

Nancy E. Riley

# Gender, Work, and Family in a Chinese Economic Zone

Laboring in Paradise

 Springer

Nancy E. Riley

# Gender, Work, and Family in a Chinese Economic Zone

Laboring in Paradise

 Springer.

Nancy E. Riley  
Department of Sociology/Anthropology  
Bowdoin College  
Brunswick, ME, USA

ISBN 978-94-007-5523-9 ISBN 978-94-007-5524-6 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-5524-6  
Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg New York London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012953097

© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed. Exempted from this legal reservation are brief excerpts in connection with reviews or scholarly analysis or material supplied specifically for the purpose of being entered and executed on a computer system, for exclusive use by the purchaser of the work. Duplication of this publication or parts thereof is permitted only under the provisions of the Copyright Law of the Publisher's location, in its current version, and permission for use must always be obtained from Springer. Permissions for use may be obtained through RightsLink at the Copyright Clearance Center. Violations are liable to prosecution under the respective Copyright Law.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

While the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication, neither the authors nor the editors nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media ([www.springer.com](http://www.springer.com))

Gender, Work, and Family  
in a Chinese Economic Zone

*For Bob and Maggie, for everything.*

# Acknowledgments

This book has been a long time in the making and I am grateful for all the support I have had along the way.

I will be forever thankful to all those in Dalian who shared their stories with me. Their friendliness and openness made my fieldwork a pleasure and their perspectives taught me a great deal about many things. I thank the Fulian (Women's Federation) of the Dalian Economic Zone for sponsoring my research and for providing all the support and encouragement they did; Xiao Wang was especially helpful whenever I was in the DEZ.

I thank my wonderfully supportive colleagues at Bowdoin College, including Krista Van Vleet, Craig McEwen, and Susan Bell. I am especially grateful to Sara Dickey for all the tea and chocolate and the many helpful conversations I have had with her about this work over the years and to Deb DeGraff, whose different perspective on these issues allowed me new insights. Lori Brackett has provided wonderful support at work, for this project and everything else. The Bowdoin librarians were also always ready to find materials for me. Outside of Bowdoin, Susan Greenhalgh, Kathy Ferguson, and Elisa Johnston have all been people to whom I have turned for advice. Penny Martin, Dharni Vasudevan, Krista Van Vleet and Deb DeGraff offered me both friendship and writing space, both much appreciated. My parents, Francis J. Riley and Marion Riley, were supportive from the ground up.

My work has been supported by several fellowships and grants. Thanks to the University of Hawai'i Women's Studies Program and to the Rockefeller Foundation for a Rockefeller Fellowship and for conference funding where I presented this work. Early fieldwork was supported by the Committee for Scholarly Communication with China (CSCC) and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. Additional funding came from large and small grants from Bowdoin College, including a Kenan Fellowship in the early stages and a sabbatical leave later on. The East-West Center (Honolulu) provided me a home and friendly colleagues at two different times while I was writing. I also want to thank anonymous reviewers whose constructive advice made this manuscript much stronger than it would have been otherwise. Thanks to staff at Springer Publishing, including Evelien Bakker, Bernadette Deelen-Mans, and A. Lakshmi Praba for their help in publication and to Bob Gardner, for indexing.

My life in the field was made immeasurably more pleasant by the wide range of support I have received from the Ghalili family in Dalian. Thanks to Nikka, Sacha, and Dima and especially to Ladon and Foad. From warm hospitality, incredible food, help when I was ill, to helping me make contacts in the field, I could not have accomplished what I did without their support. May we all have friends like these.

A friend once told me that if she could have any wish in the world, it might be a few days alone every now and then, away from her busy work and family life. Just to think, to write, and to think some more. She told me this as I was about to leave for three days just like that, three solid days of writing and thinking, away from the demands of my regular life. My friend's wish underscored how grateful I am for those times I had, that my family allowed me to carve out, to go off and write and think. It was those periods of times, and the other kinds of supports and understanding on the part of my family, that made it possible to finish this book. I will be forever thankful and appreciative for that understanding. I owe a great deal to Bob Gardner for all his help and support in all of my work, and to Maggie who has been with me for most of the journeys of this book, figurative and literal, having spent much time with me in the field, and often waited patiently for me to get home from work.



# Contents

<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Doing Research in the Dalian Economic Zone .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Chinese Economic Zones.....	16
Economic Zones: Sites of Exploitation and Opportunity .....	19
The Dalian Economic Zone .....	22
Doing Research in the Economic Zone.....	24
The Dilemmas of Feminist Research.....	27
<b>3 Urban as Paradise: Understanding the Urban/Rural Divide.....</b>	<b>33</b>
Urban/Rural Differences .....	34
Migrants in the City .....	38
The Role of the State.....	40
The Hukou System.....	41
The Role of Ideology .....	44
Gender.....	47
The Role of Education .....	48
<b>4 “It’s Just Women’s Lot:” The Role of Gender .....</b>	<b>53</b>
Growing Up.....	54
Migration.....	59
Work.....	61
Marriage.....	67
Family .....	69
Mothers and Daughters .....	71
Parents and Parents-in-Law.....	73
Alternative Family Forms: Mistresses and Prostitutes.....	75
Interpreting the Role of Gender in Dalian Women’s Lives.....	77



<b>5 “A Woman has to struggle to get what she wants”:</b>	
<b>Gender and Power</b> .....	83
Understanding and Measuring Power .....	83
Power at the Micro Level .....	85
The Macro Level .....	86
Multi-level Approaches to Understanding Power .....	87
Women’s Power in Dalian.....	89
Work .....	89
Family Economics.....	90
Housework and Childcare .....	94
Time .....	95
Resisting Inequality.....	96
Interpreting the Findings.....	97
The Language of Rights .....	99
<b>6 Performing Gender in a Modern Economic Zone</b> .....	107
The Constraints of Rural Life .....	108
Migrants in the City: Constraints and Opportunities .....	110
Gender and the City .....	112
Chinese Modernity: Place, Gender, Family .....	113
Place .....	115
Gender .....	116
Family .....	119
Modernity in the Lives of Dalian Migrant Women.....	123
<b>7 Conclusion</b> .....	129
Dalian Women’s Challenges to Inequality.....	130
The Future .....	134
Beyond Dalian .....	136
<b>References</b> .....	139
<b>Index</b> .....	151

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Huiyang was in her early 30s when I first met her; over the course of several hours of interviews, I came to see her as the success story that so many rural migrant women aspire to. She had grown up in a poor rural family, one of four children. Her family was classified as “peasant,” with a rural hukou. She managed to graduate from middle school, at the age of 16, but was unable to pursue further education because of her family’s straitened circumstances and the lack of schooling in her rural region. Huiyang found small jobs for several years after graduating, working first in agricultural jobs, and then finding ways to earn small amounts selling goods in a local market. She described her earlier life as very difficult: “I was always worried about not selling enough, and if I did not sell enough, I did not have enough money. I was always worried, always had to work, I worked all the time. I started work early, and finished late in the evening. I used to ride a bike then, and carry 100 jin [over 100 lb] or more of things every day.” When she was 28, Huiyang managed to land a job in a big factory in the Dalian Economic Zone and has worked there since. In her conversations, she makes it clear how important her family life is to her. She had married someone whom a relative had introduced to her and they have a 10 year old daughter. She and her husband have bought an apartment in the Zone. Perhaps most importantly, they both now have urban hukou, allowing them access to urban services; her daughter goes to school in the Zone and Huiyang has dreams that her daughter will eventually be able to attend university, something completely unavailable to Huiyang herself as a rural peasant.

By the standards of most in this region, Huiyang epitomizes success: a rural migrant who has achieved official urban status, whose daughter has a promising future in front of her. She herself assesses her life very positively. Huiyang works at least 8 hours a day on an assembly line at an American-owned factory; there, she makes a salary considered good relative to the salary she might earn at another factory and much more than she ever imagined making when she had been living in the village. Her hours at the factory are bookended by hours spent in housework and childcare, work for which she is nearly solely responsible. In spite of this very busy life, she insists her life is great and not at all difficult. “I don’t have any worries...

Look at me,” she insists, “I never wake before 5 and I usually am asleep at 10. It is not tiring work at all!”

Huiyang’s positive assessment of her life in the Dalian Economic Zone (DEZ) and the efforts she put into achieving it represent the experiences of many women there, most of whom are rural migrants. In my research, I have sought to understand the perspectives of Huiyang and other rural migrants. Many of them talked about the promise of a new life, a different and better life, than they had left behind in rural villages, and the efforts it took or would take to reach their goals. This project focuses on the family lives of married women who have migrated from rural villages to urban spaces. I argue that Dalian women<sup>1</sup> live their lives amid two major inequalities: as women, they must grapple with long-standing and deeply embedded gender inequalities; but in their conversations, they are even more focused on a second inequality, that of the urban/rural divide. These inequalities are central to understanding Dalian women’s lives and we will see how they have influenced their lives, their choices, and their futures. But equally important is the discourse of modernity in contemporary China, a discourse that has been constructed through gender, family and the urban/rural divide. This force is best analyzed at the societal level, but it nonetheless has a powerful impact on individuals. A close examination of Dalian women’s lives illuminates both the new promises and beginnings in the lives of these women and in China more generally but also indicates the continuation of past practices.

The Dalian Economic Zone, where this research takes place, is part of southern Liaoning Province in Northeast China and on the coast of the Yellow Sea. The Zone lies some 35 km northeast of Dalian city. Shenyang, a major industrial city, is situated about 350 km north of the Zone. Northeast China is known for having some of the heaviest industrial investment anywhere in China. Shenyang is considered one of the most polluted cities in the country<sup>2</sup>; the city’s water and air have been collecting the output of factories and enterprises for years. Between and around these urban areas are numerous villages where peasants grow rice, apples, and vegetables for the urban market.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, when most of this research took place, the Dalian Economic Zone was hardly a bustling place. The Economic Zone is relatively new. First opened in 1984, for most of the last 25 years, it remained a relatively quiet space. The ornamental trees lining the streets are still small, the buildings clearly recently built. The Zone counts many wide boulevards and streets but only in the last few years have the streets begun to take on the bustle and energy usually seen in urban areas; for much of the past couple decades, these streets often seemed nearly

---

<sup>1</sup> In this book, I sometimes use a shorthand, “Dalian women” to describe these women. But I refer – always – to women who live and work in the DEZ.

<sup>2</sup> Shenyang has been making progress since 1988 when it was named one of the ten most polluted cities in the world by the World Health Organization, but it is still a city with environmental problems.

deserted and even now, there are stretches of wide boulevards with few people to be seen. The area is designed as an industrial zone, and there are areas where nearly the only structures visible are large box-like factory buildings. In other places, abandoned construction sites litter the landscape. Other areas are more populated but during the winter months, the winds howl often and strongly enough that people rush from building to building. There are neighborhoods here, and these are increasing in number and in population density, but they still lack the long and complex histories of neighborhoods in most Chinese cities; neighbors often don't know each other or their families very well. Nevertheless, lives are shaped, created and enjoyed amidst this sometimes harsh physical environment; here and there, people shop and gather and eat. The streets are paved, often lined with cobbled sidewalks; tall buildings house families, children, fathers, mothers, friends, and relatives. Around any of the several schools in the Zone you can find small vendors selling snacks to the students, and at certain times of the day, the streets are full of colorfully dressed children and their parents on their way to or from school. The big market is always busy, and in the morning and evening, there are many small stands where farmers and others sell goods to those shopping for evening meals. Bicycles and small motorcycles swish to and fro, ringing bells and horns as they make their way through the crowds. There is now a large, bustling shopping center with modern stores, including a KFC and even a Starbucks. Office workers, in fashionable outfits and business clothes, bustle from their office to restaurants for lunch meetings or just an informal get-together with colleagues and friends. At certain times of the day, hundreds of factory workers, most of them young women, leave the factory grounds together to make their way to the small markets or food stalls. Some wear their factory uniforms and others are dressed in colorful, fashionable street clothes, with heeled shoes, faces made up, and carrying pretty bags.

But for all these markers of urban, the Dalian Economic Zone is also different from other urban areas, including Dalian city. In fact, it is much easier for rural migrants to reside here than in the city; the restrictions on living in the city are much greater, and these different rules of residence for outsiders reflect the differences between zone and city. The Zone is not a full-fledged city, lacking at least the historical weight of Dalian city. But it also a more transient place, with rural migrants, many of them on short-term work contracts and residence permits, making up a large proportion of the population.

In spite of any of the DEZ's limitations, many migrant women see their lives in the Dalian Economic Zone as successful. In the Dalian Economic Zone, women carve lives out of sometimes unfriendly environments. Most of these women are rural migrants, with no formal or official promise of what their future holds, living on temporary or non-existent work and household permits, and seemingly at the mercy of factory management who orders their lives in severe ways, in ways that seem very different from the lives they left in their home villages. But when asked, most of these women see themselves as very lucky, clearly seeing the area as a place of enormous possibility both for themselves and their family members. While most arrive in the Zone on temporary work permits, most hope and work toward more permanent settlement.

What is it about the Dalian Economic Zone that would push Huiyang and all the other rural migrant women with whom I talked to make every effort both to get to the zone and to find a way to stay there? From my own perspective, the DEZ was not a very charming or attractive place, but several women I talked to described it as “paradise.” To understand how these migrant women came to see the DEZ so positively requires an understanding of social, economic, and ideological forces both large and small, near and far.

In this book, my purpose is to examine the lives of these migrant women, particularly married women, who work in factories and other jobs in the Dalian Economic Zone (DEZ). But before I began to hear the stories of women, I had a different set of research questions; those evolved once I began fieldwork and listened to women talking about their lives. I started this project focused on a question about power in families. I asked: how do these new jobs affect women’s power in their families? I was particularly interested in various issues of power in this context of a new economic zone: women’s interpretation of power in their own lives, the sources of power they claim, the hindrances and obstacles they face to achieving power, and the ways they assert their power.

In the course of my fieldwork, I quickly realized that while that question was still relevant and an important one to examine, in order to answer it, I had to broaden my perspective and shift my focus in ways that addressed other important issues in the lives of Dalian migrant women. When Dalian women talked about and assessed their lives, they did not focus on the questions of gender and family inequality that were the driving questions of my research. Rather, in interviews and conversations, they turned again and again to how well they had succeeded (or not) in their quest to become urban residents. As I listened to their stories and to their dreams and frustrations, it became clear how even the most intimate spheres of their lives were shaped by wider social, political, and economic forces. Thus, my project took a slightly different turn, in order to bring these different spheres of social life together. I came to understand the necessity of employing an approach that brings together micro-level politics with larger political, ideological, and discursive influences (see also Ferguson 1999). Understanding the micro-politics of family power would not be possible without recognizing and addressing rural migrant women’s desires and the ways they were focused on urban residence. Together, they allow us insight into both the most far-reaching and the smallest levels of social life in China today.

I reframed my research question in order to understand why Dalian women were so focused on achieving urban residency and on the differences—the inequalities—between rural and urban areas, that when they talked about other issues in their lives, it was often through that lens. How, I began to ask, does gender inequality—at work, but particularly in their families—relate to these issues of urban and rural inequality? Gail Hershatter’s advice is relevant here: she suggests that scholars take note when gender matters to participants and when it seems to recede (Hershatter 2007: 116); she argues that “we need to track when and by whom it is used or discarded, as well as attending to how and why it is entwined with or displaced by other categories” (117). That perspective became central to my project, as I sought to understand how gender was entwined with other inequalities and categories, particularly the urban/rural divide and modernity.

Thus, while this book, and the research on which it is based, examines the issues of women's power in a changing Chinese society, it is not possible to ask as simple a question as whether or not these women have power or whether these new jobs and new urban lives give them more power. And while it may be easy to compare the scenes of rural and urban China and see those differences as the obvious reason women move to work in the factories or want to acquire a permanent urban residency, I argue that it is not simply urban/rural differences that underlie women's behavior and goals. There is no simple binary, with urban areas posited as good against the backward rural villages; many women envision Dalian as paradise for a variety of reasons that are enmeshed in very complex constructions. My goal is to tease apart those complexities to understand the gendered nature of modernity and power as these play out in urban and semi-urban environments and to explore how they influence women's constructions of identity and success. Women's power, the ways they define that power and how they use, resist, construct, and shape power, is influenced not only by their own decisions, determinations, and skills but by the way that power has been constructed and resides in and through the social structures in which they live (Allen 1999). We can think of women as performing gender, but they do so in ways that reflect that social landscape; women are constructing themselves and their lives using pieces of the world around them, often in new and creative ways.

This study looks at multiple levels of influences on the lives and futures of Dalian women to understand why women see the Dalian Economic Zone as paradise. It focuses on the lives of individual women, and builds on their own stories, examining individual-level characteristics such as the role of education or family background. We have to address and attend to the details of these individual lives; it is important that these women are rural migrants working in an Economic Zone, and mostly married. Their lives and experiences are situated within a number of overlapping and crosscutting social, political, ideological, and historical conditions. But it is also necessary to be attentive to the influences and features—the social, political, economic and ideological landscapes—that lie outside these individual lives, at the community, national, and even global levels. These features are complex, contradictory and complementary and women in Dalian adapt to them and adapt them in novel fashion, crafting paths and lives for themselves that reflect the different resources and influences around them. As individuals, women live their lives and plan their futures within these larger social structures, structures that shape the paths that they take or do not follow. The larger structures by no means determine outcomes, but we can nevertheless see the power—the constraints and opportunities—of these larger structures and issues in lives of individual women. Particularly key have been the two inequalities of gender and rural/urban residence.

Gender shapes the lives of all women and men in China today and plays a role at the national, village, family, and individual levels. Gender influences the hopes, opportunities of, and expectations for village women and often plays a role in women's decisions about their future (Hershatter 2007; Judd 1994). Equally important is the enormous urban/rural divide in China today, which has become a defining feature of the Chinese social landscape (Attane 2002; Solinger 1999). This divide has an economic component, as urban China receives the greater share of resources and attention

of China's plans for future economic growth. But the division between rural and urban China is also symbolic and is tied to constructions of modernity and development; these too influence women as they make decisions about their lives or even imagine the possibilities. While these overarching structures play influential roles in women's lives, individual women experience and address these differently, bringing to the mix their own characteristics, hopes, plans, and skills.

This study focuses primarily on married women working in the Dalian Economic Zone in multinational and Chinese factories. Their lives and strategies suggest the ways that identity is crafted, constructed, and shaped by forces as far away as the state and as individual as a woman's access to education, the roles her husband plays in the family and household, or her own personal goals. In spite of the contrasts with rural areas, women working in this economic zone do not lead easy lives. Most of them work in factories and other enterprises for long hours at low pay, at least by the standards of industrialized countries. Their working lives are similar to women's lives in other economic zones around the world (see Fernandes 1997; Freeman 2000; Kim 1997; Lee 1998). As these and other scholars have noted, understanding the connections between the workers in these economic zones and larger issues of globalization, world capitalism, and labor struggles is central to placing the overarching design of these economic zones and the workers in them. Pun (1999, 2005), for example, has examined how rural migrant women "become dagongmei" ("working girls") in China's Shenzhen area. She argues that these (mostly unmarried) women and their experiences are linked to the state's and market's construction of class in contemporary China and the ways that rural migration is linked to the needs of national development and global capitalism.

My work complements the work of these and other scholars (Chang 2009; Jacka 2005b; Sun 2009a); the women in Dalian, like the women in all other economic zones in China (and elsewhere) represent and mirror key issues in global capitalism today. Nevertheless, my focus is different than that of some other scholars. My interest is less in their lives at work than in their family lives. And, again, my primary concern is the lives of married women; as we will see, their marital status influences their relationships with many social, economic and political institutions in key ways. Their roles as mothers bring responsibilities and create pathways toward their goals that are directly tied to those roles. Nevertheless, these Dalian women, like those Pun and others have written about, are similarly influenced by "industrial capitalism [which] simultaneously manipulates wants, lacks, and desire and enshrines them among the Chinese peasantry, who not only dream of becoming industrial producers but also modern consumers" (Pun 2005: 13–14). I argue, however, that for these married women, their position as mothers influences what kind of producer and consumer roles they see for themselves.

In Dalian, as elsewhere, women's power in their families is not equal to that of their husbands. While many have argued that economic access can translate into family power (Blumberg 1991), for these women in Dalian, their work—though regular, relatively high paying and in an urban setting—does not necessarily translate into equality at home. While they have a certain independence in some areas of their lives, their lives are much more circumscribed than their husbands' and, in most



ways, gender inequality is as deeply rooted here as it is elsewhere—in China and outside it. At the same time, these new jobs, and this new urban space give women access to new forms of power and the ability to maneuver in ways that might have been previously unavailable to them. Women in Dalian combine these new opportunities and structures with old structures to create new lives for themselves. Most notable, perhaps, is the way that many have taken on the mantle of leaders in their household, using new opportunities to find and promote opportunities and successes of family members, particularly their children.

The women who make it to the Economic Zone and find work are often the ones that are most able to strategize wisely and successfully. Migration brings difficulties and dangers, and these women are the ones who have made it through the obstacles. But even within these successes, their stories are not ones of widespread or single-direction change, or absolute equality with men around them, but contain the complexities and contradictions that mirror the environments in which they live. Their conversations underscore their belief in their ability to make and achieve goals, to assess the situation and find and follow a path to those goals. In their descriptions about work, for example, they use the language of rights and responsibilities, easily discussing what they see as their rights in that arena.

But their discussions and language about their families and their roles there are different in tone and perhaps goal as well. Here women do not strategize, plan, or carry out their own plans in the same way that they do in their work arenas. In interviews with me, women regularly report that their lives are busier and much less easy than are their husbands', and they acknowledge that by many measures, their husbands retain more power than they do—economic control but also more control over their own time. But at the same time, women apparently do not address perceived inequalities within the household in the same ways that they might outside it. About work, women speak of rights and responsibilities, about what they are owed and what they need to do to get what is their due. When they speak of home, however, they are much more likely to simply shrug their shoulders at the inequalities and burdens they face there. While gender inequality seemed strong and obvious to me as an outsider, women themselves often responded in ways that suggested that gender inequality is not a major concern in their lives. These apparent paradoxes raise questions of how women perceive their role and position in their households and families, and how gender is enacted in family settings. Women are hardly just acquiescing to the inequality in their households. Rather, they seem to be focused on other ways and routes to achieve what they consider to be satisfying, successful lives. At the same time that they describe difficult, tiring lives, they also report satisfaction in their lives. Dalian's Economic Zone has given them new opportunities to reconstruct themselves into modern, successful women.

The Dalian Economic Zone invites such reconstructions and reimaginings. Here, the power of modernity and the influence of that force on the imaginations of rural women is easily apparent. One of several sites of government early efforts to modernize the country using a capitalist model, these sites have taken on symbolic importance. The DEZ is full of factories owned by foreign enterprises, and the women who are working in them are thus connected to globalization on a daily basis. In that way,

but in many others as well, rural women have access to modernity in the DEZ; even if actual acquisition of many the elements of modern life are out of their financial reach, they are nevertheless living a modern life. The physical surroundings themselves underscore their new relationship to modernity; women in Dalian often mentioned the significance of high rise buildings, paved streets, and numerous stores. Most of those working in factories are not able to buy the stuff of modernity, or actively take part in consumption. But as Schein (2001) has argued, the influence of consumption and its association with modernity is felt well beyond those who can actually afford to consume at a particular level. For these Dalian women, then, living in the city, and working at urban jobs, represents a relation to modernity and a modern status that was unavailable in the village. As well, they are closer, at least physically, to the promise of a consumerist, modern life. This promise, this potential, rather than current behavior, may be another reason that, as we will see, children become the focus of women's efforts to attain urban, modern, status. It is significant that the large proportion of those working in the zone are migrants from nearby rural villages. The potential of moving from a rural, un-modern status to a modern, urban status was part of the social landscape of the DEZ. The women at the center of this study are thus part of a huge trend in China, in which millions of peasants are moving to urban areas, crossing, deal with challenging the urban/rural divide.

While rural/urban residence is important, that does not negate the importance of gender, either in the process of migration nor in these women's lives. Rather, gender is apparent and present all along the way—in the migration process itself and in the ways that women think about their lives and their futures. When trying to explain why women do not contest inequality in the household (as Huiyang—whose story began this chapter—did not in hers), one could argue that women are willing to sacrifice their own individual goals for the good of the family; indeed, the ideology of the family, and of gender, lends support for this explanation and I believe this is part of the explanation. That may be especially true in China where identity is closely tied to the family and where the state and other social institutions have not promoted a separate identity for individuals outside their families. This family identity is also particularly strong for women. But I argue it is not as simple as women giving up their own goals for their family. Rather, in their family roles and in the attention and energy they give to their families, Dalian women are using this normative family identity to achieve their own goals, to construct and present themselves as successful, modern women. In this way, the findings of this research differ from that of others (but see Lee 1998 for similarities). Mary Beth Mills, writing about young migrant women in Bangkok, describes these women's "contested selves;" "their attempts to pursue *thamsamay* aspirations [to be modern women] were fundamentally at odds with their obligations as young women to rural kin" (Mills 1999:135). The Dalian women at the heart of this study, in contrast, seemed to have found ways to dovetail their own interests in modern life with the expectations of and obligations and responsibilities as mothers. They use their status as married women to justify their attention to acquiring the status of modern women.

How women construct this identity and the importance of the urban in doing so is a key piece of this project and my argument. Here, Judith Butler's arguments