Family Migration in China: Gender Inequalities in Determinants, Labour Market Outcomes, and Household Labour

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Abstract

China's rapid economic development has been supported by large numbers of people migrating within the country. While an increasing share of migration now involves couples and other family members—a pattern known as family migration—research on migration in China remains largely focused on individuals. As a result, the role of couple dynamics in shaping migration decisions and post-migration outcomes has been largely overlooked, particularly in relation to gender disparities.

This doctoral thesis addresses these gaps by examining family migration—defined as the movement of couples, with or without children, between counties—in China through three empirical studies based on longitudinal data from the China Family Panel Studies (2010–2018). The studies explore the factors influencing family migration decisions (Study I) and their consequences for men and women in terms of labour market outcomes (Study II) and the division of household labour (Study III). A central focus is placed on how gender, family dynamics, and household registration (Hukou) policies interact to shape these processes.

Findings reveal that decision-making within couples remains asymmetrical, with migration primarily driven by the male partner's educational attainment, while the female partner's education has little to no influence. This pattern is especially pronounced among rural-Hukou households, where traditional gender norms are more rigid. Additional findings highlight gender disparities in migration outcomes. While both men and women experience higher employment rates following migration, women's post-migration employment reflects a growing demand for low-skilled labour rather than gender equality progress. Further, married women face a decline in earnings, and mothers (with coresident children) experience even greater employment and income disadvantages after migration. While rural Hukou status does not exacerbate women's disadvantages, men with rural registration face lower post-migration employment rates, further highlighting the demand for low-skilled female labour

rather than signalling improved gender equity. Beyond the labour market, family migration also reshapes the dynamics of domestic labour. Results show that couple migration leads to an increase in women's housework hours, while men's domestic workload remains unchanged.

By highlighting persistent gender inequalities in family migration, this thesis provides a deeper understanding of migration dynamics in China and underscores the structural and cultural barriers that limit women's economic and social mobility.

Keywords: family migration, gender inequality, paid work, housework, China

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research objectives

Regional economic disparity drives internal migration in China, with migrants comprising 26.6% of the total population as of the 2020 Census (Cheng and Duan 2021). Traditionally, migration was dominated by individual workers, often resulting in split-household arrangements where men relocated for employment while women and children remained behind (Fan and Li 2020; Roberts et al. 2004). More recently, shifts in economic structures, policy changes, and evolving social norms have altered migration patterns. Expanding labour opportunities in destination places, such as social service providers or manufacturing workers, for women has increased female participation (Hou, Guan, and Yang 2019; Yang and Chen 2013), contributing to a rise in family migration. More and more couples—and sometimes their children—relocate together to enhance household earnings (Fan and Li 2019; Sheng 2014; Zhao, Liu, and Zhang 2018). By 2017, 81.6% of migrant households included at least two members, according to the National Floating Population Dynamic Monitoring survey (Zhu and Huang 2022).

Despite the significant role of couples and family households in internal migration in China, existing research has primarily focused on migration and its consequences at the individual level. As a result, studies have largely overlooked whether persistent gender inequalities and intra-couple dynamics influence major life decisions such as migration, as well as the broader impacts migration has on spouses and other family members beyond the household head (Meng, Zhao, and Liwu 2016). Moreover, the limited research available presents conflicting findings, particularly regarding the educational profiles of migrating couples—some studies suggest a positive selection effect, while others indicate more diverse patterns (Fan, Sun, and Zheng 2011; Wang et al. 2019).

To better understand migration in China, it is essential to address migration decisions and associated outcomes in the context of couple and family

households, assessing couple-level factors and the interactions between partners, among others. In contrast to China, research in Western countries has long explored these associations, particularly since the late 20th century, when scholars identified a connection between rising female labour market participation and declining internal migration rates—especially at life stages where family formation has already occurred. Findings from this extensive literature indicate that migration decisions within couples tend to be more responsive to the male partner's labour market resources (e.g., education, earnings, experience), though a female partner with equal or greater resources can sometimes veto a move (Cooke 2001; Vidal and Huinink 2019). After relocation, women are more likely to face disadvantages, experiencing declines in labour-force participation, work hours, and earnings (Cooke 2001), as well as widening gender gaps in earnings and housework hours within couples (Cooke et al. 2009; Vidal, Perales, and Baxter 2016). Additionally, studies highlight the role of gender attitudes and family formation in shaping these patterns—while increasing gender egalitarianism challenges traditional family migration dynamics, conventional patterns often persist when couples have already formed families (Cooke 2008; Lersch 2016; Vidal and Huinink 2019).

The aim of my PhD thesis is to advance our understanding of internal migration dynamics in China by incorporating a family context and gender inequality perspectives. In China, migration has implicitly been framed as a process in which women follow their male partners, reflecting their historically secondary role in the labour market and persistent gender norms that assign men to paid work and women to domestic responsibilities. However, these assumptions have not been thoroughly tested in academic research. This issue is particularly salient in contemporary China, where numerous gender equality-oriented policies have been implemented to enhance women's educational attainment and labour force participation. However, the effectiveness of these policies remains limited, and traditional gender norms continue to prevail. Consequently, women continue to experience persistent disadvantages in the labour market. For instance, women face lower earnings, fewer job opportunities, and limited career advancement, even when they have comparable education and experience to men (Cheng et al. 2024; He and Wu

2017; Li, Tang, and Jin 2024; Liu and Zuo 2023; Xiao and Asadullah 2020; Xiu and Gunderson 2015). Additionally, life course transitions—such as parenthood—can further exacerbate gender disparities, as becoming a mother is negatively associated with labour market outcomes (Cheng et al. 2024; Meng, Zhang, and Zou 2023). These complex dynamics underscore the need for empirical research on how men and women in couples influence family migration decisions, and how family migration influences gender inequalities in both the labour market and the division of household labour.

A key overarching research question of this dissertation is: *How do gender, partner and family dynamics contribute to the determination and the consequences—both in the labour market and in household labour—of contemporary migration in China?*

A distinctive feature of internal migration in China is the sharp divide between rural and urban areas, reinforced by the Household Registration System (Hukou). Established in the late 1950s, the Hukou system has historically restricted population mobility and access to social benefits, creating structural barriers that differentiate the migration experiences of rural and urban residents. While migration from rural to urban areas is often driven by better economic opportunities, migrants from rural backgrounds face institutional disadvantages, such as limited access to public services, labour market discrimination, and precarious employment conditions. These disparities likely influence not only who migrates but also how migration affects labour market outcomes and gendered divisions of labour within households. For example, rural-to-urban migration can enhance women's employment opportunities, especially for those with lower education levels or limited work experience. These shifts may help narrow gender disparities in both paid and unpaid work. The impact of family migration may therefore vary depending on the Hukou status and the rural or urban origin of partners, shaping both the decision-making process and post-migration consequences.

A second overarching research question of this dissertation is *to what extent the causes and consequences of migration within couple or family households are shaped by the distinct dynamics of urban-rural movements and the*

constraints imposed by the household registration system?

The rest of this introductory chapter is composed of four sections. The first section briefly presents the theoretical framework of my dissertation, introducing key concepts and the main theoretical approaches adopted in the literature. The second section discusses in more detail the study context, to enable the reader to have a more solid background on the structural, institutional and cultural dimensions underlying the dynamics of internal migration, gender inequality and family and partner dynamics in China. The third section introduces the methodological design. Finally, the fourth and last section introduces the outline of the thesis, briefly summarizing the contents of the remaining chapters.

1.2 Theoretical framework

1.2.1 couple and family migration

Internal migration refers to the process of changing one's stable residence within national borders, typically involving a permanent or long-term move that alters an individual's daily activity space, including work, education, and social interactions (Vidal and Huinink 2019). This type of movement distinguishes itself from temporary mobility by its lasting impact on settlement patterns and socio-economic integration.

In China, internal migration is often conceptualized in relation to both changes in Hukou-registered addresses (see next section) as well as changes in residential addresses, with these changes typically measured at the county level (Losavio 2021; Su, Tesfazion, and Zhao 2018; Yue et al. 2020). County-level divisions constitute the third tier of administrative geography in China, positioned below provinces and prefectures, but above towns and villages (Bernard, Bell, and Zhu 2019). Each county typically comprises a central town or small city, along with surrounding rural villages and farmland. Some counties are also integrated into major metropolitan areas such as Beijing and Shanghai. There are over 2800 counties in mainland China, averaging 3,361 square kilometres and approximately 470,000 residents (National Bureau of Statistics,

2010, 2011). Counties serve as significant socioeconomic and administrative units, where migration can profoundly reshape local labour markets, social networks, and access to public services. Along these lines, this study adopts a definition of internal migration based on changes in residence across counties, capturing shifts that have tangible consequences for individuals and communities. While studying internal migration at the county level in China is particularly relevant due to the socio-economic implications of such moves, I am aware that relying solely on administrative classifications may overlook other relevant forms of within-country mobility, such as residential mobility or long-distance moves within large counties. Nevertheless, we focus on inter-county change with a particular emphasis on the type of Hukou registration and urban-rural origins, allowing for a systematic analysis of internal migration that aligns with key economic and social boundaries and offering valuable insights into patterns of labour migration and urbanization.

As more family members participate in migration, internal migration patterns have grown increasingly complex. The timing and sequencing of movements among family members shape diverse relocation trajectories. Yang and Chen (2013) categorized some of the major patterns into different types, such as couples migrating together, couples migrating with children, husbands migrating first, and wives migrating first. Similarly, Fan and Li (2019) identified broader family structures involved in migration, including couples, parents with children, parents with married children, and multi-generational households spanning three or four generations. Yet, due to data constraints, these studies remain descriptive, offering limited insight into the complex relationship between migration and family dynamics in China. Relatedly, it remains unclear whether and how migration and its outcomes result from and exacerbate gender disparities between spouses. To close gaps in knowledge, this thesis puts the focus on couple and family migration in China. I define couple migration when both spouses relocate together, at about the same time. I consider cases where one spouse relocates and the other follows within a short time interval as instances of couple migration. While some of the existing literature has focused on who moves first and the implications of staggered migration, less attention has been given to the consequences of both partners having

relocated—a gap this thesis seeks to fill. Family migration is similarly defined to couple migration, but can also include additional household members, most commonly children (Wang et al. 2019).

1.2.2 Theoretical perspectives on gender inequality in family migration

Migration is frequently understood as an economic strategy driven by employment opportunities and financial considerations. While research in Western countries has extensively explored the impact of gender and the economic resources of men and women on both decisions and consequences of family migration, studies on this topic remain scarce in China. To provide a theoretical foundation for understanding gender inequality in family migration, this section briefly introduces three central perspectives: the human capital perspective, the gender role perspective, and the life course perspective.

The human capital perspective views family migration as economic investment aimed at maximizing their collective economic benefits (Mincer 1978). In this framework, families decide to migrate if the potential economic gains outweigh the cost. Theoretically, this decision is gender-neutral, meaning the spouse has with higher earning potential should lead the migration (Cooke 2008; Mincer 1978; Vidal and Huinink 2019). However, in practice, the labour market often disadvantages women's, limiting their opportunities and positioning them as "tied migrants" or "trailing spouses" (Cooke 2001; Krieger 2020). Empirical studies have shown that family migration often results in reduced employment and earnings for women due to their limited economic opportunities (Cooke et al. 2009; Krieger 2020).

The gender role perspective has expanded on the human capital model by integrating gender ideology, which emphasizes how cultural and social expectations shape gendered decisions and outcomes. Traditional gender norms position men as primary breadwinners and women as secondary earners, shaping migration patterns that often prioritize men's career advancement at the expense of women's careers. In contrast, more egalitarian gender ideologies assume that both partners' careers should be equally considered in migration decisions. Research has shown that even when female partners

holding traditional gender roles have higher economic resources, male partners' employment prospects are still prioritized when families relocate (Boyle et al. 2008). As a result, women are more likely to experience job discontinuity and earnings loss post-migration, as gender ideology exerts a stronger influence than human capital in shaping these outcomes (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Lersch 2016; Shauman and Noonan 2007).

The life course perspective moves beyond economic rationale and gender roles by integrating the interplay between life events and migration decisions and outcomes. It emphasizes that migration decisions are closely linked to significant life course events such as marriage, childbirth, and union dissolution (De Jong and Graefe 2008; Kley and Drobnič 2019). The timing of migration events in relation to life course events can significantly impact employment outcomes, particularly for women. For instance, the negative effects of family migration on women's employment and earnings are more pronounced when migration coincides with parenthood (Boyle et al. 2003; Cooke 2001; Kley and Drobnič 2019). This aligns with findings suggesting that couples are more likely to conform to traditional gender roles after becoming parents (Muller, Hiekel, and Liefbroer 2020). By emphasizing the complex interdependencies among migration, and family dynamics, the life course perspective advocates for a more nuanced analysis of asymmetric migration patterns.

Above all, the human capital perspective explains the economic motivations behind migration decisions, while the gender role perspective underscores the influence of traditional gender norms. The life course perspective further expands on these frameworks by considering how family dynamics and major life events shape migration patterns over time. However, existing research has not sufficiently examined whether these perspectives apply to the Chinese context.

1.3 The study context

1.3.1 Hukou, internal migration, and economic reforms

In China, significant regional economic disparities have led to high levels of

internal migration, with individuals predominantly relocating from economically underdeveloped to more developed areas (Hou et al. 2019). Geographically, the eastern provinces consistently attract over 50% of internal migrants, while the central and western regions absorb the remaining share (Duan, Xie, and Lü 2019). Rural-to-urban migration remains the predominant pattern, although urban-to-urban migration has been gradually increasing (Kong and Dong 2023). This trend is primarily driven by the pronounced economic divide between rural and urban areas, which is institutionalised through the household registration (hukou) system. As a result, the majority of migrants possess an agricultural (rural) hukou and have relatively low levels of education, typically a junior high school education or less (nine years or fewer) (Duan et al. 2019; Meng et al. 2016; Wei and Jinju 2022). Men are generally more likely to migrate than women (Wei and Jinju 2022).

These internal migration dynamics in contemporary China are closely linked to past economic reforms and the institutionalization of the Household Registration System (Hukou), which has historically restricted mobility. The market-oriented reforms initiated in the late 20th century spurred rapid urbanization and economic growth, creating strong migration incentives. However, the Hukou system, originally designed to control population movement, has continued to impose structural barriers by limiting rural migrants' access to urban welfare, employment opportunities, and social services. These historical legacies shape migration patterns today, influencing who migrates, under what conditions, and with what socio-economic consequences.

Hukou and internal migration

Chinese Household Registration System (Hukou) is widely accepted as having a great impact on internal migration and the experience of migrants. Hukou consists of two main components: type and Hukou location. The first generation registered under Hukou was grouped as agricultural (rural) or non-agricultural (urban) based on occupation (Cheng and Selden 1994). Subsequent generations inherit both type and location from their parents, regardless of their birthplace or current residence (Song 2014). The hukou system is widely regarded as a primary driver of social stratification and inequality in China, with

the most pronounced manifestation being the urban–rural divide in access to economic resources and social welfare (Chan and Buckingham 2008; Song 2014; Wu and Zheng 2018). For instance, urban hukou holders benefit from significantly greater access to public services, including education, healthcare, housing, and pension systems. In contrast, rural hukou holders are largely excluded from these benefits, despite their substantial contributions to the national economy through agricultural production and migrant labour.

First implemented in the 1950s, the Hukou system initially restricted labour mobility within China (Chan 2009), requiring official approval for relocation. While economic reforms since 1978 have loosened these restrictions, Hukou continues influencing migrants' access to resources in their destinations. Understanding the Hukou system is essential for analysing internal migration and its role in shaping social inequalities in China.

In the pre-reform era, state policies strictly restricted rural Hukou holders from migrating to urban areas (Andreas and Zhan 2016; Zhao et al. 2018), entrenching a dual socio-economic structure. Urban industrialization was prioritized as the state's economy (Chan 2009; Gar-on Yeh and Wu 1999). The state enacted the "unified purchase and marketing" program to sustain this priority during resource shortages (Cheng and Selden 1994). Through the program, agricultural goods and raw materials were extracted from rural areas at lower prices and supplied to urban residents. The price disparity of these products played a critical role in accumulating the capital necessary for industrial growth (Kam Wing Chan 1994). To ensure the stability of this urban-focused subsystem, state-provided social welfare and subsidies were provided for workers with urban Hukou and their families (Chan 2009). These entitlements included lifetime employment, centrally determined wages, and access to essential services like housing, education, childcare, health care, and pensions (Ding, Dong, and Li 2009; Wu 2013; Zhao et al. 2018).

In contrast, rural people, comprising approximately 85% of Chinese population, were excluded from state-provided welfare and subsidies (Chan 2009; Wu 2013), receiving only minimal coverage for health, education, and pensions (Meng 2012). Organized into collectivized production teams, they were tasked

with producing food grain and raw materials to support urban industrialization (Chan 2009). Despite strict Hukou migration restrictions, rural-urban disparities drove some farmers to relocate to cities, where they were identified as “blind migrants” in the official documents (Chan 2009).

In the post-reform era, restrictions on migration under the Hukou system were gradually relaxed and eventually removed (Chan and Zhang 1999; Zhang 2010). These changes responded to a surplus of rural labour and a growing urban demand for cheap labour. Economic reforms began in rural areas with the introduction of the household responsibility system, which replaced the collective system (Lin 1992). This system assigned land-use rights from villages to households (Andreas and Zhan 2016; Song 2014), enhancing productivity and freeing up surplus labour (Chen and Fan 2018; Meng 2012). Crucially, it reduced collective intervention in rural families, granting them the autonomy to determine how to allocate their labour (Sheng 2014), including pursuing migration opportunities.

On the other hand, the transition to a market-oriented economy has increased labour demand in cities, drawing a substantial influx of rural migrants (Andreas and Zhan 2016). In response to this trend, the Hukou system has partially reformed to align with migration realities (Hu, Xu, and Chen 2011; Zhang 2010; Zhao et al. 2018). Since 2000, policies have encouraged rural people to relocate to towns and cities (Zhao et al. 2018). Consequently, rural Hukou holders can freely live and work outside of their registered Hukou address (Chen and Fan 2018; Wu and Treiman 2004). This shift is reflected in census data from China's National Bureau of Statistics, which documents a remarkable increase in the migrant population, growing from 6.87 million in 1982 to 375.82 million by 2020 (Cheng et al. 2024).

Labour migrants in post-reform era

The Hukou system significantly impacts the work and lives of massive migrants. Its urban-rural divide is particularly evident in resource allocation, such as economic and educational opportunities (Zhou, Lin, and Gu 2024). Rural-to-urban migration has long been the dominant pattern (Kong and Dong 2023),

despite other forms, such as urban-to-urban migration, being on the rise. Most migrants have a junior high school education (Fan and Li 2019), and they often face Hukou-based discrimination that limits their opportunities in cities (Kuang and Liu 2012; Meng 2012; Song 2016). This results in their overrepresentation in low-wage jobs and living a marginalized life (Keung Wong, Li, and Song 2007). Their marginalized status is further evident in the prevalence of temporary and circular migration (Andreas and Zhan 2016; Zhao et al. 2018). To understand these characteristics, the subsequent sections will focus on Hukou-based discrimination and the complexities of Hukou conversion.

Hukou-based discrimination and labour marker outcomes

Hukou-based discrimination systematically disadvantages migrants in labour market outcomes (Gagnon, Xenogiani, and Xing 2011; Kuang and Liu 2012; Zhou et al. 2024). Unlike people with local Hukou, migrants often face exclusion from higher-quality jobs and instead work in informal private sectors (Shaohua Zhan 2011; Wu and Zheng 2018). These sectors predominantly offer low-wage, low-skilled, and unstable jobs (Song 2014; Zhang 2010; Zhou et al. 2024), such as factory work and service jobs (Qin et al. 2016; Wu, Pieters, and Heerink 2021). Additionally, migrants endure poor conditions, longer hours, and fewer benefits than their residents (Peng 2020; Zhang and Wu 2017). These labour market inequalities extend to housing, as migrants often reside in low-quality accommodations (Zhou et al. 2024) like factory dormitories or urban villages (Lin, Wu, and Li 2020). In addition, they rely heavily on social networks, such as kinship ties (Lin et al. 2020), for job opportunities (Fan 2003). Together, these factors contribute to their lower levels of social and economic integration with local populations (Chen and Wang 2015; Xie, Leng, and Ritakallio 2016).

Moreover, urban-to-urban and rural-to-urban migrants encounter similar socioeconomic barriers in the urban labour market (Ou and Kondo 2013). Nonetheless, urban-to-urban migrants have generally better employment outcomes (Cheng, Nielsen, and Smyth 2014; Gagnon et al. 2011), primarily derived from the pre-market discrimination in the distribution of educational resources, which disproportionately favours urban areas (Zhou et al. 2024). Rural people generally attain lower education levels than urban people (Song

2012; Ye, Wu, and Tan 2016). This educational gap directly impacts their ability to compete in the skilled labour market.

To conclude, the unfavourable outcomes hardly support migrants' ability to settle permanently in their destination areas. As a result, many are forced into a pattern of circular migration, migrating between original and destination places for job opportunities.

Hukou conversion

Another reason for temporary and circular migration lies in the challenges of Hukou conversion. While urban Hukou offers greater benefits, most migrants maintain rural Hukou (Chen and C. Cindy Fan 2016). This decision can be explained through two key aspects:

On the one hand, the rising benefits of rural Hukou are largely attributed to expanding basic public services for rural Hukou holders (Chen and C. Cindy Fan 2016; J. Zhou et al. 2022). One notable example is China's New Rural Cooperative Medical System (NRCMS), introduced in 2003 to provide rural Hukou holders with affordable healthcare. By 2010, the program covered over 95% of the rural population (Yang 2018), significantly improving their subjective well-being and health security (Chen et al. 2018; Qi et al. 2022). Rural migrants can also benefit from the NRCMS as they retain rural Hukou identity (Müller 2016). In addition to healthcare benefits, land-use rights serve as social security for the rural population by providing economic stability and safeguarding livelihoods (Chen and C. Cindy Fan 2016). These benefits have increased the attractiveness of maintaining rural Hukou, making urban Hukou conversion less desirable (Song 2014).

On the other hand, it results from a mismatch between migrants' preference for settling in large cities and the emphasis of Hukou reforms on small and medium-sized cities (Chen and C. Cindy Fan 2016). Entry criteria for Hukou conversion typically include holding a tertiary education degree, owning property within the administrative area, or possessing specific occupational skills (Chan and Buckingham 2008). Small and medium-sized cities with

populations under 500,000 are generally considered "easier conversion cities," while larger cities impose stricter requirements, making them "harder conversion areas" (Zhang and Tao 2012).

Other policies

Efforts to reduce inequality have led to policies designed to improve living standards for migrants and their families in urban areas (Chen and Fan 2018). The Labour Contract Law (2008) and the Social Insurance Law (2010) obligate employers to pay social security contributions to all employees. In theory, these laws extend the Urban Employee Social Insurance coverage to migrants. However, enforcement has been weak, particularly for migrants concentrated in low-wage positions (Chan 2012a; Song 2014). By 2009, 9.8% of rural migrant workers had pension, 2% had maternity insurance, and 3.7% had unemployment insurance (Chan 2012a). Educational access for migrant children has expanded but remains inadequate (Song and Dong 2018; J. Zhou et al. 2022). Public kindergartens give priority to children with local Hukou, leaving limited spaces for migrant families (Song and Dong 2018).

Although new policies aim to address the challenges faced by migrants in urban areas, reforms to close the rural-urban divide have been scarce (Chan and Buckingham 2008; Wu 2013). This disconnect underscores a persistent gap between policy objectives and their implementation. As a result, the structural inequalities perpetuated by the Hukou system continue to shape the lives of migrants.

1.3.2 Economic reforms, gender inequality, and family values

Economic reforms have produced uneven progress toward gender equality, amplifying disparities between public and private spheres. While women achieve a high labour force participation rate in the public sphere (Chen and Ge 2018; Liu and Zuo 2023), they continue to shoulder the majority of housework at home (Luo and Chui 2018; Zuo and Bian 2001). The World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Report ranked China 106th out of 153 nations in the world for gender equality (Si 2022). Addressing this puzzle

requires an analysis of cultural norms and social attitudes that reinforce gender divisions in both the workplace and the household.

Economic reforms and gender inequality

During the pre-reform era, strict enforcement of gender-equality laws and policies supporting women's high labour force participation promoted their social status (Cook and Dong 2011; Lee 2012; Zuo and Bian 2001), especially for urban women. Over 90% of urban women worked in state-owned sectors (Zuo and Bian 2001), benefiting from equal pay (同工同酬, tong gong tong chou), maternity leave, workplace nursing rights, and public childcare (Ding et al. 2009; Gustafsson and Li 2000; Shu 2004). These measures fostered gender equity, particularly in the urban workforce. By contrast, rural women's involvement in production teams paralleled that of men (McMILLAN and Naughton 1992). However, their social and economic opportunities saw limited progress due to persistent traditional norms and weaker institutional support in rural areas (Shu 2004).

During the post-reform era, state-led gender equality shifted to a focus on individual capabilities and traditional gender roles (Ji and Wu 2018). The restructuring of state-owned enterprises of the late 1990s disproportionately impacted women, with many losing their jobs and facing difficulty in re-entering the labour market (Ding et al. 2009; Hu, Opper, and Wong 2006; Summerfield 1994). Although the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests (1992) formally guaranteed equal rights in many dominants (Xiao and Asadullah 2020). Educational reforms have also improved women's participation in education and their labour force competency (Si 2022). However, the privatization of reproductive and caregiving responsibilities has placed an unequal burden on women (Ji and Wu 2018; Meng et al. 2023). This shift has contributed to the resurgence of traditional values towards women.

While advances in gender equality have reshaped the public sphere (Hu 2015), persistent domestic inequality continues to limit women's economic prospects. The interaction between public and private roles has constrained women's participation in the labour market, often relegating them to marginal positions

(Hu et al. 2006). Consequently, despite continuous improvements in women's educational attainment, gender difference in employment opportunities and outcomes have grown, underscoring the need to address structural inequalities and cultural norms.

Educational reforms and widening gender gap in the labour market

Educational reforms have expanded higher education for both genders (Si 2022), reducing but not fully eliminating gender gaps (Zeng et al. 2014). Since the introduction of free nine-year compulsory education in 1986, comprising six years of elementary and three years of junior high education. After completing compulsory education, most students attend high school for three years, followed by national university entrance exams to obtain a four-year bachelor's degree (Si 2022). Data from the 2020 Seventh National Population Census reveals that the average years of schooling for the population aged 15 and above was 9.91 years, with men averaging 10.22 years and women 9.59 years. This represents a reduction in the gender gap from 0.8 fewer years for women in 2010 to 0.6 fewer years in 2020 (Statistics China 2021).

Compared to men, women's education opportunities are more heavily influenced by the allocation of family resources (Chiang, Hannum, and Kao 2012; Wu, Ye, and He 2014), making intrahousehold discrimination a significant contributor to gender gaps in education (Hu, Guo, and Ding 2022). Girls in one-child families tend to receive greater educational resources than those with male siblings, benefiting from the absence of competing claims for resources (Lee 2012; Lei et al. 2017). In rural areas, where the one-child policy (1980-2016) was less strictly enforced due to cultural norms such as son preferences.

Contrary to progress in narrowing the educational gender gap, labour market inequalities have intensified (Chi and Li 2014; Liu and Zuo 2023). Evidence shows that while labour force participation has declined for both genders, the gender difference has grown (Chi and Li 2014; Liu and Zuo 2023). Similarly, the gender pay gap has increased (Liu and Zuo 2023; Ma 2021). Liu and Zuo (2023), using the China Household Income Project (1988-2013) and the China Household Finance Survey (2013-2017), found that the gender gap in the

labour force participation rates widened by over 15 per cent, and the gender earnings gap reached approximately 25% by 2016.

The widening labour market gender gap in China is primarily driven by gender discrimination embedded in societal norms (Jiang et al. 2023; Li et al. 2024; Xiao and Asadullah 2020), with lesser contributions from gender gaps in education, privatized childcare, and motherhood penalties (Chi and Li 2014; Connelly et al. 2018; Meng et al. 2023). These norms shape workplace attitudes, hiring practices, and the division of domestic responsibilities, disproportionately disadvantaging women. To fully understand gender inequality in China, it is essential to understand the cultural and historical roots of these norms about family and gender values.

Family and gender values

In China, gender norms are frequently cited as key factors in explaining women's disadvantages in the labour market, along with the gendered division of household labour in China. Modernization has contributed to a growing awareness of gender equality, reflected in evolving societal attitudes and policy reforms. Nevertheless, traditional gender norms remain pervasive, shaping individuals' behaviours and limiting progress toward gender parity.

Ancient Chinese society operated within a patrilineal framework that emphasized male authority while subordinating women. The "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" prescribed strict moral principles and social codes for women's behaviours. The Three Obediences include their obedience to their father, husband, and son at different stages of life, while the Four Virtues emphasise propriety, speech, demeanour, and domestic skills (Lee 2012). These cultural norms effectively excluded women from education and economic opportunities, further reinforcing their subordinate status in both the family and society.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a series of laws and policies have substantially advanced women's socio-economic position. They gained access to education, entered the labour force, and

assumed various social roles. However, traditional patriarchal attitudes remain pervasive, influencing individuals' behaviours. The belief that "men work outside, women stay at home" is particularly representative of these attitudes (Wu, Wang, and Wang 2022; Xiao and Asadullah 2020). Wu et al. (2022), using multi-source data from 1990 to 2018, observed a decline in support for this belief after 2010. By 2018, support among men fell from 64% to 48%, and among women from 62% to 43%. Although these trends suggest a gradual shift in attitudes, the persistence of such beliefs highlights the resilience of traditional gender norms in modern Chinese society.

Son preference is another representative feature of traditional patriarchal attitudes (Hu et al. 2022; Murphy, Tao, and Lu 2011), reflecting the idea that sons carry on the family lineage and provide vital support to ageing parents. This preference is amplified in the absence of a comprehensive social welfare system, as elderly people rely on their sons for care and financial support (Hu et al. 2022; Ling 2017). Consequently, families invest more in sons' education (Chen, Chen, and Liu 2019; Hu et al. 2022), migration opportunities (Wei and Jinju 2022), and often assist with childcare for their grandchildren. Even during the strictest implementation of the one-child policy, many rural families insisted on having a son due to cultural and economic pressures (Ling 2017; Murphy et al. 2011).

Daughters who are only children benefit to some extent from the one-child policy. Lee (2012) observed no disparity in years of schooling between only-child boys and only-child girls, while significant gaps persist in multiple-child households. However, daughters still receive less investment, as most families, adhering to the patrilocal tradition, believe that daughters will ultimately leave their families to join their husbands' households and increase their family's labour resources (Fan 2003). From childhood, daughters are expected to perform family chores (Hu 2015, 2018), and these expectations intensify when they assume the roles of wife and mother, reinforcing traditional gender norms (Chen and Ge 2018).

1.3.3 Family migration in China

Family migration as a trend

Family migration, involving couples moving together with or without children, has become increasingly common in China since 2010 (Fan and Li 2019, 2020; Song and Dong 2018; Yang and Chen 2013; Zhao et al. 2018). Fan and Li (2019) analysed this trend using nationally representative floating population surveys in 2011 and 2015. They noted an increase in couple migration from 22.22% to 22.83%, while in the parent(s)-with-children migration from 44.15% to 48.68%. The study also highlighted a growing tendency for families to migrate in a single batch, reducing the need for reunification in batches. Between 2011 and 2015, the proportion of couples migrating in one batch rose from 74.22% to 80.54%, while the proportion of parents with children migrating in one batch grew from 40.27% to 48.61%. These changes indicate a trend toward a more cohesive family migration pattern.

Family migration tendencies can be explained through cultural and institutional factors. Culturally, traditional family values emphasizing unity and shared responsibility promote the idea of family relocation (Sheng 2014). Institutionally, policies improving migrants' situation have enabled spouses and children to migrate together (Liang, Li, and Yue 2023; Peng 2020; Qin, Peng, and Wan 2024). Despite these developments, family migration remains underexplored in academic research. Existing literature predominantly examines individual migration and left-behind women and children (Fan and Li 2020; Hu 2013), leaving significant gaps in understanding gender dynamics. For instance, how spousal roles and characteristics during migration behaviour require further investigation.

While the literature on family migration is limited, some studies provide useful insights into migration behaviour among couples. Yang and Chen (2013) analysed data from the Chinese Migrants Dynamic Survey and found that couples migrating together or with their children accounted for the majority of cases (41.1% and 39.1%, respectively). In comparison, cases where the husband migrated first (12.9%) or the wife migrated first (4%) were less

frequent. They suggested that traditional gender roles, where husbands have greater decision-making power, likely drive the tendency for wives to follow their husbands. Yet, their study did not reach definitive conclusions about how couples make migration decisions.

Similarly, Meng et al., (2016) examined the role of children in influencing couple's migration decisions using household survey data. Although their work advanced the understanding of family migration, it neglected to explore the role of individual characteristics, such as education or skills, within couples. This leaves a significant gap in understanding whose human capital matters in migration behaviours—a central focus of my thesis.

In addition, as internal migration increasingly involves multiple family members, researchers have turned their attention to the well-being and experiences of migrant children and older migrants (Peng 2020; Qin et al. 2024; Wu, Coulter, and Dennett 2023), particularly in the context of family reunification (Cheng et al. 2024; Qin et al. 2024). However, limited attention has been given to how their participation affects women and men after relocation. Our analysis will address this critical gap, exploring the gendered impacts of family dynamics in migration.

Female and male migrants in urban labour market

Research on gender inequality in the labour market of migrants is insufficient, especially concerning how migration exacerbates existing disparities. This section will provide an overview of employment-related characteristics of migrant women and men, highlighting key differences in employment rate, employment condition, and labour earnings. Understanding these disparities is crucial for addressing the broader implications of gender inequality within migrant couples.

Men typically migrate for economic reasons, while women often move for family reasons (Chen and Fan 2018), such as supporting the education of male siblings (Chiang, Hannum, and Kao 2015). Despite broader opportunities created by economic reforms, male migrants consistently achieve better job

market outcomes. Female migrants, by contrast, experience lower employment rate (Guo and Shen 2016; Qin et al. 2016; Zhao and Hannum 2019), and reduced labour income (Magnani and Zhu 2012; Qin et al. 2016; Wu et al. 2021; Xing, Yuan, and Zhang 2022), and fewer working hours (Meng 2012; Wu et al. 2021). For instance, Zhao and Hannum (2019) found that in 2013, 92.3% of male migrants were employed full-time, compared to 75.88% of females, with female migrants earning 1000 Chinese Yuan less per month. Wu et al., (2021) reported that female migrants worked 55.56 hours per week on average, about two hours less than their male counterparts (57.61). These statistics underscore persistent gender inequalities in migration outcomes, even as opportunities expand.

Recent papers also highlight occupational gender segregation among migrants (Hou et al. 2019; Qin et al. 2016; Wu et al. 2021). Qin et al., (2016), using data from the 2010 National Migrant Dynamics Monitoring Survey, found that male migrants were twice as likely as female migrants to hold professional occupations, with 16.1% of men compared to just 8.2% of women working in these roles. Hou et al., (2019) analysed data from the same survey conducted in 2015, focusing on female migrants. They reported that 66.8% of female migrants worked in the service industry.

Migrant women are affected by the intersection of gender discrimination and the Hukou system, which creates significant barriers to labour market participation. During pregnancy, many migrant women leave the workplace due to the lack of work benefits such as maternity leave or paid sick leave (Kong and Dong 2023). After childbirth, they tend to transition to part-time jobs or low-skilled self-employment (Zhao and Hannum 2019) due to limited public childcare services in destination cities (Kong and Dong 2023; Maurer-Fazio et al. 2011; Song and Dong 2018). Instead, they rely on informal family support (Liu, Wu, and Chen 2016), such as care from grandparents, which is less available in the destination (Kong and Dong 2023). By contrast, migrant men living with children experience no change in their likelihood of full-time employment. In some cases, men benefit from parenthood (Zhao and Hannum 2019).

In summary, migrant women continue to be more disadvantaged than migrant men. However, internal migration offers potential avenues for women's empowerment. First, data indicate that female partners can occasionally lead family moves (Yang and Chen 2013). Although this portion remains small, it signals a shift in women's role in family matters. Second, migrant women's remittances home redefine their social value by achieving higher employment rates and labour earnings than non-migrant women. This enhanced economic contribution has challenged the tradition of son preference in their rural community (Lu and Tao 2015). Third, migration to urban areas often distances women from natal family control, granting them greater autonomy (Gaetano 2008). Urban life can further challenge traditional gender roles (de Bruin and Liu 2020), positively influencing women's identity and behaviour. This study will examine the potential empowerment of women through internal migration.

1.4 Methodology

This study utilizes data from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) (https://opendata.pku.edu.cn/dataverse/CFPS?language=en) to conduct its empirical analysis. Established by the Institute of Social Science Survey (ISSS) at Peking University, CFPS is a biannual, nationally representative longitudinal survey that examines various aspects of Chinese communities, families, and individuals (Xie and Hu 2014). The baseline survey, launched in April 2010, covered 25 provinces where 94.5% of Mainland China's population resides. The survey collects data on all members of sampled households, which are defined as economically independent dwellings.

To ensure representativeness while optimizing cost efficiency, CFPS employs a multistage probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling approach with implicit stratification. In the 2010 baseline survey, nearly 15,000 families and 30,000 individuals participated, achieving a response rate of 79%. Since then, the survey has been conducted bi-annually, with data available from 2010 to 2020. To minimize potential distortions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this

study focuses on data collected between 2010 and 2018.[1]

CFPS is well-suited to the empirical objectives of my research for several reasons. First, it provides information on the county of residence of respondents over time, which enables identifying migration events of individuals. In addition, since the survey only interviewed individuals residing at the household's primary address, those who were not living at that location were recorded as absent members. However, because the addresses of absent members were not collected, it is not possible to identify or analyse patterns of multi-local living arrangements. Second, the longitudinal element of the survey enables to tracking of information from individuals and households before and after migration, allowing the study of within-individual change. This enables me to capture dynamic processes underlying determinants as well as outcomes of migration. Additionally, in some chapters, I also exploit repeated observations of individuals using fixed-effects models to reduce analytical issues in regression-based research such as omitted variable bias. Third, the multi-actor design of the data collection enables me to link individuals who are or were members of the same household over the study window, enabling me to study the migration of couples and the associated dynamics of partners in the decisions and the consequences of couple migration. Last, the dataset contains other essential information for the proposed study associations, including individual educational level, employment status, earnings, working hours, and

[1] First, based on the Progress Report of CFPS 2020 (https://www.isss.pku.edu.cn/cfps/en/news/news1/1355152.htm) indicates that all interviews were conducted between July and December 2020, with approximately 89% completed via telephone rather than the face-to-face interviews used in previous waves. The household-level completion rate was also lower than in earlier rounds. Second, during the 2020 survey period, China implemented widespread lockdown policies—varying across regions—in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has shown that these mobility restrictions significantly reduced both intercity and intracity migration, leading to a notable decline in overall human mobility, including daily activities such as commuting and outdoor movement (Zhang, Luo, and Zhu 2021). Given these factors, I argue that the CFPS 2020 data may not be suitable for analysing migration patterns.

housework hours, among other relevant variables.

For the empirical analyses, I deploy state-of-the-art quantitative methods that exploit the longitudinal structure of the data. To estimate the determinants of interregional migration, I deploy discrete-time event-history models, as they are well-suited for analysing time-to-event data while accounting for both time-varying and time-invariant factors influencing migration decisions. To estimate the consequences of migration, I use panel data models such as fixed-effects regressions, which help control for unobserved heterogeneity by distinguishing between within-individual changes and between-individual differences. Additionally, when analysing **couple migration**, I incorporate information from both male and female partners, considering absolute and relative values of key variables (e.g., education, income, employment status). This design allows for a rigorous empirical test of hypotheses on **partners' dynamics**, shedding light on gendered decision-making processes and their labour market and household implications.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is structured into five chapters. Following this introductory chapter, three chapters introduce essays on decisions and consequences of couple migration for men and women in contemporary China. The empirical chapters can be read as stand-alone papers.

Chapter 2 examines the migration behaviour of two-gender-couple households in contemporary China, where rising female education levels intersect with persistent traditional gender norms regarding the division of labour. This chapter investigates how the education of both male and female partners influences migration decisions, testing hypotheses related to gender symmetry and asymmetry in these dynamics. It also examines the role of gender ideology, the Hukou system, and urban-rural residence in shaping these patterns. Using longitudinal couple-dyadic data from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS, 2010–2018), I deploy discrete-time event history models to provide nuanced insights into inter-county couple migration.

Chapter 3 investigates the gendered labour market outcomes of inter-county migration. In particular, this chapter assesses how relocation affects employment status and earnings for men and women, highlighting potential gender disparities that arise from women's structural disadvantages in the labour market that are juxtaposed with the expanded job opportunities available to migrants in urban China. Further, the chapter focuses on the role of marriage and parenthood as a key factor exacerbating gender inequality in the labour market outcomes of migrants and also addresses the role of household registration type or Hukou status of migrants for labour outcomes. The empirical analysis employs fixed-effects regression models using data from the China Family Panel Studies (2010–2018).

Chapter 4 explores the gendered outcomes of family migration beyond the labour market. Since migration can reshape labour market outcomes, which in turn may influence domestic labour division, this chapter analyses whether housework hours shift for male and female partners post-migration. It further evaluates how these changes are influenced by factors such as gender ideology and economic dependency. Using a change-score OLS model, the study estimates variations in housework hours based on two-wave CFPS data (2014 and 2016).

Finally, chapter 5 concludes the thesis by summarizing and discussing key findings, outlining contributions to research and policy implications, discussing research limitations and suggesting avenues for future research.

Chapter 2 Family migration in China: A longitudinal analysis of couples' migration behaviour

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Chapter 3 Internal Migration and Labour Market Outcomes Among Chinese Men and Women

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3.1 Introduction

China's labour market has undergone profound changes in recent decades, transitioning into a market-driven system due to economic reforms. This transformation has given rise to a substantial internal migration, particularly from rural to urban areas, significantly influencing the work and family lives of both men and women. Nowadays, people are free to migrate without the restriction of the Household Registration System (Hukou) (Zhang 2010). According to the report, (National Bureau of Statistics 2021), the number of internal migrants reached approximately 493 million, marking a 69.73% increase from the 6th National Census (2010). Additionally, data from the Migration Population Service Center indicate that women accounted for nearly 48% of migrants between 2009 and 2018.

However, studies on internal migration have predominantly focused on male migrants, often regarded as heads of household. Consequently, the labour market outcomes of female migrants have received relatively little attention, and studies on gender disparities in the labour market after migration remain scarce. Existing research highlights persistent occupational segregation among migrants, with women concentrated in lower-paying sectors (Fan 2003; Hou et al. 2019; Qin et al. 2016; Wu et al. 2021). Female migrants also earn less than male migrants (Magnani and Zhu 2012). While these findings align with broader labour market gender inequality, whether migration exacerbates or mitigates gender inequality remains inadequately understood. On the one hand, China's internal migration patterns increasingly involve children moving with their parents, which may aggravate gender inequalities for women. This is largely due to lower human capital and the persistence of traditional gender roles, such as women being expected to prioritize childcare and household responsibilities (Cook and Dong 2011; Yu and Xie 2018; Zhang, Hannum, and Wang 2008). On

the other hand, migration can provide women with job opportunities unavailable in their hometowns (Liang and Chen 2004; Summerfield 1994). Furthermore, moving to urban or economically developed areas may reduce the influence of traditional gender norms, which are more prevalent in rural communities. This shift might have some positive impact on women's labour market outcomes after migration.

This study is the first to provide a comprehensive analysis of gender inequality in the labour market within the context of internal migration in contemporary China. We also aim to address whether and how migration events exacerbate gender inequality in the labour market, and how family dynamics moderate these associations. Importantly, we acknowledge that intersecting with gender inequality, Hukou discrimination is lingering in the labour market as the fallout of ever-implemented urban-Hukou-biased policies. The research aims to address the following inquiries:

(1) How is internal migration associated with changes in labour market outcomes among Chinese men and women?

(2) Do these associations vary by family status and types of Household Registration *(Hukou)*?

To this end, we analyse labour market outcomes among individuals using the longitudinal data from the China Family Panel Studies (2010-2018) and apply fixed effects models to analyse individuals' inter-county migration. We test hypotheses on labour market outcomes in the Chinese context. Our analysis first examines whether internal migration reduces labour market allocation mismatches for men and women by tracking changes in employment status. Among those employed, we assess changes in earnings. Furthermore, we investigate gender differences in labour market outcomes of migration, considering the role of family status in shaping these patterns. Finally, we assess how the association between migration and labour market outcomes varies by Hukou status, recognizing the institutional disadvantages faced by rural Hukou holders in urban labour markets and welfare access.

Extending previous studies, this research provides a deeper examination of labour market outcomes following migration. By analysing gender disparities in employment and earnings, we contribute to understanding whether relocation further reinforces gender inequality in the labour market. Moreover, we consider the broader institutional and cultural context of China, assessing whether women experience a dual disadvantage—one shaped by gender norms and another by systemic institutional constraints—after migration.

3.2 Background and hypotheses

3.2.1 Theoretical explanations of gendered migration outcomes

In Western countries, the literature on labour market outcomes of migration has consistently found that women are more likely to encounter career detriments (Krieger 2020; Lersch 2016). Research tends to adopt one of two primary theoretical perspectives that differ in the extent to which the process of migration decision-making is assumed to be gender neutral or not.

Among the gender neutral or symmetric approaches, human capital theory has been widely deployed in migration studies. Mincer (1978) pointed out that households migrate with the primary goal of unitarily maximizing their net gain, typically through increased earnings. Within this framework, the partner with higher earning potential is assumed to lead the movement, while the other is considered a “tied mover” (Cooke 2001). In such cases, migration may result in one partner experiencing upward mobility in the labour market while the other partner faces a job loss. Empirical evidence shows that being a tied mover harms labour market outcomes (Cooke 2001; Krieger 2020). The prevailing consensus suggests that migration is more likely to favour men’s careers, while women are more likely to lose following relocation in terms of employment (Clark and Huang 2006) and earnings (Bird and Bird 1985; Cooke et al. 2009). This theory argues that human capital resources (e.g., education) of male and female partners yield equivalent returns during migration. Thus, the human capital model posits that the economic rationale for relocation is characterized by egalitarian and symmetrical considerations.

However, the resource model only offers a partial explanation for the gendered outcomes after migration. It fails to account for the situation in which women continue to experience career setbacks despite having more market power than their partners (Cooke 2003; Kühhirt 2012). In response, scholars have proposed a gender asymmetry framework, arguing that the evaluation of gains and losses of migration differs between men and women (Cooke 2003; Shauman 2010). This perspective emphasizes that the relative weight of men's and women's resources is unequal in shaping both migration decisions and their economic consequences.

The gender role theory stands as the most established gender-asymmetrical perspectives to family migration, explaining the potential disadvantage faced by women. Expected gender roles within private (family) and public (e.g., labour market) areas often emphasize the asymmetry in resources between male and female partners in migration decisions and their subsequent outcomes. In other words, the career gain and loss of male partners weigh more than those of female partners. Research indicates that migration tends to have unequal effects on men and women, often reducing women's participation in the workforce (Boyle et al. 2003; Clark and Huang 2006), despite their strong prior standing in the labour market (Pailhé and Solaz 2008).

In addition, studies in China indicate that gender norms better explain labour market inequalities than disparities in human capital, such as education (Shu and Bian 2003; Xiao and Asadullah 2020). Despite this, internal migration research has largely overlooked this factor. Most studies highlight the adverse effects of childcare responsibilities on female migrants' employment and income, yet they fail to account for pre-migration conditions (Kong and Dong 2023; Zhao and Hannum 2019). These findings mirror broader labour market patterns in China (Maurer-Fazio et al. 2011). However, the extent to which migration exacerbates or alleviates these disparities remains unclear. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of how migration influences gendered labour market outcomes.

3.2.2 Gender inequality, family dynamics, labour market, and internal migration

Over the past decades of economic reform, China's labour markets have evolved into a market-driven system. This transformation has given rise to gender inequality and substantial internal migration.

The rise of gender inequality within the labour market is one of the consequences of economic reforms in China (Ji and Wu 2018). The disadvantage faced by women in the labour market has been worsening in terms of both employment status and labour income since the onset of economic reforms. In the pre-reform era, the government implemented various policies to achieve gender equality and strictly prohibited discrimination against women (He and Wu 2018; Xiao and Asadullah 2020). For instance, women's labour market participation was ensured by expanding existing provisions on childcare and social security systems (Chen 2005; Maurer-Fazio et al. 2011; Connelly et al. 2018).

During state-sector restructuring reform in 1990s, a phenomenon known as "xiao gang chao (下岗潮)" (layoff wave) disproportionately affected women (Summerfield 1994). Married women were laid off at higher rates and faced challenges when re-entering the labour market (Ding et al. 2009), given the failure of public care services to function (Ji and Wu 2018). The transition from public to private childcare provision creates cost barriers for low-income families, particularly for migrant families (Connelly et al. 2018). This responsibility gradually shifted back to individual families, disproportionally burdening women (Cook and Dong 2011). Meanwhile, traditional gender ideology, like "men should focus on their careers, while women should focus on the family", has reemerged since economic reforms (Chen 2018). This resurgence places expectations on women to fulfil their familial duties or even withdraw from the workforce (Chen 2005).

Additionally, maternity leave is only entitled to female workers, evolving from 90 days in 1988 to 128 days in 2016 (Connelly et al. 2018; Zhou 2019). The time and effort demand of care work limits women's labour market participation

equally with men. Hence, the gender gap in labour force participation has widened (Hu et al. 2006), reaching to 10% point difference by 2009, compared to a mere 2% in 1988 (Chi and Li 2014). Market forces have led to increased wages in specific industries, creating wage disparities associated with certain occupations. Men generally have better access to higher-paying jobs (Shu and Bian 2003). Despite significant increases in both men's and women's earnings, the gender pay gap has also widened (Chi and Li 2014).

Substantial internal migration is another consequence of the economic reform due to the huge economic disparity between rural and urban areas. A large number of people migrate from rural to urban areas or economically underdeveloped to developed areas. Limited attention is paid to the gender inequality of migrants in the labour market in internal migration studies of China. There is a high degree of gender segregation between male and female rural Hukou migrants. Male migrants show a greater inclination to relocate to urban areas and find non-agricultural jobs (Zhao et al. 2018). Moreover, male migrants concentrate on more prestigious occupations than female migrants (Fan 2003; Meng 1998), such as jobs in industry. Many factories and service sectors tend to be female-intensive, and these jobs are more appealing to rural women, which are unavailable in their original place (Liang and Chen 2004; Summerfield 1994). This has a favourable impact on employment, especially for benefiting rural Hukou women (Liang and Chen 2004). A study, nevertheless, found that female migrants have a much lower employment rate than male migrants (Qin et al., 2016). Two studies found that, on average, male migrants earn over 26% more than their female counterparts (Magnani and Zhu 2012; Qin et al. 2016). It is worth noting that these studies rely on cross-sectional or census data, leaving us with limited insights into whether migration exacerbates or alleviates gender inequality. By using longitudinal data, we expect that:

H1a: Labour market outcomes improve for both genders after migration.

H1b: Women experience a less growth in labour market outcomes compared to men post-migration.

Family dynamics are a key factor in shaping gender inequality in labour market

outcomes. Women, particularly those who are married, are frequently expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over their work responsibilities. In contrast, men face significantly fewer constraints in this regard (Fan 2003). Empirical evidence indicates that women's marginalization in the labour market is strongly linked to marital status and motherhood (Chen 2018). Marriage reduces a woman's likelihood of employment by approximately 17% and correlates with lower earnings (Zhang et al. 2008). Furthermore, mothers experience a 20.4% wage penalty compared to women without children (Yu and Xie 2018).

Western migration studies indicate that married women's labour force participation often declines post-relocation, while the presence of children further limits their employment and earnings (Boyle et al. 2003; Cooke 2001, 2003; Kley and Drobnič 2019; Rabe 2011). However, limited research in China has explored the disproportionate impact of family responsibilities on female migrants compared to their male counterparts. Zhao and Hannum (2019), drawing on data from the 2013 National Floating Population Dynamics Monitoring Survey (NFPDMS), investigated the relationship between labour market outcomes and family obligations among migrant men and women. Their nested logit model revealed that while marriage is negatively associated with employment for migrant women, it has a positive effect on employment for migrant men. Additionally, OLS regression analyses indicated that marriage is linked to higher earnings for both male and female migrants; however, male migrants benefit more significantly from this effect (Zhao and Hannum 2019). In accord, we expect that:

H2: Marriage negatively impacts women's labour market outcomes after migration, whereas it positively affects men's outcomes after migration.

A new dynamic in internal migration in China shows that a rising number of family migrations has been observed in the past decade, with millions of children relocating with their parents (Fan et al. 2011; Peng 2020). Most papers focus on the education outcomes of migrant children in destination places, overlooking the gender gap in labour market outcomes among migrants who live with co-living children. Research shows that childcare costs have a substantial negative impact on employment for both migrant and local mothers,

with migrant mothers particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in these costs (Song and Dong 2018). Peng's (2020) qualitative research underscores the persistence of traditional gender roles, revealing the dual burden migrant mothers face in balancing work and childcare, alongside heightened expectations for migrant fathers to fulfil the breadwinner role. An empirical study using data from the China Migrants Dynamic Survey (CMDS) 2015 indicates that migrant mothers residing with children face the most significant disadvantages in hourly earnings compared to married and childless migrant women (Kong and Dong 2023). Similarly, Zhao and Hannum (2019) demonstrate that childcare responsibilities negatively affect employment and income for migrant women. In contrast, migrant men do not experience reduced employment opportunities and, in some cases, even see an income advantage when living with children. In accord, we expect that:

H3: Living with children adversely affects women's labour market outcomes after migration, whereas it positively influences men's outcomes after migration.

3.2.3 Heterogeneity by type of Household Registration (Hukou)

Historically, internal migration in China was strictly regulated by the Household Registration System (Hukou) (Cheng and Selden 1994). This system categorizes individuals as either agricultural (rural) or non-agricultural (urban) residents, primarily based on birthplace or inheriting the Hukou status of parents (Meng 2012; Song 2016). In the pre-reform era, state policies prioritized urban development, offering comprehensive social welfare benefits to urban residents while restricting rural populations' mobility. As a result, migration between rural and urban areas remained highly constrained. However, with the advent of economic reforms, these restrictions have gradually eased, primarily due to labour surpluses in rural areas and increasing workforce demands in cities (Zhang 2010).

While the Hukou system no longer restricts mobility, different Hukou types continue to influence access to key resources and social welfare services, such as healthcare, education, and housing (Meng and Zhang 2001; Song 2014). As a result, migrants often face barriers to local services and welfare benefits,

particularly as many rural migrants choose to retain their original Hukou status (Chen and C. Cindy Fan 2016). On the one hand, the Household Responsibility System (HRS) grants land-use rights to agricultural Hukou households, ensuring continued access to rural benefits (Song 2014). Additionally, agricultural Hukou holders benefit from policies such as minimum living allowances and the New Cooperative Medical System, which provide financial and healthcare support (Han and Huang 2019). Consequently, many rural residents maintain their agricultural Hukou status even after relocating. On the other hand, non-agricultural Hukou holders continue to enjoy more substantial advantages in most regions (Song 2014; Vortherms and Liu 2022). Although Hukou conversion policies have been relaxed, many rural migrants remain ineligible for non-agricultural Hukou, limiting their ability to access urban-based benefits (Wu and Treiman 2007).

The advantages associated with non-agricultural Hukou create a strong preference for this status while also shaping employer hiring preferences. Migrants with agricultural Hukou often face discrimination in the labour market compared to their urban Hukou counterparts (Gagnon et al. 2011; Zhang 2010; Zhang et al. 2016). For instance, Zhang et al. (2016) found that rural Hukou migrants earned only 49% of urban workers' labour income, with discrimination explaining 27% of this wage disparity.

Studies comparing migrants with rural and urban Hukou statuses have revealed persistent socio-economic disparities between these groups. Chen (2011) observed that in Shanghai, individuals with urban Hukou are more likely to secure employment in skilled, managerial, or professional occupations, whereas those with rural Hukou face more limited job opportunities. Using nationally representative data, Gagnon et al. (2011) further demonstrated that urban Hukou migrants earn significantly higher wages than their rural Hukou counterparts. These findings underscore the systemic disadvantages faced by rural Hukou migrants, with the wage gap indicating potential discrimination against this group.

Empirical research on gender disparities in labour market outcomes among migrants with different Hukou statuses is insufficient. Magnani et al. (2012)

found that male migrants with agricultural Hukou earn 30.2% higher hourly wages than their female counterparts. The prevailing literature suggests that female migrants encounter a dual disadvantage, as they face both gender and Hukou-related barriers in the labour market (Huang 2001; Magnani and Zhu 2012; Meng 1998). In accord, we expect that:

H4: Holding an agricultural Hukou has a negative effect on women's labour market outcomes after migration, while it has a positive effect on men's outcomes after migration.

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Data

The empirical analyses use longitudinal data from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS; https://opendata.pku.edu.cn/dataverse/CFPS?language=en). CFPS is a nationally representative, biannual longitudinal survey launched in 2010 by the Institute of Social Science Survey (ISSS) of Peking University. In the baseline survey in 2010, almost 15,000 households and 30,000 individuals were interviewed. The data source meets the requirements for the proposed empirical objectives. The survey monitors individuals who relocate within China by tracking changes in their province and county of residence, facilitating an analysis of internal migration patterns. Additionally, it collects data on critical variables such as employment status, earnings, marital status, children's living arrangements, Hukou types, and other migration-related factors. For this study, we utilize data from available survey waves, including 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018.

3.3.2 Sample selection

This study examines gender differences in labour market outcomes using self-reported survey data, with individual observations as the unit of analysis. We excluded individuals in full-time education, those who were disabled, retired, or in the armed forces, and restricted the sample to ages 16–59.

The data was divided into two samples: one for employment status and another for earnings. As earnings-related variables are only comparable between 2014 and 2018, the earnings analysis was limited to this period, and unemployed individuals were removed. Observations with missing data were excluded from both samples, and only individuals with at least two survey waves were retained to analyse within-individual variation.

Table 3.1 The selection of samples

	Steps of sample selection	**Employment Status (2010-2018)**		**Annual Earnings (2014-2018)**	
		individuals	observations	individuals	observations
1	Observations with self-reported questionnaires	55,963	180,710	49,898	111,393
2	remove full-time students, disabled, retirees, soldier	45,925	138,740	40,027	84,824
3	keep observations aged from 16 to 59	39,680	118,180	33,055	69,985
4	remove unemployed observations	--	--	21,519	38,354
5	remove all missing values	36,579	98,150	14,379	22,870
6	keep observations who were observed at least two waves	25,876	87,447	6,456	14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018 Note: Earning variable is only comparable in 2014, 2016 and 2018 wave.

The final dataset comprises 87,447 observations from 25,876 individuals for employment status analysis and 14,947 observations from 6,456 individuals for annual earnings analysis (Table 3.1).

3.3.3 Measures

Our analysis focuses on the association between internal migration and changes in two labour market outcomes at the individual level. The specific dependent and independent variables are described in Table A3.1.

Dependent variables

The key measures of labour market outcomes include a binary measure of employment status and a continuous measure of annual earnings. **Employment status** was coded as a dummy variable, where 1 indicated current employment (including self-employment) and 0 indicated unemployment. Respondents who reported working exclusively on their farmland were classified as unemployed, following standard labour market definitions that exclude subsistence farming from formal employment categories.

Annual earnings were measured for currently employed respondents at the time of the survey. The natural logarithm of earnings was used in fixed-effects models. Respondents provided after-tax earnings data, including wages, allowances, service payments, and material benefits, for the past 12 months. Earnings were adjusted for inflation using annual indexes from the *China Statistical Yearbook (2022)*. To mitigate the influence of extreme values, earnings observations below the 1st percentile and above the 99th percentile were excluded as missing values in Step 5 of Table 3.1.

Independent and control variables

Our study considers **women's migration** and **men's migration** as key independent variables. Migration status was operationalized using the first observed wave's residential county as a reference point. If an individual changed counties, the corresponding wave and all subsequent waves were coded as 1; otherwise, they were coded as 0. To simplify the analysis, we constructed two categorical variables by combining gender and migration status: (1) Women's migration (0 = women before migration; 1 = women after migration). For female respondents, the variable shifts from 0 to 1 upon migration. For male respondents, the variable remains constant at 0 and is therefore excluded from the fixed-effects estimation, allowing the model to estimate the effect of migration specifically on women. (2) Men's migration (0 = men before migration; 1 = men after migration). This variable follows the same logic, estimating the effect of migration on men, with women's values remaining

constant and thus excluded from the fixed-effects model.

The models examine key demographic and socioeconomic factors, including **marital status** (0 = unmarried, 1 = married), Hukou types (0 = non-agricultural, 1 = agricultural), and **the age of the oldest cohabiting child at home**, categorized as follows: 0 = no child at home, 1 = 0–7 years, 2 = 8–18 years, and 3 = over 18 years.

Given the prevalence of multiple and circular migrations, we incorporated **migration frequency** and **return migration**—determined by tracking county changes across survey waves—as control variables. These migration-related measures were recalculated for distinct sample groups to ensure robustness.

Consistent with the theoretical framework and empirical evidence reviewed in preceding sections, the models adjust for potential confounders including: (1) **age** (continuous), (2) educational attainment (dichotomized as **junior high school completion**: 0 = no, 1 = yes), (3) **co-habiting parents** (0 = no, 1 = yes), and (4) **residential types** (0 = rural, 1 = urban).

Analytical strategy

Our analysis proceeds in two main parts. We begin with the analysis of descriptive statistics of labour market outcomes by gender and migration status. We compare the difference in outcomes before and after migration, and the relationship with gender. In the second part, we use fixed-effects regressions to test our hypotheses. Fixed effects models can effectively control for unobserved time-invariant and individual-specific characteristics, thus eliminating potentially large sources of bias (Allison 2009). We estimate a fixed-effects logit model to examine changes in employment status, capturing within-individual variation over time in binary labour force participation outcomes. For earnings, we employ a fixed-effects log-linear model, allowing us to assess proportional changes in logged earnings while accounting for unobserved time-invariant individual heterogeneity.

To test Hypotheses 1a and 1b, Models 1a and 1b, examining the relationships

between labour market outcomes and the migration status of men and women, will be deployed while accounting for other relevant variables. To verify Hypothesis 1a, we expected that the coefficients of men's and women's migration are significantly positive. To verify Hypothesis 1b, we expected that the coefficient size of men's migration would be higher than women's.

To assess the subsequent hypotheses, we incorporate interaction terms between men's/women's migration and the following:

- Indicators of marital status (Model 2a and 2b). To verify Hypothesis 2, we expected that the role of migration in labour market outcomes is moderated by marital status. There are positive coefficients for the interaction term with men's migration, whereas negative coefficients for the interaction term with women's migration.
- Indicators of the presence of children at home (Model 3a and 3b). To verify Hypothesis 3, we expected that the role of migration in labour market outcomes is moderated by the oldest child's age. There are positive coefficients for the interaction term with men's migration, whereas negative coefficients for the interaction term with women's migration.
- Indicators of Hukou types (Model 4a and 4b). To verify Hypothesis 4a and 4b, we expected that the role of migration in labour market outcomes is moderated by Hukou types. There are positive coefficients for the interaction term with men's migration, whereas negative coefficients for the interaction term with women's migration.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Descriptive results

Table 3.2 provides descriptive statistics of employment status by gender and migration status. For women, the employment rates are 37% before migration and 62% after migration. For men, the rates are 58% before migration and 82% after migration. The improvement of women's participation in the labour market is slightly higher than men's after migration (25% > 24%).

Table 3.2 Employment status by gender and migration status

	Women			Men		
	Before Migration N = 41,182[1]	**After Migration** N = 3,046[1]	**p-value**[2]	**Before Migration** N = 39,515[1]	**After Migration** N = 3,704[1]	**p-value**[2]
Employment Status			<0.001			<0.001
No	26,012 (63%)	1,172 (38%)		16,647 (42%)	649 (18%)	
Yes	15,170 (37%)	1,874 (62%)		22,868 (58%)	3,055 (82%)	

Source: CFPS 2010-2018

[1]n (%); [2]Pearson's Chi-squared test

Table 3.3 displays the logged annual earnings differ by gender and migration status. Women earn 10.09 before migration and 10.33 after migration, while men earn 10.37 before migration and 10.63 after migration. Men's earnings increase by 0.26, more than the 0.24 increase for women. And the gender gap in annual earnings widens after migration (0.15 > 0.12).

Table 3.3 Logged annual earning by gender and migration status

	Women			Men		
	Before Migration N = 5,318[1]	**After Migration** N = 476[1]	p-value[2]	**Before Migration** N = 8,115[1]	**After Migration** N = 1,038[1]	p-value[2]
Annual earning (log)	10.09 (0.77)	10.33 (0.72)	<0.001	10.37 (0.72)	10.63 (0.68)	<0.001

Source: CFPS 2014-2018

[1]Mean (SD); [2]Wilcoxon rank sum test

3.4.2 Model results

The central hypothesis of this study examines how internal migration affects labour market outcomes for men and women. Table 3.4 presents the

coefficients from fixed-effects models for employment (Model 1a) and earnings (Model 1b) separately. The result from Model 1a demonstrates that men ($\beta = 0.646$, $p < 0.01$) and women ($\beta = 0.489$, $p < 0.05$) have significantly higher odds of employment after migration, with odds increasing by approximately 90.8% and 63%, respectively, compared to the reference group. There are no significant effects of men's and women's migration on their earnings (Model 1b). Thus, according to which we expect women and men will improve their labour market outcomes after migration, Hypothesis 1a is partially supported by significant coefficients in Model 1a. The Wald test's significant result of the men's and women's migration coefficient ($0.646 > 0.489$, $p < 0.05$) provides support for Hypothesis 1b.

Table 3.4 Fixed effects models of labour market outcomes of migration

	Employment Status (2010-2018)		**Earnings (2014-2018)**
	(1a)		(1b)
	Coefficient[12]	Wald test	Coefficient[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	0.646**	P<0.05	-0.114
	(0.244)		(0.097)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.489*		-0.076
	(0.238)		(0.104)
No. Obs.	41,889		14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, oldest child's age at home, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; in model for employment (2010-2018), 14,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes; full model results can be seen in Appendix Table A3.2. 1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001; 2 Log Odds

We further explore whether the associations between migration and labour market outcomes for men and women are moderated by marital status. Interaction terms of men's and women's migration with marital status were added into Model 2a and Model 2b, with results presented in Table 3.5. The findings indicate that marital status significantly influences women's employment rate and earnings between pre- and post-migration, whereas, for men, it only affects men's employment rate after migration. Results from Model

2a show that, for unmarried men, the odds of being employed increase significantly after migration, with a log-odds coefficient of 1.366 (OR ≈ 3.92). For married men, the net effect is 1.366 – 0.829 = 0.537 (OR ≈ 1.71), indicating that marriage reduces the positive employment effect of migration. Similarly, for unmarried women, migration is associated with a large increase in the odds of being employed (β = 2.119, OR ≈ 8.33). For married women, the net effect is 2.119 – 1.761 = 0.358 (OR ≈ 1.43), showing that the positive employment impact of migration is greatly diminished by marriage. Unmarried women increase by almost 10% [exp(0.095) -1] in annual earnings after migration, while married women decrease by around 12% [exp(0.095-0.223) - 1] in annual earnings after migration. Overall, being married is associated with a weaker positive effect of migration on both employment and earnings for women.

Table 3.5 Fixed effects models of labour market outcomes of migration (interaction with marital status)

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	**Earning (2014-2018)**
	(2a)	(2b)
	Coefficient[12]	Coefficient[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	1.366***	-0.104
	(0.370)	(0.118)
Women after migration (ref. before)	2.119***	0.095
	(0.464)	(0.133)
Married (ref. unmarried)	0.114	0.072
	(0.099)	(0.045)
Interactions		
Married men after migration	-0.829**	-0.028
	(0.320)	(0.084)
Married women after migration	-1.761***	-0.223*
	(0.422)	(0.110)
No. Obs.	41,889	14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include oldest child's age at home, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; in model for employment (2010-201814,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes; full model results can be seen in Appendix Table A3.3. 1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;2 Log Odds

For men, marriage also reduces the employment benefit of migration, but there is no significant difference in earnings by marital status. The associations between marital and migration status align more closely with Hypothesis 2 for women, suggesting marriage negatively affects women's outcomes after migration. However, for men, the findings do not support this hypothesis, as marriage does not have the expected significant positive impact on their outcomes after migration.

Turning to Hypothesis 3, which examines whether parenthood negatively affects women's labour market outcomes but benefits men, Table 3.6 presents fixed-effects models (Model 3a and 3b) incorporating interaction terms between migration and the age of the oldest cohabiting child.

The results strongly support the hypothesis for women but not for men. Among women without cohabiting children, migration is associated with a substantial increase in employment likelihood (log-odds $\beta = 1.102$, $p < 0.001$). However, this advantage is significantly diminished when children are present. The net employment effects of migration decrease to 0.342 log-odds (1.102 – 0.760) for women with a youngest co-residing child aged 0–7, to 0.397 (1.102 – 0.705) for those with children aged 8–18, and to a negligible 0.029 (1.102 – 1.073) when the oldest child is over 18. These patterns suggest that the presence of children substantially reduces women's capacity to convert migration into improved labour force participation. Earnings outcomes mirror these patterns. While women without children experience a modest post-migration earnings gain of approximately 5% [e (0.050) −1], those with cohabiting children aged 8–18 or over 18 experience significant earnings declines of approximately 20% [1−e (0.050−0.275)], respectively.

By contrast, the results for men are mixed and provide little evidence that parenthood amplifies the economic benefits of migration. Migration is associated with a significant increase in men's employment ($\beta = 0.910$, $p < 0.01$), but interaction terms with the age of the cohabiting child are generally insignificant. The only notable exception is for fathers living with an adult child, who experience a diminished employment benefit (net effect: 0.910 – 0.931 = –0.021). No statistically significant earnings effects are observed for men

across child-age categories.

Table 3.6 Fixed effects models of labour market outcomes of migration (interaction with age of co-habiting oldest child)

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	**Earning (2014-2018)**
	(3a)	(3b)
	Coefficient[12]	Coefficient[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	0.910**	-0.168
	(0.283)	(0.103)
Women after migration (ref. before)	1.102***	0.050
	(0.284)	(0.121)
Oldest child's age (co-habiting) (ref. No/none)		
0-7	-0.452***	-0.014
	(0.076)	(0.032)
8-18	-0.219**	0.027
	(0.067)	(0.027)
>18	-0.166**	-0.026
	(0.060)	(0.024)
Men's migration # Oldest child's age at home		
After # 0-7	0.317	0.129
	(0.333)	(0.084)
After # 8-18	-0.196	0.010
	(0.279)	(0.071)
After # >18	-0.931***	0.106
	(0.263)	(0.074)
Women's migration # Oldest child's age at home		
After # 0-7	-0.760**	-0.103
	(0.266)	(0.135)
After # 8-18	-0.705**	-0.275*
	(0.268)	(0.116)
After # >18	-1.073***	-0.274*
	(0.294)	(0.127)
No. Obs.	41,889	14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; in model for employment (2010-2018), 14,369 fixed-effects (45,558

observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes; full model results can be seen in Appendix Table A3.4. [1]*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;[2] Log Odds

In a further analysis of the Chinese context, we address the interactions of migration and Household Registration (Hukou) types. The findings from Table 3.7 indicate that there is only a statistically significant negative interaction for men. This contrasts with Hypothesis 4, which suggests that holding an agricultural Hukou type is negatively associated with women's outcomes but positively associated with men's outcomes. Among men with non-agricultural Hukou, migration is associated with a substantial increase in employment likelihood (log-odds β = 1.261, $p < 0.001$), while the change in earnings is marginal and statistically insignificant (β = –0.019), amounting to an approximate 2% decrease in predicted income [1−exp(−0.019)]. For agricultural men, however, the employment gains from migration are significantly reduced by 0.714 log-points (β = –0.714, $p < 0.05$), yielding a net increase of only 0.547 log-odds in employment. Moreover, the earnings penalty is amplified: agricultural men see a decline of 13.8% [1−exp(−0.019−0.137)], indicating a compounded disadvantage in both employment and income terms. In contrast, no statistically significant interactions are observed for women across Hukou types.

Table 3.7 Fixed effects models of labour market outcomes of migration (interaction with Hukou types)

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	**Earning (2014-2018)**
	(4a)	(4b)
	Coefficient[12]	Coefficient[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	1.261***	-0.019
	(0.363)	(0.110)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.453	-0.022
	(0.315)	(0.107)
Agricultural Hukou types (ref. Non-Agricultural)	-0.060	-0.010
	(0.111)	(0.034)
Interactions		

Agricultural men after migration	-0.714*	-0.137*
	(0.313)	(0.068)
Agricultural women after migration	0.049	-0.086
	(0.262)	(0.088)
No. Obs.	41,889	14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, oldest child's age at home, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; in model for employment (2010-2018), 14,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes; full model results can be seen in Appendix Table A3.5. 1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;2 Log Odds

3.4.3 Sensitive analysis

The significance of rural-to-urban migration driven by economic motivations has been established in the previous part of this paper. In Chinese studies, rural-urban migration is typically defined as individuals with rural Hukou residing in urban areas for a period of time (Fan and Li 2019; Luo and Chui 2019). In our study, most migration involves moves from rural to urban areas; however, we did not consider Hukou types when defining the migration variable. To assess whether Hukou types lead to different labour market outcomes by gender, we replicated all previous models using two newly defined migration variables (migration frequency and return migration were adjusted accordingly).

The two new definitions of internal migration are as follows: (1) If the wave first observed individuals with rural Hukou living in urban areas, and the county differed from the previous wave, we also coded the migration for that wave and subsequent waves as 1 (approximately 3% of individual observations in both the employment and annual earnings samples). (2) If the wave first observed individuals with rural Hukou living in urban areas, we coded the migration for that wave and subsequent waves as 1 (approximately 28% of individual observations in the employment sample and around 32% in the annual earnings sample). The direction of the coefficients and the levels of significance across these models were very similar to those in the main analysis, and the results largely supported our findings (see Tables A3.6-3.13).

3.5 Discussion

This study offers a longitudinal perspective on the link between internal migration and labour market outcomes for Chinese women and men. Unlike prior research that relies on cross-sectional data, we use panel data to track changes in residence, employment, earnings, and family status over time. While Hukou regulations no longer restrict mobility, they still shape labour market outcomes. We define migration as an inter-county movement event and conduct a gender-based comparison of labour outcomes before and after migration.

Our analysis also examines how Hukou types influence post-migration outcomes, particularly whether agricultural Hukou remains a disadvantage, especially for women. Additionally, we explore the effects of marriage and childcare responsibilities on labour market outcomes after migration, addressing a gap in Chinese migration research. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of gender inequality in the labour market through the lens of migration.

Some key findings arise from our study. First, the model results indicate that migration increases women's employment rates, similar to its effect on men. Moreover, migration expands women's access to economic opportunities that were previously limited in their places of origin (Liang and Chen 2004; Summerfield 1994). Urbanization has spurred the expansion of industries that predominantly employ female workers, particularly in low-skilled manufacturing jobs. These positions are often unattractive to local urban women but serve as viable employment opportunities for rural migrant women. Despite this increase in employment, we find no significant differences in men's and women's annual earnings before and after migration. This outcome likely reflects the concentration of migrant labour in low-wage sectors such as factory work.

According to previous literature, migration is primarily driven by the goal of maximizing net economic gains (Mincer 1978). In China, most internal migration follows this pattern, with migrants relocating to secure employment or improve

job prospects. However, marital status plays a crucial role in shaping migration motivations. Marriage and parenthood also tend to adhere more strongly to traditional gender roles, leading to higher expectations for employment conditions, especially for men (Peng 2020). However, these expectations often do not align with reality, as many lack the qualifications for better job opportunities at their destinations. Consequently, we found that married men experience a smaller increase in employment rates after migration compared to unmarried men.

This second finding contrasts with those of Zhao and Hannum (2019), who found that marriage positively affects migrant men's employment and income, while it benefits migrant women's income but reduces their employment rates. However, our results indicate that marriage negatively influences both men's and women's employment and adversely affects only women's earnings after migration. One potential reason for this discrepancy is the methodological approach: while Zhao and Hannum (2019) used cross-sectional data that compared migrants and non-migrants, our study employs longitudinal data, allowing for an analysis of individual changes over time. The result differences may also be attributed to selective factors among migrants in their study, such as pre-migration advantages in the labour market, higher levels of motivation, or greater skill acquisition.

Our third finding confirms previous studies: women who migrate while living with children experience a decline in employment and earnings compared to childless women or mothers without cohabiting children after migration. As discussed earlier, limited access to public childcare services and the high cost of private childcare in destination areas force many migrant mothers into a difficult choice between working and caregiving. As a result, they often accept low-paying jobs that do not cover childcare costs or leave the workforce entirely to care for their children.

Additionally, we find that migration also lowers men's employment rates when they live with an adult child. This trend is linked to the limited pension coverage for elderly Chinese and the shortage of public childcare services. Older adults might migrate with their children either to receive care or to assist in raising their

grandchildren. Women are more likely to move to provide grandchild care, while men may relocate to be cared for by their adult children.

Our final key finding highlights the intersection of gender and Hukou status in shaping labour market outcomes for migrants. Specifically, individuals with a non-agricultural Hukou generally hold an advantage over those with an agricultural Hukou in securing employment (Gagnon et al. 2011; Yu Chen 2011). Consequently, female migrants with an agricultural Hukou are often perceived as facing a double disadvantage (Magnani and Zhu 2012). However, our findings challenge this notion, as we did not observe significant labour market disparities among women based on Hukou type post-migration. Instead, differences emerged among men, with agricultural Hukou men experiencing lower employment rates than their non-agricultural counterparts.

This unexpected result may be related to the evolving labour demands driven by China's urbanization process. During the early stages of urbanization, male-dominated industries such as construction required a large supply of manual labour. However, as urbanization progressed, the demand for service sector workers increased—a sector that disproportionately employs women, particularly agricultural migrant women. This shift has, to some extent, narrowed the employment gap between women with different Hukou types while simultaneously widening the disparity among men. The lower employment rate and reduced earnings among agricultural Hukou men post-migration may be due to higher relocation costs and fewer job opportunities compared to their non-agricultural Hukou counterparts.

It is crucial to emphasize that this finding does not imply gender equality in the labour market. Rather, they highlight structural shifts in employment dynamics, revealing how urbanization has reshaped labour demand in ways that alter the traditional disadvantages associated with Hukou status—particularly for women.

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. Due to data constraints, we were unable to capture the precise timing of migration events, which may have influenced our findings. Although we attempted to control for migration experience and return migration, we could not determine the number

of between-county moves individuals had made before entering the study. We could only observe whether they returned to their first-recorded county, not whether they returned to their hometown. Given that more experienced migrants often achieve better labour market outcomes, this limitation may affect our results.

Similarly, since we limit our examination of migration events to the selected survey years, we cannot identify the true first and subsequent migrations. However, we also believe that the age effect can partially compensate for this deficiency. Older people are more likely to have migration experiences and thus obtain better outcomes, which is also confirmed by the positive coefficients in the model.

While our study has certain limitations, it makes key contributions to the understanding of gendered labour market outcomes in China's internal migration context. This is the first study to compare employment rates and earnings between men and women before and after inter-county migration. Our findings indicate that while employment rates improve for both genders post-migration, access to higher-paying jobs remains limited. Additionally, mothers are disproportionately affected, often facing poorer employment outcomes due to the high cost of private childcare services and limited access to public services.

To enhance employment opportunities for rural migrants, urban labour markets must become more accessible. Vocational training programs can help migrants develop skills that align with available jobs, while equal access to social welfare—including childcare, healthcare, and housing—can ease financial pressures and improve employment prospects for women. These measures would not only support migrant well-being but also contribute to reducing gender inequality.

Future research should expand on our findings by examining additional labour market factors, such as job contracts, access to social insurance, and employment stability. Additionally, further studies should explore gendered outcomes within families, particularly regarding the division of household labour.

3.6 Appendix

Table A 3.1 Descriptive statistics of analysed samples

	Sample for employment status (2010-2018)	**Sample for Earnings** (2014-2018)
Employment status		
No	44480 (50.9%)	
Yes	42967 (49.1%)	
Annual earning (logged)		
Mean (SD)		10.3 (0.755)
Median [Min, Max]		10.4 [7.38, 12.0]
Men's migration		
Before	83743 (95.8%)	13909 (93.1%)
After	3704 (4.2%)	1038 (6.9%)
Women's migration		
Before	84401 (96.5%)	14471 (96.8%)
After	3046 (3.5%)	476 (3.2%)
Marital status		
Unmarried	10111 (11.6%)	1940 (13.0%)
Married	77336 (88.4%)	13007 (87.0%)
Oldest child at home		
No/none	23132 (26.5%)	3915 (26.2%)
0-7	14696 (16.8%)	3130 (20.9%)
8-18	24386 (27.9%)	4499 (30.1%)
>19	25233 (28.9%)	3403 (22.8%)
Hukou types		
Non-Agricultural	19422 (22.2%)	6201 (41.5%)
Agricultural	68025 (77.8%)	8746 (58.5%)
Age		
Mean (SD)	40.4 (10.6)	39.0 (9.71)
Median [Min, Max]	41.0 [16.0, 59.0]	39.0 [16.0, 59.0]
Junior high school		
No	66183 (75.7%)	8185 (54.8%)
Yes	21264 (24.3%)	6762 (45.2%)
Co-habiting parents		
No	51060 (58.4%)	8229 (55.1%)
Yes	36387 (41.6%)	6718 (44.9%)
Residential types		
Rural areas	48747 (55.7%)	4975 (33.3%)
Urban areas	38700 (44.3%)	9972 (66.7%)

Migration frequency		
Mean (SD)	0.0992 (0.370)	0.112 (0.348)
Median [Min, Max]	0 [0, 4.00]	0 [0, 2.00]
Return migration		
No	86260 (98.6%)	14850 (99.4%)
Yes	1187 (1.4%)	97 (0.6%)
N	87447	14947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018

Table A 3.2 Full model results of labour market outcomes of migration

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	**Earnings (2014-2018)**
	(1a)[12]	(1b)[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	0.646**	-0.114
	(0.244)	(0.097)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.489*	-0.076
	(0.238)	(0.104)
Married (ref. unmarried)	0.027	0.057
	(0.097)	(0.044)
Oldest child's age (co-habiting) (ref. no/none)		
0-7	-0.487***	-0.004
	(0.073)	(0.032)
8-18	-0.262***	0.023
	(0.065)	(0.027)
>18	-0.241***	-0.028
	(0.058)	(0.024)
Agricultural Hukou types (ref. Non-Agricultural)	-0.087	-0.026
	(0.109)	(0.034)
Age	0.184***	0.082***
	(0.006)	(0.003)
Junior high school (ref. no)	1.356***	0.073
	(0.203)	(0.056)
Co-habiting parents (ref. no)	-0.330***	-0.039
	(0.065)	(0.023)
Urban residential areas (ref. rural)	0.354***	0.085**
	(0.091)	(0.029)
Migration frequency	-0.076	0.144
	(0.189)	(0.090)
Return migration (ref. no)	-0.420	-0.284*
	(0.231)	(0.113)
No. Obs.	41,889	14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; in model for employment (2010-2018), 14,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes; 1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001; 2 Log Odds

Table A 3.3 Full model results of labour market outcomes of migration (interaction with marital status)

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	**Earnings (2014-2018)**
	(2a)[12]	(2b)[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	1.366***	-0.104
	(0.370)	(0.118)
Married (ref. unmarried)	0.114	0.072
	(0.099)	(0.045)
Women after migration (ref. before)	2.119***	0.095
	(0.464)	(0.133)
Oldest child's age (co-habiting) (ref. no/none)		
0-7	-0.500***	-0.004
	(0.073)	(0.032)
8-18	-0.264***	0.025
	(0.065)	(0.027)
>18	-0.239***	-0.027
	(0.058)	(0.024)
Agricultural Hukou types (ref. Non-Agricultural)	-0.084	-0.026
	(0.109)	(0.034)
Age	0.184***	0.082***
	(0.006)	(0.003)
Junior high school (ref. no)	1.316***	0.068
	(0.203)	(0.056)
Co-habiting parents (ref. no)	-0.321***	-0.038
	(0.065)	(0.023)
Urban residential areas (ref. rural)	0.348***	0.085**
	(0.091)	(0.029)
Migration frequency	-0.094	0.156
	(0.189)	(0.091)
Return migration (ref. no)	-0.442	-0.295**
	(0.231)	(0.114)
Interactions		
Married men after migration	-0.829**	-0.028
	(0.320)	(0.084)
Married women after	-1.761***	-0.223*

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	Earnings (2014-2018)
	(2a)[12]	(2b)[1]
migration	(0.422)	(0.110)
No. Obs.	41,889	14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; in model for employment (2010-201814,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes;

1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;2 Log Odds

Table A 3.4 Full model results of labour market outcomes of migration (interaction with age of co-habiting oldest child)

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	**Earnings (2014-2018)**
	(3a)[12]	(3b)[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	0.910**	-0.168
	(0.283)	(0.103)
Oldest child's age (co-habiting) (ref. no/none)		
0-7	-0.452***	-0.014
	(0.076)	(0.032)
8-18	-0.219**	0.027
	(0.067)	(0.027)
>18	-0.166**	-0.026
	(0.060)	(0.024)
Women after migration (ref. before)	1.102***	0.050
	(0.284)	(0.121)
Married (ref. unmarried)	-0.008	0.055
	(0.098)	(0.044)
Agricultural Hukou types (ref. Non-Agricultural)	-0.086	-0.028
	(0.109)	(0.034)
Age	0.185***	0.082***
	(0.006)	(0.003)
Junior high school (ref. no)	1.330***	0.069
	(0.203)	(0.056)
Co-habiting parents (ref. no)	-0.314***	-0.035
	(0.066)	(0.023)
Urban residential areas (ref. rural)	0.339***	0.083**
	(0.092)	(0.029)
Migration frequency	-0.117	0.155
	(0.191)	(0.089)
Return migration (ref. no)	-0.405	-0.291**
	(0.235)	(0.113)
Men's migration # Oldest child's age at home		
After # 0-7	0.317	0.129
	(0.333)	(0.084)

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	Earnings (2014-2018)
	(3a)[12]	(3b)[1]
After # 8-18	-0.196	0.010
	(0.279)	(0.071)
After # >18	-0.931***	0.106
	(0.263)	(0.074)
Women's migration # Oldest child's age at home		
After # 0-7	-0.760**	-0.103
	(0.266)	(0.135)
After # 8-18	-0.705**	-0.275*
	(0.268)	(0.116)
After # >18	-1.073***	-0.274*
	(0.294)	(0.127)
No. Obs.	41,889	14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; in model for employment (2010-2018), 14,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes; full model results can be seen in Appendix Table A3.4.

[1]*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;[2] Log Odds

Table A 3.5 Full model results of labour market outcomes of migration (interaction with Hukou type)

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	**Earnings (2014-2018)**
Characteristic	(4a)[12]	(4b)[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	1.261***	-0.019
	(0.363)	(0.110)
Agricultural Hukou types (ref. Non-Agricultural)	-0.060	-0.010
	(0.111)	(0.034)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.453	-0.022
	(0.315)	(0.107)
Married (ref. unmarried)	0.026	0.056
	(0.097)	(0.044)
Oldest child's age (co-habiting) (ref. no/none)		
0-7	-0.489***	-0.005
	(0.073)	(0.032)
8-18	-0.263***	0.024
	(0.065)	(0.027)
>18	-0.241***	-0.027
	(0.058)	(0.023)
Age	0.184***	0.082***
	(0.006)	(0.003)
Junior high school (ref. no)	1.354***	0.075
	(0.203)	(0.056)
Co-habiting parents (ref. no)	-0.329***	-0.040
	(0.065)	(0.023)
Urban residential areas (ref. rural)	0.359***	0.088**
	(0.091)	(0.029)
Migration frequency	-0.082	0.148
	(0.190)	(0.091)
Return migration (ref. no)	-0.404	-0.289*
	(0.233)	(0.113)
Interactions		
Agricultural men after migration	-0.714*	-0.137*
	(0.313)	(0.068)

	Employment Status (2010-2018)	Earnings (2014-2018)
Characteristic	(4a)[12]	(4b)[1]
Agricultural women after migration	0.049 (0.262)	-0.086 (0.088)
No. Obs.	41,889	14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; in model for employment (2010-2018), 14,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes;

1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;2 Log Odds

Table A 3.6 Fixed effects models of employment status: Hukou-based migration definitions

	Between counties, and rural Hukou at urban area	Rural Hukou at urban area
	(5a)[12]	(5b)[12]
Men after migration (ref. before)	0.412** (0.136)	0.381** (0.125)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.272* (0.131)	0.246* (0.124)
No. Obs.	41,889	41,889

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, oldest child's age at home, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; in models for employment (2010-2018), 14,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes;

1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001; 2 Log Odds

Table A 3.7 Fixed effects models of employment status including interactions with marriage: Hukou-based migration definitions

	Between counties, and rural Hukou at urban area	**Rural Hukou at urban area**
	(6a)[12]	(6b)[12]
Men after migration (ref. before)	1.050***	1.033***
	(0.305)	(0.303)
Women after migration (ref. before)	1.861***	1.855***
	(0.421)	(0.420)
Married (ref. unmarried)	0.103	0.106
	(0.099)	(0.099)
Interactions		
Married men after migration	-0.782*	-0.786*
	(0.320)	(0.321)
Married women after migration	-1.758***	-1.771***
	(0.421)	(0.422)
No. Obs.	41,889	41,889

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include oldest child's age at home, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; in model for employment (2010-201814,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes;

1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;2 Log Odds

Table A 3.8 Fixed effects models of employment status including interactions with oldest child's age (co-habiting): Hukou-based migration definitions

	Between counties, and rural Hukou at urban area	**Rural Hukou at urban area**
	(7a)[12]	(7b)[12]
Men after migration (ref. before)	0.594**	0.585**
	(0.188)	(0.182)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.803***	0.806***
	(0.201)	(0.197)
Oldest child's age (co-habiting) (ref. No/none)		
0-7	-0.453***	-0.451***
	(0.076)	(0.076)
8-18	-0.220**	-0.221**
	(0.067)	(0.067)
>18	-0.169**	-0.169**
	(0.060)	(0.060)
Men's migration # Oldest child's age at home		
After # 0-7	0.340	0.355
	(0.331)	(0.332)
After # 8-18	-0.165	-0.195
	(0.282)	(0.279)
After # >18	-0.889***	-0.905***
	(0.262)	(0.263)
Women's migration # Oldest child's age at home		
After # 0-7	-0.746**	-0.760**
	(0.267)	(0.267)
After # 8-18	-0.654*	-0.691*
	(0.268)	(0.269)
After # >18	-1.027***	-1.054***
	(0.295)	(0.295)
No. Obs.	41,889	41,889

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; in model for employment (2010-2018), 14,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes;

[1]*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;[2] Log Odds

Table A 3.9 Fixed effects models of employment status including interactions with Hukou types: Hukou-based migration definitions

	Between counties and rural Hukou at urban area	**Rural Hukou at urban area**
	(8a)[12]	(8b)[12]
Men after migration (ref. before)	1.101***	1.061***
	(0.299)	(0.298)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.323	0.290
	(0.236)	(0.238)
Agricultural Hukou types (ref. Non-Agricultural)	-0.059	-0.015
	(0.111)	(0.113)
Interactions		
Agricultural men after migration	-0.855**	-0.803*
	(0.320)	(0.313)
Agricultural women after migration	-0.113	-0.064
	(0.269)	(0.264)
No. Obs.	41,889	41,889

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, oldest child's age at home, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; in model for employment (2010-2018), 14,369 fixed-effects (45,558 observations) removed because of only 0 (or only 1) outcomes;

1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;2 Log Odds

Table A 3.10 Fixed effects models of earnings: Hukou-based migration definitions

	Between counties, and rural Hukou at urban area	**Rural Hukou at urban area**
	(9a)[1]	(9b)[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	0.014	0.015
	(0.040)	(0.039)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.051	0.056
	(0.053)	(0.051)
No. Obs.	14,947	14,947

	Between counties, and rural Hukou at urban area	Rural Hukou at urban area
	(9a)[1]	(9b)[1]

Source: CFPS 2014-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, oldest child's age at home, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration;

1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;

Table A 3.11 Fixed effects models of earnings including interactions with marriage: Hukou-based migration definitions

	Between counties, and rural Hukou at urban area	Rural Hukou at urban area
	(10a)[1]	(10b)[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	0.035 (0.079)	0.038 (0.080)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.224* (0.104)	0.229* (0.104)
Married (ref. unmarried)	0.073 (0.045)	0.072 (0.045)
Interactions		
Married men after migration	-0.025 (0.084)	-0.028 (0.084)
Married women after migration	-0.209 (0.111)	-0.212 (0.111)
No. Obs.	14,947	14,947

Source: CFPS 2014-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include oldest child's age at home, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration; 1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;

Table A 3.12 Fixed effects models of earnings including interactions with oldest child's age (co-habiting): Hukou-based migration definitions

	Between counties, and rural Hukou at urban area	**Rural Hukou at urban area**
	(11a)[1]	(11b)[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	-0.026 (0.057)	-0.024 (0.056)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.186* (0.087)	0.192* (0.085)
Oldest child's age (co-habiting) (ref. No/none)		
0-7	-0.014 (0.032)	-0.014 (0.032)
8-18	0.026 (0.027)	0.025 (0.027)
>18	-0.027 (0.024)	-0.027 (0.024)
Men's migration # Oldest child's age at home		
After # 0-7	0.128 (0.084)	0.132 (0.084)
After # 8-18	0.015 (0.072)	0.007 (0.072)
After # >18	0.103 (0.074)	0.102 (0.074)
Women's migration # Oldest child's age at home		
After # 0-7	-0.098 (0.135)	-0.102 (0.134)
After # 8-18	-0.262* (0.117)	-0.267* (0.117)
After # >18	-0.262* (0.127)	-0.263* (0.126)
No. Obs.	14,947	14,947

Source: CFPS 2010-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, Hukou types, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration;1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;

Table A 3.13 Fixed effects models of earnings including interactions with Hukou types: Hukou-based migration definitions

	Between counties, and rural Hukou at urban area	**Rural Hukou at urban area**
	(12a)[1]	(12b)[1]
Men after migration (ref. before)	0.116 (0.062)	0.125* (0.062)
Women after migration (ref. before)	0.128* (0.061)	0.136* (0.062)
Agricultural Hukou types (ref. Non-Agricultural)	-0.007 (0.035)	-0.001 (0.037)
Interactions		
Agricultural men after migration	-0.192* (0.076)	-0.176* (0.071)
Agricultural women after migration	-0.170 (0.098)	-0.146 (0.092)
No. Obs.	14,947	14,947

Source: CFPS 2014-2018; Note: Standard errors are clustered by individuals and shown in parentheses; other variables include marriage, oldest child's age at home, age, junior high school, co-habiting parents, residential types, migration frequency, and return migration;1*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001;

Chapter 4 Family migration and gender inequality in housework: evidence from China

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4.1 Introduction

The division of housework serves as a key indicator of gender inequality, shaped by factors such as gender norms, time availability, and economic resources (Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Bianchi et al. 2000; Dominguez-Folgueras 2022; Mandel, Lazarus, and Shaby 2020; Nitsche, Grunow, and Hudde 2025). Research has increasingly highlighted the impact of life course transitions on housework division between male and female partners (Boďa et al. 2024; Horne et al. 2018; Hwang, Svec, and Lee 2023; Lozano and Garcia-Roman 2022; Schulz and Raab 2024). Typical findings indicate that major life events, such as marriage and parenthood, often result in increased housework time for women due to shifts in gender role expectations, available time, and economic resources (Bianchi et al. 2014; Fan 2024; Kühhirt 2012). Similarly, family migration—where couples migrate together, possibly with children— has been shown to affect labour market outcomes (Cooke et al. 2009; Krieger 2020; Muller et al. 2020). These findings suggest that family migration may shape how housework is divided, potentially deepening gender inequality within couples. However, this relationship remains underexplored in existing research.

China offers a compelling case for exploring the association between family migration and housework division. By the 2020 Census, internal migrants made up 26.6% of the total population (Cheng and Duan 2021). According to the National Floating Population Dynamic Monitoring survey, by 2017, 81.6 % of migrant households consisted of two or more members (Zhu and Huang 2022). This large-scale migration is primarily driven by employment opportunities in economically developed regions, with rural-to-urban migration emerging as the dominant pattern, though other patterns also exist (Frank Qu and Zhao 2014; Kong and Dong 2023; Zhao et al. 2018). Despite this, there has been little

discussion on gender differences in the labour market outcomes after family migration, not to mention the changes in housework. Empirical evidence shows that both women and men benefit from internal migration through increased employment opportunities (Meng 2012). On the one hand, by moving to urban areas with more job opportunities women from rural areas may access the labour force, increase working hours, or get higher pay, which potentially affects their housework. On the other hand, men may also profit from employment opportunities combined with traditional gender-role beliefs prevalent among rural populations, which may prevent women from increasing paid work and focusing on unpaid work. Additionally, a transition to urban life could lead to shifts in traditional views among rural couples, potentially altering the housework time of women and men. These potential results remain unexamined in academic research about internal migration in China, forming the core focus of our research.

The present paper aims to analyse the association between housework time and family migration by comparing the housework hour change between migrants and non-migrants within selected period. Specifically, we examine whether the housework time of female and male partners changes after migrating with their spouses. We also investigate whether adjustments in their housework time respond to the changes in employment conditions and coresidential arrangements subsequent to the couple's relocation. This study contributes to the literature in two ways: first, it expands our understanding of gender inequality in labour division of couples, using high-quality panel data from China, which enable us to measure actual changes in housework time for both respondents and their partners. Second, the study sheds light on the mechanisms driving changes in housework division during an important life course transition within the Chinese context.

We use two waves of data from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS, 2014 and 2016) to estimate the effect of couples' migration—where partners migrate together—on changes in housework hours for both female and male partners. The CFPS data offers significant analytical advantages, as it includes information on respondents' working and housework hours in both waves,

enabling an analysis of time-use changes. Additionally, it provides respondents' residential county, which allows for the identification of migration events, as well as other theoretically relevant variables for modelling.

4.2 Background and hypotheses

4.2.1 Internal migration and gender labour division in China

In China, economic disparities and urban job opportunities are the primary drivers of large-scale migration (Shen 2017). Studies on internal migration often focus on the rural-urban migration, framed within the institutional context of the Household Registration System (Hukou). This system maintains a urban-rural divide, categorizing individuals as either rural (agricultural) or urban (non-agricultural) residents primarily based on parental inheritance (Song 2014). It also perpetuates an imbalanced distribution of economic resources and developmental opportunities across urban-rural divides. Meanwhile, urban Hukou holders enjoy extensive social welfare benefits, including healthcare, housing, education, pensions, and employment—resources largely inaccessible to rural populations and rural migrants (Zhao et al. 2018). Although rural residents can technically transition to urban Hukou, the process remains highly restrictive (Song 2014). As a result, most rural migrants continue to hold their original Hukou while residing and working in cities (Chan 2009; Chen and C. Cindy Fan 2016). Consequently, rural residents tend to have lower levels of education than urban residents, with the majority of migrants having only completed junior high school (nine years) (Meng et al. 2016). And institutional barriers further limit their economic opportunities, leading to employment in low-wage, low-skilled, and precarious jobs (Song 2014; Zhang 2010; Zhou et al. 2024), such as factory and service work (Qin et al. 2016; Wu et al. 2021). Nevertheless, migration has increased employment rates for both men and women, as urban industries continuously seek a cheap labour force.

Regardless of migration context, the division of labour is evolving but still reflects persistent gender inequality in Chinese society. The traditional idiom "Men should focus on career, while women should focus on family" (nan zhu wai, nv zhu nei, 男主外女主内) reflects this enduring ideology. Support for this

belief grew before 2010 but declined in subsequent years (Wu et al. 2022; Xiao and Asadullah 2020). Nevertheless, from 1990 to 2018, support never fell below 43%, underscoring the persistence of traditional gender norms in China.

Therefore, gendered expectations shape household labour from an early age, with daughters being socialized to perform family chores (Hu 2015, 2018). These expectations intensify in adulthood, particularly when women assume the roles of wife and mother (Chen and Fan 2018). Married women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid labour, including housework and caregiving, compared to their partners (Chen 2024; Luo 2024; Zhang 2017; M. Zhou, Kan, and He 2022). In the realm of paid employment, research indicates that while labour force participation has declined for both men and women, gender disparities have widened, particularly in terms of labour force participation and wages (Chi and Li 2014; Liu and Zuo 2023). The increasing gender gaps can be largely attributed to persistent gender discrimination embedded in societal norms (Jiang et al. 2023; Li et al. 2024; Xiao and Asadullah 2020).

The urban-rural divide is also evident in the divergent trajectories of gender norms and attitudes. Urban residents, influenced by urbanization, modernization, and superior educational opportunities (Hu and Scott 2016), tend to adopt more progressive gender perspectives (de Bruin and Liu 2020). Zhou et al. (2022) reported that urban women devote roughly three fewer hours weekly to housework and adult care compared to their rural counterparts, whereas urban men contribute approximately two more hours. Thus, the migration process from rural/underdeveloped areas to urban centres may precipitate changes in housework division, mediated through exposure to differing gender ideologies in destination communities.

4.2.2 Theoretical background: what shapes couples' housework division

Three dominant theories frequently examined in the literature on housework are (1) the resource-based perspective, (2) the time availability perspective, and (3) the gender perspective.

The resource-based theory assumes that housework is generally regarded as an unpleasant task and most individuals seek to avoid it (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010). This framework is often characterized as gender-neutral: the partner with greater economic resources holds more power to bargain out the housework (Bianchi et al. 2000; Geist and Ruppanner 2018; Sayer 2005; Sullivan and Gershuny 2016). Typically, education (Bianchi et al. 2000; Davis and Greenstein 2009) and labour earnings (Dominguez-Folgueras 2022; Gupta 2006; Killewald and Gough 2010; Sullivan and Gershuny 2016) serve as key indicators of these resources. In general, men typically earn higher returns in the labour market compared to women (Lewis, Campbell, and Huerta 2008), leading to women doing more housework (Bianchi et al. 2000). Evidence suggests that when a woman earns less than her male partner, she tends to perform more housework (Mandel et al. 2020). On the other hand, when women's labour market participation increases, the domestic division of labour is expected to become more equal. Empirical evidence supporting this explanation shows that households where both partners contribute similar earnings tend to adopt a more gender-equal approach to housework (Aassve et al. 2014). However, when women out-earn their male partners, they may share more housework to conform to traditional gender expectations (Aassve et al. 2014). This compensatory behaviour, however, appears to diminish in more gender-egalitarian countries, where women with higher earnings do reduce their housework time as expected (Mandel et al. 2020).

Another gender-neutral perspective is the time availability perspective: before deciding who does more housework, the couple first consider the amount of housework and each partner's time allocation in the labour market. And the partner who is unemployed or works fewer hours in paid employment is expected to take on more housework (Coverman 1985; Geist and Ruppanner 2018; Steinmetz et al. 2022). Additionally, the presence of children increases both childcare demands and the volume of other family chores. Therefore, employment conditions (e.g., employment, working hours) and parenthood status (e.g., the age of children) are measured to examine time availability theory (Artis and Pavalko 2003; Fauser 2019; Gough and Killewald 2011; Gupta, Sayer, and Pearlman 2021). Empirical results indicate that full-time

employment is linked to a decline in housework responsibilities for both female and male partners (Aassve et al. 2014). However, study also found that mothers tend to do more domestic work when their husbands have more available time, a pattern that fathers do not replicate (Craig and Powell 2011). As some results cannot be fully explained by gender-neutral approaches, some scholars suggest that a gender perspective provides a more compelling explanation for these gendered outcomes in the division of housework.

From a gender perspective, housework is viewed as the symbolic enactment of gender behaviour (Artis and Pavalko 2003; Carriero and Todesco 2018). Gender norms assume men should invest more time in paid work, while women are expected to allocate more time to unpaid work. The *doing gender* theory suggests women are often expected to handle the majority of housework, regardless of their economic contributions or time availability, to conform to traditional gender roles (Bianchi et al. 2000; Carriero and Todesco 2018; West and Zimmerman 1987). Marriage, in particular, creates a setting in which housework often becomes a behaviour that reinforces traditional gender roles (Schulz and Raab 2024). In academic research, this perspective is commonly investigated through gender identity and gender ideology (Mandel et al. 2020; Nitsche et al. 2025). Empirical research informed by *doing gender* theory highlights that in culturally conservative contexts, women persistently assume a greater share of domestic labour than their spouses, even when they are the primary earners (Mandel et al. 2020). At the couple's level, female partners in households characterized by shared traditional gender norms engage in more housework than those in egalitarian-oriented couples (Nitsche et al. 2025). Notably, men's gender ideology often exerts greater influence on household labour arrangements than women's beliefs. Women are more likely to enact egalitarian principles—reflected in a reduced housework burden—only when they possess higher education and earn income equal to or greater than their partner's (Carriero and Todesco 2018).

4.2.3 Family migration and couples' housework division

Based on existing theoretical arguments, family migration could couples'

housework division in several key ways:

First, family migration may expose couples to more progressive gender norms, as internal migration in China is often associated with movement from rural to urban areas or from less economic developed to more developed areas. Women socialized in rural areas, particularly after marrying, tend to adopt more traditional roles as wives or mothers. Moreover, since rural individuals are often more embedded in social networks, the expectations for their gender role behaviour come not only from within the household but also from the broader community. In other words, community norms around gender roles influence women's behaviours (Xiao and Asadullah 2020).

Internal migration has the potential to reshape gender role norms among migrants by reducing external pressures from their original communities and adopting a more progressive view. However, exposure to urban norms may also have the opposite effect. Rural migrants frequently encounter Hukou-based discrimination, both in the labour market and in broader urban life (Kuang and Liu 2012; Zhou et al. 2024). Furthermore, their reliance on kinship networks for employment (Fan 2003; Lin et al. 2020) reinforces economic dependency on familiar social structures. These barriers hinder their social and economic integration into urban communities (Chen and Wang 2015; Xie et al. 2016). In turn, low levels of integration may heighten feelings of exclusion, prompting migrant couples to maintain traditional gender roles in household labour.

Due to limitations in cross-sectional data, most studies on internal migration in China define migrants based on discrepancies between their Hukou-registered and residential addresses (Chen and C. Cindy Fan 2016; Luo and Chui 2019; Wu et al. 2021). Research indicates that rural-registered women who migrate to urban areas perform less housework than those who remain in rural areas (Luo and Chui 2019). Furthermore, the gender gap in housework between partners tends to narrow in urban environments (de Bruin and Liu 2020). These findings imply that couple migration may contribute to a shift in housework, with both female and male partners adjusting to a more progressive gendered environment. To examine this effect, we compare partners who migrated as a couple during the study period with those who did not and propose the following

hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Family migration is expected to reduce women's housework hours and increase men's housework hours.

Second, family migration may contribute to an unequal division of housework due to changes in labour market outcomes, which in turn influence the distribution of time and bargaining power within households. Research in Western societies suggests that migration decisions tend to favour men's careers (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Cooke 2001), often at the expense of women's employment stability (Rabe 2011). Women, particularly those employed before migration, are more likely to experience job loss (Boyle, Feng, and Gayle 2009) and a reduction in paid work hours (Geist and McManus 2012). Meanwhile, men's earnings typically rise post-migration (Cooke et al. 2009), while women's earnings decline, further shifting bargaining dynamics in unpaid labour (Cooke 2003; Geist and McManus 2012). For example, Vidal et al. (2016) found that family relocation intensifies gender disparities in domestic work.

In China, although family migration can offer economic benefits to both genders, significant gender disparities remain. Compared to male migrants, female migrants face lower employment rates (Guo and Shen 2016; Qin et al. 2016; Zhao and Hannum 2019), reduced labour income (Magnani and Zhu 2012; Qin et al. 2016; Wu et al. 2021; Xing et al. 2022), and fewer working hours (Meng 2012; Wu et al. 2021). These shifts in employment patterns may indirectly influence the division of household labour by altering economic resources and available time. In addition, women may experience higher employment rates following migration. For example, many factories and service-sector jobs—often concentrated in urban areas—tend to be female-intensive and are more appealing to rural women, as such employment opportunities are typically unavailable in their places of origin (Liang and Chen 2004; Summerfield 1994). Consequently, women may undergo greater variation in employment conditions as a result of migration. Based on these dynamics, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Among female partners, the association in housework hours

associated with family migration is partially explained by changes in both their own and their partner's time availability and economic resources following migration.

Hypothesis 2b: Among male partners, the relationship between family migration and housework hours is weak and remains largely unchanged after accounting for both their own and their partner's time availability and economic resources following migration.

Third, family migration may influence housework demands through changes in coresidential arrangements, particularly regarding the presence of children and grandparents. In China, while millions of children migrate with their parents (Fan et al. 2011; Peng 2020), a substantial number are left behind—remaining in their original communities rather than moving with migrating parents (Cheng et al. 2024). This highlights the importance of considering the presence or absence of children when analysing the impact of family migration.

The presence of children at the destination often exacerbates gendered labour inequalities by limiting migrant women's employment opportunities (Song and Dong 2018; Zhao and Hannum 2019). Parenthood often reinforces traditional gender roles, with mothers shouldering a disproportionate share of housework, as suggested by doing gender theory (Baxter, Hewitt, and Haynes 2008; Bianchi et al. 2000). Peng's (2020) qualitative research underscores the enduring influence of traditional gender norms in parenting, highlighting the dual burden migrant mothers face in managing paid and unpaid labour, while migrant fathers experience mounting pressure to conform to the breadwinner role. Moreover, migrant families often lack access to public childcare services and reduced support from extended family, further increasing housework demands (Ayika et al. 2018; Bojarczuk and Mühlau 2018).

Grandparents, particularly grandmothers, often provide essential support for housework and childcare in Chinese families (Chen, Liu, and Mair 2011; Yu and Xie 2018). This arrangement is deeply rooted in cultural norms and supported by policies related to employment and childcare. Their involvement, especially in co-residential settings, enables many mothers to continue working after

childbirth. For instance, Maurer-Fazio et al. (2011) found that living with either parents or parents-in-law has a comparable positive effect on women's employment status, indicating the significance of intergenerational support.

In some cases, grandparents themselves migrate to urban areas explicitly to assist with childcare and domestic tasks (Goh 2009; Zhao and Huang 2018), viewing it as their "duty". This caregiving role often eliminates the need for paid childcare and facilitates mothers' continued labour force participation. As such, while the presence of children may increase housework demands and reduce women's labour supply (e.g., through part-time work), co-residence with grandparents tends to have the opposite effect, supporting women's employment.

Informed by these considerations, we argue that women's domestic labour is more sensitive to changes in coresidential arrangements than men's, whose time use remains more stable due to their continued emphasis on the breadwinner role. Based on this reasoning, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: Among female partners, the effect of family migration on housework hours is further shaped by changes in coresidential arrangements.

Hypothesis 3b: Among male partners, the relationship between family migration and housework hours remains largely unchanged after accounting for shifts in coresidential arrangements.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Data and sample

This study utilizes longitudinal data from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS; https://opendata.pku.edu.cn/dataverse/CFPS?language=en), a large panel survey of approximately 15,000 households and 30,000 individuals tracked since 2010. We selected the 2014 and 2016 waves for analysis, as these waves contain the necessary information: (1) Since 2014, CFPS has collected data on respondents' hours spent in both paid and housework; (2) the 2014 wave

uniquely included questions on respondents' gender ideology, which is included as a control variable in our models; and (3) additional data are available to capture migration events and other variables needed to examine our theoretical hypotheses.

The analysis sample was restricted to heterosexual couples of working ages (16 to 59 years) and included N=6,399 couples. Exclusions applied to full-time students, retirees, and active military personnel, resulting in N=5,656 couples. Of these, N=5,629 couples were cohabiting with their spouses, and we further restricted the sample to couples whose combined weekly hours of paid work and housework did not exceed 112 hours, ensuring at least 8 hours per day for sleep. After excluding cases with missing data in the selected variables across both waves, the final analytical sample comprised N=4,124 couples, including one man and one woman per couple.

4.3.2 Operationalisation

Dependent variable

Change score in weekly housework hours. We calculated the change score for weekly housework hours as the difference between values from waves 2014 and 2016. While housework time was measured differently in each wave, the definition consistently excluded caregiving for family members. In wave 2014, respondents reported their average daily hours spent on housework, regardless of employment status. In wave 2016, however, unemployed respondents reported their average daily housework hours, whereas employed respondents provided separate estimates for a working day and a non-working day. For employed respondents in 2016, we calculated weekly housework hours by multiplying hours on a working day by five and on a non-working day by two, then summing these totals. For all other respondents, we multiplied the daily hours by seven. To address outliers, we top-coded housework hours over 56 per week to a maximum of 56 hours, affecting only the top 1% of responses.

Key independent variables

Couple migration. To identify migrants, we compared each respondent's county

ID across survey waves. If the county differed between two waves, the respondent was categorized as a migrant (assigned a value of 1); otherwise, they were categorized as a non-migrant (assigned a value of 0). In our sample, 3% of respondents fall into the migrant category. Among migrants, approximately 82% held an agricultural household registration type, and about 70% resided in urban areas by the 2016 wave. This pattern indicates that the predominant migration type in our sample is rural-to-urban, aligning with the common discussion in Chinese research, where rural-to-urban migration typically refers to individuals with agricultural registration living in urban areas for an extended period.

Shifts in the employment status of respondents and partners. The original employment status variable includes two categories: employed (1) and unemployed (0). Notably, respondents who reported working on their own farmland were recoded as unemployed (0). This is because, in most cases, farmland can only sustain subsistence needs, yielding only minimal economic return. Based on employment status dynamics, we classified individuals into four categories: remained unemployed, remained employed, transitioned from unemployment to employment, and transitioned from employment to unemployment. In our sample, 50.8% of female partners and 35.2% of male partners remained unemployed; 36.5% of female partners and 52.7% of male partners remained employed; 5.9% of female partners and 5.5% of male partners transitioned to employment; and 6.8% of female partners and 6.6% of male partners transitioned to unemployment.

Change score for weekly working hours of respondents/partners[8]. We initially assigned a value of 0 to unemployed individuals. For employed individuals reporting work hours exceeding 68 per week, we top-coded their values at 68 hours per week, aligning with a previous Chinese study using CFPS data (Liu,

[8] The correlations between shifts in employment status and change score for weekly working hours are 0.067 for female partners and 0.14 for male partners, respectively. The weak correlations suggest that multicollinearity is unlikely when both variables are included in the model.

MacPhail, and Dong 2018). According to the study, the 68-hour threshold ensures individuals have sufficient time to meet the minimum requirements for self-care. The change score was then calculated based on the difference in hours worked between the two survey waves.

Shifts in coresidential arrangements. Combining life course transitions with the typical Chinese coresidential arrangements, coresidential arrangements were categorized into three types: couple-only families, nuclear families (couple with children), and extended families (couple with parents, or couple with children and grandparents). In our sample, 80.7% of families maintained the same pattern across waves; 2.5% transitioned from couple-only or nuclear to extended family; 4.4% transitioned from couple-only to nuclear family; 5.0% transitioned from extended to nuclear family; and 7.3% transitioned from extended or nuclear to couple-only family.

Change in the number of co-habiting children[9]. Only cohabiting children were included in the analysis. This variable was recoded into three categories: no change in number, increase, and decrease. In our sample, 72.2% of couples had the same number of cohabiting children across both waves; 14.6% had an increase in cohabiting children; and 13.2% had a decrease.

Control variables

Building on the theoretical framework outlined in the background section, we controlled for potential confounders including individual gender ideology scores, education level, log-transformed household income per capita, residential type, Hukou status, age, and within-couple age differences. All variables were drawn

[9] The correlation between shifts in coresidential arrangements and changes in the number of cohabiting children is 0.49. When both variables are included in the same model, all generalized variance inflation factor (GVIF) values remain below 2.5, suggesting acceptable multicollinearity. Moreover, sensitivity analyses—including dropping one variable or combining them into a single measure—reveal that the substantive conclusions of the model, particularly regarding the coefficients for couple migration, remain unchanged. Given the robustness of the findings, we retain both variables in the final model.

from the 2014 wave.

In line with theories on relative resources and gender perspectives, gender ideology and education are significant factors in the division of housework. However, this paper focuses on whether changes introduced by migration impact shifts in housework time. Therefore, we control only for individual gender ideology and education levels (categorized as less than middle school, and middle school or higher).

Regarding individual gender ideology scores, respondents were asked their opinion on the statement, “Men should focus on career, while women should focus on family,” using a 5-point scale where 1 indicated "totally disagree" and 5 indicated "totally agree." Higher scores indicated more traditional attitudes. In our sample, the average score among female and male partners was 3.98 and 4.04, respectively.

Regarding education, 51.6% of partnered women and 38.6% of partnered men had completed less than junior high school, while 48.4% of partnered women and 61.4% of partnered men had completed at least junior high school or higher education.

Regarding the other variables, 57.3% of couples lived in urban areas, while 42.7% lived in rural areas. However, 79.9% of female partners and 77.1% of male partners held agricultural household registrations, while 20.1% of female partners and 22.9% of male partners held non-agricultural registrations. The average ages of female and male partners were 40.6 and 42.2 years, respectively. On average, female partners were 1.59 years younger than their male partners. Descriptive results can be seen in Appendix Table A4.1.

4.3.3 Analytical strategy

This study is primarily concerned with the impact of migration on housework hours, while other variables are incorporated to help explain or contextualize this relationship. The analytical strategy uses a panel design with change score models (Allison 1990), employing OLS regression models to examine changes

in our dependent variable. The analysis is conducted at the individual level, with separate regression models for women and men to better capture gender differences in the relationship between domestic work hours and couples' migration. Our hypotheses were tested in the following steps:

- Model 1 serves as a baseline, including variables on couples' migration, respondents' education, type of living area, household registration type, respondents' age, gender ideology score, and the age difference between partners.
- Model 2 builds on Model 1 by adding control variables for changes in employment status and working hours for respondents and their partners.
- Model 3 further adds control variables to Model 1 to account for coresidential arrangements, including transitions between couple-only, nuclear, and extended family arrangements, as well as changes in the number of children at home.
- Model 4 is the full model, incorporating all variables from Models 2 and 3.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Descriptive results

Table 4.1 presents the average change in housework hours by gender and migration status. Over the two waves, non-migrant women showed no change in housework hours; conversely, migrant women increased their housework time by an average of 3 hours per week, a statistically significant increase. Men, regardless of migration status, increased their housework hours by only 1 hour, a change that was not statistically significant. These results indicate that family migration is associated with an increased investment in housework for women, with no corresponding increase observed for men. This finding contradicts Hypothesis 1, which anticipated a decrease in housework hours for women and an increase for men following migration.

Table 4.1 Change score in weekly housework hours by gender and migration status

	Women			Men		
	Non-migrant N = 3,999[1]	**Migrant** N = 125[1]	**p-value**[2]	**Non-migrant** N = 3,999[1]	**Migrant** N = 125[1]	**p-value**[2]
Change score in weekly housework hours	0 (13)	3 (13)	0.024	1 (12)	1 (12)	0.8

Source: CFPS 2014 and 2016; [1]Mean (SD) [2]Wilcoxon rank sum test

4.4.2 Model results

Ordinary least squares (OLS) coefficients from the multivariate analyses of changes in weekly housework hours are presented separately by gender (Table 4.2 for women; Table 4.3 for men). Starting with Model 1, contrary to the expectation outlined in Hypothesis 1, the results show that migrant women, compared to non-migrant women, experience a statistically significant increase of approximately 2 hours and 14 minutes ($\beta = 2.231$, $p < .10$) in weekly domestic work hours. On the other hand, no significant change was observed for men ($\beta = .155$, $p > .10$).

In Model 2, we introduced four theoretically relevant variables to capture changes in employment status and working hours for respondents and their partners. The model's results suggested that changes in individuals' housework time are influenced mainly by their own employment characteristics, rather than by their partners' employment conditions. This trend applied similarly to both men and women, highlighting the primary role of personal employment shifts in affecting housework allocation.

Specifically, for women, a shift to employment ($\beta = -3.028$, $p < .01$) was significantly associated with a reduction in housework time, whereas a shift to unemployment ($\beta = 5.750$, $p < .001$) corresponded with an increase in housework hours. Additionally, changes in weekly working hours were linked to

a modest reduction in household labour, approximately 1 minute per week (β = -0.017, p < .05), suggesting that variations in paid work hours did not translate directly into equivalent shifts in domestic responsibilities. For men, a shift to unemployment (β = 2.614, p < .001) significantly increased their housework time, while a shift to employment (β = -1.155, p > .1) showed no statistically significant effect. The influence of men's working hours on changes in housework time was marginal but negative (β = -0.020, p < .01). Notably, adding these variables slightly reduced the effect size of the migration variable for women (β = 1.981, p < .10).

Hypothesis 2a is partially supported — women's housework changes are significantly affected by their own economic/time status but not their partners'. However, for men, the coefficient for migration increased (β = .276, p > .10) but remained statistically insignificant. Hypothesis 2b is not fully supported: men's housework hours do respond significantly to their own employment and work hours. However, partner's characteristics have no effect, as predicted.

Model 3 explored potential mechanisms within family dynamics that link family migration to changes in housework hours among partnered women and men. We included two key variables: shifts in coresidential arrangements and the number of cohabiting children.

Consistent with hypothesis 3a, accounting for these variables slightly reduced the effect of family migration on women's housework time (β = 2.130, p < .10). Conversely, the effect of family migration on men's housework time remained statistically insignificant and displayed a minor reduction in magnitude (β = .148, p > .10). This was aligning with hypothesis 3b, which indicates that the migration coefficient of will remain non-significant and stable and coresidential variables have no significant effect.

Results further revealed that only women's housework time appeared sensitive to family dynamics. Specifically, in cases where families shifted to an extended household arrangement (β = -2.339, p < .10), women tended to spend less time on domestic duties. However, no statistically significant effects were observed when the coresidential pattern shifted from couple to nuclear (β = .809, p > .10),

from extended to nuclear (β = .628, p > .10), or from the others to couple (*β* = -.321, *p* > .10). Moreover, variations in the number of cohabiting children showed the expected association with women's housework hours, with women in households with more children dedicating significantly more time to housework (*β* = 1.505, *p* < .05). This effect suggested that the presence of each additional cohabiting child increased women's housework by approximately 90 minutes per week.

Model 4 is the full model, including all variables from the previous models. The conclusions derived from this model align with those from Models 1 and 2. For women, the coefficient of migration on outcomes decreases slightly but remains significant (*β* = 1.892, *p* < .10). For men, however, the coefficient for migration remains small and statistically insignificant.

Table 4.2 Change score in weekly housework hours of women, OLS coefficients

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Migrant (ref. non-migrant)	2.231+	1.981+	2.130+	1.892+
	(1.197)	(1.135)	(1.200)	(1.143)
Shifts in the employment status (ref. remain unemployment)				
Remain in employment		0.322		0.442
		(0.622)		(0.623)
To employment		-3.028**		-2.948**
		(1.028)		(1.029)
To unemployment		5.750***		5.659***
		(0.891)		(0.893)
Shifts in the employment status of partners (ref. remain unemployment)				
Partner remains in employment		-0.426		-0.396
		(0.645)		(0.645)
Partner shifts to employment		-0.105		-0.080
		(1.047)		(1.048)
Partner shifts to unemployment		-1.141		-1.135
		(0.922)		(0.922)
Weekly paid work hours change		-0.017*		-0.018*
		(0.008)		(0.008)

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Partner's weekly work hours change		0.004		0.005
		(0.007)		(0.007)
Shifts in coresidential arrangements (ref. unchanged)				
Couple/nuclear to extended family			-2.339+	-2.401+
			(1.301)	(1.265)
Couple to nuclear family			0.809	0.877
			(1.356)	(1.332)
Extended to nuclear family			0.628	0.671
			(0.952)	(0.943)
Nuclear/extended to couple family			-0.321	-0.493
			(1.018)	(1.020)
Change in the number of co-habiting children (ref. unchanged)				
Increased			1.505*	1.238+
			(0.745)	(0.744)
Decreased			0.480	0.445
			(0.892)	(0.885)
N	4124	4124	4124	4124
R2	0.005	0.024	0.008	0.027

Source: CFPS 2014 and 2016; Notes: cluster-robust standard errors were applied to account for correlation within couples; other variables include individual gender ideology scores, education level, the logged value of household income per capita, residential types, Hukou types, age, and age differences within couples; full model results can be seen in Appendix Table A4.2; + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table 4.3 Change score in weekly housework hours of men, OLS coefficients

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Migrant (ref. non-migrant)	0.155	0.276	0.148	0.264
	(1.095)	(1.109)	(1.104)	(1.119)
Shifts in the employment status (ref. remain unemployment)				
Remain in employment		0.550		0.552
		(0.602)		(0.603)
To employment		-1.155		-1.135
		(0.820)		(0.819)
To unemployment		2.614**		2.622**
		(0.942)		(0.942)

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Shifts in the employment status of partners (ref. remain unemployment)				
Partner remains in employment		0.112		0.075
		(0.542)		(0.544)
Partner shifts to employment		-0.033		-0.059
		(0.914)		(0.917)
Partner shifts to unemployment		0.555		0.551
		(0.840)		(0.840)
Weekly paid work hours change		-0.020**		-0.020**
		(0.006)		(0.006)
Partner's weekly work hours change		-0.002		-0.002
		(0.007)		(0.007)
Shifts in coresidential arrangements (ref. unchanged)				
Couple/nuclear to extended family			0.681	0.672
			(1.100)	(1.087)
Couple to nuclear family			-0.444	-0.388
			(1.285)	(1.285)
Extended to nuclear family			-0.213	-0.178
			(0.688)	(0.687)
Nuclear/extended to couple family			0.900	0.969
			(0.897)	(0.900)
Change in the number of co-habiting children (ref. unchanged)				
Increased			-0.058	-0.131
			(0.645)	(0.646)
Decreased			-0.451	-0.459
			(0.642)	(0.643)
Num.Obs.	4124	4124	4124	4124
R2	0.004	0.010	0.004	0.011

Source: CFPS 2014 and 2016; Notes: cluster-robust standard errors were applied to account for correlation within couples; other variables include individual gender ideology scores, education level, the logged value of household income per capita, residential types, Hukou types, age, and age differences within couples; full model results can be seen in Appendix Table A4.3; + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

4.4.3 Robustness check

To enhance comparability between groups, we employ Coarsened Exact

Matching (CEM), a matching method that reduces imbalance in observational data by temporarily coarsening continuous variables into meaningful strata before exact matching (Iacus, King, and Porro 2012). Empirical evidence indicates that individuals with higher education and agricultural registration are more likely to migrate within China. Since our focus was on couples' migration, the education levels and household registration types of both wives and husbands were used to calculate weights at the couple level. In other words, partners within the same household shared an identical weight. Model results showed that the coefficient size for migration effects on women and men changed only slightly, with direction and significance levels remaining consistent. Therefore, our main results remained (Appendix Table A4.4 and A4.5).

4.5 Discussion

Previous research has examined how well-established theories—such as time availability, relative resources, gender perspectives, and life course events—explain the division of housework between partnered women and men. However, few studies have examined the impact of family migration, an important life course event, on housework division. In this paper, we integrated theoretical explanations of domestic labour division developed in Western countries with empirical evidence from China on family migration, labour market outcomes, and family dynamics. We hypothesize and test how family migration influences housework hours for partnered men and women.

Hypothesis 1 was not supported in the base regression models, which showed that a marginally significant effect of family migration on women's housework hours but no significant association for men. This result may be due to the fact that women are more likely to migrate as housewives and caregivers for family or marriage reasons, while men more often migrate for economic purposes (Mu and Yeung 2018). Female migrants might take on additional housework to reduce their partners' hours in family chores. Additional regression models were employed to examine whether these findings align with the theoretical frameworks of time availability theory and *doing gender* theory.

In line with rational considerations, both women and men adjust their housework hours based on changes in their own time availability. Hypothesis 2a and 2b were supported. Specifically, the direct effect of couple migration on women's housework hours declined once changes in both partners' employment conditions were introduced into the model. The analysis revealed that only respondents' own changes in employment status and working hours significantly influenced variations in their housework time. Moreover, partnered women were especially responsive to employment transitions. When women moved from unemployment to employment, they reduced their housework by roughly three hours per week. This reduction reflects not only time constraints but also increased financial contribution. While such changes suggest rational adjustments to time and resource allocation, the gendered nature of this pattern also supports doing gender theory, which emphasizes how gender norms shape labour within households. Additionally, despite both partners being employed, previous research has shown that male migrants generally work more hours than female migrants (Meng 2012; Mu and Yeung 2018).

Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported. After controlling for changes in family structure, including the presence of children and grandparents, migrant mothers spent approximately two more hours on housework than non-migrant mothers. In contrast, no significant difference was observed in housework hours between migrant and non-migrant fathers. These outcomes emphasize the importance of migration as a determinant of shifts in women's housework time. When the number of cohabiting children rises, the burden of domestic labour predominantly falls on women. However, a common co-residential pattern in China may offer support for mothers' paid employment. Grandparents, particularly grandmothers, often provide primary childcare and assist with child-related chores (Maurer-Fazio et al. 2011; Meng et al. 2023). In migrant families, it is typical to invite grandparents to help reduce women's domestic burden, offering a more feasible alternative to paid services. This support allows mothers to participate in paid work, maximizing the economic benefits of migration.

Surprisingly, partnered migrant women's housework hours remained increased

by around two hours, even after accounting for changes in employment conditions and family status. This suggests that family migration has a direct effect on women's housework hours. Contrary to our hypothesis that women would reduce housework hours due to increased modern influences and fewer constraints from their original communities, our findings pointed in the opposite direction. Here, we present some potential explanations for this unexpected result.

Partnered migrant women's increased involvement in housework can be primarily explained by their limited integration into urban communities. As previously discussed, many migrants come from rural backgrounds, possess lower educational levels, and are more inclined to hold traditional gender ideologies. Their limited education often leads to employment in low-skilled sectors and residence in marginal housing, such as factory dormitories or urban villages, which hinders their interaction with urban residents (Chen and Wang 2015; Lin et al. 2020; Yue et al. 2013). These environments may foster cultural dissonance and lower life satisfaction, prompting migrant women to cling more tightly to familiar, traditional gender roles as a means of maintaining identity (Frank, Hou, and Schellenberg 2016; Polavieja 2015). Meanwhile, kinship and family networks serve as critical support systems for rural migrants seeking employment in urban China (Chang, Wen, and Wang 2011). On the other hand, although living away from their original social networks might lessen traditional gender expectations from their home communities, it also reduces access to family or community support with household chores. As a result, even as migrant households adjust economically, they tend to retain conventional gender norms in the domestic sphere (Blau, Kahn, and Papps 2011; Polavieja 2015).

Our study also has some limitations. We are unable to determine the specific number of relocations each couple has experienced. For couples with extensive relocation histories, the observable changes may be less pronounced. One possible solution could be to focus only on newlywed couples; however, the sample size available would not be sufficient to support this analysis. Furthermore, we chose not to include individual labour income variables for

each partner in our current analysis. While incorporating such variables could offer a more direct test of intra-household bargaining theory—by capturing the economic resources each partner contributes to the household—doing so introduced issues with model robustness. Specifically, the inclusion of separate income data for each partner led to less stable and less consistent results across specifications, which raised concerns about the reliability of our findings when this variable was included. This instability may be due, in part, to the heterogeneity of household types in our sample, particularly the inclusion of households with single earners. As a result, we believe that a more suitable approach for testing bargaining dynamics may involve focusing on dual-earner couples, where both partners have measurable and potentially negotiable economic power within the household. Investigating these dynamics within the subset of dual-earner households is a key avenue we intend to pursue in future research. We also acknowledge that incorporating interaction terms between migration and other theoretically relevant independent variables could offer deeper insights into the theoretical hypotheses. However, due to the limited sample size of the migrant group, such analyses are unlikely to yield reliable results. In future research, when more comprehensive data become available, we intend to further explore these interactions.

4.6 Appendix

Table A 4.1 Descriptive results of sample

	Women (N=4124)	Men (N=4124)	Overall (N=8248)
Change score in weekly housework hours			
Mean (SD)	0.471 (13.3)	0.563 (12.3)	0.517 (12.8)
Median [Min, Max]	0 [-56.0, 49.0]	0 [-56.0, 56.0]	0 [-56.0, 56.0]
Couple migration			
Non-migrants	3999 (97.0%)	3999 (97.0%)	7998 (97.0%)
Migrant	125 (3.0%)	125 (3.0%)	250 (3.0%)
Shifts in the employment status			
Remain unemployment	2094 (50.8%)	1453 (35.2%)	3547 (43.0%)
Remain employment	1504 (36.5%)	2173 (52.7%)	3677 (44.6%)
To employment	244 (5.9%)	227 (5.5%)	471 (5.7%)
To unemployment	282 (6.8%)	271 (6.6%)	553 (6.7%)
Change score for weekly working hours			
Mean (SD)	-26.5 (30.2)	-31.3 (30.8)	-28.9 (30.6)
Median [Min, Max]	-30.0 [-68.0, 68.0]	-40.0 [-68.0, 68.0]	-35.0 [-68.0, 68.0]
Shifts in coresidential arrangements			
Unchanged	3329 (80.7%)	3329 (80.7%)	6658 (80.7%)
To extended	104 (2.5%)	104 (2.5%)	208 (2.5%)
Couple to nuclear	180 (4.4%)	180 (4.4%)	360 (4.4%)
Extended to nuclear	208 (5.0%)	208 (5.0%)	416 (5.0%)
To couple	303 (7.3%)	303 (7.3%)	606 (7.3%)
Change in the number of co-habiting children			
Unchanged	2977 (72.2%)	2977 (72.2%)	5954 (72.2%)
Increased	603 (14.6%)	603 (14.6%)	1206 (14.6%)
Reduced	544 (13.2%)	544 (13.2%)	1088 (13.2%)
Gender ideology scores			
Mean (SD)	3.98 (1.21)	4.04 (1.11)	4.01 (1.16)
Median [Min, Max]	4.00 [1.00, 5.00]	4.00 [1.00, 5.00]	4.00 [1.00, 5.00]
Education			
Lower	2130 (51.6%)	1590 (38.6%)	3720 (45.1%)
Middle school and higher	1994 (48.4%)	2534 (61.4%)	4528 (54.9%)
Household income per capita			
Mean (SD)	9.09 (1.20)	9.09 (1.20)	9.09 (1.20)

	Women (N=4124)	Men (N=4124)	Overall (N=8248)
Median [Min, Max]	9.27 [-0.182, 13.6]	9.27 [-0.182, 13.6]	9.27 [-0.182, 13.6]
Residential types			
Rural	2362 (57.3%)	2362 (57.3%)	4724 (57.3%)
Urban	1762 (42.7%)	1762 (42.7%)	3524 (42.7%)
Hukou types			
Non-agricultural	828 (20.1%)	944 (22.9%)	1772 (21.5%)
Agricultural	3296 (79.9%)	3180 (77.1%)	6476 (78.5%)
Age			
Mean (SD)	40.6 (8.85)	42.2 (8.74)	41.4 (8.83)
Median [Min, Max]	42.0 [16.0, 57.0]	43.0 [19.0, 57.0]	43.0 [16.0, 57.0]
Age differences within couples			
Mean (SD)	-1.59 (2.80)	1.59 (2.80)	0 (3.22)
Median [Min, Max]	-1.00 [-23.0, 12.0]	1.00 [-12.0, 23.0]	0 [-23.0, 23.0]

Source: CFPS 2014 and 2016

Table A 4.2 Change score in weekly housework hours of women, OLS coefficients

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Migrant (ref. non-migrant)	2.231+	1.981+	2.130+	1.892+
	(1.197)	(1.135)	(1.200)	(1.143)
Shifts in the employment status (ref. remain unemployment)				
Remain in employment		0.322		0.442
		(0.622)		(0.623)
To employment		-3.028**		-2.948**
		(1.028)		(1.029)
To unemployment		5.750***		5.659***
		(0.891)		(0.893)
Shifts in the employment status of partners (ref. remain unemployment)				
Partner remains in employment		-0.426		-0.396
		(0.645)		(0.645)
Partner shifts to employment		-0.105		-0.080
		(1.047)		(1.048)
Partner shifts to unemployment		-1.141		-1.135
		(0.922)		(0.922)
Weekly paid work hours change		-0.017*		-0.018*
		(0.008)		(0.008)
Partner’s weekly work hours change		0.004		0.005
		(0.007)		(0.007)
Shifts in coresidential arrangements (ref. unchanged)				
Couple/nuclear to extended family			-2.339+	-2.401+
			(1.301)	(1.265)
Couple to nuclear family			0.809	0.877
			(1.356)	(1.332)
Extended to nuclear family			0.628	0.671
			(0.952)	(0.943)

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Nuclear/extended to couple family			-0.321	-0.493
			(1.018)	(1.020)
Change in the number of co-habiting children (ref. unchanged)				
Increased			1.505*	1.238+
			(0.745)	(0.744)
Decreased			0.480	0.445
			(0.892)	(0.885)
Gender ideology	-0.510**	-0.508**	-0.502**	-0.496**
	(0.178)	(0.179)	(0.179)	(0.179)
Middle school and above (ref. no)	0.025	0.114	0.043	0.114
	(0.473)	(0.481)	(0.473)	(0.481)
Household income per capita	0.136	0.078	0.144	0.078
	(0.198)	(0.211)	(0.199)	(0.211)
Agricultural Hukou (ref. non-agricultural)	-0.679	-0.534	-0.706	-0.517
	(0.531)	(0.537)	(0.531)	(0.537)
Urban areas (ref. rural areas)	-0.010	-0.102	0.069	-0.067
	(0.476)	(0.490)	(0.479)	(0.492)
Age	-0.008	-0.016	-0.008	-0.015
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.028)
Within-couple age difference	0.010	0.029	0.011	0.030
	(0.077)	(0.077)	(0.078)	(0.078)
Num.Obs.	4124	4124	4124	4124
R2	0.005	0.024	0.008	0.027

Source: CFPS 2014 and 2016; Notes: cluster-robust standard errors were applied to account for correlation within couples. + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table A 4.3 Change score in weekly housework hours of men, OLS coefficients

	M1	M2	M3	M4
Migrant (ref. non-migrant)	0.155	0.276	0.148	0.264
	(1.095)	(1.109)	(1.104)	(1.119)
Shifts in the employment status (ref. remain unemployment)				
Remain in employment		0.550		0.552
		(0.602)		(0.603)
To employment		-1.155		-1.135
		(0.820)		(0.819)
To unemployment		2.614**		2.622**
		(0.942)		(0.942)
Shifts in the employment status of partners (ref. remain unemployment)				
Partner remains in employment		0.112		0.075
		(0.542)		(0.544)
Partner shifts to employment		-0.033		-0.059
		(0.914)		(0.917)
Partner shifts to unemployment		0.555		0.551
		(0.840)		(0.840)
Weekly paid work hours change		-0.020**		-0.020**
		(0.006)		(0.006)
Partner's weekly work hours change		-0.002		-0.002
		(0.007)		(0.007)
Shifts in coresidential arrangements (ref. unchanged)				
Couple/nuclear to extended family			0.681	0.672
			(1.100)	(1.087)
Couple to nuclear family			-0.444	-0.388
			(1.285)	(1.285)
Extended to nuclear family			-0.213	-0.178
			(0.688)	(0.687)
Nuclear/extended to couple family			0.900	0.969
			(0.897)	(0.900)
Change in the number of co-habiting children (ref. unchanged)				
Increased			-0.058	-0.131
			(0.645)	(0.646)
Decreased			-0.451	-0.459
			(0.642)	(0.643)
Gender ideology	0.082	0.099	0.089	0.106

	M1	M2	M3	M4
	(0.175)	(0.174)	(0.174)	(0.174)
Middle school and above (ref. no)	-0.283	-0.286	-0.304	-0.304
	(0.452)	(0.454)	(0.453)	(0.455)
Household income per capita	0.340+	0.234	0.330+	0.226
	(0.178)	(0.193)	(0.179)	(0.194)
Agricultural Hukou (ref. non-agricultural)	-0.519	-0.360	-0.506	-0.355
	(0.421)	(0.419)	(0.424)	(0.421)
Urban areas (ref. rural areas)	0.009	-0.120	0.007	-0.114
	(0.414)	(0.431)	(0.416)	(0.433)
Age	-0.062**	-0.055*	-0.060*	-0.055*
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Within-couple age difference	-0.026	-0.034	-0.025	-0.032
	(0.077)	(0.077)	(0.077)	(0.077)
Num.Obs.	4124	4124	4124	4124
R2	0.004	0.010	0.004	0.011

Source: CFPS 2014 and 2016; Notes: cluster-robust standard errors were applied to account for correlation within couples; + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table A 4.4 Change score in weekly housework hours of women, OLS coefficients, weighted

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Migrant (ref. non-migrant)	2.226+	2.082+	2.184+	2.056+
	(1.171)	(1.115)	(1.175)	(1.124)
Shifts in the employment status (ref. remain unemployment)				
Remain in employment		0.323		0.464
		(0.671)		(0.671)
To employment		-3.914***		-3.854***
		(1.056)		(1.061)
To unemployment		5.117***		4.992***
		(0.990)		(0.981)
Shifts in the employment status of partners (ref. remain unemployment)				
Partner remains in employment		-0.318		-0.258
		(0.668)		(0.670)
Partner shifts to employment		0.178		0.214
		(1.087)		(1.084)
Partner shifts to unemployment		-0.938		-0.915
		(0.931)		(0.934)
Weekly paid work hours change		-0.014		-0.014+
		(0.008)		(0.008)
Partner's weekly work hours change		0.006		0.006
		(0.007)		(0.007)
Shifts in coresidential arrangements (ref. unchanged)				
Couple/nuclear to extended family			-2.149	-2.170
			(1.387)	(1.363)
Couple to nuclear family			1.490	1.586
			(1.388)	(1.357)
Extended to nuclear family			0.126	0.130
			(1.065)	(1.045)
Nuclear/extended to couple family			-0.460	-0.700
			(1.114)	(1.120)
Change in the number of co-habiting children (ref. unchanged)				
Increased			1.665*	1.454+
			(0.783)	(0.770)
Decreased			0.748	0.815
			(0.979)	(0.977)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Num.Obs.	4022	4022	4022	4022
R2	0.005	0.026	0.009	0.029

Source: CFPS 2014 and 2016; Notes: cluster-robust standard errors were applied to account for correlation within couples; other variables include individual gender ideology scores, education level, the logged value of household income per capita, residential types, Hukou types, age, and age differences within couples; + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table A 4.5 Change score in weekly housework hours of men, OLS coefficients, weighted

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Migrant (ref. non-migrant)	0.188	0.306	0.158	0.272
	(1.066)	(1.080)	(1.073)	(1.088)
Shifts in the employment status (ref. remain unemployment)				
Remain in employment		0.593		0.614
		(0.630)		(0.631)
To employment		-1.263		-1.217
		(0.846)		(0.845)
To unemployment		2.750**		2.766**
		(1.059)		(1.061)
Shifts in the employment status of partners (ref. remain unemployment)				
Partner remains in employment		-0.114		-0.156
		(0.564)		(0.564)
Partner shifts to employment		0.117		0.084
		(0.865)		(0.861)
Partner shifts to unemployment		0.732		0.710
		(0.867)		(0.866)
Weekly paid work hours change		-0.018**		-0.019**
		(0.007)		(0.007)
Partner’s weekly work hours change		-0.003		-0.003
		(0.007)		(0.007)
Shifts in coresidential arrangements (ref. unchanged)				
Couple/nuclear to extended family			1.446	1.424
			(1.372)	(1.375)
Couple to nuclear family			0.304	0.404
			(1.234)	(1.229)
Extended to nuclear family			-0.153	-0.153
			(0.655)	(0.637)
Nuclear/extended to couple family			1.065	1.100
			(0.883)	(0.889)
Change in the number of co-habiting children (ref. unchanged)				
Increased			-0.024	-0.161
			(0.643)	(0.634)
Decreased			-0.334	-0.303
			(0.673)	(0.681)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Num.Obs.	4022	4022	4022	4022
R2	0.003	0.011	0.004	0.012

Source: CFPS 2014 and 2016; Notes: cluster-robust standard errors were applied to account for correlation within couples; other variables include individual gender ideology scores, education level, the logged value of household income per capita, residential types, Hukou types, age, and age differences within couples; + p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Although migration among families—referring to couples, possibly with children—has become more prevalent in China, the dynamics within couples that influence migration decisions, as well as the differing outcomes for men and women, remain underexplored. This thesis seeks to address this gap by examining gender inequality in family migration decisions and outcomes through three empirical studies. By exploring how the interplay between gender, family dynamics and household registration (*Hukou*) status influence migration determinants and outcomes, the thesis contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of migration in the Chinese context. This chapter starts by summarizing the key findings, then moves on to discuss its contributions, acknowledge its limitations, and outline future directions.

5.1 Summary of findings

Chapter 2 examines the determinant of a couple's migration, addressing hypotheses on gender symmetry and asymmetry of partner's resources for household migration decisions. The findings, consistent with Western research, show that couple's migration behaviour is more responsive to male partners' resources. Despite advances in education, Chinese women still face disadvantages in earnings and occupational status (He and Wu 2017; Li et al. 2024; Liu and Zuo 2023), limiting their economic power in household negotiations. It follows that partners' gender ideology do not significantly alleviate the role of male partner's education for migration decisions. Instead, traditional gender norms remain deeply embedded in Chinese society, often placing more authority in the hands of male partners. This pattern is especially pronounced in rural families (de Bruin and Liu 2020). Along these lines, I find that the role of the male partner's education is more relevant in couples' relocations for those with an agricultural household registration.

Chapter 3 examines whether and how internal migration affects women's and men's labour market outcomes, also focusing on differences by family status and household registration type. Unlike evidence from Western countries,

findings from my analyses show that both Chinese women and men benefit from migration through increased employment opportunities. The huge economic divide between rural and urban areas has created more female-intensive jobs in cities, particularly for less-educated women. While both women and men have higher employment rates after migration, their earnings are not significantly different before and after migration. This result might partly stem from the analysis of earnings focusing solely on samples employed continuously before and after migration. Owing to their lack of education, skills, and institutional restrictions, most migrants are relegated to low-paying jobs. Thus, significant earnings variations are difficult to detect.

Married individuals see smaller employment gains than unmarried ones, with married women suffering a significant drop in earnings after migration, likely due to reinforced traditional gender roles (Chen and Ge 2018). Likewise, mothers living with children experience lower employment growth but greater earnings reductions than childless women or women not living with children after migration. Interestingly, the study finds no evidence that rural registration exacerbates women's disadvantages, though rural-registered men display lower post-migration employment rates than those with urban registration. These findings do not signal progress toward gender equality but rather underscore the growing demand for low-skilled female labour in urban markets.

Chapter 4 further examines how a couple's migration affects changes in the division of household labour for female and male partners. By incorporating three key theoretical perspectives, the study examines whether a couple's migration, as a major life course event, contributes to changes in housework hours. Findings from the analysis show that women's housework hours increase by about two hours after migration, even when accounting for changes in employment, paid work hours, and coresidential arrangements. A potential explanation is the role of social isolation. Migrant families, often constrained by occupational and residential segregation, struggle to integrate into local communities (Chen and Wang 2015; Lin et al. 2020). This isolation may reinforce traditional gender expectations, compelling women to take on a greater share of domestic labour. Additionally, living apart from extended family

members, such as grandparents, may increase the time cost associated with family chores.

5.2 Contribution to knowledge

This thesis contributes to migration research by examining key determinants, labour market outcomes, and housework dynamics among couple households in China. This thesis addresses within-couple dynamics and gender inequality underlying migration within China, and the institutional barriers that shape it. Women's disadvantages underlying family migration result not only from their weaker position in the labour market but also from their rural Hukou status.

The paid and unpaid labour of female migrants is particularly sensitive to China's broader institutional landscape. Migrant mothers, for example, face severe labour market penalties due to local access to essential public services like childcare, deepening their economic and social precarity. This indicates that simply increasing women's labour force participation is not enough to achieve gender equality—at least not under the current Hukou system. Addressing gender inequality requires broader reforms that also tackle the urban-rural divide reinforced by the Hukou system.

This thesis advances research knowledge on migration in the Chinese context by incorporating partner dynamics and examining the role of relative—rather than solely absolute—resources and gender ideologies of both male and female partners, rather than analysing individuals or head-of-household characteristics, as is common in Chinese studies.

Further, adopting a longitudinal approach my research refines the conceptualization of migration in Chinese research. While cross-sectional studies often define migrants based on discrepancies between residential and Hukou-registered addresses, longitudinal data offer a more precise measurement by capturing actual geographic moves—specifically, inter-county migration in this study. In my thesis, I use an underutilized longitudinal multi-actor dataset that showcases how tracking partners' residential locations and employment trajectories over time contributes to improvements in measuring

and modelling. This includes the use of fixed-effects models, mitigating omitted variable bias and enhancing the reliability of findings.

Another important innovation is acknowledging the division of labour household as an outcome. Housework division is a well-established indicator of gender inequality, with prior research linking it to major life events such as parenthood, but rarely addressed in internal migration studies. Our findings confirm that, even after accounting for key factors influencing housework division, women's housework hours increase after migration. This result sheds new light on the role of family migration in reinforcing gender inequality. It suggests that beyond traditional drivers, migration itself can shape domestic labour dynamics, further entrenching disparities between men and women.

I also believe that this thesis contributes to theory refinement in family migration studies, by considering family and gender perspectives in the Chinese context. My findings indicate that gender asymmetries in within couple dynamics are even stronger as traditional gender norms continue to reinforce men's authority in family decision-making. As a result, women's economic resources rarely translate into bargaining power with their spouses. Despite couples with higher levels of education might be more egalitarian, the migrant population has often intermediate levels of education. Also, the context of opportunities is often a limitation, where migrant women –event those with more education than their partners– often have access only to low-paying jobs. These economic limitations prevent women from gaining greater bargaining power and challenging traditional gender roles.

5.3 Contribution to practice

Several policy implications can be drawn from the main findings of this thesis. The Hukou system plays a significant role in shaping the lives and work experiences of migrant families, reinforcing the urban-rural divide. This divide contributes to disparities in education, economic opportunities, and overall development between urban and rural areas. Economic institutions not only limit educational attainment for rural populations but also hinder their access to

better-paid employment in urban labour markets.

While urban areas provide increasing employment opportunities, particularly for female migrants, discriminatory policies and Hukou-related restrictions frequently channel migrants into lower-paying jobs. These barriers not only widen socio-economic gaps between migrants and urban residents but also contradict policy efforts aimed at narrowing these disparities. To enhance economic outcomes for migrants, policymakers should allocate greater educational resources to rural areas. Additionally, urban labour markets must eliminate discriminatory hiring practices and ensure equal access to better-paying jobs. Strengthening labour law enforcement is crucial to protecting migrants' rights, including securing fair wages, job stability, and access to employment-related benefits.

This thesis also highlights the heightened motherhood penalties faced by migrant women, largely due to their restricted access to public or affordable private childcare in urban areas. Expanding access to affordable childcare services would facilitate greater workforce participation among migrant women. Increased engagement in the public sphere would, in turn, expose them to urban environments where they may adopt more progressive gender norms, challenging traditional expectations surrounding their roles as wives and mothers.

Simultaneously, housing and social infrastructure must be prioritized to facilitate the integration of migrant families into urban life. Local governments should increase investment in affordable housing initiatives, including low-rent and subsidized housing, while also enhancing urban transportation and healthcare systems to better accommodate the needs of growing migrant communities. Additionally, fostering an inclusive urban environment through cultural integration programs can provide a strong foundation for migrants to achieve both economic and social stability in their new communities.

5.4 Limitations and future directions

While this thesis makes important contributions, some limitations should be

acknowledged and possibly considered for future research. The study dataset tracks migration based on residential county changes but does not record the exact timing of migration. Because migration events are captured at two-year intervals, the data may not fully reflect the precise sequence of couples' migration. This limitation raises the possibility that some couples migrate in separate stages, which could affect the findings. Prior studies indicate that most migrations occur in one batch or follow a husband-first pattern, with wife-first migration being relatively rare (Yang and Chen 2013). As a result, the potential impact of this limitation is likely minimal. Likewise, as only households' primary addresses were documented, we cannot detect broader residential and mobility patterns, including migration in multi-local living arrangements. Future research with more detailed migration data will allow for a deeper and more accurate analysis of migration dynamics.

The dataset used in this study does not include information on migration motives, which previous research has identified as key determinants of family migration outcomes (Gillespie, Mulder, and Thomas 2021). Based on the findings of this thesis, it can be inferred that female partners are more likely to follow their spouses when relocating, reflecting the persistence of traditional gender roles in Chinese society. However, due to the absence of migration reason data, these findings do not provide direct causal evidence. Given that some studies have documented instances where wives migrate first, incorporating such information into the dataset would significantly enhance the analysis. This additional data would offer critical insights into why male educational attainment emerges as the primary driver of migration and why male partners tend to experience more favourable outcomes than female partners in this study.

Also, the sample in this study is not fully representative at the respondent level, as it primarily consists of individuals with lower educational attainment, particularly those with a junior high school education (nine years). Although data show that most migrants have this level of education, the proportion of highly educated migrants, such as those with university degrees (sixteen years), has been increasing (Gu 2021). However, the CFPS dataset does not adequately

capture this group, which may affect the study's applicability to highly educated migrants.

Future research should explore various forms of family migration and their respective outcomes. The present study focuses exclusively on cases where both spouses migrate simultaneously, as the dataset contains relatively few instances of other migration patterns. As previously mentioned, no existing research has examined the underlying mechanism wife-move-first pattern in China and its associated outcomes. Does it reflect a more egalitarian gender ideology within the household, or is it driven by the wife's higher level of human capital? Moreover, does this migration pattern lead to improved employment opportunities and higher earnings for female partners? If so, could these advantages strengthen their bargaining power within the household, potentially reducing their domestic labour burden? Investigating these questions would contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving gender dynamics in family migration within China's transitional context.

Future research should also place greater emphasis on return migration, where migrants move back to their hometowns after working in urban areas. Most existing studies focus on individual migrants, citing reasons such as Hukou constraints (Zhang et al. 2020), rural entrepreneurship (Démurger and Xu 2011), or family obligations (Jürges 2006). However, there is little empirical research on how return migration intersects with gender inequality at the family level.

There are many pressing questions that remain unanswered. Do families leave urban areas because the male partner struggles to earn a sufficient income? If the female partner becomes the primary breadwinner, do families still return, or is return migration primarily structured around male economic opportunities? Addressing these questions will require future research to incorporate comprehensive and nuanced data, allowing for a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in return migration.

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