

Trapped in Migration

Migratory Careers and Entrepreneurial Creativity of Chinese Migrant Women in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT: How do Chinese migrant women fight against economic and social disqualification to find their place in Taiwanese cities and in the Taiwanese labour market, after a double migratory ordeal firstly within China and then from China to Taiwan, where they face situations of double-discrimination? This empirical study of three urban spaces and one rural village in Taiwan shows the capacity of those women to face domination by developing creative strategies of survival and resistance. The plurality of the economic activities women can produce proves the emergence of transnational economic spaces between the Chinese society of departure and the Taiwanese society of arrival that contribute to bottom-up globalisation.

KEYWORDS: Bottom-up Globalisation, Double-discrimination, Gender, Labour and Marriage Migration, China and Taiwan, Entrepreneurship, Solidarity, Transnationalism, WeChat.

Introduction

The growing process of capitalistic globalisation has amplified internal and international migratory processes in China (Rouleau-Berger and Li 2013) and from China to Taiwan (Tsai and Hsiao 2006) during the last decade. The gender dimension seems to be a major characteristic of these mobilities (Hsia 2012; Xiao and Xin 2006). Studies on domestic migration in China have demonstrated the complexity of migratory patterns that are increasingly pluralised (Rouleau-Berger 2010). Scholars have focused on the apparatus of social and urban discrimination (Li and Tian 2010; Ren and Pun 2006) and employment disqualification (Li 2012; Yan 2008; Solinger 1999) migrant workers (*nongmin gong* 农民工) must face in Chinese cities, specifying the role of gender in the processes of social exclusion (Tong 2012; Jacka 2006) and labour exploitation (Pun 2005). Abundant literature analyses women's marriage migration from China to Taiwan (Tseng 2015; Hsia 2012; Toyota 2008; Lu 2005). This literature focuses mainly on the marriage-migration industry and the situations of gender and ethnic discrimination in Taiwan (Cheng 2013), concentrating only partially on employment and labour issues (Lan 2008; Xiao 2006) relating to Chinese spouses (*dalü peiyou* 大陆配偶) that are often associated with the broader case of foreign brides (*waiji peiyou* 外籍配偶). At the same time, the contemporary debate about international migration is increasingly concerned with transnationalism and transnational circulations (Castles and Miller 2009; Ong 1999; Glick Schiller et al. 1994), underlying the central link between the societies of departure and arrival of migrants, the two being closely embedded (Tarrus 2002). Thus, based on the case of a double migratory ordeal, first within China and then in Taiwan, this article brings together the labour and marriage dimensions of women's migration within a transnational perspective. In this respect, international scholarship has pointed to the importance of the entrepreneurial activities (Ambrosini 2009; Portes 2003) developed by the actors of migration, who capitalise resources (Orozco et al. 2005; Tarrus 1999) and develop competences (Rouleau-Berger 2010) to fight against marginalisation and social exclusion (Parreñas 2011; Sayad 1999; Scott 1987).

Women's contemporary migration frequently embodies a dense labyrinth of ordeals, producing a plurality of configurations, expectations, and possibilities. Thus, vulnerability, conceived as the "tendency to social disqualification" (Paugman 1996: 12), and fantasy (Moore 2007: 17), defined as the capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004) and to act (Ricoeur 2004), are two distinguishing features of women's migratory careers. From this perspective, inside the "gendered and ethnicized order of globalization" (Sassen 1998: 6), where the status of migrants often tends to discrimination and disqualification in both the societies of departure and of arrival, almost visible spaces of survival and resistance (Hardt and Negri 2000) emerge, and practices of mutual help and solidarity occur. Thus, the case of the double migration of Chinese women—firstly within mainland China and secondly from China to Taiwan—gives evidence of the complexity of the regimes of discrimination in both the societies of departure and of arrival, as well as of the capacity to act of the actors of migration, and their ability to develop multiple strategies to face their difficulties. In China and in Taiwan, Chinese migrant women experience situations of discrimination and social exclusion that lead to the development of a plurality of individual and collective tactics of resistance, based on entrepreneurial inventiveness and on a shared sense of sisterhood. Based on this conceptualisation, the main research questions addressed are: first, why, after several years of temporary work in China, do some migrant working women engage in international marriage-migration to Taiwan? Second, how are the situations of vulnerability and social exclusion reproduced in Taiwan at the intersection between gender, social origin, and their new marital status? Third, which weapons do women, individually and collectively, mobilise to fight against discrimination? The concept of career (Martiniello and Rea 2014) is useful when integrating three different levels of the analysis: the structures (the economic and spatial regimes, the disqualifications and hierarchies), the networks (in terms of resources and support), and the individual as agent (skills and competences, capacity of action, imaginaries and intentions). It is thus helpful to show how the entanglement of the multiple roles of wife, daughter-in-law, and worker during the migratory process is emblematic of the similarities and the differences in terms of regimes of

discrimination, social contexts, and migratory policies between China and Taiwan.

Based on the hypothesis of a link between internal and international migration of women from China to Taiwan, where the situations of discrimination and of social exclusion are repeated, this paper aims to analyse the creative strategies Chinese migrant women develop to deal with marginalisation within the Taiwanese society and in labour market. Firstly, the link between internal and international migration of women from China to Taiwan is looked at. The specific structure of the Chinese labour market and the apparatus of social and urban marginalisation (Yan 2008; Jacka 2006) that young migrant working women (*dagong mei* 打工妹) face is examined, as well as the changes in norms and identity that occur among young rural girls who experience city life. Therefore, women's ordeal of international migration to Taiwan through cross-border marriage⁽¹⁾ with Taiwanese nationals is not only conceived as a strategy of hypergamy (Constable 2003: 165-169), where women "marry up" to improve their social status, but is also considered in the framework of a form of transgression and resistance to the regimes of social and economic disqualification that characterise the Chinese society of departure. Further, the paper explores the diversification of the regimes of social exclusion in Taiwan on two different levels: gender domination within the family and cases of discrimination in the labour market. The contribution concludes with an analysis of the emergence of strategies of adaptation and resistance as well as the development of a plurality of economic initiatives by Chinese migrant women. Thus, micro-entrepreneurship appears to correspond to an individual and collective defence tactic to fight against disqualification within Taiwanese society and its labour market. The study of these practices also helps to reconsider female migration from China to Taiwan in a transnational perspective (Glick Schiller et al. 1994: 1-24), where the economic activities of migrants, displacement, and material and symbolic exchanges play a key role (Portes 2008: 817), contributing to bottom-up globalisation (Tarrow 2002).

Methodology

Research Fieldwork

Fieldwork for this study was conducted between December 2016 and March 2017⁽²⁾ in three different spaces in Taiwan. The suburbs of the city of Taipei (Nanshijiao 南势角 and Sanchong 三重) constitute the first location, where, due to low rental rates and the abundance of low-legitimised professional opportunities, Chinese migrant women tend to live. The second place is the city of Hsinchu 新竹 and particularly its suburbs (Zhubei 竹北 and Zhudong 竹东), chosen because of the presence of companies where women's husbands work, and where a huge community of women from China consequently exists. The third space is the rural village of Hukou 湖口乡 in Hsinchu County. The decision to study women's living and working experiences within rural areas is based on the hypothesis of Chinese women being "trapped in migration" in Taiwan. Many of them unknowingly married Taiwanese men whose economic conditions are precarious and who are unable to afford the urban lifestyle (Lu 2005). Zhudong is thus a representative case of the wider situation characterising women's experiences in the different research sites. Not only is it a semi-rural area where lower-class Taiwanese husbands, the agricultural and factory workers who often opt for international marriage, reside (Lan 2008), but it is also geographically close to Hsinchu Science and Industrial Park (*Xinzhū kēxué gōngyè yuānqū* 新竹

科学工业园区), where the Taiwanese grooms work. In 42 observed cases, international marriage resulted from a first meeting with a factory girl during a business trip (*chuchai* 出差). International migration and the making of a new career in a rural area of Taiwan embodies the "paradoxes of hypergamy" (Constable 2003: 146), where the expectations of women suddenly meet the unimagined reality of the society of arrival, facing a loss of capital and a plurality of disqualifications during migration.

Research Methods

The collection of data is organised around three multi-sited sequences. I first developed analysis of migrant women's employment in the Chinese and Taiwanese labour markets. To understand their choice to migrate to Taiwan, it is important to define their social status, their employment positions, their level of remuneration, professional relations, and the discrimination female Chinese migrant workers face within Chinese cities. In Taiwan, I studied the segments of the labour market in which Chinese women are commonly employed to understand their relationship with employment, their remuneration level, their working relationships with Taiwanese colleagues, their status, the presence of unequal treatment in the workplace, etc. The aim is to examine how Chinese women develop low-legitimised forms of economic activities and micro-entrepreneurship to fight against discrimination. *In situ* observations of both the working situations and of the social networks between women were made in order to link the effects of social constraints to the production of new forms of solidarity and resistance. Through multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), I followed women during their collective activities, observing their interactions to discover individual and collective strategies of everyday resistance to discrimination. I attended professionalising make-up classes promoted by the Taiwanese government, and Chinese ethnic minority dance courses organised by a Chinese migrant from Hunan, and I also taught free English classes to migrant women on the second floor of a lingerie shop owned by a woman from Chongqing in Nanshijiao. This enabled me to identify several informants and use them as a bridge to reach others. Thanks to a gender affinity with women and the relationship of reciprocity and respect we could establish, I could live with them and participate in their daily lives. Finally, through in-depth interviews and informal conversations in Chinese, I collected 50 biographies of migrant women, aged 25-35 years. They all underwent internal migration within China, from the countryside to the city, and experienced temporary work (*dagong* 打工) in major Chinese cities (in Guangdong, Fujian, and Zhejiang provinces), and then successfully migrated to Taiwan through marriage to Taiwanese citizens. The biographical method (Demazière and Dubar 1997) is useful when analysing the reciprocation of individual women's careers from Chinese to Taiwanese spaces. In studying the link between women's internal and international migration, it is thus fundamental to consider structural determinants, resources, and social networks (Martiniello and Rea 2014) both in the country of origin and in the receiving country. Within this framework, the reconstruction of the migratory careers of women from China to Taiwan shows that the starting point of the migration process is not the arrival in the receiving country, but rather that the migratory pro-

1. The *sine qua non* condition to enter legally the territory of Taiwan.
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cesses are often multidirectional and bifurcated, and there is a close inter-connection between the society of departure and the society of arrival.

From the countryside to Chinese cities, from Chinese cities to Taiwan

Internal migration and aspirations for autonomy

In China, the young migrant working woman (*dagong mei*) who moves from a rural area of an inner province to a large coastal city to join the labour force within the urban industrial apparatus (Solinger 1999) represents a vulnerable subject facing triple domination: cultural, in the patriarchal and patrilocal family of origin (Jacka 1995: 10-25); social and economic in the urban labour market (Li 2012; Pun 2005); and in the factory dormitories (Ren and Pun 2006), where the migrant workers—"second-class citizens" (Li and Tian 2010: 69-87) deprived of fundamental social rights—are exploited. As a young female migrant worker, this first experience of internal migration from the countryside to the city exposes the *dagong mei* to a plurality of situations of discrimination. At the same time, this access to large globalised cities and the pluralisation of working experiences permit young rural women to capitalise skills, competences, and a strong repertory of economic, social, and symbolic resources (Rouleau-Berger 2010). For young women, the choice of migrating, that is leaving the rural family to integrate into the urban reality, corresponds to a chance to discover a different world—consumerist, modern, and globalised (Pun 2005)—and embodies a strong desire to become an urban, modern, and autonomous subject. Consequently, domestic migration not only represents an immediately effective means to improve poor economic conditions experienced during a rural childhood, but is also associated with a chance to access a modern self and attain the desired urban status.

Xiao Mei, 30 years old, comes from a rural village in Sichuan province and is currently living in Zhudong. After graduating from middle school at the age of seventeen, she left her village for Zhuhai (Guangdong Province) with some co-villagers (*laoxiang* 老乡) to work in the local factories. Xiao Mei's words express the excitement of a young rural girl who discovers the "new horizon" represented by the globalised city of Zhuhai, where, according to her, she could win the autonomy and independence she had long desired:

I still remember the day I left my home village [*laojia* 老家]. I was very excited. I was young and I didn't really know what working in a factory meant but I was happy. Every year, my co-villagers who worked in Guangdong came back with presents and new clothes, fashion bags (...). I wanted to do the same, I wanted the same life. So, when my dad said that I had to leave to earn money, I was quite excited.⁽³⁾

Large Chinese coastal cities, which were originally opened to liberalise the economy and allow international penetration, constitute the spaces where the cheap migrant labour force is concentrated, as that is where multiple opportunities for working and social mobility exist. At the same time, these cities represent painful spaces of labour exploitation and of urban segregation, where the dream of economic independence and modernity of young rural girls encounters the hard working conditions in the factories as well as the precarious lifestyle in the dormitories.

Marginalisation within Chinese cities and in the labour market: *Dagong mei* 打工妹 as *waisheng mei* 外省妹

Miao Miao, 28 years old, currently lives in Hukou. Her biographical path is very similar to Xiao Mei's. Originally from a village in Hubei Province, she and her sister left their family to work in Shenzhen. Her initial excitement about a modern urban lifestyle in the big city was rapidly altered by the gruelling industrial work in an electronics factory:

I would have never imagined that working there would be so hard: my co-villagers sometimes complained about that when back in the village for the New Year but I didn't really believe them. How could factory work be so hard? I was happy in Shenzhen, you know... It's a big city and you can have fun. There are places to dance and to play around, but how can you have fun when you must always work overtime [*jiaban* 加班] to earn money? I really liked that city. It was well-developed and clean compared to my village. But, I must say that I really didn't have the time and money to enjoy city life. It was easy to find a job but it was not easy to work in the factory. The work was hard and at the beginning I felt stupid. The managers were very powerful and sometimes they insulted me because I was an outsider [*waisheng mei* 外省妹] (...). In China, if you don't have the urban *hukou*, you know how it works, whether you have money or connections [*guanxi* 关系] or... I knew I would not be able to live like this all my life.⁽⁴⁾

In fact, apart from the segmented and stratified structure of the Chinese labour market (Rouleau-Berger and Li 2013: 13), which limits migrant labour to dehumanising industrial work (Pun 2005), the dream of access to urban status is shattered by Chinese migratory policies, which disadvantage long-term urban integration for migrant workers,⁽⁵⁾ as well as by the dictates of the rural patriarchal family, which oblige young women to return to the village to get married. Women's migratory and professional careers give evidence of the difficulties of long-term urban integration for migrant workers within the Chinese city. Their biographical paths also show their strong desire for autonomy, independence, and modernity that they can appreciate through living and working in Chinese cities. Thus, the career is not linear, but is built in part by changes in the perspectives, motivations, and desires of the individual (Martiniello and Rea 2014: 1089). Xiao Lin's case is, in this respect, emblematic for its lucidity and representative of most of the other cases in showing the confrontation between initial expectations and the actual migration experiences. 30 years old, she comes from a rural village in Guangxi Province and currently lives in the district of Sanchong, in Taipei. At the age of 17, she migrated to Foshan, following some co-villagers:

When I left the village, I was very excited. I knew that going to Guangdong meant earning money for myself (...). The work in the factory was very hard, almost 12 hours per day and not that much money, but, at that time a thousand *kuai* per month for me meant a lot (...). After almost half a year, I decided to change and to move

3. Interview with Xiao Mei, Zhudong, 22 December 2016.

4. Interview with Miao Miao, Hukou, 16 January 2017.

5. I refer here to the *hukou*, the household registration system through which people obtain social rights, and to the *zhanzhu zheng*, the temporary residence permit for migrant workers in the city.

to Shenzhen, where one of my sisters was working. She said that Shenzhen was much better than Foshan and that the pay was higher.⁽⁶⁾

Xiao Lin therefore moved to Shenzhen and began working in a Taiwanese electronics factory. Even though she disliked the working conditions there, she appreciated the city environment:

I went out shopping with my colleagues and I had fun. In Shenzhen you can have a lot of fun and you can buy many things. It is also easy to go to Hong Kong.⁽⁷⁾

On the other hand, within the factory regime, Xiao Lin faced situations of humiliation in the workplace:

I was sitting all day long in front of the assembly line, and it was exhausting. Sometimes I needed to go to the toilet and they didn't give me permission to stand up. I woke up at half past six in the morning and started work at seven. I had a one-hour break for lunch at the canteen, and then back to the assembly line until night. Sometimes I had to work until eleven. That was not the life I dreamed of (...).⁽⁸⁾

Xiao Lin had been capitalising mobility capital and knowledge: she was now aware that because of her low educational level and her lack of professional skills, it would not be easy to find a better job in the future:

When you come from the countryside to work in the city, you do not have many chances; whether you have some connections [*guanxi*], someone who can help you (...) otherwise you stay in the factory forever. When you are born a *dagong mei*, you will be a *dagong mei* forever.⁽⁹⁾

Injunction to marry and the strategy of hypergamy through international migration

Chinese migrant women living in large Chinese cities and working inside multinational companies face a constant struggle between their aspirations, related to their pre-constituted image of the urban space, and the reality of the practices of marginalisation within the cities and in the labour market. Their urban and professional careers in China are constructed both on an objective level, related to the entrance of new and different social and economic regimes, and also on a subjective level, related to the definition, or attempts at definition, of a new subjectivity that wants to be urban and modern. The problem of the construction of new subjectivities represents the *pivot* around which the idea of project (Bloch 1959: 82) is constructed, as an anticipation of the self that, in terms of the future, seems to be "possible." Nevertheless, as previously shown, women's expectations face a plurality of institutional, economic, and social obstacles during their first migratory ordeal in China. Consequently, what happens when the entrance to new economic and urban regimes corresponds to a hurtful experience (Pollak 1995), increasing the awareness of being unable to reach the long-term urban status and independence the first migration was aimed for?

For some women, despite the strong injunction to marry by the patriarchal family of origin (Tong 2012: 45), returning to the village after an urban experience would correspond to a regression in their career. Lin Lin's case is,

in this respect, illustrative of 36 out of 50 of the interviewees. In 2010, after almost four years of work in several textile factories in Zhongshan (Guangdong), Lin Lin went back to her village in Hunan to celebrate the New Year and realized that her family was arranging a marriage (*xiangqin* 相亲) for her. Lin Lin's words express her frustration and insecurity: on the one hand, she liked the city of Zhongshan and she refused to go back to the village to marry a co-villager, defined as dirty (*zang* 脏), impolite, and uneducated (*mei suzhi* 没素质); on the other hand, she was conscious of the difficulties of long-term urban integration for a migrant worker in a Cantonese city:

I was happy in Zhongshan; the problem was the job: I had many friends there and even if the work was hard, we always found some time for fun. I liked the city but I could not have been a factory girl forever (...) that year, when my father announced to me that I had to get married, I couldn't believe it! I didn't want to marry a villager. Men from the countryside smoke, play chess; they are lazy and dirty, without any education (...). In Zhongshan I met some men from Hong Kong and also from Taiwan; they are very different. They dress well, speak with a soft voice, and they have money. My friend had a Taiwanese boyfriend and he was very nice to her. He bought her all she wanted. I also wanted a Taiwanese boyfriend, so I asked my friend to introduce me to her boyfriend's friends: that's how I met my husband.⁽¹⁰⁾

Dagong mei's careers are thus constructed within the articulation of opportunity structures and constraints (Martiniello and Rea 2014: 1086). The migratory experience helps women to capitalise skills and knowledge, and accumulate capitals (economic, social, and moral) that they can remobilise to face the difficulties during the progression of their career. In terms of opportunities, the working environment of the factory and of the city, as well as the social networks established can represent an advantage. It is because of the globalised dimension of large Chinese coastal cities that some Chinese migrant working women can relate to the reality of Taiwan. This can be a physical reality, based on meeting Taiwanese businessmen (*taishang* 台商), company bosses, or men looking for a foreign spouse. It can also be an imagined reality (Appadurai 1999: 68), rested on the narration of others' experiences or on the imagined vision of an idyllic and romantic island. In this respect, the words of Xiao Lin, deceived by her social condition of *gongren* 工人 around the assembly line of the factory, are illustrative. One day, she needed to meet with one of the managers of the Taiwanese factory where she was employed:

I am a cute girl, and as soon as he saw me, he liked me. He invited me to dinner and he was nice to me. I knew he was single and he wanted to get married. Many other girls married *taishang*. So, when he proposed, I couldn't say no. Going to Taiwan was a good opportunity to change my life. I remember that when I was young, we always watched Taiwanese romance movies. I thought that Taiwan was a nice place where everything was easy and that I had finally found the opportunity to leave the factory and live a better life.⁽¹¹⁾

6. Interview with Xiao Lin, Taipei, Sanchong, 19 January 2017.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Interview with Lin Lin, Taipei, Nanshijiao, 2 February 2017.

11. Interview with Xiao Lin, Taipei, Sanchong, 19 January 2017.

Thus, paradoxically, the factory where Xiao Lin had been suffering for several months changed from the Weberian iron cage to a multiple-exit room (Bloch 1959: 113). When Xiao Lin announced to her family her decision to marry a Taiwanese man, she encountered resistance:

My mother said that I should have married someone from the village and had children there, but I didn't want to. I didn't want to become like my mother and spend the rest of my life in the countryside (...).⁽¹²⁾

In the end, Xiao Lin transgressed her familial obligations, married the Taiwanese man, and migrated to Taiwan. For women, this form of transgression against the patriarchal family of origin corresponds with a way of affirming their new subjectivity, shaped within the city and through the working practice. The *dagong* work and the life experience in the urban space increase women's consciousness of their desires, life objectives, and ambitions. Thus, cross-border marriage migration is for some women a strategy of hypergamy, of upward mobility, embodying a means to independence and improvement of social status. Furthermore, as Constable observes in her analysis of "global hypergamy" (Constable 2003: 167), women who marry too far, refusing to follow the culturally prescribed patterns of marriage—in the case of Xiao Lin, the family-imposed pattern corresponded to a rural marriage in the countryside—encounter disapproval. These new *dagong* subjects are now aware of the social norms characterising their home village, related to a subaltern role of the woman within familial hierarchies. The choice of migrating to Taiwan embodies a form of both transgression against the rural social order and rural family obligations, as well as resistance against the disqualifying industrial working regime and spatial segregation within the city. For women, international marriage does not correspond to passivity and despair, but rather expresses their capacity for action, their selectivity and choice (Ong 1999: 11). Women's accounts also show the importance of imagination in the decision to migrate to Taiwan, which is an unknown destination yet associated with ideals of a "promised land," where work possibilities are multiplied and where the dream of access to modernity and urban status can finally become reality.

Studies of the marriage migration phenomenon of Chinese women to Taiwanese citizens show the complexity of the migratory industry hidden behind this practice, represented by the agencies (*zhongjie* 中介), the matchmakers, and the existing practice of arranged marriage (*baoban hunyin* 包办婚姻) (Hsia 2012; Lu 2005). Here, women's international migration to Taiwan is considered an individual strategy of fighting against a condition of social and economic marginalisation in the Chinese society of departure, as well as a means of access to long-term modernity, autonomy, and urban status. It is notable that behind the choice of migrating to Taiwan is hidden the construction of a mythicized image of Taiwan.

Trapped in migration

Among young female migrant workers, some leave Chinese cities to migrate to Taiwan through marriage with a Taiwanese citizen. However, women's expectations encounter the reality of the country of arrival, where the situations of domination and discrimination they once encountered in Chinese cities are reproduced. This integrates both the characteristics of Taiwanese society and the Taiwanese gendered legislation (Cheng 2013: 158), which impose a change in both their marital status and their new position

in society as a "spouse." For Chinese women, the Taiwanese regimes of domination and discrimination are shaped on two different levels: inside the family and in the labour market. Within these situations, it is possible to observe the similarities and differences of the forms of discrimination they faced in China and how these new subjectivities are shaped through multiple and inextricable roles of wife, daughter-in-law, and worker.

Family and gender domination

The first regime of domination—defined as a situation where subjects are positioned into asymmetrical or hierarchical conditions (Boltanski 2009: 37) and which is based on control of the subject's bodies and actions (Foucault 1984)—is within the familiar sphere; on arrival, Chinese spouses commonly live with their parents-in-law, immediately assuming the gendered role of mother and daughter-in-law (*xifu* 媳妇) and obliged to provide "unpaid reproductive labour" (Benería 2007: 16) as a "natural part of women's duty and identity" (Hsia 2012: 9). The paradox of the hypergamy thus invests the familiar environment as well, where women face a reproduction of the patriarchal hierarchies that characterise both their hometown in China (*niangjia* 娘家) and the new husband's family in Taiwan (Cheng 2013: 164).

Liang Liang, 28 years old and originally from Guangxi, currently works in a school canteen in Zhudong. At the age of 22 she married a Taiwanese native 20 years her senior, and curious and excited, she arrived in Zhudong, where, she believed, working and living opportunities would be better than in Zhongshan's factories. Nevertheless, as soon as she arrived Liang Liang had the feeling of being "trapped," realising that Taiwanese life in Zhudong did not correspond to her expectations. On the contrary, it represented a decline and a regression within her career:

Do you see Zhudong? It is almost the countryside. All the buildings are so old and low. Zhongshan was much better. When I arrived here, my husband told me that I didn't need to work, that I just had to take care of his parents and his daughter (he had previously divorced). It was horrible; I spent the first three years taking care of his mother, who was sick and not even able to wash her ass. I woke up early, I prepared breakfast, then I went to the street market to help my husband's sister sell tofu, then I went back home to prepare lunch, then back to the market until night. Then, back home to cook dinner. After that, I had to take care of my husband, who came home late at night after work and who wanted to make love whereas I didn't want to. I felt like a slave.⁽¹³⁾

Moreover, relationships with the husband's family are often conflictual. Forty-five women declared themselves to have sustained injuries from their mothers-in-law (*popo* 婆婆), with ethnic stereotyping related to their mainland Chinese origin (Tsai 2011: 244–246) combined with gender bias to suggest questionable moral integrity (Tseng 2015: 112). In this context, ethnic stereotypes are strengthened by a diffused nationalist, anti-Chinese, and anti-communist sentiment, objectified into legislation that exposes marriage migrants from China to stricter regulations of residency and citizenship (Lan 2008: 837) than those from South-East Asia. The expression *dalumei*

12. *Ibid.*

13. Interview with Liang Liang, Zhudong, 17 February 2017.

大陆妹 is thus emblematic: literally "girl from the mainland," but also a homophone for a type of vegetable in Taiwanese dialect, it is often employed to indicate a negative image of a Chinese bride being a prostitute or mistress. Qian Qian, 28 years old, from Jiangxi, living in the district of Nanshijiao in Taipei and working as a housekeeper in a hotel, describes her domestic experience:

For almost two years I have been living with the mother of my husband and his younger brother. They used to look down on me and they treated me as their slave. Often, when talking to my husband, they used to say: "Your *dalumei* does not cook well, and she cannot clean the house (...)." Once the brother of my husband asked me many questions. First: "Did you come here to steal my brother's money?" Second question: "Are you here just to obtain a Taiwanese identity card?" Third question: "After obtaining the Taiwanese identity card, are you going to divorce my brother?" I felt very embarrassed.⁽¹⁴⁾

Discrimination in the Taiwanese labour market

The second regime of discrimination encompasses the economic dimension, related both to access to employment and disqualification in the labour market. Here, discrimination is intended as a "barrier to the social recognition in the labour market" (Roulleau-Berger and Liu 2014: 8). Thus, despite progress in terms of migratory policies in Taiwan since the 2009 reform of the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area (*liang'an renmin guanxi tiaoli* 兩岸人民关系条例), when Chinese migrant spouses do obtain the right to work,⁽¹⁵⁾ the sphere of employment still represents the core of social and economic exclusion. A Chinese accent (*kouyin* 口音), stronger in land-locked provinces, reveals the social identity (Goffman 1963) of the woman and makes her rural mainland origin immediately identifiable. Low-qualified and often deprived of Taiwanese citizenship,⁽¹⁶⁾ Chinese migrants can only integrate into disqualifying segments of the labour market. Some of them re-join the industrial sector; others the care sector; some of them perform gendered occupations in the fields of hairdressing, make-up, or massage. In most cases, it is a question of precarious jobs, where the boundary between what is legal and what is illegal is weak. Women's accounts give evidence of discrimination in access to employment and in the recruitment process. 80% of the interviewees denounced the existence of visible forms of social exclusion, such as unequal treatment in the workplace, including low remuneration levels, extra-contractual obligations, and poor professional relations. 27 year-old Zi Xun, from Hunan, first explains the difficulties of gaining access to employment, then declares she has been the victim of inequality due to her remuneration level in the LED factory where she is working in Zhudong:

I spent several months looking for a job. Every day, I made phone calls asking for a job, but as soon as they heard my accent, they said they didn't want foreign workers. Sometimes, I also went to the worksite for an interview, and they said they would call me back, but they didn't (...). Now I work in the factory and I earn 20,000 dollars and something per month, but my Taiwanese colleagues earn almost 30,000 dollars; as I do not have a Taiwanese identity card, I have to pay a contribution towards health insurance every month, and every month I also have to pay taxes, while my Taiwanese colleagues only

pay taxes once a year in May. I think this is unfair because we perform the same job and we spend the same time at work.⁽¹⁷⁾

A third of the informants are also victims of informal and recurrent harassment by their colleagues and their superiors, through insults referring to their Chinese origin and to their status as foreign bride, or through contestation of errors and inefficiencies. Mei Mei, 30 years old, from Jiangxi, currently lives in Hukou. In November 2016 she left her job at an electronics factory with her colleague, another Chinese woman, because of insults they received from their colleagues:

It was really depressing to hear the same comments everyday: "Did you come here to steal your husband's money and Taiwanese people's jobs? If your husband has money, why do you have to work?" It was these sorts of insults and gossiping by our colleagues (*sangu liupo* 三姑六婆). It was exhausting, because we were working hard and we didn't do anything bad (...). [T]hat's why we decided to resign and start our own activity.⁽¹⁸⁾

De facto, the repetition, although in different forms, of discrimination in Taiwan puts Chinese women in a situation of severe vulnerability. Clearly, entering the Taiwanese reality of life and work constitutes a painful experience for these women, who realise that access to modernity and emancipation—initially attributed to migration to Taiwan—is a matter of fantasy (Moore 2007) and illusion (Sayad 1999). Many women tend to regret the migratory ordeal to Taiwan: the disillusionment and disappointment they feel accentuates the desire to migrate back to China. So, after the mobility experience in Taiwan, women seem to be "trapped in migration": due to Taiwanese migratory, spatial, and gendered policies, rejection by Taiwanese society on arrival, and subsequent economic disqualification, a desire to divorce and return to the society of departure materialises. However, a sense of duty, family responsibilities, and the fear of losing face (*diu mianzi* 丢面子) appears to inhibit the desire to migrate back.

Transnationalism and entrepreneurship

Within the migration "trap," where access to employment seems to be obstructed in a majority of cases, these women are required to develop adaptability capacities to cope with the difficulties that characterise the host society. Thus, to oppose disqualifying labour regimes, women must engage in innovative practices of micro-entrepreneurship and informal economic activities, corresponding to a "creative response and adaptation strategy" (Parreñas 2011) to overcome the obstacles of entering labour markets and suffering the workplace. In many cases, when stigmatisation, social contempt, and exclusion in the workplace prevent women from performing their professions, auto-entrepreneurship seems to be an effective way to survive and work. Of the 50 interviewees, 20 have denounced the difficulties of entering Taiwanese labour markets and have consequently

14. Interview with Qian Qian, Taipei, Nanshijiao, 6 March 2017.

15. Before the reform of 2009, Chinese migrant spouses in Taiwan could obtain the right to work only after two years of residence.

16. According to the reform of the law in 2009, citizenship is obtainable after six years of residence in Taiwan.

17. Interview with Zi Xun, Zhudong, 14 February 2017.

18. Interview with Mei Mei, Hukou, 23 December 2016.

started their own economic activity, and 42 out of 50 have developed small on-line businesses through the social network of WeChat. In fact, these practices seem to be current. Not only do they avoid the neutralisation of the identity and the “invisibilisation” of their competences, but they also prove to be an instrument of adaptation to fight against social exclusion. For women, working not only represents a concrete means of survival and economic independence, but is also an intimate space of individuality and communitarian affirmation. In many cases, micro-entrepreneurship is developed through women’s social networks and is based on the cooperation of other Chinese women, thus it represents a gendered and intimate space of mutual help, where working is associated with sisterhood and affection. Demonstrating initiative and commitment, Chinese women reactivate the social, moral, and economic resources capitalised during their two migratory ordeals, within mainland China and in Taiwan, and develop more or less visible adaptation paths. Thus, within the city, inside the low-legitimised space of the labour market, urban realities of survival emerge, finding their own weapons to resist (Scott 1987). These spaces synthesize the necessity and desire of the migrants to work and the “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai 2004: 81) that motivated the two migratory ordeals in China and in Taiwan: autonomy, modernity, economic independence, and status recognition. Within these spaces, Chinese women develop a plurality of economic activities, often characterised by a transnational dimension (Glick Schiller et al. 1994), connecting the society of departure and the society of arrival on different levels. Evidence provided from my fieldwork proves the central role that solidarity mechanisms between Chinese migrant women play in the development of these economic practices, especially in terms of capital, socio-economic support, and labour force.

Entrepreneurial Inventiveness

Meng Meng, 30 years old, comes from Hainan Province. At the age of 16, she left her home village to join her sisters in Shenzhen, where she worked first as a factory worker and then as a waitress in a small restaurant. Married to a Taiwanese man, she arrived in Zhudong at the age of 26 and found a job in a local factory, where the salary was low and she was a victim of harassment by her colleagues. In 2016, during the New Year celebration, Meng Meng returned to her home village in Hainan, and on arriving back in Zhudong she decided to start her own economic activity, on the street just in front of her lodgings. Meng Meng has opened a small stand where she sells sweet potatoes, candy floss, and some products typical of Hainan Island (smoked fish, nuts, goji berries, etc.). When entering her house, I discovered a considerable stock of cosmetics, face masks, and traditional Chinese food from Hainan. Meng Meng explains:

It is very hard to earn money here in Taiwan, especially if you are Chinese. Taiwanese people do not like us and it is quite impossible to find decent work, especially if you don’t have Taiwanese citizenship. That’s why I decided to develop my own activity; I am my own boss [laoban 老板] and I do not have to obey others.⁽¹⁹⁾

To arrange her business, Meng Meng called on her social networks (*guanxi*) in both China and Taiwan. In this sense, the Chinese sociologist Yang Yiyi (2008: 450) describes *guanxi* as a social network articulated simultaneously on the heritage of the kinship regime—in this case in China—and on a new relationship of mutuality, reciprocity, and confidence in Taiwan. Thus, social



Figure 1 – The WeChat “Chinese sisters in Hsinchu mutual help group” (Xinzhushengshi jiemei huzhu qun 新竹省市姐妹互助群) where Meng Meng promotes her business, 2017.

© Photo taken by the author.



Figure 2 – Meng Meng’s inside her place, selling Chinese traditional food to two “sisters”, from Hunan and Jiangxi, met on the WeChat group, 2017.

© Photo taken by the author.

networks represent a form of social capital as they constitute “a system of interpersonal connections that link the migrants throughout and within their spaces of origin and of destination based on kinship, friendship, and the feeling of belonging to the same community of origin” (Zhang 2006: 109). In Hainan Province, Meng Meng has a couple of fellow villagers who send the products to Shenzhen, the city where she formerly worked, and her former colleagues collect the goods and send them to Taoyuan Airport

19. Interview with Meng Meng, Zhudong, 20 February 2017.

(Taipei). There Li Jing, a young Chinese migrant from Anhui and a friend of Meng Meng, collects the products and sends them to Zhudong. Through a dense network of Chinese migrant women living in the county of Hsinchu, developed through the social network of WeChat, the “Chinese sisters in Hsinchu mutual help group” (*Xinzhū shengshì jiēmei hūzhu qún* 新竹省市姐妹互助群) allows Meng Meng to promote her products, and clients increase by word of mouth: the integrality of Meng Meng’s clients are therefore Chinese migrant women. Here, we observe that transnational migratory processes include not only circulation, where the actors physically move. Meng Meng’s case shows that it is possible to be involved in transnational practices and relationships even without a physical movement, thanks to the social networks of immigrants and the virtual, and often invisible, delivery of goods. Independent small entrepreneurs can thus rely on their social capital, based on strong solidarity, which derives from a general feeling of uncertainty characterising the status of migrants (Portes 2003: 828).

Practices of survival and resistance

38 years old Hubei native Xiang Xiang arrived in Taiwan before her friend, 30-year-old Xiao Lin, also from Hubei, and arranged her friend’s marriage. These two women worked for several months in an electronics factory in Hukou, where they met Xiu Lan, 32 years old, from Yunnan Province. The three women decided to abandon industrial work because of discrimination in the workplace. Divorced from their husbands, they needed to find a means of survival for themselves and their children. Xiang Xiang and Xiao Lin started working in a massage parlour, while Xiu Lan found a job in a laundry owned by a foreign spouse from Thailand. Suddenly, the Thai woman needed to leave Taiwan and sold the business to Xiu Lan, who bought it with the help of her two Chinese friends. The laundry is structured on two floors: the laundry is on the first floor, and on the second floor, the three women have organised a small shop selling underclothes and cosmetics imported directly from Guangdong Province, where the three of them previously worked. After working in a factory in Foshan (Guangdong Province), Xiu Lan had found a job as sales assistant in an underclothes shop in Zhuhai. After migrating to Taiwan, she kept contact with the owner of that shop, with whom she decided to arrange the new business. If someone decides to buy the products, all that is required is sending an order via WeChat, and the goods are sent directly from Guangdong to Hukou. Moreover, a couple of years ago, Xiang Xiang ran a small brothel on the second floor of the laundry. While working in the massage parlour she had also worked as a prostitute through an agency. Facing serious economic problems, Xiang Xiang appealed to the same agency she had previously worked for to find some Taiwanese clients and suggested that she would supply the prostitutes. She explains:

I knew some sisters in Hukou that were engaged in this profession because they desperately needed money, and I recommended them to work here. I could easily find clients for them and I got a small percentage through the agency. ⁽²⁰⁾

The brothel does not exist anymore, and the three women sell cosmetics and underclothes in the laundry, also arranging make-up classes for the Chinese “sisters” (*jiēmei* 姐妹) living in Hukou. During the celebration of the Chinese New Year, the three women organise a big lunch for all the Chinese “sisters” in the laundry. Thus, Xiu Lan explains:



Figure 3 – Huan Jin’s stocks of products from Sichuan (spicy traditional food) and from Guangdong (facial masks), inside her beauty salon, 2017. Products are bought and sold through WeChat, thanks to a dense social network of friends, colleagues and relatives in China and to a new social network of Chinese “sisters” in Taiwan.

© Photo taken by the author.

Our business is not only a good way to earn money, but it is also a way to recreate a community of sisters here in Hukou, who can help each other when necessary. I remember that the first year I celebrated the New Year in Taiwan I felt lonely, so far from my family, so now on the second day of the lunar calendar ⁽²¹⁾ [*chu er* 初二], we organise a big party here, because this is our new *niangjia* 娘家. ⁽²²⁾

Sisterhood and solidarity

Huan Jin, 35 years old, comes from Sichuan. After plurimigration within China (Sichuan-Shanghai-Fujian-Guangdong), she has been living in Taipei for nine years. In the last three years, the round trips between her home village in Sichuan, Guangdong Province, and Taiwan have become increasingly frequent (*paolai paoqu* 跑来跑去). Divorced and facing the difficulties of entering the Taiwanese labour market, she decided to open a beauty salon inside her apartment, where she performs massages. Once a month, she hosts Chinese ethnic minority dance classes organised by her friend Lin Lin, from Hunan: the classes are free and open to all the “sisters” of the city. Consequently, Huan Jin’s beauty salon has become a space of meeting and exchange for Chinese migrant women, a real space of mutual help. For ex-

20. Interview with Xiang Xiang, Hukou, 22 January 2017.

21. The *chu er* is when tradition requires a woman to go back to her parents’ house (*niangjia*).

22. Interview with Xiu Lan, Hukou, 29 January 2017.



Figure 4 – An example of payment through WeChat “red packet” of an amount of 400 RMB, between a Chinese migrant woman in Taiwan, the seller of milk powder, and her previous colleague in Shenzhen, the client.

© Photo taken by the author.

ample, it is there that in December 2016, the “sisters” collected money to help a Sichuanese woman bring her sick mother to Taiwan to seek medical care. Moreover, Huan Jin, like many of my informants, is engaged in an innovative form of commerce (overseas personal shopper, *daigou* 代购) based on the export of Taiwanese products (especially milk powder, facial masks, and medicines) to China. Built on the social network of clients she developed during her internal migration experiences, she manages to send the products to Shenzhen, Xiamen, and Shanghai, where, thanks to her contacts, they are redistributed among the various clients. Payment on WeChat is made in *renminbi* 人民币 (RMB) through the “red packet” (*hong bao* 红包) mechanism, which permits easy transfer of money online. All the transactions made through WeChat are invisible and tax-free (*mian shui* 免税), because the platform is linked to a Chinese bank account as opposed to a Taiwanese one. As explained by Huan Jin, since mobility is increasingly circular and women often go back and forth across the border, they can easily spend the RMB collected on WeChat during their stays in China without having to exchange them for Taiwanese dollars.

Here, the social networks built by women, both in China and Taiwan, clearly represent a vector of attachment to the past and of projection towards the future. These multiple forms of micro-entrepreneurship and informal economic activities of independent work correspond to a proactive response to the difficulties of social and professional integration into Taiwanese society. These practices show women’s capacity to activate and mobilise the social, economic, and relational resources capitalised during

the internal and international migratory ordeals: they are in the forefront of informal transnational economic initiatives, where the help and collaboration of a network of villages, former colleagues, and/or family members in China and in Taiwan is fundamental. These practices give evidence of different forms of transnationalism: connective (Ambrosini 2009), through the transfer of people and money; commercial (Orozco et al. 2005), via the products sold on WeChat; and symbolic (Tarrus 1999), by the circulation of norms, traditions, and identities. The sentiment of “sisterhood” among women also plays an important role in the development of these practices and careers in Taiwan. Women consider themselves “sisters,” as part of a community based on their shared Chinese origin, the migratory and marriage experience, and gender. Frequently developed via WeChat, and relying on an intimate sentiment of sisterhood and of belonging to the same “community of destiny” (Pollack 1995), social networks help these female entrepreneurs to ensure collaboration, help, moral support, and a permanent clientele.

Conclusion

Internal and international movements of women between China and Taiwan show the pluralisation of professional patterns and migratory careers of women who often face situations of vulnerability and social contempt. These circulations give evidence of the complexity and similarity of the regimes of discrimination that women face within both the society of departure and the society of arrival. Simultaneously, these migratory careers attest to women’s capacity of action to develop a plurality of strategies and tactics of resistance to domination. Considering these women to be victims of globalisation would be inappropriate, as they demonstrate both in China and in Taiwan their ability to mobilise competences and individual and collective resources, connecting the different spaces of their mobility. Their migratory paths confirm the emergence of hierarchies and dominations, but also the appearance of new arrangements between the communities, the development of new norms and institutions, as well as of negotiations and adaptation capacity. Economic initiatives of Chinese women in Taiwan represent a form of “globalisation from below.” Their proliferation calls into question the idea of “here and there” (Tarrus 2002: 14). Thus, the connections between the two countries, China and Taiwan, deriving from migrant women’s practices could help to reconsider the articulation between the two spaces in terms of “circulatory territory” (Ambrosini 2008): a territory that transcends the traditional logic of origin-destination circulation, and is now based on a new arrangement, both spatial and chronological, between the past, the present, and the future of the migrants.

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