

Gender, family, and internal migration in post-reform China

Weiwen Lai



Gender, family, and internal migration in post-reform China

Weiwen Lai

Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociological Demography at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Monday 7 April 2025 at 13.00 in Lecture hall 8, vån 3, hus D, Södra huset, Universitetsvägen 10 and online via Zoom, public link is available at the department website.

Abstract

The thesis examines the interdependent relationships between gender roles in the family and internal migration in China. Study I explains gender differences in labor migration outcomes from the perspective of the migration intention-behavior link. Study II investigates how men's and women's marriage and family status are related to their first labor migration and whether these associations change across birth cohorts. Study III examines how having a migrant spouse affects the non-migrant husband's and wife's housework time and whether this impact is moderated by intergenerational co-residence. Study IV explores the relationship between married couples' joint migration and housework dynamics, especially the intra-couple gender division of housework.

Overall, this thesis has contributed to a better understanding of why Chinese men have higher migration risks than Chinese women. It demonstrates that Chinese individuals' gender roles in the family are an important underpinning of the gender differentials in migration propensities. This thesis has also highlighted the inertia of the traditional gender role division in migrants' families, casting doubt on the often-argued narrative about the potential of migration to unsettle the unequal gender relations in family life in China.

Keywords: *migration, gender, family, China.*

Stockholm 2025

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-239703>

ISBN 978-91-8107-130-6

ISBN 978-91-8107-131-3

ISSN 1404-2304

Department of Sociology

Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm



GENDER, FAMILY, AND INTERNAL MIGRATION IN POST-REFORM
CHINA

Weiwen Lai



Gender, family, and internal migration in post-reform China

Weiwen Lai

©Weiwen Lai, Stockholm University 2025

ISBN print 978-91-8107-130-6

ISBN PDF 978-91-8107-131-3

ISSN 1404-2304

Printed in Sweden by Universitetservice US-AB, Stockholm 2025

To my wife and my
family, who always stand
next to me.

To internal migrants in
China who have suffered
from discrimination and
separation from their
families.

Contents

Acknowledgement	1
Abstract	4
Sammanfattning (Summary in Swedish)	5
List of studies	6
Introduction.....	7
China’s internal migration: A brief overview	9
The internal migration population and its continuous growth	9
The hukou system and migration	10
Who is an internal migrant and how to define it?	14
Gendered patterns of migration in China	17
Left-behind wives and children.....	22
Men’s and women’s gender roles and their migration in China	25
The gender division of labor in the Chinese family	25
Why do women often migrate less?	26
Gender relations of migrants and their families: Focusing on housework.....	29
Data, methods, and ethical concerns	38
RUMiC (Study I).....	38
The 2018 CHIP (Study II).....	39
The CHNS (Study III)	40
The CFPS (study IV).....	41
Ethical considerations	42
Summary of the empirical studies.....	44
Study I: Weaker Intentions or Lower Realization? Explaining Gender Differences in Labor Migration from Rural China.....	44
Study II: Changing Roles of Marriage and Family Status for Labor Migration? The Case of Rural China (with Jing Song).....	45
Study III: Spousal Migration, Intergenerational Co-residence, and the Non-migrant Husbands’ and Wives’ Housework Time in Rural China (with Yuying Tong).....	46
Study IV: Couple Migration and Housework Dynamics in China: A Longitudinal Analysis..	47

Concluding remarks	49
Understanding gender differences in migration: Perspectives and assumptions	49
The inertia of gender relations in Chinese families affected by migration	50
Limitations, reflections, and future research directions	53
The heavy focus on rural-origin Chinese people	53
Housework and its assumptions	53
Definitions of migration in China	54
References	56

Acknowledgement

I came to Stockholm during COVID-19 to start my PhD studies. At that time, I was trained as a sociologist and had only a vague sense of what demographic research was. And I knew very little about Sweden. Before departing for Sweden, many friends were concerned about whether I could get used to the cold temperature because I had always lived in places under a hot and humid subtropical climate. How time flies. It is about time to wrap up this rewarding journey.

My earnest gratitude should go to my supervisors: Gunnar Andersson, Gerda Neyer, and Maria Brandén. There was a time when I struggled with where to pursue my PhD, Singapore or Sweden. It was a personal email from Gunnar that persuaded me to come to SUDA. Without any doubt, Gunnar has been a role model when I try to think and do research as a demographer. His highest standard of research has been driving me to be as meticulous, rigorous, and honest as possible in my research. He has always been incredibly responsive and tended to my needs. I am more than lucky to have Gerda and Maria as my supervisors. It is hard to name an example, as there are so many. Always showing their care to me, they are the ones I regularly turn to when I have questions for my research.

I am particularly grateful for Jing Song and Yuying Tong at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, not only because I collaborated with them for part of my thesis. Jing Song hosted me for my short-term research stay in Hong Kong and made me feel like I was coming back home. During my postgraduate years in Hong Kong, I audited Yuying's course on social demography, which was my first encounter with demographic research. That moment, I felt "Oh there is something really cool and I want to do that in the future." I am also grateful for Sofi Ohlsson-Wijk and Kieron Barclay. They are thorough discussants for my half-time and final seminars, respectively, providing many constructive comments and suggestions and encouraging my research.

I have met many wonderful friends during my PhD years, making this challenging journey more fun and easier. Weiqian Xia is one of the first few friends I have in Stockholm. How much fun we had at many gatherings when we played music, tried new restaurants, and discussed culture and politics. Wooseong Kim has been a buddy for me in many senses. It is such a great joy to share the path with him. We started our Ph.D. programs almost at the same time, worked as research

assistants in the same research project, and served on the doctoral council together. If one has the chance to talk to him for a minute, you will get how much of a great guy he is. My officemate has been Johanna Finnström for four years. I cannot ask more by sharing the workspace with such a nice person. She is very thoughtful and considerate all the time. She taught me so many cool things about Sweden. I cannot remember how many times I texted her just to ask her what a grocery item was.

During my stay in Stockholm, I am truly grateful that I have the opportunity to have as my colleagues Siddartha Aradhya, Lovisa Backman, Sunnee Billingsley, Eric Carlsson, Filip Dabergott, Jasper Darin, Flore Debruyne, Sven Drefahl, Ann-Zofie Duvander, Helen Eriksson, Flore Debruyne, Martin Hällsten, Lisa Harber-Aschan, Zeth Isaksson, Elida Izani Ibrahim, Konstantin Kazenin, Sanni Kuikka, Martin Kolk, Anna Lund, Hernan Mondani, Eleonora Mussino, Anna-Karin Nylin, Livia Oláh, Elena Pupaza, Johanna Schiratzki, Ryan Switzer, Mikaela Sundberg, Caroline Uggla, Rosa Weber, Ben Wilson, and Frankseco Yorke. The interaction with these great minds is an indispensable part of my work life. Although our conversations are not necessarily scholarly, they are always friendly and interesting.

I have met some wonderful friends in Stockholm: Mayuri Chatterjee, Mengyuan Sun, Ma Li, and Xiaojie Xu. The time we spent together wandering in the woods, exploring Fika places in the city, or cooking new dishes at home was some of the not-so-many moments in which I felt the joy of connecting with others and sharing our feelings. And thank Xiaowen Lin, a close friend for more than 10 years, for always encouraging me.

There are two things I would like to mention. First, I do not have a good memory. I have a hunch that some important persons are left out – it is all my fault, and please accept my sincere apology. Second, as you may know, I am not very talkative. My gratitude to all of you is much deeper than that conveyed by this acknowledgement.

My parents, Hongguang Lai (赖红光) and Qianting Lai (赖倩婷), have always had faith in me, one thing I never doubt, and have given me everything they can. It is a privilege to have them as parents for any child. I have always felt indebted to them. The Chinese culture may still expect children to pay back in one way or another. Well, I cannot think of a way of doing that since I owe them so much.

The last big “thank you” is for my wife, Zhuoqi Ding, who has constantly been understanding and supporting me without the thinnest hesitation. I know that she is always around when I need

her – I hope I have somehow managed to do something similar for her. It goes without saying how much of a compromise she made when we decided to move to Stockholm together. The past few years have not been entirely smooth for us professionally as researchers and personally as a couple. Sometimes, the ride was quite bumpy and rough, and we felt moody and down. We have gone through those tough times together, just as we have shared countless truly happy moments along the journey. The joy of sharing life with such an amazing person is no less than accomplishing this thesis. I look forward to our years ahead.

Abstract

The thesis examines the interdependent relationships between gender roles in the family and internal migration in China. Study I explains gender differences in labor migration outcomes from the perspective of the migration intention-behavior link. Study II investigates how men's and women's marriage and family status are related to their first labor migration and whether these associations change across birth cohorts. Study III examines how having a migrant spouse affects the non-migrant husband's and wife's housework time and whether this impact is moderated by intergenerational co-residence. Study IV explores the relationship between married couples' joint migration and housework dynamics, especially the intra-couple gender division of housework.

Overall, this thesis has contributed to a better understanding of why Chinese men have higher migration risks than Chinese women. It demonstrates that Chinese individuals' gender roles in the family are an important underpinning of the gender differentials in migration propensities. This thesis has also highlighted the inertia of the traditional gender role division in migrants' families, casting doubt on the often-argued narrative about the potential of migration to unsettle the unequal gender relations in family life in China.

Sammanfattning (Summary in Swedish)

Avhandlingen undersöker de ömsesidiga relationerna mellan könsskillnader i yrkes- och hemarbete och intern migration i Kina. Studie I förklarar könsskillnader i migrationsutfall utifrån ett "intention-beteende"- perspektiv. Studie II analyserar sambandet mellan mäns och kvinnors äktenskaps- och familjestatus och deras första interna migration, samt huruvida dessa samband förändras mellan födelsekohorter. Studie III undersöker hur makars hushållsarbete förändras när en av dem migrerar internt, och om effekten modereras av intergenerationellt samboende. Studie IV undersöker hur den könade fördelningen av hushållsarbete förändras när gifta par migrerar.

Sammantaget bidrar avhandlingen med en ökad förståelse av varför kinesiska män har en högre migrationsrisk än kinesiska kvinnor. Den visar specifikt att den traditionellt köntypiska fördelningen av hemarbete är en viktig bidragande faktor till könsskillnader i migrationsbeslut. Avhandlingen visar även att den traditionella könade arbetsfördelningen i hemmet tenderar att bestå även i familjer som migrerat internt av arbetsrelaterade skäl. Avhandlingen utmanar därmed det vanligt förekommande narrativet att migration i sig leder till en mer jämlik arbetsfördelning inom familjer i Kina.

List of studies

- I. Weiwen Lai. Weaker Intentions or Lower Realization? Explaining Gender Differences in Labor Migration from Rural China. *Stockholm Research Reports in Demography* 2024:19. Revised and re-submitted to Journal.
- II. Weiwen Lai & Jing Song. Changing Roles of Marriage and Family Status for Labor Migration? The Case of Rural China. *Stockholm Research Reports in Demography* 2024:50. Submitted to Journal.
- III. Weiwen Lai & Yuying Tong. Spousal migration, Intergenerational Co-residence, and the Non-migrant Husbands' and Wives' Housework Time in Rural China. *Stockholm Research Reports in Demography* 2024:24. Submitted to Journal.
- IV. Weiwen Lai. Couple Migration and Housework Dynamics in China: A Longitudinal Analysis. *Stockholm Research Reports in Demography* 2025:3 Submitted to Journal.

Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate the interdependent and dynamic relationships between men's and women's gender roles in the family and internal migration in post-reform China (1978 till now). From different perspectives, four empirical studies of the thesis test an overall assumption that gender relations in Chinese families are both the cause and consequence of internal migration.

As in many other contexts, internal migration in China is a gendered process (Bernard et al., 2019; He & Gober, 2003), as easily seen by the skewed male-to-female ratio of the migrant population (Cheng & Duan, 2021). Research often highlights the gender division of labor in the family as one of the root causes of the gendered differentials in migration (Fan, 2003, 2008). At the same time, scholars perceive the massive migration in China as a transformative power for family change toward more gender equality in family life (Choi & Peng, 2016; Yuan & Zhang, 2023).

There are two overarching research objectives, each forming the central research question of two empirical studies. The first objective is to contribute a better understanding of what underlies the gender differentials in internal migration in China. Study I examines the gender differences in short-term labor migration among rural residents from the perspective of the migration intention-behavior link. Linking migration intentions and outcomes provides deeper insight into whether gender disparities in labor migration stem from gender differences in migration intentions or in the ability to act on those intentions. Study II is a collaboration with Jing Song. The rapidly changing migration landscape in China has set the scene for this study. Couple or family migration is on a steady rise. The policies governing migrants' rights, not least migrant children's rights to attend public schools in the host place, have become less discriminatory and more integrative, likely encouraging more parents to migrate with children. We examine whether the roles of marriage and childbearing in first-time labor migration have changed over the birth cohorts from 1951 to 2000 for rural men and women.

The following two empirical studies shift the focus to the thesis's second objective, aiming to understand the consequences of migration on gender relations in the family among the married

group. Both studies examine housework as the outcome because housework participation and division are highly gendered family life practices. Study III is a joint work with Yuying Tong. China has a large group of left-behind spouses, mainly wives with migrant husbands. We examine whether having a migrant spouse is related to a change in the non-migrant spouse's housework time and whether having a migrant husband differs from having a migrant wife. We also place this impact of spousal migration in a broader household context by evaluating the moderating role of intergenerational co-residence. We assess whether this moderating role of intergenerational co-residence differs for left-behind husbands and wives, motivated by the gendered nature of the intergenerational exchanges in the Chinese context, depending on who lives with whom (S. Hu & Mu, 2021). Study IV turns to the increasingly prevalent phenomenon of couple migration in China and examines how couples' joint moves within and across provinces affect housework dynamics, especially the intra-couple gender division of housework, a key indicator of gender inequality in family life.

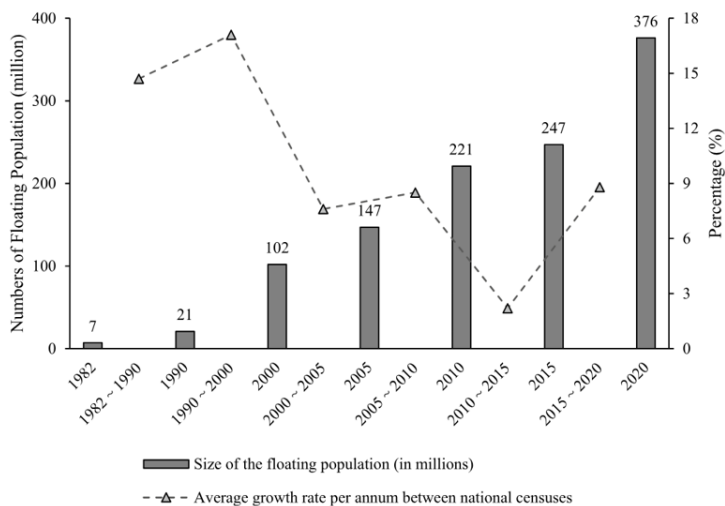
In the following parts of this introductory chapter, I start by providing a brief overview of the history and development of China's internal migration. It is followed by a section elaborating on the gender division of labor in Chinese families in relation to migration decisions, and in this section, I highlight the debates on migration and gender relations in the family that shed light on this thesis. The following two sections introduce the datasets and methods for empirical studies and summarize each study's findings, respectively. In the next section, based on the research findings, I discuss the implications for the thesis's proposed research questions and for the broader migration literature. This chapter concludes by discussing the thesis's limitations, reflections, and future research directions.

China's internal migration: A brief overview

The internal migration population and its continuous growth

The massive internal migration in China is hardly new to demographers and migration scholars. As shown by Figure 1, censuses across years capture a continuously increasing number of internal migrants, rising from 7 to 376 million between 1982 and 2020. In 2020, about a quarter of China's 1.4 billion population could be considered internal migrants who lived in a place different from where their home address (hukou) was registered. So important is internal migration that it is the single most important determinant of population change at the subnational level rather than fertility or mortality (Gu, 2014).

Figure 1: The increasing trend in internal migration in China from 1982 to 2020



Source: Cheng & Duan, 2021, p 279

The overall internal migration stream, despite having changed remarkably over the past few decades, remains largely characterized by individuals' short-term moves from rural to urban areas, from less developed to more developed places, and from inland to coastal regions. Rural-to-urban moves accounted for about two-thirds (66%) of all internal moves in 2020, up from 56% in 2000 (Duan et al., 2022). The majority of internal migrants move for better economic opportunities. The 2000 and 2010 census data showed that about three-fourths of internal migrants move for work or business (Liang et al., 2014). Internal migration is often temporary, as many internal migrants move for work for short periods before they move to another place or return to their hometowns. Most internal migrants move within rather than across provinces, China's sub-national units. The within-province migrants accounted for 66.8% of the total migrant population in 2020, down from 72.4% in 1990 (Duan et al., 2022).

The hukou system and migration

It is difficult to understand China's migration developments without referencing the country's hukou system, a household registration system for the whole population. The origin of the system dates back to the 1950s, when China's institutions were socialist, and its economy was centrally planned and managed in a top-down manner (Chan, 2015). Simply put, every Chinese citizen is assigned a specific type of hukou status at birth.

Hukou has two key properties as an institutional identity. First, hukou could be binarily categorized as agricultural or non-agricultural for decades. The two types of hukou are often referred to as rural and urban hukou, respectively. In most cases, people born in rural areas will be granted agricultural hukou, while people born in urban areas will be granted non-agricultural hukou. Policy reforms targeting hukou have been underway for decades. More local governments had gradually got rid of the rural-urban hukou categorization, with all residents receiving the same type of hukou, not being differentiated by rural or urban. Eventually, in 2014, the state council abolished the binary agricultural-vs-non-agricultural hukou categorization in the whole country. Another important property of hukou is that each individual has a registered home address, assuming that the address is the place of one's origin. For children born before 1998, a child's

hukou status followed their mother's hukou by default. With a legal change in 1998, a child could, in theory, follow either the mother's or father's hukou since then.

The importance of the hukou system in individuals' everyday lives can hardly be exaggerated because it has been the institutional backbone defining one's position in society. Hukou is tied to the entitlement to nearly all local social service and welfare benefits, such as education, jobs, healthcare, and pension, to name a few. The financing of public institutions is planned based on local residents whose hukou is registered locally. The requirement of local hukou has put migrants in an awkward position because most of them keep their hukou registered in their hometown. Since around 2010, China, however, has been pushing to loosen the link between hukou and access to social services.

As one of the most critical social institutions in China, the hukou system distributes public goods based on individuals' hukou statuses, generating high levels of social inequality between migrants and natives. Linking hukou to the entitlement to social services was an effective means of controlling population movements in the country during the socialist period (from 1949 to 1978). Voluntary, self-initiated migration was rare in that period. Apart from a few state-organized large-scale population movements for political reasons from the 1950s to 1970s, the central government formally prohibited individuals' unapproved movements to other places. Only a few reasons could be justified for individuals' migration to other places, including marriage and official job transfer. For individuals who even managed to migrate on their own in socialist years, they could hardly stay and settle. Jobs and housing were assigned and food was rationed, depending on whether one had the required hukou status. An unauthorized migrant could not access essential public services, let alone the legal consequences they might face, such as being sent by law enforcement to detention centers.

Against this historical backdrop, China's massive internal migration began in the early 1980s as the country transitioned to a market-oriented economy. According to the classic push-pull framework (E. Lee, 1966), China's phenomenal migration is made possible by both vital pushing and pulling factors. On the push side, there was a huge surplus of rural laborers (estimates varying from 40 to 200 million) due to the abolishment of collective farming in the countryside in 1978 (Brooks & Ran, 2003). The de-collectivizing of farming in rural places led to an immense increase

in agricultural productivity. Thus, a smaller labor force was needed in the agricultural sector. Large numbers of rural laborers needed jobs the rural economic system could not provide.

On the pull side, the emerging labor market in part of the country needed laborers to keep factories running. The past few decades since the early 1980s saw an influx of foreign investment, stimulating the country's economic growth. The economic development was accompanied by a burgeoning private sector, which first thrived in the country's coastal areas, such as the Pearl River Delta. Labor-intensive industries, such as textile manufacturing and electronic product assembly, were the first to develop in China, bringing a huge number of job opportunities in urban labor markets. To meet the labor demand and boost the country's economic development, the central government in 1984 no longer proscribed rural individuals' movements within the country on the condition that they could take care of their farmland in their hometowns and made ends meet without demanding support from governments upon moving to other places. The lifting of the migration restriction has ushered in a new era of massive rural-to-urban labor migration. In this sense, it is not hard to understand why internal migrants in China are often called "peasant workers," as they used to be farmers but migrated for off-farm employment.

It was not until the 1990s that Chinese individuals started to migrate on a massive scale, as indicated by a tremendous jump in the number of internal migrants from 21 million in 1990 to 147 million in 2000 (Cheng & Duan, 2021). Nowadays, regardless of their hukou status, Chinese individuals can move freely within the country at will. In recent years, facing labor shortages due to the aging population, many local governments' attitudes toward migrants have become increasingly welcoming. It has become much easier for migrants to transfer their hukou to the host places to settle down permanently, except for a few metropolises, such as Beijing and Shanghai, where the thresholds of obtaining local hukou are very demanding.

Social policies on internal migration have evolved significantly, aiming at migrant's better integration in the host places and enhancing social protections for them. One of the milestones along this progressive path is that many cities had gradually revoked the need to obtain a temporary resident permit previously required of migrants, following the tragic death in 2003 of a college-educated man, Zhigang Sun, who was thought by the police to be a migrant without proper documents. He was arrested and sent to a detention center, where he was beaten to death. The mistreatment of Zhigang Sun was the epitome of internal migrants, a group that tended to be

subject to policy abuse and economic exploitation by public authority. Eventually, in 2015, the Ministry of Public Security made it explicit that the country abolished resident permits as a legal document, which was first designed to monitor and manage the migrant population. Several central government agencies enacted various blueprint-like and top-down policies to promote migrants' access to key social services in the host place, such as medical services and their children's education.

Although migration restrictions based on hukou have been lifted, hukou remains a key institutional factor affecting migrants' well-being. Internal migrants still feel the grinding impacts of the lack of local hukou. They are systematically barred from quality job opportunities and channeled to occupations that native residents usually ward off. For example, in the capital city of Beijing, internal migrants are still barred from many jobs in the public sector, which typically requires local hukou. Furthermore, migrants' jobs are characterized by low labor protection, low wages, and harsh working conditions, such as long work hours and inflexible work schedules. It is well documented that in China, internal migrants, given their migrant identity, have widely suffered from varying degrees of wage penalties and job discrimination in the labor market (Frijters et al., 2010; H. Wang et al., 2015; R. Zhu, 2016).

Despite continuous legal and policy advancements in improving migrants' general social status, internal migrants are considered inferior citizens compared with natives in a social and legal sense. This differentiation or discrimination cannot be more manifest than the attempt of the municipality government of Beijing in 2016-17 to expel what it described as the "low-end population," most of them being internal migrants living in the suburban areas surrounding the capital city. The undertone of placing migrants as "low-end" makes tangible a value-laden population ladder in which migrants and natives are two different groups positioned at the two ends.

It is not surprising that Lee & Meng (2010) compared the hukou-migration system in China with the guest worker system in Germany, where foreign-born immigrants were welcomed to work temporarily but not to settle. In a more critical tone, Davin (2014) considered the hukou system as a caste-like system that differentiates migrants from natives. The two social groups, based on their assigned institutional identities (natives vs. migrants), have systematically different access to resources and are treated differently by sociolegal regulations.

Who is an internal migrant and how to define it?

a) By hukou change

Existing studies on Chinese migration have used inconsistent ways to define internal migration, partly because of the heterogeneity in this population and the difficulty of reaching a consensus on definitions. Nevertheless, few will disagree with the conceptual differentiation of permanent and temporary migrants based on whether they transfer hukou to their destination places (Y. Liu & Xu, 2017; M. Sun & Fan, 2011). With a change in hukou registration to destination places, migrants are thought to settle there. In comparison, the moves of migrants whose hukou are registered in their hometowns seem temporary. They are expected to return to their origin places in the future, which they do in many cases (Chunyu et al., 2013). Thus, it makes sense for many studies to use the term “floating population” to refer to temporary migrants (Liang et al., 2014; Liang & Ma, 2004). In the literature on Chinese migration, migrants who have transferred hukou to their destinations are often labeled as permanent migrants. In comparison, migrants who have kept hukou in their hometowns are often labeled as temporary migrants.

For migrants to settle down in the host place, hukou transfer is a vital factor. Accessing key social services is still closely tied to whether one has local hukou. It is not at all a personal choice for migrants to transfer their hukou. For decades until recently, many local governments had been concerned with a precipitous influx of permanent migrants and the increases in public expenditures that would follow. Following practices from the socialist era, they only approved the applications for hukou change based on a few reasons related to job transfer, marriage, and college education.

While it was dauntingly difficult for migrants to settle down by transferring their hukou, it has become less so. With the rapid aging trend and the resulting labor shortages, more local governments are trying to attract migrants with a much less stringent requirement for acquiring local hukou, hoping that more migrants will settle down to contribute to the local economy. For example, in many medium-sized cities in China, having a college degree suffices to acquire local hukou. There is no unified national policy about the requirements for individuals to meet in order to obtain local hukou. The requirements vary considerably by location, with more developed areas imposing more stringent conditions.

The importance of hukou in accessing public services has been declining, with some policy reforms aiming to decouple the link between them. However, such policy efforts have achieved partial success. It is a discomforting reality of Chinese society that migrants without local hukou do not have the same access to public services as natives because of their differences in institutional identities. It is still more inconvenient, and often more expensive at the same time, for migrants than natives to use local public services in a given place.

Since the onset of the massive migration in China in the 1990s, the share of temporary migrants among all migrants, temporary and permanent migrants combined, has increased. Among all inter-county migrants aged five or older in 1990, 45.9% were temporary migrants. This proportion climbed to 74.4% in 2000 (M. Sun & Fan, 2011).¹ The trend among inter-province migrants is more marked. Among all inter-province migrants aged five or older, respectively, in 1990, 2000, and 2010, the proportions of temporary migrants were 53.3%, 86.8%, and 92.3% (Fan, 2018). Since 2000, temporary migration has been the main driver of China's growing migration population. Despite being much smaller in population size, permanent migrants are more socioeconomically advantaged than temporary migrants, as indicated by their sharp differences in occupations and incomes (M. Sun & Fan, 2011; Z. Zhang & Wu, 2017).

It is important to note that this thesis focuses on temporary migrants instead of permanent migrants. In other words, permanent migrants are not within the scope of this thesis. Rather than the term "floating population," I consistently use "internal migrant" to refer to temporary migrants throughout the thesis, including in this introduction chapter and the four empirical studies.

b) Official definition and scientific literature

It is a standard practice that China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) defines floating population, or temporary migrants, as individuals living outside the county where their hukou is registered for at least six months.² This is also the way Chinese censuses, one of the major data

¹ The data on the share of permanent migrants among cross-county migrants in 2010 was missing because of a change in the design of the 2010 census, which Sun and Fan (2011) relied on (also see Fan, 2018).

² In China, spatially and administratively, county-level units are clustered within city-level units, and city-level units are clustered within province-level units.

sources to track the country's migration developments, identify internal migrants. Nonetheless, whether the NBS's definition of migration corresponds to reality is debatable.

First, the NBS's definition of temporary migration applies to those moving across county borders. This definition captures migrants moving to other counties, cities, or provinces but falls short of covering within-county migrants, a group of short-distance migrants whose size is not expected to be small (Liang et al., 2014). Second, the NBS's six-month threshold excludes short-term migrants. However, the six-month threshold seems to contradict the view that internal migration in China is considerably as short-term as just a few months. Those moving to a new place for less than six months will not be considered migrants.

While some Chinese migration studies used the same way as the NBS to define internal migration, many studies did not, mainly because of the lack of information, especially when such studies relied on survey data. It is common for surveys in China, even established large-scale ones (e.g., the *Chinese General Social Survey* or the *China Health and Nutrition Survey*), not to have information on migration as detailed as when individuals move to a new place and how long they have stayed.

To name a few examples of how scholars measure internal migration in China in different ways. One common approach is to utilize self-reported places of hukou registration (Huang, 2020; Yuan & Zhang, 2023), a standard piece of information in many of China's large-scale surveys. If one lives outside the place of hukou registration, he or she will be considered a migrant. Some scholars define migration by comparing one's type of hukou status, holding rural or urban hukou, to the type of current residency, living in rural or urban areas (Y. Hu, 2016; Z. Mu & Yeung, 2018). If one holds rural hukou yet lives in an urban place, that individual is considered a rural-to-urban migrant. Comparing places of residence at different time points can be a reasonable approach. Zhu & Vidal (2024) used the identification codes of the counties where individuals resided and identified migrants based on whether they resided in a different location than in the previous observation in a panel survey. Others use a simpler definition, which measures migration by whether one is living in the household (R. Mu & De Brauw, 2015). With this approach, a migrant is one who does not live at home at the time of the survey.

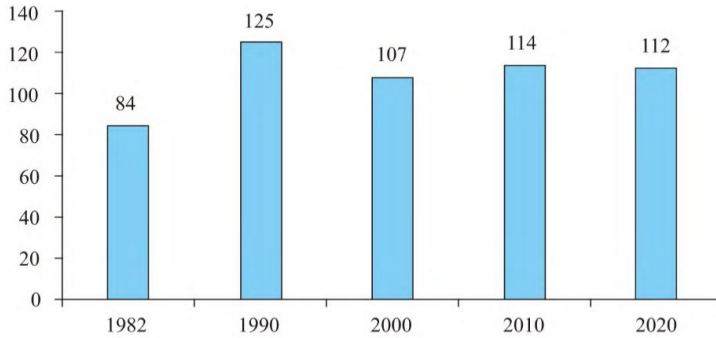
The core message that this brief overview highlights is that despite a definition from the NBS, measuring migration is a very complex and contentious issue, echoing other scholars' views (Liang,

2007). The thesis has exemplified the heterogeneity of the Chinese migrant population by investigating different types of migration and using different operationalizations to measure migration across the four empirical studies.

Gendered patterns of migration in China

A well-established finding is that China's internal migration is gendered in multiple ways. First, Chinese censuses show that the sex composition of the migrant population was unbalanced from 1982 to 2020, as shown in Figure 2. In 1982, the migrant group was more represented by women than men. However, the gender pattern has reversed since 1990. With a male-to-female sex ratio of 125 in 1990, the migrant population comprised more men than women in that year. This pattern of gender imbalance changed to be less salient in later years, with the male-to-female sex ratio declining to 114 in 2010 and 112 in 2020. It is likely that after 2000, more Chinese women migrated for work. It is worth noting that the age structures of the migrant group may contribute to the skewed sex ratios (Alexander & Steidl, 2012).

Figure 2: Male-to-female sex ratio of the migration population across censuses from 1982-2020

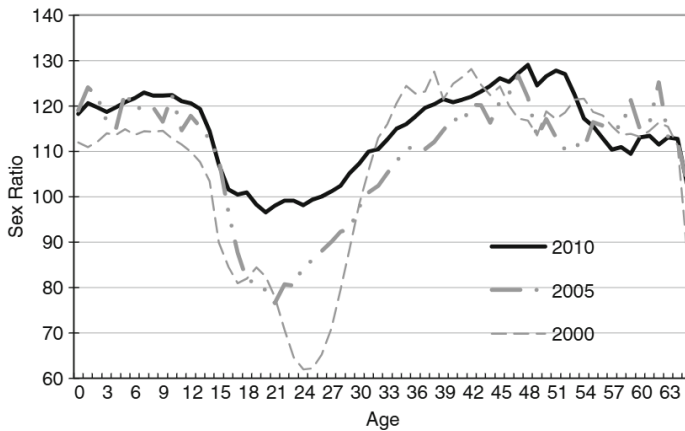


Source: Duan et al., 2022, page 50.

When accounting for age structures, Figure 3 displays a more nuanced pattern, largely consistent from 2000 to 2010, of sex ratios among migrants based on census data. The outnumbering of migrant men is a persistent characteristic for those aged 30 or older, peaking at around age 40 before declining. In 2010, the sex ratio of the migrant group aged 40-50 was as high as nearly 130. The overrepresentation of men among Chinese migrants is more striking when zooming in on the rural-origin migrant group. According to the NBS's annual nationwide surveys

targeting rural-origin migrant workers (农民工监测调查), men accounted for about two-thirds of this migrant group from 2010 to 2022.³

Figure 3: Age-specific sex ratio of the migrant population from 2005 to 2010



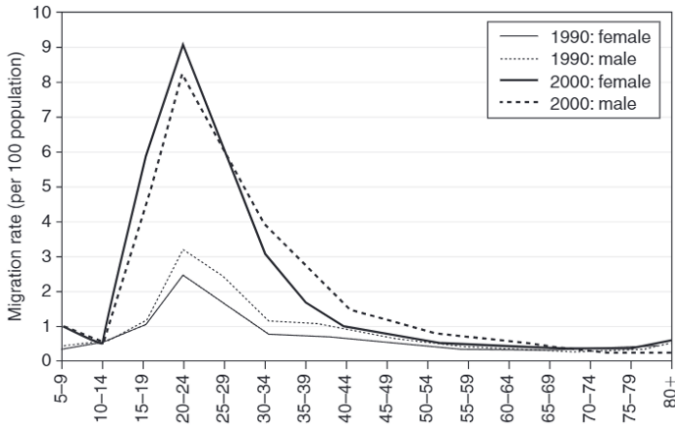
Source: Zheng & Yang, 2016, page 231.

The gender differences in migration propensities can also be seen in migration rates. Using data from the 1990 and 2000 censuses, Fan (2008) looked more in-depth into the gendered patterns of cross-county migration rates across age groups in China (Figure 5). Fan found that while in the 1990 census, men had higher migration rates in all age groups, the 2000 census indicated that the migration rates before age 30 were higher among women than among men. Only after age 30 did women become less mobile than men (Figure 4). Using census data up to 2010, Zheng & Yang (2016) largely replicated these findings on gender differences in age-specific migration rates for cross-province migration. With the latest 2020 census, Zhou (2023) showcased a similar gendered pattern of migration rates featuring men’s higher migration rates from their mid-20s onward. The

³ My own calculations based on annual reports from the briefs on these surveys.

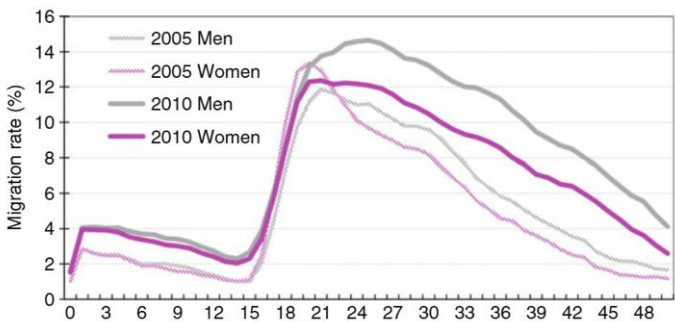
gender differences in migration rates emerged in younger age groups in 2020 compared with previous years.

Figure 4: Inter-country migration rates by sex, the 1990 and 2000 census



Source: Fan, 2008, page 78

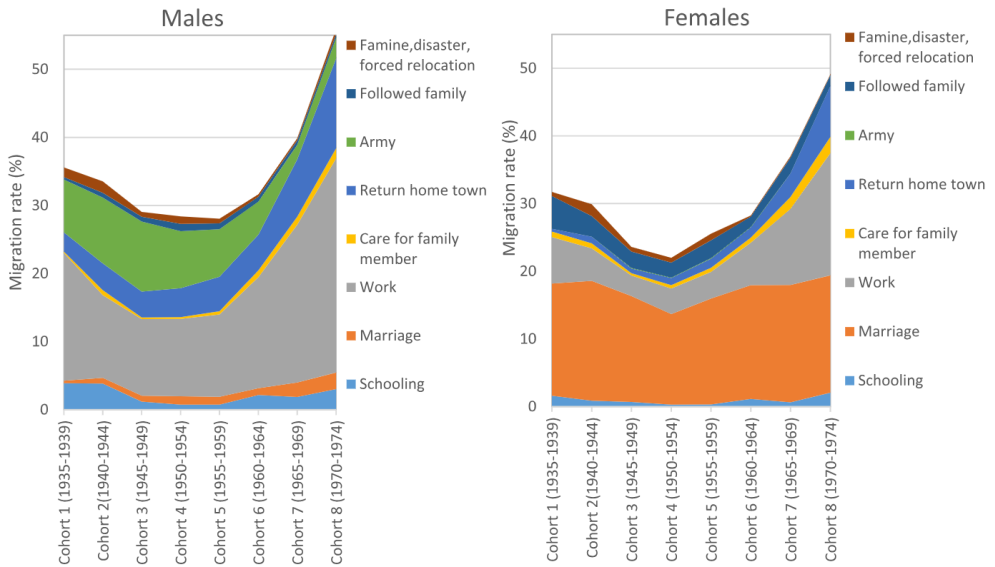
Figure 5: Inter-province migration rates by sex, the 2005 and 2010 census



Source: Zheng & Yang, 2016, page 231

In a cohort analysis, Bernard et al. (2019) showed that Chinese men had consistently higher completed migration rates than Chinese women by age 40 across the birth cohorts from the 1930s to the 1970s (Figure 6). Not only did these cohorts of men and women differ in migration likelihood, but they also tended to move for different reasons. For all their moves, while the dominant reason for men’s migration was work, marriage was at least as important as work for women’s migration. Nevertheless, the relative importance of marriage compared to work as a reason for migration declined for women over time. Bernard and her colleagues’ findings on the gendered patterns of migration reasons are largely consistent with those based on census data (Liang & Ma, 2004).

Figure 6: Men’s and women’s reasons for migration across the birth cohorts 1935-1974



Source: Bernard et al. 2019, page 9

In short, different data sources have consistently indicated that despite a narrowing gender gap, Chinese men have higher migration rates and are more likely to migrate for work reasons compared to Chinese women.

Left-behind wives and children

The full picture of Chinese migration involves not only migrants but also their families. Large numbers of Chinese individuals, often referred to as the left-behind population, are affected by their family members' migration. Among them are wives with migrant husbands and children with at least one migrant parent.

There is debate over who qualifies as a left-behind family member and how large the left-behind population is. More certain is the increase in its size over the past few decades. Based on census data, one estimate holds that the size of left-behind wives with migrant husbands was 9.1, 29.9, and 37.8 million in 2000, 2005, and 2010, respectively (Duan et al., 2017). Given their strikingly large group size, left-behind wives have been the focus of public and academic discourses. Left-behind wives seem to dominate the group of left-behind spouses, but recent studies suggest that the group size of left-behind husbands with migrant wives may be larger than previously thought (Lyu et al., 2024; Qin & Lyu, 2020). From the perspective of left-behind children aged 0-17 who had at least one migrant parent in 2020, 24.6% lived in households with a migrant mother and a left-behind father, not much lower than 29.8% with a migrant father and a left-behind mother (Lyu et al., 2024).

Many married women in China are left behind because they need to care for another left-behind group: their children, who cannot migrate together. According to Duan et al. (2017), the number of left-behind children with at least one migrant parent was 22.9, 73.3, and 69.7 million in 2000, 2005, and 2010, respectively. Given their family roles of nurturing children, mothers are more bound to their left-behind children than fathers are. Over 80% of left-behind wives were mothers who lived with their children from 2000 to 2010 (Duan et al., 2017). On the other hand, from the perspective of the children with at least one migrant parent, from 2000 to 2015, more than 60%

were left behind in their hometown and looked after by one parent or grandparents, with the rest most likely to migrate with parents (Chan & Ren, 2018).

Household arrangements of migrants and their family members in China have been changing. There are two related trends in the development of Chinese migration, both of which contribute to the growing sizes of migrants' households in the host place (Liang, 2016). First, while having left-behind spouses is still not uncommon, more married couples migrate together over time (Zhou, 2004). In other words, Chinese wives are less likely to stay alone in their hometowns as their husbands migrate to seek work outside. According to the *China Migrant Population Monitoring Survey* in 2013, more than four-fifths of married migrants lived with their spouses (Y. Zhu et al., 2016).

Second, not only do married couples tend to migrate together over time, but they are also more prone to migrate with children. Among migrants' children, instead of being left behind, more of them join their parents and become migrants themselves. In 2000, left-behind children far outnumbered children. In contrast, the number of left-behind children trailed that of migrant children for the first time in 2020. Among children with at least one migrant parent, the proportion of migrating with parents increased from 39.7% to 51.5% between 2000 and 2020 (Cheng et al., 2024).

For three or four decades until recently, the difficulty of migrant children to attend public schools in the host place tied such children and their parents, especially mothers, to their hometowns. It used to be the case that access to public education in local schools directly depended on whether one's hukou was registered locally. To migrants and their children alike, acquiring local hukou had been a hard-to-reach institutional threshold (Liang & Song, 2016). There are limited choices in education for school-age children who migrate with their parents. They are either suboptimal, sending children to private, low-quality schools only enrolling migrant children, or too financially demanding, paying to the public school of interest a one-time sponsor fee worth as much as months of household income. When considering the household's financial situation and their children's future development, the most reasonable choice for many of these parents is to leave their children behind so that they can attend public schools in their hometown (Ye, 2011).

Integrative social policy towards migrant children's education is behind the trends in couple or family migration. Since 2000, the central government has repeatedly stressed that it is the

responsibility of local governments to provide compulsory education for school-age migrant children living within their jurisdiction. Such social policies set off to grapple with the difficulty faced by migrants with children when they try to enroll their migrant children in public schools in the host place. Nevertheless, local governments have considerable autonomy in deciding how they carry out such policies toward migrant children's education. Some local governments, especially those of places receiving large numbers of migrants, do not have sufficient financial means or the capacity to provide education for all school-aged children of migrants (S. Liu et al., 2017; Peng, 2019).

In short, compared with natives, many migrants encounter extra hurdles when they try to secure a seat in public schools for their children. That said, it has become more realistic and feasible for parents to migrate with their children and have them receive education in the host place (Cheng et al., 2024). Improved access to education opportunities for their children has likely set parents free from the need to stay in the hometowns, not least for mothers, who, relative to fathers, tend to be left behind to care for their children.

Men's and women's gender roles and their migration in China

The gender division of labor in the Chinese family

An essential factor underlying the gender differences in migration patterns in China is the division of men's and women's roles in marriage and the family. Once with the highest female labor participation rates in the world in the socialist era because of the then-upheld communist ideology of gender equality, China dismantled most of its social institutions backing gender equality in its transition to a market-oriented economy. One immediate upshot is a reversal in gender equality in the family (Cook & Dong, 2011). With much less support from the state, the gender division of family roles in post-reform China reverted to being more rigid and traditional. While part of the burdens associated with family reproduction, especially care work for young children and aged parents, was socialized, they are now the family members' responsibility, especially for female members. However, China's economic transition has brought unprecedented opportunities for men and women through migration. Migrating to other places constitutes an important pathway to improve their life chances, such as finding better employment and better spouses elsewhere or escaping patriarchal families or communities, especially for women (Davin, 1996, 2014; Y. Liu & Erwin, 2015).

From a cultural perspective, Chinese husbands' and wives' family roles are different and complementary in an unequal manner, sometimes wrapped as the "men outside, women inside" gender norms under the teaching of Confucianism (Choi, 2019). In short, the primary family roles of husbands are the economic providers who ensure the economic well-being of their families. Housework is unpaid domestic work inside the family and thus is usually not considered the husband's primary household obligation. In contrast, Chinese wives' family roles are positioned within and inside the family: they are expected to provide labor for unpaid work in the domestic sphere, such as housework and care work for other family members. The "men outside, women inside" norms are far more of a cultural ideal than something that fits the reality in contemporary China, considering women's important economic roles for their families nowadays (Choi, 2019; Cook & Dong, 2011).

From 1990 to 2020, the ratio of female to male labor force participation rates was around 85 in China, much higher than that of its neighboring countries of South Korea and Japan. For both countries, the ratio was around 65 in 1990 and around 74 in 2020.⁴ Based on three nationwide surveys on women's social status in 1990, 2000, and 2010, Yang (2014) showed that among the working-age population in China, both men and women worked long hours for paid activities, 436 and 372 minutes per day for men and women, respectively. However, housework and care work seem to be women's sphere: they spent 217 minutes per day on such activities, more than twice that of men (93 minutes per day). From this account of time use patterns, many Chinese women assume dual family roles as income earners and homemakers.

Why do women often migrate less?

Much has also been written about how men's and women's gender roles in the family shape the gender differentials in migration behavior, a set of relationships that are well-documented and context-dependent. Qualitative studies suggest that when it is not possible to migrate with children, mothers often consider that migration to a new place for work is incompatible with their tasks of providing care for children in various migration contexts, such as Vietnam (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011) and India (Ugargol & Bailey, 2018). Numerous quantitative studies have reached similar conclusions that compared with men, women's migration decisions are more likely to be constrained by their family obligations of childbearing across contexts (Chort, 2014; Lindstrom & Giorguli Saucedo, 2007). The consistent impact of family obligations on women's migration reflects that in many places, women assume more childrearing responsibilities than their male counterparts, and thus, childrearing tends to be a female-specific cost for their migration.

However, some studies have found that women's migration is not deterred by or even driven by their roles as mothers. One telling example is the international migration of female domestic workers from the Philippines and Indonesia, many of whom continue to migrate after becoming mothers. Their decisions to migrate and leave their children behind in their home countries align with these women's obligations as mothers, part of which entails ensuring their children's future prospects. Considering the need to prepare for enough savings for their children's college

⁴ Aggregate data from World Bank Open Data: <https://data.worldbank.org/>.

education, labor migration is a way for these mothers to live up to the responsibilities associated with motherhood (Paul, 2015; Song et al., 2024). Rather than violating gender norms, such migrant mothers were heralded as “economic heroes” for their families and countries (Parrenas, 2001).

While the emphasis on their economic roles for the family appears to justify some mothers’ migration decisions, some left-behind fathers with migrant spouses also try to re-interpret their family roles. They consider the everyday practice of taking good care of their children as an important trait of responsible and caring fathers (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011; Lam & Yeoh, 2018). Not entirely rigid, gender roles are malleable and open to one’s interpretation, largely depending on local norms. In short, men’s and women’s gender roles in the family do not necessarily encourage or discourage their migration as long as they do not fundamentally conflict with individuals’ role expectations in the domestic sphere.

In the Chinese context, studies often posit that women, especially mothers, are tied to the family and cannot migrate because of their household obligations of performing housework and taking care of family members staying behind in origin places (Fan, 2003, 2008; He & Gober, 2003; Ye et al., 2013, 2016). Women’s family roles as such appear to be a crucial constraining factor for their migration. In comparison, men’s family roles as income earners incentivize them to undertake migration to pursue higher economic returns by taking up off-farm jobs elsewhere. In the era of migration, the “men outside, women side” gender norms have been re-interpreted in China (Fan & Chen, 2020; Jacka, 1997). Migration to seek more profitable work and bring home enough money is considered a type of “outside” work, consistent with the gender role expectations for Chinese men.

Earlier migration studies in China, in line with the gendered division of labor in Chinese families, support that women’s domestic duties are a highly deterring factor for their migration. For example, Fan made a strong case for explaining men’s and women’s different migration trajectories in relation to their gender roles in marriage and the family (Fan, 2003, 2008, 2009). She showed that in the 1990s, the window for young and single women to migrate for work was short-lived because single migrant women who reached their 20s were expected by their parents to stop migrating, return home, and get married. Shortly after marriage, these young couples would start having children. As for such mothers, they tended to stay home since then because they needed to care for their children.

Fan's fieldwork, which detailed how married couples negotiated migration decisions, found that it was more socially acceptable and economically rational for rural households to send husbands rather than wives to migrate. When married couples do not migrate together but form multi-local split households, husbands, given the economic provider roles expected of them, should move for better-paid jobs and send home remittances. A wife's solo migration to pursue work is deemed disgraceful and only seen as appropriate in certain situations, such as when the husband is sick. In short, Fan's writings in the early 2000s clearly demonstrated that the wife's role as a homemaker and caregiver usually discouraged them from migrating. These gender role considerations in migration decisions have contributed to the fact that the left-behind spouse tended to be a wife rather than a husband.

Fan's findings may seem somewhat updated because China's migration has been changing rapidly. The migration developments have brought some uncertainties into our prior understanding of how men's and women's gender roles in the family are related to their migration decisions. To start with, the conventional understanding that Chinese women no longer migrate after marriage is, to some degree, not valid. Roberts et al. found that a considerable fraction of Chinese women in their sample migrated for the first time after marriage in 2000 (Roberts et al., 2004). Recent studies have pointed to a rising trend in couple migration (Duan et al., 2013; Fan & Li, 2019; Liang, 2016; L. Meng et al., 2016). Marriage, on its own, seems less deterring for women's migration than it was before.

It is less clear from the literature whether Chinese women's roles as wives or mothers hinder their migration. There is a close tie between marriage and childbearing in China. Out-of-wedlock births are rare, and childbearing usually occurs shortly after marriage. Thus, as for many Chinese couples, marriage often intermingles with parenthood. Compared with the family obligation as wives, more deterring for women's migration prospects may be their obligations as mothers. Mothers, instead of fathers, are expected to care for children in their daily activities and interactions. When children cannot migrate together and demand care work from parents, mothers tend to be tied to their children. Nevertheless, in some cases, mothers' responsibilities of caring for children do not necessarily prevent them from migrating when alternative care arrangements are available, such as having children live in skip-generational households where grandparents become the primary caregivers of their grandchildren (J. Liu, 2014; Murphy, 2020).

The tying of left-behind mothers and children in communities of origin becomes less able to characterize the reality. An increasing number of married couples migrate with children (Fan & Li, 2019). The rise in family migration, couples moving with their children, is in part because of recent policy efforts aiming to admit more migrant children to public schools in the destination. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that this new migration development does not overshadow a larger group of left-behind children (Chan & Ren, 2018). In 2020, of all children in China, 22.5% were left-behind children with at least one migrant parent in their hometowns, whereas a smaller proportion, 13.1%, were migrant children (Cheng et al., 2024).

Gender relations of migrants and their families: Focusing on housework

A large body of studies in different contexts has investigated the other side of the relationship between gender roles and migration, surrounding the research questions of whether migration leads to a change in men's and women's gender roles in the family. This line of work is often framed around the debate on how migration can affect gender equality in family life. Evidence from existing studies is conflicting and inconclusive (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 2006; Pedraza, 1991).

Many scholars view migration to new places as an impetus for gender equality in the family for various reasons. From an economic perspective, some migrant women, especially those moving for employment opportunities, secure a better labor market position and experience an overall improvement in their economic well-being, such as the cases of domestic migrant women in France (Pailhé & Solaz, 2008), Dominican migrant women in the U.S. (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991), and female migrant domestic workers from Southeast Asian countries (Krummel, 2012; Thakkar, 2021). The economic gains may empower migrant women in negotiations of family matters with family members. Moreover, migration to new places may present a new set of cultural ideals and institutional support to migrants. When migrating to places where gender norms are more liberal and institutional support for the family is more solid, migrants' gender role behavior in family life may become less traditional, with women in these families not having to invest as much time in unpaid family labor as before (Haukanes & Pine, 2021).

However, the migration story is not always rosy. The trailing wife hypothesis that female partners suffer from economic loss when they move with their male partners is supported in many contexts. The specific cultural and institutional setting in which migrants are embedded depends on the migration reception contexts. The gender climate of the host context may be more traditional than that of the migrants' origins, as seen in the case of Egyptian migrants in Arab countries (Samari, 2021). While individuals often migrate to places with a higher level of gender equality at the societal level, the flow of return migration does the opposite trick, re-imposing traditional gender values on return migrants (Vlase, 2013). If anything, the broader migration literature highlights the important roles of various migration-related factors - including reasons for migration, migration destinations, and individuals' post-migration employment status - in shaping how men and women negotiate their gender roles in the family after migration.

While measuring gender relations in family life is complicated, housework is a central focus in the literature on gender and migration. Housework provides an excellent window to understand migrants' gender dynamics in the family. Nearly without exception in contemporary societies, housework participation is a gendered aspect of family life, given that women are responsible for a larger share of housework than their male counterparts (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016; Baxter & Tai, 2016). In recent discussions, gender inequality in sharing domestic duties such as housework and care work is considered a significant hurdle to achieving full gender equality (Costoya et al., 2022; Goldscheider et al., 2015).

A small body of quantitative research on migrants' housework participation and division mirrors the message from the broader migration literature: the impact of migration on housework is heterogeneous across migration contexts. Krieger & Salikutluk (2023) find that both male and female immigrants in Germany spend more time on housework. In the long run, immigration does not change the gender gap in such immigrant men's and women's loads of housework. Vidal et al. (2016) show that family migration within Australia does not lead migrant couples to alter the pattern of sharing housework. Both studies suggest that gender relations in the family remain largely the same after the migration.

Some scholars approach this debate by particularly linking migrants' work and family lives. For example, despite working long hours in the labor market, Italian immigrant wives in Canada are responsible for homemaking (Haddad & Lam, 1994). The economic wellbeing of migrant

wives can worsen instead of improving. Some qualitative studies suggest that given their unpromising employment prospects in the host place, Chinese wives who immigrate with their husbands to Australia double down on their domestic roles and assume a larger share of domestic responsibilities after migration (Ho, 2006).

Migration can also affect the housework time for left-behind family members who do not migrate together but stay in communities of origin. In various countries, it is common for households to have one or more members migrate to other places while the rest members stay. Having a migrant family member may disrupt the distribution of housework to varying degrees and impose more household chores on left-behind family members (Antman, 2013). There is some evidence that having a migrant family increases non-migrant women's housework time in various contexts, such as Nepal (Yokying et al., 2023), Kyrgyzstan (Karymshakov et al., 2017), and Georgia (Torosyan et al., 2016). When facing migrant family members, left-behind women seem pushed to invest more time in unpaid domestic work in the family.

When focusing on married couples, it is more prevalent for households to have left-behind wives than left-behind husbands in some contexts. Research focusing on left-behind wives has debated whether having a migrant husband empowers his left-behind wife in the household (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; West et al., 2024). On the one hand, the evidence that left-behind wives spend more time doing housework indicates their heavier investment in the domestic role, possibly pointing out that such wives are more bound to their households. On the other, studies also suggest that left-behind wives, the de facto household in the absence of their husbands, have more power in household decision-making (Desai & Banerji, 2008; Fakir & Abedin, 2021). In this sense, having a migrant husband changes the intra-couple power dynamics in the wife's favor.

Nevertheless, the gender role behavior of left-behind wives in the family, including their time investment in housework and exercise of household decision-making power, is likely heterogeneous, as it is conditional on various factors, such as household structures (Desai & Banerji, 2008; West et al., 2024). For instance, West et al. (2024) find that the empowerment of left-behind Bangladesh women in their households due to having migrant husbands is tempered when living in multigenerational households.

While the scholarly inquiry into the relationship between migration and gender relations in the family is hardly new in the literature, the context of China - including its rooted patriarchal culture

and gendered division of labor in the family - provides an interesting setting to re-examine research questions stemming from these relevant debates. As with many other countries, Chinese families are characterized by a highly unequal division of housework between spouses. According to the most recent national time use survey in 2018, Chinese men's daily housework time was 45 minutes, compared with 126 minutes for Chinese women.⁵ This gendered division of housework is considered one of the key manifestations of the gender-unequal norms scripting Chinese family life (Cook & Dong, 2011; Luo & Chui, 2018; Song & Ji, 2020).

Like elsewhere, migration in China is a family process that may trigger changes in gender role behavior in the family. Given the large numbers of internal migrants and families affected by migration, hardly one can separate China's massive migration, a demographic phenomenon, from the country's concurrent profound family change, which some scholars consider has been moving toward individualization and de-traditionalization (Song & Ji, 2020; Yan, 20). The distribution of housework time between male and female members has become more balanced in Chinese families (Yang, 2014), mirroring the trends observed in many other parts of the world (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016). The female-to-male gender gap in daily housework time decreased from 139 minutes in 1990 to 87 minutes in 2010, possibly reflecting the equalizing of gender relations in Chinese families.

Some scholars view Chinese individuals' migration as a powerful means to transform the gender relations in the family. Across scholarly writings, internal migration is considered a potential catalyst for more egalitarian gender relations in the family, emphasizing the positive changes on multiple fronts for migrant women (Choi & Peng, 2016; Han, 2021; H. Zhang, 2009). Like other migration settings, labor migration boosts Chinese women's economic independence and, thus, elevates their autonomy vis-à-vis family members. Early studies have documented that young unmarried Chinese women's labor migration and their earning capability are a significant bargaining chip that heightens their family status (Davin, 1996; Han, 2021).

Among couples who migrate together, migration may present itself as an opportunity to re-organize household activities in family life. Previous works emphasize migrant women's significant economic roles for the family to understand intra-couple gender exchanges that have

⁵ Statistics from a brief report on this survey: https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-01/25/content_5361065.htm.

changed after migration (Davin, 1996; Haddad & Lam, 1994; Jacka & Gaetano, 2004). In rural China, where the majority of internal migrants come from, agricultural production is still one of the primary income-generating activities. In 2019, the primary sector, mainly farming, absorbed 58.5% of all employed individuals in rural places.⁶ Many married couples in rural areas work on a small area of farmland on a family basis. Wives in these rural households may not receive a share of the income generated from farming or cannot independently decide on household expenses. This lack of economic independence may partly be responsible for women's low status in rural households.

Despite their significant contribution of labor to income-generating activities, rural wives' family roles are often seen mainly as homemakers who cover household chores and care work for family members. The wives' economic roles, which are not always explicit, are underestimated or taken for granted. For example, the economic importance of their sidelined work of raising livestock in the backyard is often neglected because activities of this sort are considered part of the housework for which wives are responsible (Jacka, 2006).

Migration may challenge the gender division of labor among Chinese couples because such wives gain more access to employment opportunities in the host places. Given the nature of labor migration for the overall migration flow in China (Liang et al., 2014), many Chinese internal migrants are highly active in the labor market, with most holding off-farm jobs. To migrant wives, having secured a stable waged job and being economically independent may equip them with more bargaining power in the family. They can position themselves in a less disadvantaged spot relative to their husbands when they bargain over their share of domestic duties.

Migrant wives' gaining traction in the labor market is not merely monetary but also symbolic in an important way that may sway couples' gender relations. Through their earning capability and economic contribution to the family, migrant wives' family roles as income earners are made visible, possibly undermining the husbands' dominance in family matters. One form of such dominance is their lower investment in housework chores, a type of undesirable labor, than their wives.

⁶ Source: the 2020 China Rural Statistical Yearbook, <https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsjsj/2020/indexeh.htm>.

After migration, Chinese couples' prior time allocations to housework tend to be challenged by their changes in day-to-day work schedules, especially for wives. Before migration, many rural wives' tasks mainly include farm work and raising livestock in small numbers. Their work routines are flexible and compatible with running household chores and looking after family members (F. Chen, 2005). Migration to take up off-farm jobs tends to touch off a different daily time routine for such wives and their families. Migrant men and women in China are concentrated in time-demanding occupations, such as construction for men and service sectors for women (Cook & Dong, 2011; Fan & Chen, 2013). Compared with rural natives, migrants work longer hours in China (Z. Mu & Yeung, 2018). At first glance, given their heavier investment in the labor market, Chinese migrant wives seem to assume a less intensive domestic role.

Migration usually exposes Chinese couples to a different cultural context, even though they move within the country. As a large country, China is characterized by remarkable differences in various dimensions between rural and urban places. By large, China's urban places are much more developed than their rural counterparts due to the socialist legacy and the recent economic development that initially unfolded in urban places. The rural-urban divide is so pronounced that Martin Whyte described China as "one country with two societies" (Whyte, 2010). Prevailing local gender norms, closely linked to socioeconomic development, are more equal or diverse in urban places than in rural ones. Considering that many migrants move from villages to cities in China, the gender norms they are exposed to appear to be more egalitarian than what they were accustomed to.

Take housework time as an example. The division of household labor between male and female family members is more gender-unequal in rural areas than urban areas. From 1990 to 2010, the female-to-male ratio of housework time was around 2.5 among rural residents, larger than the ratio of 2 among urban residents (Yang, 2014). Based on a national time-use survey carried out in 2008, research shows that while rural and urban women similarly spent 26 hours per week on housework, urban men spent four more hours on housework than rural men (Table 1) (Dong & An, 2015; L. Wang & Klugman, 2020). These different pieces of evidence all testify to the rural-urban divide of gender norms around labor division in the family. When it comes to housework dynamics, urban families are more egalitarian than rural families.

Table 1: Time use patterns (hours per week), by rural/urban differences

	Total		Urban		Rural	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Paid work	42	30.7	33	25	51.7	37.3
Unpaid work	9.6	26.1	11.7	26	7.2	26
Housework	8.1	22.3	10	22.5	6.1	21.9
Childcare	1.3	3.6	1.5	3.2	1	4
Adult care	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.1
Total hours	51.6	56.8	44.7	51	58.9	63.3
Percentage gap (%)		33		28.6		37.6

Note. Percentage gap (%) is the gender gap in unpaid work for total working hours per week

Source: Wang & Klugman, 2019, page 55

In China, most internal migrants come from rural areas and move to urban places, and they are caught in the middle between the different gender norms of family roles on both ends. According to the classic assimilation theory, one may anticipate that these migrants' gender role behavior, such as housework participation, becomes similar to that of the majority group in the destination (Alba & Nee, 2015). Upon embracing the urban gender norms, migrant wives may feel unsatisfactory about the prior way of sharing housework that they take up most of the housework (Fan, 2008; N. Zhang, 2013).

Chinese migration research has been tussling over whether internal migration is associated with individuals' changing gender relations in the family, including their gender role attitudes and behavior (Choi & Peng, 2016; Y. Liu & Erwin, 2015; C. Zhang et al., 2013). Both the aforementioned economic change and cultural influence hint at the potential of migration to disrupt some of the roots backing the gender-unequal family dynamics in China.

At least from an ideational perspective, this view has received amounting empirical support among studies on Chinese migration. Their evidence suggests that compared with natives, migrants' gender role attitudes are more egalitarian, likely signaling a liberalizing effect of migration on Chinese individuals' views on gender roles (J. Chen et al., 2010; Y. Hu, 2016; Yuan

& Zhang, 2023). Nevertheless, it is much less clear whether Chinese migrants' gender role behavior in the family changes to be less traditional, as their attitude change does.

Apart from migrating together, some married couples in China experience migration in which only one spouse moves, the husband in most cases, and the other spouse stays in their hometowns (Duan et al., 2017; Qin & Lyu, 2020). This type of spousal migration, in effect, splits the household spatially, resulting in multi-local households. Having a migrant spouse creates a different household circumstance than for those who migrate together. The immediate consequence of spousal migration for left-behind spouses is the physical absence of a spouse from the household. Also absent is the migrant spouse's contribution of labor to household activities.

Scholars have been discussing the impact of having a migrant spouse on the left-behind spouse's family role and its broader implications for the gender relations of these Chinese couples who do not share the same roof (He-Schaefer & Fan, 2024; Ye et al., 2016). While conjugal gender relations take many forms, housework participation is a key factor in understanding gender dynamics between spouses in family life. In China, it is more common for split households in the source place to keep left-behind wives rather than left-behind husbands. When faced with a migrant husband, a wife appears inadvertently to double down on her domestic role by spending more time attending to household chores to meet the needs of children and other family members.

Qualitative research suggests that Chinese left-behind wives encounter heavier workloads because of the multiple family roles they need to fulfill after their husbands leave the household. Replacing their husbands, left-behind wives need to engage more in farm work; meanwhile, they have to cover household chores like they used to (H. Wu & Ye, 2016; Ye et al., 2016). Similar to their counterparts in many contexts (de Haas & van Rooij, 2010; Ghimire et al., 2021), the left-behind experience of Chinese women presents a complex and partly inconsistent story of changing gender dynamics in the family. In the absence of their husbands, left-behind Chinese wives seem to hold more decision-making power and have more autonomy in the household. However, they also have to grapple with labor loss due to having migrant husbands. The migration of their husbands may impose more household duties on them, reinforcing their female-specific roles as homemakers.

Quantitative findings are consistent in that for rural Chinese households, having a migrant household member is associated with women spending more time on income-generating farm

work. This evidence is likely to indicate that left-behind women in split households substitute the migrant members in economic production such that they provide more remunerative labor for farm work (Chang et al., 2011; R. Mu & van de Walle, 2011). Compared with economic activities, it is less clear how left-behind Chinese spouses' participation in housework responds to a spouse's migration. The reallocation of time to paid work and housework may be different household processes because housework tends to be more sensitive to one's family roles than paid labor.

Few scholars examine household structures, such as who lives in the household with whom, to understand the experiences of spouses left behind in China. As observed in other contexts (Desai & Banerji, 2008; West et al., 2024), household structures may play a key role in shaping left-behind family members' daily experiences in family life in the Chinese context. Though declining, intergenerational households are not an uncommon living arrangement among Chinese people. Since co-resident Chinese parents often help share household duties with their adult children (S. Hu & Mu, 2021), the extra amount of housework that left-behind spouses take up should be shaped by the household structure related to whether adult children and their parents or parents-in-law live together.

In sum, housework participation is an important indicator of one's gender roles in the family, making it a valuable lens through which to understand the gender dynamics of migrants and their families left behind. This analytical focus on housework suits China, which has a large migrant population in the migrant-receiving place and a large left-behind population in the migrant-sending place.

Data, methods, and ethical concerns

Each empirical study of the thesis draws on longitudinal data from a different nationally representative survey. These surveys contain different critical information to address the key research questions of the respective studies. Studies I and II use data from the repeated cross-sectional survey program, the *Chinese Household Income Project* (CHIP). This survey program is the Chinese data source contributing to the international project of the *Luxembourg Income Study*. Study I uses the 2007 and 2008 rounds of the CHIP, a special component of the CHIP program. They differ from the other rounds of CHIP surveys in that they employ a longitudinal design and, for the first time, sample migrants living in urban areas. The 2008 and 2009 rounds of CHIP surveys are thus also called the *Longitudinal Survey on Rural Urban Migration in China* (RUMiC) (Akgüç et al., 2014). Study II uses the 2018 round of the CHIP, which is the most recent one. Study III uses panel data from the *China Health and Nutrition Survey*. Study IV uses panel data from the *China Family Panel Studies*.

In the following discussions, I will introduce the surveys and datasets associated with each empirical study and present the type of migration under examination and research methods. Ethical considerations are discussed at the end of this section.

RUMiC (Study I)

Study I uses the rural sample of panel data from the first two rounds (2008 and 2009) of the RUMiC. This survey used a multistage probability sampling approach. It covered nine provinces distributed across eastern, central, and western regions in China, including Anhui, Chongqing, Guangdong, Hebei, Henan, Hubei, Jiangsu, Sichuan, and Zhejiang. The attrition between the 2008 and 2009 waves is minor, with a loss of less than 1% (Akgüç et al., 2014).

I focus on short-term labor migration intentions and outcomes in this study. Given the research question regarding gender differences in the migration intention-behavior link, the RUMiC is a reasonable data source because it includes information on respondents' migration intentions and

can track their migration activities over time. To my knowledge, the RUMiC is the only large-scale nationally representative survey collecting information on migration intentions within a specified time frame.

The 2008 baseline wave of the RUMiC asked for information on whether respondents intended or planned to migrate for work in the near future, and its 2009 follow-up wave collected information on respondents' migration activities over the past year. As Study I treats migration intention and outcome indicators as dichotomous variables, binary logistic regression models with county fixed effects are used in this study.

The 2018 CHIP (Study II)

Study II examines a specific type of migration, namely the first labor migration, and uses the 2018 round of the *Chinese Household Income Project*. The 2018 CHIP used a multistage probability sampling approach and covered the same nice provinces as the RUMiC. The similarity between the RUMiC and the 2018 CHIP is because, as a tradition, the sample of CHIP surveys draws on a much larger random sample of the *Annual Household Survey* administered by the National Bureau of Statistics of China.⁷

Song and I draw on the rural sample and part of the urban sample from this survey. The critical advantage of this survey is that it included both rural natives living in rural areas (the source place) and rural-origin migrants living in urban areas (the host place). Therefore, the 2018 CHIP did not select rural-origin respondents based on their migration outcomes – whether respondents had migrated at the time of the survey. Including respondents from both ends of the migration flow is important for estimating unbiased relationships when migration is the outcome of interest (Hoem, 2014; Hoem & Nedoluzhko, 2016).

⁷ Study I and II used data from different rounds of surveys that belong to the *Chinese Household Income Project*. As mentioned by Walder & He (2014), the CHIP survey team does not publish the response rates of their surveys. Government-supported surveys in China, like the CHIP, have high response rates, as benchmarked by international standards. Per personal correspondence with a scholar knowledgeable about the CHIP's survey implementation, the response rate is close to 99%. Despite the lack of available statistics on response rates, the CHIP surveys should be reliable, and their data should be of high quality, as they have been widely used in academic research.

Of the multiple rounds of the CHIP, the 2018 round is the first one to collect respondents' ages at first marriage. The 2018 CHIP also collected information on the timing of first labor migration and the basic demographic information of respondents' children, including their dates of birth. The survey information on the occurrence and timing of demographic events such as marriage, childbearing, and migration suffices for us to reconstruct respondents' life course for further analysis.

We calculated the median ages at first marriage, first childbearing, and first labor migration for different birth cohorts of men and women to delineate their changes in these three life course events. We used standard event history techniques of Kaplan-Meier estimators and discrete-time logistics models for binary and multivariate analyses to examine the gender and birth cohort differences in how marriage and childbearing are associated with first labor migration.

The CHNS (Study III)

Study III draws on seven waves (1997, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2011, and 2015) of panel data from the *China Health and Nutrition Survey*. The survey design of the CHNS is complex because its sampling has undergone significant developments. The CHNS is, nevertheless, approximately nationally representative. It covers 15 of the 34 provinces or province-level administrative units in China. Among them are Beijing, Chongqing, Guangxi, Guizhou, Heilongjiang, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangsu, Liaoning, Shaanxi, Shandong, Shanghai, Yunnan, and Zhejiang. Within each province included in the survey, a stratified probability sample was generated using a multistage, random cluster design. Between the two consecutive waves of the CHNS, the attrition rates are, on average, around 10% at the individual and household levels (B. Zhang et al., 2014).

The migration under examination is a spouse's migration among married couples. Only the rural sample of the CHNS is used in this study. Thus, the study population includes those living in villages and townships. The CHNS is well situated for our research questions about how having a migrant husband or wife is related to the non-migrant spouse's housework time and how this association is moderated by co-residence with parents or parents-in-law. The CHNS had a long observation window extending for almost 20 years, allowing us to capture whether couples

experienced the out-migration of a spouse. The CHNS has routinely and consistently collected a wealth of information on household structures and household members' time spent on housework.

Given the panel data of the CHNS, Tong and I employed individual fixed effects models to compare the housework outcomes of the same husbands or wives when they had co-resident spouses versus when they had migrant spouses. We additionally specified an interaction term between having a migrant spouse and living in intergenerational households to test the moderating role of intergenerational co-residence. Models were separately fitted for men and women.

The CFPS (study IV)

Study IV uses five waves of panel data (2010, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020) from the *China Family Panel Studies*. The CFPS is a nationally representative survey that collects longitudinal data in a prospective manner (Xie & Hu, 2014). The survey's sampling frame included all province-level administrative units in mainland China except Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, and Ningxia, covering 95% of the Chinese population in 2010, the year the baseline survey was conducted. The baseline survey implemented a multistage probability strategy for building a nationally representative sample. The follow-up rates before the 2020 wave were higher than 85% at the household level and around 80% at the individual level (Y. Sun et al., 2024). The attrition between the 2018 and 2020 waves was slightly higher because of COVID-19, a period when it was more difficult than usual to follow and re-interview respondents.

I focus on married couples' joint migration within and across provinces and how such moves shape couples' housework outcomes. Unlike the three previous empirical studies, I consider not only the rural-origin group but also include the urban-origin group in the final sample. Compared with other large-scale social surveys in China, the CFPS is the only nationally representative survey that systematically follows respondents, even when they migrate to other places or not between waves and, at the same time, routinely asks for information on housework time. Given its detailed information on migration history and time spent on housework, the CFPS is an appropriate data source to address this study's research questions. I use couple fixed effects models to estimate how couple migration within and across provinces is associated with several housework outcomes both at the individual and couple levels.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the thesis, I take consistent and well-considered measures to guarantee that the usage of individual-level data aligns with the overall aim of ensuring the integrity of participating individuals and protecting against various forms of harm (Swedish Research Council, 2025).

The four individual studies draw on pre-existing data from surveys that are publicly accessible. The *China Health and Nutrition Survey* has ethical approval from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the National Institute of Nutrition and Food Safety. The *China Family Panel Studies* is approved by the Biomedical Institutional Review Board at Peking University. All respondents in these two surveys would be given a consent form before participating. The other two surveys – the *Longitudinal Survey on Rural Urban Migration in China* and the 2018 round of the *Chinese Household Income Project* – were carried out with the assistance of the National Bureau of Statistics of China.

I submitted an application and reached an agreement with each survey's data management team to access the data on the condition that I would not exploit the data to identify survey respondents and that I would utilize the data solely for research purposes. All the person-level data from these surveys I have accessed are anonymized upon distribution. Respondents were identified via a given personal identifier. As for geographical information, only provinces are directly identifiable by the data from these surveys. Therefore, the risk of exposing respondents according to their locations should be low. More importantly, all these surveys do not distribute the key to identifying respondents to data users.

Data are stored in a secure location that only I can access. Throughout data analyses, I have adhered to the ethical guidelines of the Department of Sociology at Stockholm University. This thesis does not use any ethically sensitive information from these datasets. Subgroup analyses were only performed as long as the numbers within groups were large enough to ensure that survey respondents could not be identified with the information used to group them. All results are presented in an aggregate manner.

Overall, in handling individual-level data throughout the analysis, I took extra caution to minimize the risk of causing harm of any sort to research participants as much as possible so that the potential risk was smaller than the benefits of using personal data.

Summary of the empirical studies

Study I: Weaker Intentions or Lower Realization? Explaining Gender Differences in Labor Migration from Rural China

The main objective of Study 1 is to explain gender differences in labor migration outcomes by linking individuals' short-term migration intentions and outcomes. There is strong, robust evidence that in China, women have lower migration risks than men (Fan, 2018; Zheng & Yang, 2016).

From the perspective of the migration intention-behavior link, there are substantively different explanations for the gender differences in migration outcomes observed in China: 1) women have weaker labor migration intentions than men; 2) women are less responsive to positive labor migration intentions than men; and 3) a combination of the two aforementioned explanations. By linking respondents' labor migration intentions and subsequent labor migration outcomes, this study aims to extend our prior understanding by exploring how gender differences in migration risks emerge.

I draw on the rural sample from the first two waves (2008 & 2009) of the *Longitudinal Survey on Rural Urban Migration* (RUMiC). The baseline wave in 2008 and the follow-up wave in 2009 collected information on one-year labor migration intentions and labor migration outcomes, respectively. With the data, I construct the link between one-year labor migration intentions and outcomes for rural Chinese men and women.

This study finds that compared with rural men, rural women have lower levels of one-year labor migration intentions and outcomes and are less likely to turn positive labor migration intentions into migration behavior. This study finds little evidence that rural men's and women's differences in migration intentions are the primary reason for rural women's lower labor migration risks. Instead, this study suggests that part of the gender differences in labor migration outcomes is because men are more responsive than women to their positive labor migration intentions.

In China, rural Chinese women's lower realization of labor migration intentions is also likely due to their lower factual or expected economic returns from labor migration and their lower autonomy to act on will, compared with their male counterparts.

Study II: Changing Roles of Marriage and Family Status for Labor Migration? The Case of Rural China (with Jing Song)

This study examines whether the roles of marriage and childbearing have changed in rural Chinese individuals' decisions of first labor migration against a few important migration developments in China. First, over birth cohorts, first labor migration occurs earlier, but first marriage and childbearing occur later. Second, couple or family migration has become more common. Third, social policies governing migrants' rights have become more inclusive, especially migrant children's access to public education in the host place. Against such demographic and policy trends, Song and I postulate that the roles of marriage and childbearing for labor migration have become less constraining for migration decisions. We investigate this potential temporal trend with birth cohort indicators.

This study uses the 2018 round of the *Chinese Household Income Project*, and the final sample includes rural-origin respondents born from 1951 to 2000. We group respondents into five successive birth cohorts (1951-60; 1961-70; 1971-80; 1981-1990; 1991-2000). We find that over the birth cohorts, rural men and women migrated for work earlier for the first time and had a higher proportion of having experienced first labor migration. We calculate the ages at first marriage, first childbearing, and first labor migration for groups stratified by gender and birth cohort. The results suggest that rural men and women had a remarkable shift in the timing of these life course events across the birth cohorts. Compared with older cohorts whose first labor migration often occurred after first marriage and first childbearing, a reversed pattern is observed that first labor migration tended to occur before first marriage and first childbearing among men born in the 1981-1990 and 1991-2000 birth cohorts and women born in the 1991-2000 birth cohorts.

The results from discrete-time logistic models show that being married and having children aged 0-6 and 7-18 lower the risks of men's and women's first labor migration. While there is no gender difference in the role of marriage, having children aged 0-6 and 7-18 is a greater obstacle

for women's labor migration than that of men. The models that allow the effects of being married and having children aged 0-6 and 7-18 to vary across birth cohorts by specifying interaction terms show that having children, especially those aged 7-18, has become more hindering for first labor migration over birth cohorts, especially for rural women. This evidence on birth cohort trends differs from our initial expectation that marriage and childbearing evolve to be less obstructing for labor migration.

Study III: Spousal Migration, Intergenerational Co-residence, and the Non-migrant Husbands' and Wives' Housework Time in Rural China (with Yuying Tong)

This study focuses on the migration of a spouse, either a husband or a wife, and examines how such spousal migration impacts the non-migrant spouse's housework time. Tong and I also place this household process of re-allocating housework beyond intra-couple marital exchange by considering whether co-residence with parents or parents-in-law has played a moderating role. The gender differences in the impact of having a migrant spouse on the non-migrant spouse's housework time and the moderating role of intergenerational co-residence are the key research questions of this study.

We use longitudinal data from the *China Health and Nutrition Survey* (1997-2015, 7 waves of panel data) to fit individual fixed effect models. This study finds two gendered household processes relating to housework time allocation between household members. First, the impact of having a migrant spouse on the non-migrant spouse's housework time differs for non-migrant husbands and wives. While having a migrant husband does not change his non-migrant wife's housework time (no significant relationship), having a migrant wife substantially increases her non-migrant husband's housework time (a positive relationship).

The second gendered household process points to the different moderating roles of intergenerational co-residence for non-migrant husbands and wives. When non-migrant husbands live in intergenerational households, they will likely receive support from parents or parents-in-law. The positive relationship between having a migrant wife and the non-migrant husband's housework time is thus considerably reduced. In contrast, the moderating role of intergenerational co-residence is the opposite for non-migrant wives. For non-migrant wives, living in

intergenerational households increases their housework time, likely reflecting their caregiving obligations toward parents or parents-in-law.

Echoing prior research (Desai & Banerji, 2008; West et al., 2024), this study has demonstrated the importance of household structures, which can be a critical factor in shaping left-behind spouses' family life dynamics. Given that intergenerational exchanges are gendered in China, left-behind husbands and wives are likely to fare differently in intergenerational households, as evidenced by this study.

Study IV: Couple Migration and Housework Dynamics in China: A Longitudinal Analysis

The objective of Study IV is to examine whether couples' joint migration affects their intra-couple time allocation in housework, motivated by the long-lasting and contentious debate on whether migration can lead to higher or lower levels of gender equality in family life. In the Chinese context, I consider the highly gender-unequal division of housework as one important indicator of married couples' unequal marital exchanges in daily family practice. As such, I approach the debate by assessing whether couple migration leads to a more egalitarian way of sharing housework.

This study examines two types of couple migration in China: married couples' cross-county and county-province migration. To grasp a thorough understanding of migrant couples' housework dynamics, I include various housework outcomes at both the individual (husbands' housework time and wives' housework time) and couple levels (couples' total housework time, the wife's share of the couple's housework time, and the female-to-male gender gap in housework time). I draw on six waves of panel data (2010-2020) from the *China Family Panel Studies* and employ couple fixed effects models to compare the housework outcomes of the same couples before and after their joint migration.

The results show that couples' migration to another county within the same province is unrelated to housework outcomes. In comparison, couples' migration to another province lowers both husbands' and wives' housework time, thus decreasing couples' total housework time. Nevertheless, like cross-county couple migration, cross-province couple migration does not change the wife's share of the couple's total housework time or the gender gap in housework time.

Suppose these two couple-level indicators can measure levels of gender inequality in couples' sharing of housework duties. Neither cross-county nor cross-province couple migration has the potential to sway how couples divide housework. This study yields a clear message that at best, one can observe the potential equalizing impacts of migration on Chinese couples' gender relations in other aspects, such as gender role attitudes, rather than the intra-couple gender division of housework.

Concluding remarks

Understanding gender differences in migration: Perspectives and assumptions

The gendered migration patterns in China set the scene for the thesis, which seeks to better understand why men and women exhibit different migration patterns. Consistent with a large body of prior works showing Chinese men's higher spatial mobility, this study finds different aspects of gender differentials in internal migration outcomes. Chinese men have higher risks of short-term labor migration (Study I) and first-time labor migration (Study II) than women. Among married couples, it is far more common for husbands to migrate than wives (Study III).

Unlike fertility research, in which scholars have long used fertility intentions to examine fertility outcomes (Schoen et al., 1999; Spéder & Kapitány, 2015), migration intentions have received less attention in demographic studies on migration issues. As a case study about internal migration in China, Study I has demonstrated how the analytical approach of using the link between migration intentions and outcomes can be mobilized to deepen our understanding of the sources of gender differences in migration outcomes. That study suggests that Chinese men are more likely than women to act on their positive migration intentions, partially explaining the observed gender differences in labor migration outcomes.

Despite the contentious debates around the usefulness of migration intentions (Constant & Massey, 2002; Wanner, 2021), the potential of migration intentions may be underestimated in migration studies. Migration intentions can arguably be a powerful tool that researchers can mobilize to understand more in-depth why gender differences in migration outcomes arise. The added value of applying migration intentions in migration studies aiming to explain gender differences in migration outcomes becomes more apparent when considering that gender differences in migration behavior are widely observed in the world. Study I has only showcased one of the many possible ways migration intentions exert their impacts. It is likely that the migration intention-behavior link differs between migration contexts.

A tradition of the line of migration studies attempting to understand gender differences in migration outcomes is to scrutinize men's and women's migration decisions from the lens of their gender roles in the family. The gender division of labor in the family is often assumed to shape family members' migration decisions, either incentivizing or discouraging migration for men and women (Fan, 2003; Jacka, 2006; Pedraza, 1991). However, this set of relationships is context-dependent, since the gender division of labor in the family differs from one place to another. The thesis fleshes out this assumption in the Chinese context: mothers, given their roles of nurturing children, are less prone to leave the households to migrate for work than fathers (Study II).

One of the thesis's main takeaways is that, echoing what migration research has repeatedly emphasized, migration contexts matter in understanding the relationships between gender roles in the family and migration (Connelly et al., 2010; Landolt & Wei Da, 2005; Lu & Tao, 2015). Study II has demonstrated that time is one of the many important layers of migration contexts. The widely held assumption that marriage and parenthood impede Chinese individuals' migration has remained largely uncontested, despite the country's remarkable migration developments in recent decades. It seems that these relationships are assumed to be stable over time.

The thesis, however, challenges the stability of this assumption by showing the different likelihoods of migration among different cohorts of Chinese parents. Being a father or mother is likely to mean different considerations in migration decision-making for those born in the 1960s and the 1980s. The differences in migration considerations across different birth cohorts of parents stem from a set of intermingled social dynamics that took place during the years elapsed, including changing migration norms, changing life course, and changing social policies.

In short, there is hardly a set of prototypical relationships fixed across time as a handy tool for researchers to understand how men's and women's roles in the family can trigger or hinder their migrations. Thus, for this line of research in China and beyond, to achieve a deeper understanding of gender differences in migration, it is important to pay closer attention to certain assumptions about gender roles in the family (e.g., what it means by being a good father or mother), as these roles tend to evolve even within a given context and interact with concurrent social dynamics.

The inertia of gender relations in Chinese families affected by migration

The thesis has brought to the fore the persistent gender-unequal norms of men's and women's roles in Chinese families, especially among the married group. One consistent message from the thesis is that Chinese individuals' gender role behavior in family life is not severely challenged by migration. For one, the gender division of housework between migrant couples has not shifted to be more egalitarian or less (Study IV). Additionally, having a migrant wife imposes much housework on left-behind husbands, appearing to challenge the default setting that husbands rarely attend to the bulk of housework (Study III). Nevertheless, left-behind husbands take on significantly less housework whenever alternative labor is available in the household. Such left-behind husbands' hesitance to take up more housework duties is likely perpetuated by the "men outside, women inside" gender norms that set men free from covering housework in the family.

The thesis's overall findings on the gender relations in migrants' families in China seem somewhat at odds with the narrative with a progressive and developmental tone among many scholarly writings on Chinese migration (Davín, 1996; Y. Hu, 2016; C. Zhang et al., 2013; H. Zhang, 2009). From a macro view, internal migration, especially considering its nearly incessant supply of labor for the country's emerging labor markets, has been a driving force of great importance behind China's economic development over the past few decades. The discourse of societal development powered by migration is a wholesale package, entailing the country's concurrent family change, including changing gender dynamics around the family.

At times, the relationship between migration and family change is presented as linear storytelling: migration steers the traditional, unequal gender relations in Chinese families to be modern, diverse, and egalitarian. As posited by some scholars, migration, in the form of either migrating oneself or having migrant family members, may disrupt some of the socioeconomic underpinnings of the traditional gender relations in Chinese families through various channels. These channels include the social remittance of new gender values, women's economic empowerment, and changes in living arrangements (Connelly et al., 2010; Levitt, 1998; Lu & Tao, 2015).

Different from such a positive view on the influences of migration on family life, the thesis has instead projected an account of the inertia of the rooted gender norms about men's and women's family roles, which seem to have deeply affected the gender dynamics in migrants' families. It is clear from this thesis that migration does not give rise to a substantive change in

Chinese men's and women's gender role behavior in their families, at least in terms of their housework participation and division. In short, if migration is truly a driving force of family change in the Chinese context, this thesis highlights that there is likely a limit to the force.

More broadly, as for the context of contemporary China, the thesis puts a question mark on the migration narrative in relation to the country's family change. It is worth taking a second thought to consider what migration means for migrants, migrants' families, and their family lives before turning to the assumption that migration equals more gender equality in the private sphere.

Limitations, reflections, and future research directions

The heavy focus on rural-origin Chinese people

The study populations of three empirical studies consist of rural-origin individuals (Studies I, II, and III). Study IV also has a high proportion of rural-origin respondents in the final sample. The focus on rural-origin individuals is strategic because the internal migration flow of China has been from rural to urban areas. This similar research design across studies is partly due to practical considerations. The RUMiC (Study I) and the 2018 CHIP (Study II) collected information on migration activities only for rural-origin respondents but not urban-origin respondents.

Nevertheless, in recent years, China has witnessed a rise in urban-to-urban migration, the movement of urban-origin individuals (Cai & Wang, 2022). This migrant group is beyond the scope of this thesis. When suitable data are available, it will be interesting to re-examine the research question raised by this thesis and compare the similarities and differences between rural-origin and urban-origin individuals' migration and its impacts on family life.

Housework and its assumptions

Studies III and IV investigate the consequences of migration and rely on housework outcomes to understand whether migration can lead to changes in Chinese men's and women's gender role behavior in the family. The approach of using housework as the outcome is reasonable, given that Chinese couples hold a gender-unequal way of distributing housework, with female partners covering more housework duties than their male partners. In addition, existing studies often consider how couples share housework as an important indicator reflecting gender equality in family life (Brines, 1994; S. Hu & Mu, 2021).

A few caveats should be highlighted with this approach. First, the thesis does not intend to tread into the debate of gender equality versus gender equity in housework sharing. Nonetheless, it is worth clarifying that a more equal distribution of housework time primarily reflects the

equality aspect of housework sharing from an objective, quantitative perspective. This thesis has not examined the equity aspect of housework sharing from a subjective, qualitative perspective. From the perspective of equity, research on housework participation and division raises slightly different questions from that of this thesis, such as whether one perceives his or her contribution to housework as fair (Perales et al., 2015).

Second, what is open to discussion is the implications of the finding that left-behind husbands perform more housework (Study III). It is tempting to interpret it as a shift toward more gender equality in family life, given men's deeper involvement in housework, a type of labor they usually tend to shun. However, a second thought is perhaps needed. In split households with left-behind husbands and migrant wives, the conventional way of dividing family roles for the husband and wife are just swapped. The non-migrant husbands have little choice but to accept their migrant wife's erstwhile family role as homemakers.

Third, an overarching question the thesis sets out to answer is whether migration, in various forms, can shape gender relations in the family, and if so, how. Using housework time as an outcome is a valuable and established approach. Due to data constraints, this thesis leaves care work unexamined. Care work time is another important time-use component in day-to-day family life. Future studies can pursue whether care work time is as impacted by spousal migration and couple migration as housework time.

Definitions of migration in China

The first challenge facing scholars on Chinese migration is to determine which type of migration to examine. This issue is more complicated than it seems. Despite an official definition from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, research has used a wide range of definitions, which are often inconsistent.

In many cases, the main reason for using inconsistent migration definitions is the lack of information from data sources, usually surveys. Insufficient survey information on migration activities has left some basic facts about Chinese migration unclear. Consider first-time migration, a unique and significant life event, as an example. Our understanding of this type of migration is still considerably limited as to when Chinese people move, where, for what reasons, and for how

long, let alone the more nuanced and sophisticated knowledge that needs to build on such basic facts.

Study III is an endeavor to address the clarity issue in defining migration with data from the 2018 CHIP. That study pits first labor migration to another township, one specific and clearly defined type of migration, under examination. This is as far as the 2018 CHIP can go with its survey information. Future studies aiming to yield a more precise and detailed picture of migration patterns in China could turn to the 2014 wave of the *China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study*, which has a special module retrospectively collecting detailed migration data. Another valuable source is the *China Labor-force Dynamics Survey*, which has also collected a wealth of information on migration activities in retrospective and prospective manners.

References

- Akgüç, M., Giuliotti, C., & Zimmermann, K. F. (2014). The RUMiC longitudinal survey: Fostering research on labor markets in China. *IZA Journal of Labor & Development*, 3(1), 5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-9020-3-5>
- Alba, R., & Nee, V. (2015). *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Harvard University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674020115>
- Alexander, J. T., & Steidl, A. (2012). Gender and the “Laws of Migration”: A Reconsideration of Nineteenth-Century Patterns. *Social Science History*, 36(2), 223–241.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0145553200011779>
- Altintas, E., & Sullivan, O. (2016). Fifty years of change updated: Cross-national gender convergence in housework. *Demographic Research*, 35, 455–470.
<https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2016.35.16>
- Antman, F. M. (2013). The impact of migration on family left behind. In A. Constant & K. Zimmermann, *International handbook on the economics of migration* (pp. 293–308). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781782546078.00025>
- Baxter, J., & Tai, T. (2016). Inequalities in Unpaid Work: A Cross-National Comparison. In M. L. Connerley & J. Wu (Eds.), *Handbook on Well-Being of Working Women* (pp. 653–671). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9897-6_36
- Bernard, A., Bell, M., & Zhu, Y. (2019). Migration in China: A cohort approach to understanding past and future trends. *Population, Space and Place*, 25(6).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2234>
- Brines, J. (1994). Economic Dependency, Gender, and the Division of Labor at Home. *American Journal of Sociology*, 100(3), 652–688. <https://doi.org/10.1086/230577>
- Brooks, M. R., & Ran, T. (2003). *China’s labor market performance and challenges*. International Monetary Fund.
- Cai, F., & Wang, D. (2022). Impacts of Internal Migration on Economic Growth and Urban Development in China. In J. DeWind & J. Holdaway (Eds.), *Migration and Development*

- Within and Across Borders: Research and Policy Perspectives on Internal and International Migration*. United Nations. <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210021821>
- Chan, K. W. (2015). Five decades of the Chinese hukou system. In I. R. Robyn & G. Fei (Eds.), *Handbook of Chinese Migration*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781783476640.00009>
- Chan, K. W., & Ren, Y. (2018). Children of migrants in China in the twenty-first century: Trends, living arrangements, age-gender structure, and geography. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 59(2), 133–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2018.1535906>
- Chang, H., Dong, X., & MacPhail, F. (2011). Labor migration and time use patterns of the left-behind children and elderly in rural China. *World Development*, 39(12), 2199–2210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2011.05.021>
- Chen, F. (2005). Employment transitions and the household division of labor in China. *Social Forces*, 84(2), 831–851. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2006.0010>
- Chen, J., Liu, H., & Xie, Z. (2010). Effects of Rural–Urban Return Migration on Women’s Family Planning and Reproductive Health Attitudes and Behavior in Rural China. *Studies in Family Planning*, 41(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4465.2010.00222.x>
- Cheng, M., Chen, Y., Lyu, L., & Bai, Y. (2024). Children on the Move in China: Insights from the Census Data 2000–2020. *Population and Development Review*, 50(3), 865–889. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12653>
- Cheng, M., & Duan, C. (2021). The changing trends of internal migration and urbanization in China: New evidence from the seventh National Population Census. *China Population and Development Studies*, 5(3), 275–295. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42379-021-00093-7>
- Choi, S. Y. P. (2019). Migration, masculinity, and family. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(1), 78–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1427562>
- Choi, S. Y. P., & Peng, Y. (2016). *Masculine compromise: Migration, family, and gender in China*. University of California Press.
- Chort, I. (2014). Mexican Migrants to the US: What Do Unrealized Migration Intentions Tell Us About Gender Inequalities? *World Development*, 59, 535–552. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.01.036>

- Chunyu, M. D., Liang, Z., & Wu, Y. (2013). Interprovincial Return Migration in China: Individual and Contextual Determinants in Sichuan Province in the 1990S. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 45(12), 2939–2958.
<https://doi.org/10.1068/a45360>
- Connelly, R., Roberts, K., & Zheng, Z. (2010). The Impact of Circular Migration on the Position of Married Women in Rural China. *Feminist Economics*, 16(1), 3–41.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13545700903382752>
- Constant, A., & Massey, D. S. (2002). Return Migration by German Guestworkers: Neoclassical versus New Economic Theories. *International Migration*, 40(4), 5–38.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00204>
- Cook, S., & Dong, X. (2011). Harsh Choices: Chinese Women’s Paid Work and Unpaid Care Responsibilities under Economic Reform: Chinese Women’s Paid Work and Unpaid Care Responsibilities. *Development and Change*, 42(4), 947–965.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2011.01721.x>
- Costoya, V., Echeverría, L., Edo, M., Rocha, A., & Thailinger, A. (2022). Gender Gaps within Couples: Evidence of Time Re-allocations during COVID-19 in Argentina. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 43(2), 213–226. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-021-09770-8>
- Davin, D. (1996). Gender and rural-urban migration in China. *Gender & Development*, 4(1), 24–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/741921947>
- Davin, D. (2014). Demographic and Social Impact of Internal Migration in China. In I. Attané & B. Gu (Eds.), *Analysing China’s Population* (Vol. 3, pp. 139–162). Springer Netherlands.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-8987-5_8
- de Haas, H., & van Rooij, A. (2010). Migration as emancipation? The impact of internal and international migration on the position of women left behind in rural Morocco. *Oxford Development Studies*, 38(1), 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600810903551603>
- Desai, S., & Banerji, M. (2008). Negotiated identities: Male migration and left-behind wives in India. *Journal of Population Research*, 25(3), 337–355.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03033894>

- Dong, X., & An, X. (2015). Gender Patterns and Value of Unpaid Care Work: Findings From China's First Large-Scale Time Use Survey. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 61(3), 540–560. <https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.12119>
- Duan, C., Lv, L., & Zou, X. (2013). Major Challenges for China's Floating Population and Policy Suggestions: An Analysis of the 2010 Population Census Data. *Population Research*, 37(2), 17–24.
- Duan, C., Qin, M., & Lai, M. (2017). Study on Left-behind Wives in China. *Population Journal*, 39(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.16405/j.cnki.1004-129X.2017.01.001>
- Duan, C., Qiu, Y., Huang, F., & Xie, D. (2022). From 6.57 Million to 376 Million: Remarks on Migration Transition in China. *Population Research*, 46(6), 41–58.
- Fakir, A. M. S., & Abedin, N. (2021). Empowered by Absence: Does Male Out-migration Empower Female Household Heads Left Behind? *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 22(2), 503–527. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-019-00754-0>
- Fan, C. C. (2003). Rural-urban migration and gender division of labor in transitional China. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27(1), 24–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.00429>
- Fan, C. C. (2008). *China on the move: Migration, the state, and the household*. Routledge.
- Fan, C. C. (2009). Flexible work, flexible household: Labor migration and rural families in China. In L. Keister (Ed.), *Work and organizations in China after thirty years of transition* (Vol. 19, pp. 377–408). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S0277-2833\(2009\)0000019016](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0277-2833(2009)0000019016)
- Fan, C. C. (2018). Gender Differences in Chinese Migration. In C. Hsieh & M. Lu (Eds.), *Changing China* (1st ed., pp. 243–268). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429501760-15>
- Fan, C. C., & Chen, C. (2013). The new-generation migrant workers in China. In F. Wu, F. Zhang, & C. Webster (Eds.), *Rural Migrants in Urban China* (pp. 17–35). Routledge.
- Fan, C. C., & Chen, C. (2020). Left behind? Migration stories of two women in rural China. *Social Inclusion*, 8(2), 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v8i2.2673>
- Fan, C. C., & Li, T. (2019). Familization of rural–urban migration in China: Evidence from the 2011 and 2015 national floating population surveys. *Area Development and Policy*, 4(2), 134–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2018.1514981>

- Frijters, P., Lee, L., & Meng, X. (2010). Jobs, Working Hours and Remuneration Packages for Migrant and Urban Workers. In X. Meng, C. Manning, L. Shi, & T. Effendi, *The Great Migration* (p. 13619). Edward Elgar Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781000724.00011>
- Ghimire, D., Zhang, Y., & Williams, N. (2021). Husbands' migration: Increased burden on or more autonomy for wives left behind? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(1), 227–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1675502>
- Goldscheider, F., Bernhardt, E., & Lappegård, T. (2015). The Gender Revolution: A Framework for Understanding Changing Family and Demographic Behavior. *Population and Development Review*, 41(2), 207–239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00045.x>
- Grasmuck, S., & Pessar, P. R. (1991). *Between two islands: Dominican international migration*. Univ. of California Pr.
- Gu, B. (2014). Internal Migration Dominates Population Dynamics In China. *Asian Population Studies*, 10(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2013.876702>
- Haddad, T., & Lam, L. (1994). The Impact of Migration on the Sexual Division of Family Work: A Case Study of Italian Immigrant Couples. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 25(2), 167–182. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.25.2.167>
- Han, Y. (2021). Bargaining with patriarchy: Returned *dagongmei* 's (factory girls') gendered spaces in neoliberalizing China's hinterland. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 28(12), 1673–1694. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2020.1825213>
- Haukanes, H., & Pine, F. (Eds.). (2021). Migration, gender dynamics, and social reproduction: Polish and Italian mothers in Norway. In *Intimacy and mobility in an era of hardening borders*. Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526150226.00016>
- He, C., & Gober, P. (2003). Gendering Interprovincial Migration in China. *International Migration Review*, 37(4), 1220–1251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2003.tb00176.x>
- He-Schaefer, Y., & Fan, C. C. (2024). Urban-urban split households in China: Gender, migration, and stay-behind women. *Transactions in Planning and Urban Research*, 3(1–2), 11–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27541223241239639>

- Ho, C. (2006). Migration as Feminisation? Chinese Women's Experiences of Work and Family in Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32(3), 497–514.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830600555053>
- Hoang, L. A., & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2011). Breadwinning wives and “left-behind” husbands: Men and masculinities in the Vietnamese transnational family. *Gender & Society*, 25(6), 717–739. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211430636>
- Hoem, J. (2014). The dangers of conditioning on the time of occurrence of one demographic process in the analysis of another. *Population Studies*, 68(2), 151–159.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2013.843019>
- Hoem, J., & Nedoluzhko, L. (2016). The dangers of using ‘negative durations’ to estimate pre- and post-migration fertility. *Population Studies*, 70(3), 359–363.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2016.1221442>
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P., & Cranford, C. (2006). Gender and Migration. In *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender* (pp. 105–126). Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-36218-5_6
- Hu, S., & Mu, Z. (2021). Extended gender inequality? Intergenerational coresidence and division of household labor. *Social Science Research*, 93, 102497.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2020.102497>
- Hu, Y. (2016). Impact of rural-to-urban migration on family and gender values in China. *Asian Population Studies*, 12(3), 251–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2016.1169753>
- Huang, X. (2020). The Chinese Dream: Hukou, Social Mobility, and Trust in Government. *Social Science Quarterly*, 101(5), 2052–2070. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12847>
- Jacka, T. (1997). *Women's work in rural China: Change and continuity in an era of reform*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jacka, T. (2006). *Rural women in urban China: Gender, migration, and social change*. Sharpe.
- Jacka, T., & Gaetano, A. M. (2004). Introduction: Focusing on Migrant Women. In A. M. Gaetano & T. Jacka, *On the Move* (pp. 1–38). Columbia University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7312/gaet12706-intro>
- Karymshakov, K., Saulaimanova, B., & UNU-WIDER. (2017). *Migration impact on left-behind women's labour participation and time-use: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan* (119th ed., Vol. 2017). UNU-WIDER. <https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2017/343-1>

- Krieger, M., & Salikutluk, Z. (2023). Migration and Dynamics in Men's and Women's Domestic Work. *Journal of Family Issues*, 44(4), 954–976.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X211055117>
- Krummel, S. (2012). Migrant Women: Stories of Empowerment, Transformation, Exploitation and Resistance. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(7), 1175–1184.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.681459>
- Lam, T., & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2018). Migrant mothers, left-behind fathers: The negotiation of gender subjectivities in Indonesia and the Philippines. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(1), 104–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2016.1249349>
- Landolt, P., & Wei Da, W. (2005). The Spatially Ruptured Practices of Migrant Families: A Comparison of Immigrants from El Salvador and the People's Republic of China. *Current Sociology*, 53(4), 625–653. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392105052719>
- Lee, E. (1966). A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47–57.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2060063>
- Lee, L., & Meng, X. (2010). Why Don't More Chinese Migrate from the Countryside? Institutional Constraints and the Migration Decision. In X. Meng, C. Manning, L. Shi, & T. Effendi, *The Great Migration* (p. 13619). Edward Elgar Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781781000724.00010>
- Levitt, P. (1998). Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion. *International Migration Review*, 32(4), 926–948.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/019791839803200404>
- Liang, Z. (2007). Internal Migration: Policy Changes, Recent Trends, and New Challenges. In Z. Zhao & F. Guo (Eds.), *Transition and Challenge: China's Population at the Beginning of the 21st Century*. Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199299294.001.0001>
- Liang, Z. (2016). China's great migration and the prospects of a more integrated society. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 42(1), 451–471. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081715-074435>
- Liang, Z., Li, Z., & Ma, Z. (2014). Changing Patterns of the Floating Population in China, 2000-2010. *Population and Development Review*, 40(4), 695–716.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2014.00007.x>

- Liang, Z., & Ma, Z. (2004). China's Floating Population: New Evidence from the 2000 Census. *Population and Development Review*, 30(3), 467–488. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2004.00024.x>
- Liang, Z., & Song, Q. (2016). Migration in China. In M. J. White (Ed.), *International handbook of migration and population distribution* (Vol. 6, pp. 285–309). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-7282-2_14
- Lindstrom, D. P., & Giorguli Saucedo, S. (2007). The interrelationship of fertility, family maintenance and Mexico-U.S. Migration. *Demographic Research*, 17, 821–858. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2007.17.28>
- Liu, J. (2014). Ageing, migration and familial support in rural China. *Geoforum*, 51, 305–312. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.04.013>
- Liu, S., Liu, F., & Yu, Y. (2017). Educational equality in China: Analysing educational policies for migrant children in Beijing. *Educational Studies*, 43(2), 210–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2016.1248904>
- Liu, Y., & Erwin, L. (2015). Divided Motherhood: Rural-To-Urban Migration of Married Women in Contemporary China. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 46(2), 241–263. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.46.2.241>
- Liu, Y., & Xu, W. (2017). Destination Choices of Permanent and Temporary Migrants in China, 1985–2005. *Population, Space and Place*, 23(1), e1963. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.1963>
- Lu, Y., & Tao, R. (2015). Female migration, cultural context, and son preference in rural China. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 34(5), 665–686. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-015-9357-x>
- Luo, M. S., & Chui, E. W. T. (2018). Gender Division of Household Labor in China: Cohort Analysis in Life Course Patterns. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39(12), 3153–3176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18776457>
- Lyu, L., Mei, Z., Li, R., Yan, F., Wang, X., & Duan, C. (2024). Status and Changes of the Rural Children Left Behind in China: 2010-2020. *Population Research*, 48(1), 103–117.
- Meng, L., Zhao, M. Q., & Liwu, D. S. (2016). Joint migration decisions of married couples in rural China. *China Economic Review*, 38, 285–305. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2014.05.015>

- Mu, R., & De Brauw, A. (2015). Migration and young child nutrition: Evidence from rural China. *Journal of Population Economics*, 28(3), 631–657.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-015-0550-3>
- Mu, R., & van de Walle, D. (2011). Left behind to farm? Women's labor re-allocation in rural China. *Labour Economics*, 18, S83–S97. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2011.01.009>
- Mu, Z., & Yeung, W.-J. J. (2018). For Money or for a Life: A Mixed-Method Study on Migration and Time Use in China. *Social Indicators Research*, 139(1), 347–379.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-017-1698-x>
- Murphy, R. (2008). The impact of socio-cultural norms on women's experiences of migration and the implications for development. *Migration and Development: Future Directions for Research and Policy, SSRC Migration and Development Conference Papers*, 256–276.
- Murphy, R. (2020). *The children of China's great migration*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pailhé, A., & Solaz, A. (2008). Professional outcomes of internal migration by couples: Evidence from France. *Population, Space and Place*, 14(4), 347–363.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.504>
- Parrenas, R. S. (2001). Mothering from a Distance: Emotions, Gender, and Intergenerational Relations in Filipino Transnational Families. *Feminist Studies*, 27(2), 361.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3178765>
- Paul, A. M. (2015). Negotiating Migration, Performing Gender. *Social Forces*, 94(1), 271–293.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sov049>
- Pedraza, S. (1991). Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17(1), 303–325. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.17.080191.001511>
- Peng, Y. (2019). Getting rural migrant children into school in South China: Migrant agency and parenting. *Asian Population Studies*, 15(2), 172–189.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2019.1578531>
- Perales, F., Baxter, J., & Tai, T. (2015). Gender, justice and work: A distributive approach to perceptions of housework fairness. *Social Science Research*, 51, 51–63.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.12.010>
- Qin, M., & Lyu, L. (2020). The scale, family structure and evolution trend of China's rural left-behind population. *Journal of Yan'an University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 42(4), 77–84.

- Roberts, K., Connelly, R., Xie, Z., & Zheng, Z. (2004). Patterns of temporary labor migration of rural women from Anhui and Sichuan. *The China Journal*, 52, 49–70.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/4127884>
- Samari, G. (2021). Coming back and moving backwards: Return migration and gender norms in Egypt. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(5), 1103–1118.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1669437>
- Schoen, R., Astone, N. M., Kim, Y. J., Nathanson, C. A., & Fields, J. M. (1999). Do Fertility Intentions Affect Fertility Behavior? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61(3), 790.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/353578>
- Song, J., & Ji, Y. (2020). Complexity of Chinese Family Life: Individualism, Familism, and Gender. *China Review*, 20(2), 1–18.
- Song, J., Lai, W., & Fong, E. (2024). Motherhood and Women’s Migration: Evidence from Foreign Domestic Workers in Hong Kong. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 00027642241242930. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642241242930>
- Spéder, Z., & Kapitány, B. (2015). Influences on the Link Between Fertility Intentions and Behavioural Outcomes: Lessons from a European Comparative Study. In D. Philipov, A. C. Liefbroer, & J. E. Klobas (Eds.), *Reproductive Decision-Making in a Macro-Micro Perspective* (pp. 79–112). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9401-5_4
- Sun, M., & Fan, C. C. (2011). China’s Permanent and Temporary Migrants: Differentials and Changes, 1990–2000. *The Professional Geographer*, 63(1), 92–112.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2010.533562>
- Sun, Y., Wu, Q., & Zhang, C. (2024). China Family Panel Studies: Design Concepts and Common Data Misuses. *The World of Survey and Research*, 1, 4–14.
- Swedish Research Council. (2025, January 15). Ethics in research and good research practice. Retrieved 15 January 2025, from <https://www.vr.se/english/mandates/ethics/ethics-in-research.html>
- Thakkar, S. (2021). Moving towards empowerment: Migrant domestic workers in India. *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies*, 27(3), 425–440.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2021.1957195>

- Torosyan, K., Gerber, T. P., & Goñalons-Pons, P. (2016). Migration, household tasks, and gender: Evidence from the Republic of Georgia. *International Migration Review*, 50(2), 445–474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12147>
- Ugargol, A. P., & Bailey, A. (2018). Family caregiving for older adults: Gendered roles and caregiver burden in emigrant households of Kerala, India. *Asian Population Studies*, 14(2), 194–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2017.1412593>
- Vidal, S., Perales, F., & Baxter, J. (2016). Dynamics of Domestic Labor Across Short- and Long-Distance Family Relocations. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78(2), 364–382. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12269>
- Vlase, I. (2013). ‘My Husband Is a Patriot!’: Gender and Romanian Family Return Migration from Italy. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 39(5), 741–758. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.756661>
- Walder, A. G., & He, X. (2014). Public housing into private assets: Wealth creation in urban China. *Social Science Research*, 46, 85–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.02.008>
- Wang, H., Guo, F., & Cheng, Z. (2015). A distributional analysis of wage discrimination against migrant workers in China’s urban labour market. *Urban Studies*, 52(13), 2383–2403. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098014547367>
- Wang, L., & Klugman, J. (2020). How women have fared in the labour market with China’s rise as a global economic power. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 7(1), 43–64. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.293>
- Wanner, P. (2021). Can Migrants’ Emigration Intentions Predict Their Actual Behaviors? Evidence from a Swiss Survey. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 22(3), 1151–1179. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-020-00798-7>
- West, H., Khan, A., Razzaque, A., & Kuhn, R. (2024). Migration, Gender, and Families: The Effects of Spousal Migration on Women’s Empowerment. *Demography*, 61(3), 769–795. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00703370-11370243>
- Whyte, M. K. (Ed.). (2010). *One Country, Two Societies: Rural-Urban Inequality in Contemporary China* (1st ed.). Harvard University Asia Center. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1sq5t74>

- Wu, H., & Ye, J. (2016). Hollow lives: Women left behind in rural China. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 16(1), 50–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12089>
- Xie, Y., & Hu, J. (2014). An Introduction to the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS). *Chinese Sociological Review*, 47(1), 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.2753/CSA2162-0555470101.2014.11082908>
- Yan, Y. (20). *Private life under socialism: Love, intimacy, and family change in a Chinese village, 1949 - 1999* (Orig. Printing 2003). Stanford University Press.
- Yang, J. (2014). Gender Disparity in Time Use: Trend and Characteristics in 1990-2010. *Population & Economics*, 5, 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1000-4149.2014.05.001>
- Ye, J. (2011). Left-behind children: The social price of China's economic boom. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(3), 613–650. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2011.582946>
- Ye, J., Wang, C., Wu, H., He, C., & Liu, J. (2013). Internal migration and left-behind populations in China. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 40(6), 1119–1146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.861421>
- Ye, J., Wu, H., Rao, J., Ding, B., & Zhang, K. (2016). Left-behind women: Gender exclusion and inequality in rural-urban migration in China †. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 43(4), 910–941. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1157584>
- Yokying, P., Saksena, S., & Fox, J. (2023). Impacts of migration on time allocation of those who remain at home in rural Nepal. *Journal of International Development*, 35(7), 2067–2106. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3765>
- Yuan, C., & Zhang, D. (2023). Moving towards gender equality in China: The influence of migration experiences on rural migrants' gender role attitudes. *Demographic Research*, 49, 355–384. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2023.49.14>
- Zhang, B., Zhai, F. Y., Du, S. F., & Popkin, B. M. (2014). The China Health and Nutrition Survey, 1989-2011. *Obesity Reviews*, 15, 2–7. <https://doi.org/10.1111/obr.12119>
- Zhang, C., Gao, Q., & Li, X. (2013). The Impact of Rural-urban Migration on Gender Relations in Chinese Households. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 19(1), 39–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2013.11666141>
- Zhang, H. (2009). Labor Migration, Gender, and the Rise of Neo-Local Marriages in the Economic Boomtown of Dongguan, South China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 18(61), 639–656. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560903033935>

- Zhang, N. (2013). Rural women migrant returnees in contemporary China. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 40(1), 171–188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2012.749867>
- Zhang, Z., & Wu, X. (2017). Occupational segregation and earnings inequality: Rural migrants and local workers in urban China. *Social Science Research*, 61, 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.06.020>
- Zheng, Z., & Yang, G. (2016). Internal Migration in China: Changes and Trends. In C. Z. Guilmoto & G. W. Jones (Eds.), *Contemporary Demographic Transformations in China, India and Indonesia* (pp. 223–237). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24783-0_14
- Zhou, H. (2004). An analysis of the trend of family migration in China and its influencing factors. *Population Research*, 28(6), 60–69.
- Zhou, H. (2023). The Pattern of Age-specific Migration Rate of Floating Population and Its Changes in China. *Journal of East China Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 55(1), 185–201. <https://doi.org/10.16382/j.cnki.1000-5579.2023.01.017>
- Zhu, M., & Vidal, S. (2024). Family migration in China: A longitudinal analysis of couples' migration behaviour. *Population, Space and Place*, 30(4), e2751. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2751>
- Zhu, R. (2016). Wage differentials between urban residents and rural migrants in urban China during 2002–2007: A distributional analysis. *China Economic Review*, 37, 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2015.04.002>
- Zhu, Y., Lin, L., & Ke, W. (2016). Trends in Internal Migration and Mobility: International Experiences and Their Implications for China. *Population Research*, 40(5), 50–60.