academic semester.

Lai Sze: How much money was spent on tuition, or educational and living expenses on a monthly basis?

Xue: "Tuition isn't by month, it's by semester! Tuition alone was almost 2000 RMB. That's just for one semester. And then there are living expenses every month. I had to spread out (the money to cover) my living expenses. I needed, for one month, I would need one hundred fifty yuan or so."

Lai Sze: Are there other costs or fees?

Xue: "Every once in a while, I would have to go pay for assorted things, to pay for copies of (course) materials, newspaper subscriptions, or just all sorts of things. But it wasn't always for certain. (These costs) are voluntary, and vary for each person. But every time we go, I end up buying something, and we go just about every month. I can only take it (these costs) from my living expenses, because we can't ask home for more money for these expenses. I had to ask home for money to cover expense every time. My living expenses each month were about eighty RMB. The remainder (of the money) went to paying fees."

During her interview, Xue stated that her father makes between one to two thousand RMB per month, or between twelve to twenty-four thousand RMB per year, as a migrant laborer. Given that her tuition and fees cost about 2500 RMB per semester around the time she wanted to drop out of school, Xue's yearly cost for attending gaozhong would have been about 5000 RMB per year. Since Xue had a younger brother, Xue's father would have paid about ten thousand RMB per year on tuition and living expenses while Xue and her brother were in school. Xue's mother helps control expenses and is able to maintain a household by growing crops in North River. Since such a large proportion of the household income was devoted to covering the cost of education, it is not surprising that Xue was anxious about needing to do well in school and was worried about not testing into college. As the earlier excerpt about Xue's decision to opt out of school illustrates, she realized that she did not want

to risk having to compete with better students at her school or with the students attending the two other, better academic schools in North River only to fail on the education pathway. Calculating that she would reduce the financial burden on her father, Xue decided to drop out of the education path.

## V. Women's Agency

Every narrative in this chapter captures the moment when women calculated the costs and benefits of their education, then decided to opt out. I derive four important points about women's self-assessments and decision making; (1) decisions are rational, (2) decisions are based on women's self-interests, (3) decisions to leave are made independently of parents and against parents expressed desires, and (4) women anticipate family disappointment and resistance but proceed with their decisions anyway.

**Decisions are rational.** In each scenario, women explained their decision as the benefits of leaving outweighing the costs and risks of staying on the education path. Xiaodong opted out even though her parents could easily pay for her education because she wanted to try out other options. Since her parents owned a grocery store, and her extended family had several businesses in North River and the surrounding area, Xiaodong easily saw herself becoming a business owner. With knowledge and capital readily available to her, Xiaodong did not need to spend any more time in school. Hongyue is another woman from a high SES household who opted out of education; she left because she could not bear being there when her best friend dropped out for work. Similarly, Chun, a woman from a middle SES household, lost interest in school when she became the last of all her friends to remain in school. Hong, a woman from a poor SES household opted out when father was injured. Hong left school to ease the familial financial burden and to help her brother graduate from college.

**Decisions were based on women's own self-interest.** Some women decide to opt out to pursue personal happiness; Xing left because she grew weary of her

classmates' constant bullying, while Yang decided to experience society by sight-seeing all over China before marriage.

**Women make the decision to leave independently of parents and against parents expressed desires.** Women sometimes consult no one and sometimes discuss plans with women who have left or plan to leave. Xue reasons that everyone can find a job and earn money, but that not everyone is able to test into college. Her mother pleaded with Xue to stay in school, to no avail; Xue decided to opt out, avoiding potential failure on the college entrance exam and the overwhelming academic competition.

**Family disappointment and resistance were expected and occurred.** As one of two daughters from a low SES household, Shan's older sister opted out of school for work to support the family. When Shan decided she too would opt out of education, her parents told her that she needed to think carefully about the life she would be choosing by dropping out of school. Her older sister was disappointed in Shan's decision. Familial disappointment and resistance to women's opting out are present in all households irrespective of SES. Parents, siblings, and extended family members all want women to become education migrants, often pleading with them to stay in school.

Opting out of education is a serious decision with concrete long-term consequences. It is one of the first major decisions rural women can make on their own as they enter adulthood. Their rationality, independence, basing decisions on their own preferences, all in the face of expected family disappointment and resistance –highlight women's agency as decision makers. The opportunity for women to exercise agency and volition demonstrates the determination it takes to opt out of education and become workers.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **CONCLUSION, THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In this chapter, I summarize my findings about young women's aspirations and the factors that influence their participation in rural-to-urban migration in North River from 2000-2008. I then discuss how these findings extend and inform theory and research on rural women's migration in China. I conclude by discussing the implications of this study for future research and potential interventions to augment rural women's ability to improve their lives through educational and vocational migration options.

#### **I. WHAT IS NEW? FINDINGS OF THE NORTH RIVER STUDY**

Figure 6.1 compares the design of my study to prior studies.

[Insert Figure 6.1]

Prior studies of rural women's migration examined women who migrated in the 1980s and late 1990s and typically interviewed women after migration occurred. Most analysts did not directly ask women their reasons for migration and depicted the migration decision as being made by the natal household head to improve natal family economics. In contrast to these prior studies, I interviewed women who migrated from North River, a relatively prosperous rural village, between 2000 and 2008. I interviewed women at multiple stages of migration including when deciding to migrate. I also asked women directly about their reasons for migration.

Figure 6.2 compares the traditional model of women's migration to the model that emerges from my research.

[Insert Figure 6.2]

Prior researchers reported that most women migrated for marriage or for work. Marriage was most common migration pathway for rural women from very poor families who achieved social mobility by “marrying up.” I found that the North River women who migrated between 2000 and 2008 look very different from the rural women who migrated earlier.

One difference between my findings and those of earlier researchers is that education is a major pathway for migration. Parents encourage their daughters to pursue college and vocational schooling. Families devote significant household resources to fund their daughters' studies, and are disappointed if daughters drop out of school. Not only is education a pathway for migration, it is the pathway most preferred by rural women and their families. Rural women who realize they cannot make it as educational migrants, turn to work, postponing marriage until they have established personal autonomy and financial independence in urban areas.

The second difference is that virtually all migrants in North River state that they are postponing marriage until they have achieved some personal independence either through education or work. Young women in my study negotiate with their parents about marriage timing. They find ways to work with their parents to reduce the parental pressure for daughters to follow the previous rural pattern of marrying in their early twenties. Instead, young women delay marriage and redefine what they want from marriage and a future spouse. In the past, marriage was a primary route for leaving rural areas (Davin 1999) and for upward mobility (Huang and Fan 1998) but marriage is not a primary initial migration pathway for women from North River.

A third difference is that the women who migrated from North River between 2000 and 2008 have more ambitious goals for migration and exercise more autonomy than did the rural women migrants portrayed in prior research. Women's goals for migration now incorporate aspirations for permanence, integration, and autonomy. The women from North River have considerable space to negotiate decisions at various points in the migration trajectory and draw on multiple networks of information and support. One result is that they have the freedom to and actually do make choices that

further their personal aspirations. This sharply contrasts with early migrants who were portrayed as carrying out patriarchal directives or migrants portrayed by Lee (1998), Beynon (2004), Pun (2005), or Jacka (2006), who made decisions within a much narrower sphere. By postponing marriage, women increase their choices for life-course decisions in spheres such as where to live, occupational trajectories, and occupational skills preparation and certifications. Women shore up their personal finances, hoping to secure a steady source of income that is independent of husbands or in-laws. Women take their time in courtship and dating as part of their search for companionate marriages where their husbands will support their long-run goals to stay in urban areas free from rural familial obligations. The cumulative effect of postponing marriage and prolonging the duration of personal autonomy is that more women attain upward social mobility through their own efforts. This pattern is vastly different from findings based on migrants from the 1980's and 1990's when improvement in women's life chances was based on marrying into rural and sub-urban areas near metropolises (Fan and Huang 1998) and hypergamous marriages (Davin 1999).

Probably the biggest change between my findings and those of prior studies is that parents encouraged and support educating their daughters. One hallmark of China's patriarchal system is the pattern of gendered preference for sons. This long-standing tradition played out in the 1980s and 1990s in daughters being asked by household heads to quit school for work. While women from poor households in North River still confront this dilemma, these young women describe their parents' agony over the inability to finance their daughters' education. Poor parents apologize to their daughters when they cannot find funds to pay for their schooling.

## **II. CONNECTING PAST RESEARCH AND THEORY**

Rural women migrants in the 1980s and 1990s had limited options, no family support for higher education, and limited autonomy (Lee 1998; Murphy 2002, 2006; Tsai 2002; Jacka and Gaetano 2004; Pun 2005; Hannum and Park 2007; Yan 2008). They

married young in arranged marriages, and returned to rural areas (Davin 1999; Fan 2008). The North River women who migrated in 2000 to 2008 report more and better options, strong parental support for higher education, more autonomy, postponement of marriage, and intentions to relocate to urban areas.

Rural women have been migrating for less than 30 years in China. Why do we observe such an explosion in women's opportunities, autonomy, and support from parents?

My best guess is that the changes are due to the confluence of two positive forces. The expansion of economic growth and education infrastructure in China provided new opportunities for rural women. Prior waves of migration provided rural parents and daughters the resources to take advantage of these emerging opportunities.

Economic growth and the growth in national educational institutions to accommodate the need for skilled labor force has resulted in more opportunities for rural women to enter urban colleges and has opened up skilled urban jobs which were closed off to previous waves of women migrants. At the same time, wealth and knowledge accumulated by prior waves of migrants has expanded financial, social, and human capital in rural areas so that parents have more resources to support their daughters' education. The North River migrants, unlike prior migrants, could turn to past migrants as role models. They have access to wider networks in rural and urban areas, and the structure of educational and occupational opportunities available to them has widened enormously. Their parents have more resources enabling women to imagine a wider range of possible futures than prior migrants. And they have more tools to realize those visions. These factors contribute to rural women's more ambitious aspirations.

### **III. PROJECTING FORWARD**

In this section, I conclude the dissertation by discussing directions for future research and potential policy implications and government interventions. Many of the

findings and insights highlighted in the preceding two sections can help researchers and policy makers identify fissures for where and when interventions can most effectively support young women's attempts to improve their material and social conditions.

## **Future Research**

The immediate application of my research is developing a set of questions to include in quantitative surveys and ethnographic studies about women's migration choices and what they hope to gain by migrating. North River is a middle income area, so it would be good to collect data from poverty stricken, poor, and wealthy rural localities across China for comparison.

In the future, I would like follow-up on how North River women are faring as more of my participants transition from school and enter the urban labor markets. Another consideration is assessing how women fared as college graduates. China underwent high levels of unemployment immediately after my fieldwork. It would be intriguing to gauge the impact of social networks on women's ability to locate work and cope as exercise their financial independence in changing urban settings. Follow-up studies with work migrants would allow me to determine whether and how they've transitioned from urban jobs to entrepreneurialship. I would also like to see how postponement of marriage and initiation into courtship affects the evaluation of marriage candidates for both migrant groups.

## **Research**

Although a sizable proportion of rural women choose to leave North River as students, most from poor and some from middle SES household chose to opt out after calculating the costs and risks for educational migration. Undoubtedly, many women in other parts of China are making similar decisions. My North River study is not unique in identifying common exit points from education. However, my interviews reveal when women make their decisions to leave and whom they consult for information about the costs and benefits of opting out. A worthwhile direction for exploration would be

examining whether women from regions of high and low economic strata base their calculations and decision-making on similar factors. This information is invaluable for designing more effective programs for rural women's educational and occupational achievement.

### **Policy Implications and Possible Interventions**

The inclusion of questions about parental support for daughters' education will help researchers assess whether my findings are particular to regional and middle-income characteristics, or if other regions of China are also experiencing shifts in parental investments in daughters' education. It would also help government agencies determine whether and where more resources should be directed to better support rural parents in their efforts to help their daughters achieve in school and in their transitions into the urban labor market.

By targeting these points as locations of possible interventions and providing crucial support through social networks, government programs can help women improve their likelihood of staying in school, becoming better trained, and starting better careers. Alternatively, for women who still want to opt out of education for employment, government resources can be used to help women identify jobs with higher pay and better work conditions.

For family demography, my research helps us refocus inquiry on how these shifts in women's aspirations affect micro-level behaviors like child-bearing, marriage, and family arrangements. How are shifts in parental preference to include the education and support of young women impacting the pressures, obligations, and pathways of their brothers? Changes in gendered norms are seldom one-sided, hence it behooves researchers to more closely study how rural men are faring in migration.

Furthermore, it is necessary to contextualize the above findings in the process of urbanization. Parents currently support their daughters' education because of the anticipated benefits and perception that schooling results in more and better opportunities for upward mobility in urban society. Support for daughters' education is

recent, so it is still unclear whether parents would continue this pattern during economic downturn.

On the international level, I would like to compare the findings and insights gained from my North River sample for lessons from other developing economies engaged in globalization. For example, are rural women active participants in migration activities and migrant labor in countries like India, Philippines, and Mexico? Comparison of migration patterns and of women's motivations across these localities would enable cross-cultural dialogues about mechanisms of social mobility in a global context. Such comparisons would be extremely fruitful in facilitating our understanding of what factors enable women to become “emissaries of modernity” across developing economies.

**Table 2.1. Selecting Population with Data on Migration and on Migration Pathway  
by Household SES, North River, Hebei, China 2008-2009**

Progressive Steps	SES Categories			
	High	Middle	Low	Total
1. Total number of women in ages 17-28 in village population register	53	248	108	409
2. Number of eligible women with information on whether migrated	45	222	83	350
3. Number of women who actually migrated according to informants	44	204	72	320
4. Number of women with information on migration pathway	43	192	69	304

Table 2.2. Pathway by SES for Women Migrants from North River, Hebei, China 2008-2009

Household SES	Pathway			Total
	Education	Not Married and Working	Married	
ALL	40%	28%	32%	100%
	(122)	(84)	(98)	(304)
HIGH	51%	23%	26%	100%
	(22)	(10)	(11)	(43)
MIDDLE	46%	23%	31%	100%
	(87)	(44)	(61)	(192)
LOW	19%	43%	38%	100%
	(13)	(30)	(26)	(69)

Note: Parentheses include numbers of migrants in each category.

Table 2.3. Migration Pathway by SES for Study Participants, North River, Hebei, China 2008-2009

Migration Pathway	SES Categories			
	High	Middle	Low	All
Education	6	7	2	15
Work	4	7	7	18
Marriage	2	3	4	9
All migrants	12	17	13	42

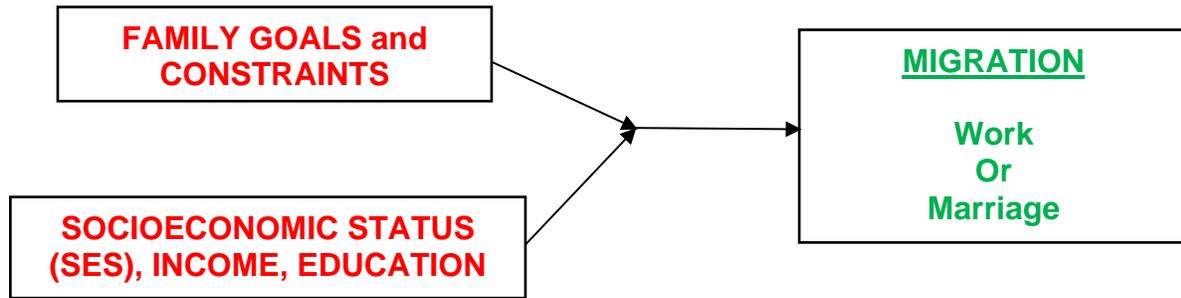
**Table 2.4 Comparison of Migrant SES and Pathway for all Migrants and Study Participants, North River, Hebei 2008-2009**

SES	POPULATION (N=304)			SAMPLE (N=42)		
	HIGH	MIDDLE	LOW	HIGH	MIDDLE	LOW
Education	51%	46%	19%	50%	41%	15%
Work	23%	23%	43%	33%	41%	54%
Marriage	26%	31%	38%	17%	18%	31%

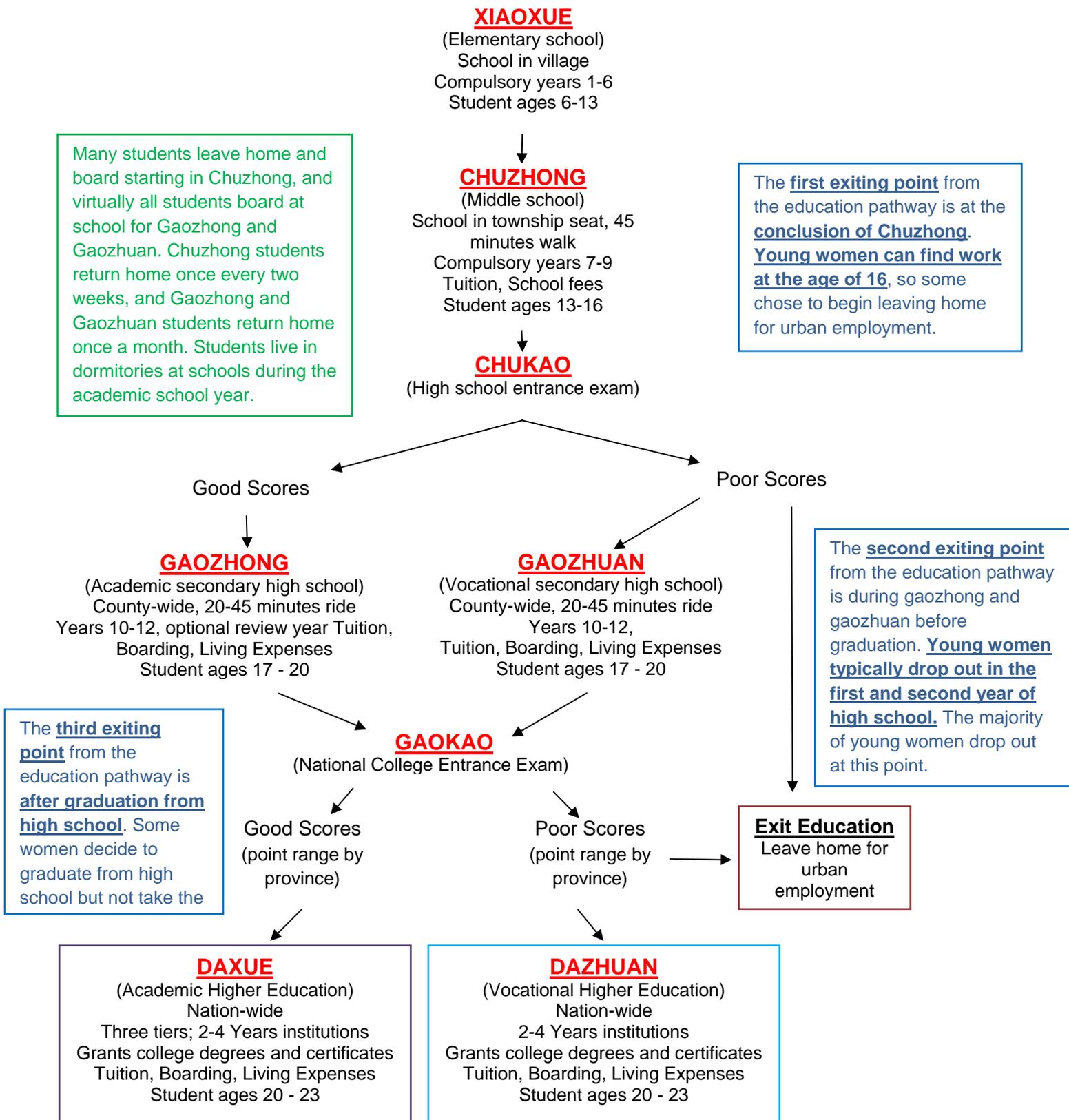
**Table 4.2 Acts of Socialization from Social Networks by Women's Migration Pathway, North River, China 2008-2009**

<b>Family</b>	
	(Parents, Uncles, Aunts, Grandparents)
	Emphasize importance of education by directly telling young women
<b>Extremely Common Themes For Family</b>	Encourage good performance on homework, ask for academic awards, and reward achievement
	Emotional support for rigors of study schedule and test-taking
	Consulting, debating, and making decisions about college majors and cities to move to
	Have family and relatives in migration destinations
	(Parents, Uncles, Aunts, Grandparents)
	Relate news of others academic accomplishments as motivation
<b>Common Themes For Family</b>	Disapproval of school drop-outs and associating with drop-outs
	Provide Alternative location for residency to attend better school or change schools for better education
	(Siblings and Cousins)
	Deciding which gaozhongs and colleges to target and apply to for education migration
	(Parents, Uncles, Aunts, Grandparents)
	Pay additional fees to transfer into a better school
	Discourage dating in school
<b>Less Common Themes for Family</b>	Get feedback from others about better school, majors, cities, and options
	(Siblings and Cousins)
	Discuss and develop tailored strategies for doing well in school
	Evaluating possible jobs and career tracks
	Deciding how to best prepare oneself for different career tracks
	Determining which cities offer the best chances for expansion
<b>Teachers</b>	
	Rating student classroom performance, helping students understand education options
<b>Extremely Common Themes For Teachers</b>	Reinforce value of education in classroom interactions, assignment, and school-wide announcements
	Teaching skills to do well in school and for standardized test-taking
	Telling students to identify target schools, majors, and careers
<b>Common Themes for Teachers</b>	Directly stating pros of education migration with students in speeches by teachers, counselors, and principals
	Not discuss risk potential of failing on exams
<b>Less Common Themes for Teachers</b>	Encourage students to talk to parents about attending college
	Encourage feedback and interactions between student, parents, and teachers supporting education pathway
	Follow-up with students undergoing emergencies to encourage them to continue in school
<b>Peers</b>	
	Help each other develop better study habits
	Discuss jobs of other classmates and debate possible career trajectories
<b>Extremely Common Themes For Peers</b>	Serve as examples for aspirations for jobs, careers, dating, relationships, marriage, and residency
	Has friends in school
	Has friends/peers staying in the education (Pathway of migration)
	Compare pros and cons of living in different cities
<b>Common Themes for Peers</b>	Figure out which friends to migrate with
	Learn how to ask teachers for help and to perform better in classroom activities
	Peers who dropped out want to return to school

**Figure 4.1 Classical Model of Migration of Rural Women**



**Figure 4.2 Structure of Education in North River, China 2008-2009**



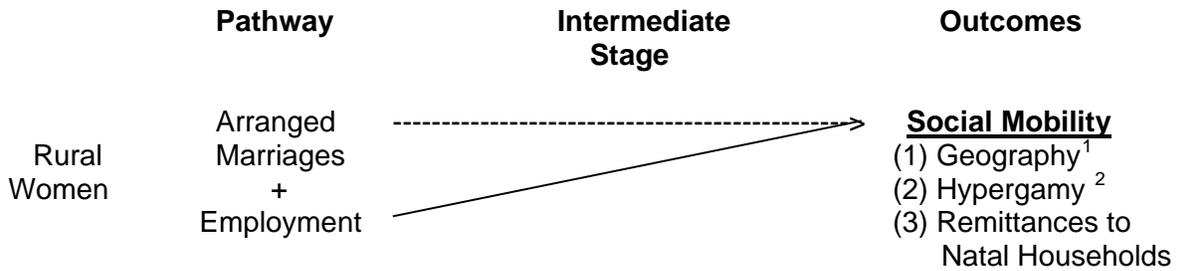
**Figure 6.1 Comparison of Study Characteristics of North River Study to Existing Research on Rural Women's Migration Motivations**

	<b>Migration Pathway</b>		<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Migration Timing</b>
<b>Existing Literature</b>	Marriage	----->	<b>Social mobility</b> based on information at <b>migration destinations*</b>	1980s and 1990s
	+ Employment			
<b>North River Study</b>	Marriage	----->	<b>Social mobility</b> based on <b>accounts</b> captured as <b>aspirations at origin</b> and <b>choice of destination</b>	2000-2008
	+ Employment			
	+ Education			

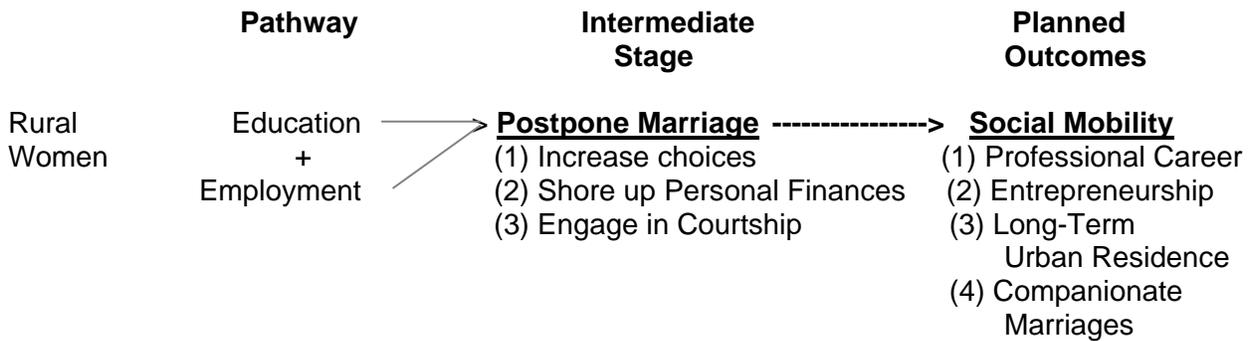
\*With the exception of two studies conducted by the Research Center for Rural Economy of the Ministry of Agriculture of over 300 household during Spring Festival 1995 and two follow-up waves collected in May-June 1999 and in 2005 (Fan 2008, pp15-16) and the Chinese Population and Information Research Center study of 3000 women collected in Anhui and Sichuan in August and September 2000 (Roberts et al 2004).

**Figure 6.2 Comparison of Models of Migration of North River Study to Existing Research on Rural Women's Migration**

**A. Existing Literature from 1980s and 1990s**



**B. North River Study Migration 2000-2008**



1 Fan and Huang 1998

2 Davin 1999

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